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The Recurring Progress of English Political Thought in Shakespeare's Histories

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THE RECURRING PROGRESS OF ENGLISH POLITICAL
THOUGHT IN SHAKESPEARE'S HISTORIES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Since the Historicist trend of Shakespeare Studies started in the mid-20th century, there has been a consistent debate over how medieval/religious/centripetal or modern/secular/centrifugal Shakespeare is in a set of eight plays he composed concerning the 15th-century history of England, called the "histories" by the compilers of Shakespeare's First Folio (1623). To be precise, there has been a dialectical debate going on for over half a century. On the one hand, there are prominent literary critics and theorists of the mid-20th century like Tillyard, Campbell and Ribner who locate Shakespeare's histories within the Providentialist tradition of the late Tudor era which is heavily invested in medieval religious and political ideas. On the other hand, literary critics and theorists of the late 20th century like Greenblatt, Sinfield and Rackin mostly, to different degrees, see Shakespeare as a manifestation of the early modern Machiavellian approach to politics. However, the issue on which they all have a consensus is that what Shakespeare presents in his histories is a totalizing idea of politics: the former see it in terms of a medieval/religious nature and the latter in terms of a modern/secular nature.

My contention is that Shakespeare is a transitional figure who demonstrates dilemmas, ambivalences and even paradoxes on different levels; and that is why any attempt at locating him and his histories in only one ideology or clear set of ideas proves suspect to me. Indeed, as S. K. Heninger has perceptively put it, a residual "epistemology

of faith” coexisted throughout the period with an emergent “epistemology of empiricism,” but “neither was privileged over the other.” Accordingly, throughout the history plays Shakespeare presents a host of contending and at times contradictory worldviews. It is in fact through the recurrence of certain Providential and Machiavellian ideas/motifs/themes/epistemes that the eight plays can be linked together, making them a rather collective entity – though still full of tension and conflict.

Perhaps the most consistent motif that the history cycle demonstrates is change itself: the fall of one kind of “order” and the rise of another. What falls is the medieval political authority. This destroys the feudal system and the old nobility and leads to almost a century of chaos. Instead of that religious medieval order, a precarious religio-secular nationalism emerges. However, it is still much tempered with a receding medieval political theology. And this latter order is still the order of the day in Shakespeare’s time. Indeed, it is my contention that through the history cycle Shakespeare in fact depicts this very paradoxical order of his contemporary late sixteenth-century England, and not the epistemology of the fifteenth century when the stories of the plays actually occur.

We can see in the plays that the fall of the old order does not take place once and for all, and neither does the rise of the new order. In fact, they keep receding and proceeding throughout the histories, even at times commingling, as they do in the chronicles on which they were based. Therefore, in my opinion, a realistic model to survey Shakespeare historically would be the one that takes into account the fact that there is no one dominant worldview or ideology in the histories; and that the residual and the emergent orders keep in constant conflict.

The epistemological outcome of this ongoing alternation is that “progress” is not linear. It is not even incremental, i.e. constantly going forward by degrees. Progress is indeed a “recurring” process that clearly manifests itself in the receding and proceeding philosophical/theological/political epistemes that exist in the history cycle. In other words, progress keeps happening, but it is more like the movement of tides – ebbs and flows – that eventually look forward but which do not happen smoothly or predictably. It is this recurring progress of English political thought during the late Tudor era that I want to establish in my dissertation through an extensive and multifaceted study of Shakespeare’s history plays.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am an Iranian dissident who has fought against the totalitarian regime of the Islamic Republic for the greater part of his life, close to a decade of which has already been spent in exile. The degree of Doctor of Philosophy was denied to me by the Iranian regime because I was an “undesirable element.” They did it to me regardless of my scholarly qualifications; regardless of the fact that I was the top student nationwide throughout my undergraduate studies; regardless of the fact that I was a prolific writer and researcher; and regardless of a lot of other things. They simply told me they had lost my doctoral entrance exam papers at the University of Tehran. That is how they destroy you in a totalitarian system. And that is why although I spent six years of my life at Tehran University, the top university in Iran, I am usually hesitant to brag about it. But I will proudly say that I am an IUP graduate. IUP accepted me, respected me, cherished me and supported me all along. I want to especially thank Dr. Downing, the teacher and scholar with a heart of gold, who brought me to IUP and helped me grow. I also want to thank my supervisor Dr. Orchard who patiently and knowledgeably guided me through the process of writing my dissertation, and with whom I share a profound passion for Shakespeare and British history. I also want to thank Dr. Slater whom I wanted to have the honor of having on my dissertation committee because like me he is a lover of classic movies, one of the greatest of which, Laurence Olivier’s *Henry V*, prominently features in my dissertation. Thank you all for your kindness and support throughout all these years. I also want to thank the wonderful people of Indiana and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for treating me like a Pennsylvanian, like one of their own. When I picked PA to be my adopted home, I knew exactly why I was doing it. Because I loved history and politics; because I knew I would be living in the state of the Declaration of

Independence and the US Constitution; and because I could go and see Gettysburg. Above all, I want to thank America for giving me the opportunity to be a better person, to be more useful to my fellow human beings. In the end, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Mina and Changiz, who never stopped supporting me, both materially and spiritually, through all kinds of adversities during these difficult years; and who were not able to attend the dissertation defense of their beloved son because they were stuck halfway around the world in Iran. I love you all. Thank you very much.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

In the heat of the climactic Battle of Agincourt, perceiving that the outnumbered English are about to be routed by the numerous superior French, King Henry V in a tactical move ruthlessly orders the immediate execution of the French prisoners of war lest they break free and join their comrades in arms to fight against the English. Perhaps as a result of such reprehensible tactics as the relentless massacre of defenseless POWs employed by their commander and leader, the English win the war in the end. However, King Henry refuses to take credit for the victory, and at every turn praises God. He doesn't even allow for his sword and bruised helmet to be carried before the army when returning to England, as was the tradition for the victor. Instead, he attributes the victory at Agincourt to God. The fact that the night before the battle he had communed with God in private and begged for victory only if the English cause were right clears King Henry of any suspicion of dissembling piety in public for the sake of practicalities.

Is King Henry a sincere man of God or a ruthless politician? To cast it in analytical terms, is he a Providentialist or a Machiavellian? To be more precise, does Henry meekly resign himself to the absolute will of the Lord and await the "Grace" of God? Or does he "act" according to the circumstances and create his own destiny? Paradoxically, King Henry seems to do both at the same time; i.e. he is a "believer" as much as an "acter." In the king's conscience as well as his world, Providentialism and Machiavellianism seem to have been inextricably intertwined.

Now, the paradox that lies at the heart of *Henry V* is the very problem that for close to a century has afflicted a certain tendency in Shakespeare scholarship. Since the pointedly Historicist trend of Shakespeare Studies started in the mid-twentieth century, there has been a

consistent debate over how Providential (medieval/religious/centripetal) or Machiavellian (modern/secular/centrifugal) Shakespeare's approach is in a set of eight plays he composed – some of them in collaboration with Christopher Marlowe (see Hersher) – concerning the fifteenth-century history of England, called the “histories” by the compilers of Shakespeare's *First Folio* (1623).

On the one hand, there are the prominent literary critics and theorists of the mid-twentieth century like Tillyard, Campbell and Ribner – the Providentialists – who locate Shakespeare's histories within the tradition of the “Tudor Myth.” This tradition regards Shakespeare as a propagandist for the official political doctrine of the Tudor era that is heavily invested in medieval religious and political lore. On the other hand, literary critics and theorists of the late twentieth century like Greenblatt, Sinfield and Rackin – the Machiavellians – mostly to different degrees see Shakespeare's treatment of the histories as a manifestation of the early modern secular approach to politics.

However, the issue on which both the Providentialists and the Machiavellians – these latter with qualifications across schools as I shall more clearly indicate in the literature review section – have a consensus is that what Shakespeare presents in his histories is an unfractured, unified worldview and consequently a totalizing idea of politics: the former see it in terms of a medieval nature and the latter in terms of a modern nature. For the former, Shakespeare represents the unfolding of a religious Tudor Myth; for the latter that of a secular Tudor Myth. Nevertheless, the totalizing drive remains at the heart of both readings of Shakespeare.

My contention, however, is that Shakespeare is a transitional figure who demonstrates dilemmas, ambivalences and even paradoxes on different levels; and that is why any attempt at

pinning him and his histories to any one ideology or clear set of ideas proves suspect to me. As John Brannigan has argued with reference to both Providentialists and Machiavellians:

It would be difficult for many historians to accept that the plays of Shakespeare expressed a world-view which was representative of Elizabethan society's world-view. Indeed even to argue that there was such a phenomenon as a single Elizabethan world-view is problematic, and implies that there is, consciously or unconsciously, a grand design at work in every minute action. (75)

Be that as it may, generations of humanists, impressionists and New Critics who noticed the “ambivalences” and “ambiguities” in the histories rarely surveyed them in the light of the Age of Shakespeare's epistemological crisis that was a consequence of contemporary developments in geographical discoveries, human sciences, natural sciences, technology and theology that all together fundamentally affected politics. Instead, they generally attributed those ambivalences to his “genius” or some such subjective category. But the historical truth behind the ambivalences and ambiguities is that Shakespeare used to live during the transitional times between the two worlds of the Middle Ages and the so-called modern era; i.e. the Renaissance. Indeed Patrick Collinson has argued that

The world into which William Shakespeare was born was fragmented, with, in John Donne's telling phrase, all coherence gone. Shakespeare and countless others of his generation did not know what to believe or, if they did, could not tell when they might be called on to believe contrary things. Like all human systems, the medieval church had been wracked with strife and occasionally plunged into constitutional crisis. Head and members were chronically discordant, and for forty years in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries there had been two and even three heads. (21)

As Mayer says in *Shakespeare's Hybrid Faith: History, Religion and the Stage* (2006), "Shakespeare... was born into a society which was spiritually in crisis, where Catholics, Protestants and others were engaged in a quest for meaning" (6). He continues,

[R]eligion for Shakespeare was not so much a matter of systematic allegiance as one of constant debating and questioning.... The problem is and has been that the terms of this questioning among scholars have often been incomplete, one-sided or partisan, whereas the cultural and religious universe around Shakespeare was fast-moving, ever-changing and largely hybrid. (5)

Indeed, as S. K. Heninger has perceptively put it, a residual "epistemology of faith" coexisted throughout the period with an emergent "epistemology of empiricism," but "neither was privileged over the other" (Rackin 6). Accordingly, throughout the history plays Shakespeare presents two contending and at times contradictory worldviews. As I will later fully demonstrate, in many respects the singular plays are unrelated to one another, especially with regard to plot and characterization. And that is why imposing a rigid worldview on them to make them look coherent will not work. However, that is not to say that the plays cannot be seen as a distinct entity among Shakespeare's works. My argument is that it is through the recurrence of certain Providential and Machiavellian ideas/motifs/themes/epistemes that the eight plays can be linked together, in effect making them a rather unified whole – although still full of tension and conflict.

Perhaps the most consistent motif that the history cycle demonstrates is change itself: the fall of one kind of "order" and the rise of another. What falls is the medieval political authority.

This destroys the feudal system and the old nobility and leads to almost a century of chaos. In the aftermath of the battles of Barnet and Tewkesbury that effectively extinguished Lancastrian resistance and ended the war between the Yorkists and the Lancastrians, Shakespeare, in a symbolic gesture, has the Yorkist King Edward IV count the English nobles who perished during the Wars of the Roses:

Once more we sit in England's royal throne,
Re-purchased with the blood of enemies.
What valiant foemen, like to autumn's corn,
Have we mow'd down, in tops of all their pride!
Three Dukes of Somerset, threefold renown'd
For hardy and undoubted champions;
Two Cliffords, as the father and the son,
And two Northumberlands; two braver men
Ne'er spurr'd their coursers at the trumpet's sound;
With them, the two brave bears, Warwick and Montague,
That in their chains fetter'd the kingly lion
And made the forest tremble when they roar'd.
Thus have we swept suspicion from our seat
And made our footstool of security. (*3 Henry VI* v.7.1-14, 366)¹

Here Edward gives us only a sampling of the feudal lords and old noble houses that were destroyed during the English civil war: three Dukes of Somerset, two Earls of Northumberland, two Lords Clifford, one Earl of Warwick and one Earl of Montague. With these gone, the road

¹ All Shakespeare quotations throughout this dissertation are from Greenblatt, Stephen, et al. *The Norton Shakespeare*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1997. As such, the page number(s) on which the quotes appear in Greenblatt et al. will be mentioned at the end of each citation.

was cleared for the rise of a new order and idea of politics. However, it is perhaps the Lancastrian Young Clifford who gives the most cogent account of the chaos in the course of the plays. During the bloody battle of Towton, a dying Clifford enters the stage, wounded in the neck and regretting his imminent death. He rues the fact that Henry VI is not the absolute monarch his father and grandfather were, so that he could keep the realm in peace and avoid bloodshed. In his own words:

Impairing Henry, strengthening misproud York,
The common people swarm like summer flies;
And whither fly the gnats but to the sun?
And who shines now but Henry's enemies?
O Phoebus, hadst thou never given consent
That Phaethon should cheque thy fiery steeds,
Thy burning car never had scorch'd the earth!
And, Henry, hadst thou sway'd as kings should do,
Or as thy father and his father did,
Giving no ground unto the house of York,
They never then had sprung like summer flies;
I and ten thousand in this luckless realm
Had left no mourning widows for our death;
And thou this day hadst kept thy chair in peace. (*3 Henry VI* ii.6.7-20, 327)

What in particular is at stake here is the authority of the king – and in the larger picture the medieval political theology on which the king's authority rests. Medieval authority has crumbled during the reign of King Henry VI and chaos has ensued. The old institution of

monarchy and the feudal hierarchical order are no longer working properly. The king has lost the “body politic.” Clifford believes it is solely King Henry’s fault by imputing that “Henry, hadst thou sway’d as kings should do, / Or as thy father and his father did,” the English civil war would have never occurred, and “I and ten thousand in this luckless realm / Had left no mourning widows for our death.”

This is also how Queen Margaret appraises the standing of the royal authority in her contemporary England when she tells the Duke of Suffolk in the previous play (*2 Henry VI* i.3) that in her opinion the king is only one nobleman among peers – *primus inter pares* – without any divine aura. This Clifford aptly points out in his allusion to the Classical Greek mythological sun god, Phoebus (Apollo), whose fiery chariot was checked by Phaethon (Richard Plantagenet) and impacted and scorched the earth (England). Therefore, in Shakespeare’s fifteenth-century England, as W.B. Yeats has put it, “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world” (Greenblatt 2036).

Instead of that fundamentally religious medieval order, a precarious religio-secular nationalism emerges that is still much tempered with a receding medieval political theology. It is the very paradoxical order that I tried to bring to light in the anecdote about Henry V at the beginning of this study. And this latter order, i.e. religio-secular nationalism with a tint of medievalism, is still the order of the day in Shakespeare’s time. Indeed, it is my contention that through the history cycle Shakespeare in fact portrays that paradoxical order of his contemporary late sixteenth century rather than that of the fifteenth century when the stories of the plays actually occur. As Rackin says, “[Shakespeare’s] versions of the history of medieval England were inevitably shaped by the concerns of the Renaissance audience for which he wrote, and they tell us more about his world than they do about the world of the Plantagenets” (36).

What I have particularly noticed with regard to this pattern of fall and rise is that in the course of the plays the fall of the old order does not take place once and for all, and neither does the rise of the new order. In fact, they keep receding and proceeding throughout the histories, even at times commingling to the point of indistinction, like the accounts of the chronicles on which they were based. Therefore, in my opinion, a realistic model to survey Shakespeare historically would be the one that takes into account the fact that there is hardly a dominant worldview or ideology in the histories; and that the residual and the emergent orders keep in constant conflict; and it is indeed the convergence of these residual and emergent orders that creates the dominant.

In the larger picture, the epistemological significance of this ongoing alternation in Shakespeare's histories is that it lays bare to us the fact that "progress" is not linear. It is not even incremental, i.e. constantly going forward by degrees. Progress is indeed a "recurring" process that clearly manifests itself in the receding and proceeding philosophical/theological/political epistemes with which the history cycle is studded. In other words, progress keeps happening, but it is more like the movement of tides – ebbs and flows – that eventually look forward but do not happen smoothly or predictably. It is this philosophy of history, this idea of the recurring progress of English political thought in the span of the Plantagenet-Tudor eras that I want to establish in my dissertation through an extensive and multifaceted study of Shakespeare's history plays.

Theoretical Orientation

As theoretical orientation, I have adopted a conflation of classical liberalism with history of ideas, cultural studies, Neo-Marxism, New Historicism and Cultural Materialism to study the progress of institutional political thought in Shakespeare's histories. I believe Raymond

Williams' theory of cultural history best accommodates my intention in that respect. Indeed, there can be distinguished in the plays what Williams, in his *Marxism and Literature* (1977), has called the "dominant," the "residual," and the "emergent." The model Williams offers is well-equipped for studying epistemes and their structuration in Shakespeare's histories, as both the model and the plays are concerned with a world in flux. These epistemes do not necessarily come in a chronological order – the order of writing the plays in the span of a decade, but are scattered throughout the eight history plays.

As a strictly political term, progress is a tenet of liberalism. It has always existed in the history of mankind, but the kind of progress that liberalism espouses is a rather modern phenomenon. The basic assumption of liberalism is that progress is incremental; i.e. it takes place by degrees while always moving forward. My contention is that it is not incremental, but recurring. For instance, there is a resurgence of medievalism in the form of Augustinianism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, most notably in the Protestant revolutions of the sixteenth century and then the mid-seventeenth-century Puritan Revolution. This Augustinian trend would dominate Anglo-American politics and theology for at least up to the mid-eighteenth century – especially in America.

In the course of my study, I will also implicitly challenge postmodernism that posits the arguments – against both liberalism and Marxism – that history does not necessarily move forward, and that historical developments are mostly arbitrary. In contrast, I will argue that humanity eventually moves forward, but at certain junctures – or faultlines – it also temporarily goes backward. That I can clearly see in Shakespeare. For instance, *Henry V*, written last among Shakespeare's histories regarding the fifteenth century, still demonstrates strong medieval epistemological concerns such as Providentialism and chivalry along with obvious traces of early

modern humanism and Machiavellianism. And these are *all* Shakespeare's contemporary concerns. In fact, the history cycle is not just a mere representation of those concerns, but Shakespeare's active intervention in and strong reproduction of them. What the histories constitute is indeed a strong process of signification for the political epistemology of the era. As Kastan says: "Shakespeare does not merely dramatize what he finds on the pages of the chronicle. He structures his history to give it a shape that the historical records deny" (177). Simply put, Shakespeare both reflects and (re)creates the political discourse of his age through the history plays.

Williams' theory provides me with the opportunity to study Shakespeare from at least two (past & present) spatiotemporal perspectives, which in turn will allow for a negotiation with various historical epistemes. The only tactical modification made to this theory has been to place the dominant factor beyond the strict boundary of Medieval and Modern, not necessarily to dehistoricize it but because I believe the dominant in Shakespeare and his age is an uneasy conflation of the residual and the emergent.

From the New Historicists and Cultural Materialists in general I adopted their anecdotal philosophical/anthropological/genealogical/political/literary modes of study aimed at a synchronic reading of texts and history, a technique that originated in Nietzsche and Foucault. The beginning of this very chapter represents an instance of thick description in the form of an anecdote. I have also picked Alan Sinfield's theory of the faultlines but mostly stripped it of its original dissident orientation because I don't need that for the purposes of my study, which is focused on institutional political thought and the issue of political authority across ages. To be more specific, Shakespeare used to write, as Sinfield has put it, on the "faultlines" or turning points in history; i.e. at the historical juncture between the Middle Ages and the modern times

whose tug of war greatly affected contemporary philosophical, political, social, and cultural norms.

According to Smith, “The ‘faultlines’ of Sinfield’s title are the cracks in the social edifice produced by these oppositional forces. Shakespeare’s plays, produced as part of an enterprise that did not enjoy a secure place in early modern culture, are situated by Sinfield along such ideological fissures” (115). As a result, Shakespeare’s history plays do not present a coherently medieval/religious/centripetal or modern/secular/centrifugal worldview, but an inconsistent mix of both: an uneasy coexistence of two worlds. This clearly shows why Sinfield’s theory can be amenably applied to Shakespeare’s histories.

Still, I was not completely satisfied with the result. I felt there was something missing. I had managed to adopt modern and postmodern theories to accommodate my orientation and my aim, but I could see that those theories were mostly focused on early modern, modern and postmodern issues, and not medieval philosophy and politics whose strong traces I had found in Shakespeare. That is one – but not the sole – reason that I started consulting late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century texts that dealt with specific aspects of the Middle Ages with which I was concerned. These mostly fall within the “residual” part of things in my study of Shakespeare.

The first of the theories I found most useful as well as stimulating in that direction was Arthur Lovejoy’s study of the Great Chain of Being in Western Philosophy. This is the groundbreaking work that established the scholarly school of History of Ideas. Lovejoy traces the concepts of “plentitude,” “continuity” and “gradation” that created the chain in the area of Western thought from ancient Greece to the early nineteenth century, and concludes that it was only with the fundamental unraveling of that theological chain during the Romantic period that

the free human subject was born. I might not completely agree with Lovejoy on his conclusion, but I admire the way he traces the provenance of ideas. Ideas are the mothers of institutions, and Lovejoy concentrates on the very ideas that created Western political institutions for more than a millennia. One of these ideas, the chain, as Tillyard has pointedly emphasized, is there in Shakespeare as a medieval residue.

The second interesting theory is Ernst Kantorowicz' "Two Bodies of the King," which in fact constitutes the strictly political aspect of the Great Chain of Being. This is Kantorowicz' monumental study of the late medieval idea/theory of kingship. According to him, during the late Middle Ages, the king in Western Europe acquired a bicameral body, namely, body natural and body politic. The first was the corporeal body of the king – like the one every other person has – which was subject to all human shortcomings, most significantly to decay and death. The other was the corporate body that went beyond the natural body; and it was not subject to decay. That body in fact constituted an institution, that of the monarchy. And as the monarchy headed the nation, it could never die. Therefore, although individual kings die, kingship always lives. This is a significant concept with grave consequences, and it is present in Shakespeare's history plays as well as during the reigns of the Plantagenets, the Tudors and the Stuarts. I have designated it as a residual episteme in Shakespeare's histories. King Richard II is perhaps the most obvious and notorious manifestation of it, to whom Kantorowicz has devoted a full chapter at the beginning of his book.

The third trend I cannot specifically call a theory. It is more a unique mode of reading history that is typically absent from institutional histories. It is Johan Huizinga's sensual/sensory method of reading medieval cultural history. This is a classic study of cultural life in Western Europe during the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance. The book is one of those

fundamental studies that popularized cultural historiography – as contrasted to institutional/political historiography – during the early twentieth century. Huizinga was a student and friend of the great Swiss cultural historian, Jacob Burckhardt. And this book is very much in the vein of Burckhardt. I would have used Burckhardt himself as well if he were more accessible, but he is unwieldy as his reflections mostly come as insights scattered in the course of legions of lectures. Huizinga is more economical and has an accessible structure. His is a history with an aura. To be more precise, Huizinga, through his style of writing, provides thick descriptions of medieval cultural practices and customs. I have adopted Huizinga's approach and sensibility to aura and atmosphere in some of my thick descriptions, most notably in chapters three and five.

The Duke of Marlborough once famously said that he learned the history of England from Shakespeare. Since then, some have agreed with him on the “historical” value of Shakespeare's histories while many have tended to disagree. As the nature of my study shows, I am not going to join the debate over the degree of Shakespeare's facticity with respect to history, for I seek a different goal. However, my interest in the histories arises exactly from the fact that they somehow do and want to represent a certain period of English history, in the process creating a grand narrative of history, philosophy and politics. In telling the tale of the Plantagenets, Shakespeare in fact imposes his vision on his past and his present. As the instance of the Duke of Marlborough shows, that vision was projected into the future for more than a century, and I daresay the projection still continues.

In creating that grand narrative of history, Shakespeare to a great extent is indebted to Edward Hall's *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancastre and Yorke* (1548). This imaginative history of England from the deposition of King Richard II to the accession of King Henry VII roughly covers the same period of time as Shakespeare's histories. As Zeeveld,

Tillyard and a number of others have shown, among the sixteenth-century English chronicles and histories, *Hall's Chronicle* can be singled out as the source that exerts the greatest influence on Shakespeare's histories. It is not only the sequence of events but also the style of delivery and narrative ingenuity in Hall that Shakespeare tends to adopt in his plays. According to Zeeveld, "Shakespeare turned repeatedly to Hall rather than Holinshed in writing the historical plays, and... Hall's influence may be felt notably in Shakespeare's characterization and in a new dramatic expression of the theme by which Hall imposed unity on fifteenth-century history" (319).

The history cycle is indeed an epic with a large and colorful cast of characters. Following Hall, Shakespeare's histories are focused on the ongoing struggle of monarchs, nobles and commoners for power in a rapidly changing world. My argument is that the histories, in roughly depicting the events of the fifteenth-century England, in fact represent and recreate many of the concerns of the sixteenth century, that is, the politico-philosophical concerns of Shakespeare's age. It is this process of representation and signification on which I want to focus in my dissertation. As my reading of the plays is in part influenced by the New Historicist and Cultural Materialist modes of reading, the history plays' correspondence with their past history as well as contribution to their – and our – contemporary history are of great interest to me. In other words, it is the histories' continuous conversation with history across ages that I want to study. As Mayer says: "Indeed, the history play per se is not about closure, it is a fundamentally open form, which echoes the ongoing process of history and its multifaceted unfolding" (11).

History of Shakespeare Historicism

Despite the fact that Shakespeare Criticism has a long and eminent history, attention to the historicity of Shakespeare's texts is a rather new phenomenon. Shakespeare Criticism starts

with Ben Jonson's highly subjective distinction between Shakespeare as the "poet of nature" and himself as the "poet of culture," which has become "the single most repeated and most variously interpreted critical commonplace on Shakespeare in critical history" (Grady 266). Jonson's view that Shakespeare was "a great natural poet with certain faults would descend to Restoration critics [John Dryden the most important of all] and then dominate much of the Age of Reason's critical estimate of Shakespeare" (Grady 267).

The latter phase of Neoclassicism in the second half of the eighteenth century saw the deification of the Bard as an unrivaled genius whose plays were held up as the mirrors of nature. Despite the numerous liabilities that Shakespeare harbored in the eyes of the Neoclassicists, Dr. Johnson, in his meticulously annotated *The Plays of William Shakespeare* (1765), set out to justify the Bard's greatness like no one had ever done before. According to Michael Dobson, "it was through a series of steps over several decades of the eighteenth century that Shakespeare began to be seen as England's greatest poet, and one to be compared with any the world had produced" (Grady 270). Johnson was doubtless the central and most prominent figure in that trend.

The Romantics, notwithstanding all their antipathy towards Neoclassicism, retained the Neoclassicists' fascination with Shakespeare. However, their fascination was of a different nature than their predecessors. While the Neoclassicists – perhaps with the great exception of Dr. Johnson – had tried to measure Shakespeare against and make him conform to the French standards of "decorum" and "unities" – in which effort they usually failed – the Romantics praised him exactly because they thought Shakespeare actually drove a coach and horses through those restrictive standards. It was the "Sturm und Drang" movement and the "zeitgeist" men of letters like Goethe, Schiller, Schlegel, Tieck and Tegel who through their interpretations and

translations of Shakespeare into German promoted that Romantic Shakespeare. In turn, it was Coleridge who articulated those aestheticist German ideas for the English-speaking world and by that defined the dominant popular understanding of Shakespeare up to the present time: “With such views Coleridge helped fix the new understanding of Shakespeare that dominated the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Shakespeare as a supreme artist of the imagination whose massive achievement challenges our comprehension rather than calls forth censure” (Grady 274).

So far we can see no Shakespeare Historicism. The historical interest in Shakespeare largely centered on his quality as a poet and man of letters, whether seen from a Neoclassic or a Romantic perspective. As such, the focus on history plays as specific modes of signification with a decidedly historiographic slant towards their subject matter, i.e. “histories,” is a rather youthful phenomenon in the venerable world of Shakespeare scholarship. With a glance at the historical archives of Shakespeare Criticism since the time immediately after the Bard, it can be perceived that what the compilers of the *First Folio* termed “histories” was received and performed at different times during history not necessarily as specific kinds but as tragedies, comedies and sometimes epics that happen to have been set during a time in the real history of England.

Even as tragedies or tragicomedies not all of them were popular, frequently performed or even appreciated. According to Charles Boyce in his historical survey of the performance of the histories, since their composition in the sixteenth century up to the twentieth century, from among the plays of the first (Yorkist) tetralogy, *1 Henry VI* was totally ignored (217), *2 Henry VI*, after its initial success during the time of Shakespeare, was almost forgotten (239), and *3 Henry VI* was rarely performed (255), whereas *Richard III* was always among the most popular of Shakespeare’s plays (500). As for the second (Lancastrian) tetralogy, *Richard II* was usually

popular (482), *1 Henry IV* was always popular (161), *2 Henry IV* was generally less popular (186), and *Henry V* was popular only intermittently (200).

Serious interest in the historicity of Shakespeare's histories only arose near the end of the nineteenth century. It continued to develop in the first half of the twentieth century and found its most prominent manifestation in mid-century in the works of Tillyard and Campbell, who together founded what can be called Shakespeare Historicism. After them, the major part of the bulk of historicist studies of Shakespeare – especially regarding his history plays – has been a response to their work, either as rejection or affirmation – or a synthesis of both – although not necessarily without qualifications.

As there is no historical survey of Shakespeare Historicism up to our time, or at least I was not able to find one during my research for my dissertation, I decided to write a brief one myself. Based on original research, I have come to believe that so far there have been three major phases in Shakespeare Historicism, which I have duly called Early Historicism, Historicism, and New Historicism. In this section, I am going to introduce each one; describe their approaches, characteristics and concerns; and illustrate them with examples. Approach-wise, my own dissertation, I believe, falls somewhere between Historicism and New Historicism, with of course a strong tinge of Early Historicism in the form of rigorous archival research.

To begin with, Early Historicism that starts in the late Victorian era as a reaction to the predominant Romantic and Victorian bardolatry and character analysis and continues up to the pre-WWII years is generally interested in finding traces of history, historical characters, historical events and ideas as well as literary forms and tropes, mostly in the form of philological and antiquarian studies, in Shakespeare within the framework of English nationalism. It looks like a kind of historical consciousness – time-and-space-bound-ness – is taking shape during

these years in response to the wanted literary impressionism of the previous eras. These are almost all historical studies focused on a single subject with no specific grand narrative, theory or philosophy behind them, probably except for a jubilant – although mostly tacit – nationalism which is self-conscious of England’s position in the world as the heart of the British Empire.

The English Chronicle Play (1902) by Felix E. Schelling is perhaps the most ambitious treatment of the history plays at the beginning of the twentieth century. As Schelling himself puts it, “It is the purpose of this book to relate the story of the English Chronicle Play, to treat of its origin, its flourishing in the age of Queen Elizabeth and of its decline in the two following reigns, and to touch so far as necessary its relation to other forms of contemporary drama and literature” (1). Schelling believes that “The English Chronicle Play began with the tide of patriotism which united all England to repel the threatened invasion of Philip of Spain. It ebbed and lost its national character with the succession of James, an un-English prince, to the throne of Elizabeth” (1-2).

As is obvious, the guiding principle for Schelling in his study is English nationalism which he believes the history plays exude. He says that despite the influence of Seneca, the imitation of Plautus, the borrowings from Machiavelli, and the inspiration of romance, “it is this national fiber which remains in the heart and soul of the Elizabethan stage” (vi). Indeed, “the impulse under which the English Chronicle Play developed was distinctively national” (vi). In his opinion, that is why “The Chronicle Play has been called distinctively English. Its growth was indigenous, its spirit national” (2). As ten plays by Shakespeare concern the lives and deeds of English monarchs and events of their reigns, Schelling places Shakespeare at the heart of this nationalistic enterprise on the stage.

Machiavelli and the Elizabethan Drama (1897) by Edward Meyer is another example. Meyer, who presents his study in two chapters, namely, “Machiavelli in English Literature previous to the Drama,” and “Machiavelli in the Drama,” extensively deals with the emergence of Machiavellianism in English political and belles-lettristic literature, including the public disputes between Gabriel Harvey and the University Wits and the use to which they put Machiavelli. Meyer reveals that what the Elizabethans used for their Machiavelli was not Machiavelli himself:

To my surprise, I found that what the Elizabethans reverted to so often as the maxims of the Florentine statesman, were, in four cases out of five, not to be found in his writings at all; but were perverted from the same in a manner infinitely unjust. The natural conclusion was, that they could not have been taken directly from the works of the great politician. (ix)

Indeed, Meyer finds out that it was *Contre-Machiavel* by Gentillet that the Elizabethans used rather than Machiavelli. Innocent Gentillet (1535-1588), a devout French Huguenot who had been enraged by the ruling Medicis due to their role in the St. Bartholomew Massacre (1572) of Paris, took it upon himself to attack Machiavelli as the manifestation of everything Italian. *Contre-Machiavel* (1576), in which he fulminated against Machiavelli as the font of the impiety and devilry that the Italian Medicis had unleashed on France, was the fruit of that effort. The book was originally written in Latin and soon translated into French.

And that, according to Meyer, is how the Elizabethans, including the young Gabriel Harvey and later the University Wits like Robert Greene, Thomas Nashe and Christopher Marlowe discovered Machiavelli; although Harvey as a language scholar is suspected of having known the original Machiavelli, but for reasons of practice and expediency chosen to hush it up.

Asserting that *Contre-Machiavel* has since been the source of misunderstanding Machiavelli in the English-speaking world, Meyer then goes on to exhaustively count the Machiavellian passages and references in political and literary writings of the Elizabethan Age, including Shakespeare's drama.

Clements Markham's *Richard III: His Life & Character, Reviewed in the light of recent research* (1906) is another example of Early Historicist Shakespeare studies. Written at a time when the then new trend of reinstating Richard III was on the rise, Markham's book constitutes revisionist historiography on a grand scale that is meant to be a retort to the tradition of historiography that, under the influence of or in order to contribute to the Tudor Myth, used to portray Richard III as an evil individual. Markham's reading of the Tudor history and historiography is profoundly skeptical. As such, his account proves to be one of the earliest examples of reading Shakespeare "against the grain" in a completely self-conscious manner. In his own words,

There are periods of history when the greatest caution is called for in accepting statements put forward by a dominant faction. Very early in my life I came to the conclusion that the period which witnessed the change of dynasties from Plantagenet to Tudor was one of these. The caricature of the last Plantagenet King was too grotesque, and too grossly opposed to his character derived from official records. The stories were an outrage on common-sense. I studied the subject at intervals for many years, and in the course of my researches I found that I more or less shared my doubts with every author of repute who had studied the subject for the last three centuries, except Hume and Lingard. My own conclusions are that Richard III must be acquitted on all the counts of the indictment. (i)

As such, Markham meticulously studies the sources such as Bernard André, Polydore Vergil, and Edward Hall who cast Richard in an evil light to find the “truth.” After investigating the “materialist” intentions of all the authorities on Richard, Markham locates the original source of the account in Cardinal John Morton (Bishop of Ely in *Richard III*) who had defected from Richard to Richmond, and in whose household Thomas More used to be a page. He believes that More’s notorious account of Richard is in fact that of Morton’s. In general, this is an informative survey of Richard III’s historiography although Markham himself cannot always be trusted for impartiality. One very important issue that this study reveals retrospectively and across ages is that there had indeed existed some sort of “Tudor Myth” in English historiography after all.

As the last instance of Early Historicist Shakespeare studies, I would like to introduce Gordon Zeeveld’s classic philological survey, “The Influence of Hall on Shakespeare’s English Historical Plays” (1936). This is a comparative study of Shakespeare’s history plays and Edward Hall’s *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancastre and Yorke* (1548), commonly known as *Hall’s Chronicle*. First laying a background of how Hall came to compose his history, Zeeveld then traces phrases, lines, passages, and even moods in Shakespeare to their original in Hall. This study clearly demonstrates the extent of Hall’s influence on Shakespeare, which in turn shows that Tillyard was right in his insistence that, contrary to the common scholarly belief up to the early twentieth century, it was not Holinshed who exerted the greatest influence on Shakespeare’s histories but Hall. Holinshed actually lifted passages from Hall and generally simplified them and in the process stripped them of their original significance, whose trace can still be seen in Shakespeare.

However, it is perhaps not Zeeveld’s meticulously philological methodology but his nonchalant philosophical conclusion that gives an important clue to the generation of

Shakespeare historicists to come, thereby setting the new trend of Shakespeare Historicism. As he concludes, “To Hall, the history of the fifteenth century was an object lesson of the disaster which overwhelms a nation torn by domestic dissension. *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families*, as its title indicates, traces the consequences of a single act, the usurpation of Henry Bolingbroke, through a century of civil strife to its settlement in the marriage of Henry VII to Elizabeth” (318).

World War II seems to have caused a sea change in the historicist attitude to Shakespeare. It was as if the early-twentieth-century complacently nationalistic historical studies could no longer account for the mood of a world at war and the subsequent sense of disintegration of civilization as well as the loss of the empire. Thus, during and immediately after the war, studies emerged that read the history plays like an articulated “philosophy of history” imbued with a strongly nostalgic longing for a lost “order.” These were historical studies that self-consciously imposed a grand design on Shakespeare’s histories wholesale. They would read history through the lens of a robust and rigorous theory of history. Although still demonstrating traces of English nationalism, these studies were different in character from the turn-of-the-century blood-and-guts nationalistic studies in that they were highly philosophical – usually with a dark and pessimistic undertone – and were couched in a new compelling critical vocabulary. This is what I have called Historicism, which would in time fundamentally transform the significance of Shakespeare’s history plays.

The Cambridge don E.M.W. Tillyard is the founder of that tradition. In *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1942), Tillyard, who wrote this book as a guide to “historical context” for his subsequent *Shakespeare’s History Plays* (1944), sets out to draw a comprehensive religio-philosophical picture of the Age of Elizabeth – which mostly corresponds with the Age of

Shakespeare – to show that Shakespeare composed his history plays completely under the influence of that “world picture.” In Tillyard’s view, Shakespeare fully reproduces the Tudor Myth that he found in Hall; and he reflects the world picture that the Elizabethan institution upholds:

People still think of the Age of Elizabeth as a secular period between two outbursts of Protestantism: a period in which religious enthusiasm was sufficiently dormant to allow the new humanism to shape our literature... This has been taken as one of the great English versions of Renaissance humanism, an assertion of the dignity of man against the asceticisms of medieval misanthropy. Actually it is in the purest medieval tradition. (1960, 3)

Having bashed the classic liberal humanist view of Shakespeare, Tillyard, through a comprehensive historio-philosophical analysis, then presents a mostly monolithic view of the Age of Shakespeare: “Coming to the world picture, one can say dogmatically that it was solidly theocratic, and it was a simplified version of a much more complicated medieval picture” (1960, 4). In the end, Tillyard concludes that the Age of Shakespeare, the early modern period, was not very different from the Middle Ages: “Indeed all I am trying to establish is that the Elizabethan age is of a piece with what went before and after it, that it is *not* remarkable for its departure from the norm” (1960, 20).

What Tillyard, based on the assumptions he made in *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1942), later propounded in his *Shakespeare’s History Plays* (1944), Robin Headlam Wells has succinctly described as such:

With Tillyard the picture of Elizabethan politics changes dramatically. Instead of controversy and debate we find ‘orthodox doctrines of rebellion and of the monarchy...

shared by every section of the community.’ This ‘orthodox’ Elizabethan belief in the sinfulness of rebellion is, Tillyard explains, one aspect of a providentialist interpretation of English history which saw the Wars of the Roses as God’s punishment for the crime committed by Henry Bolingbroke in deposing a reigning monarch. The ancestral curse this act had incurred was thought to have been finally expiated only when Henry Tudor defeated the tyrannical Richard III and united the two royal houses through his marriage to Elizabeth of York. Such is the theory of English history which Tillyard claims Shakespeare found in his chronicle sources. (395)

Next comes Lily B. Campbell, who believes “Poets today have another philosophy, and their plots reveal their uncertainties. But Shakespeare’s plots were clear and sure because he had a definite, fundamental conception of universal law” (7). Although it is usually Tillyard who is credited for investing Shakespeare’s histories firmly in the English history of the Age of Elizabeth, it is indeed Campbell who does that in her *Shakespeare’s Histories: Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy* (1947). While Tillyard is mostly concerned with the religio-philosophical context of the plays, Campbell, laying out pretty much the same intellectual ground, goes further by studying the histories as “mirrors of Elizabethan policy,” i.e. reflections of specific political events and phenomena during Elizabeth’s reign. In her own words,

Perhaps it will help explain my point of view in regard to Shakespeare’s plays if I venture to state my own credo. I do not believe that a poet exists in a vacuum, or even that he exists solely in the minds and hearts of his interpreters. I do not believe that he can write great poetry without conviction and without passion. I do not believe that his reflection of his period is casual and fragmentary and accidental. Rather, it seems to me the poet must be reckoned a man among men, a man who can be understood only against the

background of his own time. His ideas and his experiences are conditioned by the time and the place in which he lives. (6)

Based on that notably historicizing assumption – which is indeed a great deal for her time, Campbell reads *Richard II* as a reflection on the question of deposition (of Elizabeth); two *Henry IV* plays as reflections on rebellion, especially the Northern Rebellion of 1569; *Henry V* as a reflection on Tudor theories of war; and *Richard III* as the manifestation of the “Machiavellian” practice during the reign of Elizabeth. In the meantime, Campbell also conducts a great deal of archeological study by investigating contemporary texts of Shakespeare’s era in different areas as well as introducing late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century studies of Shakespeare’s histories.

Writing more than a decade after Tillyard and Campbell, Irving Ribner, in *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare* (1957), while concurring with Tillyard and Campbell that the history play cannot be considered outside the scope of Elizabethan historiography, posits that “we must have a more adequate conception of Elizabethan historical purpose and method than either has offered” (13). Drawing attention to the fact that “our concept of the history play is necessarily a twentieth-century construct which we impose upon a relatively homogeneous body of drama which the Elizabethans themselves made no attempt to define” (14), Ribner attempts to conduct his study of the history plays in accordance with the guiding principle of the “general purposes of history during the sixteenth century,” which he believes stems from two major springheads:

We thus can isolate two distinct trends which exerted influence upon Elizabethan historiography: a humanist trend essentially classical in origin, and a medieval trend based upon the premises of Christian belief. We cannot suppose, however, that in the

minds of Elizabethans there was any clear distinction between these two lines of influence.... Both historical traditions found expression in the drama, and in the greatest history plays of the era we find an easy mingling of the two. In *Richard II*, *King John*, and the *Henry IV* plays, Shakespeare uses history both to glorify England and to support temporal political doctrine, and at the same time he uses it to assert divine providence in the universe and to illustrate a rational plan in human events. The English Renaissance, in most intellectual areas, shows an easy merging of the medieval and humanist. (24)

Based on this dual classification, Ribner enumerates (26) the “purposes” to which he believes the Elizabethans put history to use as such: 1) a nationalistic glorification of England; 2) an analysis of contemporary affairs; 3) a use of past events as a guide to political behavior in the present; 4) a use of history as documentation for political theory; 5) a study of past political disaster as an aid to Stoical fortitude in the present; 6) illustration of the providence of God as the ruling force in human and primarily political affairs; and 7) exposition of a rational plan in human events which must affirm the wisdom and justice of God. Equipped with this clear set of ideas, Ribner states that “In the following chapters the English history play will be traced from its emergence out of the medieval religious drama through its degeneration into romance in the seventeenth century and its consequent final extinction as a vital force in the English theater” (31).

Since then, the brand of Shakespeare historicism whose most famous representatives were Tillyard and Campbell came under heavy fire, with later generations accusing them of having made some gross generalizations about Shakespeare and his age. Already in the early 1950s A. P. Rossiter, in his Cambridge lectures which were later collected in the now classic *Angel with Horns* (1961), was arguing that Shakespeare’s histories are replete with

“ambivalences” that render them open-ended and unresolved. According to him, “Taken all together, the Histories are a dark glass, where we gaze *per speculum in enigmatē*” (43). In an article pointedly called “Ambivalence: The Dialectic of the Histories” Rossiter sets out to debunk what he regards as the dogmatic claims of Tillyard and Campbell and their ilk by boldly picking on the Tudor Myth:

Because the Tudor myth system of Order, Degree, etc. was too rigid, too black-and-white, too doctrinaire and narrowly moral for Shakespeare’s mind: it falsified his fuller experience of men. Consequently, while employing it as FRAME, he had to undermine it, to qualify it with equivocations: to vex its applications with sly or subtle ambiguities: to cast doubts on its ultimate human validity, even in situations where its principles seemed most completely applicable. His intuition told him that it was *morally* inadequate.” (59)

Therefore, Shakespeare’s intuitive way of thinking about History... is *dialectical*. The old eristic-argumentative system which he used is static; but *his* thought is dynamic, alterative, not tied to its age. It has that extra degree-of-freedom which is given only by what I called a constant ‘Doubleness’: a thoroughly English empiricism which recognizes the coextancy and juxtaposition of opposites, without submitting to urges (philosophical, moral, etc.) to obliterate or annihilate the one in the theoretic interests of the other. (62)

Rossiter was a second generation New Critic who revolted against the sort of historicism that had been in the ascendancy in Shakespeare scholarship since the early twentieth century. His lectures are famous for their imaginativeness as well as perceptive close readings of classic texts. Rossiter’s approach is important as a prominent example of an aestheticist, generally non-historicist, approach to Shakespeare that has continued to our era through metadramatists and all those interested in reading Shakespeare out of time and space.

However, the most substantial challenge to Tillyard came with the emergence of militantly political postmodern theories such as Feminism, New-Marxism, New Historicism, Cultural Materialism and Postcolonial Studies. As R. S. White remembers:

Attempting to explain the changes, Hugh Grady wrote in 1991 of Shakespeare criticism, ‘Around 1970... doubtless under the impact of the Vietnam era and the student insurgency which marked the late Sixties and early Seventies in both American and British universities a fundamental change begins to occur: a paradigm crisis, usually the preliminary stage of a paradigm shift, can be observed to begin.’ (279)

Approaching Shakespeare from a mostly anti-Anglocentrist, anti-nationalist, materialist and fragmentary perspective, postmodern theorists and critics typically tend to read Shakespeare “against the grain;” i.e. they fundamentally challenge the received ideas about Shakespeare from his own time to theirs. For instance, they typically reject – if not actively discourage – aestheticist or moralistic readings of Shakespeare. As such, their approach can be said to be anti-Classicist as well as anti-Romanticist. Instead, their mode of reading is strongly influenced by radical Continental philosophy and theory, especially by Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Althusser, Foucault, Derrida and Lacan. This trend in general I have called New Historicism. It is historicism with a strongly self-conscious theoretical inclination as well as an explicit political agenda.

Stephen Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self-Fashioning, from More to Shakespeare* (1980) is the most typical example of this trend. In this founding text of New Historicism, Greenblatt argues that the Renaissance man was a protean – almost Machiavellian – kind of creature that felt compelled to “fashion” himself to keep up with the times; however, in the process Greenblatt finds out that it was indeed the sociopolitical norms of the day that fashioned the Renaissance

man, and not himself. In other words, the Renaissance man, contrary to the humanist belief, was totally constrained by the ideological discourse of his age, which was the discourse of power.

And Shakespeare was no different. In Greenblatt's own words,

[A]s my work progressed, I perceived that fashioning oneself and being fashioned by cultural institutions – family, religion, state – were inseparably intertwined. In all my texts and documents, there were, so far as I could tell, no moments of pure, unfettered subjectivity; indeed, the human subject itself began to seem remarkably unfree, the ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society. (256)

Another example is Greenblatt's "Invisible bullets: Renaissance authority and its subversion" (1988), a frequently anthologized essay in which he most explicitly puts forward – in Alan Sinfield's words – his "entrapment model" of ideology. According to Greenblatt, the Elizabethan political apparatus, in the manner of an Althusserian "Ideological State Apparatus," used to consciously create subversion in order to contain it. After investigating a number of Shakespeare's history plays for that process – and finding them to actually conform to that restrictive pattern, Greenblatt seems to extend that notion by implication to politics anytime and anywhere. In that, he commits the same fallacy of which most Shakespearean scholars have accused Tillyard, which is the fallacy of overgeneralization and totalization.

Specifically speaking, Greenblatt argues that there is no escape from the dominant political discourse of the period; that every move a subject/dissident makes within the discursive framework actually empowers and perpetuates rather than destabilizing that framework. As Brannigan says, "Greenblatt's thesis concerning power rests upon his ability to see in every anecdote or situation a microcosmic image of the same formula and his willingness to abolish all

specificity and difference” (65-66). It is mostly in reaction to Greenblatt that Sinfield and Dollimore later present their more open model of ideology in the form of “dissident reading.”

However, Greenblatt is important for my dissertation both as a representative of a significant historicist trend in Shakespeare Studies and as a source of profound – if at times controversial – ideas and methodologies through which to approach Shakespeare. In this dissertation I am going to argue against Greenblatt’s totalizing view of power in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* to show that there can indeed be found a great deal of “subjective freedom” in Shakespeare’s histories; and that reading Shakespeare can still constitute a “liberating” experience.

Dollimore and Sinfield’s early attempts at presenting a Cultural Materialist reading of Shakespeare had their fruition in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism* (1985), a collection of essays by various authors including themselves. But although their approach in this collection is obviously Cultural Materialist, they have not been able to completely distance themselves from the New Historicists – especially Greenblatt – with whom they seem to have a love/hate relationship. For in the end it is not necessarily the methodology but the mindset that separates Cultural Materialists from New Historicists. The mature Cultural Materialist is more optimistic than the typical New Historicist, for he/she believes that change is possible, that “dissidence” exists and that it can exert influence and in certain circumstances bring about change.

It is with Sinfield’s *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (1992) that the breakthrough occurs. This book is where Sinfield posits his fundamental concept, considerably based on the work of Raymond Williams, of the “faultlines” in the early modern period. Having refined his Cultural Materialist reading of Shakespearean texts, Sinfield,

obviously in response to the New Historicist – and thus passivist – “entrapment model” of ideology, argues that dissidence is indeed possible because no ideological structure is whole, and therefore can’t be totalizing. It is by employing/exploiting those fissures and fractures in the dominant ideological system that dissidents throughout history have been able to express and enact their divergence. And Sinfield attempts to discover that process in *Faultlines*.

Sinfield is not necessarily non-partisan when it comes to the significance, form and extent of dissidence. He sometimes reads too much into texts and events to magnify their dissenting status. An obvious example is his reading of *Henry V* as a predominantly anti-establishment play (see “History and Ideology, Masculinity and Miscegenation: The Instance of *Henry V*,” 109-142). Another instance is his regarding of Sir Philip Sidney as a dissident in the Elizabethan court (see “Protestantism: Questions of Subjectivity and Control,” 143-180). *Henry V*, as I showed in the introduction and will show again in the course of this dissertation, is mostly an establishment play. We can certainly read anti-establishment themes into it, but what it shows on the face of it – and how generations of playgoers and politicians have seen it – is predominantly pro-establishment. Phillip Sidney was not a real dissident either. In fact he belonged to the faction of hardcore Protestants in the court of Queen Elizabeth who constantly pushed for more reform. They were a powerful faction that finally set the tone for the politics of 17th-century England by negotiating the English succession with James I. Sidney himself died in battle on the Continent while promoting that Protestant trend. However, the fact that Sinfield has produced a highly dynamic model that can be modified and used for different kinds of reading is to a great extent liberating, especially in comparison to Greenblatt’s closed model of politics.

Last but not least, in *Stages of History: Shakespeare’s English Chronicles* (1990), Phyllis Rackin, a feminist literary theorist and critic and a former President of the Shakespeare

Association of America, raises several fundamental questions with regard to the concept of history in the early modern period and then examines the effects of those questions in the work of Shakespeare. She has posited the most important issue for my study in Chapter Two of her book, where she says, “Chapter 2 discovers in the Renaissance transition from providential to Machiavellian accounts of historical causation an anticipation of the twentieth-century movement from providential to Machiavellian interpretations of Shakespeare’s history plays” (x).

This is one of the critical orthodoxies of the late twentieth century that has faced considerable challenge since the beginning of the new millennium. As a famous example, David Womersley, in his “Against the Teleology of Technique” (2006), has cogently argued and demonstrated that the smooth movement from Providentialism to Machiavellianism in English historiography during the early modern period is a myth that the “revisionist” historians of the mid-twentieth century such as F.J. Levy and F. Smith Fussner created through a highly selective reading – and at times misreading – of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century historical texts. To this subject I will return in more detail in the section on English historiography in Chapter Two.

As such, reading Shakespeare too much in the light of the Machiavellian momentum of the late twentieth century has run the risk of misrepresenting Shakespeare – and thus confounding his historical significance as a liminally multi-faceted phenomenon/character – by stripping him of a fundamentally providential propensity in his history plays. As John-Christopher Mayer has argued in *Shakespeare’s Hybrid Faith: History, Religion and the Stage* (2006),

It is a rarely mentioned fact that the plays that contain the most allusions to religion in the whole of the Shakespeare corpus are the dramatist’s English history plays.... Strangely

enough, no extended study has been devoted to religion in the histories.... This might be explained by the fact that religion in the histories is often considered to be a byword for politics. Indeed, much of the scholarship produced in the 1980s and early 1990s was influenced by secularist perspectives, partly produced by the New Historicist and Cultural Materialist movements, characterized by their will to throw light on the workings of power and by their broadening of the field of politics to adjacent fields, such as that of religion – a trend which has often resulted in the blurring or oversimplification of confessional issues. (9)

Before I bring this historical survey to an end, I would like to reemphasize the fact – as I first mentioned at the start of this study – that although the Historicists and New Historicists are very different in their concerns and methodologies, they are united in one significant thing, and that is their belief in an airtight, totalizing view of history and ideology. In that respect I believe John Brannigan has drawn the most accurate comparison between the most prominent members of the two houses of the Providentialists and the Machiavellians, namely Tillyard and Greenblatt:

Tillyard shares the new historicist idea that a single complex process operates in early modern culture. For Tillyard the idea is a highly detailed and structured hierarchy in which the Elizabethan political and social order is justified as part of a larger cosmic order. For Greenblatt the idea is a process of self-fashioning, by which the subjectivity of each individual is constructed within a heightened awareness of the position of the self within structures of power. Both understand these processes as constitutive of society and culture, both understand that, in Greenblatt's words, 'literary and social identities were formed in this culture.'.... Tillyard also notes the relevance of treating the Elizabethan order seriously for the events taking place in central Europe in 1943, just as new

historicists often note the relevance of the early modern period for recent issues of colonialism, gender, sexuality and Marxism. (59)

To complement Brannigan's assessment, Rackin argues in the early 1990s, History is always constructed in retrospect. Thus, the criticism of the 1940s and 1950s found in the medieval world, and in Shakespeare's representations of it, a story of national union and English patriotism that answered to their own desires and needs, just as the radical criticism of the present finds a story of conflict and subversion. In both cases, present desire is projected in the form of a historical plot: alternative political agendas construct alternative plots. (59)

In the end, as Robin Headlam Wells said in 1985, "The debate which Tillyard began in 1944 is not yet over; insofar as it is partly about the way we read literature it probably never will be" (403). In a sense, the history of Shakespeare Historicism can be perceived as a history of the debate between the sacred and the profane. Tillyard and Campbell, if we remember, rebelled against the liberal humanists because they tended to read Shakespeare in a secular light. In turn, the generation of Greenblatt revolted against Tillyard and Campbell because they tended to read Shakespeare in a religious light. More recent studies demonstrate a more reserved return to religious themes, to explore them more deeply if not necessarily to endorse them. In the course of this history, sometimes the sacred has dominated the field and some other time the profane. The Almighty and the Machiavel seem to have been locked in an eternal fight for the soul of history. As such, the history of Shakespeare Historicism can be said to have its roots in Shakespeare himself. Given this historical background, in my dissertation I am going to pick up that debate between the Machiavellians and the Providentialists where it has been stuck since the 1980s.

The Conflicted Unity of the History Cycle

The history cycle is not a unified body of writing with a straightforward plotline or a single thematic. To make things more complicated, Shakespeare composed the two tetralogies in a reverse order from the actual historical chronology – that’s why King Richard III (1452-1485) comes before King Richard II (1367-1400). With regard to time frame, action and dramatic structure these plays prove to be very different. The three *Henry VI* plays cover a staggering span of 53 years from the death of Henry V (1422) to the accession of Henry VII (1485). *Richard III* occurs in almost three years (1482-1485); *Richard II* two years (1398-1400); *1 Henry IV* two years (1402-1403); *2 Henry IV* eight years (1405-1413); and *Henry V* five years (1415-1420).

The three *Henry VI* plays have a loose dramatic structure, as they depict a lot of events over a long period of time. That is why Shakespeare, who most of the time needs to push the plot forward by showing the events, has less time to wax poetic or philosophical. Characters hardly develop, and as such rarely raise our empathy. Occasionally they attract our sympathy, most significantly in the case of Humphrey of Gloucester. Episodic in nature and with little emphasis on the sophisticated in-built “cause-and-effect” approach that is a major methodological component of the second tetralogy as well as *Richard III*, these plays should be more accurately called “chronicle” than “history.” None of them builds up to a climax: they do not necessarily end in climactic battles or any kind of straightforward conclusion.

On the other hand, the other plays – with the exception of *2 Henry IV* – have rather tight structures and are unified around a central dramatic action. *Richard III* depicts the rise and fall of an evil tyrant; *Richard II* depicts the fall of a contrite tyrant and the rise of a penitent politician; the two *Henry IV* plays depict the coming of age of Prince Hal through war and rebellion and his disagreements with his father; and *Henry V* depicts the unfolding of the divine providence for

King Henry and England. Structurally, *2 Henry IV* is something of an anomaly. It constitutes a loose continuation of the first play, to which it adds themes and epistemes but not necessarily plot/story. Prince Hal even becomes a major character late in the play (Act IV). As such, *2 Henry IV* did not have to be there, and the maturing theme of *1 Henry IV* would have still been complete.

As is obvious, some of these plays can be regarded as stand-alone pieces, because they focus on one clear storyline in a short span of time, and the development of characters and events all contribute to that single storyline. This in turn can make them conform to the more familiar classical and medieval forms/genres, which is actually how they were generally perceived, received and performed historically, i.e. up to the late nineteenth century. These are *Richard III* (morality play/Senecan tragedy/“mirror for magistrates” spin-off); *Richard II* (tragedy); *1 Henry IV* (epic/comedy), and *Henry V* (epic). Each one of these plays, with all their formal and structural differences, constitutes a self-justifying unit that can be read or performed independently of the others and still make complete sense. Of these, *1 Henry IV*, with its perfectly balanced structure, meticulously Aristotelian plot development, extremely well-motivated complex characters – on both the protagonist and antagonist sides – vivid and intimate representation of the high and the low affairs of life, and profoundly human subject matter, proves to be the archetypal “history play.”

On the other hand, none of the Henry VI plays would prove a satisfactory read if not read as part of a larger whole; and even then they would still be lacking a sense of closure if it weren't for *Richard III*. As it happens, the first tetralogy that was written under the direct influence of – and, as has been recently revealed, in collaboration with – Christopher Marlowe in general shows more obvious signs of crude Machiavellianism – in the derogatory sense – than the thematically

diverse and morally complex second tetralogy. As a consequence, the characters in these plays are hardly “characters.” Rather, like those of Marlowe’s, they are predominantly allegorical “types,” with one foot in morality play and the other in revenge tragedy, but whom Shakespeare happens to curiously cast in the framework of English history. The most famous/notorious is of course Richard III himself, who is an amalgam of Vice and Tamburlaine. Despite the penultimate pangs of conscience that Shakespeare kindly bestows on him, Richard, like his Senecan and Marlovian predecessors – and unlike the tragic figures of *The Mirror for Magistrates*, goes down unrepentant in the end: “A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse!” As Harold Bloom points out in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1997) with reference to Richard III as Shakespeare’s last Marlovian character:

Change, the only law observed by his protagonists, was also the law of Shakespeare’s inwardness.... There is very little change in Marlowe: all his vaunters are one vaunter, his victims one victim, his Machiavels one Nick. Tamburlaine, Barabas, the Guise, even Faustus share the same rhetoric, and are dizzy with the same desires. Shakespeare, swerving from Marlowe, created distincts. (xlvi)

Nevertheless, apart from both the Providentialists and the Machiavellians who see an overarching guiding principle in the histories, a handful of independent, non-partisan scholars have noted that the eight plays can indeed be interpreted as a unified body. They have various conceptions of the significance of the plays, and the way they read and structure the tetralogies are also different. However, they all agree that the mostly justified reaction to the “totalizing craze” should not close the door on more reasonably holistic interpretations of the plays that are properly backed by evidence from the texts. Here I intend to study the views of those scholars and then present mine.

To begin with, Robert Adger Law, an anti-Tillyardian who was Tillyard's contemporary, presents a painstakingly hairsplitting and carefully balanced textual and structural assessment in "Links between Shakespeare's History Plays" (1950). He protests that such a forthright explanation of the coherence existing in the eight plays as Tillyard and Campbell advocate seems inadequate to account for all the problems involved, "textual, structural, and use of source material" (168). He believes that "each one of Shakespeare's plays... has a separate entity adapted to its own audience. Yet the eight 'histories' are coupled together by linking devices not always observed by commentators" (168). Then he embarks upon his painstaking analysis of the plays to find those linking devices. The gist of Adger Law's analysis is that

As [Shakespeare] passes from each one of the eight reigns to the next in succession, he takes pains to construct in the final scene an approach to the first scene of the ensuing play, or else echoes at the beginning of the second play a speech at or close to the end of the first. Sometimes he uses the same speaker, sometimes similar phrasing, but always the same dominant topic that he has used earlier. In most cases the echo involves a situation or incident not found in Holinshed or other chronicles but invented by Shakespeare, a dramatic fiction. (186)

The existence of these links, in his opinion, "testifies to a consistent purpose of the author" (186). And yet he refuses to endorse Tillyard and Campbell:

Since these plays are so linked together, and since they so frequently, as both Tillyard and Miss Campbell have proved, reflect contemporary political ideas, do they together form an epic poem, of which England herself is the heroine? I think not. The histories are too unlike in form and structure... to be regarded as united cantos of one great epic. Rather, they are carefully coupled together like separate coaches of a railway train.... The

two tetralogies, I believe, were not so conceived from the beginning, but are eight individual dramas.... But the tetralogies together form a distinct unit among Shakespeare's works. (187)

In the end, it seems that Adger Law cannot quite make up his mind as to whether the histories are separate plays or a unified body. However, his defining the plays as "separate coaches of a railway train" is edifying. This means although the majority of the individual plays visibly maintain a high degree of internal autonomy – as I tried to point out above, there are deeper and perhaps subtler commonalities between them that can only be perceived and understood through a foreknowledge of the histories' immense "context" and vast background; and it is those deeper and less visible traits that link the plays to one another, effectively creating a distinct entity out of them.

The next instance advocates for a more imaginative and thematically rich account of the histories' unity. In "Structural Pattern in Shakespeare's Histories" (2009), a more amenable Sherman Hawkins addresses Tillyard's "vision" and "bold conception," believing that there is "no contradiction between seeing the histories as individual and different, yet also as parts of a larger whole" (67). He argues that the two tetralogies constitute two distinct units that are thematically opposed to each other. As he says, "instead of a single series of eight plays stretching chronologically from *Richard II* to *Richard III*, we have two blocks of four plays, each dealing with a continuous but disjunct historic period and culminating in the contrasted portraits of Richard III and Henry V" (68).

As such, he structurally divides the eight plays in two distinct tetralogies and then contrasts the tetralogies with regard to characters and the action of the plays. The unity he sees in the tetralogies is antithetical; i.e. not by "sequence" but by "opposition" (74). In his own words,

[T]he two tetralogies, like Richard and Henry, move in contrary directions. In the first tetralogy Edward Berry traces a thematic pattern so systematic and coherent that it must be deliberate: play by play, the tetralogy shows the progressive disintegration of political community. Just as deliberately and systematically, the second tetralogy shows its restoration. The earlier series moves downward from loss of empire abroad through civil war at home to absolute tyranny. Reversing this downward trend, the second series moves from despotism through civil war to conquest of empire abroad. (71)

What Hawkins sees in the two tetralogies is a general pattern not of “evolution and decline,” but of “loss and restoration” (74). The movement is from defeatism to triumphalism. However, the development of this pattern moves in reverse to the historical reality. As the first tetralogy comes second in time and the second first, the compositional and conceptual orders subvert the chronological order. To put it in Aristotelian terms, the “crisis” that should have chronologically come first comes last; and the “denouement” that should have chronologically come last comes first. Thus, in adopting the reverse order of composition for the development of his historical material, Shakespeare confounds chronology and by that history. The “and they lived happily ever after” that should have solely gone to Henry VII goes much more substantially to Henry V.

The interesting point about Hawkins’ conceptualization of the plays is that he tacitly – that is, without the typical alarums and excursions of the mid-twentieth-century Providentialists – brings Providentialism back to the interpretation of the histories:

And if any myth informs this pattern, it is – as more than one critic has perceived – the mythos of Christian history, of paradise lost and regained, paralleled in the fall and reformation of the individual soul. Plato’s philosophic rulers need only to be educated,

but in order to redeem his time and become the pattern of all Christian kings, Prince Hal has to undergo conversion, a symbolic death and rebirth. (74)

Almost on the same “antithetical” wavelength but from a more Machiavellian perspective, David Kastan, in “Shakespeare and English history” (2001), argues for an existential reading of the plays through the persistence of human “will” and “desire” that unite the two tetralogies in contrast:

In the so-called first tetralogy, history is always at risk of being undone by present desire, as the glorious achievements of Henry V are quickly forgotten. The later histories, however, reverse the focus but not the motive: history there is self-consciously achieved by present desire, as the second tetralogy drives towards Henry’s acceptance of his heroic destiny. Henry IV’s ‘unthrifty son’ manipulates his own history throughout the second tetralogy to emerge as England’s hero-king. (180)

In the end, it is perhaps Rackin who has so far made the subtlest interpretation of the progress of the plays and how they can be seen as a unity. I have already classified Rackin as a member of the Machiavellian school – which she proves to be in a considerable number of ways. However, she is sophisticated and flexible enough to be able to regard the histories as a dynamic set of texts that are capable of epistemologically and ideologically developing and by that accruing peculiar layers of significance:

The progress Shakespeare traces in his history plays is not simply the progress of historical events but the progress of historiography. The order of the plays’ composition follows the progress of Renaissance historiography, as history becomes increasingly problematic and truth more and more difficult to determine. (29)

In view of these interpretations, despite the justified criticism of the totalizing views of the Providentialists and the Machiavellians, the histories can still be regarded as a distinct body of writing. As I stated at the beginning of this study, I believe that it is through the existence of certain Providential and Machiavellian ideas/motifs/epistemes that the histories can be linked together. The scholars whose views I have expressed also believe in the existence of similar sets of ideas. However, they see these ideas as evenly and contrastively distributed between the two tetralogies – whether they are read in the chronological or the compositional order. This in turn renders the “progress” of whatever position for which they are advocating “linear.”

My contention is that this progress is not linear but “recurring.” As a matter of fact, it is ironic that the play most associated with Machiavellianism also demonstrates the most intense Providentialism. That is *Richard III*. Also, it is ironic that the last play in the order of composition which must naturally represent the most recently emergent ideology most strongly advocates for the most residual one. That is *Henry V*. As Kastan has astutely observed,

No single model of history emerges from the plays. They do not uniformly enact God’s providential design, nor do they inevitably assert the truth of a machiavellian *Realpolitik*; the pious Henry VI is destroyed by a machiavellian monster, but that monster is in turn undone by the actions of providence. The plays experiment with different formal strategies as they seek a form for history: homiletic tragedy, saturnalian comedy, the prodigal son play, epic history, and these often in improbable mixtures that bring incompatible visions of history into contact and conflict. (175)

Based on these premises, in the following pages I am going to conduct a study of Shakespeare’s history plays on the faultlines between the Middle Ages and the modern times; where I have distinguished three major dominant, residual, and emergent epistemes. I have

designated Medievalism as the residual, Modernism as the emergent, and Absolutism as the dominant epistemes in Shakespeare's history plays. After making a necessary survey of the history of the concept of political authority in Western Christianity from the early Middle Ages to the late Renaissance as well as a survey of English Renaissance Historiography in Chapter Two, I will start to investigate those overarching epistemes – that are usually subdivided into subordinate epistemes – in the coming chapters.

CHAPTER 2

POLITICAL AUTHORITY AND ENGLISH HISTORIOGRAPHY

Part One: Political Authority in Western Christianity

Introduction

Half way through *Richard II*, when realizing that the exiled Bolingbroke has landed in Ravenspurgh in rebellion against him, King Richard returns from Ireland at the head of his army to put down his cousin's rebellion. Upon landing in Wales, Richard is spurred by his loyalists, the Bishop of Carlisle and the Duke of Aumerle, to make haste lest Bolingbroke succeed in advancing his cause. However, confident that the Almighty and His angels are on his side, King Richard boasts that

Not all the water in the rough rude sea
Can wash the balm off from an anointed king;
The breath of worldly men cannot depose
The deputy elected by the Lord:
For every man that Bolingbroke hath press'd
To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown,
God for his Richard hath in heavenly pay
A glorious angel: then, if angels fight,
Weak men must fall, for heaven still guards the right. (*Richard II* iii.2.50-58, 982)

Richard believes that since he is an “anointed” king, i.e. that he has been consecrated by the holy oil as a sign of divine approval, God is bound to intervene on his behalf, send His angels to his aid, and save his throne. However, as soon as Richard realizes that Bolingbroke has indeed managed to attract a great number of English nobles to his cause and bring large parts of the

country under his sway, and that no army of angels has appeared to fight on Richard's side, the king is reduced to despair, dismisses his forces and resigns himself to Bolingbroke's will. Later, during a parliament session in Westminster Palace, Richard is deposed and Bolingbroke is consecrated and crowned king.

This succession of events that Shakespeare has masterfully cast in the form of drama struggles with the most fundamental question of politics, that of authority. Does the king's authority come from God or from sheer power? If the first holds, why is Richard deposed through force? If the second holds, how come Bolingbroke feels the need to be consecrated king after the fact? In Shakespeare, political authority curiously comes from both God and man. But it is not necessarily due to a confusion in the accounts of the sources – the medieval chronicles – that Shakespeare maintains both positions. I argue that Shakespeare indeed impeccably reflects and reproduces the political discourse of his age, which allows for authority to come from both sources: divine and human. To understand how, we need to have a historical survey of the concept of authority (*auctoritas/potestas*), the source and extent of political jurisdiction in the Western Christian world, a concept that constitutes the *raison d'être* of the state.

Based on extensive research, I have come to recognize three major forms of authority in Western Christianity up to Shakespeare's time – and well beyond. These are various forms of “descending theories of authority” that occur in three phases: theocentric-ecclesiastical (God+Church) in the Early Middle Ages; theocentric-ecclesiastical-secular (God+Church+State) from the High to the Late Middle Ages; and theocentric-secular (God+State) in the early modern period. As we can see, somewhere along the way the church is eliminated from the equation of power, and in the case of the Protestant world – especially England – it becomes subsumed under the state. In other words, the development of the concept of authority in Western Christianity in

our particular period of study is from “Papism” to “Caesaropapism.” Here I am going to survey that development with an eye to its significance for a historicist analysis of Shakespeare’s history plays.

Most of the events, ideas and theories discussed in the early part of this section have little or nothing to do with England or Shakespeare when they originally occur, as they are concerned with the ongoing theopolitical disputes between the papacy and the pagan Romans, the Byzantine Empire, and the Holy Roman Empire. However, they assume importance for England during the Late Middle Ages when Shakespeare’s histories are set; but even more significantly during the early modern period when they become the background against which the reformers and the monarchs unfold their theological and political reforms. That is when many of these issues are revived and become incorporated in the newly invigorated Christianity of the Protestants as well as in the Tudor Myth in the form of an accumulated epistemological package, and that is where Shakespeare finds them. In England this epistemological package will begin to wane only in the late seventeenth century, most prominently with the 1688 Glorious Revolution.

However, before we proceed I must clarify that the issues discussed in this section do not necessarily constitute the “contextual background” for the “residual” in Shakespeare. Indeed, all these issues will reappear in Shakespeare’s time in a package that includes both the residual and the emergent epistemes. There is in fact an ongoing millennial debate that, in my opinion, culminates in Shakespeare’s histories. Saint Augustine’s ideology and methodology, whose discussion starts this section as well as ending it in modified forms through the theories of the early modern period, is a case in point.

Authority in the Early Middle Ages (c. 500 – c. 1000)

It was Saint Augustine (354-430), the Bishop of Hippo and one of the original “Church Fathers,” who for the first time broached the question of authority in Western Christianity. Augustine was living in a time of great turmoil. The Roman Empire had recently been subjected to a series of destructive invasions by the “barbarians” – tribal people of Germanic origin; and the invaders, who had sacked the city of Rome in 410, were threatening to overrun the rest of the empire, in one of whose remote provinces in North Africa Augustine was a patriarch. Amidst the bloodshed, fire and destruction, the pagan Romans would lay the blame on the Christians for the dismal situation of the Christianized Roman Empire. They believed that since Rome had disavowed the ancient gods, the gods in turn had turned their backs on Rome, and that the barbarian invasions were in fact a manifestation of the divine retribution against the empire.

Augustine started his monumental project of *City of God* – which would eventually run up to 22 books in the stretch of 14 years (413-426) – to refute the pagan accusation that Christians were the cause of the Roman Empire’s fall as well as to give succor to the Christian community that was baffled by the mysterious workings of a Providence that had abandoned His supposed instrument of will on Earth, the Roman Empire. As Luscombe and Evans say, “Augustine in the end rejected the notion that a Christian empire was the sacral fulfilment of the destiny of Rome” (323). It was this rejection that necessitated a whole new ontological explanation for the existence of the world and its affairs. In order to achieve that explanation, Augustine had to dismantle the secular-cyclical political philosophy of the pagan Greeks and Romans and create a metaphysical political theology from scratch.

Augustine was a Manichean heavily under the influence of Neoplatonism before he converted to Christianity. As such, when he started to develop his Christian political theology, he

conceptualized it in a preponderantly Manichean mold. For Augustine, cast in an ancient Persian framework of dualism, history constitutes a constant conflict between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. The human will has no agency in this titanic battle as God has already predestined most of the souls to hell and only an elect few – the very dwellers of the City of God – to heaven. Salvation comes from God’s unconditional and irresistible “Grace,” regardless of what man does in this world. Augustine in effect relays Saint Paul’s doctrine of “justification by faith alone” (*sola fide*). Based on this premise, Augustine redefines the nature of politics by placing it in the middle of a grand narrative of the unfolding of the Divine Providence; a straight progress of history from the Fall to the Last Judgment. As Markus says, “In this image Augustine represented the course of human history in terms of a dramatic conflict of forces which will appear in their naked reality only beyond history... A theology of the primordial forces at work in human will and action has become an interpretation both of history and of social existence” (100).

The pattern of Augustine’s universal salvation history would serve as the model of chronicle writing for the remainder of the Middle Ages. This is the very model that early Tudor chroniclers and historians would eventually adopt with some modifications, especially with regard to its universalist scope. Here we can already see in Augustine one of the roots of Providentialism in Shakespeare. Sir Thomas More’s account of Richard III which would go into Hall’s and Holinshed’s nationalist *Chronicles* and through them reach Shakespeare is strongly influenced by Augustine’s worldview and political theology. Shakespeare’s King Richard III is an Augustinian “Scourge of God” *par excellence*. We shall see about that soon.

Augustine’s account of authority is a corollary of his philosophy of the existence of the state, which in turn is predicated on his conception of human nature. Based on the Scriptures,

God gave Adam and Eve the free will to choose between Good and Evil, and they chose Evil. As a consequence of the Original Sin, Adam and Eve fell, and since then mankind has had to live in a fallen world. But this world is only a temporary abode, a place of pilgrimage, or a “vale of tears.” As such, man’s final destination is still the world to come where he is bound to eventually meet his Maker, whether in salvation or damnation. However, in the meantime man is to lead a life of righteousness. But how can he do so when he has already demonstrated his moral incapacity when he abused his free will to disrupt God’s perfect order? Therefore, in Augustine’s opinion, here in this world of the fallen, some sort of extra-personal instrument or institution becomes necessary to discipline man and maintain order. And for him that is the *raison d’être* of the state. In Dyson’s words,

The State is not, as it had been for Plato and Aristotle, a natural part of human life, nor is it a forum for the realization of human character and potential. It is an unnatural supervention upon the created order. It has been called into being by the fact that man’s naturally sociable and co-operative disposition has been perverted by pride: by the pride that drives him always to want to be more than he is. It is a theatre of conflict and competition. (56)

Augustine’s is indeed an account of politics in a postlapsarian world where attaining “justice” – giving everyone their due – is impossible. The Original Sin, the cause of the fallen nature of man which makes him incapable of ruling himself in an orderly manner, in turn rules out the possibility of any good – let alone ideal – order in this world. As Dyson says, “If true justice could exist on earth, there would be no need for the State. It is precisely the impossibility of true justice on earth that makes the State necessary” (185). As such, Augustine makes politics the sorry concern of the fallen man instead of the secular citizen of classical antiquities. That is

why for Augustine the state is never an ideal institution. It is only “useful” insofar as it tends to the worldly affairs of human beings. Indeed, it is a relatively important undertone in the *City of God* that although we can’t have a perfect community in this world, we can at least have a “well-ordered” one that takes care of our most basic needs, most importantly protecting us from our sinful nature. With that, Augustine starts to distance the concept of the state from the active politics of the pagans and instead to shape the passive politics of early Christianity. In other words, what Augustine calls for is minimal politics and therefore small state.

That said, for Augustine it makes little difference whether the head of the state is fair or tyrannical; rather, the fact that he maintains order and punishes men for their misdeeds is enough – and that’s exactly what Richard III does, that is, before he finally falls due to his own sins. It goes without saying that in Augustine’s view the state is a necessary evil, but the one that must be obeyed if the relative worldly “order” is to be maintained. The issues pertaining to the other world lie far beyond the pettiness and degradation of the state. As Ryan says,

Augustine’s account of the limited utility of the earthly city, taken in conjunction with everything he says about the mixed nature of all earthly associations, including the church, leads naturally and readily to the thought that the task of the state is to care for externals – to keep the peace, to regulate property, and to perform useful tasks such as providing law courts to settle disputes. Deep matters, questions of the meaning of life and the ultimate rewards of virtue, must be settled elsewhere. (126)

Predicated on this definition of the state, Augustine propounds his theory of authority. If the state is an instrument of God on Earth, then all authority comes from God Himself. As such, the fallen man is to submit to the state, even if it is tyrannical. As Dyson says, “Augustine is always clear in his insistence that tyrannical government is not an infliction that we are entitled

to resent. It is an instrument ordained of God to punish the wicked and test the righteous” (79). There is of course a tiny space for resistance to the state when it orders men to do blatantly ungodly things, but that is only a tiny bit and even that is to be conducted in a state of passivity – the basis for the modern theory of “passive resistance.” Augustine’s view of political authority is indeed authoritarian. In fact, what he does is to convey the Pauline Doctrine of unquestioning subjection to the powers that be: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Romans 13:1; from *King James Version*). In Dyson’s words, “The power that rulers have comes to them from above. It descends from God. It does not proceed upwards from their subjects, and no one may prescribe or limit the use of a power that he has not conferred” (79).

With all that said, Augustine makes a moot point of what constitutes the state and who exactly is to wield power. What is obvious is that he did not mean for the church to assume the functions of the secular state. From his empyrean perspective, we can see his stance that it is below the church to take charge of secular matters in this fallen world. And even his church is not an ideal institution, as it has inevitably been diluted as a consequence of the Fall. Indeed Augustine’s “City of God” – the community of the elect – is an idea and not an entity. In the final analysis, in tackling the questions of human nature, authority and state, Augustine’s intention was not to draw an articulated political philosophy, but, in Milton’s words, “to justify the ways of God to men.”

However, from the solid premises of the political theology Augustine laid in *City of God* there were only a couple of steps for the church to assume secular authority. And his successors managed to press Augustine’s position on authority to its logical conclusion. In the centuries to come, modified forms of Augustine’s conception of politics and political authority were taken up

by the Catholic Church. The medieval “Political Augustinianism” is a reflection of and derivation from Augustine, where Augustine’s views on secular politics were ironically appropriated by the Catholic Church to create church government and church hierarchy. As such, during the couple of centuries after Augustine, the Catholic Church, enacting the will of God on Earth, became the supreme wielder of political authority. The fragmentary condition of the secular power during the Early Middle Ages also made it all the more easy for the church to assume control of secular matters all over Western Europe. This would become the trend until the rise of the early centralized secular states in the High Middle Ages.

Half a century after Augustine, it was Pope Gelasius I (492-496) who, while drawing a clear line between the church and the state, would hint at the papal authority over secular powers. In a famous letter called *duo sunt* (there are two) written to the Byzantine Emperor Anastasius I in 494, Gelasius laid down the “Doctrine of the Two Swords” with reference to Matthew, “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21). Gelasius explained in the letter that although the so-called two swords, the sacred authority of priests (*auctoritas*) and the royal power (*potestas*), were independent in their specific spheres, they were supposed to work in tandem. However, as the final destination of man was the hereafter regarding which the church was the ultimate authority, the royal power was in the end subject to ecclesiastical authority.

It was based on that formulation – as well as on Augustine – that a century later Pope Gregory I (590-604) would set out to unify Western Christendom under papal supremacy. As such, when in the mid-eighth century the chieftain of the Franks wanted to legitimize his rulership over his peers and people, what he did was to seek consecration by the pope; i.e. the bestowing of the Grace of God on the king by His minister on Earth. In January 754, Pope

Stephen II (752-757) anointed and crowned Pepin the Short first King of the Franks, who by then established the Carolingian Empire. In return, Pepin promised to protect the Church from the infidels and Saracens. Indeed it was a case of mutual benefit. The pope needed the king to fight the Muslim invaders of Andalusia and Gaul, and the king needed the pope's blessing for legitimacy.

The consecration that Richard II believes – as stated at the start of this chapter – must protect him from his rebellious cousin comes from this Carolingian tradition. The controversial Salique Law on which the Archbishop of Canterbury famously and laboriously elaborates in *Henry V* also comes from these very Carolingians and their ancestors. It was also in the Carolingian Empire that feudalism proper was established. As Van Caengem says, “the feudal chain was meant to create order and establish an hierarchy of which the monarch was the apex” (200). Before the Carolingians, the overlords would give away their territorial lands to their vassals for perpetuity. The Carolingians made land ownership temporary, subject to the vassal's service to the emperor: “The feudal grants of the Carolingians merely put the land at a man's disposal for the duration of his vassalage: afterwards the ‘benefice’ reverted to the lord, who could bestow it on someone else” (Van Caengem 200). It is the unraveling of this feudal order – remember Richard II's unscrupulous land leases and arbitrary confiscations – that Shakespeare would memorably dramatize in his history cycle over a thousand years later.

In assuming secular authority, two curious documents bolstered the claims of the papacy, especially during the High Middle Ages: the *Donation of Constantine* and the *Decretals of the Pseudo-Isidore*. The first was allegedly an imperial decree through which the Roman emperor Constantine the Great (272-337) had transferred authority over Rome and the Western Roman Empire to the pope. The second was a series of ecclesiastical texts supposedly penned by the

early Christian clerics and Church Fathers that asserted papal supremacy. Much later, both documents were proved to be Carolingian forgeries. In the fifteenth century, the Italian humanists Lorenzo Valla and Nicholas of Cusa, using linguistic, philological and stylistic methods, revealed that the documents demonstrated a great degree of anachronism, thereby exposing them as forgeries. A century later, the humanists' methods would be adopted by the reformers to shake the pope's authority to its foundations. However, by that time the *Donation* and the *Decretals* had already run their course and made their impact.

Authority from the High to the Late Middle Ages (c. 1000 – c. 1500)

Based on the Carolingian model, in the following centuries, kings and emperors would eagerly seek the blessing of popes for legitimacy while increasingly assuming the role of the protector of the church and defender of the faith. In the process, the secular power would gradually grow into a rival force for the spiritual power, a process that would set the *imperium* and the *sacerdotium* on a collision course. The struggle for authority would finally come to a head in the form of the Investiture Controversy (1056-1122) at the start of the second millennium. It was a protracted dispute between Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085) and the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV over who had the ultimate authority on ecclesiastical appointments.

It was customary for kings and nobles to commission the building of cathedrals, churches and chapels, and by that to acquire the right to appoint whomever they wanted as priest. Gregory regarded this as a blatant intrusion of secular power into ecclesiastical sphere. He believed that although the laity were allowed to create the physical body a place of worship such as a church, the appointment of priests was in the sole jurisdiction of the papacy. As such, asserting the supremacy of the spiritual sword over the temporal sword, he revolted against the practice of lay

investiture (ordaining of priests), by that making “the Gregorian version of Gelasius a permanent part of medieval canon law” (Robinson 289).

In the course of the dispute, in 1080 Gregory excommunicated and deposed Henry IV, the first time in history that a pope deposed an emperor. The dispute ended only in a precarious balance between the church and the state when Pope Calixtus II and Emperor Henry V in 1122 agreed on the Concordat of Worms, which, although allowing for the emperor’s limited role in ecclesiastical matters, strongly asserted papal supremacy. As Robinson says, “Before the Investiture Contest the image of the two swords was intended to suggest harmonious co-operation... It was this harmony that Pope Gregory VII was alleged to have destroyed by unlawfully seizing the secular sword” (303).

After the Investiture Controversy, the pope would be elected by a newly created College of Cardinals instead of nominated by the emperor. The church would also acquire the sole right of appointing priests, at least in theory. From then on, although the church had managed to ward off the state’s encroachment on its authority, the secular sphere of power would start to grow. In other words, the Investiture Controversy proved to be only a Pyrrhic victory for the pope. Gregory’s violent reaction clearly betrays the church’s fear of the growing secular power. This event foreshadows the dispute between King John and Pope Innocent a century later, which would become of utmost importance for the question of imperial authority – and for Shakespeare – in early modern England.

As such, the church managed to maintain the capability of commanding authority during the couple of centuries after the controversy. Although rarely studied from this perspective, the Crusades – as well as the Papal Inquisition – in fact provided a testing ground for the Gregorian interpretation of Gelasius’ Doctrine of the Two Swords and the notion of papal supremacy.

Indeed Pope Urban II (1096-99) would launch the first Crusade in 1095 in the heat of the Investiture Controversy. One of the aims of this sacred call to arms might have been an implicit assertion of papal supremacy over the emperor. As we might remember, much later, Henry IV and Henry V of England would also use the “crusade” in the very same capacity; i.e. as a means of asserting authority.

Pope Alexander III (1159-1181), while continuing the ongoing dispute between the papacy and the empire – this time with the fierce Frederick Barbarossa, would in a papal bull recognize the right of Afonso I to proclaim himself King of Portugal, thereby creating a new sovereign state. This was the pope who chastised and humbled King Henry II of England for his part in the murder of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket. But the most powerful pope of the later High Middle Ages was undoubtedly Innocent III (1198-1216). Claiming supremacy over all of Europe’s kings, Innocent would constantly clash with the resourceful Philip Augustus of France as well as the inane John of England, eventually excommunicating the latter for his insistence that he must appoint the Archbishop of Canterbury (lay investiture). It was as a consequence of King John’s excommunication by the pope that the English barons were able to impose their will on him, laying the foundation of constitutionalism in England by having John sign *Magna Carta*.

The last assertion of papal supremacy – which was probably its most dogmatic as well – came from Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303). During a heated dispute between the pope on the one hand and King Edward I of England and King Philip the Fair of France on the other over the latter’s refusal to submit to the pope in ecclesiastical matters, Boniface issued a papal bull called *Unam Sanctam* (1302) in which he claimed sweeping powers for the church and the pontiff. Following the Gregorian interpretation of the Doctrine of the Two Swords, Boniface insisted that

the secular sword is subordinate to the spiritual sword. He also asserted the necessity of the secular ruler's submitting to the spiritual authority, that is, to the pope, for securing salvation.

However, by that time the papacy and its hierocratic view of politics had long been under fire. Beset with problems on many fronts, the church would soon collapse under its own weight. The Babylonian Captivity (1309-1376) and the subsequent Western Schism (1378-1417) were the two cataclysmic events that drove a nail into the medieval papacy's coffin. The first took place just a short time after Boniface's bull. Under the pressure of the French royalty, the Holy See would be removed from its ancient seat in Rome to the French city of Avignon. This is what later historians would call the Babylonian Captivity with reference to the Jews' removal from Jerusalem and forced stay in Babylon in 605 BC, until Cyrus the Great of Persia would release them from bondage in 539 BC. From then on for more than a century the church would turn into an instrument of power in the hands of the French kings, who put it to good use against England during the Hundred Years' War (1337-1553).

The second was a time when the other secular powers of Europe, in order to vie with France, tried to appoint their own favorite popes. It happened that there were three popes at a time, each supported by a set of secular powers. The schism eventually ended with the Council of Constance (1414-1418) and the church was united once more, but by that time the papacy was a spent force. These events severely reduced the public respect for the church in general and for the papacy in particular. By way of noting, it is important that we remember the late medieval political collapse of England – which Shakespeare depicts in his history cycle – takes place around and after the time of these events. So in one respect the fall of the medieval secular order coincides with the fall of the medieval ecclesiastical order.

However, before we move forward to that time, we must go back a couple of centuries to trace the rise of secular authority in Western Christianity. Two important discoveries were made in the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that drastically transformed the Western European attitude towards the concept of authority. They were the Roman Law (the *Corpus Juris Civilis* of the Emperor Justinian) and Aristotle's *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*. Both rooted in a tradition of natural law, they bestowed a greater degree of agency on the human subject and thereby on the human side of things in general. More specifically, Aristotle and Roman Law both emphasized the "political nature" of man. Based on that premise, the jurists and philosophers of the time started the codification of law and other rules of human conduct. This was indeed the time when institutionalization of secular politics started in Western Europe. It is with good reason that the period is significantly called the "Twelfth-Century Renaissance."

The High Middle Ages can best be described as the age of church-state conflict that would eventually lead to the emergence of the secular state in the early modern period. The dispute between the church and the state, as we noted earlier, started in the eleventh century. The Investiture Controversy was the high tide as well as the most manifest example of that dispute. We already introduced the champions of papal supremacy and discussed their ideas and theories. On the other side of the spectrum there were the champions of royal authority that merit attention. Here I am going to introduce those great temporalizers of politics.

The first of these was John of Salisbury, who is usually credited as the first real political thinker of the Middle Ages as well as with writing the first medieval political – in contradistinction to theopolitical – treatise. As an associate of Archbishop Thomas Becket of Canterbury during his dispute with King Henry II of England, it is curious that John should later promote royal authority at the expense of the papacy. Indeed, he was probably the first medieval

thinker to argue for the “divine right of kings,” thereby putting the king on a par with the pope if not making him totally superior to the pontiff. In order to do so, John drew extensively on the newly discovered body of Roman Law.

The organic metaphor for the political community, the “body politic,” which was based on the notion of the “Great Chain of Being” – to which we will have an extensive recourse in the chapter on the residual – was most cogently expounded by John for the first time in order to promote the king’s position in the political hierarchy. In his *Polycraticus* or *Statesman’s Book* (1159), John “employed the analogy of the human body to outline the appropriate functions and offices of the state. With the clergy representing the soul while the magistrate was analogous to the head, John argued that the former must always serve in a directive capacity to the latter” (Spellman 49).

Ironically, it was Thomas Aquinas, whose synthesis of classical natural philosophy and medieval Christianity – Thomism – was to become the official doctrine of the Catholic Church, who through his great influence and meticulous formulation popularized and universalized the very notions and ideas that would all in all throw the weight on the side of royal authority. Aquinas was the quintessential Christian Aristotelian. His synthesis of divine law and natural law, which would eventually go down in the annals of history of thought as Scholasticism, was an almost impossible attempt at reconciling Augustine with Aristotle, and faith with reason. It is indeed with Aquinas that the Neoplatonism of the early Middle Ages begins to give way to the Aristotelianism of the late Middle Ages. Quietly modifying Augustine’s dictums, Aquinas posited that faith is justifiable through reason. In effect, Aquinas justified the Catholic Church’s hierocratic view of society through Aristotle’s natural law.

It is in Aquinas that the basically pagan notion of the Great Chain of Being becomes fully Christianized. The Chain was a residue of the classical antiquity. It had been taken up by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, a Syrian monk who lived shortly after Augustine, and it was through him that the Neoplatonic doctrine of the Great Chain of Being would descend to the late medieval political thinkers. According to that doctrine, God has endowed everything with a specific nature, from the most perfect nature to the least perfect. This is what Arthur Lovejoy would call “gradation” in his monumental early twentieth-century study of the Chain. As Ryan says, “Those ideas were eventually important for political theory because they reinforced the idea that the entire universe was hierarchically organized, and humanity part of a ‘great chain of being’ that dictated the rights and duties of all creatures” (145). In line with this hierarchical attitude, Aquinas posited that the head of the community of men was endowed with the most perfect nature. And that was, surprisingly, not the pope but the king.

In his only explicitly political treatise, *De Regimine Principum* (1260s), or in its shorter form, *De Regno (On Kingship)*, which he wrote at the request of King of Cyprus, Aquinas asserts that the best form of state organization is monarchy. Following Aristotle’s model, in this monograph Aquinas undertakes to explain different kinds of constitutions and assess their advantages and liabilities to single out the best – or the least harmful – of them. However, unlike the pagan Aristotle who prefers democracy, Aquinas states that monarchy is the best form of constitution. This arises from the fact that his idea of government is heavily influenced and strongly shaped by a divinely inspired hierarchical order that accounts for the source of authority from above; that is, from Heaven. Employing the very organic analogies that John of Salisbury had introduced, Aquinas posits that if the body politic is to function well, it must have a strong head. And that is how he promotes royal authority. As Hamilton Bleakley says, Aquinas “affords

the ruler a central place in his political theory” (575). As much as his account of politics is theological, this Doctor of the Church can indeed be regarded as an early and influential champion of secular authority.

The last and most revolutionary of the medieval thinkers to advocate for royal authority was Marsilius of Padua. He was a physician by profession, but it was for his controversial political treatises that he became famous. The most important is *Defensor Pacis* (1324) or *Defender of Peace*, which he wrote to refute the papal claim to *plenitudo potestatis* (fullness of power) in matters of church and state. Marsilius wrote the monograph against the background of Pope John XXII’s dispute with King Ludwig of Bavaria, the elected candidate for the Holy Roman Emperor. Expectedly, the argument arose over the extent of the papal and imperial territorial jurisdictions. In the treatise, Marsilius, employing Aristotelian methods and referencing biblical passages at the same time, argues that Jesus never meant for the church to rule on earth (here he draws on the moot point that Augustine had made a thousand years before). He contends that the church has no jurisdiction in secular as well as some spiritual matters, giving as an example excommunication, which, since it pertains to the good of the community as a whole, must be in the hands of the state and not the church. As such, Marsilius argues for the sovereignty of the Empire as “defender of peace.” His argument for secular authority manifests the early stages of caesaropapism. That is why two centuries later the reformers could see Marsilius as one of their own. However, as Canning says,

Although Marsilius’ view of the state was in this sense essentially secular, it was still late medieval in that for him the ‘corporation of citizens’ would in fact be a ‘corporation of the faithful’.... The case of Marsilius, the most radical medieval employer of Aristotelian political ideas, illustrates that, despite the availability of the distinction between church

and state, what may be termed a modern idea of the state did not develop in the late Middle Ages. The problem was the role attributed to religion. A thoroughly secular view of man's life in organised society did not emerge. Thus the idea of the divine source of rulership coexisted with naturalistic ideas of the state; the theoretical duty of the ruler to ensure godly government persisted; and for many writers the claims of ecclesiastical jurisdiction still limited the exercise of secular sovereignty. (362-363)

As we noted, the Late Middle Ages witnessed a rise in the secular power's fortune. A mixture of ancient and new Christo-pagan concepts went hand in hand to sanctify or even deify the king. The king could now lay claim to a "divine right" that rubbed shoulders with royal absolutism. This is what we clearly see in the case of King Richard II of England. But absolutism would not fully emerge until the sixteenth century when the state apparatus necessary for its implementation became available. In other words, before a fully bloomed caesaropapism becomes possible, papism must be completely dismantled. That is why Richard's absolutism is hollow, a fact that Shakespeare dexterously depicts in the deposition scene (IV-1). Indeed Shakespeare's genuine absolutist kings are those who never boast of it. But more on that later.

Authority in the Early Modern Period (c. 1500 – c. 1700)

Now we must enter the last stage of our survey, which begins with the Reformation. Martin Luther, of whom Roland Bainton once famously said he was "so much a gothic figure that his faith may be called the last great flowering of the religion of the Middle Ages" (Baumer 166), was the first and most formidable religious reformer to start the salvo against the pope. The Augustinian canon began with an attack on the corruption and profligacy of the church. That is why the humanists like Erasmus and More initially regarded him as one of their own. But Luther soon showed that what he wanted was far beyond the cosmetic changes that the humanists had

intended for the church. In the Ninety-Five Theses that he nailed to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg in October 1517, Luther put the very existence of the Catholic Church under a large question mark. In the theses he excoriated Rome for its usurpation of earthly power and establishment of hierarchism.

Reviving Augustine's doctrine of "Irresistible Grace" and asserting that mankind is only saved through the grace of God, Luther denied that any human effort can change his destiny in the world to come. Obviously, this obviates the necessity of the church as an instrument of intercession between man and God. Similarly, when he emphasizes that it is only through a personal and private reception and contemplation of the Scriptures that one can get in touch with the Heavenly Father, the existence of a priestly class that can interpret the Word of God and administer His sacraments on earth becomes redundant. That is why vernacularization – which also contributed to a sense of nationalism – was an important part of the Reformation project.

As such, by eliminating the intercessory role of the church as well as the function of the priestly class, Luther destroyed the ancient and venerable authority of the pope. Invoking Saint Paul, Luther drew a solid line between the temporal and spiritual spheres and emphasized their complete separation. From there, the next step was to fill the vacuum with a new force, for which Luther nominated the secular authority. Following the Pauline injunction, he took a step further and denied that any kind of resistance could be made to "the powers that be." And this is how Luther paves the way for caesaropapism and royal absolutism. As Spellman says,

But in defining the Church as a community of the faithful lacking disciplinary and coercive power rather than a hierarchical government backed by canon law, Luther magnified the role of the godly prince in the work of sustaining the Christian polity. In

fact, he put an end to the medieval doctrine of the two swords, charging the prince with the impossible task of defining and upholding the true faith. (65)

Luther's assertion that active resistance to the magistrate was sinful and therefore forbidden (a position at odds with his own resistance to Emperor Charles V) helped to 'legitimate the emerging absolutist monarchies of northern Europe' and became one of the more contested issues faced by political thinkers during the following 200 years. (66)

In a sense, the Reformation can be described as the return of Augustine with a vengeance. The 529 Council of Orange had rejected Augustine's notion of absolute predestination. It had specifically condemned the belief that God has predestined the majority of humanity to hell on account of Adam's Original Sin. Luther would bring back both the Original Sin and the predestination to hell with much fire and brimstone. By that he denied any spiritual as well as institutional hope that man can actively save himself from damnation. Luther in effect destroyed the Catholic and Neoplatonic optimism about a better, eternal place beyond this world. Instead, he created an intense existential anxiety for man that would have grave consequences for politics in the centuries to come, with some of which, I believe, we are still grappling today. As Sinfield says,

Both Catholicism and neoplatonic humanism encouraged belief in a *continuity* between human and divine experience; that one might school one's soul and rise from one to the other. Protestantism insisted on the gap between the two, emphasizing the utter degradation of humankind and the total power of God to determine who shall be saved. (144)

Indeed, it is my contention that hadn't it been for Luther's near-complete success in debunking the medieval psychology, Machiavelli's *realpolitik* would not have found the wide

acceptance that it did – although rarely acknowledged – in the decades to come. I believe Machiavelli's emergence is greatly indebted to Luther's destruction of both the last vestiges of papal authority and the relatively optimistic Scholastic worldview, the negation of both of which in turn stems from Augustine's political realism and epistemological pessimism. Simply put, when securing salvation in the world to come becomes almost impossible, man would do best to concern himself with the little happiness and peace that he can get in this world.

That is exactly Augustine's *raison d'être* for the existence of the state, of course shorn of his absolute faith in the hereafter. As far apart as they are from each other, Luther and Machiavelli agree on one significant thing: the flawed nature of the fallen man, which is what shapes their politics. They are both Augustinians, and they will bequeath their gloomy vision of the world to Hobbes. As such, the so-called "secular" political philosophy in the early modern times is in fact predicated on a strongly "religious" premise. In other words, the modern man is born not in spite of but in consequence of the fallen man. As Franklin Le Van Baumer once ironically noted,

The reformers contributed to individualism, although none of them were individualists in the modern sense; to nationalism, although they hoped to restore Christian unity; to democracy, although hardly any of them were democrats; to the 'capitalistic spirit,' although they were extremely suspicious of capitalists; indeed, to the secularization of society, although their aim was exactly the reverse. (169)

That said, we can now investigate the ideas of the infamous Florentine. In *The Prince* (1513), Machiavelli gives instructions to the up-and-coming Prince on the quest for power. In the monograph he discusses what he thinks the Prince ought to do in order to usurp and retain power instead of what he should do to be a moral monarch. In the process, he gives the Prince the set of

unsavory pieces of advice that would eternalize him as the embodiment of evil and immorality. For instance, in one of the most notorious examples, Machiavelli advises the Prince that he does not need to “be” pious in reality; what he does need is to simply “look” pious – Richard III at Baynard’s Castle is a case in point. *The Prince* looks like a parody of the genre of “education of a prince” that the humanists, most famously Erasmus, were popularizing at the time. As it happens, Machiavelli’s highly distorted image of humanism proved to be the more enduring version in the realm of politics. As Spellman says,

With Machiavelli the ‘new man’ of the Renaissance, confident and ambitious, this-worldly and concerned with personal greatness, takes his place on the contested stage of the secular state. It is a state that is to be treated as a human artifact, a work of art, and no longer as the directing force behind a great drama, either chivalrous or divine, that is enacted under a larger canopy of meaning. (58)

At the center of *The Prince* lies Machiavelli’s conception of “human nature,” which in his view is quite static. For him, “man’s nature is such that it never changes or evolves with the passage of time but always remains constant and immutable” (Bondanella & Musa 26). But what is constant in human nature, according to Machiavelli, is inconstancy, fickleness, self-seeking and self-serving behavior. As such, he believes that the Prince should take into account the peculiarities of human nature if he wants to rule successfully. As Spellman puts it, “Machiavelli believed that in order to achieve political stability, people should be treated in a manner consistent with how they behave in fact.” (57).

Machiavelli has a deeply Augustinian view of human nature, which leads him to believe the proper sphere of morality is not politics/public life. That is why in *The Prince* Machiavelli, as if in a peculiar version of the Doctrine of the Two Swords, separates morality from politics.

Saying that he omits morality is not to say that he prescribes immorality. What he means in effect is that politics should be “amoral” if it wants to work at all. That is why he does not busy himself with prescribing rigid rules for attaining power and retaining it; for that won’t do in a world that does not have solid moral foundations. Instead, Machiavelli gives priority to circumstance over system. As Ryan puts it,

It is worth remembering, however, how far Machiavelli shares the orthodox Christian pessimism about human nature. He is closer to Augustine than to Pico della Mirandola and his conviction that we might make ourselves cherubim. It is not obvious that his grim view of human nature is Christian in origin, but he believes in a version of original sin: “all men are by nature bad and will do all the evil they can.” They must be disciplined by good laws, and if law has broken down, then by any means possible. Machiavelli did not have a surprising moral theory; he had a surprising readiness to confront head-on the fact that politics requires the willingness to get your hands dirty. (243)

As it happens, Machiavelli was not famous for his political writings in his own time. His prominence, or rather, notoriety, came near the end of the century long after his death, when his political treatises were made available to the Western European elite through pirated and half/mistranslated copies that circulated among them. It seems that the scholarly travelers to Italy and France were the first to bring Machiavelli to the attention of the English public.

Among those scholarly English should be counted the “University Wit” Christopher Marlowe, whose entire literary career can be said to have been invested in the construction of memorable ‘Machiavellian’ anti-heroes. His vengeful Barabas in *The Jew of Malta* (1589) is an early example of the ‘Machiavellian’ anti-hero in English drama. Even the play’s prologue is delivered by a character representing Machiavelli. The figure of *Doctor Faustus* in his

eponymous play (1590) also demonstrates strong ‘Machiavellian’ traits, such as his desire to make a blood pact with Lucifer to attain omniscience.

‘Machiavellianism,’ as Marlowe and other Elizabethans understood it, was the manifestation of the maxim “the end justifies the means.” As such, for them Machiavelli represented a rather metaphysically evil character – even the devil himself – that would stop at nothing to achieve his ends. Indeed the overreaching ‘Machiavel’ of the early English drama is more based on the ‘Vice’ of Moralities than on Machiavelli. But the epithet stuck, which shows how the Elizabethans identified Machiavelli with Vice/Devil. As Bondanella says, “the Elizabethans’ nearly four hundred references to the Florentine Secretary introduced the derogatory terms ‘Machiavellian’ and ‘Machiavellianism’ into the English language” (vii).

Marlowe seems to have introduced Shakespeare to ‘Machiavel’ and ‘Machiavellianism.’ Recently, after a great deal of textual analysis, it was revealed that Marlowe had indeed collaborated with Shakespeare on the Henry VI trilogy. As a result, the *New Oxford Shakespeare* series now credits Marlowe as co-author. If we look closely, we can see that the Machiavels are already there in the history plays. Richard Plantagenet with his half-baked scheming nature is an early example. Jack Cade is another. Even Margaret of Anjou can be regarded as a ‘Machiavellian’ character. But it is indeed Richard’s son, the Duke of Gloucester – the future King Richard III – who establishes the ‘Machiavellian’ tradition in Shakespeare. From that trilogy onward, Shakespeare would produce memorable Machiavels throughout his career, regardless of the genre. Richard III in his eponymous tragedy/history play (1592), Shylock in the comedy *The Merchant of Venice* (1599), Iago in the tragedy *Othello* (1603), Edmund in the tragedy *King Lear* (1606), and Macbeth in his eponymous tragedy (1606) are all consummate and accomplished Machiavels.

If Luther snatched the two swords from the pope and graciously gave them to the Prince, and if Machiavelli taught the Prince how to wield the swords, King James I of England undertook to justify why the Prince was the only person in the world who could legally hold the swords. King James was an ardent advocate of the Divine Right of Kings; the concept that stipulates the monarchs receive their legitimacy through their “anointment” from God – rather than being simply upheld by the consent of their subjects.

This was an “absolutist” theory that emphasized a strict hierocracy with the king as head of the state and the church, and with the bishops as his arms. James’ now hackneyed proclamation during the Hampton Court Conference, “no bishop, no king,” says it all. This was a fundamentally late medieval concept of kingship, and Richard II, as we saw, was its last practitioner during the Middle Ages – a practice that eventually led to his downfall and transformed the foundations of politics in England.

The fact that James felt it necessary to expound and elaborate upon the concept of divine right of kings actually shows the extent to which it had fallen into disuse during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. As Van Baumer has argued, “when absolutist theories did begin to be voiced at the end of the century they were the response of a weakened monarchy to attacks from Parliament on royal prerogative” (Headlam Wells 394). Nevertheless, as a dutiful Christian king, James took it upon himself to enlighten his subjects as to his divine rights. With this, he would open the can of worms that Elizabeth had carefully avoided for nearly five decades.

Throughout his career, King James was busy asserting his divine rights through different means. The most well-known of them are two treaties that he wrote even before he had become King of England. They were many times reissued and widely circulated among the elite during his reign. The first was *The True Law of Free Monarchies* (1598) that James reportedly wrote to

refute the arguments of those who held “contractarian” views of monarchy. Asserting the divine right of kings with many references to the Bible, especially to the Old Testament, James attempted to put the clock back by a couple of centuries, arguing that kings are indeed like feudal lords who stand above the law – because they are the source of the law, and to whom their subjects owe an unconditional fealty.

In *Basilikon Doron* (1599) or the “Royal Gift,” which James wrote as a handbook of rule for his four-year-old son, Prince Henry, he continues to elaborate on the theme of divine right of kings. Putting forward a patriarchal view of society, James asserts that the king is in fact the “royal father” of his nation, and his subjects are his children. In line with his *via media* approach to religious issues, James also attacks the dissenters of all kinds, including the Scottish Presbyterians, the “Papists” and the Puritans. James also advises his son to avoid convening a parliament unless it is absolutely necessary, anticipating King Charles I’s “Eleven Years’ Tyranny” (1629-1640) during which time he would not call any parliaments.

After King James’ death in 1625, his heir King Charles I, following his father’s absolutists tendencies, would gradually run afoul of the commons and Parliament in a long process stretching for almost a quarter of a century. This would eventually lead to the English Civil War and beheading of King Charles – which could be interpreted as decapitation of royal absolutism. In the aftermath of the civil war and during the Stuart Restoration, the very contractarian theories of government that James had tried to suppress would come into fashion to shape the political contours of the Anglo-American world.

Conclusion

As we saw, by the early seventeenth century, in the Protestant world divine authority had been denied to the church and bestowed on the state. Ironically, in this transition one of the most

formidable Church Fathers, Saint Augustine, had come to the assistance of the state. As such, the politics of the age was still theocentric, and the polity still “confessional.” The Stuart England, with King James as both its monarch and foremost political theorist, is the quintessential Protestant state. The grandiose *King James Bible* that the king commissioned during the Hampton Court Conference (1604), or in its formal title, the *Authorized Version*, speaks volumes about the divine authority of the monarch.

As such, the old theocentric and theopolitical worldview did not die easily. It survived to play its part in the transitional world of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. As Burns notes, “just as the great institutions of medieval society – the papacy, the empire, the ‘feudal monarchies’, the canon and civil laws – survived only in changed forms, so medieval political ideas survived to play a part in changed circumstances and were themselves changed in the process” (651). Indeed, Raymond Williams’ theory of cultural history can be appropriately applied to the history of political authority in Western Christianity with Augustine – or rather, Augustines – on both sides of the residual/emergent divide, whose conflation leads to the early modern absolutism as the dominant factor in political thought and practice.

It is my belief that in this long-drawn and violent drama of struggle for political authority, Shakespeare, given his undeniably iconic status in the world of ideas, is one of the most – perhaps even THE most – significant sites of contention between the old and the new, the sacred and the profane, and the residual and the emergent. To put it clearly, what we see in Shakespeare’s histories is a projection of the medieval struggle for power that bears more resemblances with the time in which it was written than with the time it was written about. However, before we reach Shakespeare proper, we need to make a survey of English

Renaissance Historiography to see how it shaped Shakespeare's vision in conceptualizing the history cycle.

Part Two: The Epistemological Anxiety of English Historiography

Introduction

Half way through *Richard III*, Richard of Gloucester, the Lord Protector, and his cousin and confederate the Duke of Buckingham who have designs on the throne of the recently deceased King Edward IV, commit his two sons and heirs, Prince Edward and Prince Richard, to the Tower of London. In the meantime, Prince Edward, in a flash of precocious curiosity, starts to question Buckingham about the provenance of the tower. He wants to know who built the tower and when it was built. The duke says it was built by Julius Caesar when he came to Britain. When the prince proves unconvinced, the duke assures him that it was indeed Caesar who built the tower, for it has been registered in the historical records. Here the prince opines,

But say, my lord, it were not registered,
Methinks the truth should live from age to age,
As 'twere retailed to all posterity,
Even to the general all-ending day. (*Richard III* iii.1.75-78, 549)

In simple English, the prince says in his opinion the truth must stand shining for all ages and folks to see, even if there were no records of it. He believes in the kind of truth that stands independent of, nay, beyond records. It is a kind of self-sufficient and self-sustaining truth that does not need to be committed to the materiality of paper to live on. Prince Edward's conception of truth, to use Derrida's term, is hilariously "logocentric." It sounds very much like Saint Anselm of Canterbury's so-called "ontological argument" that posits even if sense perceptions cannot comprehend God, the existence of God can still be proved based on simple logic; that is,

Anselm's tautological logic. At any rate, what Prince Edward betrays in this episode is an epistemological anxiety with the business of "keeping records;" that is, with historiography. How is history written? Why is it written? What is its function? And so on and so forth.

In the larger picture, in the words that he puts in the mouth of his precocious prince, Shakespeare expresses the epistemological anxiety of the early modern English historiography. Ironically, during that era, the chief function of historiography proved not to preserve the past but to fundamentally alter it; not to write the record but to overwrite it over and over again, as in a palimpsest. That shows why the prince is justified, as if in his anxiety over the provenance of an artifact he is indeed anticipating the much confused and contested account of the subsequent disappearance of himself and his brother, the Princes in the Tower.

In a sense, the early modern English historiography can be seen as a self-conscious and ferocious attempt at constructing a "history" that stands in stark contrast to the well-known past. Behind that attempt lies a fundamentally political drive. Two major figures of "authority" were to be overwritten: first the House of York and then the institution of papacy. That set in motion creative forces that would change the past as well as the future forever. In this section I am going to survey that process and demonstrate how it affects and culminates in Shakespeare.

The Medieval Chronicle

"History" as we know it today is a creation of the Renaissance; and it assumes practical importance in the process of being created. As Kastan punningly puts it, "Indeed, the printing of history in England is virtually coextensive with the history of printing in England" (168). Before that time, as the great historian of Tudor historical thought A.J. Levy once said, "Medieval curricula had no place for history except insofar as it might be subsumed under rhetoric. The prevailing scholasticism concerned itself more with the eternal verities than with the transitory

flux of human events” (9). In other words, the typical mindset of the Late Middle Ages was less concerned with a relentless battle of conflicting forces in the march of time than with a timeless contemplation. That is one important effect of Aquinas’s ameliorating of Augustine, which the Renaissance and the Reformation would violently subvert.

The most usual forms of history writing during the Middle Ages were the so-called annals and chronicles. The typical substance of these forms was an atemporal hodge-podge of biblical and classical narratives, the legendary history of Britain – like the tales of King Arthur – as well as highly subjective accounts of the reigns of monarchs that were stitched together with no coherent logic. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (9th century), William of Malmesbury’s *Chronicle of the Kings of England* (12th century), Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c. 1138), Layamon’s *Brut* (c. 1200), Jean Froissart’s *Chronicles* (1400), Ranulph Higden’s *Polychronicon* (1482), and Robert Fabyan’s *New Chronicles of England and France* (1504) are the most famous representatives of the chronicle genre.

According to Levy, the central concern of the chronicle is a belief in the orderliness of the universe based on the accounts of the Old and New testaments, with the Incarnation at the very center. That is why in each book there was “a framework based on the ages of the world, combined with another derived more specifically from British history” (11). The chroniclers’ approach to their material was accumulative and non-discriminative. Their typical method of constructing an account was to dig for and pick chunks of information from sundry sources about their subject – for instance, about a miracle or a war – and then place them all in one piece regardless of whether their setting together followed a plausible logic or not. That occasionally led to contrary accounts of the same event. As Trimble says,

The chronicler, interestingly enough, in following the usual medieval method of gathering from many writers, clearly formulated this into the principle that differences of opinion necessarily creep into history after a lapse of time, and a chronicler should not be considered as affirming the truth of what he wrote, but only of what he had seen in other books. (32)

That clearly shows why the most salient epistemological feature of the chronicle is its lack of a sense of anachronism; that is, the sensibility to recognize that a person, thing or event does not belong in a specific time in the past. Basically, anachronism is an inconsistency in chronology that throws all kinds of phenomena together regardless of historical accuracy. It is like Shakespeare's Romans' wearing Elizabethan costumes, or King Edward III being represented as a knight of the Round Table. As Levy says, "In the [chronicles] there was no sense of anachronism; for them all history was present history... because it expressed a theological schema that was equally valid in all times or places" (21). As such, the author of the chronicle demonstrated a marked indifference towards the essential differences between past and present, and "thought of the events of a hundred years before his own time as occurring in a context identical to the world in which he himself lived" (Levy ix).

Advent of Humanism

All that would change with the advent of humanism, although not overnight. As Pocock puts it,

The Renaissance English had a sense of tradition but hardly any sense of either Progress or revolution. Their thought was still ruled by the Christian perception that human action means little apart from the workings of God and by the classical perception that history is

a branch of rhetoric, in which the moral and political deeds of men are exhibited for praise or blame, as examples to be imitated or avoided. (143)

However, “progress” was already being made, although recurrently. As we already saw in the previous section, during the fifteenth century the Italian humanists Lorenzo Valla and Nicholas of Cusa made a point of anachronism when they exposed the *Donation of Constantine* and the *Decretals of Pseudo-Isidore* as Carolingian forgeries. In the decades to come, the concept of anachronism would be fully developed by the humanists across Western Europe. As Matheson says (67), already in the early sixteenth century, under the humanist influence, Fabyan was casting doubt on the existence of King Arthur and England’s legendary past.

But humanists invented other important concepts and methods as well. As a result of the revival of classical Greek and Latin models of literature and historiography, the humanists developed a keen sense for style and rhetoric, fact checking, source criticism, analytical objectivity, and vetting their sources for inconsistencies as well as trying to resolve their conflicts as much as possible. One significant contribution the humanists made to historiography was following a pattern of cause and effect in constructing historical accounts. Previously, there was only one cause for every movement on earth, and that was God, the Prime Mover. But as the theologians and philosophers of the later Middle Ages tried to reconcile divine law with natural law, they inadvertently bestowed a degree of agency on what is not God, which is mostly man. That medieval move is what eventually led to humanism’s attributing all that occurs in this world to two major causes: the will of God (first cause) and the will of man (second cause). In a nutshell, Daniel Woolf describes the epistemic changes in the early modern English historiography as such:

1. The articulation of a sense of period and the acquisition, among a greater proportion of the population than previously, of a historical mental map.
2. The emergence of a sense of the past as continuous process and the establishment of the primacy of causal relationships between diachronically contiguous or proximate events over exemplary and analogical relationships between temporally remote and disconnected ones.
3. The development of a visual sense of the past.
4. A growing understanding of formal boundaries between genres but also of the liquidity of historical matter and its capacity to transcend such boundaries.
5. A more confident sense of the “real” and the “probable,” together with a willingness to concede the existence of the unknowable rather than attempt to “fill in the blanks.” (36)

The Reformation

With all that said about humanism, contrary to Levy’s well-known conclusion that humanism exerted the greatest influence on the early modern English historiography, I believe it was in fact political expediencies of the time rather than mere intellectual developments that led to the production of the early modern historiography in England. As Fussner says, “‘Historiography’ was a concept which was beginning to make itself felt in Tudor society in ways that were new, although not unprecedented. Increasingly, officials called up past precedents to support present policies and saw to it that even medieval writings were available for propaganda” (8). Indeed humanism was enabled to flourish during the early modern period because it was adopted by the political establishment of the day for promoting certain political goals, most especially in England. As Breen says, “James Simpson in particular has observed

that, in the case of post-Reformation England, state formation and canon formation – that is, political and literary history – are intimately related” (7).

As I mentioned before, there were two major phenomena that the Tudor establishment wanted overwritten and altered. The first was the previous reign of the Yorkist kings; the second the ancient papal institution. The first task was undertaken by various figures such as Thomas More, the humanist man of letters and politician; Polydore Vergil, the collector of Peter’s Pence and humanist historian; and Edward Hall, the Erastian MP and royalist historian. The second task was performed by various figures such as Thomas Cromwell, the royalist politician and reformer; John Bale, the antipapist bishop and historian; and John Foxe, the prelate and author of the greatest and most popular Protestant martyrology. Interestingly, while the second task is neutrally or even positively called the Reformation, the first is usually relegated to the status of a Tudor Myth. Truth is, they were the two sides of the same political agenda. Not that there was a sort of Greenblattian invisible and overarching “power” that subdued these souls to do its bidding. Rather, they all followed and promoted the Tudor political agenda for their own various and very different reasons. And they all used humanist methods to do that.

Anti-Yorkist Historiography

To begin with, when the Earl of Richmond usurped the crown of England in the aftermath of the Battle of Bosworth Field, he was fully aware that the civil war from which he had emerged victorious had started exactly because someone else has usurped the crown from someone else. That is, the image of instability due to lack of a substantial lineal claim to the crown was constantly before King Henry VII’s eyes. As such, to avert a similar disaster, the king tried to employ methods of ideological persuasion – as well as stark force if necessary – to

prevent rebellion. To this attempt must be attributed the first wave of early modern English historiography.

Sir Thomas More's *History of Richard III* is the instigator of that trend. The real reason why More wrote his account of Richard III is not clear. Was he looking for a career in the Tudor court? Was he trying to defend his one-time master, Archbishop Morton, who had once served Richard and then defected to Richmond? Or was he simply trying to test his newly-acquired humanist writing skills on a controversial topic? Whatever the reason, what More did through his account was to demonize Richard for the time being – and most probably forever – to the satisfaction of the Tudors. But he did not simply produce a crude propaganda piece. More's account of Richard III is indeed a tour de force of humanist composition. What More demonstrates in his account of Richard, to use Breen's words, is "the humanist approach to history as both literary mode and analytical method" (5).

It is the first time in modern history that such a well-drawn and articulated character is created in all his different aspects and characteristics. From an analytical perspective, that this character is bad to the bone is only incidental to the fact that he is a completely humanized character, the like of which could not be found in the medieval chronicles. Drawing on Roman models, especially Sallust and Tacitus, More produces a penetrating psychological portrait of Richard by closely analyzing his feelings, his thoughts, and his manners. And yet the overarching theme of his account, the rise and fall of a tyrant (*de casibus*), is conspicuously medieval, of course with a strong dose of Augustinian providentialism. As Pocock says, "The Renaissance sense of history combined pre-Christian with Christian elements under considerable pressure" (150).

It is not for nothing that while all the historians and chroniclers after More, including Vergil, Hall and Holinshed, would substantially modify their source materials to suit their editions, they would reproduce More's account of Richard almost verbatim; probably because they knew if they changed it in any way they were likely to destroy its dramatic coherence and effect. As Levy says, "It was this blending of every resource and of every piece of information into one central theme that became More's legacy to his successors" (72). And that is how Shakespeare finds Richard III near the end of the century.

It was with the same anti-Yorkist, Tudor-centric bent that Polydore Vergil was officially commissioned by King Henry VII to produce a history of England. Vergil was a priest who had come to England on behalf of the pope to collect Peter's Pence, the annual tax that every head was supposed to pay to the pope. Little did he know that he was to remain in England for a good part of the remainder of his life. Vergil brought with him to England the most advanced methods of historiography from Italy. It was he who seriously questioned the existence of King Arthur – which earned him the eternal enmity of English nationalist historians.

It was also Vergil who for the first time made a considerable concentration on the period between the reigns of Richard II and Henry VII that was to feature prominently as the matter of history in all forms and variations during the Tudor and early Stuart eras. Vergil's meticulous selection of historical material as well as his conscious attempt to impose order on his collected pieces are the hallmarks of his career as a historian. As Kastan says, "He brought to the practice of history writing a methodological self-consciousness previously absent from the writing of English history" (170). Indeed, what he bestowed upon history was a solid "teleological design" that would become the foremost feature of historiography from thence forward.

However, during his lifetime Vergil was not well known to the English public because his *Anglica Historia* was only published in 1534, long after his royal patron had passed away, and probably with him the immediate necessity for downgrading the Yorkists. On the technical side, Vergil's history was written in Latin, and would not be fully translated into English until the nineteenth century. But saying that Vergil was virtually unknown to the public does not mean that his history went unnoticed in the sixteenth century. Indeed Vergil made his impact on his contemporary England, both methodologically and ideologically, through one who knew his work very well, namely, Edward Hall.

The son of a Shropshire grocer, Hall was born in London, and studied at Cambridge for a BA, graduating in 1518. He would go on to become a lawyer and Member of Parliament and an ardent advocate of King Henry VIII who once commended him as "our well-beloved subject" (Lucas 357). What Hall is famous for today is his grand account of the fifteenth-century England, *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancastre and Yorke*, known in abbreviated form as *Hall's Chronicle*. The *Chronicle*, believed to be commissioned by King Henry VIII's government, was published by Richard Grafton in 1548, one year after Hall's and King Henry's death, with a revised version appearing in 1550. However, it is through *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* – which reproduced most of Hall, albeit with much simplification – first published in 1577 and later more famously reissued in 1587, that most of the posterity came to know of *Hall's Chronicle*. The second edition (1587) became the basis for Shakespeare's plays concerning the history of England.

The *Chronicle's* subject matter is the account of the lives of kings of England from Henry IV to Henry VIII, including most famously the account of the so-called Wars of the Roses. However, what is significant about the *Chronicle* is not so much its subject matter as its

methodology. Simply put, it is how Hall chooses to treat his material that matters most. He was one of the first to impose a grand design on scattered facts and anemic accounts of long dead kings in order to create a splendidly epic narrative that addressed itself to the contemporary problematics of the Tudor era: a tale of an England that has just recovered from a turbulent civil war and is thankful for the peace and prosperity that the strong new dynasty has bestowed upon her. As Lucas says,

Unlike many earlier Tudor chronicles, Hall's work was no mere gathering of dates, kings, and notable events. Rather, it announced in its very title a desire to trace the development of a single historical problem, the dissension that grew among members of the fifteenth-century nobility out of two competing claims to the English throne. Although not averse to including unrelated matter in his volume, Hall nevertheless strove to keep his announced subject at the forefront of much of his work, a move that made his *Union* all but unique among the printed vernacular histories of its time. (358)

In one respect, Hall's approach to history bears a strong resemblance to Saint Augustine's philosophy of history: both regard history as the linear unfolding of the Divine Providence over a long stretch of time. Where Hall differs from Augustine is in his animating his all too human subjects with agency. For him, although God is still up there as the author of the grand drama, it is the human beings themselves who choose what role to play. Through this approach, what Hall did in effect was to cast the recent history of England in the mold of a compelling human drama of transgression, retribution, redemption and regeneration that came down to Shakespeare – and to us, largely out of its immediate “historical context” – in the form of the “Tudor Myth” (see Parchizadeh). And that is the staying power of *Hall's Chronicle*.

Hall even anticipates Shakespearean prophetic orations in his writing style. For instance, take this statement at the beginning of his chapter on the reign of King Henry IV – effectively the beginning of the *Chronicle*, which sounds like a Shakespearean chorus (I have modernized most of the spelling):

What mischief hath insurged in realms by intestine [visceral] division, what depopulation hath ensued in countries by civil dissension, what detestable murder hath been committed in cities by separate factions, and what calamity hath ensued in famous regions by domestical discord and unnatural controversy.... But what misery, what murder, and what execrable plagues this famous region [nation] hath suffered by the division and dissension of the renowned houses of Lancaster and York, my wit [mind] cannot comprehend nor my tongue declare neither yet my pen fully set forth. (Hall 1)

Hall's Chronicle is indeed a kind of story-telling with a particular consciousness about its “moral.” It best represents, in Fussner’s words, “philosophy teaching by examples” (9) as the noblest goal of history writing in the Tudor era. It is the kind of edifying account that Philip Sidney would praise half a century later as “poesy,” indicating that during the early modern period there was not a substantial difference between “history” and “literature;” making us wonder that when Sidney said he preferred the poet to the historian, he really meant the medieval chronicler and not someone like Hall. The fact that Shakespeare would later reproduce much of Hall in his “drama,” both materially and stylistically, attests to the “literary” value of Hall. As Lucas says,

Despite its own relatively short life as a printed text, Hall’s work and its historiographic model served as a spur for later English historians to embrace the new humanist-influenced style of vernacular history-writing that flowered in the late Elizabethan and

early Jacobean periods, a style whose emphasis upon narrative, character development, historical analysis, and the critical use of sources owes an enormous debt to Hall and his chronicle. (362)

Anti-Papist Historiography

The second major wave of historiography in early modern times was necessitated by the Reformation, which, unlike the rest of Europe, in England proved to be a particularly political phenomenon. As Levy says, “whereas on the Continent the Reformation was begun by religious reformers and was then taken over by governments which saw advantages for themselves in it, in England the reverse was largely true” (83). As Henry VIII was not happy with his “barren” wife, the Spanish Catherine of Aragon, he kept asking the pope for an annulment of their marriage. The pope, stuck between King Henry and Emperor Charles V – who was Catherine’s nephew – was pressured by the powerful Habsburg emperor who had Rome under his thumb not to disgrace his aunt. Inevitably, the pope refused to grant Henry a divorce. In reaction, Henry started a fierce anti-papal campaign that would change England forever.

Henry resolved to break from Rome and become the supreme head of both the church and the state in England; a concept called “caesaropapism,” as we comprehensively discussed in the previous section. Like his father, he would employ force as well as ideological apparatus to attain his goal. As his break with the Roman Catholic Church called for a new conception of the “nation” for the English, “Translations of classical writings were published with introductions colored by a nationalistic purpose. Contemporary and past events were rewritten in the light of new conditions and with a strong patriotic flavor” (Trimble 35). England needed to be a “sovereign state” and an *imperium* – and not just a *regnum* – since time immemorial to be able to

legitimately break from the power of the pope. The task of providing Henry with those means and justifications fell to the lot of the Tudor ideological apparatus as well as the reformers.

The foremost among the Reformers proved to be Thomas Cromwell, statesman and King Henry's close adviser for around a decade. In fact, it was Cromwell who, after Henry's wishes, orchestrated the project of Reformation in England. It was he who directed the Parliament to grant Henry supremacy and keep in line with his absolutist tendencies in general. The Dissolution of the Monasteries (1536-1541) was also instigated by him. To bolster Henry's caesaropapism, Cromwell had Lorenzo Valla's refutation of the *Donation of Constantine* as well as Marsilius of Padua's *Defensor Pacis* translated into English. Under Cromwell's auspices, court historians and clerics would tirelessly rummage through old parchments and parliament rolls to find evidence of England's ancient independence from Rome.

What they found was gathered in the early 1530s in a large body of writing called *Collectanea satis copiosa*, or a 'large enough collection,' on which Henry repeatedly drew to push forward his absolutist project. The collection was made the ground for the Act in Restraint of Appeals (1533), the most important statute in sixteenth-century England, which forbade any appeal to the pope on matters both spiritual and secular, and instead designated the king as the sole and final arbiter and adjudicator of such matters. The subsequent Act of Supremacy (1534) that declared the king "supreme head of church and state in England" was also based on that collection. Cromwell was responsible for one more monumental act of the English Reformation, and that was the publication of the Great Bible (1539), arguably the first complete translation of the Scripture into English, by Myles Coverdale, who ironically drew heavily on the incomplete translation by William Tyndale whom Henry had burned at the stake as a heretic.

Another important figure of English Reformation was John Bale, himself a Carmelite monk who revolted against the papacy, and to whom Cromwell took a particular shine. As Womersley says, “It was John Bale who first voiced explicitly the perception on which Tyndale had already more or less consciously acted, that Protestantism required the complete rewriting of English history” (99). Bale was a very active scholar who used his historiographic scholarship to achieve a political goal: to denounce the pope and the Catholic Church. He did it through three major mediums. First, he produced a string of mystery and miracle plays, medieval genres that focused on Biblical events and lives of Christian saints, to denounce the papacy and the monastic system. Only a handful of them survive today. It is believed that it was these plays that for the first time brought Bale to the attention of Cromwell, who became his patron until his own execution by Henry. Bale then set out working on a long and scholarly list of British authors since time immemorial up to his own time to show that there was a long-standing tradition of writing in and about England as well as in vernacular English. The copious list was published posthumously during the reign of Elizabeth under the title *Catalogue of the Famous Writers of Great Britain*.

However, what Bale is remembered for today is the penning of arguably the first English history play, *Kynge Johan* (1538), about the early thirteenth-century quarrel between King John of England and Pope Innocent III. Bale turns John into a proto-Protestant martyr and a medieval prototype of Henry VIII. In the play John is depicted as a defender of the English church against Rome’s intervention. In reality, as we saw in the previous section, he was trying to control the church against the pope’s will. However, it is here that King John, who was in many ways an insignificant monarch during the Middle Ages, begins to rise to a mythic status for the English Reformation. It is no surprise that more than half a century later Shakespeare would also produce

his own version of the play, which has many affinities with that of Bale's, especially in its antipapist stance.

But the most publicly influential among the Reformers was undoubtedly John Foxe, the Puritan prelate who, while in exile in Germany during the Marian Persecutions, wrote a Protestant martyrology that became almost as popular as the Bible in England, namely, *Acts and Monuments*, popularly known as *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (1563). The book is a tome. It went through four major and many minor editions and abridgments during Foxe's lifetime and was chained to the altar beside the Great Bible by a decree of the 1571 Convocation to be readily accessible to the faithful, and some of its passages became popular sermons in Anglican and Puritan churches. It was this book that effectively shaped the English Reformation's perception of the papacy, and that of England's in general for generations to come. The matter of the book is the account of the Christian martyrs from the Roman times to the Marian Persecutions, but the real focus is on the proto-Protestants – like the fourteenth-century Lollards – and Protestants.

Foxe's method of depicting the martyrdoms is greatly stylized, rhetorical and dramatic. Despite his serious subject matter, he is rarely austere and formal. Instead, he portrays his martyrs-to-be in a highly human albeit dignified manner. Among Foxe's thousands of accounts of Protestant martyrdoms, that of the execution of Ridley and Latimer stands out as an archetypal example. Foxe begins the account with a description of Ridley's manners during the night before his execution. By showing that while all around him are sad and anxious, Ridley is calm and cheerful, Foxe creates dramatic contrast to foreground Ridley. He even tries to cheer up his family. Then he goes to bed quite composed. On the execution day, Foxe carefully reconstructs the setting. He describes how Ridley was attired in a bishop's robe while Latimer was poorly clad. Here again Foxe creates dramatic contrast, this time to achieve an interplay between the

two major characters. The composed Ridley is the strong pole of the drama while the anxious Latimer is the weak one:

So he, following a pretty way off, at length they came both to the stake, the one after the other, where first Dr. Ridley entering the place, marvellous earnestly holding up both his hands, looked towards heaven. Then shortly after espying Master Latimer, with a wondrous cheerful look he ran to him, embraced, and kissed him; and, as they that stood near reported, comforted him, saying, “Be of good heart, brother, for God will either assuage the fury of the flame or else strengthen us to abide it.” (The Execution of Ridley and Latimer)

Foxe then starts to describe Ridley and Latimer’s last mannerisms, which look almost like their last rites. Given the fact that they were being burned as heretics – which denied them the usual rites of passing at the peril of their souls – Foxe, as if in a jibe to the Marian persecutors, transforms Ridley and Latimer’s last acts and words into their last rites. After recounting how they refused to recant the “true faith” to save their lives, Foxe depicts Ridley giving away his gown and little personal belongings to those who had gathered to watch, and how people clawed to get a piece of his clothes (because he was to be martyred).

Before the end, Foxe shows how Latimer finally found his ballast and took heart when he saw Ridley’s dignified manner: “Then they brought a faggot, kindled with fire, and laid the same down at Dr. Ridley’s feet. To whom Master Latimer spake in this manner, ‘Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle, by God’s grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out’” (The Execution of Ridley and Latimer). The account culminates in a strongly providential “trial by fire” that equals some of Shakespeare’s best heroic scenes in *Henry V*. In the end, as Levy says,

The combination of history and theology led, first of all, to an increased importance for history. The Reformed churches turned to the past for one form of evidence of their validity, and though Scripture obviously served that purpose better, yet history took on a value beyond that of supplying moral examples. Moreover, men like Foxe and Bale, who saw the hand of God in everything, returned to the theological presuppositions of the early Middle Ages, and their idea of history resembled that of Bishop Otto of Freising or that of St. Augustine. (122)

The end result was that the theologians, like the humanists found history essential for their purposes and thus dignified it. But the theologians did not leave the subject as they found it. Forced by the pressure of controversy, they adopted the latest methods of source criticism and made them serve theology. Foxe and Jewel did more to spread the knowledge of that product of humanism than the schoolmasters. (123)

Conclusion

During much of the twentieth century, many well-known historians, foremost among them Levy and Fussner, strongly believed that the sixteenth-century epistemological shift in politics was first and foremost due to humanism, and as a consequence the development of political thought was mostly traced from a humanist, secular perspective rather than from the perspective of a shift in religio-political authority. However, as Womersley has argued, “The revisionist narrative of a process of intellectual change [the one promoted by the school of Levy and Fussner]... seriously distorts the domain of writing to which it claims to correspond, and it does so nowhere more damagingly than its denigration of the role played by religious belief in shaping the texts of Tudor historians” (95).

Here we can see that in the half century after the “revisionists,” the dynamics of the forces that created the early modern world – and historiography – has dramatically changed. That is because, as Elton once succinctly said, “History is a skeptical, not a devotional, study” (257). As such, in order to prevent history from turning into yet another kind of “faith,” the historical assumptions that have become ossified as orthodoxies must be put to question every once in a while. Truth is, in its immediate effects on how the contemporary players perceived politics, the Reformation played a much greater role during the sixteenth – and a good part of the seventeenth – century than humanism. As Ackroyd says,

The reformation of the English Church was, from the beginning, a political and dynastic matter; it had no roots in popular protest or the principles of humanist reform. No Calvin or Luther would have been permitted to flourish in England. Reformation was entirely under the direction of the king. (287)

In other words, the transformation that took place during the sixteenth century was more political/institutional than either cultural or popular. Indeed, Sir Thomas More’s decapitation in 1535 can be regarded as the effective end of humanism in active politics, especially in England. As it happened, neither King Henry nor his close advisers were in the mood for utopian thinking. But humanism in general survived, mostly in the intellectual methodological sphere. It can be said that while the humanists provided the modern intellectual arms and ammunition, it was the Reformers who fired them at the ancient institution of papacy. As William Raleigh Trimble said around seven decades ago,

Though various aspects of Renaissance culture began to affect English intellectual life early in the Tudor era, there was no perceptible stimulation of any widespread interest either in history or in improved methods of historiography.... When a new and radically

different kind of history appeared in the 1530s and 1540s, it was due not to the influence of Renaissance historians on the Continent, but rather to the forces of religious change, political and military events, and a growing nationalism, which were unified by the strong leadership and exalted conception of the monarchy. The more marked characteristics this new historiography evinced were the limited scope of events treated in comparison with the broad sweep of the medieval chronicle, the greater discrimination and the greater degree of bias with which data were now handled, and the evident purpose of making history a medium to defend the policies of the crown and to glorify England's past. (40-41)

Now, where does Shakespeare stand in the middle of all this? It is my belief that Shakespeare, not necessarily through a conscious effort on his own part, becomes the focal point of all these arguments, all these radical efforts to rewrite the past in the image of the present, and in the process to revive the past to change the future. To put it in Woolf's words, there is in Shakespeare the "capacity to cast the past into complex and dynamic relationships with itself and with the present" (40). To put it more specifically, it is in Shakespeare's histories that the Christian historiography of Augustine comes to live side by side with the pagan historiography of Cicero, Sallust and Tacitus. It is in the histories that the Renaissance and the Reformation intermingle and culminate. It is in the histories that the second causes are allowed a great degree of freedom of action while still working within the greater framework of the First Cause – and it is here that Shakespeare is the foremost humanist. As such, it is in Shakespeare that history can go forward while at the very same time going backward, and vice versa. Indeed, it seems that through the Prince in the Tower Shakespeare in fact gives voice to his own historiographical anxieties. As Kastan says,

Shakespeare finds in the act of writing histories the deepest truth of history writing: that it is not the representation of the *past*, but is the *representation* of the past. The past cannot be fully recovered from ‘the swallowing gulf / Of dark forgetfulness and deep oblivion’ (*Richard III* 3.7.128-9), and its representation is therefore inevitably partial, in both senses of the word, a product both of the incomplete traces that have survived and the shaping concerns of those who seek and study them. Shakespeare knows that history is always as much invented as found, speaking the interests of the present as much as those of the past that it would bring into view. His histories may be undependable registers of historical fact, but they are brilliant meditations on the nature of history itself. (180)

And those meditations have no bearing whatsoever on the time of Shakespeare now, but they do on ours. That is because many of the conflicts that he bequeathed to us in the form of the histories are still the problematics and as such among the hottest topics of the day today, most prominently those of power, politics, religion, authority and morality. Today we rarely read More, Machiavelli, and Luther; almost never Augustine, Aquinas, Vergil, Hall, Bale and Foxe. But we live with the consequences of what they did and said, even if we are not aware of it. And we do still read Shakespeare. It is through him that we can – at least partially – reconstruct the narrative of the conflict that shaped our world of today, and is still shaping it. That, apart from the sheer aesthetic joy of reading him and seeing him in action, is why Shakespeare is important. In the pages that follow I will do my best to reconstruct that narrative of conflict between the present and the past in Shakespeare, which I have called “the recurring progress of English political thought.”

CHAPTER 3

THE RESIDUAL

Introduction

According to Raymond Williams,

The residual, by definition, has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present. Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue – cultural as well as social – of some previous social and cultural institution or formation. (122)

The residual most significantly exists in the form of “medievalism” in Shakespeare’s history plays. There are medieval epistemological trends and elements scattered throughout the histories. The most important of them, in my opinion, are Providentialism, feudalism and chivalry/crusading. These trends are not much apart from one another epistemologically and structurally. In fact, they collectively constitute a vast network of ideas, values and practices that shapes medieval polity and leaves its strong imprint on the Renaissance polity where Shakespeare is situated. Therefore, in this chapter I am going to survey medievalism as the “residual” in Shakespeare’s history plays.

During the Middle Ages, politics was not what we mostly consider it today. There was little “circulation of power,” a phenomenon that all kinds of elective procedures as well as the fact of sociopolitical mobility – to which I will return in the next chapter – have made widely possible today. People would “inherit” rather than “attain” their position in a strictly hierarchical and hierocratic polity. As a result, in the medieval idea of “order” the position of everyone and

everything was pretty much fixed. In Huizinga's words, "Man at that time is convinced that right is absolutely fixed and certain" (22). As Ackroyd says,

Order was the first principle, sustaining the great chain of being. That is why so much concern was attested for hierarchy and degree, with all the 'estates' of society carefully designated and maintained. Nothing must get out of balance... The medieval delight in ritual and ceremony was in itself a veneration of custom. Just as medieval law was based upon precedent, so medieval society was governed by habit. Custom was the great law of life. (201)

This divinely-inspired hierocratic idea of order is tellingly reflected in medieval paintings and illuminations. That can be clearly seen in two of the most celebrated late medieval royal portraits in England, both pertaining to Richard II. One is the Wilton Diptych and the other the Westminster Portrait. The Wilton Diptych, commissioned in the 1390s by King Richard II, is a devotional painting with a curious narrative. In the left panel the Anglo-Saxon kings and saints Edward the Confessor and Edmund the Martyr along with Saint John the Baptist present a kneeling child king to the Christ Child and Virgin Mary in the right panel, where the legion of young female angels that have surrounded the Virgin and the Child wear badges of white harts on their shoulders and breasts. The white hart, Richard's adopted heraldic emblem, is associated with Christ as a symbol of humility and sacrifice. That lends Richard a divine aura as well as authority. One of the angels holds the flag of Saint George with an orb on top of it that contains a miniature of England.

As such, the Wilton Diptych means to immortalize England as the New Jerusalem and King Richard as Christ come-again. In other words, it is the famous concept of the "divine right of kings" that Richard promotes through this painting. Anachronism, that epistemological staple

of the Middle Ages, can be clearly seen in this painting. History as we know it today does not exist here, because medieval historiography – as I mentioned in Chapter Two – is mostly a confessional rather than a positivistic practice. The whole purpose of invoking cross-historical personages in this painting is to create the apotheosis of King Richard, turning him into a timeless/ageless object of veneration. According to chronicles of the time on which the Tudor historians such as Polydore Vergil and Edward Hall would later draw, it is how Richard really perceived himself.

The Westminster Portrait, although different in form, articulates much the same ideas of eternity and everlasting grandeur. Richard's portrait is the first of its kind as no portrait of a living English king had been painted before. Richard commissioned it in the 1390s to assert his divine right as king. In the portrait a crowned King Richard is sitting in state on the coronation chair in Westminster Abbey while holding an orb attached to a Cross Fleury in the right hand and a staff with a *planta genista* (sprig of broom) on its top in the left. The association with the cross and the sprig is immediately obvious to anyone knowing the religio-political context of the portrait. They demonstrate Richard's commitment to uphold his providential as well as feudal claim to the Plantagenet Empire. And Richard has eternally fixed his gaze on the viewer. As Peggy Baker says,

The portrait is almost an icon, seeming to show the king transformed by his coronation into an object of veneration. He is portrayed as static and unmoving. His face shows no hint of emotion. The portrait's religious connotations are deepened by its placement. It has always hung in Westminster Abbey. The intent was, perhaps, to give an aura of invincibility and inevitability to its all-too-human subject.

As we can see in the abovementioned paintings, the medieval fixity went beyond mere politics. In fact, political stasis was predicated upon a universal cosmological/theological theory called the “Great Chain of Being” (see Lovejoy). This theory had come down to the Middle Ages from Aristotle and Neoplatonists, albeit with much alteration and modification. In Chapter Two, in the section on the development of political authority in Western Christianity, I already explained how this basically pagan cosmological theory would become Christianized by the likes of John of Salisbury and Thomas Aquinas during the High Middle Ages.

According to that theory, God is the Absolute Being; that is why He can’t be contained in Himself. And since He can’t be contained, He must flow from Himself. Lovejoy calls this “plentitude.” Simply put, because God is so full of Himself, He by nature must emanate from Himself. That – God’s plentitude – is the reason the world was created. God created the world in an ascending order: the most perfect beings were placed at the top of the ladder while the least perfect were placed at the bottom. That is what Lovejoy calls “gradation,” which means there is a strict hierarchical design in God’s creation of the world and its creatures. The fact that every creature is directly linked to the creature above and below it on the chain is called “continuity.”

In this Great Chain of Being, man occupies the middle section, with the angels above him and animals and other kinds of creatures and objects below him. However, among men the king is the most perfect creature, and as such authority descends from him to his inferiors. This is what Ryan calls the “descending theory of government”:

The descending theory of government, in which authority comes from God and descends to popes and kings, and thence to their dependents, and so on downward, suited medieval rulers and the Christian understanding of the world. The Christian worldview rested on a

hierarchical and hierocratic conception of authority that transcended the merely political: all authority came from God and was divinely ordained. (134)

That is why medieval political thought/theory is more accurately called “political theology” (see Kantorowicz 26), because it rests on a metaphysical conception of order and authority that only starts to crumble with the advent of the Renaissance; but the process will take around two centuries to complete in the area of institutional politics in Western Europe. As Ernst Kantorowicz has put it in his monumental study of medieval political theology, *The King’s Two Bodies*, the late medieval king indeed has two bodies: “body natural” and “body politic,” or “the mortal and personal king and the perpetual and corporate crown” (Cantor 81).

Curiously, in King Richard’s late medieval conception of kingship, the corporate body of the king, or the body politic, is strongly – although never explicitly – associated with Jesus Christ through symbolism and imagery. That is what Richard clearly articulates in his portraits that we discussed above. In other words, the late medieval king, in his body-politic manifestation, becomes the supreme agent of enacting the Providence on earth as “Christ come-again.” Conceptually and theoretically, that goes even beyond the royal absolutism that would emerge more than a century later during the Renaissance. As Kantorowicz says,

[T]he king appeared as a *persona mixta*, because a certain spiritual capacity was attributed to him as an effluence of his consecration and unction. It is true that the papal doctrine finally denied to the king a clerical character, or relegated it to some insignificant honorary titles and functions. Nevertheless, the late mediaeval authors continued to emphasize that the king was “not purely laical” or, in the language of the law, was “not an ordinary person.” (44)

The power of the king is the power of God. This power, namely, is God's by nature, and the king's by grace. Hence, the king, too, is God and Christ, but by grace; and whatsoever he does, he does not simply as a man, but as one who has become God and Christ by grace.... That is to say, the king, otherwise an individual man, is *in officio* the type and image of the Anointed in heaven and therewith of God. (48)

Kantorowicz provides the best evidence for how during the late medieval times the consecrated king was associated with the figure of Christ (see the chapter on Christ-Centered Kingship). And Christ, if we remember, is the supreme agent of Providence. Therefore, in the late medieval New Testament theology, it is Jesus Christ who in a fundamentally soteriological role unfolds the divine plan. As Dunn has noted, He does that by sacrificing Himself (708-711).

Interestingly, the *Oxford Biblical Studies*' entry on "Christology" tells us about the two distinct persons of Christ: Son of Man and Son of God. This seems to be the basis for the two bodies of the king, from which can be deduced a Christological concept of Providence. Not that the Puritans would regard Providentialism in that framework two centuries later. And that is obvious why. The Puritans were hugely under the influence of the Old Testament. The Puritan interpretation of Providence is a rather recent phenomenon in Western Christianity, because it is only during the Reformation that the Old Testament is brought to the fore in the Western Christian world.

King Richard II, however, seems to have subscribed to a Christological version of Providence. He was a devout Catholic after all. And Shakespeare seems to have kept some residue of this kind of Providentialism in his representation of history. The deduction becomes even more logical when we realize that the two bodies' doctrine is partly translated into Tudor Absolutism more than a century later, when the king becomes only second to God. But the

Tudors would never associate themselves with the person of Christ. That is why the Christological concept of Providence must be late medieval.

Even Shakespeare's representation of absolutism is more inclined towards a Christological reading. Both *Richard II* and *Henry V* have sacrificial themes; and Henry V literally offers himself as sacrifice, although he is not martyred. When in Chapter Two I found similarities between *Henry V* and the episode of Ridley and Latimer's martyrdom in *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, I was trying to draw attention exactly to this Christological attitude. In sum, the Providentialism in Shakespeare seems to be strongly qualified by a Christological reading of the Providence. No wonder when the iconoclastic Puritans shut the theaters during the mid-seventeenth century interregnum, even the fundamentally Christological Shakespeare was not spared.

Throughout the history cycle, Shakespeare twice famously uses that Christological conception to portray his kings, first in the case of Richard II and then Henry V. Interestingly, although both Richard and Henry are depicted at certain junctures as Christ-like figures, the providential plan that Shakespeare represents through these two kings finds two very different fates. While in Richard's case God's grace leaves the king and the Providence is cancelled – and thus “nature” is disrupted; in Henry's case God's grace remains with the king and the Providence is fulfilled – and “nature” is restored. As such, Shakespeare casts Richard and Henry – and all the political theology that is predicated on these two kings – as diametric opposites. Richard is “the Christ that could be;” Henry “the Christ that is and will be.” In the following pages, we shall investigate this case more thoroughly through examples from the text.

Providentialism

Throughout the histories, Shakespeare keeps resorting to different manifestations of Providentialism. One manifestation comes in the Augustinian mold of the “King-as-Scourge-of-God,” which Shakespeare most famously utilizes in *Richard III* (see Chapter Two, p.5 for a more comprehensive explanation). Another is the metaphysical signs, disasters and prophecies (see Hutton) based on the late medieval *de casibus* tradition that was popularized in England during the Tudor Age through the “Mirror for Magistrates” genre. This tradition, which is concerned with famous magistrates of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, is a strongly didactic genre that in depicting the rise and tragic fall of the magistrates, mostly as a result of providential intervention or inability of the subject to notice the signs of Providence, warns against the dangers of *hubris* or excessive pride, the fleeting nature of power and prosperity, and the vanity of human wishes. This Shakespeare mostly uses in the Yorkist Tetralogy, especially in *Richard III*. The rise and fall of Lord Hastings in *Richard III* is a prominent example, to which we will later return in more detail. In short, as Anthony Baker says,

Theologically, the histories bring us up against the doctrine of providence, the account of God’s interest in and provision for the ongoing life of the world he made. Does a divine director oversee the course of things through time, or is history a sequence of scenes in which the virtuous and the vicious equally fill the world with words, and none of it finally hangs together? (757)

However, the most significant manifestation of Providentialism in the plays, as I explained above, comes in the form of the body politic and the organic conception of the world that is predicated on it. The body politic is the central metaphor in *Henry V*. In all the history plays, this last one has the most strongly articulated organic ideas/metaphors about the realm. Is

it because England, given the Continental religious conflicts, the papal interdict on the island nation and the fact of Elizabeth's having no heir, needed that kind of organicity and continuity in the wake of the precarious 1590s? Also, the king's voice is nowhere more authoritative and unchallenged than in this play. This is an essentially absolutist play, and absolutism is an essentially Tudor phenomenon. Is *Henry V* Shakespeare's most articulated contribution to the doctrine of Tudor Absolutism?

The Archbishop of Canterbury's extended simile of the beehive for the kingdom is the most complete articulation of the body politic in all the history plays. King Henry and his nobles are planning to invade France, but the king is concerned about the Scots who might invade England in his absence. Canterbury reminds him that as God has created the world in gradation and given every creature its most suited task, all individuals work as an organic entity to achieve the end of the whole. Such is the beehive and its different kinds of bees that perform different tasks at the behest of the queen for the welfare of the community. Canterbury then likens the kingdom to a beehive, where all strive to accomplish the best interest of the nation. Therefore, if Henry as king and head of the nation divides his force in four quarters, takes one to France and leaves three at home, England will be able to defend herself against all her enemies. In Canterbury's own words,

Therefore doth heaven divide
The state of man in divers functions,
Setting endeavour in continual motion;
To which is fixed, as an aim or butt,
Obedience: for so work the honey-bees,
Creatures that by a rule in nature teach

The act of order to a peopled kingdom. (*Henry V* i.2.183-189, 1461)

Another hierocratic organic metaphor is delivered by the Chorus at the beginning of Act II, where England is likened to a “little body with a mighty heart.” While explaining how the Englishmen, encouraged by the example of King Henry, “the mirror of all Christian kings,” are jubilantly selling their lands and possessions to acquire horses, armors and swords for the war in France, the Chorus bundles the land, the people and the king in one functional package in the following terms: “O England! Model to thy inward greatness, / Like little body with a mighty heart, / What mightst thou do, that honour would thee do, / Were all thy children kind and natural?” (*Henry V* ii.0.16-19, 1464).

A curious application of the body politic occurs in Act II, Scene 2, where the French have recruited the lords Cambridge, Scrope, and Grey to kill King Henry before he gets a chance to set sail for France. Henry already knows that; nevertheless, he keeps counsel with the traitors so that they themselves reveal their treachery and proclaim their own sentence. While in the presence of the would-be traitors, Henry orders that the soldier who railed against him be brought before him. He says he wants to forgive him, but the conspirators demand harshness out of their feigned concern for the security of the king. Yet the king pardons the soldier, and instead hands the conspirators their commissions for France, which are actually their indictments. They lose color, and the king teases them. When they ask for pardon, the king reminds them of their harshness towards the drunk soldier for a minor offense. The disarmed traitors confess to their treason and state that they deserve to receive capital punishment.

It is when the conspirators ask for forgiveness that that curious application of the body politic occurs. The king says he will forgive them on behalf of his person – “Touching our person seek we no revenge” – which means he holds no personal grudge against his would-be

assassins; and that he is indeed that “mighty heart” to which the Chorus refers in the prologue to Act II. However, Henry condemns them to death for their conspiracy against the corporate body of the king, because that would have affected not only his person but the totality of the realm. Therefore, Henry proclaims his sentence not out of personal revenge but of communal responsibility. This is a very delicate doctrinal issue in late medieval political theology. Henry himself cogently propounds the principle as such:

You have conspired against our royal person,
Join'd with an enemy proclaim'd and from his coffers
Received the golden earnest of our death;
Wherein you would have sold your king to slaughter,
His princes and his peers to servitude,
His subjects to oppression and contempt
And his whole kingdom into desolation.
Touching our person seek we no revenge;
But we our kingdom's safety must so tender,
Whose ruin you have sought, that to her laws
We do deliver you. Get you therefore hence,
Poor miserable wretches, to your death. (*Henry V* ii.2.162-174, 1470-1471)

Henry then tells his nobles that “Since God so graciously hath brought to light / This dangerous treason lurking in our way,” this providential prevention of the conspiracy must be taken as a good omen for the French expedition. They say amen and set sail for France. As it appears, King Henry himself is a Christ-like figure with a prophetic vision. Shakespeare shows that during a sustained encounter in the course of the play that has never been studied as a sign of

Henry's divinity. When in France, King Henry three times receives the French herald Montjoy in his camp. Montjoy has the thankless task of delivering to Henry the threats of the French king and nobility. Yet he manages to do so in such a respectful and dignified manner that King Henry starts to like him, and even gives him a tip for the bad news he keeps bringing him.

The second time when Montjoy appears to offer Henry terms of surrender and ask for ransom, after Henry rejects his offer, Montjoy bids King Henry farewell and says that this is the last time they are seeing each other. Yet Henry assures Montjoy that they shall see each other one last time. Montjoy, aware of the unequal balance of power between the French and the English, is dubious – as should be an unknowing audience; he most probably believes that in the ensuing battle Henry will be wiped out along with the rest of his army. However, what Henry prophesies indeed comes to pass, and after the battle of Agincourt a subdued and chastened Montjoy meets a triumphant King Henry for the third time and requests his permission for the French nobles' dead bodies to be collected and buried according to Christian custom, which the *Mirror of All Christian Kings* graciously grants.

This episode bears a strong resemblance to the Biblical account of Saint Peter's denial of Jesus Christ, most famously known in art and literature as Peter's Denial. It has been stated in the Synoptic Gospels that during the Last Supper, that is, during the night before Christ is arrested by the Romans, he predicts that the Apostle Peter will deny him three times before the cock crows. Peter vehemently protests, but when the time comes, he actually denies any knowledge of Jesus Christ three times in a row. After the third time, when the cock crows, Peter remembers Christ's prophecy, and bitterly cries. He then becomes the rock on which the Christian Church is established. The effect is the double affirmation of Christ. That also goes for King Henry in the abovementioned episode.

Providentialism comes to a head in *Henry V* during the night before the Battle of Agincourt. King Henry, cloaked as an ordinary soldier and away from the fray of his camp, kneels down and soliloquizes about his father's usurpation of the crown from Richard, asking God for victory instead of visiting his father's sin upon his head. And God grants Henry's wish in the upcoming battle, both washing his father's sin off of him and making him the greatest king in his time. Agincourt literally becomes the test of fire Henry V goes through in lieu of his deceased father, who was never able to expiate for his sin by making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land; and Henry comes out of the trial triumphant, both materially and spiritually.

In addition to the hierarchical metaphors based on the Great Chain of Being, as Spurgeon points out (216), the running imagery in the early histories, from *1 Henry VI* to *Richard II*, is the organic imagery, most famously depicted in the garden scene in *Richard II*. This is the scene where the Duke of York's gardener, while instructing his aide how to weed out the plants so that the garden grows evenly, passes judgment on King Richard's conduct through the use of a set of botanical metaphors and plant imagery, driving his point home that Richard has been a poor gardener for the garden in his care, namely, England:

[Bolingbroke] Hath seized the wasteful king.
O, what pity is it
That he had not so trimm'd and dress'd his land
As we this garden! We at time of year
Do wound the bark, the skin of our fruit-trees,
Lest, being over-proud in sap and blood,
With too much riches it confound itself:
Had he done so to great and growing men,

They might have lived to bear and he to taste

Their fruits of duty: superfluous branches

We lop away, that bearing boughs may live:

Had he done so, himself had borne the crown,

Which waste of idle hours hath quite thrown down. (*Richard II* iii.4.55-67, 991-992)

Had Richard taken care of England as the Gardener and the Servant are going to take care of the Duke of York's garden, i.e. elevating individuals but also being aware of their faults and thus handing them punishment and demotion when it is due, and not letting them grow in power and prestige while they are not worthy of it, justice would have been done to all, and Richard himself would have benefited from it, reaping the fruit. But Richard proved to be a poor gardener, and look what has happened to him and his garden now.

But this is by no means the only instance where Shakespeare employs organic imagery in *Richard II*, as this play is replete with all kinds of organic metaphors that are based in a medieval conception of creation, order and authority. As Kantorowicz says,

The legal concept of the King's Two Bodies cannot... be separated from Shakespeare. For if that curious image, which from modern constitutional thought has vanished all but completely, still has a very real and human meaning today, this is largely due to Shakespeare. It is he who has eternalized that metaphor. He has made it not only the symbol, but indeed the very substance and essence of one of his greatest plays: *The Tragedy of King Richard II* is the tragedy of the King's Two Bodies. (26)

Early in the play, in John of Gaunt's palace in London, when Gaunt and the Duchess of Gloucester have an impassioned conversation about her husband's – Thomas of Woodstock's – murder, the Duchess resorts to an extended organic metaphor to lay out the pedigree of the sons

of Edward III, of whom John of Gaunt is the fourth and Woodstock was the last, and by that to spur Gaunt to avenge her husband's and his brother's death on King Richard:

Edward's seven sons, whereof thyself art one,
Were as seven vials of his sacred blood,
Or seven fair branches springing from one root:
Some of those seven are dried by nature's course,
Some of those branches by the Destinies cut;
But Thomas, my dear lord, my life, my Gloucester,
One vial full of Edward's sacred blood,
One flourishing branch of his most royal root,
Is crack'd, and all the precious liquor spilt,
Is hack'd down, and his summer leaves all faded,
By envy's hand and murder's bloody axe. (*Richard II* i.2.11-21, 957)

Here the Duchess draws a curious contrast between those "branches" that "dried by nature's course" and the one that was "hacked" and "cracked" "[b]y envy's hand and murder's bloody axe," emphasizing the unnatural and abrupt manner of Woodstock's departure in comparison to the natural course of the others' life and death. The "disruption of nature" is why the Duchess insists that Gaunt must set the record straight. However, Gaunt believes that Woodstock's murder has not disrupted the course of nature because it was ordered by God's anointed: "But since correction lieth in those hands / Which made the fault that we cannot correct, / Put we our quarrel to the will of heaven" (*Richard II* i.2.4-6, 957). Here Gaunt resorts to the concept of the Great Chain of Being to justify his inaction in the face of divine providence:

God's is the quarrel; for God's substitute,

His deputy anointed in His sight,
Hath caused his death: the which if wrongfully,
Let heaven revenge; for I may never lift
An angry arm against His minister. (*Richard II* i.2.37-41, 958)

The Duchess resigns, but hopes that Bolingbroke could kill Mowbray – her husband’s *de facto* murderer – during the single combat in Coventry. We can clearly see the signs of the body politic and the divine right of kings in this episode. Gaunt, an old-fashioned gentleman, would not be the breaker of the established divine order. In reply to the Duchess’ “Where then, alas, may I complain myself?” Gaunt confidently states “To God, the widow’s champion and defence” (*Richard II* i.2.43-44, 958). However, it is eventually not God that avenges Woodstock, but a mortal man. Soon, Gaunt’s very son, the fundamentally Machiavellian Bolingbroke, will take the step that Gaunt himself was not yet ready to take.

However, in the meantime it is Richard himself who delivers the most abundant organic metaphors in the course of the play. When he returns from Ireland in haste to counter the advance of his rebellious cousin Bolingbroke, Richard addresses England as if it was living: “Dear earth, I do salute thee with my hand, / Though rebels wound thee with their horses’ hoofs” (*Richard II* iii.2.6-8, 981). The connection between him and his land is organic. Then he bids his earth to do his command: to be hostile to his rebellious enemies. It is the continuation of the same Providentialism that we studied at the beginning of Chapter Two, with angels above fighting on Richard’s side. This time it is the earth below him. The whole thing functions in the framework of the Great Chain of Being (gradation):

Feed not thy sovereign’s foe, my gentle earth,
Nor with thy sweets comfort his ravenous sense;

But let thy spiders, that suck up thy venom,
And heavy-gaited toads lie in their way,
Doing annoyance to the treacherous feet
Which with usurping steps do trample thee:
Yield stinging nettles to mine enemies;
And when they from thy bosom pluck a flower,
Guard it, I pray thee, with a lurking adder
Whose double tongue may with a mortal touch
Throw death upon thy sovereign's enemies. (*Richard II* iii.2.12-18, 981)

In Richard's conception – which is totally orthodox late medieval – every single object and creature in his realm will do his bidding to protect him from his enemies: the earth will refuse to feed them; the spiders, toads and adders will sting them; and the nettles will wound their feet. When Richard perceives hesitation in his loyal companions, the Bishop of Carlisle and the Duke of Aumerle, he assures them that “Mock not my senseless conjuration, lords: / This earth shall have a feeling and these stones / Prove armed soldiers, ere her native king / Shall falter under foul rebellion's arms” (*Richard II* iii.2.23-26, 982).

Carlisle, though on the same providential wavelength with King Richard – “Fear not, my lord: that Power that made you king / Hath power to keep you king in spite of all” (*Richard II* iii.2.27-28, 982) – nevertheless believes that Richard must actively employ his divine authority to his advantage. When Aumerle frankly tells Richard that they must not sit idly by and indulge in providential effusions while Bolingbroke is advancing in the country, Richard gives him a royal rebuke by bringing up another important organic metaphor in the tradition of the Great Chain of Being, that of the Sun (the searching eye of heaven) for the king:

Discomfortable cousin! Know'st thou not
That when the searching eye of heaven is hid,
Behind the globe, that lights the lower world,
Then thieves and robbers range abroad unseen
In murders and in outrage, boldly here;
But when from under this terrestrial ball
He fires the proud tops of the eastern pines
And darts his light through every guilty hole,
Then murders, treasons and detested sins,
The cloak of night being pluck'd from off their backs,
Stand bare and naked, trembling at themselves?
So when this thief, this traitor, Bolingbroke,
Who all this while hath revell'd in the night
Whilst we were wandering with the antipodes,
Shall see us rising in our throne, the east,
His treasons will sit blushing in his face,
Not able to endure the sight of day,
But self-affrighted tremble at his sin. (*Richard II* iii.2.32-49, 982)

Richard resorts to one of what Tillyard calls “primacies” in the late medieval order of things: “God among the angels, the sun among the stars, justice among the virtues, and the head among the body’s members” (1960, 31). This is an extended organic metaphor that casts Richard as king of men in the role of the most perfect of the stars, the Sun. Here Richard casts the whole episode of his Irish expedition and the events consequent upon it within a narrative of medieval

gradation and order. When the Sun (Richard) was away in the antipodes (Ireland), thieves and robbers (Bolingbroke and the rebels) found their opportunity to roam around and do their unsavory deeds. However, as soon as the Sun reappears from the other side of the globe, it will start to fire its bolts at the thieves and murderers, and they will be scandalized and vanquished.

The Sun imagery is sustained throughout the act not only by Richard but also by Bolingbroke; as if the rebel is rehearsing for one last time the medieval myth that he is soon going to demystify forever. When stationed in Wales before Flint Castle where Richard has taken refuge, Bolingbroke catches sight of Richard on the parapets above, and honestly, self-revealingly and almost involuntarily exclaims:

See, see, King Richard doth himself appear,
As doth the blushing discontented sun
From out the fiery portal of the east,
When he perceives the envious clouds are bent
To dim his glory and to stain the track
Of his bright passage to the occident. (*Richard II* iii.3.61-66, 987)

Here Bolingbroke betrays his true intention in metaphors. He reveals that despite his admitted aim of only coming to claim what is his, he has in fact come to claim the throne of England. He is indeed the “envious cloud” that is intent upon dimming the Sun King’s glory and curbing his passage to the west. This he openly undertakes to do in the iconic Act IV, Scene 1 at Westminster Abbey, where Providentialism comes to a culmination – and then is shattered – in *Richard II*.

The Duke of York brings the news that King Richard has willingly abdicated in favor of his cousin. He then acclaims Bolingbroke as King Henry IV. Bishop of Carlisle, the Richard

loyalist who is present, strongly protests that “What subject can give sentence on his king?” (*Richard II* iv.1.112, 995). The Bishop is a staunch believer in the late medieval order of things and the divine right of kings. He believes that the God’s anointed cannot be deposed by his subjects, and that when he himself is not even present. To depose an anointed king is to go against God and nature:

And shall the figure of God’s majesty,
His captain, steward, deputy-elect,
Anointed, crowned, planted many years,
Be judged by subject and inferior breath,
And he himself not present? O, forfend it, God,
That in a Christian climate souls refined
Should show so heinous, black, obscene a deed! (*Richard II* iv.1.116-122, 995)

Carlisle then makes the prophecy that thenceforward will become the stock-in-trade of almost all the Tudor historians, from More to Hall to Holinshed and to Shakespeare; namely, the prophecy at the heart of the Tudor Myth. A recently-made BBC documentary series on the Wars of the Roses that is strongly beholden to Carlisle’s prophecy clearly shows how that Providential concept is still alive in the English national psyche. Carlisle predicts that if the nobles depose Richard and crown Bolingbroke king in breach of the divine law, the realm will tumble into chaos and brother will be set against brother, drowning England in blood for generations. In fact, the so-called Tudor Myth stems from Carlisle’s grim prophecy:

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

Peace shall go sleep with Turks and infidels,
And in this seat of peace tumultuous wars
Shall kin with kin and kind with kind confound;
Disorder, horror, fear and mutiny
Shall here inhabit, and this land be call'd
The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls.
O, if you raise this house against this house,
It will the woofullest division prove
That ever fell upon this cursed earth.
Prevent it, resist it, let it not be so,
Lest child, child's children, cry against you woe! (*Richard II* iv.1.127-140, 996)

The Bishop casts the whole predicament in Christian imagery and iconography – with which the play is replete. He says England will turn into “The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls” if King Richard is sacrilegiously, illegally and forcefully deposed. According to Christian tradition, Golgotha was the place outside Jerusalem where Christ was crucified. Here we can see that Carlisle boldly parallels the subversion of Richard with the crucifixion of Christ. This, as we saw in the Wilton Diptych and will see again soon, is not far from what Richard himself believes.

Here Bolingbroke has to back off in the face of such grave accusations that put his soul as well as his claim to the throne in peril. He calls for Richard to come and abdicate so that there remains no shadow of a doubt that the transition is legitimate and legal: “Fetch hither Richard, that in common view / He may surrender; so we shall proceed / Without suspicion” (*Richard II* iv.1.146-148, 996). When Richard enters, Bolingbroke asks him, “Are you contented to resign

the crown?" (*Richard II* iv.1.190, 997). Richard, although with much reluctance, eventually deposes himself because, as Carlisle emphasized, no earthly breath has the authority to depose the God's anointed. So it falls to the lot of the cornered king himself to perform the ritual of un-kinging himself:

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:
All pomp and majesty I do forswear;
My manors, rents, revenues I forego;
My acts, decrees, and statutes I deny:
God pardon all oaths that are broke to me!
God keep all vows unbroke that swear to thee! (*Richard II* iv.1.193-205, 997)

Here Richard, spurred by Northumberland to read the articles of accusation against himself, bursts out in anger at all who are present. He takes up the Christological narrative that Carlisle started a few lines before. Richard likens those present to Pontius Pilate, the prefect of the Roman province of Judaea, who presided over the trial and crucifixion of Christ. By that Richard implicitly casts himself in the character of Christ: "Though some of you with Pilate wash your hands / Showing an outward pity; yet you Pilates / Have here deliver'd me to my sour

cross, / And water cannot wash away your sin” (*Richard II* iv.1.229-232, 998). Here Richard voices his extreme disgust of disrupting the divine order by defiling the body politic:

Nay, if I turn mine eyes upon myself,
I find myself a traitor with the rest;
For I have given here my soul’s consent
To undeck the pompous body of a king;
Made glory base and sovereignty a slave,
Proud majesty a subject, state a peasant. (*Richard II* iv.1.237-242, 998)

It is at this point that Richard asks for a mirror “That it may show me what a face I have, / Since it is bankrupt of his majesty” (*Richard II* iv.1.256-257, 998). What he sees in the mirror, perhaps for the first time in his life, is Richard the man and not Richard the king. It is indeed the forced divorce of Richard’s corporeal body from his corporate body and the dispersion of the divine aura around his head that clear his eyes and make him see himself for what he really is. Apart from its eternal existential importance, this episode also has a temporal functional significance which Shakespeare explores much more explicitly in *3 Henry VI*.

In the aftermath of the Battle of Towton, in a forest in the north of England, two gamekeepers are hunting in the woods where they encounter the “quondam king,” Henry VI. The king talks to himself about Queen Margaret and Earl of Warwick who have gone to France for different purposes, and weighs their merits and abilities to win over the French king, finally ruling in favor of Warwick’s superiority. Here the gamekeepers reveal themselves and want to arrest Henry. They ask him who he is who keeps talking about kings and queens; and Henry replies in riddles: “More than I seem, and less than I was born to” (*3 Henry VI* iii.1.56, 330). One of the gamekeepers hints that, “Ay, but thou talk’st as if thou wert a king” (*3 Henry VI* iii.1.59,

330). Henry says he is a king, in his mind. When they ask him about his crown, he says, “My crown is in my heart, not on my head” (*3 Henry VI* iii.1.62, 330).

Then the gamekeepers want to take him away. Here Henry reminds them of the oath of allegiance they took to him when he was anointed king at nine months old, but they say they are King Edward’s subjects now. Henry says, “So would you be again to Henry, / If he were seated as King Edward is” (*3 Henry VI* iii.1.94-95, 331). What Henry exposes here is the formality of the body politic, or the corporate body of the king. Regardless of blood and pedigree, he who possesses the regalia – the ceremonial and symbolic trappings of royalty – wields authority and therefore is king. When those formalities are gone, the king loses his divine aura and by that his authority, as both Henry VI and Richard II do. That turns them into mere mortal men. As Kantorowicz puts it,

The king that “never dies” here has been replaced by the king that always dies and suffers death more cruelly than other mortals. Gone is the oneness of the body natural with the immortal body politic, “this double Body, to which no Body is equal.” Gone also is the fiction of royal prerogatives of any kind, and all that remains is the feeble human nature of a king. (30)

Richard III, although not as deeply rich in organic imagery or Christology as the Lancastrian Tetralogy, follows a very articulated providential plan nevertheless. As it happens, the play starts with a prominent organic metaphor. The play’s famous opening lines “Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer by this sun of York” (*Richard III* i.1.1-2, 516) that Richard delivers have a direct reference to the medieval metaphor of the Sun. It is a pun on King Edward IV as both “Son of York” (the son of Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York) and “Sun of York” (the divine king from the House of York). It is also an allusion to Edward’s

adopted badge of the Blazing Sun. Shakespeare in fact gives an account of the provenance of that badge in the previous play, *3 Henry VI*. During the Battle of Wakefield, Edward and Richard are stationed in a plain near Mortimer's Cross in Herefordshire (II-1) when they see three suns in the sky, which they take as an omen of victory. Edward says he will bear three suns as his badge henceforward. Richard looks back to the events of *3 Henry VI* at the beginning of *Richard III*.

The play is studded with signs of Providentialism. King Henry VI's corpse starts to bleed at the sight of Richard (I-2), as if he bears the stigmata that Jesus Christ received in Calvary – rendering Richard into the Antichrist by implication. Anne – later Richard's queen – curses Richard (and herself by implication) and her curse takes effect. Margaret of Anjou, acting as Chorus and Fury, keeps cursing the Yorkists, and they all fall prey to her curses. Prophetic dreams are all over the play, most famously in the cases of the Duke of Clarence, Lord Stanley, and Richard III himself. The final act is where all this Providentialism in the play – as well as the whole Yorkist Tetralogy – comes to a head. We shall study them one by one.

Although curses and cursing characters abound in *Richard III*, it is Margaret of Anjou, previously Queen Margaret, whose curses take effect most effectively. She first enters upon the stage in I-3, where almost all the major characters of the play have gathered in the palace to attend the presence of King Edward. And she starts to curse them one by one for different reasons. When she is done cursing, Margaret prophesies that Richard will prove the doom of them all. And she proves to be right. We can see its manifestation in the following scenes.

When Queen Elizabeth's party are to be executed in Pomfret Castle at Richard's behest, the victims recollect Margaret's curses and rue their fate. Grey says, "Now Margaret's curse is fall'n upon our heads, / For standing by when Richard stabb'd her son." Rivers continues, "Then cursed she Hastings, then cursed she Buckingham, / Then cursed she Richard" (*Richard III*

iii.3.14-17, 555). In turn, Lord Hastings, who has suffered at the hands of the Queen's party, does not seem so unhappy about their fate. He even gloats over their misery at the hearing of the news of his enemies' execution. This becomes the ground for his downfall, which has a strongly *de-casibus* tone to it. That immediately materializes in the next scene.

The nobles have gathered at the Tower of London to appoint the coronation date of Edward V. All commend Hastings as a close affiliate of the Lord Protector (Richard) and believe if he is not there in time Hastings can pronounce the date on his behalf. Richard enters cheerfully, and asks the Bishop of Ely to send for his garden's strawberries for him. He then goes out to confer with Buckingham. Hastings takes that as Richard's being in a good mood. He is almost proud of himself for knowing Richard's every mood and habit. Outside, Richard lets Buckingham know that Hastings is not going to get along with their plan to usurp the crown.

Then the confederates reenter, and Richard abruptly accuses Queen Elizabeth and Lady Jane Shore of witchcraft against himself. He literally has Hastings pronounce his own sentence (like when Henry V has the three plotters do the same) by asking him what he should do to the traitors, to which Hastings says he must be harsh on them. Richard then associates Hastings with the alleged traitors because Shore is his mistress, and orders Hastings' immediate execution. Overawed, Hastings reflects upon his being remiss in taking heed of the signs, his gloating over his enemies' misery, Margaret's curse, and fragility of man's fortune. This is an episode perfectly out of *The Mirror for Magistrates*. As Hastings says,

Woe, woe for England! Not a whit for me;

For I, too fond, might have prevented this.

Stanley did dream the boar did raze his helm;

But I disdain'd it, and did scorn to fly:

Three times to-day my foot-cloth horse did stumble,
And startled, when he look'd upon the Tower,
As loath to bear me to the slaughter-house.
O, now I want the priest that spake to me:
I now repent I told the pursuivant
As 'twere triumphing at mine enemies,
How they at Pomfret bloodily were butcher'd,
And I myself secure in grace and favour.
O Margaret, Margaret, now thy heavy curse
Is lighted on poor Hastings' wretched head! (*Richard III* iii.4.80-93, 558)

The last to remember Margaret's curse before going down is the turncoat Duke of Buckingham (V-1), Richard's erstwhile crony and confederate, whom Richard will have executed on a charge of treason. In addition to these curses, there are three prophetic dreams in the play that add weight to the Providential nature of *Richard III*.

The first is that of the Duke of Clarence in the Tower of London. While awaiting his verdict, Clarence tells Brakenbury, the keeper of the tower, that he passed a miserable night, "So full of ugly sights, of ghastly dreams" (*Richard III* i.4.3, 533). When Brakenbury asks him to explain, Clarence recounts that he dreamed that he had been released from the Tower and embarked upon a barge to Burgundy with his brother Gloucester. Richard tempts George to walk upon the hatches while both are looking toward England and remembering "a thousand fearful times" (*Richard III* i.4.14, 533) during the Wars of the Roses. Here Richard suddenly stumbles, and in order to keep himself from falling, he strikes George and makes him fall overboard. While drowning, George sees "a thousand fearful wrecks" and "Ten thousand men that fishes gnaw'd

upon” (*Richard III* i.4.24-25, 533) as well as jewels and diamonds that were scattered at the bottom of the sea among the bones of the dead.

What Clarence experiences in this episode is a simulacrum of one of those classic descents to hell that Homer, Virgil and Dante had so harrowingly portrayed in their epic accounts. He continues to recount that Charon, “that grim ferryman which poets write of,” conveyed his soul “Unto the kingdom of perpetual night,” (*Richard III* i.4.46-47, 534) where he was greeted by the ghosts of those whom he had slain or had a hand in undoing. The first was the Earl of Warwick, his father-in-law, whom he betrayed and left for King Edward. Warwick admonishes him for his falseness: “What scourge for perjury / Can this dark monarchy afford false Clarence?” (*Richard III* i.4.50-51, 534). The second to appear is Edward of Lancaster, Henry VI’s heir whom Clarence and his brothers stabbed to death. He also condemns Clarence for his falseness: “Clarence is come; false, fleeting, perjured Clarence, / That stabb’d me in the field by Tewkesbury” (*Richard III* i.4.55-56, 534). Edward then calls upon the Furies to harrow Clarence: “Seize on him, Furies, take him to your torments!” (*Richard III* i.4.56, 534). Upon that call, the forces of darkness converge upon Clarence and shriek in his ears, at which he awakens in horror:

With that, methoughts, a legion of foul fiends
Environ’d me about, and howled in mine ears
Such hideous cries, that with the very noise
I trembling waked, and for a season after
Could not believe but that I was in hell,
Such terrible impression made the dream. (*Richard III* i.4.58-63, 534)

Clarence is apparently suffering for his treachery and bad deeds. To put it in Freudian terms, the nightmare he has is in fact a Dantean projection of his misdeeds into the world of dreams. In the end, he admits to his wrongdoing and wishes that God visit it on him and not his wife and children. A little later, he is killed by two murderers in the pay of Richard.

The second dream belongs to the ever-cautious Stanley. Early in the morning, he sends a messenger to Hastings, letting him know that he had a dream in which the boar (Richard) razed his helm (III-2), and bids Hastings to fly with him to the north. Hastings tells the messenger that Stanley needn't worry because he has the situation under control, and they had better not incite the boar to give chase. It is later revealed that Stanley was right and Hastings wrong. The dream proved prophetic. This is the very dream that Hastings was talking about a few paragraphs above when Richard condemned him to death on the charge of high treason.

The last and most important of the prophetic dreams in the play belongs to King Richard himself. It is here that the providential plan of the play is revealed to the full. In the manner of a morality play, during the night before the Battle of Bosworth Field, the Good and the Evil pitch their tents on opposite sides of the battlefield. Even their manners mirror those of one another. Richard is rude, cold, and colloquial; Richmond is respectful, warm and dignified. Richard is atheistic and Richmond godly. Richmond and Richard then go to bed to get some rest before the battle. While they are asleep, the ghosts of all those whom Richard murdered in the course of the tetralogy appear upon both Richard and Richmond, cursing the first and condoning the second. Richard awakens in horror and exclaims with a heavy conscience:

My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
And every tongue brings in a several tale,
And every tale condemns me for a villain.

Perjury, perjury, in the high'st degree

Murder, stem murder, in the direst degree;

All several sins, all used in each degree,

Throng to the bar, crying all, Guilty! Guilty! (*Richard III* v.5.147-153, 591)

In the ensuing Battle of Bosworth Field, Richmond vanquishes Richard and washes away all his curse and carnage with his corpse. The providential plan for England has completely unfolded. Richard has perfectly played his role as the Scourge of God. He has destroyed all the individuals who have committed sinful acts or wreaked havoc on England, or both: Somerset, Clarence, Buckingham, Hastings (gloats in the Woodvilles' misery), King Henry VI (plunges the country into bloodshed through his incompetence) and many more. In fact, there is historical evidence that shows Richard might have indeed been motivated by religious fervor in his political endeavors. As Ackroyd says,

Another intriguing aspect of his religious faith can be found. He owned a copy of the Wycliffite translation of the New Testament, as well as William Langland's *Piers Plowman*; both of these books had been condemned by a synod of the Church in 1408. They smacked of Lollardy and a more austere version of Catholicism. It can be safely concluded that Richard was interested in an unorthodox and more rigorous piety, wholly in keeping with what can be surmised of his stern character. He need have no scruples if he was doing the work of the Lord. (265)

From a providential perspective strongly in line with Saint Augustine's philosophy of history – which regards the earthly ruler as the Scourge of God, Richard purges England from the residue of evil that started with Richard II's deposition and thrived during the Wars of the Roses, and then he himself is undone by the Lord. There is a suggestion in the play that after

Richard, God appoints Richmond to be his scourge in England. This is manifested in Richmond's plea to God before he goes to sleep on the Field of Bosworth:

O Thou, whose captain I account myself,
Look on my forces with a gracious eye;
Put in their hands thy bruising irons of wrath,
That they may crush down with a heavy fall
The usurping helmets of our adversaries!
Make us thy ministers of chastisement,
That we may praise thee in the victory. (*Richard III* v.5.61-67, 591)

Here, by promoting himself and his forces as a more effective instrument of discipline ("O Thou, whose captain I account myself;" "thy bruising irons of wrath;" "thy ministers of chastisement;" etc.), Richmond indicates that Richard is no longer needed as the Scourge of God. With Richard's undoing in the Battle of Bosworth Field – which clearly attests to God's turn of favor, Richmond assumes that role for himself. As we shall see in the chapter on the dominant, history will show that Richmond – who would become King Henry VII – was a much more effective instrument of enacting order on earth. In the end, in *Richard III* Shakespeare retroactively imposes a Providential plan on the predominantly Machiavellian world of the three Henry VI plays and thus upon the Wars of the Roses. All the carnage and destruction assume a higher significance hitherto hidden from view. As Rackin puts it,

Richard believes (as well he might, given his background in the *Henry VI* plays) that the world runs on Machiavellian principles, but almost from the first the audience is given reason to believe that he may be mistaken. Prophecies, prophetic dreams, curses that take effect – all suggest that supernatural forces are involved in the events that Richard

believes and claims are completely under his control.... Richard thinks he is living in a world governed by Machiavellian *Realpolitik*, but Shakespeare places him in a world governed by providence, a dissonance that produces heavy dramatic irony. (63)

Feudalism

Providentialism goes hand in hand with feudalism. In fact, the hierarchical nature of the Great Chain of Being, which is manifested in Lovejoy's concept of gradation, becomes the foundation stone of feudalism, especially in its last phases. Generally speaking, feudalism is a form of vassalage in which the lords pledge unconditional fealty to their overlord. But more technically – and this is how feudalism was practiced for most of the Middle Ages – it is a peculiar form of property rights in which the magnates hold land from their sovereign in return for their allegiance to him. As Luscombe says,

Vassalage is the tie that binds a warrior to a lord when the former, the vassal, does homage and swears an oath of fealty to the latter. Vassalage basically was meant to be a mutual and life-long bond between a lord and his man.... Enduring personal loyalty (*commendatio*) of a warrior to his lord is the central feature of vassalage. Only when the vassal is rewarded with a grant (*beneficium*) of lands known as a fee or fief does such vassalage become feudal vassalage. The fief, however, is usually only granted on account of the service due from the vassal (*servitium dehitum*). (160)

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, during the Early Middle Ages (the so-called Dark Ages) the Western European Germanic ruling races such as the Merovingians in the Frankish lands and the Anglo-Saxons in the British Isles would give land away to their subjects in perpetuity. However, in the eighth century the Carolingians would make the grant of land conditional; that is, they would give land away to their subjects only for the duration of their service, upon ceasing of

which the land would automatically revert to the sovereign to give it away to whomever he wished.

As time went by, a host of theoretical and legal novelties would alter the practice of feudalism. During the High Middle Ages – which corresponds to the era of the Normans in England, the wider discovery of Aristotelian philosophy as well as the Roman law started the process of transplanting classic feudalism with a form of proto-ownership. By the fourteenth century, “money fief” was beginning to replace the classic form of feudalism in England; i.e. land could be acquired from an overlord through payment of money rather than offering him strict vassalage. In time, landholding became hereditary. Noble families in charge of a piece of land could keep their fief for generations by paying nominal homage to the king along with providing him with various kinds of service when necessary. As Van Caengem says, during this period

the material element had become more important than the personal element, i.e. the vassalic bond: the means had become more important than the aim and vassals became known as ‘feudatories’. There is thus solid historical justification for the modern use of ‘feudalism’ instead of ‘vassalage’, for from the later Middle Ages onwards the system was mainly a peculiar form of land-holding.... Fiefs had become or were becoming hereditary... fiefs were entering into the family patrimony irrespective of the personal qualifications of their holders. (202)

That is how the kings and nobles of the Late Middle Ages find and practice feudalism in Shakespeare’s history plays. It is King Richard II, usually regarded as a fundamentally medieval king and personality, who officially starts the institutional unravelling of classic feudalism by practicing this new form, pejoratively called “bastard feudalism” by some historians (see Coss).

Richard gives land away to whomever can deliver a greater sum to his coffers. In Richard's England, land becomes a commodity to be bartered instead of a right to be held from the sovereign.

In bastard feudalism, when the king calls upon his magnates for war, they are not under obligation to personally go to war with him. Instead, the lords and their men can accompany the king in war for a sum of money – this is called “indenture” or contract; or they can provide the king with money so that he can “retain” a private or mercenary army. That is what Richard does. He gives land to magnates, takes their money, and retains soldiers for himself. His private army of Cheshire archers is a clear manifestation of that. This practice erodes the foundations of classic feudalism by marginalizing the old nobility, and instead starts the process of centralization of royal power on the back of the nouveau riche and the mercenary.

John of Gaunt's protestations against Richard II's malpractice have usually been interpreted as the moral rants of an old nobleman against the immorality of a young, profligate king. That is in one sense true. However, Gaunt's stance can also be seen as an institutional reaction against practices that have undermined classic feudalism. For Gaunt, a strictly hereditary form of feudalism with a strong sense of vassalage – a mutual bond between the sovereign and his magnates – is the ideal. After all, Gaunt, himself an old-style knight, is the son of Edward III who vigorously tried to revive the esprit de corps of ancient vassalage by looking back to the legend of King Arthur and his Round Table.

On the contrary, what King Richard represents is bastard feudalism in which camaraderie among the magnates and unconditional loyalty to the sovereign do not count for much. Rather, it is the logic of cost and benefit that carries weight. And that is what the old-style Gaunt loathes. When Gaunt, in his sickbed in the Ely House and awaiting Richard's arrival, opens his heart to

his brother, the equally traditional Duke of York, he is actually deploring the decline of old feudalism – and by extension and a couple of centuries’ projection in time, the rise of mercantilism as well as capitalism:

This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land,
Dear for her reputation through the world,
Is now leased out, I die pronouncing it,
Like to a tenement or pelting farm:
England, bound in with the triumphant sea
Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege
Of watery Neptune, is now bound in with shame,
With inky blots and rotten parchment bonds:
That England, that was wont to conquer others,
Hath made a shameful conquest of itself. (*Richard II* ii.1.57-66, 967-968)

Note how the imagery that Gaunt employs to draw his ideal England is romantic while the imagery that he uses to describe Richard’s England is economic. Contrast “This land of such dear souls,” “this dear dear land,” “Dear for her reputation through the world” and “England, bound in with the triumphant sea / Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege / Of watery Neptune” with “leased out,” “tenement,” “pelting farm,” “inky blots” and “rotten parchment bonds.” This trend of romanticizing the old England culminates in Gaunt’s famous speech beginning with “This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle” (*Richard II* ii.1.40, 967).

When a reluctant Richard arrives to pay his dying uncle a last visit, Gaunt openly accuses him of being “Landlord of England” and not its king. For Gaunt land/England is alive/organic with a distinct romantic personality; for Richard, in Gaunt’s opinion, it is a lifeless object that

only stands surety for money. However, let's not forget how Richard addresses England in highly organic terms no less romantic than his uncle's when he returns from Ireland, which proves Richard is still a fundamentally medieval character. This presents us with a conundrum for Richard's character. He embraces the relatively new concept of money fief and yet emotionally engages in organic metaphors. It is a painful dilemma in which he finds himself: straddling two worlds, and not quite being in either.

Finally, Gaunt diagnoses this new state of affairs as an "illness" and predicts Richard's political death on its account. When Gaunt eventually dies and Richard declares his intention to confiscate his properties, which now actually belong to the exiled son of his deceased uncle, Henry Bolingbroke, the Duke of York paints a grim picture of the future by paralleling providentialism with feudal legalism. He warns Richard that if he denies Bolingbroke, the Duke of Hereford, his property rights, he will indeed go against the very providential and legal principles that made him king in the first place; and by that will open the door on anarchy and his own downfall:

Take Hereford's rights away, and take from Time

His charters and his customary rights;

Let not to-morrow then ensue to-day;

Be not thyself; for how art thou a king

But by fair sequence and succession?

Now, afore God – God forbid I say true! –

If you do wrongfully seize Hereford's rights,

Call in the letters patent that he hath

By his attorneys-general to sue

His livery, and deny his offer'd homage,
You pluck a thousand dangers on your head,
You lose a thousand well-disposed hearts
And prick my tender patience, to those thoughts
Which honour and allegiance cannot think. (*Richard II* ii.1.196-209, 970-971)

However, the bullheaded Richard will not take his uncle's advice and will indeed confiscate his cousin's property. That is a signal moment in the English politics of the Late Middle Ages, for it starts the unravelling of feudalism forever. Although Bolingbroke will later defy custom and precedent by deposing an anointed king, it was the deposed king himself who defied custom and precedent in the first place by nullifying Bolingbroke's feudal property rights. As Ackroyd says,

Such an interference in the laws of inheritance was immensely shocking to a society that relied deeply upon custom and precedent. No landowner, or landowner's family, could feel safe under such a king. Any monarch who unlawfully deprived his subjects of their property, in defiance of the injunctions of the Magna Carta, was at once considered to be a tyrant. (190)

And the tyrant is readily deposed by one of his subjects. Richard II was the last of the Plantagenet line that had ruled England legitimately – from father to son – for 250 years. With him gone, anyone with a drop of royal blood could lay claim to the crown. And that is what actually happens for the span of almost a century after Richard's fall. Therefore, the breakdown of English medieval polity starts with King Richard II.

If Richard II is keen on killing the old feudal order, Henry V, on the contrary, does everything in his power to revive the image of it, albeit temporarily. Unlike the courtly Richard,

Henry is a warlike king in the vein of his father Henry IV, his grandfather Gaunt, and most importantly, his great grandfather Edward III. In the words of his archenemy, King Charles VI of France, Henry is a “stem of that victorious stock” (*Henry V* ii.4.62-63, 1474). That is one reason why in *Henry V* Shakespeare goes back to glorification of the old order and custom and precedent. And this partly proves my overall point in this dissertation that progress is a recurring rather than a linear phenomenon, for Shakespeare gives the residual a great role in this last major history play of his oeuvre, to a degree that we don’t see in the previous plays.

The most significant revival of feudal tradition takes place in the famous episode where the Archbishop of Canterbury reads from long rolls and parchments to prove that King Henry’s claim to the French crown is just. The episode has been most memorably enacted in Laurence Olivier’s cinematic rendition of the play (1944). Felix Aylmer plays the Archbishop of Canterbury, and gives the whole episode a comic twist by rummaging through a sea of rolls for archaic laws and long-forgotten names. However, the episode was indeed absolutely serious for its contemporary times, and of course also for the Age Shakespeare.

Before embarking upon a conquest of France, King Henry asks the Archbishop of Canterbury to justify his cause. He asks the Archbishop to tell him “justly and religiously” how he can inherit the French crown in spite of the Salic Law: “My learned lord, we pray you to proceed / And justly and religiously unfold / Why the law Salique that they have in France / Or should, or should not, bar us in our claim” (*Henry V* i.2.9-12, 1458). Canterbury justifies Henry’s claim by stating that the Salic Law originates not in France but Germany (it belonged to the era of the old Holy Roman Empire). He then bolsters Henry’s claim by resorting to the Scriptures to overrule the Salic Law: “The sin upon my head, dread sovereign! / For in the book of Numbers is

it writ, / When the man dies, let the inheritance / Descend unto the daughter” (*Henry V* i.2.97-100, 1459).

And this is where Canterbury starts the long and laborious exposition of Henry’s pedigree as well as custom and precedent that ring so hollow and ridiculous today. Here I will try to make sense of Canterbury’s confused account in this episode. The Hundred Years’ War (1337-1453) started as a result of a structural anomaly in the feudal system. Under duress, Henry III of England had given up most of the Plantagenet Empire through the Treaty of Paris (1259), but he kept the possession of the Duchy of Gascony in southwestern France. However, as Gascony was located in France, the English king was technically required to acknowledge the French king as his overlord. As a result, when Edward III became king of England in 1327, through the feudal system he also became a subject of King Philip of Valois. Edward had to pay “homage liege” to the sovereign from whom he held land, to provide him with men and arms when he went to war, and not to enter alliances against his overlord.

This was unthinkable. As a result, Edward subverted the whole situation by taking a bold step. Instead of paying homage to the French king, he declared himself King of England and France in 1337. To couch his claim in symbolic imagery, Edward quartered the Royal Arms of England and adopted the Capetian fleur-de-lis side by side with the Plantagenet *lions passant* to make the Royal Arms of England and France. The notoriously confusing motto of the Order of the Garter, “Shame on him who thinks ill of it,” refers, according to Ackroyd (162), not to the garter of the lady who dropped it during a royal party but to Edward’s claim to the French crown.

In flagrant neglect of the Salic Law that debars women from succession, Edward pressed his claim through his mother Isabella of France who was the last surviving child of the Capetian King Philip the Fair. That is what near a century later concerns Henry V when he wants to revive

the claim of the House of Plantagenet to the French crown. Henry, who is both a shrewd politician and a pious man, means to resolve the problem of the Salic Law – that probably kept haunting King Edward’s campaign in France – once and for all. That is why he asks Canterbury to “justly and religiously” unfold to him how his claim is just. And Canterbury more than amply provides Henry with a just and religious *casus belli*. So when Henry asks “May I with right and conscience make this claim?” Canterbury concurs, “The sin upon my head”! Those present then spur Henry to follow in the footsteps of his great grandfather and great uncle. Canterbury says,

Stand for your own; unwind your bloody flag;

Look back into your mighty ancestors:

Go, my dread lord, to your great-grandsire’s tomb,

From whom you claim; invoke his warlike spirit,

And your great-uncle’s, Edward the Black Prince. (*Henry V* i.2.101-105, 1459-1460)

The Bishop of Ely and the Duke of Exeter follow suit:

Ely: Awake remembrance of these valiant dead

And with your puissant arm renew their feats:

You are their heir; you sit upon their throne;

The blood and courage that renowned them

Runs in your veins. (*Henry V* i.2.115-119, 1460)

Exeter: Your brother kings and monarchs of the earth

Do all expect that you should rouse yourself,

As did the former lions of your blood. (*Henry V* i.2.122-124, 1460)

So Henry, armed with religion, ancient law and popular acclaim, embarks upon a conquest of France, and in the end gets what his ancestors never could: he forces the French king

to acknowledge his progeny's right to be crowned King of France. Nevertheless, the old feudal order is in decline in general. Henry V himself is in one way the facilitator and accelerator of its fall. If we remember, before sailing for France, Henry, according to Shakespeare, attains the traitorous Richard, Earl of Cambridge. Attainder was the harshest form of punishment for the nobility during the Middle Ages. It constituted stripping a magnate of all his titles, rights and properties for high treason against the monarch. That is the punishment Henry V metes out to Richard, Earl of Cambridge.

This makes the earl's son, Richard Plantagenet, clamber up the ladder of nobility and struggle to get back his title and rights, which in turn precipitates the English civil war that Shakespeare has eternalized in the Henry VI plays. The Wars of the Roses come at the end of a long process of disintegration of feudal system, where holding land becomes more important than vassalage to the king. Richard Plantagenet is the supreme manifestation as well as the main agent of that disintegration. He wants his title and lands back not because he is Henry's vassal but because it is his birthright. With Richard Plantagenet ownership is born and feudalism dies.

Chivalry/Crusading

If feudalism is the structure of the medieval polity, chivalry is its ideal. To put it another way, feudalism is the body of the medieval polity while chivalry is its soul. When the vassalic element in feudalism takes the form of an ideal code of honor and conduct instead of just an obligatory duty to the overlord, what we have is chivalry. As Saul says, "The medieval aristocracy were shaped in a chivalric image. When knights went off to war, they did so in one capacity as subjects acknowledging their obligations to their king, yet they did so in another as adventurers questing 'for honour and fame'" (5). As it happens, Shakespeare's histories abound with chivalry.

The Lancastrian Tetralogy famously opens with a trial by combat. The abortive joust at Coventry Tilts between Bolingbroke and Mowbray was reportedly the last time an issue of honor among the nobility was officially decided through single combat in England. Bolingbroke, later King Henry IV, himself had an extended and noteworthy history in crusading. As a young cadet of the House of Lancaster, Bolingbroke would take part in the crusade against the pagan Lithuanians in Prussia, with his father John of Gaunt bankrolling the expensive expedition. Through the crusade, the Lancastrians were most likely advancing the chances of their house to acquire the crown of England in view of King Richard's childlessness.

This crusading propensity in Bolingbroke we can see manifested in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays where King Henry constantly speaks of his desire to go on a crusade in the Holy Land, a desire that never materializes in the course of the history cycle. His death in the Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Palace (2 *Henry IV*, IV-5) is in one sense an ironic reminder of the fact that he never delivered on his promise of taking the cross to the Holy Land. Nevertheless, Henry seriously advises his son and heir, Prince Hal, not to underestimate the strategic importance of crusading and overseas war for healing the divisions at home.

Hal in turn becomes the ultimate crusader. He shows his chivalry during the Battle of Shrewsbury while fighting honorably for the royal cause, defending his father, facing the equally chivalrous Hotspur in single combat, and finally emerging victorious. Hal continues that chivalric streak in his own play, *Henry V*. There, drawing upon the claim of his great grandfather, King Henry embarks upon what is more of a crusade than a simple territorial war in France. As I mentioned above, Edward III had assumed the title of King of England and France and adopted the Capetian fleur-de-lis as his heraldic symbol. As such, as Saul says, "The Hundred Years War was therefore in a technical sense a chivalric dispute, a quarrel between two

knights over the right to bear a particular coat of arms.” (94-95). It is Henry V who finally settles that generational chivalric dispute.

Edward had also appropriated as the flag of England the red cross on the white background that was associated with the crusading Knights Templar. The flag was later attributed to the warrior Saint George, whom was also adopted by Edward as the patron saint of England. Henry V was vigorously trying to revive that chivalric ethos and imagery that had been spoiled by Richard II and hadn't found a chance to resurface during the reign of Henry IV. “Cry ‘God for Harry, England, and Saint George!’” (*Henry V* iii.1.34, 1477) that Shakespeare has Henry mistakenly deliver before the walls of Harfleur – it was actually delivered at Agincourt – encapsulates all the religio-nationalist imagery that Edward had generated and Henry was eager to revive. As Saul says,

Edward's posthumous reputation was to be of considerable significance in shaping the character of English late medieval kingship. Through his remarkable triumphs in war Edward established a new paradigm of militant chivalric rule. English history in the late Middle Ages was to be in a very real sense a negotiation with the memory of his achievements. For as long as the pursuit of external war was considered the foundation of good kingship and success in war the measure of God's blessing on the kingdom, Edward's kingship was the exemplar for others to follow. (110)

By contrast, the Yorkist Tetralogy is mostly concerned with the decline of chivalric values in England. The tetralogy starts with the untimely demise of Henry V, the very symbol of chivalry, and the heart-rending mourning of the nobility for his loss. As Joan of Arc later eloquently points out, with Henry gone the glory of medieval England comes to an end:

Glory is like a circle in the water,

Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself

Till by broad spreading it disperse to nought.

With Henry's death the English circle ends;

Dispersed are the glories it included. (*1 Henry VI* i.3.112-116, 451)

The three Henry VI plays are in fact rife with signs of decline of chivalry. It is not for nothing that most of the chivalric figures of *1 Henry VI* die not in combat but in a much more neutral – and much less noble – manner. Salisbury and Gargrave are shot with a cannonball during the siege of Orleans (I-4), and Bedford dies of old age in something like a wheelchair (III-2). It must be noted that although gunpowder was introduced to Western Europe during the fourteenth century, its effective use came during the last phases of the Hundred Years' War, when our history plays take place. In a sense, Shakespeare parallels the fall of chivalry with the rise of gunpowder.

In the course of the play, Talbot frequently scolds the English for their cowardice and unchivalrous conduct. Sir John Fastolfe, the progenitor of the much more famous Sir John Falstaff, is the iconic example of an unchivalrous knight in this play, and Shakespeare certainly meant him to be a foil to Talbot, the sum of all that is chivalric. Fastolfe is an offshoot of Miles Gloriosus, the classic epitome of the bragging coward. Even before he appears on the stage, we hear of his rank-breaking and dastardly escape at the Battle of Patay which exposed Talbot's flank and led to the loss of the city and Talbot's capture by the French (I-1). He again breaks rank and flies in Rouen. Later, during King Henry VI's coronation in Paris (IV-1), when Talbot sees Fastolfe, he snatches the Garter from him and tears it while cursing him for his cowardice, upon which King Henry banishes Fastolfe.

Talbot's episode with the Countess of Auvergne (II-3) is a rare and curious reproduction of chivalric romance in early Shakespeare, especially with regard to the concept of courtly love. It looks very much like one of those Arthurian episodes where the knight is ensnared by an enchantress and then breaks the spell and escapes unscathed but wiser, something like Sir Lancelot's encounter with Morgan le Faye. Although the Countess is an enemy, when she invites Talbot to her castle, he accepts her invitation out of chivalric courtesy. Before Talbot arrives, the Countess reveals that she has laid a plot for Talbot, comparing herself to the Scythian Tomyris who killed Cyrus the Great.

Upon Talbot's arrival, the Countess starts mocking at him and telling him that he does not live up to his reputation. When Talbot gets resented and is about to leave, she says he is her prisoner. The imagery she uses to portray the situation bears a great resemblance to the words of a witch: "Long time thy shadow hath been thrall to me, / For in my gallery thy picture hangs: / But now the substance shall endure the like, / And I will chain these legs and arms of thine" (*I Henry VI* ii.3.35-38, 462). However, the crafty Talbot frustrates her plot by blowing his horn and summoning his soldiers, whom he calls his "substance," with whom he has subdued France. The Countess, chastened, admits to Talbot's greatness and asks for his pardon, which Talbot magnanimously grants and instead asks her to let him taste of her vintage wine. She is honored to do so. The spell breaks and the witch is metamorphosed into a lady through Talbot's cunning and chivalry. This seemingly digressive episode to the plot of the play is in fact meant to magnify Talbot's status as the perfect knight.

Talbot & Son's last stand is the closest to classic chivalry we get in the first tetralogy. It is the only battle in the countless battles depicted in the Henry VI plays to which Shakespeare gives mythic proportions. He does that by using bombastic language as well as mythological

imagery, comparing Talbot and John to Daedalus and Icarus (IV-6), the mythic inventors who flew towards the Sun on leather wings until the wax in Icarus' wings melted and caused his tragic downfall. This is a signal scene in which we witness one of the last glimpses of the old chivalry and its final demise. Talbot's anxiety over the loss of his heritage is very revealing (IV-5). Before they go to battle, Talbot tells John that he called for his son to teach him his ways so that they won't get lost when he is gone, but now they are both riding to their deaths.

And so does the chivalric ideal go down in fifteenth-century England. In fact, across ages the era becomes notorious for its "barbarity" and lack of courtly refinement which is usually associated with the earlier Middle Ages. As such, over three centuries later, Sir Walter Scott, who during the great Romantic revival of the Middle Ages would give the iconic appellation "Wars of the Roses" to the English civil war of the period (in the novel *Anne of Geierstein*), resentfully refuses to incorporate it in his medievalist mythos about most noble chivalric deeds by great knights errant such as Richard the Lionheart and Ivanhoe. It is indeed Richard Plantagenet, not Talbot, who is the representative of the age. What he represents is an emergent form of nobility that is only loyal to itself and its interests. In the Yorkist Tetralogy we can clearly see the decline of chivalric values as a result of the crumbling of the old vassalic system in fifteenth-century England. As it happens, the era of the Wars of the Roses produced the deepest and most comprehensive account of the vanishing of the chivalric ideal. It is *Le Morte d'Arthur* by Sir Thomas Malory who, ironically, wrote this long account of chivalry when he was miserably imprisoned in Newgate Prison in London for his unchivalrous pro-Lancastrian plot to overthrow King Edward IV in the late 1460s.

Le Morte d'Arthur is awash with betrayal, incest, adultery, impurity and doubt. King Arthur begets Mordred by sleeping with his half-sister Morgause. He then in a panic has every

single newborn baby in his kingdom dispatched to sea in a large boat in order to get rid of the fruit of his sin, but Mordred survives. Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere have an affair, which breaks Arthur's heart and leads to the disintegration of the Round Table and the realm. The bastard Mordred, who has made his peace with his father, eventually deals a mortal blow to Arthur. But above all else, *Le Morte d'Arthur* is imbued with a deep sense of loss. The title the publisher William Caxton gave the work upon its first publication in 1485, "Death of Arthur," is quite telling of the mood of the times.

Conclusion

Organic metaphors are meant to demonstrate the intrinsic connection between medieval cosmology (Great Chain of Being) and the organic view of society. In fact, the organic analogy is used as a means of legitimizing the social hierarchy. It is Richard II, the Sun King himself, who triggers the crumbling of the medieval order of things. Richard forfeits his "divine right" by going factional and arbitrarily usurping his subjects' properties – which is their divine right as much as Richard's is. The Great Chain of Being literally begins to unravel when Richard descends from Flint Castle to surrender himself to Bolingbroke (*Richard II* Act III, Scene 3). However, as an unwanted and unpredicted consequence, Richard also starts the process of secularization of politics in England. As Heims says, with the fall of Richard and the rise of Bolingbroke, "Shakespeare potentially signals the demise of the medieval idea of the divine right of kingship. In its place arises the beginning of power politics and the manipulation of public opinion as the basis of national leadership" (105).

When Henry IV in his deathbed (2 *Henry IV* Act II, Scene 3) shows anxiety over the loss of the crown, it can be interpreted as his concern for the continuation of the medieval tradition; that while his body natural is failing, his body politic still desires to live on. But alas, to no use,

for his own usurping of the crown through the “power of the personal will” from King Richard has irremediably broken that tradition. By many times referencing the realm as a “diseased body” (see Parchizadeh 158), *2 Henry IV* shows that the organic medieval body politic is indeed in decline. Henry’s will to be buried at the Canterbury Cathedral instead of the traditional Westminster Abbey clearly shows that inevitable break with the past. Shakespeare’s King Henry IV, in other words, is a liminal character, straddling the two worlds – quite like Shakespeare himself.

The medieval doctrine is still in use during the Tudor era, and will remain in use during the succeeding reign of the Stuarts. Both Tudors and Stuarts would employ the concepts of the Great Chain of Being and the body politic to assert their sovereign rights. Elizabeth’s Anglican Church would issue *An Homily against Disobedience and Willful Rebellion* (1571); and King James would write the two treatises *The True Law of Free Monarchies* (1598) and *Basilikon Doron* (1599) to assert the divine right of kings. But in the meantime the doctrine has lost something. It is based in a hierarchical and hierocratic medieval worldview that has been dealt a huge blow by both the secularizing trends of the Renaissance and the political struggles for power, most importantly by Henry VIII’s severing of relations with the Catholic Church and replacing it with monarchy as head of both church and state. However, the final collapse of the medieval order must await yet another English civil war and the emergence of positivism and social contract theories in the second half of the seventeenth century.

As for the idea of chivalry, it would keep recurring across ages. The ideal would later resurface in the form of the archetypal “gentleman” of the books of courtier and mirrors for princes which would find its culmination in the Elizabethan concept of Protestant Chivalry, best represented by Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, and even Shakespeare himself. After going

down for more than two centuries since Shakespeare, medieval chivalry would much more colorfully and unabashedly reemerge in the Romantic and Victorian eras with a new sense of purpose; that is, as a romantic reaction to the rapid pace of industrialization as well as the spiritual crisis of the mid-nineteenth century; and as a melancholic requiem for a long-lost golden age of organicity, heroism, individualism and conscience that perhaps never was in the first place. One can safely say that Walter Scott, Alfred Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites built their glamorous careers considerably upon the back of the romanticized concept of chivalry, which is still pretty much with us today in the early twenty-first century.

CHAPTER 4

THE EMERGENT

Introduction

If the early modern period is in one way profoundly medieval, in another way it is vigorously modern. In this period we can witness “the formation of a new class, the coming to consciousness of a new class, and within this, in actual process, the (often uneven) emergence of elements of a new cultural formation” (124) that Raymond Williams has called the “emergent.” Regarding Shakespeare, modernism, usually in the peculiar form of Machiavellianism, is the most conspicuously emergent episteme in the histories. With regard to approach and subject matter, the most salient epistemological difference between Machiavelli as a political thinker and his medieval predecessors is the difference between process and structure. While the ancient and medieval political thinkers are mostly concerned with the structure of the polity, Machiavelli is interested in the “process” of politics or how politics actually works. As Arienzo and Petrina say, before Machiavelli “much of the philosophical discussion on political theory was still concerned with the grounds, limits and aims of royal kingship rather than with policy, and Machiavelli contributed primarily to a new approach to statecraft (both royalist and republican) and policy” (9). It can be said that Machiavelli’s foremost concern is the “nature of politics.”

As the medieval world order begins to crumble, age-old structures are steadily transformed and a new dynamics in sociopolitical conduct and human relations starts to take shape. As I explained in Chapter Two, it is in this period that the second causes start to appear on the map of the world, not yet superseding the First Cause but nevertheless playing significant roles in the affairs of the world. In Chapter Three we already studied the residual presence of the epistemes in Shakespeare’s history cycle that are predicated on the First Cause. In this chapter

we are concerned with the epistemes that follow from second causes. In the early modern period, human agency starts to count for something if not for everything. As Godzich says with regard to the Enlightenment – and this can also be partly applied to the early modern period,

The problem of agency arises in modern times from the partial nature of the secularization that was carried out by Enlightenment philosophy. For the Scholastics, agency was one of the attributes of God; and the world, and everything in it, moved insofar as he exercised his divine will. Human will could rise in opposition to the divine will as part of its own freedom, but it did not have any agential power as such to determine the course of the affairs of the world. The Enlightenment encounters the problem of agency because the secularization that carries out consists in bracketing away the divine instance and to let loose all that which had previously been an attribute of God.

(xx)

With God pushed somewhat to the backseat and the medieval hierarchies blurred, humans begin to transcend the old boundaries that were predicated on the divine world order; becoming restless to move out of their predetermined positions and getting upwardly mobile. They seek happiness and self-fulfillment not necessarily through single-minded devotion to God but rather through various venues of education, trade, voyage, revolution, war and royal patronage. With the emergence of the classics, foremost among them Aristotle and Cicero, and their emphasis on the role of education for individual improvement, an instrumental understanding of the world starts to supplement the already-in-place devotional understanding of it. To put it another way, the medieval *vita contemplativa* begins to give way to the classical *vita activa* during the Renaissance. As Burns says,

The political ideas [of the Renaissance] were generated in a period that requires its historians, in an especially marked degree, to ‘look before and after’. A watershed between ‘medieval’ and ‘modern’ European history has conventionally been located in the late fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth – the period which saw the final eclipse of the Byzantine Empire, the flowering of the humanist Renaissance, and the first stages of the Protestant Reformation. (1)

Early modern revolutions such as the Lutheran/Calvinist revolts across western and central Europe, including the Great Peasants’ Revolt (1524-1525) in German principalities, the French Wars of Religion (1562-1598) between the Catholics and the Huguenots, and the Protestant Dutch Revolt against the Catholic Spain (1568-1648), all of a religio-nationalist nature, occur in this period. The first great voyages of discovery – and predicated upon them, colonialism on a global scale – also start at this juncture in the history of the modern world. This whole dynamics creates sociopolitical mobility on a mass scale for the first time in the history of Western Europe, unprecedented even as far back as the republican times of the Roman antiquities. In one sense, this is akin to taking one’s destiny in one’s own hands.

During this period, the strict heavenly laws and ancient customs that act as the background against which sociopolitical action is judged begin to slacken and erode. And when there is no sure yardstick with which to measure the actions of human agents, power increasingly becomes the arbiter of disputes between the sons of man. As Machiavelli has notoriously put it in *The Prince*, “In the actions of all men, and especially of princes, where there is no tribunal to which to appeal, one must consider the final result. Therefore, let a prince conquer and maintain the state, and his methods will always be judged honourable and praised by all” (Bondanella 62). As Rackin reminds us, “In a Machiavellian universe, rival truths have no means of adjudication

but the law of force. The verdicts of force, however, are always provisional, always subject to contradiction by the next turn of the fortunes of battle” (51).

As such, Machiavelli is in fact a creature of his time rather than a creator of it. As Arienzo and Petrina say, during the early modern times Machiavelli was “a recognizable persona for libertinism, political craft, greed, vice” (2). His treatise was also treated as a handbook of evil, or at best a set of shady pieces of advice on how to govern. However, *The Prince* is first and foremost a handbook of sociopolitical mobility and self-fashioning. Machiavelli’s Prince, beyond being an evil or amoral character, is a highly flexible creature who adapts himself to all kinds of circumstances in order to move up the sociopolitical ladder. Actually, Machiavelli wrote the treatise to give counsel primarily to the up-and-coming prince. That is why this treatise has been notably regarded as a “republican” text although at its center sits the absolutist prince. *The Prince* does not concern itself with the legitimacy based on blood and precedent, and instead focuses on the process of attaining and maintaining power. What is the core of concentration here is the agency of the Prince rather than his pedigree. So, *The Prince* is republican in an early modern sense. Machiavelli’s Prince is indeed a protean character; a Renaissance Man who follows Heraclitus’ dictum that constant change is the only constancy in this world. But this is not a trait that we only see in Machiavelli’s Prince. Self-fashioning is an emergent and rising trend during the Renaissance. As Greenblatt says,

Perhaps the simplest observation we can make is that in the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process. Such self-consciousness had been widespread among the elite in the classical world, but Christianity brought a growing suspicion of man’s power to shape identity: “Hands off yourself,” Augustine declared. “Try to build up yourself,

and you build a ruin.”! This view was not the only one available in succeeding centuries, but it was influential, and a powerful alternative began to be fully articulated only in the early modern period. (2)

Self-fashioning is the order of the day in the Tudor court. But for a few exceptions, almost all those who served the Tudors during the long and turbulent sixteenth century were self-made men whose skills and abilities rather than their pedigree mattered to the sovereign. Thomas Wolsey was the son of a butcher who went to Oxford, entered the service of Henry VII, was installed as a cardinal by the pope, and eventually became Henry VIII’s Lord Chancellor. His protégé, Thomas Cromwell, was the son of a blacksmith who became a lawyer, entered Wolsey’s service, and finally became Henry VIII’s right-hand man for most of the 1530s. Francis Walsingham was the son of a lawyer who went to Cambridge, travelled widely in Europe and went on to become Queen Elizabeth’s spymaster and serve on her Privy Council for close to two decades. Walter Raleigh was an adventurer and privateer who became Elizabeth’s favorite and probably the greatest icon of the times.

Sir Thomas More, whom Greenblatt has presented as the primary Renaissance self-fashioner, is in fact a curious instance who stands out among his contemporaries. More is the archetypal man on the faultlines. He is a contradictory character, as he himself is an upwardly mobile figure and a great agent of change, and at the same time he stands in the way of change. During his early career More is given to promoting humanist ideas that if fully implemented call for dissent from the medieval norms. Much of his *Utopia* can be read in that light. And yet when he becomes Henry VIII’s Lord Chancellor, he embarks upon persecuting all sorts of dissenters. At the end of his career, not being able to follow the advice his Aristotelian/Ciceronian persona has given to Raphael Hythloday in *Utopia*, More is undone because he cannot find it in his

conscience to float with the flow of the times; and to concede to his sovereign's impious dissent from the Vicar of Christ. As such, the case of More clearly shows the practical limits of early modern humanism.

More's career is a perfect demonstration of how faith and *realpolitik*, medievalism and modernism, and residual and emergent come to clash in the early modern period. Throughout his life More constantly struggles to remain a man of conscience in a world where conscience increasingly counts for little and expediency for more. This is an aspect of his career on which Robert Bolt has strongly capitalized in his play for all time, *A Man for All Seasons* (1960). Torn between conscience and convenience, Bolt's More eventually chooses conscience. In his fate a tragedy is born out of the conflict between sociopolitical reality and philosophical ideal. And that tragedy is what has eternally projected him into the future, making him More our Contemporary.

As it happens, the conflicts and contradictions of More are also those of Shakespeare's. The most memorable of his characters are constantly at war, whether with others or with themselves. They are eternally torn between adhering to the grand narratives of the past and the present, to conscience and convenience, and to constancy and change, with the conflict between the two driving Shakespeare's narrative forward. And nowhere does he more profoundly and comprehensively demonstrate that dynamics than in the history plays, which of all his productions are substantially concerned with the question of power in human relations on a mass scale; that is, with politics. Given this general introduction, in the pages that follow I will focus on the instances of sociopolitical mobility and self-fashioning as a peculiar form of Machiavellian epistemology that I regard as the emergent in Shakespeare's history plays.

Lancastrian Mobility

For Shakespeare, struggle is universal. There is hardly a single relationship in the histories that is free of conflict. The whole cycle is expressed as war, whether between the English and the French or among the British themselves. Cast in that general framework of conflict, there is also a myriad of conflicts in different forms: sometimes just to advance a particular goal, some other times a long-term political agenda. In order to make their point and attain their end, Shakespeare's characters argue, and when they can't win the argument they go to war, anticipating by more than two centuries Von Clausewitz' classic dictum that "war is nothing but the continuation of policy with other means" (7). The History play by nature is a dialectical form/genre whose essence is tension/conflict – rather than resolution/settlement – over great matters of state. That is why I believe history play is the juncture where drama and politics meet and converge. As Knowles says,

Argument generates conflict and conflict generates action in the ensuing disjunction between words and deeds. Shakespeare's implicit theory and explicit practice as playwright draw on the centrality of argument in Renaissance culture and education and on the actuality of argument in the everyday world of human encounter.... Shakespeare's characters speak and they act, they say things and they do things. Much of the speech is concerned with persuasion or dissuasion in one form or another, directly or indirectly, by reasoning or suggestion, command or plea. Even action itself was considered as a form of argument. (1-2)

The history plays are replete with instances of sociopolitical mobility. This stems from the fact that, as we said before, the medieval order of things is crumbling in the world of the histories, and the players in the realm of politics tend more to "gain" their power and position

than simply inherit it because it is their divine right. This leads to a humanist rather than a providential theory of politics. As the ultimate source of authority – God – gradually gives way and as the order he has supposedly created for the world is exposed as engineered and artificial rather than autochthonous and natural, politics becomes much more prone to human intervention. That is why in Shakespeare’s history plays almost all the characters actively strive for power/political participation. Though we are still a long way from it, the epistemic break that Shakespeare represents here would eventually lead to the “democratization” of politics. As Chanan says in his groundbreaking *Shakespeare and Democracy*,

Shakespeare’s plays occupy a critical juncture in the emergence of [the democratic] ethos. This is not because he foresees democracy, but because he is, unknowingly, wrestling with its preconditions. Modern states were originally unified under monarchies, dictatorships or foreign rulers. To replace these systems, it had to be realized that they were humanly constructed, and able to be changed. Shakespeare’s plays continually pose the question of how human beings shape their shared conditions. (2)

From the beginning of the cycle to its end, various characters strive to break out of their predetermined mold in society and move to higher echelons. This is regardless of where they originally stand or are supposed to stand in the medieval order of things. Therefore, those who strive for an upward movement consist of a wide and sundry array of upper magnates, lower magnates, the clerics, the gentry, the peasantry and soldiery, women and immigrants. And Shakespeare gives us more than enough evidence of that in the many upwardly mobile characters that he portrays in the history plays. Interestingly, even the preponderantly allegorical Falstaff and his cohort expect upward mobility at Hal’s accession, although they eventually get frustrated.

Practically, the whole cycle starts with sociopolitical struggle, the most conspicuous manifestation of which during the early plays is the ongoing conflict between Humphrey of Lancaster, Duke of Gloucester, and Henry Beaufort, Cardinal Winchester. Gloucester was Henry IV's youngest son; Winchester was the second son of John of Gaunt, and therefore Gloucester's half uncle. They were both King Henry VI's uncles and high-ranking members of the Regency Government (1422-1437) that ruled England and the Plantagenet Empire during Henry VI's minority. In real life the uncle and the nephew never got along, as each would relentlessly strive for hegemony at King Henry's court.

Eleanor Cobham, the Duchess of Gloucester and wife of Duke Humphrey, is a good example of a woman who is a social climber. During the rather limited stage time that is allotted to her, she keeps encouraging her husband to push his nephew aside and seize the throne for himself. Her dream in which she sees that she is sitting in state in Westminster Palace while King Henry VI and Queen Margaret bow to her (*2 Henry VI*, I-2) is quite telling. The Duchess' jealousy towards as well as her rivalry with the Queen is an important sub-theme of the play that eventually affects more important matters of the state. It is by capitalizing on Eleanor's ambitiousness that her husband's enemies finally manage to bring down the Good Humphrey of Gloucester.

The Duke of Suffolk is an instance of the upwardly mobile upper nobility. Returning from France, Suffolk entices King Henry VI with the description of Margaret of Anjou's beauty and manners, and Henry falls for her (*1 Henry VI*, V-5). When Gloucester and Exeter protest that Reignier, Margaret's father, is poor, and that she will bring no dowry, Suffolk makes an excellent argument in favor of marriage for love and mutual respect, and not for money and property. However, when all exit, he reveals that what he had in mind was far more important

than a match for love. In fact, Suffolk, who has already made Margaret his paramour, means to wed her to the king so that he can bring Henry under his sway. And he manages to do so for a good part of *2 Henry VI*.

Interestingly, Shakespeare also gives us a social climber in the character of an immigrant; that is, Margaret of Anjou. Margaret initially has a hard time adapting to the English political climate because the nobility does not approve of the marriage. The high magnates in the English court disdain Margaret due to the fact that she is not equal to the king in status and does not bring a dowry with her. However, Margaret manages to make strong and effective alliances at court and steadily rise in influence and esteem, eventually surpassing all the lords in power, and becoming, in the words of a subdued Richard Plantagenet, the “She-wolf of France” (*3 Henry VI*, i.4.112, 312) and a “tiger’s heart wrapped in a woman’s hide” (*3 Henry VI*, i.4.138, 312). As such, the world of the histories to a great extent resembles Shakespeare’s contemporary world, as well as that of ours.

In addition to these minor instances, there are major upward movements in the histories that radically alter the course of history as well as the story in the drama. *Richard II* starts with a bold attempt by Henry Bolingbroke to achieve a higher status. He brings charges against Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, before King Richard. Bolingbroke accuses Mowbray of high treason against the king, and insinuates that he had a hand in the murder of the king’s uncle, Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester. However, what seems to be a dispute between the two high-ranking noblemen is in fact an oblique attempt by Bolingbroke to target his cousin and sovereign, King Richard II. And the roots of the conflict go back to a long time before the play actually begins. Shakespeare starts the action only *in medias res*.

Richard came to power prematurely when his warlike father, Edward the Black Prince, died of dysentery that he had contracted in the fields of France during the Hundred Years' War. Edward's early departure left an elderly King Edward III shattered, and the king died only a year into the death of his eldest son and heir. That left the ten-year old Richard as the next-of-kin. As he became a child king, for most of his minority a council of elders as well as his uncle John of Gaunt, the powerful Duke of Lancaster, ruled the realm on his behalf. When Richard came of age, he pushed the elders aside and installed his younger favorites in government posts.

Richard's move flustered the established nobility who saw their influence diminish at court and the matters of the state. In reaction, in 1387, five grand magnates of the realm, who had Bolingbroke, Mowbray and Woodstock in their ranks, and were to be known as the Lords Appellant thenceforward, brought "appeals," i.e. charges of treason, against a number of Richard's favorites, and succeeded in executing some of them and banishing some other. Many more were dismissed from court. This was a humiliating blow to the ego of the king, but he was in no position to retaliate. So he made his peace with his peers and bided his time until the time would come for his revenge.

The propitious moment arrived a decade later in 1397. By then Richard was finally on the ascendant and at the height of his power. So he started to harshly punish the senior Lords Appellant. He executed two of them and confiscated all their belongings. Bolingbroke and Mowbray escaped that fate by renewing allegiance to the king at the last moment. But they knew they were in constant danger. The danger became more visible when Woodstock died under suspicious circumstances while being kept in custody in Calais by Mowbray at the behest of the king. So when Bolingbroke brings charges against Mowbray at the beginning of *Richard II*, he is in fact accusing the king himself of their uncle's murder.

This might have been a move in self-defense. After all, Bolingbroke and Mowbray used to be confederates during the days of the Lords Appellant. They should have been close to each other. Then Richard takes over and Mowbray goes to Richard's side and kills Woodstock for him to save his skin. Mowbray might have been induced by Richard to do the same to Bolingbroke, or at least to try to cast aspersions on him. Or that might have been what Bolingbroke assumed. In any case, that is why Bolingbroke takes the initiative to publicly start the quarrel before he himself is accused or killed. He might have additionally wanted to decrease the prospect of danger by implicating Richard in the unjudicial murder of a magnate who was also a blood relation to both of them.

But beyond all that, Bolingbroke's gambit is in fact the continuation of the decades-long Lancastrian struggle to brush Richard aside and usurp the crown. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Richard was childless, and for most of his reign his Lancastrian uncle and cousin had tried to advance their own fortune at the cost of Richard. Bolingbroke's crusading expedition in northeastern Europe was a spectacular propaganda campaign to promote the House of Lancaster on both the domestic and international scenes. So the whole episode with Mowbray is just a testing ground for a coup against Richard. Through the quarrel and multiple accusations, many of them vague, Bolingbroke tries to precipitate a constitutional crisis and destabilize Richard.

The king is shrewd enough to realize his contumelious cousin's intentions, but he is not wise enough to assume a safe course of action. He aborts the fight at Coventry Tilts before it starts, but then he postpones resolving the problem that lies at the heart of the quarrel. Richard could have simply let Bolingbroke make his move and then attain him. That would have armed him with the force of law and custom. But he is not man enough to confront his warlike cousin while he is in his presence. Instead, Richard, like a tyrant, robs Bolingbroke of his inheritance

while he is in exile. That is an extremely awkward move that works against Richard and contributes to Bolingbroke's efforts at a coup that not only topples Richard but also brings down the whole medieval polity.

When Bolingbroke returns to England to confront his king and cousin for the last time, he makes sure not to entangle himself in the hierocratic rituals in which Richard tends to indulge and can manipulate and control due to his position. Instead, he goes directly for a kill. While at the head of a large army that has among its ranks most of the great peers of the realm, Bolingbroke lays siege to Richard, seizes him and makes him abdicate. The whole thing is done through sheer force, with little regard for divine law and feudal custom. It is actually Richard who shoots himself in the leg. As Rackin says, "Once he throws his warder down, using his ritualistic authority to interrupt the ritual that authorizes him, he abandons the field to another kind of battle – the kind that really is decided by superior military and political power, the kind that Bullingbrook is sure to win" (52). In this game of thrones, the Machiavellian Bolingbroke outsmarts the mostly medieval Richard. As Knowles puts it,

Richard is allowed his 'little scene' of poetic self-deposition. As it is all he has left, he seizes the theatrical moment, which culminates in the word-play of the 'shadow' and 'substance' of grief. But the shadow and substance of political reality are something altogether different. The shadow is the emptiness of metaphysical kingship and the substance is that of Machiavellian *realpolitik* negotiating legitimacy by proto-constitutional means. (65)

In line with what Greenblatt has put forward in his groundbreaking study of the Renaissance culture, Bolingbroke proves to be a supreme self-fashioner. He consciously and actively creates a favorable profile of himself in order to cultivate public approval. And he does

that on different levels. We already noted that he successfully presents himself as a warrior and crusader. In a time when the heroic exploits of Edward the Black Prince and King Edward III during the Hundred Years' War were still fresh in the memories, Bolingbroke's chivalric exploits went a long way toward gaining public approval. However, the aspect of his self-consciously created character that really wins the public opinion to his side is his humbleness, worldliness and good humor towards ordinary citizens. Richard II, his mirror image in many ways, is the first to notice that while expressing concern about Bolingbroke's intended upward mobility through this crafted modesty that for Richard smacks of treasonous intentions. During a conversation with his courtiers after he has banished Bolingbroke, Richard observes that

Ourself and Bushy, Bagot here and Green
Observed his courtship to the common people;
How he did seem to dive into their hearts
With humble and familiar courtesy,
What reverence he did throw away on slaves,
Wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles
And patient underbearing of his fortune,
As 'twere to banish their affects with him.
Off goes his bonnet to an oyster-wench;
A brace of draymen bid God speed him well
And had the tribute of his supple knee,
With 'Thanks, my countrymen, my loving friends;'
As were our England in reversion his,
And he our subjects' next degree in hope. (*Richard II*, i-4.22-35, 965-966)

This self-fashioning streak Bolingbroke internalizes and maintains throughout his career. Years later, as King Henry IV, he teaches his son, Prince Hal, a lesson in self-fashioning that is perhaps the greatest lesson Harry of Monmouth receives from his father in the course of the plays. While making preparations for containing the Percy Rebellion, King Henry summons his dissolute son to the court to reproach him for his debauchery and irresponsible conduct as heir to the throne. In a long soliloquy, Henry advises Hal not to underestimate the importance of creating a favorable public profile. He compares Hal to the deposed King Richard, and tells him that he himself overtook and surpassed the king exactly because he avoided the excesses of Richard, and instead created awe and inspiration among people through a mix of less visibility and more modesty and earnestness. As he puts it himself,

By being seldom seen, I could not stir
But like a comet I was wonder'd at;
That men would tell their children 'This is he;'
Others would say 'Where, which is Bolingbroke?'
And then I stole all courtesy from heaven,
And dress'd myself in such humility
That I did pluck allegiance from men's hearts,
Loud shouts and salutations from their mouths,
Even in the presence of the crowned king. (*1 Henry IV*, iii.2.46-54, 1196)

Already having the seeds of Machiavellianism in him, Bolingbroke emerges as a highly proficient Machiavellian prince in the character of King Henry IV. But once he is perched at the apex of the sociopolitical hierarchy, he himself becomes the target of upwardly mobile rivals. Henry's rather short reign (1399-1413) is troubled with rebellions by his peers and assassination

attempts on his life throughout. His own son and heir, Prince Hal, conducts perhaps the most sustained of rebellions against Henry. Hal tends to differ from his father and argue with him over issues of policy and strategy. For most of his reign, Henry has to discipline Hal and keep him down. But Hal finally manages to wrest most of the power from his sickly father near the end of his reign.

Shakespeare has memorably cast Hal's upwardly struggle in the form of his unruly youthful behavior and his carousals and whoremongering with Falstaff and his cohort in Eastcheap and downtown London. What Shakespeare does here is to project Hal's restlessness and Henry's angst into a universal father-and-son dynamics that has eternalized their story beyond their specific age and place. He even manages to show us a more revealing glimpse of Hal's upwardly struggle and Henry's attempt to suppress him in Act IV, Scene 5 of *2 Henry IV*, where Hal snatches the crown from a sleeping Henry – whom he thinks is already dead – and then a deeply perturbed Henry bitterly rebukes him for his premature seizure of the crown.

However, the single greatest challenge to Henry comes in the form of the Percy Rebellion (1403). Having considerably assisted Bolingbroke in his move to seize the crown from Richard, the Percys expect Henry to make them overlords of the north from where they originate. That itself is a sign of the times, that the old boundaries are blurred and the lords hunger for larger territories regardless of whose inherited territory they might trespass upon. Henry is indeed generous to them, but he does not accord them the full gamut of privileges that they expect of him. Shakespeare shows that in the form of Henry being an absolutist king and controlling character who is loath to give the Percys near full authority in the north. The Percys in turn start to act almost autonomously. They fight wars and make and break alliances with little regard for their king's opinion or interest.

For instance, as soon as *1 Henry IV* starts, we hear of Hotspur's fighting the Scottish rebel Earl of Douglas at the battle of Homildon Hill, capturing and releasing him and making an alliance with him, all without the king's consent. Here Henry becomes concerned for his sovereignty. If the two foolhardy, warlike and ambitious lords in the north become united, then there is cause for Henry to be concerned for their rebellion against him, especially that the Percys are related to Mortimer. But about that later. This is the background against which *1 Henry IV* unfolds. In order to thwart a very possible coup by the united front of the north, King Henry resorts to a Machiavellian stratagem to get rid of the Percys. As Machiavelli says,

Without a doubt, princes become great when they overcome difficulties and obstacles imposed upon them. And therefore, Fortune – especially when she wishes to increase the reputation of a new prince, who has a greater need to acquire reputation than a hereditary prince does – creates enemies for him, and has them undertake enterprises against him so that he will have the chance to overcome them and to climb higher up the ladder his enemies have brought him. Thus, many people judge that a wise prince must cunningly foster some hostile action, whenever he has the opportunity, so that in repressing it his greatness will emerge all the more. (Bondanella 73-74)

That is exactly what Henry does. He finds a pretext to alienate the Percys and provoke them to revolt. Henry "Hotspur" Percy perhaps unwittingly exposes the king's stratagem early in the play. King Henry has summoned Hotspur, his father Earl of Northumberland, and his uncle Earl of Worcester to the court in London to question them about the fact that he did not send him the Earl of Douglas and other Scottish prisoners of war so that the king can collect their ransom. As overlord, Henry can make that claim. It is his feudal right. However, it is not his claim but the

manner of its delivery with which Hotspur takes issue. He responds that he did not mean to refuse the king's request, but that he merely reacted in anger to the king's arrogant emissary.

According to Hotspur, while he and his soldiers were just recovering from the wounds they had received in the battle, and were about to bury their dead, a perfumed, clean-shaven and clean-clad courtier with the manners of a fop arrives and presses the king's claim: "Came there a certain lord, neat, and trimly dress'd, / Fresh as a bridegroom; and his chin new reap'd / Show'd like a stubble-land at harvest-home; / He was perfumed like a milliner" (*I Henry IV*, i.3.32-35, 1165). The lord not only offends Hotspur with his looks and manners, but also with his behavior towards his soldiers: "And as the soldiers bore dead bodies by, / He called them untaught knaves, unmannerly, / To bring a slovenly unhandsome corse / Betwixt the wind and his nobility" (*I Henry IV*, i.3.41-44, 1165). The lord scolds the wounded and exhausted soldiers because they have carried a stinking corpse against the wind that blows towards him. Hotspur, refusing "To be so pestered with a popinjay" (*I Henry IV*, i.3.49, 1165) any longer, explodes at him and declines the king's demand.

That objection sounds sincere enough. So Henry has to move to the next level to further incite Hotspur. Unappeased, the king observes that Hotspur not only still holds the prisoners but also insists that Mortimer, the king's distant cousin and a claimant to the throne, be ransomed from the rebel Welsh, Owen Glendower. Mortimer is also Hotspur's brother-in-law. The king refuses to ransom him because Mortimer has defected to Glendower and married his daughter. Henry, completely aware of Hotspur's short temper, despises Mortimer and uses harsh words to describe him. In the end, he even stimulates Hotspur by indirectly calling him a traitor:

Why, yet he doth deny his prisoners,

But with proviso and exception,

That we at our own charge shall ransom straight
His brother-in-law, the foolish Mortimer;
Who, on my soul, hath wilfully betray'd
The lives of those that he did lead to fight
Against that great magician, damn'd Glendower,
Whose daughter, as we hear, the Earl of March
Hath lately married. Shall our coffers, then,
Be emptied to redeem a traitor home?
Shall we but treason? and indent with fears,
When they have lost and forfeited themselves?
No, on the barren mountains let him starve;
For I shall never hold that man my friend
Whose tongue shall ask me for one penny cost
To ransom home revolted Mortimer. (*1 Henry IV*, i.3.76-91, 1166)

“Revolted Mortimer?!” cries Hotspur. Now Henry has managed to fully provoke Hotspur, who openly defies the king and says he would not deliver his prisoners. Henry flatly rebukes him and leaves with a threat. He has driven home his goal of alienating the Percys. This is where pride, anger and fear work together to incite the Percys to rebellion. Hotspur is white with anger because he thinks the king, whom they helped to the crown, has cheated them and denied them what is their due. He in turn provokes his father and uncle by reminding them of the role they played in Bolingbroke’s supplanting of Richard, and how he would discard them as soon as he had turned them into instruments for gaining the crown:

O, pardon me that I descend so low,

To show the line and the predicament
Wherein you range under this subtle king;
Shall it for shame be spoken in these days,
Or fill up chronicles in time to come,
That men of your nobility and power
Did gage them both in an unjust behalf,
As both of you – God pardon it! – have done,
To put down Richard, that sweet lovely rose,
And plant this thorn, this canker, Bolingbroke?
And shall it in more shame be further spoken,
That you are fool'd, discarded and shook off
By him for whom these shames ye underwent? (*I Henry IV*, i.3.165-177, 1168)

So he proposes that they should advocate for the cause of Mortimer whom Richard had called his heir before his overthrow by Bolingbroke: “But I will lift the down-trod Mortimer / As high in the air as this unthankful king, / As this ingrate and cankered Bolingbroke” (*I Henry IV*, i.3.133-135, 1167). That way they would be likely to get what they deserve, or lose their lives in trying: “The cords, the ladder, or the hangman rather?” (*I Henry IV*, i.3.164, 1168). It is interesting that the imagery Hotspur uses here consists of objects of ascent, although different ones suited to very different purposes. Through these images Shakespeare materializes sociopolitical mobility. That is one of his greatest expertise: to materialize abstract ideas in concrete images.

Worcester, trying to restrain Hotspur's rage so that he doesn't get himself into trouble ahead of time, instructs him to make friends with Douglas and enlist the Scots in the cause of

their rebellion. He also instructs his brother, Earl of Northumberland, to recruit the Archbishop of York who holds a grudge against Henry for executing his brother Lord Scroop. Worcester himself will go to Wales to join Glendower and Mortimer. When all are ready, they will revolt against the king and overthrow him. Worcester agrees with his nephew that in order to save themselves from the king's wrath and continuous suspicion, they must rebel against him and supplant him with Mortimer, whom they are more likely to control than, in Hotspur's words, "this vile politician" and "this subtle king." Notice how Worcester also zeroes in on an upward metaphor, i.e. "to raise a head," to multiple sociopolitical ends:

And 'tis no little reason bids us speed,
To save our heads by raising of a head;
For, bear ourselves as even as we can,
The king will always think him in our debt,
And think we think ourselves unsatisfied,
Till he hath found a time to pay us home:
And see already how he doth begin
To make us strangers to his looks of love. (*1 Henry IV*, i.3.277-284, 1170)

The Percys' plan goes into effect. They go back to their bases and start to strengthen their forces and prepare for rebellion. At one point the Percys and their confederates gather at the Archdeacon's House in Wales to finalize their strategy for war on the king (III-1). In the meantime, they go ahead of themselves and discuss the partitioning of England, an event that has come down to us as the Tripartite Indenture – and Shakespeare mistakenly puts it here because it actually pertains to the second phase of the Percy Rebellion at a later time. According to the

terms of the agreement, after Henry's overthrow, northern England goes to the Percys, southern England to Mortimer, and western England as well as Wales to Glendower.

This attempt at partitioning England is yet another form of upwardly movement by a faction of the nobility, for through that the rebellious lords mean to carve three smaller states out of England and become their kings. This is almost equal to contemporary attempts by politicians to gerrymander states and provinces so that they can create more favorable constituencies and by that gain a seat in the congress or parliament. In this episode Shakespeare shows how Hotspur is the most ambitious of all the upwardly mobile lords. Standing over an unfurled map of England, Hotspur hotly complains that his share of the land must be larger than those of the other two parties, and even enters an acrimonious verbal fight over the issue with the seasoned Glendower, who eventually gives in to hold the alliance intact.

However, when the rebellion finally comes, King Henry proves to be the subtler politician and more accomplished strategist – he used to be a great crusader, remember? Henry, having managed to recruit his unruly but bold son Prince Hal, cuts the rebels in half. He attacks a contingent of the Percy forces on their way to Wales at Shrewsbury, destroys the force, kills both Hotspur and Worcester, and captures Douglas. The first phase of the Percy Rebellion comes to a crushing end. The rebellion continues years later when Northumberland, Glendower and Mortimer manage to make yet another alliance. This is what comprises the greater part of the action in *2 Henry IV* which features the Archbishop of York as the king's main adversary. King Henry crushes this rebellion as well. With that, open rebellion against the House of Lancaster goes dormant and remains so for almost half a century.

Lower-Class Mobility

Years later, while the nobles are busy fighting for more power at King Henry VI's court as well as France, a distinct episode occurs that – at least for a while – shifts the struggle for upward mobility to the lower classes. That happens in the form of Cade's Rebellion (1450). Jack Cade is Shakespeare's sociopolitical climber in the character of the peasant. Although the real Cade probably hailed from the ranks of the gentry, Shakespeare, according to tradition, casts him as a peasant leader. This Cade, who is usually perceived as an early communist (see Laroque 252; and Pugliatti's chapter, "Jack Cade: An Unpopular Popular Hero," 154-178), is in fact an upwardly mobile figure that aspires to push the old nobility and royalty aside to become king. This can be clearly observed in Cade's attempt to fashion himself as royalty by fabricating a pedigree that connects him to Mortimer, Earl of March, who was the designated heir of King Richard II. Based on that concocted descent, Cade proclaims himself Lord of London and assumes the role and responsibilities of a ruler – although Shakespeare gives the whole thing a sinisterly comic twist. But in the end Cade is yet another 'Machiavellian' overreacher in the vein of Marlowe's Tamburlaine and Faust who eventually brings about his own downfall.

Shakespeare's portrayal of the Cade Rebellion is unique in early modern drama. The Tudors' official political doctrine, as I clarified before, was authoritarian. Their constant fear of rebellion, especially during the precarious later years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, is well attested to. Therefore, all kinds of "rebellion" were deemed seditious and their representation – in drama or anywhere else – suspect. The cases of the Earl of Essex and Sir John Hayward with respect to their "seditious" representations of Henry Bolingbroke in various accounts of Richard II are well-known. Essex, who had staged an allegedly seditious performance of *Richard II* before his coup (Hammer 1), was arrested, accused of fomenting rebellion against Elizabeth,

tried on the charge of high treason and then executed. Hayward, who was suspected of aiding the Essex Rebellion by giving a negative portrait of a reigning Richard (Elizabeth) against whom a heroic Bolingbroke (Essex) revolts, was repeatedly summoned and questioned by the authorities before he was left alone (Goldberg 236). As such, Shakespeare's treatment of the Cade Rebellion, in line with the predominant attitude of the times, is generally negative. Nevertheless, he manages to officially set down the fact of rebellion on the map of Tudor drama by giving it a full act in *2 Henry VI*.

Shakespeare starts the account of the rebellion with a preamble that connects it to the ongoing court conflict (*2 Henry VI*, VI-1). Off the coast of Kent, pirates capture the Duke of Suffolk whom King Henry has banished on the charge of being the prime mover behind the Lord Protector's murder. The chief of the pirates awards the prisoners to his men so that they can collect their ransom. Suffolk lets the pirates know who he is and asks to be ransomed. However, the pirates declare that they have grievances against him for what he has done to England, King Henry, and the Lord Protector, so they want to kill him on the spot. Suffolk is haughty all along. The pirates finally sever his head and send it to King Henry.

In this scene the future Kentish rebellion is connected to Suffolk's death. According to medieval chronicles – and Shakespeare doesn't have time or space to tell us about this – apart from their various grievances against the king, one of the reasons that spurred the Kentish men to hasten their rebellion was the rumor that King Henry was preparing to punish them for their murder of his one-time close adviser. At any rate, the fact that base men – as Suffolk keeps saying – openly intend to kill the duke and eventually do so is a manifest sign of sociopolitical conflict as well as the subversive nature of the times. This episode anticipates Cade's Rebellion, which Shakespeare will comprehensively depict in the following scenes.

Later, in Blackheath southeast of London, two rebellious commoners comically reflect on how the English social structure will be changed after the rebellion. Shakespeare's employment of plebeians as chorus, which will become one of the hallmarks of his dramatic career, starts in this play (remember the commoners who make perceptive comments on the political situation and in fact anticipate what is going to happen next in *Richard III* and *Julius Caesar*). Indeed the commoners' discussion foreshadows what Cade is going to do to England if his rebellion against the English nobility succeeds:

First Rebel: I tell thee, Jack Cade the clothier means to dress the commonwealth, and turn it, and set a new nap upon it. Second Rebel: So he had need, for 'tis threadbare. Well, I say it was never merry world in England since gentlemen came up. First Rebel: O miserable age! Virtue is not regarded in handicrafts-men. Second Rebel: The nobility think scorn to go in leather aprons. First Rebel: Nay, more, the king's council are no good workmen. Second Rebel: True; and yet it is said, labour in thy vocation; which is as much to say as, let the magistrates be labouring men; and therefore should we be magistrates. (2 *Henry VI*, iv.2.4-15, 264-265)

Here Jack Cade enters and introduces himself as heir to the noble house of Mortimer while the two commoners keep mocking at his boasts in asides. Right from the start, Shakespeare, perhaps from a patrician perspective, lets us know that his portrait of Cade is not sympathetic, as he depicts him as a shameless populist, a malevolent clown, and a Lord of Misrule. Cade can in fact be regarded as a toned down version of what Richard III will later be: ruthless, darkly humorous, and upwardly mobile. He promises ridiculous reforms and rewards to his followers: "There shall be in England seven halfpenny loaves sold for a penny: the three-hooped pot; shall have ten hoops and I will make it felony to drink small beer: all the realm shall

be in common” (2 *Henry VI*, iv.2.58-61, 266). Then he announces he will be king to the plebeians’ cry of “God save your majesty!” (2 *Henry VI*, iv.2.63, 266).

Cade continues with the theme of communism and social welfare by saying that there shall be no money when he is king, and that people will eat and drink at his expense, and that they all shall be clad in the same apparel so that there is no difference among them. Here a butcher suggests that the first thing they should do is to kill all the lawyers. Cade says he has a plan for that as well: “Nay, that I mean to do. Is not this a lamentable thing that of the skin of an innocent lamb should be made parchment? That parchment, being scribbled o’er, should undo a man?” (2 *Henry VI*, iv.2.69-71, 266). When the commoners bring a clerk before Cade, he condemns him to death for being able to read and write. Here social tension is projected into the sphere of education. Shakespeare will later elaborate on this theme with regard to the case of Lord Say.

A messenger enters and says that Sir Humphrey Stafford and William Stafford are coming with the king’s army to put down the rebellion. Cade, knowing that Sir Humphrey is a knight, knights himself on the spot as Sir John Mortimer. When the Stafford brothers arrive and scold Cade, he claims to be the rightful heir to the crown, and is cheered by the crowd. William Stafford believes that it was the Duke of York who taught him this. Cade denies that in an aside, but tells Stafford exactly what York will later say and do.

He says he shall let Henry reign, but he will be protector over him: “Go to, sirrah – tell the king from me, that, for his father’s sake, Henry the Fifth, in whose time boys went to span-counter for French crowns, I am content he shall reign; but I’ll be Protector over him” (2 *Henry VI*, iv.2.141-144, 268). This prefigures Richard Plantagenet’s plan for King Henry, and as such parodies York’s future treachery. It is also a reflection of the fact that many of the grievances of

the Cade Rebellion were later co-opted by the Duke of York against the Lancastrians. Shakespeare, of course, does not depict the aftermath of York's coup, but during that time and before he was embroiled in the Wars of the Roses Richard Plantagenet did indeed emerge as a political and social reformer in England.

The commoners also want Lord Say's head for selling the dukedom of Maine. Cade humorously puns on this as such: "And good reason; for thereby is England mained, and, fain to go with a staff, but that my puissance holds it up" (2 *Henry VI*, iv.2.147-148, 268). Cade adds that Lord Say can also speak French – the language of the enemy, so he is a traitor. The issue of Maine shows one of the major grievances of the rebels, which is the loss of French territories and the burden they imposed – both before and after they were lost – upon the English middle and lower classes. As long as the war in France was going on, the lower classes were taxed to pay for it. As soon as the war ended, the French started to raid the southeastern coast of England, whence the Kentish rebels come.

When the Stafford brothers see that reason will not prevail with the rebels, they declare war on them. Cade orders the commoners to assemble for war, and shows himself a true Lord of Misrule by exclaiming, "But then are we in order when we are most out of order" (2 *Henry VI*, iv.2.172-173, 268). The rebels ambush the king's army and kill the Stafford brothers in battle. The patricians fall victim to the plebeians' blade. Later, while King Henry is reading the rebels' supplication and intends to parley with Cade, a messenger enters and declares

The rebels are in Southwark; fly, my lord!

Jack Cade proclaims himself Lord Mortimer,

Descended from the Duke of Clarence' house,

And calls your grace usurper openly

And vows to crown himself in Westminster.

His army is a ragged multitude

Of hinds and peasants, rude and merciless:

Sir Humphrey Stafford and his brother's death

Hath given them heart and courage to proceed:

All scholars, lawyers, courtiers, gentlemen,

They call false caterpillars, and intend their death. (*2 Henry VI*, iv.3.26-36, 269-270)

Upon hearing this, Buckingham insists that the king should go to Killingworth (a town north of Newcastle Upon-Tyne) until an army could be raised to deal with the rebels. Henry offers that Lord Say also go with him, but Say refuses lest the king be in danger on his account. A second messenger arrives and says Cade has seized London Bridge, and many Londoners have joined him to overthrow the king. Henry and Margaret flee to Killingworth.

In Cannon Street in London (*2 Henry VI*, IV-6), Cade proclaims himself Lord Mortimer and says it will be treason to call him anything else. He also orders that for the first year of his reign the water fountain be run with claret wine at the city's expense. A soldier enters and calls him Cade, and Cade's followers instantly kill him. It seems that the rebellion which started with the intention of subverting the old order is already solidifying into something that is hardly distinguishable from its predecessor. The rebels hear of a royal army in Smithfield, and Cade moves his rabble towards it, but first orders his men to set London Bridge and the Tower of London on fire.

Cade's rabble overwhelms the London guards in Smithfield. A butcher suggests to Cade that "Only that the laws of England may come out of your mouth" (*2 Henry VI*, iv.7.5-6, 271), to which Cade replies, "I have thought upon it – it shall be so. Away! Burn all the records of the

realm: my mouth shall be the Parliament of England” (2 *Henry VI*, iv.7.11-13, 271). This is perhaps a veiled critique of Tudor absolutism. Following the authoritarian streak of the previous scene, Cade’s word becomes the sole law of the realm. Then he proclaims communism, “And henceforward all things shall be in common” (2 *Henry VI*, iv.7.16, 271). Now the rebels seize Lord Say and begin to court-martial him for his selling of the English territories in France. Cade, as I mentioned before, specifically takes issue with Say’s educational activities to his disadvantage:

Thou hast most traitorously corrupted the youth of the realm in erecting a grammar school; and whereas, before, our forefathers had no other books but the score and the tally, thou hast caused printing to be used, and, contrary to the king, his crown and dignity, thou hast built a paper-mill. It will be proved to thy face that thou hast men about thee that usually talk of a noun and a verb, and such abominable words as no Christian ear can endure to hear. Thou hast appointed justices of peace, to call poor men before them about matters they were not able to answer. Moreover, thou hast put them in prison; and because they could not read, thou hast hanged them; when, indeed, only for that cause they have been most worthy to live. Thou dost ride in a foot-cloth, dost thou not? (2 *Henry VI*, iv.7.27-39, 272)

This is indeed ridiculous, but that is how Shakespeare wants it to sound. Rebellion in Tudor England, regardless of its nature and reason, is anathema and as such must be denigrated. Then why not having the arch-rebel himself cast the concept of rebellion in a bad light by acting like a clownish villain? If someone says establishing schools for people to get educated is a bad thing, what will a decent fellow think about him? That is exactly the case with Cade. On the other hand, Lord Say – the establishment figure who is about to be martyred – denies Cade’s

accusations and makes an eloquent defense of himself, which is an indication of how Shakespeare rhetorically privileges the upper class. Nevertheless, Cade's final verdict is Say's execution.

What Shakespeare does not state anywhere in the play is that Say was a chief supporter of Suffolk and his unwise domestic and foreign policies that wreaked havoc on Kent – remember that Kent is just across the English Channel, and as such was vulnerable to French raids on its coast. Therefore, the Kentish rebels had genuine grievances against Say. The rebels' insistence that he must be executed assumes a logical justification only when we know that fact, which Shakespeare shrewdly elides from his record of the events. After that, Cade continues making some more unsavory proclamations:

The proudest peer in the realm shall not wear a head on his shoulders, unless he pay me tribute. There shall not a maid be married, but she shall pay to me her maidenhead, ere they have it. Married men shall hold of me *in capite*. And we charge and command that their wives be as free as heart can wish or tongue can tell. (2 *Henry VI*, iv.7.110-115, 273-274)

At Southwark, while the rebels are busy looting London, Buckingham and Clifford enter as the king's emissaries and offer free pardon to whomever forsakes Cade. They remind the commoners of Henry V's conquests in France and say King Henry is his son, to which they reply, "God save the king!" Here they pit the centripetal discourse of royalty, nobility and nationalism against the centrifugal discourse that Cade represents. Repulsed at the fickleness of the rabble, Cade curses them and says he will continue to fight as he does not want to be a slave to the nobles. As it happens, this is not a comical episode; neither does Shakespeare attempt to

make it sound ridiculous. Here Cade delivers perhaps the most serious and thoughtful speech by an outraged commoner in all early modern English drama:

What, Buckingham and Clifford, are ye so brave? And you, base peasants, do ye believe him? Will you needs be hanged with your pardons about your necks? Hath my sword therefore broke through London gates, that you should leave me at the White Hart in Southwark? I thought ye would never have given out these arms till you had recovered your ancient freedom: but you are all recreants and dastards, and delight to live in slavery to the nobility. Let them break your backs with burthens, take your houses over your heads, ravish your wives and daughters before your faces: for me, I will make shift for one; and so, God's curse light upon you all! (*2 Henry VI*, iv.7.163-174, 275)

Upon hearing Cade's speech, his followers change their opinion and say they will follow him. Then Clifford once more picks up the talk of Henry V and the need to follow his example in repulsing the French and reconquering France. The rabble again turns to Clifford and the king. Cade, seeing that his followers have forsaken him, curses them and flees. Buckingham allots 1000 crowns for his head and offers, "Follow me, soldiers: we'll devise a mean / To reconcile you all unto the king" (*2 Henry VI*, iv.7.209-210, 276). In this scene, the tension between the high and the low, the lord and the subject, and the patrician and the plebeian is fully materialized.

In the aftermath of the rebellion, a famished Cade has fled back to Kent and has taken shelter in a garden whose owner, Alexander Iden, happens to be a well-content citizen as well as an ardent advocate of the established law and order:

Lord, who would live turmoiled in the court,

And may enjoy such quiet walks as these?

This small inheritance my father left me

Contenteth me, and worth a monarchy.

I seek not to wax great by others' waning,

Or gather wealth, I care not, with what envy:

Sufficeth that I have maintains my state

And sends the poor well pleased from my gate. (*2 Henry VI*, iv.9.14-21, 277)

When Iden discovers Cade, a verbal fight ensues between the two that reveals Iden is not only an advocate of law and order but also a passionate proponent of private property: "Is't not enough to break into my garden, / And, like a thief, to come to rob my grounds, / Climbing my walls in spite of me the owner, / But thou wilt brave me with these saucy terms?" (*2 Henry VI*, iv.9.30-33, 278). Then they fight and Cade is killed.

Obviously, Iden is not an individual but a type. He is a symbol, and what he represents stands in stark contrast to what Cade does. As such, it is only appropriate that Iden should exterminate the representative of the class that is going to subvert his class, although he can hardly find any serious grievance against Cade's person. At this point, Shakespeare safely neutralizes the rebellion in favor of the sociopolitical status quo. He first pits Cade against royal figures of authority – the Stafford brothers – and makes him subdue them, then undermines Cade by another set of figures of authority – Clifford and Buckingham, and finally eliminates him by the hand of Iden.

Yorkist Mobility

Tension and conflict are hardly over when Cade's rebellion is finally put down. At Kenilworth Castle, no sooner has King Henry been relieved of the rebellion than a messenger arrives and brings the news of the Duke of York's return from Ireland at the head of a mighty army and his demand that the Duke of Somerset, now the king's closest adviser, be removed

from office. Henry, comparing his state to a ship that has just escaped from a tempest and is now boarded by a pirate, expresses doubt that his reign will ever see peace:

Thus stands my state, 'twixt Cade and York distress'd.

Like to a ship that, having 'scaped a tempest,

Is straightway calm'd and boarded with a pirate:

But now is Cade driven back, his men dispersed;

And now is York in arms to second him. (*2 Henry VI*, iv.8.32-36, 277)

Interestingly, here Henry sees York as adopting the agenda of the lower class, to the point that the distinction in class seems to have disappeared – “in arms to second him.” This suggests that while Shakespeare seems to be dismissing the overt agent of class conflict – Cade – he is using York to suggest that rebellion needs to, or inevitably does, become couched in the language of the upper classes. Almost as if rebellion is legitimized and becomes permissible only if it were co-opted by those whose class is the same as the ones they seek to overthrow. At any rate, when Richard Plantagenet, the Duke of York, finally emerges as the arch-rebel, he becomes probably the most sustained upwardly mobile character in all the history plays.

Richard starts from almost the bottom of the sociopolitical ladder in England and in the end becomes only second to the king, and that only in name. Throughout the three Henry VI plays that comprise the greater part of the so-called Yorkist Tetralogy and depict the early and middle phases of the Wars of the Roses, Shakespeare portrays the steady rise of Richard. His account is historically inaccurate and it misplaces a lot of events and elides many more. And yet it is epistemologically and thematically coherent and significant. In fact, in Richard's relentless struggle to move up the sociopolitical ladder, Shakespeare captures the zeitgeist of the late

medieval and early modern England, so much so that a complete theory of power and sociopolitical dynamics can be drawn from it.

As his uncle, Edmund Mortimer, reveals to him, Richard is the heir to the Mortimers and the House of York that are rooted in two sons of King Edward III; namely, Lionel of Antwerp, Duke of Clarence (third son), and Edmund of Langley, Duke of York (fifth son). That provides Richard with a better lineal claim to the throne than the reigning Lancastrians who follow their descent from John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster (fourth son). As Mortimer recounts, when Richard's father, Earl of Cambridge, was beheaded on account of high treason, and when Richard's uncle, 2nd Duke of York (Aumerle in *Richard II*), was slain during the Battle of Agincourt, their claim passed to Mortimer (whom Richard II had made his heir before his deposition by Bolingbroke). Mortimer tells Richard that upon his death his claim to the throne will be transferred to Richard.

However, there is one big problem. That is, when Richard's father, the Earl of Cambridge, was executed by King Henry V for his part in the Southampton Plot to kill the king and supplant him with Mortimer – for which he is now imprisoned in the Tower (and there is historical confusion on the part of Shakespeare here) – Cambridge's title was forfeited and his estates confiscated. I already mentioned this episode in the previous chapter in the context of *Henry V*. But there Shakespeare does not tell us that Cambridge meant to supplant Henry with Mortimer. That is because in *Henry V* Shakespeare seems to be mostly concerned with maintaining the established order rather than undermining it. But in *1 Henry VI* he seems to have no such qualms, and as such gives us a more detailed – although somewhat confused – historical account. In the end, Mortimer advises Richard to be cautious and not to act before he is in a

position of advantage: “With silence, nephew, be thou politic: / Strong-fixed is the house of Lancaster, / And like a mountain, not to be removed” (*I Henry VI*, ii.5.101-103, 468).

When Mortimer dies as a prisoner in the Tower of London, Richard gives a short soliloquy in which he reveals what he is going to do to restore his title and lands. This is the beginning of a number of Ricardian soliloquies that he will deliver in the course of the plays. These all concern sociopolitical mobility and craving for more power. Although today we identify that kind of soliloquy with Richard III, it is actually his father that starts the trend. That is indeed the characteristic with which we know the Machiavel in Elizabethan theater. In fact, on the Elizabethan stage this kind of soliloquy becomes associated with characters who, by breaking the fourth wall and directly speaking to the audience, expose themselves as sociopolitical climbers. It is against this background that Richard Plantagenet starts his long and tumultuous ascent to the top.

Shakespeare then shifts to portraying the provenance of the iconography that has shaped the popular conception of the Wars of the Roses to this day; namely, the White Rose of York and the Red Rose of Lancaster. He dramatically portrays that in the iconic scene in the Temple Garden. In the presence of the peers of the realm, Richard and Somerset are hotly arguing over a point that is not clarified. In the meantime, Somerset snubs Richard for his low rank: “We grace the yeoman by conversing with him” (*I Henry VI*, ii.4.81, 465). Warwick – who is Richard’s nephew – reminds Somerset that Richard is of noble descent: “Now, by God’s will, thou wrong’st him, Somerset; / His grandfather was Lionel Duke of Clarence, / Third son to the third Edward King of England: / Spring crestless yeomen from so deep a root?” (*I Henry VI*, ii.4.82-85, 465). Somerset retorts that Richard’s father was attainted by Henry V:

By him that made me, I’ll maintain my words

On any plot of ground in Christendom.
Was not thy father, Richard Earl of Cambridge,
For treason executed in our late king's days?
And, by his treason, stand'st not thou attainted,
Corrupted, and exempt from ancient gentry?
His trespass yet lives guilty in thy blood;
And, till thou be restored, thou art a yeoman. (*1 Henry VI*, ii.4.88-95, 465)

This upsets Richard, who replies that his father was not attainted, and that he will remember Somerset's insolence. Here I must clarify that contrary to what Shakespeare seems to believe, historians have indicated that the Earl of Cambridge was actually not attainted, but that he was stripped of his title and the crown confiscated his lands. There is a delicate medieval legal difference between the two. However, as the result is the same for our purpose, I will not go through that in detail. Suffice it to say that due to his father's treason, Richard was almost a commoner when this conversation took place. The only thing that connected him to the nobility was his blood.

At any rate, since the argument seems to go nowhere, Richard asks those present that if they agree with him, they should pick a white rose in his support: "Let him that is a true-born gentleman / And stands upon the honour of his birth, / If he suppose that I have pleaded truth, / From off this brier pluck a white rose with me" (*1 Henry VI*, ii.4.27-30, 464). Warwick, Vernon and the Lawyer each pick a white rose. Then it is Somerset's turn to ask them to pick a red rose if they want to support his cause: "Let him that is no coward nor no flatterer, / But dare maintain the party of the truth, / Pluck a red rose from off this thorn with me" (*1 Henry VI*, ii.4.31-33,

464). Only Suffolk picks a red rose. As Shakespeare shows us, the two roses are not equal in rank. The red rose is of the nobility and the white of a “yeoman.”

Something to note here is that there is more to class struggle in the history plays than just between the nobility and the peasantry. There are all kinds of class struggle/conflict, and sometimes the terminology is mixed and intermingled between the classes. Here, in a sense, the conflict between the red rose and the white rose becomes more of a class struggle than it looks. It is not a Cade struggle for sure, but calling Richard Plantagenet a “yeoman” certainly implies something is going on in terms of class conflict that we may not assume in looking at the conflict in superficial terms as a struggle between noble houses, which is intra-class struggle, rather than inter-class struggle.

That said, the fact that the white rose attracts more supporters demonstrates the *de facto* strength of Richard’s – the yeoman’s – claim. The *de jure* part of the claim also seems to be taken care of by the nameless Lawyer – is he supposed to be generic? – who seems to be there only to pick with Richard. Here Shakespeare again uses concrete images and objects to materialize abstract ideas. It should be noted that this whole episode is fictitious. The white and red roses were both Yorkist symbols that prominently feature in King Edward IV’s banners, liveries and illuminated manuscripts. It was Henry Tudor who, in a bold effort at political propaganda, confiscated the red rose for the House of Lancaster after he had vanquished Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth. Shakespeare actually creates the most memorable version of that political fiction, which is why many regard him as a Tudor propagandist. In the world of Shakespeare, the red rose is associated with the Lancastrian status quo and the white rose with the Yorkist upward mobility, finding their foremost advocates in the characters of the static

Henry and the dynamic Richard. With Richard's move, the red rose begins to wither and the white rose starts to bloom.

After Temple Garden, Richard manages to step by step push back the Lancastrians through a Machiavellian process of self-fashioning and self-promotion. With Warwick's strong support and King Henry VI's graciousness – some would say tactlessness – Richard is restored to his titles and lands. As mentioned before, Richard starts to consciously create a public image of himself as a patriotic warrior and social reformer. As the 3rd Duke of York, Richard gains recognition during the last phases of the Hundred Years' War in France. When the Lancastrian lords become concerned over Richard's rapid rise, they exile him to Ireland as constable. However, Richard uses the occasion to raise a mighty army and come back to push Somerset aside (this we already saw in the previous section on Cade's Rebellion).

Interestingly, along with Bolingbroke later, Richard Plantagenet is one of the characters in Shakespeare's history plays to whom the Earl of Essex will come closest at the turn of the sixteenth century. When Richard returns from Ireland to rid the realm – in Bolingbroke's words – of the “caterpillars of the commonwealth” like Somerset, he is indeed prefiguring the fictional Bolingbroke as well as the real Essex. However, as will be Essex's real intention as well, Richard in fact means to overthrow the monarch. At the tip of the sword, Richard extracts a promise from a beleaguered Henry that after his death Richard's progeny will rule. This precipitates England into civil war, during which Richard is captured and killed. With this, Richard's long ascent to the top becomes complete and is thwarted. Queen Margaret's putting a paper crown on Richard's head while seating him on a molehill before stabbing him to death (3 *Henry VI*, I-4) is quite telling of the vagaries of *Fortuna*.

But Richard Plantagenet's house will finally rule England for a generation in the character of the kings Edward IV and Richard III. The fall of the House of York comes as a result of yet another major upward mobility during the century, that of the Woodvilles. They were the extended family of Elizabeth Woodville, queen consort of King Edward IV. Elizabeth belonged to a family of upper gentry who as a young girl married Sir John Grey, a supporter of the Lancastrian cause who would later fall during the Second Battle of Saint Albans (1461). At his death, Grey left Elizabeth with their little sons and almost no property, as his lands were later confiscated by the victorious Yorkists. Shakespeare dramatically brings Elizabeth upon the stage as she suddenly comes to appeal to King Edward for the return of her late husband's lands.

King Edward, who has apparently fallen for Elizabeth's stunning beauty, believes that she is entitled to her husband's lands because it was their side – the Yorkists – who bereft her of her husband during the civil war. However, Richard, the Duke of Gloucester and George, the Duke of Clarence, the king's brothers, correctly suspect that Edward fancies Elizabeth, and start to gossip in asides. As Richard says, "I see the lady hath a thing to grant, / Before the king will grant her humble suit" (*3 Henry VI*, iii.2.12-13, 331). Here Edward asks them to retire and sets upon seducing Elizabeth, and when she resists, he asks for her hand, with Richard and Clarence continuing to gossip on the periphery.

Then Edward calls on his brothers and asks their opinion about his intention to marry Elizabeth. At this point they give only short answers, but it will later become known that Clarence is openly against the choice and voices his disapproval of the proposed marriage, because Elizabeth is already a widow, comes from the lower ranks of society, and brings no dowry. Richard will adopt a more "politic" approach and hide his true feelings about the marriage. Nevertheless, Edward is resolved to marry Elizabeth. When all exit and only Richard

stays behind, he delivers his first ever Ricardian soliloquy proper, in which he reveals his intention to usurp the crown through tactics that would “set the murderous Machiavel to school” (3 *Henry VI*, iii.2.193, 336).

Contrary to what it might look like in the first glance, this is a serious and important scene in which Shakespeare depicts the opening of the rift between the Yorkists as a result of the emergence of the Woodvilles. Here Shakespeare encapsulates the seeds of the turmoil that is to come later. Elizabeth is apparently a social climber who seizes upon the chance to become a king’s wife. She makes that apparent early in the scene when she says, “May it please your highness to resolve me now; / And what your pleasure is, shall satisfy me” (3 *Henry VI*, iii.2.19-20, 332). Elizabeth is the first commoner in the post-Norman Conquest era to become Queen of England. Following her marriage to royalty, Elizabeth’s family makes a dramatic rise from the ranks of the gentry to that of the nobility. Through King Edward’s good graces, Elizabeth’s sons, brothers and sisters marry into the high nobility and pick up the trappings of the royalty. This, to return to Greenblatt, is how the gentry-based Woodvilles fashion themselves for the new circumstances.

In turn, the Woodvilles’ rise in status, wealth and influence greatly disturbs the established nobles of England, including the king’s brothers and the preeminent peer of the realm, the Earl of Warwick, the Kingmaker. That is because the queen’s family, especially her brother Anthony Woodville, Earl Rivers, start to meddle in the affairs of the state in an attempt to sideline Warwick. They also advance through marriages that provoke the jealousy of the king’s brothers, as Richard and Clarence clearly demonstrate in the course of the plays. Out of envy and in self-defense, Warwick and his son-in-law Clarence start to move on the Woodvilles, eventually turning against the king himself.

Shakespeare later also shows us Warwick's and Clarence's break with the king. When Edward is busy wooing Elizabeth, Warwick has already gone to Paris to ask for the hand of Lady Bona, King Lewis XI's sister, in marriage for Edward so that the French connection will prevent further civil war that a possible Lancastrian-French alliance is likely to cause (*3 Henry VI*, III-3). The French king warmly welcomes Warwick and says he is happy to give Bona to Edward. But as soon as he wants to draw the marriage contract, a messenger arrives and brings the news of Edward's marriage to Elizabeth. Both King Lewis and Warwick are taken aback.

Warwick instantly renounces Edward and joins the Lancastrian Queen Margaret, who is a refugee at the French court, to reinstate the deposed Henry VI. He informs them that Clarence is also about to defect to their side because he is upset with Edward's dishonorable conduct – all that happens in a matter of minutes. Together, Warwick and Margaret ask King Lewis to supply them with forces and arms. Lady Bona, who feels offended, also asks her brother to lend them his support, and the king agrees. However, before the deal is done, Lewis asks Warwick for surety of his loyalty, to which he replies by marrying his elder daughter, Anne, to Prince Edward of Lancaster. This is the Anne that will later become Richard III's wife. All are happy and prepare for war.

Warwick and Margaret manage to defeat Edward and make him flee the country at the Battle of Edgecote (1469), during which Earl Rivers and his son, Sir John Woodville, are captured and killed. They also succeed in restoring Henry to the throne. But the game of thrones is not over yet. Edward finally returns from exile to confront his enemies. This leads to two of the most famous battles of the Wars of the Roses in the middle phase of the fifteenth-century English civil war, namely Barnet and Tewkesbury (April and May 1471). During these battles the combined forces of the rebel Yorkists and Lancastrians are routed by Edward and Richard,

Warwick is killed in battle, Prince Edward is captured and stabbed to death, and Henry VI captured and later executed in the Tower of London. Ironically, the House of Lancaster is not extinguished as a direct consequence of the traditional Yorkist-Lancastrian feud but mostly due to the Woodvilles' relentless push for power. But historians and critics have rarely noticed that.

After King Edward's decisive victory over the Lancastrians, the Woodvillian-Yorkist rivalry, although not ceasing to exist altogether, will come under royal control, and as such the realm will experience a relative period of peace and stability. It is with Edward's death that the Woodvilles make their final move on the throne. However, with many of the actors already out of the game, during the last phase of the English civil war the battle for ultimate power shifts to the rivalry between the Woodvilles and the faction of Richard, the Duke of Gloucester, which is composed of Richard himself and his allies Lord Hastings and the Duke of Buckingham. The Woodvilles become poised against Richard, the powerful Lord Protector, to secure the crown for Edward, Prince of Wales, and by that to make their power and influence paramount. That means Richard must go.

But Richard is no fool either. He uses the Woodvilles' upward mobility against them, initially drawing Hastings, who has suffered at the hands of the queen's party, towards himself. Richard preempts their move against him by arresting and executing some of the influential Woodvilles on the charge of treason. He also brings the young king under his control by getting rid of his Woodvillian advisers and confining him to the Tower of London. With the help of Buckingham, Richard later manages to declare King Edward's progeny illegitimate based on a pre-contract that supposedly invalidated Edward's marriage to Elizabeth. At the same time he moves against Elizabeth herself by accusing her and her companions of witchcraft and treason. This is where an alienated Hastings (from Richard) is also implicated due to his dealings with

Jane Shore, King Edward's former mistress who has close ties to the Woodvilles. As a consequence, the Lord Protector is finally offered the crown and becomes King Richard III.

These events centrally feature in *Richard III*, although Shakespeare, looking at the situation through a Tudor lens – and the Tudor Myth is considerably at work here – casts Richard in the role of the arch-villain. Early in the play (I-3), the nobles have gathered at court to attend to King Edward who in his sickbed meaningfully wishes to make peace between the Woodvilles and Richard and Hastings. Queen Elizabeth expresses concern to her sons (from her first marriage) Dorset and Grey and her brother Antony Rivers over the king's health and the aftermath of his probable death. She is afraid that the young Prince Edward will receive harm at the hands of his uncle and Lord Protector, Richard: "Ah, he is young and his minority / Is put unto the trust of Richard Gloucester, / A man that loves not me, nor none of you" (*Richard III* i.3.11-13, 525).

Now enters Richard accompanied by Hastings while complaining against the Woodvilles whom he says keep provoking the king against him. Then, using hawking symbolism and imagery, he attacks them for their ambition and upward mobility: "I cannot tell. The world is grown so bad, / That wrens make prey where eagles dare not perch: / Since every Jack became a gentleman / There's many a gentle person made a Jack" (*Richard III* i.3.70-73, 527). Wrens are the Woodvilles who dare doing deeds that are attributed to eagles, i.e. Richard and nobles of blood. Elizabeth replies: "Come, come, we know your meaning, brother Gloucester; / You envy my advancement and my friends': / God grant we never may have need of you!" (*Richard III* i.3.74-76, 527). Richard retorts:

Meantime, God grants that we have need of you.

Your brother is imprison'd by your means,

Myself disgraced, and the nobility

Held in contempt; whilst many fair promotions

Are daily given to ennoble those

That scarce, some two days since, were worth a noble. (*Richard III* i.3.77-82, 527)

“Your brother” is Clarence whom King Edward has recently imprisoned upon suspicion of wrongdoing. Then Richard tries to incite Hastings against the queen and her party: “You may deny that you were not the cause / Of my Lord Hastings’ late imprisonment” (*Richard III* i.3.90-91, 527). Richard keeps taunting the Woodvilles, reminding them of their Lancastrian factionalism when he himself fought for the glory of the House of York. Rivers says back then they were following the lawful king, and if one day Richard becomes king they will also follow him. Richard denies wanting to be king. Here King Edward summons the nobles and they leave. Richard stays behind and reveals that indeed it was he who started hostilities and not the Woodvilles. He says while it was he who set up Clarence, he will tell the lords – “And seem a saint, when most I play the devil” (*Richard III* i.3.336, 532) – that it was the queen’s party that did it so that attracts the nobles to his side. Then he instructs two murderers to kill Clarence. After Edward’s death, Richard immediately arrests Queen Elizabeth’s relatives Rivers, Grey, and Vaughan and later has them executed at Pomfret Castle.

Richard also attempts to curb the queen’s move against him through Prince Edward by imprisoning the prince and his younger brother Richard, the Duke of York, in the Tower. An interesting comment that the Lord Protector makes on his younger nephew during a conversation with him and Rivers can be read as his general disparagement of the Woodvilles’ upwardly ambitions. In the palace in London little Richard tells the Duchess of York and the Archbishop of York how his uncle Gloucester reacted to his uncle River’s opinion about his rapid growth:

Grandam, one night, as we did sit at supper,
My uncle Rivers talk'd how I did grow
More than my brother: 'Ay,' quoth my uncle Gloucester,
'Small herbs have grace, great weeds do grow apace.'
And since, methinks, I would not grow so fast,
Because sweet flowers are slow and weeds make haste. (*Richard III* ii.4.10-15, 546)

Here Richard, with his incomparable wit and delicious dark humor, warns the Woodvilles while at the same time belittling them; telling them that it is better to remain small and gracious rather than grow and go to waste. Little Richard, apparently representing the Woodville side of the family, has already been convinced that "I would not grow so fast," which is actually "I wish I would not grow so fast," because he wants to have substance instead of mere size. Let's not forget that Richard is the supreme charmer who specializes in inducing people to what is absolutely against their safety and interest. No wonder that he finally succeeds to seize the throne at the expense of the Woodvilles.

However, it is the Woodvilles that have the last laugh, as they play a major role in the downfall of Richard and the House of York. Cornered by an increasingly tyrannical Richard, Queen Elizabeth colludes with Richard's enemies to bring about his ouster. Through Margaret Beaufort and Lord Stanley, Henry Tudor's mother and stepfather, Queen Elizabeth offers in marriage the hand of her daughter, Elizabeth of York, to Henry if he can overthrow and supplant Richard. So in one way it is the upwardly mobile Woodvilles who manage to put the epitome of upward mobility, Henry Tudor, on the throne of England.

In turn, Elizabeth of York, the daughter of a commoner, becomes the first Tudor queen of England and mother of all the subsequent English monarchs. As such, the Woodvilles are

perpetuated through the marriage of Elizabeth of York to Henry Tudor. Throughout the Yorkist Tetralogy Shakespeare clearly demonstrates that neither the red rose nor the white rose were strong enough to withstand the harsh climate of the times. They would only reach equilibrium and stability in the conflated character of the Tudor Rose.

Conclusion

In the end, a qualifying note is in order with regard to the scope of mobility. The instances of sociopolitical mobility that Shakespeare depicts in his histories indeed fall within a narrow range of class. With the notable exception of Jack Cade and his followers, most of the individuals that struggle for upward mobility in the course of the histories already belong in the higher echelons of society. And that is a point of significance because while Shakespeare shows no hesitation to fully incorporate upper-class foreigners and women in his political drama, he almost always keeps the lower-class players like Cade at arm's length. On the other hand, Shakespeare occasionally couches the intra-class struggle in inter-class terminology, as in the case of Richard Plantagenet, whom he has Somerset call a "yeoman." That suggests Shakespeare might be cryptically depicting class struggle in the form of a fight between two noblemen.

Nevertheless, on the face of it, the conflict still falls within a narrow range. This has usually been regarded as an indication of Shakespeare's conservative taste in politics. That might be true, given the fact that regardless of genre we can see a clear pattern of "loss of established order and its restoration" throughout his dramatic career. However, Shakespeare might have also done that with an eye to Queen Elizabeth's antipathy towards upward mobility on the part of her subjects. Elizabeth, we must remember, was always suspicious of upward mobility because she considered it a threat to herself. The cases of Robert Dudley, Philip Sidney, Mary Stuart and Robert Devereux, all personally close to Elizabeth, are clear examples of how she was averse to

the breach of the order that her father and grandfather had established. Interestingly, as Shakespeare grows in favor with the court – which secures his career and social standing, the voice he gives to the lower classes becomes stronger and more congenial. The soldiers in *Henry V* are a case in point, to which I will return in the next chapter.

That said, the different kinds of mobility that Shakespeare presents are important because they contribute to a tremendous shift in English political epistemology. It is not like this person supplants that person in a political system that is fixed. Rather, through these individual mobilities, whole modes of thought and action are transformed as ancient structures get dismantled and new ones emerge in their place. In fact, by bestowing a great deal of agency on the “second causes” or human subjects who effect these mobilities in the course of the plays – which I have identified as one of the least studied but most important aspects of Machiavellianism, Shakespeare looks forward to a “democratic vision” of politics. However, we would do well to qualify that phrase when we apply it to Shakespeare. As Chanan puts it,

To raise [the question of democracy] is not to suggest that [Shakespeare] subscribes to a particular doctrine, but to ask whether his multi-faceted way of depicting human affairs aligns with an open society. Is there an underlying tendency in his works, taken as a whole, either towards authoritarianism or liberty, or is he forever politically ambivalent and inscrutable? Or could his ambivalence itself have a special value for democracy? (2)

If we remember, in the medieval order of things the political system is quite static because it is eternally ordained of God. In such a system, the political fate of the individual is determined by the Providence. However, what Shakespeare reveals in his epic history cycle in the form of an ongoing struggle for power by a wide range of players is that political institutions are in fact constructs that can be tampered with. That means the political fate of the individual is

not sealed before he/she is even born, but it can be shaped and molded by human beings themselves; that is, although not yet totally, but at least to a considerable degree. And that, in my opinion, is why in the final analysis the Shakespearean Experience proves liberating. As a hugely popular exposé of the constructedness of politics, Shakespeare proves to be a supreme agent of the early modern paradigm shift in political epistemology.

It is indeed his sheer capacity for envisioning the emergence of a set of groundbreaking ideas and practices in the realm of politics that makes Shakespeare proto-democratic. As it happens, the emergent cases themselves prove mostly transitional during the time frame that they take place and are depicted, i.e. fifteenth-century England. During that tumultuous period, transition occurs after transition with little prospect of settlement. This is quite clear in the case of the Wars of the Roses, where no sooner have a set of players been settled than they are subverted by another set. However, this emerging pattern of behavior turns into a component of the established order at the turn of the new century, when upward mobility becomes contained in and is put at the service of the dominant Tudor Absolutism.

CHAPTER 5
THE DOMINANT

Tudor Absolutism

In the English National Archives there is an image/document No. 5063510 dated July 16, 1504. It is a page out of a medieval-looking manuscript that depicts King Henry VII sitting in state in the Star Chamber at Westminster Abbey and receiving the prominent clerics and laymen of the realm. The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of Westminster and clerics associated with Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's Cathedral as well as the Mayor of London, while kneeling to Henry, receive a book from him. Outside the main frame of the image there is the Red Rose of Lancaster to the left; the Beaufort portcullis (the badge of Henry's mother connecting him to Edward III) to the upper left; and the quartered Arms of England and France on top, supported by the red dragon of Cadwaladr to the left (the Tudors were said to be originally from Wales) and the English greyhound to the right. The crown Henry wears is notably imperial. Royal symbolism and imagery exude from the image/document.

Another object of note in this vein comes in the area of numismatics. It is Henry's sovereign, a gold coin with the net value of a pound sterling. Henry VII is the first English king to mint a sovereign. Before Henry, the coins would bear only partial images of the monarch – usually only his head; and their backs were significantly marked with religious icons, most usually the cross. Instead, Henry puts a full figure of himself on the obverse. It is in many ways a reproduction of Richard II's Westminster Portrait that I described in the beginning of Chapter Three. However, there is a pointed difference between the two portraits. While Henry is wearing an imperial crown, Richard wore an open crown.

In their portraits that have come down to us, all the medieval English kings wear open crowns – which stands for their sovereignty over a kingdom. It is only with the Tudors that the imperial crown – that signifies sovereignty over an empire – begins to emerge; and this has consequences for the concept of authority that is predicated on the institutional power of the Catholic Church. In some versions of the coin the Beaufort portcullis lies at Henry's feet. On the reverse of the coin, against the background of the Tudor Rose there is the coat of arms of England crowned with the imperial crown. Obviously, Henry uses the coin as a visible emblem of absolute royal power. He effectively stamps his image on the nation through the sovereign.

What we see in the image and the coin is in fact a translation of the dominant contemporary sociopolitical power relations into tangible objects. In other words, the coin and the image constitute the reification of what Raymond Williams has described as the “articulate and formal meanings, values and beliefs which a dominant class develops and propagates” (110). In sixteenth-century England, which encompasses the age of Queen Elizabeth of whom Shakespeare is a contemporary, the dominant political phenomenon is the absolutism that lies at the heart of the Tudor New Monarchy. According to Slavin,

The “New Monarchies,” it was argued, were centralized states in the modern fashion, over which kings presided... by virtue of their absolute power[,] without regard to the restraints inherent in the old ideals which had placed limits upon secular power. These limits which were best typified by feudal ideas of contract, the vast structure of the Catholic Church and the maxims of Roman law... were now set aside. The modern state was trumpeted onto the stage of history, absolute in character and impatient of the multiplicity of authorities that characterized the medieval world-view. The new Messiah was the king. (viii)

The medieval idea of kingship was more restrained than that of the Renaissance. On the one hand, the Catholic Church was the linchpin of society as a religio-political institution during the Middle Ages. In the celestial hierarchy of medieval politics, the pope who presided over the Christian World State wielded much greater authority than the king, who was usually nothing more than an over-powerful local magnate. As such, there was the nominal – and even at times practical – sovereignty of the pope over the English king. Henry II was excommunicated by the pope for the murder of Thomas Becket and had to do penance to be forgiven. His son John was also excommunicated for his practice of lay investiture – appointing priests by a secular authority – and was forced to repent before he was received back to the fold.

On the other hand, there was the structure of the English polity which was still to a great extent feudal. That made the king dependent upon the good will of his peers, who had the power to restrict his decisions and actions either through acts of parliament or withholding of baronial services. This is most manifest in Magna Carta (1215) and the Provisions of Oxford (1258) that the barons imposed on King John and King Henry III respectively. The barons' powers were such that even Edward III, presumably the most powerful king of the late medieval England, was at times restrained by his barons and his parliament. In order to get the much necessary funding for his campaigns during the Hundred Years' War, Edward repeatedly had to make domestic concessions to his parliament.

That is why Richard II's well-known absolutism, as I argued before, was more ceremony than practice; for the conceptual and legal bases for practical absolutism were yet to emerge. As Pollard has pointed out, "Feudalism... was an uncongenial soil for absolute monarchy. The king was the theoretical apex of civilization, the head of everything; but practice robbed him of most of his powers, and divided them among his barons. The king was *primus inter pares*, little more"

(2). In other words, for the millennium-long duration of the Middle Ages, the king was just one magnate among others, only a little richer and more powerful.

However, as I mentioned before, after the Avignon Papacy (1309-1376) and the Western Schism (1378-1417) of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the Catholic Church was fractured and never recovered its former authority and glory. The late medieval popes were too weak or too inclined to infighting to be able to interfere with the affairs of the state. As such, the late medieval/early modern crisis of political authority started long before the emergence of the Reformation. The Wars of the Roses were themselves one clear manifestation of that crumbling of medieval authority in the sphere of Western Christianity. It is against the backdrop of this chaos that Machiavelli conceives his *Prince*. It is also against this background that Henry Tudor rises to power. As such, it should not come as a surprise that Henry VII demonstrates many characteristics of the Machiavellian prince, long before Machiavelli actually wrote the *Prince*.

Henry VII is just the sort of up-and-coming prince that Machiavelli would have in mind. Having no substantial pedigree, Henry seizes the crown by force and declares himself king by right of conquest. It is only after he has actually seized power that he embarks upon a half-hearted attempt at myth-making to produce a solid claim based on blood. The first wave of early modern English historiography that I mentioned before starts at this juncture. And it is the origin of the Tudor Myth. But it is a myth that Henry makes real through hard work – which results in the myth's staying power for the remainder of the Tudor era and for the benefit of Henry's progeny, and possibly for all England in the long run. That is because Henry manages to make the Tudor Myth the founding myth of modern England, which Shakespeare's overwhelming cultural presence has perpetuated to our day.

If the Wars of the Roses broke the medieval polity physically, the Tudor New Monarchy undertook to wipe out the residue of the *ancien régime* legally. The previous age of Lancastrians was well-known for parliamentary rule. The Lancastrian kings were greatly dependent on their parliaments, which made them weak executive authorities. That, apart from and partly in addition to what lies at the heart of the Tudor Myth, was one of the major reasons that precipitated the nation into civil war and consequent Yorkist supremacy. Having learned the lesson, during his twenty-four years on the throne, Henry VII rarely called a parliament to consult with his peers and subjects. As Pollard says, during the Tudor age “References to the Charter are as rare in the debates of Parliament as they are in the pages of Shakespeare. Not until the Stuarts came was Magna Carta discovered” (7-8). And even if parliament was called, it was to rubber-stamp the demands of the king. In Pollard’s words, “Parliament in the sixteenth century seemed to meet only to register the monarch’s decrees and to clothe with a legal cloak the naked despotism of his acts” (6).

Furthermore, Henry hardly created any peers during his long reign. Instead, he restructured the government and enacted laws to restrict the maneuvering abilities of the nobility. The King’s Council that Henry created, which would become more famously known as the Privy Council during the reign of the latter Tudors, was a tight group of capable advisers mostly composed of upwardly mobile men – the so-called “new men” – who would give Henry expert advice on issues of the state or act in different capacities on his behalf under his patronage. Henry also restructured and revived the Court of Star Chamber as an effective instrument of prosecuting the nobility and landed magnates where the lower courts would hesitate to do so. Privy Councilors and Henry’s famous Justices of Peace, many of them new men, would pack the Star Chamber.

It can be clearly seen that in order to curb the power of the magnates and promote his absolutist vision of government, Henry masterfully played on the rivalry between the emerging bourgeoisie and the residual nobility. As a result, in Tudor England class conflict interestingly contributes to the rise of absolutism – as well as the rise of the bourgeoisie. As Mousnier says, “This struggle of class was perhaps the principal factor in the development of absolute monarchies” (12). He continues to explicate,

Absolute monarchy resulted from the antagonism of two classes, the bourgeoisie and the nobility. The king needed the bourgeois for his finances, and easily obtained their obedience or their support.... The dream of members of the bourgeois class was to raise themselves to noble rank. But only the king was able to thus advance them and facilitate this change of social class, by conferring upon them ennobling public offices, by gratifying them with bishoprics and abbeys, by bestowing upon them patents of nobility, by permitting them to hold noble fiefs. (11)

Under Henry VII, the blood factor did not count for much, as he made sure that those who served him were effective bureaucrats who were devoted to their multiple tasks, and not proud and combative magnates who always had an eye on the throne. Henry made that possible by creating a proto-modern administration that worked mostly for payment rather than allegiance based on blood and honor. As Richardson says,

If reforms were to be effective, a new and invigorated administration was necessary, one whose personnel would put the interest of their king before the temptations of personal ends or individual profit. Henry’s goal was to set the crown supreme over all rival interests; to put loyalty beyond greed, efficiency above the decadence of overorganized

medieval institutionalism. The supremacy of monarchy must no longer be questioned. With the power of purse and prerogative right it was soon to become a fact. (14)

One of the most significant pieces of legislation that Henry introduced in order to curb the power of the nobility was the law against “livery and maintenance.” This was a residue of bastard feudalism. As I explained in Chapter Three, during the latter phases of the Middle Ages the lords would pay to retain and “maintain” small armies of mercenaries. Then they would attire their men in special apparels that bore their badges and heraldic signs. This was called “livery.” The practice would create many small to medium powerbases that occasionally tended to take the law into their hands. Through the ban on livery and maintenance, Henry effectively destroyed the military power of the nobility and concentrated power in the emerging standing army of the monarchy.

That is why the Tudor era is the great age of open palaces instead of fortified and entrenched castles. Some of the most famous palaces in the history of England such as Richmond, Hampton Court, Nonsuch, Greenwich and Windsor were built or significantly renovated under the Tudors. As well as being tokens of Tudor power, wealth and cultivation, what these exposed palaces demonstrate is the high degree of security that the monarch and by corollary the people enjoyed in this era – in contrast to the previous age of instability, war and chaos. By concentrating power in a rather large bureaucracy headed by the person of an absolute monarch and mandated to uphold peace and orthodoxy, Henry in effect laid the foundation of the modern state apparatus as well as the nation state. As Elton says,

In the course of this transformation there was created a revised machinery of government whose principle was bureaucratic organization in the place of the personal control of the king, and national management rather than management of the king’s estate. The

reformed state was based on the rejection of the medieval conception of the kingdom as the king's estate, his private concern, properly administered by his private organization; it conceived its task to be national, its support and scope to be nation-wide, and its administrative needs, therefore, divorced from the king's household. It is one of the paradoxes of sixteenth-century history that a dynasty, which saw the personal power of the monarchy at its height and the importance of court life greater than ever, could also transcend the purely personal view of the royal duty and treat England and the nation as the true basis of the state. (20)

However, Henry VII, although taming the nobility and succeeding in acquiring a working relationship with the clerics, did not go full throttle against the church to eradicate its authority. For him the priority was to pacify the peers and heal the scars of the civil war. It seems that a substantial revision of the religion and the faith-based power needed to wait for a full blossoming of humanism in England and then the Reformation on the Continent. As such, the task of challenging the pope in order to consolidate the power of the prince fell to the lot of Henry's son and successor, Henry VIII, who would complete the process of centralization of power in the institution of monarchy by pulling down the Catholic Church in England. As Eppley says,

During the 1530s there was a momentous shift in the manner in which religious affairs in England were governed. Whatever powers medieval English kings had enjoyed over the Church in England, they always exercised these powers as, in theory at least, the partner of the pope who was in some sense head of the universal church. Henry VIII's Reformation accomplished an unprecedented transfer of ecclesiastical authority in England from the pope to the king. The king was, Parliament declared, to be recognized

as the Supreme Head of the Church of England, the source of all spiritual as well as temporal jurisdiction within the realm. (5)

As such, at least in theory there finally remained no restrictions on the royalty in Tudor England, as the monarch neither owed allegiance to the pope, nor was he bound by a feudal polity. This led to a monopolizing of power in the person of the monarch, or rather, in his body-politic manifestation, which would place him in a special position unprecedented in the history of Western Europe since the fall of the Roman Empire. The king instead of the pope became the custodian of faith in England. Henry VIII had shown that tendency early in his career when he penned a learned treatise against the emerging Lutheranism, for which, ironically, the pope graced him with the title “Defender of the Faith.” What the pope did not see coming was that Henry was in fact grooming himself as a Doctor of the Church, a specialist in the doctrine of faith, which would have grave and eventually fatal consequences for the pope and the institution he had headed for a thousand years.

Therefore, the process had been brewing for long when Henry eventually broke with Rome and made himself the supreme head of church and state in England. The issue of the divorce was only a convenient pretext for a bold political step on which Henry had been meditating for more than a decade. With the Act of Supremacy (1534), Henry finally seized the sword that the pope had been precariously struggling to hold since the Great Schism of 1378. In the character of Henry VIII, the two swords of Saint Paul were finally united in the hands of the monarch – and this, according to hardcore Reformers, was in line with ancient Christian doctrine. Henry’s disinterment, mock trial and burning of the remains of Becket, the single greatest Catholic saint England ever produced, was first and foremost a symbolic act that signified the absolute power of the monarch over the church. As Sinfield says, during Henry’s

reign “Power, which in actuality was distributed unevenly across an unstable fraction of the hegemonic class, is drawn into the person of the monarch; he becomes its sole source of expression, the site and guarantee of ideological unity” (122). This is how royal absolutism came into being in the early modern period. As Mousnier defines it,

Absolute monarchy exists when the king, embodying the national ideal, possesses in addition, in law as well as in fact, the attributes of sovereignty: the power to make laws, to dispense justice, to levy taxes, to maintain a permanent army, to appoint officials, to decide what constitutes attacks against the public welfare, and, in particular, against the royal authority, by virtue of his extraordinary jurisdiction arising from his power as the fountain of justice. (9)

Shakespeare’s Erastianism

In his histories as well as all his other works that have something to do with monarchy, Shakespeare is profoundly concerned with central authority in the mold of royal absolutism and the consequences of its breakdown. For instance, from a political perspective, *King Lear* is a study of the disintegration of royal power which leads to chaos. By unwisely dividing his realm among his daughters, Lear makes a recipe for disaster. It is only when France conquers England that the divisions are healed. Same goes in *Hamlet* with Fortinbras’ conquest of a divided Denmark. Even the late romance *Tempest* is a lighthearted and at times comical reflection on the usurpation of royal authority from Prospero by his unworthy brother. I won’t dwell much on *Julius Caesar*, in which Shakespeare seems to openly advocate for the dictator – remember Mark Antony’s poignant funeral speech for Caesar – rather than the rebels.

Shakespeare is hardly a republican in the modern sense of the word. But how he advocates for royal absolutism in his history plays is a curious point of interest. None of

Shakespeare's kings in the histories looks anything like Henry VIII. Among the six kings that he portrays in the history cycle, only Richard II, and that by a safe distance from Henry, comes close to the definition of authoritarianism – Richard III is actually more a chaotic allegory of tyranny than the depiction of a realistic tyrant. Therefore, it is not necessarily through authoritarianism that Shakespeare contributes to – and probably promotes – absolutism. Instead, in the course of the histories, there is a sustained effort to downgrade the institution of the church. And when that process is complete, Shakespeare reveals his trump card of absolutism in the character of Henry V. We will see about Henry later. There is religion in the histories, but there is hardly church. As such, Shakespeare seems to be a staunch Erastian. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*,

Erastianism [is the] doctrine that the state is superior to the church in ecclesiastical matters. It is named after the 16th-century Swiss physician and Zwinglian theologian Thomas Erastus.... [However,] Erastianism acquired its present meaning from Richard Hooker's defense of secular supremacy in *Of the lawes of ecclesiasticall politie* (1593–1662) and as a result of debates held during the Westminster Assembly of 1643.

Erastians, although not necessarily anti-religious, hold a militant attitude towards the church, especially when it comes to the matters of the state. The great historian of the early Tudor period Edward Hall was a well-known Erastian (even before the concept came into being). As Lucas says, “Hall was a fiercely anticlerical Erastian (believing in the subordination of ecclesiastical to secular authority), who consequently zealously championed the royal supremacy and who served in the 1540s on several commissions designed to enforce Henry's religious strictures” (361). As such, Hall left an imprint of his Erastianism in the history of the noble and illustre houses of Lancaster and York that he bequeathed to Shakespeare.

No wonder then that in all of his histories, Shakespeare depicts the church either as evil or passive at best. Major men of religion are cast in a negative or at best a dubious light. Both the Bishop of Carlisle and the Archbishop of York are depicted as seditious characters who stir against the established order – as it happens, of Lancastrian origin. Carlisle stands against Bolingbroke (*Richard II*) and York goes against Henry IV (*1&2 Henry IV*). The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely are more concerned about the church's coffers than the spiritual needs of their flock. Shakespeare depicts them as self-seeking prelates who are bent upon preventing Henry V from taxing the church by offering a concession to the king in the form of money as well as providing him with a legal pretext to conquer France. There is hardly anything Godly about these supposed men of God.

However, it is in the character of Thomas Beaufort, Archbishop and later Cardinal Winchester, that Shakespeare personifies the Catholic Church as utterly evil. Catholicism, without being named, is constantly damned through Winchester. Rome and “popery” become the butt of Gloucester's – and others' – ridicule at different occasions. As the English nobles mourn the passing of King Henry V in Westminster Abbey, Gloucester and Winchester start a quarrel over religion. Winchester praises Henry for fighting the “battles of the Lord of Hosts,” and claims that “The church's prayers made him so prosperous” (*1 Henry VI*, i.1.32, 444). Gloucester seizes upon this and starts to curse the church as the cause of Henry's premature death: “The church! Where is it? Had not churchmen prayed, / His thread of life had not so soon decayed!” (*1 Henry VI*, i.1.33-34, 444).

Winchester is an ambitious and wicked character who keeps making trouble and laying plots for the king and his good Lord Protector. In order to get up the sociopolitical ladder, he even bribes the pope to ordain him cardinal. His machinations finally lead to Gloucester's

murder, which in turn tumbles the realm into chaos and leads to the English civil war. As such, it is only meet that Shakespeare gives Winchester one of the worst deaths in all his dramatic career. After Duke Humphrey's murder, when the court has gathered at Bury St. Edmund's, a messenger arrives and brings the news of Winchester's being on his deathbed, stressing that the cardinal looks as if something heavy lies on his conscience. King Henry VI and the Nevilles go to pay the prelate a last visit.

On Winchester's deathbed, when Henry asks him how he fares, Winchester starts to rave: "If thou be'st death, I'll give thee England's treasure, / Enough to purchase such another island, / So thou wilt let me live, and feel no pain" (2 *Henry VI*, iii.3.2-4, 415). All the man of God thinks of on his deathbed is himself. He would give the treasures of the realm away so that he can live longer. Henry takes that as a sign of immoral self-interest: "Ah, what a sign it is of evil life, / Where death's approach is seen so terrible!" (2 *Henry VI*, iii.3.5-6, 415). Then Winchester continues to rave and by that reveals more of his evil character: "Give me some drink; and bid the apothecary / Bring the strong poison that I bought of him" (2 *Henry VI*, iii.3.17-18, 415). Did he poison Gloucester? Here Henry, with his natural piety and gentleness, asks God for his uncle's forgiveness and bids Winchester to make a sign if he thinks his prayer has had any effect. Winchester makes no sign and dies, and Henry takes that as damnation: "Peace to his soul, if God's good pleasure be! / Lord cardinal, if thou think'st on heaven's bliss, / Hold up thy hand, make signal of thy hope. / He dies, and makes no sign. O God, forgive him!" (2 *Henry VI*, iii.3.26-29, 415). Warwick delivers the moral conclusion: "So bad a death argues a monstrous life" (2 *Henry VI*, iii.3.30, 415).

The grossest instance of the church doing evil comes, not surprisingly, in *Richard III*, where the Duke of Gloucester manages to win the crown by deceiving the nobles and the gentry

through dissembling piety. Gloucester instructs Buckingham to bring the Mayor and citizens of London to Baynard's Castle – the House of York's London estate – where he means to showcase himself as a pious man (*Richard III*, III-5). Here Richard prepares to play one of his notorious acts. As Rackin says, “In Shakespeare's history plays there is a persistent association between Machiavellianism and theatricality. Richard III, the only one of Shakespeare's English king's explicitly associated with Machiavelli, is also the most theatrical” (72).

Later, Buckingham reports that the Mayor has been induced to discuss the possibility of Richard's becoming king. He recommends that Richard feign reluctance to rule. When the Mayor arrives, he is told that Richard is engaged in religious devotions and cannot be disturbed. Buckingham provokes the Mayor to insist, and Richard finally appears before the crowd. In a carefully choreographed move, Buckingham, purporting to speak for the Mayor and people, asks Richard to take the crown. Richard refuses, and Buckingham leads the delegation away, but Richard has them called back and finally accepts the crown.

But he could not have gained the crown without the help of the church. When Richard plays the role of the humble and pious man for his audience at Baynard's Castle, two bishops, or in the words of Buckingham, “Two props of virtue for a Christian prince,” accompany him and thus give him credit, “To stay him from the fall of vanity” (*Richard III* iii.7.96-97, 563). It makes no difference that the bishops are actually two friars whom Richard has recruited for the act. As Shakespeare depicts the scene, it is indeed with the aid of the church that the atheistic and fundamentally evil Richard reaches the apex of his career as the boar that will raze England.

As such, Shakespeare anathematizes all and everything that has anything to do with the church. He even goes as far as to show an openly anti-Catholic bias. The episode occurs during a hawking event at Saint Albans. While King Henry VI and his courtiers are busy hawking, a

townsman of Saint Albans enters and announces a miracle. Apparently, a blind man named Simpcox who never saw in his life has found his eyesight. Henry is characteristically quick to thank God for the miracle: “Now, God be praised, that to believing souls / Gives light in darkness, comfort in despair!” (2 *Henry VI*, ii.1.69-70, 232). But the quick-witted Gloucester is dubious. When the king asks Simpcox to tell him what happened, he recounts that he had seen Saint Alban in his dreams more than a hundred times, and he had told him to come to his shrine and make an offering to be cured. His wife corroborates his account by saying, “Most true, forsooth; and many time and oft / Myself have heard a voice to call him so” (2 *Henry VI*, ii.1.95-96, 232). Then they notice Simpcox is also lame, which he says is because he fell off a tree. Gloucester wonders how he could have climbed a tree as a blind man, and says he doubts if Simpcox can still see clearly.

To test Simpcox’ eyesight, Gloucester asks him to tell the colors of their gowns, to which he gives correct answers, upon which Gloucester pronounces him a liar. Gloucester says Saint Alban has indeed performed a miracle by making a lifetime blind man distinguish colors as soon as he gets his eyesight. He wonders if he himself can perform another miracle by curing Simpcox’ leg: “Bring me a stool. Now, sirrah, if you mean to save yourself from whipping, leap me over this stool and run away” (2 *Henry VI*, ii.1.144-146, 234). After a beadle has lashed him only once, Simpcox indeed leaps over the stool and runs away, with the townsmen in his tail and crying, “A miracle!” Winchester mocks at Gloucester: “Duke Humphrey has done a miracle to-day.” Suffolk agrees and says, “True; made the lame to leap and fly away” (2 *Henry VI*, ii.1.160-161, 234).

The false miracle at Saint Albans can be regarded as a post-Reformation jibe at Catholic superstition. More broadly, it can be taken as an exposition of how a whole institution – that of

the medieval Catholic Church – can be sound at all when it heavily relies on such superstitions as fundamental manifestations of faith. That should have been the reason for its extinction in England. And the Tudors were right to forbid the occurrence of miracles. As Baumer says, “In contrast to medieval Catholicism, which believed in the daily occurrence of miracles, the Protestants took the position that the age of miracles had closed with the great Church Fathers” (174). As the Good Duke Humphrey clearly demonstrates, in the Age of Shakespeare miracles are made by men.

Shakespearean Absolutism

Indeed, throughout the history cycle the priestly aspect of things is transferred to the person of the monarch. The king becomes literally head of church and state. This is the “caesaropapism” of which we spoke in the previous chapters, most notably in Chapter Two on political authority. This description squarely fits only one king in the cycle, Henry V. But through the character of Henry the concept retroactively applies to all the history cycle. That is because Henry is omnipresent. He is personally there in the Lancastrian Tetralogy. In the Yorkist Tetralogy his name keeps popping up and his memory keeps being invoked as a source of emulation and a site of regret. And that is even before Shakespeare has written *Henry V*. It looks as if the whole history cycle is a prelude to the last play. Henry V is the mirror against which all other Shakespearean kings are to be measured.

The Yorkist Tetralogy starts with a glorification of Henry. At the beginning of *1 Henry VI*, the lords have gathered at Westminster Abbey to mourn the premature passing of Henry. They enthusiastically and bombastically eulogize Henry and raise him almost to the status of a god. *2 Henry VI* also opens with Gloucester grieving the giving of Anjou and Maine to Reigner by remembering his brother Henry’s valor and the hardships he endured for the conquest of

France: “Did he so often lodge in open field, / In winter’s cold and summer’s parching heat, / To conquer France, his true inheritance?” (2 *Henry VI* i.1.76-78, 216). Later, during Cade’s Rebellion, Lord Clifford invokes the memory of Henry to spur the rebels to defect from Cade’s to King Henry VI’s side: “Who hateth him and honours not his father, / Henry the Fifth, that made all France to quake, / Shake he his weapon at us and pass by” (2 *Henry VI* iv.8.159-161, 275). As such, the long shadow of Henry is cast over the whole history cycle. As Rackin says,

The final chorus’s reference to the Henry VI plays defines the place of *Henry V* in Shakespeare’s historical plot. Not only the last play in the two tetralogies, it is also their center; for the plot of Shakespeare’s historical reconstruction bends the teleological, chronological, line of his historiographic sources into a circle, beginning and ending with the death of Henry V. (84)

King Henry V is a priest-king in line with the Tudor absolutist doctrine. As Lancelot Andrews observed in a sermon based on the Old Testament, in ancient wars “a captain and a Prophet sorted together.” As Sinfield says, “The two roles are drawn into the single figure of Henry V” (122). This becomes clear when we see that although Henry is apparently a pious man, he does not need the priests after Act I; that is, after he has used them as a function of the play rather than as a source of religious inspiration. For the remainder of the play, Henry himself plays the part of the priest as well as the king. Shakespeare in fact casts Henry in the mold of the absolutist despots of the ancient world. The way he portrays absolutism is beholden to much older models than he could possibly find in the archives of medieval Europe.

As Ribner has suggested in passing and Hawkins has investigated comprehensively, Shakespeare indeed models Henry V on the persona of Cyrus the Great of Persia that he found in *The Cyropaedia*. ‘*The Education of Cyrus*,’ written (370 BC) by the Athenian gentleman-soldier

Xenophon, is a largely fictional biography of Cyrus the Great (580-530 BC), the founder of the Persian Empire as the first great land empire in human history. According to *Encyclopedia Iranica*, “The work has been considered a historical novel, a romantic history, a didactic treatise, and an educational novel.”

In Xenophon’s telling, Cyrus is the perfect absolutist king whose subjects tend to follow without ever questioning his judgment. He is a royal prince (his maternal grandfather, Astyages, is the great king of the Medes) who rises through the ranks not on account of his blood but his acumen. He first masters the virtues of a good king and commander during his long education, and then embarks upon unifying the fractured petty kingdoms of his age to create an empire. But he does not do so only through military prowess – in which he excels – but through wisdom, justice, temperance and persuasion. He can even be a trickster at times, but when it comes to evaluating his overall achievements, his occasional cunning counts for little. This Cyrus is not just a king, but a philosopher, public speaker, soldier, and lover. He develops his character and public profile step by step to become an enlightened and benevolent despot who eventually builds an empire and wins the hand of a noble lady. *Cyropaedia* is indeed an ancient bildungsroman. It was the story of rags-to-riches, the American Dream of classical antiquities.

The text was lost – or probably suppressed – during the Dark Ages. It only began to reappear with the emergence of humanism during the late medieval times, when it exerted perhaps the greatest influence on the emerging genre of “mirror for princes,” which was in turn widely reflected in Renaissance literature. Machiavelli, who was greatly beholden to the genre, was a fan of Xenophon, although he substantially distorted the idealistic/romantic nature of the genre through his stark realism. But the classical stratagems in the genre can be seen as the source of Machiavelli’s unsavory pieces of advice to the Prince, although hugely aggrandized.

And it was mostly through Machiavelli that Xenophon's *Cyrus* reached the modern political thinkers as well as the American Founding Fathers.

Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* was quite famous during the Tudor era. Roger Ascham, tutor to the young Elizabeth, knew it well. According to Hawkins, Sir Philip Sidney highly praised it as "an 'absolute heroicall poem' because under the name of Cyrus it presents... the model of a righteous governor" (342). Edmund Spenser, in his preface to *The Faerie Queene*, utilizing Sidney's famous division between the philosopher and the poet, justified his teaching by example rather than by precept in his romance by drawing upon the instances of *The Cyropaedia* and *The Republic* and preferring Xenophon to Plato:

To some I know this Methode will seem displeasent, which had rather have good discipline delivered plainly in way of precepts, or sermoned at large, as they use, then thus cloudily enwrapped in Allegoricall devises. But such, mee seeme, should be satisfied with the use of these dayes, seeing all things accounted by their showes, and nothing esteemed of, that is not delightfull and pleasing to common sense. For this cause is Xenophon preferred before Plato, for that the one, in the exquisite depth of his judgement, formed a Commune-wealth, such as it should be; but the other, in the person of Cyrus and the Persians, fashioned a government, such as might best be. (Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Book I)

In the character of the medieval King Henry V, Shakespeare translates the ancient Greco-Persian emperor into a Renaissance prince. He appropriates *Cyrus* down to detail, "including even an incognito tour of his camp on the eve of battle" (Ribner 183). As Hawkins says, "Xenophon's institution of the prince, like Shakespeare's, takes the form of fictionalized history, and his story of a young prince who masters the five virtues, invades a great kingdom, wins it in

a battle against overwhelming odds, and marries a princess reveals many likenesses to the career of Shakespeare's hero" (342).

Shakespeare largely keeps the romantic mold of the genre while injecting it with little doses of realism/Machiavellianism. Like Cyrus, although Henry is a royal prince by heredity, he creates his character and attains his place in the hall of fame among the greats by actively striving for improvement, glory and grandeur. Beginning with *I Henry IV*, Hal gradually builds a public profile of virtue for himself that culminates in *Henry V*. Of course, he follows the advice that his father gives him in that regard, which is perhaps the best advice anyone receives in the course of the history plays. Henry's case, as Baumer succinctly puts it (107), is "aristocracy by talent" rather than birth.

Also, like Cyrus, Henry is the kind of leader whose subjects tend to follow without ever questioning him. They take his words for gospel truth. For instance, at the sight of the French numerical superiority at Agincourt, Warwick wishes that there were more Englishmen present: "O that we now had here / But one ten thousand of those men in England / That do no work today!" (*Henry V* iv.3.15-17, 1499). In response to his wish, Henry delivers the splendid Saint Crispin's Day speech – which is actually more of a sermon – where he eloquently and heroically persuades Warwick that their numbers are enough if God wills it that they should succeed; otherwise it won't matter how large their numbers are. Warwick becomes so enthused that he announces his desire to fight alone beside the king: "God's will! My liege, would you and I alone, / Without more help, could fight this royal battle!" (*Henry V* iv.3.74-75, 1500). This is the true power/magic of Henry: he inspires people and makes them follow him and his example.

Henry even makes his enemies King Charles, the Constable of France, and more conspicuously the French herald Montjoy acknowledge his eminence. He has the power to

command respect even when he is cruel. That we can see in his treatment of Falstaff, both at the end of *2 Henry IV* and the beginning of *Henry V*, where his rejection of the old knight breaks his heart and eventually kills him. But the Boar's Head denizens understand and bless the king. Another instance is when Henry metes out capital punishment to the Southampton Plotters, and they acknowledge the justness of his decree and accept their fate without fighting back.

But this idealized image, as I mentioned before, is tempered with occasional doses and glimpses of realism. Interestingly, like the real-life Henry VII, Shakespeare's Henry V also plays on upward mobility and class conflict to bolster his position and power. If we notice, *Henry V* is the play of the common soldier rather than the knight and the noble. It is the common soldiers of different British nationalities who – of course after Henry himself – take the center stage. Compare the French expedition in *Henry V* to all the other wars in the history cycle; and you will see that while they are the battles of the nobility with little or no presence of the people, this one is the battleground for the common Englishman. Fluellen (Welsh), Jamy (Scottish), MacMorris (Irish) and Gower (English) are Henry's "bureaucrats" on whose shoulders and relying on whose unconditional loyalty Henry rises to power, becoming the embodiment of the frontispiece to Hobbes' *Leviathan* half a century before the philosopher actually wrote his seminal treatise on absolutism.

The class conflict in *Henry V* is also projected to the Anglo-French theater of war, where the French are depicted as aristocratic while the English are portrayed as mostly common men. And Shakespeare masterfully builds on that conflict to create the ideal absolutist English king. Here Shakespeare draws two vividly contrastive portraits of the English and the French. While the English are down-to-earth and selfless, the French are haughty and selfish. This is clearly manifested in the words and acts that the two sides speak and conduct with regard to each other –

and themselves. As a case in point, compare King Henry's dignified battle speech in IV-1 with the Constable of France's undignified speech in IV-2.

In a similar manner, while the French are healthy, well-equipped and numerous superior, the English are sickly, poorly equipped and diminished in size. These are all best manifested in the prologue to Act IV, where the Chorus asks the audience to imagine the two opposing camps during the night before the Battle of Agincourt:

Proud of their numbers and secure in soul,
The confident and over-lusty French
Do the low-rated English play at dice;
And chide the cripple tardy-gaited night
Who, like a foul and ugly witch, doth limp
So tediously away. The poor condemned English,
Like sacrifices, by their watchful fires
Sit patiently and inly ruminate
The morning's danger, and their gesture sad
Investing lank-lean; cheeks and war-worn coats
Presenteth them unto the gazing moon
So many horrid ghosts. (*Henry V* iv.0.17-28, 1491)

But this sustained contrast is not meant to downgrade the English. Rather, through the contrast Shakespeare creates a foil out of the French in order to aggrandize the subsequent achievement of the English as a feat of giant killing. Shakespeare in fact keeps showing us the writing on the wall only to spectacularly subvert it in the end. King Henry himself defines that contrast and anticipates its outcome. When the Duke of Gloucester complains – offstage – about

the poor condition of the English and the superiority of the French, Henry draws his attention to the fact that there are two sides to every situation, and that he must see the glass half full:

Gloucester, 'tis true that we are in great danger;
The greater therefore should our courage be.
Good morrow, brother Bedford. God Almighty!
There is some soul of goodness in things evil,
Would men observingly distil it out.
For our bad neighbour makes us early stirrers,
Which is both healthful and good husbandry:
Besides, they are our outward consciences,
And preachers to us all, admonishing
That we should dress us fairly for our end.
Thus may we gather honey from the weed,
And make a moral of the devil himself. (*Henry V* iv.1.1-12, 1491-1492)

As Henry prophesies, by the end of the battle the hard-pressed English, gathering “honey from the weed,” win the battle against all odds and stand victorious on the field of Agincourt. However, the delectable contrast in *Henry V* had to wait three and half centuries before it could be fully translated into visual terms. That is what Laurence Olivier would do in his cinematic adaptation of *Henry V* (1944). In this masterpiece of montage and mise-en-scène, Olivier, availing himself of the cinematography of the legendary Jack Hildyard, visualizes Shakespeare’s international class conflict by casting the two camps in contrastive sets and costumes, as well as emphasizing the sense of contrast by using rapid intercuts during the battle scenes. The climax of this visual style – and the drama – comes in the exquisite one-minute French paladin charge

sequence that culminates in the cloud of arrows released from the English longbows. That is way beyond anything Shakespeare's "ciphers to this great accompt" could have produced on the "unworthy scaffold" and the "wooden O" of the Elizabethan stage (*Henry V*, Prologue to Act I).

In the end, Henry also shows his share of artfulness during his wooing of Katharine. With his boldness, vigor, and vivacity he overpowers Kate, as he has done France. Here Kate can be seen as a symbol of France; a microcosm that stands for the macrocosm Henry has already conquered. It is as if the concluding remarks of Machiavelli's *The Prince* come to life in this last scene of *Henry V*: "Fortune is a woman.... It is clear that she more often allows herself to be won over by impetuous men than by those who proceed coldly. And so, like a woman, Fortune is always the friend of young men, for they are less cautious, more ferocious, and command her with more audacity" (Bondanella 87). Kate is Henry's *Fortuna*.

Like the Cyrus of *The Cyropaedia* and the Henry VII of the Tudor Myth, Shakespeare's Henry V is a protean character who can cast himself in many different guises. He is the perfect Renaissance Man, the absolute self-fashioner who lives a wide range of lives, both in the past and the present. In his character Henry gathers the king, the theologian, the civil administrator, the public speaker, the wit, the judge, the soldier, the crusader, the lover, and the peacemaker. As the Archbishop of Canterbury describes him,

Hear him but reason in divinity,
And all-admiring with an inward wish
You would desire the king were made a prelate:
Hear him debate of commonwealth affairs,
You would say it hath been all in all his study:
List his discourse of war, and you shall hear

A fearful battle render'd you in music:
Turn him to any cause of policy,
The Gordian knot of it he will unloose,
Familiar as his garter: that, when he speaks,
The air, a charter'd libertine, is still,
And the mute wonder lurketh in men's ears,
To steal his sweet and honey'd sentences;
So that the art and practis part of life
Must be the mistress to this theoric. (*Henry V* i.1.39-53, 1456)

And that is the key to Henry's success in a highly dynamic world, that he, far from solely relying on his hereditary status – as the doomed Richard II had done – actively strives to become the perfect, absolutist sovereign that he is. In the words of Rackin, “No longer imposed by an inherited social position, the new man's identity is constructed in action: the theatrical principle of present performance replaces the historical principle of hereditary status as its defining ground” (75). As Hawkins says, “Irving Ribner maintains that though Shakespeare never condones Richard's deposition, he glorifies the Lancastrian kings who replace him. The public virtues of Henry IV make up for his illegal title, while his son combines public and private virtues to become the greatest of English kings. A stress on virtue here replaces the emphasis on lineal descent” (313).

To sum up, in the character of Henry V Shakespeare creates a hybrid creature who has one foot in the Middle Ages and another in the Renaissance, and in whom medieval piety and modern ingenuity, and tradition and invention come together. Henry V is Shakespeare's representation of the Tudor absolute monarch who finally wields both the secular and spiritual

swords of Saint Paul at the expense of the church. If we look closely, we can see that this priest-king has many affinities with the Henry VII of the Document No. 5063510 of July 16, 1504 that is kept in the English National Archives. Henry V is indeed the perfect king whom Shakespeare presents as an idealized image of Tudor absolutism. However, in the final analysis, *Henry V* fares far beyond the temporal restrictions of the age to become, in Shakespeare's view, an ageless allegory of good government.

AFTERWORD

Shakespeare's histories are highly lively accounts of the development of some of the most fundamental political ideas and institutions in the West. The movement from the Middle Ages to the early modern period witnessed a development in institutionalization and state formation. In the dialectic/tension/conflict between the medieval and the early modern, new ideas and institutions are born. Some continue in changed ways; some others come into being for the first time. As such, what Shakespeare's histories demonstrate historically is the paradigm shift in the teleology and *raison d'être* of the state from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. The residual and the emergent epistemes are there in the character of the Judeo-Christian and revived Classical teachings; an uneasy mix of Hebraism and Hellenism that we call the Renaissance.

However, in the larger picture, through the epic account of the generational debate between the warring Yorkists and Lancastrians and their ancestors and offspring, Shakespeare indeed recounts a story of the universal interplay between *gnosis* and *praxis*, and between order and liberty in power politics, the general contours of which have come down to us in many ways unchanged. For instance, we can see traces of Augustine's philosophy of history, Providentialism and Christian salvation history in the Liberal and Marxist faith in progress and the belief that human efforts are directed towards an overarching end. Body politic is translated into the extra-personality of the modern state. Diplomatic immunity in contemporary international relations also springs from that concept. More specifically, the distinction between the Crown and the person of the monarch in British dominions is a direct continuation of the late medieval body politic. Feudalism and its variations, especially in the late medieval incarnation of bastard feudalism, become the basis for modern property rights, especially private property.

Absolutism leads to the birth of the centralized government, which is the foundation stone of the nation state; and to the summing up of the nation in the character of the state. The Machiavellian realization that all human institutions are constructs rather than eternal things results in secularism and sociopolitical mobility, which in turn leads to a wider circulation of power and finally to democracy. As for chivalry, war is sometimes inevitable, but the approach to war greatly matters. The chivalric ethos and its strong faith in certain codes of honor during battle has been the harbinger of institutes, norms and methods to reduce human cost at war – the Geneva Conventions are a case in point. This has led to the economy of violence in the Western sphere of politics. Chivalry is also an important springhead of modern individualism.

Nevertheless, despite all this positive contribution in the form of a predominantly progressive philosophy of history, the portrait that the major interpreters of Shakespeare's histories drew of him in the course of the long twentieth century was mostly negative. During WWII, E.M.W. Tillyard regarded the history plays as the manifestations of the Tudor Myth, a strictly static religious ideological apparatus of the Tudor dynasty. Tillyard believed that through the history plays Shakespeare promoted the conservative political ideology of the Tudor court; that he was a propagandist for Queen Elizabeth. Tillyard's approach remained the standard method to define the nature of the history plays for almost four decades.

Beginning with the early 1980s, Stephen Greenblatt and a host of others started to question Tillyard's views. Under the influence of a newly-found interest in Machiavelli, they posited that religion did not count for much in the Tudor ideological apparatus, and that it was actually Machiavellian precepts that carried the day. According to this school, it was the stark self-interest of the individuals and their dizzyingly dynamic efforts at adapting themselves to the continually changing circumstances in order to attain their merely material goals that was the

motor of politics in the Tudor Age. Greenblatt famously expounds that theory in his best-known work, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*.

What Tillyard and Greenblatt do is actually to bracket off alternative ways of reading Shakespeare's history plays; Tillyard through religious determinism and Greenblatt through cultural determinism. By doing so they effectively eliminate different epistemological approaches that can help us better understand and analyze history, politics and literature. It's not simply about the way one reads literature; it is about how one sees the world. In contrast, by showing that politics is not immutable, Shakespeare transcends both kinds of Providential and Machiavellian determinisms that are at the heart of Tillyard's and Greenblatt's conceptions of him. As such, contrary to his famous interpreters, Shakespeare's is an open philosophy of history – if not always smoothly progressive – that is still relevant today.

Indeed the past is not a foreign country. When we study history in general and history of ideas in particular, we usually don't see total break but shifting continuity. In the case of England, the sense of custom and tradition was retained, but it was put at the service of revolution. The Reformation drew upon ancient law, custom, tradition and literature to introduce significant and game-changing novelties. As Ackroyd says, "Continuity, rather than change, is the measure of the country" (279). That is why classic English political thought, while usually considered conservative, is indeed progressive. The result that it yields is not instantaneous but ripens in the process of a prolonged ebb and flow between the past and the present. Endurance is the key here. That is why the fruit of this progress tends to linger.

And Shakespeare is perhaps the greatest manifestation of that process as well as its lively site of contention. In him the old and the new live side by side, always with tension but also tolerant of each other. The residual and the emergent are all over his history plays, and they are

nowhere much apart from one another. As we saw in the course of this study, many characters in the plays such as Richard II, Henry IV and Henry V demonstrate strong signs of both. So the condition is more that of flux than stasis. Shakespeare's history plays are complicated phenomena because each one of them emanates epistemological ebbs and flows that make complete sense only when taken as a whole. This is a clear manifestation of my contention at the start of this dissertation, that progress is not linear, but recurring.

The contemporary significance of all this is that the same process of going back and forth, I mean between spiritualism and secularism, and between order and liberty, is still running in our world; and the ongoing conflict between and sometimes the conflation of pretty much the same principles govern our lives. For instance, the American War of Independence was a political conflict between the colonial settlers and the British Crown over the sovereignty of the 13 Colonies, but the Founding Fathers gave it a heavily religious tone by pointing out that they were acting on man's God-given rights, a concept that is now enshrined in the US Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution. This is liberal; this is progressive; and this is from John Locke; and yet it is not totally positivist.

Similarly, the American Civil War was originally a conflict over economy and sovereignty, but Abraham Lincoln turned it into a moral crusade by going against the institution of slavery upheld by the South, which many Christians and Abolitionists in the North believed was an ungodly institution. Lincoln both liberated the slaves and won the civil war, and in the long run laid the foundations of our contemporary "United" States. A century later, during WWII, President Roosevelt cast the fight against Nazism and Fascism in the mold of yet another moral crusade; as did Presidents Kennedy and Reagan against Communism during the Cold War. Kennedy himself was a devout Catholic, and Reagan a devout Protestant.

In the early twenty-first century, President Trump's "Make America Great Again" has a religious ring to it as well. One implicit message here is to make America great again by returning it to its religious moral principles. He makes that clear when he uses the phrase "God Bless America" as the concluding remark to most of his important public speeches. Therefore, although we generally assume that politics – at least in the West – has become completely secularized, from time to time we can witness the return of God, sometimes with a vengeance. This is what I tried to demonstrate in the section on the history of Shakespeare Historicism: that in line with specific spatiotemporal circumstances, spiritualism and secularism keep receding and proceeding in our conceptualization of Shakespeare. As we can see, liberal progress is not linear; it is recurring.

In the final analysis, if we regard politics as the art of organizing and mobilizing force to achieve an end on a mass scale, then Shakespeare's histories are all political metanarratives: they are pseudo-historical stories that lay bare the workings of politics in performance. That is why the history plays go beyond the time they were written in, for and about and become literally "universal," because what they are in effect is a study of the "nature of politics," which has little changed since the Age of Shakespeare. As Robin Headlam Wells has perceptively put it,

[W]here criticism and historical scholarship have combined most successfully the result has tended to confirm a view of Shakespeare not as the apologist, or the critic of establishment doctrines (though it must be said that he does perform both roles at different times), but as an exceptionally shrewd political analyst. (403)

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