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# Richard II

*The Cambridge Dover Wilson Shakespeare*

VOLUME 28

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE  
EDITED BY JOHN DOVER WILSON



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THE WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE

EDITED FOR THE SYNDICS OF THE  
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BY

JOHN DOVER WILSON

KING RICHARD II

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# KING RICHARD II



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## KING RICHARD II

*Richard II* comes down to us in a good text, upon which Dr A. W. Pollard has written a masterly bibliographical essay, and has been happy in its modern editors, among whom the name of Herford stands pre-eminent. The character of its central figure has moreover laid a spell upon most of the great critics, a spell scarcely less potent than that of the Prince of Denmark, with which it has often, somewhat misleadingly, been compared. The concentration of nineteenth-century criticism upon character-problems has, however, here as elsewhere, led to a distorted view of the play as a whole, a view which merits reconsideration, while recent discoveries in regard to the sources seem likely to revolutionize our ideas of the genesis not only of *Richard II* itself but of the Histories that succeed it. These matters form the staple of the ensuing introduction, the main purpose of which is, as in the case of *Hamlet* and *King John*, rather to reconstruct, so far as is now possible, the Elizabethan attitude towards the play than to add one more interpretation of the characters of Richard and Bolingbroke to the ever-growing collection of modern analyses.

### I. KING RICHARD ON THE STAGE AND IN HISTORY, MODERN AND ELIZABETHAN

#### (a) *The date of the play*

Fortunately we can date *Richard II* with more precision than most of Shakespeare's other plays. It was entered in the Stationers' Register by the publisher Andrew Wise on 29 August 1597 and was printed for him shortly after by Valentine Simmes, in what is now known as the First Quarto. These transactions have all

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the appearance of regularity and trade respectability, and there is no reason to doubt that Wise had procured his copy of the play from Shakespeare's company, the Lord Chamberlain's Servants, in the ordinary way of business<sup>1</sup>. Further, an acting company of that time is unlikely to have allowed a popular play, such as *Richard II* undoubtedly was, to circulate among the reading public until its financial possibilities as a theatre-piece showed signs of exhaustion. We may therefore legitimately suppose that by the summer of 1597 the play had been for some time in the company's repertory. The earliest recorded performance was, in fact, a private one, and took place in Canon Row, on 9 Dec. 1595, at the house of Sir Edward Hoby, an active member of parliament and the son of the diplomatist, Sir Thomas Hoby, who is best known as the translator of Castiglione's *Courtier*. In view of the play's later association with the rising of the Earl of Essex, it is well to emphasize the highly respectable circumstances of this performance. Our record of it is an invitation dated 7 Dec. 1595 (preserved among the Hatfield papers and recently discovered by Sir Edmund Chambers) from Hoby to Sir Robert Cecil, which runs as follows:

Sir, findinge that you wer not convenientlie to be at London to morrow night, I am bold to send to knowe whether Teusdaie [Dec. 9] may be anie more in your grace to visit poore Channon rowe, where, as late as it shal please you, a gate for your supper shal be open, & K. Richard present him selfe to your vewe. Pardon my boldnes that ever love to be honored with your presence; nether do I importune more then your occasions may willingly assent unto; in the meanetime & ever restinge At your command, Edw. Hoby<sup>2</sup>.

As the paper is endorsed 'readile,' we may assume that

<sup>1</sup> v. A. W. Pollard, *King Richard II: a new quarto*, pp. 7-10.

<sup>2</sup> E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, ii. pp. 320-1. I have added a little punctuation to clarify the sense.

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Robert Cecil, already associated with his father Burghley as secretary of state, accepted the invitation and witnessed the performance of what cannot, therefore, at that date have been considered a treasonable drama. Notice too, in passing, the picture which Hoby calls up, of cooks and players (including no doubt Shakespeare) all agog for the great man's entertainment, waiting into the night for the porter's word of his arrival at the gate.

There is nothing to show that the 'K. Richard' thus presented to the view of the Queen's leading statesman had not previously been seen by others; and it is exceedingly unlikely that Hoby would have engaged the players to give a play, of which he knew nothing, before such a guest and on such a subject, or that they would have offered one not already tried out on the public stage. Moreover, the terms of Hoby's letter suggest, I think, that Cecil had himself heard of the play, and may have even perhaps expressed a desire to see it. Certainly, *Richard II* took London by storm when it first appeared. We have it on the authority of Queen Elizabeth herself that it was acted forty times, an unusually long run for an Elizabethan play, and a run to which we can assign no other date than 1595-6<sup>1</sup>. Yet if Shakespeare's tragedy had become the talk of the town before December 1595, its reputation could not at that time have been anything but recent. Indeed, we can be positive that the play, as we now have it, was first performed sometime in 1595, because, as will later appear, one of Shakespeare's main sources in the writing of it was Samuel Daniel's poem, *The Civil Wars between the two houses of Lancaster and York*, the first four books of which were entered in the Stationers' Register on 11 Oct. 1594 and published with the date 1595 on the title-page<sup>2</sup>. And this fits in well enough with the date which I hazarded for the extant text of *King John*, inasmuch as the two plays are so closely allied, both in general atmosphere and in detail,

<sup>1</sup> v. below, pp. xxxii-xxxiii.    <sup>2</sup> v. below, pp. xlii-xliii.

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that it is difficult not to believe that they were composed at the same period<sup>1</sup>. *Richard II* then, though assuredly not 'the author's first attempt at historical drama' as Swinburne asserted, is comparatively early, and belongs to the opening stages of the second period of Shakespeare's career, which began with the formation of the Lord Chamberlain's company in 1594 and their acting before the Queen, with Shakespeare as one of their leading men, during the Christmas season of that year.

(b) *Style and symbolism*

In 1595 Shakespeare was already thirty-one years of age; yet he was still, in the opinion of most critics, 'in standing water between man and boy' as regards his art. A mixture of styles has been noted by many in the verse of the play; attributed by some to revision, and by others to a struggle between the influence of Greene and that of Marlowe. 'The author of *Selimus*,' Swinburne writes, 'is visibly contending with the author of *Faustus* and *Edward II* for the mastery of Shakespeare's poetic and dramatic adolescence<sup>2</sup>.' There is probably something in this, yet too much has been made of it. It is dangerous to differ on matters poetic from critics who are them-

<sup>1</sup> v. *King John* (New Shakespeare), Introd. p. lvi. While still believing that *King John* slightly preceded *Richard II*, I am now inclined to date it at the beginning of 1595, instead of late in 1594, because it contains one or two passages which seem to have been suggested by Daniel's poem. Cf. notes below 2. 1. 44-63, 47-9, 61-3. The striking parallels between *Richard II* and *The Troublesome Reign* may be explained as due either to proximity of the dates of *Richard II* and *King John* or to *The Troublesome Reign* and the play used by Shakespeare for his *Richard II* being written by the same author. Cf. notes 1. 3. 134-5; 1. 4. 39; 2. 1. 40-68; 3. 3. 113; and on 2 *Hen. IV*, 118-20 [1950].

<sup>2</sup> A. C. Swinburne, *Three Plays of Shakespeare*, 1909, p. 60.

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selves poets; but when Sir Henry Newbolt, who in collaboration with Dr J. C. Smith<sup>1</sup> has given us a very interesting edition of the play, follows Swinburne in his introduction, I cannot in turn follow him.

In this play [he writes], if we turn from the characters to the speeches which they utter, a striking peculiarity is noticeable: the method absolutely halts between two totally different styles, the verse being partly blank verse and partly rhymed. These two styles being means of expression vitally related to the feeling or thought with which they deal, the inconsistency involved in their mixed use is a very serious one. Its effect is to produce on each occasion not a discord perhaps, but a sudden and violent change of key. As the change is always at the end of a speech or scene, and from the stronger to the weaker form, an anticlimax or sense of loss results, though this is no doubt exactly the opposite of what the author was feeling after<sup>2</sup>.

The facts are acutely observed; but I doubt whether the critic would have felt either a violent change of key or a sense of loss had he been content to judge the play by comparison with other plays of the same period rather than with the later tragedies. Too often do we wrong the younger dramatist by setting him over against his elder, the author of *Hamlet* or of *Antony and Cleopatra*. *Richard II* is not an immature *Hamlet*; it is a play in a wholly different manner, and that manner almost perfect of its kind. The kind is evident when we turn to *Love's Labour's Lost*, which belongs approximately to the same stage of the dramatist's development<sup>3</sup>. The 'mixture of styles' noted in *Richard II* is to be found there also, and as in *Richard II* the rhymes tend to recur at the end of the speeches, a fact which not only pre-

<sup>1</sup> Who has been good enough to read this volume in proof and to make many helpful suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> *Richard II*, Oxford, 1912, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>3</sup> Sir E. K. Chambers dates it 1595; in my provisional survey I give Christmas 1593 as the date of its first draft and conjecture a later revision about 1597.

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cludes the theory of revision as an explanation, but makes it certain, to my thinking, that the alternation of styles is intentional, not involuntary. *Love's Labour's Lost* is, in short, a comedy in deliberately patterned speech, and *Richard II*, as clearly, a tragedy after the same manner.<sup>1</sup>

This conclusion, if sound, has a bearing not only upon our critical appreciation of the play but also upon its stage-production. The realization of its pattern-character has recently led to the rediscovery, after three hundred years, of *Love's Labour's Lost* as a lovely and significant stage-spectacle<sup>2</sup>. It is obvious what a stylized production might make of a play so full of pageantry and symbolism as *Richard II*. Even the brawling of the nobles and the casting of their gages, at the opening of act 4, an episode irritating to the modern reader hoodwinked by naturalistic conceptions of drama, would fall into place as a detail in the design. As for symbolism, three writers have lately independently drawn attention to the sun-image, which dominates the play as the swastika dominates a Nazi gathering<sup>3</sup>. For Shakespeare the sun stood in general as the symbol of royal majesty<sup>4</sup>; but it appears that 'the sun emerging from a cloud' was also a personal emblem of King Richard himself, and is actually one of the three badges embroidered upon the robes of

<sup>1</sup> These observations do not apply to act 5, which presents special problems of its own (v. pp. lxxiii-lxxvi). The probability is that the old play upon which Shakespeare worked contained rhymed verse, and this may have influenced him in revision. But to regard it as the cause of the elaborate verse patterns of the early acts would be absurd.

<sup>2</sup> I have particularly in mind the remarkable revival by Mr Tyrone Guthrie at the Old Vic in the summer of 1936.

<sup>3</sup> v. Paul Reyher, 'Le Symbole du Soleil dans la tragédie de Richard II' (*Revue de l'Enseignement des Langues Vivantes*, June, 1923); C. Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery*, 1935, pp. 233-8; Wolfgang Clemen, *Shakespeares Bilder*, 1936, pp. 77-8.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Troil.* 1. 3. 89-94; Spurgeon, *op. cit.* pp. 235-6.

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his effigy in Westminster Abbey<sup>1</sup>. Whether the dramatist was conscious or not of this fact, he certainly employs sun-imagery with peculiar force and frequency in the play<sup>2</sup>, and theatrical producers might well take a hint from it<sup>3</sup>. *Richard II* ought to be played throughout as ritual. As a work of art it stands far closer to the Catholic service of the Mass than to Ibsen's *Brand* or Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*.

It is remarkable that the one writer to see this is Walter Pater, whose essay on *Love's Labour's Lost* is also the only critique with any understanding of that play which appeared during the nineteenth century. So far from feeling the style of *Richard II* mixed or inconsistent, he finds it perfectly adapted to the purpose and mood of the poet.

In no other play perhaps is there such a flush of those gay, fresh, variegated flowers of speech—colour and figure, not lightly attached to, but fused into, the very phrase itself.... With him [i.e. Richard] blank verse, infinitely graceful, deliberate, musical in inflexion, becomes indeed a true 'verse royal,' that rhyming lapse, which to the Shakespearian ear, at least in youth, came as the last touch of refinement on it, being here doubly appropriate<sup>4</sup>.

The style of this may strike the modern ear as itself too flowery, but it expresses the truth of the matter. 'In fact,' he declares,

<sup>1</sup> Fairholt, *Costume in England*, i. 123 (cited by Reyher *op. cit.*). Newbolt (note on 2. 4. 21-2) writes 'Richard's badge was the sun obscured by clouds,' an unhappy misstatement. Cf. also V. H. Galbraith in *History*, xxvi, 238-9 [1950].

<sup>2</sup> Cf. 2. 4. 21-2; 3. 2. 36-53; 3. 2. 217-18; 3. 3. 62-7; 3. 3. 178-9; 4. 1. 260-2; 4. 1. 283-4, and notes on these passages.

<sup>3</sup> For example, a representation of the rising sun behind the royal seat in the lists at Coventry might assist the imagination of moderns unaccustomed to the suggestions of medieval heraldry.

<sup>4</sup> *Appreciations* (3rd ed.), p. 194.

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the play of *Richard II* does, like a musical composition, possess a certain concentration of all its parts, a simple continuity, an evenness in execution, which are rare in the great dramatist. . . . It belongs to a small group of plays, where, by happy birth and consistent evolution, dramatic form approaches to something like the unity of a lyrical ballad, a lyric, a song, a single strain of music<sup>1</sup>.

Pater's perceptions, moreover, are in striking accord with those of a great modern bibliographer, based upon an exact and comprehensive survey of the textual minutiae of the First Quarto. 'The impression,' writes Dr Pollard,

which a very close study of the play has made on me (I mention it for what it is worth) is that Shakespeare wrote it at top speed, the words often coming to him as fast as he could set them down, and that some passages he could hardly have troubled himself to read over<sup>2</sup>.

I am inclined to believe, as will later appear, that Shakespeare may have fallen in love with, and lingered over, act 4; but it is the pulse of the spirit, not the ticking of the clock, which is in question. In other words, the tragedy of King Richard the Second has all the air of being composed in a single mood, as Shakespeare's 'mind and hand went together' in the easy production of a task conceived in delight and untroubled in gestation.

There are critics who dislike *Richard II*. Dr Johnson, for example, is strangely cold about this gorgeous dramatic essay on the Divine Right of kings; and can discover little in it either 'to affect the passions or enlarge the understanding.' But whether one likes or dislikes the play, none can deny that Shakespeare himself took keen pleasure in the writing of it. And because of the author's enjoyment, and of what Pater calls the drama's 'simple continuity,' *Richard II* possesses a unity of tone

<sup>1</sup> *Appreciations* (3rd ed.), pp. 202-3.

<sup>2</sup> *King Richard II: a new quarto*, pp. 97-8.



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and feeling greater than that attained in many of his greater plays, a unity found, I think, to the same degree elsewhere only in *Twelfth Night*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *The Tempest*, plays which were likewise, one may conjecture, composed without interruption and under a single impulse of passionate inspiration. The absence of comic elements suggests that this unity was, in part at least, deliberate. In *Richard II* Shakespeare, as most critics believe, is pitting himself against the author of *Edward II*. It may, therefore, be not entirely fortuitous that here and in *Richard III* alone he eschews 'such conceits as clownage keeps in pay.'

Pater is no less suggestive on the ritualistic character of *Richard II* than he is on its unity of tone; and what he wrote in 1889 under this head is the more interesting that it was inspired by memories of a production in the late 'fifties by Charles Kean, in whose hands, he tells us, 'the play became like an exquisite performance on the violin.' Perhaps Kean's elaborate stage-realism and his striving after archaeological accuracy, which gave, in Pater's enthusiastic words, not only 'the very person of the king, based on the stately old portrait in Westminster Abbey,' but also 'a scenic reproduction, for once really agreeable, of the London of Chaucer,' would have seemed to us, with our more enlightened notions of the staging of Shakespeare, both tiresome and distracting<sup>1</sup>. But what caught Pater's imagination above all, and held it for thirty years, was the actor's interpretation of the part of Richard himself, more particularly in the parliament scene, and that must have come near to Shakespeare's own intention. The remarkable passage that follows, for example, may be attributed as much to Kean as to Pater.

In the Roman Pontifical, of which the order of Coronation is really a part, there is no form for the inverse process,

<sup>1</sup> Kean also took great liberties with the text, v. p. lxxxvii.

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no rite of 'degradation,' such as that by which an offending priest or bishop may be deprived, if not of the essential quality of 'orders,' yet, one by one, of its outward dignities. It is as if Shakespeare had had in mind some such inverted rite, like those old ecclesiastical or military ones, by which human hardness, or human justice, adds the last touch of unkindness to the execution of its sentences, in the scene where Richard 'deposes' himself, as in some long, agonising ceremony, reflectively drawn out, with an extraordinary refinement of intelligence and variety of piteous appeal, but also with a felicity of poetic invention, which puts these pages into a very select class, with the finest 'vermeil and ivory' work of Chatterton or Keats<sup>1</sup>.

This goes to the heart of the play, since it reveals a sacramental quality in the agony and death of the sacrificial victim, as it were of the god slain upon the altar, which we to-day can only begin to understand by reading a book like *The Golden Bough*.

(c) *The significance of Richard's fall to the contemporaries of Shakespeare*

To the contemporaries of Shakespeare Richard was no ordinary man; and it is by failing to realize this that modern criticism, despite all its penetrating, and for the most part just, analysis of his human qualities, leaves every thoughtful reader and spectator of the drama baffled and dissatisfied. Richard was a king, and a good deal more. First of all he stood in the eyes of the later middle ages as the type and exemplar of royal martyrdom; of a king not slain in battle, not defeated and killed by a foreign adversary, not even deposed owing to weakness or tyranny in favour of his heir, but thrust from the throne in his may of youth by a mere usurper, under colour of a process at law utterly illegal, and then foully murdered. One may catch something of this aspect of his tragedy by turning to the 'form of prayer with fast-

<sup>1</sup> *Appreciations*, p. 198.

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ing,' for 'the day of the martyrdom of the Blessed King Charles I,' which was printed in the Book of Common Prayer until half-way through the nineteenth century<sup>1</sup>, or by remembering the passionate devotion which the memory of Mary Queen of Scots inspired until an even later date. Richard combined the personal attractiveness of Mary with the wrongs of Charles, and moreover belonged to a period when men were far more swayed by the glamour of kingship and the tendency to canonize those they admired, than they have been during the last three centuries. Not that the admiration was universal; there were, as ever in such cases, two parties, the idolaters and the defamers. As long as the house of Lancaster, which triumphed in Richard's fall, ruled the country, it was of course treasonable for Englishmen to take his side. But from the first on the continent, where thought was free, the reading public, already rejoicing in Boccaccio's most popular book, *De Casibus Illustrium Virorum* (1360-74), which Shakespeare's Richard seems to be describing in the well-known lines:

For God's sake let us sit upon the ground,  
 And tell sad stories of the death of kings—  
 How some have been deposed, some slain in war,  
 Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed,  
 Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping killed;  
 All murdered,

had found in Richard's own 'casus' a peculiar appeal; so much so indeed that no fewer than three different

<sup>1</sup> Our latter-day 'royalist,' Mr T. S. Eliot, is still found referring to the execution of Charles I as 'the Martyrdom' sans phrase, in a recent publication; v. *Seventeenth Century Studies in honour of Sir Herbert Grierson*, p. 242. On the other hand a Catholic historian like Mr Hilaire Belloc, who speaks of Richard II as the 'sacramental man,' and of his dethroning as 'sacrilege,' shows that the medieval conception of Richard is not yet extinct (v. *History of England*, iii. 90-1).

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contemporary accounts of it, favourable to Richard, have come down to us in the French tongue, while yet a fourth of similar sympathies, though in Latin not French, reposes in the library of Gray's Inn<sup>1</sup>. One of the French chronicles exists in some twenty or more MS. copies to be found in various continental libraries.

This widespread interest may, it is suggested, have been due in part to anti-English feeling among French patriots during the latter half of the Hundred Years' War<sup>2</sup>. But that the 'sad story' was also valued for its own sake is proved by the persistence of its popularity, which, when the accession of the Tudors healed the dynastic breach, found voice in England itself, so that the tragedy of Richard appears, not it is true very sympathetically told<sup>3</sup>, in *The Mirror for Magistrates*, 1559-63. This well-known book, an immense corpus of such 'casus,' was a continuation and enlargement of Lydgate's *Falls of Princes*, which in turn was itself an adaptation of Boccaccio's original collection. Moreover, the most remarkable fact about the four original pro-Richard chronicles is that they already, as we shall see later, give utterance to that mystical conception of the martyred king which we find in Shakespeare, and compare his betrayal with that of Christ and his enemies with Pilate and Judas, much as the play itself does. Nor is it certain that they are not in this nearer the truth than the orthodox modern historian who has on the whole accepted the Lancastrian version of the revolution of 1399. The

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted with a valuable introduction by M. V. Clarke and V. H. Galbraith as 'The Deposition of Richard II' (*Rylands Library Bulletin*, vol. xiv, Jan. 1930).

<sup>2</sup> P. viii of Preface to *Chronique de la Traïson et Mort de Richart Deux roy Dengleterre* (ed. by B. Williams, 1846); v. below.

<sup>3</sup> 'I would (quoth one of the cumpany),' runs the prose preface, 'gladly say sumwhat for King Richard. But his personage is so sore intangled as I thinke fewe benefices be at this day' (p. 110, ed. L. B. Campbell, 1938).

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official story, embodied in the Parliament Roll, was being denounced by a scholar in 1824 as 'a gross fabrication of Henry IV for purposes of state<sup>1</sup>'; and a recent study of the evidence by Professor Galbraith and Miss Clarke comes to very much the same conclusion<sup>2</sup>.

Yet the fall of Richard fascinated the late medieval and Elizabethan world as much by its magnitude and its unaccountableness as by its pathos and the sacrilege that brought it to pass.

Down, down I come, like glist'ring Phaethon:  
 Wanting the manage of unruly jades,

are words which Shakespeare places in his mouth, and some critics have taken them as the key-note of the play. But though in their sun-imagery they express the splendour of the catastrophe, like that of Lucifer from the empyrean, they do not touch its mystery, of which all at that period who studied the young king's career were conscious, and which is one of the main impressions that Shakespeare's play still leaves upon our minds. This mystery was closely associated with the supposed workings of Fortune, a Roman deity which continued to exercise under Providence a potent influence over men's thought during the middle ages, and was conceived of by Elizabethan England far more concretely than by the England of our own day, despite its daily race-meetings, its football pools and its almost universal habit of gambling. The symbol and attribute of Fortune was, of course, her wheel, which is hardly ever absent from any of the countless pictures and references to her in medieval art and literature. Shakespeare makes no mention of the wheel in *Richard II*, though he employs the less familiar figure of Fortune's buckets in the deposition scene<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> v. *Archaeologia*, xx. 138.

<sup>2</sup> v. note 1, p. xviii.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. 4. 1. 184-9 and note.

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His reticence, however, is part of his subtlety. For the wheel is constantly in his mind throughout the play. Indeed, it determines the play's shape and structure, which gives us a complete inversion<sup>1</sup>. The first act begins immediately after the death of the Duke of Gloucester, when, as Froissart notes, Richard was 'hygh uppon the whele<sup>2</sup>,' and exhibiting all the hybris and tyranny expected of persons in that position, while, at the same time, his opponent, Bolingbroke, is shown at the lowest point of his fortune, at the bottom. But from the beginning of act 2 the wheel begins to turn mysteriously of itself, or rather by the action of Fortune. The will of the King seems paralysed; he becomes an almost passive agent. Bolingbroke acts, and acts forcibly; yet he too appears to be borne upward by a power beyond his volition.

This last is an important point, since it rules out those indications of deep design which some subtle critics, following Coleridge, think they discover in the character of the usurper from the very beginning, but which I feel sure were not intended by Shakespeare. Circumstance drives Bolingbroke on from point to point: he takes what Fortune and Richard throw in his path. The attitude of the nobles towards him in 2. 3 shows that they regard him as a claimant to the throne, and by that time the larger horizon has begun to open out before him. But this is quite a different thing from entertaining deep designs. Bolingbroke is an opportunist, not a schemer<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature*, by H. R. Patch, 1927, and *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy*, by W. Farnham, 1936, pp. 415-18.

<sup>2</sup> Berners' *Froissart*, vi. 307 (Tudor Translations).

<sup>3</sup> The passage depicting Bolingbroke as a deep politician occurs in Coleridge's 1818 notes. In the lectures of 1811-12 he took a different view. 'In Bolingbroke,' he then declared, 'we find a man who in the outset has been sorely injured: then, we see him encouraged by the grievances of his country, and by the strange mismanagement of the government, yet

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And when, the hand of Death upon him, he looks back  
 over the events that had led to his accession, and solemnly  
 declares:

Though then, God knows, I had no such intent,  
 But that necessity so bowed the state  
 That I and greatness were compelled to kiss<sup>1</sup>,

the deep note of contrition proves the sincerity of the words. In fact Shakespeare followed Daniel, who himself accepted the judgment of the historians of his time upon this matter. As we shall see, Daniel considered that Bolingbroke

Was with occasion thrust into the crime,

for which Fortune was more responsible than the criminal, while the relations between the two cousins throughout the play are already defined, as a recent scholar has noted, in the following passage from Holinshed, which is itself borrowed from Hall<sup>2</sup>:

This suerlie is a verie notable example, and not vnwoorthie of all princes to be well weied, and diligentlie marked, 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, which perchance neuer thereof thought or yet dreamed; and that king Richard should thus be left desolate, void, and in despaire of all hope and comfort, in whom if there were anie offense, it ought rather to be imputed to the frailtie of wanton youth, than to the malice of his hart: but such is the deceiuable iudgement of man, which not regarding things present with due consideration,

at the same time scarcely daring to look at his own views, or to acknowledge them as designs. He comes home under the pretence of claiming his dukedom, and he professes that to be his object almost to the last; but, at the last, he avows his purpose to its full extent, of which he was himself unconscious in the earlier stages' (T. M. Raysor, *Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism*, ii. 188-9). Cf. below note 1. 1. 30-3.

<sup>1</sup> 2 *Henry IV*, 3. 1. 72-4.

<sup>2</sup> Farnham, *op. cit.*

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thinketh euer that things to come shall haue good successe, with a pleasant & delitefull end. But 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<sup>1</sup>.

The second great attraction, then, of the story of Richard of Bordeaux and Henry, Duke of Lancaster, for the men of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, was that it afforded, in its spectacle of the 'dejecting of the one and advancing of the other,' a perfect example of the mysterious action of Fortune, working of course under the inscrutable 'providence of God,' according to the quasi-mechanical symbolism under which they conceived that action. And this in turn constituted one of the main appeals of *Richard II* for the spectators who first witnessed it. For, though the operations of Fortune were most evident and potent in the lives of the great, everything human was subject to them. It is a point which did not escape Pater, who has seen so much in this play. 'His grief,' he writes of Richard, 'becomes nothing less than a central expression of all that in the revolutions of Fortune's wheel goes *down* in the world<sup>2</sup>.' Shakespeare's play was a mirror, not only for magistrates, but for every son of woman; and when on Shakespeare's stage the 'dejected' king gazed into the glass—incomparable symbol for that age!—what he saw there was the brittleness both of his own glory and of all earthly happiness.

In the third place, the reign of Richard II possessed a peculiar significance in the history of England, as the Elizabethans understood that history. In itself, and for the two protagonists who brought it to an end, a striking example of a turn of Fortune's wheel, it marked the beginning of a much greater revolution in the story of the nation's fortunes. Shakespeare and his contem-

<sup>1</sup> Holinshed, *Chronicles*, ed. 1587, vol. iii. p. 499/2/50.

<sup>2</sup> *Appreciations*, p. 199.



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poraries, rejoicing in the Tudor peace and looking back with horror to the period of civil strife, known as the Wars of the Roses, which preceded the accession of Henry VII, were haunted by fears of a return of such anarchy, and found its origin in the events of the last few years of Richard II's reign. And rightly so; for the deposition and murder of Richard not only shocked the conscience of Christendom, they struck at the legal basis of the monarchical, that is to say the whole constitutional, system of England. As Professor Galbraith puts it, "The procedure of deposition as well as the act itself was a cause of the "disorder, horror, fear, and mutiny" of the fifteenth century<sup>1</sup>."

In *King John* Shakespeare had dealt, for the one and only time, with the question of the relations between this country and the Papacy, which was one of the two main problems of Tudor England. In *Richard II*, which I think followed immediately after, he now handles the other and, in Tudor eyes, still more important problem, the problem of government, or rather of the Governor or Prince. Writing on 'the nature of Tudor despotism,' Neville Figgis, our chief authority on the history of the idea of kingship in England, remarks:

The exaltation of the royal authority was due to the need of a strong government. The crime of the Lancastrian dynasty had been, not that it was capricious or self-seeking or oppressive, but that it was weak, that law and order were not maintained and private war was once again becoming prevalent. It is as 'saviours of society' that the Yorkists and afterwards the Tudors win their position. In the statutes of liveryes and in the Star Chamber is to be found the *raison d'être* of Tudor despotism. Government must be effective, private oppression must be punished, great offenders must be forced to submit to the authority of the Crown. That is the general sentiment. In a word, obedience must be enforced. The very causes, which drove men to support the Tudors at all, drove them also to insist on the

<sup>1</sup> Clarke and Galbraith, *op. cit.* p. 33.

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paramount importance of obedience, and to proclaim the iniquity of rebellion<sup>1</sup>.

In that age men could not think of government except as embodied in a single person. Indeed, only a very small proportion of the human race is capable of thinking otherwise to-day. Dangers for government and order might therefore arise from three causes: from weakness of character on the part of the monarch, from the accession of a monarch with a weak claim to the throne, and from the turbulence and ambition of the great nobles surrounding him, who might take advantage of either of the two weaknesses just mentioned or of some other occasion. Except for the abortive insurrection of Essex at the end of her reign, Elizabeth had little trouble from her nobles, who were for the most part 'new men' and close adherents of her dynasty from motives of self-interest. But the other two dangers made a special appeal to the fears of her subjects. Not only was her own title, as also her legitimacy, open to question, but being unmarried she had no heir, so that the succession was left at hazard. Writing on *The State of England, Anno Dom. 1600*<sup>2</sup>, a contemporary lawyer, Sir Thomas Wilson, enumerates no fewer than twelve different 'competitors that gape for the death of that good old Princess the now Queen.' Moreover, though history in retrospect depicts her as a strong character and a great statesman, to her contemporaries, who judged her conduct from day to day and could neither see her reign as a whole nor appreciate to the full the difficulties that faced her, she probably appeared a weak and vacillating woman. In any event, as we shall see, there is plenty of evidence that her courtiers spoke of her not infrequently as 'Richard II' and that she herself was conscious of their doing so.

<sup>1</sup> *Divine Right of Kings* (2nd ed.), p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> Edited from the manuscripts among the State Papers in the Public Record Office by F. J. Fisher (*Camden Miscellany*, vol. xvi. p. 2).

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All this being so, the Elizabethans felt much the same interest in the Lancastrian and Yorkist period, culminating in 'the glorious union of Henry VII,' as Englishmen of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries felt in the Civil Wars and the 'Glorious Revolution of 1688.' And just as the reign of Charles I marked the beginning of the one struggle, so that of Richard II marked the beginning of the other. The period 1398-1485 was, moreover, a self-contained one, was sufficiently remote to be safe to write about, and possessed something of an epical quality, inasmuch as it embraced the martyrdom of a king, the efforts of a usurper to establish his rule, the brilliant episode of Henry V's victories over the foreign foe, the downfall of government and the reign of chaos during the quarrels of the rival dynasties, and finally the restoration of order at the hands of a new dynasty, heir to the claims of both houses. It is not surprising, therefore, that no fewer than three elaborate accounts of this critical period have come down from the sixteenth century. The first is that earliest of Tudor histories, Hall's *Chronicle* (1548), which set the tone for all the histories that followed<sup>1</sup>; the second is the poem already spoken of, a poem in eight books, entitled *The Civil Wars between the two houses of Lancaster and York* (1595-1609) by Samuel Daniel; and the third is the dramatic cycle of Shakespeare's English Histories, composed during the years 1590-9.

What Englishmen, in the age of the Tudor peace, thought about the Wars of the Roses, and the usurpation of Henry Bolingbroke in connexion with them, finds eloquent, if quaint, expression on the very title-page of Hall's book, which runs:

*The union of the two noble and illustre famelies of*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. C. L. Kingsford, *Prejudice & Promise in XVth century England*, p. 3: 'Hall's presentment of past history appealed naturally to those who came after him, and was embedded firmly in the opinion of the time.'

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*Lancastre & Yorke, beyng long in continuall discension for the crowne of this noble realme, with all the actes done in both the tymes of the Princes, both of the one linage & of the other, beginnyng at the tyme of kyng Henry the fowerth, the first aucthor of this deuision, and so successiely proceeding to the reigne of the High and Prudent Prince Kyng Henry the Eight, the indubitate flower and very heire of both the saied linages.*

And I do not know of any better text to set in the forefront of this, the first (though not the first written) of Shakespeare's series of historical plays upon the same theme, than Hall's title and the following words with which his book opens, and which, as we shall find, were themselves inspired by a passage in Froissart:

What mischiefe hath insurged in realmes by intestine deuision, what depopulation hath ensued in countries by ciuill discenciō, what detestable murder hath been cōmitted in citees by seperate faccions, and what calamitee hath ensued in famous regiōs by domestical discord & vnnaturall controuersy: Rome hath felt, Italy can testife, Fraunce can bere witnes, Beame<sup>1</sup> can tell, Scotlande maie write, Denmarke can shewe, and especially this noble realme of Englande can apparantly declare and make demonstra-  
 tion. For who abhorreth not to expresse the heynous factes comitted in Rome, by the ciuill war betwene Julius Cesar and hardy Pōpey by whose discorde the bright glory of the triūphant Rome was eclipsed & shadowed? Who can reherce what mischefes and what plagues the pleasant cuntrye of Italy hath tasted and suffered by the sedicious faccions of the Guelphes and Gebelynes? Who can reporte the misery that daiely hath ensued in Fraunce, by the discorde of the houses of Burgoyne and Orliens: Or in Scotland betwene the brother and brother, the vnclē and the nephew? Who can curiously endite the manifolde batailles that were fought in the realme of Beame<sup>1</sup>, betwene the catholikes and the pestiferous sectes of the Adamites and others? What damage discencion hath dooen in Germany and Denmarke, all christians at this daie can well declare.

<sup>1</sup> i.e. Bohemia.

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And the Turke can bere good testimony, whiche by the discord of christen princes hath amplified greatly his signiory and dominion. But what miserie, what murder, and what execrable plagues this famous region hath suffered by the deuision and discencion of the renoumed houses of Lancastre and Yorke, my witte cannot comprehende nor my tounge declare nether yet my penne fully set furthe.

For what noble man liueth at this daie, or what gentleman of any auncient stocke or progeny is clere, whose linage hath not ben infested and plagued with this vnnaturall deuision. All the other discordes, sectes and faccions almoste liuely florische and continue at this presente tyme, to the greate displeasure and preiudice of all the christian publike welth. But the olde deuided controuersie betwene the fornamed families of Lācastre and Yorke, by the vnion of Matrimony celebrate and consummate betwene the high and mighty Prince Kyng Henry the seuenth and the lady Elizabeth his moste worthy Quene, the one beeyng indubitate heire of the hous of Lancastre, and the other of Yorke was suspended and appalled in the person of their moste noble, puissāt and mighty heire kyng Henry the eight, and by hym clerely buried and perpetually extinct. So that all men (more clerer then the sonne) maie apparently perceiue, that as by discord greate thynges decaie and fall to ruine, so the same by concord be reuiued and erected. In likewise also all regions whiche by deuisiō and discencion be vexed, molested and troubled, bee by vnion and agrement releued pacified and enriched.

Exactly the same note is being struck by Daniel, sixty-three years later, in the Epistle Dedicatory to the third edition of his *Civil Wars* (1609), a passage of which is worth quoting for its emphasis upon succession in the direct line and the uncertainties of Elizabeth's reign as compared with that of James I:

And, whereas [Daniel writes] this Argument was long since vndertaken (in a time which was not so well secur'd of the future, as God be blessed now it is) with a purpose, to shewe the deformities of Ciuile Dissension, and the miserable euent of Rebellions, Conspiracies and bloudy Reuengements, which followed (as in a circle) vpon that breach of

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the due course of Succession, by the Vsurpation of *Hen. 4*; and thereby to make the blessings of Peace, and the happiness of an established Gouernment (in a direct Line) the better to appeare: I trust I shall doo a gratefull worke to my Countrie, to continue the same, vnto the glorious Vnion of *Hen. 7*: from whence is descended our present Happinesse.

Daniel never completed his poem. Neither did Shakespeare round off his cycle. Perhaps the idea of so doing did not come to the dramatist until his task was well under way. For the cycle, as everyone knows, is in two parts of four plays each, followed by a final play detached from the rest, viz. (a) *Richard II*, *Henry IV*, parts i and ii, *Henry V*, (b) *Henry VI*, parts i, ii and iii, *Richard III*, and (c) *Henry VIII*. The plays in the (b) section were undertaken first, but when those in (a) were written they were carefully linked on to the others, so as to compose a continuous series. *Henry VIII* was, however, clearly an afterthought, if it was not an old play refurbished for a particular occasion; and there is nothing to connect it with *Richard III*. Why did these two great literary undertakings remain unfinished? The death of Elizabeth provides at least one answer. With the peaceful accession of James I the problem of the succession was settled. A new dynasty was established upon the throne, a dynasty founded not upon civil war and the rise of a noble house, but upon legal right so strong that it was recognized in a foreign branch of the royal line. The address of the Translators to His Majesty which stands as preface to the Authorized Version of the Bible, 1611, has often been condemned for fulsomeness by modern writers. But the following passage from the opening paragraph shows that the gratitude they express to James for his mere existence was not all flattery:

For whereas it was the expectation of many, who wished not well vnto our Sion, that vpon the setting of that bright *Occidentall Starre* Queene Elizabeth of most happy memory, some thicke and palpable cloudes of darkenesse would so