Dramatic Representation in Shakespeare's *Richard II*

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I

Twin-starring roles are part of the virtuosity of the modern stage, especially with classical English drama where the contemporary theatre feels itself challenged to bring new life and insight to traditional forms through experiment and innovation. Sometimes it will be an Olivier playing Othello and Iago alternately. At other times it will be two actors exchanging the roles of Brutus and Cassius on following nights. Or, as in the case of the John Barton production of Shakespeare's *Richard II* at Stratford in 1973, it will involve not only the two actors—Richard Pasco and Ian Richardson—exchanging the roles of Richard and Bolingbroke on alternate evenings, but the play itself being restructured and reinterpreted to achieve this end.

Barton's production was marked by a conscious theatricality at all levels of the presentation with notable pieces of stage business such as elaborate hobby-horses for the Mowbray-Bolingbroke fight, a snowman which melted in V.ii to signify Richard as "a mockery king of snow", and a bridge between two escalators flanking the central acting area down which Richard could ride into the base court at Flint Castle in III.iii, as Peter Thomson comments in his recent *Shakespeare Survey* review of the 1973 Stratford season, "like glistering Phaethon on the Victoria Line". A note of comedy is hard to avoid in mentioning these points in the staging of the play; nor is it surprising to learn that the audience laughed during the performance. Indeed, such a note and the audience's response are quite right since this new move in the staging of Shakespeare is in large part inspired by comic theory and by its success in the modern theatre in terms of challenging an audience to think through its own understanding of the play in relation to the provocative one being seen on the stage. A modern audience accepts that it must entertain as well as be entertained.

The 1973 *Richard II* obviously threw out such a challenge to its audiences. Centrally, the challenge surrounded the critical self-consciousness and inter-relatedness in the two figures of the twin-starring roles. Anne Barton's programme note argued it in this way:

> Richard's journey from king to man is balanced by Bolingbroke's progress from a single to a twin-natured being. Both movements involve a gain and a loss. Each, in its own way, is tragic.

As an idea of what the historical events in *Richard II* are all about, such a view could attract wide agreement for itself. It would also illustrate how the concern—which Anne Barton showed with her earlier, and most influential, study *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* in the formal, structured and self-conscious dimensions of Shakespeare's comedies and romances—is capable of adapting itself to history and tragedy, and of bringing a new style into the modern stage presentation of Shakespeare generally.

But it is what this approach actually does with *Richard II* that makes for the problem. To bring off the effect of balancing and interlocking the roles of Richard and Bolingbroke, John Barton had to reshape the play considerably. Five hundred lines were cut from the text, and twenty added from 2 *Henry IV* to emphasize Bolingbroke's stature; and within the play itself every chance was taken to heighten the impact of Bolingbroke's presence on stage. Thus it was, as Peter Thomson notes, "during Mowbray's final denial of guilt that Bolingbroke began the conscious calculation that was to be reinforced when Gaunt's gesture of grace over his head turned into his mimed holding of a crown". Bolingbroke was also made to play certain roles in the action charged with dark overtones. It was "as a monk, walking beside Northumberland's horse and chanting *Kyrie Eleison,* that Bolingbroke made his return to England in II.iii; and the cowl was again a disguise in the sensational substitution of Bolingbroke for Richard's groom in V.v.". The role-playing dimension to Bolingbroke was also extended self-consciously to relate him to the audience: "the message to Richard in Flint Castle was turned into sportive deception when Northumberland, still on horseback, took it down in note form at Bolingbroke's dictation. When Northumberland assured Richard that Bolingbroke 'doth humbly kiss thy hand' (III.iii.104) the usurping actor was, in fact, standing casually downstage right". But perhaps—from Thomson's account of the production—the most telling moments came for Bolingbroke in his confrontations with Richard, as when he took up the mirror which Richard smashed in IV.i. and "lifted the empty ring frame and placed it over Richard's head deliberately enough for us to see it pass from halo to crown, and from crown to noose". It is a point further stressed in the production by the invention of a final confrontation of Bolingbroke and Richard, when as the groom Bolingbroke was made to hold "the empty ring of the mirror between his face and Richard's, the mutual reflection of two shadows strutting and

fretting their hour upon the stage".[1]

An anti-heroic mood seems to be everywhere in the Barton production; an equal and grim irony towards men involved in history, and especially those involved with kingship, seems to be where the reading of the play leads. Shakespeare certainly gives ample warrant in *Richard II* for conscious theatricality of presentation, but whether he means it to diminish or enlarge the characters on stage, to distance or bring close the proceedings of the drama, is the large critical question which this production of *Richard II* provokes.

What the modern, post-Brechtian approach achieves with Shakespeare is to isolate the political action of the play and to emphasize the personal involvement of the characters. Whether it does this at the cost of the rich meditative reaches of Shakespeare's mind and of his art in rendering historical action and profound thought as drama, is open to argument. *Richard II* offers Shakespeare's most direct meditation on death and the king; it responds also to a great change occurring between medieval and modern culture. And if it cannot unify the antinomies of what it sees, and has to leap from Act II across to Act III as a sign of its own limits of vision, *Richard II* as a play still lays down the terms with which Shakespeare was to go on into the world of his final tragedies.

II

What seems most remarkable to *Richard II* and what makes for the problem of how to present it on stage is that as a play it deals with two profoundly conflicting views of kingship and social order yet resists the issue of their conflict being joined. Richard is one kind of king; Bolingbroke is to become another kind altogether. The transfer of power from one to the other meant an immense shift in social order in England, and led to the Wars of the Roses. Feudal order and the divine right of kings in Richard was to give way to the more politically inspired moves and rule of Bolingbroke. Shakespeare shows that he understands each side perfectly yet he refuses to let the issue of political power as such be joined. Richard and Bolingbroke—for all that modern productions may wish to get around the fact—have no real encounter in the play.

Richard II remains in a vital sense a history play: it tells what

1 Peter Thomson, "Shakespeare Straight and Crooked; A Review of the 1973 Season at Stratford", *Shakespeare Survey 27* (Cambridge 1974), 143-154.

happened, shows the effects in people's lives, and reflects on the significance of each aspect of the events. But it does not take the issue of the crisis and the conflict as its subject; it draws back from having a central concern in terms of which the issue might be resolved—tragically or otherwise. Compared with what Shakespeare was later to do in his tragedies and Roman plays—the conflicts of Lear and his daughters, of Coriolanus and the Roman citizens, of Mark Antony's Rome and Cleopatra's Egypt—Shakespeare's deliberate concern to keep both sides apart in *Richard II* may be seen as a limitation in the play's achievement. It does have, however, its own peculiar power; and this is not in spite of but because of these same limitations and the way Shakespeare faces up to them.

The manner in which confrontations and encounters occur in *Richard II* is most carefully controlled by Shakespeare. In Act I the quarrel and fight between Mowbray and Bolingbroke is in effect a surrogate encounter, a substitute for the larger confrontation which has been looming between Richard and his nobles since the Duke of Gloucester's death. The quarrel at court and the combat to follow are formal and inconclusive affairs, but they enable Shakespeare to advance his exposition within a tense situation of apparent confrontation where both Richard and Bolingbroke are carefully involved but not made the centre or butt of the issue. Mowbray carries this role. In Act II Richard is drawn more deeply into dramatic oppositions through the agency of his uncles, Gaunt and York. But even here the encounters are not real ones. Gaunt is dying and York is not the power politically his words and intentions make him appear. Shakespeare makes Richard simply ignore their moral and patriotic points of view.

Even in the climax of IV.i., when Bolingbroke and Richard "confront" each other over the crown, it is not a real encounter:

York: To do that office of thine own good will,
Which tired majesty did make thee offer—
The resignation of thy state and crown
To Henry Bolingbroke.

Richard: Give me the crown. Here cousin, seize the crown.
Here cousin,
On this side my hand, and on that side yours,
Now is this golden crown like a deep well,
That owes two buckets, filling one another,
The emptier ever dancing in the air,
The other down, unseen, and full of water.
That bucket down, and full of tears, am I,
Drinking my griefs, whilst you mount up on high.

Bolingbroke: I thought you had been willing to resign. (IV.i.177-190)

The low profile to York and Bolingbroke's manner and Richard's fatalistic moralizing depress the climax, except for the one startling eruption from Richard: "Here cousin, seize the crown." Richard is role-playing a role for Bolingbroke here, and in a way so apt to the point of the scene that the audience takes the point without having to have the substance of the scene enacted for it. In this way Shakespeare is isolating the event as *effect* without having directly to dramatize the cause, a distinction which underlies the whole process of his creativity in *Richard II* and points to the principle of form on which the play is built.

Richard's classic passivity in his deposition becomes under Shakespeare's hands a theatrical activity. The historical and political reality of his situation is transformed into a stage illusion of truly imperial stature. Richard is never so convincing a king as when he is deposing himself. Such is the dramatic paradox which Shakespeare masters in Richard's speeches in Acts III and IV. But elsewhere in the play the relation between theatrical effect and historical cause cannot be brought together in this compact way so circumscribed by Richard holding the stage initiative. The structure of *Richard II,* in fact, breaks open on this issue. For what is often thought of as a change of character in Richard when he returns from Ireland is in reality a sign of a deeper problem for Shakespeare in the handling of cause and effect. The fact is that Shakespeare sees he cannot commit himself and his play to any dramatic statement or enactment of the causes for Richard's deposition. To do so would take him far beyond the bounds of his historical material, and have him presume to resolve the most vexed political question of his own day—the problem of succession.[2]

2 The relation between *Richard II,* politics and history in Shakespeare's own day is a complex but fascinating area for study. As a play, it was not a-political but too political. Queen Elizabeth saw herself as Richard, as did the followers of Essex in asking for a performance of the play shortly before the ill-fated Essex rebellion. In bringing history up to such a point of contemporary application Shakespeare was touching on an aspect of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama for which no conclusive theory has been argued in literary and dramatic criticism. That is, how far the life and genius of the English stage at its highest point correlates with the historical world of heroic kingship in English culture. D. H. Lawrence in *Twilight in Italy* sees the death of kings as the classic English subject; he also senses that in the death of Charles I and the closing of the theatres shortly beforehand there was a coincidence of cultural phases which really belong together. Where *Richard II* would fit into an hypothesis of this kind—with Richard and Charles as "divine right of kings" figures and Bolingbroke an anticipation of Cromwell—still awaits consideration.

Shakespeare's strategy in *Richard II* is therefore to hold back to a minimum the effect in the theatre of the causes (or more properly speaking the conditions) needed to explain the deposition of the king, but to raise to a maximum of theatrical power the effects surrounding the deposition. Acts I and II deal with the conditions which lead to the king's downfall—conditions being those elements without which (but not necessarily because of which) a consequence would not follow. From III.ii. onwards the dramatic issue centres on Richard's passion as *effect*. Hence the structure of the play has a logic to it relating to how the dramatist reads his material, and how he chooses to communicate it to an audience in the theatre rather than how he makes character his total concern. When this point is understood, other aspects of *Richard II* fall into place and help to show how Shakespeare turned the limitations he accepted in his material into a unique dramatic form where the basic elements of his art and vision are on display, and where a truth to history—as much belonging to Shakespeare's own day as to Richard's—is profoundly evident. It was not for nothing that Queen Elizabeth commented on this one play of Shakespeare's, and presumably had the deposition scene censored on its first appearance in print.

III

To see how Shakespeare handles the conditions which justify Bolingbroke's return as a rebel and imply Richard's part in his own downfall—without at the same time committing his play to some necessary cause as the explanation of it all—is to observe Shakespeare in Acts I and II working with a method of representation which had led to many difficulties of interpretation. As noted above, the Mowbray-Bolingbroke affair functions as a kind of substitute for the more deep-seated trouble soon to appear for Richard's rule. The "effect" of an encounter, however, is very much in Shakespeare's mind right from the start. He has Richard feed the expectations of the audience with what he would like to be creating, *viz.*, a real clash.

> Then call them to our presence face to face;
> And frowning brow to brow, ourselves will hear
> Th' accuser and the accused freely speak.
> High-stomached are they both, and full of ire,
> In rage deaf as the sea, hasty as fire. (I.i.15-19)

The process of confrontation then takes place. But the audience must feel it hard to understand, given the evidence advanced in

the charges and counter-charges, why Mowbray should be receiving such harsh treatment from the apparently impartial Richard and his council. The incident provides a striking demonstration of the disparity between theatrical demands and historical materials. Shakespeare involves Bolingbroke in the confrontation but not really on equal terms with Mowbray in spite of all their clashing rhetoric. Bolingbroke is able to say to Mowbray, "Thou art a traitor and a miscreant", but Mowbray in reply is given the more indirect and backgrounding line for Bolingbroke: "I do defy him, and I spit at him, / Call him a slanderous coward and a villain". The difference between "thou" and "him" is a vital difference in the point of view Shakespeare is building up regarding the two characters. Mowbray is the object of dramatic attention, and in becoming the scapegoat of this opening encounter between Richard and his nobles is rewarded solely by Shakespeare's giving him the first pure elegiac strain to be sounded in the play, of which there will be so many others: "What is thy sentence then, but speechless death, / Which robs my tongue from breathing native breath?" (I.iii.172-3).

Richard's role in this encounter is carefully protected and set up by Shakespeare. The connection between Richard and Mowbray over the death of Gloucester never comes to the surface of the scene in such a way as to arouse feelings in the audience against Richard. When Gaunt and the Duchess of Gloucester refer to it in scene ii, it is in one of those retrospective expository moments which Shakespeare uses so well in these early scenes, *i.e., after the event* of the clash of Mowbray and Bolingbroke on their more limited terms. Even when Gaunt in I.ii.37-41 introduces the assertion of Richard's guilt over Gloucester's death, he does so only to annul its effect for himself by absorbing it into an ideology of kingship which will protect Richard for the meantime.

Shakespeare, too, has been concerned to establish Richard as king both in and by means of this opening scene. Just as in *King Lear,* there is a postulate of kingship projected by the play. A plateau effect is created for Richard as a result of the formal rites of challenge, adjudications and courtly proceedings. Shakespeare is careful to time Richard's descent late from the heights of formality to display the signs of temperament and personality which so many critics of the play read back from the end of Act I into its beginning as a sign of character. But whether Richard has a character—as some productions have it, foppish or wicked; or as others Christ-like, frail and helpless among the robber barons—

is, arguably, beside the point. What matters is the way Shakespeare admits him into the opening incident only enough to trigger off a train of injustice against Bolingbroke sufficient to call for redress later on. Again, it is only after the event of Bolingbroke's banishment that Shakespeare in I.iv. displays Richard's envy and suspicion of Bolingbroke's popularity throughout the kingdom. Here, Shakespeare turns all the formality of Richard's kingly stance and style against Richard himself. "We did observe" carries its own irony with regard to the royal plural and Richard's kingly detachment. But what Richard did observe of Bolingbroke quickly is made to seem obsessive in its interests, so that instead of cutting Bolingbroke down to size with its sardonic tone, Richard's speech in I.iv.20-37 has the effect of enlarging Bolingbroke's stature in the mind of the audience. The speech, then, has the *effect* of creating two characters, Richard's and Bolingbroke's, when its apparent *cause* or intention was to conceal one and destroy the other. Such is Shakespeare's genius with these sting-in-the-tail moments of late exposition in *Richard II*. The opening incident of Act I, in all, presents a world in profile, its spectacle and events seen from a distance, and its personalities observed making decisions (not choice) which lead the audience to expect certain consequences to follow for Richard and Bolingbroke. But it is too much to say that the issue of a power-struggle has been joined by them at this stage.

Where Richard is drawn more into real confrontation is with his uncles in Act II. But even here Shakespeare is careful to control how the audience will see his role. Richard is not on stage during Gaunt's celebrated eulogy of England. As a result Richard does not become the direct object of the moral vision of Gaunt—if such it be. The speech strangely becomes its own end, working through an excess of poetic imagination to free itself from its roots in the dramatic intention of the character who utters it. In this it is comparable to Richard's speech on Bolingbroke earlier mentioned; although here what is in effect created is the idea of England itself in terms such that the speech has become part of patriotic lore. Gaunt is really wanting to castigate the actual England he now is leaving. But the disparity between effect and cause in his speech is part of the logic of *Richard II* as a whole, and establishes a stance and tone for the play's elegiac mind in passionate and poetic terms which Richard before long will be making his own.

When Gaunt and Richard clash, it is on more limited grounds.

The banter over Gaunt's name is that lively nervousness of characters feeling each other out (the later Hamlet and Polonius come to mind) but giving nothing away for Shakespeare in his control of the audience's point of view. What Richard meets with eventually is the bluntest of insults ("A thousand flatterers sit within thy crown"), on which level his reaction in kind ("A lunatic lean-witted fool") is justifiable for Shakespeare as part of the event or effect of the moment. The audience does not have real grounds for identifying with either party in this exchange; and if it happens that traditionally in the theatre the tongue of the dying Gaunt attracts deep sympathy rather than enforces deep harmony as Gaunt had himself intended, this is again to show how Shakespeare is bringing off a theatrical effect independent of his material. Perhaps it is possible that the new style of Shakespearian stage productions will bring about a better balance in the Richard-Gaunt roles in this scene.

With York the issue of Shakespeare's manner of representation works in an opposite direction from that with Gaunt. York has been positioned to play a central role by virtue of events and of his own insight and experience. But just as Shakespeare is later to have Lear ignore a somewhat similar role in Kent, he has Richard in imperious egotism drive right past the gesture at a moral centre which York at this moment implies. It is the play as a whole acting in its total dynamics which expresses itself in Richard's role here; it is not simply a matter of Richard's character. Instinctively, Shakespeare is looking ahead to the real political ineffectuality of York, who after playing the same routine on Bolingbroke is soon reduced to the function of a cipher among the true political forces ("I do remain as neuter"). Act II ends with Shakespeare feeling for a balance of sympathies between rebels and Queen.

IV

When Richard returns from Ireland, the manner of Shakespeare's presentation switches suddenly. Richard is no longer the kingly object of Acts I and II; he is now the human subject of the play. It is a change much less of character than of the mode of enactment Shakespeare is using, and of a new and almost total emphasis on theatrical effect rather than historical cause or condition. Richard's interiority defines a new order of theatrical reality for Shakespeare. The passivity to the role he plays becomes a dynamic activity on stage; his suffering is a kind of dramatic

doing. Such action as occurs in ways that move the audience is the alternation in his feelings, his ups and downs, his advances and withdrawals of mood. Richard's capacity for awareness, response and interpretation from III.ii. onwards is a new discovery and creation by Shakespeare of *the person* as the ground of experience, especially tragic experience, in the theatre.

Bolingbroke, so far from being Richard's counterpart in these climactic scenes of Acts III and IV, is backgrounded deliberately by Shakespeare, and sheltered by the intermediary figure of Northumberland. Bolingbroke is reserved for late and interesting development in the scenes relating to Prince Hal and to the York-Duchess of York-Aumerle situation in V.ii. and iii. These scenes point to England as becoming a new kind of society demanding a new kind of ruler, the situation which Shakespeare is to take up in *Henry IV*. But it is wishful thinking to see Bolingbroke's role in *Richard II* in any sense as comparable with that of Richard himself. It is to distort Shakespeare's meaning to do so.

How Shakespeare creates the world of effect which is the world of Richard *as person* calls for close study of the technique in Shakespeare's manner of representation. Here, it is a process of self-conscious theatricality to Richard which must be seen as Shakespeare's mode of enactment, a mode which realizes as its end and effect a peculiarly powerful stage presence of the person. Self-conscious theatricality in Richard establishes him as individual and dramatic in his own right, as the hero or the one who matters to the audience. It is the logic of relations between stage and audience which has been changed by this transformation in technique, and not the character of Richard which is in fact its effect.

Richard becomes, as it were, the master of ceremonies of his own play. He holds the initiative on stage, he announces entrances and exits, he preempts the judgments of the onlookers, he imputes points of view, and he interprets events and ideas. In all this he is like his namesake Richard III in Shakespeare's earlier play, though for an opposite reason. The technique of self-conscious theatricality in *Richard III* is to create a world of pure stage action; in *Richard II* it isolates stage suffering in an equally pure way. Shakespeare was to draw on the resources of his two Richards right through to the end of his tragedies.

Richard II becomes an open, unplaced, active character by virtue of this change. He is his own world while on stage from III.ii. onwards. And whereas in Acts I and II it was the audience who had, so to speak, to stand back and witness the spectacle of

kingly affairs, in Acts III and IV it is the other characters on the stage who have to stand back and witness the incredibly moving event of a person unfolding himself before their eyes. Richard in his suffering is his own author, agent, actor and audience. He is a kind of total theatre.

Shakespeare gives to Richard the control of the mood and point of view of what is happening to him:

> Mock not my senseless conjuration lords. (III.ii.23)
> I had forgot myself, am I not King? (III.ii.83)
> Aumerle thou weep'st, my tender-hearted cousin (III.iii.159)
> I talk but idly, and you laugh at me. (III.iii.170)

Also, the key steps in the historical action are theatrically dictated by him:

> Down, down I come, like Glistering Phaethon (III.iii.177)
> Set on towards London, cousin is it so? (III.iii.206)

It is, however, from this welter of personal initiatives given to Richard that Shakespeare makes emerge an opposite impression: "the person" of Richard creates Richard as "the king". It is a charged paradox capable of containing its own world of drama.

> What must the King do now? Must he submit?
> The King shall do it: must he be deposed?
> The King shall be contented: must he lose
> The name of King? A God's name, let it go. (III.iii.142-145)

Or, as when he role-plays again a role for Bolingbroke:

> What says King Bolingbroke, will his majesty
> Give Richard leave to live till Richard die? (III.iii.173-174)

Richard on the rebound from his own role-playing is able to be open and intimate with himself and his audience, and in doing so to discover his own emptiness.

V

Given then that dramatic encounter in historical and political terms is staved off in *Richard II* by Shakespeare, and given that cause (or condition) and effect are held separate around the change in Act III, it remains to be shown how these self-imposed limitations yet allow Shakespeare to reveal such basic elements of his art and vision as to give Richard II a key place in the Shakespeare canon and in the history of English theatre. What is involved here is a recognition of the peculiar power and meaning of the poetry, and of the way it is set off against the dramatic discovery of the person as being the grounds for Shakespeare of tragic reality. In its sharpest form it will be seen as its own kind

of confrontation in the imaginative encounter through Richard of death and the king. But it is also spread out through the play in many other forms which carry their own evocative power.

In the important scene of III.ii. the empty spaces surrounding Richard's self-dramatizations are filled with a peculiar kind of lament from the old and experienced followers of Richard. Salisbury, Scroop and in other ways Aumerle and the Bishop of Carlisle utter a powerful kind of chorus which expresses itself in poetry of so clear a form as to be almost epigrammatic. There is a firmness to the verse which implies a solidity of stance for those who utter it, as if the play in its deepest interests is finding voice in their views. It is as if Gaunt's old manner ("For sleeping England long time have I watched") is welling up from within the play to bring into an immensely rational kind of consciousness the intimations of mortality from England's past and for Richard's power.

But perhaps the more evocative intelligence for this experience is that of the Queen, who for all her simplicity of role has to carry the burden of understanding both the political and personal dimensions of the play's events. It is the way Shakespeare has her reach back, as it were, into her psyche ("my inward soul / With nothing trembles") which establishes the play's understanding of the past and of death as a compelling imaginative subject for the theatre. Her beautiful set of exchanges with Bushy in II.ii. have a profoundly sad Shakespearian cadence to them which will flow on into his later drama right through into the late romances. It could almost be Polixenes and Perdita speaking in *The Winter's Tale*:

Bushy: Then, thrice-gracious Queen,
More than your lord's departure weep not, more's not seen;
Or if it be, 'tis with false sorrow's eye,
Which for things true, weeps things imaginary.
Queen: It may be so; but yet my inward soul
Persuades me it is otherwise. Howe'er it be,
I cannot but be sad; so heavy sad,
As though on thinking on no thought I think,
Makes me with heavy nothing faint and shrink.
Bushy: 'Tis nothing but conceit, my gracious lady.
Queen: 'Tis nothing less. Conceit is still derived
From some forefather grief, mine is not so,
For nothing hath begot my something grief,
Or something hath the nothing that I grieve,
'Tis in reversion that I do possess.
But what it is that is not yet known, what
I cannot name, 'tis nameless woe I wot. (II.ii.24-40)

Salisbury's "O call back yesterday, bid time return" is understood by the Queen, grappling with her own and the play's unconsciousness, in movingly personal and dramatic terms. Hence it comes as no surprise that Richard as the play's chief spokesman of his own and England's experience should be in such firm command of this motif when it appears in definitive form in his III.ii. speech:

> For God's sake let us sit upon the ground,
> And tell sad stories of the death of kings,
> How some have been deposed, some slain in war,
> Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed,
> Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping killed,
> All murdered. For within the hollow crown
> That round the mortal temples of a king
> Keeps Death his court, and there the antic sits,
> Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp,
> Allowing him a breath, a little scene,
> To monarchise, be feared, and kill with looks,
> Infusing him with self and vain conceit,
> As if this flesh which walls about our life,
> Were brass impregnable; and humoured thus,
> Comes at the last, and with a little pin
> Bores through his castle wall, and farewell king! (III.ii.155-170)

Shakespeare is in such full possession of the verse here as to make comment superfluous. The effortless flow from a world of historical fact and record up into the reaches of Richard's self-dramatizing mind is a measure of Shakespeare's deep indwelling in this theme. But it should be stressed how aptly the conclusion comes within this imagined world of death and the king. The imagery itself seems to become absorbed into the self-dramatizing process of the character giving voice to it. When the antic Death acts out his final role: "and with a little pin / Bores through his castle wall", there is, indeed, some unique decorum of an imaginary state bringing to an end a larger imaginary state in Richard's more general self-conscious theatricality of role-playing. The role within the role resolves the role. Death imagined by a king within a King plays out its role: ". . . and farewell king!".

The same kind of decorum applies elsewhere to Richard in the play. Shakespeare finds a series of images or objects which, so to speak, belong to Richard, or do not go outside the world of his ego and identity: the descent of stairs, the disrobing of kingly garments, the handing over of the crown, the smashing of the mirror, the groom and his mention of roan Barbary, and possibly the Queen herself—all make for the effect of an external reality against which to sense the tragic quality of Richard's experience

without having to go outside the terms on which Richard has come alive in the theatre as a character.

Act V, Scene v with Richard's great speech in Pomfret Castle prison is the climax of the two chief modes of the play's manner of representation. The poetry of the play with its heavy non-dramatic ritualistic kind of elegiac declamation here finds itself almost in a condition of pure poetry: the stillness of Richard's contemplative act seems to be in itself an acceptance of the message coming out of all the ritualized stillness of the play's mind; the world as a prison, music that will not keep time, the self as many persons. But the other mode of *Richard II* is equally there, the self-dramatizing manner which creates the effect of the person as a real theatrical presence. In ways which look ahead in English theatre both to Shakespeare's own *King Lear* and to modern tragedy in Beckett, the creation of Richard's consciousness here with its efforts to objectify a world in which he is so clearly the subject, human and dramatic, is at this point in his development Shakespeare's true resolution of the concerns of his play.