Scholars are increasingly aware that Shakespeare was a critic of ideas and not merely their mouthpiece. The ideas his characters voice are always aspects of some human purpose, whose validity then becomes exposed in its fruits. A typically Tudor doctrine of political duty, for example, is voiced by several of the characters in Richard II. But few scholars nowadays argue, as did Tillyard thirty years ago, that the play essentially supports Tudor orthodoxy, or that, as Miss Campbell supposed, Shakespeare was restating the Tudor political ethic simply in order to raise the problem of whether a king might for any cause be deposed. Rather, the play sets forth the tragedy of how Richard came to be deposed by Henry Bolingbroke, and includes as causes of this outcome the reasonings and tactics of both these men and others. The story, tragic for England as a whole, is an occasion for audience pity and fear. But what is pitiable and fearful is not merely Bolingbroke's ambition and crime of usurpation, which the chronicler Holinshed emphasizes, or on the other hand Richard's wanton acts, which Holinshed laments. Shakespeare reveals, behind the reciprocal injustices, what John Elliott has termed "the weakness of Richard's philosophy of kingship." Richard's dethroning comes about less through the strength of Bolingbroke's arms than through Richard's own misunderstanding of his office.

Holinshed and Hall say nothing of Richard's philosophy of kingship, or of that of other persons in the story. There is at most only a hint of high theory in Holinshed's report of the Bishop of Carlisle's defense of Richard, "affirming that there was none among them worthie or meet to give judgment upon so noble a king . . . ; and will ye proceed to the judgement of an anointed king, hearing neither his answer nor excuse?" The elaboration of kingly prerogatives by Shakespeare's Carlisle, and by Shakespeare's Richard, must derive from other sources—in part from the dramatist's reading of two French chroniclers, who as eyewitnesses of Richard's downfall compared him to Christ before Pilate; but more directly, from Shakespeare's familiarity with official Tudor doctrine. We know from modern studies of Richard that his era was one in which continental publicists and some English theologians were emphasizing the divine sanctions of mon-
archy, and that Richard himself, as one scholar tells us, “grasped at theoretical bucklers for royal power wherever he found them,” and developed without logical consistency more extreme claims for royal absolutism than any of his predecessors had done, proclaiming himself immune from interference by anyone either in the realm or outside it, and magnifying the importance of symbols and ceremonies “as a means of retaining prestige which had formerly been based upon tacit recognition of function.” In this respect, Richard’s stance foreshadows that of the Tudors, and Shakespeare must have been aware of this fact either through wide reading or through oral tradition. Queen Elizabeth herself is reported by William Lambarde as saying: “I am Richard II, know ye not that?” and the analogy was occasionally debated by Elizabethan controversialists. Under such circumstances, Shakespeare chose to update Richard’s significance by portraying him and others of his court as imbued with doctrines of kingship like those proclaimed in the official Tudor Homilies.

But in Shakespeare’s play the actions taken by proponents of these doctrines turn out to be tragic and beset by strange contradictions. The Richard who declares in Act III that “the breath of worldly men cannot depose / The deputy elected of the Lord” later cooperates in his own deposition. While regarding his opponents as rebels and traitors, he nevertheless gives his “soul’s consent” to be “a traitor with the rest” and do whatever Bolingbroke wishes. “What you will have, I’ll give, and willing too, / For we must do what force will have us do.” Thus Richard accepts spinelessly and fatalistically what he believes to be wrong. His doctrine that subjects are unconditionally bound to obey royal authority turns into his own abject obedience to a usurper, making Richard in effect the usurper’s accomplice. Is Shakespeare suggesting that this outcome is an all-too-likely consequence of the Tudor theory of non-resistance to the powers that be? The play shows us also, in the careers of other spokesmen of Divine Right doctrine, other forms of consequence, equally ironic. It seems likely, therefore, that the dramatist is testing and exposing latent deficiencies in the premises of Tudor thinking.

Many critics of the drama have complained that Richard is too much a poet who plays with words, or too much an actor engaging in histrionics. But do we not find a similar penchant for self-dramatization in other characters as well, though their less prominent roles give this penchant lesser scope? England’s whole ethos in this play is elaborately ceremonial. Tillyard attributes the highly formalistic quality of the play’s language and action to Shakespeare’s characterizing of the Middle Ages as an era in which men valued “means more than ends.” More accurately, P. G. Phialas sees Richard’s love of ceremony as a shocking change from earlier medieval attitudes, and hence as Shakespeare’s portrayal of a “declining” England. And D. A. Traversi, without generalizing regarding the Middle Ages, finds in the high formality of the play’s action “a sense of pose” and of “majesty
in decay,” and in its ending a mood of “fatalism rather than of acceptance, of subjection to events rather than a true concordance with them.” Wilbur Sanders, more boldly and I think rightly, sees this quality of behavior and outcome as the consequence of a “sadly gelded version” of the medieval concept of the sacredness of kings. Whereas older Divine Right theory, Sanders remarks, rested on a concept of the mutuality of king and people in a corpus mysticum, of which the king was protector, the Tudor version divorced right from responsibility and neglected the prince’s traditional role as father and shepherd to his people.

It is this aspect of the play’s meaning which I wish to amplify and illustrate. Richard and others, by substituting a ceremonial interpretation of duty for the more traditional sacramental theory, reduce kingship to a hollow parade in which high pretensions mask a subsurface of intrigue and evasive practice. The whole community thus becomes ripe for the virtually Machiavellian tactics of Henry Bolingbroke. He merely wedges himself into the vacuum created by a breakdown of concern for community welfare. And this breakdown is related to an ideology of political duty which has all the half-truths and confusions of understanding one can find, for instance, in the Elizabethan Homily Against Disobedience and wilful Rebellion, first published in 1571 and ordered to be preached regularly in the pulpit, its six parts on six Sundays. Let me begin, therefore, by examining the potentialities for tragedy latent in this homily, and then show how Shakespeare exhibits in four of the characters in his play variant forms of tragic outcome to which the homily’s premises might lead.

The clerical authors of this Homily are curiously feeble as theologians. They make no mention of charity as being the first of the theological virtues, or of justice as being chief of the natural virtues. Rather, we are told in the homily’s first paragraph that “obedience is the principall vertue of all vertues, and indeed the very root of all vertues, and the cause of all felicitie.” Man’s pre-fallen state is held up as a model. But then we are told that after Adam and Eve had breached this obedience by rebellion, “the very root of all other sins,” God forthwith “repaired again the rule and order of obedience” by giving man laws ordaining due obedience to his majesty and, when mankind increased, obedience to special governors and rulers. The impression this statement gives is that the “repaired” order has the same absolute validity as the pre-fallen one. The homilist grants that there may sometimes be evil princes, but he insists that subjects are by Scripture’s teaching “bounden to obey them,” the evil ones as well as the good ones—and, indeed, that the authority of the Prince is such that “the subject that provoketh him to displeasure sinneth against his own soule.” One wonders, in that case,
how the homilist would regard, for instance, John the Baptist’s incurring the displeasure of Herod or Paul’s incurring the displeasure of the magistrates at Philippi.

A carefully selective use of proof-texts runs through the homily. Much is made, of course, of Romans 13 and of 1 Peter 2, but there is no mention of Acts 5:29, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” Likewise, much is made of David’s twice refusing an opportunity to slay King Saul although Saul was seeking David’s destruction. But no mention is made of the people’s resisting Saul when he purposed to slay Jonathan (1 Sam. 14); or of the fact that David would have resisted Saul at Keilah if he could have counted on citizen support (1 Sam. 23); or of David’s offering his services to the Philistine enemy; or of the fact that, once David had a base of citizen support in Hebron after Saul’s death, “there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David” (2 Sam. 3:1), with David eventually supplanting Saul’s heir. Those episodes, inconvenient for Tudor propaganda, are silently avoided. Also avoided, of course, is any mention of Jehu’s coup d’état, sanctioned by Elisha (2 Kings 9), or of the overthrow of Queen Athaliah, engineered by Jehoiada (2 Kings 11), or of the assassination of King Eglon by a God-appointed Ehud (Judges 3). Although various medieval theorists, including John of Salisbury, had justified tyrannicide under special circumstances, that topic was too dangerous to raise in the Elizabethan pulpit. It would have required looking into what it is that princes are ordained by God to do, and into what God has approved the people’s doing when their princes fail to do what they have been ordained to do. These questions were being raised by occasional Puritan and Catholic theorists within the Elizabethan scene, but the government position was to squelch discussion of these by emphasizing simply what “Scripture teaches” and then reducing scripture to the Procrustean bed of a few major texts unqualified by their environing context.

Even murmuring against a prince is declared to be displeasing to God. The punishment of those who murmured against Moses, says the homilist, is an example to stay us from “speaking once an evil word against our Prince,” even secretly. And see how God punished rebels such as Absalom and Sheba. Here the homilist is apparently presupposing that Elizabeth is a second Moses or a second David, although he offers no evidence to support this premise other than his reference to Elizabeth as “our gracious sovereign.” The supporters of the Northern rebellion of 1569 he characterizes as “most rash and haibredrained men, the greatest unthrifts, that have most lewdly wasted their own goods and lands.” What they falsely call reformation, he declares, is only a defacing or deformation; and though they parade banners painted with “God speed the plough,” or flags picturing the five wounds of Christ, they neither plough nor suffer others to do so, and they little know what the Cross of Christ means, which ought to be in the heart and not on flags. But in saying this, is not the homilist begging the whole question of
whether Elizabeth's own government has at heart the Cross of Christ, and whether it itself has not wasted church goods and lands?

Parts 5 and 6 of the homily denounce the bishops of Rome for their ambition, treason, and usurpation. Infinite mischiefs within England have been due to this “Babylonical beast” which abuses Englishmen who are ignorant of God’s word. So Englishmen are exhorted to study what Scripture teaches in order to avoid being misled by foreigners. The troubles of King John’s time, the homilist explains, were due to “most greedy Romish wolves” and to Englishmen’s lamentable “ignorance of their duetie to their prince set forth in GOD’s worde.” The rebellion of “ignorant subjects” against “their natural sovereign Lord the King of England” drove John to such extremity that he was “inforced to submit himselfe unto that foraigne false usurper the Bishop of Rome, who compelled him to surrender up the crowne of England.” This interpretation, we may note, differs from Shakespeare’s in his play King John. Shakespeare shows John as offering up his crown voluntarily in the hope of gaining Rome’s political support. And further, Shakespeare pictures John’s nobles as having revolted, not because of their ignorance of Scripture, but rather out of indignation over John’s apparent conniving of the death of his nephew, Prince Arthur.

The homilist makes no mention of King John’s injustices; and of course, no mention of the fact that the papacy regarded Elizabeth herself as a usurper rebelling against her Christian duty. The homilist, actually, is in the paradoxical position of preaching against rebellion from a pulpit which has sanctioned the English church’s rebellion against the Pope. Hence, to some Englishmen at least, this pulpit’s assertion (in Part 3) that “he that nameth rebellion...nameth the whole puddle and sinke of all sinnes against GOD and man” must have sounded somewhat hollow. Occasional hearers may have remembered that in Scripture itself a jealous King Saul miscalled Jonathan a rebel (1 Sam. 20:30) for trying to defend David against Saul’s allegations. Or, hearers with some theological knowledge may have recalled Augustine’s adage that “Disobedience punishes disobedience” (City of God, XIV.15). The Elizabethan homilist has ignored the complexity of divine law in its real providential working, which underlies Scripture read in its entirety.

The philosophical crunch in any doctrine of unconditional nonresistance comes at the point when its theorist must face the question of what a citizen’s duty is in the case of an evil king. The homilist answers this question simplistically. A rebel, he says (Part 1), is worse than the worst prince, and rebellion is worse than the worst government of the worst prince. Then, shifting his ground cagily, he contends that rebellion is “an unfit and unwholesome medicine to reform any small lackes in a prince,” for if all subjects who dislike their prince should rebel, no realm would ever be without rebellion. But what if a prince be evil indeed, and evidently so to all men’s eyes? To this question the homilist answers by placing the whole matter beyond
human judgment. God forbid, he says, that subjects should judge which prince is wise and godly and his government good, and which prince is otherwise; that would be “as though the foot must judge of the head: an enterprise very heinous.” Secondly, he calls on his listeners to hear Scripture (Job 34:30): “God maketh a wicked man to raigne for the sinnes of his people.” But here the homilist is slighting the context of Elihu’s statement. Elihu (not mentioned by the homilist) was saying that the reign of a hypocrite is a consequence of darkened knowledge. Verses 29-30 read in the Geneva translation: “When he (God) hideth his face, who can beholde him . . . ? Because the hypocrite doeth reigne, and because the people are snared.” Elihu assured Job, in verse 25, that when God shall “turne the night” the tyrant shall be destroyed.

The homilist argues simply that people must be content with whatever kind of king God chooses to give them. Since kings are called gods in Psalm 82:6, they rule or should rule like God their king. But here a curious distinction between resembling God’s mercy and resembling his justice is propounded. The nearer an earthly prince comes to following heavenly example, says the homilist, the greater “blessing of God’s mercy” he is to the people; but, on the other hand, the further he swerves from heavenly example, the greater “plague of God’s wrath” he is, as a just punishment on the people’s sins. Might we infer, then, that Pharaoh’s plaguing of the Israelites was a just punishment for sins of theirs? That is a case the homilist does not raise. He merely generalizes that the most subjects can do is to amend their own lives by obeying the king’s rule and praying for him. When St. Paul exhorted Christians to pray for kings, says the homilist, he was including kings such as Caligula, Claudius, and Nero, cruel tyrants; and what he meant was that we are bound to obey even a heathen tyrant if God gives us such a one because of our wickedness. Note how this logic seems to imply that the early Christians deserved to have Nero as a ruler. One infers that the political status quo is ordained to be what it is, whatever it is.

We have noted how the focus of the entire homily is on the duty of Englishmen to their ruler, with virtually nothing said of his duty to them. The relationship envisaged is solely hierarchical, the king being pictured as one of the gods of Psalm 82, while the people are pictured simply as subjects. This interpretation does not accord well with the traditional medieval view, as incorporated for instance in English rites of coronation. Those rites, whether in the fourteenth century or the sixteenth, had three well marked divisions: 1) the “recognition” of the king, a mode of election by the people; 2) the oath taken by the king to rule in accordance with law and justice by maintaining customary rights and liberties; and 3) the benediction super-added to the covenant so made between king and people, the benediction’s holy oil being regarded as a sacramental, a means by which grace might be obtained.12 Traditional coronation implied a king’s duty to public
covenant, and his acceptance of dependence on divine grace, matters which the homily bypasses.

II

Now Shakespeare’s Richard, as we have noted, interprets his office as that of “deputy elected by the Lord.” In the opening scene he emphasizes his “sacred blood,” his “upright soul” and his impartiality. But we soon sense, from the way in which Richard treats Mowbray and Bolingbroke, that his claim to impartiality is masking a self-protective motive. The two dukes are asking that the truth of Bolingbroke’s charge be settled by trial by combat, a long-established medieval custom for seeking Heaven’s judgment. Richard seeks to prevent this, because the charge that Mowbray plotted the Duke of Gloucester’s death is one that indirectly glances at Richard. To keep hidden this delicate matter (in which the orderer of the murder was really Richard, as we later learn) Richard describes the quarrel as one of choler merely, and prescribes “forget and forgive.” But when the accused Mowbray throws himself at the King’s feet to protest that he cannot sacrifice his honor, Richard consents to let justice have its opportunity at Coventry—though he says also, ominously, “We were not born to sue but to command.”

At Coventry itself, two scenes later, he halts the contest, and in the name of “our Council” pronounces banishment—on Bolingbroke for ten years and on Mowbray for life. His explanation is that he cannot allow “civil wounds” which “we think” are motivated by “rival-hating envy.” But note that Richard is here using his authority to override appeal to Divine judgment, thus himself causing, as Shakespeare lets Mowbray’s son say in 2 Henry IV (IV.1.125-129), all England’s subsequent woes. And note also the inequality of the sentences handed down. It suggests a bargain worked out in the “Council” meeting, which Shakespeare refrains from dramatizing in order to prompt our guessing at the backstage intrigue which underlies the elegant surface-show of kingly authority. Perhaps Bolingbroke’s father, a member of the Council, would give his consent only on condition of terms which implied his son’s lesser fault; and perhaps Richard consented to scuttle the loyal Mowbray, not only to let the public infer great guilt in Mowbray (and hence innocence in Richard), but also to ensure that Mowbray would never return to England to reveal what he knew of the Gloucester murder. Shakespeare has indicated adroitly the double-talk of outward uprightness and inner shadiness that characterizes Richard’s ceremonious kingship, and his Council’s dealings also.

In Act II we see a second instance of irresponsibility on Richard’s part. When the dying John of Gaunt laments malpractices by Richard, the King retaliates by confiscating the dead man’s estates. When York protests this violation of feudal custom, Richard replies merely, “Think what you will,
we seize unto our hands . . . his lands." Then he appoints York himself to
govern during Richard's absence in Ireland, and York accepts the assign-
ment, although in a self-divided mood that makes him ineffective as a
protector of Richard's interests. York soon buckles before a Bolingbroke
who breaks banishment and returns to England to demand his family in-
heritance.

Richard on returning to meet this situation salutes the "dear earth" of
England, terming it a child wounded by rebels. But he shows no concern
for the welfare of Englishmen. His sole concern is to be an "eye of Heaven,"
rising like the sun from the East, to light up the fact of Bolingbroke's treason
and make him "tremble for his sin." God has angels to fight for Bolingbroke, he
says, and Heaven will guard the right. But when he hears that his Welsh
supporters have dispersed, he turns pale; and on hearing that Bushy and
Green are gone, he accuses them of being Judases. His attitude now becomes
one of fatalistic submission:

Revolt our subjects? That we cannot mend.
They break their faith to God as well as us.
Cry woe, destruction, ruin and decay.

All he has learned from this crisis is the mortality of monarchizing. He
must now be "woe's slave," he reasons, since he cannot be a king when
subjected to a need of friends. He regards himself not as one who has be-
trayed his obligation to England, but rather as a Phaeton who has failed to
manage "unruly jades" and therefore must debasingly yield to them. Though
Bolingbroke kneels to plead, "My gracious lord, I come only for mine own,"
Richard replies, "Your own is yours, and I am yours, and all." For Richard
feels that for any subject to come in arms asking for rights amounts to a
usurpation. Must Richard then "lose the name of king?" he asks himself,
and answers: "O' God's name let it go." The loss will but rid him of cares:
he will give up, he says, his jewels and palace for a set of beads and an
almosman's gown, and "My subjects for a pair of carved saints, / And my
large kingdom for a little grave," where subjects hourly may trample on
their sovereign's head. It is evident from this speech that Richard thinks of
kingship in terms simply of station, title, and adornment, and that his piety
is of an escapist kind which purposes not charity but self-pity and self-
dramatization.

Resigning the crown in Act IV, Richard likens himself to Christ betrayed
by Judases:

Did they not sometime cry "All hail!" to me?
So Judas did to Christ. But He in twelve
Found truth in all but one, I in twelve thousand, none.

He will give up his "glories" and his "state," he says, but his deosers must
answer for their sin, a "blot damned in the book of Heaven." He will choose
non-resistance because "we must do what force will have us do," and be-
cause kingship has proved to be a brittle glory, in which a usurper such as Bolingbroke can outface him. He calls for a mirror to look at his own face, Narcissus-like, that he may study what must now be shattered. The only sin he finds in himself is in his giving his soul's consent to “undeck the pompous body of a king,” thus being “traitor with the rest” in making “glory base and sovereignty a slave.”

Meanwhile, he refuses to read the list of accusations drawn up against him. And it never occurs to him to propose redresses of injustice, by which he might continue as ruler. He prefers to focus attention instead on his own willing-yet-unwilling resigning of all “pomp and majesty”—as if he equated kingship not with its function but with its symbols of privilege. “Now mark how I will undo myself,” he says:

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.

We notice here that he regards even the sacramental balm and the “rites” which marked his installation in office as somehow properties belonging to him, natural possessions supernaturally guaranteed, but which worldlings are now sacrilegiously asking him to give up. His implication is that he must consent to dispossess himself because a martyr must yield to the powers that be, must make himself a “nothing” when betrayed by an evil world. As if to demonstrate his Christ-like piety, he adds:

God pardon all oaths that are broke to me!
God keep all vows unbrokethat swearto thee!

But notice that those whom he here prays God to pardon are the very ones he upbraids, twenty-two lines later, as “damned” for breaking their oath to him. Such piety is hopelessly contradictory. Richard’s non-resistance to the “sour cross” to which he says Pilates are delivering him is certainly understood by Shakespeare as a histrionic pseudo-piety.

The contradictions in Richard’s stance become even more evident in Act V. Meeting his Queen as he is led to prison, he tells her that he is a “sworn brother” to “grim Necessity,” in a league which he will keep till death, and he counsels her:

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

In other words, Heaven is now to be sought by serving death. The Queen replies that his attitude is unkingly. “Wilt thou,” she asks, “fawn on rage with base humility, / Which art a lion and a king of beasts?” To which Richard bitterly replies:

A king of beasts, indeed. If aught but beasts,
I had been still a happy king of men.
Notice how un-Christlike this remark is: men are regarded not as erring brothers but as beasts, and Richard is not ready to die for them, but only for his own higher glory.

In a later prison scene, however, we see him wrestling with what he calls "thoughts of things divine ... intermixed with scruples" which "set the word itself against the word." What he cannot reconcile are two scriptural texts:

"Come, little ones," and then again,
"It is as hard to come as for a camel
To thread the postern of a small needle's eye."

He finds himself divided between, on the one hand, ambitiously desiring to "tear a passage through the flinty ribs / Of this hard world," and on the other hand, seeking contentment by a stoic resignation to misfortune. It should be evident to readers of this scene that he understands neither one of the biblical texts he has cited. Finally, when armed men enter his prison he beats them to the draw by suspecting their intent of murder and attacking them with an axe, killing two, before being himself struck down—whereupon he cries out:

Mount, mount, my soul! Thy seat is up on high,
Whilst my gross flesh sinks downward, here to die.

Here we can see the gnosticism of Richard's piety, his notion of heaven as a high station which rewards the soul which has extricated itself from the body, in effect through denying charity and mounting above what the Bible means by flesh, namely, man's native humanity. This ending accords with the philosophy of kingship we have seen in Richard throughout the play, his idea that kings are not bound by ties to ordinary human beings and their needs.

III

Other outworkings of divine right theory, less extreme than Richard's but nevertheless tragic, can be seen in other characters of Shakespeare's drama. Suppose we trace, for instance, the role of the Bishop of Carlisle. He first appears as Richard's counsellor, in Act III, when Richard on returning from Ireland is lamenting the treachery of "foul rebellion's arms." Carlisle speaks up to advise against grief:

Fear not, my lord. That Power that made you King
Hath power to keep you King in spite of all.
The means that Heaven yields must be embraced,
And not neglected; else, if Heaven would
And we will not, Heaven's offer we refuse,
The proffered means of succor and redress.

It is evident that the Bishop regards Richard's kingship as of Heaven's making. But it is less clear what "means" he thinks Heaven would have
Richard embrace. He makes no mention of succor through Confession or Holy Communion, the means which a clergyman might himself offer. Having made his grand generalization, he is simply silent for the next 140 lines while Richard first rouses himself to boast of being “the eye of heaven,” then despairs on hearing his troops have fled, then curses his deserters as “vipers, damned beyond redemption,” then sits on the ground for further wailing. No attempt is made by the Bishop to correct these attitudes.

He speaks only after Richard’s wail has wound down into the bitter comment:

Throw away respect,
Tradition, form, and ceremonious duty,
For you have mistook me all this while.
I live with bread like you, feel want,
Taste grief, need friends. Subjected thus,
How can you say I am a king?

Since this question invites an answer, the Bishop offers one, but scarcely such as we might expect of a cleric and pastor. He says nothing about how Richard might acquire friends; nor does he explain, as he ought, that Richard’s need for bread makes him only human, no detriment to kingship. Here is the Bishop’s opportunity, one might think, to offer Richard an equivalent of heaven’s bread, some charitable counsel on how Richard might seek a reconciliation with the English people by initiating moves for the redress of their grievances. Is not that the bread really needed? But instead the Bishop offers a comfort which, in effect, amounts to an unwitting throwing away of tradition and duty on his part. He counsels:

My lord, wise men ne’er sit and wail their woes,
But presently prevent the ways to wail.
To fear the foe, since fear oppresseth strength,
Gives in your weakness strength unto your foe,
And so your follies fight against yourself.
Fear, and be slain. No worse can come to fight.
And fight and die is death destroying death.

What this means is: Use what troops you still have to sally forth to battle and go down fighting, thus proving you can overcome fear. It is a counsel as empty as the modern slogan, “There is nothing to fear but fear itself.” One could say, ironically, that the Bishop’s own folly here fights against himself, against at least what heaven ordained him to do—mediate a word of life, not death. And has such counsel prevented ways to wail? Richard’s reaction, understandably, is to lapse into a deeper despair: “Let no man speak again,” he says, “for counsel is but vain. . . . Discharge my followers.”

Carlisle’s third speech in the play is the well-known one preceding Richard’s deposition. York has just entered to announce to the nobles Richard’s agreement to make Bolingbroke his heir, and has added an appeal to Bolingbroke to “ascend the throne.” Bolingbroke at once says he will do so
"In God's name." The Bishop here breaks in with a thirty-five-line speech, beginning with "God forbid!" Richard, he reminds the assembly, is "the figure of God's majesty, / His captain, steward, deputy elect," anointed and crowned. Shakespeare is thus letting Carlisle voice the high theory of the Elizabethan homily. Its central contention is stated in the lines:

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

We should note that this question is being asked by a bishop, who ought to know, one might think, that there are at least some areas, notably those of faith and morals, in which he himself is by his own ordination subject to an authority other than Richard's. Carlisle's monolithic premise ignores traditional Christian theory regarding the relation of church and state, theory as ancient as that of the fifth-century Gelasius. Did not Samuel, in the days of King Saul, judge and give sentence on the monarch?

Had not the Bishop been neglecting all along his own pastoral obligation to teach Christian morals, we might expect him now to use his breath to call attention to principles higher than merely political ones for proceeding in the present situation. Why not offer some alternative to the polarized stances of the two parties? Yes, the nobles are Richard's subjects, but are they not all also God's subjects? Are they not responsible to two overlapping but not identical authorities? And even in the political realm solely, are not ruler and subjects alike bound by the king's coronation oath to act justly and in accord with customary law? A churchman might raise, furthermore, a third question: whether the legal terms, ruler and subject, might not better be subordinated to a concept such as that of father and children. All these considerations, however, the Bishop ignores and thereby misses his opportunity to act as a mediator. By his partisan and merely negative stance, he does nothing to illuminate the issue, and thus nothing capable of preventing the outcome he deplores. He is reduced to a helpless pronouncing of dire predictions:

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

Although this prediction was to prove true in England's subsequent history, can we not say that the "foul act" was reciprocally committed? Polarized forms of fault are interdependent in a decadent society or individual: to leave undone that which ought to be done interlocks with doing that which ought not to be done.

The irony of the situation is that the Bishop of Carlisle helps make his own doleful prophecy self-fulfilling. Not simply by his defective counseling, but afterwards by joining a conspiracy to unseat Bolingbroke by military means, he himself sets flowing the bloodshed which his speech has warned
against. By Shakespeare's dramatic irony, the final lines of that speech could be turned against the speaker's own subsequent action:

Oh, if you raise this house against this house,
It will the woefullest 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!"

At the very end of the play, when the conspiracy has been crushed by executions, we see Carlisle brought in as a captive and sentenced by Bolingbroke to the mild penalty of sequestration for the rest of his life. It suits the usurping king's public relations to display by this mildness his own generosity, especially to an incompetent cleric whom he need no longer fear. Thus the final irony is that a bishop who throughout the play has been of no help really to anybody is now assigned to "Choose out some secret place, some reverend room" in which he may enjoy the peace of beholding the world go by oblivious of him, except perhaps to point him out as instance of the new king's magnanimity. To that he has made himself subject.

Carlisle's stance as we have traced it differs from King Richard's in not being passively non-resistant to usurpation. One reason for this we can detect in his referring to the king's office as that of God's "captain," which implies some militancy; whereas Richard omits this designation and emphasizes instead his transcendent role as "eye of heaven," which permits him to be (except at his death) non-resistant in outward behavior, sentimentalizing a Christ-role into that of grieving martyr bowing to Necessity. Both Richard and Carlisle, however, end up alienated from the world—one in an imaginary Heaven, the other in an empty "reverend room" on earth. Richard's stance is perhaps more consistent with the specific doctrine of the Homilie Against Disobedience, while Carlisle's is more like the actual practice of those who promulgated the Homilie—they did resist rebels, and had done so when countering the Northern lords in 1569. And it is likely, I think, that had those lords succeeded and gone on further to depose Elizabeth, the proponents of the Homilie might conceivably have acted as Carlisle did in joining a conspiracy against the new government. Richard's tack and Carlisle's are scarcely more than two variant possibilities within Tudor theory. In fact, explicit sanction for armed resistance against a usurper is given in the typically Elizabethan Mirror for Magistrates, which presents the Establishment view in saying that the Earl of Salisbury was right in joining the plot to restore Richard I1 after Bolingbroke's usurpation.14

IV

But if Carlisle represents the option of urging resistance against a usurper king, there is also an opposite variant shown us by Shakespeare in his
portrait of the Duke of York, Richard's uncle. Richard's own emphasis on not resisting "Necessity" is exemplified pragmatically by the "Lord Governor" who accepts the usurper on grounds of political expediency. Some readers of the play have inclined to regard York as a spokesman for Shakespeare's own judgment, but I would agree with Sen Gupta's comment: "Since Shakespeare makes such a spineless, vacillating old man an exponent of the philosophy of order, his own attitude to that philosophy can not be without an element of irony."

It is no doubt symbolic that in the play York refers to his palsied arm. His acts have a haphazard quality. One moment we find him protesting Richard's seizure of Gaunt's estates, both verbally by pointing out that this violation of customary rights undermines the "fair sequence" on which Richard's own kingship is based, and then by walking out of Richard's presence. But the next moment we learn that York has accepted the honor of being appointed Governor, and without instituting any reforms. Like Richard, he lapses into a self-pity:

Here am I left to underprop his land,
Who, weak with age, cannot support myself.

His answer to the Queen's plea for some words of comfort is: "Comfort's in Heaven, and we are on the earth." Considering only earth's "tide of woes," he knows not what to do, and says: "I would to God the King had cut off my head with my brother's" (i.e., Gloucester's, a preceding grievance York has done nothing to redress). York is a divided man paralyzed by, on the one hand, his sense of duty to defend Richard's sovereignty, and on the other hand, a conscience that he says bids him right wrongs. The first of these, in the form of code duty, predominates when he denounces Bolingbroke's armed return to England as "gross rebellion and detested treason" and boasts:

Comest thou because the anointed king is hence?
Why, foolish boy, the king is left behind,
And in my loyal bosom lies his power.

Yet this loyalty has more rhetoric than substance. To Bolingbroke's plea of grievance York is sympathetic, and in self-defense he says to Bolingbroke's followers: "I labored all I could to do him right." Those labors, as we have seen, were as weak as his resistance now is. York's chief concern, we can infer, is the safety of his own estates and of his public reputation. While insisting that "To find out right with wrong, it may not be," he gives way eight lines later:

Well, well, I see the issue of these arms.
I cannot mend it, I must needs confess.
... But since I cannot, be it known to you
I do remain as neuter. So fare you well—
Unless you please to enter in the castle
And there repose you for this night.
Thus a claim of neutrality masks (as comparably in Richard’s case) a slide into capitulation—and then cooperation with what has been denounced. When Bolingbroke, a moment later, requests York’s company for a march against Richard’s accomplices, York replies: “It may be I will go with you. . . . Things past redress are now with me past care.”

Two scenes later the cooperation becomes commitment. York watches without protest while Bolingbroke orders to execution two of Richard’s officers, without trial and simply on the basis of Bolingbroke’s denunciation of them. Here York is allowing Bolingbroke to assume kingly prerogatives as arbitrary as those of Richard. And a moment later, when Bolingbroke asks York’s help in entreating Richard’s Queen, York says he has already dispatched a messenger on that errand. Yet he seems to wish to avoid letting himself realize that Bolingbroke’s secret aim is not simply “law” but Richard’s deposition. When Northumberland reports, a scene later, that “Richard not far from hence hath hid his head” at Flint Castle, York rebukes such language:

It would beseem the Lord Northumberland To say “King Richard.” Alack the heavy day When such a sacred king should hide his head!

But those words are York’s last in lip-service to Richard’s sacred kingship. He stands silent during the long confrontation at Flint Castle, during which Bolingbroke approaches Richard with a ceremonious humility gloving a hard fist of threats, and Richard responds with cynical denunciation while at the same time dramatizing his own readiness to give up all. When next we see York, he is Richard’s emissary to the lords at Westminster, announcing to them Richard’s agreement to yield the scepter, and adding his own cry to Bolingbroke, “Ascend the throne.” York has now become the advocate of an act that contravenes customary right, the principle he had espoused in Act II.

Such a turnabout is to us both pitiful and comic in its evident opportunism. But York (by Shakespeare’s irony) manages to look back on the whole business as the work of God. In Act V he reports to his Duchess on the London crowd’s treatment of Richard: they threw dust on his “sacred head,” he recounts, which Richard bore with such grief and patience,

That had not God, for some strong purpose, steeled
The hearts of men, they must perforce have melted,
And barbarism itself have pitied him.
But Heaven hath a hand in these events,
To whose high will we bound our calm contents.
To Bolingbroke are we sworn subjects now,
Whose state and honor I for aye allow.

What York has allowed, though he does not know it, is a steeling of his own heart, and a fatalism which excuses all.
A further irony arises in Act V. Spying a paper in his son's bosom, York demands to read it, and forces it from his son. It implicates the son in a conspiracy against Bolingbroke. "Treason! Foul treason! Villain! Traitor! Slave!" shouts the father. Quite in contrast to his timidity and paralysis in Act II, he is now all energy to saddle his horse and hasten to the king to apeach the villain, "were he twenty times my son." Brushing aside his wife's pleas as those of a fond and "unruly" woman, he rides off to Windsor and there demands (in opposition to his wife who has chased after him) that Bolingbroke show no mercy whatever on so criminal a son. One recent commentator, Professor Goddard, has remarked of this almost farcical scene: "He (York) has projected his own sense of guilt on his son and demands for him the penalty he will not admit he himself deserves." This seems to me psychologically likely, though it is even more evident that York's immediate motive is to protect himself from suspicion, even at the cost of disaster within his own family life. Such is the ironic outcome, Shakespeare no doubt intends to show, of York's less than half-hearted zeal for the welfare of the state in Act II. By betraying that obligation to the community-family, York has slid into loyalty to a usurper, toward whom now a superabundant zeal is necessary by reason solely of self-interest.

Shrewdly Bolingbroke uses the occasion, now that it has served to bind York indubitably to him, further to bind the son Aumerle by pardoning him. This seemingly magnanimous act cloaks a motive more selfish than charitable: "To win thy after-love I pardon thee." It masks also a desire to buy pardon from God for his own glancingly acknowledged sense of guilt: "I pardon him, as God shall pardon me." This one pardon he can afford, since the conspiracy will now collapse; he does not pardon, but swears vengeance on, the other conspirators.

In John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, we have another of Richard's uncles who is committed to a doctrine of non-resistance. Early in the play, when the widow of the Duke of Gloucester begs him to avenge her husband's death, he replies:

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.

And this view, precisely that of the Tudor Homilie, is elaborated by his saying that since "we cannot correct" the fault,

Put we our quarrel to the will of heaven:
Who, when they see the hours ripe on earth,
Will rain hot vengeance on offenders' heads.
The Duchess regards such a stance as not patience but despair. "Where then, alas," she asks, "may I complain myself?" To which he replies: "To God, the widow's champion and defense."

We may observe here that God's championing is being thought of solely in terms of punishing wrongdoers, rather than as rescuing or reestablishing family and community welfare. Rather than considering the injustice a problem, it is a "quarrel," which God will settle by raining vengeance. Meanwhile, man must avoid raising an arm against the king. The whole outlook differs from, say, that of the Old Testament book of Judges; and it implies a concept of kingship which itself lacks a promise of deliverance such as characterized David's kingship. Moreover, both Gaunt and the Duchess are failing to consider the kind of positive alternative to anger which David found possible when he was not a king but simply a citizen. Is man's only option either rebellion or passivity? That outlook seems all too characteristic of this society as a whole. The despair of the Duchess in her exit, as she goes off to "end her life" by companioning with grief, is accompanied by a twice uttered "Farewell, old Gaunt," which lacks all hope of faring well.

Moreover, Shakespeare has set Gaunt's theorizing within a paradoxical background. At this very moment Gaunt is on his way to Coventry, where his son Henry is to engage Mowbray in a trial by combat. The drama's first scene has shown us the son's raising of a murder charge against Mowbray, and also Richard's suspicion of this move as masking malice and treachery. Gaunt has replied that "As near as I could sift him" no malice is involved, but a concern to protect the King from a danger. On the face of the matter this may be so; but are not hidden motives involved? A charge against Mowbray, the King's closest servant, is indirectly an attack on the King's integrity, and if Gaunt is unaware of this, we can only infer that he is suppressing awareness under a narrowly legal view of the matter. In any case by condoning his son's action, Gaunt is allowing an angry arm to be raised, although within the formal bounds of convention, that could imperil Richard's position. Gaunt's neutrality is not quite what it seems—any more than is the stance of "impartiality" which Richard advertises in his dealing with the threat. As in York's neutrality of Act II, unacknowledged motives are guiding choices. The maintaining of outward propriety is a surface loyalty. But we may note that what Gaunt prays for at Coventry is neither Richard's welfare nor God's judgment, but rather that God may prosper the "good cause" Henry has purposed, namely, to "furbish new the name of John of Gaunt."

A trial by combat implies a genuine concern for justice. But when Gaunt connives with Richard to abort this ancient rite, we can only infer that Gaunt is at heart an opportunist and in tactics no less a vacillator than Richard or (later) York. By agreeing to the banishments worked out in secret council to substitute for the combat, Gaunt implicates himself in
compromise and unjust dealing. He has made himself party, in fact, to the punishment of his own son, and to the greater punishment of Mowbray, for no evident crime. Then when Richard, to appear magnanimous in public, announces a shortening of the son’s banishment from ten years to six, Gaunt, in order to cover over what the public might think of him for betraying a son, stresses the grief the sentence imposes on his own old age (termed, by Shakespeare’s dramatic irony, “My oil-dried lamp”). No heavenly oil in this lamp, we may say—though there is, paradoxically, much oily rhetoric. Richard to prevent being downstaged interposes:

Thy son is banished upon good advice,
Whereeto thy tongue a party verdict gave.

And Gaunt to parry this replies:

You urged me as a judge, but I had rather
You would have bid me argue like a father.

But if we are alert we can see in this disjoining of the duties of judge and father a symptom of England’s times and ethos—perhaps, indeed, the central defect which is making tragedy not merely of kingship but of the office of lesser magistrates. Gaunt’s rhymed couplets of serpentine logic as he dwells on the tug within himself between the judge and the father are evidence of a duplicity masking guilt.

Is not the speech also masking something else—a dim awareness that the pose of martyr on his part can aid his son’s future ambitions? In a later conversation with his son before Henry’s departure from England, Gaunt speaks adages which have a cryptic quality:

Think not the king did banish thee,
But thou the king.
Go, say I sent thee forth to purchase honor
And not the king exiled thee.
Look, what thy soul holds dear, imagine it
To lie that way thou go’st.

Such language has a double-sidedness. On the one hand, it is a formal stoicism, advocating that miseries can be conquered by a contentment which the wise man achieves through taking refuge in an inviolate kingdom of the mind, constructed by his own imagination. But on the underside the words suggest also that banishment can be used as a means for forwarding ulterior aims, and even that it may “purchase honor” for Henry in the public eye. And all this is being said in elaboration of the adage:

Teach thy necessity to reason thus—
There is no virtue like necessity.

This is a doctrine, as I have earlier noted, to which other characters in the play (notably Richard and York) likewise turn. Here I sense in it the overtones of a Stoic-Machiavellian version of salvation. It states perhaps the
subsurface reality of Tudor political attitudes. For if we recall the ups and downs of ecclesiastical-political fortunes in the sixteenth century, during the course of which many Englishmen bowed to one “settlement” while plotting another, the adage comes near to being the “virtue” of that century.

Every British schoolboy remembers old Gaunt’s oration on his deathbed, in which he likens England to a “precious stone set in a silver sea,” and even more stirringly to an “other Eden, demi-Paradise,” and laments its being “leased out... Like to a tenement or pelting farm” by Richard’s “fierce blaze of riot.” Knowing that “the tongues of dying men / Enforce attention,” Gaunt has seized the situation to speak out as “a prophet new inspired.” Few of us, under such circumstances, can fail to share his feelings of elevated patriotism and noble indignation. Yet it may be remarked that this style of prophecy is rather different from, let us say, that of the Old Testament prophet Nathan when he found something to reproach in King David. Gaunt is bluntly lambasting Richard and is openly charging him, now, with the murder of Gloucester:

That blood already, like the pelican,  
Hast thou tapped out and drunkenly caroused.  
My brother Gloucester, plain well-meaningsoul—  
Whom fair befall in Heaven ’mongst happy souls—  
May be a precedent and witness good  
That thou respect’st not spilling Edward’s blood.

Readers familiar with Holinshed’s Chronicle may doubt that Gloucester was the “plain, well-meaning soul” Gaunt here pictures. Holinshed refers to Gloucester as “fierce of nature, hastie, wilful and given more to war than to peace.”17 But Shakespeare (who has invented the whole scene) is showing how it suits Gaunt’s self-righteous view to imagine Gloucester as a soul in heaven, a corroborative witness. Similarly, it suited Gaunt’s son Henry, when accusing Mowbray of the murder, to say that “Abel’s blood” was crying out to Henry, its champion—a man whom Shakespeare shows to be not at all like innocent Abel.

Gaunt himself in Holinshed’s account is characterized, although only glanceingly, as a turbulent and self-seeking noble—this by way of Holinshed’s mitigating Richard’s “hard dealing” with Gaunt’s property. On the other hand, Shakespeare could have read in the chronicler Froissart that Gaunt did not attempt to avenge the murder of Gloucester but “wisely and amiably he appeased all these matters.”18 In Shakespeare’s dramatization we see an overtly non-revenging Gaunt who at the same time is covertly self-seeking. His amiability is suspect. When his jeremiad ends with the thrust,

Live in thy shame, but die not shame with thee!  
These words hereafter thy tormenters be!

Richard characterizes Gaunt as sullen or sulking, and York has to step in
to beg Richard to “impute his words / To wayward sickliness and age in him.” Sickliness indeed! When, as further soothing, York adds:

He loves you, on my life, and holds you dear
As Harry Duke of Hereford, were he here

Richard shrewdly but sardonically replies:

Right, you say true. As Hereford’s love, so his.
As theirs, so mine, and all be as it is.

That is: each would love to see the other dispossessed or deposed. The critic John Palmer has commented that Richard’s response is not altogether unjustified: “Richard saw in this Galahad of the sceptred isle a political enemy masquerading as a patriot, a cantankerous nobleman whose son had already made mischief in the land and was to make more.” Suspicious earlier of Bolingbroke’s “craft of smiles,” Richard is here suspicious of Gaunt’s craft of woeful lament, and with considerable justification, I would say.

For we can scarcely avoid noting that Gaunt’s prophesying is all doleful, nothing hopeful, and all critical of Richard, while advertising Gaunt’s own pious nobility. It is difficult for me to imagine how the realm of England could have come to the sorry pass Gaunt protests, without his own consent to various of Richard’s unwise policies, or without a silent allowing of them by other nobles who lacked a genuinely patriotic statesmanship of their own. Gaunt’s complaint exaggerates Richard’s deficiencies, and it certainly proposes no program for the future. Its effect, and perhaps its hidden motive, is to undermine Richard through harassment, thus setting the stage for Henry’s return as a reformer. A great many of Gaunt’s pronouncements could be turned against himself (by a dramatic irony of which I believe Shakespeare was conscious when he carefully phrased them)—for instance:

Thy deathbed is no lesser than thy land,
In which thou liest in reputation sick.
And then, too careless patient as thou art,
Commit’st thy anointed body to the cure
Of those physicians that first wounded thee.

Gaunt’s vision is myopically an adversary one, unconcerned to examine his own shortcomings. And all this comes from a man whose code has been not to raise an angry arm against the king, God’s minister. The latent contradictions stick out.

Many literary critics have supposed that Gaunt is Shakespeare’s spokesman in the play. But a consideration of Gaunt’s entire career in the play, and in particular of his wordplay on his own name in the deathbed scene, convinces me otherwise. His apology that “I watched, / Watching breeds leanness, leanness is all gaunt” strikes me as a pitiful confession of the quality of his watching. Has it been that of a shepherd? England is indeed declining into disorder; but in part because he himself has done nothing to initiate remedy.
The play as a whole seems to me a remarkable expose of the tragedy to which various deficient reasonings can lead. The exposure, however, is through ironies which undercut the didacticisms voiced by speakers in the story—and in this respect is not at all like the method of The Mirror for Magistrates. The characters' root-defects are left by Shakespeare implicit rather than explicitly labeled, and thus the dramatization arouses our pity and fear over blindnesses of understanding that might be our own in similar circumstances. Yet the result of our seeing the plights of contradiction and disaster which stem from shallow codes is an insight on our part regarding the need to rethink questions of political duty. Tudor theory's outcome in variant forms of fatalism can prompt in us a concern to reinvigorate more traditional concepts. For in retrospect, for instance, Gaunt's "other Eden" can be recognized as a realm concerned for "reputation," rather than for the blessedness of the Bible's Eden. And through our perceiving how piety can be counterfeited, by Gaunt and others, the nature of authentic duty becomes reunderstood. The tragedy, through its dramatization of duties distorted and hence self-defeating, invites us to reconceive and return to a wholesome reality which these distortions have forfeited.

NOTES

1. E.M.W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays (London, 1944), p. 261; Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare and the Holinlres (San Marino, 1947), p. 212. Tillyard is indebted to Alfred Hart, whose Shakespeare and the Homilies (1934) argues that Shakespeare borrowed the political doctrines of the Homilies, probably because he favored them and "was trying to do the state some service" (p. 76).

2. John R. Elliott, Jr., "History and Tragedy in Richard II," SEL. 8 (1968), 265. Elliott's view seems to me preferable to that of M. M. Reese in The Cease of Majesty (London, 1961). Reese sees Richard's fate as "settled before the play began" by his complicity in Gloucester's death, and he sees Shakespeare as implying that Bolingbroke was but the instrument of Richard's "predestined fall" (pp. 228-230). Then, somewhat romantically, Reese sees Richard as achieving, after his fall, a "finally valid" image of himself as a man essentially royal (p. 246).


5. See Ure, King Richard II, pp. Ixv and lix.


8. Derek Traversi, Shakespeare from "Richard II" to "Henry V" (Stanford, 1947), especially pp. 18, 35, and 45.

9. Wilbur Sanders, The Dramatist and the Received Idea (Cambridge, 1968), 146-153. More aggressively, John Danby in his Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature (London, 1949) terms the doctrine of the Homilies "no morality" (p. 88) and "political doctrine in moralistic disguise" (p. 41). I find unconvincing, however, Danby's claim (p. 196) that Shakespeare adopted the official Tudor ideology in his early years as dramatist, later changing his view radically when he wrote Julius Caesar, there justifying tyrannicide.
10. My text is Certaine Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth I (1547-1571), a facsimile reproduction of the edition of 1623, edited by Mary Ellen Rickey and Thomas R. Stroup (Gainesville, Florida, 1968). Regarding the virtue of obedience, it is illuminating to compare the view of Aquinas in S. T. II-II. Q. 104. For Aquinas, obedience is not the greatest of the virtues; it is less than the theological virtues, and is a special virtue associated with the moral virtue of justice. As regards obedience to secular princes, Aquinas says (art. 6) that "if the prince's authority is not just but usurped, or if he commands what is unjust, his subjects are not bound to obey him, except perhaps accidentally, in order to avoid scandal or danger." The sphere of authority of princes is limited.

11. We can recognize in the homilist's interpretation of King John a reflection of the Protestant tradition of Simon Fisch's Supplication of Beggars, endorsed by John Foxe in his Acts and Monuments (see the 1583 edition, pp. 1014-1016). Fisch, as cited by Foxe, cries out against the Romish "bloodsuppers" that caused a "righteous Prince" to lose his crown. In Fisch's view, John submitted "against all right and conscience" because this "blessed king, of great compassion," feared more the shedding of his people's blood than the loss of his crown and dignity. Note here the ethical contradiction involved: an allegedly righteous prince acting against all right. The tragic confusion in such reasoning was very likely apprehended by Shakespeare. We shall see in his dramatization of Richard's yielding of his crown a similar combination of alleged claim to piety alongside consent to do a wrong to his office because (so Richard reasons) he is forced to this.

12. See Reginald M. Woolley, Coronation Rites (London, 1915), especially pp. 69-71, 192-198. Regarding the union in connection with the church's benediction, Woolley quotes among others the comment of Gregory the Great: "Let the head of the King, then, be anointed, because the mind is to be filled with spiritual grace. Let him have oil in his anointing, let him have abundant mercy, and let it be preferred by him before other virtues." The historical Richard, however, seems to have associated his anointing with a divine element in kingship which, once given, was permanently characteristic of kingship and could never be taken away. See John Taylor, "Richard II's Views on Kingship," Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, 14 (1970), 189-205.

13. Although some critics (for instance, Palmer, pp. 124-125) read Mowbray and Bolingbroke as alike engaging in posturing and the "wilful misrepresentation" of self-deception, I discern in Mowbray a moral honesty which Bolingbroke lacks. Mowbray is most scrupulous in answering each of Bolingbroke's accusations, even volunteering mention of a "trespass" which vexes his soul, his having once laid an ambush for Lancaster, an act for which he penitently begged Lancaster's pardon before last receiving the Sacrament; and regarding Gloucester's death, while Mowbray denies that he slew him, he admits (in a phrase which shields Richard) that he to his "own disgrace / Neglected my sworn duty in that case." The "neglect," we may infer, was a neglect to intervene to prevent the murder—"in that sense an evasion of duty which Mowbray's sensitive soul reckons a disgrace to himself. Mowbray's later life as a crusader for Christ coheres with the Christian conscience this early scene exhibits. And it serves to highlight the callousness of Richard's injustice to Mowbray. If I am correct in this, the point is noteworthy for another reason: it shows Shakespeare as holding a view of Mowbray quite the opposite of that of The Mirror for Magistrates, where we find the official Tudor estimate of Mowbray as a man of malice who envied Bolingbroke, and indeed initiated the contention with him by charging him. (See Bullough, Shakespeare's Sources, II, 415-422). Shakespeare has reversed this interpretation.


17. Quoted by Ure in his Arden edition, p. 59, and see also p. xxxvi. As Ure points out, Gaunt’s unhistorical characterization of Gloucester accords, rather, with that given in the anonymous play *Woodstock*, of about the same date as *Richard II*.

18. Ure notes these characterizations in Introduction to his edition, pp. xxxiv-xxxv. But Ure sees Shakespeare as concerned only with broad theatrical effects, not with subtlety of characterization, and therefore probably borrowing from *Woodstock* his idea of Gaunt and of Gloucester. I would disagree; I find the *Woodstock* interpretation in *The Mirror for Magistrates* (see Bullough, *Sources of Shakespeare*, III, 416), but consider Shakespeare’s much more subtle.


20. Not only does Shakespeare’s mode of art differ from that of the popular Tudor *Mirror*; also his implicit interpretations differ (as we have noted in footnotes 13 and 18), because they are not tied to the simplistic moralism of official Tudor orthodoxy.