

A COMPARISON OF CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE'S EDWARD II
AND WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S RICHARD II

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CHAPTER I

THE TUDOR WORLD

When Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare wrote their very similar plays of Edward II and Richard II within the space of a few years in the early 1590's, they raised the chronicle history play to the highest artistic level it had ever known. Except for the completion of Shakespeare's second tetralogy and John Ford's much later play of Perkin Warbeck the history play was never to rise that high again.

Edward II and Richard II are alike in many ways, most strikingly in the similarity of the stories themselves. But this is a superficial likeness, for there are many other likenesses--in purpose, in artistry, in language-- which demonstrate more clearly than the parallel events of history the remarkable degree to which these plays resemble each other.

This study purports to examine these several areas of similarity between the two plays. However, it must first look at a few other areas of the Tudor world, for the English chronicle history play was closely related to the surging life of the nation in which it was born. Basically, the great day of the historical drama came as the last distinctive display of a renewal of interest in history

which began early in the Tudor reign. History itself took on new proportions after the breakdown of medievalism--the fall of the church and the rise of national states.

Edward II and Richard II could not escape the marked impressions of many forces which moved throughout the variegated maelstrom of the Tudor milieu.

The last years of the long reign of Elizabeth I were a period of flux and uncertainty for her people. The exuberant nationalism and joyous optimism which surged throughout England with renewed vigor after the defeat of the Spanish Armada allayed all worries of the realm for a while. But even the stunning victory over the seemingly invincible navy of Philip of Spain could not banish forever all of the problems confronting the consciousness of thinking Englishmen of all stations. New problems were to arise, and many of the old ones were but momentarily forgotten.

Elizabeth had never married, and her failure to grace the kingdom with an heir kept the question of royal succession in the foreground. As early as 1561 with the production of Gorboduc her people had warned her of the consequences of a divided kingdom.¹ Now, as her reign drew to its close, potential claimants to the throne of the aging queen were everywhere. The question as to whether or

¹C. F. Tucker Brooke, The Tudor Drama (Dallas, 1911), p. 192.

not the monarchical change could be peaceably made was the prevailing concern to all Englishmen of any degree of political awareness. The new threat of civil war brought clearly into mind old memories which had not yet fully died away, for thousands of men were then living in England whose fathers and grandfathers had fought for the causes of Henry of Richmond or Richard of Gloucester when the question of who would wear the English crown had earlier been raised and bloodily settled. Elizabeth's own intrigues to gain and protect her throne were even fresher in the minds of her people. Now she was to die childless, and a revival of the blood-baths of the War of the Roses seemed a fearful possibility at her passing.

The fanaticism of religious controversies was another destructive potentiality which rocked the reign of the Tudors. The great disturbances of the Reformation long remained unsettled, and religious persecutions continued in England throughout the sixteenth century.² The inevitable clashes of Catholicism and Protestantism were a most dangerous liability to the Tudor State. The Bishop of Rome, for long centuries claimant to the allegiance of every soul in Christendom, had asserted his right to depose at his will any temporal European prince. The anxious Tudor

²John Richard Green, A Short History of England (New York, 1916), pp. 354 ff.

government faced the necessity of impressing upon multitudes of Catholic Englishmen their counter-claim of the divine right of kings, their assertion that rebellion against the state was rebellion against the eternal God.³ Religion yielded to patriotism in 1588 when English Papists exchanged their cannon with those of Catholic Spain,⁴ but the threat of religious conflict still remained. Protestantism itself had split into various sects, and Anglicanism did not go unchallenged. The Puritan movement formed rapidly, and by the end of the century it was a force to be reckoned with.⁵

Nor did troubles end at the waters of the seas. Elizabeth had not always used her utmost tact in her relationships with foreign princes, and much ancient pride had thereby been abused. Spain, though defeated on the high seas, was still powerful. Other nations viewed with growing fear the England mighty enough to have destroyed the Spanish navy. Any long-dormant European jealousy could flare anew at any moment and plunge England into a war of

³Irving Ribner, The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare (Princeton, 1957), p. 310.

⁴Green, p. 418.

⁵J. Dover Wilson, "The Puritan Attack upon the Stage," The Drama to 1642, Vol. VI, Pt. 2 of The Cambridge History of English Literature, edited by A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller, 15 vols. (Cambridge, England, 1910), pp. 421 ff.

disastrous consequence. For all of these and many other reasons, the English people in the late years of the sixteenth century seemed to feel themselves to be a nation living "in touch with catastrophe."⁶

Such broad general feelings of doubt and insecurity as those which in part characterized much of the Tudor reign were reflected in the intellectual and literary life of the age. While the hold of the Church had been strong and unchallenged, the moral value of literature had amounted to less than its amusement value, but when the tenacious hold of religious dogma was relaxed, something of its lost awe was transferred to letters, and the doctrine of didacticism, always present in English literature, became overpoweringly strong.⁷

⁶Una M. Ellis-Fermor, The Jacobean Drama, rev. ed. (London, 1953), p. 4.

⁷E. M. W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays (London, 1948), p. 27.

CHAPTER II

TUDOR HISTORY

The Tudor age was much interested in history. From the chronicles of the fifteenth century to the chronicle plays of the sixteenth century much time and effort were devoted to the exposition of historical fact. Such works as the chronicles of Hall, Holinshed, and Stowe, the translation of Froissart's history by Lord Berners, the biographies in verse in the Mirror for Magistrates, and North's translation of Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans were among the costliest, most elaborate, and most broadly disseminated publications of the Tudor presses.¹

Efforts were also made to keep the public intelligence up to date. Such contemporary topics as the advance of the Ottoman Empire, the victories of the great conquerors Tamburlaine and Genghis Khan, and recent accounts of French and Italian events were continuously placed before the common mind. The Stationer's Register and the catalogues of old libraries contain the titles of hundreds of prose

¹Brooke, p. 299.

tracts and broadsides issued incessantly for the purpose of keeping the masses of English people informed about the latest political incidents and developments in Europe and the East.²

Why this Tudor preoccupation with history? The answers are many and varied--political, religious, social, economic--but whatever they are the basic fact remains that history, whether printed or staged, was usually designed for more than light entertainment or mere knowledge for the sake of knowledge.

To the formative Tudor dynasty history was a practical necessity. Henry VII, in attempts to cement his claims to the crown, fostered two great historical themes. The first proclaimed that his uniting of the houses of York and Lancaster through his marriage to Elizabeth, the York heiress, was a providentially inspired solution to the long Wars of the Roses. Henry also claimed to be a direct descendant of the last Briton king, Cadwallader, and encouraged the antique Welsh superstition that King Arthur would return again, with the hint that he and his heirs were the reincarnation of Arthur.³ History, then, was an important political asset to Henry VII, and he did not

²Ibid.

³Tillyard, pp. 29-30.

encourage any attack against his great "Tudor Myth"--as Polydore Vergil's disgrace for failing to support it clearly shows.⁴

To many others history also contained much efficacious merit. One of the most all-inclusive accounts of the benefits of history appears in Grafton's Chronicle of 1569 and is a part of the second preface written by a Thomas N. who has been identified as Thomas Norton, part author of Gorboduc. Among the benefits of history Norton lists the following:

Kings may learn to depend upon God and acknowledge his governance in their protection: the nobility may read the true honor of their ancestors: the ecclesiastical state may learn to abhor traitorous practices and indignities done against kings by the popish usurping clergy: high and low may shun rebellions by their dreadful effects and beware how they attempt against right, how unable soever the person be that beareth it: we all may be warned to thank God for the most virtuous wise and peaceable government that we now enjoy in comparison of terrible times heretofore. Each man may have a glass to see things past, whereby to judge justly of things present and wisely of things to come; to behold the beauty of virtue and deformity of vice, what sweetness remaineth after well doing, what stings of repentance evil doing leaveth.⁵

Obedience to the will of God, honor, loyalty, and goodness--both private and public virtues may be learned and appreciated. The didactic importance of history is

⁴Irving Ribner, "The Tudor History Play: An Essay in Definition," Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, LXIX (June, 1954), 595.

⁵Tillyard, p. 5.

explicit, for the annals of the past are a valuable guide for present behavior.

In the preface to his History of the World, Sir Walter Raleigh emphatically stated one of the ruling beliefs about history, that it repeats itself. The same patterns were recognizable in English history that marked the passage of great nations of the past.⁶ History could therefore inspire a conscious theory of existence, and the past could be used as accurate documentation for political and social theory and for the illumination which it could give to all contemporary problems.⁷

In 1574, in Thomas Blundeville's treatise entitled The True Order and Method of Reading and Writing Histories, the first reason given for the reading of history is "that we may learn thereby to acknowledge the providence of God, whereby all things are governed . . . that nothing is done by chance, but all things by his foresight, counsel, and divine providence."⁸ As late as 1622 in Hypercritica, the highly influential Edmund Bolton lists the first duty of the historian as that of "a Christian cosmopolite to

⁶Ibid., p. 55.

⁷Irving Ribner, "Marlowe's Edward II and the Tudor History Play," A Journal of English Literary History, XXII (December, 1955), 243.

⁸Ribner, "The Tudor History Play," p. 601.

discover God's assistances, dissappointments, and over-rulings in human affairs."⁹ The idea that God's hand guided the affairs of men was clearly a prevalent one throughout the Elizabethan reign.

Historiography also felt the impact of changing ideas and ideals attendant upon the disintegration of the authority of the church. Nothing could be held sacred and unprofaned, for new heresies competed on the pages of history against ancient tenets which could no longer be accepted without doubt and questioning.

The ideas of Bolton and Blundeville represented a current of thought in historiography which flowed in an unbroken stream from medieval times into the sixteenth century. This was the tradition of the medieval Christian school, an anti-nationalist school which emphasized the history of the world. It looked upon all history as the culmination of God's judgment in the affairs of men, finding in history a rational and intelligible pattern working inevitably for the good and always affirming the justice of God. Little importance could therefore be ascribed to the independent will or intelligence of mankind.¹⁰

⁹Ibid., pp. 601-602.

¹⁰Ribner, English History Play, pp. 21-22.

The new contesting current was that of the Renaissance humanist,¹¹ the current absorbed primarily from the volatile writings of Niccolo Machiavelli.¹² In this philosophy lay the important Renaissance principle that man was able in some degree to control his own destiny. This belief, a basic principle of Greco-Roman historiography, had been obscured during the Middle Ages when the de contemptu mundi emphasis on the insignificance of earthy affairs and the doctrine of the futility of man's existence in the face of the divine governing force of the universe smothered the Christian world. The humanists strongly reasserted their faith that man by his reason and strength could create his own fate, that man was not helplessly, hopelessly caught up in the eternal forces created by the will of God.¹³

There emerged then in Tudor historiography two major schools of thought--the medieval Christian and the Renaissance humanist--their basic beliefs poles apart. This cleavage in historic philosophy carried over into the chronicle drama of the age. To the former school are allied such plays as Nicholas Udall's Respublica,¹⁴ Thomas

¹¹Ibid., p. 18.

¹²Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's Histories (San Marino, California, 1947), pp. 28-29.

¹³Ribner, The English History Play, p. 18.

¹⁴See lines in Tillyard, p. 93.

Norton and Thomas Sackville's Gorboduc,¹⁵ and William Shakespeare's Richard II,¹⁶ though in the last-named play there is some mingling of the two ideas in the "strong man" conception of Henry Bolingbroke. To the latter school definitely belongs Edward II,¹⁷ Marlowe being the greatest exponent in Elizabethan drama of this humanist philosophy. The influence of Marlowe's fresh and vitally different Tamburlaine on the evolution of the history play was great, and the impact of his classical historiography may also have had some effect on such plays as George Peele's Battle of Alcazar, Robert Greene's Selimus, The Troublesome Reign of King John, and Shakespeare's Henry VI plays.¹⁸

Indeed, the mature English chronicle drama may actually be the final distinctive manifestation of the new interest in history which grew out of the arrival in England of Italian historians with their Renaissance concepts. Although the Middle Ages had produced several great chroniclers in England--Matthew Paris, Thomas of Walsingham, Ranulph Higden, and others--there was a revival

¹⁵See lines in Tillyard, p. 97.

¹⁶Ribner, "The Tudor History Play," p. 594.

¹⁷Ribner, Marlowe's Edward II, p. 246.

¹⁸Irving Ribner, "The Idea of History in Tamburlaine," A Journal of English Literary History, XX (December, 1953), 266.

of interest in history in the early part of the fifteenth century, when Duke Humphrey of Gloucester commissioned Tito Livio of Ferrara to write an account of the life of Henry V. The new Renaissance history began in earnest when Polydore Vergil arrived in England about 1501. His great work, Anglica Historia, was not in print until 1534, however.¹⁹ In the meantime Robert Fabyan had published The New Chronicles of England and of France, essentially a medieval work, but one used often by Elizabethan writers of historical drama.

A verse chronicle by Richard Grafton appeared in 1543. The first part, down to 1436, had been the work of John Hardyng. Grafton merely continued Hardyng's chronicle, bringing it up to date. In 1548 Grafton printed posthumously the famous work of Edward Hall, The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and York. In 1562 Grafton also brought out An Abridgement of the Chronicles of England. This popular work went through five editions by 1572.²⁰

John Foxe produced his Actes and Monuments, commonly called The Book of Martyrs, in 1563. Foxe interpreted history in accordance with his own strong reformation

¹⁹Ribner, The English History Play, pp. 4-5.

²⁰Ibid., p. 5.

prejudices, and the work was an important source for several Tudor history plays, particularly the biographical dramas. In 1565 John Stowe wrote A Summarie of Englyshe Chronicles. Ten editions were printed by 1611, and the book was probably the most important short history of England published in the entire Tudor period.²¹

The Tudor histories carried on some of the medieval traditions, but they also show the influence of the new humanistic style. They were predominantly secular works, intensely nationalistic, and often propagandistic in support of the royal family.²² Many of the histories were little more than mere listings of chronological events. There were, however, certain figures who made important additions to this inadequate style.

Polydore Vergil was one innovator of considerable merit. He was the first humanist historian in England to break away from the purely annalistic form of history.²³ Instead of following the contemporary style, Vergil patterned his style after that of classical historians.²⁴ His mind contained true critical faculties. He analyzed the facts and carefully weighed the statements recorded by

²¹Ibid., p. 6.

²²Ibid., p. 4.

²³Campbell, p. 60.

²⁴Tillyard, p. 32.

past centuries before he arrived at his conclusions. He looked upon history as a connected, unified narrative in which cause and effect were intimately related. He interpreted events, generalizing upon their significance, so that they might serve as useful lessons ever capable of new application. His work was also the first to introduce terse and energetic summaries of personal character. In these ways Vergil set the pattern for the popular chronicles.

Vergil's own history of England was composed in Latin, however, and all nine editions before 1651 were printed on the continent. Therefore, Anglica Historia left the mass of Englishmen uninformed.²⁵

In 1513, when Vergil was still occupied in writing his history, Sir Thomas More wrote his unfinished book of Richard III. The work deserves its immortality, for it brings into English chronicling a sense of drama and intimacy with the actual event portrayed which is found elsewhere in English historical writing only in Cavendish's Life of Cardinal Wolsey and Lord Berners' translation of Froissart.²⁶

The scene in which the widow of Edward IV, in sanctuary at Westminster, is persuaded by the Archbishop to

²⁵Campbell, p. 60.

²⁶Tillyard, p. 40.

give up her younger son to the care of his uncle, the Protector, surpasses in its tragic quality anything the English drama produced until the Golden Age.²⁷ On the comic side the episode of Doctor Shaw's embarrassment during his sermon, after which "the preacher gat him home and never after durst look out for shame but kept him out of sight like an owl,"²⁸ places More outside the range of Froissart.

More differs from the Frenchman by adding a taste of classical formality to Froissart's informal realism. It is just this blend that gives More his distinction. The opening of the book, which finds Edward IV on his deathbed, has the delicate touch of a fairy tale, but the king's dying oration is full of classical rhetoric. More's blend is complete and convincing. It remained for years as one of only two examples of original English historical writing²⁹ apt to incite a dramatist to feel close to his subject and treat it primarily as a record of human life rather than a mere series of events or a repository of didacticism.³⁰

²⁷Ibid., p. 38.

²⁸Ibid., p. 39.

²⁹The Life of Cardinal Wolsey was the other. Berners' work was a translation.

³⁰Tillyard, pp. 39-40.

One of the greatest of the historians following Vergil was Edward Hall. His chief importance lay in the fact that he was the first English chronicler to show in all its completeness that new moralizing influence of history which came in with the breakdown of the Middle Ages: the weakening of the Church and the rise of nationalism.³¹

In Hall's opinion truth had suffered from the prejudices of monastic historians. Therefore, he attempted to free English history from the perversions of the clergy, and on the way he missed no opportunity to link the churchmen with seditious acts. These presentations of the Catholic-inspired maladies of previous ages were offered as lessons to Hall's own age. The lesson was quite topical. In the years in which Hall wrote his history there was some evidence that a hostile Roman clergy was gathering the scattered remnants of the White Roses in an attempt to renew the Hundred Years' War. Against such contemporary dangers Hall wrote The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and York, and a dozen of his political pamphlets spoke the same vehement language.³²

The special significance of Hall's work is that it introduced a sense of drama into the manner of expressing

³¹Ibid., p. 42.

³²W. G. Zeeveld, The Influence of Hall on Shakespeare's English Historical Plays (Baltimore, 1937), p. vi.

history, "not . . . the sense of drama in the actual event [as in More] . . . but the sense of the moral concatenation of great events: moral as against psychological drama."³³

The most important figure of Tudor history in so far as connections with the chronicle plays are concerned was Raphael Holinshed, author of the monumental Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland. Holinshed, in the main, was merely a compiler, and he all too often missed the points established in his more distinguished sources. His frequent borrowings from Hall and Vergil, for instance, reflected little real understanding. Holinshed lacked the space to be as complete as Hall had been in his more limited area of investigation, but even so Holinshed's abbreviations and omissions were not always intelligently done. He lacked the ability to examine his sources and discern their essentials. In these faults he blurred somewhat the great Tudor myth.³⁴

Holinshed did have several qualities that made him extremely useful to his contemporaries. His style was simple, and his sense was at once understandable. He contained more information and was more up to date than Vergil, Fabian, or Grafton, and he covered far more history than Hall. Because of these qualities he was very useful

³³Tillyard, p. 42.

³⁴Ibid.

to others and thereby enjoyed a fame beyond his actual deserts.³⁵

Historians of the late Tudor Age had a great variety of styles available to them, from which they could choose one to imitate. They could follow either the pedestrian chronicling of Fabian, the vivid and intimate humanity of More and Berners, or the moral drama of Hall. The first unfortunately remained the usual practice; the second was appreciated by Cavendish; the third passed on to the poets.³⁶

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Tillyard, p. 50. The one exception to this statement would be Sir John Hayward's History of Henry IV, which shows the true spirit of Hall's great work.

CHAPTER III

THE TUDOR HISTORY PLAY

The title of "history play" extended over a wide variety of dramatic forms. Bale's King John was in essence a morality drama.¹ Much of Greene's James IV was a romantic comedy.² Tamburlaine was a chivalric romance,³ and Huon of Bordeaux was a biographical drama of a mythological hero.⁴ The Taming of the Shrew was called a history,⁵ as was Hamlet.⁶

Some of the so-called histories lay entirely, like Richard III, or almost entirely, like Richard II, within the strictest limits of the definition of tragedy.⁷ However, such a play as Henry V clearly demonstrated that a history play need not be allied to tragic concepts.

Nor was it necessary for a history play to contain factual accuracy. That legendary accounts were not divorced from history was evidenced by Shakespeare's

¹Ribner, The English History Play, p. 10.

²Brooke, p. 263.

³Ibid., p. 235.

⁴Ibid., p. 321.

⁵Ibid., p. 184.

⁶Campbell, p. 8.

⁷Brooke, p. 297.

Cymbeline,⁸ Samuel Rowley's The Birth of Merlin, and The Valiant Welshman, ascribed only to "R. A. Gent.," which treats "the life and valiant deedes of Caradoc the Great, King of Cambria, now called Wales."⁹ Writings concerning such legendary figures might have been accepted as truth by the Tudors, but in Alphonsus of Aragon Robert Greene simply borrowed his hero from a history of Naples by Bartolommeo Fazio and surrounded him in a tapestry of imaginary romances and battles--with no concern whatsoever for historical truth.¹⁰

To make a definition of history play based on a careful study of historical fact is clearly impossible. Nor will a definition based on form be any more successful, for one form is often merged with another. Gorboduc combines in itself the morality and the Senecan traditions, but the spirit of the play is that of the didactic Mirror for Magistrates, and its content marks it as a chronicle play.¹¹

Content, then, is a key to the definition of the history play. Many of the early plays which were termed "histories" in their day are untouched by any philosophy. Certain others show only a trace. A few, such as

⁸Campbell, p. 8.

⁹Brooke, p. 350.

¹⁰Ribner, The English History Play, p. 10.

¹¹Tillyard, p. 93.

Sir Thomas More, Edward III, and Sir John Oldcastle, stand out clearly from the norm, giving ample evidence of the reflective abilities of their authors.¹² These are the true history plays, for our definition of history play shall agree with the bases of the definitions of Lily B. Campbell,¹³ E. M. W. Tillyard,¹⁴ and Irving Ribner.¹⁵ A history play is simply a drama which proposes to accomplish on the stage the serious purposes of the Tudor historian in another area. That is, the true history play evinces "a conscious philosophy of history."¹⁶ It uses the past as documentation for political theory and for the light which it might throw upon contemporary problems--thus serving as a guide for present behavior.¹⁷ In attempting to achieve these purposes the playwright felt free to alter his sources to magnify certain important ideas, for the didactic purposes of history were considered by the Renaissance to be far more important than any intrinsic claim it might have to truth.¹⁸

¹²Ibid., pp. 105-106.

¹³Campbell, p. 17.

¹⁴Tillyard, pp. 320-321.

¹⁵Ribner, The English History Play, p. 14.

¹⁶Ribner, "Marlowe's Edward II," p. 243.

¹⁷Ribner, "The Tudor History Play," p. 599.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 593.

Before culminating in artistry and philosophy in the great works of Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare, the Tudor chronicle play evolved in a long and somewhat tortuous path. It first began to emerge out of other dramatic traditions with the appearance of Kynge Johan, written by John Bale some time before 1536. In this production chronicle material was adapted for the first time to serve the legitimate purposes of Tudor historiography. All of the old vices of the morality drama appeared, but during the course of the play these abstract qualities were personified. Seditious became Stephen Langton; Private Wealth became Cardinal Pandolphus;¹⁹ Usurped Power became the Pope; Dissimulation became the Monk, Simon of Swynsett, who poisoned John²⁰--thus, the history play was born out of the womb of the old morality drama.

King John may be seen to have fulfilled in several ways the Tudor concepts of the purpose of history. The Catholic historian Vergil had written a strongly biased account of John. Bale, writing from the Protestant point of view, completed a deliberately contradictory account of the royal martyr who died in opposing the Papacy, but history was used to support Bale's interpretation of John's

¹⁹Ribner, The English History Play, p. 37.

²⁰Tillyard, p. 93.

character. This factor was in itself sufficient reason to classify King John as a history, but there were others. For one thing, the drama was intensely nationalistic--and glorification of England was a frequent occurrence in the historiography of the period. Moreover, the play focused upon a series of historical events which related an account of a political problem comparable to that of the religious dangers facing England at the time of the writing of King John,²¹ less than twenty years after Martin Luther nailed his theses to the door of the church at Wittenberg.

The influence of the moralities lasted for decades in the evolution of English historical drama. It passed through the Gorboduc of Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton in 1561²² and lasted into the day of Marlowe and Shakespeare with the appearance of The Life and Death of Jack Straw, written by an unknown author probably between 1587 and 1590.²³

Indeed, the structure of the morality play was perfectly adaptable for the execution of historic functions. It was both didactic and symbolic, designed for the communication of idea rather than fact, and built upon a plot formula by which every event would be related to the others for the creation of a meaningful whole.²⁴

²¹Ribner, The English History Play, pp. 38-40.

²²Ibid., p. 31.

²³Ibid., p. 80.

²⁴Ibid., p. 31.

Thomas Legge's Latin play, Richardus Tertius, written probably in 1579 or 1580, introduced the Senecan tradition of tragedy into the English chronicle play. To write his play Legge had no greater task than to follow his sources, for the chroniclers had portrayed Richard III according to the common pattern of the Senecan tyrant. Vergil, for instance, had stressed the importance of nemesis in Richard's downfall, and More and Hall had recorded corresponding speeches for various other historical figures.

Legge's play was more than a mere imitation of the Senecan tradition, however. He selected historic incidents from an extended period of time and dramatized much of the action that occurred in Richard's reign. In following the chronicles as closely as he did, Legge created a work that in its scope and variety far surpassed the usual Senecan tragedy. He could not retain the Latin unities. Nor did he retain the chorus, although a choric song did end each act. Thus, something of the form and devices of the Senecan tradition were united with the diversity of action, episodic manner, and epic sweep of the English chronicles.²⁵

The tragic ideals of Seneca long held the scholarly stage in thrall. The Misfortunes of Arthur, performed at Gray's Inn in 1587, represented no change from the

²⁵Ibid., pp. 68-69.

structure or theory of Gorboduc. Each play carefully followed every classic rule except that of the unities.²⁶

In the Inner Temple Gismond of Salerne in Love had been performed for the Queen in 1568. The most striking feature of his play was its disregard of the practice of omitting any view of horror or bloodshed from the stage. The heroine died on stage, and the hero's heart was brought bleeding into the sight of the audience.²⁷ The ocular presentations of terror and blood were features of The Spanish Tragedy and Tamburlaine, which wrecked the Senecan tradition forever in England in 1587.²⁸

With the production of The Famous Victories of Henry V some time before the Armada period, Queen Elizabeth's company introduced yet another tradition--that of the heroic romance--into the evolution of the history play.²⁹ Many early plays were ill-constructed biographical sketches of the lives of famous heroes of legendry. Gradually the old rambling romances of such mythological heroes as Sir Clyomon and Huon of Bordeaux were driven from the stage. But it was still found to be profitable to treat the lives of actual personages in much of the same episodic

²⁶Brooke, pp. 194-195.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 196-197.

²⁸Ibid., p. 197.

²⁹Ribner, The English History Play, p. 71.

manner. While there was a decline in plays of such titles as Chinon of England, The Four Sons of Aymon, and the famous Amadis of Gaul, there was a contemporaneous rise in such plays as Buckingham, Captain Thomas Stukeley, Owen Tudor,³⁰ and The Famous Victories of Henry V.

As drama The Famous Victories is generally considered worthless. Interspersed with the loosely related events of history were scenes of pure buffoonery which had no relation whatsoever to the minute plot. The popular hero, Henry V, was exalted in a series of loosely connected episodes. The incoherent effect created by this formless structure made any attempt to detect definite historic doctrines in the play impossible of success. But the king did much heroic boasting at the expense of the French, and it was this aspect of patriotism which connected this play to the purposes of the Tudor historian and brought it within the limits of our definition of the history play. If patriotic vaunting was a part of the glorification of England included in Tudor history, it was also a part of the English heroic folk legendry.³¹ History and legendry were joined in The Famous Victories, and the tradition of the heroic romance, as evidenced in early plays on

³⁰Brooke, pp. 321-322.

³¹Ribner, The English History Play, pp. 72-73.

Saint George, Robin Hood, and King Arthur,³² became an integral factor in the growth of the chronicle play. It lasted throughout the Elizabethan period, culminating in Shakespeare's Henry V and Marlowe's mighty Tamburlaine.³³

The Life and Death of Jack Straw presented a more beneficial advance in the development of the history play than either Richardus Tertius or The Famous Victories. Little claim might be asserted for its dramatic value: any connection between scenes was slight if present at all; the hero was poorly drawn; there was practically no dramatic unity.³⁴ Nonetheless, the play was important, for the action was vigorous and not poorly written. Its author was able to handle verse with some degree of skill.³⁵ Historically, it was the first chronicle play, entirely free from the abstractions of the moralities, which concentrated upon a single episode of history (that of the peasants' revolt in Essex and Kent in 1381³⁶) and attempted through the light of past experience to illuminate a present political problem: either the insurrection of

³²Felix Schelling, The English Chronicle Play (New York, 1902), p. 9.

³³Brooke, p. 235.

³⁴Ribner, The English History Play, p. 79.

³⁵Schelling, p. 46.

³⁶Ibid., p. 45.

apprentices in 1586³⁷ or the especially heavy taxes of 1588 (and the unrest in the countryside because of them)³⁸ have been suggested as the cause of the writing of this defense of Elizabeth.³⁹

The three plays--Richard Tertius, The Famous Victories, and Jack Straw--epitomized the traditions out of which the chronicle play emerged. By 1594 when Greene's Selimus was published, these various traditions had fused, and the history play was recognizable as a genre.⁴⁰

If the English chronicle play had by then attained some degree of form, it nonetheless was still woefully lacking in artistic merit. As yet, no work was known which contained the dramatic sense or poetic brilliance which were to make the efforts of Shakespeare and Marlowe the finest of the day. The early plays often were little more than successions of poorly constructed, loosely connected scenes dramatizing the lives of ancient British kings or legendary heroes.⁴¹ None yet possessed any unity in treatment or conception; all depended upon the attractiveness of

³⁷F. G. Fleay in Ribner, The English History Play, p. 75.

³⁸Hugo Shutt in Ribner, The English History Play, p. 75.

³⁹Mary G. M. Adkins terms Jack Straw a defense of Elizabeth. Ribner, The English History Play, p. 79.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 66.

⁴¹T. M. Parrott and R. H. Ball, A Short View of Elizabethan Drama (New York, 1943), p. 287.

the personalities portrayed to make up for their artistic deficiencies.⁴² No attempt was made to manifest either continuous purpose or historical perspective.⁴³ This absence of any central theme or philosophy was largely a characteristic of such plays as Peele's Edward I and The Battle of Alcazar, the anonymous Look about You, and The Famous History of the Life and Death of Captain Thomas Stukeley. Marlowe's Edward II and Shakespeare's Richard II, in the extent of their philosophy, were clearly to be a part of the minority.⁴⁴

In the earlier plays characterization was slight and ineffectual. The rapid succession of events did not demand any great portrayal of character. In The Famous Victories of Henry V, the change in Prince Hal from a would-be patricide to a good and glorious king was an unexplained reformation.⁴⁵ Even in Tamburlaine most of the figures were wooden still-lives.⁴⁶

The inclusion of a great deal of extraneous comic material added nothing to the worth of the chronicle plays.

⁴²Brooke, The Tudor Drama, p. 322.

⁴³Ibid., p. 304.

⁴⁴Tillyard, pp. 105-106.

⁴⁵Ribner, The English History Play, p. 72.

⁴⁶Ribner, "The Idea of History in Tamburlaine," pp. 264-265.

The humor of the histories ranged from the elaborate buffoonery of The Famous Victories to the morbid ambiguities and grisly jokes in The Massacre at Paris.⁴⁷

Verse was not yet a fluent means of expression in Elizabethan art. The Famous Victories was written entirely in prose.⁴⁸ Jack Straw contained passable verse,⁴⁹ but even George Peele's Edward I, despite occasional elevated lines, was largely characterized by "long scenes of doggerel verse."⁵⁰ Although The Wounds of Civil War by Thomas Lodge contained quantities of careful, melodious blank verse, their value was rendered ineffective by the formless plot and psychological poverty of the play.⁵¹

Many of these ill-becoming qualities of the early histories were eliminated in the writing of the untitled composition generally known as Woodstock. The unknown author of Woodstock was in many respects an accomplished dramatist. He skillfully analyzed the events of a period of fifteen years and carefully formed an accurate view of the struggle waged by the patriot Duke of Gloucester

⁴⁷Brooke, p. 304.

⁴⁸Wilhelm Creizenach, The English Drama in the Age of Shakespeare (London, 1916), p. 28.

⁴⁹Schelling, p. 46.

⁵⁰Ribner, The English History Play, p. 92.

⁵¹Brooke, p. 312.

against the extravagance of Richard II and the destructive tendencies of his favorites. The portrait of Richard's self-indulgent nature was much truer than that of the royal poet drawn by Shakespeare. Moreover, the dramatist clearly showed in the elevation of the flatterers, the crushing economic burden of the blank charters, and the murder of Gloucester, the actual causes of Richard's overthrow, causes which Shakespeare was later to pass lightly over.⁵²

In addition to his ability to synthesize history into a unified narrative, the author of Woodstock was able to put much variety into his work by the contrapuntal use of prose and verse, comedy and tragedy. Although his verse is little more than acceptable, his talent for writing prose and his ability to offer scenes of true comic relief were two of his most distinguished qualities. His skill in developing character was another of his finest assets. Woodstock's character was so comprehensive, so convincingly portrayed that he became a tragic figure of proportions at least equal to Edward II and Richard II.⁵³

In 1587 Christopher Marlowe's Tamburlaine burst on the London dramatic scene with tremendous impact. More than any other drama Tamburlaine set the vogue for the plays which shortly followed. It has been called "the source and

⁵²Ibid., pp. 328-329.

⁵³Ibid., p. 329.

original of the Elizabethan history play."⁵⁴ The play had faults, to be sure--but the rapid movements of scene after scene of wild and savage action were delivered in accents of lyric passion hitherto unknown. Behind Marlowe English poetry was sometimes beautiful, sometimes interesting and inspired, but it was decidedly archaic. But Marlowe took blank verse and molded it into an instrument of perfection.⁵⁵ The day of Edward II and Richard II could now be foreseen.

With the appearance of Edward II in 1591-1592, Marlowe carried the chronicle play to its highest level prior to Shakespeare's greatest histories.⁵⁶ The material of the annals was treated with conscious attention to the rules of dramatic composition; any consideration of temporary popular appeal was for the first time subordinated

⁵⁴Brooke, p. 302. Ribner agrees for different reasons. See "The Idea of History in Tamburlaine," pp. 251 ff.

⁵⁵One of the finest appreciations of Marlowe's poetry is James Russel Lowell's. See Tucker Brooke, "Marlowe's Versification and Style," Studies in Philology, XIX (April, 1922), 190. It reads:

"In the midst of the hurly-burly there will fall a sudden hush, and we come upon passages calm and pellucid as mountain tarns filled to the brim with the purest distillations of heaven. And again, there are single verses that open silently as roses and surprise us with that seemingly accidental perfection, which there is no use talking about because itself says all that is to be said and more."

⁵⁶Hazleton Spencer, Elizabethan Plays (Boston, 1933), p. 102.

to the higher artistic principles.⁵⁷ Technically, the play marked Marlowe's highest achievement in dramatic art. Characterization was extended beyond one or two main characters, difficult problems of selecting and condensing material were surmounted with ease. To draw the emotions to the side of a king so weak and bad as Edward was truly a masterful transfer of sympathy.⁵⁸ The poetry, though not lyric, was nonetheless highly dramatic.

Shortly thereafter, Shakespeare in Richard II also demonstrated an advance in the development of the chronicle play. Shakespeare concentrated heavily upon the character of Richard to develop a tragic dénouement. All the forces irreconcilable to Richard were embodied in the person of Henry Bolingbroke. This was a new thing in Elizabethan drama, and the result of Shakespeare's efforts was a clearly discernible tragedy of character.⁵⁹

⁵⁷Brooke, The Tudor Drama, pp. 322-323.

⁵⁸Spencer, p. 102.

⁵⁹Hardin Craig, An Interpretation of Shakespeare (New York, 1948), p. 125.

CHAPTER IV

THE SOURCES OF EDWARD II AND RICHARD II

Both Marlowe and Shakespeare made extensive use of actual historical writings in their search for material which could be adapted for their purposes. Holinshed's Chronicles served as the main source for each playwright,¹ though some attention seems also to have been given to other chronicles, particularly Stowe's Annals.

Generally, the events and descriptions of the recorded histories were followed closely in the two plays. However, both dramatists compressed, expanded, or invented material as they saw fit to do so. Marlowe, for instance, has devoted far more importance to Piers Gaveston than do any of the chroniclers. The first half of Edward II centers around Gaveston's five years (1307-1312) as the king's favorite. The second half of the play covers the much longer period from 1312 to 1330.²

¹For Marlowe: Michel Poirier, Christopher Marlowe (London, 1951), p. 174. For Shakespeare: Hardin Craig, editor, The Tragedy of Richard the Second (New York, 1912), p. x.

²Philip Henderson, Christopher Marlowe (New York, 1952), p. 119.

Another example of Marlowe's adaptation of his sources may be seen in these voluptuous early lines of *Gaveston*:

I must have wanton poets, pleasant wits,
Musicians, that with touching of a string
May draw the pliant king which way I please:
Music and poetry is his delight;
Therefore I'll have Italian masques by night,
Sweet speeches, comedies, and pleasing shows;
And in the day, when he shall walk abroad,
Like sylvan nymphs my pages shall be clad;
My men, like satyrs grazing on the lawns,
Shall with their goat feet dance an antic hay;
Sometime a lovely boy in Dian's shape,
With hair that gilds the water as it glides,
Crownets of pearl about his naked arms,
And in his sportful hands an olive-tree,
To hide those parts that men delight to see,
Shall bathe him in a spring; and there, hard by,
One like Acteon, peeping through the grove,
Shall by the angry goddess be transformed,
And running in the likeness of an hart,
By yelping hounds pulled down, shall seem to die:
Such things as these best please his majesty.
(i. 50-70)³

This passage is nothing more than poetic transcription of Holinshed's more simple prose; the chronicler wrote that the flattering *Gaveston* furnished the court with "companies of jesters, ruffians, flattering parasites, musicians, and other vile and naughty ribalds, that the king might spend both days and nights in jesting, playing, banqueting, and in other filthy and dishonorable exercises."⁴

³Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II*, in C. R. Baskervill, V. B. Heltzel, and A. H. Nethercot, *Elizabethan and Stuart Drama* (New York, 1934), pp. 375-420. All subsequent citations from *Edward II* are from this edition unless otherwise indicated.

⁴Henderson, p. 119.

A further example of Marlowe's expansion of the Chronicles may be noticed in the entire scene (x) which he created out of four brief lines in Holinshed:⁵

The same night it chanced that Guie erle of Warwicke came to the verie place where the erle of Cornwall was left, and taking him from his keepers, brought him unto Warwike, where incontinentlie it was thought best to put him to death.⁶

Marlowe's inventive prowess is evident in the supremely horrible figure of Lightborn. Nothing but great pity can be felt for the doomed Edward as the assassin coldly laughs aside the suggestion that when he sees the king he will pity him:

Relent! Ha, ha! I use much to relent!...
 You shall not need to give instructions;
 'Tis not the first time I have killed a man.
 (xxi. 27, 29-30)

With what inhuman villainy he proceeds to reveal the skillful ways he knows to destroy a living being:

I learned in Naples how to poison flowers:
 To strangle with a lawn thrust through the throat;
 To pierce the windpipe with a needle's point;
 Or, whilst one is asleep, to take a quill
 And blow a little powder in his ears;
 Or open his mouth and pour quicksilver down.
 And yet I have a braver way than these.
 (xxi. 31-37)

⁵John Bakeless, The Tragical History of Christopher Marlowe, Vol. II (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1942), p. 16.

⁶Raphael Holinshed, The Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland, Vol. II (London, 1807), p. 551. All subsequent citations from Holinshed are from this edition unless otherwise indicated.

It has been suggested that Marlowe founded the character of Lightborn upon one of his secret service acquaintances.⁷ And there may be a great deal of truth in the assertion, for Lightborn becomes real as do few other hired killers in all of Elizabethan drama.

It was from the second edition of Holinshed's Chronicles that Shakespeare drew his historical facts, for only here does Holinshed mention the portent of the "withering of the bay-trees" which Shakespeare dramatizes in II. iv. 8.⁸ The playwright followed his sources as closely in Richard II as in any other of his history plays. The leading events of the drama and all the major characters except the queen are quite historical, as are "the whole substance, action, and interest of the play."⁹

Shakespeare's dependence on Holinshed is evident in the drawing of several of the characters. The brief description in the Chronicles of Richard and the account of his misdeeds enabled Shakespeare to construct the pliant, narcissistic portrait of the king. Shakespeare took Holinshed's description of York as "verilie a man of

⁷Henderson, p. 118.

⁸Norman Hudson, "Introduction," King Richard the Second, edited by Ebenezer Black (Chicago, 1916), p. xii. All subsequent citations from Richard II are from this edition.

⁹Ibid., p. xi.

gentle nature, [who] wished that the state of the commonwealth might have been redressed without losse of any mans life or other cruel dealing"¹⁰ and developed an affable old character of great interest.

The dramatist has taken some liberties with historic accuracy. He has changed Gaunt from the selfish and ruthless politician of history¹¹ into a kind and sympathetic father and uncle. When Richard chides Gaunt, reminding him that his own voice agreed to the verdict of his son's banishment, Gaunt's answer tugs gently at the heartstrings:

You urged me as a judge; but I had rather
 You would have bid me argue like a father.
 O, had it been a stranger, not my child,
 To smooth his fault I should have been more mild...
 Alas, I look'd when some of you should say,
 I was too strict to make mine own away;
 But you gave leave to my unwilling tongue
 Against my will to do myself this wrong.
 (I. iii. 237-240, 242-245)

The character of Gloucester benefits immeasurably in Shakespeare's resurrection of him. Recognized by history as one of the cruelest men in an age of cruelty,¹² Thomas of Woodstock is transformed into "noble Gloucester" (IV. i. 37), the "noble duke" (IV. i. 82), "my dear lord, my life" (I. ii. 16). His murderer, "like a traitor coward,/"

¹⁰Allardyce Nicoll and Josephine Nicoll, editors, Holinshed's Chronicle As Used in Shakespeare's History Plays (New York, 1927), p. 51.

¹¹Craig, Richard II, p. xi.

¹²Wilson, King Richard II, pp. lxii.

Sluiced out his innocent soul through streams of blood"
(I. i. 102-103).

The purpose behind the alteration of the moral qualities of Gaunt and Gloucester is to direct sympathy toward Henry rather than Richard. Other than these changes the principal divergences in Richard II from Holinshed's account consist merely of shifts in time and place. Thus, in the third act, all the events concerning the capture of Richard take place at Flint Castle rather than at various points on the countryside, and in the fourth act the activities of three separate meetings of the Parliament are combined as one.¹³

The inventiveness of Shakespeare has long been believed to be evident in the deathbed scene of Gaunt and his famous ode to England, but Gaunt's death is recorded by Froissart. The parts of the woman characters (other than the queen), the gardener and his servant, and the groom are probably also of the poet's own invention.¹⁴

Most of the deviations from source in both plays may easily be recognized as attempts to increase dramatic effectiveness by heightening contrasts, eliminating

¹³Craig, Richard II, pp. x-xi.

¹⁴Ibid., p. x. Wilson argues that Shakespeare was greatly indebted to Froissart for Gaunt's scene. See J. Dover Wilson, editor, King Richard II (Cambridge, England, 1939), p. lvi.

repetitive events, or forming more quickly the growing lines of battle. Thus, the anachronism of introducing young Mortimer into the first scene of Edward II, when he did not actually figure historically until several years after the events depicted in that scene, brings immediately to the foreground the contest between the weak king and the most vehement of the rebel lords.¹⁵ Similarly, the defeat and death of Lancaster are made to seem the direct results of his part in the execution of Gaveston. In reality these events were unrelated and took place years apart.¹⁶

Edward's refusal to ransom Mortimer Senior apparently was an addition inserted to heighten the extent of Edward's sins--for in this act he was obstinately denying the lawful rights of the Mortimer family.¹⁷ Dramatically, young Spencer became a servant of Gaveston in order to work the Spencers more quickly and easily into the development of the play. In truth, they were of noble birth and extremely cruel disposition, and Gaveston had been dead for six years before the Spencers rose to power.¹⁸ The alteration of their character and class was made to strengthen their

¹⁵Bakeless, p. 10.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 19-20.

¹⁷Ribner, "Marlowe's Edward II," p. 251.

¹⁸Bakeless, Christopher Marlowe, p. 18.

comparison with Gaveston and to heighten their contrast to Mortimer.

Also for the sake of dramatic art Queen Isabella and Prince Edward go to France together in the play--whereas they actually made the journey on different occasions. Marlowe's fusion of their trips eliminates the need for repetitious acknowledgment of them in the play.¹⁹

It appears evident from Marlowe's deviations from his sources that he was endeavoring to select his material in such a way as to emphasize a few limited aspects of the life of Edward of Carnarvon, and to explain them through the desires and capabilities of the characters concerned. To make his figures seem lifelike and their relation to the events of their time appear necessary and even organic, Marlowe had to omit much source material which was highly dramatic, but which might have forced out of focus the primary contest with which he was concerned, that between Mortimer and his faithless king. These necessary historical omissions have been summarized by W. D. Briggs:

Marlowe omitted the suppression of the Order of the Temple; everything connected with the constant warfare with Scotland, except the allusions in ll. 655-6, 913, 962, 975 ff.; everything connected with the Irish wars except the allusions in ll. 419, 960; everything connected with Edward's journey to France to do homage, and with the French attacks on his continental possessions, except the allusions in

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 18-19.

11. 958, 1350 ff.; all quarrels between Edward and the nobles on grounds other than his maintenance of lewd favorites, such as the quarrel between the king and Lancaster about Lancaster's homage for the earldom of Lincoln, and that arising from Isabella's exclusion from the castle of Badlesmere. Furthermore, he omitted all private wars, such as those between Banister and Lancaster, between Middleton and the Bishop of Durham, between the Marcher lords and the Despensers, except the allusion in l. 1341 f.; all the give and take of the war against Lancaster and his party save their final overthrow; the incident of Poidras; the treason of Andrew Harclay; the condemnation of Orleton, Bishop of Hereford; and finally, all such distractions of the kingdom as took place between the murder of Edward and the execution of Mortimer except the rising of the Earl of Kent.²⁰

Hall's Chronicles contain only a few passages that Shakespeare could not have found in Holinshed, but Hall in several instances contains more detailed accounts than does his successor. Shakespeare's dependence on Hall may best be illustrated by the few verbal reminiscences in the play for which there is no corresponding statement in Holinshed. The following example also makes possible another interesting observation--the fact that Shakespeare began his play at the precise point where Hall began his history.

Richard's lines,

Then call them to our presence: face to face
And frowning brow to brow, ourselves will hear
The accuser and the accused freely speak:
(I. i. 15-17)

may have been suggested by Hall's prose,

²⁰W. D. Briggs, Marlowe's Edward II (London, 1914), pp. ci-cii.

[Richard] called to hym the duke of Lancastre and his consaill, and also the dukes of Herfforde and Norffolk, & caused the accuser to report opely the words to him declared.²¹

Hall's version of the Abbot's Conspiracy is far livelier and closer to Shakespeare's presentation than is Holinshed's. The influence of the earlier chronicler seems likely in this case.²² For the fact that Richard "had no small truste in Welshemen" Hall is the sole authority.²³

The Annals of John Stowe was a further reference used by Shakespeare in his research for Richard II. Stowe supplied all the information used in the Bishop of Carlisle's speech to describe the exile and death of Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk.²⁴ Stowe's account read:

Thomas Moubrey duke of Norffolke, which was exiled, died at Venice, in his return from Jerusalem.²⁵

Carlisle informed Henry:

Many a time hath banish'd Norfolk fought
For Jesu Christ in glorious Christian field,
Streaming the ensign of the Christian cross
Against black pagans, Turks and Saracens;
And toil'd with works of war, retir'd himself
To Italy, and there at Venice gave
His body to that pleasant country's earth,

²¹Zeeveld, Influence of Hall on Shakespeare's History Plays, p. 322.

²²Ibid., pp. 327-328.

²³Ibid., p. 323.

²⁴Craig, Richard II, p. 10.

²⁵John Stowe, Annales (London, 1631), p. 324.

And his pure soul unto his captain Christ,
 Under whose colors he had fought so long.
 (IV. i. 92-100)

Several quite significant parallels, ones which differ from the historical sources, exist between Richard II and the Civil Wars, published by Samuel Daniel in 1594. Both of these works picture the child queen as a mature woman and give her a final meeting with Richard after his return from Ireland. In each piece the triumph of Henry and the humiliation of Richard reach their climaxes as the two cousins ride into London together.²⁶

A few verbal similarities are evidence to give additional support to the contention that some borrowing did take place. Daniel's version of the plot to murder King Richard is closer to Shakespeare's than are those of the chroniclers. Holinshed, copying Hall word for word, wrote:

. . . king Henrie, sitting on a daie at his table, sore sighing, said; Have I no faithfull freend which will deliver me of him, whose life will be my death, and whose death will be the preservation of my life? This saieng was much noted of them which were present, and especiallie of one called Sir Piers of Exton.²⁷

Daniel records more clearly the subtle maneuverings of a Henry preparing to rid himself of the danger of a living Richard:

²⁶Laurence Michel, editor, The Civil Wars (New Haven, 1958), p. 12.

²⁷Holinshed, III, 517.

the eye of his assassin; this is a link that is absent in the efforts of Hall and Holinshed.²⁹

There are other comparisons. Richard's statements in the "Northumberland, thou ladder" speech (V. i. 55) that Bolingbroke will come to spurn Northumberland may have been suggested by Daniel's less concrete lines:

Th' aspirer once attained unto the top
Cuts off those means by which himself got up.³⁰
(II. 15. 7-8)

Richard's prophecy that even the very rocks will fight to protect England's king,

This earth shall have a feeling, and these stones,
Prove armed soldiers ere her native king
Shall falter under foul rebellion's armes.
(III. ii. 24-26)

closely resembles Salisbury's eloquent plea in The Civil Wars that Richard remain in his present strategic position:

Here have you craggy rocks to take your part
That never will betray their faith to you;
.
If men will not, these very cliffes will fight
And be sufficient to defend your right.
(II. 29)³¹

For most of the singular instances of similarity between the two works, Shakespeare appears to be the debtor. Dover Wilson argues in favor of this conclusion and remarks

²⁹Ibid., p. xlii.

³⁰Michel, p. 20.

³¹Ibid., pp. 20-21.

that Shakespeare did not always surpass the loveliness of Daniel's narrative poem:

. . . his [Daniel's] exquisite description of the entry of captive Richard into London and of the interview that follows with his queen . . . [shows] . . . that here at least Shakespeare did not manage to wrest the laurel from his teacher.³²

Another available source possibly used by Shakespeare is Lord Berners' excellent translation of The Chronicles of Sir John Froissart. Both Reyher and Wilson are of the opinion that it would be strange if

. . . the fourth and final book of that immortal work with its detailed and vivid account from the hand of a contemporary and to some extent an eyewitness, of the stirring events of Richard's last years, an account moreover accessible in the excellent English of Berners, had not been drawn upon for the play.

The mention of Richard's prevention of Bolingbroke's marriage in II. i. 167 is explicit in Froissart, though it is not found in the English chroniclers.³³ The expression, "on pain of life," is found in no known source except Froissart.³⁴ It is perhaps possible that Shakespeare's likenesses with Froissart stem from Shakespeare's use of The Civil Wars, for Daniel relied heavily on the Frenchman's account. Daniel, for instance, finding his information in Berners' translation (II. 572), wrote:

³²Wilson, King Richard II, p. xliv.

³³Tillyard, p. 253.

³⁴Wilson, King Richard II, p. lv.

"Tis said, with his own hand he gave the crown."³⁵

Although Shakespeare may have read Froissart, he was probably indebted to Daniel when he had Richard say:

"With mine own hands I give away my crown" (IV. i. 210).

Reyher and Wilson also suggest the "remarkable apologia for Richard entitled La Chronique de la Traison et Mort de Richart Deux roy Dengleterre" by Jean Le Beau as a possible source for parts of Richard II. Many of the parallels noted by these critics are present in Holinshed, but the portrayal of Richard after his death may be due to Le Beau. The idea of Richard as a martyr-king, an idea not present in Holinshed or Hall, is explicit in Le Beau. The suggestion to portray Isabella as a grown woman may also have come from Traison. Finally, the method of Gloucester's death (decapitation) as presented in Shakespeare is consistent with that found in both Le Beau and Froissart--and not with that given by the English historians.³⁶

Verbal echoes of the historians' actual words are frequent in both plays. An echo of Holinshed occurs when Edward bids his friends to "take shipping and away to Scarborough" (viii. 5). The facts are at variance in this case, however, for the chronicle relates that it was Edward

³⁵R. M. Smith, Froissart and the English Chronicle Play (New York, 1915), p. 152.

³⁶Wilson, King Richard II, p. xlvi.

himself who "leaving the queen behind him, took shipping, and sailed from thence with his dearly beloved familiar the earle of Cornewall, unto Scarbourgh."³⁷

Another restatement of Holinshed's language appears in Lancaster's boast to the king:

Four Earldomes have I beside Lancaster,
Darbie, Salsburie, Lincolne, Leicester.
(i. 101-102)

This statement by Lancaster simply transforms into verse the prose of the chronicle, altering the order of the earl's possessions into poetic meter. Holinshed's version had stated: "He was possessed of five earledomes, Lancaster, Lincolne, Salisburie, Leicester, and Darbie."³⁸ A comparison of several historical accounts makes the fact clear that Marlowe used Holinshed in this instance, for other chroniclers give differing lists of Lancaster's holdings.³⁹

Another point on which Edward II and Holinshed concur with each other but differ from other chroniclers occurs in the enumeration of Gaveston's offices. Holinshed writes:

For having revoked again into England his old mate the said Peers de Gaveston, he received him into most high favour; creating him earle of Cornewall, and lord of Man, his principall secretarie, and lord chamberlaine of the realme.⁴⁰

³⁷Holinshed, II, 551.

³⁸Ibid., p. 569.

³⁹Bakeless, p. 11.

⁴⁰Holinshed, II, 547.

Marlowe condenses this passage into Edward's brief statement.

I heere create thee Lord high Chamberlaine
Cheefe Secretarie to the state and me,
Earle of Cornewall, king and Lord of Man.
(i. 153-155)

The indignant meeting of the peers which results from such excessive liberalities contains one unmistakable borrowing from Holinshed, who alone among the chroniclers mentions the New Temple as the scene.⁴¹ Marlowe repeats this knowledge in dialogue:

Warwick: But say my lord, where shall this meeting
bee?
Bishop: At the new temple.

(ii. 75-76)

The Latin quotation of double-meaning which seals Edward's fate is strangely enough not an invention of the Marlovian imagination. The ambiguous line was taken directly from the Chronicles--though Holinshed actually credited the Bishop of Hereford and not Mortimer with the devising of it.⁴²

Several minor details are also from Holinshed. These include the mention of the marriage between Gaveston and the daughter of the Earl of Gloucester, the acquaintance of Baldock and Spencer, and Spencer's succession to Gaveston's position as lord chamberlain. The fierce reproach of the nobles beginning "When wert thou in the field . . ."

⁴¹Ibid., II, 549.

⁴²Ibid., p. 586.

(vi. 178) is directly from the source except for the comparison with the players.⁴³

The arrest of the Bishop of Coventry is also recounted in the drama almost precisely as in Holinshed; but Marlowe seems to have had Fabian's Chronicle also in mind in this case, for where Holinshed says merely that the Bishop was sent "to prison," Fabian says specifically "unto the toure of London."⁴⁴ This is repeated in Marlowe's line: "'Tis true the bishop is in the tower" (ii. i). From Fabian also came the account of the jig sung by the Scots after their defeat of the English at Bannockburn. Fabian transcribes the ditty as follows:

Maydens of Englonde, sore maye ye morne
 For your lemmans ye have loste at Bannockisborne,
 With a heve a lowe.
 What wenyth the kynge of Englonde
 So soone to have wonne Scotlande
 With rumbylowe.⁴⁵

Marlowe's version follows Fabian's very closely, though it has been pruned somewhat of its broad Scotch flavor:⁴⁶

Maids of England, sore may you moorne,
 For your lemmons you have lost at Bannoeks borne,
 With a heave and a ho.
 What weeneth the king of England,
 So soone to have woone Scotland,
 With a rombelow.

(vi. 186-191)

⁴³Bakeless, pp. 13-14. Holinshed, II, 551.

⁴⁴Bakeless, p. 11.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 15.

⁴⁶Ibid.

Edward's plea for a drink of water (xx. 25) and the following incident concerning the shaving of the king in a puddle have long been thought to have been suggested by Stowe's Annals,⁴⁷ wherein Marlowe could have read the following passage:

. . . they determined for to shave as well the haire of his head, as also of his beard: wherefore, as in their journey they travailed by a little water which ranne in a ditch . . . a Barber came unto him with a bason of colde water taken out of the ditch to shave him withall.⁴⁸

There are a few verbal similarities between Richard II and Thomas of Woodstock, doubtless an earlier play than Shakespeare's, which are worthy of brief recognition. In each play John of Gaunt speaks similar words to Richard:

& tho^u no king but landlord now become
to this great state that terro^rd Christendome⁴⁹
(2826-2827)
Landlord of England art thou now, not king.
(II. i. 113)

Other parallels are

rent out o^r kingdome like a pelting ffarme
(1888)
Like to a tenement or pelting farm.
(II. i. 60)

⁴⁷F. S. Boas, Christopher Marlowe (Oxford, 1930), p. 189.

⁴⁸John Stowe, p. 226.

⁴⁹Wilson, King Richard II, p. 1. Citations from Woodstock are printed before those from Richard II. All citations from Woodstock are from the edition of Wolfgang Keller, Shakespeare Jahrbuch (Berlin, 1899), pp. 45-121.

and

They would not tax & pyll the commons see
 (466)
 The commons hath he pilled with grievous taxes.
 (II. i. 246)

This final parallel is one of the most interesting and conclusive:

I have a sad presage comes sodenly
 that I shall never see these brothers more
 on earth I feare, we never more shall meete.
 (1399-1401)
 Farewell--if heart's presages be not vain,
 We three here part, that ne'er shall meet again.
 (II. ii. 144-145)

Doubtless, Shakespeare's most famous borrowing is from Marlowe's Doctor Faustus. The aged doctor marveled of Helen:

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,
 And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
 (xiv, 93-94)⁵⁰

Richard, looking at his features in a glass during the deposition scene, wonders:

Was this face the face
 That every day under his household roof
 Did keep ten thousand men? was this the face
 That, like the sun, did make beholders wink?
 Was this the face that faced so many follies,
 And was at last out-faced by Bolingbroke?
 (IV. i. 281-286)

Several plays exist which show verbal parallels with Edward II; among them are Edward II, Soliman and Perseda,

⁵⁰Citation from Dr. Faustus is from Baskervill, Heltzel, and Nethercot, p. 370.

The Wounds of Civil War, Woodstock, and The Troublesome Raigne of John King of England. Whether or not Marlowe was the borrower cannot be ascertained with any degree of surety in every case, but the fact that he did borrow occasionally from other plays is an accepted fact--Edward's line: "Because he loves me more than all the world" (iv. 77) was taken almost verbatim from The Spanish Tragedy of Thomas Kyd.⁵¹ At any rate, the parallels are interesting enough to deserve reproduction here.⁵²

'Tis but temporall that thou canst inflict.
(1550)

It is but temporall that you can inflict.
(Edward I. v. 954)

Hence fained weeds, vnfained are my woes.
(1964)

Hence faigned weedes, vnfaigned is my grieffe.
(Edward I. xxv. 2800)

. . . to equall it receive my heart.
(162)

To equall it: receive my heart to boote.⁵³
(Soliman and Perseda, I. ii. 40)

Father, thy face should harbor no deceit.
(1875)

This face of thine shuld harbour no deceit.
(Soliman and Perseda, III. i. 72)

⁵¹Bakeless, p. 28.

⁵²All citations from Edward II are printed before the citations from the other plays. All citations from Edward II in the remainder of this chapter are from the edition of A. H. Bullen, The Works of Christopher Marlowe (London, 1884). All citations from Peele's Edward I are from the Malone Society reprint of the 1593 edition.

⁵³Bakeless, p. 30. He gives no references.

I tell thee 'tis not meet, that one so false
Should come about the person of a prince.

(2248-2249)

It is not meete that one so base as thou
Shouldst come about the person of a king.

(Soliman and Perseda, I. v. 71-72)

Immortall powers, that knows the painfull cares,
That waites upon my poor distressed soule,
O levell all your lookes upon these daring men,
That wrongs their leige and soveraigne, England's
king.

(2302-2305)

Immortal powers that know the painfull cares,
That waight upon my poor distressed hart,
O bend your browes and levill all your lookes
Of dreadfull awe upon these daring men.

(The Wounds of Civill War, p. 55)⁵⁴

The murmuring commons.

(962)

The murmoring commons.

(Woodstock, I. iii. 258)⁵⁵

I dare not, for the people love him well.

(1036)

I dare not, Greene; for . . .
hee's so well belovd.

(Woodstock, IV. i. 73-74)

. . . a new elected king.

(2064)

. . . their new elected king.

(Troublesome Raigne, part II. sc. 2. 80)⁵⁶

Thou proud disturber of thy countries peace

(1176)

Proud, and disturber of thy Countreyes peace.

(Troublesome Raigne, part I. sc. 7. 13)

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 31. Citations are from the Hunterian Club reprint.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 33. References are from Keller's edition. See footnote 49.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 34. References are to the Praetorius facsimile edition.

It is evident that both Marlowe and Shakespeare consulted several sources before they began the writing of their plays. The stories of the tragic reigns of Edward and Richard were not to be haphazard productions. What little material there was in the plays which was not implied in the chronicles did not violate the Tudor views on historical integrity. There were serious purposes behind the writings of these two plays, and they were not to be approached carelessly.

CHAPTER V

THE STORIES AND CHARACTERS OF EDWARD II AND RICHARD II

The Stories

Even the most casual reader must notice certain comparisons between the two plays of Edward II by Christopher Marlowe and Richard II by William Shakespeare. The most evident likenesses stem from the similarities of the stories themselves. Each play depicts the follies of a tragically blind and unwise king, besieged by flatterers. Through continuous abuse of the principles of simple humanity and neglect of the responsibilities of office, the kings foolishly arouse the displeasure of their nobles. In both dramas successful rebellions are generated by the return to England of an exile. The weak kings are overthrown, but in their deaths, Edward and Richard appeal to our sympathy, for they are greatly wronged.¹

Richard of Bordeaux and Edward of Carnarvon

The portrait of Richard is one of a king who began to reign as a child and never grew to be worthy of a manly

¹Craig, Richard II, p. xiv.

crown.² Richard has been king for almost as long as he can remember, and being king is to him an invitation to pleasure, not to duty. The glamor of the court, the pomp of office are treasured things in Richard's peaceful, dreamlike existence. In kingship, as in all other serious aspects of life, Richard is but a dilettante; his is the spirit which delights to command, but which cannot enforce.

Edward of Carnarvon suffers also from a truly tragic blindness, an immaturity of thought, vision, and action. To his all-consuming love for his favorite all royal responsibilities are subordinate. The king that Marlowe has drawn is a simple, effeminate child, one who wants only to love and be loved. The crown is to him meaningless as a symbol of office; it is but the means by which his exclusive passion for his minions may be freely indulged. Service is for slaves; Edward would frolic with his Gaveston instead.

When Richard first appears, the deficiencies of his character are readily apparent. He happily exchanges the ceremonious language of a formal trial with Gaunt, Mowbray, and Bolingbroke, for in this instance he has the opportunity to enact the part of a monarch with dignity, bearing,³ and

²Edward Dowden, Shakspeare [sic]: His Mind and Art (New York, 1880), p. 172.

³Ibid., p. 174.

gracious condescension. But matters suddenly shake him from his complacency. Bolingbroke accuses Mowbray of the murder of the Duke of Gloucester, a crime in which the king himself is seriously implicated.⁴ Richard exclaims in wonderment at the passionateness of Henry: "How high a pitch his resolution soars" (I. i. 109).⁵ Then, worst of all, Mowbray not only fails to cover for Richard, but in his own denial of guilt actually implicates his liege. The composure of the king dissolves about him. His speeches become forced and incoherent.⁶ His attempts to use the full weight of his office to end the quarrel between the two nobles fail; Richard cautions Mowbray: "Lions make leopards tame" (I. i. 174) and warns both adversaries: "We were not born to sue but to command" (I. i. 196). The reverence of Henry and Norfolk for majesty stops short of obedience, and Richard must continue:

Which since we cannot do to make you friends...
 Since we cannot atone you, we shall see
 Justice design the victor's chivalry.
 (I. i. 197, 202-203)

At the lists at Coventry Richard denies justice to both of them.⁷ His inordinate love of pageantry draws

⁴John Palmer, Political Characters of Shakespeare (London, 1945), p. 122.

⁵This line assuredly is an aside, though no editor shows it as such.

⁶Harold Goddard, The Meaning of Shakespeare (Chicago, 1951), pp. 251-252.

⁷Craig, An Interpretation of Shakespeare, p. 128.

every last possible moment of excitement out of the affair before he throws down his warder to stop the poised combatants. Richard's solution to this dangerous problem is to banish both the incendiary elements from the land. His judgment may be questionable,⁸ but he thinks he has taken the steps necessary to settle his land enough to allow him to turn attention to the Irish wars.

Our first glimpse of Edward's character shows him to be equally as fond of pageantry and show as is his royal counterpart in Shakespeare. Gaveston, planning ways to impress and please the king, envisions:

. . . wanton poets, pleasant wits,
Musicians that with touching of a string
May draw the pliant king which way I please.
Music and poetry is his delight;
Therefore I'll have Italian masques by night,
Sweet speeches, comedies, and pleasing shows;
(i. 50-55)

But Edward also knows the authority of his position and demands it be respected. When the nobles press him for the removal of Gaveston, he threatens:

. . . Mortimer, I'll make thee rue these words,
Beseems it thee to contradict thy king?
Frown'st thou thereat, aspiring Lancaster?
The sword shall plane the furrows of thy brows,
And hew those knees that now are grown so stiff.
I will have Gaveston; and you shall know
What danger 'tis to stand against your king.
(i. 90-96)

⁸But not for the reason given by Craig, Richard II, p. 123--that Mowbray is a loyal and faithful servant. Mowbray has already said too much.

Edward's offenses continue, as he, like Richard, proceeds systematically to alienate all sympathy from him. He raises Gaveston to positions far above his worth. He violently removes the Bishop of Coventry from office and replaces the churchman with Gaveston. He thrusts aside the queen who loves him, having no time for her now that he has Gaveston. The irrational bestowal of high offices on Gaveston, the attack against the representative of the Church, his rejection of his queen are all unbecoming the dignity of the king's person and place. Perhaps Edward's manliness and kingliness sink to their lowest levels when he offers his all in exchange for Gaveston. He begs of the nobles:

Make several kingdoms of this monarchy,
 And share it equally among'st you all,
 So I may have some nook or corner left,
 To frolic with my dearest Gaveston.
(iv. 70-73)⁹

The opposition of the nobles forms into a solid mass, and the Archbishop of Canterbury threatens to discharge them of any allegiance to their king. In all his sightlessness, Edward has one moment of lucidity and realizes

⁹Ribner, noting the horror of a divided kingdom in Gorboduc, Henry VI, and King Lear, concludes that Edward's coupling of this suggestion with that of his utter abandonment of his throne makes him guilty of the two most serious sins in the Renaissance catalogue of political crimes. See "Marlowe's Edward II," p. 251.

the time has come for him to submit. He warns himself: "It boots me not to threat; I must speak fair" (iv. 63). In agreeing to Gaveston's dismissal, Edward gains a second chance to rule his kingdom with dignity and wisdom--Richard is to have only one.

The opening unrest in both plays seems to have been settled. That troubles were to arise again is due to the lack of any normal feelings of pity and understanding in the make-up of the kings. Richard moves ruthlessly through the wreckage of hearts that once loved him. His loss of all our sympathy comes rapidly and is complete. It culminates when, upon hearing of Gaunt's illness, he exclaims:

Now put it, God, in the physician's mind
To help him to his grave immediately!...
Come, gentleman, let's all go visit him.
Pray God we may make haste and come too late!
(I. iv. 59-60, 63-64)

Old John of Gaunt does die, and Richard promptly seizes the estate of Lancaster. When the Duke of York protests against this seizure of "the royalties and rights of banish'd Hereford" (II. i. 190), the "luxurious insolence"¹⁰ of office that is Richard of Bordeaux mockingly asks: "Why, uncle, what's the matter?" (II. i. 186). The nobles, incensed at Richard's continuous maladministration, prepare

¹⁰ Stopford Brooke, On Ten Plays of Shakespeare (London, 1919), p. 82.

to support the cause of Henry, who rapidly returns to claim his own.

Edward also tramples heartlessly on the feelings of one who deserves his love and respect. So consuming is his dotage on Gaveston, even when he and the Frenchman are separated by the breadth of the Irish Sea, that he continues to spurn his queen, calling her a "French strumpet" (iv. 145) and concluding with what is to Isabella a dreadful finality:

And witness heaven how dear thou art to me!
There weep, for till my Gaveston be repealed,
Assure thyself thou com'st not in my sight.
(iv. 167-169)

In response to the distressed queen's urging and in accordance with Roger Mortimer's plan to eliminate forever the problem of Gaveston by killing him, the king is allowed to recall his favorite. The attempt on Gaveston's life fails, however, and Edward, furious at this act of treachery, prepares to crush the nobles by trial of arms, for "'Tis war that must abate these barons' pride" (vi. 97).

The revolt against Edward's authority differs from that against Richard's in that the former is not generated and developed while the king is far removed from the scene. Richard returns to face a situation which has already surpassed in its powers his ability to defeat it. Edward, however, is from the very first in a position to face

his enemies and oppose them by counter-moves as best he can.

In neither play are the nobles without righteous grievances. Causes for the uprisings are fully explained by the rebels. Mortimer complains to Edward:

The idle triumphs, masques, lascivious shows,
And prodigal gifts bestowed on Gaveston
Have drawn thy treasury dry, and made thee weak,
The murmuring commons overstretched hath.
(vi. 153-156)

In Richard II Ross similarly grumbles:

The commons hath he pill'd with grievous taxes,
And quite lost their hearts; the nobles hath he
fin'd
For ancient quarrels and quite lost their hearts.
(II. i. 246-248)

Edward suffers more abuse, this time from Lancaster:

Thy garrisons are beaten out of France,
And, lame and poor, lie groaning at the gates.
The wild O'Neil, with swarms of Irish kerns,
Lives uncontrolled within the English pale,
Unto the walls of York the Scots made road
And unrestricted drave away rich spoils.
(vi. 157-163)

To this condemnation Mortimer adds:

The haughty Dane commands the narrow seas,
While in the harbor ride thy ships unriggered.
(vi. 164-165)

Richard's reign has also been marked by a lack of military success and to a greater degree than Edward's by an unwillingness on the part of the monarch to fight. Northumberland, speaking also of the bankruptcy of the treasury, bitterly attacks Richard for this:

Wars hath not wasted it for warr'd he hath not,
 But basely yielded upon compromise
 That which his noble ancestors achiev'd with blows.
 More hath he spent in peace than they in wars.
 (II. 1. 252-255)

In Edward II Mortimer asks his sovereign, "Who loves you but a sort of flatterers?" (vi. 167) and then continues:

Thy court is naked, being bereft of those
 That makes a king seem glorious to the world--
 I mean the peers, whom thou should'st dearly love.
 (vi. 170-172)

Northumberland echoes these words against Richard:

The king is not himself, but basely led
 By flatterers; and what they will inform,
 Merely in hate, 'gainst any of us all,
 That will the king severely prosecute...
 (II. 1. 241-245)

The main charges against both the kings are these three: a flagrant bankrupting of the realm, the allowed humiliation of English arms, and dependence on the flatterers to the disregard and rejection of the nobles. Such offenses can be corrected only by war, and to this end events rapidly shape themselves. The conflict of civil war acts differently on the kings: the adversity breaks Richard; it makes Edward.

The initial success at arms belongs to Edward's peers. Gaveston is their prisoner, and Edward is penitent. The king asks to see Gaveston once more, and if the nobles "will gratify his grace so far/He will be mindful of the courtesy" (viii. 37-38). But bellicose old Warwick kills

Gaveston instead, thereby committing the error which is shortly to cost him his own life.¹¹ In killing the one thing that would have pacified Edward, Warwick is guilty of a tragic mistake, for he has transformed a weak, effeminate youth into a warrior king. Enraged that the rebels would deny him his request, the vengeful Edward vows:

Treacherous Warwick! Traitorous Mortimer!
 If I be England's king, in lakes of gore
 Your headless trunks, your bodies will I trail,
 That you may drink your fill, and quaff in blood,
 And stain my royal standard with the same,
 That so my bloody colors may suggest
 Remembrance of revenge immortally
 On your accursed traitorous progeny.

(xi. 134-141)

Edward's threatening words, unlike Richard's or an earlier Edward's, are not things of mere "sound and fury." He replaces Gaveston in his regard with Spencer, and the bloody conflict begins again. The king, successful in the renewed war, executes the rebels, all but Mortimer, and banishes his brother Edmund from his presence for daring to remind him:

Brother, in regard of thee and of thy land
 Did they remove that flatterer from thy throne.
 (xi. 229-230)

¹¹ Warwick actually died peaceably in his bed several years after the slaughter on Blacklow Hill. See Briggs, p. 103.

Hot Edward soon learns he must fight yet a third time, for Mortimer, aided to escape by Edmund Duke of Kent, returns at the head of a French army. The king suffers reversal here, but when Spencer begs him to flee, he answers in a fashion surely more worthy of kingship than Richard's base cowardice:

What! Was I born to fly and run away,
 And leave the Mortimers conquerors behind?
 Give me my horse, and lets r'enforce our troops,
 And in this bed of honors die with fame.
 (xvi. 4-7)

From this rash courage Edward is talked away, and in hiding at the Abbey of Neath, the trials that the recent months have laid on Edward break him momentarily into Richardian self-pity:

...Good father, on thy lap
 Lay I this head, laden with mickle care.
 O, might I never open these eyes again,
 Never again lift up this drooping head,
 O, never more lift up this dying heart!
 (xvii. 39-43)

There is no rest nor peace for the weary king, for at this time his enemies rush in. For all his grief, so far has Edward changed from his original weaknesses of character that he cries to his captor, Leicester:

Here, man, rip up this panting breast of mine,
 And take my heart in rescue of my friends.
 (xvii. 66-67)

Upon his return from Ireland Richard faces a situation which roughly approximates that of Edward, but Richard

demonstrates neither courage nor any degree of consistency in his behavior. The king does not fear to face rebellion, for he believes he has a large Welsh army at his service.

He loudly proclaims:

Not all the water in the rough rude sea
 Can wash the balm of an anointed king;
 The breath of worldly men cannot depose
 The deputy elected by the Lord.
 For every man that Bolingbroke hath press'd
 To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown,
 God for his Richard hath in heavenly pay
 A glorious angel; then, if angels fight,
 Weak men must fall, for Heaven still guards the
 right.

(III. ii. 54-62)

Finding that his arrival is one day too late to arrest the withdrawal of the Welsh, Richard immediately falls to the opposite extreme of his recent assurance and boastfulness.

In his complete despair Richard can only murmur:

But now the blood of twenty thousand men
 Did triumph in my face, and they are fled;
 And, till so much blood thither come again,
 Have I not reason to look pale and dead?
 All souls that will be safe fly from my side,
 For time hath set a blot upon my pride.

(III. ii. 76-81)

Such is Richard's indecisive character that his entire outlook alters at a word. At Aumerle's remonstrance to remember who he is, the king revives. At this new height of emotion he replies to Scroop's announcement that he brings no good news with a speech which mockingly minimizes the seriousness of his weakened position and ends with these words: "The worst is death, and death will have his

day" (III. ii. 104). But Scroop's revelation of the executions of Bushy, Green, and Wiltshire causes Richard's newfound courage to shatter about him, and once more he treads upon the lowest walks of despair. In one of the most striking speeches in the play, Richard begins:

For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the deaths of kings:
(III. ii. 155-156)

At mention of York's power Richard's hopes again sweep into the clouds, only to be crushed with finality by Scroop's heavy tale of York's defection to Henry of Lancaster. Aumerle attempts to resurrect the shattered remains of Richard once more, but Richard is past all help. To Aumerle's plea, "My liege, one word" (III. ii. 215), Richard ironically answers: "He does me double wrong/That wounds me with the flattery of his tongue" (III. ii. 215-216).

Richard has faltered, and, in effect, given up. He passes "From Richard's night to Bolingbroke's fair day" (III. iii. 218). His fall is not far distant. Indeed, the rapidity with which he divests himself of throne and realm is remarkable. In answer to the kneeling Bolingbroke's entreaty, "My gracious lord, I come but for my own" (III. iv. 196), the ruins respond:

Your own is yours, and I am yours, and all.
(III. iv. 197)

Well you deserve: they well deserve to have,
 That know the strong'st and surest way to get.

 What you will have, I'll give, and willing too.
 (III. iv. 200-201, 206)

Richard is completely unwilling to offer even a token opposition to Henry's usurpation. York later reminds Richard in the deposition scene that he is there

To do that office of thine own good will
 Which tired majesty did make thee offer,
 The resignation of thy state and crown
 To Henry Bolingbroke.
 (IV. i. 177-180)

This, Richard admits he is quite willing to do--but not without the full course of his beloved show. Richard is in his deposition scene playing the part of ruined majesty. He mourns:

Alack, why am I sent for to a king,
 Before I have shook off the regal thoughts
 Wherewith I reign'd? I hardly yet have learn'd
 To insinuate, flatter, bow, and bend my knee.
 Give sorrow leave a while to tutor me
 To this submission. Yet I well remember
 The favours of these men. Were they not mine?
 Did they not sometime cry, "All hail!" to me?
 So Judas did to Christ; but He, in twelve,
 Found truth in all but one; I, in twelve thousand,
 none.
 (IV. i. 162-171)

He asks for the crown held by York and dramatizes further:

Give me the crown.--Here, cousin, seize the crown;
 Here cousin,¹²

¹²Another of Shakespeare's realistic little touches lies in the repetition of this line. Bolingbroke, naturally reluctant to perform with Richard, at first had drawn back somewhat. See Craig, An Interpretation of Shakespeare, p. 133.

On this side my hand, and on that side thine.
 Now is this golden crown like a deep well,
 That owes two buckets, filling one another.
 The emptier ever dancing in the air.

(IV. i. 181-186)

Richard's reign is at an end; his life draws rapidly to like conclusion.

How different does this "shadow" of Richard's grief-- as Henry called it (IV. i. 292)--appear in comparison to the captured Edward's simple, unbelieving speech when told he "must go to Killingsworth" (xvii. 81): "'Must!' 'Tis somewhat hard when kings 'must' go" (xvii. 82). Later, he wonders at the enormity of the change that has taken place:

But what are kings, when regiment is gone,
 But perfect shadows in a sunshine day?
 (xviii. 26-27)

Not so willing as Richard is Edward to throw away his crown, to "give ambitious Mortimer my right" (xviii. 53). At the insistence of the rebels he proffers the crown, but takes it back again. Both he and Richard are struck by the enormity of their sin in willingly taking part in their own dethronement, their own rejection of their duty and Heaven-bestowed right. Edward says:

. . . Here receive my crown;
 Receive it? No, these innocent hands of mine
 Shall not be guilty of so foul a crime.
 He of you all that most desires my blood
 And will be called the murtherer of a king,
 Take it.

(xviii. 97-102)

The thought of the first three of Edward's lines is echoed by the dethroned Richard of Bordeaux:

Nay, if I turn mine eyes upon myself,
I find myself a traitor with the rest;
For I have given here my soul's consent
T'undeck the pompous body of a king. . . .
(IV. i. 247-250)

But Richard can live without a crown, and therefore he asks one favor of Henry: "Then give me leave to go" (IV. i. 313). For Edward there is nothing without a crown:

Come, death, and with thy fingers close my eyes,
Or, if I live, let me forget myself.
(xviii. 110-111)

Where is my crown?
Gone, gone! And do I remain alive?
(xxii. 88-89)

In all of the misery wherein Edward feels that "Grief makes me lunatic!" (xviii. 114) he is able to think of others than himself:

Let not that Mortimer protect my son;
More safety is there in a tiger's jaws
(xviii. 115-116)

O Gaveston . . .
For me both thou and both the Spencers died.
(xx. 41-42)

Richard's softer character is evident in his parting visit with his queen: "Join not with grief, fair woman, do not so . . ." (V. i. 16-17). However, this aspect of Richard's nature is still intermingled with his extreme self-consciousness to such an extent that sentiment for him, even in his great misfortune, is not untempered by

some less sympathetic attitude. This feeling of Richard is seen in his speech including these lines:

Tell thou, the lamentable tale of me
And send the hearers weeping to their beds.
(V. i. 44-45)

Even so, the great mental duress forced on Richard and Edward has somehow broadened their perception. Their political understanding has increased to a great degree. Edward has already pleaded that Mortimer not be allowed near the young prince, and Richard, continually badgered by Northumberland, lashes out in a depth of vision not seen in him before:

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 ne'er so little urg'd, another way,
To pluck him headlong from the usurped throne.
(V. i. 55-65)

In this growing perceptive sense, do the ex-kings realize their own faults as rulers, the ones which caused their people to revolt and overthrow them? Certain it is that Edward does not. He laments:

Ah, Leicester, weigh how hardly I can brook
To lose my crown and kingdom without cause. . . .
(xviii. 51-52)

Yet how have I transgressed
Unless it be with too much clemency?
(xviii. 122-123)

A greater awareness has come to Richard. In his cell at Pomfret Castle he briefly chides himself as he listens to the movements of the clock:

And here have I the daintiness of ear
 To check time broke in a disorder'd string;
 But for the concord of my state and time
 Had not an ear to hear my true time broke.
 I wasted time, and now doth Time waste me
 (V. v. 45-50)

Here, too, Richard realizes the full extent of what he has foolishly, almost unbelievably, allowed to be done to him, and such a thought is far from pleasing. Richard, furious at his own ineffectuality, shouts:

I was not made a horse;
 And yet I bear a burden like an ass,
 Spurr'd, gall'd, and tir'd by jouncing Bolingbroke.
 (V. v. 92-94)

Richard is at last coming to that juncture of strength, vision, and forcefulness of mind that in an earlier moment might have saved him. But now the odds against him and the incredible weakness of the position to which he has debased himself are too great to overcome. The refusal of the keeper to taste Richard's food because Pierce of Exton, lately come from Bolingbroke, demands the contrary destroys the last of Richard's weak subservience, and the sometime king thunders:

The devil take Henry of Lancaster and thee!
 Patience is stale and I am weary of it.
 (V. v. 103-104)

The keeper's cries for help draw Pierce and his armed servants into the room to confront a ready and able Richard. Snatching a weapon from one of his assailants, Richard kills him and one other before Pierce cowardly strikes him down. Pierce's words are to be Richard's eulogy. The assassin says of Richard: "As full of valour as of royal blood" (V. iii. 113).¹³

There is a pathetic majesty in Edward's death which vividly contrasts to Richard's warlike fall. Persecuted in mind and body, standing alone in all the world, the enfeebled Edward simply begs of his assassin:

Yet stay awhile; forbear thy bloody hand
 And let me see the stroke before it comes,
 That--and even then when I shall lose my life--
 My mind may be more steadfast on my God.
 (xxii. 73-76)

As Matrevis and Gurney join Lightborn in bending over Edward's weakened and prostrate body for the final blow, Edward's last words are those of a quiet prayer: "Assist me, sweet God, and receive my soul!" (xxii. 107).

¹³Harold Goddard says there was nothing praiseworthy in Richard's manner of opposing death, his reactions being nothing more than the "galvanic twitching of a frog's legs" (p. 159). In the light of Pierce's words, Hardin Craig's interpretation would seem to be closer to Shakespeare's intentions. Craig states: "Thus in the last few seconds of his life Richard II strikes an honest blow in his own defense, and we somehow feel that our belief has been justified, that somewhere in this vain and ineffectual king there was hidden the soul of a man." See An Interpretation of Shakespeare, p. 134.

kept, the waters of which reach to his knees so that he dare not fall asleep, composes a sketch of horror that cannot fail to be repaid with pity.¹⁵ We realize that the inhuman cruelty of his torments, the terror of his death, and his quiet acceptance of his fate mark him truly as one more sinned against than sinning.

Henry Bolingbroke and Roger Mortimer

Each king faces a strong, determined, and implacable foe, an adversary worthy of the title. The taints of villainy that by the ends of the plays mark the names of Mortimer Junior and Henry Bolingbroke are not evident at first, for both are loved by the common people and appear as protectors of their land.

Mortimer, rash and obstinate in attempts to force Edward to recognize his duty, reminds the king that it is concern for the welfare of England which prompts the nobles to oppose Gaveston, and to this end:

Mine uncle here, this earl, and I myself
 Were sworn to your father at his death
 That he should ne'er return into the realm.
 (i. 81-83)

Although the nobles do succeed in forcing Gaveston into exile once again, they soon decide to allow the king the

¹⁵In this scene "Marlowe has given free play to that morbid instinct for cruelty which is the most displeasing feature of his personality." Poirier, p. 183.

return of his minion. For once Gaveston is in England again "How easily might some base slave be suborn'd/To greet his lordship with a poniard" (iv. 264-265). Mortimer hopes in this to reunite the separated king and queen and remove the threat of Piers Gaveston forever:

Know you not Gaveston hath store of gold,
Which may in Ireland purchase him such friends
As he will front the mightiest of us all?
And whereas he shall live and be belov'd,
'Tis hard for us to work his overthrow.

(iv. 254-258)

And therefore, though I plead for his repeal,
'Tis not for his sake, but for our avail;
Nay, for the realm's behoof, and for the king's.

(iv. 241-243)

This which I urge is of a burning zeal
To mend the king and do our country good.

(iv. 256-257)

For all his pains Mortimer is hated by his sovereign. Edward would throw him in the Tower except that "I dare not, for the people love him well" (vi. 230). Time brings to Edward and Mortimer greater enmity and a war in which the nobles, at first successful, are eventually crushed. But Mortimer is able to escape from Edward's prison through the aid of the Duke of Kent, and he flies to France, where better fortune awaits him.

Henry Bolingbroke is initially portrayed even more favorably than Mortimer. Henry comes before the court of Richard only to expose a traitor:

Look, what I speak, my life shall prove it true:
That Mowbray hath receiv'd eight thousand nobles
In name of lendings for your highness' soldiers
The which he hath detain'd for lewd employments,

Like a false traitor and injurious villain.
 Besides I say and will in battle prove

 That all the treasons for these eighteen years
 Complotted and contrived in this land
 Fetch from false Mowbray their first head and spring.
 Further I say and further will maintain

 That he did plot the Duke of Gloucester's death

 And consequently, like a traitor coward,
 Sluic'd out his innocent soul through streams of
 blood:

(I. i. 87-92, 95-98, 100, 102-103)

Bolingbroke's accusations against the Duke of Norfolk consist of three parts: theft, treason, and the murder of Henry's uncle, the Duke of Gloucester. The first two Mowbray evades easily, vindicating himself completely. The third is the charge on which Bolingbroke intends to concentrate, and it is this concentration which Richard fears. Henry's exile leaves the question unsettled until Henry shall return again--and then his skillful manipulation of this question will be evident.

Henry seems greatly wronged when Richard banishes him. But the worried king is hoping desperately in the banishment of the duke to remove a distinct threat to his crown, for Henry Hereford is something more than a novice at the game of politics, and this fact Richard fearfully recognizes when he admits:

Ourself and Bushy, Bagot here and Green
 Observ'd his courtship to the common people;
 How he did seem to dive into their hearts
 With humble and familiar courtesy,

What reverence he did throw away on slaves,
 Wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles
 And patient underbearing of his fortune,
 As 'twere to banish their affects with him.
 Off goes his bonnet to an oyster-wench;
 A brace of draymen bid God speed him well,
 And had the tribute of his supple knee,
 With "Thanks, my countrymen, my loving friends,"
 As were our England in reversion his,
 And he our subjects' next degree in hope.
 (I. iv. 23-36)

The exiling of Bolingbroke settles nothing. The facts of Gloucester's death remain unknown until Henry can return, and then the skillful way in which he used his uncle's death to shake Richard from his throne will become evident.

Less rash and open in his methods than Mortimer, Henry must be recognized as the abler political strategist of the two antagonists. He easily evades the minor obstacle of York, and when the old duke warns him: "Take not, good cousin, further than you should,/Lest you mistake the heavens are o'er our heads" (III. iii. 16-17), Henry humbly answers:

I know it, uncle, and oppose not myself
 Against their will.
 (III. iii. 18-19)

Note the ambiguity of Henry when he states:

Methinks King Richard and myself should meet
 With no less terror than the elements
 Of fire and water,

 Be he the fire, I'll be the yielding water;
 (III. iii. 52-54, 56)

He quickly corrects himself by adding immediately:

The rage be his, whilst on the earth I rain
My waters; on the earth, and not on him:
(III. iii. 59-60)

Henry's "courtship of the common people" has been mentioned before, and it continues even after his ascendancy. York, describing the entrance of the new king into London, observes that Bolingbroke,

Bareheaded, lower than his proud steed's neck,
Bespake them thus: "I thank you, countrymen."
And thus still doing, thus he pass'd along.
(V. ii. 19-21)

One of Henry's first acts as king is to question Bagot about the murder of Gloucester. Bagot accuses Aumerle, the king's own cousin, of the crime, and this charge is supported by several other knights. Threats and gages are hurled across the room in rapid succession. The scene as a whole is comparable to the opening one in the play, in which Richard found himself caught in an unfavorable position between Norfolk and Bolingbroke. Henry, however, does not allow the situation to get out of hand. He determines to postpone the trial of Aumerle¹⁶ until Mowbray can be repealed. When he hears that Norfolk is dead (thereby the case need never be re-resurrected), Henry's exultation bursts forth:

¹⁶An interesting touch here. Henry falls into the usage of the royal "we." See Palmer, p. 160:
"Lords appellants,
Your differences shall all rest under gage
Till we assign you to your days of trial."
(IV. i. 104-106)

Sweet peace conduct his sweet soul to the bosom
Of good old Abraham!

(IV. i. 103-104)

Such a wish seems strange when seen side by side to Henry's charges, threats, and evident malice toward Mowbray in the opening scenes. But Gloucester's murder has by now served the new king's purpose (that of offering a means to attack Richard), and he can well afford to let the matter drop. Aumerle is never brought to trial.

Mortimer never has been a politician of stature equal to Henry's finesse, but he is not completely lacking in this respect. The king's neglect of his duty gives Mortimer cause to say:

Then may we with some color rise in arms;
For, howsoever we have borne it out,
'Tis treason to be up against the king.
So shall we have the people of our side,
Which for his father's sake lean to the king,
But cannot brook a night-grown mushrump, . . .
(iv. 279-285)

Then, too, Mortimer is able to keep his deadly ambitions masked from others' view by posing as the champion of young Prince Edward.

Mortimer is a far more audacious opponent than Henry. He has always felt that his grievances are just and should be allowed. His firm belief in the righteousness of his cause makes him bold. In an early scene he promises that

The name of Mortimer shall fright the king,
Unless he be declined from that base peasant.
(iv. 6-7)

Before the king he openly threatens: "We will not thus be faced and overpeered" (iv. 19).

Bolingbroke differs from Mortimer in a significant way. This is his lack of any sustained intense hatred of the king who has wronged him. Part of his kindnesses toward Richard are mere show, but part are certainly sincere. Thus, as Richard descends to the base court to meet him, Henry, affecting his humility, urges his men to "stand all apart/And show fair duty to his majesty" (III. iii. 87-88). When Northumberland presses Richard, demanding he read the charges against him, Richard refuses, and Henry commands, "Urge it no more, my Lord Northumberland" (IV. i. 271).

But Henry knows that the opportunity for power is his for the taking--and the will for power is strong in him. His thoughts have never been far removed from the crown since he arrived in England to be met by the powerful force of rebellious nobles. Richard is weak; he is merely the one final force to be met, not destroyed, for Bolingbroke to achieve his goal.

This attitude changes after Henry's succession. His statement, echoed by Pierce of Exton--"Have I no friend will rid me of this living fear?" (V. v. 2)--marks not the personal hatred of the new king for the old, but rather the natural nervousness of a political mind, which realizes in

the deposed monarch a future threat. For no one thing so quickly makes a people forget the faults of a ruler as the transgressions of his successor. Henry as king of a troubled state must necessarily displease many--and Richard II, that sweet and lovely rose, is still alive to be recalled to the memory of all who grow to hate Henry IV. Richard alive is a greater threat to Henry's security than Richard dead could ever be. Long before Aumerle gave a hint to the logic behind Henry's reasoning here when he advised Richard,

. . . let's fight with gentle words
Till time lend friends, and friends
their helpful swords.
(III. iii. 131-132)

Such prophecy proves too true for the usurper's comfort when Aumerle, Carlisle, and the Abbot of Westminster form their plot to slay the new king. Henry, then, neither hates nor fears Richard the man, but Richard the symbol is a far different consideration, and in the death of the symbol the various factions favoring Richard are isolated into units without a champion. That such is Henry's true feeling is demonstrated in his welcome to Exton, the murderer of Richard:

Exton, I thank thee not; . . .
Though I did wish him dead,
I hate the murderer, love him murdered.
(V. vi. 39-40)

But Exton has done Henry service. As Pierce says, Richard is now no more than Henry's "buried fear" (V. vi. 31).

As king Bolingbroke has been a mixture of mercy and severity to Richard and his followers.¹⁷ "Oxford, Salisbury, Blunt, and Kent" (V. vi. 8) and other rebels were promptly beheaded, but Aumerle was spared. Spared also was the crusty old Bishop of Carlisle because of the "high sparks of honor" (V. vi. 29) the king had noticed in him.

In contrast, Mortimer intensely hates the person of the king and shows no mercy to any who support him--not even to Edmund of Kent, who aided Mortimer in his escape from the Tower. Of Edward, Mortimer says to Isabella, ". . . let me alone to handle him" (xix. 22). He commands Edward's captors to keep their former king in incessant torment:

Seek all the means thou canst to make him droop,
And neither give him kind word nor good look.

(xix. 53-54)

Let no man comfort him; if he chance to weep,
But amplify his grief with bitter words.

(xix. 63-64)

The fickleness of the commons (so feared by Henry) also alarms Mortimer. And again the reason why a king must die is not so much personal as political:

The King must die or Mortimer goes down;
The commons now begin to pity him.

(xx. 1-2)

¹⁷Dowden, pp. 181-182.

The murder of the king by Mortimer's henchmen backfires on the ambitious lord. The young king, furious at his father's death, approaches a disdainful Mortimer, whose speech reflects his overconfidence:

As for myself, I stand as Jove's huge tree,
And others are but shrubs compared to me.
All tremble at my name, and I fear none.
Let's see who dare impeach me for his death.
(xxiii. 11-14)

Mortimer is soon to see the one who dares. Young Edward III, not base Mortimer, controls the hearts of England. Mortimer, facing death as bravely as he had faced life, goes to his execution by the king's command. Unrepentant, undaunted, he thus departs:

Base fortune, now I see that in thy wheel
There is a point to which when men aspire,
They tumble headlong down. That point I touched,
And seeing there was no place to mount up higher,
Why should I grieve at my declining fall?--
Farewell, fair queen. Weep not for Mortimer,
That scorns the world, and, as a traveler,
Goes to discover countries yet unknown.
(xxiii. 59-67)

Mortimer killed a king; Bolingbroke killed a king-- yet the outcomes of these similar acts were very dissimilar. Mortimer had already fallen from the top of fortune's wheel by allowing Edward III to slip from his control. The reason Mortimer gave for returning to England was to insure the rights of the young Plantagenet; this he did too well. Therefore, Mortimer dies, while Henry, more positively in command of his kingdom, suffers only the

"guilt of conscience" (V. vi. 31) as he views his "buried fear." Mortimer found in the killing of Edward and Edmund that these were not his worst enemies. He had left himself vulnerable to the young king, a force of his own creation. Mortimer's fault was either that he killed one Edward too many or one too few.

Edmund of York and Edmund of Kent

In character and conscientiousness, and occasionally in deed, Edmund Duke of Kent and Edmund Duke of York coincide. Each strives fearlessly and consistently to effect a conclusion that will benefit his country. Placed amid the surroundings of self-seeking, cruel, blind, and incompetent men, these two, in their honesty and devotion to higher ideals, do indeed occupy a unique position.

These men serve as the only links between the rival factions. They are the only figures in the two plays who can see the rights of both sides. Kent is able to see only one side at a time, however; York sees both at once, and this perception complicates his behavior.

Kent, at first a determined supporter of his brother Edward, advises his king to repay the nobles for their opposition thus:

Brother, revenge it, and let these their heads
Preach upon poles, for trespass of their tongues.
(i. 116-117)

Wiser and with a broader vision than his liege, Kent grows amazed at the royal excesses. At the reckless settling of titles on Gaveston he cautions:

Brother, the least of these may well suffice
For one of nobler birth than Gaveston.
(i. 157-158)

and at the maltreatment of the Bishop of Coventry he pleads:

Ah, brother, lay not violent hands on him,
For he'll complain unto the see of Rome!
(i. 188-189)

Edmund is continually rebuked by his brother for his attempts to direct the king's actions. Though he still warns the nobles of their duty to their lord, he comes to realize that Edward's inordinate passion for his minion is nothing short of ruinous folly. In one last attempt to awake the sleeping king he suggests:

My lord, I see your love to Gaveston
Will be the ruin of the realm and you,
For now the wrathful nobles threaten wars,
And therefore, brother, banish him forever.
(vi. 204-207)

When Edward commands instead, "Out of my sight and trouble me no more," Kent leaves to unite with the forces of the rebellious peers.¹⁸

York, uncle to King Richard, is less willing to waste his breath in trying to correct the faults of young bloods

¹⁸Historically, Kent was at this time only six years old. See Poirier, p. 75.

who do not desire his offerings of good advice. He advises the sickened John of Gaunt to forget his desire to give Richard counsel.

Vex not yourself, nor strive not with your breath;
 For all in vain comes counsel to his ear

 Then all too late comes counsel to be heard,
 Where will doth mutiny with wit's regard.
 Direct not him whose way himself will choose:
 'Tis breath thou lack'st, and that breath wilt
 thou lose.

(II. i. 3-4, 27-30)

Already greatly displeased with Richard for his lack of policy, York is completely alienated from his sovereign by Richard's harsh treatment of the dying Gaunt and his immediate seizure of the "royalties and rights of banish'd Hereford" (II. i. 190) when Gaunt dies. Richard's gross misconduct toward the Lancastrians pricks York's "tender patience to those thoughts/Which honor and allegiance cannot think" (II. i. 207-208).

A sufficiently strong threat lies in these words to cause many men to stop and ponder before continuing along the same unaltered course, but it is perhaps the height of Richard's blindness that he ignores this and in turn entrusts his disturbed realm to a man whose loyalty is already strained to the breaking point.¹⁹

¹⁹Craig, Richard II, p. 126.

Cares of office weigh heavily on the aged regent. The arrival of the army of Henry Bolingbroke threatens disaster to Richard's rule:

The nobles they are fled, the commons they are cold,
And will, I fear, revolt on Hereford's side.
(II. ii. 88-89)

Another turbulence storms across his aged shoulders; news of the death of his sister-in-law, the Duchess of Gloucester, follows hard on the heels of information regarding Bolingbroke's return. As York remarks:

God for his mercy! what a tide of woes
Comes rushing on this woeful land at once!
I know not what to do:
(II. ii. 98-100)

York faces an even more difficult choice than does Kent in deciding where his allegiance should lie. He summarizes his problem thus:

Both are my kinsmen:
T'one is my sovereign, whom both my oath
And duty bids defend; t'other again
Is my kinsman, whom the king hath wrong'd
Whom conscience and my kindred bids to right.
(II. ii. 111-115)

The questions facing York and Kent are complex; they do not involve any clear-cut right. Wrongs have been committed by both sides. The question must be decided on the basis of which group of wrongs more nearly deserves to be changed by force of arms into the right. Kent has already joined the rebels. York, weak and ineffectual, cannot oppose his nephew Harry and falls in with the rebels,

though he professes to be "neuter" (II. iii. 159). This is, of course, in itself, treason to Richard, but York has little choice, for he is virtually a prisoner.²⁰

In the revolt against Edward the nobles are at first successful. Warwick and Lancaster scatter the king's army and effect the capture of Gaveston, who is shortly put to death. The war is renewed by a vengeful Edward with redoubled vigor. In the second campaign the king triumphs and summarily orders the execution of those who have opposed him. Edmund's attempts to defend the captured peers cause him again to be banished from his brother's presence. A thoroughly embittered Kent soliloquizes:

Nature, yield to my country's cause in this.
 A brother? No, a butcher of thy friends!

 Unnatural king, to slaughter noble men
 And cherish flatterers.

(ix. 3-4, 8-9)

In France Edmund helps to organize a French army to follow Mortimer and Isabella in yet another attack on Edward. But on their return to England, Kent repents of his opposition to Edward, for he has grown distrustful of Mortimer, Isabella, and their intentions:

Edward, this Mortimer aims at thy life!
 O, fly him, then! But Edmund, calm this rage;

²⁰Ibid., p. 128.

Dissemble, or thou diest, for Mortimer
 And Isabel do kiss while they conspire,²¹
 (xvi. 19-22)

The king is captured by the henchmen of Mortimer, and Kent, convinced that Mortimer and Isabella constitute a greater evil than Edward, determines to rescue his brother from the tortures of his keepers. Failing in his plan, Kent is himself taken prisoner and sentenced to die by the command of Mortimer. In his last moments a much distressed Kent pleads to Mortimer that England must respect the rights of her natural kings:

Art thou King? Must I die at thy command?

 Either my brother or his son is king,
 And none of both then thirst for Edmund's blood.
 (xxi. 102, 105-106)

Although he now rides with the rebels, old Edmund of York appoints himself to be the guardian of Richard's rights. His verbal support of the king is never lacking:

. . . alack the heavy day,
 When such a sacred king should hide his head!
 (III. iii. 8-9)
 . . . alack, alack for woe,
 That any harm should stain so fair a show!
 (III. iii. 70-71)

York warns the peers how they should conduct themselves.

When Northumberland says he uttered "Richard" rather than

²¹Kent serves as a kind of chorus, guiding sympathy for or against Edward. Here occurs the beginning of Marlowe's efforts to arouse sympathy for his king. See Poirier, p. 178.

"King Richard" only to be brief (III. i. 10), York verbally chastises him for the oversight, pointing out:

The time hath been,
 Would you have been so brief with him, he would
 Have been so brief with you, to shorten you,
 For taking so the head, your whole head's length.
(III. iii. 11-14)

At this moment Bolingbroke advises: "Mistake not, uncle, further than you should" (III. iii. 15). To this York snaps: "Take not, good cousin, further than you should, / Lest you mistake the heavens are o'er our heads" (III. iii. 16-17).

York's behavior would appear inconsistent, unless we accept the fact that in all things York is guided by a desire to effect the best results for his country and for all who are involved in England's most tragic times. Thus, he comforts Richard for the loss of his crown by reminding him that it was "tired majesty" (IV. i. 178) which prompted him to give it up--while shortly before he had hailed Bolingbroke in the following manner:

Ascend his throne, descending now from him;
 And long live Henry, fourth of that name!
(IV. i. 111-112)

The Duchess of York continues our sketch of her husband:

My lord, you told me you would tell the rest,
 When weeping made you break the story off,
 Of our two cousins coming into London.
(V. ii. 1-3)

A dozen of them here have ta'en the
sacrament,
And interchangeably set down their hands,
To kill the king at Oxford.

Duchess: He shall be none;
We'll keep him here: then what is that to
him?

York: Away, fond woman! were he twenty times my
son,
I would appeach him.

(V. iii. 95-102)

As always, York is motivated in his deeds by a belief in either the will of Heaven or the most noble values of the earth. England has just passed through an almost bloodless revolution. A recurrence of hostilities could not possibly result in so small an expenditure of English life. He so advises Bolingbroke

If thou do pardon, whosoever pray,
More sins for this forgiveness prosper may.
This fester'd joint cut off, the rest rest sound;
This let alone will all the rest confound.

(V. iii. 83-86)

The Queens

The queens of Richard and Edward have a sufficient number of lines to warrant giving them individual attention. Some few similarities between the queens should be recognized. History records two interesting observations: each is named Isabella; each is French. Dramatically, there is little ground for a comparison. One of the few points in which the queens compare is in their love for Richard and Edward. The love of Richard's queen for her

husband and her sorrow at his fall are genuine. She grows sad at the departure of her "sweet Richard" (II. ii. 9) for Ireland. Hearing of Richard's capture, she rushes to be with him. As the fallen king walks through the London streets to the Tower, she awaits him. She bids her ladies:

But soft, but see, or rather do not see,
 My fair rose wither: yet look up, behold,
 That you in pity may dissolve to dew,
 And wash him fresh again with true-love tears.
 (V. i. 7-10)

She attempts to resurrect the broken Richard, but such is vain. When Northumberland orders Richard's prison changed to Pomfret, she begs of him: "Banish us both, send the king with me" (V. i. 83). Northumberland denies the request, and then she pleads: "Then whither he goes, thither let me go" (V. i. 85).

Isabella's initial protestations of love for Edward must also be considered true. When first we see her, she unhappily speaks of Gaveston's domination of her husband's affections: "For now my lord the king regards me not,/But dotes upon the love of Gaveston" (i. 49-50). Mortimer, offering to remove "that sly inveigling Frenchman" (i. 57) by force of arms, is refused, for Isabella will not suffer Edward to be attacked:

. . . let him stay; for, rather than my lord
 Shall be oppress'd with civil mutinies,
 I will endure a melancholy life,
 And let him frolic with his minion.
 (i. 64-67)

Farewell, sweet Mortimer, and for my sake
 Forbear to levy arms against the king.
 (i. 81-82)

In no way may the distressed queen please her lord;
 her very presence is odious to Edward:

Queen: Whither goes my lord?

Edward: Fawn not on me, French strumpet!

.
 Thou art too familiar with that Mortimer,
 And by thy means is Gaveston exiled.
 But I would wish thee reconcile the lords,
 Or thou shalt ne'er be reconciled to me.

Queen: Your highness knows it lies not in my power.

Edward: Away then! Touch me not.--Come, Gaveston.

.
 Queen: Wherein, my lord, have I deserved these
 words?

Witness the tears that Isabella sheds,
 Witness this heart, that, sighing for thee
 breaks,

How dear my lord is to poor Isabel!

(iv. 144-145, 154-159, 163-166)

Gaveston's false accusations concerning the affection of the queen for Mortimer have been believed by the foolish king. Isabella, then, he thinks, will be able to persuade Mortimer to allow Gaveston to remain in the court as Edward's favorite. The supreme irony of this situation lies in the fact that Gaveston's lies and Edward's belief in them are to force Isabella and Mortimer together, to create a league that will in time slay Gaveston and smash Edward's rule.

If we do, and we should, accept Isabella's lovelorn complaints in the early scenes, we must also admit that

time does change her to the point where we cannot believe her speech concerning Edward's overthrow:

I rue my lord's ill fortune. But, alas,
Care of my country called me to this war!
(xvi. 73-74)

for we have already learned from Kent that she and Mortimer "do kiss while they conspire" (xvi. 22). She openly consents to Edward's death!

The alteration of Isabella's character, horrible as it is, is not without provocation. Even the patience of a queen may wear thin at continued rebuke:

Ay, Mortimer, the miserable queen,
Whose pining heart her inward sighs have blasted,
And body with continual mourning wasted:
These hands are tir'd with haling of my lord
From Gaveston, from wicked Gaveston;
And all in vain; when I speak him fair,
He turns away, and smiles upon his minion.
(viii. 23-29)

She tells the rebels what way Gaveston has fled:

He's gone by water unto Scarborough;
Pursue him quickly, and he cannot scape;
The king hath left him, and his train is small.
(viii. 37-49)

It is no wonder that it is to Mortimer that Isabella turns to find the affection denied her by Edward. Mortimer is young, strong, sympathetic--and he is always near! Together, Isabella and Mortimer strike Edward from his throne, and there is no mercy in their hearts for those who lie defeated before them. When Kent is sent to be beheaded, young Edward, now king, questions her of his

uncle. How ruthlessly she subordinates all pity in her breast: "He is a traitor; think not on him. Come" (xxi. 114).

Each queen is said to have been separated from her husband and rejected from his love because of the presence of the flatterers. Soon after Gaveston's return to Edward's welcoming arms, Isabella laments:

For now my lord the king regards me not
 But dotes upon the love of Gaveston

 And when I come, he frowns, as who should say,
 "Go whither thou wilt, seeing I have Gaveston."
 (ii. 49-50, 53-54)

In Richard II Bolingbroke accuses Bushy and Green of separating Richard and his queen.

You have in manner with your sinful hours
 Made a divorce betwixt his queen and him,
 Broke the possession of a royal bed,
 And stain'd the beauty of a fair queen's cheeks
 With tears drawn from her eyes by your foul wrongs.
 (III. i. 11-14)

Henry, as he did in the opening scene, appears in the pose of Richard's protector, but in retrospect his words here are just another of his hypocrisies. His charge against Bushy and Green is not substantiated by anything else in the play.²² Neither the speeches of the queen with Richard nor her discourses with the flatterers demonstrate that this was her belief. Her relations with Richard seem quite

²²Shakespeare may well have had the story of Edward II in mind at this point.

properly marital, and there is no hint of malice in her long discourses with Bushy, Bagot, and Green in II. ii. On the contrary, Richard charges the rebels with having wronged the royal family by coming between him and his queen. He cries at Northumberland:

Doubly divorc'd! Bad men, you violate
A twofold marriage, 'twixt my crown and me,
And then betwixt me and my married wife.
(V. i. 71-73)

One critic has said of Edward's queen, "Isabel is colorless."²³ This is a misconception--for her character is vividly (if perhaps not carefully) portrayed, and there is often a beauty in her lines which creates some of the most charming and delicate images and comes as close to being lyric as anything else in the play. The sweet sadness in the following emotion-stirred lines is evidence enough.

Would when I left sweet France and was embarked,
That charming Circes, walking on the waves,
Had changed my shape, or at the marriage day
The cup of Hymen had been full of poison,
Or with those arms that twined about my neck
I had been stifled, and not lived to see
The king my lord thus to abandon me!
(iv. 171-177)

The charge of being colorless might be more aptly applied to Richard's queen, for hers is an unfortunate characterization. Shakespeare has done so little for her

²³Henderson, p. 119.

that he did not even bother to grant her a name; she is simply "Queen."

The speeches of the queen are highly contrived things, and she has few good lines in the play. The garden scene does absolutely nothing to improve her portrayal; nor does her parting scene with Richard benefit her characterization very much. It is an odd thing indeed that the finest lines concerning her love for Richard are spoken not by the queen but by her gardener in this brief statement of sympathy:

Here did she fall a tear; here in this place
I'll set a bank of rue, sour herb of grace:
Rue, even for ruth, here shortly shall be seen
In the remembrance of a weeping queen.
(III. iv. 104-107)

To this her final words to her husband hardly can compare:

Give me mine own again; 'twere no good part,
To take on me to keep and kill thy heart,
So, now I have mine own again, be gone,
That I may strive to kill it with a groan.
(V. ii. 97-100)

The Flatterers

The charges against the flatterers in Richard II must necessarily be accepted, though Bushy, Bagot, and Green do not generally appear as villains in any of their own speeches or actions. The accounts of their sins come from Bolingbroke, Gaunt, and York; the flatterers do not betray any ungracious aspects of their characters by any misdeed or cruel word except their unified cry of "Amen" (I. iv. 65)

in response to Richard's vicious wish that he might arrive at Ely House to find Gaunt dead.

Bushy exhibits a very kind and sympathetic regard for his queen. His consideration of her feelings clashes sharply with Gaveston's innuendo and denunciations of Isabella in Edward II and with Holinshed's portrayal of Bushy as "an exceedingly cruell man, ambitious, and covetous beyond measure."²⁴ Bushy speaks to the queen, sorrowing over Richard's departure for Ireland, with words of courtesy and intended comfort:

Madam, your majesty is too much sad.
 You promis'd, when you parted with the King,
 To lay aside life-harming heaviness
 And entertain a cheerful disposition.
(II. ii. 1-4)

As the power of Bolingbroke nears, the three flatterers consider the vulnerability of their positions. Their closeness to Richard is dangerous; the king will drag them down with him as he sinks:

Green: . . . our nearness to the king in love
 Is near the hate of those love not the king.
 Bagot: And that's the wavering commons: for their
 love
 Lies in their purses; and whoso empties them,
 By so much fills their hearts with deadly
 hate.
 Bushy: Wherein the king stands generally condemn'd.
 Bagot: If judgment lie in them, then so do we,
 Because we ever have been near the king.
(II. ii. 127-134)

²⁴Nicoll and Nicoll, p. 51.

The aroused commons, long victimized by Richard's harsh taxation, are a distinct threat to all who side with Richard. Bushy warns:

. . . little office
Will the hateful commons perform for us,
Except like curs to tear us all to pieces.
(II. ii. 137-139)

Some little touches of sympathy may even be felt for the flatterers, for Bagot's lovely lines are "big with fate":

Farewell: if heart's presages be not vain,
We three here part that ne'er shall meet again.
(II. ii. 142-143)

Green, even as he flees for his own life, lets fall a word of commiseration for York, vainly trying to hold together Richard's shattered kingdom:

Alas, poor duke! the task he undertakes
Is numbering sands, and drinking oceans dry:
(II. ii. 145-146)

Gaveston's attitude toward Edward's queen is openly and completely contemptuous. When Isabella begs of the husband who has spurned her: "On whom but on my husband should I fawn?" (iv. 146), Gaveston answers with the sneering innuendo:

On Mortimer, with whom, ungentle queen--
I say no more. Judge you²⁵ the rest my lord.
(iv. 147-148)

²⁵Note the polite, respectful insolence of Gaveston. Though Isabella attacks him with a "thou," he replies to her with the polite form of the pronoun, "you."

To her shout of "Villain, 'tis thou that robb'st me of my lord!" (iv. 160), he replies by mocking, "Madam, 'tis you that rob me of my lord" (iv. 161).

His viciousness and cunning come into view when he plots Mortimer's death: "Why, then, we'll have him privily made away" (vi. 231).

The character of Gaveston is admirably expanded by the few brief lines in which we learn that Gaveston is loved by someone other than the immature King of England.

Gloucester's daughter reads the Frenchman's letter and is overjoyed:

The grief for his exile was not so much
As is the joy of his returning home.
This letter came from my sweet Gaveston.
What needs thou, love, thus to excuse thyself?
I know thou couldst not come and visit me.
(v. 56-60)

The other flatterers, Baldock and Spencer, openly plan their rise:

Baldock: Spencer, seeing that our lord th' Earl of
Gloucester's dead,
Which of the nobles dost thou mean to
serve?
Spencer: Not Mortimer, nor any of his side,
Because the king and he are enemies.
Baldock, learn this of me, a factious lord
Shall hardly do himself good, much less us;
But he that hath the favor of a king
May with one word advance us while we live.
The liberal Earl of Cornwall is the man
On whose good fortune Spencer's hopes
depend.

(v. 1-10)

Both Spencer and Baldock are introduced to Edward by Cornwall (Gaveston), and after the death of the Frenchman they become the new favorites of the king.

Spencer's father also comes to the court:

I come in person to your majesty,
Spencer, the father of Hugh Spencer there,
Bound to your highness everlastingly,
For favors done in him, unto us all.

It is an interesting aspect of Edward's character that, although each of the flatterers begins his relationship to the king with a touch of policy, he has the ability to inspire love and affection in the flatterers. All stand by him till their deaths.²⁶ Gaveston, believing he would be taken prisoner unto the king, rejoiced, "Sweet sovereign, yet I come/To see thee ere I die" (ix. 91-92). The elder Spencer faces death bravely as a defender of Edward's rights. His parting words to his insolent executioners are:

Rebel is he that fights against his prince;
So fought not they that fought in Edward's right.
(xvi. 80-81)

Captured with Edward at the Abbey of Neath, Baldock thus takes his leave of the prince whom he shall never see again in this world:

My lord, it is in vain to grieve or storm.
Here humbly of your grace we take our leaves;
(xvii. 76-77)

²⁶Mills, pp. 27-28.

And as Edward of Carnarvon is led away an anguished Spencer cries:

O, is he gone? Is noble Edward gone?
 Parted from hence, never to see no more?
 Rent sphere of heaven, and fire, forsake thy orb!
 Earth melt to air! Gone is my sovereign,
 Gone, gone, alas, never to make return.
 (xvii. 99-103)

Bushy and Green also die bravely. Bushy snaps back at Henry, the self-made judge and jury who has sentenced him to die:

More welcome is the stroke of death to me
 Than Bolingbroke to England. Lords, farewell.
 (III. i. 31-32)

Nor is Green broken or overawed by the threat of death; he states:

My comfort is that heaven will take our souls
 And plague injustice with the pains of hell.
 (III. i. 33-34)

The Assassins

The assassins, Pierce of Exton in Richard II and Lightborn, Matrevis, and Gurney in Edward II, compare only in deed, not in character. Pierce's murder of Richard is an irrational act, committed in a moment when Exton rashly jumps to carry out the bidding of the suggestive words of his king. In contrast, Lightborn is a cold, calculating professional in the art of killing, and Gurney and Matrevis have long been occupied in filling Edward's last days with misery and torment.

Pierce's one swift blow fails to convey the horror that the elaborate and terrifying scheme of Lightborn does when the ugly, black-garbed villain and his two helpers hover over the prone body of the enfeebled ex-monarch, lying helplessly in majestic expectation of his death.

Only to Lightborn is there satisfaction, and to no one is there reward in the deeds of infamy. A sorrowful Exton cries: "O, would the deed were good!" (V. v. 115). To this compare Matrevis's regretful: "I would it were undone!" (xxxiii. 2). Lightborn, however, manifests obvious pride in his skillful destruction of a man, "Tell me, sirs, was it not bravely done?" (xxii. 114). His joy is brief, for he is immediately slain by the treacherous Gurney.

Lightborn dies; Gurney flees; Matrevis and Pierce can show no advantage for having damned their names. Exton receives from Henry this brief blessing:

Exton, I thank thee not . . .

With Cain go wander through the shades of night.
(V. vi. 34, 43)

Matrevis's final bequest from Mortimer is comparable: "Fly to the savages" (xxiii. 9).

CHAPTER VI

POLITICS AND RELIGION

Long ago August Wilhelm Schegel asserted that Shakespeare's history plays provide "examples of the political course of the world, applicable to all times."¹

To the Elizabethan audience, much more so than to the modern reader, the fact that Richard II and Edward II were primarily political histories would be readily apparent. It is probably true that the political significance of Shakespeare's study would be more easily seen than Marlowe's, for Richard II moves immediately to the matters in question and concentrates more clearly upon them than does Edward II. Certain it is that Marlowe moves immediately to his contest between king and nobles, but their differences often seem to hinge on nothing more than disagreement concerning the character and worth of Piers Gaveston. The main issues, then, seem to shift and blur as the story of Edward progresses. This is not the case in Richard II. Again and again the same arguments return to the foreground (where the opening scene initially laid

¹August Wilhelm Schegel, Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, translated by John Black (London, 1913), pp. 419 ff.

them) as Gaunt and York, Henry and his rebels, Richard, Aumerle, and Carlisle voice their respective tenets.

The religious aspects of both plays are so closely allied to the political as to be inseparable. The "divine right of kings" theory and Edward's high-handed methods of dealing with the church are integral parts of the larger political questions.

Most scholars today feel that Shakespeare's political concepts were quite orthodox. In their opinion Shakespeare knew that Richard's offenses never amounted to tyranny; hence, outright rebellion against the king was a crime.² In support of this contention the modern historian Hilaire Belloc condemns the dethronement of Richard as a "sacrilege," and T. S. Eliot agrees that in Elizabethan times Richard was looked upon as a royal martyr.³

The fact that such opinions as these were shared by the Elizabethan world is shown in John Hayward's History of Henry IV, published in 1599. In this account the Archbishop of Canterbury urges Bolingbroke to return to England from his exile in France, and for Henry's benefit the clergyman cites various precedents for the deposition of a king. The context of the work manifests Hayward's

²Tillyard, p. 261.

³J. D. Wilson, King Richard II, p. xvii.

tidings" (l. 71), and he sympathizes genuinely with the queen in her sorrow:⁵

Pardon me, madam. Little joy have I
To breathe this news, yet what I say is true:
(III. iv. 81-82)

This entire scene, in fact, is an elaborate political allegory. Wiltshire, Bushy, and Green represent the weeds which Richard, the bad gardener, failed to uproot, but which Henry, the new caretaker of the garden of the commonwealth, has promptly and efficiently destroyed.⁶

Richard is made to appear in direct contrast to Henry, and Richard suffers from such juxtaposition. In the first scene the king bids Bolingbroke and Mowbray to cease their bickerings, but he cannot enforce his demands. A dual exile of the combatants is the only solution Richard can decide upon to rid himself of the incendiaries, and such a decision settles nothing--in fact, the folly of it is soon to topple Richard's throne. Later in the play Bolingbroke faces a situation that is almost precisely similar to that which Richard could not handle. Bagot and Aumerle once once more raise the question of Gloucester's death. Again harsh words, threats, challenges, and gages fly back and forth before the throne. But Henry, as desirous to see

⁵Ibid., p. 250.

⁶Ibid.

the matter drop as Richard had been, easily dismisses the whole affair:⁷

Lords appellants,
Your differences shall all rest under gage
Till we assign you to your days of trial.
(IV. i. 104-106)

Nothing further is ever heard of the matter. Henry never assigns their "days of trial."

By a certain unwritten law of necessity, then, does Bolingbroke's treachery receive what justification it enjoys. England needs such a king as Henry IV, a man of strength, courage, and wisdom, as the head of state. The era of the blind, poetic folly of the actor-king is over forever.

The theory in opposition to Henry's law of necessity is that of "the divine right of kings," the assertion that a king on earth is but the embassy of the King of Heaven. Richard, firmly believing that the king can do no wrong, feels quite secure in his position as the Lord's minister. The threat of rebellion does not cause him to tremble because for every man Bolingbroke can raise to bring against the king

God for his Richard hath in heavenly pay
A glorious angel: then, if angels fight,
Weak men must fall, for heaven still guards the
right.

(III. ii. 60-62)

⁷Palmer, p. 160.

Such metaphysical defenses of Richard's character are repeated again and again by several figures in the play. Gaunt cannot fulfill the Duchess of Gloucester's desire for revenge of Woodstock's death because

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

York, admitting that he knows Richard caused the decapitating of Woodstock (II. ii. 102), still cannot bring himself to oppose God's emissary--even when the great opportunity offers itself. Instead of joining the rebels he threatens them:

. . . if I could, by Him that gave me life,
I would attach you all and make you stoop
Unto the sovereign mercy of the king.
(II. ii. 155-157)

Bolingbroke, Northumberland, and their compeers are in their political rebellion violating the order established under the sanctity and will of Heaven, and when Henry says, "In God's name I'll ascend the regal throne" (IV. i. 113), the blasphemy is more than the Bishop of Carlisle can bear:

Marry, God forbid!

.
And shall the figure of God's majesty,
His captain, steward, deputy elect,
Anointed, crowned, planted many years,
Be judg'd by subject and inferior breath,
And he himself not present? O, forbend it, God,
That in a Christian climate souls refin'd
Should show so heinous, black, obscene a deed!

I speak to subjects, and a subject speaks,
 Stirr'd up by God, thus boldly for his king.
 My lord of Hereford here, whom you call king,
 Is a foul traitor to proud Hereford's king;
 And if you crown him, let me prophesy,
 The blood of English shall manure the ground,
 And future ages groan for this foul act:
 (IV. i. 114, 125-128)

To the modern reader the political issues of Edward II are probably dimmed by the personal ones, but they are present, nonetheless. Marlowe tells his audience that a ruler must rule with strength, justice, and an awareness of both the power and needs of his subjects.⁸ The assertion in Edward II that a sovereign must observe justice is a consideration not found in earlier Marlovian plays. The basic awareness of the fact that the nobles and even the commoners are political forces of prime importance is yet another new element.⁹ The theme of a king's relation to his nobles is one of the principal political themes in Edward II. After Edward's brief reconciliation with the barons, Isabella delivers this important piece of didacticism:¹⁰

Now is the king of England rich and strong,
 Having the love of his renowned peers.

⁸Ribner, "Marlowe's Edward II," pp. 251-252.

⁹Paul Kocher, Christopher Marlowe (Chapel Hill, 1940), p. 285.

¹⁰Ribner, "Marlowe's Edward II," pp. 251-252.

Edward does not rule justly, however--his refusal to ransom the elder Mortimer, captured by the enemy while serving his king, emphasizes this point.¹¹ Young Mortimer states, "Who should defray the money but the king,/Seeing he is taken prisoner in his wars?" (vi. 116-117). Lancaster later reminds Edward: "Twas in your wars; you should ransom him" (vi. 140). Edward, however, refuses to do his duty in this matter. He merely offers the nobles a seal to allow them to collect revenue throughout the realm. This petty procedure is an insult which Lancaster cannot bear; he cries: "Your minion Gaveston hath taught you this" (vi. 145). And on Lancaster's heels an angry Mortimer threatens:

My lord, the family of the Mortimers
 Are not so poor but, would they sell their land,
 Would levy men enough to anger you.
 We never beg but use such prayers as these.
(iv. 146-149)

The use of Edward's seal to raise the ransom money is a form of begging which the honor of the Mortimers cannot stand, and Edward's offer of the emblem is an insult to all his nobles. Rash, foolish Edward is soon to reap his whirlwind.

Edward, unlike Richard, neither has nor desires the support of the Church. Gaveston's hatred of the Bishop

¹¹Ibid., p. 251.

of Coventry causes the king to order his men to attack the Bishop:

Throw off his golden miter, rend his stole,
And in the channel christen him anew.
(i. 186-187)

The Archbishop of Canterbury is properly outraged at Edward's rash acts and promptly informs the pope of their magnitude. The Archbishop joins with the opposition against Gaveston and threatens Edward:

Remember how the bishop was abused!
Either banish him that was the cause thereof,
Or I will presently discharge these lords
Of duty and allegiance due to thee.
(iv. 59-62)

Edward submits: "The legate of the pope will be obeyed" (iv. 64). But when the rebels withdraw and leave the frustrated king alone, he vents his pent-up anger:

Why should a king be subject to a priest?
Proud Rome, that hatchest such imperial grooms,
For these thy superstitions taper lights,
Wherewith thy antichristian churches blaze.
I'll fire thy crazed buildings, and enforce
The papal towers to kiss the ground!
With slaughtered priests may Tiber's channel swell,
And banks raised higher with their sepulchers!
As for the peers that back the clergy thus,
If I be king, not one of them shall live.
(iv. 96-105)

In these various political and religious aspects probably lie the true meanings of the plays. Here exist all the implications--religious, political, and thereby social--which Shakespeare and Marlowe desired to impress upon the minds of their audiences.

Berdan, for instance, positively declares the purpose of Edward II to have been political. In his opinion Marlowe was serving in the employ of the Scots, and Edward II actually discussed the contemporary scene in Scotland--the play being designed to demonstrate that the faults of James VI, potential ruler of England at Elizabeth's passing, were above the common people or the nobles. Marlowe was showing the results of the sin which strikes a land that permits opposition to and deposition of its ruling king.¹²

Una M. Ellis-Fermor suggests that Edward II completed the group including The Massacre at Paris, the first part of The Contention betwixt the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster, and The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York. These plays she regards as studies in statecraft, kingship, and Machiavellian policy. Marlowe, once in sympathy with Italianate doctrines, outgrew them by the time of the writing of this finish to the tetralogy:¹³

Edward II, the play that completes this group, indicates, by its sympathetic analysis of a figure who was the helpless prey of those intrigues, his rising certainty that there was a world elsewhere as significant, if not more significant, than that

¹²John M. Berdan, "Marlowe's Edward II," Philological Quarterly, III (July, 1924), 197 ff.

¹³L. J. Mills, "The Meaning of Edward II," Modern Philology, XXXII (August, 1934), 11.

of "policy," and that more of the true nature of man was revealed in it.¹⁴

Quite different opinions are those voiced by F. P. Wilson and L. J. Mills. Wilson argues that Marlowe does not feel the sacredness of royalty, that the tragedy is in the main a personal one--without wider repercussions. He feels that the play exhibits ambition, hatred, envy, lust, and the corruption of men and women in power or in the search of power.¹⁵

Mills believes that Marlowe's many dramatic omissions from Holinshed and the modifications of historic materials manifest that the purpose of the play was not political. It rather deals with the single elemental passion of the king for the friendship of Gaveston and the Spencers.

In general, then, Marlowe omits from, rearranges, and adds to his source materials in such a way as to center attention upon the relationship between Edward and Gaveston and between Edward and the Spencers, and upon the results of that relationship.¹⁶

Much evidence may be cited to support this argument. The play begins with Gaveston reading these lines from Edward's hand:

. . . come, Gaveston,
And share the kingdom with thy dearest friend.
(i. 1-2)¹⁷

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 11-12.

¹⁵F. P. Wilson, Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare (Oxford, 1953), p. 102.

¹⁶Mills, p. 14.

¹⁷Ibid.

When the king and his favorite first meet again, Edward's greeting is one of great warmth:

Embrace me, Gaveston, as I do thee.
 Why shouldst thou kneel? Knowest thou not who I am?
 Thy friend, thy self, another Gaveston.
 Not Hylas was more mourned of Hercules,
 Than thou hast been of me since thy exile.
(i. 141-145)¹⁸

Edward calls Gaveston "my friend" (l. 148), "sweet friend" (ll. 161, 406, 434), "my dearest Gaveston" (l. 367), "my Gaveston" (l. 373), "him I love" (l. 398), and "sweet Gaveston" (l. 402).¹⁹ He defends Gaveston "Because he loves me more than all the world" (iv. 77), and he declares vengeance on the nobles "for the murder of my dearest friend" (l. 1513). Similarly "sweet Spencer" appears in ll. 1908, 1931, and 1946,²⁰ and Edward's affection for him is evident. Both the Spencers and Gaveston are included in Edward's mournful realization of the causes of the deaths of his friends:

O Gaveston, it is for thee that I am wronged!
 For me, both thou and both the Spencers died.
(xx. 41-42)

In spite of the disagreements of Mills and Wilson, it is hard to deny that Edward II is a political play. The only voice raised against extending this designation to

¹⁸Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

include Richard II is Stopford Brooke's,²¹ and his arguments are inconclusive.

Didacticism is quite evident in both plays. Although neither Richard nor Edward is a criminal in the sense that Richard III was a criminal, their neglect of duty is proved inexcusable. Both Marlowe and Shakespeare clearly show that a ruler must always fulfill his responsibilities to his kingdom. Wanton irresponsibility in the highest office of the land is a crime which neither gods nor men may allow.

²¹Stopford Brooke, p. 75.

CHAPTER VII

THE LANGUAGE OF THE PLAYS

Poetry

The language of Edward II and Richard II contrasts greatly. Marlowe has unexpectedly suppressed his natural lyric talents, and the mighty ardor and luxurious language of Tamburlaine becomes the inheritance of Richard II rather than Edward II. Marlowe's subordination of poetic fancy allows the swiftly moving action of his play to flow unmolested. His change of styles permits the flashing cut and thrust of his speech to speed the action along. His sentences are short and clear, the dialogue quick, often consisting of sharp retorts approaching stichomythia. His verse is also converted to dramatic purposes. The percentage of lines of less than five feet is higher, lines with feminine endings lower than in his earlier works--accounted for in part by the poet's desire for terse, rapid-fire dialogue.¹

Such a desire is not a part of Shakespeare's plans for his lyrical drama. Here, the speeches are long, the imagery abundant. Shakespeare, in his extended lyricism,

¹Poirier, p. 190.

has achieved a great degree of contrast by using both a common and a rhetorical style to offset each other. Richard, Gaunt, Mowbray, and the Queen usually speak in the more ornate style. Bolingbroke, Northumberland, and Aumerle speak in a simpler, more direct idiom. Their plainer language and less fanciful imagery have the effect of portraying them as more practical men than Richard and Gaunt. Such a contrast of style is evident also in Richard's speeches. His more prosaic lines accent the fact that he is often merely playing the part of a king. Such is the case when he says, "Now mark me, how I will undo myself" (IV. i. 203) and "I had forgot myself; am I not a king?" (III. ii. 83) before he launches forth into his rhapsodical reveries.² With his natural artistic insight Shakespeare may have determined that the character of Richard, "being itself sentimental, fantastic, and fluent, was best represented by the fluid, hurrying, rhyming measures he used."³

Many individual lines and brief passages in Richard II stand out for their quality of beauty or sententiousness:

Comfort's in heaven; and we are on the earth,
(II. ii. 78)

²Craig, Richard II, p. xv.

³Stopford Brooke, p. 72.

The purest treasure mortal times afford
Is spotless reputation.

(I. i. 177-178)

Here is Bolingbroke's recognition of the awesome power of kings:

How long a time lies in one little word!
Four lagging winters and four wanton springs
End in a word: such is the breath of kings.

(I. iii. 213-215)

And here is Richard's parting from his queen:

I am sworn brother, sweet,
To grim necessity, and he and I
Will keep a league till death.

(V. i. 20-22)

Even so, Shakespeare's poetry has serious faults.

Derek Traversi complains of the all too frequent "deliberate and strained lyricism"⁴ of the opening scene.

Hazleton Spencer's criticism is more explicit:

Except in the monologues of the stricken hero, the verse is seldom distinguished. It is not pedestrian; but its elevation is secured, not by the development in flashing metaphor of an idea or a passion, but by labored accumulation of too obviously "poetic" diction. Save for a few lines like "This precious stone set in the silver sea," even John of Gaunt's famous speech (II. i. 31-68) is built up rhetorical brick by brick, not poured out in Shakespeare's best tumultuous style⁵

⁴Derek Traversi, Shakespeare from Richard II to Henry V (Stanford, California, 1957), p. 17.

⁵Spencer, The Art and Life of William Shakespeare, p. 175. In connection with this see the findings of William McAvoy, "Form in Richard II," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, LIV (July, 1953), 355-356. In regard of Shakespeare's classical learning McAvoy states that Gaunt's speech follows the rules set by Athonius's Progymnasmata and the school of Lovichius for the praising of a city or town.

E. M. W. Tillyard, noting that Richard II is the most ceremonial of Shakespeare's histories, states that the language is also that of ceremony--it is highly stylized and not vibrantly alive. Richard's departure from his loving and beloved queen is an "exchange of frigidly ingenious couplets."⁶ It is the language of ceremony, not that of passion or true affection with which Richard and Isabella take their leave of one another:⁷

Richard: Go, count thy way with sighs; I mine with
groans.
Queen: So longest way shall have the longest
moans.
Richard: Twice for one step I'll groan, the way
being short,
And piece the way out with a heavy heart.
(V. ii. 89-92)

The same effect occurs when the Duchess of York kneels before Henry to plead for her son's life. Her words are nothing more than mere "formal antiphony."⁸ Wherever real emotions arise, Shakespeare avoids a natural presentation and resorts to conventional conceits.

In Edward II the individual line is generally much less notable than in Richard II. The few lines that are of particular value in themselves are generally ones of reflective rather than emotional appeal.⁹

⁶Tillyard, p. 246.

⁷Ibid., pp. 246-247.

⁸Ibid.

⁹C. F. Tucker Brooke, "Marlowe's Versification and Style," Studies in Philology, XIX (April, 1922), 199-200.

diction of Edward II is never strained in its attempts to create a forceful medium for dramatic expression. Marlowe's blank verse flows swiftly, powerfully, and beautifully in the following lines:

This tottered ensign of my ancestors,
Which swept the desert shore of that dead sea
Whereof we got the name of Mortimer,
Will I advance upon this castle walls.
(vii. 22-25)

Proud Rome that hatchest such imperial grooms,
For these thy superstitious taper lights,
Wherewith thy antichristian churches blaze,
I'll fire thy crazed buildings, and enforce
The papal towers to kiss the lowly ground!
With slaughtered priests may Tiber's channel
swell,
And banks raised higher with their sepulchers!
(iv. 97-103)

But then, in the murder scene the imagery departs. The dialogue is spare and grim, for the speech is not that of proud Mortimer or of excitable Edward--these are the laconic voices of practiced murderers.¹²

Lightborn: See that in the next room I have a fire,
And get me a spit, and let it be red hot.
Matrevis: Very well.
Gurney: Need you anything else besides?
Lightborn: What else? a table and a featherbed.
Gurney: That's all?
Lightborn: Ay, ay; so, when I call you, bring it in.
(xxi. 29-34)

Shakespeare's blank verse also serves him well. The speeches beginning "Not all the water in the rough rude sea" (III. ii. 54-62) and "Northumberland, thou ladder" (V. i. 55-68) amply demonstrate the power and beauty at his

¹²Henderson, pp. 124-125.

command. But Shakespeare frequently chose to inject rhymed couplets into his verse, and the change in tone that rhyme causes is often considerable and often detrimental. Rime is not an unconscious development in language,¹³ and it would have been far more beneficial to the strength of his verse if Shakespeare had not concentrated on the use of it so often as he did. In consideration of this criticism, let us consider certain passages in the opening scene:

Now, Thomas Mowbray, do I turn to thee,
 And mark my greeting well; for what I speak
 My body shall make good upon this earth,
 Or my divine soul answer it in Heaven.
 Thou art a traitor and a miscreant,
 Too good to be so and too bad to live
(I. i. 35-40)

These lines of blank verse constitute a good beginning, but Shakespeare immediately lessens their effect with the following piece of logic:

Since the more fair and crystal is the sky,
 The uglier seem the clouds that in it fly.
(I. i. 41-42)

The rime and the image are both unfortunate. The couplet cannot possibly be read to maintain the high dramatic point established by lines 35-40. Having now worked rime into Bolingbroke's speech for the first time, Shakespeare must needs follow it with two more couplets. The first of these is also inappropriate, but the latter reads well and

¹³Craig, Richard II, p. x.

constitutes a rather effective conclusion to the speech:

Once more, the more to aggravate the note,
With a foul traitor's name stuff I thy throat;
And wish, so please my sovereign, ere I move,
What my tongue speaks my right drawn sword may
prove.

(I. i. 43-46)

And thus the language of the scene proceeds--with rime interrupting a finer usage of blank verse. Note the last four lines in this passage. They are the most ridiculous in the play, ruining what has begun as a good speech:

Wrath-kindled gentlemen, be rul'd by me;
Let's purge this choler without letting blood.
This we prescribe though no physician;
Deep malice makes too deep incision.
Forget, forgive; conclude and be agreed;
Our doctors say this is no month to bleed.

(I. i. 152-157)¹⁴

Rime is not, of course, always synonymous with dramatic ineffectiveness. Notice the triplet at the end of this delivery by Henry; the rime destroys nothing of the strength built up in the preceding lines of blank verse:

Further I say, and further will maintain
Upon his bad life to make all this good,
That he did plot the Duke of Gloucester's death
.
And consequently, like a traitor coward,
Sluic'd out his innocent soul through streams of blood;

¹⁴The question arises as to whether the almost ludicrous effect of these lines is intentional. Certain it is that Richard is now very flustered; but this speech begins well, and his next lines are quite adequate. I doubt that Shakespeare was intentionally trying to advance the characterization of Richard with these lines.

Which blood like sacrificing Abel's cries,
 Even from the tongueless caverns of the earth,
 To me for justice and rough chastisement,
 And by the glorious worth of my descent,
 This arm shall do it, or this life be spent.
 (I. i. 98-100, 102-108)¹⁵

Edward II does not lack rhyme, but this device is always subordinate. When it does occur, it sometimes marks either the ending of a speech, as here:

Yet, gentle monks, for treasure, gold nor fee,
 Do you betray us and our company.
 (xvii. 24-25)

or the ending of a scene, as here:

Madam, along, and you, my lord, with me,
 That England's peers may Hainault's welcome see.
 (xiii. 81-82)

Otherwise, rhyme is used only for emphasis or excitement and in periods of deep emotion:

As for myself I stand as Jove's huge tree,
 And others are but shrubs compared to me.
 (xxiii. 11-12)

Would . . .
 I had been stifled and not lived to see
 The king my lord thus to abandon me!
 (iv. 176-177)

That like a mountain overwhelms my bliss
 In which extreme my mind here murdered is.
 (xviii. 54-55)

Considering how few rhymes appear in Edward II, it is interesting to note how often one line of a couplet ends a speech and the other begins a new.

¹⁵Any quarrel with the poet's taste in this passage would not stem from his rime, but from his "bad"- "good" word-play in l. 99. This is the second time he has tried the same punning effect in this serious scene, the first being only a few lines before (l. 40).

Leicester: Imagine . . .
 . . . that you lay for pleasure here a
 space,
 Not of compulsion or necessity.
 Edward: Leicester, if gentle words might comfort
 me,
 Thy speeches long ago had eased my sorrows.
 (xvii. 2-6)
 Queen: Villain, 'tis thou that robb'st me of my
 lord!
 Gaveston: Madam, 'tis you that rob me of my lord.
 (iv. 160-161)

Here the effect is consciously made, for Gaveston is intentionally mocking the queen. In connection with this, it is surprising to see how often the rhyme consists of the same word. One example has been seen above; there are others:

I must entreat him, I must speak him fair,
 And be a means to call home Gaveston.
 And yet he'll ever dote on Gaveston
 And so am I forever miserable.

(iv. 184-185)

Edward: And therefore tell me, wherefore art thou
 come?
 Lightborn: To rid thee of thy life--Matrevis, come!
 (xxii. 104-105)

At one emphatic point a couplet is affected to tie neatly together Baldock's sententious little thought:

Reduce we all our lessons unto this:
 To die, sweet Spencer, therefor live we all;
 Spencer, all live to die, and rise to fall.
 (xvii. 110-111)¹⁶

¹⁶These lines are quite in keeping with the character of Baldock. The "smooth-tongued scholar" (xvi. 65) has always made either a jest or a maxim out of life. Why should he change now?

There is only one extended rhyme in the play. This is the quotation of the insolent jig sung by the victorious Scots after the battle of Bannocksbourn:

Maids of England, sore may you mourn
 For your lemans you have lost at Bannocksbourn.
 With a heave and a ho!
 What, weeneth the King of England
 So soon to have won Scotland?
 With a rombelow!

(vi. 186-191)

A close study of the language of the two history plays reveals several very interesting similarities. One irregularity which seems to have enjoyed general acceptance in Elizabethan versecraft is the introduction of extra-metrical words. An otherwise complete line of blank verse may be extended by the addition of a vocative or other phrase of direct address or occasionally even by an exclamatory adverb without having the meter be regarded as faulty. Several examples occur in Edward II:¹⁷

No, but wash / your face / and shave / away / your
 beard.

(xx. 31)

No, unless / thou bring / me news / of Ed/ward's
 death.

(xi. 46)

Lords, Sith that / we are / by suf/ferance / of
 heaven

(xiv. 17)

In the same way we find in Richard II:

¹⁷Tucker Brooke, "Marlowe's Versification and Style," pp. 194-195.

Gentlemen, will you / go mus/ter men? / If I / know
 (II. ii. 108)
 I'll dispose / of you, Gentlemen, go mus/ter up /
 your men.
 (II. ii. 116)

Occasionally, after a pause or in connection with a particularly emphatic word, one syllable is omitted:¹⁸

Here, here: / (x) now / sweet God / of heaven
 (xviii. 107)
 And none / but we / shall know / (x) where / he
 lieth
 (xviii. 41)

The same metrical variation occurs in Richard II.

Not so: (x) e/ven through / the hol/low eyes / of
 death
 (II. i. 270)
 Your grace / mistakes: / (x) on/ly to / be brief
 (III. iii. 10)

There are a number of passages in the two plays which display a striking verbal affinity. A pun on the word "convey," used in the sense of "to carry away secretly" in addition to its meaning of "to transport," is one of these. Edward orders the Bishop of Coventry to be taken to prison: "Convey this priest to the Tower" (i. 199). "True, true," answers the bishop (i. 200). Henry responds to Richard's expressed desire to be allowed to leave by commanding: "Go, some of you convey him to the Tower" (IV. i. 316). A shocked Richard cries in answer, "O, good! Convey! Conveyers are you all, / That rise thus nimbly by a true king's fall" (IV. i. 317-318).

¹⁸Ibid., p. 194.

An interesting parallel exists in the proposed cures for the misfortunes of Bolingbroke and Edward. Gaunt advises his exiled son:

Teach thy necessity to reason thus

 Think not the king did banish thee,
 But thou the king

 Look, what thy soul holds dear, imagine it
 To lie that way thou goest, not whence thou com'st.
 (I. iv. 277, 279-280, 286-287)

Leicester attempts to cheer Edward in the same way:

Imagine Killingworth Castle were your court,
 And that you lay for pleasure here a space,
 Not of compulsion or necessity.
 (xviii. 2-4)

"Imagine," they both advise. Imagination is to be the means to allay the heartfelt hurts of "necessity." The proposed solution is not acceptable. Bolingbroke cries:

O, no! The apprehension of the good
 Gives but the greater feeling to the worse.
 Fell sorrow's tooth doth never rankle more
 Than when he bites, but lanceth not the sore.
 (I. iv. 300-303)

Edward's reply shows similar disbelief in the medicinal charm of the imagination:

Leicester, if gentle words might comfort me,
 Thy speeches long ago had eased my sorrow
 (xvii. 5-6)

The lion image in connection with the person of a king is frequent in both dramas. This usage is responsible for one of the most striking verbal parallels in the two plays. Edward continues his above speech by stating:

But, when the imperial lion's flesh is gored,
 He rends and tears it with his wrathful paw,
 (And,) highly scorning that the lowly earth
 Should drink his blood, mounts up into the air.
 (xvii. 11-14)

Richard's queen chides her husband in this manner:

The lion dying thrusteth forth his paw,
 And wounds the earth, if nothing else, with rage
 To be o'erpower'd
 (V. i. 29-31)

The similarities here are great. The speeches occur in situations that coincide closely. The parallels of the lion furious in his pain and the wrathful destructiveness of his paw are too great to pass unnoticed.

Another interesting comparison between Edward II and Richard II involves a comment on Italian fashions, and the comment is noteworthy for it doubtless denotes the general feeling of the English toward the Italians. York, in advising Gaunt not to waste his breath in offering Richard counsel, laments that Richard's ears are filled with sounds of praise and flattery:

Lascivious metres, to whose venom sound
 The open ear of youth doth always listen;
 Report of fashions in proud Italy,
 Whose manners still our tardy apish nation
 Limp after in base imitation:
 (II. i. 19-23)

One of the reasons why Mortimer hates Gaveston is the flatterer's self-flattery:

I have not seen a dapper Jack so brisk:
 He wears a short Italian hooded cloak,

Larded with pearl, and in his Tuscan cap
 A jewel of more value than the crown.
 (iv. 412-415)

The Italianate fashions are connected with the foolish Richard and the detestable French flatterer--as though they are things no true English heart would be associated with.

Edward realizes the power of the nobles and agrees to their demands by persuading himself that "It boots me not to threat; I must speak fair" (iv. 63). Aumerle also considers his opposition carefully; and when Richard asks if he should "send/Defiance to the traitor" (III. iii. 129-130), Aumerle answers, "No, good my lord; let's fight with gentle words . . ." (III. iii. 131).

The captured Lancaster, facing death from Edward's vengeance, says:

The worst is death, and better die to live
 Than live in infamy under such a king.
 (xi. 242-243)

Richard, greeting Scroop's announcement that he bears bad news, says:

The worst is death, and death will have his day.
 (III. ii. 103)

Several other verbal parallels should not be overlooked. Compare Edward's farewell to Gaveston, "Therefore, with dumb embracement, let us part" (iv. 134), with Richard's goodbye to his queen: "One kiss shall stop our mouths, and dumbly part . . ." (V. i. 95).

The tremors of guilt that the kings felt in consenting to their own depositions are greatly similar. Each feels that he would be a traitor if he took willing part in the deposing of himself, a legitimate, divinely-appointed king.

Edward says:

. . . . No, these innocent hands of mine
Shall not be guilty of so foul a crime.
(xviii. 98-99)

And Richard, having with his own hands removed his crown, declares:

. . . if I turn mine eyes upon myself,
I find myself a traitor with the rest;
(IV. i. 247-248)

When Northumberland approaches Flint Castle to speak with Richard on Bolingbroke's behalf, he does not bow; and Richard admonishes him for the oversight:

. . . how dare thy joints forget
To pay their awful duty to our presence?
(III. iii. 75-76)

In Edward II the angry nobles also refuse to bow, and Edward, speaking to Lancaster, threatens to "hew those knees that now are grown so stiff" (i. 94)--"so stiff" that they will not bend in obeisance to their sovereign.

After Richard's deposition, Northumberland presses the ex-king to sign a record of his crimes. Richard ignores him. Northumberland starts to repeat his demand, but Richard cuts him off:

Northumberland: My lord--
 Richard: No lord of thine, thou haught
 insulting man.
 (IV. i. 253-254)

In Edward II Bishop Berkeley enters to speak to the
 deposed Edward and immediately arouses his fury:

Bishop: My lord--
 Edward: Call me not lord. Away--out of my sight.
 (xviii. 111-112)

Northumberland, tongue-lashed by York for not placing
 Richard's title before his name, answers:

Your grace mistakes: only to be brief
 Left I his title out.
 (III. iii. 10-11)

The same Bishop Berkeley replies to Edward's fear that
 Mortimer will usurp his crown:

Your grace mistakes; it is for England's good
 And princely Edward's right we crave the crown.
 (xviii. 38-39)

In the very first scene Richard declares:

We were not born to sue, but to command,
 Which since we cannot
 (I. i. 196)

Richard's grandfather, young Edward III, also has problems
 of command. He begs his mother to stop Mortimer from kill-
 ing Kent, and she says she dares not speak. The child-king
 states:

Nor I, and yet methinks I should command;
 But seeing I cannot
 (xxi. 94-95)

These numerous verbal parallels are extremely interesting. Even considering the similarities of the incidents forming the dramas, these likenesses may not be dismissed as coincidence. Shakespeare was familiar with Edward II, appreciated several of Marlowe's passages, and used them in his own play a short time later.

Imagery

Imagery has the ability to enhance and deepen the symbolic meaning of that which occurs on the stage. In many early plays images arise because certain situations required them or because they aid in emphasizing certain themes.¹⁹ Similarly, Shakespeare's early word play is often mere undisciplined wit,²⁰ but in Richard II imagery becomes the characteristic mode of expression for the king.²¹ To a lesser extent it marks the speech of other characters. In Richard II, then, Shakespeare's imagery may be responsible for the "great unity of tone and feeling" which exists in the play.²² Language has now become

¹⁹W. H. Clemen, The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1951), p. 54.

²⁰Richard D. Altick, "Symphonic Imagery in Richard II," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LXII (June, 1947), 340.

²¹Clemen, p. 54.

²²Altick, p. 339.

allied to structure and has been converted to the "higher purpose of poetic unity."²³

Doubtless, the dominant image in Richard II is that which compares the nation to a garden. Almost an entire scene (III. iv) is devoted to the presentation of it. Here, the gardener regrets that Richard had not cared for the garden of the commonwealth as well as the gardener cared for his tiny plot of ground. For Richard has allowed weeds to spring up in his land to choke her fairest flowers to death,²⁴ and it is these weeds that Bolingbroke has "sworn to weed and pluck away" (II. iii. 167).

The image continues. Richard is the "fair rose" (V. i. 8)²⁵ which has been plucked by Bolingbroke. Richard warns Northumberland that he, who knows how to "plant" (V. i. 63) usurping kings, must be watchful of Henry, who fears the duke might "pluck" (V. i. 65) him also from the throne.

A slight but interesting variation of this pattern occurs in the Duchess of York's greeting to her son:

²³Ibid., p. 340.

²⁴For a more complete discussion of this imagery see the preceding chapter.

²⁵Just as a king was supreme among men, or the lion among beasts in the Elizabethan idea of cosmic order--so was the rose supreme among flowers. And Richard the king, sometimes referred to as the lion, therefore equals Richard the rose. See Tillyard, pp. 15-16.

". . . who are the violets now/That strew the green lap of the new-come spring?" (V. ii. 46-47). Henry Bolingbroke has become that season of the year which engenders whole new gardens in the commonwealth of England.

Other leading images are earth-ground-land, blood, pallor, sun, tears, tongue-speech-word, snake-venom, physical injury and illness, blot, washing, sweet-sour, generation, and jewel-crown.²⁶

Of all these verbal motifs the most unusual are probably Shakespeare's leading metaphors of unpleasantness, the use of the word "sour" and the contrapuntal contrast of sourness and sweetness. The frequent usage of "sweet" in relation to both persons and things is, of course, a conventional epithet; "but the word, however commonplace the specific phrases in which it occurs, is decidedly not commonplace, for it acts as a foil for the very unaccustomed use of its antonym."²⁷ Such phrases as "sweet Richard" (II. ii. 9), "your sweet majesty" (II. ii. 20), "sweet York, sweet husband" (V. ii. 107), are as conventional as anything in Shakespeare. Scarcely more remarkable is such a usage as this:

And yet your fair discourse hath been as sugar,
Making the hard way sweet and delectable.
(II. iii. 6-7)

²⁶ Altick, p. 355.

²⁷ Ibid.

The play is notable also for the persistent usage of "sour" as either a verb or adjective:

Not Gloucester's death, nor Hereford's banishment
Nor Gaunt's rebukes, nor England's private wrongs
.
Have ever made me sour my patient cheek.

(II. i. 165-166, 169)

The grand conspirator, Abbot of Westminster
With clog of conscience and sour melancholy
Hath yielded up his body to the grave.

(V. vi. 19-21)

Several times various motifs are joined: "I'll set a bank of rue, sour herb of grace" (III. iv. 105). Here the mention of "sour" is united with the motif of "tears," for the gardener plants the herbs for the "weeping queen" (III. iv. 107). In the next quotation "sour" is used in connection with "washing":³⁰

Though some of you with Pilate wash your hands,
Showing an outward pity; yet you Pilates
Have here deliver'd me to my sour cross,
And water cannot wash away your sin.

(IV. i. 239-242)

"Washing" is itself a persistent motif. Though Richard says blood cannot be washed away, that is the image Bolingbroke clings to:

. . . yet, to wash your blood
From off my hands, here in the view of men
I will unfold some causes of your deaths.

(III. i. 5-7)

I'll make a voyage to the Holy Land,
To wash this blood from off my guilty hand.

(V. vi. 49-50)

³⁰Ibid., p. 354.

"a mockery king of snow,/Standing before the sun of Bolingbroke" (IV. i. 261).

The fact that imagery is an integral part of Richard II may be seen clearly. The references to the sun are correlated to Richard's personal fortunes. Prosaically, the king is deposed, banished, killed. Poetically, his brightness is dimmed, for he passes "From Richard's night to Bolingbroke's fair day" (III. ii. 218).³⁴

Marlowe's imagery (though not so varied) in much the same way as Shakespeare's reflects certain dominant themes. The motifs most often repeated seem to be friend-love,³⁵ dissemble-deceit-policy, and blood-heads-swords.

The immediate beginnings of the troubles which are to crush Edward are occasioned by the nobles' wish that he "shake off smooth dissembling flatterers" (xi. 169), men such as the Spencers and Gaveston, who think it not amiss "to speak men fair" (i. 41), to flatter them, "and make them live in hope" (i. 42).

But Mortimer and the other lords deceitfully trick Edward into recalling Gaveston that they might murder him. Their true purpose becoming known to the king, Edward wonders of those who owe him their allegiance:

³⁴Samuel Kliger, "The Sun Imagery in Richard II," Studies in Philology, VI (April, 1948), 197.

³⁵This motif has been discussed more fully in the preceding chapter.

Can you in words make show of amity,
 And in your shields display your rancorous minds?
 (vi. 32-33)

In the war which follows Kent attempts to join the rebels, but the crafty old Lancaster is wary of his offers of assistance:

I fear me you are sent of policy,
 To undermine us with a show of love.
 (vii. 5-6)

Immediately Warwick echoes the same thought:

He is your brother, therefore have we cause
 To cast the worst, and doubt of your revolt.
 (vii. 7-8)

Yet Warwick will soon fatally err through "policy." In betraying the agreement made by his own compatriots to allow Gaveston to see Edward once more, he makes the mistake that eventually will cost the life of each rebel lord. But it is his intention that Gaveston and the king would never be reunited--not "If Warwick's wit and policy prevail" (ix. 93).

And Kent soon comes to regret having supported the cause of Mortimer. He fears that Mortimer and Isabella will put Edward to death. In regard to Edward, Isabella cannot be trusted. She and Mortimer too often embrace for her to love Edward still--"And yet she bears a face of love forsooth" (xvi. 23). And Edmund, himself too near the bloody hand of Mortimer, must needs take time to speak

silently unto himself: "Dissemble, or thou diest" (xvi. 20).

In hiding at the Abbey of Neath, a despondent and fearful Edward, realizing that he has been destroyed by "false Isabel" (xviii. 17), says to the Abbot whom he longs to be able to trust: "Father, thy face should harbor no deceit" (xvii. 407). Again the shaken king begs:

Yet, gentle monks, for treasure, gold, nor fee
Do you betray us and our company.

Dissimulation and treachery follow Edward to his doom. To Lightborn, who protests his innocence of any evil design on Edward's life, the weakened king but murmurs: "What means thou to dissemble with me thus?" (xxii. 78).

Mortimer joys in the effectiveness of dissimulation, and compliments the queen for hers when she sends a ring to Edward as witness of her love:³⁶

Finely dissembled! Do so still sweet queen.
Here comes the young prince with the Earl of Kent.
(xix. 72-73)

Nor is Mortimer slow to applaud himself for the ease with which he has won his way by skillfully tricking others:³⁷

They thrust upon me the protectorship,
And sue to me for that that I desire.
While at the council table, grave enough,

³⁶Poirier, p. 189.

³⁷Ibid. Holinshed says "The queene would send vnto him courteous and louing letters with apparell and other such things." See Bakeless, p. 22.

And not unlike a bashful Puritan,
 First I complain of imbecility,
 Saying it is onus quam gravissimum,³⁸
 Till, being interrupted by my friends,
Suscepi that provinciam,³⁹ as they term it;
 And, to conclude, I am protector now.
 (xxi. 56-64)

Mortimer's policy is decidedly that of the Machiavel. In this same passage he cherishes the fact that "Feared am I more than loved" (xxi. 52). Policy demands the king's death, for the "commons now begin to pity him" (xxi. 2). Even when it seems he might act freely, he moves with great caution. His instructions to his own hirelings are written in ambiguous Latin, and the assassin is immediately despatched after he has served his purpose.⁴⁰

References to the motif of blood-heads-sword are too numerous to mention, but the fact that the words of this theme touch the lives of almost every figure might be pointed out. No major character in this play can escape the ominous presence of the sword. Edward's terrible threats of vengeance and Mortimer's bloody designs have already been seen. Isabella reproaches Edward, the mis-governed king:

Whose looseness hath betrayed thy land to spoil,
 And made the channels overflow with blood.
 (xiv. 11-12)

³⁸A very heavy burden.

³⁹I have undertaken that office.

⁴⁰Poirier, p. 189.

Now, she proposes to correct her husband's faults:

. . . a heavy case
 When force to force is knit, and sword and glaive
 In civil broils makes kin and countrymen
 Slaughter themselves in others, and their sides
 With their own weapons gored!

(xv. 4-8)

Well-meaning Kent once advises Edward to repay the barons for their effrontery with death:

Brother revenge it, and let these their heads
 Preach upon poles, for trespass of their tongues.
 (1. 117-118)

Later, Kent's own head is forfeit to the law of Roger Mortimer.

Baldock will even force a pun against the heads of the captured nobles:

These barons lay their heads on blocks together.
 What they intend, the hangman frustrates clean.
 (xi. 273-274)

The first kingly act of Edward III is to send Mortimer to the block. After sending Isabella from him, suspecting that she too "spilt my father's blood" (xxiii), the young king, holding up Mortimer's head, speaks to his father's memory:

Sweet father, here unto thy murdered ghost
 I offer up this wicked traitor's head;
 And let these tears, distilling from mine eyes,
 Be witness of my grief and innocency.
 (xxiii. 99-102)

The repetition of the words of this motif and the recognition of Mortimer's Machiavellianism suggest the

belief that in a comparison of Edward II and Richard II, it is a far grimmer world into which Marlowe carries us.⁴¹

Even with a language far more subdued than his usual style, Marlowe's imagery contains countless classical allusions. In the opening lines Gaveston, reading Edward's letter, states that such welcome news

Might have enforced me to have swum from France,
And, like Leander, gasped upon the sand.
(i. 7-8)

He hurries to join Edward, for

The sight of London to my exiled eyes
Is as Elysium to a new come soul.
(i. 11-12)

And when they meet, Edward's warm greeting contains this allusion:

Not Hylas was more mourned of Hercules
Than thou hast been of me since thy exile.

A touch reminiscent of Tamburlaine occurs in Gaveston's reply:

It shall suffice me to enjoy your love,
Which, whiles I have, I think myself as great
As Caesar riding in the Roman street,
With captive kings at his triumphant car.
(i. 170-173)

Many of the classical images are quite charming in their way. The following passage contains some of the most delicate in the play:

Would when I left sweet France and was embarked,
That charming Circes, walking on the waves,

⁴¹F. P. Wilson, p. 94.

Had changed my shape, or at the marriage day
 The cup of Hymen had been full of poison,
 Or with those arms that twined about my neck
 I had been stifled and not lived to see
 The king my lord thus to abandon me!

(iv. 171-177)

The image is swift, direct, and cutting in Lancaster's
 curse of Gaveston:

Monster of men,
 That, like the Greekish strumpet,⁴² trained to arms
 And bloody wars so many valiant knights
 (ix. 14-16)

The effect is one of terror in Edward's scream:

Let Pluto's bells ring out my fatal knell,
 And hags howl for my death at Charon's shore
 (xvii. 88-89)

Imagery manifests the nemesis which overtakes the
 Mortimer who has presumed too much, stepped too far:

As for myself, I stand as Jove's huge tree,
 And others are but shrubs compared to me.
 All tremble at my name, and I fear none.
 Let's see who dare impeach me for his death!
 (xxiii. 10-13)

Spurgeon states that Marlowe "seems more familiar with
 the starry courts of heaven than with the green fields of
 earth, and he loves rather to watch the movements of
 meteors and planets than to study the faces of men."⁴³
 This assertion is probably less true of Edward II than of
 any other Marlovian effort. As she herself has pointed

⁴²Helen of Troy.

⁴³Caroline Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery and What It
 Tells Us (New York, 1935), p. 13.

out, only four times in Marlowe are images drawn directly from the surging life of Elizabethan England, and three of these are in Edward II: "a bashful Puritan" (l. 2390), "curate-like" attire (l. 769), and "a dapper jack" or young dandy (l. 709).⁴⁴ This characteristic of Marlowe is in direct contrast to Shakespeare, whose work contains innumerable images drawn from daily life. Spurgeon has overlooked one example in Edward II that should be mentioned. This is Spencer's humorous description of the way "not" to raise one's position in the world:

Then, Baldock, you must cast the scholar off,
 And learn to court it like a gentleman.
 'Tis not a black coat and a little band,
 A velvet-caped coat, faced before with serge,
 And smelling to a nosegay all the day,
 Or holding of a napkin in your hand,
 Or saying a long grace at a table's end,
 Or making low legs to a nobleman,
 Or looking downward with your eyelids close,
 And saying, "Truly, an't may please your honor,"
 Can get you any favor with great men.
 You must be proud, bold, pleasant, resolute,
 And now and then stab, as occasion serves.
 (v. 30-42)

Humor

Both Richard II and Edward II are unexpectedly devoid of that general Elizabethan complement to tragic seriousness--humor. The distinct lack of comical elements in the two plays definitely runs counter to the Elizabethan

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 35-36.

tradition. Nothing in either play can be construed as even approaching a comic subplot, but a few faint efforts at humor are evident--though the question as to whether they were so intended by the dramatists is perhaps a valid one in several cases.

In Edward II religious satire of a sort is explicit in the actions by which the Catholic Bishop of Coventry is to be christened afresh in the foul waters of the gutters and his residence confiscated because "What should a priest do with so fair a house?" (i. 205).⁴⁵ Nor is it altogether missing in Baldock's masterly affectation of exterior holiness "though inwardly licentious enough" (v. 49). This statement was perhaps recognized by Marlowe's alert audience as a slurring libel on the Puritan type.⁴⁶ These, however, are incidentals. The principal humor of the play is not of the religious type, nor is it even political. It exists in the personal sarcastic invectives exchanged by the snarling packs of royalists and rebels.⁴⁷

Marlowe's previous delight in the purely verbal quibble had been replaced by 1591 with the ironic pun and the bitter, scornful twists of meaning which are the particular characteristics of Edward II. What humor there

⁴⁵Kocher, p. 289.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid.

is in this play is not of a kind calculated to soften the impact of the tragic plot. It rather serves to strengthen the impression that it is the actions of a harsh people in a harsh world with which Marlowe is dealing.⁴⁸ The sarcasm of the nobles as they speak to Edward of Gaveston is the best example of the peculiar Marlovian irony in Edward II:

Warwick: All Warwickshire will love him for my
sake.

Lancaster: And northward Gaveston hath many friends!
(i. 128-129)

At times this macabre sense of humor develops into Marlowe's terrible "death's head jesting." Edward, after conquering the rebellious barons, taunts them ferociously: "Methinks you hang the heads;/But we'll advance them, traitors" (xi. 222-223). The word "advance" is given the double meaning of "promote" and "nail high" after execution.⁴⁹ Similarly Baldock jokes,

These barons lay their heads on blocks together.
What they intend, the hangman frustrates clean.
(xi. 274-275)

Here the pun on "lay heads together" means both "plot" and "suffer simultaneous beheading."⁵⁰

The contemptuous self-amusement which both Gaveston and Mortimer enjoy in soliloquies does not alter this general tone in the humor of the play. Mortimer, scornful

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 292.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 290.

⁵⁰Ibid.

of those deceived by his garb of humility, exults in the consciousness of his Machiavellian powers:

They thrust upon me the protectorship,
 And sue to me for that that I desire.
 While at the council-table, grave enough,
 And not unlike a bashful puritan,
 First I complain of imbecility,
 Saying it is onus quam gravissimum;
 Till, being interrupted by my friends,
Suscepi that provinciam as they term it; . . .
 (xxi. 56-63)

The belief that he will achieve his desires by assuming a Puritan-like aspect and by pleading incompetence elates Mortimer, for these are complete misrepresentations of what he knows himself really to be. The solemnity of the Latin legal terms adds a comic catalyst to the speech.⁵¹

One of the finest moments of humor in the play occurs when the queen entreats the nobles to repeal Gaveston.

Lancaster and Warwick answer her:

Lancaster: For his repeal? Madam, he comes not back,
 Unless the sea cast up his shipwreck body.
 Warwick: And to behold so sweet a sight as that,
 There's none here but would run his horse
 to death.
 (iv. 204-207)

Kocher has not chosen to refer to the one scene in Edward II that is in large part pure, carefree banter. This is scene v (part of which was printed in the section on imagery). In this scene Baldock and Spencer discuss the possibility of their rise in fortune. Baldock responds

⁵¹Ibid., p. 291.

to Spencer's advice concerning how he should act by saying:

Spencer, thou knowest I hate such formal
toys,
And use them but of mere hypocrisy.
Mine old lord whiles he lived was so precise
That he would take exceptions at my buttons,
And, being like pen's heads, blame me for
the bigness,
Which made me curatelike in mine attire,
Though inwardly licentious enough
And apt for any kind of villainy.
I am none of those common pedants, I,
That cannot speak without propterea quod.
Spencer: But one of those that saith quando quidem,
And hath a special gift to form a verb.
Baldock: Leave off this jesting: here my lady comes,
(v. 43-55)

The revelation of Aumerle's hypocrisy may be noted as the first instance of humor in Richard II.⁵² Aumerle protests that the only tears he shed at Bolingbroke's departure were formed because the wind

blew bitterly against our faces,
Awaked the sleeping rheum, and so by chance
Did grace our hollow parting with a tear.
(I. iv. 7-9)

We may well envision Richard and his small core of professional miscreants expressing appreciation of Aumerle's wit--and the advance of the audience's understanding of the subtleties of Richard's maneuverings would be much furthered thereby.

⁵²Tillyard, pp. 260-261.

In the scene (V. iii) in which Percy tells of Prince Hal and his dissolute companions, brief flashes of humor appear, particularly when Percy relates Hal's words regarding the announcement of the tournament to be held at Oxford.

His answer was he would unto the stews,
 And from the common'st creature pluck a glove,
 And wear it as a favour, and with that
 He would unhorse the lustiest challenger.
 (V. iii. 16-19)

What humor there is between the above references in the first and fifth acts is due to the venerable old character of York. The purest effort at humor in the whole play occurs in York's speech as the troubles of the realm begin to pile up around his head:

I would to God,
 So my untruth had not provoked him to it,
 The king had cut off my head with my brother's.
 (II. iii. 100-102)

York's first greeting to the returned Henry: "Tut! Tut! Grace me no grace, nor uncle me no uncle" doubtless extracts from the modern reader a smile, which perhaps the rest of York's speech on this occasion sustains. York's later request that Bolingbroke pardon Aumerle in French by saying "pardonne moi" (V. iii. 119) provides an instance of humor in a scene which is surprisingly light for the emotions considered to be running through it. The rhymed couplets which begin with the entrance of the Duchess of York to

plead for Rutland's life doubtless increase the mocking, half-serious tone of the scene. Henry himself immediately augers: "Our scene is altered from a serious thing,/And now changed to 'The Beggar and the King':"--and Bolingbroke's judgment is so accurate that no one has cared to refute it.

CHAPTER VIII

CONSTRUCTION AND DRAMATIC ART

In his volume William Shakespeare, E. K. Chambers stated that Shakespeare was still under the influence of Marlowe in the handling of the history play at the time of the writing of Richard II.¹ Although many critics look askance at any mention of Marlowe's influence on Shakespeare, there is probably some truth in this supposition.² At the same time there was also a conscious effort on the part of Shakespeare to write a history play that differed considerably from Edward II, already staged and received by the London public with acclamation. Shakespeare embodied all the tragic quality of his play in the person of his king.³ In this innovation and in the substitution of a single well-defined conflict between Richard and Bolingbroke for the constantly changing bickerings of Edward II lie the special merits of Shakespeare's play.⁴ This single conflict dominates the stage throughout

¹E. K. Chambers, William Shakespeare, Vol. I (Oxford, 1930), p. 351. Cf. Bakeless, pp. 241-245.

²Poirier, p. 191.

³Craig, An Interpretation of Shakespeare, p. 125.

⁴Tucker Brooke, The Tudor Drama, p. 327.

the drama, and this fact helps create the great unity of Richard II.

Edward II also displays a close-knit unity of structure--due to the predominance of Edward and Mortimer. They clash in the first scene, and to this clash everything else is related.⁵

Shakespeare's play covers a historical period of less than two years, from April 29, 1398, to January, 1400.⁶ Condensation of material is not as pressing a problem as usual, and the result is one of the best unified of the chronicle plays.⁷ Marlowe, however, deals with the history of England from 1307 to 1330,⁸ and reduction of his voluminous sources was not an easy task. Marlowe has, however, done an admirable job of condensing and arranging this material. The conflict between Edward and the rebels might have degenerated into a series of episodic clashes. By a skillful use of foreshadowing to interconnect the various scenes of the long struggle and to suggest a continuance of the conflict every time it seems near an end,

⁵Bakeless, p. 4. Cf. Poirier, p. 177.

⁶Hazleton Spencer, The Art and Life of William Shakespeare (New York, 1940), p. 177. Hudson, p. xxi, says March, 1400.

⁷Spencer, The Art and Life of William Shakespeare, p. 177.

⁸Henderson, pp. 117-118.

Marlowe has obviated this danger. Before Gaveston returns from Ireland, we know the nobles plan to kill him; before Gaveston dies, we know that Edward's dependence on Spencer will keep the rebellion alive; before Mortimer escapes from prison, we know that Isabella is in France trying to stir up more trouble.⁹

It can hardly be denied that the conflict of Edward and Mortimer involves more business, more action than that of Richard and Henry. Shakespeare's progression moves in sudden starts and stops; the pace in Marlowe is never allowed to flag.¹⁰

Marlowe's use of the queen to suggest the recall of Gaveston is a stroke of genius. This activity marks Isabella as a sympathetic character by displaying her womanly and wifely forgiveness, but at the same time it exhibits her influence over Roger Mortimer. Dramatically effective, their whisperings apart from the other nobles remove the necessity of presenting the same arguments for the repeal of Gaveston twice and raise questions concerning the actual relationship of the queen to Mortimer.¹¹

⁹Poirier, p. 176.

¹⁰A. H. Bullen, editor, The Works of Christopher Marlowe (London, 1884), p. xliv.

¹¹Bakeless, p. 13. Cf. Poirier, p. 178.

The staging of the war is quite commendable. The audience sees the results of battles, not the battles themselves. The play does not leave itself open to comments such as Sidney's ironic: "Two Armies flie in, represented with foure swords & bucklers, and then what hard hart will not receive it for a pitched field?"¹²

Shakespeare's play contains several naturalistic little touches so delicate that they are almost imperceptible. For instance, as the tumults of the realm descend on York's shoulders, he says to Isabella: "Come, sister (cousin I would say), pray pardon me" (II. ii. 105). York has just received news of the death of his sister, the Duchess of Gloucester, and his troubled mind is thinking of her as he speaks to his "cousin," the queen.

Shakespeare's use of Northumberland as the visual embodiment of Bolingbroke's innermost ambitions is certainly a dramatic stroke of fantastic merit--and there is hardly any effort in Marlowe to equal it. Northumberland is a much more important character in the play than has ever been realized, for by his indirection we find out Henry's direction. When Northumberland announces to Bolingbroke,

¹²Poirier, p. 177.

The news is very fair and good, my lord:
 Richard not far from hence hath hid his head.
 (III. iii. 5-6)

York lashes back at him:

It would beseem the Lord Northumberland
 To say "King Richard"; alack the heavy day
 When such a sacred king should hide his head.
 (III. iii. 7-9)

Northumberland protests: "Your grace mistakes; only to be brief, left I his title out" (III. iii. 10). There we may let the matter drop for the moment, but we shall keep it in mind. Later, when Bolingbroke sends Northumberland before Richard, the king sharply reprimands the aggressive duke:

We are amaz'd, and thus long have we stood
 To watch the fearful bending of thy knee,
 Because we thought ourself thy lawful king:
 And if we be, how dare thy joints forget
 To pay their awful duty to our presence?
 (III. iii. 72-76)

Does it not seem strange in a play which is so full of ceremony and conscious building up of formal, stylized speeches and actions as Richard II that Northumberland, coming before Richard to plead for the favor of that proud, self-conscious man, should neglect to bow before his liege lord and king? Two mistakes of Northumberland, then, enable us to see through the guile of Henry Bolingbroke.

But these moments are not the only ones in which we have known Northumberland. Recall Richard's exit after the

death of old Gaunt. Three nobles, Northumberland, Ross, and Willoughby, are left alone on the stage, and Northumberland is the first to speak:

North: Well, lords, the Duke of Lancaster is dead.
 Ross: And living too; for now his son is duke.
 Will: Barely in title, not in revenues.
 (II. i. 224-226)

Willoughby's chance words of commiseration give Northumberland the opening he has been looking for. Notice how he provokes the others further. Their answers are almost demanded by his innuendo:

North: Richly in both, if justice had her right.
 Ross: My heart is great; but it must break with
 silence. . . .
 North:
 North: Nay; speak thy mind,
 (II. i. 226-227, 229)

But Ross fails to respond adequately:

No good at all that I can do for him;
 Unless you call it good to pity him,
 Bereft and gelded of his patrimony.
 (II. i. 235-237)

and Northumberland must incite the other peers once more:

Now, afore God, 'tis shame such wrongs are borne
 (II. i. 238)

He lists several of Richard's offenses, and this time Ross and Willoughby rise to the bait. The talk swings to the treasury; Northumberland keeps it there:

Wars hath not wasted it, for warr'd he hath not,
 But basely yielded upon compromise
 (II. i. 252-253)

Ross and Willoughby respond angrily:

Ross: The Earl of Wiltshire hath the realm in farm.
 Will: The king's grown bankrupt like a broken man.
 (II. i. 256-257)

Northumberland fuels their rising fever:

But lords, we hear this fearful tempest sing,
 Yet seek no shelter to avoid the storm;
 We see the wind sit sore upon our sails,
 And yet we strike not, but securely perish.
 (II. i. 263-266)

But Northumberland has said the wrong thing; he has impressed Ross not with desire to correct Richard's wrongs, but with a sense of the futility of it all. Ross almost ruins Northumberland's whole purpose:

We see the very wreck that we must suffer;
 And unavowed is the danger now,
 For suffering so the causes of our wreck.
 (II. i. 267-269)

How quickly Northumberland must have blurted out,

Not so: even through the hollow eyes of death
 I spy life peering,
 (II. i. 270-271)

Then, he needs must grow secretive again:

but I dare not say
 How near the tidings of our comfort is.
 (II. i. 271-272)

The point of no return has finally (gratefully for Northumberland) been reached. Now, Ross and Willoughby will not let him recede. The words Northumberland has longed to hear are these:

Will: Nay, let us share thy thoughts, as thou dost
 ours.
 Ross: Be confident to speak, Northumberland:

We three are but thyself, and, speaking so,
Thy words are but as thoughts; therefore be
bold.

(II. i. 273-276)

Northumberland would be happy to--and does. The time for feeling out his subjects is over. He tells them that Henry Hereford is on his way back to England with "eight tall ships, three thousand men of war" (II. i. 286). How well has Northumberland done his work? Ross tells us:

To horse, to horse! urge doubts to them that fear.
(II. i. 299)

All three fly immediately to join Bolingbroke. A group of two dejected peers and one secret plotter have become a group of three rebels. Northumberland has done his work well.

But what is the importance of realizing Northumberland's subterfuge? The facts now evident show that Northumberland, the one man in England who shared the thoughts of the banished Henry, was carefully laying the groundwork for Hereford's return. What was to be the purpose of Henry's return? Northumberland's failure to bend his knee before Richard indicates how little the duke thinks of Richard as his king. In a very real way Northumberland's king is already Henry IV. The return of Henry Bolingbroke will not be made merely to regain the holdings of Lancaster; it will be stopped by nothing short of the very crown of England.

Both Marlowe and Shakespeare have molded into their plays two great and comparable scenes. In a comparison of the deposition and death scenes, Marlowe's art generally receives the greater praise. In regard to Richard's deposition the opinion of Hardin Craig that it is perfectly in harmony with the king's character is a true observation.¹³ But Stopford Brooke feels that the mirror scene is overlong, overworked; it decreases pity for Richard and degrades the character of Henry to its lowest point in the play.¹⁴ In connection with this, the criticism of Peter Alexander is extremely interesting:

The fallen king's insistence on his own position, however much it may touch the Judases and Pilates around him, is incompatible with the self-forgetfulness which is as essential to the tragic as to the Christian hero. For this is not the waking as from a dream of some disinterested heart to the self-seeking of society, but the long lament of one who gave short shrift to a dying Gaunt, and this contrast between Richard's indifference to others and exquisite sensibility for himself makes tragedy impossible.¹⁵

Nor does Shakespeare's death scene escape the critics' scorn. To Spencer it is "obvious theatricalism"¹⁶ and Havelock Ellis states that "the melodramatic and careless

¹³Craig, p. 132.

¹⁴Stopford Brooke, pp. 94-95.

¹⁵Peter Alexander, Shakespeare's Life and Art (London, 1939), p. 177.

¹⁶Spencer, p. 176.

murder of Richard cannot be mentioned in presence of the chastened tragedy and highly wrought pathos of Edward's last days."¹⁷

Edward's death scene and his deposition scene are both termed "admirable" by Michel Poirier.¹⁸ Here, Edward realizes his impotence, but his sorrow over his fall is not unmixed with higher qualities. He realizes that Mortimer desires the crown for himself, not for Prince Edward, and he warns against letting Mortimer too close to his son. He moves from a feeling of futility to one of anger. Both are in vain: his tormentors are unmoved. Edward, cautioned that his son may lose the crown if he forbears longer, must needs give up his crown.¹⁹

From here Edward moves to the frightful ending of his life. Broken by long hours of physical torture and mental agony, Edward struggles against pain, against fear, against sleep, and dies at last in a scene of horror, after commending his fated soul unto his God.²⁰ In these two scenes Marlowe shows that he has become "a master of the classic elements of tragedy--pity and terror."²¹

¹⁷Havelock Ellis, editor, Christopher Marlowe (New York, 1956), p. xxvii.

¹⁸Poirier, p. 181.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 181-182.

²⁰Ibid., p. 183.

²¹Henderson, p. 126.

The final summation of the artistry of Shakespeare and Marlowe in these two scenes is Charles Lamb's:

. . . the reluctant pangs of abdicating royalty in Edward furnished hints which Shakespeare scarce improved in his Richard the Second; and the death scene of Marlowe's king moves pity beyond any scene, ancient or modern, with which I am acquainted.²²

That Shakespeare ably characterizes Richard no critic denies. The change in the king from a despicable portrait of royal insolence and ineptitude to a pitiable picture of ruined majesty is a carefully guided one, and the drawing of the last Plantagenet is generally consistent. There is little change in Richard's character until he nears the end of his life.²³ Hudson is correct when he writes, "Richard is so steeped in voluptuous habits that he must needs be a voluptuary even in his sorrow, and make a luxury of woe itself."²⁴ One passage which does seem inconsistent with Richard's character is his wish that he might arrive at Ely House to find Gaunt dead. Even considering Richard's part in Gloucester's death and the fact that he needs Lancaster's revenues to finance his Irish wars, the wish seems strange, for the murder of Gloucester and the seizure of Gaunt's estate are unimpassioned acts of policy--but this wish is vile and hateful. Goddard says that this act

²²Bullen, p. xliv.

²³Richard II, pp. 132-133.

²⁴Dowden, p. 181.

is Richard's compensation for the fear of Gaunt, "possessor of unpleasant secrets,"²⁵ which made him strike four years from the total of Henry's exile. This seems unlikely. What is Gaunt's secret? It cannot concern Richard's complicity in the slaying of Gloucester--Richard's crime is common knowledge. It seems more likely that Shakespeare, anxious to alienate sympathy from his ineffectual king, put words into his mouth which would effect his purpose immediately, but which were otherwise inappropriate for his "sweet Richard"--these are words which belonged to Richard III.

As a foil to Richard, Bolingbroke is quite capably drawn. He is just as practical and unemotional as Richard is impractical and emotional. Craig thinks that the characterization of the "keen, impersonal intellectuality"²⁶ that is Henry IV is an excellent one and regrets that it has not received the recognition it deserves.²⁷

Although the portrait of Henry is not generally attacked, there are faults that should be mentioned. One sees only a limited aspect of his character. He is always a politician, never a man--not one single word of righteous

²⁵Goddard, p. 152.

²⁶Craig, Richard II, p. xvii.

²⁷Ibid.

indignation over the death and contemptible treatment of Gaunt! When Shakespeare does attempt to expand the reader's view of Henry, he moves in the wrong direction, and the result is exceedingly undesirable. In V. iii, Shakespeare shows that this dominant personality who coldly and efficiently controls a kingdom cannot control his own son. For a brief part of one scene Shakespeare introduces the Henry of 1 Henry IV, and this is a vastly different Henry from the one previously known.

York is not a simple character, for no character is simple who inspires so many different interpretations as Edmund of York. Dowden, copying Holinshed, assumes that York would "fain be all things to all men if by any means he might save himself."²⁸ To Stopford Brooke he is simply "old,"²⁹ "only a faded representation of what Richard, without his touch of genius, might have been as an old man."³⁰ He weeps for Richard; he demands his own son's death. Why simple, when he can be so beautifully complicated? Marshall Kelly believes that York is loyal to the new king because he is grateful to be once more in known waters and able to act in clear conscience. Edmund Langley

²⁸Dowden, p. 176.

²⁹Stopford Brooke, p. 79.

³⁰Ibid., p. 78.

is "a beautiful portrait of a beautiful soul."³¹ Yes! for York is not the first son of Edward III to willingly sacrifice his own. The reasons behind York's demand of Aumerle's death are the equal of those which brought Gaunt to assent to Henry's exile--loyalty to what is best for England.

The figure of Gaunt is admirable. His loyalty and devotion to Richard and to England are unquestionable. His purposes are clear; there is no hypocrisy in him. Perhaps readers give Gaunt their affection so rapidly as they do because he is a portrait of humanity. Amid all the lies and subterfuges and ill-hidden hatreds of Richard's England, Gaunt is the one man they can understand and trust always to be what he seems.

In their brief appearances Shakespeare has done justice to Aumerle, Carlisle, and the Duchess of Gloucester. Past these, his characterizations are vague and ineffectual. The queen never becomes a personality, never steps out of the shadows of nonentity. The characterization of the flatterers is actually contradictory--and not pleasingly so. The accusations against them are never seen to be true.

³¹Marshall Kelly, Ambition Plays of Shakespeare (London, 1911), p. 175.

Marlowe has concentrated his attention heavily on Edward, and the character of the king grew steadily under the poet's workmanship. Edward, too, is subject to his emotions; he cannot both think and feel at the same time. His passions rush him from one extreme to another, from transports of joy at the return of Gaveston to his rash and vicious physical attack against the Bishop of Coventry. Edward is scarcely a king in his own land, for he is subjugated under the will of the nobles. Yet, after the beheading of Gaveston, he becomes a fierce and terrible warlord. This rapid change in character may seem somewhat strained, unless the reader remembers that Edward, whatever his faults, has never been a coward. Weak, foolish, purposeless--but never cowardly, and after the death of his minion purpose enters the life of Edward II to unite with the innate strength that is his inheritance from the Plantagenet conquerors who were his fathers.

Readers have watched Mortimer change from a patriotic and daring youth into a cold and vicious regicide, and they have understood the change. For Mortimer and his friends tried to awaken a blind man from a long and foolish dream, and as a result Mortimer saw many of those friends die beneath the bloody axes of Edward Plantagenet.

The Duke of Kent's long struggles with his conscience mark him as unique, for he is the only character in the

play who has one. Despite the inadequacy of the scene in which he attempts to rescue his brother, Edmund is not incapably drawn.

The character of the shameless, gay, sneering flatterer Piers Gaveston is constructed well. Even in death he retains all of his old jauntiness. Scarcely less successful is the characterization of Hugh Spencer, an interesting compound of recklessness and craft, of virtue and of vice.³²

The rapid change in Isabella from an adoring wife to a ruthless murderess has bothered critics for many years. To Bullen she is a vain, selfish woman with no strength of character, and her wounds are superficial trifles.³³ This assertion is hardly undebatable. Although it may be true that the motivation given by Marlowe for the alteration in her character is perhaps slight and his tracing of the stages of this alteration somewhat less than perfect, he has at least given several hints and provocative suggestions that such a change could take place.

In a comparison of the artistic skill and insight which went into the characterizations of the two plays, there is little to choose between the two. Edward and Mortimer, Richard and Henry are roughly equal, although

³²Bullen, p. xliv.

³³Ibid.

Edward, far less fantastic in his misguided intellect than Richard, is much easier to understand, much easier to feel to be real. The figure of York surpasses Kent somewhat, and Gaunt has no equal in Edward II. Yet Edward's Isabella and the flatterers, Gaveston, Baldock, and Spencer, are unmatched by their Shakespearian counterparts. This final evaluation of the respective merits of the characterization of the two plays must state that, on the whole, Marlowe's efforts display a bit more discrimination in character than do Shakespeare's. In Edward II the figures are more varied, more realistic, and stand out much more forcefully as individuals.³⁴

While on the adverse side of criticism, it must be pointed out that the existence of two successive favorites in Edward II involves much useless repetition. The rebels demand the rejection of Spencer in much the same way as that of Gaveston.³⁵ Kent's attempt to rescue Edward is presented in such a way that it seems to be an incredibly foolish and ineffectual attempt.³⁶ Kent, though armed, offers no resistance to his capture. The speeches of young Edward III often sound absurd, coming as they do from the lips of a mere child.³⁷

³⁴Ibid. Cf. C. A. Swinburne, A Study of Shakespeare (London, 1920), pp. 39-40.

³⁵Poirier, p. 177.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., p. 184.

The request sent by Edward to the lords asking that he be allowed to see Gaveston once more before he dies has been developed out of all proportion. The lords debate overlong on the expediency of granting their king's desire.³⁸

Kent, attempting to join the rebel lords, is not trusted at first. Lancaster says that he fears Kent has come "of policy, /To undermine us with a show of love" (vii. 5-6). Warwick also fears Kent's purpose, and Pembroke asks him for the reason why he has deserted Edward. Kent answers: "I have informed the Earl of Lancaster" (vii. 14). Lancaster now responds: "And it sufficeth" (vii. 15). Even if we are to presume that Kent did tell Lancaster his reason and that Lancaster was mulling it over in his mind since his initial expression of doubt, some fault must still be found with the writing of the scene. We are never told precisely what the reason is, and after Lancaster's expression of faith the other rebels forget the matter, trusting their uninformed minds to Lancaster's judgment.

Nor is Shakespeare's dramatic touch always faultless. Having sent Bagot off to Ireland in II. ii. 138, he refers to him as being among those executed at Bristol in

³⁸Ibid., p. 177.

III. ii. 128, and then brings him back to life to accuse Aumerle at the opening of IV. i.³⁹

Hazleton Spencer does not care for the York-Aumerle subplot in V. iii, feeling that it is "mere padding."⁴⁰ Harold Goddard, however, argues that Shakespeare never digresses. He believes that as York, his duchess, and Rutland plead before Henry, secret fears lurk in the minds of each. York asks for his son's death because he is fearful that he might be suspect too; the duchess is afraid that her husband suspects her of being unfaithful; Aumerle's tremblings are increased by the additional fear created by Henry's knowledge of the part he played in Gloucester's death.⁴¹ It would seem that Goddard has proved the opposite of what he intended to prove. Hapless old York has no need to fear Henry--now of all times. York's loyalty need not be questioned because his son plots revolt--Aumerle's sympathies for Richard have long been known. If it is true that the thought that York suspects her of infidelity is troubling the Duchess's mind--what is this but a digression? Aumerle need not have any special fears that Henry will recall Gloucester's murder; Aumerle

³⁹J. D. Wilson, King Richard II, p. lxxv. This is a textual inaccuracy to begin with; Shakespeare has confused Bagot with the Earl of Wiltshire.

⁴⁰Spencer, p. 176.

⁴¹Goddard, p. 158.

has sins enough on the present occasion to lose his head several times over.

A structural fault that both plays have in common is the poor management of the necessary device of telescoping time. Marlowe's chief fault here is a reference to Gaveston floating on the Irish seas, when he left the palace only a few lines before. Edward's lack of knowledge of Mortimer's escape is also illogical. Mortimer flies to France and raises his army before the king realizes his adversary is no longer in the Tower.

Shakespeare wishes us to accept that Henry's exile, Gaunt's death, Richard's seizure of Bolingbroke's estate, and Northumberland's report of Henry's return to claim his own all occur within a few short hours. Henry and his soldiers are ready to return to regain his lands before he could possibly have learned of his father's death.⁴² We are entirely unprepared for this rapidity of action. Nor are we ready for Carlisle's announcement that:

Many a time hath banish'd Norfolk fought
 For Jesu Christ in glorious Christian field,
 Streaming the ensign of the Christian cross
 Against black pagans, Turks and Saracens;
 And, toil'd with works of war, retir'd himself
 To Italy; and there at Venice gave
 His body to that pleasant country's earth,
 And his pure soul unto his captain Christ,
 Under whose colours he had fought so long.

(IV. i. 92-100)

⁴²Dowden, p. 176.

Mowbray has certainly kept himself busy since his exit from the lists at Coventry a week or two before.

As an artistic endeavor Edward II rises above Richard II. There is more life, more reality in Marlowe's play than in the later play which shows his influence.⁴³ In Edward II Marlowe's art reaches its zenith; Shakespeare's greatest day is yet to come:⁴⁴

The custom of comparing Edward II to Richard II is scarcely fair to Shakespeare. . . . The whole of Shakespeare's play, with its exuberant eloquence, its facile and diffuse poetry, is distinctly inferior to Marlowe's, both in organic structure and dramatic characterization. It was not till ten years later that Shakespeare came near to this severe reticence, these deep and solemn tragic tones.⁴⁵

This opinion of Havelock Ellis is shared by Tucker Brooke, who feels that "Edward II is far more mature, and, on the whole, doubtless a finer drama."⁴⁶

⁴³Poirier, pp. 181-183.

⁴⁴Ellis, p. xxvii.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Tucker Brooke, The Tudor Drama, p. 326.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

During the reign of Henry VII, England witnessed a revival of interest in history. The Tudor state eagerly encouraged the writing of new chronicles, for, among other things, the claims of the Tudors to the throne had to be positively defended. History was able to provide such a defense, for Henry bent truth to serve his purposes. Throughout the imperiled reign of the Tudors, history was an important political asset.

The religious maelstrom which struck England in the years following the Reformation added to the importance of history. When Christian gods clashed with Christian gods, the long unquestioned authority of the universal Church was blasted into oblivion. In these years of doubt and fear, the moralizing influence of the Church was transferred to the field of letters, and the doctrine of didacticism, always present in English history, became overpoweringly strong.

The new period of English historiography actually began in 1501 with the arrival of Polydore Vergil in London. His Anglica Historia, published in 1534, introduced true critical acumen and the ability to relate cause

and effect into the English chronicles. Sir Thomas More's Richard III added a dramatic sense to history. His work brought subtle comedy onto the pages of the chronicles, and certain of his tragic episodes excel anything the English stage produced until the Golden Age. Edward Hall's main importance lay in the fact that his work, The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Fanelies of Lancaster and York, introduced in all its completeness the new moralizing force of history which developed as the power of the Church decreased. The most important historian of the age in relation to the history play was Raphael Holinshed. Holinshed, for the most part, was merely a compiler, and he often missed the major points established in his distinguished sources. However, his style was simple and easy to understand, and he covered a much longer period of history than did Hall, More, and others. Because of his great usefulness, he enjoyed a fame beyond his actual worth.

Following the reign of Henry VIII English historians had a wide variety of styles which they could imitate. Unfortunately, most continued the pedestrian chronicling of such figures as Fabian and Grafton; a few adopted the intimate and vivid humanity of More; the moral drama of Hall passed on to the poets.

The Tudor history play was long unrecognizable as a genre, for the distinguishing quality of the chronicle play was not found either in form or structure--or even in a close regard to historical truth. The distinctive feature of the history play lay in its purpose, in its attempt to serve one of the legitimate purposes of historiography as recognized by Tudor historians. To the Tudor historian the purposes of history were many, but basically he sought to find in the annals of the past a guide for present behavior. He used history to offer certain observations on various aspects of life in his own time in an attempt to promote security and well-being.

The history play began to emerge out of other dramatic traditions about 1530 when John Bale wrote his morality drama, King John. Thomas Legge's Latin play, Richardus Tertius, allied the tragic concepts of Seneca with the sweep and forcefulness of the chronicles. The anonymous author of The Famous Victories of Henry V joined the tradition of the heroic romance to the evolution of the chronicle play. The unknown writer of The Life and Death of Jack Straw wrote the first history play entirely free from the limitations of the old morality drama, which took an episode of history and dramatized it for the express purpose of commenting upon a contemporary problem. By

1594 when Robert Greene printed Selimus, the English chronicle history play was recognizable as a genre.

Many of the dramatic faults of the early plays--their episodic structure, inept characterization, and coarse buffoonery--were eliminated in the tragedy of Woodstock, whose unknown author possessed enough artistic skill to develop a well-constructed plot, provide a true comic relief, and portray a hero of tragic proportions. In 1587 Tamburlaine appeared, adding lyric passion to the structure of Woodstock, and the English stage was made ready for the arrival of Christopher Marlowe's Edward II and William Shakespeare's Richard II. These two plays raised the chronicle history drama to the highest level of artistry that it had ever attained. With the exception of the great plays which completed Shakespeare's second tetralogy and a much later play by John Ford, the history play was never to rise thus high again.

Edward II displayed a tight structural unity and a forceful blank verse. The action moved with rapidity and consistency. The lyric accents of Tamburlaine were subordinated to the sharp quick retorts of stichomythia.

The "mighty line" of Tamburlaine was more nearly the inheritance of Richard II than of Marlowe's own play. Shakespeare, however, often introduced rhyme into his verse, and the change in effectiveness that this device

produced was often detrimental. Shakespeare's tragedy has one especial merit; the dramatist embodied much of the tragic quality of his play in the character of his king. Richard's excess of sentimentality is the factor which, more than any other, leads to his downfall. The result of Shakespeare's efforts is a clearly discernible tragedy of character.

There were great similarities between Edward II and Richard II; most of these stemmed from the similarities of the stories themselves. Both portrayed the follies of blind and foolish kings, who, through continued misuse of office forced their nobles to rebel and overthrow them. But in their fall the kings appealed to our sympathy, for they were greatly wronged. There were many likenesses also between the characters of Mortimer and Bolingbroke, Kent and York, the queens, the flatterers, and the assassins which possibly demonstrated that Shakespeare was quite familiar with Marlowe's earlier play.

Both Edward II and Richard II were political plays. Each demonstrated clearly that, although neither Richard nor Edward was a criminal in the sense that Richard III was a criminal, their continued abuse of the power and dignity of their office was a crime that neither gods nor men might allow.

The serious purposes of both authors were demonstrated in the use they made of their sources. Each consulted more than one historic account to gather material for his works; Marlowe read at least three chronicles, Shakespeare perhaps as many as five or six. Each playwright carefully condensed his voluminous sources, altered, rearranged, invented material to fit his purposes. The stories of Edward of Carnarvon and Richard of Bordeaux were begun with serious purposes in mind; they were not to be treated carelessly.

As Shakespeare illustrated his various political reflections in Richard II, his imagery became more lush, more abundant than Marlowe's had been, but in both plays imagery was fused into the action itself. In Marlowe, for instance, the constant repetitions of such verbal motifs as dissemble-deceit and blood-heads-sword illustrate clearly that the world to which Marlowe carries us is an altogether grimmer world than that of Shakespeare. Both plays are exceptionally lacking in humor--the tragic seriousness of the dethronement and murder of a king did not permit the inclusion of raucous, laughing voices.

The construction of each play is worthy of much praise. Marlowe, by the skillful use of foreshadowing, never allowed his story of a long twenty-three year reign to degenerate into a series of episodic clashes.

Shakespeare's use of Northumberland as the mirror of Bolingbroke's ambitions was an admirable stroke. Each play contained two great and comparable scenes. In the deposition and death scenes Marlowe's artistry lifted these moments of pity and terror to a level slightly above that which Shakespeare could attain. Characterization of the major figures in both plays was excellent, although the flatterers and the queen of Richard II lay almost in the shadows of nonentity. As a whole the characters of Marlowe were somewhat more realistic, more diversified, less fantastic in their nature. In summation, the dramatic art and skillful touch of Marlowe generally rose above that of Shakespeare. The younger poet not seldom reached heights as great as those of Marlowe, but after a few brief whispers he slipped back to await a later day.

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