



ISAAC ASIMOV

ASIMOV'S
GUIDE TO
SHAKESPEARE

VOLUME ONE

The Greek, Roman, and Italian Plays

VOLUME TWO

The English Plays

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Note: This is Volume II. It includes indexes to both volumes. Volume I has been reproduced in a separate file. Blank pages mark the position of illustrations which are not reproduced. Contents

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The Tragedy of

KING LEAR

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HAKESPEARE wrote fifteen plays which, in one way or another, involve English history. Four of these are laid in the relatively dim time prior to the Norman conquest in 1066, and the one which deals with the oldest and the most purely legendary events is *King Lear*.

Indeed, the original Lear was myth, rather than legend, for he was a god. In the Celtic mythology, Lear (Lir or Ler to the Irish and Llyr to the Welsh) was the god of the sea. The best-known legend concerning him involved his four children, who were transformed into swans by a wicked stepmother.

The original mythical tale of Lear and his children had nothing at all to do with the version that reaches us through Shakespeare, but it did make

the name "Lear" famous to the generations of children who were told the tales, and if they forgot all else they did remember that the tale had something to do with Lear's children.

About 1135 Lear made his first appearance as a presumably historical character. This was in the *Historia Regum Britanniae (Story of the British Kings)* by Geoffrey of Monmouth.

At the time Geoffrey wrote, the Celtic people of Britain had been driven



back steadily for over six centuries and were now confined to Wales. Even there, Anglo-Norman influence was gradually becoming paramount (and, indeed, a century and a half later England carried through the final and permanent conquest of Wales).

There is always interest in what seems to be a dying culture, and Geoffrey, who lived on the Welsh border and was probably of Celtic descent, possessed that interest. Perhaps it was only natural for him to want to compensate for its dwindling present by emphasizing its great past. To do this, he made heavy use of legendary and mythic material, producing a history that is very largely fictional, although it was taken for sober fact through the Middle Ages. If there are grains of truth lying behind Geoffrey's fantasies we can no longer be sure what they are.

It was in Geoffrey's book, for instance, that the dim tales of King Arthur first made their literary appearance. The original of Arthur was probably a leader of the Celtic armies who defeated the Saxon invaders and temporarily halted their advance.

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Geoffrey brought Lear out of the myths too, making him a king of all Britain in a period much earlier than that of Arthur. Lear was supposed to have founded "Lear-cestre" and made it his capital. This is the city now called Leicester, in England's mid-regions about ninety-five miles northwest of London. (Actually, the only connection between Leicester and Lear lies in the accident of their starting with the same letter.)

Geoffrey tells a story of Lear's children and of their cruel ingratitude and fixed this new version of the legend into human consciousness forever.

In Shakespeare's own time it appeared in new forms; in *The Faerie Queene*, the long epic poem written by Edmund Spenser in 1590, for instance. It appeared in play form under the title of *The True Chronicle History of King Lear*, which was first presented in 1594 and apparently was revived in 1605.

William Camden, an English historian, wrote a popular history of the British Isles in 1586, and rang an interesting change on the legend. Rather

than attributing it to the Celtic king, Lear, he made the central character

Ine, a Saxon king, who reigned from 688 to 726.

When Shakespeare decided to do his version of the Lear story, he turned

to a history written by Raphael Holinshed for his source material. (He had used this history for many of his plays.)

Holinshed had published *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*

in two volumes in 1577 and it proved an enormously popular work. Holinshed was rather uncritical in his acceptance of earlier works and his early

chapters accepted much of what he found in Geoffrey of Monmouth.



This included the story of Lear, which was in this way inherited by Shakespeare.

According to Holinshed, Lear reigned at the time when Joash was King of Judah. This would make his time about 800 B.C. This does us no good, for our actual historical knowledge of the political history of the British Isles of this period (or of any period up to the invasion of Julius Caesar in 55 B.C.) is exactly nothing.

If we accept 800 B.C. as the time of Lear, however (just for the fun of it), that would make it deal with events earlier than those of any of the Roman plays. If we consider it in connection with the Greek plays, it would come about halfway between *Troilus and Cressida* and *Timon of Athens*.

... *the Duke of Albany than Cornwall*

The play opens in the palace of King Lear, but with no indication of where it might be located-Leicester or elsewhere. Two noblemen are on the scene and one says:

I thought the King had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall.

-Act I, scene i, lines 1-2

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The tide "Duke" is an anachronism, of course. It originated as *dux* ("leader") in the time of the Roman Empire when it was a title used for the leader of a troop of armed men. The title was taken over by the Germanic kingdoms that succeeded the Roman Empire and gradually came to be applied only to noblemen of the highest rank, particularly in France, where the word appeared as *duc*.

It was only in the fourteenth century, when the English King was trying to establish himself as King of France too, that the French title was imported into England.

Nevertheless, the anachronism is a useful one. No doubt the high nobility of the Celtic tribes had some Celtic title, but of what purpose would it have been to use it? The tide was the equivalent of the familiar "Duke" and as the Celtic people of Lear's time are made to speak Shakespearean English they may as well make use of Shakespearean titles.

Cornwall and Albany, the duchies mentioned in the first speech of the play, fit its era in a way, for both regions of Britain have important Celtic



associations.

As the Celts retreated step by step westward before the advancing Saxons from the east, they were eventually isolated in the two western peninsulas, Wales and Cornwall (which were sometimes distinguished as North Wales and West Wales, respectively).

The peninsula of Cornwall narrows steadily so that it has the flaring shape of a horn, with the narrow mouthpiece pointing out to sea. The Celtic word for horn is *corn*, so that "Cornwall" might be considered as signifying "horn-shaped Wales."

Once that meaning of the name was forgotten in later centuries, the myth-makers invented a hero named Corineus, who conquered the peninsula by killing a giant, and for whom it was then supposedly named.

Cornwall, smaller and narrower than Wales itself, offered less chance for its Celtic inhabitants to resist the English. In 815 the last of it was finally conquered by Egbert, the Saxon King of Wessex.

But what about Albany? This is from a Latin word for "white" and is sometimes given to a district of high mountains, the tops of which are white with snow even in the summer. In ancient times, for instance, a region at the eastern end of the Caucasian mountain range, bordering the Caspian Sea, was known to the Romans as Albania.

Again, the mountainous section of the Balkans, immediately opposite the heel of Italy, known as Epirus to the ancient Greeks, is called Albania today by English-speaking people. It is now a sovereign state and its own people call it "Shqipni."

Finally, the Highlands region of northern Scotland (Celtic to this day), with its rugged hills, was also called Albania in ancient times, and the name lingers on to this day as a poetic term for the region. In Holinshed, Albania is said to include not merely the Scottish Highlands, but all the lands north of the Humber River, which would mean that "Albany"

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would include northern England and all of Scotland under its sway (though in King Lear's time, to be sure, neither "England" nor "Scotland" would have meaning).

The character who delivers the first lines of the play is the Earl of Kent. ("Earl" is a title of Saxon origin and it remained the highest the English possessed till the introduction of the Frenchified "Duke.") Kent



is the southeastemmost English shire. It is the section of England closest to the Continent and therefore particularly subject to invasion. The Romans landed in Kent when they launched their invasions and called the region Cantium from the name given themselves by the tribe which inhabited it. This became "Kent" to the English, but the historic city of Canterbury in that shire preserves the older form of the name.

Neither the Duke of Albany nor the Duke of Cornwall are given a proper name anywhere in the play; each is known only by his title. In Holinshed, Albany's name is Maglanus and Cornwall's name is Henninus. The Earl of Kent has no proper name either, but he is not in Holinshed; he is Shakespeare's creation.

... the division of the kingdom ...

Apparently, the question of whether the King was fonder of ("more affected") one Duke or the other is important. The person to whom the Earl of Kent is speaking replies:

... now, in the division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the dukes he values most...

-Act I, scene i, lines 3-5

The dukes are, we see, to be among the King's heirs; so the matter of affection is relevant.

The person who answers Kent in this way is the Earl of Gloucester. He plays no part in the pre-Shakespearean version of the story, but heads a subplot that is introduced by Shakespeare. The subplot is inspired by a passage in *Arcadia*, a pastoral romance written in 1581 by the English poet Sir Philip Sidney. The tale, as told by Sidney (in overelaborate and, by modern standards, most tedious style), is set in Asia Minor, with such regions mentioned as Galatia, Paphlagonia, and Phrygia.

Shakespeare transported the tale to pre-Roman Britain and used it to set off and reinforce the King Lear story.

But why did he pick "Earl of Gloucester" as the title for the man who, in Sidney's original romance, was the Prince of Paphlagonia? There's no way of asking Shakespeare, of course, but we can speculate.

The first Earl of Gloucester in actual history was Robert, a son of King Henry I of England. He lived from 1090 to 1145 and played a prominent

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role in the civil war that followed the death of Henry I. He was the chief supporter of Henry's daughter, Matilda, against the claims of Henry's nephew, Stephen.

But since Robert of Gloucester was Henry's son, why was he not himself the claimant of the throne? Ah, it so happens he was Henry's bastard son and therefore unqualified to succeed. The Gloucester subplot is



intimately concerned with the matter of a bastard son and perhaps that is why "Earl of Gloucester" suggested itself to Shakespeare.

... *I have a son* ...

The fact of bastardy turns up at once. Gloucester is attended by a youth who turns out to be his bastard son, Edmund. He has been abroad (presumably being educated, for in Shakespeare's time traveling and studying on the Continent was the preferred manner of giving noble English youngsters a liberal education) and has now returned. Gloucester therefore introduces him to Kent with several gross jokes on the matter of Edmund's illegitimacy.

It seems unlike Gloucester, as his character is later revealed, to speak in this coarse way, but Shakespeare has much to do in this crowded play, and it is necessary for the sake of the plot to establish Edmund's relationship to his father forcefully and at once.

Gloucester goes on to say:

But I have a son, sir, by order of law, some year elder than this . . .

-Act I, scene i, lines 19-20

This older and legitimate son (the father's heir on both counts) will be introduced later as Edgar. The names of both sons are anachronistic in a play that involves pre-Roman Britain. Neither Edmund nor Edgar is a Celtic name. Both are Saxon names. In Shakespeare's time, however, Saxon names were sufficiently archaic in sound to give *King Lear* its ancient flavor. Whether Saxon or Celtic made (and makes) no real difference.

... *the lords of France and Burgundy* ...

In sweep King Lear and his court. Included are the Duke of Albany and the Duke of Cornwall, whom Kent had mentioned. Present also are Lear's three daughters, who, in order of decreasing age, are Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia. (In Holinshed, the oldest daughter is Gonorilla and the youngest Cordeilla.)

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Lear has no sons, and he plans to have his daughters his heirs. Since the Duke of Albany is married to Goneril, and the Duke of Cornwall to Regan, they will profit by this.

As for Cordelia, she is unmarried but there are two suitors for her hand.



The autocratic Lear mentions them as he enters, with a cavalier snap of his fingers at Gloucester. He says:

Attend the lords of France and Burgundy, Gloucester.

-Act I, scene i, lines 35-36

In the time of pre-Roman Britain there was, of course, neither a France nor a Burgundy. The region which later came to be known by those names made up a land named Gaul. Indeed, Holinshed, in his *Chronicles*, mentions only one suitor, Aganippus, who was "one of the princes of Gallia (which now is called France)." He also says there were twelve princes in the Gaul of the time.

This makes sense. Gaul was divided into tribal areas and the Gauls themselves were as Celtic as the Britons, with a language that did not differ too greatly.

Shakespeare, however, refuses to complicate his story by introducing a tribal Gallic situation with which his audience would be unfamiliar. It was easier to speak of France.

As for Burgundy, it was a large section of eastern France that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was under the semi-independent rule of princes related to the French royal house. Burgundy played an important part in the wars of the fifteenth century between England and France. Although it was finally reabsorbed by France in 1477, its memory remained green in England. Shakespeare could use the title freely.

... *divided in three* ...

Now Lear reveals his plans. He is an old man and he wants relief from his duties. He says:

*Know that we have divided
In three our kingdom; and 'tis our fast intent
To shake all cares and business from our age,
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
Unburthened crawl toward death.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 39-43

In short, Lear will abdicate in order that his last few years might be spent in restful quiet.

The unforced and voluntary abdication of a monarch, for no other rea-



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son than that he wishes to divest himself of the onerous burden of government, is most unusual. By far the vast majority of monarchs have clung insistently to their rule, however old, tired, and diseased they may become and however taxing and difficult the demands made on them.

One of the few who did freely abdicate was Ine, King of the West Saxons. In 726 he left the throne in order that he might spend the remainder

of his life in religious devotions. He began a pilgrimage to Rome but, alas, he had waited too long and died before he reached his goal. Perhaps it was this abdication that induced William Camden to switch the Lear story to Ine in his history book.

Two other really outstanding examples of voluntary abdication can be

found in history. In 305 the all-powerful Roman Emperor Diocletian, after

a successful twenty-one-year reign, abdicated and spent the final eight

years of his life in happy retirement. And in 1554 the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, after a thirty-five-year reign during which he was the most powerful ruler in Christian Europe, divided his kingdom and retired

to a monastery where he spent the last bit of his life in peace.

It was, perhaps, the example of Charles V, still fresh in the minds of men,

that lent some plausibility to the tale of Lear. Without it, the notion of abdication might have given the play a weird divorce from reality. (In Holinshed, Lear does not actually abdicate. He merely makes arrangements for a division of his kingdom after his death-and his sons-in-law

grow tired of waiting.)

The mysteries of Hecate. . .

It falls into Lear's head at this point, before announcing the division of the kingdom, to draw from his daughters a public confession of their love for him. Somehow this seems typical of the aged king, who has had adulation for so many years without yet having had his fill of it. He loves the flattery that comes of kingship and displays that love so openly, we cannot help but wonder how he can possibly bear to part with it. And, of course, it is just the fact that he cannot that breeds the catastrophe.

Goneril and Regan play the game smoothly, inform their father of their deep love in grandiloquent style, and Lear is satisfied.

Cordelia, the youngest daughter, cannot do so. She cannot force herself into this degrading flattery. She attempts to avoid answering and when pursued, she says, essentially, that she loves Lear as a child ought to love a parent. But this is not what the childish Lear wants and at once his terribly short temper flares and explodes in the violent overreaction that is characteristic of him. He disowns Cordelia completely:



*For, by the sacred radiance of the sun,
The mysteries of Hecate and the night,*
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*By all the operation of the orbs
From whom we do exist and cease to be
Here I disclaim all my paternal care,*

-Act I, scene i, lines 111-15

Shakespeare avoids the anachronism of having any reference to Christianity in the play and yet he has no way of making use of the Celtic mythology. The Romans effectively wiped out the Druids, who made up the Celtic priesthood, and used as their excuse the claim that the religion was a particularly dark and evil one. (The real reason, undoubtedly, was that the Druids were organizers of a national resistance to the Romans.) What little the Romans spared was wiped out by Christianity later.

As a result, the Druid beliefs are virtually unknown to us and we have only the impression (probably mistaken) that they involved gruesome and bloody rites.

Shakespeare is therefore satisfied to have Lear speak in terms of a generalized worship of the heavenly bodies, which is rather sound thinking on his part. His mention of Hecate, with her underworld associations (see page I-50), is a concession to the general impression of the dark aspects of Druidism.

The barbarous Scythian

Lear in his unreasoning reaction goes to the extremes of saying:

*The barbarous Scythian,
Or he that makes his generation messes
To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
Be as well neighbored, pitied, and relieved,
As thou my sometime daughter.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 118-22

Lear talks of parents who eat their children-"makes his generation messes"; he will soon have occasion to talk of children who eat their parents. He speaks of Scythians, who, since the time of the ancient Greeks, have been the epitome of barbarism.

At the supposed time of Lear, however, the Scythians have not yet arrived at their later home north of the Black Sea, and would not for another century. And, of course, when they arrived, they might be barbarous but no more so than the Britons of the time.

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. . . *the Dragon and his wrath*

Cordelia is silent under the blow, but the blunt and honest Kent tries



to intervene. Lear, in autocratic fury, cuts him off at once:

Peace, Kent!

Come not between the Dragon and his wrath.

-Act I, scene i, lines 123-24

This is a legitimate piece of Celtic imagery. The early Celtic tribes in Britain used the figure of a dragon on the standards they took into war.

The war leader was Pendragon ("head of the dragon"); that is, he was at

the head of those who carried the dragon standard. Several of the early

Celtic kings of legend had the title, and the best known to us is Uther Pen-

dragon, the father of King Arthur.

Here Lear makes use of the dragon to symbolize the kingship.

... *by Apollo* ...

In his rage, Lear divides what would have been Cordelia's portion between Goneril and Regan. Kent again tries to intervene, and persists even when Lear threatens severe punishment and begins to swear by the gods. Kent retorts at once:

Now by Apollo, King,

Thou swear'st thy gods in vain.

-Act I, scene i, lines 162-63

Roman gods are as anachronistic in pre-Roman Britain as the Christian

God would have been, but what can Shakespeare do? The only "false gods"

known to the audience, aside from the idols mentioned in the Bible, are

the Roman gods. Later in the play, Jupiter and Juno are sworn by.

... *slenderly known himself*

Lear goes his headstrong way. He banishes honest Kent and, with many an insult, offers dowerless Cordelia to France or Burgundy. Burgundy refuses her but France takes her out of love.

The final details of the arrangement are made. While Lear resigns his powers, he keeps the name of King plus a hundred knights as his personal

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retinue. He plans to live with his two daughters in alternation, a month

with each.

The company now disperses and Goneril and Regan, the two elder



daughters, are left onstage to consider the situation. It is not to their liking and we might sympathize with them. So far, we have no reason to find fault with them. They expressed their love for their father in hypocritical manner, to be sure, but they were forced to do that. Were they to court Cordelia's fate?

What's more, they are now to be forced to deal with an erratic old monarch who has always been uncomfortably autocratic and who may now be growing senile. Goneril says:

You see how full of changes his age is.

-Act I, scene i, line 290

Regan agrees:

'Tis the infirmity of his age; yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself.

-Act I, scene i, lines 295-96

He has, in other words, even in the fullness of his mental powers, taken too seriously the flattery accorded him and believed himself to be as wise and as prudent as all insisted he was. (The time would come when Lear would recognize this fault of his most bitterly-and learn better.)

Thou, Nature . . .

The scene now shifts to Gloucester's castle, the location of which is also not stated. It might be in the city of Gloucester, which is located about a hundred miles west of London. The use of the name is anachronistic, of course, for Gloucester was founded in Roman times during the reign of the Emperor Nerva, about A.D. 97.

In the castle, Edmund, the bastard son, stands with a letter. He says:

*Thou, Nature, art my goddess; to thy law
My services are bound.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 1-2

There was the feeling in Shakespeare's time that the existence of society altered the quality of human life. In a "state of nature," men lived without rules other than their own wants and desires, and were savages.



The development of a social organization, on the other hand, involved the acceptance of rules designed to protect men in general against the selfish

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desires of any one among them. This view reached a thoroughgoing expression in a book called *Leviathan* by the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who published it in 1651, a generation after Shakespeare's death.

(It was also possible to take the alternate view. One could say that in a state of nature, man was good and kind. It was only with the development of a social organization that men began to hanker after power, office, wealth, and mastery. This view, however, did not reach prominence till the eighteenth century, and it was the French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau who, through his book *The Social Contract*, published in 1762, was its greatest spokesman.)

Edmund in accepting Nature as his goddess is throwing off all the artificial shackles imposed by society. In doing so, he throws off the social rules that distinguish between legitimate sons and illegitimate ones, or between older sons and younger sons. It is he who can take who has the right, and Edmund means to, inherit his father's lands and titles according to the natural law that gives it to the stronger and shrewder. He has worked up a scheme to make that possible.

These late eclipses. . .

Gloucester now enters, perturbed and unsettled by the events at the court. At once he sees the letter which Edmund, with deliberate clumsiness, tries to hide from him. Gloucester insists on reading it and it turns out to be from Edgar, the legitimate son; in veiled, but not *too* veiled, language Edgar invites Edmund to join him in the assassination of their father so they might share the inheritance without waiting any longer for death.

The audience is quite aware that Edmund has forged the letter and that Edgar is innocent, but Gloucester is not.

Gloucester is reluctant to believe the worst of Edgar (he is no monster of instant anger as Lear is) and urges Edmund to devise some system of testing his half brother. He then goes on to brood:

*These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good
to us.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 112-113

This represents the early belief (see page I-96) that any irregular occurrence in the heavens is a divine sign foretelling disastrous events.

There is an additional importance to the speech, however, which rests not in itself, but *in* the hint it may give as to the time of writing of the



play.

The first performance seems to have been given on December 26, 1606, so obviously it was written before that. In the previous year, 1605, there was an eclipse of the moon in September and an eclipse of the sun (visible

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in England) in October. This was followed, within months, by the appearance of a pamphlet deducing all kinds of horrible possibilities from these eclipses.

It is likely then that the play was still being written in early 1606 and Shakespeare had time to put in the speech given by Gloucester at this point, who lists the miseries that can be portended by such eclipses, perhaps in imitation of the pamphlet.

... *the Dragon's Tail* ...

Gloucester then leaves and his last speech is mockingly commented upon by Edmund, who clearly disbelieves utterly in astrology and in the influences of the heavens. Shakespeare may have intended this to further damn Edmund as an atheist and cynic, but fashions have changed and the bastard's rational comments force the modern audience to approve of what he says most heartily as an eloquent indictment of the follies of astrology.

Edmund begins:

This is the excellent foppery of the world, that when we are sick in fortune, often [through] the surfeits of our own behavior, we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and stars . . .

-Act I, scene ii, lines 128-31

He goes on to give a specific example, mocking astrological patter:

My father compounded with my mother under the Dragon's Tail, and my nativity was under Ursa Major, so that it follows I am rough and lecherous. Fut! I should have been that I am, had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing.

-Act I, scene ii, lines 139-44

The Dragon's Tail is a reference to the constellation of Draco, a wind-



ing string of moderately bright stars in the neighborhood of the north celestial pole. Ursa Major ("Great Bear"), which is also near the pole, includes the well-known stars of the Big Dipper.

Astrologically this is meaningless, since these constellations are not part of the zodiac and it is through the zodiac that the paths of the sun, moon, and planets make their way. No doubt the meaninglessness would not disturb Edmund at all, since his remarks have an inner consistency of their own. "The Dragon's Tail" has a bawdy connotation that fits "compounded" and "Ursa Major" implies a rough, bearlike nature.

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. . . *Tom o' Bedlam*

Edgar, who is Edmund's legitimate half brother, is approaching, however, and Edmund must prepare to play a new part. He says:

My cue is villainous melancholy, with a sigh like Tom o' Bedlam.

-Act I, scene ii, lines 146-47

"Bedlam" is a corruption of "Bethlehem," of all things. In 1402 the hospital of St. Mary of Bethlehem in London began to be used as a lunatic asylum. It was notorious enough to give rise to the custom of calling a lunatic or an asylum for such a "bethlehem" or "bedlam" in colloquial language.

In the days before modern programs for taking care of the mentally ill had been developed, a lunatic asylum was full of the wailing and shrieking of the mad, so that "bedlam" came to mean any scene of wild uproar.

"Tom" is among the common names of Englishmen, and is frequently used (just as much today as in older times) in connection with some concept involving masses of men—as in "Tom, Dick, and Harry," or "Tommy Atkins" for the faceless infantryman, or even "tomcat" for the male cat.

For some reason, the word "Tom" was associated with men of less than normal intelligence, so that one could speak of "Tom fool" and refer to silly nonsense as "tomfoolery" or "tommyrot." Similarly, one could speak of a madman, particularly one who was not violent enough to be hospitalized or who had been discharged as sufficiently harmless, as "Tom o' Bedlam."

Edmund's use of the phrase "Tom o' Bedlam" as Edgar comes on the scene is a dramatic forecast of what is to come. That future begins to be molded as Edmund easily convinces the ingenuous Edgar that their father,

Gloucester, is enraged with the latter. Edgar, utterly confused by this unexpected turn of events, is persuaded to agree to go armed for his own safety.

. . . *Ms Fool*

Meanwhile King Lear has taken up his month's residency with his oldest daughter Goneril and is at the palace (the location not specified) of her



husband, the Duke of Albany. As the daughters had suspected, the old man, having doffed the mantle of royalty, cannot doff the arrogancies that pertain to it.

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Goneril has just received news of an incident (one of many, undoubtedly) from Oswald, her obsequious steward. She says:

Did my father strike my gentleman for chiding of his Fool?
-Act I, scene iii, lines 1-2

The institution of the court fool (or jester) is typical of western Europe of the Middle Ages, and it arises out of the early Christian attitude toward madness. In pagan times the madman was felt to be touched by the divine and was treated with awe and respect (a feeling that plays its part in *Hamlet*, for instance, see page II-106).

To the early Christians, on the other hand, thanks in part to the tales of possession in the New Testament, madmen were felt to be infested with demons as a result of their sins. In that case, where mad antics were not extreme enough to inspire fear or disgust, they merely amused. In Shakespearean London, and for a considerable length of time afterward, it was considered fun to visit Bethlehem Hospital and watch the madmen, very much as we today go to see a zoo, except that the animals are much better treated and much more sympathetically viewed than the madmen were.

If a madman were sufficiently harmless and amusing-if, for instance, he could make "witless" remarks that were nevertheless humorous-he might be kept for the purpose by a family that was sufficiently well off to afford to feed a useless mouth. Naturally, a shrewd but poor fellow could see that if he but pretended to be slightly mad and took care to be pun-gently clever, he might get a good job.

The court fool became a standard part of the palace scene, then, and was the analogue of the modern television set, for ideally, he could do comic songs and dances, make witty comments, do sight gags, and so on. It was anachronistic to introduce one into pre-Roman Britain, but the



audience
would scarcely worry about that. In Shakespeare's time the court fool still flourished, though they were to vanish from the scene within a generation of his death.

Naturally, such a fool could say and do things an ordinary man could not possibly get away with (see page I-107). Behind the protection of his own madness and the amusement of his royal patron, he could mock arrogant lords and stately bishops and cast aspersions on all the sacred cows.

Any fool (not as mad as he seemed, usually, and someone who might well be the most intelligent member of the court) would find it hard to resist puncturing the emptiest heads, and if those heads lacked a sense of humor (as they naturally would), the fool would make himself extremely unpopular.

Goneril, as it will appear, is not fond of the Fool herself and she is exasperated at the disruption introduced by her father. And we can still sympathize with her. Divided authority is always troublesome and a captious father is not easy to take.

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She decides to put her father in his place and orders Oswald to put on an air of insolence to the King. What's more, she will consult Regan so they can present a united front to the troublesome old man.

... *Here's my coxcomb*

The Earl of Kent, banished by Lear for defending Cordelia, returns now, in disguise, and talks himself into a position as Lear's servant.

Lear does not recognize him but appreciates the manner in which he trips up Oswald the Steward when the latter begins to carry out Goneril's orders by slighting the King. The King, in this scene, acts with typical haste, pride, and arrogance. There is still a lot to be said for the daughter's point of view.

When Lear hires Kent and gives him an advance of money to close the bargain, the Fool enters and says:



Let me hire him too. Here's my coxcomb.

-Act I, scene iv, line 97

Licensed fools had standardized costumes, of which one noticeable item was the hat, which had sewn to it a piece of serrated red cloth to represent a cockscomb. The cock, after all, is a stupid creature filled with a foolish pride and given to making senseless sounds, so that there seems a resemblance between cock and fool.

The hat is, therefore, a "cockscomb," or, as universally spelled, a coxcomb. The term has come to be shifted from the appurtenance of a fool to the fool himself. A stupid man, particularly one who is vain and arrogant, is a coxcomb.

The Fool, in fact, performs a double function in offering Kent his coxcomb. Not only is he mock-purchasing Kent's services; he is also expressing an opinion, as he makes clear when he says to Kent:

// thou follow him, thou must needs wear my coxcomb.

-Act I, scene iv, lines 105-6

The Fool ("fool" though he is) is wise enough to see Lear's true position as one who cannot possibly reward a follower, for he no longer has anything to give or keep now that he has given his kingdom away. It is more than Lear can see-yet

. . . one in motley . . .

The special costume of a court fool serves two purposes. First, it is a

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silly costume which is designed to stir laughter in itself and make the task

of the fool the easier. Second, it advertises his function and makes it plain

to anyone within sight that he is a privileged character.

Naturally, a costume intended to catch the eye at once must be conspicuous. In addition to the coxcomb, therefore, the Fool wears a costume

of rough varicolored wool, so that he is a melange of patched colors. This

is called "motley," and the word itself is the badge of the fool.

The Fool uses the word in a little verse he improvises as part of his grim remarks on the folly of Lear's division of the kingdom. (It is virtually his one subject—a mournful bell tolling a single note.)

He points out there are sweet (amusing) fools and bitter (stupid) fools.

Pointing first to himself and then to Lear, he says:

*The sweet and bitter fool
Will presently appear;
The one in motley here,
The other found out there.*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 148-51



Lear, frowning, demands to know if he is being called a fool. The Fool replies caustically:

All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with.

-Act I, scene iv, lines 153-54

And Kent says, ruefully:

This is not altogether fool, my lord.

-Act I, scene iv, line 155

That, of course, is the great secret of the successful fool-that he is no fool at all.

... *Epicurism and lust*

Goneril enters, further enraged at the treatment of her steward, Oswald. She scolds Lear, with all the arrogance one would expect of a daughter of that old autocrat, showing none of the respect due a parent. Angrily, she indicts the King's hundred knights as a disorderly rabble. She says:

*... this our court, infected with their manners,
Shows like a riotous inn. Epicurism and lust*

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*Makes it more like a tavern or a brothel
Than a graced palace,*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 249-52

"Epicurism" is a reference to the teachings of the Greek philosopher Epicurus (see page I-311) and the self-indulgence it seems to justify.

Reason is, to some extent, on Goneril's side. Undoubtedly, Lear's hundred knights, owing obedience only to the King, are hard to control, particularly since the arrogant old King is sure to back them uncritically in any crisis. It is not what Goneril says that puts her in the wrong, but the harsh and cruel way in which she says it.

... *I am guiltless...*

Albany, Goneril's husband, enters and is clearly at sea. He does not know what the quarrel is all about and, mild-mannered man that he is, scarcely knows what he can do. Seeing that Lear is enraged, he can only say:

*My lord, I am guiltless, as I am ignorant
Of what hath moved you.*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 280-81



Albany's role in this play represents a departure from Holinshed. In the *Chronicles*, the sisters' husbands, Albany and Cornwall, are equally opposed to Lear and, in the end, are equally defeated by a French army.

Shakespeare, in his treatment, does not wish a French victory and finds it convenient to have a Celtic hero. Either Albany or Cornwall would have done, but Shakespeare chooses Albany and we can find a good reason for that choice.

Since Albany, as a region, represents the Scottish Highlands, it was at first a Scottish title. The first Duke of Albany was Robert Stewart, who was regent of Scotland and who received the title in 1398.

In Shakespeare's lifetime the title "Duke of Albany" was held by James VI of Scotland, who in 1600 passed it on to his infant son, Charles. In 1603 James VI became James I of Great Britain, so that the title had been held by Shakespeare's King and was now held by one of the royal princes.

Since that was so, Shakespeare would scarcely have liked to equate the title with villainy. If the play were truly historic, his hands would have been tied, but since it was legendary and it would make no difference if Albany were made virtuous rather than villainous, Shakespeare made the change and no doubt King James was gratified.

Cornwall remained doubly villainous, as though the villainy of two men

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had to be concentrated in him, but in Shakespeare's time there was no contemporary Duke of Cornwall to take umbrage.

(In 1660 the title of "Duke of Albany" was passed on to King James's youngest grandson, who was later to reign as James II. The young man was also Duke of York, and when the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam was captured by a fleet under his leadership, New Amsterdam was re-named New York in his honor, and Fort Orange, a town up the Hudson River was, for the same reason, renamed Albany.)

... a serpent's tooth ...

But if Goneril goes too far in her anger, Lear goes even further in his reaction. His own immense and tyrannical pride maintains itself unabated and he at once curses Goneril with almost unendurable venom. That curse reaches a climax in a passage that contains one of Shakespeare's most familiar gifts to the language. The curse calls down the dreadful punishment of sterility on his oldest daughter, but

*// she must teem,
Create her child of spleen, that it may live
And be a thwart disnatured torment to her.
Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth,
With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks,
Turn all her mother's pains and benefits*



*To laughter and contempt, that she may feel
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child.*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 288-96

A parent's curse is a fearful thing, particularly to an audience that lives in a time that still imparts a quasi-magical power to such things. While Goneril has been disrespectful to her father, Lear's reaction is disproportionate. After all, he has not had cause till this moment to complain of Goneril.

The balance, then, is still against Lear by any dispassionate weighing of the events of the play thus far.

. . . more knave . . .

Lear, virtually incoherent with fury, prepares to leave for Regan's palace. As he does so, Goneril says sharply to the frightened Fool, whose dislike she amply returns:

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You, sir, more knave than fool, after your master!

-Act I, scene iv, line 321

The word "knave" is homologous with the German *Knabe*, meaning "boy," and did originally mean merely that. It came to be applied to a young male servant in particular and then, because it was taken for granted by the upper classes that servants were all dishonest, to any tricky or deceitful person.

The phrase "more knave than fool" has become a cliché, more because of its use here than for any other reason, though it has appeared earlier, even as long before as Roman times, for a phrase very like it is to be found in Cicero's writings.

. . . the seven stars . . .

Lear sends Kent ahead with a letter to Regan. The King is confident that Regan will treat him kindly.

The Fool, on the other hand, sick at heart with the knowledge that Regan is very like Goneril, tries to keep up Lear's spirits with a string of patter. Lear only half listens, his mind full of self-pity and, worse for himself, beginning to suspect that Cordelia was wronged.

The Fool says:

*. . . The reason why the seven stars are no more [more]
than seven is a pretty reason.*

-Act I, scene v, lines 35-37

The "seven stars" are the Pleiades, the most striking cluster of stars



visible to the naked eye. In Greek mythology, the Pleiades were seven sisters who, in life, were chased by a hunter. They were rescued by the gods, who changed them into doves, then placed them in the heavens.

Ordinarily, Lear would have let the Fool triumph with this musty old riddle, but in his absent-mindedness he automatically gives the answer, saying:

Because they were not eight.

-Act I, scene v, line 38

But the Fool is not so easily topped. He responds at once with a bitter:

Yes indeed. Thou wouldst make a good Fool.

-Act I, scene v, line 39

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The noble Duke my master

The second act opens at Gloucester's castle. Curan, a courtier, meets with Edmund and imparts some news, saying:

I have been with your father and given him notice that the Duke of Cornwall and Regan his duchess will be here with him this night.

-Act II, scene i, lines 2-5

Nowhere in the play is the division of the kingdom between Albany and Cornwall described geographically. (After all, the details don't matter to the plot.) Since Albany is the region in the northern part of the island

of Britain and Cornwall is in the southwest, we might suppose that the southwestern half of what is now England and Wales would be added to Cornwall's holdings and the northeastern half to Albany's.

If so, Gloucester's estates would be in Cornwall's portion of the kingdom. (The city of Gloucester is about 130 miles from the modern boundary of Cornwall.) This is made plain by Gloucester's comment with respect to this:

*The noble Duke my master,
My worthy arch and patron, comes tonight.*

-Act II, scene i, lines 60-61

It was, of course, the duty of any person to stand ready to entertain his overlord as guest at a moment's notice, and however onerous the sudden and unexpected visit might be, Gloucester could only accept it as an honor.



... *likely wars* ...

Curan has another piece of news too, or rather a rumor which he puts in the form of a question:

Have you heard of no likely wars toward, 'twixt the Dukes of Cornwall and Albany?

-Act II, scene i, lines 11-12

It is by no means unusual that those who divide a kingdom later quarrel over the division, each trying to obtain more or, if possible, all. In fact, it is so far from unusual that one might almost consider it inevitable.

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This further strengthens the hint that there will not be a united front against Lear (as there is in Holinshed). Shakespeare continues to prepare a noble role for Albany.

And yet we cannot hope for too much from Albany too soon. He is no match for his firm and strong-minded queen. Indeed, after the quarrel scene between Lear and Goneril, Albany had tried to reason with his wife. Goneril had snapped out:

Pray you, content.

-Act I, scene iv, line 320

And with that, Albany fell silent. Yet it must be remembered that it was Goneril who had inherited half the kingdom. Albany shared it only by virtue of marriage. He was merely prince consort, so to speak, and conscious of a certain weakness in his position.

... *make thee capable*

Edmund is pleased over the coming of Cornwall and Regan. It will enable him to arrange Edgar's supposed criminality before more important eyes than he had expected.

Edgar is going armed, at his brother's advice. At a moment when Gloucester is almost upon them, Edmund insists that Edgar fly because he has been accused of treason against Cornwall and even hints that Cornwall's rapid approach bears some connection with that.

He urges Edgar to draw and stage a mock fight so that Edmund will not be accused of complicity in the escape.

Edgar, confused and not understanding at all what is happening, finds himself fleeing for his life, while Edmund remains behind to inflict a flesh wound on himself. Edmund then damns Edgar as a traitor and would-be



parricide to his father. Gloucester is thoroughly taken in. He will have Edgar pursued and, when found, executed. As for Edmund, he says:

*...of my land
Loyal and natural boy, I'll work the means
To make thee capable.*

-Act II, scene i, lines 85-87

Edmund's original goal of gaining the inheritance has been attained, then, for Gloucester has just promised that. The scheming son can aspire to still more, however. Cornwall and Regan have arrived and have already gained knowledge of Edgar's supposed crimes and escape. Cornwall says:

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*For you, Edmund,
Whose virtue and obedience doth this instant
So much commend itself, you shall be ours.*

-Act II, scene i, lines 115-17

... the riotous knights

Actually, Cornwall and Regan have come to Gloucester's because they know that there is conflict at Goneril's and they do not wish to have Lear troubling them.

Presumably, Goneril and Regan are rivals and would eventually squabble

over the kingdom in line with the rumors of wars "twixt the Dukes of Cornwall and Albany." For the nonce, however, they have a common enemy in Lear, or at least a common problem in the handling of the cantankerous old man, and they pull together in this.

Regan is even careful to turn the incident concerning Edgar to her own uses when she says:

*Was he [Edgar] not companion with the riotous knights
That tended upon my father?*

-Act II, scene i, lines 96-97

Edmund hastens to assure her this is so, and she now has another case in point to use against her father, should that become necessary.

... Vanity the puppet. . .

Kent appears on the scene now with letters from Lear to Regan. Simultaneously, Oswald appears with letters from Goneril to Regan. Kent, burning with anger against Oswald and his errand, advances on him with

an almost lyrical string of complicated insults that reaches its climax when

he says of Oswald that he is

... nothing but the composition [mixture] of a knave, beggar, coward, pander, and the son and heir of a mongrel



bitch . . .

-Act II, scene ii, lines 20-22

The confused Oswald tries only to avoid the other's rage, but Kent insists on a sword fight, crying:

Draw, you rascal. You come with letters against the King, and take Vanity the puppet's part against the royalty of her father.

-Act II, scene ii, lines 36-38

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Kent is anachronistically drawing here on the morality plays which became popular in western Europe about 1400. These were allegories following the progress of Man to Salvation through and across the difficul-

ties created by temptations from without and weakness from within. Various abstractions were presented in human form and one of these would

be Vanity, portrayed as a haughty lady in fine array.

Kent expresses his contempt for Goneril by comparing her with the evil

Vanity, compounded of nothing but arrogance and self-love, and empties

her further by picturing her as the same abstraction lowered a step by being

presented as a puppet show.

. . . whoreson zed. . .

The noise of Kent's onslaught and Oswald's screaming brings out Cornwall, Regan, and Gloucester, who demand to know the matter. When Oswald tries to speak, Kent breaks out again, yelling at him:

Thou whoreson zed, thou unnecessary letter!

-Act II, scene ii, line 65

"Zed" is the letter which in the United States is usually called "zee." It is a respectable and well-used letter in the Greek alphabet (where it is called "zeta," a name from which "zed" is derived). It did not, however, occur in the original Latin alphabet. It was a late acquisition, along with x (the Greek xi), and was used only for words of Greek derivation.

The letter z still stands at the very end of the Latin alphabet we use today in English and is used less frequently than any other letter but its companion, x. Because z would occur only in rather fancy words and not in the simple vocabulary of the common man, it would seem an unnecessary letter.

"Whoreson," by the way, a common Shakespearean adjective of patronization or contempt, is but a short way of saying "son of a whore" and, therefore, "bastard."



. . . *Sarum Plain*

When Oswald essays a superior smile, Kent's choler rises still further and he says:

*Smile you my speeches, as I were a fool?
Goose, if I had you upon Sarum Plain,
I'd drive ye cackling home to Camelot.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 84-86

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What the metaphoric point of the passage may be is not known, though there must have been some meaning to the Elizabethan audience. The reference has the advantage, though, of reaching into the Celtic past.

Sarum Plain is a region seventy-five miles west of London and forty miles south of Gloucester; it receives its name from the town of Sarum ("Sarbiodonum" in the period when Britain was part of the Roman Empire) on its southern edge. Sarum is usually called "Old Sarum" because

only ruins remain, while another town, two miles south, took its place as

"New Sarum" in the thirteenth century. New Sarum is now better known

as Salisbury and Sarum Plain as Salisbury Plain.

Camelot is the legendary capital of King Arthur and is therefore also associated with Celtic Britain. The exact site of Camelot (or whatever town

or fortress Camelot harks back to) is not known, but speculations concerning it involve the southwestern corner of England and the general

area of Salisbury Plain and its environs.

You stubborn ancient knave . . .

Kent's anger makes it impossible for him to be tactful and he ends by irritating and offending the none too patient Cornwall. Stocks are sent for and Kent is pinned within them by wrists and ankles. It was a disgraceful punishment, used only for offenders of low degree, and was therefore a deliberate insult offered to King Lear, whose servant Kent announced himself to be.

In calling for the stocks, Cornwall says to Kent:

*You stubborn ancient knave, you reverent braggart,
We'll teach you.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 128-29

Here, and in a couple of other references, the impression is given that

Kent is old. Yet when Kent first appeared before King Lear in disguise,

and was asked his age, he replied:



Not so young, sir, to love a woman for singing, nor so old to dote on her for anything. I have years on my back forty-eight.
 -Act I, scene iv, .lines 38-40

In our own society, an age of forty-eight does not make a man old.* It did, however, in Shakespeare's time, when the life expectancy was consid-

* The author of this book, as it happens, has, at the time of this writing, years on his back forty-eight, and he repels any suggestion of being ancient and reverent with scorn and contumely.

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erably less than it is now and when the quality of diet and medical treatment was much worse than it is now. People whom we would today call middle-aged would be in Shakespeare's time in far poorer physical shape (on the average) and far more past the median age of the society.

This disparity between what is considered old now and was considered old then shows up elsewhere in Shakespeare's plays too (see page II-263, for instance).

... *Poor Tom*

Edgar, Gloucester's legitimate son, is even worse off than Kent. Edgar has been proclaimed outlaw, to be freely killed by any who meet him, and everyone is seeking him. He must assume some disguise until the search is given over and it occurs to him to pretend to be a type of pathetic individual who is all too common in the [Shakespearean] countryside. He says:

*The country gives me proof and precedent
 Of Bedlam beggars ...*

-Act II, scene iii, lines 13-14

A Bedlam beggar is a mild madman, or one of retarded mentality, who is not hospitalized, but cannot take his place in society, either, and therefore must subsist by begging.

It is a dreadful and humiliating disguise, but it is one which few would



study carefully or expect to find a young aristocrat behind. (Besides, it gives Shakespeare a chance to intensify further the pathos and horror of several scenes ahead and to illustrate further, most meaningfully, some points concerning the human condition.) Then too, as a Bedlam beggar, Edgar will at least live; as himself, he knows, he will surely die, and soon.

Bitterly, Edgar begins to whine out an imitation of the Bedlam beggar's self-pitying cry for alms:

*... Poor Turlygod, Poor Tom
That's something yet: Edgar I nothing am.*

-Act II, scene iii, lines 20-21

"Poor Tom" is a reference to the common phrase "Tom o'Bedlam" (see page II-15), by which these beggars were known. "Turlygod" is probably an example of the incoherencies which characterized the poor whirling brains of these creatures, and which were imitated by those who used the appearance of idiocy to make richer the pickings of beggary.

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Hysterica passio . . .

Lear arrives at Gloucester's castle (having found his second daughter even in her retreat) and the first thing he sees is his faithful servant in the stocks. This visible insult, in a place to which he was flying as his last refuge, rocks him to the point where he begins to feel his sanity giving way. He says:

*Hysterica passio, down, thou climbing sorrow,
Thy element's below. . .*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 56-57

"Hysterica passio" means "affliction of the womb." The womb was thought, in ancient times (quite wrongly), to be the origin of uncontrollable emotion, whence "hysteria." This arose perhaps from the notion that women were more emotional than men, so that the epitome of the condition was to be found in an organ characteristic of women rather than men.

Lear feels himself to be losing control, with a lower organ (the womb) rising to take charge of the brain.

What follows next can only place new tensions on the old man. It is only with difficulty he obtains an interview with Regan, and once she arrives and Lear turns to her for sympathy, she makes it coldly plain



that
she is on Goneril's side.

Goneril herself arrives, and the old King, still raging at his older daughter, is pushed from one to the other, each turning the screw a bit further in limiting his privileges until finally it is clear to him that he is to be left with nothing.

Even now he tries to assert himself as the old and terrible autocratic King. He thunders:

*I will have such revenges on you both
That all the world shall-I will do such things-
What they are, yet I know not; but they shall be
The terrors of the earth.*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 278-81

Until now, there has been little choice between Lear and his daughters. All were haughty, arrogant, and ruthless in using power when they had it.

But now Lear has lost his power and the daughters have it; Lear is old and his daughters are young.

To be sure, Lear is now in Cordelia's position and is being treated no worse by his daughters than she was (with less reason) treated by him.

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But Cordelia found a husband in France at once and Lear can turn to nothing.

It is at this point that we begin to pity the old King, and Shakespeare sees to it that we do when he makes Lear begin to break down. The King tries not to suffer the unbearable humiliation of weeping before his stony-faced daughters and he must turn to the only person present who is on his side, his poor, helpless Fool, and say, pathetically:

O Fool, I shall go mad.

-Act II, scene iv, line 285

From this point on Shakespeare does not allow our new-won pity to flag for a moment. Steadily, in fact, it is intensified.

A wild storm is approaching and Regan mutters that she will allow Lear to remain in the palace, but only by himself. Not one follower can accompany him.

Lear, unwilling to accept so contemptuous an offer, calls blindly for his horse and leaves, not knowing where he's going and utterly heedless of the coming storm. Kent, who has been freed by now, goes anxiously in search of him.

...from France...



The third act opens with the storm in full fury and with Kent searching for the King. He comes upon one of the King's followers and tells him of the gathering friction between Albany and Cornwall. Kent has been receiving letters from Cordelia, too (he mentioned one of them while he was in the stocks), and he has still more important information. He says:

*But, true it is, from France there comes a power
Into this scattered kingdom,*

-Act III, scene i, lines 30-31

In Holinshed, King Lear is described as fleeing to France because of his ill-treatment; of there being graciously received by his youngest daughter.

In Shakespeare's version, however, Cordelia does not wait to be appealed to. Hearing of Lear's misfortunes, she sets forth at once to the rescue.

Apparently, the rescuing forces will be landing soon, for Kent wants to send the latest news to them by way of the follower to whom he is speaking. He says:

*// on my credit you dare build so far
To make your speed to Dover, you shall find
Some that will thank you . . .*

-Act III, scene i, lines 35-37

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Dover, on the southeastern tip of England, is the port closest to France.

It is only twenty-two miles across the Channel to Calais, the French city on the opposite shore, so that Dover is a logical point of entry for the French forces.

. . . the realm of Albion

Kent finds Lear, quite mad now, and raving into the teeth of the storm, with the poor, shivering Fool at his heels. It is only with great difficulty that Kent persuades the King to let himself be led toward a miserable hovel where they may have some shelter from the rain and wind.

As they move toward the hovel, the Fool pauses to repeat a doggerel prophecy to the audience. Such obscure prophecies in limping rhyme were common enough in those days. In fact, an excellent example is the largely meaningless verses put together by the French mystic Michel de Notre-dame, better known to us as Nostradamus. These verses, published in



1555, leaped to fame when one of them seemed (undoubtedly by accident) to prophesy accurately the rather unusual death of King Henry II of France in 1159. (Henry died in a tournament accident while he was wearing a golden helmet, and the verse spoke of a king dying in a "golden cage.")

The most famous English example is a Mother Shipton, a prophetess who is supposed to have lived at about the same time as Nostradamus, though there is no clear reference to her prior to 1641. Her maundering couplets have been interpreted as prophesying all kinds of modern inventions, like the steam engine, for instance. They also predicted the end of the world in 1881.

The Fool's couplets mock such prophecies by listing four conditions that are always true, and then six that can never come true, and concluding that when all these come to pass

*Then shall the realm of Albion
Come to great confusion.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 91-92

"Albion" is a poetic name for England and is derived, like "Albany," from the Latin word for "white." The name may have arisen because of the white cliffs of Dover, appearing on the horizon to visitors from Gaul. (Of course, legends offer far more foolish explanations—for instance, that the island of Britain was first discovered and ruled by the mythical Albion, the supposed son of Neptune.)

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... *Merlin shall make* ...

The Fool concludes by saying:

This prophecy Merlin shall make, for I live before his time.

-Act III, scene ii, lines 95-96

Merlin is the magician who plays so important a role in the Arthurian legends and in Celtic tales generally. If Holinshed's dating of Lear's reign were correct, Merlin would have lived no less than thirteen centuries after the Fool.

It is very unusual for Shakespeare to call attention to an anachronism for the sake of a laugh, but he is deliberately releasing the unbearable



tension
of the storm scene, before tightening it once more to an even higher level.

... a letter this night...

Even while Lear is battling the storm, kindly Gloucester, within the haven of his castle, is perturbed. He had objected to Kent's being placed in the stocks, and now he has apparently spoken on behalf of the King. This has served only to bring down Cornwall's savage displeasure upon him.

But there is even more reason than sympathetic humanity alone to favor the King. There could well be political necessity too. Gloucester discusses the matter with his supposedly loyal son, Edmund, saying:

There is division between the Dukes, and a worse matter than that. I have received a letter this night-'tis dangerous to be spoken-I have locked the letter in my closet. These injuries the King now bears will be revenged home; there is part of a power already footed; we must incline to the King...

-Act III, scene iii, lines 8-14

It is not hard to follow what must be going on in Gloucester's mind, quite apart from affection and pity for Lear. If a French invasion strikes a Britain rent by civil war, the invaders may well win and Lear will be restored to his throne. Lear, always easy to enrage, and always hasty and impulsive in action, will remember that it was in Gloucester's castle that he was humiliated and turned out of doors. Gloucester, despite his innocence, might well have to suffer as a result, unless he takes active measures to demonstrate that he is on the King's side.

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He proposes therefore to go out in search of the King while "loyal" Edmund remains behind to preoccupy Cornwall and Regan and keep them from noticing that he is gone.

The diabolical Edmund, however, sees a better trick than that. If he informs Cornwall of his father's act of mercy and shows him the letter his father has received, Gloucester will be proven a clear traitor, at least to the Duke. Gloucester will then be deprived of his lands and Edmund will come at once into his inheritance.

... Take physic, pomp



The play now returns to Lear, who, with Kent and the Fool, has reached the hovel.

The old, raging, tyrannical King is beginning to change. He is still pitying himself and berating his daughters, but some light is dawning. He is beginning to interpret the universe in terms other than himself.

When Kent tries to make Lear enter the hovel, the old King insists the Fool enter first. The Fool, in this instance, signifies poverty and weakness generally, and the old King, even though he is now at the lowest ebb of his life, manages to realize there are, and always have been, people worse off than himself. He says:

*Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp;
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
And show the heavens more just.*

-Act III, scene iv, lines 28-36

This speech marks the turning point of the play, the beginning of Lear's redemption through suffering.

... *pelican daughters*

The hovel into which they are entering is not untenanted, however. In it is Edgar, playing the role of Poor Tom, the Bedlam beggar, and also seeking shelter from the storm.

Edgar dares not (out of caution, shame, or both) abandon his disguise,

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even for the half-drowned individuals who now enter. He speaks wildly and goes into his begging routine:

Do Poor Tom some chanty, whom the foul fiend vexes.

-Act III, scene iv, lines 59-60

This is, of course, the early Christian view of madness-the result of possession by a devil.

King Lear can scarcely, in his own madness, grasp what Poor Tom is all about. To his own confused mind, the nearly naked Poor Tom must have been brought to his miserable pass by his daughters. This brings Lear to his own case and he broods:

... *'twas this flesh begot
Those pelican daughters.*



-Act III, scene iv, lines 74-75

Pelicans mash up fish in their large bill, then open them and allow their young to feed on the material. The young in their eagerness push the fleshy bag of the bill against the adult's chest. To careless observers, it seems that the young are tearing at the body of the parent bird and (the legend arose) feeding on its blood.

Lear thinks of the daughters as, symbolically, feeding on him; the reverse of the reference he made (of parents eating their children) in his denunciation of Cordelia (see page 11-10).

... out-paramoured the Turk ...

Edgar has no choice but to continue his begging routine. When questioned about his past life by Lear, he recites the sins that account for the punishment of demonic possession that has driven him mad. He says:

... Wine loved I deeply, dice dearly; and in woman out-paramoured the Turk. False of heart, light of ear, bloody of hand; hog in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in madness, lion in prey ...

-Act III, scene iv, lines 91-95

There is a casual anachronism in the mention of the "Turk." The Turks did not enter history till some sixteen centuries after the supposed time of Lear. In Shakespeare's time, however, they were at the very peak of their power and the "Turk," that is, the Sultan who reigned at Istanbul (Constantinople), was the most dreaded monarch in Europe. Yet to the average Christian what must have been most impressive about the Sultan was not

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his wide dominions, his absolute power of life and death, but the size of his harem. There could have been few who did not secretly (or not so secretly) envy the Sultan his unparalleled opportunities, and to "out-paramour the Turk" is to express the very limit of lust.

Having listed his sins, Poor Tom piously proceeds to go through the ritual of repentance:



Keep thy foot out of brothels, thy hand out of plackets, thy pen from lenders' books, and defy the foul fiend.

-Act III, scene iv, lines 97-99

This ritual of I-have-been-a-sinner-but-I-have-repented is well calculated to elicit coins from passers-by and is still used with great effect at revival meetings and at such secular organizations as Alcoholics Anonymous.

Lear, however, is touched chiefly by the demonstration of how much lower it is possible to be than he has himself become. From bewailing the loss of the vast social swathing of the kingship, he begins to realize that he is still, even now, a product of an artificial society. He begins to tear his clothes off, saying to Poor Tom:

... Thou art the thing itself; unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art.

-Act III, scene iv, lines 108-110

... Flibbertigibbet

There is an interruption before Lear can carry out his design to become an unaccommodated man. Gloucester enters with a torch; he has found Lear.

It is to Gloucester most of all that Edgar must not reveal himself. At the sight of his father, therefore, Edgar turns his madness up a notch and cries out, in his Poor Tom character:

This is the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet.

-Act III, scene iv, line 117

Flibbertigibbet is a name that is to be found in a book of demonology called *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures*, written by an English prelate named Samuel Harsnett.

In this book Harsnett inveighed against Jesuits and gave names to numerous demons, Flibbertigibbet among them. For this task he needed nothing more than an active and morbid imagination, and that he had.

In the course of the play, Poor Tom mentions other demonic names:

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Smulkin, Modo, Mahu, Hoppedance, Obidicut, and so on. All are from Harsnett's book. Harsnett's book was published in 1603, so it would appear that *King Lear* could not possibly have been written earlier than this date.



Lear is fascinated by Poor Tom's maunderings. He can scarcely find time to listen to Gloucester's offer of better shelter and of food and water. Lear shakes off Gloucester and says:

*First let me talk with this philosopher.
What is the cause of thunder?*

-Act III, scene iv, lines 157-58

In Shakespeare's time "philosopher" bore the flavor that "scientist" does now. (The word "scientist" was not invented until the nineteenth century.) That is why Lear, inspired by the still rumbling storm, asks the question concerning thunder, hoping presumably for a scientific answer.

When Kent joins his pleadings to Gloucester's, Lear says stubbornly:

*I'll talk a word with this same learned Theban.
What is your study?*

-Act III, scene iv, lines 160-61

Until the century after Shakespeare's death, science (or philosophy, if you will) was associated almost exclusively with the ancient Greeks. The term "Theban," that is, a native of the Greek city of Thebes, would automatically imply "philosopher."

Or would it? Is it possible Lear is being ironic? The Athenians, who were the epitome of Greek culture and philosophy, considered the Thebans, their neighbors to the northwest, to be dull and stupid. The term "learned Theban" would be a contradiction in terms to them.

But Lear does not seem to be in a mocking mood. He is continuing to grow more human. As he took care of the Fool's protection before his own, so he now will not consent to be taken better care of until Poor Tom is taken along too. Gloucester and Kent are forced to agree to this and when they do, Lear applies to Poor Tom the best of all possible philosophic names by saying:

Come, good Athenian.

-Act III, scene iv, line 183

Child Rowland . . .

Through all this, Edgar, in agony, must continue the pretense of mad-

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ness, which it is dangerous to abandon. As they leave the hovel to end the scene, he puts together ill-assorted pieces of doggerel:

*Child Rowland to the dark tower came;
His word was still, "Fie, foh, and fum,
I smell the blood of a British man."*

-Act III, scene iv, lines 185-87



Child Rowland (or Roland) is a hero of an old Scottish ballad. (The word "child" is used here with the force of a title. It is applied to a youth of good birth who has not yet attained knighthood.) From such references as are preserved, it would seem that the ballad tells of a young lad, guided by Merlin, seeking in Elf-land his kidnapped sister and gaining her through great peril. The actual ballad is lost and Poor Tom may be reciting the first line. If so, it is the only line that still exists.

(Robert Browning wrote a Gothic poem entitled "Child Roland to the Dark Tower Came" inspired by this line in *King Lear*, but this poem has no connection with the old ballad.)

From the heroic old ballad, "Poor Tom" passes to the stock exclamation attributed to villainous giants on the track of a hiding hero. Shakespeare at least avoids the anachronism of having the last line end in "the blood of an Englishman," as it is frequently given now. Englishmen did not exist in the time of Lear and came into being only after the Anglo-Saxon invasion of the island of Britain in the fifth century.

... *Earl of Gloucester* ...

While Gloucester is carrying out his errand of mercy, Edmund is carrying out his own base betrayal. He reveals the letter to Cornwall, showing that Gloucester is concealing knowledge of an invasion from France. He gets his reward, for Cornwall says grimly:

... it hath made thee Earl of Gloucester. Seek out where thy father is, that he may be ready for our apprehension.

-Act III, scene v, lines 18-20

Yet Edmund is not an utterly heartless child; he is not quite a Goneril or a Regan. He is eager for advancement, even over his father's fall, and yet it chokes him a little-for he says in an aside:

I will persevere in my course of loyalty [to Cornwall] though the conflict be sore between that and my blood.

-Act III, scene v, lines 22-24



This is an important line, for it reveals a rudimentary flaw in Edmund's villainy that will play a significant part in the denouement of the play.

... to bed at noon

Gloucester manages to get all the poor fugitives, the King, the Fool, Edgar, and Kent, into a farmhouse near his castle, a better refuge than the miserable hovel.

He leaves and the mad King then conducts an imaginary trial of Goneril and Regan in so affecting a manner that Edgar has difficulty keeping up his pretense of being Poor Tom. At the close of the trial, Lear imagines himself to be in his bed and speaks of eating in the morning. At that, the Fool says, wearily:

And I'll go to bed at noon.

-Act III, scene vi, line 84

Those are the Fool's last words in the play. He appears no more after this scene, nor is he referred to. We can suppose that he has fulfilled his dramatic purpose of harping on Lear's folly and of playing counterpoint to Lear's mad raging in the storm, and now he is discarded.

We can also suppose that, worn out and exhausted by cold, rain, and fear, he knows he will soon die even though he is young in years ("go to bed at noon"). Yet it is hard that Shakespeare didn't see fit (or, more likely, carelessly neglected) to grant him a single line as epitaph from Lear.

When Gloucester returns, he is more anxious than ever. He has heard talk of a plan to kill the King (presumably to prevent his being used as a rallying point about which to mobilize those in opposition to the new regime of the dukes). He has arranged a litter and an escort to bring the King to Dover and safety.

... *The army of France* ...

By now, news of the French invasion has reached Cornwall too. He says to Goneril:

*Post speedily to my Lord your husband; show him this letter.
The army of France is landed.*

-Act III, scene vii, lines 1-3

If there has been growing rivalry between Albany and Cornwall, the



latter apparently expects it will disappear in a common front against the

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common enemy. Certainly, Goneril is on the side of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and she may reasonably be expected to have the deciding influence over her easygoing husband.

Edmund is sent along with Goneril. This serves two functions, one positive and one negative. First, it makes possible a scene between Edmund and Goneril that advances the plot. Second, it makes it possible for Edmund to be absent in the course of what follows immediately-for Gloucester is about to be punished. We might reasonably guess that Edmund did not anticipate the exact nature of the punishment and might, if he had been present, have attempted to interfere.

... pluck me by the beard

Gloucester is captured and dragged in not long after his false son has left. He is tied to a chair in his own castle while his "guests" amuse themselves grimly by insulting him. Regan tweaks hairs from his beard and Gloucester says with indignation:

*By the kind gods, 'tis most ignobly done
To pluck me by the beard.*

-Act III, scene vii, lines 36-37

We have lost the old regard for the beard. In many cultures, a beard was the sign of manly dignity and of virility; it was when the beard appeared that a boy became (sexually) a man. In such cultures, shaving was unthinkable; it would have been equivalent, in a way, to castration.

Among the ancient Jews, there was a biblical injunction forbidding them to shave or trim their beards in any way. ("Ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shall thou mar the corners of thy beard," Leviticus 19:27.) To be forcibly shaven was to be unbearably shamed. When King David sent ambassadors to the Ammonites, the Ammonites forcibly shaved off the ambassadors' beards on one side of the face as a gesture of defiance, and that was cause enough in itself for war (see 2 Samuel 10:4-



6).
Even in much later times, it was the height of disrespect to touch the beard of a man-for that bore much the same forbidden intimacy that a touch of the genitals would possess. That is the meaning of the phrase "to beard an enemy"; that is, to defy him by touching his beard and proving him to be impotent to avenge the insult. To seize the beard firmly was even more insulting, and to pull out hairs, by adding pain, adds an unspeakable dimension to the insult.

To an Elizabethan audience, seeing the play for the first time, we might well imagine that sharp intake of breath, that shudder of horror, at seeing this young woman wantonly insulting, in this indescribable way, an old

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man in his own house. We ourselves watch this incident stonily; a shaven society is unmoved.

... Edgar was abused

The horror increases rapidly. Gloucester is forced to confess he has sent King Lear to Dover and it is clear he has knowledge of the French invasion.

Cornwall, in a passion, decides to gouge out Gloucester's eyes (onstage!) and orders his servants to hold the chair steady. When one eye has been gouged out, one of the servants in desperation snatches a sword to stop so wicked a deed. In the fight, Cornwall is wounded, but Regan stabs the goodhearted servant from behind and kills him. Gloucester's other eye is then gouged out.

When blind Gloucester warns of Edmund's vengeance, Regan has the vile pleasure of telling him that it was Edmund who betrayed him.

Gloucester now understands all that has happened and says, in heart-break:

*O my follies! Then Edgar was abused.
Kind gods, forgive me that, and prosper him.*

-Act III, scene vii, lines 92-93

Cornwall must be led away, for his wound is a bad one. He has no



time
 for Gloucester now and orders him turned out. An old and loyal
 tenant of
 his (identified in the play as "Old Man") guides him, bemoaning the
 fact that poor Gloucester cannot see his way. With infinite pathos,
 Gloucester recognizes the existence of different kinds of blindness and says:

*I have no way and therefore want no eyes;
 I stumbled when I saw.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 18-19

There is a cliff . . .

Blind Gloucester, more grief-stricken for Edgar's sake than for his
 own,
 is seen by that same Edgar in his guise as Poor Tom. Aware of his
 father's
 blindness and evident misery, he has no thought for his own wrongs.
 He
 says bitterly:

*. . . the worst is not
 So long as we can say "This is the worst."*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 27-28

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As long as breath exists, in other words, there remains the
 possibility of
 still greater misery.

Gloucester's own despair expresses itself in even grislier fashion, for
 he
 muses:

*As flies to wanton boys, are we to th'gods,
 They kill us for their sport.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 36-37

The Old Man identifies Poor Tom to Gloucester. Gloucester at once
 sees in Poor Tom a perfect guide, for a sane man might get into
 trouble
 with cruel Cornwall for succoring the blinded "traitor." Surely a
 Bedlam
 beggar is immune to punishment.

Edgar, overcome by grief, scarcely able to play his role, must
 neverthe-
 less do so, while the servant is there, at least. So he continues
 babbling of
 devils.

Gloucester asks Edgar to lead him to Dover. All roads lead to Dover
 now, where the forces of France await. Gloucester has, however, a
 special
 purpose. He says:



*There is a cliff whose high and bending head
Looks fearfully to the confined deep:
Bring me but to the very brim of it,*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 75-77

He is referring, of course, to the famous white cliffs of Dover, and his intention is suicide.

... *This kiss* ...

Meanwhile Goneril and Edmund are hastening to the Duke of Albany to bid him join Cornwall in the war against France. They are met by Oswald, who tells them, in confusion, that Albany seems not at all perturbed by the French invasion. Goneril sees at once that her husband cannot be relied on and sends Edmund back to Cornwall with a warning to that effect.

She does so in a way that sheds new light on Goneril, for she tells Edmund:

*Decline your head. This kiss, if it durst speak,
Would stretch thy spirits up into the air:*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 22-23

It is clear that Goneril is in love with Edmund. There has been no

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previous hint to this effect in the dialogue of the play, though Edmund's effect on Goneril could be made plain, easily enough, in the course of the "business."

It is important to realize that Edmund is extremely handsome. That point is made clear in the very opening dialogue of the play, between Gloucester and Kent. When Gloucester introduces Edmund with a rather leering reference to the illicit intercourse that produced him, Kent answers courteously:

*[cannot wish the fault undone, the issue of it being so proper
[handsome].*

-Act I, scene i, lines 17-18

Milk-livered man

After Edmund leaves, Goneril faces Albany and outfaces him too. She



is not in the least perturbed by Albany's exclamations against her wicked treatment of her father. She says to Mm, in contempt:

Milk-livered man!

-Act IV, scene ii, line 50

The liver is taken as the seat of the emotions. A liver rich with blood would inspire a man with noble and manly emotions. A red-livered man, then, would be aggressive and courageous. On the contrary, a liver with a deficiency of blood could rouse no such emotions; it would belong to a shrinker and coward. The usual expression is "lily-livered"; that is, white for lack of blood. "Milk-livered" does the same and carries the connotation of babyhood as well.

This linking of the liver with the emotions is wrong, of course, but it is no more wrong than our contemporary placing of the heart in this role. It is just as wrong to speak of "stouthearted" men, or "fainthearted" ones.

A Messenger arrives now, however, to inform them that Cornwall has died of the wound given him by his rebelling servant. This does not bother Goneril unduly from the standpoint of pity or sympathy, of which she has none. In fact, Cornwall's death removes a rival and makes more possible her own eventual rule with her husband (whoever he may be) over a united Britain.

However, Regan is now a widow, and Edmund is speeding toward her at Goneril's own command. As a widow, Regan would have an unfair advantage in any competition for the handsome Edmund. Cornwall's death means, therefore, the initiation of a sharp rivalry between the two sisters, each a dangerous, deadly combatant

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... so suddenly gone back ...

Kent has now reached Dover. He finds the army there, but not its leader.

He asks someone identified only as "Gentleman":

Why the King of France is so suddenly gone back, know you no reason?

-Act IV, scene iii, lines 1-2

The Gentleman explains, rather vaguely, that it is due to internal problems in France itself.

It is rather clumsy to have the King of France come and then go before he actually appears on the stage. This may be an expression of Shakespeare's anti-French feelings. In Holinshed, the French army invades Britain and defeats the British forces, and Shakespeare may well have had difficulty accepting that. He removed the French King at the last minute in the most economical way possible (he hated rewriting, according to Ben Jonson) and converted the political situation into more nearly a civil war.

The British pow'rs. . .



The entire drama is now converging on Dover. Cordelia reappears at the head of the invading army (which is now led by a British princess so that its foreignness need not be so prominent and so offensive to the audience). The native British forces are also approaching, however. A Messenger arrives to tell Cordelia:

The British pow'rs are marching hitherward.

-Act IV, scene iv, line 21

But if they are doing so, it is not in perfect unison. The Duke of Albany is clearly disaffected. When Regan (still at Gloucester's castle) asks Oswald for news and, specifically, if Albany is at the head of his forces, Oswald replies:

Madam, with much ado:

Your sister is the better soldier.

-Act IV, scene vi, lines 2-3

But there is disaffection between the sisters too. Oswald (Goneril's steward) is at Gloucester's castle only because he is carrying a letter from Goneril to Edmund, and Regan is clearly jealous. She gives Oswald a letter

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of her own to Edmund, which now Oswald must carry toward Dover. Regan also instructs Oswald to kill blind old Gloucester if he should meet him.

... henceforth I'll bear

Gloucester has reached Dover too, led by Edgar. Edgar still hides his identity, apparently fearing what the effect on his father's tottering reason would be of any sudden revelation. He can no longer maintain his role as Poor Tom, however, and has begun to speak in stately blank verse. The blind Gloucester says, in confusion:

*Methinks thy voice is altered, and thou speak'st
In better phrase and matter than thou didst.*

-Act IV, scene vi, lines 7-8

Edgar pushes that aside and begins to describe the cliff to which he claims to have led Gloucester, doing so in thrillingly effective terms while Gloucester is still standing on a featureless plain. Edgar's purpose in doing so, he explains in an aside to the audience:

*Why I do trifle thus with his despair
Is done to cure it.*

-Act IV, scene vi, lines 33-34



The scheme works. Gloucester attempts to hurl himself from the imaginary cliff and falls forward to the ground. Edgar approaches in the guise of another man and convinces his blind father that he had been led to the brow of the cliff by a demon and had been saved by divine intervention. Gloucester, whose early comments on eclipses have revealed him to be a superstitious man, accepts this, and realizes he cannot hasten death in defiance of fate. He says resignedly:

*... henceforth I'll bear
Affliction till it do cry out itself
"Enough, enough," and die.*

-Act IV, scene vi, lines 75-77

... the rain came ...

King Lear is at Dover too, still mad at least part of the time, and, in his lucid intervals, refusing to see Cordelia out of his deep shame. He has now

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apparently gotten away from those guarding him and is wandering about garlanded in flowers.

He is still learning to know himself. He has come to recognize what flattery is, for he says:

*They flattered me like a dog, and told me I had white hairs
in
my beard ere the black ones were there.*

-Act IV, scene vi, lines 97-99

He was told he had the wisdom of age, in other words, before he had outgrown the folly of youth. But he had found the limits of those powers which flattery would hold limitless. He says:

*When the rain came to wet me once and the wind to make
me
chatter; when the thunder would not peace at my bidding;
there I found 'em ...*

-Act IV, scene vi, lines 101-4

Lear, in his aimless wanderings, has come upon Gloucester and Edgar. Gloucester recognizes the King's voice and asks if it is not the King. Lear draws himself up and says, regally, in a phrase that has entered the language:

Ay, every inch a king.

-Act IV, scene vi, line 109

But he is not the king he once was. He goes through a bitter charade of dispensing justice, to show how royal he is, but he knows now he cannot



give true justice, for he does not know the hearts of men. He can see, now, the injustices suffered by mankind generally, and not by himself only. He says:

*Through tattered clothes small vices do appear;
Robes and furred gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,
And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;
Arm it in rags, a pygmy's straw does pierce it.*

-Act IV, scene vi, lines 166-69

... *the English party*

Those who are trying to guard the King enter now, but Lear madly tries to evade them, and they run offstage.

Edgar, knowing that a battle will soon be fought in the vicinity, tries to lead his blind father to safety. Now that his father is resigned to life, Edgar

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might have revealed himself, but he had been interrupted by Lear's arrival

before and, much more seriously, by a second interruption now.

Oswald enters, and, seeing Gloucester, is ready to kill him to please Regan. Edgar intervenes, however, assuming the guise of a rustic and speaking in a thick peasant dialect. They fight and Oswald falls.

With his last breath, Oswald proves faithful, at least, to those he served. He says to the supposed peasant:

*If ever thou wilt thrive, bury my body,
And give the letters which thou find'st about me
To Edmund Earl of Gloucester; seek him out
Upon the English party.*

-Act IV, scene vi, lines 251-54

Here is the inevitable anachronism. Somewhere in the play there has to be a slip, with the use of the word "English," and here it is. There were no English in Britain in Lear's supposed time, nor would there be for thirteen centuries. The word is changed to "British" in some editions of the play, but it is "English" in the oldest printed version.

Edgar opens the letters he finds on Oswald's body. (All's fair in love and war.) The one from Goneril to Edmund urges the latter to seize some opportunity to kill Albany and offers him her hand thereafter. The bastard son has risen to heir, then to the earldom, and might yet become King of all Britain.

... *a very foolish fond old man*

Lear has been caught by those who have tried to guard him. He sleeps now and Cordelia faces him at last, half afraid to wake him and yet hoping



he might be restored to sanity by this sleep. She thinks of the wild storm into which he had been pitilessly expelled and says, movingly:

*Mine enemy's dog,
Though he had bit me, should have stood that night
Against my fire . . .*

-Act IV, scene vii, lines 36-38

And when Lear wakes, she kneels to him in recognition of his royalty. But Lear knows himself now; he knows himself entirely; and he will not be the king of old. He tries to kneel to her, and when she prevents him, he says:

*Pray, do not mock me:
I am a very foolish fond old man,*
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*Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less;
And, to deal plainly,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.*

-Act IV, scene vii, lines 59-63

Then, when he is perfectly sure he is really speaking to his youngest daughter, Cordelia, he says:

*I pray, weep not.
If you have poison for me, I will drink it.
I know you do not love me; for your sisters
Have, as I do remember, done me wrong.
You have some cause, they have not.*

-Act IV, scene vii, lines 71-75a

And all the wronged and weeping Cordelia can say is:

No cause, no cause.

-Act IV, scene vii, line 75b

The whole reconciliation scene is done in the simplest language, with scarcely a poetic flight, scarcely a polysyllable, yet nowhere in Shakespeare, and, I believe, nowhere in literature, is the human heart so skillfully and ruthlessly torn in sympathy with what it sees and hears.

The enemy's in view . . .

The battle is about to begin. Edmund now leads the forces of the dead Duke of Cornwall, and Regan jealously sues for his love.

The Duke of Albany arrives with Goneril, and he, for one, makes his motive plain:



*... for this business,
It touches us, as France invades our land*

-Act V, scene i, lines 24-25

He is patriotically resisting a foreign invasion even though he admits the enemy cause is just.

Edgar, still in disguise, approaches Albany privately and gives him the letter he had obtained from Oswald's corpse, urging him to read it later.

Albany agrees.

As Edgar leaves, Edmund returns, saying:

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*The enemy's in view: draw up your powers.
Here is the guess of their true strength and forces
By diligent discovery.*

-Act V, scene i, lines 51-53

King Lear hath lost. . .

Edgar places his father in a position of safety, but after the battle he comes rushing back, crying:

*Away, old man; give me thy hand; away!
King Lear hath lost, he and his daughter ta'en:*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 5-6

When Gloucester seems to yearn for death again, and voices a preference for staying and dying rather than flying, Edgar says:

*Men must endure
Their going hence, even as their coming hither:
Ripeness is all. Come on.*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 9-11

This battle was described by Holinshed as a victory for Lear, Cordelia, and the French. Shakespeare changes that for his deeper purposes, but it seems certain that to have the French defeated suited his nationalistic prejudices in any case.

... let's away to prison

The captured Cordelia wishes to see her sisters, presumably to plead for her father's release. Lear, however, refuses. He has learned what is important in life at last and he says:

*No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison:
We two alone will sing like birds i'th'cage:
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down*



*And ask of thee forgiveness; so we'll live,
 And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
 At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
 Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,
 Who loses and who wins, who's in, who's out;
 And take upon's the mystery of things,
 As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out,*

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*In a walled prison, packs and sects of great ones
 That ebb and flow by th'moon.*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 8-19

One might argue that this makes up to Lear for all that has passed. If Lear had divided the kingdom and died, or if his daughters had been content to wait for him to die and had treated him with reasonable patience

till then, he would never have been more than he was at the beginning, a foolish raging tyrant, full of the professions of love, and ignorant of love.

But through all his misery and calamity, he has ended with a few moments of utter happiness, and those few are worth all his life besides.

As for the loss of liberty and all else, what does it matter? Lear says:

*Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,
 The gods themselves throw incense.*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 20-21

On capital treason . . .

Edmund has more than imprisonment in mind. He fully intends to be King of Britain and for that purpose other candidates for the crown must

be disposed of. In particular, Lear and Cordelia must be killed. He has stated this intention in a soliloquy before the battle and now he sends an

officer to do the job. When Albany enters and demands the prisoners, Edmund smoothly puts him off.

Regan and Goneril fall to quarreling over who is to have Edmund. Regan has an advantage in that she is not burdened with a husband, and she

announces Edmund as her new lord.

Albany, however, interrupts. He has read the letter Edgar brought him

and he stops all proceedings with the firm cry of:

*Edmund, I arrest thee
 On capital treason; and in thy attaint
 This gilded serpent.*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 83-85

Goneril, who is "this gilded serpent," is indifferent. As she says a little later on:



*... the laws are mine, not thine:
Who can arraign me for't?*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 160-61

Impenitent to the last, she is unperturbed by the revelation of her inten-

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tion to have her husband murdered. It is she who is sovereign of her part of Britain and Albany has power only as her husband. What can he do?

Her mind is much more on Regan, the sister-competitor who would have Edmund. Regan isn't well and when she groans that she is sick, Goneril says, grimly:

// not, I'll ne'er trust medicine.

-Act V, scene iii, line 97

A bit of poisoning is quite in her line.

The gods are just. . .

But Edmund has the right of trial by combat. If no one will appear to fight him, Albany will do so. That, however, is not necessary; a champion does appear. It is Edgar, disguised still, but by a full suit of armor this time.

The two fight and Edmund is beaten down. Regan has already been led away, and now Goneril, seeing Edmund at the mercy of his adversary, rushes off in despair and distraction.

Edmund, wounded and dying, knows that all ambition is over. Unlike Goneril, he is not evil for the mere sake of evil. With ambition gone, the good in him begins to show.

Edgar identifies himself, and says somberly:

*The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to plague us:
The dark and vicious place where thee he [Gloucester] got
Cost him his eyes.*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 172-75

And Edmund can only respond, humbly:

*Th' hast spoken right, 'tis true;
The wheel is come full circle; 1 am here.*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 175-76

Yet the illegitimate son has one moment of dying triumph. The dead bodies of Regan and Goneril are brought in, and Edmund cannot help but exult:



*Yet Edmund was beloved:
The one the other poisoned for my sake,
And after slew herself.*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 241-43

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It can very easily be argued that it was not ambition in itself that spurred Edmund on. He was illegitimate and therefore snubbed and despised all his life for a fault that was not his. He was searching for love and he found it at last. It was a grisly and fatal love, but with it he too could die happy.

Burst smilingly

Edgar tells the tale of his travels with his blind father and brings that tale to its end. Just before he had armed himself for the encounter with Edmund, and not sure he would survive, he finally revealed himself to old Gloucester. And Edgar then says:

*But his flawed heart-
Alack, too weak the conflict to support-
'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief,
Burst smilingly.*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 198-201

Edmund is onstage and hears this. He had had his father's love, at any rate. He says so in his initial soliloquy in the second scene of the play:

*Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund
As to th' legitimate. . .*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 17-18

Edmund may not have been satisfied with that love, for no land went with it-the entire inheritance would naturally go to the legitimate one-but he did not entirely forget it either. He was absent when Gloucester lost his eyes and perhaps he heard it first from Edgar's account and felt remorse.

At least he now says, when Edgar's tale is concluded:

*This speech of yours hath moved me,
And shall perchance do good. . .*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 201-2

And Edmund tries, for, when nearly at the last gasp, he manages to warn Albany that he has sent a man to kill Lear and Cordelia and that there



might still be time to save them.

. . . Her voice was ever soft

But Edmund's attempt is, in part, too late. His officer had hanged Cor-

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delia, but Lear, in a last superhuman effort, had killed him. Lear is now released, but Cordelia is dead and the old King comes in with his daughter in his arms. He cannot bring himself to believe she is dead and, for the remaining few moments of his life, tries to convince himself she is not. He says:

*Cordelia, Cordelia, stay a little. Ha,
What is't thou say'st? Her voice was ever soft,
Gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman.*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 273-75

. . . my poor fool. . .

Lear is all but oblivious to his surroundings. For a moment he recognizes Kent, and Kent tries to explain that he had loyally remained with him during his misfortunes. Kent says:

. . . Where is your servant Caius?

-Act V, scene iii, line 285

That apparently was the name Kent used in his disguise, a name, however, that is not mentioned elsewhere in the play.

Lear pays little attention to this and is oblivious to the news of Edmund's death. He concentrates only on Cordelia, moaning:

And my poor fool is hanged: no, no, no life?

-Act V, scene iii, line 307

It would seem that "poor fool" is a sad term of affection for Cordelia. We might long to have it apply to the Fool, so that there could be one mention of him anyway from Lear's lips, even if it is only to hear that he was hanged, but we can't in good conscience do so. It would be impossible for Lear to think of anything but Cordelia now. And with his last breath, he thinks she lives:

*Do you see this? Look on her. Look, her lips,
Look there, look there.*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 312-13

And here he dies-perhaps happily.



This ending of *Lear* can easily be viewed as the crudest and most unbearable in Shakespeare. Why could not Edmund have spoken a moment sooner and Cordelia been saved? Shakespeare had every excuse to do so,

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for in Holinshed, Cordelia's forces had won the victory and placed Lear back on the throne for a final two years as ruler.

But that would have placed the whole meaning of the play out of focus. The happy ending in Holinshed is not that Cordelia had lived, but that Lear had been restored and had died at last in her arms.

The happy ending in Shakespeare is Lear's regeneration and it is to make it perfectly clear that that is the happy ending that nothing else must be allowed to compete with it.

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W

WITH *Cymbeline* Shakespeare moves from the outright legendary time of *King Lear* (which he had written four years earlier) to a period when Britain first dimly appears in the light of history, thanks to the coming of the Romans.

The Romans made their first appearance in Britain in 55 B.C., when Julius Caesar, who was then busy conquering Gaul, launched the first of two raids against the northern island. Those raids did not lead to permanent Roman occupation, and for nearly an additional century Britain remained entirely under native rule. It was during this century that there existed a British chieftain named Cunobelin or, in the Shakespearean version, Cymbeline.

With Roman rule strengthening and deepening just across the Channel in Gaul, Britain was coming increasingly under Roman influence, economically at least. Trade with Gaul made Britain increasingly aware of Roman civilization and increasingly dependent upon it. The southern tribes of Britain (over whom Cymbeline ruled-for he was by no means King of a united Britain) began to go so far as to place Latin inscriptions on their coins.

Holinshed (see page II-4), whose scrappy information on Cymbeline was surely noted by Shakespeare, says that monarch began his reign in



33 B.C. and reigned for thirty-five years, that is, till A.D. 2. This is almost certainly too early, for the Roman sources we have make it seem that Cymbeline died only shortly before the permanent Roman occupation of Britain. We might guess, then, that Cymbeline ruled, roughly speaking, from A.D. 5 to A.D. 40.

If so, the time of *Cymbeline*, when compared with that of the Roman plays, is only slightly after *Antony and Cleopatra* and some five centuries before *Titus Andronicus*.

. . . *his wife's sole son* . . .

Except for Cymbeline himself, there is nothing in the play, no person and no event, which can be equated with any part of actual history. The play must therefore be treated as pure romance.

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It begins with a rather complicated situation (and indeed, the plotting in *Cymbeline* is denser than in any other play). Cymbeline had three children, two sons and a daughter. The two sons were stolen in infancy and were never heard of again. That left the daughter, Imogen, heir to the throne.

Cymbeline's wife, the mother of Imogen, was dead and the King had married again. The second wife was a beautiful widow with great influence over her husband. By her earlier marriage, the new Queen had a son, Cloten, and for him Cymbeline had particular plans.

The play opens in Cymbeline's court (place not specified) and two Gentlemen are discussing the situation. The First Gentleman is explaining it to the Second and says:

*His daughter, and the heir of's kingdom, whom
He purposed to his wife's sole son—a widow
That late he married—hath referred herself
Unto a poor but worthy gentleman. She's wedded,
Her husband banished, she imprisoned.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 4-8

Cymbeline's motivation is not hard to follow. In a semibarbarous tribal society, a woman could scarcely be expected to rule unless she had some strong man as husband—some man, moreover, who was the social equal of the turbulent nobility he expected to rule. The man Imogen had actually married was unsuited, because he was poor and because (as we soon find out) he had filled a rather menial position at the court.

The widow who had become Cymbeline's new Queen was, however, of high social position, and so was her son, Cloten. If Cloten married Imogen, the two together could rule without dispute and the



succession

would be settled. Cymbeline was getting on in years and his final duty to the state was exactly that—to arrange a peaceful succession. No wonder he was annoyed at Imogen's action.

It is interesting to speculate that Shakespeare may have been inspired

to set up this particular part of the plot by the actual historical situation

involving the Roman Emperor Augustus (the Octavius Caesar of *Antony and Cleopatra*, see page I-292), who in this play is treated as a contemporary of Cymbeline.

Augustus too had no sons of his own to inherit the rule. Augustus too by an early marriage had a single daughter, Julia. Augustus too then mar-

ried a beautiful girl, Livia, and she was a divorcee (not a widow) with a son by her first marriage. (She was also pregnant with what turned out to be a second son.)

Julia, the daughter of Augustus, had been married to Agrippa (see page I-340) and had a number of children, including two sons. Her husband died in 12 B.C., however, and that left only a pair of infant grandsons to

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succeed if Augustus should die suddenly. Augustus therefore had Julia

marry his stepson Tiberius, as Cymbeline would have wanted Imogen to marry Cloten.

Of course, there were differences between the play and the historical analogy. In history, it was the stepson who was unwilling to make the mar-

riage; in the play, the daughter. In history, the device was successful, for by

the time Augustus died in A.D. 14, his young grandsons were also dead, and Tiberius succeeded to the Imperial throne in peace. In the play, Cymbeline's plan has failed even before the action has begun.

... *with Cassibelan*

The Second Gentleman is interested in just who it is that Imogen has married, and he is told:

*His father
Was called Sicilius, who did join his honor
Against the Romans with Cassibelan,*

-Act I, scene i, lines 28-30

Cassibelan is known to us, through Caesar's writings, as Cassivellaunus. He ruled over the district immediately north of the Thames River in time

time of Caesar's second raid into Britain (54 B.C.). Cassibelan resisted the invader strongly.

Sicilius is an oddly Roman name for a British fighter in an age which had barely yet encountered Roman culture, but he is, of course, an entirely fictitious character, and Shakespeare has a penchant for using



Roman and Italian names for his invented men and women even when this is entirely inappropriate. (The name Cloten, used for the Queen's son, is, however, an appropriate one. A legendary King of Britain, who had supposedly ruled about five centuries before Cymbeline, was named Cloten.)

Sicilius received a second Roman name as a result of his service in the Roman wars. He was called Leonatus ("lion-born").

Sicilius' two sons died in battle against the Romans and Sicilius himself then died of grief at a time when his wife was pregnant. She gave birth after her husband's death, and, as the First Gentleman explains:

***The King he takes the babe
To his protection, calls him Posthumus Leonatus,
Breeds him and makes him of his bedchamber.***

-Act I, scene i, lines 40-42

Posthumus is a Latin name meaning "last." A child born after the death of a father is a posthumous child, since he is the last the father can pos-

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sibly have of a particular woman. The Romans often used Posthumus as

the name for a child born after the death of the father. When Augustus' daughter, Julia, was left a widow by Agrippa's death, she was pregnant.

A son was eventually born who was thus named Agrippa Posthumus, and

here is another echo of the Augustan family situation in *Cymbeline*.

... in Rome ...

With the family circumstances explained, the action of the play begins. The Queen enters with Imogen and Posthumus, toward whom she is feigning sympathy and friendship. Posthumus, newly exiled, is taking sad leave of his bride, Imogen, and is telling her where he may be reached by letter:

***My residence, in Rome at one Philario's
Who to my father was a friend. . .***

-Act I, scene i, lines 97-98

Men of consequence who were exiled from homes in the kingdoms on the outskirts of the Roman realm would naturally gravitate toward Rome. It was after all the seat of power, and a decree of the Senate or, later, of the Emperor, could do much to restore the exile to his homeland, or even place him on a throne.

Where the historical Cymbeline was concerned, a son of his (not a son-in-law), named Adminius, was in fact sent into exile for some reason, about A.D. 40.



... *in Britain*

The play shifts its scene to Rome, but the shift is not only in space, but in time as well. Suddenly, we are not in the Rome of the early emperors at all, but in the Rome of Renaissance Italy some fourteen hundred years later. The very name "Philario" at whose house Posthumus will stay is Italian rather than Roman, and the play continues to mingle bits of Augustan Rome with bits of Renaissance Italy to the end.

The Italian portion of the action that is now taken up by Shakespeare is from one of the tales of the *Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio, and Shakespeare was too negligent, or lazy, to try to convert the tale to a Roman setting.

In Rome, Philario and some friends are talking of Posthumus. One of those friends says:

Believe it, sir, I have seen him in Britain.

-Act I, scene iv, line 1

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The speaker's name is Iachimo and that name is one of the numerous versions of Jacob (an equivalent English version is James). Iachimo is a medieval Italian name, not a Roman one.

Another gentleman at the table, who is identified as "Frenchman," says:

I have seen him in France.

-Act I, scene iv, line 11

There were no France and no Frenchmen in Cymbeline's time, of course. The directions that precede this scene say also that "a Dutchman and a Spaniard are present," though neither of these speaks. The presence of a Spaniard is possible, if by that we mean a member of one of the Celtic tribes that then inhabited the peninsula called "Hispania" by the Romans. A Dutchman, however, is as impossible as a Frenchman.

When Posthumus arrives, the Frenchman greets him by recalling a prior meeting:

Sir, we have known together in Orleans.

-Act I, scene iv, line 36

A town did exist at the site of modern Orleans even in the time of Cymbeline. This Gallic town was captured and destroyed by Julius Caesar in 52 B.C. It was later rebuilt by the Romans and given the name of Aurelianum, of which "Orleans" is a corruption.



Yet despite Shakespeare's casual anachronisms in this scene, he does not make the mistake of calling Posthumus an Englishman. When Posthumus enters, Philario says:

Here comes the Briton.

-Act I, scene iv, line 29

... *th'Arabian bird* ...

Posthumus no sooner arrives but he falls into a discussion of the relative intensities of virtue of the women of different nations and begins to boast about the fidelity of his own Imogen. (This is similar to the tragic boasting of Collatinus at the siege of Ardea, see page I-205.)

Iachimo undertakes to prove that Imogen's vaunted fidelity can easily be broken. All he asks is a letter of introduction from Posthumus to give him entry and wagers a large sum against Posthumus' diamond ring (given him by Imogen) that he will bring back proof of intercourse with her.

The bet is taken and Iachimo travels to Britain. As soon as he sees

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Imogen, however, his heart misgives him. Her beauty and evident nobility daunt him and he soliloquizes:

*If she be furnished with a mind so rare,
She is alone th'Arabian bird, and I
Have lost the wager.*

-Act I, scene vi, lines 16-18

The phoenix was, in legend, an Arabian bird. There was only one phoenix in existence and, after a long life of five hundred years or so, it reproduced itself by building a nest of spices to which it set fire. It died in the flames, singing melodiously, and out of the ashes a new phoenix was born. (Is this a symbol of the one and only sun, which sets in flames only to rise afresh the next morning? For another theory, see page I-663.)

The phoenix is a symbol of uniqueness and it is in this respect that Iachimo compares Imogen to it, for he has a cynical view of the commonness of feminine virtue.

... *like the Parthian* ...

Iachimo intends the assault just the same, and if the direct approach fails, he will try deceit. He says:

*Arm me, audacity, from head to foot,
Or like the Parthian I shall flying fight-*

-Act I, scene vi, lines 19-20

The Parthian cavalry (see page I-61) was particularly noted for its habit of swarming in to attack, then go racing away. If pursued, the Parthian



horsemen would rise in their saddles, even as they were galloping, turn, and let loose a last volley of arrows. This "Parthian shot" could do great damage and the Parthians may have used the entire maneuver as an indirect device to lure the enemy into a wild and undisciplined pursuit

... for *the Emperor*

Iachimo's direct assault does fail. He pretends that Posthumus is leading a life of extreme lechery in Rome and suggests that Imogen reply in kind. Imogen refuses to believe the report and repels the suggestion indignantly, Iachimo at once pretends he has only been testing her and shifts ground. He says:

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*Some dozen Romans of us and your lord-
The best feather of our wing-have mingled sums
To buy a present for the Emperor;*

-Act I, scene vi, lines 185-87

To Shakespeare, following Holinshed's dating of Cymbeline's rule, the Roman Emperor mentioned here is Augustus. Indeed, Cymbeline would

have, by Holinshed's dating, have died twelve years before Augustus.

By the more likely later dating of Cymbeline's rule, however, the later years of his reign (in which time the play is set) would be found in the reign of Augustus' stepson, Tiberius, who died in 37, or even in the reign of Augustus' great-grandson, Caligula, who died in 41.

Our Tarquin . . .

Iachimo pretends that the plate and jewels bought for the Emperor are in a large trunk and asks permission to keep the trunk in Imogen's bedroom for safekeeping for one night before he leaves to return to Rome the next day.

Imogen agrees and the trunk is duly delivered. It does not contain jewels, however. That night, when Imogen is sleeping, the trunk opens and

Iachimo himself steps out and advances to the bed, saying:

*Our Tarquin thus
Did softly press the rushes ere he wakened
The chastity he wounded. Cytherea,
How bravely thou becom'st thy bed . . .*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 12-15

This is a reference to the tale of the rape of the Roman matron Lucretia

by Sextus Tarquinius (see page I-206). Cytherea is one of the names of

Venus (see page I-162).



... *the Gordian knot* ...

Iachimo is no Tarquin, however. He makes no attempt to rape Imogen; he wants only to win the bet. He notes the details of the room and takes off Imogen's bracelet as physical proof that he has been with her. The bracelet comes off easily, or, as Iachimo says:

As slippery as the Gordian knot was hard.

-Act II, scene ii, line 34

The tale of the Gordian knot dates far back. The Greeks had a legend

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that during a period of internal unrest in the Phrygian kingdom in Asia Minor in the ninth century B.C., an oracle declared that the proper person to select as next king would soon arrive in a wagon. Gordius, a peasant, did arrive in this fashion and was at once declared king. Gordius dedicated

his wagon to Jupiter (Zeus) after fastening its pole to the yoke by a very intricate knot of bark with the ends hidden inside.

The legend arose that anyone who could untie this "Gordian knot" would conquer all the East, but for centuries attempts to untie it failed, so

that "Gordian knot" came to be used for any difficult or even insoluble problem. Finally, in 333 B.C., Alexander the Great, passing through the old Phrygian capital (called Gordium), solved the problem neatly. He cut the knot with his sword and went on to conquer all the East.

The tale of Tereus ...

Iachimo even took pains to note what it was Imogen was reading at the time of falling asleep:

*She hath been reading late
The tale of Tereus. Here the leafs turned down
Where Philomel gave up.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 44-46

Apparently she is reading Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (see page I-8), which was written during the reign of Augustus and would, by Shakespeare's conception of the time of the play, have been a current best seller.

The book was one of Shakespeare's favorites and the tale of Tereus inspired *Titus Andronicus*, see page I-405.

A clock then strikes (the same anachronism found in *Julius Caesar*, see page I-280) and Iachimo leaves.

... *Julius Caesar smiled* ...

Meanwhile there is trouble brewing between the Roman Empire and



the island of Britain. The tribute paid by Britain is in arrears and Augustus has sent an ambassador to demand its payment Philario tells this to Posthumus and gives it as his opinion the Britons will pay rather than fight. Posthumus stoutly insists there will be war, saying:

*Our countrymen
Are men more ordered than when Julius Caesar
Smiled at their lack of skill but found their courage
Worthy his frowning at.*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 20-23

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Caesar had become aware of the island of Britain in the course of his conquest of Gaul, for he discovered that the Gauls were obtaining help from their fellow Celts on the island. He felt it necessary to do something to discourage the Britons, yet did not like to commit too great a force while leaving a still restless Gaul at his back. He therefore planned a quick raid.

In August 55 B.C., he ferried two legions (ten thousand men) across what we now call the Strait of Dover and landed them on the Kentish coast. It did not turn out to be easy. The Britons (as Shakespeare has Posthumus say) did not fight with the discipline of the Roman legions, but they fought with reckless courage, as all the Celtic enemies of Rome did.

After three weeks, Caesar was glad enough to take his men back to Gaul, with an embarrassing number of casualties and nothing much to show for it. To avoid a serious loss of face, he had to plan a second and considerably larger invasion the next year.

Proud Cleopatra . . .

The conversation is interrupted because of the return of Iachimo, who claims to have won his bet. Posthumus is incredulous, so Iachimo begins to describe Imogen's bedroom:

*-it was hanged
With tapestry of silk and silver; the story
Proud Cleopatra, when she met her Roman
And Cydnus swelled above the banks, . . .*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 68-71

This refers to the first meeting of Antony and Cleopatra at Tarsus on the Cydnus River (see page I-343). This had taken place about forty years before the play's period by Holinshed's reckoning; eighty years before



by
ours.

This and further details convince Posthumus. In shame and despair, he strips the diamond ring from his finger and hands it over, crying:

*It is a basilisk unto mine eye
Kills me to look on't. . .*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 107-8

The basilisk is the fabulous serpent which kills with its glance (see page I-150).

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. . . *old Saturn*

The shamed Posthumus, left to himself, is in agony over Imogen's supposed infidelity, made worse by his memory of her apparent virtue-which now seems to him to have been but hypocrisy. He says:

*Me of my lawful pleasure she restrained
And prayed me oft forbearance-did it with
A pudency [modesty] so rosy, the sweet view on't
Might well have warmed old Saturn.*

-Act II, scene v, lines 9-12

Saturn (the Latin version of the Greek Cronos) was the chief of the Titans (see page I-11) and the father of Jupiter (Zeus). The thought of a god who was still older than the chief of the gods naturally gave to Saturn/

Cronos the picture of ancientness.

What's more, Saturn (Cronos) must originally have been an agricultural deity who was pictured with a sickle. There was confusion with "Chronos," the Greek personification of Time, who mowed down every-

thing eventually. Saturn (Cronos) therefore came to be "Father Time" as

well, and more ancient than ever.

Imogen is thus pictured as being capable of inspiring the very oldest with a feeling of sexual desire.

. . . *granted Rome a tribute*

The Roman ambassador, Caius Lucius (quite unhistorical), arrives at Cymbeline's court and demands the lapsed tribute, saying:

Cassibelan thine uncle,



*Famous in Caesar's praises no whit less
Than in his feats deserving it, for him [Caesar]
And his succession granted Rome a tribute,
Yearly three thousand pounds, which by thee lately
Is left untendered.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 5-10

This was the result of Caesar's second invasion, in 54 B.C. This time he crossed the Channel with a fleet of eight hundred ships and no less than five legions, including two thousand cavalry. He drove the Britons back step by step to the Thames, where Cassivellaunus (Cassibelan) took up the fight. He fought most resolutely, practicing a scorched-earth policy

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when he retreated and trying to persuade the southern tribes to burn the Roman ships. His skill and perseverance did not avail against Julius Caesar in the end, and he was forced to capitulate.

... *"Came and saw and overcame"* ...

This was by no means a disgraceful defeat for the Britons. As Cymbeline's Queen points out:

*A kind of conquest
Caesar made here, but made not here his brag
Of "Came and saw and overcame." With shame,
The first that ever touched him, he was carried
From off our coast, twice beaten.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 22-26

Julius Caesar, it seems, had marched into Asia Minor in 47 B.C., after his short stay in Alexandria (see page I-321). In Asia Minor an army had been raised against him by Pharnaces, ruler of Pontus, a land which for forty years had been grimly fighting Rome. Pontus' strength had reached the vanishing point, however, and at the Battle of Zela (a town on the western border of Pontus) Pharnaces' army broke and fled almost at once.

Julius Caesar then sent a brief message to Rome, designed to show the rapidity of his victory: *Veni, vidi, vici*. The usual translation is "I came,



I saw, I conquered," but Shakespeare's "Came and saw and overcame" is just as good. (I have invented a rather lame translation of my own to catch

the alliteration as well: "Went, watched, won.")

Cymbeline's Queen is, however, being a bit boastful herself. Caesar was beaten off the first time with some shame, but the second invasion

was a clear victory for him, if not an easy one. Still, he did not remain on

the island, though he did arrange for a formal annual tribute. Yet things

might have gone worse for Britain if Caesar had not been reluctant to try

to support a permanent force in the island with Gaul still not securely in

Roman hands. It would be different a century later.

... *Lud's Town* ...

The Queen goes on to say that Caesar might easily have been entirely

overthrown, especially at one point when a storm had wrecked some of

his shipping. (This took place in the course of the first raid, actually.) When that happened, Cassibelan

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*Made Lud's Town with rejoicing fires bright
And Britons strut with courage.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 32-33

"Lud's Town" is London, so called because the legend makers who contrived the early history of Britain spoke of a King Lud who, presumably, founded a town on the site of present-day London. This is stated by Geoffrey of Monmouth (see page II-3), who makes Lud a brother of Cassivelaunus and his predecessor, so that London would, by that account, have been founded about 66 B.C.

Actually, the first knowledge we have of London is as a fortification founded by the Romans in their conquest of the island soon after Cymbeline's death, a full century after the supposed founding by Lud. Nor is there any actual reason outside the legend-filled chronicles of Geoffrey and others of his sort to suppose there was ever a king named Lud (like Lear, he may have originated as a Celtic deity) or that London was originally called "Lud's Town."

... *that Mulmutius* ...

Cymbeline cites Britain's proud and ancient history:



*Our ancestor was that Mulmutius which
Ordained our laws-*

-Act III, scene i, lines 55-56

According to the legends, Mulmutius was the sixteenth King of Britain, reigning about 400 B.C., and he was the first to have established a law code. He was the son of Cloten, whose name Cymbeline's stepson bore.

Cymbeline goes on to make Mulmutius even more ancient still, by saying:

*Mulmutius made our laws,
Who was the first of Britain which did put
His brows within a golden crown and called
Himself a king.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 59-62

This would make Mulmutius prior to Lear, hence earlier than 800 B.C. and certainly earlier than the founding of Rome. Cymbeline may be boasting here that Britain has had kings, and therefore civilization, longer than Rome.

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. . . *the Pannonians and Dalmatians*. . .

Cymbeline feels no real enmity to the Romans, however, despite this friction now between them. He says to the ambassador, Caius Lucius:

*Thou art welcome, Caius.
Thy Caesar knighted me; my youth I spent
Much under him;*

-Act III, scene i, lines 69-71

This is mentioned in Holinshed, and, of course, the Caesar referred to here is Augustus, not Julius.

While it is unlikely that Cymbeline was knighted by Augustus in anything like the medieval sense, it was customary for the Romans to hand out meaningless honors to client kings. It pleased the kings and kept them

faithful to Roman interests. Cymbeline did maintain friendly relations with Rome throughout his reign, and Rome's gjmcrack honors doubtlessly played a role.

In the play, though, Cymbeline does not preserve the peace but plans to continue withholding the tribute. This is not wild chauvinism; he feels he can get away with it:

*I am perfect
That the Pannonians and Dalmatians for
Their liberties are now in arms, a precedent*



Which not to read would show the Britons cold.

-Act III, scene i, lines 73-76

The Pannonians were tribes inhabiting that section of modern Hungary west of the Danube. The Dalmatians were tribes inhabiting the interior of modern Yugoslavia. They were indeed fighting Rome.

This was Augustus' fault. He was a man of peace, no brilliant warrior like his great-uncle Julius. Having obtained rule over the entire Empire

by his defeat of Mark Antony (see page I-370), his chief concern was to find some easily defensible boundary behind which the Empire could settle

down to a permanent peace.

To do this he felt he had to have the broad Danube River as Rome's boundary on the north. To reach that river, Augustus had to institute a naked war of aggression against the independent tribes that still lived to

the south of that river. By 9 B.C. the Roman legions had reached the Danube all along the line and it did indeed become the boundary of the Empire, a boundary that was to remain reasonably intact for four centuries.

However, the tough Pannonian and Dalmatian tribes did not accept Roman occupation easily. In the latter years of Augustus' reign, they kept

rebelling and it was necessary for Roman troops to do the job over several

times. As a matter of fact, it was the necessity of pacifying the frontier

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that kept Augustus and his successor, Tiberius, from ever dreaming of overseas adventures. For that reason, the tribes of Britain were safe whether they paid tribute or not.

It was only after the death of Tiberius that Rome's Continental boundaries were quiet enough to make feasible an invasion across the Channel and permanent occupation of Britain.

... in Cambria ...

While war threatens between Rome and Britain, the maddened Posthumus can think only of revenge. He has instructed Pisanio, his loyal servant, to give Imogen a letter he has sent; a letter which will send her on a wild-goose chase. In the course of that chase, he plans to kill her.

The appalled and bewildered Pisanio gives the letter to Imogen. It tells her that Posthumus has secretly returned to a corner of Britain to see her again, despite the sentence of death hanging over him if he is found in that country. He says:

... Take notice that I am in Cambria at Milford Haven ...

-Act III, scene ii, lines 43-44

"Cambria" is that portion of Britain now known as Wales. Wales did not exist by that name till well after the Anglo-Saxon invasion, four cen-



turies after Cymbeline's time. The word "Wales" is from an Old English term meaning "foreigner."

The Welsh themselves call their land "Cymru"-that is, the land of the "Cymry" ("fellow countrymen")-and it is this Cymru which was Latinized as Cambria.

Milford Haven is an excellent harbor in the southwest corner of Wales. A town by that name now exists on the northern shore of that harbor.

The heir of Cymbeline . . .

The scene now shifts to Wales, toward which Imogen and Pisanio are traveling. There we meet an old man and two stalwart young men. It is no surprise to anyone used to romances that the two young men are the lost sons of Cymbeline, stolen as infants. The old man describes himself as a loyal British soldier who had been falsely accused of treason and convicted. His property had been taken from him and himself sent into banishment. In revenge, he tells the audience, he kidnapped the King's sons before leaving the court and had brought them up in the wilderness. He speaks of the elder:

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*This Polydore,
The heir of Cymbeline and Britain, who
The King his father called Guiderius . . .*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 86-88

He also identifies the younger:

*. . . the younger brother Cadwal,
Once Arviragus . . .*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 95-96

Guiderius and Arviragus are the names of Cymbeline's sons as given in Holinshed, and Guiderius, the elder, is said to have succeeded Cymbeline.

There is nothing about the kidnapping of the sons and their life as outlaws, of course; that is pure romance.

And as a matter of fact, Guiderius and Arviragus may be inventions of later legend makers anyway; concocted to fill in historical gaps.

From Roman records, we have several other names applied to Cymbeline's sons. There was Caractacus (the Latin version of the British name

Caradoc), who was to fight the Romans doggedly and heroically for seven years. A second son, Togodumnus, died in battle against the Romans, and a third son, Adminius (see page II-57), was a traitor.

As for the false names given the brothers by the exiled soldier, Polydore is a Greek name, but Cadwal is Celtic enough. There was a historical man by that name (also written Caedwalla or Cadwallader). He was a Welsh war leader who defeated the English King of Northumbria in 633 and laid northern England waste in the last major offensive of the Welsh against the invading Anglo-Saxons. Cadwallader was also the name of a Welsh prince in the mid-twelfth century.



The old warrior has taken a new name for himself also:

*Myself, Belarius, that am Morgan called,
They take for natural father.*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 106-7

Morgan is also a Celtic name, still popular among the Welsh. Yet the best-known Morgan in Celtic legend is a woman-Morgan le Fay, the enchantress sister of King Arthur, and the malevolent cause of most of the troubles that crop up in that legend.

... *Sinon's weeping*

The scene shifts back to Pisanio and Imogen, who have now arrived in Wales. The time has come when Pisanio must either obey his master and
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kill Imogen, or disobey. He chooses the latter course and shows Imogen the order to kill her sent by Posthumus.

Poor Imogen is thunderstruck and fears that Posthumus' action will undermine the reputation of handsome men generally, for:

*True honest men, being heard [to speak] like false Aeneas,
Were in his time thought false, and Sinon's weeping
Did scandal many a holy tear...*

-Act III, scene iv, lines 59-61

Aeneas' falseness in connection with Dido (see page I-20) and Sinon's connection with the Trojan horse (see page I-210) were favorite references of Shakespeare's.

Pisanio promises to send Posthumus false word that he has killed Imogen and he urges the girl to don man's disguise and remain in Milford Haven, where the Roman army will soon arrive, and perhaps Posthumus with them.

He also gives her some medicine to use in case of stomach upset. He had received the medicine early in the play from the Queen and what he doesn't know is that the Queen thought it was poison. And what the Queen doesn't know is that Cornelius, the physician, mistrusting her, didn't give her real poison but only a temporary sleeping draught.

Pisanio then returns to court to avoid suspicion in connection with Imogen's disappearance.

... *crossed the Severn*



Lucius, the Roman ambassador, accompanied by Cymbeline and the British court, is also traveling westward toward Milford Haven. Cymbeline has gone as far as he can, but sends some men along as further escort, saying:

*Leave not the worthy Lucius, good my lords,
Till he have crossed the Severn.*

-Act III, scene v, lines 16-17

The mouth of the Severn River is at the boundary between England and Wales. It is the longest river in England, some 210 miles long. To the Romans it was the Sabrina River, and both the English name, Severn, and the Welsh name, Hafren, are versions of that.

Its chief tributary is the Avon River, which joins it from the east some twenty miles from the Severn's mouth. On the Avon, about twenty-five miles upstream from that junction, is the town of Stratford-on-Avon, a town immortalized as the place of Shakespeare's birth.

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Fidele, sir . . .

Imogen, in her man's disguise, comes across the cave home of Belarius and his two supposed sons (her own full brothers). No one is there, for they are out hunting, and, very hungry, she enters and eats. The hunters return, find her eating, are struck with "his" beauty, and all are suddenly friends. (There is something very like the movie *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in this scene.) The young men ask her name and she says:

*Fidele, sir. I have a kinsman who
Is bound for Italy; he embarked at Milford;*

-Act III, scene vi, lines 60-61

Thus, she accounts for her westward journey. The name she chooses, Fidele, is from the Latin *fidelis* ("faithful"), thus advertising the virtue which Posthumus mistakenly denies her.

Thersites' body . . .

A brief scene makes it clear that Fidele has joined her brothers and their supposed father in an idyllic existence.

Along comes the serpent, however, in the shape of Cloten. He has forced Pisanio to tell of Imogen's whereabouts and he has conceived the



clever
notion of putting on Posthumus' clothes and raping Imogen while
wearing
them, to avenge Imogen's earlier slights of his courtship.

He encounters Guiderius (his stepbrother), however, and there is
first
a quarrel and then a fight. Cloten is killed and Guiderius cuts off his
head
and throws it in the stream.

Meanwhile, Fidele is back in the cave, suffering from a stomach upset.
She takes the medicine given her by Pisanio and falls into a deathlike
trance.

The brothers find her, think her dead, and are heartbroken. They
must
give her all due burial rites and must do the same for Cloten, who, after
all, is a prince. They approach the latter task with bad grace, however,
and
Guiderius says, resignedly:

*Pray you fetch him hither.
Thersites' body is as good as Ajax'
When neither is alive.*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 251-53

Thersites was the very symbol of the vituperative and dishonorable
soldier (see page I-93), while Ajax was second only to Achilles as the
Greek champion at Troy (see page I-86).

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His foot Mercurial . . .

After singing dirges over the bodies and strewing flowers over
them,
Belarius and the brothers leave.

Imogen wakes, sees the body next to her, and judging by the
clothes,
thinks it is Posthumus. She says:

*/ know the shape of's leg; this is his hand,
His foot Mercurial, his Martial thigh,
The brawns of Hercules; but his Jovial face-*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 309-11

The "foot Mercurial" in Imogen's fevered description refers to Post-
humus' fleetness, since Mercury, with his winged feet, was the speedy
messenger of the gods. The thigh was like that of Mars, the muscles
like
those of Hercules; but the face, as majestic as that of Jove (Jupiter),
was
gone.

She can only think that everything Pisanio had told her was a lie
intended
to lure the unsuspecting Posthumus into the clutches of Cloten. She
shrieks at the absent Pisanio:



*All curses maddened Hecuba gave the Greeks,
And mine to boot, be darted on thee!*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 313-14

Hecuba, the aged Queen of the Trojans (see page I-85), was the very symbol of maddening misfortune.

Siena's brother

Meanwhile, the Roman invasion is on the way. Lucius, the Roman ambassador, asks after reinforcements from Rome and is told by a Captain:

*. . . they come
Under the conduct of bold Iachimo,
Siena's brother.*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 339-41

This is another switch to Renaissance Italy, for Iachimo is described as the brother of the Duke of Siena. Siena is a city 120 miles northwest of Rome. To speak of its Duke would have meaning in the Renaissance but certainly not in Augustan Rome.

Another anachronism comes immediately after when Lucius comes upon

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Imogen, still cradling the headless corpse, and asks the identity of the dead body. Imogen hides the truth by answering:

Richard du Champ.

-Act IV, scene ii, line 377

This is an excellent Norman-French name, but one that did not become possible till nearly a thousand years after the time of Cymbeline.

Lucius is instantly attracted to Imogen, who is still in her disguise as the youth Fidele, and "he" enters Lucius' service as his page.

The Roman legions . . .

The war begins. A Lord reaches Cymbeline and interrupts his concern over Cloten's disappearance to tell him:

*The Roman legions, all from Gallia drawn,
Are landed on your coast,*

-Act IV, scene iii, lines 24-25



Actually, there was no Roman invasion of Britain in Cymbeline's time. There was a threat of one, no more, in connection with the flight of Cymbeline's son, Adminius, to Rome (see page I-57).

Adminius requested help of Caligula (Rome's third Emperor, who, unlike the first two, was young and mad) so that he might be placed on the British throne.

In general, Rome helped those who requested such help because in this way the great city gained another puppet whose land was eventually absorbed. In this case, though, Caligula did nothing more than send an army to the Channel coast of Gaul. It seemed to him that an attempt to cross the Channel would involve risks not worth the gains, and perhaps he

wasn't entirely mad at that moment. Later historians, uniformly unsympathetic to Caligula, say he told his army to gather sea shells and consider those the spoils of war.

It was after the death of both Cymbeline and Caligula that the real invasion came.

Stand, stand . . .

Posthumus has received word that Imogen has been killed and now he repents his action bitterly, even though he still thinks she has been unfaithful. To punish himself, he has come to Britain and plans to dress like a peasant and fight the Romans till he is killed.

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The battle between the Romans and Britons that now begins is fought in Wales, in the near vicinity of Belarius' cave. Posthumus, in peasant disguise, beats Iachimo in single combat and disarms him. Iachimo, feeling the disgrace of being beaten by a peasant, considers it a punishment for his betrayal of Imogen and repents his action.

The battle turns against the British and Cymbeline is captured. At this moment, however, Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus join the fight on the British side, in a narrow lane where a few stalwart men can defy an army.

Belarius cries out:

*Stand, stand! We have th'advantage of the ground.
The lane is guarded. Nothing routs us but
The villainy of our fears.*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 11-13

Posthumus, in his peasant costume, joins them. They rescue Cymbeline, hearten the fleeing Britons, and turn the tide of battle, for now Lucius and



Iachimo appear and state the Romans have lost.

Apparently, Shakespeare got the idea for this bit of the play from a passage in Holinshed, concerning a Danish invasion of Scotland in 976. When the Scots army was falling back, a Scottish farmer, Hay, and his two sons defended a narrow lane in just the way Belarius and his sons are described as doing here. The Scots were heartened, and the Danes began to imagine Scottish reinforcements had arrived, so that the battle went to the Scots at last.

. . . thou Thunder-master . . .

At the end of the battle, Lucius is taken. Posthumus is also captured, claiming to be a Roman and therefore slated for execution-something he feels is deserved. In prison, however, Posthumus sleeps and dreams. In his dream, his dead family-father, mother, two brothers-all appear, protesting to Jupiter over Posthumus' undeserved miseries.

Sicilius, Posthumus' father, says:

*No more, thou Thunder-master, show thy spite on mortal
flies.
With Mars fall out, with Juno chide, that thy adulteries
Rates and revenges.*

-Act V, scene iv, lines 30-32

The "Thunder-master" is Jupiter (Zeus), whose weapon is the thunderbolt. Sicilius is urging Jupiter to pick on someone his own size, and,

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as a matter of fact, the Greek myths are ample evidence that Jupiter did do so on occasion.

For instance, he quarrels briefly with Mars (Ares) in the *Iliad*. After Mars has been wounded by Diomedes, the war god goes complaining to Jupiter, who says, "Renegade, be off, or else stop whining! I dislike you more than all the rest of my family put together."

And, of course, Juno (Hera) is notorious for her jealousy of Jupiter's numerous illicit amours. Many myths show her scolding him for them and following his loves and their children with grim persecution (see page I-24).

Lucina . . .



Posthumus' mother wails that the gods were against her son from the beginning:

*Lucina lent not me her aid, but took me in my throes,
That from me was Posthumus ripped,*

-Act V, scene iv, lines 37-38

Lucina was the Roman goddess of childbirth and was eventually considered one of the aspects of Juno, who as queen of heaven and wife of Jupiter presided over all the facets of wife- and motherhood. As a result, the goddess of childbirth was often called Juno Lucina, and Posthumus' mother is pointing out that she died in childbirth.

Jupiter himself makes an appearance and is annoyed at the complaints against his management:

*Poor shadows of Elysium, hence, and rest
Upon your never-withering banks of flow'rs.*

-Act V, scene iv, lines 67-68

Elysium is the paradise of the Greek myths (see page I-13). Jupiter assures them he will take care of Posthumus:

*Our Jovial star reigned at his birth, and in
Our temple was he married.*

-Act V, scene iv, lines 75-76

The "Jovial star" is the planet Jupiter, considered by astrologers to be a fortunate planet under which to be born.

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Augustus lives . . .

Jupiter leaves a tablet on Posthumus' breast which remains there when the sleeper wakes. It contains a not very subtle forecast of the future. Before Posthumus can be led to the gallows, he is called before the King.

It is the last scene of the play now and that last scene becomes a series of disclosures. First, the Queen is reported dead, partly of grief over the disappearance of her son. Before dying, she confesses that she had married for power, not love, that she had planned evil against Imogen and against Cymbeline himself, hoping to make Cloten king.

Lucius next enters as a prisoner of war, but warns that one battle will not end the matter. He says:

Augustus lives to think on't. . .



-Act V, scene v, line 82

There is an echo here of a battle that Augustus *did* live to think about. While no real battle was lost by the Romans in Britain in Augustus' lifetime, one was lost in Germany. Under a rather incapable Roman general,

Publius Quintilius Varus, three legions were led into the dark forests of Germany and there they were ambushed and destroyed in A.D. 9 by the German tribesmen.

No such defeat had battered down a Roman army in more than two centuries. Augustus was prostrated with grief. He could "think on't" but he could not avenge; he simply could not replace the three legions at that time without placing an unacceptable tax burden on the Empire. The story

is that Augustus could only beat his head against his palace walls crying "Varus, Varus, give me back my legions!"

... our wanted tribute ...

But disclosures continue, one after the other. Imogen, still as Fidele, asks where Iachimo got the diamond ring he is wearing, and Iachimo reveals the story of his vile deceit. Following this, Posthumus and Imogen are reunited (but not before Posthumus in one last misfortune strikes Imogen while she is in her disguise). The true identity of Guiderius and Arviragus is then revealed.

Even Lucius is freed and the war ends in a feast of love, for Cymbeline says to Lucius:

*Although the victor, we submit to Caesar
And to the Roman empire, promising
To pay our wanted tribute ...*

-Act V, scene v, lines 460-62

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In this way, Shakespeare makes it seem that while Britain became part of the Roman Empire, it did so by defeating the Romans and taking on the yoke voluntarily. Ridiculous, to be sure, but nothing is too ridiculous to swallow if it natters national pride.

According to Holinshed, once Cymbeline was dead and Guiderius King, the tribute was stopped again and war began once more.

Actually, the sons of Cymbeline do seem to have been more anti-Roman than their father. At least the Romans said they were, and with a new Emperor, Claudius, at the helm, they launched an invasion in 43 under Aulus Plautius.

Some forty thousand Romans landed in southeastern England, rapidly

subduing the area south of the Thames, killing off some of Cunobelinus' (Cymbeline's) sons, and leaving one, Caractacus, to carry on the fight.

Caractacus fought bravely for some years, then fled to what is now southern Wales, carrying on the fight among the hills until 51, when he was finally captured and sent to Rome as a prisoner. His family went with



him and they were all well treated by Claudius, who was not at all a bad Emperor.

With this begins the history of Roman Britain, a more or less prosperous time for the island, compared with what went before and after; a time that endured for three and a half centuries.

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The Tragedy of

HAMLET

Prince of Denmark

r

ROMAN rule over Britain came to an end in 410, when the last legions left the island. Germanic tribes were tearing at the western provinces of the Empire and Roman soldiers could no longer be supported in Britain.

Before the end of the century, pagan Germanic tribes—Jutes, Saxons, and Angles, from what is now the North Sea coast of Germany and Denmark—invaded the eastern and southern coasts of Britain. For two centuries they fought the Celts, and little by little, Britain, the island of such legendary kings as Lear and such dimly historical ones as Cymbeline, was converted into Anglo-Saxon England.

England never made up all the island, however. The northern third came to be known as Scotland, and this retained much of the original Celtic flavor, despite cultural infiltration from the south. The western peninsula of Wales also remained Celtic, and, in fact, remained independent till the thirteenth century.

By 600 England had reached almost its present extent, and the next four and a half centuries—till the crucial year of 1066, when the island fell to Norman conquerors from across the Channel—makes up the period of Anglo-Saxon England.

Two of Shakespeare's plays are set late in this period, but in neither case is the setting in England itself. Rather, the plays are set just beyond the English borders in lands intimately connected with England.

The events in the two plays are roughly contemporary, but one is considerably less historical than the other, and we will consider that less historical one first.

That play is *Hamlet*, which, by all odds, is Shakespeare's best known and most popular play. Its scene we know from the title itself, when that is given in full: *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. In the play, Denmark is pictured as a martial and imperial nation.



This is strange to us, to whom Denmark is the epitome of the peaceful, civilized little state that minds its own business, does not annoy its neighbors, and has achieved a kind of society that is very largely stable, healthy, and pacific.

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And indeed, the recent history of Denmark is most peaceful. It was involved in the Napoleonic wars, it fought against Prussia and Austria in 1864, it was invaded by Germany in 1940, but in every case its role was strictly defensive. It was a victim, not a participant.

The last time Denmark deliberately entered a war of her own accord, in the role of aggressor, was in 1700. In that year its king, Frederick IV, who had just ascended the throne the year before, joined with Poland and Russia against Sweden. Sweden was then ruled by the half-mad military genius Charles XII, who was only eighteen years old at the time. Charles XII struck like lightning and Denmark was out of the war, neatly defeated, in a matter of a few months. Never again did she attack a neighbor.

But Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* about 1600 or 1601, at which time Denmark was still an imperial nation. From Copenhagen, the Danish King, who at the time was Christian IV, ruled not only over Denmark, but over certain German duchies to Denmark's south, over all of Norway and portions of what is now southern Sweden, and even over such polar islands as Iceland and Greenland. It had not been long before that that Denmark had ruled all Sweden; Sweden had not gained complete independence until 1523.

Nor is it the Denmark of Shakespeare's time that appears in *Hamlet*—but a far older Denmark, even bloodier and more threatening and aggressive.

Denmark had entered European history about 800, when it, along with Norway, was the home base of Viking raiders who made life hell for the inhabitants of the British Isles and the Frankish kingdoms on the Continent.

About 950 Denmark began to succumb to Christianity, but that did not, at first, soften its imperialism much. Its aggressions began to take on a



national character, however, and to be more than the feats of freebooting pirates. One of its first great kings, Sven I (called Forked-beard, because he wore one), established Danish rule over Norway, reduced Sweden to impotence, and invaded England. He died almost immediately after the initial success of his English invasion, but under his son Canute the Danish Empire reached its height. From 1014 to 1035 Canute was supreme in northern Europe.

After Canute's death, England broke away (though ruled for a few years by his sons), but Denmark continued its expansionist policies in other directions.

The history of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden during the Viking period before the time of Sven I is shrouded in darkness. We have nothing but legendary material within which we have the usual difficulty in picking out kernels of truth, and in which we scarcely know how to recognize a kernel of truth even if we come across one.

The legendary material reaches us in a book written about 1200 by a Danish historian, Saxo Grammaticus, whose history of Denmark comes

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down to 1186. It is a Danish analogue of such British histories as that of Geoffrey of Monmouth (see page II-3), and gives an account of some sixty legendary Danish kings, some of whom can be equated with mythical Norse gods.

Included in Saxo Grammaticus' tales is a bloody one concerning a prince he called Amlethus. It includes a dead father and a usurping uncle, and Amlethus must feign madness while plotting a revenge he finally achieves.

There is no sign whatever of any historical basis of the story, and it may have had its origin in dim tales of Viking feuds. Nevertheless, Saxo Grammaticus was close to the greatest imperial period of Danish history, and the atmosphere of Canute's empire seems to have crept into his version of the old legendary tale.

At least, as the tale worked its way through the centuries, ending at last in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the flavor of the period of Canute still lin-



gered, so that while *Hamlet* contains not one clearly historical character or event, comparisons can still be made with actual events in the eleventh century, and we might set the time of *Hamlet* as 1050.

Who's there

The play opens on the battlements of a gloomy castle, where, from the start, an atmosphere of uneasy brooding is established. Two sentries approach each other and each is nervous and suspicious. One of them, Barnardo, on hearing the other's footsteps, is all tension at once and calls out:

Who's there?

-Act I, scene i, line 1

But the other, Francisco (here is an example of Shakespeare's penchant for Italian or Roman names even under the most inappropriate circumstances), is just as suspicious, and demands:

Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself.

-Act I, scene i, line 2

The castle is that of the King of Denmark and is located in Elsinore. This town, known to the Danes themselves as Helsingor, is located in the northeast corner of the island of Sjaelland (Zealand in the English spelling).

Sjaelland is an island of respectable size, being about as large as Rhode Island and Delaware put together, and is located in the Baltic Sea between continental Denmark and Sweden. Indeed, Elsinore is at the point of closest approach to Sweden. The strait separating it from the Swedish city of Helsingborg is only three miles wide.

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The island of Sjaelland is the core of Denmark for all that it is not part of the continent. Over one fourth of the Danes live on this island, and its present capital (and largest city), Copenhagen, is located on it. Copenhagen is on the eastern shore of the island, about twenty-five miles south of Elsinore, and is also on the eastern limit of Danish dominion. To the east, it is separated by fifteen miles of water from the important Swedish city of Malmo.

It may seem odd that Denmark's capital is at the easternmost border of the nation, for generally (though not always) a capital city is centrally located. This, however, is usually true when the city is founded, and tradition may keep it in the same location even after the changes of history place it in a strongly eccentric position. (Thus, when Washington,



D.C.,
was made the American capital in 1800, it was centrally located as far as the original thirteen states were concerned, but now that the United States has grown westward, it is located far on the nation's eastern edge.)

Copenhagen was established as Denmark's capital about 1170. (This, by the way, fits the 1050 date of the play's events. The court is at Elsinore because Copenhagen is not yet the capital.) In those centuries both Elsinore and Copenhagen were centrally located, for southernmost Sweden was in Danish hands, so that the island of Sjaelland lay between *two* pieces of continental Denmark. In fact, southernmost Sweden was still part of Denmark in Shakespeare's time and was not given up by Denmark till 1658, nearly half a century after Shakespeare's death.

The actual setting visualized by Shakespeare seems to have been Kronborg Castle in Elsinore. This was by no means an ancient edifice in his time. It had been constructed in 1580, only twenty years before *Hamlet* was written, by Frederick II, the father of the Danish King reigning at the time of writing.

The castle still stands and Shakespeare's play has made it world-famous. In fact, *Hamlet* is played in its courtyard occasionally.

... *like the king* ...

It is midnight and Francisco, having been relieved, exits. Another sentry, Marcellus, with a friend, Horatio, joins Barnardo, and the three gather round, talking in whispers.

The cause of the nervousness appears at once. Barnardo and Marcellus have seen a Ghost and are trying to convince the skeptical Horatio of the fact. The task is not hard, for they have barely begun when the Ghost appears again.

It is important, even crucial, to think of the Ghost not as we think of ghosts generally, but as the men of Shakespeare's time thought of them.

We are all familiar with the play (even in the unlikely case that we have never read it or seen it), and we think of the apparition as "the ghost of Hamlet's father."

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But it was no such thing to the Elizabethan audience. The Ghost is a spirit that can take on any shape for any purpose. The most that can be said is that it *looks* like Hamlet's father, that it has taken on the *shape* of Hamlet's father. What it *really* is, no one can say.

Shakespeare makes that plain at every step. When it appears to the three men, Barnardo describes it as:

In the same figure like the king that's dead.

-Act I, scene i, line 41



Then, nudging Horatio, who's staring openmouthed, he says:

Looks 'a not like the king?

-Act I, scene i, line 43

Then, when Horatio finally finds his tongue and (as the best-educated of the three) addresses the Ghost in stately syllables, he says the same thing in more complicated fashion:

*What art thou that usurp'st this time of night,
Together with that fair and warlike form
In which the majesty of buried Denmark
Did sometimes march?*

-Act I, scene i, lines 46-49

"Usurp" is to take without right. The Ghost was a supernatural visitation and by ordinary natural law the place and time should have been free of it. In that sense, it usurped the time of night, and, in addition, it usurped the appearance of the dead King. Horatio seems to feel that it is not really the ghost of the dead King but merely a spirit who assumes that appearance for purposes of its own. In fact, Horatio is questioning the spirit as to its real identity.

If we don't understand this clearly, then we don't really understand the play.

. . . the ambitious Norway. . .

The Ghost disappears without speaking, and the three men, badly shaken, marvel over the accuracy of its likeness. Horatio says:

*Such was the very armor he had on
When he the ambitious Norway combated:
So frowned he once, when, in an angry parle,
He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 60-63

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Norway had indeed been part of the Danish Empire of Sven and Canute, and it is tempting to see in the martial deeds ascribed to the dead King a reflection of those historical Danish conquerors.

As for Poland, the land of the "sledded Polacks," it emerged as a nation in the tenth century under Mieszko I, who ruled from 960 to 992.

Under his successor Boleslav I, a contemporary of Sven and Canute, Poland even became an expansionist nation, conquering eastern Pomerania on the south Baltic coast. Northward across the Baltic was the southern coast of Sweden, which was then Danish territory. Poland and Denmark were thus neighbors.

After the death of Boleslav in 1025, the tide of Polish conquest receded.



In 1031 Canute took eastern Pomerania from Poland, so that the reference to smiting the Polacks reflects history accurately enough.

But "on the ice"? A battle of Poles and Danes in eastern Pomerania need not be on the ice, but it is interesting to speculate that perhaps Shakespeare had heard of such a battle in the east.

Denmark in the generations following Canute had carried on wars against the eastern pagans (a kind of crusade), and a century later this task was taken over by the Germans. The armed German bands, known as the "Teutonic Knights," formed about 1200 and gradually took over the southern shores of the Baltic Sea, displacing the Danes. By 1237 they controlled the lands we now speak of as Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (which, since 1940, have been part of the Soviet Union).

From this as their base they planned to expand eastward into the Russian lands themselves, for those were being thrown into utter ruin by the irresistible advance of the Mongols. Only the lands of Novgorod in northwestern Russia had remained free of direct Mongol domination (at the price of heavy tribute), and it was Novgorod that adjoined the new dominions of the Teutonic Knights.

At that time, Novgorod was led by Prince Alexander. In 1240 he defeated the Swedes on the Neva River (near the site of modern Leningrad) and gained the name of Alexander Nevski as a result. In April 1242 he met an army of invading Teutonic Knights on the melting ice of Lake Peipus, which now lies on the boundary between Estonia and Russia. The ice broke under the heavily armored German horsemen and their army was destroyed. The Russians won an overwhelming victory and put a final term to the eastward ambitions of the Teutonic Knights.

This, the most famous battle on the ice in history, was between Germans and Russians, rather than between Danes and Poles, and it had been a victory for the Eastern power, not the Western, but it is the picture that inevitably arises in connection with the passage quoted above.

. . . young Fortinbras

Horatio goes on to wonder if perhaps the ghostly visitation is an omen

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of troubled times to come. One can see his reasoning. The old King had

conquered the Norwegians (as Sven and Canute had in actual history), but

there was a movement afoot among the Norwegians to break free again

(as there had been in actual history, by the time of Canute's death in 1035).

Horatio describes the present situation:

*Now, sir, young Fortinbras
Of unimproved mettle hot and full,
Hath in the skirts of Norway here and there
Sharked up a list of lawless resolute,
For food and diet, to some enterprise
That hath a stomach in't; which is no other,
As it doth well appear unto our state,
But to recover of us by strong hand
And terms compulsatory, those foresaid lands*



So by his father lost;

-Act I, scene i, lines 95-104

The King of Norway, whom the old King of Denmark had defeated, was named Fortinbras. It was his son, also named Fortinbras, who was trying to reverse the earlier decision, now that the old Danish King had died.

There is no historical King of Norway by the name of Fortinbras. The name is French and means "strong-in-arm." It was customary for the early Scandinavian kings to be known by some distinguishing characteristic.

There was Sven Forked-beard himself, for instance, and his father was Harold Bluetooth. There was also an Eric Bloodaxe, a Harold Hardrada ("severe ruler"), and so on. A king with the surname of Strong-in-arm isn't so farfetched.

In actual history, though, Canute of Denmark had taken Norway from Olaf II. Olaf had accepted Christianity and had worked to ensure the general conversion of the Norwegians. As a result he is known as Olaf the Saint, having been canonized in 1164, and is the patron saint of Norway.

But he was defeated by Canute anyway and died in a final battle in 1030.

In 1035, after Canute's death, the son of Olaf did indeed try to regain Norway. The son's name was Magnus.

... the mightiest Julius ...

Barnardo agrees that this may be the significance of the Ghost. It portends war for Denmark and it wears the form of the old King as a way of foretelling that war-the war brought on in response to that King's conquests.

Horatio concurs in this analysis of the situation and draws an analogy from history:

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*In the most high and palmy state of Rome,
A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
The graves stood tenantless, and the sheeted dead
Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets;*

-Act I, scene i, lines 113-16

This is a reference to the legends that arose concerning the night before the assassination of Julius Caesar. Shakespeare had used those legends in his play *Julius Caesar* (see page I-273), which he had written a year before *Hamlet*.



Horatio refers not only to ghostly manifestations, but to more normal astronomical ones in connection with the assassination, for he goes on to say:

*. . . the moist star,
Upon whose influence Neptune's empire stands,
Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 118-20

The "moist star" is the moon, which is neither a star nor moist. In ancient times, however, the term "star" could be used for any shining heavenly object, and Shakespeare, as always, is steeped in ancient learning and is oblivious to the new astronomy burgeoning in his day. The moon is "moist" not in itself but in that it affects the oceans ("Neptune's empire").

The moon causes the tides, in other words.

There was, however, no lunar eclipse on the night before the assassination.

. . . the trumpet to the morn

The Ghost momentarily returns and again Horatio speaks to it, attempting to persuade it to reveal something of the country's fate that it might be useful to know. It is about to speak when the sound of a cockcrow is heard and it disappears. Horatio says:

*/ have heard,
The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn,
Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
Awake the god of day, and at his warning,
Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,
Th'extravagant and erring spirit hies
To his confine;*

-Act I, scene i, lines 149-55

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This is a well-known superstition and, like many superstitions, makes most sense when it is taken in context. Before modern times, the night was without the glaring artificial illumination that destroys it today; it was dark indeed. In that darkness, it was easy to imagine supernatural

visitations, when every dead tree might be a monster and any vanishing owl a ghost. Since these sights were not seen by day, it could well be reasoned that ghosts and spirits vanished with the onset of day.

Then, prior to modern times, the mechanical clock did not exist and the periods of nighttime could be distinguished only crudely. It was enough to be able to divide the night into three or four "watches" (a word taken from the practice of leaving sentries on watch, each taking part of the night

in turn). For instance, we might speak of the early portion of the night, the middle portion, the later portion, and then the actual coming of the



morning.

Naturally, men would be anxious for morning, especially in the long winter nights, and would welcome any sure sign of its approach. The crow of the rooster would be a sign early seized on and it could be used to mark the latest portion of the night. Thus, in the Bible, when it is described

how all-unknown the time of the Second Coming is, the watches of the night are mentioned: "Watch ye therefore; for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or

in the morning" (Mark 13:35).

And if spirits vanish with the day, the crowing cock is a natural signal for them. Within its context it all makes sense.

In fact, Marcellus offers a refinement of the legend by stating that on Christmas Eve the cock crows all night long so that no spirit dare budge abroad. Horatio is the epitome of rationality (he doesn't actually say the

cock's crow is a signal for spirits to depart; he merely says "I have heard" it was so) and now he replies courteously, but cautiously, to Marcellus' eager credulity:

So have I heard and do in part believe it.

-Act I, scene i, line 165

But it is morning and Horatio suggests that this matter of the Ghost be imparted to Prince Hamlet. If the Ghost takes on the appearance of the old King, he may be most willing to speak to that old King's son.

... our dear brother's death

With this first mention of Prince Hamlet, the hero of the play, the scene shifts to the court, where the new King and his Queen sit. The King speaks and at once describes the situation:

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*Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death
The memory be green. . .*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 1-2

The old King's name had been Hamlet. Father and son were named alike here in Denmark, as in Norway. To distinguish them I will refer to the old King as the "elder Hamlet."

The reigning King of Denmark, who has succeeded the elder Hamlet, and who now speaks, is Claudius. Shakespeare has chosen an aristocratic

Roman name for the purpose. (It was the name of a patrician family in the

time of the Republic and one from which several of the early emperors were

descended-including Claudius, the fourth Emperor, under whom Britain was conquered in the years following Cymbeline's death.)



In Saxo Grammaticus' original tale, the new King was named Feng, and perhaps Shakespeare did well to change that.

Apparently, from these first words of Claudius, the elder Hamlet has died quite recently, and the new King is the elder Hamlet's brother. (The word "brother" might be used in a general sense, indicating merely a close relative, an associate, or a good friend, but in this case, the play makes it clear enough that the new King is actually the younger brother, in the strictest sense of the word, of the old.)

One point which the play does not make clear is why the younger brother succeeded to the throne rather than the elder Hamlet's son. We are used to thinking, these days, that a dead king is automatically succeeded by his oldest son, but the notion of automatic succession according to strict order of family connection is a rather recent notion, and prevails in a rather restricted portion of the world. Modern audiences can easily be confused by this and lose some of the significance of the play.

In many parts of the world, and in Europe too, in the early Middle Ages the king was generally chosen from the royal family but not necessarily according to any strict order of relationship. It was more important to select a mature member of the family, skilled in war and leadership, than to choose the most nearly direct descendant. In that era of short life and violent death, it was common for a dead king to be survived by an infant son who could not possibly be the kind of king a nation needed in a barbaric age. A younger brother of the dead king was a much more logical choice.

Of course, when the young prince grew to maturity he might well consider himself to have a reasonable right to the throne and he might choose to fight for it. The king (uncle to the prince) might be well aware of this possibility and might choose to have the young child put out of the way in one manner or another—execution, imprisonment, banishment. This sort of thing happened frequently enough to make the "wicked uncle" a kind of stock character in adventure stories, second only to the "wicked step-mother."

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The Elizabethan audience would know this well. The notion of legitimacy in English and French history had brought on wars and civil wars. The notion of the "wicked uncle" was also well known, for among the English kings, John had been a wicked uncle to the "rightful king," the young Arthur of Brittany, and Richard HI had been a wicked uncle to the "rightful king," the young Edward V. Both events had been immortalized in plays Shakespeare had already written: *King John* and *Richard III*.

The Elizabethan audience would therefore well understand that a king's brother might succeed to the throne to the exclusion of the king's son. They would also understand quite well, without being told, that the son would be in mortal danger. Shakespeare did not have to explain this, and since he doesn't and times have changed, modern audiences may be in-



sufficiently aware of this point.

... now our Queen

Generally, though, the son who is excluded from the throne is quite young-like the twelve-year-old Arthur of Brittany, or the thirteen-year-old Edward V. The excluded Prince Hamlet, however, is not a child at all. Why, then, did he fail to succeed? That point is never made explicitly clear -but we can guess. Claudius goes on to say:

*... our sometime sister, now our Queen,
Th'imperial jointress to this warlike state,
Have we, as 'twere, with a defeated joy,
With an auspicious and a dropping eye,
With mirth in funeral, and with dirge in marriage,
In equal scale weighing delight and dole,
Taken to wife.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 8-14

The elder Hamlet's wife, Gertrude, (Prince Hamlet's mother) has married the new King, her erstwhile brother-in-law.

This has significance. It is a practical act of statecraft. Where a succession is not utterly undisputed, it can be bolstered by any connection with a previous reign, particularly where the previous reign was popular or well established. A new king might pretend he was the adopted son of the old king, or he might marry the old king's daughter. Or he might marry the old king's wife, assuming she were still young enough to beget an heir. (In that age of early and common death in childbirth, there was a considerable turnover in royal wives and surviving queens were often quite young.)

In the original story, as given by Saxo Grammaticus, the brother-successor marries the queen of the brother-predecessor, and in the time Saxo was writing, this would have been a rather ordinary thing to do. In

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fact, we can cite a case in actual history that involves Canute, whose historical existence hovers so over the background events in *Hamlet*.

When Canute became England's King in 1016, he barred the throne to the young sons of the earlier native king, Ethelred II. To lend an air of continuity to the government and to reconcile the English somewhat to the existence of a Danish king, Canute therefore married Emma, the widow of Ethelred.

This is not to say that the tale of Ethelred, Canute, and Emma directly influenced Shakespeare, or even Saxo Grammaticus, but it is the sort of



thing that went on in the eleventh century. What seems to us a kind of involuted and upsetting family relationship was not at all uncommon in the time in which the play is set and seemed less uncommon to Elizabethan audiences, who were closer to that time, than to ourselves.

To Norway . . .

Having announced the succession and the marriage (for the benefit of the audience), King Claudius turns to matters of state. He sends two messengers, Cornelius and Voltmand, to Norway with a message. He says:

*. . . we have here writ
To Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras-
Who, impotent and bedrid, scarcely hears
Of this his nephew's purpose-to suppress
His further gait herein . . .*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 27-31

The situation in Norway is curiously analogous to that in Denmark. In Norway, the elder Fortinbras has been succeeded by a younger brother (not named), as in Denmark the elder Hamlet has been succeeded by a younger brother, Claudius. In Norway, a son of the older brother, named like his father, Fortinbras, is excluded from the succession, while in Denmark, a son of the older brother, named like his father, Hamlet, is also excluded from the succession. The younger Fortinbras, however, is occupying himself in foreign wars, while the younger Hamlet will have a different part to play.

. . . to thy father

Claudius then turns to Laertes, the son of a valued courtier. (Here we have a Greek name, for Laertes, in the Greek legends, is the name of the father of Ulysses.) King Claudius knows that Laertes has some request and he urges him to speak freely without fear of being denied. He says:

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*The head is not more native to the heart,
The hand more instrumental to the mouth,
Than is the throne of Denmark to thy lather.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 47-49

This extravagant expression of affection for Laertes' father (who, as it turns out, is named Polonius) is odd. There is nothing in the play that justifies it directly. Polonius is presented as a tedious old bore who is always wrong and whose advice, when followed, leads to disaster. Why, then, should the shrewd Claudius value him so highly?

The logical presumption is that Polonius had been of great use to Clau-



dius in matters of which we are not told; perhaps in helping the new King gain his throne. Did he maneuver the nobles into supporting the brother rather than the son? Did he persuade the widowed Queen to marry her brother-in-law? We can only guess.

If anything like this is true, though, it would explain the strong dislike that Prince Hamlet holds for the old courtier; a dislike that is otherwise not easily explained.

The Elizabethan audience, much more accustomed to the intrigues of royal succession than we are, might be expected to catch on to this sort of thing as a matter of course.

. . . return to France

Laertes' request is a simple one. He has been abroad, being educated. He returned, as a loyal subject, to attend the coronation, but now that that is done he asks:

*My dread lord,
Your leave and favor to return to France,*
-Act I, scene ii, lines 50-51

The University of Paris was the most famous educational institution of western Europe in the later Middle Ages and it is to be assumed that that is where Laertes was being educated. To be sure, it had its formal beginnings only about 1150 at the earliest—a full century after the time suggested for *Hamlet*, but that is a minor anachronism as Shakespearean anachronisms go—

. . . thy nighted color . . .

Claudius grants permission to Laertes and next turns to the figure who

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until now has maintained himself as a somber, silent reproach on the gay spectacle, for he is clad in garb of deepest mourning.

The Elizabethan audience does not need to be told that between King Claudius and Prince Hamlet there can only be enmity, that the very



existence of one is a deadly danger to the other. They address each other with freezing, calculated politeness.

The Queen throws herself between. Her name is Gertrude and that, at least, is Teutonic and is a form of Saxo Grammaticus' original "Gerutha." She is wife to one and mother to the other and loves each. She urges friendship, saying to her son:

*Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted color off,
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 68-69

A modern audience might be appalled by her insensitivity. Young Hamlet had loved his father and was wearing mourning in his memory. Not much time had passed since the father's death; how could she urge him to remove it?

Well, to be sure, Gertrude is not very bright. She shows herself through-out the play to be a rather shallow person, not very clear on what is going on and unaware of the consequences of her actions.

Still, there might be more. The royal marriage had interrupted the mourning and there comes a time when an ostentatious reminder of the King becomes an insult to the new. Hamlet is the natural opponent of the succession and if he continues to wear mourning it is clear enough that he feels there is no joy in the new King. It amounts almost to a claim for the throne on his own behalf. All of this would be plain to Claudius and to the Elizabethan audience (wise in the ways of disputed succession) as well.

Gertrude, sure that this open enmity is bound to lead to the death of either husband or son, or both, sees no way out but to urge her son to put off his mourning.

... the most immediate to our throne

Hamlet insists on the mourning, describing it in terms of deep grief for his father and thus, by implication, disowning any political significance.

Claudius, we may well suspect, doesn't believe this at all. He joins his voice to urge the end of the mourning costume and even offers a bribe:



*. . . think of us
As of a father, for let the world take note
You are the most immediate to our throne.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 107-9

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He clearly and openly declares Hamlet as his heir. If, then, Hamlet will allow Claudius to reign quietly, he may count on the succession next time round. The point is, though, can Claudius be believed? Hamlet makes it plain enough, as the play goes on, that in his opinion Claudius cannot.

. . . school in Wittenberg

Claudius combines the carrot with a touch of the stick. Like Laertes, Hamlet has been out of the country, receiving an education. Unlike Laertes, he is not to be allowed to return, for Claudius says:

*For your intent
In going back to school in Wittenberg,
It is most retrograde to our desire,
And we beseech you, bend you to remain
Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye,*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 112-16

It sounds like love, but almost anyone could see through that. Once outside the country, Hamlet may intrigue, gain foreign allies, raise armies.

At court, he will be in sight of his suspicious uncle and stepfather, and in his grasp too.

An education at Wittenberg is much more anachronistic than one at Paris. Wittenberg is a German city about fifty-five miles southwest of Berlin and a little over three hundred miles south of Elsinore. The University of Wittenberg, where, presumably, Hamlet has been studying, was not founded till 1502.

City and university grew famous because in 1508, only six years after its founding, a young monk, Martin Luther, was called to teach in it and accepted. It was there that Luther evolved the tenets of what is now called Lutheranism. It was to the doors of a church in Wittenberg that in 1517 he nailed his list of ninety-five theses on which he challenged debate, an act which initiated the Protestant Reformation.



The University of Wittenberg became the intellectual center of Lutheran-ism, and, in a way, this makes it fitting that Hamlet is being educated there, for the Denmark of Shakespeare's day (in common with the rest of Scan-dinavia) turned Lutheran. The Reformation was introduced into Den-mark under the royal sponsorship of King Christian III in 1536.

This passage might also be helpful in explaining something about the succession. After all, Prince Hamlet is not too young to be king and he is (as is explained on two occasions later in the play) popular with the peo-ple. Why was he passed over?

One answer is that he was not there; he was not on the spot when the succession was decided. The elder Hamlet had, as is made plain later in the

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play, died quite suddenly and unexpectedly, and Prince Hamlet was far away in Wittenberg at the time. The news of his father's death would have had to reach the, Prince (and we can imagine that Claudius would have done what he could to delay it) and then the Prince would have had to make his way to Elsinore.

It would all take time, and when he arrived, he found the succession settled-against him.

Hyperion to a satyr

The Queen adds her pleas to the King's, asking Hamlet to stay at court. Hamlet, under no illusions, knowing that if he does not stay voluntarily he will be kept by force, grants a cold and formal obedience, which the King accepts with a fulsomeness that can easily be considered sarcastic.

The court departs and Hamlet is left alone to vent his rage. He finds the new King a completely unworthy successor to the old. He compares the two in extreme terms, saying of his father:

*So excellent a king, that was to this
Hyperion to a satyr,*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 139-40

Hyperion was the Titan god of the sun (see page I-11). A satyr was a fertility spirit of the woodlands, with the horns, hoofs, and hindquarters of a goat. The reference to the satyr is significant since the most remarkable property of the satyr in the legends was (as is befitting his position as a fertility spirit) his insatiable sexual desire.

We may assume that Hamlet is scarcely objective here. He hates Clau-



dius and can see no good in him, but nothing we see of Claudius in the play *directly* matches Hamlet's low opinion. In fact, if we accept Hamlet's estimate of Claudius, the play loses much of its point.

Like Niobe, all tears . . .

But Hamlet is angry with his mother as well. She had seemed so in love with his father, had mourned so at his death-

. . . she followed my poor father's body
Like Niobe, all tears . . .

-Act I, scene ii, lines 148-49

Niobe was one of the more pathetic characters in Greek myth. She had six sons and six daughters and boasted her superiority to the goddess La-

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tona (Leto), who had only one son and one daughter. Of course, Latona's children happened to be the god Apollo and the goddess Diana (see page I-130), and they avenged the slur on their mother by shooting down Niobe's children with their divine arrows. Niobe wept endlessly at their deaths until, in belated compassion, the gods turned her into stone-a stone which still welled water.

A little month . . .

Hamlet is angered at the fact that his mother has married again, and we can understand that. It is very common to have a child consider a dead parent betrayed when the surviving parent marries again. We need not think it was such an unlikely thing to happen, though, just because Hamlet thinks the new husband so inferior to the old. It is quite possible that Gertrude, still beautiful, might have thought quite differently.

The elder Hamlet was a warlike king with all the martial virtues, and there is nothing in the play to cause one to suspect that he was not far more at home in a suit of armor than in the marriage bed. Claudius, as a "satyr," may very well have been a much better lover than the elder Hamlet, and much more adept at flattering and pleasing shallow Gertrude too. It is easy indeed to suppose that Gertrude was sure she had made a better



bargain the second time round.

What is most significant, though, is to pay attention to just what it is that bothers Hamlet about the marriage. He says:

*. . . within a month-
Let me not think on't; frailty, thy name is woman-
A little month . . .*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 145-47

He's angry also at the fact that it was the marriage of a sister-in-law and brother-in-law. This was incestuous, according to the strict rules of the church in such matters. However, state reasons often made it necessary for royalty to make marriages that would be considered incestuous under ordinary conditions, and the church was usually indulgent in such cases.

Yet even in the matter of incest, what bothers Hamlet is another aspect of it:

*. . . O, most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 156-57

It is the *haste* with which the marriage took place, the rapidity. That's what bothers him really, for he comes back to it again and again.

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Now, this preoccupation of Hamlet with the wickedness of his mother's marriage is taken by many critics to signify Hamlet's unconscious love for his mother. They find a Freudian explanation for the events of the play and think Hamlet is striking at Claudius in resentment at the stranger entering his mother's bed.

This theory falls apart if we remember that it is not the marriage itself that bothers Hamlet most, but its *haste*. What does the haste signify?

Just this. We can imagine Hamlet spurring madly toward Elsinore from Wittenberg, anxious to arrive there in time to put in his claim for the throne.

And when he gets there, perhaps merely a matter of a couple of weeks after his father's death, he finds that Claudius has already announced his forthcoming marriage to Gertrude and that this marriage, with the feeling



of continuity it provides to the previous reign, is all that is needed to sway the support of the nobility (whose voice is crucial in choosing the king) toward Claudius.

Had Gertrude waited, Hamlet would have been there and probably gained the throne. After that, she would probably have been free to marry Claudius, if she had so desired, with no complaint or objection from Hamlet.

It had not been the marriage, then, that had foiled Hamlet, but the *haste* of it. When he arrived, he found he could do nothing but accept the verdict and attend the actual marriage-and wear mourning as a gesture of defiance.

And if the marriage had been arranged in haste by Polonius, that would be more than enough to explain Hamlet's attitude toward the old courtier.

Would not Gertrude have realized that by her act she was excluding her son from the throne? Perhaps not. One can imagine that she would be flattered at being so desired by the new King and perhaps pleased with the thought of remaining Queen (she could not have remained Queen if her son became King, but only Queen Mother, which is not the same thing at all) and, on top of that, it may never have occurred to her that her son would be annoyed. After all, he would still be next in line to the throne, wouldn't he?

But Hamlet would most certainly be annoyed, and horribly annoyed too.

We have evidence for that from the history of Canute.

When Canute married Emma, the widow of the previous King, that action excluded Emma's children from the succession. Indeed, after Canute's death, his own children inherited (one of them Emma's) to the exclusion of the older children by the previous marriage. Seven years after

Canute's death, one of those older children finally succeeded to the throne in 1042. He was Edward the Confessor.

Edward, as his name implies, was a pious king, and was, in fact, eventually sainted. He was mild and gentle and yet he managed to work up a profound dislike for the mother who had kept him from the throne. Once



he became King he placed his mother in a nunnery and, what's more, kept her there the rest of her life.

Shouldn't Hamlet, who is precisely in the Confessor's position, and who is no saint, also feel most unkindly toward his mother's action? What need

of an Oedipus complex, then? It is not unconscious love that explains his actions, but a very conscious and reasonable hate.

Perchance 'twill walk . . .

To cap off Hamlet's depression over the manner in which he has lost the succession is his feeling that he is boxed in; there is nothing he can do to change the situation. He says:

But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

-Act I, scene ii, line 159

And it is precisely at this moment of despair that Horatio, Marcellus, and Barnardo enter. Hamlet is astonished to see Horatio, a schoolmate from Wittenberg, but as soon as the amenities are over, Horatio retails the news of the Ghost to Hamlet.

Hamlet is thunderstruck, questions them carefully, with his agile mind working at top speed. Finally, he agrees to come to the battlements, saying:

/ will watch tonight.

Perchance 'twill walk again.

-Act I, scene ii, lines 242-43

(This reminds one of a piece of theatrical slang. "The ghost walks" means that salaries are about to be paid. One tale to account for the origin of the phrase involves an actor who was playing the Ghost in a production of *Hamlet*. Displeased with the lack of pay, he went on strike and refused, at the last moment, to do his bit. The harassed manager was forced to hand over immediate payment and the word went out: "The ghost walks.")

Hamlet's mood changes from despair to one of keenly watchful waiting. What the Ghost signifies he cannot say, but any change is bound to give him an opening. He says:

All is not well.

*I doubt some foul play. Would the night were come!
Till then sit still, my soul.*



-Act I, scene ii, lines 255-57

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. . . his will is not his own

The scene now shifts to the house of Polonius, the courtier. Laertes, his son, is making ready for his journey to Paris. With him is his sister, Ophelia, with whom, apparently, Hamlet is in love. (The reasons for Hamlet's dislike for Polonius must be deep indeed, considering that the old man is the father of his beloved Ophelia.)

Laertes warns his sister not to take Hamlet too seriously. Even if the prince is sincere in his affection, he may be helpless to do anything about it. He explains:

*His greatness weighed, his will is not his own.
For he himself is subject to his birth.
He may not, as unvalued persons do,
Carve for himself; for on his choice depends
The safety and health of this whole state;
And therefore must his choice be circumscribed*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 17-22

This is a careful explanation of something Ophelia ought surely to understand, and of something, for that matter, that the Elizabethan audience could well take for granted.

Yet what then? Does it not apply to a King's marriage as much as to a Prince's? Is this not an indication that the marriage of Claudius and Gertrude, however much a love match it might be, was first and foremost a matter of state? And if so, is it reasonable to suppose that Hamlet, however noble a stance he may take with regard to the marriage, is not aware of the state reason for it-and most resentfully.

. . . a borrower nor a lender. . .

In comes Polonius to send his son off with a very well-known set of sententious maxims that Laertes bears with admirable patience, and which includes literature's greatest gift to the small of heart, for Polonius says, among other things:

*Neither a borrower nor a lender be,
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry [thrift].*



-Act I, scene iii, lines 75-77

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How many skinflints who know not one other verse in Shakespeare are letter-perfect in this, to use at the first sign of another's need!

When Laertes has gone, Polonius questions Ophelia as to her brother's words. Ophelia, a submissive daughter, admits they concerned Hamlet, whereupon Polonius independently warns her against the Prince and orders her to withdraw from him.

More honored in the breach. . .

It is night again, and now Hamlet has joined Horatio and Marcellus on the battlements. While they wait, there is the sound of trumpets and cannon, and Horatio, startled, asks the significance. Either Horatio is not a native Dane or he has been too long abroad, for Hamlet must explain that the King is feasting and that every time he drinks, trumpets, drums, and cannon make their joyful noise in celebration. It is a custom, Hamlet says, and goes on to say:

*But to my mind, though I am native here
And to the manner born, it is a custom
More honored in the breach than the observance.
This heavy-headed revel east and west
Makes us traduced and taxed of other nations.
They clepe [call] us drunkards . . .*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 14-19

The phrase "more honored in the breach than the observance" means Hamlet considers it more honorable to break the custom than to keep it. He disapproves of the King's revelry apparently out of a general dislike for drinking bouts and out of a determined distaste for anything Claudius does.

It is important to notice that Hamlet refers to Danes generally as earning a reputation for drunkenness and not to Claudius specifically. It is common in productions of *Hamlet* to show Claudius as half drunk much of the time, but this is utterly unfair and spoils the significance of many of the events in the play.

There is nothing in what we see of Claudius in the play to make us think he is a drunkard. Rather, he is shown always as a shrewd and careful



monarch, an opponent who taxes Hamlet to the full.

... *goblin damned*

And now the Ghost makes its appearance once again. Hamlet is staggered, but nevertheless advances boldly, saying:

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*Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned,
Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
Thou com'st in such a questionable shape
That I will speak to thee. I'll call thee Hamlet,
King, father, royal Dane. O, answer me!*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 40-45

It is clear that Hamlet himself hasn't the slightest idea of the real nature of the apparition. It could be anything. All he knows is that the thing, whatever it is, has assumed the shape of his father, and because of that he will speak to it and accept that shape if that will make it speak to him in turn. He does not say the Ghost is his father. He says "I'll *call* thee Hamlet."

The Ghost beckons Hamlet away as though to some place where they can talk privately, and Horatio is in agony over that. He too is uncertain over the nature of the Ghost and says to Hamlet:

*What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff
That beetles o'er his base into the sea,
And there assume some other horrible form,
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason
And draw you into madness?*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 69-74

But Hamlet will not be held back. Perhaps he is thinking that whatever the Ghost's intentions, the chance that something will come of it that will offer him a way out of checkmate is worth the risk. He says:

*My fate cries out
And makes each petty artery in this body
As hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve.*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 81-83

(The reference is to the beast whose slaying represented the first labor of Hercules. It was an enormous lion of superstrength that infested the valley of Nemea, see page I-58.)

Hamlet breaks away, dashing after the Ghost, and the others can only toil after while Marcellus says in mournful words that have become a common part of the language:



Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

-Act I, scene iv, line 90

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... sweep to my revenge

Alone with Hamlet on the battlements, the Ghost finally speaks, and identifies itself as being what it appears to be:

/ am thy father's spirit

-Act I, scene v, line 9

He then goes on to say what it is he has come for, what it is he wants of Hamlet. Speaking of himself in the third person, he says:

Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

-Act I, scene v, line 25

Hamlet, horrified, demands the details, saying:

*Haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love,
May sweep to my revenge.*

-Act I, scene v, lines 29-31

This is the first indication that *Hamlet* is, in essence, a play about re-venge. In its earliest form, as a tale sung by bards and dealing with crime and revenge among the Vikings, there could have been little subtlety about it. A ruler is killed and the son of the dead man manages to kill the murderer. The accent would be on heroic feats of arms, the son fighting against odds.

By the time of Saxo Grammaticus, the son must use cunning, but there is still no mystery. The murder is open and known.

In the 1580s a version of *Hamlet*, earlier than Shakespeare's, appeared on the English stage. It is forever lost and we know of it only through casual references. The author of this *Ur-Hamlet* (the prefix is German and means "early" or "original") may have been Thomas Kyd, who died in 1595 at the age of only twenty-eight.

Kyd had a penchant for melodrama and for tragedies in the style of Seneca (see page 1-270). His most popular play, *The Spanish Tragedy*, was



published in 1594 and had ghosts in it which permeated and spurred on a tale of revenge. If Kyd wrote *Ur-Hamlet* too, it may have been the play on which he sharpened his teeth for the later *Spanish Tragedy*. It was in that *Ur-Hamlet* that the Ghost was introduced and where the original murder had to be made secret and hidden, or there would have been nothing for the Ghost to reveal.

This product of Kyd's youth must have been terribly overdone.

What

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references we have to it speak of it contemptuously as a piece of blood and bombast. The English dramatist Thomas Lodge wrote in 1596 of a ghost crying like an oysterwife, "Hamlet, revenge!"

Shakespeare kept the Ghost and the revenge motif but must have added enormous subtleties that the *Ur-Hamlet* did not have.

Notice that at this first mention of revenge, Hamlet (a fiery and impulsive individual who seems irresolute only to those who, in my opinion, miss the point of the play) at once promises to achieve it as swiftly as thought. He will find that he cannot, and one point made by the play is that revenge is difficult, and that *useful* revenge may be impossible.

... *that adulterate beast*

The Ghost now tells its story. The official tale of the elder Hamlet's death was that he had been stung by a serpent. The Ghost says, however:

*But know, thou noble youth,
The serpent that did sting thy father's life
Now wears his crown.*

-Act I, scene v, lines 38-40

It is Claudius, then, who is the murderer-the wicked uncle. The Ghost makes that specific and says:

*Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
With witchcraft of his wits, with traitorous gifts-
O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
So to seduce!-won to his shameful lust
The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen.*

-Act I, scene v, lines 42-46



The Ghost speaks not only of incest but of adultery as well. And indeed, in 1576 a French writer, Francois de Belleforest, wrote a version of the Hamlet story from the Saxo Grammaticus original in which Gertrude commits adultery with Claudius while the elder Hamlet is still alive. The same implication is present here in this passage and in a few other places in the play. For the most part, though, Shakespeare ignores this matter and is intent on keeping the duel entirely between Claudius and Hamlet.

Indeed, the Ghost goes out of its way to keep Gertrude out of it. He says:

*Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven*

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*And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge
To prick and sting her.*

-Act I, scene v, lines 85-88

The Ghost cannot explain why Gertrude should have preferred Claudius to the elder Hamlet, except through sheer perversity. He says:

*... lust, though to a radiant angel linked,
Will sate itself in a celestial bed
And prey on garbage.*

-Act I, scene vi, lines 55-57

I can't help but think that this is intended to be ironic and that properly played (except that it would interfere with the intention of the scene) should elicit at least a snicker. The Ghost of the elder Hamlet is describing himself as a radiant angel and we may be excused for suspecting him of lack of objectivity. As for Claudius being "garbage," he at least possessed "witchcraft of his wits." A charming, laughing, witty younger brother may be garbage to an older brother who imagines himself to be a radiant angel-but that same younger brother can look pretty good to a frustrated woman.

... one may smile, and smile ...

But dawn is coming and the Ghost must leave. Hamlet is left alone to plan the revenge. Shakespeare doesn't give us the line of thought in full detail but we can speculate on what it might be-taking into account what follows.

To begin with, Hamlet does not in the least doubt the Ghost, at least not at that moment. It is fair to suppose that the Ghost spoke in such a way as to convince Hamlet completely that it was indeed the spirit of his father speaking. Hamlet says as much to Horatio shortly afterward:



*Touching this vision here,
It is an honest ghost, that let me tell you.*

-Act I, scene v, lines 137-38

Nor does Hamlet doubt that Claudius killed his father. He has ample reason to hate Claudius for having seized the succession from under his own nose and he needs little persuasion to believe anything evil about him. In fact, when the Ghost first reveals Claudius as the murderer, Hamlet breaks out:

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*O my prophetic soul!
My uncle?*

-Act I, scene v, lines 40-41

He had the feeling! He knew it all along!
But if Hamlet is sure the Ghost is truthful, and if he is sure his uncle has indeed murdered his father, and *ft* he has promised revenge swift as thought- Why doesn't he do it?

Why doesn't he seize some opportunity, when he is close to his uncle, or when he can maneuver himself close, to out with a dagger and bring him down?

It is the question one always asks about Hamlet. He is pictured as irresolute, as a man who thinks but cannot act, and very complicated reasons (sometimes involutedly Freudian) are presented as explanations.

But I don't think the reasons are complicated at all. If Hamlet wants only revenge for the sake of revenge; if he wants only to pay back his father's murderer at whatever cost to himself; then, yes, execute Claudius as soon as the King's body is within reach of his dagger.

That, however, is not all that Hamlet wants (if we go by any of a dozen little hints in the play). He wants also to be King. If he were to stab Claudius under conditions that would lead to his own immediate seizure and execution at the hands of horrified soldiers and courtiers, that

would not suit him at all. Even if he managed to kill Claudius and get away whole, how could he then persuade the Danish nobility to make him King?

One cannot openly kill one's way to the throne. Perhaps one could in Viking times, but not in Shakespeare's. Even Claudius did not succeed by open murder. He killed the elder Hamlet secretly, and those who then made him King (including, presumably, Gertrude) did not know of the murder.

Hamlet can undoubtedly drive the King off the throne and secure his own succession if he can reveal the truth about his father's death. He could then kill Claudius, or have him executed, and do so most righteously. Even if he kills Claudius first, he might excuse the deed and gain the throne if he can reveal Claudius to have been a regicide and himself to be an avenger rather than a murderer.

But how can he do that? How can he prove Claudius to be a murderer?

Hamlet has no evidence of the murder except what the Ghost has told him, and who would believe that? That the Ghost exists at all would be backed by the word of three common soldiers, whom no one would believe, and Horatio, whose word *would* carry weight. But who would bear witness as to what the Ghost had said? No one. The Ghost had spoken



only to Hamlet and no one else had heard the tale. And who could bear witness that the Ghost is an honest one and not an evil, lying spirit? No one again. Hamlet could say so, but he is an interested party.

Now if Claudius were a drunken boor, an inefficient king, a dark tyrant,
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the question might not arise. The court might be so pleased at having gotten rid of him that they would accept any tale, however unlikely, as a cover to make the murder seem a righteous execution.

But it is the very nub of the matter that Claudius is a *popular* king. He has the gift of charm, by the Ghost's own admission, and could win Gertrude by that gift. He is shown to us throughout the play as a capable and intelligent king and, except for what he has had to do to get and keep the crown, even a likable one. Later in the play, to be specific, he wins over Laertes at a dangerous moment by a display of courage and intelligence, mingled with his charm.

Can such a king be killed and can that murder be excused through some cock-and-bull story told by a ghost?

If it is thoughts like these that go through Hamlet's mind, he must recognize that he cannot kill Claudius outright and gain the throne, simply

because Claudius *seems* to be such a pleasant and likable fellow. And it is here that the thoughts I have been postulating must reach the surface, for

Hamlet says, in frustration:

*O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!
My tables-meet it is I set it down
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain.*

-Act I, scene v, lines 106-8

Claudius is a villain and should be killed, but he is a smiling villain and therefore dangerous to kill. (Without some sort of analysis following

Hamlet's line of thought in this fashion, the passage about the "smiling, damned villain" sounds like a non sequitur.)

Hamlet grimly writes the thought down for emphasis. He knows himself. He is not the irresolute Hamlet so many of us imagine; he is the impulsive, overeager Hamlet he shows himself to be on several occasions in the play. He makes a notation to impress the fact on his own mind that

he must *not* be overhasty-not if he wants the throne.

... more things in heaven and earth ...

What Hamlet needs is tune-time to work out what to do and to do it so cautiously as not to raise the suspicions of Claudius. Furthermore, he has a

new appreciation of his own dangers. Claudius might object to Hamlet merely on the ground that Hamlet has a grievance, and that produces danger enough for the young Prince. But if Claudius is a murderer and expects the Prince to become an avenging demon if he ever finds out, he must be ten times as suspicious, ten times as uneasy, and Hamlet's life is



therefore ten times as insecure.

Horatio and Marcellus finally come up to Hamlet after the Ghost is gone,
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and for a while the Prince speaks almost at random-his mind is desperately working out expedients and he must keep off his Mends with only an un-occupied part of it, so to speak.

Once he has sorted matters out, however, he moves rapidly. First, he swears Horatio and Marcellus to secrecy. Obviously, if Claudius discovers that Hamlet has been in conversation with the Ghost of his dead father, he will know that Hamlet has learned the truth and will strike out at once.

The rational Horatio swears, but still finds it very difficult to believe what is happening. Hamlet dismisses those doubts with a most famous pair of lines, saying:

*There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.*

-Act I, scene v, lines 166-67

"Your philosophy" (where "your" does not refer to Horatio personally, but is used as an impersonal pronoun) is, in this case, what we would now call "science." (The word "science" did not come to be used in its modern sense till the nineteenth century.)

These two lines have been used for three and a half centuries to beat down what has been conceived to be scientific dogmatism and have usually been so used by mystics of one sort or another.

Nevertheless, scientists are perfectly aware of the truth of these lines-without it there would, in fact, be no need for scientific research-and search humbly for just those things that might as yet be undreamed of. It is the mystics who, for their part, do not search but think they "know"-by revelation, intuition, or other non-rational fashion-and it is they who are usually the arrogant ones.

... an antic disposition ...

Hamlet has bethought himself now of the necessary delaying tactic. He makes Horatio and Marcellus swear never to refer to what has just occurred, no matter how Hamlet himself acts. Hamlet warns them that his own actions may seem odd:

*(As I perchance hereafter shall think meet
To put an antic disposition on),*

-Act I, scene v, lines 171-72



There is no reason to speculate as to whether Hamlet was *really* mad or only pretending. Of course, he was pretending. He says so. Nor is there any mystery as to why he was pretending. It was an extremely sensible thing to do, if we remember to interpret the event not in accordance with

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the prejudices of our time, or even Shakespeare's, but of the considerably earlier time of Saxo Grammaticus' chronicle, from which Shakespeare inherited the madness.

In pagan times a madman was thought to be touched with the divine (see page II-16) and was respected and even feared a little. If Hamlet were mad, any action which in a sane man might have seemed a suspicious move against Claudius' safety might be dismissed as a senseless antic. Furthermore, Claudius would find it difficult to take any action against a mad Hamlet under any circumstances, for the gods would then be displeased and evil might befall the entire nation.

We might wonder if Shakespeare could get away with a device that belonged in pagan times. (In Christian times madmen were thought to be possessed by malevolent evil as a punishment for sin, and far from being sacrosanct, were sometimes tormented most hideously.) Undoubtedly he could, for there was one well-known instance of just such a strategy in what Shakespeare and the men of his time considered sober history. This was the case of Lucius Junius Brutus, who in the time of King Tarquin pretended to suffer from a harmless form of madness (see page I-210) to keep himself from being executed by the suspicious tyrant. Then, when the time came, Brutus threw off the mask and helped establish the Roman Republic.

It is for this reason that Hamlet feels he has to play mad-to gain time and security so that he might devise some plan to make himself king.

Naturally, all this would be a hard job. Hamlet would not relish the role of madman; nor did he see any easy way of handling the shrewd and popular Claudius. He says, gloomily:

*The time is out of joint. O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!*

-Act I, scene v, lines 188-89

... *the very ecstasy of love*

Some time elapses between the first and second act, and during that interval Hamlet apparently labors to establish himself as a madman. The act must be complete, for he can trust no one but Horatio (and perhaps not even him, were it not that he had been part of the affair with the Ghost).

In particular, Hamlet must beware of Ophelia, not for her own sake (for she is quite an artless girl, no more shrewd and worldly-wise than



Queen Gertrude), but because her father is Claudius' closest adviser and because she herself is completely under her father's thumb. What's more, Hamlet is really in love with the girl and therefore particularly vulnerable

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there. It is easy to reason in this way that Hamlet must establish himself as mad to Ophelia most of all-and this is exactly what he does.

The scene is not presented onstage and we see it only through Ophelia's eyes when she runs to her father to describe Hamlet's deliberately mad behavior when he seeks her out. Polonius instantly reaches the wrong conclusion. He blames it on the fact that he had ordered Ophelia to be less friendly with Hamlet and that Hamlet had reacted desperately. He says:

*Come, go with me. I will go seek the King.
This is the very ecstasy of love,*

-Act II, scene i, lines 101-2

. . . aught to us unknown. . .

Claudius has, of course, also been shown ample signs of Hamlet's madness, but he is no fool. Next to Hamlet himself, Claudius is the most intelligent individual in the play, and he doesn't believe the madness. It is easy to guess from the events in the play that he suspects the madness to be exactly what it is, a ruse behind which some plot against himself can be matured.

But Claudius needs evidence of that. It isn't generally pointed out that Claudius' predicament in this play is exactly that of Hamlet. Hamlet wants to kill the King, but the King wants to kill Hamlet. Neither is safe as long as the other is alive. But the King, as well as Hamlet, cannot take the sun-pie road and simply kill. The King is but new on the throne and can scarcely yet feel secure; to kill the son of the preceding King would easily raise enough hostility against himself to hurl him from the throne. Just as Hamlet needs to do more than merely kill the King, but must gain the throne too, so the King needs to do more than merely kill Hamlet, but must keep the throne too.

Claudius needs an excuse to hallow the murder (just as Hamlet does). If Claudius can show that Hamlet is merely pretending madness as a cover for treason, he will be able to execute Hamlet safely-just as, if Hamlet can prove that Claudius killed his brother, and Hamlet's father, he will be able to kill Claudius safely.

We must not look upon the play as a case of Hamlet stalking the King-but as one of Hamlet and the King stalking each other. The suspense arises out of the question of which one will find an opening first.

In the second scene of the second act, Claudius is looking for the opening most strenuously. He has a perfectly innocent reason for endeavoring to investigate Hamlet's madness, since it is only natural that a loving step-father would search out means of helping a dear stepson.

To this end, he calls to court Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who are

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also students at Wittenberg and, like Horatio, good friends of the Prince.

Claudius explains the fact of Hamlet's madness and urges them:



*... by your companies
To draw him on to pleasures, and to gather
So much as from occasion you may glean,
Where aught to us unknown afflicts him thus,
That opened lies within our remedy.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 14-18

There is a chance, after all, that Hamlet, if he is only pretending as Claudius thinks, may be sufficiently off his guard to reveal his plans to his old schoolmates and try to get them to join his party. At the very least, he may reveal himself to be not mad. Even the admission of pretense, without anything more, would give color to the theory of conspiracy.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern agree to serve as spies. We may reasonably assume that they are not novices at court intrigue and that they may guess, even without Claudius having told them so specifically, that Hamlet is in a position to aspire to the throne and that Claudius wants this aspiration nipped. This they are presumably most eager to do, for if they are useful to the King in so secret a matter so closely touching him, they may well be rewarded most handsomely.

Hamlet himself, toward the close of the play, at a time when Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are on the point of coming to a bad end, refuses to show any regret for them, though it is he who has manipulated that bad end. He says:

*Why, man, they did make love to this employment.
They are not near my conscience . . .*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 57-58

... well ended

The ambassadors from Norway return (another indication of the time lapse between Act I and Act II) and that crisis at least is over. The King of Norway has forced young Fortinbras to end his projected war against Denmark. Fortinbras will march against Poland instead and seeks safe-conduct through Denmark.

Polonius comments on the results:



This business is well ended.

-Act II, scene ii, line 85

This does show Claudius as an efficient and capable king. In the crisis

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with Norway, he has prepared busily for war yet he has not neglected diplomacy, and has managed that with such skill and address as to achieve his ends without a shot fired or a man lost.

There is no reason that we can see why anyone in Denmark should hate him except Hamlet-which is exactly what makes Hamlet's task so difficult

... I'll loose my daughter...

But now Polonius approaches the King on the subject that really affects the latter most In fact, when Polonius announces the arrival of the ambassadors and also says that he has discovered the cause of Hamlet's lunacy, the King instantly leaps on the second:

O, speak of that! That do I long to hear.

-Act II, scene ii, line 50

He recognizes Hamlet as a far more immediate danger to himself than Norway is. Polonius, of course, insists on the ambassadors first, since he is far too dull to understand the King's alarm, and the King must give way.

Even after the ambassadors are dismissed, Polonius approaches the matter of Hamlet only with incredible long-windedness. The Queen is irritated, but the King, who must be in an absolute agony of impatience, nevertheless endures it with his unfailing charm.

Finally, Polonius comes out with his theory that Hamlet has gone mad for love.

Claudius is horribly disappointed, surely, that Polonius has come up with this, for he is certain that something much more important must be hiding behind the madness. Yet he can't jump without evidence. All he can do is gently express his doubts. He says:

Do you think 'tis this?

-Act II, scene ii, line 151

When Polonius is volubly certain it is, Claudius says, patiently:

How may we try it further?

-Act II, scene ii, line 159

Polonius has a suggestion at once. Hamlet has the habit of walking in the room in which they then are. Polonius offers to take advantage of the habit:



*At such a time I'll loose my daughter to him.
Be you and I behind an arras then.
Mark the encounter.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 162-64

The King agrees. After all, Hamlet may be off his guard with Ophelia and may reveal what the King wants revealed whether Polonius' theory is right or not.

... *method in't*

Hamlet comes walking in at this point, reading. There is nothing in the play which specifically indicates he has overheard anything at this point, but it helps to make sense of what follows if we suppose he becomes aware of Polonius' plan. It makes sense to suppose that as Claudius and Polonius are earnestly talking, Hamlet approaches the entrance to the room, over-hears them, listens, and does not actually enter until they are done talking.

Once Hamlet enters, Polonius volunteers to tackle him on the spot, for Polonius has a great opinion of his own shrewdness.

Hamlet, on the other hand, has a great dislike for Polonius (for possible reasons I have mentioned earlier), and if he has overheard the old man's plan to use his daughter as a tool, he can scarcely fail to dislike him even more.

Hamlet therefore engages in a grim duel with Polonius. Hamlet's words seem, on the surface, to mirror madness, and yet there is an inner consistency to them that puzzles Polonius.

Hamlet can scarcely enjoy his role as madman and it must give him some relief to be able to stab at his enemies under the cover of that madness, while they, in turn, so concentrate on the madness that they scarcely realize they are being stabbed.

Thus, Hamlet makes veiled references to Polonius' daughter, saying abruptly:

Let her not walk i'th'sun.

-Act II, scene ii, line 185

Whatever meanings may be attached to the warning-and Hamlet himself follows it with a ribald warning-it might also be taken to imply a plea that Polonius not use the girl as bait. If we accept the possibility that Hamlet has overheard Polonius' plan, it may well be that he wishes to spare Ophelia the hurt he must otherwise do her.

Naturally, Polonius is quite blind to this and Hamlet goes on to describe what is contained in the book he is reading:



. . . the satirical rogue says here that old men have gray

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*beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging
thick
amber and plum-tree gum, and that they have a plentiful
lack
of wit. . .*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 198-201

It is impossible to doubt that this is aimed at Polonius directly. It would seem a despairing groan at Polonius' folly (his "plentiful lack of wit") in persisting in using his poor daughter as a weapon.

Polonius, utterly confused by words that seem mad and yet seem to have some meaning he doesn't quite grasp, makes the famous remark:

Though this be madness, yet there is method in't.

-Act II, scene ii, lines 207-8

. . . your ambition . . .

When Polonius, foiled, leaves, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter. Hamlet is unfeignedly delighted to see them, and almost at once, they begin a kind of collegiate wordplay.

Then Hamlet, unable to hide his bitterness and perhaps not entirely on his guard with schoolmates, refers to Denmark as a prison. When Rosencrantz denies it, Hamlet says:

*Why, then, 'tis none to you, for there is nothing either good or
bad but thinking makes it so. To me it is a prison.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 256-57

Rosencrantz sees his opening. So far there would seem no madness in Hamlet and his discontent with Denmark can mean only one thing. It is only necessary to get him to state it. He says:

*Why then your ambition makes it one. 'Tis too narrow for
your mind.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 256-57

But of course the clever Hamlet is not the man to be maneuvered so easily. We might argue that the word "ambition" is a red flag to him. Instantly, he shifts in the direction of madness, countering the accusation that

Denmark is "too narrow" for him with a bit of bathos:

*O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a
king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 258-60

If the false friends had let that go, Hamlet might have been lulled



into security, but Guildenstern presses the matter eagerly, saying:

Which dreams indeed are ambition . . .

-Act II, scene ii, line 261

By the needless repetition of the word, Hamlet suspects exactly what they are after and how they came to Denmark. He forces them to admit that they have been sent for by the King. Once that is clear, their last chance of discovering anything from him is gone.

. . . Hercules and his load. . .

But Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have news to give too. A party of actors is arriving at Elsinore to amuse the court, and Hamlet is very interested. Partly this helps to display Hamlet as the Renaissance man, interested in everything, capable at everything, and partly it is Shakespeare's chance to make some "in comments" on the theatrical world of his time. Thus, at one point, Hamlet asks:

Do the boys carry it away?

-Act II, scene ii, line 368

This refers to companies of child actors, who were becoming popular and offering serious competition to the adult actors. Rosencrantz answers:

Ay, that they do, my lord-Hercules and his load too.

-Act II, scene ii, lines 369-70

In the course of his eleventh labor-getting the golden apples of the Hesperides-Hercules enlisted the aid of Atlas, the giant Titan who held up the sky (see page I-336). Atlas actually obtained the apples while Hercules temporarily relieved him of his load. In later years, when Atlas was visualized as supporting the earth rather than the sky on his shoulder, it was natural to think of Hercules as relieving Atlas of that load.

Rosencrantz's remark can be taken as a metaphorical way of showing how completely the boys "carry it away."

On the other hand, the Globe Theatre, in which Shakespeare's plays



were being presented at the time *Hamlet* was being written, had as its sign a picture of Hercules supporting the globe of the earth (hence "Globe Theatre"), and Rosencrantz's remark may also be an oblique reference to the fact that even the Globe Theatre is not immune to the inroads of the new fashions.

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. . . *Roscius was an actor* . . .

Polonius now enters once more with the news of the actual arrival of the players. Hamlet, who had been acting sane enough when the drama was being discussed, at once shifts into madman full gear. He begins a mad chatter about actors:

When Roscius was an actor in Rome-

-Act II, scene ii, lines 399-400

Quintus Roscius was a famous comic actor in Rome in the first century B.C. Cicero himself did not feel it beneath him to take lessons in elocution and delivery from the actor. When Roscius was sued for a large sum in 76 B.C., Cicero defended him with a speech that became famous. Roscius was even raised to a rank roughly equivalent to the British knighthood by Sulla, who was dictator of Rome from 82 to 79 B.C.

Polonius ignores Hamlet and plows on bravely in his praise of the actors who have arrived. They are so versatile, he says, that:

Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light.

-Act II, scene ii, lines 409-10

Seneca (see page I-270) was the writer of blood-and-thunder tragedies. Titus Maccius Plautus, on the other hand, of the third century B.C., was the Roman master of bawdy slapstick comedy. One can't help but wonder if Shakespeare might not have been slipping in a bit of praise for his own versatility, for he had himself written plays in both the style of Seneca at his heaviest (*Titus Andronicus*) and Plautus at his lightest (*The Comedy of Errors*).

O Jephtha . . .

Hamlet responds, mockingly, with a scrap of what seems to be a well-known ballad of Shakespeare's time:

O Jephtha, judge of Israel, what a treasure hadst thou!

-Act II, scene ii, lines 412-13

The reference is to Jephthah, a military leader ("judge") of an Israelite army. During a battle against the Ammonites, he swore to sacrifice the first living thing that emerged to greet him on his return home, if the battle were won. He gained the victory and when he returned, out came his daughter to greet him. He kept his vow and had her killed on the altar (Judges



11:30-40).

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It is a horrible story and, perhaps because of its horror, has always been a favorite tale from the Bible.

Hamlet, it would seem, is bitterly mocking Polonius, who would sacrifice his own daughter in his foolish attempt to catch Hamlet.

When Hamlet sings a few more lines to the effect that Jephthah loved his only daughter, Polonius admits the comparison by saying that he too has a daughter he loves, and Hamlet answers, grimly:

Nay, that follows not.

-Act II, scene ii, line 422

This whole colloquy makes sense best if we assume that Hamlet has indeed overheard the plan of the King and Polonius. He implies that Polonius cannot really love his daughter if he is going to use her as a degraded pawn against the man she loves.

... *the hellish Pyrrhus*

But Hamlet has an idea now; an idea that must have come to him the instant he heard the actors were coming to Elsinore. He knows them well; he is a connoisseur of the drama; and he knows they were once capable enough for his purposes. But time has passed. Are they still as skillful as he remembers them to be?

He must test them. He demands one of them recite a speech, therefore; a speech that will require much emotion and even suggests the one he wants. It is taken from a play in which Aeneas is telling Dido (see page I-20) of the fall of Troy. This in itself gives room for much emotion, and Hamlet suggests the most tear-jerking episode of all—the death of old King Priam (see page I-209). Hamlet identifies the speech by reciting an early passage himself, ending with:

*With eyes like carbuncles, the hellish Pyrrhus
Old grandsire Priam seeks.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 474-75

Pyrrhus, the son of Achilles (see page I-115), is associated with the most atrocious events of the sack.

The Player takes up the speech, spending some thirty lines on the description of the killing of Priam. Polonius very rightly interrupts:

This is too long.

-Act II, scene ii, line 509

But Hamlet, in an agony of impatience, cuts him off. He is not inter-



ested in the speech itself, but in the quality of its execution. He says:

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. . . Say on; come to Hecuba.

-Act II, scene ii, line 512

Hecuba, the wife of Priam, goes through almost unimaginable misfortune in the course of the Trojan debacle (see page I-398).

The actor goes on to recite lines concerning the unfortunate queen, and Polonius remarks in wonder that the actor has actually begun to affect himself in self-induced agony.

Look, whe'r [whether] he has not turned his color, and has tears in's eyes.

-Act II, scene ii, lines 530-31

O, vengeance

Hamlet's pretense of madness and his long wait for the moment when he might act must surely be in the highest degree frustrating. Far from being the irresolute person he is usually supposed to be, he seems to have the greatest difficulty controlling himself. When the players leave and he is alone on the stage, that control wavers. He is bitter that an actor can allow himself to weep over Hecuba's long-dead woes, whereas Hamlet himself must dissemble and do nothing more than play mad while his uncle keeps the winnings.

He berates himself in a rising crescendo of self-accusation:

*Am I a coward?
Who calls me villain? Breaks my pate across?
Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face?
Tweaks me by the nose? Gives me the lie i'th' throat
As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this?
Ha, 'swounds, I should take it, for it cannot be
But / am pigeon-livered and lack gall
To make oppression bitter, or ere this
I should ha' fatted all the region kites
With this slave's offal. Bloody, bawdy villain!
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!
O, vengeance!*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 582-93

The play's the thing

But at the last moment, in that wild cry for vengeance, he grasps at himself and steadies. There is a pause and he says quietly:

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Why, what an ass am I!

-Act II, scene ii, line 594

It is back to business. He needs evidence, evidence that does not de-



pend upon the uncertain word of a mysterious Ghost, evidence clear and open to all; and it may be that the necessary material is at hand. Hamlet mutters to himself:

About, my brains.

Hum-

*I have heard that guilty creatures sitting at a play
Have by the very cunning of the scene
Been struck so to the soul that presently
They have proclaimed their malefactions.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 599-604

Hamlet may well be thinking of the Greek tale concerning the cranes of Ibycus (see page I-198), when murderers did cry out their guilt under the emotional pressures of a moving play. And Hamlet has already prepared just such a situation. Having made certain that the Player could deliver a speech movingly, he arranged to have a particular play, *The Murder of Gonzago*, presented, then said to the Player:

*You could for a need study a speech of some dozen or sixteen
lines which I would set down and insert in't, could you not?*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 550-53

The device will serve a secondary purpose too. Hamlet is still troubled occasionally by a certain perfunctory doubt concerning the Ghost. His ambition forces him to believe and yet he is intelligent enough to know he may be helping to deceive himself. He says:

*The spirit that I have seen
May be a devil, and the devil hath power
T'assume a pleasing shape . . .*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 610-12

For both reasons then-to satisfy others and to satisfy himself-Hamlet must proceed. He ends the long scene by coming to a firm decision:

*The play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 616-17

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. . . my most painted word

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern report to the King and Queen. They have failed (through their own heavyhandedness) and have gained nothing from Hamlet. All they can say is that Hamlet seems interested in a play which he hopes the King and Queen will attend. The King at once agrees. Anything Hamlet does may offer a clue to his intentions, and he cannot afford to lose that clue.

The next attempt, though (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern having failed), is to involve Ophelia. She is placed in the appropriate spot and



Polonius busily orders her to read a devotional book to make her presence there look innocent. He proceeds to pontificate on the emptiness of outward show and the King speaks in a sad aside:

*O, 'tis too true.
How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!
The harlot's cheek, beautied with plast'ring art,
Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it
Than is my deed to my most painted word.
O heavy burden!*

-Act III, scene i, lines 49-54

This speech reveals to the audience, for the first time, that the King is really guilty and that the Ghost is an honest spirit indeed. Then too, it shows that the King *does* have a conscience. The play could scarcely "catch the conscience of the King" if Claudius were actually a monstrous villain. One can imagine Goneril (see page I-48) easily sitting through a play describing her own crimes in detail without turning a hair and blandly denying everything if accused. It is important to know that Claudius is not that sort of person so that we will know that Hamlet's stratagem has a point to it.

To be, or not to be . . .

Ophelia is placed. The Queen is sent away while the King and Polonius hide. Hamlet enters, musing, with the soliloquy that is the most famous speech in all of Shakespeare spoken at this point. It begins:

*To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 56-60

It seems to be a meditation on suicide, and Hamlet feels that everyone would kill himself and escape this miserable world, if only he were sure that some unknown and more frightful horror did not await him in the afterworld.

Can it be that Hamlet is contemplating suicide? Or wishing that the dread of hellfire did not prevent him from contemplating it?

It is difficult to believe that, for Hamlet labors very hard throughout the play to avoid death. Suicide is a sin, but if he is executed by Claudius, then he is quit of the world without suicide. Why then does Hamlet avoid death even by the extreme and possibly shameful action of pretending madness?



It is possible to argue that it is this and not suicide in the abstract which is bothering him. He has two choices as far as action is concerned. He can act directly, kill the King, and take the consequences, which would surely be death for himself. He would in this way "take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them."

On the other hand, he can dissemble, feign madness, lay his plots, and meanwhile take no action against those who have wronged him. Here he "suffers [submits to, without retaliation] the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune."

And he is not certain which choice is the nobler, which is more fitting for himself. And since the choice of direct action is virtual suicide for himself, he is lured into the thought of suicide in the abstract.

In the end, he is rather shamefaced about it. Suspecting that heroism would require direct action even at the cost of death, he knows also that he wants the crown and must take the route to that crown even at the price of heroism. He concludes:

*Thus conscience [inner calculation] does make cowards of us
all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 83-88

... proud, revengeful, ambitious ...

But now Hamlet is aware of Ophelia's presence; she is apparently at her prayers. Hamlet is not fooled by this. He knows that Claudius and Polonius are in hiding and eavesdropping, probably because he overheard them at the time the plot was first proposed, or possibly because he becomes aware of them now through some incautious movement on their part.

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To blunt this maneuver, Hamlet knows he must play the role of madness intensely, which means being cruel to Ophelia. He can't help that and yet he regrets it too. His first words on seeing her (and knowing that she is but a helpless tool) are a tender:

*Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins remembered.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 89-90



It is tempting to believe that Hamlet includes here among his sins the one that he is about to commit-pitiless cruelty toward a young and innocent girl.

The fact that he must speak harshly to Ophelia must surely infuriate him even further against the two calculating men who are forcing him to do so. Bitterly, he baits them as earlier he had baited Polonius alone. Therefore, in the midst of his remarks to Ophelia, hard and lewd-the sort of thing the gentlemanly Hamlet could never say if he were sane (or so he hopes the King and Polonius will think)-he blurts out:

I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me: I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious . . .

-Act III, scene i, lines 122-25

Of course he is. He has the pride of a prince who will take nothing less than the throne, and the ambition of one too. And that he is revengeful is the central point of the play. Furthermore, it is literally true that he feels it

were better his mother had not borne him-for his mother. If his plans go through, the Queen may live but she will no longer be Queen, and she will be disgraced.

It is in this same speech that he begins ordering Ophelia to a nunnery in a crescendo of cruel sarcasm. But is it Ophelia he plans to send to a nunnery, or is it his mother, Queen Gertrude? (Remember that Edward the Confessor sent his mother, Emma, to a nunnery once he had gained the throne.)

Hamlet flings himself out of the room, and the naive Ophelia, sure he is mad, mourns for him in beautifully phrased sorrow.

. . . to England

Hamlet, however, has overreached himself, for he has underestimated Claudius. It must have given him some satisfaction to tell Claudius exactly what he intended to do, assuming that Claudius would pay no attention to a madman's words. It must have made Hamlet feel less ashamed

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that he had forsaken the very "name of action" in order ignominiously to "suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." At least he could threaten.

But the King, emerging from hiding, is not fooled. He never has thought Hamlet was mad and he clearly takes the Prince's words about "proud, revengeful, ambitious" at face value. He says:

*. . . what he spake, though it lacked form a little,
Was not like madness. There's something in his soul*



*O'er which his melancholy sits on brood,
And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose
Will be some danger . . .*

-Act III, scene i, lines 166-70

Claudius must take action and he makes his decision; a decision he reveals, at this moment, only in part:

*. . . he shall with speed to England
For the demand of our neglected tribute.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 172-73

This connection of Denmark and England again places Hamlet back in the Canute era.

England had been paying tribute to Danish raiders ever since 991, well before the land had actually been conquered by Sven Forked-beard. Such tribute was called the "Danegeld," and altogether about 160,000 tons of silver were handed over to the Danes.

Naturally, after Sven Forked-beard conquered England, there was no further tribute as such, for the Danes controlled all the land. This control continued till the death of Canute's second son, Hardecanute, in 1042. After that, Denmark and England parted company forever; nor was Denmark ever in a position to blackmail England again. If we consider the events of *Hamlet* as taking place in 1050, it is quite accurate to speak of "our neglected tribute." It stayed neglected too.

. . . out-herods Herod . . .

Foolish Polonius still adheres to the Ophelia theory of Hamlet's madness and suggests that Queen Gertrude tackle Hamlet and find out the truth (with Polonius eavesdropping-he is a great eavesdropper). The King wearily agrees but he has no illusions and knows what he must do.

Meanwhile, Hamlet, unaware that he has overreached himself, is instructing the players in the method of making the play they are to produce

most effective. He wants King Claudius to be hit hard and therefore the

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play must be as natural as possible. A ridiculous or postured artificiality

would ruin the impact, and he advises them strongly against bombastic

overacting. He says, with energy:

*I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing
Termagant. It out-herods Herod. Pray you avoid it.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 13-15

Hamlet is here harking back to the mystery plays, which were adaptations of biblical stories, usually of the life of Jesus, put on in the Middle Ages for a largely illiterate populace. To attract the lower classes and to keep their attention one had to introduce elements of suspense and humor, with the result that ranting villains and broad farce were included.

Naturally, a most obvious villain was King Herod (see page I-325),



who, in the biblical tale, tried to kill the infant Jesus. He was always represented as a vicious tyrant, making fearful faces and yelling at the top of his voice.

Another natural villain would be some Moslem, for Islam was the perennial (and usually victorious) enemy of medieval Christendom. The west Europeans knew virtually nothing of Moslem theology and they imagined that the Moslems must worship some idol. They invented an idolatrous god called "Tervagant" (a name quickly distorted to "Termagant"), who howled as madly as Herod.

Observe my uncle

The players, rather wearily, but patiently, assure Hamlet that they know then" craft, but the Prince anxiously continues to instruct them.

Hamlet then calls Horatio to himself (the one man he dares trust) and begins a sugared flattery. The modest Horatio tries to stop him, but Hamlet says:

*Nay, do not think I flatter.
For what advancement may I hope from thee,
That no revenue hast but thy good spirits
To feed and clothe thee?*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 58-61

Hamlet is being less than honest here, but he is also being a shrewd politician. There is advancement he hopes from Horatio. He hopes to make Horatio a crucial witness, one who will stick to his story against possible pressure. That may well be the reason for the rather gratuitous mention of Horatio's poverty. If he *does* stick to the story and Hamlet becomes king, he may well hope the poverty will cease.

The flattery done, Hamlet gets to the point:

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*There is a play tonight before the King.
One scene of it comes near the circumstance
Which I have told thee, of my father's death.
I prithee, when thou seest that act afoot,
Even with the very comment of thy soul
Observe my uncle.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 77-82

If now the King gives himself away (as Hamlet is probably sure he will), Horatio will be able to bear witness that Hamlet knew of the crime from the Ghost, that he held back cautiously and honorably until he had better evidence, that he deliberately set up the play to get that evidence, and got it. With such witness from Horatio available, Hamlet could freely kill the King and achieve the succession as a hero-son and the instrument of a vengeful God.

... *the chameleon's dish* ...

But while Horatio may watch closely and remain unobserved, Hamlet



cannot. He knows he will constantly be observed and that means he must maintain his pretended madness; at least just a little longer. When the King and the court begin to enter, he says hurriedly to Horatio:

*They are coming to the play: I must be idle;
Get you a place.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 92-93

Yet he cannot prevent himself from playing at word games with the hated Claudius. Claudius asks, with formal politeness:

How fares our cousin Hamlet?

-Act III, scene ii, line 94

"Cousin," we must remember, was used by Elizabethans to mean "relative" in general, or even someone who was merely a colleague or a close friend. (Its shortened form, "coz," is found frequently in the plays.)

The question is meant "How are you?" but Hamlet deliberately takes it to mean "On what do you dine?" and answers:

*Excellent, i'faith, of the chameleon's dish; I eat the air,
promise-crammed; you cannot feed capons so.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 95-97

The answer, being off the point, and seeming nonsensical, supports

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Hamlet's supposed madness, and yet at the same time it makes a great deal of sense. (It is with this nonsense-sense that Hamlet amuses himself

and makes up to himself the disgraceful part which, in his own eyes, he is forced to play.)

The chameleon is a slow-moving, slow-living lizard that does not require much food to maintain life and is therefore never as busily eating as

warm-blooded, fast-living mammals are. Furthermore, when a chameleon

does eat, it is with the fast flick of a long tongue that unerringly spears an

insect and is back in an eye-blink. One could watch a chameleon, on and off, for a long time without catching it in that momentary feeding. For that reason, the tale rose that the chameleon did not eat at all in the ordinary sense, but lived on air.

Hamlet, then, claimed he was being forced to live on air; on promises that were only breath emerging from the mouth and nothing more substantial. Surely, he must be referring to the King's statement earlier in the

play that he would make Hamlet his heir. Perhaps Claudius had not done

so officially yet, using the madness as an excuse; or perhaps Hamlet was sure that the King was intent on finding some excuse to kill him. In any case, Hamlet knew he would never fatten (like a capon) on such promises, and his remark is intended as an insult to Claudius.



. . . *the galled jade* . . .

The play within a play begins with a dumb show that presents the plot and shows the circumstances of a murder (presumably to be dealt with in the play) which is just like that described by the Ghost. There is no real sense to the dumb show, for it robs the succeeding play of its suspense and, what's worse, gives all away to Claudius. If the King sees it, he either stops the play at once on some pretext or is warned and steels himself to show no emotion when the play actually takes place. If I were producing *Hamlet*, I would omit the dumb show, even if I didn't omit anything else.

The play itself begins in pompous rhymed verse (which Shakespeare deliberately writes in inferior style to make it seem like a play in comparison to the "reality" of *Hamlet*) and advances, at once, certain allusions that must strike viciously home.

Thus, in the play, the Player King and the Player Queen have been married thirty years; the Player King is not well and fears he may die, but hopes his wife will live on and marry happily a second time. The Player Queen, however, rejects the thought:

*Such love must needs be treason in my breast.
In second husband let me be accurst!
None wed the second but who killed the first.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 184-86

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And Hamlet, who has taken a place with Ophelia to be able to see the King's face, says to himself:

That's wormwood.

-Act III, scene ii, line 187

One can imagine him saying that with satisfaction, pleased at the application to his mother. But the Queen watches unmoved, either too hardened to respond or, much more likely, too shallow to be touched. Hamlet has to ask her directly what she thinks, and she answers with a very famous (and invariably misquoted) line:

The lady doth protest too much, methinks.

-Act III, scene ii, line 236

She may be referring to the penchant of inferior dramatists to overdo their efforts in misleading the audience, until their very insistence in pointing in one direction guarantees the actual movement in the other.

But the King is growing uneasy. The references are too close to home, and he lacks the Queen's naivete. He says to Hamlet (who is, after all, sponsoring the play):

Have you heard the argument [plot]? Is there no offense in't?

-Act III, scene ii, lines 238-39



The fact that the King is unaware of the plot means he has not seen the dumb show. Why keep it in the play then? Grimly, Hamlet assures the King that only the guilty need fear:

'Tis a knavish piece of work, but what of that? Your Majesty, and we that have free souls, it touches us not. Let the galled jade winch [wince]; our withers are unwrung.
-Act III, scene ii, lines 246-48

Claudius is far too intelligent not to understand the menace underlying Hamlet's words, yet he dare not do anything at the moment. Hamlet may be bluffing and Claudius delays reaction.

... *the ghost's word* ...

The crucial scene is now approaching. Lucianus, the nephew of Gonzago, the Player King, is about to kill Gonzago in exactly the fashion that Claudius killed the elder Hamlet.

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Hamlet, almost beside himself with tension, can't stand the delay. When Lucianus attempts to increase suspense by a little "mugging" to show villainy, Hamlet cries out:

Begin, murderer. Leave thy damnable faces and begin.
-Act III, scene ii, lines 258-59

Lucianus speaks, then pours poison in Gonzago's ear. Claudius is obviously affected, and Hamlet adds a commentary to thrust the matter home:

You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife.
-Act III, scene ii, lines 269-70

It is all Claudius can take. Extremely upset, he rises. The play is brought to an abrupt end as he leaves hurriedly.

All rush out after him, and Hamlet, left alone on the stage with Horatio, is filled with triumph; half mad with it, in good faith. Having expressed his jubilation, however, he is practical enough to make sure he has his witness:

O good Horatio, I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound. Didst perceive?
-Act III, scene ii, lines 292-93

Horatio saw. Not only that, but the whole court saw the King's action, and when the matter is explained to them they will be able to have no



doubt whatever as to the King's guilt. Hamlet can now kill the King at will.

... *I lack advancement*

What Claudius has suspected he now knows for certainty. Hamlet, somehow, is aware of the truth and can use it with deadly effect. Claudius must know his own life hangs by a thread.

The Queen, who apparently does not know the truth, can only see that Claudius is terribly disturbed and fears for her son. (And rightly so, for at this point Claudius *must* react. It is clearly a matter of life and death for him.)

The Queen sends for her son, then, in an effort to make peace between him and his stepfather, totally unaware that that is quite impossible. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern come with the message, and Hamlet, very sure of himself now, merely amuses himself with them.

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They are still trying to find out what lies behind his madness, and Hamlet says, ironically:

Sir, I lack advancement.

-Act III, scene ii, line 347

Rosencrantz points out that Hamlet is the heir to the throne, but Hamlet says:

Ay, sir, but "while the grass grows". . .

-Act III, scene ii, line 351

He does not complete the proverb, since it is well known to the audience. It is "While the grass grows, the horse starves," meaning you can't live on promises for the future, which can easily amount to nothing. Here is another reference to what he had earlier called "the chameleon's dish."

Hamlet's mocking of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern grows sharper, too, for he has little to fear now. The game is his and he tells the two false friends quite openly that they will get nothing out of him.

The soul of Nero. . .

Polonius now enters to repeat Gertrude's command that Hamlet come to her. Hamlet cannot resist one last bit of foolery with the foolish Polonius, then agrees to come. He has a moment to himself in which to soliloquize:

*Soft, now to my mother.
O heart, lose not thy nature; let not ever
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom.
Let me be cruel, not unnatural;
I will speak daggers to her, but use none.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 400-4



Here again we see that Hamlet's tendency is not irresolution, but the reverse. He must at every step fight off the temptation to action on enraged impulse.

He can feel that his anger and resentment toward his mother, whose hasty marriage has deprived him of the crown and forced him into this long unnatural course of intrigue, may drive him into a moment of hot-blooded action; even to sudden matricide.

Nero, who was Roman Emperor from 54 to 68, was a tyrannical monster, whose most sensational misdeed was that of ordering the execution of his own mother, Agrippina, in 59. (The story is that she asked the assassins to strike at the womb that bore so unnatural a son.)

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Agrippina was, to be sure, a wicked woman whose interference in Nero's rule was most exasperating, but it is difficult for men to find any excuse at all for matricide. When Nero visited Greece in 67, he tried to gain entrance to the Eleusinian Mysteries, but was refused because he had

killed his mother, and such was the popular horror of the crime that Nero, absolute tyrant that he was, was forced to back down.

It was this that Hamlet must at all costs now avoid. The most he could do to his mother, even if it turned out she was an active accomplice to his father's murder-which she was not-would be to put her in a nunnery. If he killed his mother, or had her killed, on whatever excuse, he would surely be barred from the succession by a horrified populace that

would feel the whole nation would be cursed on his account if he were king.

. . . the primal eldest curse . . .

The King *must* now get Hamlet out of the court and to England at once, and he arranges for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to go with the prince.

Clearly, they will be his jailers to make sure he goes where he is supposed to go.

Polonius enters to tell the King that Hamlet is on the way to his mother and that he, Polonius, will play the spy once more and report to the King.

And then the King, alone on the stage, kneels to pray. His remorse is great, for, as he says:

*O, my offense is rank, it smells to heaven;
It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,
A brother's murder.*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 36-38

The horror of the memory of Cain lies on Claudius. The first crime committed by man against man was that of Cain, and it was the murder

of his brother Abel. For it, Cain received a curse-"And now art thou cursed from the earth . . ." (Genesis 4: 11)-and this "primal eldest curse"

outside Eden, Claudius feels, rests on him now.



Yet he knows not how to gain forgiveness, since, however much he regrets the murder, he cannot give up the fruits and, indeed, will commit other crimes to avoid giving them up.

... *hire and salary* ...

Even as he prays, or tries to pray, Hamlet, on his way to the Queen, comes upon him.

Hamlet's sword is out and he can kill the King. It will even be best to
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do it now, for he can say that immediately upon having received confirmation of the King's guilt, rage so blinded him that he could not wait for formal condemnation.

His plan has worked magnificently. One sword thrust and he will have all-both revenge and the throne.

But Hamlet's passion interferes!

The King is praying; to kill him now in such a holy occupation would send him to heaven. Hamlet muses:

*A villain kills my father, and for that
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To heaven.
Why, this is hire and salary, not revenge.*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 76-79

Thus, Hamlet refrains from the deed. He will wait until the King is at some profane activity.

And thus Hamlet overreaches himself at the moment of triumph. Having won the game, having all in his hand, he grasps for more than he needs or has any right to ask. He wants Claudius not only killed, but damned. One might argue that damnation is God's business and not Hamlet's and that, having aspired to play the role of God, Hamlet has gone too far and has earned punishment.

The irony is that the King is unable to pray anyway, and had Hamlet struck, Claudius would have been damned as well as killed. The King rises from his knees, saying:

*My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.
Words without thoughts never to heaven go.*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 97-98

... *Is it the King*

Hamlet finally reaches his mother. From his new position, he can speak to her openly at last and he begins with such self-confident firmness that she fears (remember, he has labored hard to convince her that he is mad, and she herself is, in any case, not very intelligent) he will murder her. She calls for help.

Polonius, eavesdropping from behind the curtain, is also sure that Hamlet will kill his mother. (After all, Hamlet has deliberately played the madman with Polonius more intensively than with anyone else.) The old



courtier calls for help from behind the curtain, and now at last Hamlet gives way. The passionate need for action which he has held back all this time breaks through.

He is sure that the King has followed him up the stairs and is now the

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one who is eavesdropping. The King is engaged in no holy action now, if this is so, and Hamlet's sword flashes. Polonius falls dead and the Queen groans:

O me, what hast thou done?

-Act III, scene iv, line 26

Hamlet, a little rueful at having lost control, says:

Nay, I know not. Is it the King?

-Act III, scene iv, line 27

He lifts the curtain, finds it isn't, and says, in frustration:

*Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell
I took thee for thy better.*

-Act III, scene iv, lines 32-33

. . . the precious diadem stole

For a while, inertia carries Hamlet onward. He has come to the point of being able to lecture his mother and he cannot give up that chance, merely in order to meet a drastically changed situation. Not immediately, anyway. So he goes on to lecture his mother nearly past the point where her endurance breaks.

Again there is the emphasis on the godlike virtues of the dead elder Hamlet:

*See what a grace was seated on this brow:
Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,
An eye like Mars, to threaten and command,
A station like the herald Mercury*

-Act III, scene iv, lines 56-59

And in contrast there is Claudius, for whom Hamlet cannot find words bad enough. He denounces, most eloquently, the vileness of the sexual passion he imagines existing between Gertrude and Claudius, but as his

anger mounts with his own words, he approaches closer to what sits most near his heart. He says of Claudius:

*A murderer and a villain,
A slave that is not twentieth part the tithe [tenth]*



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Of your precedent lord, a vice of kings,
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*A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,
 That from a shelf the precious diadem stole
 And put it in his pocket-*

-Act III, scene iv, lines 97-102

There we have it. Hamlet rises in this scene to his own particular climax. First there is mention of Claudius' crime of fratricide, then (worse) his crime of lust and adultery with the Queen, and then (still worse) his crime of having stolen the succession. Shakespeare could scarcely have meant this listing of crimes to be anything but a crescendo, biting deeper and deeper toward the core, and, clearly, what bothers Hamlet most is the loss of the crown.

The Queen cannot stop Hamlet, who is in a choking rage at that loss. He says of Claudius:

A king of shreds and patches-

-Act III, scene iv, line 103

At this point, the Ghost enters for one last time. Hamlet, in his anger, has forgotten reality, and the Ghost has come to bring him back to that Polonius is dead and he must take action now. He cannot lose himself in a pointless rating of his mother, who has gone far past the point where her limited intelligence can accept what he is saying anyway.

. . . mad in craft

With an effort, Hamlet grasps hold of himself, and sees now the ruin that faces him. All that he has gained by the play within a play he has lost by his impulsive and unlucky thrust at Polonius. Had he killed the King at prayer, all would have been well. By holding off to make sure of damnation as well, he had given himself time to kill Polonius and come to grief.

For now the King has a handle with which to strike back at Hamlet. Whatever Hamlet might claim concerning the King's earlier crime would now go unheard as the King would sorrowfully point out that nothing a madman could say need be listened to. And indeed, how could the court fail to consider him a madman? He had an excuse to kill the King, but none to kill Polonius. Indeed, if he tries to make it appear that he is not mad at all, then the killing of Polonius becomes a crime for which his imprisonment or execution might well be called for.

Hamlet says, in chagrin:

*For this same lord [Polonius],
 I do repent; but heaven hath pleased it so,*
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To punish me with this. . .

-Act III, scene iv, lines 173-75

Perhaps he recognizes his sin in having desired the damnation of Clau-



dus, when all he could rightly ask for was his death.

Now he must return to playing mad, just when he thought he would no longer have to and just when (with that thought in mind) he has revealed to his mother that he is quite sane. He knows he cannot rely on his mother's good sense, for she has none. He can only hope. As impressively as he can, he orders her not to reveal his secret. The King must *not*, he says:

*Make you to ravel all this matter out,
That I essentially am not in madness,
But mad in craft.*

-Act III, scene iv, lines 187-89

. . . to England. . .

That will at least gam tune, but Hamlet has no illusions about the great loss he has suffered. Claudius is thoroughly on his guard now and cannot be taken by surprise. Furthermore, Hamlet must now face Claudius' reaction and somehow counter it. He says to the Queen:

/ must to England; you know that?

-Act III, scene iv, line 201

Nor does Hamlet doubt that there is worse in store for him than mere rustication abroad. He says:

*There's letters sealed, and my two school-fellows,
Whom I will trust as I will adders fanged,
They bear the mandate;*

-Act III, scene iv, lines 203-5

It is no great trick, under the circumstances, for Hamlet to guess the content of the letters. The King cannot possibly be safe till Hamlet is dead. England's King, though no longer subject to Denmark, will not care to affront the latter nation lightly. Undoubtedly, the letter will contain a request that the King of England imprison or execute Hamlet.

There is a similar incident in Homer's *Iliad*. There the hero Bellerophon rouses the enmity of his host's wife by refusing her amorous invitation. The angered wife accuses Bellerophon to her husband of attempting to rape her. (There is a similarity here with the tale of Joseph and Potiphar's wife-Genesis 39:7-20.) The husband, unwilling to stain his hands with

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a guest's blood, thus violating the sacred laws of hospitality, sends Bellerophon with a letter in cipher to the friendly King of Lycia. The letter, when deciphered, was a request that Bellerophon be executed. (Bellerophon, however, escaped.)

Suspecting the contents of the letter, then, Hamlet is grimly determined to circumvent it.



It had been so with us . . .

The King now comes to the Queen and each is less than honest with the other. The Queen describes Hamlet as having killed Polonius in a fit of madness, to which the King replies:

*It had been so with us, had we been there.
His liberty is full of threats to all,*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 13-14

It is his excuse, for Gertrude's benefit, for sending Hamlet away. It will give him time, he implies, to excuse Hamlet and prevent public demand for his punishment. The Queen does not say that Hamlet is really sane and would indeed have killed the King had he been there (but Claudius is shrewd enough to know that without being told). On the other hand, the King does not say he really intends to have Hamlet killed, and the Queen is by no means shrewd enough to penetrate that hidden intention.

Undoubtedly, the King wants to have Hamlet dead more than anything else in the world. Yet he must still be cautious. As he says to some of the court a little later:

*How dangerous is it that this man goes loose!
Yet must not we put the strong law on him:
He's loved of the distracted multitude.*

-Act IV, scene iii, lines 2-4

It is plain, here, that Claudius suffers the same difficulty Hamlet does. Hamlet wants to kill the King *and* get the throne too. The King wants to kill Hamlet *and* keep the throne too. It is the matter of the throne that makes direct action impossible for either one; neither dare risk losing the popularity he possesses by an act of brutal murder.

. . . thy cicatrice . . .

Hamlet hides Polonius' body and strenuously plays mad again to de-

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prive Claudius of the chance of direct action. The body is recovered at length, however, and Hamlet is made ready to go to England. It must be done hastily, and Claudius muses:



*And, England, if my love thou hold'st at aught-
As my great power thereof may give thee sense,
Since yet thy cicatrice looks raw and red
After the Danish sword, and thy free awe
Pays homage to us-thou mayst not coldly set
Our sovereign process, which imports at full
By letters congruing to that effect
The present death of Hamlet.*

-Act IV, scene iii, lines 58-65

The audience is thus told of Claudius' plan. The reference to the Danish sword fits the great raids of the Danes on England in the tenth century and of the Danish conquest of England in the early eleventh century. (Furthermore, Claudius' harsh reference to the Danish sword makes certain the fact that Shakespeare's English audience will not be lured into sympathy with him.)

... thinking too precisely. . .

On his way to the ship that will carry them to England, Hamlet meets the army of young Fortinbras crossing Denmark (with permission) on its way to Poland. Hamlet asks a Captain, an officer in Fortinbras' army, where they go. The Captain replies:

*We go to gain a little patch of ground
That hath in it no profit but the name.
To pay five ducats, five, I would not farm it,*

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 18-20

Yet the Poles will defend it and thousands of men may die over it (Shakespeare here, as in many places in his plays, makes plain his sarcastic contempt and distaste for the whole apparatus of war and national glory, though he is condemned by the audience and the times to insert much chauvinism in his writing.)

Hamlet is abashed, for here is an example of the dichotomy he has brooded over in his famous soliloquy. Fortinbras, his Norwegian analogue, is interested only "in the name of action." He "takes arms against a sea of troubles" even for the sake of nothing of worth, but merely so that he might act.

Yet Hamlet himself does not act directly, but always plans circuitously

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in order to gain everything. It is his "conscience that doth make cowards of us all." Or, on this occasion, he puts the blame on:

*... some craven scruple
Of thinking too precisely on th'event. . .*



-Act IV, scene iv, lines 40-41

And yet his plots have miscarried anyway and he is being led off to exile and possibly to death. He is through with intricate plotting and cries out in agony:

*O, from this time forth,
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!*

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 65-66

... a baker's daughter, ...

The death of Polonius has done more than wreck Hamlet's plan at the instant of victory; it has driven Ophelia mad with grief, to the horror of the King and Queen.

Ophelia's speech is distracted, but was more significant to the Elizabethan audience than it is now to us. She says, at one point:

*They say the owl was a baker's daughter. Lord, we know
what we are, but know not what we may be.*

-Act IV, scene v, lines 42-44

The statement that we don't know what the future holds for us is true enough, and certainly true enough for Ophelia, who had had no suspicion her father would be murdered, but what has it to do with the owl and the baker's daughter?

There is an old English legend to the effect that Jesus, in the guise of a beggar, came to a baker's shop to ask for some food. The baker put some dough into the oven to make a loaf of bread for the supposed beggar, but the baker's daughter, overcome with niggardliness, decided that the gift was too great and cut the dough in half. She was promptly turned into an owl as punishment, a drastic example of one who knew what she was but did not know what she would become.

... where are my Switzers. . .

Claudius mourns the gathering troubles, for Polonius had been hastily buried to avoid rousing trouble, and the very trouble they had tried to avoid

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has come as a result-the people are restless. And besides Ophelia's madness, there is her brother's rage. Laertes has hastened home from France and is rousing the people against the court. (The ease with which



popularity can be lost and public opinion made to veer makes it clear that both Claudius and Hamlet are entirely right in trying to effect their respective ends in as cautious and circumspect a manner as possible.) There is a noise at the door and the King cries out:

*Attend, where are my Switzers? Let them guard the door.
What is the matter?*

-Act IV, scene v, lines 97-98

Here is an interesting anachronism.

The district of Schwyz, secure in the Alps, formed a federation with two neighboring districts in 1291 which became the nucleus of the nation

still called Schweiz in German, but Switzerland in English.

Neighboring Austria claimed sovereignty over the districts (or cantons),

but in 1315 at Morgarten, on the edge of Schwyz territory, the army of Duke Leopold I of Austria was badly beaten by the tough Swiss infantry-

men. The cantons retained their independence and other neighboring can-

tons joined them. In 1386 and 1388 the Swiss won two more victories and

began to gain a reputation for being hard and steady infantrymen, invin-

cible in their own mountains.

This reputation was enormously enhanced when, from 1474 to 1477, the Swiss fought against Charles the Bold of Burgundy, who had a European-wide reputation as a warrior, and beat him utterly. They de-

feated him in three battles and killed him in the last.

After that the Swiss were everywhere in demand. Their mountainous

soil could not support them in luxury and their greatest export became

soldiers who would serve loyally for pay. They were trained in the difficult

art of pike-warfare (it is not easy to handle a long and heavy pike) and every contending army had its corps of Swiss.

It was not until 1515 that the spell was broken. In that year, the French

army under its King, Francis I, won a great battle at Marignano in north-

western Italy over the Swiss and Venetians. For the first time, those steady

pikemen had been defeated, and never again were they to have quite such

a hold over the military imagination.

Even so, it remained customary for kings to hire a company of Swiss mercenaries as personal guards. They were steady, and loyal only to the

King (while he paid them), and since they shared no common feelings with the people of the land, they could not be corrupted by factional or revolutionary sentiments. When in 1792 King Louis XVI of France



was
attacked at the palace of the Tuileries by French revolutionaries, the
Swiss
guards were slaughtered to a man as they loyally tried to resist in an
ut-
terly hopeless cause.

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Pope Julius II instituted a Swiss guard just prior to the Battle of Mari-
gnano, and the Pope has been guarded by one down to this very day,
though its function now is purely ceremonial.

It is natural, then, for Shakespeare, writing in 1600, to give
Claudius
a Swiss guard too, though at the time of the events in the play, not
only
were there no such guards in existence, but Switzerland itself had not
yet
become a nation.

. . . life-rend'ring pelican

Laertes is at the palace gates at the head of an angry mob. Laertes
him-
self bursts in and advances angrily at Claudius, crying:

*O thou vile King,
Give me my father.*

-Act IV, scene v, lines 115-16

Clearly, he believes Polonius has been executed at Claudius'
command,
despite all (we suspect) that Claudius owed to his courtier. Laertes
makes
no subtle plans. Unlike Hamlet's, his response bears "the name of
action."

He raises a rebellion and tackles the King directly.

Ah, but before we make invidious comparisons against Hamlet,
there
are two points to make.

First, the people know that Polonius was killed and many suspect
that
Claudius was responsible. They did not know the elder Hamlet was
killed
and it was Hamlet's task to convince them of that fact and to convince
them, further, that Claudius was the murderer. It was the convincing
and
not the revenge that was difficult.

Secondly, Laertes wants nothing beyond revenge, whereas Hamlet
wants
revenge and the throne. It is the desire for the throne that introduces
the
endless complications. (If we interpret Hamlet's actions as being the
re-



sult of a desire for revenge *only*, then the play is and must remain an unanswerable puzzle.)

Claudius shows himself at his best in facing Laertes. The King (no drunkard, no weak libertine) is fearless and shrewd. He remains calm, speaks softly, and forces Laertes to listen. He denies having been responsible for Polonius' death and asks Laertes if, in revenge, he wants to destroy his father's friends as well as his enemies.

Laertes insists he is only after the guilty. To his father's friends he will be a friend:

*To his good friends thus wide I'll ope my arms
And like the kind life-rend'ring pelican
Repast them with my blood.*

-Act IV, scene v, lines 145-47

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The pelican was widely considered in ancient times as a creature that fed its young on its own blood,

In medieval times this was taken further. Natural history in those days was often distorted into moralistic fables supposed to illustrate biblical points, as though all the universe existed only for the sake of preaching simplistic sermons to mankind. Thus, the young pelican was supposed to anger the male parent who killed them. The young remained dead for three days, at which time the female parent sat on them and poured her own blood on them, reviving them.

This allegory of the death and resurrection of Jesus helped make the mistaken belief about the pelican popular, hence Laertes' metaphor.

There's rosemary . . .

Mad Ophelia comes in at this moment. She has gathered flowers and herbs and distributes them:

*There's rosemary, that's for remembrance. Pray you, remember.
And there is pansies, that's for thoughts.*

-Act IV, scene v, lines 174-76

She is speaking the language of flowers. In a society closer to nature than our own, it was easy to make each flower significant of something and to use it for lovers' messages or for quasi-superstitious purposes. Rosemary was symbolic of fidelity in love because its fragrance lingered over long periods. Its existence was therefore not forgotten. Pansies symbolized thought by their very name, which comes from *pensee*, the French word for "thought."

As to other flowers Ophelia mentions, together with some of her odd turns of phrase, the significance is disputed.

. . . a gentleman of Normandy



The sight of his sister enrages Laertes further and Claudius has a hard job controlling him. In private (away from the Queen) he reveals Hamlet as the murderer and explains why he couldn't take action against him directly. The Queen loves Hamlet and the King (who really appears to love Gertrude over and above the fact that the marriage was useful to him and helped him gain the crown) does not wish to alienate her by imprisoning or executing her son. Then too, there is the perpetual fear of public opinion (which hampers both Claudius and Hamlet in their respective plots). Claudius refers to this when he says:

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The other motive
Why to a public count [trial] I might not go
Is the great love the general gender bear him,
 -Act IV, scene vii, lines 16-18

Claudius is about to tell him, however, that he has arranged to have Hamlet killed in England, when a messenger arrives with word that Hamlet is not in England at all but is back in Denmark.

Claudius thinks quickly. He doesn't want civil war; he wants a quiet murder that will look like accident, with the responsibility (and risk) fall-

ing on Laertes if anything goes wrong.

He recalls something he had heard from France, saying:

Two months since
Here was a gentleman of Normandy.
 -Act IV, scene vii, lines 81-82

The mention of Normandy is *not* an anachronism. While the Danish raids were laying England prostrate, similar raids were devastating the

northern coast of France. In 911, nearly a century and a half before the time of the events in *Hamlet*, a Viking raider named Hrolf had forced the French King, Charles III (the Fat), to cede a district on the Channel coast to himself and his followers. This became known as Nortmannia ("Northman-land") and then Normandy.

In 1050, at the time of the events in *Hamlet*, Normandy was a powerful, centralized, well-governed duchy under the remarkable Duke William II

(the Bastard). Normandy was then a great power, for its Duke was stronger than the King of France and at least on a par with the King of Denmark. (Sixteen years later, in fact, William was to conquer England and become King William I, the Conqueror.)

The Normans in the century and a half since Hrolf's time had been completely absorbed into French civilization and now spoke a French dialect.

Their Viking origins were virtually forgotten, but it is interesting to speculate that the Norman visitor whom Claudius mentions might have come,

at least in part, to visit the land of his ancestors.



With this contagion. . .

Claudius recalls that the Norman had spoken of Laertes' skill as a swordsman and that Hamlet had been made jealous thereby. Hamlet would surely be eager to measure his skill against Laertes and Laertes can use a friendly fencing match as a device to kill him. Matters can be so arranged that while Hamlet is using a foil with the usual guarded point, Laertes can

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"accidentally" be using one with an unguarded point and thus "accidentally" kill his father's murderer.

Laertes eagerly agrees and carries the treachery one step further. He will not only use an unguarded point; he will make use of a very virulent poison he happens to own.

*I'll touch my point
With this contagion, that, if I gall him slightly,
It may be death.*

-Act IV, scene vii, lines 146-48

In other words, the home thrust will not be necessary, if it cannot be managed against Hamlet's swordplay. A scratch will be enough.-And here Laertes loses our sympathy. His revenge might be justifiable according to the standards of the time, but surely not through a cowardly act of treachery.

Yet even this is not enough. What if Laertes doesn't manage even to scratch Hamlet? Claudius plans to prepare a poisoned drink as well and if Hamlet comes out of the duel victorious and unscratched, the drink after exertion will kill him.

Almost as though to punish Laertes for his planned treachery, or perhaps to screw his sorrow to the notch where he will not repent, the news comes that Ophelia is drowned. She fell into a brook, whether through madness or design, and made no attempt to escape.

. . . three and twenty years

Hamlet is not only back in Denmark. He is at Elsinore, with Horatio, and comes across gravediggers preparing a grave. At one point, the grave-



digger throws up a skull and tells Hamlet that he recognizes it. He says:

Here's a skull now hath lien you i'th'earth three and twenty years.

-Act V, scene i, lines 174-75

It turns out to be the skull of Yorick, the court jester of the elder Hamlet. Hamlet is startled. He turns to Horatio and, holding the skull, says:

Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath borne me on his back a thousand times.

-Act V, scene i, lines 185-88

Hamlet remembers Yorick and so he could not have been an utter in-
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fant at the time of the jester's death. It wouldn't be too unreasonable to suppose him to be seven years old at the time-and if the jester were twenty-three years dead, Hamlet would be thirty.

This by no means represented youth in Hamlet's time (or in Shakespeare's time either). If Hamlet were really thirty, it would explain his utter discontent with Claudius' act of making him heir to the throne. The life expectancy of a thirty-year-old was not really very great. By the time Claudius was dead, Hamlet himself would not, in the course of nature, expect a very much longer life himself. Is he to have the throne for a poor few years?

However, it must be admitted that a thirty-year-old Hamlet doesn't fit the rest of the play. Queen Gertrude would be in her late forties at least and that is a bit too old for her, perhaps. Then too, how explain the fact that a thirty-year-old Hamlet is still a schoolboy at Wittenberg and still, in that age of early marriages, unmarried. It would be much more comfortable to imagine a twenty-year-old Hamlet, and that could be managed very simply if the gravedigger had merely mentioned the skull of Yorick had lain in the ground thirteen years rather than twenty-three.

... *old Pelion* ...

The funeral party now arrives. The court attends, but the ritual is clearly limited and Hamlet realizes it must be a suicide who is being interred. It is Ophelia who is being buried, and the suspicion is, indeed, that she has killed herself. Laertes is furious at the priestly decision to stint the rites.
He says:



*Lay her i'th'earth,
And from her fair and unpolluted flesh
May violets spring! I tell thee, churlish priest,
A minst'ring angel shall my sister be
When thou liest howling!*

-Act V, scene i, lines 240-44

And Gertrude strews flowers on the open grave with a phrase that has become so common a cliché that few remember any longer that Shakespeare said it first, or the occasion on which it was said:

Sweets to the sweet! Farewell!

-Act V, scene i, line 245

Laertes, overcome with grief, now jumps into the grave and in grandiloquent phrases demands he be covered too:

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*Now pile your dust upon the quick and dead
Till of this flat a mountain you have made
T'o'ertop old Pelion or the skyish head
Of blue Olympus.*

-Act V, scene i, lines 253-56

A Greek myth tells of two young giants, Otus and Ephialtes, who grew six feet in height every year and one and a half feet in breadth. At the age of nine, being fifty-four feet tall and thirteen and a half feet broad, they decided to attack and defeat the gods. They planned to assault Mount Olympus (see page I-105), and to do so they decided to pile Mount Pelion on Mount Ossa.

Mount Ossa is 25 miles southeast of Mount Olympus and is 1.2 miles high. Mount Pelion is 30 miles farther southeast still and is 1.0 mile high. If Pelion is piled on Mount Ossa, a platform higher than Mount Olympus (itself 1.8 miles high) would be formed and the two giants could then aim their missiles downward with greater effect. However, the gods, with superior weapons, killed them before they could attempt the feat.

Pelion and Ossa, and even Olympus, are not really terribly high mountains, but the familiarity of this myth has placed them in literature as symbols of great height and they are so used here.

... *the burning zone*

Hamlet, who has been overhearing all this, is for the first time aware of Ophelia's death. Distracted, he comes forth to announce his own love for the lost Ophelia and bitterly mimics Laertes' braggadocio, mentioning the third mountain, which Laertes had omitted:

*And if thou prate of mountains, let them throw
Millions of acres on us, till our ground
Singeing his pate against the burning zone,
Make Ossa like a wart! Nay, an thou'lt mouth,
I'll rant as well as thou.*



-Act V, scene i, lines 282-86

It was part of the Aristotelian picture of the world that it consisted of the "elements" in layers. At the center of the universe was the solid earth; about that a sphere of water (not quite complete, so that dry land stuck through); about that a sphere of air; about that a sphere of fire (occasionally visible in the form of lightning); and finally the heavenly spheres of the planets and stars.

Hamlet here imagines that a mountain can be piled so high as to rise entirely through the sphere of air and into the sphere of fire.

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... *our deep plots do pall* . . .

Laertes is kept from attacking Hamlet on the spot, partly by the Queen's anxious pleas that Hamlet is mad, and partly by the King's careful reminder that there is the fencing match yet to come.

Hamlet leaves them and reaches the castle with Horatio. He is a soberer Hamlet, much quieter than he was. He must be brooding about that unlucky sword stroke of his that not only spoiled his plot, but made him a deadly enemy in Laertes and lost him his lovely Ophelia.

He is about to tell Horatio how he managed to escape from the death awaiting him in England. It was entirely a matter of improvisation and luck, quite different from the long, careful plotting in Elsinore. Yet the improvisation had succeeded where all his carefulness had earlier failed.

He can only find refuge in fatalism, saying:

*Our indiscretion sometime serves us well
When our deep plots do pall [fail], and that should learn us
There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 8-11

From now on, it seems, Hamlet will involve himself in no subtlety. He will merely wait his chance, trusting it will come.

... *th'election and my hopes*

Hamlet tells how, unable to sleep aboard ship, and aware of danger, he crept to the cabin of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and stole the letter



they carried. He opened it, found that the King of England was being asked to execute Hamlet. He copied over a new letter, asking the English King to execute the bearers of the letter, sealed it with his father's seal (which he happened to be carrying), and put the new letter in place of the old.

A pirate ship then attacked (as Horatio had earlier been told in a letter from Hamlet) and Hamlet alone was captured. He managed to persuade the pirates to take him back to Denmark and here he was, now, while Rosencrantz and Guildenstern went on to their deaths.

Hamlet now lists his grievances against King Claudius:

*He that hath killed my king, and whored my mother,
Popped in between th'election and my hopes,
Thrown out his angle for my proper life,*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 64-66

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This is the only time in the entire play that Hamlet openly admits that he had had "hopes" for the succession and that it is a grievance to him that he was outmaneuvered in this respect by Claudius.

Again, as in the scene with his mother after the killing of Polonius, he lists his grievances in order of what must be mounting outrage, and again the order is the same: the murder of the King and (worse) the marriage of his mother and (still worse) his own loss of the throne. This time he adds a fourth matter which has arisen since the scene with his mother and which is obviously worst of all: Claudius had tried to have him killed.

... *the fall of a sparrow* ...

Horatio points out that if Hamlet still wants vengeance and the throne, he must allow for the fact that the news of the death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern will alert Claudius to exactly what has happened. There isn't much time during which Hamlet can count on confusion and uncertainty keeping Claudius off guard again. Hamlet agrees that there isn't much time:



It will be short; the interim's mine

-Act V, scene ii, line 73

And yet Hamlet is in no haste. He is through plotting, for his plots have brought nothing but disaster on his head. When a messenger suggests that Hamlet engage in swordplay with Laertes, with King Claudius betting on victory for Hamlet, he wearily agrees.

He has earlier been keen indeed in guessing the King's plot in connection with the trip to England, but now he worries about nothing. The matter of fencing with someone whom he knows now to be a deadly enemy seems to give him no qualms. He assures Horatio that he has been practicing swordplay and will win, yet goes on:

*But thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart.
But it is no matter.*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 213-14

He may be thinking of Ophelia and wondering if her loss is not a heavy price to pay even for the throne-which he has not yet gained. Horatio, however, assumes Hamlet is suffering some presentiments of evil concerning the duel and therefore urges him to refuse the challenge. Hamlet shrugs this off. He is placing all his hopes on the "divinity that shapes our ends." To the suggestion he back away, he says:

144 *Not a whit, we defy augury. There is special providence in the*
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jail of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to
come, it will be now, if it be not now, yet it will come. The
readiness is all.

-Act V, scene ii, lines 220-24

The reference is to Jesus' assurance of divine care to his apostles: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father" (Matthew 10:29).

Why, then, should Hamlet have sought so earnestly to force events to his liking? God will do so in His own time and it will be Hamlet's task merely to be ready when that time comes.

. . . poor Hamlet's enemy



And now the fencing match!

Laertes and Hamlet ceremoniously greet each other and Hamlet gracefully begs pardon, placing the blame for Polonius' death on his own madness, and says:

*If t be so,
Hamlet is of the faction that is wronged;
His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy.*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 238-40

This sounds rather dishonest of Hamlet. He knows he was never mad. And yet it is still necessary for him to play at madness; and it was the game of madness that guided events up to the point where he thrust blindly through the curtain. In that sense it was indeed the necessary pretense of madness that was "poor Hamlet's enemy." And in addition, at the very moment when Polonius was killed, when Hamlet was in the mood of exalted triumph at the success of the play within a play, when he was finally in a position to talk to his mother in a way he had long wanted to-perhaps at that very moment he was mad indeed.

. . . the King's to blame

The fencing then starts. Laertes carefully picks the poisoned blade while Hamlet takes the first that comes to hand. His only question is a careless:

These foils have all a length?

-Act V, scene ii, line 266

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Hamlet has the best of it at first, and the Queen drinks to his victory. Despite Claudius' convulsive attempt to stop her, she makes use of the cup of poison which he has prepared for Hamlet.

In a final exchange, Laertes manages to wound Hamlet, and, as the play is usually presented, Hamlet, suddenly aware that Laertes is fighting with an unguarded sword-point, forces a change in weapons and wounds Laertes in his turn.

The Queen collapses, crying she is poisoned. Laertes falls too, and in contrition admits what has been done, crying to Hamlet:

Thy mother's poisoned.



I can no more. The King, the King's to blame.

-Act V, scene ii, lines 320-21

Hamlet has what he said he would get. Without making plans, without laying plots, divinity has shaped his ends. The King is accursed before the entire court of the vilest crimes, under conditions where it is impossible to disbelieve the accusation.

For Hamlet "readiness is all," and he is ready.
He kills the King.

... an antique Roman ...

But it has all worked out with one fatal flaw. Hamlet has been poisoned. He is dying too. He has achieved his revenge, but not the succession after all.

Hamlet, feeling himself weakening, asks Horatio to report the events correctly, lest any rumors spread that Hamlet had acted any way but honorably. (Perhaps he is still worried that people may not consider it noble of him to have taken so devious a route to revenge when he was pretending madness and managing "to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.")

Horatio, however, does not wish to survive. Seizing what is left of the poisoned wine, he says:

*/ am more an antique Roman than a Dane.
Here's yet some liquor left.*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 342-43

Under Christian law, suicide is a sin. Life came from God and belonged to God. The deliberate ending of life is murder, even where the life is the murderer's own.

Not so among the pre-Christian Romans. To them (as to the Japanese

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before World War II) it was an honorable gesture to prefer death to disgrace.

Perhaps the most impressive case was that of Cato the Younger, who, when his army was defeated by Julius Caesar, killed himself rather



than
survive the end of his country's freedom (see page I-281).

Hamlet, with his last dying strength, wrests the poison from Horatio. Hamlet has lost life and succession but he must at least save his honor. Claudius had been popular; might there not be some who would insist he was innocent and that Hamlet had killed him out of pure thwarted ambition? Horatio must bear witness to the truth:

*// thou didst ever hold me in thy heart
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story.*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 347-50

On Fortinbras . . .

And now come outsiders. Fortinbras of Norway returns victorious from Poland. Ambassadors arrive from England. But Hamlet's eyes are closing, his voice fading. He says:

*I cannot live to hear the news from England,
But I do prophesy th'election lights
On Fortinbras. He has my dying voice.*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 355-57

Hamlet was apparently the only child of the elder Hamlet, and Claudius has no children. From anything we can tell from the play, the Danish royal family has been utterly wiped out with Hamlet's death, and yet Denmark must have a king. Young Fortinbras of Norway is of a kindred nation and has proved himself a capable warrior. It is reasonable to pass the scepter on to him.

Actually, there is an echo of Canute's time in this too. When Canute's second son, Hardecanute, died in 1042, the Danish royal line of Canute died out. Hardecanute, aware that this might happen, arranged to have the kingship pass to Magnus of Norway, who earlier in this chapter (see page II-84) was pointed out as playing a role analogous to that of young Fortinbras in *Hamlet*.

Magnus the Good ruled as King of both Norway and Denmark from 1042 to 1047.

And thus ends this play of ironic revenge, with the announcement



that
the English King has executed Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and with
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Horatio preparing to tell the story to Fortinbras. And we may
conclude
with Horatio's touching words to Hamlet, as the Prince dies:

*Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet Prince,
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 360-61

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The Tragedy of

MACBETH

0

ON MARCH 24, 1603, Queen Elizabeth I of England died, leaving no children behind. (Indeed, she had never married.) Her aunt, Margaret Tudor, the older sister of Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII, had married James IV of Scotland. Their son reigned over Scotland as James V during much of the reign of Henry VIII in England. James V was thus first cousin to Elizabeth I.

James V died in 1542, only thirty years old, even before Elizabeth I started to reign. He left behind a six-day-old daughter who was to be the famous Mary, Queen of Scots. Mary was forced to abdicate in 1567 by her rebellious nobles, and her infant son (then thirteen months old) was named King in her place.

This son, who reigned as James VI, was the great-great-grandson of Henry VII of England (through two female ancestors), where Elizabeth was the granddaughter of Henry VII. James VI was still King of Scotland when Elizabeth I died. He was her nearest surviving relative and he succeeded to the throne, becoming James I of Great Britain and Ireland.

In 1589 James VI had married Anne of Denmark, the daughter of Frederick II of Denmark, who had died the year before, and the elder sister of the new King, Christian IV (who was destined to reign for the phenomenal length of sixty years).

In 1606 Christian IV came to visit his brother-in-law, James I of Great Britain, and it is thought that Shakespeare wrote the play *Macbeth* in honor of this occasion.

It was made to order for the purpose, with all of Shakespeare's skill. It is, for instance, a play dealing with early Scottish history, the only one of Shakespeare's plays to be devoted to that theme, and this is clearly done in honor of James's Scottish origins.



[. . . *Enter Three Witches*]

Shakespeare catered further to the tastes of the new monarch by saturating the play with witchcraft, and *Macbeth* is the only play in which this is done.

Early modern tunes were the heyday of the witch-hunting mania. Nor

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was it all madness. There were still remnants of pre-Christian beliefs and ritual here and there among the peasantry of western Europe, and undoubtedly there were some people who tried to cultivate magic powers and who believed themselves really to be what other people called witches.

Some of these were caught and treated as dangerous sinners who really did have the magical powers they thought they had. Along with them, numerous old women were tortured and murdered for no other crime but that of being old, ugly, and accused. The usual excuse for it was the terrible verse in the Bible which reads, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Exodus 22:18).

As it happened, James I had pretensions to scholarship. He wrote books, discoursed learnedly on theology, had decided opinions which he strongly maintained, and in general wore people out with his pompous pedantry. He could scarcely fail to have a high opinion of himself, after all, for who was there to argue with him and prove him wrong? Another king might feel free to do so, perhaps, and Henry IV of France (much the abler man) said of James, very sarcastically, "He is the wisest fool in Christendom," and the general feeling is that Henry was right.

This does not mean he was all fool, however. Much of his learning was quite genuine, and in 1604 he wrote *A Counterblast to Tobacco* (anonymously), in which he denounced the new habit of tobacco smoking in harsh terms—yet terms with which a modern non-smoker can heartily agree and which, in the light of modern medical discoveries, would seem to be justified.

James I considered himself a particular expert on the matter of witchcraft. In 1597 he had written a book called *Demonology*, in which he advocated, among other things, the severest measures against witches.

Naturally, if James I was interested in witches, Shakespeare was going to give him witches. Nor did he have to make them up. He found them involved, in the sources he consulted, in the story of an early Scottish king, Macbeth. In fact, it is possible that one reason he chose this particular passage of Scottish history was because it allowed him to make use of witches.

Consequently *Macbeth* starts, mysteriously, in "an open place" in Scotland, and the very first stage direction is:

[*Thunder and lightning. Enter Three Witches.*]

-Act I, scene i

On they come; mysterious, grotesque, foreboding. One can well imagine

James I sitting back with satisfaction and casting a pleased look at his royal

brother-in-law. He will be able to study the stage witches and after



the
play is over he will surely proceed to explain to poor Christian at
most
tedious length all the places where Shakespeare proved he didn't
really
understand about witches.

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... *Graymalkin*

This first appearance of the witches (aside from pleasing James) serves merely to fix the atmosphere. They have only come together to decide when the really crucial next meeting is to take place. From the rapid question-and-answer, we learn that there is a battle in progress and that they plan to meet with someone named Macbeth.

Having said that, they must leave at once, for they are called. The First Witch cries out:

/ come, Graymalkin.

-Act I, scene i, line 8

The Second Witch says:

Paddock calls.

-Act I, scene i, line 9

Witches were thought to have sold their souls to the devil and, in return, to have received evil spirits as companions and servants. The Latin word for servant is *famulus*. A spirit who acts as a servant is therefore a "familiar spirit," or simply a "familiar."

These familiars were thought to take the shape of animals so that they might exist in the neighborhood of the witch without being detected. A cat was one favorite shape of this sort (based, perhaps, on no other reason

than that old ladies who had survived their families and were forced to live on in isolation found cats to be quiet and agreeable company. If old ladies, being old, are witches, then their cats are their familiars).

Graymalkin is apparently a favorite name for a gray cat, "malkin" being a diminutive of the then popular name Matilda.

The Second Witch has a familiar in the shape of a toad (the apparently natural habitat of an evil spirit, since it is a squat and ugly creature).

An obsolete name for a toad is "paddock."

What bloody man . . .

The witches chant a final couplet and whirl off the stage, but we need not wonder long what is happening. The matter of the battle is made plain at once when onto the stage comes an aged King and his court. A bleeding



soldier follows and the King says:

*What bloody man is that? He can report,
As seemeth by his plight, of the revolt
The newest state.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 1-3

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The King who asks the question is Duncan I, who became King in 1034. At this time Scotland was just forming as a nation. Until some two centuries before, it had been populated by a collection of tribes who had found security in their wild hills against the Romans, who ruled the southern part of the island till 410 (see page II-76), and the Saxons, who began to flood into that southern part later in the century (see page II-77).

By 800, however, the northern section of the island of Britain had lost its security, for danger came directly from the eastern and northern seas in the form of the Viking raids (see page II-79). England and Ireland suffered as badly.

Much of the northernmost areas of Scotland became Viking and remained so for a long time, while the Scots in the southern sections began to huddle together in self-defense. In 840 the nucleus of a nation called "Scotland" was formed, but for a long time the title of King was bandied back and forth, most bloodily, by several families, and Scottish history remains very dim.

It is only with Duncan that Scottish history begins to gain some firmness and the kingship settles down to a single dynasty. There remained dynastic disputes and always and perpetually war with England on the south, but all the kings of Scotland from this point on (with the one exception that is the theme of this play) were descendants of Duncan.

We know virtually nothing of Duncan I save that he reigned. Holinshed (see page II-4), who was Shakespeare's source, speaks of him as "soft and gentle of nature." He does not mention his age, but it is very likely he was fairly young. He had succeeded his grandfather, Malcolm II (1005-34), to the throne. Even if Malcolm II had attained the age of seventy (a great age for the time) at his death, it would be fair to suppose that his grandson,

Duncan, would then be about thirty at the time of his accession. He reigned only six years, so that in the last year of his reign, 1040, when the play opens, he would be only thirty-six. Another piece of evidence in favor of his youth is that he had two sons at the time of his death, of whom the older was only nine.

Nevertheless, Shakespeare makes him an old man. Partly this serves to increase the horror of the crime that brings his reign to a bloody close. Partly, too, it may have been done to avoid offending King James I. James's

own father, Henry, Lord Darnley, had met a similar bloody end, and it was widely believed that James's mother had been involved in the deed.



It would be the height of folly to remind James of this. Lord Darnley had been only twenty-two years old when he died, however, and if Duncan was made an aged, white-bearded king, the similarity would be minimized.

(Since *Macbeth* covers the period from 1040 to 1057, the events in this play are contemporaneous with those in *Hamlet*.)

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'Gainst my captivity

The bloody man is recognized by one of those who attend the King and who now says:

*This is the sergeant
Who like a good and hardy soldier fought
'Gainst my captivity.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 3-5

The speaker is Malcolm, the elder son of Duncan. He was born about 1031 and would therefore have been some nine years old at the time *Macbeth* opens. By the end of the play he would be twenty-six years old and perfectly capable of acting the role assigned to him in the last act. Shakespeare does not allow the dramatic time within the play to equal the actual

historical time. It is his intention, in fact, to push through the play in a whirlwind of activity, making very little time seem to pass. For that reason,

he has none of the characters age in the play, and Malcolm is as old at the beginning as he is at the end.

Malcolm has a younger brother, Donalbain (Donald Bane, or Donald the Bonny; that is, Handsome), who is on the scene but does not speak.

Duncan and Malcolm are both treated with great gentleness in the play and made to seem very attractive, partly because James I traced one line

of his descent from them. He was eighteen generations removed from Duncan I, in a genealogy that included three women; and, of course, seventeen from Malcolm.

Donalbain is neglected almost entirely. He speaks seven lines in the entire play. Partly this is because he did, in actuality, have only a minor part

to play in the events of this play. Partly, too, we can suspect it is because he is not represented among the ancestors of King James.

The merciless Macdonwald

The sergeant, who is referred to as "Captain" in the cast of characters of the Signet edition, describes the battle:

*The merciless Macdonwald-
Worthy to be a rebel for to that
The multiplying villainies of nature
Do swarm upon him-from the Western Isles*



Of kerns and gallowglasses is supplied;

-Act I, scene ii, lines 9-13

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The Scottish realm, so recently united by Duncan and his immediate predecessors, is by no means firmly knit. Various individual chieftains would wish to preserve their independence or even to take over the central monarchy for what little that was actually worth in those days. The Western Isles are off the northwestern coast of Scotland and are better known these days as the Hebrides, a distortion of an old name used by the Greek geographers. They came under Viking domination about 900, and indeed, the Vikings controlled the northernmost sections of Scotland (the Highlands) altogether; not only at the time of the play, but for two centuries after Duncan's time.

The "kerns and gallowglasses" (names given to Irish soldiers, light-armed and heavy-armed respectively) came from the Hebrides and, according to Holinshed, from Ireland too-which had also been under strong Viking domination until nearly this time.

Macdonwald, then, is fighting with Viking help, against the new Scottish kingdom of the Lowlands which threatens to destroy Viking domination of the north-and which eventually did.

... brave Macbeth. . .

At first, according to the Captain's account, the battle seemed to be in Macdonwald's favor:

*... Fortune, on his damned quarrel smiling,
Showed like a rebel's whore: but all's too weak:
For brave Macbeth-well he deserves that name-
Disdaining Fortune, with his brandished steel,
Which smoked with bloody execution,
Like valor's minion carved out his passage
Till he faced the slave;*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 14-20

Macbeth, then, so fleetingly mentioned by the witches in the first scene, is the loyalist general, fighting on behalf of his sovereign, Duncan.

Actually, Macbeth is more than just a general. He seems to have been a grandson of Kenneth II (971-95), the father of Malcolm II; perhaps his mother was a sister of the latter king. Since Duncan was a grandson of Malcolm II, Macbeth would be the first cousin (once removed) of the reigning King. The chances are that, historically, Macbeth was older than the King, forty years of age perhaps, though in the play Macbeth is shown as a fighter in the prime of his strength, while Duncan is an aged man.

The relationship between Macbeth and Duncan is made plain enough in the play. When Duncan hears the Captain tell of Macbeth's chopping his way to Macdonwald and killing him, he cries out:

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O valiant cousin!

-Act I, scene ii, line 24



It might be argued that in Shakespeare the term "cousin" can be used as a general term for honored friend as well as for relative. On the other hand, later in the play, Macbeth says specifically:

. . . I am his kinsman and his subject,

-Act I, scene vii, line 13

The fact of the relationship is important. Macbeth, as Duncan's cousin, was of the royal family, and in those days there was no fixed system of "legitimacy" whereby one member of the royal family had definite and universally agreed upon precedence over another for the throne (see page II-164).

Ideally, the strongest and most competent member of the royal family should be on the throne. Duncan was soft and gentle, but he was also negligent and inefficient. He was not a king for those hard times, and under him, Scotland experienced rebellion and anarchy. This displeased Macbeth.

As Holinshed says, ". . . Makbeth speaking much against the King's softness, and overmuch slackness in punishing offenders . . ."

We can perhaps sympathize with Macbeth. It was Duncan's incapacity that allowed Macdonwald's rebellion and it was then Macbeth who had to risk his life in incredible exertions to make good Duncan's failure. It might well have occurred to many, comparing Duncan's inertia and Macbeth's overflowing energy, that the wrong cousin was on the throne. (And it may have occurred to Macbeth himself too.)

None of this, of course, is to be found in Shakespeare's play, where the right of Duncan (the ancestor of James I) is unquestioned, while Macbeth (who is not in the line of ancestry) is granted no shadow of legitimate claim to the kingship.

. . . the Norwegian lord. . .

Macbeth's superiority in arms showed the brighter in the aftermath of the victorious battle against Macdonwald, for the rebel's death did not end matters. No sooner had that battle ended, reported the Captain:

*But the Norwegian lord, surveying vantage,
With furbished arms and new supplies of men,
Began a fresh assault.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 31-33

According to Holinshed, this is "Sueno king of Norway." This might be



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Sven II of Denmark, who became king in 1047, and who began a new Danish dynasty after the extinction of the line of Canute and the temporary sway of Magnus I of Norway (see page II-84). If so, the use of his name would be a little anachronistic, though in later years he made two futile attempts to attack England, which was then in the strong grasp of William the Conqueror.

It may well have been a Danish rather than a Norwegian invasion of Scotland that Macbeth had to deal with at that time, whatever the name of the leader of the invading army. If so, though, Shakespeare was certainly careful to leave it Norwegian. After all, with Christian IV of Denmark, the royal brother-in-law, in the audience, mention of a Danish defeat would have been unpolitic.

Perhaps this Norwegian invasion was not really a second battle, but rather part of the first battle delayed. Macdonwald, fighting with Viking help, may have been defeated by the skillful maneuvering of Macbeth, who, acting with admirable celerity, encountered Macdonwald before he could join with his Norwegian allies. Having defeated him, he then turned on the Norwegians.

... *Macbeth and Banquo*

Disturbed at the news of the fresh invasion, Duncan asks:

*Dismayed not this
Our captains, Macbeth and Banquo?*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 33-34

This is the first mention of Banquo in the play. He is mentioned in Hol-
inshed, but there is reason to think he is not a historical personage. He
seems, rather, to have been invented for a political purpose.

James I of England belonged to the house of Stuart. The first Stuart to
reign over Scotland was Robert II, who began his reign in 1371.

Robert II succeeded to the throne because his mother was the
younger
sister of the preceding King of Scotland, David II. It was through his
mother that Robert II (and therefore James I) could count himself a
scion
of the old kings of Scotland, dating back to Duncan and beyond. Through
his father, he was merely a descendant of Walter FitzAlan, a Norman
baron
who had been made steward of the Scottish King David I (who had
reigned
three quarters of a century after Duncan),

For the house of Stuart, in the male line, to go back no further than
David I, and to be represented then by an immigrant from England
(Scot-
land's age-long enemy) who had a non-military position from which



the name itself was drawn, was humiliating. (To be sure, a steward was a higher position than it now sounds. In medieval times the king's steward

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was the overseer of his estate and of all domestic ceremonies—a virtual "secretary of the interior.")

Consequently, the legend of Banquo was originated. It was from him that the house of Stuart was supposed to be descended. Banquo was presented as of good Scottish stock, dating back to Duncan's time. What's more, he was a general, fighting valiantly and victoriously. This produced

a much better aura about the Stuart line than Walter FitzAlan did.

By Holinshed's time the myth of Banquo had been fixed, and he is mentioned in the chronicle. However, Holinshed was writing in Elizabeth's time and he had no reason to be overly gentle with Banquo, who doesn't come out very well. For Shakespeare things were different. Since James I considered himself a descendant of Banquo as well as of Duncan, Banquo had to be handled with kid gloves, and was.

... *another Golgotha*

The Captain laughs off any possibility of Macbeth and Banquo being frightened. He himself has left the battle, because of his wounds, while it was still undecided, but the generals were raining blows on the enemy as though

... *they meant to bathe in reeking wounds,
Or memorize another Golgotha,*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 39-40

Golgotha ("place of a skull") was the name of the site on which Jesus was crucified (see Matthew 27:33), and it had a most dolorous infamy in consequence. The Captain implies that Macbeth seemed to be dealing out so much slaughter as to seem ambitious to make the field tragic enough to be as horribly infamous as Golgotha.



. . . *Thane of Ross*

The Captain is weakening and cannot complete his story. He is led away to have his wounds attended to. Two newcomers arrive, however, and Malcolm identifies one of them:

The worthy Thane of Ross.

-Act I, scene ii, line 45

"Thane" is from a word that means a "follower" or "servant." The King's immediate followers or servants are his nobles, and the word became a title of nobility, equivalent to "earl."

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Ross is a section of northern Scotland and its use is probably an anachronism here. Ross seems still to have been under Viking control at this time, and the first Earl of Ross was not appointed till more than a century after Duncan's reign.

Entering with Ross is the Thane of Angus (the name of a county in east-central Scotland) and already with the King is the Thane of Lennox. These titles are also anachronistic, well known in later times but not in Duncan's.

The Thane of Cawdor. . .

The King asks where Ross came from and the latter answers:

*From Fife, great King;
Where the Norwegian banners flout the sky*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 48-49

Fife is a county in southeastern Scotland, just across the Firth of Forth from Edinburgh. The Viking forces landing there are striking at the very heart of Scotland. What's more, they are receiving assistance from a Scottish turncoat:

*Norway himself, with terrible numbers,
Assisted by that most disloyal traitor
The Thane of Cawdor, began a dismal conflict;
Till that Bellona's bridegroom, lapped in proof,
Confronted him . . .*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 51-55

Cawdor is a small town in northern Scotland, about ten miles east of the city of Inverness. It was probably at the northern limits of the territory controlled by Duncan. To the north were the Vikings.

The Thane of Cawdor, feeling, probably, that the Vikings would win, was on their side. He was not actually on the battlefield, for it later turns



out that Macbeth (who fought on that battlefield) was not aware of the Thane's treason. Apparently, he had helped the Vikings with supplies, men, or, at the very least, information-and the King's officials had learned of it.

Bellona was the Roman goddess of war, considered sometimes to be the wife of Mars. Bellona's bridegroom would, therefore, be Mars, and the name is flatteringly applied here to Macbeth, for he wins the second battle as well as the first. The Norwegians are defeated and are forced to pay reparations.

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As for the traitorous Thane of Cawdor, who now finds he has backed the wrong horse after all, Duncan pronounces his sentence, saying:

*No more that Thane of Cawdor shall deceive
Our bosom interest: go pronounce his present death,
And with his former title greet Macbeth.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 63-65

To his own titles, estates, and revenues, in other words, Macbeth will find added those of Cawdor.

The weird sisters. . .

The scene now shifts back to the three witches. They are on a blasted heath; on a wasteland, that is, a plot of ground uninhabited and uncultivated.

For some thirty lines they engage in witch-ish mumbo jumbo, and talk of killing swine and putting curses on sailors. It has nothing to do with the play, or, for that matter, with the witches. It is merely there for atmosphere, and, undoubtedly, to please King James.

But then there is the sudden sound of a drum and the witches know Macbeth is coming. They quickly recite a charm:

*The weird sisters, hand in hand,
Posters of the sea and land,
Thus do go about, about:*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 32-34

The name Shakespeare has them call themselves, "the weird sisters" (by which name Holinshed also refers to them), suffices in itself to show that they are more than mere witches.

The word "weird" has come to mean "uncanny," "eerie," "gruesome-looking," partly because of its use right here in this play-but that is



not
its original meaning at all. It is from the Anglo-Saxon word "wyrd,"
mean-
ing "fate."

The weird sisters are the three beings who determine fate. They are what were called in Nordic mythology the Norns. Originally, there may have been one Norn (Fate), but the tendency was to make three of them, representing the Past, Present, and Future. (The Greeks also had three.)

The Norns were the arbiters of destiny, from whose decisions there was no appeal, and before whom even the gods were helpless. They were the embodiment of What Was, What Is, and, most fearsome of all, What Will Be.

It was these awesome creatures of ineluctable Necessity-and not just

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old crones, stirring caldrons and cackling-who were awaiting Macbeth.

. . . *to Forres*

Macbeth and Banquo come on the scene now and Banquo asks:

How jar is't called to Forres?

-Act I, scene iii, line 39

The two generals are traveling alone and they are far to the north of the site of the recent battle against the Vikings. Forres is about ninety miles north of Fife and some twenty miles east of Cawdor.

Apparently, in the aftermath of the battle, the King and his court traveled north to deal with the Thane of Cawdor. According to Holinshed, Cawdor was tried and condemned at Forres. The Scottish court was in any case forced to spend some time at Forres along the northern marches to oversee the chronic warfare with the Vikings in the Highlands.

Presumably, Macbeth and Banquo were called northward to attend the King at Forres and, when almost there, encountered the weird sisters on the heath.

. . . *that shalt be King. . .*

Each of the weird sisters in turn hails Macbeth:

[First] *All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!*

[Second] *All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!*

[Third] *All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be King hereafter!*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 48-50

The division is a neat one. The First Witch speaks of What Was: Macbeth was Thane of Glamis. (Glamis is a town in Angus County, ten



miles north of Dundee.) The Second Witch speaks of What Is: Macbeth is now Thane of Cawdor, though he is not yet aware of that fact and isn't even aware, apparently, of the discovery of the treachery of the previous thane of that title. The Third Witch speaks, of course, of What Will Be.

Why do the weird sisters confront Macbeth thus? The prophecy of future kingship is self-fulfilling. If the play is taken at its surface value, it is only the fact that the Third Witch put the matter of the kingship into Macbeth's head that leads to all the later action. If so, the witches can be looked at as demons whose only motive is to maneuver Macbeth's soul to damnation.

Or do the weird sisters merely symbolize in dramatic outward form the dark thoughts reverberating within Macbeth's head? His victories may

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have sharpened his own feeling that the wrong cousin is on the throne. He may be playing with the thought of making himself King, and the witches are a way of making that plain to the audience.

But Shakespeare didn't create the matter of the three witches; they are to be found in Holinshed, so we can't look upon them as merely the products of a great dramatist's technique.

After Holinshed describes the encounter of the weird sisters with Macbeth and Banquo, in terms that Shakespeare adheres to closely, that chronicler says, "But afterwards the common opinion was, that these women were either the weird sisters, that is (as ye would say) the goddesses of destiny, or else some nymphs or fairies, endued with knowledge of prophecy by their necromantical science."

Apparently, then, there had arisen a strong tradition, which first Holinshed and then Shakespeare adopted, that Macbeth had indeed met with something supernatural. How did such a tradition arise? It might have been pure invention, or, perhaps, we might speculate as follows:

In the sixth century Ireland underwent a kind of renaissance that endured until the Vikings came along in the ninth century and reduced the island to barbarism. During the sixth-to-ninth-century golden age, Irish

monks spread their doctrines all over the British Isles and into the European continent itself. It was Christianity, but not quite the Christianity of

Rome; there were differences in detail.

Rome fought against this "Celtic Christianity" and ultimately prevailed. In 664 at the Synod of Whitby, England turned officially from Celtic Christianity to Roman Christianity. Celtic Christianity even retreated from Ireland itself.

Indeed, Celticism found, as its last stronghold, Scotland. Down to Duncan's reign it still maintained itself stubbornly. We know very little of the



detail of that struggle, for when Roman Christianity triumphed, it wiped out the very memory of what it considered devilish cults and heresies.

It was after Macbeth's time that Roman Christianity won its final victory and Celticism died at last. The Scottish church may have looked back on Macbeth as one of the last representatives of the old Celticism and might have considered him in league with vague old magical and pagan practices. Can it be that dim tales of his league with the powers of darkness (only his Celticism, really) crystallized at last into the tale of the witches?

Thou shall get kings. . .

While Macbeth stands stunned by what has happened, Banquo (less imaginative than his fellow general) seems to think he has encountered carnival magicians. He asks if they have prophecies for him. The Third Witch, What Will Be, makes the dark sayings of her sisters plain when she says:

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Thou shall get kings, though thou be none.

-Act I, scene iii, line 67

This is a reference to the legend that Banquo is the ancestor of the Stuart line. (One can imagine that at that first showing of *Macbeth*, the Third Witch manages to indicate royal James as she declaims the line.)

By Sinel's death . . .

But now Macbeth has found his tongue, and expresses his bewilderment:

*By Sinel's death I know I am Thane of Glamis;
But how of Cawdor? The Thane of Cawdor lives,
A prosperous gentleman. . .*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 71-73

Sinel was Macbeth's father and had been the previous Thane of Glamis.

To that title Macbeth succeeded automatically on his father's death.

But even as Macbeth asks for more information, the weird sisters van-

ish, and hard on the heels of that vanishing come Ross and Angus, search-

ing for the generals. They bring a message from the King, and Macbeth

learns for the first time of Cawdor's treason and the fact that he, himself,

has succeeded to the title.

At once, the amazed Macbeth realizes that the weird sisters have told

one truth at least. And the thought enters his mind that he really may



be
King.

Whose horrid image ...

For Macbeth to become King, Duncan must cease being King, and one direct way to bring that about is for Macbeth to kill Duncan. The thought is a very easy one in a land that was as yet barely troubled by civilization, and Scotland up to that point had gone through an unending series of tribal wars in which one thane or another was Intent on killing whoever

it was that called himself King in order that he himself might take his turn

at the title. Macdonwald had only been the latest of many.

Yet Macbeth does not find it an easy thought at all. He soliloquizes:

*. . . why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
Against the use of nature?*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 134-37

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Macbeth's strong reaction against the thought of killing Duncan must

be understood in terms of Shakespeare's time, not Macbeth's.

In feudal times (and Macbeth's Scotland was certainly feudal) the King

was merely the first among equals. In many cases, the King was not as

strong as some of his chief vassals, and disobedience to the King on the

part of those vassals, or even outright rebellion, was much more the rule

than the exception.

In early modern times, as feudalism began to break down, the King came to be something more than he had been. Instead of being chosen

by the nobles generally (as is the situation in *Macbeth* and in *Hamlet*, see

page II-156) the principles of "legitimacy" were developed. Each new king became king by the rigid succession of birth, even if he were a tyrant,

an incompetent, or a moron.

Such a legitimate king was, in effect, chosen by God, since it was God who allowed him to be born in the right fashion to make his kingship in-

evitable. The King's rights were then obtained from God and he was ac-

countable to no one else. This was the doctrine of the "divine right of kings."

To kill a king in any society which believed in the divine right of kings was to commit the highest form of sacrilege. The killing was of God's dep-



uty and, therefore, in a way, of God himself.

In England, the doctrine of divine right was never as popular or as effective as it became on parts of the Continent. Through much of its history, England had a Parliament which insisted more and more on participating firmly, and even decisively, in governmental decisions, and which felt that the King was responsible to the gentry of the nation as well as to God.

The moment when divine right and consequent absolutism reached its peak in England was under Henry VIII, who ruled from 1509 to 1547 and who combined an indomitable will and a ferocious cruelty with an uncommon knack for earning popularity with his subjects. His second daughter, Elizabeth I, who reigned from 1558 to 1603, had the same knack of popularity and was much less cruel. Though both Henry and Elizabeth acted as though they were accountable only to God, they didn't make much of a fuss about it.

James I was of another sort altogether. He was a Scotsman and personally repulsive in his habits (even by Elizabethan standards), with no knack for earning popularity at all among a population who didn't like his birth, his accent, or his personality. Yet he prided himself on being a scholar and therefore insisted on airing his theories of government, and on loudly preaching the doctrine of the divine right of kings.

Perhaps one can scarcely blame him, for the times were dangerous ones for kings. The Protestant Reformation had begun in 1517 and the nations of Europe drew into irreconcilable camps, Catholics on one side and Protestants on the other. A number of the nations (England among them) were partly Catholic and partly Protestant, so that the danger of civil war was added to that of foreign war.

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In the maddened emotions of this period, it became increasingly possible to have people think the killing of kings to be justified, and even praiseworthy, if the King were of the wrong religion in the eyes of the killer.

James I's own mother, Mary, Queen of Scots, was executed in 1587, for religious as well as political reasons. Then in 1589 the French King, Henry III, was stabbed to death by a fanatical monk, Jacques Clement, who



felt
that the King was "soft" on Protestantism.

With *Macbeth* being played before James I, with the matter of regicide very much in the air, and with James's viewpoints on the divine right of kings well known, it behooved Shakespeare to make the possible killing of Duncan a much more horrifying matter than, in fact, it probably would have been considered in Macbeth's time.

... chance may crown me

Macbeth, with early seventeenth-century awe, recoils, then, from regicide, and thinks of the alternative. He continues his soliloquy:

*// chance will have me King, why, chance may crown me,
Without my stir.*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 143-44

Why not? Chance (or better, Fate) had made him Thane of Cawdor without his stir. And there isn't really such a great gap between Macbeth and the kingship. A bit earlier, in response to the statement of the Third Witch, Macbeth had said:

*... to be King
Stands not within the prospect of belief,*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 73-74

That, however, is an exaggeration. In later centuries, when the principles of legitimacy were accepted, the fact that Duncan had two sons in good health would make it seem that the kingship was not likely to pass to a collateral line. In Macbeth's time, this simply was not so.

In that age of brief lives and violent death, Duncan might die at any time, in battle or of disease, even if he were as young as he was in reality; and much more so if he were as old as Shakespeare presents him as being.

Once Duncan is dead, a successor would have to be chosen from the royal family. The two sons were, in actual historical fact, mere children, and Macbeth was not only a member of the royal family, but a great and victorious general. It would be certain that Macbeth would be chosen successor. It would be easy, then, for Chance to crown him without his stir.

Thinking of that, perhaps, Macbeth tries to shake off his



pensiveness
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and joins the others (who are more or less patiently waiting for him) on the final stage of the journey toward Forres, where are the King and the court.

The Prince of Cumberland

At Forres, the former Thane of Cawdor has been executed and the King greets Macbeth with joy and praise. Macbeth is rather studied and mechanical in his protestations of devotion.

And then the King, happy in the double victory over traitors at home and Vikings abroad, feels it is time to consider the state as secure and to give thought to a successor. He says:

*We will establish our estate upon
Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter
The Prince of Cumberland:*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 37-39

Cumberland is one of the northernmost counties of England itself, but it did not form an undoubted part of England till its conquest by William II Rufus, son of William the Conqueror, in 1092, half a century after Duncan's time. Before that it was more or less under Scottish control.

The Prince of Cumberland would be a title worn by the heir to the Scottish throne, equivalent to Prince of Wales in the English system. Indeed, by "establish our estate" Duncan means what would more directly be expressed as "settle the succession."

This is a thunderbolt to Macbeth. The wishes of a previous king (particularly a popular one) would have an important effect on popular opinion and even on the feelings of the nobility. If everyone grew used to thinking of Malcolm as heir to the throne, he was very likely to succeed automatically on Duncan's death.

Suddenly, it is far less likely that Chance would crown Macbeth with-
out his stir. If Macbeth wants to be King, he will have to stir, somehow.

He soliloquizes:



*The Prince of Cumberland! That is a step
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
For in my way it lies.*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 48-50

... to Inverness

But it is time for celebration and happiness. The King plans to visit

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Macbeth's castle so that he and his great general may feast together
and
grow ever more friendly and loving. He says to Macbeth:

*From hence to Inverness,
And bind us further to you.*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 42-43

Inverness is fifty miles west of Forres and it is here where Macbeth's castle is located, and where his wife, Lady Macbeth, is to be found.

... unsex me here

Macbeth has already sent a letter to his wife, and she enters, in the next scene, reading it, for her first appearance in the play. She is known to us (in the play) only as Lady Macbeth, which is perhaps just as well, since the name of the wife of the historic Macbeth was the uncommonly unepithetous one of Gruoch.

Lady Macbeth's reaction to the tale of what the weird sisters have said is not at all like that of Macbeth himself. Not for her the hesitations. She springs at once to the conclusion that the way to the throne must be cleared by instant action. She soliloquizes:

*Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty!*

-Act I, scene v, lines 41-44

Passages such as this one have made it common to think of Lady Macbeth as the very epitome of feminine ferocity-and yet Shakespeare wrongs her.



According to some of the fragmentary versions of early Scottish history that reach us, Lady Macbeth was the granddaughter of Kenneth IV, a Scottish king who was of a family that was rival to the one from which Duncan was descended. Indeed, Kenneth IV died in battle against Malcolm II, Duncan's grandfather.

In the primitive clan society of early Scotland, the real Lady Macbeth would have felt she had a blood feud with Duncan. (Her own husband, Macbeth, was the son of a sister of Malcolm II and might be considered as not inheriting the blood guilt in Lady Macbeth's eyes.) Under those circumstances, Lady Macbeth might, and probably did, encourage her able husband to rebel against the feckless King.

And this is what actually happened. If Macbeth, encouraged by his wife,

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aspired to the throne, he did so in the approved Scottish fashion of the time. He raised an army and rebelled.

Thus, Holinshed says: "he [Macbeth] slew the king at Enverns [Inverness], or (as some say) at Botgosuane, in the sixth year of his [Duncan's] reign." Holinshed does not say "murdered," he says "slew," and that is a word which would fit death in battle. Botgosuane, by the way, is a place some thirty miles northeast of Inverness.

Such a rebellion and such a death in battle of the King would not serve Shakespeare's purposes, for he wanted a play of horror, witchcraft, and despair. Looking for something more grisly, he came across a short account in Holinshed of the assassination of a Scottish king, Duff, by one of his nobles, Donwald. Donwald was not anxious to assassinate the King, but he was encouraged to do so by his wife. Donwald ended by doing the deed at a time when the King was his guest and asleep.

Shakespeare transplanted the deed bodily from Donwald to Macbeth, saddling the latter forever with a crime he probably would never have dreamed of committing. What's more, he made Lady Macbeth bear the blame of Lady Donwald through all the centuries.

It is indeed a fearful example of the power of the pen to alter the truth itself if it is wielded with sufficient genius. There are many other examples in Shakespeare, with the case of Richard III perhaps even more pitiable than that of Macbeth.

... as his host

Returning to Shakespeare's Macbeth, we find him with his conscience still clamoring.

Duncan has arrived at Macbeth's castle, has been greeted by Lady Macbeth, and is now at dinner. Macbeth, however, half sick with uncertainty and worry, has left the table, and is muttering to himself all the



arguments
against the deed. There is, after all, a third factor, older than either
kingly
divinity or feudal duty, to be considered; and one that is in some ways
more fearful. Macbeth argues against the deed by saying:

*First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself.*

-Act I, scene vii, lines 13-16

The sacred duties of hospitality date back to dim prehistory. In ages
when effective communities were no larger than villages or tribes, travel-
ers were forced to depend on the hospitality of strangers, and in sheer self-

interest, custom imposed stringent rules to prevent the abuse of such
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strangers. (After all, the host of today may be the traveler of
tomorrow.)

To be hospitable was strictly enjoined, and to harm a guest or allow
harm
to come to him was a terrible crime.

Thus, when Lot in Sodom entertained strangers (who were angels,
though he did not know that), the men of the city offered those
strangers
violence. Lot, according to the sacred duty of hospitality, offered to sacri-
fice his daughters to the mob, rather than allow them to touch his
guests
(Genesis 19:1-8).

Thus, the guilt is piled high on Macbeth and horror is heaped on
horror.
The man he thinks of murdering is his feudal lord, his King, his
cousin,
and his guest. He is, moreover, old, weak, and virtuous, and to top it
all
off, he is to be killed treacherously, while asleep.

... *the poor cat* ...

Lady Macbeth comes out from the feast, searching impatiently for
her
husband and fearful that his odd actions will bring on suspicion.

The two make a remarkably natural and even likable (except for the
nature of the deed they are planning) couple. They argue, but they act
as
a team and protect each other. It is clear that they are in love and that
their marriage is a successful one.

But now at this moment in the play, Lady Macbeth must infuse her
own
resolution into her wavering husband. When Macbeth begins to talk
of



abandoning the plan, she asks if he wishes to

*. . . live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would,"
Like the poor cat i'th'adage?*

-Act I, scene vii, lines 43-45

The lines are frequently quoted to describe irresolution, picturing some-
one who lets "I dare not" follow instantly (that is, "wait upon") every
time he expresses the desire "I would." The adage to which Lady
Macbeth
refers is, however, rarely known by those who quote the lines.

It is a medieval Latin proverb that can be translated "The cat loves
fish,
but does not wish to wet its foot." By Shakespeare's time it was so well
known through its use by Chaucer as not to require actual quoting.
The
picture of the cat, yearning for fish, advancing its paw, then drawing
it back
at the first touch of water, over and over, is clear enough in Lady
Macbeth's
hard voice, so that Macbeth can only writhe and say:

*Prithee, peace!
I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more is none.*

-Act I, scene vii, lines 45-47

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/ have given suck . . .

But Lady Macbeth goes on remorselessly, saying:

*/ have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this.*

-Act I, scene vii, lines 54-59

Macbeth has no surviving children in this play, or in history, it would
appear. We must assume, then, that Lady Macbeth had a baby that died
young, or, perhaps, had had a child by a previous marriage. And indeed,
after Macbeth's death, a stepson of his, Lulach, did attempt to carry on the
dynasty.

What's more, Lady Macbeth seems to be of an age, still, where more
children are considered possible, for Macbeth, awed by her ferocious de-
termination, says:

*Bring forth men-children only;
For thy undaunted mettle should compose
Nothing but males.*



-Act I, scene vii, lines 72-74

... *Pale Hecate's offerings* ...

It is now night; a horrible night. Banquo and his son, Fleance, appear in the castle courtyard, announce it to be past midnight and the King asleep. Macbeth appears and Banquo gives him a last present from the monarch, saying:

*This diamond he greets your wife withal,
By the name of most kind hostess . . .*

-Act II, scene i, lines 15-16

The crime against hospitality is thus underlined.

Left alone, Macbeth's burning imagination presents him with a hallucinated dagger, and he describes the ghastly night as follows:

*Now o'er the one half-world
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
The curtained sleep; witchcraft celebrates*

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*Pale Hecate's offerings; and withered murder,
Alarumed by his sentinel, the wolf,
Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,
With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design
Moves like a ghost.*

-Act II, scene i, lines 49-56

The pictures crowd each other-death, bad dreams, witchcraft, murder, howling wolves, ghosts. Hecate is a mythic underworld goddess (see page I-50) and in later times had come to be considered a kind of queen of witches, so that she fits into the atmosphere of this play. The advance of murder is compared to that of Tarquin, who raped the virtuous Lucretia (see page I-205).

His soliloquy done, Macbeth hastens into the castle to commit the murder.

This is carried through offstage, but the words of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as they come from and go to Duncan's bedchamber are most effective witness to the deed.

Lady Macbeth has effectively done her part. She has drugged the servants who are supposed to be guarding the King and she has made sure the door to his chamber is unlocked.

Finally, the murder is done and Macbeth comes in, panting and wild-eyed, still carrying the daggers dripping blood, and almost incoherent with the horror of it all.

... *Sleep no more*

Macbeth, who has had such difficulty overcoming his scruples in the



first
place, now feels his conscience will never give him rest. He says, in a kind of self-loathing:

*Methought I heard a voice cry, "Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murder sleep"-the innocent sleep,
Sleep that knits up the raveled sleeve of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labor's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast-*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 34-39

Lady Macbeth, with anger, tells him to stop being childish and to wash the blood from his hands, but he can only stare at the blood and say:

*Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather*

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*The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 59-62

But the daggers, which Macbeth has foolishly brought with him, must be returned to the bedchamber. When Macbeth flatly refuses to return to the scene of the crime, the indomitable Lady Macbeth does so. After all, it is necessary to put blood on the drugged servants and leave the blood-caked daggers near them, to make it seem they are guilty of the crime.

... a new Gorgon

But now there comes a knocking. Someone is trying to gain entrance into the castle. Macbeth and his wife must quickly get into their night-clothes so they can go to the door as though innocently roused from sleep.

The men at the door, who are finally let in (by a drunken porter whose talkative delay gives Macbeth and Lady Macbeth time to get ready), are Lennox, whom we have met before, and Macduff, whom we have not. Macduff is the Thane of Fife, and he has been ordered by the King to call for him early in the morning so that they might proceed on their way.

Macbeth arrives, completely master of himself, and casually points out the way to the King's chamber. Macduff leaves, but soon returns, distraught. He has discovered the bloody corpse of the King and cries out:

*Approach the chamber, and destroy your sight
With a new Gorgon:*

-Act II, scene iii, lines 73-74

The Gorgons of Greek mythology were three in number and were fearsome examples of the monsters fathered by the Greek imagination. They were winged creatures with glaring eyes, huge teeth, protruding tongues, and, most remarkable, writhing serpents in place of hair. (Could this have been



inspired by the sight of octopuses or sea anemones?) So horrible were the Gorgons that the mere sight of them turned men into stone, and Macduff is implying that the sight of the dead King would be just so horrible.

... my *fury*

Macbeth and his wife carry it off well. No one can possibly suspect them. Indeed, when Duncan's son, Malcolm, inquires in horror the name of the murderer, Lennox gives the obvious explanation:

Those of his chamber, as it seemed, had done't

-Act II, scene iii, line 103

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As Lennox goes on to say, the servants were smeared with blood, so were their daggers, and they themselves could make no satisfactory defense. And at this point Macbeth makes a self-serving remark, hoping to draw the fangs of what might otherwise become a suspicious incident afterward. He says:

*O, yet I do repent me of my fury,
That I did kill them.*

-Act II, scene iii, lines 108-9

Obviously dead men tell no tales. The live servants on questioning might have made their innocence clear; dead servants could not.

But Macbeth's clever insertion of the statement at this point where it might be least questioned does not after all go unnoticed. Macduff turns on him at once, asking:

Wherefore did you so?

-Act II, scene iii, line 109

It is easy to understand Macduff's annoyance. Even granted that the servants were the murderers, they could scarcely have done the deed on their own account. They had nothing to gain and could only have been bribed to do it by someone else who *did* have something to gain. It would have been important to question the servants thoroughly (and, in those days, with the help of a bit of torture) to find out who had hired them to do the deed.

It might (who knows) even have occurred to Macduff that if the servants had committed the murder, they would scarcely have remained on the scene waiting for capture. That anomaly too (which might even be



reflected in Lennox's statement that the servants were the murderers "as it seemed," a distinct qualification) deserved question.

As it is, Macbeth's action had destroyed vital evidence.

Nervously, Macbeth tries to explain and Lady Macbeth shrewdly creates a diversion by pretending to faint. Nevertheless, the harm is done. Macduff's suspicion has been aroused; and it will persist.

... to *avoid the aim* ...

It is the King's sons who are most in danger. At this point, suspicion could light more easily on them than on anyone else. They stand most to gain from the death of the King, for the older will succeed (he has just been proclaimed Prince of Cumberland and might have decided he could not wait even a day for the crown) and the younger, if an accomplice, will receive high office.

Of course, they know they did not do it, but that introduces another

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danger of quite another sort. If someone else killed Duncan, or hired the servants to kill Duncan, then surely it must be in order to gain the crown. And if so, Malcolm and Donalbain will have to be killed too, and that portion of the deed of murder might yet come. Malcolm says:

*This murderous shaft that's shot
Hath not yet lighted, and our safest way
Is to avoid the aim. Therefore to horse;
And let us not be dainty of leave-taking,
But shift away.*

-Act II, scene iii, lines 143-47

In actual historical fact, as stated before, Malcolm and Donalbain were mere children. After the lost battle in which Duncan was killed (in history), the youngsters were taken away by the remnants of the defeated forces. In the play, where they are made much older, and where their father is assassinated rather than defeated in battle, the situation is a flight rather than a retreat.

... to *England*

The fleeing sons could expect asylum and good treatment abroad. Abroad they would represent a "rightful heir" to the throne; they could be used to stir up dissension at home for the benefit of the neighboring nation that was serving as their host. The neighboring nation might even



invade,
using the "rightful heir" as a cover that would make the invasion seem a noble act of restitution rather than simple aggression.

Malcolm says:

I'll to England.

-Act II, scene iii, line 139

Donalbain says:

*To Ireland, I; our separated fortune
Shall keep us both the safer.*

-Act II, scene iii, lines 140-41

According to Holinshed, Malcolm received in England "most friendly entertainment," while Donalbain in Ireland "was tenderly cherished."

The fact of the exile proved in the long run to be of great importance to Scottish history (as we shall see), and even the respective places of exile, England for Malcolm and Ireland for Donalbain, were to be important.

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... *gone to Scone*

The flight of Malcolm and Donalbain plays into Macbeth's hands. The nobility has gathered, apparently, to consider the situation, and Macduff, who has attended, emerges from the castle with the news. Ross, who was not at the meeting, asks the formal decision as to who had done the murder. Macduff answers somberly:

Those that Macbeth hath slain.

-Act II, scene iv, line 23

The killing of the servants sticks in Macduff's throat. There is an edge of sarcasm to the comment, surely. Ross asks the motive of the killing and Macduff responds with what is now the accepted theory:

*They were suborned:
Malcolm and Donalbain, the king's two sons,
Are stol'n away and fled, which puts upon them
Suspicion of the deed.*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 24-27

Ross says:

*Then 'tis most like
The sovereignty will fall upon Macbeth.*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 29-30



Why not? Macbeth is, after all, the outstanding member of the royal family remaining in Scotland. Macduff says:

*He is already named, and gone to Scone
To be invested.*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 31-32

Scone is a place about two miles north of Perth and thirty miles north of Edinburgh. It was the traditional place where Scottish kings were crowned, and legend traces this back to the eighth century, or three centuries before Macbeth's time.

More solidly, the matter of Scone takes us back to Kenneth I, who ruled

over the tribes of Scots who had entered the land from northern Ireland.

Kenneth, the Scots leader, forced his domination over the tribes of Picts,

who had inhabited the land through Roman times, and it was with this

amalgamation of the two Celtic peoples that the history of Scotland as we

know it starts, about 846.

Scone was the old Pictish capital, and Kenneth adopted it as a gesture

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of conciliation. He brought to it the great "Stone of Scone." Very likely, this was a pre-Christian object of worship, but it was Christianized and the

monks gave out that this was the very stone that Jacob had slept on in Canaan when he dreamed of angels making their way between heaven and

earth. ("And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that

he had put for his pillows and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it"-Genesis 28:18.)

The Scottish kings were crowned while sitting on it, until Edward I of England seized it in 1296 and carried it back to London. Ever since then the Stone of Scone has been under the coronation throne in Westminster

and English kings have been crowned on it. Scone continued to be the place

of coronation for Scottish kings, even without the Stone, right down to the

time of James VI, whose elevation to the throne of England as James I ended Scotland's history as an independent nation.

... play'dst most foully ...

All seems to be going perfectly for Macbeth. As the Third Witch had predicted, he has become King. Yet there are flaws in the picture. Macduff

clearly does not accept the official version. When Ross asks if he is going



to Scone, he answers:

No, cousin, I'll to Fife.

-Act II, scene iv, line 36

This is a clear sign of disapproval. It is also reasonable to suppose that by refusing to attend the coronation, he will avoid taking some sort of oath to Macbeth as his King. That would leave the way clear to a future rebellion against Macbeth without the necessity of having qualms about feudal honor.

Nor is Macduff the only one to suspect. Banquo shares a certain knowledge with Macbeth that others do not have. He was on the scene when the weird sisters spoke.

He appears at Forres, where the old Thane of Cawdor had been executed and near where the weird sisters had appeared. The city is now King Macbeth's capital. Banquo, alone on the stage, broods about it:

*Thou hast it now: King, Cawdor, Glamis, all,
As the weird women promised, and I fear
Thou play'dst most foully for't.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 1-3

Holinshed makes Banquo an accomplice. He says: "At length, therefore, communicating his [Macbeth's] purposed intent with his trusty friends,

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amongst whom Banquo was the chiefest, upon confidence of their promised aid, he slew the king. . ."

This certainly doesn't sound like a secret, treacherous assassination, where one tells as few people as possible (no one, best of all) and needs little aid. This is what would happen if an armed rebellion is planned and if allies are sought who might bring contingents of troops to the side of the rebellion.

Armed rebellion was, of course, a standard method of procedure in medieval times, and even in England down through the fifteenth century, as many other Shakespearean plays attest. It would not seriously hurt Banquo's reputation to know he had taken part in one, especially if it were victorious.

Once Shakespeare had converted the death of Duncan into a cowardly murder in defiance of the laws of hospitality, though, Banquo had to be kept out of it. After all, Banquo's supposed descendant, James I, was in



the audience.

In the play, then, Banquo is allowed no knowledge of Macbeth's plot and can only suspect that he had "play'dst most foully for't." Yet this concession to the audience sits rather uneasily upon the play. If Macduff, with no knowledge of the weird sisters, can suspect Macbeth so actively as to refuse his presence at the coronation, then for Banquo, with his knowledge, to have nothing more than a vague fear is for him to be naive almost to the point of imbecility.

... my oracles as well

For the sake of the drama, Shakespeare vastly condenses the time span of the play. The historic Macbeth had a fairly long reign of seventeen years. The first ten years, said Holinshed, were peaceful and were, we may reasonably assume, an improvement over Duncan's short, incompetent, and rebellion-filled reign. Holinshed says:

"Makbeth, after the departure thus of Duncane's sons, used great liberality towards the nobles of the realm, thereby to win their favor, and when he saw that no man went about to trouble him, he set his whole intention to maintain justice, and to punish all enormities and abuses, which

had chanced through the feeble and slothful administration of Duncane.

... He made many wholesome laws and statutes for the public weal of his subjects."

But later in his reign, says Holinshed, "the prick of conscience (as it chanceth ever in tyrants, and such as attain to any estate by unrighteous means) caused him ever to fear, lest he should be served of the same cup, as he had ministered to his predecessor."

Of course, we need not suppose that Macbeth's growing suspicion, which made him react with increasing cruelty against any possibility of dis-

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loyalty or rebellion, was entirely due to "the prick of conscience." We might find a more mundane reason in the fact that after ten years, Duncan's exiled sons had reached man's estate and were intriguing day and night for Macbeth's fall.

Shakespeare, in the play, skips the ten years of peace, prosperity, and justice as though they had never been. From the coronation at the end of

Act II, he proceeds at once to Macbeth's latter years as a suspicious tyrant

at the beginning of Act III.

Macbeth's fear that he will be served as he has served points logically to Banquo first of all. Banquo also had his promises from the weird sisters.



They had told him that though he would not himself be King, his posterity would gain the kingship.

What's more, Banquo has not forgotten that. In the soliloquy which opens the third act, he says:

*... it was said
It should not stand in thy posterity,
But that myself should be the root and father
Of many kings. If there come truth from them-
As upon thee, Macbeth, their speeches shine-
Why, by the verities on thee made good,
May they not be my oracles as well
And set me up in hope?*

-Act III, scene i, lines 3-10

... strange invention

But Macbeth now enters. He was a brave general in Act I; a treacherous assassin in Act II; and now, in Act III, he is the suspicious tyrant.

But then, even in the play, the suspicions that torment the new King are not presented as groundless. Macbeth says to Banquo, in the course of the conversation that follows Banquo's opening soliloquy:

*We hear our bloody cousins are bestowed
In England and in Ireland, not confessing
Their cruel parricide, filling their hearers
With strange invention.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 29-32

In the shortened time span of the play this seems to follow not long after the flight of Malcolm and Donalbain, and their intrigue abroad seems

to have begun at once. In actual history, some ten years have elapsed, and

it is the fact that the children have grown into young men capable of leading armies that now makes them dangerous.

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My genius . . .

But it is Banquo who is the immediate danger. A little later in the scene, when Banquo has left, Macbeth muses about him, saying:

*There is none but he
Whose being I do fear: and under him
My genius is rebuked, as it is said
Mark Antony's was by Caesar.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 54-57

The relationship of Mark Antony's genius (that is, his guardian spirit) to that of Octavius Caesar is mentioned in *Antony and Cleopatra*, the play



which Shakespeare wrote immediately after *Macbeth* and which was probably revolving in his mind as he wrote this passage.

There seems no reason for Macbeth to take this attitude toward Banquo. Just before this passage, he says of him:

*...in his royalty of nature reigns that
Which would be feared. 'Tis much he dares;
And, to that dauntless temper of his mind,
He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valor
To act in safety.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 50-54

Yet there is absolutely nothing in the play to justify these words. Banquo's part has been an entirely passive one. It is Macduff who displays a wise suspicion and a courageous opposition; Banquo's suspicions, which should be much more firmly based than Macduff's, don't prevent him from remaining at Macbeth's side. It would seem, rather, that he is as ambitious as Macbeth and sees in Duncan's death nothing more than a step forward to the gaining of the crown for his posterity.

It is easy to suppose that Shakespeare is ladling out this undeserved praise to Banquo for the sake of Banquo's descendant in the audience.

For Banquo's issue. . .

Macbeth, for his own safety, then, would have Banquo dead. He cannot openly have Banquo executed, for he has no good cause, and to do the deed without cause would offend and frighten the other noblemen of the realm and would make them all the more liable to listen to the blandishments of Duncan's exiled sons.

Macbeth would have to use the same tactics he used for Duncan—the

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secret assassination—and to make that possible he questions Banquo on his movements that night.

The King is planning a banquet, but Banquo must take care of an errand first and will be riding through the early part of the night. Macbeth asks, still apparently offhand:

Goes Fleance with you?

-Act III, scene i, line 35

Fleance will indeed be going with Banquo, and this is important, for if Macbeth is to abort the prediction that Banquo's posterity will sit on the throne then Fleance, Banquo's only son, must die too.

If he does not do so, as Macbeth says later, after Banquo's departure:

For Banquo's issue have I filed [defiled] my mind;



For them the gracious Duncan have 1 murdered;
-Act III, scene i, lines 65-66

And yet, as in almost every point where Banquo is involved in the play, there arise questions. There is the straightforward story of Duncan, Macbeth, and the vengeance of Duncan's sons, which is not seriously distorted by Shakespeare's conversion of Duncan's death in battle into Duncan's death by assassination. To it, however, is added the Stuart-manufactured legend of Banquo, and it doesn't really fit. Even Shakespeare can't make it fit.

Why should Macbeth be so upset over the possibility that Banquo's posterity will succeed to the throne? Macbeth has no children of his own and therefore there is none of his posterity to be cheated. The throne must go to someone, and if Macbeth leaves no successor why not to Banquo's descendants as to any other?

To be sure, Macbeth has a stepson, but he is not mentioned in the play. To be sure, Macbeth may still be hoping for children of his own, but that is not mentioned in the play either. In short, there is no reason at all given in the play why Macbeth should possibly resent the throne's going to the posterity of his friend and ally Banquo.

We can only suppose that where the necessity of absolute consistency in the play and the necessity of pleasing King James are at variance, prudent Shakespeare decides to please the King. He makes Banquo an undeserved hero (undeserved even by what we find in the play itself) and makes a great, though unnecessary, point concerning Banquo's posterity, among whom James I includes himself.

Nought's had . . .

Macbeth makes arrangements with two desperadoes to take care of
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Banquo and then returns to the palace to rejoin his wife. Both he and Lady Macbeth are undergoing a degeneration of character.

Lady Macbeth had arranged for the killing of Duncan without a qualm,



but now in the aftermath, things are beginning to go wrong. She says:

*Nought's had, all's spent,
Where our desire is got without content:*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 4-5

She has achieved the pinnacle of her ambition and finds that she cannot now rest. It is as difficult to remain there as to get there and she is condemned to everlasting struggle. Her resolution is beginning to weaken, and it will continue to weaken till it destroys her.

As for Macbeth, the matter is reversed. He too recognizes the difficulties of his new position and the uselessness of having struggled for it. He can even envy the dead Duncan, saying:

*Duncan is in his grave;
After life's fitful fever he sleeps well.
Treason has done his worst; nor steel, nor poison,
Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing,
Can touch him further.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 22-26

But stress is hardening Macbeth, not softening him. He had been all qualms in the killing of Duncan, but is much less so now. Indeed, he doesn't even feel it necessary to tell his wife of what he plans in connection with Banquo. He says:

*Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,
Till thou applaud the deed.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 45-46

It is almost as though he recognizes the entry of weakness into his wife and feels it safer to act alone henceforth.

... *Fleance is 'scaped*

Banquo returns, with Fleance, from his afternoon ride and is walking toward the palace and the banquet which Macbeth is giving when he is set upon by the assassins and killed.

One of the murderers reports to Macbeth as the feast begins, and says:

Most royal sir, Fleance is 'scaped.

-Act III, scene iv, line 21

The plan has failed in essence, therefore, for the prediction of the weird sisters has not been aborted, and Banquo's posterity may still (and, according to the legends of later times, did) survive to rule over Scotland.

As at all points connected with the Banquo subplot, there are puzzles. When Banquo was killed, Fleance fled and presumably left Scotland, though Shakespeare does not say so. In fact, after the scene of Banquo's



murder, Fleance is never mentioned again in the play; he has served his purpose of representing the posterity that is to come. Holinshed, who accepts the Banquo-Fleance legend, says that he fled to Wales.

But why flee at all? Presumably he knew nothing of Macbeth's guilt, for Banquo (for all we can tell from the play) kept his doubts to himself and acted the part of loyal subject to his erstwhile cogeneral. If Banquo is killed by mysterious footpads, why should Fleance assume they were assassins hired by Macbeth? Why does he not, on fleeing from those murderers, make his way to the palace-if not immediately, then eventually-and demand that Macbeth find the murderers of his father and punish them? That would, of course, place him in the power of Macbeth, and he would not then live long.

Shakespeare does not bother to explain this point. In the rush and fury of a dramatic production, many loose ends can be left with impunity. Holinshed, who is writing sober history, must explain it and does so quite feebly. He says that after Banquo's murder, Fleance, "having some inkling (by the admonition of some friends which he had in the court) how his life was sought no less than his father's," fled the country.

And where does Fleance go? To England, to join Malcolm? To Ireland, to join Donalbain? Surely either son would have welcomed a recruit that bore the important name of Banquo's son. No, he went to Wales, and is no more heard of. He does not participate in the final battle of revenge against Macbeth, even though his father's final words as he falls under the daggers of the assassins are:

*Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly, fly!
Thou mayst revenge.*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 17-18

There are no difficulties, of course, if it is remembered that Banquo and Fleance never existed and that they are pasted onto the story through Stuart insistence, while Shakespeare emphasizes them the more to please his King.

... *th'Hyrcean tiger*

There follows a very dramatic scene at the banquet. Before Banquo had left Macbeth to go off on his fatal trip, Macbeth had said to him:

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Fail not our feast.

-Act III, scene i, line 27

He knew full well, of course, that it was his intention that Banquo never



return. The unsuspecting Banquo answers, however:

My lord, I will not.

-Act II, scene i, line 28

Now Banquo, though dead, keeps his word, and his ghost appears at the feast, throwing Macbeth into a frenzy of horror, which the others cannot understand, for only Macbeth can see the apparition.

He cries to it at one point:

*Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
The armed rhinoceros, or th'Hyrcean tiger;
Take any shape but that [Banquo], and my firm nerves
Shall never tremble.*

-Act III, scene iv, lines 101-4

The "Hyrcean tiger" is the tiger from Hyrcania, which is a region bordering the Caspian Sea on the southeast. Indeed, the Caspian Sea was called the "Hyrceanum Mare" in ancient times.

It is interesting that Macbeth does not treat the apparition as necessarily

the ghost of Banquo, in the sense that we would speak of it nowadays—a spirit belonging to no one else, with its bloody wounds gaping. To Macbeth it is an evil spirit from hell which chooses for some purpose of its own to take on the shape of the murdered Banquo and might just as easily have taken on any other. Macbeth is daring it to do just that, to take on any other,

however horrible, for it is only the dead Banquo at this particular moment

that is capable of unmanning him. (Macbeth's attitude toward the ghost of Banquo is precisely that of Hamlet and Horatio toward the ghost of the elder Hamlet, see page II-82.)

The appearance of the ghost breaks up the feast, and Lady Macbeth is forced to ask the guests to leave in a phrase that has entered the language.

She says:

*Stand not upon the order of your going,
But go at once.*

-Act III, scene iv, lines 120-21

In other words, they must not waste time trying to file out in strict order

of precedence, with those of greater social status going first.

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... *Macduff denies his person*

And even here the Banquo subplot seems an intrusion. As soon as the guests have left, Macbeth is himself and can discuss with Lady Macbeth the state of the nation without the slightest qualms. It is as though the epi-



sode with the ghost had never been.

Macbeth's concern, even with Banquo dead, is the nobility in general. They have shown a constant tendency to revolt during Duncan's reign and they may do so again. Macbeth must keep all of them under surveillance and, as he says to Lady Macbeth:

*There's not a one of them but in his house
I keep a servant fee'd.*

-Act III, scene iv, lines 132-33

One nobleman in particular rouses his keenest suspicion. He says to Lady Macbeth:

*How say'st thou, that Macduff denies his person
At our great bidding?*

-Act III, scene iv, lines 128-29

Because Shakespeare has dropped Macbeth's ten good years, this seems as though the reference is to Macduff's failure to be present at the coronation, and one can even reasonably suppose that the feast just concluded was intended to celebrate that coronation.

In Holinshed, it was not by absence at the coronation or immediately thereafter that Macduff roused the royal suspicion. It couldn't be, since for ten years after that coronation Macduff lived peacefully in Scotland. Holinshed's story is that about 1050 Macbeth decided to build a better and more elaborate royal palace, and demanded that the various members of the nobility fulfill their feudal duties by contributing money and labor to the project. When it was the turn of Macduff, he sent laborers and money, but did not appear himself, as the others had done, because he mistrusted Macbeth. It was this absence that goaded Macbeth to the stern action which Shakespeare will describe.

By the worst means . . .

With Banquo dead and with Macduff due to be taken care of next, Macbeth feels the need of guidance. On the heath near Forres, the weird sisters

searched him out and, in a way, forced evil upon him against his will. Now,
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however, he has been corrupted to the point where he intends to seek them

out and voluntarily snatch at evil. He says:

/ will tomorrow



*And betimes I will, to the weird sisters:
More shall they speak, for now I am bent to know
By the worst means the worst.*

-Act III, scene iv, lines 133-36

This mention of the weird sisters leads into a short scene in which they appear again. This time Hecate, the witch queen, appears also, and in jiggling rhyme scolds the weird sisters for dealing with Macbeth without her. There is a song and they are gone.

This seems to be an interpolation by some hand other than Shakespeare's. A younger contemporary of Shakespeare, Thomas Middleton, wrote a play called *The Witch* in 1610, in which Hecate was a character and in which two songs appear which are to be found one in this scene, and the other two scenes later. Some suggest that there was an attempt by Middleton to prepare a musical version of *Macbeth* and that the Hecate scenes are a remnant of that.

In fact, the version of *Macbeth* which we now possess may not be the original but may be one which was somewhat cut to fit into the musical format. (After all, songs and dances take up time.) One reason for thinking so is that *Macbeth* is comparatively short. It is only three fifths the length of *Hamlet*.

On the other hand, there are no obvious gaps in the plot to make us suspect cutting, except possibly for the appearance of a Third Murderer at the last minute on the occasion of Banquo's assassination. Originally, Macbeth had made arrangements with two assassins, and the appearance of a third for no apparent reason and fulfilling no apparent function is puzzling. There have been a number of attempts to explain it, and it is conceivable that some earlier scene explaining the existence of the Third Murderer is lost.

... *the tyrant's feast* . . .

The death of Banquo has indeed roused suspicions among the nobility. The Thane of Lennox, speaking with an unnamed Lord, manages to voice those suspicions. Banquo's murder, like Duncan's, has been blamed on an escaped son, and Lennox cannot swallow that.

The unnamed Lord may have arrived in Scotland from abroad, for he seems to have information concerning affairs in England. Lennox asks him concerning the whereabouts of Macduff, who seems a living warning against being too frank in talk these days:

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*... for from broad words, and 'cause he failed
His presence at the tyrants feast, I hear,
Macduff lives in disgrace.*

-Act III, scene vi, lines 21-23

Both Lennox and the Lord he is addressing refer to Macbeth as a tyrant, but this does not necessarily mean that Macbeth was extraordinarily cruel.

In the original Greek sense, the word was used to describe one who had seized the throne without possessing it by right of birth. Such a usurper was a tyrant even if he ruled justly and mildly. But, of course, Macbeth was now becoming a tyrant in the modern sense as well.



... *the most pious Edward* ...

The Lord begins to answer Lennox's question concerning Macduff with an account of the present doings of Malcolm:

*The son of Duncan
From whom this tyrant holds the due of birth,
Lives in the English court, and is received
Of the most pious Edward with such grace
That the malevolence of fortune nothing
Takes from his high respect.*

-Act III, scene vi, lines 24-29

"The most pious Edward" was Edward the Confessor. He was the son of the Saxon King Ethelred the Unready and Emma, a princess of Normandy (see page 11-89). He had been born about 1003, but when he was only eleven years old, his father (a most inept king) was hurled from the throne by a Danish invasion under Sven Forked-beard. Edward was carried off to Normandy, his mother's home, for safekeeping.

Sven died soon after his conquest, but his son Canute managed to seize England and to rule over it, very capably, for eighteen years. Canute married Emma, Ethelred's queen, and had a son by her, Hardecanute. When

Canute died in 1035, Emma supported her young son by him, rather than

her considerably older son by Ethelred. As it happened, it was Harold Harefoot (an illegitimate son of Canute) who succeeded. He died in 1040, however, and Hardecanute then became King of England.

It was just when Harold died and Hardecanute succeeded that Duncan

was killed and that his son Malcolm was brought to England.

Hardecanute was the half brother of Emma's son by Ethelred. That other son, Edward, was still in Normandy. Hardecanute, feeling the relationship, and realizing perhaps that he would leave no successors, invited

Edward back to England. When Hardecanute died in 1042 at the age of
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twenty-three, Edward succeeded to the throne, twenty-eight years after his father had lost it.

Edward was a weak king, whose reign brought disaster to England. The young Duke of Normandy (William the Bastard, who a quarter century later gained the much to be preferred name of William the Conqueror) was a cousin, and Edward considered him the logical successor to

the throne, though this was quite unacceptable to the Saxon aristocracy. What's more, Edward had taken a vow of chastity and meant it, so he would have no children to dispute the possibility of a Norman succession.

Edward's vow of chastity was an indication of his interest in the religious life. So was his nickname "the Confessor," which attested to the regularity of his attendance of religious services. He was greatly esteemed for his piety even in his lifetime, and after his death, when (very largely because



of him) England was conquered by Normandy and its Saxon population reduced to a subject race, his reign was looked back upon as a kind of "good old days" and his piety was enlarged to saintliness. In 1161, indeed, not quite a century after his death, he was canonized.

It is to be expected, aside from Edward's saintliness, that he would be hospitable to the young Scottish prince. For one thing, he could scarcely help seeing in Malcolm's exile from Scotland an echo of his own long exile from England. For another, practical politics always made it convenient to support a pretender to the throne of a neighboring kingdom.

. . . warlike Siward

The Lord proceeds with his account. Macduff, it seems, has also gone to England (and Macbeth, who apparently is not yet aware of this, is thus too late to visit on Macduff the fate of Banquo). The Lord says:

*. . . Thither [to England] Macduff
Is gone to pray the holy King [Edward], upon his aid
To wake Northumberland and warlike Siward;
That by the help of these, with Him above
To ratify the work, we may again
Give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights,*

-Act III, scene vi, lines 29-34

Despite the praise given to Edward, it is clear what a weak king he is.

In the confusion of a century of Danish invasion, the Saxon nobility had become quite independent and the English nation was a congeries of quarreling lords. (This greatly helped that nation fall to the well-governed and united Norman duchy a decade later.)

If the anti-Macbeth faction of Scotland wanted help from England, they

could not get it directly from Edward, who was very largely a figurehead.

They had to get it from one or more of the feudal lords and use Edward only for what he was worth as an intercessor with these same lords.

In this case, the logical choice was Siward, the Earl of Northumberland.

In asking Siward for help, the anti-Macbeth faction was making a very practical choice.

For one thing, there was a matter of relationship. Shakespeare says nothing of it in the play, but according to Holinshed, Duncan had been

married to the daughter of Siward, and Malcolm, the exiled Scottish prince, was therefore the grandson of the Northumbrian earl.



Quite apart from that, there was a matter of practical politics. Northumberland was the northernmost county of England, abutting on the Scottish border, and there was a long record of border raiding between the lords of southern Scotland and those of northern England. An Earl of Northumberland would therefore be only too ready to meddle in internal Scottish politics in the hope of salvaging good for himself. In this case, the good that Northumberland would hope to salvage for himself was all too obvious.

Northumberland was what was left of the older kingdom of Northumbria, which had included all the region from the Humber River to the Firth of Forth; that is, roughly from York to Edinburgh.

The northern portion of Northumbria, then called "Bernicia," had been ceded to Scotland by Edgar I of England in 970. The reasons for the cession are dim, but it seems not to have been the result of any military defeat for England. It seems rather to have been something in the nature of an attempt to come to a permanent accommodation with Scotland in order that the two lands might live forever in peace. It worked on a short-term basis, anyway, for Edgar's thirty-one-year reign was sufficiently free of military troubles to gain him the name, in the chronicles, of "Edgar the Peaceful."

However, one can scarcely expect that the lords of northern England would be entirely reconciled to the loss of Bernicia. The earls of Northumberland would surely be on the constant watch for the opportunity to regain it. Siward, if he agreed to help Malcolm, might well have had in mind Bernicia (which to the Scots had become "Lothian") in return.

This cannot appear in Shakespeare's play, of course, for there the opposing forces are divorced from practical politics and are rather representative of the eternal struggle of Good versus Evil, with Siward, in this case, on the side of the Good.

Siward, who is portrayed in this play as a plain and heroic soldier in the best English tradition, was, however, a most unlikely example of



partisan-
 on-the-side-of-Good. He was of Danish extraction and he had become
 earl in 1041 through the simple expedient of murdering his wife's
 uncle,
 who had been the previous earl. Siward, in short, had actually
 committed
 the kind of crime that Macbeth had not, in actual historical fact,
 committed.

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Thanks to Shakespeare's bow to English nationalism and to the
 family
 pride of James I, the role of Good and Bad was neatly inverted for all
 time.

... none of woman born

It is time now for Macbeth's projected visit to the weird sisters, and
 they come onstage again in the opening of the fourth act. They are
 brew-
 ing charms while listing a most grisly account of the ingredients they
 use
 as
 Shakespeare once more caters to the witch-hunting pedantry of
 James I.
 There is also the second intrusion of Hecate with a song, and then
 Mac-
 beth comes.

The weird sisters are quite willing to tell him what he wants to know
 in
 a
 series of visions. The first one is that of an armed head, signifying war,
 who
 says:

*Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth! Beware Macduff!
 Beware the Thane of Fife. Dismiss me: enough.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 71-72

As on the occasion of the first meeting with the weird sisters, the
 first piece of information is not really informative. Then they had
 greeted
 Macbeth as Thane of Glamis, to begin with; and he had known he was
 that.
 Now they tell him to beware Macduff, and he is already planning to
 kill
 him.

The second vision is in the form of a bloody child, who says:

*Be bloody, bold, and resolute! Laugh to scorn
 The pow'r of man, for none of woman born
 Shall harm Macbeth.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 79-81

The phrase "none of woman born" is a common metaphor for "no one,"
 since who can there be who has not had a mother? Macbeth certainly
 accepts this interpretation of the statement, for his first remark is an



ex-
ultant:

Then live, Macduff: what need I fear of thee?

-Act IV, scene i, line 82

Macbeth is inured to blood by now, however, and he quickly decides to kill Macduff anyhow just to make sure.

And yet the phrase "none of woman born" can be used in a more special way to mean no one who has been born of woman *in the usual way*; that is, by emerging through the vaginal canal. In that case, the

190 woman would actively have borne the child; she would have given it birth.

If the child were taken out of the mother's body in any other way, as by what we now call Caesarean section, for instance, the child would still have

a mother but he would not have been born of that woman.

Caesarean sections in which the child lived could not have been common prior to the birth of modern surgery and antiseptics, but they were not unheard of either. Julius Caesar was supposed to have been born by Caesarean section, and indeed, the name of the operation recalls that fact.

Macbeth, in his relief at the nature of the statement by the second apparition, does not take careful note of the circumstances surrounding it.

The weird sisters cannot tell outright falsehoods; they can only deceive. The fact that the statement concerning "none of woman born" is made by a bloody child indicates the truth, for a child crudely taken directly out of the mother's abdomen would be bloody.

Nor does Macbeth note the inconsistency of the first two statements. After all, if none of woman born can harm him, why has he been warned to beware Macduff?

Here we have the significance of the well-known speech by Banquo, which is made shortly after Macbeth has met the weird sisters for the first time. When Macbeth is greeted as the Thane of Cawdor, it seems that part of what the weird sisters have told him is true. The suspicious Banquo warns him, however, that:

*The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
In deepest consequence.*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 124-26

It is exactly this which is happening now.



Great Birnam Wood . . .

A third apparition is that of a crowned child with a tree in his hand,
who
says:

*Macbeth shall never vanquished be until
Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill
Shall come against him.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 92-94a

Dunsinane Hill is a crag a thousand feet high that is part of the Sidlaw Hills that run between Perth and Dundee in east-central Scotland. Birnam is a town about a dozen miles north of Perth, and the wood is the forested region between.

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Again Macbeth jubilantly accepts the statement literally, saying:

*That will never be.
Who can impress the forest, bid the tree
Unfix his earth-bound root?*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 94b-96

Once more, he does not pay attention to the apparition itself. The crowned child is clearly meant to represent Malcolm, and the tree in his hand clearly shows how the wood will be made to *appear* to come to Dunsinane.

. . . the eighth appears . . .

At this point, really, Macbeth has what he wants, and by the internal logic of the play, should leave. However, Shakespeare never for a moment forgets his royal audience and he wants a display for James. He therefore has Macbeth ask if Banquo's descendants shall ever reign.

This the weird sisters gladly answer by means of an apparition consisting of a line of kings marching across the stage, with Banquo's bloody ghost marching along with them to indicate them to be his.

Macbeth writhes at seeing them and finds their numbers unbearable.
He cries out:

*Another yet! A seventh! I'll see no more.
And yet the eighth appears, who bears a glass
Which shows me many more; and some I see
That twofold balls and treble scepters carry:*



-Act IV, scene i, lines 118-21

This line of kings refers to the Stuart dynasty, which traced its descent

from Banquo. They are:

- (1) Robert II (1371-90)
- (2) Robert III (1390-1406)
- (3) James I (1406-37)
- (4) James II (1437-60)
- (5) James III (1460-88)
- (6) James IV (1488-1513)
- (7) James V (1513-42)
- (8) James VI (1567-1625)

As you see, there are indeed eight, but there is a gap between the last

two. No king is listed for the period between 1542 and 1567. In that interval there was a queen, Mary, who was the daughter of James V and the

mother of James VI (James I of Great Britain). She was, however, exe-

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cuted by the order of Queen Elizabeth I after a long imprisonment in England. James VI, her son, never did anything about getting her released,

nor did he protest her execution, for he preferred to stay on his good behavior in the hope of a peaceful succession to the English throne as the nearest relative of Elizabeth.

In 1603, at Elizabeth's death, James VI did indeed succeed to the throne, gaming it from the executioner of his mother, as he might not have

done if he had made a fuss at that time. One might argue that by guaranteeing a peaceful succession, the craven behavior of James VI served England well. Since Shakespeare viewed a disputed succession with horror (as can be seen from the number of plays that revolve about this matter and the way in which he treats the subject in those plays), he might have taken this view. In that case, with James VI (now James I of Great Britain) in the audience, why risk any unpleasantness by any reference

to Mary, Queen of Scots-and so such reference is omitted.

It is James, himself, the King who sat watching, who was the "eighth king" of the apparition, and it was he who, in the play, held up the glass in which Macbeth saw "many more."

Shakespeare had no way of knowing at the time the play was written that such a prophecy would come true, and it represents mere flattery of

the reigning monarch. Indeed, for a time, it looked as though the proph-

ecy would prove most spectacularly untrue. In 1649 Charles I of Great Britain, the son and successor of James I, had his head cut off by his erstwhile subjects, and for some years Great Britain remained without a king.

In 1660, however, Charles II, the son of the executed Charles I, was restored, and there has been no serious break since. Seventeen monarchs



(thirteen kings and four queens) have reigned in Great Britain after James I, and every single one of them has been a descendant of James I. The present British Queen, Elizabeth II, is a twelfth-generation descendant of James I.

The fact that some of the future monarchs shown in the glass held by the eighth King wore "treble scepters" was meant to indicate that they would be kings not only of England, but of Scotland and Ireland as well; they would be kings of Great Britain, in other words. And this too proved true. James I was the first of this kind, but all his reigning descendants to this day remain sovereign over Scotland and over part of Ireland at least.

Into his power . . .

It is now that Macbeth discovers that Macduff has actually left for England. The nature of his errand cannot be in doubt, and Macduff has been so incautious as to leave his family behind. Macbeth orders them all slain and those orders are carried out.

The news of the slaughter of his family has not reached Macduff, how-
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ever, when that nobleman meets with Malcolm (the elder son of Duncan) before the palace of the English King.

Malcolm greets Macduff with suspicion and reserve. It may be that Macduff's purpose is but to entice him to Scotland, there to be killed.

If we turn to history, such a view would by no means be paranoid. About twenty years earlier something very much like that had happened, so that we can scarcely blame Malcolm for saying:

Devilish Macbeth
By many of these trains hath sought to win me
Into his power . . .

-Act IV, scene iii, lines 117-19

What had happened twenty years before (and Shakespeare does not bother to mention it, although the tale was undoubtedly well known to this audience) came at a time when King Edward the Confessor was still an exile in Normandy. After the death of Canute in 1035, his illegitimate son, Harold, sat insecurely on the throne and wanted to eliminate possible competitors about whom the discontented might rally.

Letters reached Normandy, therefore, purporting to come from Saxon nationalists anxious to overthrow the Danish King. Edward refused to take the bait, but he had a younger brother, Alfred, who did. Alfred raised a fleet and sailed to England, where he was greeted with apparent friendliness by those who seemed sympathetic to his cause. Once off guard, how-



ever, he and his men were easily killed.

It is only with great difficulty, then, that Macduff manages to convince Malcolm of his sincerity. Malcolm deliberately accuses himself of a variety of crimes, feeling that if Macduff is interested only in luring him back

to Scotland, he will accept all crimes. When Macduff falls away in disgust instead, Malcolm accepts him joyfully to his side and tells him that an invasion of Scotland by Siward of Northumbria is even then being planned.

'Tis called the evil

At this point there comes an interruption that has nothing to do with the play, but a great deal with James I in the audience.

A Doctor emerges from the palace and Malcolm asks if King Edward is coming out. The Doctor says:

*Ay, sir. There are a crew of wretched souls
That stay his cure: their malady convinces [defies]
The great assay of art; but at his touch,
Such sanctity hath heaven given his hand,
They presently amend.*

-Act IV, scene iii, lines 141-45

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Macduff asks in wonder what the disease might be that is the despair of physicians yet which the English King can cure with a touch. Malcolm explains:

*'Tis called the evil:
A most miraculous work in this good King,
Which often since my here-remain in England
I have seen him do. How he solicits heaven,
Himself best knows: but strangely-visited people,
All swoll'n and ulcerous, pitiful to the eye,
The mere despair of surgery, he cures,
Hanging a golden stamp about their necks,
Put on with holy prayers: and 'tis spoken,
To the succeeding royalty he leaves
The healing benediction.*

-Act IV, scene iii, lines 146-56

The disease here spoken of as "the evil," or sometimes more specifically as "the King's evil," is scrofula, a tuberculous swelling of the lymph glands of the neck, with a variety of unsightly side effects.

For some reason, it came to be believed that the touch of a king could heal the condition. The practice was first commonly followed in France, and in England the first practitioner was Edward the Confessor, who brought the practice from Normandy.

The custom of touching for the evil continued, on and off, in later centuries, and reached a new peak of popularity with James I and his im-



mediate successors. So pleased was James I at becoming King of England that he simply had to practice touching for the evil, since by that time the procedure was associated with the King of England particularly. By touching successfully (and what Englishman would publicly dare deny he had been helped by the royal touch) he could prove himself a legitimate English monarch.

This whole episode is simply dragged in, for Edward does not actually appear and the practice of touching has nothing to do with the play at all in any way. Indeed, it all mounts to the climactic sentence that " 'tis spoken, to the succeeding royalty he leaves the healing benediction." This can apply directly to James and one can only wonder if the actor playing Malcolm did not look directly at James as he said this and perhaps make some sort of respectful bow-and if James did not then smile fatuously and lean over to explain to his Danish brother-in-law.

Actually, considering that James was a physically dirty individual of appalling personal habits, his touch was much more likely to give disease than cure it.

Once this interlude on the King's evil is completed, Shakespeare returns to the play. Ross has just arrived from Scotland with the news of

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the taking of Macduff's castle and the slaughter of his family. This further exacerbates general hatred of Macbeth and all are now furiously ready to join Siward's army and march into Scotland.

Out, damned spot. . .

Macbeth has fortified himself against the invasion at Dunsinane Hill, protected by stone walls, by a still loyal force of Scotsmen, by his own fury, and by his reliance on the prophecies of the weird sisters.

Lady Macbeth, however, has broken under the strain and walks in her sleep. Watched by a doctor and one of her waiting women, she not only walks, but talks, reliving the lurid past in broken snatches.

In bitter irony, she, who had once contemptuously told her husband to wash Duncan's blood off his hands, has nightmares in which she cannot wash the blood off her own. Rubbing her hands in despair, she cries in her sleep:

Out, damned spot! Out, I say!

-Act V, scene i, line 38

A little later, she says:

What, will these hands ne'er be clean?

-Act V, scene i, line 46

And, finally:



*Here's the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes
Of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.*

-Act V, scene i, lines 53-55

We ourselves don't usually think of Arabia as a source of perfumery; we are all too apt to think of it as desert merely. Southern Arabia, a reasonably fertile portion, was, however, the source of frankincense, and that burned itself into the European consciousness because of its mention in the Bible, particularly as one of the gifts brought to the infant Jesus by the wise men.

Lady Macbeth's breakdown has come only with the lapse of considerable time. In the play, we are prepared for this sharp change in the Queen by the fact that she has been absent from the stage for a long time—five scenes.

In actual history, seventeen years have passed since Duncan's death, and this passage of time is implied, if not specifically indicated, by Mac-

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beth's depressed speech shortly after he appears at Dunsinane, while he is arming for the battle:

*/ have lived long enough. My way of life
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf,
And that which should accompany old age,
As honor, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have. . .*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 22-26

If Macbeth was in his early forties when Duncan died, as he may well have been, he would be pushing sixty in 1057, which is the year in which Siward, Malcolm, and Macduff were closing in on him. That is old enough on the medieval scale to make him speak justly of "the sear, the yellow leaf." (In the play, of course, despite this speech, he has not visibly aged and can still engage in harsh single combat.)

. . . *the English epicures*

Indeed, things are even worse for Macbeth than the play itself indicates. The present war, in actual history, is at least three years old and it has been going badly for Macbeth. Siward's invading force had already defeated Macbeth in 1054, although there is no reference to that in the play. Now Macbeth has been forced back into a kind of last stand.



What's more, many of the Scottish nobility have deserted him for the English, something which is pointed out in the play. The desperate Macbeth scorns that, however. He relies on the prophecies of the weird sisters still. He cannot be defeated till a forest moves and he cannot die at the hand of anyone born of woman. He says, grimly:

*Then fly, false thanes,
And mingle with the English epicures.
The mind I sway by and the heart I bear
Shall never sag with doubt nor shake with fear.*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 7-10

The reference to "English epicures" is a reminder that throughout his-
tory England has been larger, more populous, milder, and more fertile than Scotland. England has always been more affluent, then, than cold, bare Scotland to the north. The impoverished Scots could console themselves by imagining that their harsh land toughened them, while England's smiling acres condemned its people to luxurious effeminacy. Not so, of course, but it made the Scots feel better to think so.

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. . . *Donalbain be with his brother*

One person who might be with the invading English is not. Caithness, one of the deserting Scottish nobles, asks:

Who knows if Donalbain be with his brother?

-Act V, scene ii, line 7

He is not, and after this remark, he is no further mentioned. Actually, he had spent his exile in Ireland and had grown up as much under Celtic influence as Malcolm under English influence. Donalbain, to the end of his life, remained a leader of the retreating Celtic aspects of Scottish culture.

He could scarcely join his brother when that brother was marching north surrounded by Englishmen and was himself virtually one of them.

Donalbain remained in exile as long as his brother dominated Scotland, which meant lingering on the outskirts of the land for some thirty-five *additional* years.

As for mythical Fleance, Banquo's son, he is nowhere mentioned. One might suppose that he would be eagerly marching with the invading army to avenge his father's murder, but he isn't. There is apparently a limit to how much can be invented for the Banquo-Fleance myth.



... a mind diseased

In the fury of his preparations, Macbeth is still concerned about his beloved wife. He finds time to ask about her health. The doctor (unwilling to go into detail about the sleepwalking and what has been revealed) says cautiously that she is not physically sick but mentally troubled. Macbeth says, desperately:

*Cure her of that.
Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 39-45

It is one of the particularly remarkable passages in Shakespeare, for, of course, we of the twentieth century recognize that Macbeth is asking, and quite accurately, for a psychiatrist. The treatment might well be to

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help Lady Macbeth realize consciously those memories she was repress-
ing so effectively that they could only burst forth when she was asleep.
But the doctor, a man living well before the time of Freud, says resignedly:

*Therein the patient
Must minister to himself.*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 45-46

... hew him down a bough

The invading army has by now penetrated past Perth and is marching upon the fortified castle at Dunsinane from the west. Siward asks the name of the forest the army is passing through and is told it is Birnam Wood. Malcolm then says:

*Let every soldier hew him down a bough
And bear't before him. Thereby shall we shadow
The numbers of our host. . .*

-Act V, scene iv, lines 4-6

The strategy is to make the invading force seem even larger than it is by making its actual number less clear. (There is always a tendency to magnify the enemy when one is in ignorance of the truth.)

This speech is also a concrete appearance of the third apparition of the



weird sisters. Malcolm, the "crowned child," is holding a tree in his hand, or the bough of one, and so is every other soldier.

... sound and fury

Within the castle, Macbeth has more than mystic prophecies to spur him on. He has sound military reasons for anticipating victory. The English force, swollen by Scottish deserters, is too large to meet in open battle, but that is not necessary. His castle is prepared to face a long siege and he says, grimly:

*Our castle's strength
Will laugh a siege to scorn. Here let them lie
Till famine and the ague eat them up.*

-Act V, scene v, lines 2-4

In medieval times a siege was as hard on the besiegers as on the besieged. In a day when even elementary hygiene was unknown, disease among the idle, bored besiegers could be counted on. What's more, where

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the besiegers were made up of several different groups potentially hostile (as in this case, English and Scots), one could count on those groups falling out among themselves. It had happened often enough in history so that Macbeth might safely expect it.

There is no reason, then, to expect Macbeth necessarily to lose. Not yet. But then something happens that alters everything.

Macbeth's aide, Seyton, comes in with news, saying:

The Queen, my lord, is dead.

-Act V, scene v, line 16

That is all the information given the audience at this point, but the matter is probably worse than it sounds, for at the very end of the play, in its final speech, Malcolm refers to the

*... fiendlike queen,
Who, as 'tis thought, by self and violent hands
Took off her life-*

-Act V, scene viii, lines 69-71

Macbeth must face the fact that his beloved wife has killed herself. He is a soldier, facing a crucial battle, and he tries first to accept the news in stoical fashion, after the fashion of Brutus in *Julius Caesar*



on
hearing of the death of Portia (see page I-305). Macbeth says:

*She should [would] have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such a word.*

-Act V, scene v, lines 17-18

Accepting the word "should" in its modern sense, it sounds as though Macbeth is callously and impatiently wishing that his wife had waited for a more convenient time to die. Reading it as "would," however, we see that he is trying to console himself with the thought that death is inevitable and that if she had not died now, she would have died at some later time.

Soon or late, he would have had to accept this news.

But then, having tried to bear up, he breaks down. With his wife gone, there is nothing left to live for. All his crimes and remorse, all his reverses had not brought him to despair, but his wife's death does and he finds life meaningless-utterly without value. He reaches the despairing conclusion that:

*Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale*

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*Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing.*

-Act V, scene v, lines 24-28

At this point, a Messenger comes in to report that a very strange thing has happened-Birnam Wood seems to have shaken loose and to be approaching Dunsinane.

Haggard Macbeth rather welcomes this than otherwise. There is no more talk of a siege. He had earlier doubted his capacity to defeat the invading force in open battle, but now that the prophecy of the weird sister is coming true and the condition for Macbeth's defeat has been met, Macbeth suddenly orders a sortie.

He is going to meet the enemy. Far from fearing death, he welcomes it, saying:

*I 'gin to be aweary of the sun
And wish th'estate o'th'world were now undone.*

-Act V, scene v, lines 49-50

... the Roman fool ...



In the battle that follows, Macbeth kills Siward's son in single combat, but the invaders win generally and take the castle. It remains only to kill or capture Macbeth himself. Macbeth, however, is determined to sell his life dearly. He is defeated but he will not yet give in, and says:

*Why should I play the Roman fool, and die
On mine own sword? Whiles I see lives, the gashes
Do better upon them.*

-Act V, scene viii, lines 1-3

This contemptuous reference to "Roman fool" deals with the Roman penchant for suicide, notably, for instance, with the case of Mark Antony, who fell on his own sword when faced with final defeat (see page I-382). Shakespeare was blocking out *Antony and Cleopatra* in his mind at the time *Macbeth* was being written, so the reference comes naturally.

Untimely ripped

None in the invading host is more furiously active in seeking out Macbeth than is Macduff, who has a wife and children to avenge. When they finally meet, Macbeth taunts Macduff by saying that no man of woman born can harm him.

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Whereupon Macduff, understanding the equivocation of the phrase at once, grates out:

*Despair thy charm,
And let the angel whom thou still hast served
Tell thee, Macduff was from his mother's womb
Untimely ripped.*

-Act V, scene viii, lines 13-16

The use of the word "angel" sounds strange to modern ears, which associate angels with divine goodness. In the medieval view, however, Satan and all his cohorts were angels once, something of which Milton makes epic capital in his *Paradise Lost*. A fallen angel was a demon and it is to one of these fallen angels that Macduff refers.

As for himself, Macduff came to life by means of a Caesarean birth. We don't know the details. Did his mother die toward the end of her pregnancy and was the child "untimely ripped" from her for that reason? We don't know. Holinshed, who was Shakespeare's source, tells us no more about that than Shakespeare does.

At any rate, Macbeth now sees the significance of the nature of the apparition of the bloody child who spoke of "none of woman born" and understands Banquo's early warning about "honest trifles." He cries out:

... be these juggling fiends no more believed,



That palter with us in a double sense;

-Act V, scene viii, lines 19-20

... *Lay on, Macduff*

For a moment, Macbeth refuses to fight, but when Macduff orders him then to surrender and be made a scorned and baited prisoner, he collects himself. His life is forfeit; he knows he cannot win; but he will go down like a soldier. Macbeth says:

*Though Birnam Wood be come to Dunsinane,
And thou opposed, being of no woman born,
Yet I will try the last. Before my body
I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff;
And damned be him that first cries "Hold, enough!"*

-Act V, scene viii, lines 30-34

These are Macbeth's last words. He is killed and gains, at last, the release of death.

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... *King of Scotland*

Macduff, carrying Macbeth's head, greets Malcolm with the news and cries out to him:

Hail, King of Scotland!

-Act V, scene viii, line 59

All join and, indeed, Malcolm does become King of Scotland in 1057, seventeen years after the death of his father, Duncan, and having now reached the age of twenty-six. He was to have, on the whole, a long and a fortunate reign, remaining on the throne as Malcolm III Canmore for thirty-five years. Nor did he have to pay Siward with a province, for Siward died almost immediately after the final battle with Macbeth, and England was soon to be convulsed with the disorders following the death of Edward the Confessor in January 1066. Malcolm held on to Lothian and it remained Scottish right down to Shakespeare's time.

The Anglicization which Malcolm brought to Scotland can be seen in Malcolm's final speech, in which he says:

*My thanes and kinsmen,
Henceforth be earls, the first that ever Scotland*



In such an honor named.

-Act V, scene viii, lines 62-64

The Scottish title gave way to the English one as the old Celtic language gave way to Teutonic English, so that though Scotland remained politically independent, it became a cultural appanage of the southern kingdom.

The time was soon to come when Malcolm in was to return the favor of protection during exile. After William of Normandy (see page II-138)

conquered England at the Battle of Hastings in the fall of 1066, two youngsters managed to make then- way to Scotland. They were a brother

and sister, Edgar and Margaret, grandchildren of Edmund Ironside, who

had been a half brother of Edward the Confessor.

Malcolm protected these exiles as Edward the Confessor had protected

him ten years before. Indeed, Malcolm married Margaret, so that the blood of the Saxon kings of England was preserved La the line of kings

who ruled in Scotland.

Malcolm managed to maintain a precarious on-and-off peace with Wil-

liam of Normandy-now King William I (the Conqueror) of England-but became more daring when the Conqueror's son, William II Rufus, succeeded to the throne in 1087. In one last raid on northern England in

1093, Malcolm encountered an English army and was defeated and

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killed. With him died Edward, his eldest son by Margaret, who had been named in honor of the king who had once protected the exiled son of Duncan.

After Malcolm's death, his brother Donalbain, who had remained in exile throughout his brother's reign, managed to seize the throne, fifty-three years after the fateful death of his father, Duncan. Donalbain was

supported by the Celtic party in Scotland and his reign represented a last,

feeble resurgence of Celticism. After an extremely unquiet reign, he was deposed in 1098.

Three of Malcolm's sons by Margaret then ruled in succession: Edgar, Alexander I, and David I. It was from David I that all the succeeding kings of Scotland, even the Stuarts (including James I), descended. James I was

of the sixteenth generation of descent from David I, and the present Queen of England, Elizabeth II, is of the twenty-eighth generation of descent.



The Life and Death of

KING JOHN

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THE FOUR "English plays" I have dealt with so far all have their events taking place in the period before 1066. These events are largely legendary and what portions of the action are inspired by actual history are badly distorted.

In 1066 William of Normandy conquered England from the Saxons and the light of history began to shine more brightly on the land, and, indeed, on all of Europe. The barbarian invasions of Western Europe came to a halt at last, there was a rise in literacy and in culture, and the chronicles and histories of the time were better recorded.

In the 1590s Shakespeare wrote no less than nine historical plays dealing with this post-Conquest period of English history. Eight of these dealt with the troubled fifteenth century, with a central point involving the troubled successions to the throne.

Undoubtedly, this reflected the great problem of Shakespeare's own time. In the 1590s Queen Elizabeth I was in her sixties. She had refused to marry; she had no children; and death could be only a few years away.

If her death were followed by a disputed succession, England might once again experience the horrors of civil war, as she had experienced them in the past. Most thinking Englishmen were concerned about this and must have been uncomfortably aware that on any morning they might wake to find the great Queen dead and the nobility choosing up sides for a struggle.

Shakespeare's concern expressed itself in one play after another, dealing with the struggle for the throne, showing in pitiless clarity the ignominy of motive, act, and character such a struggle produced.

About 1596, though, when five of these fifteenth-century plays had been already written and three remained to be written, Shakespeare broke in with a play about King John in the early thirteenth century.

This came about, perhaps, because in 1591 there had appeared a play entitled *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England* which had proven popular. More than once, Shakespeare had been able to try his own hand at a version of a popular play, always producing a better one that drove the earlier version into oblivion. He was the more tempted because here again was a plot that dealt with a disputed succession and the troubles in the form of civil war and foreign invasion that resulted.

To get the background, let us go back to King Henry II of England, who ruled from 1154 to 1189. He was, through his mother, a great-grandson

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of William the Conqueror, and he was, in his own right, a strong and competent king.

Altogether, Henry II had five sons. The oldest son, William, died in 1156 at the age of three, but the other four sons survived infancy. They



were, in order of decreasing age, Henry, Richard, Geoffrey, and John. Two of these sons died during the lifetime of their father, Henry in 1184 and Geoffrey in 1186. Richard, the older of the two remaining sons, succeeded to the throne in 1189 as Richard I.

When Richard died in battle in 1199, his younger brother, John-the last living son of Henry II-succeeded. He was thirty-two years old at the time.

. . . what would France . . .

The play opens in 1199 with John fresh upon the throne. Immediately, he must face the hostility of France. This hostility had stretched back to the time of John's father, Henry II.

Henry II (and his sons after him) ruled over broader territories in France than the French King himself controlled, and for over half a century it was the overriding concern of the kings of France to regain some or all of this territory.

Through much of the reign of Henry II, the King of France had been Louis VII. Louis avoided meeting Henry II in actual battle but had intrigued against him skillfully and, toward the end of his reign, deliberately encouraged Henry's sons to revolt against him.

Louis died in 1180 and his son Philip II succeeded to the throne and to his father's policy. Philip had carried on war against Henry and Richard and when Richard died and was succeeded by John, Philip intended to continue his efforts.

The play opens then with the newly crowned King John facing Chatillion, the arrogant ambassador of his royal French foe, who now, at the age of thirty-four, has already been on the throne for nineteen years.

John says:

Now say, Chatillion, what would France with us?

-Act I, scene i, line 1

The borrowed majesty. . .

Haughtily, Chatillion says:

*Thus, after greeting, speaks the King of France
In my behavior to the majesty,
The borrowed majesty, of England here.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 2-4

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Clearly, Philip of France is repudiating John's title to the throne of England. John's is a majesty that is only "borrowed" from its true holder. Chatillion is deliberately insulting the new English King, but John is no knight-errant. He is a devious man who can bear insults and accept defeats where this is necessary.



With him, however, is his mother, Queen Eleanor, who is quite another kind of person. She is on fire with resentment at once and responds harshly:

A strange beginning: "borrowed majesty"!

-Act I, scene i, line 5

Eleanor (or "Elinor," as Shakespeare spells it) is surely one of the most unusual women of the Middle Ages. Her father was William X, the Duke of Aquitaine, the rich and smiling country that makes up the southwestern quarter of France. In 1137 he died, leaving Eleanor behind as his only child. She was a fifteen-year-old beauty and the richest heiress in Europe. Because of the land she inherited she is known as Eleanor of Aquitaine in the history books.

Naturally, such an heiress could scarcely remain unmarried long. Louis the Young, heir to the throne of France, was a natural husband, for by the marriage Louis could add Aquitaine to the French territory which he already controlled directly. The marriage took place just three months after Eleanor had become duchess. One month after that (it was still 1137), Louis' father died and the young bridegroom became King Louis VII of France.

It was not, however, a happy marriage. Eleanor was gay, frivolous, and quite aware that she was a great heiress in her own right. She led a court of troubadours and pleasure seekers whom King Louis found distasteful.

Louis was a grave and serious person, very much involved in kingly duties. Undoubtedly he seemed like a wet blanket and spoilsport to his merry Queen; undoubtedly she seemed like a featherbrained ninny to her hard-working King.

What was worse was that though she bore two children to Louis, both were girls, and by French custom, neither could inherit the throne either for themselves or for their descendants. Louis wanted a son and Eleanor wasn't giving him one.

The final straw came in connection with a Crusade. Half a century earlier a Christian army had taken Jerusalem and the Holy Land, but now



the Moslems were making a comeback. A Second Crusade was necessary, and in 1147 Louis VII volunteered to be one of the leaders.

Queen Eleanor, however, would hear of nothing but that she must go with her husband, complete with her court. The whole adventure was to be like a knightly romance, with beautiful ladies watching their gallant lovers winning the colorful tournaments which Eleanor no doubt pictured a Crusade to be.

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It didn't work that way. The Second Crusade was a costly and humiliating fiasco and Louis VII was forced to return home, a complete failure, and totally estranged from his wife. In 1152 he divorced her even though that meant losing Aquitaine.

Eleanor was a good hater and the humiliation of the divorce was sufficient motive for her to make a quick second marriage that would be as harmful as possible to her ex-husband. She was thirty now, but still good-looking and, what was more important, still an heiress.

Ruling over the northwestern quarter of France was a gallant and intelligent nineteen-year-old youth, Henry of Anjou. His father had been Count of Anjou, but his mother was Matilda, who had been daughter of King Henry I of England. There were many who considered Matilda to be the rightful Queen of England, but she had been unable to establish that rule, and her cousin, Stephen, ruled instead.

(In a way, the death of King Henry I in 1135 had led to a true time of troubles thanks to the disputed succession, and one might wonder whether

Shakespeare had ever been tempted to write a play dealing with it. However, if he had written of Matilda and Stephen, he would have had to picture an English queen who was eventually defeated and who was driven out of London by the aroused citizens. With Queen Elizabeth on the throne

and with many in the land hating her for religious reasons, such a play might have found itself too easily viewed as treasonable, and if Shakespeare

ever had the thought of writing one, he must have dismissed that thought quickly.)

Even though Stephen was England's King, he was growing old. One of his sons had died and the second had neither the ability nor the desire to succeed. Once Stephen died, it was certain Henry of Anjou would succeed to the throne.

Eleanor married Henry at once, as much to spite Louis VII as anything else, while Henry took this older woman to wife as much for the sake of Aquitaine as anything else. This second marriage of Eleanor took place only two months after her divorce from Louis VII.

Two years later Stephen died and Henry became King Henry II of Eng-



land. England and his French dominions together made up Henry's "Angevin Empire," so called because Henry was of the line of Anjou. It was this Empire that Louis VII and his son, Philip II, strove to break up.

Eleanor did for Henry II what she had not been able to do for Louis VII; she supplied the English King with sons, and in the latter part of his reign he was surrounded by four of them.

They were scarcely a blessing to him, though. He was busy and could pay them little attention, so that they grew up quite mother-oriented. What's

more, Eleanor's second marriage soon turned out to be as unhappy as the first, and out of her hatred for Henry, Eleanor encouraged her sons to rebel against their father.

The rebellion did not succeed and the sons had to flee to Louis VII for
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protection. Eleanor tried to join them, but Henry managed to capture her at least and imprisoned her for the rest of his reign.

The sons came crawling back to make their peace with their formidable father, but they continued to be a threat to him and to each other to the very end of Henry's life.

When Henry II died, on July 6, 1189, and Richard became King, his first action was to release his mother from imprisonment. She was sixty-seven years old now, but as firm and as formidable as ever. She devoted the remainder of her life to backing her two sons, and to my way of thinking (despite the inflated reputation of Richard, at least) she was more of a man than both sons put together.

When Richard died in 1199, Eleanor was seventy-seven years old, a tremendous age for that time, but she was still strong enough and energetic enough to canvass the English nobility and populace for oaths of allegiance that would settle John, her youngest and best-loved son, firmly on the throne.

Naturally she, much more than John, would react with instant resentment to the deliberately provocative phrase "borrowed majesty."

Arthur Plantagenet. . .

John quiets his mother, for he wants to hear what Chatillion has to say. Chatillion does not keep him waiting. He says:

*Philip of France, in right and true behalf
Of thy deceased brother Geoffrey's son,
Arthur Plantagenet, lays most lawful claim
To this fair island . . .*

-Act I, scene i, lines 7-10

At this time, notions of "legitimacy" were beginning to rise in western



Europe. That is, it was felt that the crown should not pass merely to some member of the royal family-preferably to some adult member with proven ability at fighting and administration (see page II-95)-but to the one who was next in line according to some definite system, regardless of age or capacity.

The system usually used was to have the eldest son inherit, followed by his heirs, and only when the eldest son had no heirs at all would the crown pass on his death to the second son and his heirs. Only by default of heirs to the second son would it pass to the third, and so on.

Prince William (first son) died at the age of three, naturally without heirs. Prince Henry (second son) also died without heirs. Prince Richard (third son) succeeded to the throne, therefore.

Even before Richard's succession, Prince Geoffrey (fourth son) had

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died without heirs, having been thrown from his horse while jousting, when only twenty-eight years old. It would seem then that when Richard died without heirs in 1199, the crown would pass to John, according to the strict tenets of legitimacy.

There was a catch. Geoffrey, the fourth son, was indeed childless at the time of his death, but at that time his wife was pregnant. In 1187 she was delivered of a posthumous baby boy, whom she named Arthur. By the strict tenets of legitimacy, Arthur, heir of the fourth son, had precedence over John, the fifth son, to the crown of England.

It is this right which Philip II of France is maintaining.

But why Arthur Plantagenet? What is the significance of that second name?

That began as a nickname of Geoffrey of Anjou, the father of Henry II. According to one story, Geoffrey made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and donned lowly garb as a gesture of humility. He carried a sprig of broom, a common shrub, in his bonnet as another such gesture. Another legend has it that he planted broom shrubs to improve his hunting tracts. (The broom plant has long thin branches which can be tied in a bundle to a stick and used to sweep with. Such an instrument came to be called a "broom" eventually, no matter what it was made of.)

The broom plant is the *planta genista* in Latin and *planta genet* in medieval French. Geoffrey, whether through his bonnet or his hunting, gained a nickname by this gesture and was called Geoffrey Plantagenet.

When Henry succeeded to the English throne as Henry II, he was often referred to as Henry Plantagenet, as though he had inherited his



father's
nickname. To some later historians it seemed a virtual family name, to
be
granted all the descendants of Henry II through the male line.

... *Ireland, Poitiers* ...

Nor is it only England that is claimed by Philip on Arthur's behalf. The
French dominions of the Angevin Empire are demanded as well.
Chatillion
lists some of the territories, saying the claim extends

*To Ireland, Poitiers, Anjou, Touraine, Maine,
Desiring thee to lay aside the sword
Which sways usurpingly these several titles,
And put the same into young Arthur's hand,
Thy nephew and right royal sovereign.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 11-15

Ireland had first been invaded by the English in 1169. Norman knights
entered the western island on the pleas of some Irish chieftains who
had
been defeated by others. The Normans were quite successful and Henry
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feared they might carve out independent Norman kingdoms that would
make more trouble for England than the chaotic Irish tribal society
could
possibly make. Henry therefore brought an army into Ireland and estab-
lished a section about Dublin as English-controlled territory.

In 1177 Henry II appointed his young son John (only ten years old at
the time) as titular Lord of Ireland, in order to give him a title. When
John tried to take personal charge of Ireland in 1185, he botched the
job. John remained Lord of Ireland, off and on, during Richard's reign
(losing it for a while because he intrigued against Richard during the lat-
ter's absence on a Crusade).

As for "Poitiers, Anjou, Touraine, Maine," there are four districts ly-
ing between Normandy and Aquitaine, all of them part of the empire built
up by Henry II.

... *ambitious Constance* ...

King John naturally refuses to accept the demands of Philip of France
and Chatillion leaves with what amounts to a declaration of war.
After he is gone, old Eleanor of Aquitaine bursts out in fury:

*What now, my son! Have I not ever said
How that ambitious Constance would not cease
Till she had kindled France and all the world
Upon the right and party of her son?*

-Act I, scene i, lines 31-34



The Constance here referred to is the Duchess of Brittany. Brittany itself is the northwesternmost peninsula of France, a region known as Armorica to the Romans. In the sixth century, when the island, Britain, was being overrun by Saxons, parties of Britons fled to the peninsula for safety and it was from that time that the peninsula came to be known as Brittany.

Throughout the Middle Ages Brittany retained a kind of precarious semi-independence, although it was frequently forced to pay tribute to the King of France or to the Duke of Normandy. In the eleventh century Normandy was at the peak of its power when its duke, William II, invaded and conquered England, and Brittany was subservient to him and to his successors.

It was part of the French dominions of Henry II, but of all his French provinces it was least tightly tied to him. When it tried to establish its real independence under its duke, Conan IV, Henry invaded Brittany and occupied much of its territory. Henry then saw a way of converting a loose connection into a tight dynastic union. Conan's only living child was a daughter, Constance. Henry arranged to have her marry his son Geoffrey,

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and on Conan's death, not long after, Geoffrey became Duke of Brittany.

When Geoffrey died, Constance ruled Brittany, and when her son was born, her ambitions for him were clearly evident in the very name she chose. She called him Arthur, the legendary hero of the Britons in their struggle against the Saxons. This was particularly appropriate as a name for the Duke of Brittany, the land to which so many Britons had fled.

At the time of Arthur's birth, there was only Richard standing closer to the throne, and there seemed a good possibility that Richard would have no children. That meant that Arthur might very well be King of England someday, and Constance put her full effort toward making sure of that. She was as ambitious in her way as Eleanor was in hers, and the stage was set for the battle of the queens on behalf of their sons.

... *Cordelion* ...

The matter of high politics is interrupted at this point by a much lowlier matter; a disputed succession again, but this time to an ordinary bit of land. A sheriff brings in two brothers clamoring for judgment. The King asks their identities, and the older brother, Philip, replies that he is



*... eldest son,
As I suppose, to Robert Faulconbridge,
A soldier, by the honor-giving hand
Of Cordelion knighted in the field.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 51-54

"Cordelion" is a variation of "Coeur-de-lion," meaning literally "heart-of-lion," the common nickname of King Richard I of England, elder brother and predecessor of King John.

It is proper that the nickname be in French, for the language of the court of the King of England had been Norman French since the time of the Conquest. Even in King Richard's time, over a century and a quarter after the Battle of Hastings, at which William of Normandy conquered England, the English King ruled more land in France than in England, considered himself more French than English, spoke French rather than English, and was French rather than English.

Richard grew up in Aquitaine, his mother's appanage, ruled over it throughout his youth, and considered it his home. He visited England only twice during his reign, both times briefly, and then only to collect money. He fought in France and he died in France.

Nevertheless, his nickname has been translated into English, so that he is "Richard Lion-Heart" or "Richard the Lion-Hearted," and he has, under that name, become a great English hero about whom numberless tales have been told.

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He deserves the nickname, to be sure, since he loved to fight and he usually won. He was a born knight-errant, who enjoyed more than anything else the giving and taking of huge thwacks. On the other hand, he was larger than most men, better fed and better muscled, better trained and better outfitted. Why shouldn't he be brave then?

Also to his credit was the fact that he was a troubadour as well as a knight. He sang sweetly and composed verses as good as those any king might compose. What's more, he loved his mother.

There, however, his virtues end. Richard was a vain, faithless person, who was not very intelligent, and whose reign was one long disaster for England. He won battles and lost wars, and in his eternal quest for money with which to lose those wars, he would use any means, however ignoble. He sold land, offices, justice. He gave up his rights to Scotland for money. He squeezed the Jews and behaved in such a manner that anti-Semitic riots burst out all over England, one of the rare times such actions dis-



graced the land.

He was not even a manly person, except for his ability to fight. He lacked resolution and another nickname for him (not as well known as "Lion-Heart") was "Richard Yea-and-Nay," meaning he could easily be swayed to either side of a question and then swayed back again.

And yet because he played what seemed a heroic role in the Crusades, he is forgiven everything by Englishmen, and the picture of him in their minds is the utterly false one glamorously drawn in books such as Walter

Scott's *Ivanhoe* and *The Talisman*. (And, of course, in all the legends that build up Richard, his brother John is made to stink by comparison.

John was not actually a worthy man, to be sure, but except that he did not shine in personal combat, he was no worse than Richard.)

... *perfect Richard* ...

The argument between the two brothers involves the accusation of bastardy. Both are the sons of Faulconbridge's wife, but the question is one of fatherhood. The younger son, Robert, insists that the older, Philip, was a bastard; that he was born while Faulconbridge was overseas on King Richard's business, while Richard remained in Faulconbridge's home, apparently on Faulconbridge's business.

King John and Queen Eleanor believe this even before it is explained. The Queen finds resemblances to her dead son in face and voice and King John says:

*Mine eye hath well examined his parts,
And finds them perfect Richard . . .*

-Act I, scene i, lines 89-90

In short, the older son is accepted as the bastard of Richard I and is enthusiastically accepted as a grandson by Eleanor and as a nephew by John.

(He is called Philip the Bastard in the cast of characters and his speeches are uniformly attributed to "Bastard.")

It seems queer that a bastard should so quickly and cheerfully be accepted by the legal members of a family.

To explain this, it must first be made clear that the situation, as described by Shakespeare, is completely unhistorical. A person named Philip is mentioned in passing as a bastard son of Richard I in Holinshed, but the actual existence of any son of Richard, legitimate or illegitimate, is in the highest



degree unlikely.

It seems certain that, despite the fact that Richard was married to Berengaria of Navarre, he never had serious relations with any woman.

He seems to have been a thoroughgoing homosexual, a fact glossed over by his later idolaters, but known perhaps to his contemporaries. Constance might not so eagerly have groomed her son for the kingship if she had not been utterly confident that Richard would have no children to leave

the crown to.

But if we forget history and grant the existence of Philip, bastard son of Richard I, why is he introduced into the play and made so much of when Shakespeare is quite hard on bastards in other plays (notably in *King Lear*-see page II-12)? Indeed, Philip the Bastard is the hero of this play, if there is one.

For one thing, there is a precedent for a bastard, near-allied to a reigning

king, who is honored by that king and who offers complete fidelity in return. This is the case of Jean Dunois, a bastard son of Louis of Orleans and therefore first cousin of Charles VII of France. Dunois was treated with honor by Charles when he was the beleaguered Dauphin in a land overrun by triumphant English and Dunois, in return, fought ably on Charles's behalf. It was he, with the help of Joan of Arc, who raised the siege of Orleans, so that there was double reason for calling him "Bastard of Orleans."

Secondly, Philip the Bastard is useful dramatically. King John is insufficiently heroic and King Richard would have made a better representative of England. Since Richard is dead, a mythical bastard is brought in who is presented in all respects as a kind of Richard brought back to life.

Thirdly, if Philip's existence is admitted, then, but for the fact of illegitimacy, he, and not either Arthur or John, would be the rightful King of England. We might well suppose that this point can be used to serve as a kind of climax to the play at the end.

Colbrand the giant. . .

John is ready to grant the Faulconbridge inheritance to Philip, despite

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his patent illegitimacy, but Eleanor urges him to join the court, exchanging his land for the chances of gaining honor and glory.

Philip does so gladly, and in doing so makes (to our modern tastes) brutal mockery of his brother's appearance, for his brother, the legitimate son, lacks the genes of large King Richard, and is lean and wizen by comparison.

Philip is dubbed Sir Richard Plantagenet by King John (though the title is never used in the play). The Bastard is then left alone on the stage



and his soliloquy on vanity (carried out in a tone of mocking cynicism that is characteristic of him) is interrupted by the panting arrival of his mother. She is in hot pursuit of her younger son, whose aspersions on her honor (in claiming his older brother to be a bastard) she resents.

She asks the Bastard furiously as to the whereabouts of his brother, and he answers, still mocking:

*My brother Robert? Old Sir Robert's son?
Colbrand the giant, that same mighty man?*

-Act I, scene i, lines 224-25

Colbrand the giant is a character in the very popular romance *Guy of Warwick*. This was composed in the time of Henry II and eventually came to be accepted as authentic history, which, of course, it was not. Guy of Warwick is an English knight-errant who performs the usual knight-errantish deeds across Europe, fighting Saracens, opposing magicians, rescuing beautiful damsels, and slaying monsters.

Returning to England, he found that land under the heel of a Danish giant, Colbrand, who, at the head of the Danish forces, is collecting vast tribute. (There is something authentic here. In the tenth century England was indeed prostrate before Danish raids and did indeed have to pay out all the tribute it could scrape up.)

In Winchester, Sir Guy of Warwick fought in single combat with Colbrand, slew him, and delivered England from the Danish yoke. And for as long as the romance remained popular, Colbrand the giant remained a stock phrase to characterize anything vast and terrible. It is used here, of course, as humorous irony, for the thin Robert.

... *Basilisco-like*

Lady Faulconbridge is taken aback by the evident mockery of her, a mockery the Bastard quickly makes more explicit. She says, nervously:

What means this scorn, thou most untoward knave?

-Act I, scene i, line 243

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And he replies, with reference to his recent promotion to a title,



based
on his mother's dishonor:

Knight, knight, good mother, Basilisco-like,

-Act I, scene i, line 244

The reference is to a play by Thomas Kyd (see page II-100), *The Tragedy of Solyman and Perseda* (1588), in which one of the characters is a boastful knight named Basilisco. He is very proud of his title and would not have it omitted, so that in speaking of his name, he adds, "Knight, knight, good fellow, knight."

To which the "good fellow," implying that despite the title the character will not be denied, replies, "Knave, knave, good fellow, knave!"

Shakespeare has the Bastard reverse the progression and refer to the inspiration for it, sure that he would thus delight the audience by reference to a competitor.

Faced with the Bastard's calm assurance of his own illegitimacy, his mother breaks down and admits Richard to have been his father.

Before Angiers . . .

The second act shifts the scene to France, where the war between the Kings of England and France has begun. The real issue is whether the continental dominions of the Angevin Empire are to remain in the hands of the Plantagenets or are to revert into the hands of the King of France. The status of Prince Arthur is but a convenient pawn in this fundamental struggle, something that Arthur's mother, Constance, does not understand.

The current of war has carried Philip of France to the gates of one of the important cities of the Angevin Empire, and his first speech of the play begins:

Before Angiers well met. . .

-Act II, scene i, line 1

Angiers, or, in its modern French form, Angers, is a city about 170 miles southwest of Paris. It was the capital of the County of Anjou, ancestral home of the Angevin line.

. . . brave Austria

Philip has not come alone. His son is with him, and so is Arthur, on whose behalf he is supposedly fighting, as well as Arthur's mother, Con-

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stance. In addition, he has a foreign ally, and in his first speech it is he whom he is greeting:



Before Anglers well met, brave Austria.

-Act II, scene i, line 1

In Shakespeare's time Austria was a great power, but in the time of the play it was still a rather minor German duchy. It had been under the overlordship of Bavaria and had only broken free in 1156. It achieved its first prominence in European history as a result of an action of the very

man referred to here as "brave Austria." (His speeches in the play are always marked as "Austria.")

The man addressed is, properly speaking, Leopold V, Margrave of Austria. (The title "margrave" is equivalent to that of "count.")

Leopold

had spread his sway over Styria to the south, and since Styria was a duchy,

he advanced in title and became Leopold I, Duke of Austria.

Leopold went off to the Crusades and was part of the host that came to

assist at the siege of Acre, a coastal city in the hands of the Moslems.

In

July 1191 the Christian army, with Richard the Lion-Heart its principal

leader, took the city.

Leopold, who had after all participated in the siege, placed his standard

on one of the battlements of the fallen city. Richard, seeing no point in

giving credit to anyone else, ordered the standard removed and had it thrown to one side. Some say that when Leopold protested, Richard kicked

him in the rear end and forced him into humiliating silence.

The English chroniclers seem to consider this an amusing and heroic action.

When it was time for Richard to go home, he realized there were going

to be difficulties. He had managed to antagonize almost everyone in Europe and he lacked the army to force his way across the Continent against that antagonism. He decided to sneak across the Continent.

He

had his ship drawn ashore near Venice and off he went in disguise.

But Richard could not very well imitate a nobody. He was large, muscular,

and haughty. Nothing he could do could prevent him from appearing

what he was—an arrogant knight of high estate. It was only a matter of time before he would be identified, and as luck would have it, he was recognized at the worst possible time.

Near Vienna, in December 1192, he was surrounded by armed men who

were clearly intent on holding this obviously important personage for ransom. Richard drew his sword and said he would surrender only to their leader. When that leader appeared, it turned out to be none



other than Duke Leopold, who promptly imprisoned him.

Leopold was execrated in England for this action, of course. He was viewed as a base coward who had been rightly kicked in the butt as advance payment for his subsequent villainies.

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He serves as a needed villain in this play, someone at whom the English audience can mock and sneer. King Philip of France won't do; for he was a most capable king who was to prove victorious. (He even came to be known, for his victories, as Philip Augustus, in memory of Rome's great first Emperor, see page II-55.)

Leopold, however, was another matter. He is greeted as "brave Austria," which is undoubtedly intended to draw hooting catcalls. He is a braggart who wears a lion skin but doesn't act the part, so that he is a transparently warned image of the lion-hearted Richard. And what is more, it is to the Bastard, the resurrected spirit of Richard, that the chief task of baiting and, eventually, killing Leopold is left.

There is only one catch to this whole thing. Leopold of Austria died in 1194, five years before the accession of King John. He cannot possibly play a role in John's time.

... came early to his grave

King Philip next introduces Austria to young Arthur, saying:

*Arthur, that great forerunner of thy blood,
Richard, that robbed the lion of his heart
And fought the holy wars in Palestine,
By this brave duke came early to his grave;*

-Act II, scene i, lines 2-5

This (which serves to alert any dull-wit in Shakespeare's audience who doesn't know why Austria must be treated as a villain) makes it sound as though Richard died in Austrian imprisonment, but this is not so. In fact, he didn't even stay in Leopold's grasp long. The German Emperor Henry VI forced Leopold to disgorge his important prisoner and set him free at last for 150,000 marks, which had to be squeezed out of the sweat of Richard's subjects. Richard finally returned to England, safe and sound, in 1194.

How, then, did Richard die?

Well, having stayed in England just long enough to collect some money, Richard crossed the Channel into France and spent the remainder of his reign fighting King Philip.



In 1199 a peasant unearthed a crock of gold on the land of Guiomar, Viscount of Limoges, a territory in northern Aquitaine. Of course, Richard considered Aquitaine peculiarly his own, and as he always needed money, he promptly demanded the gold. The Viscount of Limoges was willing to grant part but not all.

Richard at once rode off to lay siege to a castle at Chalus, twenty miles southwest of Limoges, where the Viscount was holed up. The Viscount

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offered to surrender conditionally, but Richard refused conditions. While the King reconnoitered the walls, an arrow struck him in the left shoulder.

Richard ordered an assault at once and the castle was taken. Only then did he bother to have the arrow extracted.

It was too late. The age was innocent of antibiotics or even of the notions of ordinary hygiene. The wound festered and turned gangrenous and Richard died on April 6, 1199.

He could not be said to have been killed by Guiomar of Limoges. He was killed by his own folly and his eagerness to fight over little causes.

Shakespeare combines the two men, Leopold of Austria and Guiomar of Limoges. The character called "brave Austria" here is listed in the cast of characters as Lymoges, Duke of Austria, and at one point later in the play he is addressed by Constance as Lymoges. The combination is grotesque but it gives Shakespeare a needed villain.

... the Lady Blanch of Spain

The combined forces of Philip and Austria make ready to lay siege to Angiers, when Chatillion arrives with news concerning John. The English King, he says, has raised an army and has invaded France:

*With him along is come the mother-queen
An Ate, stirring him to blood and strife;
With her her niece, the Lady Blanch of Spain;
With them a bastard of the king's deceased;*

-Act II, scene i, lines 62-65



Ate is the Greek goddess of vengeance and mischief, and that certainly is a rather apt description for Eleanor of Aquitaine, who through her long life made ample trouble for her two husbands and for all those who crossed her.

The present fight is between her son John and her grandson Arthur, and in this she is entirely on the side of her son, while her attitude toward Arthur is such that one can scarcely recognize the grandmotherly relationship.

For one thing, of course, she had scarcely ever as much as seen Arthur;

for another, she hated Constance, her daughter-in-law, for if Arthur be-

came King, Constance would become Queen Mother.

As for "Blanch of Spain," she was not Eleanor's niece, but King John's

niece and therefore Eleanor's granddaughter. In addition to the five sons

which Eleanor had borne Henry II, she bore three daughters as well (which,

plus two daughters to Louis VII, gave her ten children altogether-an amazing number of childbirths to have survived in those days, especially

when it left her time to make so much trouble besides.)

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Eleanor's three daughters by Henry were, in order of age, Matilda, Eleanor, and Joan, and all married kings.

The middle daughter, Eleanor (namesake of the old Queen) was born in

1161, so that she was six years older than John. In 1170, when the younger

Eleanor was still only nine years old, she was married to Alfonso VIII,

King of Castile (a region then making up the north-central part of what is

now Spain). About 1187 they had the daughter whom Shakespeare calls

"Blanch of Spain," but who is known in history as "Blanche of Castile."

She was eleven years old at the time of the accession of King John.

... *great Alcides" shoes* ...

John and his forces appear and he and Philip at once engage in argu-

ment. Philip insists the rightful King of England is Arthur and John denies

that Philip has any say in the matter.

Eleanor joins in on John's side and is answered at once by Constance.



The two women are well matched in vitriolic temper and in articulate billingsgate, and when they begin tearing at each other, the men are forced to one side.

Austria tries to stop them and the instant he opens his mouth, the Bastard cries him down. This begins the constant baiting of Austria by the resurrected spirit of Richard, to the delight of the audience. The Bastard refers, for instance, to Austria's affectation in wearing a lion skin and says:

*It lies as sightly on the back of him
As great Alcides' shoes upon an ass.*

-Act II, scene i, lines 143-44

Alcides is Hercules, of course (see page I-70). The Bastard is saying that a lion skin on Austria's back is like Hercules on an ass's back.

The canon of the law . . .

The men are not at their words long, however, when the quarrel breaks out once more between Constance and Eleanor, and the younger manages to outcry the older. Constance maintains that if Arthur is suffering wrongs and injuries, it is entirely owing to the wickedness of his grandmother. He is being punished not for his own, but for her sins:

*Thy sins are visited in this poor child;
The canon of the law is laid on him,
Being but the second generation
Removed from thy sin-conceiving womb.*

-Act II, scene i, lines 179-82

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Constance is referring to the Book of Exodus (21:5): "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me."

A will that bars the title . . .

King John, irritated by these caustic fleers at his beloved mother, cries out:

Bedlam, have done.

-Act II, scene i, line 183

By this anachronistic reference to the hospital of St. Mary of Bethlehem (Bedlam), see page II-15, he is calling Constance a lunatic.



Eleanor, however, strives to remove the argument from the level of personalities and brings in a matter of legality. She says to Constance scornfully:

*Thou unadvised scold, I can produce
A will that bars the title of thy son.*

-Act II, scene i, lines 191-92

It seems that while Richard was alive and making ready to leave for the Holy Land (from where, conceivably, he might not return), he recognized Arthur as his heir. (Richard's actions toward the succession always seemed to be those of a man who knew that he himself would have no children.)

Arthur was only two years old at the time and it made sense to have the boy raised in England, in Normandy, or in Aquitaine-somewhere where he could be educated into considering himself an Angevin and a Plantagenet. The Bretons preferred, however, to keep the young child in Brittany.

In 1196 Richard was safely home from the Crusade, and he demanded that Arthur, now nine years old, be given up to him. The Bretons refused again. Rather than let their young duke become a Norman by upbringing, they turned him over for education to King Philip of France.

It was plain, then, that Arthur would have a French education and would become a thoroughgoing Frenchman. Richard considered Philip his arch-enemy and he could not face leaving his kingdom to a puppet of that same arch-enemy. He therefore disowned Arthur, naming John as his heir. John was still Richard's heir when Richard died. (John was at the deathbed.) It was undoubtedly this to which Eleanor was referring.

Of course, it remains a question whether a reigning king can alter the tenets of legitimacy to suit his own desires. Constance, however, does

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not raise this fine point. Instead, she answers, with equal contempt, that if Eleanor has a will, it is a forged one.

... to the walls

The discussion ends where it began-in absolute disagreement. Both armies try to enter the city of Angiers, but the citizens have something to say about that, and in response to the sound of a trumpet, one of



them
appears above, crying:

Who is it that hath warned us to the walls?

-Act II, scene i, line 201

In the Signet edition, the speaker is identified as "Hubert," and in the cast of characters, he is listed as "Hubert, a citizen of Angiers." Later in the play, Hubert plays a role which makes him clearly identified with a historical Hubert who can scarcely have been a citizen of Angiers. The Kittredge edition and the original printed version of the play identify the speaker simply as "Citizen," and in my opinion, this is what should be done.

Saint George . . .

The Citizen will admit only that side into Angiers which proves its right by victory in battle. The English and French forces prepare to fight, therefore, and the Bastard says:

*Saint George, that swinged [beat] the dragon, and e'er since
Sits on's horseback at mine hostess' door,
Teach us some fence.!*

-Act II, scene i, lines 288-90

In medieval times a legend had grown popular concerning a Christian martyr, George, who lived in Palestine and who died in 303, during the last great Roman persecution of the Christians. He was canonized as St. George, and the event in his life which attracted most notice was his rescue of a maiden from the wicked jaws of a dragon-which he slew.

George may well have been a historical character, but it seems quite reasonable to suppose that the incident with the maiden and the dragon was a Christianization of the popular motif in such pagan myths as that of Perseus and Andromeda. In any case, the deed appealed to the Norman knights at the time of the Crusades. They liked a saint who played the knight, and St. George was popular with them.

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Edward III, who reigned a century and a half after John, fancied himself a knight and adopted St. George as England's patron saint. The cry of "St. George" became a rallying cry in battle, and it would be expected that St. George would, by divine action, improve the English strokes in battle ("Teach us some fence").

Of course, the popularity of St. George led to numerous taverns adopting him as a name. The tavern signs up and down England would have him on horseback and full armor, on the point of sticking the dragon.



Hence he "sits on's horseback at mine hostess' door"-though perhaps not as soon as in King John's time.

... the mutines of Jerusalem

The English and French forces fight a long and inconclusive battle and are each still refused admittance.

The Bastard then impatiently suggests that it is ridiculous to fight a battle for the spectator-sport pleasure of the people of Angiers. He says to the two kings.

*Do like the mutines of Jerusalem,
Be friends awhile and both conjointly bend
Your sharpest deeds of malice on this town.*

-Act II, scene i, lines 378-80

It is not often that quarreling factions forget their disputes and join against a common enemy, although that seems such a sensible thing to do. Very often, in history, one side or the other of the dispute, fearing loss, actually joins the common enemy.

An example of the more sensible attitude is that of the Jews of the first century. Though split into numerous factions by differences over detail in religion, they managed to combine when it came to fighting the Romans and from 67 to 70 held off the best armies the Romans could send in.

... Lewis the Dolphin ...

The exasperated kings agree and prepare to combine forces and assail the stubborn city from separate directions, when the Citizen spokesman of Angiers anxiously suggests a compromise, with the essential point being a matrimonial one. He says:

*That daughter there of Spain, the Lady Blanch,
Is near to England: look upon the years
Of Lewis the Dolphin and that lovely maid.*

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*If lusty love should go in quest of beauty,
Where should he find it purer than in Blanch?*

-Act II, scene i, lines 423-27

The queer title, "the Dolphin," dates back to the house of the Count of Vienne, a city on the Rhone River. In 1133 Guigues Dauphin became count, bearing the title of Guigues IV. Why he was called Dauphin (the French word for "dolphin") is not known. Some think a dolphin was on his coat of arms or his battle standard. On the other hand, it may have been a personal name.

Succeeding counts all bore the name until it became virtually a title. The spreading territory ruled by Vienne on the east bank of the Rhone River came to be known as Dauphine (the land of the Dolphin family, so



to speak) in consequence.

Humbert II of Dauphine, who began to rule in 1333, spent so much money on wars and other extravagances that he went virtually bankrupt. In 1349 he sold his kingdom to John, the oldest son of Philip VI of France. When John became King John II of France the very next year, he in turn made his oldest son the ruler of Dauphine. The oldest son was, in other words, the Dauphin, and that remained the title of the heir to the French throne for five hundred years.

In that sense, Louis (who later resigned as Louis VIII) was Dauphin since he was the oldest son of Philip II of France. However, the time of the play is a century and a half before the title was transferred to France, so its use in connection with Louis is anachronistic. Although Shakespeare presents Louis as a man who, while young, is capable of taking part in warfare, he was actually born in 1187 and was only twelve years old at the time of the accession of King John, no older than Prince Arthur of Brittany and a year older than Blanche of Spain.

However, neither the youth of children nor disparity of ages is a bar in the case of dynastic marriages.

The compromise is agreed to. The marriage was, in actual history, arranged in May 1200 and quickly took place. Some land was ceded by John to the Dauphin (meaning to Philip) as a dowry, though not as much as Shakespeare indicates, and in return Philip recognizes John as King of England.

... *Earl of Richmond* ...

This means that Prince Arthur is abandoned. John has offered him a sop, saying unctuously:

*We will heal up all,
For we'll create young Arthur Duke of Britain*
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And Earl of Richmond ...

-Act H, scene i, lines 550-52

This, however, is nothing at all, for Arthur was already Duke of Brittany and no one disputed that. What's more, the Duke of Brittany traditionally held the title of Earl of Richmond as well, since the time of William's conquest of England a century and a half before. John was merely recognizing what existed and was granting nothing.

What John hypocritically offered, Philip hypocritically accepted on behalf of Arthur. Philip, after all, had upheld Arthur's cause in the first place only as far as it would serve to advance his own self-interest.

... *break faith upon commodity*

All depart and the Bastard is left alone on the stage to deliver a diatribe against this same self-interest, which he terms "commodity." He says:

*Since kings break faith upon commodity,
Gain, be my lord, for I will worship thee!*



-Act II, scene i, lines 597-98

The Bastard's anger at the compromise cannot be understood without reference back to the earlier *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England*, which served as inspiration for *King John*. In *The Troublesome Reign* it seems that Blanche had been promised to the Bastard. Faith had therefore been broken with the Bastard, who had looked forward to a beautiful and highborn bride. To have that snatched away because of the self-interest (commodity) of the kings would naturally infuriate him. Shakespeare, having removed the motivating wrong, neglected to moderate the fury.

A widow, husbandless. . .

During the negotiations between England and France over the marriage of Louis and Blanche, Constance has been absent, which is convenient, for had she been present, she would have raised an unbearable storm over the betrayal. She is, at the time, in King Philip's tent, anxiously awaiting the result of the battle.

The Earl of Salisbury is sent to tell her the results. He is William Longsword, a bastard son of Henry II, who during the reign of Richard I was given the hand of the heiress to the earldom of Salisbury so that he himself became the 3rd Earl. In some ways he may have helped form one of the models for the Bastard of the play. He was the illegitimate brother rather

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than the son of Richard, and he was given the honors due a member of the family.

At first Constance will not believe the news Salisbury brings her. She insists he is only trying to frighten her, and she warns him that he will be punished for that:

*For I am sick and capable of fears,
Oppressed with wrongs, and therefore full of fears,
A widow, husbandless, subject to fears,
A woman naturally born to fears;*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 12-15

Here Shakespeare alters the historical state of affairs for the sake of greater poignancy. Constance is a widow, yes, but she is by no means husbandless. In those days, women who owned great estates did not stay unmarried. They needed the protection of a man; and there were many men who needed the estates.

It was not long after the death of Geoffrey, son of Henry II and father of Prince Arthur, that Constance married Ranulf de Blundeville, Earl



of
Chester. This marriage was annulled in 1199, the year in which King
John
mounted the throne, and Constance married a third husband, Guy de
Thouars, who was still her husband at this time and for the
remainder of
her life.

Her grief is magnificent, however, and she tears passion to tatters as
it is
gradually borne in on her that Salisbury is telling the truth and that
she and
her son are indeed betrayed.

... the holy legate ...

Until now, Shakespeare has kept rather closely to actual chronology,
and
the first two acts have dealt, more or less, with the events of the first
couple
of years of John's reign. However, Shakespeare wants to unify the
events
of the reign and bring them all down to his central purpose in writing
the
play (discussing the results of a disputed succession) by making
every-
thing center about the matter of Prince Arthur.

Since the entire business with Arthur from beginning to end
occupies
only the first third of John's reign, it becomes necessary for
Shakespeare
to drag forward the later events and pile them into a kind of heap. It
will
require considerable effort to sort out the chronology of the actual
historical
events.

Thus, at the opening of the third act, King John is with King Philip
in
the latter's tent and with them are the other important characters of
the
play. The railing Constance has been impatiently turned away and the
Bas-
tard has been baiting Austria once more, when Philip suddenly says:

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Here comes the holy legate of the Pope

-Act III, scene i, line 61

The appearance of this legate betokens the year 1211 and not 1200, as
was the case a moment before. Eleven years have vanished (though later
in the play some of the events in that eleven-year gap will be described
as taking place *after* the legate's appearance). To explain the legate, we
must do a little rapid recounting of history.

After the compromise of 1200, Philip sat back to wait his chance to



break it under conditions favorable to himself.

King John knew that Philip was doing just this and did his best to organize his dominions for defense. For the purpose he needed to secure the communications between his provinces in the north of France and those in the south. The best way to do so (it seemed to him) was to arrange a marriage. He had obtained a divorce from his first wife and he decided that Isabella, the daughter of the Count of Angouleme, would make a good second wife. She was only thirteen at the time, but her family controlled strategic land between Anjou and Aquitaine, north and south.

John arranged matters quickly and married her in 1200. She was to remain John's Queen for the rest of his reign and was to be the mother of the next King of England.

Unfortunately for John, however, she had been betrothed to Hugh IX of Lusignan, a city fifty-five miles north of Angouleme. John tried to make it up to the offended nobleman, but Hugh IX would not be appeased. He had been a loyal comrade in arms of Richard the Lion-Heart, but now he felt wounded and mistreated and he turned to King Philip for redress. (By a curious turn of events, Isabella of Angouleme was to return to France in 1220, after John's death, when she was still in her early thirties. She was then to take as her second husband Hugh X of Lusignan, the son and successor of her old betrothed.)

Philip listened to the complaints of Hugh IX. As King of England, John was an independent sovereign, but as overlord of Normandy, Anjou, Aquitaine, and the rest, he was Philip's vassal, just as Hugh was John's vassal. According to the letter of the feudal law, Philip could judge a quarrel between a vassal and that vassal's vassal when the latter appealed. In order to do so, Philip summoned John to appear before him to answer the charges.

John would not, of course. His dignity as King of England made that impossible, and Philip knew he would not. When John failed to come, he was in contempt, and Philip could, again quite according to the letter of feudal law, declare John deprived of the lands he held as Philip's vassal.

Naturally, that meant nothing unless Philip was prepared to take them by force, but this was exactly what he planned to do. In 1202, two years after the marriage of the Dauphin with Blanche of Castile, the war started again. Philip ordered John deposed, once again recognized Arthur as

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rightful King of England, and called on all his French vassals (and all John's French vassals too) to join him against John.

The third and fourth acts of the play deal with that war, a war which placed John in dire need of money. Events made John so financially desperate, in fact, that he was forced to turn to the church for money. This the church would not yield willingly, and John proceeded to take it from them anyway, something which got John into a great deal of trouble, not only in his lifetime, but beyond.

Not only was the major portion of his reign occupied with a cankerous and eventually losing fight with the church, but after his death, the churchly

chroniclers, who controlled events in retrospect since it was they who wrote

history, commemorated their bitterness against John for this fight by black-

ening his character. He was not an admirable man by any means, but the



chances are he was not nearly as black as the chroniclers made him appear.

When the legate arrived in 1211 (not 1200), it was in order that he might breathe new life into the church's end of the struggle and escalate the papal offensive against John.

...*from Pope Innocent*...

The legate identifies himself:

*I Pandulph, of fair Milan cardinal
And from Pope Innocent the legate here,*

-Act III, scene i, lines 64-65

It was John's misfortune (and all his life he was dogged with bad luck) to be dealing with the particular Pope with whom he had to deal.

The papacy had been growing in strength since the beginning of the crusading movement, and reached its very apogee and peak of power when

Lothair of Segni was elected Pope on January 8, 1198. He chose to reign under the name of Innocent III.

Innocent III was determined to assert the superiority of the church over the temporal power, not only in the case of John, but in that of every

Western king. He was usually successful, for he had great ability and was a man of grim resolution.

...*Stephen Langton*...

Pandulph demands that John explain certain of his actions in defiance

of the church (actions which have not been referred to or foreshadowed

in the course of the play but which, of course, would be known to the educated members of the Elizabethan audience).

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Pandulph asks of John:

*Why thou against the church, our holy mother,
So wilfully dost spurn; and force perforce
Keep Stephen Langton, chosen Archbishop
Of Canterbury, from that holy see:*

-Act III, scene i, lines 67-70

This particular problem had arisen in 1205, when Hubert Walter, the forty-third Archbishop of Canterbury, died. John saw this as a golden opportunity. He could appoint to the office some creature of his own who would co-operate with him and help tip some of the gold of the churchly



coffers into the royal treasury.

This, however, Pope Innocent III would not consent to allow. He saw quite clearly what John's intention was and he therefore appointed his own

candidate in the person of Stephen Langton.

On the face of it, Langton was an excellent choice. He was an Englishman, born in Lincolnshire, and he was a renowned scholar. In 1181, while still a young man, he went to Paris and spent a quarter of a century immersed in scholarship there. He was the first to divide the Old Testament

books into the chapters we now find in our Bibles.

In Paris he met Lothair, the future Pope Innocent III, and eventually when Lothair became Pope, Langton became a cardinal.

John, however, was not concerned merely that the next Archbishop of Canterbury be an Englishman and a scholar. Langton, long a resident of France, had lost much of his Englishness and, as a friend of the Pope besides, would never co-operate with John in obtaining funds from the church to support a war against France. John *had* to oppose the appointment at whatever cost, and years of stalemate passed.

... no *Italian priest*

John quite angrily refuses to bend to Innocent's command. He says:

... wo *Italian priest*
Shall tithes or toll in our dominions;
But as we, under God, are supreme head,
So under Him that great supremacy
Where we do reign, we will alone uphold
Without th'assistance of a mortal hand:

-Act III, scene i, lines 79-84

The historic King John might well have felt quite justified in resisting the

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papal demands. For well over a century, kings and emperors had been quarreling with popes over the right to appoint bishops.

Henry I, the great-grandfather of John, had quarreled with the Pope of

his time over the very matter of the appointment of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and a compromise had then been reached in 1107, just a century before John's time, which had given the English King certain rights in such matters. Since then the papacy had grown stronger and

Innocent III had no intention of being bound by compromises extorted

from the weaker popes of the past. John, however, would naturally feel otherwise.

Yet the language of the speech, the contemptuous reference to the Pope

as an "Italian priest" and to himself as "the supreme head," belongs to a

later time. It is something Henry VIII might have said, three centuries



after John's time, in turning the English church away from papal domination. Shakespeare was writing *King John* a half century after Henry VIII had successfully accomplished this, and was writing for an English audience, turned mainly Protestant, who would look back on the quarrels with the papacy with their sympathies entirely for the crown. The remark concerning an "Italian priest" was a clear bid for the nationalist feelings of the audience, and indeed, at least part of the success of the Protestant Reformation in northern Europe was resentment over the great role played in the church by the men of southern Europe, and particularly by the men of Italy.

In fact, King John, whose character had been blackened in earlier days because of his opposition to the church, underwent a kind of renovation when England turned Protestant, precisely because of that opposition. It is for that reason that he comes off as well as he does in Shakespeare's play.

Shakespeare was, however, far less grossly anti-Catholic than much of his audience. *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England*, from which Shakespeare seems to have drawn much of his inspiration for the play, was harshly anti-Catholic. Thus, in the earlier play, the Bastard at one point ransacks monasteries and finds a nun hidden in the abbot's room, a friar in the nun's room, and so on. This reflects the charges of immorality which were among the excuses used by Henry VIII in closing down the English monasteries a half century before the play was produced, and, of course, such scenes served also to titillate the prurient tastes of the audience.

Shakespeare scorns such grossness, but clearly makes Pandulph a villain, and insofar as John resists the power of the papacy, makes the King a hero.

... *you blaspheme* ...

King Philip of France, listening to John's bold reply to Pandulph, says:

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Brother of England, you blaspheme in this.

-Act III, scene i, line 87



There is a hypocrisy in this that the play does not make clear, for Philip II had had his own troubles with the church.

In 1193, six years before John became King of England, Philip II, who was then a widower, married Ingeborg, the sister of King Canute VI of Denmark. What went on during the wedding night no one knows, but whatever it was, it didn't suit Philip. The next morning he repudiated her

and arranged to have an assembly of bishops annul the marriage. When Ingeborg refused to return to Denmark, Philip had her placed in a convent

and three years later took another wife.

This behavior was utterly against the rules of the church, and the Danish King, whose sister had been thus insulted, appealed to Pope Celestine III (Innocent's predecessor).

Pope Celestine III ordered Philip to abandon his new wife and reinstate Ingeborg. Philip paid no attention to this at all. But then, in 1198, Celestine III died and Innocent III became Pope. Innocent was not the man to be played with.

In January 1200 he placed France under an interdict. That is, all public worship was ended in France. The churches were closed, the church bells

no longer rang, the sacraments (except for baptism and extreme unction)

were suspended. Thus, when Louis the Dauphin married Blanche of Castile, the rites had to be performed on territory ruled by John, for mar-

riages could not be performed on French soil. It was a fearful weapon against a people to whom suspension of worship seemed like a license to the devil to take souls to hell. It placed a king under the powerful pressure

of an affrighted public opinion to give in to the Pope.

By September 1200, then, Philip had to surrender and agree to take back Ingeborg. He didn't really; he kept her in a convent; but he had to grant her the title of Queen.

And it is this Philip who is presented here as clucking his tongue over John's defiance of Pandulph.

... curst and excommunicate

Despite Philip's warning, John remains truculent and defiant, saying:

*Yet I alone, alone do me oppose
Against the Pope, and count his friends my foes.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 96-97

For John to say this at such a time and occasion was most impolitic, but it was ideal for the Protestant audience. It must have elicited cheers, and

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that would be the signal for Pandulph to assume to the role of archvillain indeed and to fulfill the very image of what Protestants must have imagined Catholic priests to be like-right down to the plotting of rebellion and regicide.



Pandulph is made to say:

*Then, by the lawful power that I have,
Thou shalt stand curst and excommunicate:
And blessed shall he be that doth revolt
From his allegiance to an heretic;
And meritorious shall that hand be called,
Canonized and worshipped as a saint,
That takes away by any secret course
Thy hateful life.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 98-105

In actual history, England and John were struck down by the weapons of the church even before the coming of Pandulph. Innocent III placed England under the interdict in March 1208. John, however, more unbending than Philip of France, refused to back down. By the use of force, he kept many priests at work, and maintained what he conceived to be his royal prerogative. For a year and a half he defied the interdict and it was only then that Innocent decided on a more specific thrust.

In November 1209 John was excommunicated. It was now no longer the kingdom generally that suffered but John personally. He was denied communion with the church. He could not attend mass or participate in any religious functions. His subjects were relieved of any duties they owed him and the Pope even went through the motions of deposing John and turning his kingdom over to Philip of France.

What must have interested Shakespeare's audience particularly was that a later pope applied similar weapons against Elizabeth I, who was England's Queen at the time *King John* was written. The papal weapons did not work, however, against a mainly Protestant land, especially since most English Catholics remained loyal to Queen and country even in the face of the papal stand.

But most of all the audience must have thrilled with horror at the open call to assassination, for in the 1590s it was widely believed by Protestants that monks and Jesuits preached assassination of prominent Protestants as a matter of policy.

To be sure, they could point to evidence. In 1584 William the Silent, the leader of the Dutch Protestant revolt against the arch-Catholic Philip II of Spain, had been assassinated by a Catholic in the Spanish King's pay. In 1589 Henry III, the Catholic King of France, had been assassinated by a monk who thought he was not Catholic enough. And in 1572 French Protestants had been slaughtered by the thousands on St. Bartholomew's

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Day, on which occasion Philip II of Spain and Pope Gregory XIII gave forth with open expressions of delight. (It is said that on receiving news

of the massacre, Philip II laughed out loud for the only time in his life.)

Under the force of Pandulph's curse and excommunication, Philip of France is pictured as being forced, reluctantly, to break his truce with John. The war resumes.

This is, of course, a perversion of history. To repeat, it was John's marriage to Isabella of Angouleme and his refusal to come before Philip for judgment that began the war again in 1202 (two years after the marriage



of Louis and Blanche, and not immediately afterward as in the play). It was certainly not caused by troubles with the church, which were more the result of the war with France than the cause of them.

The perversion, however, serves its purpose. Not only does it condense history and place the entire length of the reign within the scope of the play, but it gives the play a more nationalist bias that makes it more suitable for the partisan ears of Englishmen.

In the case of John's marriage, he was clearly in the wrong and (technically at least) Philip was in the right, even though he might be hypocritically ignoring his own marital entanglements of the recent past. This is nothing on which to rest John's case, and Queen Isabella is nowhere mentioned or referred to in the play.

To rest the quarrel upon John's bold defiance of the Pope and on Philip's craven cowering beneath the papal thunders placed John entirely and heroically in the right to the Protestant Englishmen of the 1590s.

... *Austria's head* ...

Once again, the English and French forces fall to battle in the vicinity of Angiers, and the Bastard enters with a private victory. He says:

*Now, by my life, this day grows wondrous hot.
Some airy devil hovers in the sky
And pours down mischief. Austria's head lie there,*
-Act III, scene ii, lines 1-3

The Bastard has, apparently, killed the Duke of Austria, and is usually presented as now wearing the lion skin (which may account for his sardonic remark about the day growing hotter-because of his added garment).

This apparently is inspired by the one comment Holinshed makes concerning a supposed bastard son of Richard. He says: "The same year [1199, that of Richard's death and John's accession], Philip, bastard son to King Richard, to whom his father had given the castle and honor of Cognac, killed the Viscount of Limoges, in revenge of his father's death."

... For the dramatic purposes of the play, the Bastard has, by this kill,

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earned an even better title to be considered the reincarnation of Richard, and his wearing of the lion skin further symbolizes his position as heir of the tradition of the Lion-Heart.

Hubert, keep this boy

John enters with a victory of his own, for young Arthur is his



captive.
 He says to a follower:

Hubert, keep this boy.

-Act III, scene ii, line 5

Since the Signet edition calls the Citizen of Angiers, in an earlier scene, Hubert, it would seem that that Citizen has suddenly become a trusted servant of John.

This is hard to accept. It is better to consider the man now termed Hubert as someone utterly distinct from the Angiers Citizen. Indeed, this present Hubert is a historical character, Hubert de Burgh, who was an important administrator under King John. Indeed, toward the end of the reign, he was promoted to the position of chief justiciar.

He had served John even before the latter's accession to the throne and was an important official at the time of the wars with France here described. He did indeed serve as jailer of Prince Arthur, the role he is described as having in the play.

My mother is assailed . . .

John says further:

*Philip make up:
 My mother is assailed in our tent,
 And ta'en, I fear.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 5-7

The Philip here referred to is not the King of France, of course. John is addressing Philip Faulconbridge, the Bastard.

The reference to John's mother being assailed is a reminiscence of a real event that took place during the war over Isabella of Angouleme.

Eleanor, at one point in the fighting, had fled for safety to a castle at Mirebeau, a few miles south of Anjou. In 1203 an army marched to besiege that castle, one that was nominally led by Prince Arthur of Brittany, who was now fifteen years old, and a man by the standards of the time.

John, now as ever, a loyal and loving son to his mother, dropped everything to hasten to the relief of the castle (which was being besieged by his



mother's grandson). On August 1 he won a victory there. He not only dispersed the French army but captured Hugh IX of Lusignan, the old betrothed of John's Queen. Most important of all, it was on this occasion (as in the play) that he captured Arthur. This victory represented the very peak of John's military career.

In the play, though, it is the Bastard who rescues the aged Queen Mother, for in response to John's fears for her safety, the Bastard says:

*My lord, I rescued her;
Her Highness is in safety, fear you not:*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 7-8

Bell, book, and candle . . .

Now John announces he will hasten to England, for he will need more money to pursue the war. (It is the war which leads to desperation for money, which leads to the quarrel with the church, and not the quarrel which leads to the war as in the play.)

John sends the Bastard ahead to scrounge the necessary money by any means out of the church, and the Bastard says with grim joy:

*Bell, book, and candle shall not drive me back
When gold and silver beck me to come on.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 22-23

This is a reference to actions which symbolize the solemnity of excommunication, in a rite dating back to the eighth century. At the conclusion of the reading out of the excommunication, a bell is rung, a book is closed, and a lighted candle is put out. The ringing bell signifies that the act is public; all men are called to hear. The closing book signifies the words that lend the presiding bishop the power to perform the rite and is a clear enough symbol that the words of the churchly rituals are henceforth locked away from the excommunicated culprit. Finally, the candle is extinguished to signify that the light of the church is removed from the culprit.

The Bastard is saying that not even excommunication will keep him from rifling the treasures of the church. This should lead up to the scene in which (in the earlier play) he does ransack the chests of abbots and nuns and finds evidence of sexual misdemeanors, but Shakespeare will have nothing to do with that scene.

He is a very serpent. . .

Once the Bastard leaves, John has to face another problem. The ques-

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tion now is what to do with Arthur. Had the young man died in battle,

John would have been triumphant. It would have been a fair death, and

that death John would have become the rightful King of England by every

possible legal criterion.



But Arthur has been captured alive, and as long as he lives he will remain the center about which disaffection and rebellion might rally. Yet he is also in John's power and under these conditions an inconvenient prince might easily be dealt with.

Shakespeare pictures John as succumbing to the obvious temptation. He flatters Hubert, into whose charge he has put Arthur, makes vague promises of love, preference, and reward, then says:

*. . . Hubert, throw thine eye
On yon young boy; I'll tell thee what, my friend,
He is a very serpent in my way,
And wheresoe'er this foot of mine doth tread
He lies before me: dost thou understand me?
Thou art his keeper.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 69-74

Hubert understands, and undertakes to kill Arthur.

. . . O, amiable, lovely death

Yet if the convenience of the dispatch of Arthur is clear to John, it is clear to his enemies too, or to some of them at least.

It is clear to Constance of Brittany, for instance, the bereft mother, who fears the fate of her son in John's hands and rises to a height of grief that has no parallel in literature for sheer intensity of anguish. She hymns the death she wants for herself, for instance, as:

*Death, death, O, amiable, lovely death!
Thou odoriferous stench! sound rottenness!
Arise forth from the couch of lasting night,
Thou hate and terror to prosperity,
And I will kiss thy detestable bones,*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 25-29

It seems almost a shame to point out that this scene, in any form, is un-historical. Constance had, in history, died in 1201, a year after the marriage of the Dauphin to Blanche of Castile and two years before the capture of Prince Arthur.



... the right of Lady Blanch ...

Pandulph, the Pope's legate, also sees Arthur's danger, but his reaction is quite different from that of Constance, of course. He is shown as the typical Italian Jesuit of English Protestant imaginings, unmoved by emotion, oblivious to right and wrong, seeing only political advantage. Where Philip of France and Louis the Dauphin are in despair over the loss of the battle and Constance wails in tragic anguish over the loss of her son, Pandulph sees that actually John has lost.

He points out that John is sure to murder the captured Arthur, and when Louis the Dauphin asks what good that will do the French, Pandulph says:

*You, in the right of Lady Blanch your wife,
May then make all the claim that Arthur did.*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 142-43

Blanche is the daughter of John's older sister, and that might lend color to the claim. It would, however, be a feeble color. Descent through the daughters of Henry II would not, according to English usage, make someone eligible for the throne until all the line of the sons of Henry II was extinct. And while John was alive, that line was not extinct.

Moreover, it passed the bounds of likelihood (it would seem) that the English would be willing to accept a French prince as their king simply because he was married to the daughter of an English king.

Pandulph rebuts this point even before it is made, for he is sure the murder of Arthur will boomerang against John:

*This act so evilly borne shall cool the hearts
Of all his people, and freeze up their zeal,*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 149-50

Pandulph points out that under those conditions, Louis need merely invade England with a small force to have Englishmen rally round him by the thousands.

... with false reports

What actually happened to Arthur no one knows. All history can tell us is that after the Battle of Mirebeau, he was transferred to a prison tower

in a fortified castle in the charge of Hubert de Burgh and was never heard of again. Presumably he died, and everyone took it for granted he was

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killed at John's orders before the year 1203 saw its end. Some even proposed that John did it with his own hands.

It isn't likely that John would have done it himself (there were plenty he



could hire to do the job), but certainly no modern historian doubts that Arthur was killed. Considering the storm that arose after Arthur's disappearance, John would certainly have exhibited Arthur alive or if he were dead, revealed the true manner of that death, if his story would in the least have withstood investigation. The fact that he never offered a defense is the worst evidence against him.

Shakespeare, however, is anxious to make a case in John's favor. He is a King of England and an ancestor of Queen Elizabeth I, and it will not do to make him so villainous as to shame his descendants. (The only English King whom Shakespeare treats as a thorough villain is Richard III, and he is not among those from whom Elizabeth claims descent. Indeed, the villainy of Richard III makes Elizabeth's claim to the throne all the more secure, and so Shakespeare has no need to hold back in that case.)

According to Shakespeare's account in this play, then, John has ordered Hubert to kill the Prince, but later the order has been lessened to blinding. Hubert, however, cannot, in the pinch, carry out even the lesser sentence. In a most sentimental scene, Arthur pleads with Hubert, and the latter gives way and decides to spare him. To do so would ruin him with John, of course, and so he says to Arthur:

*Your uncle must not know but you are dead.
I'll fill these dogged spies with false reports;*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 128-29

So it would appear, according to Shakespeare's version, that though John originally ordered the death of Arthur, the killing was not carried through, nor was mutilation, and John turned out to be innocent of Arthur's blood.

... once again crowned

The scene shifts to London, where John has gone through the ceremony of a coronation a second time and says:

*Here once again we sit, once again crowned,
And looked upon, I hope, with cheerful eyes.*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 1-2

The second coronation has involved a renewed oath of allegiance from the various nobles of the realm. There can be two purposes in this second coronation. By forcing these oaths after the excommunication, John can keep his vassals from maintaining that their oaths at the initial coronation

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in 1199 had been voided by excommunication. They have, after all, sworn new ones.

Secondly, by now Arthur should be dead, and there would be none to dispute John's claim to the throne. If the first coronation was invalid, Arthur being alive, the second coronation would be valid, Arthur being dead.

And it was wise to have the second coronation take place before the



news
of Arthur's passing became current.

Was once superfluous . . .

The lords are not blind, however, and they are disturbed at the possible purposes of the second coronation. One of them, Pembroke, says, sullenly:

*This "once again," but that your Highness pleased
Was once superfluous . . .*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 3-4

In other words, the second coronation was one too many and was carried through only at the whim of the King.

Pembroke was William Marshal, 1st Earl of Pembroke. He had been born in 1146, was one of England's foremost soldiers under Richard the Lion-Heart, and had helped run England while Richard was away on the Crusade. In John's early years he was leading armies in England and France continually and was always a staunch supporter of the King.

This theme of superfluity is taken up by Salisbury, who talks of it in the best-known passage of the play (which contains one of the most frequently misquoted phrases in Shakespeare). Salisbury says, with reference to a second coronation added to a first that was ample:

*To gild refined gold, to paint the lily,
To throw a perfume on the violet,
To smooth the ice, or add another hue
Unto the rainbow, or with taper-light
To seek the beauteous eye of heaven to garnish
Is wasteful and ridiculous excess.*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 11-16

People almost invariably quote the phrase as "to gild the lily," although it makes much more sense to deride the gilding of gold.

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. . . Arthur is deceased . . .

John tries to placate the troubled lords, but the true reason for their concern comes out at once. They fear John's intentions toward Arthur. They



point out that since John's hold on the throne is secure, he ought to release Arthur.

At this point Hubert enters, and John, assuming Arthur is dead, readily grants the request and ostentatiously orders Hubert to set Arthur free. Then, when he gets Hubert's (false) report concerning Arthur's death, he turns and says blandly:

*We cannot hold mortality's strong hand,
Good lords, although my will to give is living,
The suit which you demand is gone and dead.
He tells us Arthur is deceased tonight.*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 82-85

The lords, who knew very well that Arthur in prison was very likely to experience a convenient death, did not for a moment accept John's implication that that death was natural. Horrified and angered, they withdraw. Pandulph's prediction is coming true.

Where is my mother's care

Almost at once, a Messenger enters with news of a distracting nature from France. A French army, larger than ever before, is now making war on England.

And as a matter of fact, Arthur's capture at Mirebeau marked the turning point of John's fortunes. Once Arthur disappeared into captivity, reports of his death at once began to circulate and the results were devastating for John.

Brittany was incensed at the apparent murder of its prince. Its chief bishop accused John openly of having engineered the murder, and King Philip did his best to broadcast the accusation. John's French vassals began to fall away in droves. The killing of the Prince was a crime that, in their eyes, would be sure to draw down the curse of heaven, and they did not want to be in the way when lightning struck.

Philip's armies, heartened by a sense of right, penetrated the Angevin dominions, and John's forces, correspondingly disheartened, were driven back and back.

At the news of Philip's successes, John is astounded that they could have

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been carried through without his having been warned in time by his mother.

He says:

*Where is my mother's care,
That such an army could be drawn in France
And she not hear of it?*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 117-19

But the Messenger says:



*My liege, her ear
Is stopped with dust: the first of April died
Your noble mother:*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 119-21

This was April 1, 1204. Eleanor of Aquitaine had died at last, some eighty-two years old, active to the last. It had been her marriage with Henry II a half century before that had created the Angevin Empire, and she had lived just long enough to see it being destroyed under the last of her sons.

The Messenger adds:

*. . . and, as I hear, my lord,
The Lady Constance in a frenzy died
Three days before . . .*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 121-23

This is a dramatic juxtaposition, but of course Constance had really died three years before.

. . . the streets of Pomfret. . .

Philip's forces continued victorious after Eleanor's death, and on June 24, 1204, they took Rouen, capital of Normandy. Normandy was the original home of the line of kings that now ruled England; now it was French again, not quite a century and a half after William of Normandy had conquered England.

With the loss of Rouen, John was driven from northern France altogether (though he retained parts of Aquitaine), and he could do nothing but lay slow plans for reconquest. It was now that he really had to rifle

English churchly coffers for money, for he had not only lost French provinces, but also the revenues of those provinces.

The Bastard returns from his money collections and brings with him tales of a disturbed populace. He says:

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*. . . here's a prophet that I brought with me
From forth the streets of Pomfret, whom I found
With many hundreds treading on his heels,
To whom he sung, in rude harsh-sounding rhymes,
That ere the next Ascension-day at noon,
Your Highness should deliver up your crown.*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 147-52

Pomfret is a slurred form of Pontefract, a city in southern Yorkshire,



some thirty miles southwest of York. William the Conqueror, during a campaign of devastation designed to break the Saxon resistance in the north, broke down an old Roman bridge in the vicinity in 1069. The town therefore received the name of Pontefract ("broken bridge"). It is best known for its castle, where Richard II was to meet his death nearly two centuries later (see page II-312).

Ascension Day is the fortieth day after Easter and commemorates the tale told in Acts of the Apostles (1:3,9) to the effect that Jesus remained with the apostles for forty days after the Resurrection and then "he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight."

... many thousand warlike French

The prophecy is not harmful in itself, but it can work to break morale, to give the people cause for despair and even revolt, so that they might readily yield to some foreign enemy. It is thus a possibly self-fulfilling prophecy.

Indeed, Hubert reports the news of fear and unrest among the populace. He tells the King concerning the English people:

*Young Arthur's death is common in their mouths,
And, when they talk of him, they shake their heads
And whisper one another in the ear,*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 187-89

Hubert also brings other news, saying the people

*Told of a many thousand warlike French,
That were embattailed and ranked in Kent.*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 199-200

Louis the Dauphin did indeed lead an army to the invasion of England (as, in the play, he was urged to do by Pandulph), and he won sufficient success in doing so to cause him to be called by the vainglorious title of

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"Louis the Lion-Heart" since he was doing in England what Richard I had done in France.

Louis' invasion, however, did not take place till 1216 (by which time he was twenty-eight), a round dozen years after Arthur's death. Its occasion

was not the death of the young Prince but John's troubles with his own rebelling nobility. Nor did the nobles rebel over Prince Arthur, but over John's financial exactions. They forced the King to sign the Magna Carta in 1215, granting them certain rights and limiting the royal powers.

Shakespeare doesn't mention the Magna Carta anywhere in *King John*, and this is sometimes considered an odd and curious fact.

It is not in the least odd or curious. To us today, the issuing of the Magna Carta is the most important event in King John's reign because it was such

a meaningful early step toward the establishment of a limited monarchy in



England and the eventual birth of a form of democratic government which we in the United States were to inherit. However, it was by no means important in Shakespeare's time, when England had just been through a century of unusually strong central government by strong-willed monarchs, and when Parliament was comparatively weak and unimportant.

Within a generation of Shakespeare's death, the situation was to change.

Parliament was to grow strong, rebel, and cut off a king's head, but that was half a century in the future. In the 1590s, the memory of the Magna Carta was dim indeed.

Besides, even if it had been strong, Shakespeare might still have ignored it. The whole point of the play, as Shakespeare presents it, is the quarrel over the succession, and all else is subordinated to it. It is his intention to

show that the death of Arthur was the wrong way to settle that quarrel, and

he must show how evil followed it. Therefore, the French invasion must come hard on that death and not after the Magna Carta—something which would only obscure the point Shakespeare was trying to make.

... *my uncle's spirit* ...

John, aware now of what a terrible mistake he has made, turns in whining indignation on Hubert for having followed orders. Hubert is forced to reveal that he has not really killed the Prince, and for a while John thinks

joyfully that all may be mended.

But what is Shakespeare to do with the Prince? It is all very well to say that John's order to kill him was not carried out, so that John was innocent.

The fact is that Arthur never emerged from prison. *Something* must have happened to him.

Shakespeare presents him, therefore, as attempting to escape by leaping from the tower. He is killed in the process, and can just manage to say, after jumping:

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O me! my uncle's spirit is in these stones!

Heaven take my soul, and England keep my bones!

-Act IV, scene iii, lines 9-10

So Arthur's death is accidental after all.

But who will believe it? No one. Not even the characters in the play.

... *toward Bury* ...

Pembroke, Salisbury, and Bigot, the English lords who had been at John's second coronation, come across Arthur's body and are certain



he was murdered by Hubert at John's orders. They will not believe Hubert's denials, and though the ever faithful Bastard tries to prevent them, they throw off their allegiance of John. Lord Bigot cries:

Away toward Bury, to the Dolphin there!

-Act IV, scene iii, line 114

This is Bury St. Edmunds, a town in Suffolk, sixty miles northeast of London. The Dauphin's invading army is clearly making terrifying progress.

Bury was particularly associated with the opposition to King John on the part of the lords, since it was there in November 1214 that the lords had taken an oath to persevere in their demands for what became the Magna Carta and to compel King John to accept their terms.

Thus have I yielded . . .

The circling disasters have forced John to surrender in some directions so that he might survive in others. He gives in to Pope Innocent III. The fifth act opens with John making his submission to Pandulph, giving him his crown:

*Thus have I yielded up into your hand
The circle of my glory.*

-Act V, scene i, lines 1-2

The submission took place in 1213, well before the Dauphin's invasion. Indeed, it took place precisely so that John could free his hands for an invasion of France.

John had in 1213 almost completed his plans to invade France and reconquer the French provinces he had lost nearly a decade before. It was for this very purpose that he had scabbled so hard for money that he had driven himself into excommunication. Now he dared not take an army over-

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seas while he was excommunicate. The army would too easily be induced to desert and a rebellion could too easily be raised behind his back at home.

John therefore agreed to allow Stephen Langton to assume his post as Archbishop of Canterbury, and in return, Langton lifted the excommunication from John's head. For this, John agreed to hand over his kingdom to the Pope, ruling thereafter only as a papal vassal. It was a great



humiliation

for John, but it had its value. John paid the Pope an annual tribute of a thousand marks and that was the full extent of the papal overlordship.

And John received a benefit in return for this very light tribute. Since England was now the territory of the church, Philip of France could scarcely invade it without considerable trouble with Rome.

And yet, however meaningless the transfer of the crown was, John had given it up, in a manner of speaking, and he had done so by Ascension Day, as the prophet from Pomfret had predicted.

Once the quarrel with the Pope was settled, John made ready to invade France, in conjunction with the German Emperor Otto IV. Otto was the son of John's elder sister Matilda, so that he was John's nephew.

On July 27, 1214, the army of Otto IV, with English contingents, met the army of Philip II at Bouvines, a village ten miles southeast of Lille. It was a confused battle in which the knights made the air resound with the

clash of metal upon metal. At one point, Philip II was seized and pulled off his horse. He was so well protected by his armor, however, that the enemy could find no chink through which to kill him before he was rescued.

In the end, the result of the mutual battering was that the Emperor's forces were driven from the field. The victory of Philip II was complete and the Battle of Bouvines proved one of the decisive engagements of the Middle Ages.

John lost his last hope of retrieving the Angevin Empire and gained the nickname of "John Softsword." All his rapacity and connivery had alienated his nobles and he had not even the chance of vindicating his plans by a great victory. The loss of this battle helped strengthen the cause of the lords and helped lead to the Magna Carta. The confusions of that time led to the invasion of Louis the Dauphin.

Shakespeare does not mention the Battle of Bouvines any more than he does the Magna Carta. His anti-French animus never allows him to admit that the French can win a battle-except by treachery or witchcraft.

... the French lay down their arms

Once John has submitted, Pandulph becomes all English in his sympathies. He has encouraged Louis previously, but now he says:

*Upon your oath of service to the Pope,
Go I to make the French lay down their arms.*

-Act V, scene i, lines 23-24

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In 1213, actually, Pandulph did serve England by preventing a French invasion, even going so far as to threaten Philip with excommunication if he tried it.

This just meant, however, that John was free to organize an invasion of France, the one that ended disastrously at Bouvines. We can well



imagine that Philip was furious at a papal policy that kept him from invading England but did not stop England from invading France. After Bouvines, Philip sent the Dauphin into England, uncaring whether it was papal territory or not.

Pandulph couldn't stop that invasion, but King John was sufficiently beholden to him to be willing to appoint him Bishop of Norwich in 916. For several years after John's death, Pandulph remained one of the most influential persons in the English government. He returned to Italy in 1220, but after he died in Rome in 1226, his body was taken to Norwich for burial.

... London hath received

Pandulph cannot stop the furious Dauphin, and the Bastard enters to report further French progress. He says:

*All Kent hath yielded-nothing there holds out
But Dover Castle-London hath received,
Like a kind host, the Dolphin and his powers.*

-Act V, scene i, lines 30-32

This represents the extent to which John had alienated his own people in the course of his single-minded and futile attempt to reconquer the lost French provinces.

Louis had landed in Kent (having actually been invited to invade by some of the English barons annoyed at John's attempts to repudiate the Magna Carta) on May 30, 1216. Only three days later, on June 2, Louis entered London, which offered no resistance.

Then, on July 16, 1216, Pope Innocent III, whose strong hand John still hoped might force the Dauphin back, died.

With the Pope dead, with the Dauphin in London, with the English nobility flocking to the enemy, with a Scottish army threatening invasion from the north, John's fortunes hit bottom.

This fever . . .

Only the Bastard remains (in the play) true to the spirit of Richard. He is a hero, never daunted by odds, always ready to fight in the bluff fashion

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beloved of English nationalists. He carries on the battle against Louis the Dauphin and the defecting English lords, crying out to the latter:

*You bloody Neroes, ripping up the womb
Of your dear mother England, blush for shame.*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 152-53



Nero had his mother killed, but to be fair about it, it was his mother's idea (see page II-126) that she be stabbed in the womb.

John, however, cannot last much longer. Battle between the loyal forces and the Dauphin begins, but during its course, when Hubert asks him how he is, he replies:

*This fever, that hath troubled me so long,
Lies heavy on me: O, my heart is sick!*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 3-4

This is the first indication we have that John is ill. But now he must leave the field. He sends a message to the Bastard, who is leading John's army, telling him where he is going. John says:

Tell him, toward Swinstead, to the abbey there.

-Act V, scene iii, line 8

This is some sort of error. It is not Swinstead. What is meant is Swineshead Abbey, in Lincolnshire, twenty-five miles southeast of Lincoln itself.

... on *Goodwin sands*

Though John is sinking fast, he has some good news to support him. The Dauphin's hoped-for reinforcements will not arrive. A Messenger says:

*Be of good comfort, for the great supply
That was expected by the Dolphin here,
Are wracked three nights ago on Goodwin sands.*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 9-11

The Goodwin sands are dangerous shoals, ten miles long, lying about five miles off the southeastern tip of England. There is a tale that they at one time jutted above the sea, from which they were protected by a wall. After the time of William's conquest, the story goes, the wall was neglected,

fell into ruin, and the islands were inundated in a storm in 1100 that

beat them down into mere shoals. The tale is dramatic but is probably an invention.

... *poisoned by a monk*

The battle ends in, apparently, a narrow French victory. The Bastard goes to find the King and finds Hubert instead. Hubert tells him:

*The King, I fear, is poisoned by a monk:
I left him almost speechless...*



-Act V, scene vi, lines 23-24

Indeed, John died of the fever on the night of October 18, 1216, at the age of forty-one, with his French dominions mostly gone and his own England half in control of a foreign army.

There was a story, popular in later years, to the effect that he had been poisoned by a monk. This would naturally go well with Shakespeare's Protestant audience. In actual fact, it is probable John died a natural death. Natural deaths were common enough in those days.

... *Prince Henry in their company*

Hubert has further news for the Bastard. He says:

*The lords are all come back,
And brought Prince Henry in their company,
At whose request the King hath pardoned them,
And they are all about his Majesty.*

-Act V, scene vi, lines 33-36

Shakespeare has had to manage this clumsily. The English nobility had defected, according to his reading of history, because of Arthur's death. How, then, could they come back when Arthur was still dead?

Shakespeare's tale is that Louis the Dauphin, for no clear reason (except, perhaps, that he was a vile Frenchman, which was reason enough for Shakespeare's audience), had decided to kill all the English lords on his side once he had won his victory, and was so imprudent as to let his resolve be known. A French lord who was one-quarter English (which made him a fellow with decent impulses, of course) warned the English lords, who at once returned to John.

This is ridiculous. What really happened was that John died, thus removing the one person whom the nobility would not deal with. Had John

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continued to live, it is at least possible that the French would have won a

complete victory, with incalculable consequences in history.

As it was, in place of John there was now a nine-year-old boy who ruled as Henry III and who was crowned on October 28, 1216. He held sway, to begin with, only over a section of western and southwestern England, all the rest being held by Louis or by rebel barons.

Still, with Henry III crowned, the rebels had a change of heart. The new King, as a child, would be popular with the people, and with a child-king the barons might expect to retain the rights they had recently won. Indeed,

those around the young King, particularly Hubert de Burgh, were careful

to reissue the Magna Carta, and it was that which chiefly acted as a magnet

to bring back the rebels. Since Shakespeare did not use the Magna Carta,

he could not use that as the motivation.



... with all submission. . .

John's son, Henry, has made no appearance in the play at all, until John is on his deathbed. In part, this makes sense, for Henry wasn't born till 1207, four years after Arthur's death.

Young Henry's sudden appearance now allows Shakespeare an important scene. Once more, as in the case of Prince Arthur, a young prince claims the throne according to strict legitimacy. Once more there is an older relative who might claim the throne instead. As John had been to Arthur so was the Bastard to young Henry. To be sure, the Bastard was illegitimate and so could not, in theory, inherit. However, he was a tried and loyal soldier, the son of Richard the Lion-Heart, even if illegitimate, and undoubtedly in this great crisis that England faced, many would have welcomed him on the throne rather than a nine-year-old boy. (Of course, we are accepting Shakespeare's picture of the moment and must ignore the fact that in actual history, the Bastard did not exist.)

Shakespeare has the Bastard show the proper way to react to a disputed succession. Forgetful of his own possible claim, the Bastard labors only to unite England and avoid civil war.

As soon as John dies, the Bastard kneels before the young prince and says:

*... happily may your sweet self put on
The lineal state and glory of the land!
To whom, with all submission, on my knee,
I do bequeath my faithful services
And true subjection everlastingly.*

-Act V, scene vii, lines 101-5

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This England never did . . .

Meanwhile the report arrives to the effect that Pandulph has persuaded the Dauphin to make an honorable offer of peace, and the Bastard delivers the rousing finale of the play, a finale filled with the pride of a nation that a few years back had defeated the huge fleet of the Spanish Armada. He says:



*This England never did, nor never shall,
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror
But when it first did help to wound itself.
Now these her princes are come home again,
Come the three corners of the world in arms,
And we shall shock them! Naught shall make us rue
If England to itself do rest but true!*

-Act V, scene vii, lines 112-18

Thus the play ends, with the audience undoubtedly cheering.

But it had its truth too. The French, and such of the English as remained with them, were badly defeated at Lincoln in 1217. That restored almost all of England to the control of Henry III and to those who ruled in his name. Louis the Dauphin was left with little more than London.

Blanche of Castile on the French shore tried to raise a fleet which would sail to England with reinforcements and provisions to help her husband.

Hubert de Burgh, however, collected ships of his own, met the French fleet

en route, and destroyed most of it.

That left Louis helpless, and he agreed to leave England on receipt of a payment of ten thousand marks from Henry.

Seven and a half centuries have passed since then, and from that day to this, London has never again seen a foreign army within its city limits.

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The Tragedy of

KING RICHARD THE SECOND

a

AT THE close of *King John*, the young Prince Henry is succeeding to the throne as Henry III, and the year is 1216. At the start of *Richard II*, it is 1398, nearly two centuries later, and in order to understand the historical setting of the latter play it is necessary to go over some of the events that took place in that gap.

Henry III, who was nine years old when he ascended the throne, remained King for fifty-six years, dying in 1272. He was succeeded by his son, Edward I, who in 1307 was succeeded by his son, Edward II, who in 1327 was succeeded by his son, Edward III.

This century that followed the death of King John saw England preoccupied with itself and its immediate neighbors on the British Isles. It was a period of virtual isolationism for the land. This is not to say it was a period of absolute peace. Under Edward I, in particular, English armies were fully employed. Wales was conquered and Scotland was almost conquered.

The once great dominions in France, however, had continued to shrink, and the expansive days of the Angevin Empire were almost forgotten. When Edward came to the throne in 1327, what was left was chiefly a section of territory along the southwestern shores of France, bordering



on the Bay of Biscay, with Bordeaux as its chief city. That still remained of the inheritance of Eleanor of Aquitaine (see page II-210).

Edward III came to the throne at the age of fifteen, but he had already spent two years as Duke of Aquitaine, ruling over the shrunken English territory around Bordeaux. This gave him a French orientation and perhaps made him see himself as a new Richard the Lion-Heart (see page II-207), who had once, as a youth, ruled over Aquitaine too.

For the first few years, young Edward could only dream. He was dominated by his mother and her lover, Mortimer, but in 1330 the new King seized power in his own name and at once made up his mind to rule in knightly fashion.

Edward III always saw himself as a knight. He was as romantic as Richard I in his notions and just as apt to see his role entirely as conquering warrior. He strengthened England's grip over Wales and Scotland (a grip that had weakened during the reign of the preceding King, Edward II). Then he turned his eyes to France.

Edward III remembered that he was a direct descendant of Henry II.

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He was the great-great-great-grandson of Henry II, and filling the gap completely were four kings. Eventually, Edward took to symbolizing that solidly male, solidly royal descent by calling himself Edward Plantagenet (see page II-212). Edward's sons and their sons continued to call themselves Plantagenets.

As long as French dominions remained under English control, there was bound to be enmity between the two nations. Philip Augustus of France (see page II-243) had destroyed the Angevin Empire, but the region about Bordeaux remained, and in order to regain this, the French were always willing to intrigue against the English. They supported the Scots, for instance.

Edward, in return, supported the cities in Flanders and the Netherlands who wished to engage in their commercial ventures without interference from the French King and who were therefore willing to turn to the English King.

In 1328 there occurred a most significant event. King Charles IV of France died and left behind him no sons, no brothers, and no nephews.

However, he did have a living sister, Isabella, and this Isabella was none other than the mother of young Edward III, who at that time had been on the throne for but a year. By English custom, Edward III would have inherited the French crown.

The alarmed French did not, however, want an English king ruling over them. There was a so-called "Salic law" dating back to the days of the Frankish tribes who had asserted their rule over Roman Gaul, which was

supposed to forbid the inheritance of the kingship by a female or by the descendant of a female. It had never been called into play, however, for this was the first time in French history that a king had died without either



a son or a brother to succeed him.

It was now applied and the throne passed to a first cousin of Charles IV, Philip of Valois. He was further removed by blood than Edward III, but unlike the latter, Philip traced his descent from the royal line through males

only, and he assumed the throne as Philip VI.

Edward at first recognized Philip's title, but as the quarrel between England and France over the Flemish trade sharpened, the English King decided to take a drastic step. In 1337 he declared himself rightful *King of France* (a title the British monarch retains to this day) and began to make

preparations for an invasion of that land in order to make good that title

by force. This began what is known in history as the Hundred Years' War.

Actually, this title is an overstatement. The Hundred Years' War was not a single war but a series of wars interspersed by periods (sometimes lengthy ones) of peace. From beginning to end, though, the English effort to conquer France lasted a hundred and fourteen years.

France was much larger, richer, and more populous than England, yet England came surprisingly close to making good its conquest. There were

reasons for this. England had cut new military teeth in her wars against

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the Scots and the Welsh and had developed a fearsome weapon in the long-bow, which she borrowed from the Welsh. The weapon looked simple but it was not. To use it properly, it had to be pulled with a force of a hundred pounds; and this required strong muscles and long training.

The French, on the other hand, were torn apart by unruly, undisciplined

nobles who could not learn, for a long time, how to fight united in battle, and who considered the bow a plebeian weapon anyway, fit only for cowards and commoners. (And it should be remembered that through the

period of greatest English conquests, France was torn by civil war.)

Edward's first great stroke of fortune came on June 24, 1340, when, after

several unsuccessful attempts to invade France, his ships defeated and virtually destroyed the French fleet off Sluys on the coast of what is now the Netherlands. This gave England control of the Channel (an advantage she was to keep through most of history since) and finally made it possible

for Edward to ship an army into France.

By this time an invasion had become an absolute necessity, for Edward had gone bankrupt in his unsuccessful attempts till then and had had to

repudiate his debts. Only in France could he gather the loot that would make him solvent again.

In 1346, therefore, he abandoned the cautious use of Continental allies (never entirely trustworthy) and attacked France directly, sending an Eng-

lish army into Normandy. This army almost reached Paris before the French King could gather his forces for the defense.

Edward now scurried northeastward with a French force four times



the size of his own in pursuit. The English turned at Crecy, near the mouth of the Somme River, in a patch of land which had been English-controlled for half a century. There the first great land battle of the Hundred Years' War was fought in August 1346. The French army, badly led and wildly disorganized, was cut to pieces by the smoothly functioning English bowmen.

Edward moved on to Calais, a hundred miles north, and took it after a year-long siege in August 1347. Calais was just across the Channel from Dover, and the sea gap there was only twenty-five miles. These victories set up a kind of mystique among the English, an illusion that one Englishman could defeat ten Frenchmen. For a long time this was of great psychological help to the English, but in the long run it lured them on to attempt too much and to lose all.

After the fall of Calais, the war marked time. In 1350 Philip VI died, and his son, John II, succeeded to the throne. John was as steeped in knightly tradition as Edward III was, but lacked any trace of generalship.

On top of that, the vast and deadly plague called the Black Death was weakening and disorganizing France. (It also wreaked havoc in England, but not quite as badly.)

England saw its chance to resume aggressive warfare, therefore, with the main thrusts pointing inward from her old base at Bordeaux in the

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southwest and her new base at Calais in the northeast. In September 1356,

just ten years after Crecy, a battle just like it was fought at Poitiers in west-central France. Again the French outnumbered the English. Again the French were disorganized and unprepared for English archery. The

heavily armored Frenchmen were maneuvered into ambush on marshy ground. They were mired down and captured like so many beached whales, with their King, John II, taken also and carried off prisoner to England.

Anxious to regain his freedom, John gave in to English demands and in October 1360 signed the Treaty of Calais, ending the first portion of the Hundred Years' War. Edward received a considerable enlargement of his territories in southwestern France, and in return gave up his claim to the French throne.

The victory was, however, more apparent than real. England was weakened by her war effort, and even more by her own encounter with the Black

Death, and could not maintain her newly won position. In 1364 Charles V, the capable son of John II, ascended the French throne and, with the help of his general, Bertrand du Guesclin, gradually nibbled away at English holdings, reducing them steadily.

As for Edward III, he could do nothing to reverse the downhill slide. He was not really a great king except for the victories he had won in the field, and now he left the fighting to his sons and gradually sank into pre-



mature senility. He died in 1377, having reigned fifty years.

Edward III fathered many sons, as Henry II, his great predecessor, had done. And Edward's sons, like Henry's (see page II-212), gave occasion for quarrels over the succession. Since Edward's sons and their descendants play their roles in eight of Shakespeare's plays, beginning with *Richard*

II, let us list them in order of decreasing age:

- (1) Edward of Woodstock
- (2) William of Hatfield (died young)
- (3) Lionel of Antwerp
- (4) John of Gaunt
- (5) Edmund of Langley
- (6) Thomas of Woodstock
- (7) William of Windsor (died young)

Edward, the oldest, born in 1330, was heir to the crown. In 1337 he was made Duke of Cornwall—the first duke ever to be created in England. ("Duke" was a French title, and the English had hitherto been content with the native title of "Earl." This Frenchification of title was a sign of Edward's view of himself as a King of France as well as of England.) Then, in 1343, young Edward was proclaimed Prince of Wales, the title usually granted, sooner or later, to the oldest son of a reigning king.

Edward of Wales's adult life was entirely that of a warrior-knight, and though, like his father, he was inept at anything but battle, he was idolized

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by the English for his victories, just as his father was. The story eventually arose that he wore black armor, so that he was called "the Black Prince."

It is by that name only that he is now universally known, though its first recorded use did not occur till nearly a century after his death.

At the Battle of Crecy, the Black Prince, still only sixteen years old, was head of the right wing of the army. At one point, the story goes, the right wing seemed in trouble and an anxious English officer suggested that the King send it reinforcements. Surveying the situation, Edward III responded like a knight rather than a general, and said, "Nonsense! Let the boy win his spurs!"

Win them the boy did, and in 1355 the Black Prince was sent to France with an independent command. It was his army (more French than English, by the way) that met the French army near Poitiers. It was the Black Prince, then, who won the second great English land victory of the Hundred Years'

War, and it was he who captured King John II of France.

After the signing of the Treaty of Calais, the enlarged English



dominions in southwestern France were put under the rule of the Black Prince, and a rare mess he made of it. He maintained an expensive court, taxed heavily, made no attempt to win the favor of his subjects, and in general turned the natives fiercely anti-English and made it that much easier for Charles V and Du Guesclin to win back lost French ground little by little.

Perhaps the Black Prince recognized that he could only do well in battle, for in 1367 he quite gratuitously interfered with a dynastic struggle going on in Spain between two claimants to the throne. He Interfered on the side of Pedro (known as "the Cruel") and placed him in control of the country. Once his princely Blackness had left, however, Pedro was quickly overthrown. The Black Prince was further rewarded with broken health, for sickness assailed him in Spain and from it he never recovered.

He returned to England in 1371 and, after a long illness, died in 1376, one year before his father. His younger brother, Lionel, had died even earlier, in 1368.

At the time of the death of Edward III, then, only three of his seven sons remained alive. These were the fourth son, John of Gaunt (aged thirty-seven), the fifth son, Edmund of Langley (aged thirty-six), and the sixth son, Thomas of Woodstock (aged twenty-two).

In an older time, one of these sons would have succeeded, but by now the principle of legitimacy (see page II-164) was thoroughly established.

None of the younger sons could inherit until the line of the oldest son was extinct. The Black Prince might be dead but he had left behind him a surviving son.

The son was named Richard, and it is no surprise at all that a man like the Black Prince would hark back to the Lion-Heart. Richard had been born on January 6, 1367, at Bordeaux, and was therefore known as Richard of Bordeaux. He was nine years old when his father died, and a few months

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later, in November 1376, his grandfather Edward III proclaimed the boy Prince of Wales, which amounted to recognizing him as heir to the throne.



When Edward III died on June 21, 1377, the ten-year-old Prince of Wales became King Richard II of England without trouble.

Nevertheless, a ten-year-old cannot rule, and the new King's uncles were the important powers in the land.

The existence of a boy-king was particularly unfortunate at this time, for England was in trouble. The war in France continued to sputter now and

then, enough to produce large expense without victory. The heavy taxation

this made necessary, combined with the havoc of the Black Death, drove the English peasantry into revolt—one of the few peasant revolts in English history.

In May and June 1381 there were local uprisings all over England. One group of rebels under a leader named Wat Tyler actually occupied London for four days. King Richard himself, only fourteen years old, faced them fearlessly, and at a crucial point, when Wat Tyler was suddenly stabbed to death and it seemed the mob would get out of control, the King rode into their midst and offered to be their leader. This brave act prevented

bloodshed in London and the peasant revolt elsewhere was put down forcefully but far less bloodily than similar revolts on the Continent. It was the greatest act of the King's reign.

Nevertheless, he was still a boy, and his uncles still remained the real rulers. This, in fact, continued through most of Richard's reign, even after

he had long passed the age when he was capable, according to custom, of ruling by himself.

It was only in the last few years of his reign that Richard II finally managed to shake free, and it is with those last few years that Shakespeare's play deals. And even so, when the play begins, King Richard is speaking to an uncle.

Old John of Gaunt. . .

The play opens in 1398 in Windsor Castle on the Thames, about twenty miles west of the center of London. It had been an austere fortress (first built by William the Conqueror in 1070) until Edward III had converted it into a residential palace.

Since that time it has become so associated with English royalty that when the royal house wanted a new non-German name during the excitement of World War I (they had inherited a German name from Prince Albert, the German consort of Queen Victoria), they chose "Windsor." When Edward VIII abdicated in 1936, he became "Duke of Windsor."

Richard II is thirty-one years old when the play opens but has tasted real power for only a year or so. He is making up for the long years under

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his uncles' domination and he addresses one of them with the regal haughtiness of a proud King, beginning:

Old John of Gaunt, time-honored Lancaster,

-Act I, scene i, line 1



John was the fourth son of Edward III and the oldest son to survive his father. Two centuries before it might well have been he who would have succeeded to the throne (as John II), but times had changed.

John was born in 1340, not long after Edward III had first attempted an invasion of France at the beginning of the Hundred Years' War. The royal family had accompanied the King and the army, and it was in the city of Ghent (in what is now Belgium, but was then the County of Flanders) that he was born. He is known by his birthplace as John of Ghent, or, in the Shakespearean spelling, John of Gaunt.

John of Gaunt receives very favorable treatment at the hands of Shakespeare, partly because he was the ancestor of the monarchs who were on the English throne during the dramatist's lifetime. In 1595, when *Richard II* was written, Elizabeth I was the English Queen, and she was the great-great-great-granddaughter of John of Gaunt.

In real life, John of Gaunt seems to have been a man of mediocre ability, saved from obscurity only by the fact that he was a king's son.

In the last years of Edward's reign, with the King senile and the Black Prince an invalid, the leadership of the smoldering war in France fell to John of Gaunt. In 1373 he led an army out of Calais and marched it across the width of France to Bordeaux. The French, in no mood to fight another grand battle, faded before him, so that he accomplished nothing except to lose half his army through attrition.

Returning to England, he tried to organize a parliamentary party in opposition to one organized by the Black Prince. He was, however, no more successful in politics than in war. Even though the death of the Black Prince left John of Gaunt temporarily supreme in his influence over the senile King, the death of the King soon afterward robbed him of that influence again.

-Except money. He had an unfailing touch for wealth. He married for money, as did everyone in those days when they could. In 1359 John of



Gaunt married Blanche, the daughter of Henry, 1st Duke of Lancaster.

When Henry died, leaving no sons, John of Gaunt was granted the title

and inherited the vast revenues attached thereto. He became John of Lancaster and it was by this name that he was known to his contemporaries.

Thus, Richard in the first line of the play calls him not only "John of Gaunt"

but "Lancaster" as well.

John of Gaunt, as Duke of Lancaster, drew revenue from perhaps one

third of all England and became the richest of all the King's subjects, and

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yet that did not help make up for his personal mediocrity and political ineptitude.

In the intrigue and infighting that surrounded the throne of the young

King, John of Gaunt felt himself terribly outclassed and seized, with relief, at a chance for leaving England.

The excuse was a dynastic one. John of Gaunt's first wife, the heiress of Lancaster, had died in 1369, and John had not waited long to make another advantageous marriage. In 1371 he married Constance of Castile, the daughter of Pedro the Cruel, whom the Black Prince had placed on the

Castilian throne. (Castile was then the largest Christian kingdom on the Spanish peninsula.)

Pedro, however, had been defeated and killed in 1369, and in the 1380s the son of Pedro's illegitimate brother ruled Castile as John I. John of Gaunt claimed that he himself was the rightful King of Castile since he was Pedro's son-in-law. Off he went in 1385 on an expedition to Spain. No doubt he saw himself repeating the grand successes of his father, Edward

III, in his invasion (for similar reasons) of France.

If so, he was wrong. His expedition was one great big flop. John of Gaunt was defeated by John I and had to sign an agreement giving up his claim to the Castilian throne.

He got money, though, in compensation-as always, he grew rich even as he failed. What's more, his young daughter by his Spanish wife married

King John's son, who later ruled as Henry III. In 1406 John of Gaunt's grandson was to rule Castile as John II, but Gaunt was not to live long enough to see that day.

When John of Gaunt returned to England in 1389, he found the situation

worse than he had left it, and, as always, he was himself helpless to handle

matters or to prevent the catastrophe that followed.

He could only survive it, and now, in 1398, he faced his nephew, who had emerged from all the difficulties surprisingly triumphant and who in-



tended to make himself absolute king of his realm.

John of Gaunt, now aged, could not stop that, either. Of course, we must not overestimate Gaunt's age. The famous first line of the play makes it sound as though John of Gaunt were aged indeed, and so he was by the standards of his time and Shakespeare's. It was a time, we must remember, when life expectancy was thirty-five at best and anyone over forty was getting on in years. (Shakespeare himself died at fifty-two.)

Nevertheless, Gaunt was not particularly old by our own standards. At the time he stood before King Richard, he was only fifty-eight years old.

... *Henry Hereford* ...

John of Gaunt has been called before the King to present his son, who
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 has become involved in a dispute so severe that it requires a royal
 judgment. Richard says:

*Hast thou according to thy oath and band [bond]
 Brought hither Henry Hereford, thy bold son,*

-Act I, scene i, lines 2-3

Henry, the oldest son of John of Gaunt, was born April 3, 1366, at Bolingbroke Castle in Lincolnshire. He was therefore known as Henry of Bolingbroke and is referred to throughout this play as "Bolingbroke." He is first cousin to the King and a year older than he.

In 1386, when John of Gaunt was leaving for Spain, Bolingbroke married Mary de Bohun, an heiress. Bolingbroke had, quite obviously, his father's aptitude for getting his hands on money. Bolingbroke was, however, a much more capable politician than his father, and while John of Gaunt was in Spain, his son played a surprisingly important role in the events taking place in England.

These events centered about Thomas of Woodstock, the sixth son of Edward III, and the youngest of the three sons that survived the death of that king. Thomas of Woodstock was the most forceful of Edward's sons, next to the Black Prince himself. Though he was fifteen years younger than John of Gaunt and not much more than a boy himself at the time of Edward's death, it was Thomas who became the power behind the throne.

(He was called Thomas of Woodstock, by the way, because he had been born in 1355 in the same castle where the Black Prince had been born.)

Like John of Gaunt, Thomas of Woodstock had married an heiress. She was Eleanor de Bohun, whose father, the Earl of Hereford, had died



with-
out a male heir and had left her half his rich estate. Eleanor was sister
of
Mary de Bohun, who later married Bolingbroke. Thomas of Woodstock
and Henry Bolingbroke were not only uncle and nephew, therefore,
but
brothers-in-law as well.

Thomas of Woodstock had been one of those most active in suppressing
the peasants' revolt. He had also led a last great raid out of Calais and
into

France in 1380. Like all such efforts since Poitiers, it had been most im-
pressive but had achieved very little.

Nevertheless, it was Thomas' energy that dominated most of Richard's
reign, and it was chiefly to get away from Thomas that John of Gaunt
made his way to Spain.

While Gaunt was absent, Thomas was supreme and was virtually the
uncrowned King of England. In 1385 he forced the young King (now
eighteen and quite capable, in his own eyes, of ruling without
supervision)

to create him Duke of Gloucester. Uncle Thomas thus became Thomas of
Gloucester, and it is as "Gloucester" that he is referred to in *Richard II*.

By 1386 the battle lines were clearly drawn. The young King was in-
creasingly conscious of the semidivine aura about a legitimate king. It
was

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God who had made him only surviving son of the oldest son of Edward
III,
and domineering uncles, who were merely younger brothers of that
king,

must not interfere. The manner in which he, Richard, had ridden into
a

wild and hostile mob, who had fallen away from him and had dared
not

touch the Lord's Anointed, must have convinced him forever that he
was

apart from other men. But Thomas of Woodstock was *not* convinced
of

that.

In fact, Thomas organized Parliament about an antimonarchical
stand,

and when King Richard offered to rebel against his uncle's
domination,

Thomas openly threatened to bring about the King's deposition.

But Richard II had been building a party of his own, gathering men
about him who would stand with him against Thomas of Gloucester.

In

August 1387 he decided to strike out for independence. He moved to
have

Thomas of Gloucester and the chief men of the antimonarchical party
ac-

cused of treason.

The move was premature, however. Thomas of Gloucester and his
allies



at once "appealed" (that is, accused) the King's friends of treason. Thomas of Gloucester and the other noblemen who were the movers of this counterstep came to be known as the "lords appellant" in consequence.

In the tug of war that followed, it was the lords appellant who turned out to have the power on their side. The King had to call a Parliament which was dragooned into convicting the King's friends and executing some of them. Richard was left friendless and helpless and Thomas was in control to a greater extent than ever.

Henry Bolingbroke, during the course of this battle between royal nephew and powerful uncle, stood on the side of the uncle, who was his own uncle as well as his brother-in-law. Bolingbroke was one of the lords appellant, in other words.

Thomas of Gloucester undoubtedly found him a shrewd and valuable ally. After all, if John of Gaunt died in Spain, Bolingbroke would inherit all the wealth and power of Lancaster. This, however, was a case of two heads being worse than one. Thomas was a hothead who was prepared actually to depose Richard, but if he did so, the question arose as to who would then be king.

Undoubtedly, Thomas would have liked to be king, but Bolingbroke made it quite clear that John of Gaunt, as oldest surviving son of Edward III, was the logical next in line, and that he himself, as the oldest son of John of Gaunt, was in line thereafter. Thomas of Gloucester must have seen no great advantage in substituting for the weak King the firm, shrewd Bolingbroke. So Richard was saved and the vengeance fell chiefly on his supporters rather than on himself.

Richard II had learned one lesson anyway. He needed not only a party of his own, but a large party, larger than any his hated uncle could build, and one that would strike with overwhelming force when it did strike. For

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years, therefore, he labored to build up another group of allies, a veritable private army.

What's more, he labored with success (for he had great charm when he chose to exert it) to win over as many as possible of the lords appellant and their adherents, leaving Thomas of Gloucester and his chief allies increasingly isolated. In particular, Richard wooed and won Bolingbroke, who deserted his uncle when the final crunch came.

Thomas of Gloucester, grown careless with success, and badly underestimating the young King, was caught off guard and began a countermove too late. In the summer of 1397, alarmed by the King's rising strength,



Thomas began another attempt to procure the deposition of Richard, but he had lost his allies. John of Gaunt (strengthened in his stand by his son, no doubt) opposed the move and it failed.

King Richard could now strike. He visited Thomas of Gloucester's castle in September 1397 and had him suddenly arrested and sent out of the country, to Calais. Gloucester's chief allies were also arrested and were eventually either executed or banished.

Richard was now supreme and could reward those who had stood with him. Bolingbroke was given his father-in-law's title of Hereford. What's more, where the father-in-law had been merely an earl, Bolingbroke became Duke of Hereford, and it is as "Henry Hereford" that Richard first refers to him in the quoted passage above.

Bolingbroke's position with the King was not as firm, however, as their alliance in 1397 might make it appear. Gratitude is a short-lived commodity in politics, and Bolingbroke was too near the throne to be treated with anything but suspicion.

Richard had no sons of his own and he planned to leave the throne, according to the strict tenets of legitimacy, to the descendants of Lionel, third son of Edward III (since he himself was the last of the line of the first son and there were no heirs to the second).

The heirs of Lionel, however, could not compare in wealth, prestige, and importance with the fourth son, John of Gaunt, and his son Bolingbroke. Richard must have known that shrewd, ambitious Bolingbroke had an eye on the throne despite the fact that he was not really next in line; Bolingbroke had shown that plainly in his earlier alliance with Thomas of Gloucester. Richard II had to watch Bolingbroke warily, therefore, and deal with him promptly when and if he grew clearly dangerous.

. . . the Duke of Norfolk . . .

That point of danger may now have come, and Richard may well feel himself to be in a delicate position. He demands of John of Gaunt whether he has brought his son

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*Here to make good the boist'rous late appeal
Which then our leisure would not let us hear,
Against the Duke of Norfolk, Thomas Mowbray?*

-Act I, scene i, lines 4-6

Thomas Mowbray, born in 1366, was just Bolingbroke's age. He had been a companion of the King (one year younger than himself) when both

were young, and was made Earl of Nottingham in 1383.

But then Mowbray began a career of changing sides. He grew jealous of another favorite of the King's and, out of pique, joined the party of Thomas

of Gloucester against the King and became one of the lords appellant. He was not an extremist, however, and when the question of deposing the

King came up, he threw his influence on the side of the milder line of action,

that of merely bringing the King's favorites to trial.



Afterward, Richard wooed Mowbray as he wooed Bolingbroke, and was successful there too. Once again Mowbray became a close companion of the King. Indeed, when Richard swooped suddenly down upon Thomas of Gloucester and put him under arrest, it was in Mowbray's care that he

placed his uncle. It was Mowbray who carried Gloucester off to prison in Calais and who served as his jailer there. Mowbray, like Bolingbroke, was promoted for his services, and became Duke of Norfolk.

But now what was to be done with Thomas of Gloucester? He was, after all, a son of Edward III, and he could not be disposed of out of hand. He simply could not. He had to be tried for treason and Parliament gathered for that purpose. And it proved to be too late, for word came from Calais that, behold, Thomas of Gloucester had died.

Now it was certainly possible for people to die suddenly in those days. The smallest fever or infection could kill in a time when medical knowledge was nearly nil, and diseases were easily caught in a time when the appreciation of hygiene was likewise nearly nil.

Still, the death of Gloucester at this juncture was so politically convenient for Richard (who might not have been able to make out a good case for treason, considering that Gloucester had been popular with Parliament) that the whispers at once started that the troublesome uncle

had quietly been murdered at his nephew's orders—just as once Arthur of Brittany, in similar circumstances, had been quietly murdered at his uncle's orders (see page II-239).

As these whispers and rumors grew, Mowbray began to feel himself in a most uncomfortable position. He had been Gloucester's jailer. If Gloucester had been murdered, it must have been Mowbray who had given the immediate order. If this were shown to be so, Mowbray might have to face execution himself.

Richard was in an equally uncomfortable position, for Mowbray's only conceivable defense would be that he had been ordered to take the action by the King. And if that came out, then Richard would find himself in the

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difficult position of King John, who lost northern France partly because

of the obloquy that fell upon him through Arthur's death.

Mowbray could not help but realize that his danger came not only from the King's enemies, who hated him for his deed (if the deed had actually been committed—history is not certain), but from the King himself. After all, dead men tell no tales, and a dead Mowbray could scarcely accuse the King.

Mowbray began to fear for his safety and looked about for some way of making himself secure. He needed allies and Bolingbroke seemed a natural one. He and Bolingbroke were the last of the lords appellant still alive and were therefore in equal danger. He therefore approached Bolingbroke.

It turned out Mowbray had calculated wrongly. Bolingbroke was determined to play for high stakes. Mowbray had tipped his hand and Bolingbroke seized the advantage at once. To begin with, he went to King Richard, reported Mowbray's conversation, and accused him of treason. Desperately, Mowbray was forced to deny the charge and to call Bolingbroke a liar.



... *sacrificing Abel's* ...

Richard is in an extraordinarily ticklish position. He is forced to call the two noblemen before him and hear their mutual accusations, yet more than anything else he wants the quarrel ended. He wants the matter of the death of Thomas of Gloucester left unexplored and even unmentioned.

But that is precisely what Bolingbroke does not want. He wants the matter brought up. The clouds of suspicion that would be raised could do nothing but harm Richard, and if they harmed Richard they would have to help Bolingbroke.

Therefore, after the mutual accusations and counteraccusations between Bolingbroke and Mowbray have been carried through, the former comes to the point. He not only accuses Mowbray of misusing certain public funds, but adds solemnly:

*... he [Mowbray] did plot the Duke of Gloucester's death,
Suggest his soon-believing adversaries,
And, consequently, like a traitor coward,
Sluiced out his [Gloucester's] innocent soul through streams
of blood;
Which blood, like sacrificing Abel's cries
Even from the tongueless caverns of the earth
To me for justice and rough chastisement:*

-Act I, scene i, lines 100-6

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The murder of Gloucester is compared to that of Abel, whose sacrifices of the firstlings of his flocks were found acceptable by God, and who was slain by his elder brother Cain, whose sacrifices were not accepted. God, in rebuking the murderer, says, "the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground" (Genesis 4:10).

The comparison limps, though, if it is intended to apply to a murder by Mowbray, who had no close relationship to Thomas of Gloucester. On the other hand, if Mowbray were acting under orders from King Richard, the matter was altogether different. Gloucester would have been killed by the son of his older brother and the comparison becomes close indeed.

One can imagine Bolingbroke looking at Mowbray in the course of his accusing speech and then, when he reaches the terrible phrase "like sacrificing Abel's," turning to stare directly at the King. Richard must surely wince at the allusion, and he mutters uneasily:

How high a pitch his resolution soars!

-Act I, scene i, line 109

... *to fetch his Queen*

Mowbray does his best to avoid the dangerous topic, hoping perhaps to show his loyalty to the King and to ensure his future safety. He denies



killing Thomas of Gloucester in a few brief and rather unconvincing words.
 He is more circumstantial in denying the lesser charge, that he has stolen public funds.

Part, he insists, he paid out as required, and part he kept as payment of a debt owed him by Richard:

*The other part reserved I by consent,
 For that my sovereign liege was in my debt
 Upon remainder of a dear account,
 Since last I went to France to fetch his Queen.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 128-31

Richard had married twice. In January 1382, when he was only fifteen, he married Anne of Bohemia, who was sixteen. She was daughter of the King of Bohemia, who had reigned as Charles IV, Holy Roman Emperor, and who had died four years before. It turned out to be a love match and

Anne proved to be a popular Queen. When Richard, in a fit of petulance, deprived London of its privileges after the city had refused him a loan, it was her intercession that won pardon.

She died of the plague in 1394 when she was only twenty-eight. (In that same year, Bolingbroke's wife died also. She was only twenty-four. Life was short in those days.)

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Richard II went into deep and, apparently, sincere mourning, but kings cannot long remain in mourning, especially if they have no heirs. Besides, a marriage can be a useful stroke of international policy.

The war in France had been sputtering on despite the Treaty of Calais, but by 1388 it had died out almost entirely. Richard desperately wanted that truce to continue, for he had neither the money nor the inclination to carry on the war. What better way of ensuring continued peace than by taking a French bride.

The French King, Charles V, the great enemy of the Black Prince, had died in 1380 and had been succeeded by his son, Charles VI. In 1397 the daughter of the new King, Isabella, was seven years old, and it was she that Richard married as his second wife. It would be some years before she could bear him an heir to the throne, but Richard was still reasonably young and could wait.

Mowbray had played a part in the negotiations that led to the marriage and was clearly claiming gratitude from Richard for this. And, in a way, Richard did have much to be grateful for. It was after this French marriage that Richard had Thomas of Gloucester arrested. He might not have had



the courage to do so if he did not know that France was friendly at the moment and would make no move to embarrass him.

And yet the French marriage was unpopular. In this period of history, French marriages were always unpopular in England; it was consorting with the enemy, and English xenophobes were prompt to blame anything that went wrong afterward on French influence.

Some maintained that once Richard had made a French marriage he grew interested in French manners and vices, picked up French ideas of absolute monarchy, and, in short, was corrupted away from his earlier English virtue. This is nonsense. Richard's penchant for absolutism was longstanding, and he needed no seven-year-old French girl to put the notion into his head.

... Coventry upon Saint Lambert's day

Desperately, Richard tries to get the two disputants to end their quarrel now, before irreparable damage is done to his position. He fails, however. Bolingbroke is intent on carrying through his scheme to shake the throne, while Mowbray does not dare let the accusation of murder stand without some resolution of the dispute.

Richard is forced, therefore, to take the path called for by the laws of chivalry and to set up a trial by combat. In a way, he was making the best of it, for the complicated and punctilious code of chivalry could bring on many delays and Richard might have time to work out some method of procedure that would extricate him from this dismal mess he was in.

The mutual accusations of Bolingbroke and Mowbray were made in

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January 1398, only four months after the death of Thomas of Gloucester.

The inevitable delays of the chivalric code put off the trial by combat eight

months more. Shakespeare does not specify this delay or make a point of

it. In his histories, it is always important to hasten the action, and he does

so now. He has Richard say to the two disputants:

*Be ready, as your lives shall answer it,
At Coventry upon Saint Lambert's day.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 198-99

There is no indication of how long a time lapse this involves.

Coventry is a town in Warwickshire which was the site for the best-



known single event in the history of Saxon England. About 1050 Coventry was in that portion of central England then known as Mercia. The wife of the Earl of Mercia was Godgifu, a name which was later smoothed down to Godiva. She urged her husband, out of her own softheartedness, to lower the taxes on Coventry. He finally said he would if she would ride through the market place naked. She took him at his word, riding through the market place on horseback with no clothes on, but with her long hair covering her adequately.

In the fourteenth century Coventry became part of the estates of the Black Prince. It passed on to Richard II and became a royal residence. Parliament sat there at least two times.

It was common in medieval times to identify days by the names of saints. The medieval church had a large number of saints who were specially noted on one particular day or another, usually because that was the anniversary of their martyrdom. Lambert was a native of what is now the Netherlands and lived in the seventh century. His day is September 17, so the trial by combat at Coventry is set for September 17, 1398.

... thy sometimes brother's wife

The time lapse between the quarrel before the King and the meeting at Coventry is filled in by Shakespeare with a scene in John of Gaunt's London house, to which the distraught Duchess of Gloucester has come, grieving for her murdered husband.

Shakespeare makes no specific mention of the Duchess' age, but somehow the impression is given that she is old; that she is of Gaunt's generation. Actually, though, Thomas of Gloucester was only forty-two when he died or was murdered. His wife was only thirty-one at the time and is only a year older at the time of this scene.

The Duchess tries to rouse Gaunt to some sort of action, but John will not be roused. Eloquently, she points out that if an assassination of a prince of the realm goes unavenged, other princes may with impunity be killed.

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But John knows that Richard II is the real murderer and he cannot nerve himself to turn against his King. He can only council patience, saying:



*God's is the quarrel; for God's substitute,
His deputy anointed in His sight,
Hath caused his [Gloucester's] death . . .*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 37-39

Here is the semidivinity admitted of a long by grace of God, a king "who can do no wrong." This is exactly the sort of absolutism which Richard II is indeed trying to establish, but which never really took firm root in England, though it did so in other parts of the world.

Frustrated, the Duchess can only say:

*Farewell, old Gaunt; thy sometimes brother's wife
With her companion, Grief, must end her life.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 54-55

She does, too, for she dies the next year, aged thirty-three. Through most of history the life expectancy of the female (treated as a drudge and subjected to the terrible dangers of frequent childbirth) has been even shorter than that of the male. It is only in contemporary times, when medicine has removed the dangers of childbirth, that the natural fitness of women has reflected itself in a several-years-longer life expectancy than is true of men.

. . . *good old York* . . .

Before the Duchess leaves, however, she says:

Commend me to thy brother, Edmund York.

-Act I, scene ii, line 62

She wants York to visit her, but then, in an access of renewed grief, bemoans the uselessness of such a visit to her castle:

*Alack; and what shall good old York there see
But empty lodgings and unfurnished walls,*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 67-68

Edmund, the fifth son of Edward III, was the only one of the brothers of John of Gaunt who was still alive. He was born at King's Langley in Herefordshire on June 5, 1341, and was therefore Edmund of Langley.

He accompanied the English forces in France and Spain but won no particular distinction. He married Isabella, a younger daughter of Pedro the

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Cruel. After John of Gaunt had married Constance, the two brothers found themselves married to two sisters.

Edmund was a mild-mannered, weak man who did not take much part in the strenuous infighting about Richard. He remained on good terms with his royal nephew and in 1385 was created Duke of York. He is fifty-seven years old at the time of this scene, only a year younger than "old John of Gaunt," and therefore "good old York." (He was the only one



of
the seven sons of Edward III fated to live beyond his sixtieth
birthday.)

My Lord Aumerle . . .

Now we move on to Coventry, where the preparations are being
made
for the single combat. Overseeing the formalities is the Lord Marshal,
who
says:

My Lord Aumerle, is Harry Hereford armed?

-Act I, scene iii, line 1

Aumerle is Edward, the son of Edmund of York. By birth, Aumerle
is
Edward of Norwich, for that was where he was born, and he became
Earl
of Rutland in 1390. He was only seventeen at the time of that
promotion.

Edward of Norwich remained firmly on the side of Richard
throughout
-so firmly, in fact, that when his uncle Thomas of Gloucester was mur-
dered, Edward was awarded much of the dead man's estates and was
created Duke of Albemarle (named for a district in Normandy). Albe-
marle is slurred to Aumerle in this play. Aumerle is still only twenty-
five
years old at the time of this scene.

. . . his warder down

The lists are prepared with great ceremony, which Shakespeare
reports
in copious detail. But then, when the two combatants, Bolingbroke
and
Mowbray, face each other, lances couched, the Marshal cries:

Stay, the King hath thrown his warder down.

-Act I, scene iii, line 118

King Richard by this action stops the proceedings cold and, without
the
combat having taken place at all, goes on to give his verdict. It is an
odd
one, in which both parties are declared guilty and both are sent into
exile;
Bolingbroke for ten years and Mowbray for life.

The pair of exile verdicts are not puzzling in themselves. Richard
was
wary of both men. Mowbray knew too much and Bolingbroke dared



too
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much, and the King would be rid of both. Exile on the plea that only so can the peace be kept (for a duel to the death will only rouse desire for vengeance against the victor, whichever he might be) is the logical solution.

Bolingbroke's exile is the shorter because he is the grandson of Edward III and the son of John of Gaunt, and must be treated more gingerly. Indeed, Bolingbroke's ten years are reduced to six as a sop to Gaunt. Still, that is only froth. Once Bolingbroke is out of the country it will be easy enough to prevent his return. Undoubtedly this is Richard's thought.

But why did Richard wait till the last minute? Had Richard pronounced the double exile at the moment the quarrel was brought before him, he might have gained the image of a strong king careful of the nation's peace.

Why then set up a holiday atmosphere and a pitch of excitement that attracted the attention of all England during an eight-month wait, and then

-only then-puncture the whole thing?

This, mind you, is not a Shakespearean invention intended to serve a dramatic purpose. It really happened this way, according to Holinshed.

Was it that Richard was irresolute and that not until the last minute could he bring himself to pronounce sentence? Or was it the reverse?

Was it Richard's vanity, his sense of divinity, that made him enjoy playing the role of a god-letting everything come to a magnificent climax and then, with an almost negligent gesture, crushing it all?

Whether irresolution or vanity, the move was a bad one for Richard. It created tremendous sympathy for both Bolingbroke and Mowbray, and whether men got the impression that Richard was weak or tyrannical, the impression of him was a bad one.

My native English . . .

Shakespeare is careful to build up the anti-Richard feeling in the audience (to match that which was being built up in the nation) by presenting both exiles with pathetic speeches. Mowbray, thinking of perpetual exile, says:



*The language I have learnt these forty years,
My native English, now I must forgo,
And now my tongue's use is to me no more
Than an unstrung viol or a harp.*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 160-63

Actually Mowbray was only thirty-two years old, not forty, but the rest is true enough. The picture is of a man, speaking only English, who must spend the rest of his life wandering through lands where only other languages are spoken. It is hard for Englishmen and Americans to gather the

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full horror of such a sentence now, when the language is spoken by hundreds of millions the world over, and when there is almost no place on earth where one cannot find *someone* who understands English.

In the time of Richard II, English was a language spoken by three million Englishmen only. Few foreigners bothered to learn so minor and out-of-the-way a language. Men of culture were much better off with French or Italian-to say nothing of Lathi. And in Shakespeare's time, the situation was little better.

... *the frosty Caucasus*

As for Bolingbroke, he must listen to old Gaunt's sententious consolations, to the effect that the exile is to imagine he is on a voluntary tour and that everything is happy, happy. Bolingbroke responds bitterly concerning the insufficiency of imagination:

*O, who can hold a fire in his hand
By thinking of the frosty Caucasus?*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 293-94

The Caucasus was the name of a mountain in Greek mythology, one that was placed on the eastern edge of their known world, on the eastern shores of the Black Sea-where a whole range of peaks are now known as the Caucasian Mountains in consequence. Mount Caucasus was imagined to be higher and therefore colder than any other mountain on earth, and it can be used, poetically, to symbolize ultimate cold.

... *Bushy, Bagot here and Green*

Aumerle has seen his cousin, Bolingbroke, off on his way to banishment and returns to Richard to report that dangerous man safely out of the way.

Richard, listening somberly, now admits his deepest suspicions of Bolingbroke. The exiled cousin had designs on the throne and was preparing



the
way to that throne by courting popularity. Richard says:

*Ourself and Bushy, Bagot here and Green,
Observed his courtship to the common people,*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 23-24

To understand the identity and position of Bushy, Bagot, and Green, we must remember that Richard II, in common with many kings of the late medieval and early modern periods, was engaged in one long attempt to assert the royal power over that of the aristocracy—the proud dukes and

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earls whose income was equal to that of the king or higher, and who fought constantly for the equivalent of kingly power for themselves.

The power of the higher nobility dated back to feudal times and they were jealous of that power and would not yield an inch. To the long, therefore (that is, to any king who was even slightly above the stage of a moron), the nobles were uncomfortable and even intolerable as advisers. They were too proud, too harsh, too fond of their own way, and too ready to intrigue and betray if thwarted.

It was natural for Richard II, and for many another king both before and after, to seek for advisers among the lesser nobility or the middle class.

Such men had no power of their own and therefore had to be intensely loyal to the king, for they had nowhere else to turn.

Such king's men would naturally be despised and resented by the high nobility. Feeling this enmity, the king's men or "favorites" would do their best to enrich themselves or otherwise gain power in order that they might not be utterly lost should the king die. The king might, in turn, be willing to grant favors, titles, wealth to those who were loyal to him.

Among the high nobility there would, of course, be all the more resentment against favorites who received rewards. The lords would cry out that the favorites were rifling the realm.

Moreover, the favorites would be a convenient target. The king, as the Lord's anointed, is relatively immune from blame. The favorites, however, can be blamed for everything, and in particular, for misleading and corrupting the king. And by aiming at the favorites, it is rather easy to strike the king himself. The lords appellant had struck at Richard's favorites earlier in his reign and in doing so had kept Richard himself helpless for a decade.

Sir John Bushy, Sir John Bagot, and Sir Henry Green, all mentioned in this passage, had originally been hangers-on of the party of Thomas of Gloucester. Richard II had won them over as he had won over such greater men as Bolingbroke and Mowbray.

With Bushy, Bagot, and Green, however, there was no need for Richard to feel any uneasiness. They were country gentry with no power of their own and with full awareness of the hostility of the higher nobility. Only in King Richard could they find safety, let alone power, and only to King Richard would they be loyal.



... *the rebels which stand out in Ireland*

At the moment, Richard II seems to be riding high. He has, with a strong hand, taken care of the internal enemy and overcome the dangers that would come of questioning the death of Gloucester. He could now turn against external enemies. Green says, concerning Bolingbroke and his efforts to court popularity:

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*Well, he is gone, and with him go these thoughts.
Now for the rebels which stand out in Ireland;*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 37-38

Ireland's long history is almost uniformly tragic, and with respect to that sad island, England, beginning with Henry II's invasion (see page II-213), is almost uniformly the villain.

The eastern portion of the island, centering about Dublin, was under an uneasy English control, though most of the island remained wild and free for centuries. In fact, in the two centuries that followed Henry II, English domination grew weaker as English efforts were all too often directed

elsewhere. Edward III, for instance, was so busily concerned with France

that he could only left-handedly deal with Ireland.

By the time Richard II came to the throne, the English settlers in Ireland were forced to pay tribute to the native clan leaders to the west.

Richard II did not rejoice in war and did everything he could to remain at peace, yet public opinion (particularly that of the nobility, which saw in war a chance for loot and "glory") drove him in the direction of war.

He had to fight Scotland, for instance, which continued to receive support, supplies, and money from France, and which used them to raid England's northern counties. In 1385 Richard had therefore led an English

army northward and burned Edinburgh, but on the whole the expedition

turned out to be an expensive failure, ending in stalemate.

The chronic rebellion in Ireland offered Richard another chance, and he was forced to take it. In 1394 he led a sizable army into Ireland. Here he made no attempt to settle matters by brute force. Making use of what was always his strongest card, he tried diplomacy, flattery, and charm. He

won over many of the Irish chieftains with fancy titles and with grants of land, and concentrated on the pacification of Mac Murrough, chieftain of Leinster, that section of Ireland immediately outside the English-controlled area.

This too was achieved, at least on paper, when Mac Murrough, with most of the Irish clans won away from him, was forced to yield. In 1395 Richard II came back from Ireland with his army intact and his aims apparently accomplished. He found himself welcomed as a conquering hero.

It was an unusual experience for the King and it must have given him quite a false notion of how easy an Irish campaign might be.

But it had not lasted. While Richard had been gathering power into his own hands in England, Mac Murrough of Leinster had taken advantage of



the royal preoccupation by tearing up the paper he had signed and placing himself in opposition to the English again. He even engineered the assassination of the English viceroy, Roger de Mortimer, in 1398.

This could not be endured and Richard II was going to have to go back to Ireland to straighten out affairs again. With Mowbray and Bolingbroke both gone, there seemed no reason why he could not do so. In fact, an im-

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pressively victorious Irish campaign would rouse the English out of any dumps into which they might have fallen over the exile verdicts and any uneasiness they might feel over the fate of Thomas of Gloucester.

... to farm our royal realm

There was one difficulty, however. Wars are expensive, always expensive, and medieval kings were forever in difficulty when it came to raising funds anyway. According to the feudal system, the money went to the feudal lords and the King only received revenues from his own royal estates and from certain perquisites such as customs dues. To get more he had to go begging to the nobility or the merchants, and both could be niggardly enough. It was usually quite difficult to get enough money for ordinary expenditures, considering the scale of lavish living most monarchs felt it necessary to assume if they were to impress their subjects and other monarchs with their power. To get special funds for war was very nearly impossible. (Very often, the money had to come by finding some rich subject a traitor and confiscating his estates, or by winning a victory and looting the enemy.)

Richard had no defeated enemy to loot and, at the moment, no traitorous estate to confiscate. He had to take other action, and says:

We are enforced to farm our royal realm,

-Act I, scene iv, line 45

This is, he must lease those estates belonging directly to the crown, as well as other royal sources of revenue, granting them for a fixed number of years in return for an immediate cash grant. It was rather like



borrowing from the bank at a high rate of interest. Richard would obtain money right at the moment when he needs it, but the revenues he has leased out, added up over the years, would be much greater than the spot cash he has received. In the long run, then, the King loses a great deal (unless he makes it up by victory), while those leasing the revenues make huge profits.

Naturally, Richard would grant the leases to those he favors, and equally naturally, those who had no share in the profits would be horrified at the procedure.

The lining of his coffers. . .

Nor does Richard fail to see other possible sources of revenue.

Bushy enters with the grave news that John of Gaunt has suddenly fallen sick and has sent for Richard, begging the King to come to him. Richard rejoices at the news. He openly hopes for Gaunt's quick death, again with

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an eye to the Irish war, for some of the Lancastrian wealth can then be taken by the crown. He says:

*The lining of his coffers shall make coats
To deck our soldiers for these Irish wars.*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 61-62

Actually, John of Gaunt did not fall sick until four months after the non-duel between Mowbray and Bolingbroke.

. . . fashions in proud Italy

The scene shifts to the London palace in which John of Gaunt lies dying. At his bedside is his last remaining brother, Edmund of York. Both are in deep depression over the heedless follies of Richard-his extravagances, and most of all his leasing of lands and revenues to his favorites.

York blames the evil influences to which Richard's youth is subject, and, as is true in every period of history, decries the frivolity of the younger generation and their tendency to follow foreign innovations in place of the good old-fashioned customs of the past. (It is what we now call the "generation gap.")

Richard, says York, will not bend his ear to good council:

*No, it is stopped with other flattering sounds:
As praises-of whose taste [even] the wise are fond-
Lascivious meters, to whose venom sound*



*The open ear of youth doth always listen;
Report of fashions in proud Italy
Whose manners still our tardy-apish nation
Limps after in base imitation.*

-Act II, scene i, lines 17-23

The reference to Italy is anachronistic and is more nearly an expression

of Shakespeare's own nationalism rather than of York's in 1399.

In the fourteenth century, during the reign of Edward III, Italy was indeed exploding with a burst of intellectual activity. Their artists and writers

were suddenly looking at the Greek and Latin past with new eyes and began to model their own work on classic models. They called their time a

period of rebirth (the "Renaissance"). The centuries between the time of

the ancients and this new time of rebirth they called the "Middle Ages."

Slowly, the Renaissance culture spread out from Italy, north and west,

almost hypnotizing other nations with its glories. It was not, however, till

the sixteenth century that it reached England. It was in Shakespeare's time,

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not in Richard's, that Italian art, literature, music, fashions-the whole Italian way of thought-captivated the English.

The Italian touch was priceless, for it stimulated England into a blaze of genius of an intensity it had never seen before and was never to see again.

And of this golden age of English culture, Shakespeare himself was the brightest ornament.

Yet men are never comfortable with cultural change, even when they themselves typify it and profit by it. There were many items in the new

Italian influence which were indeed disturbing to what we would today call

the Establishment. Shakespeare's contemporary, the Italian scientist Gali-

leo, was upsetting the Ptolemaic and Aristotelian view of the universe, and

Machiavelli was introducing a new kind of politics divorced from medieval

notions of chivalry and feudal honor. (Shakespeare never accepted these

innovations, and his plays remain firmly on the side of the old.) Besides,



sixteenth-century England was moving away from Catholic Christianity, and Italy, as the center of the papacy, had come to seem a dangerous land of evil to Englishmen.

In 1595, then, when Shakespeare was writing and producing this play, older men were indeed shaking their heads and moaning at the spreading of Italian ways and the vulnerability of the thoughtless young to foreign corruption. Shakespeare merely transferred this contemporary view to the time of Richard's reign two centuries before.

This royal throne of kings . . .

Gaunt replies in a memorable speech. Richard is destroying England by his policies, he says. England, invincible to foreign attack by virtue of its happy position as an island, is dying from within. His panegyric to England in the course of this speech is the most lyrical bit of Shakespearean patriotism, for Gaunt describes England as:

*This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands,
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,*

-Act II, scene i, lines 40-50

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Yet this too is somewhat anachronistic. The description is of an England blessedly isolated and on the defensive, but in Gaunt's time, the English philosophy of war was entirely offensive. In the past half century, English armies had won heady victories over France and had interfered effectively in Spanish affairs. Before that, they had roved even farther afield. John of

Gaunt points that out in this same speech, saying that English kings are:

*Renowned for their deeds as jar from home,
For Christian service and true chivalry,
As is the sepulcher in stubborn Jewry
Of the world's ransom, blessed Mary's son,*



-Act II, scene i, lines 53-56

The reference is, of course, to Richard the Lion-Heart, who led an army to the Holy Land and fought his way nearly to Jerusalem (see page II-219).

Then why the defensive note in Gaunt's panegyric, the emphasis on England behind an oceanic moat beating off the invasions of men from "less happier lands"?

Gaunt's speech applies not at all to the time of Gaunt's death, but to the tune in which *Richard II* was first produced.

In 1595 all Englishmen had a fresh and glorious memory of victory. Only seven years before, in 1588, a vast armada of ships had swept northward from Spain, intent on crushing England. It would have seemed to any impartial observer that Spain, the greatest military power in Europe at the time, would surely defeat England, which was then, at best, a second-rate power, and which was, moreover, apparently on the brink of civil war.

Yet England's smaller but nimbler ships, and her daring sea-hardened captains (like Sir Francis Drake), aided by the chance intervention of storms at sea, smashed the Armada and, almost at a stroke, made England a great power.

It is easy to imagine the pride that must have swept the nation, the feeling of invincibility that burgeoned. England indeed must have seemed to her population to be an impregnable island guarded by supermen in super-ships. John of Gaunt's speech, when delivered, must have brought the audience screaming to its feet. Gaunt goes on to say that this glorious England is being ruined from within by Richard's policies:

*That England that was wont to conquer others
Hath made a shameful conquest of itself.*

-Act II, scene i, lines 65-66

That, surely, must have lost Richard any sympathy anyone in the audience may have had for him.

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... *old Lancaster hath spent*

Present in this scene between John of Gaunt and Edmund of York (but not speaking through the first part of the scene) is also the Earl of Northumberland, the scion of a proud and ancient family called the Percys.

A William de Percy crossed the Channel with William the Conqueror in 1066 and was given great lands in northern England. His family had remained there ever since, and upon them had devolved the task of fending off the periodic raids of the Scots, and of conducting raids of their own.

The Percy family, hardened in this border warfare, felt itself virtual lords of the north, for they were generally little beholden to any help from the



central government. This attitude of theirs is of crucial importance to the events of this time.

A Henry Percy had fought at Crecy with Edward III, and it was his son, another Henry Percy, who was raised in rank to an earldom and who is the "Northumberland" (the most northern of the English counties and the most exposed to Scottish depredation) of this play.

Richard now enters, and John of Gaunt finally speaks plainly to him, accusing him of extravagance and foolish fiscal policies. The King, infuriated, threatens his dying uncle, who, secure in the knowledge of approaching death, taunts him, at last, with having murdered Thomas of Gloucester.

Northumberland helps Gaunt out of the room and comes back almost immediately with the news that the old man has died. Northumberland says:

*His [Gaunt's] tongue is now a stringless instrument;
Words, life and all, old Lancaster hath spent.*

-Act II, scene i, lines 149-50

This death took place, in actual fact, on February 3, 1399. By that time Bolingbroke had been in exile four and a half months.

. . . plate, coin, revenues, and movables

Coldly, Richard greets the news of Gaunt's death. His concern is with his projected Irish expedition, and he still needs money for that. He there-fore haughtily announces:

*Towards our assistance we do seize to us
The plate, coin, revenues, and movables
Whereof our uncle Gaunt did stand possessed.*

-Act II, scene i, lines 161-63

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This is an act of enormous significance. John of Gaunt, as Duke of Lancaster, had the broadest estates and the largest revenues in England. Once he was dead, his son, Bolingbroke, automatically became Henry of Lancaster and all those estates and revenues were his. That right could not be taken away except for high treason and there was no accusation of that in his banishment.

To confiscate those estates was illegal, but Bolingbroke was far away in exile and the Lancastrian revenues were more than Richard could, at



that
moment, resist.

... the last of noble Edward's sons

Edmund of York is now moved to object to this crime, for his is an unusual privilege. As he says:

/ am the last of noble Edward's sons,

-Act II, scene i, line 171

(He is destined to live on three more years in that position.)
York lists all of Richard's acts of injustice that he has patiently endured, and includes one which is not otherwise mentioned in the play, for he speaks of:

*... the prevention of poor Bolingbroke
About his marriage ...*

-Act II, scene i, lines 167-68

This seems to refer to events in France, where Bolingbroke has been ever since his exile.

In France, Bolingbroke is by no means a nonentity, but is an honored guest at the French court for obvious reasons. He is near the succession to the throne and in case of renewed war between England and France, Bolingbroke could be an important French weapon. He could be used to start a civil war within England by being encouraged to claim the throne.

For Bolingbroke's part, French friendship was obviously valuable, since with French help he might recover what he had lost and even gain the throne itself. A marital alliance that would knit Bolingbroke to the French royal family might be to the advantage of both. Bolingbroke was a widower and therefore available, and he began to negotiate a marriage contract with a cousin of the French King.

Naturally, it was to Richard's interest to keep this from happening; to keep Bolingbroke from too close a connection with the French throne. Richard therefore sent an envoy hastily to France, demanding that the marriage not be permitted to go through, and negotiations were accordingly
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broken off. That was "the prevention of poor Bolingbroke about his marriage."

This would only serve to sharpen the enmity between the two cousins.

The projected marriage would make it clear to Richard that Bolingbroke was plotting to gain French help, while Bolingbroke would see that Richard had an unrelenting eye upon him.

... a thousand dangers on your head

Edmund of York goes on to say that this final act of injustice, this seizing



of Lancastrian wealth and the disinheriting of Bolingbroke, goes too far.
He warns Richard that by this act:

*You pluck a thousand dangers on your head,
You lose a thousand well-disposed hearts,*
-Act II, scene i, lines 205-6

This was something Richard might have seen for himself. He had, after all, touched the "pocket nerve" at last. All kinds of tyranny might be endured as long as money, property, revenues are held sacred. But now, if Richard could act thus in the case of the greatest nobleman in the kingdom, casually disinheriting him without accusation of treason (let alone conviction), what other nobleman would feel safe? Richard was striking at the security of every lord in the realm and was begging for treason.

... to the Earl of Wiltshire ...

But Richard has reached the heights of megalomania and can no longer see clearly. His faith in the kingship and the apparent success of all his strokes has blinded him to any possibility of failure. Ignoring York's remonstrances, he puts the matter of the seizing of Lancastrian wealth into action at once, saying:

*Go, Bushy, to the Earl of Wiltshire straight;
Bid him repair to us to Ely House,
To see this business.*

-Act II, scene i, lines 215-17

The reference is to the 1st Earl of Wiltshire, William le Scrope, who had been raised to the earldom by Richard in 1397. In 1398 he was made treasurer of England and it would be he who would have to take charge of the paper work required to transfer the holdings of Lancaster to the throne.

This Wiltshire did, apparently without a murmur, though both he and

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his father had served John of Gaunt. His father, Richard le Scrope (1st Baron Scrope of Bolton) had served as Chancellor-the King's chief ad-



ministrator-from 1378 to 1382, but having tried to stem Richard's extravagance, had been dismissed.

. . . Lord Governor of England

Now at last, Richard is ready to go to Ireland. Shakespeare's compression of time makes it appear that he leaves almost immediately upon Gaunt's death, but of course some time must elapse, if only to organize the necessary financial matters. In actual fact, Richard did not leave for Ireland till the end of May 1399, nearly four months after the death of his uncle.

He had to leave someone in charge, and the choice was an inevitable one:

*And we create in absence of ourself
Our uncle York Lord Governor of England,*

-Act II, scene i, lines 219-20

Edmund of York, next to the King himself, was now the most exalted in the land, the only surviving son of Edward III. His word was most likely to carry weight by its sheer authority, least likely to be questioned.

But he was old, weak, and irresolute, and everyone knew it. If there were no emergency during Richard's absence, York would do. If there were a sudden burst of trouble, however, he would be helpless. It was something anyone ought to have been able to foresee, but Richard was too caught up in his own glory to suspect that anything might possibly go wrong.

. . . eight tall ships . . .

Richard leaves the stage now, but Henry of Northumberland remains behind, with two lesser noblemen, Ross and Willoughby. Northumberland is disturbed. He has, till now, been on Richard's side, but the act of sequestering the Lancastrian estate bothers him. He feels insecure and sounds out the others, who soon show themselves to be equally upset.

Undoubtedly, Richard's act had given Bolingbroke his opportunity, and the latter had seized upon it at once. Bolingbroke, disinherited as well as banished, and for no clear fault, was now wronged past endurance, and in his wrongs, many noblemen saw their own possible future if they did not act.

Bolingbroke entered into cautious (and treasonable, if he failed) diplomacy with various lords after John of Gaunt's death and came to an

agreement with Northumberland. By the time Richard left for Ireland,



negotiations were complete and the moment of opportunity had come, for the King was gone from the land and the Lord Governor he had left behind (Edmund of York) was a deputy of straw.

In the play it all seems to happen at once—John of Gaunt's death, the King's departure for Ireland, Bolingbroke's move. Actually, as I said, John of Gaunt died in February and the King departed in May. Bolingbroke made his move at the beginning of July 1399.

What Bolingbroke needed in the way of help was ships, for the sea lay between him and England. He did not want the ships from the French King directly since it would hurt his cause to seem to be an enemy agent. The solution to the dilemma is made plain at once, however, when Northumberland begins to reveal his secret to the clearly sympathetic Ross and Willoughby. He says:

*. . . / have from le Port Blanc, a bay
In Brittain [Brittany], received intelligence*

-Act II, scene i, lines 277-78

Not hated France, but the Duke of Brittany would do the job.

In the days of King John, Brittany had been part of the Angevin Empire (see page II-210). But it had been Arthur of Brittany, the land's boy-duke, who had aspired to the English throne and who had been killed by John. Thereafter, John and his English forces were driven out of northern France and a new line of dukes, of French origins and sympathies, began to rule over Brittany. Bertrand du Guesclin, the French hero of the early decades of the Hundred Years' War, was a Breton.

Nevertheless, when the fortunes of war clearly turned against France, Brittany bethought itself and attempted to remain neutral in the struggle.

This gave Brittany a rather favorable image as far as Englishmen were concerned. The Breton duke, John V, who held the duchy in 1399, displayed great friendship to Bolingbroke and was willing to lend him ships. These ships Bolingbroke could accept without compromising his cause.

Northumberland, then, after listing the men of note who



accompany
Bolingbroke, tells the others:

*All these well furnished by the Duke of Brittain
With eight tall ships, three thousand men of war,
Are making hither with all due expedience,*

-Act II, scene i, lines 285-87

...in post to Ravenspurgh

Bolingbroke is making for a northern port on England's east coast,

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where he can join with Northumberland and the other lords of the region and where Richard (in Ireland, which lies off England's west coast) would have most trouble to move an army to counter the invasion.

Northumberland urges his listeners to spur northward to meet the re-
turning Bolingbroke:

Away with me in post [haste] to Ravenspurgh;

-Act II, scene i, line 296

Ravenspurgh, or Ravenspur, as it is usually spelled in gazetteers, is (or rather was) a town on the spit of land jutting out to sea north of the Humber. It no longer exists. Its site was swept away by the sea about a century after Bolingbroke's landing.

And thus, at the beginning of July 1399, only ten months after his sentence of exile, five months after his father's death, and perhaps six weeks after Richard had left for Ireland, Bolingbroke returned in arms to England.

... young Henry Percy

Shakespeare continues to compress time and make events follow one another rapidly. Richard has just left and already the Queen is bewailing his absence and giving voice to apprehensions which will not be calmed:

*Some unborn sorrow ripe in Fortune's womb
Is coming towards me . . .*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 10-11

The Queen is Isabella of France, who at this point is, in actual historical fact, only ten years old. Shakespeare finds it necessary, however,



for dramatic purposes, to have her speak and be addressed as a grown woman.

And no sooner does the Queen express her fears, when Green rushes in with the news of Bolingbroke's landing, following so hard after Richard's leaving (in the play, not in reality) that for a moment, Green hopes to catch the King before he has left.

It is too late. The King is gone and disaffected lords are already flocking to Bolingbroke's standard. Green lists them, including among others:

The Lord Northumberland, his son, young Henry Percy,
-Act II, scene ii, line 53

This is the first mention of Northumberland's son, who in the next play of the series is to be one of the chief characters.

Henry Percy was born in 1364, so that he was three years older than Bolingbroke. At this moment in history, when Bolingbroke was land-

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ing at Ravenspurgh, Henry Percy was thirty-five years old, which for those times was well into middle age. He could by no stretch of fancy be described, in actual fact, as "young Henry Percy."

But Shakespeare knew what he was doing. As he made the Queen older to make this scene and a couple of others more effective, so he made Henry Percy younger because he is destined yet to play an important role as a young fire-eater, with the accent on the youth.

(Henry Percy's father, Northumberland, is fifty-seven by the way, an old man only two years younger than "old John of Gaunt" and only one year older than "good old York." However, to keep the illusion of Henry Percy's youth, the old age of his father is never referred to in this play.)

Such was the precocity of life in those days that Henry Percy, at the time of Bolingbroke's landing, had already had twenty years experience as a warrior, for he had been taking active part in battle from the age of fourteen. He had for quite a while now been in charge of the border warfare with Scotland and was so keen at this task, so forward and aggressive, that he gained the nickname "Hotspur"-that is, someone who was all on fire to spur on his horse and charge the enemy. It is the nickname one would give a rash person with no control over his temper, and it is in that fashion that Shakespeare will picture Henry Percy in the next play. In this play his speeches are assigned to "Percy" and in the next to "Hotspur." The two are the same person, and for this play I will speak of "Henry Percy."

Henry Percy was at one point captured by the Scots and released only after the payment of a heavy ransom. Toward this ransom, King Richard contributed three thousand pounds, a huge sum in those days. Ordinarily, one might suppose that Percy owed the King considerable gratitude for this, quite apart from the usual call of allegiance of a subject to his king. However, gratitude was not a common motivating force in politics in those days, any more than it is nowadays, and Henry Percy joined his father at once-in favor of Bolingbroke and against Richard.



... *the Earl of Worcester*

The Queen demands to know why Northumberland and the rest have not been declared traitors. Green replies:

*We have: whereupon the Earl of Worcester
Hath broken his staff, resigned his stewardship,
And all the household servants fled with him
To Bolingbroke.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 58-61

This habit of calling people by their highest tides can be obscuring. The Earl of Worcester held the post of Lord Steward, the highest officer

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over the King's personal household, empowered by the staff of office he

carried to give all commands. Why should he betray *the King*?

It becomes less mysterious when it is explained that the Earl of Worces-

ter's actual name was Thomas Percy and that he was Northumberland's

younger brother. Rather than name his brother and nephew traitors, he

joined their company. (In actual fact, though, he did not break the staff

till a month after Bolingbroke's landing, when the rebellion was clearly

succeeding. Worcester was the last of the Percys to switch from Richard

to Bolingbroke.)

... *presently at Berkeley*

Things continue to grow worse. The Duke of York, who is in charge of the kingdom, is totally incompetent to handle the situation. He is confused, despairing, and far too old to be vigorous (though he is actually

only a year older than Northumberland).

York recognizes that the north is lost. All its nobility is flocking to Boling-

broke. The stand must be made in the west, where Bolingbroke might be

held off until Richard returns with his forces from Ireland. York says, therefore:

*... Gentlemen, go muster up your men,
And meet me presently at Berkeley.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 117-18

The town of Berkeley is only ten miles from the border of Wales. Its castle, in which York plans to make his stand, is remarkably ill-omened,



however. It was here, only seventy years before, that the King's great-grandfather, Edward II, was brutally murdered after his deposition.

... straight to Bristow Castle

The favorites now begin to disperse. Conditions look bad and they know well they will themselves be the first targets of the rebels. They must find some sort of safety at once. Green says:

*Well, I will for refuge straight to Bristow Castle.
The Earl of Wiltshire is already there.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 134-35

Bristow is an older name for Bristol, a city about twenty miles south of Berkeley and, at that time, the largest city in the west of England. If that does not hold, nothing will.

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Bushy goes with Green, but Bagot finds even Bristol not safe enough. He will feel secure only in the royal presence. He says:

... / will to Ireland to his Majesty.

-Act II, scene ii, line 140

As a result he will live longer than the others.

From Ravenspurgh to Cotshall. . .

Clearly, everything hinges on Richard. If he returns quickly, if he takes speedy and firm action, then the mere fact that he is King may win for him. There is respect for the title and a dislike for the name of traitor. A king is divinely ordained and rebellion against him is not only a crime but a sin, and the medieval mind knew that well. However much the lords might hold out against Richard, the smallest indication of firm action on his part might cause defection among the ordinary soldiers serving under the rebels.

The rebelling lords therefore had to move quickly and win as much as possible as soon as possible. By the time Richard returned, the rebellion would have to be clearly victorious. They therefore raced southwestward while Richard was still in Ireland, and Edmund of York weakly tried to gather forces in the west.

Without meeting any resistance to speak of and with their forces strengthening, the rebels sped on, and Northumberland, who is with Bolingbroke, speaks of the distance they have marched.

*But I bethink me what a weary way
From Ravenspurgh to Cotshall. . .*

-Act II, scene iii, lines 8-9



What Shakespeare refers to here as "Cotshall" are the Cotswold Hills, a low, rolling region that makes up much of Gloucestershire. The distance traversed from Ravenspurgh to reach Gloucester and the neighborhood of Berkeley, where Edmund of York is to be found, is 175 miles as the crow flies.

To be sure, Northumberland mentions the distance only to indulge in gross flattery, implying that Bolingbroke's pleasant conversation has made the long way short. He is feathering his nest, expecting Bolingbroke to be king and hoping to reap rich payment for his services.

... tender, raw, and young

Nor does Northumberland think of himself only. The to-be-king must

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be made to feel in debt to Northumberland's son and heir also. When that son, Henry Percy, arrives from reconnoitering Berkeley Castle, Northumberland introduces him to Bolingbroke, and Percy at once plays the necessary part, saying:

*My gracious lord, I tender you my service,
Such as it is, being tender, raw, and young,
Which elder days shall ripen. . .*

-Act II, scene iii, lines 41-43

The picture is of a teen-age stripling standing there, an untried fledgling, rather than a middle-aged veteran of two decades of ferocious fighting. That distortion will be extraordinarily useful in the next play in chronological sequence, which Shakespeare was to write two years later.

... that young Mars of men

Percy's report makes it clear that Edmund of York does not have the force to resist and the rebels can therefore move on boldly. On July 26, 1399, Bolingbroke's army lays siege to Berkeley Castle-less than a month after his landing at Ravenspurgh.

When Edmund of York appears, he can only bluster, wishing he were a younger man:



*Were I but now the lord of such hot youth
As when brave Gaunt, thy father, and myself
Rescued the Black Prince, that young Mars of men,
From forth the ranks of many thousand French,*

-Act II, scene iii, lines 98-101

This is typical English bombast of Shakespearean times, with its implication that a few Englishmen are a match for large numbers of French.

Actually, there is no record of John of Gaunt and Edmund of York ever

rescuing the Black Prince in this fashion.

Bolingbroke speaks meekly to his uncle, insists he comes only for his lost revenues and title. He wants only what is his own. Those around him support him and York confesses he feels Bolingbroke was ill used in this respect and quickly talks himself into abandoning any attempt at resistance.

York declares himself a neutral, or tries to, but this is not quite enough

for Bolingbroke, who wants this last surviving son of Edward III committed with all his prestige to the rebel cause. He insists that York accompany the rebel army to Bristol, where the favorites are, and to this York in the end must agree.

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My lord of Salisbury. . .

But what of Richard II? Storms had kept ships from moving from England to Ireland (even the stars fought against Richard) and a crucial three

weeks passed after Bolingbroke's landing before the news reached the King—three weeks in which the rebel forces had gathered and the march southwestward had taken place.

Once the news did arrive, Richard was overwhelmed. He had convinced himself of his own untouchability and he was not prepared for disillusionment. In fact, everything had been going wrong for him even before the news about Bolingbroke had reached him.

The rough Irish tribesmen were showing no signs of being overawed by the kingly majesty. Richard followed Mac Murrough into the bogs but never caught him. The King merely tired his own men while pursuing a phantom and was forced back into Dublin, quite conscious of having been made to look foolish. It left him in a deep depression and it was while in this state that the news of Bolingbroke's invasion reached him.

He sent one of his loyal followers, John Montacute, 3rd Earl of Salisbury (who was *not* a descendant of William Longsword, the "Salisbury" of *King John*, see page II-227), eastward across St. George's Channel into north Wales, there to raise an army. The King himself was supposed to follow soon, but he could not bring himself to stir. Where speed was essential if even a last hope was to be preserved, Richard lingered on eighteen

fatal days more in Ireland. One wonders if he simply could not bring himself to face the facts.



The delay ruined everything. Salisbury had gathered a Welsh army, forty thousand strong, but where was news from Richard? In a case of such do-or-die emergency, the only logical reason for failure to hear from

him was that he was dead-either killed in battle, drowned at sea, or perished of disease. The illogical reason-that he was just wasting time-occurred to no one.

So the Welsh Captain, who leads Salisbury's gathered army, says:

*My Lord of Salisbury, we have stayed ten days,
And hardly keep our countrymen together,
And yet we hear no tidings from the King;
Therefore we will disperse ourselves. Farewell.*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 1-4

Salisbury pleads for further delay but is refused. The Welsh Captain explains that all sorts of unfavorable omens abound and the soldiers will

not linger. (The English were fond of picturing the Welsh as terribly superstitious.)

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... a royal bed

While Salisbury loses his army, the rebel forces have reached and taken

Bristol. Bushy and Green are captured and led to their execution. To justify that execution, Bolingbroke accuses them of having misled and per-

verted King Richard. Among other things, Bolingbroke says:

*You have in manner with your sinful hours
Made a divorce betwixt his queen and him,
Broke the possession of a royal bed,*

-Act III, scene i, lines 11-13

There is a strong implication here of homosexuality between the King

and the favorites. When a young king is close to young male favorites, such a scandal is always readily believed by some-and sometimes it is true.

There is the case of Edward II, father of Edward III and great-grand-

father of Richard II. Edward II, like Richard II, was a weak and extrav-

agant king. He too had favorites who were unpopular with the nobility.

He too was rebelled against. In the case of Edward II, however, the con-

nection with the favorites was definitely homosexual. His Queen was in-

deed neglected and resentful over the fact, and it was she, therefore, who



was the heart and soul of the conspiracy that destroyed him.

Just three years before *Richard II* was written, another historical play, *Edward II* by Christopher Marlowe, had been produced. Perhaps Shakespeare could not resist adding this note of sexual scandal as a way of helping his own play compete with the earlier one.

If so, it is a false note. The supposedly mistreated Queen is only ten years old, remember, so there was scarcely a "royal bed" to dispute the possession of. Nor can the reference be turned back to Richard's first wife, Anne of Bohemia, with whom, all sources agree, Richard was deeply in love and by whom he was deeply beloved.

To fight with Glendower. . .

Bolingbroke sees to the execution of Bushy and Green and orders good treatment for Richard's Queen. There is next the Welsh army under Salisbury to consider, since Bolingbroke does not yet know that it has melted away. He says:

*. . . Come, Lords, away
To fight with Glendower and his complices;*

-Act III, scene i, lines 42-43

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Wales had maintained the Celtic resistance to first the Saxons and then the Normans for eight centuries. The last independent Prince of Wales was Llewelyn ab Gruffydd, who ruled north Wales in the time of Edward I. Edward warred against Llewelyn, forced him to submit, and annexed Wales to the English crown in 1277. (Thereafter the title "Prince of Wales" was routinely given to the oldest son of the English King. The first to receive this title was Edward I's young son, the future, and ill-fated, Edward II.)

There began a long series of attempts by the Welsh to regain their independence. Llewelyn himself revolted and was killed in 1282. That didn't end matters, however. The Welsh continued to wait for a rescuer, someone who would drive the hated English from the wild Welsh hills.

Such a one seemed to have been found in Owen Glendower, a Welshman who boasted a tenuous connection with the old princely line and who seemed to have a charismatic hold over his countrymen.



It is he who was probably the Welsh Captain who addressed Salisbury in the previous scene. Bolingbroke, in speaking of Salisbury's Welsh army, would naturally speak of fighting Glendower rather than Richard, for that would make his actions seem part of a patriotic national war rather than a treasonable civil one.

... the balm off from an anointed king

Finally, in August 1399, Richard comes to shore in northern Wales near where he conceives Salisbury's army to be encamped. He has been in Ireland for ten weeks. It was a fatal ten weeks. He had left England at what seemed the peak of his power, an absolute king no one dared gainsay; he returned to find himself with neither an army nor subjects.

From this point on Richard suffers an uninterrupted flow of disaster and humiliation, and his character changes. He is no longer the headstrong young King, displaying his absolutism stubbornly against all advice. He has become a poet, singing his way to death in some of the most melodious speeches Shakespeare ever wrote. Having deliberately lost Richard every shred of audience sympathy, Shakespeare now deliberately wins it back, until at the end, the audience is surely weeping for the same Richard they had been heartily angry with in the first half of the play.

To begin with, though, Richard still has his illusions. He still thinks the aura of kingship will win for him, that Bolingbroke's initial victories were possible only because the King was away from England. He says:

*Not all the water in the rough rude sea
Can wash the balm off from an anointed king;*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 54-55

The anointing oil ("balm") used at the coronation was a symbol of the

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divine grace that made him King and that could not be reversed by man-
he believes.

But quickly he begins to unbelieve as he learns the scope of the disaster. Salisbury appears, but without his army; that had broken up and dispersed the day before. The news arrives that Bristol is taken and Bushy, Green, and Wiltshire executed. And the Duke of York, Richard's last hope, is gone over to Bolingbroke too.

By as much as Richard had a false idea of his glory before, so now is he cast into useless despair. A more practical man might have weighed matters and done what he could with the hand he had been dealt. Richard might have fled overseas, hoping, like Bolingbroke, to get aid, and



return.
He did no such thing. He could think of no better action than to scurry off with Lord Aumerle and a few others about him to the doubtful security of the walls of Flint Castle nearby.

... the death of kings

Richard's despair is his undoing. Shakespeare depicts him as already anticipating the very worst even before he flees to Flint Castle. There is not only deposition but death in his mind, as he explains in a moving speech that includes the lines:

*For God's sake let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings:*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 155-56

His despair may be realistic but it is not the act of a leader who must inspire faith and not require sympathy.

Furthermore, he lacks a realistic appraisal of the situation. With all his paeans to death, he avoids it and accepts humiliation in exchange for life. This is the last thing he should do. In a similar situation, Cleopatra (see page I-388) accepts death as a means of depriving Octavius Caesar of his greatest victory. Richard is in a better position than Cleopatra, for Richard is the legitimate King of England. Everyone admits that, even Bolingbroke. For Bolingbroke to succeed requires some very ticklish negotiation in which Richard himself must co-operate.

Richard, stronger and less despairing, might have defeated Bolingbroke by refusing to co-operate, if only by accepting the death he apparently longs for.

... Bolingbroke on both his knees ...

If Richard does not truly understand the situation, Bolingbroke does.

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Bolingbroke has discovered that the Welsh army is dispersed and that Richard is penned up La Flint Castle.

He takes his army there and surrounds the castle, but what next? If Bolingbroke wishes to be king, it is not enough to defeat Richard. He



must get Richard alive, bring him to London, and carry through all the negotiations that would make Bolingbroke's own accession completely legal. If Richard dies resisting capture, or if he must be dragged to London by obvious force and refusing to co-operate in any way, Bolingbroke may still make himself king but most Englishmen would refuse to accept him as *legitimate* king. His reign would then be precarious and he would face revolt after revolt.

Bolingbroke tries hard, therefore, to allay Richard's fears and suspicions. He pictures himself as a suppliant only, returning to recover his own and nothing more. He sends Northumberland to carry a message to the walls of Flint Castle, telling him:

. . . thus deliver:

*Henry Bolingbroke
On both his knees doth kiss King Richard's hand,
And sends allegiance and true faith of heart
To his most royal person; hither come
Even at his feet to lay my arms and power,
Provided that my banishment repealed,
And lands restored again be freely granted;*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 33-40

Northumberland delivers the message and Richard, in utter humiliation, grants the request. The banishment is lifted, the Lancastrian estates restored; and now Bolingbroke is Henry of Lancaster.

To be sure, Richard knows what a strong king would have done (supposing a strong king would have allowed himself to get into Richard's situation). Richard says to Aumerle after having given in:

*Shall we call back Northumberland, and send
Defiance to the traitor and so die?*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 128-29

Aumerle councils against that, urging Richard to play for time. It is useless advice.

Richard takes the advice, but if he cannot bring himself to risk and accept death rather than humiliation, he nevertheless pampers himself with all the joys of self-pity. He says he will change his kingdom:

*. . . for a little grave
A little, little grave, an obscure grave;*

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*Or I'll be buried in the King's highway,
Some way of common trade, where subjects' feet
May hourly trample on their sovereign's head;
For on my heart they tread now whilst I live,*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 152-57

There is something infinitely non-heroic about this speech by a King who had so short a while before been so absolute. Yet Aumerle weeps at it and surely so must the audience.

And yet if all Richard wants is a grave, why did he not accept one and defeat his enemy in the act?



... *glist'ring Phaethon*

But Bolingbroke cannot be sure Richard will not resist and deliberately invite death. As long as Richard is up there on the castle walls, Bolingbroke is not entirely safe. Richard must be in his hands, surrounded by his armed men, his life guarded and kept safe; for Richard, alive, well, and unharmed, will be needed in London if Bolingbroke is to become king in fact as well as in name.

Northumberland therefore returns with a new request. Would Richard come down to the courtyard so that Bolingbroke can speak to him face to face?

It seems so small and reasonable a request, but actually it is a call for complete surrender. Richard has his last free choice and makes it. He surrenders and descends, saying:

*Down, down I come, like glist'ring Phaethon,
Wanting the manage of unruly jades.*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 177-78

The figure is perfect! Phaethon, in the Greek myths, was the son of Helios, the sun god. Laughed at by his friends for claiming this relationship, Phaethon played on Helios' paternal fondness and obtained permission to take in charge the golden chariot of the sun and drive its divine horses over their daily course.

The steeds, however, missing the firm, familiar control of Helios, went wild. The sun moved out of its course, swooping toward the earth, burning a broad swath across Africa and permanently darkening its natives. (In this fashion, the Greek mythmakers accounted for the Sahara Desert and for Black pigmentation.) Finally, to prevent the earth generally from being destroyed, Jupiter loosed his thunderbolt, struck Phaethon, and hurled him, dying, down to earth.

And so it was with Richard. He was the son of the Black Prince and

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the grandson of Edward III, both of whom were dominating personalities who controlled the English aristocracy in their lifetimes. Richard, however, when he was put in control of the golden chariot of the English throne, could not, in the end, manage the "unruly jades" who were the aristocracy, and with Bolingbroke administering the lightning bolt, down, down he came, like *glist'ring Phaethon*.

Richard is quite aware he has surrendered. He knows what is coming next too. He says:

*For do we must what force will have us do.
Set on towards London, cousin, is it so?*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 205-6



... *the balance of great Bolingbroke*

At London, Richard is to be tried before Parliament and there is no doubt as to how that trial will go.

The Queen, who is in honorable detention at the Duke of York's palace, hears the very gardeners discussing the matter, and they are certain that Richard faces doom. She challenges them angrily, refusing to believe this possible, and says:

*Thou, old Adam's likeness, set to dress this garden,
How dares thy harsh rude tongue sound this displeasing news?*
-Act III, scene iv, lines 73-74

A gardener is a man of Adam's original profession, of course, since "the Lord God took the man [Adam] and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it" (Genesis 2:15).

The gardener answers her with a careful explanation of the facts of power politics:

*King Richard he is in the mighty hold
Of Bolingbroke. Their fortunes both are weighed:
In your lord's scale is nothing but himself
And some few vanities that make him light;
But in the balance of great Bolingbroke
Besides himself are all the English peers,
And with that odds he weighs King Richard down.*
-Act III, scene iv, lines 83-89

The Queen can do nothing but resolve to hasten to London, there to see the King perhaps.

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As far as Callice. . .

In London, Parliament has been called into action on September 13, 1399 (just four days short of the anniversary of the non-duel between Bolingbroke and Mowbray). It was called in the name of Richard II-who was still legally King and was treated so.

The trial begins with the probing of the dire event that has set Richard's downfall into motion-the murder of Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester.

Bagot, the last remaining member of Richard's coterie of favorites, is questioned, and he puts the blame squarely on Aumerle. Speaking to him, he says:

*I heard you say, "Is not my arm of length,
That reacheth from the restful English court
As far as Callice to mine uncle's head?"*
-Act IV, scene i, lines 11-13

Bagot is accusing Aumerle of having gloried in giving the order, at court, that sent couriers speeding to Callice (Calais) to direct Mowbray to have Thomas of Gloucester murdered.



Calais, after having been taken by Edward III in 1347, remained continually in English hands throughout the Hundred Years' War, serving always as an armed camp, easily supplied across a narrow stretch of sea. From it English raiding parties could swoop into France at will.

Even after the end of the Hundred Years' War, when France was almost completely cleared of English forces, Calais was the exception. England maintained its hold on that nearest scrap of its onetime broad conquests.

It was not until 1558, when Queen Mary I led England into a foolish war on behalf of her husband, King Philip II of Spain, that Calais was lost by the English. The humiliation of that loss of the final bit of French territory was such that Queen Mary mourned, "When I die, Calais shall be found written on my heart."

... *banished Norfolk* ...

There follows a scene of bombastic charge and countercharge. Aumerle denies having ordered Gloucester's death. Others accuse him; some defend him. The practical Bolingbroke suggests that the matter be settled by recalling Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, who had been Gloucester's jailer and with whom Bolingbroke himself had nearly fought over this very matter a year before.

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The Bishop of Carlisle, however, one of the few left with the courage to support Richard openly, announces it is too late to recall Mowbray:

*Many a time hath banished Norfolk fought
For Jesu Christ in glorious Christian field,
Streaming the ensign of the Christian cross
Against black pagans, Turks, and Saracens;
And, toiled with works of war, retired himself
To Italy, and there at Venice gave
His body to that pleasant country's earth,*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 92-98

Mowbray did, upon his banishment, make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The picture of him as another Lion-Heart fighting the Saracens is, however, sheer romance. The Crusades had been over for a full century, and there were no Christian armies fighting in the Holy Land and would not be for over five centuries more.

After his pilgrimage, Mowbray retired to Venice and died there on September 22, 1399, nine days after the opening of the Parliament. His lifelong banishment had lasted just one year, and Bolingbroke was left the last surviving of all the lords appellant.



... *good old Abraham*

There is nothing, of course, that may so safely be honored as a dead adversary, and Bolingbroke, who did his best to disgrace and kill Mowbray while the latter was alive, can now afford to make an impressive show of being affected. He says of his dead enemy:

*Sweet peace conduct his sweet soul to the bosom
Of good old Abraham.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 103-4

The expression "Abraham's bosom" dates back to the ancient Greek custom of eating with the right hand while reclining on the left elbow.

An honored guest would sit at the right of the host, and when the guest reclined leftward, his head would be near the host's chest. His head was, so to speak, in the bosom of his host. To be "in the host's bosom" was, therefore, to be in the place of honor.

In the Gospel of St. Luke, there is the parable of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus. After both died, the rich man was taken off to hell while the beggar went to heaven. Or as Luke tells it, adopting the Greek idiom (for he himself was, in all likelihood, a Greek and not a Jew), "the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:22).

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The picture, properly conceived, is that of Lazarus the beggar becoming an honored guest in heaven, and of sitting on the right hand of Abraham himself at the heavenly banquets.

In societies which did not eat reclining, "Abraham's bosom" did not have this clear significance. Rather, it became synonymous with heaven-as it is here.

... *Henry, fourth of that name*

The dispute over Thomas of Gloucester (which, in actual history, stretched over days of debate) did its work. Bolingbroke wasn't interested in actually establishing the guilt, jury-fashion, or having Aumerle (his cousin, and the only son of the only living son of Edward III) executed. It was enough to stir up the mud so as to spatter Richard with strong suspicion of that dark crime. Richard was sufficiently blackened to make his deposition possible.

Richard himself must have thought so. Conscious of his own guilt and unbearably pressed by those who imprisoned him, he finally agreed to surrender the crown and accept Bolingbroke as heir.

Edmund of York brings the news and advises Bolingbroke to:



*Ascend his throne, descending now from him,
And long live Henry, fourth of that name!*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 111-12

Eagerly, Bolingbroke accepts the crown, and from this point on he might be termed "Henry IV." Throughout the rest of the play, however, his speeches are still attributed to Bolingbroke.

The blood of English . . .

There is not, however, universal acclamation of this. One man, the Bishop of Carlisle, is still brave enough to speak. Boldly, he denounces the parliamentary procedures as illegal, since subjects were passing judgment on their King with the King not even present, thus denying him the legal rights of any common criminal.

So much is historical, but Shakespeare adds to it by putting a hindsight prophecy into Carlisle's mouth. Carlisle says:

*My Lord of Hereford here, whom you call king,
Is a foul traitor to proud Hereford's king;
And if you crown him, let me prophesy*

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*The blood of English shall manure the ground,
And future ages grown for this foul act;*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 134-38

He was right, of course. Hindsight prophecies always are.

Richard's deposition, despite all Bolingbroke's painstaking legalisms, was *still* an intolerable blow at legitimacy. Once Bolingbroke was made King by act of Parliament instead of by act of God through line of birth, it did not take long for even the dullest-witted lord to see that almost anyone else could be made king in that same way. There began, therefore, a full century of striving for a throne that could so easily be seized, and the blood of English *did* manure the ground.

My Lord of Westminster . . .

The Bishop of Carlisle is arrested for his bold statement. Northumberland says:

*Of capital treason we arrest you here.
My Lord of Westminster, be it your charge
To keep him safely till his day of trial.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 151-53

"My Lord of Westminster" is the abbot of Westminster Abbey. The Abbey is the most famous of all English churches. It is near the Houses of Parliament and English monarchs are crowned there. Many monarchs as well as many of their famous subjects are buried there too.



... *proceed without suspicion*

Yet Bolingbroke's cautious soul is stirred by Carlisle's speech. He knows that the consent of Parliament is a shifty sort of thing to base the kingship on and that men could easily claim afterward that there had been trickery involved.

It was not enough to say that Richard had agreed to hand over the crown. He must stand before Parliament in person, and with his own hand and tongue, in the full sight and hearing of everyone, do so. Bolingbroke says:

*Fetch hither Richard, that in common view
He may surrender; so we shall proceed
Without suspicion.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 155-57

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Richard comes and meekly does as he is asked to do. In beautiful lines, he yields the crown and gives it to Bolingbroke. He even finally learns the truth about himself. No more does he dream of a kingly aura; no more does he imagine there is some unwashable balm that bathes him. In fact, he says:

With mine own tears I wash away my balm,

-Act IV, scene i, line 206

So Judas did. . .

And yet has Richard *really* given up, or, deprived of everything, is he trying to lead from weakness? Whatever he has done he has clearly done under duress, and all can be disavowed. What he needs are backers, and how many of those who now stand there watching him stripped of royalty might be induced to change sides-out of pity or out of fear or out of both?

Is there perhaps some lingering nervousness about treating a legitimate king so? If Richard is King by grace of God, then is there not a blasphemy in the attempt to undo what God has done?

Even as Richard is in the process of giving up his crown, he tries to activate just this fear by making the comparison with another trial nearly fourteen centuries before. He points out that those who now turn pitilessly on him once honored and flattered him. He says:

*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.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 169-71

The reference is to the moment when Judas betrayed Jesus to the authorities and did so while still pretending to be a loyal disciple. "And



forth-
with he [Judas] came to Jesus, and said Hail, master, and kissed him" (Matthew 26:49). It was with that "Judas kiss" that he identified the one who was to be arrested, and Richard implies a similar treason, but more widespread, in his own case.

He attempts to cast fear into the hearts of those who might be watching and telling themselves that they are taking no active part and are therefore innocent. He says:

*... some of you, with Pilate, wash your hands,
Showing an outward pity: yet you Pilates
Have here delivered me to my sour cross,
And water cannot wash away your sin.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 238-41

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Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator of Judea, when forced to condemn Jesus, regretted the judgment (according to Matthew) and attempted to evade responsibility: "he [Pilate] took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person" (Matthew 27:29). It did not help Pilate; he went down in history with infamy on his name.

... worthily deposed

Bolingbroke is not so blind that he does not see the danger. It must not be made to appear that Richard is being forcibly stripped of his crown simply because Bolingbroke is ambitious. It must be clear to the nation that Richard has forfeited the crown, and that Bolingbroke has become King simply because, as next in line, he has a duty to step into the empty throne. But how can Richard have forfeited the crown? Why-by having committed a series of crimes that have made him unworthy to be God's anointed?

And to prove that that is so, he must openly confess to those crimes.

Thus, when Richard has given up the crown and asks if there is more he must do, Northumberland says:

*No more, but that you read
These accusations, and these grievous crimes,
Committed by your person and your followers,
Against the state and profit of this land:
That by confessing them, the souls of men
May deem that you are worthily deposed.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 221-26



And here, at last, Richard balks. Up to this point, everything that has been done can be undone. If he confesses to the crimes listed on the paper, he will be beyond the point of no return.

As Richard tries to avoid that ultimate loss, Northumberland twists and turns with him, presenting the paper again, and yet again, with an increasingly impatient "My lord-."

To which the King, or ex-King now, in the agony of knowledge that he is no longer lord, cries out in a phrase that has, ever since the play was produced, characterized the historical Northumberland in the minds of man:

No lord of thine, thou haught, insulting man,

-Act IV, scene i, line 253

Finally, Bolingbroke himself can stand it no more and orders Northumberland to desist, whereupon Northumberland says bluntly:

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The Commons will not then be satisfied.

-Act IV, scene i, line 271

But Richard gets away with it. Out of the total disaster, he has salvaged one crumb; he has refused to admit to any wrongdoing, and Bolingbroke's title to the throne is therefore flawed. This does Richard no personal good in the end, but it helps make Bolingbroke's reign a laborious time of civil conflict, and perhaps Richard would consider that better than nothing if he could know.

In any case, Bolingbroke could wait no longer. The parliamentary sessions designed to make the transfer of power completely legal had lasted two and a half weeks, in actuality, and that was enough.

... to the Tower

Bolingbroke ends the proceedings by ordering Richard led away. He says:

Go some of you, convey him to the Tower.

-Act IV, scene i, line 316

The Tower of London was a royal residence (remaining so right down through Shakespeare's time). It housed many of the governmental functions, such as the mint and the archives-even the royal menagerie at times.



It was also used to imprison men of rank. This is not surprising, for there were no prisons in the modern sense in medieval England and few places where anyone could be kept in reasonable security from attempts at rescue other than within the fortress-castles themselves.

Our coronation . . .

And with Richard gone, Bolingbroke says:

*On Wednesday next we solemnly set down
Our coronation . . .*

-Act IV, scene i, line 318

The deposition of Richard II took place on September 30, 1399. Richard had reigned for twenty-two years, most of that time without power. This deposition in September came two years and nine days after the September death of Thomas of Gloucester and one year and twelve days after the September non-duel between Bolingbroke and Mowbray.

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. . . a merry day

Richard did not entirely miscalculate. The plotting against the new King began at once—in a matter of weeks at the most Shakespeare, with his dramatic time compression, has it begin at the instant of deposition.

There remains Aumerle, for instance, who even now is loyal to Richard. He and the Bishop of Carlisle, and others too, are ready to take extreme action to restore Richard. In this they are joined by the Abbot of Westminster.

The Abbot says, cautiously:

*Come home with me to supper: I will lay
A plot shall show us all a merry day.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 333-34

. . . Julius Caesar's ill-erected Tower

Richard's Queen, having come to London, waits grief-stricken, hoping to see him on his way to detention. She says:

*This way the King will come, this is the way
To Julius Caesar's ill-erected Tower,*

-Act V, scene i, lines 1-2

The Tower of London, the most famous non-ecclesiastical building in England, was not, despite legend, first built by Julius Caesar. Caesar's two raids into England in 55 and 54 B.C. were merely raids (see page II-62),



and he left little behind but a memory.

Julius Caesar was, however, one of the most renowned men in history and England was proud of the connection, even if it was only to memorialize and magnify the defeat.

The oldest portions of the Tower were actually begun after another and even more significant conquest. When William, Duke of Normandy, took England in 1066 and became "William the Conqueror," he began at once to

construct a fortification just outside London, a place where a Norman garrison might be stationed to overawe the city in case it had any notion of rebelling. This fortification grew into the Tower.

Despite the Queen's reference to the "ill-erected Tower"-that is, to a tower erected for ill purposes-it had not yet gained the dreadful reputation in Richard II's time that it was to have by Shakespeare's own time, and in that sense the remark is an anachronism. It was only a century after the

tune of this play that kings and queens began to die in the Tower.

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You must to Pomfret. . .

But even the Tower of London is not enough; it is too close to the center of things. Bolingbroke is too much the realist not to expect conspiracies,

so Richard must be removed, taken farther away, pushed toward the horizon, where he might possibly fall from the minds of men. Consequently the

emotional leave-taking of Richard and his Queen, when they meet on the road to the Tower, is interrupted by the arrival of the ex-King's nemesis, Northumberland.

That rough man says:

*My lord, the mind of Bolingbroke is changed:
You must to Pomfret, not unto the Tower.*

-Act V, scene i, lines 51-52

Pomfret, or Pontefract (see page II-244), had a castle that was almost as old as the Tower of London, for it was begun in 1069, three years after the Conquest, by a Norman knight named Ilbert de Lacy. (In those years, the Normans put up their frowning castles all over England as a way of holding down the countryside, a tactic that worked admirably well from their standpoint.)

Angrily, Richard makes a hindsight prophecy, predicting that Northumberland and Bolingbroke, united against him now, will yet fall out:

*. . . Thou shall think
Though he divide the realm and give thee half,
It is too little, helping him to all;
He shall think that thou which knowest the way
To plant unrightful kings, wilt know again,
Being ne'er so little urged another way,
To pluck him headlong from the usurped throne.*



-Act V, scene i, lines 59-65

Of course, that is what does happen, and an astute observer can see that it is inevitable. We might even suppose that Richard at this point in the play can hope that it will happen soon and that in the course of that falling out, he may yet retrieve his throne.

In actual historical fact, Richard did not leave for Pomfret immediately after the deposition. He remained in the Tower for nearly a month, leaving for Pomfret on October 28, 1399.

As for Isabella, Richard's Queen, she remained in England two years more, returning to France in 1401. She had spent five years in England, and

was still only twelve years old on her return to France. But she was also
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still the daughter of the King of France. She married again, to Charles of Orleans, Count of Angouleme, and died in 1409 at the age of twenty.

. . . call him Rutland. . .

The scene shifts now to the palace of Edmund of York, who is telling, with a wealth of sad emotion, how Richard and Bolingbroke arrived in London, the former to disgrace, the latter to acclaim.

This involves an anachronism. The Duchess of York, Isabella of Castile, had died in 1393, five years before the deposition. Insofar as she plays a part in this last act, she is strictly Shakespeare's invention.

In comes Aumerle, and his mother greets him by that name. York says stiffly:

*. . . Aumerle that was,
But that is lost for being Richard's friend;
And, madam, you must call him Rutland now.
I am in Parliament pledge for his truth
And lasting fealty to the new-made king.*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 41-45

Aumerle had been promoted to his dukedom after the death of Gloucester. That has now been stripped from him and he is back to his earlier title of Rutland, a mere earldom. The speeches he is given in this last act are,



however, still attributed to "Aumerle."

Aumerle's demotion was, on the whole, a light punishment, and might have been more severe if Bolingbroke were not endeavoring to make as few enemies as possible in the course of the difficult transition period.

Yet a second offense could scarcely be expected to win equally light punishment, and York quickly discovers that Aumerle/Rutland is involved in a conspiracy being set up by the Abbot of Westminster and that it plans on nothing less than the assassination of the new King. (This discovery, in actual fact, took place in January 1400, about three months after Richard's deposition.)

The seriousness of the situation is plain to Edmund of York, since he is the guarantor of his son's loyalty and will therefore be himself considered equally guilty. Hastily, he gets ready to spur to Bolingbroke to warn him of the plot and clear himself. The distracted Duchess, who can think only of her son and not of plots, urges Rutland to make all haste to Bolingbroke in order to confess and be forgiven before he can be accused. The two men leave on a mad race to the court, with the Duchess planning to hasten there herself.

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... my unthrifty son

Meanwhile, at court, where everyone is getting ready for a grand tournament and celebration at Oxford in honor of the new reign (a celebration which was to be the occasion on which the conspirators planned to kidnap and assassinate Bolingbroke), the new King is worried over something quite other than conspiracies:

*Can no man tell me of my unthrifty son?
'Tis full three months since I did see him last,
If any plague hang over us, 'tis he.*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 1-3

Bitterly, Bolingbroke states that his son is a habitue of taverns and con- sults with loose and lowborn companions.

Henry's "unthrifty son" is another Henry, born in the castle at Monmouth (on the border of southeastern Wales) on September 16, 1387.



Mary de Bohun was his mother and Eleanor de Bohun, Duchess of Gloucester (see page II-264), was both his aunt and great-aunt.

When Bolingbroke was exiled in 1398, young Henry of Monmouth remained in England, in Richard's own care. By all reports, Richard treated him well. The boy was even knighted on the occasion of the ill-fated expedition into Ireland.

In October 1399, mere weeks after Bolingbroke had become King, young Henry was created Prince of Wales. Bolingbroke was anxious, after all, to establish not merely himself on the throne, but his line as well, and by making the young boy Prince of Wales, he was establishing him as heir to the throne.

In January 1400 the Prince of Wales was only a little over twelve years old. He could scarcely be a very great habitue of taverns or a very effective consort of thieves and highwaymen.

Shakespeare is here indulging, however, in a dramatic irony that would be well appreciated by every man in the audience. Henry of Monmouth, as they would all know, was fated to become Henry V, England's most heroic king, its most perfect throned knight, the victor of her most fortunate battle, and the monarch ideal of English history. This is the person over whom Bolingbroke's concern hovers.

Henry of Monmouth was apparently a rather gay young man as Prince of Wales (and why not?), and later legend exaggerated this youthful ebullience into a kind of dissolute recklessness in order to make more wonderful and glorious the sudden conversion of a wastrel princeling into a knightly king. Shakespeare makes full use of this tale, and expounds it in the next three plays of this series.

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He lays the groundwork now, making the prince older than he really is, as earlier he had made Henry Percy considerably younger than he really was, in order that, by making the two of an age, he could prepare a dramatic contrast.



... unto the stews

Indeed, it is none other than Henry Percy who now tells the King that he has seen the Prince and told him of the coming celebration at Oxford. When Bolingbroke asks what the Prince answered, Percy says:

*His answer was, he would unto the stews,
And from the commonest creature pluck a glove,
And wear it as a favor . . .*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 16-18

One can scarcely think of a sharper gesture of contempt than to fight under the banner of a common prostitute (a "stews" is a brothel), for it mocked the rules of courtly love that held a true knight should fight for an idealized lady.

We might speculate as to why the young Prince is pictured as so contemptuous of a celebration in honor of his own father's accession to the throne, an accession that probably would (and eventually did) bring the Prince to the throne in turn.

The hostility between King and Prince, which shows itself here, and which is carried on in the next two plays, may be only the natural un-friendliness between a man in high position and his destined successor. After all, the successor waits for promotion through death, and every king must wonder what his heir is thinking and whether the princely ears might not prick up at every kingly cough. It is almost traditional in English history, particularly, that the King and the Prince of Wales be enemies.

But is there anything in this particular case of Henry Bolingbroke and Henry of Monmouth that goes beyond the stock rivalry of the monarch and his heir?

Could it be that the young Prince had loved Richard, who undeniably had charm and who had been good to the boy? Perhaps the Prince was distressed at Richard's deposition and imprisonment. Bolingbroke says he hasn't seen his son for three months. That period of time might have been plucked out of thin air by Shakespeare, but it does represent, even if only by coincidence, the time lapse since Richard's deposition.

The Prince may never have recovered from the manner in which his



fa-
ther had achieved the throne, may never have learned to value his
own
title, since he considered it tainted. There is nothing specifically to
indicate
this except, possibly, for one significant speech three plays later, but
it is
an interesting possibility.

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In this passage, concerning the Prince of Wales and the stews, Shake-
speare sets up the first contrast between that young rake and Henry
Percy;
a contrast he will use with considerable effect in the next play.

It is Henry Percy, gallant, eager after honor, a budding warrior,
who
accosts Henry of Wales. And it is Henry of Wales who gives this flip,
dis-
graceful, and even disgusting reply. But it will all come out right in the
end.

... strong and bold conspiracy

But now in comes Aumerle/Rutland, breathless, eager to confess his
crime, demanding forgiveness for something intended but not yet
com-
mitted. Following fast comes Edmund of York furiously demanding
death
for his treasonable son. And after him comes the Duchess, pleading
for
life for that same son. All three surround Bolingbroke.

To us, today, Edmund of York's wild attempts to ensure the death of
his only son and heir seem disgusting, especially in a man who, till
then,
had been so weak, and who had betrayed his own king.

However, in the medieval code, loyalty to one's liege was the
supreme
secular virtue and the equivalent of modern loyalty to the nation. I
pre-
sume we would react differently to a modern play in which a father
accuses
his son and sacrifices him to justice where that son is preparing to
betray
the United States to a wartime enemy.

In the end, Aumerle is forgiven once more, but the fact of the
conspiracy
disturbs Bolingbroke. He bursts out:

O heinous, strong and bold conspiracy!

-Act V, scene iii, line 58

What to do? The conspiracy aimed at the reinstatement of Richard.
Al-



though far away at Pomfret Castle, Richard still served as the center of disaffection and would serve as the center of more, even if this one were aborted and if Richard himself did nothing.

It would be best if Richard were to die, but would he be so obliging as to do so? Of course, Richard might be quietly killed, but if that were to happen, Bolingbroke would be handing a propaganda weapon to his enemies, the same one that Richard handed out in the killing of Thomas of Gloucester, or John had in the killing of Arthur of Brittany. What, then, to do?

Have I no friend. . .

There is a tradition that Bolingbroke made use of a device reported on several occasions in history. That is, he was supposed to have made some ruminating remark in a moment of passion where men could overhear, in

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the hope that they would act on that remark. They could then be disowned when they had done their work.

Such a remark is reported to have been made at table by Bolingbroke, according to Holinshed, and Shakespeare follows that report. One of the King's attendants, Sir Pierce Exton (who does not appear in the play before this point) overhears it and, coming onstage, immediately upon the conclusion of the scene with Rutland and his parents, says to a friend:

*Didst thou not mark the King, what words he spake?
"Have I no friend will rid me of this living fear?"*

-Act V, scene iv, lines 1-2

Exton is sure that Bolingbroke was referring to Richard II and that the friend who rid him of the ex-King would greatly profit by the deed. Off he hastens, then, to Pomfret Castle with a band of hired killers.

Actually, there is no real evidence in favor of this. There is only Holinshed's weak statement that "One writer, which seemeth to have great knowledge of King Richard's doings, saith that. . ."

The remark of Bolingbroke, "Have I no friend will rid me of this living fear?" could well have been borrowed from the well-known tale



concern-
 ing the earlier king, Henry II (see page II-205). In 1170 he had made
 such a remark in connection with his bitter enemy, Thomas Becket,
 Arch-
 bishop of Canterbury, who was then slain in his own cathedral by four
 of
 the King's knights.

Taste of it first. . .

The real cause of Richard's death remains a mystery. He may have
 been
 killed, of course, at Bolingbroke's orders, but one good possibility is
 that
 he died of starvation. He may have been deliberately starved (that
 leaves
 no marks for suspicious eyes searching for evidence of murder and
 can
 be
 represented as a wasting illness) or perhaps he starved himself, either
 out
 of a desire to avoid lingering out a life of imprisonment or out of a
 morbid
 fear of poison.

There is an indication of this last in the scene in Pomfret Castle that
 fol-
 lows, a scene that is Richard's last appearance in the play. The keeper
 brings Richard a meal and Richard says:

Taste of it first, as thou art wont to do.

-Act V, scene v, line 99

But the meal goes uneaten. In Shakespeare's version, it is now that
 Exton
 and his crew break in and Richard is killed. This takes place at the
 begin-
 ning of February 1400, some four months after Richard's deposition.

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Our town of Ciceter . . .

Meanwhile, the conspirators, finding that Aumerle does not join them,
 suspect they have been betrayed. They abandon their attempt to
 kidnap

Bolingbroke and in desperation (for they will surely be executed if caught,
 for the intention alone) gather their men for a fight.

They fall back to the west, where half a year before the earlier forces
 loyal to Richard had tried to make their stand, and a battle develops.

None of this is described in the play, but immediately after Richard's
 death, the scene shifts back to Windsor Castle and Bolingbroke reports
 the progress of that battle. He says:

. . . the latest news we hear



*Is that the rebels have consumed with fire
Our town of Ciceter in Gloucestershire,*

-Act V, scene vi, lines 1-3

Ciceter is the slurred form of Cirencester, a town twenty miles east of Berkeley, where Edmund of York had once tried to resist Bolingbroke.

Northumberland, however, quickly arrives with the news that the rebels have been defeated and their military leaders executed. This includes the Earl of Salisbury, who the previous summer had tried to hold the Welsh army together for Richard. The Abbot of Westminster also dies, but the Bishop of Carlisle is merely ordered into seclusion (though he died soon after).

... a voyage to the Holy Land

Now that the last armed partisans of Richard are dead, there is only Richard himself, and his role is finished too, for Exton brings in the coffin containing the dead ex-King. (The body must be viewed, else there will be no way of preventing imposters from claiming they are the supposedly dead King and being followed by many loyal but misled men. It has happened many times in history both before and after the time of Richard II.)

Thus is Bolingbroke's triumph and Richard's fall complete, and yet there remains one thing to be done. It must not appear that Bolingbroke desired the death, or Richard might still win in the very act of dying.

Bolingbroke therefore turns on Exton in execration, and when the murderer protests that he but took the King at his word, Bolingbroke says:

*They love not poison that do poison need,
Nor do I thee . . .*

-Act V, scene vi, lines 38-39

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This Machiavellian doctrine may be well understood by the men of the court, learned in power politics, but there are the common people, to whom the murder of a king, even a deposed king, is a horrible crime.

Guilty or innocent, then, Bolingbroke must do penance. He must make a show of grief, of having loved the ex-King. He must bury him with full honor, and then do even more, for he says:

*I'll make a voyage to the Holy Land,
To wash this blood off from my guilty hand,*



-Act V, scene vi, lines 49-50

He never does this, partly because he never has the opportunity. The guilt he has incurred and his uncertain claim to the crown keep him facing further conspiracies.

But this final reference to the Holy Land fits in with another reference to the Holy Land with which the next play, *Henry IV, Part One*, begins, so that the two melt together with scarcely a seam.

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The History of

HENRY IV, PART ONE

i

In 1597, two years after *Richard II* had been presented, *Henry IV, Part One* was written. Its action follows almost immediately upon that of the former play. *Richard II* closed with the death of Richard II (see page II-312) in February 1400. *Henry IV, Part One* opens a little over two years later, in June 1402, in the King's palace in London.

The King is Henry IV, who in *Richard II* was Henry of Bolingbroke, Duke of Hereford, and later (after the death of his father, John of Gaunt)

the Duke of Lancaster. In the previous play, his speeches were labeled "Bolingbroke." Now they are labeled "King."

In *Richard II*, Bolingbroke was pictured as a young man, dominating and forceful. Now he is pictured as an old man, tired and worn. Actually, he was still only thirty-six years old when the play opens, but this is actually middle age by medieval standards.

In addition, Henry IV suffered some chronic disease through most of his

reign. This grew gradually worse and made him seem older than he was. The disease involved skin lesions as its most notable symptom and many at the time considered it to be leprosy striking him in divine punishment for his crime of taking the throne from the legitimate king, Richard II.

It seems very doubtful that this was so, however, and some suggest syphilis instead, though at this time that disease had not yet become prominent in

Europe. It may have been something as common and as undramatic as psoriasis.

But even if Henry IV were in complete health, he might well have sunk under the cares of state, for during much of his reign he was occupied with

the suppression of revolt, and of wars with the Welsh and Scots, who



seized
on the confusion of civil war among the English to advance their own
national ambitions.

... to the sepulcher of Christ

Henry strikes the theme of his reign in the first line of the play:

So shaken we are, so wan with care,

-Act I, scene i, line 1

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Then, after bemoaning the continuing disputes that embroil the
land, he
hopes for respite so that he might embark on an expedition that was
a longed-for ambition of his:

*... Therefore, friends,
As far as to the sepulcher of Christ-
Whose soldier now, under whose blessed cross
We are impressed and engaged to fight-
Forthwith a power of English shall we levy,
Whose arms were molded in their mother's womb
To chase these pagans in those holy fields*

-Act I, scene i, lines 18-24

Henry had promised to go to the Holy Land to do penance for the
death
of Richard II (see page II-314) at the close of *Richard II*, and he is still
trying.

It is a forlorn hope and it is quite certain that if he really had
attempted
to lead a Crusade, it would have led only to disaster, for the Ottoman
Em-
pire, which was at that time the principal Moslem power, was far
stronger
than any army any Western power could send against it.

Yet one can understand Henry's longing to do *something* to
convince
the nation that he was in God's good grace, *something* to make his
rule
completely legitimate. Not only would that put an end to civil war, but
it
would ensure the safety of his line, for it would mean that his son and
his
son's son would be legitimate kings in their turn.

... my gentle cousin Westmorland

Having made this resolve, King Henry turns to the nobleman at his
side,



and says:

*. . . Then let me hear
Of you, my gentle cousin Westmorland,
What yesternight our council did decree
In forwarding this dear expedience.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 30-33

The man addressed here is Ralph Neville, 1st Earl of Westmoreland.

He had originally been a follower of Thomas of Gloucester (see page II-264) and had been knighted in 1380 by that nobleman.

Young Neville showed a masterly ability to choose the winner. When the showdown came between Thomas of Gloucester and King Richard II, Neville was on the side of the King and against his earlier patron. In 1397, after Gloucester's imprisonment and death, Neville was rewarded with the earldom of Westmoreland.

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Meanwhile, he had further advanced his hopes by a marriage to a daughter of the wealthy John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster.

John of Gaunt had had, in addition to his legitimate offspring, several children by his mistress, Catherine Swynford. He later married Catherine and legitimized those children. It was one of these legitimized children-Joan Beaufort-that Ralph Neville married.

This made him brother-in-law (or half brother-in-law) to Henry Bolingbroke, who was John of Gaunt's oldest son by his legitimate wife. When Bolingbroke became King Henry IV, Ralph Neville of Westmoreland became the King's "gentle cousin," for "cousin" in Shakespearean terms was a general term for any relative.

What's more, when Bolingbroke had landed in England and began his rebellion against Richard II (see page II-287), Westmoreland quickly chose the winning side again and once again profited. Under King Henry, he was put in charge of the western frontier and supervised the fighting against the Welsh.

. . . the noble Mortimer

Westmoreland, listening to this useless talk of the Holy Land, quashes it at once. Yes, the question of a Crusade was being discussed, but then came news of a serious defeat in the west:

*. . . the noble Mortimer
Leading the men of Herefordshire to fight
Against the irregular and wild Glendower,*



*Was by the rude hands of that Welshman taken,
A thousand of his people butchered;*

-Act I, scene i, lines 38-42

Who is "the noble Mortimer"? To straighten that out and see the significance of his capture, let us go back to Edward III and his seven sons (see page II-259).

The first was Edward, the Black Prince, and it was his son who became King Richard II. The fourth son was John of Gaunt, and it was his son, Bolingbroke, who succeeded Richard II and reigned as Henry IV.

But, according to the tenets of strict legitimacy, once Richard II was dead, the next king should be drawn from the line of the second son of Edward III. Failing that, the line of the third son should follow. Only failing that, too, could Henry IV be considered legitimate king.

Edward's second son was William of Hatfield, who died a boy, leaving no descendants of any kind. Edward's third son was Lionel of Antwerp, Duke of Clarence. Lionel died in 1368, but by then he had reached the age

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of thirty, had married, and had had a child. It was a daughter, named Philippa.

Philippa married Edmund Mortimer, 3rd Earl of March. ("March" means "borderland" and the name is applied to districts on the Welsh border.) Edmund Mortimer died in Ireland in 1381.

By that time, though, he had a son, Roger Mortimer, who became the 4th Earl of March. This fourth earl, who succeeded while Richard II was still King, was, in point of fact, the heir to the throne if Richard should die without children. March was, through his mother, the grandson of the third son of Edward III; Bolingbroke was only the son of the fourth son of Edward III.

Richard II recognized the 4th Earl of March as his heir and made him his deputy in Ireland after the first and relatively successful royal expedition to Ireland (see page II-277). But then in 1398 Roger Mortimer was assassinated and that was the immediate occasion for Richard's second, and thoroughly disastrous, expedition to Ireland (see page II-292).

Roger Mortimer had, however, left a son, Edmund Mortimer, 5th Earl of March, and him Richard at once recognized as next in line to the throne. However, Richard was deposed the next year by Bolingbroke, who took the throne for himself without regard to young Edmund of March, who was great-grandson of third son, Lionel-but who was only eight years old.

At eight, the "rightful heir" was not dangerous, but he could be used as a puppet by older men who could rebel in the sacred name of legitimacy. Besides, he would grow older. The 'cautious Henry IV therefore placed the Earl of March and a younger brother in strict custody and kept them



thus throughout the reign.

But then, who was this Mortimer who had been defeated by the Welsh? It was *Sir* Edmund Mortimer, an uncle of the 5th Earl of March and not himself the legitimate heir. He is at best third in line, after nephew Edmund and his younger brother Roger.

Holinshed, from whom Shakespeare obtains much historical information for this play, confuses the two Edmund Mortimers, uncle and nephew, and thinks it is the uncle, leading the armies, who is the rightful heir to the throne (as though Henry IV were such a madman as to give an army to the rightful heir).

Shakespeare, following Holinshed, makes the same mistake and throughout *Henry IV, Part One* has his characters act as though the legitimate heir to the throne has been captured by the Welsh.

As for Glendower, he was pictured as heading Welsh forces during the time, two years before, when Bolingbroke had rebelled against Richard II (see page II-294).

Glendower had had an English education, and his serious rebellion against the English began in September 1400, after Henry IV had been King for half a year, partly because of personal feuds with a neighboring English lord and partly because the confusion inherent in the beginning

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of the reign of a king considered a usurper by many offered him troubled water to fish in.

Glendower's rebellion did best in south Wales. His capture of Mortimer, which took place on June 22, 1402, not only enhanced his prestige but gave him an opportunity for meddling in internal English politics.

. . . *the gallant Hotspur* . . .

Westmoreland has further news, not quite so bad and yet not good either, for it concerns a battle in progress, with no clear knowledge as yet as to its outcome. This second battle is on the Scottish border. Westmoreland says:

*On Holy-rood Day the gallant Hotspur there,
Young Harry Percy, and brave Archibald,
That ever-valiant and approved Scot,
At Holmedon met. . .*

-Act I, scene i, lines 52-55

Holy-Rood Day (Holy-Cross Day, for "rood" is the Anglo-Saxon equivalent of the Latin-derived "cross") is September 14. The day celebrates the anniversary of the return of the Holy Cross (upon which Jesus was crucified) to Jerusalem by the East Roman Emperor Heraclius. This took place in 627, after Heraclius had defeated the Persians, who had captured Jerusalem and taken the Cross thirteen years earlier. (Seven years later the Moslem Arabs took Jerusalem and the Cross was lost forever, so that the celebration of Heraclius' feat was really a rather hollow one.)



This battle with the Scots took place, indeed, after the battle with the Welsh, but nearly three months after. For dramatic purposes, Shakespeare compresses time so as to make it seem that they took place almost together.

Harry Percy, who led the English side in this battle with the Scots, played a small part in *Richard II*. He is the son of Northumberland, who in *Richard II* was the most prominent of Bolingbroke's partisans.

In *Richard II*, Harry Percy was presented as a young man, a teen-age stripling. Now, two years later, he is depicted as a seasoned warrior, though still young, and is given his nickname "Hotspur" (see page II-288). In the interval between the plays he had led the campaign against Glendower and had cleared north Wales of the insurgents (though leaving the Welshman strong in south Wales).

However, he had been fighting long before then, for he was, in actual fact, no young man at all, but thirty-eight years old, two years older than the King himself.

Seventeen years before, Hotspur had been engaged in another battle

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on the Scottish border which had gone down in legend. The battle involved the earls of Douglas, who dominated the south of medieval Scotland as the Percys dominated the north of medieval England. The two families engaged in border warfare with scant regard for the central government on either side.

In 1388 James, 2nd Earl of Douglas, invaded England and besieged Newcastle (about forty miles south of the border) for three days. He captured Hotspur's battle flag and Hotspur, to retrieve this blow to his military reputation, forced a battle at Otterburn near the border. The Scots won again and Hotspur was captured-but Douglas was killed. This battle inspired (in a badly distorted way) a well-known ballad, "Chevy Chase."

Hotspur was released on payment of a heavy ransom, much of which was contributed by Richard II, whom Hotspur repaid rather foully ten years later.

James was succeeded by a bastard son, Archibald, the 3rd Earl of Douglas. He died at the end of 1400, and was succeeded by his son, another Archibald, the 4th Earl. It is the 4th Earl of Douglas who is "brave Archibald."

The 4th Earl of Douglas invaded England in 1402 and at Holmedon (Humbleton) in Northumberland met the same Hotspur who had once fought against his grandfather. (Naturally, Shakespeare cannot make use of this interesting fact, since it would wreck the basic interest of the play, which depends on making Hotspur and the Prince of Wales approximately the same age. Hotspur's age may be supposed to be in the early twenties, as far as this play is concerned.)

Sir Walter Blunt. . .

Westmoreland's news of an uncertain battle is capped by the King himself, however, for a new messenger has just arrived and has brought later



news. The King introduces the messenger, saying:

*Here is a dear, a true industrious friend,
Sir Walter Blunt, new lighted from his horse,*

-Act I, scene i, lines 62-63

Blunt (his name was actually Blount) is a veteran soldier, who had been with the Black Prince on his victorious foray into Spain thirty-five years before (see page II-260) and had also accompanied John of Gaunt on his much less fortunate Spanish venture (see page II-263). Now he was serving the son as loyally as he had served the father.

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Mordake, Earl of Fife . . .

The news Blunt brings is good. Hotspur has won a great victory.

Hotspur did it, actually, by the cool use of archery from long distance, while the Scots vainly tried to charge into close quarters, with no archers

of their own to cover. It was as though two armies were fighting today and only one had air support. It was a slaughter and the Scots lost ten thousand against very few English. (Even allowing for inevitable exaggeration by the victors, it was a slaughter.)

What was most important was that a number of high-ranking Scots noble-men were captured. The King lists them:

*. . . Of prisoners, Hotspur took
Mordake, Earl of Fife and eldest son
To beaten Douglas, and the Earl of Athol,
Of Murray, Angus, and Menteith.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 70-73

Of these, the most important is the first mentioned, Mordake (or Murdoch, as we would spell it today), Earl of Fife. He was the son of Robert Stuart, 1st Duke of Albany (and *not* the son of Douglas).

This actually makes him a still higher prize, for Robert Stuart's older brother, John, had been reigning as King of Scotland since 1390, under the name of Robert III. The King was old and incapacitated, so that Robert Stuart, the younger brother, was the regent and the actual ruler.

Hotspur had thus captured the son of the regent of Scotland and the nephew of the reigning King.

. . . my young Harry

The joy of the victory and the great honor it brings Hotspur forces a sad thought to the mind of the King. When Westmoreland joins in the praise of Hotspur, the King says:

*Yea, there thou mak'st me sad, and mak'st me sin
In envy that my Lord Northumberland*



*Should be the father to so blest a son:
A son who is the theme of honor's tongue,
Who is sweet fortune's minion and her pride;
Whilst I, by looking on the praise of him,
See riot and dishonor stain the brow
Of my young Harry . . .*

-Act I, scene i, lines 78-85a

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Here is the central conflict of the play. A kind of twin character is presented, both named Harry, both of an age. One is all good: martial, honor-seeking, brave, and knightly to a fault. The other is all bad: dissolute, disregarding his position, the friend of blackguards.

It is in order to set up this conflict that Shakespeare has taken nearly twenty years off Hotspur's age. What's more, he has had to add a few years to the Prince's age (the King's "young Harry," who is the Prince of Wales), for at the time of the Battle of Holmedon, the King's son was, in actual fact, only fifteen years old.

Yet, even at this young age, the Prince of Wales has already been campaigning in north Wales. With whom? Why, with Hotspur himself. In real history, in other words, Hotspur has taken the young Prince campaigning with him and has undoubtedly been like a father to him; he was old enough.

But, however much they made a kind of father-and-son pair in history, they make a brother-and-brother pair in Shakespeare, and so effective is this play under the lash of Shakespeare's transcendent genius, that history is forever thrust out of the arena.

Shakespeare has immortalized the rakehell Prince as he has immortalized the gallant young Hotspur, and no possible debunking in this book or any other can wipe out the Shakespearean picture and replace it with what is, after all, merely truth.

. . . mine Percy, his Plantagenet

The sorrowing King can only wish that it could turn out somehow that matters had been reversed. He says:

*. . . O that it could be proved
That some night-tripping fairy had exchanged
In cradle clothes our children where they lay,
And called mine Percy, his Plantagenet!*

-Act I, scene i, lines 85b-88

Edward III had been a Plantagenet by virtue of his descent from Henry II through an unbroken line of males (see page II-212). All the descendants of Edward III, through the male line only, were Plantagenets too.



The Prince of Wales was the son of the son of the son of Edward III and was therefore a Plantagenet.

... *young Percy's pride*

But then King Henry turns away from his self-pity and approaches
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something more important—the insubordination of Hotspur. The gallant young man had taken an important prisoner, and prisoners were valuable, for they could be ransomed for large sums. (Hotspur himself, remember, had been captured and ransomed at a high price after the Battle of Otterburn.)

The King says indignantly to Westmoreland:

... *What think you, coz,
Of this young Percy's pride? The prisoners
Which he in this adventure hath surprised [captured]
To his own use he keeps, and sends me word
I shall have none but Mordake, Earl of Fife.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 90-94

The King apparently feels that a victory by any Englishman was a victory for England and that any prisoners taken were therefore the King's (today we would say "the national government's") and not the general's.

This, however, Hotspur refuses to allow. The ancient practice of the border armies was to make personal profit of the prisoners, and he was not going to be denied his ransoms, which were earned at the peril of his life.

Indeed, this is an example of the kind of quarrel that was bound to arise in a land whose King had come to the throne in the fashion that Henry IV had. The nobles (including Henry IV himself, then Bolingbroke) had rebelled against Richard II's arrogation of too much power to tax and control. The Percys had been foremost in this rebellion and without them Henry could not have reached the throne. Having fought for freedom from centralized "tyranny" (for "states' rights," to use our own nearly equivalent term), the Percys naturally felt they ought to have it and that Henry IV, whom they had helped to the throne in that cause, should certainly not be the one to deny them.

Henry IV, however, once in power, could see no way of conducting the



affairs of the kingdom but in the very way Richard II did. He had to increase his powers and get money wherever he could, for he needed money as badly as ever Richard did.

The quarrel was irreconcilable but it must be said that consistency seemed to be on the side of the Percys. Indeed, Hotspur might fairly argue that he was proposing a generous compromise against his own best interest. Mordake, whom he was proposing to surrender to the King, was the most important prisoner he had, and was likely to bring the highest ransom. The King, in rejecting that offer and demanding all, must have seemed simply a greedy tyrant to the Percys.

(Shakespeare followed Holinshed in this matter of the prisoners, by the way, and Holinshed may be wrong. There is reason to think that, in actuality, King Henry grudgingly conceded the point. But if he did so, it didn't change matters. The quarrel between centralization and decentrali-

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zation was irrepressible and if it was patched over here, it would simply break out there.)

. . . *his uncle's teaching* . . .

Westmoreland, on hearing the news of the quarrel over the prisoners, considers Hotspur too young to be the true instigator. There are older, more conspiratorial heads behind it. He says, wrathfully:

*This is his uncle's teaching, this is Worcester,
Malevolent to you in all aspects,*

-Act I, scene i, lines 95-96

Worcester was Sir Thomas Percy, Earl of Worcester, who had broken with Richard II rather late in the day (see page II-288). He was the younger brother of the Duke of Northumberland and therefore the uncle of Hotspur.

The fact that he hesitated before joining the rest of the Percys in the rebellion against Richard II may well have meant that he was inclined toward Richard or that he disliked or distrusted Bolingbroke (or both) and that he abandoned the former for the latter only when it became unsafe to do otherwise. It would therefore be quite credible that he should be the readiest of the Percys to consider a rebellion against the new King.

As it turns out, Westmoreland's suspicions of Worcester are quite correct, but we cannot expect the former to attempt to smooth matters over



in any case. Westmoreland was of the Neville family, after all, and they are a northern family who had long been enemies of the Percys. Westmoreland would be only too eager to see them in trouble.

Now, Hal . . .

The King decides to call the Percys to his palace at Windsor for a conference on the matter, and so ends the first scene, filled with matters of state, with battles lost and won, with warriors and rebels, with anger and danger. That done, Shakespeare switches to the London lodgings of the Prince of Wales.

Here, however, as King Henry had indicated, is no Hotspur; no knight of storybook honor and valor. Instead, we have a gay and thoroughly human youngster, with his boon companion, a grossly fat, dissolute, white-haired old villain, who, without a single saving grace but his wit, manages to be so entirely lovable as to win his way not only into the Prince's heart, but into the audience's as well.

The fat old man is Sir John Falstaff, and though he is not a historical

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character, but is an almost whole-cloth creation of Shakespeare's, he is more real to the reader in his gross humanity than anyone else in the play. He bursts into the scene at once, speaking even before the Prince does:

Now, Hal, what time of day is it, lad?

-Act I, scene ii, line 1

(Because Falstaff consistently calls the Prince by this ultrashort nickname, one less formal, even, than Harry, the Prince is best known in this play as "Prince Hal.")

Now what sparked Shakespeare in the direction of this fat wonder?

One of Shakespeare's sources for *Henry IV, Part One* was a play by an anonymous writer entitled *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, which covered the ground in this play and in the two following, *Henry IV, Part Two* and *Henry V*, but was shorter than any one of these. *The Famous Victories* contained the legend of Prince Hal's wild youth and his sudden reformation at his coronation.

In *The Famous Victories* are the germs of some of the events in Shakespeare's plays, but one has only to read the episodes of the earlier play and the corresponding episodes in Shakespeare to see, with amazement, how much can be done with how little, in the hands of a genius.

In *The Famous Victories*, one of the Prince's companions was Sir John



("Jockey") Oldcastle, and Shakespeare borrowed that name, but nothing else. The John Oldcastle of the older play had not a scrap of wit or of anything worth remembering; whereas Shakespeare's John Oldcastle was and remains one of the greatest comic creations of all time.

Well then, who was John Oldcastle? Is there anyone by that name who was indeed a companion of the Prince and who was turned away after the Prince had become King (which, as we shall see, was the affecting and tragic climax of Falstaff's life)?

There was, as it happens, a Sir John Oldcastle in history, and he was indeed a friend of Prince Hal. He was not, however, an old man, nor was he fat or dissolute. He was no more than ten years older than the Prince and twenty-five years old, perhaps, at the time of Hotspur's victory over the Scots. He was an able warrior who took part in Hotspur's expedition into north Wales, and it was at that time that he grew friendly with the young Prince of Wales, who was also present on that expedition.

Oldcastle kept Hal's friendship throughout the period that he was Prince of Wales and, what's more, continued to keep it after Hal became King Henry V.

In 1408 (six years after the opening events of *Henry IV, Part One* and while Hal was still Prince of Wales) Oldcastle married an heiress of the wealthy Cobham family and eventually could be styled Lord Cobham. He had every right to look forward to honored old age or to an honored death in battle.

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There was but one flaw. He was unorthodox in his religion.

Some thirty years before *Henry IV, Part One's* opening events, an English religious reformer, John Wycliffe, had developed a doctrine very much like those developed by the moderate Protestants a century and a half later. Despite the opposition of the orthodox, Wycliffe lived out his life in safety and died a natural death in peace in 1384, because of the protection afforded him by none other than John of Gaunt, the father of Henry IV.

Wycliffe left behind disciples called "Lollards" (from a Dutch word meaning "mumbler," applied to them derisively because they were always



mumbling prayers). The church authorities strenuously opposed Lollardism, and Henry IV, whose flawed title made it expedient for him to gather friends anywhere he could, turned against those whom his father had protected.

The Lollards found their converts chiefly among the lower classes, so the movement was fairly easy to oppress and, eventually, suppress, but some few noblemen were converted. One of these was Sir John Oldcastle. What is more, he was a convinced and dedicated Lollard who was determined to keep his faith to the death.

By the time Hal became King Henry V, the oppression of Lollardism had reached the point where Oldcastle's life was in danger. Henry V, who did not want to harm the friend of his youth, but who could not resist church pressures forever (particularly since he needed church funds for his own aggressive designs against France), personally appealed to Oldcastle to submit and to renounce his heresy.

Oldcastle refused and was eventually condemned as a heretic in September of 1413. The King granted him a forty-day stay of execution, hoping he would reconsider. He didn't; he escaped instead, and tried to raise a rebellion. Part of its aim was the kidnapping of the King.

The uprising was pitifully inept and failed, but Oldcastle escaped again and wandered the Welsh hills for nearly four years before he was finally captured. At last, on December 14, 1417, he was executed in the fashion of the time; that is, as a heretic, he was suspended over a slow fire and gradually roasted to death. Henry V could not save him.

Why was Sir John Oldcastle, brave warrior, earnest reformer, and martyr, so scurrilously treated in *The Famous Victories*? He was a heretic, wasn't he? And a traitor too? And the author of the play was, as the play itself shows, an untalented scribbler incapable of rising above the stereotype.

The Cobhams, however, were still a noble and influential family in Shakespeare's time. They might ignore the existence of Sir John Oldcastle in *The Famous Victories*, where he played a small role in a poor play unworthy of notice.

When Shakespeare's play was put on the stage, though, and became an

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instant hit, with Sir John Oldcastle the very center of its fun, the Cobhams roared with anger. In addition, England was now largely Protestant and Oldcastle was viewed as a proto-Protestant and martyr, so that the Cobhams were not alone in their indignation. Shakespeare, for all his genius, had a strong commercial sense. He was not going to do anything really unpopular, so he instantly agreed to change the name and made that change before the printed version of the play appeared.

The change in the name did no good at all for the Lord Cobham of Shakespeare's time. His political opponents promptly dubbed him "Sir John Falstaff."

But having erased Oldcastle's name, where did Shakespeare come upon Falstaff?

Well, Prince Hal, after he became King, had another associate, Sir



John Fastolfe, who fought with him in France and bore himself well in many battles. There was one occasion, though, when he was accused of cowardice. It was a wrongful accusation and he eventually justified himself. However, in Shakespeare's early play *Henry VI, Part One*, Fastolfe briefly appears as a cowardly runaway.

What more did Shakespeare need? Here was an associate of Prince Hal who proved cowardly. He altered a few letters in the name and so was born Sir John Falstaff.

... *old sack* . . .

Falstaff and Prince Hal engage in a battle of wits, which is, as always in the play, a standoff. The Prince is constantly on the attack, for Falstaff is a marvelous target (both literally and figuratively); yet Falstaff can nimbly dodge any blow and turn it back again.

Much of the flavor of these exchanges has dimmed with time and obsolescence, however, to say nothing of changes in fashion as far as what is and isn't considered funny. Matters of obsolescence can be corrected in footnotes and commentary, but this cannot restore spontaneity of appreciation, of course. Still, as examples, Prince Hal's first comments to Falstaff begin:

Thou art so fat-witted with drinking of old sack. . .

-Act I, scene ii, lines 2-3

It is clear from the context that sack is a kind of alcoholic drink, yet it is not one that is familiar to us today, even though it is so closely associated with Falstaff that we can scarcely think of one without the other.

It is simply any dry wine, which is *vin sec* in French, with "sack" as an Anglicization of the French *sec*. Sack came to be associated in particular with the dry wines of southern Europe, such as the white sherry of Spain.

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Then again, Falstaff begins at one point:

Marry, then, sweet wag. . .

-Act I, scene ii, line 23

"Marry" is a common Elizabethan interjection that we don't use nowa-days and that seems to make no sense. Why "marry"? It is an oath, a shortened form of "By the Virgin Mary" (just as "dear me" is supposed to be from the Italian *dio mio*, or "my God"). Oaths have a way of sterilizing themselves in order that they might enter respectable society.

... *my old lad of the castle*



One particular thrust and riposte has more than ordinary interest. Falstaff wickedly deflects some of Prince Hal's jabs by bringing in one of the tavern women as a non sequitur, saying:

... is not my hostess of the tavern a most sweet wench?
-Act I, scene ii, lines 41-42

Prince Hal, twisting agilely, says:

*As the honey of Hybla, my old lad of the castle-and is not
a buffjerkin a most sweet robe of durance?*
-Act I, scene ii, lines 43-45

Hybla is proverbial for the sweetness of its honey, so Hal is agreeing with Falstaff in most equable fashion-but the sting follows immediately.

"The Castle" was a well-known London brothel and Falstaff's propensities

are thus hinted at. The play on words would have been perfect if the original name of the character, Oldcastle, had been kept. This play on words now remains as a mere fossil trace, so to speak, of that name.

Shake-

speare didn't change this passage, either because of negligence or because he couldn't bear to give up the joke.

And then Hal stings Falstaff still harder by bringing in a buff jerkin as a balancing non sequitur. "Durance" means durability but it also means

imprisonment. Prince Hal might be innocently commending the good wear-

ing qualities of a garment, but since sheriffs officers wore these buff jer-

kins (tan leather jackets), he might also be implying that Falstaff would

eventually end in prison, if nothing worse.

Falstaff takes it in its worse sense and is jarred out of his good humor.

He says, irritably:

... What a plague have I to do with a buffjerkin?
-Act I, scene ii, lines 47-48

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To this, Prince Hal retorts at once with a balancing:

Why, what a pox have I to do with my hostess of the tavern?
-Act I, scene ii, lines 49-50

The "pox" is, of course, syphilis; an indication of what might occur to those who have to do with my hostess of the tavern or other such light wenches. The mention is anachronistic, though not as anachronistic as in *Troilus and Cressida* (see page I-106).

Prince Hal's scornful denial of having anything to do with "my hostess of the tavern" is to be noted. Shakespeare is careful of the dignity of the



future hero-king.

Hal does indeed consort with low companions, but he does and says nothing really disgraceful. He participates in a robbery, as we shall see, but only as part of a practical joke, and he makes amends for it. He drinks, to be sure, but is never shown the worse for liquor, let alone actually drunk. Most of all, he is never tarred with sexual immorality. Shakespeare never shows him as anything worse than a young man with a keen sense of humor and a liking for horseplay. A little worse than this, perhaps, is the fact that for the sake of amusement, he will tolerate rather disgraceful behavior on the part of those who amuse him.

. . . wisdom cries out. . .

But Prince Hal's toleration is not something that makes him blind to wicked behavior. Rather he uses it as a butt for irony. We might speculate that he relishes Falstaff even more for the excellent target he makes than for the wit of his rejoinders.

Thus, Falstaff begins to talk lugubriously of reforming (as he does periodically) and says, in mock sorrow, that a dignified old lord had scolded him in the open street (presumably for corrupting the Prince). Falstaff had not listened. He says, sighing:

. . . and yet he talked wisely, and in the street too.

-Act I, scene ii, lines 90-91

Prince Hal seizes upon the expression at once to deliver a devastating biblical jab, saying:

Thou didst well, for wisdom cries out in the streets, and no man regards it.

-Act I, scene ii, lines 92-93

This is a reference to a verse in the Book of Proverbs, which reads:

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"Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets" (Proverbs 1:20).

The irony in that "Thou didst well" lies in what follows that verse in the Bible, and what follows must be well known to Falstaff, who is both educated and intelligent. It is a warning that since personified Wisdom has cried out and was disregarded she would in turn desert those who had not heeded her in their hour of need. Personified Wisdom says, "I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh."

The comment might therefore be regarded as a threat to Falstaff from the Prince; a threat which, in the end, is carried out.

The disconcerted Falstaff manages to return to his protestations of reform, but when the Prince suddenly suggests a bit of purse snatching, avid old Falstaff is ready at once. The Prince laughs and Falstaff says of purse snatching in a tone of wounded dignity:



*Why, Hal, 'tis my vocation, Hal. 'Tis no sin for a man to labor
in his vocation.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 108-9

And of course, Prince Hal must laugh and own defeat when faced with so wildly and madly inadequate a defense. For the fun of watching Falstaff squirm out of anything, he will forgive him everything-or almost everything.

... at Gad's Hill...

Yet the reference to purse snatching gets the audience ready for something serious. If there is one definite item in the tales of Prince Hal's wildness (one that is included as the opening episode in *The Famous Victories of Henry V*), it is the legend that Prince Hal was involved in a piece of highway robbery.

Shakespeare cannot do without it-it is too much a part of the story as known to everyone (like Washington and the cherry tree)-but he transmutes it beyond recognition. Falstaff, fencing verbally with the Prince, is looking forward to some more serious action. There is a plan for a robbery on foot and Falstaff means to get a share of the loot.

Poins, another one of the Prince's low companions, enters and announces that arrangements have been indeed made for the robbery. He says:

... tomorrow morning, by four o'clock early [4 A.M.], at Gad's Hill! There are pilgrims going to Canterbury with rich offerings, and traders riding to London with fat purses. I have vizards [masks] for you all; you have horses for yourselves.

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Gadshill lies tonight in Rochester. I have bespoke [reserved] supper tomorrow night in Eastcheap.

-Act I, scene ii, lines 128-34

Canterbury lies fifty miles southeast of London, and is the spiritual center of England, as London is the temporal center. Between pious pilgrims carrying offerings to Canterbury and rich merchants carrying money to London, the road between is a gold mine for highwaymen. Poins is promising they can complete the job and be back in Eastcheap (a lower-class district in London) having a good supper by night, and the richer for much loot.

About halfway between Canterbury and London is the town of Roches-



ter, where Gadshill (another of the worthless crew with whom the Prince amuses himself) has arranged all the necessary details and where he is staying.

The similarity between Gadshill, the man, and Gad's Hill, the place where the robbery is planned, is confusing, but the first is derived from the second. In *The Famous Victories* there is a character called "the Thief," whose name is Cutbert Cutter, but who is nicknamed "Gad's Hill," presumably because that is his favored spot for thievery.

Gad's Hill (or Gadshill) itself is a low hill about three miles northwest of Rochester, where, presumably, highwaymen can command a prospect of the road in either direction, and which was notorious for the robberies committed there. (Its greatest fame, next to the fictional events upon it described in this play, is the fact that it was the home of the English novelist Charles Dickens in his later years. He died in Gadshill in 1870.)

...Not I...

Yet although legend makes Prince Hal a participant in the robbery, Shakespeare softens the blow. When Falstaff invites Prince Hal to be a member of the gang, Hal says indignantly:

Who, I rob? I a thief? Not I, by my faith.

-Act I, scene ii, line 142

And despite a momentary temptation to waver, he holds fast to his refusal to be a thief, though he makes no attempt to sway the others against the action.

Poins, however, takes an opportunity to speak to Prince Hal alone and induces him to take part in a practical joke. Falstaff and the others will indeed be allowed to hold up merchants and steal their money, but then Poins and the Prince, masked beyond recognition, will rob the robbers in

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their turn. The hope is that later that evening, Falstaff will be sure to tell monstrous lies to explain matters and will be trapped in them.

In this way, Prince Hal participates in the robbery only out of an irrepressible desire to play a practical joke, and this is a weakness which men are quite apt to excuse.

/ know you all...

Yet still Shakespeare seems nervous. He simply cannot allow Prince Hal, the future hero-king, to be too base to begin with, despite all the legends in the world. He must supply him with a motive for his undignified behavior, and one that sounds as noble as possible.

Therefore, when Falstaff and Poins are gone and he is alone on the stage, he looks after them thoughtfully and says:

*/ know you all, and will awhile uphold
The unyoked humor of your idleness.*



*Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
To smother up his beauty from the world,
That, when he please again to be himself,
Being wanted, he may be more wond'ered at*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 199-205

Prince Hal is pictured as not serious in his tomfoolery, as aware all along of his own greatness, and indeed, as following a deliberate design of increasing that greatness by its contrast with his earlier follies.

This may have gone over with an Elizabethan audience to whom Henry V was a half-divine memory, but it rings completely false to us. It is out of character for the Prince, and indeed, if it were to be taken seriously, it would lessen our regard for him. To play the fool out of high spirits and youthful zest can be endearing; to do so out of deep political calculation is repellent.

However, the speech need not be taken as a real part of the play itself. It is Shakespeare speaking to the audience, assuring them that Prince Hal is really going to be the hero-king someday and that they need not be disturbed at the Gad's Hill incident.

Needless to say, there is nothing at all in the legend of Prince Hal to indicate that he was roistering out of deep policy.

The scourge of greatness. . .

Back the scene shifts now to high politics. At Windsor Castle, the King
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is confronting the Percys in anger over the matter of the prisoners being withheld from him. He has reached the point, as the scene opens, where he is using threats.

Worcester replies for the Percys and does so intransigently:

*Our house, my sovereign liege, little deserves
The scourge of greatness to be used on it-
And that same greatness too which our own hands
Have help to make so portly.*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 10-13

This is the claim of the Percys to gratitude for their part in placing Henry IV on the throne, a claim they make on several occasions through the play-yet it is this very claim that places them under a permanent pall of suspicion as far as the King is concerned.

The King will not yield to any suggestion that he owes gratitude, for such suggestions are dangerous. The mere act of yielding to subjects for any reason will but give them occasion to ask for more, if that yielding is thought

to represent something due those subjects. (In modern terms, we might say that Henry IV appreciated the futility and dangers of attempting



"appeasement.")

This harks back to the prophecy of Richard II in *Richard II*, when on the occasion of the deposed King's last meeting with Northumberland, Shakespeare has Richard warn the arrogant nobleman that the tune will come when he will feel any reward too little while the new King will fear that a man who could rebel against one king would easily rebel against

another as well (see page II-307).

And indeed, King Henry, quite aware that Worcester's attitude verges on the flatly rebellious, orders him out of the royal presence.

This villainous saltpeter . . .

Northumberland, however, having vainly tried to stop Worcester in his defiance, now hastens to conciliate the angry King. He declares the report of Hotspur's withholding of the prisoners to have been exaggerated, and Hotspur himself attempts to justify himself in a famous speech that begins:

*My liege, I did deny no prisoners,
But I remember, when the fight was done,
When I was dry with rage and extreme toil,
Breathless and faint, leaning upon my sword,
Came there a certain lord, neat and trimly dressed,
Fresh as a bridegroom. . .*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 28-33

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This courtly fop (whose identity it would be wonderful to know if it were not that the whole incident is fictitious), appearing on the scene of the battle, prattles on in so foolish a manner, according to Hotspur, as to induce wild irritation in the wearied fighter. (Of course, Hotspur is shown throughout the play as a person prone to irritation, and from the description of this event, we can scarcely blame him in this particular case.)

As one example of the stupidities uttered by the courtier, Hotspur quotes him as saying:

*. . . that it was great pity, so it was,
This villainous saltpeter should be digged
Out of the bowels of the harmless earth,
Which many a good tall fellow had destroyed
So cowardly, and but for these vile guns,
He would himself have been a soldier.*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 58-63

Gunpowder is a mixture of charcoal, sulfur, and potassium nitrate (the last bearing the common name of "saltpeter"). Of the three



components,
saltpeter is the least common and the most difficult to obtain. It is therefore
the bottleneck in gunpowder manufacture and that is why the fop regrets
its being mined.

Gunpowder was known to the Chinese long before it came into use in Europe, and there are occasional examples of European knowledge of it in

the thirteenth century. Roger Bacon, the English scholar, makes references in 1268 to something that might well be gunpowder. (This was in the time when China and eastern Europe were united into one vast Mongol Empire and travelers from Europe were reaching the Far East by a long overland journey. Perhaps vague word of gunpowder was brought back.)

The first European actually to design a metal cylinder from which a projectile might be hurled by an explosion of gunpowder was a German monk and alchemist, Berthold Schwarz. This first cannon may have been constructed in 1313.

Cannons, to begin with, were clumsy, ineffectual, and far more dangerous to the persons firing them than to the persons being aimed at. They were used for the first time in actual warfare at the Battle of Crecy in 1346 by Edward III (see page II-257) and then by that monarch again the next year at the siege of Calais. At both battles, they served mostly for show and psychological effect, however, and it was many decades before they could be of real use.

In 1402, at the time of the Battle of Holmedon, cannon were still a rarity. Hotspur won the battle with his archers and no cannon were used. As

for small handguns, they hadn't even been devised yet. The fop's complaint about saltpeter is therefore anachronistic.

By Shakespeare's time, however, two centuries later, it had already become abundantly clear that gunpowder-fired artillery was taking over the battlefield and was changing the face of war and the very social system of Europe.

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come abundantly clear that gunpowder-fired artillery was taking over the battlefield and was changing the face of war and the very social system of Europe.

Prior to 1400, castle walls were invulnerable to anything but a long siege, and armored knights could fight freely in battle without much fear of being killed (except once in a while by another armored knight-and even then capture and subsequent ransom was the usual procedure). The nobility was safe, in other words, and could well afford to be brave and to despise the lowborn, who were not trained in the complicated use of arms, did not own horses to bestride, and had to fight poorly armored and afoot, so that they were killed in droves.

But then came gunpowder. Now cannon, fired by lowborn men, beat



down the castle walls. What's more, a gun in the hand of a cobbler or a peasant could send its bullet through the armor of the best knight in the land long before that knight's lance or sword could reach the gunner. (It would have to be a lucky shot, however, for it was a long time before hand-guns could be aimed accurately.)

Gunpowder made knights and castles obsolete, and it was that, more than anything else, that ended the feudal system. The days of the Percys and the Douglases passed, when war could only be fought with artillery trains that were so expensive only the King could afford one.

Obviously, the aristocracy, longing for the good old days, would sigh for a time when gunpowder had not been invented to put the lowborn on a par with the highborn, and the fop expresses that view—reflecting not 1402, the year in which the described event happened, but 1597, the year in which the play was produced.

... *the foolish Mortimer*

But now we come to the real point (which remains even if the matter of the prisoners is unimportant and was compromised away). King Henry says indignantly that despite everything Hotspur is not yielding up the prisoners unconditionally:

*Why, yet he doth deny his prisoners,
But with proviso and exception,
That we at our own charge shall ransom straight [at once]
His brother-in-law, the foolish Mortimer;*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 76-79

This is the real point. The sister of the captured Sir Edmund Mortimer is the wife of Hotspur. (Hotspur is thus an uncle by marriage of young Edmund Mortimer, 5th Earl of March, who is the legitimate heir to the throne.)

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Henry IV would naturally distrust the relationship, feeling that the Percys, who had helped him to the throne and who now knew the way, would gladly help someone else with a better right from the standpoint of strict legitimacy who was, moreover, a relative of their own. (This would be true whether Hotspur was uncle to the legitimate heir, as is historically the fact, or brother-in-law, as Shakespeare was misled by Holinshed into thinking.)

It was also a matter of money. The restlessness of the times had raised the King's expenses and lowered his revenues, and Henry IV simply could not afford to ransom Mortimer—though naturally he would hate to have to



admit this.

From this standpoint, it was clear the Percys were offering no compromise at all. If they kept the prisoners, they would certainly use the money received from the Scots for their return to buy Mortimer back from the Welsh. If they handed the prisoners to the King on the understanding that he buy back Mortimer, nothing is really changed. The money still goes from the Scots to the Welsh, and the only difference is that the King has had to play the middleman.

... damned Glendower

To defend his refusal to ransom Mortimer, the enraged King goes on to declare that the captured general

*... hath willfully betrayed
The lives of those that he did lead to fight
Against that great magician, damned Glendower-
Whose daughter, as we hear, the Earl of March
Hath lately married. . .*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 80-84

The reference to the Earl of March here is a specific example of Shakespeare's Holinshed-bred confusion. The imprisoned Mortimer is, to repeat, merely the uncle of the young Earl of March, who is (and remains) safe in Henry's hands.

The mention of Glendower as a magician refers to the medieval notion that the Welsh, generally, had access to dark, magic rites. This was partly because of the difference in culture. The Welsh had traditions dating back to before the Anglo-Saxons came, and these mystic, Druid-born matters were strange, and therefore frightening, to the English. There were rumors, for instance, that Mortimer had lost his battle against Glendower because the Welshman had raised storms against the English by means of his magic art. Nor did the Welsh, or Glendower in particular, do anything to allay the English fears, since it was of great psychological help to them.

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The fact that Edmund Mortimer had married Glendower's daughter would certainly tend to give some color to the King's outraged (and, to the Percys, outrageous) accusation of the captive as a traitor. However, Shakespeare's compression of events is here unfair to Mortimer.

Mortimer had been captured in June and Hotspur had taken his prisoners in September 1402. For three months Mortimer had already languished in captivity and no move had been made to ransom him. Even after the prisoners were taken, there was no move, and the King, in trying to take the prisoners for himself, was actually preventing the ransom.

One can scarcely blame Mortimer, then, for buying his own freedom at the price of marrying Glendower's daughter in December, after fully



half a
year of imprisonment. It might even be natural to expect him to
remember
after that lapse of time that it was not the ungrateful Henry but his
own
young nephew who was the rightful King of England.

... *the gentle Severn* ...

Indignantly, Hotspur denies the imputation of treason against his
brother-in-law, using as evidence a single combat between Mortimer and
Glendower. He says:

*...on the gentle Severn's sedgy bank,
In single opposition hand to hand,
He did confound the best part of an hour
In changing hardiment with great Glendower.*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 97-100

The Severn (see page II-69) rises in central Wales and flows east
then
north through eastern Wales, where the battle between Mortimer and
Glendower took place. It crosses into western England, then turns
south-
ward and flows into Bristol Channel.

The account of the fight on the Severn seems altogether unlikely. Hot-
spur describes a single combat between generals, which takes place often
in knightly romances and epic tales, but virtually never in sober history.
He includes details-like three stops by mutual agreement for rest and drink
-which are to be found in the tales of King Arthur rather than in legitimate
chronicles.

King Henry is not influenced by Hotspur's glowing account. He
dismisses
the tale as myth, saying that Mortimer wouldn't dare meet Glendower
in
single combat. He ends the argument by a flat demand for the
prisoners
and a flat refusal to ransom Mortimer, on pain of strong reprisal
otherwise.

Indeed, he forbids any further mention of Mortimer; then he leaves.

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... *the next of blood*

Hotspur, staring after the King, goes almost mad with rage. He thinks
at
once of rebellion:

*... I will lift the downtrod Mortimer
As high in the air as this unthankful king,
As this ingrate and cank'ered Bolingbroke.*



-Act I, scene iii, lines 133-35

As though the displacement were already made, as though Mortimer were on the King's throne and Henry deposed, Hotspur gives the latter his name of Bolingbroke (see page II-264), by which he was most commonly known before he was King.

Worcester now returns, understands the situation at once, and sets about fanning Hotspur's flame and turning it to use. When Hotspur angrily describes the King's refusal to ransom Mortimer, Worcester responds coolly:

*/ cannot blame him. Was not he [Mortimer] proclaimed
By Richard that dead is, the next of blood?*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 143-44

Here again is Holinshed's error. The young Earl of March, Mortimer's nephew, was so proclaimed. Still, if we accept Shakespeare's version, what Worcester is doing is reminding Hotspur that in yearning to depose Henry for Mortimer's sake, he is no rebel striving to uplift a relative, but a loyal subject fighting for the true King.

And now, for policy's sake, Northumberland begins to make a great reversal. In *Richard II* he was pictured as the most eager of those who wished for Richard's deposition (see page II-304). Now he responds to Worcester's statement with a piece of canting piety, saying:

*He was, I heard the proclamation:
And then it was when the unhappy king
(Whose wrongs in us God pardon!) did set forth
Upon his Irish expedition;*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 145-48

... *this canker Bolingbroke*

Both Worcester and Northumberland are dangling the bait before Hotspur. They are old men; it is Hotspur who has the energy to carry through

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a violent action. They must take advantage of his anger at the King and not allow him to cool down. Hence the careful explanation that Hotspur's brother-in-law is the true heir and their snuffing sorrow for Richard.

Hotspur (who conveniently forgets that he was himself thoroughly involved in Richard's deposition) takes the bait and berates his father and uncle for their deeds, professing himself appalled



*That men of your nobility and power
Did gage [pledge] them both in an unjust behalf
(As both of you, God pardon it, have done)
To put down Richard, that sweet lovely rose,
And plant this thorn, this canker Bolingbroke?*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 170-74

Having taken the bait, Hotspur is now ready for instant action, without thought or preparation, impelled only by his hot rage.

To pluck bright honor . . .

Worcester stops him at once. He wants Hotspur's enthusiasm, his bravery, his ability to fight a battle. He does not want him trying to plan, but wants him rather to be guided by wiser heads-like Worcester's own. Worcester begins therefore to unfold the conspiracy against the King, a conspiracy which he has already set afoot.

Hotspur, however, having been hotly spurred to emotion, is not so easily stopped. At the first mention of a plot, he at once sees battles, victory, the toppling of a king, the setting up of another, all redounding to his own honor-and he goes off into a paean in praise of honor:

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

-Act I, scene iii, lines 199-203

This is Hotspur at his most one-sided extreme. Nothing exists for him but "honor," and it is important to realize that what he means by "honor" is a reputation for daring, warlike deeds. To win that reputation he would jump to the moon or dive into the abyss. It is the psychology of the "college try," the drive for the winning touchdown at all costs.

It is admirable, in a way, and it is admired, and our hearts beat faster as Hotspur declaims-and yet it is schoolboyish. There is more to life than touchdowns, and the push for the personal touchdown may lose the team

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its game. There are times when great ends must come before the Hotspur

version of "honor," and this Hotspur never learns.

Lest the audience mistake the schoolboyishness of Hotspur in their admiration for his speech about honor, Shakespeare has Hotspur follow it immediately by a description of the schoolboy tricks he will play on the



King:

*He scud he would not ransom Mortimer,
Forbade my tongue to speak of Mortimer,
But I will find him when he lies asleep,
And in his ear I'll hollo "Mortimer."
Nay, I'll have a starling shall be taught to speak
Nothing but "Mortimer," and give it him*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 218-23

Hotspur still keeps his schoolboyish attractiveness, of course, but how does this compare with Prince Hal? It is the comparison of Hotspur and Prince Hal that is the core of the play, and we surely feel that the Prince, however convivial he might be with Falstaff, would never meet a high crisis with the kind of low comedy Hotspur has just offered.

. . . sword-and-buckler Prince of Wales

Nor does Shakespeare rely on the audience keeping Prince Hal in mind at this point without help. Hotspur passes on at once to a mention of the Prince-for the first time in this play. He makes the mention with utmost contempt, saying:

*And that same sword-and-buckler Prince of Wales,
But that I think his father loves him not
And would be glad he met with some mischance,
I would have him poisoned with a pot of ale.*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 228-31

Part of the contempt lies in the adjective "sword-and-buckler," the typical weapons of the lower classes-which makes it a sneering reference to Prince Hal's well-known penchant for low associates.

Nor does Hotspur offer to fight the Prince; it would stain his honor to take up a gentleman's weapons against such a dishonorable wretch. It would be enough to poison him, and not even with a glass of wine (a gentleman's drink), but with the low-class pot of ale.

. . . a candy deal of courtesy

Worcester has borne patiently with Hotspur's ravings, but they show no

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signs of stopping. When he and Northumberland try to dam the flood they have themselves initiated, Hotspur breaks away, and in such a fury that he can scarcely speak, recalls the King's softly insinuating courtesies when first they met, on the occasion of the beginning of the revolt against Richard (see page II-291). Hotspur says:

Why, what a candy deal of courtesy



*This fawning greyhound then did proffer me!
"Look when his infant fortune came to age,"
And "gentle Harry Percy," and "kind cousin"-
O, the devil take such cozeners [deceivers]!*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 248-52

Hotspur, who is incapable of the use of smooth diplomacy, is all the more furious that he should have been made the object of it and been (as he thinks) gulled by it.

The Archbishop

But now Hotspur runs down at last and Worcester has the chance to outline his plot.

The Scottish prisoners are to be given back to the Scots without ransom on conditions that the Douglas power join them in their revolt. Mortimer will, of course, also join them with the power of Glendower at his back.

It is not enough, however.

If the Percys go to war in alliance with Scotland and Wales, national tempers will be stirred against them. Patriotic dislike of Scotland and Wales was dangerously strong. What was needed was some English figurehead of unimpeachable loyalty on their side and this Worcester has also prepared. It will be up to Northumberland to supply one. He . . .

*Shall secretly into the bosom creep
Of that same noble prelate well-beloved,
The Archbishop.*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 263-65

Hotspur assumes at once the Archbishop of York is meant, and Worcester says:

*. . . True; who bears hard
His brother's death at Bristow, the Lord Scroop.*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 267-68

Here once more Shakespeare, misled by Holinshed, makes a mistake, but rather a minor one.

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The two "brothers" here referred to are William Scrope and Richard le Scrope, for since both are the sons of the 1st Baron Scrope, they would certainly seem to be brothers.

However, there are two 1st Baron Scopes. One is Richard, 1st Baron Scrope of Bolton, and the other is Henry, 1st Baron Scrope of Masham, and the two are merely first cousins.

William le Scrope is the son of Scrope of Bolton, and it is William who became Earl of Wiltshire (see page II-284) and who was captured at Bristow (Bristol) by the forces of Bolingbroke and executed.

Richard le Scrope is the son of Scrope of Masham, and Richard became Archbishop of York in 1398, in the last year of the reign of Richard II.

The Archbishop of York is thus the second cousin, not the brother, of "the Lord Scroop."



Undoubtedly, grief and resentment over the death of a second cousin is not likely to be as deep and painful as grief and resentment over the death of a brother. And the Archbishop did desert that second cousin to the extent of supporting the rebellion of Bolingbroke. Nevertheless, the family connection did exist, and whatever the motive, the Archbishop was talked into considering joining the plot. It was clear he would make an admirable front man.

With the plot detailed, Worcester leaves to join Mortimer and Glendower. Clearly mistrusting Hotspur's strategic insight, his last warning is:

*. . . No further go in this
Than I by letters shall direct your course.*
-Act I, scene iii, lines 289-90

Charles' wain . . .

The scene shifts to Rochester, where the robbery at Gad's Hill is being prepared. Into the innyard comes a carrier (the equivalent of today's truck driver) anxious to get his horse saddled so that his load of merchandise might move with the break of day. He sets the time by saying:

*. . . And it be not four by the day [4 A.M.] I'LL be hanged.
Charles' wain is over the new chimney, and yet our horse not
packed.*
-Act II, scene i, lines 1-3

It was at 4 A.M. that the gang was to meet at Gad's Hill, so it will soon be time for the robbery.

Charles' Wain is the seven stars we usually refer to as the Big Dipper. It

looks like a big dipper, to be sure, but to rustic eyes it also looks like a

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country cart ("wain" is an alternate form of "wagon") with a long pole to which the horse is to be hitched.

The "Charles" in Charles' Wain is a reference to Charlemagne ("Charles the Great"), who ruled over western Europe from 768 to 814 and was the most renowned of all the Western medieval kings.

Why was the wain that of Charlemagne? Nobody knows. There are theories. One, for instance, is that the nearby star, Arcturus, was considered to be the horse drawing the wagon; Arcturus was confounded with Arturus (King Arthur) and King Arthur with Charlemagne. So it ends with Charles drawing the wagon, which therefore becomes Charles' Wain.



The Big Dipper is close enough to the polestar so that in the latitude of England it never sets. It circles the polestar and is always above the horizon, so that it can be seen at any time of any clear night. Its exact position varies with the time of night, and to those who use no other clock and are frequently astir in the night, as are the carriers, its exact position ("over the new chimney") will tell them the time.

...*the Wild of Kent*...

After some back and forth banter between the carrier and another who joins him, Gadshill enters. It is he who is arranging the robbery, and an informant assures him that the earlier information still holds good:

... *there's a franklin in the Wild of Kent hath brought three hundred marks with him in gold.* ...

-Act II, scene i, lines 56-58

A franklin is a free farmer. (The word "frank" is an old word for "free," hence a person who is frank is as honest and open as a freeman is expected to be, not lying and underhanded like a slave—a distinction made by freemen, of course.) A free farmer had much more chance to prosper than did the serfs, who were bound to the land and to some lord (rather like what we would call "sharecroppers"). A franklin therefore came to mean a prosperous farmer.

"Wild" is more commonly spelled "weald" nowadays. The word is akin to the German *Wald* and refers to a forest. There was, in older times, a well-forested region in Kent, Surrey, and Sussex, the area southeast and south of London. This has long since been cleared, of course, but the term still refers to the plain between the North Downs and the South Downs, two low ranges of hills in southeastern England.

A mark was a com equivalent in value to thirteen shillings and fourpence, so that three hundred of them were equal to two hundred pounds, a tremendous sum in those days.

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...*Saint Nicholas*...

Gadshill's informant knows what Gadshill is planning and makes grim mention of the gallows, adding,

... / *know thou worshippest Saint Nicholas.* ...

-Act II, scene i, lines 66-67

St. Nicholas was the patron saint of travelers, and since travelers were the chosen prey of highwaymen, the latter worshiped him in the sense that

they hoped he would send them many travelers. In fact, "St. Nicholas' clerks" was a slang term for highwaymen, and in the immediately preceding

speech, Gadshill says of the franklin and those accompanying him:



... if they meet not with Saint Nicholas" clerks, I'll give thee this neck.

-Act II, scene i, lines 63-64

This usage of the name of good St. Nicholas would seem all the more inappropriate these days, for another version of the name, by way of the Dutch "Sant Nikolaas," is "Santa Claus."

... other Troyans ...

Gadshill's response to the other's gibe concerning the gallows is a confident

There are other Troyans that thou dream'st not of, the which for sport sake are content to do the profession some grace; that would (if matters be looked into) for their own credit sake make all whole.

-Act II, scene i, lines 71-75

The reference to Troyans (Trojans) harks back to the old legends of the siege of Troy (see page I-73). The classical legends depicted them as bravely defending their city, and later legends had them the ancestors of the Romans and the British. With all this favorable notice, the word came to mean "a good fellow" or "a fine chap."

Gadshill's reference is, of course, to Prince Hal.

And now the robbery goes off exactly as planned. Falstaff and the rest (minus Poins and Prince Hal) wait for the merchants and attack them when

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they come (the whole being carried through in broad farce, particularly at the expense of Falstaff's fatness).

Once Falstaff has the gold, however, Prince Hal and Poins, thoroughly disguised, fall upon the thieves, two against four, and easily obtain the gold. Falstaff is forced to run clumping away, despite his fat.

... the ninth of the next month. . .

Hotspur has his much greater plot in action as well, but as is to be expected, it is moving more slowly, for much must be done. In Hotspur's castle in Northumberland, Hotspur is trying to gather together the different forces that might make part of the conspiracy. He comes onstage, reading a letter from an unnamed nobleman who has been approached. The letter writer is cautiously refusing to join the uprising but is trying to make the refusal a very polite one (just in case the Percys win out after all).

Hotspur is, however, characteristically enraged and interrupts his reading with animadversions on the writer's character and courage, and with



outcries of firm confidence in the plot. When the letter writer mentions danger, Hotspur cries out:

. . . / tell you, my lord fool, out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety.

-Act II, scene iii, lines 9-10

As evidence of the excellence of the plot, Hotspur runs over the list of those involved for the benefit of the letter writer, who cannot hear (and perhaps for his own benefit as well), and says:

Have I not all their letters to meet me in arms by the ninth of the next month, and are they not some of them set forward already?

-Act II, scene iii, lines 26-29

Since the army will be gathered on the "ninth of the next month" and since the rebellion came out in the open in July 1403, it is now June 1403. It is just a year since the defeat of Mortimer by Glendower, the event which opened the play.

Hotspur's musing has him all on fire to get on with the affair and he prepares to leave, scarcely paying attention to his wife, Catherine, who nags anxiously at him to find out what he is doing and where he is going. She guesses close to the mark when she says:

I fear my brother Mortimer doth stir about his title and hath sent for you to Une his enterprise. . .

-Act II, scene iii, lines 81-83

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This is a clear reminder of the relationship between Hotspur and the captive Mortimer, something that is at least part of the motive for the conspiracy.

. . . the king of courtesy . . .

The contrast continues. While Hotspur is engaged in foolhardy but romantic knight-errantry, Prince Hal is whiling away his time in a tavern in Eastcheap. He tells Poins, with great delight, that he has made friends with tapsters. The tapsters say, he reports:

. . . that, though I be but Prince of Wales, yet I am the king of courtesy and tell me flatly I am no proud Jack like Falstaff, but a Corinthian, a lad of mettle, a good boy (by the Lord, so they call me!) and when I am King of England I shall command all the good lads in Eastcheap.

-Act II, scene iv, lines 9-15



Prince Hal, it can be seen, is the pink of courtesy toward those beneath him (though he is not above making a little good-natured fun of the poor tapsters and does so in a passage that follows). Falstaff may stand upon his knighthood and hold himself aloof from the workingman, but not the Prince.

They are fascinated by his graciousness and call him a "Corinthian" in approval. Corinth was the leading commercial city of Greece at various times in its history (see page I-171) and was a haunt of traders and sailors, who brought in wealth and demanded pleasure and relaxation after the rigors and dangers of sea voyage. Corinth was therefore notorious as the home of skillful prostitutes and gay life-the Paris of Greece. In Shakespeare's time and for several centuries more, a "Corinthian" was a pleasure seeker, a gay blade.

... not yet of Percy's mind. . .

Yet Prince Hal is not unaware of Hotspur. In fact, he mentions him and describes him in such a way as to burlesque the earlier scene between Hotspur and his wife.

After exhausting himself with laughter over the tapsters, the Prince says (ruefully, perhaps, as though knowing that to others Hotspur's ways may seem nobler):

I am not yet of Percy's mind, the Hotspur of the North; he that kills me some six or seven dozen of Scots at a breakfast,
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washes his hands, and says to his wife, "Fie upon this quiet life! I want work." "O my sweet Harry," says she, "how many hast thou killed today?" "Give my roan horse a drench," says he, and answers, "Some fourteen," an hour after, "a trifle, a trifle."

-Act II, scene iv, lines 102-9

For the first time the contrast between the two men is put into a less conventional light. Hotspur's chivalry and "honor" becomes a kind of grotesque preoccupation with killing for no reason but to kill. His concern is first for his horse, who is necessary to him for his killing, only later for his



wife, who is not.

Coming as it does, immediately after the Prince's foolery with the tapsters, we see the contrast particularly clearly. Prince Hal forgets matters of importance in his preoccupation with laughing, but Hotspur forgets matters of importance in his preoccupation with killing. Brought down to this, in the absence of the trappings of battle and with the enlightenment of Prince Hal's sarcasm, we may catch a glimpse of the fact that laughter is perhaps a better reason for which to neglect business than murder is, and that he who delights his "inferiors" is perhaps more to be admired than he who kills them.

... *beware instinct* ...

Now enters Falstaff, ferociously upset over the miscarrying of the robbery. They had the money, after all, and then it was taken away from them, all because the Prince and Poins were not with them to stand against those who had robbed the robbers.

As he sits there, fuming and muttering, Prince Hal asks, with a straight face, for the details. Falstaff begins at once to embroider, and to multiply the number of those by whom he had been attacked.

Having given him all the rope necessary, the Prince confronts Falstaff with the truth; that he and Poins, but two in number, easily took the money from Falstaff and three others.

Now what can Falstaff say?

This is the climax of the jest. Perpetrating the practical joke was fun and listening to Falstaff lie was fun, but surely best of all would be watching Falstaff squirm out of the hole he had talked himself into. The Prince was probably certain that Falstaff's endless ingenuity would meet the challenge most amusingly.

And as for Falstaff, it is quite possible that even in the course of his lying, his quick wit worked out the truth, and that he made his lies all the worse in order to make his escape the more spectacular.

Now it comes. Falstaff, faced with the truth, says:

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By the Lord, I knew ye as well as he that made ye. Why, hear you, my masters. Was it for me to kill the heir apparent? Should I turn upon the true prince? Why, thou knowest I am as valiant as Hercules, but beware instinct. The lion will not touch the true prince.

-Act II, scene iv, lines 268-73

This was an age when the study of zoology was largely the creation of moral myths to edify mankind. The entire world of life seemed nothing



more than a schoolroom to educate sinful man. The lion was the king of beasts and therefore, out of the brotherhood of kingship, would not harm a Icing of men.

... a true prince

But Falstaff is not just a figure of fun. We can very easily argue that he can give as good as he gets, and certainly he has been bamboozled most cruelly. He has been mocked, mistreated, forced to walk when his horse was hidden, forced to hand over his ill-gotten gams, forced to flee, and now he was being mocked and derided.

Was there not to be at least some residuum of hard feeling as a result? And though Falstaff could not openly show his displeasure against the Prince of Wales, was there no secret way his wit could find to show it? Surely, he knew Hal well enough to know what might really be bothering him.

Shakespeare nowhere says so in this play, but we might fairly argue that Prince Hal has never really reconciled himself to the manner in which his father attained the throne (see page II-304). Secretly, he may consider his father a usurper and himself merely the heir to a usurped crown. He can scarcely value either his own title or his own position, and it is just this, perhaps, that causes him to pass his time in wasting and roistering. Why behave like a Prince of Wales when, in his heart, he doesn't really feel he is one?

And if that is so, and if Falstaff knows this feeling of Hal's or shrewdly suspects it, it would be precisely on this sore that his wit would land, in return for his own humiliation.

He has already described Prince Hal, in a voice and face that surely seems all respect, as a "true prince." Now he jabs harder and, while remaining in a position in which no one can find the slightest trace of lack of respect, manages to flay the Prince when he says:

*/ shall think the better of myself, and thee, during my life-I
for a valiant lion, and thou for a true prince.*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 274-76

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Falstaff is saying that his own instinctive shying away from a fight with Prince Hal is overpowering evidence in favor of himself as a lion and Hal as a true prince. But is this not like saying that there is some doubt that Hal is a true prince and that evidence like this is needed to set such doubts at rest? Worse yet, it is notorious that Falstaff is *not* a valiant lion. By equat-



ing the two characteristics, is Falstaff not hinting that it is notorious that Hal is *not a true prince*?

And even if this is the furthest thing from Falstaff's mind, would the sensitive Prince Hal not interpret the speech in this fashion and be unable to answer since the doubts as to his own legitimacy cannot be put into words before his future subjects? He must suffer grimly in silence, and from this view, Falstaff has turned the tables neatly.

. . . made Lucifer cuckold. . .

And now the harsh world intrudes on this gayest of all Shakespearean scenes. A nobleman has come from court to summon Prince Hal. Carelessly, the Prince sends Falstaff to turn him away, but Falstaff returns with grim news. The conspiracy is now in the open; Hotspur's army is in the field.

Falstaff lists the enemies, and in listing Glendower, he identifies him, indirectly, as

. . . he of Wales that gave Amamon the bastinado, and made Lucifer cuckold, and swore the devil his true liegeman . . .

-Act II, scene iv, lines 337-39

In other words, Glendower has overpowered the various devils (Amaimon is the name of one of the chief devils of hell in medieval demonology, which named hordes of them-see page II-34) and made them his servants. This is a claim Glendower himself makes later in the play.

. . . kills a sparrow flying

When Falstaff lists the Scotsman, Douglas, it is his skill as a horseman that seems to be most impressive. Falstaff describes him as:

. . . that sprightly Scot of Scots, Douglas, that runs a-horse-back up a hill perpendicular-

-Act II, scene iv, lines 343-45

Prince Hal chimes in, setting up Falstaff for a riposte:

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He that rides at high speed and with his pistol kills a sparrow flying.

-Act II, scene iv, lines 346-47

Falstaff eagerly gives him the straight line:



You have hit it.

-Act II, scene iv, line 348

And Prince Hal answers at once:

So did he never the sparrow.

-Act II, scene iv, line 349

Once again, Prince Hal punctures the pretensions of chivalry. The picture of a doughty knight, utter master of his horse and with an unerring eye making impossible shots with easy grace, is suddenly shattered. (The fact that the pistol didn't come into use till about twenty years after the time of this scene and that the use of the word is anachronistic is not very important.)

... some of thy instinct

Hal's dry joke also serves the purpose of showing the audience that he is utterly unafraid at this news.

And yet he must be affected. The rebellion must clearly have, as one of its justifications, the claim that Henry IV is not the rightful King and that

Hal is therefore not a true prince. Falstaff's jibe is thus repeated and made infinitely stronger by the news.

That Hal may well be brooding about this comes at once. Falstaff, teasing again, asks the Prince if he isn't horribly afraid at hearing this news.

Prince Hal answers with a bitter return jab:

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

-Act II, scene iv, line 372

He has not forgotten Falstaff's remark.

... in King Cambyses' vein

But Hal can scarcely turn his anger full upon Falstaff, for if Falstaff is jabbing at him, it is not Falstaff's fault that the situation exists to be jabbed

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at. Rather it is Hal's father who is at fault; it is King Henry who usurped the crown and crushed his young son under a burden of guilt.

If this is so, we can understand why, for the rest of the scene, Prince



Hal engages in what would otherwise seem an utterly heartless parody of his father, who is now engaged in the crisis of his thus far brief reign.

Falstaff warns Prince Hal that he will get a dressing down when he comes to his father, and they decide to practice an answer. Falstaff himself will play the angry King, and he says:

. . . / must speak in passion, and I will do it in King Cambyses' vein.

-Act II, scene iv, lines 386-87

Cambyes was King of the Persian Empire from 529 to 522 B.C. His great feat was the conquest of Egypt and the addition of that land to his realm. Herodotus tells the tale in his great history, written nearly a century later, but, getting his information from Egyptian priests, who could scarcely have been sympathetic to the Persian monarch, the Greek historian presents Cambyes as a raging and blasphemous madman.

The first important piece of historical drama in Elizabethan times was devoted to this ancient king. It was *The Life of Cambises, King of Percia*, written by Thomas Preston and put on the boards in 1569. It was a bombastic piece filled with murder and bloodshed and proved a popular success.

Naturally, Cambyes was shown in the play as raging madly across the stage, and his name became one of the bywords for monstrously over-acting. Shakespeare was not too proud to present such tales of blood and gore himself, notably in *Titus Andronicus* (see page I-391), but by 1597 he had matured and was ready enough to poke fun at the practice, caring nothing for the fact that the Cambyes to which Falstaff refers is a character in a play not written till a century and a half after Falstaff was dead.

. . . I do not only marvel . . .

Nor is it only ranting passion that Shakespeare aims to satirize. Falstaff begins to speak in intricately balanced sentences:

Harry, I do not only marvel where thou spendest thy time, but also how thou art accompanied. For though the camomile, the more it is trodden on, the faster it grows, so youth the more it is wasted, the sooner it wears.

-Act II, scene iv, lines 398-402

The style is derived from a book written by an English courtier named John Lyly. The book was *Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit*, published in 1578, when the author was only twenty-four. It was a didactic book aimed



at the reform of education and manners, but its contents were unimportant compared to its style. Lyly perfected the balanced sentence; each in two parts of similar length and contrasting contents. He made use of exotic words and farfetched similes often drawn from nature.

Indeed, his style was so tortured and overwritten that it removed the language from the common folk. Only the well-educated could write in his manner or understand it once it was written. It therefore appealed to snobs and for a while had a fantastic run of popularity as those who did not understand it nevertheless pretended to do so in order to be in the swim.

By the 1590s, however, opposition and ridicule began to make themselves felt. A writer like Shakespeare, who aimed for all men and not for the superelegant few, naturally found euphuism (as the style was called) abhorrent, and this is one of the places where he laughs at it with deadly effect. (He gibes at it also in *Love's Labor's Lost*, see page I-426.)

... *banish plump Jack* ...

But Falstaff suddenly turns from his euphuism into a panegyric (in the King's name) on himself. In annoyance, Prince Hal stops him and offers to play the King himself.

Doing so, he turns the tables on Falstaff and (in the King's name) begins to berate Falstaff in colorful style. But Falstaff is perfectly master of the situation. With scarcely the skip of a heartbeat, he seizes the floor and (in the Prince's name, this time) launches into another panegyric of himself, ending:

... for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant being, as he is, old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry's company, banish not him thy Harry's company, banish plump Jack, and banish all the world.

-Act II, scene iv, lines 475-80

In the excitement of this peroration, Prince Hal's response is pushed into the background. But it is a somber and serious one and it reflects, perhaps, the Prince's pain over Falstaff's gibing at his status as a true



prince. In response to the plea not to banish Falstaff, Prince Hal says:

/ do, I will.

-Act II, scene iv, line 481

It is a grim portent of the climax of Falstaff's life.

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... all to the wars. . .

But the fun is interrupted once again. This time the sheriff and his watch are at the door in search of the robbers of Gad's Hill. At least one of the robbers, Falstaff, is unmistakable, and the sheriff is searching for a man of huge fatness. If Falstaff is seen, he is as good as convicted, and highway robbery was, at the time, a capital offense. It was not a fine that Falstaff was risking, or even imprisonment, but the halter and the noose.

Yet either Falstaff is not quite the coward he is usually considered or else he has utter faith in the Prince. He faces the sheriff's entry calmly and at Prince Hal's direction retires behind a curtain and actually goes to sleep there while the Prince fends off the sheriff with ambiguities that hide the truth without actually being outright lies.

But once the sheriff is gone, the fun is over. Prince Hal searches the sleeping man's pockets to see what smiles might be gained at the expense of the contents (a restaurant bill), but then he turns serious. Looking at the sleeping Falstaff, he says to Peto (another of the low crew):

I'll to the court in the morning. We must all to the wars, and thy place shall be honorable. I'll procure this fat rogue a charge of foot, and I know his death will be a march of twelve score [paces]. The money shall be paid back again with advantage [interest].

-Act II, scene iv, lines 545-50

The reference to the repayment of money with interest promises to clear up the last trace of guilt on the Prince's part as far as the robbery is concerned. Not only did he not take direct part in it, but he will return the money with additional payment to make up for the bodily fear and the inconvenience which the merchants incurred.

/ can call spirits. . .

Once again, back to Hotspur. Two scenes before, he had left his Northumberland castle. The lengthy scene between Prince Hal and Falstaff has given him time to reach Wales and now he is in the very lair of the



redoubtable Glendower. With him there is Mortimer, earlier a prisoner of Glendower and now the Welshman's ally and son-in-law. With him also is Worcester, the brains of the conspiracy.

Hotspur is impatient. To him, Glendower in particular is a weird and alien figure. Hotspur can be poetic enough in the cause of his monomania, honor, but on all other subjects he is prosaic and literal. Besides, he has

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led armies against the Welsh, who were, in their turn, led by the very man who now faces him across the table, and this can scarcely make him comfortable.

Glendower, for his part, has kept his hold over his Welshmen by impressing them with the notion that he has supernatural powers, and apparently he means to do the same in the case of his new English allies.

Thus, when Hotspur tries to flatter Glendower by describing the King's fear of him, Glendower responds with ponderous gravity:

*/ cannot blame him. At my nativity
The front [face] of heaven was full of fiery shapes
Of burning cressets [beacons], and at my birth
The frame and huge foundation of the earth
Shaked like a coward.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 12-16

This is another expression of the common belief that the heavenly bodies have nothing to do but act as gentlemen ushers announcing various events taking place (or about to take place) on our own insignificant earth (see page I-96).

Hotspur takes our modern view of the matter (like Edmund in *King Lear*-see page II-14) and says:

Why, so it would have done at the same season if your mother's cat had but kittened, though yourself had never been born.

-Act III, scene i, lines 17-19

With rising anger, Glendower states his claims to supernatural powers over and over, while Hotspur stubbornly continues to sneer. This reaches a peak in a famous exchange indeed. Glendower says, impressively:

/ can call spirits from the vasty deep.

-Act III, scene i, line 52

And Hotspur answers at once:



*Why, so can I, or so can any man;
But will they come when you do call for them?*

-Act III, scene i, lines 53-54

However much sensible men applaud this answer and are grateful to Hotspur for making it, and quote him in season and out, it was a dreadful remark to make on this occasion. It was Glendower he was speaking to, and without Glendower the rebellion would not succeed. Was this a time

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to cross him? Why not take him at his own evaluation as long as his friendship was necessary?

In this again is the contrast between Hotspur and Prince Hal. The Prince is courteous even to tapsters from whom he has nothing to gain; Hotspur is rude even to Glendower, from whom he has everything to gain.

Into three limits . . .

Mortimer, angry at Hotspur's folly, manages to call him off, and turns the meeting to its purpose-an agreement on the division of the kingdom after the conspirators have won a victory over King Henry. (This is a case of dividing the bearskin before the bear is killed, but it is necessary, for none of the parties will fight unless they are satisfied in advance they will not be cheated afterward.)

They hunch over a map and Mortimer indicates the division:

*The Archdeacon hath divided it
Into three limits very equally.
England, from Trent and Severn hitherto,
By south and east is to my part assigned;
All westward, Wales beyond the Severn shore,
And all the fertile land within that bound,
To Owen Glendower; and, dear coz, to you
The remnant northward lying off from Trent.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 71-78

The Archdeacon here referred to is the Archdeacon of Bangor (a town on the northwestern shore of Wales just across the narrow strait from the island of Anglesey). Presumably the Archdeacon was chosen as a learned man and a neutral who would be fair to all three.

The division is a reasonable one, if a division there must be. Glendower, getting all the land west of the Severn, gets not only the region



now recognized as Wales but good English areas including all of Herefordshire and parts of Shropshire and Worcestershire.

If the Percys get the land north of the Trent, then they have all of northern England down as far as Nottingham and Derby. They come as close as a hundred miles to London in places.

The rest of England, south of the Trent and east of Severn, is the part that Mortimer (or rather, his nephew, Edmund of March) will reign over as King. It would be more populous and wealthy than either of the other portions and it might be supposed that both Glendower and Hotspur would swear to some sort of surface allegiance to Mortimer. Still, the conditions of the rebellion are such and the services of Glendower and Hotspur of that sort as to make any control over them impossible. There would be,

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essentially, three independent kingdoms: England, Wales, and (to use the Anglo-Saxon name for the old northern kingdom) Northumbria.

Such a situation could not be stable, of course. Inevitably there would be friction; inevitably warfare and blood. England would descend into anarchy, perhaps for generations, conceivably for centuries.

Shakespeare's audience would be bound to listen with indignation to any plan to divide England in three. If they had up to this point admired Hotspur for his bravery and gallantry, they could scarcely admire him any further. It may well be to encourage the audience to lose that admiration more thoroughly that Shakespeare has Hotspur act so childishly in this scene.

A huge half-moon . . .

Thus, even while Mortimer and Glendower pass on to the next order of business—when and where the different armies shall meet to form a united front against the King—Hotspur breaks into a pout over the map, which he has continued studying. He says, sulkily:



*Methinks my moiety north from Burton here,
In quantity equals not one of yours.
See how this river comes me cranking in
And cuts me from the best of all my land
A huge half-moon, a monstrous cantle [section] out.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 95-99

The Burton referred to here is Burton-on-Trent, a town near the southernmost point reached by the curving Trent River. From Burton, the Trent River runs east toward Nottingham, then swings north into the Humber. If the Trent River were to continue eastward, it would enter the Wash, and Lincolnshire would be included in Hotspur's portion rather than in Mortimer's. It is this which Hotspur bemoans, and he actually suggests damming the river in such a way as to make it flow east.

But then Glendower, whose portion is not affected by the Trent one way or another, suddenly objects (even though Worcester and Mortimer are humoring Hotspur in this impossible project just to keep him from going out of control). Again Glendower and Hotspur are at it, to the endangerment of the whole project.

... the dreamer Merlin ...

When the two separate at last and Glendower leaves, the others are
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free to turn on Hotspur. Mortimer instantly scolds him for baiting the Welshman, and Hotspur replies defensively:

*/ cannot choose. Sometime he angers me
With telling me of the moldwarp and the ant,
Of the dreamer Merlin and his prophecies,
And of a dragon ...*

-Act III, scene i, lines 147-50

Merlin, the ancient sage of the Welsh myths (and a prominent part of the King Arthur legend), was a figure of hope to the late medieval Welshmen, longing as they did for some way of recovering their lost independence. Many prophecies were attributed to him and naturally they were interpreted in such a way as to give the Welsh hope.

According to Holinshed, one of the prophecies current in Wales at this time was to the effect that the kingdom of the moldwarp (mole) would be divided by a dragon, lion, and wolf. To interpret this one, it was neces-



sary to suppose that King Henry was the devious mole, having won the crown by his underground maneuvering. The dragon was clearly Glendower, for it was a creature much associated with Wales and early Celtic legends. The lion was who else but Hotspur, while Mortimer could just as well be the wolf as anything else.

No doubt it was this that Glendower was regaling Hotspur with, along with a good deal more of mystical matter, and it was this that Hotspur couldn't abide.

Defect of manners. . .

Despite the harm Hotspur is clearly doing, Mortimer labors to flatter him and keep him in good humor.

Not so Worcester. It is he who has set the conspiracy in motion, and he has said very little while Hotspur was playing the fool. Now he bursts out in anger against Hotspur's tactlessness:

*You must needs learn, lord, to amend this fault.
Though sometimes it show greatness, courage, blood-
And that's the dearest grace it renders you-
Yet oftentimes it doth present harsh rage,
Defect of manners, want of government,
Pride, haughtiness, opinion, and disdain;*

-Act III, scene i, lines 179-84

Thus are Hotspur's faults clearly outlined to the audience just in case
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they have not picked them up for themselves out of the action. The contrast with Prince Hal continues to swing toward the Prince's side.

. . . at Shrewsbury

But the conspiracy is in motion and the meeting place has already been assigned. Mortimer had said, earlier:

*Tomorrow, cousin Percy, you and I
And my good Lord of Worcester will set forth
To meet your father and the Scottish power,
As is appointed us, at Shrewsbury.
My father Glendower is not ready yet,
Nor shall we need his help these fourteen days.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 82-87

Shrewsbury is the chief town of Shropshire, on the upper Severn, ten miles east of the Welsh border. It controls the roads into northern Wales and the Percys can wait there in reasonable security, with their backs toward Wales, until Glendower joins them. Then they can advance.



After a scene in which Mortimer's Welsh wife (Glendower's daughter) sings and there is a little comic relief from Hotspur and his wife (Hotspur is always at his most engaging when he is making broad love to his wife—he is the slap-on-the-rump type) it is time to leave. Off they all ride and the rebel army is in the field.

. . . thy younger brother. . .

Back in London, meanwhile, King Henry and Prince Hal confront each other in earnest, much as the play acting with Falstaff had presaged. In fact, the King almost sounds like Falstaff as he deplores the Prince's taste for low company. At one point he says:

*Thy place in council thou hast rudely lost,
Which by thy younger brother is supplied,*
-Act III, scene ii, lines 32-33

This is anachronistic. At the time of Hotspur's rebellion, Prince Hal was, in actuality, not yet sixteen, and had no voice in the government. It was not until 1409, six years after the rebellion, that he demanded and received a place on the council. By that time his father was ailing and the Prince moved naturally into political opposition.

It is easy to account for this. There is the normal rebellion of a son

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against parental authority, and the desire for a man soon to be king to begin organizing the kingdom in his own fashion. As for Henry IV, he, knowing he had not long to live, apparently feared the possibility that the Prince might be tempted to seize the throne before it was properly his—and the King's obvious hostility further alienated the son.

For a time, in fact, the King forced the Prince of Wales out of his position and replaced him with a younger brother, as indicated in the verses

quoted above. It was the King's hostility, however, and not the Prince's dereliction of duty that brought about the change. What's more, the popularity of the Prince forced the King to restore him to his position.

And who was the younger brother?

Mary de Bohun (see page II-264) had been the wife of Henry IV (then Henry Bolingbroke) for a dozen years before her death in 1394. In that time she gave birth to six children, including four sons. Prince Hal was the oldest of the four, of course. The second, one year younger, was Thomas, who eventually became the Duke of Clarence. It was Thomas of Clarence who replaced Prince Hal on the council for a short time in 1412 when he was twenty-four and Prince Hal twenty-five.

The legends that make Prince Hal wild and dissolute would naturally have it that he was relieved of his council post because of his behavior. In fact, a favorite story is that he struck the Chief Justice of England when



that functionary was trying to arrest one of the rakehells whom the Prince had befriended and protected. The Prince was himself arrested in consequence and placed in confinement.

This is almost certainly not so. The legend cannot be traced back further than the sixteenth century and it is probably mere embroidery on the earlier legends-making a good story better. This incident is included in *The Famous Victories*, but Shakespeare does not use it directly, probably

because it would present Prince Hal in entirely too gross and bad a light.

Shakespeare does refer to this later in the series of plays, though, when it

can be used to present the Prince in a noble light.

... / did pluck allegiance ...

The King continues to scold Prince Hal, assuring him that by making himself common to every Englishman he will weary them. He holds himself up as an example, explaining how cleverly he won the affection of the people by keeping himself carefully aloof so that the occasional sight of him was impressive-while King Richard bored the populace by being forever in view.

And on those occasions when the people did see him, Henry played up to them. Now, remembering those days, he tells his son:

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*... I stole all courtesy from heaven,
And dressed myself in such humility
That I did pluck allegiance from men's hearts,
Loud shouts and salutations from their mouths
Even in the presence of the crowned King.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 50-54

Here, clearly, the King proves himself to be incredibly undiplomatic. How can he impress his sensitive son by this open admission that he stole the kingdom and by seeming to glory in the baseness of the theft? If we are correct in interpreting Prince Hal's actions as brought about by his unhappiness over the ambiguity of his title and position, then how must he feel when his father's every word casts mud upon that same title and position?

Prince Hal can only withdraw into himself, and when his father's long, self-serving speech ends, he says coldly:

*/ shall hereafter, my thrice-gracious lord,
Be more myself.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 92-93

Is there irony in the adjective "thrice-gracious"?

And what is "myself"? If Hal is not really a true prince in his own estimation or by his father's words, why should he act like one? Why not be "more myself," that is, a mere subject, and enjoy himself like one? The



remark might be interpreted as a grim promise to be even more dissolute.

. . . no more in debt to years. . .

But then the King finds the proper key to Prince Hal's soul. He compares the Prince to Hotspur, pointing out that in deeds Hotspur has a better claim to the throne than Prince Hal does. He describes Hotspur as being one who:

*. . . being no more in debt to years than thou,
Leads ancient lords and reverend bishops on
To bloody battles and to bruising arms.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 103-5

Having said this, he then goes on to picture Prince Hal as stooping to the utmost in degradation. Wondering helplessly why he bothers to reason with Hal at all, King Henry says, in a moving speech:

*Why, Harry, do I tell thee of my foes,
Which art my nearest and dearest enemy?*

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*Thou that art like enough, through vassal fear,
Base inclination, and the start of spleen,
To fight against me under Percy's pay,
To dog his heels and curtsy at his frowns,
To show how much thou art degenerate.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 122-28

Prince Hal cannot withstand that. True prince or not, whatever his status, he is no coward and no degenerate. In an impassioned and stirring speech, he promises that he will yet make his father proud of him:

*/ will redeem all this on Percy's head
And, in the closing of some glorious day,
Be bold to tell you that I am your son,*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 132-34

So warlike does Prince Hal sound now, so like Hotspur himself and so like what a Prince of Wales should be, that the King joyfully cries out:

*A hundred thousand rebels die in this!
Thou shalt have charge and sovereign trust herein.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 160-61

. . . my son, Lord John of Lancaster

But the time of battle is at hand. Interrupting the conversation between father and son is Walter Blunt, who comes in with the news:



*... Douglas and the English rebels met
The eleventh of this month at Shrewsbury.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 165-66

The date indicated is July 11, 1403.
But the King has already taken his countermeasures. He says to Prince Hal:

*The Earl of Westmorland set forth today;
With him my son, Lord John of Lancaster:
For this advertisement is five days old.
On Wednesday next, Harry, you shall set forward;
On Thursday we ourselves will march. Our meeting
Is Bridgenorth.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 170-75

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Westmoreland is the real general, and the mention of John of Lancaster has little historical significance. John is the third son of Henry IV and is two years younger than Prince Hal. John was born on June 20, 1389, and had just turned fourteen, actually, when Hotspur raised his rebellion.

He too is made some ten years older by Shakespeare.

Bridgenorth, the assigned place of meeting of the royal forces, is on the Severn River, twenty miles downstream from Shrewsbury.

... paid back again

Another scene with Falstaff follows, but now the Prince comes in only at the end, for he can find little time for idle amusements.

Remember that after Prince Hal had turned away the sheriff's men and found Falstaff sleeping behind the curtain he had gone through Falstaff's pockets for a lark. Now Falstaff claims pickpockets have relieved him of great, but fictitious, valuables, and a broadly farcical quarrel proceeds between himself and the landlady, Mistress Quickly, complete with ribald allusions.

When the Prince enters, he keeps the two at each other for a while for the fun of it, but when Falstaff finally asks about the situation as far as the Gad's Hill robbery is concerned, Prince Hal says:

... / must still be good angel to thee. The money is paid



back again.

-Act III, scene iii, lines 183-84

Prince Hal's hands are thus cleaned of the one really serious fault Shakespeare can bear to have him commit.

Hal goes on to say that he has procured Falstaff a charge of foot. That is, Falstaff can sign up a group of infantrymen for service in the war and he can lead them as its officer. This is a post of considerable honor for Falstaff.

... so dangerous and dear a trust

Hotspur, Worcester, and Douglas the Scot are in camp now near Shrewsbury. So far all has gone like clockwork for them and they are supremely confident.

But now comes the beginning of a check. A Messenger comes with letters from Hotspur's father, the Earl of Northumberland. The Earl is sick, it would appear. Nor can his army come under a deputy, for as Hotspur says, scanning the letter:

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*... nor did he think it meet
To lay so dangerous and dear a trust
On any soul removed but on his own.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 33-35

This is a severe blow. Northumberland's men are needed to make the army large enough to withstand the King's forces. What is much worse is that men were sure to think the illness was a feigned one; that Northumberland quailed at the last moment and lacked the courage to place himself firmly on the side of open rebellion. Naturally, if Hotspur's soldiers felt that Northumberland thought it safer to be ill than to fight, the heart

would go out of them and they would fight half defeated to begin with.

Worcester, clear-thinking, sees this. Probably if he had guided the army, it would now have retreated, waiting some other chance for battle.

Hotspur

thinks otherwise, however. Anxious always to fight, he counters Worcester's warning of the psychological damage the defection has brought them

with a psychological counterattack, saying:

*I rather of his absence make this use:
It lends a luster and more great opinion,
A larger dare to our great enterprise
Than if the Earl were here;*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 75-78



Given Hotspur's character, he feels the fewer his allies, the greater his own share of glory and "honor" if he wins. The thought of this but spurs him on, and thinking that his entire army thinks as he does, he imagines they will all fight with great vigor for this reason.

(Yet it must be added that the time will come when Prince Hal is himself King and is about to face a much larger and much more unequal battle-and in a much greater speech he will reason just as Hotspur does here. But Prince Hal will have better reason to do so and he will win; for he is the greater man.)

... like feathered Mercury

More bad news arrives, brought by Sir Richard Vernon, a partisan on the side of the Percys. The royal army, he says, is marching toward them with breathless speed. Westmoreland, John of Lancaster, the King himself are all leading contingents that are converging upon the rebel forces.

But there is a personal contrast, one that fills this play, that must be taken care of. Hotspur shrugs these enemies, even the King, all aside, and demands:

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*... Where is his son,
The nimble-footed madcap Prince of Wales,
And his comrades, that daffed the world aside
And bid it pass?*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 93-96

Now for the first time the comparison changes. Until now, whenever Hotspur and Prince Hal have been directly compared, it has always been glory and honor for the first, contempt and disgrace for the second. But

now it is another story. Vernon has seen Prince Hal not in the tavern but in the field, and he says:

*I saw young Harry with his beaver [helmet] on,
His cushes [thigh-armor] on his thighs, gallantly armed,
Rise from the ground like feathered Mercury,
And vaulted with such ease into his seat
As if an angel dropped down from the clouds
To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus
And witch the world with noble horsemanship.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 103-9

Mercury, the messenger of the gods, is routinely pictured with small wings at his ankles, symbolizing the speed with which he can move. Prince



Hal bounds into his saddle as though he, like Mercury, can fly.

His horse too shares in this metaphor, for he is compared to Pegasus, the famous winged horse of Greek mythology.

This description Hotspur cannot face. Earlier, Prince Hal, goaded by his father's contempt, promised to meet Hotspur in single combat and by victory earn his right to be called the King's son. Now, in balancing contrast, Hotspur, goaded by Vernon's description, cries:

*. . . Come, let me taste my horse,
Who is to bear me like a thunderbolt
Against the bosom of the Prince of Wales.
Harry to Harry shall, hot horse to horse,
Meet, and ne'er part till one drop down a corse.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 118-22

He cannot draw his power. . .

Hotspur can hardly wait for battle now. There remains still one of the rebel contingents to come, and Hotspur longs for it so that the battle may start without further delay. He says:

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O that Glendower were come!

-Act IV, scene i, line 123

This brings down the worst blow of all, for Vernon says:

*. . . There is more news.
I learned in Worcester, as I rode along,
He cannot draw his power this fourteen days.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 123-25

It would be dramatically interesting if it could be shown that Glendower was pouting because of Hotspur's insults earlier in the play. It could then be seen just how Hotspur's character impeded the conspiracy-but there is no clear hint of that.

In actual fact, Glendower's failure was the consequence of competent action on the part of the royal army. They had moved quickly, more quickly than the rebels counted on, and took Shrewsbury before Hotspur's army could enter. With Shrewsbury in the King's hands, Hotspur was cut off from Glendower. Hotspur now had to fight his battle in an attempt to smash the royal army or, failing that, at least to take Shrewsbury and pave the way for joining Glendower, and do so under heavy disadvantage-or not fight at all.

Yet not to fight at all at this point would be to risk the melting away of



his army, disheartened at being outmaneuvered, and might make of Hot-spur a hunted fugitive sure to be captured and executed-a most dishonorable end.

... ay ragged as Lazarus...

At least some of the royal forces are not yet at Shrewsbury, however, at least in the Shakespearean view. Falstaff is encountered near Coventry in a long soliloquy that shows him at his very worst, and in a situation where the audience must find it hard indeed to feel anything but disgust.

He has received over three hundred pounds with which to hire 150 soldiers he is to lead into battle. He carefully chooses substantial men who desperately don't want to be in the army and who can bribe their way out of a forced enlistment. Thus, he obtains additional money and ends by enlisting men from the very dregs of society.

Falstaff describes them contemptuously in an address to the audience as:

... slaves as ragged as Lazarus...

-Act IV, scene ii, line 25

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This harks back to the very famous parable in Luke about Lazarus, a beggar who waited for crumbs at the gate of a rich man's mansion. After both died, Lazarus went to heaven and the rich man to hell.

It is easy to see that this parable would be much cherished by the vast majority of the poor and oppressed, since it holds out the promise of redress after death and, even more, the anticipation of seeing one's oppressors punished. Consequently, Lazarus, from the frequent references to the parable, became the archetype of misery and pauperdom on earth.

Another reference to the parable, and to its other side, is found earlier in the play. When Falstaff is making elaborate fun of the fiery face of his alcoholic servant, Bardolph, Falstaff says:

I never see thy face but I think upon hellfire and Dives that lived in purple; for there he is in his robes, burning, burning.

-Act III, scene iii, lines 32-34

The rich man in the parable is given no proper name, but in the Lathi version of the Bible he is *dives*, which simply means "rich man." It was



easy for those who knew little Lathi to suppose that Dives was the proper name of the hell-bound individual.

Falstaff, in describing the miserable wretches he has recruited, uses another biblical reference when he says:

. . . you would think that I had a hundred and fifty tattered prodigals lately come from swine-keeping, from eating draff and husks.

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 34-36

Here we have another famous parable from Luke: that of the prodigal son, reduced to misery by his own folly, and then taken back and forgiven.

(Naturally, the promise of forgiveness is a source of consolation to all men, so that the parable became popular indeed.)

At the depth of the prodigal's misery he is forced to keep swine for a bare living (a terrible fate for a Jew, who considers swine unclean) and

is so famished that he envies the swine their food. The popular version of

the parable has him actually eat the draff, or pig swill, but what the Bible says is "And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat" (Luke 15:16). It does not say that he actually ate them.

It is impossible to find excuses for Falstaff in this action of his, which is personally unmoral and nationally treasonable, except the very feeble one that others did the same. Yet perhaps that is what Shakespeare had in

mind. In many places in his plays Shakespeare manages to show his distaste for war, and here he bitterly satirizes the kind of corruption which

war makes common, the general erosion of human values which it brings about.

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At the close of the soliloquy, Falstaff encounters Prince Hal and Westmoreland on their way to the gathering of the royal forces. Falstaff says to the Prince:

How now, mad wag? What a devil dost thou in Warwickshire?

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 51-52

They are still some fifty miles east of Shrewsbury, though Westmoreland says his army is there already.

The number of the King , . .

Outside Shrewsbury, Hotspur's incontinent rage and lack of self-



control

(spurred on, perhaps, by his peevish anger at the fact that the despised Prince of Wales is showing knightly qualities after all) are still working against himself and his allies.

Hotspur wants to attack at once, and in this he is backed by that other border fighter, Douglas. Vernon and Worcester, with more common sense, urge caution-some of the cavalry have just arrived and are tired. Some have not even arrived. Finally, Worcester says desperately:

*The number of the King exceedeth ours.
For God's sake, cousin, stay till all come in.*

-Act IV, scene iii, lines 28-29

Hotspur manages to restrain himself, but barely. When Blunt arrives with an offer to negotiate, Hotspur responds with a long list of his grievances and then grudgingly asks for a chance to ponder the matter overnight.

... the fortune of ten thousand men

The scene switches to the palace of the Archbishop of York, in the city of York. He is sending messages in all directions in the greatest haste, for as he says to the man who will carry them:

*Tomorrow, good Sir Michael, is a day
Wherein the fortune of ten thousand men
Must bide the touch . . .*

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 8-10

A touchstone is a dark, hard rock upon which the soft metal gold will rub off where it touches and leave a mark. The marks made by pure gold and by gold to which varying amounts of copper have been added differs

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in color. A sample of unknown gold alloy can be marked across the touchstone and the color compared to standards. In this way the composition of the gold alloy can be determined.

A touchstone has thus come to mean anything that can be used as a test. The fortune of ten thousand men must bide the "touch," that is, will be tested by the battle to see which side will be victorious, which defeated.

It is now the day before the Battle of Shrewsbury, or July 20, 1403, and the Archbishop is making preparations for strengthening himself



against
the King in case his ally, Hotspur, is defeated in the battle.

... crush our old limbs...

The scene shifts back to the King's camp near Shrewsbury. It is sunrise and Hotspur has had his night to think things over. He has sent Worcester and Vernon to the King to see what can be done to achieve a peaceful settlement. (He has, as is later made clear, accepted Westmoreland in their place as a surety for the safe return of these negotiators.)

The King greets Worcester, the brains behind the rebellion, most coldly and says:

*... You have deceived our trust
And made us doff our easy robes of peace
To crush our old limbs in ungentle steel.*

-Act V, scene i, lines 11-13

Since Prince Hal is made ten years older than he really is, for dramatic purposes, his father must be made older too. The vision here is of an old man come tottering out to war, but as a matter of historical fact, the King is actually only thirty-seven years old at this point and is over twenty years *younger* than is Worcester, whom he is now addressing with such self-pity.

... that oath at Doncaster

Worcester repeats (as Hotspur had in an earlier scene) the Percy litany: how the King had returned from exile with a handful of men; how the Percys had saved him by taking up his cause; how without them he could not have succeeded. Something new is added, however. Worcester says, self-righteously:

*... You swore to us,
And you did swear that oath at Doncaster,
That you did nothing purpose 'gainst the state,
Nor claim no further than your new-fall'n right*

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The seat of Gaunt, dukedom of Lancaster.

-Act V, scene i, lines 41-45

Doncaster is a town in southern Yorkshire, forty-five miles west of Ravenspurgh, where the King (then Bolingbroke) had landed.

Undoubtedly Bolingbroke did so swear in order not to frighten off possible allies who might be reluctant to come out openly in favor of an actual deposition of Richard II. Once the rebellion gained rapid success, however, it was inevitable that the goals be made higher, and certainly, both in history and in Shakespeare, the Percys were not behindhand in



helping
Bolingbroke to the throne once the path there turned out to be a
smooth
one.

But now, when the Percys have broken with the new King, they remember the oath and use it to show that Henry had unrightfully usurped the throne. That too is to be expected in practical politics; the King dismisses the whole argument lightly.

... a truant been to chivalry

But Prince Hal answers. He is now going to fulfill the promise he made his father on the occasion of their reconciliation. He praises Hotspur to Worcester and says in frank self-criticism:

*For my part, I may speak it to my shame,
I have a truant been to chivalry;
And so I hear he [Hotspur] doth account me too.*

-Act V, scene i, lines 93-95

The Prince then challenges Hotspur to single combat as a way of deciding the battle, rising thus from the depths of Falstaffian frivolity to the heights of Hotspurian "honor."

The King is satisfied with the offer, but will not risk his heir. He offers instead to grant full amnesty to all the rebels, even to Worcester, if they will all lay down their arms.

Can honor set to a leg

Worcester leaves, but there is no surety that the offer of amnesty will be accepted. It is necessary that the King's forces prepare for momentary battle, in case the offer is not accepted.

Falstaff, who has been on the scene all this time with occasional bits of comic relief, now betrays nervousness; a nervousness with which Prince Hal refuses to sympathize.

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Falstaff, then left alone on the stage, muses on the nature of "honor" as earlier in the play Hotspur had done, but to much different effect. He says, in part:

*Can honor set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or lake away the
grief of a wound? No. Honor hath no skill in surgery then?
No. What is honor? A word . . .*

-Act V, scene i, lines 131-34

Remember that honor is not to be taken in a broad sense to mean virtue, integrity, honesty, or any of the great moral attributes of mankind. To the



Hotspurs of the world, it means merely military prowess and nothing more;
it means the reputation of winning in battle and facing the enemy with
show of fear. It is the honor of the pugilist, of the western gunfighter,
and
-at its worst-of the gangster.

It is this honor which Falstaff derides, pointing out its essential empti-
ness. It is almost unavoidable to feel embarrassed at Falstaff's
"cowardly"
downgrading of honor, but as the centuries have passed and as wars
have
grown steadily more terrible, the Falstaffian view is making sense to
more
and more men. In fact, we have now reached the point where it would
seem
that the safety of the human race itself depends on dismissing this
kind
of
"honor" as a mere word.

... so sweet a hope

Worcester dares not carry news of the King's offered amnesty to Hot-
spur. He cannot trust the King. Even if the amnesty is given and
accepted,
the Percys will all live at the edge of a volcano. The King will always sus-
pect them, never trust them, and sooner or later find an occasion to
destroy
them.

Yet Hotspur the impulsive is perfectly capable of veering from
extreme
to extreme and may swing from intransigent violence to a sudden
snatch
at "honorable" peace.

Consequently, Worcester talks Vernon into helping him
misrepresent
the King's statement, and Hotspur is told there are to be no terms
and
that
the battle must be fought. Worcester does add, however, that Prince
Hal
has challenged him to single combat.

At once Hotspur is interested. He wants the details, saying:

*... Tell me, tell me,
How showed his tasking [challenging]? Seemed it in con-
tempt?*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 49-50

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But again Hotspur must be disappointed, for the Prince's manner of challenge is praised in highest terms. Vernon speaks highly of the Prince's bearing and behavior, and says of him:

*// he outlive the envy of this day,
England did never owe [own] so sweet a hope,
So much misconstrued in his wantonness.*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 66-68

In angry frustration, Hotspur can only promise, once again, that he will kill the Prince.

... all his wardrobe ...

The Battle of Shrewsbury was fought in medieval style, with the King himself in the forefront of his forces. This was necessary, for the King was the rallying point and inspiration, and when he charged forward with the cream of his forces serving as his bodyguard, the rest of the army would follow in excitement and achieve the necessary breakthrough.

This was also a great risk. The death of the King would automatically mean the end of the battle with the Percys the victors. When the word went around that the King had fallen, the heart would go out of his army.

It was not unheard-of strategy, therefore, to prepare several soldiers (presumably volunteers) with the royal insignia, to draw the enemy fire, so to speak. It was done on this occasion.

The battle began with the Percy archers repeating the stand they had made at Holmedon ten months before. The royal forces began to fall as the Scots had done on the earlier occasion. The King had numbers on his side, however. Leading fresh forces into the battle in a violent charge, he drove the rebels back.

Shakespeare, who never displays much understanding of battle tactics, confines himself to describing single combats. The rebels bent all their efforts on bringing down the King, and according to Holinshed, Douglas the Scot was particularly active here. Shakespeare follows this. Douglas has killed three men in the King's regalia, including Blunt.

With Blunt dead at his feet, Douglas thinks the battle won. Hotspur, who knows the real King well, disabuses the Scot, who, annoyed at the false Kings in the fight, says in exasperation:

*Now, by my sword, I will kill all his coats;
I'll murder all his wardrobe, piece by piece,
Until I meet the King.*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 26-28

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... they are peppered

Falstaff is shown on the battlefield too. His charge of infantrymen has been destroyed, though he himself remains unscratched. In fact, Falstaff



has deliberately led his men into the hottest portion of the fight precisely in order to kill them off. He says:

/ have led my rag-of-muffins where they are peppered.

-Act V, scene iii, lines 36-37

This seems senseless until one realizes that officers who did this could sometimes manage to draw the dead soldiers' pay for themselves before the statistics caught up with them, and presumably Falstaff plans to do this.

Falstaff says:

There's not three of my hundred and fifty left alive, and they are for the town's end, to beg during life.

-Act V, scene iii, lines 37-39

This lends an even bitterer point to the comment he had just made on coming across the dead body of Sir Walter Blunt, when he said:

There's honor for you!

-Act V, scene iii, lines 32-33

Military renown, it would seem, leads to disregarded death if one is noble, and if one is a common man, to wounds, disablement, and the dubious privilege of begging for one's livelihood from those who have stayed home and avoided "honor." Advocates of military glory get scant encouragement from Shakespeare really, despite a few resounding speeches here and there.

... to jest and dally ...

Prince Hal, without his sword (it is presumably lost in the heat of battle), enters at this point. He tries to borrow Falstaff's sword or his pistol.

Falstaff won't yield his sword and his pistol case has a bottle of sack in it. The Prince hurls the bottle at Falstaff, saying impatiently:

What, is it a time to jest and dally now?

-Act V, scene iii, line 55

Falstaff is always Falstaff, just as Hotspur is always Hotspur, but the

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Prince can play either role as suits the occasion, and on the battlefield,



he
must be Hotspur and not Falstaff.

... thou bleedest too much

In actual history, Prince Hal, even though merely a sixteen-year-old, was on the field and fought well. He was wounded by an arrow in the face (fortunately not much more than a scratch) and refused to retire, insisting that the wound was insufficiently serious and that his retirement would dishearten the soldiers.

Shakespeare keeps the wound and the incident. He has the King concerned over the wound. He says to the Prince:

I prithee, Harry, withdraw thyself, thou bleedest too much.

-Act V, scene iv, line 1

The Prince refuses:

*... God forbid a shallow scratch should drive
The Prince of Wales from such a field as this,*

-Act V, scene iv, lines 10-11

... another counterfeit

Douglas, still searching for the King, comes upon the real one at last, but now he is suspicious. He approaches cautiously, saying:

*I fear thou art another counterfeit;
And yet, in faith, thou bearest thee like a king.*

-Act V, scene iv, lines 34-35

These two lines represent the turning point of the battle and, in a way, of Henry's reign. Beyond the literal meaning of the lines, one can see the nation's fear that King Henry is but a counterfeit—that he is not the legitimate heir to the crown, so his rule cannot thrive.

But now we have Douglas' word that he acts like a king and looks like one. And, in fact, this is what he proved when he took a firm stand against rebels and won over them.

The King does not retreat before Douglas, as one might suppose he ought to not only because his life is more important to the cause than any knightly gesture could be, but because the King is represented by Shakespeare as an old man, and Douglas as a skilled and almost irresistible warrior.

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In actual fact, though, the King was young enough at Shrewsbury to take active part in the fight, and according to Holinshed (who cited stories

that were perhaps exaggerated by flatterers), he killed thirty-six men with

his own hands. What's more, Holinshed reports that the King did indeed



fight with Douglas and was beaten down, but rescued.

Holinshed does not mention the rescuer, but it was probably those who were charged with the King's safety, and who came roaring in as soon as they saw him in trouble. Naturally, Douglas would be forced to retreat.

Shakespeare, however, now begins to produce the climax of the play, using details which are not to be found in Holinshed or anywhere else.

It is the Prince of Wales himself who rushes in when the King is about to be slain by Douglas; it is the Prince who, singlehanded, beats back the doughty Douglas and forces him to flee.

The King, rising again, says to his son:

*Thou hast redeemed thy lost opinion,
And showed thou mak'st some tender of my life,
In this fair rescue thou hast brought to me.*

-Act V, scene iv, lines 47-49

Thus, the King atones for his earlier picture of the Prince fighting against his father in Percy's pay, and the Prince is just human enough to rub it in a bit:

*O God, they did me too much injury
That ever said I heark'ned for your death.
If it were so, I might have let alone
The insulting hand of Douglas over you,*

-Act V, scene iv, lines 50-53

. . . those proud titles . . .

There remains one thing, and one thing only. The two Harrys, Hotspur and the Prince, must meet. Each has sworn to slay the other.

And now they do meet, issue their formal challenges, and begin the duel toward which all the play from the very start has been heading. Falstaff enters too, cheering on his Prince, so that the Prince out-Hotspurs Hotspur with his Falstaff-self looking on.

The fight ends, as it must, in the Prince's victory, and Hotspur falls. But he is Hotspur to the last and says:

*/ better brook the loss of brittle life
Than those proud titles thou hast won of me.*

-Act V, scene iv, lines 77-78

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In Hotspur's sense, "honor" passes from loser to victor. It is the same logic that makes the winner of a prizefight the Heavyweight Champion of the World even though the loser had won a dozen previous fights and the winner just this one. And it is the title of champion that Hotspur bewails the loss of, not life itself.



What's more, it is the same "sword-and-buckler Prince of Wales" that has won all. The turnabout is complete.

Poor Jack, farewell

But even while the Prince and Hotspur were fighting, Douglas entered and fought with Falstaff, who could escape only by falling down and pretending to be dead.

Prince Hal, leaving Hotspur's body, now stumbles over Falstaff's, and is struck with regret:

*What old acquaintance? Could not all this flesh
Keep in a little life? Poor Jack, farewell!
I could have better spared a better man.*

-Act V, scene iv, lines 101-3

It might have made dramatic sense to have had Falstaff really dead here. It would have represented the final death of Prince Hal's gay, misspent ways. In bidding farewell to Falstaff, Hal might have been saying good-bye to youth and carefree joy, and might have taken up the role of Hotspur for the rest of his life.

Yet perhaps not. Prince Hal, in Shakespeare's drawing, never became entirely Hotspur even at the height of his career as hero-king. He never accepted honor as quite the all in all, but remained always human, always well rounded.

... a long hour by Shrewsbury clock

This would seem to be made plain in a final bit of symbolism. Once the Prince has left, Falstaff rises cautiously to his feet, spies Hotspur's corpse, stabs it, and impudently carries it off to claim a reward for having killed the chief rebel.

He encounters the two royal brothers, Prince Hal and John of Lancaster, who both stare in astonishment at seeing Falstaff alive.

The Prince protests that he himself killed Percy, but Falstaff calmly insists that he and Percy were both down and out of breath as a result of their

respective encounters with Douglas and the Prince:

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*... but we rose both at an instant and fought a long hour
by Shrewsbury clock.*

-Act V, scene iv, lines 145-46

Prince Hal, amused as always by Falstaff's ways, lets the matter drop. He is not the glutton for honor that Hotspur was, after all, and he is willing to have Falstaff try to see how much of it he can make stick to himself. Besides, it fits actual history to have Hal not too clearly the slayer of Hotspur.



Hotspur was indeed killed at the Battle of Shrewsbury on July 21, 1403, but his death came at the hands of an unknown man. There is no historical foundation for the Prince of Wales as the slayer. Even Holinshed does not say the Prince killed Hotspur. Shakespeare states it out of dramatic necessity, but he has the Prince make no effort to ensure his own clear credit, so as to account for the lack of historical evidence since.

Falstaff leaves the stage, for the last time in this play, with the body of Hotspur on his back. The two extremes of Hal's personality thus meet and blend together physically at last, as they do (we are expected to understand) in the Prince himself.

... the day is ours

The death of Hotspur means the end of the battle. Once the word of his death was spread about, the disheartened rebels could only seek safety in flight. The Prince says:

The trumpet sounds retreat; the day is ours.

-Act V, scene iv, line 157

Worcester and Vernon are taken and delivered up to execution at once. (In actual fact, they were executed two days after the battle.) Douglas was captured alive, having fallen and hurt himself badly when trying to get away from the scene of battle. But he was a Scot and not an English traitor and he was released without ransom.

That was a good stroke of policy, actually. Hotspur had released his Scottish prisoners to induce them to fight on his side, and the King released Douglas in return for his neutrality and that of those Scots he could influence thereafter.

The battle might be won, however, but the rebellion was not over. The King himself makes that plain in his final speech of the play:

*You, son John, and my cousin Westmorland,
Towards York shall bend you with your dearest speed
To meet Northumberland and the prelate Scroop,*

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*Who, as we hear, are busily in arms.
Myself and you, son Harry, will towards Wales
To fight with Glendower and the Earl of March.*

-Act V, scene v, lines 35-40

So the play ends only in the sense that the Prince versus Hotspur confrontation has reached a final, satisfying climax. The larger tale goes on, without a break, into the next play in the series, *Henry IV, Part Two*.



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THE PLAY *Henry IV, Part Two* presents an interesting problem. Is it a play that is really separate and distinct from *Henry IV, Part One*? Or are the two to be taken together as one long, ten-act play-which is too long to be played in one evening and is therefore divided into two plays of normal length for convenience' sake.

To me it seems they are two separate plays and that the second exists by accident. This is the way I see it:

According to the legends that had grown up in later times, Henry of Monmouth, Prince of Wales ("Prince Hal") had been a madcap, riotous youth, given to low companions, and even engaging in highway robbery. He had, however, reformed under the stress of emergency, fought and killed the rebellious Sir Henry Percy ("Hotspur"). He then reconciled himself with his father, King Henry IV, succeeded to the throne as the heroic Henry V, broke away from his evil companions and banished them from his presence.

This would make a beautifully tight plot for a single play, and *Henry IV, Part One* is almost that play. It contains Hotspur, gallant and rebellious. It contains Prince Hal, gay and wild; with Falstaff, that great comic invention, as his companion. Prince Hal does indeed reform, is indeed reconciled with his father, becomes a gallant, gleaming knight, meets Hotspur on the battlefield and kills him.

So far, so good. It only remains for Shakespeare to travel quickly from the Battle of Shrewsbury (July 21, 1403) to the death of the King (March 20, 1413) and follow it by the triumphant coronation of the new King, Henry V.

To be sure, there is a ten-year gap between the battle and the coronation, but dramatic necessity could easily close the gap and no one in the audience would complain.

Yet Shakespeare did not carry the play to its natural end. Having reached the triumphant conclusion of the Battle of Shrewsbury, he holds back. He



not only ends the play at that point but makes a sequel inevitable, for in the King's final speech in that play there is talk of further battles against additional rebels in Yorkshire and in Wales.

But why? With the legend almost completed, why hold back and become involved in five more acts of *Henry IV, Part Two*, acts which prove rather

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impoverished in incident when compared with the crowded and wonderful events of *Henry IV, Part One*.

Let us speculate! Suppose Shakespeare had been writing *Henry IV, Part*

One with the intention of making a complete whole of it (simply *Henry IV*) and, in the process, had invented Sir John Falstaff (see page II-327).

By the middle of the play, Shakespeare realized he had something bigger than he had quite expected to have. He sensed that Falstaff was going to make a tremendous hit and he was human enough to want to milk the character for all it was worth. So he decided, midstream, to make

Falstaff carry two plays rather than one. He ended the original play after the Battle of Shrewsbury and decided to write a sequel.

If this was what happened, events proved Shakespeare right. *Henry IV, Part One* was an instant smash hit and Falstaff was the most successful item

in it. Shakespeare could now bring the fat man back for five more acts of fun with the enthusiastic approval of the audience. So he got to work on *Henry IV, Part Two* almost immediately after the production of *Henry IV, Part One*, and by 1598 it was ready to be played.

It wasn't entirely easy, though. The non-Falstaff portions of the play had little of dramatic value to carry the play. There were new rebellions against Henry IV, to be sure, but they were pitifully poor as compared with the earlier one that had featured such bravura characters as Hotspur and Glendower.

Then too, even Falstaff himself introduced a problem. The structure of *Henry IV, Part One* had been too neat. The Prince of Wales had already reformed in that play and had become a knightly hero; he had already reconciled himself to his father. What could happen, then, in the Second Part?

Boldly, Shakespeare unreformed Prince Hal. Once again he had to be made to go through the mill. Once more he had to be scolded by the King, once more he had to repent and reform, once more he had to be accepted

in a joyous reconciliation. What with this and the new set of rebellions, *Henry IV, Part Two* became an inferior repetition of *Henry IV, Part One*,

but it was necessary if the incomparable Falstaff was to be brought back,



and that meant it was worth the price.

... a *bloody field by Shrewsbury*

The events of *Henry IV, Part Two* begin immediately after those at the closing of *Henry IV, Part One*. The First Part had ended with the Battle of Shrewsbury and the Second begins with the report of the battle.

Shakespeare ties the two together by having a special introduction (or, to use the Shakespearean equivalent, "induction"). For the purpose, Rumor is personified, a human figure painted all over with tongues. He says:

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*/ run before King Harry's victory,
Who in a bloody field by Shrewsbury
Hath beaten down young Hotspur and his troops,*
-Induction, lines 23-25

It is not, however, the truth that Rumor brings. Rather the reverse. The news that is first being spread abroad is that it is the King who has been defeated and Hotspur who is victorious-that Douglas has slain the King and Hotspur has killed the Prince of Wales.

This might easily have actually characterized the first reports, quite apart from the dramatic possibilities it laid open for the first scene of the play.

The early stages of the Battle of Shrewsbury did indeed seem to be in favor of Hotspur and his archers, despite their smaller numbers. Douglas the Scot did indeed work miracles of valor on the rebel side and at one time he did indeed strike down the King (see page II-376).

Presumably, messengers, eager to be the first with good news in order that they might reap the rewards that go to bearers of good tidings, would take off at once, under the assumption that what was so well begun would soon be well ended and that further delay would merely lose them the chance of being first.

... *old Northumberland*

Rumor says, therefore:

*This have I rumored through the peasant towns
Between that royal field of Shrewsbury
And this worm-eaten hold of ragged stone,
Where Hotspur's father, old Northumberland,
Lies crafty-sick.*

-Induction, lines 33-37



This is the third play in which Henry Percy, 1st Earl of Northumberland, appears. In *Richard II* he was the leader of the lords who deserted Richard for the rebel Bolingbroke; the one who more than anyone else worked

to depose Richard and make Bolingbroke his successor as Henry IV.

In *Henry IV, Part One* he was the titular head of the Percy family, which broke away from Henry IV and tried to overturn him as well.

Northumberland is indeed quite old, being sixty-one at the time of the Battle of Shrewsbury, an advanced age for those times particularly.

The real head and brains of the Percy conspiracy had been Northumberland's slightly younger brother, Thomas Percy, Earl of Worcester. Worcester had been with Hotspur every step of the way down to that final battle at Shrewsbury, where Worcester had been captured and executed. North-

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umberland, however, had flinched at the end, and had not led his forces to join his son, using sickness as an excuse. The absence of Northumberland's forces had been an important factor in assuring Hotspur's defeat.

There is no clear indication in *Henry IV, Part One* that Northumberland's sickness was not real, except that his refusal even to send an army under a deputy was suspicious. Here in the Induction, however, the use of

the phrase "crafty-sick" makes it clear indeed that, in Shakespeare's view,

Northumberland was merely feigning sickness in a most poltroonish attempt

to avoid trouble even at the expense of his son's life.

Northumberland's unheroic act served its purpose in actual historical

fact. Northumberland claimed he was innocent of rebellion, and King Henry, impelled by practical reasons in the aftermath of Shrewsbury, allowed Northumberland to live and even to retain his title and estates.

Since Caesar's fortunes

The first to reach Northumberland is one who was not at the battle but who claims to have spoken with someone who was. Northumberland greets

him anxiously:

What news, Lord Bardolph?

-Act I, scene i, line 7

The messenger is Thomas, 5th Baron Bardolph. He was involved in the rebellion from the start. He is a historical character, but unfortunately

Shakespeare had already used the name Bardolph for Falstaff's alcoholic

companion in *Henry IV, Part One*. He must retain the character, and so

there are two Bardolphs in this play. Northumberland's ally must be dis-



tinguished by having his speeches assigned to "Lord Bardolph," while Falstaff's companion has his speeches assigned simply to "Bardolph."

Lord Bardolph's message is precisely that which Rumor had described -all of triumph and victory. He says:

*O, such a day,
So fought, so followed, and so fairly won,
Came not till now to dignify the times
Since Caesar's fortunes!*

-Act I, scene i, lines 20-23

Throughout medieval times, ancient Rome was thought of as the Empire par excellence, and continued to be so regarded as late as the eighteenth century, when the English historian Edward Gibbon thought it represented

the peak of human history. And of all the Roman generals, Julius Caesar

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(see page I-253) was the most famous. To say a victory is the greatest since Caesar's time is to give it praise indeed.

But then comes Travers, another rebel partisan, who did not see the battle either, but who had received news that was not at all like that reported by Lord Bardolph.

For a while the issue is in doubt, but then comes Morton, a third messenger. He was actually at Shrewsbury, so that his news, at last, is firsthand, but his manner tells all before he opens his mouth.

Northumberland, looking at him, says in despair:

*Even such a man, so faint, so spiritless,
So dull, so dead in look, so webegone,
Drew Priam's curtain in the dead of night,
And would have told him half his Troy was burnt,
But Priam found the fire ere he his tongue
And I my Percy's death ere thou report'st it.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 70-75

The reference is, of course, to the ten-year siege of Troy, the city ruled by aged Priam, and to its final destruction (see page I-209).

A speedy power . . .

Morton finally tells the news accurately and in full. He concludes:

*The sum of all
Is that the King hath won, and hath sent out
A speedy power to encounter you, my lord,
Under the conduct of young Lancaster
And Westmorland.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 131-35



Lancaster is Prince John, Duke of Lancaster (see page II-364), third son of the King, while the Earl of Westmoreland (see page II-317) is the general of the royal armies.

This passage knits this play to the previous one, for in *Henry IV, Part*

One the King's last speech includes the order sending Lancaster and Westmoreland to the north against Northumberland and his allies.

Shakespeare thus skips over the actual capitulation and pardon of Northumberland in the aftermath of the Battle of Shrewsbury. It was not until two

years later (1405) that Northumberland renewed the rebellion, taking heart

from the fact that the King's rule was in continuing trouble, since Glendower was still a source of infinite bother in Wales and since the French

were making successful raids on the southern English coast. (Indeed, it

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was these problems in west and south that must surely have induced King

Henry to pretend that he believed Northumberland's protestations of innocence, since he could scarcely enjoy the prospect of still more war in the north.)

Shakespeare ignores this two-year gap and has the new rebellion follow almost immediately upon the old one.

The gentle Archbishop of York . . .

Despite the defeat at Shrewsbury, the new rebellion has its possibilities.

Morton goes on to say to Northumberland:

*. . . my most noble lord,
I hear for certain, and dare speak the truth:
The gentle Archbishop of York is up
With well-appointed pow'rs.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 187-90

The Archbishop of York was from the first considered to be an important adjunct to the Percy rebellion (see page II-344). He was popular, and, as a high ecclesiastic, would help convince the public of the rightness of the Percys' cause.

He had not taken part in the Battle of Shrewsbury, but there is a scene in *Henry IV, Part One* which shows him working to raise an army in case Hotspur is defeated (see page II-369).

Northumberland is also told of the Archbishop's skillful use of propa-



ganda:

*He's followed both with body and with mind,
And doth enlarge his rising with the blood
Of fair King Richard, scraped from Pomfret stones;
Derives from heaven his quarrel and his cause;*

-Act I, scene i, lines 203-6

Thus, the ghost of Richard, slain, according to belief, at Pomfret Castle five years before (see page II-312), continues to haunt his successor. Henry's title, despite the victory at Shrewsbury, is still tainted, is still of doubtful legitimacy, and rebels rise at every hand to contest his dubious right to the throne.

... witty in myself...

Now, in the second scene, Falstaff appears. He is the reason for this
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play and immediately after the serious tone is set (and undoubtedly the audience was impatient enough to have that over and done) he waddles onto the scene in as broadly farcical a manner as possible.

He has received some honor for his dubious deeds at the Battle of Shrewsbury (where, for one thing, he loudly claimed the honor of having killed Hotspur, see page II-377) and on the strength of that he is putting on all the airs of a great nobleman.

Prince Hal has given him a page to accentuate Falstaff's new role, but the Prince does so in his own style, giving him a particularly small one (so that he is always played by the smallest and youngest child who can be made to recite the lines).

Undoubtedly the laughter breaks out the moment the fat man struts on-stage with the tiny Page mimicking him behind, and continues for as long as the actor playing Falstaff can manage to keep it going. After a quick exchange with the page, in which Falstaff has the worst of it (undoubtedly to renewed laughter), Falstaff proceeds to describe his own value as a character:

Men of all sorts take a pride to gird [mock] at me. The brain of this foolish compounded clay, man, is not able to invent anything that intends to laughter more than I invent or is invented on me. I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men.

-Act I, scene ii, lines 6-11

Shakespeare is boasting here, glorying in the success of the character he has invented and saying quite openly that no one could do better.

... A whoreson Achitophel



But Falstaff can't be allowed to associate with the Prince quite as freely and as often as was the case in *Henry IV, Part One*. To be sure, the Prince must have occasion for a new reconciliation with the King, but after Shrewsbury and the slaying of Hotspur, he can never be altogether Falstaffian again. He is allowed in *Henry IV, Part Two* just one scene, one, with Falstaff, on anything like the old terms.

For the rest, then, Falstaff must be played off, scene after scene, against individuals other than the Prince.

Thus, when Falstaff grandly asks after some satin he has ordered from a merchant, the little Page calmly punctures his pretensions by replying that

the merchant does not consider Falstaff's credit good and thinks very little

of Bardolph as security either. The humiliated Falstaff can only burst out in a denunciation of the merchant:

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Let him be damned, like the glutton! Pray God his tongue be hotter! A whoreson Achitophel!

-Act I, scene ii, lines 36-37

Falstaff, like many an ungodly man, makes frequent use of biblical allusions. The damned "glutton" is Dives (see page II-368), the rich man who went to hell and who suffered from a heated tongue in consequence. Luke describes him as begging to have Lazarus, the beggar in Paradise, "dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame" (Luke 16:24).

As for Achitophel (Ahitophel in the King James version), he was a wise counselor of David who abandoned the old king and joined the conspiracy mounted by Absalom, David's son. The conspiracy failed and Achitophel committed suicide by hanging himself. His name is therefore a resoundingly sonorous symbol for a traitor; and a traitor who comes to a bad end at that.

... *the nobleman that committed the Prince* ...

But now a worthier foil for Falstaff arrives when the Lord Chief Justice comes onstage (Sir William Gascoigne in actual history, though Shakespeare doesn't use his name). He is the highest symbol of law in the land, and he plays a famous role in the legend that surrounds Prince Hal's wild youth.

The story, which first became current in 1531, about a century after Hal's death, is given in some detail in *The Famous Victories of Henry V* (see page II-327) and is the most effective portion of this miserable play from which Shakespeare drew part of his inspiration. According to the tale, the Chief Justice had arrested one of the Prince's lowborn associates. The Prince demanded his release, a demand which the Chief Justice, with careful respect, refused to grant. Beside himself with rage, the Prince thereupon struck the Chief Justice.

Still respectful, the Chief Justice explained that as a human being he accepted the blow from the Prince, but that as an official he represented the King's majesty, so that the blow upon him was a blow against the King. He therefore arrested the Prince and had him taken to jail.

Although Shakespeare did not include this episode in *Henry IV, Part*



One (feeling probably that it presented the Prince in too bad a light), he relied on the audience knowing all about it so that one casual reference was sufficient. When the Chief Justice enters, the Page says to Falstaff:

Sir, here comes the nobleman that committed the Prince for striking him about Bardolph.

-Act I, scene ii, lines 57-58

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... in question for the robb'ry

The Lord Chief Justice spies Falstaff and inquires about him. He has reason to take note of the man, for there is still the highway robbery at Gad's Hill (see page II-346). Even though the Prince paid back all the money (see page II-355), a felonious assault is a felonious assault, and in those times, that particular crime was a hanging matter.

The matter was never really threshed out and the Lord Chief Justice is disturbed about it. Speaking to his servant, who identifies Falstaff, the Lord Chief Justice inquires:

He that was in question for the robb'ry?

-Act I, scene ii, lines 62-63

... discomfort from Wales

Falstaff proceeds to do everything he can to avoid the subject. He affects to mistake the Chief Justice's servant for a beggar, then, when the Chief Justice himself approaches, becomes full of concern for the latter's age. As a last resort he begins to talk off the subject, saying:

... I hear his Majesty is returned with some discomfort from Wales.

-Act I, scene ii, lines 107-8

In that same last speech in *Henry IV, Part One* in which the King ordered Lancaster and Westmoreland to the north, he stated that he himself and the Prince of Wales would lead a portion of the army into Wales. This they did, but without notable success. Glendower's guerrilla tactics were a match for the English, all the more so since he received help from the French. In 1404 he actually concluded a treaty with France, which recognized him as "Owen, Prince of Wales," and in 1405 he won a considerable victory at Grosmont on the southern Welsh border.

It was as a result of this battle that Henry IV was forced to return "with some discomfort from Wales." It was also the result of this battle that encouraged Northumberland and the Archbishop of York to move into open opposition again.



Falstaff's reference to the Welsh expedition is an indication of the actual two-year lapse between the rebellions of Hotspur and Northumberland. Otherwise, one might wonder how, so soon after Shrewsbury, the King had time to march into Wales and return, either with comfort or discomfort.

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Your days service . . .

The Chief Justice tries manfully to force Falstaff to the point. He reminds Falstaff that he did not appear before the court when called and is technically in contempt. He says, however:

Your day's service at Shrewsbury hath a little gilded over your night's exploit on Gad's Hill. You may thank th'unquiet time for your quiet o'erposting [getting away with] that action.

-Act I, scene ii, lines 153-56

Thus are *Henry IV, Part One* and *Henry IV, Part Two* knit together at the Falstaff level as well as at the Northumberland level.

The Chief Justice also warns Falstaff against future misbehavior and against continuing to mislead the Prince of Wales. Falstaff shows no signs of doing anything but joking, so the Chief Justice is forced to give up, saying:

Well, the King hath severed you and Prince Harry. I hear you are going with Lord John of Lancaster against the Archbishop and the Earl of Northumberland.

-Act I, scene ii, lines 211-14

Thus, lip service is paid to the Prince's reformation in Part One, but it can be seen that the Prince's separation from his low companions is not yet voluntary. Rather, the King has brought it about by taking the Prince into Wales and sending Falstaff to the north, and has in this way "severed" them. The separation is not entire and there will still be room for the final one, which will come of the Prince's own volition in good time.

. . . Lord Marshal. . .

In the rebel camp, meanwhile, the Archbishop has outlined his plans and then says:

*And, my most noble friends, I pray you all,
Speak plainly your opinions of our hopes.
And first, Lord Marshal, what say you to it?*



-Act I, scene iii, lines 2-4

The person addressed here is Thomas Mowbray, the son of the Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, whose quarrel with Bolingbroke (later Henry IV) Ms the first act of *Richard II* (see page II-268).

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The younger Thomas was born in 1386 and had been only twelve years old at the time of his father's non-duel; thirteen when his father died in Venice.

He had inherited some, but not all, of the titles and honors of his father.

His father had once been the Earl of Nottingham and to this young Thomas

had succeeded, so that he was 3rd Earl of Nottingham. His father had been

created marshal of England for life and this too the son had inherited, so

that he could be called Lord Marshal.

Nevertheless, it was only natural that he retain a certain enmity against

the great adversary of his father, an adversary who now reigned as King of

England. The fact that he was never granted his father's highest title of

Duke of Norfolk, or the revenues that went with it, could only have exacerbated his anger.

Mowbray of Nottingham therefore joined Northumberland and the Archbishop against the King. He and two lesser rebels, Lord Hastings and

Lord Bardolph, agree that their forces are too small unless they can count

on the certain help of Northumberland. That is, they will be too small if

the King turns against them in full force.

However, they rely on the King being unable to do this. After all, he has

other problems in addition to the rebellion in the north. Hastings says:

*... his divisions, as the times do brawl,
Are in three heads: one power against the French,
And one against Glendower, perforce a third
Must take up us. So is the infirm king
In three divided . . .*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 70-74

So the Archbishop decides to press on with the rebellion, using the memory of Richard II to the full as a propaganda device.

Nevertheless, a successful rebellion cannot be raised against a usurping



king with no more than a memory to counter him. The previous king, now dead, cannot be raised to life to resume the throne. A new king, presumably legitimate, must be waiting in the wings for the moment when the usurper is overthrown, and this was indeed the case here.

In actual history, the Archbishop raised the rebellion on behalf of the young 5th Earl of March (see page II-320), who was legitimate heir to the throne through his descent from Lionel, third son of Edward III. The 5th Earl had been Henry's prisoner ever since the beginning of his reign, but now he had been temporarily freed through a ruse, and for a very fugitive moment it seemed the rebels might have a "true king" to rally round. Young March was quickly retaken, however, by Henry.

But none of this appears in this play, for Shakespeare, misled by Holinshed, knows nothing of the young imprisoned earl. He thinks the legitimate

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mate King is the earl's uncle, Sir Edmund Mortimer (see page II-320), who is still alive and still with Glendower in Wales.

... near at hand

Falstaff, who is supposed to raise a troop of men (as in *Henry IV, Part*

One) and join the royal forces moving northward, is in no hurry to do so.

His immediate concern is trouble in the tavern. He has been sponging on

Mistress Quickly, the hostess of the tavern, and she wants the sum he owes

her before he leaves for the army. For that reason she has called in the

minions of the law.

A broadly farcical battle takes place between Falstaff and Bardolph on

one side and the constables and Mistress Quickly on the other, with Mis-

tress Quickly by far the most formidable of the lot, with respect to both her

voice and her arm.

The Lord Chief Justice enters to break up the fray. Falstaff addresses

him with his usual inextinguishable effrontery, but is ordered to satisfy the

woman. This Falstaff does, but not in the way the Chief Justice intended.

He does not pay her at all, but wheedles the foolish woman into agreeing

to advance him additional funds.

But while this goes on, a Messenger arrives, announcing to the Lord Chief Justice:

The King, my lord, and Harry Prince of Wales



Are near at hand.

-Act II, scene i, lines 138-39

When asked exactly where they are, the Messenger says:

At Basingstoke, my lord.

-Act II, scene i, line 175

Basingstoke is forty-five miles west of London. The purpose for their return is to reinforce the armies marching north against the rebels there.

The Messenger says:

*... Fifteen hundred foot, five hundred horse,
Are marched up to my Lord of Lancaster,
Against Northumberland and the Archbishop.*

-Act II, scene i, lines 179-81

The rebels, it seems, will not be able to rely quite as much as they had thought upon the division of the King's forces.

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... exceeding weary

But the arrival of the King's forces in the vicinity of London enables the Prince of Wales to push on to London for a breather and for some relaxation after the old fashion.

He enters his London establishment with Poins (one of his lowborn companions, but the least disreputable of them, and in this play the only one of those companions to be his regular associate). His first words in this play are:

Before God, I am exceeding weary.

-Act II, scene ii, line 1

He should well be weary, having been posting hard from Wales, but the line may also be taken to indicate that the madcap Prince of *Henry IV, Part One* is forever gone. He may call forth an echo of the old times for the sake of justifying this second play (which is really justified only by Falstaff's presence), but it is only an echo. He wants a drink, but is rather embarrassed (he would not have been embarrassed before Shrewsbury) at the plebeian nature of his wants. He says:



Doth it not show vilely in me to desire small beer?

-Act II, scene ii, lines 5-6

He continues an idle conversation and Poins half mockingly scolds him for it, saying:

Tell me, how many good young princes would do so, their fathers being so sick as yours at this time is?

-Act II, scene ii, lines 29-31

Thus, we see Prince Hal unreformed. Here he is with his low companion, drinking small beer, engaged in unedifying conversation, even though his father is sick. And yet the unreformation is inserted only in order to make it possible for Prince Hal to go through a reconciliation scene, eventually, with his dying father. Shakespeare draws in the unreformation as lightly as ever he can, and the Prince's noble nature is allowed to shine through quite clearly. Thus, he says now at the mention of his father's sickness:

... I tell thee, my heart bleeds inwardly that my father is so sick.

-Act II, scene ii, lines 46-48

Why, then, does he not show his concern? As he explains to Poins, the

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sight of an heir apparent doleful over the fact that he might soon succeed to the throne would strike everyone as a piece of hypocrisy, and the Prince does not wish to be thought a hypocrite.

... Althaea's dream ...

Bardolph enters now with Falstaff's page and at once there are the inevitable jokes concerning the former's fiery complexion. Even the Page joins in, with the most high-flown allusion of all, saying:

Away, you rascally Althaea's dream, away!

-Act II, scene ii, line 86

In amusement, the Prince asks why the Page uses the phrase, and the boy says:



Marry, my lord, Althaea dreamed she was delivered of a firebrand, and therefore I call him her dream.

-Act II, scene ii, lines 88-90

This, as it happens, is a mistake. It was not Althaea who dreamed she was delivered of a firebrand but Hecuba, the Queen of Troy (see page I-104). The dream came at the time of the birth of her son Paris, who was fated to start the Trojan War, which would end in the burning of the city.

Shakespeare must know this, for four years later, when he wrote *Troilus and Cressida*, he had Paris referred to by his madly prophetic sister, Cassandra, as "our firebrand brother" (see page I-104).

Can it be, then, that Shakespeare is trying to raise a laugh from his audience by the Page's misallusion? If so, would he not have the Prince (who could not possibly be allowed to show signs of lack of intelligence or classical education) make some sort of amused and oblique reference to this? Instead, the Prince tips the Page for an interesting metaphor, as though it were entirely correct.

It must be a slip of Shakespeare's pen, one which he never corrected because of his aversion to rewriting and reconsidering.

Who, then, was Althaea? What was the situation that made this supposed slip of the pen an easy one to commit?

Althaea was Queen of Calydon, a city in the Aetolian section of northern Greece. When her son, Meleager, was a week old, the Fates appeared to her and told her her son would live only so long as a particular brand in the fireplace would remain unburned. Althaea snatched the brand from its place at once and preserved it carefully thereafter. Meleager grew to manhood and flourished until one day, in a quarrel, he killed his two uncles,

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Althaea's brothers. In a fit of rage, Althaea threw the brand in the fire, and when it was completely burned Meleager died.

A dramatic enough story, after all, and it is quite understandable that in the heat of turning out the play, Shakespeare for a moment confused the two mythological tales of firebrands.

...from Japhet

Bardolph has arrived in order to bring a letter from Falstaff, who has heard the Prince is in town. It is a haughty letter, befitting Falstaff's new sense of Importance after Shrewsbury, and begins with a grandiloquent notice of his own title of "knight."

Poms jests ironically at this, comparing Falstaff's pride to those who have a distant relationship to the royal family and are always managing to bring it up. The Prince agrees, saying of such people, with resignation:

... they will be kin to us, or they will fetch it from Japhet.

-Act II, scene ii, lines 117-18

Japhet (Japheth in the King James version) was one of the three sons of Noah. In the tenth chapter of the Book of Genesis, the descendants of



each of the three sons are listed. Several of the peoples of southwestern Asia (the Israelites, the Assyrians, the Phoenicians) are the descendants of Shem, while several of the peoples of northeastern Africa (the Egyptians and Libyans) are descendants of Ham; hence Semites and Hamites respectively.

From Japheth are descended a number of individuals, and the Bible says:

"By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided . . ." (Genesis 10:5). It is usually taken to mean that the men of Europe are descended from Japheth. Therefore, any two Englishmen are related at least to the extent of being equally descended from Japheth.

Ephesians . . .

The Prince goes on to read Falstaff's letter, which is impossibly conceited and, though brief, is long enough to slander Poms. The amused Prince wants to know where Falstaff is staying these days and what company he is keeping. The Page answers the last part of the inquiry by saying:

Ephesians, my lord, of the old church.

-Act II, scene ii, line 149

Ephesus, that great merchant city of Roman times (see page I-170),
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was as renowned for its luxury as Corinth (see page I-171) had been. "Ephesian," like "Corinthian," came to be used in Elizabethan times for any roistering gay blade.

Ephesus was also one of the cities where St. Paul spent considerable time. He founded a church there and later wrote it a letter (Epistle to the Ephesians) which is included in the New Testament. He warned the church members against those among them who did not meet the strict qualification of Christian fellowship. He says: ". . . fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you. . . . Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting . . ." (Ephesians 5:3-4).

The Page intends, by his remark, to compare Falstaff's companions with those Ephesians of the old church against whom St. Paul was warning the godly.

. . . Jove's case

Prince Hal is eager to see Falstaff once again and Poins suggests they



visit the tavern disguised as waiters. The Prince is a little embarrassed again (he has definitely grown more inhibited) and says:

*From a God to a bull? A heavy descension!
It was Jove's case.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 173-74

The Prince comforts himself with the thought that Jupiter (Jove) once condescended to become a bull in order to woo the Phoenician princess Europa. (Europa, fascinated by the beautiful and tame white bull that had clambered out of the sea, climbed onto its back. The bull at once leaped back into the sea and swam with her to Crete, where she bore Jupiter three sons.)

And speaking thick . . .

Meanwhile Northumberland is making ready to go to war despite the pleas of his wife and of his daughter-in-law, Catherine Mortimer (called "Lady Percy" in the cast of characters), who had been the wife of his son, Hotspur (see page II-288). Northumberland pleads that honor requires his presence, and his daughter-in-law demands passionately why honor had not brought him to Shrewsbury, where Hotspur had died while waiting vainly for his father.

She points out (with anxious exaggeration) that the Archbishop of York is strong enough to do without Northumberland, saying bitterly:

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*Had my sweet Harry [Hotspur] had but half their numbers,
Today might I, hanging on Hotspur's neck,
Have talked of Monmouth's grave.*

-Act II, scene iii, lines 43-45

Monmouth is, of course, Prince Hal (Henry of Monmouth), from the city in which he was born (see page II-309).

In the course of her speech, Lady Percy describes Hotspur with idolatrous affection as the very image of knighthood, one whom all others imitated. She says:

*And speaking thick, which nature made his blemish,
Became the accents of the valiant,
For those that could speak low and tardily
Would turn their own perfection to abuse
To seem like him.*

-Act II, scene iii, lines 24-28



Apparently, by "speaking thick," Hotspur's widow meant that he spoke rapidly, the words crowding on one another and often outpacing his thought, so that he is forced to stammer or fumble for a word.

In the end, Northumberland is overpersuaded by his womenfolk and turns to caution again. For the second time he vilely betrays those who count on him. He cannot simply do nothing now, as he did in Hotspur's rebellion, and hope for a second amnesty. This time his complicity is too clear. He therefore plans to flee to Scotland.

... *Mistress Tearsheet* ...

The scene shifts back to Eastcheap now, where Falstaff is planning to have a last carouse before going off to the wars. Things are being made ready and in charge is the waiter Francis, who wants to arrange for music. He says to another servant:

... *see if thou canst find out Sneak's noise. Mistress Tearsheet would fain hear some music.*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 11-12

Doll Tearsheet's function in the tavern is clearly that of a prostitute, her very name indicating her trade. In *Henry IV, Part One* there were ribald remarks tending to point up Falstaff's lechery, but there were no direct indications thereof, perhaps because Shakespeare was concerned not to stain the madcap Prince Hal with any sexual immorality.

Now, with the Prince making only a glancing appearance, it is safe to

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bring in the women, and Doll Tearsheet comes on somewhat the worse for liquor. Falstaff enters, bawling a ballad, and the two immediately set to bawling, for the humor cannot lie in any actual love passages between the fat man and the painted woman, but in the mutual screeching and caterwauling that must precede them.

... *Ancient Pistol* ...

Just as the quarreling is about to turn to elephantine caresses, the servant enters and says to Falstaff:

Sir, Ancient Pistol's below and would speak with you.

-Act II, scene iv, lines 70-71

"Ancient" would seem to indicate age, but actually, it is here a corruption of "ensign." An ensign was a flag and it was also the flag-bearer, the



soldier who carried the flag.

The ensign or ancient had a difficult task. In the days before uniforms, it was hard to tell friend from enemy in the heat of battle. Armies, or groups within armies, had to cluster about some easily visible mark and

remain with it. This mark or sign was often the ensign.

Naturally, the flag-bearer must carry the flag into the thick of the battle

and guard it with his life. He is the particular target of the enemy, for if

the flag is taken, at least a portion of the forces under it are left in confusion.

The loss of so prominent an object as a flag would become known to all

the army, and would be a signal of defeat. It would dishearten many and

make total loss of the battle more probable.

Consequently an ensign must be a bold and seasoned daredevil, and his

position is one of renown. One would expect him to be of fiery speech and

temper and so Ancient Pistol is. His very name testifies to his explosiveness.

In fact, Doll Tearsheet's first words at hearing of his arrival (she has met

him before, obviously) are:

Hang him, swaggering rascal! Let him not come hither. It is the foul-mouthed'st rogue in England.

-Act II, scene iv, lines 72-74

... pampered jades of Asia

The very word "swagger" puts Mistress Quickly into a cold sweat, and

she tries to bar Pistol from the premises (though she is manifestly uncer-

tain of the meaning of the word). She says:

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If he swagger, let him not come here.

-Act II, scene iv, line 75

It is, however, the essence of Ancient Pistol that though incredibly valorous (and therefore swaggering) in speech, he is incredibly cowardly in performance. He is like a caricature of Falstaff, an even greater braggart

and an even greater poltroon.

Even the grandiloquence of his speech is not his own, for he is a perpetual quoter of bits and pieces of dramatic plays of Shakespeare's time; choosing always the most bombastic and fustian speeches, garbling them,



misquoting them, and misapplying them.

Thus, when despite all his ferocious talk, Pistol is put down by the angry Doll Tearsheet, he finds refuge in a quotation from *Tamburlaine the*

Great by Christopher Marlowe, which had appeared ten years before the production of *Henry IV, Part Two* and which had made a great hit.

Marlowe, born in 1564 and therefore precisely of an age with Shakespeare, is second only to Shakespeare in reputation as an Elizabethan dramatist.

Indeed, Marlowe was writing successful plays while Shakespeare was still but a struggling actor, eking out his income by patching up other people's work. Marlowe died in a tavern brawl in 1593, when he was only twenty-nine years old, and it is conceivable that had he lived a reasonably full life he might have matured further and given Shakespeare a real run

for his money. Perhaps Shakespeare suspected this and took a little special

pleasure in a chance to satirize one of Marlowe's most famous (and bombastic) speeches.

This takes place in Act II of *Tamburlaine the Great*, when Tamburlaine, the Mongol conqueror who was, in fact, a contemporary of Henry IV, enters Babylon in his final triumph. (Tamburlaine was known to history as Tamerlane or Timur-i-lenk, and Babylon ceased to exist some fifteen hundred years before his time, but why quibble?)

Tamburlaine's carriage is drawn by the kings he has conquered, so that their humiliation and his own exaltation are emphasized. He addresses the

defeated monarchs as the "pampered jades of Asia." They are jades (cart horses) who had been pampered while kings.

And now Pistol, having been screeched at and manhandled by the women of the tavern, affects in his most ferocious accents to treat them as

mere jades (a term which can be used for prostitutes also) compared to his own conquering self:

. . . *Shall packhorses*
And hollow pampered jades of Asia,
Which cannot go but thirty mile a day,
Compare with Caesars, and with Cannibals,
And Trojan Greeks?

-Act II, scene iv, lines 167-71

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He has it all wrong, of course, saying "Cannibals" for "Hannibals" and using that contradiction in terms "Trojan Greeks." The more sophisticated portion of the audience which would know the speech by heart would naturally laugh (as we do at any of the countless parodies of Hamlet's famous "To be or not to be" soliloquy).

. . . *the seven stars*

Pistol keeps referring with dark significance to his sword, referring to



it as "Hiren"-apparently giving it the name "Irene," meaning "peace," as a kind of ironic joke, and punning also on "iron"-but is finally persuaded to lay it down.

Grandiloquently, he expresses his affection for Falstaff, saying:

Sweet knight, I kiss thy neaf [fist]. What! We have seen the seven stars.

-Act II, scene iv, lines 190-91

In the days before efficient night illumination, staying up after sunset was far less common than today, and only roisterers would be carousing into the dim hours of the night. To see the seven stars (the Pleiades) together is to have been boon drinking companions through much of the night, and Pistol boasts of this relationship of himself to Falstaff.

... *Come, Atropos* ...

But the fight breaks out again and Pistol, suddenly furious, snatches up his sword once more, crying:

*... let grievous, ghastly, gaping wounds
Untwine the Sisters Three! Come, Atropos, I say.*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 202-3

The Sisters Three are the Fates, who guide men's destinies (see page 1-50). This guidance is described metaphorically in the Greek myths, where they are pictured as spinning the thread of man's life. To "untwine" them is to untwine the thread; that is, to bring death. Pistol calls on Atropos, therefore (her name means "unswerving"), whose task it is to snip the thread of each man's life as the right moment comes.

... *the Nine Worthies*

Falstaff is forced to take up his own sword and drive Pistol out. This

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is the only occasion on which Falstaff proves a successful fighting man, which shows clearly that Pistol is even lower on the scale than Falstaff. Doll Tearsheet, grateful to Falstaff for taking her part, can now return to her own kind of fighting, and there is as close an approach to tenderness

as is possible under the circumstances. She wipes the perspiration from

Falstaff's face and coos at him:



*I' faith, I love thee. Thou art as valorous as Hector of Troy,
worth five of Agamemnon, and ten times better than the Nine
Worthies.*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 222-25

Hector and Agamemnon were opposing commanders in chief in the Trojan War (see page I-80), but the Nine Worthies are something more complicated. They are a collection of nine warriors drawn from history who are the subject of medieval hero tales. They are so drawn as to include three pagans (Hector, Alexander the Great, and Julius Caesar), three Jews (Joshua, David, and Judas Maccabeus), and three Christians (Arthur, Charlemagne, and Godfrey of Bouillon).

... before the wicked. . .

It is at this point that the Prince and Poms, in their waiter disguise, enter. Presumably, Doll sees and recognizes them (or perhaps she had been paid in advance and was part of the plot), for she instantly starts to question Falstaff about the two men. Falstaff, predictably, begins a comic description of the Prince and Poms that cannot help but insult them desperately. The Prince and Poms spring out and confront him, and the Prince demands an explanation. The Prince warns him not to pretend he knew Hal was there all along, as he had done after the affair of Gad's Hill.

Falstaff, however, scorns to use the same excuse twice. He insists that what he said was not meant as abuse at all but was said out of friendship and love of the Prince. He says to Poms:

*I dispraised him before the wicked, that the wicked might not
fall in love with thee. In which doing, I have done the part
of a careful friend and a true subject. . .*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 327-30

And so Falstaff gets away with it again.

But now a Messenger comes. The King is in London too, and the rest of the army must move northward at once. In *Henry IV, Part One*, when the news of Hotspur's rebellion first comes, that does not at the start move the Prince or interfere with his pleasure. Now, however, he says at once:

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*By heaven, Poms, I feel me much to blame,
So idly to profane the precious time,*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 370-71

He makes ready to leave at once:

Give me my sword and cloak. Falstaff, good night.

-Act II, scene iv, line 375

That is his last farewell to Falstaff as his friend. The Prince's unreforma-



tion is the minimum required to keep Part Two moving.

. . . Earls of Surrey and of Warwick

The King is in his palace. It is deep night and he is in his nightclothes, but cares of state oppress him and he must deal with the rebellion. He calls a page and tells him:

*Go, call the Earls of Surrey and of Warwick
But, ere they come, bid them o'erread these letters
And well consider of them.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 1-3

The two noblemen mentioned had similar histories. The Earl of Surrey was Thomas Fitzalan, the fifth of the family to bear the title. His father, Richard Fitzalan, had been the 4th Earl and had been the right-hand man of Thomas of Gloucester. When Richard II carried out his coup against Thomas of Gloucester in 1397 (see page II-266), Richard, Earl of Surrey, was taken and executed. The titles had been bestowed outside the Fitzalan family.

Once Henry IV deposed Richard II and became King, however, young Thomas Fitzalan was restored to the earldom. It is this 5th Earl of Surrey, twenty-four years old now, that the King summons.

Also on the side of Thomas of Gloucester against Richard II had been Thomas de Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick. He too had been taken by Richard II in the great coup of 1397, but he made abject submission and escaped actual execution. He was, however, imprisoned and he lost his estates. He died in 1401, a little over a year after the deposition of Richard II.

Richard de Beauchamp, the son of Thomas, was restored to the earldom, and it is he who is the Warwick referred to here. He was twenty-three at this time and had already served Henry IV well, having fought against Glendower in Wales and against Hotspur at Shrewsbury.

While waiting for these lords, the King muses on the fact that the poor and miserable probably sleep well at night, while he, a king, cannot sleep

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at all. It is the cares of state, of course, that keep him waking, and he ends

the soliloquy with the famous lines:

*. . . Then happy low, lie down!
Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 30-31

. . . cousin Nevil. . .



When the earls come, Henry finds himself thinking of the odd twists taken by fate. Northumberland had once been chief of those who had striven to depose Richard II, and now he was rebelling in the name of that same dead and deposed king. He quotes Richard's last speech to Northumberland, in which he foretold exactly the change in situation that had actually taken place (see page II-307).

The King calls on witnesses to this fact and turns to Warwick, reminding him that he was there (although Warwick does not actually appear as a character in *Richard II*). Henry says to him:

*You, cousin Nevil, as I may remember-
When Richard, with his eye brimful of tears,
Then checked and rated by Northumberland,
Did speak these words, now proved a prophecy:*

-Act III, scene i, lines 66-69

The reference to "cousin Nevil" is a mistake on Shakespeare's part. The Warwick being spoken to is, as aforesaid, Richard de Beauchamp. His son, however, who died in 1445, four decades after the events here being described, was the last of the Beauchamps. The title then passed to the Neville family, and one of them, Richard Neville, was the most famous Earl of Warwick in history. Shakespeare carelessly pushes the famous Neville family name forward in time and applies it to the wrong man.

The earls try to reassure the brooding King. Warwick, especially, tells him that the rebels are probably weaker than rumor makes them and that he has news that Glendower is dead (which, however, he isn't). The King lets himself be persuaded that it is only his own illness that is making him such prey to anxiety and, presumably, returns to bed.

... page to *Thomas Mowbray* ...

New characters are now introduced. Falstaff, on his way northward, must pick up soldiers and for the purpose stops at a place in Gloucester-
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shire where an old college friend of his, Robert Shallow, is now a justice of the peace.

Shallow, an old man, who has clearly led a quiet and shrinking life, now remembers the old college days as a time when he was a kind of colossal roisterer. His senile chuckles and leers over it all fool no one in the audience, of course.

Talking to his cousin, Silence, another justice of the peace and an even more insignificant creature than Shallow, he boasts of his comrade swash-bucklers, of their acquaintanceship with all the prostitutes of the vicinity, and of his friendship with Falstaff. He says:



Then was Jack Falstaff, now Sir John, a boy, and page to Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk.

-Act III, scene ii, lines 25-27

This is an interesting sidelight on Falstaff as a youth, for except for Shallow's recollections, he exists in the minds of men only as an elderly winebibber. In fact, when the Lord Chief Justice, in the first act, called Falstaff old, Falstaff, in his reply, implied that he was never anything else. He said:

My lord, I was born about three of the clock in the afternoon, with a white head and something a round belly.

-Act I, scene ii, lines 194-96

Yet here Shallow talks of him as young Jack Falstaff, page. This detail fits in with the notion that Prince Hal bitterly resented his father's deposition of Richard II, and that his own wild behavior was designed deliberately to spite his father. Thomas Mowbray of Norfolk had nearly fought a duel with King Henry in the days when the latter was only Bolingbroke (see page II-268). Does it not seem natural, then, that Prince Hal should choose as his disreputable companion a onetime page of that same old enemy of his father's?

On the other hand, Shakespeare is playing fast and loose with time. Nowhere does he say how old Falstaff is, but it seems reasonable to picture him as fifty at least, and possibly sixty, especially since Shallow, who is always pictured as a doddering old man, was a schoolmate of his. Even if Falstaff were only fifty, he would have been born in 1355, and that would have made him at least ten years older than Thomas Mowbray, whose page Shallow recalls him as being.

... *Sir Dagonet* ...

Falstaff now arrives, recruiting his men for the fight as he did in *Henry*

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IV, Part One (see page II-367), and again he is at his worst and his least



sympathetic. He plays callously on the names of those brought before him by Shallow, makes heartless jokes, and releases the best of the men in return for small bribes, keeping the worst for the wars.

Shallow objects, but is easily overborne and is too interested, in any case, in talking about old college days, and giving himself away with nearly every line. Thus, in one of his reminiscences he says:

... I was then Sir Dagonet in Arthur's show. . .

-Act III, scene ii, lines 289-90

The vision might be of Shallow playing a doughty knight in a theatrical spectacle based on the Arthurian legend. Not so! Dagonet was King Arthur's fool, knighted as a royal jest. Shallow played in this remembered play precisely the part he plays in the real one we are watching.

Falstaff listens with patience, saying little, but finally utters his immortal summary of gay college days, saying:

We have heard the chimes at midnight, Master Shallow.

-Act III, scene ii, lines 220-21

This contains precisely the significance of Pistol's earlier comment on the "seven stars" (see page II-400).

Yet however much Falstaff may patronize Shallow and sneer at him behind his back, the fact remains that Shallow is well off, whereas Falstaff must live by his wits. Falstaff, when he is alone on the stage, soliloquizes enviously:

And now has he [Shallow] land and beeves.

-Act III, scene ii, lines 337-38

To a man like Falstaff, the situation seems to be made to order. When the battle is over, he will be back and lighten Shallow of the load of some of his wealth.

New-dated letters . . .

It is now June 1405. The armies led by the Archbishop of York and Thomas Mowbray (the son of the man for whom Falstaff had once been page, according to Shallow) now face the King's forces.

The Archbishop of York makes an announcement:

*/ must acquaint you that I have received
New-dated letters from Northumberland,*



-Act IV, scene i, lines 6-7

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The letters contain, of course, Northumberland's encouragement and best hopes, but announce that he himself will not be there. In fact, he will be in Scotland. History repeats itself. As was the case just before Shrewsbury two years earlier (see page II-365), Northumberland flinches away from the confrontation and dooms the rebellion.

As before Shrewsbury, the royal forces offer an amnesty to the rebels. Thomas Mowbray argues against accepting the amnesty (just as Worcester had argued before Shrewsbury), but this time the hard line does *not* succeed.

The Archbishop of York decides to accept the amnesty.

/ do arrest thee . . .

It was the Earl of Westmoreland who has brought the offer of amnesty. Once it is accepted, John of Lancaster, the King's son and Prince Hal's younger brother, comes onstage to scold the rebels and listen to their grievances. He says to the Archbishop:

*My lord, these griefs shall be with speed redressed.
Upon my soul, they shall. If this may please you,
Discharge your powers unto their several counties,
As we will ours,*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 59-62

The offer is accepted, and the rebels' army is dispersed. But as soon as Lord Hastings returns with the news that the rebels' army is gone, Westmoreland says:

*Good tidings, my Lord Hastings, for the which
I do arrest thee, traitor, of high treason.
And you, Lord Archbishop, and you, Lord Mowbray,
Of capital treason I attach you both.*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 106-9

The Archbishop, shocked, points out that John of Lancaster is breaking his word. Lancaster replies with a quibble. He had promised to redress their grievances, and he would do that by executing them. Once dead,



they would have no further grievances.

In actual history, this vile betrayal was carried out by Westmoreland rather than Lancaster, who was only sixteen at the time. The rebels were handed over to the King when he arrived, taken to York, and there be-headed. The citizens of York were fined heavily for their support of the rebels (for the King, as always, was in need of money).

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... the hook-nosed fellow of Rome ...

With the battle over, or rather, never begun, Falstaff arrives just in time to capture Sir Coleville of the Dale, who has no intention of fighting in a lost cause and surrenders himself without a blow.

Prince John arrives and berates Falstaff for his tardiness. Impudently, Falstaff praises himself and says:

... here, travel-tainted as I am, have [I], in my pure and immaculate valor, taken Sir John Coleville of the Dale, a most furious knight and valorous enemy. But what of that? He saw me, and yielded, that I may justly say, with the hook-nosed fellow of Rome, "There, cousin, I came, saw, and overcame."

-Act IV, scene iii, lines 37-43

One can only laugh at Falstaff's nerve and at what must surely be Lancaster's frustrated impatience, for Coleville of the Dale shows no signs at all of any desperate fight. Yet Falstaff calmly compares himself to none other than Julius Caesar and to the famous phrase used by that general after the Battle of Zela (see page II-64).

... sober-blooded boy ...

Coleville is taken off to York with the others to be executed. Holinshed does indeed mention a Sir John Coleville of the Dale as one of those executed, which gives Shakespeare the idea for this passage, but of course there is no mention of any particular person-let alone the fictitious Falstaff-capturing him.

Lancaster gives Falstaff permission to return to court by way of Gloucestershire (where Falstaff intends to fleece Shallow). Falstaff, left alone, broods about the young Prince John:

Good faith, this same young sober-blooded boy doth not love me, nor a man cannot make him laugh.

-Act IV, scene iii, lines 89-91



Falstaff does well to be disturbed. His ability to please Prince Hal rests exactly on the fact that he can make the Prince laugh. A man who does not laugh, a man without a sense of humor, is immune to Falstaff. The Lord Chief Justice is such a one and Prince John is another, and it makes Falstaff uneasy to be with such humorless individuals. There is no way he can get round them.

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This encounter with Prince John may have a deeper-lying significance as well. It was he who, in 1417, twelve years after the execution of the rebels at York, brought Sir John Oldcastle, the Lollard leader, back to London for trial, and he was present at the execution, which consisted of roasting over a slow fire.

Since Falstaff was originally intended to be Oldcastle (see page II-327), it is no wonder that he shivers in the presence of the cold-eyed, humorless Prince John. It is the shadow of death by torture, touching him in his other incarnation.

... *my son of Gloucester*

The King is in Westminster Abbey meanwhile, awaiting news of battle. He continues to be pictured as older and sicker with each appearance, though he was still only thirty-eight when the Archbishop of York was executed.

He is sufficiently conscious of impending death to want to have his sons around him. In particular, he feels the need of the presence of his oldest son, his heir. He says:

*Humphrey, my son of Gloucester,
Where is the Prince your brother?*

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 12-13

Humphrey was the youngest of the four sons of Henry IV. He was born in 1390 and was therefore only fifteen at the time of the non-battle with the Archbishop. The use of the term "Gloucester" is an anachronism. He did not receive that title till after his father's death.

Humphrey does not know where Prince Hal is, and the King asks:

Is not his brother, Thomas of Clarence, with him?

-Act IV, scene iv, line 16

Thomas of Clarence is the King's second son. He was referred to in



Henry IV, Part One, though not by name, as the younger son who had taken Prince Hal's place on the council (see page II-361). But Hal is not with Thomas; in fact, Thomas is onstage and tells the King that his older brother is with Poins and other companions of that sort.

At once the King bemoans his heir's degeneracy, saying:

*Most subject is the fattest soil to weeds
And he, the noble image of my youth,*
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*Is overspread with them. Therefore my grief
Stretches itself beyond the hour of death.*

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 54-57

He fears for England under an unworthy successor just as though the Shakespearean version of the Battle of Shrewsbury had never taken place and as though Prince Hal had not demonstrated his heroism and knightli- hood-and even though Hal has displayed very little wildness in this play. But the long delay that enabled Shakespeare to bring back Falstaff for a reprise is almost over, and the tale of Prince Hal's wildness and reform is taken up again and this time will be brought to its proper climax and not, as in *Henry IV, Part One*, aborted.

... a great power of English and of Scots

Westmoreland enters now to bring the news that the Archbishop of York and his partisans have been taken. And that is not all. Another messenger arrives with further news, saying:

*The Earl Northumberland and the Lord Bardolph
With a great power of English and of Scots
Are by the shrieve [sheriff] of Yorkshire overthrown.*

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 97-99

Shakespeare is now beginning to compress time rapidly. It was not until 1407, two years after the end of the Archbishop of York, that Northumberland (still in his Scottish exile) grew sufficiently heartened by trouble

in the north of England over taxation to make his own move at last.

He invaded England at the head of an army of Scots and rebels and fought, in 1408, at Branham Moor, a dozen miles southwest of York. He was sixty-six years old by then, a patriarchal age for the times, but he can have none of our sympathy.

In *Richard II* he betrayed Richard, then hounded him brutally; in *Henry*

IV, Part One he betrayed first Henry IV, then his own son; and in *Henry IV, Part Two* he betrayed the Archbishop of York. It is almost a pleasure to record that, having cravenly refused to fight with others, when his



presence might have meant victory, he finally chose to fight alone, and was defeated and killed.

The other opponents of Henry IV, who played so important a role in *Henry IV, Part One* and were so unimportant in *Henry IV, Part Two*, also met their end at last. Mortimer, who had been captured by Glendower and had gained his freedom by marrying the Welshman's daughter, died at some uncertain date, but probably in 1409, the year after Branham Moor.

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Glendower himself continued a skillful guerrilla activity to the very end of the reign of Henry IV, but was never again a real danger to the throne. His forces were gradually pinched off and he himself reduced to a fugitive, but he was never actually captured. To the end, no Welshman would betray him. He died, of course, probably in 1416, but no one knows where or how, and though relentlessly hunted, he died breathing free air.

The river hath thrice flowed. . .

And now Shakespeare, having advanced the year from 1405 to 1408 in a few verses, advances it again to 1413 in another few verses, and the King lapses into his final illness. Hearing the news of Northumberland's defeat, he says:

And wherefore should these good news make me sick?

-Act IV, scene iv, line 102

The King is made as comfortable as possible, but despite cheering words, the worst is feared and supernatural portents are spoken of. Thomas of Clarence says:

*The river hath thrice flowed, no ebb between;
And the old folk, time's dotting chronicles,
Say it did so a little time before
That our great-grandsire, Edward, sicked and died.*

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 125-28

The great-grandsire referred to is, of course, Edward III (see page II-253), who had died in 1377, thirty-six years before the death of Henry IV. Holinshed records that this triple rise in the water of the Thames, with no fall between, took place in 1411, two years before the King's death. There is no Hotspur present to say that the Thames would have flooded in just the same way if any cat had died (see page II-356), or to say that in the two years between the flooding and the death of the King, uncounted thousands had died, and who was to say for which, if any, the flood had come.

Besides, Shakespeare improves on Holinshed, who mentions nothing about its having happened a previous time just before the death of Edward III.



Thy wish was father. . .

And now at last Prince Hal arrives and finds his father dying. He asks to sit alone with his father, who lies in bed in a restless sleep, the crown at his side.

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Prince Hal apostrophizes the crown, scolding it for the unhappiness it brings kings, and thinking his father will never wake again, he tries it on. His father's tainted title and his own questionable status as "true prince" are perhaps still in his mind, for he feels he will be called on to protect his royal status. He says, determinedly, as he puts on the crown:

*. . . Lo, where it sits,
Which God shall guard. And put the world's whole strength
Into one giant arm, it shall not force
This lineal honor from me.*

-Act IV, scene v, lines 42-45

The Prince leaves the room, still wearing the crown, and the King wakes to find it gone. The King supposes Hal cannot wait for his father's death, so eager is he to become king in his turn, and orders the heir brought before him.

The Earl of Warwick finds the Prince in the next room, weeping, and brings him back with the crown. The Prince explains he thought his father would not wake, and the King says sadly:

*Thy wish was father, Harry, to that thought,
I stay too long by thee. I weary thee.*

-Act IV, scene v, lines 92-93

Even more sadly, he pictures England's future as he sees it, given his son's penchant for rascals and debauchees:

*Harry the Fifth is crowned. Up, vanity!
Down, royal state! All you sage counselors, hence!
And to the English court assemble now,
From every region, apes of idleness!
Now, neighbor confines [nations], purge you of your scum.
Have you a ruffian that will swear, drink, dance,
Revel the night, rob, murder, and commit
The oldest sins the newest kind of ways?
Be happy, he will trouble you no more.
England shall double gild his treble guilt,*



England shall give him office, honor, might,

-Act IV, scene v, lines 119-29

Shakespeare pays for making one play into two by having to repeat a scene in which the father majestically and fearfully indicts the son, yet

he does it completely differently the second time, without losing any force.

In the previous play, the King had pictured his son as being in Hotspur's

pay and cowering before his frowns; now he pictures England as reduced

to a carnival and haunt of sin.

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The Prince is as crushed by the second image as he was by the first.

He

humbly assures his father of his respect and love in so sincere a way as

to win the royal pardon the second time as he did the first. This time, though,

it is, in effect, a deathbed reconciliation.

With foreign quarrels . . .

With the reconciliation complete, the King prepares to give the Prince his dying advice. The old King feels that the civil wars which had arisen out of the imperfect title might die out with a new king who would gain a throne by inheritance, and not by seizure. Yet there was the danger that noblemen might conspire out of nothing but boredom. So he says:

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

-Act IV, scene v, lines 212-15

This course of advocating a foreign war merely to solve domestic problems seems to us today to be completely immoral. Yet in older times, when war was virtually a gentleman's only trade, it would have seemed less so. And, as a matter of fact, Prince Hal followed his father's advice (as given by Shakespeare—who had the advantage of knowing what was going to happen) once he became King Henry V.

Lest we grow too self-righteous about this, we might as well remember that in 1861, when Lincoln became President and the United States was split into two halves that were on the point of war, the new Secretary of State, William Henry Seward, suggested to President Lincoln that the United States deliberately go to war with Great Britain in order to unite the land against a common enemy. This Lincoln refused to do and Seward settled down to become a rational governmental leader.

In that "Jerusalem" . . .



The King then asks of Warwick whether the room in Westminster Abbey in which he first sickened had a name. (It is an odd request, but Shakespeare needs it for dramatic effect.) The King is told that it is called the Jerusalem chamber. Whereupon the King says:

*Even there my life must end.
It hath been prophesied to me many years
I should not die but "in Jerusalem,"*

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*Which vainly I supposed the Holy Land.
But bear me to that chamber; there I'll lie.
In that "Jerusalem" shall Harry die.*

-Act IV, scene v, lines 235-40

These are the last words we hear from Henry IV, still talking of the Holy Land, as he did at the end of *Richard II*. He died on March 20, 1413, at the age of forty-six, worn out by sickness and toil, having reigned for fourteen years and having been the victim, even more than Richard II himself, of the day on which the crown changed hands.

And yet he was by no means a failure. Facing rebellion year after year, he defeated it year after year, never backing down, never despairing, and the result was that, through infinite toil, he passed on to his heir a united nation; strong enough, as that heir was to discover, to make astonishing conquests across the Channel.

. . . in continual laughter . . .

In Gloucestershire, Falstaff is with Justice Shallow again, busily preparing to fleece him, while Shallow lends himself to the process by being so anxious to curry favor with Falstaff, whom he conceives to be a great man at court.

As a matter of fact, Falstaff, not knowing the changes about to take place, conceives himself to be a great man. In fact, he looks to Shallow for more than money to continue that greatness by the one means that has never failed him. He says in a soliloquy, after Shallow has spent a scene being as senile and quavery as Shakespeare can make him:

*/ will devise matter enough out of this Shallow to keep Prince
Harry in continual laughter . . .*

-Act V, scene i, lines 80-82

That day, alas for Falstaff, will never come.

Not Amurath an Amurath . . .



At court Henry IV has died and Prince Hal is now Henry V. There is apprehension among many who (as in Henry IV's great speech, see page II-411) expect the new King to be as riotous now as he had been when a Prince, and who look with anxiety at the prospect of having to kowtow to men like Sir John Falstaff.

The Lord Chief Justice is particularly concerned, for he cannot help
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but remember that he once put the man who is now King Henry V in jail.

He prepares for the worst and speaks of:

*... the condition of the time,
Which cannot look more hideously upon me
Than I have drawn it in my fantasy.*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 11-13

The three brothers of the new King (Thomas of Clarence, John of Lancaster, and Humphrey of Gloucester) enter, and Warwick wishes that the King were but as good as the worst of his three brothers. Thus, the audience is keyed up for the first appearance of wild Prince Hal as King Henry V.

He appears and is, at once, the hero-king of legend, unbelievably great and unbelievably human at the same time. He speaks to his brothers, who are waiting in anxiety as they try to guess what the new times will bring, and says:

*Brothers, you mix your sadness with some fear.
This is the English, not the Turkish court.
Not Amurath an Amurath succeeds,
But Harry Harry.*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 46-49

Amurath, or better Murad, is the name of five Turkish sultans. Only one of them, however, had yet been on the Turkish throne at the time that Henry V became King of England. He was Murad I, who was the Turkish Sultan from 1362 to 1389, during the reigns of Edward III and Richard II. It was a time when the Ottoman Turks were advancing triumphantly in the Balkans, and indeed, the crowning battle was fought at Kossovo in what is now southern Yugoslavia in 1389. The Christian army of the Serbs, who then controlled the area, was utterly destroyed and the Balkans fell under a Turkish rule that was to last for five centuries. Murad I, however, died in the course of the battle.

The next sultan of that name, Murad II, did not ascend the throne until 1421, eight years after the succession of Henry V, so it is a little anachronistic to have Henry V, at the time of his succession, speaking of an Amurath succeeding an Amurath.

The third king of that name, Murad III, reigned, however, in Shakespeare's time. He became Sultan in 1574, when Shakespeare was ten years old, and he died in 1595, some two years before *Henry IV, Part Two* was produced. It is undoubtedly Murad in of whom Shakespeare was thinking when he had Henry V speak these words.

The Turkish sultans were born of a polygamous social system. When a sultan died, there were many sons who might succeed to the throne,



and principles of legitimacy were never clearly established. In addition, the Turkish princes were particularly alien to each other (more so than English princes, for instance) in that they were born of different mothers.

What's more, the mothers themselves intrigued mercilessly on behalf of their sons while the old sultan was yet alive. (We get a brief glimpse of this in the Bible, for instance, at the court of the dying King David, in the first two chapters of 1 Kings.)

Usually, the Turkish prince who managed to gam the throne had his various brothers executed at once lest they be the occasion for civil wars. In particular, when Murad III (Shakespeare's Amurath) succeeded to the throne in 1574, his very first act was to order the execution of five brothers.

Such a deed undoubtedly rang through Christian Europe, which considered it as just the sort of unspeakable act of which the infidel Turks were capable.

It is this which is in Shakespeare's mind when he has Henry V reassure his brothers that it is not an Amurath who is becoming King but just good old Harry, and that they are therefore safe. Indeed, Henry V did treat his

brothers well. It was he who raised his youngest brother Humphrey to the title of Duke of Gloucester in 1414, the year after his accession, though Humphrey is anachronistically called by that title in *Henry IV, Part Two*.

Henry V also, in that same year, made John of Lancaster Duke of Bedford, and it is as Bedford that that brother is best known to history.

In return, Henry V's three brothers served him faithfully during his reign and the two survivors served his successor faithfully.

... still bear the balance ...

Henry next deliberately baits the Lord Chief Justice, reminding him that he himself was once sent to jail by him. The Lord Chief Justice, expecting the worst in any case, has the courage to answer that if he is to be punished for upholding the King's law against the King's son, then let the new King be prepared to see his own son scorn him and his law someday.

Henry V, having heard what he hoped to hear, answers gravely:

*You are right, Justice, and you weigh this well.
Therefore still bear the balance and the sword.
And! do wish your honors may increase,
Till you do live to see a son of mine
Offend you-and obey you-as I did.*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 102-6

He then goes on humbly to ask the Lord Chief Justice to be his adviser



and lend his grave experience to help a young king. Thus does the new King prove that his father's fears that he would drive away "all you sage
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counselors" were groundless. In fact, Henry V goes further. He not only demonstrates his virtue, he specifically renounces his vice:

*The tide of blood in me
Hath proudly flowed in vanity till now.
Now doth it turn and ebb back to the sea,
Where it shall mingle with the state of floods
And flow henceforth in formal majesty.*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 129-33

It remains only to put that high resolve to the test, and for that Falstaff, unknowingly, waits.

. . . *thy tender lambkin* . . .

Falstaff is still with Shallow in Gloucestershire, being feted in rustic splendor, when Pistol arrives with the news, breathless and wild. He cannot speak except in his fustian tragic metaphors and is continually being interrupted by the Gloucestershiremen, who cannot understand him and who throw him into a fury. Finally, he manages to choke it out:

*Sir John, thy tender lambkin now is king.
Harry the Fifth's the man. I speak the truth.*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 118-19

All is at once confusion. Shallow's appointment as justice of the peace automatically expires with the old King's death and so does Silence's (who faints).

But Falstaff calls for his horse at once. He has no doubt that he is now to be the power behind the throne. He says:

Master Robert Shallow, choose what office thou wilt in the land, 'tis thine.

-Act V, scene iii, lines 124-26

Pistol and Bardolph are ecstatic, with visions of wealth and power in their heads, but Falstaff's own vision climbs to the heights:

I know the young king is sick for me. Let us take any man's horses; the laws of England are at my commandment. Blessed are they that have been my friends, and woe to my Lord Chief Justice!

-Act V, scene iii, lines 137-41

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/ *know thee not, old man* . . .



With a thousand pounds of Shallow's money, Falstaff rides madly to London. With him are his various satellites, including Shallow. It is coronation day, April 9, 1413, with Henry V about to pass in most solemn procession. Falstaff can hardly wait; his part-time sweetheart, Doll Tearsheet, has been taken off to prison on an accusation of murder, and he is certain he can save her.

Henry V passes in all state and Falstaff forces a public confrontation by calling out to him. The procession stops and the climax of the two *Henry IV* plays comes.

In measured tones, the King begins:

*/ know thee not, old man. Fall to thy prayers.
How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!
I have long dreamt of such a kind of man,
So surfeit-swelled, so old, and so profane,
But being awaked, I do despise my dream.*

-Act V, scene v, lines 48-52

Falstaff is thus publicly repudiated and humiliated, forbidden to approach within ten miles of the King at any time. (Holinshed says, without detail, that the riotous friends of Hal's princehood were forbidden to approach closer than that distance.)

Uncounted numbers have regretted this speech. Loving Falstaff because he made them (as well as the Prince) laugh, the watchers and readers of the play have mourned the Prince's action and felt he was a coldhearted prig to turn against the man so publicly. I have, in the past, been firmly of that opinion myself.

Yet on further thought, it is wrong to blame Henry V. Accepting the Shakespearean situation, we must see that Falstaff had invited the public humiliation by accosting the new King publicly, and on the coronation day of all times. Henry V had somehow to wipe out of the public mind the vision of himself as a wild, riotous person. That image had been centered on Falstaff, and therefore, it was on the King's treatment of Falstaff that his public image rested.

Henry V could not bend in this respect; he could not move. If the conspiracies against the throne were to cease, he must be seen as anointed King, rightful King, true King. In order to lift the ever present stain of the deposition of Richard II he had to speak as King and not as man.

Orson Welles starred as Falstaff in a recent motion picture based on *Henry IV, Part One* and *Henry IV, Part Two*, and this scene, as portrayed there, struck me as perfect.



The man who had been Prince Hal and was now Henry V spoke without looking at Falstaff, and though his words were the words of the King of England, his face bore the anguish of Prince Hal. And as for Orson Welles's Falstaff, he bore the blinding shock of the rejection but on his face was pride too, pride that this wild young prince whom he had always thought he could wind about his finger had become a great man far beyond and outside his control.

Finally, it must also be remembered that even as King, Henry V was not heartless. He says to Falstaff:

*For competence of life I will allow you,
That lack of means enforce you not to evils.
And, as we hear you do reform yourselves,
We will, according to your strengths and qualities,
Give you advancement.*

-Act V, scene v, lines 67-71

Surely this is decent treatment.

As far as France

With that done, Shakespeare can now point to the future. Lancaster, pleased at this action of the King in repudiating Falstaff, now has no fears for the reign. He expects a heroic time:

*/ will lay odds that, ere this year expire,
We bear our civil swords and native fire
As far as France.*

-Act V, scene vi, lines 106-8

It is a hindsight prophecy that is almost correct. Within a year, Henry V begins planning an invasion of France, but it is only after two years that the invasion actually begins.

... will continue the story ...

The promise of another play is made explicit in the Epilogue, in which the speaker says:

*If you be not too much cloyed with fat meat, our humble
author will continue the story, with Sir John in it, and make
you merry with fair Katherine of France. Where, for anything
I know, Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless already 'a be killed*

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*with your hard opinions, for Oldcastle died martyr, and this
is not the man.*

-Epilogue, lines 26-32

Shakespeare betrays his nervousness here. There is still controversy over the fact that Falstaff was first named Oldcastle (see page II-327), thus offending the influential Cobham family and the extreme Protestants.



They were probably the more offended because they were in opposition to the Essex faction (see page I-120), on whose side Shakespeare notoriously was. Shakespeare therefore makes a flat and explicit disclaimer of any connection between Falstaff and Oldcastle.

Nevertheless, despite the promise here, Falstaff does not appear in the continuation of the story, which is to be found in the play *Henry V*. Either Shakespeare wanted no more of the controversy with Cobham, or he was tired of Falstaff after ten acts, or he felt Falstaff's appearance in France would be anticlimactic after the tremendous repudiation scene.

Perhaps all three possibilities influenced him. As a matter of fact, however, Falstaff did appear in a third play (which we will take up next), though, according to legend, not at Shakespeare's own desire. It is indeed anticlimactic and even distressing that Falstaff does so.

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OF WINDSOR

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HERE is a story that Queen Elizabeth was so taken by the character of Falstaff in *Henry IV, Part One* and *Henry IV, Part Two* that she made it known she wanted very much to see Falstaff in love. The royal whim is a command and the story goes further that Shakespeare was required to complete the play (from a cold start) in two weeks.

Estimates as to the year in which this happened vary from 1597 (when *Henry IV, Part Two* was still being written) to 1601 (two years after its sequel *Henry V* was written).

There is no way of knowing whether this story of writing on command is true. The earliest reference to it we know of is a comment in 1702 by the English critic and dramatist John Dennis.

If it were true it would explain a great deal. It would explain why the play is almost entirely prose-by far the least poetic play written by Shakespeare. There was no time granted for poetry. Then too, the play shows great signs of haste, and a number of its facets are incomplete or flawed. Worst of all, the play is a slander on Falstaff, since there is nothing of the great comic genius of the two *Henry IV* plays in the fat fool we have in this one.

Or perhaps all this exists for other reasons, because the play was something that didn't work-and the tale concerning Elizabeth's command was invented to account for what otherwise would be puzzling in Shakespeare.

The scene is set in Windsor, a town on the Thames River, and the site of Windsor Castle (see page II-261). Since Falstaff is the central character, we would expect the events of the play to take place in the period of 1400 to 1413. There is, however, no sign of the period about it other than the names of the characters and *one* reference to Prince Hal. Aside from



that it is actually Shakespeare's only here-and-now play, the only one whose events take place in Shakespeare's own time and own place.

... *twenty Sir John Falstaffs* . . .

The play starts off with the aged Justice Shallow tottering onstage. He had made a hit in *Henry IV, Part Two* (or would do so if, as is possible,
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the two plays are being written simultaneously) and here he is with his superannuated bravery, saying:

Sir Hugh, persuade me not; I will make a Star-chamber matter of it. If he were twenty Sir John Falstaffs, he shall not abuse Robert Shallow, Esquire.

-Act I, scene i, lines 1-4

In the first speech, then, there is mention of Falstaff, so that the audience can anticipate his appearance. In fact, we may even wonder whether the argument might not be over the thousand pounds that Falstaff obtained from Shallow toward the end of *Henry IV, Part Two* and then was unable to pay back because of his repudiation by the newly crowned Henry V.

Sir Hugh, it will turn out, is Sir Hugh Evans, a Welsh parson ("Sir" is a courtesy title for parsons), who will speak with a thick accent. (There is a successful character, Fluellen, in *Henry V* who also speaks with a thick Welsh accent. Whether Sir Hugh inspired Fluellen or vice versa depends on which play was written first, and this we do not know.)

The Star-chamber was a dreaded branch of the law since it dealt extra-legally in matters concerning which no specific law held. It consisted of judges without a jury. It could proceed on rumor; it could order torture; it was, to a considerable extent, irresponsible and much feared (hence the deadly threat in "I will make a Star-chamber matter of it"). It was abolished, and good riddance to it, in 1641, as part of the reforms initiated by the English parliamentary faction that had rebelled against Charles I.

The source of its name is uncertain, but the best guess seems to be that it met in a room in which the ceiling was decorated with stars.



... *Justice of Peace* ...

Following Shallow is his cousin Slender, the faithful shadow and admirer of the old man. To be the admirer of so feeble a hero is to be the shadow of a shadow, and this role Slender fills, rather as did Silence in *Henry IV, Part Two*. Slender is the epitome of the country bumpkin.

After Shallow speaks, Slender worshipfully adds to the final words "Robert Shallow, Esquire" a formal title intended to make the man more formidable:

In the county of Gloucester, Justice of Peace, and Coram.

-Act I, scene i, lines 5-6

"Coram" is Slender's humorous (for the then audience) distortion of "Quorum," a term used for justices with special legal qualifications who were required to be present at the sessions of a court.

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... *Master Abraham* ...

Distorted versions of Shallow's greatness in the legal world rattle bravely between Slender and Shallow himself, but Evans, the Welshman, through his Welsh accent, labors to calm Shallow and make peace. He even introduces an interesting distraction.

George Page, a gentleman of Windsor, has, it seems, a pretty daughter, Anne, who brings with her a dowry of seven hundred pounds. Evans says:

*It were a goot motion if we leave our pribbles and prabbles,
and desire a marriage between Master Abraham and Mistress
Anne Page.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 54-56

This is a sensible diversion, since "Master Abraham" is Slender himself, and since Shallow's fury, it will soon turn out, depends upon the loss by Slender of a trifling sum of money, which the gain of seven hundred pounds would make negligible.

... *Bardolph, Nym and Pistol* ...

Shallow and Slender are at once interested. Shallow is willing to see Mr. Page concerning the matter. They are actually standing before his door, and within his house, Falstaff himself is at present to be found.

When Falstaff appears, he is unrepentant, and insolently admits that he



has committed various offenses against Shallow. (It is done without wit. The real Falstaff would have managed to turn it all into a laugh and have inveigled Shallow into apologizing.)

Falstaff then turns on Slender and demands his complaint. Slender indicates Falstaff's followers:

. . . your cony-catching rascals, Bardolph, Nym and Pistol. They carried me to the tavern and made me drunk, and afterward picked my pocket.

-Act I, scene i, lines 123-26

Bardolph has appeared with Falstaff in both *Henry IV, Part One* and *Henry IV, Part Two* and has a face greatly reddened by excessive drinking, which makes him an endless butt for Shakespearean wordplay. Pistol,

who appears only in *Henry IV, Part Two* of those two plays, is the epitome of the swaggerer. He talks ferociously and grandiloquently but is, of course, an arrant coward.

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Nym does not appear in either of the Henry IV plays, but does appear (along with Bardolph and Pistol) in *Henry V*. It is his comic bit to speak constantly of "humor" (the Shakespearean term for "temperament" or "personality").

It was a common device among the Elizabethans (and among dramatists of both earlier and later times) to extract humor out of having a man possess some overriding characteristic, like (to use contemporary examples) Jack Benny's cheapness or Bob Hope's feckless lechery. The word "humor" meaning "funniness" comes from the fun arising in the depiction of a "humor" meaning "outstanding temperamental characteristic."

. . . Mephistophilus

Each of the accused hangers-on of Falstaff draws his sword in indignation and answers in his own style. Bardolph uses a metaphor drawn from his concern for eating and drinking:

You Banbury cheese!

-Act I, scene i, line 127

Banbury is a town sixty-five miles northwest of London, noted in Shake-



spearean times as a stronghold of Puritanism, and therefore subjected by the anti-Puritan playwrights to considerable ridicule. A characteristic cheese produced in Banbury was only an inch thick, which did not affect its deliciousness, of course, but could be used as a handle to sneer at Puritan parsimony (though there was really no connection, since the cheeses antedated the Puritans). Bardolph's remark is a sneer at Slender's slenderness, for the name is descriptive of the man both physically and mentally.

Pistol, on the other hand, says:

How now, Mephistophilus!

-Act I, scene i, line 129

Pistol, as is characteristic of him, is drawing on the blood-and-thunder dramatics of the time and is referring to a character out of Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragedy of Dr. Faustus*, where Mephistophilus is the name of the devil who tempts Faust. It is a highly inappropriate comparison for Slender, but Pistol's dramatic quotations are always distorted, inappropriate, or both.

Nym says:

Slice, I say! PAUCA PAUCA. Slice! That's my humor.

-Act I, scene i, lines 131-32

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Nym presents his humor as that of a man of action, not words. The phrase "pauca" is a short version of *pauca verba* (Latin for "few words").

When Slender, trembling, maintains his position, Pistol challenges him to a duel with the opening cry:

Ha, thou mountain-foreigner!

-Act I, scene i, line 157

A mountain-foreigner is a non-Englishman from the western hills; that is, a Welshman. The very word "Welsh" is from the Saxon *wealh*, meaning "foreigner."

... *Scarlet and John*

Pistol and Nym do most of the talking, so Falstaff turns to Bardolph for his statement, saying:



What say you, Scarlet and John?

-Act I, scene i, line 168

Will Scarlet and Little John were two of the prominent members of Robin Hood's band (who were known for robbing the rich, supposedly for the benefit of the poor). This reference to robber outlaws would seem to be a cynical indication that Falstaff knows his men for the petty thieves they are. Since Bardolph is Falstaff's right-hand man, he is compared to Little John, who plays the same role in connection with Robin Hood. And "Scarlet" is a none too subtle reference to Bardolph's fiery complexion.

Bardolph also denies the accusation-and that's it.

After 181 lines of the first scene of the play, Shakespeare wearies of trying to make it a play about Falstaff and his latter-day merry men, and drops the whole thing. The quarrel between Shallow and Slender on one side and Falstaff and his men on the other is never referred to again in the rest of the play.

Perhaps if Shakespeare had had time, he would have abandoned what he had written so far and made a new beginning; but if the tale is true that he was racing the clock, then any lines that filled space would have to do.

... Book of Songs and Sonnets ...

Anne Page, the pretty young heroine of the seriously romantic portion of this play (a portion that is almost vanishingly small) enters briefly.

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Slender, who sees Anne for the first time, is instantly struck into a kind of mooncalf love. He sighs and says:

*/ had rather than forty shillings I had my Book of Songs
and
Sonnets here.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 191-92

This "Book of Songs and Sonnets" is commonly called *Tottel's Miscellany*. It was the first English anthology of poetry, and was compiled and published by Richard Tottel in 1557. Poor Slender, unless he can crib from the poems in this book, would be tongue-tied in the presence of Anne Page.

Slender asks his servant, Simple (who appears opportunely in order to be asked), where the book is. He is told:

*... did you not lend it to Alice Shortcake upon Allhallowmas
last, a fortnight afore Michaelmas?*

-Act I, scene i, lines 196-98

Allhallowmas, or All Saints' Day, is celebrated on November 1. It is a day set aside for commemorating all saints generally, known and unknown.



Michaelmas is the festival in honor of St. Michael and all the angels. (St. Michael was the archangel who led the angels of light against Satan and his fallen hosts, according to the legends which are best known to us through then-treatment in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.)

Michaelmas is on September 29, so Simple is saying that Slender lent the book on November 1, a fortnight before September 29, which was, of course, humorous to those in the audience who knew their church holidays. (We would preserve the fun if we had Simple say the book had been lent "on Christmas, two weeks before Thanksgiving." There is something to be said for cultural as well as linguistic translations.)

... *Sackerson loose* ...

Alone with Anne Page and without any poetry to guide him, Slender is utterly lost. At one point he tries to impress Anne with his virile courage. He leads the subject round to bears, and having ascertained that Anne is afraid of bears, he says:

*I have seen Sackerson loose twenty times, and have taken
him
by the chain;*

-Act I, scene i, lines 284-86

Sackerson was a famous bear of Shakespeare's time, kept in Paris-
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Garden just across the Thames from the center of London. He was a tame bear and taking him by the chain was a favorite amusement of children, especially since the bear was undoubtedly muzzled just in case it happened to forget it was tame.

... *a region in Guiana* ...

Meanwhile, as it happens, Falstaff is desperately short of funds, and, in this play at least, there is no Prince Hal to lend him money. (Can the events in the play be taking place after Falstaff's repudiation by the Prince-become-King?) As a measure of economy, he fires Bardolph, who is promptly hired by the Host (owner) of the Garter Inn. Bardolph becomes a tapster, an ideal occupation for him, actually.

It falls into Falstaff's head, next, to replenish his finances by making love to Mistress Ford, the wife of a well-to-do middle-class citizen. In gratitude for his favors, she will (he thinks) make him gifts of money.



To hedge his bets, Falstaff decides also to make love to Mistress Page (Anne Page's mother). She is also a possible source of money, for as Falstaff says:

She bears the purse too. She is a region in Guiana, all gold and bounty.

-Act I, scene iii, lines 67-68

Guiana is the name given to a section of the northern coast of South America, not noted, particularly, for its wealth. However, this is easily confused with Guinea, a name applied to the southern shore of the western bulge of northern Africa. (That name is derived from the land, whose people called it Ghana in ancient times, and who call it Ghana again since the various African regions gained their independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s-though the section of the Atlantic Ocean that washes its shores is still called the "Gulf of Guinea.")

The region now called Ghana was noted for its gold, and on this its ancient prosperity depended in great part. Indeed, when the English gained control of it, they called it the "Gold Coast." In 1663, well after Shakespeare's time, a gold coin was first stamped out of gold obtained from Guinea. Naturally, it was named the "guinea" and its value was finally fixed at twenty-one shillings (a pound plus a shilling). If this coin had been extant a century earlier, Shakespeare would most certainly not have confused Guinea and Guiana.

The guinea was no longer coined after 1813, but it continued to be used in professional fees because of its prestige-and of its extra shilling.

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... *Sir Pandarus of Troy* ...

Falstaff, in pursuit of this plan of his, has written the same letter to both Mistress Ford and Mistress Page and orders Nym to carry the letter to the former while Pistol acts as messenger to the latter.

In a most extraordinary attack of scruples both refuse to do anything as base as act the go-between. As Pistol says, grandly:

*Shall I Sir Pandarus of Troy become,
And by my side wear steel?*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 75-76



Pandarus was the go-between in the Troilus and Cressida legend (concerning which Shakespeare was soon to write *Troilus and Cressida*) and gave rise to the word "pander" (see page I-113). We can sympathize with Pistol's feeling that the occupation of pimp is inconsistent with the dignity of a soldier's status, but we can be a little surprised that either he or Nym should find anything at all to which they cannot stoop.

The two henchmen quit Falstaff's service on the spot. Falstaff, undisturbed, sends the letters by his small page (presumably the one who is introduced in *Henry IV, Part Two*). There his speeches were identified as "Page" and he was nowhere given a name; here he is called Robin. (Naturally, since another character has the surname "Page.")

Falstaff leaves, and his resentful men, too proud to pander but not too proud to carry tales, decide to betray his plan to the husbands of the two ladies.

... *Cain-colored beard*

Meanwhile, Sir Hugh Evans, the Welsh parson, has decided on the need for a go-between to handle the love affair of Slender and Anne Page, which he is hopefully pushing. He has sent Simple (Slender's servant) to Mistress Quickly, who is servant to a physician, feeling that she will be the ideal go-between.

Mistress Quickly is the name given to the hostess of the Boar's Head Tavern in *Henry IV, Part One* and *Henry IV, Part Two*. In those plays, her tavern is clearly used as a house of prostitution, so that her role as go-between for lovers would be in character. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, however, she is a much more respectable person in occupation than the character of the same name in the earlier plays.

Mistress Quickly is willing to undertake the service (presumably she will be well paid for it), even though she doesn't know the man for whom she

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must labor and makes all sorts of false starts in trying to identify him.

She asks if he has a large beard and Simple says:

*He hath but a little whey face, with a little yellow beard-a
Cain-colored beard.*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 22-23

Cam, the slayer of Abel, and the world's first murderer according to the biblical story, was, for some reason, given a reddish-yellow beard in



the tapestries dealing with biblical subjects. Judas, the betrayer of Jesus, was given the same color beard.

The juxtaposition is humorous here, of course, for anyone less likely than Slender to be driven by ungovernable passion into monstrous acts of violence or treason is hard to imagine.

... *la grande affaire*

The physician for whom Mistress Quickly is working is Dr. Caius, a Frenchman, whose accent is even heavier than Evans' and who is pictured as a comic stereotype—very fierce. His short temper will explode if he finds Mistress Quickly entertaining strange men in his absence, so that when she discovers he is coming home, she quickly shoves Simple into the closet.

Dr. Caius is apparently on his way to some great social affair at court. He says so, in French:

Ma foi, il fait fort chaud. Je m'en vais a la Cow-la grande affaire.

-Act I, scene iv, lines 51-52

This means "My word, it is very hot. I am going to the Court—the great affair." It is not translated in the play and nothing comes of it. It may have been thrown in just to color the characterization. Or it may have been an in-reference to something going on at the time the play was written.

It is just possible that Queen Elizabeth's hurry-up order for the play to be written (assuming this story is true) was not entirely because she couldn't wait to see Falstaff in love, but because she wanted some rollicking play to be staged on the occasion of some important—and imminent—ceremony at the court.

From other references later in the play, it may be deduced that the reference is to an installation of new appointees to the Order of the Garter. One such installation is known to have taken place in May 1597. This is quite early, almost impossibly early for the play, for it means that *The Merry Wives of Windsor* would have had to be written while Shakespeare was still working on *Henry IV, Part Two*.

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Still, if this is so, then the assembled notables attending the installation (all of whom could undoubtedly speak French fluently) would surely find amusement in a comic Frenchman hastening off to go to the affair all were at that moment attending.

At the last minute, before Dr. Caius leaves, he remembers something



he had forgotten and pulls open the closet door, unexpectedly revealing Simple. The furious Frenchman demands an explanation, and when it is given, it promptly turns out that Dr. Caius is himself a suitor for the hand of the lovely Anne Page. Naturally, he deeply resents the efforts of Sir Hugh to marry her off elsewhere.

Fuming, the Frenchman sits down to write a letter, then says to Simple:

You jack'nape, give-a dis letter to Sir Hugh. By gar, it is a challenge.

-Act I, scene iv, lines 106-7

The stage is thus set for a comic duel between two competing fracturers of the English language.

When Dr. Caius stamps angrily off to court, in comes Fenton, a handsome young man who is also courting Anne Page (and of course, it is with him that the audience must side-to say nothing of Anne herself-against the pip-squeak Slender and the firecracker Caius).

Mistress Quickly has already promised to help Slender and Caius and she will help Fenton too. It is all one to her, as long as she is paid, and Fenton pays her, saying:

Hold, there's money for thee; let me have thy voice in my behalf.

-Act I, scene iv, lines 153-54

... *under Mount Pelion*

By now, Mistress Page has received the letter from Falstaff, and as a respectable housewife ungiven to intrigue, she is thoroughly angered. She says:

What a Herod of Jewry is this! O wicked, wicked world.

-Act II, scene i, lines 20-21

By "Herod of Jewry" she merely means a villain (see page II-121). Mistress Ford comes onstage with an identical letter and, is identically indignant. Mistress Page, referring to Falstaff's size and the consequences



of attempting to make love with him, says in anger:

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I had rather be a giantess and lie under Mount Pelion.

-Act II, scene i, lines 77-78

According to the Greek myths, Zeus and the other Olympians defeated a race of monstrous giants early in earth's history. After the victory, the giants were placed, for safekeeping, under mountains designed to keep them penned forever. Thus, Enceladus, one of the leading giants, was placed under Mount Etna.

It is easy to suppose that the story arose from the need to account for the activity of volcanoes.

Mount Pelion played a part in another myth, which was, however, very like that of the revolt of the giants. In this second myth, two monstrous young men planned to assault Mount Olympus, the highest mountain in Greece and the home of the gods. To achieve a platform high enough, they were planning to pile Mount Pelion on Mount Ossa (see page II-141). Mistress Page fuses the two myths in her allusion.

Mistress Page and Mistress Ford, in their anger, determine to turn the tables on Falstaff; to lead him on, fruitlessly, until he is worn out. It is this determination of the two women to make Falstaff the butt of their merry plans (merry for themselves and the audience, if not for Falstaff) that makes them "The Merry Wives of Windsor."

... *Sir Actaeon* ...

Nor are the two women the only ones to know of Falstaff's intentions. Nym and Pistol betray Falstaff, out of pique, and inform the husbands. Pistol says to them:

*Prevent, or go thou,
Like Sir Actaeon he, with Ringwood at thy heels.
O, odious is the name.*

-Act II, scene i, lines 116-18

Actaeon was a hunter, in Greek mythology, who caught sight of Diana (Artemis) bathing and stopped to watch. Diana, the virgin goddess of the hunt, was bitterly offended at this, and turned Actaeon into a stag so that he was torn to pieces by his own dogs. (Ringwood was a standard name for hounds in Elizabethan times.)

Because Actaeon wore the horns of a stag, and because the wearing of horns was symbolic of a husband of an unfaithful wife (see page I-84), Pistol is making use of the reference as a grandiloquent warning. At the last minute he finds himself too delicate to say the actual word, which is too "odious" for his refined sensibilities. The word, as everyone in the audience knows, is, of course, "cuckold."

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... *such a Cataian* ...



Page, a calm, sensible man, has no jealous fears and is incredulous. He says:

/ will not believe such a Catalan. . .

-Act II, scene i, line 140

The use of "Cataian" (meaning a Chinaman) harks back several centuries before Shakespeare's time, to when a nomadic tribe, the "Khitan" or

"Kitai," ruled northern China. They controlled the land from 907 to 1125, long enough to lend their name to it. The Mongols, under Genghis Khan, conquered the region in 1213, and before the end of the century, the Venetian traveler Marco Polo visited the land. The name of the old nomadic tribe, by then a century and a half gone, still lingered, and Marco

Polo called north China "Cathay," so that in England a native of China became a "Cataian." Since xenophobia was even more widespread in medieval times than now, it was taken for granted that so exotic a creature

as a Chinaman had to be a liar.

The present name of the land, China, comes from an even older line of rulers, the Ch'in dynasty, which controlled the land for less than half a century, from 259 to 210 B.C. The Ch'in emperor who ruled during most of this period was Chin Shih Huang Ti, a strong ruler under whom the Great Wall was built. Emperor Chin had all the historical books of the time burned in order to glorify his own reign by making it seem as though

history began with him. He succeeded to the extent that his reign was the first to emerge from the obscurity of legend (in later times), and that gave China its name.

Unlike Page, Ford is pathologically jealous, and the news of Falstaff's plans throws him into a fever of rage. He decides to investigate the matter

by dealing with Falstaff directly, under the disguise of a "Mr. Brooke."

. . . the world's mine oyster

Falstaff is waiting at the Garter Inn for news of his intrigue's success, and

Pistol, having betrayed him, is unblushingly applying for a loan. Falstaff refuses, whereupon Pistol delivers the best-known lines of the play:

*Why, then, the world's mine oyster,
Which I with sword will open.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 2-3

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The trade of mercenary soldier was common in most times and could be lucrative. Not only were you paid, if all went well, but you had the



chance of loot in the sacking of cities and the taking of spoils. If all else failed, you could sack and loot your own side. Of course, you might be killed, but that was the occupational hazard of the position.

The phrase "the world's mine oyster" has become standard now for any-one who goes bravely out into life with nothing but native talent with which to wrest a fortune out of it.

... *she-Mercury*

Now comes Mistress Quickly, the ubiquitous go-between of this play, with messages to Falstaff from the merry wives. She goes about it with such circumstance that the impatient Falstaff cuts her short, saying:

But what says she to me? Be brief, my good she-Mercury.
-Act II, scene ii, lines 79-80

Mercury was, of course, the messenger of the gods (see page I-105), and a "she-Mercury" would then be any female messenger.

Thus prodded, Mrs. Quickly informs Falstaff that he has an assignation with Mistress Ford between ten and eleven in the morning, when Ford will be gone. Mistress Page also sends a letter promising an assignation at the first opportunity. Falstaff is delighted.

... *a damned Epicurean rascal.* . .

Ford enters now, disguised as Mr. Brooke, a stranger unknown to Falstaff. Intending to find out whether Falstaff will indeed succeed in making love to Mistress Ford, he spins Falstaff a tale that he himself is in love with the woman and cannot win her. He urges Falstaff to win her and inform Brooke, so that, with his own knowledge of this escapade, he can force her to his own will.

Falstaff falls in with this wholly improbable tale at once and assures Brooke that he already has an assignation, and genially slanders Ford for a cuckold.

He leaves and Ford is left behind, beside himself with rage, saying of Falstaff:



What a damned Epicurean rascal is this!

-Act II, scene ii, line 286

Epicurus was a Greek philosopher who founded a school in Athens
in

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306 B.C. He preached a practical, sensible philosophy that eschewed superstition (see page I-311), adopted a materialistic approach to life, proclaimed pleasure the chief goal of human existence, and defined the highest pleasure to be that achieved by moderation in those activities that seemed pleasant.

Those who followed Epicurus in later centuries often abandoned the key word "moderation," so that the teachings degenerated into hedonism, the unrestrained search for pleasure. Epicureanism fell into disrepute and the word slandered the founder of the philosophy by coming to stand for a system of heedless pleasure, luxury, gluttony, and lust. Clearly, Ford applies it to Falstaff in the most insulting possible way.

... *Wittol*

Poor Ford can only fume at the names applied to him in his real identity by Falstaff: names which he feels he deserves and which he cannot bear. The names of devils are not as ugly as those he has been called. He cries out in agony:

*Amaimon sounds well; Lucifer, well; Barbason well; yet they
are devils' additions, the names of fiends. But Cuckold!
Wittol!*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 295-98

Devils' names such as Amaimon and Barbason are among the numerous inventions of medieval and early modern demonologists (see page II-34).

Thus, in 1584, a little over a dozen years before *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was written, there appeared a work called *The Discovery of Witchcraft* by Reginald Scot, which described an important devil called

"Marbas, alias Barbas." It is this which probably gave Shakespeare the

name "Barbason." As for Amaimon, he, in the medieval tales of demonology, was supposed to rule over the eastern portion of hell.

All these old names of devils are now forgotten (and good riddance) except for those which are mentioned in the Bible, and among these is

Lucifer. It appears at a point in the Book of Isaiah where the prophet triumphs over falling Babylon and says, "How art thou fallen from heaven,

O Lucifer, son of the morning!" (Isaiah 14:12).



The Hebrew word here translated as "Lucifer" is *helel*. Literally, it means "the Shining One," and is thought to refer to the planet Venus. The planet Venus can appear in the sky either as a morning star in one half of its orbit, or as an evening star in the other half. In its morning star aspect, the Greeks called it *phosphoros* ("light-bringer") because it heralded the approach of dawn. In Latin this became *lucifer*. So *helel* became Lucifer.

The use of the term "Lucifer" in this verse in Isaiah was probably an

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ironic reflection on the pride of the Babylonian King, for whom "Morning Star" may have been among the flattering titles applied by sycophantic courtiers (much as Louis XIV of France loved to hear himself referred to as "the Sun King").

With time, however, these verses came to gain a more esoteric meaning.

By New Testament times, the Jews had developed, in full detail, the legend

that a band of angels had rebelled against God at the time of the creation of

man and had been cast into hell in consequence. Isaiah's verse was re-

interpreted as referring to this, so that to Christians, Lucifer became one

of the names of the leader of those fallen angels.

The beautiful morning star, the *real* Lucifer, had indeed fallen from heaven.

But all these diabolical names did not sound as bad in Ford's ears as did "cuckold." And worse yet was "wittol."

This is a corruption of "witwall," a woodpecker which for some reason was associated with the cuckoo (the name of which gave rise to "cuckold"). The first syllable, "wit," is an old English word for "know." This somehow gave rise to the notion, then, that a wittol was a cuckold who knew his own condition.

After all, Ford was now in the position of becoming not only a cuckold but also a wittol; he was actually working to become a wittol out of sheer jealousy-rather to know than be uncertain.

... *my Aesculapius* ...

And what of that challenge that Caius has sent to Sir Hugh? Apparently, the Host of the Garter has been asked to make the arrangements, and he has conceived the jest of giving each a different meeting place. Each, therefore, is waiting uselessly and thinking the other has dodged the match out of cowardice.

Caius has been waiting for quite a while, brimming over with impatience and anger, mouthing threats at the absent Evans, when the Host appears, pretending to be sure the duel is over. He says:



Is he dead, my Ethiopian? Is he dead, my Francisco? Ha, bully? What says my Aesculapius? My Galen?

-Act II, scene iii, lines 25-27

The Host is a bouncing fellow who repeats himself in slightly different ways, that being his badge of humor. Caius is an Ethiopian because he has a swarthy complexion (something typically French to the English of Elizabethan times). And, of course, Francisco is a humorous distortion of *français* for Frenchman.

Aesculapius and Galen are references to Caius' profession. Galen is the

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most famous physician of the Roman period (see page I-230). Aesculapius (or, in the Greek form, Asklepios) was a mythical son of Apollo and a great physician. He could even restore the dead to life, and when he was persuaded to do so, Jupiter was sufficiently angered at this interference with the natural order of things to kill him with a thunderbolt.

... *in Hibocrates* ...

Meanwhile, though, Evans has been waiting in vain on the other side of Windsor. The Host has sent Page, Shallow, and Slender (who have been with him while he was teasing Caius) across-town to see how Evans is doing.

Evans, less ferocious than Caius, is nevertheless angry enough. Concerning Caius, he says:

He has no more knowledge in Hibocrates and Galen-and he is a knave besides. . .

-Act III, scene i, lines 62-63

Hippocrates, a Greek physician who was at the height of his career about 400 B.C., was the first rationalist teacher of medicine whom we know by name and is therefore called "the Father of Medicine." He established a school which continued for some centuries and of which the various writings were indiscriminately ascribed to Hippocrates himself. The famous Hippocratic oath, still sworn to by many medical students on graduation, is a product of that school.

Hippocrates and Galen were the two great physicians of antiquity and were considered the last word almost down to 1800. To accuse Caius of being ignorant of their teachings is a deadly medical insult.

... *a Machiavel*

The Host now appears with Caius in tow, and tells the two victims, in glee, of the joke he played on them, explaining that he valued both of them too much to allow them to come to harm. He is very proud of him-



self, saying:

Am I politic? Am I subtle? Am I a Machiavel?

-Act III, scene i, lines 95-96

Niccolo Machiavelli was a Florentine who, after faithfully serving his city, was deprived of office in the course of a political overturn in 1512. Forced into retirement, and saddened by the situation in Italy, which was

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then being ruined by invaders from the stronger nations beyond the Alps, he wrote his theories of political science in a book called *The Prince*.

In this book he described the principles he felt ought to guide rulers. Although himself a kindly and honest man, he recognized that in the harsh world of the time (and perhaps of any time) rulers had to be guided by realism and sometimes be harsh and cruel.

To foreigners, Machiavellian principles seemed typically Italian, featuring intrigue and subtle trickery, so that "Machiavellian" came to epitomize all that was scheming and underhanded. It still bears that meaning today.

When the stage clears and Evans and Caius are left alone together, however, it turns out they are by no means as pleased with the Host as he is with himself. They vow revenge.

... *the wild Prince* ...

The question of Anne Page is taken up again. Even while other matters are going on, Slender has been sighing with "Ah, sweet Anne Page" and "Oh, sweet Anne Page." Now he actually has a dinner engagement with his fair dream girl, for Page himself approves of Slender as a husband for his daughter. Page owns, though, that Mrs. Page favors Slender's rival, the peppery Dr. Caius.

The Host asks what Page thinks of young Fenton, but Page turns him down firmly, saying:

Not by my consent, I promise you. The gentleman is of no having. He kept company with the wild Prince and Poins; he is of too high a region;

-Act III, scene ii, lines 67-69

Not only is Fenton a poor man (he "is of no having"), but he was part of the company that made *Henry IV, Part One* and *Henry IV, Part Two* so frolicsome. Such aristocratic wildness would sit quite poorly with a respectable middle-class burgher like Page.

This is the only reference in the play to Prince Hal and it serves but poorly to set the scene near 1400, for everything else in the play (even one



quite specific reference to Queen Elizabeth, see page II-445) sets it near 1600.

... *Jack-a-lent* , ,

Mistress Quickly, in her dealings with Falstaff, had earlier persuaded the fat knight to lend Robin to Page, pretending that Page yearned for just such a boy attendant. Of course, the merry wives are really using him as a go-

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between to arrange their own plans. They scheme to have Falstaff come to Ford's house for his assignation with Mrs. Ford. They will then pretend that Ford is coming, force Falstaff to hide in a large basket of filthy, smelly linen, take him out of the house, and throw him into the ditch near the Thames River.

The whole thing will be ruined if Falstaff catches wind of it, of course. Mrs. Page says to Robin, therefore:

You little Jack-a-lent, have you been true to us?

-Act III, scene iii, lines 25-26

Robin is, of course, very gaudily dressed-an obvious comic device of contrasting elaborate clothing with the small and insignificant body of the boy. Because of his clothing, indeed, Robin resembles the gaudy puppet used in pre-Lenten celebrations. Such a puppet is suspended by a rope and all combine to strike at it with sticks till its outer wrappings break so that a shower of goodies from within is made available for grabbing catch-as-catch-can. Such a puppet is a "Jack-a-lent."

... *my heavenly jewel*

Robin earnestly swears that he has not given away the plot and apparently he hasn't, for Falstaff now enters with heavy flirtatiousness, quoting gallantly from a book of sonnets:

"Have I caught thee, my heavenly jewel?"

-Act III, scene iii, line 41

This is a quotation from one of the sonnets in *Astrophel and Stella*, a collection of poems by Sir Philip Sidney written about 1584 or slightly earlier. These were unsurpassed by the sonnets of any poet of the time, except, of course, for those of Shakespeare himself.



... *like Bucklersbury* ...

Mrs. Ford counterfeits bashfulness at this romantic approach and Falstaff affects plain talk, saying:

I cannot cog and say thou art this and that, like a many of these lispig hawthorn buds that come like women in men's apparel and smell like Bucklersbury in simple-time.

-Act III, scene iii, lines 68-71

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Falstaff is no affected dandy, in other words. Simples are herbs with medicinal properties. Each herb was supposed to have one and only one particular medical value and hence it was a "simple" remedy. Many of the medicinal herbs have aromatic odors and the markets in which they are

exposed for sale would therefore have delightful aromas (particularly when contrasted with the kind of smells common in the filthy, unwashed London of 1600).

Bucklersbury was the name of the London street where the herb-sellers and druggists of the time congregated. In the season when simples were for sale, their odors could be detected for blocks around.

Falstaff has not gone very far when young Robin arrives with his rehearsed account of Ford's coming-but then Mrs. Page arrives with the horrid news that Ford is *really* coming. Falstaff hides in the basket of dirty clothes (as the two women had planned all along) when Ford bursts in.

Page, Caius, and Evans are all with him trying to calm his jealous fury, but Ford *knows* Falstaff is there, thanks to the game he has played in the guise of Brooke, and will not be allayed. He is determined to expose his wife, but unwittingly lets the basket of clothes go by.

Naturally, he can't find Falstaff, and much crestfallen, he begins to think Falstaff was merely boasting in saying he had an assignation with Mrs. Ford. He can only apologize.

... *the peaking cornuto* ...

The various plots advance. Anne Page continues to be the focus of Slender, Caius, and Fenton, with Page pushing the first, Mrs. Page the second, and Anne herself the third.

As for Falstaff, he is at the tavern brooding over his misfortune. He is very sorry for himself for having had his assignation interrupted, for having

been buried under a pile of stinking clothes, and for having been nearly drowned in a ditch. Yet when Mistress Quickly comes, he is soon persuaded to try another assignation. (The women are not done making a fool

of Falstaff, particularly since they overheard Ford say that he had learned

of the first assignation from Falstaff's own lecherous boasting.)

But now Ford enters, once again disguised as Mr. Brooke, and anxious



to know how it was Falstaff was not at the house. If Falstaff were to say that Mrs. Ford had refused him, that would be balm to the husband's jealous soul. But Falstaff doesn't say that at all. He was there, all right:

. . . but the peaking cornuto her husband, Master Brooke, dwelling in a continual larum of jealousy, comes me in the instant of our encounter, after we had embraced, kissed, protested . . .

-Act III, scene v, lines 69-73

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"Cornuto" is from a Latin word meaning "horned" and is therefore another of the vast Elizabethan set of synonyms and circumlocutions for "cuckold."

Falstaff explains that he escaped in the basket of dirty clothes (which now Ford recollects having seen leaving) and also says that he has a second assignation for the next day. Now poor Ford is worse off than ever.

. . . the fat woman . . .

There is an interlude in which Evans, with his Welsh accent, gives William Page (the younger brother of Anne Page) a lesson in Latin with Mistress Quickly listening. Evans' accent and Mistress Quickly's naivete combine to yield a number of ribald allusions, many of which are lost on us today, thanks to the constantly changing vocabulary of ribaldry.

But this interlude succeeds in allowing an impression of the passage of time, and we are ready for the second assignation. It goes exactly as the first did. Again, Ford comes raving toward the house to catch Falstaff. It's no use trying to use the dirty clothes dodge again, and it occurs to Mistress

Ford to disguise him as a woman. She says:

My maid's aunt, the fat woman of Brainford, has a gown above.

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 71-72

Apparently, there was a grossly fat woman in Shakespeare's time who kept a tavern in Brentford (Brainford), a town on the Thames about half-way between Windsor and London—a town eventually engulfed by the expanding boundaries of the great city. Presumably she was renowned for her size and the audience would know whom Shakespeare meant and laugh at this hit as to Falstaff's fatness.

. . . the devil be shamed

Ford comes bursting into the house, with his friends trying to calm him down exactly as before. Mrs. Ford has deliberately directed that a basket of dirty clothes be carried out of the house, and Ford pounces on it with grim glee. He says:



Now shall the devil be shamed.

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 115-16

Shakespeare is here quoting from himself. In *Henry IV, Part One*, Hotspur, in his impatient colloquy with Owen Glendower, makes use of a

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proverbial phrase. When Glendower offers to teach him to command the

devil, Hotspur offers to teach him, in turn, to shame the devil: "Tell truth

and shame the devil" (see page II-288).

It may be that in having Ford announce that he will shame the devil (by

revealing Falstaff under the dirty clothes and thus proclaiming truth) he

deliberately reminding the audience of that passage in *Henry IV, Part One* is

and attempting to tie this play in with the earlier one.

Ford's bitter cry proves useless, however. Though he throws the dirty

clothes every which way, no Falstaff is revealed and it is Ford who is shamed.

At this point, Falstaff, disguised as the fat woman, is led out the door.

Ford hates her anyway, as a witch, and in his mad frustration, he must beat

someone. Seizing a cudgel, he beats the disguised Falstaff unmercifully

out of the house, then searches every room and finds nothing.

... *the Germans* ...

The Host has not yet been paid back by Evans and Caius for his practical

joke at their expense. Now something comes up which may represent the

Evans-Caius revenge, but it is hastily done and poorly knit into the texture

of the play.

The Host is suddenly told by Bardolph:

Sir, the Germans desire to have three of your horses. The Duke himself will be tomorrow at court, and they are going to meet him.

-Act IV, scene Hi, lines 1-3

Nothing earlier in the play has prepared the audience for this, nor are we

told either now or later who the German Duke is. The usual conjecture is

that it is a reference to Duke Frederick I of Württemberg, a duchy in south-



west Germany in the corner between the Rhine and Danube rivers.

Frederick I was Duke when *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was written.

(He died in 1608.) He was a most aggressive fellow, who had managed to free Württemberg from the overlordship of the Austrian Empire by persuading the Emperor to accept a large sum of money in return for freedom.

It was Frederick's ambition to be accepted into the very exclusive Order of the Garter. He made a plague of himself as he badgered Elizabeth on this point, and in the end, she sanctioned his election to the Order in 1597.

He was not actually invested, however, despite his strenuous overtures, till after Elizabeth's death.

If *The Merry Wives of Windsor* really had its premiere on the occasion of the investiture of 1597, an investiture which Frederick did not attend, the

whole passage may have been intended to poke fun at the unpopular Ger-

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man, who was, after all, a foreigner and a pest. Indeed, I wonder if it may

be possible that the reason this portion of the plot is as incomplete and unsatisfactory as it is is that it was censored after the initial performance to

avoid creating a minor international incident

The Host is not troubled by these demands of the Germans. They have reserved the entire inn for a week and he plans to make them pay heavily.

... *Herne the Hunter*

By now Mistress Ford and Mistress Page have told their husbands the entire story and Ford really swears to turn over a new leaf. He will trust his wife henceforward. But meanwhile, is there one last trick they can play on Falstaff?

Mistress Page says:

*There is an old tale goes that Herne the Hunter
Sometime a keeper here in Windsor Forest
Doth all the wintertime, at still midnight,
Walk round about an oak, with great ragg'd horns;*

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 27-30

This is a typical medieval legend, concerning a spirit that does petty



harm to men, blasting trees, blighting cattle, and so on, rather like Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (see page I-29). Tales are invented to account for these wildwood spirits, and these appear in different nations in different ways. It is quite possible, though, that they are the remnants of pagan nature myths, driven underground by the coming of Christianity, and that Herne is what is left of some old god of the hunt who, for lack of worship, has turned bitter and spiteful.

It is Mrs. Page's suggestion that Falstaff be persuaded to disguise himself as Herne the Hunter and meet Mistress Ford under the oak tree. There he can be set upon by various children, disguised as elves and fairies, with Anne Page at their head as Fairy Queen. They will pinch and punish Falstaff for invading ground sacred to them.

Ford agrees to be disguised as Brooke one last time in order to inveigle Falstaff to go.

... *at Eton*

Page is particularly pleased with this plan, for it occurs to him to arrange to have Slender add something to the occasion. Anne Page will be in Fairy Queen disguise:

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*And in that tire [attire]
Shall Master Slender steal my Nan away,
And marry her at Eton.*

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 72-74

Eton is a small town just across the Thames from Windsor, on the north bank. Eton is world-famous for its great boarding school, founded by Henry VI in 1440. A good percentage of England's ruling classes attended it.

... *three Doctor Faustuses*

But now horrible news suddenly reaches the Host. The Germans who have asked for the three horses have run off with them, without paying. As Bardolph says, they have:

*... set spurs and away, like three German devils, three
Doctor Faustuses.*

-Act IV, scene v, lines 67-69

Here again is a reference to Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. It dealt with Faust's bargain with the devil and it was therefore easy for the ignorant to confuse Faust with the devil.



This may also be another slap at Frederick of Wiirttemberg, the meaning of which has been pruned away, for Frederick had some sort of post horse trouble on a 1592 visit to England. There was, to be sure, later, a mix-up in which an important French diplomat had gotten into a quarrel over post horses. He didn't steal them but was accused of wanting to, and this created quite a scandal that may have still been fresh when *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was produced.

... of Readins, of Maidenhead, of Colebrook. . .

This whole to-do must have been arranged somehow by Evans and Caius as revenge against the Host, though this is never made plain, either because Shakespeare was too hurried and slipshod in preparing the play, or because the sense of the scene has been censored out.

In any case, Evans and Caius come in separately, with deliberately late warnings, in order that they might enjoy the Host's discomfiture. Thus, Evans says, in mock friendship:

There is a friend of mine come to town tells me there is three
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cozen-germans that has cozened all the hosts of Readins, of
Maidenhead, of Colebrook, of horses and money.
 -Act IV, scene v, lines 74-78

(A "cozen-german" is a "cheating German" and is a play on the word "cousin-german," which means "first cousin.")

Reading (Readins), Maidenhead, and Colnbrook (Colebrook) are all towns in the neighborhood of Windsor. Maidenhead is about ten miles up-stream from Windsor on the Thames River, and Reading is about forty miles upstream. Colnbrook is not quite on the river but is a town ten miles due east of Windsor.

Thus, Evans and Caius are amply revenged and even Falstaff gets a chance to feel a little grim satisfaction at seeing someone else made the butt of a practical joke.

... *Goliath with a weaver's beam*

The plot continues to develop. Page plans to have Anne Page dressed in white so that she might be recognized by Slender, who will then steal her away. Mrs. Page plans to have her in green so that she may be recognized by Caius. Both have separately arranged this with Anne, who, however, means to fool both and slip away with Fenton.

Fenton promises the Host to make good the latter's loss over the post horses if the Host will serve as witness at the church so that he and Anne might get married.



And Mistress Quickly manages once again to persuade Falstaff to an assignation. When Ford, disguised as Brooke, appears, Falstaff promptly tells him all that has happened. He excuses his tame submission to being beaten by Ford because he, Falstaff, was disguised as a woman. Here we have the only faint tang of the real Falstaff in the play, when he goes on to explain that:

*... in the shape of man, Master Brooke, I fear not Goliath
with a weaver's beam,*

-Act V, scene i, lines 22-24

Goliath is, of course, the Philistine giant whom David slew. Goliath is described in the Bible as being six cubits and a span in height (over nine feet) and as having weapons that were correspondingly huge, for "the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam" (1 Samuel 17:7).

... for the love of Leda

While the "fairies" lie in wait for him, Falstaff comes to Herne's oak at
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midnight, with the antlers on his head. It is a piece of dramatic irony. He had planned to plant horns on Ford's head, but here he wears them himself.

He consoles himself for this animal disguise by the thought of Jupiter (Zeus), who, though king of the gods, did not scorn to adopt animal disguise in the cause of love. (Prince Hal himself on one occasion solaces himself with such a thought too, see page II-396.) Falstaff says:

*Remember, Jove, thou wast a bull for thy Europa; love set on
thy horns. O powerful love, that in some respects makes a
beast a man; in some other, a man a beast. You were also,
Jupiter, a swan for the love of Leda.*

-Act V, scene v, lines 3-7

The manner in which Jupiter turned himself into a bull in order to induce the Phoenician princess Europa to climb on his back so that he might swim off with her to Crete is referred to elsewhere in Shakespeare (see page I-44).

The case of Leda, Queen of Sparta, is almost as famous. Jupiter approached her in the shape of a swan and coupled with her in that fashion. The result was that Leda eventually laid two eggs, from which a total of four children were hatched. The most famous of the four was none other than Helen of Troy (see page I-76).

Our radiant Queen . . .

Mistress Ford comes; Falstaff is happy. Mistress Page also comes and Falstaff is not in the least taken aback; he is ready for both. But then they



suddenly hear a noise and run away.

While Falstaff is for the third time deprived of joy, the "fairies" enter with Evans leading them, disguised as a satyr, and none other than Pistol in the role of Hobgoblin or Puck (see page I-29). Pistol addresses one of the fairies and, in a most un-Pistol-like speech, says:

*Cricket, to Windsor chimneys shalt thou leap.
Where fires thou find'st unraked and hearths unswept,
There pinch the maids as blue as bilberry.
Our radiant Queen hates sluts and sluttery.*

-Act V, scene v, lines 46-49

There's no pretense here of any setting in the years shortly following 1400, with Fenton a companion of wild Prince Hal. "Our radiant Queen" is Elizabeth I, sitting in the audience and smiling at this reference to her belief in cleanliness and neatness.

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... *chairs of Order* ...

It is then time for the Fairy Queen to speak, but it is not Anne Page in this role, but rather Mrs. Quickly, who also gives the fairies orders for housewifery about the palace, saying:

*The several chairs of Order look you scour
With juice of balm and every precious flow'r.*

-Act V, scene v, lines 64-65

These are the special seats in St. George's Chapel, Windsor, assigned to specific members of the Order of the Knights of the Garter, a very topical reference if the play is really part of the entertainment in the course of the festivities attendant upon the installation meeting of those Knights.

To make it clearer still, Mistress Quickly says:

*And HONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE write
In emerald tufts, flow'rs purple, blue, and white.*

-Act V, scene vi, lines 72-73

"Honi soit qui mal y pense" (meaning "Evil to him who evil thinks" or "Shame to him who thinks evil of it") is the motto of the Order of the Garter. It came about this way, according to legend.

About 1348 King Edward III was attending a court ball when Joan, Countess of Salisbury, somehow managed to lose her garter. This



placed
her in a ridiculous and embarrassing position, but the gallant King
diverted
attention by quickly picking up the garter and placing it on his own
knee.

And lest anyone draw some ribald conclusion from this, he said,
"Honi
qui mal y pense."
soit

Edward III considered this a very knightly thing to do (and it was cer-
tainly most courteous of him), and so he established an order of
knights
in
honor of the incident, the Most Noble Order of the Garter. It was
made
very exclusive, with only members of the royal family, some foreign roy-
alty, and twenty-five knights from among the aristocracy. It is the
highest
order of knighthood in the world and very few commoners have ever
been
elected. One who was elected, in 1953, was Winston Churchill.

... *I am made an ass*

All this time, Falstaff, afraid of what the fairies might do in the way
of charms and enchantments, has cowered and lain still. The fairies
now
pretend to discover him and begin to pinch him and beat him.

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While this is happening, Slender steals away with someone in white
who
is *not* Anne Page; Caius steals away with someone in green who is *not*
Anne Page; and Fenton steals away with Anne Page.

Ford comes in, crowing over Falstaff, and now, finally, Falstaff
catches
on. He says:

/ do begin to perceive that I am made an ass.

-Act V, scene v, line 122

The Falstaff of the King Henry plays would certainly have
discovered
this much earlier in the game.

... *eat a posset* ...

Yet when all have laughed their fill at Falstaff, they let it go. It is, after
all, a merry play, and no one is permanently put down. Page says:

Yet be cheerful, knight. Thou shalt eat a posset tonight at my



house.

-Act V, scene v, lines 173-74

A posset is a glass of hot milk, liberally laced with a strong alcoholic beverage, and Page plans to have a joke on his wife when he tells her how he has arranged to have Slender marry Anne.

But Slender shows up with a boy in tow. It was not Anne he had stolen. Mrs. Page explains that she has double-crossed Page by dressing Anne in green instead of white, but her glee is cut short when Caius arrives to reveal that he too has been stuck with a boy.

Then in come Fenton and Anne. They are married, and Falstaff manages a dry grin that in all this fooling of himself, the Pages have managed to be fooled as well.

But the Pages accept the matter in decent resignation and all return to celebrate with no hard feelings anywhere.

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The Life of

HENRY V

i

IMMEDIATELY after the completion of *Henry IV, Part Two*, Shakespeare went on to write *Henry V* in 1599.

The man for whom *Henry V* is named is the one who was Prince Hal, the madcap Prince of Wales, in the two *Henry IV* plays. Prince Hal is lovable and the closer we get to him, the more lovable he is. King Henry is merely admirable and, at that, more admirable from a distance.

Shakespeare's very attitude changes. He cannot write about a hero-king in quite the same way he did about a madcap prince. He even feels, or affects to feel, a little uneasy over the majesty of the theme. He must deal with the greatest land campaign the English had ever yet conducted and with the nation's greatest land victory, an almost impossible storybook victory, and he seems to feel it will strain even his own genius to do so.

. . . the warlike Harry . . .

If Shakespeare was not himself awed at the task, he might well have felt the audience would expect something impossible. Awaiting the tale of the great battle and of the hero-king who won it, they might expect some impossible pitch of grandeur.

Shakespeare begins, therefore, with an apologetic Prologue, deploring the insufficiency of the tools at his disposal and asking the audience to make up the difference in imagination:

Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts:



*Into a thousand parts divide one man
And make imaginary puissance [armies].
Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them*

-Prologue, lines 23-26

If, on the other hand, he had a scene as large as reality, and armies as numerous:

*Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,
Assume the port of Mars, and at his heels*

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*(Leashed in, like hounds) should famine, sword, and fire
Crouch for employment.*

-Prologue, lines 5-8

Shakespeare tells us at once that we are to expect no Prince Hal in this play. "Warlike Harry" will be "like himself"; that is, an incarnation of Mars, the god of war.

In dealing with the events of this reign Shakespeare has the strongest temptation to be chauvinistic and jingoistic, for he will be dealing with total victory under the most amazing circumstances-and Shakespeare is chauvinistic and jingoistic. Yet even here, his essential pacifism and dislike of war (see page II-133) manages to break through. He might have described Henry V with glory and victory in his train, but he doesn't. It is "famine, sword, and fire" just waiting to be let loose.

... *in th'eleventh year...*

The play itself opens in the antechamber of the King's palace in London. The time is 1414, a year after the crowning of Henry V-the incident which ended *Henry IV, Part Two*.

There are two men onstage; they are high prelates, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely.

The Archbishop of Canterbury was, at this time, Henry Chicheley, the sixty-second of the line. He had just been appointed to the post on the death of his predecessor and was to remain Archbishop for twenty-nine

years. He is terribly worried over internal politics, which seems at the moment to be threatening the church, and he says to the Bishop of Ely:

*My lord, I'll tell you, that self[same] bill is urged
Which in th'eleventh year of the last king's reign
Was like [likely], and had indeed against us passed
But that the scrambling [disordered] and unquiet time
Did push it out of farther question.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 1-5

The eleventh year of the last long's reign (that of Henry IV) was 1410, four years before the play opens. The bill in question, which had nearly passed then and was now being pushed in Parliament again, would have

permitted the King to seize certain of the lands that had been willed to



the church.

The temptation for such seizures was perpetual throughout western Europe. Left to itself, the church's holdings grew constantly larger, for it was common for men of property to will land or goods to the church, partly out of real piety and partly out of a shrewd feeling that such a gift would

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ease the pathway in the life to come and make up for a good deal of sinning.

And although the church took, the church never had to yield in its turn, for it was immortal.

Consequently, more and more land was withdrawn from the possibility of normal taxation and a heavier and heavier burden was laid upon the steadily decreasing number of acres of secular territory that remained.

Eventually, the pressures always grew too great and on one pretext or another, churchly treasures were extracted or churchly land taken over.

And naturally, the church always resisted.

The constant rebellions that had plagued Henry IV had made his need of money desperate. The church's property was hungered for, yet the very unsettlement of the time allowed the King no leisure to carry through, with parliamentary legality, what would have been a most ticklish process.

Now, with a new King and a period of quiet, the matter was being pushed again.

... *th'offending Adam* . . .

Both prelates agree, with somber uneasiness, that the bill, if passed, would be ruinous to the church. But how prevent it?

Meaningfully, the Archbishop of Canterbury turns to the character of the new King, pointing out how different he had proved himself from the wild Prince of Wales all had known. At the moment of coronation, says the Archbishop:

*Consideration like an angel came
And whipped th'offending Adam out of him,
Leaving his body as a paradise*

-Act I, scene i, lines 28-30

One of the best-known biblical stories is that of Adam and Eve, created



in the paradisiacal Garden of Eden. By eating fruit forbidden them by God, they sinned and (together with the serpent who had tempted them) were punished.

Adam and Eve (and presumably the serpent too, though that is not mentioned) were driven out of the garden, which was left an unsullied paradise with their departure. And so, in the Archbishop's metaphoric hyperbole, was it with Henry V.

... *Hydra-headed willfulness*

The Archbishop goes on to say:

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*Never came reformation in a flood
With such a heady currence [fast current] scouring faults;
Nor never Hydra-headed willfulness
So soon did lose his seat-and all at once-
As in this king.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 33-37

The Hydra was a monster out of Greek mythology, one that lived near the city of Argos. It was a horrible snake with nine heads, whose very breath was poisonous. Whenever a head was cut off, two new ones grew at once in its place, and one of its heads was immortal.

Hercules killed it. In order to do so, he had his attendant apply fire to the neck of each lopped-off head to prevent new growth. The immortal head he buried, still hissing and snapping, under a huge boulder.

Despite Hercules' victory, it is the horror of the Hydra that lingers in men's memories, and "Hydra-headed" remains an adjective to describe

any situation that grows worse with every attempt at cure.

The Gordian knot. . .

The Archbishop goes on further, praising Henry V not only for his moral qualities, but for his intellectual ones as well. His grasp of theology and military matters, says the Archbishop, is unparalleled. And as for politics:

*Turn him to any cause of policy,
The Gordian knot of it he will unloose,
Familiar as his garter. . .*

-Act I, scene i, lines 45-48

The reference to the Gordian knot is to a dramatic story involving Alexander the Great, one in which his solution to a hard problem was



supposed to have ensured him a career of conquest (see page II-61).

Henry V, as it happened, was the closest approach to Alexander the Great that the English nation could boast. He was twenty-six when he became King (Alexander the Great had been twenty-one); he attacked a much larger nation and defeated greater armies than his own in as spectacular a style, on at least one occasion, as Alexander had done. And finally, Henry V was fated to die young at thirty-five as Alexander had done at thirty-three.

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As touching France . . .

But how does all this affect the matter of the bill, the Bishop of Ely wants to know. The Archbishop of Canterbury explains at once:

*... I have made an offer to his Majesty-
Upon our spiritual Convocation,
And in regard of causes now in hand,
Which I have opened to his Grace at large,
As touching France-to give a greater sum
Than ever at one time the clergy yet
Did to his predecessors part withal.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 75-81

In short, the shrewd Archbishop has gauged King Henry's character.

He is pious and would not willingly offend the church. He is anxious to achieve military glory and would be willing to have the church's blessing on an enterprise against France.

It is up to the Archbishop, then, to assure him that a war against France would be a just one and to offer him money with which to fight it. It would be less money by far than the church would have to surrender if the bill passes, so the church gains. On the other hand, Henry would have it free and clear without the necessity of pushing a bill through Parliament with all the uncertainties and enmities that that would give rise to, and without leaving behind him the dangerously embittered enmity of the always powerful church hierarchy.

Actually, modern historians do not think that the Archbishop of Canterbury was really the moving spirit behind Henry's foray into France, or that the churchman really deliberately fomented war to save church



property. However, Holinshed in his history (see page II-4) places the blame on Canterbury, and Shakespeare, finding that there, adopts the view.

. . . *the Law Salique*. . . ,

The Archbishop, as he says, had actually begun to explain to Henry just why it was that he could rightfully claim the throne of France, when matters were interrupted by an embassy from that kingdom.

But now the scene shifts to Henry V and his court, in the throne room of the palace-and it turns out he wants to talk to the Archbishop after all, before he talks to the French ambassadors. Presumably he is not certain what answer to make to what they might have to say until he hears the Archbishop out. He says to the Archbishop:

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*My learned lord, we pray you to proceed,
And justly and religiously unfold
Why the Law Salique, that they have in France
Or should or should not bar us in our claim.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 9-12

The Archbishop replies:

*There is no bar
To make against your Highness' claim to France
But this which they produce from Pharamond:
"In terram Salicam mulieres ne succedant";
"No woman shall succeed in Salique land."*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 35-39

The "Law Salique," or the "Salic law" in our more common phrase, played its part in the origins of the Hundred Years' War in the first years of the reign of Edward III nearly a century before (see page II-255). The Salic law is so called because it was first associated with the Salian Franks, that is, the Frankish tribe that lived along the Sala River (now called the Ijssel) in what is now the Netherlands.

This particular tribe first became prominent about 420, according to legend, under a certain King Pharamond, of whom nothing is known but the name. The grandson of Pharamond was named Merovaeus. He ruled from 448 to 458 and gave his name to the line of descendants that succeeded him, the so-called Merovingians. The grandson of Merovaeus was Clovis I, who succeeded to the leadership of the Salian Franks in 481. It is Clovis who is the first Frankish monarch to be an actual historical



figure. By his time the Salian Franks had established themselves in a small region in northwestern Gaul. Under Clovis, they conquered wide areas, and by his death in 511, they controlled almost all of what we now call France.

It was in Clovis' reign that the laws of the Franks were first put in writing, and included among them was a restriction on the rights of inheritance of land through the female line. Not only could a daughter not inherit, but neither could the male descendant of a daughter.

Originally, it seems, this law was applied strictly to the inheritance of land, rather than to titles, but it was an easy step to extend it to the inheritance of the kingship. France adhered to this rule for fourteen centuries after Clovis. Other nations might have reigning queens, even great ones (think of Queen Elizabeth I of England, Queen Isabella of Castile, Queen Maria Theresa of Austria, Queen Catherine II of Russia), but France never did. What's more, from the tenth century on, she never allowed a man to ascend the throne who could not trace his ancestry to some past reigning king through males alone, without the intervention of a single female.

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It was this Salic law, then, which barred King Henry from claiming the French throne, for he was forced to cite his descent from the French King Philip IV (who reigned from 1285 to 1314) by way of that king's daughter.

King Pepin . . .

It remains for the Archbishop to break down the validity of the Salic law, which he does at great length in a passage taken by Shakespeare from Holinshed.

The Archbishop maintains, for instance, that the Salic land is not France but a section of Germany (and so it is; for it is in the Netherlands, which in the time of Henry V was indeed part of Germany). He also says that the law was established by Charlemagne, three centuries after Clovis, and was applied to the Salian area which had been newly conquered by Charlemagne. In this he is a bit overzealous. The Salic law was always taken to apply to all the territory ruled by the Frankish monarchs.

The Archbishop then goes on to maintain that the Salic law, even if considered as applying to France, was, on several occasions, broken by the French themselves:



*King Pepin, which deposed Childeric,
Did, as heir general, being descended
Of Blithild, which was daughter to King Clothair,
Make claim and title to the crown of France.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 65-68

The Merovingian line, descending after Clovis' reign into blood and barbarism, had by 638 become a dreary series of short-lived monarchs without either the ability or the desire to rule, and completely under the domination of vigorous noblemen who called themselves "mayors of the palace."

In 741 Pepin the Short was Mayor of the Palace and he elevated a Merovingian puppet to the throne. This last of the Merovingians was Childeric III, sometimes called Childeric the Stupid.

Pepin grew tired of being king in everything but name and persuaded the Pope to give him legal title as well. In 751, therefore, with full papal blessing, Childeric was deposed and the Mayor of the Palace became Pepin I, King of the Franks. The new line was referred to as the Carolingians, from Pepin's father Charles (or Caroms, in Latin).

Pepin, in order to strengthen his legitimacy in the eyes of the populace, who had been ruled by Merovingians for two and a half centuries, traced his descent back to a previous King Clotaire (there were four Merovingians of that name) through the female line. It was easy to do that because descent through the female was not carefully recorded and was therefore the more easily faked.

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It didn't matter, though, whether Pepin was of Merovingian descent or not. The point was he was accepted as King by the Pope and by medieval standards that took care of the matter. From a practical standpoint, that meant a new start was being made under conditions to which the Salic law didn't really apply.

Once Pepin was King, however, his descendants reigned in accordance with that law. Just as all the Merovingians were descended, through males only, from Pharamond; so all the Carolingians were descended, through males only, from Pepin I.

The Archbishop's citing of Pepin as a case in which the Salic law was broken is therefore worthless, really.

Hugh Capet also. . .



The Archbishop then goes on learnedly to the next case:

*Hugh Capet also-who usurped the crown
Of Charles the Duke of Lorraine, sole heir male
Of the true line and stock of Charles the Great-*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 69-71

Again it was a case of illegitimate succession.

The Carolingian line, stemming from Pepin I, reached a height of glory under his son, Charlemagne (Charles the Great), but then it too withered, and a line of young or incompetent (or both) kings ruled France. The last of these, Louis V (also called *Louis the Do-Nothing*), died in 986.

The only Carolingian left who was descended by way of males only from Pepin the Short was Charles of Lorraine, Louis's uncle. However, Charles of Lorraine ruled over a duchy that was under the control of a German king and the French nobility would have none of him. They decided to choose one of their own for King.

At the time, the most powerful French lord was Hugh Capet. He managed to get himself crowned King by the Archbishop of Reims, the highest prelate in France, and his rule was eventually recognized by the Pope.

... *th'Lady Lingard*

The Archbishop of Canterbury points out that Hugh Capet claimed descent from the Carolingians through the female line, saying that Hugh:

*Conveyed himself as heir to th'Lady Lingard,
Daughter to Charlemain, who was the son*
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*To Lewis the Emperor, and Lewis the son
Of Charles the Great.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 74-77

Here Shakespeare manages to speak of Charlemain (Charlemagne) and Charles the Great as though they were two different people.

Charlemain, the father of Lady Lingard according to this passage, is really Charles the Bald, who reigned over the territories of France from 840 to 877. He was the son of "Lewis the Emperor" (usually referred to in history books as "Louis the Pious") and the grandson of Charles the Great, the real Charlemagne.

Here the Archbishop is taking seriously what was undoubtedly a fraudulent claim by Hugh Capet intended to cover him with Carolingian legitimacy. Actually, Hugh's title to the crown was (like Pepin's) derived from the church and not from inheritance.

... *Lewis the Tenth*

The Archbishop then points out that:



*... King Lewis the Tenth
Who was sole heir to the usurper Capet,
Could not keep quiet in his conscience
Wearing the crown of France, till satisfied
That fair Queen Isabel, his grandmother,
Was lineal of the Lady Ermengard,
Daughter to Charles the foresaid Duke of Lorraine.*
-Act I, scene ii, lines 77-83

"Lewis the Tenth" is taken directly from Holinshed, who says he is also known as "St. Louis," but that, of course, is really Louis IX. Actually, it doesn't matter if Louis IX chose to claim descent from the Carolingians through the female line. His actual right to the throne lay through his descent, by males only, from the church-blessed Hugh Capet.

Besides, the story may not be true at all. Louis didn't have a grandmother named Isabel. His father's mother was Elizabeth of Hainaut and his mother's mother was Berenguela of Castile.

The Archbishop concludes that since the kings of France inherit by virtue of descent through a female from Pharamond in two places (Pepin and Hugh Capet), they have no right to bar the claim of Henry V on the ground of female descent.

That, of course, would not be the French view at all. The Merovingians, as long as they lasted, ruled through male descent only, and so did the Carolingians.

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Then, if we were to allow Hugh Capet to be the legitimate King of France on the basis of papal approval and start with him, we find that the male descendants did not fail for over three centuries. Through eleven

generations each king was succeeded by his oldest son: Hugh Capet by Robert II, Henry I, Philip I, Louis VI, Louis VII (see page II-207), Philip II (see page II-207), Louis VIII (see page II-226), Louis IX, Philip III, Philip IV, and Louis X in that order.

In 1316 Louis X died and the spell was broken. His son John had died just a few months earlier, leaving no descendants, and Louis was survived by only one daughter.

His younger brother, the second son of Philip IV, succeeded as Philip V, reigned six years, and died in 1322, being survived by two daughters only. He was succeeded by his younger brother, the third son of Philip IV, who reigned six years as Charles IV and then died in 1328, leaving one daughter.

There were no further sons of Philip IV to inherit. To be sure, Philip IV had a daughter Isabella. By English custom, she would now have become queen and her son would have succeeded her. By French custom, thanks to the Salic law, this was not possible.

The French instead, having used up the sons of Philip IV, turned to the line of his younger brother. That younger brother was Charles, Count of Valois, who had died in 1325 but had left a surviving son, Philip.



It was this Philip of Valois (see Genealogy page II-256) who ascended the French throne in 1328 as Philip VI. He was the grandson of Philip III and counted his descent from Hugh Capet through ten intervening individuals, all male.

But what of Isabella, the daughter of Philip IV? She had married Edward II, King of England, and her son had succeeded to the English throne in 1327 as Edward III.

Where Philip VI was grandson of Philip III, Edward III was grandson of Philip IV, a later king. Therefore, Edward III had the better claim to the French throne *except* that he was grandson through a daughter rather than through a son and the Salic law held him off. (Not only the Salic law, of course. The French people generally would far rather be ruled by a Frenchman than by an Englishman, and that was the more important fact in the end.)

Nevertheless, Edward III claimed the French throne. That was the legalistic justification for the first part of the Hundred Years' War, which included the great English victories of Crecy and Poitiers (see page II-257) and which finally dwindled down to a long but uneasy peace during the reigns of Richard II and Henry IV.

But now Henry V was on the throne and he was of a mind to take up once more the argument of Edward III.

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... the Book of Numbers. . .

Henry wants more than legal quibbles, and the Archbishop is ready to quote God's law. He says:

*. . . in the Book of Numbers is it writ:
When the man dies, let the inheritance
Descend unto the daughter.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 98-100

The reference is to Numbers 27:8, which reads: "If a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter."

... your great-grandsire's tomb

The Archbishop then directs the King:

*Go, my dread lord, to your great-grandsire's tomb,
From whom you claim; invoke his warlike spirit,
And your great-uncle's, Edward the Black Prince,
Who on the French ground played a tragedy,
Making defeat on the full power of France,*



*Whiles his most mighty father on a hill
Stood smiling . . .*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 103-9

The reference is to an incident at the Battle of Crecy, when Edward III was so confident as to refuse to come to the aid of his son, the Black

Prince, sure that the boy could take care of himself (see page II-260).

By reminding Henry of this most gallant episode (by the standards of the time), the Archbishop is trying to rouse Henry's fighting spirit. Yet

Henry stands oddly irresolute and requires considerable urging by his

courtiers. We may assume that Shakespeare is pleased to picture him as

reluctant to go to war since that would mirror the dramatist's own dis-

taste for this bloody pursuit.

Yet if this were real life rather than a play, we might imagine that some-

thing else was occupying Henry's mind and making him reluctant to go

to

war.

At this very time that Henry V was listening to the Archbishop of Canterbury, there lived Edmund Mortimer, 5th Earl of March (see page II-320), who was great-great-grandson of Edward III through the third son of that king while Henry V was great-grandson of Edward III merely through the fourth son.

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To be sure, Edmund of March inherited through a woman, the daughter

of that third son of Edward III, but since England did not recognize a Salic law and since Henry V would go to war rather than recognize it in

France, how could he deny that March did not have a better claim than

himself to the crowns of both countries?

The superior claim of March to the English crown was indirectly recog-

nized by Henry IV, who had kept him in honorable imprisonment through-

out his reign, and it was that superior claim which was partly the occasion of Hotspur's rebellion.

When Henry V came to the throne, he felt somewhat more secure than

his father ever had, so he released Edmund of March. Still, he kept him

under reasonably close watch all the time.

In this play, Henry V's precarious and doubtful claim to the throne (like his father's before him) is not emphasized. The emphasis is entirely on the war in France and on victory, victory, victory. But the matter of the disputed succession was to come up again in later decades and other



plays of Shakespeare deal with that time.

Your brother kings . . .

Other members of the court support the Archbishop's suggestions. The first to speak is the Duke of Exeter:

*Your brother kings and monarchs of the earth
Do all expect that you should rouse yourself,*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 122-23

The Duke of Exeter who speaks these lines is Thomas Beaufort, third and youngest son of John of Gaunt by his mistress Catherine Swynford.

Since John of Gaunt is the grandfather of Henry V, Exeter is the King's

half uncle. Exeter was a bastard by birth but John of Gaunt eventually

married Catherine and had his children by her legitimized in 1397, two

years before his death. They were debarred from the succession to the

throne by Henry IV, John of Gaunt's oldest son by his first marriage, but

they were all honored with high titles and positions.

Actually, though, Shakespeare (following Holinshed) anticipates a little

here. Thomas Beaufort was only Earl of Dorset at this time. He did not be-

come Duke of Exeter until 1416, two years later.

. . . your Grace hath cause . . .

The Earl of Westmorland chimes in:

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They know your Grace hath cause and means and might;

-Act I, scene ii, line 125

Westmoreland has played a role in the previous two plays, for he was the chief general of Henry IV. He had taken as his second wife Joan Beaufort, the sister of Thomas of Exeter, so that he was the King's uncle by marriage. Both he and Exeter are about fifty years old now.

The King of Scots. . .

And still King Henry is not ready to move. There is the question of Scotland. There has been perennial war with the Scots who occupy the northern third of the island of Great Britain for over a century now,



since the tune of Edward I (the grandfather of Edward III), and France has consistently supported the Scots. As a result, whenever the English were otherwise engaged, either in France or in civil war, the Scots were sure to invade the northern counties.

King Henry says as much, but the Archbishop, anxious not to let the French adventure be refused, pooh-poohs the Scottish danger. England can take care of herself, he insists, saying:

*When all her chivalry hath been in France,
And she a mourning widow of her nobles,
She hath herself not only well defended
But taken and impounded as a stray
The King of Scots; whom she did send to France
To fill King Edward's fame with prisoner kings,*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 157-62

The events described belong to the beginning of the reign of Edward III. In 1329, two years after Edward became King, David Bruce became King of Scotland, reigning as David II. He was only five years old at the time and his succession was displeasing to Edward, who was supporting another claimant to the throne, one who could be counted on to serve as an English puppet.

To put the puppet on the throne, Edward III sent an army toward Scotland, which met the Scottish forces at Halidon Hill, near the North Sea end of the border between the two nations. The English had archers and the Scots did not, so that when the Scots foolishly charged and exposed themselves, the English cut them down long-distance and won an utter vic-

tory on July 19, 1333, in very much the same way they were to do seventy years later in Hotspur's victory at Holmedon (see page II-322).

Young King David, still only nine years old, was taken to France by his loyal supporters and there Philip VI supported him for seven years. David II returned to Scotland only in 1341.

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In 1346 Edward III had taken his army into France and it seemed quite likely at first that he would be defeated and destroyed. David II, therefore, seized the chance to lead a large army into England, penetrating seventy miles beyond the border, nearly to Durham. There, at a place

called Neville's Cross, on October 17, 1346, he fought the English. The result was the same: English archers won over Scottish spearmen. David II

was captured and kept imprisoned in England for ten years.

In the play, the Archbishop combines the two defeats, telescoping David's imprisonment after the second battle with the flight to France after

the first and makes it appear that the Scottish King was sent prisoner to

Edward III abroad. Nevertheless, the Archbishop makes his point as



to the ineffectuality of Scottish aggression and urges King Henry to sail to France without overmuch worry concerning the northern border.

... not from the King

Now Henry is ready for the French ambassadors. They enter and he says:

*Now are we well prepared to know the pleasure
Of our fair cousin Dauphin; for we hear
Your greeting is from him, not from the King.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 234-36

The King of France at this time was Charles VI. He had been reigning a full generation, for he had mounted the throne in 1380 when he was but

twelve years old. He was the great-grandson of Philip VI, as Henry V was the great-grandson of Philip's great adversary, Edward III.

Charles VI was on the French throne during the reigns of Richard II and Henry IV, and France might well have recovered completely, in that period of English internal troubles, from the wounds inflicted earlier by

Edward III and the Black Prince, had it not been for an unexpected disaster.

In April 1392 Charles VI fell ill of a fever, underwent convulsions, and suffered enough brain damage to make him a mental cripple.

From

then to the end of his life (a period of thirty years) he alternated between

raving madness and a precarious sanity. He was called "Charles the Mad"

and was incapable of really ruling, so that others had to act in his place.

France was distracted and fell into protracted civil war of its own, so that

the situation was made to order for the invasion of Henry V.

It is very likely, in fact, that the knowledge that France was in chaos was a more persuasive argument in favor of an English invasion than any amount of priestly exhortation from the Archbishop.

The madness of Charles VI is not referred to directly in this play (per-

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haps because the English monarchs of Shakespeare's day were descended

from him and Queen Elizabeth I was his great-great-great-granddaughter).

Nevertheless, the fact that the message is from the Dauphin, rather than

from the King, is one indirect indication that the French King is incapable of ruling.

The best-known Dauphin of this period of French history is one who



appears in connection with the story of Joan of Arc, whose own appearance is, as yet, fifteen years in the future. The Dauphin of the time of Joan of Arc was named Charles and he is *not* the Dauphin referred to at this point in *Henry V*.

The Dauphin who is sending this embassy to Henry is Louis, the oldest son of Charles VI, and he is referred to in the cast of characters as "Lewis, the Dauphin."

... our wilder days

Apparently, the Dauphin, Louis, is sending an answer to Henry's demand for sovereignty over the various provinces ruled by Edward III after his great victories and before the turmoil of the reigns of Richard II and Henry IV had frittered them away. This demand did not necessarily indicate that Henry V was planning an actual invasion; it might have served merely to indicate that he was not abandoning title to the lands and was reserving the right to take action if he wished.

At least, so the Dauphin interpreted the demand. He may have reasoned that Henry, on the basis of the tales of his younger days as Prince Hal, was pleasure-loving, and would not really care to immerse himself in the hardships of a campaign in France. To indicate his own contempt for the new English King, then, the Dauphin sent him a gift of tennis balls, a clear indication that he was to amuse himself in games and pleasures and forget about France.

Henry sees clearly what has misled the Dauphin. He says:

*... we understand him well,
How he comes o'er us with our wilder days,
Not measuring what use we made of them.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 266-68

He then promises to respond to the tennis balls with cannon balls, and the decision is finally made for war.

... three corrupted men



The second act opens with the return of the Prologue, now entitled
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Chorus, who, before each act, will fill in the events the audience must know.

The Chorus describes England preparing for war while France attempts to abort the threatened invasion by encouraging a continuation of the civil wars in England over the succession. The French even try to arrange to have King Henry assassinated. The Chorus apostrophizes the England of Henry's time, saying:

*... France hath in thee found out-
A nest of hollow bosoms-which he fills .
With treacherous crowns; and three corrupted men-
One, Richard Earl of Cambridge, and the second,
Henry Lord Scroop of Masham, and the third,
Sir Thomas Grey, knight, of Northumberland-
Have for the guilt of France (O guilt indeed!)
Confirmed conspiracy with fearful France,
And by their hands this grace of kings must die,*

-Act II, Chorus, lines 20-28

Who were these men?

Richard, Earl of Cambridge, was the younger son of Edmund, Duke of York, whom we met in *Richard II* as the weakling uncle of that king. Richard of Cambridge is therefore the younger brother of Aumerle, the friend of Richard II, who conspired against Henry IV soon after the latter became long (see page II-308).

Aumerle was demoted to the title of Earl of Rutland as a punishment for having remained friendly to Richard II too long. When old Edmund of York died in 1402, however (the year in which *Henry IV, Part One* opens), Rutland was allowed to succeed to his father's title and revenues and became Edward, Duke of York. He was also Earl of Cambridge, but about the time that *Henry V* opens, he had released that title to his younger brother, who became Richard, Earl of Cambridge.

Richard of Cambridge had a perfectly good reason to want the death of Henry V; one that required no French gold. He had married Anne Mortimer, younger sister of Edmund Mortimer, 5th Earl of March. It was Edmund of March who was "rightful" King, and if Henry V died without



children (and he was unmarried at the time), then Edmund's right to the throne would be all the clearer. Then if Edmund died without heirs (as he eventually did), his sister, Anne, Richard's wife, would be next in line, and through her, Richard's son. (As a matter of fact, Richard's son would, in time to come, claim the kingdom, and Richard's grandson would one day rule it.)

And so, the dreadful turmoil of claims and counterclaims that had been set in motion with the deposition of Richard II continued into the reign of Henry V.

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As for Henry Lord Scroop of Masham, he had family reasons for disliking Henry V. His uncle, Richard, had been the Archbishop of York who had risen against Henry IV and had been executed, a tale told in *Henry IV, Part Two* (see page II-406). Scroop of Masham's second cousin, once removed, had been the Earl of Wiltshire, who had been executed by Henry IV when, as Bolingbroke, he was taking over the throne (see page II-284). The Scroops owed a debt to the King's father, then, that they were willing to pay to the son.

The third conspirator, Sir Thomas Grey, is a minor figure, but it is interesting that he comes from Northumberland, the home territory of the Percys, who had raised two rebellions against Henry IV.

... *Lieutenant Bardolph*

We do not, however, with the opening of the second act, switch immediately to the King and to the conspiracy against him. There is first an interlude in London, among characters of the type with whom the King passed the time while he was Prince of Wales.

Two of them meet and one says:

Well met, Corporal Nym.

-Act II, scene i, line 1

This is the Nym of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (see page II-424) complete with his "humors," his dark hints, and his affectation of desperate valor. We cannot say whether he was introduced in this play and carried over into *The Merry Wives of Windsor* or vice versa. It depends on which play was written first, and concerning that there is no definite decision.

Nym answers:

Good morrow, Lieutenant Bardolph.

-Act II, scene i, line 2



Bardolph (who has been promoted, it would seem, for he was only a corporal in *Henry IV, Part Two*) is rather remarkable for appearing in no

fewer than four of Shakespeare's plays: *Henry IV, Part One*, *Henry IV, Part Two*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *Henry V*.

The rest of the group cannot say the same. Pistol is not in *Henry IV, Part One*, Prince Hal is not in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Falstaff is not in *Henry V*, and so on. Mistress Quickly is indeed in all four, but in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* her position and character are quite different from

what they are in the other three plays, whereas Bardolph remains recognizable-

ably himself throughout

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It appears at once that Nym is at enmity with Pistol, for the latter has married Mistress Quickly, who had earlier been betrothed to Nym.

Nym is full of dark threats and when Pistol and his new wife enter there are many valorous words between the two enemies, but no action. They draw their swords, but when Bardolph threatens to kill whoever moves first, they both sheathe at once in obvious relief.

. . . He is very sick. . .

But where is Falstaff?

Falstaff's page hurries onstage with the news of him. He is the page who appears with Falstaff at the beginning of *Henry IV, Part Two*, the page given Falstaff by Prince Hal. He is also, presumably, the young page who is found in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* too. His speeches are assigned to

"Page" in *Henry IV, Part Two*, to "Robin" in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*,

and to "Boy" in *Henry V*.

The Boy says:

Mine host Pistol, you must come to my master-and your hostess. He is very sick and would to bed.

-Act II, scene i, lines 84-86

And Mistress Quickly, whose lines in this play are identified as "Hostess," responds anxiously:

*By my troth, he'll yield the crow a pudding one of these days.
The King has killed his heart.*

-Act II, scene i, lines 90-91

At the end of *Henry IV, Part Two*, the Epilogue had promised to have Falstaff appear again in the next play, but Shakespeare has clearly changed his mind. Can it be that *The Merry Wives of Windsor* had already been written and that the unsuccessful version of Falstaff in that play had killed the character for Shakespeare?



... to trust these traitors

But before Falstaff's end is described, the scene shifts to Southampton, where the King's forces are gathering. Southampton is on the south-central coast of England, protected by the Isle of Wight against damage from storms or enemy attacks. The traitors, led by Richard of Cambridge, plan to kill the King here, before his forces can embark.

The plot is already known, however, and the King is holding his hand in

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order that when he strikes it may be with full effect. This is, of course, a tactic that is not without its dangers, and the King's generals are nervous.

Bedford says:

Fore God, his Grace is bold to trust these traitors.

-Act II, scene ii, line 1

Bedford is the third son of Henry IV, one of the younger brothers of Henry V. He played his part in *Henry IV, Part Two*, where he was known

by his earlier title and called "John of Lancaster." In 1414, however, as

he was making ready for his French campaign, King Henry passed out a

number of promotions and John of Lancaster became Duke of Bedford.

... his bedfellow

The King's generals also stand amazed at the self-assurance of the conspirators and at the way they manage to maintain the appearance of loyalty.

What's more, one of them, at least, is a particular ingrate, for, as Exeter

says:

*Nay, but the man that was his bedfellow,
Whom he hath dulled and cloyed with gracious favors-
That he should, for a foreign purse, so sell
His Sovereign's life to death and treachery!*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 8-11

The reference is to Henry Scroop of Masham, who had been a good friend of the King's and who had been made treasurer by him and had been

employed on diplomatic missions. One might wonder at the King's friendship with a Scroop of Masham, considering that two of the latter's relatives had been executed by the King's father, but this must be viewed in relation to the times. In the days when the King's officials were always



drawn from the few noble families who were endlessly interrelated, it was impossible to find anyone who did not have some relative who at one time or another had been punished, demoted, exiled, or executed by the King or by his predecessor.

The reference to foreign gold here reinforces the comment in the Chorus. In actual fact, the conspirators were rebelling on behalf of the Mortimers, and if they took French gold, it was no more than the King's father had done when he rebelled against Richard II. Had Bolingbroke (later Henry IV) failed, he too would have been denounced as having been in French pay-and if the Mortimer faction had won out over either Henry IV or

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Henry V, the accusation of foreign bribery would have been dropped. History, we must always remember, is written by the winners.

... with his lion gait. . .

King Henry sets his trap. He maneuvers the hypocritical conspirators into feigning superloyalty and demanding the punishment of some minor offender who had uttered drunken threats against the King.

Once that is done, Henry magnificently exposes their hypocrisy and all confess at once in terror. Eloquently, Henry berates them, saving his harshest words for his erstwhile friend and confidant, Scroop of Masham. The King says to Scroop of Masham:

*// that same demon that hath gulled thee thus
Should with his lion gait walk the whole world,
He might return to vasty Tartar back
And tell the legions, "I can never win
A soul so easy as that Englishman's."*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 121-25

The demon is Satan, of course, and his "lion gait" is a reference to Chapter 5, verse 8 in the First Epistle of Peter: ". . . your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

Tartar is a shortened form of Tartarus, which in Greek mythology is a place of torture in the underworld.

So, with the traitors led off to execution and made into a public example, King Henry V is ready to embark. On August 11, 1415, the English ships set sail and Henry's willingness to stake all for the highest possible



reward
is expressed in the last line of the scene, in which the King says:

No king of England, if not king of France!

-Act II, scene ii, line 194

... *to Staines*

The men once attached to Falstaff are also planning to leave, and Hostess Quickly wishes to accompany her husband, Pistol, part way. She says:

Prithee, honey-sweet husband, let me bring thee to Staines.

-Act II, scene iii, lines 1-2

Staines is a town some twenty miles west of the center of London in the direction of Southampton.

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... *in Arthur's bosom* ...

But Pistol is sorrowing, for Falstaff is dead. We can detect that sorrow unmistakably even through the man's fustian oratory. As for Bardolph, he expresses his own sorrow in a direct simplicity that shows us well how Falstaff can inspire love despite his gross faults. Bardolph says:

Would I were with him, wheresome'er he is, either in heaven or in hell!

-Act II, scene iii, lines 7-8

Hostess Quickly retorts with spirit that Falstaff cannot be in hell. She says:

He's in Arthur's bosom, if ever man went to Arthur's bosom.

-Act II, scene iii, lines 9-10

The phrase "Arthur's bosom" is, of course, the Hostess' naive error for "Abraham's bosom" (see page II-300). Among the less educated English, the one hero of past ages they would be sure to know about was King Arthur, and he would be confused with all past great men of importance.

... *the Whore of Babylon*



Falstaff comes to his death, then, with only his lowborn friends grieving for him, and his Prince Hal a majestic king now, setting forth upon a great adventure.

Hostess Quickly is questioned concerning the circumstances of Falstaff's death, and she says at one point:

'A did in some sort, indeed, handle women; but then he was rheumatic [of wandering mind?], and talked of the Whore of Babylon.

-Act II, scene iii, lines 38-40

The reference to the "Whore of Babylon" was good for another laugh in Shakespeare's time, for it again emphasized the simplicity of the Hostess, who took the Whore of Babylon to be a woman, perhaps some prostitute whom Falstaff had known and she herself had not.

Actually, the phrase is from the Book of Revelation, which (17:4-5) describes a woman: "And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication-

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tions: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."

It is this symbolic vision which is referred to as the "Whore of Babylon," and the reference, at the time that Revelation was written, was to the Imperial Roman government. Rome was persecuting the early Christians and could not be mentioned directly for fear of consequences, but inveighing against Babylon (which had once dragged the Jews off into exile) was safe and the cover was transparent enough.

The sixteenth-century Protestants, rebelling against the Catholic Church, and in particular against the notion of papal supremacy, were quick to see the reference to Rome as a handy way of vilifying the papacy. Thus, Hostess Quickly not only raised a smile from the learned with her reference to the Whore of Babylon, but a snicker from the Protestant zealot as well.



... and of Orleans ...

Now, for the first time, the French appear on the scene. King Charles VI (who is never shown insane) is perturbed at the news of the English invasion. Concerned that France be prepared for the onslaught, he appoints defense duties among the peers, saying:

*Therefore the Dukes of Berri and of Bretagne,
Of Brabant and of Orleans, shall make forth,*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 4-5

Of these, the most significant name is that of Orleans, for that name was at the center of the disasters that followed the madness of the French King and laid the realm open to invasion.

Charles VI had a younger brother, Louis, with great ambition but little ability. In 1392 he was made Duke of Orleans, and it was just about that time that the King had his first attack of insanity. Someone had to take over the actual rule of the kingdom, and who better (in his own eyes) than the King's brother?

This was disputed. Charles VI had an uncle, Philip, the youngest of the three brothers of Charles V, the preceding King of France. When Charles V had become king, he had made his brother, Philip, the Duke of Burgundy, and this particular duke is commonly known as Philip the Bold.

- Philip outlived his royal brother (with whom he got along well). During the years when Charles VI was too young to rule, Philip and his surviving brothers were the real powers of the kingdom. When the French King went mad and was as a child again, Philip saw no reason why he should not be in control.

Thus, France broke up into two factions, headed by the King's brother,

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Louis of Orleans, and the King's uncle, Philip of Burgundy, respectively. In 1401 the hostility between the two parties came almost to the point of open warfare. A peace between them was patched up but it was a most uneasy one, and on the whole it was Philip who remained in the ascendant.

Philip died in 1404 and was succeeded as Duke of Burgundy by his son John, popularly known as John the Fearless. He was first cousin to



**Louis
of Orleans.**

Louis of Orleans took advantage of Philip's death to seize power in the kingdom and, in particular, to keep control over the Dauphin. Louis bid for popularity by adopting a hawkish attitude toward England, which was then ruled by Henry IV (who was having his own troubles with the Percys). John the Fearless naturally came out in opposition, advocating an accom-

modation with England. The two French leaders patched up some sort of truce on November 20, 1407, but three days later, on November 23, Louis of Orleans was assassinated by bravoes in the pay of John the Fearless.

If by that move John thought he would seize control of France, he was wrong. It led to open civil war instead.

Louis of Orleans had left behind a son and heir, who was now known as Charles of Orleans. He was only thirteen years old at this time and a year before he had married none other than Isabella, the widow of Richard II

of England (see page II-287). She was a daughter of Charles VI and therefore first cousin to her new husband; she was also five years older than he and died in 1409.

The new Duke of Orleans needed help and he found that help in the person of the wealthy and powerful Bernard VII, Count of Armagnac, whose daughter, Bonne, he married as his second wife in 1410. Thereafter, the party favorable to the Orleans faction was known as the Armagnacs, and when Henry V came to the English throne in 1413, France was bleeding to death in the continuing civil war between the Armagnacs and the Burgundians.

In 1414 the Armagnacs gained a temporary ascendancy and had the seven-year-old murder of Louis of Orleans officially condemned; for a while, John the Fearless found himself cut off from power. Angrily, John and the Burgundian territory he ruled (a sizable fraction of France) maintained a neutrality in the events that were to follow. Henry V was to be opposed by Armagnacs only when he invaded France; opposed by Armagnacs, moreover, who would be forever looking uneasily over their shoulders for fear of a stab in the back from the Burgundians.

It is Charles of Orleans, then, the head of the Armagnac party, who is one of the men assigned defense tasks by the King, and it is he who is to be one of the leaders of the army that is to oppose Henry V. Charles of Orleans was a poor general, but he was, surprisingly enough, a good poet, and by some he is considered to be the last of the troubadours.

Of the others mentioned, the Duke of Berri (or Berry) was John, the older brother of Philip the Bold and the last of the uncles of the mad King

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Charles VI to survive. He was seventy-four years old at this time and had led a life of luxury at the expense of the peasants, whom he taxed ruthlessly and forced into revolt out of sheer desperation.

In the quarrels between the Armagnacs and the Burgundians, John of

Bern had tried to play the role of mediator (as a quarter century before John of Gaunt had tried to do under similar conditions in England, see page II-263). Berri was not successful (anymore than Gaunt had been),



and he tended to lean toward the side of the Armagnacs. However, at his age there was little he could really do, or wanted to do.

The Duke of Bretagne (Brittany) was John V "the Valiant." He had been on the side of Philip the Bold, but after the assassination of Louis of Orleans, John of Brittany turned against John the Fearless. Although he shifted toward the Armagnac faction, he did his best to maintain the traditional Breton neutrality in the war between England and France. His forces arrived at the battlefield too late to fight against Henry V, and one gets the impression that the lateness was deliberate.

The Duke of Brabant was Anthony, who was actually a brother of John the Fearless, so little could be expected of him in the way of resolute resistance against the English.

Indeed, of the four dukes mentioned, only Orleans could be counted on as wholeheartedly anti-English-and he was incompetent.

... *the Roman Brutus*

Shakespeare, as a patriotic Englishman, may be expected to magnify the fear of the French at the prospect of an English invasion, but they had a right to be uneasy. England might be much the smaller, poorer, and less populous kingdom, but France was in chaos and there was the disturbing memory of what had happened seventy years before at Crecy and Poitiers (see page II-257).

The French King refers to the earlier battles, but Louis the Dauphin shrugs off his father's tearfulness, maintaining that the English King Henry V is but a shallow person intent on pleasure.

This is vigorously rebutted by someone who is listed as "The Constable of France" in the cast of characters. He says, concerning King Henry:

... *you shall find his vanities forspent* [used up]
Were but the outside of the Roman Brutus
Covering discretion with a coat of folly;

-Act II, scene iv, lines 36-38

The Roman Brutus referred to is the Lucius Junius Brutus who lived in Rome in the early days described in *The Rape of Lucrece* (see page I-210), the one who hid his cleverness under a pretended stupidity.

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But who was the Constable who said this and what is the meaning of the title?

Originally, the constable was an officer whose title, in Lathi, was *comes stabuli* ("the stable official"). In the centuries when the heavily



armored mounted knight was the chief force in battles, the condition of the horses was of vital importance. The constable might have been a stable official first, but the title came to be given to the commander of the cavalry and then to the commander in chief of the army.

The title reached its peak importance in France, and the Constable of France (the commander in chief of the French army) was at this time Charles D'Albret.

Even as the French talk, the Duke of Exeter comes from England bearing the demand that Charles VI resign the crown of France to Henry V. Charles VI does not answer at once, but asks time to think.

... to Harfleur

Again the Chorus appears, to open the third act. He says:

*O do but think
You stand upon the rivage [shore], and behold
A city on th'inconstant billows dancing;
For so appears this fleet majestic,
Holding due course to Harfleur.*

-Act III, Chorus, lines 13-17

Harfleur is a port at the mouth of the Seine River and there were a number of reasons for making for it. Henry V was conscious of the importance of sea power. England held Calais, and had done so for over half a century, since Edward III had taken it in 1347, so they controlled the eastern Channel. Harfleur was, at that time, the most important Channel port in the hands of France (though having been far overtaken by Le Havre, a couple of miles to the west, in the centuries since, Harfleur is an unimportant town now).

If Henry could take Harfleur as his first stroke, he would control all the Channel, could supply his forces in France at will, and would leave France without adequate means for striking back at England. Furthermore, since

Harfleur was at the mouth of the Seine, it offered the possibility (*it all broke just right*) for a march up the Seine to Paris itself.

There may have been a psychological reason too. Harfleur was in Norman territory and it was in Normandy that the line of English kings of which Henry was a member had first risen to power and it was Normandy that represented England's oldest claim to French territory.

Having left Southampton on August 11, 1415, the English fleet crossed

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the Channel and arrived at Harfleur (120 miles to the southeast) on August 13.

Katherine his daughter . . .

Meanwhile, Exeter has brought word to Henry of King Charles's



com-
promise offer. As the Chorus says:

*. . . th'ambassador from the French comes back;
Tells Harry that the King doth offer him
Katherine his daughter, and with her to dowry
Some petty and unprofitable dukedoms.
The offer likes not;*

-Act III, Chorus, lines 28-32

The French King's offer has its points. The English King, whatever his estimate in his own eyes and those of his countrymen, was a minor personage in the eyes of the Europe of the time, and in no way to be compared with the King of France. English kings had, in the past, been proud to accept the social compliment of a French princess to wife.

Thus, Edward II, the father of conquering Edward III, had married Isabella, the daughter of Philip IV of France; and Richard II, the grandson of conquering Edward III, had married Isabella, the daughter of Charles VI.

Katherine (or Catherine) was the younger sister of Isabella and was only fourteen years old at this time-which made her eminently marriageable, nevertheless, according to royal customs of the time. If in addition France was offering dukedoms ("petty and unprofitable" or not), then, from her own point of view, she was making a most generous offer.

In fact, we might wonder about Shakespeare's characterization of the dukedoms as "petty and unprofitable." It sounds almost sarcastic. *Henry V* is a chauvinistic play, celebrating England's most renowned victory in war, and yet one can argue that Shakespeare's own hatred of war peeps through even here. The long argument of the Archbishop seems a device for demonstrating the tawdry origin of the war, and here we have Henry deliberately refusing a generous offer out of greed for all. Later on there will be other passages which might be interpreted as showing Henry in a less than favorable light, though very cautiously-so cautiously that the audience (especially a chauvinistic Elizabethan audience) might miss it all and give



Shakespeare the dubious satisfaction of sneering at them in secret.

... *the devilish cannon* ...

The Chorus indicates the start of hostilities, by saying:

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... *the nimble gunner*
With linstock now the devilish cannon touches,
And down goes all before them.

-Act III, Chorus, lines 32-34

Artillery, which had been used at the Battle of Crecy as virtually nothing more than a dangerous toy to frighten horses and kill the gunners themselves, had made great strides in the seventy years since. Cannon were more reliable and cannon balls more destructive.

Gunpowder was still worthless in hand-to-hand fighting, for useful handguns had not been developed, but it could be used to batter a city's walls to far greater effect than ever a battering ram could be used, and with greater safety, by now, to the attacking soldiers.

... *unto the breach* ...

Henry landed without resistance. The Constable chose the unheroic but wiser course of keeping the French forces at Rouen, fifty miles upriver, between the English and Paris, and leaving Harfleur to its fate. This inglorious policy was made necessary by France's financial chaos. The twenty-year squabbling that had accompanied the French King's madness had left the nation virtually bankrupt, and she had to fight the war cheaply.

D'Albret may well have reasoned, too, that Henry's force would be greatly weakened in the course of the siege and that there would be time enough to tackle him after a few months had passed.

He was not far wrong. Harfleur would not surrender and was put under siege on August 17, 1415. She was to stay under siege for five weeks, and during that time the English were to suffer considerably from disease.

Morale started slipping, too, since there is nothing so deadly in war as the dull boredom of a siege that seems to be getting nowhere. Henry was hard put to it to counter that slipping morale, as is indicated by his speech beginning:

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more;
Or close the wall up with our English dead!

-Act III, scene i, lines 1-2

He is urging his forces to attack an opening forced in Harfleur's walls, inducing them to risk their lives with the time-honored technique of the general. That is, he tells them how brave and heroic they are in the hope that they will believe him and prove so.

That such feelings are not necessarily shared by all in the army Shake-



speare cannot resist making plain, for the speech is immediately followed by a parody of its opening by Bardolph, who cries:

On, on, on, on, on, to the breach, to the breach! 1
-Act III, scene ii, lines 1-2

While saying this, he moves, we may be sure, very little. I
Even the talk of charging is too much for Nym, who (giving Bardolph his older title, perhaps through a Shakespearean oversight) says:

Pray thee, Corporal, stay; the knocks are too hot; and, for mine own part, I have not a case of lives.
-Act III, -scene ii, lines 3-5

When a bolder officer enters to drive them on, Nym apparently runs off, for he appears no more in the play. It is to be presumed he has deserted. Bardolph and Pistol also leave the stage, though in their case the direction must be toward the wall, for they will be heard from again.

Lingering behind is the Boy, Falstaff's old page, who has also gone to the wars and who now delivers an ironical soliloquy on the character of the three men he has accompanied. They are cowards and thieves. In particular, he says:

Nym and Bardolph are sworn brothers in filching. . .
-Act III, scene ii, lines 45-46

To be sure, soldiers are notorious for their taking ways, and were especially so in earlier times when they were treated as virtual slaves by their officers and sometimes left to starve except for what they could loot. Nym and Bardolph, however, and Pistol too, for that matter, are sneak thieves virtually by profession. All were involved in the petty plundering of Slender at the start of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and Bardolph was party to the highway robbery at Gad's Hill in *Henry IV, Part One*.

As for Nym, his very name is a reflection of *nehmen*, the German word for "to take," and the related archaic English word "nim" or "nym," which means "to steal."



... to the mines ...

As an example of valiant men in the army (after all, Henry's troops did not consist entirely of such miserable specimens as Bardolph, Nym, and Pistol) Shakespeare introduces a scene involving four captains. These are Gower, an Englishman; Fluellen, a Welshman; Jamy, a Scotsman; and Macmorris, an Irishman.

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The four nationalities are no accident, we may well believe. Shakespeare is trying to show the British Isles united under the English hero-king. Furthermore, it gives him a chance to extract humor from three different kinds

of broken English (a type of humor that is unfortunately lost on us to a great extent, since the nature of dialects has changed since Shakespeare's time). It reminds us, in fact, of those dreary World War II motion pictures

in which American soldiers bore nicknames such as Dakota, Texas, California, and Brooklyn-all in a single picture-to emphasize national unity.

Of the four, Fluellen the Welshman is the most interesting character. It

is he who has just driven Bardolph and Pistol on to the breach and whose rough actions have forced cowardly Nym to desert.

He speaks with a thick Welsh dialect like that of Sir Hugh Evans in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. What's more, he is a mass of crotchety eccentricities, such as wishing to refer learnedly to military history and to the ancient wars at every opportunity.

Though cranky and odd, Fluellen is, however, honest and brave. This is a reflection of Shakespeare's time, when the Welsh had adjusted themselves to English domination so that the English could afford to grant them

their due, rather than a reflection of the time of Henry V, when the Welsh

had lately been in rebellion and when the memory of Glendower (see page II-294) was fresh.

Gower begins the scene by addressing the Welshman, saying:

Captain Fluellen, you must come presently [immediately] to the mines; the Duke of Gloucester would speak with you.

-Act III, scene ii, lines 56-58

The Duke of Gloucester is King Henry's youngest brother, just raised to the dukedom before the French campaign began. He played a small role in

Henry IV, Part Two (and was called Gloucester there-see page II-408-thought at that time he had not yet received the title). I shall call him



Humphrey of Gloucester to distinguish him from the Thomas of Gloucester referred to a number of tunes in connection with *Richard II*.

Humphrey of Gloucester commanded the English artillery and was also in charge of the mines. These were tunnels secretly dug under the walls so that a charge of gunpowder could be placed there and then set off, in the hope that a sizable section of the wall would then be weakened or even made to collapse (hence "undermined").

... *the countermines*

Fluellen scorns the mines, however, which he claims, pedantically, have not been properly dug. He says:

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... for look you, th'athversary, you may discuss [state] unto the Duke, look you, is digt himself four yard under the countermines.

-Act III, scene ii, lines 62-65

Gunpowder was not all on one side. What Fluellen is saying is that the defending forces in Harfleur were digging mines of their own four yards beneath the English mines. The French mines were countermines. A proper charge in the lower tunnel would break down the upper one and bury the English miners, without damaging the walls significantly. This would be especially true if the defending forces managed to catch the English miners in a portion of the tunnel not yet directly under the wall.

And, as a matter of fact, the English, during the siege, twice tried to undermine the walls and were twice balked by countermines. The opposing miners actually fought small battles underground.

... *he is an ass*...

Gower explains that the mining procedures are under the charge of an Irishman, Captain Macmorris, and Fluellen bursts out:

By Cheshu [Jesus], he is an ass, as in the world! I will verify as much in his beard. He has no more directions in the true disciplines of the wars, look you, of the Roman disciplines, than is a puppy-dog.

-Act III, scene ii, lines 72-75

Macmorris enters in despair. The English miners have been ordered back by Gloucester and the Irishman insists that in just an hour he would have completed the job and blown up the wall.



Fluellen, however, chooses this moment to begin to needle the poor Irishman, of whose bravery there can be no doubt but who, we may suppose, lacks Fluellen's knowledge of military history. When Fluellen urges him to join in a discussion of some abstruse points of military science, Macmorris rightly refuses, insisting that this is not the time. And when Fluellen casually refers to Macmorris' "nation," Macmorris goes into a spasm of defensive anger.

It is clear that the Irishman is being made the butt by the other three and this, again, reflects the situation in Shakespeare's tune. In 1597, just a year before *Henry V* was produced, the Irish had risen in rebellion, and they were still in rebellion at the time the audience was watching the first performance. The audience could therefore be expected to be anti-Irish and quite ready to laugh at an Irishman being made to look ridiculous.

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. . . the wives of Jewry

The English army, weakening with disease, could easily die at Harfleur if the siege continued much longer, and Henry decided to storm the town. This meant, if the storm succeeded, that the town would be given over to an unrestrained sack. (It would be the promise of rape and loot that would encourage the soldiers in the dangerous task of storming a garrisoned wall, and the anger at their inevitably large casualties that would drive them on in revenge.)

Henry V threatens Harfleur with the consequences of such a sack. He cries out to the defenders on the wall:

*. . . in a moment look to see
The blind and bloody soldier with foul hand
Defile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters;
Your fathers taken by the silver beards,
And their most reverend heads dashed to the walls;
Your naked infants spitted upon pikes,
Whiles the mad mothers with their howls confused
Do break the clouds, as did the wives of Jewry
At Herod's bloody-hunting slaughtermen.
What say you? Will you yield, and this avoid?
Or, guilty in defense, be thus destroyed?*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 33-43

This is a dreadful passage to attribute to Henry V. We might suppose that this is only a war of nerves, a threat designed to frighten the Harfleurians into surrender, and that it isn't really meant.

And yet somehow we can see that this is another place in this play of pride and glory where Shakespeare's revulsion against war shows



itself.

War is something which makes even a king such as Henry V speak in such abominable terms as these. It makes the hero-king describe English soldiers

as capable of utterly unspeakable atrocities. It makes him even willing to

compare his men to those of Herod (see page I-325). That Judean mon-

arch, according to Matthew 2:16, had ordered all the male children in Bethlehem under two years of age slaughtered in the hope that the infant

Jesus would be among them. This is the so-called "Slaughter of the Innocents."

Worse yet, Henry V considers the Harfleurians to be "guilty in defense,"

implying that the whole burden of guilt for the vile acts he promises would

rest on the victims themselves for having defended themselves too reso-

lutely. As he says, a little earlier in the same speech:

What is't to me, when you yourselves are cause,

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*If your pure maidens fall into the hand
Of hot and forcing violation?*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 19-21

No matter how much we tell ourselves that this is strategy, that Henry doesn't mean it, it is bothersome. It is a line of reasoning always taken by

the aggressor, most particularly by a brutal one. Hitler could not have done better, and by this line of reasoning Great Britain would have deserved all she would have received had the Nazis won the Battle of Britain and successfully invaded the too resolutely defended island.

We yield our town ...

But if the English army was suffering, so were the defenders. The food supply was running low in Harfleur; the town had been dreadfully battered and many of its garrison killed. Worst of all, there seemed no sign of relief. Nowhere on the horizon was there a sign of the French army. The men of Harfleur had been abandoned.

Harfleur asked Henry for a five-day respite, till September 22, promising to surrender then if there were no signs of relief. Henry relied on the paralysis of the French and granted the delay, investing that much in the hope that it would make an expensive storming of the town unnecessary.

The investment proved worthwhile. There was no relief and Harfleur surrendered. Shakespeare skips the five-day interval, however, and has the surrender follow immediately on Henry V's threat. The Governor of Harfleur says from the wall:



We yield our town and lives to thy soft mercy.

-Act III, scene iii, line 48

On September 22, 1415, then, the town surrendered after a five-week siege and was occupied by the English quietly and without undue atrocity. The population was forced to leave, for the most part, so that the port could be taken over entirely by the English, and on September 23 Henry himself entered in pomp and state.

. . . retire to Calais

The victory had been a Pyrrhic one, however. Between the attrition of war, disease, and desertion, perhaps as little as only one third of Henry's original force of fighting men remained in fighting trim, and winter was coming on.

There were not wanting those who advised Henry to be content with

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the victory at Harfleur and to return to England to refit his army for a return the next year.

This, however, Henry could not do. To return with two thirds of his army gone and only one city to show for it would be impossible. Somehow

he had to stay in France until he had something better to display.

Yet if he were to stay in France, it could not be at Harfleur. That would

simply be asking the French forces to bestir themselves at last and put

him under siege in his turn.

So King Henry says to his uncle, Exeter:

*For us, dear uncle,
The winter coming on, and sickness growing
Upon our soldiers, we will retire to Calais.*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 54-56

Calais was a strong English fortress, where his army could find safety and time to refurbish just as well as in England itself; and yet in Calais it could do so without being under English eyes and with the army's wounded state not so visible. Then, after a while, some further victories might be won that would make a return to England possible.

On October 8, 1415, then, Henry V's weakened and thinned-out army, made up of only fifteen thousand men, set forth on its march of 125 miles (as the crow flies) from Harfleur to Calais.

. . . the river Somme

The time taken by the march is filled in by Shakespeare with a short scene (entirely in French!) in which the young princess Katherine is try-

ing to learn English from her old lady in waiting. The humor is



intended
for the educated among the audience, who understand French, and
rests,
in the end, on the fact that some perfectly good English words sound
(to
Katherine's ears) like French vulgarisms for sexual intercourse and
for
the vagina.

With that out of the way, we switch to the French gathered at
Rouen,
the chief city of Normandy. It is about fifty miles east of Harfleur and
seventy miles northwest of Paris. The scene opens with King Charles
saying:

'Tis certain he hath passed the river Somme.

-Act III, scene v, line 1

That remark, with "he" referring to King Henry, covers an eleven-
day
march that was a thorough horror. Henry had given strict orders that
there was to be no looting, no destruction. This was not only humane;
it
was intelligent as well. The English army had to move quickly and it
could

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not risk the disorder and delay that would follow if stragglers began
to
loot and the habit caught on. What's more, the marching columns
were all
too weak, and if an aroused peasantry began harassing it in revenge,
it
might be destroyed piecemeal.

Henry marched along the coast, taking the quickest route to Calais.
The
weather was, and remained, miserable, raining nearly constantly and
turning raw and chilly at night. (It was, after all, October.) Dysentery
and
diarrhea continued to afflict the army.

Nevertheless, within three days they had traveled fifty miles and
had
reached the vicinity of Dieppe. They were nearly halfway to their
goal.

Two days later, on October 13, 1415, they reached Abbeville, near
the mouth of the Somme River (a stream that roughly paralleled the
course of the Seine, but lying seventy miles to the northeast). Sixty
miles
beyond, due north, lay Calais and safety.

The French, however, were following a rational plan; an inglorious
one,
but rational. They were fading away before the English and letting the
rigors of the march complete what the siege at Harfleur had begun.
(It
was the strategy of the Russians on the occasion of Napoleon's retreat
from



Moscow four hundred years later, and when such a strategy works, it works to perfection.)

Now, when the English reached the Somme, they found the bridges broken down, and a French army waiting on the other side.

If the English wanted to cross, they would have to swim the fast, cold current, and those who survived would have to fight as soon as they climbed the opposite bank.

That was impossible. The increasingly anxious Henry had to find another way of crossing and he began a march upstream to find it. This was the very worst part of the war. The food supplies gave out, yet the English army still dared not try to live off the country. They no longer had an assured goal, since they did not know where a ford might be found, and each day of march upstream took them farther and farther from Calais, leaving them weaker and weaker.

What's more, the English could be certain that the French on the other side of the river were gathering and growing stronger. The French army, indeed, kept pace with Henry, making no attempt to cross the river themselves. The French were content (at least so far) to let the river flow between the armies and to wait for the English invaders to sicken and die.

The English reached and passed Amiens, thirty miles upstream from Abbeville, and still there was no safe crossing point to be found. By October 18 they had reached Nesle, twenty-four miles farther still, and only then came the news that a ford had been discovered. They had to cross marshy ground to reach it, but by dismantling some houses they formed rough wooden flooring and that night they crossed the Somme.

It was this feat which King Charles is referring to, and there is no question but that the French had been caught napping. Undoubtedly, they felt

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the ford was not a practical one and they negligently allowed the army to cross while they were engaged elsewhere, or nowhere. Had they been alert enough to discover what was happening they could have attacked Henry in the midst of the crossing with his army divided in two by the river. They would then have surely crushed him.



The English were on the right side of the Somme River at last and the army was intact. Yet they were now over ninety miles from Calais. Five days of painful marching had but set them back by thirty miles and if that were not enough, a large French army lay between the bedraggled English host and safety.

Certainly anyone who could at this moment have considered Henry's situation would not have given a finger-snap for his chances of coming out alive. And if the French had kept their heads and had continued their cautious policy of avoiding battle, but had taken to small harassing actions instead, Henry would have been lost.

. . . isle of Albion

Unfortunately for the French, the rational strategy was an inglorious one as well, and they found it impossible to carry out. They were medieval knights. They were heavily armored, rode huge horses, carried thick lances. They faced a moth-eaten huddle of greatly outnumbered infantry-men and archers.

How could they avoid a battle under such circumstances? There was no risk in a battle. In their eyes, it was a "sure thing." The Constable, contemplating the situation now that Henry has crossed the Somme, sees battle and glorious victory as the obvious counter. He says to King Charles:

*And if he be not fought withal, my lord,
Let us not live in France; let us quit all
And give our vineyards to a barbarous people.*

-Act III, scene v, lines 2-4

The remaining French generals vie in decrying England and the English, to the undoubted delight of Shakespeare's audience, who know well what the upshot will be. With every vaunt and sneer of the French, the audience's anticipation of what is to come must grow keener (and Shakespeare will stretch out that anticipation as long as he can). The Duke of Bretagne (Brittany) is made to say:

*. . . if they march along
Unfought withal, but I will sell my dukedom*



*To buy a slobb'ry and a dirty farm
In that nook-shotten [misshapen] isle of Albion.*

-Act III, scene v, lines 11-14

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Albion is an old synonym for Great Britain, often used in poetry. There are various legends to account for its use, referring to some mythical individual named Albion (or Albia, if a woman), but surely this is unnecessary. It seems to come from the Latin word for "white," and anyone standing at Calais and seeing the white cliffs of Dover glimmering on the horizon would need no great imagination to call the island Albion, the "White Land."

(But despite this speech put into his mouth by Shakespeare, John of Brittany had no great stomach to get into the fight in real life and, as I said earlier, did not bring up his forces in time to have them at the battle.)

Charles Delabreth . . .

The French King sends a herald to Henry to ask him to surrender or, if that is refused, to challenge him to battle. He then calls the roll of the great French nobles, whom he urges to rise in their might and destroy the English army. He says:

*Charles Delabreth [D'Albret], High Constable of France,
You Dukes of Orleans, Bourbon, and of Berri,
Alencon, Brabant, Bar, and Burgundy,
Jacques Chatillon, Rambures, Vaudemont,
Beaumont, Grandpre, Roussi, and Faulconbridge,
Foix, Lestrade, Bouciquault, and Charolois,*

-Act III, scene v, lines 40-45

It is a sonorous and rolling list but it has a grim dramatic irony in it, for it is the list (taken from Holinshed) of those who in a short while are to be dead or captive as an outcome of the battle they are now demanding to fight.

One of the names on the list ought not be there. The Duke of Burgundy, hostile to the Armagnac party, who controlled the French King and Dauphin, was maintaining neutrality. However, Brabant is listed by Holinshed as a brother of Burgundy and the latter name must have caught Shakespeare's hasty eye, in connection with Brabant (and with Bar, which



follows immediately after in Holinshed's list), so that all three, with the alliteration of *b*'s, appear together.

... *from the bridge*

Meanwhile, King Henry and his miserable host have been toiling northward, and by October 23, five days after the crossing of the Somme, they have worked their way fifty miles to a small stream called the Ternoise. They are now only forty miles from Calais.

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The scene opens with Gower asking his Welsh comrade:

How now, Captain Fluellen, come you from the bridge?

-Act III, scene vi, lines 1-2

The bridge is one across the Ternoise, which the English army has captured and is crossing. Fluellen grandiloquently praises the fight in his own peculiar fashion, which is to compare everything to the ancient fighters.

Exeter, who has led the army, is likened to Agamemnon (see page I-79) and a certain lower officer to Mark Antony (see page I-261).

It turns out that the second man referred to is none other than Pistol, who has, of course, imposed on the credulous Fluellen with his vaunting words rather than with any actual deeds.

... *stol'n a pax* ...

Pistol comes on the scene, aware that he has impressed Fluellen, and presumes on that fact to ask a favor:

*Fortune is Bardolph's joe, and frowns on him;
For he hath stol'n a pax, and hanged must 'a be-
A damned death!*

*Let gallows gape for dog; let man go free,
And let not hemp his windpipe suffocate.*

-Act III, scene vi, lines 40-44

Holinshed refers to such an incident involving an unnamed soldier. It took place on October 17, the day before the crossing of the Somme, and was intended to show the good order with which the English marched.

One pax was stolen-that is, a picture of the crucifixion which the



people kissed during the mass. It was a thing of little intrinsic value but important, of course, to the local church from which it was taken. The soldier who stole it was hanged at the King's own order, nor did the army move till the execution was carried out.

The army could not help but be impressed by this, and, what is more important, the surrounding population could not help but be impressed either. Were it not that the population remained quiet, surely Henry's poor band would have been smothered.

Pistol is here requesting that Bardolph (whom Shakespeare makes the stealer of the pax) be gotten off through Fluellen's influence. Fluellen, however, can do nothing. He is an honest soldier who understands the reason for the King's command to refrain from looting, and the dire necessity that makes the execution irrevocable. He tells Pistol he could not interfere even if it were his own brother who was being executed. Thereupon Pistol insults Fluellen with an obscene gesture and leaves in a fury.

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(We cannot help but be surprised at Pistol and rather pleased with him. He has taken trouble for a friend and on that friend's behalf has been willing to anger the redoubtable Fluellen. Good for Pistol!)

The King then enters, inquires as to the recent action, and is told by Fluellen that the only Englishman lost is the one who robbed the church. Fluellen describes Bardolph in such a way that we who know the two parts of *Henry IV* realize that the King must recognize the man. Yet Henry too can do nothing, for as he says, in explaining why it is necessary to forbid loot and execute looters without pity:

... when lenity and cruelty play for a kingdom, the gentler gamester is the soonest winner.

-Act III, scene vi, lines 117-19

And that is the end for poor Bardolph.

Montjoy

At this point the herald sent by King Charles reaches King Henry and delivers a lordly speech which, in essence, asks that the English either surrender or be destroyed.

Henry, having listened patiently, asks the herald's name and is answered:



Montjoy.

-Act III, scene vi, line 146

This is not really a name but a title. In ancient times a little mound that acted as a direction post on Roman roads was called "Mons Jovis" ("Mound of Jupiter"), since Jupiter was the god of hospitality and it is certainly a hospitable thing to direct a stranger.

The phrase, corrupted to *montjoie* in French and "montjoy" in English, was used for anything which could be used to direct. The heralds at tournaments, in directing the combatants, would use *montjoie* as their cry, and the phrase became the official title of the chief herald of France.

...on to Calais

Henry answers Montjoy with weary frankness:

*. . . tell thy King, I do not seek him now,
But could be willing to march on to Calais
Without impeachment [hindrance] . . .*

-Act III, scene vi, lines 148-50

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Under the circumstances, this is perfectly reasonable, but Henry is cornered, and if the French insist, he will have to fight.

The French do insist, and a battle is now inevitable. The meeting place is at a small village called Agincourt, about five miles north of the Ter-noise River. (On modern French maps the name will be found as Azincourt.)

... the pipe of Hermes

The French army has placed itself squarely across Henry's path to Calais.

If Henry tries to advance he must collide with the French army and (in the French view) be destroyed. If Henry tries to retreat, his ragamuffin army will melt away altogether. If Henry tries to stay where he is, the French army will fall upon him.

It is now the night of October 24, 1415, and the French are supremely confident that the next day will be the last for Henry and his English army. In the French camp, then (to which the scene now shifts), all is optimism and impatience for the daylight.

The Dauphin, pictured by Shakespeare as a foolish fop, can do



nothing
but talk about his horse. He says:

*. . . the earth sings when he [his horse] touches it. The
basest horn of his hoof is more musical than the pipe of
Hermes.*

-Act III, scene vii, lines 16-18

This is one of the rare places where Shakespeare uses the Greek name of a god-Hermes. It is much more usual for him to call Hermes by the Latin equivalent, Mercury (see page I-9).

One of the feats told of Hermes' childhood was that he cut reeds at a river's edge and made of them the first shepherd's pipes. (This tale is

also told of the nature god, Pan, so that such a device is sometimes called

a "Panpipe" or "pipes of Pan.")

The Dauphin also says of his horse:

If is a beast for Perseus:

-Act III, scene vii, lines 20-21

The reference is to Pegasus (see page I-92), the winged horse of Greek myth. It was Bellerophon who rode Pegasus and the Dauphin would have

done better to have used that name. However, there is also a connection

between Pegasus and Perseus. Perseus had killed the monster, Medusa,

and from her blood Pegasus sprang full-grown.

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. . . brother Bedford

But what of the English camp?

It is quite different there. The Chorus comes onstage to open the fourth act by describing the somber English army watching the night's passing with

apprehension.

King Henry is described as walking through the army, trying at every step to buoy up spirits with his own air of confidence. The result is immortalized in a famous line as Shakespeare has the Chorus say that to all the soldiers the King brought:

A little touch of Harry in the night.

-Act IV, Chorus, line 47

The fourth act proper opens with Henry making his progress through the army, beginning with his brothers. He says:



*Gloucester, 'tis true that we are in great danger;
The greater therefore should our courage be.
Good morrow, brother Bedford.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 1-3

The Duke of Bedford (the King's middle brother) was not actually at the Battle of Agincourt. He was back in England, ruling in the King's place. It was the Duke of Clarence (the King's oldest brother) who was at the battle along with Gloucester (the King's youngest brother). The substitution of Bedford for Clarence may be a result of the influence of later events. Clarence died a few years later in France, while Bedford was to live on and become, next to King Henry himself, England's greatest champion in France. To those who know what is to come, Bedford's name would sound better than Clarence's in connection with Agincourt

. . . Sir Thomas Erpingham

The King then moves on to greet an old officer, who is still fighting with the verve of a youngster. He says:

Good morrow, old Sir Thomas Erpingham:

-Act IV, scene i, line 13

Sir Thomas answers with gay gallantry. On the next day it is he who

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is to have the honor of giving the signal for the English to start fighting
(to "open fire," as we would say today).

Upon Saint Davy's day

After that, King Henry meets Pistol. The King remains unrecognized, for he is muffled in a coat and passes himself off as a Welsh officer. (This is not altogether a lie, for Henry was born in Monmouth, a city that is on the very border of Wales and is often considered Welsh.)

Pistol, under the impression he is speaking to a countryman of Fluellen's, and still smarting from the latter's rebuff in the matter of poor Bardolph, says truculently to the King:

*Tell him [Fluellen] I'll knock his leek about his pate
Upon Saint Davy's day.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 54-55

St. David was a more or less legendary sixth-century Welsh priest who founded many churches through Wales. He became the patron saint of the land and David therefore became a common name among the



Welsh. It was pronounced "Taffid" in their dialect and this was familiarized to "Taffy." "Taffy" came to signify a Welshman generally, as in the familiar nursery rhyme that begins (with English prejudice): "Taffy was a Welshman/Taffy was a thief. . ."

One tale told about St. David is that in 540, on the occasion of a battle between the Welsh and the Saxons, the Welsh, on David's advice, wore leeks in their caps in order that they might distinguish friend from foe. (Long afterward, armies adopted distinctive uniforms in order to achieve that same end.) The identification aided them in winning the victory. Presumably, leeks were chosen because the battle happened to take place in a field where leeks were growing.

It became customary, then, for Welshmen to wear leeks on St. David's feast day, which was March 1. It was their way of distinguishing themselves from the Saxons still, and of maintaining their national identity even under conditions where they had been under foreign control for centuries. The custom is precisely analogous to the more familiar situation (to ourselves in America) of the Irishmen wearing the representation of a shamrock on St. Patrick's Day.

To offer to knock off a Welshman's leek on St. David's Day is to insult not only him, but his very Welshness. It is hitting Fluellen at the very core of his being.

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. . . in *Pompey's camp* . . .

Pistol leaves but the King remains on one side of the stage and can overhear, without being observed, when Gower and Fluellen enter. As soon as Gower opens his mouth, Fluellen shushes him for making too much noise on the battlefield, lecturing him, as is his wont, on the ancient usages. He says:

If you would take the pains but to examine the wars of Pompey the Great, you shall find, I warrant you, that there is no tiddle toddle nor pibble pabble in Pompey's camp . . .

-Act V, scene i, lines 68-71

Pompey the Great is best known in history not for his victories but for his defeat by Julius Caesar (see page I-257). It is typical of Fluellen's pedantry that he should enlarge so on Pompey rather than on Caesar.

King Henry is rather impressed by Fluellen. He recognizes, as the audience must, that behind all those eccentricities is solid worth.

. . . *if the cause be not good* . . .

King Henry next encounters three common soldiers, John Bates, Alexander Court, and Michael Williams, all depressed and all fearful of what the dawning day will bring.

Michael Williams, the most outspoken of the three, even dares to wonder openly whether all they have gone through and are to go



through
is in a just cause. He says:

. . . if the cause be not good, the King himself hath a heavy reckoning to make, when all those legs and arms and heads, chopped off in a battle, shall join together at the latter day . . .

-Act IV, scene i, lines 136-39

At the day of judgment many of the dead soldiers will have been found, in other words, to have died in sin, and since they have died as a result of following the King's orders, the King is responsible for that.

The King (pretending to be a common soldier) argues otherwise, maintaining that each soldier is responsible for the state of his own soul and

can lay the blame nowhere else.

Williams, still gloomy, apparently thinks the King would not be so ready to commit his men to battle if he were not sure of being ransomed himself, even if defeated and taken. When the King says that he has heard

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that the King would not let himself be ransomed (but, presumably, would fight to the end), Williams says, cynically:

Ay, he said so, to make us fight cheerfully; but when our throats are cut, he may be ransomed, and we ne'er the wiser.

-Act IV, scene i, lines 197-99

This was not altogether cynicism, either. At the Battle of Poitiers (see page II-259) French commoners died in droves, while French King John was taken into a very comfortable imprisonment pending his ransom.

It was, in fact, one of the horrors of medieval warfare that the noblemen who instigated and led the fighting were very rarely killed but were taken courteously, treated gently, and held for ransom (after all, it might be the captor's turn to be taken prisoner in the next battle), while the peasant, ill armed or unarmed, and fighting only because he would be killed if he didn't fight, was ruthlessly murdered. The peasant had no money to offer as ransom, you see.

The King (still as a common soldier) answers so vigorously that it comes to a quarrel. They can't fight now, of course, but they agree to fight at a more convenient time. They exchange gloves in token and agree to wear them in their caps as a gesture of defiance. Williams says angrily:

This will I also wear in my cap. If ever thou come to me and say, after tomorrow, "This is my glove," by this hand, I will take thee a box on the ear.

-Act IV, scene i, lines 218-21

Not today, O Lord

Despite his self-confident bearing with the men of the army, King Henry, once he is left alone, finds himself a prey to the agony of responsibility



and self-doubt, and like his father before him (see page II-402) envies the lowborn, who can at least sleep while cares hound the King to wakefulness.

He then thinks of the possibility of divine punishment, and falls to prayer, saying:

*Not today, O Lord,
O, not today, think not upon the fault
My father made in compassing the crown!
I Richard's body have interred new,
And on it have bestowed more contrite tears
Than from it issued forced drops of blood.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 297-302

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The theme of the four plays beginning with *Richard II* thus reaches its climax. If the Plantagenet line remains under its curse that followed the murder of Thomas of Gloucester (see page II-267), then the final blow might follow if Henry's army was destroyed and himself killed. That would plunge England into sure civil war once again and a resurgent and vengeful France might, this time, invade England during the chaos and serve it as Henry V was trying to serve France.

On the other hand, if Henry's army won free, might it not be an indication that the initial crime of the death of Thomas of Gloucester had finally been expiated, that England had been forgiven?

Henry's reburial of Richard, his tears of contrition and penitence, and (as he goes on to detail) his works of charity and piety on Richard's behalf might well be sincere regret, for there is good reason to suppose he loved Richard and sorrowed over his fall (see page II-309). It might also be an anxious supplication of heaven. And it might also be good politics. Open display of grief and penance might prevent the people of England from fearing heaven's hand against Henry and might hamper rebellious nobles who could otherwise use the ghost of Richard to raise revolt at home while Henry was absent in France.

... *full three-score thousand*

The sun rises now. The hosts oppose each other. The odds are most uneven. Westmoreland, speaking of the French, says:

Of fighting men they have full three-score thousand.

-Act IV, scene Hi, line 3

And Exeter responds:



There's five to one; besides they all are fresh.

-Act IV, scene iii, line 4

In other words, twelve thousand English, worn out and bedraggled from a backbreaking march, are facing sixty thousand fresh Frenchmen. The odds may be exaggerated (and some English accounts go even further and make the odds ten to one) but the lowest estimate is that the French had a three-to-one advantage, and that is enough too.

. . . good Salisbury . . .

One English lord now makes his first appearance in the play. He makes

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a brave speech and as he leaves to take over his portion of the line, Bedford says:

Farewell, good Salisbury, and good luck go with thee!

-Act IV, scene iii, line 11

Salisbury is Thomas Montacute, 4th Earl of Salisbury. He is the son of John of Salisbury, who tried to raise an army in Wales on behalf of Richard II (see page II-292) and then fought loyally for Richard to the end.

The earlier Salisbury had been a prominent Lollard (see page II-328) and had met his end in 1400 at the hands of an anti-Lollard mob. The younger Salisbury now fought loyally for the son of the man against whom his father had fought, and for the King who had destroyed Lollardy. Call it patriotism.

. . . the Feast of Crispian

The King enters just in time to hear Westmoreland wish that some of the soldiers uselessly in England were with them at the field, to reduce the odds. The King, overhearing, begins a wonderful speech in which he asks for not more men, but fewer, since with defeat, the fewer men the less harm to England, while with victory, the fewer men the greater honor to England. He says:

*. . . if it be a sin to covet honor
I am the most offending soul alive.*

-Act IV, scene iii, lines 28-29

Here Henry V is playing the role of Hotspur (see page II-341), but, as we shall see, with more rationality and patience. The King goes on to say:

This day is called the Feast of Crispian:

-Act IV, scene iii, line 40



According to a legend which can be traced back no further than the eighth century, Crispin and Crispian were two brothers, Christians, living in Rome. They fled the persecution of Christians begun under the Roman Emperor Diocletian. They traveled to Soissons in what was then Gaul (later France), and there they remained in hiding, supporting themselves as shoemakers. In 286 they were found and beheaded, presumably on October 25, which became their day of commemoration. They were the patron saints of shoemakers and their day was particularly celebrated in France. And it was on October 25, 1415, that the Battle of Agincourt was to be fought.

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... *we happy few* ...

In moving words, King Henry forecasts how in future years all who participate in the battle will recall with delight their part in it and ends with lines that are sheer magic:

*We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he today that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition.
And gentlemen in England, now abed,
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here;
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 60-67

Can Henry really have been so confident before a battle in which the odds were so enormously against him? Or is it a speech made up by a writer who has the advantage of hindsight? To be sure, Shakespeare didn't make up the essence of the speech (though he improved upon that essence wonderfully); it comes from Holinshed. Yet Holinshed was writing with hindsight too.

On the other hand, all evidence points to the fact that Henry V was a competent general. With the dawn he had a chance to study the field and the general conditions; he knew the nature of the French force and how he intended to counter them. Perhaps he honestly thought that, odds or no odds, he had a good chance to win. If so, it was not (as we shall



see)
without reason.

. . . the lion's skin

The Chief Herald of France again arrives to demand surrender. It is, in the view of the French, Henry's last chance to evade destruction. Henry answers with calm pride that they had better win their victory first before worrying about what to do with the supposedly beaten English. He says:

*The man that once did sell the lion's skin
While the beast lived, was killed with hunting him.*
-Act IV, scene iii, lines 93-94

This is reminiscent of a reply made by King Ahab of Israel to a Syrian demand for surrender under similar circumstances to those at Agincourt.

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Ahab said (1 Kings 20:11): "Tell him, Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off."

Henry goes on to say that even if his soldiers are killed, they will do mischief to France after death. He says of the prospective English corpses:

*. . . the sun shall greet them
And draw their honors reeking up to heaven,
Leaving their earthly parts to choke your clime,
The smell whereof shall breed a plague in France.*
-Act IV, scene iii, lines 100-3

This is, again, a most unpleasant passage to wish upon the knightly King, and Shakespeare (we may assume) is once again voicing his own detestation of war and of its horrors.

The leading of the vaward

The Duke of York rushes in and says:

*My lord, most humbly on my knee I beg
The leading of the vaward.*
-Act IV, scene iii, lines 130-31

This is the same man who, as Aumerle, had been friend to Richard II and conspirer against Henry IV fifteen years before (see page II-273). It was his younger brother, the Earl of Cambridge, who had conspired against



Henry V just a few months earlier and who had been hanged in consequence.

Perhaps it is to prevent himself from moving into personal eclipse as a result of the deeds of himself and his brother that he now makes the grand gesture of offering to lead the foremost ranks against the French.

... both hanged...

The battle opens with a comic scene between a swaggering Pistol and a quivering French captive, as Pistol demands ransom, with neither able to understand the other's language.

The Boy (Falstaff's onetime page) must do the translating. Of course, the Boy can scarcely be a boy any longer. He was given to Falstaff immediately after the Battle of Shrewsbury, which was in 1403. It is now 1415. If the Boy had been eight years old when he walked behind Falstaff at the start of *Henry IV, Part Two*, he is twenty now.

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However, Shakespeare is not bound by chronology and the Boy is still treated as too young to fight. He is, perhaps, twelve or thirteen.

The French soldier finally manages to make it plain he will pay ransom and he and Pistol go marching off. The Boy, remaining behind, says of Pistol in contempt:

Bardolph and Nym had ten times more valor than this roaring devil i'th'old play that everyone may pare his nails with a wooden dagger; and they are both hanged; and so would this be, if he durst steal anything adventurously.

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 72-77

We know that Bardolph was hanged for stealing that pax. This is the first word we have, though, that Nym was hanged too. We may presume it was for desertion.

The Boy goes on to say that he will stay with the luggage, which is being guarded by the boys only, all the men being off in fight. (The English numbers are too few to allow any to be detached for merely non-combat support.)

... tout est perdu

And then we switch suddenly to the French, who, from their earlier almost hysterical confidence, are suddenly in the depths of despair. The Duke of Orleans cries out to the Constable:

O Seigneur! le jour est perdu, tout est perdu!

-Act IV, scene v, line 2

That is: "O, sir! The day is lost, all is lost!"

What happened? How could the French lose, with all the odds so



**much
in their favor?**

To Shakespeare this is no problem, nor to the Elizabethan audience.

After all, the French outnumbered the English only five to one, and it might

be considered an article of faith to Englishmen in those tunes that one

English soldier was at least as good as five miserable Frenchmen, so of course

the English won.

We need not accept that for a moment. Even a modern Englishman would no longer accept that. The French are as brave fighters and soldiers

as any in the world and have shown that to be true in more instances than

is worth repeating. We need go no further than to say that in the end they

drove every Englishman out of France.

Well then, what happened at Agincourt?

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The answer is that the odds were not in French favor after all, not when

all the factors were taken into account.

In the first place, the overconfident, poorly led French threw away the undeniable advantage they had possessed in numbers by choosing to fight on a front that was no more than a thousand yards wide, with either flank blocked off by dense woods. Only so many Frenchmen could be squeezed into those thousand yards, so that the English faced an actual front line little more numerous than themselves.

This still left the French with ample reserves, of course, but there was another matter.

The backbone of the French army was the armored knight. The large horse, covered with armor and bearing an armored knight on his back, represented a formidable mass when it charged, but could it charge? The ground had been damped down and turned to mud by the rainy spell that had made Henry's march such a horror, and the field was a quagmire. When the time came for the battle to start and for the French to advance, the line just stood there as the horses labored to lift their hoofs out of the clinging mud.

The English army, on the other hand, lacked horsemen and remained mobile. What's more, it consisted chiefly of archers, well trained in the use of the longbow. The lengthy, sturdy arrows shot out at tremendous speeds, could make their way through armor at surprisingly long distances. (Few of us know, nowadays, what the sight and sound of a large flight of long arrows is like. Perhaps the most dauntingly wonderful scene in the excellent motion picture made of this play by Sir Laurence Olivier is the one in which the arrows fly hissing against the sky. It freezes the blood.)

The arrows landed among the thick ranks of the French, spreading destruction and confusion among soldiers who could hardly move. When French chaos was at its height, Henry ordered his footmen forward with ax and sword. It was a slaughterhouse in which the French didn't have a chance.

Even if the French had managed to charge-which they never did-it



would probably have done them little good. Henry had surrounded his archers with stakes, blunt ends buried firmly in the ground, hard and sharpened ends upward. A charge would have broken when the first horses were impaled.

Could Henry V have foreseen the course of the battle?

Why not? Was it difficult to see the narrow breadth of the battlefield and the muddy nature of the ground? Was it hard to calculate the result of a battle between skilled archers and heavy, unmaneuverable horsemen? Remember that Henry had the advantage of remembering the one-sided archery victories of the English against the Scots in the last couple of decades (see page II-322).

It is not surprising, then, that Henry maintained his confidence despite the odds that were apparently against his army. It is not even surprising

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that he could state that he preferred fewer men to more-for his victory was sure even with fewer men, and the greater the odds against him the more psychologically devastating would the victory be.

And indeed, Agincourt became the most celebrated victory in English history, right down to the Battle of Britain in 1940. It would be years before the French could emerge from the psychological disaster they suffered

and dare fight the English without feeling half defeated to begin with.

The noble Earl of Suffolk. . .

The English casualties were few-and included only two titled noblemen. One was the Duke of York, who had earlier demanded the honor of leading the van. King Henry asks for him and Exeter tells him York is dead:

*. . . and by his bloody side,
Yoke-fellow to his honor-owing wounds,
The noble Earl of Suffolk also lies.*

-Act IV, scene vi, lines 8-10

Thus ends the life of Aumerle of *Richard II*. As for the Earl of Suffolk, Holinshed lists him as a casualty, but beyond that I can find nothing more concerning him.

. . . kill his prisoners

The very extent of the victory at Agincourt was embarrassing to the English in one respect. They were encumbered with prisoners whom the various captors were holding for ransom. When it seemed to the English leaders that the French were rallying or that new contingents were reaching the field, the English had to rid themselves of the encumbrance that they might fight. They were too few in number to set aside a contingent large



enough to guard the prisoners and make sure these would not escape and rejoin the French.

King Henry therefore gave a lamentable order, saying:

*The French have reinforced their scattered men.
Then every soldier kill his prisoners!
Give the word through.*

-Act IV, scene vii, lines 36-38

It was a deplorable atrocity, perpetrated under a mistaken impression, for the French were in no condition to renew the battle and the prisoners might have been safely held and ransomed.

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The English themselves, not inclined to let anything spoil the glory of Agincourt, nevertheless feel a little hangdog about it and try to excuse it.

It was done in the heat of battle, they say, and what's more in reprisal for a French atrocity, for the story as told later was that fleeing French soldiers out of frustration at their defeat pillaged the baggage and slaughtered the boys left in charge.

Shakespeare makes use of this atrocity as excuse. Gower and Fluellen come onstage and Gower says:

'Tis certain there's not a boy left alive, and the cowardly rascals that ran from the battle ha' done this slaughter;

-Act IV, scene vii, lines 5-7

Since the Boy had earlier mentioned he was among those guarding the baggage, we may assume he is now dead. That, then, is the end of Falstaff's page and of the Robin of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

And yet the killing of the boys is not as good an excuse for the atrocity reprisal as it might seem. It was not the French soldiers who had done this, according to the best information we have, but civilians of the area who took advantage of the battle to loot the camp.

In any case, does Shakespeare approve of the killing of the prisoners even if the excuse is as he gives it? Or does he view this as just another of the unforgivable atrocities inseparable from war? If the latter, he cannot say so directly; not in connection with the great and glorious Battle of Agincourt and the knightly hero-king Henry V. The audience would not have endured it and Shakespeare was not the type to boldly cast defiance into



the
teeth of an audience.

But he might be indirect about it. He has Gower say, after describing the death of the boys:

... wherefore the King most worthily hath caused every soldier to cut his prisoner's throat. O, 'tis a gallant king!

-Act IV, scene vii, lines 8-11

Surely, "worthily" is the wrong adjective. The King might much better

have done it "sorrowfully" or "regretfully" or even "wrathfully." "Worth-

ily" sounds sarcastic. Even more so does "gallant king" sound sarcastic.

War, Shakespeare seems to be saying as clearly as he dares, ruins what it touches, and even a great and merciful king is made a monster by it.

... Alexander the Pig...

Gower's remark about the killing of the prisoners and of the gallantry of

King Henry is followed at once by Fluellen's estimate of the King, making

use (as he always does) of ancient warriors for the purpose. Fluellen points

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out that King Henry was born at Monmouth (which makes him Welsh by place of birth, if not by ancestry), then asks:

What call you the town's name where Alexander the Pig was born?

-Act IV, scene vii, lines 13-14

Gower instantly corrects him, explaining that he means Alexander the Great, and the short-tempered Fluellen asks captiously if Pig (Big) is not equivalent to great. There is an easy laugh here, thanks to the Welsh habit of sounding *b* like *p*, but is that the only reason Shakespeare makes use of the phrase? Can he be hinting that even Alexander, the ideal warrior and the greatest of all conquerors, had his swinish aspects?

And is it an accident that Fluellen then goes on to draw parallels between Alexander and Henry?

... his best friend, Cleitus

There is ample room for similarities between Alexander and Henry (see page II-452). Fluellen cites none of these similarities but sinks in bathos when he can only dredge up the fact that there is a river both in Monmouth



(Henry's birthplace) and Macedon (Alexander's birthplace):

... and there is salmons in both.

-Act IV, scene vii, line 32

But then Fluellen goes on to something specific and significant. He says:

Alexander, God knows, and you know, in his rages, and his furies, and his wraths, and his cholers, and his moods, and his displeasures, and his indignations, and also being a little intoxicated in his prains, did, in his ales and his angers, look you, kill his best friend, Cleitus.

-Act IV, scene vii, lines 35-41

The incident took place at a banquet in 327 B.C. in Maracanda (the modern Samarkand) after Persia had fallen and Alexander had reached its extreme northeastern corner. Alexander had grown dizzy with success, heard himself hailed as a god and more than half believed it. Besides, he had drunk too much and he couldn't hold his liquor.

Alexander listened complacently while those about him praised his deeds as far superior to those of his father, Philip of Macedon.

Cleitus (or Clitus), a boyhood friend of Alexander, who had saved the King's life at the first battle fought in Asia, listened with gathering anger.

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Rather drunk himself, he rose to defend Philip and denounce Alexander.

In a fury, Alexander seized a spear, ran him through, and killed him.

Gower indignantly repudiates this incident as comparable to nothing in

Henry's life, and Fluellen mentions the repudiation of Falstaff. The comparison is quite inept, however, but it gives rise to another thought.

Why pick out one of the most disgraceful episodes in Alexander's life

for a comparison? Why stress Alexander's rage under the influence of

intoxication with wine, if not, perhaps, to have us think of Henry's rage

under the influence of intoxication with victory.

Is it the comparison with the killing of the prisoners that is being



hinted
at? Is Shakespeare (through Fluellen) trying to encourage the audience to think of it themselves without directly saying so?

It is tempting to think this, for immediately after Fluellen's speech, King Henry comes on the scene, furious (presumably at the news of the slaughter of the boys), so that the similarity to Alexander "in his rages" becomes evident. Henry says:

*I was not angry since I came to France
Until this instant.*

-Act IV, scene vii, lines 57-58

And then, quite superfluously, but rather as though Shakespeare were laboring to make his point, Henry orders the atrocity a second time. He says:

*... we'll cut the throats of those we have,
And not a man of them that we shall take
Shall taste our mercy.*

-Act IV, scene vii, lines 65-67

He orders that told to the remnants of the French forces still on the field.

... where leeks did grow ...

With the battle over, Fluellen approaches King Henry and says:

Your [great] grandfather of famous memory, an't please your Majesty, and your great-uncle, Edward the Black Prince of Wales, as I have read in the chronicles, fought a most prave pattle here in France.

-Act IV, scene vii, lines 94-98

The reference can only be to the Battle of Crecy (see page II-257). The
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two battles were fought in the same general area, by the way. Crecy is only about twenty miles southwest of Agincourt. Fluellen goes on to say, concerning the battle:

... the Welshmen did good service in a garden where leeks did grow, wearing leeks in their Monmouth caps. ...

-Act IV, scene vii, lines 101-3

This casts a glow of patriotism over the matter of wearing leeks. Instead of referring it to a battle against the Saxons, it places it (quite wrongly) in a battle against the French. Furthermore, Fluellen stresses the Welsh as



Monmouth men, for it was in Monmouth that Henry was born.
Consequently, when Fluellen asks the King to wear the leek on St. David's Day, Henry agrees, adding:

For I am Welsh, you know, good countryman.
-Act IV, scene vii, line 108

This is only in the sense that he was born in Monmouth, but of course, it is symbolic of the unity that befalls all men of the kingdom, Welsh as well as English, in the aftermath of the great victory.

But one last sting remains. Fluellen, swelling with pride over the King's acknowledgment of Welshhood, cannot resist making it look as though it is the King who is honored, not the Welsh. He says, with unconscious patronization, and even more than a little *lese-majeste*:

I need not be ashamed of your Majesty, praised be God, so long as your Majesty is an honest man.
-Act IV, scene vii, lines 116-18

King Henry answers with gentle and grave courtesy, but can it be that Shakespeare is hinting, through Fluellen, that even Henry V might not always be an honest or good man and that in such a case one ought to be ashamed even of the hero-king?

... *Alencon and myself* ...

Now Williams enters. He is the soldier who exchanged gloves with the King when the latter pretended to be a common soldier.

The King, wishing to get some amusement out of the fiery Fluellen (or, conceivably, to get back at the Welshman's condescension in wishing him an honest man?), passes to him the glove he had received from Fluellen the night before. He says to Fluellen:

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Here, Fluellen, wear thou this favor for me and stick it in thy cap; when Alencon and myself were down together I plucked this glove from his helm.

-Act IV, scene vii, lines 155-58

Shakespeare is making use here of some of the Homeric details that gathered about the battle in later legends. King Henry was said to have fought in single battle with John, Duke of Alencon, who had been promoted to the dukedom less than a year before. The story is that King Henry was beaten down and might have been killed if his guard had not rushed up and killed Alencon. Henry was supposed to have tried to save Alencon's life but the infuriated guard were beyond control.



Alencon's grandfather, Charles of Alencon, was brother of King Philip VI of France. He had been an earlier casualty at the hands of the English, having died at Crecy.

Fluellen wears the glove, having been told that anyone who offers to strike him for it is a friend of Alencon's and therefore an enemy.

My Lord of Warwick . . .

Henry merely wants to be amused; he doesn't want any real trouble. Consequently, he has someone supervise the results. He says:

*My Lord of Warwick, and my brother Gloucester,
Follow Fluellen closely at the heels.*

-Act IV, scene vii, lines 173-74

Warwick appeared in minor fashion in *Henry IV, Part Two* (see page II-402) and his appearance in this play is even more fugitive.

Fluellen meets Williams, who strikes him. Fluellen falls instantly into a Welsh pepper pot of anger, until the King finally separates them and owns up to the truth.

Williams, undaunted, carries himself well and honestly against the King himself, saying that the King presented himself as a common soldier and therefore could not take exception to being treated as one. The King admits the justice of the argument and rewards the sturdy Williams with a gloveful of crowns-to which Fluellen grandiosely adds a shilling.

. . . ten thousand French

The heralds have meanwhile been surveying the field of battle and making what we would today call a "body count." Among the highest-ranking prisoners, says Exeter, is:

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Charles Duke of Orleans, nephew to the King;

-Act IV, scene viii, line 78

Charles of Orleans was taken to England after his capture and remained there for twenty-five years. It was a splendid captivity for him, however. He was treated with the full honor of his rank and he spent his time in ease and comfort, writing poetry to his heart's content.

It was not till 1440 that he was released and returned to France. The young twenty-one-year-old who had been captured at Agincourt came back an elderly man (for those times) of forty-six. It was far too late for him to gain re-entry into the field of French politics, so he withdrew to private life and became a patron of literature.

In a way, though, Charles of Orleans had the last laugh (posthumously) over Henry of England. Charles's son became King of France in due time, whereas Henry's son, before he died, was not even King of England.

But that is in the future. King Henry, listening to the names of the prisoners, says:



*This note doth tell me of ten thousand French
That in the field lie slain,*

-Act IV, scene viii, lines 82-83

The list of the noble dead is given, taken right out of Holinshed, as is the number of the English dead. King Henry reads off the latter:

*Edward the Duke of York, the Earl of Suffolk,
Sir Richard Ketly, Davy Gam, esquire;
None else of name; and of all other men
But five-and-twenty.*

-Act IV, scene viii, lines 105-8

The figure of twenty-five English dead in combat seems incredibly low, but there have been one-sided casualty lists in later, more thoroughly documented battles. Thus, in the Battle of New Orleans, fought on January 8, 1815 (just four hundred years after Agincourt), the tables were turned on the English. They suffered over two thousand casualties fighting an American army, while the Americans lost exactly eight killed and thirteen wounded.

Still, Holinshed himself implies that the report of twenty-five English dead is unreliable and that a figure of five or six hundred is more likely. Some figures are even as high as sixteen hundred. However, it seems quite probable that the French losses outweighed those of the English by at least ten to one.

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O God, . .

The listing of casualties extorts from Henry the cry:

*O God, thy arm was here!
And not to us, but to thy arm alone,
Ascribe we all!*

-Act IV, scene viii, lines 108-10

The night before, Henry had prayed that God might not remember the deposition of Richard II and thus had God answered. The sweep of the tetralogy from *Richard II* to *Henry V* might seem to go from crime to punishment to forgiveness, and England stood (or was about to stand) on the sunlit peak of victory and prosperity, clean of sin once more.

(That peak was, of course, only a temporary one. All things are temporary in history.)

. . . and to England then

With the battle over, Henry V could return to his original march to reach

Calais. Of course, it was no longer as a fugitive, broken army trying to avoid



the French and hide its wounds-but rather as the most gloriously victorious band of men England had ever seen.

The battle had not changed the English materially. It had not brought them more men or altered their bedraggled condition. They were still few

and sick and could not remain in France as they were. What they had won,

for the moment, was still only a safe passage to Calais.

But oh, the glory they carried with them. Who in England would count numbers or ask the cost now? Henry says, exultantly:

*. . . to Calais; and to England then;
Where ne'er from France arrived more happy men.*
-Act IV, scene viii, lines 127-28

They reached Calais, finally, on October 29, four days after Agincourt, and three weeks to the day after they had left Harfleur.

. . . their conqu'ring Caesar. . .

The English army remained in Calais till November 17, resting, and then
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returned to England. Henry V entered London in triumph on November

23, 1415, having been away from England for three and a half months.

The speech of the Chorus that opens the fifth act describes England's response:

*How London doth pour out her citizens!
The mayor and all his brethren in best sort-
Like to the senators of th'antique Rome,
With the plebeians swarming at their heels-
Go forth and fetch their conqu'ring Caesar in;*
-Act V, Chorus, lines 24-28

The Chorus could compare it only to a Roman triumph (see page I-254), and indeed, had Henry been a general of the Roman republic and had he won a battle such as Agincourt, he would most surely have earned, and been awarded, a triumph.

. . . the general of our gracious Empress

Next, in an almost gratuitous aside, Shakespeare has the Chorus say something which succeeds in dating the first production of the play with unusual exactness. The Chorus draws a comparison between London's gaiety at Henry's return and what would follow-

Were now the general of our gracious Empress



*(As in good time he may) from Ireland coming,
Bringing rebellion broached on his sword,
How many would the peaceful city quit
To welcome him!*

-Act V, Chorus, lines 30-34

"The general of our gracious Empress" is the Earl of Essex (see page I-119), of whose party Shakespeare was a devoted member.

Essex had been put in charge of an army to suppress an Irish rebellion under Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone. Essex left England on March 27, 1599, and the play must have had its first showing in the three-month interval that followed it, for by the end of June it had become quite apparent that Essex had failed miserably.

He returned no "conqu'ring Caesar" at all, but a defeated soldier, full of blame for those whose lack of support he considered to have doomed his efforts.

Another general was sent to Ireland and succeeded where Essex had failed. Essex then grumpily rebelled against the "gracious Empress," Queen Elizabeth, and was executed for his pains, an event that must have deeply affected Shakespeare (see page I-120).

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The Emperor's coming . . .

The Chorus bids the audience skip over the events of the next couple of years:

*Now in London place him;
As yet the lamentation of the French
Invites the King of England's stay at home;
The Emperor's coming in behalf of France
To order peace between them; and omit
All the occurrences, whatever chanced,
Till Harry's back-return again to France,*

-Act V, Chorus, lines 35-41

The "lamentation of the French" increased immeasurably as the result of the Battle of Agincourt. If Henry V had gained no immediate advantage in the way of actual occupied territory, he gained enormously in the way of psychology.

The Armagnacs, who had been led by the now imprisoned Charles of Orleans, bore the full brunt of the blame for the defeat, for the Burgundians had had no part in it. Had John the Fearless of Burgundy moved quickly enough after Agincourt, he might actually have gained control of Paris



and

with it France, so cast down was the Annagnac prestige.

However, Charles of Orleans was succeeded by Bernard VII, Count of Armagnac and Orleans' father-in-law. Since Constable D'Albret had died at Agincourt, Armagnac appointed himself the new Constable and controlled what was left of the army. Acting more quickly than John the Fearless, Armagnac seized Paris.

The Dauphin, Louis, who had sent the tennis balls to Henry, and who was so in love with his horse on the night before the battle, died in December, two months after Agincourt. His younger brother, John, became Dauphin and died in his turn in April 1417.

The mad King Charles's youngest and only surviving son (only fourteen years old at this time, and also named Charles) now became Dauphin.

Dauphin Charles remained under Armagnac control in the years that followed. In fact, there were times when the only real asset held by the Armagnacs was the Dauphin of France and the legitimacy that he represented.

Meanwhile, though, John the Fearless of Burgundy, who had not been quick enough to seize Paris, managed to hold that city under virtual siege. Doing whatever he could do to cross and thwart the Armagnacs, Burgundy seized control of the Queen of France and declared her Regent, ruling in place of the mentally incapacitated King Charles (but with Burgundy himself in real control).

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France advanced closer to anarchy every day and Henry V was content to let the chaos in the land of the enemy grow for a time while he himself remained quietly at home, attending to affairs there and building up a new army for a second foray.

A second advantage accruing to Henry V as a result of the Battle of Agincourt was that it suddenly made him the most important man in Europe.

So colossal a victory rang from one end of Christendom to the other. Even the Holy Roman Emperor, the greatest secular prince of the West and the temporal ruler (in theory) of all Christians who owned the Pope as spiritual head, came to visit Henry.

This Emperor was Sigismund. He was the son of one Holy Roman Emperor (Charles IV, who reigned from 1346 to 1378) and the younger brother of another (Wenceslaus, 1378-1400). He was also the brother of "good Queen Anne" of Bohemia, the first wife of Richard II (see page II-269).

He himself had become King of Hungary in 1387, but the Hungarian throne was no bed of flowers in those days. The Turkish armies were then advancing steadily in southeastern Europe, winning victories greater than that of Agincourt, and winning territories far wider and far more permanently than anything Henry V would be able to do. When Sigismund tried to lead an allied Christian army against the Turks at Nikopol on the lower

Danube (*in what is now northern Bulgaria*), he was badly defeated.



In 1411, four years before Agincourt, Sigismund managed to get himself elected Holy Roman Emperor, but that was little improvement over his earlier crown, except in title. The Emperor had little real power and was constantly at the mercy of the powerful higher nobility of a patchwork Germany that remained disunited till the mid-nineteenth century.

The most noteworthy event of Sigismund's reign was the trial of John Huss, the Bohemian church reformer. Huss had agreed to step into the very stronghold of his enemies in order to defend his views, on Sigismund's promise that he would be safe. The promise was worthless. Huss was tried, convicted of heresy, and burned at the stake in 1414, the year before Agincourt, an act which led to years of civil war.

The Emperor was a potentially capable man, but he was hampered by the times and his reign was marked by defeat in war and dishonor at home.

Nevertheless, he bore the glorious title of Emperor that had originated with Octavius Caesar (see page I-355), and nothing could erase that. In 1416 the wondering little island of England saw that this Emperor was not too proud to visit them and to meet and confer with King Henry at Canterbury and even sign a treaty with him. It was another helping of glory for King and country.

Finally, on July 23, 1417, Henry V embarked on his second invasion of France. Conditions were even better for him this second time than they had been the first. John the Fearless was now making an attempt to take

Paris by force and Henry could count on being faced by demoralized and

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fearful Armagnacs who would have the dreaded English monsters at their throat and the Burgundians snarling at their flank.

... Parca's fatal web

The fifth act opens in France again and Fluellen has yet to pay back Pistol for his insulting remark about the leeks on the night before Agincourt. (Three years and a half have passed since then, but we gather that Pistol has repeated the insult since.)

It is the day after St. David's Day, and therefore March 2, 1418. In the seven months since Henry has arrived in France, he has conquered a good part of Normandy, taking city after city. None dared stand long against the hero of Agincourt, and to be sure, Henry's military leadership was excellent. This campaign is more to be admired than the one-shot stab of Agincourt, however briefly brilliant the latter may have been.

Fluellen tells Gower, indignantly, that on the previous day Pistol had approached Fluellen with bread and salt, suggesting that Fluellen eat the leek he was wearing. Fluellen, unable to answer properly at the moment, was wearing the leek again now and waiting for Pistol. When Pistol appears, Fluellen, with mock politeness, greets him as a scurvy, lousy knave.

Pistol says, grandiloquently:

Ha, art thou bedlam [mad]? Dost thou thirst, base Trojan,



To have me fold up Parca's fatal web?

-Act V, scene i, lines 20-21

"Parcae" is the Roman name for the Fates (see page II-160). Pistol is thus threatening, as he did at one point in *Henry IV, Part Two* (see page II-398), to cause the Fates to put a close to the web of life they are spinning. In short, he is threatening to kill Fluellen.

... *Cadwallader* ...

Fluellen is unmoved by the threat. With coldly rising anger, he suggests that Pistol eat the leek. Pistol replies:

Not for Cadwallader and all his goats.

-Act V, scene i, line 29

Cadwallader was the legendary King of the Celtic Britons in the sixth century. He led an expedition to the northwestern peninsula of Gaul, a region which had been called Armorica and which thereafter came to be called Brittany. "His goats" is an insulting reference to the Welsh.

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That does it. With a rain of blows, Fluellen forces Pistol to eat the leek.

... *my Doll* ...

Poor Pistol now leaves the stage for the last time, telling us of one final blow. He says:

*News have I, that my Doll is dead i'th'spital of malady of
France [syphilis]*

-Act V, scene i, lines 84-85

At first glance this would seem to refer to Doll Tearsheet, the whore of *Henry IV, Part Two* (see page II-397). In fact, early in the play, when Pistol and Nym are quarreling over the fact that the former has married Mistress Quickly, Pistol advises Nym to take Doll Tearsheet instead, and at that time Doll is referred to as being in the hospital, suffering from syphilis.

Nevertheless, it was Nell Quickly whom Pistol had married and it is very likely that "Doll" is a misprint for "Nell."

So Pistol leaves to return to England, where he plans to live as a pimp and a thief while pretending to be a wounded veteran of the French war.

(What other hope for an old soldier anyway in those days, see page II-374.)

Pistol is the last breath of the Falstaff group.



... this meeting...

Better than two more years pass before the next scene, though there is no indication of that in the play.

The year 1418 had been a terrible one for France. The people of Paris had rebelled against the Armagnacs in May and June, massacring many, including Bernard of Armagnac himself. The Duke of Burgundy had little trouble, then, in forcing an entrance into Paris on July 14 (of all days) and gaining control of both the capital and the mad King.

He already had the Queen. If he could have seized the Dauphin as well, it is very likely that John the Fearless would have controlled all France outside of Normandy, which was in Henry's strong grip.

The Dauphin, however, had been seized by some of the Armagnac party who had managed to leave Paris in the midst of the disturbances and who had, with the Dauphin, retired to Bourges, 120 miles south of Paris. For years afterward, the Dauphin, ineffectual though he was, remained the center of the national resistance to the English.

Meanwhile, Henry V was completing the conquest of Normandy. He laid siege to Rouen, its largest city, the old capital of William the Conqueror (Henry's great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather).

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Rouen held out for seven months, enduring the extremity of privation and starvation. John the Fearless was only seventy-five miles upstream but

he never made a move to help. In January 1419 the scarecrow remnants of its population had to give up.

By now the extreme danger of France made it almost an impossible luxury to continue the civil war. John the Fearless and the Dauphin were virtually forced into coming to some sort of understanding that would strengthen the French hand against the English. On July 11, 1419, they reluctantly signed an agreement.

The English were by then almost at the capital, however. They took Pontoise, only twenty miles northwest of Paris, and John the Fearless (what was it he was fearless of, one wonders) decided to abandon the capital without a fight. Taking the poor, mad French King with him, he made for Troyes, about eighty miles southeast of Paris.

The Armagnacs were sure that this was a Burgundian betrayal; that John the Fearless, immediately after having put the Armagnacs off their guard with a faithless treaty, was leaving Paris by arrangement with the English.

The furious Armagnacs asked for another meeting, which took place at Montereau, about midway between Paris and Troyes. There, on September

10, 1419, John the Fearless was struck down by one of the Armagnac faction. He was served as he himself had served Louis of Orleans a dozen



years before (see page II-473).

But that made peace between Armagnacs and Burgundians impossible and it ensured the victory of Henry V. One of the French faction would have to gain a kind of miserable victory over the other by being the first to cringe to the English invaders and thus ensure getting its place in the English "new order."

The cringers were the Burgundians, and in the spring of 1420 Henry, who now controlled virtually all of northern France, including Paris itself,

met with the Burgundian party in Troyes to make (or rather dictate) a peace. The second scene of the fifth act opens with a reference to this meeting.

King Henry says:

Peace to this meeting, wherefore we are met!

-Act V, scene ii, line 1

. . . *and to our sister*

Henry greets the French peace delegation in the order of rank, beginning with royalty:

*Unto our brother France and to our sister
Health and fair time of day. . .*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 2-3

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This is the first appearance of the French Queen in the play. She is Isabella of Bavaria, usually called Isabeau by the French (and Isabel in the cast of characters). She had been married to King Charles VI in 1385, when she was only fifteen years old. She was now fifty and she had had a miserable life with him after he had gone mad. She tried to take care of him and she bore him numerous children, the youngest being Katherine, who was also present at the peace conference and who, in 1420, was nineteen years old, and the Dauphin Charles, who was now seventeen and who was *not* at the conference, of course.

Isabella was a German, a foreigner, and therefore suspect to the French. Like a much later French queen of German origin, Marie Antoinette, Isabella lacked discretion and gave the gossipmongers a chance to accuse her of light behavior. With telling and retelling, her character was cut to ribbons.

Thus, when her husband was mad, she was rarely out of the presence of Louis of Orleans. There was reason for this, since Louis was the nearest approach to a central authority at that time (see page II-472). The talk, however, was that they were lovers, and there were probably not wanting those who were sure she kept the King mad by her magical arts, although in actual fact she seemed to have sought out every possible cure for his malady.

After the assassination of Louis of Orleans, when France broke apart under the strife of Armagnac and Burgundian, Isabella played a most uncertain role. She switched from side to side in an agony of uncertainty and gained the distrust of both. She ended with the Burgundians, and at the peace meeting at Troyes she played what seemed a particularly despicable part.



... *Duke of Burgundy*

Henry then extends his greetings downward:

*We do salute you, Duke of Burgundy;
And, princes French, and peers, health to you all!*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 7-8

The Duke of Burgundy here referred to is usually known as Philip the Good. He had succeeded to the dukedom when his father, John the Fearless, was assassinated half a year before.

Since the Dauphin's party had been responsible for the assassination and since the Dauphin himself had been at the scene, the new young Duke (he was only twenty-three at this time) felt a desperate need for revenge. Reluctantly, he threw in his lot with Henry V and was ready to recognize Henry as the successor to Charles VI, rather than see the hated Dauphin gain the crown.

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It is he who has arranged the meeting, and he now makes a strong plea for peace, in the eloquence of which it is not hard to detect Shakespeare's own pacifistic views.

... *compound a boy* ...

The various members of the two parties go off to haggle over the terms of the treaty, while King Henry remains behind with fair Katherine, the French princess.

She is quite a catch, for she has only one brother living, the Dauphin Charles. If he can be disinherited and if the Salic law can be disregarded, then her son will be the next King of France; and if Henry marries her, that son will be his too, and will therefore be King of England as well.

Henry woos her in blunt soldier's terms, making a virtue of simplicity and directness. He refers to the son they might have:

*Shall not thou and I, between Saint Denis and Saint George,
compound a boy, half French, half English, that shall go to
Constantinople, and take the Turk by the beard? Shall we
not? What say'st thou, my fair flower-de-luce?*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 214-18

St. George was the patron saint of England (see page II-224) and St. Denis was the patron saint of France. (Denis is the French version of the Greek Dionysius.) According to the legend, St. Denis was the first bishop of Paris and was martyred in the third century at the age of over a hundred.

The martyrdom was by way of decapitation, and the wonder tale has it that he then rose and walked a considerable distance with his head in his



hands.

The flower-de-luce (more popularly called the "fleur-de-lis") is the stylized form of the lily used in heraldry. The royal coat of arms of France had such lilies thickly strewn over the shield, but Charles VI reduced them to three.

Henry visualized here a son who would unite England and France under his rule and dreamed that the united kingdom would then be strong enough

to face and beat back the Turks, who, as we said, were in his time (and for a century more) marching onward with giant steps through southeastern

Europe and toward its very heart.

It is hard to tell whether the reference to Constantinople is an anach-

ronism or not. At the time of the peace conference in Troyes, Constantinople was still in Christian hands. It was almost all that was left of the

old Roman Empire but in it there was still a majestic crowned monarch

who called himself Roman Emperor and traced a continuous history back

in time but over two thousand years. The Roman dominion had begun as

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but a single city, Rome itself, and now it had ended as but a single city, Constantinople.

Constantinople was ringed by the Turks and yet it held out and was to

hold out for an additional generation, not falling till 1453. By Shakespeare's

time it had been Turkish for a century and a half and represented all that

was fearful about the Turks.

Shakespeare (who was not strong on the minutiae of dates) might have

intended to have Henry speak anachronistically of Constantinople as the

Turkish capital, meaning that he hoped his son would penetrate* to the

heart of the Turkish Empire. Or he might have meant he would go to the rescue of still Christian Constantinople.

And yet it does not matter. Poor Henry! His son was never to lead a mighty crusade against the Turks. He was to be a kindly soul who was far more like his mother's father than his own, and in the end he was to hold neither France nor England.

... *Heritier de France*

The others return. The French party has agreed to everything. The last



quibble is Charles's reluctance to agree to a form whereby Henry's name is to be included along with his own in papers granting lands and titles.

The manner in which Henry's name is to be included is as:

"Notre tres cher fils Henri, Roi d'Angleterre, Heritier de France"

-Act V, scene ii, lines 351-52

This means "Our very dear son Henry, King of England, Heir to France."

But this too the French agreed to at last.

In other words, the crown was preserved for the mad King during his lifetime as a pathetically puny bit of saved face. Once he was dead, Henry V, as son-in-law, would inherit.

And what of the Dauphin? He was disowned and the implication was that he was not of legitimate birth. Indeed, Queen Isabella was compelled to testify to her own adultery and was made to swear he was not true son of the King.

The Treaty of Troyes was signed on May 21, 1420, and that moment (five and a half years after Agincourt) was the peak of England's medieval grandeur.

There was even a hope at that moment that England and France might have been welded into a single land. Or, as Queen Isabella says:

*That English may as French, French Englishmen
Receive each other!*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 379-80

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(Alas, it was not to happen. It was not till over five hundred years more had passed, at a time when France was once again faced with an abysmal disaster, when Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of England, made a similar suggestion in 1940. That fell through too.)

It was with that hope in mind, though, that Henry took the first step, saying:

Prepare we for our marriage . . .

-Act V, scene ii, line 382

It is the last speech of the play and Shakespeare leaves the King at the peak of his glory.

Henry the Sixth . . .

Only the Epilogue hints at the tragedy to come. The Chorus returns for his final speech (which takes the form of a sonnet) and says:

*Henry the Sixth, in infant bands crowned King
Of France and England, did this king succeed;
Whose state so many had the managing,
That they lost France, and made his England bleed:
Which oft our stage hath shown. . .*



-Epilogue, lines 9-13

Henry V married Catherine of Valois on June 2, 1420, and took her to England half a year later. On February 23, 1421, she was crowned Queen of England in Westminster.

Henry's brother, Thomas of Clarence, remained in France as the King's viceroy. Despite the Treaty of Troyes, the war continued and was even taking on the character of a national resistance centering about the Dauphin.

What's more, success was beginning to spoil the English. Some of them must truly and honestly have believed, after Agincourt, that Englishmen could defeat any number of Frenchmen, however great.

Clarence was, apparently, too careless, and on March 22, 1421, at Bauge, 140 miles southwest of Paris, he was ambushed by a large force of Frenchmen. He was killed and his troops with him, before reinforcements could come up to save him.

Henry had to rush back to France, and on June 12, 1421, he landed in Calais for his third (and last) expedition into France. He was successful as usual in his military ventures, though it took him seven months to reduce the strong point of Meaux, thirty miles east of Paris. (The French weren't so easy to defeat as all that, despite Agincourt.)

While Henry was besieging Meaux, Katherine was bearing him a son at Windsor Castle. The young prince was born on December 6, 1421, and

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was named Henry. (He was known as Henry of Windsor.) Mother and child came to Paris in the spring of 1422 and Henry still seemed to be in his glory.

But he had fallen sick with symptoms of dysentery during the siege of Meaux and it was getting worse. What the disease was we cannot say now but it was beyond the power of medieval medicine to cure.

Henry V died on August 31, 1422. He was thirty-five years old and he had reigned not quite ten years. Ironically, the mad King of France out-lived him, so that Henry V never succeeded to the throne he had won.

Henry's son succeeded him as Henry VI of England, and when mad King Charles died a few months later he became King of France as well. It was in the reign of Henry VI that England lost what she had gained under Henry V. That sad tale was told in plays Shakespeare had written some six or seven years before and they had indeed appeared oft on the stage.



It is to them that we now turn.

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The History of

HENRY VI, PART ONE

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IF WE go by the chronology of the events within Shakespeare's plays, there are, following *Henry V*, three plays that deal with the long, turbulent, and tragic reign of Henry VI, the unfortunate son of the victorious Henry V. The three were among the very first plays written by Shakespeare, and were prepared between 1590 and 1592.

The least of the three is *Henry VI, Part One*, which shows such flaws that many Shakespearean critics think that it is not pure Shakespeare, but that the dramatist merely patched up a pre-existing play.

Some suggest that Shakespeare wrote two plays (those now called *Henry VI, Part Two* and *Henry VI, Part Three*) dealing with the English civil wars of the 1450s and 1460s. He then, perhaps on impulse, went back to an older play dealing with the still earlier events of the reign of Henry VI and made it *Henry VI, Part One* after patching it up to make it fit the other two better.

Indeed, in 1592, just about the time *Henry VI, Part One* may have been produced, Robert Greene wrote a savage satire in which one passage seems to be directed at Shakespeare. Greene's fury, some think, may have been aroused at Shakespeare's patching up of this play. Could it be that Greene was the original author and objected to the changes (as any author surely would)? We will probably never know the details or have a final answer to this question.

... unto Henry's death

Henry VI, Part One opens with the funeral of Henry V at Westminster Abbey in September 1422, two years after the events that closed *Henry V* on a note of such triumph.

The casket of the great King is brought onto the stage to funereal music, while high-placed English nobles bemoan their loss. The first to speak says:

*Comets, importing change of times and states,
Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky,*

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*And with them scourge the bad revolting stars
That have consented unto Henry's death!*

-Act I, scene i, lines 2-5



The speaker is John, Duke of Bedford, the older of Henry's two surviving brothers. He played a small part, as John of Lancaster, at the Battle of Shrewsbury in *Henry IV, Part One* (see page II-364), and a larger role against the rebels in *Henry IV, Part Two* (see page II-407).

In *Henry V* he was given the newer title of Duke of Bedford, granted him after Henry V's accession (see page II-415). This is thus the fourth play in which he appears.

Conjurers and sorcerers. . .

Speaking after Bedford are his younger brother Humphrey of Gloucester, who was in charge of the mining operations at Harfleur (see page II-479) and who was later wounded at Agincourt; and Thomas Beaufort, Duke of Exeter, who also fought at Agincourt (see page II-487).

Exeter, in his speech, takes issue with Bedford for suggesting that the stars (that is, Fate, or God's will) have caused Henry's death. He says:

*Or shall we think the subtle-wilted French
Conjurers and sorcerers that, afraid of him,
By magic verses have contrived his end?*

-Act I, scene i, lines 25-27

Actually, this begins the general theme of the play, which is designed to explain why the French defeated the English. To patriotic Englishmen this was a great puzzle, for with Agincourt as evidence it seemed plain that one Englishman could defeat any number of Frenchmen. That the French were poorly led and that they were prostrated by bad government and civil war was ignored. That the situation was bound to change once generalship was unproved and the civil war ended was also ignored.

The use of witchcraft by the French seemed a more natural explanation. This is one of the two great causes, then, for the English defeat, and it will be elaborated in the course of the play.

The church's prayers. , .

Speaking fourth is a churchman, who says of the dead King:

*The battles of the Lord of Hosts he fought;
The church's prayers made him so prosperous.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 31-32

The one who speaks is the Bishop of Winchester, Henry Beaufort. He is the second of the three sons of John of Gaunt by his third and last wife, Catherine Swynford (see page II-319), and is therefore the older brother of Thomas of Exeter, who had delivered the previous speech.

Both Winchester and Exeter were half brothers of King Henry IV and therefore half uncles of King Henry V, who now lay in state.

Henry Beaufort had been closely associated with the government of his half brother, Henry IV, serving him as chancellor in 1403 and being appointed Bishop of Winchester, one of the oldest and richest clerical posts in England.



In 1405 he resigned his post as chancellor in order to associate himself with the part of the Prince of Wales (who was later to be Henry V), and in this showed the most pronounced facet of his character, a coldly calculating and overweening ambition. When Henry V succeeded to the crown in 1413, Winchester became chancellor once more, and in 1417 he resigned the post yet again to become a delegate to a huge and important conference of bishops in Constance in southwestern Germany. He even became cardinal for a while as a result.

While Henry V lived, Winchester's power was limited by the existence of a strong king who did not entirely trust him and who finally forced him to give up the cardinalate. With Henry V's death, however, there was going to be a scramble for power among the immediate relatives of the new King, who was still a baby. In this scramble, Winchester was going to be someone to take into account, for in addition to his very real ability, he had the prestige of high churchly office and (most important of all, perhaps) was enormously rich.

... an effeminate prince

The ones who were most likely to compete for power over the new King and, through him, over England, were the four men here assembled,

two uncles of the new King (Bedford and Gloucester) and two great-uncles (Winchester and Exeter). Bedford and Exeter are primarily soldiers

and do not wish to be involved in the cutthroat intrigue of politics.

That leaves Gloucester, who, like Winchester, is primarily a politician. Both are descendants of John of Gaunt, Gloucester a grandson and Winchester a son, but through different wives, and the rivalry between them is

inveterate and to the death.

Gloucester lunges at Winchester at once, responding to the latter's comments concerning "the church's prayers." He says:

*The church! Where is it? Had not churchmen prayed,
His thread of life had not so soon decayed.
None do you like but an effeminate prince,*

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Whom, like a schoolboy, you may overawe.

-Act I, scene i, lines 33-36

The hint is that Winchester prayed for death for Henry V, rather than for victory, and had what he wished. One might indeed argue the case for that, for it was certain that Winchester could not advance his ambitions as long as Henry V lived, and he might well have had considerable animosity toward the King for making him give up the title of cardinal.

The reference by Gloucester to "an effeminate prince" is a forecast of what is to come for the new baby King. Gloucester himself could not know, of course, but the audience would know that Henry VI when he grew up was to be extremely pious and unwarlike, therefore "effeminate" and under

Winchester's influence.



. . . *thou art Protector*

Winchester replies, bitterly:

*Gloucester, whate'er we like, thou art Protector
And lookest to command the prince and realm.
Thy wife is proud. . .*

-Act I, scene i, lines 37-39

By the will of Henry V, John of Bedford was made commander in chief of the armies in France and Humphrey of Gloucester was put in charge of affairs in England. He protected the person of the infant King Henry VI, and was therefore Lord Protector. As Lord Protector, Gloucester would be the logical power behind the throne, as Winchester clearly recognizes.

Unfortunately for himself, Gloucester, though as ambitious as Winchester, was neither as good a politician nor as devious a one.

(Winchester's reference to Gloucester's wife comes to nothing, but foreshadows important events in *Henry VI, Part Two*. Perhaps this is one

of those inserts whereby Shakespeare tried to make this play fit the two succeeding ones.)

Thus, at the very start of the play, immediately after the mention of witchcraft, there is brought forward the second reason which Englishmen

understood as bringing about the defeat in France. This was the squabbling among the lords at home; the eternal politicking that prevented full attention being paid to the war. There was at least more justification in this as an excuse for the lost war than in witchcraft.

. . . *Than Julius Caesar*

Bedford labors to soothe the quarrel, saying impatiently:

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*Cease, cease these jars [quarrels] and rest your minds in
peace;*

-Act I, scene i, line 44

Bedford was indeed the peacemaker, or rather, the attempted peacemaker, of the period, for he wore himself out trying to handle the French abroad and the squabbling nobles at home.

He makes an effort to continue with the solemnity of the funeral. Addressing the dead King, he says:

*A jar more glorious star thy soul will make
Than Julius Caesar. . .*

-Act I, scene i, lines 55-56

This is a reference to a passage in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (see page I-8) which states that Caesar's soul was placed in the heavens as a star after his assassination.

Actually, Bedford's chief attempt at peacemaking did not come imme-



diately at the funeral. Winchester and Gloucester's most violent quarrel, one that almost led to civil war, did force Bedford to hasten back from France to mediate it, but this took place in April 1425, two and a half years after the death of Henry V.

Compression of time is necessary in historical dramas, of course, and this alone is not to be too seriously found fault with. In *Henry VI, Part One*, however, such compression is carried to an extreme, with distortions added as well. In none of Shakespeare's other histories are the chronicles followed so badly-and that is one argument for supposing that this particular play is not Shakespeare's in essence.

Sad tidings . . .

Thus, immediately after the two causes of the loss of France-witchcraft and internal squabbling-are set forth, the consequences, in terms of defeat, are announced.

A Messenger arrives from France, crying:

*Sad tidings bring I to you out of France,
Of loss, of slaughter, and discomfiture:
Guienne, Champagne, Rheims, Orleans,
Paris, Guysors, Poictiers, are all quite lost.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 58-61

All this seems to have happened overnight, even as Henry V is being buried. Yet Orleans, for instance, was not the site of an English defeat

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till 1429, seven years after Henry V's death, and the battle for it will occupy a later part of the play. As for Paris, that was not to be retaken by the French till 1437, fifteen years after Henry V's death.

The list of names is not to be taken literally, however. It merely serves to ring out a litany of defeat, the beginning of the swing of the pendulum back from Henry V's victories. The Messenger places the blame on internal squabbings and says:

*Amongst the soldiers this is muttered,
That here you maintain several factions,
And whilst a field should be dispatched and fought
You are disputing of your generals [strategy].*

-Act I, scene i, lines 70-73

The Dolphin Charles. . .



A Second Messenger now arrives with additional bad news:

*The Dolphin Charles is crowned king in Rheims;
The Bastard of Orleans with him is joined;
Reignier, Duke of Anjou, doth take his part;
The Duke of Alencon ftieth to his side.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 92-95

The "Dolphin Charles" is the Dauphin who was disinherited by the Treaty of Troyes (see page II-516). Though disinherited, he did not disappear.

He remained in Bourges in central France, the city to which he had been taken when first the Burgundians and then the English had taken Paris (see page II-513). Behind him rallied that part of France which was not under the control of either the English or the Burgundians.

Charles VI of France, having reigned for forty-two years and having been mad for most of them, died on October 21, 1422, less than two months after the death of Henry V. (By that small a space of time did Henry miss out on the chance of winning the ultimate of his dreams and being actually crowned, officially, at Reims, as King of France.)

Henry's infant son, Henry VI, was crowned King of England on September 1, 1422, and was recognized as King of France by those parts of the land under English control.

The Dauphin, Charles, had himself crowned in Poitiers in November 1422 and became, theoretically, Charles VII. The nation, however, would not accept the coronation as legal until it was performed in the time-honored manner at the cathedral of Reims, and Reims was under the control of the English. (Henry VI was not crowned at Reims, either.)

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Charles remained merely the Dauphin, then, until July 17, 1429, when he was finally crowned at Reims. But this took place seven years after the death of Henry V and not on the day of his funeral.

Of the others mentioned in these verses, the Bastard of Orleans is Jean, Comte de Dunois. He was an illegitimate son of that Louis of Orleans who was assassinated by John the Fearless of Burgundy (see page II-473), and a half brother, therefore, of Charles of Orleans, who had been captured at

Agincourt (see page II-506).

Dunois was a capable general who joined the forces of the Dauphin in 1420, when the Treaty of Troyes was being signed. He first made his mark in 1427 (five years after Henry V's funeral) on the occasion when

the English were laying siege to Montargis, sixty-five miles south of Paris.

Other French towns had been besieged to extremity without the French being able, or willing, to send relief. Harfleur, Rouen, and Meaux had been examples. This time, however, relief was sent under Dunois, and he

managed the battle so well that the English experienced heavy losses and

were forced to raise the siege. It was a portent of things to come.

Reignier, Duke of Anjou, is better known in history as Rene I, the Good. Actually, he was only thirteen years old at the time of the death of Henry V, and did not succeed to the title of Anjou until 1434. He is men-



tioned here not because he was important in himself as far as the progress of the war was concerned, but because he was the father of the woman who was later to become a fateful English queen.

The Duke of Alencon is John II, the son and successor of John I of Alencon, who had died at Agincourt, according to legend in single combat with Henry V (see page II-505). The younger John was likewise only thirteen at the time of Henry's death.

. . . *the stout Lord Talbot* . . .

Then there arrives a Third Messenger, who comes not to talk of generalities but to describe a specific battle. He says:

*I must inform you of a dismal fight
Betwixt the stout Lord Talbot and the French.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 105-6

It is Talbot who is the true hero of *Henry VI, Part One*. Indeed, one might almost say that this play bears a resemblance in atmosphere and quality to the motion picture *The Green Berets* and Talbot is its John Wayne.

John Talbot was a member of an English aristocratic family, the second son of the 4th Baron Talbot. His life is a chronicle of warfare, for he was one of those who were born to battle. He fought in Wales during the reign

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of Henry IV, and commanded the English forces in Ireland during the great year of Agincourt.

He first went to France in 1419, four years after Agincourt, and was the fighting mainstay of the English forces there after the death of Henry V.

He was the victor of some forty skirmishes and battles and, indeed, was so uniformly victorious that he seemed invincible.

His first mention in this play at this point is in connection with the crisis of the war, the siege of Orleans. This crisis began in 1428, six years after the death of Henry V, and at a time when the English (despite this first scene of the play) were still on the offensive.

. Bedford gathered some ten thousand men, who marched up to the walls of Orleans on October 12, 1428, and put it under siege. This siege, which lasted half a year, was to prove the turning point of the Hundred Years' War.

Orleans was on the middle reaches of the Loire River, seventy miles



south of Paris, and halfway between Paris and Bourges, where the Dauphin held his court.

If Orleans were taken, there was little to stop the English from swarming southward. The French, who had suffered enough to break the spirit of the nation ten times over, might very well find it the last straw and the French national spirit might well have been overthrown at last (at least for awhile).

At the siege were a number of important English leaders, and John Talbot, the ever victorious, was one of them. He was just about forty years old at this time.

Retiring from the siege . . .

But the siege of Orleans was broken at last under particularly remarkable circumstances, as we shall see. And in the aftermath, Talbot was *not* victorious. The Third Messenger explains:

*The tenth of August last, this dreadful lord,
Retiring from the siege of Orleans,
Having full scarce six thousand in his troop,
By three and twenty thousand of the French
Was round encompassed and set upon.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 110-14

The story, as the Third Messenger tells it, is that Talbot, even though outnumbered four to one, held out for three hours with Talbot wreaking personal destruction beyond imagination. (He was called "the English Achilles" by his later admirers.)

Actually, Talbot might have fought like a hero, but he had also fought

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like a fool. The version given here in the play has scarcely anything in common with the facts. Talbot was *not* ambushed and might easily have avoided a battle and escaped when a French force (consisting of only eight thousand men and *not* twenty-three thousand) approached him at

Patay in June 1429 (and *not* August 10), some fifteen miles northwest of Orleans.

The trouble was that Talbot was humiliated at having had to retreat from Orleans, and with the odds four to three against him (*not* four to one) he decided to fight. Of course, such a keen sense of "honor" is often praised by those who are safe at home, but the Battle of Patay caused the unnecessary deaths of two thousand Englishmen, and that is a high price to pay for Talbot's wanting to pay back his humiliation.



... *Sir John Falstaff* . . .

Talbot's defeat was blamed not only on ambush by a superior force but also on treason. The Third Messenger explains that Talbot's strong fight might have won after all:

*// Sir John Falstaff had not played the coward.
He, being in the vanward, placed behind
With purpose to relieve and follow them,
Cowardly fled, not having struck one stroke.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 131-34

The Sir John Falstaff mentioned here is actually Sir John Fastolfe, and the latter is the name given in other editions of this play. (It was because of this passage and another like it that Shakespeare used "Falstaff" as the name of his great comic creation in *Henry IV, Part One* and *Henry IV, Part Two*, see page II-329.)

This passage, as it happens, is sheer libel on a brave and sensible officer, who is made the goat for Talbot's folly.

Fastolfe had distinguished himself at the Battle of Agincourt and had served loyally and well as Henry Vs representative in Normandy. He had also done well at the siege of Orleans, whining the "Battle of the Herrings" in February 1429. This battle got its name because an English column, which fought the battle, was bringing food supplies to the army investing Orleans. A French relief force attacked it and was driven off thanks to Fastolfe's good generalship. However, some barrels of herring were broken open in the melee and herrings were spread over the field.

Fastolfe was cocommander of the retreating English force at Patay. Being an intelligent general, and not a rakehell fighter like Talbot, he pointed out that the logical move was to hasten the retreat and avoid the French,

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thus saving the army for use on a more appropriate occasion. While he and Talbot were arguing, the French attacked and the opportunity for a safe retreat was lost.

To those English who were taught to believe that one Englishman was



as good as ten Frenchmen, Fastolfe's advice to avoid the fight was looked on as cowardice and he was blamed for Talbot's defeat. This is an example of what those who have studied history well know: When stupidity is considered patriotism, it is unsafe to be intelligent.

A base Walloon . . .

Among the casualties is Talbot himself. Or, as the Third Messenger puts it:

*A base Walloon, to win the Dolphin's grace,
Thrust Talbot with a spear into the back,*

-Act I, scene i, lines 137-38

A Walloon is the name given to French-speaking inhabitants of southern Belgium. In Talbot's time that area was under Burgundian control and the Walloons would not be likely to be fighting on the French side.

However, in Shakespeare's time, the Walloons, who were Catholics, tended to be on the side of the Spaniards, who were fighting the strong revolt of the Dutch Protestants, who were in turn supported by the English. Walloon might thus be used simply as a term of contempt that would be so understood by an Elizabethan audience.

. . . Lord Hungerford

Talbot has not been killed, however. The Third Messenger says:

*. . . he lives, but is took prisoner,
And Lord Scales with him and Lord Hungerford;*

-Act I, scene i, lines 145-46

Lord Walter Hungerford had served with Henry V in France and was present at the Battle of Agincourt. In fact, it was probably he, rather than Westmoreland, who wished for ten thousand more men on the eve of the battle (see page II-495).

Talbot, Hungerford, and Scales (the last was Thomas de Scales) all



survived imprisonment for many years. Scales has a small role in *Henry VI, Part Two*.

The Earl of Salisbury. . .

Despite the fact that the First Messenger announced the loss of Orleans (which the English never truly held, so that it can only mean the lifting of the siege) and the Third Messenger described a defeat of Talbot, which came only after the lifting of that siege, we are suddenly back in time and the siege of Orleans continues.

When Bedford vows to return to France forthwith with a new army, the Third Messenger says:

*So you had need, for Orleans is besieged;
The English army is grown weak and faint;
The Earl of Salisbury craveth supply*

-Act I, scene i, lines 157-59

Salisbury (Thomas de Montagu, 4th Earl of Salisbury) appeared in *Henry V* just before the Battle of Agincourt. After the death of Henry V, Salisbury became Bedford's chief lieutenant in France, and it was he who headed the besieging force of English at Orleans.

To Eltham . . .

So the mourners scatter: Bedford to raise an army and Gloucester to arrange for the new King's coronation as Henry VI. Exeter says:

*To Eltham will I, where the young king is,
Being ordained his special governor,*

-Act I, scene i, lines 170-71

Eltham is an eastern suburb about eleven miles from the center of London.

Winchester, seeing Bedford busied with war and Gloucester and Exeter rushing about the baby King's business, feels left out, but he does not intend to be so for long. He mutters to himself as the crowded scene ends:

*Each hath his place and function to attend;
I am left out; for me nothing remains.
But long I will not be Jack out of office.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 173-75

Froissart, a countryman of ours . . .

The scene shifts to France, where the Dauphin and his forces are jubilant over the fact that the English, short of men and of rations, cannot long maintain the siege of Orleans.

The French attack and though they outnumber the English by the usual ten to one, they are driven back with great slaughter. (All battles are Agin-



courts, to hear the English legends tell it.)

Alencon says:

*Froissart, a countryman of ours, records
England all Olivers and Rowlands bred
During the time Edward the Third did reign.
More truly now may this be verified,
For now but Samsons and Goliases
It sendeth forth to skirmish.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 29-34

Jean Froissart was a French historian who visited England, Scotland, and Italy, then wrote a history entitled *Chronicles of France, England, Scotland and Spain*, which covers the history of those countries from 1325 to 1400, including the early portions of the Hundred Years' War and the battles of Edward III.

Oliver and Rowland (Roland) are the main characters in the *Song of Roland*, a legend set in Charlemagne's time. They were superhuman heroes who, like the Knights of the Round Table, could easily defeat odds of ten to one if pressed. So could such biblical strong men as Samson and Goliath (Goliath), of course.

The purpose of this portion of the scene is clearly to show that Frenchmen simply could not defeat Englishmen in fair fight, even though the Englishmen might be starving, have their best fighter (Talbot) taken, and be facing a foe outnumbering them ten to one.

But in that case, why were the English defeated? The reason follows at once.

A holy maid . . .

It was witchcraft, you see.

The Bastard of Orleans, Dunois, arrives and says:

*Be not dismayed, for succor is at hand:
A holy maid hither with me I bring,
Which by a vision sent to her from heaven
Ordained is to raise this tedious siege
And drive the English forth the bounds of France.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 50-54

The "holy maid" is, of course, Joan of Arc, one of the most amazing characters in history. If her story were told as a work of fiction it would be considered too fantastic to be plausible.



She was born in 1412 at Domremy, 160 miles east of Paris, a village whose only claim to fame through all its history is that Joan was born there. Her name was Jeanne Dare, but this came to be spelled Jeanne D'Arc as though she were of noble birth and as though she were Joan of Arc, with Arc being the place of her birth. This is wrong, but it is too late to change it.

She was called Joan la Pucelle (Joan the Maid) also, because she remained a virgin and this was considered in her favor, for it made more plausible her role as a holy girl receiving inspiration from heaven. Shakespeare calls her Joan la Pucelle and her speeches are labeled "Pucelle." What's more, her birthplace is now called Domremy-la-Pucelle. Because her most remarkable deed was in connection with the siege of Orleans, she is also called the Maid of Orleans.

In her teens she was experiencing visions and imagining herself called to save France. In 1428, when these experiences of hers finally drove her to action, the Dauphin had still not been crowned at Rheims, though six full years had passed since the death of his father. What's more, the siege of Orleans might defeat him forever. It seemed to Joan that her mission had to start at once and that she had to relieve the siege and crown the Dauphin.

The Dauphin was then at Chinon, 90 miles southwest of Orleans (not at Orleans itself, as the play makes it appear) and 270 miles from Domremy. Joan left Domremy in January 1429 and arrived at Chinon on February 24, 1429. She had to cross English-controlled territory to do so, and so she dressed in man's costume to avoid the land of trouble a young girl might have in those days (or these) if she were encountered by soldiers.

... *Thou art an Amazon*

Shakespeare's treatment of Joan of Arc makes us most uncomfortable. We have long grown accustomed to treating her from the French viewpoint as a heroine and saint. (She is actually a saint, having been canonized in 1920, but this was long after Shakespeare's time, of course.)

By the English she was looked on as a witch, and when they had her in their power, they treated her as one. Shakespeare looked upon her as a witch too, and could scarcely have done anything else if he expected

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to keep this play on the boards. He does not hesitate to distort her story grotesquely (or to follow an already grotesquely distorted story).

Thus, in order to prove her mission to the Dauphin, he has her wield a sword and engage in single combat with him. What's more, she defeats

him (a sign of witchcraft, since how else could a woman defeat a man—even if that man be merely a Frenchman). The Dauphin, beaten, cries out:

*Stay, stay thy hands! Thou art an Amazon
And fightest with the sword of Deborah.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 104-5

The Amazons were women warriors in Greek legend, and Deborah was a woman judge in early Israelite history who inspired a defeat of



the Canaanites, though she herself bore no arms. The comparison with Deborah, though meant by Shakespeare to be ironical, is a good one.

Needless to say, no such duel took place in reality. In actual fact, once Joan arrived at the Dauphin's court, she was questioned by ecclesiastical authorities for nearly a month to test her sincerity. In the end, the churchmen advised the Dauphin to make use of her at Orleans. This did not necessarily mean that they believed her to be inspired, but they may well have thought that she could convincingly act as though she were. If the French were heartened by a maid who claimed power from heaven and if the English were equivalently disheartened, then the French might win, and what did it matter whether she were really inspired or not?

... *Saint Martin's summer* . . .

Joan goes on to reassure the French in absolute terms, saying:

*Expect Saint Martin's summer, halcyon's days,
Since I have entered into these wars.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 131-32

St. Martin's summer is what we call "Indian summer" (a name of uncertain origin), a period of warmth in November that, traditionally, follows the first frost. It is brief but while it lasts, coming as it does after the breath of winter has already made itself felt, it is infinitely appreciated and seems even warmer and calmer than it really is.

Calling it St. Martin's summer brings back the old custom of marking time by saints' days. The feast day of St. Martin of Tours is November 11 and this is the time when such a period of late warmth may well come.

"Halcyon days" is a term that dates back to Greek myth. Alcyone (or Halcyon) was married to Ceyx and they were dreadfully in love. When

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Ceyx died in a shipwreck on an occasion when Alcyone, against her will, had stayed at home, she threw herself into the sea and drowned.

Both lovers were turned to kingfishers by the sympathizing gods. The Greeks went on to elaborate the fable by imagining that kingfishers lay eggs in a nest which they set floating in the sea. In memory of the ancient tragedy, the gods keep the seas calm for the sake of those eggs during the two weeks centered about the winter solstice (the last two weeks in December). These are the "halcyon days."



It seems strange that Joan should be promising the French good times in images that imply brief periods of fortune only. (After all, both St. Martin's summer and the halcyon days are followed by the real winter.) It is not, however, Joan that is promising, but Shakespeare, and undoubtedly that is all he is willing to give the French, regardless of history.

... *Caesar and his fortune* ...

Joan's pride (for naturally Shakespeare will not show her with the becoming humility a saint would be expected to have) causes her to burst out with an overweening:

*Now am I like that proud insulting [insolent] ship
Which Caesar and his fortune bare at once.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 138-39

This refers to an episode in the life of Julius Caesar. While Caesar was being ferried across a stretch of water, the sea ran so high that the pilot, afraid for his safety, wanted to put back. Caesar, pointing forward with magnificent arrogance, said, "On, pilot, and fear not. You carry Caesar and his fortune."

The word "fortune" carries the meaning, in this case, of "good luck." Caesar believed he had been assigned triumph and success by the Fates and that it was therefore impossible for him to die until that end had been achieved. For that reason the ship could not sink, and Joan's triumphant cry compares herself to that ship.

... *Saint Philip's daughters* ...

The Dauphin is completely won over by her utter confidence and believes her to be inspired:

*Helen, the mother of great Constantine,
Nor yet Saint Philip's daughters, were like thee.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 142-43

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The Dauphin is here comparing Joan's ability to divine and foresee with that of other women in Christian legend. Helen, the mother of Constantine, was supposed to have discovered, in 326, the True Cross on which Jesus was crucified as the result of a vision.

"Saint Philip's daughters" is a reference to the biblical Book of Acts (21:9) where Philip the evangelist is said to have had "four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy."

And so the French agree not to abandon their attempts to break the siege, for Joan promises them victory.



This be Damascus. . .

While Joan of Arc was invigorating the French, civil broils among the English were being exacerbated. Gloucester is hurrying to the Tower of London to survey its stores of munitions, presumably for the French wars but possibly for his own cause, and he finds it under the control of Winchester.

The armed retainers of the two quarrel and Winchester emerges to face Gloucester in person. Winchester, as a priest, is not armed and he dares Gloucester to kill him:

*. . . stand thou back, I will not budge a foot;
This be Damascus, be thou cursed Cain,
To slay thy brother Abel, if thou wilt.*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 38-40

Winchester is Gloucester's half uncle, a relationship close enough to make the Cain and Abel analogy a useful one. (Bolingbroke used the analogy to threaten Richard II, see page II-269.) The mention of Damascus refers to the later legend that the site on which Cain killed Abel was the place where the city of Damascus was eventually built.

The Lord Mayor of London emerges then, and carefully reads the riot act. Anyone who strikes a blow after that is breaking the law. That breaks off the quarrel, for Gloucester, like a good Englishman, says:

Cardinal, I'll be no breaker of the law,

-Act I, scene iii, line 80

The Lord Mayor, naturally portrayed as a fat, middle-aged merchant, with none of the aristocratic virtues such as the love of violence, undoubtedly raises a laugh from the audience by concluding the scene with the remark:

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*Good God, these nobles should such stomachs bear!
I myself fight not once in forty year.*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 90-91

Despite the fact that bloodshed has been averted on this occasion, we can be quite sure that the deadly feud between uncle and nephew will continue.



. . . like thee, Nero

Again the scene shifts to Orléans; this time to the English besiegers. Talbot is on the scene again, having been exchanged for a French prisoner.

Salisbury, the English commander, having greeted Talbot with joy, points out a certain turret grate through which he can see the French forces. He does not know that a French gunner, having discovered Salisbury's habitual use of that grate, has trained a gun on it, and left his son to be ready to use it.

The boy uses it and Salisbury drops, badly wounded. The maddened Talbot swears to avenge the leader. He says:

*. . . I will [avenge]; and like thee, Nero,
Play on the lute, beholding the towns burn.*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 95-96

In A.D. 64 there was a great fire in Rome. This was not an uncommon occurrence in a city riddled with wooden, jerry-built slums and with only the sketchiest of fire-fighting equipment. The Emperor Nero, who was in his summer residence at Antium (see page I-236), hastened back to supervise matters and to do what he could to relieve suffering. It was six days before the fire was finally mastered.

Watching the fire one night, according to one story, Nero (who considered himself a great show business personality) strummed the lute and gloomily sang a ballad concerning the burning of Troy. It was an inappropriate, even tactless thing to do, but wasn't really wicked. Nero has, however, a bad press for a variety of reasons, including the fact that he caused Christians to be tortured afterward on the pretext that they had started the fire.

The story has therefore become current that Nero himself started the fire (he didn't) and then played and sang in delight at the sight (as now Talbot threatens to do). Usually, Nero is said to have fiddled and "to fiddle while Rome burns" expresses the height of callousness and indifference. Actually, the violin was not invented till many centuries after Nero's time, and it was the lute, as Talbot says, that Nero used.

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A holy prophetess . . .

Even as Salisbury lies dying, the news comes of Joan of Arc. A Messenger arrives, saying:

*My lord, my lord, the French have gathered head:
The Dolphin, with one Joan La Pucelle joined,*



*A holy prophetess new risen up,
Is come with a great power to raise the siege.*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 100-3

The issue is joined and the rest of the play deals largely with the combat between Talbot, the plain, brave soldier fighting for England, and Joan of Arc, the wicked witch, fighting for France.

But Shakespeare has the chronology here exactly reversed. He has Talbot captured, then Joan of Arc arrive at the French court, then Salisbury killed. Here's the way it really went:

1) Salisbury was hideously wounded by the lucky shot of the boy gunner on October 27, 1428. He was carried to Meung-sur-Loire, ten miles down-stream, for treatment, and died there on November 3. The result was that English morale suffered a serious downturn.

2) Joan of Arc arrived at the French court on February 24, 1429, four months *after* the wounding of Salisbury. When she was finally allowed to go to Orleans, the French morale underwent a jubilant upturn, and on May 4, 1429, the French attack broke the English siege and sent the English into retreat. (Orleans was the Stalingrad of the Hundred Years' War.)

3) The Battle of Patay was fought during the retreat and Talbot was captured on June 29, 1429, four months *after* Joan's arrival at the French court. Talbot was kept imprisoned, by the way, for four years and was not released till 1433.

. . . thou art a witch

The first confrontation of Talbot and Joan as pictured in the play is a directly physical one at Orleans. They actually fight, and Talbot, who singlehandedly can kill droves of French soldiers, cannot kill one French girl.

The conclusion is obvious and Talbot cries out:

Blood will I draw on thee, thou art a witch,

-Act I, scene v, line 6



Of course, no such duel took place. Joan of Arc went with the army and

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even led them, dad in armor, but she never actually fought. It was her presence that counted and the belief the soldiers had in her, not any martial deeds she could perform.

... *France's saint*

The French broke the siege, drove off the English, and entered Orleans on May 7, 1429. The turning point of the Hundred Years' War (thirteen and a half years after Agincourt) had come at last. The Dauphin, in transports of ecstasies, pours praise on Joan that is replete with classical allusions. He says:

*Divinest creature, Astraea's daughter,
How shall I honor thee for this success?
Thy promises are like Adonis' garden
That one day bloomed and fruitful were the next.*

-Act I, scene vi, lines 4-8

Astraea was a goddess personifying justice and innocence, who lingered upon earth after the conclusion of the primeval Golden Age. Finally, men's increasing wickedness forced her away too, and she went to heaven where she was fixed among the stars as the constellation Virgo (the Virgin). Naturally Joan la Pucelle (the Virgin) would seem like her.

During the ancient agricultural festivals held in honor of Adonis (see page I-5) in midsummer, quick-growing plants were sown in plots, made to bloom in eight days, then allowed to wither. They were then thrown into the sea or river with images of the dead Adonis. This is a transparent representation of the growth and death of the plant world with the seasons, which is what the Adonis myth symbolizes. "Adonis' garden" is used for anything that quickly fulfills its promise. (It also quickly dies, so that the metaphor, like "Saint Martin's summer" earlier, is not entirely favorable.)

The Dauphin also says:

*A statelier pyramid [pyramid] to her I'll rear
Than Rhodope's . . .*

-Act I, scene vi, lines 21-22



According to a Greek legend, Rhodopis (the correct spelling) was an Egyptian prostitute who built the Pyramid of Menkure out of her earnings.

There is nothing to the legend, of course, but it is a most tactless allusion

where virginal Joan is concerned. Undoubtedly Shakespeare did not use it

by accident.

Finally, the Dauphin says:

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*No longer on Saint Denis will we cry, -
But Joan La Pucelle shall be France's saint.*

-Act I, scene vi, lines 28-29

Undoubtedly, Shakespeare meant this as the crowning example of the effeminate prince's exaggerated praise, but as it happens, it turned out to be

a perfectly valid prediction.

In this day and age, when patron saints are out of fashion, there is one personage on whom Frenchmen can look back as a representation of all

that is imperishable about France, of all that can rescue it from even the

greatest depths of degradation, and that is Joan of Arc. She has become a symbol, not only to France, but to all the world, of a gleaming rescue at the point when all hope seems gone.

... *the regions of Artois*

Once the siege of Orleans was broken, the English tide began to recede. They never returned to Orleans. On the contrary, the French pursued the English and beat them at the Battle of Patay, the first great French victory in the open field. It broke the myth of English invincibility, and of Talbot's too.

England might then have been struck hard and Paris might have been regained by France, were it not for Joan's anxiety to have the Dauphin crowned. That was her main aim-to make Charles the legal King of France.

The Battle of Patay had opened the road. Charles and Joan led the French army to Rheims, 140 miles northeast of Orleans, and there the Dauphin was crowned on July 17, 1429, and became Charles VII, King of France.

In the play, however, in place of all this there is built up an outright falsification of history in the interest of English vanity.

At the beginning of Act II, Talbot, Bedford, and Burgundy are seen approaching Orleans in an attempt to regain what has been lost. Talbot addresses the other two:

*Lord Regent, and redoubted Burgundy,
By whose approach the regions of Artois,
Wallon, and Picardy are friends to us,*

-Act II, scene i, lines 8-10



Artois, Wallon, and Picardy are regions in northeastern France, and this is a reminder that the English had beaten France mainly because part of France was on their side against the rest. It was not English valor that kept the English secure in France, so much as the Burgundian alliance, and this is not often admitted in Shakespearean history.

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Actually, the Burgundian alliance had been unnecessarily weakened in the years following the death of Henry V through the ineptness of Humphrey of Gloucester, the Lord Protector.

Gloucester had, in 1423, the year after Henry V's death, married Jacqueline of Hainaut, who owned large possessions in the Netherlands. This displeased Philip of Burgundy for several reasons. In the first place, Jacqueline had previously been married to the Duke of Brabant, a kinsman of Burgundy. The lady had virtually eloped with Gloucester and had had her marriage to Brabant annulled by a dubious appeal to a Pope not recognized by all of the West. This proceeding was an insult to Burgundy, who considered his relative of Brabant to have been treated shabbily. (Brabant was Jacqueline's second husband, by the way. Her first had been the very Dauphin who had sent Henry V the tennis balls, see page II-465.)

Secondly, Gloucester greedily wanted to grab the Netherlandish territory that represented his wife's estate and landed five thousand men at Calais to fight a war in the Netherlands. This not only diverted English strength from the more important war against the Dauphin, but seriously offended Burgundy a second time, since he considered the Netherlands his own sphere of influence.

The whole thing almost led to a duel between Gloucester and Burgundy, despite Bedford's frenzied attempts at mediation. In the end the matter was settled when Gloucester's marriage was declared void in 1428. Gloucester then married Eleanor Cobham, his mistress, a relatively lowborn lady. (It was Eleanor, as we can tell from later events, whom Winchester had anachronistically referred to at Henry V's funeral when he darkly warned Gloucester, "Thy wife is proud," see page II-523.)

Burgundy's friendship for England was seriously bent by all this and England's defeat before Orleans cooled it further. Nevertheless, for the while, though the earlier enthusiasm was gone, Burgundy remained an English ally, and that was important with respect to the matter of Joan of Arc.

Coward of France . . .

Talbot explains that the French are celebrating their victory (which he attributes to sorcery, of course) and are off their guard, so that the city can be retaken by surprise attack.

Burgundy agrees with the witch theory, for he has ample reason to hate the Dauphin and take up a point of view so discreditable to him. He says:

*Coward of France! How much he wrongs his fame,
Despairing of his own arm's fortitude,
To join with witches and the help of hell.*



-Act II, scene i, lines 16-18

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And so Orleans is (fictitiously) retaken, and the French, including Joan and the Dauphin, are made to fly the city, disgracefully, in their night-clothes.

But then Orleans is never mentioned again in the play and succeeding English feats of derring-do are always farther and farther back with no mention anywhere of how it was that all the victories place the English nearer and nearer total defeat.

... *Scythian Tomyris* ...

With Orleans retaken, Shakespeare lays the groundwork for the (thoroughly fictitious) display of Talbot's invincibility in another respect, for he receives an invitation to visit the castle of the Countess of Auvergne, a region some 150 miles south of Orleans.

Presumably, this represents the possibility of a little love-making, and Burgundy and Bedford leer a bit at the possibility. Neither seems perturbed that Talbot is being asked to travel far into French-controlled territory. The clear-sighted Talbot, as much superior to the French ladies as to the French soldiers, lays plans of his own which are not revealed to the audience. (He calls a captain to his side and whispers to him.)

But then the lady at her appearance in the next scene reveals at once that she has formed a plot to kill Talbot. She says:

*I shall as famous be by this exploit
As Scythian Tomyris by Cyrus' death.*

-Act II, scene iii, lines 5-6

Cyrus was the great conqueror who established the Persian Empire-the largest that western Asia had yet seen-in the sixth century B.C. In 529 B.C. his lust for ever more territory had led him against the hordes of the nomadic tribe of the Massagetae, which then occupied the land east of the Caspian Sea.

According to Herodotus, the tribe was governed by a queen, Tomyris. In battle against the Massagetae, Cyrus suffered his first defeat-and his last as well, for he was killed. Tomyris then located his body and cut off its head and threw it in a vat of human blood as a symbol of its insatiability for battle and blood when alive.

Shakespeare refers to Tomyris as Scythian (see page I-397), a name easily given to any nomadic tribe. Actually, the Massagetae drove out the Scythians from the trans-Caspian area and replaced them.

When Talbot arrives at the Countess' castle, she is first disappointed that he is so small of stature, and secondly she tries to arrest him.

Talbot, however, laughs and calls in his soldiers, for that was the preparation he had arranged in whispers. He arranged to have himself accom-

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panied by a strong force, for he was not such a fool as to come at a



French lady's call unaccompanied.

The French Countess falls into a state of great admiration for Talbot (something that would seem reasonable to an Elizabethan audience), and the scene ends in feasting and gaiety.

... a case of truth

But now comes a scene which everyone agrees is entirely Shakespeare.

It was inserted to mark the genesis of the War of the Roses, the great, confused civil war that fills *Henry VI, Part Two* and *Henry VI, Part Three*.

By means of this scene, plus other passages, this present play, originally a simple Talbot chronicle, becomes an almost appropriate *Henry VI, Part One*.

The fundamental excuse for the civil war is the old, old question of the succession. Who was the true successor of Richard II?

Was it a representative of the line of Henry IV, Henry V, and now Henry VI, who were all descended from John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster and fourth son of Edward III? (This is the Lancastrian line.)

Or was it Edmund Mortimer, the 5th Earl of March, who was descended (on his mother's side) from Lionel of Antwerp, third son of Edward III (see page II-320)?

The cause of Mortimer had been defended by Hotspur against Lancastrian Henry IV in *Henry IV, Part One* (see page II-320) and by the Earl of Cambridge against Lancastrian Henry V in *Henry V* (see page II-466).

Now a new champion of the Mortimers has arisen, and the scene opens with a question by him.

*Great lords and gentlemen, what means this silence?
Dare no man answer in a case of truth?*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 1-2

The speaker is Richard Plantagenet, son of the just mentioned Earl of Cambridge. He owns the surname because he is descended by unbroken male line from his great-grandfather Edward III Plantagenet (see page II-255).



Plantagenet's grandfather had been Edmund of Langley, who was the Duke of York in *Richard II*, and his uncle was Edward, Duke of York ("Aumerle" in *Richard II*), who died at Agincourt (see page II-500). By that time, Richard Plantagenet's father, the conspiring Earl of Cambridge (Edward of York's younger brother), had been executed. The young boy, who was only four years old at the time of Agincourt, would, ordinarily, have inherited the title and become Duke of York. As the son of a convicted traitor, however, he could not inherit and remained merely Richard Plantagenet.

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Despite this denial of title, he remained on a social par with the lords of the realm and could deal with them on a footing of equality. Here he was demanding that they answer him on some point of law. What that point was is not stated anywhere in the scene but it seems reasonable to suppose that it involves the succession. Plantagenet wants to know, perhaps, whether the Mortimer line is the true pathway of descent of the English crown.

It is important to remember that the line of monarchs who were on the throne in Shakespeare's time were firmly Lancastrian in sympathy. Consequently, Shakespeare finds the chronicles of the time pro-Lancastrian and against the pretensions of the line of Mortimer. Shakespeare would absorb that point of view and would not, in any case, place anything in his plays that might be too boldly against the Establishment of his time.

Richard Plantagenet, therefore, is treated with less than justice by Shakespeare in various places. He is shown here to be raising the matter of the succession and to be laying plots to secure that succession for himself, whereas the truth of the matter seems to be that he was a loyal servant of the crown and was eventually pushed into rebellion by the incapacity of King Henry VI and the malevolence of some of those about him.

Plantagenet's case, briefly, would be this. If male ancestry only were considered, he would have no claim on the throne, for he would then be descended from Edmund of Langley, the fifth son of Edward III.

Plantagenet's father, however, had married Anne Mortimer, the younger sister of the Earl of March. If the Earl of March died without issue, then Richard Plantagenet was the son of the daughter of the son of the daughter of Lionel, the *third* son of Edward III.

Plantagenet's line is usually called the Yorkist line, both because he was descended from Edmund of Langley, Duke of York, and because he himself would eventually be Duke of York. By the marriage into the House of Mortimer, the House of York had thus developed a better claim to the throne than the House of Lancaster.

With the Yorkists representing a third son and the Lancastrians only a fourth, Richard Plantagenet could, in his own view, confidently demand a judgment from the others.



... *the Temple Hall* ...

Plantagenet is answered, rather nervously, by one of the noblemen present, who says:

*Within the Temple Hall we were too loud;
The garden here is more convenient.*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 3-4

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The Temple Hall was a favored residence for law students, so it was a good place to discuss a point of law. However, since the point under discussion could easily lead one to treasonable statements, it was indeed better to move to a more private place.

The speaker of these lines is William de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk. He spent his younger years in France, doing excellent service, first under Henry V, then under the Earl of Salisbury and the Duke of Bedford. When Salisbury was killed at Orleans, it was Suffolk who took over the command of the English army (though he does not appear in that capacity in the play's scenes dealing with the siege of Orleans-he being pushed into the background in favor of Talbot).

Suffolk was taken prisoner in the aftermath of the retreat from Orleans but was soon ransomed.

We might suppose from the fact that Suffolk is present that this scene takes place enough time after the lifting of the siege of Orleans to give him a chance to be ransomed and come back to England, so that we can say the scene is taking place in 1432. However, the scene shows no real indication of time and it is thoroughly fictitious anyway, so that any attempt at chronology is futile.

... *wrangling Somerset* ...

Richard Plantagenet feels that if they have been silent in the Temple Hall for fear of eavesdroppers, they ought no longer be silent in the privacy of the garden. He says:

*Then say at once if I maintained the truth;
Or else was wrangling Somerset in the error?*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 5-6

Who was Somerset? To explain that, we must return to the Beaufort family.

John of Gaunt had two sets of descendants. Through his first wife, he had given birth to Henry IV and his descendants, which, among the characters in this play, include the reigning child-king Henry VI and his uncles,

John of Bedford and Humphrey of Gloucester.

Through his third wife, John of Gaunt had given birth to three sons,



John Beaufort, Henry Beaufort, and Thomas Beaufort. These were all born while his third wife was still merely his mistress and were therefore illegitimate at birth. However, when John of Gaunt married that mistress, he managed to force through a decree legitimizing his children by her, though Henry IV carefully saw to it that they were declared ineligible for succession to the throne. There is some question as to whether this ineligibility was an actual decree or a later forgery, but in any case, if the line of Henry IV failed, the Beauforts would certainly put in a strong claim to the throne.

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What's more, it seemed as if the elder Lancastrian line might fail. The adult representatives, Bedford and Gloucester, had no heirs and very likely would not get any (and didn't). That would leave Henry VI, the boy-king, the last of the elder Lancastrians, and he was not of robust health.

With that in mind, where did the three Beaufort brothers stand? The youngest, Thomas, was Duke of Exeter. He died in 1426, three years before the lifting of the siege of Orleans, and left no heirs.

The middle Beaufort is Bishop of Winchester, who is very much alive, but as a churchman, will have no heirs.

The eldest Beaufort, John, was created Earl of Somerset by his half brother, Henry IV, but did not live to enjoy it long, for he died in 1410, at the age of twenty-seven or so.

John Beaufort had three sons in his turn. The eldest, Henry Beaufort, succeeded to the title of Earl of Somerset, but died in 1418 at the age of seventeen, leaving no heirs.

The other two sons were John Beaufort and Edmund Beaufort. John was the next holder of the title. He fought in France, where he spent fourteen years as a captive. He was promoted to Duke of Somerset in 1443 but died in France the next year, leaving behind only a daughter, Margaret Beaufort. The title of Somerset passed on to John's younger brother, Edmund.

It is impossible to say which brother is meant by Shakespeare's "Somerset," John or Edmund. The cast of characters calls him John Beaufort, but by the end of the play, events are described which take place after John's death and where the Somerset mentioned can only be Edmund Beaufort.

The best we can do is consider Shakespeare's "Somerset" of *Henry VI, Part One* an amalgam of John and Edmund, the brothers who represent the second Beaufort generation.

Clearly the Beauforts must be Lancastrians, for on that their claim to the throne depends. Somerset, moreover (John-Edmund Beaufort), as descendant of the oldest Beaufort brother, would be the heir to the throne on strict Lancastrian principles if Henry VI died without children, just as Richard Plantagenet would be the heir to the throne on strict Yorkist principles and ought even to replace Henry VI on that throne.

So the battle line is drawn: Richard Plantagenet versus John-Edmund of Somerset. The other nobles present are being asked to choose sides.



... *quilllets of the law*

It is not hard to see that nobody present wants to choose sides. To side with Richard Plantagenet would be to commit treason or near treason, and Somerset would not forget. To side with Somerset would become treason if Plantagenet should ever succeed to the throne, and he would not forget.

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Suffolk pleads lack of expertise in legal questions. Richard Plantagenet then appeals to the Earl of Warwick, who likewise weasels, saying:

*... in these nice sharp quilllets [distinctions] of the law
Good faith, I am no wiser than a daw.*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 17-18

Warwick is Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, who appeared briefly in both *Henry IV, Part Two* (see page II-402) and in *Henry V* (see page II-505).

Richard of Warwick fought at the side of Henry IV at the Battle of Shrewsbury and then spent two years on a tour of Europe, including a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. During Henry V's wars in France, Beauchamp commanded Calais. He served as ambassador to France and received the Emperor Sigismund there when the latter was traveling to England (see page II-510).

When Henry V died, his will made Warwick the tutor of his infant son, a post he held till 1437. He took young King Henry VI to France in 1430, and it was while he was there that the event took place for which he is best known in history-for it was he who supervised the trial and execution of Joan of Arc.

... *a white rose* ...

Seeing that no one will speak openly, Richard Plantagenet proposes a silent test. He says:

*Let him that is a true-born gentleman
And stands upon the honor of his birth,
If he suppose that I have pleaded truth,
From off this brier pluck a white rose with me.*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 27-30

Somerset follows the notion and for his side plucks a red rose.

This is supposed to explain why the White Rose was the badge of the House of York in the civil wars that eventually followed and the Red Rose the badge of the House of Lancaster.

Actually, the White Rose of York became prominent only during the civil wars and the Red Rose became prominent only after the end of those wars as a counter to the well-known White Rose.



In the next century, historians made such free use of the symbols that a legend arose concerning the origin, and it is that which Shakespeare made use of here. And it was because of that legend that the civil wars came to be known as the Wars of the Roses.

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... *grace the yeoman* ...

Now the other noblemen do take sides. Warwick plucks a white rose, for instance, and Suffolk a red rose. The quarrel grows more heated and finally, Somerset moves to leave, piercing Plantagenet as he does so with a spiteful barb, when he says to Suffolk:

We grace the yeoman by conversing with him.

-Act II, scene iv, line 81

A yeoman is a commoner, and Somerset is maintaining that since Plantagenet's father was executed for treason and Plantagenet himself is untitled, he is unfit for noblemen to talk to.

Third son , . .

Warwick defends Richard Plantagenet against the implication of non-nobility, saying of him:

*His grandfather was Lionel Duke of Clarence,
Third son to the third Edward King of England:*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 83-84

"Grandfather" is used here as a general term, for Lionel was actually Richard's great-great-grandfather.

The emphasis on the fact that Lionel was third son is shaft enough in return, for Somerset is descended only from the fourth son.

... *the next Parliament*

When Somerset and his faction leave, Warwick consoles Plantagenet by saying:

*This blot that they object against your house
Shall be whipped out in the next Parliament
Called for the truce of Winchester and Gloucester,
And if thou be not then created York,
I will not live to be accounted Warwick.*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 116-20



This next Parliament spoken of here met in 1426, which makes the scene
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puzzling if it is taken as real instead of fictitious. In 1426 the siege of Orleans, the subject of the first act, had not yet taken place. Somerset (John) was in French imprisonment and could not be present, while his brother (Edmund) was not yet Somerset. Richard Plantagenet himself was not yet fifteen.

However, it is useless to try to unscramble the hopelessly tangled chronology of this play.

... *the end of Edmund Mortimer*

Chronology continues to suffer, for now we are taken to the Tower of London, where Edmund Mortimer is supposed to be imprisoned. He is seated in a chair, an old man, and says to a Jailer:

... *these gray locks, the pursuivants [foretellers] of death,
Nestor-like aged in an age of care,
Argue the end of Edmund Mortimer.*

-Act II, scene v, lines 5-7

Shakespeare is quite wrong here. Presumably this is Edmund Mortimer, the 5th Earl of March, who is the rightful heir to the throne on the basis of strict legitimacy (see page II-320). He died in 1425, the year before the "next Parliament" that Warwick had just spoken of in the preceding scene.

We might suppose, then, that the scene of the roses took place in 1425 just before Mortimer died, with all the anachronisms concerning Plantagenet's age and Somerset's imprisonment swallowed.

However, at the time of Mortimer's death, he was only thirty-four years old. "Nestor-like aged"-that is, as aged as the legendary Nestor (see page I-91)-he certainly was not.

Of course, in *Henry IV, Part One* Shakespeare confused Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March, with his namesake uncle who had been captured by Owen Glendower (see page II-320). If Shakespeare means the uncle here, then that uncle, having been born in 1376, would still only have been forty-nine years old in 1425. However, he would not have been around then, for uncle Mortimer remained in Wales after his capture and died about 1409 at the age of thirty-three. Neither uncle nor nephew fits



Shake-
speare's picture at all.

This loathsome sequestration . . .

Edmund Mortimer is waiting for a visit from Richard Plantagenet, the son of his sister, so he can pass on his own claim to the throne. He says, referring to Richard:

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*Poor gentleman! his wrong doth equal mine.
Since Henry Monmouth [Henry V] first began to reign,
Before whose glory I was great in arms,
This loathsome sequestration have I had;*

-Act II, scene v, lines 22-25

For Edmund to speak of a "loathsome sequestration" (i.e., imprisonment) since Henry V first began to reign is a libel on that King. Edmund of March was indeed imprisoned by Henry IV (under conditions not too onerous), but Henry V actually set him free!

Henry V took Edmund of March with him on his first expedition to France and Edmund fought loyally at Harfleur and at succeeding battles. In 1423, after Henry V's death, Edmund was sent to Ireland and placed in charge of the English settlement there. He remained in Ireland till his death

in 1425 of the plague.

He did *not* die a prisoner in the Tower of London. He died a free man and a high official of the crown.

In fact, so far from being against the line of Lancaster, it was he (it is believed by some) who informed Henry V of the treason of Richard of Cambridge, perhaps in gratitude for his freedom or in exchange for it. If so, this was rather a despicable act, since the treason was conceived for the

purpose of making Edmund king.

This would also mean that the Edmund pictured here as waiting for his nephew, whose "wrong doth equal mine," is waiting for a nephew particularly wronged by Edmund himself, for it was Edmund who procured the death of the nephew's father, his own brother-in-law.

My father, Earl of Cambridge. . .

Richard Plantagenet arrives, still smarting from Somerset's slurs on his executed father, and asks Edmund Mortimer for the truth:

*Therefore, good uncle, for my father's sake,
In honor of a true Plantagenet,
And for alliance' sake, declare the cause
My father, Earl of Cambridge, lost his head.*

-Act II, scene v, lines 51-54



Edmund Mortimer, in response, details the list of the sons of Edward III and explains that the line of Mortimer represents the rightful kings. From

this point of view, of course, the Earl of Cambridge was not committing treason, but was fighting loyally for the true king against a usurper.

Richard therefore says:

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*. . . methinks, my father's execution
Was nothing less than bloody tyranny.*

-Act II, scene v, lines 99-100

Edmund Mortimer warns Richard to proceed about his plans cautiously and then dies. With his death, Richard inherits the Mortimer estates, which are great, and automatically becomes the 6th Earl of March.

But now more than ever he needs the slur on his own position, brought about by his father's execution, wiped out. This can best be done by the recognition of his claim to the title of York at the next Parliament.

With that in mind, Richard says:

And therefore haste I to the parliament,

-Act II, scene v, line 127

Thou bastard. . .

The session of Parliament called to patch up some sort of truce between Humphrey of Gloucester and Henry of Winchester is made hideous by their quarreling. It gets so bad that their retainers, forbidden to use weapons, manage to achieve bloody results by pelting each other with rocks. (It is on this occasion that Bedford himself had to come back from France to effect a kind of compromise, though this is not dealt with in the play.)

The quarrel degenerates to personalities. When Winchester seems about to say he is as good as Gloucester, Gloucester sneers back:

*As good?
Thou bastard of my grandfather!*

-Act III, scene i, lines 41-42

And of course, Winchester is one of the three bastard-born Beaufort brothers (see page II-545). Since the brothers were legally legitimized, however, the use of the word seems unfair.

Others begin to take part. Somerset, the nephew of Winchester, is on his side. Warwick is on the other.

It should be mentioned that the embittered rivalry between Gloucester and Winchester involved the war in France. Gloucester, who could never forget he was brother of Henry V and had fought at Agincourt, was what we would today call a hawk. He was against anything short of complete victory in France. Winchester, determined to oppose Gloucester in everything, assumed a dovish stance and favored some sort of accommodation in France short of total victory.

Naturally the existence of a strong "peace party" in England weakened the English stand in France.



.. my tender years . . .

And now the King, Henry VI, who is presiding over the parliamentary session, intervenes, speaking for the first time in the play that is named for him. He begins:

Uncles of Gloucester and of Winchester,

-Act III, scene i, line 65

This is accurate enough. Gloucester is the King's uncle and Winchester his great-uncle. (Gloucester is about thirty-five years old at the time of the Parliament, Winchester about fifty.) The King goes on to say:

*Believe me, lords, my tender years can tell
Civil dissension is a viperous worm
That gnaws the bowels of the commonwealth.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 71-73

He is right, but his years are even more tender than one would think from this speech, for in 1426 Henry VI was only five years old. He goes on to say to the two uncles:

*/ would prevail, if prayers might prevail,
To join your hearts in love and amity.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 67-68

This is apparently a good introduction to the character of the King, for he was indeed a gentle soul who believed in the reign of love; a far too gentle soul to be King. And this was true despite the fact that every effort was made to train the royal child into what might be considered the proper aristocratic belief that the best argument is not love, but a knock on the head.

Warwick, who was in charge of the King's education, followed the stern policy of beatings for slight offenses, and Henry VI was constantly terrorized as a child.

This did not cause him to learn what he was required to learn, for he never betrayed a strong intellect. In fact, he seems to have inherited the mental instability of his mother's father, Charles VI of France (see page II-464), though this was never so extreme in Henry VI. Beating never succeeded in forcing intelligence into Henry VI, and to the end of his life



he remained a gentle nonentity, lovable in his genuine piety and in his un-willingness to do harm, but an utterly incompetent king who did England more harm (unintentionally) than a strong tyrant would have done.

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. . . *princely Duke of York*

Through royal command a hollow truce is patched up between Gloucester and Winchester, who are forced to shake hands.

With that done, the matter of Richard Plantagenet's title is taken up and it goes through without trouble. The King says:

*Rise, Richard, like a true Plantagenet,
And rise created princely Duke of York.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 173-74

Richard, now of York, is vindicated, but his enemies remain. All cry the ritual:

Welcome, high prince, the mighty Duke of York!

-Act III, scene i, line 178

One person, however, Somerset, leader of the Lancastrian faction, says in a muttered aside:

Perish, base prince, ignoble Duke of York!

-Act III, scene i, line 179

. . . *Henry born at Windsor . . .*

All leave the stage now but Exeter, Somerset's uncle, the youngest of the original Beaufort brothers. He is a Lancastrian by definition, but primarily he is an English general, fighting Frenchmen since Henry V's first campaign ten years before. He sees the quarrelsome factions as fatal for the English cause in France and says:

*And now I fear that fatal prophecy
Which in the time of Henry named the Fifth
Was in the mouth of every sucking babe,
That Henry born at Monmouth should win all
And Henry born at Windsor lose all:*

-Act III, scene i, lines 196-200

No doubt there was such a prophecy. Every age sees an infinite num-



ber of prophecies of all types. Later ages remember only those prophecies that seem to have come true, and with the retelling improve them in order to have them fit subsequent events even better.

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Exeter finds the prophecy so likely to come true

*... that Exeter doth wish
His days may finish ere that hapless time,*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 201-2

Exeter got his wish. He died before the year was out, still in his late forties and while the British position in France was still at its peak. It was not till two years after Exeter's death in 1427 that there came the turning-point siege of Orleans.

With Exeter's death, Henry, Bishop of Winchester, remained the last of the original Beaufort brothers.

Cowardly knight. . .

There follows another completely fictitious scene, in which Joan of Arc and the French forces take the city of Rouen by treachery, after which good

old Talbot retakes it the same day by prodigies of valor, the French being shown up as effeminate cowards at every possible chance.

None of this is so. The French did not take Rouen during Joan of Arc's short lifetime. When they finally did take it (eighteen years after Joan's death), the English did not retake it either that day or ever. What's more,

the particular treachery ascribed to the French, that of having soldiers

infiltrate the town in the guise of peasants, was a device actually used by the *English* in taking the town of Evreux in 1441.

There is a short passage, moreover, in which Sir John Falstaff (Fastolfe in other editions) is shown running away from the fight. A Captain calls out after him as he flees:

Cowardly knight, ill fortune follow thee!

-Act III, scene ii, line 109

This scene of cowardice is as utterly false to history as was the earlier report.

... stout Pendragon . . .

Bedford is on the scene too. He is old and sick now and unable to move from his chair. Nevertheless, he refuses to leave the scene of battle, saying:

*... once I read
That stout Pendragon in his litter sick
Came to the field and vanquished his foes.*



-Act III, scene ii, lines 94-96

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Pendragon is Uther Pendragon, the legendary father of the legendary King Arthur. Such feats have indeed been reported in history-of Pepin of Heristal, for instance, the great-grandfather of Charlemagne. The mere presence of an admired leader, though he cannot himself strike a blow, though he be only carried in a litter, can do wonders for soldiers' morale and help bring about victory.

. . . our enemies' overthrow

Once the recapture of Rouen is completed, however, Bedford makes his last speech. He says, just before dying:

*Now, quiet soul, depart when heaven please,
For I have seen our enemies' overthrow.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 110-11

John Plantagenet, Duke of Bedford, did indeed die at Rouen. He died on September 14, 1435, however, at which time Rouen was still firmly in English hands and would remain so for another fourteen years.

What's more, far from leading the French taking of Rouen, Joan of Arc died in the city. After having been captured by the Burgundians, turned over to the English, tried and convicted of heresy, she died at the stake in Rouen on May 30, 1431, not yet twenty years old. The place where she was burned is called the Place de la Pucelle to this day.

Bedford was moderately old for that period of time, being forty-six years of age when he died. His death was a great loss to England. With Salisbury, Exeter, and Bedford all gone, the great generals of the age of Henry V had passed. Only Talbot remained, and for all that this play exaggerates him into fustian, he was indeed a resolute and indomitable fighter who never gave up, and while he lived the Hundred Years' War continued.

They set him free, . . .

The gain-loss of Rouen forces Joan la Pucelle (in the play, at any rate) to other expedients. By use of honeyed words (and, no doubt, by witchcraft, in English eyes) she decides to win over Burgundy from the English alliance.

She gains a parley with him, appeals to his French patriotism, and points out that England will not, in any case, keep faith with him. She says:

*Was not the Duke of Orleans thy foe?
And was he not in England prisoner?
But when they heard he was thine enemy,*

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They set him free without his ransom paid,

-Act III, scene iii, lines 69-72

At this Burgundy changes sides, while Joan says, in an aside:

Done like a Frenchman: turn and turn again!

-Act III, scene iii, line 85

In this play, even the French sneer at the French.

Actually, Burgundy's turnabout came in 1435 and Joan of Arc had nothing to do with it; she had been dead for four years.

The turnabout came for much more serious reasons than a few honeyed words. In fact, from the very start England had a terrible job keeping Burgundy on their side.

Philip the Good of Burgundy did fight with the English in the fury of his rage at the assassination of his father, John the Fearless, by the Dauphin's men (see page II-513), but what he wanted was revenge on the Dauphin and no more. He was *not* interested in being chief French lackey to the English.

While the formidable Henry V was alive, Philip had to tread softly, but once the great king was dead, only a continuing series of bribes in the way of additional land kept him in line. Then, in 1423, Bedford himself had to agree to marry Philip's sister, Anne, and establish a family relationship.

Strains on the alliance continued. First there was the folly of Gloucester's marriage and his attempted war in the Netherlands (see page II-540), which the Duke of Bedford had to stop. Then there was the French recovery, the rescue of Orleans, the English defeat at Patay, the coronation of Charles VII at Rheims.

English victory no longer looked so sure and Philip could not see the profit to be gained in fighting a war that would go on forever. Then too, his sister, Anne, died in November 1432, leaving no children and there was no longer any family bond between Burgundy and Bedford.

Burgundy therefore began to push hard for a treaty of peace that would enable him and the English to keep at least some of the gains they had made in these last fifteen years. Bedford, on the other hand, still longed for total victory.

In early 1435, however, Bedford could no longer resist the pressures. He sent representatives to meet at the town of Arras, in Burgundian territory, there to treat with the Dauphin, or with King Charles VII, as he must really be called.

Yet the English could not bring themselves to give in. They would not accept the terms offered by King Charles and broke off negotiations. Philip

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of Burgundy shrugged his shoulders. If the English were too foolish to save half because they insisted on grasping for all, they would lose all (and they certainly did). That did not mean that Burgundy had to lose all as well. He therefore continued to negotiate on his own behalf with Charles, and Charles, eager to have Burgundy on his side against England, offered generous terms.

When Bedford died, it was not in a spirit of triumph at a fictitious vic-



tory at Rouen, as the play has it. It was in bitterness of spirit, knowing that Burgundy had left the English alliance and that England's last chance of conquering France was gone. The Treaty of Arras between Charles of France and Philip of Burgundy was signed on September 21, 1435, exactly one week after Bedford's death. The English-Burgundian alliance that had brought France to the verge of destruction had lasted only sixteen years.

But it wasn't Joan's witchcraft; it was English folly.

And did the liberation of Charles of Orleans have anything to do with it? Absolutely not!

Joan's remark that Charles of Orleans was Philip's enemy and that Charles was prisoner in England was correct. Orleans was certainly the enemy of Burgundy, since their respective fathers had been the heads of the competing factions in civil war, and since Philip's father had ordered the assassination of Charles's father.

Then, too, Charles of Orleans was indeed taken prisoner at the Battle of Agincourt and remained in England for years thereafter. He was not freed without ransom, however; he was forced to pay a very large ransom.

What's more, he was not freed till 1440, nearly five years *after* Burgundy's defection.

His freedom was, in fact, the result of English squabbling at home. By 1440 the peace party under Winchester was strong indeed, in view of the way in which the English kept losing ground. It was felt that the freeing of Orleans was an easy way to make a move toward de-escalation of the war. Then too, since Humphrey of Gloucester, England's leading hawk politician, favored hanging on to Orleans as a visible reminder of the great victory at Agincourt, Winchester was all the readier to free Orleans as a blow against his great competitor.

That was indeed the way it worked. When Orleans was freed, Gloucester was staggered. He never regained the initiative and his career continued to decline steadily.

After his release, by the way, Charles of Orleans spent a quiet quarter century, divorced from politics, writing poetry, and patronizing other liter-

ary figures. He made a rich marriage (which helped pay off his ransom) and in 1462, when he was sixty-eight years old, his wife gave birth to a son who was someday to be King of France. Since even his imprisonment in England had been a gentle one, there is no denying that in many ways the lot of the loser at Agincourt was much better than that of the winner.

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When I was young. . .

The endless chronological confusion continues.

We are next in Paris, where the young Henry VI has come to be crowned King of France. It was an enforced piece of pageantry. Charles VII had



been crowned King of France in Reims on July 17, 1429 and however much the English might pretend to sneer at this, that coronation had a profound psychological effect.

The English could only crown Henry VI as King of France in return, but they should have done it sooner, when Reims was available to them. Now Reims was in the French grip and the English had to make Paris do. A coronation at Paris was not official, but it was all that could be done.

On April 23, 1430, then, Henry VI was brought to Calais. (It was St. George's Day, the celebration of England's patron saint, but even St. George could not retrieve the irretrievable.) On December 17, 1430, the King was taken to Paris with lavish ceremony. Though this event takes place after Bedford's death and Burgundy's defection in the play, it actually took place five years before either in real history.

Talbot is pictured as being present at the coronation, which he was *not*, for he was in French imprisonment at the time following the Battle of Patay.

King Henry responds to the presence of Talbot in most gracious fashion. Shakespeare has him say:

*When I was young (as yet I am not old)
I do remember how my father said
A stouter champion never handled sword.*

-Act III, scene iv, lines 17-19

The King was certainly "not old." At his coronation in Paris he was just past his ninth birthday. And to remember something his father said

when he "was young" would make him a prodigy indeed, for he was not quite nine months old when his father died.

.. Earl of Shrewsbury

Talbot receives his reward with a title. King Henry says:

We here create you Earl of Shrewsbury,

-Act III, scene iv, line 26

Actually, Talbot was not created Earl of Shrewsbury till 1442, a round

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dozen years after Henry's French coronation. The title has remained in

Talbot's family down to this very day.

Not only is Talbot elevated, but the man who (according to the legend Shakespeare followed) betrayed him is degraded. When Sir John Falstaff

(Fastolfe) enters, Talbot assaults him and rips the garter from his leg (this shows Falstaff to have been a Knight of the Garter, see page II-446)



and denounces him as a coward.

Not all is gladsome, however, for Falstaff has entered carrying messages telling of the Duke of Burgundy's defection.

Cousin of York . . .

Yet as though to show that the defection of Burgundy and the deadly peril that this brings down upon the English causes do not prevent the English nobility from continuing to bicker, the quarrel between the White

Rose and the Red breaks out again on the very day of the coronation.

King Henry tries a compromise. He puts on the red rose of Somerset in order to calm him, and then, to show York that this does not indicate any

royal displeasure to himself, proceeds to appoint the latter to high office.

He says:

*Cousin of York, we institute your grace
To be our Regent in these parts of France;*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 162-63

In other words, York is succeeding to the position formerly held by Bedford.

This did indeed happen. York was appointed to take charge over the French territories in January 1436, four months after Bedford's death (but five years after Henry VI's coronation in Paris).

Richard of York seems to have been completely loyal to the crown at this time. Even if he had in mind his own superior claim to the throne according to the strict tenets of legitimacy, he may well have felt that to press the claim would be unpractical.

What he had in his favor was some legalistic quibbling about lines of descent which might be conclusive to lawyers but might be beyond the population generally. What the Lancastrians had was the memory of the

great and conquering Henry V, and that memory was something the English people could understand very well.

Moreover, York as a child had been kindly treated by Henry V after the execution of his father for treason and he might find it difficult to desecrate the memory of that King by maintaining him to have been a usurper.

The return of his title and his appointment to high office would also have a soothing effect on him.

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In fact, though Shakespeare adopts the anti-York bias of his time and

portrays York as scheming for the throne from the very beginning, there

is no act of his until very nearly the end of his life that shows this to be



true. In fact, if he were really aspiring to the throne, some of his acts, as we will see, would be inexplicable.

... there begins confusion

When the stage clears after the coronation, Exeter again remains behind as at the Parliament that made Richard Duke of York. Again he soliloquizes dolefully, saying:

*'Tis much when scepters are in children's hands,
But more when envy breeds unkind division;
There comes the ruin, there begins confusion.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 192-94

Exeter is correct but he is literally a voice from the grave. He was three years dead at the time of Henry's coronation in Paris, nine years dead at the time York was placed in charge of the French campaign.

The prediction of ruin and confusion came dolefully true, however. In France, Richard of York found himself unable to do anything. Talbot devastated the territories of the Duke of Burgundy wherever and whenever he could, but that won the English no friends.

What's more, Richard felt himself to be poorly supported by the home government. The Beauforts (Winchester and Somerset) gained steadily at the expense of Humphrey of Gloucester. Not only were the Beauforts head of the peace faction, but they were entirely suspicious of York. No matter how loyal he might demonstrate himself to be, they remained always conscious of his descent from Lionel and could never bring themselves to trust him. Naturally, they would not have been pleased by English victory under York, for that would have made York the darling of the English people. They would sooner lose the war than win with York.

York realized that. Paris fell to the French in 1436 soon after his appointment to the post, and in 1437 he gave up trying and asked for his recall, after he had held the post for little over a year.

York was replaced by Warwick, who could accomplish nothing either, and who died at his post in 1439. The next year, York was appointed once again and went to France most reluctantly.

This time he did remarkably well. Paris was gone and the English hold-ings in southwestern France were vanishing rapidly, but York and Talbot between them maintained and even strengthened the English grip on Normandy.

After 1445 there was a rather long truce between the two sides, but in

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the course of the truce, the French grew stronger and the English weakened, especially thanks to a marriage arranged for King Henry VI (a marriage which will be the central factor of *Henry VI, Part Two*).

In 1447 Somerset was placed in charge of the English forces in France,



and now Somerset can definitely be identified. John Beaufort, the older brother, died in 1444, and Edmund, the younger brother (see page II-547), succeeded to the title in 1448. What's more, the title itself had been raised in value. In 1443 John had become Duke of Somerset, and that was what Edmund became in his turn.

In 1447, then, Edmund Beaufort, grandson of John of Gaunt and soon to be Duke of Somerset, was placed in charge of the English forces in France. (There is no indication in *Henry VI, Part One* that "Somerset" changes identities in the course of the play.)

As it happened, Somerset proved incompetent. The French swept into Normandy and took Rouen and Harfleur in 1449, cities it had taken Henry V much to capture thirty years before. Talbot himself was captured and kept prisoner a year after the fall of Rouen (which is quite a different tale from that given in the play, where Talbot retakes Rouen).

The English made a last effort. They sent a new army into Normandy. It met the French on April 15, 1450, at the village of Formigny, on the Norman coast some fifty miles west of Harfleur. But alas for England, the days of Crecys and Agincourts were over. The English no longer faced large and incompetent French armies. Actually, the French at Formigny were fewer than the English, but they had by now sharpened their efficiency in the hot forge of war and disaster. The French won, killing two thirds of the English army.

Within a year all of Normandy was French and the work of Henry V was utterly undone.

... *the gates of Bordeaux* ...

In the scene after the coronation in Paris of King Henry, we find ourselves suddenly in Bordeaux in the southwest of France. Talbot is leading his army to the walls of the city and cries:

*Go to the gates of Bordeaux, trumpeter;
Summon their general unto the wall.*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 1-2

What has happened? Well, it is suddenly more than twenty years after Henry's coronation, a huge two-decade time gap that is simply sloughed off, the period during which English armies were evicted from nearly all of France. After 1451 the English controlled only Calais in the north-

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east and the region about Bordeaux in the southwest. They were back to where they had been before Henry V came to the throne.

Bordeaux had been English for three centuries. Richard the Lion-Heart ruled there in the twelfth century and it was much more his home than England was. Edward the Black Prince ruled there, and his son, who was later to be Richard II, was born there.

But now, in the disasters that were befalling England, even Bordeaux was threatened. The rich regions around it that had been an English empire so long melted away, and finally on June 5, 1451, Bordeaux fell to the French.

One great English captain was left, the indefatigable Talbot. Somehow



the loss of Bordeaux stung the British even more than the loss of Normandy, and Talbot was sent to the southwest to retrieve the loss there.

He was nearly seventy years old by this time, but his fighting spirit was not in the least diminished.

... that villain Somerset

In September 1452 the English under Talbot again marched into Bordeaux, and wide areas round about declared for them.

If the English thought this was another turning point, however, they were living in a dreamland. Talbot's ancient frame could not alone bear the weight of the war, and that was all the English had-Talbot.

Charles VII (still referred to as the "Dolphin," or Dauphin, in the play, though he had been crowned a quarter century before) merely gathered his forces and marched toward Bordeaux. French reconquest was not difficult at all.

In the play there is no indication at all that the duel for Bordeaux comes so late in the game, when virtually all the rest of France has been cleared of the English. It seems to be taking place instead at a time when there are English armies in the north that ought to be marching to the aid and support of Talbot. Why did they not, then? The Shakespearean picture is that the relieving armies were two in number, one under the control of Somerset, one under that of York, and the rivalry between the two ruined Talbot.

Thus, when York hears that Charles VII is marching toward Bordeaux with overwhelming force, he can only say, petulantly:

*A plague upon that villain Somerset,
That thus delays my promised supply
Of horsemen . . .*

-Act IV, scene iii, lines 9-11

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And then, when messengers from Talbot arrive at Somerset's army, Somerset says sullenly:

*It is too late, I cannot send them now;
This expedition was by York and Talbot
Too rashly plotted.*

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 1-3

My Icarus . . .

On July 14, 1453, the French were laying siege to the city of Castillon, thirty miles east of Bordeaux. Talbot hastened to its relief, as spirited as ever.

But he was Talbot-who thought that bravery was all that was required.



He attacked without waiting for his artillery to come up and he was killed, together with most of his army, on July 17, 1453.

His son, another John Talbot, had joined him before the battle. Young John dies first and old Talbot, himself dying, cradles his son in his arms, and mourns:

*. . . there died,
My Icarus, my blossom, in his pride.*

-Act IV, scene vii, lines 15-16

Icarus was, in the Greek myths, the son of Daedalus, the great inventor. Both were imprisoned in Crete, the King of which land they had offended. Daedalus devised wings of feathers glued to a light framework with wax, and, making use of these, he and Icarus flew out of Crete.

Daedalus had warned Icarus not to fly too high, but Icarus did not obey.

He climbed into the sky too near the sun and the heat melted the wax. Away fluttered the feathers and down went Icarus into a section of the Aegean Sea north of Crete and west of Asia Minor, a section sometimes called the Icarian Sea in his honor.

Talbot himself dies, but not before delivering a line of considerable power. He says that his dead son is smiling as though to say (having died only after killing numerous Frenchmen):

"Had Death been French, then Death had died today."

-Act IV, scene vii, line 28

The Battle of Castillon was the last action of any consequence of the Hundred Years' War, which thus ended in utter English defeat thirty-eight

years after Agincourt. There was no peace treaty, no formal conclusion. It

just petered out. And all that was left to the English was Calais, which

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Edward III had captured a century before, and which they were to keep for another century.

In the same year that the Hundred Years' War ended, and only a month

and a half before the death of Talbot, an even more dramatic event took

place. The city of Constantinople, which for eleven hundred years had been

the capital of emperors who could trace their title back to the Roman Augustus

(see page II-55), fell to the Turks.

It was the end of an age, both East and West. In the East, the last shadow of the ancient world was destroyed, and in the West, the



warfare of the Middle Ages came to an end. Out of the ravagement of the Hundred Years' War, the modern nations of England and France were slowly to emerge.

... to Paris ...

Nothing in this anachronism-haunted play shows that the Battle of Castillon ended the Hundred Years' War.

Joan of Arc appears among the victors, looking down upon the dead body of Talbot-the embodiment of French witchcraft triumphant at last over English valor. Actually, though, Joan had been dead twenty-two years by the time of Castillon.

With the battle over, the Dauphin says:

*And now to Paris, in this conquering vein:
All will be ours, now bloody Talbot's slain.*

-Act IV, scene vii, lines 95-96

Yes, of course, except that all was theirs already.

The Earl of Armagnac. . .

The play shifts to England and it is now made to seem that the death of Talbot had so disheartened the English as to place the peace party in the ascendant.

Actually, the time moves backward several years. The peace party is in the ascendant, but it had been so for a decade before Talbot's death.

Henry VI's minority ended in 1437, when he was sixteen years old and Gloucester's role as Protector lost its point. The young King's piety gave Gloucester's great enemy, Winchester, particular influence over the royal youngster, who was no more able to rule than before, despite his "majority."

Gloucester's position was further shaken by his defeat in the matter of the release of Charles of Orleans (see page II-558) and by the trial of his

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wife for witchcraft (an event which Shakespeare pushes further ahead in time and makes an important part of *Henry VI, Part Two*).

Gloucester fought desperately to maintain the ascendancy of his own hawkish position and to save Normandy at least. Through the early 1440s he tried to arrange some marriage that would bind Henry VI to the side of a firm and aggressive foreign policy. Gloucester says to Henry:

*The Earl of Armagnac, near knit to Charles,
A man of great authority in France,
Proffers his only daughter to your grace
In marriage, with a large and sumptuous dowry.*



-Act V, scene i, lines 17-20

The Earl of Armagnac referred to was Jean IV, of the line of Bernard VII (see page II-473). As Charles VII grew stronger and exerted his influence more and more in southern France (the Armagnac bailiwick), Jean IV grew disaffected. He turned toward the English and Humphrey of Gloucester saw in him a new Burgundy.

Armagnac was encouraged to rebel and talk arose concerning a marriage between his daughter and King Henry in order to tie him firmly to English interests.

... my years are young

Henry did not like the idea suggested by Gloucester. He says:

*Marriage, uncle! alas, my years are young,
And fitter is my study and my books
Than wanton dalliance with a paramour.*

-Act V, scene i, lines 21-23

By now, though (1444), his years were not so young that he might not take a wife. He was twenty-three years old.

However, he remained a child in many ways all his life. He was never able to take independent action, was always glad to be led by any stronger personality. He would indeed have preferred being left to his books and his prayers, and he was never interested in women.

But Henry was in no danger. French influence in the south grew even more rapidly than was expected, and Armagnac was slapped down. He was clearly going to be of no use to England anyway, and Humphrey's marriage project was destroyed. That was his last chance and he had lost it.

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Damsel of France . . .

But the war (in the play at least) continues. The Dauphin and Burgundy, together with Joan of Arc, march toward Paris. There they will meet the English forces under Richard of York.

Before the battle, Joan's demons come onstage and leave her, presaging disaster for her. In the battle, the English win, and after York and Bur-



gundy fight hand to hand, York captures Joan and says:

Damsel of France, I think I have you fast;

-Act V, scene iii, line 30

The germ of truth that lies beyond this monstrous fantasy is that Joan of Arc was indeed captured in the course of a campaign against Paris. That, however, was a couple of decades earlier and long before York was placed in charge of the forces in France.

After Charles VII was crowned at Reims in July 1429, Joan favored a direct attack on Paris, and forced an attempt in that direction with inadequate forces under reluctant leaders. She was wounded by an arrow through the thigh and was forced to retreat. That ruined the aura of invincibility about her, but she kept trying to force the French into aggressive action, and on May 23, 1430, Joan was captured at the city of Compiegne, forty miles northeast of Paris.

This was before the Treaty of Arras. The Burgundians were still on the side of the English and the Duke of Bedford was still alive. Far from Burgundy fighting on behalf of Joan, it was the Burgundians who captured Joan. They sold her to the English for ten thousand francs, and on January 3, 1431, the English (who were then under Warwick, not York) had her.

In a sense, then, York took Joan from Burgundy, but it was not really York who did so, but his predecessor, and he did not take her by force of arms from Joan's ally, but through purchase from Joan's enemy, and not after the Battle of Castillon, but twenty-two years before.

... daughter to a king

Meanwhile, Suffolk has also captured a woman prisoner in the course of the same battle. This pair of captures, as part of the same scene, is significant from a dramatic standpoint, for this second capture is of a woman who will do more harm to England than Joan of Arc had done.

Suffolk, impressed by her beauty, asks her name, and she replies:

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*Margaret my name, and daughter to a king,
The King of Naples . . .*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 51-52

This is as badly distorted as the capture of Joan of Arc.

After the failure of Gloucester's projected Armagnac marriage, the peace party was supreme in England and men such as Winchester, Somerset, and Suffolk were in control.

When York's term of office in France expired in 1445, he was ordered back to England (as will be made clear in *Henry VI, Part Two*). This was partly because of the general enmity toward him on the part of the Beaufort



family and their allies, and partly because he was too hawkish.

Suffolk then arranged a truce with France and at Arras began negotiating a marriage that would help make for a permanent peace that would perhaps leave Normandy at least in English hands.

For the purpose he chose the girl Margaret, the daughter of Reignier I (Rene I) of Anjou. In theory, the kingdom of Naples succeeded to him after the death of its queen, Joanna II, in 1435, but he never ruled. The Spaniards of the kingdom of Aragon, who then controlled Sicily, took over Naples as well.

Rene of Anjou remained titular king, however. That is, he held the title and though it brought him neither power nor income, it did carry with

it social prestige. It was much easier for the English King to marry the daughter of a King of Naples than of a Count of Anjou, even if Naples was an empty title. Hence, Margaret is introduced as the "daughter to a king."

Margaret was born in 1429 and was only fifteen years old when Suffolk was negotiating the marriage. It was a good match from the standpoint of diplomacy. Not only was she of high rank, thanks to her father's titular kingdom, but she was of a family that had been loyal to the French King and therefore would be useful in urging a peace upon France—the kind of peace Suffolk and his party wanted.

To the later English chroniclers, however, Margaret was a hated Frenchwoman who, far from bringing a dowry with her, cost England provinces in exchange for the marriage. She played an unpopular role in the civil wars that followed and it was easy to blame her for everything that could

not be attributed to Joan of Arc.

Her general unpopularity caused the legend makers to make everything

about her unsavory and disgraceful. Thus, Suffolk is pictured in this play

(which follows the legends) as falling in love with her, and then pushing through her marriage to Henry in order that he might have her as his paramour and, through her, rule both the weak English King and England itself.

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Thou art no father. . .

Joan of Arc makes her last appearance now. She is on trial before the Duke of York, but this trial, like everything else concerning Joan in the play, bears no relation at all to reality, except that there way a trial.

To put the real facts briefly, Joan was placed on trial as a heretic on January 13, 1431, before an ecclesiastical court presided over by Pierre Cauchon, Bishop of Beauvais. The trial continued for months and Joan maintained her dignity and her resolution throughout. She was finally burned in the market place of Rouen on May 30, without ever breaking.

The final picture of Joan in the play, however, is so disgraceful and so clearly the result of unreasoning English prejudice that it, more than anything else, makes it difficult for the play ever to be staged nowadays.



In the play Joan is first made to deny her father, a shepherd, and shout:

*I am descended of a gentler blood.
Thou art no father nor no friend of mine.*

-Act V, scene iv, lines 8-9

The self-righteous English lords affect to be shocked at Joan's action, and her father stamps off in a rage, urging that she be burned.

Joan then tries to save herself by first claiming to be a virgin, next claiming to be with child, next claiming each of three men as father of that child. She is led off, presumably to be executed.

Fortunately, this scene has never affected the general opinion of Joan among posterity. Nor did her execution in actual history long remain a blot on her memory-rather it was turned into martyrdom.

In 1450, when Charles VII re-entered Rouen, he ordered an inquiry into the trial. (After all, he had been crowned through the agency of Joan and he could scarcely have his crown ascribed to the labors of one officially declared a heretic and witch. In 1456 the inquiry was concluded, and the judgment of the trial was reversed.)

... a solemn peace

With Joan of Arc led off to execution-the witch to be killed-peace is signed. This is not really a peace but merely the truce arranged in 1445, accompanying the marriage arrangements with Margaret of Anjou.

In the play the description of that peace or truce is a completely chauvinistic one. King Charles, still called merely "Charles" and denied his royalty, must acknowledge King Henry as his overlord, and therefore, pre-

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sumably, rightful King of France, while agreeing to pay tribute to that over-

lord. The scene ends, therefore, with York saying:

*So, now dismiss your army when ye please;
Hang up your ensigns, let your drums be still,
For here we entertain a solemn peace.*

-Act V, scene iv, lines 173-75

... break it...

If the truce of 1445 had been permanent, England would have ended a hundred years of sporadic warfare in France with Normandy gained at least. Whether that was worth the bloodshed and misery is extremely doubtful, but no doubt it would have been a source of pride to the English in later generations.

However, even as the truce is being agreed to, Alencon is whispering



to
King Charles that he may

... break it when your pleasure serves.

-Act V, scene iv, line 164

Naturally, Charles could not be expected to acquiesce permanently to the loss of Normandy, if that could be avoided. (Nor could England be trusted, for that matter, to refrain from growing aggressive again if France ever weakened.)

In this case the years following the truce saw France increasingly gain strength while England continued to slide down the bickering trough to ruin. In 1447 York, her best soldier, was sent into semiexile in Ireland to suit the prejudices of the Lancastrians, and in 1448 Charles opened a new offensive that broke the truce.

As described earlier (see page II-562), this led quickly to the loss of Normandy and to the final Battle of Castillon in southwestern France.

... England's royal queen

It might seem reasonable to speculate that if Shakespeare were working with an earlier play, this scene in which a truce is triumphantly signed by the English would be a natural ending.

A final scene is, however, added, which would seem to be an appendix to the natural conclusion; an appendix that serves as a kind of cement between this play and *Henry VI, Part Two*.

In the royal palace at London, Suffolk is describing the beautiful Margaret of Anjou to such effect that chaste King Henry is utterly won over

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and his dedication to his study and his books is forgotten. He says to Gloucester:

*... my Lord Protector, give consent
That Margaret may be England's royal queen.*

-Act V, scene v, lines 23-24

This ascribes more power to Gloucester than he had at this time, for he is now near his final fall. However, Shakespeare deals with the fall of Gloucester in *Henry VI, Part Two* and can give no hint of it here.

Gloucester argues against the marriage to Anjou and for Armagnac, since Armagnac is rich and Anjou poor. Suffolk argues the kingly title and the lady's beauty and scorns the idea that the English King will let himself be swayed by thought of money.



And Henry, corrupted by passion, insists on having Margaret.

. . . *the youthful Paris* . . .

So it is that the play now ends in midstroke. Suffolk, who has been ordered to bring back Margaret of Anjou, delivers the last speech of the play, after Gloucester leaves in defeat:

*Thus Suffolk hath prevailed, and thus he goes,
As did the youthful Paris once to Greece,*

-Act V, scene v, lines 103-4

But that is just an indication of the baleful events ahead, for Paris' mission to Greece brought back Helen of Troy (see page I-76) and eventual destruction on the land he brought her to. And the same, or almost, was to happen to England.

Henry VI, Part Two will begin with scarcely a jog, with the return of Suffolk, his mission successfully completed.

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The History of

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HENRY VI, PART TWO begins just where *Henry VI, Part One* ends. The latter play had concluded as William de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk (see page II-545), was leaving for France to arrange the wedding of King Henry VI with Margaret of Anjou. This present play begins as Suffolk returns, the mission successfully completed.

. . . *ancient city, Tours*

The play opens in the royal palace in London. King Henry VI is on his throne, his nobles about him, and Suffolk addresses him:

*I had in charge at my depart for France,
As procurator [deputy] to your Excellence,
To marry Princess Margaret for your Grace,
So in the famous ancient city, Tours,
In presence of the Kings of France and Sicil,
The Dukes of Orleans, Calaber, Bretagne and Alencon,
Seven earls, twelve barons, and twenty reverend bishops,
I have performed my task and was espoused,*

-Act I, scene i, lines 2-9



The marriage by proxy had taken place in Tours in central France. It is on the Loire River, about seventy miles downstream from Orleans, where the turning point of the Hundred Years' War had taken place.

The date of the marriage was April 23, 1445, and it is necessary to see in what position England and France lay in those years. Since the turning point at Orleans in 1429 (see page II-527), the English tide had been ebbing steadily. By 1444 England still held Normandy in force, together with the province of Maine immediately to its south, as well as Calais in the northeast and the region around Bordeaux in the southwest. If they could settle for that, they would still have salvaged a good deal of the conquests of Henry V.

The peace party in England, of whom Suffolk was now the chief, felt that only by arranging a treaty could these still occupied sections of France

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be retained. Over the outcries of the remaining hawks in England, who held that the war must be continued to final victory at all costs, an approach to such a peace was made.

A ten-year truce was announced in 1444, and such a truce, if kept, would give ample time to work out a permanent peace. In order to make it more likely that the truce would be kept, Suffolk negotiated a marriage alliance between the English King Henry VI, and the French noblewoman Margaret of Anjou.

Margaret was a descendant of John II of France (the King who had lost the Battle of Poitiers to the Black Prince, see page II-257). Her father, Rene of Anjou, was titular King of Naples (see page II-526) and brother to the wife of the French King, Charles VII. Since Naples and Sicily were at various times in their history under the same rule (and were thus combined in 1444, except that they were under a Spanish ruler and not under Rene), the King of Sicily referred to in line 6 is undoubtedly the father of the bride.

Margaret, who, as you see, was the niece of the French King, was only fifteen years old at the time of her marriage.

... the duchy of Anjou ...

Suffolk delivers his proxy bride to King Henry, who greets her joyfully. Suffolk next hands over a document which represents the terms of the truce he has negotiated with France.



It falls to Humphrey of Gloucester (see page II-479) to read it. Humphrey is the King's only remaining uncle and is the closest to the throne—the heir, in fact, since the King as yet has no children. He was created Lord Protector (of the King), since Henry succeeded to the throne when he was only nine months old.

Officially, he ceased being Lord Protector in 1429, when the King was seven years old, but in some ways Henry remained seven years old all his life and always needed a protector. Gloucester's influence gradually diminished, but by virtue of his relationship he remained close to the throne always and was probably long thought of as Lord Protector even after the title was no longer officially his. Shakespeare gives him that title still as this play opens, even though King Henry is now twenty-three.

As the nearest relative of the King, then, Humphrey has the honor of reading the treaty and soon comes to a passage which goes:

*. . . That the duchy of Anjou and the county of Maine shall
be released and delivered to the king her father . . .*

-Act I, scene i, lines 50-52

Maine, as I said before, is a French province lying directly south of Normandy, while Anjou lies to the south of Maine.

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There is some justice to this condition. Anjou and Maine made up the hereditary dominions of Margaret's father, Rene of Anjou, so he was only asking for his own.

Both provinces had been ravaged by English soldiers during the course of the Hundred Years' War, but Anjou, the more southerly of the two, was never actually occupied. Even at the height of the English offensive, Anjou remained French (despite the implication all through this play that Anjou was English-occupied).

From the dovish point of view, then, the concession was not as large as it seemed, for only Maine really had to be surrendered and this was worth it if the rest of the English-held territory could be saved.

From the hawkish point of view, however, this was base appeasement of the wicked French. Nor, they felt, could it be argued that the provinces were merely being given back to their rightful duke, who was now King Henry's father-in-law. It was quite obvious that the Duke of Anjou held no real power except that which was given him by France, and that the provinces, once ceded, would be in the grip of the French King—the great enemy of England.

And as a matter of fact, Rene was the last Duke of Anjou to hold even the semblance of an independent rule over his province. After his death in 1480, Anjou was united to the French crown and remained an integral part of France ever after.

. . . without having any dowry

When Gloucester (the surviving brother of conquering King Henry V, and England's leading hawk) reads the passage ceding Anjou and Maine, he is struck dumb and the paper drops from his hand. Henry Beaufort,



Bishop of Winchester (see page II-522), picks it up and reads on. Winchester had been a cardinal briefly during the reign of Henry V. He had given up the office then at Henry's demands, but in 1426 he had once more secured the title. While his speeches are labeled "Winchester" in *Henry VI, Part One*, they are labeled "Cardinal" here. I will refer to him as Cardinal Beaufort in this play.

The final section of the treaty states that Margaret is

... sent over of the King of England's own proper cost and charges, without having any dowry.

-Act I, scene i, lines 60-62

Worse and worse. It was customary for a bride to bring a dowry with her. In arranging a marriage, the bride's dowry was constantly in mind, and in the case of a royal marriage, the dowry might well be some cities or a province brought under the control of the husband.

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For the English (who still considered themselves a conquering people with the French as their inferiors) to be forced to take a French princess for their King without any dowry at all, and with the King even paying transportation costs and giving up two provinces in addition in a kind of reverse dowry, was too great a humiliation. From the very moment of the marriage, Margaret was unpopular in England.

In fact, the legend arose in later years (and is made use of in Shakespeare's version of history) that the surrender of these two provinces was what led inevitably to England's final loss of French dominion. Not so, however. Anjou, at least, was never England's to give up; and as for Maine, England evaded the terms of the treaty and held on as long as she could. The reverse dowry amounted to zero, therefore, and it was for other reasons that the English lost.

... France, 'tis ours. . .

The King accepts it all with pleasure. He, the Queen, and Suffolk leave, but the rest remain to rage and quarrel.

Gloucester, the archhawk, speaks first, crying out against the shame of the treaty and the loss it represents, after all that had been done to win France. He says it is a matter of

Undoing all, as all had never been.



-Act I, scene i, line 103

Cardinal Beaufort, the archdove and Gloucester's half uncle (see page II-581), denies any loss, saying:

For France, 'tis ours; and we will keep it still [always].

-Act I, scene i, line 106

This makes the situation seem as it was described at the end of *Henry VI, Part One*, when the truce of 1444 was being signed. The earlier play made it appear that it was France that was giving in and that King Charles had accepted the overlordship of the English King. This fantasy view is maintained at the start of this play, so that more than ever the theory is advanced that only this foolish and disadvantageous treaty designed to arrange a French marriage lost England the long war.

. . . the keys of Normandy

A more rational note is struck by another hawk, who says:

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These counties were the keys of Normandy!

-Act I, scene i, line 114

Normandy, in north-central France, was, of all sections of France, most dear to the English aristocracy. It was from Normandy that William the Conqueror had come to establish himself in England and it was back to Normandy that most of the aristocracy could trace their lines and their ancestral estates. It almost seemed to them that Normandy was their true home.

Henry V had conquered Normandy in his second campaign in France, between 1417 and 1419 (see page II-510), and it was for that section that the English fought most fiercely. Even in 1445 that province was still firmly held. The fears that this hold would be weakened with the cession of the guarding regions to the south was a poignant one.

The speaker of this line, by the way, is the Earl of Salisbury.

There was an Earl of Salisbury in *Henry VI, Part One*, but this is not the same one. The earlier earl, Thomas de Montagu, had died in the course of the siege of Orleans (see page II-536), sixteen years before *Henry VI, Part Two* opens.

Thomas de Montagu had left no sons, but by his first wife he had an only



daughter, Alice, who had in 1425 (three years before Thomas' death) married Richard Neville, a son of the Earl of Westmoreland who was a character in *Henry IV, Part One*, *Henry IV, Part Two*, and *Henry V* (see page II-317).

Richard Neville inherited the title after Thomas de Montagu's death, and it is Richard who is the Salisbury of this play.

. . . *Warwick, my valiant son*

Having made the remark concerning the keys of Normandy, Salisbury interrupts himself and asks:

But wherefore weeps Warwick, my valiant son?

-Act I, scene i, line 115

Again there is a possible confusion of names. In *Henry VI, Part One* we had an Earl of Warwick, who was a strong partisan on the side of Richard of York, who was in charge of the education of Henry VI, who was regent of France for a while, and who oversaw the trial and execution of Joan of Arc (see page II-548).

That Earl of Warwick is now dead. He had died in 1439 at the age of fifty-seven, six years before *Henry VI, Part Two* opens. Actually, he died before *Henry VI, Part One* concluded, though he is made to be present at the signing of the truce of 1444 in that jumbled play.

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The new Earl of Warwick is the son of the Earl of Salisbury, and, like his father, is named Richard Neville.

Richard Neville of Warwick, one of the dominating figures of the next few decades, was born in 1428 and so is only seventeen years old at the time that *Henry IV, Part Two* opens. His wife was the heiress to the earldom of Warwick and it was through her that Richard gained his title (in fashion similar to that in which his father had gained *his* title). Actually, Richard didn't get the title till March 1450, five years after this play opens, so it is a bit anachronistic to call him Warwick in this first scene.

. . . *myself did win them. . .*

Warwick explains his tears as being over the loss of the two provinces. He says:

*Anjou and Maine! myself did win them both;
Those provinces these arms of mine did conquer:*

-Act I, scene i, lines 119-20

This is, of course, ridiculous. This seventeen-year-old boy never fought in France, and Anjou was never conquered by anybody in that century. This seems to be a careless confusion of Richard Neville with Richard Beauchamp, the earlier Earl of Warwick of *Henry VI, Part One*.



... *the good Duke of Gloucester*

Richard of York also expresses himself against the marriage, but it is Humphrey of Gloucester who is most furious. He denounces a tax that Suffolk is pushing through Parliament to defray the expenses of the marriage and predicts that all France will be lost.

When he leaves, however, Cardinal Beaufort of Winchester renews his ancient plotting against Gloucester. He warns all within hearing that Gloucester as the heir to the throne would be displeased with any marriage that might give the King a child. Gloucester must be taken care of, then:

*What though the common people favor him,
Calling him "Humphrey, the good Duke of Gloucester."*

-Act I, scene i, lines 158-59

Gloucester, for all his faults as a politician, was popular with the people. He was, after all, the only living brother of the great Henry V, and was therefore a perpetual reminder of those great days of conquest. He had him-

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self fought bravely in those days and had maintained a loud patriotic stand ever since, and patriotism always sounds good.

In addition, he was renowned for his hospitality, he was a patron of scholars, and he gave large bequests to Oxford University. It is scholars who write history and in retrospect they remembered him as even better than he was, until finally the legend of "good Duke Humphrey" arose.

He being of age . . .

Another lord present, speaking now for the first time, agrees with the Cardinal's view and says of Humphrey of Gloucester:

*Why should he then protect our sovereign,
He being of age to govern of himself?
Cousin of Somerset, join you with me,
And altogether with the Duke of Suffolk,
We'll quickly hoise Duke Humphrey from his seat.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 165-69

The speaker is the Duke of Buckingham. He is another Humphrey-Humphrey Stafford-who married the heiress to the earldom of Buckingham. In 1444, just before this play opens, he was created the 1st Duke of Buckingham.

Buckingham was himself of royal blood. His mother had been the daugh-



ter of Thomas of Gloucester (see page II-264), the youngest son of Edward III. Buckingham was thus a great-grandson of that fecund monarch,

and is a second cousin, once removed, of King Henry VI. He is also second cousin to Edmund Beaufort, 2nd Duke of Somerset (see page II-562), whom he here addresses as "Cousin of Somerset."

It is soon made clear, though, that the outrage at Humphrey of Gloucester's position of Protector for a King old enough to rule for himself is pure pretense. All know very well that the King cannot rule, whatever his age, and Buckingham is soon proposing to Somerset that one or the other of them will become the new Protector.

. . . thy acts in Ireland

Buckingham and Somerset leave, but York remains behind along with the father-son combination, Salisbury and Warwick. York is the most important member of the royal family who is *not* a descendant of John of Gaunt, and since he can trace his ancestry to an older brother of Gaunt (see page II-542), he has a better right to the throne, legalistically speaking, than Henry VI.

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Thus, Salisbury, disapproving of the haughty bearing of Cardinal Beaufort and sympathizing with Gloucester's hawkish views, turns to York as a natural ally against the Cardinal. Salisbury says:

*. . . brother York, thy acts in Ireland,
In bringing them to civil discipline,
Thy late exploits done in the heart of France,
When thou wert regent for our sovereign,
Have made thee feared and honored of the people:
Join we together for the public good,*

-Act I, scene i, lines 194-99

York had indeed done well in France in the years immediately preceding the truce and had kept England's grip on Normandy firm, and had indeed gained considerable popularity as a result. This, however, but made him all the more feared by the Lancastrians, who, with good reason, distrusted the abilities and popularity of a man who could argue a superior claim to the throne.

When his stint in France was completed, therefore, he was *not* reappointed. In fact, earlier in the scene, immediately after the fatal treaty that accompanied the marriage was read, King Henry said:

*Cousin of York, we here discharge your Grace
From being regent i'th'parts of France,*

-Act I, scene i, lines 66-67

The "acts in Ireland" to which Salisbury refers in his address to York were equally noteworthy, but, however, had not yet been performed. They came later, and York's trip to Ireland will play its part eventually in the



play. He did spend some time in Ireland in the early 1430s, however, though not in connection with any serious disorders there at that time.

. . . the fatal brand Althaea burned

Salisbury and Warwick then leave, and finally York is left alone onstage. Shakespeare continues to follow the anti-Yorkist feelings of his time and has York brooding on his own thwarted right to the throne. York says, addressing himself concerning the cession of the provinces:

*I cannot blame them all-what is't to them?
'Tis thine they give away, and not their own.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 220-21

In an agony of frustration at this disposal by others of what he considers his own, he says:

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*Methinks the realms of England, France, and Ireland
Bear that proportion to my flesh and blood
As did the fatal brand Althaea burned
Unto the Prince's heart of Calydon.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 232-35

This is a reference to Meleager of Calydon, whose life would last only so long as a brand in the keeping of his mother, Althaea, remained unburned (see page II-394). Richard feels the loss of his realm will kill him just as surely as the burning of the brand would kill Meleager.

York decides, therefore, to play for the crown, biding his time and choosing his allies. He says:

*Nor shall proud Lancaster usurp my right,
Nor hold the scepter in his childish fist,*

-Act I, scene i, lines 244-45

Lancaster is here a reference to King Henry, whom York is denying the regal title and giving only that which he inherits from his great-grandfather,

John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster.

York concludes that when the time is ripe:

*. . . force perforce, I'll make him yield the crown,
Whose bookish rule hath pulled fair England down.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 258-59

It must be repeated here, though, that there is no sign, in actual history, that York had such deep-laid plans so early in his career. As far as we may judge from his deeds in France before the truce that opens the play and his deeds in Ireland after the truce, he was utterly loyal.

. . . unto Saint Albans



The scene now shifts to the house of the Duke of Gloucester, where he is in conversation with his wife, the Duchess Eleanor.

The two are wide apart in their attitudes. Humphrey is perturbed and fearful. He has been dreaming of destruction, of being ousted from his office. Eleanor, on the other hand, has been dreaming of exaltation, of becoming queen (after all, Humphrey is heir to the throne).

Gloucester scolds her for that, but he is too good-natured not to be quickly mollified.

A Messenger then arrives, saying:

*My Lord Protector, 'tis his Highness' pleasure
You do prepare to ride unto Saint Albans,*

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Where as the King and Queen do mean to hawk.

-Act I, scene ii, lines 56-58

St. Albans is a town some twenty miles northwest of London's center; it is named after the first English martyr, St. Alban, who died there, according to legend, in 303. It was in St. Albans that King John II of France was held prisoner after the Battle of Poitiers, and before Henry's reign was over there were fated to be two important battles there.

... new-made Duke of Suffolk

Humphrey of Gloucester hurries off to join the King, and his Duchess promises to follow after. She lingers behind a little, however, to consult with John Hum, a dishonest priest who has been practicing on the Duchess' ambition. He has contacts with witches and sorcerers who, the Duchess thinks, will help her achieve what she wants-the royal crown. She gives him money and leaves.

Hum, remaining behind, reveals in a soliloquy that he is what we might call a double agent. He says:

*Yet have I gold flies from another coast-
I dare not say, from the rich Cardinal
And from the great and new-made Duke of Suffolk.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 93-95

In other words, Gloucester's opposition know of the poor Duchess' intrigues and are luring her on, hoping to destroy her, and with her, her husband as well.

In the play, Suffolk is promoted to duke immediately after bringing Margaret to England. Thus, after that fatal treaty has been read, the fatuously pleased King says to Suffolk:



*Lord Marquess, kneel down: we here create thee
First Duke of Suffolk, and girt thee with the sword.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 64-65

Actually, the promotion came three years later at an even more inappropriate time for Suffolk.

... rightful heir to the crown

Back at the royal palace a group of petitioners await the Protector to have him answer their pleas and judge their quarrels. Suffolk and Queen

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Margaret enter instead and Suffolk insists on knowing the nature of the petitions.

One of the petitioners, an armorer's apprentice named Peter Thump, has come to lodge information against his master. He says, handing Suffolk his petition:

*Against my master, Thomas Horner, for saying that the
Duke of York was rightful heir to the crown.*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 26-28

This, of course, was York's danger. He *was* rightful heir to the crown on the basis of strict legitimacy, and some Englishmen, displeased with the feeble rule of the King and having plenty of evidence of York's ability, were bound to remember this.

No matter how loyal York might be in reality, there was no way he could stop people from turning to him, and that in itself would suffice to feed increasing suspicion against him on the part of the Lancastrians. Eventually that suspicion would force the Lancastrians to take such actions against York as to force York into rebellion. It was all quite inevitable.

... bent to holiness

Queen Margaret quite naturally loses her temper over the suggestion that York is rightful King and she herself, therefore, no Queen at all. She tears up the petitions and drives the petitioners away.

Petulantly, she complains to Suffolk at the weakness of a government



that stoops to listen to petitions. She is dissatisfied with so weak a King as her husband, one who is still under the thumb of a Protector. Finally, she says energetically that when she had been wooed by Suffolk on King Henry's behalf

*I thought King Henry had resembled thee
In courage, courtship and proportion:
But all his mind is bent to holiness,*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 55-57

As a matter of fact, the husband-wife situation might well have been reversed for the good of all. Margaret of Anjou, had she only been a man,

would have made a strong King, while Henry, converted to a woman, would have made a perfect Queen. Unfortunately, that could not be.

Margaret, despising her husband (and undoubtedly left sexually unsatisfied by him), threw herself into party politics on her own.

Naturally, as a Frenchwoman, she would be for peace with France, and she therefore

espoused with all the energy of her nature the side of Suffolk and the Cardi-

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nal. She bitterly opposed the hawkish Gloucester and the equally hawkish (and dangerously competitive) York.

In this way, she lost her chance to keep the English crown above faction, dragged Henry with her into the mire of partisan politics and civil war, increased the hatred of herself on the part of all who opposed Suffolk, and sought a scapegoat for the debacle in France.

It was her passion and venom, in fact, that went far to starting the civil war soon to come, and her energy and indomitability that kept it going so long and made it so disastrous.

... *that proud dame* ...

Queen Margaret lists the lords whom, on one pretext or another, she dislikes, but she knows who is her prime hate and it is no man at all. She says:

*Not all these lords do vex me half so much
As that proud dame, the Lord Protector's wife:*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 77-78

This is a very natural attitude, considering that the Duchess is next in line for the queenhood and might conceivably become Queen while Margaret is still alive to anguish at being replaced. Furthermore, the Duchess



was actually richer than the Queen and would undoubtedly flaunt that wealth and openly sneer at the impoverished Frenchwoman who was temporarily Queen.

Shakespeare plays up this antagonism of the two women, and yet, however correct dramatically this might be, it is utterly wrong historically. The Duchess' sad end was accomplished four years before Margaret's marriage to Henry had made her Queen. When Margaret came to England, Eleanor was already dead; Queen and Duchess were never rivals and, in fact, never met.

Yet we must follow Shakespeare's version of history, of course.

... *Paris was besieged* ...

The court enters again, squabbling over whether Somerset is to take over what remains of the English dominions in France, or whether York is to be reappointed, after all, to his now expired post as regent in France.

When King Henry feebly tries to smooth over the quarrel, Queen Margaret jumps with relish into the fray, helping the party of the Cardinal and Suffolk denounce Humphrey of Gloucester, until the Protector, in frustra-

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tion at the wolves howling at him from every direction, hastens out of the room.

Once he is gone, the Queen, pretending to mistake the Duchess for a servant, boxes her ear. The Duchess, in a towering rage, also leaves.

Humphrey of Gloucester, having mastered himself, and unaware of the gross insult to his wife, returns to plead that his fellow hawk, York, be appointed regent.

York, however, sees clearly that Gloucester is helpless and that Suffolk's party is in the ascendant. He exclaims that it will be of no use going to France. Even if he were appointed to the post, he says:

*My Lord of Somerset will keep me here
Without discharge, money, or furniture,
Till France be won into the Dolphin's hands.
Last time, I danced attendance on his will
Till Paris was besieged, famished, and lost.*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 170-74

Richard of York had been regent in France twice, from 1437 to 1439 and from 1440 to 1445. The first regency had indeed been disastrous, and York blamed that on lack of home support. It was not then, however, that Paris was taken. The French took Paris in 1436, the year before York took his post. And York's second term had been most successful and he could make no complaints about home support then. (It was the second term that had just expired.)

As it happens, though, the post falls to Somerset, for just at this point,



Suffolk drags in Thomas Horner the armorer and Peter Thump the apprentice and has the latter repeat his accusation that the former had maintained York to be rightful King of England. York is furious and denounces any such belief as utterly treasonable, but it does him no good. Even Gloucester has to admit that if such opinions are being bruited about, it would be dangerous to give York a key position in France.

So it is Somerset who goes to France.

The Duke yet lives. . .

Duchess Eleanor, maddened by the blow she has received, has lost her last scruples and is now in the garden outside her house, engaged in a seance conducted by one Margery Jourdain. The Duchess wishes to learn the future in order, presumably, to adjust her behavior to that future, and for that purpose has demons called up.

As frequently happens in the Shakespearean plays, the demons called upon by black magic actually appear. In this case a Spirit becomes manifest and answers questions in oracular fashion.

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The first question, put to it by Roger Bolingbroke, an astrologer patronized by Gloucester, refers to the future of the King himself. The answer comes:

*The Duke yet lives that Henry shall depose,
But him outlive, and die a violent death.*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 31-32

This remark is deliberately obscure in the fashion of oracles generally, since it lends itself to a double meaning and therefore has a greater chance

of being true. Thanks to the fact that English is a largely uninflected language, the first line of the prophecy can mean: "The Duke yet lives who shall depose Henry" or "The Duke yet lives who shall be deposed by Henry." It depends on which version of the first sentence is accepted before one can decide whether Duke or King shall live longer, then die a violent death.

As a matter of fact, both versions of the oracle are true or almost true (as the more sophisticated of the Elizabethan audience would know). There was a duke living who would, in a sense, depose Henry and also be deposed by Henry, and as a matter of fact, both duke and Henry would die a violent death.

By water . . .

The next question concerns the future of the Duke of Suffolk, and the answer by the Spirit is:

By water shall he die, and take his end.

-Act I, scene iv, line 34



Ambiguous, of course. Does "by water" mean near water, or by means of water and therefore by drowning? As it turns out, this is a true prediction in one fairly clear sense, and is true also in a more remote sense that doesn't appear till the event.

... *shun castles*

The final question concerns the Duke of Somerset, and the answer is:

Let him shun castles:

Safer shall he be upon the sandy plains

-Act I, scene iv, lines 36-37

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Well, does that mean that Somerset is in danger of being killed in the siege of a castle, or that he will be sent prisoner to a castle and there executed, or what? Again the actual event is far less straightforward. As is almost always the case in the fictional use of oracles, the statements that emerge are true, but useless.

... *Aio te, Aeacida*

But the net has been drawn about the Duchess. Kept fully informed by the despicable Hum, the agents of King Henry close in, allowing the seance to proceed only that they might catch her red-handed.

In the play it is York and Buckingham who trap her. York's position here is odd, since he is serving the interests of the Suffolk-Somerset clique and one would think he would have no desire to do that. And indeed, his presence is a Shakespearean invention.

York reads the three prophecies which had been written down by those at the seance as they were given and pauses to laugh at the first, which deals with the Duke and the King. He sees the obvious ambiguity as to which will depose which and says:

*Why, this is just "Aio te, Aeacida,
Romanos vincere posse."*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 62-63

This is the oracle supposedly given to Pyrrhus, the King of Epirus, when in 282 B.C. he was preparing to cross over into Italy to attack the Romans. Translated, it says, "I tell you, descendant of Aeacus, that you the Romans can conquer."

But, both in Latin and in English, that can mean either "you can conquer the Romans" or "the Romans can conquer you." And here too, both senses had elements of correctness, for Pyrrhus did conquer the Romans in two battles, while the Romans conquered Pyrrhus in one. The Romans



conquered in the last battle, however.

This description of the arrest of the Duchess is, in some respects, correct, but not in all. The attempt at witchcraft, and the arrest, took place, actually, in 1441, four years *before* the marriage of Henry VI and Margaret. Furthermore, York was not present at the arrest and couldn't have been. In 1441 he was in France, laboring to hold Normandy.

Nevertheless, it is good drama to have him at the arrest, if only to have him read the prophecy. For, as it happens, and as the Elizabethan audience would well know, it is York himself who is the duke in question who will, after a fashion, depose the King and who will then, after a fashion, be deposed by the King, and who will die a particularly pathetic death by violence. (This will not happen till the next play, however.)

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Although by sight. . .

While the arrest of the Duchess is taking place, the King and Queen are hawking at St. Albans. The Cardinal and Gloucester are also there, quarreling viciously as usual and reaching the point of agreeing to a duel. (At the time of the Duchess' arrest, Humphrey of Gloucester is fifty years old and the Cardinal well over sixty, so that the duel would scarcely be marked by very athletic swordplay.)

There follows, then, a comic interlude in which a countryman, Saunder Simpcox, pretends a miracle, claiming to have been born blind but having suddenly become able to see.

The King is clearly shown in this scene to be a rather credulous (if well-meaning) fool, for his every remark is one of priestly piety that is clearly out of sorts with his secular position and with the non-pious mood of everyone else in the party (especially the Cardinal). Thus, on hearing that the blind man has suddenly been made to see, the King intones:

*Great is his comfort in this earthly vale,
Although by sight his sin be multiplied.*

-Act II, scene i, lines 70-71

In other words, vision would expose him to temptations which would not bother him if he were blind, and his good fortune might therefore make him a greater sinner. The reference seems to be to a verse in the Gospel of St. John (9:41): "Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see: therefore your sin remaineth."

This immediate passage actually refers to blindness in a symbolic sense.

The Pharisees, whom Jesus is addressing, claimed to know the truth and to require no teaching, hence they remained sinners. If they admitted



their lack of knowledge (or blindness), they would learn, and cease to sin.

The occasion for the remark, however, came after a passage earlier in the chapter in which Jesus had restored sight to a man born blind, and it was this, presumably, which brought the passage to the mind of the pious King Henry.

At Berwick . . .

The King asks the countryman where he is from, and Simpcox answers:

*
At Berwick in the north, and't like your Grace

-Act II, scene i, line 83

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Berwick is on the North Sea coast of northern England, only three miles south of the Scottish border.

But now Gloucester takes over the cross-examination, the details of which Shakespeare borrows from a book entitled *Acts and Monuments of These Latter and Perilous Days*. This was written by an Englishman named John Foxe and was published in 1563. Foxe had looked up all the tales he could of people who had been persecuted, tortured, and killed for the sake of religion, so that the book promptly got its popular title of *The Book of Martyrs*.

Quietly, Gloucester lures Simpcox into identifying colors by name, something that no man blind from birth and seeing only for half an hour could possibly do. The impostor is ordered punished, though his wife cries out:

Alas, sir, we did it for pure need.

-Act II, scene i, line 157

This is important, really. The French wars had rested heavily on the English population and had brought other troubles as well. The weakness of the government under Henry VI had allowed various nobles (like Gloucester and the Cardinal, for instance) to recruit what were virtually private armies which fought one another and terrorized the populace. Furthermore, England was taking to sheep farming in a big way, and since this could be most profitably carried out on large tracts of pasturage, fields which had previously been held in common for the beasts of a town or district were now being enclosed for the special use of the nobles who owned the sheep herds.

It was decades of deterioration of the position of the English peasantry which caused the common folk to lose faith in the government and search for an alternative. The land was ripe for either revolution or civil war-or both.

Even while Gloucester is basking in the praise that follows his exposure of Simpcox, there comes the news of his wife's witchcraft and arrest. Poor Gloucester, stunned by the news, abandons all thought of fighting the



Cardinal. He can only say that if his wife has indeed practiced witchcraft, the law must take its course.

... *but for Owen Glendower* ...

Meanwhile, back in London, Richard of York is represented as once again dreaming of the throne. In secret discussions with Salisbury and Warwick, he reveals the nature of his dynastic claim and once again the tale of Edward III's seven sons is recounted, and York's descent from the third son (through his mother) as compared with Henry's descent from the fourth is once again emphasized. (It is hard to suppose that Salisbury and

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Warwick are ignorant of all this, but then, the audience must be told.) At one point, when York comes to mention Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March (his mother's brother), and the "rightful" successor to Richard II, Salisbury interrupts to say:

*This Edmund, in the reign of Bolingbroke [Henry IV],
As I have read, laid claim unto the crown;
And, but for Owen Glendower, had been King,
Who kept him in captivity till he died.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 39-42

Once again there is the old confusion. It was not the Earl of March and heir to the throne who was captured by Owen Glendower, but his namesake uncle (see page I-320). Here at least, though, the captured un-

cle is described as dying in captivity, which is true; at least, he died in Wales, fighting for Glendower, whose son-in-law he became. In *Henry VI, Part One* Mortimer is described as dying in the Tower of London (see page II-552), which was true of neither uncle nor nephew.

What Shakespeare doesn't stress is that Richard of York is married to Cecily Neville, the sister of the Earl of Salisbury. The two men are brothers-in-law and the Nevilles have family reasons to be Yorkists.

... *the Duke of York a king*

Salisbury and Warwick are convinced, and hail Richard of York as King.

York urges them to go slowly and bide their time. He is even Machiavellian

enough to urge that they wait for Gloucester's destruction, predicting that

that would work to the Yorkist interest. (But, again, York's Machiavellian-

ism is presented as part of Shakespeare's anti-Yorkist bias. There is no

justification in history for it.)

The other two agree and Warwick says:



*My heart assures me that the Earl of Warwick
Shall one day make the Duke of York a king.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 79-80

This is one of those fictional prophecies fated to come true, or almost true. Warwick was indeed to become the bulwark of the Yorkist cause and was in time to be known as "the King-Maker," though it was not York whom he would make king.

York replies:

*Richard shall live to make the Earl of Warwick
The greatest man in England but the King.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 82-83

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Again nearly true. The time was indeed to come when Warwick would be the greatest man in England but the King, but that King would not be York himself.

... *in Smithfield* ...

The next scene opens with King Henry passing judgment on Duchess Eleanor. Her accomplices, who are lowborn, are subjected to horrible deaths, for King Henry says:

*The witch in Smithfield shall be burnt to ashes,
And you three shall be strangled on the gallows.*

-Act II, scene iii, lines 7-8

Smithfield is in east-central London. It was a place which had first been a site for tournaments, then for fairs, then for public executions. It is now

the site of London's chief meat markets.

The witch, Margery Jourdain, was indeed burned. Of the other three, however, only Roger Bolingbroke, the astrologer, suffered the full severity of the law. He was drawn and quartered. That is, he was hanged, cut down before he was dead, and then vivisected. One of his accomplices died in prison, but the wretched informing priest, Hum, was pardoned.

... *in the Isle of Man*

As for Eleanor, her punishment was much gentler, since she was a high-placed noblewoman. King Henry says to her:

*... after three days' open penance done,
Live in your country here in banishment,
With Sir John Stanley, in the Isle of Man.*



-Act II, scene iii, lines II-13

The Isle of Man, thirty miles long and ten miles wide, is located in the Irish Sea between northern England and northern Ireland. It had been under the rule of Scotland until Edward III took it for England.

In English hands, it was first under the control of the Montagu family (which later included, for instance, the "Salisbury" of *Richard II*, see page II-292, and the "Salisbury" of *Henry VI, Part One*, see page II-495).

The uncle of the Salisbury of *Richard II* sold it to William le Scrope, Earl of Wiltshire (see page II-284), who lost it for his family when he was executed in the course of Bolingbroke's rebellion. In 1406 Bolingbroke, now Henry IV, passed it on to Sir John Stanley, in whose family it has remained ever since.

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It was an isolated island, sparsely settled and primitive, and served well as a kind of English Siberia.

Holden at Bury . . .

Gloucester's fall proceeds apace. His wife is condemned and the King orders him to give up his office as Protector.

After a comic interlude in which Peter Thump and Thomas Horner fight over the former's accusation of treason against the latter, the Gloucester motif is taken up again.

The wretched Duke meets his even more wretched Duchess performing her penance. Dressed in a white sheet and barefoot, the Duchess must parade through the streets of London, bearing a candle in her hand, a description of her crimes on a paper pinned on the back of the sheet, and subjected to the derision of the mob.

Gloucester tries to comfort her and she tries to warn him against further steps on the part of his enemies. Even as they speak, a Herald arrives, saying:

*I summon your Grace to his Majesty's Parliament,
Holden at Bury the first of this next month.*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 70-71

Shakespeare is condensing time here. The chronicle of Gloucester's fall is something like this:

(1) In 1440 Charles of Orleans was released from imprisonment over Gloucester's objections (see page II-558) and Gloucester's influence was definitely broken.

(2) In 1441 Duchess Eleanor was convicted and exiled, to Gloucester's further humiliation. She was sent to the Isle of Man, where she survived some two years, dying in 1443.

(3) In 1445 Margaret of Anjou married Henry VI and became the most inveterate of all Gloucester's enemies, all the more so since Gloucester for all his defeats and humiliations remained heir to the throne unless Margaret could produce a child.

It was not, then, till 1447, after Margaret had been married two years



with no signs of a pregnancy, that it was decided that Gloucester must be put out of the way once and for all. A Parliament was called for the purpose, but it was not to meet at London. Gloucester was popular with the Londoners and to deal with him appropriately might be difficult.

Parliament was therefore assembled at Bury St. Edmunds, sixty miles northeast of London. Bury was in Suffolk, which means in the home territory of Gloucester's enemy the Duke of Suffolk.

What's more, the Parliament was called in haste and without giving
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Gloucester advance notice, so that he would be unable to gather his own men in his defense. Gloucester therefore says in wonder, at hearing of the calling of Parliament:

*And my consent ne'er asked herein before?
This is close [secret] dealing. Well, I will be there.*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 72-73

If, indeed, the Parliament had been called immediately after Gloucester's series of disasters, it would have been surprising that he would not suspect arrest and worse and that he would not take care not to go anywhere near the Parliament.

As the play stands, we must suspect Gloucester of an astonishing degree of naivete. In historical fact, however, the Parliament was called six years after the Duchess' conviction, and Gloucester, having grown used to his own disgrace and powerlessness, might well not expect that his enemies would feel the need to take any further action against him. He would therefore appear, totally unsuspecting, at the Parliament.

...all is lost

Parliament meets and Gloucester is late. The Queen immediately begins denouncing him to the King as a traitor. Once again the English nobility is shown as engaged in quarrels, nothing but quarrels, and to emphasize the consequence, Somerset comes in with news. We had last seen him being appointed regent in France, but now, when the King asks for news concerning France, Somerset replies grimly:

*... all your interest in those territories
Is utterly bereft you: all is lost.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 84-85

That this was eventually so was due, in large part, to the incompetence of Somerset himself. Yet Somerset's statement at this moment is premature in the light of actual history.

At the time of the Parliament at Bury in 1447, England still held Normandy and the regions around Bordeaux. It was not till the next year that the great French offensive began which swept England out of Normandy by 1450 and out of Bordeaux in 1451. It was not till 1453 that the last English effort failed and Talbot died at Castillon (see page 11-564). Thus, it was to be six years yet before "all is lost."



It makes dramatic sense, nevertheless, to have Gloucester's fall come at the time of the final bankruptcy of his policy of French conquest and no retreat

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... *high treason* ...

Now Gloucester finally appears and at once Suffolk greets him with:

/ do arrest thee of high treason here.

-Act III, scene i, line 97

It was on February 11, 1447, the second day of Parliament, that Gloucester was arrested.

Yet the arrest was insufficient. To make the accusation stick there would have to be a trial, and there would be difficulty in making the charge of treason stick, particularly since his popularity with the commoners would make it difficult to railroad him.

Clearly, it would be most convenient for the Queen and her party to have Gloucester die somehow, and assassination is in the air.

... *from Ireland am I come* ...

Suddenly, though, a Post arrives with more bad news from abroad. He says:

*Great lords, from Ireland am I come again,
To signify that rebels there are up,
And put the Englishmen unto the sword.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 282-84

This is not surprising. Ireland had been in a state of chronic rebellion ever since the time of Edward III. With England spending all its energies for four generations in a futile attempt to conquer France, it could scarcely maintain a strong presence in Ireland.

Even a fighting machine like Talbot, the superman fighter of *Henry VI, Part One*, when he was Lord Lieutenant of Ireland from 1414 to 1419 (when Henry V was fighting at Agincourt and conquering Normandy), could do very little against the Irish.

Still, England never gave up its hold entirely, and at periodic intervals someone would be sent over to chastise the rebels.

In this case, the Suffolk faction has the brilliant idea of sending York to Ireland.

... *all for Ireland*

York's position as "rightful heir" was threatening enough to the Lan-



castrians. The arrest and prospective death of Gloucester would leave York one step closer to the throne, making him senior member of the royal family, next only to the King (if the Beauforts are considered ineligible to inherit the throne). It would be best to get him off the scene.

And where better than in Ireland, where his military reputation, won in France, might well perish? He himself might even die there, as his maternal grandfather, Roger Mortimer, had (see page II-320).

York has no choice but to accept. He says:

*My Lord of Suffolk, within fourteen days
At Bristow [Bristol] I expect my soldiers;
For there I'll ship them all for Ireland.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 327-29

Actually, things did not move as fast as all that. York managed to delay for two years the time of his leaving of England. It was not till 1449 that he sailed for Ireland.

John Cade . . .

But York (as represented by Shakespeare's prejudices) has plans of his own. He may be forced into virtual exile but he will manage to make things hot for his enemies at home just the same. For that purpose, he has a tool at hand. He says:

*I have seduced a headstrong Kentishman,
John Cade of Ashford,
To make commotion, as full well he can,
Under the title of John Mortimer.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 356-59

Kent is the southeasternmost county of England (see page I-6) and Ashford is a sizable town some forty miles southeast of London. Kent had been in the forefront of the Wat Tyler insurrection seventy years before, and its people had not forgotten. Nor had things grown better since, so that Kent was ripe enough for revolt. Nevertheless, as is usually the case, those who are revolted against are certain that there would be no trouble at all were it not for outside agitators.

It is not at all likely that John Cade was an instrument of the Duke of York. To be sure, later Lancastrian propaganda, which had become official party line, so to speak, in Shakespeare's time, had it that Cade was a native Irishman who came to Kent during the period of York's stay in



Ireland. The implication is that he was sent by York, and York, in his speech, refers to Cade as having served him as a spy in Ireland:

*Full often, like a shag-haired crafty kern,
Hath he conversed with the enemy,
And undiscovered come to me again
And given me notice of their villainies.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 367-70

(Yet when did this happen? York was only now heading out to the civil war. On his previous stay in Ireland, he had been a young man in his early twenties and had gone only to look over his estates there; he did no fighting.)

. . . that John Mortimer . . .

Furthermore, if Cade were acting as York's agent, he would surely not represent himself as a competing claimant for the throne.

Yet York reveals the intention to have Cade call himself John Mortimer, thus pretending to be a member of the Mortimer family and legitimate heir to the throne. This would make his words carry greater weight with a peasantry who were trained all through life to respect royalty, but could scarcely serve York's own ends.

One might argue that the rights of the Mortimer family would be brought to public notice without implicating York directly. Yet it might also be argued that if the rebellion failed (as it did), the rights of the Mortimer family would be tarred with the actions of a rabble-rousing mob and York's interests would be hurt.

That York should go to such lengths fits the Machiavellian motives attributed to him by Lancastrian propaganda but makes little practical sense.

Shakespeare has York say, as though to make the Mortimer imposture more plausible:

*For that John Mortimer, which now is dead,
In face, in gait, in speech, he doth resemble:*

-Act III, scene i, lines 372-73

Surely this is unnecessary. History makes it perfectly clear that it is



the
easiest thing in the world for any imposter, regardless of appearance,
to
claim to be royalty. In the centuries before photography, few
commoners
knew what the members of the royal family looked like. In the
centuries

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before radio, few knew what they sounded like. Any imposture,
however
ridiculous, would carry conviction, if only the imposter promised to
improve
the lot of the people.

. . . dispatched the Duke . . .

The next scene opens, still at Bury St. Edmunds, with men running
across the stage. One, the First Murderer, calls to another:

*Run to my Lord of Suffolk; let him know
We have dispatched the Duke as he commanded.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 1-2

Humphrey of Gloucester was, as stated earlier, arrested on
February
11, 1447. He never came to trial. He was found dead in his bed on the
morning of February 28.

It was, of course, maintained that Gloucester had died a natural
death,
and his body was displayed to show that it bore no marks. And, to be
sure, at the age of fifty-six it was quite possible for Gloucester to die of
a
heart attack, especially considering the heavy defeats and
frustrations he
had endured over the past seven years.

On the other hand, the death came about so conveniently for his
enemies
that no one believed it was natural. The country, almost
unanimously,
took it for granted that Suffolk had ordered the duke's murder.

Gloucester had been popular before and, of course, in retrospect
grew
even more popular. Suffolk became correspondingly more
unpopular.

Since Gloucester left no direct heirs his estates were up for grabs.
With

uncommon shortsightedness (like Richard II after the death of John
of

Gaunt-see page II-282) Suffolk seized those estates for himself and
for

his family and friends. Then, in 1448, at the Queen's insistence, he
was
made a duke.



Surely if anything was required to make Suffolk more execrable with the people generally than to seem a murderer, it was to seem a robber of the man he had murdered. And if anything else was needed to complete his infamy in the eyes of the commons, it was the general belief that he was the Queen's lover.

It took three years after Gloucester's death for Suffolk's unpopularity to increase to the explosion point, and that point came in the aftermath of the disgrace of the loss of Normandy.

In the play, however, Normandy is depicted as lost at the time of Gloucester's arrest, and Suffolk has already been made a duke after his success in bringing Margaret of Anjou to England. It is therefore possible for Shakespeare to go immediately and dramatically from Gloucester's destruction to that of Suffolk.

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... the commons send you word ...

As soon as Gloucester's death is announced, King Henry faints, and when revived, is convinced the death was murder. Queen Margaret, in a long and eloquent speech, argues otherwise but fails to move him.

Warwick enters to accuse Suffolk directly as a murderer, and the quarrel degenerates into actual swordplay.

Finally, Salisbury (Warwick's father) enters to report on the common people, who have been gathering. He says to King Henry:

*Dread Lord, the commons send you word by me,
Unless Lord Suffolk straight be done to death,
Or banished fair England's territories,
They will by violence tear him from your palace,*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 243-46

At once, Henry banishes Suffolk, ordering him to leave England within three days.

It was not immediately after Gloucester's death, however, but three years later, that Suffolk's turn came. When Parliament met in January 1450, Suffolk's arrest was demanded by the commons. On March 17 he was banished for five years and commanded to leave England by May 1.

... at point of death



Nor was Suffolk the only one of Gloucester's enemies to be ruined. Even while Suffolk is being banished, a courtier enters to announce:

*... Cardinal Beaufort is at point of death;
For suddenly a grievous sickness took him,*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 369-70

The King hastens to his side, and as Cardinal Beaufort mumbles his last words, Henry says:

*Lord Cardinal, if thou think'st on heaven's bliss,
Hold up thy hand, make signal of thy hope.
He dies and makes no sign.*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 27-29

In the play, Cardinal Beaufort dies in an agony of guilt over the death of Gloucester and, as Shakespeare makes plain, goes to hell for it.

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Whether the guilt really existed or not, the Cardinal (unlike Suffolk) did indeed meet his end immediately after Gloucester's death. He died in his own palace on April 11, 1447, about six weeks after Gloucester's death. He was some seventy years old at the time of his death, and was the last of all the sons of John of Gaunt-the last of all the grandsons of Edward III-to die.

Of the house of Lancaster (those descended hi the male line, exclusively, from John of Gaunt) there now remained only Henry VI, Gaunt's great-grandson by his first wife, and Edmund of Somerset, Gaunt's grandson by his third wife, plus the latter's sons.

... by "water" I should die

As it happens, Suffolk does not quite go off to banishment. The popular fury against him grew and there were many, especially in London, who were outraged to think he was to escape death, and go off into an exile from which he might return. It looked as though all England were to be in turmoil. Perhaps to avoid this, Suffolk's ship was stopped after he had embarked on May 1, and he was taken onto a ship of war. On May 5, 1450, he was executed, presumably at the direction of a government which was throwing him to the wolves in an attempt to avoid worse. Suffolk was fifty-four years old at the time, which somehow weakens the passionate scenes in which Shakespeare depicts him taking leave of the twenty-year-old Queen.

In the play, the ship carrying a disguised Suffolk (to keep him from being murdered while he was still on his way to the ship) is indeed taken by the warship. Suffolk is handed over to a man who announces his name to be Walter Whitmore.

Suffolk is shocked and explains his start by saying:

Thy name affrights me, in whose sound is death.



*A cunning man did calculate my birth,
And told me that by "water" I should die:*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 33-35

This is a reference to the prediction given by the Spirit in the seance scene (which, in history, took place nine years before Suffolk's exile). "Walter" was, in medieval times, frequently pronounced "Water," so that a common shortened form was Wat, as in Wat Tyler. The common use of Wat as a first name is reflected in the common use of Watson as a surname.

Thus, Suffolk not only died by water (at sea), but by Water (at the hands of Walter).

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... like ambitious Sylla ...

It is plain that Suffolk faces death, but he scorns to plead for mercy. As for the Lieutenant who is in charge of the ship that has taken him, he goes through the reasons why Suffolk deserves death. Suffolk is told that he has been avaricious and gathered much of England's wealth; he has been the lover of the Queen; he has brought about Gloucester's death.

The Lieutenant says of Suffolk:

*By devilish policy art thou grown great
And like ambitious Sylla overgorged
With gobbets of thy mother's bleeding heart.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 83-85

Sylla, or Sulla, was one of the generals who, in the last century of the Roman republic, helped destroy the constitution of that republic and pave the way for the foundation of the Empire. In 82 B.C. Sulla led his army against his enemies, who were then in control of the city of Rome. He was the first general actually to attack Rome with a Roman army, and in that sense, he was "overgorged with gobbets of [his] mother's bleeding heart." What's more, after his victory, Sulla confiscated the property and estates of his enemies and used these to enrich himself and his followers. This resembles the manner in which Suffolk absorbed Gloucester's estates.

A Roman sword. . .

Suffolk still breathes defiance, pointing out that many great men in history had been killed by worthless murderers. He says:

*A Roman sword and banditto slave
Murdered sweet Tully; Brutus' bastard hand
Stabbed Julius Caesar; savage islanders
Pompey the Great; and Suffolk dies by pirates.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 135-38



Tully is Cicero, who was executed by soldiers sent by Mark Antony (see page I-307). Brutus was supposed by some to have been an illegitimate son of Julius Caesar (see page I-273). Pompey was not killed by savage islanders but by more or less civilized men of the Ptolemaic kingdom of Egypt (see page I-257).

But Suffolk is killed by the men he calls pirates-because they have taken his ship on the open waters.

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After he is dead, two gentlemen who had accompanied him undertake to bear his body back to London.

... the filth and scum of Kent

But now it is time to deal with the rebellion of Jack Cade, whom York had mentioned earlier on the occasion of his leaving for Ireland (see page II-597).

What happened was that after Suffolk's death, there was no one of the Lancastrian party left to guide the feeble King except for Somerset, and he was almost as unpopular as Suffolk, thanks to his failure in France.

The one man to whom many people turned was Richard of York. He had been competent in France, the last capable administrator of the Hundred Years' War; and what's more, he was proving competent in Ireland. He managed to quiet the rebels there and with such a mixture of firmness and gentleness that Ireland was to remain thoroughly Yorkist in sympathy through all the civil wars that were to follow.

What's more, he was the only Plantagenet (descendant of Edward III, through males exclusively) to be left outside the House of Lancaster. It didn't take bribery to make people think that York should be placed in a position of high power next to the King. The fact, then, that Yorkist feeling mounted in England after 1450 is no necessary indication that York was stirring up rebellion; it might just as well mean that the common people had the good sense required to see the obvious.

Some thirty thousand men of Kent and Sussex, under the leadership of Jack Cade (or John Cade) marched to London, then, to place their petition on York's behalf before the King. They wanted reforms in the



government, and they wanted York. There was no intention of violence at the start; all was respectful, and indeed, many in the crowd were respectable small landowners whose hearts were filled with loyalty to the crown and to the mild King (though not necessarily to the foreign Queen).

Like all rebellions of farmers, peasants, and workmen, this one was vilified by chroniclers of the time, for chroniclers are usually drawn from scholars who are patronized by the aristocracy and identify with them. It is therefore difficult to get a reasonable picture of what happened. Certainly Shakespeare, who is always ready to make fun of artisans and peasants, presents the rebellion in a spirit of broad farce.

By the middle of June 1450 (some five weeks after Suffolk's execution -a sacrifice by which the Queen's party did not, after all, prevent popular disorders) Cade's army was encamped in Blackheath, south of the Thames River and about five miles east of London's center.

The court temporized, receiving petitions and answering them with every show of sympathy, while quietly gathering troops as quickly as possible.

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Once the troops were gathered, a detachment of soldiers was sent against the Kentishmen under two brothers named Stafford.

The petitioners, confused and frightened at the coming of armed men, and certainly not dreaming of battle, rapidly retreated back toward Kent.

They were overtaken by a contingent of armed men at Sevenoaks, about twenty-three miles southeast of London.

In the play, the retreat is not mentioned. The army is pictured as meeting Cade's men while the latter are still at Blackheath, and the elder Stafford cries out to them:

*Rebellious hinds, the filth and scum of Kent,
Marked for the gallows; lay your weapons down.*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 119-20

It is very common for lowborn rebels to be addressed in this fashion by the aristocrats sent against them. The theory is that the dogs have to be shown their place and that it requires only a show of firm contempt to make them turn tail and run. This works-sometimes.

And sometimes the aristocrats are torn to pieces for their pains.



... *the Duke of Clarence' daughter...*

In this case, Cade does not turn tail. Rather, he argues himself to be an aristocrat too, and a claimant to the throne, in fact. He says:

*... Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March,
Married the Duke of Clarence' daughter, did he not?*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 133-34

The Duke of Clarence is Lionel of Antwerp, third son of Edward III, and his daughter was Philippa. She did indeed marry Edmund Mortimer, the 3rd Earl of March. The Staffords admit that much.

Cade goes on to explain that Philippa then had twins, which the Staffords promptly deny. The elder of these, says Cade, was stolen away by a beggar woman and grew up to be a bricklayer, and Cade himself is the son of that elder son of Edmund Mortimer.

This would make Cade a first cousin of Edmund, the 5th Earl of March (see page II-320), and prior to him in his claim to the throne. It would also make Cade first cousin, once removed, of Richard of York, and prior to him in his claim to the throne too.

Cade, however, for the sake of the King's father, Henry V, offers to make no demand for the throne but will be satisfied with merely being Lord Protector.

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... *Lord Say's head...*

One of Cade's henchmen makes a specific demand, saying:

*And furthermore, we'll have the Lord Say's head for selling
the Dukedom of Maine.*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 158-59

Lord Say is James Finnes, and his full title is Lord Saye and Sele. He was

a close associate of the dead Suffolk and he served Henry VI as lord chamberlain and lord treasurer. Since he was in charge of finances it seemed

reasonable to blame him for high taxes. (A descendant of his was involved

in the colonization of New England, and the "Say" in the name of Old Saybrook, Connecticut, comes from his name.)

There is then a battle, on June 18, in which Cade's forces actually win,

killing both Staffords. To be sure, the Staffords had come up with only

a vanguard of the army, the main forces of which were still behind in Black-

heath.



... *in Southwark* ...

Meanwhile, in London, softhearted King Henry is wondering how he can treat with Cade so as to avoid bloodshed, while savage Queen Margaret is hugging Suffolk's head to her bosom, and mourning.

A Messenger hastens in, and says:

The rebels are in Southwark: fly, my lord!

-Act IV, scene iv, line 27

The victory over the Staffords had a strong psychological effect. When Cade's men moved forward again, nobody cared to try to stop them. The rebels reached Southwark, just across the Thames from the heart of London, at the beginning of July.

There seemed nothing to stop them from entering London itself and it would be the height of folly to let the King be captured. Buckingham therefore says to him:

*My gracious lord, retire to Killingworth,
Until a power be raised to put them down.*

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 39-40

Killingworth, or better, Kenilworth, is a castle located just south of
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Coventry, about ninety miles northwest of London. It is best known today because of the novel *Kenilworth* by Sir Walter Scott, much of the action of which (set in Shakespeare's time, incidentally) takes place there.

As Henry makes ready to flee, a Second Messenger arrives, crying:

*Jack Cade hath gotten London Bridge!
The citizens fly and forsake their houses;*

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 49-50

On July 3, 1450, Cade entered London without a fight. It was really a remarkable feat.

... *to win the Tower* ...

Not only did John Cade enter London without bloodshed (by agreement with the Lord Mayor), but he endeavored to keep his men in order and to prevent damage of any sort.

In the play, on the other hand, he orders them to burn London Bridge and pull down the Tower. Actually, London could not be held for long unless the Tower could be taken, and that was firmly held by Lord Scales, who announces to the assembled citizens:

*Such aid as I can spare you shall command,
But I am troubled here with them myself:*



The rebels have assayed to win the Tower.

-Act IV, scene v, lines 7-9

Lord Scales is mentioned briefly in *Henry VI, Part One* as having been taken prisoner at the Battle of Patay with Talbot (see page II-529). That battle was twenty years in the past, but Lord Scales was still vigorous and was to live on to 1460. Indeed, at the time of Cade's rebellion, Talbot himself was still alive too. It was not till 1453, three years later, that Talbot fell at Castillon (see page II-564).

. . . because they could not read. . .

Somehow, however, Cade's men managed to get hold of Lord Say, whom the court had supposedly sent to the Tower for his own safety. How the capture was effected Shakespeare doesn't explain and neither does history.

Cade holds a mock trial of Lord Say, accusing him chiefly of encouraging literacy. Shakespeare thus pokes fun at the anti-intellectualism of the common man.

Yet one must admit that there is anti-intellectualism too, and that

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common men of Shakespeare's time might well feel that the learned placed penalties on them merely for not being learned. Thus, Cade says to Say:

. . . thou hast put them [poor men] in prison, and because they could not read thou hast hanged them . . .

-Act IV, scene vii, lines 45-47

This undoubtedly has reference to the famous system of "benefit of clergy" which derives from the 105th Psalm (14-15): "He [God] suffered no man to do them [His people] wrong: yea, he reprov'd kings for their sakes; Saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm."

This passage served as a kind of shield for the priesthood against the secular power. In the Middle Ages it was used to protect priests from being tried by secular courts, since the king must do God's prophets (a term extended to cover the clergy generally) no harm. This was valuable for the clergy, since the clerical courts-before which alone they could be tried-did not pronounce the death sentence.

This "benefit of clergy" was eventually extended to all who could read (since literacy was virtually confined to the clergy in the Middle Ages). If a person convicted of murder could read a passage from the Bible, he was

exempt from execution but was merely branded on the hand. A second murder, however, would mean execution. Literacy meant one murder



free,
in other words.

To literates, this might seem a fine thing, but to illiterates it might look uncommonly like unfair advantage on the part of those who could read.

In acting against those who committed the "crime" of being literate, then, Cade's rabble were not being merely obscurantist but were getting a vague kind of revenge.

... *in the Commentaries* ...

Lord Say attempts to defend himself, beginning:

*Kent, in the Commentaries Caesar writ,
Is termed the civil'st [most civilized] place of all this isle:*
-Act IV, scene vii, lines 62-63

This is a soothing attempt at flattery.

Caesar landed in Kent when he invaded England (see page II-53), since

Kent is the nearest part of the island to the Continent. Since it was nearest

to the Continent, it would be that part of the island which would be most

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apt to trade with Gaul and to receive some influence from distant Rome.

Naturally, then, Caesar would judge it to be most nearly civilized.

Henry the Fifth . . .

Despite all Lord Say can say on his own behalf, he is beheaded by Cade's

men. The next day, July 4, Cade could no longer hold his men entirely in

check and a few houses were pillaged. The Londoners, roused at this, be-

gan to resist and called on the help of the soldiers stationed in the Tower of

London.

Cade's army spent the night across the river, and on the early morning

of July 5, when they tried once again to enter London, they were met by the angry citizens of the city and were thrown back. Once that was done,

the court began to break up the army by diplomacy. Promises of redress

were made and a number of men, who had faith in those promises, went



home.

In Shakespeare's version, Cade's men are shown as a destructive rabble who are looting London, when two men of the court, Buckingham and Clifford, enter to offer pardon and make soft promises. Clifford (the 8th Baron Westmoreland) uses another tack too, for he makes use of a magic name. He calls out:

*Who loves the King and will embrace his pardon,
Fling up his cap, and say "God save his Majesty!"
Who hateth him and honors not his father,
Henry the Fifth, that made all France to quake,
Shake he his weapon at us and pass by.*

-Act IV, scene viii, lines 14-18

Cade's men are strongly influenced at the mere mention of Henry V. (It is exactly this which would make York reluctant to attempt to implement his claim to the throne. The name of Henry V was still potent and until Henry VI's misrule had dissolved that potency, a rebellion based on mere legalism would have no chance.)

Cade tries to hold his forces together, but Clifford calls out the name of the great victor of Agincourt and makes a hawkish speech against France so that patriotism explodes the cause of the rebels, and Cade flees.

It was not quite that simple in actual history. After his first group broke up, Cade managed to gather enough men to make some sort of display two days later, but they quarreled among themselves and the Londoners were still firm against them. It was then that Cade gave up, quietly took to his horse, and galloped southward to the coast. No doubt he hoped to escape to France.

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... an esquire of Kent

A thousand marks were placed on Cade's head, and in the play, Cade is forced by famine into a Kentish garden, hoping, after five days of running and starving, to make a meal. Here he is discovered by the small landowner, a model of staunch English yeomanry, who refuses to summon help but fights Cade alone, for, as he says:

*... it shall ne'er be said, while England stands,
That Alexander Iden, an esquire of Kent,
Took odds to combat a poor famished man.*

-Act IV, scene x, lines 44-46

Cade is struck down, mortally wounded. Only then, from Cade's dying statement, does honest Iden learn who it is he has slain, so that he cries out:



Is't Cade that I have slain, that monstrous traitor?

-Act IV, scene x, line 68

Actually, matters were not quite that heroic. Iden did indeed slay Cade in single combat, but not unwittingly, and not out of sheer desire to fight for his property. When Cade galloped southward, Iden raced hotly after him, playing a part no more noble than that of bounty hunter, for he was after the thousand-mark reward. He caught up with the fugitive, killed him, and collected.

. . . with a puissant and a mighty power

Scarcely has Henry VI, at his safe refuge in Kenilworth, heard of the breakup of Cade's army and the flight of Cade, than he gets additional news less welcome. A Messenger enters and says:

*The Duke of York is newly come from Ireland,
And with a puissant and a mighty power*

-Act IV, scene ix, lines 24-25

Shakespeare's anti-Yorkist bias makes it appear that York has brought his army from Ireland in order to take advantage of the confusion caused by Cade's rebellion (something he had supposedly instigated).

The actuality is quite different. Cade's rebellion had been wiped out in

July and York did not arrive from Ireland till September 1450. The actual

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facts would make it appear that York was arriving out of duty rather than out of ambition alone. It was quite plain that Henry VI could not rule and that his chief minister, Edmund of Somerset, was both unpopular and incapable.

York was senior Prince of the Blood and was heir to the throne if Henry VI should die without children (barring the doubtful claim of the Beaufort family). Why should he not have every interest to try to reorganize the government under himself as Protector? Many Englishmen would have viewed this with favor and one member of Parliament even suggested, at this time, that York be declared heir to the throne officially. (The member was put in the Tower for making the suggestion, however.)

. . . Duke Edmund to the Tower



The Lancastrians could see quite plainly that Somerset was their weak point. King Henry therefore takes the action best calculated to soothe York and, for that matter, protect Somerset. He sends Buckingham to meet York, giving him instructions to-

*... ask him whafs the reason of these arms.
Tell him I'll send Duke Edmund to the Tower,
And, Somerset, we will commit thee thither,
Until his army be dismissed from him.*

-Act IV, scene ix, lines 37-40

... Ajax Telamonius

Shakespeare, by attributing ambition to the crown to York, has to twist the next scene into a series of odd events. Thus, York begins the scene by announcing:

*From Ireland thus comes York to claim his right,
And pluck the crown from feeble Henry's head.*

-Act V, scene i, lines 1-2

Then, when Buckingham arrives as emissary from the King, York finds himself helpless to proceed for no visible reason and must say in frustration:

*... now, like Ajax Telamonius,
On sheep or oxen could I spend my fury.*

-Act V, scene i, lines 26-27

This is a reference to the end of Ajax (son of Telamon), who, out of
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ungovernable rage at having been denied the armor of the dead Achilles, went mad and slew herds of domestic animals, thinking them to be his Grecian enemies (see page I-110).

Actually, York's purpose in returning from Ireland fell far short of the crown. He marched his army into Kent, more as though exploring the feeling of the nation than attempting to rouse rebellion (though perhaps

he would have rebelled if an overwhelming uprising in his behalf had developed, which it didn't), and what he found made him feel he could safely demand the end of Somerset as the power behind the throne.

Indeed, he says as much to Buckingham:

*The cause why I have brought this army hither
Is to remove proud Somerset from the King,*

-Act V, scene i, lines 35-36

Command my eldest son. . .

Buckingham smoothly assures York that Somerset has already been



sent
a prisoner to the Tower, and York, accepting the assurance, dismisses his army. This is not just something Shakespeare invented; it really happened.

Now, if York had been the Machiavellian plotter Shakespeare pictures him as, if he had come to England desperately intent on seizing the throne, it passes the bounds of belief that he would so easily dismiss his army on the mere word that Somerset would be imprisoned. If, however, he were intensely loyal to the King and were intent only on becoming Protector, he might well have faith in Ms monarch.

Disbanding his army (this took place, in actual fact, in March 1452, a year and a half after his arrival from Ireland, and not immediately after, as the play makes it appear), York says joyously:

*... let my sovereign, virtuous Henry,
Command my eldest son, nay, all my sons,
As pledges of my fealty and love;
I'll send them all as willing as I live:
Lands, goods, horse, armor, anything I have,
Is his to use, so [provided that] Somerset may die.*

-Act V, scene i, lines 48-53

The sons of Richard of York, whom he here refers to, and who are to play important parts in succeeding plays, have not yet made their appearance on the stage.

The sons were four in number, and in order of their birth, they were Edward, Edmund, George, and Richard. At the time York disbanded his

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armies, the respective ages of the first three were ten, nine, and three. The youngest, Richard, had just been born.

... like to Achilles' spear

It quickly appears that Somerset is not to be executed, however, and that he is not even in prison. Indeed, he comes onstage with the triumphant Margaret, whose hatred of Richard of York keeps her from dissembling any further.

York, maddened at this, throws caution to the winds. He berates Henry for his double-dealing and tells him he is not fit to be King. It is rather he himself, says York, who should be King. He says:

*That gold [the crown] must round engirt these brows of
mine,
Whose smile and frown, like to Achilles' spear,
Is able with the change to kill and cure.*

-Act V, scene i, lines 99-101



This is one of the references to a minor legend concerning the great Greek hero Achilles (see page I-78). When the Greeks first landed in Asia Minor, they found themselves in Mysia, far from Troy, since they lacked maps. The King of Mysia, Telephus, tried to resist and was badly wounded by Achilles, who wielded a spear only he was strong enough to handle.

Telephus' wound festered and an oracle told him it could be cured only by its cause. Telephus therefore offered to guide the Greek host to Troy if Achilles would use his spear to cure the wound. Achilles agreed and scraped some of the rust from the spear into the wound, or, in an alternate version of the tale, scraped some on the ground, from which sprang the herb yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), which served as cure.

Achilles' spear thus came to be a proverbial representation of anything that could work equally well to help or hurt, and a king, of course, can be either frowning or smiling, using the same face to kill or cure.

... *capital treason* ...

York's speech is, to be sure, treasonable, and Somerset at once says:

*O monstrous traitor! I arrest thee, York,
Of capital treason 'gainst the King and crown:*

-Act V, scene i, lines 107-8

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Clifford enters later and goes a step further. He says of York:

*He is a traitor; let him to the Tower,
And chop away that factious pate of his.*

-Act V, scene i, lines 134-35

At the time York disbanded his army, he was indeed arrested, and no doubt the Lancastrians would have been glad to execute him. Practical politics dictated otherwise. York was too popular to deal with summarily and there was the recent case of Gloucester, whose death had, in the end, ruined Suffolk. There was therefore no real attempt to go to extreme measures against him, especially since he did not, in actual fact, say or do anything as openly treasonable as Shakespeare makes it appear.

Outcast of Naples. , .

York is not anxious to be a martyr either. Upon first disbanding his army, he had offered his sons as hostages for his loyalty and good behavior, and now he once again makes the offer.

Queen Margaret sneers at this and refers to-

... *the bastard boys of York*

-Act V, scene i, line 115

York then burst out in tit-for-tat invective, saying to the Queen:



*O blood-bespotted Neapolitan,
Outcast of Naples, England's bloody scourge!*

-Act V, scene i, lines 117-18

This makes it sound as though Queen Margaret is Italian. She is not, of course, but is thoroughly French. However, her father is titular King of Naples (see page II-568) and is kept from ruling there by the fact that a Spanish dynasty is in effective control. In that sense, the Queen is a Neapolitan and an outcast. And, of course, to the Elizabethan audience, which is accustomed to hearing Italian vice and subtlety (see page II-279) constantly contrasted with English virtue and candor, the use of an Italian-sounding epithet against Margaret would be most effective.

. . . our weapons shall

Two of York's four sons, Edward and Richard, appear, and are willing to guarantee their father's good behavior. Richard, the younger, pictured

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in this play and the next as a fire-eating hothead, says, concerning their method of freeing York from threatened arrest:

And if words will not [suffice], then our weapons shall.

-Act V, scene i, line 140

This is a remarkable speech for young Richard to make, since at the time of his father's arrest, he had just been born.

It is at this point, however, that Shakespeare skips two years without giving any indication of having done so—two years of great importance, too.

In the play, York goes straight from his position as arrested traitor without an army to sudden defiance. An army springs up from nowhere and York makes ready for war. This is quite confusing and would be inexplicable unless we could turn to history and see what really happened.

York was arrested on March 10, 1452. Since it seemed imprudent to chop off his head, the King pardoned him and sent him back to his estates.

There York remained quietly for a while, convinced perhaps that events would work out in his favor and that time was on his side.

And, to be sure, three separate events took place in 1453 which were of prime importance.

First, on July 17, 1453, Talbot fought and lost the Battle of Castillon (see page II-564). That ended, at long last, the great adventure in France



which Edward III had started and which Henry V had lifted to its peak. The English were out of France (except only for Calais) once and for all, and all Englishmen had to realize it. A scapegoat was needed for that and for the death of the idolized Talbot, and the natural scapegoat was the minister in power-Somerset. And he, to a large extent, deserved it.

Then, a month later, in August, King Henry's mental condition finally broke down. He had never been bright, but he had been sane. Now even that could no longer be said. He could no longer respond sensibly to statements made to him, and his condition was so plainly incompetent that the court dared not show him in public. For as long as they could, they maintained the fiction that he was well, but, of course, rumors spread.

Then, finally, in October of that same year of 1453, Queen Margaret was delivered of a baby boy. There was at once a rumor, widely believed throughout the land, that Henry was not the father of the boy. (And certainly, considering Henry's temperament, that is an easy piece of scandal to believe).

Still, believing the son of a queen to be illegitimate and proving it are two different things. No one dared make the attempt to *prove illegitimacy* (to try and to fail would be fatal to the accuser) and the infant was accepted. He was named Edward and was also made Prince of Wales, in order to make it perfectly clear he was heir to the throne.

By the end of 1453, then, the situation was this. The King's condition

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was bound to become known sooner or later, probably sooner, and there would have to be a Protector. Somerset had grown simply too unpopular to serve as Protector. Margaret herself now had a baby to defend and she was to bend all her energies henceforward to a single-minded effort to see to it that her young prince would someday succeed to the throne. It seemed clear, then, that she would have to swallow her pride and make a conciliatory gesture toward York. Unless she gave him an inch, the country (on hearing of Henry's condition) might compel him to take a mile-so he was recalled to a place on the council and when he demanded the removal of Somerset that demand was met and Somerset went to the Tower of London.

In February 1454 a new Parliament was opened by York and it was clearly in his interest to demonstrate to the nation why it was that the King could not open it for himself. As it happened, John Kemp, sixty-fourth Archbishop of Canterbury, had just died, and it was customary for a deputation of lords to consult with the King on possible replacements. York made sure that such a deputation was formed and that the King was forced

to face it. All could see at once that Henry was mentally incompetent.

Now if York had truly been the cold-blooded schemer Shakespeare makes him out to be, if he had truly had his heart set on the throne, matters would now have been simple for him. King Henry could have been shut up as a madman and a convenient death could have been arranged for him. The infant Prince of Wales could have been declared il-



legitimate (who would have doubted it?) and Queen Margaret could have been imprisoned, or even executed for the treason of having been unfaithful to the King.

York would then have legally, and probably with minimum trouble, succeeded to the throne.

But as a matter of fact, York *still* shows no signs, even as late as 1454, of really having ambitions for the throne. When Henry's madness was made plain, Parliament appointed York Protector, and he accepted that position without trying to make it more. What's more, when, by the end of 1454, King Henry had recovered to the point where he could be considered sane once more, York promptly resigned his position as Protector—the act of a thoroughly loyal man.

Once again, though, York's reward for loyalty was a harsh blow. No sooner was York out of the way than King Henry (or, more likely, Queen Margaret acting in his name) made it his first business to liberate Somerset

and place him in charge of the government once again.

This was very foolish of Margaret (but then she always allowed her passions to rule over her good sense—if she had any), for she couldn't possibly have done anything to worse offend the nation. The last person they wanted was the man they felt had lost France and betrayed Talbot.

Nor could she have done anything to worse offend York. It was only now that York finally felt that nothing could be done with King Henry, that only

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a complete revolution could save England. He saw no choice but to raise an army and thus open the Wars of the Roses. And among the chief partisans to join him now were the Earl of Salisbury and his son the Earl of Warwick.

...foul indigested lump

The entire two-year period—complicated politics, the loss of France, the madness of the King, the birth of an heir, the coming and going of York as Protector, the fall and rise of Somerset—is skipped by Shakespeare between one line and the next.

Instead, immediately after York's arrest and apparent utter defeat, York signals Salisbury and Warwick to enter out of nowhere and the civil wars begin.

Clifford, the most extreme of the Lancastrians, and young Richard, York's youngest son, who is to be the most extreme of the Yorkists, at once engage in a slanging match. Clifford says angrily to young Richard:

*Hence, heap of wrath, foul indigested lump,
As crooked in thy manners as thy shape!*

-Act V, scene i, lines 157-58



Thus begins Shakespeare's portrait of young Richard, whom he ends by making one of the great villains of history. Because Shakespeare is Shakespeare, that portrait of Richard cannot be erased from the consciousness of the world, and yet it is almost totally wrong.

The anti-Yorkist bias of the Tudor dynasty under whom Shakespeare wrote and lived was directed most concentratedly, as we shall see, against this same Richard. He was vilified endlessly and shamelessly and most skillfully by Sir Thomas More, who in 1514 or thereabouts wrote *A History of Richard III*. In this book, More carefully repeated rumors designed to air the worst theories about Richard that the Tudors wanted aired, while carefully refraining from presenting them as actual statements of fact. Shakespeare drew on More's history, presenting all the vicious theories as facts.

Thus, contemporary portraits and descriptions of Richard do not indicate that he was particularly deformed in any way. He was small, perhaps, though this was more noticeable than it might otherwise have been through a comparison with his older brother Edward, who was over six feet tall, and a giant of a man by the standards of those days.

It is also possible that one of Richard's shoulders was higher than the other. More describes Richard as follows: "As he was small and little of stature so was he of body greatly deformed, the one shoulder higher than

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the other. . . ." He carefully gives no other instances of the way in which he was "greatly deformed."

But that is enough. Later presentations had him a hunchback, club-footed, and hideous. Hence Clifford's sneer at him as a "foul indigested lump."

Later in the scene, Clifford's son, identified here as "Young Clifford," addresses Richard as:

Foul stigmatic . . .

-Act V, scene i, line 215



One who is stigmatic carries a stigma or mark, which may be placed on his body by a branding iron as the result of his conviction of some crime, or may be there from birth. In the latter case (as was supposedly true of Richard, who was, as it was later said, born deformed) the mark was placed there by God.

Old Salisbury . . .

King Henry, in his turn, berates the Earl of Salisbury, who is the most important of the nobles who rallied to the side of York. He says:

*Old Salisbury, shame to thy silver hair,
Thou mad misleader of thy brain-sick son!*

-Act V, scene i, lines 162-63

Salisbury is fifty-five years old at the time of the opening of the War of the Roses, which is indeed quite old for the time.

It is interesting that although Shakespeare never as much as whispers of the madness of Henry VI (any more than he did of the madness of Charles VI, see page II-464), he has Henry talk of the madness or possible madness of others. Thus, he makes Henry speak of Warwick as "brain-sick" and Salisbury as "mad" outright. Earlier in the scene Henry says of York:

*... a bedlam [mad] and ambitious humor
Makes him oppose himself against his King.*

-Act V, scene i, lines 132-33

. . . turned to stone . . .

In actual history, York raised his army in Ludlow in western England, near the Welsh border. This was the traditional bailiwick of the earls of March (that is, the Mortimer family, of which York was a member on his

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mother's side). He then marched his men rapidly toward London, encountering the Lancastrian army at St. Albans (see page II-584) on May 22, 1455.

York offered his submission to the King on condition that Somerset be turned over to him (for execution, clearly). York, even at this late date, was thus ready to play for something less than the crown. The King (or rather, the Queen through him, for she was always obdurate) refused and battle was joined.

The Lancastrians held the town firmly, but Warwick led a portion of the army round part of the hill on which it stands and attacked suddenly from the rear, forcing an entry to the streets. Almost at once, the



surprised

Lancastrians gave way.

The Lancastrian army suffered some notable casualties. Shakespeare (who always treats battles in the Homeric style as successions of single combats, when he treats of them at all) has York and Clifford clash. Clifford is killed.

York leaves and Young Clifford enters and finds his father's body. He is horrified and says:

*Even at this sight
My heart is turned to stone; and while 'tis mine,
It shall be stony.*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 49-51

Young Clifford for the next few years was indeed to be the crudest of the Lancastrians and was to receive the nickname "the Butcher" for that reason.

He goes on to say:

*Henceforth, I will not have to do with pity:
Meet I an infant of the house of York,
Into as many gobbets will I cut it
As wild Medea young Absyrtus did:*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 56-59

This speech forecasts one of the most dramatic scenes of the next play.

The classical reference is to the escape of the Greek hero Jason after he had taken the Golden Fleece from the King of Colchis. The King's daughter escaped with him and took her young brother along. As they were rowed madly across the sea by Jason's crew it became obvious that the ship of the furious King was gaining on them.

Thereupon Medea cut her brother, Absyrtus, into pieces and tossed these overboard. The horrified King gathered the pieces and carried them

back to Colchis for burial. Thus Jason escaped and Medea began her role as one of the great unprincipled villainesses of literature.

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Young Clifford carries his dead father from the battle scene, saying:

*As did Aeneas old Anchises bear,
So bear I thee upon my manly shoulders;*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 62-63

When Aeneas (see page I-20) fled from burning Troy as one of its few survivors, he took his old father with him. His father was too old and palsied to walk, let alone run, and Aeneas carried him on his shoulders even though the added weight endangered his own escape. This has been held up in literature as a model of filial piety ever since.

... an *alehouse'* paltry sign



In a second single combat, young Richard kills Somerset in the streets of St. Albans.

Now, Somerset was indeed killed in the battle, but despite Shakespeare, not every death in battle is the result of single combat between balanced foes. Exactly who killed Somerset is not known, but one thing is known: it was not young Richard. At the time of the Battle of St. Albans, Richard was just three years old and the amount of fighting he could do was strictly limited.

Richard is shown here as fierce and brave in battle and this everyone allows him. Though his later detractors loaded him with every physical deformity and moral vice, they could not deny his bravery, and even Shakespeare doesn't go so far as to do so. Of course, the fact that Richard fights so well and so fiercely is itself evidence that he couldn't be very deformed; it is not at all likely that a clubfooted hunchback would be such a terror in battle.

The exact place of Somerset's death is significant too, for he dies under the sign of an inn. Richard says:

*... underneath an alehouse" paltry sign,
The Castle in Saint Albans, Somerset
Hath made the wizard famous in his death.*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 67-69

In the seance scene, the Spirit, asked about Somerset, had said, "Let him shun castles" (see page II-588), and, of course, with typical wizard-like ambiguity, the reference turned out not to be to a real castle, but to a sign on which a castle was painted.

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Saint Albany battle . . .

At this point *Henry VI, Part Two* ends-with Somerset, York's great enemy, killed, and the pathway cleared for York to become King if he wishes. Warwick closes the play, saying:

*... 'twas a glorious day:
Saint Albans battle won by famous York
Shall be eternized in all age to come.
Sound drum and trumpets, and to London all:*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 29-32

So the battle might have been "eternized" (i.e., immortalized in fame) if it had really settled the issue, but the Wars of the Roses were only beginning. A generation of fighting was yet to come.

So *Henry VI, Part Two* ends with York's victorious army marching toward London, and it is in London that *Henry VI, Part Three* will begin.



HENRY VI, PART THREE

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HENRY VI, PART THREE begins just where *Henry VI, Part Two* left off—at least to all appearances. In the last speech of the earlier play, the Earl of Warwick had urged the victorious Yorkists to march from St. Albans to London. And now, as *Henry VI, Part Three* opens, the Yorkists are indeed in London—at the House of Parliament, in fact—and are discussing, one supposes, the Battle of St. Albans.

. . . *the King escaped* . . .

Warwick has the first word here, as he had the last in the previous play. He says:

/ wonder how the King escaped our hands?

-Act I, scene i, line 1

Actually, this is the first sign that Shakespeare is once again compressing time and that more than this first battle of the Wars of the Roses is involved.

The King, you see, did *not* escape after the Battle of St. Albans.

Poor Henry VI, with his insecure hold on sanity (see page II-614), was probably not too clear what the fighting in the streets of St. Albans was all about. He was slightly wounded in the neck by an arrow, and when the battle was over, the Yorkist forces discovered him hiding in a tanner's house. He was treated with all possible respect and was taken to London with the Yorkist forces.

It was quite possible for York to have deposed King Henry now and forced (or allowed) Parliament to declare him King. He did not do so. When Parliament assembled on November 12, 1455 (half a year after the Battle of St. Albans), York was satisfied to accept the post of Protector for a King who was a second time officially declared mad. The chief difference between this second bout of royal madness and the first was that then Somerset (York's deadly enemy) had been alive, even though in the Tower, and now he was dead, having been killed at St. Albans.

Therefore, though York was Protector during both the King's periods of insanity, he must have felt more secure the second time.

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Nevertheless, when during the Christmas celebration in 1455 Henry VI made a public appearance and acted quite sane, York gave up the protectorship again. In February 1456 he was out of office and for a second time he had allowed the reins of government to slip from his fingers.

York's failure to make full use of his victory at St. Albans and his insistence on viewing the feeble King Henry as King in truth certainly makes York seem a loyal subject forced into rebellion by the enmity of such



people as Somerset and Queen Margaret.

However, the anti-Yorkist bias of Shakespeare, which makes him present York as scheming for the throne from the very beginning, forces him to suppress the actions, just described, whereby York clearly showed his loyalty to Henry.

. . . the great Lord of Northumberland

But back to Shakespeare's version. In answer to Warwick's question, Richard of York says that the King fled after the Battle of St. Albans, abandoning his army:

*Whereat the great Lord of Northumberland,
Whose warlike ears could never brook retreat,
Cheered up the drooping army; and himself,
Lord Clifford, and Lord Stafford all abreast
Charge our main battle's front, and, breaking in,
Were by the swords of common soldiers slain.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 4-9

The "great Lord of Northumberland" was Sir Henry Percy, 2nd Earl of Northumberland. He was the son of none other than Hotspur (see page II-288). The 2nd Earl was born in 1394, so that he was nine years old when his father died at the Battle of Shrewsbury.

The boy was kept in confinement by the shrewd and suspicious Henry IV, but once Henry V came to the throne, young Percy benefited by the new monarch's determination to smooth over all English quarrels so that he might safely leave for France. Young Percy, then twenty years old, was liberated and allowed to inherit his family's land, revenues, and titles.

Henry V's estimate of what ought to be done was correct in this case. The young man was grateful and the Percys no longer revolted against the House of Lancaster. The 2nd Earl was, indeed, faithful to the death, and died at the Battle of St. Albans at the age of sixty-one, an age at which he might well, and without blame, have avoided battle. (The 2nd Earl did not, by the way, play any part in *Henry VI, Part Two*, and he is mentioned here at the very start of *Henry VI, Part Three* only that he might be declared already dead.)

Lord Clifford, on the other hand, played a part in the previous play, and his death was described at its end (see page II-618). There it was attributed not to a common soldier (as is correct) but, more dramatically and



in-

correctly, to Richard of York himself in single combat.

Lord Stafford was Humphrey, Earl of Stafford. He was the son of Humphrey, 1st Duke of Buckingham, that Buckingham who appears in *Henry VI, Part Two* as a partisan on the Lancastrian side and who had entrapped the Duchess of Gloucester at her sorcery (see page II-589).

Lord Stafford's father. . .

York's oldest son is also present. He is Edward, Earl of March (inheriting the ill-fated title of the Mortimer family, see page II-320). Actually, he was only thirteen years old at the time of the Battle of St. Albans and he did not take part. Shakespeare makes him older, however, because, as usual, he is condensing the time lapse in the play.

Edward of March brings additional news, saying:

*Lord Stafford's father, Duke of Buckingham,
Is either slain or wounded dangerous,*

-Act I, scene i, lines 10-11

Actually, Buckingham survived the battle and did not die till five years later at another battle. Since Shakespeare plans to skip those five years, he must be disposed of now.

. . . the Earl of Wiltshire's blood

Another chimes in, saying:

*And, brother, here's the Earl of Wiltshire's blood,
Whom I encountered as the battles joined.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 14-15

The speaker is the Marquess of Montagu. His name is John Neville, and he is a brother of Richard of Warwick. (It is Warwick whom he is addressing, hence the "brother" in his speech.)

The Wiltshire who is here described as having died in the battle is no relation to the Wiltshire of *Richard II* (see page II-284).

This new Wiltshire was James Butler, 5th Earl of Ormonde and Earl of Wiltshire, who was associated with York during the latter's stay in Ireland.

When York left Ireland in 1450, Butler remained behind, in charge of the English interests. He married a girl of the Beaufort family, which made

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him a relative of Somerset by marriage and tied him to the Lancastrian

side. He fought against the Yorkists in both Ireland and England, and,

as stated, was wounded at St. Albans.

. . . the line of John of Gaunt



The climax to this serial description of the battle comes with the arrival of none other than Richard, youngest son of York. He comes striding in with Somerset's head. He had killed Somerset at the end of *Henry VI, Part Two* and now he displays his trophy.

Since Somerset was the leader of the Lancastrian party (after the ineffectual King and his virago of a Queen), it seemed to the dazzled Yorkists that victory was indeed theirs.

One of the nobles present says, with savage sarcasm:

Such hope have all the line of John of Gaunt!

-Act I, scene i, line 19

The speaker is John Mowbray, 3rd Duke of Norfolk, now forty years old. His grandfather had been the Thomas Mowbray, 1st Duke of Norfolk, whose quarrel with Bolingbroke (son of John of Gaunt) had filled the first act of *Richard II*. John Mowbray's uncle, another Thomas Mowbray, had been allied to the Archbishop of York in *Henry IV, Part Two* and had died through the treachery of John of Lancaster, grandson of John of Gaunt.

The 3rd Duke of Norfolk thus had good family reasons for hating the descendants of John of Gaunt, and the dead Somerset, whose head he was apostrophizing, had been a grandson of John of Gaunt. Of course, all those present were perfectly aware that King Henry VI was a great-grandson of John of Gaunt, so that what Norfolk had said was clear treason.

... *Possess it, York*

Warwick does worse. Not content with speaking treason, he urges an act of treason. Pointing to the throne, the seat reserved for the King in opening Parliament, he says to York:

*This is the palace of the fearful King,
And this the regal seat. Possess it, York;
For this is thine and not King Henry's heirs'.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 25-27

York, thereupon, with the active assistance of the others (who thus

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share in the treasonable act), sets himself on the throne, thus making a symbolic display of himself as King.

Here is the point where five years drop out of history, for, as described

earlier, the Battle of St. Albans was followed by York's loyal acceptance

and return of the protectorship, with no claim upon the throne at all.

What happened?



Well, after York had resigned the protectorship for the second time in February 1456 (nine months after St. Albans), Queen Margaret took over once more. By October 1456 she had appointed strong Lancastrian partisans to all important government posts. She tried to get rid of York by sending him to Ireland again, but he avoided that post firmly. He retired to his estates and remained watchful.

The sons of the lords who had died at St. Albans were breathing fire to attack York, but the government did not quite feel ready for renewed war, and, to win time, efforts were made to win over the potentially dangerous duke and to establish some sort of conciliation. King Henry himself may have been feebly sincere about this, but to the Queen and her partisans this was merely a device that would, hopefully, put York off his guard.

Negotiations for such an accommodation were begun in October 1457 and on March 25, 1458, it was consummated. York and Warwick agreed to build a chapel to the memory of the lords who fell at St. Albans and to pay damages to their widows and children. Both sides then went together

in procession to St. Paul's, with Queen Margaret and Richard of York actually walking hand in hand.

Margaret was only buying time, however. Even while the conciliation was proceeding, she was quietly collecting an army.

Her first overt action was against Warwick. Warwick had been appointed Captain of Calais (the last remaining English possession in France) in August 1455 in the aftermath of the victory at St. Albans, and he remained the only Yorkist in high position after York himself had resigned the protectorship.

Warwick was harassed by the hostile court, however, and received no financial support from them. He was therefore forced to engage in rather

piratical attacks on merchant shipping, and in May 1448, two months after

the conciliation, he was recalled to London to answer some complaints lodged against him by the owners of the ships he had taken.

Warwick saw clearly that the Lancastrians in control were out to break him despite the conciliation and he did not stay in London long. He conferred quickly with his father, Salisbury, and with York himself, then hastened back to Calais.

Now at last the Yorkist forces gathered themselves for the renewal of the war that Margaret was clearly preparing. York retired once more to Lud-

low to raise an army and Salisbury joined him after defeating a small

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Lancastrian force en route. Warwick also came, with troops brought from Calais.

Thanks to Margaret's energy, however, and the time gained by conciliation with the always a little too trustful York, the Lancastrians were far better prepared than they had been four years earlier. Then it had been the Yorkists who had advanced to meet the Lancastrians near their base



of operations. Now it was the Lancastrians who advanced all the way to Ludlow, and on October 13, 1459, York found himself hemmed in by the enemy army.

Nor did York have a chance to make a fight for it. During the night, most of his troops (judging, no doubt, that the Lancastrians would win) deserted him and passed over to the other side. There was nothing for the Yorkists to do but flee. Richard of York made it to Ireland, where he was popular and safe. Warwick, taking Salisbury and Edward of March with him, got safely to Calais, where *he* was popular.

For half a year afterward, Margaret and her Lancastrian supporters were supreme in England. They called a Parliament on November 29, 1459, and all the Yorkists, including Salisbury, Warwick, and York himself were declared traitors.

Margaret then tried to expand her power across the Channel by appointing a Lancastrian to replace Warwick as Captain of Calais. The new appointee was Henry Beaufort, 3rd Duke of Somerset, the son of York's great enemy who had died at St. Albans. Henry of Somerset was still a young man of twenty-three at the time. He and his two younger brothers were the last Beauforts, the last to be descended in a strictly male line from John of Gaunt, whose great-grandsons they were.

Henry of Somerset bore a hated name, however. When he tried to land in Calais, Warwick easily drove him off and the entire English fleet transferred its allegiance to the Yorkists.

With control of the sea, Warwick could sail to Dublin and back to Calais; then, having arranged matters with York, he carried a small army of fifteen hundred men to Kent toward the end of June 1460. Men flocked to his banner and what followed was more a triumphal procession than a war-like campaign.

On July 2, 1460, Warwick and his men marched unopposed into London, to the cheering of the populace. Young Edward of March, the eldest son of Richard of York, was with him, and won all hearts, for he was eighteen years old now, over six feet tall, blond, and very handsome. He



was a new Richard Lion-Heart (but heterosexual) and the people went wild over him.

The Lancastrians had hastily backed away, moving northward, and Warwick, without waiting long, pursued. Warwick reached the enemy at Northampton, and on July 10, 1460, a battle was fought. This time the situation was precisely the reverse of what it had been at Ludlow nine months previ-

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ously. Now it was a Lancastrian contingent, scenting defeat, that deserted, and it was the Lancastrians that were forced into retreat.

It was at this Battle of Northampton that the Duke of Buckingham, whom Edward of March claimed to have wounded at St. Albans (see page II-624), was actually killed, and it was at Northampton that Edward of March fought and not at St. Albans (when he had been too young). This is an indication of how Shakespeare condensed the two battles and skipped the time between.

King Henry was captured at Northampton, as he had been at St. Albans, and for the second time was brought back to London by triumphant Yorkists. A new Parliament was called and it dutifully followed the tide of battle, undoing all the deeds of the Lancastrian Parliament the year before and passing a new set of Yorkist resolutions.

With the Yorkists in control of London and much of the country, Richard of York came from Ireland. He entered into London with all the pageantry he could muster, marched into the House of Parliament, and thoughtfully faced the royal throne. Apparently, he was tired of accepting Margaret's word and being betrayed, and seriously considered the possibility of making himself King and settling matters. The story is that he placed a hesitant hand upon the throne as though tempted, but he did *not*, apparently, actually sit on it as Shakespeare had him do.

Earl of Northumberland . . .

It was on October 16, 1460, that Richard of York decided to declare for the kingship and demanded it of Parliament. What stood in the way was King Henry himself. He was such a pitiful, inoffensive creature that it was difficult to go against him, especially since the people generally felt he was a saint because of his piety, and blamed all the evils on the Queen and the ministers.

York therefore had to consider the possibility that in seizing the throne, the spectacle of the gentle Henry hurled ruthlessly from power might turn the hearts of men from him. Some clever device would be needed to avoid this.

Shakespeare represents the uncertainty as to the proper course of action in terms of a direct confrontation between York and the King.

Henry enters, even as York is seated on the throne, and with the King are surviving members of the Lancastrian party. Referring bitterly to



York's attempt at usurpation, Henry rouses the indignation of his party by reciting the harm done them by the Yorkists. He says:

*Earl of Northumberland, he slew thy father,
And thine, Lord Clifford; and you both have vowed revenge*
-Act I, scene i, lines 54-55

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We met Lord Clifford in *Henry VI, Part Two*, where he was called "Young Clifford," since his father was "Clifford." It was Young Clifford who had promised a grisly revenge, and now, promoted to "Clifford" in this play, he will later take it.

The Earl of Northumberland who is here addressed is still another Henry Percy. He is the 3rd Earl of Northumberland, having succeeded to the title when his father died at St. Albans. The 3rd Earl had been born in 1421, the year before Henry V had died, and he was now thirty-four years old.

... gentle Earl of Westmoreland

Northumberland and Clifford both affirm that they do indeed want revenge. So does a third Lancastrian, who advocates an immediate attack on York, tearing him from the throne, but King Henry says:

Be patient, gentle Earl of Westmoreland.
-Act I, scene i, line 61

This is Ralph Neville, 2nd Earl of Westmoreland, grandson and namesake of the 1st Earl, who had led the forces of Henry IV in *Henry IV, Part One*. He is thus the nephew of Salisbury and the first cousin of Warwick and represents the Lancastrian side of the family. (Like all civil wars, the Wars of the Roses pitted relatives against one another.)

Cousin of Exeter ...

Henry is certainly in no position to use force against York after the Battle of Northampton. He says, therefore, to one of his nobles who has joined Clifford and Westmoreland in demanding action:

*Cousin of Exeter, frowns, words, and threats
Shall be the war that Henry means to use.*
-Act I, scene i, lines 72-73

Exeter is no descendant or relation of the Exeter who appears in *Henry*



V. That Exeter had been the youngest of the three Beaufort sons of John of Gaunt and had held the title only for his life.

Before his day one John Holand had been 1st Duke of Exeter. His widowed mother had married the Black Prince and had become the mother of Richard II. Holand was thus elder half brother to that King and was made 1st Duke of Exeter in 1397 for helping Richard take over from Thomas of Gloucester. After Bolingbroke overthrew Richard and became

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Henry IV, Holand was demoted for his share in Gloucester's death. Then, when he continued to plot against Henry IV, Holand was executed and his titles forfeited. It was for this reason that the title was available for the use of Thomas Beaufort (passing thus from the half brother of the old King to the half brother of the new).

Meanwhile the son of John Holand (also John Holand) served Henry V and later Henry VI faithfully in France, remaining a strong Lancastrian to the end, despite the nature of his father's fate, and despite the fact that he was married to Anne, a daughter of none other than Richard of York.

' In 1444 his loyalty was rewarded by the restoration of his family title (Thomas Beaufort had been dead seventeen years), and once again a John Holand was Duke of Exeter. It is this Exeter that Henry VI now addresses.

... for *this my lifetime* ...

Henry VI, as good as his word, confines himself to arguing with Richard of York, who argues back. Partisans on both sides join in, and the whole story of the succession is brought up again. Did Henry IV usurp the crown or conquer it? Were the Mortimers the real heirs or not?

The weight of the argument seems to be on the side of the Yorkists and even Henry grows uncertain. Then, when Warwick tires of the wrangling and calls in the Yorkist army, the King cries out:

*My Lord of Warwick, hear but one word;
Let me for this my lifetime reign as king.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 170-71

In short, Henry is represented as volunteering to disinherit his own son provided he might rest on the throne himself.

Actually, this compromise was a shrewd move on York's part. By leaving Henry VI on the throne, York avoids an actual act of what might be considered usurpation and prevents loss of the "sympathy vote." The English public would be far less concerned with Henry's son (whom many suspected to be illegitimate, anyway). Furthermore, as Henry's heir, York would have all the power of the state and be King in fact, while poor Henry remained King only in name.

It was on October 23, 1460, that the compromise was reached, and there is a peculiar parallel with what happened just forty years earlier in



1420. Then mad King Charles VI of France had been forced to disinherit his son and accept vigorous Henry V of England as his heir (see page II-516). Henry had only to wait for the death of the sick old King-yet it was Henry who died first. Now mad King Henry VI of England (even the

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Roman numeral was the same) was forced to disinherit his son and accept vigorous Richard of York as his heir. Richard had only to wait for the death of the sick old King-yet-By means of this compromise, by the way, the Spirit's statement in the seance scene of *Henry VI, Part Two* was almost fulfilled. That statement had said that "The Duke yet lives that Henry shall depose," and Richard, Duke of York, had, in a sense, deposed Henry.

... *disinherited thine only son*

The compromise, carried through at the expense of the Prince of Wales, was a very sensible one, it would seem, and solved all problems, but one person at least would never accept it. That person was Queen Margaret. Her son, Edward, was seven years old now, and as long as he lived she would never for one moment give up the attempt to make him King eventually.

Queen Margaret had been at the Battle of Northampton, but she had managed to escape, taking her son with her. Together, they had managed to make their way to Scotland.

In the play, she now makes her appearance in London at the House of Parliament with her son, Edward of Wales. This is quite impossible, of course, since if they had been in London in 1460, they would both have been seized by the Yorkists and placed in the Tower. From there, in all probability, neither would have emerged for a long time, if ever.

Dramatically, though, the confrontation is necessary. When the Queen approaches, Exeter, who alone of the Lancastrian lords has accepted the compromise, tries to sneak away. So does the poor King, as frightened of his virago Queen as ever he was of York.

She stops them, however, and addresses her feeble husband with profound contempt, saying:

*Hadst thou but loved him [the Prince] half so well as I,
Or felt that pain which I did for him once,
Or nourished him as I did with my blood,
Thou wouldst have left thy dearest heart-blood there,
Rather than have made that savage duke thine heir
And disinherited thine only son.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 220-25

And actually, as long as the Prince lived, Margaret never gave up. She did not hesitate to appeal to foreigners for help, and when the English failed her she did not hesitate to bring mercenaries into the land.

This made her more unpopular than ever in England, but little she cared for that. She was not an Englishwoman by birth and she had no cause



to
love the land in which she had found only misery.
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She leaves Henry in a fury now, vowing to raise an army in the north
and lead it herself.

... all *the Northern earls and lords*

The second scene of the play opens at one of York's castles. It is located
near Wakefield, twenty-five miles south of York itself.

Shakespeare, with his anti-Yorkist bias, makes it appear that it is the
Yorkists that are ready to break the compromise, for York's sons urge
their father to make himself King outright without waiting for Henry's
death.

Thus, his son Richard tempts York by saying:

*And, father, do but think
How sweet a thing it is to wear a crown,
Within whose circuit is Elysium
And all that poets feign of bliss and joy.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 28-31

Actually, young Richard was still only eight years old, and to make him
the ringleader of the attempt to break the compromise treacherously
is
merely more of the vilification of which he was chief target in
Shakespeare's
time. (The speech has another purpose too, for it will gain a kind of grisly
irony soon enough.)

Richard of York is swayed by his son's words and agrees to make the
try for kingship outright when a Messenger arrives, crying:

*The Queen with all the Northern earls and lords
Intend here to besiege you in your castle:
She is hard by with twenty thousand men;*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 49-51

In actual history, however, York had no plans to break the compromise
and no need to. He lacked nothing but the name of King, and it was
surely
not worth renewing a civil war just for that.

It was Queen Margaret whose hostile acts were forcing an end to the
compromise. She was raising an army in the north (including
Scotsmen
eager for loot) and she simply had to be dealt with. Early in December
1460, then, only a month after he had been declared heir, York
hurried
northward. He took only a small force with him, feeling, perhaps, that
the
need for haste was uppermost and that a woman would be ineffective as
leader of armies anyway.

He didn't know Margaret. At Wakefield, he found himself neatly



trapped
by a far superior force.

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. . . *ten to one*

Richard of York might have remained in the castle and withstood a siege. A relieving army would have surely come up in time. However, he apparently could not bear the shame that would have come upon him at the word that he had been trapped and besieged by a woman.

The fire-eating young Richard (again the villain of the piece) urges battle and York allows himself to be overpersuaded, saying:

*Many a battle have I won in France,
When as the enemy hath been ten to one.
Why should I not now have the like success?*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 73-75

This fits in with the English legend that all battles in France were Agincourts. We can be sure, though, that York had no such impression in reality. His battles in France were not Agincourts and well he knew it

. . . *bloody Clifford* . . .

Shakespeare makes it appear that York's sons Edward and Richard were with him in the castle. They weren't. Edward was with part of the Yorkist army at the city of Gloucester, 125 miles to the southwest. Eight-year-old Richard wasn't yet to the wars at all.

It was York's second son, Edmund, Earl of Rutland, who was with him, and he appears in the play only at this one point. Shakespeare's source, Edward Hall, says Edmund is twelve years old at the time and he is therefore presented in this scene as a schoolboy. Actually, he was seventeen years old, only one year younger than Edward of March, who was already a seasoned warrior.

York tried to send Edmund of Rutland out of the castle, along with his Tutor (a priest named Sir Robert Aspall, though this name is not given in the play). York did this, presumably, in the hope of saving him in case the battle was lost, but luck was against the young man. Rutland says to his Tutor:

*Ah, whither shall I fly to 'scape their hands?
Ah, tutor, look where bloody Clifford comes!*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 1-2

Clifford's father had been slain at St. Albans (see page II-618) and Clifford had sworn to kill all members of York's family who came into his



hands. At the end of *Henry VI, Part Two* he particularly threatened York's children and that served the dramatic purpose of forecasting the scene that has now come.

Is as a Fury . . .

Young Rutland pleads for his life, but Clifford says, in a rage:

*The sight of any of the house of York
Is as a Fury to torment my soul;
And till I root out their accursed line
And leave not one alive, I live in hell.*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 30-33

The Furies (or Erinyes, to the Greeks) were three avenging goddesses whose function it was to pursue those guilty of great crimes, filling them with dread and driving them mad. They are the personification of remorse, or the maddening pangs of awakened conscience.

Rutland still pleads. He himself has done Clifford no harm, and if his father had:

. . . 'twas ere I was born.

-Act I, scene iii, line 39

Not quite. Clifford's father was killed at St. Albans in 1455, and at that time Rutland was twelve years old.

. . . one son . . .

Rutland makes one final plea, saying:

*Thou hast one son. For his sake pity me,
Lest in revenge thereof, sith God is just,
He be as miserably slain as I,*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 40-42

This sounds like a hindsight prophecy of something that will actually come to pass, but not so. Clifford will die in battle not long after this scene and will, indeed, leave behind one young son, Henry Clifford, about seven years old. Young Henry was brought up in obscurity in order to preserve him from Yorkist vengeance, so that he is sometimes referred



to as "the shepherd lord."

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After the final fall of the Yorkists, however, he came back into his own and lived to reach an age of about seventy before dying in bed.

... *Phaethon hath tumbled* ...

The battle was fought on December 30, 1460, and it was an utter defeat for Richard of York, who had been badly outnumbered. The next scene opens as York stumbles onto the stage, attempting to flee. He speaks, as he does so, of the doughty deeds of his sons Edward and Richard as they had attempted to rescue him, but failed. (Actually neither one was at the battle.) He does *not* mention his brother-in-law, the Earl of Salisbury, who *had* been trapped with him.

In the aftermath of the battle, Salisbury was also attempting flight. He was taken, carried to Pontefract (where Richard II had died), and executed, dying on the last day of the year at the age of sixty.

As for York himself, he is taken on the field of battle, and Clifford, who is among the captors, exults:

Now Phaethon hath tumbled from his car,

-Act I, scene iv, line 33

The same mythic metaphor is used for the fall of York as Shakespeare was to use some years later to describe the fall of Richard II (see page II-297).

... *wanton Edward* ...

Clifford would like, of course, to kill York on the spot, but savage Margaret has better sport in mind. She intends to torture York before she kills him and she is subtle enough to prefer mental torture to the mere breaking of limbs.

Once he is bound and helpless she taunts him:

*Where are your mess of sons to back you now?
The wanton Edward, and the lusty George?
And where's that valiant crookback prodigy [monster],
Dicky your boy ...*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 73-76

For the first time Edward is described as "wanton." He was indeed to become a great womanizer (though it is questionable whether he had yet had time to prove himself one as early as 1460) and his lust was to contribute mightily to the ruin of his house.

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The "valiant crookback prodigy" is, of course, young Richard, whom Shakespeare virtually never has anyone refer to without mention of his supposed deformities.



"Lusty George" is York's third son, who so far has not appeared onstage. He was born on October 21, 1449, in Dublin, while his father was serving as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. He was only eleven years old at the time of York's capture.

Margaret then reaches the very depths of infamy when she goes on to say:

*. . . where is your darling, Rutland?
Look, York, I stained this napkin with the blood
That valiant Clifford, with his rapier's point,
Made issue from the bosom of the boy;
And if thine eyes can water for his death,
I give thee this to dry thy cheeks withal.*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 78-83

Shakespeare's anti-Yorkist and pro-Lancastrian bias does not extend to the Frenchwoman Margaret. And indeed, she was so hated in England that she was the greatest asset the Yorkists had. The story of Rutland's death, as we can well imagine, was used to rouse England against her, and Rutland was made younger than he really was to increase the horror of the tale.

As the death of Humphrey of Gloucester had ruined Suffolk, so the death of Rutland was to ruin Margaret and the Lancastrian cause by losing her the last remnant of popular sympathy. And York's own end was converted into an even more pathetic tale. In this one case, Shakespeare follows the Yorkist party line, perhaps because he cannot bring himself to miss the chance of a scene of grisly perfection that no one in all history could have better handled than himself.

A crown for York . . .

Thus, Margaret is not done with her gruesome and horrible mockery. She cries out:

*A crown for York! and, lords, bow low to him.
Hold you his hands whilst I do set it on.*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 94-95

A paper crown is put on York's head, while all those assembled bow low to him in mock reverence. What a commentary on York's remark in the last act of *Henry VI, Part Two* concerning the crown: "That gold must round engirt these brows of mine" (see page II-612). The imperious



remark put into his mouth by Shakespeare was for this purpose put there, to forecast the moment when it would come true, with paper substituted for gold.

It is even more effective to consider now young Richard's comment just two scenes before: "How sweet a thing it is to wear a crown." York knows now how "sweet" it is and the time will come when young Richard will know as well.

What actually happened, historically, was, of course, not nearly as bad. York was found dead on the field and there was no occasion for Margaret's sadistic capering. His head was cut off and placed on the walls of York for all to see, and was then adorned with a paper crown to signify the vanity of his hopes for the succession. (That paper crown was, however, a propaganda mistake of appalling dimensions. The Yorkists built out of that crown the tale that was eventually used by Shakespeare in this play, and Margaret was pilloried for all time as a monster.)

She-wolf of France . . .

York has taken all of it dry-eyed, stunned at the disaster, but now Margaret demands his final words so that she might have the ultimate triumph of listening to his tormented wails.

York, however, can do better than that. In one final speech, the greatest in the three *Henry VI* plays, he spoils her triumph and gives her the name that marks her place in history for all time. He begins:

*She-wolf of France, but worse than wolves of France,
Whose tongue more poisons than the adder's tooth!
How ill-beseeming is it in thy sex
To triumph like an Amazonian trull*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 111-14

He taunts her with her father's poverty, denies to her any beauty, virtue, or statesmanship, then says:

*Thou art as opposite to every good
As the Antipodes are unto us,
Or as the South to the Septentrion.
O tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide!
How couldst thou drain the lifeblood of the child,
To bid the father wipe his eyes withal,
And yet be seen to bear a woman's face?*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 134-40

The Antipodes ("opposed feet") represent the other side of the spherical



("seven stars") refers to the Big Dipper, which is always in the northern sky, so that the word is a fancy synonym for "north."

It is the powerful line "O tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide!" that is noteworthy here above all, however. It has an importance quite apart from anything in the play.

When the English playwright Robert Greene (see page I-147) wrote a savage satire called *A Groatworth of Wit* in 1592, he snarlingly denounced

someone he called "an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you, and being an absolute Johannes-factotum is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country."

Shakespeare started as an actor and began to patch up the plays in which he was appearing (to the very natural annoyance of the writers thereof).

When he began producing popular plays of his own, it would naturally make men like Greene envious. What! Did a mere player think he could out-write *real* writers?

Greene did not name Shakespeare, but the semipun "Shake-scene" is enough to identify him, and if that is lacking there is that "tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide"-one word changed of what may be the juiciest single line Shakespeare had yet written and that possibly only the year before-which gives it away completely.

... *tigers of Hyrcania*

And now York weeps at last, saying:

*That face of his the hungry cannibals
Would not have touched, would not have stained with blood;
But you are more inhuman, more inexorable,
O, ten times more, than tigers of Hyrcania.
See, ruthless queen, a hapless father's tears:
This cloth thou dipp'd'st in blood of my sweet boy,
And I with tears do wash the blood away.
Keep thou the napkin, and go boast of this;
And if thou tell'st the heavy story right,
Upon my soul, the hearers will shed tears;
Yea, even my foes will shed fast-falling tears
And say "Alas, it was a piteous deed!"
There, take the crown, and, with the crown, my curse;*
-Act I, scene iv, lines 152-64

York has turned the tables. His speech has caused Northumberland, who is present, to break down in tears himself, and Margaret must



feel

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the truth of what York says-that from the propaganda standpoint she has been destroyed. She is from now on a she-wolf of France; she is from now on worse than a hungry cannibal, worse than a tiger of Hyrcania (Hyrcania is a wild region bordering the Caspian, noted in ancient times for its feral animals-the tales magnified by distance).

York, who was heir to the throne about six weeks altogether, is stabbed to death by Clifford and Margaret, but it is no triumph now.

And in this way, another part of the seance prophecy comes true. The Duke who has deposed Henry (see page II-588) has died a violent death.

Marched toward Saint Albans...

The news reaches Edward and Richard, the sons of York, and they are half mad with grief and rage at the deaths of their father and brother (and the manner of those deaths).

When Warwick enters, they fly to give him the news, but he has already heard of it and is bringing additional bad news.

After the death of York and the destruction of his small army, Margaret, her fury growing with victory, marched southward. The wild Scottish clansmen in her army, perennially angry with the English, looted to their hearts' content and Margaret made no attempt to stop them. There was no further hatred she could receive and what she wanted was only continued victory and continued revenge at whatever cost.

Warwick has nothing to say of his own father's death at Wakefield (since that was ignored by Shakespeare, who found it necessary to concentrate entirely on York), but goes on to say:

*I, then in London, keeper of the King,
Mustered my soldiers, gathered flocks of friends,
And very well appointed, as I thought,
Marched toward Saint Albans to intercept the Queen,
Bearing the King in my behalf along;*

-Act II, scene i, lines 111-15

Poor Henry VI, all through the Wars of the Roses (or at least that portion he lived to witness), had at no time even the feeblest shadow of a will of his own. He was merely a living flag, a symbol of royalty, to be used by whichever side controlled him. In this case, Warwick used him to indicate that he was fighting for the King, while the Queen was, by that very token, a rebel and traitor.

Before Warwick could assemble his forces after York's unexpected defeat and death, Margaret had swept all the way to St. Albans. There, on

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February 17, 1461, a second battle was fought, nearly six years after the first. This time it was the Lancastrian army that rounded the flank of the opposition and fell on its rear. Warwick had to retreat quickly,



leaving
numerous dead. Margaret had a second victory.

Lord George . . .

By her victory at the second Battle of St. Albans, Margaret was able to retake King Henry. She allowed the abbey at St. Albans to be looted for needed money, executed several prisoners, and showed every sign of intending to enter London. The Londoners, fearing her savagery and that of her Scots, began to make desperate preparations for defense.

London was on its own too, for Warwick, with what remained of his army, was moving rapidly westward to join the forces of Edward, who now, by his father's death, was not only Earl of March, but Duke of York as well.

Warwick says to Edward:

*Lord George your brother, Norfolk and myself,
In haste, post-haste, are come to join with you;*
-Act II, scene i, lines 138-39

George has not yet been onstage, but he is not yet twelve, after all. Still, his absence cannot be accounted for only by his youth, for Shakespeare makes all York's sons older than they are (except Rutland, whom he made younger), and George is three years older than Richard, whom Shakespeare has pictured as fighting like a hero in several battles.

Instead, the excuse used is that George was in Burgundy, and Warwick says:

*. . . for your brother, he was lately sent
From your kind aunt, Duchess of Burgundy,
With aid of soldiers to this needful war.*
-Act II, scene i, lines 145-47

Shakespeare's attempt to make George's absence plausible entangles him in an anachronism. At the time of the second Battle of St. Albans, in 1461, Philip the Good (see page II-514) was still Duke of Burgundy. It was not till 1467 that he died and was succeeded by his son, Charles the Bold. Before Charles had been duke for a year, he married Margaret of York, a daughter of Richard of York. The Duchess of Burgundy was thus George's sister rather than his aunt and she did not in any case become duchess till 1468.



Making another head . . .

Warwick is careful to explain that he was hastening westward not in retreat, but merely to seize the opportunity to fight again. He explains that:

*... in the marches here we heard you were,
Making another head to fight again.*

-Act II, scene i, lines 140-41

Shakespeare is here being unfair to Edward. He was doing far more than merely "making another head" (gathering new forces). He had gathered an army almost immediately the news of York's death had reached him and had been ready to fight far sooner than Warwick had been.

On February 2, 1461, Edward fought a battle against Welsh partisans of the Lancastrians at Mortimer's Cross, about a dozen miles southwest of Ludlow. He won that battle and began marching eastward to join Warwick.

He was still marching when word came of Warwick's defeat at St. Albans.

The two met, then, not because Warwick had retired westward, but far more because Edward was boldly pushing eastward.

By the time Edward and Warwick joined forces they were only a day or two from London. It was now February 23, 1461, a week after the second Battle of St. Albans, and Margaret's ferocious cavalry was raiding the northern edge of the city.

But news reached Margaret that Edward was marching posthaste toward her. Her own army was in disarray and she was surrounded by hostile countryside. She considered it only prudent to retire northward. She did so and the threat to London was lifted.

London went wild with joy, and to them, now, Edward was a savior dropped from heaven. When, on February 25, 1461, Edward rode into London at the head of the rescuing army, he was greeted with a hero's welcome.

... this brave town of York

Margaret's retreat was a long one—some 160 miles northward to York. The next scene opens outside that city, and Margaret, who is now the possessor of King Henry, shows him the sights—particularly the head of old York, still decomposing on the wall of the city. She says:



*Welcome, my lord, to this brave town of York.
Yonder's the head of that arch-enemy
That sought to be encompassed with your crown.*

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Doth not the object cheer your heart, my lord?

-Act II, scene ii, lines 1-4

The sight might have satisfied Margaret's ferocity but certainly there was little else to commend it, for the Queen's victories and cruelties had by now utterly boomeranged.

A half year before, Richard of York had deemed it impolitic to seize the throne and contented himself with being heir. But now the tales of the martyred deaths of Richard of York and of his son, Edmund of Rutland, had created immense sympathy for the Yorkist side, and Margaret's wild

march southward had created equal hatred for the Lancastrians. Even poor

Henry's plight no longer struck a chord, for he was with Margaret and therefore party to her misdeeds.

The result was that only two months after York's death, his son was able to do what he himself could not. On March 2, 1461, a council of the nobility declared Edward King, and on March 4 the young man headed a great procession to Westminster and sat on the throne that his father (despite Shakespeare) had only dared touch. He was still not yet twenty-one years old, and now he reigned as Edward IV.

Yet King Edward could not remain in London to enjoy being King. Margaret still held the north and she would have to be defeated. The Wars of the Roses went on.

Comes Warwick . . .

Predictably, mild Henry takes no pleasure in the sight of York's dead head. He turns from all bloodshed; even regretting the bloody victories of his father, Henry V (something no one else in Shakespeare does-and perhaps this is one occasion when Shakespeare's pacifism dares speak against the great Henry's deeds directly).

Henry VI says:

*I'll leave my son my virtuous deeds behind;
And would my father had left me no more!
For all the rest is held at such a rate
As brings a thousand-fold more care to keep
Than in possession any jot of pleasure.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 49-53

One gathers that the very kingship wearies Henry and that his view is



quite different from that of young Richard, who felt that the crown held Elysium.

But blood must continue, for the Yorkist forces have swarmed northward on Lancastrian heels. A Messenger arrives, saying:

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*... with a band of thirty thousand men
Comes Warwick, backing of the Duke of York,
And in the towns, as they do march along,
Proclaims him king . . .*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 68-71

Thus, in place of a Duke of York killed for aspiring to be King comes another Duke of York who is proclaimed King.

Helen of Greece . . .

The Yorkist army arrives and there is the usual slanging match between the two sides. At one point, Edward says to Margaret:

*Helen of Greece was fairer far than thou,
Although thy husband may be Menelaus;
And ne'er was Agamemnon's brother wronged
By that false woman as this King by thee.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 146-49

This harks back to Suffolk's statement in the last speech of *Henry VI, Part One* to the effect that he was going to France for a Queen as Paris had gone to Greece (see page II-571). Paris had gotten the beautiful Helen, who betrayed her husband and brought ruin to her adopted country of Troy. The less beautiful Margaret, it is implied, has done the same.

But more is implied too. The accusation of Henry VI playing the part of Menelaus and of his being wronged by Margaret clearly implies the illegitimacy of the young Prince of Wales, and one can see the Yorkist line of argument. Not only is Edward rightful King of England through the line of Mortimer, but even if it were not so, Henry is incapable of rule and his son is illegitimate, and the throne is then Edward's by inheritance anyway.

Forspent with toil . . .

The two armies plunge into furious battle, the force of which becomes clear at the very beginning of the next scene, when Warwick makes his appearance onstage, crying out:

*Forspent with toil, as runners with a race,
I lay me down a little while to breathe;*

-Act II, scene iii, lines 1-2

The scene is Towton, a small place about fifteen miles southwest of



York, and the battle took place on March 28, 1461. It began in a swirling snowstorm and it continued for six hours.

No careful tactics were involved. So furiously frantic were both sides that they merely fell on each other frontally and hacked away until, in all, some thirty-eight thousand Englishmen were dead on either side—a carnage far greater than any battle in France through all the Hundred Years' War.

The bloody, senseless nature of the fighting is made plain by the device of having King Henry comment on it. He sits down in a corner of the field, wishing he were dead or living the life of a harmless shepherd, and watches the particular tragedy of civil war—that members of one family might be fighting on opposite sides. He witnesses the plight of a father who has killed his son, and of a son who has killed his father.

... towards Berwick ...

In the end, though, it is the Yorkists who have the victory. The Lancastrian forces are smashed completely, and Queen Margaret must flee the field. The Prince of Wales comes running onto the stage with his mother (actually, he was only eight years old at the time of the Battle of Towton), crying to King Henry:

Fly, father, fly! for all your friends are fled

-Act II, scene v, line 125

Queen Margaret is more specific. She says:

Mount you, my lord, towards Berwick post amain

-Act II, scene v, line 128

Berwick (see page II-591) is on the Scottish border. And indeed, Margaret, her son, and her husband must, in the aftermath of Towton, leg it to Scotland once again, as she had done the year before after the Battle of Northampton.

Giving no ground ...



With royalty gone, Clifford staggers onto the stage. He is badly wounded.

He has, according to the Shakespearean version of the battle, been fighting with young Richard. Whether he has or not doesn't matter, for his end came in less prosaic fashion. In the aftermath of the battle, Clifford, while removing his helmet, was accidentally struck in the throat by an arrow shot by an unknown hand.

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He is onstage now to die, unrepentant to the last, and breathing the belief of all extremists always—that all misfortune comes from compromise and that only unyieldingness can win out. He says, in apostrophe to the absent King Henry:

*... Henry, hadst thou swayed as kings should do,
Or as thy father and his father did,
Giving no ground unto the house of York,
They never then had sprung like summer flies;*

-Act II, scene vi, lines 14-17

Clifford dies and lies there to be taunted by his victorious Yorkist enemies. The head of York is taken down from the walls of York, and the head of Clifford is put up instead. The Butcher had survived his victims just three months.

The Earl of Northumberland (grandson of Hotspur), who had been moved to tears by York's last speech, also died at this battle.

... crowned England's royal king

Edward IV had been declared King, but there had earlier been no time to go through the full ceremony, thanks to the necessity of chasing north after Margaret. Now, with the happy (for the Yorkists) outcome of the Battle of Towton, there would be time for all desirable ceremony. Warwick says to Edward:

*... now to London with triumphant march,
There to be crowned England's royal king;*

-Act II, scene vi, lines 87-88

The coronation of Edward, carried through with full splendor and pageantry, even though Henry VI yet lived, took place on June 29, 1461, just three months after the Battle of Towton.

... Duke of Gloucester



One of the King's prerogatives is the naming of peers, and Edward, after Towton, promises to make his brothers into dukes (as, indeed, he proceeded to do after the coronation). He says:

*Richard, I will create thee Duke of Gloucester;
And George, of Clarence:*

-Act II, scene vi, lines 103-4

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These titles are fitting. On two previous occasions Clarence had been the title given to a second son. Thus, Lionel of Antwerp (see page II-259) had been created the 1st Duke of Clarence in 1362. He was Edward III's third son, to be sure, but the second had died in infancy and Lionel was thus the second to survive to manhood. (It was from Lionel that Edward traced the descent that made him, in the Yorkist view, legitimate King, so that too militated in favor of the use of the title.)

In 1368 Lionel died without male heirs and it was not until 1412 that another Duke of Clarence was created. This was Thomas, the second son of Henry IV (see page II-361) and the younger brother of Henry V. He had died in 1421, without sons, and now it was the turn of George, second surviving son of Richard of York and younger brother of Edward IV, to be the third holder of the title.

In the same way, Gloucester had become a traditional title for a king's youngest son or brother. The first Duke of Gloucester had been Thomas of

Woodstock, given the title in 1385. He was the youngest son of Edward III. The title became extinct in 1397 with Thomas' death and was revived in 1414 when Henry V made his youngest brother, Humphrey, the Duke of Gloucester. Again it became extinct, in 1447, with Humphrey's death, and now Richard was receiving it to become the third holder of the title.

Richard didn't like this, for as he says:

*Let me be Duke of Clarence, George of Gloucester;
For Gloucester's dukedom is too ominous.*

-Act II, scene vi, lines 106-7

He might well say so, for the first duke, Thomas, after being nearly mas-
ter of King Richard II, was finally imprisoned and assassinated (see page

II-267); while the second duke, Humphrey, after being nearly master of

King Henry VI, was imprisoned and assassinated (see page II-599). One

might easily be suspicious enough to suspect the same fate for the third;

though, as a matter of fact, Richard was not fated to follow the pattern.

He did better-and worse.

However, Clarence was, in its way, an ominous title as well. The first

duke, Lionel, died at the age of thirty. He was the least of those sons of

Edward III who survived to manhood, and was the first to die. The



second duke, Thomas, died at the age of thirty-three. He was the least of the sons of Henry IV, and the first to die. Might it not be that George would expect the same? Because that is what, in the end, he got.

In any case, Warwick impatiently derides Richard's superstitious remark and the appointments stand.

... in thy shoulder...

After Towton, Edward expresses prime gratitude to Warwick, saying:

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*... in thy shoulder do I build my seat,
And never will I undertake the thing
Wherein thy counsel and consent is wanting.*

-Act II, scene vi, lines 100-2

The gratitude was deserved. It had been Warwick's energy and dash that had kept the Yorkist cause alive during its dark hours; it had been his riches and power that had been a prime factor in raising armies for York.

And now that he was Earl of Salisbury (by his father's death) as well as of Warwick, he was richer and more powerful than ever.

He was thirty-three years old at the time of Edward's coronation, and provided he could be the most influential man in England after the King (whose first cousin he was), he was content to bear all the heavy burdens

of the kingdom on his shoulder.

Even after the coronation, there were corners of England that required quieting, particularly in the north, and this task Warwick took upon himself.

Indeed, he had family reasons for it. The Nevilles and the Percys were the great rival families of the north and that old feud had simply taken on a new name when the Nevilles became Yorkists and the Percys Lancastrians.

In the north, besides, there was still Somerset (the son of Richard of York's great enemy), who had escaped northward from Towton and was still striving to raise forces. Warwick sent his brother, John of Montagu (see page II-624) against Somerset. (Montagu had been captured at the second Battle of St. Albans and had been imprisoned, but he was freed once more after the Battle of Towton.)

On May 15, 1464, Montagu surprised Somerset at Hexham in the far north, only thirty miles from the Scottish border. There the Lancastrians

were defeated once again, and Somerset was killed. Somerset had no legitimate sons and left behind two younger brothers as the last members

of the Beaufort family, sprung from John of Gaunt by his third wife—at least the last male members descended through an all-male line.

All organized Lancastrian resistance came temporarily to an end thereafter, and the Nevilles crowned their victory when Montagu was given the title of Duke of Northumberland immediately after the victory at Hex-



ham; a title which had been borne by four Percys (the first of whom had been Hotspur's father). What's more, another Neville, Warwick's brother,

George, was made Archduke of York in 1465. The Nevilles thus reached the very peak of their power and were the uncrowned kings of the north.

As for Edward IV, he remained in London, enjoying himself tremendously. He liked to eat and he liked sex, and he had food and women in abundance. He was handsome and charming and it was so long since London had seen a King who was a man's man rather than a sniveling monk (as it must then have seemed to them) that Edward's self-indulgence but made him the more popular.

All seemed well for the new young King.

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. . . *the Lady Bona* . . .

Only one Lancastrian didn't give up and wouldn't give up—Queen Margaret. Having reached Scotland after the disaster at Towton, she did her best to persuade the Scottish rulers to support her. Edward could offer Scotland larger bribes, however, and Margaret, despairing of help in the northern kingdom, took her son to France.

There she hoped to interest the French in helping her and even went so far as to offer them Calais in exchange. The French were by no means eager to start the Hundred Years' War over again and besides there was still a very dangerous conflict between France and Burgundy, for the latter duchy was stronger than ever, and France's hands were not free.

Nevertheless, Warwick quite realized that the French would be eager to help Margaret all they could. They might do so quietly and underhandedly to avoid direct implication, but even that much could be troublesome indeed for England. It was necessary, then, to neutralize the French somehow, and that might best be done by a marital alliance.

The two most recent French marital alliances had been disastrous for England. Catherine of France had married Henry V and had passed on her father's mental weakness to her son, Henry VI. Margaret of Anjou had married Henry VI and of that marriage the less said the better. Nevertheless, hope springs eternal. . .

Edward IV was young and handsome and surely somewhere in the French royal family a pleasant match could be made for him that would cement relations between England and France to the point of making Margaret's efforts useless.

In the play, Warwick says, in the immediate aftermath of the Battle of Towton, that they must go to London for Edward's coronation and:

*From whence shall Warwick cut the sea to France,
And ask the Lady Bona for thy queen.*

-Act II, scene vi, lines 89-90

The Lady Bona is the third daughter of Amadeus VIII of Savoy and the younger sister of the French Queen. Warwick's mission came in mid-1464 after the Battle of Hexham, not immediately after Towton, as would appear in the play. Shakespeare here compresses four years of time.



... *Lewis a prince soon won...*

When Margaret went to France, she took her idolized son with her, but she was not concerned for Henry, whose presence would only have been an embarrassment. He was left behind in the north of England, where

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for some years he lurked as a fugitive, aided in secret by such Lancastrians

as dared the wrath of Warwick and his adherents. Sometime in mid-1465

he was recognized by Yorkists, or possibly betrayed to them. In July 1465 he was arrested, taken to London, and placed in the Tower.

Shakespeare uses his recognition and arrest (by a pair of forest keepers

-game wardens, we might say) as a means of advancing the plot somewhat, for he has Henry soliloquize on events as he wanders through the

northern forests. Talking of Margaret's mission to France and of Warwick's

competing embassy, he says:

*// this news be true, ;
 Poor queen and son, your labor is but lost;
 For Warwick is a subtle orator,
 And Lewis a prince soon won with moving words.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 31-34

"Lewis" is Louis XI, who now ruled France. His father was Charles VII (see page II-525), who reigned throughout the last thirty years of the Hundred Years' War and who lived to see the English driven out. He died in 1461, soon after the Battle of Towton.

His son, Louis XI, was crowned at Rheims on August 15, 1461, just six weeks after the "coronation of Edward IV. In 1464, when Warwick was going to France, Louis had been King for four years.

Perhaps he had yet to make his mark, but Henry VI's estimate that Louis was a "prince soon won with moving words" was almost ludicrously wrong. Louis XI was one of the shrewdest men ever to sit on a throne. (He is sometimes called "the Spider King" because he was visualized as sitting in the middle of a web and controlling affairs in every direction by gentle twitches of this strand or that.) Surely neither Margaret nor Warwick nor anyone else would ever be able to win him over to anything he didn't want to do.



... *Sir Richard Grey* ...

Meanwhile, back in London, King Edward finds he must make decisions concerning the upsetting aftermath of the civil broils. He discusses one suppliant with his younger brother Richard, saying:

*Brother of Gloucester, at Saint Albans field
This lady's husband, Sir Richard Grey, was slain,
His land then seized on by the conqueror.
Her suit is now to repossess those lands;*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 1-4

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The lady involved is a "commoner" in the sense that she is not of royal blood and is not related to any of the kingly lines of Europe. Nevertheless, she is of the aristocracy. Her husband was not quite "Sir Richard Grey," as this passage has it, but Sir John Grey, 7th Baron Ferrers of Groby. He had been a Lancastrian and had died at the age of twenty-nine at the second Battle of St. Albans in 1461. Having been declared guilty of treason, his property was confiscated.

Now, three years later, his widow has come begging Edward for the return of that property to the young children left behind by her husband. The widow was Elizabeth Grey, born Elizabeth Woodville, and she was the daughter of Sir Richard Woodville.

Sir Richard Woodville had been with Richard of York when the latter was head of the English forces in France, and in 1448 had earned the title of Baron Rivers for his services there. In 1450 he helped put down Cade's rebellion. What's more, about 1436 he had married Jacquetta of Luxembourg, who was the widow of the Duke of Bedford (see page II-415), who had died the year before.

Sir Richard was a Lancastrian when England split into civil war, fighting on the side of King Henry all the way through the Battle of Towton. After that battle, however, he came over to the Yorkist side, swearing fealty to Edward IV.

When Edward IV was visiting Jacquetta of Luxembourg at her manor, the lady's daughter, Elizabeth, seized the opportunity to make her request for the confiscated property.

The amorous Edward was much taken by the beautiful Elizabeth and undoubtedly would have liked to make love to her in return for granting her request. The details we don't know, though Shakespeare has a richly comic scene in which Edward tries to get Elizabeth to agree to go to bed with him while Elizabeth slips and slides in an attempt to avoid doing so without losing her suit, and brothers George and Richard make dryly ribald comments on the sidelines.

In the end, somehow, Elizabeth actually persuaded Edward to marry her, and on May 1, 1464, that marriage took place.

The marriage, into which Edward was led by infatuation, was extremely impolitic. The fact that Elizabeth was of non-royal blood was sure to displease the rest of the aristocracy, who would resent having one of themselves suddenly raised to a position higher than themselves. Furthermore, she was five years older than Edward (twenty-seven years to his twenty-two) and was a widow with three children, and that too would be found offensive by the whisperers and gossipers of the court.

Edward, who must have been terribly embarrassed, and a little uneasy,



as to the reaction on the part of his nobles, kept the marriage secret for six months, even to the incredible point of not telling Warwick about it when the latter went to France to arrange for a royal bride for his royal master. (What Edward could possibly have been thinking of, we can't be

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sure. Perhaps he felt that Warwick's diplomacy might fall through any-way, or perhaps he thought that by delay he might have time to think of some way out of the mess.)

... the golden time I look for

Edward has to break off his interview with Lady Grey to attend to King

Henry, who has been brought to London as a prisoner. Left alone onstage,

Richard of Gloucester, the King's youngest brother, now expresses his own feelings.

The thought of Edward's marriage to anyone at all is displeasing to him because it will mean the possibility of children who will be nearer to the throne than himself. Concerning Edward, he says spitefully:

*Would he were wasted, marrow, bones and all,
That from his loins no hopeful branch may spring,
To cross me from the golden time I look for!*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 125-27

Suddenly, Shakespeare presents Richard as ambitious for the crown. This is the further working of the anti-Yorkist bias, which from this point on is most sharply concentrated on Richard, for reasons which will be clear enough as this play and the next proceed.

It is precisely because Richard's actions do not match the guilt of his later reputation that Shakespeare must have him mouth villainous speeches every once in a while. This is similar to the fashion in which Richard of York in the earlier plays was constantly being made to speak treason even though he can never be shown committing any.

Actually, at the time of Edward's marriage to Elizabeth Grey, Richard was still only twelve years old and certainly lacked the kind of ambition attributed to him here. In fact, from all that is known of Richard, he was completely and utterly faithful to his brother through all of Edward's reign.

Nevertheless, Shakespeare has Richard count up the individuals who stand between him and the crown, even if Edward did not marry or if he died without children. He says:

*... between my soul's desire and me-
The lustful Edward's title buried-
Is Clarence, Henry, and his son young Edward,
And all the unlooked-for issue of their bodies,*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 128-31



In 1464 Henry VI still lived, as did his son Edward, Prince of Wales. In addition, of the Beaufort family, which was also descended from John
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of Gaunt, there were still two younger sons of Somerset. In other words, four males yet existed who were descended from John of Gaunt by way of males only.

And even if Gaunt's progeny are disregarded as having a right inferior to that of the progeny of Lionel of Clarence, and even if King Edward were to die without an heir, there still remained George of Clarence, a brother younger than Edward, but older than Richard.

... *Love forswore me* ...

Richard feels that only the crown can content him because he cannot find consolation in love. He says:

*Why, Love forswore me in my mother's womb:
And, for [so that] / should not deal in her soft laws,
She did corrupt frail Nature with some bribe,
To shrink mine arm up like a withered shrub;
To make an envious mountain on my back,
Where sits deformity to mock my body;
To shape my legs of an unequal size;
To disproportion me in every part,
Like to a chaos, or an unlicked bear-whelp
That carries no impression like the dam.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 153-62

Here is the full list of Richard's deformities, all fictitious. Can a man with a hunchback, a withered arm, and a clubfoot fight like a demon in battle and be superlatively skillful in strenuous hand-to-hand battle, as we know from history and as is true even in Shakespeare's plays?

Richard's comparison of himself to an "unlicked bear-whelp" is the result of a nature legend that grew up out of the fact that the mother bear gives birth in the winter while she is hibernating. The cubs are unusually small at birth but have some months of security and repose in which to suckle and grow.

Careless observations of the newborn cubs gave rise to surprise at their unusual smallness compared to their mother, and even compared to the cubs themselves in the later stage in which they were usually first seen at the end of the hibernating season. The legend arose that they were born shapeless and were then licked into bear form by their mothers.

Richard, then, is here bitterly commenting that he himself was never licked into shape.

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... *the murderous Machiavel* ...



Richard therefore determines to gain the crown by any possible means and lists the talents he knows he has for the purpose, saying:

*I'll play the orator as well as Nestor,
Deceive more slyly than Ulysses could,
And, like a Sinon, take another Troy.
I can add colors to the chameleon,
Change shapes with Proteus for advantages,
And set the murderous Machiavel to school.
Can I do this, and cannot get a crown?
Tut, were it farther off, I'll pluck it down.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 188-95

Nestor (see page I-91), Ulysses (see page 1-92), and Sinon (see page I-210) are all well-known characters in the tale of Troy, much used in literature as symbols of wisdom, shrewdness, and treason respectively.

Proteus was a sea god in Greek myths, usually pictured as an old man who herded the sea creatures. He had the ability to foretell the future and also the ability to change shapes at will. If anyone wanted information, he had to sneak up on Proteus, seize him, and then hold him through all the changes in shape he undertook-whether into a lion, a monstrous snake, even a dancing fire. If the man in whose grasp he was held maintained his grip steadily and boldly, Proteus would turn back into his natural shape and give the desired information.

Proteus became the very symbol of inconstancy, therefore, and "protean" means "changeable."

As for Machiavelli (see page II-280), he was to Elizabethans (and to some moderns) the very epitome of Italian intrigue and deceit, so that for Richard to claim to be able to be so much more advanced than he as to be able to teach him was going far indeed. As a matter of fact, it goes further than it seems, for Machiavelli was not born until five years after Edward's marriage-the supposed occasion for Richard's present speech.

... the greatest part of Spain

The scene now shifts to France, where Margaret and Warwick are disputing before the throne of Louis XI, Margaret begging for help to her cause, and Warwick offering a marital alliance. The old, old arguments over the succession are aired. Warwick boldly declares Henry VI a usurper,

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implying that the entire Lancastrian line has reigned illegally, having unrightfully taken the throne from the Mortimer family.

This is disputed by an English nobleman who is present and says:

*Then Warwick disannuls great John of Gaunt,
Which did subdue the greatest part of Spain;*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 81-82

This is a reference to Gaunt's Spanish expedition, which certainly



did not "subdue the greatest part of Spain," or indeed, any part of it. It was a complete failure (see page II-263) but it suits Elizabethans, who had, only four years before, beaten off the vast Spanish Armada, to put it this way.

The speaker is John de Vere, 13th Earl of Oxford, a convinced Lancastrian and one of the few fated to survive the Wars of the Roses.

. . . your king married the Lady Grey

In the end Warwick persuades Louis XI to accept the marital alliance. This makes sense, for Louis would surely have reasoned that it was better to make friends with an apparently securely seated monarch than to lose time and effort (and court danger, too, perhaps) by siding with one the nation had rejected.

But then come letters from England, and when King Louis reads those addressed to him, he is furious, and we can scarcely blame him. He cries out:

*What! has your king married the Lady Grey?
And now, to soothe your forgery and his,
Sends me a paper to persuade me patience?
Is this th'alliance that he seeks with France?
Dare he presume to scorn us in this manner?*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 174-78

What happened was that after Edward had been married for some months, he found it no longer possible to keep the secret. It must have been obvious there was some sort of intimate relationship between the King and Lady Grey, and Lady Grey must have bitterly resented being taken to be a mistress where she was really a Queen. What's more, Edward may have begun to fear that if he kept the marriage secret any longer, he might raise a question as to the legitimacy of any sons he might have and lay the groundwork for future civil wars.

So, on September 29, 1464, a great council was held and the former Lady Grey was formally introduced as Edward's wife and, therefore, Queen of England.

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The marital negotiations in France were indeed broken off and it was indeed a dreadful affront to King Louis and an even greater humiliation for Warwick.

It was an insult to Bona of Savoy as well, though she came out of it well. She went on to marry Gian Galeazzo, Duke of Milan. She survived him and then ruled Milan in the name of her young son. On the whole,



her life was more successful than that of Edward's wife was fated to be.

... return to Henry

Warwick, thus humiliated, is maddened into seeking revenge by any means. He remembers the great deeds he has done for the house of York.

He remembers the death of his father in battle for York and he even remembers disgraces he has stoically endured for his King's sake. He says:

Did I let pass th'abuse done to my niece?

-Act III, scene iii, line 188

This is a reference to a tale that King Edward, an inveterate seducer, once attempted to proposition Warwick's niece while a visitor in Warwick's home. What would have been an incredibly gross act from anyone else becomes permissible in a King, and Warwick let the matter slide.

Now, however, Edward has gone too far, and Warwick says:

*... to repair my honor lost for him [King Edward]
/ here renounce him and return to Henry.*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 193-94

Here again Shakespeare condenses time—six full years of it.

Warwick, humiliated by Edward's marriage, nevertheless (in actual history) had to swallow his pride. Rebellions against a King (even by Warwick) could not be brought into existence by a snap of the fingers. Warwick would have to gain confederates, gather an army, win some measure of public opinion. In short, he needed time.

Therefore, Warwick sailed back to England, to all outward appearances acquiescing in the decision of his King. In reality, he began to spin his web and to plot Edward's downfall.

He had material to work with, for Edward's marriage had hurt him in many ways. The new Queen had, after all, been daughter and wife to Lancastrians, and that offended many hitherto loyal Yorkists. Why, after all, should a Lancastrian woman be so rewarded, when worthy Yorkists were being disregarded?

It wasn't as though it were the Queen alone. She had a large family and all of them now flocked to court to be rewarded with lands, titles, and office.

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Elizabeth had five brothers and seven sisters, for all of whom good marriages were now arranged and to whom fat estates fell in consequence. Her father, Sir Richard Woodville, became treasurer and then lord high constable.

All these honors had to come from somewhere, and since in the first few years of Edward's reign the Nevilles had virtually monopolized power, they began losing out now. For instance, Warwick wanted a nephew of his



to marry the heiress of the Duke of Exeter, but Queen Elizabeth used her influence to secure her for her own oldest son, Thomas Grey, by her former marriage.

In proportion as the Neville family lost power in court to the swarming Woodvilles and Greys, Warwick grew more furious and more intent on revenge and more anxious to whisper in the ears of those who shared his own dislike for the new situation.

The final straw came in foreign policy. Warwick still favored some sort of alliance with France, but Edward had another idea.

France was still at odds with Burgundy. In 1467 Philip the Good (see page II-514) had died and his son, Charles the Bold, became Duke of Burgundy. Under Charles, Burgundy reached the peak of its power, and Charles's ambition was to defeat France and gain a royal title for himself. Through his entire ten-year reign, he carried on a duel with *Louis XI*. It was Charles's warlike ability versus Louis' patient shrewdness and it was probably this duel that kept Louis from interfering in English affairs more decisively.

As it was, England had to choose which side it was to favor, France or Burgundy—it could scarcely be friends with both, and its best bet would be to side with the eventual winner, if one could but know which the winner would be.

Warwick wanted France, but Edward, again behind his onetime supporter's back, chose Burgundy. The alliance with Burgundy was concluded in 1467, and in 1468 Edward's sister, Margaret, married Charles the Bold.

That was the very end for Warwick. If there had ever been a chance for some kind of reconciliation with Edward, that killed it

... as for Clarence. . .

Warwick, in his speech to King Louis immediately after hearing of Edward's marriage (following Shakespeare's version of history), speaks of allies, saying:

*And as for Clarence, as my letters tell me,
He's very likely now to fall from him,
For matching more for wanton lust than honor.*

-Act iii, scene iii, lines 208-10

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Odd! After what Shakespeare has put into the mouth of Richard of Gloucester, it might seem inevitable that it would be Richard who would seize the chance to betray his brother, hoping that somehow he would be able to snatch at the crown. He would certainly do this if he were the monster he was sedulously portrayed as being *in* the next century. Yet actually,

Richard remained staunchly faithful to his brother, despite the marriage, and never rose to the lures of Warwick.

It was George of Clarence, rather, who was the weak one. It was he who seemed to have ambition, who resented the overwhelming influence of the Queen's relatives at court. It was he, perhaps, who aspired to the crown and it was he whom Warwick was able to wean away.



Warwick had no sons, but he did have two attractive daughters, who, in addition to the undeniable beauty of their persons, were England's greatest heiresses. Warwick offered the older, Isabella, to Clarence after the final outrage of the Burgundian marriage. King Edward, not so stupid as to fail to see the danger in this marital union, forbade the marriage. Clarence stubbornly found occasion to go to Calais, and there, in July 1469, he married Isabella Warwick. After that, Warwick was sure he could count on the boy. (He was twenty years old at the time.)

The signal for open revolt was now raised. King Louis of France, once the Burgundian marriage had been put through, could only decide that Edward was going to support Charles the Bold against him, and he could have no other response than to do what he could to pull Edward down.

Warwick's influence and King Louis' discreetly offered funds raised armies in the north of England, which was crying out against the King's relatives and which had been Lancastrian not too long before. Warwick's older brother, John Neville, the new-made Duke of Northumberland, hesitated. He did not like to oppose his brother. Hastily (perhaps too hastily)

Edward took back the title of Northumberland and returned it to the Percy family. If John Neville had hesitated before, he hesitated no longer. He joined the revolt.

King Edward sent an army northward to destroy the rebels, and on July 26, 1469, battle was joined at Edgecote, some twenty miles southwest of Northampton, site of the Yorkist victory ten years before.

This battle was not a Yorkist victory. The King's army was defeated, and Richard Woodville, the Queen's father, together with John Woodville, one of her brothers, were taken and executed.

Now Warwick, with his new son-in-law, Clarence, could return from Calais to England in clear triumph. Warwick had shown his power and it seemed quite evident that Edward could not remain King without him. He

was the "king maker" in truth, and Edward would have to admit it.

However, Edward was actually a capable fighter and politician on his own (when he could bring himself to make the effort), and there were many who were on his side and would be glad to see the powerful Warwick taken down a notch. There was much and tedious pulling to and

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fro as Edward and Warwick lunged and fainted, and in April 1470 Warwick, Clarence, and their families sailed back to Calais to draw new breath. Here too Edward was ahead of them. The Warwick party was denied admittance and the mouths of cannon aimed in their direction looked deadly. Warwick now had no choice but to make for France itself and become openly Lancastrian. Shrewd Louis XI arranged a reconciliation between Margaret of Anjou and the man who had been her greatest enemy

after Richard of York himself. This took place in June 1470, so that Shakespeare, in showing Warwick to have turned Lancastrian immediately

after Edward's marriage, skips (as aforesaid) six busy years.

... mine eldest daughter. . .



The reconciliation between Warwick and Margaret can scarcely rest on words alone, not after all that lay between them in the past. Something firmer was required, and, as it happened, Warwick, who had used one daughter for George of Clarence, had another for Margaret. He says to the tight-lipped Queen:

*This shall assure my constant loyalty,
That if our Queen and this young Prince agree,
I'll join mine eldest daughter and my joy
To him forthwith in holy wedlock bands.*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 240-43

Shakespeare gets the daughters wrong. The eldest daughter was Isabella, who had been Duchess of Clarence for a year now. It was his younger daughter, Anne, whom Warwick now arranged to marry to Edward, son of Henry VI, and Prince of Wales. Prince Edward was seven-teen years old at the time.

England is safe . . .

The fourth act opens with King Edward introducing his new wife to a sullen court. His brothers, George of Clarence and Richard of Gloucester, openly express their displeasure, and Montagu (Warwick's brother) speaks of the benefits of a French alliance, now made impossible.

Edward blusters that he need not fear either France or Warwick and one courtier backs him up by saying:

*Why, knows not Montague that of itself
England is safe, if true within itself?*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 40-41

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This standard piece of English patriotism is spoken by William Hastings. He was forty years old at this point; that is, a dozen years older than King Edward. He was the King's boon companion. It often happens that a young king, addicted to pleasure, finds an older, more experienced man useful to him in the making of arrangements for fun and games. Hastings served the King in this fashion and was a great favorite of his as a result.

. . . the heir of the Lord Hungerford

Naturally, Hastings is rewarded for his services as master of the revels and part-time pimp, and George of Clarence sardonically observes in response to the other's backing of the King:

*For this one speech Lord Hastings well deserves
To have the heir of the Lord Hungerford.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 47-48

Lord Hungerford had been briefly referred to in *Henry VI, Part One*



as having been captured at the Battle of Patay (see page II-529). He had died in 1449, but by now part or all of his rich estate had been concentrated in the hands of a girl who was given to Hastings in marriage. By this marriage he could be granted the title "Baron," and could be addressed as Lord Hastings.

Envious George apparently feels that such estates should somehow be kept in the family.

... the heir and daughter of Lord Scales

Richard of Gloucester also objects to Edward's free and easy distribution of estates. He says to King Edward:

*... methinks your Grace hath not done well
To give the heir and daughter of Lord Scales
Unto the brother of your loving bride.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 51-53

Lord Scales is also mentioned in *Henry VI, Part One* as having been taken at Patay (see page II-529). He appears briefly in *Henry VI, Part Two* as well, as commander of the Tower of London during Cade's rebel-

lion (see page II-606). He died in 1460, leaving a daughter as his heir, and in 1461 this daughter married Anthony Woodville, Queen Elizabeth's brother, who became Lord Scales as a result.

It is unfair, however, to blame this marriage on Edward's partiality
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for his Queen. It took place three years *before* Edward's marriage to Elizabeth Woodville.

... Clarence will have the younger

Now comes the news that Warwick has defected and made an alliance with Margaret, and that the son of the latter is to marry the daughter of the former. George of Clarence, hearing this, muses concerning that marriage. Which daughter is involved, he wonders, and decides:

*Belike the elder; Clarence will have the younger.
Now, brother king, farewell. . .*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 118-19

There are two reversals here. George of Clarence married Warwick's daughter *before* the latter's reconciliation with Margaret. And it was the *elder* daughter that George married, not the younger.



Clarence and Somerset. . .

Shakespeare's compression of time forces quick action now. Actually, Clarence had defected long before Warwick's reconciliation with Margaret. So had Montagu. Neither would have been at King Edward's court to hear the news of that reconciliation. Now that the news has come, Shakespeare is forced to have Clarence's delayed defection take place at once. Edward just a few lines after Clarence's last speech exclaims:

Clarence and Somerset both gone to Warwick!

-Act IV, scene i, line 127

Who was Somerset? Actually there was no Somerset, officially, at this time. There had been Henry Beaufort, 3rd Duke of Somerset, who had died at the Battle of Hexham in 1464. With his death, the victorious Yorkists had abolished the right of the Beaufort family to the title.

Henry Beaufort had no children, but he had two younger brothers, and one of them, Edmund, called himself 4th Duke of Somerset. This title was only recognized by the Lancastrians and he couldn't possibly have been at King Edward's court.

Pembroke and Stafford. . .

Edward at once begins his preparations. He says:

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*Pembroke and Stafford, you in our behalf
Go levy men, and make prepare for war.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 130-31

Pembroke was William Herbert, who had been granted the title of Earl of Pembroke by Edward in 1462.

Apparently, Shakespeare now moves back in time to a point before the Battle of Edgecote and therefore at least a year before the reconciliation of Warwick and Margaret. We can tell this because William of Pembroke died at Edgecote and by the time of the reconciliation had been dead a year.

The Stafford referred to in this passage is Sir Humphrey Stafford, a cousin of the Staffords who had been killed in the course of Cade's rebellion (see page II-604). Sir Humphrey, like Pembroke, died at Edgecote.

. . . the Thracian fatal steeds



Warwick, having made the final plunge, acted with the greatest energy. His reconciliation with Margaret had taken place in June 1470, and on September 13 he landed on the shores of southern England. King Edward was in the north attending to the disturbances which had been deliberately stirred up there by Warwick's partisans in order to cover the southern landings.

Warwick marched inland, ready for a confrontation with King Edward, who, in considerable confusion at the surprise onslaught, was marching hastily southward in disarray.

As the armies face each other somewhere in Warwickshire (according to Shakespeare), Warwick exults that Edward is ill guarded and may be taken unawares. In fact, he may even be kidnapped out of his army:

... as *Ulysses and stout Diomede*
With sleight and manhood stole to Rhesus' tents,
And brought from thence the Thracian fatal steeds,
-Act IV, scene ii, lines 19-21

This refers to an incident in the tenth book of the *Iliad*. Troy had just been reinforced by Rhesus, King of Thrace, who brought with him an excellent detachment of horsemen. Ulysses and Diomedes (see pages I-92 and I-79), sent as spies into the Trojan lines that night, came upon Rhesus' party, sleeping unguarded in their overconfidence (the Greeks had had the worse of the battle the day before). The two Greeks killed Rhesus and drove off his horses.

In later times, the story was improved by the statement that an oracle had foretold that Troy would never fall if Rhesus' horses could but once

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graze on the Trojan plains. That is why they are referred to as "fatal steeds," since their actions would signify the judgment of the Fates.

Warwick's plan is carried through. Edward IV is captured in his tent, while Richard of Gloucester and Lord Hastings manage to get away. Warwick does not intend to kill Edward but takes off his crown in order that he might restore it to Henry. Warwick is "king maker" indeed.

The dramatic scene does not, however, accord with history. The confrontation did not take place in Warwickshire but in Lincolnshire, close to the east coast. Edward was not captured but could see that resistance was hopeless, for Warwick was gathering troops steadily while Edward's army was falling apart through desertion. Edward decided flight was the only reasonable alternative. He made his way to the coast and took ship for Holland in October 1470.

(The year before, however, *before* Warwick's reconciliation with Margaret, King Edward had very briefly been captured by the Archbishop of York, George Neville, who was Warwick's brother. This imprisonment, from July to October 1469, which took place before King Edward was fully aware that Warwick was in open rebellion-which is why he was careless enough to be captured in the first place-Shakespeare shifts a year later



for dramatic purposes.)

... *brother Rivers* ...

Back in the London palace, Edward's Queen hears the news and says:

*Why, brother Rivers, are you yet to learn
What late misfortune is befall'n King Edward?*

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 2-3

She is speaking to her brother Anthony Woodville, Lord Scales (see page II-661). When their father had died in the north fighting against the Neville-inspired disturbances, Scales had succeeded to the paternal title as well, and became 2nd Earl of Rivers.

Although he was unpopular among the nobility, as all the Woodvilles were, since they were jealously supposed to owe their sudden pre-eminence to their relationship to the King, Scales seems to have been a rather capable person-loyal to Edward and a devotee of the arts.

... *Edward's offspring* ...

Elizabeth is about thirty-three years old at this time and is still quite young enough to bear children. In fact, she is pregnant at the moment and

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says she is avoiding emotional upset as much as possible for the sake of the health of the unborn child:

*And I the rather wean me from despair
For love of Edward's offspring in my womb.*

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 17-18

Since Warwick is triumphant, Elizabeth decides to fly, and it was while she was in sanctuary in Westminster Abbey that she gave birth to Edward's child on November 2, 1470.

... *Sir William Stanley*

In 1469, when Edward was really held in captivity by the Archbishop of York, Warwick was still working to a certain extent underground and trying to be in something less than open rebellion. He was not ready to go all the way and Edward was still popular enough, particularly in London, to make the imprisonment politically dangerous. It was after Edward was



freed, and reasonably certain that it was Warwick's hand that had been behind the imprisonment, that Warwick and Clarence had been forced to go first to Calais and then to France.

Once they came back as open Lancastrians and with French support behind them, they had nothing to lose. Had Edward truly been captured in 1470, they would surely have placed him in the Tower and held him securely.

Shakespeare places the activity in 1470 but is forced to keep the conditions of 1469. He has the imprisonment in a Yorkshire castle and makes it a light and negligent one. It is possible to spirit the captive King out of the castle and with that purpose in mind a few die-hard Yorkists under the leadership of Richard of Gloucester arrive.

Richard, who is conducting the enterprise, and who has not yet revealed its details, says to his companions:

*Now my Lord Hastings and Sir William Stanley,
Leave off to wonder why I drew you hither,*

-Act IV, scene v, lines 1-2

William Stanley was of a wealthy family and he and his brother Thomas Stanley were important Yorkist leaders. Their role in the next reign was to be even more important.

Richard's plan succeeds. Edward IV is snatched out of imprisonment and is free again.

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... *Warwick, after God* ...

In London, meanwhile, Henry VI, who had spent five years in the Tower of London, was also set free. In October 1470 he was once again King, and says:

But, Warwick, after God, thou set'st me free,

-Act IV, scene vi, line 16

Thus is Warwick revenged on Edward IV.

Now the other meaning of the seance prophecy concerning the Duke and the King (see page II-588) comes true. The Duke (or the Duke's son -who is Edward IV) is deposed *by* Henry VI. The deposer was promised a violent death, and it will come for Henry VI, the King, as it had already come for Richard of York, the Duke.

... *Earl of Richmond*

All is sweetness and light for the moment. Warwick and Clarence vie to see who can be most generous in giving the other credit. Henry asks that

his wife and son be sent for from France and then turns to Somerset,



who
is present, and inquires as to the young boy who accompanies him.
Somerset answers:

My liege, it is young Henry, Earl of Richmond.

-Act IV, scene vi, line 67

The young boy (thirteen years old at this time) is Henry Tudor, and his line of descent was a very interesting one.

The Tudor family was a Welsh family of consequence which could trace itself back to an official of the last independent Prince of Wales. The first of the family to be of importance to English history was Owen Tudor. He was a handsome young man who came to the English court soon after the death of Henry V and caught the eye of Katherine of France (see page II-476), Henry's widow.

Katherine was still only in her twenties and she can scarcely be blamed for falling in love. She secretly married Owen about 1427. The royal family was naturally displeased at the apparent liaison between them (having been married to the great conqueror, could Katherine stoop to a Welsh squire?) and Owen lived on the continuing edge of possible execution. Nevertheless, the two were happy together and though they had to live their marriage clandestinely, Katherine managed to have three sons and a daughter by her second husband.

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Owen Tudor, as stepfather of Henry VI, was a good Lancastrian even though he had been placed under arrest a couple of times for his relationship with the King's mother. His wife, Katherine, had died in 1437 at the age of thirty-six, and he himself was taken prisoner at the Battle of Mortimer's Cross (see page II-643) in 1461 and beheaded afterward.

Two of Owen Tudor's sons by Katherine were of importance to English history. The oldest son was Edmund Tudor and the second was Jasper Tudor. These were half brothers to Henry VI, who treated them well, declared them of legitimate birth, knighted both in 1449, and gave them titles in 1453. Edmund became Earl of Richmond and Jasper became Earl of Pembroke.

Jasper was a doughty fighter on the Lancastrian side, having fought at the first Battle of St. Albans (see page II-618) when he was only twenty-four. He managed to get away from Mortimer's Cross, where his father had



been captured and then executed, and left the country. He returned with Warwick, when Henry VI was reinstated on the throne.

As for Edmund, Jasper's older brother, he died young, in 1456. In his short life span of twenty-six years he did not have time for many feats of arms. He did have time for one important act, though. He married Margaret Beaufort, the daughter of John Beaufort, who was the "Somerset" of the scene of the roses in the Temple Garden (see page II-548) in *Henry VI, Part One*. What's more, he managed to get her pregnant before he died.

Three months after that death, on January 28, 1457, Margaret bore him a son.

This was Henry Tudor, who, on his mother's side, was thus the great-great-grandson of John of Gaunt. On his father's side, he was half nephew of Henry VI.

Throughout his boyhood, Henry Tudor (who succeeded to his father's title of Earl of Richmond) remained under the protection and care of his uncle, Jasper Tudor.

.. England's hope . . .

King Henry calls young Henry of Richmond to him and says:

*Come hither, England's hope. If secret powers
Suggest but truth to my divining thoughts,
This pretty lad will prove our country's bliss.*

-Act IV, scene vi, lines 68-70

This is a dramatic moment, for the aging and feeble King seems suddenly to foresee the future. But then, even if this is not simply a legend invented after the fact, this piece of prophecy is not as wonderful as it sounds.

King Henry's heir is his son, Prince Edward, and if anything happens to Edward, next in line are the various members of the Beaufort family, of whom Henry Tudor represents the oldest branch. In short, by Lancastrian accounting, Henry Tudor is second in line to the throne and King



Henry
might well take note of this and hope for the best.

... to Burgundy

At this moment bad news arrives from the Archbishop of York. A Post says to the inquiring Warwick:

*... Edward is escaped from your brother,
And fled, as he hears since, to Burgundy.*
-Act IV, scene vi, lines 78-79

Edward's earlier marital diplomacy now stood him in good stead. He had married his sister, Margaret, to Charles the Bold of Burgundy, and he made his way to the court of his brother-in-law. so

Charles was by no means anxious to have this refugee on his hands, feeling it would but exacerbate his troubles with France. The only way to turn the matter to profitable account was to give Edward the necessary help to get back to England. Then, if Edward managed to regain the throne, France would lose its new ally Warwick, and Burgundy would (Charles hoped) gain a grateful King. With that in mind, Charles the Bold supplied Edward liberally with men, money, and ships.

Indeed, Somerset is pictured as foreseeing this, for he says to Oxford:

*My lord, I like not of this flight of Edward's
For doubtless Burgundy will yield him help*
-Act IV, scene vi, lines 89-90

Nor is Somerset sanguine as to the result, and his first care is the preservation of young Henry of Richmond for the future. He says:

*... Lord Oxford, to prevent the worst,
Forthwith we'll send him [Richmond] hence to Brittany,*
-Act IV, scene vi, lines 96-97

As a result, young Richmond survives and lives to reappear in English history at a crucial moment.



The scene shifts to York, where Edward's army is in the field.
Edward
says:

*Well have we passed and now repassed the seas
And brought desired help from Burgundy.
What then remains, we being thus arrived
From Ravenspurgh haven before the gates of York,
But that we enter . . .*

-Act IV, scene vii, lines 5-9

On March 12, 1471, about five months after he left England so hastily, Edward was back with a new army, Burgundian-financed, and landed in Ravenspurgh, where, nearly three quarters of a century before, Bolingbroke had landed (see page II-287) to begin his rebellion against Richard II and start a century-long cycle of civil war.

. . . march amain to London

Once in England, Edward IV proved at his best as a general. Warwick had moved north to intercept him but Edward managed to slip past his old supporter. Warwick was left behind in frustration at Coventry while Edward raced on to London.

Shakespeare reverses matters. He has Edward's march to London come first and only later does he take up the events at Coventry.

Thus, Warwick, still in London, and apparently not yet leading an army north to try to intercept Edward, is made to say that Edward

*Hath passed in safety through the Narrow Seas
And with his troops doth march amain to London;
And many giddy people flock to him.*

-Act IV, scene viii, lines 3-5

Warwick and the others have barely left the stage, leaving Henry behind, when Edward and his men burst in. Edward cries:

*Seize on the shamefaced [modest] Henry, bear him hence;
And once again proclaim us King of England.*

-Act IV, scene viii, lines 52-53

On April 11, 1471, Edward, having taken London, rode to St. Paul's,
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where Henry VI was seeking sanctuary. The Bishop of London delivered him up, however, and he was placed once again in the Tower. His restoration to the kingship had lasted just half a year.



... towards Coventry ...

Now Shakespeare backtracks in time and takes up the events at Coventry which had actually *preceded* Edward's seizure of London. Thus, Edward, in London, is made to say:

*... lords, towards Coventry bend we our course,
Where peremptory Warwick now remains:*

-Act IV, scene viii, lines 58-59

This makes it all sound as though Edward has driven Warwick out of London and is now pursuing him. Not so. We are simply backtracking in time.

... than Jephthah. ...

At Coventry Warwick confronts the two Yorkist brothers, Edward and Richard. Warwick is waiting for reinforcements. Indeed, Oxford arrives, as does Warwick's brother, Montagu.

But then comes George of Clarence and suddenly he turns against his father-in-law and rejoins the Yorkist cause.

Clarence is well aware of the poor figure he thus makes, having betrayed each side in turn, and tries to bluster a defense. He speaks of the oath of fidelity he has not so long ago made to Warwick and says:

*To keep that oath were more impiety
Than Jephthah, when he sacrificed his daughter.*

-Act V, scene i, lines 90-91

This refers to the well-known tale of Jephthah in the eleventh chapter of the Book of Judges. Jephthah swore an oath before a battle with the Ammonites that if he won he would sacrifice to God the first living thing that greeted him on his return to his home. That first living thing was his daughter, and he sacrificed her—thus choosing the greater sin of human sacrifice in preference to the lesser sin of breaking a thoughtless vow to God.

This dramatic second betrayal did indeed happen near Coventry, but, as was said above, it was before Edward's taking of London and not after—



ward.

George had been thinking second thoughts about his alliance with
War-

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wick after the reconciliation with Margaret. He saw Henry reinstated on the throne and his son, Prince Edward, as heir. What then would happen

to George of Clarence? With what would his ambition be satisfied? When Edward returned to England, George had, moreover, the clammy feeling that his brother might win after all. George would then be left on the losing

side, with exile facing him, at best, and execution at worst. When Edward evaded Warwick and skimmed past Coventry, George hastened to rejoin him before it was too late—that is, before Edward got to London and felt (possibly) that he no longer needed George. As it happened, George switched back in time, and Edward forgave him.

... towards Barnet. . .

Warwick, discomfited by Clarence's defection, says to King Edward:

*Alas, I am not cooped [prepared] here for defense!
I will away towards Barnet presently [at once],
And bid thee battle, Edward, if thou dar'st.*

-Act V, scene i, lines 109-11

This is weak. If Warwick feels he is not prepared for defense, why does not King Edward lay siege to the town? If Edward does not, why should Warwick want to fight specifically at Barnet?

Here is what really happened. After slipping past Coventry and picking up the repentant George of Clarence, Edward dashed to London, placed King Henry in the Tower, and had himself redeclared King. But Warwick, furious, followed him as rapidly as he could.

Warwick hoped to attack Edward while he was celebrating the capture of London—a celebration which might be all the more unrestrained since Easter was very near—and catch him unprepared.

Edward, however, for once sacrificed his pleasures and did not linger. London was taken on Thursday, April 11, 1471. The next day was Good Friday, and on the day after, April 13, the day before Easter, Edward was on the move north. By nightfall he had reached Barnet, some ten miles north of London's center, and there he found the outposts of Warwick's hurrying Lancastrian army and there the battle took place.

... Die thou ...

The Battle of Barnet was a gruesome one. The two armies waited tensely through the night for the dawn, but when the dawn came, it arrived with a

fog that turned everything from sightless black to sightless gray.

Daring to wait no longer, the armies blundered into each other, no part



knowing what the other parts were doing. On the left, Oxford the Lancastrian defeated Hastings the Yorkist. The Yorkist line broke completely there but Edward in the center and Richard on the right did not know this and therefore fought on undismayed.

In fact, Richard, pushing forward on the right, defeated the Lancastrian left under Warwick himself, and when Oxford returned from his pursuit of Hastings, Warwick's Lancastrians, panicky and trigger-happy, fearing that the men looming up from the fog were Yorkist reinforcements, met them with a shower of arrows.

That confusion meant final victory for the Yorkists after three hours of chaos, and when Warwick fell, mortally wounded, the Lancastrians were done.

In the play it is Edward himself who drags the wounded Warwick onto the stage, saying:

So lie thou there! Die thou, and die our fear!

-Act V, scene ii, line 1

As Warwick lies dying, he finds that his brother Montagu, who had been fighting on his side, is already dead, for Somerset, coming upon him, says:

Ah, Warwick! Montague hath breathed his last,

-Act V, scene ii, line 40

Thus, on Easter Sunday, 1471, the two Neville brothers die.

... a puissant power

Yet Edward's victory had been by the merest hair. Had his brother George not made his second betrayal at a crucial time, part of the *elan* of the dash to London might have been absent, and Warwick might conceivably have caught the King. And had the morning not been foggy at Barnet, Warwick might conceivably have won there.

Indeed, had Warwick been more patient and had he not attempted by his rapid march to surprise and trap Edward, he might have been better off, for he might then have caught Edward between two fires. Even as Warwick lies dying, Somerset says:

*The Queen from France hath brought a puissant power.
Even now we heard the news.*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 31-32

For once, this is not an example of Shakespeare condensing history.



Queen Margaret had indeed landed at Weymouth in southern England on April 14, the very Easter Sunday on which the Battle of Barnet was fought.

She had gathered together a sizable army of exiles and foreigners and had set sail for England on March 24, only twelve days after Edward's own landing at Ravenspurgh. By all odds, she ought to have arrived in ample time to supply the forces needed for Edward's final defeat, but, unfortunately for the Lancastrian cause, a series of storms and contrary winds had kept driving her back.

Even so, had Warwick waited but two more days before forcing a battle and dodged Edward's army, the news of the Queen's arrival would have reached him, and the game might then have been played altogether differently.

As it was, Margaret heard of Warwick's defeat and death the day after she landed, and for a while, even her savage and indomitable spirit broke.

Hath raised in Gallia . . .

Edward too has heard of the landing of the Queen's army and that somewhat spoils the jubilation in the aftermath of the victory at Barnet. Edward says, at the close of the battle:

*I spy a black, suspicious, threat'rung cloud
That will encounter with our glorious sun
Ere he attain his easeful western bed.
I mean, my lords, those powers that the Queen
Hath raised in Gallia have arrived our coast,
And, as we hear, march on to fight with us.*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 4-9

Actually, the Queen's army had to take time to marshal itself and gather reinforcements in England. They made their way to Bath, fifty-five miles north of Weymouth. Edward could therefore remain ten days in London, repairing his army and getting some rest. It was not till April 24, 1471, that he marched westward toward the last Lancastrian army.

. . . toward Tewksbury



Still on the battlefield of Barnet, Edward says concerning the Queen's forces:

*We are advertised [advised] by our loving friends
That they do hold their course toward Tewksbury.*

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*We, having now the best at Barnet field,
Will thither straight. . .*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 18-21

Thus, Shakespeare skips the ten-day respite in London and gets on with the action.

Queen Margaret's army, marching northward in search of territory where it might entrench itself and strengthen its powers in friendly surroundings, received the news that Edward was now marching hastily toward them.

Tewkesbury (the usual present-day spelling) was the strongest position within easy reach at that time and it was there that Margaret's army made ready to fight. Tewkesbury is in western England, forty miles southwest of Coventry.

. . . Oxford to Homes Castle. . .

Shakespeare gives no details of the battle. The armies collided and fought on May 4, 1471, three weeks after Barnet. Again, the impetuous attack of Edward and Richard carried the day and once again the Lancastrians broke. A number of the Lancastrian leaders were taken.

According to Shakespeare, one was Oxford. Thus, King Edward appears onstage, the battle over, the prisoners bound, and says:

Away with Oxford to Homes Castle straight.

-Act V, scene v, line 2

That is strange. Opposition leaders, if taken alive, were generally executed as traitors after the battle. Why was this not the case with Oxford?

Actually, it was because Oxford was not at Tewkesbury. He had fought well at Barnet but then went to France. It was not till 1473, two years after Tewkesbury, which had been fought without him, that he attempted a reinvasion of England and a revival of the ruined Lancastrian cause. He was besieged in Cornwall and, after four and a half months, was forced to surrender.

Passions had lessened by then and he was imprisoned rather than executed. The imprisonment was at a Hames Castle, near Calais, for it seemed best to keep him away from English soil proper.

. . . off with his guilty head

Concerning another prisoner, matters were more straightforward. Edward IV says:



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For Somerset, off with his guilty head.

-Act V, scene v, line 3

This was carried through, and Edmund Beaufort, son of the Edmund of Somerset of *Henry VI, Part Two*, was executed on May 6, 1471. His younger brother, John, had died in the course of the battle, and this meant that the family of Beaufort was extinct. There was no one left who could trace his descent to John of Gaunt and Catherine Swynford through male ancestors only.

There remained only young Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, a great-grandson of John of Gaunt on his mother's side.

Take that. . .

Edward, Prince of Wales, the son of Queen Margaret and (presumably) of Henry VI, is also taken at the Battle of Tewkesbury, where, according to later pro-Lancaster accounts, he bore himself bravely.

The earliest accounts we have of the battle state that the Prince of Wales was slain in its course by some unknown hand. The later pro-Lancastrian accounts, however, have him taken prisoner.

As prisoner, he boldly maintains his right to the throne in the face of the Yorkist brothers. Angered to a pitch of unreasoning fury by Prince Edward's words, King Edward says:

Take that, the likeness of this railer [Queen Margaret] here.

-Act V, scene v, line 38

With that the King stabs the young man, who is eighteen years old at this time.

George of Clarence and Richard of Gloucester also stab him, and the picture is of the brave young Lancastrian prince slaughtered by a triplet of assassins. It makes for a good Lancastrian atrocity story to balance the Yorkist atrocity story of the deaths of Rutland and York (see page II-639).

But atrocity stories are usually suspect (though not always, as those who have lived through certain recent periods in German and Russian history can testify) and it is much more likely that young Prince Edward died an ordinary battlefield death that day as the early reports state and

as two thousand other men did. Or, if he had been captured, it is much more likely that he would have been executed as Somerset was and it is most unlikely that the royal brothers would themselves have wielded the knives.



O, kill me too

Queen Margaret, witnessing the death of her son, breaks at last. Now all her hope is gone. Her son had been the light of her life, the one object to which all her hopes had been pinned. She was forty-one years old now and could expect no second child, and there is nothing left for her. For the first time she pleads instead of threatens; pleads for the one gift left her enemies can give her, saying:

O, kill me too!

-Act V, scene v, line 41

Richard of Gloucester, relentless, is perfectly willing to do so, but Edward holds him back. He fears that by killing the Prince, they have already done too much.

Actually, this dramatic scene is fictional. Queen Margaret was not taken at Tewkesbury, and even if her son were assassinated, she would not have been able to witness it. She fled the battlefield and managed to make it to Coventry, where she hid in a convent. King Edward's army passed through Coventry after the battle, however, and on May 11 Margaret was taken.

... a bloody supper...

Suddenly, in the aftermath of Tewkesbury, King Edward notices that Richard is gone. He asks after him and Clarence says that Richard has departed

*To London, all in post [haste]; and, as I guess,
To make a bloody supper in the Tower.*

-Act V, scene v, lines 84-85

Henry VI is at the Tower of London and the implication is that Richard intends to take care of him now that Prince Edward is dead and Queen Margaret imprisoned.

Indeed, in the next scene Richard of Gloucester is at the Tower, facing the ex-King, who shrinks frightened from him, and who goes through the list of Richard's deformities which the anti-Yorkists piled upon him in later years, adding a new one:

*Teeth hadst thou in thy head when thou wast born,
To signify thou cam'st to bite the world;*

-Act V, scene vi, lines 53-54

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At that, Richard, angered, stabs and kills the King.
The truth, as best we know it, is this. King Edward and his triumphant Yorkist army entered London once again on May 21, 1471, two and a half weeks after Tewkesbury. The next morning Henry was found dead in the



Tower. He was only forty-nine years old at the time of his death and he had been King virtually all his life without ever having held the power of the kingship for a moment. He had been ruled and guided by others, harried and chivied from this point to that, weak-minded at best, out of his mind altogether at times, and after his long misery he probably welcomed death at last.

It is, of course, asking too much of coincidence to suppose Henry's death was natural. No one doubts that King Edward had ordered the ex-King quietly murdered and one can grasp the reasons for it. As long as Henry lived he would be the center for Lancastrian uprisings, and Edward had had enough of that now. Henry VI was therefore killed for the same reasons that Richard II was killed (see page II-312), and, before him, Edward II.

What is utterly unlikely is that Richard of Gloucester, though he carried the King's order to the Tower, performed the act with his own hand. There were any number of willing daggers to do the job and there is no evidence for Richard's personal guilt except for the word of the later atrocity tellers-and those atrocity tellers heaped every obloquy on Richard in an attempt to justify the dubiously legal position of his eventual successor. (History is written by the victors.)

Clarence, beware . . .

Shakespeare follows the official anti-Yorkist, anti-Richard line and improves on it with all the power of his genius. The next play in the series will have Richard as its central character, and in it, his crimes and enormities will reach horrid heights. This is forecast in several speeches throughout this present play and is made most specific now.

Even as Richard stands over Henry's lifeless body, he says:

*Clarence, beware. Thou keep'st me from the light;
But I will sort a pitchy day for thee;
For I will buzz abroad such prophecies
That Edward shall be fearful of his life,
And then, to purge his fear, I'll be thy death.
King Henry and the Prince his son are gone:
Clarence, thy turn is next. . .*

-Act V, scene vi, lines 84-90



With King Henry's death, all the male line of John of Gaunt is gone.
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Henry Tudor is *not* a Plantagenet. He is descended from Henry II, and Edward III only on his mother's side.

King Edward and his brothers, however, while claiming their throne by right of descent from Lionel of Clarence on their grandmother's side, nevertheless descend from Edmund of York on their father's side and are still Plantagenets (see page II-255). In fact, the sons of old Richard of York are the only Plantagenets left.

Young Ned . . .

As it happens, though, there is a new heir to the English throne. In the final scene of the play, Edward IV, again seated securely on the throne and reunited with his Queen, says to her:

*Come hither, Bess, and let me kiss my boy.
Young Ned, for thee, thine uncles and myself
Have in our armors watched [remained awake] the winter's
night,
Went all afoot in summer's scalding heat,
That thou mightst repossess the crown in peace:*

-Act V, scene vii, lines 15-19

Edward's first son, born while he was himself in exile, was five months old at the time of the Battle of Tewkesbury. On June 26, 1471, when he was still not yet seven months old, he was made Prince of Wales, taking the title vacated by the earlier Prince Edward, now dead.

George of Clarence and Richard of Gloucester both swear allegiance to the baby heir to the throne, but the Elizabethan audience knows well that King Edward's speech to his infant boy contains grisly dramatic irony, for he will *not* "repossess the crown in peace." And if anyone lacks that knowledge, a couple of asides from Richard make it plain that he intends harm, as will be amply revealed in the next play.

. . . waft her hence. . .

There remains only one question. What should be done with Margaret, the ex-Queen, for whom ransom money has arrived? King Edward, in a fit of leniency, says:

Away with her, and waft her hence to France!

-Act V, scene vii, line 41

Actually, the ransom did not follow so soon. Edward kept her imprisoned

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for five years under circumstances that were definitely not lavish but



were not actually cruel. She was only then ransomed by Louis XI of France and in 1476 returned to the France she had left as a teen-age bride thirty years before. Her period as Queen of England had been a most unhappy one for herself and for England.

And thus, with all apparently serene, *Henry VI, Part Three* ends in triumph and celebration, so that King Edward's last line-and the last line of the play-is:

. . . *here, I hope, begins our lasting joy.*

-Act V, scene vii, line 46

But Richard remains, a black symbol of danger, and the next play, *Richard III*, will open with him, and the most melodramatic of all Shakespeare's histories will begin.

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The Tragedy of

RICHARD III

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RICHARD III deals with events that immediately follow *Henry VI, Part Three*, and it is very likely that Shakespeare began work on it as soon as he was through with the *Henry VI* trilogy. It was probably completed by 1593 at the latest.

At that time Shakespeare was still at the beginning of his career. He had written two narrative poems, a number of sonnets, a couple of light comedies, and the *Henry VI* trilogy, all popular and successful, but none, as yet, a blockbuster. With *Richard III* Shakespeare finally made it big.

It is a play after the manner of Seneca, like *Titus Andronicus* (see page I-391), which Shakespeare was also working on at the time, but infinitely more successful.

Indeed, *Richard III* is so full of harrowing and dramatic episodes, and Richard III himself is so successful a character, so wonderful a villain, with so much bravery and dry humor mingled with his monstrous behavior, that the play pleased all and made it quite plain that Shakespeare was a new star of brilliant magnitude on the literary scene. Indeed, despite the

fact that the play is quite raw compared to the polished mastery of Shakespeare's later plays, it is still one of his most popular and successful plays



today.

... *this sun of York*

The play opens with Richard of Gloucester, youngest brother of King Edward IV, alone on the stage. He sets the time of the scene by saying:

*Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this sun of York;*

-Act I, scene i, lines 1-2

This ties in well with the final speech in *Henry VI, Part Three*, in which Edward IV says happily that the troubles are all over and that only joy is left.

It was in 1471 that the last serious Lancastrian threat was smashed at Tewkesbury (see page II-674). Old King Henry VI and his son, Prince

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Edward, were dead immediately after that battle, and no one was left to dispute the right of King Edward to the throne.

The "sun of York" (and a sun was one of the symbols of the Yorkist house) was indeed shining.

Plots have 1 laid. . .

The sun of York does not satisfy Richard, however. In a speech that resembles one he had made in the earlier play (see page II-654), he explains that he is so physically deformed that the joys of peace, such as dancing and love-making, are beyond him. He will therefore confine himself to the joys of ambition, and labor to make himself a king. After all, in *Henry VI, Part Three* he waxed lyrical over the joys of being a king (see page II-634), and it is not to be wondered at that he should want those joys.

In order to become a long, he must get those out of the way who have a prior right to the throne. Among them, of course, is his older brother George of Clarence. Richard explains in his soliloquy:

*Plots have 1 laid, inductions [beginnings] dangerous,
By drunken prophecies, libels, and dreams,
To set my brother Clarence and the King
In deadly hate the one against the other;
And if King Edward be as true and just
As I am subtle, false, and treacherous,
This day should Clarence closely be mewed up
About a prophecy which says that G*



Of Edward's heirs the murderer shall be.

-Act I, scene i, lines 32-40

Shakespeare is here condensing time, for George of Clarence's break with his royal brother came in 1478, six years after the climactic Battle of Tewkesbury, despite the appearance in the first two lines of the soliloquy that it is the very morrow of the battle that is in question.

Why did the break between the brothers come? Well, it required no plot on the part of Richard, really, for George of Clarence had some of the characteristics in reality that Richard was later slanderously described as having.

It was George who was ambitious and faithless. He had deserted Edward and had sided with Warwick in 1470, and had come back to his allegiance to York, we may be sure, only out of a feeling that Warwick was going to lose and that he himself would gain more by a second double cross.

Edward had forgiven the twice faithless George but that did not prevent George from continuing to scheme for his own aggrandizement in such a

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way that the King was bound, eventually, to suspect his brother of aiming at the throne.

George did his best, for instance, to keep his hands on the whole enormous Warwick estate. This may have been out of mere avarice but it may also have been out of a realization of how useful wealth would be in planning a revolt. He had married Warwick's elder daughter, Isabella, in the days when he and Warwick had been friends and allies. The younger daughter, Anne, had been married to Edward, Prince of Wales, the son of old King Henry. Prince Edward was now dead and Anne was a widow; and George was determined to keep her a widow, lest some new husband insist on a half share in the Warwick estate. While Anne remained a widow, George controlled it all, and he kept the poor lady a virtual prisoner to see to it that the situation would continue.

This intentness on wealth at all costs would naturally disturb Edward.

Then there arose a new matter. Charles the Bold of Burgundy died in battle in 1477, leaving behind a twenty-year-old daughter, Mary, as his only heir. (Charles's wife had been Margaret of York, the sister of George of Clarence, see page II-642, but Mary was his daughter by a previous wife.)

Burgundy had, for over half a century, been the wealthiest nation in Europe, and under Charles it had reached its political peak, for Charles



had almost defeated France and made an independent kingdom of his land. Now, with only a girl to rule Burgundy, its days seemed numbered under the pressure of France on its west and the Holy Roman Empire on its east. Unless, that is, some strong independent prince quickly married Mary and carried on where Charles the Bold had left off. George of Clarence was now a widower and he saw himself as husband of Mary and as the new Duke of Burgundy.

King Edward thoroughly disapproved of this scheme. It seemed to him that if his ambitious, faithless brother became Duke of Burgundy, with all the resources of Burgundy at his call, he would be a source of endless trouble. He would have the money to finance plots against Edward and to scheme at a double throne.

Edward therefore forbade the marriage and the two brothers became open enemies. It did not take much more for Edward to begin to suspect George of plotting his death. Two of George's henchmen were accused of trying to bring about that death by sorcery, and when George insisted they were innocent, Edward angrily had his brother arrested and thrown in the Tower of London.

Whether George was actually plotting Edward's death we cannot say, but certainly, his past and his character gave cause for suspicion and in those troubled times that was enough.

And what had been Richard's record through all this? Well, for one thing, he had remained utterly faithful to Edward in the hard times when Warwick had temporarily hurled him from the throne. He had fought with

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bravery and distinction at the Battles of Barnet and Tewkesbury. He had done Edward's dirty work (probably) in arranging the death of old King Henry VI in the Tower. In all respects, Richard was as much the loyal brother as George was the faithless one.

This helps explain the frustrating manner in which the characters in *Richard III* fall prey to villainous Richard, though his villainy is made to appear patent to all. In actual history, you see, he *wasn't* a villain.

Thus, consider the prophecy which helped set the King against his brother; that someone with the initial G would be a traitor to him. (Undoubtedly, there were prophecies extant of this sort, and of every other too, for there are astrologers and prophets everywhere and at all times, even



in our own country now, and only those prophecies which come true or seem to come true are later remembered.) The King felt this applied to George of Clarence; but why not to Richard of Gloucester? The King suspected George because George deserved it; he did not suspect Gloucester because the real Gloucester's unshakable loyalty left no room for suspicion.

We can also ask ourselves whether Richard really had a hand in raising Edward's suspicions against George. There is no evidence of that at all until the later anti-Richard polemicists got to work. They say that he spoke openly in favor of his brother to the King in order to hide his secret maneuverings. The "maneuverings," however, are a later invention presented even by the polemicists as only a matter of suspicion, whereas the one *fact* they admit is that Richard defended his brother openly—which took courage.

My Lady Grey his wife. . .

Even as Richard (in Shakespeare's version) reveals his plots and villainies, George is brought onstage on his way to the Tower. This would make it January 16, 1478.

Richard expresses hearty sympathy and says:

*Why, this it is when men are ruled by women.
'Tis not the King that sends you to the Tower.
My Lady Grey his wife, Clarence, 'tis she
That tempers [influences] him to this extremity.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 62-65

It pays Richard to rouse hostility against the Queen. In the first place, the Woodvilles (her relatives) are not popular among the aristocracy because they have monopolized so much in the way of estates and power purely on the basis of their in-law relationship to the King. Richard would gain allies, automatically, if he made himself the head of the anti-Woodville faction.

Then too, it would be wonderful for Richard if the Queen were so

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unpopular that people would become ready to believe that there was something wrong or irregular in her marriage to the King. Richard already implies as much by referring to her as "My Lady Grey," giving her the name she had borne before her marriage (see page II-652) as though she had no right to any other. After all, if her marriage were not a legal one, her children would be illegitimate and they would not be rightful heirs to the throne.

What's more, it is quite plausible that Queen Elizabeth would indeed be hostile to George of Clarence. When George deserted King Edward and switched to Warwick's side, it was partly because he was displeased with Edward's marriage. And if George were ambitious to be King, it could



only
be at the cost of Elizabeth's children. In both cases, the Queen had
ample
reason to hate George.

Anthony Woodville . . .

Richard continues to insinuate his anti-Woodville venom. He says:

*Was it not she, and that good man of worship,
Anthony Woodville her brother there,
That made him send Lord Hastings to the Tower,
From whence this present day he is delivered?*

-Act I, scene i, lines 66-69

Anthony Woodville, 2nd Earl Rivers (see page II-664), had, as the Queen's brother, profited greatly at court, yet he had earned that profit too. He had accompanied Edward during the latter's temporary exile (when George was fighting him) and had fought bravely for him at the Battle of Barnet.

Lord Hastings was also a favorite of the King's (see page II-661) and had been made Governor of Calais. Rivers had wanted the post for himself and that was a cause of hard feelings between them.

On the other hand, the Queen had a much more understandable reason for disliking Hastings. Although she was a loyal and fruitful wife (giving King Edward seven children, two sons and five daughters), Edward never found one woman enough and had a whole series of mistresses. It was Hastings who helped him in his extracurricular amours and the Queen could scarcely feel kindly toward Hastings in view of that.

. . . Mistress Shore

Yet Hastings was released. The King did not push matters to extremities there, and George says bitterly:

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*By heaven, I think there is no man secure
But the Queen's kindred, and night-walking heralds
That trudge betwixt the King and Mistress Shore.
Heard you not what an humble suppliant
Lord Hastings was to her for his delivery?*

-Act I, scene i, lines 71-75

"Mistress Shore" is Jane Shore, wife of a London goldsmith. Though



Edward had had many women, Jane Shore was his favorite. He took her as his mistress in 1470, at which time she was in her middle twenties, and kept her till the end of his reign.

Undoubtedly, Hastings was one of the "night-walking heralds" who helped maintain the secret contacts between King and mistress, and he may even have tasted of her himself, for he certainly kept her after the King's death. It is not surprising, then, that Hastings should turn to Jane Shore for use of her influence with the King.

The King is sickly. . .

Off goes Clarence to the Tower, Richard all concern and promising all help, but inward all glee. No sooner is Clarence gone, when Hastings, newly released and vowing vengeance gainst the Queen's party, appears. Richard asks for news and Hastings says:

*The King is sickly, weak, and melancholy,
And his physicians fear him mightily.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 136-37

At the time of George's imprisonment, King Edward was only thirty-six years old, certainly a young man by our standards, but he was prematurely aged even by the standards of those times.

One might argue, of course, that Edward's life had been a harrowing one, full of battles, of exiles and returns, of hasty marches and anxious fears. Even after the Battle of Tewkesbury, he had not been entirely in the clear. Although the civil wars were temporarily over, there had been a foreign campaign (which Shakespeare does not mention).

King Edward had not forgotten that Louis XI of France had helped Warwick and Queen Margaret inflict upon him the humiliation of defeat and flight (see page II-664). In 1473, two years after the Battle of Tewkesbury, Edward therefore began to plan an invasion of France in concert with Burgundy, as in the great days of Henry V. (Charles the Bold was still alive then and he was always ready to listen to any projects that might serve to harm France.)

By June 20, 1475, Edward had gathered the greatest army that England had, to that day, ever sent abroad and had landed it in Calais.

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But now matters turned out differently than with Henry V in two important ways. First, Burgundy proved an utter flop. Charles was not ready with the help he had promised.

Secondly, Louis XI was a very unusual king and Edward IV was no match for him. Louis had no intention of fighting. Instead, he sent flattering messages to Edward along with three hundred cartloads of wine. This was distributed to the English soldiers, who promptly got uproariously drunk.

After the wine came the gold. The English nobility was quite ready to accept it (though Hastings was sufficiently nervous to draw the line at



ac-
tually taking it, and suggested that it be put in his sleeve while he
looked
the other way). Edward himself was bribed by the promise of a
marriage,
in due time, between Louis' son and Edward's daughter. Edward was
very
intent on arranging great marriages for his daughters and this pleased
him.

In the end, then, the English, having come into France with a
greater
army than Henry V ever had, left France without ever having struck a
blow.

Only one Englishman is recorded as having protested against this
dis-
grace and that was none other than Richard of Gloucester. Naturally,
the
later anti-Richard historians say nothing of this.

Yet it was probably not the pressures of a harried royal life that
went
furthest toward making Edward prematurely old; it was rather
overindul-
gence. He ate too much and grew fat; he played too much and wore
out.

As Richard says of King Edward in response to Hastings' news:

*O, he hath kept an evil diet long
And overmuch consumed his royal person.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 139-40

... *Warwick's youngest daughter*

The news is good for Richard, who looks forward to Edward's death
after that of George, something which would leave him the last
remaining
son of Richard of York.

He longs for that time, as he says:

For then I'll marry Warwick's youngest daughter.

-Act I, scene i, line 153

Warwick's youngest daughter is Anne, the widow of Prince Edward, the
Lancastrian heir. (In *Henry VI, Part Three* Shakespeare refers to her
as
the older daughter, see page II-660, but that error is corrected here.)

It was this Anne whom George was hiding, so anxious was he to keep
any part of the Warwick estate from leaving his control. Richard would,

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in his turn, be very anxious to marry her in order to have a firm financial
base himself. (Which is not to say Richard might not have felt affection for
her as well. The fact that a woman has money doesn't make her inevitably
unlikable, after all.)



King Edward was on Richard's side in this, for he wanted to reward his youngest brother's loyalty and was not at all eager to contribute to faithless George's wealth. George, however, resisted even the wish and insisted that Richard could marry Anne only if he renounced any share in the Warwick estate.

Pale ashes . . .

No sooner does Richard leave the stage than Lady Anne Neville, the very girl whom he has just mentioned, comes onstage. She has the dead body of King Henry VI with her and is mourning his death. This would make it appear that the scene is taking place very shortly after May 21, 1471, when the King was killed, and therefore nearly seven years *before* the imprisonment of George of Clarence.

Anne apostrophizes the dead King:

*Poor key-cold figure of a holy king,
Pale ashes of the house of Lancaster,*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 5-6

She curses the man who killed the old King and, in the play, she knows that man to be Richard of Gloucester. She extends the curse by saying in her apostrophe to the corpse:

*// ever he have wife, let her be made
More miserable by the life of him
Than I am made by my young lord [her dead husband] and
thee.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 26-27

She then says to those who are carrying the corpse:

*Come, now towards Chertsey with your holy load,
Taken from Paul's to be interred there;*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 29-30

After Henry's death in the Tower he was laid in state in St. Paul's Cathedral, his face left visible, in order that anyone who wished could see that it was indeed Henry and that he was indeed dead. Otherwise there would

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be bound to be imposters who would claim to be Henry and would gather rebels about themselves, in John Cade fashion (see page II-604).

Once that was done, the body was removed to the abbey at Chertsey, which lies twenty miles southwest of the center of London.

I'll rest betide the chamber. . .

But even as Anne is bewailing the dead King and cursing his murderer,



in walks that same murderer (according to Shakespearean history) and there begins a strange courtship.

Richard dares, despite everything, to ask Anne to marry him, but when he suggests that he would like to be in her bedchamber she replies, waspishly:

I'll rest betide the chamber where thou liest!

-Act I, scene ii, line 112

This, in effect, is a second curse upon any wife Richard might have.

Yet in the end Anne softens and begins to respond to Richard's clever words. Richard agrees to take over the interment of the dead King, and Anne leaves.

Richard orders the corpse taken up and when asked if it is to be carried to Chertsey, he replies:

No, to Whitefriars; there attend my coming.

-Act I, scene ii, line 226

Whitefriars is an abbey north of the Thames.

Richard did indeed move Henry's body from Chertsey, but only in later years. Eventually, rumors began to spread that miracles were being worked at Henry's burial site. Clearly, the sympathy for a dead saint might work against the house of York and in favor of a Lancastrian pretender. Richard therefore (he was King by then) had the body moved. Where it was moved, no one can be certain, for it was never found again.

Edward her lord. . .

When Richard is once again alone onstage, he glories in his performance, feeling pride that one as ugly, as deformed, as criminal as himself should be able to win the lady over by smooth words alone. He asks sardonically:

*Hath she forgot already that brave prince,
Edward her lord, whom I, some three months since,
Stabbed in my angry mood at Tewksbury?*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 239-41

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But it's no use asking how she could do such a thing.

In real history, Richard was not ugly and not deformed. Nor was he the type of criminal later tales made of him. He did not stab "Edward her lord," who died in battle, despite the scene in *Henry VI, Part Three* (see page II-675).

Anne, by the way, was only fifteen years old when Prince Edward died at Tewkesbury, and it is not certain that she was really married to him



(he was eighteen) at the time, though she was certainly betrothed.

Naturally, this tale of Richard's wooing is not historical. Shakespeare did not even find it in any of his sources. He apparently invented it solely to produce a dramatic scene.

History's tale is almost as dramatic and much more traditionally romantic. Richard apparently penetrated his brother's estate in secret and found the Lady Anne disguised as a maid. He spirited her off and married her in 1474 when she was eighteen years old, three years after Tewkesbury (not three months) and four years before George's imprisonment.

Even so, George would not release the estate and Richard did not get his half of it until the question was brought up before Parliament. (George shows up very badly in all this, as in almost every action of his life.) In 1476 Anne gave birth to a son, the only child Richard was destined to have. Thus, at the time of George's imprisonment, not only was Richard already married, he was already a father. Richard's son never appears in the play, since there is no opportunity in that connection to vilify Richard.

Richard's half of the Warwick estate lay chiefly in the north and he succeeded to the role of the Nevilles there (see page II-649). Indeed, in the last years of Edward's reign, Richard was the hard-working and capable ruler of the north. Working always for Edward, his own loyalty remained untarnished. Between 1480 and 1483 he served the north with such efficiency and justice as to grow popular indeed. He was outstanding in war as well as in peace, for he invaded Scotland and established the English boundary there as it stands today.

... the trust of Richard Gloucester

The scene shifts to the palace, where Queen Elizabeth is distraught over the possibility of Edward's death. With her are three members of her family. There is her brother Anthony Woodville, Lord Rivers, who is just the King's age. There are also her two sons by her earlier marriage. One is Thomas Grey, 1st Marquis of Dorset, who is now twenty-six years old, and Richard Grey, his younger brother (referred to in the play as Lord Grey).

When the men try to comfort her with the thought that even if her husband should die, her son would be King, Queen Elizabeth replies:

*Ah, he is young, and his minority
Is put into the trust of Richard Gloucester,*

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A man that loves not me, nor none of you.

-Act I, scene iii, lines 11-13

How can Edward entrust his sons to the mercies of his evil, ruthless brother? Easily—since in history that brother was loyal, capable, and warlike. He was the natural Protector, as an earlier Gloucester had been of an earlier child-king (see page II-523).

The Prince of Wales, another Edward, was only eight years old at the time of the imprisonment of George of Clarence.

... Buckingham and Derby

Two courtiers approach, and Lord Grey announces them, saying:



Here come the lords of Buckingham and Derby

-Act I, scene iii, line 17

Buckingham is Henry Stafford, 2nd Duke of Buckingham. He is the grandson of Humphrey Stafford, the 1st Duke, who played his part in *Henry VI, Part Two* as the man who entrapped and arrested Duchess Eleanor of Gloucester (see page II-589).

Buckingham's grandfather had died at the Battle of Northampton (see page II-630) in 1460, fighting on the side of Lancaster. Buckingham's father (Humphrey, Earl of Stafford) had died earlier still, in 1455, at the first Battle of St. Albans (see page II-624), also as a Lancastrian.

In 1460, then, it was young Henry, only six years old then, who inherited the ducal title. Edward IV took Henry in charge and saw to it that he grew up a firm Yorkist. In 1466, when he was still only twelve, he was married to Catherine Woodville, the sister of Queen Elizabeth, to bind him more firmly to the Yorkist cause, and to strengthen the Woodvilles with a good aristocratic connection.

Nevertheless, Buckingham was not entirely trusted. Edward IV held on to much of his ancestral estates, including the duchy of Hereford, and let him remain in obscurity. He was twenty-four at the time of George's imprisonment.

Derby is Sir Thomas Stanley. (His brother, William Stanley, is referred to in *Henry VI, Part Three* and is even onstage in the scene in which Edward IV is rescued from his imprisonment by the Archbishop of York—but is given no lines to say.)

Sir Thomas Stanley was an extraordinarily successful opportunist, for in those changeable times of civil war he managed always to shift to the winning side. He married Eleanor Neville, a sister of Warwick, just in time to be a Yorkist and to obtain high office under Edward IV. He went with the army to France in that 1475 fiasco and he fought in the north

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under Richard in the early 1480s. He was thirty-three at the time of George's imprisonment.

The Countess Richmond . . .

Both Buckingham and Stanley greet the Queen with polite good wishes, but the Queen turns on the latter and says peevishly:

*The Countess Richmond, good my Lord of Derby,
To your good prayer will scarcely say "Amen."*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 20-21

After the death of his wife, Stanley married again and his second wife was none other than Margaret Beaufort, the widowed great-granddaughter of John of Gaunt and the mother of Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond (see page II-666), who was the Lancastrian pretender to the throne. Thus, Stanley managed to keep a foot in the Lancastrian camp—and yet he got



away with it, managing also to be in high office with the Yorkists until it was time for him to decide which way to make the final jump.

Small joy have I . . .

The news that Buckingham and Stanley bring is that King Edward is feeling better and wants to make peace between the warring factions at his court.

Just then, however, in comes Richard of Gloucester, with Hastings. Richard plays the role of plain, blunt-spoken gentleman, angry with the Woodvilles for having had George of Clarence thrown into the Tower. With grim irony, he taunts the Queen with having maneuvered a marriage with a King who was too young to know better. Elizabeth, feeling herself bruised and battered from every direction, cries out:

Small joy have I in being England's Queen.

-Act I, scene iii, line 109

Even as she says so there appears in the background none other than old Queen Margaret, the wife of dead King Henry VI. She mutters, vindictively:

And less'ned be that small, God I beseech him!

-Act I, scene iii, line 110

Where did she come from? What was Margaret doing at Edward's court?

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In real life, she was not there. She could not be. Louis XI had ransomed her as part of the general settlement after Edward's abortive invasion of France in 1475. She had then gone back to her native land to remain there in poverty for the rest of her life. She never returned to England.

Margaret was, to be sure, alive at the time of the imprisonment of George of Clarence, but she was in France. Her appearance at the court is utterly fictitious and is designed merely to produce another dramatic scene. (Her appearance here places her in four different plays, however, since she was in all three *Henry VI* plays.)

The curse . . .

Richard and the others continue to wrangle while Margaret, unnoticed, listens. Richard accuses the Woodvilles of having been Lancastrians once, which is true (see page II-652), and they reply that they were merely



being loyal to their King.

At that, Margaret finally steps forward to maintain her status as their rightful Queen even now.

At once, all turn upon her. Richard says coldly that her misfortunes are the result of

*The curse my noble father laid on thee
When thou didst crown his warlike brows with paper
And with thy scorns drew'st rivers from his eyes
And then to dry them gav'st the Duke a clout [cloth]
Steeped in the faultless blood of pretty Rutland,*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 173-77

This was indeed the great scene of *Henry VI, Part Three* (see page II-639).

. . . *my quick curses*

As each person present piously scolds her for that atrocity, she turns on them, in frustration, and decides to do some cursing of her own. She cries out:

*Can curses pierce the clouds and enter heaven?
Why, then, give way, dull clouds, to my quick curses!
Though not by war, by surfeit die your king,
As ours by murder, to make him a king!
Edward thy son, that now is Prince of Wales,
For Edward our son, that was Prince of Wales,
Die in his youth by like untimely violence!*

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*Thyself a queen, for me that was a queen,
Outlive thy glory like my wretched self!
Long mayst thou live to wail thy children's death
And see another, as I see thee now,
Decked in thy rights as thou art stalled in mine!
Long die thy happy days before thy death,
And, after many length'ned hours of grief,
Die neither mother, wife, nor England's Queen!
Rivers and Dorset, you were standers-by,
And so wast thou, Lord Hastings, when my son
Was stabbed with bloody daggers. God I pray him
That none of you may live his natural age,
But by some unlocked accident cut off!*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 194-213

If this were an actual curse, actually delivered by Margaret, at the actual time it was supposed to be delivered, it would be a most amazing performance, for it proved to be nearly entirely accurate. It was composed, however, long after the events it was supposed to predict, so that we need not marvel at her prescience. It is nevertheless a crucial part of the drama



as
presented by Shakespeare. The rest of the play, as a matter of fact, describes the slow working out of Margaret's curse.

The worm of conscience . . .

A strong curse would make even a rationalist uneasy, and in the sixteenth century there were few rationalists and curses were considered efficacious by almost everyone. Even the hard Richard is disturbed and he tries to quiet Margaret before she moves on to the one person as yet unmentioned -himself.

But Margaret turns on him grimly and says:

*The worm of conscience still begnaw thy soul!
Thy friends suspect for traitors while thou liv'st
And take deep traitors for thy dearest friends!
No sleep close up that deadly eye of thine,
Unless it be while some tormenting dream
Affrights thee . . .*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 221-26

And this curse too is slowly worked out in the play.
And when Queen Elizabeth tries to shrug off this curse of Margaret upon Richard, the ex-Queen says to the present one:

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*The day will come that thou shalt wish for me
To help thee curse this poisonous bunch-backed toad,*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 244-45

Margaret excepts only Buckingham from her cursing, for he has neither harmed her nor stood by while others did. She tries to warn him against

Richard but he scorns her; whereupon she shrieks:

*O, but remember this another day,
When he shall split thy very heart with sorrow,
And say poor Margaret was a prophetess.*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 298-300

And that day too will come.

Catesby, I come . . .

Margaret leaves, her dramatic function done, and a gentleman arrives to say that King Edward wants the Queen. She says:



Catesby, I come. Lords, will you go with me?

-Act I, scene iii, line 321

The person who brought the message was William Catesby, who was later to be one of Richard's loyal advisers.

. . . my executioners

Richard is left alone on the stage, yet again. He muses gleefully on his villainy, when two men enter and Richard says:

But soft! Here come my executioners.

-Act I, scene iii, line 338

Apparently, Richard is in no mind to wait upon the law to bring about the end of George of Clarence; nor is he going to chance the possible repentance of King Edward. He will have George murdered forthwith.

Actually, of course, nothing of the sort happened. The law *did* take its course, after a fashion. That is, after George had been committed to the Tower on January 16, 1478, he was tried before a jury of English peers.

King Edward himself was prosecutor and in person came to demand his brother's condemnation. The peers could scarcely refuse and it was the

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Duke of Buckingham who acted as "foreman of the jury" and pronounced the death sentence.

On February 7 the speaker of the House of Commons demanded that the sentence be carried out, and soon afterward it was announced that George of Clarence was dead. Obviously, he had been executed as the law had demanded.

And what had Richard of Gloucester to do with that death? Nothing at all. Except that, even according to Sir Thomas More's dreadfully prejudiced account, he openly protested the whole procedure.

. . . to cross to Burgundy

In the Tower, meanwhile, the imprisoned George of Clarence is in con-



versation with the Keeper, and is telling him a nightmare he had had the night before. He begins:

*Methoughts that I had broken from the Tower
And was embarked to cross to Burgundy,*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 9-10

Burgundy was the natural place for him to flee, since his sister was dow-
ager duchess there.

Richard (in George's dream) is also on board ship, and George hurtles overboard when Richard stumbles and falls against him. George's first horrified thought as he plunges into the water is:

O Lord, methought what pain it was to drown!

-Act I, scene iv, line 21

Eventually (in his dream) he does drown, for he says:

*I passed, methought, the melancholy flood,
With that sour ferryman which poets write of,
Unto the kingdom of perpetual night.*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 45-47

The sour ferryman is, of course, Charon (see page I-68).

. . . *renowned Warwick*

George's dream continues after death, and, once in hell, he meets the shades of other dead men. He says:

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*The first that there did greet my stranger soul
Was my great father-in-law, renowned Warwick,
Who spake aloud, "What scourge for perjury
Can this dark monarchy afford false Clarence?"*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 48-51

The tale of the double perjury of George of Clarence, who first deserted his brother for Warwick at a crucial point, then Warwick for his brother at another crucial point, is told in *Henry VI, Part Three*.

Another shade approaches, crying out:

*"Clarence is come, false, fleeting, perjured Clarence,
That stabbed me in the field by Tewksbury.
Seize on him, Furies, take him unto torment!"*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 55-57



It is the shade of the young Prince of Wales, son of Henry VI, of course. And it is these lines which have forever pilloried George to those who are interested in this period of history, for he is almost never mentioned without some reference to "false, fleeting [fickle], perjured Clarence."

... *the malmsey butt* ...

The murderers arrive at the Tower then, after Clarence has fallen asleep again.

In a long scene, the murderers first debate with each other whether to kill George, then, when George awakes, they debate the matter with him. The First Murderer loses patience at last and stabs him, saying:

*Take that! And that! If all this will not do,
I'll drown you in the malmsey butt within.*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 272-73

Malmsey is a sweet wine produced in such Mediterranean regions as Cyprus, Italy, and Spain. In it, George of Clarence experienced the pain of drowning which earlier in the scene he had described with such fear.

Was George really drowned in a barrel of wine? Surely not. While the manner of his death was kept secret and only the fact of it announced, it seems ridiculous that anything as *outré* as drowning was involved. The bit about the malmsey gained currency after George's death but what inspired it we don't know. It was too dramatic not to be spread and eventually it came to be believed.

Shakespeare uses the tale to inject not only an added bit of gruesomeness

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in this horror play, but also because it inspires the poetic tale of his night mare drowning as a bit of dramatic irony.

... *God punish me*

The second act opens with King Edward on the stage for the first (and only) time. He appeared in *Henry VI, Part Two* as a teen-age earl, and in *Henry VI, Part Three* as a vigorous, sensuous King. Now he seems a sick old man striving to smooth the quarrels at court, presumably so that he may leave the throne to his young son in peace.

Under the royal eye, the various factions are forced to embrace and swear friendship; Hastings and Buckingham on one side, and the various Woodvilles (including the Queen) on the other.

All swear their love, fulsomely. Thus, Buckingham says to the Queen:

*Whenever Buckingham doth turn his hate
Upon your Grace, but with all duteous love
Doth [not] cherish you and yours, God punish me
With hate in those where I expect most love!*

-Act II, scene i, lines 32-35

This, as it turns out, is still additional dramatic irony, involving a



self-curse, like those of the Lady Anne.

But where is Richard of Gloucester so that he might join the love feast?

Buckingham spies him and says:

Here comes Sir Richard Ratcliffe and the Duke.

-Act II, scene i, line 46

Ratcliffe is another of the lowborn but trusted advisers of Richard. Richard gladly adds his voice to the general reconciliation and then, at an appropriate moment, snaps at them that George of Clarence is dead and throws the assemblage into disarray. King Edward can only gasp:

Is Clarence dead? The order was reversed.

-Act II, scene i, line 88

Was it? Not as far as history can tell. It is inserted here only to make it clear that Richard's is the full blame for George's death.

... *he rescued me*

King Edward bewails his brother's death, and indeed, Holinshed does

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say that whenever, during the rest of his reign, he had to pardon a criminal on appeal, he expressed sorrow over the fact that no one had pleaded for George's life. Shakespeare gives him the opportunity to express this sorrow now by the artificial device of having Stanley rush in to crave pardon for a henchman of his who has just committed murder. Edward says:

*Who told me, in the field at Tewksbury
When Oxford had me down, he [George] rescued me
And said, "Dear brother, live, and be a king"?
Who told me, when we both lay in the field
Frozen almost to death, how he did lap [wrap] me
Even in his garments, and did give himself
All thin and naked, to the numb-cold night?*

-Act II, scene i, lines 113-19

This is all very theatrical and perhaps Edward did regret his brother's death (and perhaps he put on the show to avoid seeming a tyrant), but does this sound like George? Would he rescue the brother he had shortly before tried to destroy? Was he unselfish enough to expose himself to



bitter cold for his brother's sake? Somehow that doesn't sound like the George we know, and we can all too easily suspect that this speech is included only for pathos.

Good grandam . . .

We next see onstage none other than the Duchess of York, together with the young son and daughter of George of Clarence. The son (whose speeches are ascribed to "Boy") asks:

Good grandam, tell us, is our father dead?

-Act II, scene ii, line 1

The Duchess of York tries to shield the children but cannot for long and is forced to admit the death. She is Cicely Neville, and she has suffered much. She is the aunt of the Earl of Warwick, who had been betrayed by her son, George, and killed in battle with her son, King Edward. She was the widow of Richard of York, who had died at Wakefield eighteen years before (see page II-639), and she is the mother of Richard of Gloucester too, and of slaughtered Edmund of Rutland.

George's son is Edward Plantagenet. His mother having been the eldest daughter of Warwick, the son inherits the title and is Earl of Warwick. Actually, he is not likely to have asked the question of his grandmother,

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for at the time of his father's death he was only three years old. His sister, Margaret, who also appears in this scene, was five years old.

. . . our king, is dead

The old Duchess of York bewails the treachery of her son Richard. In the play, she recognizes him throughout as a monstrous villain (though in real life she was always on good terms with him and probably felt him to be the best and most capable of her sons).

Even while the mourning proceeds, Queen Elizabeth enters with fresh cause for grief. She cries out to the Duchess:

Edward, my lord, thy son, our king, is dead!

-Act II, scene ii, line 40



The play makes it sound as though Edward died soon after George's death, possibly of remorse.

Not at all. Edward died on April 9, 1483, a little over five years after George's death. It was far more anger than remorse that did him in, for earlier that year Louis XI had renounced the treaty that would have married his son to Edward's daughter, and Edward was furious enough to plan another invasion.

It was not to be, however. Weakened by gluttony and debauchery, he fell ill and lingered only ten days. He was still three weeks short of his forty-first birthday at the time. And thus, for the first time, came to pass one of Queen Margaret's curses: "Though not by war, by surfeit die your king."

... *the young prince your son* ...

A scene of wild wailing by the women and children follows, until Rivers, the Queen's brother, rather impatiently says to Elizabeth:

*Madam, bethink you like a careful mother
Of the young prince your son. Send straight for him;
Let him be crowned . . .*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 96-98

The young Prince, Edward, had appeared in the last scene of *Henry VI, Part Three* as a baby. At that time he was made Prince of Wales and declared heir to the throne.

In 1473, when the young Prince was only three years old, he was taken to Ludlow to be titular ruler of the borderlands (or "marches") abutting

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Wales. This was the traditional estate of the Mortimer family, who were the earls of March. (Edward IV was himself Earl of March before the death of his father.) While in the west, the young Prince was placed in charge of his maternal uncle, Rivers, and his half brother, Lord Grey.

All this was supposed, eventually, to give the young Prince of Wales education in government, but those who were opposed to the Woodvilles saw in it something rather more sinister. The Prince was separated from

the court and was surrounded by Woodvilles, who would surely bring him

up to be strongly pro-Woodville in sympathy. By the time the young Prince succeeded to the throne, the Woodvilles would be immovable.

Of those opposed to the Woodvilles, Richard of Gloucester and Henry



of Buckingham would be paramount. They represented the old nobility, and both were descended from Edward III. (Buckingham's descent was not exclusively male, however, so he was not a Plantagenet.)

If it was indeed the Woodville plan to educate the Prince of Wales in their own interest, Edward IV died too soon. The young Prince was only thirteen at the time of his father's death, too young to rule on his own. There would be needed a regent or Protector and he was not old enough to play a part in the power struggle that would now come.

. . . *have comfort* . . .

Even as Rivers talks of crowning the Prince, Richard enters, all sympathy and warmth, saying:

*Sister, have comfort. All of us have cause
To wail the dimming of our shining star;*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 101-2

In actual history, Richard was not at court at the time of Edward's death. He was in the north, fighting the Scots successfully and upholding English honor.

As soon as he heard the news of the death, he went riding to London with a six-hundred-man escort, all wearing mourning. He supervised a magnificent funeral for his dead brother and called on all men to swear an oath of loyalty to the dead King's son, taking the oath himself first and accepting the Prince of Wales as Edward V, King of England. (Naturally, to the anti-Richard propagandists of succeeding reigns, this was profound hypocrisy, but they have no real evidence for that other than their own accusations.)

By the time Richard was back in London, however, the Woodvilles had had time to make their first moves and the new boy-king was also on his way to London with what amounted almost to an army. They were determined, apparently, to keep the royal child in a firm grip.

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Clearly, the anti-Woodville faction could not allow this to happen without attempting some counter or their cause might be forever lost. Thus, after the arrangement is made, in the play, to escort the new young King to London, Buckingham says to Richard, when the two are left alone on-stage:

*My lord, whoever journeys to the Prince,
For God sake let not us two stay at home;*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 146-47



. . . *virtuous uncles* . . .

The tension over who was to control the new King, the Woodvilles or the old nobility, was bound to give rise to the specter of civil war again, and Shakespeare now introduces a street scene in which a group of citizens are nervously discussing the news.

One of them, listed as Third Citizen in the speech assignments, says pessimistically:

Woe to the land that's governed by a child!

-Act II, scene iii, line 11

This is a biblical quotation, for in Ecclesiastes 10:16 we find "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child . . ." though that may have more a figurative than a literal meaning, so that what is intended is: Woe to the land whose king lacks wisdom.

The First Citizen is more optimistic. There were child-kings before whose accession did not mark immediate civil war. He says:

*So stood the state when Henry the Sixth
Was crowned in Paris but at nine months old.*

-Act II, scene iii, lines 16-17

(Henry VI succeeded to the throne at the age of nine months, to be sure, but he wasn't crowned at Paris till many years later, see page II-559.)

The Third Citizen points out that things were different then:

*. . . then the King
Had virtuous uncles to protect his Grace.*

-Act II, scene iii, lines 20-21

Actually, the comparison is a poor one, if comfort is intended. There was almost a civil war during the minority of Henry VI, and the ones at fault were those same "virtuous" uncles. At least Humphrey of Gloucester,

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the King's uncle, and Henry Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester, the King's great-uncle, were at odds, and their wrangling did England a great deal of damage and contributed to the loss of France (see page II-552).

Neither First nor Third Citizen seems to remember this, and instead, the First Citizen, speaking of uncles, says naively:

Why, so hath this, both by his father and mother.

-Act II, scene iii, line 22

But it is precisely that there are two uncles-Richard of Gloucester on the father's side and Anthony of Rivers on the mother's-that creates the



problem, for they are of opposing factions.
The Third Citizen sees this at once, for he says of the uncles:

*Better it were they all came by his father,
Or by his father there were none at all;
For emulation [rivalry] who shall now be nearest
Will touch us all too near. . .*

-Act II, scene iii, lines 23-26

. . . *at Stony Stratford*

In the palace, Queen Elizabeth is waiting for the arrival of her son, along with his Woodville escort. With her is the Archbishop of York, who brings news. He says:

*Last night, I hear, they lay at Stony Stratford;
And at Northampton they do rest tonight;
Tomorrow or next day they will be here.*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 1-3

The Archbishop of York is Thomas Rotherham, an English prelate who had long been a favorite of Queen Elizabeth. Through her influence, he gained a series of bishoprics, culminating in the Archbishopric of York in 1480. He also served as chancellor (the chief administrative official) from 1474 to the end of the reign of Edward IV.

If by the previous night the young King and his party were at Stony Stratford, they had traveled eighty miles southeast from Ludlow and had then been only fifty miles from London. To go to Northampton the following night would be odd, however, for Northampton is about thirteen miles due north of Stony Stratford and to go there would be to move away from London.

Actually what was happening was that Richard of Gloucester, together

with Buckingham, had gone westward to meet the young King and, if

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possible, to wrest him from the control of the Woodvilles. This is made out to be a terribly wicked deed by the anti-Richard propagandists later on, but viewed from the standpoint of practical politics, it was natural enough.

The dying King Edward IV had named Richard as Protector and it was clear that the Woodvilles would try to nullify that. Richard was only



fighting for his own. It might be ambition but it could be more than that, too; it was possible Richard considered himself more capable than the Woodvilles, and if so, it might well be argued that he was right.

Presumably, Richard was not of a mind to attack the escort directly and perhaps initiate what could degenerate into a civil war. He preferred strategy. By the time the young King and his party were at Stony Stratford, Richard and his were at Northampton.

Richard sent to Rivers and Grey, inviting them to meet him at Northampton so that they might confer on plans for the coronation. The Woodvilles chose to accept rather than to make the first move toward open hostility, and all dined together warmly at Northampton the following night.

This, apparently, is why the Archbishop places the Woodville party at Stony Stratford one night and Northampton the next.

... my son of York

The Dowager Duchess of York is also present when the Archbishop brings the news and with grandmotherly care expresses a hope that the King has grown sufficiently since they last saw him. Queen Elizabeth responds:

*... I hear no; they say my son of York
Has almost overta'en him in his growth.*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 6-7

This is the first mention of Queen Elizabeth's second son, and his first appearance too, for he is also onstage. This second son, named Richard for his grandfather, is two years younger than the new King. Born in 1472, he is eleven years old now.

... sent to Pomfret

But now a Messenger comes hastening in with news. The young King is well, but not so with his escort. He says:

*Lord Rivers and Lord Grey are sent to Pomfret,
And with them Sir Thomas Vaughan, prisoners.*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 42-43

While the pleasant night of dining had kept the Woodvilles busy, Rich-



ard's men had proceeded to Stony Stratford, where apparently they won over the Woodville escort by either threats or bribes or both. The next morning, Richard, Buckingham, and the Woodvilles rode amicably to Stony Stratford, and when they got there, Richard placed Rivers and Grey under arrest. This was on April 30, 1483, only three weeks after the death of Edward IV.

Richard and Buckingham then made their way to the place where the King himself had spent the night and bent their knees to him. This did not prevent Richard, however, from arresting Sir Thomas Vaughan, who was personal counselor to the boy-king. Vaughan had been an ardent Yorkist who had fought in many battles, but he was part of the Woodville faction and Richard would not have him.

The arrests were brutal and were carried through by treachery. This is not to be admired and yet one might very easily argue that it was Richard's prime duty to prevent civil war. He had taken the course which would wipe out the Woodville faction suddenly and without general bloodshed.

Before there was time for response, it would be all over, and by cruel action against a few, he would have prevented eventual cruel action against many.

This sort of reasoning has been indulged in, in one way or another, by every strong ruler in the history of the world (something like it was, for instance, used to justify the dropping of the atom bomb on the people of Hiroshima). Its use does not make Richard admirable, of course, but neither does it make him a monster.

Queen Elizabeth recognizes the efficacy of the blow, for as soon as she hears the news, she says:

Ay me! I see the ruin of my house.

-Act II, scene iv, line 49

... we will to sanctuary

Queen Elizabeth might have faced up to the situation with courage (as old Queen Margaret would have, we can be sure). She might have out-faced Richard, demanded the release of her kinsmen, tried to raise an army, start a civil war. Or she might have tried to soothe and flatter Rich-



ard, bidding her time.

She did none of these things. Fearing the worst and incapable of taking any positive action, she fled. She says to her younger son:

Come, come, my boy; we will to sanctuary.

-Act II, scene iv, line 66

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Elizabeth had been in sanctuary before, in Westminster Abbey, when Warwick had driven her husband out of England. She had been safe there

then, for Warwick had not offered to violate sanctuary, and there she had

given birth to the child who was now King. She returned to the same sanctuary now. With her she took not only the young Duke of York but also (though not mentioned in this passage) her five daughters and her remaining son by her first marriage, Dorset.

The Archbishop of York, for helping her on this occasion and for remaining loyal to the Queen who had patronized him, was relieved of his position as chancellor and was even imprisoned for a short time.

Lord Cardinal. . .

The young King, Edward V, now escorted by Richard of Gloucester, Buckingham, and their men, arrived in London on May 4, 1483. Edward

V, more than a little upset by the disappearance of his Woodville relatives, wonders why his mother and brother are not there to greet him.

The reason is soon apparent when Hastings appears to explain that Queen Elizabeth and young Richard of York are in sanctuary.

This is troublesome for Richard. Queen Elizabeth herself may stay in sanctuary for all he cares. The same might be said for her daughters or her remaining Woodville son. Richard of York is another matter altogether.

The young Duke of York is next in line for the throne and is therefore a prize for anyone who meditates civil war. If Richard is to maintain the peace of England, he must control young York as well as the young King.

Buckingham therefore says:

*Lord Cardinal, will your Grace
Persuade the Queen to send the Duke of York
Unto his princely brother presently?*

-Act III, scene i, lines 32-34

The Lord Cardinal here addressed is Thomas Cardinal Bouchier, who is



sixty-fifth Archbishop of Canterbury. He received that office in 1454 when Henry VI was King and labored in vain to bring about a reconciliation between York and Lancaster in the early years of the Wars of the Roses. In 1461 it was he who crowned Edward of York and made him Edward IV.

...at the Tower

While the Archbishop of Canterbury goes off, rather reluctantly, and under some pressure from Buckingham, to perform his task, the young King asks where he will be lodging. Richard answers smoothly:

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*Where it seems best unto your royal self,
If I may counsel you, some day or two
Your Highness shall repose you at the Tower;*

-Act III, scene i, lines 63-65

The Tower of London (see page II-305) gained a grim reputation as a place of imprisonment and execution for state prisoners—partly, in fact, because of the events in the late fifteenth century: the imprisonment and death of Henry VI and of George of Clarence, for instance.

Nevertheless, it did serve as a royal residence as well, even in the time of Edward V. When Richard suggests the Tower, he clearly wants the boy-king secure from seizure by the Woodville faction or by anyone else who might wish to dispute the government as being set up by the Protector. In that sense, the King would be held a prisoner.

On the other hand, it cannot be assumed that the King is only a prisoner simply because he is in the Tower, or that Richard, in suggesting the Tower, views it *only* as a prison.

His wit set down . . .

The mention of the Tower brings up Shakespeare's favorite historical character, and the young King talks sententiously of Julius Caesar. He says:

*That Julius Caesar was a famous man.
With what his valor did enrich his wit,
His wit set down to make his valor live.
Death makes no conquest of this conqueror,
For now he lives in fame, though not in life.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 84-88

It was indeed a remarkable aspect of Caesar that he made his fame as a man of thought as well as a man of action. In oratory, he was considered second, in his time, only to Cicero. As a prose writer, he was also second only to Cicero, and his *Commentaries* described his own campaigns in Gaul with great skill. In this way, he helped assure his own immortality "in fame, though not in life."



Edward Vs remarks are intended to show his intelligence, to demonstrate what a King there might have been and to intensify the villainy of those who did away with him. To show that it was not only intelligence but also nobility and gallantry, young Edward is then made to say, to Buckingham:

And if I live until I be a man,

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*I'll win our ancient right in France again
Or die a soldier as I lived a king.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 91-93

The English dream of French conquest died hard. It was still active through the first half of the sixteenth century. As late a king as Henry VIII invaded France with some dun notion of conquest a generation after young Edward V's brief life..It wasn't until Spain replaced France as England's chief enemy in the late sixteenth century that the long and useless dream faded.

To be sure, England fought France on a number of occasions thereafter, the final battle being that of Waterloo in 1815, but after the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, such wars did not involve dreams of continental conquest on England's part.

... the Duke of York

But now the Cardinal returns with the King's younger brother, and Buckingham greets them with:

Now in good time here comes the Duke of York.

-Act III, scene i, line 95

It seems, in the play, that it took the Cardinal little time to persuade the Queen to give up her younger son. Actually, it was a hard job that required not only cajolery, but threats. Richard had to make it clear, no doubt, that if the Queen did not give up her son, force would be used.

Again, this seems ruthless of Richard and it is ruthless. That can't be glossed over. But once again, it might be looked upon as a stroke of politics necessary to prevent any danger of civil war.

In any case, it was on June 16, 1483, fully six weeks after the young King's entrance into London, that his younger brother was released from sanctuary and was sent to join Edward V in the Tower. With that, Richard lost interest in the Queen and her other children and throughout the rest of the play they are in no particular danger.

... the installment of this noble duke

Richard was playing a dangerous game during the months after his brother's death. He had struck sharply and daringly, destroyed the Woodville faction, and placed himself in control of the King.

Once that was done, the very success brought new danger. There was an anti-Woodville alliance that backed Richard, but once the Woodvilles were



gone would the alliance hang together? There was Hastings, for instance, who was at strong enmity with the Woodvilles, but not out of any particular love for Richard. How reliable was he now?

At some point (we don't know exactly when) Richard must have begun to feel that the post of Protector was not enough. Its power was insufficient

and it was impermanent. In three years or so, young Edward V would be old enough to rule in his own name, and in those three years enemies might accumulate waiting to destroy Richard. This had happened to another Protector less than half a century before, one who had also been a

Duke of Gloucester (see page II-599).

Richard might also have reasoned that England needed a strong King, and not a royal child with squabbling advisers. The record of the minority

of Henry VI was not of such a nature as to bear repetition.

Then too, there's no use in trying to make Richard out to be an utter angel. The chance to be King was tempting and there were few who could resist that temptation.

But if Richard was to make himself King, whether out of pure ambition, or self-defense, or a noble concern for England's welfare, he must still make sure he had appropriate allies. The opposition must be won over or

disposed of in advance or else he would become King only to preside as general on one side of a civil war, as had been the case with Edward IV.

Thus, Buckingham begins the intrigue on behalf of Richard by calling Catesby to his side. He says to him:

*What thinkest thou? is it not an easy matter
To make William Lord Hastings of our mind
For the installment of this noble duke [Richard]
In the seat royal of this famous isle?*

-Act III, scene i, lines 161-64

Catesby is doubtful. He shrewdly suspects that Hastings' old friendship for Edward IV will not allow him to abandon Edward IV's son. What's more, he thinks Stanley will follow Hastings in this.

...sit about the coronation

Nevertheless, Buckingham urges Catesby to sound out Hastings, then says:

*And summon him tomorrow to the Tower
To sit about the coronation.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 172-73

Originally, it had been planned to crown young King Edward on May 4,

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the day on which, *in fact*, he had entered London. The arrest of the Wood-



viles gave Richard reason (or pretext, perhaps) to delay the coronation, in order to make sure the country was quiet.

A new date of June 22, 1483, was being considered, and this date is now approaching. It is by now less than two weeks off and something must be done quickly. If Richard is to be King he cannot wait. Once Edward V is crowned, he will be that much harder to set aside.

Give Mistress Shore. . .

As Catesby leaves to see Hastings, Richard calls after him with rough humor:

*Tell him, Catesby,
His ancient knot of dangerous adversaries [the Woodvilles]
Tomorrow are let blood at Pomfret Castle,
And bid my lord, for joy of this good news,
Give Mistress Shore one gentle kiss the more.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 181-85

Jane Shore, who had been mistress of the dead King, was perfectly willing to oblige Hastings after the King's death.

One can see Richard's purpose here. Hastings, in gratitude over the death of his enemies, might remember that Richard had been the agent for the working of this revenge and perhaps might feel he ought to help Richard in return. Richard is perfectly willing to dispose of Hastings if necessary, but, as a sensible man, he would rather have his help than his death.

The earldom of Hereford. . .

Meanwhile loyal Buckingham is to have his reward. Richard says:

*. . . when I am king, claim thou of me
The earldom of Hereford and all the movables
Whereof the King my brother was possessed.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 194-96

This is a reference to the ancestral estates which Buckingham had inherited through his descent from the Bohun family, but which Edward IV had retained for his own use because of the Lancastrianism of Buckingham's father and grandfather.

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He dreamt the boar. . .

At Lord Hastings' house, someone arrives before Catesby does. It is a Messenger with a word from Lord Stanley. The Messenger says:

. . . this night



He [Stanley] dreamt the boar had rased off his helm.

-Act III, scene ii, lines 10-11

Richard's standard had a boar depicted upon it so that it was easy to refer to Richard as "the boar" (or, if one wanted to be insulting, "the hog").

The suspicious Stanley, to whom survival was a fine art, did not trust Richard, and felt that something dangerous was in the wind. He wished to warn Hastings, obliquely (anything direct would be unsafe), that Richard might be planning to cut off a few heads.

The message suggests flight but Hastings laughs at the warning. He feels that Catesby is his friend, and Richard too.

... this crown of mine ...

But then comes Catesby, who loses no time in advancing the suggestion that Richard ought to be King. Whereupon Hastings says:

*I'll have this crown of mine cut from my shoulders
Before I'll see the crown so foul misplaced.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 43-44

That seals his fate, but he doesn't know it, and for the rest of the scene he is in high good humor, continually complimenting himself on how well off he is.

... Margarets curse ...

Before the meeting of the Tower to which Hastings is heading is shown, there is a quick shift of scene to Pomfret Castle, where, nearly a century before, Richard II died (see page II-312) and where now the Woodvilles are being led to execution. A second time, Margaret's curse is fulfilled. She had wished that those who stood by while her son was murdered

at Tewkesbury be "by some unlocked accident cut off."

To be sure, her prophecy was imperfect. She had mentioned Rivers and

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Dorset in that connection (for Shakespeare was following Holinshed in this respect). Dorset, however, was safe in sanctuary. It was Dorset's younger brother, Lord Grey, who was accompanying Rivers. Shakespeare might easily have changed the curse to suit this historically correct fact,

but this seems to be one of the many places where Shakespeare didn't bother to make a correction.

As it is, it is Grey who remembers the curse and says:



Now Margaret's curse is fall'n upon our heads,

-Act III, scene iii, line 14

The exact day on which the execution took place is not certain but it is commonly said to have taken place on the day that Hastings attended the meeting at the Tower. If so, that would make it June 13, 1483, just six weeks after they were proceeding so happily to London with the young King, fully expecting to be masters of England.

. . . good strawberries . . .

Meanwhile, at the Tower, the council is meeting, with Hastings still fatuously confident of Richard's friendship. When Richard finally appears, after all are seated, he seems perfectly calm and amiable. Indeed, he engages one of the men present in apparently aimless small talk, saying:

*My Lord of Ely, when I was last in Holborn
I saw good strawberries in your garden there.
I do beseech you send for some of them.*

-Act III, scene iv, lines 31-33

My Lord of Ely is John Morton, an aged prelate over sixty years old. He had been a partisan on the Lancastrian side and it was not till after the Battle of Tewkesbury that he submitted to the Yorkists. He proved useful as a diplomatist to Edward IV, negotiating the treaty with Louis XI in 1475 after Edward's abortive invasion.

He was finally rewarded for his belated conversion and his usefulness by being made Bishop of Ely in 1479. His heart, however, always remained with the house of Lancaster to at least some extent, and the shrewd Richard did not trust him.

The Bishop of Ely is thought by some to have written the history of Richard III usually ascribed to More (see page 11-616) or to have supplied More his source. If so, one can easily see the history can scarcely be unbiased.

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. . . that harlot strumpet Shore

And yet, before the council is over, Hastings, together with Stanley and Morton of Ely, are arrested. No doubt it was done suddenly, under a show

of good fellowship, as in the case of the Woodvilles, in order to paralyze any attempt at resistance. When it was done, though, it was probably done

in straightforward fashion, with the usual accusation of treason.

Later legend, however, had Richard do it in deliberately sadistic fashion. After his great show of friendliness, he retires a moment, then returns

in a rage, crying out that he is the victim of witchcraft. He says:



*Look how I am bewitched. Behold, mine arm
Is like a blasted sapling withered up;
And this is Edward's wife, that monstrous witch,
Consorted with that harlot strumpet Shore,
That by their witchcraft thus have marked me.*

-Act III, scene iv, lines 67-71

To the Elizabethan audience, which firmly believed that Richard was a monster, with all his features and limbs misshapen, it would be well understood that Richard's arm was withered to begin with and that by making this speech he was deliberately mocking his victims and amusing himself by making patently foolish accusations as a cause for action.

Actually, he didn't have a withered arm in the first place, so the story is patently false. Secondly, there was no need for such foolishness; a straight-forward arrest was all that was necessary.

How did the story of the withered arm and witchcraft start then? Was it pure invention? Or was there a natural origin? We can speculate. . .

The fact is that Richard did arrange to have Jane Shore punished. She had not been a bad mistress as mistresses go. She had exerted no undue influence on Edward IV, and had used her power (or what power she had) neither to enrich herself unduly or to harm anyone out of spite.

Nevertheless, her existence was probably offensive in itself to Richard, who was puritanical for his times (the real Richard, not the legendary one), and he may even have blamed her for the excesses that brought his loved brother to an early grave. He therefore delivered her to an ecclesiastical court, which forced her to undergo penance, making her walk through the London streets, barefoot, in a single garment and carrying a lighted candle.

(Richard's deeper motive, if one wishes to ascribe Machiavellianism to him, may have been to blazon forth in dramatic fashion the fact that his brother the King had been notoriously wanton. This would fit in well with what was soon to be forthcoming.)

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Jane Shore was punished only for her sexual offenses, but the nature of the penance was precisely that inflicted on Eleanor, Duchess of Gloucester, forty years before (see page II-594), and Eleanor had been accused of witchcraft. After a time, therefore, it was easy to suppose that Jane Shore had been accused of witchcraft too, and then that fable was easily escalated into a transparently fake excuse on the part of Richard to get at Hastings, who had become her lover after Edward's death.

Lovell and Ratcliffe . . .

Indeed, when Hastings, stunned and utterly confused at Richard's accusation, begins stumblingly to say something, Richard orders his head chopped off at once and says:

Lovell and Ratcliffe, look that it be done.

-Act III, scene iv, line 77

Francis Lovell was the third (along with Catesby and Ratcliffe) of Richard's lowborn advisers. He was made a viscount at about this time.

Lowborn advisers are generally the target of vilification by the aristocracy (see page II-276) and are blamed for all that goes wrong by a populace reluctant to grumble against the King himself. Thus, a defamatory couplet, ascribed to one William Collingbourne, was soon to circulate about the land to Richard's considerable propagandistic disadvantage, one which went: "The Rat, the Cat, and Lovell our Dog / Rule all England under the Hog."

The Rat is Ratcliffe, the Cat is Catesby, and the Hog is, of course, Richard with his boar standard.

. . . thy heavy curse

Hastings too was a stander-by at the death of Prince Edward at Tewkesbury according to Holinshed, and he too was included in the old Queen's curse, which now is fulfilled a third time, as Hastings himself says:

*O Margaret, Margaret, now thy heavy curse
Is lighted on poor Hastings' wretched head!*

-Act III, scene iv, lines 91-92

Apparently, he died on the same day as did his Woodville enemies, though if that is so, Ratcliffe is made to be in two places at one time. It is he in the previous scene who supervises the execution of the Woodvilles, and it is he, with Lovell, who is supposed to supervise this execution now.



... He deserved his death

Richard does not have Stanley or Morton beheaded. The quick death of Hastings he apparently felt to be lesson enough. No one, he seems to have decided, would now be hardy enough to oppose his own assumption of the throne-not openly, at any rate.

(That, as it turned out, was a mistake on his part, for both Stanley and Ely were to betray him at crucial times. This represented still another fulfillment, a fourth, of Margaret's curse, for she had wished that Richard might "take deep traitors for thy dearest friends.")

It remained, however, for Richard to convert mere lack of opposition into enthusiastic acceptance. For that reason, in the next scene, Richard and Buckingham are shown politely explaining to the Lord Mayor of London the reason for the sudden execution of Hastings. The latter (they say) was conspiring to assassinate Richard and Buckingham.

The shocked Mayor says at this:

*Now fair befall you! He deserved his death,
And your good Graces both have well proceeded
To warn false traitors from the like attempts.*

-Act III, scene v, lines 47-49

The Lord Mayor of London at this period was Sir Edmund Shaw. He was a supporter of Richard, and, in actual fact, the Duke had a deserved popularity with the people of London at this time. This meant a good deal, since their active opposition would probably have prevented Richard from assuming the crown.

... the bastardy of Edward's children

Richard was working fast. The execution of Hastings and the Woodvilles had broken the baronial opposition, the seizure of the young Duke of York had deprived potential rebels of a rallying point, and now he was winning over the people.

To clinch his hold on the people, Richard launched a clever propaganda campaign aimed at the London middle class in particular. The Lord Mayor had gone to the city hall, no doubt to meet with other city officials, and Richard instructs Buckingham on just how he is to press the point. Richard says:

*There, at your meetest vantage of the time,
Infer the bastardy of Edward's children,*

-Act III, scene v, lines 74-75

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In actual fact, it does indeed seem that Richard organized a whispering campaign stressing the fact that Edward was in the habit of promising marriage to young women who seemed resistant to his blandishments.



Lady Elizabeth Grey was fascinating enough and resistant enough to force him to carry out the pledge openly, so that she became Queen, but she was by no means the first to receive one.

Eleanor Butler, widowed daughter of John Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury and hero of *Henry VI, Part One*, was one of those to whom Edward IV had promised marriage, the whispers went. Another of the sort was a Lady Elizabeth Lucy, and the whispers even went so far as to maintain that in this latter case, the King had actually gone through some private form of marriage to satisfy her, then had thrown her over. If this were so, then his later marriage to Lady Grey was invalid and his children by her were illegitimate.

There is no way of telling whether all this were true or not, and perhaps Richard would not have hesitated at this point in stretching the truth a bit, if that meant placing a strong King (himself) on the English throne.

... *his hateful luxury*

The people (particularly the comfortable and morally conservative London middle class) would be readier to believe these tales of Edward if they could be made to understand the nature of his lust. It would also serve to make the dead King more unpopular and his children less acceptable.

Thus, Richard tells Buckingham:

*Moreover, urge his hateful luxury
And bestial appetite in change of lust,
Which stretched unto their servants, daughters, wives,
Even where his raging eye or savage heart,
Without control, lusted to make a prey.*

-Act III, scene v, lines 80-84

This would well tie in with the punishment of Jane Shore, the most notorious of his mistresses. She was, after all, the wife of a middle-class Londoner, who had been cavalierly taken from her husband to serve the royal lust. Surely each London citizen could see himself in the role of enforced cuckold and would be offended. (And surely each citizen-wife might be offended at the thought of the danger she had undergone-or possibly at not having been picked by the roving royal eye.)

In any case, the whispering campaign was so well calculated and so cleverly pursued that public opinion veered rapidly from young Edward to his warlike uncle.

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... *the issue was not his begot*

Indeed,, the later tales of the anti-Richard chroniclers make the



whispering campaign reach a most monstrous pitch. Thus, Richard tells Buckingham:

*Tell them, when that my mother went with child
Of that insatiate Edward, noble York
My princely father then had wars in France,
And by true computation of the time
Found that the issue was not his begot;*

-Act III, scene v, lines 86-90

This is implausible on several counts.

First, it was unnecessary. It sufficed that Edward V and the young Duke of York were illegitimate; the illegitimacy of Edward IV would be in that case irrelevant. In fact, it would be worse, for it would cast a shadow on

Richard himself. (If the mother produced one bastard, why not two?)

Second, it would involve an incredible slur on Richard's own mother, and even if he were monster enough to initiate such a slander, it would

certainly offend his mother to the core. In fact, Richard, even in his role

as Shakespearean villain, is a little nervous about his mother's reaction,

for he tells Buckingham concerning the issue of his mother's infidelity:

*Yet touch this sparingly, as 'twere far off,
Because, my lord, you know my mother lives.*

-Act III, scene v, lines 93-94

But in actual history, Richard III was always on good terms with his old mother and there is no evidence at all that she thought him a monster (as

she constantly does in the play, making open reference to his vile character

at every opportunity.)

Then, third, it was too easily countered. If York had thought his oldest son was a bastard, would he have placed such love and reliance on him in

his final years, as he most notoriously did?

. . . to Doctor Shaw

With Buckingham gone about his business, Richard says:

*Go Lovell, with all speed to Doctor Shaw.
Go thou [Catesby] to Friar Penker.*

-Act III, scene v, lines 103-4

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The whispering campaign had to be brought out into the open and to a



climax speedily indeed-before coronation time. On June 22, the day which at one time had been considered for the coronation, a friar, Dr. Ralph Shaw (a brother of the Lord Mayor), preached publicly on the bastardy of the children of Edward IV, telling the tale of the prior marriage. Friar Penker did his share in this as well.

The possible bastardy of a king, even if only through a quibbling technicality, would be a frightening thing at the time. An illegitimate king would

be one who would not be king by the grace of God, and to make him a king would ensure evil for the kingdom.

. . . the brats of Clarence, . .

Left alone onstage, Richard says:

*Now will I go to take some privy order
To draw the brats of Clarence out of sight,
And to give order that no manner person
Have any time recourse unto the Princes.*

-Act III, scene v, lines 106-9

The logic of events was forcing Richard further and further. If he were to become King, then the children of his dead brothers Edward IV and George of Clarence, all of whom had a better claim on the throne than himself, would have to become prisoners indeed, if only to keep them out of the exploiting hands of potential rebels.

All this was not unprecedented in English history, and indeed, in any land where the monarch does not have a clear title to the throne, those with possibly better titles are imprisoned or worse, almost as a matter of

course. Thus, Henry IV, whose title to the crown was no better than Richard's, kept the young Earl of March, whose title was better, in prison throughout his reign.

Again, we are faced with acts that do not redound to Richard's credit, but (again) it was the habit of the time and Richard is merely a realistic politician, and not an unusual monster, for doing as others did.

. . . his contract by deputy. . .

The later chroniclers go into detail in recording how reluctant the citizens were to make Richard King and how many times and how crudely they had to be nudged into doing it. Thus, Buckingham returns to describe

their failure to respond despite the fact that he had followed Richard's orders and mentioned

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*. . . his contract with Lady Lucy
And his contract by deputy in France;*

-Act III, scene vii, lines 5-6

Here is something Richard had not specifically mentioned himself. Twenty years before, Warwick had gone to France to arrange a marriage



between Edward IV and Bona of Savoy (see page II-650). The negotiations had broken down because of Edward's marriage to Lady Grey (something which had led eventually to the break between Edward and Warwick).

If, now, Edward had agreed to marry the Lady Bona, that too might be considered as good as a marriage in the eyes of God and it might suffice to render a later marriage invalid.

Despite all this, the commons remained unenthusiastic and Buckingham is forced to go through a long farce in which he begs Richard to become King while Richard (pretending to be deep in a pious discussion with two priests) first refuses and finally gives in almost tearfully. Buckingham at last cries out:

*Then I salute you with this royal title:
Long live King Richard, England's worthy king!*

-Act III, scene vii, lines 238-39

Actually, Richard was not as unpopular as the later historians pretended, or else his whispering campaign worked better than they cared to admit. On June 25, 1483, three days after the tale of the bastardy of the princes had been made the subject of open preaching, a gathering of nobles, clergy, and citizens declared Edward IV's marriage to Elizabeth Grey invalid on the grounds of previous marriage. The sons of the dead King were excluded from the throne and the crown was offered to Richard.

On June 26 he accepted and became Richard III, so that little Edward Vs reign (with never a coronation) had lasted less than three months.

... *to be crowned*

Buckingham then says:

Tomorrow may it please you to be crowned?

-Act III, scene vii, line 241

Richard agrees. Actually, he was crowned not the day after his acceptance of the throne, but eleven days after, on July 6, 1483.

The coronation was carried through with great success and with no signs of trouble. Richard had obviously made up his mind to win over all hearts with liberality and geniality. Having won the throne by dubious

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means he might hope to drown that out in the memories of men by the deeds of a long, competent, and just reign. Surely Richard might easily hope to reign twenty years or so, since he was only thirty-one years old when he assumed the kingship, and as for competency, he had displayed that in every field. (As for precedent for living down a dubious beginning, think how Henry V's glamorous victories had utterly drowned out the memory of the rebellion and murder by which his father had gained the crown.)

Richard saw to it, for instance, that the widow and children of Hastings were well taken care of, and also the widow of Rivers. Even the widow of Oxford, an obdurate Lancastrian (see page II-656), was pensioned off.

He and his wife, Queen Anne, then proceeded to make a royal progress throughout England, and were greeted with enthusiasm wherever they



went, particularly in the north, where his successful campaign against Scotland in recent years had made him very popular.

. . . live with Richmond . . .

The news that Richard has made himself King is brought to Queen Elizabeth when she tries, vainly, to see her sons in the Tower. With her is her one remaining son (by her earlier marriage), Dorset. She realizes that

Richard's new position will make him all the more eager to prevent challenges from those who favor the deposed Edward V.

Distraught, she says to Dorset:

*// thou wilt outstrip death, go cross the seas
And live with Richmond, from the reach of hell.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 41-42

Richmond, whom we saw in *Henry VI, Part Three* as a youngster, lived in Brittany through all the years since Tewkesbury. At the time of the accession of Richard III he was a man of twenty-six, and round him all the Lancastrian remnant had rallied and, further, all those who had been Yorkists but who for one reason or another opposed Richard III.

Nor mother, wife . . .

Queen Elizabeth remembers Margaret's curse and urges Dorset to flee:

*Lest thou increase the number of the dead
And make me die the thrall of Margaret's curse,
Nor mother, wife, nor England's counted queen.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 44-46

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Actually, Dorset escaped Margaret's curse, which had specifically included him to be "by some unlocked accident cut off." He fled, as Elizabeth asked him to do, and he did eventually ally himself with Richmond. He was to live on to 1501, dying at last of natural causes at the age of fifty.

Queen Elizabeth, however, does indeed represent the fifth occasion on which Margaret's curse comes true. She was no longer Queen or wife, and although she remained a mother all her life (for several of her children, including her son Dorset, outlived her), she had already witnessed the death of one child, Lord Grey.

That part of Margaret's curse which says of Elizabeth, "Long mayst thou live to wail thy children's death / And see another, as I see thee now, / Deckerd in thy rights as thou art stalled in mine!" came only



partly true. Elizabeth did live on for nine years after the death of her husband and did see another reigning as Queen. Before she died, however, she was to see her eldest daughter become Queen of England. There must have been some small compensation there.

... never yet one hour...

Richard's wife, the Lady Anne, now to be the Queen of England (whom Elizabeth will be forced to see "Decked in thy rights"), is also present. She bewails her own lot, remembering that once she had wished that Richard's wife would be made more miserable than she herself had been made by her first husband's death (see page II-689). She now realizes that she had cursed herself:

*For never yet one hour in his bed
Did I enjoy the golden dew of sleep,
But with his timorous dreams was still awaked.
Besides, he hates me for my father Warwick,
And will, no doubt, shortly be rid of me.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 82-86

It's hard to tell what goes on between a man and wife, but there is no hard evidence to the fact that the marriage between Richard and Anne was anything but a reasonably happy one. At the time of his accession, he and Anne had been married nine years and had a seven-year-old son whom they dearly loved. Besides, no imputations of sexual immorality clung about Richard as they had about Edward IV; not even Shakespeare accuses Richard of lust.

Richard's son is not mentioned in the play, no doubt because there is no way of turning the existence of a loved son into another example of monstrosity on the part of the King.

The reference to Richard's timorous dreams harks back to Margaret's

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curse again, and is the sixth instance of its coming true. Margaret had said, with regard to Richard, "No sleep close up that deadly eye of thine, / Un-
less it be while some tormenting dream / Affrights thee. . . ."

... I wish the bastards dead

Richard is now King of England but he feels insecure even so. He begins to hint as much to Buckingham, his right-hand man, musing about the princes in the Tower-but Buckingham is suddenly obtuse. Finally Rich-



ard is forced to be direct, and raps out:

*Shall I be plain? I wish the bastards dead,
And I would have it suddenly performed.*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 18-19

Here approaches the climax of Richard's infamy in the eyes of the English chroniclers of the succeeding century, and the great puzzle of his reign even in legitimate history.

What happened to the princes? After Richard became King, they were never seen again, and within a month of his coronation the rumor began to go round that they were dead. Undoubtedly, they did die eventually, and the skeletons of two small bodies have been located in the Tower, bones that could very easily be their remains.

The question is: Did Richard III order them killed?

In English history, between the time of Henry II and Richard III, there were four times when a reigning monarch had been deposed and had lived on while his successor took over the robes of office. The first three cases were those of Edward II, Richard II, and Henry VI.

(1) Edward II was deposed on January 7, 1327, by a Parliament under the domination of his wife Isabella and her lover Mortimer. Edward's fifteen-year-old son succeeded as Edward III but for a time he was merely a puppet in the hands of his mother and her lover. In September 1327 Edward II was secretly murdered at the order of the ruling pair.

(2) Richard II was deposed on September 30, 1399, and his cousin succeeded as Henry IV. In February 1400 he was murdered, undoubtedly at the order of his successor (see page II-312).

In each of these two cases, the murder came in a matter of months. The reasoning, in each case, was undoubtedly that to leave a deposed monarch alive was merely to leave a center about which revolt could gather. Only the death of the ex-King could ensure the safety of his successor.

(3) Henry VI was, in a sense, deposed on March 4, 1461, when Edward IV was proclaimed King. Henry VI was not captured by the victorious Yorkists until July 1465, and he was then imprisoned in the Tower.

Edward IV did *not* follow precedent but instead let ex-King Henry live.

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For five years Henry remained a live prisoner in the Tower and Edward's reward for this moderation was that when Warwick rebelled against him, he used Henry as the rallying point and restored the old King to the throne in October 1470. When Edward IV regained the throne through the battles of Barnet and Tewkesbury, he did not repeat his earlier mistake. Henry VI was killed at once.

Now Richard III was faced with a fourth situation of the sort. Edward V had reigned only a matter of weeks and had never been crowned, but surely he would serve as the center of any disaffection that might evolve. And if he died, his younger brother would succeed to that position. Richard might have felt that it was necessary for the good of the state that the princes die.

If, after those deaths, Richard then reigned long enough and well enough, they would be forgotten. It was never held against Edward III that his father had been murdered to get him the crown (though it was not Edward III himself who had been responsible). Henry IV had some trouble over the death of Richard II but he lived out a natural reign and his son and grandson succeeded him. Edward IV had a troubled reign before Henry's



death and a relatively peaceful one after.

It might easily have been so with Richard too, except for one thing that made the situation unique. The ex-King and his brother were children. The enormity of killing two children was too great, and even arguments of state failed to cover the matter completely. If Richard III did order the young princes killed then even his apologists must shake their heads uneasily.

But did he?

... is *Tyrrel*

Since Buckingham, who has helped Richard at every step with his monstrous deeds (according to the Shakespeare version of history), seems to draw the line at killing the princes, Richard must find another tool.

He calls a Page and asks for some unscrupulous person, and wonder of wonders, the Page knows the very man. He says:

His name, my lord, is Tyrrel.

-Act IV, scene ii, line 40

Richard seems to have heard of the man only vaguely and when he meets him later, questions him to gauge his quality. This makes it appear as though Tyrrell is some obscure "gunman for hire."

Nothing of the sort! He was Sir James Tyrrell, a member of a distinguished family and an ardent fighter in the cause of York. He had been

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knighthood in 1471 for his services and he served as Member of Parliament in 1477.

There is nothing in his later life to indicate he was a murderer. He served Richard III in various capacities, which would have been odd if he

had supervised the murder of the princes. Richard would have wanted

him out of the way lest he bear witness if that had been the case, and if

Richard were the monster he was supposed to be, he would certainly have arranged to have Tyrrell killed.

He did not. Tyrrell survived Richard and lived to serve Richard's suc-

cessor, Richmond (who was to reign as Henry VII). Henry VII had everything to gain from having people believe that Richard had had the

princes killed, in order to plunge his predecessor into the depths of popular

execration and shore up his own hold on the throne-yet he employed Tyrrell.

It was not till 1502, after Henry had reigned seventeen years, that Tyrrell fell into the royal bad graces. Tyrrell was accused of treason, ar-

rested, and executed. Before he was executed, however, he confessed,



or
was forced to confess, or was reported to have confessed, that he had
been
placed in charge of the Tower on the day the princes were killed and
that
he had supervised that killing at the hands of two assassins.

Was the confession true? It is impossible to say. We can only state
that
it was awfully convenient for Henry VII.

There are some superapologists for Richard III who maintain that
the
princes were kept alive throughout Richard's short reign and were
killed
by Henry VII for the same reasons of state that might have motivated
Richard. In that case Henry VII would badly need some sort of
evidence
to put the blame elsewhere.

But why Tyrrell? Why extract a confession from him rather than
from
someone else? Perhaps a little clever psychology was involved here.

Exactly one reigning king in English history was assassinated. That
was
William II, who died on August 2, 1100, with an arrow in his back
during
the course of a gay hunting party. It might have been an accident, but
William was a hated man and everyone considered it an
assassination.
Exactly who did it is not certainly known either, but one man fled
rather
than face an inquest, and though he stoutly maintained his innocence
(from
abroad), common opinion made him the assassin.

And who was this man? His name was Walter Tirel and there were
ru-
mors that the family of Sir James Tyrrell was descended from this
man.
Could Henry VII have picked Tyrrell for the role of killer of the
princes
because he could rely on the populace associating this Tyrrell with the
earlier Tirel?

In any case, the version put out in the report of the confession is the
one
that is used in Shakespeare's *Richard III* and is the one that is accepted
by
the world.

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The boy is foolish . . .

Richard must take measures with respect to others than the young
princes too. He says to Catesby:

Rumor it abroad



*That Anne my wife is very grievous sick;
I will take order for her keeping close.
Inquire me out some mean poor gentleman,
Whom I will marry straight to Clarence' daughter.
The boy is foolish, and I fear not him.*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 49-54

It is clear from this passage that (in Shakespeare's version) Richard plans to make sure his wife dies; presumably by poison. Actually, Richard's young son died in April 1484 at the age of eight, some nine months after his coronation, and not even the most extreme anti-Richard fanatic ever suggests he had anything to do with *that*. All reports indicate, rather, that Richard and Anne were overcome with grief and one might suspect it was that grief rather than any hypothetical poison that shortened the mother's life.

On March 16, 1485, Queen Anne died. She was only twenty-nine at the time of her death, but life was short in those days and there is absolutely no real evidence that Richard in any way hastened her death.

Naturally, Richard III would be concerned over Clarence's children, particularly the son, who had precedence over him to the throne, just as the royal princes had.

For that reason, Richard intends to marry the daughter, Margaret (who inherited her great-grandfather's title of Salisbury), to some individual sufficiently low in the social scale to make her and her descendants unacceptable as monarchs.

This is the sort of scheme suitable for the Richard of the legend, but it never happened. She was indeed married to a gentleman not very high in the social scale, one Sir Richard Pole, but this was not engineered by Richard III, but by his successor, Henry VII.

As for young Edward, Earl of Warwick, the only son of George of Clarence, he was kept in prison through Richard's reign. This may be regarded as a harsh act perhaps, but Richard's successor, Henry VII (made the epitome of nobility in this play), *also* kept him in prison.

Edward may have been mentally retarded, but do we know that for a fact? Shakespeare has to say so to account for the fact that monster



Richard does not kill him. And why can't Richard be accused of killing him, since he is accused of so many other things he did not do? Because

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the actual truth of the death of Edward of Warwick is known. He was executed not at the order of Richard III, but at the order of his successor, Henry VII, in 1499.

... *my brother's daughter*

And why must Richard be rid of Anne? Through her and the Warwick connection she signified, Richard was more secure in the north than he would be without her. Actually, her death was a political blow to him as well as a personal loss.

This, however, is useless for the Richard legend. Some self-seeking motive must be found for her death, and he is made to think of the security of his throne. He says:

*I must be married to my brother's daughter,
Or else my kingdom stands on brittle glass.*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 59-60

The reasoning is clear. If he married Elizabeth, the oldest daughter of Edward IV, and had a son by her, that son would be a grandson of Edward IV. If Richard's own title to the throne was faulty, the son might nevertheless be accepted for his grandfather's sake.

Nevertheless, if he did so, Richard would be marrying his own niece and would be committing incest. The rumor that Richard planned to marry his niece actually spread itself after the death of the Queen. Richard, in actual history, was horrified at the suggestion and on April 11, 1485, before the Lord Mayor of London and a group of substantial citizens, he solemnly disavowed any such intention.

Just the same, the anti-Richard polemicists of the next reign pinned the intent of incest to him.

... *the giving vein* . . .

Buckingham now re-enters. He recalls that Richard has promised him the earldom of Hereford and now requests it. Richard is concerned with the threat of Richmond, recalling that Henry VI had prophesied he would someday be king (see page II-667). Buckingham keeps insisting on his reward.

Richard, angry at Buckingham's flinching away from the murder of



the
princes, finally flashes out at him:

/ am not in the giving vein today.

-Act IV, scene ii, line 115

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Thus, Richard reneges on his promise to his faithful henchman (faithful in all but the final demand) and forces nun into the opposition. In a way, this is the seventh coming-true of Margaret's curse, for she had wished that

Richard would "Thy friends suspect for traitors while thou liv'st."

But here too, Richard is maligned, for, as a matter of fact, he did turn over Hereford and its income to Buckingham within a week of his coronation.

To Brecknock . . .

The shocked Buckingham, left alone onstage, says:

*Made I him king for this?
O, let me think on Hastings, and be gone
To Brecknock while my fearful head is on!*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 119-21

Brecknock is a county in southern Wales and its chief city is also called Brecknock (Brecon, in the modern version). The city is about 140 miles west of London, and it would seem that Buckingham feels the need of distance and wild country to keep him safe.

Actually, since Richard did indeed give him the promised reward, Buckingham did not flee for safety's sake. He fled because he turned against Richard and aimed to raise an army of sturdy Welshmen to help him overthrow the King.

Why? Nobody really knows, but that he did so because of his mistreatment at the hands of Richard is an invention of the later chroniclers.

Can it be that his experiences in helping Richard reach the throne may have put it in his mind that he was himself a descendant of Edward III and a third cousin, once removed, of Richard III? Can he have thought of the crown for himself?

Or if he did not think of this spontaneously, might it be that there existed those who put it in his mind in order to use him as a tool to overthrow Richard? The Bishop of Ely (see page II-714), who had been arrested along with Hastings a few months earlier, had been placed in the charge of Buckingham. Some suggest that the bishop artfully and eloquently fired the seeds of ambition in him and persuaded him to revolt.

We will probably never know the truth.

. . . tyrannous and bloody act. . .



Now the stage is cleared, and after an appropriate and ominous interval, Tyrrell enters, saying:

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*The tyrannous and bloody act is done,
The most arch [extreme] deed of piteous massacre
That ever yet this land was guilty of.*

-Act IV, scene iii, lines 1-3

The princes, in other words, have been killed, and for the eighth time, Margaret's curse comes true. She had said to Queen Elizabeth: "Edward thy son, that now is Prince of Wales, / For Edward our son, that was Prince of Wales, / Die in his youth by like untimely violence!"

Now even if we set aside Tyrrell's confession in the next reign, the question still arises: Did the princes die in the Tower (no matter how and no matter by whom) during the reign of Richard III?

The answer, alas, is very likely in the affirmative. It is the one atrocity of which Richard III cannot be cleared.

The rumors of the princes' deaths arose in August 1483 and spread. By January 1484 the French government was broadcasting official accusations

in this respect, anxious, as the French always were, to embarrass England

politically. (Louis XI, see page II-651, died in 1483, his reign exactly spanning that of Edward IV, and was succeeded by his thirteen-year-old son, Charles VIII.)

It seems beyond question that had the princes been alive, Richard would

have produced them as a matter of political necessity. Had they died of natural causes, Richard would at least have said so, even if he suspected that his enemies would refuse to believe him.

Instead, Richard stubbornly maintained a deep silence on the matter.

We can only suppose that Richard (perhaps after hearing of Buckingham's defection and fearing that the existence of the princes would accelerate the effect of the rebellion) hastily gave the order for their killing.

If so, it must have greatly disturbed his conscience and perhaps he made

no defense because he felt that none could be made. Perhaps he even felt

that he deserved the obloquy heaped upon him. It is even possible to wonder if he felt (in the context of his times) that the death of his own son, nine months later, was a punishment for his deed.

The murder of the princes was a mistake as well as a crime. The atrocity tale did more to stir up rebellion and keep it alive than the living princes would have been able to do. What's more, the fact of that murder, unrefuted by Richard and perhaps unrefutable, made the public ready to believe

all the other libels placed on poor Richard's head by his enemies in later

reigns. It was possible to make Richard a monster and to attribute to



him

a hundred vile deeds of which he was innocent because of this one horrible

act of which (whatever his motives and however he may have justified it to

himself) he was probably guilty.

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... *backed with the hardy Welshmen*

In Shakespeare's version, no sooner does Richard learn of the death of the princes than he receives word of Buckingham's defection. (In real history, it seems possible-though we have no evidence-that it may have been the other way around.)

Ratcliffe enters, saying:

*Bad news, my lord. Morion [the Bishop of Ely] is fled to
Richmond,
And Buckingham, backed with the hardy Welshmen,
Is in the field, and still his power increaseth.*

-Act IV, scene iii, lines 46-48

By October 1483 it was plain that Buckingham was not only meditating rebellion in Wales, but was actually organizing it. Richard declared him a traitor, and on October 18, 1483, Buckingham took the field and led his Welsh army out of Wales and into England.

... *the waning of mine enemies*

The march of events is interrupted by a long scene involving the women of the play. Old Queen Margaret enters first, gloating over the manner in which the Yorkists are destroying each other. She says:

*Here in these confines slyly have I lurked
To watch the waning of mine enemies.*

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 3-4

This is a good trick for her. Not only had she spent the last years of the reign of Edward IV in France, so that she could not have appeared on the scene in any part of *Richard III*, but she had died in 1482, a lonely, miserable, embittered woman of fifty-three. She had died, in other words, a year before Richard III had come to the throne and too soon to see any of the fulfillments of the curse attributed to her in this play.

She is joined by her old rival, ex-Queen Elizabeth, and by her even older rival, the Dowager Duchess of York, and all three bewail their miseries. In fact, ex-Queen Elizabeth finds so much in common with ex-Queen Margaret as to say to her:

O thou well skilled in curses, stay awhile



And teach me how to curse mine enemies!

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 116-17

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Thus, Margaret's curse comes true a ninth time, for she had said to Elizabeth that "The day will come that thou shalt wish for me / To help thee curse this poisonous bunch-backed toad."

Richard himself enters, however, and manages to persuade (or to seem to have persuaded) ex-Queen Elizabeth to agree to his marriage to her daughter, the Princess Elizabeth, exactly as, at the beginning of the play, he had talked Lady Anne into marriage.

It should be repeated, though, that there is no historical evidence that such a marriage was contemplated.

... a *puissant navy*...

But now Ratcliffe arrives with more bad news. He says:

*Most mighty sovereign, on the western coast
Rideth a puissant navy; to our shores
Throng many doubtful hollow-hearted friends,
Unarmed, and unresolved to beat them back.
'Tis thought that Richmond is their admiral;*

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 433-37

Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, had been seeking help from his continental hosts for years. Cautiously, they had avoided committing themselves. Only now, with Buckingham in rebellion, did it seem worth the gamble to help Richmond do what Bolingbroke had once done with similar help (see page II-286).

Indeed, Richmond's attempted invasion was designed to co-operate with Buckingham's rebellion, for as Ratcliffe says concerning the ships:

*... there they hull [drift] expecting but the aid
Of Buckingham to welcome them ashore.*

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 438-39

... *the Duke of Norfolk*

Richard must take speedy action. He cries out:

Some light-foot friend post to the Duke of Norfolk:

-Act IV, scene iv, line 440

The Duke of Norfolk was John Howard, first of that family to bear the title. His mother, however, was a daughter of Thomas Mowbray, the



Duke
of Norfolk who had fought that famous non-duel with Bolingbroke
(see
page H-273).

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Norfolk was an ardent Yorkist, and in 1483, after Richard's accession, he was made Duke and Earl Marshal of England. He was thus the commander of Richard's army in the absence of the King himself.

... never will be false

Richard feels harried from all sides. He turns his mistrustful eyes on Lord Stanley, Earl of Derby and stepfather of Richmond, but Stanley says:

*Most mighty sovereign,
You have no cause to hold my friendship doubtful.
I never was nor never will be false.*

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 491-93

This is rather ironic, since Stanley was a twister and turner who never hesitated to be false to anyone, and in this way ended up always on top. What's more, despite his pious assertion, he was to be specifically false to Richard.

Richard, however, lets himself be partly convinced and asks only a hostage. He says:

*Go then and muster men; but leave behind
Your son George Stanley.*

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 494-95

How could Richard, so sharp, so suspicious (in Shakespeare's version), accept the word of so confirmed a trimmer as Stanley?

But Stanley was not the only one to benefit from Richard's leniency. There were a number of disaffected Yorkists who were plotting secretly (as Stanley was) to betray Richard to Richmond, and the King seemed to detect none of them. One might almost think the killing of the princes had broken the King's spirit. He was reluctant to shed further blood.

Buckingham's army is dispersed. . .

News of continuing defection continues to come in from all



directions,
but then, suddenly, a Third Messenger arrives, who says:

*... by sudden floods and fall of waters
Buckingham's army is dispersed and scattered,
And he himself wand'ered away alone,*

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 510-12

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Buckingham's rebellion turned out to be abortive. His army, marching eastward, found the Wye and Severn rivers in flood and could not cross them. The few days' delay was fatal. The initial fervor of his men waned; the floods looked like heavenly disapproval and a bad omen; and the army began to disperse.

Without a single passage of arms, Buckingham found himself defeated and a fugitive.

The same bad weather also aborted Richmond's attempt to land men to co-operate with Buckingham, and a Fourth Messenger arrives to say:

The Britain [Breton] navy is dispersed by tempest.

-Act IV, scene iv, line 521

It was in Brittany that Richmond was living. Brittany was then under Francis II, its last semi-independent duke. He died in 1488 (five years after Richmond's abortive invasion), leaving a daughter, Anne, as his only heir. She married Charles VIII, the French King, and since then Brittany has remained an integral part of France.

To Salisbury . . .

Buckingham as fugitive was no more successful than Buckingham as rebel leader. In comes Catesby to say:

My liege, the Duke of Buckingham is taken.

-Act IV, scene iv, line 531

With grim satisfaction, Richard says:

*Someone take order Buckingham be brought
To Salisbury . . .*

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 537-38

Richard had already reached Salisbury on his way to deal with the western rebellion. Buckingham asked for an audience with Richard, but the King refused to see his erstwhile friend and ordered him executed forthwith.

As Buckingham is led to execution, he says bitterly:

*This is the day which in King Edward's time
I wished might fall on me when I was found
False to his children and his wife's allies.*



-Act V, scene i, lines 13-15

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He had sworn this at the time when the dying King Edward had attempted to reconcile the factions at the court, and he had then said that if he broke the oath, "God punish me / With hate in those where I expect most love!"

He remembers also Margaret's curse, saying:

Thus Margaret's curse falls heavy on my neck:

-Act V, scene i, line 25

Margaret had warned him to remember her words "another day, / When he [Richard] shall split thy very heart with sorrow." This is the tenth occasion on which her prophecies come true.

On November 2, 1483, Buckingham was executed. He was twenty-nine years old.

... landed at Milford

With Buckingham's death, the six months of confusion following the death of Edward IV came to an end, and Richard III entered a period of calm.

It was during this period that he labored to outlive the irregularities of the beginning. For instance, he went on to display his enlightened rule when Parliament was called into session. (There was, as it turned out, only a single Parliament under Richard III.) It met on January 23, 1484, and a large number of laws against unfair taxations and against too great an ease of arrest were passed.

The laws that were passed, all of them liberal, were published in English, rather than Latin, for the first time, so that all men could understand them and not scholars only. As another way of making them more available to all, they were printed. Indeed, Richard went out of his way to encourage the growth of printing in the land.

It seems quite reasonable to suppose that if Richard had only had a chance to live out a normal life span, if his son had lived, if foreign intrigue against him had ceased, he would have ended as one of the best and most popular kings the land had ever had. But it was not to be.

In this period of intended peace and justice, his son and wife died, and disaffected Yorkists continued to intrigue with Richmond.

Richard III endeavored to persuade Duke Francis of Brittany to hand over Richmond, but Richmond managed to make his way into France



proper and there to find a still more powerful patron in the French government.

The French were most eager to make use of Richmond. Richard III was an able warrior and the most determined monarch England had seen since Henry V. He had objected to his brother's pusillanimous treaty with Louis XI (see page II-688) and there was reason to think that he might want to

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invade France once again, once his domestic troubles were settled. It was up to France, therefore, to see that those domestic troubles continued.

With French help, Richmond was finally ready to make another move, and Shakespeare skips a nearly two-year interval by having the announcement of that move made by Catesby in the same speech in which he announces Buckingham is taken (and immediately after an earlier Messenger had stated that Richmond's fleet had been dispersed by storms and had returned to Brittany-that was the first attempt).

Catesby says:

*... the Earl of Richmond
Is with a mighty power landed at Milford*

-Act IV, scene iv, lines 532-33

Richmond, having left Harfleur on August 1, 1485, landed at Milford Haven (see page II-67) on August 7. Milford Haven, a Welsh port, was a good place for a landing for Richmond, who was a Tudor and therefore the descendant of a Welsh family. It was to be taken for granted that the Welsh would flock to the standards of a Welshman.

... Elizabeth her daughter

Meanwhile, Stanley, who is busy at his treason, is sending a message to Richmond, explaining that the fact his son is being held as hostage inhibits his actions. He says to the go-between:

*... say that the Queen hath heartily consented
He should espouse Elizabeth her daughter.*

-Act IV, scene v, lines 7-8

It would appear, then, that ex-Queen Elizabeth had deceived Richard (in the play). Having seemed to concede to his demand that she agree to let him marry her daughter, she is, instead, conniving to have Richmond do so.



The marriage, as it happens, was a political necessity for Richmond. He was depending for much of his strength, not on Lancastrians, but on dissident Yorkists. These Yorkists were opposed to Richard but were not entirely overwhelmed with delight at the thought of a Lancastrian long. By agreeing to marry Princess Elizabeth, Richmond is making it possible for his son and successor to be a grandson of Edward IV. Richmond's son would then be Yorkist as well as Lancastrian and the long feud could finally be buried. And this, in fact, is what really happened.

The person to whom Stanley is talking is Sir Christopher Urswick, a chaplain who is confessor to Margaret Beaufort, mother of Richmond and

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wife of Stanley. In history, he did, in fact, help to carry on the negotiations that led to the marriage of Richmond and Princess Elizabeth.

Oxford . . .

Stanley asks Sir Christopher concerning the men who have lined up behind Richmond and Sir Christopher says:

*Sir Walter Herbert, a renowned soldier;
Sir Gilbert Talbot, Sir William Stanley,
Oxford, redoubted Pembroke, Sir James Blunt,
And Rice ap Thomas . . .*

-Act IV, scene v, lines 12-15

Of these, several are worth comment.

Sir Walter Herbert was the son of William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke.

The elder Herbert had appeared briefly in *Henry VI, Part Three*, was captured at the Battle of Edgecote (see page II-663), and was later executed by the Lancastrians. Despite this family grudge against the Lancastrians, Sir Walter fights for Richmond.

Sir William Stanley is the brother of the Stanley to whom Sir Christopher is speaking.

Oxford is the Lancastrian leader of *Henry VI, Part Three* who fought at Barnet and who eventually led the last forlorn attempt at Lancastrian invasion several years after Tewkesbury (see page II-674). He was imprisoned near Calais but eventually managed to escape and join Richmond.

Sir James Blunt is the grandson of Sir Walter Blunt, who appeared in *Henry IV, Part One* (see page II-373) and who died at the Battle of Shrewsbury.



From Tamworth thither . . .

Now at last Richmond appears on the scene. He is already in the center of England. He stops his march to address his men, and referring to Richard, says:

*. . . this foul swine
Is now even in the center of this isle,
Near to the town of Leicester, as we learn.
From Tamworth thither is but one day's march.*

-Act V, scene ii, lines 12-13

Richmond, having landed in Milford Haven, marched northeastward

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through Wales. He was not opposed, but neither was he vigorously supported by people who undoubtedly expected him to be defeated by the warlike Richard.

When Richmond emerged from Wales and took Shrewsbury (see page II-360) without a fight on August 15, 1485, he had only four thousand men. From Shrewsbury, he marched about forty-five miles eastward to Tamworth (a town some fifteen miles northeast of modern Birmingham).

It was not till a week after Richmond's landing that Richard learned of the invasion. He marched as rapidly as he could to Leicester, twenty-five miles east of Tamworth, and by August 20 the two armies were facing each other. Richard's army was larger and better than Richmond's and

Richard was far the better general.

On that basis alone, one would have expected Richard to win.

. . . here in Bosworth field

Richard at least acts confident. When he appears on the scene, he says:

*Here pitch our tent, even here in Bosworth field.
My Lord of Surrey, why look you so sad?*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 1-2

The two armies met for actual combat in a field twelve miles west of Leicester and only three miles from the small town of Market Bosworth, which gave its name to the battle-renowned for being the last of the generation-long Wars of the Roses.

"My Lord of Surrey" is Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey and son of John of Norfolk, who is also on the scene.

. . . Lord Northumberland

Surrey denies being downhearted, and indeed, he and his father are



to fight valiantly for Richard. What Richard seems to be unaware of, however, is that some of his officers have no intention of fighting for him. There is the case of Stanley, of course, but he is not the only one.

At one point Richard asks of Ratcliffe:

Saw'st thou the melancholy Lord Northumberland?

-Act V, scene iii, line 68

Northumberland is the Henry Percy whose titles were temporarily given to John Neville (see page II-659) in the early part of the reign of Edward IV.

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Northumberland is reported to Richard as laboring to keep up the army's morale, but he had a right to be melancholy. He was playing a double game, having sold out to Richmond, and such games are hard to play on the field of battle.

What's more, Richmond is doing his best to avail himself of the treasonable intentions of Richard's officers. He tries to establish communication with Stanley, for instance, saying to one of his own officers:

*Sweet Blunt, make some good means to speak with him
And give him from me this most needful note.*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 40-41

"Jockey of Norfolk . . .

Nor can it be that Richard is entirely unwarned of all this. After the night is over (a night during which Shakespeare has all the ghosts of people whom Richard has supposedly slain appear to him in a nightmare-remember Margaret's curse-and curse him, while blessing Richmond), the Duke of Norfolk finds a note in his tent. He brings it to Richard and it reads:

*"Jockey of Norfolk, be not so bold,
For Dickon thy master is bought and sold."*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 305-6

("Jockey" is a diminutive of John, "Dickon" of Richard.) The note tells the truth, but Richard curtly dismisses it as merely enemy propaganda, designed to hurt morale.

. . . he doth deny to come

One might suppose that Richard is blind to possible treason because in his heart he wants to lose. The death of son and wife have deprived him



of hope for the future, the killing of the young princes must surely lie heavy on his heart, the Elysium that Shakespeare represents him as thinking is to be found within the circuit of the crown (see page II-634) eludes him, and in his short reign all his attempts to be the just and good king have failed to keep the Hydra-head of rebellion from erupting.

Nevertheless, when the Battle of Bosworth opens on August 22, 1485, Richard fights with all his old-time generalship and bravery. As Catesby reports to Norfolk:

The King enacts more wonders than a man,

-Act V, scene iv, line 2

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But it does no good. At a crucial moment, when Stanley is supposed to hurl his division into the fray, a Messenger arrives, saying:

My lord, he [Stanley] doth deny to come.

-Act V, scene iii, line 344

Richard furiously orders Stanley's hostage son decapitated, but in the heat of battle there is not time.

There is worse to come (though the details are not mentioned in the play). When Richard's army was counterattacked in flank, Northumberland's men could easily have swept that thrust aside, but Northumberland stood idle also.

If, of Richard's army, those who actually fought are counted, then it was Richmond who had the outnumbering forces after all.

... *My kingdom for a horse*

Richard, fighting like a giant, is nevertheless unhorsed and comes staggering onto the scene with what is (for some reason) one of the most famous lines in Shakespeare's plays. He cries:

A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!

-Act V, scene iv, line 7

Actually, Richard might have survived. He could easily have escaped the field. Earlier kings had survived lost battles; even his brother, Edward IV, fled before Warwick and survived to return.

Catesby says to Richard:

Withdraw, my lord; I'll help you to a horse.

-Act V, scene iv, line 8

Richard, however, refused. He would not run to take up a life in exile as his brother had done and as Richmond had done.

We might easily imagine that he was tired of it all; tired of the politics and executions that had gotten him his crown; tired of the unending labors



to win a popularity that would not come; tired of continual treason; and (perhaps) tired of the conscience he must live with over the matter of the princes.

. . . the bloody dog. . .

In the play, Richard and Richmond meet and fight (Shakespeare always

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decides battles by Homeric single combat) and Richard falls.

Richmond
says in triumph:

The day is ours; the bloody dog is dead.

-Act V, scene v, line 2

Actually, the battle came to an end when Richard, despairing, deliberately charged into a dense group of enemies, crying "Treason, treason."

He hacked away, killing a number, before he was pulled off his horse and

killed in his turn, at the age of thirty-two.

Richmond at once assumed the crown and became Henry VII of England.

Richard III was the last Plantagenet to rule in England, the last King who

could trace his ancestry back through a continuing series of males to Henry

II of England. One Plantagenet alone remained in existence and that was

young Edward, son of George of Clarence, still in the Tower. This grand-

son of Richard of York, and great-great-great-grandson of Edward III,

was to remain in prison under Henry VII as well.

. . . the White Rose and the Red

But the English people no longer worried about Plantagenets. More than

anything else they wanted peace. What kept Henry VII on his throne, more than anything else (for he was a hard, cold, avaricious man, not at

all the saintly character pictured by Shakespeare), was the English longing

for peace at last.

Henry VII caters to this desire when he says:

We will unite the White Rose and the Red.



-Act V, scene v, line 19

By this he means his marriage to Elizabeth of York, daughter of King Edward IV. He goes on to say:

*O, now let Richmond and Elizabeth,
The true succeeders of each royal house,
By God's fair ordinance conjoin together!
And let their heirs, God, if thy will be so,
Enrich the time to come with smooth-faced peace,*

-Act V, scene v, lines 29-33

Henry VII eventually married Elizabeth on January 18, 1486, half a year after Bosworth, at which time she was twenty-one years old. The marriage lasted for seventeen years, since Elizabeth died in 1503. In that

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time, though, she bore Henry a daughter and two sons. The younger son, born on June 28, 1491, eventually succeeded to the throne as Henry VIII, and it was he who represented the union of White Rose and Red, for he was the son of Henry VII and the grandson of Edward IV.

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The Famous History of the Life of

KING HENRY THE EIGHTH

s

SHAKESPEARE had written his last play dealing with fifteenth-century English history in 1599. It was *Henry V*. With that, he had completed the eight plays which carried English history from 1399 to 1485, through all the turbulent quarrels over the succession that had begun with the deposition of Richard II.

That stretch of history from the death of Thomas of Gloucester in Calais to the death of Richard of Gloucester at Bosworth represented a neat section of English history, with a clear beginning, a clear ending, and a glorified peak at the Battle of Agincourt. It even had a moral (the evils of deposing a rightful king, even under provocation) and, above all, it supplied a happy ending, for after the Battle of Bosworth, England moved into an era which was, on the whole, one of peace and reconciliation.

Having completed his treatment of the fifteenth century, then, it was reasonable for Shakespeare to move on to his tragedies, his Roman



plays, his bitter comedies. (One might also speculate that after 1599, with the tragedy of the revolt and execution of the Earl of Essex that soon followed (see page I-120), Shakespeare lost his taste for English history as a theme of drama. It had come too close to home.)

Yet one historical play remains to be treated; one more attempt to deal with English history. That was *Henry VIII*. It dealt with a period later than that of any other historical drama Shakespeare had written and it

came at the very close of the dramatist's career. It was produced about 1612 or 1613 and many scholars do not consider it pure Shakespeare. There is a strong feeling that, like *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (which was written at about the same time), *Henry VIII* was worked at in collaboration with Fletcher (see page I-53).

Nevertheless, *Henry VIII* sounds considerably more Shakespearean than *The Two Noble Kinsmen* does, and the former is usually attributed to Shakespeare alone on the title page. What's more, *Henry VIII*, unlike *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, is usually included among editions of Shakespeare's collected works.

The events depicted in *Henry VIII* begin in 1520, so that thirty-five years have passed since the conclusion of *Richard III*. The Wars of the Roses were ended with the Battle of Bosworth and the policy of Henry VII (the "Richmond" of *Richard III*) was devoted almost entirely to the pre-

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vention of any new eruption. His aims, in other words, were just those of Richard III—peace and a strong monarchy—but Henry succeeded where Richard had failed.

Henry VII followed a deliberate policy of reconciliation. He indulged in no indiscriminate executions. He respected Parliament, went through all the necessary forms, had himself crowned on October 30, 1485, and fulfilled his promise to the anti-Richard Yorkists who had allied themselves with him by marrying Elizabeth of York (the daughter of Edward IV) on January 18, 1486.

In addition, he strengthened his own position by beginning a deliberate policy of vilification of Richard III. This successfully dimmed the possibilities of popular support for Yorkist pretenders and, in the long run, worked so well (thanks to More's biography of Richard, see page II-616, and, most of all, to Shakespeare's own play concerning him) that poor Richard was ineradicably branded for all time as the unspeakable monster he most certainly was not.

Finally, Henry VII was careful to move ruthlessly against anyone who might just possibly serve as a Yorkist rallying point. Thus, he continued to keep Edward of Warwick (the son of George of Clarence, and the last living Plantagenet) in prison.

There was another Yorkist who, however, was free and represented perhaps a greater danger than Warwick. He was John de la Pole, Earl of Lincoln, and the son of a sister of Edward IV and Richard III. When Richard's



own young son had died, it was John of Lincoln, his nephew, whom he named as his successor.

John of Lincoln joined an abortive revolt led by one Lambert Simnel, who pretended to be Edward of Warwick escaped from imprisonment. The revolt was not a dangerous one and was quickly crushed at a battle at Stoke (about 110 miles north of London) in 1487. John of Lincoln was killed at the battle. Lovell (who had been one of Richard III's chief advisers, see page II-715) was also fighting on the Yorkist side and was seen fleeing from the lost battle, but was never seen again thereafter.

Simnel had been financed by Margaret of Burgundy, the dowager duchess, who was another sister of Edward IV and Richard III's (see page II-642). She remained a bitter-to-the-end opponent of the Lancastrians, a kind of mirror image of that other Margaret, the one of Anjou.

Margaret of Burgundy supported any movement against Henry VII of whatever kind. She must have known Simnel was an imposter, for instance, but that didn't matter to her. She also supported one Perkin Warbeck, who pretended to be Richard, Duke of York, Edward IV's younger son (see page II-705), and claimed to have escaped from the Tower.

Warbeck made a better try at it than Simnel had done, but in the end he was defeated and captured too. He was imprisoned in the Tower and hanged in 1499. In that same year, Edward of Warwick was also executed on general principles and the last Plantagenet was gone.

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As for Margaret of Burgundy, she died in 1503 and the Yorkist cause vanished forever.

These Yorkist plots, which thus enlivened the life and reign of Henry VII, affected the English people little, and Henry, a shrewd and avaricious man,

devoted himself to building up the English treasury. When he died in 1509

England was prosperous, rich, peaceful, and ready to embark on its career

of world empire. It was, in fact, during the reign of Henry VII that the first English exploration of the New World began. An expedition under the

leadership of the Italian explorer Giovanni Caboto (better known in English as John Cabot) discovered Newfoundland and was the first to touch

the American mainland itself.

In addition to crushing the Yorkist cause by force and policy, Henry adopted it and made it part of his own dynasty. When he died, his son, another Henry, succeeded to the throne as Henry VIII. He was not only the son of Henry VII and therefore a descendant of John of Gaunt, and a Lancastrian, but he was the son of Elizabeth of York and therefore the grandson of Edward IV. In the person of Henry VIII, the houses of Lancaster and York, the Red Rose and the White, were combined.

As though to make that quite evident, Henry VIII, who became King at the age of eighteen, seemed to be Edward IV reborn. He was tall and strong, loved to wrestle and to write love ballads too. He was fair-haired

and handsome, learned and affable. It is no wonder that he was enormously popular with the people-and indeed, he remained so throughout his long reign, even though his handsomeness degenerated into piglike



obesity and his affability became an almost psychotic cruelty. He ended by being the sadistic tyrant in reality that Richard III was only in fable.

At the time *Henry VIII* opens, Henry VIII had been on the throne of England for eleven years.

Good morrow . . .

As the play opens in the antechamber of the palace in London, three men enter. One speaks, saying:

*Good morrow, and well met. How have ye done
Since last we saw [each other] in France?*

-Act I, scene i, lines 1-2

The speaker is Edward Stafford, 3rd Duke of Buckingham, the eldest son of the Buckingham who played so important a role in *Richard III* (see page II-692), first helping that King gain the throne and then almost at once moving into revolt.

When Henry of Buckingham was executed under Richard, his son Edward (who is now speaking) was only five years old. When Richard III

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was defeated and killed, two years later, the new monarch, Henry VII, restored his father's title and lands to young Edward.

By the time Henry VIII succeeded to the throne, Buckingham was high in favor and one of Henry's first acts as King was to make Buckingham Lord High Constable (essentially a commander in chief of the armed forces), a post which his ancestors had held.

. . . a fresh admirer

The person addressed by Buckingham replies:

*I thank your Grace,
Healthful, and ever since a fresh admirer
Of what I saw there.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 2-4

These words are spoken by Thomas Howard, 2nd Duke of Norfolk. He

is the son of "Jockey of Norfolk" (see page II-731), who was Richard's chief supporter at the Battle of Bosworth and who died at that battle. Thomas was himself at the battle and is referred to in *Richard III* by his

earlier title of Earl of Surrey (see page 11-737).

Thomas Howard was badly wounded at Bosworth but survived and was

kept in prison till 1489. He was then released by Henry VII (who strove

to conciliate where he could) and was restored to the lower title of Earl of

of



Norfolk (not Duke). Thomas remained a loyal servant of the Tudors there-after.

In 1513, during the reign of Henry VIII, Thomas Howard led the English army to a great victory over the Scots at Flodden, and in 1514 he was made Duke of Norfolk, thus gaining his father's full title at last.

Those suns of glory. . .

But what happened in France that caused Norfolk to be such an admirer of the events in retrospect? Buckingham wants to know too, for as he says:

*An untimely ague
Stayed me a prisoner in my chamber when
Those suns of glory, those two lights of men,
Met in the vale of Andren.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 4-7

It was not only in England that a promising new king had ascended

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the throne. All of Western Europe was breaking out of the Middle Ages and into the full light of the Renaissance, and, as though to mark that, a number of important new young monarchs appeared on the scene.

In France, Charles VIII (see page II-729) had been on the throne at the time of the Battle of Bosworth. He had gone on, after he came of age, to fight wars in Italy that brought him into conflict with Germans and Spaniards (instead of with those traditional French enemies, the English). He died in 1498 with no sons and was succeeded by his second cousin, once removed, who reigned as Louis XII, and who was the son of the old age of Charles of Orleans, the loser at the Battle of Agincourt (see page II-506).

Louis XII continued the Italian wars and the fighting with the Spaniards and Germans. When he died in 1515, also without a son, his first cousin (once removed) succeeded as Francis I. Francis was twenty-one years old at this time, three years younger than Henry VIII.

Then, in 1516, a young man named Charles (only sixteen) began to inherit vast territories. Through his mother he was grandson of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, and when Ferdinand died, he became Charles I



of Spain. When his own father, Maximilian, died, he also inherited territories in Burgundy and Germany. (Charles was great-great-grandson of Philip the Good, see page II-514.) Finally, in 1519, he was elected, Holy Roman Emperor and was Charles V in this respect. It is as Emperor Charles V that he is remembered in European history.

Thus, in 1520, when *Henry VIII* opens, Western Europe is dominated by three young monarchs: Emperor Charles V, aged twenty; King Francis I of France, aged twenty-six; and King Henry VIII of England, aged twenty-nine.

For a whole generation now, the French had been fighting Germans and Spaniards in Italy, and now those Germans and Spaniards were united under Charles V. The great feud between France and England that had filled the fifteenth century had now been replaced by a greater feud between France and the Empire-plus-Spain that was to fill the sixteenth century.

England was, at this time, far weaker than either France or the Empire in extent of territory, in population, and in wealth, but she was important as a makeweight. By adding her own force to one side or the other she might well make victory certain for the side she favored.

At first, England, unable to free itself of its ancient enmity to France, automatically sided against her. In 1513 Henry VIII sent an army to Calais, and once again, as in the days of Edward III and Henry V, the island nation made ready to invade France. At that time, Louis XII was still King of France, Maximilian was still Emperor, and Ferdinand II was still King of Spain.

Henry VIII was no Henry V, however, and all he could do was to lay siege (and inefficient siege at that) to a few nearby French towns.

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On August 16, 1513, the French prepared to get provisions into one of the besieged towns under cover of a mock battle. For the purpose, they lined up their army at Guinegate, about thirty miles southeast of Calais.

(This is now in French territory, but at that time it was in Flanders, which was part of the Empire.)

As the French hoped, the English took the bait and prepared for battle. The French charged, managed to get supplies into the town, and once that

was done, quickly retired. The English, however, pursued with far more energy than had been anticipated, and the French retirement was changed



into a flight. Panic struck the French and the English found themselves with a considerable victory and with many prisoners, even though hardly a shot had been fired on either side. It came to be known as the "Battle of the Spurs" because of the anxiety with which the French had spurred their horses.

On September 9, only three weeks later, came the great victory over France's ally, Scotland, at Flodden.

This double triumph gave Henry VIII all the glory he wanted, and when his allies, following their own interests, seemed inclined to make peace with

France, Henry felt no need for carrying on the campaign singlehanded. He

therefore made a peace of his own with Louis XII, in 1514.

It is not surprising, then, that when Francis I and Charles V, as new monarchs, prepared to continue the feud of their predecessors, both should

court the young English monarch who had done so well in 1513.

Francis won a spectacular propaganda victory when he persuaded Henry

to come to France for what we would today call a "summit conference."

Toward the end of May 1520, Henry VIII set out on his peaceful mission to France, and during June of that year, amid fabulous pageantry,

Henry VIII and Francis I met in the valley of Andren, about eight miles south of Calais.

It was these two kings to whom Buckingham refers, hyperbolically, as "Those suns of glory, those two lights of men."

'Twixt Guynes and Arde

Norfolk describes the occasion, saying:

*'Twixt Guynes and Arde [they met].
I was then present; saw them salute on horseback;*

-Act I, scene i, lines 7-8

Guynes and Arde (actually Guines and Ardres) are two towns, five miles apart, the former west of the valley of Andren, the latter east. Guines

had been given over to the English forces, Ardres to the French.

On June 7, 1520, the two monarchs, lightly attended, rode out into the valley between to embrace and display their trust in each other.

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Although in this dialogue Buckingham complains of having been confined to his quarters by illness, and Norfolk acts as though he had been

an eyewitness, Shakespeare has reversed the actual roles. The truth is that

Buckingham was at the festivities, the most prominent Englishman



there
next to the King himself. It was Norfolk who was absent. He, as victor
of
Flodden, was in England serving as Henry's deputy during the latter's
stay in France.

All clinquant, all in gold. . .

The English and French, at this meeting, vied each with the other to
impress with outer appearance; to show by visible splendor the power
and
glory of their respective kingdoms. As Norfolk says:

*Today the French,
All clinquant [glittering], all in gold, like heathen gods,
Shone down the English; and tomorrow they [the English]
Made Britain India: every man that stood
Showed like a mine.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 18-22

In fact, such was the elaborateness of the costume and decorations
at
that meeting that the place has come down in history as "the Field of
the
Cloth of Gold."

. . . Bevis was believed

Nor was it show only. Francis labored to keep Henry in good humor, for
the French King needed Henry more than Henry needed him. Francis him-
self had a long nose and it was obvious that Henry was far more handsome,
but the Frenchman did not mind that and deliberately let his fellow mon-
arch shine. Francis also took the calculated risk of going unarmed into
the English camp and ordered his men to fraternize freely without regard
for possible treachery. The English, less trusting, kept together and main-
tained a certain aloofness.

There were fabulous entertainments, including tournaments in true
medieval fashion, with gorgeous armor and complicated pageantry every-
where. As Norfolk says:

*When these suns
(For so they phrase 'em) by their heralds challenged
The noble spirits to arms, they did perform
Beyond thought's compass, that former fabulous story,*

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*Being now seen possible enough, got credit,
That Bevis was believed.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 33-38

Bevis is a character in one of the medieval romances which *Don Quixote*
satirized and killed. The romance was *Sir Bevis of Hamton* and it was



filled (as all such romances were) with incredible fights, with tremendous wounds, given and taken, together with all sorts of magical byplay involving wizards and sorcerers. Norfolk's hyperbole states that so remarkable were the fights at the Field of the Cloth of Gold that even the tales of Bevis became plausible by comparison.

Actually, the fights were put-up jobs, of course. The two kings won all jousts in which they were involved, for who would have the hardihood to refuse to fall down before the royal spear or to venture to unhorse the royal person.

Only one real misadventure marred this love feast. At one point, Henry VIII, who was very proud of his wrestling ability, seized the slighter Francis suddenly, and said, "Brother, I want to wrestle with you."

If Francis had not been caught by surprise all might possibly have been well; they would have struggled for a while and ended in a draw. Francis, however, without thinking, put into play his own wrestling ability. Almost by reflex, he tripped Henry and the English King fell heavily to the ground. Henry rose, crimson with mortification, and all of Francis' flattery and diplomacy went for nothing.

It might have gone for nothing anyway, to tell the truth, for actually Charles V was not idle. All the time that Francis I had been wooing Henry with such ostentation and expense, Charles had quietly been working on the side with bribes and promises. In the end, the Field of the Cloth of Gold proved an enormous fiasco for the French, for Henry maintained a careful neutrality in the continental wars that followed, leaning toward Charles rather than Francis at odd moments when the neutrality bent.

... *the right reverend Cardinal of York*

Buckingham asks who arranged so magnificent a spectacle, and Norfolk answers:

*All this was ord'ed by the good discretion
Of the right reverend Cardinal of York.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 50-51

The Cardinal of York referred to here is Thomas Wolsey, born about 1473 and ordained a priest in 1498. His first important position was that of tutor to the three sons of Thomas Grey, 1st Marquess of Dorset, who

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was the stepson of Edward IV and who appeared in *Richard III* (see page II-691) as one of the few Woodvilles who survived that reign.

Wolsey rose steadily, each of his employers being impressed by his abil-

ity and helping him onward, until he became chaplain to Henry VII. After

the death of Henry VII, Wolsey became one of the most influential advisers of Henry VIII. It was he who encouraged Henry to invade France

in 1513, and after the double victory at Guinegate and Hodden, it was Wolsey who negotiated what proved a most profitable peace with Louis



XII of France. Wolsey was therefore rewarded with the Archbishopric of York in 1514 (a post he held *in absentia*). In 1515 the Pope made him cardinal and on December 22 of that year Henry made him Lord Chancellor.

As Cardinal of York and Lord Chancellor, Wolsey was the most powerful man in England after the King himself, and he used his position to the full. He loved wealth and power, obtained both and flaunted them pitilessly. He patronized art and literature and outshone all the nobility.

His organization of the Field of the Cloth of Gold was of a piece with his love of magnificence and it was he who cleverly saw to it that the occasion was to profit neither Francis nor Charles, really, but that England was to remain as far as possible a free agent, ready to throw her weight this way or that in order to prevent either France or the Empire from becoming too powerful. It was Wolsey who invented the notion of England as the guardian of the "balance of power," a post she was to maintain for four centuries, successfully preventing any continental conqueror, from Charles V and Francis I, right down to Hitler, from controlling all of Europe.

The devil speed him . . .

At the mention of Wolsey, Buckingham breaks out:

*The devil speed him! No man's pie is freed
From his ambitious finger.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 52-53

A powerful subordinate is always envied by others. When that subordinate is a man of comparatively low origins and when he ostentatiously parades his power and takes pleasure in humiliating men of higher birth than himself, that envy can rise to colossal heights.

Buckingham and Norfolk vie with each other in denouncing Wolsey's low birth and his gift of intrigue, and then the third person present, who till now has not spoken, says:

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*. . . / can see his pride
Peep through each part of him.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 68-69

The speaker is George Neville, Lord Abergavenny, a member of a younger branch of the family of which Richard of Warwick (see page II-580) had been the most famous representative. George Neville was married to Mary Stafford, the duke's daughter, and so was Buckingham's



son-in-law.

This butcher's cur . . .

Buckingham, as a leading nobleman of the realm, is particularly outraged with Cardinal Wolsey (who now appears briefly on the scene, long enough to exchange disdainful stares with the duke) and says of him:

This butcher's cur is venom-mouthed. . .

-Act I, scene i, line 120

There was a rumor, spread by those who were anti-Wolsey, to the effect that his father was a butcher. Somehow, the role of butcher seems particularly lowly and bloody to an aristocrat, but in this case, the tale is almost surely false. Wolsey's father was of the middle class, a comparatively rich merchant with herds of sheep, and one who was involved in the wool trade, which in the England of the time was a thoroughly respectable occupation.

This Ipswich fellow's. . .

Buckingham, in his fury, feels that even the Field of the Cloth of Gold, which he and Norfolk have just been marveling over, is a criminal act of Wolsey's. After all, many of the English noblemen who were there had beggared themselves and ruined their estates in order to shine with the proper luxury, and for what? Nothing of value had come out of it.

In fact, Buckingham felt the King would be horrified if he knew the truth of the situation. He says:

*I'll to the King,
And from a mouth of honor quite cry down
This Ipswich fellow's insolence . . .*

-Act I, scene i, lines 136-38

Wolsey was born in Ipswich, a town sixty-five miles northeast of London.

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. . . the Queen his aunt

Norfolk tries to calm Buckingham and prevent him from taking on an unequal fight, but Buckingham believes he has an unbeatable weapon. He

says:

*. . . Charles the Emperor,
Under pretense to see the Queen his aunt
(For 'twas indeed his color, but he came
To whisper Wolsey) here makes visitation.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 176-79



Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain had had two daughters, Juana and Catherine. Juana, the elder, was the mother of Emperor Charles V. Catherine, the younger, was the wife of Henry VIII. Thus, the Queen of England was the aunt of the Holy Roman Emperor.

Buckingham explains that Emperor Charles, anxious to negate the effects of the Field of the Cloth of Gold, intrigued with Wolsey and was successful in doing so. Buckingham says, triumphantly:

*Let the King know,
As soon he shall by me, that thus the Cardinal
Does buy and sell his honor as he pleases,
And for his own advantage.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 190-93

In this, of course, Buckingham is being very naive. The King is no more honest than his chancellor and the trafficking with both sides is as much part of his policy as Wolsey's.

Arrest thee of high treason. . .

Before Buckingham can put his foolish plan into action, he is forestalled. An officer enters and directs the sergeant to make an announcement. The sergeant says:

*My lord the Duke of Buckingham, and Earl
Of Hereford, Stafford, and Northampton, I
Arrest thee of high treason, in the name
Of our most sovereign King.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 199-202

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The officer in charge is, according to the play, named Brandon. This is a fictitious name. The actual arresting officer was Henry Marney. Abergavenny was also arrested.

. . . you have half our power

In the second scene, Henry VIII himself appears and expresses his gratitude to Wolsey for having uncovered Buckingham's treason. Before this matter can be carried onward, however, Queen Katherine enters. (She is usually known as Catherine of Aragon in the history books, but in this play



her name is spelled as Katherine, and I will use that spelling too.)
 The royal couple greet each other most lovingly. Indeed, when she kneels to him as a suitor, he says:

*Arise, and take place by us. Half your suit
 Never name to us: you have half our power.
 The other moiety [half] ere you ask is given.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 10-13

Katherine was, at this time, thirty-six years old, six years older than her royal husband, who was now verging on thirty. Nor was she beautiful. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that Henry loved her, at least during the first dozen years of their marriage.

Her marriage into the English royal family was part of the policy of Henry VII, who felt that in this way he would gain the alliance of the rising power of Spain against the old enemy, France. The fluctuations of politics made Katherine's position in England rise and fall, however, and for a while, toward the close of Henry VII's life, it looked quite bad for her, as the old King decided to do without the Spanish alliance after all.

As soon as Henry VII died, however, the handsome young lad who succeeded as Henry VIII promptly married Katherine. He didn't have to; it might well have been to his advantage not to, and to have sought a younger bride. Despite her age and plainness, however, she appeared to Henry VIII to be a forceful and capable woman with interests that paralleled his own. He judged that in her care he could leave the government whenever he was on his travels, and could be confident that she would do a good job.

In all this he was correct. She served as regent when he was campaigning in France, and between herself as ruler and Norfolk as general, the Scots were handily crushed.

In 1521, at the time of Buckingham's trial, the royal marriage was still strong, even to the point where Henry was scarcely even unfaithful oftener than now and then.

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... in great grievance



Queen Katherine's suit is not for herself, but for the people. She says:

*/ am solicited, not by a few,
And those of true condition, that your subjects
Are in great grievance.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 18-20

This was true. Henry VIII, with all the ardor of a young king anxious to be admired, had developed an extravagant court. Wolsey, with his own hankering for wealth and magnificence, had encouraged him in this, and the conspicuous consumption of the Field of the Cloth of Gold had made things all the worse.

The money that parsimonious King Henry VII had painstakingly laid aside in the course of a careful and economical reign had vanished like snow in the munificence of his successor, and Henry VIII soon found it necessary to apply the screws to his subjects.

His subjects proved recalcitrant. In 1523, some two years after Buckingham's trial, Wolsey, in fact, had to place maximum pressure on Parliament to get them to vote new taxes.

Should without issue die . . .

Katherine openly blames the great exactions upon Cardinal Wolsey (for the two are enemies) and he protests innocence. The King orders relief for the subjects and then the council can turn to the matter of Buckingham.

The first witness against Buckingham is referred to as the Surveyor. This Surveyor was Charles Knevet (though his name is not given in the play). He is, or was, a high official of Buckingham's estates, and now he enters, prepared to give evidence against his master. He says:

*First, it was usual with him-every day
It would infect his speech-that if the King
Should without issue die, he'll carry it so
To make the scepter his.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 132-35

There was one flaw in King Henry's marriage, you see. Queen Katherine had given birth to four girls and two boys, yet all but one had been either

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stillborn or had died after a very short while. The lone survivor was a



girl,
the Princess Mary.

She had been born on February 18, 1516, so that at the time of the trial of Buckingham she was five years old. She was not a pretty child and did not grow up to be a pretty woman, but like her mother, she was intelligent and capable.

Unfortunately, she did not make a satisfactory heir. In France, the Salic law (see page II-255) prevented a woman from sitting on the throne or from transmitting the succession to any of her descendants, male or female. In England there was no Salic law, and the female could transmit the succession. Indeed, Henry VII laid claim to the throne through the fact that his mother, Margaret Beaufort, was descended from John of Gaunt, and not through his father, who was merely a member of a family of Welsh squires.

It followed, then, that if King Henry lived long enough to allow Mary to grow up, marry, and have a son, that son would certainly succeed without trouble.

However, that son, assuming he came at all, might very well be no more than an infant at the time of his grandfather's death, and the events in the reigns of such infant successors as Henry VI and Edward V made that prospect unappetizing.

Then too, what if Henry VIII died while Mary was yet without a son? Could Mary herself succeed?

Only once in English history had a female served as monarch. This had been Matilda (the mother of Henry II, see page II-210) and that had not been a true reign, for in her time there was a civil war during which her cousin, Stephen, had been actual ruler. This one precedent was disheartening.

Since the reign of Henry II, there had been no case of a female ruling, nor was there even cause to consider the possibility. There was always a close male relative to inherit. Most of the kings left sons or, if they were childless, they had brothers or male cousins. If on any of those occasions a female existed with a better claim to the throne (if she had only been male) than the actual successor, she was ignored. For instance, when



Henry VII succeeded to the throne in 1485, his mother was still alive. If she had been male, she would have taken precedence and become King of England, for she was one generation closer to John of Gaunt. Henry VII could not then have succeeded until her death, and as it happened, she died in the same year as her son, in 1509.

In actual fact, she was ignored and the crown went directly to her son.

What, then, if she had not had a son?

Henry VIII, therefore, had every reason to feel that if he expected his dynasty to continue (and this was the ardent hope of every monarch, somehow) he would have to have a son. A daughter wasn't good enough.

The fact that sons had been born to him but had not lived was not only

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a practical disappointment but, in those superstitious times, made Henry think seriously that there might be something about the marriage that displeased heaven. As it turned out, he had other, grosser reasons to be dissatisfied and his concern about heavenly anger was often derided in later years as royal hypocrisy. And yet there might have been elements of real concern in it as well.

And what had Buckingham to do with the succession? Well, his great-great-grandmother had been Anne, the daughter of Thomas of Gloucester (see page II-264), and this made Buckingham the great-great-great-great-grandson of Edward III. What's more, his father's mother had been a Margaret Beaufort (not the mother of Henry VII, but her first cousin), and through her, he was a great-great-great-grandson of John of Gaunt. If, indeed, Henry VIII died and if Mary, as a woman, was considered ineligible for the throne, Buckingham could indeed easily be considered to be next in line.

... *lost your office*

The question is: Was the Surveyor giving true testimony? In all likelihood, he was lying. For one thing, he had a grievance against Buckingham. Queen Katherine points this out, saying:

*If I know you well,
You were the Duke's surveyor, and lost your office
On the complaint o'th'tenants.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 171-73

The Surveyor had been corrupt, had oppressed the tenants, and Buck-



ingham had had the decency to side with his mistreated tenants against his own dishonest officer. The discharged employee, however, is all too likely to bear malice against his ex-employer, and any evidence he bears against him is not lightly to be trusted (though, of course, it need not necessarily be false). Moreover, Wolsey, anxious to get rid of Buckingham, is supposed to have paid Knevet well for his testimony.

. . . *Sir Thomas Lovell* . . .

But then, even if what the Surveyor had said is taken as true, it does not deal with a matter of outright treason. If Henry VIII dies without issue, then Buckingham might become King quite legally, and for Buckingham to look forward to such a situation with relish might argue ambition on his part, but that in itself is not treasonable. The ambition might be accompanied by a longing for the King's death and that *would* be treasonable, but how prove it?

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The Surveyor sets about improving the case. He says that Buckingham had stated that

*. . . had the King in his last sickness failed [died],
The Cardinal's and Sir Thomas Lovell's heads
Should have gone off.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 184-86

Sir Thomas Lovell was the official in charge of the Tower, and in those days, when the Tower was used to house prisoners of the highest importance, it was a responsible position indeed. Actually, the historic Lovell had retired in 1518, but Shakespeare has him appear throughout the play.

And yet, threatening the death of mere ministers is still not treason enough to warrant the execution of a man as highly placed as Buckingham.

About Sir William Bulmer-

The Surveyor, however, is not yet done. He says:

*Being at Greenwich,
After your Highness had reproved the Duke
About Sir William Bulmer-*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 188-90



Sir William Bulmer was a member of the King's personal household who had resigned to enter that of the Duke of Buckingham. We can well imagine why Bulmer might have done so. The King was a captious and tyrannical master with an uncomfortable amount of power, for with a word he could cost a man his head (and, as his later career showed, he was not at all chary about saying such a word). Buckingham, on the other hand, was a much more genial sort of man.

King Henry, however, would naturally take this as an insult. To have himself quitted for Buckingham could scarcely please him, and not only would Bulmer have earned the royal displeasure for leaving him, but Buckingham too would be in trouble for accepting him. Bulmer was forced to trial and was reduced to making no defense other than a plea for mercy, which Henry finally gave with very poor grace.

From what we know of Henry's character, taking his reign as a whole, we can well imagine that the incident rankled and that he did not forget either Bulmer or Buckingham. When the time was ripe, he would strike back.

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... put his knife into him

The Surveyor now proceeds to complete his task. He states that Buckingham had been so angered by the risks he had run in connection with the matter of Bulmer as to make threats, saying that if he (Buckingham) had been committed to the Tower, then

*"... I would have played
The part my father meant to act upon
Th'usurper Richard, who, being at Salisbury,
Made suit to come in's presence; which if granted,
As he made semblance [pretense] of his duty, would
Have put his knife into him."*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 194-99

It was to Salisbury that the elder Buckingham had been brought for his execution after his abortive revolt. He had indeed asked for a final audience with Richard and had been refused (see page II-733).



This threat of assassination (if the Surveyor could be believed) was enough treason for anyone, and the King orders Buckingham to immediate trial; a trial which, in actual history, took place on May 13, 1521, nearly a year after the Field of the Cloth of Gold.

To Pepin or Clotharius . . .

The next scene (still at the palace) offers the audience a sneer at the French and their ways, something that was always popular in England. The Lord Chamberlain and Lord Sands enter and both speak with disapproval of the manner in which Englishmen have affected French fashions since the Field of the Cloth of Gold.

The Lord Chamberlain (unnamed in the play) is the aged Charles Somerset, Earl of Worcester, an illegitimate son of Henry Beaufort, 3rd Duke of Somerset, who had died nearly sixty years before at the Battle of Hexham (see page II-649).

Lord Sands is Sir William Sands, who did not actually gain the right to be called "Lord" till 1526, five years after Buckingham's trial, when Henry VIII made him a baron. In that same year he succeeded to the post of Lord Chamberlain at Charles of Worcester's death. In this play, however, there is no indication of this and Worcester remains Lord Chamberlain throughout.

One of the Chamberlain's remarks concerning the Frenchified expressions affected by those Englishmen who had succumbed to foreign customs was to the effect that

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*. . . you would swear directly
Their very noses had been counsellors
To Pepin or Clotharius, they keep state so.*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 8-10

Pepin was an early French monarch (see page II-455), the father of Charlemagne. He was the first king of the Carolingian dynasty, ruling from 751 to 768.

Clotharius (or Clotaire) was a common name among the kings of the previous dynasty, the Merovingian. The last of that name, Clotaire IV, reigned from 717 to 719.

This backhanded reference to ancient French kings undoubtedly represents a resentful feeling of English inferiority. The French were able to speak of great kings and powerful realms through the early centuries of the Middle Ages, when England was riven into petty kingdoms soon to suffer under the heel of invading Danes.

. . . Sir Thomas Bullen's daughter



As it happens, the Lord Chamberlain and Lord Sands (together with Sir Thomas Lovell, who joins them) are on their way to a banquet being given by Wolsey.

The banquet offers the stage the first of several chances at spectacle granted by this play (and part of its weakness is that it is designed more as spectacle than as drama).

There is gallant chaffing between the lords and ladies, and the King himself, masked and in shepherd's disguise, enters with an accompanying part. (Apparently, during the premiere performance of this play on June 29, 1613, a cannon fired as a salute to the King's entrance at this point set fire to the Globe Theatre and burned it to the ground.)

The King finds himself attracted to a young lady who had previously been flirting with Lord Sands. After Henry unmask, he asks as to the young lady's identity and the Chamberlain tells him:

*An't please your Grace, Sir Thomas Bullen's daughter,
The Viscount Rochford, one of her Highness' women.*

-Act I, scene iv, lines 92-93

The lady is Anne Bullen (usually known in history books as Anne Boleyn). Her father, Sir Thomas Bullen, was a prosperous merchant, and,

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as a matter of fact, King Henry was already familiar with the family in a rather intimate fashion.

Although reasonably faithful to his wife till now, he did have a few flirtations, something which was taken for normal for men generally in those days, and certainly for kings. As long as he kept those flirtations discreet and did not flaunt them in the face of the court, that was all that even the most exacting wife would be expected to require.

In 1519 Henry had had a son by a lady in whom he was interested. The boy was named Henry Fitzroy (Henry "son of the King" in Norman-French), which was open enough. The King showered titles on this boy, making him Duke of Richmond, and some even thought he hoped to make the illegitimate boy his heir in default of a legitimate son. Perhaps so, for he must have been extraordinarily cherished by the King as proof that he, at least, could have a son even if Queen Katherine couldn't. Young Fitz-



roy died, however, before he was nineteen and that hope went glimmering.

Young Fitzroy's mother did not last long in the King's favor (no woman did, and Katherine of Aragon was the only reasonably enduring love of his life). After her, he took as his mistress, briefly, none other than Mary Bullen, elder sister of Anne Bullen.

In 1522 Anne Bullen entered the service of the court as maid of honor to Queen Katherine. It is uncertain how old Anne was at the time, somewhere between fifteen and twenty, with most historians inclining toward the younger part of the range.

She caught Henry's eye-it is not certain when-and he grew interested. This proved to be more serious than earlier flirtations, partly because he was growing more and more tired of his aging and ailing wife and partly because he was also growing more and more worried about the succession.

The trial of Buckingham may have been the turning point as far as this was concerned. Even if Buckingham were framed and if Henry knew that, there was still no doubt that uncertainty as to the succession encouraged treasonous intrigues. So Henry grew desperate for a legitimate son, if not by Katherine then, somehow, by someone else.

Earl Surrey . . .

The trial of Buckingham can have only one conclusion, and he is convicted. We do not witness the trial directly but are told of it by two gentlemen. They are sure that Buckingham's conviction was the result of Wolsey's intrigues, and the First Gentleman cites evidence, saying:

*. . .first, Kildare's attainer,
Then Deputy of Ireland, who removed,
Earl Surrey was sent thither, and in haste too,
Lest he should help his father.*

-Act II, scene i, lines 41-44

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Kildare is Gerald Fitzgerald, 9th Earl of Kildare, scion of an Irish family of Norman extraction who had held a dominating position on that island for generations. The Fitzgerald family had so long had their own way that they were only under the slightest control by the government in



London. They carried on their feuds with other chieftains of either Norman or native Irish extraction, made war and peace at will, and generally kept the land in a state of turbulence.

In an effort to exert stronger central influence, Wolsey removed Kildare from office as Lord Deputy of Ireland, and replaced him with the Earl of Surrey.

The Earl of Surrey was Thomas Howard, the son and namesake of the Duke of Norfolk. In 1495 he had married Anne, a younger daughter of Edward IV, and thus became a brother-in-law of King Henry VII, who was married to Anne's older sister. Surrey's sister, Elizabeth, was the mother of Anne Bullen. Surrey was thus Anne Bullen's uncle.

Surrey's wife died in 1512 and in 1513 he married Elizabeth, the daughter of the Duke of Buckingham. Thus, at the time of Buckingham's trial, that nobleman was Surrey's father-in-law (not quite "father," as stated in the First Gentleman's speech).

Surrey was bitterly anti-Wolsey and that is probably one reason why he was sent to Ireland (as Richard of York had once been sent there by his Lancastrian foes, see page II-596). Whether the virtual exile had anything directly to do with the Buckingham trial is, however, not likely.

First, Kildare's replacement by Surrey took place in 1520, months before Buckingham was accused, and it is hard to say whether Wolsey was looking so far ahead in such detail. Besides, there was little to fear in Surrey and therefore small reason to exile him in haste. The minister was firmly backed by King Henry and the royal will was not to be flouted at any time during his reign. Thus, the person who was forced to pronounce the final sentence of condemnation was none other than Norfolk, the same man who had been so friendly with Buckingham in the first scene of this play, who was the father of Surrey and who was certainly just as bitterly anti-Wolsey as Buckingham himself.

If Norfolk could do nothing, what could Surrey have done even if he had been at the scene?

. . . poor Edward Bohun

Buckingham is led out to execution (this took place on May 17, 1521) and makes a speech maintaining his innocence. He says at one point:

*When I came hither, I was Lord High Constable
And Duke of Buckingham; now, poor Edward Bohun.*

-Act II, scene i, lines 102-3

Actually, he was Edward Stafford, but then he was descended from the house of Bohun as well. It was Eleanor Bohun (see page II-264) who had married Thomas of Gloucester, and he was descended from that marriage. Eleanor's sister, Mary Bohun, had married Bolingbroke and was the

mother of Henry V. The use of Bohun here as a family name in place of Stafford would, to an Elizabethan audience, stress Buckingham's royal descent and make more plain the real reason for his execution.



... a separation

Once Buckingham departs, the two gentlemen continue their conversation, and a fresh piece of gossip drives the execution out of their minds.

The Second Gentleman says:

*... Did you not of late days hear
A buzzing [rumor] of a separation
Between the King and Katherine?*

-Act II, scene i, lines 147-49

Time is being condensed here. Buckingham's execution took place in 1521. Anne Bullen first caught the King's eye no earlier than 1522 (though it took place before the execution in the time scheme of the play), and for years it remained only an on-and-off flirtation, and perhaps did not even involve serious intimacy.

By 1527, however, two things had happened. Henry had grown increasingly interested in the fascinating Anne and increasingly anxious about the matter of an heir. Katherine was by then forty-two years old and it was just about impossible to hope that she would produce a son.

Since Katherine would not resolve the situation by obligingly dying, Henry had grown desperate enough to press for a divorce in order to make way for a second legitimate marriage and a new chance at a legitimate son.

Cardinal Campeius . . .

The Second Gentleman goes on to say:

*... Either the Cardinal
Or some about him near have, out of malice
To the good Queen, possessed him [the King] with a scruple
That will undo her. To confirm this too,
Cardinal Campeius is arrived, and lately;
As all think, for this business.*

-Act II, scene i, lines 156-61

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It was easy to blame Wolsey for all that was going badly, for he was becoming most unpopular among Englishmen generally. It was he who had tried to force Parliament to grant heavy taxes to support the King's extravagances at home and abroad. It was he who kept England to a pro-imperial policy that was proving a failure.

Emperor Charles V, for all the agreements worked out with him by Wolsey, did not order his foreign policy to the benefit of England. Moreover, the Emperor had specifically promised to marry Mary, the



daughter
of Henry VIII (and the Emperor's own first cousin), and then backed
out,
to the humiliation of the English court.

Wolsey might have taken stronger action to counter Charles were it
not
for certain personal ambitions of his own. But even those were being
thwarted, and the First Gentleman sees in the moves against
Katherine a
revenge motive against the Queen's nephew. He says:

*'Tis the Cardinal;
And merely to revenge him on the Emperor
For not bestowing on him at his asking
The archbishopric of Toledo . . .*

-Act II, scene i, lines 161-64

Actually, Wolsey had higher ambitions still, for he wanted to be
Pope.

This ambition strikes us today as absolutely ridiculous, so used are
we to
the fact that the Pope is invariably an Italian. That, however, was not
al-

ways so. Until the sixteenth century there were popes of many
nations,

and in 1154 an Englishman, Nicholas Breakspear, had come to the pon-
tifi-
cal throne as Adrian IV. (He was the only Englishman to make it.)

In 1521, when Pope Leo X died, the succession depended a great deal
on the influence of Charles V, and he might easily have made Wolsey
Pope. He didn't. He chose a Dutchman instead, Adrian Florisze
Boeyens,

an aged man whose chief distinction (aside from his irreproachable
virtue)

was the fact that he had been the Emperor's boyhood tutor. The new
Pope

(the only Dutch Pope in history) reigned as Adrian VI and even this
may

well have frustrated Wolsey, for that might have been the very title he
would have adopted in commemoration of the earlier English Pope.

But then, Adrian VI was an old man; he reigned for only a little over
a year and then died. Once again, Wolsey might have been considered
for

the post and once again he was not. The succession fell this time upon
Giulio de' Medici, a member of the famous ruling house of Florence.
He

reigned as Pope under the name of Clement VII and Wolsey's chance
was gone forever. As a matter of fact, Adrian VI was the last of the non-

Italian popes, and with Clement VII there began an unbroken line of Ital-

ian popes that has lasted through (at the moment of writing) no less
than

forty-four papal reigns.

By 1527, therefore, both King Henry and Wolsey were ready to aban-



don the Emperor and to switch to a French alliance instead, which Wolsey now negotiated (even though to the general population a French alliance was still anathema).

The switch in foreign policy fit Henry's plans for a divorce too, for as long as he was friends and allies with the Emperor, it would be difficult to break away from the Emperor's aunt. If, on the other hand, he were at war with Charles (and such a war was declared in 1528), he would have one more excuse for discarding his Queen.

Wolsey favored the divorce. He might well feel personal animosity against the Queen, but in addition he recognized the importance of the succession. He assured Henry that the divorce could be managed and that he himself would take care of it as far as the Pope was involved.

He began well, for he persuaded Pope Clement to send a representative, Cardinal Lorenz Campeggio (Campeius was the Latinized version of the name), to hear the divorce suit. Campeius arrived in London on October 7, 1528.

Undoubtedly, both Henry and Wolsey assumed that this was only a face-saving gesture on the part of the Pope and that, after a due pretense of going through the legal formalities, the divorce would be granted forthwith.

What neither Wolsey nor Henry understood clearly, apparently, was that poor Pope Clement was in a dreadful position with respect to the Emperor. An Imperial army had sacked Rome in 1527 and Charles V had control of all Italy. The Pope was virtually his prisoner and dared not antagonize him. If French armies wrested Italy from Charles, then well and good, Pope Clement might agree to let Charles's aunt be cast out. If French armies failed, Clement could do nothing—it was as straightforward as that.

... his brother's wife

In the next scene, the matter of the divorce is carried further in a discussion between several noblemen, including the Duke of Norfolk.

It would appear in the play that the Duke of Norfolk here is the same man who appeared in the first scene with Buckingham. Actually, the Norfolk of the first scene, the 2nd Duke, died in 1524, three years after Buckingham's execution. He was succeeded by his son and namesake, who had been the same Earl of Surrey who had been placed in charge of Ireland, and who now became the 3rd Duke of Norfolk.

Shakespeare takes no account of this succession. He keeps Norfolk throughout, with no indication that there was a change of man behind the title. He also has the younger man continue to appear in the play under his older and lesser title of Surrey.

The Chamberlain, who is also present, describes the King as immersed



in sadness and explains to Norfolk:

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*It seems the marriage with his brother's wife
Has crept too near his conscience.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 16-17

This is the first mention in the play that Henry VIII had had a brother.

This thrown-away reference is not lost on the Elizabethan audience, however, for they would know the tale well.

Henry VIII had indeed had a brother, and an older brother at that. The older brother was named Arthur and had been Prince of Wales and heir apparent to the throne of Henry VII. It was to him that Katherine was betrothed in the days when Henry VII wanted an alliance with the rising nation of Spain. The betrothal had taken place when both were children and it had been done by proxy, for Katherine remained in Spain.

In 1501, though, when Arthur was fourteen (and when his younger brother, Henry, was ten), it was decided that it was time enough for marriage and Katherine was sent for. She arrived in England on October 2, 1501, and the marriage was performed on November 14.

Arthur, however, shared the misfortune of the earlier Prince Arthur, John's nephew (see page II-240), and never lived to sit on the throne. He died of illness on April 2, 1502.

And now what was to become of the Spanish alliance? Ferdinand of Spain, Katherine's father, pushed hard for a marriage of his daughter to her dead husband's younger brother so that the dynastic connection be retained.

This was tricky for several reasons. First, it was against the rules of the church for a woman to marry each of two brothers. To be sure, one might ask whether the marriage with Arthur had been a true marriage; it had lasted only a few months and both husband and wife were quite young.

The marriage might never have been sexually consummated, and, in fact, Katherine always insisted it had not been. If that were so, there would be no difficulty in getting a special dispensation from the Pope to nullify



the first marriage and allow the second. Such a dispensation was indeed obtained and a new betrothal was arranged.

But now political difficulties arose. Henry of England and Ferdinand of Spain were caught up in political jockeying and Henry insisted on using Katherine as a pawn to be played against her father. When Henry VII died in 1509, Katherine was still unmarried and was even feeling the pinch of poverty. But then young Henry VIII, as soon as he was King, carried through the marriage.

Nearly twenty years later, with Katherine old, ailing, and without a son, Henry VIII regretted that hasty action of his youth. Whatever his ulterior motives, he had a legitimate religious cause, as the Bible clearly stated (Leviticus 20:21, "And if a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an un-

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clean thing; he hath uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless.")

Of course, the Pope had given a dispensation, but perhaps the Pope had acted hastily and on inadequate ground. After all, the results proved the sin, for Henry VIII was childless in the sense that he had no male heirs. Surely the present Pope would see the justice of this argument and would undo the work of the earlier dispensation.

... *too near another lady*

The seriousness of the King's scruples might not be taken as genuine by all, for most of the court had to know by now of Henry's infatuation for Anne Bullen.

Thus, there is another gentleman present, Suffolk, who, in an aside, says of the Chamberlain's comment about the King's conscience:

*No, his conscience
Has crept too near another lady.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 17-18



The speaker is Charles Brandon, son of Sir William Brandon. Sir William does not have a speaking part in *Richard III* but he appears onstage.

Prior to the Battle of Bosworth, he is referred to by Richmond (later Henry VII), and after the battle, he is referred to again as one of those who had been killed. According to legend, he was killed by none other than Richard III himself.

Young Charles, who was only eleven years old at the time of Bosworth, was a favorite of young Henry VIII, and in 1514 he was elevated to the title of 1st Duke of Suffolk. Charles of Suffolk was in love with Mary Tudor, sister of Henry VIII, but Mary was married to old King Louis XII of France as part of the political arrangement after the Battle of the Spurs.

Louis did not live long, however, and when Mary was widowed, she and Charles married. King Henry could scarcely be expected to approve of this, for an unmarried sister could be a very handy item for use in the marital diplomacy of the time. Still, by turning over most of the money they could get their hands on to King Henry, the young couple managed to keep the royal anger within bounds.

We need not go along entirely with Suffolk's cynical remark, however. Regardless of Henry's love for Anne, his anxiety for the succession probably came first. If Katherine had but given him a healthy son, he might still have loved Anne, but he would very likely have kept her as his mistress only and never dreamed of divorce.

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The French King's sister

The Chamberlain, like the others, blames everything on Wolsey and he sees what the Cardinal is driving at. He says:

*All that dare
Look into these affairs see this main end,
The French King's sister.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 39-41

Like Warwick before him (see page II-650), Wolsey looked upon a



royal marriage as a tool of diplomacy and saw value in an alliance with France, in which marital and political would support each other. And as in the case of Warwick, the King chose to marry for love instead. Wolsey did not quite understand that Henry's feelings about Anne Bullen were strong enough to involve actual marriage.

The French princess Wolsey had his eye on was Marguerite of Navarre, the sister of King Francis I. She was a widow, for in 1509, the very year in which Henry VIII came to the throne, she had married Charles, Due d'Alencon, a descendant of the Alencon who has a small part in *Henry VI, Part One* (see page II-526). The Duke had died in 1525 and Marguerite, widowed after sixteen years of marriage, was available.

Still, however suitable she was politically, there were certain disadvantages. She was getting on in years, for she was thirty-five, only a year younger than the King, and Henry was tired of middle-aged wives; he wanted a young Queen. He might even have argued to himself that Marguerite was past her best years for childbearing and that the marriage might be self-defeating. (As a matter of fact, though, Marguerite did marry again and gave birth to a daughter who was destined to be the mother of the great French King, Henry IV.)

... *my new secretary*

Norfolk and Suffolk try to see the King on business, but he rejects them rather savagely. He chooses, instead, to see Wolsey and Cardinal Campeius, for he is anxious to conclude the matter of the divorce.

The King greets both cardinals and then says to Wolsey:

*Prithee call Gardiner to me, my new secretary;
I find him a fit fellow.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 115-16

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The reference is to Stephen Gardiner, who was just about Henry's age, and whose early life paralleled that of Wolsey. He was the son of a cloth-maker, was destined for the church, and proved a brilliant student.

Wolsey spied him as a bright young man and made him his secretary in 1525. Wolsey made use of him in the negotiations with the Pope in con-



nection with the divorce and so well did Gardiner shine in this that Henry made him his own secretary in 1529.

... one Doctor Pace

Cardinal Campeius, observing Gardiner in conference with the King, asks Wolsey:

*My Lord of York, was not one Doctor Pace
In this man's place before him?*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 121-22

Yes indeed. Richard Pace had served as Wolsey's secretary before Gardiner.

Campeius then warns Wolsey that there are evil rumors about Wolsey abroad, concerning all aspects of his career, even his treatment of his secretary. He says that rumor has it that Wolsey

*...fearing he [Pace] would rise (he was so virtuous),
Kept him a foreign man still; which so grieved him
That he ran mad and died.*

-Act II, scene ii, lines 127-29

This is an example of how Wolsey was vilified later and his deeds made more evil than they were. In the play, Wolsey does not defend himself but cynically blames Pace's troubles on his insisting on remaining virtuous.

To be sure, Wolsey did employ Richard Pace on foreign missions, having him negotiate a Swiss attack on the French when the French were the enemy, and using him as his agent in his own attempts to achieve the papacy. This was not in order to keep him from promotion by preventing him from being at court-but because he was a capable agent.

Nor did Pace go mad and die. Wolsey finally replaced him, but Pace was still alive when Cardinal Campeius was in the country. Indeed, Pace out-lived Wolsey himself by six years.

... for Caernarvonshire ...

We return to Anne Bullen, whom we saw only briefly at Wolsey's ban-

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quet, and who is now in a conversation with an Old Lady (unnamed). Anne virtuously pities Queen Katherine's miseries, saying that she



herself
would on no account be willing to be highly titled. The Old Lady dryly re-
fuses to accept Anne's protestations. She says:

*In faith, for little England
You'd venture an emballing [being made Queen]. I myself
Would for Caernarvonshire . . .*

-Act II, scene iii, lines 46-48

Caernarvonshire is the northeasternmost county of Wales, a mountain-
ous region that is by no means rich and that is sufficiently far from
London
to seem a kind of rustic wilderness.

Anne has her chance to display her sincerity almost immediately
when
the Chamberlain arrives with a gift from the King. The Chamberlain
says
to Anne:

*Ta'en of your many virtues, the King's Majesty
Commends his good opinion of you, and
Does purpose honor to you no less flowing
Than Marchioness of Pembroke . . .*

-Act II, scene iii, lines 60-63

Anne Bullen was granted this title, in actuality, on September 1,
1532,
rather later than it would appear here. In the play, the title seems to
be
granted while Cardinal Campeius is in England, whereas actually
Anne
received it three years after the cardinal had left for good.

Anne, despite her earlier protestation, accepts the title with thanks.
Nor
does the Chamberlain make any bawdy asides at this point as one
would
think he must surely do. Instead he praises Anne Bullen in an aside
and
says:

*. . . . who knows yet
But from this lady may proceed a gem
To lighten all this isle?*

-Act II, scene iii, lines 77-79

The Chamberlain would have had to be prescient indeed to suspect
this,
but Shakespeare had the advantage of hindsight and played for



audience

applause at this point, for well he (and the audience) knew that Anne Bullen was fated to be the mother of Queen Elizabeth I.

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... *appeal unto the Pope*

It is now the Queen's turn to face trial, as earlier it had been Buckingham's. The divorce trial took place on June 18, 1529, eight years after Buckingham's execution.

Katherine, alone and friendless, stands before the powerful King and his powerful minister and manages to dominate the proceedings. Refusing to answer to her name when it is called out, she denies the jurisdiction of the court over her. She proudly attests her own virtues as a wife and denounces Wolsey. Finally, she says:

*/ do refuse you [Wolsey] for my judge, and here,
Before you all, appeal unto the Pope,*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 118-19

This was Katherine's trump card and she played it fearlessly. If the King, or Wolsey, or Campeius, had managed to persuade Katherine to agree to a divorce, the whole matter could have been completed without the Pope having to experience political embarrassment. Katherine need only have expressed her wish to retire to a convent, and the Pope would have given her his kindly permission to do so.

By adamantly refusing a divorce, rejecting the trial, and loudly appealing to the Pope, Katherine would force action of a different kind. It was one thing for the Pope to grant the Emperor's aunt a divorce she asked for, but quite another for him to force her out of a royal marriage against her will.

The Emperor's hand, after all, was at the papal throat.

Our daughter Mary

In Queen Katherine's absence, King Henry begins a circumstantial account of how it first came to him that his marriage might be an illegitimate

one. The matter began, he says:

*... on certain speeches uttered
By th'Bishop of Bayonne, then French ambassador,
Who had been hither sent on the debating
A marriage 'twixt the Duke of Orleans and*



Our daughter Mary.

-Act II, scene iv, lines 171-75

Royal princesses were bartered on the marriage market in accordance

with political expediency, of course. In 1518, when England was friendly

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with France, Mary was suggested as future bride for the son of French King

Francis, even though she was only two years old. When England broke away from France and turned to the Empire, it was Emperor Charles who

was temporarily the marital prospect. Then, on April 30, 1527, when an alliance with France was formed once more, there were the possibilities that Mary might marry, if not Francis, then his second son, Henry of Orleans (who, twenty years later, was destined to reign as King Henry II of France).

It is not unlikely that the Bishop of Bayonne, in the course of marital negotiations, would cast doubt on Mary's legitimacy as one way of lowering

the value of the marriage from the French standpoint and forcing England

to bid higher in other respects. One can wonder, however, whether Henry

VIII might not have maneuvered the matter himself, for by then he was already revolving the possibility of divorce in his mind and it would have suited him well to have the matter brought into the open by an outsider.

My Lord of Canterbury . . .

The King, according to the story he presents the court, sought ecclesiastical opinion and finally reached the highest in the land. He says:

*/ then moved you,
My Lord of Canterbury, and got your leave
To make this present summons.*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 217-19

The Archbishop of Canterbury at this time was William Warham.

He

had become archbishop in 1504 and it was he who crowned Henry and

Katherine in 1509. He was an old man now, about eighty years old, and he

had long since stepped back to let Wolsey (who, as Archbishop of York,

was only second in the English hierarchy) take over.

Warham approved the divorce, for he could do no other, since he was

utterly dominated by King and cardinal.



... *well-beloved servant, Cranmer*

The papal legate, Campeius, is unmoved by Henry's recital. He has been effectively neutralized by Katherine's appeal to the Pope, for until the Pope considers that appeal, his legate can do nothing. Campeius says as much, urging an adjournment until such time as the Queen would consent to be present at the trial.

This clearly catches Henry off guard and annoys him. Presumably he had expected to continue the trial in Katherine's absence, reach a proper

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decision in favor of divorce, and carry on smoothly from there. Now he sees that this will not be so after all, and in an aside, he says:

*My learned and well-beloved servant, Cranmer,
Prithoe return; with thy approach, I know,
My comfort comes along.*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 238-40

Cranmer was a learned churchman, some two years older than the King, and was one of those who had grown interested in developments then taking place in Germany.

In that land in 1517, a certain monk named Martin Luther had challenged many aspects of the accepted theology of the Catholic Church. This had initiated what seemed at first merely a monkish dispute, of the type that often ruffled the intellectual hierarchy of the church without seriously affecting its power structure.

Through a variety of circumstances, however, Luther's doctrines spread like fire through stubble (among other reasons, because the monk made skillful use of the relatively new invention of printing to scatter his argumentative and colorfully written pamphlets far and wide). By 1520 Cranmer and other clerics were discussing these new "Lutheran" notions in England, and one of the most important of them was that the Pope had no special authority over the church as a whole and that the large edifice of tradition built up by the Catholic Church need not be accepted simply



because the Pope ordered it so.

Henry VIII, who fancied himself a scholar, was highly indignant over Luther's views. In 1521 he wrote a book defending the traditional Catholic position and denouncing Luther. He insisted he wrote it himself, though many people suppose it was edited by some learned cleric. The book was taken to Rome by the Dean of Windsor and an appreciative Pope (strongly urged on by the dean) conferred upon Henry, on October 11, 1521, the title of "Defender of the Faith." (This title was retained by Henry even after he turned against the Pope, and has been held by all succeeding English monarchs down to this day.)

But now there was the matter of the divorce, and Henry was looking for help from the Pope and not finding it. His earlier conviction that the Pope was the final authority had to give way, and it was this that made Cranmer suddenly valuable to him.

It seems that in 1527 Cranmer happened to meet with a couple of the King's councillors, including Stephen Gardiner. In discussion the matter of the divorce, Cranmer took the attitude that the Pope was by no means the last word. Interested in Lutheran doctrine and sympathetic to it, Cranmer suggested that the King could take the problem to the various universities of Europe. In other words, the general opinion of the learned

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clerics of Christendom might support Henry, and in that case, the Pope's

opinion, even if adverse, need not be allowed to carry weight.

Now, two years later, Henry snatched at this alternative as a way out of his dilemma, and he remained grateful to Cranmer for this to the end of his life.

... stol'n away to Rome. . .

Wolsey and Campeius do their best to persuade Katherine to submit to a trial, in order to prevent a possibly destructive confrontation between



King and Pope, but Katherine, with steel-like constancy, refuses and insists on justice.

This is a serious defeat for Wolsey, and his enemies among the aristocracy gather gleefully to plot against him. Norfolk tells the others:

*... The King hath found
Matter against him [Wolsey] that forever mars
The honey of his language.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 20-22

For one thing, the cardinal had belatedly discovered that he wasn't conducting the divorce proceedings in order to have Henry marry a French princess after all. Instead, he found that Henry had his eyes on Anne Bullen. Wolsey was horrified and the whole matter of the divorce lost its savor for him. He began to backtrack and to the cold, shrewd King that was fatal.

Suffolk says:

*The Cardinal's letters to the Pope miscarried,
And came to th'eye o'th'King;*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 30-31

Worse yet follows, for Suffolk goes on:

*... Cardinal Campeius
Is stol'n away to Rome; hath ta'en no leave;
Has left the cause o'th'King unbundled ...*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 56-58

The trouble was that although Henry VIII was all-powerful inside England, he had no power to influence the great events on the Continent. About the time of the trial, the French effort to wrest Italy from Charles V came to a final failure. In August 1529 France and the Empire signed a peace that left Italy in Charles's control. That meant it left Pope Clement

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in Charles's control too, and papal approval of Henry's divorce from Charles's aunt was now impossible.

The trial dragged on through July, but Katherine wouldn't attend, wouldn't agree to any quiet settlement, and insisted on her appeal. By July 23 the trial came to a halt. The Pope, helpless to do anything but delay, recalled Campeius, who left England. Campeius did not steal away without leave-taking, however; he had a final interview with the King on



September 19.

From that moment on, Wolsey was through. He had promised Henry a divorce, but all he had obtained for Henry was a long humiliation. It was clear that Wolsey was not the man to get the King past the Pope, and it was necessary for Henry to find new tools.

... an *archbishop*

As Wolsey's stock falls, that of Cranmer rises. Cranmer feels it possible to bypass the Pope and has already been gathering opinions favorable to the King from various places. The nobles praise his labors and Suffolk says:

*...we shall see him
For it an archbishop.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 73-74

Again, time is being condensed. About two and a half years dragged on after the conclusion of the trial before Henry could actually get past the Pope. In 1532 Cranmer was sent to Germany by the King. Officially, he was to consult the Emperor, but actually he made contact with Lutheran princes, gathered Lutheran opinions, and confirmed his own sympathies to the new doctrines. Indeed, Cranmer abandoned his own celibacy and married his niece, for the Lutheran doctrines did not see any necessity for celibacy among the priesthood.

In August 1532 the old Archbishop of Canterbury died, and by March 1533 Cranmer was appointed to the vacant post and became sixty-ninth Archbishop of Canterbury.

The packet, Cromwell

Wolsey does not yet know he is out of favor. He enters with an underling and says:

*The packet, Cromwell,
Gave't you the King?*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 76-77

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Wolsey is speaking to Thomas Cromwell, a person of fairly low birth, whose early life is obscure until 1520, when, at the age of about thirty-five, he entered Wolsey's service. Eventually, he became Wolsey's confidential



secretary.

The packet, it turns out, is the immediate occasion for Wolsey's down-fall, at least in the play. The King enters and angrily gives Wolsey a paper that had accidentally found its way into the packet. It turns out to be a confidential accounting of the cardinal's property. The cardinal looks at it when the King leaves and mutters:

*'Tis th'account
Of all that world of wealth I have drawn together
For mine own ends; indeed, to gain the popedom,
And fee my friends in Rome.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 210-13

The King can now use Wolsey's greed as an excuse to degrade him, for he can now undoubtedly find cause for believing in his corruption, his intrigues with Rome, and so on. Wolsey is through.

. . . *the Great Seal* . . .

Almost at once the nobles come to him and Norfolk says:

*Hear the King's pleasure, Cardinal, who commands you
To render up the Great Seal presently
Into our hands, and to confine yourself
To Asher House, my Lord of Winchester's,*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 228-31

The Great Seal was the insignia of the Lord Chancellor's office. Wolsey was thus discharged from his position as what we would call "Prime Minister." This took place on October 17, 1529, only four months after the opening of the trial at which Wolsey was to have sat in powerful judgment over Queen Katherine.

The surrender of the Great Seal was only the development of a process that had begun earlier, however. Suffolk says:

*Because all those things you have done of late,
By your power legative, within this kingdom,
Fall into th'compass of a praemunire-
That therefore such a writ be sued against you:
To forfeit all your goods, lands, tenements,
Chattels, and whatsoever. . .*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 338-43

A "Statute of Praemunire" had been passed in 1392 under Richard II. It had been designed to limit papal power in England and under it no one



could deal with the Pope in certain ways without royal authority. On October 9, 1529-eight days before he had been stripped of office-Wolsey had been accused of having violated that statute, and, in consequence, forfeited almost all he owned to the King. He was allowed, however, as a gesture of royal mercy, to retain his post as Archbishop of York.

... *Sir Thomas More* ...

The nobles, having amused themselves by mocking the fallen minister, leave, and Wolsey, left alone, indulges in an emotional soliloquy over the passing of his greatness. Then Cromwell enters with mews, saying:

... *Sir Thomas More is chosen
Lord Chancellor in your place.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 393-94

Sir Thomas More was the most learned man in England in his time and was, in many respects, a most admirable person. He was an advocate of education for women and saw to it that his own daughters were fully educated.

He was a writer too, turning out a biography of Richard III in 1514, in which he intended to point a moral by contrasting a bad king, Richard, with a good one, Edward IV. (It must be remembered that Edward IV was Henry VIII's grandfather.) The biography served the purposes of Tudor propaganda and was used by Shakespeare as a source for his play

Richard III. More never finished it and one wonders if that was because he realized it was a propaganda piece and not true history and sickened of it. Shortly afterward, he wrote *Utopia* (a word I meaning "nowhere"), a picture of an ideal society-which added a word to the English language and gave rise to a genre of literature.

More was a fascinating man and Henry VIII delighted in his company. As Lord Chancellor, he was an excellent choice in many ways, for he was hard-working, kindhearted, just, and popular. He had opposed excessive taxation under Henry VII and as Speaker of the House of Commons had had the courage to stand up to Wolsey in 1523 against excessive taxation again.

In another respect, Henry was mad to appoint him. More was strongly anti-Lutheran and he could not possibly approve the divorce unless the Pope approved. If the Pope did not approve, More-a man of principle-could see no way around it and would not lift a finger to find one. When the time came that Henry *had* to ignore the Pope, More too fell from favor.



...in secrecy long married

Cromwell brings other news that is anachronistic, however, for again the lengthy period following the fall of Wolsey, a period full of twisting and turning before Henry can have his way, must be eliminated.

Cromwell says:

*... Cranmer is returned with welcome,
Installed Lord Archbishop of Canterbury.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 400-1

But that did not take place till March 1533, three and a half years after

Wolsey's fall.

Cromwell goes on:

*Last, that the Lady Anne,
Whom the King hath in secrecy long married,
This day was viewed in open as his queen,*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 402-4

It wasn't till July 1531, however, a year and a half *after* Wolsey's fall, that Henry finally separated from Katherine and refused to see her any more. After that, Anne began to accompany the King openly, even on trips abroad. They were secretly married on January 25, 1533, and on March 28, Cranmer, now Archbishop of Canterbury, officially declared Henry's marriage to Anne legal.

... He will advance thee

Wolsey advises Cromwell to abandon the sinking ship and seek safety. He says:

*Seek the King
(That sun 1 pray may never set!)-I have told him
What and how true thou art. He will advance thee;*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 414-16

Cromwell did as he was told. An ordinary secretary might have fallen with his master, but Cromwell gained a seat in Parliament almost at once and began attempts to reach the ear of the King with plans for circumventing the Pope and for making the King himself head of the English Church. This was Cranmer's theology, but Cromwell offered himself as minister to put that theology into practice.

Henry agreed, accepted his services, and began promoting him. Even-



tually, Cromwell's services were such that he became a peer. In April 1540 lowborn Thomas Cromwell was made Earl of Essex.

But Wolsey is given prescience by Shakespeare. He warns Cromwell to avoid ambition and corruption, saying:

*Then if thou fall'st, O Cromwell,
Thou fall'st a blessed martyr.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 448-49

Cromwell did eventually fall. In fact, by the time he was created Earl of Essex, he had already gotten into deep trouble with Henry over a different marriage and divorce. In June 1540 he was arrested and on July 28 (only four months after his promotion to the earldom) he was executed.

However, this is well after the events with which the play concludes, and with Cromwell's fall it has nothing to do.

Had I but served my God. . .

Finally, Wolsey ends his speech with a famous remark:

*O Cromwell, Cromwell,
Had I but served my God with half the zeal
I served my King, he would not in mine age
Have left me naked to mine enemies.*

-Act III, scene ii, lines 454-57

The statement was really made (according to legend) on his deathbed. For a while after his fall, Wolsey had lingered near London, hoping for a reconciliation with the King, and indeed, he appears to have continued to receive some proofs of lingering affection.

Wolsey was then supposed to have engaged in secret correspondence with the Pope, as well as with King Francis and Emperor Charles, hoping, possibly, to enlist their help in establishing his innocence of ever having worked with them against Henry and thus in aiding him in his planned reconciliation.

Eventually, though, he was pushed into going to York so that he could, for the first time, actually fill the post he had held so long. In April 1530 he began the trip to York.

Once there, he planned a public enthronement in November and this displeased the King. By that time tales of his secret correspondence came to light, and Henry decided Wolsey was engaged in treason. On November

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4, 1530, just three days before the planned enthronement, Wolsey was arrested and ordered back to London for trial.

His health, however, was destroyed and this last journey was too much for him. He traveled slowly, but by the time he reached Leicester he was dying, and on November 29, 1530, just a year after his fall, he closed his eyes for the last time with (if the story can be believed) the famous re-



mark about "Had I but served my God . . ." on his lips.

. . . from her coronation

The fourth act opens with two gentlemen meeting once more. They had met before (a dozen years before in real time) on the occasion of the conviction and execution of Buckingham. Now the event is a much happier one. The First Gentleman says to the Second:

*You come to take your stand here, and behold
The Lady Anne pass from her coronation?*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 2-3

The coronation took place on May 31, 1533, immediately after Cranmer's blessing of the marriage.

. . . a late court at Dunstable . . .

The Second Gentleman asks as to the fate of Katherine, whom he can refer to now only as the Princess Dowager. The First Gentleman says:

*The Archbishop
Of Canterbury, accompanied with other
Learned and reverend fathers of his order,
Held a late court at Dunstable, six miles off
From Amptill, where the Princess lay. . .*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 24-28

Since Henry had separated himself finally from Katherine in 1531, she had been established at Amptill, a town forty miles north of London. In 1533 she was subjected to a second trial at Dunstable, ten miles south of Amptill (not six), and this was quite different from the earlier trial four years before.

Again Katherine refused to appear despite repeated invitations, but this time there was no papal legate and no Pope to appeal to. Cranmer acted on his own and on May 23, 1533, he declared Henry's marriage to Kath-

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erine void. That cleared the way for his blessing of the marriage to Anne and for the coronation of the new Queen within the week.

Katherine did not give in. She refused to accept Cranmer's decision or any of the matters that followed-such as declaring her daughter, Mary, to be illegitimate. She maintained herself to be Queen to the very end, but the strain was hard on her. As the First Gentleman says:

. . . she was removed to Kimbolton,



Where she remains now sick.

-Act IV, scene i, lines 34-35

Kimbolton is about twenty miles north of Amptill.

He of Winchester

The description of Anne's coronation by a Third Gentleman leads to a discussion of the changes that have taken place. Gardiner, for instance, has been promoted (in 1531) from the post of the King's secretary to that of Bishop of Winchester, the wealthiest clerical position in England and the one that had once been held by Henry Beaufort (see page II-522).

The Second Gentleman points out that there is hostility among the new men of the court. He says:

*He of Winchester [Gardiner]
Is held no great good lover of the Archbishop's,
The virtuous Crammer.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 103-5

The source of the enmity is not given, but part may have been the result of Gardiner's frustrated ambition. Gardiner had had hopes for the archbishopric of Canterbury and the lesser post of Winchester was not sufficient consolation.

The Third Gentleman, however, points out that Cranmer has an ally:

*Thomas Cromwell,
A man in much esteem with th'King, and truly
A worthy friend. The King has made him Master
O'th'Jewel House,
And one, already, of the Privy Council.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 108-12

Cromwell had succeeded Gardiner as the King's secretary, and his rapid rise thereafter was bound to displease the ambitious Gardiner.

Yet the differences between Gardiner on one side and Cromwell and

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Cranmer on the other were not entirely due to jostings of ambition. There were religious differences too.

Cromwell and Cranmer led the way in the English Reformation that followed the King's divorce. Gardiner, on the other hand, was a religious conservative who was willing to go along with the divorce but who wanted



no change in Catholic doctrine.

On the whole, Henry was on Gardiner's side theologically, for the King remained "Defender of the Faith" in his heart and did not budge from Catholic doctrine except where his self-interest was at stake.

This was not only in the matter of the divorce. There was also a question of money. Henry VIII needed funds and now that he was breaking with the Pope, the rich (and in some cases, corrupt) monasteries were at his mercy. The monks were staunchly on the side of the Pope, and therefore against the divorce, and they were rich! What other crimes were necessary?

Sir Thomas More stood out against the King replacing the Pope as head of the Catholic Church, and, for his pains, he was executed on July 6, 1535, the victim of the kind of tyranny he had wrongfully ascribed to Richard III. With his death, Cromwell became supreme, under the King, and supervised the dismantling and looting of the monasteries. The King had the money he needed and the ruling groups in England shared sufficiently in the loot to gain a vested interest in maintaining the Reformation and opposing any return to Catholicism.

For the sake of the benefits he gamed, then, Henry raised Cromwell and Cranmer on high and left Gardiner, with whose philosophy he really sympathized, in the rear.

... *your name Capucius*

At Kimbolton, meanwhile, Katherine is dying. She has a last visitor, and says:

*// my sight fail not,
You should be Lord Ambassador from the Emperor,
My royal nephew, and your name Capucius.*

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 108-10

"Capucius" is the Latinized form for "Chapuys," who was, indeed, the Imperial ambassador at Henry's court.

Katherine, for all her stubbornness in the matter of the divorce, still seemed to regard Henry with the love and respect due a husband and a king. Clinging fiercely to her rights against all the world, she was never betrayed into a single word against her cruel husband.

On her deathbed, she composed a letter to him asking for very little—that he should look after their daughter, Mary, and see to the personal

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welfare of the few servants who had attended her in the last years of her unhappiness and disgrace.

Henry managed to feel a last twinge of conscience at this and sent Capucius to Katherine with some consoling message. (He was safe now, after all, for she was dying.) It would seem that, in actual fact, Capucius came



too late and found her dead, but according to Holinshed, he came before she had sent the letter and was the agent for taking it to the King. Shake-speare, as always, follows Holinshed.

Capucius' arrival indicated the interest the Emperor Charles was still taking in the affairs of his aunt. He could do nothing for her directly, for he was in no position to make effective war on Henry; certainly not to invade England. Nevertheless, he steadfastly refused to allow the Pope to come to any compromise with Henry, even though that meant the loss of England as far as Catholicism was concerned.

On March 23, 1534, Clement VII had at last firmly declared that the marriage between Henry and Katherine had been entirely valid. (He died half a year later, having lived through a catastrophic eleven-year period as Pope.)

Henry had to react to this and he did so strongly. On March 30 he had his Parliament formally break all ties that bound the Anglican Church to the papacy, and the King himself was established as head of the church. (A year later, More was executed for refusing to accept this.)

Now, in January 1536, with all that was precious to her-her husband and her faith-lying in ruins about her, Katherine lay dying.

... his young daughter

Katherine asks Capucius to take the last letter to the King:

In which I have commended to his goodness

The model of our chaste loves, his young daughter-

-Act IV, scene ii, lines 131-32

The Princess Mary, daughter of Henry and Katherine, had been ten years old when the long-drawn-out affair of the divorce had begun.

Her life became a miserable one thereafter. By the end of 1531 she was separated from her mother, and they were never allowed to see each other again, not even when Katherine was dying.

Mary was twenty years old at the time of her mother's death, and in her attitude she was a perfect copy of Katherine. Like her mother, Mary always refused to give up a jot of her rights. She; would not recognize the divorce, would not give up her title of Princess, held firmly to the Catholic faith when Henry abandoned it.

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In fact, her fierce attachment to the Catholic view (by which her mother had never ceased being Queen and she herself never ceased being Princess, as opposed to an Anglicanism which had made of her a bastard) was to lead to five tragic years for England when the traumatized girl became Queen in her turn, seventeen years after her mother's death.

Having made her final plea, then, Katherine died on January 7, 1536, at the age of fifty. Her stubbornness in the matter of the divorce ushered in long years of religious unrest in England, but perhaps they would have come anyway, for Protestant doctrines were invading the land with an intensity far beyond anything Henry himself wished to see.

The only crime of which Katherine could be accused, even by her greatest enemies, was that of failing to bear a living son.

The Queen's in labor

It was Anne Bullen's turn now to produce an heir. As the fifth act opens, Sir Thomas Lovell tells Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester:

*The Queen's in labor,
They say, in great extremity, and feared
She'll with the labor end.*

-Act V, scene i, lines 18-20

Anne Bullen had gotten to work at the task of producing an heir with promptness. At the time of the secret marriage, she was already pregnant and perhaps it was a missed period that made it the more necessary to marry. After all that Henry had done to supply himself with a satisfactory male heir, he could scarcely run the risk of allowing any question of illegitimacy to arise.

So it was that in early September 1533, seven months after her marriage (but over two years *before* Katherine's death, which had been described in the previous scene), Anne was in labor.

Gardiner, hearing the news, wishes the child well, but makes no effort to conceal his hostility to the Queen and to her two supporters, Cranmer and Cromwell.

...Is the Queen delivered

Naturally, King Henry is very anxious concerning the arrival of the heir. He comes onstage, speaks absently to others, including Cranmer, and then springs to real attention when the Old Lady (who has, presumably, been



in attendance on the travelling Queen) enters. He cries to her:
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*Now by thy looks
I guess thy message. Is the Queen delivered?
Say "aye," and of a boy.*

-Act V, scene i, lines 161-63

Henry could not command fate, however. The child was a girl, born on September 7, 1533, and Henry VIII was inexpressibly disappointed. He had no way of foretelling that this child was, a quarter century later, to sit on the throne and be the greatest monarch in English history. He knew only that it was another girl.

The Old Lady, perfectly aware of the bad news she was carrying, tried to make the best of it. She says it is a boy, going on to explain:

*'Tis a girl
Promises boys hereafter.*

-Act V, scene i, lines 165-66

Alas, this was not a true prophecy. The child born that day was fated to have no sons; no children at all. She remained unmarried all her life and in legend (and even, perhaps, in reality) remained a virgin. She came

to be so well known as "the Virgin Queen" that the American state of Virginia is named, in that fashion, for her.

She was, in consequence (woe to Henry's dynastic ambitions), the last of the Tudor line, of which Henry VII had been the first, so that the line endured altogether for only 118 years and only three generations. Nevertheless, James I, who succeeded Elizabeth I, was the great-grandson (through his mother) of a sister of Henry VIII and was therefore the great-great-grandson of Henry VII. All England's monarchs from the time

of Henry VIII have been descendants of Henry VII, but since Elizabeth, none have been descendants of Henry VIII.

The upper Germany . . .

The next two scenes deal with Gardiner's attempt to destroy Cranmer. Gardiner accuses the Archbishop of Canterbury of heresy, and strives to secure official confirmation of this view from the council. (This took place in 1540, actually, though in the play it seems to precede the christening of the new baby princess-which took place in 1533.)

Gardiner points out the dangers of heresy and says it would lead to

*Commotions, uproars, with a general taint
Of the whole state; as of late days our neighbors,
The upper Germany, can dearly witness,*

-Act V, scene iii, lines 28-30

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The reference seems to be to the Peasants' War of 1524-25. Luther had made a passionate attack on the religious establishment and was winning out. The poor peasants of the upper Rhine, assuming that this was a



call for a general overhaul of the system, and long suffering unbearable economic oppression which reduced them to the levels of slaves and animals, rose in revolt.

As always, when a downtrodden and uneducated group, without sophisticated leadership, breaks into revolt, there is a general anarchy in which

blind destruction is the order of the day and in which many relatively innocent and helpless people suffer. Since the peasants took vengeance on their aristocratic masters (who were the articulate members of society),

their actions were presented as atrocious beyond words. When the peasants were finally beaten (as they virtually always were throughout history) and were remorselessly punished in the ratio of ten to one, there was

little indignation over that, for who worries about the inarticulate robots at

the bottom of the economic pyramid?

In any case, Luther was horrified over the revolt. He had depended for his support on the various German princes who saw in a break with Rome

increased political power for themselves and (as in Henry's case) a flood of money from the property and lands under clerical control. But these same princes could now also see that once a revolution is started, it can spread wildly, and while they might like to rifle the church, they did not think it fun to be rifled, in turn, by their peasants.

Naturally, the church made the point that revolution was contagious (a point Gardiner now makes), and Luther, rather than see his new doctrines collapse as fearful princes drew back, decided to line up his new doctrines on the side of the political establishment. He broke out into a flood of incredible invective against the peasants, calling for their suppression by the most extreme methods. By doing this, he held the Lutheran princes in line, but he lost the peasants. The regions in which the revolt took place remain Catholic to this day.

Despite Luther's opportunism, the Peasants' War remained a horrible example to those who thought of venturing on heresy. Europe's aristocracy, unless it could move as pretty much of a unit under a strong king (as in England and in the Scandinavian countries), preferred not to stir up trouble by setting the example of a revolt against authority, and Lutheranism, which for a while had seemed likely to take over all of Western Christendom, met its limits and was restricted largely to the Teutonic countries.

... this new sect

Gardiner accuses Cranmer of being in sympathy with Luther's doctrines

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(and therefore, presumably, of subjecting England to the dangers of popular disorder), saying to him:

Do not I know you for a favorer



Of this new sect?

-Act V, scene iii, lines 80-81

Cranmer, indeed, is about to be arrested and sent to the Tower, when Henry enters, intervenes decisively, and saves the Archbishop.

While Henry VIII remained alive, his strong and autocratic hand kept diverse opinions from breaking into open conflict. Both Gardiner and Cranmer were kept under control.

After Henry's death, however, there was first a period of strong Protestant action, in which Cranmer was supreme and Gardiner was imprisoned. There next followed a time of strong Catholic reaction, in which Gardiner was supreme and Cranmer was burned at the stake.

Only with Elizabeth I was a new compromise reached and the groundwork laid for a kind of non-dogmatism in the official view of religion.

... a thousand thousand blessings

In the final scene in the play, Cranmer presides over the baptism of the baby, Elizabeth. He speaks prophetically (thanks to the hindsight of the dramatist), saying:

*This royal infant-heaven still move about her!-
Though in her cradle, yet now promises
Upon this land a thousand thousand blessings
Which time shall bring to ripeness.*

-Act V, scene v, lines 17-20

Cranmer would have had to be a prophet indeed to have foreseen this.

Henry certainly did not foresee it.

The birth of a girl soured the King on Anne; perhaps it made him think

that heaven still frowned on him and that he had to look elsewhere.

As

time went on, he even began to think of divorcing Anne, and might have

done so except for the general opinion that if he did, he might have to take back Katherine. This meant he had to wait for Katherine's death be-

fore doing anything about Anne.

Yet he could engage in extracurricular affairs, and he did. It was not long after Elizabeth's birth that Anne began to feel what Katherine had

earlier felt.

When Katherine finally died, poor Anne was jubilant, feeling that now

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she was really Queen, for there was no one left to dispute the right-and besides, she was pregnant again and this time surely it would be a boy .

..



... *covetous of wisdom* ...

Cranmer goes on in his eulogy of the baby princess, saying:

*Saba was never
More covetous of wisdom and fair virtue
Than this pure soul shall be.*

-Act V, scene v, lines 23-25

"Saba" is a variant of "Sheba" and the reference is to the Queen of Sheba, who is described in the tenth chapter of 1 Kings as having made a long trip to Jerusalem in order to sit at the feet of the wise King Solomon and learn from him.

And the Princess Elizabeth, in the course of a perilous childhood (she too, like her older sister Mary, had to go through periods in which she was considered a bastard, and even experienced times when imprisonment and execution seemed near), received a thorough education which she completely absorbed. She spoke French, Italian, Latin, and Greek, was acquainted with classical literature, could dispute with the learned men of her court on an equal basis, and as Queen showed herself the rival, and usually the superior, intellectually and politically, of any king in Europe.

Shall star-like rise ...

When Cranmer's eulogy passes beyond Elizabeth, it becomes ludicrous. He says of the baby:

*So shall she leave her blessedness to one
(When heaven shall call her from this cloud of darkness)
Who from the sacred ashes of her honor
Shall star-like rise, as great in fame as she was,*

-Act V, scene v, lines 43-46

This refers to Elizabeth's successor, James I (see page II-149), whom nobody could possibly recognize in this ridiculously fulsome description. But then, of course, James was on the throne at the time this play was produced and one could scarcely praise Elizabeth without making James appear the insect he was in comparison, unless one also grossly lied by praising James just as much.

With this the play ends. Henry VIII, who has not shone to advantage

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through much of the play, appears golden in the final act as he protects

Cranmer and is happy over the princess.

But the play stops just in time, for after the death of Katherine of Aragon, Henry is in full pursuit of Jane Seymour, one of Anne's maids of honor.

Anne Bullen walked in on Henry when he was engaged in some intimate play with Jane and the Queen threw a fit. Since she was in late pregnancy,



Henry, in anguish over the possible effect on her, tried to soothe her. It was to no avail. Anne went into premature labor and on January 29, 1536 (only three weeks after Katherine's death and on the very day of her official funeral), gave birth to the son Henry was looking for-but it was dead.

Henry was furious and that was the end for poor Anne. The King trumped up charges of adultery, against her, had her committed to the Tower on May 2, 1536, and had her executed on May 19. She had been married to her royal husband for only three years-a sadder marriage and an unhappier end than Katherine had had.

The next day Henry married Jane Seymour, and she finally gave Henry the son he wanted on October 12, 1537, but died herself on October 24.

The remainder of Henry's reign was one long horror as he married and divorced a fourth wife, executed a fifth, and died before he could think of what to do with the sixth-all this time ruling a frightened court with absolute autocracy, and always quick to kill any who roused his ire or his suspicions.

He finally died on January 28, 1547, and was succeeded by Jane Seymour's son, then nine years old, who ruled as Edward VI. He was a sickly boy who died on July 6, 1553, only fifteen. His older sister, Mary, Katherine's daughter, followed, and initiated a five-year reign during which she uselessly and violently attempted to force England back to Catholicism.

When she died on November 17, 1588, at the age of forty-two, her twenty-five-year-old sister, Elizabeth, Anne's daughter, finally came to the throne, and there began a glorious reign that was to last forty-five years and was amply to fulfill Cranmer's words.

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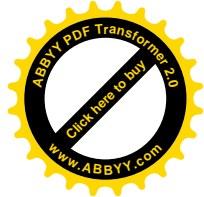


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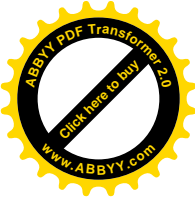
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