

THE ARDEN SHAKESPEARE

KING RICHARD II

EDITED BY CHARLES R. FORKER



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KING
RICHARD II

THE ARDEN SHAKESPEARE

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RICHARD II

Edited by
CHARLES R. FORKER

THE ARDEN SHAKESPEARE
LONDON • NEW YORK • OXFORD • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

THE ARDEN SHAKESPEARE
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Charles R. Forker is Professor of English Emeritus at Indiana University, Bloomington. His many publications include critical editions of Shirley's *The Cardinal* (1964) and Marlowe's *Edward II* (1994), and a major study of the works of Webster, *Skull Beneath the Skin: The Achievement of John Webster* (1986). His most recent work is a study of Shakespeare's Richard II, *Shakespeare: The Critical Tradition: 'Richard II'* (London, 1998).

To
the memory of
Stuart Major Sperry

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GENERAL EDITORS' PREFACE

The Arden Shakespeare is now over one hundred years old. The earliest volume in the first series, Edward Dowden's *Hamlet*, was published in 1899. Since then the Arden Shakespeare has become internationally recognized and respected. It is now widely acknowledged as the pre-eminent Shakespeare series, valued by scholars, students, actors and 'the great variety of readers' alike for its readable and reliable texts, its full annotation and its richly informative introductions.

We have aimed in the third Arden edition to maintain the quality and general character of its predecessors, preserving the commitment to presenting the play as it has been shaped in history. While each individual volume will necessarily have its own emphasis in the light of the unique possibilities and problems posed by the play, the series as a whole, like the earlier Ardens, insists upon the highest standards of scholarship and upon attractive and accessible presentation.

Newly edited from the original quarto and folio editions, the texts are presented in fully modernized form, with a textual apparatus that records all substantial divergences from those early printings. The notes and introductions focus on the conditions and possibilities of meaning that editors, critics and performers (on stage and screen) have discovered in the play. While building upon the rich history of scholarly and theatrical activity that has long shaped our understanding of the texts of Shakespeare's plays, this third series of the Arden Shakespeare is made necessary and possible by a new generation's encounter with Shakespeare, engaging with the plays and their complex relation to the culture in which they were – and continue to be – produced.

THE TEXT

On each page of the play itself, readers will find a passage of text followed by commentary and, finally, textual notes. Act and scene divisions (seldom present in the early editions and often the product of eighteenth-century or later scholarship) have been retained for ease of reference, but have been given less prominence than in the previous series. Editorial indications of location of the action have been removed to the textual notes or commentary.

In the text itself, unfamiliar typographic conventions have been avoided in order to minimize obstacles to the reader. Elided forms in the early texts are spelt out in full in verse lines wherever they indicate a usual late twentieth-century pronunciation that requires no special indication and wherever they occur in prose (except when they indicate non-standard pronunciation). In verse speeches, marks of elision are retained where they are necessary guides to the scansion and pronunciation of the line. Final -ed in past tense and participial forms of verbs is always printed as -ed without accent, never as -'d, but wherever the required pronunciation diverges from modern usage a note in the commentary draws attention to the fact. Where the final -ed should be given syllabic value contrary to modern usage, e.g.

Doth Silvia know that I am banished?
(*TGV* 3.1.214)

the note will take the form

214 **banished** banishèd

Conventional lineation of divided verse lines shared by two or more speakers has been reconsidered and sometimes rearranged. Except for the familiar *Exit* and *Exeunt*, Latin forms in stage directions and speech prefixes have been translated into English and the original Latin forms recorded in the textual notes.

COMMENTARY AND TEXTUAL NOTES

Notes in the commentary, for which a major source will be the *Oxford English Dictionary*, offer glossarial and other explication of

verbal difficulties; they may also include discussion of points of theatrical interpretation and, in relevant cases, substantial extracts from Shakespeare's source material. Editors will not usually offer glossarial notes for words adequately defined in the latest edition of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* or *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, but in cases of doubt they will include notes. Attention, however, will be drawn to places where more than one likely interpretation can be proposed and to significant verbal and syntactic complexity. Notes preceded by * discuss editorial emendations or variant readings from the early edition(s) on which the text is based.

Headnotes to acts or scenes discuss, where appropriate, questions of scene location, Shakespeare's handling of his source materials and major difficulties of staging. The list of roles (so headed to emphasize the play's status as a text for performance) is also considered in commentary notes. These may include comment on plausible patterns of casting with the resources of an Elizabethan or Jacobean acting company, and also on any variation in the description of roles in their speech prefixes in the early editions.

The textual notes are designed to let readers know when the edited text diverges from the early edition(s) on which it is based. Wherever this happens the note will record the rejected reading of the early edition(s), in original spelling, and the source of the reading adopted in this edition. Other forms from the early edition(s) recorded in these notes will include some spellings of particular interest or significance and original forms of translated stage directions. Where two early editions are involved, for instance with *Othello*, the notes will also record all important differences between them. The textual notes take a form that has been in use since the nineteenth century. This comprises, first: line reference, reading adopted in the text and closing square bracket; then: abbreviated reference, in italic, to the earliest edition to adopt the accepted reading, italic semicolon and noteworthy alternative reading(s), each with abbreviated italic reference to its source.

Conventions used in these textual notes include the following. The solidus / is used, in notes quoting verse or discussing verse

lining, to indicate line endings. Distinctive spellings of the basic text (Q or F) follow the square bracket without indication of source and are enclosed in italic brackets. Names enclosed in italic brackets indicate originators of conjectural emendations when these did not originate in an edition of the text, or when this edition records a conjecture not accepted into its text. Stage directions (SDs) are referred to by the number of the line within or immediately after which they are placed. Line numbers with a decimal point relate to entry SDs and to SDs more than one line long, with the number after the point indicating the line within the SD: e.g. 78.4 refers to the fourth line of the SD following line 78. Lines of SDs at the start of a scene are numbered 0.1, 0.2, etc. Where only a line number and SD precede the square bracket, e.g. 128 SD], the note relates to the whole of a SD within or immediately following the line. Speech prefixes (SPs) follow similar conventions, 203 SP] referring to the speaker's name for line 203. Where a SP reference takes the form e.g. 38 + SP, it relates to all subsequent speeches assigned to that speaker in the scene in question.

Where, as with *King Henry V*, one of the early editions is a so-called 'bad quarto' (that is, a text either heavily adapted, or reconstructed from memory, or both), the divergences from the present edition are too great to be recorded in full in the notes. In these cases the editions will include a reduced photographic facsimile of the 'bad quarto' in an appendix.

INTRODUCTION

Both the introduction and the commentary are designed to present the plays as texts for performance, and make appropriate reference to stage, film and television versions, as well as introducing the reader to the range of critical approaches to the plays. They discuss the history of the reception of the texts within the theatre and scholarship and beyond, investigating the interdependency of the literary text and the surrounding 'cultural text' both at the time of the original production of Shakespeare's works and during their long and rich afterlife.

P R E F A C E

Richard II has occupied an important place in my literary consciousness since I was introduced to the play as an undergraduate in the late 1940s by Stanley Perkins Chase at Bowdoin College, where I also acted the role of Bolingbroke in a *Mask and Gown* production. H.V.D. Dyson, my tutor at Merton College, Oxford, and Alfred Harbage, my doctoral supervisor at Harvard, further stimulated my interest by prompting me to write essays on topics closely related to the tragedy. The play has figured prominently in my university teaching and research over the years – experience which led eventually to my assembling historical commentary on *Richard II*, published in 1998 as a volume in Brian Vickers's series, *Shakespeare: The Critical Tradition*. That even minor details of the play continue to absorb my attention will be obvious to readers of the commentary, which may be accused, I fear, of threatening at times to overwhelm the text it was written to serve. I would plead in defence that I have devoted much space to extended quotation from the sources (or possible sources), and that it is important to make immediately present to readers as rich a historical context as possible for the understanding and interpretation of a drama that exploits nuanced or conflicting political attitudes and that portrays ambiguities of motive. Because *Richard II* is by design the most lyrical of Shakespeare's histories, I have also thought it useful to suggest ways in which the more problematic and irregular lines may be scanned.

Like all editors of Shakespeare, I am heavily indebted to my predecessors – especially to the deservedly influential editions of *Richard II* by John Dover Wilson (1939), Matthew W. Black (the New Variorum editor, 1955), Peter Ure (1956), Stanley Wells (1969) and Andrew Gurr (1984). Each of these has prepared the

ground for my own work and taught me much. Nor could I have read as widely and as profitably in the scholarship and performance history of the play as I have done without the aid of Josephine A. Roberts's indispensable annotated, two-volume Garland bibliography (1988). I owe particular thanks to the reference departments of the research libraries consulted in the preparation of this volume, especially to those at the Bodleian Library, the British Library, the Folger Shakespeare Library, the Henry E. Huntington Library and, far from least, the Indiana University Library and its rare-book adjunct, the Lilly Library. Ann Bristow, David K. Frasier and Jeffrey Graf, my librarian colleagues at Indiana, have been unfailingly resourceful.

Any edition of a work by Shakespeare in the twenty-first century must inevitably be collaborative, often in ways of which the individual contributors may be unaware. Michael J.B. Allen, David M. Bergeron, David Bevington, A.R. Braunmuller, James C. Bulman, Joseph Candido, S.P. Cerasano, T.W. Craik, Katherine Duncan-Jones, R.A. Foakes, Donald Foster, R.D. Fulk, Walter Hodges, Michael Jamieson, Howard Jensen, Frederick Kiefer, F.J. Levy, Trevor Lloyd, Timothy Long, William B. Long, Russ McDonald, Randal McLeod, Gordon McMullan, Giorgio Melchiori, Robert S. Miola, Margaret Loftus Ranald, Peter Slemon, W.E. Slights, Bruce Smith, J.J.M. Tobin, John W. Velz, Brian Vickers, Eugene M. Waith and Stanley Wells have all helped make this edition better than it otherwise would have been – some by giving advice or information on specific points, others by shedding their light more generally. Among innumerable friends who have offered support at moments of frustration or discouragement, sometimes unwittingly, Michael Duff, Denzil Freeth, the Revd John B. Gaskell, John B. Hartley, Lewis J. Overaker, Eric S. Rump, Janet C. Stavropoulos and the Revd James K. Taylor must be singled out.

My greatest debt is to Richard Proudfoot, a general editor of tirelessness, enthusiasm and exemplary tact, who curbed my

more flagrant excesses with the irony they merited, made valuable points that had escaped my notice, and guided me with learning, forbearance, and sharp critical intelligence through the shoals and turbulences of the long passage from first draft to final copy. George Walton Williams, associate general editor, was equally assiduous, perceptive and wittily sympathetic in suggesting improvements. I could scarcely have hoped for two scholars as deeply experienced and as personally engaged with *Richard II* as these gentlemen; and although I have dared to disagree with them in a few particulars, their influence on the final product has been pervasive and hugely important – a point which no one who bothers to count the citations of ‘RP’ and ‘GWW’ in the commentary will doubt. David Scott Kastan also offered me the benefit of his well-honed critical scrutiny, providing especially helpful counsel on the structuring of the Introduction. These acknowledgements would be seriously remiss if they did not include mention of Jessica Hodge, publisher of the Arden 3 series, whose ability to exert the necessary pressures on authors is expertly leavened by a sense of humour, a genuine respect for her charges and an irresistible capacity for affection. Equally deserving of my homage is Nicola Bennett, my meticulous, self-effacing, eagle-eyed and endlessly diligent copy-editor, who preserved me from many inconsistencies and blunders, who sharpened my logic and clarified cloudy sentences, and who not infrequently bettered the substance as well as the accidents of this book.

Charles R. Forker
Bloomington, Indiana

INTRODUCTION

Richard II marks an exciting advance in the development of Shakespeare's artistry. Its unusual formality of structure and tone as well as the impressive eloquence of its style seem to have been crafted to express the mystique of kingship more emphatically than any of the earlier histories without neglecting a subtle handling of its major action – the dethronement of an unsuitable anointed monarch by an illegitimate but more able one. The power and ordered grandeur of the state as symbolically centred in the throne are brought into tragic conflict with the human weakness and political inadequacy of its incumbent. Thus, audiences are called upon to respond not only to the fall of a particular king (Fig. 1) but also to the disquieting possibility that the institution of hereditary monarchy may itself be unviable. The subject would have been especially magnetic in the waning years of the last Tudor, who was sometimes thought to be dangerously influenced by ambitious favourites, and the identity of whose as yet unspecified successor was stimulating intense partisan speculation. Struggles for a crown were not new. In his plays on the Wars of the Roses Shakespeare had already shown the chaotic horrors of civil war and the displacement of weak kings by stronger ones. What is unique and fresh in *Richard II* is the stress on the divinity that was thought to hedge kings, the abandonment of historical diffuseness and the probing not merely of divine right as a concept but of the unstable personality of a king who puts his whole trust in its theoretical protections.

In the character of Richard, Shakespeare achieved a higher degree of psychological complexity than he had yet managed in tragedy. *Titus Andronicus* with its sanguinary sensationalism, *Romeo and Juliet* with its star-crossed lovers victimized by



1 Richard II in Henry Holland, *Baziliologia*, 1618

circumstance and *Richard III* with its Vice-like, overreaching protagonist offered limited scope for the exploration of tragic personality. In the first play of what was to become his second tetralogy Shakespeare seized the opportunity to dramatize the original mythic cause of the disasters already staged in the *Henry VI–Richard III* sequence. In so doing, he excavated new soil, exposing the roots of the fateful contest for power by showing them to lie not merely in the factionalism of kinship or party but also in contrasts of sensibility, temperament, emotional predisposition and philosophical outlook. Richard, the man of words, postures and ceremonial dignity, is defeated by Bolingbroke, the man of actions and pragmatic realism. A new spirit of assertive individuality seems finally to dissolve the settled harmonies of medieval tradition and hierarchical order. And Shakespeare so arranges the contest that our sympathies are necessarily divided. Depending on one's perspective – an important motif in the play (see especially 2.2.14–27) – Richard is either a tyrant or a martyr, Bolingbroke either a patriot or a ruthless opportunist, York either the reluctant servant of an historical shift or a pusillanimous defector. The ambiguous moral foundations of the action become part of the dramatic experience. Defeat dignifies Richard because the sufferings entailed in the loss of his crown open him to a deeper awareness of his failings and to a less blinkered sense of his dual identity as fallible mortal and God's anointed. But as Alfred Harbage remarks, 'Shakespeare's worst king', judged in terms of competency, 'is never hated, and is often even loved – for his eloquence, his irresponsibility amounting almost to innocence, his deep conviction that he is *deserving* of love' (68). Paradoxically, Henry, the new and unillusioned king, implicates himself in the role-playing and moral compromise (with its attendant guilt) that he had seemed so vigorously to oppose in Richard.

In particular ways *Richard II* adumbrates Shakespeare's maturer tragedies and histories. Hamlet's egotism, self-consciousness and verbal brilliance are all to be found more rudimentarily in Richard's character, as is a pale simulacrum of Lear's growth from

arrogance to humility. The sympathy evoked for Richard even at his weakest looks forward to that we feel for the defeated and love-betrayed Antony. The break-up of England that begins under Richard's reign finds a counterpart of sorts in the collapse of the Roman republic in *Julius Caesar*; and Brutus' misguided commitment to political assassination is not wholly unlike Richard's mistake in ridding himself of the troublesome Gloucester. The glowing nationalism of Gaunt's great praise of England anticipates the spirit of Agincourt that so vitally informs *Henry V*.

Finally, *Richard II* is a play for the ear, its balances and symmetries of character and structure finding analogies in the graceful cadences, rhetorical artifices and striking imagery of its language. It is surely significant that the poets Yeats and Masfield were attracted to the vocal charms of its protagonist.¹ Nor is the verbal opulence merely decorative. The play is among Shakespeare's first to utilize patterns of imagery and thematic repetition for dramatic and structural purposes. What both the Duchess of York and Richard refer to as 'set[ting] the word . . . against the word' (5.3.121, 5.5.13–14) marks the play's style, not merely in the narrow sense of juxtaposing one biblical passage with another but in the broader sense of pitting different meanings of words and opposed attitudes against each other. The tragedy's penchant for wordplay and *double entendre* thus becomes an important resource of its characterization and dramaturgy.

This Introduction falls into several subdivisions. 'Politics' seeks to establish the play's ideological and cultural context, its relation to Elizabethan censorship, the ambiguous responses to major characters that its dramatic technique and structure encourage and, finally, the survival of topical significances into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. 'Language' discusses the play's complex style, imagery and rhetoric. 'Afterlife' outlines its changing reputation with particular attention to the varied history of twentieth-century stagings. Four final sections take up the 'Date'

1 See Forker, 372–8, 463–5.

of the play, 'Venues of Early Performance', Shakespeare's use of 'Sources' and decisions affecting the 'Text' of the present edition.

POLITICS

Historical Context and the Issue of Topicality

As Elizabeth I aged, it became increasingly common to identify her with Richard II. Her remark to William Lambarde in 1601, 'I am Richard II. Know ye not that?', is only the best known of several such comparisons.¹ The reasons were at least two. The first had to do with a perception in some quarters that the Queen was unusually susceptible to flattery and that favourites such as Leicester and Burghley were able to exert dangerous and harmful control over her policies, especially with regard to monopolies and burdensome taxes and, from a Catholic perspective, to religious toleration. The second pertained to the unsettled succession. Both concerns undoubtedly reinforced the parallel with Richard and may have had something to do with the appearance during Shakespeare's career of at least four plays on Richard's reign – *The Life and Death of Jack Straw* (1590–3), *Woodstock* (1591–5), Shakespeare's own tragedy (1595), and an anonymous play, now lost, described by Simon Forman as having been played at the Globe on 30 April 1611.²

- 1 For Lambarde, see Chambers, *WS*, 2.326. Sir Francis Knollys, after giving unwelcome advice to the Queen, wrote in 1578 that he refused to 'play the partes of King Richard the Second's men' (a synonym for flatterers), while Lord Hunsdon at some point before 1588 repeated the same phrase. Sir Walter Raleigh in a letter to Robert Cecil (6 July 1597) remarked that Essex was 'wonderfull merry att y^e consait [conceit] of Richard the 2', apparently alluding to the same analogy (see Chambers, *WS*, 1.353). On 19 February 1601 at Essex's trial for treason, the prosecutor, Sir Edward Coke, invoked the parallel again: 'Note but the precedents of former ages, how long lived Richard the Second after he was surprised in the same manner [as Elizabeth was surprised by Essex]?' (Black, 581).
- 2 Chambers, *WS*, 2.339–40. All four plays portray Richard as guilty of tyrannous actions or policies, although the implied condemnation falls heaviest on his counselors, especially in the case of *Jack Straw* in which the boy king is apparently unaware of how brutally the tax collectors oppress the common people; Straw observes, 'The king God wot knowes not whats done [to] such poore men as we' (l. 61). A fifth play, *Pierce of Exton* (1598) by Chettle, Dekker, Drayton and Wilson, was apparently never completed; see Chambers, *ES*, 2.167.

As to the first point, *Richard II* does indeed dramatize attitudes similar to the complaints against Elizabeth's ministers voiced by opponents of her fiscal policies:

NORTHUMBERLAND

. . . The King is not himself, but basely led
By flatterers; and what they will inform
Merely in hate 'gainst any of us all,
That will the King severely prosecute
'Gainst us, our lives, our children and our heirs.

ROSS

The commons hath he pilled with grievous taxes,
And quite lost their hearts. The nobles hath he fined
For ancient quarrels, and quite lost their hearts.

WILLOUGHBY

And daily new exactions are devised,
As blanks, benevolences, and I wot not what.
But what, i'God's name, doth become of this?

(2.1.241–51)

As Richard Simpson pointed out in 1874, these lines recall the malcontent sentiments of such Catholic controversialists as Thomas Morgan, Richard Rowlands and Robert Parsons.¹ These men wrote tracts with titles such as the following: (1) *The Copy of a Letter Written by a Master of Art of Cambridge . . . about the present state and some proceedings of the Earl of Leicester* (1584); (2) *A Declaration of the True Causes of the Great Troubles, Presupposed to be Intended Against the Realm of England* (1592); and (3) *An Advertisement Written to a Secretary of My Lord Treasurer's of England* (1592). The first of these writings warns Elizabeth to beware of the fates of Edward II, Richard II and Henry VI – 'thre iust and lawful kinges' who came 'to confusion . . . by alienation of their subiectes' and 'to[o] much fauour towardes wicked persons'; for Richard's reign the examples given are Robert de Vere

1 See Forker, 240–6, 516–17.

and Thomas Mowbray – ‘two moste turbulent and wicked men, that set the kinge againste his owne vncles and the nobilitie’ – de Vere being paralleled with Leicester.¹ The second tract contains a philippic against William Cecil, the Lord Treasurer, accusing him of oppressing the people in the Queen’s name with all manner of ruinous financial burdens – ‘great & grieuous exactions’, ‘newe impostes and customes’, ‘forfaictures’, ‘confiscations’, ‘forced beneuolences’, ‘huge masses of mony raised by priuie seales’, ‘subsidies’ and the like.² As Simpson points out (Forker, 242), Shakespeare’s use of the terms ‘new exactions’ and ‘benevolences’ (2.1.249–50) seems almost to echo the very words of the propagandist (Rowlands?). The third pamphlet, an English translation of a Latin work by Parsons, speaks of the ‘fierce & cruell lawes’ recently enacted by Elizabeth against Catholics, singling out her chief ministers over the course of the reign ‘who haue bin the causes and instrumentes of all miserie to Ingland . . . and of the perdition of the realme by their especiall authority with her Maiestie’, namely Sir Nicholas Bacon, Leicester, Sir Francis Walsingham, Sir Christopher Hatton and especially Lord Burghley.³ Meanwhile, radical Puritans were as dissatisfied with Elizabeth’s government as the Catholics. In 1576, for instance, Peter Wentworth rose in Parliament to attack those royal advisers and politicians who, ‘through flattery’, sought ‘to devour our natural Prince’, causing her thereby to commit ‘great faults – yea, dangerous faults to herself and the State’.⁴ And John Penry, a major force behind the Marprelate pamphlets (executed for sedition in 1593), also attacked members of the Queen’s Council, not only for their scandalous leniency to Roman priests and recusants

1 Thomas Morgan(?), *Copy of a Letter*, 187–8. The book rapidly became known under the title of *Leicester’s Commonwealth* and was so reprinted in 1641 (see Peck).

2 Richard Rowlands(?) (also known as Richard Verstegan), *Declaration*, 60. See also 2.1.250n.

3 John Philopatris (Richard Rowlands?), *Advertisement*, 11. This work is an abridged translation, written under the pseudonym John Philopatris, of a Latin tract, *Elizabethae . . . saeuissimum in Catholicas . . . Edictum* (1592).

4 See Neale, 1.320–2. Wentworth was worried about Elizabeth’s failure to take forceful action against Mary, Queen of Scots.

but also (on account of their support of the Anglican settlement) for being rebels and conspirators against God.¹

Concerning the second point, namely the succession, the analogy between Richard II and Elizabeth was even more widely applicable. Both monarchs, after all, were childless. The Queen tried to discourage speculation and debate on the matter just as Richard had done some two centuries earlier;² but popular uncertainty about who would succeed was thought to weaken the stability of both reigns. At the time of his deposition, Richard's closest male relative was a child of three, Edmund Mortimer, fifth Earl of March, whose claim descended from Lionel, Duke of Clarence, Edward III's third son, through the female line (see Appendix 3). But claims were also made for Bolingbroke, who descended from the fourth of King Edward's sons, on the grounds that it was customary in the fourteenth century to entail great estates upon the male line.³ There had also been a bogus legend, created by Lancastrian partisans, that Edmund Crouchback, Earl of Lancaster (an ancestor of John of Gaunt), was the older rather than the younger brother of Edward I and had been passed over for the throne on the grounds of his physical deformity. This story too was used to promote the legitimacy of Bolingbroke as heir presumptive over Mortimer.

Heated debate about Elizabeth's successor arose almost immediately after her accession and continued intermittently throughout the reign. Various names were mentioned, both in and out of Parliament, the possible candidates including (1) Mary, Queen of Scots, descended from Henry VIII's sister Margaret, and, after her execution, her son James VI; (2) Lady Catherine Grey, the younger sister of the tragic Lady Jane Grey, who, however, died in 1568,

1 See Forker, 517, n. 11.

2 See Saul, 397; also 3.3.113n. A law of 1571 (13 Eliz. I c. 1; see *Statutes*, 4.527) prohibiting the promotion of any successor to the throne other than Elizabeth's own issue is a case in point; see also Neale, 1.136, 150. Later when the intemperate Wentworth dared to write *A Pithy Exhortation* urging the Queen to settle the succession (posthumously published in 1598 but circulated earlier in manuscript), he was imprisoned in the Tower.

3 See 1.1.117n., 1.4.35n. and 36n.

leaving her son, Lord Beauchamp, as a possible but weak contender; (3) Lady Margaret Stuart, Countess of Lennox, and, later, her granddaughter, Lady Arabella Stuart; (4) Margaret, Countess of Derby, descended from Mary Tudor, younger sister of Henry VIII, and, after 1593, her son Ferdinando (Lord Strange); (5) Henry Hastings, third Earl of Huntingdon (Leicester's brother-in-law), whose claim would have revived the issues of the Wars of the Roses since his ancestry was Yorkist; and (6) Philip II of Spain, and, after his death, his daughter, the Infanta. Many Catholics, of course, favoured the Scottish queen and, later, the Infanta, while the more extreme Protestants tended to back Catherine Grey or her son Beauchamp, and, later, Huntingdon. James VI, who in strict genealogical terms had the best claim, enjoyed mixed support and was successfully, though clandestinely, promoted after Burghley's death by Sir Robert Cecil, his son and successor as chief minister.

There is no reason to suppose that in *Richard II* Shakespeare intended to allude to the specifics of these controversies, the details of which he would hardly have known since they were the special province of court gossip and intrigue or the stock-in-trade of professional politicians and religious sectarians. Palmer's assertion that in contemporary eyes the tragedy was regarded as 'the most topical . . . of the period' (118) is probably an overstatement. But there can be no doubt that when the play was written and first staged, such questions were in the air and that in some viewers at least the tragedy could have provoked a range of timely political resonances.

The Connection with Essex

Discussion of the play's topicality has centred mainly on events surrounding the Essex rebellion of 1601. This is partly because the dangerous issue of deposition had become entangled in the late 1590s with the other controversies touching the monarchy, the popular but volatile Earl being its chief focus (Fig. 2).¹ At

1 The issue of Elizabeth's deposition had arisen in 1570 when Pope Pius V issued his bull of excommunication against her. This document declared her to be no legitimate queen and released her subjects from all fealty and obedience. Most English Catholics, however, do not seem to have taken the papal edict seriously.

Essex's Star Chamber trial for treason in February 1601, Cecil charged that the Earl 'had been devising five or six years to be King of England . . . and meant to slip into Her Majesty's place' by insinuating himself 'into favour' with 'the Puritans', 'the Papists' and 'the people and soldiers' in general.¹ The linking of Shakespeare's tragedy with Essex was obviously after the fact and, from the dramatist's point of view, fortuitous, but it has nevertheless affected interpretation of the play's politics. The relevant facts may be summarized as follows.

On 7 February 1601, the day before Essex staged his abortive rebellion, a group of the Earl's supporters paid Shakespeare's company forty shillings to revive an old play on 'the deposing and killing of King Richard II' at the Globe – generally considered to have been Shakespeare's tragedy. The conspirators apparently believed that the drama would serve as effective propaganda for their treasonable enterprise.² When Augustine Phillips, one of the shareholders of the Chamberlain's Men, was summoned to answer for the actors, he pleaded that they had been reluctant to put on the drama, it being 'so old and so long out of use that they should have a small company at it', but had nevertheless been 'content to play it' as requested.³ That Shakespeare and his fellows were innocent of any seditious design is clear from their having escaped punishment on this occasion and also from the

1 *CSPD*, 554. William Camden in his *History of the . . . Princess Elizabeth* (1630) wrote that when the Catholics despaired of a papist successor to Elizabeth, some of them 'cast their eyes vpon the Earle of Essex . . . feigning a Title from *Thomas of Woodstock*, King *Edward* the third's sonne, from whom hee deriued his Pedigree' (4.57). As early as 1594 the Jesuit Robert Parsons, writing under the pseudonym of Doleman, dedicated to Essex his *A Conference about the Next Succession to the Crown of England*; in the dedication Parsons writes, somewhat incriminatingly, 'no man is in more high & eminent place or dignitie at this day in our realme, then your selfe, whether we respect your nobilitie, or calling, or fauour with your prince, or high liking of the people, & consequently no man like to haue a greater part or sway in deciding' the succession '(when tyme shall come for that determination) then your honour.'

2 This performance, if of Shakespeare's play, presumably included the abdication scene absent from the Elizabethan quartos, for without it the play could hardly have been thought to serve the rebels' political ends.

3 *CSPD*, 578.



2 Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex, attributed to Nicholas Hilliard, c. 1587

fact that they were playing at court only days after Essex's trial.¹

1 See Barroll. The treatment of the actors on this occasion contrasts strikingly with the experience of Ben Jonson and two fellow actors of Pembroke's Company (Gabriel Spencer and Robert Shaw), who were imprisoned and probably threatened with torture for performing the 'very seditious' *Isle of Dogs* in the summer of 1597. See Jonson, 1.15–16.

Two years earlier (in February 1599) Sir John Hayward's controversial volume, *The First Part of the Life and Reign of King Henry IV*, had appeared, bearing a dedication to Essex in which the Earl is referred to as 'futuri temporis expectatione' – a phrase that could be interpreted as suggesting him as heir apparent to the throne.¹ The book, despite its misleading title, offers a detailed account of Richard's deposition and death, containing also several passages in which critics have observed similarity to Shakespeare's phrasing.² Although Essex himself seems to have repudiated the dedication, the book appeared unhappily at a time when he and the Queen were at odds over his mission in Ireland, and Her Majesty seems to have been infuriated by what she took to be a sign of intolerable presumption and disloyalty on the Earl's part. Accordingly, the dedicatory page was quickly removed from the unsold copies by order of the Archbishop of Canterbury. A revised edition, which included the author's apology for having unwittingly misled readers, was seized and burned by the Bishop of London before any copies could circulate. The book, which was uncommonly popular, continued, however, to cause trouble for the Earl, and its publication was urged as evidence against him in July 1600, when he was being charged with malfeasance in connection with his activities in Ireland. A document in the State Papers, dated 22 July, supports a charge of treason against him in the following language:

Essex's own actions confirm the intent of this treason. His permitting underhand that treasonable book of Henry IV to be printed and published; it being plainly deciphered, not only by the matter, and by the epistle itself [Hayward's Latin dedication], for what end and for whose behalf it was made, but also the Earl himself being

1 The full phrase that made trouble for both Hayward and Essex, translated from the Latin, reads: 'great thou art in hope, greater in the expectation of future time'.

2 See 2.3.122n., 2.4.9–15n., 4.1.122n., 131–2n., 135n., 208n., 5.2.18–20n., 5.4.2n., 5.5.77–83LN, 5.6.38–40n.

so often present at the playing thereof [i.e. of the book's subject-matter?], and with great applause giving countenance to it.¹

Already committed to the Tower under suspicion of subversion, the unfortunate Hayward faced interrogation by the authorities at two different trials (on 11 July 1600 and 22 January 1601), Sir Edward Coke having carefully read the suspected book in preparation for his examination of the prisoner. Coke's notes for the first trial list suspicious parallels between Elizabeth's time and Richard II's as depicted by Hayward, including the apparently incriminating coincidences that Bolingbroke, like Essex, was an earl and that Richard, like Elizabeth, was confronted by a rebellion in Ireland. A summary of these notes appears as an abstract in the State Papers:

Interrogatories and notes [by Attorney General Coke] on Dr. Hayward's book, in proof that the Doctor selected a story 200 years old, and published it last year, intending the application of it to this time, the plot being that of a King who is taxed for misgovernment, and his council for corrupt and covetous dealings for private ends; the King is censured for conferring benefits on hated favourites, the nobles become discontented, and the commons groan under continual taxation, whereupon the King is deposed, and in the end murdered. With extracts from various parts of the book.²

Although Hayward confessed that he had unhistorically introduced the term 'benevolence' into the reign of Richard II despite his having read about such a device only as early as Richard III, he nevertheless disclaimed any motive of drawing subversive analogies between the earlier king's reign and the present time, citing various precedents and sources, and arguing that historians may legitimately embellish their sources and invent details for literary effect.

1 *CSPD*, 455.

2 *CSPD*, 449.

Essex's further indiscretions, however, victimized Hayward once again and led to the author's second trial of 1601 at which the whole question of his supposed sedition was reopened. Again the biographer of Richard II protested his innocence.¹ But, still not believed, he was kept in prison, apparently until after the Queen's death.²

Elizabeth, irritated by the commonly voiced parallel between Richard II and herself, commented wryly on the matter on 4 August 1601 when Lambarde presented to her his digest of historical records kept in the Tower. Glancing at Lambarde's pages, her eye fell upon the reign of King Richard, and the moment elicited her ironic remark about her having become a latter-day re-embodiment of the medieval monarch (see p. 5). In the exchange that followed she and Lambarde alluded specifically to Essex:

W.L. 'Such a wicked imagination was determined and attempted by a most unkind Gent. the most adorned creature that ever your Majestie made.'

Her Majestie. 'He that will forget God, will also forget his benefactors; this tragedy was played 40^{tie} times in open streets and houses.'

(Chambers, *WS*, 2.326–7)

Elizabeth's mention of forty performances, presumably of Shakespeare's play, would seem to refer to earlier presentations from about 1595 when *Richard II* was new. And perhaps Cecil's allusion in July 1600 to Essex's 'being so often present at the playing' of Hayward's book is also a loose way of speaking of early stagings of Shakespeare's tragedy – since in Cecil's mind the play, although of earlier date, would constitute merely a dramatized version of the same dangerous matter as that contained

1 *CSPD*, 539–40.

2 Dowling gives a detailed account of Hayward's 'troubles' in connection with his ill-fated *Life of Henry IV*. She believes, as I do, that Hayward was a loyal subject but was unjustly suspected of being an accessory to Essex's treason owing to accidents of timing that he could hardly foresee. The letter-writer John Chamberlain could 'finde no buggeswords' (sinister or subversive meanings) in Hayward's dedication (see Chamberlain, *Letters*, 1.70).

in Hayward's prose history. Alternatively, as Heffner (774–5, 780) suggests, Cecil may have been referring to some sort of pageant or recitation founded on Hayward's *Life of Henry IV* and replete with pointed analogies to current affairs. Neither of these references can be logically identified or connected with the special revival of *Richard II* at the Globe on 7 February – a performance from which the Earl was absent. Nor, as Ure (lxi) points out, is it reasonable to suppose that the authorities would have allowed a whole chain of performances after 1599 (when Hayward's book was published) if there was any chance that these were being mounted for the clandestine purpose of exciting popular discontent.

Analogies between Richard and Elizabeth or between Bolingbroke and Essex are clearly available in *Richard II*, but how they are received resides largely in the eye of the beholder. This point becomes clearer if we note two contrasting allusions to Essex in contemporary poetry, both of which seem to have been suggested by Richard's words in Shakespeare's play describing Bolingbroke's 'courtship to the common people' (1.4.24–36). Anonymous verses written about 1603 after the Earl's execution laud 'Renowned Essex' for 'vail[ing] his bonnett to an oyster wife' and behaving humbly in the streets to the 'vulgar sort that did admire his life'; whereas five years earlier in *Skialetheia* the satirist Everard Guilpin had ridiculed the Earl ('great *Foelix*') for the same behaviour – behaviour that he clearly interpreted as evidence of ambitious hypocrisy taught by '*Signor Machiauell*': 'passing through the street', Essex 'Vayleth his cap to each one he doth meet', thus affecting to be the very 'honny-suckle of humilitie'.¹ Even if some viewers of *Richard II* could identify Bolingbroke with Essex, as these poets apparently did, they might respond to the analogy in politically opposite ways. As for the verbal parallels between Hayward's book and Shakespeare's play, these are almost certainly due either to the use of common sources or to Hayward's

1 For details, see 1.4.24–36n. and 31LN.

having seen a performance of the tragedy or read one of the three quarto editions that appeared in print before his own work was published. Evelyn Albright, to be sure, tried to make a case for Hayward's *Life of Henry IV* as a source for Shakespeare, arguing that the dramatist had probably read the historical work in an early manuscript and had deliberately set out to construct a political allegory based upon it with a view to commenting upon current affairs. As Heffner showed, however, her argument depends upon false or unlikely assumptions and on a perverse wrenching of dates and time sequences.¹ Contemporary overtones the play certainly contains, but it is hardly possible to maintain that Shakespeare planned it with Richard and Bolingbroke as thinly veiled portraits of Elizabeth and Essex. As Palmer (119) observes, the Queen and her Privy Council knew that the play itself contained no treason. But this did not eliminate the treasonable purposes for which it might be used; Sir Gilly Meyrick, who in 1601 had bespoken the performance of 7 February (see p. 10), paid for confusing a drama of universal scope with a political manifesto by forfeiting his life on the gallows.

Ideology: Competing Conceptions of Monarchy

It would have been impossible for a playwright dramatizing the dethronement of an English king to avoid issues about the locus of ultimate authority in the state, or to suppress entirely the abiding tension between the concept of an anointed monarch (*rex imago Dei*) and a government of laws as incorporated in Parliament. The subject of deposition could not but involve debate, however circumspect or indirect, on the precarious balance between crown and people. Inevitably tied to such questions – especially in the 1590s – was the on-going, though officially silenced, controversy about the succession, accompanied of

1 Albright's article, published in *PMLA* in 1927, was answered by Heffner in the same journal in 1930; further debate between the two continued in later issues of *PMLA* in 1931 and 1932.

course by the theory of divine right. The result in *Richard II*, as Clegg phrases it, is ‘an uneasy dialectic between alternative views of succession, alternative views of kingship, and alternative views of the actions of both Richard II and Bolingbroke’ (442). The dramatist would already have encountered similar tensions in *Woodstock* (see pp. 149–52).

The political theology of the king’s two bodies became deeply implicated in the Tudor definition of monarchy. The King’s natural body incorporated his humanity and was thus subject to the frailties and mortality of the flesh, but his body politic embodied the state and so set him apart from all others, being ubiquitous and immortal. If the doctrine were applied uncritically, particular actions of a king might be interpreted as possessing a mystical and almost unchallengeable authority.¹ Thus Henry V in Shakespeare’s play can speak of himself as double-natured – a ‘god’ that suffers ‘mortal griefs’ and so is ‘twin-born’ (*H5* 4.1.234, 241–2). In her first words to the Privy Councillors after her accession in 1558 Elizabeth adopted the familiar vocabulary, speaking of her sorrow for the death of her sister as a function of her ‘bodye naturallye considered’ but of her power to govern England as proceeding from her ‘bodye politique’.²

Kantorowicz (24–41) sensitively interprets *Richard II* as a tragedy of royal christology in which the title figure progressively confronts his peculiar crisis of identity: Richard’s dual nature not only defines but magnifies his sufferings, forcing him in stages to come to terms with the fatal disuniting of his human from his mystical body, and pushing him ultimately to self-deposition and self-annihilation. Kantorowicz speaks of the inevitable ‘duplications’ inherent in kingship and shows how Richard struggles self-consciously, even theatrically, with them: ‘Thus play I in one person many people’ (5.5.31). That Richard is psychologically

1 The historical Sir John Bushy is supposed to have claimed, for instance, that the ‘Laws are in the King’s mouth, or sometimes in his breast’; quoted by Kantorowicz (28). Holinshed (3.502) makes a version of this comment one of the items (no. 14) charged against Richard in Parliament.

2 Quoted in Axton, 38.

wedded to christological kingship (he believes at one point that God will protect him with a battalion of angels) is obvious in his language – as, for instance, in his reference to himself as the ‘deputy elected by the Lord’, whom the ‘breath of worldly men cannot depose’ (3.2.56–7) and in his several comparisons of himself to Christ. But the same idea is also supported by Gaunt, who uses similar terminology (‘God’s substitute, / His deputy anointed in His sight’ (1.2.37–8)), and by Carlisle (‘the figure of God’s majesty, / His captain, steward, deputy elect, / Anointed, crowned, planted many years’ (4.1.126–8)). York refers to Richard as ‘the anointed King’ (2.3.96) and even after his defection to Bolingbroke can still speak of him as ‘sacred’ (3.3.9), a word that crops up more often in *Richard II* than in any other work of Shakespeare’s. The usurper himself partly endorses Richard’s iconic conception of monarchy when he envisages their meeting at Flint as the ‘thund’ring shock’ of a cataclysmic storm with Richard as the reigning element of ‘fire’ or lightning and himself as ‘the yielding water’ (3.3.56–8).¹ But this sacral and absolutist emphasis reflects only one aspect of the play’s complex political vision.

As Talbert has pointed out, a more constitutional view of monarchy had steadily evolved through the writings of such men as Sir Thomas Smith, Bishop John Ponet, Richard Hooker, Sir Philip Sidney and others. Although these writers were far from denying divine right, they emphasized a more contractual relationship between ruler and people and viewed the commonwealth as a system of checks and balances rooted in the primacy of law as institutionalized in Parliament. According to this conception, the state was defined less in terms of an opposition between the one and the many than as a corporation in which the King was but the head of a more comprehensive body consisting also of the three estates – clergy, peers and commons. An engraving in Glover’s *Nobilitas Politica vel Civilis* (1608) which shows Elizabeth presiding in Parliament on her throne of state (Fig. 3) illustrates this

1 See 3.3.58–60n.

more inclusive understanding of *rex in parlamento*. The so-called Parliament scene of Shakespeare's tragedy (4.1) suggests the same concept, not only by its action but by the use (in both Q and F) of the term '*Parliament*' in the opening stage direction.¹ The coronation oath implied that the King, as distinct from a tyrant, derived his power from the consent of the governed and, as the appointed executive of law and justice (interpreted as the will of God), could be removed from office if he failed to redress grievances or abused his powers. While the *Homilies* stressed the duty of passive obedience even to a wicked prince (as in Gaunt's words to Gloucester's widow in the play),² medieval constitutional theorists such as Henry de Bracton and Sir John Fortescue had argued that England was traditionally a limited monarchy, and that passive obedience was therefore repugnant to common law as ordinarily understood. Bracton's famous principle that the King, although not under man, was nevertheless 'under God and under the law because law maketh a king' was quoted in support; and Fortescue's statement to the effect that 'the king exists for the sake of the kingdom, and not the kingdom for the sake of the king' had similar force.³ Bracton, indeed, had managed a somewhat slippery reconciliation of the seeming contradiction between a king's near-absolutist prerogatives and his theoretically limited powers by suggesting that as God's minister the monarch could only do right, but that if he happened to do wrong he was acting not as a king but as a minister of the devil.⁴ Based on such precedents, the concept of a merited as opposed to a merely inherited kingship grew stronger.

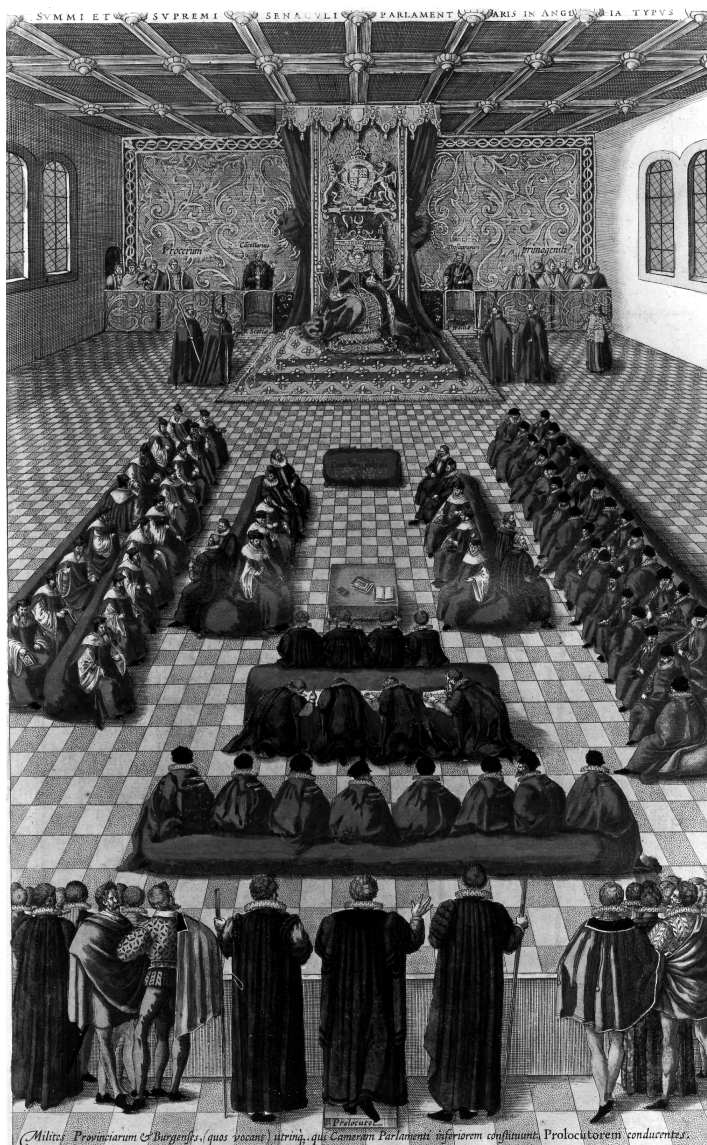
This constitutional view of royal power enjoyed wide respect during Elizabeth's reign and seems to have been held by many loyal subjects of humanist and intellectual bent; but the more strident proponents of limited monarchy tended to be either

1 See 4.1.0.1–5n. The altered title-page of Q4 (Fig. 18) refers to 'the Parliament Sceane, and the deposing of King Richard'.

2 See 1.2.37–41n.

3 See Talbert, 216, n. 120; Stubbs, 3.258.

4 See Stubbs, 2.326.



3 Elizabeth I in Parliament, engraving in Robert Glover, *Nobilitas Politica vel Civilis*, 1608

papist or puritan. The Jesuit Parsons in a 1594 treatise supporting the Spanish Infanta as Elizabeth's successor argued that Richard II had been justly and legally deposed, while the Calvinist Wentworth, who favoured James VI, resembled Parsons in being an incendiary defender of parliamentary rights, insisting that though Elizabeth might be God's deputy, her power existed only 'to minister justice according to the good and wholesome laws of the land'.¹

Reticently, *Richard II* also dramatizes the view of parliamentary supremacy described above, including the power to judge kings. The most obvious instance occurs when Northumberland, acting presumably as Bolingbroke's agent, asks his fellow peers in Westminster Hall 'to grant the commons' suit' that Richard may be brought before Parliament to 'surrender' 'in common view' (4.1.155–7). Later in the scene Northumberland tries at three different points (222–3, 243, 269) to make the captive king read aloud a list of 'accusations' and 'grievous crimes . . . Against the state and profit of this land' so that 'the souls of men / May deem that', 'by confessing them', he is 'worthily deposed' (4.1.223–7). The 'articles' which Richard evades by pleading that his 'eyes are full of tears' (4.1.243–4), and which the play never fully explains, are the '33 solemn articles' which Holinshed says were presented to Parliament as a basis for trying the King – a means of assuring that Richard's power to harm the commonwealth further would be officially nullified. Holinshed prints the document listing Richard's 'heinous points of misgouernance and iniurious dealings' as ruler.² When Bolingbroke cautions Northumberland to cease pressing the articles upon Richard, the over-zealous Earl complains that 'The commons will not then be satisfied' (4.1.272). Shakespeare clouds the issue of whether Richard can be legally condemned by Parliament by having the King depose himself, thus removing the matter from their hands, and by prefacing to

1 *Conference*, 1.32, 2.61–2. For Wentworth's defence of the liberties guaranteed by Parliament, see Neale, 1.321, 2.262–3.

2 See 4.1.222–3n., 225n. and 227n.

Richard's appearance Carlisle's courageous protestation of divine right. Nevertheless, the playwright suggests the latent power of Parliament to depose its sovereign by converting Richard's private resignation in the Tower (as described by Holinshed) into a public abdication before the highest court of the land.¹ Bolingbroke's adjudication of the quarrels among the 'Lords appellants' with which the scene opens also dramatizes the function of Parliament as a court of law; although not yet installed officially as Henry IV, the Duke presides over these 'differences' as *rex in parlamento*, ordering that they 'shall all rest under gage' until he assigns their 'days of trial' (4.1.105–7).

In addition, the play invites sympathy for nobles and commons both as elements of Parliament and as social classes by having Ross and Willoughby, two choric voices, comment on Richard's tyrannical abuses of power. The King loses his subjects' hearts by governing high-handedly without the participation and consent of his supporting legislators, one of whose functions is to vote subsidies; instead he acts independently – by imposing 'grievous taxes', fines for 'ancient quarrels', 'new exactions', blank charters, 'benevolences' and the like (2.1.246–50). Richard's most criminal act, apart from destroying Gloucester and farming the realm, is the 'robbing of the banished' Bolingbroke (2.1.261), an egregious violation of the cherished law of inheritance on which the royal title itself depends. York laments that 'the commons . . . are cold' to Richard's cause and may 'revolt on Hereford's side' (2.2.88–9), implying thereby that the King has ignored or overridden their interests. Only Bushy and Bagot, the 'caterpillars of the commonwealth' (2.3.166), speak disparagingly of the commons, calling them 'hateful' (2.2.137) and 'wavering' (2.2.128). But Shakespeare complicates our response to the implicit opposition between absolutist and constitutional monarchy by occluding the motives of Richard's antagonist and by deliberately refraining

1 See 4.1 headnote.

from having him defend his usurpation on moral, legal or theoretical grounds.¹ Since he never soliloquizes, we have no access to his private thoughts and must judge him almost exclusively by his actions. Publicly, Bolingbroke claims only to seek what is legally his – his hereditary lands and title. And Richard makes it unnecessary for him to claim more by agreeing to relinquish the crown before it has been formally demanded. Moreover, Bolingbroke is too shrewd politically to contest a concept of divine viceregency so important for his own authority and security in the next reign, even if to do so would serve, in the short term, to justify his occupancy of Richard's place. The closest Bolingbroke comes to acknowledging his ambition for the throne is his response to York's warning at Flint Castle that he and his adherents are under divine judgement: 'the heavens are o'er our heads' (3.3.17). Bolingbroke's answer, 'I know it, uncle, and oppose not myself / Against their will' (3.3.18–19), seems to suggest that the popular Duke regards himself, at least for the moment, as a man of destiny, a figure whom greater powers have singled out to be the deliverer of the nation. If Bolingbroke can ride to power on the crest of some supernatural and foreordained agency, the issues of parliamentary supremacy and rule by legislative assent become moot. A king by virtue of necessity, if not by conquest, may dispense with legalistic niceties.

Characterization: Attitudes towards Richard and Bolingbroke

Shakespeare inherited divergent and competing interpretations of Richard and Bolingbroke (see pp. 129–30, 137–8, 139, 143–4, 147–8, 156–7). In the interests of simplification – indeed oversimplification – these have been referred to conventionally as 'Yorkist' (pro-Richard) or 'Lancastrian' (pro-Henry) according to the dynastic factions that subsequently fostered them for their own political advantage. From the Lancastrian point of view

1 Holinshed notes that after Bolingbroke had captured Richard and brought him as prisoner to London, he caused a parliament to be called, 'vsing the name of king Richard in the writs directed forth to the lords' (3.502). The judicial body that the usurper assembled to convict Richard of unfitness to rule had to be called in the name of the figure it was proposing to unseat.

(represented by the majority of English chroniclers), Richard was a weak, incompetent and despotic king, extravagantly self-indulgent, deaf to wise counsel, dominated by corrupt and selfish favourites and altogether ruinous to his country. Bolingbroke, on the other hand, was a justly popular and wronged nobleman, a strong and capable leader, the darling of fortune and destiny, the politically natural successor to Richard, a man who responded boldly to the needs of his time and the saviour of the nation. This essentially is the view of his career that Henry himself voices in *2 Henry IV* when, indulging in the luxury of hindsight, he disclaims any ambition for the throne: 'then, God knows, I had no such intent, / But that necessity so bow'd the state / That I and greatness were compell'd to kiss' (3.2.72–4).¹ But according to the Yorkist writers, who naturally wished to discredit the Lancastrian revolution, the youthful Richard was more victim than villain – a generally devout and well-meaning monarch, misled into wrongful policies and exploited by false and self-seeking friends. Bolingbroke tends to emerge in this interpretation as an ambitious, unscrupulous, opportunistic and dissimulating politician.² The French chroniclers, who sympathized with Richard on account of his birthplace and his Gallic wife, promoted the image of a royal martyr betrayed by his own subjects and dethroned by a shrewd and cruel usurper. The complex intersection, assimilation and overlapping of these contradictory traditions in the writings that must have influenced Shakespeare, whether directly or indirectly, have been well described and analysed by Duls.³

- 1 Cf. Holinshed, who remarks on the 'verie notable example . . . that this Henrie duke of Lancaster should be thus called to the kingdome, and haue the helpe and assistance (almost) of all the whole realme, [who] perchance neuer thereof thought or yet dreamed'. Supernatural powers are ultimately responsible for Richard's fall and Bolingbroke's success: 'in this deiecting of the one, & aduancing of the other, the prouidence of God is to be respected, & his secret will to be woondered at' (3.499).
- 2 Cf. *2H4* 4.5.183–5: 'God knows, my son, / By what by-paths and indirect crook'd ways / I met this crown'. It should be remembered also, as Smidt (98) reminds us, that ambition was considered to be a 'serious . . . vice . . . in the Elizabethan moral system'. Cf. Baldwin's dedication of the *Mirror* (63): 'Well is that realme gouerned, in which the ambitious desyer not to beare office.'
- 3 See Duls, especially 7–8, 112–90, 196–203.

Even in Holinshed, a chronicle compiled of diverse materials, Shakespeare encountered mixed attitudes to Richard and Bolingbroke. There we read that Richard ‘began to rule by will more than by reason, threatning death to each one that obeied not his inordinate desires’; given to ‘furious outrage’, he was ‘a man destitute of sobrietie and wisdom’ who wickedly ‘abused his authoritie’ (3.493). Yet the same chronicler can also refer to him as a ‘bountifull and louing souereigne’, victimized by ‘ingratitude’ (3.508) and lied to by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Pilate-like Arundel, who had promised that he should be safe from ‘anie hurt, as touching his person’ (3.501). In general Holinshed treats Bolingbroke benignly – as courageous, politically adept, deservedly popular and carefully respectful of the King. Yet it is equally clear that the Duke is ruthless in destroying Richard’s friends. Accusing Bolingbroke of ‘ambitious’ and ‘tigerlike crueltie’, Holinshed also says that he ‘wanted moderation and loialtie in his dooings’ for which he was afterwards duly punished: ‘What vnnaturalnesse . . . was this, not to be content with [Richard’s] principallitie’, ‘his treasure’, ‘his depriuation’, ‘his imprisonment’ and ‘wooluishlie to lie in wait . . . and rauenouslie to thirst after his bloud, the spilling whereof should have touched his conscience[?]’ (3.508). Referring specifically to the scene at Flint Castle where Richard and Bolingbroke have their all-important encounter, Talbert observes that such ‘antithetical attitudes . . . are so closely juxtaposed’ by Shakespeare ‘that for all intents and purposes they fuse with one another, and that fusion accords with the way in which two attitudes toward kingship have been kept alive’ throughout the play: ‘Even as Richard lacks the vigorous and wise [capacity to govern] . . . , his right by inheritance, by the hand of God, by a simplified world-order, is expressed forcefully’ (168–9). What is true of this crucial scene is true in a broader sense of the tragedy as a whole.

Shakespeare partly accomplishes the ‘fusion’ to which Talbert points by subtly undercutting or rendering ambiguous the roles of Richard and Bolingbroke as divine-right monarch and irresistible challenger. This technique is clearest in the Flint Castle episode

where Richard, a figure of 'Controlling majesty' (3.3.70) who dazzles his subjects like the sun, nevertheless descends from his royal eminence into 'the base court' (3.3.176) at the request of a mere vassal and not only grants Bolingbroke's demands but, in his 'doom-eagerness',¹ yields his person to the enemy, all the while indulging in histrionic and unkingly self-pity. Nor does Shakespeare fail to balance the mixed portrayal of Richard with an equally mixed image of Bolingbroke. The Duke approaches the castle with the full force of his army and the sound of 'brazen trumpet' (3.3.33), yet 'without the noise of threat'ning drum' (3.3.51). He protests 'allegiance and true faith of heart' to his sovereign. He offers to lay his 'arms and power' at Richard's 'feet', at the same time issuing an ultimatum to his liege lord that if his demands are not 'freely granted', he will 'use the advantage of [his] power' to create 'showers of blood / Rained from the wounds of slaughtered Englishmen' (3.3.37–44). He kneels before Richard with a show of submission and kisses the royal hand; but the elaborate courtesy and tactful observance of protocol, although minimizing imputations of ambition, in no way alter the military and political facts. And in Northumberland's dropping of Richard's title (3.3.6–9) and failure to kneel (3.3.75–6), Shakespeare subtly conveys a hint of the usurper's ultimate goal. Bolingbroke accomplishes his purpose of regaining the status of Duke of Lancaster and of taking Richard prisoner without creating the impression that he openly seeks the crown. Yet Richard's sarcastic address to him as 'King Bolingbroke' (3.3.173), taken in conjunction with Northumberland's unceremonious behaviour, creates just the opposite impression. Has Richard masochistically delivered up himself and his throne to a hypocritical enemy who would have seized power in any case? Or has Bolingbroke through luck, percipience, a heroic temperament and skilful manoeuvring

1 Harold Bloom (2) uses this term: 'Richard is both his own victim, or rather the victim of his own imagination, and the sacrifice that becomes inevitable when the distance between the king as he should be and the actual legitimate monarch becomes too great' (Bloom, 3).

simply placed himself in a position to have greatness thrust upon him? The scene leaves these equivocal issues unresolved.

Shakespeare, indeed, contrives to promote ambiguous impressions of both antagonists throughout the drama and to manipulate audience responses in such a way as to keep approval and disapproval, or sympathy and alienation, in a more or less constant state of flux. According to Rackin, the audience is made to play 'a carefully calculated role' not listed among the cast of characters, 'complete with motivations, actions, errors, and discoveries' (263). Rackin goes so far as to allege that 'keeping our sympathies in suspense' constitutes the play's 'primary technique' (86). These minor fluctuations, of course, do not disturb the general drift towards increased emotional identification with Richard, as befits a tragic protagonist, or the gradual distancing from Bolingbroke that naturally accompanies it. Nevertheless, the progressive disclosure and complication of character adopted in *Richard II* represents a new and subtler technique than anything observable in earlier plays, especially the histories.

There is space here to touch only on high points by way of illustration. While the opening act presents a generally negative impression of Richard (his weak yielding to subordinates, his apparent responsibility for Gloucester's death, his unjust caprice as judge, his implied jealousy of Bolingbroke, his farming the realm, his callousness towards Gaunt), it simultaneously qualifies the effect by dramatizing his royal demeanour, his shrewd capacity to assess enemies and Gaunt's principled refusal to take vengeance against 'God's substitute' (1.2.37). Although the portrait of Bolingbroke is contrastingly positive, emphasizing courage and patriotism, the action also raises doubts about his loyalty since, while protesting concern for 'the precious safety of my prince' (1.1.32), he seems to threaten Richard by accusing Mowbray and suggesting (in opposition to his father's doctrine) that the duty of avenging Gloucester falls specifically to him. The play promotes further uncertainty by Richard's reference to the opponents' 'sky-aspiring and ambitious thoughts' (1.3.130) and to

Bolingbroke's political craft in wooing commoners 'As were our England in reversion his, / And he our subjects' next degree in hope' (1.4.35–6). An additional ambiguity arises when Gaunt, asserting that Richard has 'caused' Gloucester's death, adds the phrase, 'if wrongfully' (1.2.39), thus blurring the issue of royal guilt.¹ Although Richard later acknowledges his 'weaved-up follies' (4.1.229) and refers to his 'sins' (4.1.275) in general terms, he never expresses the slightest guilt for the killing of his uncle, an action carried out by subordinates. Shakespeare leaves the question of Richard's bad conscience for the death unresolved just as, at the end of the play, he applies a balancing ambiguity to the murder of Richard at the hands of Exton – a deed which King Henry may or may not have secretly authorized despite his combination of relief and guilt after it has been accomplished.²

By dramatizing the King's arrogance, his deafness to wise counsel, his heartless response to Gaunt's death and the confiscation of Bolingbroke's inheritance, Act 2 brings Richard to his nadir in the sympathies of the audience; Northumberland's 'Most degenerate King!' (2.1.262) seems justified. Yet our dismay at Richard's tyrannical incompetence is immediately balanced by the news that Bolingbroke has already raised an army and plans to invade England, violating his oath of fealty and delaying only until Richard has left for Ireland.³ In his phrase, 'Redeem from broking pawn the blemished crown' (2.1.293), Northumberland seems to hint enthusiastically at usurpation. If the 'anointed King' (2.3.96) has demonstrated unfitness to rule, the alternative to the passive obedience which

- 1 Rabkin comments: 'If the unthreatened rule of the King is the principle of the state's survival, there may be some justification for what he [Richard] has caused to be done. At any rate, to take arms against God's minister is to Gaunt an even more egregious crime than Richard's' (83).
- 2 Morse finds Shakespeare 'specific and explicit on the crisis in 1399, but tacit and inferential about responsibility; he managed to keep interpretation open and to avoid fixing blame' (123).
- 3 See 2.1.289–90n. As early as 1852 Hudson could speak of Bolingbroke's 'noiseless potency of will', of 'his most silent, all-pervading, inly-working efficacy of thought and purpose' (Forker, 193).

Gaunt had endorsed is the backing, in Bolingbroke's own phrase, of 'a banished traitor' (2.3.60) – what York later calls 'gross rebellion and detested treason' (2.3.109). Moreover, Shakespeare now introduces the Queen, who acknowledges nothing of her husband's misrule, as a means of evoking sympathy for her 'sweet Richard' (2.2.9). In emotional terms, this prepares for York's dilemma, torn, as he is, between his two 'kinsmen' – the one his 'sovereign, whom both my oath / And duty bids defend', the other a nephew 'whom the King hath wronged, / Whom conscience and my kindred bids to right' (2.2.111–15). Worcester's defection and the flight of Bushy, Bagot and Green, who apparently ignore York's order to 'muster up . . . men' (2.2.118), only increase our sense of Richard's vulnerability and further emphasize the King's isolation. Richard's power to command the loyalty of friends now looks significantly weaker than his cousin's.

On his return Bolingbroke conveys mixed impressions – attractive humility in response to Northumberland's fulsomeness but also self-assurance and promises of reward as his 'infant fortune comes to years' (2.3.66); the metaphor suggests his long-range strategy. He speaks also of 'my treasury' (2.3.60) as though he were already a monarch. York's horror of 'braving arms against [the] sovereign' (2.3.112) reincorporates the orthodoxy of passive obedience voiced earlier by Gaunt. Moreover, the speciousness of Bolingbroke's argument that his new title, Duke of Lancaster, has annulled the crime of his early return, since he was banished only as Hereford, has an alienating effect. The situation nevertheless allows him to describe with eloquence the legal injustice of which he has been the victim – an injustice that is seen once more (as in 2.1) to weaken Richard's implied position that inheritance alone is enough to make and protect a king. Then York's futile assertion of authority, his wish to make Bolingbroke 'stoop / Unto the sovereign mercy of the King' (2.3.156–7), proves hollow, as he collapses into a stance of neutrality and offers the rebels whom he has just so roundly scolded the hospitality of his castle.

York's failure of nerve recapitulates Richard's earlier failure (1.1.196–9) to make Bolingbroke and Mowbray obey his will. Although York is 'loath to break our country's laws', he seeks to evade the political untenability of his position by welcoming the invaders as neither 'friends nor foes' (2.3.169–70). Act 2 concludes with Salisbury's gloomy forecast of Richard's setting sun, 'weeping in the lowly west' and the political 'storms' in prospect (2.4.21–2). Up to this point, Shakespeare has so manipulated responses that audiences can hardly be sanguine or approving of either Richard or Bolingbroke.

In Act 3, as Stirling observes, Shakespeare presents Bolingbroke and Richard in two consecutive scenes that individually dramatize their 'utter difference' of 'temperament' (29), finally making them confront each other in the third scene, which settles dispositively the issue of Richard's removal from the throne. All three scenes encourage ambivalent responses to both antagonists. In the first Bolingbroke is shown to be decisive, efficient, brisk and diplomatically prudent, condemning Bushy and Green, sending courteous commendations to the Queen, and setting in motion a military expedition against Glendower and the remaining loyalists. But by executing the favourites, he ruthlessly exceeds his authority, behaving already as though he were king; he also makes them scapegoats, trumping up charges of sexual misconduct and blaming them for Richard's injuries to him personally, just as he had earlier attacked Richard through Mowbray for Gloucester's death.¹ The parallel scene of the King's return from Ireland develops the sentimental side of Richard, showing his histrionic oscillations between unjustified elation and the 'sweet way' of 'despair' (3.2.205). Self-indulgently anticipating total defeat, Richard is the first person after Bolingbroke's return to pronounce the word 'deposed', obsessively repeating it four times (3.2.56, 150, 157, 158). Attraction to the martyrdom of abdication causes him to ritualize the abandonment

1 See 3.1 headnote and 3.1.11–15n.

of his sacred body, the body symbolized by his throne, to sit upon the ground, where he can meditate on death and the common humanity that unites him in his physical body to his subjects and all other mortals:

Throw away respect,
Tradition, form and ceremonious duty,
For you have but mistook me all this while.
I live with bread like you, feel want,
Taste grief, need friends. Subjected thus,
How can you say to me I am a king?
(3.2.172–7)

As a monarch Richard never appears weaker, more self-absorbed or more in love with catastrophe than in this scene, which ends in his renouncing politics altogether: ‘Discharge my followers. Let them hence away, / From Richard’s night to Bolingbroke’s fair day’ (3.2.217–18). Clearly the scene functions to contrast the King’s emotional instability with the icy and rigorous control of his adversary. Yet tragic sympathy for Richard begins to emerge with the challenge to his authority, and self-knowledge, though incomplete, begins to accompany self-pity. The brittle confidence, arrogant self-possession and careless indifference of the earlier Richard have melted to disclose a richer and more vulnerably complex personality. The ‘hollow crown’ speech (3.2.160–77) reveals that the speaker’s untested faith in the divine protection of his title has been shattered as completely as the mirror he will later break. The new ingredient is Richard’s own questioning of the integrity of the king’s two bodies – a unity that heretofore he had shallowly assumed. Attack from without has sparked dividedness within. And the result is a protagonist of greater capacity for self-understanding and emotional depth than has yet been disclosed. Meanwhile, Bolingbroke has remained a closed book – a figure whose inner self has been carefully screened from our gaze. Paradoxically, the ineffectual King appears to be a more interesting, interior and multifaceted human being than the figure who

threatens him. But most importantly, the scene near the Welsh coast serves as a significant watershed in Shakespeare's dramaturgical scheme, clarifying the lesson that the political conflicts of the play are inseparable from the psychological and moral complexities of the men who contend for dominion. Tragedy, even if its historical subject is a revolution, must concern itself as much with human beings as with political theory.

The pivotal scene at Flint Castle continues to show both figures in a double light. While Bolingbroke presents himself as the loyal proponent of justice ('My gracious lord, I come but for mine own'), thus gaining our approval, Richard's bitter response, 'Your own is yours, and I am yours and all' (3.3.196–7), embraces a more far-reaching truth. Richard becomes a prisoner, knowing that London can mean only dethronement and probable death; and when he adds, 'For do we must what force will have us do' (3.3.207), Bolingbroke revealingly fails to contradict him.¹ Our impression of Richard is equally mixed. While theatricalizing his own humiliation in the 'base court', behaving like a spectator at his own tragedy,² Richard nevertheless clings to that exalted conception of royalty that supplies the foundation for his grief in having to forfeit it. Richard's majesty, which impresses even his opponent and causes York, now fully committed to Bolingbroke, to weep for what has been lost, emerges as something more than romantic illusion. At the same time both antagonists are to some extent victims of self-delusion. Richard remains unable or unwilling to confront the flaws of character and policy that have brought him to his unhappy pass, however realistically he may now assess his present

- 1 Act 4 makes it clear that 'London' means not only Parliament but also 'the Tower' (4.1.316). Stirling notes the 'economy and understatement' as well as the 'taciturnity' of Bolingbroke's 'discursive self-revelation' in the falling action of the play: Bolingbroke's most significant decisions regarding Richard tend to be 'embodied in a terse statement', each time another character having 'either evoked it from him or stated its implications for him' (33–4).
- 2 Pointing to such moments of self-consciousness as Richard's 'Well, well, I see / I talk but idly, and you laugh at me' (3.3.170–1), Palmer observes that the King is 'possibly the only appreciative witness of his tragedy' (159); he is echoing Chambers, who says of Richard that he 'becomes an interested spectator of his own ruin' (*Survey*, 91).

danger; and Bolingbroke seems equally unable to acknowledge (perhaps even to himself) the thirst for sovereignty that underlies his self-restraint and calculated realism, even though his upward momentum towards the throne is now more obvious than ever.¹

The garden scene, which immediately follows, confirms objectively what was implicit at Flint Castle – that ‘Bolingbroke / Hath seized the wasteful King’ (3.4.54–5) and that his deposition at ‘London’ is imminent (3.4.90). Sympathy for Richard is renewed through the Queen’s distressed reaction to the baleful news she has overheard. But at the same time the Gardeners elaborate a patterned explanation of how badly the fallen King had tended his ‘sea-walled garden’ (3.4.43) and, by implication at least, defend the usurpation of power as a sad necessity. The Queen, moreover, voices the momentous implications of her husband’s dethronement by comparing it to the Fall, thus endowing Richard’s tragedy, as did the chronicler Hall, with the significance of a mythic and long-lasting national disaster.

Bolingbroke’s status as king *de facto* becomes clearer early in Act 4 where the Duke, using the royal ‘we’, presides impassively over his squabbling nobles and exerts his control by deferring their ‘days of trial’ (4.1.106–7). By reviving the matter of Gloucester’s death, Shakespeare muddies the waters more disturbingly than before. Although Bolingbroke says little, his resolute demeanour contrasts with Richard’s inability in the analogous opening scene to make his quarrelling subjects obey him.² Yet only when York announces that ‘plume-plucked

1 Bolingbroke ‘never allows himself to know where he is going. Every step in his progress towards the throne is dictated by circumstances and he never permits himself to have a purpose till it is more than half fulfilled’ (Palmer, 134). He ‘does not attempt to think through his position clearly or persistently’ (Baxter, 112). See also the discussion of Daniel (pp. 143–4).

2 Berger (‘Perspective’, 264–5) argues that the contrast redounds to Richard’s credit rather than to Bolingbroke’s: sitting ‘quietly through most of the scene’ Bolingbroke, unlike his counterpart, refuses to ‘intervene in the volatile factionalism that bodes ill for future stability’. Although I regard Bolingbroke’s silence during the quarrel as evidence of his shrewdness and politic restraint, not of his weakness, Berger’s contrary interpretation serves to illustrate the shifting and ambiguous responses that both characters seem designed to elicit.

Richard' has willingly adopted him as 'heir' (4.1.109–10) does Bolingbroke for the first time acknowledge his claim to sovereignty: 'In God's name I'll ascend the regal throne' (4.1.114). This is the dramatic moment in Shakespeare's brilliant recasting of Holinshed that elicits Carlisle's divine-right protest and the prophecy that crowning Bolingbroke will transform England into a Golgotha of national slaughter for generations yet unborn. Carlisle's brave defence of the inviolable sanctity of kingship causes Bolingbroke to hesitate;¹ and although the prelate is instantly arrested for his reactionary loyalty, he nevertheless forces the usurper, most inconveniently, to summon the fallen King into Parliament so that his abdication may be witnessed and Bolingbroke's accession accepted 'Without suspicion' (4.1.158). For once, Bolingbroke has been placed on the defensive. And, once he appears, there Richard manages to keep him for the remainder of the act, dominating the stage in his improvised pageant of self-unkinging. This scene, as Palmer rightly says, 'is the summit of the play' (167).

Thus Shakespeare contrasts two kinds of power – the political and the theatrical. Bolingbroke may hold the reins of sovereignty, but Richard is the master of self-dramatization with its attendant arts – command of rhetoric and metaphor, the power to embarrass enemies, ironic wit and quicksilver fancy, the capacity to evoke both pity and irritation, the posture of associating his own sufferings with the Passion of Jesus, and the histrionic skill to make the narcissistic contemplation of his own identity coterminous with a ceremony of monarchical renunciation that communicates a sense of desecration and the loss of sacred tradition. Richard manages to endow his own fall with cosmic significance – with the fracturing of an ancient and venerable world order in which the king is seen as a vital link in the great chain that connects the celestial with the earthly. The player-king now triumphs theatrically over

1 It is debatable whether Bolingbroke actually occupies the throne at this point. See 4.1.114n.

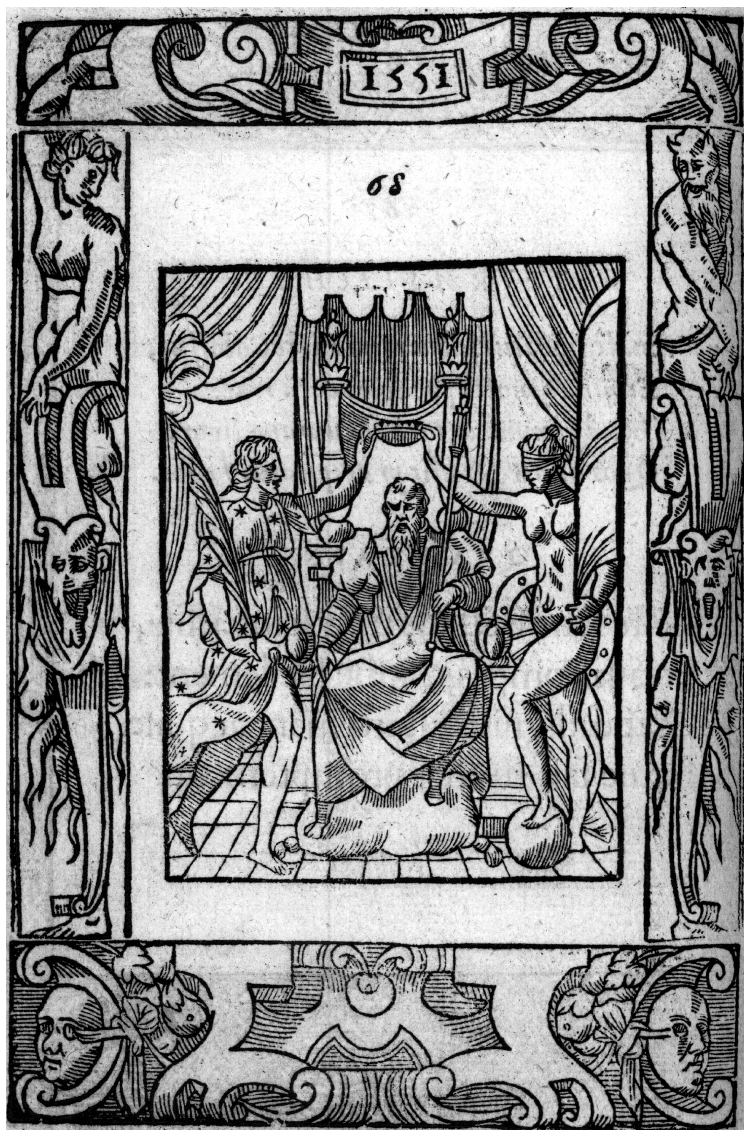
the king of *Realpolitik* but at the cost of half-annihilating both himself and the beautiful principle on which he had believed his royalty to be founded.

Yet again a certain doubleness of perspective, rooted in the sacramental theology of kingship itself, pervades the episode of discrowning; for, paradoxically, Richard contrives to assert the sacred inviolability of his office while simultaneously divesting himself of its symbols and thereby violating it himself. Although Richard has the talents of an actor, inventing 'a great ceremony for his humiliation', as Philip Edwards phrases it, 'kingship is for him no actor's part, put on and put off at will' (102), but rather the defining ground of his being. The man who had grandly claimed that an ocean of sea-water could not 'wash the balm off from an anointed king' (3.2.55) now affects to remove it 'With [his] own tears' (4.1.207). In rituals of the degradation of priests and bishops, only those who have been anointed themselves can presume to officiate in the scraping off of the holy oils and chrism. Yet it is equally clear that in such degradations the subject is prohibited only from lawfully exercising his sacramental powers, since the gifts of the Holy Spirit conferred by anointing at consecrations and ordinations are permanently valid and beyond the power of human beings to annul. 'Ay, no. No, ay', Richard's equivocal answer to Bolingbroke's question of whether he is 'contented to resign the crown' (4.1.200–1), encapsulates concisely his divided attitude. The inverted rite of dispossession to which Pater famously called attention (see Forker, 298), and which Richard languishingly draws out to such liturgical length, expunges in a psychological sense the very identity of the speaker.¹ As Ranald (195) observes, the ceremony 'is infinitely more than mere formality', constituting as it does 'his annihilation as a kingly person, his reduction to the rank of knave, the destruction of his achievements, and, as Richard sees it, his excision from the roster of English kings, since he has become a traitor to the office he had held'. Yet at the same time

1 See Ranald, 183–96; also 4.1.203n.

Richard cannot but asseverate the timeless legitimacy of his kingship – his claim to the body mystical that cannot theoretically be sundered from the body physical until death. He condemns the ‘heinous’ act of ‘deposing . . . a king / And cracking the strong warrant of an oath, / Marked with a blot, damned in the book of heaven’ (4.1.233–6); he compares himself twice to Christ, the King of all creation, whose Godhead is sempiternal; and he condemns himself for cooperating in the inversion of an immutable hierarchy – for consenting ‘T’undeck the pompous body of a king’, for having made ‘Glory base and Sovereignty a slave, / Proud Majesty a subject, State a peasant’ (4.1.250–2).

Of course the episode exposes also the fallible side of Richard’s nature so that a tragic divide opens up between the semi-divine dignity of the rank he once held (and still glorifies) and his own solipsistic exhibitionism. The comparisons to Christ have a double edge. Looked at from a merely human perspective, Richard’s claim that his sufferings exceed those of his Saviour, since Jesus had only one Judas while he has had to cope with ‘twelve thousand’ betrayers (4.1.171–2), reveals a degree of presumption approaching blasphemy. At the same time, however, the analogy between the dethroning of an anointed sovereign and the Passion contains a certain theological validity according to the christology of divine-right doctrine. The windlass image of the two buckets carries something of the same doubleness about it (see 4.1.184n. and Fig. 4). Richard applies it to his own advantage by making the high bucket (Bolingbroke) dance emptily, carelessly and illegitimately in the air while the low bucket, representing himself, is heavy with grief and the weight of sacred tradition. The analogy is tactically clever since it apparently exasperates Bolingbroke as intended; but the verbal wit displayed also casts doubt upon the profundity of Richard’s grief since the deepest kinds of suffering do not usually accommodate such ostentation. The same point can be made about the emblematic mirror into which Richard gazes before he smashes it in a climactic *coup de théâtre* – an action he himself can refer to as ‘this sport’ (4.1.290). At one level the



- 4 Virtus and Fortuna holding a crown over a king's head, from Guillaume de la Perrière, *La Morosophie*, Lyons, 1553, emblem 68

episode can be read as extravagant escapism, a means by which Richard narcissistically evades a reality he himself has invited. The Epistle of James likens a Christian who hears the word of God but, self-deceivingly, fails to translate it into action 'unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass' for 'he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was' (1.23–4). It is this self-deception that Bolingbroke imputes to Richard's gesture as he refers with a hint of contempt to 'The shadow of [his] sorrow' (4.1.292). But the mirror, as a reflector of truth (as well as of vanity), also allows the fallen King a moment of deeper insight into his own nature. It becomes for him 'the very book . . . Where all [his] sins are writ' (4.1.274–5) and the means of disclosing, as through a glass darkly, 'the tortured soul' (4.1.298) that lies beneath the youthfully handsome and as yet unwrinkled countenance.¹ The brittleness of the glass symbolizes for Richard the fragility and impermanence of life itself and links up thematically with the 'hollow crown' speech of 3.2 with its effect of expanded consciousness and deepened self-perception.² And throughout Richard's quasi-tragic performance, Bolingbroke has been reduced to the role of a 'silent King' (4.1.290), who can only regain a measure of assurance by 'conveying' his rhetorically potent enemy 'to the Tower' (4.1.316). Nor is it other than by masterly design that Shakespeare concludes the scene of Richard's 'woeful pageant' (4.1.321) with the Abbot of Westminster's counter-revolutionary plot. Having permitted Richard to usurp the spotlight emotionally, thereby casting the political usurper into shadow, the dramatist now revives the possibility, perhaps even the distant hope, of an actual reversal in the power structure of the state.

1 Nichols quotes a report that in her final illness Queen Elizabeth 'desired to see a true looking-glass, which in twenty years she had not sene, but only such a one as was made of purpose to deceive her sight: which glasse, being brought her, she fell presently into exclayming against those which had so much commended her, and took it so offensively, that some which had flattered her, durst not come into her sight' (3.612).

2 See 4.1.275.1n., 287–8n., 292–3n. and 294n.

Mixed reactions to Richard continue in Act 5. In the largely private farewell of the royal lovers (dramatically, the Guard and the Queen's ladies are non-presences), Richard's devotion to his wife comes over as deep and genuine; yet Richard still acts the player-king, emoting over his own tragedy and transmuting it into literary artifact – 'the lamentable tale of me' (5.1.44). But the self-conscious language of both speakers may be read in part as a psychic effort to control the rawness of grief adopted in the spirit of mutual protectiveness. However we receive Richard's egoism, it contains an element of self-recognition. He can speak of their 'former state' as a 'happy dream' from which present cruelties have awakened them, at the same time acknowledging 'grim Necessity' and hoping for the 'new world's crown' that will deliver them from the 'profane hours' of earthly existence (5.1.18–25). Richard's thoughts of an incorruptible crown probably represent more than a flight to platitude since piety was an aspect of his historical personality well documented in the sources available to Shakespeare. Finding his resigned passivity unroyal, the Queen rebukes him for playing the submissive schoolboy rather than the lion, 'king of beasts' (5.1.26–34), to which Richard wittily responds that he has indeed been overthrown by 'beasts' rather than 'men' (5.1.35–6). In coming to terms with his fall, Richard still lashes out at subjects rather than blaming himself. Northumberland's entrance returns us instantly to Bolingbroke's world of *Realpolitik*, the impingement of the public realm upon the private being a pervasive theme of Shakespeare's histories.¹ And Richard's shrewd forecast of Northumberland's treason under Henry dramatizes the painful truth that the fallen King is a better judge of his enemies than of his friends. The scene shows Richard in defeat as a loving husband and perceptive analyst of the Bolingbroke–Northumberland alliance without diminishing

1 Benthall's production starring John Neville emphasized the intimacy of the King's encounter with his wife by having the lovers sit on the ground – a recapitulation of Richard's posture in the 'hollow crown' speech (3.2.160–77). Trewin (*Neville*, 57) comments on the 'heartbreak' in Neville's voice at this point.

our awareness of his self-absorption or his continuing belief in the rightness of his inherited role. The emotional parting between husband and wife also balances the drawn-out leave-taking between Gaunt and his son in 1.3.

York's evocative description of Bolingbroke and Richard in the London streets provides a final contrast between the antagonists. His lingering sympathy for the King he has deserted makes his rigorous commitment to Bolingbroke and, later, his condemnation of his own son in proof of it, doubly ironic. York's finely contrasted vignettes delineate political success and failure, at once underscoring the *de casibus* theme of mutable fortune and the volatility of popular opinion.¹ Bolingbroke, who receives the prayers and accolades of the crowd with gestures of humility, is clearly the master of public relations, nor does the portrait necessarily suggest insincerity despite our memory of what Richard had said about his 'Wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles' (1.4.28). Still, York's metaphor involving the difficulty of following a 'well-graced actor' (Bolingbroke) onstage because the next actor (Richard) will be received as tedious by contrast (5.2.24–6) again suggests political manipulation in the usurper. And in view of Richard's histrionic character, already so thoroughly developed, it is also piercingly ironic, for the contrasting description of the martyr-king, on whose 'sacred head' dust is thrown and who bears his humiliation with 'grief and patience' (5.2.30–3), seems to embody unvarnished authenticity while it is Bolingbroke who has succeeded to the role of player-king. Despite his engaged feelings, York comments gnominically on the providential nature of the power-shift without assigning blame or innocence to either winner or loser: 'heaven hath a hand in these events, / To whose high will we bound our calm contents' (5.2.37–8). Such resignation could be interpreted as York's final evasion of responsibility for pusillanimously capitulating to the stronger of two leaders – to his prizing of a settled order above all else.² But the lines are chiefly choric and

1 See 4.1.184–9n.

2 See 5.2.37–8n.

emphasize a theme that undergirds Shakespeare's histories as a group – namely that the tragic currents of political change lie finally outside and beyond the power of men to control.

The eruption of conflict between York and Aumerle dramatizes a tragic effect of revolution – division within nuclear families (staged emblematically in *3 Henry VI*, 2.5). Like Bolingbroke, York also has a rebellious child. The vehement condemnation of a son for treason to one king, by a father who has already committed the same offence to his predecessor, is obviously replete with irony. But the play implies that there is an important difference between Aumerle's immature act of rashness and York's bowing to unalterable circumstance. Moreover, Aumerle, once exposed, is so desperate to save his own skin that he makes no attempt to plead for his confederates whose secrecy he had religiously sworn to protect. Before the dangerous discovery, however, his parents comment tartly on the slippery footing of a courtier's life in a way that would resonate meaningfully with Tudor audiences.¹ When his mother inquires casually about those currently in favour with the new regime (the latest 'violets' of 'the new-come spring'), Aumerle replies suspiciously that he neither knows nor cares, prompting his father to urge caution lest the boy 'be cropped before [he] come to prime' (5.2.46–51). Once Aumerle's secret has been bared, the urgent relevance of these remarks becomes frighteningly clear: in great agitation York calls for his boots to accuse the traitor openly, while his duchess tries to prevent him in a panicky effort to spare her child's life.

Shakespeare complicates our response to the fresh crisis, and to the conflict between family and state that it precipitates, by allowing the parental disagreement to degenerate into farce. Ridiculously trying to cope with contradictory orders, York's servant is baffled, while Aumerle stands impotently mute, transfixed by confusion and despair. Then the son, the father and the mother, each having ridden independently and in sweaty haste to Windsor, successively enter the royal presence, flinging

1 It was well known, for instance, that Leicester, Raleigh and Essex, each of them particular favourites of Elizabeth, had several times fallen in and out of her good graces.

themselves down in a contest of kneeling that elicits an amused couplet even from King Henry: 'Our scene is altered from a serious thing, / And now changed to "The Beggar and the King"' (5.3.78–9). The suppliants plead passionately for opposite decisions – the father for his son's death, the mother for his life – and all three embarrass the King by refusing to rise until he has acted on their conflicting petitions. Their begging, couched mostly in a jingling doggerel, cannot but undercut the gravity of the matters in hand – somewhat as the Bastard's unceremonious tone in *King John* undermines the fustian of other characters in that play. The rhetoric becomes absurdly formalistic and antiphonal – a virtual burlesque of court protocol. Henry disposes of the first real threat of his reign with masterful self-possession, implacably executing the most dangerous members of the conspiracy while showing mercy to Aumerle, who no longer poses a security threat. But as Zitner observes, the farcical elements modify the tone and import of the drama in a significant way and therefore, inevitably, of its politics: the scenes of Aumerle's conspiracy parody magniloquence and the courtly ceremoniousness insisted upon elsewhere, even hinting at Shakespeare's growing 'disaffection' with the genre in which he was working and with the 'illusion' that stylized 'historical tragedy' is adequate to its purpose (255).¹ Zitner believes that the Aumerle scenes, often cut in production, 'enrich the play' by introducing a new perspective characteristic of Shakespeare's 'complexity and toughness of mind' (257) and thus anticipate the tension between comedy and tragedy, between high and low, that the *Henry IV* plays were to realize so fruitfully. Perhaps Zitner overstates the revisionary effect of these scenes upon audiences (the comic material passes rather quickly); but there can be no question that the episode encourages a response to political crisis different from that

1 Black disagrees with Zitner, arguing that the near-farcicality of the conspiracy scenes, far from 'undercutting or mocking the seriousness of the play', 'intensif[ies] that seriousness by contrast or counterpoint' as in the relationship between masque and antimasque ('Interlude', 112).