An Evaluation and Criticism of Shakespeare's Use of Historical Materials In A Selected Group of His History-Dramas

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An evaluation and criticism of Shakespeare's use of historical materials in a selected group of his history-dramas. (Henry VI, Parts I, II, III, and Richard III)

being

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Section A Part 1.
The Tests of Historicity

In order to establish a fact as truly historical, one must consult several reliable sources. These sources must be investigated as to trust-worthiness by determining if by any chance one is based on the other. If this is true, they cannot be considered independent sources. Shakespeare, for his history-dramas, used Hall's and Holinshed's chronicles. These cannot be considered as independent sources since Holinshed has used Hall's chronicles as a basis for his work over this civil war period. The testimony of an eye witness, if it is given shortly after the occurrence of an event, is of more value than an account of the same event handed down by word of mouth. That is why an account which is written is often more desirable and accurate than one which is told, provided of course that the manuscript was written immediately after the happening of the event. Time allows the personal feelings to color the story. Shakespeare has taken events from the chronicles and colored them with his own ideas and feelings as well as the ideas and preferences of the Elizabethan audience. His accounts, for the most part, are possible but many of them are not probable. Shakespeare has shown us in Richard III especially, a character which was possible. The various murders which are attributed to him could have happened and some of them were hinted at in the
chronicles as being possibilities but that did not establish them as facts. The people of the time expected Richard III to be a superhuman villain so Shakespeare portrays his own feelings and the feelings of the audiences he was striving to please in this last play. An event may be possible, but a single affirmation that it actually did occur does not move it from the background of possibility into the foreground of probability.

Interpretation of established facts plays a great part in the use of historical facts. Shakespeare, in an age of highly developed nationalism, pictures an age in which historically there is no evidence of nationalism. This naturally puts him in a place to defend Henry VI and the Lancastrians, and condemn the Yorkist faction whether they deserve it or not. Very little is said of religion but we know Shakespeare was writing about a Catholic England while he was living under a Protestant government.

Section A  Part II.

Reasons for Choice of Subject

It has always been a subject of interest to me to try to discover what actual facts in the history of people caused the literary personages to write the things they did. Another interesting point is to determine the philosophy of people of a given age which caused them to enjoy and appreciate certain types and styles of writing.

"The critics of the seventeenth century appreciated Shakespeare's genius although they found him crude and faulty when compared to the French dramatists whom they regarded as a standard; but since they were actually closer to Shakespeare in point of time and consequent ease of comprehension, and were not theory-ridden, they had certain advantages over later critics. Dryden in his essay Of Dramatick Poesie (1668) writes finely of Shakespeare as the man of all the moderns who 'had the largest and most comprehensive soul,' and yet he is careful to point out Shakespeare's irregularities and inconsistencies. Thomas Rymer in A Short View of Tragedy (1693) states the case of late seventeenth century England against Shakespeare, saying he was barbarous, irrational, and over-exuberent; and, though there was no lack of defenders, that is the gist of the dramatic criticism of the age. Yet it was practically always admitted that Shakespeare was possessed of a transcendent genius.

E. Craig, Hardin. Shakespeare (1922).
The classicists admired Shakespeare's genius but they were not indulging in Shakespeare worship. The critics of the eighteenth century considered his work directly and sensibly. Dr. Samuel Johnson was the first who paid serious attention to the conditions in which Shakespeare did his work. Edward Malone studied Shakespeare and his age profoundly.

As a part of the Romantic Movement, came a new Shakespeare criticism. The thinkers found in Shakespeare such a magnificent picture of life that they thought of him as having "the insight of a seer and the power of a poet, as greater and more significant than life itself. Each of his plays became a microcosm capable of yielding to the student, if he came with love and admiration in his heart, finer truth than science could yield. Science, they argued, bounds itself by fact; poetry has no such limits, but is a mode of revelation of the philosophy of life, presenting in concrete and constructive form what life means and what life might be." Shakespeare was thought of as a philosopher and teacher. It is an idealistic, almost a mystical point of view.

In the twentieth century there has sprung up a group of critics who are more sceptical in regard to Shakespeare. They are willing to recognize his good points, but notice also his flaws in workmanship as did the critics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They are not ready to take unqualified the ideas of the nineteenth century. They are trying to determine

what Shakespeare said and what he meant when he said it.

Shakespeare's universality made it possible for people of all ages to appreciate his work. We do not hear so much about his historical dramas as we do of his tragedies and comedies. The history-drama is, nevertheless, important and interesting. It served as a stepping stone in the development of the drama proper. The awakening of nationalism made people interested in the history of their own nation. Ordinarily, we accept Shakespeare's historical drama as fact instead of as literature. We do not allow for the dramatic episodes which were necessary in order to hold the interest of the Elizabethan audience. For example, consider the supernatural scenes. The audience demanded something of the unusual, of the impossible. So far as history is concerned the playwright was under obligation to entertain the audience with things which they believed and liked. It would not have been good policy for the author to have condemned in any way the great public, even if it were at fault.

"Our great dramatist, as is well known, has illustrated the passions of the day with tragic incidents in his plays of Henry VI. But in this I suspect there is the special pleading of the Tudor writers, who wished to represent in the strongest way how great were the blessings which came in with the accession of the family under which they lived, and how healing had been the pacific policy of the first Tudor prince."


5. Rogers, James Thorold--Six Centuries of Work and Wages 1919 p. 223.
True history uses facts to form a theory—not a theory to form facts. It is true that Shakespeare used as the source of his plays Hall's and Holinshed's chronicles, but many times he deviated from the facts to serve his dramatic purpose. This is true of other periods as well as of the civil war between the houses of York and Lancaster. The character of George Washington, which we teach to our children is a literary, traditional character instead of an historical one. We do not really believe in the story of the cherry tree—yet it was taught to us, and we pass it on to our children. It is a very pretty, sentimental, poetic idea but as real history, it is worthless. Shakespeare used specific instances to illustrate his points, and we have taken too many of them as literal truths. He used the instances to bring out a theory vividly. We accept his theory and along with it, the facts to substantiate it.

This period in English history is not usually dealt with in detail by the majority of historians. It is not considered a vital period. Evidently it was considered important during Shakespeare's time or he would not have made it the basis for four of his plays. This is probably due to the fact that the Tudor dynasty was on the throne of England. Very little has been written concerning Shakespeare's authenticity in his portrayal of characters or events.
Section B

Authorship and the Parallel Texts

Shakespeare began his career as a playwright by revamping plays which were already in existence. For many of his plays he used as sources, plays which were being played by companies other than the one to which he belonged. Since these plays were in quarto and not published in folio for some time, it was possible for him to make additions and changes from time to time. For this reason some of his plays are inconsistent in style. There will be evidence that the play was written early in his career as well as evidences of later work.

It is not likely that Shakespeare is the sole author of 1 Henry VI, neither is it probable that he had no hand in it. "The original 'Harry the Sixth' has been attributed to Marlowe, Greene, and Peele severally or with collaboration among them. Peele's claim seems the best because of the frequent parallels between the play as we have it and the known work of Peele, and because the spirit of rampant patriotism or chauvinism, which must have characterized the original version and is not absent from the present play, is characteristic of Peele. Shakespeare's version is most clearly seen in those parts of the play which make it fit into a series with 3 and 4 Henry VI and Richard III." The Rose Garden scene is undoubtedly Shakespearean but the treatment of the character of Joan of

Arc is not at all like his character portrayal of other works. Mention is made of a play "Henry the Sixth" in Henslowe's Diary in 1592. This play treated of the same subject matter as that of I Henry VI.

There are parallel versions of the plays II and III Henry VI. The first is the "Contention" and the second is "The true Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke." Some of the best critics assign to Marlowe, Peele, or Greene a share in the authorship of these plays. There are two views for the reason for the existence of these parallel versions. One is that II and III Henry VI are revisions of the other plays and the other is that the Contention and the True Tragedie are debased versions of I, and III Henry VI supplied to the printers by dishonest actors who stole them from the theatre. Hardin Craig prefers the latter of the two theories.

It is possible, according to Professor Adams in his Life of Shakespeare, that Shakespeare wrote II and III Henry VI in order to rival the popularity in Henslowe's theater of an early form of the play now known as I Henry VI. Evidence of this is found in Greene's attack on Shakespeare as "An upstart croe beautified with our feathers," and a"Tygers heart wrapped in a player's hyde."

"Professor Brooke finds some indications that I Henry VI

8. Ibid Professor Adams Life of Shakespeare, p. 214-15
9. Ibid Greene A Groatsworth of Wit
may have been revived about 1599 in order to take advantage of the interest in the theme re-awakened by the popularity of Henry V and thinks that the reference to Henry VI in the epilogue of Henry V is a hint of such a revival."

Shakespeare had probably acted a part in the Henry plays. In the play of Richard III he has pictured his own conception of the nature of the civil war period. The downfall of the house of York had probably been treated before, but this play is Shakespeare's own. The War of the Roses period was not complete and it was natural for Shakespeare to write the final chapter of the story. Shakespeare has shared the opinion of contemporary writers in his picture of the villainy of Richard III. Both Polydore Vergil and Sir Thomas More picture Richard III as a villain and in this way satisfy the Tudor rulers.

Shakespeare's treatment of Richard III which he began in Henry VI and developed further in the last play of the tetralogy is entirely Machiavellian. Machiavelli in his writings forgot that men are more than political beings. He neglected religion excepting as a part of the state machinery. In the realm of politics he subordinated morals to political expediency. "We doubt whether any name in literary history be so generally odious as that of the man whose character and writings we now propose to consider. The terms in which he is com-

10. Craig, Hardin. op. cit. p. 101
11. Craig, Hardin. op. cit. p. 108
monly described would seem to import that he was the Tempter, the Evil Principle, the discoverer of ambition and revenge, the original inventor of perjury, and that before the publication of his fatal Prince, there had never been a hypocrite, a tyrant, or a traitor, a simulated virtue, or a convenient crime.... The church of Rome has pronounced his works accursed things. Nor have our own countrymen been backward in testifying their opinion of his merits. Out of his surname they have coined an epithet for a knave, and out of his Christian name a synonym for the Devil."

Machiavelli's 'Mandragola' was a popular and successful comedy. "In its form, its spontaneity, vivacity, and wit, it is not surpassed by Shakespeare; but it is a biting satire on religion and morality, with not even a hint of a moral to redeem it. Vice is made humorous, and virtue silly; its satire is 'deep and murderous;' and its plot too obscene to be narrated."

Shakespeare's plays were for a long time stock plays in the repertory of the theater and were likely to be revised and revived at almost any time up to 1625.


Nick Machiavel had ne'er a trick
Tho' he gave his name to our old Nick

(Hudibras Part III Canto I)

Section C

Methods

I have endeavored to make a careful and minute study of the period of the civil war in England in order to determine wherein Shakespeare has used the definite facts of history and wherein he has deviated from these facts.

In my study of the history, I prepared a columnar chart. In this chart I considered the following points: battles, personnel, main events, geography, foreign influence. I prepared a similar chart for the plays which cover this period. After both charts were complete, I compared them as to subject matter and character portrayal.

As source material for this period, I found as especially valuable the four volumes of the Paston Letters. These contain valuable accounts of incidents from the view point of the people living at that time. The Holinshed chronicle is also very good for the source of facts. Evidence is found that Shakespeare used both Holinshed and Hall's chronicles as the basis for his plays.

For the minute history the most valuable works I found were Gairdner's Introduction to the Paston Letters and J. H. Ramsay's two volumes on Lancaster and York. Gairdner used as a basis for his work: Hall's chronicles, Holinshed's chronicles, London chronicles, and many of the Rolls of Parliament.

For general history I used the following references:
of England and Greater Britain, James Rogers--Six Centuries of
Work and Wages, Encyclopedia Britannica, Encyclopedia Americana.
The plays which I used were: Henry VI, Parts I, II, III, and
Richard III. The introductions by Rolfe were valuable in
this comparative study.
Section D

Historical Discrepancies

We know more about Shakespeare's characters and incidents of the civil war between the Lancastrians and Yorks than we do of the history of the period. The name given to this civil war, 'The War of the Roses,' is even a poetical title, not an historical one. True, the white rose was one of the emblems of the house of York, but the red rose was not used as an emblem of the Lancastrians until Henry VII, a Tudor King, became the ruler of England.

Shakespeare pictures to us in York, Salisbury, and Warwick, three powerful, rebellious, grasping lords. From the time when Richard, Duke of York, learns from Mortimer that he is the heir of Jon of Gaunt, an elder brother of the ancestors of the reigning king, Shakespeare pictures him plotting to gain the throne of England. He welcomes being sent to Ireland, so that he may have an opportunity to gather an army and return to overthrow the government, and seize the throne for himself. Shakespeare makes the most of the suspicion at this time that Jack Cade's rebellion, which in reality was a political demon-


stration of the people against the government, was instigated and promoted by York. History takes a different attitude. York is the heir of John of Gaunt through female descendancy. Henry IV was an usurper therefore Henry VI has a weaker claim to the throne than has Richard of York. For this reason York has been denied the council of the king, which was his right by birth as well as by ability. He was feared by the intimates of the king because his influence was likely to supplant their own. York had to force his way to the king's council, on his return from Ireland in 1450. He presented his petition and received an answer from the king. The uprisings in Ireland gave the king and his favorites a chance to rid themselves of York's presence. It was a case of temporary exile. York, realizing this, came back with an army to rid the nation of Somerset, not the king. Many people supported him because they looked to him for leadership.

"From the demand which arose in the country that York, not Somerset, should be given the chief voice in the government, the War of the Roses began.

"There was, undoubtedly, a feeling throughout the country that the Duke of York was one of few strong men left. After the loss of Normandy in 1450, some unknown poet lamented the lack of great men to bring peace and order to the country:

16. Their demands and requests were entirely of a political nature. J. R. Ramsay, op. cit. Vol II, (1892) p. 127.
The Root is dead, the Swan is gone
The fiery Cresset hath lost his light.

Therefore England may make great moan
Were not the help of God Almighty.

The Castle is won, where care begun,
The Porte-Cullis is laid a-down;

Yclosed we have our Velvet Hat
That covered us from many storms brown.

The Boar is far into the West
That should us help with shield and spear

The Falcon fleeth and hath no rest
Till he wit where to dig his nest.

19. John, Duke of Bedford
20. Humphrey, Duke of Gloster
22. Rouen
23. Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset
24. Cardinal Henry Beaufort
25. Thomas Courtney, Earl of Devonshire
26. The Duke of York

York is pictured by Shakespeare as antagonistic to the king. History shows us that York and the king agreed but he and the queen did not. Before the Battle of St. Albans, York tried to get two messages to the king. One he sent through Archbishop Bourchier—repudiating all intention of disloyalty and declaring they brought the armed forces for the king's protection. They requested the Archbishop to explain to Henry the true motives of their conduct. From were the next day, they penned an address to the king himself protesting their good intent. They complained of the unfair proceedings of the enemies in excluding them from the king's presence and in poisoning the king's mind with doubt of allegiance.

28. Geiringer's Introduction to the Paston Letters (1895)


Moste Cristen Kyng, ryght hygh and myghty Prince, and our mooste redoubted souverayn Lorde, we recommaunde us as humblye as we suffice unto your hygh excellence, where unto please it to wete that for so moche as we hyre and understand to our grettyst sorowe ertheyle that our ennemyes of approued esperience, such as abyde and kepe theym sylf under the whynge of your Magestee Royall, have thrownen unto the same ryght stedyousely and ryght fraudulentlye manye ambyguiytes and doubtes of the fayth, lygeaunce and dewtee that, God knowyth, we beere unto your hyghnesse, and have put theym yn as grete devoyr as they coude to estraunge us from your mooste noble presence and from the favour of your gooode
grace; whych goode grace to us ye and owe to be our soulder
and mooste desyred yole and consolation: We at thyse tymes be
comyn wyth grace and your true and humble lyenge men, toward
your seyd Hygh Excellence to declare and shew theerto at large
our seyd Fythy and ligescunc, enteryng wyth the mercye of
Jesu un the seyd comyng, to put us yn as diligent and hertye
devoyr and dewtee as onye your lyenge men on lyve to that at
may avausce or preferre the honnour and wellfere of the seyd
Majeeste Royalle and the seurte of the seyd most notable person;
the whyche we beseeche our blessed Creature to prosper (in) as
grete honnor, yole, and felicitie as ever had onye prince
erethlye, and to your seyd Hyghnesse so to take, accept, and
repute ws, and not to plese to gve trust or confidence unto
the sinistrez, malicious, and fraudulent laboures and rapportes
of our seyd enmnyes unto our comyng to your seyd most noble
presence; where unto we beseech humblye that we may be adimittie
as your lyenge men, to th'entent to show us the same; wheroff
yesterday we wrote our letteres of our entent to the ryght
reverent fader yn God, the Archebysshope of Cauterburye, Your
Chancellor of England, to be shewed to your seyd Hyghnesse, where-
off, forsomoch as we be not acerteyned whethyr our seyd entent
be by hyse fadrehode shewed unto your seyd goode grace or not; we
send therooff unto thys closed a copy of our said letteres of our
disposicion toward your seyd Hygh Excellence and the honnour and
Welle of the land, whereynne we wolde persever wyth the grace
of our Lorde.
York was evidently the choice of the people because after
the battle of St. Albans, London received the victors in
triumph with a general procession.

Before the battle near Ludlow, the Yorkists sent three
messages to the king protesting their actions had been mis-
construed and their tenants subjected to wrong and violence
and themselves lay under unjust suspicion. They said their
enemies wanted their lands and hoped to obtain them by influence
with the king. They assured the king they had avoided battle
not from fear but from dread of God and the king. This seems
to have been borne out by facts since at the next parliament
the Yorkists were attainted.

Warwick's success on the sea against Spain is not men-
tioned by Shakespeare. Neither does he mention the humiliating
fact that after Ludlow, Warwick remained supreme on the sea as
well as in Calais. Many supporters flocked to Calais until it
became a Yorkist stronghold. An attempt was made by Rivers to
capture some of Warwick's ships in Sandwich but Warwick sent
John Denham who brought Rivers and his son to Calais. Somerset

34. Paston Letter 317.
35. Paston Letter 345 and 346.
was appointed Captain of Calais after the Yorkist attainder but he was unable to assume his post as his own men betrayed him to Warwick. Warwick, with a fleet went to Ireland to meet York. The Lancastrian fleet dared not attack him even though they had superior numbers, because they could not trust their own men, so he was allowed to pass in peace. Shakespeare does not picture for us this Warwick but instead, pictures to us Warwick, the king-maker, who deserts his king as soon as he disobeys his wishes and supports the Lancastrian cause. He shows us not the Warwick who would serve his king (Henry VI) if given a fair chance, but a Warwick who, before the battle of St. Albans, refuses to do homage to his king. Henry says to Warwick and Salisbury:

"Why, Warwick, hath thy knee forgot to bow? Old Salisbury, shame to thy silver hair Thou mad misleader of thy brain-sick son! What, wilt thou on thy death-bed play the ruffian, And seek for sorrow with thy spectacles? O, where is faith? O, where is loyalth? If it be banished from the frosty head, Where shall it find a harbour in the earth?"

Salisbury replies--

"My lord, I have considered with myself The title of this most renowned duke,

And in my conscience do repute his grace
The rightful heir to England's royal seat."

Historically, York makes no claim to the throne until in 1459, shortly before the battle of Northampton. It appears as if the Yorkists were forced to fight to protect themselves and their property as Salisbury was when he won at Bloreheath against Audley. Here he fought to keep from being arrested. His arrest had been ordered because there had been a brawl between one of the king's servants and one of Warwick's. Warwick had retired to Calais so the Queen and her followers turned against the Duke's father.

Shakespeare shows us a Gloster who died a martyr at the hands of his enemies—the queen, Suffolk, and Beaufort. We see him lose his position as protector of the realm because of jealousies. The queen is jealous of Eleanor, the Duchess of Gloster:

"Not all these lords do vex me half so much
As that proud dame, the lord protector's wife.
She sweeps it through the court with troops of ladies,
More like an empress than Duke Pumphrey's wife.
Strangers in court do take her for the queen;
She bears a duke's revenues on her back,
And in her heart she scorns our poverty.

Shall I not live to be aveng'd on her?
Contempluous, base-born call'd as she is,
She vaunted mongst her minions t'other day,
The very train of her worst wearing gown
Was better worth than all my father's land.

Till Suffolk gave two dukedoms for his daughter."

The Lords: Suffolk, Somerset, Buckingham, Salisbury, and Warwick are pictured as jealous of Gloster's power over the king which prohibits them from having the control they desire. Shakespeare's Gloster refrains from doing anything to help his wife when she has been sentenced to banishment because he holds in such high respect the laws of England and the life of his king. In reality this restraint was probably due to his desire to protect himself from suspicion and to retain his position as leader of the war party of the realm.

"Gloster was clever and cultivated, the patron of scholars, and at the same time master of the arts which please the people, was self-seeking and unprincipled, constantly stirring up dissension at home and abroad.

"Henry V. measured Humphrey's capacity, and by his will named him merely deputy for Bedford in England. Humphrey at once claimed the full position of regent, but the parliament and council allowed him only the title of protector during

---

Bedford's absence, with limited powers. In 1425, he entangled himself in a quarrel with the council and his uncle Henry Beaufort, and stirred up a tumult in London. Open war was averted only by Beaufort's prudence, and Bedford's hurried return. With some difficulty Bedford effected a formal reconciliation at Leicester in March 1426. To check his indiscretion the council, in November, 1429, had the king crowned, and so put an end to Humphrey's protectorate, but during Henry VI's absence in France he acted as warden in England. The defection of Burgundy roused English feeling, and Humphrey won popularity as leader of the war party. He continued to thwart Suffolk, who was now taking Beaufort's place in the council, by opposing the king's marriage to Margaret of Anjou. Under Suffolk's influence Henry VI grew to distrust his uncle. The crisis came in the Parliament of Bury St. Edmunds in February, 1447. Immediately on his arrival there, Humphrey was arrested, and four days later, on February 23, died. He was long remembered in spite of his bad political record, as the good Duke Humphrey, on account of his liberal patronage of scholars and of learning.  

Queen Margaret was condemned by Shakespeare. She was considered still a French woman, and as such despised. There is a decided agreement here of Shakespeare and the war party of Gloucester in this condemnation. She is blamed for much of the

trouble. Historically she is now considered a brave, courageous woman trying to hold the throne of England for her husband and her son. Shakespeare shows a woman who scorns her husband and takes the government out of his hands so that she and her favorites may rule.

"My lord of Suffolk, say is this the guise
Is this the fashion in the court of England?
Is this the royalty of Britain's isle
And this the royalty of Albion's king?

I thought King Henry had resembled thee
In courage, courtship, and proportion;
But all his mind is bent to holiness—
To number Ave-Maries on his beads,
His champions are the prophets and apostles,
His study is his tilt-yard, and his loves
Are brazen images of canoniz'd saints.
I would the college of the cardinals
Would choose him pope and carry him to Rome,
And set the triple crown upon his head;
That were a state fit for his holiness."

"What are you made of? You'll nor fight nor fly!"
"Nay, go not from me; I will follow thee.

42. Henry VI, Part II, Act V, Scene III, L. 74, (Rolfe edition)
Who can be patient in such extremes?
Ah, wretched man! would I had died a maid,
And never seen thee, never borne thee son,
Seeing thou hast prov'd so unnatural a father!
Meth he deserv'd to lose his birthright thus?" 43
"Enforced thee! art thou king, and wilt be forc'd?
I shame to hear thee speak. Ah, timorous wretch!
Thou hast undone thyself, thy son, and me,
And given unto the house of York such head
As thou shalt reign but by their sufferance." 44

Henry--

"For Margaret my queen, and Clifford too,
Have chid me from the battle, swearing both
They prosper best of all when I am thence." 45

Shakespeare may be partial in his attitude against Margaret, but he agrees as to her character with the old chronicler Hall who informs us that Queen Margaret 'excelled all other as well in beauty and favour as in wit and policy, and was in stomach and courage more like to a man than to a woman.' he adds that, after the espousals of Henry and Margaret, 'the king's friends fell from him; the lords of the realm fell in division among themselves; the Commons rebelled against their natural prince; fields were foughten; many thousands slain; and, finally, the

44. Henry VI, Part III, Act I, Scene I, L. 229-234(Rolfe edition)
king was deposed, his son slain, and his queen sent home again with as much misery and sorrow as she was received with pomp and triumph;'

"This passage seems to have furnished the ground-work of the character as it is developed in these plays with no great depth or skill. Margaret is portrayed with all the exterior graces of her sex; as bold and artful, with spirit to dare, resolution to act, and fortitude to endure; but treacherous, haughty, dissembling, vindictive, and fierce. The bloody struggle for power in which she was engaged, and the companion-ship of the ruthless iron men around her, seem to have left her nothing of womanhood but the heart of a mother—that last stronghold of our feminine nature. So far the character is consistently drawn: it has something of the power, but none of the flowing ease of Shakespeare's manner. There are fine materials not well applied; there is poetry in some of the scenes and speeches; the situations are often exceedingly poetical; but in the character of Margaret herself there is not an atom of poetry."

The chroniclers give us a different Henry VI from Shakespeare's. According to the chronicles, Henry's imbecility was very nearly allied to utter incapacity. The fact is brought out that his weakness was undoubtedly an inherited tendency from

46. Introduction to the Rolfe edition of Henry VI, Part II, p. 19
47. Introduction to the Rolfe edition of Henry VI, Part II, p. 19
his grandfather, Charles VI, the mad king of France. They consider very little difference between his weakness and idiocy. Shakespeare has shown us a king with virtues unsuited to the age in which he moved; contemplative amidst friends and foes; hurried along by a distempered energy; peaceful under circumstances that could have no issue but in appeals to arms; just in thought, but powerless to assert even his own sense of right amidst the contests of injustice which hemmed him in.

Henry VI seemed to be absolutely ignorant of the world in which he lived. Ramsey gives the following incident to illustrate this fact. "Riding into Cripplegate one day from St. Albans, he saw a ghastly looking object set up on a stake over the gate; enquiring what it was, he was told that it was the quarter of a traitor executed for treason against himself. 'Take it down at once,' he said, 'I would not have a Christian body so treated on my account for anything.'"

Shakespeare's Richard II is a villain with few if any redeeming qualities. All during Edward IV's reign Richard is trying to put out of his way anyone who might keep him from seizing the throne when the opportunity might arise. Shakespeare has described Richard as contemporary historians delineated him. He has simply given vividness and actuality to the portrait as he found it in their works. He did not originate it, though

48. J. H. Ramsey, op. cit. 249-250
he may have exaggerated some of its details. It is not known that Richard was in any way responsible for the death of Clarence, yet Shakespeare has him give the order for his murder. Edward, who in reality probably caused the execution, mourns his death. He is clever about laying the blame at the queen's door—saying that she poisoned the king's mind in order to bring more advancement to her followers. Richard, in reality, probably desired the throne but had made no definite plans to gain it until he had been successful in overcoming the queen's party in obtaining the protectorate.

"Out of the struggle for the crown during the War of the Roses had come the conception of Richard III as the evil genius of his own house and a monster in shape of man. Polydore Vergil in *Historie Angliae* (1574) had so presented him. Polydore Vergil was an Italian and was, therefore, familiar with the Renaissance conception of absolute villainy. His making of Richard III the scapegoat for the crimes of his family and of his time was no doubt gratifying to Henry VII, who considered himself Lancastrian, since by making Richard a villain and a usurper beyond the pale of human sympathy his own claim was the more completely vindicated. Sir Thomas More, Lord Chancellor under Henry VIII, also wrote in the same unfair manner, *The Life of King Richard III*, which was adopted by the chroniclers Hall, Grafton (publisher of Hall), and Holinshed

49. T. F. Tout, *op. cit.* p. 295-286
himself, so that the belief that Richard was a human fiend became universal. Richard was bad enough, and although he may not have been the chief instrument in the murder of Clarence, no doubt committed most of the terrible crimes imputed to him, and some others besides. The things which probably most misrepresented him, however, are endowing him with superhuman subtlety and hypocrisy and putting him with his self confessed accursedness before us as a living force. These features are literary and not historical.

"The righteous Henry, Duke of Richmond, is seated on the English throne, bringing with him a promise of peace and security for the kingdom. Henry VII, a selfish, rather mean ruler, hardly deserves to be presented as an unstained hero and leader, like Fortinbras in Hamlet and Malcolm in Macbeth; but in the light of beneficent Tudor rule and greatness it was a proper compliment to the Queen, his grand daughter, so to present him."

The whole play of Richard III is a succession of crime, murder and intrigue, when in reality Richard would probably have proven to be a good ruler had his plans been allowed to materialize.

"In 1484, Richard met his parliament....Its proceedings show that Richard was making a bid for popular favour, and striving to pose as a constitutional Yorkist king. He was anxious to remove the bad impression created by the crimes

50. Craig, Herdin. op. cit. p. 105-106
through which he had won his way to the throne, and he was so able a man that he might very well have become a good ruler and a useful king if he had had the chance of developing his policy. However, his power rested on too narrow and personal a basis. He could not conciliate the Lancastrians, and he had hopelessly set against himself most of the supporters of York. He could expect no faithful service from the selfish nobles who had helped him to the throne, and constant intrigues and conspiracies made his position insecure."

"The Statues of the Parliament have always been regarded with interest as giving some indication of the domestic policy that Richard would have followed had his reign been prolonged. The legislation was of a mixed character, a good deal of it following old and well-worn paths. But we also have honest attempts to grapple with admitted evils."

Wherever Richard went anxious work awaited him. His situation was one of the utmost anxiety and difficulty. Nobody resisted him, but he could trust no one; everything ran through his fingers like sand. In vain he did everything that a king could do to make himself popular. In vain he showed kindness to the widows of his fallen enemies—Lady Hastings, Lady Rivers, the Duchess of Buckingham, Lady Arundel. In vain he translated the remains of Henry VI, as a fresh protest that he was not

51. T. F. Tout, op. cit. p. 297
responsible for the misdeeds of his brother. In vain he scattered offers of pardon and restitution among the followers of Richmond: not a man would stoop to pick one of them up."

Shakespeare pictures in Richard, a man who makes no excuses for his crimes.

"The first thing that strikes us in the study of Richard is the absolute frankness—at least to himself. He makes no excuses for his villainy, he does not attempt to palliate or justify it to himself. In the very first speech of the play he describes himself plainly. Nature has handicapped him at his birth. She has sent him into the world 'deformed, unfinished, scarce half made up,' so that the very dogs bark at him as he walks by them, therefore, he says, 'I am determined to prove a villain.'

"In dealing with others he is equally frank unless the nature of his plans demands concealment or hypocrisy. In wooing Anne he tells her bluntly that he did kill her husband and her father. To his agents and associates in crime he indulges in no ambiguities, but declares at once what he intends to do or desires them to do. Murder he treats as if it were a simple business transaction. Shakespeare, taking this idea of Richard from the chroniclers, carries it out thoroughly in his development of the character. 'Richard glories in his deviltry, and

52. J. H. Ramsey, op. cit. Vol II, p. 527
53. Richard III, Act I, Scene II, L 131-184
takes posterity into his confidence through the soliloquies of the poet, which are psychological studies in shamelessness.' These soliloquies are a "dramatic necessity; we could not get at the real man without them."

Considered from the historical viewpoint, Shakespeare has many omissions in the four plays of this period. For instance, no mention is made of the following battles: Bloreheath, Newnham Bridge, Sandwich, Northampton, Mortimer's Cross, Second Battle of St. Albans, and Hedgeley Moor. These are not the largest battles but some such as Bloreheath and Mortimer's Cross were turning points. Shakespeare tells us in detail of the losses in France, but says little of the Scotch aid to the Lancastrian cause. He does not mention the French plunder of Sandwich, Warwick's defeat of the Spanish fleet, nor the fear of a French invasion. He is equally quiet concerning the alliance of Scotland and England in 1464.

Shakespeare begins this fictional struggle with the scene in the Temple garden—commonly referred to as the "Roses Garden Scene." In this scene Richard of York plucks a white rose in

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54. Introduction to the Rolfe edition of Richard III, p. 18-19
55. Gairdner's Introduction to the Paston Letters
      Holinshed Chronicles, England, Vol III, p. 244
56. Paston Letter 317
57. Paston Letter 305 and 314
the garden and asks all who agree with him to do likewise. Somerset plucks a red rose and asks his followers to do the same. Thus the group is divided into Yorkists and Lancastrians in a very beautiful, poetic scene. The only reference in history which might have been somewhat similar is the incident about 1450—after York has been trapped upon his return from Ireland—York and Somerset accuse each other of treason.

There is no evidence of any definite scene between Gloster and Beaufort but we know such a thing might easily have occurred as they were always disagreeing. The hunt at St. Albans is not referred to in history but it is in harmony with the times and gives the Duchess of York a chance for the interview with the practitioners of sorcery. Here Shakespeare gives us a hint that Gloster might be cruel and unreasonable at times in his treatment of the poor.

Joan of Arc was captured by Burgundy and sold to the English who burned her at the stake. Shakespeare pictures a scene in which York captures her in battle. His whole treatment of the character of Joan of Arc is disgusting. His

61. Ibid., p. 22
63. Henry VI, Part II, Act II, Scene I, (Rolfe edition) L. 66-161
64. A. L. Cross, op. cit. p. 169
attitude is ridiculous and coarse, altogether unlike Shakespeare.

Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, was deprived of the protectorate when Henry VI was crowned king (1429). Shakespeare delays this until after Margaret of Anjou had become queen of England (1445). He lays the blame of Gloucester's dismissal to the queen and Suffolk. Four days later Gloucester died. Shakespeare takes the hint that he might have been murdered and makes it a fact, even picturing the actual murder and later Beaufort, who died soon after, was made to confess his share in the plot. There is no evidence that Gloucester did not die a natural death. Shakespeare probably has reference to the downfall and imprisonment of Gloucester in 1447, but he definitely mentions the protectorate in Gloucester's speech:

"Madam, I am protector of the realm, 66
And, at his pleasure, will resign my place."

Eleanor, the Duchess of Gloucester, was banished for sorcery in 1441 so it is quite impossible that Margaret, the queen, ever knew her, much less was disturbed by her superiority as she complained to Suffolk.

66. T. P. Tout, op. cit. p. 272
68. Henry VI, Part II, Act I, Scene III, (Rolfe edition) p. 121-123
70. Henry VI, Part II, Act I, Scene III, (Rolfe edition) p. 77-89
Cade's rebellion was at the time suspected to have been instigated by York but it was really a political uprising of the common people as a "protest against the maladministration which still prevailed at court." Their complaints and requests were political in character. Cade took the name of Mortimer in order to gain the support of the Yorkists. Shakespeare almost humorously makes him a contender for the throne of England.

At the Battle of St. Albans York was completely victorious. The king was wounded, then taken prisoner. Your asked forgiven-

71. T. F. Tout, op. cit. p. 279
72. J. H. Ramsey, op. cit. Ramsey gives a copy of these requests and demands. p. 127-128
73. Paston Letter 239 gives a detailed account of the battle.
74. Paston Letter 239—"And at this same tyme were hurt Lordes of name--the Kyng, our sovereyne Lord, in the neck with an arrowe.
75. Paston Letter 239—"This done, the seyde Lordes, that ye to wotse, the Duke of Yorke, the Earle of Salesbury, the Earle of Warrewyke, came to the Kyng, our sovereyne Lord and on here knees he soughte hym of grace and foryeveness of that they hadde doen yn his presence, and be sought hym of his heynesse to take hem as his true legemen, seyng that they never attendyde hurt to his owne persone, and therfore (the) Kyng oure sovereyn Lord toke hem to grace, and so desyred hem to
75. continued

cease ther peple, and that there shulde no more harme be doon; and they obeyde hys commandeement, and lote make a cry on the Kynges name that al maner of pepull shulde cease and not so hardy to stryke any stroke more after the proclamacyon of the crye; and so ceased the scyde batayle, Deo gratias."
ness of the king, and asked him to acknowledge them as true liegmen. This Henry did. Then the king and the nobles went to London. Shakespeare allows him to escape with Margaret and come back to find York seated on the throne. The Paston Letters show evidence that there was some suspicion that the Duke of York had occupied the King's chamber but there could have been no such scene as the scene between York and the king. After the battle of Northampton, York did go to London, occupy the king's quarters and declare himself king. Henry declined to justify his own claim and submitted to the decision of the Lords that York should become king after the death of Henry VI.

76. Paston Letter 239—"And on the morwe the Kyng and the seyde Duke, with other certeyn Lorde, come in to the Bysshope of London, and there kept resydence with joye and solemnyte, concludyng to holde the parlement at London, the ix day of July next coming."

Paston Letter 240—"The kyng with all the Lorde come to London to Westmunstyr on Fryday, at v of clocke at cittyr none, and London went a generalle processyon the same day."

77. Henry VI, Part III, Act I, Scene I, (Rolfe edition)

78. Paston Letter 242—"Hit was seyd, for sothe, that Harpere and other of the Kynges chamber were confedered to have steked the Duke of York in the Kynges chamber; but hit was not so, for they have clered theym therof."

The scene immediately following—between Margaret and the king concerning the disinheritance of their son could not have taken place because Margaret, after the battle of Northampton, was in the North gathering together her forces to attack the Yorkists and release the king who was imprisoned by them.

The second battle of St. Albans and the battle of Mortimer’s Cross are both omitted. The battle of Mortimer’s Cross was a turning point for the Yorkist party. Shakespeare merely makes mention of the fact that Edward and Richard were at Mortimer’s Cross awaiting news of Warwick, who returns with news of his defeat at the hands of Margaret and her Scottish soldiers.

It is hardly possible that Margaret could have been at the battle of Wakefield as she was in Scotland arranging for more aid when she received news of the results of the battle.

The father and son scenes which Henry VI sees at the battle of Towton were used for effect to show how families even were divided by the struggle. This is not an historical scene but a very effective one.

King Edward’s marriage to Lady Grey was kept secret so it is hardly possible that his brothers knew about it. This

81. T. F. Tout, op. cit. p. 236
82. J. H. Ramsay, op. cit. p. 245
83. Henry VI, Part III, Act II, Scene I, ( Rolfe edition)
84. ibid, p. 206
marriage was in 1464. Warwick had arranged for a French alliance. After the rebellion under Robert Wells, in 1470, Warwick and Clarence flee to France. At this time Louis XI with difficulty arranges an alliance between Warwick and Margaret. Warwick had learned of and disapproved the king's marriage before he instigated the rebellion so it is not likely that he was at the French court asking for the marriage of Lady Bona to Edward when news of Edward's marriage reached him as Shakespeare has it. In the scene following this news it seems that Warwick and Margaret are very willing to form an alliance and they ask the French king to join them. Shakespeare makes no mention of Clarence having gone to France. It is possible that he has combined the two expeditions of Warwick to the French court.

Edward himself was afraid of his brother Clarence, and had him arrested and sent to the tower on charges of sorcery. He was condemned to death and secretly executed. Shakespeare, on the strength of a hint in the chronicle, directly charged Richard with the deed. It is not known who killed Edward the Prince of Wales or his father, Henry VI. It is probable that Henry VI at least was killed by order of Edward IV. Yet

86. ibid, p. 255-256
87. ibid, p. 286

T. F. Tout, op. cit. p. 291
Shakespeare has Richard calmly admit that he killed both of them.

"Nay, do not pause; for I did kill King Henry;--
But 't was thy beauty that provoked me.
Nay, now dispatch; 't was I that stabb'd young Edward;--
But 't was thy heavenly face that set me on.--

Margaret of Anjou was taken prisoner at the battle of Tewkesbury. She was ransomed by her people and allowed to return to France. When she is supposed to be on the continent, Shakespeare, by poetic license brings her on the stage. She returns to the scene of her former triumphs and defeats, to gloat over the factional struggles of her enemies and seems to enjoy thoroughly their discomfort and her own revenge.

Queen Elizabeth became afraid for the safety of her second son when she heard of the fate of her kinsmen and moved with him to the sanctuary. Richard with an armed force came and took him to the tower where his elder brother was. "Three days after the coup d'etat in the tower he went in force by water to Westminster, and invested the Sanctuary. To save the scandal of an open violation of the privileges of the church, Cardinal Bourchier and Chancellor Russell, to their endless disgrace, exerted their influence with the unfortunate queen to induce her to surrender her last precious pledge. Buckingham took the little

89. T. F. Tout, op. cit. p. 291
R. B. Howat, op. cit. p. 191
Duke of York from their hands in the middle of Westminster Hall; a few steps further on, at the door of the Star Chamber, Gloster was waiting to receive him, 'with many loveynge wordys; and so is departed with my lord cardenale to the toure, wher he is; blessed by Jesy mery'" Shakespeare has the child brought out to meet his brother on the way to London. It was generally suspected that the princes were murdered by Richard's order but Shakespeare brings Tyrrel on the scene and all but shows us the committing of the murder of itself. C. R. Markham in "Richard III: A Doubtful Verdict Reviewed," took the ground that Henry VII, rather than Richard III was the murderer of the sons of Edward IV.

Ann died and Shakespeare has another opportunity to accuse Richard of a murder.

The scene between the two Queens--Margaret and Elizabeth--and the Duchess is as impossible as Margaret's former scene because she was not in England at the time.

The ghost scene was entirely impossible but very symbolic and satisfied the Elizabethan love of the supernatural.

Shakespeare was justified in his portrayal of York, in view of the fact that he was writing these plays chiefly for the entertainment of an Elizabethan audience. His own patriotism would justify him. Elizabeth was a Tudor, Henry VII was a descendant of the Lancastrians. It was natural that the

90. J. H. Ramsay, op. cit. p. 486
91. English Historical Review VI 280-283 and 806-813
enemies of the Lancastrians should be pictured as rebels. In view of the fact that they were opposing the ruling house they were rebels. This was an age of nationalism.

Gloster is spoken of as the "Good Duke Humphrey" in the chronicle. Shakespeare develops this idea and makes him truly good, in spite of his badness. Instead of Gloster, Shakespeare makes Beaufort the villain. Even after a period of one hundred years, the English people had probably not forgotten or forgiven the humiliation of the losses in France. Gloster was the leader of the war party and Beaufort of the peace party. This probably accounts for the attitude.

It was natural for the people to object to Margaret of Anjou. To begin with she was a foreigner and furthermore instead of her bringing with her a dowry, Suffolk had agreed to give to her father the provinces of Maine and Anjou. This was particularly distasteful to Gloster and the war party. The English people as a whole had been paying to maintain this war in France and they were not ready to give any of it back. The government had been under the control of the Lords so long that they objected to a spirited queen who was ready to take the management of affairs into her own hands.

I can see no justification of his picturing of the villainy of Richard to the exclusion of all other traits of his character. He was treacherous but probably not nearly so black as he was.

92. Henry VI, Part II, Act III, Scene III
painting. Shakespeare has made the very most of suspicion in this case. If there was a chance for a murder to have been committed, he assumes it as a fact and lays it at Richard's door.

His omission of many of the battles is due possibly to his fear of monotony. If there were too many the audience would become bored and his play would lose its effect. He has chosen the largest battles and they appear in the order in which they were fought. The victory in each case goes to the party who won it historically.

No mention is made of the French plunder of Sandwich. It seems that Shakespeare missed a dramatic point in not bringing out Margaret's part in instigating this attack. It is possible that he did not have access to this chronicle and the fact seems not to be known generally in England.

Many of the unhistorical scenes which Shakespeare introduces into his plays were done for dramatic effect. It is more effective for the dramatist to show us an actual quarrel between men such as Gloster and Beaufort than to tell us they were unfriendly as the historian does. The Rose Garden scene does not lose any of its effectiveness and beauty because it is untrue. It was probably a little more satisfying to an English

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95. An old French Chronicler says this attack was planned by Margaret because of her hatred of York in order to make a diversion, while the Scots should ravage England.
audience to have Joan of Arc captured by one of their own soldiers than to be captured by the Burgundians and sold to the English for execution. On mere suspicion Cade’s rebellion was laid at the door of York. This was natural for at the time the party opposed to the government would be suspected for instigating all uprisings against it. I think Cade’s claim to the throne is put in to relieve the tenseness of the drama by adding a little humor.

Margaret is pictured in the battle of Wakefield for dramatic purposes. Here she is allowed to take revenge on York and his son. From this time on the civil war is more of a war for revenge as shown by Clifford’s speech to Rutland:

"Your father killed my father"

The father and son scenes dramatically bring out the horrors of the factional war. A war in which a family could be divided against itself just as the nation at this time was divided against itself.

Anything of the supernatural appealed to the Elizabethan audience. Hence, I consider Shakespeare justified in bringing Margaret on the stage to call down her curse on the heads of her enemies in the midst of their quarreling. It would not have been satisfactory had not each of the curses proved true just as they did in the case of Eleanor in an earlier play. Neither did it seem quite fair that Margaret should be exiled to France, her husband and her son murdered and her enemies allowed to go in peace. Ghost scenes were especially popular

96. Hall’s Chronicle
at this time and here they served the purpose of giving us a
glimpse into the subconscious minds of the two opposing
leaders. These scenes, though they seem not a real part of
the play and are absolutely impossible even unexplainable,
give a foreshadowing as to what the outcome of the battle will
be the next day.
Section E

Dramatic Justification

Shakespeare used incidents of history as a basis for his historical plays but he has deviated widely from them. He has not verified these incidents to determine whether they were facts but has developed the period according to his own ideas and the ideas of the people who lived at this time. Shakespeare was a nationalist living in an age of nationalism, yet he is dealing with an age in which there is no nationalism. This is probably his reason for picturing York, Salisbury, and Warwick as grasping rebels. He offers no alternative. He fails to show us any of their good points. Seventeenth century England was not Catholic yet Shakespeare wrote of England when the religion of the nation was Catholic. This possibly helped him to picture Gloucester as a martyr and Winchester as a villain. He mocks Winchester in his cardinal's robes and suggests in one of Margaret's speeches that Henry, because of his piety and weakness, should be a pope instead of a king.

Some of Shakespeare's incidents were taken directly from Hall's chronicle, for instance the conversation between

97. Henry VI, Part II, Act III, Scene I and 2
98. ibid, Act III, Scene 3
99. Henry VI, Part I, Act V, Scene 1, L. 28-33
100. Henry VI, Part II, Act I, Scene 3, L. 57-66
Talbot and his son. But in many other places he has not been
careful of either time or place. Several incidents separated
by several years may occur at the same time. He has pictured
to the Elizabethan audience what they wanted most to see, and
has interpreted the scene in the language and feelings of
the seventeenth century instead of the fifteenth. England was
proud of Talbot's victories in France and he was honored
on the stage after two hundred years. The Tudor dynasty
had brought peace and prosperity to England. It was grati-
fying to an English audience to see the first Tudor, Henry VII,
pictured as good and noble even if he did in reality have
many faults. In order to show a contrast of Tudor and
Yorkist character, Shakespeare followed contemporary historians
in his picture of Richard III, making of him an unpardonable
villain, a Machiavellian who stopped at nothing to gain his
ends. Some of these differences might be due to the fact
that he wrote very rapidly, but most of it is to secure dramatic
effect. He wrote to please his audience and in order to do this,
it was necessary for him to omit some things and exaggerate
others. He took incidents which were only hinted at as possibi-
lities and developed them into facts, showing on the stage the
event itself. Some things which were somewhat embarrassing to
the Lancastrian faction were left out entirely. Warwick's 101

101. See N. 12, p. 10 and N. 49, p. 27
success on the sea as well as his holding of Calais was omitted. The plunder of Sandwich by the French was also left out.

It is quite natural that we should be more interested in Shakespeare's portrayal of this period than in the history itself. His plays were written for entertainment and were intended to stir the emotions of the people who saw them. But we have depended too much on his absolute authenticity. We think because he took the main idea from historical sources that every incident he portrays to us is authentic history instead of being a purely dramatic episode. We remember dogged York, the good Duke Gloster, the saintly Henry, the she-wolf of France, Warwick the trouble maker, and Richard the crook-backed murderer; rather than York the protector, Gloster the trouble maker, Henry the imbecile, Margaret the Queen, Warwick protector of the sea, and Richard the organizer. The very name--The War of the Roses--has been taken from Shakespeare and not from history.
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