The Background of Shakespeare's Histories and the Application of the Historical Theory on Richard II and Henry V

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Since the historical theory during Shakespeare's time was partly affected by classical trends, we had better shed some special light on the Greek period. The Greek history was born, in its modern sense, in the fifth Century before Christ. The Greek historians demonstrated the cause-and-effect principle more than anything else. Their aim was investigation and enquiring rather than generalization, complication and exaltation. This does not mean that their treatment of history was completely scientific, since they did not explain in certain cases why things happened, although they attributed many events to the gods, or rather Fate who "was destructive only when humans were blind to their own dangers, and the victim the gods loved to strike down was the man who stuck his neck out,"[1] as M.M.Reese puts it.

The English medieval belief—and even during, but at a lesser degree, in the Renaissance—is to some extent in line with the Greek idea. Yet the difference is that while some changes are attributed to Fate according to the Greeks, the medieval people attribute all changes affecting man to Providence, or all that man did, does or will do is in the fulfilment of God's will. However the British humanists, who were affected by the Greeks and the Romans, discarded this medieval belief and showed that man had a free will.

The Greeks believed in change, and to them, life is full of upheavals, unpredicted events and reversals from happiness to misery or vice versa. While this change is clearly related to God's will according to the medieval moralists, yet to the Greeks it was not fully explained, excluding Fate's influence.

The medieval writers saw man as controlled by providence without any free will. The Greeks considered man free and he can sometimes challenge some conventions. Thus medieval historiography was basically anti-humanist and pessimistic, while that of the Greeks is almost optimistic when compared with the medieval notion. That is why the Renaissance humanists rejected the medieval view that man and society will never attain perfection.

Greek history is not only didactic but also stoic. Polybius (204-122 B.C.) is one of the first Greek historians who had looked at history in a philosophical way. He drove lessons from the past human experience and reached a conclusion that man cannot control the world and must bravely bear whatever misfortune happens to him, especially if it is beyond his power and cannot be prevented.

The medieval conception of man is that he is powerless and is always in need of God's grace and Christ's redemption.

If the Greeks believed that history was didactic, so did the Elizabethans. We must not forget that didacticism is a medieval belief which we clearly notice in the medieval morality plays. Apart from that, it is Boccaccio's ***De Casibus Vironum Illustrium*** which had a great influence on historical didacticism. However "the first version of the ***De Casibus*** was probably finished about 1360 and given to the world about 1363-1364; a revised version was finished sometime between the death of Petrarch, that is before October 1374,"[2] as Willard Farnham remarks. The ***De Casibus*** is in Latin prose and it is a

series of stories rendered in a dream framework. In this dream Boccaccio is surrounded by many weeping ghosts of illustrious people of all races and times who want to have their tragedies included in his intended book which they have some previous knowledge about. He selects some of these lamentable stories in his nine-volume work. He does that in a chronological order of time starting from Adam and Eve and ending up with King John of France whom the British captured and defeated at Poitiers in 1356.

Boccaccio's ***De Casibus*** was translated into English verse by John Lydgate in his around 36000-line poem the ***Fall of Princes*** between 1430 and 1438, but first printed in 1494. Yet Lydgate's long poem has a lot of influence on ***A Mirror for Magistrates*** which was printed in 1555 during Queen Mary's reign. Yet it was first published in 1559 in the second year of Elizabeth's accession to the throne. The time span of the ***Mirror*** extends from Richard II to Edward IV. Its first edition contained nineteen short tragedies. In the 1563 edition eight more tragedies were added. There were more tragedies interpolated in the editions of 1578 and 1587 extending the time covered to Henry VIII's reign.

The ***Mirror*** is a series of tragic monologues spoken by the ghosts of certain famous British statesmen. They seem as if they were addressing the authors of the ***Mirror***. It is written in verse, yet it contains some prose comments presumably rendered by the authors who are still anonymous.

As the title suggests, the ***Mirror***'s main purpose is to educate the ruler, the "magistrate," through exemplary stories to teach him how to avoid mistakes by giving him moral lessons. Accordingly the ***Mirror*** is following Boccaccio's ***De Casibus*** and Lydgate's ***Fall of Princes***. It is clear then that we see the moral code of Boccaccio's cause-and-effect

theme in the ***Mirror***. It is no exaggeration when we conclude that the influence of the ***Mirror*** on Shakespeare's histories is much larger than that of the English chronicles by Hall and Holinshed.

The ***Mirror*** also depends on the British chronicles, although sometimes it deviates from them when not alluding to the Tudor myth and the Arthurian descent. The job of the ***Mirror*** "consists of those general doctrines about educating the rulers by the example, about the king's status, about obedience to him, and about civil war,"[3] to use E.M.W. Tillyard's words. Accordingly the rulers must rule justly because the peace of the state depends on the policies of its rulers, otherwise they will bring up God's wrath and vengeance. If the contemporary leaders do not take this advice they will ruin themselves and the state's security. Thus the merits and demerits of a ruler are reflected into his state.

The moral theme of the ***Mirror*** goes side by side with the homilists who propagate the protestant theory which is applied in their homilies. Hence the ruler is considered the agent of God from whom he derives his authority and only to whom he is responsible. It is God who appoints the king, no matter how far he is good or bad. The ruler can be God's minister through whom he punishes the bad people; or he can be God's scourge who both punishes himself and his likes. No man has the right to rebel against the king.

Since the king is God's deputy, he must watch his subordinates and check their shortcomings and even take advice from them if need be. Otherwise God will set up a rebellion to bring the corrupted people into account and severely punish them even if He stirs up rebellions. If a right king is deposed, it is rightful to resist the usurper and reinstate the overthrown monarch. By following these rules the king can avoid the civil wars and disastrous events.

The ***Mirror***, as far as British history is concerned, was followed by two major works, the first was Edmund Spenser's ***The Fairy Queen*** which the author began to write in 1570 and whose first three books were published in 1580 and the second three books were published in 1596. The second work was Sir Philip Sidney's the ***Arcadia*** which was published in 1590 four years after its author's death. Spenser was interested in the Arthurian legend and associated the resurrection of Arthur with the Tudors. Sidney's ***Arcadia*** has some affinity with the ***Mirror*** and the civil wars. These two works may have influenced Shakespeare's histories to a certain degree.

We must also mention that ***Gorboduc***, a play written by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton and published in 1561-62, must have some influence on history. It is the off-shoot of the ***Mirror***. Here in ***Gorboduc*** there is no justification for the people to raise against and kill their king. The play also follows the instructions of morality plays.

Let us now deal with the influence of the chronicles on Shakespeare. The two major chronicles are Edward Hall's ***The Union of the Noble and Illustre Families of Lancastre and York***, published posthumously in 1548 and Raphael Holinshed's ***Chronicle*** which was published in 1577 and whose second edition appeared in 1587. Hall's work is longer than Holished's, yet Hall's interest is concerned with a single span of English history beginning from Richard II and ending with Henry VIII. Holinshed, although his work is shorter than Hall's, goes back earlier starting from the British legend. Shakespeare depended more on Holinshed than on Hall.

Before dealing with the Tudor myth and the homilies which the Tudors exploited for their purpose, we must show the Elizabethan's concern with history. The general idea about the world according to most Elizabethans is that the universe is divided between two worlds,

the macrocosm (the larger world) and the microcosm (the smaller world). There is a kind of harmony and correspondence between these two worlds. Whatever prevails in heavens (the larger world) corresponds to what happens on earth (the smaller world). Thus God in heaven among the angels corresponds to the king among his subjects on earth. Besides, there is also a hierarchic system and a chain of order— God among the angels, king among men, the sun among the planets, eagle among the birds, lion among the animals and so on. Angels are higher than mankind which is higher than animals which are higher than plants. Any disorder in the microcosm breeds disorder in the macrocosm.

This conception is originally medieval. Accordingly God's rule is perfect while man's rule is imperfect. Man's fall and his Original Sin are the cause of his corruption for which Christ's grace is needed. Since Machiavelli does not believe in this natural order, the Elizabethans rejected his doctrines.

Moreover, the medieval people did not merely consider history "the record of events or mere homage to man's worthy deeds, but a repertory of solemn lessons useful above all as a practical guide for the princes of today, with Boccaccio cited as the main authority,"[4] as Tillyard points out.

It is time now to talk about the Tudor myth. Undoubtedly during the Tudors' accession to the throne, history was used as propaganda for their regime. They added new conceptions to the medieval notion of the world. This kind of practice started when Henry VII, a Tudor monarch, ascended the throne in 1485. He exploited history to meet his interests, first as he is related to the house of Lancastre and to the Welsh ancestery, and second as his wife, Elizabeth, daughter of Edward IV and heiress of York. This marriage by itself

helped to heal the schism between the two houses of Lancastre and York. Henry VII's accession to the throne came just after defeating and killing Richard III, the usurping bad king, and the end of the Wars of the Roses which lasted thirty Years (1455-1485). These wars were generally between the two houses of Lancastre and York whose badges were red and white roses respectively.

The Tudor myth is briefly summarized by Tillyard's words when he states that this myth "shows the justice of God punishing and working out the effects of crime, till prosperity is re-established in the Tudor monarchy."[5] According to the chronicler Hall we know that Bolingbroke swore not to do Richard II any harm. Yet he backed out and became a faithbreaker by causing Richard II's death. He had already deposed him and usurped his throne. These two sinful misdeeds excited God's wrath which did not only directly afflict Henry IV (Bolingbroke) by making his reign troublesome, but also his grandson, Henry VI, by raising the Wars of the Roses during his rule.

Anyhow the Elizabethans saw how God's punishment and curse travelled from a grandfather to visit on a grandson. Another case is similar when Edward III executed his uncle the Duke of Kent, then his (Edward III's) grandson, Richard II had to be revenged on and to die a cruel death. Again another example the Elizabethans knew very well. It is about Henry VII who sinned by executing Lords Stanley and Warwick. Consequently his grandson Edward VI was afflicted by an early death.

Actually the Elizabethans were afraid of the civil wars and their disasters. They were worried that the Catholics, who did not regard Elizabeth a rightful queen, might make some troubles against the monarchy. They believed that the monarchy was the best security to them. Paradoxically they thought of Henry V, although he was the son

of a usurper, as a good ruler especially when he left his licentious companions and had Richard II's body reburied in Westminster to atone for his father's guilt.

It is no wonder why Shakespeare exploits the Tudor myth, simply because Elizabeth was his own contemporary queen and whose grandfather was Henry VII, the founder of the Tudor dynasty. Thus Henry VII's deeds had to be highly praised while his misdeeds had to be hushed up.

We can now say a word about the homilies and how they influenced history. According to the homilists obedience to a bad king is much better than running into a disastrous civil war. It is only God, who appoints the ruler, can judge whether the king is bad or good. It is none of the subjects' business to do that. Any rebellion against a king, even if he is unjust, is worse than that king. To disobey a king is a sin, and to raise a rebellion against him is only adding a new sin to another sin. This is a protestant conception unlike that of the Catholics who encourage rebellions, as when the Pope did with King John, which caused a lot of trouble, local and foreign, to England. The homilists go further when they compare an uprising against the king to that against God in the Garden of Eden.

Yet there are, among the Elizabethans, other notions which seem quite contradictory to what we have mentioned before. Thus in the passage of time the Yorks' claim of kingship faded away to some extent. Some Elizabethans even justified Richard II's deposition for having committed a lot of violations. As in the case of defeating and killing Richard III, it was looked upon more justifiable than Richard II's case, simply because Richard III was considered a bad king, and moreover he was succeeded by a king from the Tudor dynasty just like their contemporary Queen Elizabeth whom they wanted to idolize.

Now we must show the motivations which helped the English chronicle plays to flourish. Before tackling this subject, it is worth noting that the term "chronicle plays" applies to the English plays which are concerned with English politics and the lives of the English rulers. Thus Shakespeare's ***King Lear*** and ***Macbeth***, although they deal with kings, are not considered chronicles because they are more interested in tragic universal evil and sorrow than in politics and kings' lives. They end tragically. Shakespeare's ***Richard II***, on the other hand is not considered a tragedy as is the case with ***King Lear*** and ***Macbeth***, but a chronicle play, because it ends with the fall of Richard II, which is by itself the rise of Henry IV.

The English chronicle plays flourished after the defeat of the Armada in 1588 up to Elizabeth's death in 1603. There are many reasons for the popularity of this genre. Patriotism is the most important reason, especially after the defeat of the Armada as it aroused the nationalistic feelings among the citizens. The second reason is the widespread of learning due to the invention of the press as first introduced into England by Caxton in 1476 which helped to the access of the translated and local chronicle history to a lot of readers and playwrights. The third reason is concerned with the popular theme of the fall of princes initiated by Boccaccio's ***De Casibus*** and Lydgate's the ***Fall of Princes***. This theme was favoured by both the medieval and humanist views. The fourth chroniclers, reasons is the availability of the English chroniclers' works like those of Hall and Holinshed. The fifth reason is that the Elizabethans were interested in battle scenes and spectacle, which the chronicle play supplied. The sixth reason is related to the Tudor myth, as the Tudor rulers desired to see their achievements enacted on the stage to furnish them with a political propaganda. The seventh reason is the agreement of both the classicists and the

religionists to promote history plays. The classic or humanist trend focuses on the glorification of England and the moral lessons taken from contemporary or previous history to show the merits and demerits of the rulers in order to make these lessons a guide to the present ruler.

The religionists are influenced by the medieval theories concerned with history. They emphasize the role of God's Providence and how it affects human affairs and politics. In other words history to them is God's work and a revelation of His plan on mankind. Great disasters mean punishment. The king is God's deputy and must be obeyed and he is responsible only to God.

In both cases history is used in order to evade the shadow of the civil war and to remind Elizabeth to nominate her heir since she is not married. If she dies, they are afraid that uprisings might happen for the accession to the throne. These claims bolster up the idea that the English chronicles are purely English to the bone having no foreign influence. For this reason the playwrights did their best to add or omit whatever events considered fit or unfit respectively for their texts, which many times were used for political propaganda.

What remains now is to deal with Shakespeare's application of what he found fit of all the foregoing contradictory views concerning history on ***Richard II*** (1595) and ***Henry V*** (1598-99).

Richard's father was the distinguished hero, the Black Prince, heir to Edward III. Since he died before Edward III, Richard ascended the throne to succeed his grandfather, Edward III at the age of ten. His uncles were helping him run the state's affairs during his teenage.

Like Marlowe's Edward II, Shakespeare's Richard II was a weak king. Both playwrights derived their historical background concerned these two plays, from Holisshed. Shakespeare, like

Marlowe, made some alterations on his source. Thus Alan S. Downer tells us that Isabel,

> Richard's queen, was actually ten years old at the time of the king's abdication. In the play she is approximately Richard's own age, increasing the pathos of the hero's situation as he is separated from her. Pathos and dramatic effectiveness are gained also by setting Richard's abdication before the full parliament of England, instead of before a few lords in the Tower.[6]

In ***Richard II***, Shakespeare focuses on the last two years of the king's life. His main concern in this play is a patriotic cause in order to see how a weak king might bring disasters to his country. He invents for this purpose non-historical incidents enacted by common characters, like the Gardener who finds out that Richard should cut off corrupt heads in order to get things settled in the state. This Gardener orders one of his two servants to remove unwanted branches, while he will himself uproot the harmful weeds:

> Go thou, and like an executioner
> Cut off the heads of too fast growing sprays
> That look too lofty in our commonwealth:
> All must be even in our government.
> You thus employed, I will go root away
> The noisome weeds which without profit suck
> The soil's fertility from wholesome flowers.[7]

This figurative language metaphorically used for political reasons continues when the assistant gardener complains of the political situation, implicitly explained in agrarian terms:

Why should we in the compass of a pale,
Keep low and form and due proportion,
Showing, as in a model, our firm state,
When our sea-walled garden, the whole land,
Is full of weeds, her fairest flowers chocked up,
Her fruit trees all unpruned, her hedges ruined,
Her knots disordered, and her wholesome herbs
Swarming with caterpillars.

(3.4.40-47)

Then the Gardener speaks both implicitly and explicitly to show how the country has been deteriorated by Richard who is now taking the consequences. Thus he tells his assistant:

Hold thy peace.
He that hath suffered this disordered spring
Hath now himself met with the fall of leaf:
The weeds which his broad spreading did shelter,
That seemed in eating him to hold him up,
Are plucked up root and all by Bolingbroke—
I mean the Earl of Wiltshire, Bushy, Green. . .
And Bolingbroke
Hath seized the wasteful King. O, what pity is it
That he had not so trimmed and dressed his land
As we this garden! We at a time of year
Do wound the bark, the skin of our fruit trees,
Lest being over proud in sap and blood
With too much riches it confound itself;
Had he done so to great and growing men,

They might have lived to bear, and he to taste
Their fruits of duty. Superfluous branches
We lap away, that bending boughs may live:
Had he done so, himself had borne the crown,
Which waste of idle hours hath quite thrown down. . . . .
Depresed he is already, and deposed
'Tis doubt he will be. Letters came last night
To a dear friend of the good Duke of York's,
That tell black tidings.

(3.4.47 ff.)

All the foregoing quotations concerning the two gardeners are influenced by the use of common people and things for a political device, or rather the dramatic use of metaphor. Shakespeare did not only invent the gardeners deviating from his source, but stepped aside from his usual practice in his works, by making the common people, gardeners, speak in verse, the language of important persons. He probably does that for political reasons since always poetical speeches, especially if they are simple and not affected like those in the two gardeners' passages, have a stronger impact on spectators. Moreover, poetry is easier to memorize than prose, and the verse passages everybody memorizes usually outnumber those which are rendered in plain prose. Poetry is a refined language affects the emotions, senses and mental faculties much better than ordinary prose, especially in those matter of general concern like politics and patriotism, or emotional concern like love affairs and sensations. We can ask ourselves now about the large size of poetry we still memorize from the time of high school till now, compared with many prose passages we have forgotten,

or we still remember with difficulty. Even if we still keep them in our memories they are outnumbered by those unforgettable verse passages.

Kenneth Muir stresses the political situation further when he remarks that Shakespeare gives the two gardeners verse speeches so that he can "please his new aristocratic friends."[8] In this case we can elaborate on this political situation and point out that the moral lesson rendered by poetry to those who appreciate poetry will make the play give a better moral lesson.

Shakespeare's patriotism concerning England as if it were a character, is not only shown through the two gardeners, but previously in Gaunt's deathbed speech in his description of England:

> This royal throne of kings, this scept'red isle,
> This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
> This other Eden, demi-paradise,
> This fortress built by Nature for herself
> Against infection and the hand of war,
> This happy breed of men, this little world,
> This precious stone set in the silver sea
> Which serves it in the office of a wall. . . .
> This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
> This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings. . . .
> Is now leased out—I die pronouncing it. . . .
> That England that was wont to conquer others
> Hath made a shameful conquest of itself.
> Ah! would the scandal vanish with my life,
> How happy then were my ensuing death!
>
> (2.1.40 ff.)

Another effective scene of patriotism is given to Richard on his return from Ireland to England which was threatened by a rebellion:

I weep for joy
To stand upon my kingdom once again.
Dear earth, I do salute thee with my hand,
Though rebels wound thee with their horses' hoofs.
As a long-parted mother with her child
Plays fondly with her tears and smiles in meeting,
So weeping, smiling, greet I thee, my earth,
And do thee favors with my royal hands.
Feed not sovereign's foe, my gentle earth,
Nor with thy sweets comfort his ravenous sense;
But let thy spiders, that suck up thy venom,
And heavy-gained toads in their way,
Doing annoyance to the treacherous feet
Which with usurping steps do trample thee. . . .
This earth shall have a feeling, and these stones,
Prove armed soldiers, ere her native king
Shall falter under foul rebellion's arms.

(3.2.4 ff.)

The last-mentioned quotation together with the preceding ones are self-apparent speeches intended patriotically to glorify England and to teach moral and political lessons.

Since Shakespeare lived during the Tudor period, he wanted to curry favour with Queen Elizabeth when he wrote ***Richard II***, especially when history was prescribed and motivated by political

necessities. Here he was faced with the issue of the Divine Right of kings, the deputies of God. Kings were considered agents of divine mercy and punishment.

Richard II is a play about the deposition of a rightful king anointed by God according to the predominant belief then. The playwright in this case must tackle this issue very carefully to satisfy both the ruler and the people. Reese tells us that

> Richard II always occupied a special place in the Elizabethan mind. . . . He was the archetype English martyre; no other mediaeval king aroused such compassion for his fate, not even Edward II, who like himself was deposed and cruelly murdered. That he was the last of the Plantagenets, the last direct descendant from the Conqueror, gave him a particular sanctity. The unbroken line that was severed in his fall has never been restored.[9]

Regicide was totally sinful, and usurpation would breed rebellions. Kingship was divinely planned and instituted. There is no better passage concerning the Divine Right of kings than the following passage spoken by Gaunt to the Duchess of Gloucester who desired to revenge her husband on Richard II, the murderer:

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

And when she asked Gaunt: "Where, then, alas, may I complain myself" (1.2.42)? he simply answered: "To God, the widow's champion and defense" (1.2.43).

If we add the homilies instructions we can realize how strong the theme of the Divine Right is demonstrated. Accordingly the Bishop of Carlisle addresses Richard as follows: "Fear not, my lord; that power that made you king / Hath power to keep you king in spite of all" (3.3.2.27-28). Again when Bolingbroke tells Carlisle: "In God's name, I'll ascend the regal throne" (4.1.113), Carlisle suddenly retorts defending the anointed king:

> Marry, God forbid!. . .
> What subject can give sentence on his king?
> And who sits here that is not Richard's subject?. . .
> And shall the figure of God's majesty
> His captain, steward, deputy elect,
> Anointed crowned, planted many years,
> Be judged by subject and inferior breath,
> And he himself not present?
>
> (4.1.114ff.)

Carlisle goes on in his defiance of Bolingbroke and his fellow-rebels prophesying that Richard's deposition will beget all kinds of misfortune:

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

Shall kin with kin, and kind with kind confound;
Disorder, horror, fear, and mutiny
Shall here inhabit, and this land be called
The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls.
O, if you raise this house against this house,
It will the woeful division prove
That ever fell upon this cursed earth!

(4.1.136ff.)

Muir comments on the Bishop of Calisle's speech remarking that "Shakespeare deviated from his sources in giving the Bishop of Carlisle his eloquent prophecy just before the deposition scene."[10]

The anointed king should be protected by God and no one dares to take away God's balm from him. In this respect Richard reassures the Divine Right doctrine:

Not all the water in the rough rude sea
Can wash the balm off from an anointed king;
The breath of wordly men cannot depose
The deputy elected by the Lord. . . .
If angels fight,
Weak men must fall, for heaven still guards the right.

(3.2.54 ff.)

Richard wonders if it is possible that people can revolt against him : "Is not the King's name twenty thousand names" (3.2.85)? If anyone betrays the king, he is betraying God: "They break their faith to God as well as us" (3.2.102). He believes that his traitors are worse than Judas: "Three Judases, each one thrice worse than Judas"

(3.2.132)! He also compares others who are taking sides with he rebels to Pilate: "Though some of you with Pilate wash your hands" (4.1.238). He once more tells the conspirators:"And water cannot wash your sin" (4.1.241).

The biblical references concerning Richard's murder are even used by Bolingbroke, the usurper, when he chides and expels Exton, the king's murderer: "With Cain go wander through shades of night / And never show thy head by day nor light" (5.6.44). Bolingbroke feels guilty of Richard's murder, and so he thinks of some religious atonement by going to the Holy Land: "I'll make a voyage to the Holy Land, / To wash this blood off from my guilty hand" (5.6.49-50). Once more Shakespeare stresses this point when he makes Henry IV, in ***2 Henry IV*** feel guilty for having been a usurper. On his deathbed, he tells his son the following quotation:

> Come hither, Harry, sit thou by my bed,
> And hear, I think, the very latest counsel
> That ever I shall breathe. God knows my son,
> By what by-baths and indirect crook'd ways
> I met this crown; and I myself know well
> How troublesome it sat upon my head.
>
> (***2 Henry IV***, 4.4.320-325)

Richard's murder by Bolingbroke is not only mentioned in ***2 Henry IV*** but even in ***Henry V***. Here Henry V on the eve of the battle wants God not to hold him responsible for his father's sin:

> Not today, O Lord,
> O, not today, think not upon the fault
> My father made in compassing the crown!

I Richard's body have interred new,
And on it have bestowed more contrite tears
Than from it issued forced drops of blood.
(***Henry V***, 4.1.297-301)

It clearly seems that Shakespeare sides with the teachings of the homilies concerning the importance of the king as God's deputy. He also accepts the moral theme of the ***Mirror*** and the bad consequences of misrule. In these cases the playwright warns that if the ruler neglects his kingship, he will indirectly help traitors to overthrow him. Thus Richard comes to the conclusion that he must consider himself a traitor having not discovered the conspiracy against him led by Bolingbroke and others. He gives the following speech in the moral manner of the ***Mirror***:

Mine eyes are full of tears, I cannot see:
And yet salt water blinds them so much,
But they can see a sort of traitors here.
Nay, if I turn mine eyes upon myself,
I find myself a traitor with the rest;
For I have given here my soul's consent
T' undeck the pompous body of a king;
Made glory base, and sovereignty a slave,
Proud majesty a subject, state a peasant.
(4.1.243-251)

Derek Traversi comments on the foregoing passage remarking that "the treachery, moreover is doubly personal because Richard, by

past irresponsibility, has betrayed himself before he was in turn betrayed."[11] For this reason the play may be associated with tragedy: "It is the tragedy of betrayal, as well as that of fallen royalty."[12]

Shakespeare goes further in his moral teaching making Richard after having been betrayed say that he is no longer the king of mankind, but only "the king of beasts" (5.1.34).

The theme of the ***De Casibus*** and the ***Fall of Princes*** reiterates itself when York describes how Richard, the pompous king, is now no more respected but only humiliated. "No joyful tongue gave him his welcome home, / But dust was thrown upon his sacred head" (5.2.29-30).

The playwright for some political reasons sides with Richard whose faults he tries to overlook while those of Bolingbroke he fully exposes. In this regard H.M. Richmond finds out that Bolingbroke is a Machiavellian person and the play is a :

> political decline from the primal innocent of the ideal medieval society to a Machiavellian pragmatism in the modern vein. Shakespeare systematically identifies in Bolingbroke that new type of amoral personality to whom success and title will necessarily go in the modern political life that has been cut off from medieval cosmic values.[13]

Bolingbroke claims that he is innocent of Richard's blood when he tells Exton, the king's murderer: "I thank thee not" (5.6.34). Yet Shakespeare exposes this pretence by making Exton remind Bolingbroke that he has been the instigator: "From your own mouth, my lord, did I this deed" (5.6.37). Shakespeare, through Exton, also tells us

that Bolingbroke once said:"Have I no friend will rid me of this living fear [Richard II]" (5.4.2)?

If Shakespeare speaks a lot of Bolingbroke's atrocities, he says little of Richard's misdeeds and excesses. History knows that Richard murdered Gloucester, confiscated Gaunts' property and imposed unjust taxations. He was misguided by selfish parasites, wasted his time with foreign fashions and banished a lot of people.

This unbalanced situation makes Leonard F. Dean believe that the play is ironic and it is neither "the restoration of legal rights and order (as Bolingbroke would have it), nor the play of the betrayal and sacrifice of the anointed king (as Richard insists)."[14]

One other thing we find in Shakespeare is that he makes us feel sympathetic to what has happened to Richard. He depicts his deposition in a deplorable way. He furnishes us with other moving scenes like when Richard says:"I weep for joy / To stand upon my kingdom once again" (3.2.4-5). Rarely does Shakespeare give us an impressive picture about Bolingbroke and his fellow conspirators.

Having dealt with ***Richard II***, we move to ***Henry V*** whose great title hero is the antithesis of Richard II, the weak king. There is a link between ***Richard II*** and ***Henry V*** since Henry V is the son of Henry IV (formerly Bolingbroke) who deposed Richard II. Both plays carry the same theme—glorification of England with emphasis on its rulers. Both deal with the political Tudor myth and the Divine Right of kings. In each play Shakespeare indirectly urges Queen Elizabeth to ward off civil wars and bring peace and security to the state.

As for the differences between the two plays, they are expressed by the powerless and weak Richard II and the powerful heroic Henry V. Their structure also differs as ***Richard II*** is more dramatic than epic, while ***Henry V*** is more epic than dramatic. The other disparity between

the two plays is that ***Richard II*** deals with internal affairs while ***Henry V*** deals with both internal and foreign affairs but with emphasis on the latter side. Another difference is that while ***Henry V*** teems with comic scenes, there is no such thing in ***Richard II***. In ***Henry V*** Shakespeare uses the chorus at the beginning of each act and at the epilogue, while he abandons the chorus in ***Richard II***. When ***Richard II*** speaks of defeats, deposition, banishment and internal disturbances, ***Henry V*** speaks of victories abroad, happy marriages and spectacles of battles. ***Henry V*** has scenes of victorious parades while ***Richard II*** demonstrates scenes of a humiliating deposition. In ***Richard II*** the king is deposed and murdered, while the title hero in ***Henry V*** rejoices among his people. The people welcome Henry V home after coming from France, while Richard is met with a rebellion when he is back from Ireland. Henry V kills the traitors while Richard II is murdered by the traitors. The time span concerning ***Richard II*** is within the last two years of the king's reign, while it extends longer in ***Henry V***. Henry V's speeches are, on the other hand, much longer than those given to Richard II.

It is worthwhile now to give some historical background to Henry V. He is one and the same Prince Hall of ***Henry IV***. In that play he led a licentious life of debauchery. He ascended the throne in 1413 following his father's death. When he became king, there was a great transformation in his life as he put aside all that riotous life and devoted himself to the welfare of his country. In 1415 after two years of his nine-year reign (1413-1422) he took up the campaign against France, which ended up with his victory at Agincourt in 1415. According to the Treaty of Troyes (1420) it was stipulated that Henry V and his heirs should be heirs to France. Yet Henry V died in 1422 survived by his

infant son, Henry VI. Throughout Henry VI's reign (1422-1461) France was lost while England was busy with its civil wars.

Shakespeare wants to show us that Henry V is victorious in war, diplomacy and love in order to make him an ideal leader to be followed by others. He calls him "the mirror of all Christian kings."[15] The theme of the Divine Right of kings is still held in this play. On the eve of the battle of Agincourt Henry begs God to forgive him because of his father's sin for having deposed and killed Richard II, as we have already mentioned. Thus the biggest crime against the king, God's deputy, is regicide.

Henry claims that he is appointed by God "in whose name" (1.2.290) he is always speaking. The playwright again shows us how kingship is important that the three traitors against Henry confess what they did was a felony which deserves death. One of them, Grey, says before he is led for execution:

> Never did faithful subject more rejoice
> At the discovery of most dangerous treason
> Than I do at this hour joy o'er myself,
> Prevented from a damned enterprise.
> My fault, but not my body, pardon, Sovereign.
>
> (2.2.161.65)

The king implicitly regards this revolt plotted against him by the three traitors as a revolt against God, like the Original Sin:"For this evolt of thine, methinks, is like / Another fall of man" (2.2.141-42).

The king's crown is always looked upon as sacred. To this effect the Archbishop of Canterbury encourages Henry to invade France: "God

and his angels guard your sacred throne, / And make you long become it" (1.2.7-8)!

Since the king is God's deputy, He must then assist him at the battle. In this concern Henry thanks God for having helped him win the war against the French saying:"God fought for us" (5.4.8.122).

The play is concerned with patriotism and the unity of the state. Hence Henry proudly declares: "But we our kingdom's safety must so tender" (2.3.175). Henry's army is united despite the ethnic differences among his leaders. This unity is confirmed when each leader participates in leading a certain portion in the army. Thus we have Fluellen (Welsh), Gower (English), Macmorris (Irish) and Jamy (Scot). They speak in their different accents and dialects, but they are unanimous in their loyalty to their king and country. The national solidarity of the state is represented by them. It is to remember that around 1599, the time when this play was written, there was an Irish rebellion against Queen Elizabeth. Yet in this play every part of England enjoys peace under Henry's reign.

The other unifying theme in the play is the marriage between Katherine, the French Princess, and Henry, the English hero king. This marriage puts an end for a while to the hostilities between two Christian countries especially when England is predominantly Protestant, while France is predominantly Catholic. England is made more unified and much stronger if France is annexed to it. Thus Henry amicably tells Katherine, the French Princess, with lots of riddles:"But in loving me you should love the friend of France: for I love France so well, that I will not part with a village of it—I will have it all mine. And, Kate, when France is mine and I am yours, then yours is France, and you are mine" (5.2.77-81). He keeps harping on this unity which is half French and half English. They might beget a son who is again half

English and half French:"And thou must therefore needs prove a good soldier-breeder. Shall not thou and I, between Saint Denis and Saint George, compound a boy, half French, half English" (3.2.213-15)? Are there better unities between this couple and their respective countries than those expressed by the foregoing quotations?

The playwright spares no effort to bolster up the theme of patriotism and ambition in this play. Here Henry longs for annexing France to his throne:"No king of England, if not King of France" (2.3.193). Henry considers himself the rightful king of France simply because Queen Isabella—King Edward II's wife, King Edward III's mother, and daughter of King Philip IV of France—was French. Moreover Henry V is the great-grandson of Edward III. These are the pretexts Henry depends on to secure his right in the French throne. To Shakespeare and the Elizabethans this is patriotism, but to others, especially the French, this is a mere transgression and a groundless claim. Henry here works in line with his father's deathbed instruction to go into foreign wars; and that is why the king says:"For we have now no thought in us but France" (1.2.302). He also feels that the French throne will be obtained by "my rightful hand" (1.2.293).

To Shakespeare and the Elizabethans the only alternative to avoid civil wars was a strong and popular monarchy, like that of Henry V. People in all their stratified classes should obey the king who is responsible only to God. The civil wars which broke out during Henry IV's reign and during the reign of his grandson, Henry VI are the consequences of Henry IV's deposition of Richard II. The English do not want these wars to be repeated. When Shakespeare directly idolizes Henry V, he is indirectly eulogizing Queen Elizabeth for the peaceful reign England has under her. If Henry V defeated the French at Agincourt in 1415, Elizabeth put the Spanish Armada to rout in 1588.

So both internal and external achievements of the two monarchs are kept in mind.

The play also deals with the surprising transformation of Henry from a libertine with bad companions into an ideal king forsaking Falstaff the womanizer and the drunkard. In his reign traitors and criminals are brought into account and they take the consequences.

Shakespeare pays tribute to Henry and shows us how he is welcomed in London by people of all walks of life on his victorious return from France. He compares him to the triumphant Caesar when his people welcomed him in Rome after defeating Pompey the Great:

> The mayor and all his brethren in best sort—
> Like to the senators of th' antique Rome,
> With the plebeians swarming at their heels—
> Go forth and fetch their conqu'ring Caesar in.
>
> (V. Chorus.25-28)

Religious people like the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Fly from the beginning speak favourably of Henry, before he is introduced to us, defending his rightful claim "to the crown and seat of France / Derived from Edward, his great-grandfather" (1.1.88-89). The intention of this statement is to show that Henry is not only supported by political people to ascend the French throne, but also by the church, the house of God. Thus religious and political people have joined hands to make this issue a patriotic one. The other purpose of this claim is that when foreign wars are triumphant outside the realm, they prevent disunity at home.

Still Shakespeare cherishes the idea that transformation and reform are not only achieved by Henry, but also by his subjects who

follow suit. Paradoxically Falstaff, Henry's immoral companion in his gay days, is now reformed before his death. Surprisingly enough he attacks what he has already been addicted to—liquor and women. The boy reported that Falstaff before he died "cried out [complained loudly of] of sack [liquor]. . . and of women, . . . and said they were devils incarnate" (2.3.28 ff.). Thus there is a chance that misguided people can reform themselves if they see that their rulers have already reformed themselves. Of course a repentant wasteful man, like Falstaff, who has wasted his life with bad women and drink will come to himself when he approaches death. The women whom he attacks are certainly not all women, but those licentious women who brought him to his bad end. Had he got married, he would not have allied himself with those vicious women whom he is condemning here. However Shakespeare is only making fun here as he wants to amuse his spectators, men and women.

In his depiction of Henry as a just ruler, who should be followed by other rulers, Shakespeare shows us how this ideal king listens to others' consultations before he takes any action. The king consults the Archbishop of Canterbury "to proceed, / And justly and religiously unfold" (1.2.9-10) his mind concerning his right about the French throne and the Law Salique.

The king should not be proud and distance himself from his people. A short time before the battle of Agincourt, Henry meets his soldiers and "Bids them good morrow with a modest smile, / And calls them brothers, friends, and countrymen" (IV. Chorus. 33-34). This is the right way the king modestly addresses his people. Henry excites his soldiers to fight so that "This story shall the good man teach his son" (4.3.56), when he victoriously goes back home. While those who are not participating they feel ashamed:"And gentlemen in England, now abed, / Shall think themselves accursed they were not here" (4.3.64-65).

If kings behave and talk this way, no rebellions or civil wars would take place. Furthermore Henry swears that he will rather die than ransom himself if he is taken prisoner:

Herald, save thou thy labor,
Come thou no more for ransom, gentle herald;
They shall have none, I swear, but these my joints.
(4.3.121-23)

This patriotic side of the king will never create a conflict between him and his subjects who will do their best to protect their king and save the country from the evils of civil wars. As a result people die while they utter Henry's name. Thus York is reported while dying to have asked Exeter convey his last words: "Dear my lord, / Commend my service to my Sovereign" (4.6.22-23).

A good king would not allow criminals, thieves and opportunists to play havoc with the country's peace. Bad people like Nym and Bardolph are hanged for their atrocities in order to give lessons to others. Pistol is expected to have the same end; not to mention the three traitors who were put to death for their treachery. When bad people are punished by a popular king, peace and justice will overwhelm the state, and this is what Shakespeare expects from a hero king like Henry. We have already mentioned that even Falstaff who was the favoured companion to young Henry is put to silence and he no more plays an important role in the play.

Henry is not only made a prominent king admired by his subjects, but also the most distinguished character in the play which carries his name. Thus "the minor characters are all dependent on Henry,"[16] as John Russell Brown states.

The play is so controversial that it has provoked a lot of criticism. To this effect J.H. Walter says: "It is strongly ironical that a play in which the virtue of unity is held up for imitation should provoke so much disunity among the commentators."[17]

Finally Henry V despite what his detractors say about him, he is a man by whom "England at last has a king who can physic all her ills,"[18] as Reese reassures.

NOTES

[1]M.M.Reese, ***The Cease of Majesty: A Study of Shakespeare's History Plays*** (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1968), 2.

[2]Willard Farnham, ***The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy*** (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), 70.

[3]E.M.W. Tillyard, ***Shakespeare's History Plays*** (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 99.

[4]Ibid., 39.

[5]Ibid., 47.

[6]Alan S. Downer, ***The British Drama: A Handbook and Brief Chronicle*** (New York: Applenton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1950), 108.

[7]William Shakespeare, ***Richard II***, ed. Kenneth Muir (New York: The New American Library, The Signet Classics, 1963), 3.4.33-39. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in my text between parentheses showing acts, scenes and lines numbers respectively.

[8]Kenneth Muir, "Introduction" to William Shakespeare, ***Richard II***, ed. Kenneth Muir, xxv.

[9]Reese, 225.

[10]Muir, xxix.

[11]Derek Traversi, ***Shakespeare from "Richard II" to "Henry V,"*** in William Shakespeare, ***Richard II***, ed. Kenneth Muir, 240.

[12]Ibid.

[13]H.M. Richmond, ***Shakespeare's Political Plays*** (New York: Random House, 1967), 139-140.

[14]Leonard F. Dean, "From ***Richard II*** to ***Henry V***: A Closer View," in Leonard F. Dean, ed., ***Shakespeare: Modern Essays in Criticism*** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 194.

[15]William Shakespeare, ***Henry V***, ed. John Russell Brown (New York: The New American Library, The Signet Classics, 1965), II. Chorus.6. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in my text between parentheses showing acts, scenes and lines numbers respectively.

[16]John Russell Brown, "Introduction" to William Shakespeare, ***Henry V***, ed. John Russell Brown, xxiv.

[17]J.H. Walter, "Introduction to ***Henry V***," in Eugene M. Waith, ed., ***Shakespeare, the Histories: A Collection of Critical Essays*** (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., Twentieth Century Views, 1965), 152.

[18]Reese, 317.

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