THE LINKED ANALOGIES OF *RICHARD II*

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HOWEVER one looks at it now, *Richard II* seems to mark a kind of transition in Shakespeare's development as a dramatic poet. To his contemporaries it may very well have seemed a relatively tame performance after the exciting combination of historical material and Senecan villainy in *Richard III* and the lyrical movement of his sophisticated *Romeo and Juliet*. For us, it is perhaps easier to see that Shakespeare had reached a terminus of sorts in both of these early plays. *Romeo and Juliet* is something that we should not willingly part with, but we should be reluctant to acquire many more like it. For that matter, a play surpassing *Romeo and Juliet* in its kind almost defies the imagination. Of possible plays like *Richard III*, also perfect in its way, one specimen is quite enough. And so it is with plays like *Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, and *Titus Andronicus*. Shakespeare, by the time he came to write *Richard II*, had proved that he was capable of achieving as much perfection as was desirable in several of the more important dramatic forms that his predecessors had sketched out for him. It remained for him to show that he had something new to offer, either by producing a startling innovation in form or by offering a new idea of drama. We can be grateful that he left the first of these alternatives to his younger contemporary Ben Jonson, whose surer sense of structure enabled him to produce innovations that found few imitators mainly because he himself did all that could conceivably be done with them. Shakespeare's great contribution was the rediscovery of an ancient and all but forgotten path for drama. That he too had few followers is regrettable, but hardly his fault. Even now we come stumblingly to a definition of what it was he found. Tragedy, since Bradley, looms large in our eye, and we still tend to define Shakespeare's

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achievement in relation to that. The value of *Richard II*, we are sometimes tempted to say, lies in its anticipations of characterizations yet to come, Brutus, Hamlet, and Macbeth. So it does, but not exclusively there. What really sets this remarkable play sharply apart from Shakespeare's own earlier work and the work of all his contemporaries is an approach—demonstrable in most of his later work quite without regard to formal classification—which reveals Shakespeare clearly as a poet with a metaphysical turn of mind, capable of seeing the particular event both as something unique and as something participating in a universal web of analogy. We find next to nothing of this in the *Henry VI* plays, in *Comedy of Errors*, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, in *Romeo and Juliet*, or in *Richard III*, which, for all its slick dramaturgy, remains a play about Richard III, at its farthest conceivable extension a warning to would-be usurpers and tyrants. It is in *Richard II*, a play popularly and rightly famous for one passage in glorification of England, that Shakespeare manages for the first time to extend his field of reference to include everybody.

The kind of seeing which this new approach to material requires is illustrated in that scene in Act II in which the Queen betrays an inclination to see more in Richard's going to Ireland than a mere separation. Bushy, with more common sense than foresight, tries to persuade the lady that simple sorrow has distorted her judgment and made her look upon perfectly normal situations as if they were ingenious *trompes-l'oeil*,

> . . . perspectives, which rightly gaz'd upon
> Show nothing but confusion, ey'd awry
> Distinguish form; so your sweet Majesty,
> Looking awry upon your lord's departure,
> Find shapes of grief, more than himself, to wail;
> Which, look'd on as it tis, is nought but shadows
> Of what it is not.
>
> (II.ii.18-24)

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Bushy would have her look squarely at the event and accept it at face value. The Queen, however, is not easily comforted. "It may be so," she replies; "but yet my inward soul/Persuades me it is otherwise." She happens to be right, of course; history makes her right. But Shakespeare gives her kind of vision at least as much vindication as history does. If we may believe some of the critics who have written about it, *Richard II* contains much that is unassimilated, contradictory, and without especial significance. That is, if we look at the play "rightly," in Bushy's sense, we see in it at least a partial failure to achieve complete control over the historical materials. Perhaps this is so. Nevertheless, if we take a hint from Richard's Queen and eye the play awry (as, for example, in our recollection of it), it has a way of subtly distinguishing a form that tends to pull all the seemingly irrelevant parts together and make the whole meaningful as no chronicle before it, dramatic or nondramatic, had ever been.

Some writers have attributed this "informed quality" of *Richard II* to Shakespeare's conscious or unconscious dependence upon an analogy with ritual. Among those who have acknowledged the importance of ceremony and ritual in the play is E. M. W. Tillyard, who devotes several illuminating pages of his *Shakespeare's History Plays* (New York, 1946, pp. 245-59) to the matter; but Tillyard sees ceremony only as part of the data of the play, an attribute of Richard and his medieval kingship, which Bolingbroke is about to destroy. One might say that Tillyard looks at the play "rightly," in Bushy's sense. J. Dover Wilson, on the other hand, following some remarks by Walter Pater, has observed in his edition that *Richard II* stands so remarkably close to the Catholic service of the Mass that it ought to be played throughout as ritual. Hardier critics than Wilson have gone still further and made out cases for relating the play to ancient fertility rites, some of which, like their Christian counterparts, present remarkably close analogies with this play. For example, of the four types of fertility ritual in which F. M. Cornford

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found a significant tendency toward drama (*The Origin of Attic Comedy*, London, 1914, p. 53 ff.), three show a resemblance to the action of this play which is too striking to be ignored. In one of these, which Cornford calls "The Carrying Out of Death," the sin of a whole kingdom is symbolically purged with the death of a single victim. In another, "The Fight of Summer and Winter," winter personified as an evil antagonist is defeated by the representative of summer. In a third, perhaps the most suggestive of all, the old king, or old year, having grown evil through decay, is deposed and replaced by the new.

Suggestive as all these examples of ritual are, however, they have only the most doubtful kind of connection with plays of the Elizabethan theater; for as far as responsible investigators have been able to tell, the theater which Shakespeare inherited was a lineal descendant of neither folk rite nor Christian ritual. It is much more sensible to explain whatever ritual movement we find in *Richard II* as something Shakespeare himself achieved—partly by analogy with existing ritual perhaps, but achieved by himself —in the process of shaping a particular event from chronicle history into a living poetic symbol. In that sense, it may be said that he imported into English drama something that it had not inherited legitimately—or, to revert to our first metaphor, he rediscovered for drama an almost forgotten path, impossible for most but vastly rewarding for those few capable of using it. The question to be asked and answered is, how did he happen to stumble upon it? One cannot answer such a question with finality. Shakespeare's own profound sense of analogy must, of course, provide nine tenths of any answer anyone might suggest; and the presence in England of a powerful Christian ritual, revitalized by half a century of intermittently vigorous opposition, certainly had something to do with it. But in addition to these aspects of Shakespeare's achievement, one other, related to both and yet isolable in its own right, commands attention; and that is his per-

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sistent use of Biblical story as analogue for his secular fable. In *Richard II* this aspect confronts us from beginning to end.

The most obvious manifestation of it is the identification of Richard with Christ, which happens to be an historical one. Shakespeare makes explicit use of it first in Act III, when he makes Richard refer to Bushy, Bagot, and Green as "Three Judases, each one thrice worse than Judas!" (III.ii.132). In Act IV, of course, there is considerably more of this sort of thing. There the Bishop of Carlisle warns that if Bolingbroke ascends the throne, England shall be called "The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls" (IV.i.144). And Richard observes of Bolingbroke's supporters:

> . . . I well remember
> The favours of these men. Were they not mine?
> Did they not sometime cry, "All hail!" to me?
> So Judas did to Christ; but He, in twelve,
> Found truth in all but one; I, in twelve thousand, none.
> (IV.i.167-71)

A bit farther on he calls his enemies by another name:

> . . . some of you with Pilate wash your hands
> Showing an outward pity; yet you Pilates
> Have here deliver'd me to my sour cross,
> And water cannot wash away your sin.
> (IV.i.239-242)

This set of allusions, familiar even to casual students of the play, serves admirably to point up Richard's own view of the situation and also to underline effectively the official Elizabethan view that (in the language of the *Homilies*) "The violence and injury that is committed against aucthoritie is committed against God. . . ." A second set of allusions, equally familiar, begins with Gaunt's reference to "This other Eden, demi-paradise," which gets its proper qualification somewhat later in the Garden scene of Act

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III, when the Gardener's man describes England as a "sea-walled garden" choked with weeds and the Gardener himself receives the Queen's rebuke for presuming to accuse Richard of negligence:

Thou, old Adam's likeness, set to dress this garden,
How dares thy harsh rude tongue sound this unpleasing news?
What Eve, what serpent, hath suggested thee
To make a second fall of cursed man?
(III.iv. 73-76)

Here with these allusions a second attitude, not exclusively Elizabethan, is underscored: viz., that the king, as himself man, is responsible to God for the right use of sovereignty, both by defending true religion and the honest subject and by punishing the wicked.

Taken together these two sets of allusions give us a double image of Richard—Richard *microchristus* and Richard *microcosmos*, Richard the Lord's Anointed and Richard Everyman. This, of course, is simply the conventional Elizabethan double image of kingship and would not of itself be particularly startling were it not for the additional suggestion of a pattern that unfolds as the play proceeds. The Golgotha of which Carlisle speaks does indeed come to pass. Richard rides to London with many to throw dust upon his head but none to cry, "God save him!" Despised and rejected, he languishes at Pomfret, only to face his executioners with such a manifestation of regality in death that Exton, like the centurion at the foot of the cross (who said of Jesus, "Truly this man was the Son of God."—cf. *Matt.* 27:54; *Mark* 15:39), is compelled to acknowledge it:

As full of valour as of royal blood!
Both have I spill'd; O would the deed were good!
For now the devil, that told me I did well,
Says that this deed is chronicled in hell.
(V.v.114-117)

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Even Bolingbroke, to whom Richard alive was a "living fear," is moved to say:

> Though I did wish him dead,
> I hate the murder, love him murdered.
> (V.vi.39-40)

Perhaps some Elizabethans, long accustomed to hearing and seeing typological interpretations of Scripture, saw in this combination of allusion and historical fable a kind of significance that we are likely to overlook. What Shakespeare was giving them in this presentation of Richard as a sort of Adam-Christ was nothing less than a typological interpretation of history. In Scripture the fall and death of the First Adam is corrected and atoned for by the sacrificial death of the Second (see *Romans* 5:12-21). That is, Adam's disobedience and death is an anticipatory realization of a pattern that achieved its complete historical realization only in the perfect obedience and death of Jesus of Nazareth, with whose resurrection a way was cleared for Adam (and all those who had sinned in Adam) to escape the full consequences of death. From the typologists's point of view this pattern, perfectly symbolized by one Adam's atonement for the other's sin, is the eternal principle of which all history is in one way or another but the spelling out. Whether he realized it or not at the time, Shakespeare, in laying the outlines of such a complex and richly suggestive symbol against the surface of his chronicle material, had given to secular fable a significance that it had achieved only rarely in drama since the days of Aeschylus and Sophocles. To paraphrase Dryden, he had affected the metaphysical in his treatment of it. Moreover, having underscored that revolutionary affectation by utilizing ceremonial in his play, by presenting ceremonially much that was not strictly ceremony, and by frequently alluding to the symbolic substance of analogous pagan ritual (sun and ice, summer and winter, etc.),

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he had also produced a work which "eyed awry" strongly suggests an analogy with ritual.

Seeing a ritualistic aspect in a play, however, is not the same as identifying it with ritual or attempting to play it as ritual. To see Richard as a ritual type of Adam-Christ is certainly warranted by Shakespeare's text, but to see him exclusively as that is to see Bolingbroke exclusively as Satan-Judas; and this is certainly *not* warranted by the text. The leading question of the play is not simply "What is true kingship?" but "What is the true king? What is the Lord's Anointed?" Mere ritual is powerless to answer this question, and history and the *Homilies* do little better. Shakespeare could expect his audience to know the report of history that both Richard and the Lancastrain usurper in their turns possessed the title of "Lord's Anointed" and could expect them accordingly to stand with Gaunt when he says ruefully near the beginning of the play:

> God's is the quarrel; for God's substitute,
> His deputy anointed in His sight,
> Hath caus'd his death; the which if wrongfully,
> Let Heaven revenge. . . .
> (I.ii.37-40)

He could assume that the judgment of York on Bolingbroke in Act II would be accepted as appropriate by loyal Englishmen everywhere:

> My lords of England, let me tell you this:
> I have had feeling of my cousin's wrongs
> And labour'd all I could to do him right;
> But in this kind to come, in braving arms,
> Be his own carver and cut out his way,
> To find our right with wrong—it may not be;
> And you that do abet him in this kind
> Cherish rebellion and are rebels all.
> (II.iii.140-47)

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Similarly, he could let York's pained acquiescence in Bolingbroke's accession to the throne serve as an appropriate public moral for the play as a whole: ". . . Heaven hath a hand in these events,/To whose high will we bow our calm contents" (V.ii.-37-38). Yet there is something less than a martyr's acquiescence in Richard's famous metaphor for the historic turnabout:

> Now is this golden crown like a deep well
> That owes two buckets, filling one another,
> The emptier ever dancing in tthe air,
> The other down, unseen, and full of water.
> That bucket down and full of tears am I,
> Drinking my griefs, whilst you mount up on high.
> (IV.i.184-189)

The conclusion startles Bolingbroke into saying, "I thought you had been willing to resign." And Richard replies with three lines that would be uncomfortably out of place in a play reduced to the level of ritual:

> My crown I am; but still my griefs are mine.
> You may my glories and my state depose,
> But not my griefs; still am I king of those.

Here Richard is undoubtedly already thinking of himself as a betrayed and repudiated Christ, moving ahead to a sour cross while the Pilates stand about washing their hands. The role evidently delights him, and he plays it well. Nevertheless, we should notice that the role is one he has himself discovered, not one that has come looking for him. We should also notice that Shakespeare cast Richard initially in quite another role, which he plays equally well, in spite of himself, and which temporarily at least disqualifies him as a spotless victim.

The Richard that Shakespeare sets before us at the beginning of the play is not only God's Anointed but a man guilty, ultimately if not directly, of his uncle's death. He knows that no

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one has proved his guilt, and he thinks that no one, except Aumerle of course, knows exactly what the details of Woodstock's death were. Yet Bolingbroke, in the very first scene, pronounces the murdered man Abel and his murderer by implication Cain:

> . . . like a traitor coward,
> Sluic'd out his innocent soul through streams of blood;
> Which blood, like sacrificing Abel's, cries,
> Even from the tongueless caverns of the earth,
> To me for justice and rough chastisement;
> And, by the glorious worth of my descent,
> This arm shall do it, or this life be spent.
> (I.i.102-108)

What Bolingbroke does not realize is that his condemnation and threat of revenge, hurled at the innocent Mowbray, are applicable only to Richard. The Cain he really seeks, however unwittingly, sits on the throne before him and wears the robes of the Lord's Anointed. And ironic as this situation is, it becomes even more ironic when we think of the ancient identification of Abel with Christ and of Cain with the disbelieving Jews who slew him. In Shakespeare's time there was nothing particularly esoteric about such an identification. The New Testament provides ample authority for it (*Matt.* 23:25 and *Heb.* 11:4; 12:-24); there is a reference to it in the Canon of the Mass; and frequent use of it is made in the writings of the Church Fathers. Among Shakespeare's audience there must have been at least a few who had encountered it in contemporary exegetical works and a great many who knew about it from pictorial representations in the familiar *Biblia Pauperum.* Yet even if the identification of Richard-Christ with Richard-Cain escaped the audience entirely, the primary application of Bolingbroke's allusion to the story of Cain and Abel could hardly have escaped them. They all knew well enough what had happened to Woodstock

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and who was directly responsible for it, and they could not have missed the implication that Richard secretly bore the curse of Cain. A second allusion to the murder of Woodstock, however, completes the identification. It is Gaunt who makes this one:

> O, spare me not, my brother Edward's son,
> For that I was his father Edward's son.
> That blood already, like the pelican,
> Hast thou tapp'd out and drunkenly carous'd.
> (II.i.124–127)

Here we have one of our oldest symbols for the Savior, the pelican mother who feeds the young with her own blood, inverted by Gaunt to make an accusation against the young king. That is, Richard, who should have been the parent pelican of the figure, prepared to nourish his brood with his own life if need be, is here accused of having caroused on the blood of another (Woodstock), leaving his young to fare for themselves. Perhaps Shakespeare's audience missed this allusion too. No one can say for sure about that. The important point is that Shakespeare put it there; and with it the chain of analogies, as Shakespeare conceived it, seems complete: Richard-Christ-antichrist-Cain, all are linked as one.

But what of Bolingbroke, who also assumes the role of the Lord's Anointed before the play is complete? After Cain had killed his brother, God put his mark on the fugitive murderer and decreed that no vengeance be taken upon him. The traditional Christian explanation for God's prohibition against revenge in this case was that satisfaction for Abel's blood was to be expected only with the advent of "Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and . . . the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel" (*Hebrews* 12:24). Bolingbroke, in proclaiming himself the avenger of a murdered Abel, was using a figure of speech, to be sure, but he was nevertheless presuming to make right in his own way something that mere man can never

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make right. In other words, he was presuming to do something that even as *microchristus* he could not expect to accomplish without committing the same sin he would avenge. The place of Bolingbroke in the action of the play is perhaps clear enough without the use of Biblical allusion, but such allusion can help us state it: Bolingbroke's story is that of a man who sets out to slay the murderer Cain and does so, only to find that he has the blood of Abel on his hands.

Richard II, then, if it is to be compared to ritual, must be compared to some of the pagan rituals we know, and not to any Christian ritual. The allusions point to a clear, unambiguous analogy with Christ for neither of the principals. Each is a *microchristus* with a specifically human blind spot, a failure to see that kingship, like human nature generally, involves both a crown and a potential Cain who wears the crown. Each discovers, among other things, that the crown is never enough to make the wearer immune to the consequences of being human, but each finds in his turn that the crown can be an eloquent teacher. The crown is a well of instruction, and Richard gets his in the process of descending. From the moment he sets foot on English soil after his return from Ireland, he alternately gropes for and rejects the knowledge which he fully possesses only in the hour of his death at Pomfret. There, breeding thoughts, setting Scripture against Scripture, and imaginatively assuming and repudiating all sorts and conditions of mankind, he comes at last to the flat truth,

> Nor I nor any man that but man is
> With nothing shall be pleas'd, till he be eas'd
> With being nothing.
> (V.v.39-41)

At this moment, ironically, he achieves his most kingly stature and in physical weakness poses his greatest threat to Bolingbroke, who at almost the same time receives a similar enlightenment on

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the way up. Up to the moment of his coronation Bolingbroke has never once thought of the terrifying efficacy that regal power confers upon human impulses. As Bolingbroke he could wish Richard dead and bury the guilt of the wish in his own soul. As Henry he must learn that even a whispered wish is a powerful command. That he wished Richard dead is now enough to make Richard dead, and the blood of Richard is upon him. Turning upon Pierce of Exton, who held the actual dagger, he condemns him in the words of innocent Mowbray:

> With Cain go wander through the shades of night,
> And never show thy head by day nor light.
> (V.vi.43-44)

But the Mowbray who once left England "To dwell in solemn shades of endless night" (I.iii.177) now rests in Abraham's bosom and was never Cain. The two lines that follow are at once sober and plaintive:

> Lords, I protest, my soul is full of woe
> That blood should sprinkle me to make me grow.

And with these lines we come full circle. The great Biblical-metaphysical framework of allusion that began with Bolingbroke's reference to the murder of Abel has encompassed the fable and returned to its starting point. We can now state the questions of the play in terms of the analogies that define them: Who is the Cain? Who, the Christ? Can one avenge Abel with becoming Cain? Can Cain dwell with Christ in the same golden well?

Such questions as these inevitably arise whenever a great dramatic poet lays the relatively clear-cut distinctions of mythic pattern against the disorderly flux of human affairs. It makes little difference whether the poet particularizes his myth and so brings it to the status of history (as the Greeks frequently did)

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or brings to the particularity of chronicle history the outlines of a more ancient imitation. The result is the same. In either case we find good and evil, innocence and guilt, so inextricably mixed that human ingenuity cannot say for sure where the dividing line is. As in the ancient fertility rites and in the Christian mass, we tend to find slayer and slain, old king and new king, Cain and Christ, united in one human frame. There is no other solution in purely human terms. And the bewildered protagonist who suddenly sees the unresolvable paradox in his human situation can only cry out, as Bolingbroke does:

> Lords, I protest my soul is full of woe
> That blood should sprinkle me to make me grow.

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