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RICHARD II AND THE MUSIC OF MEN'S LIVES

By PHILIP BROCKBANK

When Richard II, in Shakespeare's play, is approaching the end of his life, he has reason to reflect that the concord of his state and time is shattered:

How sour sweet music is
When time is broke, and no proportion kept!
So is it in the music of men's lives. (5.5.41-3)

We are watching an historical and personal catastrophe, but since we are also approaching the end of one of the most lyrical tragedies of Shakespeare's early maturity, we are also attending to the climax of the poet's harmonious art. Shakespeare, reading the old histories of the disastrous reign of King Richard (perhaps as many as seven of them) and turning them into theatre for our delight, has been making music of men's lives.

An adequate account of the play must attend to the subtle inter-relationships that Shakespeare creates, or re-creates, between the styles of theatrical poetry and historical events, and between the larger processes of human community and the more poignantly focussed, personal processes of the individual life. That the art of the renaissance should invite this kind of critical attention is a sign of its continuity with the art and thought of the middle ages. For Shakespeare, like Boethius, Dante and Chaucer before him, continued to be interested in the ways in which human confusions could be contained within a divine order and an ultimate harmony. The poet, in Chaucer's time and in Shakespeare's (even in our own) is under traditional pressure to satisfy our ethical imaginations, to make art and design out of its representation of muddled passages of life. Thus Dante at the end of the *Purgatorio* is wryly aware that he is obeying both the laws of his poem and the laws of a divine moral dispensation. The *Consolations* of Boethius enable Chaucer to change the perspective of *Troilus and Criseyde* in order that the lovers' human tragedy should be transfigured to divine (and human) comedy.

In her deft analysis of *The Knight's Tale* Elizabeth Salter warns us "not to confuse rhetorical ordering with imaginative";¹ but clear distinctions in this territory are not easy to come by. Theseus (from his reading of Boethius) tries to transcend the lovers' undignified history:

Thanne may men by this ordre wel discerne
 That thilke Moevere stable is and eterne;
 Wel may men knowe, but it be a fool,
 That every part dirryveth from his hool.

(KT 3003-6)

But, as Elizabeth Salter observes, "Our difficulty does not lie in reconciling the death of Arcite with a divinely ordained plan, but in reconciling the noble account of this plan with the ugly manifestation of divine motives and activities which Chaucer has allowed his poem to give."² The perplexities faced by all theodiceans, from classical times, through the Enlightenment of Leibnitz, to the most recent endeavours to vindicate the ways of God to man, recur and persist in insoluble forms, and Shakespeare's *Richard II* is a crucial document in a long tradition. If Chaucer did indeed read his Troilus story to Richard, the king would have had reason to reflect upon his own prospects of looking down from "the holughnesse of the eighthe spere" to contemplate "with ful avyusement, / The erratik sterres herkenyng armonye, / With sownes ful of hevenyssh melodie."³ Bushy in the play speaks of "perspectives which rightly gazed upon / Show nothing but confusion; ey'd awry / Distinguish form" (2.2.19-20). Richard's own story very much needs to be viewed awry to distinguish form.

The play's historicity can, in certain perspectives, be seen to be of a piece with its harmony, inviting us to glance backwards in Shakespeare's art to the fair conjunction of the white rose and the red at the end of *Richard III*, which is itself a glance forward in history to the final end of the "great discord and division" proclaimed by Edward Hall as "the union of the two noble and illustre families of Lancaster and York." Hall's resonant phrases offer a musical resolution of the discords of the reign which has given solace to many since it was first offered to the Tudor public - most recently to those whose responses to Shakespeare's histories have been orchestrated by the late E.M.W. Tillyard. But I wish to look in other directions - towards certain principles at work in the structure of the play, and towards Jean Bodin's ample and complex theories of law, sovereignty and (to return to a phrase from the play) the concord of state and time.

I cannot confidently claim that Shakespeare had read Bodin's *Six Books of the Commonweal* before they were translated from the French by Richard Knolles in 1606 although I think it perfectly possible that he had, but I am concerned with certain convergences and divergences of thought and insight between Bodin's contemplative thought and Shakespeare's theatrical thought. Shakespeare is the poet and playwright of commonwealth, and nowhere moreso than in two musically alert plays of the middle period - *The Merchant of Venice* and *Richard II*.

The Tudor myth of Polydore Vergil's and of Hall's devising is notoriously an instrument of propaganda. In outline it is intended to reassure the subject state of the divine authority of the sovereign figure; Providence has worked to such good purpose that the conflicts of the past are assuaged, the moral and political wounds of the state healed, and under the high and prudent dominion of

Henry VIII, the indubitable flower and very heir of the contending lineages, all will be well.

Bodin's awarenesses are philosophically more spacious, affording an apparently more direct access to the ideology of Renaissance monarchism. "Of the three lawfull Commonweales, that is, a popular estate, an Aristocraticall, and a royall", says Bodin, "a royall monarchie is the best".⁴ The royal monarchy satisfies the elegant principle that a body should have only one head, together with some more intricate principles of geometric proportion which are meant to harmonise the multiple inequalities of society.

With the encouragement of the more conservative scholars of the past fifty years, including Theodore Spencer, Lily B. Campbell and Hardin Craig, we would have little difficulty in reconciling Hall's outline of a stabilising Providential process with Bodin's account of a poised and harmonious society. Shakespeare's histories might then be received on much the same terms as the homilies against wilful rebellion. A nostalgic Tudor recollection of Edward III, or even of Hotspur's Richard ("that sweet lovely rose"), might create the illusion that an old divine dispensation had been recovered and restored.

I prefer to allow the imaginative art its own momentum and autonomy, but I wish at the same time to see it engaging with and dislodging the historical myth and the political wisdom from which it derives some of its effects.

Shakespeare's *Richard II* was not the only play of the period to deal with the reign. At least one (reported by Simon Forman) has been lost. But each of the two survivors has its style and modest structure. *Jack Straw* is made to express the grievances of the populace, exploited by usurers in the market place and saved by the solicitude of an innocent king. *Woodstock* is made of a verse answering to the plain-living and plain-speaking virtues that the playwright attributes to his hero. In the sense of the terms that *Richard II* invites, however, they are not lyrical plays; they have no music.

Marlowe's *Edward II*, which has also occasioned comparison with *Richard II*, does have its music - a music that modulates as the poet diverts the flow of our sympathies from the king's victims to the victim-king:

And there in mire and puddle have I stood
This ten days space; and least that I should sleep
One plays continually upon a drum.
They give me bread and water, being a king.

The words are spoken to that drum-beat. The music is in the indefatigable pulse of life holding on, and it is made out of the historical event, not contemplatively but re-creatively.

Shakespeare's play is about many of the same things as Marlowe's - political assassination, misgovernment, nostalgia for an old chivalric dispensation, royal minions and royal martyrdom but it does not repeat Marlowe's effects. It offers a fuller

manifestation of the nature of historical process and a greater awareness of the significance of style, personal and ideological, in the commonwealth. That historical process, both in the time of Shakespeare and in the time of Richard, was dispossessing the myths of divine kingship even before they could properly establish themselves. The symmetries of Shakespeare's play are related to the fidelity with which he traces this process in the realm and in the consciousness of the king.

In *Richard II* Shakespeare at once re-creates, celebrates, anatomises and repudiates the idea and figure of the divine sovereign. The play realises the pressures of the past upon the present and of the play's present upon England's future. Shakespeare had already written about the Wars of the Roses and in *Richard II* he is aware of their not-too-distant coming on. In *Woodstock* and *Edward II* we may be persuaded that the mess of the realm is the immediate responsibility of those who make it, within the boundaries of the play. In *Richard II*, obscure unstabilizing damage has already been done within the reign but out of reach of the play, the validity of the institution of royal monarchy itself is called in question, and we are made to feel that there can be no going back.

The feat of historical analysis is also a feat of style. For although the style of the play resembles that of others of the same phase (*Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), it is here used upon historical material to historical advantage. Shakespeare's plays of fifteenth century English history are about the paradoxes attending the exercise of power. In the aesthetically and ethically satisfying speculations of Bodin, power is the ceremonious exercise of high moral authority, in the service of divine and natural justice. In the world that falls under Montaigne's sceptical scrutiny in the *Apology for Raymond Sebonde*, a Pacific island is ruled by a dog - recalled in *Lear* as "The great image of authority - a dog's obeyed in office." (4.6.156-7)

Style of a highly formal kind, enlisting many rhetorical devices and refining the symmetries of the language, is particularly apt in *Richard II* because the play is primarily about the relationship between power and ceremony. It is so constructed that the ceremony which makes "high majesty look like itself" fails as a vehicle of government, an instrument of harmony in the commonwealth, but proves to be a source of solace for the abdicating king. It is politically sterile but personally efficacious.

Prompted by Hall,⁵ Shakespeare chose to start his play at the moment when the chronicles tell of Henry, duke of Hereford, presenting a supplication to the king "wherein he appealed the duke of Norfolk in field of battle, for a traitor, false and disloyal to the king, and enemy unto the realm." A "great scaffold" is erected in the castle at Windsor, and the king sits in his "seat of justice" in order to "minister justice to all men that would demand the same, as appertained to his royal majesty." The king commands the constable and marshall of the realm formally to call on appellant and defendant to "shew his reason" or else make peace without delay. Shakespeare's stage is therefore already set in the ceremonious theatre of history. But in what Hall himself calls the "sumptuous

theatre" of the lists at Coventry, the ceremony is arrested, the presiding king abjures it.

Responding to the chronicle material, *Richard II* was probably first played before a stage version of that traditional pageant property, the tournament façade. Evidence of a circumstantial kind might be found in analogues with medieval settings for play and tournament, in more distant analogues from the Netherlands, but - most convincingly - in the play itself: in its deployment of heraldry and of tournament settings, its stylizations of language and its mounting of certain key episodes. In the play's first phase the façade is background for a throne, a display of the rituals of government and of tournament justice, and for the last words of Gaunt, composing a memorial to England's equitable and chivalrous past. The façade may well have carried the devices of Edward's seven sons, the "seven vials of his sacred blood" counted by the duchess in the second scene, devices still to be found (if incompletely) over the main gateway of Trinity in Cambridge. As the play advances, however, the relationship of the action to the façade changes. The splendours and symmetries of public show give place to more intimate episodes of power exercised, mourned, frustrated or abdicated. The play may therefore be said to become less medieval as it advances or, more precisely, less like a Tudor tournament with its inheritance of medieval paraphernalia. In Bodin's terms, it becomes less geometric and harmonical.

Mark Rose (in *Shakespearean Design*, 1972) has shown that the play responds well to chiasmic analysis, and it happens that his little pictures of the play's structure offer the same kind of dainty reassurance as Bodin's. But *Richard II*, like all of Shakespeare's plays, is not only a pattern to look back upon, it is also a process to be lived through. And I turn now to the way in which that process is regulated.

In order to perceive the consonance in the play between the movement of events and the changing significance of theatrical ceremony and of the attendant verbal music, we may compare the three occasions on which appeals are heard before authority: the first and third scenes; the first of Act IV (when Fitzwater and Aumerle appear before Bolingbroke); and the third of Act V (when Aumerle and the Duchess plead for pardon). The appeals are widely spaced but significantly inter-related in the momentum and design of the play and the history.

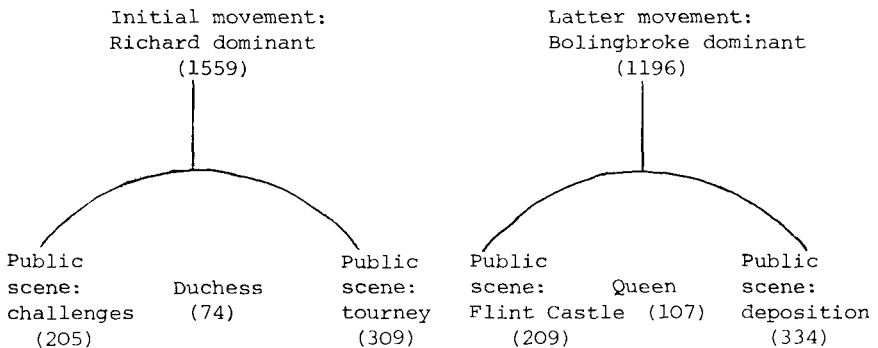
In the first scene authority in the person of Richard presides from the throne in full decorum, and all who play the game obey its rules. The conventions of tournament are themselves the principal sources of theatrical art. The chronicles offer Shakespeare the appellat styles of speech that he can amplify and refine: "Right dear and sovereign lord, here is Thomas Mowbray duke of Norfolk who answereth and saith, and I for him, that all which Henry of Lancaster hath said and declared (saving the reverence due to the king and his council) is a lie; and the said Henry of Lancaster hath falsely and wickedly lied as a false and disloyal knight, and both hath been, and is a traitor against you, your crown, royal majesty and realm." Shakespeare's rhetorical

amplifications are more spacious than Holinshed's and more hospitable to technical analysis. Puttenham, for example, might have found *merismus* or "the distributer" in Richard's address to Mowbray - "the distribution of every part for amplification sake":

Mowbray, impartial are our eyes and ears.
 Were he my brother, nay, my kingdom's heir,
 As he is but my father's brother's son,
 Now by my sceptre's awe I make a vow,
 Such neighbour nearness to our sacred blood
 Should nothing privilege him nor partialize
 The unstooping firmness of my upright soul.
 He is our subject, Mowbray, so art thou:
 Free speech and fearless I to thee allow.

(1.1.115-23)

But it is not mere *merismus*; the amplifications are creating a music of divine authority, a language of command. The music-of-state is in tune with the vocal poise and symmetry, and with the play's structure. The spectacle of this particular scene owes its symmetry to the ascendancy of the throne between contending parties, poised in equal scales. But in a wider span of the play the first scene is itself poised on one side of a point of balance located in the second scene - on a principle that, if Rose is right, operates elegantly throughout the play; Rose decorates his page with patterns like this:



Mark Rose takes more comfort from Pythagoras than I instinctively can; but not, I think, more than Bodin. Bodin's analysis of the harmonies of state comes to rest in analogous diagrams, but only after reflecting upon the dominion of his "wise prince", governing according to the laws of equity and equal poise:⁶

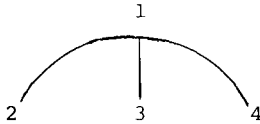
The wise prince shall set his subjects in a most sweet quiet, bound together with an indissoluble bond one of them unto another, together with himselfe, and the Commonweale. As is in the foure first numbers to be seene: which God hath in Harmonicall proportion disposed to show unto us,

that the Royal estate is Harmonicall, and also to be Harmonically governed. For two to three maketh a fift; three to foure, a fourth; two to foure, an eight; one to three, a twelfth, holding the fift and the eight; and one to foure, a double eight, or *Diapason*: which containeth the whole ground and compasse of all tunes and concords of musicke, beyond which he that will passe unto five, shall in so doing marre the harmonie, and make an intollerable discord.

In the margin at this point Bodin sets a simple diagram, meant to demonstrate the plain aesthetic satisfactions to be derived from royal monarchy:

Now the sovereigne prince is exalted above all his subjects, and exempt out of the ranke of them: whose maiestie suffereth no more division than doth the unitie it selfe, which is not set nor accounted among the numbers, howbeit that they all from it take both their force and power.

Figures 2, 3 and 4 in Bodin are the three estates: "Ecclesiasticall . . . Martiall . . . and the common people of all sorts . . . as schollers, marchants and labourers."



The tournament, as trial-by-combat, expresses in spectacle and language, an undivided aspiration and allegiance to God, the sovereign, and the martial self. The freedoms that are allowed and taken are contained within the space of the lists. In this play, as in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Love's Labour's Lost*, Shakespeare encourages his audience to be acutely conscious of the arts of language: "The boisterous late appeal", "the accuser and the accused freely speak", "with a foul traitor's name stuff I thy throat", "what my tongue speaks my right-drawn sword shall prove", "giving reigns and spurs to my free speech". But the rhetorical ornament takes on a political and historical significance by exploiting the pace and purpose of trial by tourney - it makes a cavorting temper of language, spurred, curbed or wheeling, to charge or to keep within bounds, as occasion requires. Neither in the chronicle at this point nor in the play is it of any use to probe beneath the bright armour of the style for the circumspect souls of Bolingbroke and Mowbray, for they are contestants in a verbal lists, and ride the language as they ride their horses. We can judge their skills more readily than their causes, and honour seems more at stake than justice.

Had this trial by combat taken place it might have been the

last in Europe's history. As it is, Richard arrests it because he cannot rest secure in the myth of his divinely derived authority, for reasons made plain both in the murmurings about Woodstock and in his sudden appropriation of Gaunt's property. Richard himself does violence to those harmonies of state which the tournament ritual is designed to honour. "A royal Monarch or king," says Bodin, "is he which placed in sovereignty yeeldeth himself as obedient unto the lawes of nature as he desireth his subjects to be towards himself, leaving unto every man his naturall liberty, and the propriety of his own goods." That concern with "natural liberty" and private property might be the cue for a Marxist historian to remark that Bodin had bourgeois motives for proclaiming a royal monarchy, but in the play Richard's offence is against the proper expectations of the dynastic nobility. He takes "from Time / His charters and his customary rights" and dislocates "fair sequence and succession".

The second appeal scene of the play, which virtually opens Bolingbroke's reign in Westminster (IV.i) finds the old harmony marred, and making an intolerable discord. Shakespeare contrives for it an embarrassing decline in the old rhetorical skill. Bolingbroke is no longer playing that game and makes no attempt to compete. His first words are designed by Shakespeare to recall and to dismiss Richard's equivalent words. From the nine lines beginning, "Mowbray, impartial are our eyes and ears" (1.1.115-123), we come to: "Call forth Bagot; / Now Bagot, freely speak thy mind." (4.1.1-2) But Shakespeare makes appellant and defendant persist in the old mode - in first-scene speech - even if they have lost the old mastery.

To measure the distance between harmonies of justice in the first and fourth acts, we may compare two feats of exhortation. This is Bolingbroke, offering to spit in the first scene:

Ere my tongue
 Shall wound my honour with such feeble wrong
 Or sound so base a parole, my teeth shall tear
 The slavish motive of recanting fear,
 And spit it bleeding in his high disgrace,
 Where shame doth harbour, even in Mowbray's face.
 (1.1.190-5)

And here is Fitzwater, spitting in Act IV:

I dare meet Surrey in a wilderness,
 And spit upon him whilst I say he lies,
 And lies, and lies. There is my bond of faith,
 To tie thee to my strong correction.
 As I intend to thrive in this new world,
 Aurmerle is guilty of my strong appeal.
 (4.1.74-9)

Puttenham would have found much to deplore in Fitzwater's poverty of invention, and would surely have counted "I say he lies, and lies and lies" among the vices of speech. But we can't from this evidence

accuse Fitzwater of having nodded through the rhetoric lectures of the trivium, we can say only that Shakespeare has relaxed his control of ceremonious hyperbole in order to make the squabble uglier and its energies more arbitrary and dangerous, and to make Bolingbroke's laconic interventions more decisive than Richard's elaborate ones could have been. The play's structure has changed its music. We are no longer being invited to enjoy appellant rhetoric in a fan-vaulted monarchy: we are being invited to keep our ears tuned for the new language which makes Bolingbroke "thrive in this new world". His brevities cut like sword-thrusts through the embroidered, tarnished, fabric of the old speech, while gauntlets shower absurdly about his feet.

The effect won from the words is won again by the spectacle. Richard in the first scene presided from the throne, Bolingbroke in this dominates from the stage platform; he dominates without presiding, and it is only when he has done what he wants to do that he moves, casually, "in God's name" to "ascend the regal throne". Power has been exercised but ceremony slighted. Carlisle's impressive protest (the Ecclesiastical estate still speaks the old language) is against the exercise of power without the ritual authority to endorse it:

What subject can give sentence on his king?
 And who sits here that is not Richard's subject?
 (4.1.121-2)

The rest is a familiar re-statement of what are sometimes, mistakenly, supposed to be the unchallenged dominant Elizabethan assumptions about the nature of monarchy:

Shall the figure of God's majesty,
 His captain, steward, deputy elect,
 Anointed, crowned, planted many years,
 Be judg'd by subject and inferior breath,
 And he himself not present
 (4.1.125-9)

- to which the unmusical answer is, "Yes". The figure of God's majesty is a cypher; power now belongs to the platform, not to the throne and the façade. When Richard is called in, it is not in response to Carlisle's eloquence, but to serve Bolingbroke's laconically expressed purpose, "So we shall proceed without suspicion."

The third appeal, Aumerle's before Bolingbroke in Act V Scene 3, has often been cut from performance. In this scene authority becomes casually peremptory and all ceremony turns to farce. The king is musing upon his prodigal son who prefers the stews in London to the triumphs in Oxford, when he is broken in upon by the stage-direction, "*Enter Aumerle amazed*", and responds, "What means our cousin that he stares and looks so wildly?". Bolingbroke dismisses the court but Aumerle still won't talk until the door is locked. "Have thy desire", says the king - another shoulder-shrugging brevity, humouring his mad cousin, and speaking the distance between Henry's possession of power and Richard's. Then York hammers on the door.

Any attempt to make the next exchanges tense and solemn is liable to miscarry. York shouts a breathless warning through the door, "Thou hast a traitor in thy presence there", and Bolingbroke, according to Dr Johnson's stage-directions, draws his sword as he cries, "Villain, I'll make thee safe". Then York, "Open the door or I will break it open", and Bolingbroke lets him in, "What is the matter, uncle? Speak, recover breath; tell us how near is danger That we may arm us to encounter it." The effect of the king trying to keep his crazy relatives under domestic control is inescapable. I doubt if Bolingbroke is even carrying a sword (he speaks to York as if he is unarmed) and to draw it over Aumerle who, the dialogue tells us, is on his knees in abject terror, cannot but be gratuitously comic. Bolingbroke keeps his new-style dignity well enough, but the scene is also a valediction to the old style. York treats the new King as he did the old, and the new King for a moment plays the old part;

Thou sheer, immaculate, and silver fountain
From whence this stream through muddy passages
Hath held his current and defil'd himself

(5.3.61-3)

but not for long. There is more banging on the door, and another frantic voice: "What ho, my liege, for God's sake let me in!" and Bolingbroke: "What shrill-voiced suppliant makes this eager cry?" answered: "A Woman, and thine aunt, great King; 'tis I!" At this point we hardly need Bolingbroke to tell us that "Our scene is altered from a serious thing / And now changed to "the Beggar and the King." "My dangerous cousin", he says to Aumerle (who may be still on his knees), "let your mother in." And mother comes, recovering breath enough to re-enact for the last time, the antique proprieties in the rhetorical music of Richard's reign. "A God on earth thou art", she says at last. That extravagant claim about monarchy is given an appropriate but distinctly absurd human context; the king can spare her son ("such is the breath of kings") and therefore deserves these orisons. But they count for nothing; Aumerle was spared before his mother arrived, and his father's persistence in the old rigour grows fatuous ("Speak it in French, King, say 'pardonne moy'"). The God on Earth has to silence the Duchess's intricate antithetical eloquence - "Good Aunt, stand up", he says, twice, as he turns aside to cope with his "trusty brother-in-law" and the rebel abbot. It is an extraordinary episode, but, as the last of the appeal-scenes, its function in the play's structure is clear if not crucial.

To compare these three scenes is to attend to one of the large extra-personal movements of the play. Ceremonies of government, with their attendant verbal music, however decorous and impressive at the start, are shown to be impotent and farcical at the end. The increasingly manifest political impotence of Richard's elaborate machinery and style of government entails a continuing but almost unseen gravitation of power and allegiance to Bolingbroke. I call this movement unseen and impersonal because Richard's abdication of the throne and Bolingbroke's abdication of ceremony are not explicitly motivated; they are responses to an historical inheritance. The play

is obscure about Bolingbroke's ambition. He enlists the support of the people and returns from Ireland not "for England" but "for Lancaster". We are not allowed to see the gathering armies of the rebels; there are no battles, no riots, no street-scenes. There is just the sense of a dissolving false order, which grows with the discovery that Richard's authority is merely a show, a pageant, like the stage-setting, like the language, and indeed like the play itself.

Take, for example, another of the play's more modest scenes - where Bolingbroke confronts York at Berkeley Castle. The question which we might think of urgent importance - did Bolingbroke come for Lancaster or England? - is hardly asked and the play supplies too few data for an answer. "The noble Duke hath sword his coming is but for his own" (2.3.148-9), says Northumberland, and York disdains to reply. It is enough that Bolingbroke has the power - power that has gravitated towards him since Richard sought to dispossess him of his property; and power cannot for long be dissociated from "authority", that is, from acknowledged power.

"Well, well," says York, "I see the issue of these arms. / I cannot mend it, I must needs confess". York's impotence is not merely a manifestation of his personal "character" - although it is that - but also a comment on his public predicament - one that is made representative of this particular moment of English history. York, like Gaunt, epitomises age, weakness, and a nostalgia for an England in which, to return to an earlier formulation, government would be the ceremonious exercise of high moral authority. First the weakness: "Because my power is weak and all ill left"; then the nostalgic, ceremonious assertiveness, authority looking for divine sanction but lacking military power:

But if I could, by Him that gave me life,
I would attach you all and make you stoop
Unto the sovereign mercy of the King. (2.3.155-7)

and finally, a collapse to unceremonious simplicity, directly meeting the human situation:

But since I cannot, be it known unto you
I do remain as neuter. So, fare you well;
Unless you please to enter in the castle,
And there repose you for this night. (2.3.158-61)

York's plight is in part a moral one; he sees Richard's injustice ("I have had feelings of my cousin's wrongs"); but it can find no moral solution. Once the new king is crowned he will try, comically and eccentrically, to make high majesty look like itself. Government, therefore, finds less and less use for harmonies of speech and ceremony as the play advances. But it does not follow that Shakespeare finds less and less use for them. On the contrary, through Gaunt and through Richard, through York, the Duchess of Gloucester, and the Queen, and even through the gardeners and the groom, he diverts them to a different end. Ceremony, the play reveals, may be politically spent at this historical moment, but it

remains a vehicle of emotional solace.

In the geometry of Rose's *Richard II* certain scenes are called "private", and this in itself might suggest a line across his roving arcs, below which hides the intimate as distinct from the public self. But, alas for diagrammatic thought, the intimate motives of the self are often active in public scenes, while private scenes yield public truths of comprehensive consequence. Like Philomel in *Lucrece* (1121-41) the Gaunt of the play's second - private - scene, still finds "frets upon an instrument" to "tune our heart-strings to true languishment" when his "deep groans the diapason hear" for the state of England, in the scene of his death. The banishments of Bolingbroke and Mowbray occasion much consolatory eloquence, with Mowbray evoking the vocal music whose solace exile will deny him:

The language I have learnt these forty years
My native English, now I must forgo
And now my tongue's use is to me no more
Than an unstringed viol or a harp,
Or like a cunning instrument cas'd up
Or being open, put into his hands
That knows no touch to tune the harmony.

(1.3.159-65)

Gaunt and the Duchess still know how to tune the harmony. In the scene played between them we glimpse the hidden significance of the spirited exchanges that make the first scene. The Duchess hopes that justice will be done in the ceremonious trial of strength in Coventry: "Be Mowbray's sins so heavy in his bosom, / That they may break his foaming courser's back." But that kind of moral gravity is an indulgence of feeling; there is no real hope in it; nor any reassurance in the quiescent pieties of Gaunt:

God's is the quarrel; for God's substitute
His deputy annointed in His sight,
Hath caused his death; the which, if wrongfully
Let Heaven revenge; for I may never lift
An angry arm against His minister. (1.2.37-41)

These are not, as they occur, the unequivocal moral and political positives of the play; although they have a representative quality and remind us of clusters of Medieval and early Tudor beliefs about the sanctity of the throne and the efficacy of the lists as providential justice. They are not only in the play, they are also in character. And the character of Gaunt in this scene and through to his last, is made up of a sequence of speeches about old-age, impotence, quiescence, disease, guilt and decay. This "character" is used by Shakespeare to structural purpose, disclosing the moral exhaustion masked by the pageant rhetoric of the first scene. The scene works as the play works, moving from an authoritative to a consolatory ceremonious music of speech. Compare the Duchess's first speech with her last:

Finds brotherhood in thee no sharper spur?
 Hath love in thy old blood no living fire?
 (1.2.9-10)

with

Yet one word more - grief boundeth where it falls
 Not with an empty hollowness, but weight.
 (1.2.58-9)

The spent spirit plays itself out in subtle verbal quibbles. The rhetorical figure that puns upon "empty hollowness" and "weight" was known as *Atanaclasis*, or in Puttenham's English, "The Rebound", "alluding to the tennis ball which being smitten with the racket rebounds back again". Thus the figure plays upon itself, and is still rebounding in the last lines where "hollowness" is still a dominant effect in the cadence of the verse and in the "empty lodgings and unfurnished walls / Unpeopled offices, and untrodden stones" of Plashy.

The play's second act, largely about the dying Gaunt, opens with an eloquence which is about eloquence: "O, but they say the tongues of dying men / Enforce attention like deep harmony". Gaunt's prophecy culminates effects built up in the first act. Shakespeare insinuates into it the chroniclers' and the *Woodstock* author's indictments of the reign - the "farming" of the realm, the blank charters, and other marks of Richard's ineptitude and importunity. But it is also, and equally, an heroic exhortation recalling England's fading greatness. Those felicities about the "demi-paradise" and the "silver sea" belonged then, as now, to an age other than the dramatic present, and to a rarer dimension than the solid geometry of political history. What is solid and actual is the nostalgia itself. For Edward III's reign was remembered by the chroniclers and by the anonymous playwright, as the heyday of English chivalry. The deep harmonies of language about which and through which Gaunt speaks are related to the harmonies of state which were thought to be a reality in the time of Edward but ceased to be so in the time of Richard. A chivalrous age and the harmonies of its language are, we are made to feel, dying together - betrayed, violated, leased out.

But Gaunt's eloquence has a personal as well as a political function. It is not only condemnatory of the living, it is also consolatory to the dying:

The setting sun, and music at the close,
 As the last taste of sweets is sweetest last,
 Writ in remembrance of things long past.
 (2.1.12-14)

"More are men's ends mark'd than their lives before", says Gaunt. We allow the claim for him as we must later allow it for Richard himself. He makes a self-consciously good end: "Will the king come, that I may breathe my last?", and is made to fulfil the rôle that one tradition requires of a dying statesman - he makes music at the

close.

What is true of the secondary figures of the play is more commandingly true of Richard. He too, but in a different range of senses, is an impotent figure; incapacitated not by guilt, age and disease, but by culpable innocence, fecklessness and vanity. York redeems himself by acting the perfect subject, to either king; the Duchess by acting out her threnody of grief; Gaunt by playing the part of dying prophet. Richard redeems himself, in his own eyes, and before his court and theatre audiences, by fulfilling the kingly roles that circumstance requires him to play.

First he plays the king in office - the megaphonic voice of authority, the president of the lists. Off the throne he plays the impulsive, reckless sophisticate, the man of "wicked and naughty demeanour" described in the chronicles, who bungles the Irish business, grabs money and jeers at Gaunt. The spoiled-patrician-child posturings of the "natural" Richard are themselves theatrical. This is the second rôle that mars the harmony of the first and makes intolerable discord.

When Richard returns from Ireland, however, the boyish petulance is shed. Little by little, through the superb self-dramatisations of the third and fourth acts, he comes to dominate our imaginations in his role as abdicating king. We discover that, whatever the political vanity of "thrice gorgeous ceremony" it opens immense perspectives of solace. His language entertains the great medieval themes - the wheel of fortune, *contemptus mundi*, the dance of death and the sanctity of sovereignty - whose resonances make it paltry to be Bolingbroke. Richard's glorious angels cannot contend against Bolingbroke's "hard bright steel" but his voice and bearing still command the theatre. "Yet looks he like a king!", York cries when Richard appears on the walls of Flint castle, and throughout the scene Shakespeare turns spectacle into word to vindicate him. The sun-king is unmoved (as we all are) by Northumberland's political reassurances ("His glittering arms he will commend to rust") but lets the sun-metaphor itself proclaim the truth - "Down, down, I come, like glist'ring Phaëton, Wanting the manage of unruly jades." Bolingbroke refuses to hear; he is deaf to the king's music. "What says his majesty?" "He speaks fondly," says Northumberland, "like a frantic man, Yet he is come." *Richard II*, the play and the king, open up that space between political truth and imaginative truth which continues to interest Shakespeare in *Antony and Cleopatra*. But when the great king-metaphors have served their turn as aesthetic and imaginative solace to the man Richard, there is nothing more they can do. They cannot salvage his power or stop him from sharing other men's vulnerabilities. Like Gaunt's vision of England, Richard's magical sovereignty is nostalgic and cannot be effective.

His public self-dramatisation reaches its climax when he compares himself to Christ: "Did they not sometimes cry 'All hail' to me? So Judas did to Christ." These are the words that prompted Dover Wilson to speak of "Shakespeare's miracle play". But the miracle play is not Shakespeare's precisely, but Richard's. Shakespeare probably got the idea from Holinshed's comments on the King's flatterers. Bushy, he says, "invented unused terms, and such

strange names as were rather agreeable to the divine majesty of God, than to any earthly potentate." Yet the miracle-play pose is moving because as an abdicating king Richard still speaks for and from his office, and because the claims he makes for his sacred status are consciously ironic, made in the course of discovering his own weakness. Richard remembers the coronation ceremony and, as it were, plays the film backwards:

I give this heavy weight from off my head,
And this unwieldy sceptre from my hand.
(4.1.204-5)

Through another rhetorical figure - this time *anaphora* - poet and king together unweave the spell that the ritual had once cast:

With mine own tears I wash away my balm
With mine own hands I give away my crown,
(4.1.207-8)

returning the king to his humanity. The king, said Tudor law, with one of its voices, had two bodies.⁷ The doctrine was a convenient one for lawyers and court advisers, but in the perspectives of Shakespeare's play it is allowed no final validity. The political body is the community; the human body is not sword-proof; and the divine body is an illusion, however powerful its spell upon the imagination.

Richard's final role is, like Gaunt's, to make a good end. In the abdication scene Richard plays what he calls a "woeful pageant" to a court audience - much as his own story might have been played in fact before Henry VIII. But at Pomfret he is without an audience. He plays to himself, in private, become mere man. His isolation is established before we see it, when he bids goodbye to the Queen:

I am sworn brother, sweet,
To grim necessity; and he and I
Will keep a league till death.
(5.1.20-1)

That heroic commitment to the inevitable sounds a stoical note in Richard's closing music. Chaucer's Theseus too had found it wisdom "To maken vertu of necessitee" (KT 3042) but did not charge his thought with such chivalric irony. The Queen's response recalls Gaunt on "men's ends" ("The lion dying thrusteth forth his paw/ And wounds the earth, if nothing else, with rage/ To be o'erpower'd.") And there shortly follows York's talk of the procession through London, using a theatre image to express the contempt the public feel for one whose role in public spectacle has been usurped; but Richard remains the "well-graced actor" and his last soliloquies are histrionic still.

The Pomfret speeches are rich in an extreme mode of self-dramatization:

My brain I'll prove the female to my soul,
My soul the father, and these two beget
A generation of still-breeding thoughts. (5.5.6-8)

The king's mind mimics the playwright's and the players':

Thus play I in one person many people,
And none contented; (5.5.31-2)

and while the ironies are sardonic and self-directed, they are also bringing Richard's consciousness right into the centre of our final experience of Shakespeare's play. The virtuosity of Richard's thought is both his solace and ours:

How sour sweet music is
When time is broke, and no proportion kept!
So is it in the music of men's lives.
And here have I the daintiness of ear
To check time broke in a disordered string;
But for the concord of my state and time
Had not an ear to hear my true time broke.
I wasted time and now doth time waste me.
(5.5.42-9)

The solace is in the symmetry, in the equal poise of that last line. But it is also in the imaginative art which puts political disorder into a satisfying verbal order. Shakespeare, to return to my beginning, making his plays out of Hall and Holinshed, is making music of men's lives.

Yet Shakespeare's music bids farewell to Hall's and Bodin's; there is no prospect of geometrical harmonies of state being restored on the old terms. To adapt Elizabeth Salter's words on Chaucer's Theseus, neither Hall's nor Bodin's accounts of the divine plan can be reconciled with its ugly manifestations in the history of Richard's reign. Out of an episode of bad government Shakespeare has nevertheless made a good play, and history has provisionally been made to yield an aesthetic form. The plays to come in Shakespeare's theatre will make fresh but equally transient treaties between authority, soldiery and the populace in the common weal. And plays to come will attend afresh to the tragic processes shadowed by the Bishop of Carlisle: "Disorder, horror, fear and mutiny / Shall here inhabit, and this land be called / The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls." The catastrophe courses of history are another story, but after the play of *Richard II* we can say that the ritual allegiance that Carlisle is asking for cannot in itself avert them.

NOTES

- 1 *Chaucer: The Knight's Tale and The Clerk's Tale* (London, 1962).
- 2 *Op.cit.* p.31.
- 3 *Troilus and Criseyde*, V. 1809-12.
- 4 Jean Bodin, *The six bookes of a commonweale*. Translated out of the French and Latine copies by R. Knolles, London, 1606 (STC 3193) p.700.
- 5 The chronicle material for *Richard II* is selectively reprinted in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Vol. III, ed. Geoffrey Bullough (London, 1963).
- 6 Bodin, *op.cit.* p.790.
- 7 See Ernst Kantarowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton, 1977). Kantarowicz found one of his starting points in Dover Wilson's *New Shakespeare* edition of *Richard II*.