

The Case for Shakespeare: History, Politics and the Law in *Woodstock*

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In ‘The Date and Authorship of *Thomas of Woodstock: Evidence and Interpretation*’ (2007), a response to my 2006 four-volume study, MacDonald P. Jackson said this:

The basic weakness in Egan’s case for Shakespeare’s authorship of *Woodstock* is that he adopts the old methods of ‘parallel hunting,’ and lists dozens of verbal parallels between *Woodstock* with Shakespeare that are the stock of early modern drama. I explain what is wrong with this procedure and how its defects can be remedied, in a couple of paragraphs introducing my article, ‘The Date and Authorship of Hand D’s contribution to Sir Thomas More: Evidence from Literature Online,’ (Shakespeare Survey 59 (2007) 69-78 and in ‘Shakespeare in the Quarrel Scene in *Arden of Faversham*’ *Shakespeare Quarterly* 57 (2006) 249-93 (255-8). There I distinguish between (a) the mere accumulation of verbal ‘parallels’ between a disputed play and the plays of a scholar’s favored candidate for its authorship and (b) a comprehensive search with the aid of an electronic database, for phrases and collocations that the disputed play shares with five or fewer plays, whoever their author, first performed within a predetermined period.¹

I’m obliged to say that Jackson’s account is simply not true. My evidence for Shakespeare certainly includes multiple collocations, but as Jackson himself demonstrates, line parallels and even echoes can of course be plagiarized. In my argument, they are thus merely supporting data, although as Vickers insists one cannot make a convincing attribution without them. The real case for Shakespeare lies in the play’s dramatic skill and brilliance.

A good starting point perhaps is recognizing that this lost and

¹ MacD. P. Jackson: ‘The Date and Authorship of *Thomas of Woodstock: Evidence and Interpretation*,’ (*Research Opportunities in Medieval and Renaissance Drama* XLVI (2007) pp. 99-100.

almost forgotten drama sustains critical analysis beyond its modest reputation. Apart from Rossiter's introduction to *Woodstock, a Moral History*, whose insights include a penetrating study of the king's complex personality, the play has inspired Edgar Schell's fine discussion of its intellectual politics in *Strangers and Pilgrims* (picked up and elaborated by Charles Forker in his Arden edition of *2 Richard II*), Janet Stavropoulos's discerning look at the masque and its centrality to the story, John James Elson's, 'The Non-Shakespearean *Richard II* and Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I*,' and Alzada J. Tipton's study of the play's subtle grasp and exposition of Elizabethan law.²

Some of the best commentary has come from the historians. The medievalist Ernst H. Kantorowicz in *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton U.P., 1957), has an insightful chapter on *2 Richard II*, while Marie Axton's oblique discussion in *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London, 1977), also deserves recognition. Taken together, these articles and book chapters reveal an extraordinarily complex, intelligent and skillfully executed drama that warrants more than the patronizing dismissal of a Jackson or a Lake.

Compared with its non-Shakespearean contemporaries, *Woodstock/1 Richard II* stands unchallenged in the sophistication of its narrative structures, political analyses, presentations of character, linguistic finesse, and dramatic configurations. It is

²A.P. Rossiter: *Woodstock, a Moral History* (London: (Chatto & Windus, London, 1946), passim; Edgar Schell: *Strangers and Pilgrims: From The Castle of Perseverance to King Lear* (The University of Chicago Press, 1983) pp. 77-112; Charles R. Forker (ed.): *King Richard II* (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2002), pp. 144-152; Janet C. Stavropoulos: ' "A masque is treason's license": the Design of *Woodstock*,' *The Journal of the South Central Modern Language Association* (Summer, 1988) pp. 1-12; Alzada J. Tipton: ' "The Meanest Man...shall be permitted freely to accuse": The Commoners in *Woodstock*,' (*Comparative Drama*, Vol. 32, 1998), pp. 117-145); John James Elson, 'The Non-Shakespearean *Richard II* and Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I*.' (*Studies in Philology*, 1935).

driven and held together by Hegelian and psychoanalytical proto-concepts—dialectical, Oedipal and what in a seminal essay Freud calls ‘the uncanny’³—both typical and preemptive of the later Shakespeare. As we shall see, its intellectual abstractions and their realization invite and deserve comparison with *Richard II*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Lear*, if not always at the level of a poetry perhaps ‘simplified’ for the provinces, as Rossiter suggests, but as a theatrical construct and vehicle for genuinely artistic concerns.

Masques and Masquerade

If the above seems overstated, this is only because the play has not been recognized for the masterpiece it is. Consider the conceptual and executive complexities of a nodal episode, the Shakespearean play-within-the-play (IV.ii.103-222). Stavropoulos persuasively demonstrates that it is one of the plot’s central events (‘the meaning of Woodstock, then, as a function of its dramatic design, inheres in the masque at Plashey,’) arguing that it ‘enacts a process of transformation’ in which

Richard and the parasites manipulate the dramatic illusion of the masque to establish the kingdom of misrule, to control and modify reality...the spirit of antithesis permeates this masque, providing ocular proof of the perversion of kingship.’⁴

These insights—especially the way ‘the spirit of antithesis’ runs through everything—may be extended by further comparison with Shakespeare’s more famous internal dramas, particularly ‘The Mouse-Trap,’ which conceptually owes more to our masque than has been acknowledged. Corbin and Sedge catch a glimpse of it when they remark that *I Richard II* ‘initiates the dramatic practice of using the masque deceitfully as a cover for

³ Sigmund Freud: ‘The “Uncanny,”’ in *Collected Papers*, Vol. IV, ed. M. Masud R. Khan, trans. Alix Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1925, 1971) pp. 368-407.

⁴ Janet C. Stavropoulos: ‘A masque is treason’s license’: the Design of *Woodstock*, in *The Journal of the South Central Modern Language Association* (Summer, 1988) pp.9- 11

treason and murder.⁵ From Claudius's perspective, that's exactly what happens.

Shakespeare's inset masques and dramas (*The Taming of the Shrew*, *Loves's Labor's Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest*, *Henry VIII* and *Hamlet*) create 'box-within-a-box' effects in which 'the spectator is engaged in watching one group of characters watching another.'⁶ The most famous instance is 'The Mouse-Trap,' whose theatrical semiotics arise from multi-layered reverberations of illusion versus reality—the audience watching Hamlet watching Claudius watching himself personified in the dumb show of *The Murder of Gonzago*. One consequence is to suck both audience and actors into vortices of uncertainty and ambiguous reference; another draws spectators into the action by blurring the line between themselves and the audience on the stage. 'The whole play, we know,' writes Lanham of *Hamlet*, 'seeks authenticity, reality behind the arras, things as they are.'⁷

The same is true (or largely so) of *Woodstock's* masque. Deliberately fluid approximations of role, participation and audience collaboration prod or provoke its relationship to the action into a continuous but asymmetrical flux. Both *Woodstock* and the drama's watchers—internal and external, rural or country house, on stage and off—constitute variously and sometimes simultaneously observed observers, viewers of concomitant behaviors in which actors look upon actors who are themselves acting parts often more or other than those originally assumed. If all the world's a stage—the Globe's motto, *Totus mundus agit histri- onem*, 'The whole world is acting'—then, as Moseley expresses it,

⁵ Corbin and Sedge, *Thomas of Woodstock*, p. 36.

⁶ Leah Scragg: *Discovering Shakespeare's Meaning: An Introduction to the Study of Shakespeare's Dramatic Structures* (London & New York: Longman, 1994) pp. 88-9.

⁷ Richard A. Lanham: 'Superposed Plays: *Hamlet*' in David Young (ed.): *Shakespeare's Middle Tragedies: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1993) p. 24.

the moral judgement demanded by the watching of a play bounces back on the audience, for they too are actors and their very language never allows them to forget the fact.⁸

Note the shifting levels of reality in the following moment from *I Richard II*'s internal drama, climaxing in the king's proleptic erasure:

King: Put on a vizard! Stop his cries!

Woodstock: Ha, who bids them so? I know that voice full well.

Afore my God, false men, King Richard's here!

Turn thee, thou headstrong youth, and speak again!

By thy dead father's soul, I charge thee, hear me,

So heaven may help me at my greatest need,

As I have wish'd thy good and England's safety.

Bagot: You're still deceiv'd, my lord, the King's not here.

—*I Richard II*, IV.ii.189-196

The multiple facets of these lines in context are more decisively self-revealing than the actors' public personae (from the Latin for mask) and more clearly hypocritical (from the Greek for actor). The dynamics both here and in the play-within-the-play as a whole generate a kind of extended theatrical Heisenberg Effect where the mere presence of the internal viewer—Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, late Lord Protector, theatrical and political martyr, figure symbolic, unreal and yet undeniably historical—alters the conditions of the masque and of the encompassing narrative itself.

It goes without saying that this is equally true of what might be

⁸ Moseley, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, p. 33, attributing the Globe's motto to John of Salisbury, a twelfth-century Bishop of Chartres. Moseley also appositely quotes (slightly inaccurately) Sir Walter Raleigh's 1612 lyric: 'What is our life? The play of passion./Our mirth? The music of division./Our mothers' wombs the tiring-houses be,/Where we are dressed for life's short comedy./The earth the stage; Heaven the spectator is,/Who sits and views whosoe'er doth act amiss. /The graves which hide us from the scorching sun /Are like drawn curtains when the play is done. /Thus playing post we to our latest rest, /And then we die in earnest, not in jest.'

called the paying audience, whether it comprises country dwellers or their ‘betters,’ country squires, though each generates different transformations. Even more profoundly, when Richard’s cronies deny his presence (‘the King’s not here’) we are confronted suddenly with yet another level of performance: a play within the play within the play-within-the-play, an extraordinary technical audacity and one fully worthy of its creator—of the creator I propose. The meta-drama of Richard II’s unpresent presence, that is, monarchical disguise/effacement to the point of self-erasure, articulates the play’s most sensitive and delicate meanings. In order to complete Woodstock’s deposition, Richard is compelled in effect to abandon his own identity as king: he is precisely, as Gaunt expresses it in *2 Richard II*, ‘possess’d now to depose [him]self’ (II.i.108). We may add that from the longer and more unequivocally Shakespearean perspective the masque in *1 Richard II* uncovers finally the secret of its successor play, a work whose central critical puzzle—why does Richard II give in to Bullingbrook so easily?—has never been satisfactorily explained in literary terms by the critics. The answer is rooted in the contradictions of his personality, discussed in more detail below, and the fact that he had experienced deposition once before. In *2 Richard II* he embraces an old friend.

The Russian-doll or onion-layered revelations in *Woodstock / 1 Richard II* are clearly deliberate. For the external viewers of the masque, that is, ourselves, the principle of uncertainty abruptly becomes the only certain principle. Both the watcher of the inset play and its principal performer—the same figure, Woodstock—are integrated smoothly as elements, that is, as a single polysemous element in the action being staged, though at differentiated points of consciousness. We of the audience may be equally caught up, I would say intentionally so.⁹ In one mode, *1 Richard II* contains an invert variation of *Macbeth*, guests unexpectedly setting upon their host;¹⁰ in a second, Woodstock’s death becomes a more explicit rendition of *The*

9 A progression or theatrical continuum later taken to its logical conclusion in German Expressionist drama when members of the audience were encouraged to mount the stage and smash the set.

10 I owe this point to Stavropoulos, *op. cit.* p. 9.

Murder of Gonzago.

By way of illustration, compare the epistemological complexities found in *1 Richard II*'s masque with their close counterparts in *Hamlet*:

Player Queen: ...If, once a widow, ever I be wife!

Hamlet: If she should break it now!

Player King: 'Tis deeply sworn. Sweet, leave me here awhile;

My spirits grow dull, and fain I would beguile

The tedious day with sleep. [*Sleeps*]

Player Queen: Sleep rock thy brain,

And never come mischance between us twain! [*Exit*]

Hamlet: Madam, how like you this play?

Gertrude: The lady protests too much, methinks.

Hamlet: O, but she'll keep her word!

Claudius: Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence in 't?

Hamlet: No, no, they do but jest, poison in jest; no offence i'the world.

—*Hamlet*, III.ii.225-235

Gertrude's famous line resonates on a minimum of three levels: the Player Queen's; her own, as a real Queen; and finally Hamlet's jealous version. It's also the case, it seems to me, that the lady doth not protest too much, though the fact that Gertrude thinks she does adds another layer of meaning, a fourth, to her fuzzy part in Claudius's crime. The psycho-emotive consequences here, in *1 Richard II*, and other Shakespearean plays-within-the-play, include alternate heightenings and diminutions in the audience's response to and with the tale and its teller, since life and art—history and interpretation, disillusion and illusion, analogy and mendacity—are constantly run into and out of one another. Hamlet himself drops ambiguously in and out of his role as chorus and watcher: is his question to Gertrude that of son, actor, inquisitor, director, viewer or playwright? The answer is any one and all of the above.

The Shakespearean Dialectic

Complex manipulations of this sort are of course a Shakespeare trademark, especially in tragedies like *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* where reality and appearance are successively opposed in ways so profoundly dialectical they mutually interpenetrate. At key

moments the two become indistinguishable, e.g. Banquo's ghost or the dagger drawn by Macbeth's conscience-stricken mind. Hamlet himself, who knows not seems (I.ii.76), is uncertainly sane or insanely uncertain throughout—is he feigning as he claims, and/or is he really mad beyond that? At one point he self-consciously adopts an antic disposition (I.v.173) yet immediately thereafter presents himself to Ophelia like an emissary from Hell itself, the spirit of his father's spirit (accompanied by a sigh 'so piteous and profound / As it did seem to shatter all his bulk'):

...with his doublet all unbrac'd,
No hat upon his head; his stockins fouled,
Ungarter'd, and down-gyved to his ankle,
Pale as his shirt; his knees knocking each other,
And with a look so piteous in purport
As if he had been loosed out of hell
To speak of horrors...

—*Hamlet*, II.i.75-81

All Elsinore's actors, including the Prince, are constantly adopting some kind of role, posturing, concealing, falsely misrepresenting, as they try to discover the method in his madness and/or the madness in his method. Even the innocent but then not-so-innocent Ophelia deceives him in the 'get thee to a nunnery' scene, provoking her former lover—or is he?—once again into a state of double-edged insanity, the overthrow of a noble mind (III.i. 147, 150). The player weeps for Hecuba, yet what's she to him?—that is, how genuine is his fake emotion? And how genuinely absent is Hamlet's self-proclaimed lack of it? In what senses, metaphorical and actual, is he both alive and dead (V.i. 251), while the play's other Hamlet, a dead man out of his grave, walks in the waste and middle of the night? Young Hamlet, a live man who jumps into a grave, announces while still living, 'I am dead, Horatio...Horatio, I am dead.' He says it twice, in a retroactively revealing emphasis (V.ii.333, 338). Existence or non-existence, to be or not to be, that was and is and existentially always will be the question.

These creative ambiguities are different only in number and

persistence, not in kind, from the dramatized court of Richard II where Gaunt remarks, assuming Hamlet's role, 'To hide our hate is soundest policy,' (*I Richard II*, I.i.199). York, Arundel and Surrey agree, promising to falsely 'smooth our sullen brows with smiles,' (I.i.195-200), that is, to smile and smile while being villains—for in the end they all conspire against the Crown. Even the virtuous Anne a' Beame equivocates like Ophelia, e.g., 'I see no fault that I dare call a fault,' she ambivalently says of the minions (III.i.59), and 'Whom my lord favors must to me be welcome,' (III.i.44), etc. Truths personal and political are cloaked behind beards, fine or funny clothes, fair-sounding but disingenuous words, like the king's graphic fiction of the disinherited young man (II.ii.62-94).

Indeed, the 'paper' he flourishes in that scene is doubly a prop: first, in the little drama he stages, and second, in the larger drama of which it is part. Further, like the coronation that follows, the action is dominated by magnificent tableaux and spectacles—all showy exhibition and display behind which the deadly fissures slowly widen. A vivid example is the naked power struggle abruptly disclosed in the family row at Richard's wedding to the gentle and increasingly embarrassed Anne ('The King but jests, my lord, and you grow angry,' I.iii.111).

Before the masque, Green says in an unconsciously revealing speech: 'our devices here are like jewels kept in caskets, or good faces in masks that grace not the owners because they are obscur'd' (*I Richard II*, III.i.77-9). The imagery is prescient: later at the kidnapping he and his friends obscure their features in masks, disgracing them all, the king himself most significantly so.

The dramatist knows exactly what he's doing. At the opening of IV.ii the Duchess gallops off to tend to the ailing Queen Anne, wearing a cloak and mask suitable for riding. But the detail functions as a piece of 'visual imagery' anticipating the arrival of the king and his ministers in lethal disguise.¹¹ Stavropoulos and

¹¹ . See also *Text and Variorum Notes* (2006), IV.ii.1-3.

Inga-Stina Ekeblad aptly quote Supervacuo:

A masque is treason's license, that build upon:
'Tis murder's best face when a vizard's on.

—*The Revenger's Tragedy*, V.i.196-7

I Richard II's masque-within-the-play holds up a mirror to the nature of all its participants, aware and unaware, scorned and virtuous, reflecting the very age and body of Elizabeth I's time and, as Shakespeare understood it, their own.¹² At its climax Woodstock, like Claudius, literally steps into—is dragged into—the masque itself to become not only its audience but (what he always really was, as the 'real' audience knows all along) its central figure. He is vizarded and costumed to resemble his captors and carried out screaming, his protesting cries accompanied, that is, drowned out, by the king's triumphant drums.

The next time we hear these same drums is on the battlefield when the observing audience is dangerously included in the action, implicitly invited to real-life activism. This of course would be especially so if the performance is in an open field, feet from the spectators:

York: Never such vipers were endur'd so long
To grip and eat the hearts of all the kingdom.
Lancaster: This day shall here determinate all wrongs.
The meanest man tax'd by their foul oppressions
Shall be permitted freely to accuse,
And right they shall have to regain their own,
Or all shall sink to dark confusion. [*Drums sound within*]

—*I Richard II*, V.iii.31-7

The masque was thus no masque, just as the king intended though not quite as he meant. Stavropoulos observes: 'Like the traditional court masque, [the inset drama in *I Richard II*] shows that the illusion of the masque world represents political reality.'¹³ The apparent illusion was and is reality—though of course

¹² Cf. Campbell, *Shakespeare's 'Histories'*, pp. 168-9.

¹³ Stavropoulos, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

like everything else in the drama, a reality of another kind, that is, an illusion ‘more authentique’ than historical reality itself.

Solid Research

We see from the above that *1 Richard II* is both chronicle and parable, the two levels, as in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, playing with dialectical complements that become almost indistinguishable. The drama is an analytical account of Richard II’s reign (excluding its famous climax), and a socio-moral lesson about the dangers and consequences of abrogated rulership. Its episodes explain and contextualize so much of what is narratively decisive in *2 Richard II*—the ambiguous circumstances surrounding Woodstock’s death, the long history of tension between the Crown and the Duchy of Lancaster, the psychogenesis of the king’s unbalanced, sado-masochistic personality and his irresponsible but apparently compulsive destruction of the realm—that they are not fully comprehensible without it.

The key phrase is ‘not fully.’ In *2 Richard II* Shakespeare does provide some information from the first play, but only as much as we need. It’s enough to know that Woodstock was murdered under vague circumstances and that a big section of the aristocracy is murmuring against the king. Shakespeare treats Part One as history, though not in the superficial sense of assuming his audience’s familiarity with it. On the contrary, he more reasonably assumes their ignorance and so provides a quick summary of the earlier play’s axioms and main conclusions:

Northumberland: The King is not himself, but basely led
By flatterers...

Ross: The commons hath he pill’d with grievous taxes,
And quite lost their hearts: the nobles hath he fined
For ancient quarrels, and quite lost their hearts.

Willoughby: And daily new exactions are devised,
As blanks, benevolences, and I wot not what:
But what, o’ God’s name, doth become of this?

Northumberland: Wars have not wasted it, for warr’d he hath not,
But basely yielded upon compromise
That which his noble ancestors achieved with blows:
More hath he spent in peace than they in wars.

Ross: The Earl of Wiltshire hath the realm in farm.

Willoughby: The King's grown bankrout, like a broken man.
Northumberland: Reproach and dissolution hangeth over him
...most degenerate king!

—2 *Richard II*, II.i.241-62

1 Richard II is the bedrock, the intellectual foundation grounded in the solid research of Shakespeare's own understanding. Echoes of the play in the passage above are distant but unmistakable: the king is 'much misled by flatterers' (*1 Richard II*, II.iii.40) and has 'lost' the people's 'hearts' (V.iii.95); territories won by Edward III and the Black Prince have been shamefully 'surrendered up' (IV.i.113); Richard has incurred such ruinous expenses (II.iii.103-5, III.95-6, III.ii.34-6) that the commons are cruelly 'taxed and pill'd' (I.iii.113) by blanks and benevolences; the realm is being 'farmed out' (IV.i.39-56, 123-230); Richard is 'degenerate' (I.i.32), and 'confusion' (civil war) 'hangs o'er' his wretched head (II.ii.49).

The importance of studying *1 Richard II* then, at least in relation to its successor, is that it puts us in touch at the deepest levels with Shakespeare's most fundamental sources and ideas. The complex narratives pursued in *1* and *2 Richard II* come down in the end, metaphorically and literally, to the deposed monarch's fascinating, attractively repellent personality—to the role of the subjective in history. Richard II is the story's hero and its victim, his bewildering contradictions—domineering and spineless, crude yet sensitive, willing to fight but abruptly caving in, smarter and more articulate by far than Bullingbrook yet incapable of outmaneuvering him verbally and intellectually—are increasingly the focus of the action. It's all about him, finally, and we retroactively perceive with Shakespeare that it always was. 'No sovereign,' writes Oman, 'was ever more entirely the author of his own destruction than Richard II.'¹⁴

This is why in the second play Shakespeare doesn't bother to

¹⁴ Sir Charles Oman: *The History of England From The Accession of Richard II to the Death of Richard III (1377-1485)*, in William Hunt (ed.): *The Political History of England*, Vol. IV, (London: Longmans, Green and Co. 1906) p. 151.

rehearse in detail the facts of Woodstock's death, the scandal of the Blank Charters, or explain John of Gaunt's complaints about the leasing of the kingdom and its reduction to the status of a pelting farm. His understanding had matured: Richard's youthful crimes really don't and didn't matter. The issue was the man who would not be king, an inference already present in the first play when Bushy ironically praises his display of 'kingly spirit' even as he hands over his kingdom (*1 Richard II*, IV.i.161-2).

Viewed anamorphically thus, an illuminating concept Marjorie Garber uses in her discussion of *Hamlet*,¹⁵ long-standing critical disagreements about *2 Richard II* may be resolved. Among them is the way Bullingbrook, for all his centrality, seems curiously two-dimensional, a less substantial figure compared to Richard. *1 Richard II*'s correcting lens allows us to recognize Bullingbrook as just one of the king's pawns: if not him, the play suggests, then another ambitious baron. What Henry IV afterwards acknowledges is exactly right:

God knows, I had no such intent,
But that necessity so bow'd the state
That I and greatness were compell'd to kiss:
—*2 Henry IV*, III.i.72-4

Some have greatness thrust upon them. It's Richard's necessity that bows the state, leaving England no alternative but to respond as it does, a virtual bloodless revolution. Richard II is his own destiny.

The Revolution

Contradiction and irrationality are at the heart of Richard's mystery and *1 Richard II* exemplifies them at virtually every juncture.

Act I, scene I dramatizes the king's initial and apparently

¹⁵ Marjorie Garber: 'Hamlet: Giving up the Ghost,' in Susan L. Wofford (ed.): *William Shakespeare Hamlet* (Boston and New York: Bedford Books of St Martin's Press, 1994) pp. 299-310.

unprovoked assault upon his uncles, the first skirmish in the Wars of the Roses. They reel in bewilderment and dismay:

Lancaster: Why, Edmund, can'st thou give a reason yet
Though we, so near in blood, his hapless uncles,
(His grandsire Edward's sons, his father's brothers!)
Should thus be made away?

—*1 Richard II*, I.i.75-8

It's not even clear at this point whether Richard is genuinely behind the attack, though his minions would hardly dare, or so the play suggests, to undertake it without his implicit knowledge and consent. The faintest whisper of his tragic end is thus heard in his beginning, the monarchical nod-and-wink encouraging assassination, a reference taken up again by the fleeting presence of Pierce Exton himself among Woodstock's entourage.¹⁶ In V. iii John of Gaunt confronts Richard with the charge of attempted political murder and the king finally does not, can not, deny it:

Lancaster: And you, my lord, remember not so well
That by that Carmelite at London once,
When at a supper, you'd have poison'd us.

—*1 Richard II*, V.iii.81-3

Yet to what end? Lancaster's question at I.i.75—'Why, Edmund, can'st thou give a reason yet...?'—is a good one, never satisfactorily answered. The issue is surely not of control; in the second act Richard has little difficulty compelling Woodstock to step down as Protector and then dismissing Lancaster and York from office. Even at his wedding in I.iii he announces without serious opposition his decision to hand over Arundel's prize booty to his minions—'Once more, be still! / Who is't that dares encounter with our will?' (I.iii.166-7)—and appoint them to high positions in his administration:

Young Henry Green shall be Lord Chancellor,
Bagot, Lord Keeper of our Privy Seal,
Tresilian, learned in our kingdom's laws,

¹⁶ See also *Text and Variorum Notes*, I.i.111.s.d. and *A Short History of the Text* (2006).

Shall be Chief Justice. By them and their directions
King Richard will uphold his government.

—*1 Richard II*, I.iii.191-5

The paradox of course is that in reality Richard couldn't be less interested in exercising administrative power. He becomes king only to give it all away, as he climactically does in IV.i. in return for a monthly stipend from his relatively low-born favorites. The full political revolution is executed later in the scene when, map spread before him and the court, Richard spells out in detail the disposition of each of the 'nine-and-thirty shires and counties' of his kingdom. Afterwards he seems completely unaware of the magnitude of what has been accomplished, though as Schell remarks, 'it is difficult to imagine a more painstakingly or more thoroughly dramatized abdication.'¹⁷ And, we might add, one more calculated to horrify Elizabethans.

Richard seems oblivious to the danger in which he has placed himself and the kingdom, though there are hints and indications in abundance. This is a monarch whose defining mode is abdication. Having given all to his friends, his fate rests entirely in their hands, his future frighteningly and potentially like self-deposed Lear's (which of course it finally does become, though from another direction):

Green: 'Sfoot, what need you care what the world talks?
You still retain the name of king, and if any disturb ye,
We four comes presently from the four parts of the kingdom
With four puissant armies to assist you.

—*1 Richard II*, IV.i.139-43

Green: Why, Richard, King Richard, will ye be as good as your word,
and seal the writings? 'Sfoot, an' thou dost not, and I do not join with
thine uncles and turn traitor, would I might be turn'd to a toadstool!

—*1 Richard II*, IV.i.145-7

Green: Were I as you, my lord...

—*1 Richard II*, I.iii.200

¹⁷ Schell, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

Each of Green's speeches contains a chilling moment quickly papered over with a laugh or grammatical transition: 'Were I as you, my lord...' 'we four comes presently from the four parts of the kingdom with four puissant armies...' '...and I do not turn traitor.'

But Richard's myopic focus remains obsessively upon his uncles, and particularly Woodstock. It's almost a pathology:

Thus have I parted my whole realm amongst ye;
Be careful of your charge and government.
And now to attach our stubborn uncles.
Let warrants be sent down, Tresilian,
For Gaunt and York, Surrey and Arundel,
Whilst we this night at Plashy suddenly
Surprise plain Woodstock.

—*1 Richard II*, IV.i.229-35

He ends the scene with a bloodcurdling threat completely disproportionate to Woodstock's known offenses, its asymmetrical intensity compelling another look at his deeper, unconscious motives:

Beware, plain Thomas, for King Richard comes
Resolv'd with blood to wash all former wrongs!

—*1 Richard II*, IV.i.442-3

But what wrongs? Woodstock slightly embarrassed Richard before his queen at their wedding, and refuses to return to Court. These were not normally capital offenses. Richard's language is the language of Oedipal revenge: 'Was ever subject so audacious?' he demands, adding that he feels like

a mother that beholds her child
Dismember'd by a bloody tyrant's sword!
I tell thee, Bagot, in my heart remains
Such deep impressions of his churlish taunts,
As nothing can remove the gall thereof
Till with his blood mine eyes be satisfied.

—*1 Richard II*, IV.i.68-73

Wanton Humors

The explanation of this murderous fury, or at least part of it, may be found in I.i —Shakespeare's first scenes invariably contain solutions to the puzzles he later sets. Kermode calls him a 'virtuoso of openings.'¹⁸ In a deep sense his plays can only be reread, and this is true also of *I Richard II*.

Early in Act I the king's condition is defined as principally psychological:

Good brother, I have found out the disease:
When the head aches, the body is not healthful.
King Richard's wounded with a wanton humor.

—*I Richard II*, I.i.146-8

'Wanton humor' sounds obscure to the modern ear, though it was as significant to Elizabethans as Hamlet's equally archaic 'antic disposition' (I.v.181). The problem in both cases is the prince's state of mind—madness in great ones must not unwatched go. While Woodstock with his characteristic generosity qualifies Richard's diagnosis, ''tis not deadly yet, it may be cur'd' (I.i.150), as the narrative develops it becomes clear that the king is possessed of a profound and fatal *maladie intérieure*—

My wounds are inward. Inward burn my woe!

—*I Richard II*, IV.iii.178

— eventually convulsing both him and the entire realm.

Everything becomes 'strange, unheard of...never [before] spoke nor done!' (III.ii.67, 73), half-anticipating Macbeth's surreal 'and nothing is / But what is not' (I.iii.141-2). Even treachery takes forms that are 'the strangest...ever heard of' (IV.iii.53-4). The accustomed order, society, the cosmos itself, are all upset in typically Shakespearean ways, 'strangely metamorphosed' (III.ii.149):

¹⁸ Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language*, p. 31

Woodstock: What transformation do mine eyes behold,
As if the world were topsy-turvy turn'd!

—*1 Richard II*, II.ii.142-3

Nature is denatured:

Then force the sun run backward to the east,
Lay Atlas' burden on a pigmy's back,
Appoint the sea his times to ebb and flow
And that as easily may be done as this!

—*1 Richard II*, II.ii.152-4

The lights of heaven are shut in pitchy clouds
And flakes of fire run tilting through the sky.

—*1 Richard II*, IV.ii.67-8

Among the writer's evocations of Richard's deepening pathology is the widening semantic net gathered about the word 'wanton,' an important descriptor employed in the play no fewer than 15 times. It is indeed the single-most frequent adjective used when speaking about the Court. We find 'a wanton king' (I.i.48, II.iii.63); 'King Richard's...wanton humor' (I.i.149); 'a little wanton. So perhaps are we' (I.ii.39); 'young and wanton' (I.iii.24) 'his wanton side' (I.iii.255); 'Come, wantons' (II.ii.206); 'My wanton lord' (II.iii.52); 'their wanton heads' (II.iii.97, III.ii.20); 'wanton Green' (III.ii.41);¹⁹ 'our wanton youth' (IV.i.134); 'my wanton son' (V.i.61); 'that wanton king,' (V.i.145); 'that wanton tyrant' (V.iii.4) and 'wanton Richard,' (V.vi.2). Its gamut of meanings variegates across an extended and complex spectrum to include psychological disturbance, childish cruelty, weakness, frivolity, youthful wildness, flirtatiousness, absence of regal virtue, fiscal waste, risibility, treachery, lasciviousness, loss of control, murderous rage and oppressive tyranny. As Kermode observes:

Language games were always a feature of Shakespeare's style...[he] had a developing passion for exploring the range of particular words.

¹⁹ Though the meaning is distinct, Shakespeare repeats 'wanton green' in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, II.i.99: 'And the quaint mazes in the wanton green...'

Empson noted the remarkable array of ambiguities in his deployment of words like 'wit' and 'sense.'²⁰

It's thus no coincidence at all that in *1 Henry IV* Worcester describes Richard's reign as 'a wanton time' (V.i.50). Simultaneously vague and precise in its personal and political connotations, the word moves with its own weight and all the attendant meanings acquired in Shakespeare's first Richard II play.

Hurrying History

1 Richard II is a work of deceptively surreal transitions, symbolized by Woodstock's 'golden metamorphosis' (I.iii.76). The principal one is the kingdom's overthrow by a 'good' civil war. Inseparable from that event, and keeping step with it at every point, is the king's personal and political erasure, not only by his rebellious uncles but through his own perverse self-will. Richard's compulsive urge to abdicate is the secret of his dramatic allure.

More than qualified to monarchize, and even at one point believing that he wishes to, Richard in office quickly tires of the task and carelessly passes it along. He is precisely and almost contradictorily anti- or un-Nietzschean, driven not by a will to power but to powerlessness. He is not just a weak king like Henry VI, but one who actively hands the chalice from his lips. The type fascinated Shakespeare, who wrote at least two plays exploring it. In *Richard II, Parts One and Two* the king modulates, or modulates himself—the ambiguity is part of the larger concept—from king to non-king, from attainment to surrender, from unchallenged possession of the throne to its spineless abdication. Among the action's subtler ironies from play to play is that the boy has more authority than the man, the uncrowned monarch a more significant political resonance than the declining sovereign who later occupies the throne.

By the end of *1 Richard II* the king is at his uncles' mercy, effectively deposed and, as we know from history, suspended from office for several days. In *2 Richard II*, restored but weak-

²⁰ Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language*, pp. 64-5.

ened, he continues to invite catastrophe—like the Bourbons, he learns nothing and forgets nothing. The response is inevitable, even predictable, and he appears almost eagerly to welcome it.

Twice deposed—thrice if we include his voluntary division of the kingdom in *1 Richard II*—Richard in both plays constantly complains of his political impotence,

Then, Woodstock, give us right, for we are wrong'd.
Thou art the rich, and we the poor man's son.
The realms of England, France, and Ireland
Are those three crowns thou yearly keep'st from us.

—*1 Richard II*, II.i.85-8

yet cherishes it with equal intensity, hurrying history along:

You four shall here by us divide yourselves into the nine-and-thirty shires and counties of my kingdom, parted thus...Thus have I parted my whole realm amongst ye. Be careful of your charge and government.

—*1 Richard II*, IV.i.196-8, 229-30

Even before this dramatic moment Richard has in practice yielded—he literally can't wait. Lancaster and York comment bitterly:

Lancaster: But we have four kings more, are equal'd with him:
There's Bagot, Bushy, wanton Green, and Scroop,
In state and fashion without difference.

York: Indeed, they're more than kings, for they rule him.

—*1 Richard II*, III.ii.40-3

In *2 Richard II* of course he again surrenders, virtually without a struggle, to Bullingbrook. Apathetically sitting upon the ground, to the frustration of his followers—

My lord, wise men ne'er sit and wail their woes,
But presently prevent the ways to wail.

—*2 Richard II*, III.ii.178-9

—he complains that he never truly was a king. If we accept *I Richard II* as Shakespeare's allusive background it's a fair enough observation, for in that play he is barely crowned before handing it all over to his friends. In Part Two: 'Subjected thus, / How can you say to me I am a king?' (*2 Richard II*, III.ii. 176-7).

Shakespeare's Richard II

The family and political situations in *I Richard II* may be derived from Seneca but their resolutions—emotionally, intellectually, theatrically—are pure Shakespeare. Rossiter makes this point well, noting that Shakespeare's psychologically complex monarch, who is after all one of his most memorable and original figures, a prototypical Hamlet,²¹ approximates the king of *I Richard II* so closely that in the first half of the play the two may be said to be identical:

Richard is wrong-headed but not Wrong incarnate...[his] main characteristics are vanity and perversity (of will, understand); his behavior is that of a thwarted schoolboy preparing to break or broken loose: sulky, defiant, fretful, malicious, irresponsible, drunk with vain self-esteem. In all this he is very close to the figure in the first two acts of Shakespeare, and unlike the one who returns from Ireland in the third. There is a vein of malice in nearly all he addresses to his uncles, and at times he carefully prepares the ground for a stab by assuming a conciliatory manner before it is delivered...The unexamined emotional urge of the moment supplies his 'part' and he 'plays it up' regardless of the state and even his own final advantage. The same short-sightedness and histrionic (or hysterical) instability reappears in Shakespeare...[he has] all the main lines of Shakespeare's player-king.²²

This is another remarkable acknowledgment, considering the importance and originality of Richard II in the pantheon of

²¹ 'The value of *Richard II*, we are sometimes tempted to say, lies in the anticipations of characterizations yet to come, Brutus, Hamlet and Macbeth.' (J.A. Bryant Jr.: 'The Linked Analogies of *Richard II*' in Nicholas Brooke (ed.): *Richard II: A Casebook* (London: Macmillan, 1973) p. 187; '[*Richard II*], in Act V, begins to sound a little like a proleptic parody of *Hamlet*,' (Harold Bloom: *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998) p. 252.)

²² Rossiter, *Woodstock*, pp. 26, 43-5, 46.

Shakespeare's characters. This is no minor figure one writer might snatch from another to plug a little hole; Richard's nature goes to the very heart of both *1 Richard II* and *2 Richard II*. Nor is Rossiter's case weakened by his recognition that after returning from Ireland in the canonical play the king undergoes a further evolution. Indeed, this metamorphosis—and it is not his last, as we perceive in the unexpectedly resolute and courageous figure of *2 Richard II*, V.i—serves only to establish an even deeper association with the first play, where he constantly re-vises himself in response to each fresh catastrophe. It is one of his most striking characteristics, a defining inner mechanism:

Richard is the self-regarding emotional man...a play-actor who evades reality until the dread of retribution breaks in. He feels the first twinge of true responsibility at Anne's death...and leaves the play with his first entirely adult sentiment—that grievous wrong has been done Woodstock, and there is no escaping the final debt (V.iv.end).²³

'His first entirely adult sentiment': Rossiter seems to understand that this is Shakespeare's portrait of the monarch as a young man, his invocation of 'the final debt' acknowledging *1 Richard II* and the climax of *2 Richard II*.

We may add that both Richards desire, uniquely and contradictorily, to be simultaneously loved and dreaded—to have friends and yet 'monarchize, be fear'd and kill with looks' (*2 Richard II*, III.ii.165).²⁴ Adoration mixed with fear: the Oedipal confusions

²³ Rossiter, *Woodstock*, p. 45.

²⁴ This famous line seems to have had a basis in truth: the continuator of the *Eulogium* notes that three times a year the historic Richard II would sit 'ostentatiously' in his chambers, ceremoniously enthroned and encrowned 'from after dinner till vespers, talking to no one but watching everyone; and when his eye fell on anyone...that person had to bend his knee to the king.' (E.M. Thompson (ed.): *Chronicon Anglie 1328-1388* (London: Rolls Series, 1874), pp. 154-5, cited by Saul, *op. cit.*, p. 342.) The detail may support my speculation that the author of *1 Richard II* consulted the *Eulogium*, an anonymous contemporary account, now in F.S. Haydon (ed. and trans.): *Eulogium (historiarum sive Temporis)* 3 vols., Rolls series (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans and Roberts, 1858-63). Saul, *op. cit.*, p. 177 n3, referencing

Richard experiences towards his own father and grandfather.
Again Rossiter:

The natural result is that [Richard] attitudinizes...Everything is slightly or grossly exaggerated...The same short-sightedness and histrionic (or hysterical) instability reappears in Shakespeare.²⁵

Indeed, almost the whole of the king's dramatic history, from his early twenties to his death at Exton's hands, may be traced by following the narrative trajectory from *1 Richard II*, I.iii to *2 Richard II*, V.v. All that's missing is his role in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, when at the age of 14 he personally rode out to meet the rebels and defused the situation. The lacuna is adequately explained by the fact that Shakespeare transferred the moment to the Jack Cade scenes in *2 Henry VI*, giving Richard's part to Henry:

King: For God forbid so many simple souls
Should perish by the sword! And I myself,
Rather than bloody war shall cut them short,
Will parley with Jack Cade their general.

—*2 Henry VI*, IV.iv.10-13

The adaptation establishes a further subtle connection between our play and its two chief companions in Shakespeare. Among other things it shows that he knew the detail of Richard's history long before dramatizing its final year.

Richard II, Hamlet and Oedipus

The portrait of the young king in *1 Richard II* is surprisingly deft in the modern way, its tones and colors often anticipating Freud, Marx and even more recent thinkers. If this still seems overstated, bear in mind how almost conventionally this capacity is acknowledged in modern Shakespeare studies, e.g., *Hamlet* as an Oedipal drama, *King Lear* with its demand that 'distribution should undo excess, / And each man have enough,' etc. (IV.i.70-

A. Gransden: *Historical Writings in England, II, c.1307 to the Early Sixteenth Century* (London, 1982) pp. 158, 181, conjectures that the *Eulogium* continuation was written by Thomas Chillenden, prior of Christ Church, Canterbury, who attended parliament.

²⁵ Rossiter, *Woodstock*, pp. 44-5

1).²⁶ I shall show that these and other intellectual brilliancies are found equally in the work of the ‘unconventional and audacious’ Anon.²⁷

An important outcome is that, despite the exegetical distortions wrought by the ‘title wars’ of the 1920s, it is Richard rather than Woodstock who emerges as the star of *1 Richard II*—who moves on to Part Two. The short explanation is that he is a pathology, and an enticing one, while the duke remains simply a man who in the end is more important dead than alive. This is not to dismiss him: like the Bastard in *King John*, Woodstock is ‘a complicated figure made up of incompatible elements, suggesting not a type but an individual.’²⁸ As Rossiter was the first to recognize,

Here it may be argued at once...that the author has observed exactly what Shakespeare had done [in *2 Henry VI*], and has drawn his Duke of Gloster with new lines but on the same principles. ... Woodstock has far more sides to him. He can unbend more, is more amusing. His brusque, no-nonsense affection towards his Duchess is likelier than Humphrey’s grieved forbearance with the impossible Dame Eleanor: he is less unremittingly high-minded.²⁹

To this we need to add Corbin’s and Sedge’s elaboration that Woodstock is not a ‘simple figure of virtue’ but an individual who is

continually at war with himself, attempting to preserve loyalty to the crown in others and yet failing to control his own temper at moments of crisis.³⁰

²⁶ ‘There are, for example, times when it is almost impossible to believe that [Shakespeare] had not read Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and Wittgenstein...in *King Lear* he comes near to championing some form of socialist redistribution.’ (Terry Eagleton: ‘Company Man,’ review of *The Age of Shakespeare* by Frank Kermode, *The Nation*, 1 March 2004.)

²⁷ Axton, *The Queen’s Two Bodies*, p. 97.

²⁸ Kermode, *Shakespeare’s Language*, p. 31

²⁹ Rossiter, *Woodstock*, p. 66.

³⁰ Corbin and Sedge, *Thomas of Woodstock*, p. 35

He can be angrily sarcastic (III.ii.182, 191) and mockingly cruel, as he is when he lures the absurd but harmless Courtier into showing off his new fashions, laughing at him behind his back, while winking ferociously at the audience. Realistically hesitant under pressure, occasionally a ditherer, he is nonetheless capable of impulsive violence:

Hence, flatterer, or by my soul I'll kill thee!

—*I Richard II*, II.ii.148

Politically, Woodstock is far from the almost Christ-like conciliator the critics often claim for him:

Come, brother York, we soon shall right all wrong,
And send some headless from the court ere long.

—*I Richard II*, I.iii.273-4

This is an accurate forecast of the Merciless Parliament of 1388, when the triumphant Appellant Lords purged the king's household and executed eight of his closest associates, including Tresilian. There is also something to be said for Schell's view that his uncle's 'tactlessness and moral inflexibility' is instrumental in driving Richard at least part of the way towards disaster.³¹ Woodstock emerges from the play a martyr but no saint. The young king on the other hand is psychologically elusive: his character possesses real depth, full of the half-perceived motives Shakespeare is famous for. Too lightly or too harshly treated by the critics—Ornstein for instance simply waves him away as 'thoroughly despicable and corrupt',³²—he deserves closer and more sympathetic scrutiny.

Richard appears at first a somewhat mysterious figure, his date of birth curiously unknown, then incorrectly given:

King: Our birthday, say'st thou? Is that noted there?

Bushy: It is, my lord.

³¹ Schell, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, pp. 110-11.

³² Robert Ornstein: *A Kingdom for a Stage: The Achievement of Shakespeare's History Plays* (Harvard U.P. (1972) p. 13.

King: Prithee, let me hear't,
For thereby hangs a secret mystery
Which yet our uncle strangely keeps from us.

—1 *Richard II*, II.i.97-101

By the second play, even his family name has been called into doubt (rumor had it that he was really the illegitimate son of a Bourdeaux priest)—

I have no name, no title,
No, not that name was given me at the font,
But 'tis usurp'd:

—2 *Richard II*, IV.i.255-6

—conferring upon him a meta-historical dimension, a man of enigmatic origins but momentous destiny who, like Oedipus, tragically helps contrive his own unhappy fortune and that of the commonwealth he rules.

Another 'Oedipal' conjunction is Richard's possession of not one but two dead fathers: biologically, the Black Prince, politically, Edward III. It's a significant doubling in a play as full of pairs as *Hamlet*, and against whose twinned memories Richard is compelled to struggle. The first gave him life, the second a crown. Collectively they leave behind an intimidating reputation he is obliged by history and circumstance to match and even surpass, his inability to do so becoming part of his evolving personality. Set by Edward III upon the throne because he was the Black Prince's son and double, 'exact image or true likeness,'³³ with all the expectation this implies, the youthful king strives to achieve the impossible and then gives up. He is thus literally defeated by his ghosts—the very ones who denounce him in *1 Richard II*, V.i—long before Bullingbrook's challenge becomes manifest.

The degree to which Richard resembles his father is a theme

³³ *Rotuli Parliamentorum* II, 330, in A.R. Myers (ed.): *English Historical Documents, Vol. IV, 1327-1485* (London: Eyre & Spottiswood, 1969) p. 122.

introduced early in the play. He finds himself in a classic double-bind, another set of contradictions: to be himself is to be less than himself, that is, less than the Black Prince whose 'image' and 'counterfeit' he embraces as his initial incarnation:

But these bright shining trophies shall awake me,
And, as we are his body's counterfeit,
So will we be the image of his mind,
And die but we'll attain his virtuous deeds.

—*1 Richard II*, II.i.90-3

He does die before attaining his father's virtuous deeds.

'Counterfeit' is also consciously ambiguous: Richard is both a copy and a fake, as the Revels Plays and Nottingham editors recognize.³⁴ The word is moreover a self-inflicted wound since he has just used it with disparaging prolepsis of the 'counterfeit relenting' Duke of York (II.i.49). Richard's follow-up remark, 'So will we be the image of his [the Black Prince's] mind,' also suggests both his father's high expectations and his own vainglorious dreams.

On the other side, among the first things we learn about the young king is that he is not at all like his father. He is instead a 'wild prince' (as opposed to a Black) and 'So far degenerate from his noble father' that he hardly resembles him in any particular at all (*1 Richard II*, I.i.32, 48). Nor is the charge a casual one; it is maintained through *2 Richard II* where he is again described as 'most degenerate!' (II.i.262.)

In *1 Richard II* the nature of the king's 'degeneration' is clarified; part of the allusive backdrop, it is both physical and moral. The boy, now a man, has grown as 'unlike' his father as might be (I.i.48), even in appearance—for instance, Edward, the Black Prince, did not possess 'a swart and melancholy brow' but enjoyed a 'sweet and lovely countenance' (I.i.34-5). Secondly,

³⁴ Corbin and Sedge, *Thomas of Woodstock*, p. 82, Parfitt and Shepherd, *ed. cit.*, p. 21.

he would never have stooped like his son to cowardly poison, not even to dispatch a foe:

Ere he'd 'a done
A deed so base unto his enemy,
Much less unto the brothers of his father,
He'd first have lost his royal blood in drops,
Dissolv'd the strings of his humanity
And lost that livelihood that was preserv'd
To make his (unlike) son a wanton king.

—*1 Richard II*, I.i.42-8

The parenthetical '(unlike)' appears thus in MS., suggesting a strong authorial emphasis. A major theme of the rest of the play is the extent to which this judgment is fair. Anon concludes that it is, though we're held in some suspense before the final verdict is delivered: along with the pervasive doubling goes an even-handed weighing until the masque scene, when Richard is at last convicted of tyranny and sentenced to eventual deposition. As he recedes from his father's 'counterfeit and image,' at first unconsciously and then with growing self-awareness, the king becomes less regal, his court less courtly. Woodstock's refusal to return when bid is ironically double-edged: 'My English plainness will not suit that place,' he says, 'The court's too fine for me' (III.ii.216-17).

Again we note the touches, large and small, and the way they all perform double and treble duty. Almost immediately following the Lords' departure in II.ii. Green displays the familiarity of a lover and the hair-raising discourtesy of publicly calling the king by his first name:

Pox on't, we'll not have a beard amongst us. We'll [shave the] country and the city too, shall we not, Richard?

—*1 Richard II*, II.ii.180-1

Green also highlights the dangerous frivolity of the new regime, intent on fleecing the country and wasting government time designing ridiculous new fashions for the court. Richard comments, accurately enough—

Come, wantons, come. If Gloucester hear of this,
He'll say our Council guides us much amiss

—*1 Richard II*, II.ii.206-7

—but later again frames his innovations as historic:

Thou see'st already we begin to alter
The vulgar fashions of our homespun kingdom.
I tell thee, Nan, the states of Christendom
Shall wonder at our English royalty.

—*1 Richard II*, III.i.49-52

What is History?

E.H. Carr's great question, the study and nature of history itself, is one of the drama's themes, a remarkably modern concern probed at some length. Aside from the repeated references to chronicles and memory, among them—

If any age
Keep but a record of this policy...
Let me be chronicl'd Apostata!

—*1 Richard II*, III.ii.74-7

...bear record, righteous heavens,
How I have nightly wak'd for England's good.

—*1 Richard II*, V.i.123-4

Oh, you just gods, record their treachery.

—*1 Richard II*, V.i.140

...Now who but we
Can make report of Woodstock's tragedy?

—*1 Richard II*, V.i.271-2

Not all our chronicles shall point a king
To match our bounty, state, and royalty.
Or let [all our successors] yet to come
Strive to exceed me, and if they forbid it,
Let records say, only King Richard did it!

—*1 Richard II*, III.i.90-4

With this in mind, the play casts doubts and certainties on some

famous historical matters, including Woodstock's notorious 'confession' of treason, written under duress at Calais, and the truth about his murder. It also shows Richard constantly preoccupied with his own historic destiny, the unstated but always present irony of his famous deposition in 1399 accompanying every move.

This is especially noticeable in the early scenes when the young king still entertains 'youthful hopes' of equaling or even surpassing his father's and grandfather's historic achievements. Even after Anne's tragic death Bagot reminds him:

your state is strong.

Your youthful hopes with expectation crown.

—*1 Richard II*, IV.iii.148-9

Richard's regal ambitions are energetically stressed, especially when he describes his plans to rebuild Westminster Hall and in it daily feed ten thousand men. He tells his friends proudly: 'Let records say, only King Richard did it!' (II.i.90-4)

The minions egg him on, gleefully anticipating further wealth and power:

Green: An excellent device! The commons has murmur'd [against us] a great while, and there's no such means as meat to stop [their mouths].

Scroop: 'Sfoot, make their gate wider! Let's first filch their mon[ey] and bid them to dinner afterwards.

—*1 Richard II*, II.ii.197-200

Everyone around Richard, including his uncles, unscrupulously plays upon his deep thirst for historic accomplishment. 'Such deeds as this will make King Richard shine / Above his famous predecessor kings,' York smarmily tells him (*1 Richard II*, II.ii.80-2), while Bushy and his accomplices, anxious to push him into yet another confrontation with Woodstock, actually produce a volume of English Chronicles 'Containing acts and memorable deeds / Of all your famous predecessor kings' (*1 Richard II*, II.i.55-7). Among them is a report of how Edward III, 'Although but young and under government' seized his own Protector and

hanged him from a 50-foot gallows (*1 Richard II*, II.i.55-65). The hint is broad enough. This account becomes the seed burgeoning ultimately in Woodstock's death and thus, one may argue, Richard's own final tragedy.

What's especially interesting here, and fully worthy of subtle Shakespeare, is that Bushy's text is imaginary and many of its particulars obviously and deliberately exaggerated. The young Edward III story, for instance, is wholly fictitious; Rossiter persuasively finds it modeled on the execution of Hugh Spencer, a favorite of Edward II's, who was 'drawne and hanged on a pair of gallowes of fiftie feet in heighth.'³⁵

There are other errors and/or distortions, among them the date of the Battle of Poitiers, actually 1356 but given in the false chronicle as 1363. Some of the play's auditors would surely know this. Other details of the famous battle are so patently improbable—within an hour, 6,000 French dead, 1,700 nobles and 10,000 'of the common sort' taken prisoner, etc.—that it's almost certain the author intended the entire passage to be understood as a deliberate manipulation by Richard's sycophants.³⁶ A further telling error is that some of the cited figures don't add up: twice 7,750 (the number of prisoners supposedly captured at Poitiers) is not 11,700 (the number of prisoners said to be captured). Another is the way 17 imprisoned earls (according to Froissart, from whom some of the original information clearly derives³⁷) metastasize one hundred-fold to a ludicrous 1,700. Any Elizabethan audience would know there were not that many earls in England and France combined.

³⁵ Rossiter, *Woodstock*, p. 216, citing Holinshed, III, pp. 250f., 339.

³⁶ For an accurate account of the battle, see Churchill, *The Birth of Britain*, pp. 355-6.

³⁷ See G.C. Macaulay (ed.): *The Chronicles of Froissart translated by John Bouchier, Lord Berners* (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1910) p. 56, and *Text and Variorum Notes*. Shakespeare cites Froissart directly: 'Froissard, a countryman of ours, records/England all Olivers and Rolands bred/During the time Edward the Third did reign' (*1 Henry VI*, I.ii.29-31). Berner's version is also recognized as 'a major source for *Edward III*' (Forker, *Richard II*, pp. 152-3).

Poitiers was a great triumph, but in Bushy's chronicle a victory of such magnitude out-Agincourts Agincourt, the most spectacular military achievement in English history before the Armada. Indeed, immediately after hearing Bushy's account of Poitiers Richard observes, with perhaps unconscious irony:

A victory most strange and admirable.
Never was conquest got with such great odds.

—*1 Richard II*, II.i.84-5

The sting in Bushy's tale—the point of his contrived chronicle—is the revelation of 'the certain time and day' of Richard's birth, which he and the other minions have cooked up in order to make further trouble between the boy and his uncles. The fake history gives 3 April 1365; in fact it was 1367, a critical two-year difference, making him still a minor. The analogy with the incorrect date of Poitiers is unmistakable. Believing himself to have come of age, Richard is thus lured into an early seizure of power from his uncles, a historic moment vividly rendered in the next scene.

Led by Keller and Rossiter, critics these 80 years have jeered at Anon's factual and arithmetical errors in II.i., assuming them to be examples of his ignorance or carelessness (and besides, Shakespeare would never commit such foolish mistakes). The author however is perfectly aware that Bushy's data are wrong, pointing it when Woodstock quietly remarks, as Richard carries out his palace revolution in the next scene:

And yet I think I have not wrong'd your birthright,
For if the times were search'd I guess your Grace
Is not so full of years till April next.

—*1 Richard II*, II.ii.100-2

It is the critics thus who are deceived, overlooking the irony of one kind of history, *1 Richard II*, reflecting obliquely on another kind, Bushy's inaccurate chronicle. 'Now who but we / Can make report of Woodstock's tragedy?' Lapoole confidently demands about the true history of his murder (V.i.271-2).

The answer is the play. Since it is ‘fiction,’ but of a truthful kind, and the textual histories ‘fact,’ but full of errors, Anon comments implicitly on issues of historical semantics still unresolved. Can literature be evidence? The author’s claim is for the greater authority of fiction—and we’re helpless to disagree—precisely because it is imaginatively coherent and, as it were, history before our very eyes (Stavropoulos’s ‘ocular proof.’) In the same way the ‘reality’ of Woodstock’s ghosts, or for that matter Hamlet’s and Macbeth’s, is not undercut by describing them as ‘visions’ (*I Richard II* V.i.199). What the audience sees it believes.

Subtle emphases of this kind throughout the play encourage us to take second and even third looks at its implicit meanings: Woodstock’s remark, ‘For if the times were search’d,’ anticipates the Schoolmaster in the next scene, who hints, ‘I have shown art and learning in these verses, I assure ye, and yet if they were well search’d they’re little better than libels’ (III.iii.135-7).

Shakespeare/Anon understands exactly what he’s doing when he allows Bushy to get his facts so decisively incorrect. Behind this play is a powerful mind thinking hard about the nature of collective memory, its import, and its political uses. As Schoenbaum remarks, the episode ‘reminds us of the caution we must exercise in making use of [any] written memorials.’³⁸ Woodstock’s confession of treason, which Richard caused to be read from pulpits throughout the land, was a notorious case in point.

The Royal Family

In Act I the matter of Richard’s resemblance to his father is posed directly, first by Lancaster, as we have noted, and later by the king himself. It’s a neat strategy, permitting the dramatist to both pursue his theme of doubling and develop the king’s poly-faceted temperament. What’s ironic is that Richard’s ambition to recreate his father’s heroic achievements succeeds no further than rebuilding Westminster Hall as a soup kitchen and surren-

³⁸ Schoenbaum, ‘*Richard II* and the Realities of Power,’ in Farrell, ed., *Critical Essays on Shakespeare’s Richard II*, p. 41.

dering 'Our forts of Guisnes and Calais' in return for French support against his own people (IV.i.112-14). Later Woodstock bitterly asks,

This town of Calais, where I spent my blood
To make it captive to the English king,
Before whose walls great Edward lay encamp'd
With his seven sons, almost for fourteen months;
Where the Black Prince, my brother, and myself,
The peers of England, and our royal father,
Fearless of wounds, ne'er left till it was won—
And was't to make a prison for his son?

—*I Richard II*, V.i.159-66

The gap between Richard's aspirations and abilities is marked and obviously deliberate. At one point Lancaster says of the reconstruction of Westminster Hall that if it

devour as it has begun,
'Twere better it were ruin'd lime and stone.

—*I Richard II*, III.ii.24-5

His language is subsequently echoed by the king himself when, in a fit of grief over Anne's death, he destroys Sheen Palace:

Down with this house of Sheen! Go, ruin all,
Pull down her buildings, let her turrets fall!
Forever lay it waste and desolate,
That English king may never here keep court,
But to all ages leave a sad report,
When men shall see these ruin'd walls of Sheen
And sighing say, here died King Richard's queen.
For which we'll have it wasted lime and stone
To keep a monument of Richard's moan.

—*I Richard II*, IV.iii.153-9

The inference is that Richard is a destroyer not a builder. Later, when he foolishly relinquishes his kingdom, he glimpses the extent of his own falling off, that is, the way he has squandered his political and financial patrimony. He is simply not the man his father was:

We shall be censur'd strongly when they tell
How our great father toil'd his royal person
Spending his blood to purchase towns in France,
And we, his son, to ease our wanton youth,
Become a landlord to this warlike realm,
Rent out our kingdom like a pelting farm,

—*1 Richard II*, IV.i.131-6

The phrase 'pelting farm' is justly celebrated; as Robinson says, Shakespeare was right to rescue it for John of Gaunt's speech in *2 Richard II*. Its use in *1 Richard II* signals a moment of personal and political transition, Richard's metamorphosis from monarch into landlord, his kingdom into a pelting farm. The charge famously recurs in *2 Richard II*. Richard is still the chairman of the board, but from this point, *1 Richard II*, IV.i.131-6, he ceases to be a monarch in any meaningful sense. What only remains are the instruments of his abdication, and he accepts them willingly:

All: They're here, my lord!

King: View them, Tresilian, then we'll sign and seal them.

—*1 Richard II*, IV.i.151-2

The psychological interest in this moment—for Richard's decision to be credible—is that in giving away his kingdom he gains the supportive and uncritical family he never had. If that sounds somewhat like Lear, it's not a coincidence. The king's true relatives are replaced man for man by surrogates and, more significantly, father for father.

Richard's gradual 'disappearance,' Schell argues, begins in the middle of Act II, 'when he throws off the protectorship, dismisses his uncles from their offices, and turns the guidance of the Body Politic over to his minions.'³⁹

This is a moment of vivid transition, but in fact the process begins even earlier. At his wedding Richard defines the favorites

³⁹ Schell, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

as his equals, or nearly so, seating them beside himself and Anne and insultingly above his uncles:

Bagot and Green, next to the fair Queen Anne
Take your high places by King Richard's side.

—*I Richard II*, I.iii.1-2

Later in the scene the full meaning of this gesture becomes apparent. Woodstock bursts out:

Upstarts, come down, you have no places there!
Here's better men to grace King Richard's chair!

—*I Richard II*, I.iii.120-1).

Keller also notes the conscious symmetry of the play's architecture, summarizing his argument in a simple diagram, opposing an 'evil group' comprising the King, Tresilian, Green, Bushy, Bagot, Scroop and Nimble against a 'good,' made up of the Queen, Woodstock, Lancaster, York, Arundel and Cheney.⁴⁰

The symmetry is clearly purposeful, especially in the way that Tresilian—Woodstock's structural, moral and political counterpart—becomes Richard's surrogate parent, replacing the former Lord Protector. This is one of the many ways the Lord Chief Justice resembles Falstaff. He is the only adult among Richard's favorites, the one he most looks to for advice. Act III opens with a tableau including 'Tresilian whispering with the King,' an objective correlative for their relationship as a whole: he literally has the King's ear.⁴¹ Richard relies almost exclusively on his judg-

⁴⁰ Keller, *ed. cit.*, p. 33.

⁴¹ Alan C. Dessen, citing *I Richard II*. III.i.0.s.d., III.i.131-4, III.iii.31, III.iii.74, III.iii.49, III. iii.216, III.iii.234, IV.iii.8-9 and IV.iii.69, argues that 'whispering' is 'an iterative pattern which can clarify and develop issues basic to this play.' (Alan C. Dessen: *Elizabethan Drama and the Viewer's Eye* (N. Carolina U.P., 1977) p. 108.) It's a good insight, though Dessen notes with some surprise that it comes from 'a play not known for its imagery or iterative patterns' (p. 88). Dessen's comment unconsciously reveals how dismissively *I Richard II*—a play rich in imagery and iterative patterns—has been treated by the critics. His

ment, blind to the fact that Tresilian is openly cheating him and scheming with the minions against his interests (IV.i.1-18, 39-46).

Richard also feels anxious when the older man isn't there. He tells his friends at a critical moment: 'Would he [Tresilian] were come! His counsel would direct you well!' (II.ii.190). In II.i.43-6 the Lord Chief Injustice successfully advises against the 'too rash' policy of immediately arresting Woodstock, Lancaster and York; later he persuades the King to adopt the disastrous Blank Charters (III.i.11-26), whose imposition includes spying, repressions, summary detentions and illegal hangings. He originates the plan to kidnap Woodstock (IV.i.81-9), and draws up the contract under which Richard leases out his kingdom to become bond-slave to the law (of which of course Tresilian is top officer). After its signing, Tresilian is given authority to enforce its terms and collect the minions' rents. As the Butcher says, '...there's one Tresilian, a lawyer, that has crept in amongst them and is now a lord, forsooth,' (III.iii.63-4). In this role he makes 'more wrangling i' the land than all the wars has done these seven years' (V.ii.33-4).

Mighty Opposites

Richard is thus an ambiguously doubled figure, Black Prince and not-Black Prince at almost every level, emotional, personal, theatrical. Balancing parallels of this kind are a characteristic Shakespeare maneuver—*Hamlet*, to go no further, includes two eponymous figures, one alive but dead, the other dead but alive. Kermode observes that in the play

There are pairs of characters: Cornelius and Voltemand, two ambassadors who speak (together) only ten words. The play-within-the-play is an uneasy double of *Hamlet*, and the Dumbshow of the play-within-the-play. The role of revenger is doubled (by Laertes and by Fortinbras), and the chronographies of the opening scene (Barnardo's and Horatio's) form brackets for the whole of it. Laertes has a double departure and a double blessing from his father ('A double blessing is a double

consternation at its unexpected depths is another little pointer to its true author.

grace' [I.iii.53]—a line which doubles 'double.' Compulsive duplication occurs everywhere...⁴²

Among *Hamlet's* other 'joined opposites'⁴³ are Gertrude's concealment of Polonius, when he is mistaken for the king by Hamlet and dies for it, while moments later concealed Hamlet allows a vulnerable Claudius to live on. There is also a ghost who may or may not be a goblin damned; a poisoned brew taken for a healthful drink; ambiguous madness and ambiguous suicide; mirth in funeral and dirge in marriage; a bated sword unbated; Hamlet's insignia ring counterfeiting false Claudius's (which sends the duplicitous and interchangeable Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their doom); Hamlet's sincerely insincere apology to Laertes, who accepts it with insincere sincerity; and even young Fortinbras carrying out an invasion of the kingdom while claiming only to be passing through. Note also Gertrude's two marriages and two husbands, the parallel father murders (by Claudius and by Hamlet) and the overwhelming sense of the entire state crushed between the fell incensed points of mighty opposites. The dialectic is everywhere and obviously too systematic to be casual or coincidental.⁴⁴

The point is, we find the same extended twinnings at work in *I Richard II*, similarly indulged in not merely for effect but to reinforce the ironic contrasts which are the play's inner mechanism—Richard as copy/fake of his father is the prime example, though there are many others. The practice includes scenes, episodes, concepts, characters and even lines, interwoven so pervasively yet so discreetly their extent has never been recognized.

⁴² Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language*, p. 102

⁴³ John Carey, quoted by Kermode, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁴⁴ Another notable example is *I Henry IV* which, as J.C. Bullman observes, 'is a play structured on dramatic oppositions—tavern versus court, mock king versus legitimate king, wayward prince versus chivalric warrior...' (*Henry IV* Parts 1 and 2, in Hattaway, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays*, p. 162.) This compares well with Corbin and Sedge's description of *I Richard II* (*Thomas of Woodstock*, p. 4.)

Among the most remarkable and revealing are the two Extons, *I Richard II*, I. i. 116-29, whom all editors since Rossiter have mistakenly collapsed into a single figure.⁴⁵ Not only do the editors refuse to believe what is plainly before their eyes, they alter the evidence so that it looks like what they expect to see—one wonders how often this takes place unnoticed in all manner of texts, not only Shakespeare.⁴⁶ Thus Rossiter emends Anon's stage directions to read, in lower case and with decorative parentheses, as though transcriptively authentic

Enter thomas of woodstock in frieze. The Mace (afore him). The lord mayor exton, and others with lights afore them

—Rossiter, *Woodstock, a Moral History*, I.i.108.s.d.

while relegating to his end notes, as an afterthought to another matter, the crucial information that

MS reads *The Lord Mayre & Exton*, but I take it that only one person is meant, on Holinshed's authority and the single exit at [I.i.128.]⁴⁷

But Rossiter's scholarship is uncharacteristically at fault, especially as it appears deliberate. According to Holinshed, there were in fact two Extons in Richard II's day: Sir Nicholas Exton, Sheriff of London in 1385, Lord Mayor in 1386, appointed Constable of Northampton Castle in 1387 by the king himself,⁴⁸ and 'one called Sir Piers of Exton,' probably a close relative.⁴⁹ Ros-

45 See *Text and Variorum Notes*, (2006) I.110.s.d.

46 See for example *John Jones: On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1971) for a discussion of deliberate mistranslations of the *Poetics*.

47 Rossiter, *Woodstock*, p.182. Elsewhere Rossiter seems willing to allow a minor character to exit undirected: 'Perhaps Fleming exits here.' (*Woodstock*, p. 201)

48 Anthony Tuck: *Richard II and the English Nobility* (London: Edward Arnold, 1973) p. 60.

49 Holinshed, *Chronicles*, III, p. 14. See also Henry Irving and F.A. Marshall (eds.): *The Works of William Shakespeare* (London, Blackie & Son, 1888-90) Vol. II, p. 456, n. 32.

siter's unreferenced Holinshed citation is pure invention, though it has been repeated on his authority ever since.⁵⁰

Rossiter's point about the single exit is no stronger. Not only does 'Hie thee, good Exton...Good Lord Mayor, I do beseech ye,' (I.i.116-17) suggest a departure followed by a new speech to another character, but in fact it was not uncommon for playwrights, and especially Shakespeare, to omit 'Exits' for obviously cued departures such as 'Hie thee, good Exton!' Feuillerat records 16 instances in the Quarto of *2 Henry VI* alone,⁵¹ while Chambers observes that 'many [exits], clearly required by the action, remain unnoted. Actors might be trusted to find their own way off the stage.'⁵²

In fact, it seems probable, as elsewhere in this remarkable play, that the name-duplication must be deliberate. The courtier Exton Woodstock sends off on an errand, before turning to the Exton who is Lord Mayor of London, may even be an ironic cameo of Sir Pierce of Exton, Richard II's eventual assassin. Comparable inter- and intra-textualities appear everywhere, for example in the barely whispered affinities between the virtuous Woodstock, twitted by Richard and friends for the 'homespun huswifery' of his plain dress and opinions (I.iii.77, 198), and the equally virtuous Queen Anne who is later wished 'quick utterance for [her] huswifery' (II.iii.64). By no coincidence, in the end it is Woodstock who speaks the her most moving epitaph:

So good a lady, and so virtuous,
This realm for many ages could not boast of.
—*1 Richard II*, IV.ii.57-8

The writer's subtle skill points to the only man in England who

50 E.g., Parfitt and Shepherd, ed. cit., p. 6, Corbin and Sedge, *Woodstock*, pp. 56-7. See my *Text and Variorum Notes* (2006), I.i.110.s.d., and I.i.128.s.d.

⁵¹ Albert Feuillerat: *The Composition of Shakespeare's Plays: Authorship, Chronology* (Yale U.P., 1953) pp. 51, 86.

⁵² E.K. Chambers: *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*, 2 Vols. (Oxford U.P. 1930), Vol. 1, p. 120.

could have wrought so well—who did, and uniquely so, in three dozen other plays, humorous, historical and tragic.

Doublings

I Richard II's initial focus is on spectacle and costume, allowing for a great variety of doublings, contrasts, and pairings.

Elizabethan companies, especially when on tour, were extremely proud of their wardrobes, often the real thing cast off by wealthy donors, and looked for opportunities to display them. Our playwright cleverly provides every excuse—in a sense his story is entirely about apparel, outward appearance versus inner reality. Without wishing to belabor a critical commonplace, Woodstock's frugal and unaffected dress is emblematic of his general integrity—

Faith, my lord, his mind suits with his habit:
Homely and plain, both free from pride and envy,
And therein will admit distrust to none.

—*I Richard II*, I.i.109-11

—starkly opposed in the strongest visual and moral terms with the minions, 'fine fools' who are 'attir'd very fantastically, and talks as foolishly.' (III.ii.126).

Richard's new friends are frivolous but devious, more concerned with their own interests than those of the country; indeed, the suggestion at one point is that they actively disregard England, while the king himself is denounced as 'English blood, not English born' (V.iii.101). After the Battle of Cadzand, high-minded Woodstock urges selling off the captured prize ships to repay debts owed to the Commons. Instead Richard gives them to his minions and sweeps out, leaving the old lords in shock:

Lancaster: These prizes ta'en by warlike Arundel
Before his face are given those flatterers!

Surrey: It is his custom to be prodigal
To any but to those do best deserve.

Arundel: Because he knew you would bestow them well,
He gave it such as for their private gain
Neglect both honor and their country's good.

—*I Richard II*, I.iii.228-34

Related visual/moral oppositions include old vs. young, tradition vs. innovation—

Shall England, that so long was governed
By grave experience of white-headed age,
Be subject now to rash unskillful boys?

—*1 Richard II*, II.ii.149-51

—and bearded vs. unbearded, since hairless chins equate with immaturity and poor judgment, while beards, especially white ones, denote gravity, experience and wisdom:

Scroop: Old doting graybeards!

‘Fore God, my lord, had they not been your uncles,
I’d broke my Council staff about their heads.

Green: We’ll have an Act for this: it shall be henceforth counted] high [treason] for any fellow with a gray beard to come within forty foot of the court gates!

Bagot: Ay, or a great-bellied doublet. We’ll alter the kingdom [presently.]

Green: Pox on’t, we’ll not have a beard amongst us. We’ll [shave] the country and the city too, shall we not, Richard?

—*1 Richard II*, II.ii.173-181

As the last two lines indicate, the age/beard images are neither casual nor mechanically applied. Their meanings are reinforced when Tresilian flatly refuses to have his own beard removed (III.i.27-34)—he is, and remains, the only man among the monarch’s youthful flatterers. The hairless boys quickly become walking representatives of England’s pillage; their baby faces proclaim it silently each time they’re on stage, and of course they do nothing to help the audience forget it. In the Spruce Courtier scene, Woodstock graciously ‘doubles’ the Courtier’s tip to his groom—

I’ll double his reward. There’s twelve pence for ye.

—*1 Richard II*, III.ii.183-4

—thus not only elaborating the duplication theme but dramatizing the qualitative gulf between the old and new ruling classes.

Meanwhile, in a skillful expansion of the dress symbolism, we're given a full scene in which good Queen Anne and her maids stitch with their own hands 'needful clothing /To be distributed amongst the poor.' (II.iii.59-60)

We saw earlier that Woodstock and what he represents is the unstated presence in this scene, Anne's 'huswifery' (II.iii.64) recalling the 'homespun huswifery' of the Protector's modest apparel (I.iii.77). When Cheney enters and discovers what Anne is doing, he points up the contrast with Richard:

Why, there's one blessing yet, that England hath
A virtuous queen, although a wanton king.

—*I Richard II*, II.iii.61-2

These are serious words: we've already seen the weight attached to 'wanton.' Anne and her charity alone barely keep the forces of rebellion in check. The Duchess of Ireland observes,

...your virtuous charity, fair Queen,
So graciously hath won the commons' love,
As only you have power to stay their rigor,

—*I Richard II*, II.iii.43-5

a claim Woodstock also makes when Anne is dying:

But woe is me, the good Queen Anne is sick
And, by my soul, my heart is sad to hear it.
So good a lady, and so virtuous,
This realm for many ages could not boast of.
Her charity hath stay'd the commons' rage
That would ere this have shaken Richard's chair
Or set all England on a burning fire.
And 'fore my God I fear when she is gone

This woeful land will all to ruin run.

—*I Richard II*, IV.ii.55-63

These are the marks of a real playwright—Shakespeare's marks. No other Elizabethan dramatist integrates history, image, action and idea quite so thoroughly, nor pulls it off so unobtrusively.

The scene in which Anne makes clothing comments directly if obliquely on Woodstock's seriousness and the frivolity of the king and his little friends. It also plays a significant role in the wider politics of the drama. The Queen's death thus becomes the major tragedy Shakespeare's sources considered it to be, presaging the calamity that soon falls upon Richard and his state. Timing aside—Anne actually passed away in 1394—the play's version, including the king's melodramatic grief, is true to history in all essentials.

A lesser playwright might have been satisfied at this point, but not Anon, who pursues the apparel theme virtually to the conclusion of his drama. In III.i Nimble enters literally jangling in the new court style and demands of Tresilian, gesturing at the gold links 'kneeifying his toes': 'How do ye like the rattling of my chains, my lord?' (III.i.116). Emphasizing the point and helping to develop the symbolic resonance, Tresilian's punning reply gives history an even darker edge: 'Oh, villain, thou wilt hang in chains for this!' (III.i.117). Ironically of course it is Tresilian who later hangs, turned in by Nimble who has cast off his shackles.

Nimble's moment is an important one for it shows that the minions' fashions are neither limited to themselves nor without political consequences. The Blank Charters are their policy equivalent, conceived and executed in the same irresponsible, schoolboy way:

King: Thou told'st me, kind Tresilian, th'ad'st devis'd
Blank Charters to fill up our treasury,
Opening the chests of hoarding cormorants
That laugh to see their kingly sovereign lack.
Let's know the means we may applaud thy wit.

Tresilian: See here, my lord: only with parchment, innocent sheepskins.
Ye see here's no fraud, no clause, no deceit in the writing.

All: Why, there's nothing writ!

Tresilian: There's the trick on't!

—1 *Richard II*, III.i.7-15

A new and effete ruling group, whose members while laughable are no joke, has seized power.⁵³ The Blank Charters trick is funny but not funny, as is Green's teasing of Tresilian a few lines later: 'Thou send'st out barbers there to poll [i.e., fleece] the whole country; 'sfoot, let some shave thee!' (III.i.28-30). The point is elaborated in the following scene when the ludicrous Spruce Courtier—*nouveau riche*, crass, arrogant—personifies the socio-political revolution Richard and his minions have wrought. Woodstock allows him to enter Plashy with the ironic proviso, '[So] he brings no Blank Charters with him!' (III.ii.119), later soliloquizing on the 'strange metamorphosis' represented by his dress, manner and bearing. Woodstock rhetorically adds: 'Is't possible that this fellow that's all made of fashions should be an Englishman?' (III.ii.149-51).

The Courtier's snooty manner, affected speech, 'chinless-wonder' stupidity, underfed, exhausted horse and above all his menacingly inverted toes and knees (III.ii.204-9), instate the country's new fashions of constraint and conformity, a *bouleversement* of everything most Elizabethans considered 'natural.' As Stavropoulos remarks:

...the court fop in his knee chains becomes a living emblem of the disorder and paralysis of England at the mercy of Richard's irrational, incoherent rule.⁵⁴

The Spruce Courtier also exemplifies in an interestingly progressive way the play's thesis that politics, as Lenin memorably expressed it, is concentrated economics. He is the other side of the dispossessed Dunstable peasants, expropriated by the state and then hanged, whose fate is uncompromisingly dramatized in the middle portions of the play.

⁵³ See above, and *Text and Variorum Notes* (2006) III.ii.130.s.d, III.iii.164-71.

⁵⁴ Stavropoulos, *op. cit.*, p. 6. Johnson's characterization of Osric as a 'fop...that exposes affectation to just contempt' (*Dr Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. Wimsatt, p. 140) applies equally to the Spruce Courtier.

Woodstock/*I Richard II*'s 'borrowed robes' imagery thus anticipates *Macbeth*'s in some striking ways, even to the armor Tresilian and Nimble finally buckle upon their backs.⁵⁵ In V.ii they appear farcically equipped for war, so 'loaden with armor,' as Nimble remarks, 'I cannot stir' (V.ii.5). To get a sense of the crushing symbolic weight Richard's rule imposes even on his supporters—the metaphor derives from the play itself—compare Nimble's heaviness with his witty, self-descriptive pun, before the king seizes power: 'As nimble as an eel, sir,' (I.ii.69). It is only in the penultimate scene that he discards his courtly impedimenta and, once again 'light as a feather' (V.v.1), hands Tresilian over to the Lords, the only character exiting the drama completely unscathed. He dumps fat Tresilian like his useless armor.

'Clothes' in Shakespeare, writes Kermode, quoting 'Robes and furr'd gowns hide all' (*King Lear*, IV.vi.164), 'are emblems of addition—what is added out of pride or wickedness, to the natural man.'⁵⁶ This notion is by no means at odds with *I Richard II*; in fact it describes quite accurately one of the play's central themes. We're returned again to the masque, where questions of disguise, kingly authority and the rule of law achieve their highest valency. The episode also is a key moment in Richard's ongoing disappearance as King. Vizarded and equipped as hunters, he and his minions lie their way into Woodstock's presence, seize him, garb him as themselves (the hunted becomes the hunter, a long-range image) and carry him off like prey. The entire operation is cast as a boar hunt, not indeed by men but by animals, as the Duchess of Gloucester's premonitory dream clarifies. She prophetically tells Woodstock:

[Methought] as you were ranging through the woods
An angry lion with a herd of wolves
Had in an instant round encompass'd you;
When to your rescue, 'gainst the course of kind,
A flock of silly sheep made head against them,

⁵⁵ Caroline F.E. Spurgeon: *Shakespeare's Imagery And What It Tells Us* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958) pp. 325-7.

⁵⁶ Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language*, p. 187.

Bleating for help, 'gainst whom the forest king
Rous'd up his strength, and slew both you and them.

—*I Richard II*, IV.ii.20-6

The equation is consistent and well worked-out. Before the hunters appear, Woodstock completes his wife's presage with an explicit analysis comparing

the state as now it stands,
Meaning King Richard and his harmful flatterers,
Unto a savage herd of ravening wolves,
The Commons to a flock of silly sheep.

—*I Richard II*, IV.ii.31-4

At the end of this beautifully constructed scene he again restates its major premise, drawing an almost mathematically precise dramatic and political syllogism:

Some man commend me to my virtuous wife,
Tell her her dreams have ta'en effect indeed:
By wolves and lions now must Woodstock [bleed.]

—*I Richard II*, IV.ii.213-15

These equivalents are validated by Nimble at Radcot Bridge when the minions' impressed troops 'run away like sheep' (V.ii.11) even before the battle starts. Nimble himself is imaged as a 'mouse' (V.v.12), the rest of Richard's supporters as 'dogs' (V.ii.12).

We noted earlier that Richard's 'disappearance' as king—one might almost call it an evaporation—commences in I.iii.1-2 when he invites the favorites to take their places as his near-equal. Thanks to the 'clothing revolution' that follows soon afterwards he is quickly rendered indistinguishable among them. The sycophants levitate politically before our very eyes—as Lapoole says after murdering Woodstock, 'we shall rise, whilst Richard's king!' (V.i.287.) The transition is expressed literally and metaphorically:

Lancaster: We could allow his clothing, brother Woodstock,
But we have four kings more, are equal'd with him:

There's Bagot, Bushy, wanton Green, and Scroop,
In state and fashion without difference.

—*I Richard II*, III.ii.39-42

In the masque, directed doubly by Cynthia and the Moon, the king's coterie enter together, clothed alike and vizarded. Which one is Richard? We don't know, and that's the point, he is indistinguishable. Later in the scene—the moment is oddly contrived though no one has ever questioned it, so naturally does it present itself—the king is twice said to be literally 'not there':

Woodstock: Speak, is King Richard here?

All: No, no, my lord. ...

Woodstock: Afore my God, false men, King Richard's here!

Turn thee, thou headstrong youth, and speak again!

By thy dead father's soul, I charge thee, hear me,

So heaven may help me at my greatest need,

As I have wish'd thy good and England's safety.

Bagot: You're still deceiv'd, my lord, the King's not here.

—*I Richard II*, IV.ii.181-196

Richard's obliteration as a monarch and a person is well underway. When he speaks, it's with a voice almost literally disembodied. If I were directing this scene, I'd keep him on the move, so the audience itself remains uncertain who and where he is. 'Well said, old mole!' I'd like them thinking as his cries come now from here, now there.

Schell insists that Woodstock's kidnapping is 'climactic because it marks the furthest point in Richard's progress into the land of unlikeness,'⁵⁷ meaning his degeneration from Black Prince to counterfeit Black Prince to *primus inter pares* to just one among equals and then to none among equals—to being simply and pathetically 'not there.' However, it gets worse for Richard. The masque is the most subtly elaborated statement of the 'unlikeness' theme but it's by no means the last, nor has Richard's sinking vessel struck bottom.

⁵⁷ Schell, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

That such a continuum exists somewhere inside the writer's imagination may be inferred from the fact that despite the philosophical artistry displayed in Woodstock's kidnapping—consider the phenomenological and existentialist implications of the whole masque-within-the-play—as any Elizabethan audience would know, greater humiliations lay ahead for Richard. His deposition in the final scene is still to come, and after that Bullingbrook and Pomfret. The masque is a symbolic low but in fact he recovers from it, ending the scene visible both to Woodstock and the audience. At this climax he is clearly back in command, pointedly instructing his men to cast off their disguises as they leave Plashy:

Deliver him to Lapoole—the ship lies ready.
Convey him o'er to Calais speedily,
There use him as we gave directions.
Sound up your drums, our hunting sports are done,
And when you're past the house, cast by your habits
And mount your horses with all swiftest haste.
The boar is taken, and our fears are past!

—*1 Richard II*, IV.ii.217-22

But in the next scene, diminished by grief over Anne's sudden death and shocked into a sense of his own general culpability, Richard becomes a virtual prisoner of his minions. He weeps in his aunt's arms, ready to ask her forgiveness for Woodstock's fate, but Green and Scroop quickly tear him loose and 'by violence' bear him into 'an inward room'

Where still he cries to get a messenger
To send to Calais to relieve his uncle.

—*1 Richard II*, IV.iii.123-4

This is supposed to be the King of England, mind you, the descendant and true image of the Black Prince and the mighty Edward III. The moment is almost a parody of Woodstock's kidnapping and is one of the drama's many subtle doublings. Bagot says:

I do not like those passions.

If he reveal the plot we all shall perish.

—*1 Richard II*, IV.iii.123-4

Like so many other figures in the play—I'll come back to this motif—Richard is silenced and disempowered. The minions are now in full command of the situation and government, hurrying the Duchess back to Plashy (IV.iii.128-9) but with no better policy than to press ahead with Woodstock's murder and the inevitable civil war.

Radcot Bridge is thus the logical culmination of the forces slowly marshaled throughout the play. On the royal side, the king is little more than a figurehead; it's 'the minions of the King' (V.iii.39) who organize an army and take the field against Lancaster and York. At first Richard is not even present, a detail true to the historical record—'He was resolv'd but lately / To take some hold of strength, and so secure him,' (V.iii.43). Eventually he does show up with some troops, only to be humiliatingly elbowed aside:

King: I cannot brook these braves. Let drums sound death,
And strike at once to stop this traitor's breath!

Bagot: Stay, my dear lord; and once more hear me, princes.
The King was minded, ere this brawl began,
To come to terms of composition.

—*1 Richard II*, V.iii.109-10

But the time for negotiations is long past. The battle starts and arrives quickly at its historical outcome. The fleeing Tresilian tells us: 'The day is lost and dash'd are all our hopes. / King Richard's taken prisoner by the peers' (V.v.7-8). Richard the Redeless, (unlike) son of the Black Prince, creator of nothing and destroyer of everything, has been brought to his first account.

Edmund Plowden

As we've seen, the 'true tragedy' of *Richard II* is that he encompasses his own destruction; he is 'possess'd now to depose [him]self,' as Gaunt remarks in *2 Richard II*, II.i.107. This insight is a powerful link between our play and Shakespeare's canonical work. It is surely going too far to suggest that in addi-

tion to everything else Shakespeare also stole Anon's most fundamental political perspectives—his point of view. In *2 Richard II* Richard acts with brutal determination when seizing Bullingbrook's estate yet fails to defend his actions with equal resolution; in *1 Richard II* he slowly subverts the notion of christological kingship, witlessly placing himself and his kingdom under civil legislation—his 'state of law' made 'bond-slave to the law' (*2 Richard II*, II.i.113).

In other words, Richard is the same man in both dramas, but challenged by contrasting circumstances, historic and dramatic. Part Two is the foundation drama of the second tetralogy, Part One a historico-political parable advocating severe restraint upon monarchical authority. The two works are not incompatible yet their emphases remain distinct.

Among features common to both are complex political notions now customarily associated with the historians Ernst H. Kantorowicz and F.W. Maitland, whose discussions of the Tudor legal doctrine of the King's Two Bodies continue to receive considerable attention and numerous follow-up studies.⁵⁸ Based on the *Commentaries* of the Elizabethan lawyer, Edmund Plowden

⁵⁸ Ernst H. Kantorowicz: *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton U.P., 1957), with a well-known chapter on *2 Richard II*; F. W. Maitland: 'The Crown as Corporation,' in *Selected Essays*, ed. H.D. Hazeltine et al. (Cambridge U.P., 1936) pp. 104-127. For positive discussions see Marie Axton: *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977), the same author's 'The Influence of Edmund Plowden's Succession Treatise,' *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 37 (1973-4) pp. 209-26, and Lorna Hutson: "'Our Old Storehouse': Plowden's *Commentaries* and Political Consciousness in Shakespeare," in *Shakespeare and Hungary*, ed. Holgar Klein and Péter Dávidházi (Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), pp. 249-73. Critical assessments may be found in David Norbrook: 'The Emperor's New Body? *Richard II*, Ernst Kantorowicz, and the Politics of Shakespeare Criticism,' *Textual Practice* 10 (1996) pp. 329-58, and S. Schoenbaum; 'Richard II and the Realities of Power,' *Shakespeare Survey* 28 (1975) pp. 1-13, reprinted in Farrell, ed., *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Richard II*, pp. 41-57.

(1518-85),⁵⁹ it is argued that *2 Richard II* in particular explores political and philosophic tensions between the institution of the monarchy, eternal and incorruptible, and the temporal king *in propria persona*—i.e., King vs. king. Plowden writes:

For the King has in him two Bodies, viz. a Body natural, and a Body politic. His Body natural...is a body mortal, subject to all Infirmities that come by Nature or Accident...But his Body politic is a Body that cannot be seen or handled, consisting of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Direction of the People, and the management of the publick-weal...⁶⁰

Kantorowicz's analysis, all the more impressive because it's not by a professional critic, goes so far as to claim that '*The Tragedy of King Richard II* is the tragedy of the King's Two Bodies.'⁶¹ The concept is 'not only the symbol but indeed [the play's] very substance and essence,'⁶² exemplifying Richard's growing awareness that the formal immortality of his office, on which he initially banks everything, must give way to the very real deposition and personal death he ultimately endures. Among many illustrations, Kantorowicz cites the king's plaintive 'let us sit upon the ground' (*2 Richard II*, III.i.155ff.), in which 'all' monarchs are finally 'murdered.' Kantorowicz glosses: The king that 'never dies' here has been replaced by the king that always dies and suffers death more cruelly than other mortals. Gone is the oneness of the body natural with the immortal body politic, 'this double Body to which no Body is equal.'⁶³

That Shakespeare and Anon appear to have been equally familiar with Plowden and his double-king theories should not surprise us at this point; indeed *1 Richard II* breaks off just after Nimble claims to have thoroughly studied his works ('I have plodded in

⁵⁹ *Les Commentaries, ou les Reports de Edmund Plowden* (London: Richard Tottel, 1578). For an English translation, see [F. Hargrave]: *The Commentaries or Reports of Edmund Plowden* [etc.] (London, 1779, 1816).

⁶⁰ Plowden, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

⁶¹ Kantorowicz, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Kantorowicz, *op. cit.*, p. 30. The internal quote is from Plowden.

Plowden,' V.vi.32-3), suggestively speaking for the dramatist himself. There is also an intensely personal feel to his

Nay, I have studied for my learning, I can tell ye, my lord. There was not a stone between Westminster Hall and Temple Bar but I have told them every morning.

—*I Richard II*, V.vi.27-30

When Richard finally takes up his throne in II.ii it is only after he has been acknowledged King both in himself and in his heritable right. He describes his uncrowned being as bodily scant, himself as scanted, literally incomplete:

Our body could not fill this chair till now,
'Twas scanted to us by protectorship.

—*I Richard II*, I.iii.120-1

Another reference to Plowden occurs in V.ii when a nervous Nimble asks Tresilian:

My lord, have ye no trick of law to defend us? No demur or writ of error to remove us?

—*I Richard II*, V.ii.27-8

His most famous aphorism aside ('the case is altered'), Plowden was known and respected for attending debates between eminent attorneys so as to discover demurrers or subtle legal exceptions. His goal was to

commit to wrytting those thinges which I hearde, and the Iudgement thereuppon...And finding great profit therby, I disposed my selfe at last to reporte the arguments and Iudgements made and geuen in the kynges courtes uppon demurrers in law, as those of which I might reape more fruit and perfection in Iudgment...[I]n this booke there is no Recorde entered, but such vpon which there is a Demurrer in lawe, or a special veredict conteigning a matter in lawe, which bothe were debated of those of the barre and benche to the uttermost, and in thende allowed,

or for the causes shewed in this booke disallowed by the iudgement of the court, and so most firme to trust unto.⁶⁴

So apparently Anon knew his Plowden, if not uniquely, unusually enough among Elizabethan dramatists. Shakespeare of course was another. Establishing his familiarity with the jurist is a simple matter. In addition to using The King's Two Bodies concept in *2 Richard II*, Shakespeare directly cites Plowden in *3 Henry VI*, IV.iii.31, when Warwick, arguing with Edward IV about his status as monarch, sneers: 'Ay, but the case is alter'd.' In *Hamlet*, the dramatist again alludes to Plowden during the gravediggers' discussion of the legal implications of Ophelia's suicide:

1 Clo. Give me leave. Here lies the water; good. Here stands the man; good. If the man go to this water and drown himself, it is, will he, nill he, he goes, mark you that. But if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself; argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life.

2 Clo. But is this law?

1 Clo. Ay, marry, is't—crowner's quest law.

—*Hamlet*, V.i.15-22

The reference is to the suicide by drowning of Sir James Hales in *Hales v. Petite* (1561), a famous case described by Plowden. His lengthy analysis is neatly paraphrased by Greenwood:

As Sir James Hales, being alive, caused Sir James Hales to die, therefore the act of the living man was the death of the dead man, for which the living man must be punished.⁶⁵

Axton, Forker and Schell all show that comparable applications of The King's Two Bodies' doctrine appear in both *Richard II* dramas, Forker indeed going so far as to claim that 'Shakespeare found already available in the anonymous play a dramatically

⁶⁴ 'The prologe of the Auctor yielded in English by E.M.', *Les Commentaries, ou les Reports de Edmund Plowden*, sigs. 5r-v, cited by Hutson, *op. cit.*, pp. 252-3.

⁶⁵ George Greenwood: *The Shakespeare Problem Restated* (London: John Lane Company, 1908), p. 416.

fruitful dubiety that could serve his own purposes as a maker of tragedy.’⁶⁶ But this is intellectual sleight-of-hand, the dazzling language quickly passing over the more serious question of how and why both writers drew so deeply upon the same set of relatively obscure and indeed legally debatable notions, coming to similar conclusions. There is a lot more going on here than ‘a dramatically fruitful dubiety.’

Forker also describes the scintillating versatility of the ‘division’ scene —

In *Woodstock*, where we see Richard actually renting out the kingdom to his four favorites, the scene shows us a king who, by quartering his realm, actually shatters the unity of his political body by an act of self-alienation and self-dispersion...In effect, Richard has destroyed his identity as king by sharing out and thereby obliterating his uniqueness.⁶⁷

—without for a moment wondering who at that time could possibly (and often did) put together such complex theatrical semantics. As so often when it comes to *1 Richard II* one senses a historic opportunity missed.

Nor is the presence of KTB theory that obvious; in both plays its deployment is quite subtle, an implicit background issue. It wasn’t until 1957 that anyone even noticed it in *2 Richard II*, with critics like Forker only later retroactively discovering it also in Part One. Maitland moreover considers the whole notion ‘metaphysical nonsense’ and even Kantorowicz calls it a ‘theology.’⁶⁸ Neither play, as Axton repeatedly makes clear, incarnates any kind of Tudor consensus on the matter, for none existed. She notes rather: ‘The King’s Two Bodies was never a fact, nor did it ever attain the status of orthodoxy; it remained a controversial idea.’⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Forker, *Richard II*, p. 151.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Axton, *op. cit.*, p. 13; Kantorowicz subtitles his book ‘A Study in Medieval Political Theology.’

⁶⁹ Axton, *op. cit.*, p. x.

KTB's appearance in both plays in the same form must thus assume considerable significance in the broader context of the present inquiry, though this is not the reason I foreground it here. Plowden and his dualities take us in two important but diverging analytical directions: first, the steady focus in *1 Richard II* upon Elizabethan law, and secondly, the multitude of doublings, pairings, twinings and even parallel scenes which grow from it and illustrate the play's organizing principle. Energized by unanswered questions about the king's ambiguous but complementary identities, both meet dialectically in the uncertainties of Tresilian's ambiguous edicts, calculated to deceive both Lords and minions:

subtle laws, that Janus-like
May with a double face salute them both.

—*1 Richard II*, I.ii.64-5

In the next two sections I discuss the double/dialectical format of the play, and its profound commentaries upon Elizabethan law in practice and in theory. Among my conclusions is that this subtly architected historico-political drama has surely earned a thorough revaluation by its critics, especially those who have so superficially dismissed it.

Doubly Redoubled

Once recognized, the principle of tragically interpenetrating opposites energizing *1 Richard II* becomes increasingly difficult to overlook. Keller observed the symmetrical disposition of the play's characters and political forces; also noticeable are its larger movements, from order to disorder to a new order, from peace to war to uneasy reconciliation, from Protectorate to independence to supervised authority, from king to non-king to qualified restoration. The remarkable anticipations of Hegel's dialectic are readily discernible, especially as forms of historical tragedy. Inspiring them is the ambiguous, contradictory presence of Plowden's doubled monarch, uneasily reconciled in the reigning king-tyrant.

In the world of *1 Richard II* everything is topsy-turvy turned, as Woodstock remarks. A groom may be a duke and a duke can be

an ostler; healthful drinks are poisoned; noble men are humbled and humble men ennobled; the Lord Chief Justice is the biggest felon in the land; England may be rented for seven thousand pounds a month, turned into a pelting farm and its king become no-king; never had English subjects such a landlord nor English king such subjects; prizes are bestowed upon the least worthy while the most worthy are scorned and murdered; docile and lawful citizens rebel; false history is proclaimed truth while truth itself goes unproclaimed and unrecorded; the loyal are condemned as traitors while traitors are rewarded; a whistle is a word and a tune an act of treachery; the government abandons the people who abandon it; inexperienced beardless boys rule while bearded men of grave experience are removed from office; treason may be put into any man's head; the king consumes his kingdom to feed a part; it is a crime to speak ill of nothing; a Black Prince is fair; a husband and wife are the same thing and hermaphrodites both cut and longtail; a widow is a man; things never spoke nor done before are now said and done; can they be rebels called that now turn head? Is it possible that this fellow that's all made of fashions should be an Englishman? It is as good at first as last; a man's deed is and is not his own; innocent verses are little better than libels; so men be rich enough they're good enough; fools make conscience how they get their coin; people's lives and lands and livings are the king's; a friendly masque is a deathly trap; princes may be led like slaves; the king denies his kingliness and as a man his own identity; England's ancient rights are abrogate; 'God bless' means 'God curse' and is treasonous; assassination looks like natural death; the dead may walk and a nephew kill his grandsire's sons—his father's brothers! Common murderers may smother a prince and servants betray their masters.

Other twinnings flicker by, among them the Spruce Courtier's toefied knees and kneeified toes, meaningful blank charters without words and meaningless proclamations full of them, Nimble's repeated sarcasm, 'We shall have a flourishing commonwealth' (I.ii.88, III.i.166-7). Knowledge is shot through with ignorance: 'Be ignorant of what you know' (I.i.188), and ignorance shot through with knowledge: 'Your name [Ignorance] proclaims no

less, sir, and it has been a most learned generation' (II.iii.12-13). Speech is silenced (II.ii.146, 156, 198, III.ii.83, IV.i.91, IV.ii.189, IV.ii.210, IV.ii.14, IV.iii.47, IV.iii.119-23, V.i.4, V.iii.110) and silence speeched: 'Ah, your silence argues a consent, I see' (III.ii.164).

The play breaks off on a complicated alliterative pun, 'for I have plodded in Plowden...' (V.vi.32-3), where plodding and plowing not only merge with the notion of hard work—'Nay, I have studied for my learning, I can tell ye, my lord,' etc. (V.vi.27-30)—but the word 'plod' itself looks back to Tresilian's first scene with Nimble in which he encourages him to emulate his career, from 'plodding clerk...Till by the King I was Chief Justice made' (*1 Richard II*, I.ii.105-8). Unfortunately for Tresilian, his devil learns his master's lesson of calculated self-interest only too well.

Ironies of this kind, with which the play abounds, are another kind of doubling. In many ways the whole work operates as a kind of giant pun, like *Hamlet*, its Janus-face simultaneously proclaiming loyalty to the crown while encouraging rebellion against it.

'Discountenance not the day with the least frown,' says Woodstock in another witty word-play (I.i.186). As a further irony, the author takes the whole of England for his subject, court and country life set side by side for deliberate comparison. We're given images of almost every social class and rank, from the bumpkins of Dunstable and its wealthier merchants, shrieves and petty officials, to the new breed of courtier lords and petty-bourgeois upstarts like Tresilian and Nimble. Only the clergy are spared.

The system is portrayed as egregiously porous with individuals rising and falling almost overnight, especially of course the minions. The townsfolk of Dunstable, and 700 whisperers beside, find their lives ruined in a single afternoon, while

Distressed poverty o'erspreads the kingdom:
In Essex, Surrey, Kent and Middlesex

Are seventeen thousand poor and indigent.

—*1 Richard II*, II.iii.17-20

At Court, we find the monarch and the old aristocracy, like everyone else, susceptible to dramatic reversals in rank: Woodstock is deposed and so finally is the king himself.

A small but significant group of scenic themes interestingly sublates, including the poison introduced into the body politic by the king's party in the opening scene, and the national detoxification carried out thereafter by the Lords. Another set deals with the extensive eating and consuming imagery which underscores Richard's wasting of the realm, e.g.—

Ay, cankers! Caterpillars!
Worse than consuming fires
That eats up all their furies falls upon.

—*1 Richard II*, I.iii.163-5

Oh, vulture England, wilt thou eat thine own?

—*1 Richard II*, III.ii.84

You feed not in Westminster Hall 'a-days, where so many sheep and oxen are devour'd. I'm afraid they'll eat you shortly, if you tarry amongst them.

—*1 Richard II*, III.ii.157-9

—and the eventual restoration of plenitude, or at least its prospect:

Thus princely Edward's sons, in tender care
Of wanton Richard and their father's realm,
Have toil'd to purge fair England's pleasant field
Of all those rancorous weeds that chok'd the grounds
And left her pleasant meads like barren hills.

—*1 Richard II*, V.vi.1-5

Inserted within these macrostructures are lesser but by no means less significant pairings, assembled like fractals supporting and reflective of the whole. Among them is a series of balanced scenes, e.g., I.i. and I.ii (presenting first the Lords, then their

antithesis, the minions) brought together in an explosive synthesis at the wedding in I.iii.

A second example is the signing of the Blank Charters,

Come, you boar's grease, take off this seal here. So, this is your deed?
—*I Richard II*, III.iii.110-11

which parallels the king's signing away his kingdom:

Why, Richard, King Richard, will ye be as good as your word, and seal the writings?
—*I Richard II*, IV.i.145-6

On both occasions of course the attempt is to legally defraud the signatories of their lands and livings. The intratextual reverberations continue throughout the balance of the play, e.g., Green's final Macbethian defiance:

I would thy master and the late Protector
With both his treacherous brothers, Gaunt and York,
Were all oppos'd with thee, to try these arms:
I'd seal't on all your hearts.
—*I Richard II*, V.iv.5-8

Other instances include the 'clothing' scenes (the minions gilding themselves while Anne sells her jewels to stitch up garments for the poor, and Woodstock keeps proudly to his friese). Then there are the two deaths and grievings which transform Richard: first, his beloved wife unexpectedly passes ('For all my earthly joys with her must die,' IV.iii.138), second, Green is killed ('Hard-hearted uncles, unrelenting churls, / That here have murder'd all my earthly joys!' V.iv.31-2). That these moments are twins to be compared is indicated not only by the recurrence of 'earthly joys' but directly in Richard's cry, 'What loss can be compar'd to such a queen?' (IV.iii.151).

The answer obviously is Green, and Green/Queen may be another subtle doubling. Consistent with what the Sonnets and some plays suggest about Shakespeare himself, our drama is

among the first sustained literary portraits of bisexuality. Far from gratuitous, it's historically true in Richard's case and a further expression of the king's two bodies.

Each of Richard's bereavements similarly marks a distinct political and emotional transition. After the first, when his 'griefs again redoubled' (IV.iii.116), he becomes self-absorbed, internalized, his withdrawal keeping pace with his political disappearance:

Come, come, let's go.
My wounds are inward. Inward burn my woe!
—*1 Richard II*, IV.iii.178

Kermode emphasizes this tendency—Richard self-absorbed and self-observing—in the increasingly isolated monarch of *2 Richard II*. We may recognize his origins or at least first manifestations in the earlier play:

But Richard II alone has a habit of studying himself from the outside, as it were...in a sense he is always calling for a mirror, finding in his reflection a king stripped of all his belongings (II.iii.142 ff.).⁷⁰

After his second great loss, Green, Richard grows uneasily conscious of his ultimate, almost predestined removal as monarch, a moment Rossiter considers his 'first entirely adult sentiment':⁷¹

Come, come, we yet may hide ourselves from worldly strength,
But heaven will find us out, and strike at length.
—*1 Richard II*, V.iv.53-4

Nor have we exhausted the play's ironic and/or emphatic doublings. While far from mechanically symmetrical, the action proliferates in scenic and imagistic couples, repetitions drawing attention to its big concerns and preoccupations. In I.iii, the wedding scene, Woodstock describes Richard in balanced pairs sepa-

⁷⁰ Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language*, p. 43.

⁷¹ Rossiter, *Woodstock*, p. 45.

rated by *yet* or *but*. The effect is almost algebraically quadratic: Richard is

A wild-head, yet a kingly gentleman,
A youth unsettled, yet he's princely bred...
The kingly stock of England and of France.
Yet he's a harebrain, a very wag, i' faith...
A young and wanton choice...
But his maturity, I hope you'll find,
True English-bred, a loving king and kind.

—*1 Richard II*, I.iii.24-32).

The young king's reaction to this is itself wittily pointed, acknowledging Woodstock's rhetorical symmetry but also the two-edged nature of his compliments: 'I thank ye for your double praise, good uncle' (I.iii.33). Soon afterwards, he offers up a few barbs of his own, another equilibrium. Woodstock's response is literally doubled: 'Ay, ay, do, do' (I.iii.71).

Balanced contrasts also enhance the narrative. Act I.i bursts upon a dark stage with a call for lights, but everything important thereafter continues to be 'done i' the night, sure' (III.iii.97). Two-thirds through, just before the masque scene, the world is darker still, 'so dark...The lights of heaven are shut in pitchy clouds' (IV. i.67), an image later paired directly with the minions whose 'dark clouds obscure the sparkling stars / Of [Richard's] great birth and true nobility' (V.iii.85-6). Woodstock is pressed to death on a featherbed (V.i.232-40) and in the next scene the minions' levied soldiers agree with the feigned enthusiasm of whores to be 'press'd on a feather-bed,' but as soon as their captors' backs are turned they run away (V.ii.9-10). These cognates, like Nimble's armor, noted earlier, extend the sense of the government's oppressive weight. Richard II's heavy rule is all murder and self-indulgence.

In our comparison with *Hamlet* we recognized the dramatic importance of the ghostly appearances in *1 Richard II* when Woodstock's father and brother materialize to warn him that he is 'beset with murder! Rise and fly!' (V.i.64). Their alarm and its occasion are forcefully anticipated by the Duchess of Gloucester,

who like her husband is given a premonitory dream, a ‘vision’ that ‘did appear so lively to me,’ in which his brutal murder is foreshadowed. (IV.ii.19 f.). Tying the two episodes even closer together, Woodstock uses the same language, a ‘lively...vision’ to describe his father’s and brother’s visitations. (V.i.109, 116, 199). As in the deaths of Green and Anne, content and phrasing associate the moments, conferring narrative credibility upon both.

Beyond these pairings, Woodstock’s ghosts dramatically instate the play’s doubling and dialectical themes, not only through the ambiguities of presence (the re-living dead) but in their twinned materializations (grandfather and father to the king, father and brother to the sleeping Woodstock). The duke’s slumbering itself simultaneously approximates and anticipates the deep damnation of his taking off.⁷²

At this point Woodstock’s personal condition, nearly-dead, inverts that of the ghosts, nearly-alive. Together their hieratic adjurations against the king establish our play and 2 *Richard II* as revenge tragedies, though as Marjorie Garber rhetorically demands, in an essay on *Hamlet*’s ghost replete with implications for our own analysis, ‘What, indeed, is revenge but the dramatization and acculturation of the [Freudian] repetition compulsion?’⁷³ Psychoanalytic concepts appear deeply worked into a story—I mean that of *Richard II*—richly susceptible to notions about the compulsion to repeat. It is Oedipal vengeance of a kind and, in Garber’s Lacanian sense, ‘spiritually’ uncanny.⁷⁴

We may note in this context too that *1* and *2 Richard II* often

⁷² The reference to *Macbeth*, I.vii.20 is justified for there are strong parallels between the assassinations of Duncan and Woodstock. Note too Shakespeare’s habitual equations of sleeping and dying, e.g., ‘sleep, thou ape of death,’ (*Cymbeline*, II.ii.31), ‘that sleep of death,’ (*Hamlet*, III.i.65), ‘death-counterfeiting sleep,’ (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, III.ii.365), etc.

⁷³ Garber, ‘*Hamlet: Giving up the Ghost*,’ p. 299.

⁷⁴ Garber, *op. cit.*, pp. 299-310.

appear uncannily, indeed compulsively, to repeat one another, especially in narrative shape—in both plays Richard II is violently usurped by the House of Lancaster. This history seems to have held a peculiar attraction for Shakespeare; it is the only tale he told twice.

At an even deeper level of duplication, certain key scenes in the story's first iteration seem deliberately repeated in the second. Among them is Richard's murder which, as we have already noted, ironically plays off Woodstock's parallel assassination. Another is the unhistoric appearance of Sir Pierce of Exton in *I Richard II*, I.i. A third is the moment in his deposition when he famously dashes a mirror to the ground—

For there it is, crack'd in an hundred shivers
—2 *Richard II*, IV.i.199

—unmistakably recalling Woodstock's deposition when he similarly casts down his staff of office, smashing it in almost the same words:

There, let him take it, shiver'd, crack'd and broke,
—1 *Richard II*, II.ii.164

Note also the typically Shakespearean verbal stage-direction, 'There,' the word suited to the action. These are deep connections, clearly going beyond anything that might be called influence or borrowing or ironic annotations by one playwright on the work of another.

The two-authors hypothesis cannot be sustained in the light of references so obscure and yet so evident. Some of the drama's most subtle self-commentaries emerge from the comparison of pairs. In V.i for instance the oily Lapoole assures Woodstock,

Disquiet not your thoughts, my gracious lord.
There is no hurt intended, credit me,
—1 *Richard II*, V.i.168-9

recalling York's reassurances to Richard earlier in the play:

My royal lord, even by my birth I swear,
My father's tomb, and faith to heaven I owe,
Your uncles' thoughts are all most honorable.

—*1 Richard II*, II.i.141-3

The comparison throws into sharp relief the Duke's 'counterfeiting' and bad faith which Richard rediscovers to his most serious cost in the second play. Sending us further backwards through the text, Lapoole's deceit ('There is no hurt intended') compels another look at York's urgings that Woodstock excise the 'ulcers' poisoning the court (I.i.155). Excision, we subsequently learn, means stabbing them to death: 'Cut but this ulcer off, thou heal'st the kingdom,' Arundel tells Cheney as they kill Green (V.iv.12ff.). York is also readily complicit in the Lords' strategy of pretended friendship ('To hide our hate is soundest policy,' I.i.199), while quietly preparing to 'remove those hinderers of [Richard's] health' (I. i.194) and 'send some headless from the court ere long' (I.iii.274). This last is spoken directly by Woodstock to York who does not demur; to the contrary, the scene closes with a strong sense of agreement.

Another example is Woodstock's use of climbing imagery in his final scene,

This counsel if he [Richard] follow may in time
Pull down those mischiefs that so fast do climb,

—*1 Richard II*, V.i.192-3

which takes on a rather less benevolent inflection when set beside his only other use of it, in I.i:

Soft, soft!

Fruit that grows high is not securely pluck'd,

We must use ladders and by steps ascend

Till by degrees we reach the altitude.

You conceit me too? Pray be smooth awhile.

—*1 Richard II*, I.i.177-81

The whole of the Lancastrian project, culminating in Henry IV and his coronation over the body of 'plume-pluck'd Richard' (*2 Richard II*, IV.i.108), a reference perhaps to the first play's

clothing imagery, may be conveyed in this apparently modest and even bland pronouncement.

Hendiadys

References to doubles and doubling, as in *2 Richard II*, are found throughout the earlier drama. Nuances shift, but almost all their meanings have to do with deceit or criminality: 'double practices' (I.i.118), 'a double face' (I.ii.65), 'double praise' (I.iii. 33), 'You need not thus have doubled with your friends' (II.ii.96), 'double his reward' (III.ii.183-4), 'double his revenues' (IV.i. 18), 'griefs again redoubled' (IV.iii.115), 'Again we double it: rebellious traitors!' (V.iii.123).

Stylistically, synonyms or near-synonyms are often brought together in pairs, reinforcing the sense of duplication. Examples include 'rough and stern' (I.ii.33), 'screw and wind' (I.ii.44), 'tax and pill' (I.iii.113), 'slow and melancholy' (I.iii.92). 'plain and honest' (I.iii.18), 'fortune and success' (II.i.87), 'torture and afflict' (II.i.140), 'summon and direct' (II.i.161), 'strange and wonderful' (II.i.59), 'good and perfect' (II.ii.13), 'feast and revel' (II.iii.101), 'mirth and sport' (IV.ii. 135), 'fearless, bold' (V.i.4), 'stern and terrible' (V.i.25), 'haste and fly' (V.i.75), 'wake and fly' (V.i.78), 'guard and keep' (V.i.134), and 'wise and reverend' (V.i.189).

Also prominent is hendiadys, a related rhetorical form in which two dissimilar adjectives, verbs or substantives (as opposed to paired synonyms) are disconcertingly coupled to achieve a conscious semantic purpose, for example, 'see and shun,' (I.i.190-1). Long recognized as characteristic of Shakespeare's style, its dramatic consequence closely resembles Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt*, an estranging or making new, as Pound would say, of concepts, motives and circumstance.

Kermode among others shows overwhelmingly how Shakespeare's application of the form reflects the dialectical cast of his mind and work, so like Anon's, especially at the linguistic level

where the meaning of the whole depends upon a kind of unnaturalness in the doubling, a sort of pathological intensification of the device...it

can introduce unease and mystery into an expression.⁷⁵

Vickers' *Counterfeiting Shakespeare* (1985) also contains an illuminating discussion of the figure.⁷⁶ Among many illustrations he cites

her wanton spirits look out
At every joint and motive of her body
—*Troilus and Cressida*, IV.v.56-7
and

But as he is my kinsman, my dear friend,
The shame and fault finds no excuse nor end.
—*The Rape of Lucrece*, 237-8

I Richard II's hendiadyses, as elsewhere in Shakespeare, are both performative and reflective of the organic contrasts structuring the action. Instances include: 'to see / And shun those stains that blurs his majesty' (I.i.190-1), 'You must observe and fashion to the time' (I.ii.37), 'Of this remiss and inconsiderate dealing,' (I.iii.224), 'I never saw you hatch'd and gilded thus' (I.iii.78), 'Mount and curvet like strong Bucephalus' (I.iii.91), 'The battle full of dread and doubtful fear' (II.i.72), 'A victory most strange and admirable' (II.i.84), 'Woodstock and Gaunt are stern and troublesome' (II.i.124), 'And every hour with rude and bitter taunts' (II.i.130), 'The news to all will be most wish'd and welcome' (II.i.154), 'A soldier and a faithful councilor,' (II.ii.160), 'Thou'dst rid mine age of mickle care and woe' (II.ii.199), 'And suit themselves in wild and antic habits' (II.iii.91), 'In state and fashion without difference' (III.ii.42), 'Others there be refuse and murmur strongly' (III.ii.81), 'in operation and quality different' (III.ii.205), 'All rich and rare' (IV.i.52), 'We heard the people midst their joy and moan' (IV.ii.113), 'So full of dread and lordly majesty' (V.i.20).

⁷⁵ Kermode: *Shakespeare's Language*, p. 102, quoting George T. Wright, 'Hendiadys and *Hamlet*,' *P.M.L.A.*, 96, pp. 168ff.

⁷⁶ Vickers, *Counterfeiting Shakespeare*, Chapter 6: *Rhetoric: the Shakespearean 'hendiadys'*, pp. 163-188.

I've characterized *1 Richard II* as a work of 'golden metamorphoses,' or subtly wrought transitions, affecting the story, its characters, politics and conception of history, scenic arrangements, imagery and verbal structures. Thoroughly planned and executed as any in Shakespeare, not forgetting *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, the obsessive patterning suggests that these remarkable innovations were the playwright's practice almost from the first. He was perhaps the most 'natural' dramatist in the history of the genre.

Legal Issues

Against Plowden's notion of the King's Two Bodies, the descendants of Henry VII proposed an alternative set of dual regalities: *de facto* and *de jure*. The Yorkists might be the latter but the House of Lancaster emphatically remained the former. As G.R. Elton notes:

Essentially, all Tudors rested their title on accomplished fact which, they argued, announced God's choice.⁷⁷

Clearly at odds with two-body theory, and occasioning philosophically complicated debate about the source and bases of legitimate power, the *de-facto/de-jure* counterclaim compels us to supplement and extend Kantorowicz's insights. This is much as Shakespeare and his contemporaries were forced to do, confronting a dynasty whose legitimacy was assailed from every direction—its historic claim to the throne questioned, the Queen herself excommunicated, sentenced to death and, most dangerous of all, declared a bastard, that is, entitled legally neither to reign, inherit nor bequeath.

For all these reasons, in *1* and *2 Richard II* and Elizabethan political law generally, not only the double-bodied king is dramatized, considered and measured. Related topics include the pressing matter of monarchical legitimacy, inheritance law and its ap-

⁷⁷ G.R. Elton (ed.): *The Tudor Constitution: Documents and Commentary* (Cambridge U.P., 1968), p. 1, citing Holdsworth, Pickthorn and especially Bacon (*Henry VII*, ed. J.R. Lumby (Cambridge U.P. 1885) p. 133.)

plication to the Crown, the bounds of government authority, parliament's role, the rise of contract law, and established common rights versus the wide-ranging statutes defining treason. The plays certainly explore the implications of KTB theory but set against it Baconian, i.e. Tudor, doctrines of legitimacy by conquest⁷⁸—the divine might of kings.

In both dramas, and indeed all of Shakespeare, matters are finally settled on the battlefield. Plowden is thus not merely exemplified, as Kantorowicz shows, but demonstrated to be wrong: the sword invariably proves mightier than the pen. This fact alone puts Anon/Shakespeare in the Lancastrian camp and largely accounts for the famous political and emotional ambivalence of *2 Richard II*'s conclusion, when the better but less-entitled man succeeds. Such contradictions were inevitable in the light of the damaging Wars of the Roses and Henry VII's final victory over a legitimate monarch. They also neatly match the author's dialectical temperament: he was not only for all time but of his age.

The same antitheses, articulated differently, confront each other in *1 Richard II*. Although its ending is lost, the play's closing moments can be safely surmised to have included Richard's *de facto* deposition: we're told that 'King Richard's taken prisoner by the peers' (V.v.8). We can also assume his *de jure* restoration, for there he is, still on the throne, at the start of *2 Richard II*. Besides, everyone knew the story of Henry IV and how his usurpation led to civil war and the loss of France. The aspect of Richard II's reign Anon finds interesting was its first solution, constitutional monarchy, and not its second, deposition and death. By choosing to examine 1387 and not 1399 the playwright was making an unexpectedly mature and pointed case with strong implications for Elizabeth I.

From the moment that the king and/or his minions attempt to murder the sons of Edward III, constitutional and judicial issues take thematic precedence—i.e., from the very first. Richard's

⁷⁸ Elton, *The Tudor Constitution*, pp. 2-3.

legal and moral responsibility aside, the assault is uncivilizing, a return to the primitive, comparable in mood and apprehension with the Fool's apocalyptic vision when 'going shall be us'd with feet' (*King Lear*, III. iii.94). In *1 Richard II* it is combined with a hint of the Edenic fall—

We all are weary
And fain we would lie down to rest ourselves,
But that so many serpents lurk i' the grass
We dare not sleep.

—*1 Richard II*, I.i.141-4

—famously evoked again in the 'other Eden' speech by the same character, John of Gaunt (*2 Richard II*, II.i.42).

In *1 Richard II* I.ii the legal theme becomes explicit, not as an abstraction but with real consequences in the world of politics and power: 'Had they been dead,' Green fumes over the failed attempt to poison Richard's uncles, 'we had rul'd the realm and him' (I.ii.19). But never mind: there's equifinality or more ways than one way to skin a cat. Since legalities are the issue, Green and his friends have 'so wrought / With kingly Richard' that their man Tresilian will 'shortly underprop the name...of Lord Chief Justice of England!' (I.ii.27-8). Gratefully accepting his elevation Tresilian assures his sponsors that

I will screw and wind the stubborn law
To any fashion that shall like you best.
It shall be law, what I shall say is law,
And what's most suitable to all your pleasures.

—*1 Richard II*, I.ii.45-7

Along with the social plague of 'twisty law,' as Rossiter puts it,⁷⁹ come the twisty lawyers, none more so than Tresilian, remembered by Elizabethans as justly executed 'for misconstruing the lawes, and expounding them to serue the Princes affections.'⁸⁰ Nor is he exceptional, at least in our play; on the contrary, the Lord Chief Justice is a depressing credit to his

⁷⁹ Rossiter, *Woodstock*, p. 73

⁸⁰ Campbell, *Mirror for Magistrates*, p. 73

profession. 'I will wear the office in his true ornament,' he says proudly (I.ii.35), giving voice to every litigant's nightmare vision of the courts:

Methinks already I sit upon the bench with dreadful frowns frighting the lousy rascals; and when the jury once cries 'Guilty' could pronounce 'Lord have mercy on thee,' with a brow as rough and stern as surly Rhadamanth; or, when a fellow talks, cry: 'Take him, jailor, clap bolts of iron on his heels and hands!'

—*I Richard II*, I.ii.29-34

Rhadamanthus, son of Zeus and Europa, dispensed harsh justice in the infernal regions. Tresilian's England becomes a kind of judicial hell, one of the fardels Hamlet thought made life hardly worth living. 'I rule the law,' Tresilian assures Nimble, a horrific inversion capped by his promise to put an axe into his devil's executing hands while protecting him from retribution (I.ii.122). In these cynical illegalities he directly echoes the king—another doubled element—who promises his avaricious minions:

Fear not my uncles, nor their proudest strength,
For I will buckler ye against them all...
Do what ye will, we'll shield and buckler ye.

—*I Richard II*, II.i.6-7

Like the minions, Nimble fully appreciates the opportunity: 'Nay, and you'll stand between me and the gallows,' he assures Tresilian, 'I'll be an arrant thief, sure!' (I.ii. 94-5).

That these two are scoundrels is evident, and any other Elizabethan dramatist, Peele for example, would have fully milked the moment for its rogue-comedic possibilities. But Anon unexpectedly declines, giving the scene a serious turn. Tresilian's deprivations will be carried out scrupulously according to the law, or at least his unchallengeable interpretation of it. 'Thou by the law shall stand' (I.ii.121-3) he reminds Nimble. The system is to be used against itself, injustice clothed as justice, a vision resembling Lear's dystopian universe in which

Robes and furr'd gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,

And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;
Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it.

—*King Lear*, IV.vi.165-7

Tresilian is the world's first theatrical white-collar criminal, a consummate court politician. He deceives everyone, even his friends and the king, whose trust he ruthlessly exploits. Savoring his elevation, he confesses in a Machiavellian soliloquy:

The dukes will frown; why, I can look as grim
As John of Gaunt, and all that frown with him.
But yet until mine office be put on
By kingly Richard, I'll conceal myself,
Framing such subtle laws that Janus-like
May with a double face salute them both.
I'll search my brain and turn the leaves of law:
Wit makes us great, greatness keeps fools in awe.

—*I Richard II*, I.ii.60-7

With Nimble's ambiguous help—the theme of doubleness is discovered everywhere—Tresilian gleefully reviews his dubious curriculum vitae. A sneak thief even at school, as Nimble reminds him,

Ay, saving your Honor's speech, your worshipful tail was whipp'd for stealing my dinner out of my satchel. You were ever so crafty in your childhood that I knew your Worship would prove a good lawyer.

—*I Richard II*, I.ii.100-3

Tresilian initially became 'a plodding clerk' struggling for many years as 'a pleading lawyer.' Now finally, thanks to the minions' need for a reliable crook, he finds himself appointed to the country's highest legal office, having 'crept' in among His Majesty's counselors 'and is now a lord, forsooth' (III.iii.63-4). The incredulity stresses Tresilian's double breach of nature. Even he acknowledges a career of politics and graft, observing vain-gloriously 'with how much peril / We have attain'd this place of eminence' (I.ii.114-15).

Corruption and Collapse

Tresilian is absent from the next scene (I.iii), the marriage of

Anne to Richard, as he should, given his commoner status, though his corrupt and corrupting presence hovers nearby:

...false Tresilian, whom your Grace, we hear,
Hath made Chief Justice. Well, well, be it so,
Mischief on mischief sure will shortly flow.

—*1 Richard II*, I.iii.131-3

After the social courtesies appropriate at a royal wedding, state and family niceties dramatically break down when it emerges that Richard's new policies are directly opposed to that of his Protector and the Commons. Nominally the issue is the fate of 'three-score sail of ships, and six great carracks / All richly laden' (I.iii.146-7), taken at sea by Arundel. Responsible Woodstock wants to sell them to repay forced parliamentary loans, but Richard unilaterally decrees otherwise:

Our word, good uncle, is already pass'd,
Which cannot with our honor be recall'd:
Those wealthy prizes already are bestow'd
On these our friends.

—*1 Richard II*, I.iii.154-7

During the consternation that follows, the king's bidding out-faces all the rest. 'Who is't that dares encounter with our will?' (I.iii.167) he demands, casting down a gage the old nobility eventually take up. The question indeed leads to the drama's heart, and we spend the rest of the action discovering its answer. At this point, however, everything goes Richard's way, emboldening him. The minions get their ships and he follows up by announcing a series of high-level government appointments, rubbing his uncles' faces in it:

To those slight gifts,
Not worth acceptance, thus much more we add:
Young Henry Green shall be Lord Chancellor,
Bagot, Lord Keeper of our Privy Seal,
Tresilian, learned in our kingdom's laws,
Shall be Chief Justice. By them and their directions
King Richard will uphold his government.

—*1 Richard II*, I.iii.189-95

Richard and his retinue then arrogantly sweep out. The next thing we hear is that the kingdom is in an uproar, ‘war...and civil dissension, / The men of Kent and Essex do rebel,’ etc. (I.iii.238-40). The play unequivocally assigns blame:

Now, headstrong Richard, shalt thou reap the fruit
Thy lewd, licentious willfulness hath sown.

—*I Richard II*, I.iii.245-6

Note the triple-barreled charge: lewdness, i.e., homosexuality, which we have yet to see; licentiousness, i.e., governance ‘unrestrained by law’;⁸¹ and willfulness, which in Shakespeare invariably teaches its own harsh lesson:

O sir, to willful men,
The injuries that they themselves procure
Must be their schoolmasters.

—*King Lear*, II.iv.304-6

The swift-moving action here—tumbling over itself, anticipating the future, describing actions before their causes might reasonably be known—is typical of Shakespeare, comparable to Bullingbrook’s return on the heels of his disinheritance. In *I Richard II* the fiery John of Gaunt advocates immediately joining with the rebels, arresting the king’s ministers (as they now are) and executing them. Woodstock, however, successfully counsels a more peaceful road involving parliament, clearly also the dramatist’s preferred solution. In the Commons people may have ‘their deeds,’ or complaints, ‘examin’d thoroughly’ (I.iii.266). Later, Woodstock says that the ‘just proceedings’ of a ‘happy parliament shall make all even, / And plant sure peace betwixt the King and realm. (I.ii.21-2.)

Rights and Liberties

Tipton glosses the above well, pointing out that Woodstock and the peers all look to parliament and the legal system to guarantee

⁸¹ *OED* 2, citing ‘Till now you have gone on and fill’d the time / With all licentious measure, making your wills / The scope of justice’ (*Timon of Athens*, V.iv.3-5).

established liberties. Important Elizabethan jurists like Sir Edward Coke, and familiar texts such as Fortescue's *De Laudibus Legum Angliae* (ca. 1470, translated and published six times between 1573 and 1672), Elyot's *The Boke Named the Governour* (1531), and Smith's *De Republica Anglorum* (1583), all supported the commons' right to own private property, enjoy due process under law and above all be consulted about new taxes.⁸²

To this extent, the play's critique of the historical Richard II is orthodox enough. It becomes dangerous when even the peaceable Woodstock is shown considering violent alternatives, illegalities necessary to save both king and kingdom, a preemptive shifting of the ideological ground. The case for rebellion, developed early as 'the King, all careless, / Heaps wrong on wrong, to stir more mutiny' (I.iii.251-2), is later made authoritative by the ghosts of Edward III and the Black Prince, in effect Divinity and History, speaking their judgments in favor of resistance. By this point the dichotomies have grown more complex than merely legit against non-legit. Woodstock calls it a matter of national salvation:

...if by fair means we can win no favor,
Nor make King Richard leave their [the minions'] companies,
We'll thus resolve for our dear country's good
To right her wrongs, or for it spend our blood. ...
Come, brother York, we soon shall right all wrong,
And send some headless from the court ere long.

—*I Richard II*, I.iii.267-70, 73-4

These minatory words set the conditions for everything that follows. Though Sophocles can hardly have been in the author's mind, *I Richard II* parallels Antigone's tragic dilemma, duty to the state vs. duty to the gods. Following Woodstock's vague threat, the nobles increasingly break the law—or, as the play suggests, are driven to it—until by the end we find them anticipating almost to the word Cromwell's 'We fight the king to

⁸² Tipton, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-125.

defend the *King*,⁸³ their sedition undertaken

in tender care

Of wanton Richard and their father's realm.

—*I Richard II*, V.vi.1-3.

Act Two continues the play's exploration of legal themes in full measure. Urging Richard to become 'a tyrant unto tyranny' (II.i. 24), i.e., to defy and suppress parliament and his Protector, the minions counsel:

Law must extend unto severity

When subjects dare to brave their sovereign.

—*I Richard II*, II.i.26-7

Richard eagerly grasps at the proposed cover:

Tresilian, thou art Lord Chief Justice now,

Who should be learned in the laws but thee?

Resolve us therefore what thou think'st of them

That under title of protectorship

Seek to subvert their king and sovereign.

—*I Richard II*, II.i.28-32

'Brave' (to outface) has quickly become subversion. Tresilian's elaboration is a frightening expansion of the law against treason, though one not unfamiliar to Elizabeth's subjects. Since the monarch enjoys a 'sacred state,' any opposition is by definition sacrilegious, 'nothing less than treason capital, / And he a traitor that endeavors it' (II.i.34-8). Note how this Plowdenesque formula stops short, though barely so, of declaring the King himself divine; it's his state, his Body Politic, that faces threat.

Richard and his ministers typically elide the ambiguity, demanding the Lords' immediate arrest and execution as traitors (II.i.39-42). Tresilian advises against it, not because of any illegality but

⁸³ Ethyn Kirby: *William Prynne, A Study in Puritanism* (Harvard U.P., 1931), p. 60, cited by Kantorowicz. Italics in the original. The distinction between *king* and *King* may be the earliest recorded use of typographical semiotics whose apotheosis is the work of e.e. cummings.

on political grounds, ‘For fear the people rise in mutiny’ (II.i.46). Richard is compelled reluctantly to agree, unconsciously forecasting what will become decisive in *2 Richard II*:

Ay, there’s the fear—the commons love them well,
And all applaud the wily Lancaster,
The counterfeit relenting Duke of York,
Together with our fretful uncle Woodstock,
With greater reverence than King Richard’s self.

—*1 Richard II*, II.i.47-51

Popular opinion then is the true check on monarchical abuse, adding a further dimension to Bullingbrook’s revolt. The argument is closely related to George Buchanan’s vigorous case against Mary, Queen of Scots and her claims to Divine Right.⁸⁴ As we saw earlier, Shakespeare was almost certainly familiar with *De jure regni apud Scotus* and may well have read further in Buchanan’s influential work.

Other contemporary texts supporting what is sometimes called the Contract Theory of Kingship—royal authority derives not from God but God-through-the-People, acknowledged in coronation oaths—include Hubert Languet’s *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* (1579)⁸⁵ and the attacks on Elizabeth’s personal legitimacy by ‘R. Doleman,’ the Jesuit Robert Parsons (or Persons) in his notorious *Conference About The Next Succession To The Crowne Of England*.⁸⁶ These texts are rarely considered in rela-

⁸⁴ George Buchanan: *De Maria Scotorum Regina* (1571), translated as *Ane Detectioun of the Duings of Mary Quene; De jure regni apud Scotus* (1579); and *Rerum Scoticarum Historia* (1582).

⁸⁵ George Garnett (ed. and trans.): *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos, or, Concerning the Legitimate Power of a Prince over the People, and of the People over a Prince*. (Cambridge U.P., 1994).

⁸⁶ R. Doleman: *A conference about the next succession to the crowne of Ingland, diuided into two partes. Where-of the first conteyneth the discourse of a ciuill lawyer lawyer, how and in what manner propinquity of blood is to he [sic] preferred. And the second the speech of a temporall lawyer, about the particular titles of all such as do or may pretende ... to the next succession. Where vnto is also added a new & perfect arbor or genealogie of the discents of all the kinges and*

tion to *2 Richard II*, though our discussion suggests they should be. Both *Richard II* dramas are as fully *engagé* as the most ardent Sartrean could wish.

In II.i the minions follow up Tresilian's unctuous legal reasoning with Bushy's even more dubious 'monument of English Chronicles' (II.i.55) containing false precedents (e.g., Edward III's execution of his Protector, II.i.61-5) and incorrect facts (the dates of Poitiers and Richard's own birthday, etc., II.i.83, 103). That the youthful king accepts what he's told on trust, especially the disinformation that he was born in 1365 and is thus already 21 years old, comments sharply on his naiveté and illustrates of how easily he is 'wrought' by the favorites.

When York arrives to invite him to the summoned parliament, the king feels prepared to handle what he fully realizes is a direct challenge to his authority:

Have they so soon procur'd a parliament?
Without our knowledge too?

—*1 Richard II*, II.i.151-2

He therefore agrees to attend, his style as always to honor the letter but not the spirit of the rules. After York leaves, Richard tells his friends:

Yes, we will meet them, but with such intent
As shall dismiss their sudden parliament
Till we be pleas'd to summon and direct it.

—*1 Richard II*, II.i.159-61

Inheritance Law

Shakespeare often stages trials or trial-like scenes. *1 Richard II*, II.ii, when Richard finally accomplishes his throne, seems to be

princes of England, from the conquest vnto this day, whereby each mans pretence is made more plaine (Antwerp: Arnout Coninx, 1594). As noted earlier, Doleman/Parsons advances the claim of the Spanish Infanta on the grounds of John of Gaunt's marriage to the eldest daughter of the King of Castile, referred to in *1 Richard II*, I.i.56. It does not follow that this reference, nor any heed our author may have paid to Doleman's tract, implies Catholic sympathies or support for the Infanta.

among the first he undertook. The issues again are relentlessly legal, absolute monarchy versus parliament and the rule of law. Representing the latter, Lancaster tells the king as he arrives that the meeting's purpose is

To have your Grace confirm this parliament
And set your hand to certain articles
Most needful for your state and kingdom's quiet.

—*1 Richard II*, II.ii.55-7

As the first line cited indicates, the Lords are moving narrowly within the law: technically, only monarchs were entitled to summon a parliament. Bullingbrook later maneuvers similarly, calling in the king's name the parliament that deposes him. But in *1 Richard II* Richard anticipates everything, adroitly using the occasion to trick his uncles into acknowledging his full right to the throne. In doing so he uses a legal analogy, as we've seen, the case of the 21-year-old man whose guardian will not yield up his property (*1 Richard II*, II.ii.66-76).

Richard successfully demands and receives his inheritance, seizing the throne in a quasi-legal palace coup— 'quasi' because it was indeed a question, complicated by two-body theory, as to whether the Crown could only be inherited or also passed on like a chunk of land. This unresolved issue went back to Henry VIII, whose first Act of Succession declared that 'all the issue had and procreate' between the King and his new wife, Anne Boleyn,

shall be your [i.e. Henry VIII's] lawful children and be inheritable and inherit, according to the course of inheritance and laws of this realm, the imperial crown of the same, with all dignities, honours, preeminences, prerogatives, authorities and jurisdictions to the same annexed or belonging, in as large and ample manner as your Highness to this present time hath the same as king of this realm, the inheritance thereof to be and remain to your said children and right heirs in manner and forms as hereafter shall be declared...⁸⁷

⁸⁷ An Act for the Establishment of the King's Succession, 1534 (25 Henry VIII, c.22) in Elton, *The Tudor Constitution*, pp. 6-7.

It's significant too that when Richard finally ascends the throne he does so in both his monarchical beings. This historic episode (absent the legal argument) was pivotal in the king's early history and thus fully deserves its own scene. Still, the dramatist shows a nice eye for the moment's broader legal significance, allowing both sides to bring rather different emphases to the word 'rights' in the king's coronation oath. The distinction, easily lost in the noise, excitement and ceremony, contrasts his sense—

And here we claim our fair inheritance
Of fruitful England, France, and Ireland,
Superior Lord of Scotland, and the rights
Belonging to our great dominions

—*1 Richard II*, II.ii.109-12

—with the Lords' insistence that he is merely 'sovereign lord of England's ancient rights!' (*1 Richard II*, II.ii.117-18). The issue comes up repeatedly afterwards. Richard's declaration stresses his personal sovereignty, incorporating everyone else's rights, 'our great dominions,' within his own; the Lords and parliament describe a monarch who guarantees long-established freedoms, including local immunities going back to William the Conqueror (IV.iii.19-23) and implicitly, as Holinshed records, the Magna Carta and the Carta de Foresta.⁸⁸ Their view, sanctioned by history and the play, represents not only justice but what are later described as England's oldest 'liberties' and 'privileges' (IV.i.19, IV.iii.25), that is, strict limits on monarchical power exercised through parliament.

Tipton arrives at parallel conclusions about this scene, adding that its oppositional semantics help transform 'the idea of kingship from one of privileges to one of responsibilities.'⁸⁹ This is indeed the play's deepest ideological intent, as we'll presently see. Anon was as well-versed as Shakespeare in the law and

⁸⁸ Holinshed, *Chronicles*, III, p. 321. Richard of course is a king not of the Great and Forest Charters but of Blank Charters. It's unclear whether this symmetry was ever consciously in the dramatist's mind.

⁸⁹ Tipton, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

legal history, apparently aware that the exact nature and process of eldest-son inheritance was settled in the late-1300's, or about the time of Richard II. Saul notes that

By the later fourteenth century it was becoming common for the private estates of the nobility to descend in the male line rather than through the heir general,⁹⁰

an observation supported by the case of *Thomas de Dutton v. Adam*, son of Roger de Moldeworth (1349), often cited as a precedent during the reign of Elizabeth I.⁹¹ We cannot be certain of course that Anon had this particular litigation in mind, but it bears comparison with the fictional instance Richard cites, and comes to a similar resolution.⁹² It was also not unusual for Shakespeare to incorporate case law—we've seen for example the use he makes in *Hamlet* of *Hales vs. Petite*.

The consequence of Richard's legal violations becomes immediately evident. The world is 'topsy-turvy turned,' perhaps recalling *Macbeth's* 'hurly-burly,' as he dismisses his uncles from the Council and appoints his friends in their places.

The king metamorphs into a tyrant before our very eyes and ears:

Woodstock: What transformation do mine eyes behold,
As if the world were topsy-turvy turn'd!
Hear me, King Richard!

⁹⁰ Saul, *Richard II*, p. 420. This dating fits in well with *1 Richard II*, V.i.244, where one of the murderers uses the idiom, 'dead as a door-nail,' also dating from about 1350. The phrase is conventionally but erroneously attributed to Shakespeare (it occurs for example in *Piers Plowman*) who as we've seen uses it in *2 Henry IV*.

⁹¹ *A descriptive catalogue of ancient deeds in the Public Records Office*, Vol. 4, H.M.S.O., 1902) p. 357 (Myers, *English Historical Documents*, Vol. IV, pp. 992-3).

⁹² See Myers, *op. cit.*, pp. 992-3, and K.B. McFarlane: 'The English Nobility in the Later Middle Ages,'

12^o Congrès International des science historiques (1965) I, *Grandes Thèmes*, pp. 337-45.

Richard waves him aside:

King: Plain Thomas, I'll not hear ye. ...
Give up your Council staff, we'll hear no more.

—*1 Richard II*, II.ii.144-56

The Lords are driven out and Richard and his friends instantly begin their subversion of the law, almost literally at the point of a sword:

We'll have a guard of archers to attend us,
And they shall daily wait on us and you.
Send proclamations straight in Richard's name
T'abridge the laws our late Protector made.

—*1 Richard II*, II.i.183-6

Rule by Decree

Proclamation law was another contentious issue. Richard takes a grave step in abrogating parliament, a blunder underscored by the frivolous legislation Green half-playfully proposes. But note the resonating menace of Bagot's last sentence:

Green: We'll have an Act for this: it shall be henceforth counted high treason for any fellow with a gray beard to come within forty foot of the court gates!

Bagot: Ay, or a great-bellied doublet. We'll alter the kingdom presently.

—*1 Richard II*, II.ii.176-9

The 'great-bellied doublet' to be banished the court is a 'doubly' redoubled reference to the clothing imagery in word and idea: doublets are subsequently banned in favor of singlets, Polonian hats, knee chains, etc. But as so often in Shakespeare, the joke comes with a sharp edge. Nor are Bagot's words intended lightly: they are picked up two scenes later by the king himself when he boasts to Anne of the new styles:

Thou see'st already we begin to alter
The vulgar fashions of our homespun kingdom.

—*1 Richard II*, III.i.48-9

The doublings by this point have become quadruplings—note the symmetry, doubled doubles. Even more, Richard’s unconscious repetition suggests that he is like one of his own Blank Charters, an empty parchment upon whom anything might be writ. The scene thus replicates within itself, like a strand of DNA, genome instructions from a parent narrative so distant as to be barely perceptible yet undoubtedly the donor. Whatever else may be said against *1 Richard II*, it is not the work of a writer careless with his details.

Act II.iii, Queen Anne’s big scene, is one of the least thematically ‘legal’ in the play, though it still reverberates with allusions and references to the law. Anne reviews England’s plight in the company of Woodstock’s wife and York’s niece, the Duchesses of Gloucester and Ireland. Rank poverty is abroad and like the good Queen and Christian that she is, Anne is doing what she can to relieve the general misery. The terms in which she does so are also revealing, for she not only gives all she hath to the poor, she swears to do it by parliament and the people:

The wealth I have shall be the poor’s revenue
As sure as ’twere confirm’d by parliament.
—*1 Richard II*, II.iii.46-7

It’s an important if minor emphasis: the good queen backs parliament against the autocratic king. The drama’s only saint, she fears civil war despite the success of her charitable efforts. Other characters acknowledge her as the single bastion between Richard and disaster:

your virtuous charity, fair Queen,
So graciously hath won the commons’ love,
As only you have power to stay their rigor.
—*1 Richard II*, II.iii.43-5

When she hears of Richard’s spendthrift ways and praetorian guard of 400 archers, Anne presciently forecasts the country’s doom: ‘Oh, certain ruin of this famous kingdom!’ (II.iii.103). She is not reassured when told that ‘England’s not mutinous; /

‘Tis peopled all with subjects, not with outlaws’ (*1 Richard II*, II.iii. 39-42).

Once more Tresilian’s *eminence grise* figures prominently as Cheney, entering to summon the Duchess of Gloucester, tells Anne of the dubious tricks he and the king are concocting to boost revenues—

Tresilian with King Richard likewise sits
Devising taxes and strange shifts for money.
—*1 Richard II*, II.iii.98-9

—a skillful foreshadowing of the scene that follows. At the conclusion of II.iii Anne is left ‘a queen of misery’ (II.iii.80) to lament in private her husband’s self-destructive follies.

Illegalities in Action

First theory, then practice. Act III.i demonstrates Tresilian’s legal fraudulence in action. Observed, as the scene opens, ‘whispering with the King’ (III.i.0.s.d), he soon reveals his brilliantly evil contrivance, as the play presents it, to ‘fill up [Richard’s] treasury’ (III.i.7). The Blank Charters scam, forced promissory notes with their amounts to be filled in later, is greeted with wonder and acclaim:

Scroop: Excellent, Tresilian!
Bushy: Noble Lord Chief Justice!
Bagot: Where should his Grace get such a Councilor!
—*1 Richard II*, III.i.24-6

Tresilian himself describes the scheme as a ‘trick,’ (III.i.14), a term used throughout the play, and elsewhere in Shakespeare, to mean a smart but dishonest maneuver. Among many examples in *Woodstock* we find: ‘Was this the trick, sweet prince? Alack the day’ (II.ii. 95), ‘There’s the trick on’t!’ (III.i.14), ‘I have a trick in law’ (III. i.134), ‘Oh, they say there are strange tricks come forth / To fetch in money’ (III.ii.35-6), ‘Oh, my lords, I have set a trick afoot for ye; an’ ye follow it hard and get the king to sign it, you’ll be all kings by it’ (IV.i.39-40), ‘I have a trick shall fetch him from his house at Plashy in spite of all his favorites,’ (IV.i.

78-9), 'I know my lord will find some trick / To seize their goods' (IV.iii.5-6), 'my lord, I have a trick for't' (IV.iii.57), 'My lord, have ye no trick of law to defend us? No demur or writ of error to remove us?' (V.ii.27-8), 'I have thought of a [trick] that ye shall 'scape them all most bravely' (V.v.22-3), 'I have thought upon this trick: I must take ye prisoner' (V.v.31), 'I thank him he taught me this trick, to save myself from hanging' (V.vi.22-3).

These may be compared with *I Henry IV*, II.iv.262-5:

Prince: ...What trick? what device? what starting-hole canst thou now find out to hide thee from this open and apparent shame?

Poins: Come, let's hear, Jack; what trick hast thou now?

In his first soliloquy, Tresilian colonizes as his own this terrain of ambiguous legality, his most memorable phrase, 'legit or non-legit?' (I.ii.29) setting the course he maintains to his own bitter end. He is Shakespeare's archetypal shyster.

The Blank Charters carry his hallmark, not only cleverly circumventing parliament's right to authorize taxes but providing legal ways to confiscate property itself. This is quite an ingenious fleshing out on the dramatist's part, raising a host of legal issues hot in the 1590s. As Tipton notes:

Tresilian's blank charters are particularly obnoxious violations of the law of property because they both rob citizens of their property and deny those citizens the chance to approve the tax forced upon them. The blank charters deny their recipients the ability to even know how much for which they will be taxed, let alone the chance to acquiesce in the taxation.⁹³

Queen Anne enters, determined somehow to check Richard's Icarian plunge into catastrophe. Yet as we've seen, she too has learned the value of equivocation, responding to her husband's ministers and their ludicrous fashions with tactful agility (*I Richard II*, III.i.44, 59). Language itself—all language, even that of the play's most virtuous characters—grows subversive and cor-

⁹³ Tipton, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

rupt, part of the general poisoning. Death may be hidden in a healthful drink, mortal debt written upon an innocent parchment, treason put in (and into) any man's head. In the next scene even plain-speaking Woodstock puns and equivocates. When Richard witlessly remarks,

I tell thee, Nan, the states of Christendom
Shall wonder at our English royalty
—*I Richard II*, III.i.50-1

what comes out pathognomically is the reverse of what he thinks he's putting in. Other examples include the emotive negatives attending 'quaint' and 'resolve' in, for example, 'Suit they [the new fashions] not quaintly, Nan? Sweet queen, resolve me!' (III.i.58).⁹⁴

The adoption of the licitly illicit Charters policy is accompanied by an extension of the king's legal justifications for increasing his autarchic rule. Anne asks him to revoke his 'sentence' on his uncles—the grammatical associations are probably intentional—but Richard refuses because

Kings' words are laws: if we infringe our word,
We break our law.
—*I Richard II*, III.i.66-7

This sentiment and its placement are strategic and later repeated. Richard has crossed his Rubicon without realizing it: from 'who dares encounter with our will?' in I.iii, his unspoken will itself now claims the force of law. This theory and its practice set him on a collision course with parliament and the old nobility. Indeed, among the charges 'Objected' against him in 1399 was that '...he said that the lawes of the realme were in his head.'⁹⁵

England desired a king, which is what it got in Bullingbrook, and not a Roman emperor—'And thou shalt reign like an emperor over us,' (*I Richard II*, IV.i. 228)—which is what it jettisoned in Richard. From this perspective, an Elizabethan playwright-

⁹⁴ *OED*, 'quaint,' 1b, 2, 7; 'resolve,' 2a, 4, II. 6b, 8, 22a.

⁹⁵ Holinshed, *Chronicles*, II, p. 860.

historian might well consider the legal issues raised and resolved in the early reign of Richard II to be constitutionally of the first importance.

And indeed they were. Taking his play objectively, that is, looking at it without *2 Richard II* in mind, Anon plainly recommends some form of constitutional monarchy as best for England. Assuming Shakespeare is our dramatist, the proposal is typically prescient, even politically progressive for its day.

Richard exits III.i with a further display of capricious royal will. Perfectly aware of the outrage the Blank Charters will provoke, and fearing Woodstock as a political rival, he sends a messenger to recall him to Court: 'We'll have him near us. Within his arrow's length / We stand secure: we can restrain his strength' (III.i.106-7). He then departs with his entourage to show off their new fashions in public and observe the builders' progress at Westminster Hall (ironically of course the site of his ultimate deposition).

Tresilian summons his agents, Crosby, Fleming and Nimble, giving them precise instructions for the use and distribution of the Blanks. Again the theme is legit or non-legit?—that is the question. Their commission is charged 'with the Council's hands' (III.i.124) to ensure the cooperation of local officials. The Blanks are to be signed and sealed, and careful note made of how much each signee is worth, 'what rents, / What lands, or what revenues they spend by th' year.' (III.i.128-9). Tresilian's agents are also to act as spies, marking 'who grudges or but speaks amiss' (III.i.132-3) and then arresting them. Once victims are in the toils of the legal system,

I have a trick in law
Shall make King Richard seize into his hands
The forfeiture of all their goods and lands.
—*1 Richard II*, III.i.135-7

The scene ends with the increasingly sinister figure of Nimble

rattling his own and England's chains. The jeer in his last line reveals unexpected characterological depths and ambiguities, all developed later:

We will domineer over the vulgar like so many Saint Georges over the poor dragons. Come, sirs, we are like to have a flourishing commonwealth, i' faith!

—*1 Richard II*, III.i.165-7

In III.ii, Woodstock, York and Lancaster gather at Plashy to discuss the increasingly perilous condition of England and the Crown. When Cheney arrives with news of the Blanks, 'strange tricks come forth / To fetch in money' (III.ii.35-6), the three brothers immediately recognize that

This foul oppression will withdraw all duty,
And in the commons' hearts hot rancors breed
To make our country's bosom shortly bleed.

—*1 Richard II*, III.ii.87-9

They resolve to do what they can to head off popular anger by promising the country 'redress,' in effect taking their first step towards outright rebellion. 'Can they be rebels call'd, that now turn head?' (III.ii.85) Woodstock rhetorically demands, another climactic.

The rest of the scene is given over to the Spruce Courtier, the drama's legal issues implicit but no less powerfully invoked by the interactive contrast between duke and upstart. We also see Plain Thomas mischievously wondering how he might steal the Courtier's horse, like Henry VI's feather an image of the people:

You're a very indifferent beast, you'll follow any man that will lead you.

—*1 Richard II*, III.ii.155-6

He also privately indulges himself in a few good-humored lies, equivocations and deceits, albeit only to the horse (III.ii.133-45).

It's good to know Woodstock is no saint; and that he is not, shows the Master's touch. He displays an invigorating capacity for bitterness and irony, sarcastically calling Richard his 'dear lord and kinsman' (III.ii.182), while sneering at the three days the Council spent designing new fashions:

By my faith, their wisdoms took great pains, I assure ye!
The state was well employ'd the whiles, by th' rood.

—*I Richard II*, III.ii.191-2

Woodstock's final message to the king, 'Tell him I'll keep these parts in peace to him' (III.ii.227), is also double-edged, for the audience has just seen him and his brothers planning to directly countermand the royal edict. Woodstock is enough of a politician to dissemble.

The Dunstable scene, III.iii, is in my view the play's most powerful, not only for its skillful blend of tragedy and humor and its invention of the theatrically brilliant Simon Ignorance, but because it is so clearly spun from the fiber of the author's being and experience. The townsmen admittedly are grotesques, yet like the faces in a da Vinci cartoon plainly drawn from a real world, one well known to the artist. Rural speech rhythms, attitudes and idioms are also neatly caught and rendered. The locals, canny and suspicious, find themselves out-argued and outfoxed by slick Nimble and his innocent-seeming Blank Charters.

Most of the scene comprises a series of vignettes epitomizing the fear and anxiety of living in a bureaucratic tyranny. I recognize the harmonics from my own boyhood in apartheid South Africa. People gather in small *sotto voce* groups, nervously glancing over their shoulders as they share the political news. Meanwhile the constabulary tries to listen in, identifying the leaders and writing down their names:

Nimble: They begin to murmur, I'll put them all down for whisperers.
Master Bailey, what's he that talks so?

—*I Richard II*, II.iii.49-50

Finally, after being bullied into signing the Blank Charters, a

handful of citizens are arrested *pour encourager les autres* and whisked off to prison to be tortured and then hanged, their land and properties confiscated by the Crown. The method and its moment anticipates the seizure of the Duchy of Lancaster in the next play.

What we're given is the essence of Tresilianism, the triumph of lawyering over law, when even protest becomes meaningless. 'Ay, ay,' snarls Nimble to one of the men who threatens to denounce him, 'when you're hang'd speak what you will, we care not. Away with them!' (III.iii.188-9.)⁹⁶ It's a tyranny but, as the action emphasizes, of a new sort, thought-out and cleverly leveraged via local officials. Richard's abuses are camouflaged, like so much else in the play, by ornate dress and the language of officialdom:

You have seen the High Shrieve's warrant and the Council's commission, and therefore I charge ye in the king's name, be ready to assist us.

—*I Richard II*, III.iii.3-5

Simon Ignorance, the frightened toady, rushes in to help, his ingratiating fear palpable and grimly expressed. He's a buffoon but a dangerous one, the kind of self-seeking creep—but then who can blame him?—without whom the system could not operate. His portrait is a kind of somber or doleful satire, acrid as Kafka's Castle, less humorous than Gogol's Inspector-General, more overtly political than both:

I have begun myself and seal'd one of your Blanks already, and by my example there's more shall follow. I know my place and calling, my name is Ignorance and I am Bailey of Dunstable... You shall find me most pestiferous to assist ye; and so I pray ye, commend my service to your good lord and master.

—*I Richard II*, III.iii.6-8, 132-3

⁹⁶ In her great study of totalitarianism Arendt cites David Rousset on Nazism, *Les Jours de Notre Mort* (1947): 'How many people here still believe that a protest has even historic importance?' (Hannah Arendt: *The Burden of Our Times* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1951) p. 423.)

As indicated, three contrasting in stances of legal terror follow. First, a group of local merchants is partly tricked, partly coerced, into signing Blank Charters—

There is no harm, I warrant ye. What need you fear, when ye see Bailey Ignorance has seal'd before ye?...Here, ye bacon-fed pudding-eaters, are ye afraid of a sheepskin?...And can it be any harm, think ye, to set your hands to nothing? These Blank Charters are but little pieces of parchment.

—*I Richard II*, III.ii.92-3, 95, 99-101

—then arrested and charged with ‘grumbling’ and ‘whispering’ against the government. Though their fate at this point is uncertain, we later learn that they are indeed to be hanged, as Nimble villainously promises, and their properties and livings forfeit to the Crown. It’s not only judicial murder then but the destruction of entire families. We have to remind ourselves that the men’s crime is to have listened to a rumor that

King Richard’s new Councilors (God amend them) had crept into honest men’s places than themselves were, and that the King’s uncles and the old lords were all banish’d the court, and he said flatly we should never have a merry world as long as it was so.

—*I Richard II*, III.iii.57-61

Mere words alone, unsupported by any overt act—one of the big debates in Tudor treason law—constitute treachery in this nightmare creation. The dramatist’s rancid view is clear enough. As Tipton points out, Henry VIII’s 1534 Treason Act, updated in the reigns of Edward VI, Mary, and twice by Elizabeth,⁹⁷

allowed for the prosecution of treason based solely on spoken words... [and] caused wide-spread anger and alarm...Edward, Mary and Elizabeth all reinstated the concept of treasonous words as their reigns progressed...the idea of spoken words as treason remained a threatening presence throughout the century.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Edward VI 1552, Mary 1554, Elizabeth 1571 and 1585. Texts are given in Elton, *The Tudor Constitution: Documents and Commentary*, pp. 61-3, 67-9, 72, 76.

⁹⁸ Tipton, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

In fact the Elizabethan statutes—the ones most relevant to our play—cast their net more widely still, condemning as treason all critical or disapproving ‘compasses, imaginations, inventions, devices or intentions,’ and any ‘printing, writing, ciphering, speech, words or sayings.’ Traitors were those who ‘publish, declare, hold opinion, affirm or say by any speech, express words or sayings’ anything questioning the authority of the Crown.⁹⁹ They and ‘their aiders, consenters, counsellors and abettors’ were to ‘suffer such pains of death and other penalties as is limited and accustomed in cases of high treason.’¹⁰⁰

I Richard II, III.iii mocks this absurdly comprehensive language by taking it at its word. Singing becomes an arrestable offense, as we see from the fate of the second set of victims, the schoolmaster and his servant. Apprehended for the mildly political ballad, ‘Will ye buy any parchment knives?’ with its ambiguous chorus, ‘God Bless my lord Tresilian!’ (III.iii.149-171), the two men are carted off and, as we later learn, condemned to death:

Schoolmaster: Treason? Patientia good sir, we spoke not a word!

Bailey: Be not so pestiferous, mine ears have heard your examinations, wherein you utter’d most shameful treason, for ye said, ‘God bless my lord Tresilian.’

Schoolmaster: I hope there’s no treason in that, sir.

Nimble: That shall be tried!

—*I Richard II*, III.iii.179-83

The servant’s crime is to have listened, that is, stood silently by while sentiments critical of the government were expressed, like the play’s audience, some of whom will have got the point. Finally, with the remorseless logic of a true dictatorship, an unequivocally innocent man is taken into custody for simply whistling the tune of the schoolmaster’s song:

⁹⁹ 1534: 26 Henry VIII, c. 13 (*The Statutes of the Realm*, London: Record Commission, 1830-52), cited in Elton, *The Tudor Constitution*, pp. 61-7; John Bellamy: *The Tudor Law of Treason: An Introduction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979) pp. 14, 30-2.

¹⁰⁰ Elton, *The Tudor Constitution*, p. 63.

There's a piece of treason that flies up and down the country in the likeness of a ballad, and this being the very tune of it, thou hast whistl'd treason.

—*I Richard II*, III.ii.202-4

By now officialdom is drunk with power, freely inventing categories of default and arguments to uphold them. Among the play's great legal parodies is Nimble's wily reasoning by which the whistler is condemned. His ingenuity evokes both laughter and despair:

That's all one. If a man whistles treason, 'tis as ill as speaking [it.] Mark me, Master Bailey: the bird whistles that cannot speak, and [yet] there be birds in a manner that can speak too. Your raven will call ye [black,] your crow will call ye knave, Master Bailey, ergo he that can whistle can speak, and therefore this fellow hath both spoke and whistl'd treason. How say you, Bailey Ignorance?

—*I Richard II*, III.iii.206-11

'Ye have argued well, sir,' Ignorance responds. One might say that his and Nimble's words have metamorphosed into the law itself, an outrage to parliament even greater than Richard's (who at least has some kind of theory in support). The whistler's most casual comment or explanation is turned against him:

Ignorance No? How durst you whistle, then? Or what cause had ye to do so?

Whistler: The truth is, sir, I had lost two calves out of my pasture, and being in search for them, from the top of the hill I might spy you two i' the bottom here, and took ye for my calves, sir; and that made me come whistling down for joy, in hope I had found them.

Nimble: More treason yet, he takes a courtier and a Bailey for two calves! To limbo with him, he shall be quarter'd and then hang'd!

Whistler: Good Master Bailey, be pitiful!

Ignorance: Why, law ye, sir, he makes a pitiful fellow of a bailey too! Away with him...

—*I Richard II*, III.ii.218-27

Act III.iii is a legal and political tragedy vectored as bucolic comedy: that is its Shakespeare-like genius. Later, when the arrestees are arraigned, tried and convicted, we find the joke's on us, for as Elton observes, 'the essence of law lies in its sanc-

tion.’¹⁰¹ We’ve been laughing unwittingly at ourselves and suddenly it’s not funny anymore.

The jokey unjokes continue in IV.i where we find Tresilian, the evil puppet master, manipulating the entire machinery of state from behind the throne. Like the murderous masque-within-the-play, which he also masterminds in this scene, he conducts a ruthless scam-within-the-scam which, it is briefly suggested, may leave him richer even than the king:

So, seven thousand pounds
From Bedford, Buckingham and Oxford shires,
These Blanks already have return’d the king.
So then there’s four for me and three for him;
Our pains in this must needs be satisfied.

—*1 Richard II*, IV.i.6-10

Tresilian’s embezzlements—note the modernity of his crime, which in Shakespeare’s day will not have seemed so drearily familiar as in ours¹⁰²—are justified by the amoral spirit, as the play has it, of Richard II’s reign and era:

Good husbands will make hay while the sun shines,
And so must we, for thus conclude these times:
So men be rich enough, they’re good enough.
Let fools make conscience how they get their coin,
I’ll please the King and keep me in his grace,
For princes’ favors purchase land apace.

—*1 Richard II*, IV.i.11-16

That last line is the key: it looks ahead to the contractual division of the kingdom later in the scene, potentially the most consequential of all Richard’s legal illegalities and the one in which he mortally and self-damningly sets aside KTB philosophy. The king treats his Body Politic as though it were his Body Natural, and vice versa, an error he continues to make in *2 Richard II*,

¹⁰¹ Elton, *The Tudor Constitution*, p. 334.

¹⁰² Coincidentally enough, the term ‘embezzlement’ was first used in John of Gaunt’s last will and testament, 1397 (*OED* 1).

claiming against experience that

The breath of worldly men cannot depose
The deputy elected by the Lord.

—2 *Richard II*, III.ii.56-7

Those critics who attack the division of England in *1 Richard II* as ahistorical quite miss the point, which is that the moment is cast principally in the subjunctive voice (and keeping in mind that Richard was finally deposed in 1399 for having ‘giuen possessions of the crowne to men vnworthie.’¹⁰³) If the king can inherit or bequeath England like a piece of private property, as we saw in II.ii and as Henry VIII had done for his descendants in no fewer than three Acts of Succession and a Will, can he then lease or even sell it in the self-same way? After handing over to Bagot his slice of the kingdom, Richard unselfconsciously says

Those parts are thine as amply, Bagot, as the crown is mine.

—1 *Richard II*, IV.i.201-2

his language strikingly recalling Henry’s first and most important Act of Succession assigning to his children ‘the imperial crown...in as large and ample manner as your Highness to this present time hath the same as king of this realm.’¹⁰⁴ While few members of the audience could be expected to pick up on the reference, these echoes are obviously deliberate and considered.

Beyond maneuvers of the above sort, if the monarch were all-powerful and legislatively unchecked—the thrust of Richard’s policy—he might commit any political or personal atrocity. This is the play’s larger thesis, an observation put in the mouth of Richard himself—

King: Remember ye not the proviso enacted in our last parliament, that no statute, were it ne’er so profitable for the commonwealth, should stand in any force ‘gainst our proceedings?

¹⁰³ Holinshed, *Chronicles*, II, p. 859.

¹⁰⁴ Elton, *The Tudor Constitution*, p. 7.

Green: 'Tis true, my lord: then what should hinder ye to accomplish anything that may best please your kingly spirit to determine?

King: True, Green, and we will do it, in spite of them. Is't just, Tresilian?

Tresilian: Most just, my liege.

—*I Richard II*, IV.i.158-60

This exchange is apparently derived from Richard's trial in 1399:

15 Item, the parlement setting and enacting diverse notable statutes, for the profit and advancement of the commonwealth, he by his privie freends and solicitors caused to be enacted, that no act then enacted, should be more prejudiciall to him, than it was to anie of his predecesors: through which proviso he did often as [he] listed, and not as the law did meane.¹⁰⁵

The legal formula, 'privie freends and solicitors,' developed to permit the farming of the realm, renting it out, is a bold extension of early contract law, resting on the presumptions we've just discussed, viz., that the king's word supersedes parliament in all respects and that his kingdom is a personal estate to be disposed of as he desires:

Tresilian: Most just, my liege. These gentlemen here, Sir Henry Green, Sir Edward Bagot, Sir William Bushy, and Sir Thomas Scroop, all jointly here stand bound to pay your Majesty, or your deputy, wherever you remain, seven thousand pounds a month for this your kingdom; for which your Grace, by these writings, surrenders to their hands all your crown lands, lordships, manors, rents, taxes, subsidies, fifteens, imposts, foreign customs, staples for wool, tin, lead, and cloth; all forfeitures of goods or lands confiscate, and all other duties that is, shall, or may appertain to the king or crown's revenues; and for non-payment of the sum or sums aforesaid, your Majesty to seize the lands and goods of the said gentlemen above named, and their bodies to be imprisoned at your Grace's pleasure.

—*I Richard II*, IV.i.164-74

The implicit ironies are picked off one by one in the dialogue that follows: 'How like you that, Green?' Richard triumphantly

¹⁰⁵ Holinshed, *Chronicles*, II, p. 860.

demands (IV.i.175), completely overlooking the point that by contracting out his right to imprison, etc., formerly absolute, he has rendered himself and his kingdom bonds slave to the law. John of Gaunt's denunciations in both dramas resound justly enough. By reducing his realm to the status of a pelting farm, hired land, and his title to that of landlord, Richard effectively unking himself, setting the conditions for Bullingbrook's assumption of power in the second play. Gaunt's charge that England

Is now leased out...

With inky blots and rotten parchment bonds.

Landlord of England art thou now, not king:

Thy state of law is bonds slave to the law.

—2 *Richard II*, II.i.58-113

makes the point explicit, summarizing the legal conditions preceding his son's act of usurpation.

Legal Privilege

Elsewhere in IV.i Richard prepares for his most overtly criminal act, Woodstock's kidnapping and murder. Accompanying it is a clear if anachronistic abuse of the 1539 Act of Proclamations—

Go, Tresilian, let proclamations straight be sent

Wherein thou shalt accuse the dukes of treason,

And then attach, condemn, and close imprison them.

—1 *Richard II*, IV.i.108-10

—which allowed Henry VIII 'to set forth proclamations for the good and politic order and governance of this his realm.'¹⁰⁶

Richard's abuse of the privilege rumbles through to the action's climax when the Lords issue proclamations of their own. Government authority has been transferred.

Worse yet, to forestall the inevitable uprising, Richard commits

¹⁰⁶ 1539: 31 Henry VIII, c. 8 (Elton, *The Tudor Constitution*, pp. 27-30.)

an act of royal treachery which, like the defecting nobles in *King John*, plainly deserves impeachment:

We'll send unto the King of France for aid,
And in requital we'll surrender up
Our forts of Guisnes and Calais to the French.

—*1 Richard II*, IV.i.112-14

The young king is legally and ethically lost, and he knows it. All that remains is *force supérieure* and a crypto-Forsterian willingness to betray his country rather than his friends:

Let crown and kingdom waste, yea life and all,
Before King Richard see his true friends fall!

—*1 Richard II*, IV.iii.115-16

The rest of Richard's reign is a desperate gamble, a slow and almost willing surrender to the inevitable by a man who, we've seen, refuses in his heart of hearts to be the monarch history and the times demand. That role passes finally to Henry Bullingbrook.

Act IV.ii, like the Dunstable scene, is theory's concrete expression, the on-the-ground reality of what Richard's breaches and expansions of the law signify in the actual world. Nor do I mean simply the 'actual world' of the drama, for as we've seen the theatrical and philosophical complexities of the masque-within-the-play draw audiences generally into the performance, exacting complicity and participation. The virtually undisguised suggestion that Elizabeth I herself 'directs the masque' (IV.ii. 125), i.e., is as vulnerable as Richard to allegations of unlawfulness and misrule, compounds the sense of risk and dangerous excitement. The closest analogy I can think of is the staging of *Les Mouches* (1943), Sartre's edgy treatment of the Orestes story, in German-occupied Paris during World War II.

Before the masque and after it—its immediate dramatic context—we encounter a series of legal oppositions consistent with the play's analysis as a whole. Woodstock is all propriety and due process, Richard and his governing council little more than a

gang of thugs. Aware of his own political significance and the anger provoked by the Blank Charters, Woodstock reminds the masquers, whose goodwill and anonymity he accepts at face value, that Richard is

our king and God's great deputy,
And if ye hunt to have me second ye
In any rash attempt against his state,
Afore my God, I'll ne'er consent unto it.
I ever yet was just and true to him,
And so will still remain. What's now amiss
Our sins have caus'd, and we must bide heaven's will.
I speak my heart: I am Plain Thomas still.

—*I Richard II*, IV.ii.145-52

This is orthodox Tudorism, emphasizing the egregiousness of what happens next. Again Richard preserves legal forms but not their content. Woodstock is 'arrested' according to established practice—

Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester,
Earl of Cambridge and of Buckingham,
I here arrest thee in King Richard's name
Of treason to the crown, his state and realm.

—*I Richard II*, IV.i.176-9

—but then instantly denied his rights or, as the play suggests, what ought to be his rights, and shipped off to Calais:

Woodstock: I'll put in bail, and answer to the law.
Speak, is King Richard here?
All: No, no, my lord. Away with him!
Woodstock: Villains, touch me not!
I am descended of the royal blood,
King Richard's uncle, his grandsire's son,
His princely father's brother!
Becomes it princes to be led like slaves?
King: Put on a vizard! Stop his cries!

—*I Richard II*, IV.ii.184-9

The scene ends on a note of royal triumph. The palace revolution has been successfully accomplished. What lies ahead however is

civil war, the counter-revolution, cast (as always) as a liberation struggle.

Act IV.iii relentlessly continues Shakespeare's prescient vision of the totalitarian state, a system of oppression marked by the appearance of legalities: fake elections, rigged courts, show trials. The scene opens with Tresilian at his Rhadamanthine worst, megalomania cloaked in the robes of justice. Immediately before his entrance Crosby and Nimble tell us that

The High Shrieves of Kent and Northumberland
With twenty gentlemen are all arrested
For privy whisperers against the state...
There will be work for the hangman first; then we rifle the goods
and my lord [i.e., Tresilian] seizes the lands.

—*I Richard II*, IV.iii.2-4, 7-8

The prisoners are arraigned and confronted in a mockery of a trial by a Lord Chief Justice who ruthlessly strips from them every right, natural or established, before casting them away. He enters, the most feared and powerful figure in the land, with his mind already made up: 'Call for a marshal there! Commit the traitors!' (IV.iii.12). When the Shrieve of Kent attempts to speak he is instantly silenced: 'Sir, we'll not hear ye, the proof's too plain against ye!' (IV.iii.14). Tresilian then launches into a violent legalist attack, accusing the men of treachery for refusing to sign Blank Charters 'gainst the King's decrees' (IV.iii.18).

The shrieves' defense recalls the subtle disagreement over 'rights' spelled out in Richard's coronation oath, royal prerogatives vs. ancient liberties (II.ii.109-12). Fine shades of verbal meaning, the play demonstrates, often turn out to have great consequences—just the sort of point we'd expect from a dramatist with legal training and an interest in history and power politics. The Shrieve of Kent explains his refusal to sign in terms of privileges going back to 1066, the dawn of English political time:

My lord, I plead our ancient liberties
Recorded and enroll'd in the king's Crown Office,
Wherein the men of Kent are clear discharg'd

Of fines, fifteens, or any other taxes,
Forever given them by the Conqueror.

—*1 Richard II*, IV.iii.19-23

Tresilian responds with equivocations that outdo even Nimble's sophistry condemning the whistler. The new tax does not breach ancient rights, it's simply a collecting of 'spare money' to be used laudably in the national defense, and besides the king's power is absolute, and besides any opposition to his will deserves death:

You're still deceiv'd. Those Charters were not sent
To abrogate your ancient privilege,
But for his Highness' use they were devis'd
To gather and collect amongst his subjects
Such sums of money as they well might spare,
And he in their defense must hourly spend.
Is not the subjects' wealth at the King's will?
What, is he lord of lives and not of lands?
Is not his high displeasure present death?
And dare ye stir his indignation so?

—*1 Richard II*, IV.iii.19-23

The shrieves bravely try again, but it's a lost cause. At issue is the nature of kingship itself, the rule of a 'gentle,' i.e., civilized, prince against the tyranny of an emperor. Note the recurrence of the term 'bond-slave,' a key locution in Shakespeare's portrayal of Richard II's self-doomed autocracy. These men are not traitors, they're being legally robbed. It's quite striking that the play sees everything entirely from their point of view:

We are free-born, my lord, yet do confess
Our lives and goods are at the King's dispose,
But how, my lord, like to a gentle prince,
To take or borrow what we best may spare,
And not, like bond-slaves, force it from our hands.

—*1 Richard II*, IV.iii.34-8

Tresilian's answer goes to the core of the debate: 'Will you set limits to the King's high pleasure?' (IV.iii.40). But in his mouth

the question is rhetorical, an unequal argument, since he is simultaneously judge, prosecutor and lawmaker—the essence of despotism.

Tresilian is also a silencer: throughout the play people vainly beg him to listen. Even Nimble in their first scene complains: ‘My mouth was open, I’m sure!—If your Honor would please to hear me—!’ (I.ii.82-3) In the end the shrieval pleas are also simply and brutally silenced:

Why suffer ye their speech? To prison, hie!
There let them perish, rot, consume, and die!
Exeunt Officers with the Shrieves
—1 *Richard II*, IV.iii.47-8

Anon/Shakespeare however is not finished with his dissection of the Ricardian revolution which has passed, as it were, its 18th Brumaire and entered the phase of Terror. Tresilian instructs his men Crosby and Fleming:

Go, sirs, to terrify the traitors more,
Ye shall have warrants straight to hang them all.
—1 *Richard II*, IV.iii.80-1

Nimble enters with a list of ‘Seven hundred whispering traitors’ (IV.iii.69), including the schoolmaster and the whistler. Tresilian notes, significantly adding himself to the king and even using the royal we, that

Of all the sort, these are most dangerous
To stir rebellion ‘gainst the King and us.
—1 *Richard II*, IV.iii.34-8

Yet as the text makes clear, the prisoners’ defaults are all imaginary, concocted by the authorities. Shakespeare our contemporary out-Orwells Orwell: their transgressions aren’t merely thought-crimes they’re non-existent thought-crimes. Nimble assures his master,

I'll put treason into any man's head, my lord, let him answer it
as he can.

—*I Richard II*, IV.i.60-1

his words and their bearing chillingly anticipating Lavrenti Beria, Stalin's ruthless chief of police, who famously told his boss, 'Give me the man, I'll find his crime.'

The parallels go quite remarkably beyond mere coincidence, for as we've seen, the victims are explicitly moneyed peasants, English *kulaks*,

Fat chuffs, my lord, all landed men. Rich farmers, graziers and such fellows,

—*I Richard II*, IV.iii.74-5

whose lands, Tresilian remarks, 'are better than their lives to us' (IV.iii.78). The more tyranny changes, the more it is the same. Politics, greed and legalized theft fuse in a set of powerful, almost timeless images.

Fate—or, if you prefer, History—intervenes at this point with the sudden death of Queen Anne. The entire narrative, dropping as it were into a minor key, shifts perceptibly from national outrage to Richard's personal tragedy. Indeed, the two converge, as they should in the history of a king:

Oh, God, I fear even here begins our woe:
Her death's but chorus to some tragic scene
That shortly will confound our state and realm.

—*I Richard II*, IV.iii.143-5

Desperate to recover his lost integrity and restore legality, the distraught monarch revokes Woodstock's death sentence—too late, or too ineffectually. He is already in a prison of his own construction, the minions his warders, 'The jewels of his heart, his dearest loves,' as Tresilian describes them, not without sarcasm (I.ii.43). Richard's royal command is disregarded though it's on the record, partly exculpating him. He leaves the stage a virtual hostage to himself, not to be seen again until his ignomin-

ious defeat at Radcot Bridge. The last we hear is that he's been overthrown and taken prisoner by the peers (V.v.9).

Act V.i, Woodstock's murder at Calais, is of course the most vivid portrayal of criminal behavior in the play. As this suggests, it's not indulged in merely for spectacle or dramatic tragedy but as a further variation on the theme of sham legality. Lapoole reminds the murderers,

No, wound him not,
It must be done so fair and cunningly
As if he died a common natural death,
For so we must give out to all that ask.

—*I Richard II*, V.i.11-14

Afterwards he remarks with satisfaction:

So, this was well perform'd. Now who but we
Can make report of Woodstock's tragedy?
Only he died a natural death at Calais—
So must we give it out, or else King Richard
Through Europe's kingdoms will be hardly censur'd.

—*I Richard II*, V.i.271-5

It's all a public-relations exercise, and when it fails the world comes crashing down around King Richard's ears. The attempt to lure Woodstock into writing a confession of guilt, disguised as an appeal for mercy, constitutes another manipulation of the law, as he himself well recognizes:

...why should my fond entreaties
Make my true loyalty appear like treason?
No, no, Lapoole, let guilty men beg pardons;
My mind is clear.

—*I Richard II*, V.i.177-81

The legalities breached by Lancaster and York in rising up against their nephew's murderous regime are absolved in advance by the ghosts of Edward III and the Black Prince, and also as it were by a kind of Indulgence paid in Woodstock's blood:

If I must die, bear record, righteous heaven,
How I have nightly wak'd for England's good,
And yet to right her wrongs would spend my blood.
Send thy sad doom, King Richard, take my life,
I wish my death might ease my country's grief.

—*1 Richard II*, V.i.123-7

It's to the dramatist's credit that there is not the slightest suggestion here of cheap or even subtle analogies with Christian redemption. Woodstock is not England's savior. That role belongs to Henry VII.

Tresilian, Nimble and Green

The play's relentless focus on the law emerges again in the unexpected star turns of V.ii and later V.v, Nimble and Tresilian, whose dialogue and anxieties keep all the legal issues front and center. The king's corrupt social and political system is crumbling rapidly: his proclamations of the Lords' treachery are disregarded by the people, who, Nimble reports, 'say the proclamation's false, my lord, / And they'll not fight against the King's friends' (V.ii.14-15). Pressganged into military service, the minions' troops run away as soon as possible. Tresilian's predictable, one-note response—

They shall be hang'd like dogs for't!
What, dares the slaves refuse their sovereign?

—*1 Richard II*, V.ii.12-13

—rings as hollow as the crown on Richard's head. Without the threat of force, legal chicanery is equally empty:

Nimble: My lord, have ye no trick of law to defend us?
No demur or writ of error to remove us?

Tresilian: Nimble, we must be wise.

Nimble: Then let's not stay to have more wit beaten into our heads.
I like not that, my lord.

—*1 Richard II*, V.ii.27-32

Tresilian and Nimble decide to run away from the real and inevitable justice of Woodstock's outraged brothers, Lancaster and York, though one final legal twist still lies ahead. This play is nothing if not a web of forensic ironies.

Among the greatest of these is Act V.iii, perhaps the only battle in Shakespeare fought exclusively for justice. It's clear from the start that the rebels have no interest in power or the crown. Lancaster articulates their war aims without irony:

This day shall here determinate all wrongs.
The meanest man tax'd by their foul oppressions
Shall be permitted freely to accuse,
And right they shall have to regain their own,
Or all shall sink to dark confusion.

—*1 Richard II*, V.iii.33-7

Later he tells Richard and the minions exactly what he and his fellow peers require. There is nothing to suggest that his words are insincere and, as we've seen, it is overwhelmingly likely that the play ended with the rebels' objectives realized and the king magnanimously restored. It's quite striking too that again the issues are framed exclusively in terms of law:

Let him revoke the proclamations,
Clear us of all supposed crimes of treason,
Reveal where our good brother Gloucester keeps,
And grant that these pernicious flatterers
May by the law be tried, to quit themselves
Of all such heinous crimes alleg'd against them,

And we'll lay down our weapons at thy feet.

—*1 Richard II*, V.iii.120

Richard's response, as always, is to stand upon his crown and military force:

King: Presumptuous traitors!

All: Traitors!

King: Again we double it: rebellious traitors!

Traitors to heaven and us! Draw all your swords

And fling defiance to those traitorous lords!

King's Men: Let our drums thunder and begin the fight!

—*1 Richard II*, V.iii.121-6

Two small but important scenes remain before the drama's lost climax: V.iv, in which Green is slain, and V.v, in which Nimble resolves to turn Tresilian over to the Lords. In the first, the legal theme briefly appears as Richard and his minions prepare to make a run for it: 'Loud proclamations post throughout the camp / With promise of reward to all that take us' (V.iv.44-6), though the king himself, dramatically matured by adversity and grief, has his eyes turned towards another kind of Justice:

Oh, my dear friends, the fearful wrath of heaven
Sits heavy on our heads for Woodstock's death.
Blood cries for blood; and that almighty hand
Permits not murder unreveng'd to stand.
Come, come, we yet may hide ourselves from worldly strength,
But heaven will find us out, and strike at length.

—*I Richard II*, V.iv.49-54

These words look ahead to the climax of our play and even more to the better-remembered finale of Richard's reign in 1399. There can be little doubt that the ambiguity is purposed: Shakespeare/Anon knew perfectly well that the most famous deposition in English history was still to come. Whether he planned at this early point to write its history will remain forever moot.

Act V.v contains the most ironic moment in a play redolent of irony: Tresilian, the man of law, is himself fatally entangled in its coils. With the king's forces in retreat, Nimble recognizes that justice is no moral abstraction but follows rather the locus of political authority—the ultimate rebuttal of Plowden's mysticism. The Lords have themselves issued proclamations superseding Richard's, one of them demanding Tresilian's arrest and threatening death to anyone who conceals him (V.v.26-7, 41-2), another promising 'a thousand marks for him that takes him, with the dukes' favors, and free pardon' (V.v.27-8). He resolves to turn his master in.

At this point the dramatist plays up the ironies for all they're worth. First, Nimble calls his betrayal a 'trick,' one of Tresilian's favorite legalistic terms—

My lord, I have thought upon this trick: I must take ye prisoner.

—*I Richard II*, V.v.30-1

—and then mockingly sings the chorus from the schoolmaster's song, 'God bless my lord Tresilian!' (V.v.35).

He has gone over to the other side. 'Ye see one of your own swords of justice drawn over ye,' Nimble crows (V.v.43), recalling his erstwhile master's promise to 'put the [executioner's] ax into thy hand' (I.ii.122). Nimble indeed 'stands by the law' as Tresilian once promised him (I.ii.123)—the Lords' new law. Increasingly delighted by his own cleverness, he even silences his prisoner (a quick glance back at the fates of the shrieves) as he marches him off to certain death: 'No more words. Away, sir!' (V.v.46).

The surviving last lines of the play (V.vi.1-33) continue to reverberate with the juridical and personal ironies ringing at the conclusion of V.v. 'Our proclamations soon shall find [Tresilian] forth,' says Lancaster (V.vi.13) as Nimble drags him in, the schoolmaster's words, stripped of ambiguity, on his triumphant lips:

The traitor now is ta'en.
I here present the villain,
And if ye needs will know his name,

God bless my lord Tresilian.

—*I Richard II*, V.vi.16-19

What remains of the scene is full of law, legal terms, judicial references and a remembrance of Plowden. Nimble proudly tells the assembled peers that he was once Tresilian's apprentice, 'and I thank him he taught me this trick, to save myself from hanging' (V.vi.22-3). 'Thou'rt a good lawyer, and hast remov'd the cause from thyself fairly' Lancaster smiles back (V.vi.24-5), provoking this bacchanal of further legalisms:

Nimble: I have remov'd it with a Habeas Corpus, and then I took him with a Surssararis, and bound him in this bond to answer it. Nay, I have

studied for my learning, I can tell ye, my lord. There was not a stone between Westminster Hall and Temple Bar but I have told them every morning.

—*I Richard II*, V.vi.26-30

The MS breaks off soon afterwards with a final tantalizing reference to Plowden. Asked why he turned against Tresilian, Nimble offers the following incomplete explanation: ‘Partly for these causes: first, the fear of the proclamation, for I have plodded in Plowden and can find no law ...’ (V.vi.33).

No law...what? We shall never know, though it’s clear that *I Richard II* comes from a mind saturated with legal issues, legal questions, precedents, historical examples, torts, subtle and not-so-subtle case applications, ambivalent feelings about the law and lawyers, a sense of first-hand court experiences, justice and injustice, a fascination with words and their political reverberations. And yet it’s all so cunningly integrated with a well-told tale supported by vividly drawn characters, good prose and poetry, powerfully conceived and executed scenes backed by what Rossiter called a ‘big view’ of history, that it’s never intrusive, or at least insufficiently so to have been much noticed.

Conclusion

I Richard II is a complex work conceived, architected and executed by a master playwright with a strong sense of history, politics and legal issues. He saw and understood Richard II’s tragedy in strongly Shakespearean terms, certainly none that conflict with the second play, and expressed his vision using images, doublings, characters, themes and ideas often indistinguishable from Shakespeare. He deployed literally hundreds of expressions found nowhere else but in Shakespeare. Yet he was not a plagiarizing hack and, as we’ve seen, must have written his play decades before Shakespeare composed many of the histories, tragedies and comedies with which it has been paired and compared. The significant ones are *2 Henry VI*, *2 Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Julius Caesar*, *Edward III*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, the *Henry IV* plays and *Hamlet*, nine in all, though perhaps the most stunning result of our journey is that it traverses the whole of the *Collected Works*. There is not a single Shakespeare

play without deep and even extensive connections to *1 Richard II*; most of his poems, including the sonnets and the first and second heirs of his invention, also bear unmistakable traces.

Given the abundance of evidence, it seems neither fair nor possible to leave the author, as does Rossiter, the way we found him—faceless, anonymous, unceremoniously forgotten. Every word doth tell his name.