SHAKESPEARE'S MONARCHICAL VIEWS

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THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State College in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Denton, Texas
January, 1959
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CHAPTER I

SHAKESPEARE'S HISTORICAL MILIEU

The English history plays of Shakespeare are being subjected to renewed and intense criticism. Even though much progress has been made in interpreting these lesser-known plays, only the groundwork has been laid. There is ample room for more scholarly work to be done. The purpose of this study is to treat one aspect of the poet's political views, his views on monarchy as found in the two great English history tetralogies, and to compare them to the monarchial views of his age.

To begin with, some refutative comments need to be made in the hope of warding off possible dissension. There perhaps are some esthetes who sincerely believe that any interpreting or analyzing or deducing of ideas from Shakespeare's plays is sacrilege, and that one should be content with the pure enjoyment of these works of art. Sir Sidney Lee replies to members of this school of thought by saying that

the scholar, critic, and teacher aim, in the study of literature, at something beyond the experience of transient sensation. They aim at accuracy in the appreciation of an author's work; ... The critic and teacher examine the causes of literary achievement as well as its effects. It is pedantry to concentrate attention on the causes of literature to
the neglect of its results; but there is scholarly virtue in a prudent survey of the external circumstance which attends the birth and life of literature.1

Indeed, one who refuses to be interested in an author's history, beliefs, or personality almost seems to defy his natural instincts.

When one seeks biographical information for research purposes, there are but two primary sources, records left by others about an author or records left by the author himself. Shakespeare said little about himself, and few remarks about him have been preserved. Hence, what is known about his beliefs and ideals is what may be pieced together largely from internal evidence in the plays. The important question to be answered satisfactorily now is one which Lee, among many others, has asked: "What is the revelation which Shakespeare made in his plays of his private experiences and sentiments?"2

Sidney Lee answered his question negatively, believing that the objective nature of drama prohibits an intelligent search for individual character or specific opinions on controversial subjects. He spoke of the "inextricable dilemma" of Shakespeare's contrasting views


2Ibid., p. 86.
on such subjects as drinking, church affiliation, woman's rights, or marriage. Invariably Lee discussed Shakespeare in relation to specific subjects. Granted that such delving and deducing may be carried to ridiculous extremes leading to the predicted dilemma, nevertheless, a judicious and thoughtful study of Shakespeare's plays can and inevitably must reveal some of the author's personal sentiments regarding basic and broad questions since each man's every thought is colored by his personal ideals and beliefs. That anyone can be truly objective is a fallacy already exposed by psychological study.

In deference to Lee's argument, however, it may be said that in attempting to ascertain what Shakespeare's general views were on a broad topic (not a specific one), this study will cover several plays. Having such a perspective from which to see the poet's ideas may be advantageous. This study attempts to determine only Shakespeare's broad views on a basic English Renaissance question, one so universal that it, of necessity, colors the English history plays and must not be overlooked if the interpretation of them is to be comprehensive.

That an intelligent and sensitive Elizabethan artist living in London could have failed to be interested in so vital and dynamic a field as politics seems beyond debate,
despite the opinions of some historians, such as Alfred F. Pollard, who wrote:

No period of English literature has less to do with politics than that during which English letters reached their zenith; and no English writer's attitude toward the questions, with which alone political history is concerned, is more obscure or less important than Shakespeare's.\(^3\)

This historian stated further that Shakespeare shunned contemporary politics and that his "politics are perfunctory."\(^4\) Several recent studies, however, have shown that Shakespeare's politics were not perfunctory and that the poet did not "shun" political questions, though he was wise enough to use discretion where controversial political issues were involved.\(^5\) One must not forget that Elizabethan censorship was a powerful whip controlling aspiring young playwrights who wanted their plays performed or published. What most disturbed Pollard is something that has also disturbed others in regard to Shakespeare and politics. It is difficult for this historian to believe that anyone who did not openly advocate reforms of various kinds could have been concerned with

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\(^4\) Ibid., p. 442.

\(^5\) Perhaps the two most widely known are John Palmer's Political Characters of Shakespeare (London, 1945) and E. M. W. Tillyard's Shakespeare's History Plays (London, 1951).
his government. But Shakespeare's not being a radical reformer did not preclude an interest in certain phases of the political game. Indeed, one contemporary historian maintains that Shakespeare

accepted without doubt the world views inherited by his age, its morality, its political principles, its science, its prejudices and its superstitions . . . .

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The historiography of the Elizabethan era in general and of Shakespeare's history plays in particular is germane to the poet's political attitudes. Renaissance views of history and its use were shaped largely by Machiavelli,7 who subordinated historical truth to the elucidation of his own political theory. The use of history for expository purposes can be traced, therefore, to Italian humanism. Paralleling and opposing this secular outlook was the soteriological interpretation of history, which proposed that human events are but the unfolding of God's divine plan for salvation. The prime purpose of history was a moral one: its most important function was to teach. For example, those who tried through violence to alter the harmony of God's plan and who failed to profit from contemplating the aberrations of history were


destined for ultimate failure. The purposes of most
Elizabethan historical dramas were similar to those of
true history. "One of the most important historical pur-
poses of many Tudor dramatists was to show the logic and
reason in God's control of political affairs." 8
Shakespeare also used the past to throw light on the
present, to assert the hand of Divine Providence in human
events, and to expound political doctrine. Like
Machiavelli, he did not mind warping or modifying history
where it seemed expedient for dramatic or didactic pur-
poses.

The basic Tudor monarchical belief, to which all
others are subsidiary, is the theory that a monarch rules
by divine right, that is, that a king's power comes
directly from God. Other basic views evolve logically
from this. If a ruler's power is delegated to him by God,
it must and should be absolute, for in opposing God's
temporal ruler, one is opposing God. If only God has the
inherent right to create a king, He is also the only one
to depose him. To Elizabethans, rebellion was the worst
possible sin and evil because it violated the order and
harmony in the universe. 9 Hereditary right was

8 Ibid.

9 For an excellent discussion of Elizabethan views on
an ordered universe in relation to Shakespeare's his-
tories, see Tillyard, pp. 10-18.
indefeasible to Elizabethans. The right acquired by birth could not be forfeited through any acts of usurpation, by any incapacity in the heir, or by any act of deposition. Tudor rulers, however, did not emphasize the importance of hereditary succession because of their own precarious hereditary position. According to Figgis, legitimacy was the main reason that James I was welcomed with such unanimity and succeeded to the throne of England in spite of two acts of Parliament excluding his house.\textsuperscript{10} A Tudor ruler, in theory at least, was responsible to God for his actions, not to his subjects. But being responsible to God, he was subject to God's moral law, which dictated that he be a wise, just, and benevolent governor of his people and have their interests, not his own, at heart. This is the prime reason that so much Renaissance intellectual activity went into literary attempts to define and foster the qualities necessary for kingship. Though Shakespeare did not write a conduct book or a moral allegory, such as \textit{The Faerie Queene}, he had much to say about what qualities were necessary for kingship. In fact, Shakespeare had much to say about each facet of Tudor monarchical doctrine.

\textsuperscript{10}John Neville Figgis, \textit{The Divine Right of Kings} (Cambridge, 1922), p. 87.
A preliminary examination of the history of this divine right theory is à propos to this discussion. This theory belongs to an age when religion and politics were inextricably mixed, and a religious basis was necessary for the general acceptance of any doctrine. "All men demanded some form of divine authority for any theory of government." Stemming from ancient Hebrew monarchical ideals, the theory, as used in England, came from the medieval dissension between the Papacy and rising national states. Catholics said the pope's rule came directly from God and was supreme in both temporal and spiritual fields. The pope, if he chose, could delegate some of his temporal powers to princes who were dependent upon his authority ultimately. If the embryo nation states of the later Middle Ages were to survive, their kings had to compete with and overthrow this deeply imbedded idea of papal supremacy. They accomplished this by advocating the divine right theory whereby God himself, not the head of the Church, delegated power to the kings.

Later Middle English history reveals the English kings sparring with the pope over this theory, as well as others akin to it. King John is important here because when, in 1266, he rejected the pope's demands and protested papal claims, the basis was formed for a

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11 Ibid., p. 11.  
promulgation of the divine right theory. A king of England for the first time had grace from God against the will of the pope.\textsuperscript{13} The reign of Edward I further developed the theory and planted firmly on English soil the hereditary kingship ideal. Edward simply removed the necessity and significance of the coronation ceremony by being declared a king while on a crusade and not being crowned until two years later. No longer need a king be even nominally given his powers from the Church—he would soon derive them from God directly by way of inheritance which eventually became the only essential element in the making of a king. By the beginning of the fourteenth century "the Crown had become a birthright."\textsuperscript{14} The English treasured the law of primogeniture, regarding this mode of the devolution of the crown as superior to merely human methods of election. They felt it was almost sacred because, for good or bad, as reward or punishment, "the birth of an heir was regarded as the judgment of God."\textsuperscript{15}

The historical Richard II was an early advocate of a theory corollary to the divine right idea, absolute monarchy. Altering and nullifying statutes agreed upon by both houses, he felt that neither law nor custom bound his

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 26. \textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p. 27. \textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 36.
actions. Richard's aim was to create a permanent despotism. At heart he was anti-papal, feeling that he was king by God's grace and by right of birth. But his despotic, absolutist claims were repudiated—the articles of deposition which contained the charges against Richard imply a constitutional theory of government. The nobles passed over the nearest heir to the throne and elected Henry Bolingbroke, asserting, therefore, the right of Parliament to elect the fittest heir within the royal family. Yet the fact that Henry felt obliged to assert some sort of flimsy claim to the throne indicated that there was strong popular sentiment about the importance of legitimacy. Indeed, strict hereditary succession had a firm grasp on the English mind.

The new constitutional dynasty was an abysmal failure, for it was not strong enough to keep the wealthy nobility in check, and England attempted to call in the legitimate line for assistance. After a usurper's dynasty is established, the dispossessed line will not gain public support unless there is a strong sentiment of legitimatism—thus the raison d'être of the Wars of the Roses. Legitimatism and divine right principles triumphed, for at the accession of Edward IV in 1461 his opponents were

16 Ibid., p. 74.  
17 Ibid., p. 81.
forced to assert pretensions of hereditary right.\textsuperscript{18} The theory was there and all succeeding kings and their opponents had to deal with it. Even Richard III paid lip-service to hereditary succession and divine right by working out a scheme which enabled him to claim that he was the undoubted heir of Edward IV. Henry Tudor had some claims to the throne, as all other claimants could be barred for some reason or other.\textsuperscript{19}

With the accession of Henry VIII the divine right idea continued to prevail, while its correlative, hereditary succession, suffered a decline because Henry's absolutism triumphed at the expense of legitimism when the king gained the power to choose his own successor. The succession could no longer be considered sacred.\textsuperscript{20} Elizabeth, as Henry's eventual successor, aroused controversy on the continent because she was not regarded as a legitimate sovereign. Great as she was, Elizabeth was harassed throughout most of her reign by the spectre of her monarchical claims which were invalid if Henry's divorce from Catherine was invalid.\textsuperscript{21}

While of course there were some dissenters who rebelled covertly and overtly against the traditionally

\textsuperscript{18}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 83. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{19}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 85. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{20}\textit{Ibid.} \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{21}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 87.
accepted Tudor political doctrine regarding monarchy (Christopher Marlowe is one literary spokesman for this group), most Elizabethans, satisfied with their government and Queen, had no quarrel with the political ideas advocated, especially since all of them had roots extending back into Middle English history. Tudor absolutism, made easy by the destruction of feudal lords during the Wars of the Roses, was a practical necessity if England was to become and remain a world power. Ribner, in the final chapter of his book, discusses several religious documents in which Elizabethan political doctrines are expressed. One of the most important of these homilies, *Against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion*, asserts the doctrine of passive obedience. Some of its major ideas are that obedience is the virtue among virtues, that Satan is the author of rebellion, that the king's reign is by God's ordinance, and that if the prince is evil, God is scourging his people for their sins. It further declares that subjects cannot judge their rulers lest they too be judged.\(^{22}\)

Elizabeth was an extraordinarily popular queen. Her views regarding monarchy mirror, to a large extent, those of her subjects. Elizabeth devoutly believed that she ruled by divine right and governed her country in an aura

\(^{22}\)Ribner, p. 310.
of religion, becoming, by her stressing of the anointing at her coronation, a "quasi-sacramental character." She told her Parliament on several occasions that she was their anointed Queen and no doubt felt herself as appointed by God to rule her subjects.\(^{23}\) In one instance, when being strongly urged by Parliament to marry, she said, "I am your anointed Queen. I will never be by violence constrained to do anything." And in another similar situation, she said in a forceful speech to a committee of both houses of Parliament which had demanded again that she marry, that it was unthinkable that "the foot should direct the head in so weighty a case."\(^{24}\) These were her ways of emphasizing her divine right to rule and the absolutism of her throne. This absolutism cropped up frequently in the Queen's words and actions, especially when her will was questioned. In replying to her council when told that a person she wanted beheaded had done nothing to warrant it, she expressed herself thus: "Away! What the law fails to do, my authority shall effect."\(^{25}\)

In many of her sayings and formal speeches to Parliament, Elizabeth indicated that she, as a good


Renaissance ruler must, felt the weight of the heavy responsibility to God which accompanied kingship. A quotation from a very early letter to King Edward VI, written when she was seventeen, is indicative of Elizabeth's innate sense of obligation and her essentially serious nature. She wrote, "Moreover, lest I should seem unmindful of my duty, I give my thanks to your majesty for having conceived such an opinion of me, as you have fully expressed in your letters."\(^{26}\) In one of her final speeches to her subjects the old Queen said,

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\text{I have ever used to set the Last Judgment Day before mine eyes, and so to rule as I shall be judged to answer before a Higher Judge, to whose judgment seat I do appeal that never thought was cherished in my heart that tended not to my people's good . . . . To be a king and wear a crown is more glorious to them that see it, than it is a pleasure to them that wear it.}^{27}
\]

Sometimes this idea has majesty and dignity as Elizabeth expressed it, but the theory can be reversed and used to thwart others' wishes or demands, as when she wrote to James VI of Scotland, who was threatening her for having his mother killed. "Being a queen and a prince sovereign [I am] answerable to none for my actions, otherwise than I shall be disposed of my own free will, but to Almighty

\(^{26}\)George Rice, The Public Speaking of Queen Elizabeth (New York, 1951), p. 73.

\(^{27}\)Chamberlin, p. 136.
God alone.”28 More than once the Queen took refuge behind the divine right theory.

Elizabeth many times promulgated the passive obedience doctrine. It was the mainstay of her throne. She said once, defending herself against one of numerous insurrections, "My wisest clergy maintain on the authority of Holy Writ that no rising against one's prince, not even for conscience's sake, can be just or reasonable."29 Again, to a French ambassador who had spoken of a rebellion, Elizabeth answered, "There is nothing in the world I hold in greater horror than to see a body moving against its head and I shall be very careful not to ally myself with such a monster."30

Though she felt that ultimately she was responsible only to God, she was fully cognizant of the fact that this made her morally responsible also to her subjects. Like all Tudor rulers she knew the importance of keeping the good will of her subjects and so she consistently, whether feigned or real it is not known, reiterated her feeling and devotion for her people. Two illustrations will suffice. In a speech to her judges upon their assumption of office in 1559, the young Queen admonished them to

28Ibid., p. 4.  
29Ibid., p. 137.  
30Ibid.
Have a care over my people . . . do you that which I ought to do . . . . Everyman oppresseth and spoileth them without mercy . . . . See unto them . . . . for they are my charge. I charge you, even as God hath charged me. I care not for myself; my life is not dear to me. My care is for my people. I pray God, whoever succeedeth me, be as careful of them as I am. 31

In one of her last but most trying years, 1601, Elizabeth made a short speech to the people in her chapel on a Sunday morning shortly after the execution of Essex, which she concluded by saying, "Be always faithful to me, as I always desire to keep you in peace; and if there have been wiser kings, none has ever loved you more than I have." 32

31 Ibid., p. 11. 32 Ibid., p. 15.
CHAPTER II

DIVINE RIGHT AND PASSIVE OBEDIENCE

Shakespeare's two English history tetralogies reveal beyond doubt that their author was much concerned with such Tudor monarchical doctrines as the divine right of kings to rule and the necessity of passive obedience on the part of the subjects. The two tetralogies will be considered as a unit. This is the usual way to examine these plays, though recently one scholar has advocated that each tetralogy be given separate treatment.¹ The eight plays, beginning with Richard II and ending with Richard III, deal with one period in English history, the fifteenth century. It could not have been by accident that Shakespeare dealt in dramatic form with each significant ruler of this period. This is important despite the fact that the early tetralogy, 1, 2, 3 Henry VI and Richard III, is concerned with later fifteenth-century history, and the later group of plays concentrate on the

earlier reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, and his son Henry V.

Ribner stresses the composition dates of these tetralogies, emphasizing the several intervening years between because he, too, would have the two cycles considered separately. Stressing the obvious difference in artistic maturity of the groups, he treats each one as if the other were almost nonexistent.\(^2\) Though undoubtedly the poet's dramatic and poetic powers vastly improved during the years separating these two tetralogies, it seems unrealistic to suppose, as Ribner does, that Shakespeare's entire basic outlook on life, especially regarding politics, was radically altered in so relatively brief a span of years, especially in view of the fact that he dealt in similar ways with the same basic questions in the two cycles. A second pertinent reason for treating these plays as a unit is the numerous references linking one group with the other. A German scholar, though realizing that each play is necessarily unified for dramatic purposes, considers the two tetralogies as one great whole united by the great theme of retribution.\(^3\)

\(^2\)Ribner, p. 160.

To facilitate keeping the two tetralogies distinct, such terms as early and later, first or second will be avoided. For clarification, then, the Richard II, 1 and 2 Henry IV, and Henry V plays will be termed the Bolingbroke tetralogy; the 1, 2, and 3 Henry VI, and Richard III plays will be named the Lancaster-York tetralogy.

The divine right theory, having been explained and presented as the foundation of most Elizabethan monarchical views, leads into a discussion of the two groups of English history plays in relation to it. The first play of the Bolingbroke tetralogy is the crucial one for the divine right theory of government, King Richard II being the dramatist's principal exponent of this Tudor doctrine. That the play is primarily concerned with the king's divine right to rule is unquestionable, but in attempting to ascertain the poet's views on this subject one may not make so positive a statement, Lily B. Campbell believes the central question to be whether or not any subject may judge his king. She feels that Shakespeare answers this question repeatedly in passages unauthorized by Holinshed's Chronicle. As an example, Campbell quotes from a speech by the Bishop of Carlisle, who, after hearing Bolingbroke say that he will depose Richard, answers the usurper with ominous questions,

What subject can give sentence on his king? And who sits here that is not Richard's subject?
which he himself answers:

My Lord of Hereford here, whom you call king,
Is a foul traitor to proud Hereford's king:4

If Campbell's idea is valid, and Shakespeare was saying
that no subject can judge a king, it follows that the poet
was advocating the divine right theory.

On the other hand, Harold C. Goddard, though he
admits that Shakespeare had no use for the strong-man
policies of Bolingbroke and sees that the rest of the
history plays reveal where these policies lead, feels that
"in Richard II Shakespeare interred the doctrine of the
divine right of kings."5 Having once committed himself to
the belief that Shakespeare condemned both the doctrine of
legitimacy and de facto kingship, Goddard is hard put to
find an explanation of just what the poet was advocating.
His solution to this problem is not without interest. He
presents Shakespeare as a democrat advocating democracy
"in a poetic rather than a strictly political sense"6 in
the gardener's scene. The importance of the scene, sym-
bolically, is not to be denied, but Goddard fails to
connect it adequately to democracy, even poetic democracy,
whatever that may be. The critic intimates that because

4Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's "Histories": Mir-
5Harold C. Goddard, The Meaning of Shakespeare
(Chicago, 1956), p. 159.
6Ibid., p. 160.
Shakespeare portrayed "workers with imagination enough to extend their own experience and vocation into a political analogy," the poet was implying that these are the men in whose hands government should rest. It would seem more logical to treat the scene as an affirmation of the Tudor kingship ideal. Had Richard been as solicitous of his kingdom as the gardener was of the garden, he would not have been disgraced, dethroned and finally murdered. By Tudor standards, then, Richard was an extremely poor king, for a good Tudor ruler's first care must be his subjects', not his own, well-being. The wise gardener is as fully cognizant of the political situation as Goddard says he is when he expresses regret that Richard has been seized.

O, what pity is it,
That he had not so trimm'd and dress'd his land
As we this garden! We at time of year
Do wound the bark, the skin of our fruit-trees,
Lest, being over-proud in sap and blood,
With too much riches it confound itself:
Had he done so to great and growing men,
They might have lived to bear and he to taste
Their fruits of duty: superfluous branches
We lop away, that bearing boughs may live:
Had he done so, himself had borne the crown,
Which waste of idle hours hath quite thrown down.

The gardener has diagnosed Richard's trouble correctly.
The king let his powerful nobles become too powerful and

7Ibid.

they overwhelmed him. But the gardener is not expressing any democratic ideas. He is a proper royalist, faithful to his king, whose weaknesses are apparent, and certainly would not ally himself with a rebellious group. The gardener is a product of his age, even to his policy of expediency which dictates his insistence that Bolingbroke should have been killed. If the gardener's views are any reflection of Shakespeare's own, the poet was a faithful Tudor royalist.

Richard was the last in a long line of legitimate kings and he undoubtedly ruled by divine right. Throughout the play his recourse is always his legitimacy and the sacrislege of its being ignored. After the scathing chastisement the king received from old Gaunt, Richard, not capable of defending himself against the accusations, retorts only with a threat and a reiteration of his legitimacy.

Now, by my seat's right royal majesty, Wert thou not brother to great Edward's son, This tongue that runs so roundly in thy head Should run thy head from thy un reverence shoulders. 9

In his discussion with the Bishop of Carlisle on the coast of Wales, Richard reveals the degree to which he feels that his kingdom and right to rule come from and depend upon God, on whom he relies for assistance. The king,

9Richard II, II, i, 120-123.
after admonishing the earth not to feed those who oppose
him, feels confident that

This earth shall have a feeling and these stones
Prove armed soldiers, ere her native king
Shall falter under foul rebellion's arms. 10

Carlisle agrees with his king that the power that made him
has the power to keep him on the throne, 11 but also warns
Richard that

The means that heaven yields must be embraced,
And not neglected; 12

The king continues comparing himself to the sun. He is
blindly oblivious to the gravity of the situation until he
is jarred to reality by Salisbury, who tells him of the
dispersion of the Welsh army. Momentarily afraid and
despairing, the king, at Aumerle's brief reminder of his
kingship,

Comfort my liege, remember who you are 13
does remember himself, saying,

I had forgot myself: am I not king?
Awake, thou coward majesty! thou sleepest.
Is not the king's name twenty thousand names?
Arm, arm, my name! a puny subject strikes
At thy great glory. 14

Though Richard is pathetic and pitiable in his
childishness and lack of self-control, all he says cannot

10 Ibid., III, i, 23-25. 11 Ibid., III, i, 27 f.
12 Ibid., III, i, 29 f. 13 Ibid., III, i, 81.
14 Ibid., III, i, 82-86.
therefore be discarded as so much foolishness, for with all his faults, Richard's intelligence was keen. He grew wise, as many do, through suffering. But he never forsook the theory that his kingship was derived from God, his subjects owing him allegiance as they owed it to God. In his first, but not last, dark hour, realizing his kingdom is lost, the king philosophizes thus:

Say, is my kingdom lost? why, 'twas my care;

Revolt our subjects? that we cannot mend;
They break their faith to God as well as us:
Cry woe, destruction, ruin, and decay;
The worst is death, and death will have his day. 15

This is but one of the many ominously prophetic speeches uniting the catastrophic events of the later plays to Richard II. The king again asserts his divine right to rule when Northumberland—and one assumes purposely so—fails to kneel in the king's presence. Richard says,

We are amazed; and thus long have we stood
To watch the fearful bending of thy knee,
Because we thought ourself thy lawful king:

If we be not, show us the hand of God
That hath dismiss'd us from our stewardship;
For well we know, no hand of blood and bone
Can grip the sacred handle of our scepter,
Unless he do profaner steal or usurp. 16

Branding Bolingbroke as a usurper, Richard, again predicting the future, says that England is doomed, for God omnipotent

Is mustering in his clouds on our behalf

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15 Ibid., III, i, 95-103. 16 Ibid., III, ii, 72-81.
Armies of pestilence; and they shall strike
Your children yet unborn and unbegot,
That lift your vassal hands against my head
And threat the glory of my precious crown.\textsuperscript{17}

One other prophecy that should be mentioned is the king's
warning to Northumberland that Henry Bolingbroke, whom he
has helped to the throne, will one day hold Northumberland
himself suspect.\textsuperscript{18} This prophecy is soon fulfilled, for
the struggle between Henry IV and Northumberland is the
subject of \textit{1 Henry IV}. Therefore, do not discount what
this prophetically intelligent king says.

Richard II is indeed an advocate par excellence of
the divine right theory. But this would not, considering
Richard's weak and selfish rule, be conclusive evidence of
the poet's belief in the theory. The king let himself be
dominated by ruthless and self-aggrandizing men, such as
Bushy, Bagot, and Green, and repudiated such men as
Northumberland and Gaunt. He began undermining the very
feudal system which was the foundation of his kingship by
confiscating Gaunt's lands for selfish purposes, while
levying unjust taxes upon his people. With only Richard's
poor record of stewardship to rely on, one might well
agree with Goddard that the poet reduces to absurdity the
doctrine of the divine right of kings.

\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Ibid.}, III, ii, 85-90.
\textsuperscript{18}\textit{Ibid.}, V, i, 55-68.
One must not, however, stop with the person of the deposed king. Other factors need close examination before a decision is reached regarding Shakespeare's views on the divine right theory. Within the play itself, perhaps the most conclusive evidence indicative of the poet's support of the theory, thus implying that Shakespeare basically upheld Richard regardless of his weaknesses, is that the sympathetic characters in the play are all against deposition, even to the lowly gardener, who has been mentioned previously, and Mowbray, who apparently served as Richard's scapegoat and had every right to take offense at his king's unfair treatment of him. But Mowbray receives his sentence of banishment for life with equanimity. Nothing can make him betray his king or prove disloyal. He sees Bolingbroke for what he is—a scheming politician.

No, Bolingbroke, if ever I were a traitor
My name be blotted from the book of life,
And I from heaven banish'd as from hence!
But what thou art, God, thou, and I do know,
And all too soon, I fear, the king shall rue.  

Even Mowbray's son held no grudge against Richard II, but instead blamed Bolingbroke for forcing the king to banish his father. Young Mowbray tells Westmoreland:

What thing, in honor, had my father lost,
That need to be revived and breathed in me?
The king, that loved him, as the state stood then,
Was, force perforce, compell'd to banish him.  

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19 Ibid., II, iii, 201-205.
20 Henry IV, IV, i, 113-116.
In the discussion between the Duchess of Gloucester and John of Gaunt, the father of Bolingbroke lays down the accepted Tudor philosophy of kingship (which his son was later to repudiate). Gloucester's widow, wanting vengeance for her husband's death, has been trying to instigate a rebellion against Richard, her husband's real murderer. She is righteous and moving, but Gaunt, who does not hesitate to criticize Richard when the two meet later, is here wisely unmoved by her pleas and tells her what every loyal subject is compelled to say in a similar situation, regardless of personal feeling.

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

According to Shakespeare's Gaunt, vengeance was up to God. Campbell has noticed, and correctly so, that this was not the position taken by the historical Gaunt, who, in Holinshes, considered various proposals for revenging Woodstock's death and finally decided to forget past injuries and remain loyal if the king would rule more wisely. So Shakespeare deviated from his source in making Gaunt uphold Richard solely because he was the

\[21 \text{Richard II, I, ii.}\quad 22 \text{Campbell, p. 195.}\]
\[23 \text{Ibid., I, ii, 37-41.}\quad 24 \text{Campbell, p. 196.}\]
legitimate king and ruled by divine right. This, along with other evidence, is strong proof that the poet was expressing the importance of the Tudor doctrines of divine right and passive obedience.

Also noteworthy is Campbell's comparison of Mary Stuart's death with Richard's having Gloucester murdered. According to Campbell, the two were comparable in Elizabeth's mind:

But to any who avenge the royal blood spilled by the king, Shakespeare has Gaunt give the answer that every loyal subject of Elizabeth gave to those who would avenge the death of Mary. 25

Elizabeth allied herself frequently with Richard II. She, like him, was often accused of leasing out her kingdom and of letting favorites, such as Leicester, dominate her to the exclusion of wiser counsellors. Elizabeth, on an inspection tour of the Tower records with William Lambarde, is quoted as saying, "I am Richard II, know ye not that?" 26

The Duke of York, whose first concern was for his country, was against the Bolingbroke-instigated rebellion. When faced with the problem of disloyalty, York replies with sound doctrine to the traitorous nobles.

My lords of England, let me tell you this; I have had feeling of my cousin's wrongs And labor'd all I could to do him right,

25 Ibid.
But in this kind to come, in braving arms,
Be his own carver and cut out his way,
To find out right with wrong, it may not be;
And you that do abet him [Bolingbroke] in this kind
Cherish rebellion and are rebels all.27

Loyal to Richard as long as he possibly could be, York,
nevertheless, supported the usurper-king when it seemed
best for England that he do so. Bringing to Bolingbroke
word of "plume-plucked" Richard's "abdication," York has
the courage to tell the de facto king to

Ascend his throne, descending now from him;
And long love Henry, fourth of that name!28

The Bishop of Carlisle is perhaps the wisest and most
just of Shakespeare's clergy.29 He is a credit to his
profession. Shakespeare may have meant for Carlisle's
violent denunciation of Bolingbroke's crime to symbolize
the religious aspect of the usurper's sin. Bolingbroke
was not unaware that what he was doing was sacrilegious.
His final treatment of the Bishop of Carlisle is important
because of the light it throws on the king's conscience.
Repeatedly Bolingbroke as king had punished rebels by a
death sentence. Such harsh treatment of insurrectionists
was common; Bolingbroke himself would probably have been
treated in a similar manner had his rebellion not been

27Ibid., II, iii, 140-147.
28Richard II, IV, i, 110 f.
29Campbell, p. 208.
successful. Yet when the plot formed by the Bishop of Carlisle, the Abbot of Westminster, and Aumerle was disclosed and thwarted, not one of the three was sentenced to death. However, the Abbot died before Bolingbroke had an opportunity to sentence him, and it is not difficult to see why Aumerle, so young and penitent, was forgiven. But one wonders why Carlisle, always Henry's enemy, was not put to death. If the bishop does represent the divine laws that Henry is overthrowing, then Henry's lenient treatment of Carlisle, whom he ordered to

Choose out some secret place, some reverend room,  
More than thou hast, and with it joy thy life;  
So as thou livest in peace, die free from strife:30

indicates the king's hesitancy to incur more of God's wrath by desecrating another of His representatives. Perhaps Henry would have liked to make peace with the forces which opposed him. But too many evil, irrevocable deeds had already been done for God to grant any amnesty to Henry IV. Bolingbroke paid for his sin by having his conscience continually plague him. That he desired to expiate his guilt by a crusade to the Holy Land suggests again that he himself realized the religious and moral nature of his crimes.

To Carlisle, Shakespeare gave one of the most powerful speeches of the play, a speech which proves the

bishop's awareness that Bolingbroke's deed would rend the harmony of the universe and upset God's order. He knew full well that this disastrous event would lead to chaos, because no man, even a Henry Bolingbroke, could attempt to alter God's ordained plan without bringing down curses upon his house and his country. Through Carlisle, Shakespeare was warning that, though it was difficult to follow a transgressing king, anyone who tried to execute God's vengeance and depose the deputy ordained by God would know no happiness or peace of mind. Henry had done what his father would not do: he had taken upon himself a quarrel that was God's. These ideas are all implied, if not implicitly stated, in Carlisle's impassioned, divinely inspired, prophetic diatribe against Bolingbroke's ascendancy to the throne.

And if you crown him, let me prophesy: 
The blood of English shall manure the ground, 
And future ages groan for this foul act; 
Peace shall go to sleep with Turks and infidels, 
And in this seat of peace tumultuous wars 
Shall kin with kin and kind with kind confound; 
Disorder, horror, fear and mutiny 
Shall here inhabit, and this land be call'd 
The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls. 31

31 Richard II, IV, i, 136-144. For a contrasting opinion on the Bishop of Carlisle, see Marshall Kelly, Ambition Plays of Shakespeare (London, 1911), p. 174. Kelly feels that Shakespeare's churchmen are always wrong and that Carlisle is deceiving himself and others when he insists on the sacrilegious aspect of Richard's deposition.
This speech, regardless of when it was written in relation to the Lancaster-York tetralogy, clearly links the two cycles, for here in the earliest play (historically) is a foretelling and foreshadowing of future events. The bishop clearly prophesies the Wars of the Roses, a series of intermittent wars which ravaged England for over a hundred years and killed most of the nobility. The dramatist, in the three remaining plays of this tetralogy and four of the coming one, is concerned primarily with these wars and events leading to them.

Campbell, again comparing Richard II to the story of Richard in Holinshed's Chronicles, has observed a most significant difference in the two. As Holinshed tells the story, Richard is made to read a list of his sins before Henry proclaimed himself king and was crowned. Shakespeare, apparently intending that Bolingbroke not be justified, has Northumberland demand that Richard read the confession of his sins after the deposition, which was already a fait accompli. So in Shakespeare the deposition was not, in this respect, justified until after it was accomplished.32

It is extremely significant that Shakespeare further deviated from Holinshed by refusing to allow Richard to

32Campbell, p. 208.
suffer the complete ignominy of actually reading aloud a list of his sins. Holinshed tells the story this way:

The king with glad countenance . . . said openlie that he was ready to renounce and resign all his kinglie maiestie in manner and forme as before had promised. And although he had and might sufficiently have declared his renouncement by the reading of an other meane person; yet, for the more suertie of the matter, and for that the said resigna-
tion should have his full force and strength, himselfe therefore read the scroll of resignation, in maner and form as followeth.33

But in the play, Bolingbroke sees Richard's terrible degradation, hears himself termed a usurper by the right-
ful king, and then tells Northumberland to "urge it no more."34 Despite Northumberland's protests that "the Commons will not then be satisfied,"35 Richard is not made to read the list before him. One wonders what moti-
vated Bolingbroke to relent? Could it have been respect for the man he deposed? Probably not, for Richard was not the type of person a Bolingbroke would admire or respect. Could it have been the usurper's innate and instinctive respect for the monarchical theory Richard represents and the laws of God that have been overthrown? Quite pos-
sibly, for Bolingbroke, whose father was Gaunt, must have

33 W. G. Boswell-Stone, Shakespeare's Holinshed (London, 1907), p. 44.
34 Richard II, IV, i, 271.
35 Ibid., IV, i, 272.
been imbued from childhood with respect for the sacredness of the crown. Perhaps Bolingbroke was momentarily shaken by the realization of exactly what he had done and almost involuntarily stopped the public persecution of a man who he knows is England's rightfully anointed king appointed by God to rule and responsible only to God himself. This deviation from Holinshed strongly suggests that Shakespeare subscribed to the theory Bolingbroke was rebelling against, but could not quite ignore.

So Bolingbroke becomes King Henry IV, and knows no more peace. Exton, whether rightly or wrongly one does not know, interprets the king's words, "Have I no friend will rid me of this living fear?"\(^{36}\) to mean that he was commissioned to kill Richard II, who would always, as long as he should live, have the indelible mark of kingship on him and be a threat to Henry's rule. But when confronted with Richard's body and his murderer, the king repudiates and banishes Exton, shifting the blame, as his son was to do so often, over to his instrument.

Exton, I thank thee not; for thou has wrought
A deed of slander with thy fatal hand
Upon my head and all this famous land.\(^{37}\)

But Henry's shifting is in vain. His original sin of deposition has begun to work its evil spell. Evil begets

\(^{36}\)Richard II, V, iii, 5.

\(^{37}\)Ibid., V, vi, 34-36.
evil and now Henry's soul is doubly full of woe, for he has not only deposed a rightful king, but has also spilled royal blood as well. It did, indeed, take blood to make him grow. Seeking forgiveness for his sins, Henry vainly suggests a voyage to the Holy Land to wash the blood from his guilty hands.\textsuperscript{38}

But Henry is destined not to find redemption. \texttt{Henry IV} opens on the same plaintive note on which \texttt{Richard II} had ended. Henry's ill-begotten throne is breeding nothing but the predicted trouble. The king reveals the price he has paid for his crown in his first words:

\begin{quote}
So shaken as we are, so wan with care,  
Find we a time for frighted peace to pant,  
And breathe short-winded accents of new broils  
To be commenced in strands afar remote.\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

Rebellion breeds rebellion and Henry must put off his pilgrimage to the Holy Land until disputes have been settled and the rebellious factions subdued. \texttt{Henry IV} puts down the Percy revolt skillfully, thus succeeding where Richard failed. Here, however, as Ribner notes,\textsuperscript{40} the situation is reversed, because Henry is the unlawful king and Mortimer, whose cause the Percys are nominally supporting, has the hereditary right to the throne. Ribner states

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., V, vi, 46, 50 f.  
\textsuperscript{39}I Henry IV, I, ii, 1-4.  
\textsuperscript{40}Ribner, p. 167.}
that Shakespeare in this play is asking which is more important, divine sanction of hereditary right or proven ability to govern and de facto possession of the crown. The answer, in Ribner's interpretation, is that since the Percys lose, Shakespeare must have been condemning Mortimer's cause and by analogy, the divine right theory.\textsuperscript{41} Agreeing that both Henrys felt the weight of the sin of Richard's deposition, Ribner still feels that their reigns were not condemned because of it.\textsuperscript{42} But the Percys' cause was not a just one. They used Henry's defective title only as a pretext for their own encroachments. Mortimer was only a figurehead, an excuse for rebellion to these nobles who, in reality, wanted to dictate to a king. Also, one must not make the mistake of judging the reigns of either Henry IV or Henry V by transient successes. Both gained temporary victories, but neither's reign was ultimately successful. Even the glorious victories of Henry V were soon after his death dissolved into only a shadowy dream for England, a dream of a French empire that was forever lost by Henry V's successors.

Henry IV's conscience, then, continued to pursue him inexorably. Kelly even feels that the king's fear of Mortimer forced the subversive plot of the Percys into

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Ibid.}  \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{42} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 168.
existence. Certainly it does seem that with just a little tact and discretion the king could have retained the Percys' loyalty.

Campbell, again astutely comparing Shakespeare to Holinshed, notices two revealing plot deviations, both of which suggest that the poet wanted to emphasize the inevitable retribution that accompanied the usurper's overthrowing the rightful king. One difference is that Holinshed has Henry vow in the last year of his rule to make the pilgrimage, the vow, therefore, not being connected in any way with Richard's death. That Shakespeare connects the vow with the regicide is quite significant. The second difference Campbell notes is that Shakespeare exaggerates the king's worry over Hal. Henry IV's acceptance of his son's deeds as divine retribution for his own sins is the poet's own interpretation of Holinshed. Surely there is a reason for Shakespeare's picturing Henry IV as vainly trying to placate an avenging King of kings.

Henry's apostrophe to sleep illustrates the deep and personal uneasiness that he feels. Uneasy indeed lies the head that wears a usurped crown. The king is brooding

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43 Kelly, p. 192.  
44 Campbell, p. 229.  
45 Henry IV, III, ii, 31.
over the seemingly inevitable unfaithfulness of friends. Percy, the man nearest his soul,\textsuperscript{46} has betrayed him, and now Northumberland is fulfilling a prophecy. The king recalls the words of Richard to Northumberland:

\begin{quote}
Northumberland, thou ladder wherewithal
The mounting Bolingbroke ascends my throne,
The time shall not be many hours of age
More than it is ere foul sin gathering head
Shall break into corruption: thou shalt think
Though he divide the realm and give thee half,
It is too little, helping him to all;
And he shall think that thou, which know'st the way
To plant unrightful kings, wilt know again,
Being e'er so little urged, another way
To pluck him headlong from the usurped throne.
The love of wicked men converts to fear;
That fear to hate, and hate turns one or both
To worthy danger and deserved death.\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

So Richard's words still haunt Bolingbroke, for they are uncannily coming true. As his deathbed speech to his son reveals, Henry IV has, as the Archbishop expressed it,

\begin{quote}
\ldots found to end one doubt by death
Revives two greater in the heirs of life.\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

Henry IV admits to his son the irregular manner in which he gained the crown and the evil which attended it.

\begin{quote}
God knows, my son,
By what by-paths and indirect crook'd ways
I met this crown; and I myself know well
How troublesome it sat upon my head.\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{46}\textit{Ibid.}, III, ii, 61.

\textsuperscript{47}\textit{Richard II}, V, i, 55-68.

\textsuperscript{48}\textit{Henry IV}, IV, i, 199 f.

\textsuperscript{49}\textit{Ibid.}, IV, i, 84-87.
One of the dying king's last wishes is that God will forgive him for the way he gained the crown.

How I came by the crown, O God forgive; And grant it may with thee his son true peace live.\textsuperscript{50}

Henry IV's son, Prince Hal, ascends the throne of England, but not without misgivings inherited from his father.\textsuperscript{51} The new king also finds sleep a luxury which seems to be denied him, and on the eve of the Battle of Agincourt in a furtive and fearful prayer to the "God of battles," Henry begs:

\begin{quote}
... think not upon the fault
My father made in compassing the crown!
I Richard's body have interred new.\textsuperscript{52}
\end{quote}

The same blight is upon both reigns; both kings are usurpers. The French victories of Henry V, as has been mentioned previously, hardly survive his death. It is tragically ironical that Henry V's conquests, of which he was so proud, are lost by the son that the king was also to be so proud of. What happened to the boy, "half French, half English, that shall go to Constantinople and take the Turk by the beard?"\textsuperscript{53} The great soldier failed to produce a soldier.

\textsuperscript{50}Ibid., IV, v, 219 f.

\textsuperscript{51}For an extremely interesting discussion on Henry's regression and deterioration, see Goddard, pp. 215-268.

\textsuperscript{52}Henry V, IV, i, 310-312.

\textsuperscript{53}Ibid., V, ii, 221-224.
It seems certain that Shakespeare was upholding the Tudor doctrine of passive obedience when he wrote into *Henry V* the scene between Henry and the three common soldiers. Henry begins the discussion by saying that if he were a subject, he would prefer to die fighting for his king since the king's cause is just. Williams answers in a doubtful tone, indicating that he for one is not at all sure of the justice of Henry's cause. The soldier is raising an unexpected issue, for Henry undoubtedly had thought that the righteousness of his cause would be taken for granted. But it was not, and Williams' quick retort, That's more than we know, coupled with Bates' affirmation of the passive obedience doctrine,

Ay, or more than we should seek after; for we know enough, if we know we are the king's subjects: if his cause be wrong, our obedience to the king wipes the crime of it out of us.

put Henry on the defensive. How he attempts to evade this issue will be discussed later. The significance here of this scene lies in the fact that Shakespeare was aware of the prevalence, of the almost universal acceptance of this doctrine of passive obedience, especially among the masses, and chose to make it an integral part of this play, as well as others in the English history tetralogies.

54 *Henry V*, IV, i, 129-133.  
Ribner admits that Tillyard and Campbell have both demonstrated that Elizabethans saw history from Richard II to Henry VII in a conventional pattern, the deposition of Richard II being the great crime resulting in the Wars of the Roses which caused constant turmoil till the coming of the Tudor dynasty, and that most Elizabethans agreed substantially with Tudor monarchical principles of divine right and passive obedience. 57 He also realizes the important place Elizabethans gave to their belief that a healthful society must observe degree and order, with every citizen in his place, exercising his proper function in the social hierarchy. 58 Believing Shakespeare to have been concerned with these doctrines, Ribner, nevertheless, feels that there are other elements in the Bolingbroke tetralogy which do not always echo traditional Tudor ideas. 59

There is some evidence, Ribner feels, that Shakespeare was coming to regard the notion of the divine right of kings with skepticism. One example the critic gives is the way in which Richard, parrot-like, repeats these doctrines, especially in the scene where the king lands on the Welsh coast. 60 Ribner says that this scene illustrates the pathetic insufficiency of these doctrines.

57 Ribner, p. 157.  
58 Ibid.  
59 Ibid., p. 158.  
60 Richard II, III, i.
by themselves. "Something more than God's protection is needed to preserve the king in the harsh reality of Renaissance power politics."\textsuperscript{61} It is unlikely, however, that Shakespeare was criticizing Tudor divine right doctrines, because Richard had no conception of the Tudor interpretation of this doctrine. Elizabeth would never have ceased to rely on her wits as Richard did. She, like her father, knew that God helps those who help themselves. So the Tudor monarchical doctrine is not the question in point. If Shakespeare was condemning any political doctrine, it could only have been Richard's brand of the divine right theory. The poet, then, was not necessarily unorthodox in his presentation of Richard.\textsuperscript{p 466}

Another argument Ribner offers in substantiation of his views regarding Shakespeare's partial unorthodoxy in \textit{Richard II} is that if Richard's deposition were considered by the Elizabethans to be a sacrilege followed by one hundred years of chaos, it is difficult to believe that the followers of Essex would have called for the play on the eve of their insurrection in 1601.\textsuperscript{62} But the Essex group's use of the play does not prohibit its being generally considered orthodox. The play fitted the immediate needs of Essex because a deposition did occur in it. The insurrectionists were not interested in Shakespeare's

\textsuperscript{61}Ribner, p. 166. \textsuperscript{62}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 157.
long-range depiction of the tragic result of Bolingbroke's brazen and presumptuous act. Also, neither Shakespeare nor the actors were in any way condemned for the presentation of the play, or implicated in the rebellion. One other question that Ribner raises is why, if the play was considered orthodox, the deposition scene was not performed during Elizabeth's reign? It is not unnatural that Elizabeth, whose throne was never truly secure, should not have relished seeing the very act she feared most depicted on a stage. Out of deference to their Queen, upon whom their livelihood depended, Shakespeare and his group could have prudently withheld the deposition scene.

Henry V is succeeded by his weak-willed son, Henry VI, who in his utter helplessness resembles a rowboat in a hurricane. "In Henry VI, civil war is depicted as the natural consequence of an original disturbance of the due order of history." Tillyard also feels that in this tetralogy God is punishing England for shedding Richard's blood. In these four plays is the complete fulfillment of the various dire predictions in Richard II. But there are retrospective speeches which also seem to unite the two tetralogies. Tillyard has listed several to support

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63 Ibid.
64 Ulrici, p. 369.
65 Tillyard, p. 169.
his treatment of the two as a single unit. The dying Mortimer, in reviewing his star-crossed life and telling Richard Plantagenet why it was so, retells the story of Bolingbroke's deposition of Richard. \footnote{Tillyard, p. 147. Cf. 1 Henry VI, II, v, 61-70.} Then in 2 Henry VI, York in explaining his title to Warwick goes back to Edward III, but "fixes the mainspring of subsequent English history in the murder of Richard II." \footnote{Ibid. Cf. 2 Henry VI, II, i, 9-28.} In Richard III, Earl Rivers links his coming death at the hands of Richard III with the death of Richard II.

Within the guilty closure of thy walls [Pomfret Castle]
Richard the second here was hacked to death; \footnote{Richard III, III, ii, 11f.}

Ribner, however, states that, though the crimes of Richard's death may be behind the chaos of the Lancaster-York tetralogy, Shakespeare never emphasized that the Wars of the Roses were punishment for Richard's deposition and murder. \footnote{Ribner, p. 99.} One wonders how he could have emphasized it more than by linking the two cycles so closely together and dramatizing all the squabbling, lying, and bloodshed which resulted from the murder of Richard. Ribner then explains that, since history was not mere pageantry for Shakespeare, who saw meaning in it, the dramatist presents...
a vast scheme in this tetralogy whereby England brings evil on herself, suffers the degradation of the civil war, and loses her conquests. God then pities England and allows her the grace to make a good choice of a ruler in Henry of Richmond.⁷⁰ So Shakespeare is presenting England's scheme for salvation which is implicit in any Christian philosophy of history. This is all quite correct, but there is a missing link which Ribner cannot adequately explain. How did England bring down all these catastrophic events upon herself? Rightly emphasizing that violations of divine harmony have been committed, yet refusing to admit that the murder of Richard was the principal violation, Ribner is forced to find the reasons for the evil somewhere else—and he does. He says that the sins committed within the Lancaster-York tetralogy—the sacrifice of Talbot, the murder of Gloucester, and the treason and lechery of Suffolk—are the reasons for England's loss of God's favor.⁷¹ Yet it seems more logical to see these evils of the Lancaster-York cycle as symptoms of a disease whose germ was planted in England by Bolingbroke's crime.

As Ribner interprets these plays, their primary purpose is to present the horrors of internal dissension and the concomitant need for a successor of Elizabeth.⁷²

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 101. ⁷¹Ibid. ⁷²Ibid., p. 110.
These are valid possible reasons for the tetralogy, and might be quite pertinent to a complete analysis of the plays, but neither purpose invalidates or even impinges on the larger interpretation based on both cycles. A playwright is not limited to one or two objectives in writing a play.

Scholars generally believe that according to Shakespeare, the possession of the crown purges the possessor of all defects and that the subjects owe obedience to the king, regardless of his mode of accession.\textsuperscript{73} Part of the Tudor monarchical doctrine is found in this idea. The royal supremacy had to be safeguarded and the evidence in both cycles of plays seems to indicate that Shakespeare concurred with the theory.\textsuperscript{74} As Ribner points out, regardless of the fact that Henry VI is not fit for kingship and has a weak title (York's actually is stronger) Shakespeare as usual censures rebellion against a \textit{de facto} king.\textsuperscript{74} (It is worth noting, though, that Ribner feels that it was permissible for Bolingbroke to rebel against Richard II, who was not only a \textit{de facto} king but a legitimate one as well.) But what Shakespeare felt was the people's duty toward their king—whoever he may be—neither lessened his belief in the importance of

\textsuperscript{73}Ribner, p. 113, Campbell, p. 213.

\textsuperscript{74}Ribner, p. 112.
legitimacy nor stopped him from portraying the severe retribution which killing a true king necessitated.

Henry VI is tormented by his illegitimacy. York's prior claim was never far from the king's mind, and everyone else's also. What are the treasonous words that Horner the armourer was reputed to have uttered? Suffolk quotes the armourer who allegedly had said:

That Richard Duke of York
Was rightful heir unto the English crown
And that your majesty was an usurper. 75

Then the king himself, on the defensive to prove the validity of his title to Warwick and York says,

Henry the Fourth by conquest got the crown.
To which York retorts,

'Twas by rebellion against his king.

And Henry, in an aside, admits the weakness of his position:

I know not what to say; my title's weak. 76

While the king is talking with Clifford and Queen Margaret shortly before the battle with York's forces, Clifford urges the king to look upon his son and

... steel thy melting hand
To hold thine own and leave thine own to him. 77

75 Henry VI, I, iii, 86-88.
76 Henry VI, I, i, 132-134.
77 Ibid., II, i, 41f.
But the king is inconsolable, his answer indicating that he is fully aware of the curse upon his house which makes resistance futile.

Full well hath Clifford play'd the orator, Inferring arguments of mighty force. But Clifford, tell me, didst thou never hear That things ill-got had ever bad success? And happy always was it for that son Whose father for his hoarding went to hell? I'll leave my son virtuous deeds behind; And would my father have left me no more!\textsuperscript{78}

Indeed the ill-begotten crown would never let its wearers rest. Nor would it allow England to prosper. Gloucester, during his long ordeal of being undermined by Suffolk and the queen, describes accurately England's body politic. Addressing the king, he says,

Ah, gracious lord, these days are dangerous: Virtue is choked with foul ambition, And charity chased hence by rancour's hand; Foul subordination is predominant And equity exiled in your highness' land.\textsuperscript{79}

And the king himself, upon seeing a father who has inadvertently killed his own son in the civil war, begs God to have mercy and lift the heavy shroud covering England.

Woe above woe! grief more than common grief! O that my death would stay these rueful deeds! O, pity, pity, gentle heaven, pity!\textsuperscript{80}

There is little controversial matter in Richard III. Critics agree that the theme of the play is the rise of a

\textsuperscript{78}Ibid., II, i, 43-50.

\textsuperscript{79}2 Henry VI, III, i, 142-146.

\textsuperscript{80}2 Henry VI, II, v, 94-96.
dominant, evil personality which must be destroyed. Ribner and Tillyard agree that the purpose of the play is to show the working out of God's plan to restore England to prosperity. 81 Two men in this play, Clarence and Edward IV, die acknowledging their guilt and thinking of others. This penitence is a prelude to England's forgiveness and regeneration. 82

Whereas the sins of other men had merely bred more sins, Richard's are so vast that they are absorptive, not contagious. He is the great ulcer of the body politic into which all its impurity is drained and against which all members of the body politic are united. 83

If Shakespeare can be considered unorthodox anywhere in these two tetralogies, it is in Richard III. Yet incongruously enough what seems to be political unorthodoxy here in reality is quite in line with Tudor doctrine. In Richard III is found the only ultimately successful rebellion. In principle, no Tudor advocate ever openly authorized rebellion. Archbishop Crammer's words, "Though the magistrates be evil, and very enemies to Christ's religion, yet the subjects must obey in all worldly things" 84 are typical of Tudor propaganda. But some

81 Ribner, p. 118, Tillyard, p. 204.
82 Tillyard, p. 205. 83 Ibid., p. 208.
84 Thomas Crammer, Miscellaneous Writings of Thomas Crammer, edited by John Edmund Cox (Cambridge, 1846), p. 188, cited in Ribner, p. 121.
modification of this principle had to be made in order to allow for the lawful origin of the Tudor dynasty. Therefore, in dramatizing the rebellion against Richard, Shakespeare actually was quite orthodox in that he justified well the accession of Henry of Richmond. The poet accomplished this in several circumspect ways, being always careful not to be deprecatory toward Henry VII. Richard III, deserving or not, is pictured as the most cold-blooded, Machiavellian villain imaginable. Also, as Ribner points out, Shakespeare played down the rebellion motif by portraying Richard as God's scourge. "When God's purposes have been served, the evil scourge must himself be destroyed, and for this purpose God chooses another agent through whom he may operate."85 One is left, then, with the idea that God, not Henry Tudor, caused Richard's death. Henry's personality is under-developed. His role is a passive one; he is an instrument in the drama rather than an actor.86 The final subtle distinction that justifies this rebellion is that, in Tillyard's words, Richard "was so clearly both a usurper and a murderer that he qualifies as a tyrant; and against an authentic tyrant it was lawful to rebel."87

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85 Ribner, p. 122.
86 Ibid.
87 Tillyard, p. 212.
makes clear that it is lawful to rebel against a tyrant when he says,

If you do sweat to put a tyrant down,
You sleep in peace, the tyrant being slain. 88

The spiritual uneasiness of Henry IV and Henry V, the ultimate futility of each king's every seeming accomplishment, and the disastrous Wars of the Roses culminating in the political Mephistopheles, Richard III, are direct results of the sacrilegious treatment of Richard II. Each tetralogy throws added light on the other and both reveal that, so far as Tudor political doctrine was concerned, their author was in complete accord with his age, advocating the divine right theory and its sister doctrine, passive obedience. Shakespeare graphically illustrated the dire results of a radical alteration of God's plan or a disregard of God's anointed ruler.

88 Richard III, V, iiii, 55f.
CHAPTER III

IDEAL OF KINGSHIP AND ABSOLUTISM

The influence of the Tudor ideal of kingship is extensive in Shakespeare's English history tetralogies. Elizabethans in general were fully aware that for England to prosper she must have a good monarch on her throne, and the evidence suggests Shakespeare's awareness of this fact. The dramatist also permeated these plays with the Tudor doctrine of absolutism which was considered necessary for the peace of the realm.

Ribner believes the main issue in the Bolingbroke tetralogy to be what constitutes a good king. He substantiates his theory by stating that it is not surprising that Shakespeare should be interested in this topic, for a main problem of the era was the topical one of who should succeed Elizabeth. (In discussing the Lancaster-York tetralogy Ribner has said that Shakespeare expressed fears of what might occur should the succession question not be settled.)¹ Emphasizing his point, Ribner says that Shakespeare's

¹Ribner, p. 110.
chief political purpose in these plays was to delineate various royal types and to indicate the qualities of the perfect English king. 2

It is questionable that the poet's main political purpose was what Ribner indicates, especially when the two groups of plays are viewed together, but certainly one political purpose was to set in relief requisite kingly qualities. Shakespeare did this by dramatizing significant aspects of the political life of several kings, each of whom is deficient in some of these important qualities.

The principal rulers of these two cycles, Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI, will be treated in this study in relation to their fitness or lack of fitness for kingship. Richard III, whose Machiavellian nature and obvious villainy set him apart from the above-mentioned kings, will be purposely omitted from this discussion of who should rule England.

By Elizabethan standards, there are three criteria by which a king is judged. To be an adequate ruler, much less an ideal one, a king must have a legitimately hereditary right to the throne, and have public and private virtue. That is, he must be virtuous in his private life as a man and in his public life as a king. The perfect Tudor gentleman also had to have similar public and private virtue. For example, he had to be a man of his word

2Ibid., p. 159.
in public and in private, be heroic in battle and temperate in gratifying his desires, be unselfish in serving his king and country, and devoutly, but not ostentatiously, religious.\textsuperscript{3}

From an Elizabethan standpoint, the kings that Shakespeare was treating in the two tetralogies were far from perfect. Not one could come up to Tudor standards. Shakespeare was orthodox in his presentation of these kings because he did not treat them as ideal. While it is true that the poet was concurring with Tudor historians in interpreting fifteenth-century monarchs, there are perhaps other more fundamental reasons for his creating characters who are imperfect kings. Part of Shakespeare's genius lies in his ability to penetrate deep into human personalities and motivations. He was too wise a student of human nature to have ever been guilty of not realizing the impossibility of perfection in this world. Then, from a practical standpoint, a hypothetically perfect principal character is not conducive to entertaining drama. But, though none of the kings treated in this study have all the necessary public and private virtues, one king, Richard II, does have the third necessary requisite for

\textsuperscript{3}For elaborations on these ideas, see Castiglione, Count Baldesor,\textit{ The Book of the Courtier}, translated by Leonard Eckstein Opdycke (New York, 1903), Thomas Elyot,\textit{ The Governour} (London, n. d.), and\textit{ The Mirror for Magistrates}, edited by Lily B. Campbell (Cambridge, 1938).
kingship. He has a legitimate claim to the throne. This makes him England's rightful king, able to rule by divine right.

There are many differing views of this one legitimate king. Ribner sees him as a weak and effeminate ruler who has absolutely no public virtue. Kelly says that since Richard was not a fit king, he had to be deposed. This critic also states that

\[ \ldots \text{in eternal law, Richard had no claim whatever to kingship, for only supreme human faculty deserved supreme place.} \]

Richard is "bad, light and shallow of character," and, according to Kelly, his incompetent possession of power damns him. Ulrici also believes that Richard forfeits his just right to the crown by his weak use of it. Derek Antona Traversi, discussing personal and political qualities necessary for kingship, feels that Richard was lacking in all political qualities. Travis Bogard, penetrating with more objective insight into the king, distinguishes between the king and the man. He says that the two are presented alternately, never fused into a whole at a given time. There may even be more Richards,

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4Ribner, p. 16.  
5Kelly, p. 162.  
6Ibid., p. 163.  
7Ibid., p. 164.  
8Ulrici, p. 365.  
he suggests, for the king is at various times an anointed king, a petulant prince, and a philosopher. Palmer's views about Richard are more favorable:

In Richard's degradation we see a gifted, sensitive, undisciplined character exposed to the high tension of a tragic destiny.

By contrast two critics of Richard II favor the king. W. B. Yeats in one of his essays has much to say about King Richard.

I cannot believe that Shakespeare looked on Richard II with any but sympathetic eyes, understanding how ill-fitted he was to be king at a certain moment of history, but understanding that he was lovable and full of capricious fancy, . . . . To suppose that Shakespeare preferred the man who deposed his King is to suppose that Shakespeare judged men with the eyes of a Municipal Councillor weighing the merits of a Town Clerk; and that had he been by when Verlaine cried out from his bed, "Sir, you have been made by the stroke of a pen, but I have been made by the breath of God" he would have thought the Hospital Superintendent the better man. He saw indeed, as I think, in Richard II the defeat that awaits all, whether they be Artist or Saint, who find themselves where men ask of them a rough energy and they have nothing to give but some contemplative virtue, whether lyrical phantasy, or sweetness of temper or dreamy dignity or love of God, or love of his creatures.

Yeats also saw that such men as he described Richard to be tended to become unjust and violent under pressure. He

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11 Palmer, p. 150.
felt that Shakespeare cared little for the state, though he admitted that the poet thought it wrong to overturn a king and that "the historical plays from Henry IV to Richard III . . . are a fulfillment of the prophecy of the Bishop of Carlisle . . . ."\(^{13}\) In comparing Richard and Henry IV, Yeats calls Richard a vessel of porcelain and Henry a vessel of clay.\(^{14}\)

Karl F. Thompson, in his article about Richard, offers conclusive evidence to support his thesis that Richard was a martyr.\(^{15}\) Richard resists helping himself, Thompson insists, in order that he may rely solely on God.\(^{16}\) If Richard is a martyr, then his death must be revenged in this world as well as in the next, according to Elizabethan views on martyrdom. Thompson feels that Shakespeare was aware of the connotations of martyrdom, and repeatedly solicited the audience's consideration of its implications in several ways, by the deposition scene, by Carlisle's warning, by Hotspur's later regret for having helped in the deposition, and finally by having York present Richard's blood to the populace as if it were the relic of a saint. Morton describes this event.

\(^{13}\)Ibid., p. 111. \(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 113.

\(^{15}\)Karl F. Thompson, "Richard II, Martyr," Shakespeare Quarterly, VIII (Spring, 1957), 159-165.

\(^{16}\)Ibid., p. 162.
But now the bishop
Turns insurrection to religion:
Supposed sincere and holy in his thoughts,
He's followed both with body and with mind;
And doth enlarge his rising with the blood
Of fair King Richard, scraped from Pomfret stones;
Derives from heaven his quarrel and his cause; . . .

Richard's martyrdom blends well with Shakespearian orthodoxy.

It seems apparent that Shakespeare did not intend his audience to view Richard II as an ideal king. But he had more right to be king of England, despite his personal incapacities, than any other man of his time because he was England's legitimate ruler. And he was not completely without virtue, especially private virtue. The parting between Richard and his queen well illustrates several of the king's private virtues. Richard is capable of unselfish devotion to his wife. His love shines through his every word in this scene. He speaks of the way his queen looked when coming to be his bride,

She came adorned hither like sweet May, 18
and, for once forgetting his own desires, tells her that it is best that they part and she go to France.

Weep thou for me in France, I for thee here;
Better far off than near, be ne'er the near.
Go, count thy way with sighs; I mine with groans. 19

17 Thompson, p. 164. Cf. 2 Henry IV, I, i, 200-206.
18 Richard II, V, i, 78.
19 Ibid., V, i, 87-89.
Richard gains some self-knowledge and becomes fully aware of his failures. He tells the queen:

Our holy lives must win a new world's crown,
Which our profane hours here have stricken down. 20

This short speech to the queen is indicative of another of Richard's private virtues. He is sincerely religious and regrets that he has displeased God and profaned his God-given sacred responsibility of kingship.

However, there are obvious private virtues that Richard lacks. He is not faithful to those who have helped him, as his harsh treatment of Mowbray and Gaunt attests, while being blindly and unwisely faithful to selfish flatterers like Bushy, Bagot, and Green.

The discussion of Richard's complete lack of any semblance of public virtue will be brief. Even a casual reader notices that Richard, in the first three acts of the play, makes almost every possible political blunder. Until he was deposed, the king had no insight into the responsibilities commensurate with kingship. He loved the pomp and circumstance surrounding his throne and seemed to revel in the arbitrary exercise of his authority. He avoided problems wherever possible. Banishing Bolingbroke and confiscating Gaunt's lands were the worst possible political moves, for they gave Henry a pretext for

20 Ibid., V, i, 24f.
rebellion. He had no care for the welfare of his sub-
jects. His only aim was a hedonistic gratification of his
every desire. Richard felt that God should and would do
everything necessary to help. But it never occurred to
him that he would one day be held accountable for his
stewardship of the crown. The only modifying statement
one may make is that as he gained insight into himself,
Richard began to see his deplorable lack of public virtue.
His vision no longer ensnared by his selfishness, Richard
becomes fully aware that Bolingbroke is not the only
traitor. When, after being told to read the list of his
crimes, Richard tells Northumberland:

Mine eyes are full of tears, I cannot see:
And yet salt water blinds them not so much
But they can see a sort of traitors here.
Nay, if I turn mine eyes upon myself,
I find myself a traitor with the rest;
For I have given here my soul's consent
To undeck the pompous body of a king;
Made glory base and sovereignty a slave;
Proud majesty a subject, state a peasant,

the audience hears a confession which is much more moving
than the king's reading of his "sins" could have been.
Here is the agonized cry of one who realizes too late that
he has abused God's gift of kingship by ignoring the
responsibility attached to it. Sovereignty has become the
slave of nobles powerful enough to buy her, and England is
almost poverty-stricken because of the excessive demands

\footnote{Ibid., IV, i, 243-251.}
he made on the people. Richard knows that he is a traitor to his God and his country.

Henry Bolingbroke, more interesting before his coronation than after it, has received his fair share of critical treatment, the tenor of which depends to a large extent upon how the particular critic views Richard II. Those who favor Richard are almost universally antagonistic to Bolingbroke. Henry Buckley Charlton has a vivid, if derogatory, description of Bolingbroke wherein Henry is called unattractive, cold, secretive, governed by a policy of absolute expedience and resolute pragmatism. He further states that Bolingbroke suspends all moral considerations.22 Palmer unwittingly supports Charlton in this statement by citing the scene in Richard II where Henry turns the moral situation inside out, praising York for loyalty and condemning Aumerle for treachery when in reality Aumerle was the one who was loyal to the rightful king, Richard II.23 Saying that Bolingbroke was not aware of his intentions to the throne, Palmer yet admits that others saw his ambition clearly.24 Goddard says on this same subject:

23Palmer, p. 172, citing Richard II, IV, iii.
24Ibid., p. 134.
The naive reader, encountering this play for the first time, is inclined to give Henry the benefit of the doubt and think that he came back to England from his banishment merely to recover his inheritance, not with his eye on the crown. But no one can believe that for a second when he reads the rest of the story.\textsuperscript{25}

Palmer says that when Bolingbroke speaks with utter scorn to Richard, who has just dashed the mirror to the ground, saying

\begin{quote}
The shadow of your sorrow that destroyed
The shadow of your face,
\end{quote}

he shows the contempt of the realist for the imaginative exercises of the artist.\textsuperscript{26}

Traversi feels that Bolingbroke has the political qualities that Richard lacks, but is inordinately ambitious. "Bolingbroke's crime is more than personal treachery. It is the overthrow of an order divinely sanctioned in the name of inordinate ambition."\textsuperscript{27} Ulrici and Kelly, in discussing Henry's right to the throne, make some interesting observations. Ulrici points out that

Whereas in "Richard the Second" a mere outward title is insufficient, in the absence of intrinsic right and justice, to protect the state from devastation, dissension, and rebellion, the same disturbances and civil broils appear in "Henry the Fourth," because the inward qualifications for a crown . . . are not associated with the outward right.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{25}Goddard, p. 148.
\textsuperscript{26}Palmer, p. 165.  \textsuperscript{27}Traversi, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{28}Ulrici, p. 358.
Noting that Henry's presumption sapped the moral foundation from under him, Ulrici nevertheless emphasizes that those who rebelled against Henry IV were no more justified than he was.\(^{29}\) Kelly feels that the two tetralogies considered here deal with the problem of who shall rule England, Richard II being at the heart of the question. The following plays are the record of battle and shift to maintain a crown unfairly won,

a crumbling down till basest elements walk naked.
The men presented in Richard II are the highest portrayed in any of the plays . . . there is degradation of soul after soul till in Richard III no one admirable is to be found; the conflict having by that time become such as none worthy could be engaged in it.\(^{30}\)

Yet Kelly also maintains that Bolingbroke was the one for the crown and was right to be alive to his chances. His sin, as this critic sees it, was not that he sought kingship but that he sought it in duplicity, this duplicity being the reason for his blighted conscience later on.\(^{31}\)

Ribner's opinions about Henry IV vary somewhat from the norm. In brief, this scholar's interpretation of Bolingbroke (and his son also) is found in this quotation:

With his [Henry IV's] rule England casts off the sloth into which Richard had plunged it and begins a return to its former strength and nobility which is completed with the triumph of Henry V.\(^{32}\)

\(^{29}\)Ibid., p. 369.

\(^{30}\)Kelly, p. 152.

\(^{31}\)Ibid., p. 169.

\(^{32}\)Ribner, p. 157.
The dominant Elizabethan fear when the Bolingbroke tetralogy was being written was that a weak ruler would ascend the throne and powerful nobles create another civil war. So in the Henry IV and V plays, Shakespeare, Ribner proposes, was advocating the theory that it was better to have a strong and efficient king with an illegal title than a weak one. If one forgets the Lancaster-York tetralogy, this line of thinking may seem credible, but if both cycles are telescoped into one, such is not the case.

Henry IV was the first to attempt to rule in flagrant defiance of the divine right theory of kingship. So one of the prerequisites for successful rule he certainly did not have. What of the other two? If Bolingbroke has any real private virtue, as Richard did, Shakespeare did not emphasize it. He was not religious. His pilgrimage to the Holy Land was suggested only for fear of divine retribution and, as he tells Hal, for political expediency. In his deathbed advice to his son, discussing how he dealt with potential threats to his crown, Bolingbroke says:

I cut them off; and had a purpose now
To lead out many to the Holy Land,
Lest rest and lying still might make them look
Too near unto my state.33

Neither was Henry loyal to any of those who had assisted him in attaining the throne. One by one, he alienated his

332 Henry IV, IV, v, 210-213.
former friends. One example is Hotspur, who, in explaining the Percys' grievances against the usurper to Sir Walter Blunt, summarizes the king's faults succinctly by saying,

[Bolingbroke] sought to entrap me by intelligence; Rated mine uncle from the council-board; In rage dismiss'd my father from the court; Broke oath on oath, committed wrong on wrong, And in conclusion drove us to seek out This head of safety; and withal to pry Into his title, the which we find Too indirect for long continuance. 34

Worcester, at Bolingbroke's camp near Shrewsbury shortly before the battle, airs his grievances to the king himself. They are similar to Hotspur's. He tells the king:

For you my staff of office did I break
In Richard's time; ... You swore to us,
... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ...
That you did nothing purpose 'gainst the state;
Nor claim no further than your new-fall'n right,
The seat of Gaunt, dukedom of Lancaster:
To this we swore our aid.
... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ...
You took occasion to be quickly woo'd
To grieve the general sway into your hand; ... 35

Henry Bolingbroke is not without public virtue, though it is true that he sensed that what was best for England would also preserve his crown. When his absolutism is questioned by Worcester and the Percys, Henry foresees danger and attempts to evade it. He tells Worcester:

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34 Henry IV, IV, iii, 97-104.
35 Ibid., IV, iv, 34ff.
My blood hath been too cold and temperate,  
Unapt to stir at these indignities,  
And you have found me; for accordingly  
You tread upon my patience: but be sure  
I will from henceforth rather be myself,  
Mighty and to be fear'd, than my condition;  
Which hath been smooth as oil, soft as young down,  
And therefore lost that title of respect  
Which the proud soul ne'er pays but to the proud.\textsuperscript{36}

And slightly later he terminates his discussion with
Hotspur, who openly questioned the king's power by
refusing to turn his prisoners over to Henry IV, with
these firm and forceful words:

\begin{quote}
Send me your prisoners with the speediest means  
Or you shall hear in such a kind from me  
As will displease you.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

Henry has the strength to assert his rule. This Richard
could not do.

From the outset, Henry made fewer political mistakes
than Richard. He was alert enough to know that to gain
the crown and keep it successfully he must have popular
support (whereas Richard felt that his legitimate right to
the throne made it unnecessary for him to strive to be
liked by the masses). Shakespeare takes us deep into the
mind of the king in the scene where he is counselling Hal,
urging him to act more discreetly. In the course of the
conversation we find out that Bolingbroke assumed certain
poses in order to win the support and good will of the

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., I, iii, 1-9.

\textsuperscript{37} Henry IV, I, iii, 119-121.
people. Henry describes his subterfuge to his son in these words:

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

One may feel that Henry's purposeful deceit is far from being an example of virtue, but his actions, by Elizabethan standards, indicate political virtue because they indicate political wisdom. Henry wisely pardons Carlisle and Aumerle and shows political acumen in sending Blount to the disgruntled Percys with orders to ask the group to name their complaints and have them remedied. The Percys themselves are to be pardoned. Blount relays this message as follows:

The king hath sent to know  
The nature of your griefs, and whereupon  
You conjure from the beast of civil peace  
Such bold hostility . . . . If that the king  
Have any way your good deserts forgot,  
Which he confesseth to be manifold,  
He bids you name your griefs; and with all speed  
You shall have your desires with interest  
And pardon absolute for yourself and these  
Herein misled by your suggestion.  

Yet there were public virtues that Henry lacked; they were important ones. It is significant, however, that they stem from his not being a legitimate king and thus

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38 Ibid., III, ii, 50-54.
39 Henry IV, IV, iii, 41-50.
not being able to rule by divine right. Henry felt no responsibility to God for his kingship. This is not surprising since it was not God, but his own wits, which procured the crown for him. Also, he had no genuine love for his subjects. That his subjects benefited by his firm rule and political wisdom is really beside the point, for Henry's motives were always selfish ones. Bolingbroke is far from being an ideal king.

Henry V is commonly judged to be Shakespeare's presentation of the ideal ruler. 40 Most critics envision the poet uniting in one man every indispensible attribute for kingship. A brief review of such criticism will be advantageous. Campbell treats Henry V as a hero-play whose author followed his source in depicting the hero's character and achievements. Forgetting Bolingbroke's injunction to his son to keep his subjects busy with foreign affairs, Campbell asserts that Shakespeare justifies Henry V's war on moral grounds. 41 According to Tillyard, Henry V is the abstract conception of the perfect ruler. His rule is a glorious interlude wherein the ancestral curse of the profanation of an anointed and rightful king is temporarily suspended. Evelyn May Albright is an unqualified worshipper of Henry V.


41Campbell, p. 259.
Shakespeare's trilogy on Henry V shows the development of a wise, humane, and above all, courageous and patriotic king from a wayward, almost dissolute boy, impulsive and undignified but warm-hearted and devoted to the welfare of his friends and to any inspiring cause.\textsuperscript{42}

Ribner also sees Henry V as having every asset necessary for kingship. He believes that the test of a good king is his ability to maintain civil order, and Henry, like his father, succeeded in doing this. The four plays are educational dramas illustrating how an ideal king is made. In \textit{1 Henry IV}, Hal is educated in the art of war, and in \textit{2 Henry IV}, he is educated in the art of peace. Henry V, therefore, becomes both soldier and statesman.\textsuperscript{43}

But there are other quite dissimilar interpretations of Henry V. Traversi is fair and dispassionate toward the son of Bolingbroke. He recognizes that Henry possessed to a supreme degree his father's political capacity,\textsuperscript{44} but insists that in Henry V there is an uneasy balance between unbridled passion and cold self-control. Noting the harsh comparison Henry uses in assuring the French ambassador of his righteousness, Traversi quotes the king, who says that he is


\textsuperscript{43}Ribner, p. 169.

\textsuperscript{44}Traversi, p. 167.
... no tyrant, but a Christian king;
Unto whose grace our passion is our subject. 45
As are our wretches fetter'd in our prisons.

Such self-control is precarious; such fettered passions are likely to break out. They do break out, Traversi says, when the king, whose will has been crossed by the French ambassador, threatens the French in this manner:

When we have matched our rackets to these balls
We will, in France, by God's grace play a set
Shall strike his father's crown into the hazard. 46

Charlton is more forthrightly derogatory in his treatment of Henry V, calling him "the great plain man, the average Englishman." 47 Palmer finds that Henry is motivated throughout the play by self-justification. 48 Yeats says of Henry V:

He has the gross vices, the coarse nerves of one who is to rule among violent people ... he's remorseless and undistinguished as some natural force. He lacks Richard's lyricism but has a resounding rhetoric. His purposes are so intelligible ... that everybody talks of him as if he succeeded, although he fails in the end, as all men great and little fail in Shakespeare. 49

Is Henry V the perfect English Renaissance monarch? Did Shakespeare intend him to be a king par excellence?

For an answer to these questions Henry will be examined on the basis of preceding standards of legitimacy and

47Charlton, p. 18. 48Palmer, p. 185.
49Yeats, p. 113. For a scathing interpretation of Henry V, see Goddard, pp. 215-268.
morality. There can be no doubt that Henry's claim to the throne was a weak one which was invalid in the eyes of most Elizabethans and Queen Elizabeth herself. Henry V's right to the throne was based on his father's usurpation, but this fact only made Henry more determined to strengthen his rule at all costs. Even before his crowning, as Hal was talking to his father shortly before the old king's death, he says of the crown he will soon wear and the power he will soon wield:

My gracious liege,
You won it, wore it, kept it, gave it me;
Then plain and right must my possession be:
Which I with more than with a common pain
'Gainst all the world will rightfully maintain. 50

Political expediency dominates Henry's every word and action even more than it had his father's. Any potential private virtue Henry V may have had was swallowed up by his expediency fixation. Despite all the ink wasted in defense of Henry's rejection of Falstaff, the enigmatic repudiation remains a blight on Henry's character. The rejection itself was unnecessary, but the manner in which the king chose to cast off his former friend was inexcusable. To subject an old man who had considered himself almost Henry's foster-father to such public abuse and tell him:

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

502 Henry IV, IV, v, 221-225.
I have long dream'd of such a kind of man,  
So surfeit-swell'd, so old and so profane;  
But, being awake, I do despise my dream,  
as Henry did is nothing short of callous cruelty. The  
only possible motive the new king could have had was a  
political one. He who had permitted "the base contagious  
clouds/To smother up his beauty from the world," now  
pleases, as he said he would, to be "himself," that is,  
every inch a proper king. Hal's soliloquy from the first  
act of 1 Henry IV indicates that Falstaff's rejection was  
premeditated. Hal tells the audience to be en garde for  
his coming reformation.

So when this loose behaviour I throw off  
And pay the debt I never promised,  
By how much better than my work I am,  
By so much shall I falsify men's hopes;  
And like bright metal on a sullen ground,  
My reformation, glittering o'er my fault,  
Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes  
Than that which hath no foil to set it off.  
I'll so offend, to make offence a skill;  
Redeeming time when men think least I will.  

Loyalty, like everything else, was subordinated to politi-
cal expediency. Immediately upon his being crowned, Henry  
assures the Chief Justice that he will continue his  
father's policy of seeking the counsel of this just and  
honorable public servant.

51 Ibid., V, v, 51-55.  
52 1 Henry IV, I, ii, 221f.  
53 Ibid., I, ii, 231-240.
You shall be as a father to my youth;
My voice shall sound as you do prompt mine ear.
And I will stoop and humble my intents
To your well-practis'd wise directions. 54

But, as Goddard points out, the Chief Justice in reality
was thereafter forgotten, and consulted no more. 55 Doubt-
less he would not have sanctioned Henry's subsequent
actions. Goddard says that these piously loyal words of
Henry's to the Chief Justice "happen to be most expedient
ones he could conceivably have uttered and adopted at a
moment when a decorous impression was so imperative to his
success . . . ." 56

Henry made many religious protestations, but his
actions belie his words. He feigned religion because it
was a necessary accouterment for success. Henry loudly
declared his Christianity. "We are no tyrant, but a
Christian king," 57 he assures the French ambassadors.
And, when they are gone, he says:

For we have now no thought in us but France.
Save those to God, that run before our business
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
More feathers to our wings; for, God before,
We' ll chide this Dauphin at his father's door. 58

Henry is here using God's name in a cause that he knows is
not justified. When he wanted a moral ground upon which

54 Henry IV, V, i, 118-121.
55 Goddard, p. 199. 56 Ibid., p. 200.
to build his French conquests, he did not hesitate to bribe the church.\textsuperscript{59} God and the church were but implements in Henry's hands, to be used in gratifying his inordinate ambition.

Apart from his temper and deceitful nature, Henry has one other glaring personality fault which precludes his being titled an ideal king. He is unwilling to take the responsibility for his decisions and actions. In the scene with the Archbishop of Canterbury it is apparent that the king is not looking to the church for advice about the French wars; he wants to insure publicly that he will not be blamed if the venture fails. So he has the greedy Archbishop harangue about the legality of his claim to the French throne, while he has already expertly shifted the responsibility to the church by saying,

\begin{quote}
Therefore take heed how you impawn our person, 
    How you awake our sleeping sword of war: 
    We charge you, in the name of God, take heed.
\end{quote}

After Canterbury's bewildering dissertation, Henry further exonerates himself by restating his question: "May I with right and conscience make this claim?"\textsuperscript{61} The Archbishop, a willing tool, replies: "The sin upon my head, dread sovereign!"\textsuperscript{62} In the scene with the soldiers there

\textsuperscript{59}Goddard, p. 217.
\textsuperscript{60}\textit{Henry V}, I, ii, 21-23. \textsuperscript{61}\textit{Ibid.}, I, ii, 96.
\textsuperscript{62}\textit{Ibid.}, I, ii, 60. See Goddard, p. 221.
appears another instance of Henry's moral evasiveness. Williams insists that a king is responsible for the death of his men if they die for a bad cause, but the king cannot accept this responsibility and attempts to rationalize it away, evading the issue by ranting about the private sins of soldiers. These two scenes make it apparent that Shakespeare was ridiculing the whole French venture, along with the king who instigated it.

The fact that Shakespeare is careful to put the praise of the king in untrustworthy mouths makes it extremely doubtful that he saw Henry as an ideal king. The choruses praise King Henry V. Goddard explains this by stating that since Henry, because of the battles he had won, was a popular hero, Shakespeare could not criticize him too openly without risking offending parts of his audience. For the benefit, then, of the masses, so that his play could get a hearing, he presents in the choruses the popular notion of Henry while at the same time in the play itself he is telling quite a different story. But, to quote Goddard:

Can anyone believe that Shakespeare in his own person would have called Henry the "Mirror of all Christian

\[63\] Henry V, IV, i, 139-153.

\[64\] Ibid., IV, i, 153-196. Palmer, p. 236ff., has an interesting discussion of this character trait of Henry's.

\[65\] Goddard, p. 217f.
kings" and then let him threaten to allow his soldiers to impale French babies on their pikes and dash the heads of old men against the walls; or called him "this grace of kings" and then let him declare of the prisoners, "We'll cut the throats of those we have, And not a man of them that we shall take Shall taste our mercy;". . . . 66

A suspicious reader will wonder whether Shakespeare did not intentionally put the exorbitant praise of Henry in the mouth of the corrupt Archbishop. When this clergyman says of his king,

> Hear him but reason in divinity,  
> And all-admiring with an inward wish  
> You would desire the king were made a prelate  

the reader, already conditioned to the Archbishop's mercenary and selfish nature, 68 doubts that Canterbury is a fit judge of priestly qualifications. Henry has already been quoted as emphasizing that he is a Christian ruler, just and devout, but, as Goddard says, one must look at Henry's actions, not his words. 69

Does this warrior king have any public virtue? Yes, like his father, he is a strong monarch. Those around him realize that they must accede to his wishes. So, when Henry says,

> We must not only arm to invade the French,  
> But lay down our proportions to defend  
> Against the Scot, who will make road upon us  
> With all advantages. 70

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66 Ibid. 
67 Henry V, I, i, 38-40. 
68 Ibid., I, i, 6-11. 
69 Goddard, p. 220. 
70 Henry V, I, ii, 136-139.
no one dares raise any real objections. This speech divulges another public virtue of the king’s. It shows his political perspicacity. Henry knows full well that his army’s leaving for France is tantamount to an invitation to the Scots to invade his realm. Henry is not the political infant Richard was. Remembering that Henry’s watchword is political expediency, one is not surprised to see the king wisely not alienating Frenchmen. He tells Fluellen, who is to relay the message to the soldiers:

... and we give express charge, that in our marches through the country, there be nothing compelled from the villages, nothing taken but paid for, none of the French upbraided or abused in disdainful language; for when lenity and cruelty play for a kingdom, the gentler gamester is the soonest winner.\(^7\)

Note, however, that Henry issues his order not out of any feeling for the French people. It simply seems to be the easiest and most efficient way to achieve his goal of French kingship.

Uncovering the rebellion of Scroop, Cambridge, and Grey, the king acts swiftly and positively.

Their faults are open:
Arrest them to the answer of the law;
And God acquit them of their practices!\(^7\)

Henry’s decisiveness and military successes, no matter how fleeting, are consequential. They illustrate the efficacy of absolutism, whereas Richard, in spite of his hereditary

\(^7\) *Ibid.*, III, vi, 111-120.

\(^7\) *Henry V*, II, ii, 142-144.
and legal right to the throne, lacked the force to assert his absolutism. Herein lay one of his major liabilities. Both Bolingbrokes, by succeeding where Richard had failed, achieved some measure of success. Both could keep their realms at peace. Shakespeare is corroborating the Tudors who advocated the extreme necessity for a monarch's rule to be absolute.

But if Henry was a wise general who could win battles against seemingly overwhelming odds, he was not a valiant one. An ideal Tudor hero would have been forgetful of his own welfare, but Henry was not. Goddard, the most astute of critics on this phase of Henry's "victories," says,

Anyone fresh from a reading of it [the Battle of Agincourt] thinks the fourth act of this play gives the picture of a dashing hero leading his little army with indomitable courage, . . . . But if asked for the evidence of Henry's part in the battle he searches the text in vain. He has carried over his impression from the Choruses, from Henry's "tiger" speech to his soldiers, from previous indirect knowledge of the hero-king from history . . . . Shakespeare has portrayed many battles and shown many military leaders in combat, but not Henry V in the Battle of Agincourt.\footnote{73Goddard, p. 256.}

Goddard goes on to list the five scenes devoted to the battle, not one of which shows Henry fighting, and concludes that "if Shakespeare had deliberately set out to deglorify the Battle of Agincourt in general and King Henry in particular, it would seem that he could hardly have done more."\footnote{74\textit{Ibid.}}
But strength, even though it brings about absolutism, is not enough to make Henry an ideal king. He is not an unselfish and benevolent ruler. One of the major themes of the play is that Henry's gross ambition precipitated a completely extraneous war. The unnecessary and cruel slaughtering of the French prisoners is one appalling outcome of this war. When Henry issues the order:

The French have reinforced their scatter'd men:
Then every soldier kill his prisoners:
Give the word through

the fear besetting one who has instigated such a venture is apparent. Had Henry been at all solicitous for the welfare of his subjects, he would never have undertaken the war in the first place. His only concern was for himself—the preservation of his power in England and the extension of that power into Europe.

A cursory examination of the qualifications of Henry VI for kingship will conclude this discussion of the Tudor kingship ideal in relation to Shakespeare's two English history tetralogies. Many critics do not even consider the Lancaster-York tetralogy, dismissing it as artistically inferior to the Bolingbroke plays. But King Henry VI has not entirely escaped scholarly treatment, most of which is unfavorable. Ulrici calls Henry an unmanly and womanish king who is thrust into the

background by his malignant and masculine consort's love of power. Even her open infidelity, Ulrici insists, does not arouse the supremely placid king, whose weakness and indecision are pathetically inadequate for the position he holds.\textsuperscript{76} Ribner maintains that, according to Shakespeare, a king must have three attributes—strength, craftiness, and unselfish devotion to the people. Henry VI, Ribner concludes, has only one: he is unselfish.\textsuperscript{77} Craig says of Henry VI: "Shakespeare seems to have been aware of the weakness of King Henry VI to the point of imbecility, and although he knew the King's saintliness, he neither here nor later presents him in any kingly proportions."\textsuperscript{78}

Two critics, Mattie Swayne and Harold Goddard, think more highly of the son of Henry V. Swayne describes him as having values above those of his enemies. The king's vacillation, he says, is motivated by a desire for candor and just thought. Henry is objective, seeing all sides. Further, Swayne feels that the king's private virtues incapacitate him for successful public life. For example, his piety and religious idealism are confounded by the

\textsuperscript{76}Ulrici, p. 394.

\textsuperscript{77}Ribner, p. 114. Tillyard, p. 182ff., has a good discussion of relative kingly qualities of Henry VI, York, and Duke Humphrey.

\textsuperscript{78}Craig, p. 55.
harsh conflicts into which he is thrown.\textsuperscript{79} This idealism causes him to treat everyone as a person of integrity. It blinds him to the woman he married and causes him foolishly to accept Richard's promise of obedience.\textsuperscript{80} Swayne also remarks that Henry's desire for peace dominates the play. But it is Goddard who holds Henry VI in the highest regard. "Henry was a simple and sincere, a morally courageous and genuinely religious man and king" who "showed more insight into the character of his imperial father than have dozens of the commentators who have condescended to that father's son."\textsuperscript{81} Goddard further declares that Henry nearly succeeded in doing what more practical men around him could not: he almost effected an understanding between the Lancaster-York factions. Deducing that Shakespeare "had faith that innocence might yet prove to be the force that would overcome the world,"\textsuperscript{82} Goddard says that perhaps the dramatist was intimating "that in a happier time than the fifteenth century the ideal ruler may have more of the characteristics of the saint than then seemed feasible."\textsuperscript{83}

It is difficult to agree with Goddard, for a man as practical as Shakespeare would not have seen Henry VI as

\textsuperscript{79}Mattie Swayne, "Shakespeare's King Henry VI as a Pacifist," \textit{College English}, III (November, 1941), 144.
\textsuperscript{80}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 145.
\textsuperscript{81}Goddard, p. 30f.
\textsuperscript{82}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{83}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 32.
an ideal king in any age. That he would have made an
excellent priest or contemplative seems indisputable, but
priests and contemplatives do not make good kings and
vice-versa.

Henry has more private virtue than any of his three
predecessors. He is sincerely religious, as his wife
attests when she describes him in this manner:

But all his mind is bent to holiness,
To number Ave-Maries on his beads;
His champions are the prophets and apostles,
His weapons holy saws of sacred writ,
His study is his tilt-yard, and his loves
Are brazen images of canonized saints. 84

Henry was devoted to his friends, patient, humble, and
devout. In fact, he possessed every Christian virtue. 85
But these, though they will save his soul, cannot save his
kingship. However, Henry is not entirely devoid even of
public virtue. He is conscientious in carrying out his
duties as king and concerned over the welfare of his
people. One cannot imagine any of the three kings who
preceded Henry telling his wife to

Come, wife, let's in, and learn to govern better. 86

But Henry, with all his attributes, is not strong or
sturdy enough to withstand the pressures of an office for

84 2 Henry VI, I, iii, 58-63.
85 See Goddard, p. 312, for his comments on Henry's virtues.
86 2 Henry VI, IV, ix, 48f.
which he is not equipped, mentally or physically. His mettle is not stout enough. Unable to cope with the swelling, chaotic surge of insurrection around his throne, Henry despairs and in a final, desperate attempt to make peace, even gives his son's inheritance away. One suspects that he secretly feels he is doing his son a favor. Perched upon a molehill, with distant battle sounds in his ear, Henry speaks a revealing monologue, indicative of his tendency to despair and his complete inadequacy on a battle-field. Henry VI is indeed no soldier or leader of soldiers.

For Margaret my queen, and Clifford too,
Have chid me from the battle; swearing both
They prosper best of all when I am thence.
Would I were dead! if God's good will were so;
For what is in this world but grief and woe?

Henry VI and Henry V are antithetical in every way, except that both had faulty monarchical claims.

This third usurper-king is an extremely poor judge of people and their motives, his utter simplicity making him a dupe for fraudulent practices. The king's indecision encourages disloyalty. One is exasperated with Henry several times during the course of the plays. For instance, it is difficult to condone his actions when he lets Margaret and Suffolk deliberately discredit

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87 Henry VI, I, i.
88 Ibid., II, iv, 16-20.
Gloucester, knowing all the while what is going on. Amid all the fraudulence and lies, Henry piously tells his faithful and wise counsellor:

    My Lord of Gloucester, 'tis my special hope
    That you will clear yourself from all suspect:
    My conscience tells me you are innocent.89

Lacking political strength, political wisdom, and a legitimate right to the throne, Henry VI is certainly not an ideal king.

It becomes apparent after a careful reading of these two cycles of plays that one of Shakespeare's motives in writing these dramas was the promulgation of doctrines that he must have subscribed to wholeheartedly. In a negative manner, Shakespeare explicitly sets forth the Tudor ideal of kingship. None of the four kings treated here comes up to Tudor standards. Especially in the unfolding of the Lancaster-York tetralogy, the necessity of absolutism comes to the fore. The ruler of England must be absolute in order to prevent catastrophic civil wars like the Wars of the Roses. But the poet teaches a further lesson on absolutism in the Bolingbroke tetralogy. Richard's kind of absolutism, arbitrary and whimsical, will not do. Neither will the Bolingbrokes' selfishly motivated absolute rules be successful in the long run. One is left with the Tudor conception of absolutism.

892 Henry VI, III, i, 139-141.
According to the Elizabethan ideal of absolutism, it must be tempered with reason and justice and executed according to the laws of God. William Shakespeare was indeed a marvelous product of an extraordinary age.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

After any but an extremely cursory study of Shakespeare's English history plays, one conclusion seems obvious: Shakespeare, like most of his contemporaries, was interested in politics, in the government of his country. If he was politically alert, he surely formed opinions on this subject; if he formed opinions on political questions, these opinions should, or even must, be in his plays, especially the ones so closely allied to politics, the English histories. It has been the purpose of this study to attempt an assimilation of the poet's political ideas regarding monarchy, to attempt to sift through many speeches and characters of political significance in the hope of determining what Shakespeare's principal monarchical doctrines or beliefs were.

The mainstay of Renaissance English kings was the deeply imbedded doctrine of the divine right of kings to rule. This was a powerful weapon by which the English people could be whipped into servile submission. Yet by the same token it could also be used to bring prosperity and peace to the realm. How it was used depended upon the particular monarch, but used it invariably was. Other
derivative ideas evolved naturally from the fact that a monarch is ordained by God to rule in His place. If God's power is absolute, His earthly representative's should be also; therefore, English kings were absolute rulers whose will should never be contested. To do so placed one's immortal soul in jeopardy. God chose England's ruler by hereditary succession which, therefore, was in itself a sacred institution. To tamper with it was to risk incurring God's wrath. These were basic Tudor ideas, all of which were promulgated by Tudor apologists or divines. Elizabeth herself believed implicitly in them and ruled accordingly. Most Elizabethans, proud of their queen and country, agreed with these views regarding monarchy.

William Shakespeare was a monarchist, even an ardent one. Too many of his plays revolve around the English monarchy for him not to have believed, like most Elizabethans, that this was the best possible form of government. But he was more than just a monarchist; the internal evidence in the two tetralogies indicates that he was a faithful Elizabethan monarchist whose general views differed little, if any, from those of the queen, her subjects, or her Tudor ancestors. The essential facets of Tudor monarchical doctrine form the basic, underlying political foundation of Shakespeare's English history plays.
Shakespeare upheld the traditional English monarchical doctrine of the divine right of kings to rule. The principal reason for the calamitous events following Richard's deposition is that Richard was England's anointed, lawful king. As God's representative, he was responsible only to God for the stewardship of the crown. Rebellion against him was synonymous with rebellion against God himself. The principles by which Richard was king were the same ones, fundamentally, by which Elizabeth gained and maintained her throne. Insurrection against Richard was analogous to an insurrection against Elizabeth. Shakespeare did as much as any poet-playwright could have done to prevent such an event by dramatically portraying one rebellion against a rightful king, the other rebellions it necessitated, and the resultant disharmony caused by such an unnatural act as Bolingbroke's. Shakespeare's moral is transparent: no man can willfully and violently rend God's plan of history to suit his own purposes without incurring God's wrath and bringing evil to his own house, as well as to his nation.

Evolving from the sacredness of the throne, the Tudor doctrine of passive obedience prohibited any resistance to the lawful and legitimate ruler on the part of the people. The English subjects were to accept as God's will any decisions of their monarch, who was God's earthly representative. Many rebelled against their monarch in the
course of the eight plays treated in this study—Bolingbroke, the Percys, and York, to name but a few—but no one is ultimately successful, and usually the consequences of resistance are dire—both to the individual or group of individuals revolting and to the nation itself. Passive obedience was a divine law which only the most foolhardy dared transgress.

The capital illustration of the consequences of disregarding this doctrine is the lengthy turmoil triggered from Bolingbroke's rash action against his legitimate king, Richard II. This, according to Shakespeare's interpretation of these events, resulted in many years of civil strife and dissension. The realm was not to be truly united or peaceful for any length of time again until the enthronement of the Tudors. Shakespeare suggests that no matter how weak and inadequate a king Richard was, his reign could not possibly have been as bad as the cumulative rules of the usurper's successors.

Yet Elizabethans in general—and again Shakespeare was orthodox in concurring with the majority—agreed with the Tudors that for practical reasons, for the peace of the realm, it was necessary that no subject rebel against any English ruler, though his claim be only a de facto one. To transgress this law generally cost the subject his life in this world and, supposedly, in the next one
also. Shakespeare upholds both these interpretations of
the passive obedience doctrine. Bolingbroke and his
lineal descendants suffer because he rebelled against the
rightful ruler of England, but those who in turn revolt
against the de facto rules of the Bolingbrokes, from the
Percy clan on, suffer also. England as a whole is ter-
ribly weakened and wasted by any and all of these major
and minor revolutions.

There are two seeming exceptions in these tetralogies
to the law prohibiting resistance, neither of which causes
any deviation from or modification of Shakespeare's
original position. Henry VII revolted against the de
facto ruler Richard III, but Richard's villainy, coupled
with the fact that Henry VII founded the dynasty under
which England reached a zenith in her development, neces-
sitated the poet's showing approval of this one rebellion.
That he did argues strongly for his orthodoxy. The other
exception is Henry V, whose reign did apparently prosper
despite the shaky foundations upon which it was laid. But
two facts prevent one's taking the position that Henry's
successes prove that the poet was denying the validity of
this doctrine. One is that Henry's victories are amaz-
ingly short-lived. No real, lasting good came from this
illustrious reign. But even more significant is the
second fact: Henry V himself did not revolt against his
king and violate the unwritten sacred law of passive
obedience. He had properly inherited his throne from his
father, Henry IV.

In a negative fashion, Shakespeare certainly pre-
sents, in the course of these plays, his ideas of the
qualities that do and do not constitute a good king. None
of the kings in the two tetralogies meets all the speci-
fications for ideal kingship. The ideal Elizabethan and
Shakespearian king had to have public and private virtues
and be the rightful, hereditary ruler of England.

Richard II, self-centered, capricious, whimsical in
his rule of England, lacks all the public virtues neces-
sary for kingship. He has no patience with the quarrel of
Mowbray and Bolingbroke, is not just to his subjects (as
his treatment of old Gaunt attests), and consistently
repudiates those who could and would aid him in ruling
England. He seems almost determined to throw his rule and
England herself to the winds, though in reality he was so
sure that his legitimate claim to the throne would sustain
him that Richard never conceived of deposition as a pos-
sibility until it was almost a fait accompli. Totally
lacking in any public virtues, Richard did, however, have
some private virtues. His love for his wife is sincere
and admirable, and after gaining some self-knowledge and
insights into his gross political and moral blunders,
Richard displays real humility and penitence. But unquestionably Richard, according to Shakespeare, was, for better or worse, God's choice because he was the legitimate king of England. Despite his blunders, Richard was not answerable to any of his subjects, even a Bolingbroke; he was answerable only to God.

By Elizabethan standards, all the Bolingbroke kings were usurpers who had no real claim to the throne of England. Thus they could not, logically, be considered ideal rulers in the fullest, Elizabethan sense of the word. Henry IV was a prudent and clever politician who avoided the traps Richard fell into. His rule was strong, his actions decisive, but his motives were selfish ones. He cared nothing for his subjects; political expediency was the only law he recognized. If Henry had any private virtues, Shakespeare chose to avoid mentioning them.

As the twig is bent, so grows the tree. Henry V was every inch his father's son, dominated even more by expediency than his father had been. He expertly convinced those around him that a war with France was justified and necessary, knowing full well it was not. Henry was unscrupulous in attaining whatever he wanted, from French possessions to a French bride. His religion was entirely feigned. The more he calls on God's name, the more one doubts his sincerity because his actions are anything but
Christian. But Henry, like his father, did have political insights and good judgment and a strong enough personality to execute his will. Would that these two Henrys had had a conscience and sense of responsibility to accompany their political sagacity and forceful personalities. Neither of these kings can conceivably be termed ideal.

With the ascension of Henry VI the wheel seems, in some respects, to have come full circle. Henry VI in some ways reminds one of Richard II. He is devoutly religious and conscientious in fulfilling the duties of kingship. He is everything Richard could have been had his childish egotism not stood in his way. Though Henry VI has private virtues and even some public ones, he is nevertheless a failure for several reasons, not the least of which is his illegal claim to the throne. But Henry does not have strength to rule absolutely and allows his judgment to be overwhelmed by corrupt politicians, such as the Duke of York. One can admire Henry VI as a man but not as a king.

A fourth doctrine intrinsic to Tudor monarchical ideals was absolutism. No matter how arbitrary his judgments, the king must be the final authority on all matters. The necessity of this doctrine is especially apparent in the Lancaster–York tetralogy because had Henry VI's rule been more absolute the devastating Wars of the Roses might never have materialized. Absolutism
was a necessary prerequisite to peace in Renaissance England.

Shakespeare, in the course of these eight plays, gives dramatic potency to each of the four major tenets of Elizabethan monarchical beliefs—the divine right of kings to rule, the necessity of absolutism on the part of the king, passive obedience on the part of the subjects, and the Elizabethan ideal of kingship. Critics who strive to make William Shakespeare a radical reformer or a rebel where politics is concerned misrepresent the poet at least so far as his monarchical views are concerned. The evidence is overwhelming that Shakespeare was orthodox and in accord with his age in his views of monarchy.
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