Prophecy and Ideology in
Shakespeare's Richard II

HENRY E. JACOBS

Though Justice against Fate complain,
And plead the antient Rights in vain:
But those do hold or break
As Men are strong or weak.
Nature that hateth emptiness,
Allows of penetration less:
And therefore must make room
Where greater Spirits come.
(Marvell, “An Horatian Ode,” 37-44)

IT IS A COMMONPLACE TO OBSERVE that Shakespeare's Richard II traces out a fundamental shift in the nature of kingship and the justification of rule. This movement, which reflects both Tudor perspectives on history and Elizabethan political theory, signifies the transition from a medieval to a Renaissance concept of kingship and power. In this theoretical matrix, Richard II plays the role of the unsuccessful medieval monarch while Bolingbroke acts the part of a successful Renaissance prince. The basic distinction here is not merely political or ideological; rather, it encompasses two comprehensive yet distinct world views. Richard and his loyalists, for all their failings, present an essentially ordered and medieval view of the cosmos based in the rule of law. Bolingbroke, on the other hand, provides an exemplum in the exercise of power which has no basis in law whatsoever.

It is not my intention to assert that the recognition of this dialectic is original or, for that matter, worthy of further extended discussion. Rather, I suggest that this shift is recapitulated throughout the play in a series of smaller and more discrete changes in language, action, and attitude. We see a parallel transition, for example, in the way in which trial-by-combat is transformed from a vehicle which theoretically reflects divine judgment to a political tool through which courtiers may provide a show of allegiance to Bolingbroke. Perhaps the most interesting of these discrete and focused recapitulatory shifts
occurs in the play’s treatment of prophecy. It is here that we shall look for a map and a representation of the greater changes embodied in Richard II.

Maynard Mack convincingly argues that “Hamlet’s world is pre-eminently in the interrogative mood. It reverberates with questions, anguished, meditative, alarmed” (504). In a similar manner, Richard II is “preeminently” in the prophetic mood. The play abounds in prophecies and prophetic warnings. Most of these are marked linguistically and grammatically by the use of “shall” or “shalt” as auxiliary modals or by an implied “if … then” construction. “Shall,” as distin-guished from “will,” is used to express what is inevitable, what seems to be fated or decreed, or what seems likely to occur in the future. David Bevington points out that “will, which originally expressed intention, determination, or willingness, was … beginning to en-croach on shall for the expression of futurity in the first person” during Shakespeare’s lifetime (77). This encroachment does not usually occur in Richard II however; here, Shakespeare is careful to exclude “will” (in the sense of “shall”) from most of the predictive passages and to use “shall” almost exclusively to indicate the inevitability of future events. A good example of this usage is Carlisle’s prediction of the Wars of the Roses (3.3.85-100), where “shall” appears four times within seven lines (137, 139, 141, and 143) and is followed by an implied “if … then” construction. Thus, the play textualizes and verbalizes a specific grammar of prophecy that helps to establish the dominant prophetic mood.

Some of the prophecies in Richard II are simply tossed off in passing. In Act 1, for example, the Duchess of Gloucester correctly predicts her own fate. She asks Gaunt to invite York to Plashy, and then prophesies her own death before his visit:

Alack, and what shall good old York there see
But empty lodgings and unfurnish’d walls,
Unpeopled offices, untrodden stones,
And what hear there for welcome but my groans?
Therefore commend me; let him not come there
To seek out sorrow that dwells everywhere.
Desolate, desolate, will I hence and die:
The last leave of thee takes my weeping eye. (1.2.67-74)

In this minor prophetic moment, the Duchess indicates the inevitabil-ity of her own death through the “shall” that begins the passage and her willing acceptance of that death in the “will” that almost closes it.
We find another instance in the next scene when Mowbray correctly predicts that Bolingbroke will cause trouble for Richard in the future: “But what thou [Bolingbroke] art, God, thou, and I do know, / And all too soon, I fear, the king shall rue” (1.3.204-205). Mowbray's prophecy, delivered as he prepares to go into exile, reverberates throughout the entire play. It predicts the major action of Richard II just as Richard's last prophecy predicts the action of Henry IV and Carlisle's prophecy the action of Henry VI.

A similar moment occurs later in the same scene when John of Gaunt foretells his own death before Bolingbroke's return from exile:

For ere the six years that he hath to spend
Can change their moons, and bring their times about,
My oil-dried lamp and time-bewasted light
Shall be extinct with age and endless night,
My inch of taper will be burnt and done,
And blindfold Death not let me see my son. (1.3.219-24)

Richard's Queen also exercises prophetic powers; in Act 2 she predicts “[s]ome unborn sorrow ripe in Fortune's womb / Is coming towards me” (2.2.10-11). And at the close of Act 4, the Bishop of Carlisle offers a short two-line summary of his earlier and much longer prescient vision of civil war: “The woe's to come; the children yet unborn / Shall feel this day as sharp to them as thorn” (4.1.322-23).

These moments augment the prophetic mood of Richard II. The mood is more firmly established, however, by the five major prophecies that are delivered in the play. These prophecies—uttered by Gaunt, York, Carlisle, and Richard—all represent critical points in the fall of Richard and the development of the play; they provide a chart for the movement from a medieval to a Renaissance world view and the shift from law to power. This model of a world in transition is not achieved through the prophecies themselves. Rather, it is to be found in the conceptual foundation on which specific prophecies are based or in the ideology they reflect.

The first of the major prophecies is spoken rather early in the play by John of Gaunt before he is carried off to his death bed. Here, Gaunt predicts the destruction of Richard II as a result of the king's own violent behavior:

His rash fierce blaze of riot cannot last.
For violent fires soon burn out themselves;
Small showers last long, but sudden storms are short;
He tires betimes that spurs too fast betimes;
With eager feeding food doth choke the feeder;
Light vanity, insatiate cormorant,
Consuming means, soon preys upon itself. (2.1.33-39)

Hardin Craig suggests that Gaunt’s prophecy reflects the Elizabethan conviction that “those near to death or weakened by old age, since they are less hindered by bodily sensation, are capable of divination” (45). More to the point, the prophecy is expressed in a series of five progressively more emphatic metaphors of self-consumption, all based on the proverb “nothing violent can be permanent” (Dent 184). Tilly (N321) and Wilson (581) trace this proverb back to 1562, when it appeared in Norton and Sackville’s Gorboduc, but we may assume a more ancient provenance. The most significant aspect of this prophecy, however, remains its ideological basis. Gaunt’s prediction that Richard II will “burn himself out” is based partly on his own reading of Richard’s personality and partly on proverbial lore. Both of these bases reflect a medieval rather than a Renaissance orientation in Gaunt’s thinking. In commenting on these lines, Robert Ornstein notes that “it is the ‘orthodox’ [or medieval] Gaunt who speaks contemptuously of Richard’s failings” (112). Additionally, this first prophecy is limited in scope; it focuses on the individual rather than the state and it predicts a personal rather than a national disaster. Gaunt does go on, in his paean to England, to consider the national implications of Richard’s behavior; nevertheless, the prophecy itself is limited to King Richard.

The next three central prophecies in Richard II shift the focus from personal to national concerns; all predict civil war and national chaos. York’s prophetic warning against seizing Gaunt’s properties is the most limited of these:

If you do wrongfully seize Herford’s rights,
Call in the letters patents that he hath
By his attorneys-general to sue
His livery, and deny his off’red homage,
You pluck a thousand dangers on your head,
You lose a thousand well-disposed hearts,
And prick my tender patience to those thoughts
Which honor and allegiance cannot think. (2.1.201-208)

The rhetoric of prophecy is signalled here by York’s three-part “if … then” construction. Three parallel “if” clauses are balanced by three implied “then” conclusions, each of which predicts future ills for
Richard. York warns Richard II that the latter's illegal appropriation of Gaunt's property will result in personal danger. The first two "then" phrases are quite generalized, promising "a thousand dangers" and the loss of "a thousand well-disposed hearts." The third is much more specific; it accurately predicts that York himself will abandon Richard's cause.

York is, as Robert B. Price suggests, a "fading remnant of the old order" (156). The basic foundation of his prophecy is clearly this old order—specifically the medieval law of "fair sequence and succession" coupled with the parallel law of primogeniture:

Take Herford's rights away, and take from time
His charters, and his customary rights;
Let not to-morrow then ensue to-day:
Be not thyself. For how art thou a king
But by fair sequence and succession? (2.1.195-99)

Ernst H. Kantorowicz notes that the laws of primogeniture and succession were accepted and acknowledged "de facto" quite early in England: "England in 1272 recognized that the succession to the throne was the birthright of the eldest son" (330). And Irving Ribner correctly asserts that "fair sequence and succession" are the key to York's prophetic warning: "Richard himself, as York makes clear, is denying the great system of law, both human and divine, upon which his own claim to kingship depends. It is he, not Bolingbroke, who first disturbs God's harmonious order, who first attacks the divinely sanctioned principles of 'fair sequence and succession'" (162). The significant factor in this prophecy is thus its basis in medieval law and a medieval conceptualization of the state. In warning Richard, York founds his prophecy on his own reading of the old order: the medieval cosmos.

The third and fourth extended prophecies spoken in Richard II are almost identical in content, cultural context, and ideological basis. Both predict generations of civil war and internecine slaughter. The first and more generalized of these is Richard II's own vision of England's future:

Yet know, my master, God omnipotent,
Is mustering in his clouds, on our behalf,
Armies of pestilence, and they shall strike
Your children yet unborn, and unbegot ... (3.3.85-88)
In these lines, the prophetic idiom and the inevitability of future chaos are established by the verb “shall” (87). Richard clearly predicts future rather than present retribution through his reference to “children yet unborn and unbegot” (88). In the rest of the passage, however, the focus wanders away from the distant future of unborn generations to the immediate future of Bolingbroke. At line ninety-one, Richard shifts from generalized prophecies of bloodshed to specific warnings aimed at the usurper. He accuses Bolingbroke of “dangerous treason” (93) and again prophesies massive social and political disruption:

But ere the crown he looks for live in peace,
Ten thousand bloody crowns of mothers’ sons
Shall ill become the flower of England’s face,
Change the complexion of her maid-pale peace
To scarlet indignation, and bedew
Her pastures’ grass with faithful English blood. (3.3.95-100)

We might be tempted to read these lines as a prediction of immediate opposition to Bolingbroke and salvation for Richard—a prophecy that would be pathetically wrong. Several features of the entire passage, however, preclude such a reading. One is the explicit futurity of the first four lines (85-88) which shape and direct our response to the remainder of the prophecy. The second, and more telling, is Richard’s implicit and syntactic placement of the crown in an unspecified future time when it is no longer explicitly his; it is “the crown he [Bolingbroke] looks for” and it “shall” not “live in peace.”

The Bishop of Carlisle offers a strikingly similar prophecy in Act 4 immediately after York has announced the “abdication” of Richard II and the de facto crowning of Henry Bolingbroke. Carlisle is another “remnant of the old order” (Price 156); he sees Bolingbroke as a “foul traitor” and explicitly prophesies disaster as a result of usurpation:

The blood of English shall manure the ground,
And future ages groan for this foul act,
Peace shall go to sleep with Turks and infidels,
And, in this seat of peace, tumultuous wars
Shall kin with kin, and kind with kind, confound. (4.1.137-41)

This part of Carlisle’s prophecy is as unfocused as Richard’s earlier one; it predicts generalized bloodshed and “tumultuous wars” that will destroy peace, plague future generations, and divide families. As the Bishop continues, however, the prophecy becomes chillingly focused
and specific:

O, if you raise this house against this house,
It will the woefullest division prove
That ever fell upon this cursed earth.
Prevent it, resist it, let it not be so,
Lest child, child's children, cry against you woe. (4.1.145-49)

Grammatically, this section of prophecy illustrates the encroachment of "will" (146) on "shall for the expression of futurity" (Bevington 77). Shakespeare may employ the word here to suggest that such a division of houses is both willful and inevitable. In any event, the idiom of prophecy is sustained in the implied "if ... then" construction of the warning. Thematically, these five lines embody the political core of the Bishop's prophecy; they specifically articulate the dangers inherent in setting two branches of Edward III's family against one another, and they prophesy the bitter opposition of the future houses of York and Lancaster. In addition, the lines warn that such a "division" will sunder families as well as the kingdom. Ultimately, Carlisle predicts the Wars of the Roses.9

Significantly, these two prophecies share a common foundation in medieval law and in the medieval view of kingship. Both are based entirely on the idea of the king as "rex imago dei" (Kantorowicz 34).10 Richard makes the ideological basis of his prophecy absolutely explicit in an assertion of his divine stewardship immediately before delivering his prediction:

... 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. (3.3.77-81)

Carlisle also prefaces his prophecy with a clear reference to divine sanction and is equally explicit in invoking the concept of the king as God's anointed minister. Thus, his prophecy is also built on the foundation of divine election:

And shall the figure of God's majesty,
His captain, steward, deputy elect,
Anointed, crowned, planted many years,
Be judg'd by subjects and inferior breath,
And he himself not present? (4.1.125-29)

We see that the prophecies of Richard II and the Bishop of Carlisle are profoundly medieval in their ideology. Both are derived from a medieval perception of kingship and succession. Again, Kantorowicz notes that Carlisle “plays the logothetes” and “constrains ... the rex imago Det’ to appear in his speech; his definition of kingship (and consequently Richard’s) enumerates “in good mediaeval fashion, the features of the vicarius Det” (34).

Up to this point in the play, the central prophecies have been significantly consistent in their medieval bases and orientation. Other elements have already introduced the counter-view, including some of Richard’s statements about kingship and most of Bolingbroke’s actions since his return from exile. The prophetic utterances of Gaunt, York, Richard II, and the Bishop of Carlisle, however, have shared an unchanging medieval ideology as their basis. With the single exception of Gaunt’s proverbial vision of Richard’s future, these crucial predictions have also rested on a common foundation of medieval law and the medieval conceptualization of primogeniture, succession, and kingship.

It is, in fact, this very consistency that makes the final prophetic moment of Richard II so surprising and significant. In this last prophecy, Richard II predicts the future course of the relationship between Bolingbroke and Northumberland:

Northumberland, thou ladder wherewithal
The mounting Bolingbroke ascends my throne,
The time shall not be many hours of age
More than it is, ere foul sin gathering head
Shall break into corruption: thou shalt think,
Though he divide the realm and give thee half,
It is too little, helping him to all;
He shall think that thou, which knowest the way
To plant unrightful kings, wilt know again,
Being ne’er so little urg’d, another way
To pluck him headlong from the usurped throne. (5.1.55-65)

Here, Richard II prophesies the very events of Bolingbroke’s reign and of Shakespeare’s Henry IV: the falling out of “thieves,” the alienation of the Percy family, and the rebellion against Henry IV.

Richard’s final prediction is a remarkable example of the grammar of prophecy that creates much of the mood of the play. His lines are
studded with four repetitions of “shall” and “shalt.” The single use of will (as “wilt”) in line sixty-three signifies both inevitable future action and Northumberland’s willing and willful action against Henry IV. The prophecy is still more remarkable, however, in its foundation. This prophecy, unlike the previous four, is based in neither a medieval view of kingship nor a sacramental reading of the laws of succession and primogeniture. Instead, it finds its basis in Richard’s new understanding of the dynamics of power.

Shakespeare seems to acknowledge and emphasize the singularity of this prophecy. Richard’s is the only prophetic statement in the play that is recapitulated and discussed later in the Second Tetralogy. It plagues Henry IV, and he repeats it with commentary to Warwick and Surrey in Act 3 of Henry IV, Part Two. In response, Warwick attempts to explicate and belittle Richard’s prophetic insight:

There is a history in all men’s lives
Figuring the nature of the times deceas’d;
The which observ’d, a man may prophesy,
With a near aim, of the main chance of things
As yet not come to life, who in their seeds
And weak beginnings lie intreasured.
Such things become the hatch and brood of time:
And by the necessary form of this
King Richard might create a perfect guess
That great Northumberland, then false to him,
Would of that seed grow to a greater falseness,
Which should not find a ground to root upon
Unless on you. (3.1.80-92)

Warwick suggests here that Richard II’s words were merely a lucky guess based on his reading of Northumberland’s personality and Northumberland’s recent betrayal of Richard himself.

Warwick’s interpretation of Richard’s last prophecy as a “perfect guess” is certainly mandated by the political realities of Henry IV; it would be most unwise for anyone in Henry IV’s court to grant Richard too much visionary insight into England’s future. It is, nevertheless, an inaccurate and reductive reading of Richard’s “text.” Richard’s prediction of the division between Bolingbroke and Northumberland is not simply a lucky guess. Nor is it a logical extrapolation based on Northumberland’s betrayal of Richard. Rather, it is founded on a radical shift in the world of the play and in Richard’s understanding of that world.
Throughout the first three acts of *Richard II*, Richard attempted to play a double game; he used “Realpolitik” when it was convenient, but he attempted to maintain his theoretical footing in the medieval laws of succession and kingship. Even in the midst of his machinations, Richard never clearly understood the dynamics or the consequences of power politics. Most significantly, he failed to articulate the medieval interdependence of law and power. Ruth Nevo asserts that “Richard must rule, in his circumstances, either by what the Elizabethans, following Machiavelli, called virtu, or by that older dial of princes called virtue. He must govern by either power or justice, since the breach between them already exists” (63). Richard’s problem, however, is never a simple “either ... or” situation. Instead, it is the problem of articulating both justice (or law) and power simultaneously — of dressing power in the law, or, conversely, upholding the law with power. Richard’s reign in Shakespeare’s play rests on a basis of law without the power necessary to substantiate that law. In his attempts at power, however, he abandons the appearance of law completely, and thus invalidates the very system that made him king and kept him king. Once he himself violates the law, his reign has absolutely no basis of authority.

After all his power has been stripped away, Richard paradoxically gains a much clearer understanding of himself and the new order. Harold C. Goddard observes that “our respect for Richard rises also, for uncrowned, he is free to be a man instead of a king.... He learns through suffering” (157). In the framework of tragedy, such learning is necessary; it indicates a new awareness of Richard’s own errors and it comprises part of his *anagnorisis*. From a political point of view, however, this knowledge enables Richard to comprehend the world that will replace his own. At the point of his final prophecy, this new understanding of “Realpolitik” crystallizes into an accurate and detailed analysis of the dynamics of power as they will alter the relationship between the new king and the king-maker.

It is here, in this final prophetic moment, that we see in microcosm the old order give way to the new. The final prophecy neither produces nor signals this change; it is simply a marker. Transformational momentum has been mounting since Act 2 and the news that “[t]he banish’d Bolingbroke repeals himself” (2.2.49). The actual shift from law to power and from Richard to Henry is impossible to pinpoint; it has certainly occurred by Act 3, when Bolingbroke assumes the rights and role of the king in the trial of Bushy and Greene. The distinction between the four earlier prophecies and Richard’s final prophecy, however, delineates the distinction between
these two orders. The medieval ideology that serves as the foundation for the prophecies of Gaunt, York, Richard, and Carlisle is replaced by Renaissance concepts of power and politics. Thus, the prophecies of Richard II trace out in miniature the larger movement in the play from the medieval ethos of the Plantagenets to the new Lancastrian rule by power.

University of Alabama

NOTES

1The research for this essay was made possible by funding from the Research Grants Committee of The University of Alabama.

2Tillyard is one of the major spokespersons for the reading of Richard II that sees the deposed king as the representative of "the world of medieval refinement" which is "threatened and in the end superseded by the more familiar world of the present" represented by Bolingbroke (259). A significant number of scholars agree that two worlds, two orders, or two ideologies are juxtaposed in the play. There is much less agreement, however, concerning the nature of this dialectic. Phialas sees an "old" and a "new" England in the play, but his distinction is between Richard's enfeebled and devitalized England on the one hand and, on the other, England's national strength and international prestige during the reign of Richard's ancestors (308). These two Englands represent "two reigns within the Middle Ages" (310). In rebuttal, Hapgood reaffirms the medieval-Renaissance dialectic in Richard II by equating Richard's ancestors with an ordered medieval world, Richard himself with a disordered medieval world, and Bolingbroke with a "new era, in which the function and the status of the king depends ultimately on the manipulation of public opinion" (282). Elliot claims that Richard "represents not a medieval king, but a Renaissance monarch with pretentions to divine right and a divine power which no medieval ruler could have claimed" (26). He does not, however, deny the medieval basis for much of Richard's action. Ornstein affirms that Richard and his noble uncles consistently evoke a "medieval ethos," but he contends that Bolingbroke and Northumberland are equally medieval: "when the old order gives way to the new, there is no radical change in the mortal temper of English politics" (103-104). Porter recasts this opposition of worlds, time, or ideologies into a linguistic dialectic. Richard's medieval milieu is identified as a "univocal, unilingual, absolutist world of nomenclature [and] ceremonial performatives." In opposition to this, Bolingbroke's world of power is characterized by varying "tongues and silence" (47).

Most recently, Hamilton has argued against any juxtaposition of "eras" or "worlds" or "orders" in Richard II. She asserts that "the presence of these ideas about law and commonwealth in Richard II suggests that the dramatist saw in Richard's story an example of something that had happened once in England and might happen again" (16). In the body of her essay, however, Hamilton illustrates the very real medieval basis for the theory of kingship advanced in Richard II through her citations to such medieval writers and theoreticians as John Gower and Henry of Bracton.

3Contrast, for example, the traditional and sacramental imagery woven into the
first trial-by-combat between Mowbray and Bolingbroke (1.3.6sd-118) and the blatantly political challenges offered to and from Aumerle during the interrogation of Bagot (4.1.8-85). Aumerle, Fitzwater, Percy, "Another Lord," and Surrey throw down their gages in this latter scene with the full expectation that Bolingbroke will not allow the trials-by-combat to occur. While the effect of this scene is surely comic—the repeated sound of mailed gages hitting the stage punctuates the duplicated action—the motivation for most of the characters is purely political. All the nobles involved in the challenges (on both sides) realize that Bolingbroke plans to use Bagot to discredit Richard. In consequence, the providential basis of the trial-by-combat is effectively cancelled and the challenges become empty political gestures.

4In The Question of Hamlet, Levin expands and elaborates this argument at length, asserting that Hamlet "parses every affirmation by the grammar of doubt" (43).

5Unless we assume that John of Gaunt is willing his own death, the diction of this prophecy illustrates the incursion of "will" into the linguistic territory of "shall." "Shall" (222) establishes the prophetic inevitability of Gaunt's death; "will" (223) seems to recapitulate this inevitability. Further consideration, however, suggests that Gaunt is both foretelling and willing his own death. He is, after all, caught in an insoluble conflict between medieval theory and political "reality." Additionally, he has been rendered powerless and superfluous through Richard's actions, attitudes, and banishment of Bolingbroke. Gaunt, like the Duchess of Gloucester, may finally be willing to accede to the inevitability of his death.

6This prophecy (and couplet) is Carlisle's last utterance in the play. Although the Bishop is on stage in 5.6, and is commanded to "[c]hoose out some secret place, some reverend room / More than thou hast, and with it joy thy life" (25-26), he is mute in this scene. Thus, the couplet, while not signalling the end of Act 4, does indicate the loss of Carlisle's prophetic voice from the play.

7For a detailed treatment of the rhetoric of Gaunt's prophecy, see Friedman's "John of Gaunt and the Rhetoric of Frustration."

8Campbell notes the similarity of these two prophecies but does not pursue her investigation beyond this basic point (207-208).

9Battenhouse may be correct in asserting that Carlisle's prophecy "ignores traditional Christian theory regarding the relation of church and state" and that the Bishop thus "misses his opportunity to act as a mediator" (42). He is surely misreading, however, when he argues that Carlisle "helps make his own doleful prophecy self-fulfilling. Not simply by his defective counseling, but afterwards by joining a conspiracy to unseat Bolingbroke by military means, he himself sets flowing the bloodshed which his speech has warned against" (42-43). Carlisle is clearly foretelling the events of Henry IV, specifically the Wars of the Roses. His participation in the Oxford plot against Henry IV has virtually no effect on the veracity or fulfillment of a prophecy that leaps over one generation and fifty-six years.

10Editors have pointed out that much of the language in these two prophecies is derived from the first part of "An Homilie Against disobedience and willful rebellion" in Certain Sermons or Homilies appointed to be read in Churches. This specific homily, number twenty-one in The Second Tome of Homilies, was written in 1570 and added to the collection in 1571. It asserts that "Kings, Queenes, and other Princes ... are ordained of God, are to be obeyed and honoured of their subiects: that such subiects, as are disobedient or rebellious against their Princes, disobey God, and procure their owne damnation" (2.227). It is evident, however, that the basis for this
homily is entirely medieval in its theory and its dependence on biblical exegesis. Rickey and Stroup point out that "the Homilies ... provide an admirably complete introduction to the full range of medieval exegesis. In them, every member of the Established Church would again and again, year after year, have heard some two hundred quotations from the fathers, alluded to by name, encompassing virtually all of their distinctive ideas" (xi-xii).

Champion links Richard's final prophecy with his earlier one and with Carlisle's two prophecies as anticipations of the Wars of the Roses. He goes on to argue that all four of these "passages obviously fortify the religious dimensions of the play because they suggest God's ordinance beyond Bolingbroke's usurpation" (87). Champion fails to make any distinction whatsoever between Richard's last prophecy and those that precede it. Other critics are more willing to recognize the distinction between the earlier prophecies and this one. Kelly, for example, observes that Richard's final prophecy is "based on a natural rather than a supernatural evaluation of the situation" (213). Kelly, however, does not go far enough in noting the very real distinctions between Richard's last prophecy and all the predictions that have come before.

Henry IV's verbatim knowledge of Richard's final prophecy is literally inexplicable in terms of Richard II. Few of the characters on stage during this prophetic moment would have the inclination to repeat Richard's words to Bolingbroke. Only Northumberland has the opportunity, and he has every reason not to pass Richard's warning on the Henry. Nevertheless, Shakespeare wants this prophecy to resonate through Henry IV; thus, he arranges (after the fact) for Henry to hear about Richard's prediction. In 2 Henry IV, the king supposes that Warwick overheard and reported Richard's warning: "... But which of you was by — / You, cousin Nevil, as I may remember — / When Richard, with his eye brimful of tears, / Then check'd and rated by Northumberland, / Did speak these words, now prov'd a prophecy?" (3.1.65-69). This, of course, is inaccurate. As Humphreys points out, "no Warwick appears in Richard II" (92n). Henry IV's explanation of the transmission is phrased as a question, and it is made even more conditional by the "may" in the second line; these syntactic strategies might represent Shakespeare's sotto voce admission that no such observer was present. But Warwick's silent assent to the role of observer-listener represents a retroactive revision of the events in Richard II. No matter that the transmission of Richard's prophecy could not have occurred; Shakespeare revises events so that it must have occurred. Such revision underscores the importance of both Richard's initial articulation of the prophecy and Henry's repetition of it. Humphreys observes that the transmission and repetition of this warning are "a notable part of the chain of prophecies and reminiscences which unify the historical sequence" of the Second Tetralogy (93n).

We see Richard's attempts to bypass medieval law and use power politics or "slowly Machiavellianism" (Manheim 56) in his interruption of the trial-by-battle and his confiscation of Gaunt's property. Although both acts are within the king's power, they are not within the law or the tradition of the medieval world. For a detailed study of Richard's historical problems with law and the foundations of kingship, see Jones (88-112).

In Henry IV, Bolingbroke learns Richard's lesson in reverse; he discovers that power always needs to have (or to appear to have) a basis in law. The resolution of these symmetrical failures in the Second Tetralogy occurs in Henry V, where King Henry demonstrates a genius for using theatricality to represent power always in terms of law, right, and the ethically appealing.
WORKS CITED


Rickey, Mary Ellen and Thomas B. Stroup, eds. Certain Sermons or Homilies appointed to be read in Churches. Gainesville: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1968.


