HAKESPEARE'S Richard II, charming, feckless, poetic, given to dramatization of his self-pity, and apparently incapable of forthright heroic resistance, refuses to fight for his kingdom and surrenders before he is attacked. Yet, in the climactic scene of his public abdication in which he loses all, by a tenacious stubbornness in yielding he wrests from a hopeless situation a kind of victory by nonresistance. Since Richard's abdication is a foregone conclusion of which the scene presents only a public verification, it has been regarded as merely lyrical, a showcase for Richard's virtuoso performance as a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. But the scene is dramatically powerful, and much of its power comes not only from its poetic and emotional intensity, but also from the way Richard, behind and through his apparently helpless self-dramatization, continues to fight his case against Bolingbroke so as to achieve a moral victory which has enduring political consequences. And in passing the royal power on to Henry, Richard subtly alters its character by dimming its numinous light.

The scene is the culmination of a conflict between Richard and Bolingbroke which, after being quietly established, is long sustained and often indirect as the antagonists move in relation to each other but never seem quite to come to grips. The crucial scenes are ceremonial rather than personal and violent; rituals replace battles. But beneath the surface of ceremonies mortal engagements play themselves out, while one or the other of the antagonists behaves as if there were no real conflict. This fight, then, not always in the open, is neither simple nor one-sided: both victory and defeat are qualified in ways that dramatize the ambiguous nature of power and some ways of wielding it.

The antagonism between Richard and his cousin is only hinted at in the opening scenes, in which ostensibly Richard is simply trying to reconcile Bolingbroke with Mowbray; the question of Richard's complicity in the death of Thomas of Gloucester, which might be exposed in the dispute, lurks uneasily in the background. But Richard is defined at once as a king whose commands may be ignored, and he attempts to recover ascendancy by a kind of wry joke, saying in effect, "Since you will not obey this order I will change it, and command you to do what you insist on doing." And when, with the concurrence of his council, he stops the trial by combat and exiles both contestants, he seems to have recovered his fumble and taken an effective initiative which reassures his power. That he does all this histrionically is proper both to his own style and to the occasion: a public defiance must be dealt with publicly, and with the authority of ceremony.

But one pattern of Richard's behavior has been established. He places
high value on the ceremonies and symbols of power as if the power were inherent in the forms, and he tends to use them instead of swords and armies. Nor is this an illogical attitude to God's vicegerent, for they are the visible manifestations of divine sanction. Symbols and images do indeed exert political force, and Richard eventually learns not to hide behind them but to use them as means of understanding reality and coping with it, even as weapons. As he learns that forms and symbols are futile when they are empty, his opponent will learn that power without formal sanctions is not enough either. And Richard's wry victory will take place in a competition of ceremony, which he respects and handles with more skill than his antagonist perhaps because he understands better both its weakness as an idol and its strength as a shadowing forth.

When Bolingbroke has departed into exile, Richard's affairs appear to be in equilibrium. But this prologue concludes with anticipatory hints, in Richard's description of Bolingbroke's successful courtship of the crowds watching his departure, that Richard uneasily feels the threat of competition in his bold cousin. And immediately Richard initiates the conflict by his fatal decision to confiscate Bolingbroke's patrimony. As York warns Richard, in this one act he shatters the very forms and principles of succession whereby he holds his own royal power, and ignoring the implications of his act, sets in motion the causal series that brings about his fall. In direct response, Bolingbroke is impelled to a firm and unconsidered decision to violate his sentence, return to England with military forces, and demand restitution of his rights.

Like Richard, Bolingbroke fails at first to realize the drastic implications of his act, and Shakespeare has not indicated just when he realizes how little distinction there is between his forcible demand for right and rebellion, and how inevitably successful rebellion must lead him to the throne. Meanwhile, it is he who tries to maintain the forms and ceremonies of feudal fealty even while he is pressing upon his sovereign with raw military force. With elegant courtesy he moves ruthlessly on, apparently not at first conscious that his retaliatory action, though morally justified as Richard's was not, nevertheless shatters the very principles of loyalty which his language invokes and which might have made his rule secure.

Richard and Henry are set in a collision course, but their confrontation is delayed. As we learn that the King's forces have melted away and Bolingbroke's correspondingly swelled, each antagonist is shown as he takes cognizance of the rapid shift of power. Bolingbroke speaks and acts firmly and decisively, as befits a king. But when he meets the Duke of York, Lord Governor in Richard's absence, with the formalities of fealty and humility (II. iii. 80ff.), York strikes through these forms to the truth, as Richard will do when he faces Henry: "Show me thy humble heart, and not thy knee, / Whose duty is deceivable and false" (II. iii. 83-84). York then makes the issue clear: Bolingbroke is entitled to what he demands, but "in this kind to come," violating his sentence and backed by an army, is "gross rebellion and detested treason." He sees clearly, but can do nothing; as the King's representative, he cannot conscientiously support Henry, but, lacking military power, neither can he

oppose and discipline him. Between the horns of a dilemma, he makes a
decision logically right but practically absurd: he will try to stand neutral in
a situation in which no neutrality is possible. His reluctant neutrality is after
all against Richard, for when next we see him (III. i), he is in Bolingbroke's
entourage, standing silent while Bolingbroke frankly acts as if he were already
King, judging and sentencing Bushy and Bagot to immediate death.

On the other hand, when Richard sets foot again on his kingdom, saluting
the earth with his hand in filial love, his cause is, as we have been told, already
lost: his forces, believing him dead, have dispersed and his glory, which ought
to be stable and radiant as the sun, is falling like a shooting star. In this
scene, which dwells at length on Richard's step-by-step realization and ac-
ceptance of the completeness of his disaster, he suffers a succession of cruel
jolts, and his mood progresses by extreme reversals. From faith and valor,
forlorn hope, and desperate determination, he falls each time to intense despair
until he comes to rest in flat resignation to the truth of his nothingness.

He begins in full confidence that the very stones will rise to aid the right,
and dismisses the Bishop of Carlisle's wise admonition to stir himself to use
what means God has given him with the blithe assurance that the very
presence of the King will, like the sun, drive thieves to cover while angels
take arms on his side. But reality counters in the news that it is too late, "For
all the Welshmen, hearing thou wert dead, / Art gone to Bolingbroke, dispersed
and fled" (III. ii. 73-74).

For a moment he sets his hopes on the powers of the magic name of King,
only to be told that all his people are in revolt, and that Bushy and Bagot have
been executed. The name is proved a mere powerless word, and defeat has
become personal bereavement. Then, as he sits upon the ground to contem-
plate the sad tales of the deaths of kings, he is not merely indulging himself.
As he does throughout the scene, he is trying to work out some formulation,
some order, some rational or symbolic way of looking at a piece of shocking
news so that he can comprehend it and come to terms with it, a process that
becomes complete only just before his death in prison when he painfully
works out the relation of his inner world to the even more intractable outer
one that destroys him. In this most moving of his arias, he conjures up in
his imagination the very worst he must face: "Our lands, our lives and all are
Bolingbroke's, / And nothing can we call our own but death . . . ." (ll. 151-52).
And he sees that death as the common lot of kings, in their lonely danger
and mortal vulnerability. So he unkings himself to share the common hu-
manity of the subjects of kings:

I live with bread like you, feel want,
Taste grief, need friends. Subjected thus,
How can you say to me I am a king?
(ll. 175-77)

The Bishop of Carlisle urges him to leave lamenting and fight to the death,
for such a valorous death is a kind of conquest, at least of fear. But as Richard
once more rouses himself to valor, the final blow strikes him down. On learn-
ing that York and all his men have joined Bolingbroke, he dismisses his
forces and quietly accepts the cold truth: pragmatically, the man who has
the power is king. Richard sees that he is not a king, not even a simple subject—he is a name, and a name is nothing.

In this mood of extreme disillusion, wearing the royal symbols and making the royal gestures which he knows to be meaningless and futile, Richard then moves to the first of his two crucial confrontations with his antagonist. When at Flint Castle the man who is really ruler but is not ready to say so publicly meets face to face the titular King who knows that he is nothing, it is Bolingbroke, the hard realist, who insists on maintaining the gracious formalities and Richard the disabused formalist who punctures the pretenses and bares the unacknowledged truth. The real situation is revealed at once by a slip of Northumberland's tongue when he refers to the King simply as “Richard.” York once more reminds the rebels that they have no legal status. The exchange is significant. Northumberland casually explains, “Only to be brief / Left I his title out,” as if titles were meaningless. York points out that when Richard was powerful such casualness about a title might have been a mortal matter. And Bolingbroke’s uneasiness about York’s plain speaking is reflected in his attempt to stop the interchange: “Mistake not, Uncle, further than you should.”

The message he sends to Richard is altogether double-tongued.

Henry Bolingbroke
On both his knees doth kiss King Richard’s hand
And sends allegiance and true faith of heart
To his most royal person, hither come
Even at his feet to lay my arms and power,
Provided that . . . .

(III. iii. 35-40)

But what kind of humble submission includes a proviso? “If not, I’ll use the advantage of my power / And lay the summer’s dust with showers of blood. . . .” (ll. 42-43).

That this message, with all its empty formality of loyalty, is a threat, is made plain by Bolingbroke’s instructions that during the parley his powerful army should be visible marching on the plain, though “without the noise of threatening drum.” Bolingbroke is well aware that this is the crucial meeting of opposites. But at first it is a meeting of two role-players, Bolingbroke playing the wronged man begging justice, Richard playing the benevolent monarch granting it. But Northumberland, Henry’s hatchet man, almost gives away the show: neglecting to kneel, he gives Richard an opportunity to rebuke him and define the situation: if I am King, why are you not kneeling?

If we be not, show us the hand of God
That hath dismiss’d us from our stewardship;
For well we know, no hand of blood and bone
Can gripe the sacred handle of our sceptre,
Unless he do profane, steal, or usurp.

(ll. 77-81)

Here, then, is the one point Richard can and must establish: either Richard is King, or his successor is a rebel and usurper. And though he gives up all else, on this one point he will not yield. Meanwhile, Richard plays the comedy on by answering the message in the mode in which it is given: “And all the
number of his fair demands / Shall be accomplish'd without contradiction” (ll. 123-24).

While Northumberland returns to report to Henry, Richard gives full voice to his pain and humiliation; and though his conduct is hardly heroic, his grasp on fact and reality can hardly be faulted; it is Bolingbroke who thinks he can eat his cake and have it too. But he cannot both be King and be rightly King, and Richard persists in demonstrating this fact publicly. His bitter speech to Northumberland is couched in the kind of irony that cannot be successfully answered.

What must the King do now? must he submit?  
The king shall do it: must he be deposed?  
The King shall be contented. . . .  
Most mighty prince, My Lord Northumberland,  
What says King Bolingbroke? will His Majesty  
Give Richard leave to live till Richard die?  
(ll. 143-45, ll. 172-74)

The only answer, Northumberland’s motion of obeisance, leaves Richard free to clinch his point in a final sarcasm; “You make a leg, and Bolingbroke says ay” (l. 175).

The order that Richard should descend to parley in the base court is couched in language of almost excessive courtesy (“May it please you to come down”), but by comparing his descent to Phaeton’s, Richard expresses both his awareness of his misconduct and the unfittingness of the sun-king’s coming down to the level of his vassal instead of scattering thieves by his glory. And when the two antagonists confront each other, it is Bolingbroke who stands on ceremony and Richard who strips it away to show the truth. To Henry’s kneeling, he responds,

Up, cousin, up; your heart is up, I know,  
Thus high at least, although your knee be low.  
Boling. My gracious lord, I come but for mine own.  
K. Rich. Your own is yours, and I am yours, and all.  
(III. iii. 194-97)

Bolingbroke’s answer keeps the parley in terms of propriety and courtesy: “So far be mine, my most redoubted lord, / As my true service shall deserve your love” (ll. 198-99). But Richard again returns the dialogue to hard fact, in a tone of bitter irony.

Well you deserve: they well deserve to have,  
That know the strong’st and surest way to get . . . .  
What you will have, I’ll give, and willing too;  
For do we must what force will have us do.  
So on towards London, Cousin, is it so?  
Boling. Yea, my good lord.  
K. Rich. Then I must not say no.  
(ll. 200-209)

Though Bolingbroke, with his “my good lord” has maintained his fiction to the last of the scene, Richard has made a point, and made it in public: Boling-
broke and his army have in fact taken Richard prisoner, and though Richard was not taken by violence, he was most surely taken by force. And although Bolingbroke is in power, he is not altogether in the right.

In this scene, then, Richard, emotional and self-dramatizing though he is, exhibits the strength to face up to his own failures as well as to the realities of the military and political situation. He knows a lost cause when he sees it, and accepts the loss. But in his indirect way, he is fighting at least to have the record set right. For in the long run the public record does matter, as Henry will painfully know when he himself faces rebellion. There are, indeed, other things than physical force to be reckoned with in political power, such as the sanction of right, and the reputation for integrity, and the force that emanates from the mystical body of kingship.

This is the issue of the final and crucial conflict—too tacit and concealed to be called a clash—between Richard and Henry in the Deposition Scene in Westminster Hall. The question of power was settled when Bolingbroke landed, before Richard even got back; the question of right is still wide open. At the beginning of the scene (IV.i), Bolingbroke's clearheaded, decisive, and effective dealing with the fierce mutual accusations of his nobles demonstrates how much more fitted he is than Richard to control fractious nobles. And when York brings word that Richard has abdicated and adopted Bolingbroke as his heir, he is ready to "ascend the regal throne" then and there, and so take over publicly without further formality. But the faithful Bishop of Carlisle, who had failed to rouse Richard to his own defense and prevent his surrender, speaks up courageously to protest this highhanded judgment and arrogant disposal of King Richard, "himself not present." He point-blank accuses Bolingbroke of treason, and like a prophet of old warns him of the catastrophic civil war that must follow from his treasonous usurpation. Northumberland, loud, tactless, and ruthless as usual, promptly arrests Carlisle for treason, and moves on to the next matter of business. But Bolingbroke has understood the message; his future security depends on the clear rightness of his act in the public record. "Fetch hither Richard," he orders,

...that in common view
He may surrender; so shall we proceed
Without suspicion.

(IV. i. 155-57)

For only so may he proceed without opposition. But this is asking one more thing of Richard than he will grant.

What follows, then, is a planned public performance, with Richard as star performer. But Bolingbroke is the producer of it and has planned the script; Richard is to play the role of a king weary of rule, willing and even glad to relinquish his power, position, and cares to the younger, stronger man, who will accede to Richard's wish and accept the burden. So will his position as King be publicly stamped as valid. Instead, Richard improvises a script of his own in which he does, to be sure, abdicate in favor of Bolingbroke, but in such a way that in common view he may surrender; so shall we proceed without suspicion.

3 The mounting of the throne to express a rebellion in compact visual symbolism is old as the mystery cycles, in which Lucifer's grab for God's power is shown by his stepping up to God's throne and sitting on it, as in the Chester "Fall of Lucifer."
a way as to put Bolingbroke and his supporters in the wrong and establish himself as a victim forced by superior power to abdicate after being betrayed by those who owed him allegiance. Without denying his own unarguable failings and errors as King, he succeeds in showing Bolingbroke as a ruthless grasper of power and the nobles as betrayers who follow their own interests to the winning side. Richard takes command of the scene—the scene planned by Bolingbroke as well as that written by Shakespeare—from his first lines to the very end, and conducts it in such a way that it would be more dangerous for Bolingbroke to stop him than to let him continue. Bolingbroke, indeed, had made a miscalculation less than but similar in kind to the one Brutus made when he permitted Antony to speak at Caesar's funeral.

Richard's skill in using style and rhetoric as weapons appears in his first speech, in which he disposes of the fiction that he is still King much as he had by addressing "King Bolingbroke" at Flint Castle. Why, he asks, is he "sent for to a king?" But before there can be an answer, as he passes by the nobles he brands them as Judases, without implying that he is himself Christlike except in being betrayed. And when he cries "God save the King!" and waits in silence for a responory amen, he throws into their midst the embarrassing question of just who, at this moment, is their rightful King. And asking "To what service [an aptly menial word for a King obeying orders] am I sent for hither?" he elicits from York a statement of the official scenario:

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

(1177-80)

Then, in the first of two symbolic pantomimes whereby Richard dramatizes his situation visually, he takes the crown and holding it in his hands, says "Here, Cousin, seize the crown." But the last thing Bolingbroke now wants is to be obliged to seize the crown, even in a symbolic action; he stands reluctant, and must be coached by Richard—"here, Cousin"—to take hold of it. And in the moments when both men are holding the golden circle symbolizing the absolute, the divine power of rule, the whole moral ambiguity of the positions of the two men is diagrammed to the spectators. As Bolingbroke stands, holding the crown that has not yet been relinquished to him, he is forced into the embarrassed remark, "I thought you had been willing to resign" (l. 190), which Richard deftly turns to a consideration of the griefs and cares that accompany power. And to Bolingbroke's perfunctory words of philosophic comfort, he responds, much as Bolingbroke had responded to his father's attempts to mitigate the pain of exile by wise saws, with hard realism: "Your cares set up do not pluck my cares down" (l. 195).

Bolingbroke keeps trying to bring Richard back from his paradoxical but awkwardly suggestive wordplays to the intended script: "Are you contented to resign the crown?" (l. 200). Then Richard does at last make the abdication, but not simply. Contented? Both yes and no: he must perforce be contented to do what he is forced to do, but can a man be content to deny his very identity? For what of the man is left, his function denied?
In the formal parallel rhetoric of the abdication he turns over everything to Bolingbroke and cancels out himself and his reign. Yet the lines are full of suggestions that this act is not only painful but almost blasphemous. Earlier he had said, "Not all the water in the rough rude sea / Can wash the balm off from an anointed king" (III. ii. 54-55). But now, "With mine own tears I wash away my balm." He holds back nothing, not even generosity: "God pardon all oaths that are broke to me! / God keep all vows unbroke are made to thee!" (ll. 214-15).

Richard, then, has finally done what he was brought in to do. But it is not enough that he openly resign his state; he must read aloud a full statement of his crimes. Bolingbroke wants not only a clear title, but also public acknowledgement that what he has done is an act of justice, so that "the souls of men / May deem that you are worthily deposed" (ll. 226-27). The scene, which had almost come to rest, moves into a second and intenser stage of tacit conflict.

There is a nice irony in the fact that Bolingbroke does not himself make this humiliating demand, but lets Northumberland enact his ruthlessness for him—Northumberland who will later rebel against him. Irony, too, in the invitation this order offers Richard to open up publicly the 'whole question of guilt, and to make plain that his guilt for past actions does not hide or mitigate that of the men who are deposing him or those who are standing embarrassed, trying to be neutral, pitying but inactive and uncommitted like Pilate. As Northumberland presses him, Richard's inner grief and shame—shame not only for the deeds he cannot bring himself to read out but also for the weakness of what he is doing here—define the feckless but sensitive man within the King. Even in this flow of emotion, however, he remembers to check Northumberland's specious use of the humble address "My lord—"

No lord of thine, thou haught insulting man,
Nor no man's lord; I have no name, no title . . .
But 'tis usurped.

(ll. 254-57)

And in this crisis of lost identity, Richard hits upon his second device of pantomimic parable, this one a demonstration of the ambiguity of the relations between appearances and reality. He asks that a mirror be brought—and even in the request stigmatizes Bolingbroke: "Good King, great King, and yet not greatly good." Bolingbroke humors his request, and when Northumberland presses once again for the public confession and Richard lashes out in anguish, Bolingbroke must recognize that Richard is not only carrying the scene, but winning sympathy; he quietly instructs Northumberland to "Urge it no more."

The precise import of Richard's play with the mirror is difficult to formulate for he plays subtly upon the two contradictory symbolic significances of mirrors, both familiar even to commonplace. First, a mirror is not a complete truth-teller, for it shows only a surface, though without some kind of mirror man cannot see the truth about himself. Besides, since man can read in it selectively and see only what he wants to see, the mirror can be a flatterer. And so Richard, regarding himself in the glass, realizes that he sees truth, but only a partial truth and a flattering truth at that: he sees the ap-
pearances that belong to public show, ceremony, glory. By breaking the mirror he enacts the suddenness with which glory and power may be shattered, leaving the man, the human truth, unchanged and unrevealed. And Bolingbroke's attempt to turn Richard's tantalizing and somehow minatory formulations of this parable into a simpler and more commonsensical proposition only gives Richard a stepping stone to a still subtler and more disturbing statement about the durability of grief among transiencies.

And when Richard, near the breaking point, begs a final boon, he turns Bolingbroke's unctuously gracious phrase, "Name it, fair Cousin," against him: "I have a king here to my flatterer. / Being so great, I have no need to beg" (ll. 308-309). His boon, simply to be relieved of this painful scene, he asks in a simple anguished cry: "Then give me leave to go." Bolingbroke asks, as if Richard had a choice, "Whither?" "Whither you will," cries Richard, "so I were from your sights."

And now, without any more pretense of reverence or courtesy, Bolingbroke springs the trap shut: "Go, some of you convey him to the Tower." But even from the wording of that openly ruthless command Richard takes opportunity to score unequivocally a final time: "Oh, good! convey? conveyers are you all, / That rise thus nimbly by a true king's fall" (ll. 317-18). And as Richard goes, the new King sets the date for his coronation, and brusquely orders the lords to prepare themselves for it. Stripped of its velvet glove, Henry's hand shows forth iron, and Richard's moral victory is sure. It was not much of a victory, for Richard lost a kingdom, but for Henry it was a considerable defeat. As Shakespeare shows, he spent most of his reign trying to quell rebellions, to justify his title to the throne, and to regain the confidence of his nobles. Even his son Henry V, as he approached the battle of Agincourt, feared that his father's debts were not paid. It was Richard's performance at Westminster which showed to all that, however inevitable and even desirable was Henry's rise to power, his deed itself was not good, nor would all of its results be. That this was the turning point of Henry's success is made evident by a dramatic juxtaposition: no sooner has Henry left the stage than, without any break in continuity of scene, the Abbot of Westminster, the Bishop of Carlisle, and Aumerle respond to this "woeful pageant" by laying the first of the plots against the new king, "To rid the realm of this pernicious blot" (l. 325). Carlisle helps to initiate fulfillment of his prophecy.

The two antagonists will not be seen to meet again, but there is still a final stage in their conflict. We hear a report of their performances in their new roles in the procession into London, Henry playing the gracious—and demagogic—victor, and Richard, with his new humility and self-confidence in sorrow, enduring quietly and patiently the contempt and violence of the fickle mob. Yet the underlying conflict continues. Though Richard is imprisoned and powerless, his sympathizers plot against Henry's life. The Duke of York accuses his own son of treason and with almost grotesque determination demands that he be punished, as if he would make up for failing Richard by last-ditch loyalty to the new king, but Henry, realizing that in his precarious reign he cannot afford to lose more friends, grants pardon in order to gain a supporter. But he still feels that Richard's very existence is a threat even though he is helplessly enduring solitude, humiliation, and filth in prison.
There, even while Bolingbroke is fearing him, Richard comes to terms with himself, his past, and his fate without hatred or impulse to vengeance. In his final long performance with only himself as audience, he asserts a kind of spiritual valor when he hammers out the stubborn analogy of the prison to the world. He is, indeed, finding out what inner resources he has when he is deprived of all else. And he is showing how hard it is to achieve and to maintain self-sufficiency of mind. “My mind to me a kingdom is,” sang Sir Edward Dyer in gently flowing numbers, comfortably meditating, I like to imagine, in the pleasant shade of his garden. But Richard, a man who has held and lost a kingdom, suffering the unmarked days in discomfort and enforced solitude, knows that even being king of one’s own mind requires stern control and a kind of spiritual ruthlessness. He holds himself to the task of working the analogy into shape and explores his inner kingdom with unblinking honesty: “Thus play I in one person many people, / And none contented” (V. v. 31-32). And when murderers invade the solitude where unaccommodated man stands stripped of the dignity of forms and ceremonies, Richard finds valor to attack his attackers and, after the one burst of physical violence in the whole play, escapes out of life as out of a prison.

But even in his death, in his final loss of all, Richard indirectly scores once more against his antagonist, as the final moments of the play make plain. For just as Henry, impulsively rising to action in order to regain his rights, found himself on a tide that swept him at once to the triumph of kingship and the guilt of usurpation, so by inadvertence—or was it deviousness? We cannot surely know—he finds that his spoken wish for some friend to rid him of “this living fear” of Richard has led not only to Richard’s death, but to Henry’s becoming, in his own conscience at least, a murderer. I see no reason to regard his final speech as cynical or hypocritical, or anything less than expression of an appalled realization of the exorbitant price in guilt that political success may exact. He wanted to be King, but not usurper; he wanted to have Richard dead, but not to be a murderer. The wheel has almost come full circle. As behind Richard’s public actions at the beginning of the play lurked the question of who was responsible for the death of Thomas of Gloucester, so Henry is beginning a reign haunted by Richard’s death. He is pursued by uninvited guilt, and hamstrung by the precedent of rebellion he has set. Though Richard’s victory is a pallid one, neither overt nor heroic, it leaves his opponent king of a disaffected kingdom, but a defeated man, in his mouth the sour taste of self-disapproval and guilt.

University of Utah