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Shakespeare's treatment of kingship in the Lancastrian tetralogy

June Stemen Allman

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SHAKESPEARE'S TREATMENT OF KINGSHIP
IN THE LANCASTRIAN TETRALOGY

BY

JUNE S. ALLMAN

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Edward C. Pyle
Director of Thesis

William B. Hutcheson
Coordinator of Graduate Studies in English
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Tudor Myth</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard II</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I and II Henry IV</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry V</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Because of my interest in history and English, I have found the preparation of this paper extremely rewarding, not only for the dramatization of actual historical facts but also for Shakespeare's departure from historical fact in order to strengthen his drama.

I am extremely indebted to Dr. Edward C. Peple, my adviser, for his scholarly guidance in a topic that was very difficult to condense. His patience and kind consideration will always be appreciated. I would also like to express my appreciation to all of my professors and the librarians at the University of Richmond for a very pleasant association.

And certainly, I want to thank my husband, William E. Allman, and my son, Barry, without whose constant encouragement and understanding I could not have completed this thesis.
The English history play reached its highest peak of development between 1595 and 1599, for it was during these years that Shakespeare wrote the set of four plays covering the historical period from Richard II to Henry V. Each of the plays is a single entity, but in their entirety, they constitute a unified tetralogy concerning the rise of the house of Lancaster. Through the illegal seizure of the crown by Bolingbroke from Richard II to the glorious reign of Henry V, Shakespeare, as an intensely political writer, examines the facets of kingship and its inherent power and authority.

In Richard III and the Henry VI plays, Shakespeare had already depicted the Wars of the Roses with all their horror, but "there is nothing in this epilogue to connect that horror with the glorious triumph of Henry V. . . . The plays from Richard II to Henry V remain an independent unit which must be considered on its own terms and without relation to Shakespeare's earlier depiction of later historical events."¹ It is even speculated that Shakespeare was not the sole author

of the earlier tetralogy but that he wrote it in conjunction with other authors or under their influence. The earlier plays seem to be mere apprentice work in comparison with the later ones, which show a maturity of development, structurally and dramatically. It is for these reasons that I have chosen the Lancastrian tetralogy for my study.

Because the plays reflect the political concepts of Elizabethan days, it is significant to note that Shakespeare's official belief, in respect of English politics, was in the theory of Divine Right of Kings. This theory held that, since church and state were bound up together, and the coronation service was a sacrament, an anointed king could not be resisted except at the price of mortal sin. In part this idea descended from the Middle Ages, when the feudal system drew its ultimate sanction from the notion of a descending scale of authority, starting with God and ending with the lowest forms of life. This would mean that the king naturally drew authority from above and transmitted it to his lieutenants below, so that to challenge the king was to challenge the divinely ordained system of created life.2

By the time that Shakespeare was writing his history plays, the theory of the Divine Right of kings had become one of practical importance, for the problem of rebellion was the chief one facing the Tudors. In accordance with this doctrine, they were able to decree that, since they

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received their power to rule from God, rebellion was a sin not only against the state but against God. Three reasons for the development of this cult of authority of the king are given by Miss Lily Bess Campbell, who cites as her source Dr. Franklin Le Van Baumer's *The Early Tudor Theory of Kingship*:

First, in an England emerging from the anarchy of the Wars of the Roses, it was natural that the dread of further disorder should result in emphasis on obedience to authority and upon the divine retribution that ensued disobedience to the king. Second, the exaltation of the king was necessary to offset the threat of foreign intervention which persisted in the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth when the "Enterprise of England" was an immediate issue. Third, the Royal Supremacy could only be safeguarded when it was held that under no circumstances, "yea, even though the king were an infidel," had subjects the right to rebel.

Thus, it was Tudor belief that "rebellion, no matter what the cause, was the worst of all possible sins. A healthful society must observe 'degree' and 'order,' just as the heavens observed them, with every citizen keeping his proper place and exercising his proper function in the social hierarchy."

The Tudors were even responsible for raising the theory of the Divine Right of kings "to the status of an effective

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4Ribner, p. 157.
historical myth⁵ by encouraging the sixteenth-century historians to include the doctrine in their writings. Under Tudor guidance, it became the function of the historian to infer that the civil strife which had weakened and endangered the nation in the past was to serve as a practical lesson for the present. "Because rebellion was always imminent, it had to be denounced as the wickedest of all sins, the great 'puddle and sink,' in fact, in which all other sins found their origin. This was a fundamental axiom for all the chroniclers and poets who turned their hand to history."⁶ Because of Tudor influence, the English historians of the sixteenth century did not write objectively but were bound by political necessity.

The first historian to incorporate this Tudor propaganda in his work was Polydore Vergil, who was commissioned by Henry VII in 1506 specifically to demonstrate the right of the Tudors to the throne. Vergil, an Italian who had been chaplain to Pope Alexander VI, was the collector of Peter's Pence in England. Although he revealed a critical and well-balanced mind in his Anglica Historia, he showed the Tudor influence in his interpretation of the usurpation of Richard II as a criminal act for which the people were

⁵Wain, p. 25.
punished by civil war. Abandoning his humanism, Vergil acknowledged divine intervention in the events surrounding the usurpation of the Lancastrians, which he felt had set about a sequence of catastrophes that did not cease until God had been appeased. He even deemed that it was the fate of Henry V, the most glorious king, to die young in order to pay for the sins of his father. Vergil's interpretation of history was to have a strong influence on the Elizabethan dramatists, especially in their writings concerning the period of English history which preceded the accession of the Tudors.

Another important work which proclaimed the Tudor doctrine was Thomas More's fragmentary History of Richard III, written about 1513. Its importance lay in the fact that it fixed the historical reputation of the main character. Even if More were not consciously implying Tudor propaganda, he could not have been more effective in staining Richard's name politically. The main target of this history is the tyranny and misgovernment of Renaissance statecraft in which Richard becomes almost the Vice of a morality play. Shakespeare was able to catch More's spirit exactly in his own dramas, especially in the play Richard II, which Shakespeare develops into a tragedy of character. The effect of More's work upon the chronicles, which were Shakespeare's chief
source, cannot be overestimated. As M. M. Reese says, "More's book was probably the greatest single contribution to the Tudor myth." 7

Henry VIII also encouraged the promulgation of the theory of Divine Right during his reign. He especially approved of the courtly handbook entitled The Governor, written by Sir Thomas Elyot in 1531 as a guide for the ruling classes. It explained the monarchical doctrine which Henry wished to perpetuate during the crisis of the Reformation, particularly the proclamation that monarchy was the best type of government because of its sanction in the scriptures. Establishing the supremacy of the sovereign, Elyot aimed at educating in virtue those magistrates who came under the king and yet who had authority over lesser men. His was an optimistic non-Machiavellian theory that the qualities of a good ruler are the same as those of a good man and that from history he can receive inspiration to rule well. Elyot's influence on Shakespeare is shown especially in the Henry IV plays in which Prince Hal receives his education as preparation for his role as the ideal king.

But it was Edward Hall who was probably the most influential historian of the Reformation. It was not his purpose to chronicle events from Brut to his own time.

7 Ibid., p. 49.
Instead, in The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York (1548), he took an isolated era of history and followed a theme throughout. Writing to serve the political purposes of Henry VIII, he presented history as a great moral drama with emphasis on the destruction that follows civil strife and rebellion in a realm. Examining events from the reign of Henry IV through that of Henry VIII, Hall transmitted the historical pattern of Polydore Vergil and Thomas More to the writers of the Elizabethan era. In fact, the originality of Hall's contribution was to incorporate into a single coherent and dramatic pattern all the prevailing notions about history. He did this simply by identifying God's purposes with those of the Tudors. In this interpretation even the Wars of the Roses became a necessary part of a divine plan for England which culminated in the blessings of Tudor rule; and what the Tudors did was right because it was done in fulfillment of God's scheme. A providential view of history here merges with one secular and pragmatic. It was a marriage of the highest importance, since it consecrated the Tudor myth.

Hall's propagation of the Tudor myth is extremely important, for Shakespeare was greatly influenced by it in writing his history plays. In fact, every Elizabethan writer, whether or not he had a philosophy of history, was indebted to the Vergil-More-Hall reconstruction of the period leading to the reign of the Tudors. With Vergil, the interpretation was one of perfunctory duty; More concentrated on the downfall

8Ibid., p. 52.
of the main character, Richard; but only in Hall was there a series of moral condemnations which he developed into prophetic convictions. Thus, because of the moral overtones of Shakespeare's history plays, it became customary to interpret them "according to the pattern imposed on history by Hall: the tragic story of York and Lancaster was a consequence of Bolingbroke's crime and a warning to England of the danger of civil strife, which the accession of the Tudors had blissfully terminated."9

Raphael Holinshed transmitted Hall's version to his work entitled Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland, first published in 1578 and reissued in 1587. In his narrative, Holinshed was able to convey the moralizing of Hall in a practical way, demonstrating the follies of men and the terrible consequences thereof. Although he covered a large area of history in his work, he also insisted in pointing out the moral involved in the usurpation of Richard by Bolingbroke. Richard, the God-appointed king, had been driven from the throne, which action brought about a series of catastrophes which eventually ended in the glory of the Tudor reign. Having no special philosophy of history, Holinshed "faithfully reflects the dominant idea of his age that rebellion, with its inevitable train of discord and civil war, is the greatest of calamities, and he

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finds in the ample and varied lessons of history a means of educating men to avoid it."

Holinshed's comments on civil war and the duty of subjects to their rulers were of vital interest to every Elizabethan writer. His influence on Shakespeare is so well established that it is important to note how closely Holinshed followed the dominant pattern of historical writing in his century. It would have been impossible for Shakespeare not to have grasped the general moral that was implied from the facts in his chronicles. Shakespeare is deeply indebted to Holinshed, some of the lines in his plays being taken almost verbatim from Holinshed's work. For example, in Henry V "Shakespeare borrows the very words of Holinshed and merely transforms them into verse, as when he makes Henry say, 'We shall your tawny ground with your red blood discolor'; Holinshed: 'I wish not any of you so unadvised, as to be the occasion that I die your tawny ground with your red blood.'"

Of great importance in officially stating and reinforcing the Tudor belief in Divine Right in the sixteenth century were the Homilies compiled by the government to be read in place of the sermon in the Church of England. These

10Reese, p. 58.

homilies were usually delivered by beneficed clergy to their uneducated congregations to inform them of the Tudor belief regarding order in the nation, the divine sanctions of government, the importance of obedience, and the catastrophe which would occur as a result of their disobedience to the monarch. This meant that throughout the country, the pulpit spoke as one voice, the voice of the government.

The first group of Homilies, twelve in number, appeared in England in 1547, and these were followed by twenty more in 1563. The thirty-third, and most famous, was that entitled Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion, issued in 1571 in reply to the Northern Rebellion of 1569 which had struck panic into the Tudors. The Tudor Englishman was taught that God, in His infinite wisdom, had appointed the ruler over him, and that it was the duty of every man to give political allegiance to the king, lest a worse fate befall him. As the homily of 1571 proclaimed, rebellion was the greatest of all sins and the one that gave birth to the other seven. If the king should happen to be a tyrant, it was the will of God, who had sent him as a punishment to the people. Since the king is the deputy of God on earth, only God has the right to replace him. If rebellion should seem to prosper, in due time God would bring vengeance upon the usurper or his heirs.
But although the root was recognised to be rebellion against God, it was the fruit, rebellion against the state, with which the Elizabethan mind was particularly concerned. All the medieval horror at man's rebellion against God was transferred to the very thought of his rebellion against the king, and the cumulative pressure of disapproval of any form of rebellion in Tudor England is hard to imagine adequately.12

As a result, the Tudor promulgation of the theory of Divine Right passed from the historical documents of the time into the serious drama. The Vergil-More-Hall reconstruction of history with the moralizing of events and the emphasis on personal responsibility portrayed the human drama beneath the surface. From the attitudes of history, this drama became the playwrights' material for tragedy. As M. M. Reese points out, because "playwrights and historians were equally conscious of their duty as moralists to hold up a mirror to the times, . . . in this genre the functions of history and drama were congenially allied."13

Shakespeare amply reflects this inherited conception of Tudor thought emphasized in the recent history of his country. In the four plays from Richard II to Henry V, he develops this conception into

a complete political cycle from order through disorder to reunification under an ideal king. That cycle illustrates the traditional doctrine:

13Reese, p. 66.
the deposition of Richard leads to greater violence and discord than England had to suffer under the tyranny of Richard's weakness; and political harmony is restored only by one who is free both of Richard's weakness and of any taint of guilt for Richard's deposition.\textsuperscript{14}

These history plays have a collective unity, then, deriving from an Elizabethan view of history and a common fund of ideas and ideals about the ordering of man's society. In this larger sense, they must be accepted as political, for they presented not merely an epic of England's past but dramatized issues of great moment for Shakespeare's contemporaries.

\textsuperscript{14}Julian Markels, \textit{The Pillar of the World} (Columbus, 1968), p. 68.
RICHARD II

The reign of Richard II was notable in that as the rightful heir of the Plantagenets, he was the last ruler still to have full sanctity of medieval kingship. As Tillyard quotes from A. B. Steele's history Richard II, Richard was "the last king ruling by hereditary right, direct and undisputed from the Conqueror. The kings of the next hundred and ten years . . . were essentially kings de facto not de jure, successful usurpers recognized after the event, upon conditions, by their fellow-magnates or by parliament." Richard is so aware of his exalted position that he rules arbitrarily, believing that, as he is the deputy of God on earth, his course of action is the only right one. It was this illusion that caused Shakespeare to look inside the character of Richard and to make that his tragedy, for Shakespeare reveals that Richard's weakness as a man and as a king "springs at least in part from a narrow interpretation of the divine right of kings--that his right to do as he pleases cannot be questioned."16


Richard II is essentially a chronicle history, the theme being English politics, yet Shakespeare uses all of his powers as a dramatist to show that Richard's political problems and his subsequent downfall were caused by this flaw in his character. This characterization is a significant development in the history play in that Shakespeare abandoned the straight chronicle type of play exemplified by his preceding history play, Richard III. In fact, "the theme of the play is embodied in the character of Richard. His enjoyment of his own emotions and his refusal to see any world but a world of ideas, his idea of what is real and not reality itself, overthrow him." It is important to realize that the characterization of Richard is entirely Shakespeare's creation, for Holinshed does not have much to say about his character and blames his misgovernment on his youthful inexperience. By using the conventional views of kingship, however, Shakespeare has portrayed a man so intoxicated with the glories of his power that he is unable to function in a rational manner.

Having been a king since he was ten years of age, Richard has grown up with the sense of royalty ingrained in him, and he considers himself sacred. Nowhere is his illusion of

kingship shown more clearly than in the scene where he compares himself to the sun:

So when this thief, this traitor, Bolingbroke,
Who all this while hath revell'd in the night,
Whilst we were wand'ring with the antipodes,
Shall see us rising in our throne, the east,
His treasons will sit blushing in his face,
Not able to endure the sight of day,
But, self-affrighted, tremble at his sin. 18

Shakespeare portrays other characters in the play speaking of Richard in the same way. Not only do the flattering courtiers give their expression of the authority inherent in the person of Richard as king, but even Bolingbroke describes him in his humiliating position at Flint Castle in the same sort of sun-king imagery:

See, see, King Richard doth himself appear,
As doth the blushing discontented sun
From out the fiery portal of the east
When he perceives the envious clouds are bent
To dim his glory and to stain the track
Of his bright passage to the occident.

And the Duke of York describes him in a similar way:

Yet looks he like a king: behold, his eye,
As bright as is the eagle's, lightens forth
Controlling majesty: alack, alack, for woe,
That any harm should stain so fair a show!

It is little wonder, then, that in this atmosphere a young monarch would feel that he could rule with absolutism.

18 William Shakespeare, Shakespeare: Twenty-Three Plays and the Sonnets, ed. Thomas Marc Parrot (New York, 1953). All citations from Shakespeare are taken from this text.
It is not that he is cruel or tyrannical, but that he does not believe that there is any check or limit to his rule as God's deputy. It is plain that he has had his uncle Gloucester murdered before the play opens, thus overstepping the limits of power, and this is to cost him his throne, but it is also characteristic of his inability to grasp realities that he never sees a connection between the murder and his downfall. Richard's difficulty lies in the fact that he is merely "so fair a show" without substance. It was this "contrast between being and seeming, shadow and substance, between the world of appearances and the real world"19 that appealed to Shakespeare's imagination in his characterization of Richard. As a man and as a king, he is a complete failure when it is time for action because he lives in an unreal world of glorification. It was Shakespeare's purpose to portray Richard as unfit to rule in a world of serious men who are awake to reality.

Shakespeare's audience was perfectly familiar with the historical background of the play. Before the play opens, the uncles of the King, John of Gaunt, Thomas of Woodstock, and Edmund of York, have become angry with Richard, who, besides being responsible for the murder of their brother, has surrounded himself with a corrupt and greedy group of flatterers, namely Bushy, Green, and Bagot. Bolingbroke, the

eldest son of old John of Gaunt and leader of the opposition to the King, sees in Gloucester's murder a way to threaten Richard, and that is through the Duke of Norfolk, who, as keeper of Calais castle, had been responsible for the safety of Thomas. It is not certain that he had in mind to take Richard's crown for himself at this time, but he has made several charges against Mowbray. Thus, in the first scene, the two come before the King to settle their quarrel.

The opening scene with Mowbray and Bolingbroke appealing before Richard is a proper introduction for a play dealing with kingship, for in the sixteenth century the king meted out justice not only as a man but as the deputy of God. Richard's first appearance, then, is as the administrator of God. But it is already evident that Richard is losing his grasp as a ruler. Bolingbroke covertly attacks the King by accusing Mowbray of being responsible for the death of Gloucester, but everyone, including Richard, knows that Richard is the one being accused. Aware of his position and the fact that he may implicate himself, the King tries to remain detached from the quarrel. He attempts to reconcile the two men to a peaceful settlement through his boasting that a lion can tame leopards and that a king is not born to sue but to command; yet his speeches seem to be only words that he cannot put into action.
When Richard is unable to enforce his royal authority in this situation, he finally commands Mowbray and Bolingbroke to duel at the lists at Coventry on Saint Lambert's day. It is exactly the course of action that he has tried to avoid, but "his self-dramatization enables him to overlook his inability to discharge his office truly." That the real issue of the King's involvement in the murder is not resolved is not important at this stage, for it is Shakespeare's purpose to emphasize the superficiality of the quarrel and Richard's inability to settle it; however, "already the high conception of the royal prerogative is at odds with the event."21

In direct contrast to Richard's actions, the behavior of Bolingbroke in this scene is extremely significant in that it already reveals his boldness and political astuteness. Knowing the King's predicament and that he will not dare to defend himself in public without admitting that he has been an accomplice to the murder of Gloucester, Bolingbroke feels assured that he has put both Mowbray and Richard in a position from which they cannot escape without letting the truth be known. Furthermore, he strikes terror into the heart of Richard when he refers to the spilling of Gloucester's blood:

20Markels, p. 59.
21Reese, p. 231.
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.  

Rich. II, I, i, 104.

Bolingbroke's allusion to "Abel" is a sly accusation of the
King, and in the words "to me," there is a determination
that he will avenge the death of his uncle and a warning
to those who are guilty. From Richard's reply, it is ob-
vious that he sees the ambition inherent in Bolingbroke's
charge:

How high a pitch his resolution soars!  


At this point, Shakespeare inserts a scene in order to
show the fundamental problem inherent in the deposition of
a king, and that is whether or not a subject ever has the
right to resist an unjust king. This is presented in the
situation of the Duchess of Gloucester who strongly suspects
that Richard was the cause of the murder of her husband and
his brother. To her plea to John of Gaunt for vengeance,
Gaunt offers as a reply "the accepted Tudor philosophy of
kingship, which his son is later to deny in becoming Hen-
ry IV": 22

But since correction lieth in those hands
Which made the fault that we cannot correct,
Put we our quarrel to the will of heaven;
Who, when they see the hours ripe on earth,
Will rain hot vengeance on offenders' heads.  


22Campbell, p. 195.
When the Duchess then accuses Gaunt of being cowardly and thereby endangering his own life, he reiterates his stand more forcefully:

God's is the quarrel; for God's substitute,
His deputy anointed 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.  


Although in the first scene of the second act Gaunt does chide Richard for the murder, still he will not listen to the bidding of the Duchess to resist. He despises Richard's crime, but any criticism of it will stop short of rebellion. According to the position taken by Gaunt and the Tudors, it is God's quarrel when His deputy sins, and He is the only one who can avenge it. This viewpoint is significant in that it is also the same as Richard's.

After this scene with the Tudor theory of kingship clearly stated, Shakespeare returns to Richard and the combat at Coventry, where Mowbray and Bolingbroke are to settle their quarrel. This staged spectacle of the lists shows Richard's overwhelming desire for displaying his power through elaborate ceremony. It all seems so unnecessary when he has already consulted his advisers, who have agreed that banishment of the two men is the wisest solution to the problem. Therefore, when Richard throws down his warder and stops the duel, "the formality appropriate to the execution of justice
has transmuted itself into the suspect formality of the staged act of state—for there is something inescapably histrionic about Richard's exquisite timing of this 'coup.' Policy has supervened upon the 'feast of battle.' 

Furthermore, Richard's explanation for his decision does not give satisfaction but merely seems to be rhetoric by which he tries to cover up a most serious malady, that being his sheer enjoyment of kingly power:

For that our kingdom's earth should not be soil'd
With that dear blood which it hath fostered;
And for our eyes do hate the dire aspect
Of civil wounds plough'd up with neighbours' sword. . . .
Therefore, we banish you our territories.

Rich. II, I, iii, 125.

This decision not only inflicts injustice on both of the men but shows Richard's capriciousness in handling the quarrel. He decrees lifelong banishment for Mowbray, who has been on his side, and antagonizes Bolingbroke instead of either making him his friend or sentencing him to death. In reducing Bolingbroke's sentence from ten years to six in deference to the health of John of Gaunt, he gives Bolingbroke cause to comment resentfully on the strength of the King's power:

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.

Rich. II, I, iii, 213.

Although Richard wants to give the impression of being a fair administrator of justice, it appears that his justice

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in reality is merely jealousy and his mercy only trickery. In every instance, his personal feelings overwhelm him in making decisions of state. Later, he cunningly reveals to his cousin Aumerle the real reason for his decision to banish Bolingbroke:

_Ourself and Bushy, Bagot here and Green
Observed his courtship to the common people:
How he did seem to dive into their hearts
With humble and familiar courtesy. . . .
As were our England in reversion his,
And he our subjects' next degree in hope._

_Rich. II. I. iv, 23._

The banishment of Bolingbroke may resolve Richard's dilemma for the moment, but in the long run it turns out to be a foolish decision, for Bolingbroke is dangerously popular with the people. Unfortunately, Richard does not act upon his observation of this fact, but with a feeling of false security, he blindly continues on a course that is to destroy him.

Not calculating to alienate the allegiance of his subjects, he does so, however, in his plans to finance the war in Ireland. In his expediency, Richard farms out the royal lands and issues blank charters to the nobles, both of which practices are utterly repugnant to English law and custom. In the speech of the dying Gaunt, these crimes and others are summed up to indict Richard as an unworthy king:
A thousand flatterers sit within thy crown. O had thy grandsire with a prophet’s eye
Seen how his son’s son should destroy his sons,
From forth thy reach he would have laid thy shame,
Deposing thee before thou wert possess’d,
Which art possess’d now to depose thyself.
It were a shame to let this land by lease.
Landlord of England art thou now, not King.

Rich. II, II, i, 100.

This beautiful speech about the crimes that Richard has committed upon "This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England" throws Richard into a rage. His reaction is ironic in that Gaunt "has expressed unequivocally the doctrine of obedience that might be a major corollary of the theory of divine right." Furthermore, in his angry reply to the appealing patriotism of the dying Gaunt, he himself shows his unworthiness to be king:

A lunatic lean-witted fool,
Presuming on an ague’s privilege,
Darest with thy frozen admonition
Make pale our cheek, chasing the royal blood
With fury from his native residence.
Now, by my seat’s right royal majesty,
Wert thou not brother to great Edward’s son,
This tongue that runs so roundly in thy head
Should run thy head from thy unreverent shoulders.


Thus, if Richard hears Gaunt’s warning that through flattery, murder, and farming out the royal realm he is deposing himself, he fails to heed it. Throughout the play, these trespasses of Richard are balanced against "his right as king to be accountable only to God," and they are constantly

25Campbell, p. 199.
repeated as the basis for the question as to whether Richard was justly deposed:

This question might have remained merely an academic one if Richard had not foolishly decided to take one more fatal step. With the news of Gaunt's death, he curtly says, "So much for that," and announces that he intends to confiscate Gaunt's property in order to help finance the war in Ireland. Immediately the Duke of York objects to such an arbitrary decision and is appalled by Richard's complete disregard for "fair sequence and succession," the principle on which rests Richard's own right to the crown. York's plea for justice is ignored by Richard, but it clarifies the political thinking of Shakespeare:

You pluck a thousand dangers on your head,  
You lose a thousand well-disposed hearts,  
And prick my tender patience to those thoughts 
Which honour and allegiance cannot think.  
Rich. II, II, 1, 205.

Therefore, in his unwise decision to confiscate Gaunt's estate, Richard not only gives Bolingbroke a lawful grievance but also alienates many of the nobles who foresee the same fate for themselves. After Richard departs for Ireland, carelessly leaving his country defenseless and in the hands of the incompetent York, the nobles get together under Northumberland to discuss the situation. All of the crimes of Richard seem to be a justification for rebellion:
The king is not himself, but basely led
By flatterers. . . .
The commons hath he pill'd with grievous taxes,
And quite lost their hearts; the nobles hath he fined
For ancient quarrels, and quite lost their hearts. . . .
And daily new exactions are devised,
As blanks, benevolences, and I wot not what.


The failure of Richard to meet the complexities involved in ruling a kingdom is demonstrated throughout the play. Shakespeare does not soften Holinshed's judgment of Richard in his "insolent misgovernment and youthful outrage." Even if his faults stem from the rashness of youth, Shakespeare shows that he will never have the proper wisdom to rule effectively.

He will not outgrow the political obtuseness that commands a duel and then theatrically forbids it; makes an enemy of Bolingbroke but leaves him alive to nurse his resentment; goes off to Ireland when by his own folly he has just provoked a crisis at home; and commandeers the Lancastrian estate so that every landowner in England is made apprehensive about his property.26

By the time that Richard returns from Ireland, Bolingbroke has landed in England, and York, if not yielding to him, has abetted him by remaining neutral. When Aumerle explains to Richard that Bolingbroke has massed an army against him, Richard characteristically does not want to face the reality of this disaster and expresses his disbelief. Carlisle and Aumerle urge him to put up a fight

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26 Reese, p. 233.
against his enemies, arguing that God will help him if he will but help himself:

Fear not, my lord: that Power that made you king
Hath power to keep you king in spite of all,
The means that heavens yield must be embrac'd,
And not neglected; else, if heaven would
And we will not, heaven's offer we refuse,
The proffer'd means of succour and redress.

Richard, however, pays no attention to their advice. With his political fortunes deteriorating, he once more tries to cover up his constant indecisiveness through impassioned rhetoric. His irresponsibility has placed him in a position of weakness, making him vulnerable to Bolingbroke and his followers. "But he seeks neither to defend his mistakes, to undo them, nor to ignore them and negotiate freshly with Bolingbroke. He is so blinded by his image of himself that he is aware neither of having erred in the past nor of having to take swift action now."27 Still strong in the belief that the sanction inherent in the theory of Divine Right will save him, and enjoying his royal illusion to the utmost, he boasts:

Not all the water in the rough rude sea
Can wash the balm off from 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.

27Markels, p. 59.
Richard's cause is not entirely lost at this stage of the play, for Bolingbroke still insists that he has only returned to regain his patrimony. In fact, for a moment it appears that Richard will sustain himself as he reprimands Northumberland for failing to bend his knee in the presence of a king. He reminds Northumberland of the protection afforded the divinity of kings, and lays all responsibility for bloodshed on the rebels if they continue in their course:

Ten thousand bloody crowns of mothers' sons
Shall ill become the flower of England's face,
Change the complexion of her maid-pale peace
To scarlet indignation, and bedew
Her pastures' grass with faithful English blood.


Undoubtedly, if Richard had followed his one manly impulse here at Flint Castle, he would have upset Bolingbroke's plans, for it is unlikely that Bolingbroke could have won a war against the King. Or, if Richard had given in to Bolingbroke's lawful demands, he would have had no rightful reason to continue the revolt, and many of the more righteous rebels would have ceased to follow him. Instead of stiffening his resistance to the idea of being deposed, however, Richard gives in to utter despair and resolves to play a new part, that of a deposed ruler. Like a petulant child, grovelling with self-pity, Richard is the first to suggest deposition:
What must the king do now? Must he submit?
The King shall do it. Must he be depos'd?
The King shall be contented. Must he lose
The name of king? O' God's name, let it go.
Rich. II. III. iii. 143.

The abdication of Richard is perfectly toned to his character: At his first meeting with Bolingbroke, he does not even listen to the Duke's plea for the restitution of his lands. He merely assumes that Bolingbroke has come to deliver an ultimatum for the crown and gives in without a moment's thought as to the consequences of relinquishing his throne. "He himself tells Bolingbroke, 'they well deserve to have, that know the strong'est and surest way to get'; while his behaviour just illustrates how they deserve not to have, who use the strong'est and surest way to lose."28

Character and destiny seem to unite in putting Bolingbroke on the throne, as Richard's every action shows him to be an unfit king and brings him nearer to his end. The mood of the play changes once this is established.

We must not say that it ceases to be political, as Richard's adherence to his inalienable royalty is a political fact of the highest importance. But there is a shift of emphasis from an England made sick by disloyalty and misrule to the personal predicament of the king.29

Having a tendency to wilt under pressure, Richard at last resorts to throwing away the crown all for the pleasure of


29 Reese, p. 230.
a childish tantrum. From the foolishness and carelessness in the first half of the play, Richard steps to unkingliness in the second half—a much more serious matter.

It is significant to note that Holinshed's account of the deposition of Richard is quite different from Shakespeare's. Whereas Holinshed reports that Richard was so surrounded by the forces of Bolingbroke that he had no choice but to abdicate, Shakespeare does not emphasize this aspect at all. In fact, it almost seems a weakness in the play that Richard gives up his throne so easily, but it is in line with Shakespeare's purpose to show that Richard's downfall is a result of the weakness in his character. The formal deposition is initiated by the Duke of York's merely reporting to Bolingbroke that Richard is yielding his sceptre to him:

Great Duke of Lancaster, I come to thee
From plume-pluck'd Richard; who with willing soul
Adopts thee heir, and his high royal sceptre yields
To the possession of thy royal hand. . . .

Northumberland then demands that Richard make a confession of his sin in order to justify the deposition. Although it is too late for self-assertion, Richard surprisingly rises to the occasion and turns upon the earl, suggesting that if the lord were to look at his own record of sin,

There shouldst thou find one heinous article,
Containing the deposing of a king
And cracking the strong warrant of an oath, 
Mark'd with a blot, damn'd in the book of heaven. 
Nay, all of you that stand and look upon me 
Whilst that my wretchedness doth bait myself, 
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.

"But he sees himself a traitor with the rest, untrue to the 
king. Even the king cannot unmake an anointed king, he seems to say."

30

It is to be wondered, then, whether Richard can dis- 
solve his kingship so easily, for he is the lawful ruler 
and his right to rule remains one of the key propositions 
of the play. Expressing concern over this problem is the 
Bishop of Carlisle, who is outraged by the deposition. He 
brings up the old questions again—whether it is right to 
depose Richard and whether Henry is the rightful successor. 
Carlisle answers the first question:

What subject can give sentence on his king? 
And who sits here that is not Richard's subject? 

Rich. II, IV, i, 122.

It is the same reply given formerly by John of Gaunt that 
God's is the quarrel. And it is the same answer that Rich- 
ard has already given in his boastful speech about the di- 
vinity of kings. As to whether Bolingbroke is the proper 
successor, Carlisle states:

30Campbell, p. 208.
My Lord Hereford here, whom you call king,
Is foul traitor to proud Hereford's king.
Rich. II, IV, i, 134.

Because the dethronement of God's deputy is a sin which undermines the constitutional basis of the English government and leaves a power vacuum, the result is always the degeneration of society as various forces enter into bloody conflict to fill that space. The Bishop then adds a warning to the rebels that was to reverberate years later when Henry's grandson meets the same fate as Richard:

And if you crown him, let me prophesy:
The blood of English shall manure the ground,
And future ages groan for this foul act.

This is an accurate description of the Wars of the Roses, which was brought about by the deposition of Richard and which Shakespeare had already dramatized in his Henry VI and Richard III plays. But Shakespeare did not have any illusions about Richard. He portrayed him as a radically defective king in that he was not only unjust but utterly irresponsible. The Bishop of Carlisle does not excuse Richard for acting wantonly without regard for either his subjects or the law, but still, to him, Richard is a bad king whom heaven will punish in its own way.

This necessity for absolute power in the king was not questioned by many in the sixteenth century, nor the fact that it originated in the laws of God, but
medieval tradition was so persistent that not even the Homilies gave permission for irresponsible government. They admit the occasional existence of bad rulers, whose badness lies in the very fact that they allow their own wills to supersede the law. Rebellion being, of course, a remedy worse than the disease—and even Bracton held that only God had the power to punish kings—the bureaucratic author of the Homilies could do no more than try to discourage misgovernment by dwelling on the sufferings undoubtedly endured by bad rulers in the past. 31

By using Richard as an example, Shakespeare shows that the temptation inherent in sovereignty may destroy the ruler who wields it, making him wilful and corrupt. So it was with Richard whose character

both as delivered in history and as drawn in the play, is mainly that of a pampered and emasculated voluptuary, presumptuous, hollow-hearted, prodigal, who cannot be got to harbour the idea that the nation exists for any purpose but to secure his private will and pleasure, and who thinks to divorce the rights and immunities of the crown from its cares and duties and legitimate honours. 32

The results are tragic, therefore, when a man such as Richard takes on the high responsibilities of a king, "for the king's immunity from earthly sanctions makes more terrible his responsibility to God." 33

There is no doubt that Shakespeare thought Bolingbroke better qualified to be king, for in portraying his character,

31Reese, p. 130.
32Hudson, Shakespeare, p. 52.
33Reese, p. 130.
he shows him as a realist who is able to see the world about him and who can perform his duty more adequately than Richard. In fact, every step that Bolingbroke takes to gain the throne is shown to be the correct one. Although Hotspur denounces him as a "vile politician," he is a true man of affairs. Throughout the play, he is portrayed as shrewd and commanding, yet attractive in his appeal to the people. Richard has already remarked on his popularity, and if he is consciously condescending in order to win the hearts of the people, still there is genuineness in his approach, for he realizes that the strength of the throne lies in the people's reverence for it. Consequently, he is magnanimous to the outspoken Bishop of Carlisle, who remains loyal to Richard.

When Bolingbroke is faced with settling the quarrel between Bagot and Aumerle over the responsibility of the death of Woodstock, he handles the situation in a masterly fashion by withholding his decision until Norfolk can be called to testify. With Norfolk's dying before this can be done, the test of justice is not fulfilled, but Bolingbroke's gesture contrasts him with Richard. In this scene, a parallel to that in which Richard presides over the quarrel between Mowbray and Bolingbroke in the first act, Shakespeare shows that Bolingbroke possesses the political
qualities which Richard so obviously lacked. Furthermore, when Bolingbroke is faced with an uprising by Aumerle and his conspirators, who want to restore Richard to the throne, Bolingbroke immediately crushes it.

Although Bolingbroke has committed the cardinal sin of disobedience, Shakespeare yet makes it clear that it is now the duty of every man to support the newly crowned king, for the greatest fear of Shakespeare and his contemporaries was that with the accession of a weak king, civil war would be waged anew in England by powerful nobles. It was better, then, to have an illegal king who was strong and efficient than to have one like Richard who was weak and incapable. In this situation, Shakespeare was faced with a paradox in portraying the ineffectiveness of Richard as a king and in illustrating that England was better ruled by Bolingbroke without advocating rebellion. In attempting to solve this paradox, it seems that he relied on the tragedy of character, for he shows Richard as the author of his own downfall. Richard is not portrayed as the royal martyr which the Tudor chronicles tended to make of him. Richard destroys and deposes himself, and Bolingbroke, partly by virtue of his abilities, and partly because he is fortune's minion mounting the wheel in spite of himself, steps into his place.34

Yet, there is no doubt that Shakespeare did not approve of rebellion, and his conviction is expressed in the words

34Ribner, p. 164.
of Carlisle: "the deposing of Richard is a deed, 'heinous, black, obscene,' calculated to bring England 'disorder, horror, fear, and mutiny.'" It would seem that he saw rebellion in moral terms in that it destroyed not only the king but the state itself. It was simply too drastic a step to be taken against any form of misgovernment. It is likely that the nation for the most part felt about it as the author of the Homilies had expressed it. As God's instrument, the king could only be endured by his subjects, vengeance being God's alone.

In fulfillment of this aspect of the theory of Divine Right, Bolingbroke, although he has shown himself to be a better ruler than Richard, still must pay for his sin. In Act V, the play is ended with Richard's murder, but it is also the beginning of the troubles that are to beset Henry IV during his reign. The plot of Aumerle is only the first of the civil strife that is to follow. Henry also has worries of a personal nature in the antic behavior of his "unthrifty son." Furthermore, before the murder of Richard, Henry lives with the fear that he will be deposed by Richard's followers, and after the murder, he bears the torture of a guilty conscience.

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The foreshadowing of the punishment that God will bestow on the rebels and the usurper comes from Richard when Northumberland is taking him to Pomfret:

Northumberland, thou ladder wherewithal
The mounting Bolingbroke ascends my throne,
. . . 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 urged, another way
To pluck him headlong from the usurped throne.

Rich. II, V, i, 55.

In this prophecy of doom that surrounds Bolingbroke at the end of the play, Shakespeare therefore emphasizes the fact that the dethronement of the rightful ruler cannot be undertaken without punishment to the usurper because in trying to make redress, he commits the greatest sin of all.

Shakespeare does not pronounce judgment on the moral issue between Bolingbroke and his king, and yet he must have shared the belief of his countrymen that because of the sinful rejection of a divinely anointed king the soil of England had been bathed in blood during the long and bitter Wars of the Roses. Richard's fall seemed inevitable; England demanded it; and yet Shakespeare does not exculpate Bolingbroke from treason and regicide.36

36 Craig, p. 135.
In the two plays of Henry IV, Shakespeare continues the study of kingship in the same pattern that he had started to develop in Richard II. This established pattern was cherished by the Elizabethans, who found a just retribution in the unquiet reign of Henry IV. The rebel with a rebellion on his hands seemed to be a representation of poetic justice meted out by God, for it was Tudor philosophy that "rebellion was the rod of chastisement to the bad king, but the rebels were no less guilty because they were used by God." Therefore, Bolingbroke's reign is tainted from the beginning because he is touched by the general sickness, of which his reign is a just symptom. Shakespeare is implying that the rebellion succeeded because Bolingbroke was the chosen instrument of Richard's predestined fall. But he does not mean that rebellion was therefore justified. It was the diseased product of a diseased condition. Personal ambition was a prominent part of it, and it contained its own nemesis in the subsequent rivalry of the accomplices. The argument of the plays is that rebellion is always wicked; and when the ruler is a guilty man, rebellion is one of the consequent manifestations of his guilt.  

37Campbell, p. 214.

38Reese, p. 229.
The answer to the rights and wrongs of rebellion, then, seems to lie in the fact that in the reign of Henry IV chaos and anarchy are rampant.

The first lines of the play show the predicament of Bolingbroke as Henry IV:

So shaken as we are, so wan with care,
Find we a time for frighted peace to pant,
And breathe short-winded accents of new broils
To be commenc'd in stronds afar remote.

I Hen. IV, I, i, l.

The King is represented by Shakespeare as an old man, whereas in Holinshed, he was at the prime of life. In fact, at the battle of Shrewsbury, he is reported to have slain thirty-six of the enemy with his own hands. It is Shakespeare's purpose, however, to portray Henry as a man worn down with guilt from the usurpation, a burden that undermines all of his good intentions to rule well. Supposedly Bolingbroke has possession of the crown because he has the ability to rule better than the man he has replaced, but his success can be measured by the deterioration of his decisive nature to one of shifting uncertainty. Beginning his reign as a man with confidence in himself, he had planned a trip to the Holy Land to atone for his sin of usurpation, but he is never able to attain purgation in this manner, for rebellion, by which means he gained the throne, prevents him from doing so. There is irony in the
fact that he dies in a palace chamber called Jerusalem and never leaves England at all.

The political virtues that enabled him to usurp the crown become weaknesses once he is crowned, for his greatest problem each day is in keeping by force what he has won by force. He can never overcome the stigma placed on him by the usurpation, causing others to feel that they have as much right to rebel against him as he had against Richard. It is his bewilderment over this paradox that makes him rather pathetic. His ambition seems to diminish as he is pulled down with the disorder and decay of his kingdom, reminding us of Richard when he refused the advice of Carlisle and Aumerle, who urged him to awaken to his duty. Before the end of the plays, he has become a hopeless neurotic, but this side of his personality is revealed only to his family and close counsellors.

The public Henry is never unimpressive, and Shakespeare lets us feel that here is a shrewd, courageous man doing his best in conditions in which, through his own original fault, success was impossible.... In business he is swift and efficient, and he addresses all rebels in terms that would be impeccable if only he and they could forget that he was once a rebel himself. But they can never forget, and in consequence Henry never possesses the authority for the proper exercise of royal power. He is reduced to shifts. His is a threadbare, makeshift majesty, and his idea of statesmanship aims no higher than the devious manipulation of opposing forces. He is a sort of poor man's Machiavelli, using the gifts and dedicated purpose of political man simply to keep himself in power.39

39Ibid., p. 312.
Although Henry is always anxious for peace and the chance to rule well, his hopes are shattered in the very first scene with the news that Glendower has captured Mortimer, Richard's appointed heir to the throne. Even the victory over the Scots at Holmedon is ruined when Hotspur refuses to release his prisoners from this battle to the King; Henry retaliates by refusing to secure the release of Mortimer, the Percies' kinsman by marriage, thereby setting the stage for rebellion. The prediction of Richard has already come true, for the Percies, who had helped Bolingbroke to the throne for their own selfish interests, struggle against him for the same reason.

The present relationship between them is therefore grounded in mutual fear: the Percies' fear that Henry, knowing them for what they are, will not rest until he has robbed them of their power to strike in the same way again; and Henry's corresponding fear that men who have been rebels once are likely to be rebels forevermore. It is a contest in which there can be no winners. Both sides are the helpless victims of their own past.

Therefore, in the two plays of Henry IV, the nature of rebellion is shown to be unhealthy in that it produces a sickness of spirit which seems to pervade all men. Not only is it apparent in the person of the King, but it is also evident in the quarrels that follow between the rebels. Although Northumberland and the Percies are united in their

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40 Ibid., p. 287.
hatred of the King, mistrust and suspicion develop among them even while they are planning to divide the kingdom into three parts. Then, Northumberland decides not to risk his men, sending word that he is sick, and Glendower is unable to get his troops ready in time for the battle against the King's forces. Although Hotspur and Douglas want to fight with any troops available, Worcester worries about the defection of Northumberland:

... it will be thought
By some, that know not why he is away
That wisdom, loyalty and mere dislike
Of our proceedings kept the earl from hence:
And think how such an apprehension
May turn the tide of fearful faction,
And breed a kind of question in our cause.

Before Shrewsbury, even the King's offer of amnesty to the rebels is rejected by Worcester, who takes it upon himself not to report it to the others. Because he is extremely suspicious of the King, Worcester does not believe that Henry IV can fulfil his promises:

It is not possible, it cannot be,
The king should keep his word in loving us;
He will suspect us still, and find a time
To punish this offence in other faults:
Suspicion all our lives shall be stuck full of eyes;
For treason is but trusted like the fox. . . .
Look how we can, or sad or merrily,
Interpretation will misquote our looks.

Their subsequent defeat at Shrewsbury would seem to suggest that rebellion is self-defeating by its effect on the rebels
themselves. In II Henry IV, Shakespeare develops this theme further by showing that the effects of the rebellion have paralyzed the men to such an extent that they cannot act normally. This is exemplified as Morton describes to Northumberland the condition of Hotspur's troops at Shrewsbury, the reason for their defeat:

My lord your son had only but the corpse,  
But shadows and the shows of men, to fight;  
For that same word, rebellion, did divide  
The action of their bodies from their souls;  
And they did fight with queasiness, constrain'd,  
As men drink potions, that their weapons only  
Seem'd on our side; but, for their spirits and souls,  
This word, rebellion, it had froze them up,  
As fish are in a pond.  

II Hen. IV, I, i, 192.

Throughout the plays, Shakespeare shows that the uprising is doomed to failure by the uncertainty of the leaders who either fall into despair or clutch at straws as when Morton tries to strengthen Northumberland's hopes after Shrewsbury by telling him that the Archbishop of York has given the continuing rebellion a religious sanction:

But now the bishop  
Turns insurrection to religion  
Suppos'd sincere and holy in his thoughts,  
He's follow'd both with body and with mind,  
And doth enlarge his rising with the blood  
Of fair King Richard, scrap'd from Pomfret stones;  
Derives from heaven his quarrel and his cause.  

II Hen. IV, I, i, 200.

Yet some of the more practical rebels realize that their success will depend on the "crafty-sick" Northumberland's
furnishing them with troops and supplies. Lord Bardolph blames Hotspur for risking battle at Shrewsbury with only the promise of troops and warns that

Conjecture, expectation, and surmise  
Of aids incertain should not be admitted. . . .  
We fortify in paper, and in figures,  
Using the names of men instead of men.  

II Hen. IV, I, iii, 23.

The rebels, however, listen more closely to Hastings' argument:

It never yet did hurt  
To lay down likelihoods and forms of hope.  

II Hen. IV, I, iii, 34.

After the warnings of Lady Percy are rejected as are those of Bardolph, York reveals the true predicament to which the rebellion and the Lancastrian usurpation have brought everyone involved in it, whatever his party. The whole nation has become its victim:

We are all diseased.  
And with our surfeiting and wanton hours  
Have brought ourselves into a burning fever,  
And we must bleed for it; of which disease  
Our late king, Richard, being infected, died.  

II Hen. IV, IV, i, 54.

By their actions, the conspirators have offended both God and man and have degraded themselves as men. Shakespeare's conclusion seems to be that rebellion destroys the harmonious order of God's design, making men unable to direct their own destiny.
I Henry IV, dealing with rebellion to overthrow the king, is followed by the disintegration of that rebellion in II Henry IV. However, the action of the plays is extended beyond the feudal relationship between the king and his subjects to cover the disorder in the life of the nation. Henry IV is personally aware of this disorder in the actions of his son, Prince Hal, who associates with such men as Falstaff, Poins, and Pistol, other symbols of the sickness of the nation after the usurpation. Although Hal's dissoluteness is related to the state, it is apparent that there is a fresh beginning in his behavior. His conduct from the first implies that monarchy should be viewed in a new light in a world of uncertainties. Thus, the overthrow and restoration of order under royal authority is only a part of Shakespeare's purpose in this series, for through a process of education, Hal is finally able to assume with competence the burden which his father's usurpation and Richard's unworthiness have placed upon him. His gradual development from a dissolute adolescent to a responsible king gives a significant continuity to the series whereby through the portrayal of Hal and his relationship to his father and other characters in the play, Shakespeare dramatizes not only the political but also the personal qualities that make a king.
From the first scene between Henry IV and his son, it is obvious that the King does not understand the depth of character in Hal. It had been Henry's fervent hope that God would see fit to forgive his crime, so that he could "pass on to his son an unblemished succession. But even this hope seems denied, for riot and dishonour stain the brow of his young Harry, and he sees as part of his punishment the inordinate and low desires affected by his heir."41 He expresses this thought to Hal:

I know not whether God will have it so,
For some displeasing service I have done,
That in his secret doom, out of my blood
He'll breed revengement and a scourge for me;
But thou dost in thy passages of life
Make me believe that thou art only mark'd
For the hot vengeance and the rod of heaven
To punish my mistreadings.

I Hen. IV, III, ii, 4.

He continues his lecture by reproaching Hal for acting irresponsibly, as Richard had done, losing the loyalty of the people by showing himself too often in public:

The skipping King, he ambled up and down
With shallow jesters and rash babin wits,
Soon kindled and soon burnt; carded his state,
Mingled his royalty with cap'ring fools,
Had his great name profaned with their scorns...
He was but as the cuckoo is in June,
Heard, not regarded...

I Hen. IV, III, ii, 60.

In direct contrast, Bolingbroke tells Hal how he had out-maneuvered Richard and won the crown by being seldom seen:

> I could not stir
> But like a comet I was wonder'd at;
> That men would tell their children, "This is he";
> Others would say, "Where? which is Bolingbroke?"
> And then I stole all courtesy from heaven,
> And dress'd myself in such humility
> That I did pluck allegiance from men's hearts.
> 
> I Hen. IV, III, ii, 46.

After trying to impress on his erring son the fact that he will never be king if he continues his present behavior, Henry compares the courage and sobriety of Hotspur with the riotousness of Hal and his reprobate friends. Shakespeare altered historical fact by making Hotspur the same age as Hal, thereby creating a parallel to Hal. A fierce soldier in battle, Hotspur seems to accept the responsibility of his noble birth in contrast to Hal, who initially does not seem to. On this level of consideration, Hotspur, as a rival to Prince Hal, sets an example of conduct toward which Hal's father hopes his son will aspire. Henry tells Hal that he fears he has sunk so low that he will even join the Percies and Northumberland against the King's forces. But Hal, touched and repentant, immediately reassures his father:

> Do not think so; you shall not find it so:
> And God forgive them that so much have sway'd
> Your Majesty's good thoughts away from me!
> I will redeem all this on Percy's head,
> And in the closing of some glorious day
> Be bold to tell you that I am your son.
> 
> I Hen. IV, III, ii, 129.
Prince Hal was a popular hero of the Elizabethan era, and many apocryphal legends about him had developed by the time that Shakespeare was writing these plays. The theme of the prodigal son was perfect for Shakespeare's purpose, and following the action in The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth, he creates many scenes with Hal and his friends in the Boar's Head Tavern. Shakespeare, however, toned down the riotousness of the Prince, transforming "the vulgar ruffian of the Famous Victories into a madcap prince whose escapades are easily pardoned on the ground of youth and wild blood."42

From the beginning, it is clear that Hal will reform at the proper time, for Shakespeare lets Prince Hal declare his intention to allow

the base contagious clouds
To smother up this beauty from the world. . . .
I Hen. IV, I, ii, 221.

so that men will appreciate him more when he has reformed. Of course, Hal's father is not made aware of this intention, and even Hal's friends are not capable of judging the meaning of his actions or his words. Falstaff, who mistakenly thinks that his fortunes will rise with those of Hal and that thievery and other sorts of lawlessness will thrive when Hal is king, expresses his hope before the robbery at Gadshill:

42Parrot, p. 344.
But, I prithee, sweet wag, shall there be
gallows standing in England when thou art king?
and resolution thus fobbed as it is with the
rusty curb of old father antic the law? Do not
thou, when thou art king, hang a thief.

Prince. No; thou shalt.

Fal. Shall I? O rare! By the Lord, I'll be
a brave judge.

Prince. Thou judgest false already. I mean,
thou shalt have the hanging of the thieves and
so become a rare hangman.

I Hen. IV. i, ii, 66.

Whatever may be the perils of his association with Falstaff,
the Prince reveals in this conversation that his mind is of
a far nobler nature. In Shakespeare's play, he takes part
in the robbery at Gadshill only as a practical joke and makes
sure that all of the money is returned to its rightful owners.

Through the dramatic convention of the soliloquy, the
Prince is presented by Shakespeare as a practical man who
will not seize the crown before his time, but who will know
what to do when the time comes. Then he will be able to
discard his base friends easily because he has already de-
clared his intention to do so once he has gained what he
desires to know about their strengths and weaknesses as men,
their moral good and evil. In this self-revelation is a
psychological virtue which is the key to his behavior through-
out the plays. Surrounding himself with Falstaff and his
companions, who seem to be living examples of anarchy, Hal,
unlike his father, will understand them because he has lived with them. His relationship with Falstaff, then, is essential in his education, for he gains an understanding of the common people that he will rule. As Traversi explains:

The viciousness of Hal's early surroundings and of his unregenerate behavior (which his own father, with less than complete understanding, accepts at its face value) reflects the disorder which was at once the cause and the result of Bolingbroke's usurpation; the aristocratic intrigues of the rebels, with their disruptive effect upon the unity of the state, find their reflection in the dissolution of the tavern scenes, supremely incarnated in the anarchy of Falstaff. From the disorder the Prince, even as he participates in it, stands aside in detached sufficiency. He deliberately sets himself to study it, to make himself realistically familiar, on all levels, with the conditions of his future rule; and the result is that the dramatic action takes shape, round his person, in a world in which Hotspur and Douglas, Falstaff and Bardolph, Poins and Pistol, each alive in his own right, live further as an integral part of the society which it is the king's vocation to mould into an active unity of purpose.43

In his role as a successful king, it is this understanding of people that distinguishes Hal from his father, who limited his acquaintances to court circles and values. Seeing a world of reality and the people in it gives Hal an awareness that both Richard and Bolingbroke lacked, the result of which was their downfall.

The first overt evidence that Hal will redeem himself in the eyes of his father comes after Henry's admonishment

of him for his waywardness. It is obvious from the speech of Vernon that in the battle at Shrewsbury Hal intends to make good his epic boast:

I saw young Harry, with his beaver on,
His cuisses on his thighs, gallantly arm'd,
Rise from the ground like feather'd Mercury,
And vaulted with such ease into his seat,
As if an angel dropp'd down from the clouds,
To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus
And witch the world with noble horsemanship.

I Hen. IV, IV, 1, 104.

In this combat, Hal not only saves the life of his father but also defeats Harry Percy, even giving credit for the latter accomplishment to Falstaff. All of these events are Shakespeare's departure from historical fact in order to enhance the reputation of Hal. This battle is also significant in that it is a representation of the struggle between feudalism and monarchy. Hotspur, as a feudal baron in the late Middle Ages, holds family pride and personal ambition above loyalty to the king. Shakespeare however embodies in the Prince all that Elizabethans desire in a sovereign—

bravery, affability, generosity, and above all loyalty to the throne and the idea of national unity. Hal has no personal grudge against Hotspur, but he is very sure that "one England cannot brook a double reign." And so Hotspur falls and deserves to fall, all good Elizabethans would think; the sword of the Prince is the symbol of the power of the sovereign.44

44Parrot, p. 346.
Shakespeare's purpose in the study of kingship in these plays is directed toward establishing the qualities that make a good king. Since Prince Hal is the central figure, the focus is necessarily on his development into "the mirror of all Christian kings." It is of utmost importance that Hal, in learning to accept his royal responsibilities, must first of all attain the true concept of honor. In order to achieve this purpose, Shakespeare deliberately contrasts the views of Falstaff, Hotspur, and Hal concerning honor, their attitudes all being extremely different.

First, Hotspur in wildly extravagant terms expresses his notion of honor:

By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap
To pluck bright honour from the pale-fac'd moon,
Or dive into the bottom of the deep,
Where fathom line could never touch the ground,
And pluck up drowned honour by the locks.

I Hen. IV, I, iii, 201.

"In a word, the honour of which he dreams is a personal renown and nothing else; a conception which, for all its implications of bravery in battle and contempt for danger and death, is purely a selfish one." At Shrewsbury, his reckless devotion to this concept destroys him.

On the other hand, Falstaff, as a foil to Hotspur, represents the opposite type of conduct. Creating Falstaff

45J. Dover Wilson, The Fortunes of Falstaff (Cambridge, 1944), p. 70.
from a character in the *Famous Victories* known as Sir John Oldcastle, Shakespeare makes him a boon companion to Prince Hal. Old and fat, he is Shakespeare's supreme creation of the essence of merriment. Yet he is capable of being a highway robber or of abusing the King's press. He is not ashamed to feign death rather than to fight, nor is he above taking credit for a victory that he did not win. Falstaff takes exactly the opposite view of Hotspur by rejecting honor as a personal ideal. Before the battle of Shrewsbury, he asks why he should die for someone else:

Well, 'tis no matter; honour pricks me on. Yea, but how if honour prick me off when I come on? How then? Can honour set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery then? No. What is honour? A word. What is that word honour? Air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that died a Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis insensible then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon.

*I Hen.* IV, V, i, 131.

He repeats the same point of view later when he is standing over the body of Sir Walter Blunt:

I like not such grinning honour as Sir Walter hath: give me life, which if I can save, so; if not, honour comes unlooked for, and there's an end.

*I Hen.* IV, V, iii, 62.

Shakespeare sees true honour as the mean between two extremes—the foolhardiness of Hotspur at one end and the
deficiency of Falstaff at the other. Hal, later to become the ideal king of England must avoid both.

The presence of both the excess and deficiency of a virtue naturally suggests Aristotle's comprehensive theory of ethics. In this book, which he addressed, according to tradition, to his son Nichomachus, Aristotle presents his famous theory that virtuous action or good action exists as a mean between two extremes both of which are vicious. Virtue, he says, to quote from the translation of W. D. Ross, "must have the quality of aiming at the intermediate." More particularly, "it is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect; and again it is a mean because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions. . . ." These words seem to fit admirably with the words and actions of Hotspur and Falstaff.46

Hal's criticism of Falstaff's and Hotspur's ideal of honor takes place at the tavern of Mistress Quickly, in which scene he and Poins discuss the "cowardice" of Falstaff in running away at Gadshill. Although most critics agree that Falstaff is not cowardly in that he will fight, "but no longer than he sees reason," yet compared to the Prince, he is more concerned at the thought of meeting the rebels in combat:

Tell me, Hal, art not thou horrible afeard? Thou being heir apparent, could the world pick thee out three such enemies again as that fiend Douglas, that spirit Percy, and that devil Glendower? Art thou not horribly afraid? Doth not thy blood thrill?

I Hen. IV, II, iv, 402.

To which the Prince gives a scornful answer:

Not a whit, i' faith; I lack some of thy instinct.

Earlier in this scene, Hal criticizes Hotspur's concept of honor by laughing at him. As he tells Poins:

I am not yet of Percy's mind, the Hotspur of the North; he that kills me some six or seven dozen of Scots at breakfast, washes his hands, and says to his wife, "Fie upon this quiet life! I want work."

Harry Monmouth has his own idea of honor, which is revealed at the first meeting with his father, when he vows to defeat Hotspur, thereby vindicating himself of the "dishonor" the King ascribes to him. It is his intention to

make this northern youth exchange
His glorious deeds for my indignities.
Percy is but my factor, good my lord,
To engross up glorious deeds on my behalf;
And I will call him to so strict account
That he shall render every glory up,
Yea, even the slightest worship of his time,
Or I will tear the reckoning from his heart.

Such boasting may sound similar to the sentiments expressed by Hotspur, but

when he speaks of robbing Percy of his glory, he is thinking, not of personal reputation, but of regaining his father's good opinion, while his conduct at Shrewsbury shows him coveting, not the renown of glorious deeds, but the deeds themselves; once having set himself right with his conscience, he unconcernedly passes on the credit to another . . . . Thus the Prince, who is to figure in the sequel to Henry IV as "the mirror of all Christian kings," is already at Shrewsbury the soul of true
honour, caring nothing for renown, for the outward show of honour in the eyes of men, so long as he has proved himself worthy of its inner substance in his own. And this substance is only personal in so far as every patriot may share in it; for the honour he covets is to add to the honour of England.\textsuperscript{47} Further evidence that Hal seeks honor as a golden mean between the two extremes represented by Hotspur and Falstaff is demonstrated in that he does not reject their individualism entirely, for he seems to have an understanding of them that guards against any extreme position. Although he must oppose what Hotspur represents, yet he cannot do it without admitting that it must be taken into account in his overall view. At Shrewsbury he gives tribute to Hotspur's valor:

\begin{quote}
this earth that bears thee dead
Bears not alive so stout a gentleman.
\end{quote}
\textit{I Hen. IV, V, v, 92.}

And it would seem that his attitude toward Falstaff, who is playing dead on the battlefield, is similar in that his farewell is both tender and disapproving, conceding that Falstaff's views of war, government, and patriotism must be considered by anyone who would rule wisely and justly:

\begin{quote}
Poor Jack, farewell!
I could have better spar'd a better man.
\end{quote}
\textit{I Hen. IV, V, v, 103.}

The action of Hal's progress in accepting his royal responsibilities is as poignant as that of Richard's

\textsuperscript{47}Wilson, p. 72.
downfall and of Bolingbroke's disappointment over his inability to rule effectively.

These are what might well be called tragic elements in the tetralogy, and they constitute Shakespeare's special concern in these plays; for he is here, as everywhere, most keenly fascinated by the enigma of character: in Richard and Bolingbroke by the unresolved conflict or imbalance of attitudes which brings about failure; and in Prince Hal by a miraculous conjunction of traits which contribute to that special temperament needed for success in this most difficult and most demanding of public vocations.⁴⁸

It is at the close of II Henry IV in the scene with his dying father that Shakespeare dramatically shows us the real Prince. Historically, Henry IV successfully overcame the crisis in his reign by crushing the rebels at Shrewsbury, but the burdens of the crown have worn him out, so that he cannot enjoy his triumph—adding poignancy to the relationship between him and his heir. He has struggled with the problems of government and an empty treasury; the people have turned away from him and look back on the reign of Richard with nostalgia. But Hal in his youthful wisdom is able to understand the troubles that his father has faced in carrying the terrible burdens of kingship, and even Henry himself could not have spoken more movingly or with greater knowledge of government than Hal does at the deathbed of his father.

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As the King tosses about, he can only compare his wakefulness with the sound slumber of the wet shipboy, but when Prince Hal soliloquizes on the King's insomnia, he speaks not about sleep but the cause of the King's condition; he addresses the crown directly as that "polished perturbation! golden care!" Prince Hal knows that the reason for the King's restlessness is the weight of his public duties. Still addressing the crown as it rests on the pillow of his father, Hal shows a further awareness that the assumption of kingship is not without personal cost:

O majesty!
When thou dost pinch thy bearer, thou dost sit
Like a rich armour worn in heat of day,
That scalds with safety.

II Hen. IV. IV, v, 28.

In this awareness, there is a tragic element in Hal's realization of the duties of royalty and a preconception of the painful choices he will have to make as king. He realistically sees the burden he must soon bear in wielding power over a nation, for as a dominant theme in the history plays, "power, at best, is a grievous burden, its glitter tarnished by a sense of personal inadequacy, and the figure of the puny ruler weighed down by responsibility . . . ."49

49 Traversi, Shakespeare, p. 138.
Although Hal has partially redeemed himself in the eyes of his father in I Henry IV, the final reconciliation is yet to take place. Throughout the plays the King has worried about what will happen to the crown when Hal becomes king, and there seems to be cause for his anxiety when he awakens to find that Hal has taken the crown prematurely and placed it on his own head. Falling into a rage, Henry prophesies that upon his death the country will be destroyed through riot and anarchy:

Pluck down my officers, break my decrees;
For now a time is come to mock at form.
Harry the Fifth is crown'd! Up, vanity!

II Hen. IV, IV, v, 118.

Hal, however, is able to reassure him through his explanation for wearing the crown that he does not intend to waste it in dissipation:

Coming to look on you, thinking you dead,
And dead almost, my liege, to think you were,
I spake unto this crown as having sense,
And thus upbraided it: "The care on thee depending
Hath fed upon the body of my father;
Therefore thou best of gold art worst of gold..."

II Hen. IV, IV, v, 156.

Convinced that Hal is sincere in his confession, King Henry is then led to utter some confessions of his own before he dies, including the manner in which he secured the throne:

God knows, my son,
By what by-paths and indirect crook'd ways
I met this crown, and I myself know well
How troubled some it sat upon my head:
To thee it shall descend with better quiet,
Better opinion, better confirmation;
For all the soil of the achievement goes
With me into the earth.

II Hen. IV, IV, v, 184.

Furthermore, he admits that his plan for a crusade to the Holy Land was just another trick to keep his subjects from remembering the way in which he came to power. He recommends that Hal pursue the same sort of craftiness to keep order at home:

Therefore, my Harry,
Be it thy course to busy giddy minds
With foreign quarrels; that action, hence borne out,
May waste the memory of thy former days.

II Hen. IV, IV, v, 213.

In this deathbed scene, Henry tries to impress on Hal the limitations of his rule because of the usurpation. Hal, as the son of a usurper, will be denied the sanctions which belong to a king of unquestioned heredity, sanctions upon which Richard depended to offset his personal unfitness to rule. Prince Hal, however, is a complete contrast to his father in that he has a correct awareness of himself and the world, and therefore, he does not depend on fortune to control his life. Prince Hal sees in the lack of traditional sanctions an opportunity in that it enables him
to propose to himself with full awareness ends which a traditional ruler can too easily take for granted, reconciling the legitimate authority (which more clearly than his father) he is
in a position to exercise, with the insight and political skill needed to maintain it in a world of shifting and often cynical values.\textsuperscript{50}

As an inexperienced youth, Hal could have easily confused his father's craftiness with statesmanship and kept his public face separate from the one he wore in private. But Hal saw this as an affectation which would only bring him personal dishonor. Making no comments on Henry's trickery, Hal merely replies to Henry's final remark about the dubious legality of the crown:

\begin{verbatim}
My gracious liege, 
You won it, wore it, kept it, gave it me; 
Then plain and right must my possession be; 
Which I with more than with a common pain 
'Gainst all the world will rightfully maintain. 
\textit{II Hen. IV}, IV, v, 221.
\end{verbatim}

Because the main function of the king is leadership, Hal, as Henry V, quickly acts to confirm his role as the fulfillment of the perfect kingly type. Receiving the crown as a sacred trust not to be tarnished by his father's political advice, Henry V before the Lord Chief Justice, symbol of law and order, immediately repents for the wildness of his former days. But before doing so, Henry reminds the Justice that he once sent him to prison, an indignity that he has not been able to forget. In pleading his case, however, the Justice speaks as one who had represented the person and authority of Henry IV:

\textsuperscript{50}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 106.
I then did use the person of your father;  
The image of his power lay then in me;  
And in th' administration of his law,  
While I was busy for the commonwealth,  
Your Highness pleased to forget my place,  
The majesty and power of law and justice,  
The image of the King whom I presented.  

II Hen. IV, V, ii, 73.

In the Justice's defense of equality before the law, even for the Prince, he "teaches that one cannot violate the laws of the state without attacking the whole moral order, even the bonds of the family. All the more must a prince submit to the laws of the king his father."51

Henry, as the new king, then submits completely in taking on the responsibility of his office of kingship:

You are right, Justice, and you weigh this well. 
Therefore still bear the balance and the sword;  
And I do wish your honours may increase.  

II Hen. IV, V, ii, 102.

This submission is significant in that it definitely repudiates the "policy" of his father. Initially on the side of misgovernment, Hal has been converted to the side of order and justice in government, thereby exemplifying that in the realm of political morality, there are duties as well as desires. The law of voracious nature must and can be subdued to the rule of law and justice. And as the roused Henry V casts aside his irresponsible dream, those who are his lieutenants in the governing of England may rejoice in "this fair proceeding of the King's."52


52Stauffer, p. 99.
As a king intending to rule with justice, Henry's next step must be to break the ties that have bound him to Falstaff, whose only conception of the Lord Chief Justice is that of "old father antic the law." When Falstaff hears the news that Hal has been crowned, he presumptuously assumes that his position will be raised too. Not knowing that Henry has already confirmed the Justice in his office, Falstaff sets out to ride all night to the coronation, crying out:

Let us take any man's horses; the laws of England are at my commandment. Blessed are they that have been my friends; and woe to my Lord Chief Justice! Il Hen. IV, V, iii, 42.

In Il Henry IV, Falstaff is not as attractive a character as in the previous play, for besides his excessive drinking and wenching at the Boar's Head, he has become a symbol for the ugliness of civil dissension and misgovernment. Hal and Falstaff are together in this play only one time, and Hal does not seem to enjoy the association as he did formerly. In fact, "Shakespeare seems to have made a deliberate effort to keep them apart, probably to avoid smirching the character of the man about to be crowned."53 In this play, Falstaff goes his own way alone, cheating Mrs. Quickly out of a promised marriage and Justice Shallow out of a thousand pounds. He even takes advantage of

53Hunter, p. 179.
his military position to further himself financially. No restraints are placed on him as he ignores all moral and social obligations. Thus, by the time that Hal is crowned, Falstaff's total rejection is imminent. Although Shakespeare has prepared us for the final break by degrading the character of Falstaff, it may be difficult for many to see that this rejection of an old friend is part of the tragedy inherent in royalty. He must be cast aside, or society, on his level, would be steeped in anarchy. Anything other than complete rejection would be contrary to the moral involved in Henry IV and the other plays.

Actually rejecting Falstaff from the beginning, Hal has only been waiting for the proper time to make his feelings known. It is not surprising, then, that Hal resents the intimacy with which Falstaff greets him when he is Henry V, and in "what has been described as the greatest snub in literature," he curtly denounces Falstaff in public for this familiarity with him:

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

Henry V does not express himself in his old way, but in a manner fitting to his position, which seems to be as necessary as his rejection, for any other way would have been

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Rowse, p. 259.
hypocritical. In fact, in his last speech in the play, Hal’s evolution has become so complete that there even seems to be a note of bitterness, perhaps shame, that he has ever fraternized with Falstaff. The fact of the matter is that there is no room for Falstaff in a land ruled by Henry V, a hard-headed realist. All of the action in both parts of Henry IV has led up to this moment, and so there is no dramatic inconsistency in it. In fact, the final dissolution of the bond between Falstaff and Henry V seems to be a necessary part of these plays in that it translates yet again into dramatic terms of personal opposition the "disease" which we have found hanging over the English state, and it relates all the division between age and youth, action and inaction, anarchic folly and cold calculation which embody that disease to a developing split in the dramatist’s conception of the world as his plays reveal it.55

Thus, in addition to showing the divine retribution for the crime of usurpation, Shakespeare completes his purpose in the two plays of Henry IV by the redemption of Hal from an Eastcheap rake to the glorious King Henry V. In the symbolic reconciliation between Henry and the Lord Chief Justice, Shakespeare emphasizes the principal political theme: "the education of a prince in the art of government.

which involves first and above all the impartial administration of justice. What England's fate would have been had Falstaff rather than the Chief Justice prevailed, is indicated by King Henry IV:

Down, royal state! all you sage counsellors, hence! And to the English court assemble now, From every region, apes of idleness! Now, neighbour confines, purge you of your scum: Have you a ruffian that will swear, drink, dance, Revel the night, rob, murder and commit The oldest sins the newest kind of ways? Be happy, he will trouble you no more; England shall double gild his treble guilt, England shall give him office, honour, might; For the fifth Harry from curb'd license plucks The muzzle of restraint, and the wild dog Shall flesh his tooth on every innocent. O my poor kingdom, sick with civil blows! When that my care could not withhold thy riots, What wilt thou do when riot is thy care? O, thou wilt be a wilderness again, Peopled with wolves, thy old inhabitants!  

This was the general expectation which had accompanied the Prince's youth. But fortunately for England, Hal underwent his process of education and made his proper choice."  

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HENRY V

As Henry V, Hal emerges as a ruler who is capable of a self-awareness that involves subjecting his own wilfulness so that justice will prevail throughout his kingdom. From a succession of selfishly ambitious monarchs, one comes forth who is truly qualified to rule. Shakespeare deliberately portrays the man that exists beneath the royal robes and armor as one with whom the crown is safe at last. In Henry V,

the English are mirrored triumphant in a righteous cause, achieving victory through the blessing of God. A mood of exultation pervades the play. Henry V stands as the ideal hero in contrast with . . . the deposed Richard, the rebel Henry IV; for the traditional conception of Henry V was of a hero king, and about his dominant figure Shakespeare chose to fashion a hero-play.57

In this play, the theme is the test of leadership in a foreign war and not the internal struggle of the conscience to which Henry IV was subjected. Because of this situation there is too little scope for those developments of character and passion wherein the interest of the serious drama mainly consists. For, as Schlegel remarks, "war is an epic rather than a dramatic subject: to yield the right interest for the stage, it must be the means whereby something else is

57Campbell, p. 255.
accomplished, and not the last aim and substance of the whole." And perhaps it was a sense of this unfitness of the matter for dramatic use that led the Poet, upon the revisal, to pour through the work so large a measure of the lyrical element, thus penetrating and filling it with the efficacy of a grand national song of triumph. Hence comes it that the play is so thoroughly charged with the spirit and poetry of a sort of jubilant patriotism, of which the King himself is probably the most eloquent impersonation ever delineated.58

In the Epilogue to II Henry IV, Shakespeare promised to "continue the story, with Sir John in it, and make you merry with fair Katharine of France." There has been much speculation as to why he did not keep this promise, but it seems logical to assume that

Sir John's dramatic office and mission were clearly at an end when his connection with Prince Henry was broken off; the design of the character being to explain the Prince's wild and riotous courses. .... To have continued him with his wits shattered or crippled, had been flagrant injustice to him; to have continued him with his wits sound and in good trim, had been something unjust to the Prince.59

With Falstaff out of the picture, there are no comic scenes to equal those in the preceding plays, but Shakespeare does introduce other comic figures. Hostess Quickly, now Mrs. Pistol, the swaggering Pistol himself, Bardolph, with his "face all bubukles, and whelks, and knobs, and flame of fire," and Corporal Nym all carry on the low humor that was characteristic of Falstaff. In these characters,


59 Ibid., p. 10.
Shakespeare is able to bring back memories of the King's former associates in contrast to his present life, which is one of strict moral discipline.

They thus help to bridge over the chasm, which might else appear something too abrupt, between what the hero was as Prince of Wales and what he is as King: therewithal their presence shows him acting out the purpose, which he avowed at our first meeting with him, of imitating the Sun. . . . That some such clouds of vileness, exhaled from the old haunts of his discarded life, should still hang about his path, was natural in the course of things, and may be set down as a judicious point in the drama. 60

At the beginning of the play, Shakespeare emphasizes the complete conversion of Hal in the conversation between two churchmen who marvel at the change that has come about in his character:

The breath no sooner left his father's body
But that his wildness, mortified in him,
Seem'd to die too; yea, at that very moment
Consideration, like an angel, came
And whipp'd the offending Adam out of him,
Leaving his body as a paradise,
To envelope and contain celestial spirits.


The Archbishop further takes note of all of the king's accomplishments in government, religion, and even his personal relationships:

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

60 Ibid., p. 12.
You would say it hath been all in all his study; 
List his discourse of war, and you shall hear
A fearful battle render'd you in music. . . .

\textit{Hen. V, I, i, 38.}

Although the two preceding plays make it clear that there has been no unpremeditated change in the Prince,

there is no reason why the two bishops should have known it too, and their assumption of a heaven-sent conversion is an effective and economical way of emphasising the reputation that Henry now enjoys. It is the reputation that matters, not the manner of it; and it would be odd if the Church did not find in it the occasion for a certain amount of professional congratulation.\textsuperscript{61}

The overt action of the play has to do with Henry's pressing his claim to the throne of France, and at the beginning of the play, he confronts the churchmen as to the legality of his claim. Although Henry IV advised his son "to busy giddy minds/With foreign quarrels," Hal does not choose to wage war as a means of quelling any rebellion at home. Instead, he seeks the assurance of the Archbishop that the war will be justified on high moral grounds. In warning the Archbishop not to twist the facts in making his decision, he shows great concern for his subjects that the war not be carried on in a worthless cause:

\begin{quote}
For God doth know how many now in health
Shall drop their blood in approbation
Of what your reverence shall incite us to.
\textit{Hen. V, I, ii, 18.}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{61}Reese, p. 322.
It is reported by Holinshed that in the early reign of Henry V there was a bill before Parliament to convert a large amount of church property into revenue for the State. Of course, it would be to the interests of the churchmen to have the King forget about this bill and add to his dominion by taking French territory instead of theirs, but Shakespeare does not refer to this matter in the play. Whereas Holinshed makes it appear that there is some conniving on the part of the churchmen to get Henry involved in a foreign war, Shakespeare does not want to give the appearance that the King's close advisers have any ulterior motives, for it would lessen Henry's stature as the ideal king.

Instead, Shakespeare lets the Archbishop explain, in all sincerity and at great lengths, that there is no legality in the Salic law, by which France excluded female heirs to the throne. Therefore, Hal has a hereditary right to the throne of France through the mother of Edward III, and according to the Archbishop, it is even his duty to bring this territorial possession under the throne of England. It is Shakespeare's purpose to show that Henry, as a wise ruler, acknowledges the fact that a king may declare war, but only if his cause is just. Wanting reassurance, Henry again demands that the Archbishop approve the validity of his claim to the French throne, to which the Archbishop replies:

The sin upon my head, dread sovereign!  
*Hen. V.* I, ii, 97.
In Henry's "clear rectitude and piety of purpose, he will not go to war with France till he believes religiously and in his conscience that he has a sacred right to the French crown, and that it would be a sin against the divinely-appointed order of human society not to prosecute that claim." Thus, under the terms of feudal law, Henry is satisfied that he is quite justified in making war against France—a point which Shakespeare must make very clear if his concept of kingship is to be believed.

Henry will not make his declaration of war, however, until he is certain that in his absence the country will be safe from the marauding Scots. In raising this point, Henry, unlike Richard II, is aware that his duty is to protect his people. In Exeter's assurance that the realm is adequately protected, we are informed of Henry's harmonious relationship with his people:

While that the armed hand doth fight abroad,  
Th' advised head defends itself at home;  
For government, though high and low and lower,  
Put into parts, doth keep in one consent,  
Congreeing in a full and natural close,  
Like music.  


At the close of this scene, Henry announces his decision to fight for his claim, and the French envoys are sent for. Their presentation of the tennis balls, a gift

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from the Dauphin, brings forth a sarcastic retort from
Henry, which leaves the French in no doubt as to the real
issues involved:

But this lies all within the will of God,
To whom I do appeal; and in whose name
Tell you the Dauphin I am coming on,
To venge me as I may and to put forth
My rightful hand in a well-hallow'd cause.

_Hen. V, I, 11, 289._

It is not an easy task to bear the burden of the crown
in a responsible manner. Shakespeare seems to feel that one
of the greatest temptations a ruler must overcome is seek­
ing refuge from this responsibility.

He feared the abandonment of power more than he
fee'd its tyrannical exercise, and it may be
significant that the first crisis Henry has to
meet on coming to the throne is the Dauphin's
accusation that England is "idly king'd," her
sceptre fantastically borne by a self-indulgent
playboy. The mocking gift of tennis balls, an
explicit reminder of "our wilder days," gives
further urgency to the war that Henry has al­
ready decided to fight.63

It is significant to note that Holinshed places the
incident of the tennis balls before Archbishop Chichester's
speech and before an indication of the war with France.
Hall places it after the speech, inferring that this may
have been the reason for Henry's decision. But Shakespeare
places it after Henry has announced that he will go to war,
showing that it made no difference. Thus, Henry's decision

63Traversi, _Shakespeare_, p. 155.
to invade France is not made because of the personal insult, but it is inferred that England is now ruled by a man who is devoted to the good of the kingdom.

Before he leaves for the invasion of France, Henry's ability to quell civil dissension is tested when he is faced with the conspiracy of the Earl of Cambridge, Scroop, and Grey. He is able to subdue it as effectively as his father had the rebellion of Aumerle and the Percies. For their treason, Henry sentences the rebels to death, not out of personal revenge but because a conspiracy against the king is a betrayal of the kingdom:

Touching our person seek we no revenge;  
But we our kingdom's safety must so tender,  
Whose ruin you have sought, that to her laws  
We do deliver you.


In Holinshed, the real purpose of this uprising was to place on the throne Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March, the lawful king by strict primogeniture. Shakespeare does not bring this to light, however, as "no enemy of Henry is to have any reasonable ground for opposing him." In Henry V, supposedly only the "gold of France" has tempted the conspirators.

In this scene Henry's kingly qualities are further demonstrated when he pardons the drunkard who curses him personally but does no harm to the royal office. Since

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Albert H. Tolman, Falstaff and Other Shakespearean Topics (New York, 1925), p. 59.
this incident is not mentioned in Hall or Holinshed, Shakespeare seems to have added it to show the magnanimity of the King, who is able to pardon offense of a personal nature.

Upon landing at Harfleur, Henry immediately threatens the town with devastation unless it surrenders. He may seem extremely cruel in declaring that women, children, and old men will be killed unless his demand is met, but we must not judge him by the moral standards of our own day, for he was following the rules of feudal warfare.

"Harfleur he regards as his rightful inheritance, and those who withhold it from him are 'guilty in defence,' because they wage an 'impious war.'" 65 When the Dauphin is unable to meet Henry's challenge, the town surrenders. Departing from historical fact, Shakespeare demonstrates the royal clemency of Henry by having him command Exeter to "use mercy to them all."

It is in Shakespeare's original scenes at Agincourt on the eve of the battle that Henry's strength of leadership is most favorably portrayed. With his army sick and starving after Harfleur, Henry shares their danger on the field and rises to his greatest height of nobility. Throwing Erpingham's cloak over his shoulders, he goes about

incognito, listening to the conversation of his soldiers and giving them courage and comfort to bear the fearful prospects of the next day. The Chorus relates this action of the King:

For forth he goes and visits all the host,
Bids them good-morrow with a modest smile
And calls them brothers, friends and countrymen.

Ham. V, IV.

He does not attempt to hide from them the perils that they face, for his trust in his soldiers allows him to feel that the more they realize the danger the greater their courage will be. Inspiring them to die gloriously, if die they must, he speaks to them as a common man: "I think the King's but a man, as I am: the violet smells to him as it doth to me," and he assures them that the King "would not wish himself anywhere but where he is" (IV, i, 104).

This is the life-giving feature of the play. This incident also connects most closely with all Henry's past career. Through the half-concealed face of the disguised King, as he talks with the soldiers, gleam the features of the jesting Prince Hal of Eastcheap, able "to drink with any tinker in his own language."66

This scene is a complete contrast with the actions of Henry IV who "had many marching in his coats" at the battle of Shrewsbury.

But Henry is more concerned with the moral issues than the dangers involved in the battle, for he is somewhat uneasy

66 Tolman, p. 61.
of soul. His conversation with Bates, Court, and Williams, who plainly speak out about their doubts and fears, causes him to examine his conscience as to the king's responsibility for his men who are to die in battle. Henry is able to instill into them the idea that if the king's cause is "just and his quarrel honourable," then it is the duty of the soldier to fight for his king and die, if necessary. Williams probes deeper into the matter, saying: "there are few die well that die in battle," and implying his feeling that the king is responsible for the non-Christian deaths of his soldiers. However, Henry is able to absolve himself of this responsibility, making Shakespeare's conclusion seem to be that "the king is responsible for the cause in which he fights, but his subjects may not question his judgment in this matter, for he must answer only to God. Under no condition is the king responsible for the private sins of those who die in battle." Consequently, Williams admits that "'Tis certain, every man that dies ill, the ill upon his own head: the king is not to answer it" (IV, ii, 197).

This is an important episode, for it allows three very ordinary soldiers to question their loyalty to the king and their reasons for giving it. It also allows Henry to reason in a quiet way with his men.

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67Ribner, p. 190.
soberly admitting the dangers and conceding their right to hold the doubts and reservations they have expressed. It was a king's duty to feel his responsibility for the men he was leading into battle, and his claim on their obedience is complemented by his obligation to satisfy them that the cause is just and "his quarrel honourable."

The relationship between king and subjects in this scene crystallizes Shakespeare's idea of majesty. All know their duty. The subjects owe obedience, for "to disobey were against all proportion of subjection"; but "if the cause be not good, the king himself hath a heavy reckoning to make."

When the King leaves Bates and Williams, who are still not completely satisfied, he takes time to consider how little his subjects understand the difficult responsibilities placed on a king in their interests. In a long soliloquy, Henry dramatizes the tragic concept of kingship, showing that he has reached a mature understanding of it early in his career. Whereas the crown had meant prerogative and self-indulgence to Richard II, to Henry it is a great responsibility that he does not bear lightly.

Here on the eve of Agincourt, Henry also reflects on his father's sin of usurpation, which has not yet been atoned for. He prays that God will not punish him, however, by causing him to lose the battle, for he feels that he has done all that he possibly can. He has reinterred Richard's body, he has paid five hundred men to beg heaven's forgiveness, and he has built two chantries where priests sing constantly for Richard's soul. Thus, he begs:

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68 Reese, p. 330.
Not to-day, O Lord!
Of not to-day, think not upon the fault
My father made in compassing the crown!

_Hen. V._ IV, i, 309.

Throughout the play, Shakespeare emphasizes the fact that Henry V wants to be considered as a mere man like his soldiers and that he wants to understand their viewpoint. When Williams is confronted the next day with the fact that he has abused the King, he replies: "Your majesty came not like yourself: you appeared to me but as a common man; witness the night, your garments, your lowliness" (IV, viii, 53). Through these allusions to his lowliness and his appearance as a common man, Shakespeare makes certain that the symbolism of the scene is not lost. This ideal relationship between the King and his troops is further reinforced when Henry addresses his troops before the battle:

And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remembered;
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers,
For he today that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother.

_Hen. V._ IV, iii, 57.

These are words that have come to stand for much that is English.

Dover Wilson recalls Churchill's famous epitaph on those who "left the vivid air signed with their honour" in the summer of 1940, "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few," as coming from the same national mint. But it is older than Shakespeare, it is pure Hall. Listen to his last words on Henry V:
"yet neither fyre, rust, nor fretting time shall amongst Englishmen ether appall his honoure or obliterate his glorye whiche in so few yeres and brief daies achived so high adventures and made so great a conquest."

The words are English but the mood is older and universal, it is the note of epic heroism that sounded at Thermopylea and in a pass by Rouncesvalles.\textsuperscript{69}

Such an expression of brotherhood could not have come from Richard II or Henry IV on a similar occasion, and even the French bring about a significant contrast when they ask for permission to bury their dead:

\begin{quote}
To sort our nobles from our common men.  
For many of our princes—woe the while!  
Lie drownd and soak'd in mercenary blood;  
So do our vulgar drench their peasant limbs  
In blood of princes.  
\end{quote}

\textit{Hen. V, IV, vii, 77.}

In \textit{Henry V}, Henry describes himself as "no tyrant, but a Christian king," and it is Shakespeare's purpose to characterize him so. He is able to forgive the drunkard who had cursed him, and he is sincere in his apology to Bates and Williams, who have pricked his conscience about the king's responsibility for the wars in which his subjects are duty-bound to fight. Although he cannot forgive Lord Scroop for his betrayal, yet he says he will weep for him. At the surrender of Harfleur, he commands that his troops be merciful to the inhabitants. This order is repeated when Bardolph is sentenced to hang for stealing a pax from a church:

\textsuperscript{69}Walter, p. xxix.
We would have all offenders cut off: and we give express charge that there be nothing compelled from the village none of the French upbraided or abused in disdainful language.


His mercy extends to the battle at Agincourt, for he does not order the French prisoners slain until after the French have killed the boys guarding the English camp. Although Holinshed calls this a "dolorous decree," yet it is necessary from a military standpoint, and Shakespeare tries to explain and justify it in the scene with Gower and Fluellen, where Gower states:

'Tis certain there's not a boy left alive wherefore the king most worthily hath caused every soldier to cut his prisoner's throat.


Fluellen then compares the virtues of Henry with those of Alexander the Great, concluding that where Alexander in an intoxicated state had killed Cleitus, his best friend, King Henry "being in his right wits and his good judgments, turned away the fat knight."

Furthermore, although the play deals with the heroism of the diseased and outnumbered English soldiers at Agincourt, that heroism is shown to be the result of Henry's strong leadership. In enlarging his stature, Shakespeare even omits any reference to the English archers at Agincourt, to whom history mainly credits the victory. After
the battle is won, Henry does not boast but attributes the victory to God alone.

The function of these allusions to the King's justice and mercy scattered throughout the play is to stress the qualities which make Henry a successful king—his humanness and his own concept of the tragedy inherent in the role the king must play. It was in accordance with Shakespeare's purpose to present in all simplicity a political hero—the things that a political hero, when he is Henry of Monmouth, quite inevitably does and says. Incidentally his imagination is caught and held by the very human spectacle of a man in whom physical courage and resolute will are constantly at odds with a tender conscience. Henry was determined to be not only a good sovereign but a moral paragon. He must stand well with all the world—including himself. He must be perpetually building himself up as the best of kings and the king of good fellows.⁷⁰

Regardless of the betrayal of Scroop and his followers and the discontent of the soldiers on the eve of Agincourt, Shakespeare reveals that the English subjects are devoted to Henry, and he shows that their loyalty is inspired by the character of the King. Shakespeare follows Holinshede quite closely in his portrayal:

This Henry was a king of life without spot, a prince whom all men loved, and of none disdained; a captain against whom fortune never frowned nor mischance once spurned; whose people him so severe a justicer both loved and obeyed

⁷⁰Palmer, p. 242.
(and so humane withal) that he left no offense unpunished nor friendship unrewarded; a terror to rebels and suppressor of sedition, his virtues notable, his qualities most praiseworthy. 71

This may be a naive view of the King, but Shakespeare's Henry is not the same as Holinshed's, for Shakespeare enriched and strengthened his characterization. He did accept, however, Holinshed's interpretation of Henry's success. Holinshed felt that Henry's achievements were the result of good fortune and a proper balance of good characteristics. In general, this is Shakespeare's view too. Although he does not reproduce the idealized version of the chronicles, yet he stresses the importance of the balance of attitudes which allow Henry to be successful politically and militarily. He has a realization of the proper relationship that should exist between the ruler and the ruled, bringing to a proper balance the necessities of his vocation and those having to do with his personal life. "And this stress on the king's humanity, his concern with political as well as non-political values, is an indispensable attribute of the princely ideal..." 72

Although Henry V as an ideal king is triumphant in battle, he is always seeking peace. Therefore, the reconciliation

72Phialas, p. 174.
at Troyes, by which Henry was betrothed to Princess Katharine of France and by which he became the most powerful monarch in Europe, is the perfect end for the play. To the Elizabethan, Henry V was the ideal king because he never failed to keep his dedication to the state uppermost in his mind, and even his wooing of Katharine is seen as an act of state, for

this marriage in particular seals the union of two Christian countries with momentous possibilities for Christendom then divided by schism. Henry's letter to Charles as related by Hall puts the matter clearly:

"Sometymes the noble realmes of Englande & of Fraunce were united, whiche nowe be separated and deuided, and as then they were accustomed to be exalted through the vniversall worlde by their glorious victories, and it was to theim a notable vertue to decore and beautifye the house of God . . . and to set a concorde in Christes religion."\(^{73}\)

In the Epilogue Shakespeare adds the grim reminder that the fulfillment of the Tudor theory of the Divine Right of kings is yet to come in the punishment of the house of Lancaster when Henry's son loses his throne through mismanagement. But in the glorious triumphs of Henry V, he ends this historical sequence on a note of optimism with a society cured of its illness and united under the firm leadership of an ideal king. For the moment,

\(^{73}\)Walter, p. xxxi.
the sin of usurpation is forgotten and the bona fide of the new monarchy established by the act that links Henry most firmly with the future, with the Tudor state in general and in particular with Elizabeth who has defeated the Spanish Armada. The sin which has tormented Henry IV is exorcized, not by time or argument, but by his son's victory over the French at Agincourt. Hal's education has not been in vain. Henry V is the hero of the tetralogy and able to settle its haunting problems for one reason above all—he is the new national king, the herald of the Tudor monarchy which is no longer a monarchy of the old type, but something different and necessary.74

CONCLUSION

Shakespeare's treatment of kingship in his Lancastrian tetralogy reflected the general concept of Hall's "Tudor myth," but the sin of Richard's deposition was not emphasized as much as the emergence of England's most glorious king. Each play aptly contributes to the scheme of the entire tetralogy from the tragedy inherent in Richard's downfall, through Hal's education, and finally to the accession of Henry V, the ideal king.

By including the human qualities of the monarch which caused him to fail or succeed in public life, Shakespeare ably broadened the political aspects of this series of plays. Through his dramatic genius, he took the historical facts as he found them and fit his characters into a psychological atmosphere that would explain those facts. Hence, Richard II, weak and vacillating, is measured against Bolingbroke, a man of cold efficiency; and Henry V is shown as a man with great leadership qualities which enabled him to surmount the problems of kingship.

Shakespeare's achievement is overwhelming in its diversity and execution of purpose. "The English history play
was never again to attain the excellence of these plays, and when *Henry V* was written, the days of the history play as a vital form in the English drama were already numbered."

75 Ribner, p. 192.
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VITA

Born in Lima, Ohio, July 11, 1926, June Lee Stemen attended the Lima Public Schools, being graduated from Lima Central High School in 1944. She attended Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio, during the 1944-45 term.

After her marriage to William E. Allman on September 21, 1947, she moved to Columbus, Ohio, where she lived until 1949, at which time her husband accepted a position with Reynolds Metals Company in Listerhill, Alabama. One son, Barry William Allman, was born on November 17, 1954.

From 1960 to 1965, she attended Florence State University, Florence, Alabama, as a part-time student, majoring in English and history and receiving her A. B. degree in 1965. She taught English at this institution during the fall semester of 1966. Her husband was then transferred to Richmond, Virginia. Since the fall of 1967, she has been attending the University of Richmond, working on her Master's degree in English.