

# The Drama of Critical Discourse: The Case of Richard II

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Contrasting them with the poet-in-a poet, Harold Bloom says that "Critics may be wary of origins or consign them disdainfully to those carrion-eaters of scholarship."<sup>(1)</sup> That in literary criticism there is an abundance of influence is hard to deny. Actually influence in this field has been firmly established as an accepted procedure with its own decorum and etiquette. Critics often doff to each other in recognition. And one may argue that there is too some anxiety of influence here and a variety of evasion ratios. Bloom, in trying to investigate this phenomenon, seeks to formulate a "theory of poetry," a phrase which he uses as a subtitle to his other book on the subject **The Anxiety of Influence**. Whether it is possible to speak of a theory of literary criticism on the basis of influence and evasion is an interesting and even stimulating question, one which this paper attempts to answer by a consideration of some relevant works<sup>(2)</sup> of criticism dealing with Shakespeare's history play **Richard II** on its psychological, historico-political, and artistic levels.

As this discussion is bound to be historical, it is imperative that a point in time be selected, and I believe that it is appropriate to begin with Dr. Johnson,<sup>(3)</sup> who provides a number of cues to later critics by suggesting a number of the basic areas of interest and debate. It is Johnson who finds the play deficient in some respects, thus setting the tone for

most critical argument on the play. Thematically, for example, "Shakespeare is very apt to deviate from the pathetic to the ridiculous,"<sup>(4)</sup> and for evidence Johnson quotes Richard's complaint that "... subjects' feet / May hourly trample on their sovereign's head." Noting that the play follows Holinshed very closely and that some of its passages are copied "with very little alteration,"<sup>(5)</sup> Johnson remarks, "The play is one of those which Shakespeare has apparently revised, but .. it is not finished at last with the happy force of some other of his tragedies nor can it be said much to affect the passions or enlarge the understanding"<sup>(6)</sup> Here is Johnson's classical mind setting store by "to teach and please" doctrine of literature. Another area of critical interest is Richard's character, and Johnson here is equally seminal, "It seems to be the design of the poet to raise Richard to esteem in his fall and consequently to interest the reader in his favor. He gives him only passive fortitude, the virtue of a confessor rather than of a king."<sup>(7)</sup> Richard's noted weakness is to become a focal point in later analyses of the play, a backdrop against which many critics would weave their critical assessment of the work under discussion. Sketchy as he is, Johnson, with his Preface as a theoretical framework, tackles the genre of the play, its violation of decorum, its affective and intellectual impact on the reader, and the character of its titular protagonist.

These same areas are explored and built upon by Coleridge in the nineteenth century, although all we have are notes and not any systematic discussion. Artistically, he finds the play best suited for the closet rather than for "our present large theatres"<sup>(8)</sup> due to "the length of the speeches, the number of long speeches, and (to the fact) that (with one exception) the events are all historical, presented in their results not produced by acts seen or that take place before the audience."<sup>(9)</sup> While agreeing with

Johnson that the play is a tragedy, Coleridge believes that it "is, perhaps, the most purely historical of Shakespeare's dramas,"<sup>(10)</sup> and consequently here Coleridge parts company with and even rebuts Johnson as to the effect of the play on the reader.

Shakespeare avails himself of every opportunity to effect the great object of the historic drama, that, namely, of familiarizing the people to the great names of their country, and thereby exciting a steady patriotism, a love of just liberty, and a respect for all those fundamental institutions of social life, which bind men together.

As for Richard's character, the two critics are in unison to a great extent, though the Romantic critic is more specific and profound in diagnosing the king's weakness, which he finds to be "of a peculiar kind, not arising from want of personal courage, or any specific defect of faculty, but rather an intellectual feminineness which feels the necessity of ever leaning on the breast of others,"<sup>(12)</sup> the image suggesting also childish fear and diffidence. Coleridge also notes Richard's "wordy courage that betrays the inward impotence"<sup>(13)</sup> and his "feminine friendism, intensely woman-like love of those immediately about him."<sup>(14)</sup> Even his "intensive love of his country .. (is) feminine."<sup>(15)</sup> In another note Coleridge lists the king's faults, his "insincerity, partiality, arbitrariness, favoritism, and ... the proud, temerarious temperament of his barons."<sup>(16)</sup> As for the attitude of the audience toward the falling king, Coleridge leans on Johnson, though only very softly and briefly, for he does not fail to swerve away in his opinion, remarking that Shakespeare managed to present the king as an ordinary human being whose "disproportionate sufferings and gradually emergent good qualities"<sup>(17)</sup>

arouse our sympathy.

Coleridge's notes also touch upon the contrast between Mowbray and Bolingbroke, the former with his "unaffected lamentation"<sup>(18)</sup> and "desolation,"<sup>(19)</sup> and the latter with his "courtly checking of his anger in subservience to a predetermined plan,"<sup>(20)</sup> and in this regard Coleridge emphasizes the "introductory"<sup>(21)</sup> nature of the play as some of its elements were to be developed in later plays.

While one may find it difficult to integrate Coleridge's fragmentary comments on the play, and while it is not hard to see Johnson's lead in this regard<sup>(22)</sup> and the Romantic critic's evasions and revisions, the latter's insightful remarks on the king are to become a great influence on later critics, a sort of stock-in-trade in the criticism of the play.

With Hazlitt we begin to see how the subject of literary criticism becomes virtually itself, less so, of course, than poetry is as Bloom envisions it, simply because criticism has an avowed field outside it. With Hazlitt we see how elaborations, elucidations, and flat contraventions of earlier opinions set new trends going. Tackling the question of Richard's weakness, already touched upon by Johnson and expanded by Coleridge, Hazlitt initiates a new and important tradition by speaking of Richard's double personality, the king and the man, a notion which is to be readily seized upon and developed by subsequent critics. Following Coleridge's tracks, he lists Richard's arbitrariness, irresolution, pride, and lack of manly courage as some of his vices and follies leading to his downfall, and here, in the shadow of both Johnson and Coleridge, Hazlitt remarks that there is "neither respect nor love ... but we pity him, for he pities himself."<sup>(23)</sup> Hazlitt also revises Coleridge as regards the effect of the work, as if he refused to play second fiddle to him, or to anyone else for

that matter. He describes the world of the play as "accomplished barbarism,"<sup>(24)</sup> where Bolingbroke emerges as a man drawn.

with a masterly hand: patient for occasion, and then steadily availing himself of it, seeing his advantage afar off, but only seizing on it when he has it within his reach, humble, crafty, bold and aspiring, encroaching by regular but slow degrees, building power on opinion and cementing opinion by power.

Such a world governed by Machiavellian ethics cannot inspire patriotism nor any social virtues as Coleridge asserts. Hazlitt's revisionism is obviously a case of tesseract, of completion and antithesis.

With other revisionary ratios employed and often with no attempt to recognize precursors, the question of Richard's character, his weaknesses and downfall along with the rise of the charismatic and Machiavellian Bolingbroke continues to fascinate and sometimes to bewilder critics of the play in the decades to come. There are sympathizers, like W. B. Yeats, who laments the defeat of the "courtly saintly ideals of the Middle Ages,"<sup>(26)</sup> and detractors, like Swinburne, who finds the king "pitiful but not unpitiable."<sup>(27)</sup> But the germs of the Criticism have already been engendered by the great precursors and the later critics have to wrestle with them in one way or another, to jostle into the crowd to find room for themselves, a niche which they can call their own. The struggle of tradition and originality, of the other and oneself continues unabated.

E. K. Chambers, underlining the politicalness of the play and the coexistence in it of the dramatic and the lyrical, sees Richard and Bolingbroke as antithetical characters, "Richard has nothing but the irony of the right divine; he is neither efficient nor sympathetic. Bolingbroke

is efficient enough, but a self-seeker, and to the end the stain of disloyalty and usurpation mars his kingship."<sup>(28)</sup> So for Chambers has echoed the voice of his strong precursors Coleridge and Hazlitt. Diving deeper, however, he lays his hands on the root of the problem, thus pushing the criticism of the play a little bit forward. Richard is an artist, an opinion which brings to mind Coleridge's view of the King's "wordy courage." chambers says, "Even in his downfall, it gives him a thrill to take the stage in Westminster Hall and slowly to disembarass himself of his crown with speeches of studied pathos, while the lookerson are divided between admiration for the artist, pity for the man, and irritation at the poseur."<sup>(29)</sup> Here is a regression to Hazlitt's view of Richard's split personality. Another instance of regression is to follow. For Chambers Bolingbroke is "the incarnation of efficiency,"<sup>(30)</sup> an old idea in a new dress. On the other hand, Chambers rejects categorically Yeats' assessment of Richard's character as an instance of what is disparagingly called temperamental criticism.

One of the offshoots of Chambers' psychologizing is Mark Van Doren's position, which emphasizes the affinity between Shakespeare and Richard, both being poets. This artistic affinity explains the dramatist's sympathy for the king and the importance of language in the play, "Tongue is the key word, the repeated word of Richard II generally."<sup>(31)</sup> It is often associated with music and dance. The play is also permeated by ceremony and ritual, "The tournament, the disposition scene, and most of the meetings between Richard and other men are attended with ritual, sonorous with ceremony."<sup>(32)</sup> Additionally, there is frequent use, or perhaps confusion of the life-stage analogy. In such an artistic, ritualistic world, the word assumes great significance, almost for everyone. Even "Bolingbroke himself, at least until Richard's muse triumphed over his

and made him content with plainness, had been a poet."<sup>(33)</sup> But Richard dominates the play as a poet, and "his theme is himself,"<sup>(34)</sup> an opinion which might explain the lyrical strain stressed by Chambers. Richard falls as a king because he is a poet whose subjects are sorrow and disaster.

A variation of Van Doren's thesis, though played with insightful originality, is John Draper's analysis of Richard's character in the light of contemporary humour psychology.

Rejecting the multiple personality theories, Draper finds in the play a "complexity verging on inconsistency"<sup>(35)</sup> springing from the two influences on Shakespeare, Holinshed and Marlow's **Edward II**. Richard's, in Draper's view, is a mercurial type, both choleric and phlegmatic, given to fantasy and imagination and prone to philosophy and affectation in writing, "Richard is the arch-sentimentalist luxuriating in his woe."<sup>(36)</sup> Moreover, a mercurial person suffers from deprivation of common sense, lethargy and possibly madness, a fact which explains Richard's misjudgment in appointing York as his vice-regent and his other blunders in dealing with reality.

Another variation on the same theme is the study of the state-stage analogy by Leonard Dean in his article "Richard II: The State and the Image of the Theater." According to Dean, the sick state of **Richard II** is reflected in the contradiction between appearance and reality that informs the drama, whereas such contradiction is absent from **Henry V**, where the state is healthy. This symptom of sickness takes the form of an analogy between the state and the stage, a Renaissance tradition presented in More's **Utopia** and Machiavelli's **The Prince**. In **Richard II** the "theatricalness of politics"<sup>(37)</sup> is predominant and is practised by all, including the rising Bolingbroke, who, being a man of policy, adjusts "his appearance to

changing circumstances."<sup>(38)</sup> The prison scene, "which is often read as the climax of Richard's ineffectual attitudinizing ... is also ... a dramatic analysis of the moral dilemma in the theater-like state."<sup>(39)</sup>

The dialectic of tradition and originality and the play of revisionary ratios can be seen in an article by Georges A. Bonnard entitled "The Actor in **Richard II.**" The king is neither contemptible as Swinburne presented him nor admirable as Yeats saw him. He wins our sympathy because the playwright succeeds in giving him "an illusion of reality."<sup>(40)</sup> His Stage-acting is a psychological need since he feels the necessity of a mask and a disguise, "Insecure, deprived of any inward guidance, he cannot possibly let others see him as he really is, and, debarred from appearing his weak, uncertain, vacillating self, what can he do but pretend to be what he is not, but live as an actor on the stage."<sup>(41)</sup> Our sympathy for him arises from Shakespeare's fellow feeling "with a poet, a dramatist, and an actor."<sup>(42)</sup>

Another offshoot of Chambers' and Van Doren's analyses, though a little independent, swerving away from the main stream, is M. M. Mahood in his work on the thematic use of language in the play, which is a dramatization of the "efficiency of the king's words."<sup>(43)</sup> The king's tragedy results from his loss of faith in words. Like his strong precursors, Mahood believes that Richard is a poet even when he uses prose, whereas Bolingbroke relies upon strength of character. Consequently, the play is about the encounter of words and deeds, of logos and praxis. The ambiguity of such words as "breath," "honour," "tongue," "sentence," and "title" has a significant bearing on the theme of the play, and "the almost polar extremes of meaning in many of these words contribute to the rigid symmetry of the play's action, the descent of Richard and rise of Bolingbroke like buckets in a well."<sup>(44)</sup> The king's power lies in his



breath, but in the trial scene his words are inefficient against the contestants' deeds. His breath assumes power when he reduces Bolingbroke's sentence from ten to six years. On the other hand, Bolingbroke, while refusing his father's wordy consolation, "uses the conceptual power of words to snare others,"<sup>(45)</sup> and for Bushy and Greene his words "are no sooner said than done."<sup>(46)</sup> At the end of the play Richard comes to the sad realization that his words are futile, that there is a gap between a word and its referent, and consequently that human life is insignificant. He dies with "the dignity of a martyr,"<sup>(47)</sup> having discovered the truth of what we are. He has all our sympathy, but our mounting admiration goes to Bolingbroke.

And "martyr" is the very word which Karl F. Thompson employs in his article "Richard II, Martyr."<sup>(48)</sup> He remarks that Richard became "an exemplar of royal martyrdom"<sup>(49)</sup> in the late Middle Ages, and that Shakespeare, having encountered the attitude in his sources, could not "profitably adopt an unqualified view of Richard as a martyr."<sup>(50)</sup> In his attempt to create a complex character, the dramatist, in Thompson's opinion, "fell short of success"<sup>(51)</sup> because Richard's double nature, man and martyr, is "a dilemma running the course of the play."<sup>(52)</sup> Thompson adds that in the light of the age's concept of martyrdom and of such books as Foxe's **Book of Martyrs**, Richard "earlier in the play.. affects the pose of the true martyr."<sup>(53)</sup> His death, accompanied by a sense of God's imminent vengeance, contributes to his martyrdom.

Thus, Shakespeare manages to create "a moral scheme of martyrdom and retribution that unites character and theme in a final dramatic equilibrium."<sup>(54)</sup>

thus goes on the critical train of psychologizing. Thus critics weave

their originality, their individual selves around a core which seems to resist the flow of time and which insists on being seen and recognized, forcing this originality to be transparent. And Leonard Dean, seeing the dangers of overpsychologizing, has to warn against it since it blinds us to other aspects of the play such as, for example, Richard's "specific relation"<sup>(55)</sup> to Shakespeare's tragic hero. Actually, other critics have been fully aware of some of these aspects, grafting Richard's weaknesses and downfall on the political and historical dimensions of the play to produce a more intricate and comprehensive view of it. In other words, Richard's faults, multiple character, and tragic career come to be viewed in a historicalpolitical perspective, which constitutes another major trend in the criticism of the play. But here, too, we see instances of Bloom's revisionary ratios used separately and combinationally. Here Johnson, Coleridge, Hazlitt, and other precursors are incorporated into larger views, swerved from, corrected, and sometimes contradicted. All the same, as one goes through all this criticism, he is invariably seized by a strong sense of *deja vu*.

In his book **The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedies**, Willard Farnham, regarding the play as a tragedy, talks about the medieval tradition of the fall of princes and the wheel of fortune as presented by Boccaccio, Lydgate, and Chaucer. However, in Farnham's opinion, Richard's character "much outweighs fortune as the cause of his tragedy."<sup>(56)</sup> Like Edward II, Richard II "probes his inner being after misfortune has fallen upon him, but never attains self-realization,"<sup>(57)</sup> though he attains a certain "pitiful nobility"<sup>(58)</sup> in his bewilderment. One can see clearly here how Farnham merges Johnson and Hazlitt in one critical judgment.

The medieval tradition of the play is taken up by the pronounced

historian/critic E. M. W. Tillyard in his seminal work **Shakespeare's History Plays**. His final aim is the interpretation of the play as a whole, the king's deficiencies being now "a commonplace"<sup>(59)</sup> and his character having been treated well by others, "As a separate play **Richard II** lacks the sustained vitality of **Richard III**, being less interesting and less exacting in structure and containing a good deal of verse which by the best Shakespearean standards can only be called indifferent,"<sup>(60)</sup> a judgment which calls Dr. Johnson to mind. Secondly, the play is "the most formal and ceremonial,"<sup>(61)</sup> symbolism and ceremony being over-emphasized at the expense of true nature and feeling, a point which seems to offset Coleridge's appraisal in this regard. Even the garden scene turns out to be "an elaborate political al-legory."<sup>(62)</sup>

However, the ceremonial element of **Richard II** becomes becomes greatly significant in a thematic study of the play as Tillyard sets out "to conjecture a new interpretation of the play."<sup>(63)</sup> In the world of **Richard II** means matter means matter more than ends and it is "more important to keep strictly the rules of an elaborate game than whether to win or to lose is"<sup>(64)</sup> This is the world of the Middle Ages, and the play is "Shakespeare's picture of that life,"<sup>(65)</sup> an opinion which seems to echo Coleridge's point about the historicalness of this work. Some passages in it bring to mind **The Mirror for Magistrates**, as some critics have suggested, but more aptly Chaucer's Monk tale as Tillyard, swerving away, believes.

Against the ceremonial world of Richard and his court stands a world of vitality, sincerity and common sense. Richard's poetry is "all a part of a world of gorgeous tournaments, conventionally mournful queens, and impossibly sententious gardeners, while Bolingbroke's common sense extends to his backers, in particular to that most important character,

Northumberland."<sup>(66)</sup> Thus, the play is "built on a contrast,"<sup>(67)</sup> one side disintegrating and the other emerging. The world of Bolingbroke is "not so much defective as embryonic,"<sup>(68)</sup> and consequently, if one takes other elements into account, the play seems to herald many of its kind, serving as "only the prelude."<sup>(69)</sup> This is, of course, a restatement of the point made earlier by Coleridge. Tillyard, as a strong critic, tries all sorts of revisionary ratios to end up in the shadow of the Romantic critic and to provide us with an instance of apophrades, or "the return of the dead,"<sup>(70)</sup> as Harold Bloom calls it in his book **The Anxiety of Influence**. to elucidate, he says:

The later poet, in his own final phase, already burdened by an imaginative solitude that is almost a solipsism, holds his own poem so open again to the presursor's work that at first we might believe the wheel has come full circle, and that we are back in the later poet's flooded apprenticeship, before his strength began to assert itself in the revisionary ratios<sup>(71)</sup>.

Two important works of the 1940's with a political approach to the play deserve discussion here because they interact with earlier criticism. John Palmer finds the emphasis on the character of the king misleading since to Shakespeare's audience the play's "political significance was immediate and tremendous"<sup>(72)</sup> due to the topicality of the play and to the fact that in Shakespeare's age Richard had already become a legendary figure. However, Palmer cannot ignore the character of the king, and so he combines the two approaches in a sort of compromise. Shakespeare's "main purpose is to exhibit in Richard the qualities that entitled to show his exquisite futility in dealing with public affairs, to present a playboy

politician coping ineffectually with the men seriously intent on the business of getting what they want."<sup>(73)</sup> Palmer's debt to his predecessors is obvious, but he refuses to acknowledge it. The influence does not stop here. To follow up, he speaks of Richard as a split character, a man of imagination and a man of the world. Then he highlights the dispute between Mowbray and Bolingbroke as an instance of the political reality of the play, presenting politics in terms of playing games. In such a world of political realities, Richard is inefficient, being withdrawn into himself, into a world of his own creation, whereas Bolingbroke is a "climbing politician...with enigmatic silence,"<sup>(74)</sup> "enigmatic" being a symptom of affective/intuitive criticism.

Another important work of the 1940's with a political approach to the play is Lily Campbell's **Shakespeare's Histories**. Here again the reliance on earlier criticism is very clear, and so are the evasions. In her opinion **Richard II** is about kingship, this being now a commonplace in the criticism of the play. She points out that there is a great deal of topicality in the play since Elizabeth compared herself and was compared to Richard II. She then discusses Richard II's character, underlying his weaknesses, which she sets against his divine right as a king. In other words, she makes use of the dichotomy between Richard the king and Richard the man, another commonplace in the criticism of the play. Her promisingly new ground opens with Carlisle's question, "What subject can give sentence on his king?"<sup>(75)</sup> The answer which is of great significance, is given by Carlisle's prophetic speech and by other characters: a subject may not give sentence on his king. Furthermore, the picture of Henry IV at the end of the play as a king whose soul is overburdened by woe is "scarcely conducive to the encouragement of would-be usurpers."<sup>(76)</sup> Shakespeare, as Lily Campbell believes, had his eye on his age and some

of its potential problems. He "offered the follies of Richard II only as a background for the presentations of the problem that was so often discussed during Elizabeth's reign, the problem of the deposition of a king"<sup>(77)</sup>.

A relevant work of the 1950's is Kantorowicz's **The King's Two Bodies**, where an attempt is made to fuse together views discussed by earlier critics: Richard's split character, the play's political subject and its medieval world. He thus presents old views in new robes. The play, according to him, is political, and the king's split character is not only the symbol but its "very substance and essence"<sup>(78)</sup> (Why?), the royal duplication as unfolded in the three "bewildering central scenes"<sup>(79)</sup> being the king, the Fool and the God. These prototypes intersect, overlap and interfere with each other continuously. However, the king is predominant on the coast of Wales, the Fool at Flint Castle and the God at Westminster, "with man's wretchedness as a perpetual companion and antithesis at every stage."<sup>(80)</sup> As the news comes to Richard at the coast of Wales, "a curious change in Richard's attitude - as it were, a metamorphosis from 'Realism' to 'Nominalism' - now takes place."<sup>(81)</sup> What remains is the semblance of kingship, which degenerates at Flint Castle, where "he becomes somewhat less than merely 'man' or (as on the beach) 'king-body natural'."<sup>(82)</sup> In the third scene, Richard being unable to speak for himself, the Bishop of Carlisle speaks for him on the topic of God established royalty. The deposition scene is one of "sacramental solemnity since the ecclesiastical ritual of undoing the effects of conservation is no less solemn nor of less weight than the ritual which has built up the sacramental dignity."<sup>(83)</sup> Thus, Richard gradually divests himself; he "deprives his body-politic of the symbols, of his dignity and exposes his poor body-natural to the eyes of the spectators"<sup>(84)</sup>.

One has to admit that Kantorowicz is a strong critic, and his analysis of the play is very ingenious. He manages to devour all his predecessors and assimilate their characteristic views. The result is something new though the different components are still recognizable. This is an illuminating example of good criticism, which is, like good poetry in Bloom's opinion, "a dialectic of revisionary movement (contraction) and freshening outward goingness."<sup>(85)</sup> Here are Johnson, Coleridge, Hazlitt, Tillyard, Campbell, and many others, but Kantorowicz uses them all to see something fresh in the play, and he is able to show it to us rather convincingly.

to contract and expand is what Kantorowicz does, but Peter G. Phialas rejects and retrogresses. In his article "The Medieval in **Richard II**" he rejects Tillyard's major thesis, claiming that it is more attractive than convincing, "It is not likely that he (Shakespeare) was conscious of the fine demarcation separating the world of the Middle Ages from the world of the Tudors."<sup>(86)</sup> Although he agrees with Tillyard on the emphasis on ceremony in the play, Phialas questions the validity of the interpretation and raises doubts as to whether in the Middle Ages there was emphasis on means rather than ends as Tillyard claims. Instead, Phialas chooses to retreat to an earlier position in the criticism of the play. In his opinion, the unfinished tournament reflects Richard's character and not medieval life.

Richard's character, thus, remains one of the key issues of the play, engaging critics for centuries since Johnson expressed his views on the subject, and, along with this focal topic and all the psychologizing it has produced, the historical/political nature of the play has also persisted in the criticism pertaining to it. In the 1970's and the 1980's Shakespeare's

uses of history as manifested in his history plays in general come under focus as Marxist critics enter the field - as naturally they should - bringing into service the then new tools of Structuralism and Deconstruction. An example of this trend is Graham Holderness' **Shakespeare's History**. For Holderness Shakespeare's history plays, while dramatizing the past, reflect the Elizabethan Age, a view not so much different from conventional criticism on the subject, especially Tillyard's and Campbell's. They are regarded as "reconstructions of a feudal society in the process of dissolution."<sup>(87)</sup> Within this framework, Bolingbroke's rise is reactionary rather than revolutionary. Against Richard's ceremony, he stands for the new world of practical efficiency, all this being old stuff. Another example of the new trend is Paul N. Siegel's **Shakespeare's English and Roman History Plays: A Marxist Approach**. Again, the emphasis here is on the cultural significance and relevance of the plays in the context of English history, specifically in the context of the fall of feudalism and the emergence of capitalism. Class struggle, ideology, the economic factor, and the dialectic of change are focal points of such an approach, and, although some of the ideas are conventional, Siegel seems to advance beyond his predecessors by introducing theories which, he believes, govern history. One such theory is that "providence works ordinarily through secondary causes,"<sup>(88)</sup> and another is that "the divinely ordained natural order does not preclude social change."<sup>(89)</sup>

Although not concerned with history as such, nor with the interpretation of any particular history play, David Scott Kastan treads on new ground in his article "Proud Majesty Made a Subject: Shakespeare and the Spectacle of Rule." He is interested in the study of what he calls "the dangers of representation, ... a recurring theme of the antitheatrical sentiment that we conventionally if not accurately label 'Puritan'."<sup>(90)</sup> He



takes his cue from Carlisle's angry questioning protest, "What subject can give sentence on his king?/And who sits here that is not Richard's subject?" (IV,i,121-122). The question, we recall, is used as a stepping stone by Lily Campbell. At the outset, when kastan states his thesis, he has his eye on earlier criticism of the play:

The Elizabethan theatre and especially the history play, which critics as different as E. M. W. Tillyard and Stephen Greenblatt agree effectively served the interests of royal power, seem to me to be at least as effective as a subversion of that authority, functioning as a significant cultural intervention in a process of political reformation.<sup>(91)</sup>

History plays, by making the king a subject before the audience, somehow undermine his authority, threaten his inaccessibility, and demystify his state, unconsciously though inevitably, "The theatre thus works to expose the mystification of power. Its counterfeit of royalty raises the possibility that royalty is counterfeit."<sup>(92)</sup> And, if royalty depended on theatrical pomp to impress its authority on the people. such theatricality on the stage had somehow the opposite effect, of which Queen Elizabeth herself, along with a number of thinkers and government officials, was too conscious and apprehensive. Such is the topical relevance of history plays, and such is their impact on the audience. Kastan asks, "What... is to prevent the king who comes on stage decked with all the pomp of state from being called and actor?"<sup>(93)</sup> For him, this ... is the central - and potentially subversive question posed by Shakespeare's histories."<sup>(94)</sup> Thus, **Richard II** explores "not only Richard's theatricality ... but ... Bolingbroke's as well,"<sup>(95)</sup> though the latter has

more than his ceremonial theatricality to support him in his rise to power. As an actor he can capture the eye, but his practical efficiency is to be noted. Here kastan is treading on the familiar ground of his predecessors in talking about the state-stage analogy and the artistic element in the characterization of both Richard and Bolingbroke, but he has managed to argue his point quite effectively, which the execution of Charles I testifies to, this last fact being his way of bolstering his thesis on the basis of historical evidence.

Readers must have noticed that discussions so far have been mostly thematic, centering on the characters of Richard and Bolingbroke and the historical/political implications of the play. Artistic considerations have been, at best, fragmentary, with one critic here stating a few points about the play's strengths and another one there complaining of some of its weaknesses. However, in the twentieth century, Shakespeare's achievement as an artist has begun to receive increasing attention, and a pioneering critic in this regard is Caroline Spurgeon, who focuses on imagery in the Elizabethan dramatist's works. Her book **Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us**, which become a critical classic in its field, has started another act in the ongoing drama of literary criticism dealing with the play.

Spurgeon's assumption is that imagery reflects the writer's mind and character, and her approach is both qualitative and quantitative. She sets out looking for areas of iterative images, classifies them, and then analyzes their categories to arrive at the writer's psyche, "... the images he [the writer] instinctively uses are... a revelation, largely unconscious, given at a moment of heightened feeling, or the furniture of the mind, the channels of his thought, the qualities of things..."<sup>(96)</sup> With this

theoretical framework she plunges into **Richard II** and comes.

Out with the conclusion that the dominant images of the play are those of birth, generation, and inheritance. Thematically, such recurrence "undoubtedly increases the effect of Nemesis, of cause and effect, of tragedy as the inevitable result of deeds done and in no way to be avoided."<sup>(97)</sup> There is also frequent use of jewels as a store-house of images which "add beauty to the conception of the value of love, especially of love and country - a leading note in the play - and of the honour and devotion of her sons."<sup>(98)</sup>

It is beyond any doubt that Spurgeon's book, with its assumptions and applications, has sparked interest in Shakespeare's art in general and his imagery in particular. A 1942 article by Madeline Doran, entitled "Imagery in **Richard II** and **Henry IV**," traces Shakespeare's development as a dramatist by analyzing his imagery in the two plays. She finds that whereas the imagery of the first play is explicit, being "complete, correspondent point by point to the idea symbolized,"<sup>(99)</sup> that of the second is implicit, being more suggestive and ambiguous, "not fully developed, fluid in outline and fused with one another."<sup>(100)</sup> In some cases, metaphor tends to be allegorical in the earlier play, but not so in the later play. Employing Coleridge's famous distinction between fancy and imagination, she concludes that **Richard II** is more fanciful and **Henry IV** more imaginative in the use of their respective imagery, and, where exceptions occur, they are functional. Her final note falls on Richard's character. Explicit imagery is indicative, and significantly so, not only of Shakespeare's development as an artist, but also of the king's personality.

Samuel Klinger, in his study of Shakespeare's imagery, responds

directly and forcefully to Spurgeon, whose approach, as he finds it, in not only insufficient but also inadequate, tending to isolate imagery from the dramatic context. In his opinion, imagery is not an "excrescence of the play's surface but ... an integral element in the play representative of the unity of which it is itself a constituent part."<sup>(101)</sup> Additionally, Spurgeon's approach does not distinguish the lyrical from the dramatic, the tragic from the comic, "The real significance of Shakespeare's imagery is not that it differs materially but formally as part of an organic system of relationships inhering in the tragic form."<sup>(102)</sup> If lyrical poetry is to be defined by a static pattern of imagery, tragedy is marked by a changing pattern. The tragic reversal is thus highlighted. In **Richard II** the sun-shade, warmth-cold antithesis is dramatically functional. In the beginning, Richard is the sun-king, but, when Bolinbroke returns from exile, images of darkness and cold mark the opening chapter of the king's tragic fall.

Another critic to join this act of dramatic intercourse on Shakespeare's imagery in **Richard II** is Allan Downer in his article "The Life of Our Design." Like Klinger, Downer pushes his study of imagery in a new direction, stating at the outset that his purpose is to examine "the function of imagery in poetic drama, the language of poetry and its relation to the essentially dramatic devices which might be similarly named the language of props - the language of setting, and the language of action,"<sup>(103)</sup> Such a complex pattern shows not only Downer's ingenuity but also the cumulative, developmental nature of critical opinion, starting here from Spurgeon, to whom Downer's approach is a direct response. For him the crown is a symbol of the king's rank, of the condition of England and of divinity. When Richard descends to the lower stage, he sees himself as Phaeton, "a pretender to the title."<sup>(104)</sup> In the deposition scene, which marks the climax of the play, "the visual symbolic exchange of the crown,

to quote Miss Spurgeon's words on another matter, 'gathers up, focuses and pictorially presents' the downfall of a man whose nature was ill-suited to kingship, and who has to some extent come to realize the fact,"<sup>(105)</sup> And against Spurgeon's rejection of the garden scene, he defends it because it realizes dramatically and visually the theme of the play, though, being over-deliberate and super-imposed, it is a measure of Shakespeare's apprenticeship. As for natural imagery in the play, Downer believes that its "cumulative effect... is not merely to suggest the political condition of England, but the kind of world in which such a conflict as that between Bolingbroke and Richard could take place."<sup>(106)</sup> Downer's last point is the language of action which is very important in drama and finds expression in the image of rise and fall. This image permeates the plot and reflects the opposite and parallel movements of the two opponents.

The rise/fall metaphor is the core of Arthur Suzman's study of imagery in **Richard II** since he finds it spiritually and materially significant, for "spiritually, as Richard rises, so Bolingbroke declines."<sup>(107)</sup> He goes on to say that "this dual theme... provides in turn the dominant imagery and symbolism of the play."<sup>(108)</sup> He adds, "Indeed, it may justly be described as its leitmotif."<sup>(109)</sup> Some variations on this central metaphor are images of descending and ascending, high and low. Its pervasiveness and centrality can even explain Tillyard's 'ceremony.' Such imagery in Suzman's views is organic and functional, and, while serving to unify the play like "a dominant note in a melody,"<sup>(110)</sup> it, and this is a rebuttal of Spurgeon's main thesis, is deliberate rather than instinctive and unconscious. With this Shakespeare's status as an artist is to be reconsidered.

Images of rise and fall, birth, death, and inheritance, along with the

frequently discussed garden scene, are integrated in another study of imagery in **Richard II** by Clayton G. Mackenzie entitled "Paradise and Paradise Lost in **Richard II**." Agreeing with Spurgeon on the abundance of images of birth, generation, and inheritance from father to son, he, however, believes that "such ideas are amenable to much closer scrutiny than the vast scope of Spurgeon's book permits."<sup>(111)</sup> Thus, his attempt is an instance of tessera, of completion and antithesis in Bloom's scheme. He locates two sets of images in the play, one set indicating the myth of England as a second paradise and the other that of the fallen paradise. Next, he pursues the implications of those Biblical myths as they are dramatized in the play along with the other aforementioned images. In this context, the images of replenishment, rebirth, teeming earth, and gardening become significant, and so do Richard and Bolingbroke, one as a representative of the old world and the other of the new one.

"If, then, we understand the English spirit as one purchased and upheld by mortal reputation, Richard's failure to preserve such a spirit could be construed as a spiritual death."<sup>(112)</sup> And with paradise lost, "images of physical regeneration assume grotesque dimensions."<sup>(113)</sup> Now the implications of the antimyth of the fall become dominant. Death is one. The disjunction of the physical life and spiritual life is another. And Richard broods on both of them for he himself "is not oblivious to the prospect and consequences of a fallen paradise."<sup>(114)</sup> Where Mackenzie seems to depart from his predecessors is his analysis of what he calls "the theme of encirclement,"<sup>(115)</sup> which is presented by the image of the sea as both protection and threat. Here he, referring at length to the myth of Neptune and finding many sea images in the play, dwells upon the significance of the duality and its manifestations in **Richard II**. John of Gaunt's treatment of Neptune, for example, "represents the principles of

security and threat within the English paradise, and it is a paradise made all the more valuable by the possibility of its loss."<sup>(116)</sup>

Thus goes on the drama of critical discourse on Shakespeare's **Richard II**. Apparently, there is no denouement. The king's character, the condition of England, the politico-historical significance of the play and its imagery seem to have occupied critics for at least two long centuries. Literary criticism, obviously, travels very slowly, and the implications thereof are manifold.

First, tradition is of great importance in literary criticism. Whether they like it or not, critics have to wrestle with it. The struggle between tradition and individual talent seems to be as vigorous here as it is among creative writers as T. S. Eliot envisions it. The anxiety of influence is also a factor here, and critics as well as poets resort to various revisionary ratios to assert some degree of originality.

There might be a blessing in tradition, especially if literary criticism is regarded as a whole, as a human enterprise, but for the individual critic, there is often a curse in being a late-comer, or perhaps, more aptly for the strong critic, there is a challenge.

And, although this phenomenon of critical indebtedness, of influence and dependence, may not seem healthy at first sight, a second look will reveal a deeper form of health, of robust health, since definitely the critical discourse on **Richard II** has been growing ever since a critic first uttered an opinion on the play. Definitely, this critical discourse has attained a remarkable degree of maturity and complexity, which are to be hailed and encouraged. Now we seem to know **Richard II** more thoroughly and profoundly than before, but only because of the treasures bequeathed to us by these forefathers, our sturdy predecessors. An ordinary student

of literature may not be as perceptive and sensitive as Coleridge, but surely he knows more ABOUT the play than the Romantic critic's notes. Whether he knows the play as such is, for candor's sake, a different matter.

A corollary of the first implication is the observation that critical discourse, which is definitely incremental, seems to develop, at least in regard to **Richard II** as this study has shown, as a closed structure, a self-begetting, autonomous system. It is a manifestation of the healthy human urge for development and fruition. One critic's work is another's primary text, a stimulus to a critical response. One critic's awareness of his predecessors is a factor in his position with respect to the work of art, a call for reconsideration or revision, a barrier to be cleared on the way to self-realization and full fruition, a foreign element which he has to naturalize within his intellectual and psychological make-up. Elucidation, expansion, completion, and rejection are all possible attitudes. The spectrum of options is as humanly wide here as it is in Bloom's range of revisionary ratios. In other words, literary criticism suffers from a propensity for solipsistic self-examination, becoming an autonomous, epistemological construct, with its own rules, values, and norms which have to be observed more or less strictly.

Another corollary relates to the literary text, which, on the basis of the preceding argument, it is extremely difficult not to see with all the implications of historicism. Now it appears in a new light. Due to the persistent action of critical tradition, it, turning into a nodal, uneven structure with numerous blind spots, becomes itself, along with critical discourse, a historical object, always in a state of becoming, a potential and never a final thing, with its identity always made, unmade, and



remade. It gets entwined with literary discourse, forming what might be called an extended text, or, more properly, a creational text, an adulterate hybrid of texts. It stands there as a passive, defenceless thing, exposed to the violence of criticism, though always resisting and restraining, but always subdued, ignored, or relegated to a second place. It appears to me that the passivity and silence of the literary text and its very nature as a linguistic system easily and readily deconstructed prove to be strongly seductive to the ravishing practices of literary criticism, which, apparently, has so far refused to institute any serious curbing mechanisms so as not to encroach on the freedom of its practitioners<sup>(117)</sup>. The image might be far-fetched and might enrage some readers, but not, of course those approving of Roland Barthes' **The Pleasure of the Text**. And, if I tend to see the relation between criticism and literature in traditional sexist terms, it is because I feel that the "dialectics of desire"<sup>(118)</sup> is at work here, for with so much critical tradition very few texts "prattle"<sup>(119)</sup> and still fewer retain their original innocence, which, once lost, can hardly be retrieved. There was a time when the author - that is, the creative author - had all the authority. Times, evidently, have changed. It seems to me that the story of literary criticism has a remarkable affinity with the story of human civilization.

## NOTES

1. *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), p. 17.
2. Since this paper is not a mere survey of the bulk of criticism of Shakespeare's **Richard II**, only those works which prove its thesis are selected for elaborate discussion. Omissions, therefore, should not be understood as a value judgment.
3. Johnson, of course, is not the first Shakespearean critic. The honor has to go to Ben Jonson though the Doctor is definitely one of the most prestigious and influential of the critics in the early period of Shakespearean studies. Much criticism of the play is to be found in the actors' remarks. Arthur Sprague has done a great service in this field by collecting and elucidating this material in his several works.
4. W.K. Wimsatt, ed., **Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare** (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), p. 86.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
8. Thomas Middleton Raysor, ed., **Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism** (London: J. M Dent and Sons, 1960), I, 129.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 136.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

17. Ibid., p. 135.
18. Ibid., p. 133.
19. Ibid., p. 133.
20. Ibid., p. 133.
21. Ibid., p. 138.
22. Raysor mentions three other eighteenth century critics who might have influenced Coleridge in his Shakespearean criticism. These are Joseph Warton, William Richardson, and Thomas Whately, Raysor adds, "Coleridge does not refer specifically to any of the eighteenth century critics of Shakespeare except the editors. But it is unthinkable that so omnivorous a reader should have neglected entirely his English predecessors." Ibid., p. xxi.
23. William Hazlitt, **The Round Table: Characters of Shakespeare's Plays** (London: Dent and Sons, 1906), p. 272.
24. Ibid., p. 272.
25. Ibid., p. 275.
26. **Essays and Introductions** (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p. 106.
27. **A Study of Shakespeare** (London: Heinemann, 1929), p. 38.
28. **Shakespeare: A Survey** (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1925), p. 89.
29. Ibid., p. 90.
30. Ibid., p. 91.
31. Mark Van Doren, **Shakespeare** (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1953), p. 69.
32. Ibid., p. 70.
33. Ibid., p. 71.
34. Ibid., p. 72.
35. John W. Draper, "The Character of Richard II," **PO**, XXI (1942), 229.

36. Ibid., p. 233.
37. PMLA, LXVII (1952), 214.
38. Ibid., p. 215.
39. Ibid., p. 217
40. SJ, LXXXVII (1952), 93.
41. Ibid., p. 96.
42. Ibid., p. 101.
43. Shakespeare's Wordplay (London: Methuen and Co., 1957), p. 73.
44. Ibid., p. 74.
45. Ibid., p. 78.
46. Ibid., p. 83.
47. Ibid., p. 88.
48. It is very difficult to establish influence here on firm ground since the two works were published in the same year.
49. SO, VIII (1957), 159.
50. Ibid., p. 160.
51. Ibid., p. 160.
52. Ibid., p. 160.
53. Ibid., p. 162.
54. Ibid., p. 175.
55. Leonard Dean, "From **Richard II** to **Henry IV**: A Closer View," in **Shakespeare: Modern Essays in Criticism**, ed., Leonard Dean (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1957), p. 192.
56. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1936), p. 415.
57. Ibid., p. 415.
58. Ibid., p. 415.
59. (London: Ghatto and Windus, 1944), p. 246.
60. Ibid., p. 245.

61. Ibid., p. 245.
62. Ibid., p. 250.
63. Ibid., p. 251.
64. Ibid., p. 252.
65. Ibid., p. 258.
66. Ibid., p. 258.
67. Ibid., p. 259.
68. Ibid., p. 260.
69. Ibid., p. 263.
70. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), p. 15.
71. Ibid., p. 15.
72. **Political Characters of Shakespeare** (London: Macmillan and Co., 1945), p. 118.
73. Ibid., p. 121.
74. Ibid., p. 135.
75. **Richard II**: IV, i, 121.
76. (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1947), p. 211.
77. Ibid., p. 211.
78. Ernest H. Kantorowicz, **The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology** (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 26.
79. Ibid., 27.
80. Ibid., p. 27.
81. Ibid., p. 29.
82. Ibid., p. 33.
83. Ibid., p. 35.
84. Ibid., p. 36.
85. Op Cit., p. 95.

86. **SO**, XII (1961) 305.
87. (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1985), p. 131.
88. (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickenson Univ. Press, 1986), p. 48.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
90. **SO**, XXXVII (1986), 461.
91. *Ibid.*, p. 460.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 464.
93. *Ibid.*, p. 469.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 469.
95. *Ibid.*, p. 470.
96. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1935), p. 4.
97. *Ibid.*, p. 238.
98. *Ibid.*, p. 241.
99. **MLR**, XXXVII (1942), 113.
100. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
101. "The Sun Imagery in **Richard II**," **SP**, XLV(1948), 196.
102. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
103. **HR**, II (1949), 243.
104. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
105. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
106. *Ibid.*, p. 256.
107. "Imagery and Symbolism in **Richard II**," **SO**, VII (1956), 355.
108. *Ibid.*, p. 355.
109. *Ibid.*, p. 355.
110. *Ibid.*, p. 357.
111. **SO**, XXXVII (1986), 320.
112. *Ibid.*, p. 324.
113. *Ibid.*, p. 325

114. Ibid., p. 332.

115. Ibid., p. 328.

116. Ibid., p. 330.

117. Stylistics has been one attempt in this direction, and its achievements, though still below expectations, are to be hailed as a healthy and robust endeavor.

118. Roland Barthes, **The Pleasure of the Text**, tr. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 4.

119. Ibid., p. 4.