Aspects in Shakespearean Scholarship

Papers presented at "Much Ado About Shakespeare"

Symposium 1978

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INTRODUCTION

Held on March 14-18, 1978, at Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, “Much Ado About Shakespeare,” Symposium 1978, consisted of a multifaceted exploration of William Shakespeare and his works. This number of the Iowa State Journal of Research entitled “Aspects in Shakespearean Scholarship” contains the revised versions of the papers read on the fourth day of the symposium. Academic papers, though, were only one element of this symposium, as its purpose was the presentation of Shakespeare and his impact upon the world since the sixteenth century and his relevance to our day.

Ronald Watkins, the British drama critic, opened the symposium with his lecture, “Shakespeare in His Own Playhouse: The Conditions of Performance and Their Influence on Shakespeare’s Writing.” While Mr. Watkins pointed out that the arrangement of the stage influenced Shakespeare’s creation of his plays, in the second day’s lecture, “The Man Shakespeare,” Professor Samuel Schoenbaum of the University of Maryland discussed Shakespeare’s everyday concerns in London and Stratford-on-Avon and how some of them may have provided material for his plays. Various types of performance of Shakespeare were presented. The Memorial Union Board Theatre under the direction of John A. Lee gave two performances of The Winter’s Tale. And twice during the symposium Laurence Olivier’s film of Richard III was shown. The major event of the third day was a program, “The Joy of Elizabethan Spectacle,” which included examples of sixteenth-century music by the Iowa State Musica Antiqua, dancing by Ms. Dana Starkey, fencing by the Iowa State Fencing Club, and comic scenes performed by the Old Creamery Theatre of Garrison, Iowa, under the direction of Thomas O. Johnson. The fourth day was devoted to the reading and discussion of papers published in this volume, which were heard in three sessions chaired respectively by K. G. Madison, Department of History, Nancy J. Brooker, Department of English, and J. D. Beatty, Department of English, all of Iowa State University. The final day’s two sessions examined problems Shakespeare poses for the high school teacher in the classroom and for the would-be director of a school or community theatre production. The panel for “Shakespeare in the Classroom” was Eveadel Brink, Kirkwood Community College; Marjorie B. Shackford, Jefferson High School; and Annabelle Irwin, Department of English, Iowa State University. For “Shakespeare in the Theatre” the panel was Miriam Gilbert, Department of English, University of Iowa; Stephen C. Schultz, Department of Theatre Arts and Speech, University of Louisville; Patrick D. Gouran, Department of Speech, Iowa State University; and John A. Lee, Memorial Union Board Theatre, Iowa State University.

Membership on the symposium’s steering committee included the following persons from Iowa State University:

- Toby Fishbein, Library
- Linda R. Galyon, Chair, English
- Molly Herrington, Theta Alpha Phi
- Connie Huscher, Committee on Lectures
- Joseph H. Kupfer, Philosophy
- James A. Lowrie, English
- John A. Lee, Memorial Union Board Theatre
- Kenneth G. Madison, History

The symposium was sponsored and funded by the Committee on Lectures (funded by the Government of the Student Body); The George Gund Lecture Fund; The Departments of English, History, Philosophy, and Speech; The Iowa State University Library; The College of Sciences and Humanities; The College of Education; The Graduate College; Theta Alpha Phi; The Memorial Union Board Theatre; The Student Union Board; The Memorial Union Arts Exhibits; The Ames Community Arts Council; and The Iowa Arts Council. Publication of the papers in this volume was made possible by a generous grant from the Iowa State University Research Foundation and through the efforts of Ellis A. Hicks, former editor of the Iowa State Journal of Research.

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There are several ways that we can see how Henry VIII conjoins the events of history with the conventions of romance in such a way that the play presents an historical verification of the literary experience of romance. The first way is to examine the falls of Buckingham, Wolsey, and Katherine, all of which draw on Holinshed's Chronicles. The second way is to note the religious drift in the play which, albeit anachronistically, steadily implies and anticipates a turn away from Catholicism to the rise of Protestantism, and this turn is not only evident within the play, but within the play's primary source for Cranmer's trial—namely, Foxe's Acts and Monuments. The third way is to focus on how and why Cranmer, not Henry VIII, emerges in the last act as the primary spokesman for what the play means. It is my view that Cranmer's prophecy both consolidates and expresses the play's historical verification of the literary experience of romance.

If we first concentrate on the falls of Buckingham, Wolsey, and Katherine, we can see that these events are dramatized through a double focus, wherein the ostensible facts of history are absorbed by a larger providential interpretation that is characteristic of the romances. For example, the question of Buckingham's guilt or innocence seems much less important than the larger question, posed by the Second Gentleman, dealing with Buckingham's response after he has been found guilty of treason. The Second Gentleman asks, "After all this, how did he bear himself?" (II.i.30), and the remainder of the scene is concerned with Buckingham's attitude to death, which is an attitude of "a most noble patience" (II.i.36).

The virtue of patience, which is a prominent characteristic of Shakespeare's romances, is traditionally associated with Christ's humility and it signals an individual's resignation to providential forces larger than individual destiny. This conception, in the romances, dates as far back as Pericles, where Marina is emblematically likened to "Patience gazing on kings' graves, and smiling / Extremity out of act" (V.i.138-39). If Buckingham does not smile "Extremity out of act," he at least translates his individual fate into an instrument for reaffirming the power of providence where "Heaven has an end in all" (II.i.124).

What is notable about Buckingham's fall, and quite characteristic of the play's remaining falls, is not only the poise and confidence with which he meets his fate, but his ability to project himself as an emblem of a larger destiny. This sense of destiny is distinguished by a spirit of faith, forgiveness, and charity, as we can see in Buckingham's following lines:

Yet, heaven bear witness
   And if I have a conscience, let it sink me,
   Even as the axe falls, if I be not faithful!
   The law I bear no malice for my death;
   'T has done, upon the premises, but justice;
   But those that sought it I could wish more Christians.
   Be what they will, I heartily forgive 'em; (II.i.59-65)

Buckingham then reaffirms the very rule of Henry VIII, which may have victimized him:

Commend me to his Grace;
   And if he speak of Buckingham, pray tell him
   You met him half in heaven. My vows and prayers
   Yet are the King's; and, till my soul forsake,
   Shall cry for blessings on him. (II.i.88-90)

Even Wolsey, who is frequently likened to the devil, and who is continually held responsible for the evil actions in the play, himself achieves a moment of affirmation where he, too, understands his historical fate as an emblem of providential destiny. Among other things, Wolsey says at the moment of his fall:

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Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate ye! 
I feel my heart new open'd. 

How wretched Is that poor man that hangs on princes' favors! 
There is, betwixt that smile we would aspire to, 
That sweet aspect of princes, and their ruin, 
More pangs and fears than wars or women have; 
And when he falls, he falls like Lucifer, 
Never to hope again. (III.ii.365-72)

Then, after declaring “The King has cur'd me, / I humbly thank his Grace” (III.ii.380-81), Wolsey addresses an important speech to Cromwell:

Say Wolsey, that once trod the ways of glory, 
And sounded all the depths and shoals of honor, 
Found thee a way, out of this wrack, to rise in; 
A sure and safe one, though thy master miss'd it. 
Mark but my fall, and that that ruined me: 
Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition! 
By that sin fell the angels; how can man then 
(The image of his Maker) hope to win by it? 
Love thyself last, cherish those hearts that hate thee; 
Corruption wins not more than honesty. 
Still in thy right hand carry gentle peace 
To silence envious tongues. Be just, and fear not; 
Let all the ends thou aim'st at be thy country's 
Thy God's, and truth's; then if thou fall'st, O Cromwell, 
Thou fall'st a blessed martyr. (III.ii.435-49)

Wolsey’s gnomic lines at once drew on the known materials of history but reinterpret them in a strongly providential and Protestant manner. For example, Wolsey as a Catholic utters a line taken straight out of the Anglican Baptism Service, “Dost thou forsake the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of this world?” This allusion has prompted R. A. Foakes to suggest that “No doubt the allusion is intended, for Wolsey learns in his fall to be a Christian.” Furthermore, Wolsey’s mentioning of the fall of Lucifer, together with the allusion to the Anglican Baptism Service, may imply that as a Catholic he is associated with the devil—but now that his heart is “new open’d” he is speaking as a Christian, which form of speech is later attached to Cranmer, who serves as the spokesman for the Anglican Church. No doubt, such an implication involves considerable historical distortion, but that distortion points to the basically Protestant intent of the play.

But there is still more evidence in this scene that the historical fall of Wolsey has been absorbed and reinterpreted through a conjunction of religious Protestantism and the providential impulse of Shakespearian romance. In the second passage I have quoted, Wolsey’s speech draws on the tempest imagery of the romances. Wolsey, who has “sounded the depths and shoals of honor,” says that his own fall has found Cromwell “a way, out of [this] wrack, to rise in.” This is an exact description of romance’s movement beyond tragedy, and it may well echo one of the suggested sources of The Tempest, William Strachey’s True Repertory of the Wracke, which pamphlet plays on the double movement of wrack and redemption. Wolsey’s fall signals Cromwell’s rise, and Cromwell’s rise heralds Henry’s break with Rome; for it is Cromwell, Shakespear’s immediate audience would likely know, who assisted Henry VIII “in his unprecedented claim to be Supreme Head of the Church of England, which was decreed by the Act of Supremacy in 1534.”

Historically, Cromwell may not have fallen as “a blessed martyr,” but his rise out of Wolsey’s “wrack” does associate the romance’s tempest imagery with the subsequent historical emergence of the Church of England. Indeed, as we shall see in Act V, which draws heavily on Foxe’s Acts and Monuments, the tempest imagery of this play may allude to, but at least parallels, Foxe’s exhortation to the Church of England now that it has escaped “the Babylonish captivity”:
God has so placed us Englishmen here in one commonwealth, also in one church, as in one ship together, let us not mangle or divide the ship, which, being divided, perisheth; but every man serve with diligence and discretion in his order, wherein he is called—they that sit at the helm keep well the point of the needle to know how the ship goeth, and whither it should; whatsoever weather betideth, the needle, well touched with the stone of God’s word, will never fail: such as labor at the oars start for no tempest, but do what they can to keep from the rocks: likewise they which be in inferior rooms, take heed they move no sedition nor disturbance against the rowers and mariners. No storm so dangerous to a ship on the sea, as is discord and disorder in a weal public. . . . The God of peace, who hath power both of land and sea, reach forth his merciful hand to help them up that sink, to keep up them that stand, to still these winds and surging seas of discord and contention among us; that we, professing one Christ, may, in one unity of doctrine, gather ourselves into one ark or the true church together; where we, continuing steadfast in faith, may at the last luckily be conducted to the joyful point of our desired landing-place by his heavenly grace.  

The above passage from Foxe provides a rationale for how the materials of history in Henry VIII, especially the falls of Catholics are absorbed by certain romance conventions that are linked with the rise of Protestantism. This romance absorption of historical tragedy may be seen in the fall of Katherine, the final tragedy of the play. Like Buckingham and Wolsey, Katherine undergoes a trial, but once again her historical fall is dominated by a providential interpretation. If we assume, as H. M. Richmond has argued, that “Katherine’s character represents the norm against which we must measure the other characters,” then I think her fall is designed to elicit the romance experience of a state beyond tragedy. The introduction of several romance conventions reinforces this idea. Griffith, for instance, occupies the role of the loyal and wise counselor figure, continuing the tradition of Helicanus, Pisanio, Camillo, and Gonzalo in the other romances. As Katherine says, Griffith is “an honest chronicler” (IV.ii.72) because he states both the strengths and weaknesses of Wolsey’s character in such a way that Katherine concludes: ‘Whom I most hated living, thou hast made me, / With thy religious truth and modesty, / Now in his ashes honor” (IV.ii.72-75). This change of estimate is in itself significant, and it certainly embodies the spirit of tolerance that Frances Yates has noted in the play. For the fall of Katherine both absorbs and explains the fall of Wolsey, her hated enemy. Katherine wants to know how Wolsey died because “If well, he stepp’d before me happily / For my example” (IV.ii.10-11). Thus, it is the manner, not the fact, of his death that matters, and it is fascinating to watch how Katherine’s fall in part echoes what Wolsey says at the moment of his fall. As a loyal counselor, Griffith performs the same role for Katherine that Cromwell does for Wolsey. Just as Katherine responds to Griffith as an “honest chronicler” who speaks with “religious truth and modesty,” so Wolsey says to Cromwell: “I did not think to shed a tear / In all my miseries; but thou hast forced me / (Out of thy honest truth)” (III.ii.428-30). And just as Wolsey tells Cromwell, “I know myself now, and I feel within me / A peace above all earthly dignities, / A still and quiet conscience” (III.ii.378-80), so Shakespeare, through the vehicle of the character Patience—a clear romance emblem—and through the stage directions accompanying Katherine’s vision, presents Katherine with an hierophany—that is, a sacred experience— at which (as it were by inspiration) she makes (in her sleep) signs of rejoicing, and holdeth up her hands to heaven.”  

These falls, as I earlier indicated, embody a romance absorption of historical facts, or a providential interpretation of historical events. The dramatic rhythm of the play is so designed that the audience is led to anticipate a fourth trial and fall—that of Cranmer. But before we look at Cranmer’s trial, I wish to examine the relationship between the falls of Buckingham, Wolsey, and Katherine and the steady emergence of a Protestant ethos in the first four acts of the play. Such an examination is necessary not merely to demonstrate that the fifth act presents a historical confirmation of the literary experience of romance, but to
counter-balance the critical view that the last act is in no way prepared for. Such a negative view of the fifth act has been most vigorously asserted by Peter Milward who writes:

In the fifth act, however, the play makes a complete volte-face; and the atmosphere of tragedy rolls away, with no accompanying change of character . . . This is all quite out of harmony with the preceding acts, as shadow suddenly turns to light, tragedy ends in comedy, and tears are exchanged for laughter, without any justification in terms of character.\textsuperscript{10}

We have already looked at how the various tragic falls are interpreted providentially, but if we backtrack for a few moments, I think we can see how the first four acts do prepare us for the fifth act. Linked with the falls of Buckingham, Wolsey, and Katherine there occurs the steady erosion of Papal authority and the corresponding rise of Protestantism, which is officially announced in the fifth act by Cranmer at the christening of the baby, Elizabeth. Wolsey is obviously the focus of Catholicism in the first four acts, and until his fall the play voices a streak of anti-Catholic commentary. At the same time, as we shall see, Anne Bullen and Cranmer are continually associated with Protestantism; and just as important, because Henry sides with Cranmer and Anne, the play's religious movement logically, albeit anachronistically, foretells and endorses the rise of Protestantism. That is, the fall of Wolsey and Henry's divorce from Katherine represent the end of Papal authority, as well as the end of tragedy, and the rise of Protestantism supports the play's version of romance. Thus, the "complete volte-face" that Milward repudiates is, in fact, an important part of the play's intention.

As early as I.i—a scene, I might note, assigned to Shakespeare by the collaborationists\textsuperscript{11}—Wolsey is used as the focus of the play's anti-Catholicism. Buckingham associates him with the devil (I.i.52), perhaps anticipating Wolsey's own remark about falling "like Lucifer" (III.ii.371), and Buckingham also calls him "This holy fox, or wolf" (I.i.158-59). Abergavenny reinforces the association of Wolsey with the devil when he says:

I cannot tell
What heaven hath given him—let some graver eye
Pierce into that—but I can see his pride
Peepl through each part of him. Whence has he that?
If not from hell, the devil is a niggard,
Or has given all before, and he begins
A new hell in himself. (I.i.66-72)

In II.ii Wolsey is again likened to the devil, only this time the frame of reference extends to the Pope and intimates Henry's subsequent break with the Pope. The Lord Chamberlain says that "Heaven will one day open / The King's eyes, that so long have slept upon / This bold bad man [Wolsey]," to which Suffolk provocatively responds, "And free us from his slavery" (II.ii.41-43)—an echo perhaps of Foxe's "Babylonish captivity." Norfolk then says "We had need pray / And heartily, for our deliverance" from Wolsey (II.i.44-45), and Suffolk sums up the anti-Catholic (or at least anti-Papist) fervor of this exchange when he declares: "I knew him, and I know him—so I leave him / To him that made him proud, the Pope" (II.ii.54-55).\textsuperscript{12}

Still, if Wolsey is the center, both as the object and primary influence of the play's version of tragedy, we need also to notice that two of the people whom he attacks—Anne and Cranmer—are just as clearly associated, not merely with Henry's Act of Supremacy, but with the emergence of Protestantism. Historically, that is, they occupy significant roles that ultimately tie into romance conventions. For example, the first time we hear of Cranmer, who died a Protestant martyr, he is at once defined against Catholicism and invested with a symbolic significance which aligns him with the oracles of "comfort" that recur in Shakespeare's romances. At the end of Act II, Henry condemns the "dilatory sloth and tricks of Rome," and then, thinking of Cranmer, he continues: "My learn'd and well-beloved servant, Cranmer, / Prithke return; with thy approach, I know, / My comfort comes along" (II.iv.239-41).\textsuperscript{13}

Interestingly, it is Wolsey who sums up the historic and symbolic importance of Anne Bullen and Cranmer when, in an aside, he says:

Yet I know her for
A spleeny Lutheran, and not wholesome to
Our cause, that she should lie 't th' bosom of
Our hard-rul'd king. Again, there is sprung up
An heretic, an arch one, Cranmer; one
Hath crawl'd into the favor of the King,
And is his oracle. (III.i.98-104)

We need not take the word “Lutheran” altogether literally, for it is a kind of catch-all term for anti-Papist. A. F. Pollard has observed that “not everyone who was called Lutheran in England adopted the doctrines of Wittenberg; the phrase was a generic term used to express any sort of hostility to Rome or the clergy, and even the possession of the Bible in English [with which Cranmer was historically connected] was sometimes sufficient to make its owner a Lutheran suspect.”

Furthermore, Foxe also talks of the Catholic association of heresy and Lutheranism, and attacks such a linkage by saying, “if it be heresy not to acknowledge the pope as supreme head of the church, then St. Paul was an heretic, and a stark Lutheran, which, having the scriptures, yet never attributed to the pope, nor to Peter himself, to be supreme head of the church” (I.xiv).

The point, then, is that the first four acts do prepare the way for the fifth act, and they do so by employing a double movement that both traces the fall of Papal authority and the rise of a Protestant order symbolically associated with Cranmer, Anne, and Elizabeth. What the fifth act does is to assimilate all the prior historic tragedies in a strongly providential manner reminiscent of the basic design of Shakespearean romance. As many commentators have noted, the principal literary source of Act V is Foxe’s Acts and Monuments, and it has also been observed that Henry himself is reduced to a curiously passive role in Act V. Correspondingly, Cranmer’s trial becomes the dramatic center of interest, and his survival and prophecy summarize the providential import of the play. Indeed, like Foxe, Shakespeare finally emphasizes Cranmer and his trial because it is he, not Henry, who symbolically completes the break with Rome and who forecasts the rise of Protestantism under Elizabeth.

For example, V.i. begins with Gardiner attacking Anne, Cranmer, and Cromwell. He wishes Anne “grubb’d up now” (V.i.23), and tells Lovell, whom he calls a “gentleman / Of mine own way” (that is, of a Catholic persuasion) that it “will ne’er be well—— / ‘Twill not, Sir Thomas Lovell, take’t of me—— / Till Cranmer, Cromwell, her two hands, and she / Sleep in their graves” (V.i.29-32). He further asserts that Cranmer is “a most arch-heretic, a pestilence / That does infect the land . . . . [a] rank weed . . . . / And we must root him out” (V.i.45-46, 52-53). The scene opens this way not only to continue Wolsey’s former attacks on Cranmer and Anne, but to isolate Gardiner as the last desperate gasp of a fading Papal order. Moreover, the characterization of Gardiner exactly conforms with Foxe’s bitter estimate of him. Foxe writes: “But Winchester, although he had open sworn before all the states in the parliament, and in special words, against the pope’s domination, yet inwardly in his fox’s heart he bore a secret love to the Bishop of Rome” (VIII.11). Later on Foxe refers to Gardiner as “the arch-enemy to Christ and his gospel,” and to his “caviling sophistication” and “unquiet spirit” (VIII.35).

At the same time, however, when Henry tells Cranmer that he will be tried he also says, “Stand up, good Canterbury! / Thy truth and thy integrity is rooted / In us, thy friend” (V.i.113-15); and Cranmer replies, “The good I stand on is my truth and honesty . . . . God and your Majesty / Protect mine innocence” (V.i.122, 140-41). The clear dramatic purpose is to join Henry and Cranmer, defined against Gardiner, as the spokesman of “truth,” which bears directly on the apparently alternative title of Henry VIII, namely “All is True.” Evidently Cranmer’s trial is designed to reveal and define the “truth” against Gardiner’s malicious intentions, and the meaning of that truth can be precisely established by comparing a section from Foxe with Cranmer’s prophecy after the trial. Under the general heading of “Vicit veritas” (“The truth hath the upper hand”), Foxe says of the period of Papal rule that “to speak most modestly, not the truth, but the time had victory” (VIII, 39). This is an especially interesting distinction because it parallels the play’s understanding and use of history. That is, the known materials of Henry’s reign are used in such a way that the time of Henry’s history is finally replaced by the truth of Cranmer’s prophecy; moreover, Foxe believes that truth to be in “Cranmer’s book of the Sacrament, against Winchester, wherein the matter itself doth plainly cry, and always will cry, ‘The truth hath won’ ” (VIII.40).

What, then, is the “chosen truth” of the play, and how does it tie in to my hypothesis that Henry VIII presents an historical confirmation of the literary experience of romance?
Let me first quote parts of Cranmer’s final speech which emphasize the truth of his prophecy.

Cranmer begins:

Let me speak, sir,
For heaven now bids me; and the words I utter
Let none think flattery, for they’ll find ‘em true.
This royal infant—heaven still move about her!—
Though in her cradle, yet now promises
Upon this land a thousand thousand blessings,
Which time shall bring to ripeness. (V.i.v.14-20)

Cranmer then continues, “Truth shall nurse her, / Holy and heavenly thoughts still counsel her” (V.i.v.28-29), and he later says, “God shall be truly known, and those about her / From her shall read the perfect ways of honor” (V.i.v.36-37). The first thing to notice is that Cranmer does not choose to speak; rather, heaven “bids” him to speak, and thus he speaks as the voice of providence. Furthermore, Henry’s responses to Cranmer’s speech heighten our sense of a romance hierophony—i.e., “Thou speakest wonders. . . . This oracle of comfort has so pleas’d me / That when I am in heaven I shall desire / To see what this child does, and praise my Maker” (V.i.v.55, 66-68). What the child, Elizabeth, does is to oversee the time—the new Protestant time of deliverance from the “Babylonish captivity”—when “God shall be truly known.”

What is highly unusual, but dramatically appropriate, about this prophetic moment is that unlike in the prior romances the hierophany, or sacred moment, is overtly supported by a religious doctrine. In other words, the historical reign of Henry VIII is used to promote a romance experience supported by Protestant doctrine. Moreover, what Cranmer prophesies as “shall” in the future, Shakespeare’s immediate audience could easily confirm as “was” and “is” in the immediate past and present. Similarly, the baptism scene that closes the play functions both historically and symbolically, as does Cranmer’s role of godfather to Elizabeth. Cranmer is not just the godfather of Elizabeth, but historically the godfather, if you will, of the rise of Protestantism. The baptism of Elizabeth symbolically marks the baptism of England into the Church of England.

Thus, what the fifth act presents is a hierophanic spectacle of the triumph of a new Protestant order, in which the experience of romance that Cranmer expresses as a prophetic act of faith may be felt by a sympathetic audience as historical fact.” Seen in this light, “all is true” because the play, viewed as the conjunction of romance and history, celebrates what Foxe calls “this noble anthem of victory: ‘Vicit veritas’—‘The truth hath the upper hand’” (VIII, 39).

NOTES

1 G. Wilson Knight, who views Henry VIII as “Shakespeare’s one explicitly Christian play,” argues that we are “to feel British Protestantism rising in Cranmer, his advance contrasting with the fall of Wolsey, whose intrigues are partly to be associated with Rome” [The Crown of Life (London: Methuen, 1965), pp. 277, 315].
2 The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974). All further references to Henry VIII, as well as to other Shakespearean texts, are from this edition and cited within the text.
4 King Henry VIII, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: Methuen, 1968), p. 120.
5 Peter W. Milward, Shakespeare’s Religious Background (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1973), p. 164. Indeed, J. J. Scarisbrick says of Cromwell: “That the 1530’s were a decisive decade in English history was due largely to his energy and vision.” [Henry VIII Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1968], p. 303].
6 The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe, 8 vols., ed. Josiah Pratt (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1877), 1, xxiv. All further quotations are from this edition and cited within the text. Frances Yates has also observed that “in Henry VIII, we have the culmination of Foxian history with the throwing off of papal power in the name of the sacred majesty of the Monarch” [Shakespeare’s Last Plays (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 71]. See also Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, on Foxe’s “theology of History” (pp. 386-387).
Howard Felperin has noted that "This recurrent pattern of secular fall and spiritual reformation suggests a close relation between the world of Henry VIII and that of morality drama" [Shakespearean Romance (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), p. 203].


Yates, Shakespeare's Last Plays, p. 73.


Although there continue to be disputes about whether Shakespeare wrote Henry VIII or collaborated on the play, probably with John Fletcher, I lean toward the view expressed by S. Schoenbaum that "the problem admits of no ultimate solution" [King Henry VIII, ed. S. Schoenbaum (New York: Signet, 1967), p. xxii].

Significantly, at the end of the phrase "the Pope" S. Schoenbaum enters a textual note which reads, "(the expected reference would be to the devil)" [King Henry VIII, ed. Schoenbaum, p. 83].

Skeptics might refer to Cranmer's "comfort" as his approval of Henry's divorce, for historically Cranmer was in Europe seeking a favorable opinion from various universities of Henry's divorce—an activity further alluded to in III.ii.63-67. There is no question, as A. F. Pollard has argued, that "Of all the incidents affecting Cranmer's life the most important is the divorce of Catherine of Aragon. That divorce and its ramifications were the web into which the threads of Cranmer's life were woven" [Thomas Cranmer and the English Reformation 1489-1556 (London: Putnam's, 1926), p. 24]. Nevertheless, the extent of Cranmer's dramatic significance and the source of his "comfort" exceed his involvement with and approval of Henry's divorce; and this may be why the play minimizes his direct contact with the divorce proceedings.

Pollard, Thomas Cranmer, p. 94.

In this regard, Frances Yates very usefully mentions an illustration in Foxe's Acts and Monuments "which shows Henry seated on the throne of royal majesty, dismissing the papal representatives and honouring Cranmer, who holds the open Bible" [Shakespeare's Last Plays, p. 72]. The illustration itself appears in Yates's Astraea (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), plate 5a. However, the plate in fact shows Henry VIII with his feet on the Pope, a gesture that is representative of the strongly anti-papist bent of the play. Scarisbrick argues that Henry "would allow the Pope . . . but not the Papacy" [Henry VIII, p. 295].

As A. F. Pollard has shrewedly remarked, "it accorded well with the fitness of things that the first Metropolitan of the Reformed Church of England stood as godfather to the infant under whose guidance the cause of the Reformation finally triumphed" (Thomas Cranmer, p. 60). Interestingly, Scarisbrick suggests that Henry may not have attended the christening. [Henry VIII, pp. 323-324].

We should perhaps keep in mind Muriel St. Clare Byrne's observation that Henry VIII, "is a play about Tudor succession, by an Elizabethan" ["A Stratford Production: Henry VIII," Shakespeare Survey, 3 (1950), 127].
History and fiction: two ways of looking at the world that Shakespeare purposely juxtaposes in 1 and 2 Henry IV. Why? In every other Shakespearean history play, all the major characters are actual historical personages, a device that often seems a limitation, restricting richness and variety in both their verbal presentation and nonverbal presence. Falstaff is the unique instance of a central character who is tangential to history, beyond history in conception though not in dramatic convention, linked to historical process only through the world of the play. Sir John Fastolfe and Sir John Oldcastle stand as ghostly historical analogues to the fat knight; yet, the Oldcastle family’s objections and the epilogue apology aside, it is obvious even to the most historically oriented observer of Shakespeare’s text that the dramatist creates, in Falstaff, a fictional presence.

Falstaff’s story is a play in search of history; the Falstaff plot transforms our ideas of history by commenting upon it and critiquing it. Shakespeare exposes us to the stable historical myth of kingship; our expectations of this historical process, whether extradramatic or conditioned only by the facts presented in the play, point toward Hal’s succession to the throne. And, although Shakespeare further complicates our perspectives by allowing us to anticipate Falstaff’s rejection from the first, his story questions our apparent assent to history. It can seem to us, then, that we are seeing rival, antithetical versions of the same facts. Shakespeare’s structural choice—to parallel history and fiction—and the functional distribution of characters in terms of opposition and difference create a dramatic fabric that sets off the Renaissance myth of kingship against a vibrant, worldly, fictional body—Falstaff.

Splitting history from Falstaff’s story, kingship myth from fiction, highlights both Shakespeare’s structural choices and the functional distribution of characters. I should like to set up these functions and examine how their transformations, both with the history and the fiction, provide a way of sketching out some perspectives on meaning that could generate new performance strategies.

The First Quarto subtitle firmly points the way toward a division of the two narratives:

"The history of Henrie the Fourth: With the battell at Shrewsburie, betweene the King and Lord Henry Percy, surnamed Henrie Hotspur of the North. With the humourous conceits of Sir John Falstaffe," First history, then Falstaff—and as an addendum. Minus the Falstaff material, 1 Henry IV holds together as a fairly conventional, recognizably Shakespearean structure, with the major thrust of the drama given over to Hotspur’s active, stylish presence and rhetoric. Much in the manner of 3 Henry VI, Shakespeare gives less attention to Henry IV than to Hotspur, who represents all the rebels contributing to the “unquiet time” of Henry IV; Hal is conspicuously absent, and seems nearly incidental to history. Within the antagonism of rebel versus king, which focuses our attention on treacherous, subversive threats both to the king’s body and to the body of the kingdom, Hal functions as a loyal subject who defeats the rebel and restores the king; if we read his presence only in this way, he operates as little more than a convenient deus ex machina. Overall, the schematic distribution of loyal versus disloyal subjects, of king versus rebels, underlines the historical struggle; but Shakespeare sets off this distribution with another, that of father versus son. Henry IV’s function as king and father controls the significance of his struggle with Hotspur; and, when present, the father-son distribution is the more pertinent of the two. It is introduced by Henry himself:

O that it could be prov’d
That some night-tripping fairy had exchang’d
In cradle-clothes our children where they lay,
And call’d mine Percy, his Plantagenet!
Then would I have his Harry and he mine. (l.i.86-90)

The magical wish to switch sons—to substitute Hotspur, “the theme of honor’s tongue,” for Hal—relegates Hal to the position of rival other or antithetical son. Shakespeare stresses this

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position through Henry's sparse acknowledgement of Hal; each mention has a negative context: "riot and dishonour stain [his brow]" (I.i.85); he has "lost [his] princely privilege / With vile participation" (III.ii.86-87). III.ii, the one scene where Henry and Hal meet before Shrewsbury, highlights Hal's position as antithetical son and also suggests that he is, like Hotspur, a rebel, but of a different kind. Henry IV equates Hal's "degeneracy" with disloyalty by calling him "my nearest and dearest enemy" (III.ii.123). Thus Hal's promise to "be more myself" receives a double charge: that of becoming true subject and true son. He speaks of himself as "your unthought-of Harry" and swears, in the name of God, that:

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. (III.iii.147-52)

Clearly, the moment acts as a prophecy: it both underscores Hal's sense of displacement and assures us that Hotspur represents Hal as his agent in seeking glory. But Shakespeare shows the equivalence and opposition between the two sons only from Hal's point of view; Henry remains uncommitted to Hal as his son until after Hal has killed Hotspur. Although Hal's challenge to Hotspur in V.i to let the battle be decided "in single fight" meets with Henry's approval, he gives little verbal acknowledgement of the gesture. And even when Hal saves his father's life, Henry extends his favor no further than "thou hast redeem'd thy lost opinion" (V.iv.48). Hotspur's death and the spent rebellion signal Henry's verbal recognition of Hal as "son Harry." By killing Henry's wished-for son, Hotspur, Hal takes on his glories and becomes that wished-for son, as he had vowed to do. And functionally, he also takes up another dimension of Hotspur's role—that of historical antagonist. But we expect that function; it is predetermined, consistent with the line of succession, with the demands of the crown. History wraps up neatly: the "corrected" father-son distribution assures a satisfying continuity of the kingship myth; the king-rebel distribution is subsumed, wiped away by winning the day at Shrewsbury.

Although history defines and determines the necessary roles, Falstaff's story reveals—but does not enforce—alternate ways of playing those roles. Falstaff's encompassing roundness has many dimensions, among them his role-playing ability, a facet of his character that stresses his fictionality. He plays many parts; finally, his ability as an actor brings about his downfall. But during most of 1 Henry IV, Falstaff's fictionalizing impulses, his ability to change, and his impromptu, free behavior make him attractive to Hal (and to us); we both prefer playing over the serious conventional postures of the historical role of prince-soon-to-become-king. Yet Hal assures us early, in the "I know you all" soliloquy, that he will reject playing for that role. His words point toward the closure of Falstaff's story; both history and fiction move, in parallel trajectories, toward an expected outcome. In brief, the fiction in which Hal willingly participates shows him ways to widen the mythic role of king; finally, however, in 2 Henry IV, he refuses the expanded vision, returns to the known and expected role, and takes on the function of his father. His gesture limits the fiction, but it cannot limit our investment in it—and Shakespeare ensures our participation in Falstaff's story by splitting the father function, by giving Hal a fictional antithetical father as well as an historical father.

If Henry IV's functions as father and king control history, Falstaff's functions as rival father and king of the tavern world direct the course of the fiction. In the history, the opposition between son and rival son determines primary meanings; in the fiction, the opposition between father and antithetical father is paramount. And here, unlike the historical plot, the functions of father and king intertwine, reaching at once their clearest and most complex exposition in II.iv, the great tavern scene. But before treating these moments in some detail, I should like to point out Falstaff's functional similarities to Henry IV and sketch out a paradigm, within the fiction, of the overall course of the history.

At his first appearance in I.ii, Falstaff condemns Hal, just as Henry IV had done: "O, thou hast damnable iteration, and art indeed able to corrupt a saint. Thou hast done much harm upon me, Hal, God forgive thee for it!" (I.ii.90-92). The tone, however, contrasts with Henry's signalling acceptance rather than dismissal; and Shakespeare stresses this by showing us Hal and Falstaff easily bantering words of hate which we read as love. Next comes the set-up and execution of the Gadshill robbery, which contains—all in play—a miniature version
of the overall historical action from *Richard II* through 2 *Henry IV*: Falstaff, rival father and king to Hal, takes crowns; Hal, as rebel son, steals the crowns from his father, who does not recognize his son because he is disguised. Shakespeare brushes the action across his stage with full comic force, permitting its shape to take on full significance, through a series of transformations, in the tavern scene.

In the prelude to Falstaff’s return from Gadshill, Hal sets up a playlet, with Poins as accomplice, Francis the drawer as scapegoat. As he berates Francis, with Poins calling from the next room, confusing Francis’ responses, making him cry “Anon,” we hear echoes of the Henry IV-Hal-Falstaff relationship: “Hal as Henry” pulls “Francis as Hal” one way; “Poins as Falstaff” calls from offstage. The transformations function only implicitly; Shakespeare holds off their full development. Briefly, we hear Hal play Hotspur: “Fie upon this quiet life! I want work, . . . . Give my roan horse a drench” (II.iv.104-107). In these moments, fiction begins to comment on history: Hal’s playing of Hotspur both undercuts Hotspur’s honor and foretells his replacement by Hal.

Now Falstaff returns, plaguing all cowards and magically inflating the odds against him in the Gadshill robbery. The ascending numbers build toward a crescendo that Hal and Falstaff, with the audience in full assent, are willing to keep open, lifting the fiction beyond itself, towards ritual. Hal finally cuts it off—a premonition of the end of 2 *Henry IV*. But Falstaff recovers: “By the Lord, I knew ye as well as he that made ye. Why, hear you, my masters, was it for me to kill the heir-apparent?” (II.iv.267-68). Briefly, a messenger from history arrives, although we do not see him; the play extemporizes acts as the first major juxtaposition of history with Falstaff’s story, and Falstaff initiates it, setting up the transformations, just as Henry had done in the historical plot, by his wish for another son. And the playlet, like the historical plot, effectively eliminates Hal.

First, Falstaff playing Henry IV—rival father as father, tavern king as king—casts Hal playing Hal: “I do not only marvel where thou spendest thy time, but also how thou art accompanied . . . . If then thou be son to me . . . why being son to me, art thou so pointed at?” (II.iv.398-407). Now Falstaff quickly argues for the virtues of a fictional Falstaff—not the Falstaff we have seen but one with an imaginary dimension of virtue, a dimension which links him with Henry’s praiseful image of Hotspur. Then Hal takes over Henry IV’s role from Falstaff while Falstaff plays Hal. At first, he rejects “Falstaff as Hal”: “Swarest thou, ungracious boy? henceforth ne’er look on me” (II.iv.445-46). Here, Hal as Henry IV rejects a not so imaginary Hal, but one who, nevertheless, is a participant in fiction rather than in history. Next, Hal rejects Falstaff as father:

[T] here is a devil haunts thee in the likeness of an old fat man . . . . that reverent Vice, that grey Iniquity, that father ruffian, that vanity in years? Wherein is he good . . . wherein cunning, but in craft? wherein crafty, but in villainy? wherein villainous, but in all things? wherein worthy, but in nothing? (II.iv.447-59)

As the playlet draws to an end, “Hal as Henry IV” rejects “Falstaff as Hal,” thus denying not only the antithetical fictional son but also Falstaff as antithetical father. Both, Shakespeare seems to be suggesting, will be banished by history.

But characteristically, Falstaff tries to continue the magical increase of Hal’s insults of rejection, taking it as extension of the earlier playing with numbers. Playing Hal still, he justifies Falstaff:

No, my good lord, banish Peto, banish Bardolph, banish Poins, but for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant, being as he is old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry’s company, banish not him thy Harry’s company—banish plump Jack, and banish all the world. (II.iv.474-80)

Suddenly Hal’s play (which had been Falstaff’s idea) shifts, and both Henry IV and Henry V are before us, each condemning Falstaff: this is the syntactic gap between “I do” and “I will.” It is a gap into which Falstaff will fall: a gap which sums up the whole history from Henry IV to Henry V. “I do” banishes Falstaff from history now, because Hal speaks as Henry IV; “I will” sounds Henry V’s denial of Falstaff’s place in future history. The tense shift signals a refocused expectation: Hal suddenly exposes Falstaff’s comic game, juxtaposing it against the serious game of history. Falstaff sleeps behind the arras while history plays about him, in the
person of the sheriff. The moment foretells his sleep at Shrewsbury; the listings of halfpence and many pence spent for bread and wine cap the end of the ascending series of attackers Falstaff called up earlier in the scene. "We must all to the wars," says Hal, reminding us of history, foreshadowing Falstaff’s death, if only in jest, at the battle.

I should now like to consider V.i and V.iii, Falstaff’s first appearances in the historical plot, where his presence functions from the first as a comment upon the historical action. The Hal-Falstaff moments that engage with the historical plot in these penultimate moments may be rather easily separated structurally; both Falstaff’s actions—giving Hal not a pistol but a bottle of sack at the battle—and his speeches debunking honor take on Thersites-like dimensions, making him a rather conventional commentator upon the heroics of military action. It is not until after Hal saves his father’s life in V.iii and kills Hotspur in V.iv that the transformations of the character functions in terms of opposition and difference yield up their full significance.

History reaches its climax with Hotspur’s poetic death, but the moment is surrounded by fiction. Falstaff lies “dead” as well, and his attempt to escape death by counterfeiting, as Henry IV had done earlier (V.iii), and to play Hotspur—to let his honors live by cropping them—shifts the focus back to fiction, reviving our interest in playing. Shakespeare could have rung a consistent ending to his father-son antithesis with Falstaff, Hal’s rival father, and Hotspur, Henry IV’s rival son, both killed. Had he done so, then the reconciliation between Henry IV and Hal would become complete on all levels, making way for the historically “correct” kingly relationship. However, Hal’s acts—killing Hotspur and commenting upon Falstaff’s “dead” body—dispense with both the rival son and the rival father and throw the rivals into relationship. By demonstrating a relationship between Falstaff as antithetical father and Hotspur as antithetical son, Shakespeare’s strategy balances, deepens, and comments upon the father-son relationship between Henry IV and Hal. And that relationship is further complicated by Falstaff’s resurrection, which reasserts all the questions of the identity of the true king, the true father.

Coming back to life, Falstaff first recognizes the value of counterfeiting as a way to live, but then it occurs to him that if he can counterfeit, so can Hotspur. So Falstaff rekills Hotspur and becomes hero, a role we now associate with both Hotspur and Hal. It is particularly grotesque that Falstaff “kills” his “relation,” Hotspur—one antithesis “killed” by another—and that both now appear before Hal. Bearing Hotspur’s body, Falstaff enters to Hal, whom we now perceive as Henry IV’s true son. Because his act parodies Hal’s own, the gesture appals us; by coming back to life, Falstaff has both undercut Hal’s heroism and undermined the Henry IV-Hal relationship—and neither we nor Hal can brook it. Yet Hal countenances Falstaff’s lie about killing Hotspur, thus becoming associated with falsehood as a matter of policy. But the moment suggests a confrontation manqué, holding Falstaff’s story open. It is only Hal who sees and hears Falstaff’s lie; Henry IV is significantly absent. For had he been present, Hal, confronted by both his true father and his rival father, would be forced to choose: history would pull him one way, fiction another. But Shakespeare avoids this tug of war: he gives both Hal and the audience options. Rather than splitting our attention away from Henry IV-Hal to Falstaff-Hal or vice versa, we are asked to focus on the difference between these two relationships. Shakespeare suggests that one comments on the other; and he allows us, like Hal, to choose whether we will look at history through fiction or at fiction through history. The questions of who is the true king, who is the true father remain unanswered, preparing us for 2 Henry IV, which is a tragic meditation upon the gap established here between history and fiction, upon the transformation of Hal through saving his father’s life.

2 Henry IV continues the counterfeiting thrust of the first play, but in a different mode. The split father function continues to mediate firmly between history and fiction, Falstaff’s function critiquing Henry IV’s function throughout. Shakespeare also directs a new overall fictional emphasis, which further highlights and comments upon history, raising a question—What would it have been like if all had turned out differently?—which obliquely suggests that history is form of fiction.

The first moments re-image the significant scenes where fiction joined history at the Battle of Shrewsbury, seeing these through rumor’s veil—counterfeited, misrepresented. The false report giving victory to Hotspur, the antithetical son, makes an appropriate beginning for a play which will end by undoing all counterfeiting; affirming the historical mythic role of
king, and hence also affirming Henry IV’s function; denying Hal’s role-playing, and thus denying his fictional selves; and banishing Falstaff, the fictional, antithetical father.

Throughout, the action in both history and play turns upon report, upon letters, upon hearsay: messages come from court to tavern; Falstaff’s arrest is threatened but momentarily forgotten; the rebels’ scenes revolve more upon weighing and reacting to report than upon straightforward actions; Hal receives reports of and from Falstaff; Falstaff receives reports of Hal’s coming coronation. Misinterpretation abounds; and this may be read in several ways—as a comment upon history, which comes to us as report, and as a secure reminder of the fictional control over history. The historical narrative, much diminished, contains fictional moments from 1 Henry IV, replayed. Henry IV and Falstaff play the major moments of reprise: as Falstaff’s power as antithetical father diminishes, Henry IV reflects some of his behavior in 1 Henry IV, most particularly his coming back to life at Shrewsbury. And, for the most part, Hal remains apart from them both, stressing his function as antagonist to the historical Henry IV, a role he has taken up from Hotspur, as well as his gradual separation from the fiction and from his antithetical father, Falstaff.

In 1 Henry IV, Falstaff’s fiction mocks history; here, every gesture mocks Falstaff. Instead of stealing crowns, as at Gadshill, demands for payment come at him: he owes the Hostess, and Hal is not there to pay. When Hal and Poinc enter to Falstaff in II.iv, disguised as drawers, Falstaff recognizes them immediately, as he had not done at Gadshill, although he later pretended that he did so. In 1 Henry IV, we saw Hal treating Francis the drawer as Henry IV treated Hal; Hal’s appearance here both reminds us of his earlier role-playing and clarifies for us, through Falstaff’s recognition of him as “the bastard son of the King’s,” that Falstaff still thinks of Hal as his son, that he would like him to function as he had in the earlier play. But Falstaff refuses Hal as drawer to the tavern kingdom; in doing so, he also recognizes that Hal will not serve as drawer to the historical kingdom. Hal has become “other;”; he has become Henry IV’s son. In 1 Henry IV, we enjoy Hal’s exaggerated baiting of Falstaff, even when Falstaff’s attackers have been cut down to their proper numbers. But here, as Hal turns on Falstaff, the moments have a depleted, reversed tone. Hal will no longer condone attacks or self-apology from either father; but, as in the earlier tavern scene, Falstaff attempts recovery and self-justification: “No abuse, Hal... I have done the part of a careful friend and a true subject, and thy father is to give me thanks for it” (II.iv. 313-23). Falstaff’s mention of Henry IV is crucial: the fictional antithetical father expects recognition from history, from Henry IV. But, as before, history intrudes, opposing rather than affirming a relation between the two fathers, and this time the message from court has a more abrupt and decisive effect. As Hal and Falstaff leave the fictional kingdom, their farewells have a final ring: Hal knows his exit leads him into history; Falstaff expects similar deserts for the “[man] of merit,” the “man of action.”

As Falstaff’s efforts to move into history diminish his playing, Henry IV briefly takes up his counterfeiting behavior when, in IV.v, he reawakens from death to accuse Hal of taking the crown. Seen as a paradigm of Falstaff’s resurrection at Shrewsbury, the moment reflects on Henry, suggesting that he is assuming a fictionalized and, fictionalizing existence, and further implying that as history dies, some fiction dies, too. Henry moralizes on the bleak future of a destroyed kingdom, still perceiving Hal as an antagonist to history and as a rebellious son; in so doing, he perceives only the fictional Hal. To dismiss the fiction, Hal must speak as though to the crown, rather than directly to his father:

I spake unto this crown as having sense,
And thus upbraided it: “The care depending on thee
Hath fed upon the body of my father;
Therefore thou best of gold are worst of gold... .”
Accusing it, I put it on my head,
To try with it, as with an enemy
That had before my face murdered my father,
The quarrel of a true inheritor. (IV.v.157-68)

The crown has now taken on the function of the historical antagonist, thus affirming and cementing the reconciliation between true father and true son. Hal receives his father’s love, and the titles of true son and true king; the historical Hal banishes the fictional son.
Later, Hal takes on his father’s role more completely. As the newly acclaimed Henry V, he says to his brothers, “‘I’ll be your father and your brother too. / Let me but bear your love, I’ll bear your cares’ (V.ii.57-58). This Hal also now claims that the Lord Chief Justice “shall be as a father to my youth” (V.ii.118); thus he rejects both his historical and his fictional father for an abstract justice, just as he had given up the function of historical antagonist to an abstract “crown.”

And suddenly, we come to the promised end; we have already seen the image of that horror. Falstaff cries out: “God save thy Grace, King Hal! my royal Hal . . . God save thee, my sweet boy! . . . My King, my Jove! I speak to thee, my heart!” And Hal replies, “I know thee not, old man, fall to thy prayers” (V.v.41-47). The ascending series of invocations and Hal’s cutoff take us back to the playlet in 1 Henry IV, closing that gap between “I do” and “I will.” What we see and hear juxtaposes Falstaff’s expectations of an historical future and Hal’s reversion to Henry IV as Henry V, a priest-like figure out of the Middle Ages, supporting and bastioning the past, the function of the king’s role. The act of becoming his father critiques the moment when Hal saves Henry IV’s life, for in denying his rival father, Hal rejects the father figure who can look towards the future rather than the past. Hal sees only kingship, without Falstaff; Falstaff’s vision, as his cries to the new king point out, is large enough to encompass both Hal as son and Hal as king. We cannot entirely accept his rejection; if we do so, we must accept our own. For we have made an experimental, experiential assent to Falstaff in the play which has qualified our acceptance of history, of the stable myth of kingship, modifying it to favor the fictional Falstaff rather than Hal’s idea of himself as king.

But however much the shock of these moments suggests closure, Shakespeare carries the play forward, further echoing the playlet ending in 1 Henry IV. Rejected, Falstaff “sleeps behind the arras” once again: that is, the royal procession passes him by, leaving him with Justice Shallow. History intrudes, as it has done before; another war threatens, this time in France. Both history and fiction remain open-ended: we wait for proof of Hal’s right to hold the kingship, to become more than Henry V, to be “the mirror of all Christian kings” (Henry V II.1.6). For, at the end of 2 Henry IV, both Hal and Falstaff are fictions of various orders: Falstaff, because he is the “supreme fiction”; Hal, because the kingship, as he takes it up, is a fiction that he must play out once again, through a further series of roles, in Henry V. But that is another story—or is it history?

The Epilogue balances history and fiction before us once again, turning the play over to the audience. The speaker of the Epilogue—might it be Falstaff?—commits his “body to [our] mercies” and kneels “down before [us]—but, indeed, to pray for the Queen” (Epi. 13-17). In both history and play-acting, one body must kneel before another. In history, the body of kingdom, reborn, requires this. There is no fictional king. But Falstaff remains—and not just as an addendum, whatever the Quarto titles of both plays suggest. Falstaff is there as Shakespeare’s last suggestion, reinforcing the Aristotelian notion that poetry is more powerful than history, that “the final belief must be in a fiction.”

NOTES


2 All quotations are from The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).


The History Plays—a fair field full of nobles

Joel T. Rosenthal*

The History Plays—in fact if not in poetic theory—are about the nobility. Running in order from Richard II through Richard III, they are filled with the secular peers, the parliamentary nobles of the realm. These peers make up a goodly proportion of the dramatis personae of each of the eight plays, and one or more of them figure prominently in a vast majority of the separate scenes of the plays.

Richard II, the best literary and poetic disquisition we have on medieval monarchy, has but three scenes in which no hereditary aristocrats appear: that of the Queen in the garden, that in which Pierce of Exton readies himself for the ride to Pomfret, and that in which the deposed king is actually murdered. In 1 Henry IV the nobles appear in every scene except the Prince Hal-Falstaff ones, that scene (III.i) in which the king taxes the Prince with the latter’s inferiority to Hotspur, and that (IV.iv) in which Archbishop Scrope—an ecclesiastical prince from an aristocratic family—plots his rebellion. In 2 Henry IV only the scenes centering on Falstaff and Company are staged without members of the nobility. Henry V—the last play to be written—has the largest number of scenes without nobles: five without any peers, two where the presence of an aristocrat or two contributes nothing to the plot, and five or six where the French king and nobles occupy the entire stage. All three parts of Henry VI, of course, are heavily spiked with an aristocratic flavor: except for the scenes monopolized by the French, only those scenes centering on Cade’s rebellion in 2 Henry VI (IV.ii,iii,vi, and x) are without English nobles or their wives. And in Richard III only the short scene wherein the Scrivener explains the indictment of Hastings(III.vi) and that in which Tyrrel reports the princes’ murder to the king(IV.iii) are without any nobles.

This leaves us with an amazingly high tally of scenes with noble men (and women). It shows to what extent Shakespeare was still working within the conventions of the political chronicle play, and it shows how much he could contribute while ostensibly confining himself to the realm of poetry and characterization, and not explicitly crossing into that of historical causation and analysis. It also reveals how heavily his sources, and presumably his audience, were content to see English history as an aristocratic pageant. It is of considerable literary importance that the overwhelming majority of the scenes without nobles are ones that Shakespeare made up, moving from his sources to his imagination. Such scenes become more prevalent in the later plays, 1 and 2 Henry IV and Henry V, where he is working on his own to create foils to the conventional attitudes towards monarchy and the values of hierarchical society. The scenes without nobles embrace Falstaff and his colleagues, plus those wonderful episodes of Henry V that make up the king’s endeavor to provide “a little touch of Harry in the night” (IV, Prologue, . . . 1. 47), i.e., where he plays the citizen king. In short, when Shakespeare wanted to develop a psychological or dramatic problem he was apt to leave his dukes and earls behind and to follow his own lead. When he was simply a mouthpiece for narrative history, he followed the traditional mode and used the customary cast of historical personages.

For the most part, alas, he chose to follow the traditional path. And by accepting the tradition of royal-aristocratic narrative, which saw hereditary politics as the predominant force in the state, Shakespeare was tacitly accepting the fifteenth-century view of the world and the fifteenth-century analysis of English history. The primary problem of the fifteenth-century state—to contemporaries, to Tudor historians and dramatists, and to most modern scholars—concerns the king’s relationship to the peers, especially to his own close relatives, and the question of how a medieval monarch could use his various resources to impose his rule upon his over-mighty subjects. The dilemmas of fifteenth-century state were indeed grave. That the rich and mighty were and should be a special group with an exalted role in the state was beyond dispute. Their apologists saw them as part of the divine scene:

The noble persons of the world . . . some for the merits of their ancestors, some for their

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own virtues—he endowed with great honours, possessions and riches . . . . Riches are a proper instrument for the execution of virtue . . . [as in] the definition that Aristotle makes in the fourth chapter of his Politics, that 'nobility is virtue and ancient riches.'

That such noble persons were only too eager to raise large and unruly private retinues was neither peculiar, given their wealth and power, nor a unique phenomenon of the fifteenth-century. Private retinues had a long if seedy history, and recent scholarship on "bastard feudalism" both sets it into a larger, longer context and de-emphasizes its purely anarchic and antinomian features. But when these separate lines of aristocratic thrust converged to catch a weak and dependent throne and to involve it in dynastic vicissitudes, not to mention naked power struggles, we have the unhappy situation described by Chief Justice Fortescue in his On the Governance of England:

The king's subjettes woll rather goo with a lorde that is riche, and mey pay thair wages and expenses, than with thair kyng that hath noght in purse, but thai most serue hym, yf thai wil do so, at their owne dispenses . . . For, as the philosepher saith in his Etyikes, Impossible est indigentem operari bona.

So clearly the power and stability of the throne, vis-à-vis the nobles, were the main fifteenth-century political headaches. Shakespeare gave full scope to the aristocratic responsibility for this mess. In our desire to see what he says about monarchy we tend to obscure what he says—implicitly as a dramatist, rather than explicitly as a political thinker—about the nobility. If his crowns kept tottering because of the curse that stemmed from the death of Thomas of Gloucester and the deposition of the guilty but anointed Richard II, his characters were also fully engrossed in their own very proper aristocratic pursuits: aggrandizement, the acquisition of office, and private feuds. A recent reviewer in the Times Literary Supplement warns us not to force the History Plays into the procrustean bed of a treatise on monarchy: "Shakespeare does not dramatize the 'Tudor Myth' but [he] gives us something more medieval, a dramatic narrative de casibus virorum illustrium, resting on a belief in the folly of ambition and the fragility of worldly power." If the kings were the long-term exemplifications of this theme, the nobles were the daily ones.

Shakespeare was a dramatist, not a political theorist or a narrative historian. If he accepted and transmitted a view of the polity that began at its head and rarely went much below the ears, he certainly had a right to prune his material as he thought best. We have been speaking of his historical nobility as an estate or class within English society. In reality, all was hardly so harmonious. The class concept of blue blood is not mentioned here in any effort to disguise the quantity and quality of diversity, not to say hostility, that always bubbled within those august ranks. In his efforts towards clarity and dramatic tension Shakespeare trimmed the number of peers he chose to introduce into each play. He had to keep in mind the Globe's payroll, the limits of memory of even an Elizabethan audience, and the physical restraints of the stage. Consequently he was economical about the number of peers he would use in any given play, or scene thereof, and he chose in such a fashion as to make individuals representative of the larger body of nobles. 3 Henry VI, an early and unwieldy play, needed seventeen peers: five dukes, seven earls, five barons, plus the Prince of Wales and two kings. But other plays could be very economical: 1 Henry IV has six peers, plus Hotspur and Douglas; Henry V, nine peers; 2 Henry VI, nine also plus three aristocratic sons (young Clifford and York's two boys, Edward and Richard). Even Richard II, the play in which the peers play their most critical constitutional role, gets by with twelve nobles and Henry Hotspur. Richard III, which at times is almost an aristocratic pageant, has but twelve nobles (plus the bizarre total of four kings).

These numbers represent a considerable feat of dramatic compression. The English peerage in the fifteenth century, measured by the number of individual summonses issued for sessions of Parliament, could range considerably in size. But the number of peers summoned was always well in excess of anything hinted at in the dramas. For the last parliament of Richard II writs of summonses were issued to no fewer than five dukes, one marquis, ten earls and thirty-four barons: fifty men in all. The first parliament of Henry IV, which may or may not have been a parliament, had the same fifty men summoned. To take some other parliaments for our years, at dates roughly corresponding to the action of the plays: for that of 12 Henry IV forty summonses, for that of 4 Henry V thirty-six, for that of 4 Henry VI
twenty-nine, for that of 25 Henry VI forty-five, for that of 6 Edward IV forty-six, and to the last parliament of Edward IV, forty-five men including the preadolescent Prince of Wales.

Furthermore, Shakespeare's conservative or traditional view of the political scene was reinforced by his choice of nobles. For the most part he kept away from new peers and he stuck with the tried, if not always true, families that went back to the midfourteenth century or beyond. Since many of the realm's problems stemmed from the intertwining of the great noble families and the royal house, it was necessary that royal brothers, cousins, uncles and nephews—all possible claimants of the purple—should be so prominent. Royal dukes abound: John of Gaunt, John of Lancaster, good Duke Humphrey, Richard of York, poor George of Clarence, Henry VI's unpleasant son Edward, the young princes in the Tower, etc., plus all the numerous royal and quasi-royal barons whose hopes of the throne actually came to fruition. Other peers introduced in the plays usually represented established if not really ancient lines: if they had little ambition towards the throne themselves, none were beyond a little opportune king-making. The Percies, the Nevilles, and the Stanleys all wear such garments, while others lacked opportunity, not inclination. The Percies had held their earldom of Northumberland since 1377, but they had been peers of the realm since 1299. The Beauchamps had been earls of Warwick since 1268. The Staffords only got their dukedom in 1444, when Humphrey was elevated, but they had been earls since 1351 and peers of the realm since before 1308. The Nevilles had numbered among the nobility since 1295, and the Earl of Westmorland of Henry V was the fourth successive male head of that great aristocratic clan. Even the Cliffsords, exalted in the plays to an ahistorical prominence because of their bloody role in the wars, went back to the thirteenth century.

But Shakespeare was not a complete snob. Newer families were not totally ignored. The Beaufort family, embracing the dukes of Exeter and Somerset and Cardinal Beaufort, all of 1 Henry VI, and Henry Tudor of Richard III, all stemmed from John of Gaunt's liaison with Katherine Swynford in the 1360's. Humphrey of Gloucester keeps this before us when he amiably addresses his uncle, the Cardinal, as "thou bastard of my grandfather" (1 Henry VI III.1.42). The jumped-up duke of Suffolk, though hardly a parvenu, was still resented because he was a descendant of the Michael de la Pole, whom Edward III had raised from his wool brokering to the earldom of Suffolk as recently as 1366. The Hastings family were genuine newcomers: William became first Lord Hastings in 1461, one of Edward IV's peerage creations to his loyal followers (many of whom had been his father's retainers during the years of opposition).4 The Lord Hastings of 2 Henry IV is a fictitious character. The Stanleys were first summoned in 1456, and the first Lord Stanley's son was the Thomas who became Earl of Derby in Richard III. This rapid mobility within the peerage was due to Thomas' duplicity at Bosworth and to his marriage with the new king's old mother, Lady Margaret Beaufort. So we have a commingling of old and new families, with a statistical bias and a balance of interest tipping towards the old. This is a fairly faithful depiction of the peerage, regarding its blend and aggregate continuity. Sessions of Lords were invariably such a mixture of old and new, of venerable thirteenth- and fourteenth-century lines and of new men who by virtue of recent service, loyalty, and opportunism were able to leap the great social chasm.

A prime characteristic of a smallish and an hereditary aristocracy is that everyone is apt to be related to everyone else, at least figuratively speaking. This was true of the fifteenth-century peers, and it certainly is borne out in the way Shakespeare chooses and depicts them. In such a complicated genealogical maze, "family" or "relationship" cannot be a simple principle of social or political unity. As Professor Lander has reminded us about family property, "inheritance, jointure and other settlement disputes were at this time the most fertile source of long and embittered quarrels."5 so we can generalize to include other aspects of family interaction. The claims of competing relatives, the dark abyss of personal ambition, and the rivalries between the generations, even (or especially) between fathers and sons, could all work to check what might seem an obvious and compelling force for political cohesion.

Father-son relationships reveal a wide range of affection and behavior. At one extreme we have very strong and close ties. The bonds of the Talbots, the "over daring" father and "my other life" his son, go with them to the grave. The love of John of Gaunt for Bolingbroke, as expressed before the son's exile, seems genuine and fully reciprocated. Richard of York's ties with his sons—young Edward, Edmund of Rutland, George, and Richard—are as close and harmonious as later relations between the brothers are treacherous and disingenuous. Only a proud father says:
My sons—God knows what hath bechanched them;
But this I know, they have demean’d themselves
Like men born to renown by life or death. (3 Henry VI I.iv.6-8)

Salisbury speaks to Warwick with affection and pride:
Warwick my son, the comfort of my age,
Thy deeds, thy plainness, and thy housekeeping
Hath won the greatest favour of the commons . . . .

(2 Henry VI I.i.190-92)

But at the other end of the spectrum are some contrasts. The relations between Prince Hal and his father fit quite easily into a familiar pattern: the son’s rebellion and impatience at war with his expected duty and role. And what can we make, other than lack of communication and almost complete misunderstanding, between Hotspur and his faint-hearted father, or between Aumerle and his pusillanimous father, York.

So to Shakespeare father-son ambivalence, intergenerational tension, and sibling rivalry were powerful motive forces in the politics of fifteenth-century England. Whether he is using the main stream of the plot, as in 1 and 2 Henry IV, or merely touching an aristocratic sub-plot in passing, the theme is often on or just below the surface. His dramatic usage bespeaks an insight into family and personal psychology as well as into political configurations. After all, Hotspur was about thirty-five when Richard II, himself aged thirty-two, was deposed by Bolingbroke, aged thirty-three in 1399. No wonder the Percy heir chafed at the domination of a fifty-nine-year-old father and at the hectoring of a fifty-six-year-old unmarried uncle: “A hare-brain’d Hotspur, govern’d by a spleen,” as Worcester described his nephew (1 Henry IV V.i.19). Henry Bolingbroke had spent many years away from England, and one motive behind his prolonged quest for adventure elsewhere was to avoid conflict with his father. Eldest sons often had long waits before they could claim the patrimony, and the interval was not always good for their tempers. Aumerle was a mature man of twenty-six when he and his father had their falling out over their loyalty to the new dynasty, headed by his slightly older first cousin. Old York died a few years later, aged sixty-one, and Aumerle lived to die at Agincourt, though we do not know if death was from wounds, a stroke, or suffocation caused by the weight of his battle armor after he had been unhorsed. Young scions of the great houses for all their poetic petulance were typical examples of the conflict between the generations. Fifteenth-century peers lived to an average age of about fifty, so the first sons—often born when their fathers were perhaps in their early twenties if not sooner—might often have to pass a considerable spell awaiting their turn.

Although the majority of peers had lost their fathers by the time they reached legal age, and so were immediately free at age twenty-one to claim the title and family estates, there was always a significant fraction who still had to cool their heels. For them was the dilemma of finding a role worthy and yet unthreatening, innocuous, and yet not too unobtrusive. For 133 (about forty percent) of the fifteenth-century peers we can estimate age at the time of fathers’ death. Of this group thirty-five (twenty-six percent) had been aged ten or less when the father had died, thirty-seven (twenty-eight percent) between ten and twenty, forty-two (thirty-two percent) between twenty and thirty, and nineteen (or fourteen percent of the total: one man in seven) thirty or more. The last two categories are of the most interest: almost half of the future peers were into their legal age, their years of political, military, and sexual maturity, before they were allowed to take their turn as family leader and peer of the king’s realm. Consequently, father-son rivalry was hardly an anomaly, despite all the propaganda about the patriarchal universe. More than one father took his worries about filial loyalty and obedience even beyond the point of death, and the paternal will might contain a worried provision: “And that he in nowise lette interruphe nor myynyshe thoroughe no maner occasion nothingyng the testament ner last will but help and doo to the performance and accomplysshynge of the same. He thus doyng I beseeche god graunt hym much honor long lyllyf and good fortune.”

Relations between brothers also covered a considerable spread of sentiment. At times Henry IV’s sons could be very devoted and affectionate: “Before, I lov’d thee as a brother, John: / But now, I do respect thee as my soul ” (I Henry IV V.i.19-20).

On the other hand, there was always the spectre of rivalry and jealousy. If such baser feelings rarely reached the exciting level existing between Richard of Gloucester and George of Clarence, they were often but one spark from combustion. Modern parents have been
warned against such tactics for behavior modification as those adopted by Henry IV: "Thy place in Council thou hast rudely lost, / Which by thy younger brother is supplied" (1 Henry IV / V III. ii. 32-33). In a society where only the eldest son was to inherit the title, along with the bulk of the landed wealth, it is no wonder that less than wholly fraternal feelings might crop up. Neither merit nor youth was always well served by primogeniture and hereditary titles.

In some cases younger brothers could prove successful at marrying the heiresses through whom their fathers' titles and lands would descend, and then the peerage would simultaneously embrace a number of brothers. Various of the fifth Earl of Northumberland's children would hold the titles of Earl of Northumberland and Lord Egremont, while another son became bishop of Carlisle. Salisbury's sons became Earl of Warwick and Lord Montague, and again their brother became a bishop, this time of Exeter. Some of Westmorland's sons became Earl of Westmorland, Earl of Salisbury, Lord Fauconberg, Lord Bergavenny, and the bishop of Durham. The Earl of Essex's brothers rose to the positions of Lord Fitz-Warwin and Lord Berners, while another brother became the archbishop of Canterbury.

Sometimes a de novo peerage creation could serve to make the brothers into peers at the same time, as when Northumberland's brother became Earl of Worcester in 1397, twenty years after the elder Percy had come into his own high title. But mostly younger sons' paths to the peerage lay in the death of unmarried or childless older brothers. Few family lines ran smoothly from father to eldest son to eldest son through the course of three or four generations. Of the nobles whom Shakespeare actually places in his Richard II, Aumerle was eventually succeeded by his nephew; the Duke of Norfolk by a younger son nine years after the elder son had been executed for his role in Scrope's rebellion; the old Earl of Salisbury was succeeded by a nephew; Lord Berkeley by a nephew as well; Northumberland by a grandson; Lord Roos—himself a brother of the previous peer—by his son; Lord Willoughby by a son; and Lord Fitz-Walter by a younger son after the eldest had died, without heirs, during his father's lifetime. Thus we see that a random cross section of the peerage is apt to give us a good number of men who had not been sons of their predecessors and who would not have any son to succeed them.

Shakespeare gives us an ample view of aristocratic life that was affluent and opulent. It was also dangerous. Excluding the many kings who died by violence—Richard II, Henry VI, Edward V, and Richard III—there still is a great deal of blood, shed either on stage or immediately off. In Richard II the Earl of Wiltshire is led off to execution, Norfolk goes into lifelong exile, Aumerle comes within a whisker of losing his foolish head, and the severed heads of Salisbury and Oxford are referred to, though not actually needed, among the props. 1 Henry IV is not very bloody. Only Hotspur and his uncle Worcester come to untimely ends, though Lord Stafford—not introduced among the dramatis-personae—dies while counterfeiting the king at Shrewsbury. In 2 Henry IV Mowbray, Northumberland, Bardolf, and the aristocratic Archbishop Scrope leave us in hasty fashion. In Henry V while Cambridge and Scrope are executed, York and Suffolk die, offstage, at Agincourt. In 1 Henry VI "mad brained Salisbury" and the two Talbots die in battle in France, in 2 Henry VI five nobles are put to death, and in 3 Henry VI nine come to a quick end. In Richard III, at the end of the long and sanguine progression, no less than nine peers (including Norfolk and Lord Ferrers, who do not appear on stage) are put to death, along with two kings. Sudden violence, treachery, jealousy, vindictive inter- and intrafamily death are all around us: "so different from our own Queen's family life," as the Victorian matron remarked after a performance of Hamlet. Again, apart from what Shakespeare's company saved in costs by terminating so many roles so early in the evening, what can we say for his portrayal of the violence of aristocratic life in terms of its historical verisimilitude?

It was quite accurate. Of the fifteenth-century peers, i.e., of the universe of men summoned to Lords between Richard II's deposition and 1500, approximately twenty-one percent—sixty-nine of three hundred thirty—died by violence of some sort, mostly political. The ratio of violent death to natural death might dip as low as eighteen percent, as it did in the quarter century between 1426 and 1450, but it was always more than a mere passing or curious phenomenon. In the years between 1451 and 1475 violent death claimed almost half of the peers who expired: thirty-four of seventy-two, or forty-seven percent of the total. We now accept that the "Wars of the Roses" did not kill off the nobility in the sense that battlefield casualties or bad political gambles actually ended family lines through an extinction of the male heirs. But heads literally rolled, and the turnover rate within a given family's chain of succession could be pretty rapid. The ascent of the political and social pyramid grew
more and more dangerous as one neared the top. Shakespeare’s emphasis upon the higher nobility and on those with royal blood and royal aspirations concentrates our attention upon the most heavily decimated ranks. The Earl of Aumerle almost dies in Richard II. He instead escapes to grow up to become the Duke of York, who dies in Henry V where his brother, Cambridge, also dies. Cambridge’s son Richard, Duke of York, dies before our eyes in 3 Henry VI, along with his second son, Edmund Earl of Rutland. The only one of Richard’s brood to die in bed is Edward IV, who, along with his two remaining brothers, departs in Richard III. We lose an earl of Suffolk in Henry V; a Duke of Suffolk—the earl’s son—in 2 Henry VI; Clifford father, the eighth Lord, in 2 Henry VI; Clifford son, the ninth Lord, in 3 Henry VI; a duke of Somerset in 2 Henry VI and another in 3 Henry VI; the earl of Wiltshire in Richard II and his relatives the Archbishop in 2 Henry IV and Lord Scrope in Henry V. A propensity towards an early and violent death was almost an element in the genetic inheritance of some families, just as it was historically logical and dramatically necessary.

I would like to make two final points. This analysis of the plays is very much that of a social historian. It is neither intended to castigate Shakespeare for not being a better historian, nor conversely, is it meant to say that he is so great that he always sheds light on “what really happened.” From the great Duke of Marlborough’s comment, “Shakespeare, the only History of England I ever read,” we can learn something about Shakespeare, and much more about the great Duke of Marlborough. Shakespeare shaped his material as he chose. He talked more about the king than about the nobles because it made for better drama, and because sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Englishmen, in a world of an established, Protestant church and a sovereign monarch, cared more about kings than about nobles. But the source of his dramatic tension lay in the relation of his kings to their nobles, not to the populace. A Stuart monarch remarked, about the time that Shakespeare was retiring from London, “No bishop, no king.” Englishmen of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries could well have said, “no nobles, no king.”

The History Plays can be read as a gloss on aristocratic social history, just as they can be read as Elizabethan morality plays about kingship and the mutability of human affairs. But they are also poetry, some of it of a very high order. If the historian is not better attuned to appreciate this, he is not necessarily less so. The more we are versed in the dazzling complexity of medieval monarchy, the closer Richard II’s great lines come to A. E. Housman’s visceral definition of poetry:

Now mark me how I will undo myself.  
I give this heavy weight from off my head  
And this unwieldy sceptre from my hand,  
The pride of kingly sway from out my heart.  
With mine own tears I wash away my balm,  
With mine own hands I give away my crown,  
With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,  
With mine own breath release all duty’s rites.

(Richard II IV.i.204-11)

The more we analyze bastard feudalism and private warfare, the more impressed are we by Glendower’s great boast:

Three times hath Henry Bolingbroke made head  
Against my power; thrice from the banks of Wye  
And sandy-bottom’d Severn have I sent him  
Bootless home and and weather-beaten back.

(1 Henry IV III.i.64-67)

And lastly, the more we dissect the myth of Richard III’s villany, the more we appreciate the irony of his being allowed to speak one of the loveliest one-line eulogies in English literature: “And Anne my wife hath bid this world good night” (Richard III IV.iii.39).


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SHAKESPEARE'S RICHARD II AS A SAINT MANQUÉ IN A COMPOUNDED TRAGEDY

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In general the episodic nature of chronicle plays tends to discourage our concern with their plot configurations, but the tragic components of Richard II make it an exception. Viewed superficially, it assumes a deceptively symmetrical pattern, beginning with Richard's (mis)rule, particularly with his failure to recognize and cope with the primary threat to his stability, and ending with Bolingbroke's model rule, showing how he almost incidentally removes his primary threat. But Richard is such a passive victim and Bolingbroke so easy a victor, the overt action is so uncomplicated and the tone so unrelentingly formal and serious that the play will not submit to being viewed as a struggle for power between two "mighty opposites." For anyone unwilling to settle for thematic explanations of the sequences, fresh hypotheses seem called for in order to account at all successfully for the episodes Shakespeare chooses to include, their order and their handling.

Since my natural bent is to ask questions about plot structure, in Aristotelian terms rather than those of the modern Structuralists, I was once struck by some incidental remarks by A. P. Rossiter, describing the plot of Richard II as an imperfect amalgam of two plots, of which the first seems:

to have no real beginning; a coherent middle; and a ragged, muddled end. . . . Taken by itself, if we stand back far enough, it does look like the Aristotelian "simple" tragedy: The sort he thought inferior, having neither peripeteia or any real anagnorisis. Richard seems to slip steadily into calamity, mainly through "force of circumstance": and his hamartia . . . is a fatal slip, a blunder, the mishandling of a quarrel. . . .

Essentially, I propose an alternative interpretation of the phenomena that provoked Rossiter to conclude, on the basis of these remarks, that the play cannot be "taken by itself" but must depend on knowing an anonymous play called Woodstock for any adequate explication. I submit, instead, that Richard II is so constructed that the first half of the play has its own beginning, middle and end, thereby forming a whole that converts into a beginning for the last half of the play. For such plotting, Paul Goodman long ago introduced the term "compounded," to describe how in Romeo and Juliet a relatively complete romantic comedy becomes the ground for a species of tragedy. The term does not imply a subplot or parallel plot, but clearly overlaps plays with a "two-part structure" as Emrys Jones describes them. Shakespeare's Julius Caesar and his Winter's Tale may also be rewardingly viewed as compounded, but his were not the first narratives to have such a pattern; even in Homer's Iliad the plot of Achilles's requital of Agamemnon's insults seems to become the ground for a different sort of revenge plot with Hector as the victim.

Unlike the plot units of Romeo and Juliet, however, those of Richard II are both species of tragedy. The first may be briefly described as a sequence of incidents leading to Richard's deposition, the second as his futile efforts to undermine his successor's hope for an aura of legitimacy. Before formulating the evidence for these propositions, however, I need to face up to a crucial difficulty—namely, the lack of a dependable basis for classifying tragedies. The genre is ordinarily defined in nonstructural terms, for example, as embodying an illuminating vision of life. Among those who accept Aristotle's notion of a play as a quasi-thing, agreement is still difficult, especially if more discrimination is needed than his distinction between simple and complex. Probably because of a lacuna in the text, no one has persuasively explicated Aristotle's other pronouncement that there are "four distinct species of tragedy."

In order to be reasonably precise about the plots in Richard II, I shall offer a tentative schema. The simplest or most rudimentary sequence capable of producing a tragic effect is one entirely due to the situation; for example, in the medieval De Casibus narratives, the fall of a

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man from high position does not depend on whether he deserves to fall, or does anything to facilitate it, except to be subject to the Wheel of Fortune. Critics who link *Richard II* with this species tend to overlook this basic criterion, although one does observe that "the shooting star" (ll.iv.20) rather than the wheel really symbolizes Richard's fall. Apart from the winds delaying his return from Ireland, and despite Richard's occasional use of concept of the wheel (to excuse his inaction?), Fortune's role in this play seems incidental.

As for the "tragedies of suffering" and the "tragedies of character," as Aristotle labels them, they seem to be distinguished from the simple tragedies at one extreme by having the protagonist's fall depend somehow on the kind of person he is, and from the complex tragedies at the other extreme by the absence of reversals (usually events that promise the character happiness but bring the opposite) or of recognitions (events such as a person finding himself engaged in injuring someone he prizes). Furthermore, the distinction between the other two species may well be that one has a central character who merely reacts—no matter how violently—to events initiated by the other characters, the other has a protagonist with a relatively clear-cut goal that he actively pursues (for only then does the notion of the "tragic flaw" become relevant). With these distinctions in mind, I propose to re-examine *Richard II*, beginning with the first plot unit.

Its opening scene dramatizes a challenge of great moment to the nation in an extremely formal way, with the King imaging himself as an impartial judge, not a word being said to contradict his falsity. Although anyone aware of the real target of Bolingbroke's charges tends to find hints at every turn, there are no verbal signs, not even in the legal references to "ancient malice" and "misbegotten hate" (I.i.7, 33). It is made vividly clear, however, that Richard loves the center of the stage.

The second scene offers a startlingly new perspective on Richard's handling of the challenge. From a dialogue between the widow of the murdered Gloucester and his brother, John of Gaunt, we learn that Bolingbroke is using Mowbray as a stalking-horse to attack a guilty Richard. Only the King's status as "God's substitute" restrains Richard's uncle from seeking the vengeance that the widow is demanding for her husband's murder and that the audience is being prepared to desire (III.iv.33).

The next two scenes add to the catalogue of Richard's unsavory traits as he indulges his spite in gloating with Aumerle over the banished Bolingbroke and the dying Gaunt, then maintains his spendthrift ways by seizing the inheritance and by planning an Irish war as an excuse for larger extortions from his subjects. Leading an army to Ireland is hardly a trivial action, but as a means of escaping from his central problem, a latent rebellion at home, it contributes to no goal which would make him, in a technical sense, "active." Thus in the first half of the play he displays no virtues to be negated by a tragic flaw but, to quote the Gardener, only "some few vanities which make him light" (III.iv.86). Taking the Greek term "hamartia" (literally, missing the mark) at its face value, we may ask, how can a man miss a mark unless he is shooting at one?

Once past the beginning of the play (after Richard exiles Bolingbroke and seizes his properties), all the significant actions are attributable to the antagonist, who has a goal no less apparent for his denying it. In Act II, scene ii, subordinates act out the absent Richard's impending collapse: the Queen speaks of a "nameless woe" and then a messenger comes to give it a name; the Duke of York speaks of the disarray of the country in such a jumbled fashion that critics infer scribal corruption (see Ure, p. 76, n.); Bushy, Greene, and Bagot, who seem incapable of helping Richard do anything but waste money, scurry around like defenseless animals.

Meanwhile in Bolingbroke's camp the atmosphere is calm, with flattering promises being given and received on all sides. York's reproaches serve Bolingbroke as an opportunity to state his case with consummate skill; then he sloughs them off as casually as Richard did York's complaints in an earlier scene. Yet with a cause sanctified by the prayers of a dying father devoted to the welfare of England and with grievances seconded by the lords of the realm, Bolingbroke never succeeds in gaining the audience's support—a fact that makes the compounding dramatically appropriate.

Once Richard reappears, after all this foreshadowing and symbolic gesturing, he hastily submits to the pattern of failure. He may not actually invite usurpation, but under pressure becomes almost manic-depressive, helplessly fluctuating between hysterical optimism and pure funk: "Cry woe, destruction, ruin, and decay—/ The worst is death, and death will have his day" (III.ii.102-103). He expects to be betrayed, even by his favorites. Once his eminence
is threatened, his passivity is difficult to equal among other tragic figures, especially the way he relishes the symbols of his fall, beginning with "Down, down I come . . . " (III.iii.176).

These scenes in Act III are also remarkable for the illumination of Richard's personality. Apparently, for its flowering or culmination, he needs to be deposed, since only catastrophe seems to feed his extraordinary flair for lyrical expression. In earlier scenes, while ordinarily conforming to his chivalrous notions, he can be flippantly irresponsible: "Our doctors say this is no month to bleed" (II.ii.257), or illogically rhetorical, as in his objections to waking up peace (I.i.228-42). But faced with disaster, he speaks magnificently, so well that the audience ceases to cringe at his wallowing in self-pity. With his superlative verbal power to express abnegation and despair, he surpasses the eighteenth-century man of feeling.

In the first plot unit, therefore, the hero has various cravings but no goal, reacting to Bolingbroke's primarily with efforts to formulate "objective correlatives" of his dizzying emotional swings. He loves symbolic gestures: kissing the earth, descending from a castle wall, struggling over a crown, breaking a mirror—all productive of and accompanied by memorable flights of speech. In the first half at least we feel no "impulse to put Bolingbroke with the villains and Richard with the heroes," for he distracts and subverts us at every turn. And the feelings of pity and fear are also reduced by two choral-like episodes: the venerable patriot Gaunt's dying speech giving spiritual reasons for Richard's fall, and the Gardener giving practical ones—and presaging Bolingbroke's success.

Once triumphant, the new king feels the need to turn Richard's renunciation of the throne into a spectacle of voluntary abdication confirming his legitimacy. In this very unhistorical episode, Henry may be seen as suggesting a course of action still open to Richard, whose taunts and quibbles and demands all serve temporarily to frustrate Henry's craving for ascendancy commensurate with his power. Carlisle announces that without doing anything, Richard will be revenged: "The blood of English shall manure the ground / And future ages groan for this foul act" (I.iii.137-38). But can Richard do anything? Earlier, when he thinks his favorites have abandoned him, he finds "each one thrice worse than Judas" (III.ii.132). As he is later feigning submissiveness, he begins to think of himself as another Christ-figure:

Did they not sometime cry "All hail!" to me?  
So Judas did to Christ. But he, in twelve,  
Found truth in all but one; I in twelve thousand, none.(IV.i.169-71)

After momentarily pretending to forgive, Richard reverts to the analogy by calling the king and his nobles new Pilates who "Have here deliver'd me to my sour cross" (IV.i.240). During the deposition scene, therefore, Richard seems to have conceived the idea of permanently frustrating Henry's hopes of being mantled with legitimacy.

Actually there is no point in Act III at which the first plot unit breaks off and the second begins; if there were, probably Emrys Jones would have identified it as a two-part structure. But no such point is needed, any more than there is a particular speech which ordinarily marks the stages of a tragedy which Aristotle called beginning, middle and end. To illustrate these terms, so crucial to my hypothesis, one authority (A. L. Levi) chooses Richard II and talks about it in a fashion that accidentally serves my purpose. He notes that in a beginning such as "the conflict between Bolingbroke and Mowbray, anything can happen," that the middle scenes meet the test of probability, and that "In Act V, [Richard's] murder by Exton (or another) is inevitable." But actually the feeling of necessity accompanies Richard's fall, so that the question is not whether his imprisonment and murder will happen, but what import can be drawn from the scenes Shakespeare chose to include. Although the heightening of probability in tragedy is as characteristic of short sequences as of entire works (for example, the alternatives to Julius Caesar's arrival at the capitol are systematically exhausted until no other course is possible, dramatically speaking), yet Levi's approach helps us understand the compounding of Richard II. The king's spectacular turnabout in the tournament scene establishes the tone of the first half; the passivity that makes it seem inevitable that he yield the throne is enhanced by his dizzying emotional changes. Somehow out of his helplessness grows a new probability that he will choose and strive for a serious goal (Goodman, p. 60).

When Richard repeatedly alludes to his deposition as a kind of martyrdom, he is hardly distinguishable from "Weak Kings" in other Elizabethan plays. But unlike them, he goes beyond thinking and speaking of himself as a martyr; he tries to become known as a saint,
preferably a martyr, for whom Christ is the divine analogue. When he talks pathetically of being “buried where subjects’ feet / May hourly trample on their sovereign’s head” (III.i.156-57), it is an indignity consonant with such a goal. And in a following line, concerning usurpers “haunted by ghosts they have deposed,” the image is so apropos that it may contribute to the idea. However obliquely his intentions are dramatized and his behavior shaped to reach this goal, I submit that the scenes that follow may properly be viewed as his inconsistent but real attempts to achieve a sort of saintliness, neither just to think better of himself, nor to “transform his image of himself into that of a martyr to political expediency” (Ure, p. lxviii), but to become an apparition forever haunting Henry’s dreams.

The English had long been conscious of the role of martyrs in their world, particularly of Becket, who had defied a king and strengthened the Pope’s authority in England for centuries. In view of the prestige of that “holy, blissful martyr,” it is curious that his name seldom appears in Elizabethan records. How much of his eclipse was due to Henry VIII’s campaign to obliterate the memory of that “perfect pattern of a rebel” is a matter of conjecture, but Henry seems to have felt an obsessive fear, over and above the need of an excuse for plundering the richest shrine in England. Cromwell publicized a revised version of Becket’s death, and rather effective orders went out to destroy all his images and to expunge his name from manuscripts and calendars. The legend that his murder undermined the stability of Henry II’s reign, however, must have remained current among those Englishmen opposed to the suppression of the Catholic faith, and it is still being promulgated as fact in certain circles. The anti-Cecil faction which supported the Earl of Essex was Catholic oriented, including Shakespeare’s friend and patron, the Earl of Southampton. If the partial omission of the deposition scene in the Elizabethan quartos of the play is any indication, Richard II may be the nearest Shakespeare ever came to offending the authorities, especially in view of the fact that Elizabeth’s critics were already comparing her to Richard II.

Years later, when some of Essex’ supporters hired performances of the play in the streets of London, it seems highly probable that they, if not the average Elizabethan, knew and appreciated the analogy between Richard and the prelate whom Henry II considered a rival for power—and whose legend Henry VIII still feared. A supplementary reason, therefore, for their reviving this play may have been the Tudor antipathy to the saint, a feeling obliquely reflected in Holinshed’s comment that Becket “abused the benevolence of so gracious a souveraine by his insolencie and presumption.” If Essex had succeeded, as the Queen said later, she would have been Richard II; could it be that if Essex failed, the Catholic faction hopes she will become a haunted Henry II?

Although Richard’s goal may not be clearly manifested, it is still a striking contrast to his unconscious and sporadic craving to fail in the first plot. Since not much of either intention can be displayed on the stage, speech must substitute for actions, or even become the actions, for the play lacks the fluctuating fortunes characteristic of most Shakespearian tragedies. As a prisoner in near-solitary confinement, meditating on the obstacles to spiritual wholeness, Richard is stalemated at every turn by a new king who invariably manifests the attributes he needs, showering attentions on potential allies, decisively forbidding a duel in a situation clearly reminiscent of Richard’s earlier irresolution, and forgiving a would-be assassin whose father wants “This fest red joint cut off” (V.iii.83).

On the other hand, Richard’s potential is enhanced by having a loving wife, not the child bride of history, but an adult who finds even his favorites congenial. The royal couple’s lack of children is never mentioned, but in a play curiously replete with father-son relationships, the protagonist is handicapped by being barren, while the antagonist, embodying the principle of continuity by having his father’s support and a son to mention, has the task of usurpation simplified. In an affecting farewell, Richard proposes to his wife that “Our holy lives must win a new world’s crown” (V.i.24). Once cloistered with the nuns, she must never fail to relate “the lamentable tale of me / And send the hearers weeping to their beds” (V.i.44-45). Thus he is not giving her “into the hands of the usurper,” as one critic says (Ure, p. lxviii), but using her to confirm his image as martyr.

Off stage, when Richard is led in captivity through the London streets, he has another opportunity to manifest his virtues in pursuit of a goal. According to York, Richard’s suffering at the hands of the rabble suggests another Christ on his way to Calvary:

But dust was thrown upon his sacred head;
Which with such gentle sorrow he shook off,
His face still combating with tears and smiles,
The badges of his grief and patience . . . . (V.ii.30-33)
Such a performance is definitely consonant with an effort to appear saintly. Apparently he thinks himself capable of enduring imprisonment with the same blessedness as he has the taunts of the populace, but eventually he realizes his limitations and formulates them in a highly enigmatic and paradoxical soliloquy:

I have been studying how I may compare
This prison where I live unto the world;
And, for because the world is populous
And here is not a creature but myself,
I cannot do it. Yet I'll hammer it out . . . . (V.v.1-5)

The audience is asked to see him as struggling against great odds, prone to failure, but nevertheless struggling. The thoughts with which he “peoples” his miniature world lead off, in hierarchical fashion with Biblical verses. He recalls Christ’s invitation: “Come, little ones,” but immediately counters it, perhaps as a justification of his (momentary?) despair at his inability to renounce the world, with the reference to the camel’s threading the eye of the needle. His barrenness in life being recapitulated in his failure to breed anything but stillborn thoughts, he laments:

Whate’er I be,
Nor I, nor any man that but man is,
With nothing shall be pleas’ed, till he be eas’d
With being nothing. (V.v.38-41)

In the context of his goal, this crux seems to mean that a man who is no more than a man (not a saint) can never be satiated with things until he is dead. Yet the opening lines reflect his determination to succeed (“hammer it out”), and the obsessive circularity of his thoughts, the “sighs and tears and groans” may be read either as proof of his continued failure or as a purgatory which presages some form of success. Significantly, the poignant soliloquy ends with an echo of saintliness, for the music off stage, though it reminds him of his wasted life, is a welcome “sign of love.”

In this context the long, seemingly digressive episode of Aumerle’s treachery and his parents’ conflicting pleas to Henry becomes functional and emotionally effective: it permits the new king to behave like God’s deputy in forgiving sins; it cements the loyalty of York, already established as a pivotal figure in Bolingbroke’s drive to power, and it helps the audience realize that Richard’s existence is a constant threat to Henry’s security and thus partly excuses the emotional outburst that spurred on the murderers.

Having Richard become this sort of protagonist, with a goal depending more on patience than any sort of activity, makes reversals or recognitions rather unlikely. Yet in spite of the fact that the play begins to take on features of a martyrlogy, it turns out to be a tragedy, and even verges on a complex pattern in that both Richard’s soliloquy and his acceptance of the groom as his peer are the stuff of recognition, just as the final scene is a limited kind of reversal.

Significantly, the only episode between Henry’s outburst and the regicide is the appearance, immediately after the soliloquy, of a groom from the royal stables. The scene apparently reflects a growing veneration of Richard by the English people, or at least hints at such an expansion after his death. In talking to the groom, Richard instantly captures the tone of saintliness: “Thanks, noble peer” (V.v.67). And when, reverting to his earlier arrogance, he breaks out in a diatribe against the horse, he apologizes. His final warning to the groom; “If thou love me, ‘tis time thouwert away,” sounds like the saint he practices to become, and thus reawakens the possibility of his success.

Even in Holinshed’s version (“Haue I no faithfull frend which will deliuer me of him, whose life will be my death, and whose death will be the preseruation of my life?”) Henry’s outburst (as quoted by Exton: “Have I no friend will rid me of this living fear?”) sounds like an echo of an earlier Henry’s complaint: “In what miserable state am I, that cannot be in rest within mine owne realm, by reason of one onelie priest? Neither is there any of my folkes that will helpe me to deliuer me out of such troubles.” The parallelism, if only slightly verbal, exists in the situation, the tone, and the aftermath, even in the way both kings disavow complicity.

Yet when circumstances grant Richard the opportunity to become another Becket-like martyr, he fails to act out the role. Instead, his vigorous efforts to save himself by resisting, even killing some of his attackers, ironically illustrate the traits he needed, but sadly lacked,
in the first half. In actuality, a courageous death may well have done more to strengthen the rebels against Henry IV than success in becoming a saint might have done. Viewed in the context of the play, however, only if his death had taken the form of a sacrifice, if his "gross flesh" had not erupted in defiance, would he fit the category of a martyr. Though Richard does become, historically speaking, the "archetypal English martyr," the fortunate Henry IV of his play has only to cope with a king who recovers his kingly attributes too late, not with a saint who has a double claim on God's vengeance.

Unhappily for the unity of this paper, my approach has entailed some digressive hypothesizing about the kinds of tragedy and about the reputation of Becket. The justification must depend on the resulting insights into the nature of this remarkably grave play, devoid of prose passages and comic interludes, curiously lacking in action and suspense, and at times apparently digressive. By analytically separating the plot units, I hope to have suggested a new unity between the episodes leading to Richard's deposition and the subsequent ones of his quasi-martyrdom.

NOTES

1 Reasoning along similar lines, Peter Ure, ed., Richard II The Arden Edition, 9th ed. (London: Methuen, 1961), pp. 1xi-xxii, finds "four unequal phases" in its design, which might be summarized as Richard the king, Bolingbroke the invader, Richard the sufferer, and Henry the king.


3 Ibid., p. 30.


7 Several of these generalizations are modifications of K. A. Telford, Aristotle's Poetics: Translation and Analysis (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1961), pp. 118-21.


19 Apparently, his family had many ties with Catholicism.


22 Note, for example, that in martyrlogies a saint's disciples may become disloyal, but like St. Peter, they live to regret it. Richard's only noble follower, Aumerle, shifts his loyalty to Henry—permanently.
Holinshed, III, 134. This, Holinshed's third explanation of Richard's death, probably was invented to accompany the legend of his saintliness. What are the odds that it was modeled on Becket's death?

Ibid., II, 34. Of several versions of Henry's remarks (in French, recorded in Latin), this is one Shakespeare might well have read.

According to K. F. Thompson, "Richard II, Martyr," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 8 (1957), 162, "The true martyr, then, cannot fight back, cannot seek to escape . . . ."

SHAKESPEARE'S DRAMATIC SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS ON STAGE AND FILM

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The Shakespearean play is a self-conscious form of drama that consistently reflects upon its own fictive mode. It builds convincing illusion in order to examine the nature of that illusion. While this practice is to be found in the tragedies and the comedies, for the purposes of this symposium's focus on the histories and romances examples will be drawn from the latter to suggest how the play process itself comments on thematic issues. When the audience is made conscious of the dichotomy between the actor and the role, the historical event and its dramatic redaction, or in sum, between the mirrored image and nature itself, the opportunity is thus created for a resolution of the dramatic conflict at the play's center.

A consequence of this claim is the subsidiary point that the film mode is largely inappropriate to the Shakespearean play. The major cinematic tradition rises from the documentary quality of film. That is, film is in its natural mode when used to record reality. By contrast, what happens on a stage can never be taken as virtual; it is always figurative. The screen's photographic image, however, is always a virtual record. It either documents the destruction of the Hindenburg, or, as in Olivier's Henry V, if it does not record the actual Battle of Agincourt, it does record a time when Olivier and his cast of hundreds wore costumes and played at being soldiers. While we know that this battle scene is fictive, it is not the medium which so informs us. If the battles were of Algiers during the struggle for independence, or of Chicago in 1968, as in Haskell Wexler's Medium Cool, we might well accept the image as authentic.

With film, the possibility always exists that what the audience views is a virtual record. It is the norm in film-making, then, to achieve the highest degree of verisimilitude possible. In drama, the scene played before an audience can never be what it depicts. While the dramatist of the realist school may choose to ignore this fact, Shakespeare uses it to advantage.

In the Shakespearean play, the illusion is never perfect, although it is often compelling or intense. It is as though we always see the frame of artifice—the actor and the stage are revealed. In The Tempest (II.i), when Adrian, Sebastian, Gonzalo, and Antonio assess their situation, they comment variously on the isle. For Adrian and Gonzalo, the island is hospitable, an Eden wherein man may flourish in innocent prosperity, in perfect harmony with his fellows and with nature. For the others it is a desolate place where life is insupportable. These are two entirely different places, one with lush and lusty grass, the other of tawny ground. No single set can accommodate both visions. Shakespeare has set this scene on a stage, and a stage is a place that can be all places. The stage is what we envision it to be, but it can be that place only if it is a stage. The dramatic foregrounding occurs when that privilege of making the stage what one wishes it to be is extended to the characters in the play.

It would be possible to create a set somewhere between Bali Hai and a blasted heath, and each character would respond within the range of his capacity. When the stage is permitted to stand bare, however, the Shakespearean premise is allowed room to function. The scene is about human flexibility and resourcefulness, and so on, but these qualities are presented in relation to the imagination. Instead of being reflections of personality and character, they are the products of either a creative or a malformed imagination. These men create the worlds they live in, or they create the worlds to which others are forced to respond, as in the case of Prospero's magic.

The residual concept is the theatrum mundi. If the world is a stage, then the particulars of London and Vienna, Elsinore and the seacoast of Bohemia are themselves the local habitations and names bodied forth by that imagination that infects poets, lovers, and madmen. Local identity is created in time and space but obscures the true nature of the world, the boards on which all men walk out their destined roles. The true image of the world then is on

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the Globe's sterile promontory, and thus the manifest staginess of the firefretted heavens and the hellmouth to the cellarage articulates the conditions of man's existence. Just as the Tempest's characters stand on their stage to cope with what it is, so do we.

When Richard III and Buckingham make their entrance in III.v "in rotten armor, marvellous ill-favored," we have a theatrical self-consciousness to match the use of the stage. Richard tests the skills of his journeyman in policy:

Come, cousin, canst thou quake and change thy color,
Murther thy breath in middle of a word,
And then again begin, and stop again,
As if thou were distraught and mad with terror?  (1.1.4)

Knowing all the tricks, Buckingham boasts he "can counterfeit the deep tragedian" (1.5). Like the earlier remark by Buckingham when Richard enters in III.iv.26, "Had you not come upon your cue," his response declares the theatricality of the play, as well as his capacity for villainy.

The craft of acting is related to the art of politics in that both endeavors insist on the ability to assume a role. Soon enough Richard will press Buckingham to do the deed, which at first he has no will to name. Meeting the Duke's seeming obtuseness, Richard forthrightly declares,

Cousin, thou was not wont to be so dull.
Shall I be plain? I wish the bastards dead,
And I would have it suddenly performed.
What say'st thou now? Speak suddenly, be brief. (IV.ii.17-20)

In begging 'some little breath, some pause' (1.24), Buckingham dooms himself. Where Buckingham had earlier said that he could murder his breath in the middle of a word, meaning that he could play the villain, now, when asked pointblank to murder, he says nothing.

What has happened is that nature has caught up with art, and with a vengeance. Earlier, the actuality of murder was subordinated in metaphor to hesitation in speech. Instead of asking Buckingham if he could kill, Richard asks if he would mutilate a word. Where Buckingham might have said, "I am no fraud, no play actor; I will be your accomplice in murder," he testifies to his fitness for Richard's service by his ability to counterfeit the tragedian. The layers are thick indeed. He is not the true actor, only its mirror, and therein lies his competence in policy. Pressed by Richard a few scenes later, Buckingham has all the layers of artifice torn away and is exposed. Neither can he murder nor can he dissemble.

If it is fair to make use of Hamlet's prescription for the true actor in considering this scene from Richard III, we can make some intelligent guesses about what Shakespeare may be doing here. The purpose of playing is to hold the mirror to nature, to imitate humanity. That nature is the same one which the Ghost invokes in laying the duty of action upon the Prince. Hamlet's cue and prompter, the author of the text the Prince must commit to memory prior to enactment of the commissioned role, the Ghost insists that his son act on two conditions, the premise of a son's love for his father and the nature within him.

Buckingham is a technical actor; he has skills, let us grant, but like the unreformed player who struts and bellows, he works against the play itself, the necessary question to be considered. "That's villainous and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it" (Hamlet III.ii.41-42). The true actor is readiness personified; his repertoire includes plays written but never enacted. Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light. When Buckingham's counterfeit art is called upon to perform that act which most offends nature, his feeble skill fails him. Unable to dissemble or to declare forthrightly abhorrence for the commission, Buckingham can only resort to his technical tricks, murdering his breath. The audience sees the character as an inadequate actor; in fact, his moral decay can be defined by reference to his shallow art.

Dramatic self-consciousness is at the heart of the Shakespearean play because the problem of life itself is to understand its own existential nature as play. The epistemological problem with fiction lies in the conflict between the actual and the imaginary. The same problem exists with drama, but there is an important difference. Drama is about one thing becoming or standing for another thing. With fiction, one may ask, "Did this really happen, or was it made up?" In the play, the question is, "What do I have before me? Is it Richard Chamberlain or Hamlet?" One must imagine the novelistic character, whereas one must define the Shakespearean character.
In *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare seems to exploit the opportunities for a narrative self-consciousness not unlike those possible in the novel or in fiction. It is a tale, like an old tale still. The narrative recapitulation of the reunion of parents and children (V.ii) could easily have been staged, in the manner of *Comedy of Errors*. In its present form, the scene stresses the fictive quality of the reunion: it is almost beyond belief. And in its description as 'a sight which was to be seen, cannot be spoken of' (II.41-42), the dramatic nature of the event is insisted upon. We are reminded that we are at a play, where things are to be enacted, not recited.

When the play moves to its conclusion with the unveiling of Paulina's wonder, we are brought from a denial of dramatic art to its most defiant manifestation. With the reunion scene, we are asked if such a story may be believed, but with the discovering of Hermione, Leontes is asked to define or identify what stands before him. The statue seems to be what it cannot be, Hermione. But if it is Hermione, it is no statue. The poverty of these alternatives reveals the point of Shakespeare's use of dramatic self-consciousness. For where realistic art feels threatened by the nature it imitates, Shakespeare's self-reflexive art is confident of its ability to bridge the gap with nature. Paulina's masterpiece is, as Cleopatra put it, nature's piece 'gainst fancy, condemning shadows.

Where Shakespeare in *Midsummer Night's Dream* moved toward the play within the play as the consummation of his own play, here he propels the play through narration toward the ultimate fusion of art and nature. Apart from the appropriate management of emotional tone and intensity resulting from using narration as prelude to revelation, there is in both scenes—the Pyramus and Thisbe episode and the discovery of Hermione—the purgation of Shakespeare's art. If play is life's image, Shakespeare can either double that image to cope with the adversaries represented, or he can escape the play by moving into narration or the tableau.

In *The Tempest* the ambiguous stage presents to the court the milieu of each man's life. *Winter's Tale* does not use the stage so, but it does preserve that theme in the discussion of Sicilia's and Bohemia's lost innocence and in the shearing scene. The commonwealth of innocence that Gonzalo would rule over, though in such a state no rulers would be needed, lies behind each man, not before him. It is not the ideal toward which Miranda must move; it is the immaturity which she must discard, even as her father would discourse himself, burn all his books, and abjure his magic.

*Midsummer Night's Dream* moves toward the internal play; *Winter's Tale* proceeds to Hermione's statue. The movement, as it is in the progress of *Antony and Cleopatra* towards the robe and crown of immortal longing for Cydnus, is the necessary process in the redemption of art. Like the Nile in its rhythms of plenty and destruction, the play is always uncertain about its own relationship to the world. The world is always there to consume the play, and the play mocks life with its art. Shakespeare's pageants fade, leave not a rack behind. In order to survive, the old stock must be inoculated. Now where the realist might hope to see his play's prosperity insured by strict verisimilitude, Shakespeare's art calls for the continual insistence on the independence of the play from life. If drama is to purge life, it must not be contaminated by life. The mirrored image, however accurate, must never be confused for the thing itself, for then it would fail as a mirror.

When the Shakespearean play is transformed to film, everything seems to go wrong. Apart from the standard film and drama problems having to do with long speeches, entrances and exits, and structure, there is in Shakespeare the self-conscious quality. Standard cinematic narrative works best as pseudo-documentary, striving for realism with the camera serving as the unseen observer. The cinema's ability to subvert Shakespeare's dramatic self-reflexiveness is illustrated by Olivier's *Henry V*. It begins by showing the Globe company preparing for a production. It takes us to the tiring house, where the actors are busy with makeup and costumes. The camera then takes us to the stage where we see the players, the queen, who is obviously a young male, the Archbishop of Canterbury with his part in his hand, making a mess of the Salic law speech, all played in formalized style. We see the groundlings; we are given a sense of the playhouse. It's show and tell, and Olivier presents the play as museum piece. But soon the chorus provides the opportunity for the escape from the Globe, and with imagined wing, the scene is transformed. The makeup, the gestures, the costumes, the sets and props—all lose their theatrical quality. The scenes which follow are treated cinematically; that is, they look real.

Olivier means to suggest the Coleridgean thesis, that with a willing suspension of disbelief, the unworthy scaffold can bring forth the swelling scene. The film is a testament to the power
of the imagination, which can overwhelm the manifest limitations of Elizabethan stagecraft, enabling an audience to see what Shakespeare really meant. In effect, Olivier suggests the inferiority of drama to life, implying that the medium that most closely approaches life or actuality is to that extent the closest to the Shakespearean intention. Most damaging, the film obscures the dramatic foregrounding that is often so central to Shakespeare’s meaning.

Film makes literal what by nature is figurative. The process of drama is necessarily that one thing stand for another. Once that process is acknowledged, there are no limits. In one line of development an actor can play Harry, who should then “assume the port of Mars” in order to be most like himself (Henry V. Prologue 6). Or he can go among his troops as Harry Le Roy, Welshman. These layers of identity are what form the Shakespearean play, the ability of one thing to be another, but always with the sense that true identity will emerge. The idea of the play is that identity is destroyed or suspended. In self-conscious drama, multiple identities are asserted simultaneously.

The dramatic process replicates the ceaseless mutations of the world itself. In articulating its own ephemeral nature, the self-conscious play in truth goes a step further than the world it imitates. The cloud-capping towers, gorgeous palaces and the solemn temples seem to be substantial and enduringly real, but they may be compared to the baseless fabric of such visions as are evoked by drama. The theatrum mundi seduces the players on its stage by its apparent reality, whereas the Shakespearean world challenges both players and spectators alike to contend with its illusions. The Shakespearean stage was perfectly suited to the world it imitated in sharing with it the quality of variability. Like actors who continually change identity and role, the world is of unfixed and uncertain character. It is like the nature of Gerard Manley Hopkins, kindled by a Heraclitean fire:

Sometimes we see a cloud that’s dragonish;
A vapor sometime like a bear or lion,
A towered citadel, a pendent rock,
A forked mountain, or blue promontory
With trees upon’t that nod unto the world
And mock our eyes with air. Thou hast seen these signs;
They are black Vesper’s pages. . . .
That which is now a horse, even with a thought
The rack dislimns, and made it indistinct
As water is in water. (Antony and Cleopatra IV.xiv.2-11)

The Shakespearean stage was perfectly suited to the world it imitated in sharing the same quality of variability. Without venturing to define the modern world, one can acknowledge that film does not work on the premise that things are not what they seem to be. The whole point of the documentary mode is that reality is well worth preserving. Film, insofar as it concerns motion, can embrace time, process and change, but only in sequent toil. One reality supplants another. Insofar as it is based on the photographic image, film confronts the quiddity of a thing. The image can always be misread, and the image in time may change, but at any given moment, it is fixed. The filmic image authenticates its own reality in the exactly opposite way that the self-conscious scene subverts its own seeming reality.

Conventionally, films are pictures of something. What is represented in the picture may be a problem and the picture may be the product of several pictures, in effect, the Hollywood process shot of a spectacular and dangerous episode. Most members of the audience that sees the giant shark attack the unwary swimmer in Jaws know that the incident never took place, that there is no such creature, and so forth. But that does not matter. Because these things are revealed on film, cunningly of course, for all intents and purposes, they took place.

In film, the reality of the picture is accepted, or it is seldom the issue of concern; the meaning of the picture is what is in question. In drama, the reality of the scene played before an audience is never a problem. It simply and invariably is make-believe. Shakespeare exploited this characteristic of the drama. What makes it difficult to adapt Shakespeare to film is that self-consciousness in film is cut to different specifications. The self-conscious film accepts the premise of film’s documentary character and explores the enigma of the photographic image. The picture is real, but what is it a picture of? Some of the more successful self-conscious pictures include Brandy in the Wilderness, The Tragic Diary of Zero the Fool, and David Holzman’s Diary. Artless in manner, these films have an engaging candor, but the
spectator is beguiled by the questions, how much is authentic and real, how much is staged, and what does it matter anyway?

Since the films mentioned were never commercially released, Blowup and Chinatown may serve as more useful examples of filmic self-consciousness. In Antonioni’s Blowup, the photographer must study successive frames of an idyllic park scene. Progressively, portions of these frames are enlarged several times. What was at first the image of two lovers is with further examination the record of a murder. The image of human concord dissolves into what is the ultimate dissolution of social bonds. Similarly, the photograph of a man and a woman in Polanski’s Chinatown at first suggests a clandestine meeting between lovers, though of course the photograph itself can say nothing of the relationship between the individuals. The center of this film’s self-consciousness is even more subtle. The Jack Nicholson character, J. J. Gittis, is a private investigator, a private eye. For much of the film, he is nothing but a witness to a spectacle, patiently watching events he cannot understand. What he encounters is bizarre and real, but incomprehensible.

The self-consciousness of these films as films is that they provide no expository narrative frames. In essence, the films let the pictures speak for themselves, though of course they say nothing definitive. And just as the protagonists stare at their pictures and worlds, we stare at our screen, always accepting the images as testimony to some reality, but always wondering what lies beyond the edge of the frame. When such considerations are not raised in a film, then it behaves in the conventional pseudo-documentary manner. The problem of converting Shakespeare to film is that the dramatist’s mode of self-conscious art is simply ill-suited to the film mode; the best that can be done is to treat the play as virtual record, just as Olivier did with Henry V. Character and theme can survive on the screen, but the dimension of their reality is lost. Hamlet on the screen is a fixed entity; on the stage, it is a construct that the character and the actor struggle with.

In Richard III, the courtship of Anne in the context of Henry’s funeral procession is changed by Olivier into two scenes so that the courtship is extended over some months. Anne praying before the grave preserves the basic concept, except for the suggestion of time’s passage, and with that, we may suppose, the softening of attitudes. The scene itself has no clear reference to dramatic self-consciousness; if there is any hint at all, it lies in Anne’s fear that Richard may be dissembling. The dramatic foregrounding lies in the total conception of the scene. The preposterousness of the situation, which Olivier moderates by his extension of time, is the best evidence that this action is a piece of fiction.

Where Olivier attempts to soften the implausibility of it all, Shakespeare reinforced the elements that make the rapprochement between Lancaster and York deeply personal and therefore deeply repugnant. The scene is itself a condensed metaphor of what in fact happened in history with the union of the houses of York and Lancaster. Peace, according to the Tudor myth, was established when a personal union was effected between the contending houses, despite the history of enmity. The scene is not meant to be taken as actual, and where it defies credulity, it underscores the magnitude of the event figured forth.

The courtship of Anne must be considered with reference to the approach to Elizabeth for the hand of her daughter. Both scenes comment on the Tudor myth. In the first, there is the simple situation, whereby Anne must try to fathom the truth of Richard’s pledges. In the second, Richard is deprived of his power to deceive. It is as though Shakespeare were asking himself, “Was the marriage of York and Lancaster a masterpiece of deception? Did they really think that such a marriage could work? But if it were not the result of some kind of seduction, and both parties entered with full consciousness that this was to be a marriage of convenience, how could they persuade themselves that it would work?” When Richard can no longer lie, then must he resort to truth as the instrument for his purposes.

The premise in the courtship of Anne is that peace must be predicated on the lie that men are other than they are. When that lie is no longer available to Richard in the second courtship scene, the matter comes down to a new problem: when Richard swears, what reality gives warrant to his words? Is it possible to act in spite of the bloody history of the past, and if so, what fantasy, error, or expectation makes such action possible? Richard can only pledge the future as the witness to his words. Although he is probably lying, the future, or, from Shakespeare's perspective, the past, proves him right. England’s peace under the Tudors verifies his point. When Richard pledges the future, he cannot be accused of lying, then.

Language often bears the same relation to reality that the play does. Words are like
actors and props, standing for things that really do exist. When Elizabeth asks Richard to name the reality that will confirm his pledge, he can only offer the time to come. The reality to be must then be shaped by language, if that eventual reality is to escape the cycle of destruction created by the past. Right as she is in her suspicions, Elizabeth condemns England to a future created by the past; evil though he may be, Richard outlines the only recourse. Language must be freed of the past, of the dead weight of accumulated guilt and injury, providing the text for the future. In Richard III, guilty Richard and aggrieved Elizabeth stand in full awareness of the great gap between the language they use and the world they live in. In that realization the true hope of the tetralogy lies, more promising by far than the entry of Richmond, the play’s deus ex machina.

The self-conscious play works against its own powerful illusion so that it can be a weapon against the reality it would redeem. Like Richard’s promises, one asks of the play, how is it to be believed? But then, when one looks at the world created by Richard, where but in its author will one find a solution? If like Anne we are seduced by the illusion, confusing play for reality, we stand doomed for our error. But if like Elizabeth, we are equal to the face of deception, the play must deal honestly with us. The play is liberated from the petty truths of the world as it exists and is forced, at great peril of course, to find its reference in some other world, to build the nobleness of life on some new heaven, new earth. To such a lie, to such a palpable gross play, we may apply Cleopatra’s praise, “Excellent falsehood!”

NOTE

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO MARGARET OF ANJOU? or
Olivier’s Shakespeare and Richard III

Charles T. Wood*

If, in the early years of the eighteenth century, the Duke of Marlborough could stubbornly claim that he had learned all his history from Shakespeare, few today could either make—or want to make—that kind of assertion. For, revered as the Bard continues to be, his greatness is deemed to lie in the literary and dramatic genius of his poetry, not in the profundity of his historical insights. When for example, his Richard III was produced in 1975 at the Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven, Connecticut, the Program Notes carried the following warning:

“Poetry,” said Aristotle, “is truer than history.” Shakespeare apparently agreed. His “histories,” or Chronicle Plays, are generally more poetic than truthful, designed to appeal to a patriotic Elizabethan audience. For dramatic impact, Shakespeare shows a fine disregard of the facts. . . .

It is a commonplace, of course, that each generation must write its own history, but when it comes to the history of fifteenth-century England, one can only marvel at some of the changes since Shakespeare’s day—or even Marlborough’s. On February 12, 1978, and in The New York Times, the current resident governor of the Tower of London, Major General William Digby Manifold Raeburn, assures us that his present home is “a happy place,” not grim at all, no more than “a museum and a shopping mart for tourists.” Even more strikingly, The Times of London for January 17 reports that the City of Leicester has just granted permission for a statue of Richard III to be placed in its Castle Gardens, close to the site of the Old Bow Bridge from which the remains of that unfortunate monarch were supposedly thrown years after the battle of Bosworth. The statue, a creation of James Butler, R.A., will be erected as soon as the Duke of Rutland, patron of the project and a descendant of Richard’s sister Anne, has raised the £25,000 needed to finance it. If one may judge from Butler’s preliminary model, this work of art, when finished, will bear little resemblance to Shakespeare’s “poisonous hunch-backed toad.” On the contrary, Richard will enjoy a quite normal human physique, and even though he will continue to fight on foot, still without the aid of his horse, he will be shown manfully astride a hillock labeled “Treason,” heroically wielding a battle ax against the monstrous pretensions of Henry Tudor and that motley band of “beggarly Bretons” he had so shamelessly recruited to help him in usurping the crown.

Yet another sign of the times is the fate of Universal Pictures’ 1939 contribution to the Ricardian legend, a lively if gory film called The Tower of London. Starring Boris Karloff and Basil Rathbone, it is enticingly described in the catalogues as being “Shakespeare’s plot without the words,” but even though it still appears from time to time on late-night TV (where it is not to be missed), prints of this movie can be obtained from its distributor, Audio Macmillan, only with difficulty. One cannot argue, in explanation, that it was driven from the marketplace by the even greater horrors of Vincent Price’s 3D remake of 1962, for that version has been withdrawn from circulation altogether. Rather, what seems to have happened is that popular historical tastes have changed. The public that was satisfied forty years ago by a sinister Richard in somber, fog-shrouded black-and-white will now respond only to the infinitely gayer one played by Richard Dreyfus in Neil Simon’s full-color comedy, The Goodbye Girl. And if it be objected here that Simon’s script clearly shows the critics writing unfavorably about this mythical off-off-Broadway interpretation, my obvious line of defense (at least at Iowa State) is to comment, even as Dreyfus does in the film to Marsha Mason: “Who cares about New York? Ames, Iowa, is where it really counts.”

Since historians are supposed to concern themselves with such vital questions as “turning points” and “water sheds”—those brief moments in time when the course of history, like that of the Missouri in spring, suddenly seeks new channels—I have long attempted to pinpoint the

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precise moment when, in the public mind, Richard III began to shed some of the less attractive attributes with which Shakespeare and his sources had so thoughtlessly endowed him. This brings us immediately to 1956 and the release of Laurence Olivier’s version of Richard III, an event that is not without its significance in the story of how this last of the Plantagenets began to develop a more winning personality.

Those who have seen Olivier’s film may wish to challenge this assertion, for its Richard seems, on first viewing, as satisfactorily monstrous, as paradigmatically evil, as ever Shakespeare envisaged him. Indeed, given the skill with which Lord Olivier (who did his own makeup) built up his nose, imparted a sinister cast to his eyes, and crouched his back even while hideously shriveling and deforming one of his arms and hands—and given, further, the obvious relish and malign vitality with which this Richard limps, sideling and crab-like, about the sets—it could even be argued that Olivier has succeeded in surpassing Shakespeare in fashioning a monster “not shaped for sportive tricks,” and hence “determined to prove a villain.”

Yet first appearances can be deceiving, and such is the case here. If, for example, Richard is to be seen as no more than “hell’s black intelligrer,” while Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, is really the angelic herald of divine deliverance (views to which Shakespeare clearly subscribed), then why, in this film version, are Richmond’s lines cut so drastically, and why is Stanley Baker forced to play the role in such a thick and buffoon-like mock Welsh accent? Similarly, why is Richmond denied the honor of slaying Richard, replaced by a dishonorable, if overpowering, swarm of low-born infantrymen? It would appear that Olivier wanted to avoid all implication of any judgment of God as rendered in trial by combat; and that this interpretation is not without merit is proved by the next scene, one in which Richard’s body is somewhat unceremoniously dumped on the back of a horse while the camera focuses meaningfully on the slain king’s leg—and especially on the badge of his knighthood to be found thereon, that garter whose legend reads: “Honi soit qui mal y pense.” Although these gallant words of Edward III are usually rendered as: “Shame be to him who evil thinks of it.,” in the context created by Olivier as actor/director/auteur, that French “‘y” becomes deliciously ambiguous, to such an extent, in fact, that the sensitive French-speaking viewer is practically driven to translate the line not as: “Shame be to him who evil thinks of it,” but “of him”—that is, of Richard III.

It should be added at once, though, that Olivier has prepared for this somewhat unexpected conclusion with extreme care. For example, after the credits at the start of the film, a brief prologue explains the War of the Roses, no mean feat in itself. Lancastrians and Yorkists thus introduced, the prologue’s final sentence reads: “What follow are some of the most infamous of the legends that are attached to Richard III.” In this way, then, the audience is duly advised that what is about to transpire is not “true history,” but against the chance that someone should have been so blind as to have missed this warning, Olivier has, in his makeup, taken added precautions to insure that the point will be starkly re-emphasized at all crucial moments in the story. For Richard’s sinister hand is misshapen in such a way that only its little and index fingers remain visible and extended; and since Olivier shows a marked tendency to wave that hand on high only in scenes of extreme crisis about which he has the most historical doubts—for example, during the confrontation with Hastings and the interview in which Tyrrel agrees to slaughter the princes—the net result is that he manages to undercut precisely those events that have given Richard his poor reputation, for they alone are thus placed under the sign of the bull.

Earlier critics have, of course, noted some of these deviations from Shakespeare, but their explanations are unconvincing. If Richmond is shorn of most of his lines and Baker forced to mouth those few that remain in pitiful Welsh accents, they would have us believe that no more than Olivier’s ego was involved, a desire to reduce the importance of the one role that could potentially divert attention and praise from his own. Similarly, when forced to confront the troubling implications of the prologue’s emphasis on legend or the obvious import of Dickon’s garter, they tend defensively to argue that these were no more than meaningless sops to modern day supporters of Richard, some of whom had made the direst of threats if the public were not to be sufficiently informed that Shakespeare’s views were not necessarily accurate. Given Olivier’s significant commitment both of time and money, say these critics, he could scarcely have done otherwise if he wished to protect his investment.

As this paper attempts to demonstrate, these explanations are unsatisfactory. They may account for isolated specifics, but in no way do they face up to the extent to which Olivier’s rehabilitation of Richard III is thorough-going, consistent, and ultimately convincing.
Moreover, if further proof be needed, I can only, like Sherlock Holmes, call upon the evidence of the dog that did not bark in the night, asking: Whatever happened to Margaret of Anjou? Though a major figure in Shakespeare’s play, she is conspicuous by her absence in Olivier—and for reasons that may be illuminating.

Now it is true, of course, that even history’s Margaret of Anjou was a difficult woman, but Shakespeare’s is positively insupportable. Appearing at the most unlikely moments, she is endlessly called upon to fill that chorus-like role of furious fate that in Macbeth could be portrayed only by witches. And, surely, her relationship with Richard is far from friendly. As early as the first act, before he is king, she can rage at him:

Stay, dog, for thou shalt hear me.
If heaven have any grievous plague in store
Exceeding those that I can wish upon thee,
O, let them keep it till thy sins be ripe,
And then hurl down their indignation
On thee, the troubler of the poor world’s peace! . . .
Thou elvish-marked, abortive, rooting hog! . . .
Thou slander of thy heavy mother’s womb!
Thou loathed issue of they father’s loins! (I.iii.215-20, 227,230-31)

As if such taunts were not enough, by Act IV she has reached such a state of frenzy that she can complain to Cecily of York, Richard’s mother:

From forth the kennel of thy womb hath crept
A hellhound that doth hunt us all to death:
That dog, that had his teeth before his eyes . . .
That foul defacer of God’s handiwork . . .
Thy womb let loose, to chase us to our graves ....
Earth gapes, hell burns, fiends roar, saints pray
To have him suddenly conveyed from hence.
Cancel his bond of life, dear God, I pray,
That I may live and say, ‘The dog is dead.’ (IV.iv.47-49,51,54,75-78)

Although a Freudian or a follower of Gaston Bachelard would be tempted to dwell at length on the meaning of Margaret’s clearly obsessive fascination with Cecily’s interior space, I shall limit myself to the more obvious and prosaic point, that anyone seeking to rehabilitate Richard would find such a character distasteful. For Shakespeare’s Margaret lacks all sense of proportion—she is fanatic and vindictive. She is not, in short, adequately endowed with those qualities so ardently sought in modern historical scholarship, balance and objectivity, while the value judgments she is forever making tend frequently to raise unneeded doubts about the virtues of the play’s chief protagonist. Little wonder, then, that Olivier should have chosen to omit her.

Nevertheless, one should add immediately that this omission is far from capricious. After all, if Olivier was in search of the historical Richard, it stands to reason that he should have wanted to be as true to history as was humanly possible, at least given the unpromising Shakespearean materials with which he was forced to deal. In this context the elimination of Margaret of Anjou begins to make sense because the fact of the matter is that she does not properly belong in Shakespeare’s story at all. Discovered and captured in 1471 at Little Malvern Priory where she had taken refuge after her loss at Towcester, in return for a promised ransom of 50,000 crowns she had been handed over to the French in 1476, never to see England again. Even more significantly, she was to die in 1482, the year before Edward IV’s unexpected death made Richard III’s accession possible. She is not, then, a person to have around if, like Leopold von Ranke, one wants to show “how it really happened, wie es eigentlich gewesen.” Fortunately, Laurence Olivier is such a man.

In all candor, though, it must be admitted that he was not entirely without help in effecting these historical improvements. Indeed, a bit of serendipity appears to have been involved. Here the opening credits are instructive, for even though “William Shakespeare” is identified as the principal author of the script, “D. Garrick and C. Cibber” are briefly recognized as the devisers of “some interpolations” that will also have a part to play in the film that follows. This is, perhaps, somewhat to undervalue Colley Cibber’s contribution to the whole enterprise, and it is an oversight greatly to be regretted since, as comparison of his adaptation of 1700 to that of Olivier quickly demonstrates, it is to Cibber that we owe the historically penetrating decision to drop Margaret of Anjou.
One must be cautious about motive here. In the absence of verifiable facts the historian has always to be careful not to impute intentions that cannot be documented. In the present instance, for example, as long as Lord Olivier continues to maintain his stubborn silence, we shall never know for a certainty whether he really chose to work from Cibber’s text solely because of its greater historical accuracy. That seems most likely, and other explanations are admittedly improbable, but they should not, for that reason alone, be rejected outright. After all, it may in the end turn out that Olivier was responding to nothing more compelling than Cibber’s brevity—roughly 2,150 lines vs. Shakespeare’s 3,619—a quality of some importance to anyone trying to compress the play so that its length would meet the more stringent time restrictions of the cinematic form. Even though I, personally, would hesitate to accept this hypothesis without further proof, I do recognize it exists—which is why I called Olivier’s choice serendipitous. For in using that term I both avoided the problem of motivation and implicitly honored Horace Walpole, the word’s creator—and the eighteenth century’s most ardent defender of Richard III.

Be that as it may, these remarks would be sadly incomplete if I did not briefly attempt an overall assessment of this film’s achievement. As we have seen, it marked a turning point in popular attitudes toward Richard III, and if we are at last to have a statue of that monarch in Leicester, much of the credit belongs to Olivier. Without doubt, he is a person always prepared to follow his artistic instincts wherever they may lead him, even when that course means challenging the historical views of our greatest dramatist. This takes courage, and we should honor him for it.

And yet, even as I pay my homage, I find that the still, small voice of the historian within me continues to express its doubts. Thanks to Olivier and those who, after him, have taken up the torch, Richard III enjoys a much improved reputation, but the fact of the matter remains that few recognized historians have rushed to join the Ricardian cause. In their accounts, it is true, Richard no longer bears the responsibility for most of his alleged early crimes, and he has, as a result, become recognizably more human and less the monster of Shakespeare and More. Nevertheless, no bolt from the blue that I know of threatens to transform him into a man for all seasons, and I anticipate none soon, at least not from the historical profession. In fact, with the publication next year of Charles Ross’ monograph on the subject, I greatly fear that Richard III will find himself back where he started, determined to prove a villain.

For the moment, though, perhaps the most charitable way to put his circumstances is to report that in recent works he emerges with some regularity as a person who but imperfectly understood the words of the last Tempter in Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral*, for he appears to have spent the majority of his later years doing the wrong things for the right reasons. The results were disastrous in history, though glorious in literature.

That being said, we may now return to Margaret of Anjou. When one approaches Shakespeare with all the preconceptions of the modern historian, it is clear that she does not belong. But Shakespeare was no modern historian, and he suffered from none of our scholarly biases. Like the chroniclers of the Middle Ages or of the Tudor Age in which he lived, he believed that facts were no more than a glass to be seen through darkly, and hence that all of that documentable evidence on which the twentieth century so doggedly insists was often irrelevant if one wished to reflect the truth. For him, history was philosophy teaching by example, and if some of the facts—the examples—distorted the realities that lay behind them, no one in the sixteenth century was about to object if they were modified and altered in the quest for truth. In other words, poetry may indeed be truer than history, even as Aristotle averred, but when dealing with the people of England’s past, Shakespeare and his contemporaries saw no difference between them. That we see a difference is our legacy from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and from that preference for the verifiably unique to which their growing romanticism gave rise. It is this modern preference that bids us and Olivier to rid the screen of Margaret of Anjou.

In Shakespeare’s world, however, Margaret and her angelic counterpart, Henry Tudor, clearly belonged. They were the microcosmic manifestations of that divine and macrocosmic order within which alone the ambitions of a Richard III could be seen, understood, and judged. Because Olivier appears not fully to have grasped this fact, his film both becomes a caricature of Shakespeare and presents the opportunity for these parodic remarks. Margaret of Anjou may not be a part of Richard’s story, and as a member of the historical profession I would insist on the point. But as a member of the English-speaking world, I’m rather glad Shakespeare chose to include her: I like her, and I think I’ll keep her.
NOTES

7 Ross' work will appear in the English Monarchs Series of D. C. Douglas that is being published by Methuen in Great Britain and the University of California Press in the United States. Dr. Ross has graciously shared with me many of his principal interpretations in the course of private correspondence.
Surprisingly little has been written about *The Winter’s Tale* as a pastoral work. No discussion of the play can afford to ignore the pastoral elements in it. But very few commentators have gone beyond the conventional bucolic features of the fourth act to explore the pastoralism of the play as a whole. The prevailing notion of Renaissance pastoral remains that of a narrow convention derived from the classical eclogue and in various ways misapplied to other genres. In keeping with this assumption, critics often confine their reading of pastoralism in *The Winter’s Tale* to the standard bucolic features of Bohemia as a more or less gratuitous vehicle for the typical preoccupations of Shakespearean romance.

Such a reading is not so much wrong as it is incomplete. Its inadequacy is due largely to a misunderstanding of Renaissance pastoral in general. From the outset the classical eclogue was centrally concerned with the dilemmas of the poet in times of transition to an urban civilization. Thus the figure of the poet-shepherd serves as the focus for centrifugal urges that are the normal response to major displacements in the human community. In the face of such threats, the Theocritean idyll summons the fostering daemons of the countryside in defence of a cultural integrity undermined by the first megalopolis; while the Virgilian eclogue posits the solitary poet as the only source of redemption in a world of massive dislocation and exile. Such motives establish the unifying poetic imagination as the very essence of pastoral. The singer, once merely the transmitter of culture, becomes its creator or—to anticipate a key term in our discussion—its re-creator. When, in very different historical circumstances, the genre is revived in Renaissance Italy, a central theme remains the individual’s struggle to formulate positive values amid the cultural disorder of his society. As in the classical mode, literariness is still a major concern of pastoral.

What gives the Renaissance version its special flavor, and makes pastoral such a prominent force in the period, is an increasing sophistication of ideas about literature, a legacy of the widespread literary debates of the sixteenth century. Out of this ferment emerges the Christian-Platonic view of the imagination, of phantasy, as a cognitive instrument. Cassirer and Panofsky, among others, have shown that the generations from Cusanus and Ficino to Bruno and Sidney developed a conception of the mind as endowed with almost limitless powers to apprehend and even control primal existence. In his *Defence of Poetry*, in many ways a courtly *summa* of the platonizing poetics of the period, Sidney argues that it is a function of art, and of the verbal art of poetry in particular, to correct the mind’s distortions and present a purified vision of reality. By a rationally controlled exercise of the imagination, the poet is able to overcome defects of sense and will and thus restore to the “erected wit” an innocent view of things unclouded by the “infected will.” Art makes it possible to see not “as through a glass darkly.”

Yet despite the current interest in pastoral, critics have continued to ignore its inherent connection with Renaissance poetics. Recent studies of the mode, of which the most important are those of the late Renato Poggioli, have continued to emphasize the element of escape, the retreat from reality into naive imaginings of a Golden Age. In this view pastoral conventions imply either the surrender to nostalgia or the intention to establish a foil for an ethically more mature response. The paradigms would be Marlowe’s invitation and Raleigh’s reply, respectively. A few Shakespeareans (to draw closer to our present subject) have recognized in *The Winter’s Tale* especially a deeper suffusion of the pastoral impulse. But none has adequately recognized the play’s debt to the fundamental pastoral rhythm of retrieval or “recreation.” None, that is, has fully considered the implications of the premise

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that the sojourn in Arcadia (or "Bohemia") represents a temporary, restorative withdrawal from the reigning confusion of life to a kind of visionary space where the eyes of the mind are purged and one sees again in *lucido speculo*.

In the pages that follow, I will try to show that far from mechanically attaching conventional pastoral elements to the basic romance formulae of the late plays, in *The Winter's Tale* Shakespeare fully appropriates the spirit of Renaissance pastoralism and embodies it in an organically, even definitively pastoral work. The core of the work is its visionary poetics, but closely allied are two other features. One is the idea that as a mode of clarification pastoral carries the promise of a progressive or redemptive view of society. By holding up to nature the mirror of a rectified imagination, the play becomes an instrument of social regeneration. The other feature is the habitual self-consciousness traditionally associated with the form. Being centrally concerned with questions of human creativity, pastoral always implies a comment on the literary enterprise itself, and Renaissance versions usually feature a more or less explicit persona of the artist. It is in the context of these (as I see it) principal features of Renaissance pastoralism that I wish to turn now to an examination of *The Winter's Tale* as a fully pastoral work.

An obvious place to begin is to ask what image of the world the play presents. That *The Winter's Tale* portrays the loss and restoration of an innocent world of human felicity is axiomatic, though the location of that world is often misunderstood. On the one hand it is suggested that the play, which begins in an all too familiar "fallen" world of tragic experience and moves through a regenerative one of pastoral freshness, ends on the threshold of pure transcendence. This, I think, is the implication of Northrop Frye's somewhat ambiguous suggestion that in their conclusions "the romances seem to point to some postdramatic world" beyond the divisions of ordinary experience. The opposite reading locates the true innocence of the play in an unrecoverable past, symbolized by childhood, that in adult life can only be nostalgically, and sometimes dangerously, mourned. The virtues of such innocence are made clear in the springtime joyousness of the sheep-shearing feast; but in the real world, even the Sicilia of the last act, it will not suffice. Neither a transcendent order of secular grace, however, nor an idyllic and impossible golden age of individual or racial childhood quite defines the pastoral of innocence in *The Winter's Tale*. Polixenes may indeed dream aloud, in naïve bucolic terms, of a boyhood innocence wherein he and Leontes

were as twinn'd lambs that did frisk i' th' sun,  
And bleat the one at the other: what we chang'd  
Was innocence for innocence: we knew not  
The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dream'd  
That any did. Had we pursu'd that life,  
And our weak spirits ne'er been higher rear'd  
With stronger blood, we should have answer'd heaven  
Boldly 'not guilty', the imposition clear'd  
Hereditary ours. (I.ii.65-75)\[9]\n
But Hermione's confident reply—"we'll answer, / If you first sinned with us" (ii.83-84)—and the broad freedom of her play on the "grace" and "grace to boot" of their marriage convey the impression that Leontes is even now living in a kind of paradise did he but know it. Critics who are suspicious of the ornate courtliness of her speech as well as others in the opening scenes in my opinion miss the mark. Sicilia is not Denmark, and Camillo is no Osric. The freedom of this court, whether expressed by a Hermione or a Mamillius, is that of minds secure in the knowledge of their own worth. It is Leontes alone who in his temporary insanity cannot see the truth of his present state, which we may take as a type of the perfection of bliss possible in this world. It is the dramatization of this state and this possibility, both for Leontes and the audience, that constitutes the play's substance. *The Winter's Tale* enacts a thoroughly mundane, not to say secular, version of paradise lost and paradise regained.

In the unfolding of this action, with its necessary interval of time for the maturing of the play's restorative vision, a crucial moment occurs near the end of the first, tragic half of the play. As we follow with horror the destructive effects of Leontes' fantasy, two seemingly unrelated events set in motion the ultimately happy resolution: the birth of Hermione's second child and the sentence of the oracle. The latter represents the divine force of the
truth, “by the hand deliver’d / Of great Apollo’s priest” (III.ii.127-28). Famous in antiquity as the omphalos or navel of the world, the shrine at Delphos (to give it Shakespeare’s and his source’s name) is where the eternal and incorruptible word of the god enters our own world of contingency. Its utterances embody in lucid speech the principle of reason and order needed to correct the chaos effected by Leontes’ wild surmises. The birth of Perdita, on the other hand, would seem at first blush to have little in common with the oracle, though the two events occur at roughly the same time. Yet it too is a deliverance as well as a delivery. Paulina, like Apollo’s priest, has played midwife to the delivery, and it is she who delivers the babe from Hermione’s cell. In the course of connecting these acts, she speaks of the birth in such a way as to give it the force of an apocalypse, bringing with it the absolute purity of nature. Like the word of the oracle,

This child was prisoner to the womb, and is
By law and process of great Nature thence
Freed and enfranchis’d . . . . (I.ii.59-61)

As an embodiment of nature’s truth the baby is free. The innocence of nature, unblemished by the deformities of mind, is as certain and unshakable as is the knowledge of the gods. In the developing rhythm of the play, the two events have an undeniable kinship: both constitute the release into time and nature of hidden powers that will set right what Leontes has put awry.

Of course oracle and child are linked by more than analogy. The turning point of the play is when the reading of the sentence identifies the now “lost one” as the sole vehicle of Leontes’ (and the kingdom’s) resotration to a normal continuity. Herself free by nature’s law, Perdita is also the agent of the truth that will liberate her father. At this juncture, the intimate bond between the word and the child establishes at the play’s thematic center the idea of a liberating intrusion of the numinous into the human order. It should be pointed out, in passing, that this occurrence of a prophetic note is by no means a correction of a primal bond with nature through otium and song, but with the mysterious virtue of a child. The coming to maturity of this child, in the fullness of time, will be the means of the community’s deliverance from the bondage of sin and of its restoration to a Golden Age of peace and abundance. In The Winter’s Tale, this motif has accrued the accumulated weight of the Christian millenium’s reading of Vergil.

The nature of the two worlds, fallen and restored, bridged by the coming to maturity of Perdita is focused in the kinds of seeing and speaking emphasized in the two parts of the play, a consideration of great importance to the argument that the play is throughout, and essentially, a pastoral work. To a large extent the definition of pastoral as a mode of clarification necessarily centers on the question of how one sees the world. If one’s vision is clouded by passion or the excesses of imagination, the remedy must lie in the exercise of the “erected wit” to reveal the transcendent order of things. Such a remedy demands the exercise of self-control, and Leontes retires from the scene of action to undergo what he calls his “recreation” through the spiritual disciplines of penance and prayer. For the audience, meanwhile, the larger re-creation of the play will lie in the dramatic presentation of a counter-vision of pastoral innocence, suitably accompanied by a chastened vocabulary and rhetoric, in the “visionary space” of Shakespeare’s Bohemia. It is the programmatic employment of a perverted and a corrected mode of seeing and saying that defines the structure of The Winter’s Tale, at least until the final scenes, where the play comments on itself. By enacting in this manner a world lost and one restored, the play clarifies the spectator’s relation to the normally hidden sources of order in nature. As audience, we participate in the fiction of the ransoming of a world.10

I can only sketch here the organization of The Winter’s Tale around these constitutive acts of gazng and praising, and their demonic perversions. Both halves of the play make much ado about noting. The word itself recurs often in the scenes of Leontes’ passion: “Did’st note it?” he asks Camillo as he peers crookedly on his wife’s dalliance with his friend. And, “Not noted, is’t / But of the finer natures?” Other characters refer repeatedly to both the word and the act. There even seems to be a deliberate pun on the word in Polixenes’ speech
at the beginning of l.ii., where his elaborate account of the length of his stay—"Nine changes of the waterv star hath been / The shepherd's note since we have left our throne / Without a burden" (l.ii.1-3)—manages to conflate several pastoral themes with the central fact of the play at this moment, Hermione's pregnancy. But Leontes is by far the chief noter, for what he notes are the sprites and goblins fashioned by his own infected sight. It is his basilisk eye that afflicts Sicilia with the infection of his brains.

This perversion of the eye is reinforced in the first half of the play by that of the tongue. The Othello-like wrenchings of Leontes' speech have often been remarked. What I would stress here is the offsetting of his rant by the innocent effusions of Hermione in the same scenes. Her speech is informed by an irrepressible need to acknowledge and praise the "grace" of their marriage. Her tongue must endorse, as her eye has perceived, the sanctity of their life. So even when her high-spirited jesting spills over into the familiar Shakespearean waywardness of words, we can sense the inviolate innocence of her mind, as when she pleads with Leontes to spread the praise around:

Cram's with praises, and make's
As fat as tame things: one good deed, dying tongueless,
Slaughters a thousand, waiting upon that.
Our praises are our wages. You may ride's
With one soft kiss a thousand furlongs ere
Withspur we heat an acre. (l.ii.91-96)

These lines have occasionally been found "unpleasant" or worse. But in their permissible bawdry they bring together the praise of generous doing and the act, cleared of the imposition of hereditary guilt, that has made the speaker herself as fat as tame things. Such language flaunts the incorruptibility of nature even as Leontes in his jealousy is assailing it. Like her daughter later, when she avows that "Affliction may subdue the cheek, / But not take in the mind" (IV.iv.577-78), Hermione speaks with a mind that participates in nature's innocent fertility, while her husband can only assault this innocence with his fantastic dreams. His language, as Hermione says, is "a language that I understand not" (III.iii.80).

The second half of the play articulates its vision of restored innocence in similar terms of sight and speech. The keynote is pastoral simplicity. But it is the resolved simplicity of those who possess their own clear minds and can thus maintain vision and language unwaveringly. It is the love poetry of Perdita and Florizel that chiefly conveys this vision. Florizel can no more live by gazing without grazing than can Perdita's "flock." Yet "never gazed the moon/ Upon the water as he'll stand and read" her eyes (IV.iv.174-76). And if his gazes like his praises are "too large," in the sequel he justifies both. The fourth act's enactment of love's eye and tongue as constitutive agents of natural sanctity is one of the most difficult things in the play to pin down. Partly it depends on the visual metaphor of Perdita's holiday costume and its relation to Florizel's love-talk. Just as he has "most goddess-like pranked up" the shepherd girl in Flora's weeds (IV.iv.10), so he verbally adorns her with a constant flow of praise, washing, as the King remarks, "the hand was fair before!" (IV.iv.367). The poise between what Florizel perceives and what he creates is a delicate one. Like her unusual weeds, which both make her royal and set a seal on the innate royalty of which not even he is aware, Florizel's language in the scene does not so much create as re-create and enhance the paragon of nature we behold. Like Sidney's "right poet," Florizel fashions with his words a second nature that perfects as it reflects the first.

Less elusive is the constancy of eye and tongue which the lovers display in the crisis precipitated by Polixenes. For when the King's un-creating word—in an act that repeats Leontes’—strips away the "knacks" wherewith Florizel has loaded Perdita, leaving exposed the "lowly maid," her lover's steady vision keeps her royally adorned, while the reiterated word of his troth insures that the vision of a world still whole will hold:

It cannot fail but by
The violation of my faith; and then
Let nature crush the sides o' the earth together
And mar the seeds within! Lift up thy looks. (IV.iv.477-80)

For one possessed of such a constant vision of the abiding order of things, even "fantasy" is trustworthy. Florizel can safely rest "heir to [his] affection" (IV.iv.482); and the audience, through the corrective lens of pastoral, can participate in a view of human nature undistorted
The final reconciliations of *The Winter's Tale* bear out the notion of the play as an essentially pastoral work. Paradigms of an earthly paradise restored, they set forth lively images of a world whose innocence inhere in its reconstitution by the chastened imagination of the perceiver, both inside and outside the play. Perhaps all the pastoral themes of the play are summed up in the anonymous gentleman’s account of the off-stage reunions of Perdita, Leontes, and the rest:

I make a broken delivery of the business; but the changes I perceived in the King and Camillo were very notes of admiration. They seem’d almost, with staring on one another, to tear the cases of their eyes. There was speech in their dumbness, language in their very gesture. They look’d as they had heard of a world ransom’d, or one destroyed. (V.ii.9-15)

With such speeches as our cue, in the statue-scene we too are invited to behold this restoration of a lost world, orchestrated in the play’s major terms of seeing and speaking. Hermione has lived, in the awful pun, “peerless,” but Leontes would happily gaze away “twenty years together” in his new, beneficent “madness.” And when the stasis of that moment is mercifully dissolved, all the characters, like Hermione, melt and flow in an outpouring of benediction on the world that has been thus restored.

Yet despite this thematic continuity, what is most apparent in this scene is that Paulina’s “magic,” an “art / Lawful as eating” (.iii.110-11), stands as a kind of visual synecdoche for Shakespeare’s own. This is not the first reflexive moment in the play: Autolycus at the sheep-shearing feast has given us a brief, comic glimpse of the showman’s fleecing of his clients. But now, in a royal masque of reconciliation acted by and for an audience of kings and princes, we are invited to contemplate in the largest possible perspective Shakespeare’s epiphanic art. Such a glossing on the art of the play it occurs in may be seen as a theatrical version of the conventional pastoral *ekphrasis* or inserted image of an artifact reflecting on the larger work, the earliest example of which is the graven cup of Theocritus’ first Idyll. There, the ivy-bordered composition of three panels depicting the tensions of love, work, and aging within which the pastoral dream of nature may be entertained stands at the head of the book and suggests a realistic awareness of the limits of pastoral’s innocent fictions. The statue-scene in *The Winter’s Tale* provides just such a check on any tendency we might have to mistake the mode of the play. It redirects our vision from the miraculous to the possible. Like the parallel between Perdita and the oracle, the statue-scene dramatizes the interlinking of time and eternity obscure to our normal vision. But because it is a staged action or scene, and we are encouraged to perceive it as such, the restoration of Hermione makes explicit the redemptive art of the play and its wholly secular context. In its self-conscious display it consummates that elusive tension of involvement and detachment that is the hallmark of pastoral in all its guises.

It should be clear from these remarks that the pastoral art of *The Winter’s Tale* rests ultimately in a vision of society. The play depicts the regeneration not only of a man but of an entire community. And while the virtues that redeem Sicilia are set forth in a pastoral Bohemia, in the end this play, like all of Shakespeare’s pastoral fictions, returns us to court. The resolution of its theme requires that the pastoral vision in the final instance be purposeful, that it contribute to the clarification of the social order. For it is as a warrant of human continuity that we are to understand Leontes’ reformation. I do not mean to imply any mystical Jacobean notion of kinship. As Perdita remarks, “the selfsame sun that shines upon [the] court / . . . looks on all alike” (IV.iv.444-46). What is finally “royal” in Leontes’ actions, as in Hermione’s or Perdita’s or Florizel’s, stems neither from blood nor rank, but from the characters’ ideal or representative nature. Each actor, and each spectator, must reaffirm his world in order to uphold it. Yet each can do so only within a community of others sharing the same vision, as we see the actors doing at the end of *The Winter’s Tale*. It is this heightened vision that preserves the community in its essential innocence, preserves it from the individual distortions of eye, mind, and tongue that threaten to dissolve its fundamental human ties. “What! look upon my brother,” says Leontes to his wife as they depart (V.iii.147). And by this royal act he completes the play’s delivery of pastoral’s traditional gift of freedom.
and to assist them with reason and sort that give birth to good affections, theological fantasies (or “dangerous phantasies” (or “dangerous fantasies”) (or “dangerous phantasies”, another remedy offers reckless attacks.”

Bernard: The Pastoral Vision of The Winter’s Tale

Notes:


6. All included in the posthumous The Oaten Flute (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975).

7. S. L. Bethell, “The Winter’s Tale”: A Study (London: Staples Press, 1947), pp. 31-35, 90-96; Jerry A. Bryant, “The Winter’s Tale and the Pastoral Tradition,” Shakespeare Quarterly, 14 (1963), 387-88; and Thomas McFarland, Shakespeare’s Pastoral Comedy (Chapel Hill, Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1972), pp. 122-145. Bethell perceives in Shakespeare’s “Arcadia” a vision of “the beneficient ordering of the universe” (p. 31), but does not pursue this as an aspect of pastoral. Bryant acknowledges a variety of conventional pastoral elements in The Winter’s Tale but argues that Shakespeare attaches them to larger, nonpastoral themes, including the redemptive effect of characters’ “truth” on society. McFarland sees pastoral as basically an “extension” of comedy with a special emphasis on childhood and play. He has a number of valuable things to say on the world of pastoral as a “fictional coordinate” of the theological idea of paradise (p. 41) and on the Golden Age as “the reconstitution of childhood’s happiness” (p. 47).


12. “If, therefore, we find ourselves moved by good phantasies [imaginatioibus] of the sort that give birth to good affections [affectus], it remains for us to follow these affections, and to assist them with reason and intellect, and even with external effort. If we find ourselves moved by evil phantasies, another remedy offers itself: that in our position on that lofty watchtower of the intellect [i.e. the contemplative faculty] we continually observe phantasy, and anticipate its reckless attacks.” Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, On the Imagination, tr. Harry Caplan (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1930), p. 85. According to Pico’s psychology in the first part of the play the “affections” of Leontes, moved by his fantasies (or “dangerous lunes”), are contrasted with those Florizel is heir to in the second.
And his "fancy" can command his reason (IV.iv.483 ff.) because it is good. It is important to note that his happy condition is wholly attainable, in the view of Pico, Sidney, or Bacon, in this life. See p. 219, above.


14 Elsewhere in this volume, Miriam Gilbert takes the opposite view that the theatre audience can be expected to engage itself wholly with this rather obviously staged scene. I cannot see how this can be so, given the number of lines that draw attention to its staginess. Even the famous attenuation of time just before the unveiling has the effect, I believe, of both enticing us into a simulacrum of eternity and arousing our admiration for Paulina's (and Shakespeare's) art. My point is that at the end of the play our sense of reality is enhanced not lulled to sleep. Society is not forgotten or dissolved, as Frye implies, in a merely personal sense of transcendence; rather, the final scene is a social rite of retrieval, much as in the "green world" comedies. Cf. McFarland, p. 37: Shakespearean pastoral is a "representation of paradise" as both a "happy society" and "a blessed place."

15 Cf. Cassirer, p. 44, on the revived "Pelagian" epistemology of such thinkers as Galileo and Bruno: The intellect endorses God's creation, thus conferring value on being. In this way "human culture has found its true theodicy. Culture confirms the freedom of the human spirit, which is the end of its divinity."
At 4:00 P.M. Saturday, November 11, 1899, in the lecture theatre of the University of London, a performance was given of Richard II—a performance which may mark an epoch in modern Shakespearean production and criticism. The director was William Poel, the performance part of the fifth season of the Elizabethan Stage Society.

The few reviews of this production are favorable but reserved, suggesting moderate success rather than artistic triumph. The Post called the performance "remarkable...for its effect in illustrating and illuminating a Shakespearean play" and pointed out that it gave "a more concentrated, clearer, and deeper impression" than could reading the text. The Globe proclaimed it a "success," said it "triumphed," but summarized the performance as "interesting and fairly stimulating." The Athenaeum called it by the cursed adjective "adequate" and "to a certain extent illuminating."

In part this reserved tone is attributable to Poel's then-revolutionary staging methods, which the Athenaeum referred to as "the least favorable conditions." He produced the play with no realistic scenery, without even an attempt to hide the modern clock which ticked over the university Vice-Chancellor's chair. A throne indicated Richard's palace. The director also eliminated pageantry, so that the Globe complained the fight between Mowbray and Bolingbroke "could not come off"; curiously, the critic complained that Richard threw down his warder before battle commenced. The Times complimented Poel's "picturesque grouping [which] stood out effectively against the tapestry which served for background." But even the Times consoled the actors for having to overcome lack of scenery. The Post opined that such "reproduction" of Elizabethan stage and dress might interest students of theatrical history but was "exaggerated" by Poel. The critic complained especially that Poel's actors exitd up aisles of the amphitheatrical hall and spoke from the lofty galleries—to the destruction of theatrical illusion. The Globe critic thought these conventions "far from favourable," the means of exit "ludicrous."

In addition to scenic reforms, Poel also attempted to reform verse speaking. The Globe thought the speech in this production gratifyingly free of rant and "pleasingly declaimed." But the Chronicle heard "preachy intonation and faulty reading" and shouts "without light or shade" or genuine emotion, admirable only for the enthusiasm and "earnestness" of the delivery. Despite Poel's desire for rapid verse speaking, the Post belabored "slow delivery" in this production as "depressing and artistically wrong." The Athenaeum seems to substantiate this accusation of slowness by indicating that the performance—with only one interval—ran four hours.

These critics suggest that the acting was, on the whole, of high-middling quality. The Chronicle was severe, criticising the actors because some showed inadequate emotion while others exaggerated sentiments to the point of burlesque. The Globe, however, thought many roles well done, the "fierce, turbulent noblemen...well conveyed." And the Post complimented much "excellent" acting in small roles, praised the head gardener as "perfectly given." Gaunt and York were too much stereotyped old men, but York played well his collapse at Bolingbroke's hands and Gaunt performed his death scene with "remarkable truth and passion." Bolingbroke, unsympathetic "as the part demands," was played "with a good deal of thought," and had "justified itself" by the middle of the performance.

Such a "fair all-round representation" was what audiences expected of the ESS. What made the 1899 Richard different—and, as I believe, important—was the performer of the King: Harley Granville-Barker, then chiefly known as a playwright, soon to be a notable actor and great director, ultimately to become one of the most influential Shakespearean critics of

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the century. As usual, the Chronicle was severe, finding Barker “a trifle more hysterical than impressive” though “there were times when he grasped the meaning of the poet.” But other critics were more favorably impressed. The Post thought Barker’s Richard “consistently thought out” so that the idea of the role was “made to live before our eyes.” The Globe believed Barker “spoke with energy, and at times with passion, and conveyed perfectly the idea of a character in which all that was not malignant was shallow.” Unfortunately, details of Barker’s interpretation cannot be discerned in the reviews, though its outlines and obvious force are apparent in the Times’ description of the King as “gay and princely” in acts one and two, then played later with “a decided sense of character, and with pathos that seemed to touch every section of his rather difficult audience.”

Having said thus much, I now confess that I have used this production of Richard II as a means of linking to this conference on Shakespeare’s histories a hobby of mine. For several years I have been attempting to reassess William Poel’s ideas. I suggest here that his influence on modern Shakespearean production—usually attributed to rather dubious notions about verse speaking and to advocacy of simplified staging—may be greater than we have thought because he may have influenced the influential Barker more than we have thought. Several years ago, attempting to discover the methods of modern Shakespearean actors and directors, I sorted out from Poel’s writings and from Barker’s criticism—chiefly the Prefaces—principles which they suggest a director use to interpret a Shakespearean play. When I was finished, it seemed to me that I had found remarkable similarities in their suggestions. Because the bulk of Poel’s writing remains scattered through old magazines and obscure ephemeral publications, these similarities have gone largely unnoticed.

I do not suggest that Poel and Barker agreed in all details. Poel thought Barker’s Shakespeare too pictorial and Barker thought Poel’s Shakespeare “somewhat archaeological.” Barker clearly believed in what might be called the rhetoric of directing, adaptation of the play to its modern audience, while Poel argued that the audience could and should be adapted to the play, transformed into Elizabethans. Above all, Poel’s mind was tenacious but unsubtle while Barker possessed a sensitive imagination so that even when applying the same methods they reached conclusions of differing quality. Still, Poel praised Barker for revealing Shakespeare’s genius by eliminating scenic realism and dubbed the younger man his artistic heir, predicting that Barker would carry on the cause in a more practical way. In return, Barker called Poel “one of the greatest and finest influences in the English theatre” and recalled the performance of Richard II as one of the “milestones” of his own artistic career. He sometimes attributed this personal epoch to Poel’s advocacy of rapid-fire verse speaking. But in 1912—at a dinner that he sponsored in his mentor’s honor—Barker stressed Poel’s revolutionary view of Shakespeare as playwright: “Mr. Poel has tried to make us see for ourselves where the real beauty and the real wonder of Elizabethan dramaturgy comes in.” He went on to recall that Poel began his work when Irving reigned in matters Shakespearean and that he had turned heretical attack upon the Irving doctrine into the “accepted creed.” The remainder of this paper outlines the parts of that creed which Barker accepted, with side glances at the Irvingesque doctrine for sake of historical perspective.

Irving concentrated upon expression of the actor’s “individuality.” Poel and Barker shifted the emphasis. They insisted upon expression of Shakespeare’s intent. Poel never doubted that Shakespeare had had definite intentions and that they could be discovered in the text: “His art is so vital and so vividly impressed on the printed page ... that there is little justification for misrepresenting it.” Actors must realize that “their sole and responsible duty is to be loyal to the author and to interpret him according to his intentions.” Similarly, Barker insisted that the dramatist rightly regards a role as “his character ... his part” and may rightly insist that the essentials prevail in performance. Though Barker—unlike Poel—did not underestimate the difficulty of determining the essentials, belief in the desirability of finding them underlies all his writings. Introducing his Prefaces, he indicated that he would examine “the plays, one after another, in the light of the interpretation [Shakespeare] designed for them, so far as this can be deduced; to discover, if possible, the production he would have designed for them, all merely incidental circumstances apart.”

Emphasis upon Shakespeare’s intention compelled rejection of the personality acting prevalent upon the London stage when Poel and Barker began their careers. Poel wrote, “The theory that the idiosyncrasy of a character can be toned down to suit an actor’s personality cannot be insisted upon without injury to the actor’s art and to the histrionic conscience.” In his Preface to Lear Barker discussed at length the relation of an actor’s
personality to the role he played, reaching conclusions much like Poel’s, insisting upon recognition that the transcendant quality of poetic drama meant that the actor could not bring its characters "within the realistic limits of his personality." 12

But the actor’s relation to any script is no simple matter, both Poel and Barker allowed for collaboration. Poel reduced dramatic poetry to a "libretto" intended to furnish the actor with emotional sounds to rouse his audience. 13 In part, the actor aids understanding, the playwright’s words sometimes being obscure until expressed with appropriate tones and emphasis. 14 At least equally important, the actor’s reading charges lines with emotional and characterizing meaning that they might not otherwise possess. Poel recalled the old-time actor Odell as Malvolio, insinuating "a wealth of meaning" from the four words, "Gentlewoman, my lady calls." 15 Moreover, Poel denied that characters exist complete and unequivocal in the Shakespearean texts, for words—being only opportunities for the actor’s expression—vary in meaning according to how he speaks them. Some actors made a personal appeal to Ophelia, with "Nymph, in thy orisons / Be all my sins remembered"; with equal justice, Salvini spoke the line as a reflection to himself, followed by a deep sigh. 16

Barker’s comments in this regard repeat or extend Poel’s. An actor obviously contributes the language of gesture and sound, into which he translates the author’s words. 17 Equally important is the release of emotion that occurs when the actor identifies himself with his character. In "dynamic" or "suggestive" phrases without obvious literary value, Shakespeare contrived for the actor’s powerful effects of emotion or characterization. Barker cites Angelo’s "Stay a little while," "spoken to the Provost when, even at first sight of [Isabella], he half fears to be left alone with her." 18 In addition, some Shakespearean roles—Barker instances Claudius—are not sufficiently drawn to come automatically to life; the actor must complete the assemblage. 19 But even a character so complete as Hamlet offers collaborative opportunities to the actor. Indeed, one test of fully achieved character is that "it can be given a dozen different personalities and interpreted from nearly as many different points of view." 20 Poel would probably have demurred from so sweeping a statement, but it follows logically from his own arguments.

Both men insisted that the actor’s real contribution is not reinterpretation but an intangible spontaneity. According to Barker, what the reader of a play cannot predicate for himself, is the ‘quickenning of the work to which both the actors’ interpretations and their personalities contribute. It is this blank which the actors must fill with their personalities.” 21 Essentially, this point of view coincides with Poel’s belief that the actor should ‘portray the whole meaning and whole emotion of an author and add to every character he undertakes some new attraction or unexpected force.” 22

Poel and Barker rejected not only personality acting but also stage tradition, a vast body of line readings, business, and characterization, inherited—according to Poel—from great stars of the eighteenth century who, maltreating text and recreating characters, had revealed utter ignorance of Shakespeare’s art. 23 Antique and senseless “business” and “readings” hindered characterization “because the delivery does not imitate natural speech or convey any definite feeling.” 24 Moreover, traditionalist actors portrayed their roles as “theatrical types which are not supposed to conform to the conditions that govern human beings in everyday life.” 25 Similarly, Barker inveighed against ponderous traditional portrayals, among them “the bass Claudius and contralto Gertrude, brass-bound effigies, a tonweight on our chests” and the Lady Macbeth wrenched “from the subtle feminine enchantress of Shakespeare’s fancy ... into the clarion-voiced matron.” 26

Thus, the critical work of both Poel and Barker sought a route bypassing mistaken stage tradition and leading to Shakespearean intention. Both considered the actor, not totally controlled, but firmly circumscribed; beyond certain limits he could not go. They also shared fairly clear ideas as to how to ascertain those limits. The actor should find a center for the production in the play’s theme or generic classification, study early and complete texts for suggestions from stage directions and dialogue, and—most important—scrupulously preserve the dramatist’s architechtonics by acting (and allowing others to act) so that the structure of Shakespeare’s play might not vanish in production.

Poel characteristically described Shakespeare’s plays thematically, adopting this tack to prove that star-centered productions distorted Shakespeare. Macbeth, for instance, he described as depicting man’s attempt to defeat the supernatural; thus, Macbeth was pivotal to the play and producers erred in allowing ambitious actresses to over-play the Lady. 27
According to Poel, Shakespeare's plays upheld Christianity. What, he asked, could be more Christian than Shylock's defeat? In *The Merchant of Venice* Shakespeare illustrated the consequences of adhering too rigidly to law. But generations of stars had besought sympathy for the Jew, forcing this mere curmudgeon into undue prominence.⁴⁶

While Poel read *The Merchant of Venice* by light of a the-ne, Barker—characteristically—began his *Preface* to the play by locating it in a genre which implied a mood: "The Merchant of Venice is a fairy tale." And this fairy tale nature limited what an actor might do within the play. Barker warned actresses of Portia not to center the trial scene on the Mercy Speech nor to convert the speech itself into overly beautiful rhetorical "soothing syrup." The fairy tale quality demanded, not sentiment and feminine softness, but a youthful advocate who was "life incarnate and destined to victory." And *Cymbeline* must be played, not as tragedy (despite the Folio's classification) nor even as tragi-comedy, but as romance with a "providentially happy ending." In a memorably perspicacious passage, Barker analyzed the means by which Shakespeare mitigates the horror of Cloten's headless corpse and concluded, "The right interpretation of all this will depend upon a style of production and acting fitted to the style of the play."⁴⁹

As important as respect for the play's theme or genre was abandonment of modern acting editions. Poel demanded close attention to the quartos. Stage directions in these texts indicated what had actually occurred on the Elizabethan stage; even a pirate taking surreptitious shorthand would hardly bother to describe movements that he did not actually see actors perform. Poel directed his 1881 production of the *Hamlet* First Quarto on this assumption, observing the original directions and avoiding interpolation of "extraneous business." He concluded, for instance, that the absence of directions for "flourishes" at the King's entrances suggested acting "more on the lines of domestic tragedy than of the historical tragedy." Barker showed the same respect for the suggestiveness of early texts: "No one should omit to read the first Quarto [of *Romeo and Juliet*]. For all its corruptions, it gives us now and then a vivid picture of a performance Shakespeare himself must presumably have supervised." An example shows what help Barker sought in early editions. Most modern editors followed the Folio's *Enter Rosencrantz* in the scene of Hamlet's banishment; Barker recommended Q2's...*and all the rest* as a suggestion to bring on the whole company, surrounding the king with a safeguard and emphasizing the importance of a Prince's exile.⁵³

But Barker and Poel did not return to early texts only for incidental suggestions. By-passing modern acting editions allowed them to return to uncut versions, from which alone the plays could be rightly interpreted. When Poel demanded original and full texts, he did not simply protest arbitrary shortening for the sake of scenery nor was he merely pedantic, as some thought. Nor did completeness in itself satisfy Poel. He required original and thoughtful reinterpretation of "the internal evidence of the play itself—that which arises out of an intimate knowledge of the whole play and its characters, drama, and dialogue." Poel insisted upon full and original texts primarily to demonstrate Shakespeare's "constructive genius" as a playwright. He spent many years and much ink testing that "a critical and genuine appreciation of the poet's work imposes a regard for his constructive plan as well as reverence for his text." Even when conceding occasional need to shorten a play, Poel still insisted that one should omit only lines, never an entire scene, because Shakespeare gave his dramas a "unity of design; so that each scene has a relation to the whole play." Similarly, Barker urged, "A producer must...start afresh with the untouched text." He demonstrated the truth of Poel's principles by his argument that scenes customarily cut to palliate a star's ego or justify his interpretation had their place in the delicate organization of a play. The end of *Romeo and Juliet*, as staged, usually concentrated upon the deaths of the lovers, the final appearance of the Montagues and Capulets and the Friar's recounting of the tragedy gave way to "a sort of symbolic picture" of reconciliation. This, Barker wrote, falsified Shakespeare's thematic intention. He also condemned elimination of the epilepsy scene from *Othello*. Salvini had explained that the scene belittled the protagonist's "haughty and violent temper." But, Barker insisted, that was the point: it marked the abyss between Othello's early heroism and his final tragic dignity. To cut it warped both the play's structure and the actor's characterization.⁵⁹

This delicate structure should suggest to a properly sensitive actor bounds from which he might not stray. Poel admonished Shylocks to sacrifice their tragic climax in the trial scene and instead to react with violent anger; only thus would the audience be pleased at the Jew's overthrow and interested in the further doings of Portia. Barker also objected to this
customary "gerrymandered" exit of Shylock, though he urged that the actor simply pass out quietly, allowing the play's action to sweep on without pause. The solution differs from Poel's, but the principle is the same: the play must run its course without "anticlimax."59

This care for total dramatic structure led both Poel and Barker to reject one of the chief characteristics of late-nineteenth century Shakespearean acting. From at least 1874—the date of Irving's first London Hamlet—Shakespearean actors had been judged by ability to create characters in terms of realistic psychology. Both Barker and Poel argued that Shakespeare's characters are not real people but elements in a dramatic structure who cannot be expected or allowed to behave according to realistic psychology. Barker made the point repeatedly. Horatio does not tell Hamlet of Ophelia's death, but "dramatically" this passes unnoticed; Kent continues in disguise only so that duplication will not spoil Lear's recognition of Cordelia; the basket conundrum would not deter any realistically motivated Portia and Bassanio, and to try to discuss Jessica's reasons for stealing the ducats is as useless as to write the life story of Mistress Margery Gobbo.60 Poel made the same point less often but no less unmistakably.

In opposition to contemporary theatrical opinion, he denied that a psychological study alone can be the basis of tragedy. Hamlet is not about the Prince's irresolution nor madness; its appeal derives from its varied action.61 Moreover, Shakespeare's characters follow, not the laws of realistic psychology, but those of "stage effectiveness." Thus, Ophelia—who might be expected to react like a sophisticated court lady—instead possesses the mind of a village maiden, to heighten the pathos of her situation.62 Psychologizers misread because they misunderstood Shakespeare's compositional method. They supposed that the dramatic action arises from the characters. Thus, they explained action by reference to character traits that they discovered for the sake of the explanation. But in drama, unlike life, character arises from action; Shakespeare started with well-known and conventional plots, then designed characters whose temperaments would motivate the acts required of them.63 Thus, one cannot explain the deaths in Hamlet by imputing irresolution to the Prince; if one asks why Hamlet does not kill the king sooner, the sensible answer is, "If he had done so . . . the play would have ended an hour and a half too soon."64 Barker later wrote, "Why does Hamlet delay? Because if he did not, there would be no play."65

Further, in the age of actor managers, the customary question when great plays were produced was the availability of an overwhelming Lear or Hamlet. But consideration for the structure of the whole play led Poel and Barker to greater interest in supporting roles. Poel stated as a general principle, "Neither pagentry nor "stars" are helpful towards the correct interpretation of drama . . . with Shakespeare there are often a number of parts needing first-rate actors to do justice to them, and if all are not skilful the whole play suffers."66 He warned critics that concentration on a title role diverts attention from "external incidents which influence the thoughts and actions of that part"67 and urged that in writing Hamlet Shakespeare had wished to produce "an epitome of life" and not "the career of one individual." The play had been constructed to show types of character contrasted with one another: "Strong men, weak men, old men, fond women, all living and moving under the influence of a destiny that is not of their own seeking."68 Similarly, Barker suggested that the great and memorable moments of a Shakespearean play rest upon a substratum of minor incidents and characters, which provide varied "rhythms" and lifelike eb and flow of event.69 He urged that, if the choice were necessary, faithful and lively interpretation of the whole could compensate for inability of one or two leads.70

Thus, I am suggesting that for Poel—and later for Barker—the fundamental principle of Shakespearean interpretation was regard for the architectonics of the plays. And for both men the most obvious characteristic of Shakespeare's dramatic structure was contrast. Barker, in fact, called juxtaposition of contrasting scenes Shakespeare's "chief technical resource."71 This contrast would govern the performance of a sufficiently humble actor. Asked what he thought of Tree's Twelfth Night, Poel drily complimented the pretty pictures, but remarked that the actor allowed "the grossest buffoonery" in the kitchen scene. "Immediately following this," Poel pointed out, "is a beautiful poetic scene, but the audience have been brought into a mood for pantomime, and it is all spoiled. Mr. Tree loses his sense of proportion."72 Poel also complained that Capulet's two scenes bordering the potion scene—which "make it by contrast so terribly tragic"—invariably succumbed before the manager's blue pencil; the actor had no chance to express Capulet's sensuality, brutality, and egoism, all of which Shakespeare included to move pity for Juliet's suffering so that the potion speech would not appear grotesque.73 Barker wrote of the same play that it progressed—"according to
Shakespeare’s usual custom, which so obviously suits the continuities of the Elizabethan stage”—by episodes of immediate contrast of character and treatment: “Thus, after the bracing rattle of the fight and the clarion of the Prince’s judgment, we have our first sight of Romeo, fantastic, rueful, self-absorbed.”

In addition to contrast between scenes, the playwright revealed his intention by contrasts between characters. As Poel wrote, Elizabethan actors “knew that the dramatist’s characters mutually supported each other within a definite structure, and that it was the business of the actor to preserve the author’s framework.” Such contrasts might be only incidental, like that of the tragic, dark, melancholy Jessica to the gay Portia. But they might also epitomize the play. Poel saw Twelfth Night as a three-legged stool, supported by contrasting forms of love: Olivia “overmastered” by a “disconcerting and tragic” love; Orsino in love with love itself, showing “the romance of love”; and Viola portraying “the patient self-effacement of love.” Somewhat similarly, Poel saw character contrast at the basis of Richard II, denying that the play could be—as contemporary stage practice would have suggested—a mere depiction of the king’s state of mind. Instead, the tragedy arose from a duel between Bolingbroke’s practicality and Richard’s impracticality, resulting in a victory of “prosaic, or brute, sense over romantic sensibility” —a contrast that the reviews suggest was preserved in this 1899 Richard.

Barker argued that “close-woven contrasts of character . . . are the very stuff of drama.” The actor, then, should look for covert directions to show his place in what Barker called “the play’s character-scheme.” The key to acting of all roles lies in careful balance of complement and contrast, which govern the playing of Shakespeare’s characters from the smallest roles—

For the casting of Cicero . . . we have definite, if mainly ex post facto, direction; his elderly dry irony is set, when the two meet, in strong contrast with the new ebullient Casca.—
to the largest—

These, then, are the three men among whom Shakespeare divides this dramatic realm; the idealist, the egoist, the opportunist. The contrast between them must be kept clear in the acting by all that the actors do and are, for upon its tension the living structure of the play depends.

I have tried to suggest that several of Granville Barker’s methods of reading a Shakespearean play have analogues in the methods of William Poel. I cannot now present evidence to prove influence, though Barker’s reference to the 1899 Richard II as a personal milestone is suggestive. What I am more concerned to demonstrate—here and in articles that I hope will be forthcoming—is that Poel’s revolution in theatrical Shakespeare did not amount to suggestions about verse speaking and antiquarian staging. At least as important, he suggested an approach to Shakespearean roles through dramatic structure, an approach triumphantly demonstrated in Barker’s Prefaces. If Poel did influence Barker, that influence endured until the Kotjian-Brookian revolution of the 60’s. And that influence began in the lecture theatre of the University of London at 4:00 P.M., Saturday, November 11, 1899.

NOTES


"Complimentary Dinner to Mr. William Poel," *Stage* (London), 5 Dec. 1912; "The Dinner to Mr. Poel," *Pall Mall Gazette* (London), 2 Dec. 1912. (In Univ. of Kansas Poel collection.)


"The Dinner to Mr. Poel," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 233.


"The Dinner to Mr. Poel," *Pall Mall Gazette*.


"A Plea for the Early Texts," p. 76.


"The Modern Drama and the Old English Stage: Interesting Interview with Mr. William Poel," clipping from *Dublin Evening Telegraph*. (In Univ. of Kansas Poel collection.)
54 Prefaces, IV, 42.
55 Shakespeare in the Theatre, pp. 51, 61.
56 "Suit the Action to the Word," Shakespeare Journal 8 (Nov. 1922), p. 36.
58 Prefaces, III, 64; II, 181, 186.
"This Wide Gap of Time": STORYTELLING AND AUDIENCE RESPONSE IN THE ROMANCES

Miriam Gilbert*

At the end of The Winter's Tale, Leontes turns to Paulina:

Good Paulina,

Lead us from hence, where we may leisurely

Each one demand and answer to his part

Performed in this wide gap of time since first

We were dissevered. (V.iii.151-155)

The notion of characters meeting offstage to discuss and explain the complications of a play's action is familiar in Shakespeare's comedies; we hear similar speeches at the end of The Comedy of Errors, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, The Merchant of Venice, and Twelfth Night. What is unusual about the romances, however, is that the period of time which must be accounted for in such discussions is so long. Most of Shakespeare's comedies take place in a few days or a few weeks. We think of the four days (or is it just one night?) in A Midsummer Night's Dream, or of the week in Much Ado About Nothing. The Merchant of Venice needs at least a three-month span while Shylock's bond becomes due, but we scarcely notice the time because Shakespeare fills it in with Bassanio's wooing. Even the months that are necessary in All's Well so that Helena can become visibly pregnant are sandwiched somewhere between IV.iv. and V.iii. and slip by unnoticed. And in "green world" comedies such as Love's Labor's Lost and As You Like It, we find it hard to define any time scheme at all, perhaps we should listen to Orlando when he says "There's no clock in the forest" (III.ii.287-88).

But in the romances, Shakespeare persistently chooses stories that depend on wide gaps of time. Fourteen years in Pericles, twenty in Cymbeline, sixteen in The Winter's Tale, and twelve in The Tempest separate the crucial events of the story. There must be time for children to grow up—Marina, Guiderius and Arviragus, Perdita, Miranda—time during which their parents, whether innocent (Pericles) or guilty (Leontes) must also grow, through lonely suffering. The long gap is necessary for the experiences of reconciliation and rediscovery that the plays dramatize. But such a gap is a difficult problem for a playwright to handle gracefully. When we look at these four late plays, we can see how Shakespeare experiments with various solutions for this tricky structural problem—and how those solutions offer us ways of understanding our responses to the plays.

The difficulty of finding an effective dramatic way to deal with a long gap of time can be seen if we look briefly at The Comedy of Errors, Shakespeare's first comedy and perhaps his first play. Though the main action of the play occupies just one afternoon, the frame story of Aegaeon and his family begins some twenty-three years before. Aegaeon's account of the shipwreck that separated him (and one each of the two sets of twins) from his wife and the other twins, takes 101 lines, beginning with a massive sixty-four-line narrative. Modern productions frequently edit the speech or provide the information in mime; it is unusual to see it played in full, or even played seriously. Shakespeare then drops Aegaeon from the play, bringing him back only in the final scene. By then our attention is almost totally with the straightening out of the complications of the twins, and the reunion of the family, father and sons, wife and husband, while part of the general rejoicing, is subsumed in the more comic reunion of the Antipholus and Dromio brothers.

Still, the source story for Aegaeon's narrative, Apollonius of Tyre, seems to have haunted Shakespeare, for he returns to that story in Pericles, now using it as the center of the play instead of its frame. Shakespeare's solution to the problem of telling a story which ranges over the fourteen years and a variety of Mediterranean locations is a bold one; he brings in, as Chorus, the poet Gower in whose Confessio Amantis the story of Apollonius is told. The device appears earlier in Shakespeare's career, with the Chorus in Henry V, but Gower is

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different. He is named, and thus possesses a real identity; he is given mythic significance since, like the Phoenix, he comes from the ashes (1.Chorus.2); and his tetrameter couplets, noticeably different from the pentameter of the noble figures and the prose of the comic fishermen, set him apart from the play and may even remind us of the magical Puck. Unlike, Aegeon, Gower is not a character in the story and therefore Shakespeare need not construct any plausible reason for him to tell the tale; rather, he is defined as the teller of the tale and we thus accept him, and his story, without question. Moreover, he maintains his control by reappearing frequently; he has eight major speeches, three of them accompanied by dumb shows in which characters of the play act out transitional episodes and Gower then explains what has happened.

Because Gower is so firmly established as the storyteller, he and Shakespeare can put in almost anything and still create for the audience a sense of order. The episodes in the life of Pericles may lack causal connection (he just happens to be cast ashore at Pentapolis, and later just happens to turn up at Mytilene), but Gower gives those episodes narrative connection. He can move Pericles from Antioch to Tyre to Tharsus to Pentapolis to Mytilene to Ephesus. And he can just as easily jump the fourteen years between Act III with Marina's birth, Thaisa's "death," and Pericles' decision to leave the baby in Tharsus, and Act IV when Marina is now old enough to become in turn the victim of Dionyzia's plots, Leonine's ineffectual murder attempt, the pirates' capture, and the brothel keeper's threats against her virginity. By shifting from a narrator within the play (like Aegeon) who is uncomfortable with his task and who appears only twice, to a narrator outside the story who loves to tell his tale, Shakespeare frames the incredible events into the believability of a "once upon a time" story and makes the wide gap of time something we accept without question.

But the solution of using an outside narrator is not the only way to deal with the time problem, and in Cymbeline we see Shakespeare trying a different approach. Instead of giving us the whole story of Cymbeline and the loss of his two sons onstage, to say nothing of the growth of Posthumus and his wooing of Imogen, Shakespeare begins the story "some twenty years" later. Again, his solution is not entirely new; the device of having gentlemen comment on antecedent action can be seen in the opening lines of King Lear or in Philo's speech at the beginning of Antony and Cleopatra. What is different is the length of the exposition (69 lines) and the obviousness of it all. We do not find out anything about the characters of the first and second gentlemen (as compared with the masterly depiction of Gloucester's unthinking vulgarity in King Lear); indeed the second gentleman seems characterized only by his ability to ask leading questions: "But what's the matter?" "None but the king?" "And why so?" "What's his name and birth?" "Is she sole child to th' king?" "How long is this ago?" (1.1.3, 10,15,27,56,60). The opening fairly shrieks "Exposition" at us.4

The obviousness of the exposition is part of what Harley Granville-Barker has called "a sophisticated, not a native artlessness, the art that rather displays art than conceals it.5 He goes on to argue that such an approach makes us "masters of the illusion, not its victims."6 What I want to stress is not just the calculated artfulness of being openly artless, but the importance of having a long demonstration of such art at the beginning of the play. Surely Shakespeare wants to let the audience know right away what kind of play they will see: an old story, a fairy tale with lost sons, a love story with a virtuous princess, a "poor but worthy gentleman"(1.1.7), and a "thing / Too bad for bad report" (1.1.16-17). When the Queen enters right after this expository scene and describes herself as not being "after the slander of most step-mothers / Evil-eyed unto you" (1.1.71-72), we immediately hear the line in reverse; the character is obviously labelling herself as "evil-eyed stepmother," just as later Imogen will call herself by the name of her salient virtue, "Fidele," or faithfulness.

But having begun the play with a noticeable frame, a dramatized version in two voices of Gower, Shakespeare then abandons the technique and, for the most part, lets the various stories tell themselves. When he does need more exposition—and the great drawback of starting in the second half of the story is that one needs to fill in the background from time to time—he reverts to his character-as-narrator method. Thus, almost halfway through the play, Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus enter, and after the boys have complained about the rustic life and then leave to hunt, Belarius steps forward to tell us that these two are really Cymbeline's lost sons—in case we have forgotten the opening exposition. Belarius becomes for that moment the narrator; he then slips back into his role, also assumed, as Morgan, the boys' "father."
Only near the end of the play does Shakespeare once more bring in a narrator and this time he uses a device from classical drama, the *deus ex machina*, as Jupiter “descends in thunder and lightning, sitting upon an eagle” (V.iv). This appearance is conditionally narrative, since he appears in answer to the pleas of the mourning Leonati, who seem to be part of Posthumus’ dream. Nonetheless, he tells them (and us) that Posthumus “shall be lord of Lady Imogen” (V.iv.107) and leaves behind the tablet, which, when properly understood, foretells the restoration of Imogen to Posthumus, the restoration of Guidierius and Arviragus to Cymbeline, and the restoration of Britain “to peace and plenty” (V.iv.144). The final scene of the play, like the last act of *Pericles*, is not suspenseful in terms of what will happen, only in terms of how it will happen.

In contrast to *Pericles*, which is a highly-narrated play, *Cymbeline* might be called an occasionally narrated play. One could say the same of *The Winter’s Tale*, which returns to the *Pericles* structure, but with some noticeable changes. It seems as if Shakespeare, having experimented with the two patterns, returns to the first one, with the split in the middle. However, he begins with the two-gentlemen-giving-exposition approach that we saw in *Cymbeline*. But here that scene is shorter, less obvious (there are none of those leading questions), and one of the gentlemen is Camillo, a major character. Still, the emphasis on the past friendship of the kings of Sicilia and Bohemia, whether it serves to contrast with the suspicious Leontes of I.ii, or to give us an accurate picture of how the two men still feel about each other, sounds very much like exposition. And the superlatives of both speakers create another fairy-tale world, this one seemingly peopled only with happy and friendly characters.

Yet just before Leontes’ violence reaches its peak, as he denies the oracle, hears of his son’s death, and sees his wife “die,” Shakespeare inserts a curious little scene (III.i.i) that introduces again a narrative perspective—and also a moral one. Cleomenes and Dion pause on their way back from the oracle and, like choric commentators, *tell* us about their experience. Nothing happens in this scene, yet the mere mention of words such as “delicate, sweet, fertile, celestial, ceremonious, solemn, unearthly, rare, pleasant, speedy, gracious,” reminds us of a world we thought was lost. The last line of the scene, “And gracious be the issue” (III.i.22) echoes Hermione’s double mention of Grace in I.ii and her Christ-like acceptance of imprisonment, “This action I now go on / Is for my better grace” (II.i.121-122). The dramatic value of the scene lies in its quiet, its non-violence, even in its lack of action; we are reminded of a different world and of the possibilities of order.

By now it may be become clear that I am connecting overt narrative devices with order, a metaphor that may need further explanation—and defense. My sense is that *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter’s Tale* present worlds that are radically out of control—yet the plays either modify or dramatize that feeling through the presence or absence of a narrative force. In *Pericles* the order that holds the multiplicity of the play’s episodes together resides primarily in Gower. *Pericles* is powerless to control his own life; he is a figure in someone else’s story, and he can be tossed around as Gower pleases. We think of his self-description:

A man whom both the waters and the wind  
In that vast tennis court hath made the ball  
For them to play upon entreats you pity him. (II.i.58-60)

There *is* coherence in the play, through incidents that repeat or invert each other, but *Pericles* is not likely to notice such connections. *We* see that his shipwreck brings him new life—as does Thaisa’s—but he does not know that she is saved. We remember the destructive Antiochus
and his daughter of the first scene as we watch the redeeming of Pericles by Marina in the last act. But Pericles is not aware of the parallels in his life. We are the lonely ones, except for Gower, whose sense that his "painful adventures" will finally have a meaningful and re­demptive end.

In Cymbeline, Shakespeare deliberately disorders the world of the play, after the "frame" beginning, and this disorder reflects the confusion of Cymbeline, Posthumus, and Imogen. As Bertrand Evans points out, we are always superior to the characters' misunderstanding, but superiority does not breed comfort. The most painful moment in the play for the audience (and for the actress too) must be Imogen's awaking to find the headless body of Cloten and her subsequent belief that it is Posthumus' body. What has Imogen done, we think, that she should be brought to such a grotesque moment? We do not share her mistake, but our shock at her confusion reflects her pain.

Similarly, in The Winter's Tale, Shakespeare gives us the perspective to see that Leontes is making a mistake, but that does not include emotional distance from him. Leontes becomes more and more frustrated as people argue with him and refuse to support his belief; we become more and more frustrated as we see that in spite of his obvious mistakes, he is causing terrible destruction—to Hermione, to Mamillius, to the baby, to Antigonus, and to himself. Shakespeare's re-establishing of overt narrative, which offers aesthetic perspective and control, comes in three stages in The Winter's Tale. First we have the scene with Cleomenes and Dion. Second, we have the two narratives of the transition scene, III.i, Antigonus' account of his vision of Hermione and the Clown's comic account of the shipwreck and of Antigonus' death (with its echoes of the comic fisherman describing the shipwreck in Pericles). And, most noticeably, we have the entrance of Time and then of Autolycus.

Time might be called a mythologized version of Gower. He is also outside the play, while representing a force of control. He is old, even older than the medieval poet. And he is clearly not a real person, just as Gower has associations with the mythical Phoenix. But, unlike Gower, he appears after the important choices have already been made by the human beings involved. Leontes has already vowed repentance. The Old Shepherd, the most compassionate of the three fathers in the play, has already decided to care for the foundling. So Time may be seen both as a force directing the play's characters and as a force created by their own moral choices.

Time's entrance is followed soon by that of Autolycus, and I would argue that he functions as a comic version of Gower. His most important relationship is with the audience; it is to us he speaks as soon as he enters, and while he tricks the rustics, he always confides in us. True, he is not directly telling the story—and, unlike Gower, is acting in it at the same time. But his presence, rogue and thief though he is, creates a delightfully comic and ironic frame around the often sentimental events of the sheep-shearing scene. The function of that long scene is to move the audience through song, dance, beautiful poetry, and laughter into a state of mind quite different from the tortured frustration induced by the first half of the play. Shakespeare needs to change the emotional temperature from winter to spring so that we are ready for redemption, so that we want Leontes to find foregiveness and happiness. Autolycus, both as Chorus and as actor, is part of that shift in mood.

Yet Autolycus is also the new playwright, as we can see by his decision to step in and lead the Old Shepherd and the Clown to Florizel (although they think he is taking them to Polixenes). This interference, he assures us, is done for mercenary reasons; even the idea of helping "the prince, my master" has practical value: "who knows how that may turn back to my advancement?" (IV.iv.818). Autolycus is this play's version of the deus ex machina, disguised as a con man, but "littered under Mercury" (IV.iii.25). By combining the functions of narrator and playwright in one figure, Shakespeare is moving towards the discovery that will inform and control his final romance, The Tempest, where we see Prospero as chief narrator, chief actor, and the master playwright-cum-director.

To say these things about Prospero is to say nothing new, but perhaps it is worth pointing out that the combining of the functions of narrator, actor, and playwright, is a logical development of the experiments in storytelling that I have been discussing here. Shakespeare returns in The Tempest to his second pattern, starting at the end of the story, but using the major narrative feature of the first pattern, the controlling narrator. Gower is, we might say, transformed into Prospero—and yet we should not make that equation too simple. Remember that the play begins with the tempest, a scene of spectacle, created on the Elizabethan stage by sound and voices, on the modern stage by lights as well. The
opening is vivid, strong, immediate. Our sense of disorder (onstage) lasts only through Miranda's first half-line, "If by your art, dear father" (I.i.1) and from then on Prospero controls us, having first given us, as he will later give Ferdinand and Miranda, "some vanity of [his] art" (IV.i.41). The second scene of The Tempest proceeds to let Prospero establish his control of both the narrative and the dramatic elements of the play through three different and carefully worked out exposition scenes.

The first is the famous, even notorious, narration to Miranda which begins in dialogue form, with Miranda asking leading questions (which, it must be noted, make a lot more sense coming from her than from a "second gentleman"): "Had I not / Four or five women once that tended me?" "What foul play had we that we came from thence?" "Please you farther" (I.i.46-47, 60, 65). The difficult part to stage naturally is Prospero's speech (I.i.66-186), where he breaks off his story several times to make sure that Miranda is listening. Everything up till now suggests that she has been, so the constant admonitions, "I pray thee mark me," "Dost thou attend me?" "Thou attend'st not?" "I pray thee mark me," "Dost thou hear?" (I.i.67, 78, 87, 88, 106), give his story that "obvious" exposition quality we have noted before. Shakespeare seems to be showing both how naturally and how blatantly he can do an exposition scene. Yet those questions also establish Prospero's slightly irritable touchiness, the characteristic that is more fully demonstrated in the second exposition scene.

This scene (I.i.242-300), which gives us the background of Ariel's relationship to Prospero, grows out of Prospero's angry explosion at Ariel's demand for liberty. Prospero's insistence on telling Ariel "once a month" (I.i.262) how he freed Ariel from Sycorax's enchantment is a further demonstration of that irritability that we saw with Miranda. The third exposition section, in which Caliban asserts his claim that the island is really his, is the most dramatically natural, since it grows out of a two-way confrontation. With Ariel, we feel that Prospero is imposing the story on him for the nth time. With Caliban, the anger between the master and slave goes both ways. Caliban is not sullenly monosyllabic as Ariel is; he is able to be almost lyrically nostalgic as he speaks of Prospero's coming to the island, and then becomes defiantly angry in response to Prospero's insults. We may not even notice that we're getting background information, since the atmosphere is so tense that even the quiet Miranda joins in the angry exchange: "Abhorred slave, / Which any print of goodness wilt not take, / Being capable of all ill!" (I.i.351-353).

What Shakespeare has done in this scene is to give us a great deal of exposition and, at the same time, an introduction to the major dramatic conflicts in the play—and by this I mean the conflicts between Prospero and Ariel and Prospero and Caliban. I realize that the main plot would seem to be the bringing of Alonso to remorse, but Prospero's control over the mortals is so great that very little, if any, suspense lies in that story. Similarly, we know that Ferdinand is going to get Miranda; he is just going to have to carry logs for her first. And while Prospero is perturbed that he has forgotten the plot of Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban, we do not seriously imagine that they would succeed or that he would forget about them for long. In fact, so great is the control Prospero exercises over the action of the play that Shakespeare's problem in dramatic terms is how to create any sense of conflict at all.

It is here that the exposition scenes, by focusing on the relationships between master and slaves, suggest that a possible area of uncertainty, and therefore of audience interest, lies in the way we view Prospero. Is he, as he seems to be in the scene with Ariel, an irritable and somewhat tyrannical master? Has he usurped the island from Caliban, as Caliban claims? To what extent do we see, before Prospero says so in the last scene, that he is responsible for Caliban?: "this thing of darkness / Acknowledge mine" (V.i.275-276). How crucial is the relationship with Ariel in terms of moving Prospero from thoughts of revenge to the decision to remove the charm and then to destroy all his own magical powers? It seems to me that, if we are to find any point of empathy with Prospero as a man who still has some changing to do, we can do so because Shakespeare creates for this man of supreme power and order two interestingly disordered relationships with two creatures who should be his slaves but who, through their demands for liberty, raise questions for us about the master and slavery. The Epilogue transfers that mastery from Prospero to us; we are seen as the "confiners," the binders, while Prospero, like Ariel and Caliban, asks, "Let your indulgence set me free" (Epilogue, 20). Perhaps this is why the Epilogue has such tremendous emotional appeal, as we hear the master speak with the voice of his former slaves.

One might argue that the experiments in narration described here show an increasing sophistication on Shakespeare's part, from the "naive" techniques of Pericles to the assured
mastery of *The Tempest*, especially when we remember that *The Tempest* manages to tell the story within a single setting and in just four hours, compression certainly lacking in the other romances. What seems more important to notice is that the amount of overt narrative is integrally related to the kind of audience response Shakespeare is evoking. The two highly narrated plays, *Pericles* and *The Tempest*, essentially ask us to watch the events, from the perspective of either Gower or Prospero, and only near the end of *The Tempest*, to feel with Prospero. The occasionally narrated plays, *Cymbeline* and *The Winter’s Tale*, are both jealousy stories; our frustration at seeing characters so constantly misunderstand the situation or each other, our sense of a world spinning out of control are the analogues to the angry frustration of Posthumus and Leontes, the hurt confusion of Imogen, Cymbeline, and Hermione. Thus, the setting up of narrative and the discarding of them is not only a solution to the time problem mentioned at the beginning of this paper, but a strategy for guiding the audience’s involvement in the play.

The strategy is used most strikingly at the end of *The Winter’s Tale*, when Shakespeare first surprises us by placing a recognition scene offstage and then surprises us again by giving us an unexpected recognition scene. He distances us from the reunion of Leontes and Perdita by having the scene described, not played on stage, and by the sentimental language of the Third Gentleman. Then he takes us through the carefully drawn-out suspense of the final scene; as Paulina constantly frustrates the attempts of Perdita and Leontes to touch the statue, she frustrates our intuitive guess that the statue must indeed be the live Hermione. The language of the scene tells us the statue is stone—and cold. We remember that Hermione jokingly said to Leontes, “You sir, / Charge him too coldly” (i.ii.29-30). Now Leontes publicly confesses, “I am ashamed”; he is ready to feel Hermione’s value and we want her to be alive to acknowledge his change. Thus the climactic line, “Oh, she’s warm,” tells us both that Hermione is alive and that Leontes is in touch with the love he so drastically misunderstood earlier. Immediately after this climax, the narrative perspective returns. Polxines comments, “She embraces him,” and Camillo continues the description, “She hangs about his neck” (v.iii.111, 112). The action is thus frozen into tableau, the reconciliation becomes, in Paulina’s phrase, “an old tale” (v.iii.117), and we slowly detach ourselves from the scene, to watch happily as the characters move offstage—to hear the story once again. Storytelling, for the characters as for us, is here the art of reordering the world, an aesthetic bridge over the “wide gap of time.”

NOTES


2 The structure of the romances has been examined by a number of critics. The fullest treatment is Barbara A. Mowat, *The Dramaturgy of Shakespeare’s Romances* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1976), who notes some of the narrative techniques I discuss here, but does not work with them in terms of audience response. Many critics have noted the peculiar construction of the plays; the comments of Ernest Schanzer and Frank Kermode in their introductions to *Pericles* and *The Winter’s Tale*, respectively, in *The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972) are especially helpful. Northrop Frye, *A Natural Perspective* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1965) treats the romances in relation to Shakespeare’s earlier comedies; references to structural devices occur throughout his book.

3 In the final scene Emilia says: “Thirty-three years have I but gone in travail / Of you, my sons” (v.iv.402-403). Shakespeare seems to have forgotten that in Act I, he described the separation as occurring twenty-three years ago.

4 The 1974 Stratford production, directed by John Barton, emphasized this quality by having the first gentleman insert the name of the character after describing him or her—and the second gentleman, to show that he was listening carefully, later repeated the names.

5 Prefaces to Shakespeare, II (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1946), 82.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., p. 79.

Shakespeare uses a similar technique of frustrating the audience in *Othello* where we helplessly watch Othello make mistake after mistake and are frustrated by the almost total failure of everyone onstage to a) stop him and b) catch Iago. Only Emilia comes close to suspecting Iago, but she does it to his face (IV.ii.) and is promptly quieted.

Evans, p. 309, notes the relationship of Autolycus and Jupiter.

Of course, it is not completely unexpected, given the hints of Paulina in V.i. and the strong hints about the statue in V.ii.
