Character of "Henry VI" and its centrality to Shakespeare's "Henry VI" plays

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THE CHARACTER OF HENRY VI
AND ITS CENTRALITY TO SHAKESPEARE'S HENRY VI PLAYS

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The Character of Henry VI and Its Centrality to Shakespeare's Henry VI Plays

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This thesis is an investigation into and analysis of characterization in Shakespeare's Henry VI plays, showing the importance and centrality of Henry to the characterization as well as the plot and meaning of the plays.

Critics have paid little attention to the use and development of character in these plays. When they have considered character, they have tended to minimize Henry's role. A close inspection of the plays, however, reveals a great deal more subtlety of characterization than is generally accorded them, especially regarding Henry.

Chapter I surveys relevant critical works and comments upon the insights they offer into characterization generally and that of Henry particularly. Chapter II examines the double-plot structure of each of the plays, linking it to the phases of Henry's development as a character. Special attention is given to the bridge passage that covers the end of Part Two and the beginning of Part Three. In this passage, Henry's psychomythic role of king as the embodiment of the realm reaches its greatest intensity, so that Henry's mental crisis and breakdown become symbolically interchangeable with the crisis and breakdown of national order and the descent into civil war. Chapter III pursues the relationship of Henry to the most important patterns of characterization: Henry's comparative relationship to his father and grandfather; the interaction among the kings and pseudo-kings and among the Knights and Schemers due to Henry's ineffective governance; and the emblematic qualities of rulership illustrated by Henry, his uncle Gloucester, and his cousin and rival York.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Though critics ordinarily have concentrated on the central dramatic matters of plot, character, meaning and
diction when discussing Shakespeare's plays, in the case of the Henry VI plays, they have generally been preoccupied with what are essentially peripheral matters--the origin of the history play as a genre, for example, and the historical, philosophical, political and sociological ideas expressed in the plays. Critics and scholars seem to find the plays--which, with Richard III, form Shakespeare's first historical tetralogy--more interesting as historical curiosities than as plays. E.M.W. Tillyard, for example, deals with the plays mainly as descendents of the morality plays and emphasizes the abstractness of theme of the main character, an implicit "Respublica" figure who sins, endures retribution and is redeemed.1 Irving Ribner agrees wholeheartedly with Tillyard's "Respublica" thesis adding observations on the use of formal declamation as in Senecan revenge drama, of episodic structure as in miracle plays, of ritual and symbolic elements as in morality plays, and of the patterns of the rise and fall of statesmen as in de casibus stories.2 Michael Manheim theorizes that the plays of the first tetralogy are linked to the plays


of the second (Richard II; Henry IV, Part One and Part Two, and Henry V) by Shakespeare's continuing investigation of political Machiavellianism by Elizabethan thinkers. According to Manheim, the first tetralogy is ambiguous in message; but the second is clear in its advocacy of deviousness and dishonesty for successful government. David Riggs modifies Tillyard's hypothesis to show the origin of much of the play's action and diction in the established heroic drama. Robert Pierce devotes himself to a semi-sociological study of the family and state as expressed in the three Henry VI plays. Only Robert Ornstein deals with the plays as plays and resists constructing any grand theories. Unfortunately, his study of the Henry VI plays comprises only a small part of a book devoted to all of Shakespeare's English history plays and thus there remains a distressing lack of completeness about Ornstein's treatment of them.

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This is not to suggest that the studies mentioned above are without value, merely that they do not provide the organic view that one would like of plays that have been so neglected. A feeling develops that most Shakespearean critics do not consider the plays worthy of much concern. Yet the *Henry VI* plays were popular in their day and were revived in England in 1950-51 with considerable success. If we conclude that the plays are stageable dramas, we must also conclude that they ought to be considered as such.

When we consider them as dramas, rather than as documents, we find that most of the critical concentration has been on plot, as it connects with morality, miracle, revenge and heroical plays, and on its relation to contemporary theories of politics, rebellion and monarchy. Some of this work has spilled into concern with the meaning of the plays, usually, however, only in regard to Elizabethan political philosophy. Diction has received some attention, though mainly as part of the endless arguments about the place of the plays in the canon. But character has gotten very short shrift indeed, being generally ignored, or sneered at, or manipulated in support of some theory of plot. Again, we may conclude either that the characterization is not very good and thus unimportant, or that the critics have neglected this crucial aspect of the plays.

Actually, the problem is not so much that character has not been considered at all, but that is has been considered in
a half-hearted, superficial manner and that the observations of the various critics have not been tested against each other. No analysis concentrating solely on characterization has been attempted. When such an attempt is begun, it becomes apparent that the chief characters, though less developed than those of the later histories and the tragedies, are not without power, development and interest. They tend to be grouped into two categories, which I call the Knights and the Schemers. Three characters, moreover, stand out above all the rest—Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester; Richard, Duke of York, and Henry VI. These three occupy the foremost positions in both the political and moral aspects of the plays and interact with each other in special and complicated ways. Henry VI is the most important of the three and stands in the central position in each of the three plays. To see why, we should first recapitulate the action of the plays and then review the prominent critical views.

The First Part of Henry VI opens with the funeral of Henry V. Responsibility for governance during the minority of Henry VI (historically, he was nine months old, but Shakespeare does not specify his age) is divided between the young king's uncles, the Duke of Bedford as Regent of France

7A fourth character, Richard of Gloucester, must also be considered major, but his appearance comes at the end of the Third Part and forms the connection to the fourth play of the tetralogy, Richard III. Because Richard's greatest importance lies outside the subject area of this paper, he will be considered here only marginally.
(which has risen in new revolt against its English overlords), and the Duke of Gloucester as Protector in England. This division excludes the Bishop of Winchester (soon to be Cardinal Beaufort), a great-uncle of Henry's on the bend-sinister side. Winchester immediately begins plotting to get more power for himself as a stepping-stone to the papacy. More than half the play takes place in France, where it focuses on Talbot, a great general and the ideal of English chivalry, and on his conflict with Joan la Pucelle, the soldierly peasant-witch. Talbot, by means of courage and generalship, and Joan, by means of courage and craft, win successive battles against each other until Talbot is isolated--first by Joan's winning the turncoat Duke of Burgundy back to the French side, then by disagreement and uncooperativeness among the English leadership--and finally killed. Joan is subsequently captured and executed for witchcraft. During the course of the play, all the leading pure Knights--men not only of warlike spirit, but honest, loyal and chivalrous--have been killed: Salisbury by a freak gun shot; Bedford by disease; Talbot in battle. Only Gloucester remains unruled by self-interest. Midway through the play we are introduced to the boy-king, who attempts to mediate between his fractious uncles and their factions, restores his cousin Richard to the title and property of York, and names York and his enemy Somerset co-leaders of the forces in France. Later, he agrees reluctantly to a political marriage and then throws himself away on a love-match to a woman he has never
seen, Margaret of Anjou, who is graphically described by the Earl of Suffolk, the latter actually wanting her for himself.

The Second Part of Henry VI begins by following the careers of the illicit lovers, Suffolk and Queen Margaret, who manipulate the king while forming a plot with Winchester and others to overthrow Gloucester. The first step is to trap Gloucester's proud wife in treasonous and blasphemous conversation with evil spirits and cause her to be exiled. The success of this first maneuver is followed by an equally successful second: Gloucester is falsely impeached for alleged crimes committed while Protector and for plotting against the king's life (Gloucester is next in line of succession). Henry abandons his good uncle to imprisonment and thus to murder, but his conscience recognizes Gloucester's innocence. When the good Humphrey's death is discovered, Henry is outraged and so are the commons, who, led by Warwick and Salisbury, demand and obtain the exile of Suffolk. Suffolk is then himself murdered by pirates, while the other principal in the plot, Winchester, dies in guilty and impenitent agony. With the double destruction of the two most powerful peers, the field is not open to Richard of York. Earlier, the factionalization around the White Rose of the York party and York's claim to the throne through the Mortimer family have been explained (Part One, II, iv). While the plotting against Gloucester is going on, York has enlisted the powerful Nevilles, the Earl of Salisbury and his son, the Earl of Warwick, as supporters of
his claim. After the flight of Suffolk, a commoner named Jack Cade--a henchman of York's--starts a popular revolt. Though it is finally suppressed, it provides an excuse for York to return from Ireland with his army. York makes demands which the king meets, but which the queen rescinds. Thus, York, supported by the Nevilles and his own sons, reveals his dynastic claim and in the subsequent battle is victorious.

Part Three of Henry VI opens with the parliamentary meeting between the king and York after the first battle of St. Albans. There the king, pressured by the recognition of the weakness of his de facto right to the crown, offers it to York and his heirs provided he be allowed to retain it during his lifetime. This compromise is accepted, only to be violated soon after by both sides. In the next battle York and his young son Rutland are killed, the Yorkist claim passing to York's eldest son, Edward, Earl of March. This son, along with the remaining brothers George, Duke of Clarence, and Richard, the new Duke of Gloucester, has more success, wins the next battle, scatters the Lancastrian forces and is crowned Edward IV. Unfortunately, he proves no diplomat, undercutting his uncle Warwick's mission abroad to negotiate an aristocratic marriage with the French queen's sister by marrying an Englishwoman of common stock. Incensed, Warwick forms a new alliance against Edward with their old enemy Margaret and with Edward's brother, Clarence, Warwick's son-in-law-to-be. He defeats the
new king and restores Henry, who has been in prison, to the throne. Edward's loyal brother Richard rescues him, however, and persuades Clarence to return to the family fold, thus making possible the defeat of Warwick. King Henry's son Eduward is murdered on the field of battle; Henry himself is stabbed to death by Richard in the Tower and all seems triumphant for the Yorkists—except that Richard has already given expression to his plans for the internecine butchery that will gain him the throne, the subject of his own play, the fourth of the tetralogy.

It is evident from this précis of the plot that there are too many characters for Shakespeare to characterize any one of them in depth. Clearly, there are no dominant figures such as one finds in the later Shakespearean history plays. Nevertheless, certain characters are of lasting importance within the play: the king, Gloucester, Suffolk, York, Margaret, Warwick, Edward and Richard. Of these only the king, York and Margaret appear in all three plays and Margaret is of little account in the first of them. York is killed early in the third play and his role is assumed by his heir, Edward. Henry is thus not only the title character, but the only major character of all three plays and the central figure occupying the sacred role of king.

Tillyard, of course, does not see it this way. He theorizes that Shakespeare believed in a providential view of history and that the tetralogy is therefore a kind of grand
morality play with a hidden hero he identifies with Respublica from the play of the same name:

...If the Morality Play prompted the formality of Shakespeare's first tetralogy, it also supplied a single pervasive theme, one which overrides but in no way interferes with the theme he derived from Hall. In none of the plays is there a hero: and one of the reasons is that there is an unnamed protagonist dominating all four. It is England, or in Morality terms Respublica...England, though she is now quite excluded as a character, is the true hero...She is brought near ruin through not being true to herself; yielding to French witchcraft and being divided in mind. But God, though he punishes her, pities her and in the end through his grace allows the suppressed good in her to assert itself and restore her to her health.®

In a number of ways this theory is attractive. It shows us generic and historical relationships we were not aware of before; it explains the absence of a central hero; it ties together the sequence of political and military events and ascribes historical cause to them; and it brings us closer to the quasi-medieval thought processes and conventions of Elizabethan England. It also presents some difficulties, partly for an obvious reasons Tillyard himself admitted (the fact that Respublica is not listed in the cast of characters) and partly because it solves difficulties that are perhaps not difficulties at all.

There is the matter of heroes, for instance. The term is used in different ways by different critics, but generally it refers to the character who dominates the play, as Hamlet,

®Tillyard, p. 160.
Lear, Macbeth and Richard III dominate the plays named from them. What is forgotten is that there is no rule enforcing the idea that the hero should be the sole, dominating figure. Shakespeare in fact felt quite comfortable writing plays with pairs or even several heroes, or at least major characters. Antony and Cleopatra and Romeo and Juliet divide attention between both title characters. Julius Caesar may be the hero of his play, but so may Brutus, Cassius or Antony. Othello, the Moor, shares our interest with both Desdemona and Iago. Henry IV, Hal and Falstaff alternately dominate the stage in the middle plays of the second historical tetralogy, while in the first play of that group, Richard II alternates with his cousin Bolingbroke, who supplants him. One might say that the difference between the Henry VI plays and these later plays is that the latter have more than one strong character and the former have none, but one may answer by saying first, that the major characters in the Henry VI plays have been seriously undervalued, and, second, that the plays are journeyman efforts in which the story, meaning and poetry are also similarly inferior to those in Shakespeare's masterworks.

We may also wonder if the kind of providential causation Tillyard thrusts upon us really exists. First, he asks us to

9Ornstein, p. 38, also rejects Tillyard's view: "What happens happens because the characters are what they are and what they do. If England is 'doomed' to calamity, it is because the Englishmen we see are careless of their principles and untrue to their traditions.
believe in an abstraction of England, despite the fact that these plays are noticeably deficient in the use of abstraction even in the highly rhetorical dialogue, as compared to, say, Richard II. Second, we are asked to believe that this abstract England sinned in the overthrow and murder of Richard II. Is this logical? It was Bolingbroke, not "England," who ousted Richard and benefited by his murder, and who paid for it with a troubled reign. His son, Henry V, a good and pious man, escaped such trouble generally, but it reasserted itself in the reign of his grandson—as so many Elizabethans pointed out. As Henry V realized, the blood-debt was a family one. There is no doubt that the nation suffered too, but that is hardly surprising when Richard II, the man murdered, was the king. There seems to be no need for Tillyard's Respublica, and therefore good reason to dispense with it.

Fortunately, this is not all that Tillyard has to say about character in the plays, but as he applies himself to the text further difficulties arise. For example, while his observations about the "French curse" on English fortunes, as expressed first through Joan and then through Margaret, is quite apt, he uses it to overemphasize the importance of Talbot to the First Part. He says, for example, that if:

...this play had been called the Tragedy of Talbot it would stand a much better chance of being heeded by a public which very naturally finds it hard to remember which part of Henry VI is which.10

10Tillyard, p. 163.
Later, speaking of the characters of Talbot and Joan, he says they "are the most alive, for they both have a touch of breeziness, or hearty coarseness with which Shakespeare liked to furnish his most successfully practical characters."\(^{11}\)

One may argue as one likes over matters of taste, but there are serious arguments against this exaltation of Talbot. Most important, there is his lack of dimension. Talbot is an idealized soldier, pure and simple. He has no fatal flaw, no hybris beyond the boasting and bluster typical of professional soldiers. He lacks ambivalence of character and he lacks insight. He undergoes no discoveries of inner self. He is exactly the same at death as he is in every scene he appears in. His end is heroic and somewhat pathetic, but scarcely tragic. Throughout his period on stage, he keeps up a continuous stream of military and chivalrous talk that shows not the slightest depth of character. Tillyard cites in support of his view the following passage:

Hear, Hear how-dying Salisbury doth groan!
It irks his heart he cannot be reveng'd.
Frenchmen, I'll be a Salisbury to you:
Pucelle or puzzle, Dolphin or dogfish,
Your hearts I'll stamp out with my horse's heels
And make a quagmire of your mingled brains.
Convey me Salisbury into his tent.\(^{12}\)

\(^{11}\)Tillyard, p. 169.

\(^{12}\)Henry VI, Act. I, scene iv, lines 104-111. All references to the three plays are to the New Arden Editions, ed. Andrew S. Cairncross (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1957-1964). I have also adopted Cairncross's view that Shakespeare was the sole author of the three plays. The opposing view, now on the wane, held that Shakespeare was a contributor to plays written,
But this passage just as easily supports the opposite view: that Talbot is merely a romanticized English knight and general, a crowd-pleaser, but a shallow man of limited dramatic value. In fact, Talbot at times comes close to being a self-parody, a miles gloriosus, a fact which Joan recognizes when she makes grim fun of Lucy's exorbitant funeral praise by pointing out Talbot's "stinking and flyblown" corpse. As a rendering of the ideal English fighting man, Talbot is important, but he is important for what he represents rather than what he is.

Similarly, Tillyard calls Margaret and Warwick the chief characters of Part Three. He feels secure in such a judgment, he says, because they are

the chief instigators of the two kings who figure in the play... Such plot as there is (mere chronicling apart) consists in the emergence of these two as the truly dominant persons in the civil war, their opposition and

essentially, by a committee or a reviser and improver of plays written by Greene and Nashe and, possibly, others. Cairncross's justification is too lengthy to be summarized here (it exists in three parts as the Introductions to the three plays), but it has the beauty of simplicity in its effect. By eliminating conjecture on who wrote which parts of which plays, we may view the plays as a concrete whole, a planned pageant, an epic of one of England's most thrilling eras. This is crucial to my own thesis of character development and patterning, and of the centrality of Henry to them. While the plot more or less follows the history of the times as given in the Chronicles, the characterization, I think, shows the traces of a single mind and imagination at work, a mind which, as Tillyard has said, is still not the master of the form and material of drama, but is yet of awesome talent and accomplishment. Cairncross dates the authorship of all three plays as 1590, but many put the plays two years later.
varying fortunes and their final defeat largely through the expanding genius of Richard, Duke of Gloucester. If these two characters were sufficiently emphasized, the play as a whole might not act too badly.\textsuperscript{13}

Again, while there is no denying the importance of Margaret and Warwick to the movement of the plot, the characters themselves lend little support to Tillyard's view. Margaret is a rather shallow villainess (according to Tillyard, she is the extension of the abstract French curse, dramatized in Joan), remarkable only for her cruelty and courage. Unlike Richard III or Iago or Macbeth and his wife, she has neither insight into her villainy nor remorse for it. Indeed, her increasingly gross self-centeredness is one of the few threads that tie the first play of the tetralogy to the last. But aside from her thoughtless villainy, she is a one-dimensional individual. So, for that matter, is Warwick. The streak of stubborn pride, pomposity and selfishness that cause him to back his in-law York's better dynastic claim against the king's, despite his oath of fealty, also causes him to abandon and oust Edward IV, whom he had helped to the throne and offered fealty to, because of a personal slight. Like Talbot and Margaret, he is interesting for what he does, not for what he is. We get no flashes of insight into his character as we do into the characters of Henry VI, York, Gloucester and Richard.

The result is that Tillyard's argument is somewhat reductive: if we take some of the innately less interesting

\textsuperscript{13}Tillyard, pp. 191-192.
characters and say that they are the closest thing the plays have to heroes, then we can be justified in saying there are no human heroes, and can support, instead, the abstract creation, Respublica. But Tillyard reaches this conclusion only by ignoring the use of character in the plays, particularly those characters who have the most difficulties, who face circumstances that have a good deal in common with those of the later histories and tragedies, and who reveal their thoughts, human concerns and problems most often: Henry, York and Gloucester.

Significantly, Tillyard makes one of his most brilliant observations about the character relationship of these three: "Henry the actual king, Gloucester the regent and York the claimant of the throne." He says,

In their joint characters, they possess the requirements for a good king, and in their relations they make a set of character-patterns that give coherence to the play. Of the three, York is the dominant character and he is contrasted with Gloucester at the beginning and with Henry at the end of [Part Two]. York has eminently kingly qualities: he is strong both in character and in title to the throne... He is also an excellent diplomat. In fact, he combines the two great qualities of lion and fox. He would have been a great king if he had reigned; and his repeated assurances that he would win back France if he had the chance are not hollow. But Shakespeare did not think that lion and fox alone made a good king. A third quality, disinterestedness, the attribute of the pelican, was needed. Gloucester had the qualities of lion and pelican but not of fox. Henry had those of pelican alone. That is the formal pattern of the three regal figures.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{14}\)Tillyard, pp. 185-186.
Unfortunately, Tillyard continues by considering only the Duke of York, whose problems are interesting, but who is not the only figure in the plays with problems. We have, then, Tillyard's explanation of the relationship of the three royal figures, the connection of the curse of France and the two malignant female influences, and the groupings which he identifies as Virtues and Vices among the nobility (but which I have denoted as Knights and Schemers). Tillyard does not, however, pursue the matter further.

Ribner does not pursue this patterning at all. He adopts Tillyard's Respublica thesis in toto and provides us with some interesting information on the relationship of the plays to miracle plays, to de casibus stories, to Senecan declamations and to sermonistic and homiletic Elizabethan ideas about civil war, order and degree and the Tudor myth. He does, however, make one important comment about the matter of virtue in character:

Shakespeare in the Henry VI plays is absorbed with the relation between the public and private virtues—those qualities which make for the good private man, as contrasted with those which make for the efficient king—a problem with which he was to be concerned throughout his career as a dramatist... That Henry VI is a good man is emphasized over and over throughout the trilogy. Of his personal piety there can be no question. He is kind, loving, sympathetic; the tears he weeps for the woes of his country are sincere. But in spite of those qualities which might endear him to an audience, and which win for him a large measure of sympathy in his misfortunes, he is unsuccessful as a king. He is wanting in the public virtues, and it is England that primarily pays the penalty for this shortcoming in its king. No matter how
rich in personal virtue a man may be, if he does not have the public virtue which makes him a good ruler his country will suffer.\textsuperscript{15}

One might discern here a certain inconsistency between England as the perpetrator of a crime for which she must be punished, and England as innocent victim of her incompetent king. Moreover, this particular line of reasoning tends to lead toward Manheim's theory that the first tetralogy constitutes a rather desperate attempt to justify the Christian morality against the upsurge of belief in Machiavellianism, an attempt that is abandoned in the second tetralogy which (according to Manheim) shows instead the necessity of Machiavellianism for successful government.

There are two dire problems with Manheim's view: the first is the unreliability of his entire book, owing to inadequate support of his generalizations. For example, he superficially presents the entire medieval view of the king as God's deputy in two sentences without so much as a footnote and assumes that the basic theology of Christianity and its pronouncements on monarchy are known and accepted by all his readers. Since he presents no supporting evidence, it is impossible to judge the accuracy of his generalizations. The second difficulty is that his judgments on the plays rest on these generalizations--it is difficult to take them seriously when they appear to be based only on "revealed" truth.

\textsuperscript{15}Ribner, p. 115.
Thus, of Henry he says:

He has the same attributes, if a man can have them, suitable by Christian standards for a moral, just, God-fearing government; but in the whirl of a court now dominated by sixteenth-century Machiavellian standards, those older Christian virtues seem useless. Like every human being Henry has defects—if not those of the wastrel, then those of the humble and meek. He is craven and henpecked. The Henry VI plays in no way extenuate these qualities. Thus, we are finally moved to condemn him almost as much as we condemn the wastrel kings.¹⁶

The extremity of Manheim's position is made clearer when he begins to talk more specifically about Henry. He speaks of Henry's "adherence in political life to traditional Christian virtues" as being as much the cause of his downfall as his political shortcomings, and of the "seeming practical ineffectiveness of Christian leadership."¹⁷ He says that Henry's weakness "is the preachment and practice of Christian virtue."¹⁸ The difficulty of such a theory, of course, is that when arguing with it, we run the risk of spending all our time disputing the nature and meaning of Machiavellianism (about which Manheim seems to know a good deal) and of Christianity (about which he seems to know a good deal less), rather than about Manheim's theory itself.

Manheim does support his specific arguments with real evidence and begins by closely analyzing Henry's actual

¹⁶Manheim, p. 13.
¹⁷Manheim, p. 77.
¹⁸Manheim, pp. 78-79.
behavior, a healthy trend in the criticism of Henry. Unfortunately, he begins with an absurdity—"Henry's first bad move...is inheriting the throne as an infant"—but does not proceed to more reasonable considerations: Henry's trusting Winchester, his restoring York, his plucking the red rose, his succumbing to Suffolk's blandishments regarding Margaret, his allowing Duke Humphrey to be overthrown and murdered. Certainly Manheim is correct in identifying these actions as mistakes for a power politician, but he misses the fact that they indicate that Henry is something less than the exemplar of Christian virtue. In fact, for all his attempts at piety, Henry is capable of a number of sins: pride, lust, envy and violence, not to mention the hypocrisy that goes with a pretense of holiness. Similarly, Manheim's provocative observation that Gloucester is at least in part the personification of the Christian humanist is exaggerated into the Duke's being the idealization of it. But Manheim again overreaches: he attempts to justify the assertion by reference to the historical Duke Humphrey, who bears little relationship to Shakespeare's Humphrey; and he fails to realize (as have many others) that Gloucester is in many ways the king's teacher with respect to mistakes of rulership. Gloucester precedes Henry in his toleration of evil in the government, his uxoriousness, and his misjudging the

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19 Manheim, p. 83.
extent of wickedness men are capable of. But Manheim, among others, misses these important facts. Though Manheim correctly identifies the moral structure and message of the plays as centering on Henry, he misconstrues the flaws in the King's character and in his actions. These flaws are not merely the necessary result of a Christian attempting to make his way in a Machiavellian world, but flaws of a real person, a sinner like others, who is afraid, cowardly, passionate and foolish—in short, a man, not a saint.

Ornstein, in contrast, is preoccupied by neither political nor generic considerations. After rejecting Tillyard's providential emphasis, he notes the interwoven destinies of Talbot, Joan of Arc and York, including the "two-dimensional quality of literary memory and type" that marks the first of those three; "Winchester's gnawing sense of inferiority" and "Suffolk's urbane cynicism;"^20 the mixed portraits of others, who are often incorrectly seen as of one nature only, as in Shakespeare's allowing "Joan her measure of greatness" and showing "the irascible pride" that flawed Gloucester's nobility.^21

On the subject of Henry, Ornstein is especially clear-sighted, recognizing his own fundamental responsibility

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^20 Ornstein, p. 37.

^21 Ornstein, p. 38.
for his troubles: "It is Henry's failure to rule that makes his authority weak, not the flaw in his title that prevents him from ruling effectively." Ornstein points out Henry's tendency toward childishness and effeminacy and rejects the idea, so important to Manheim, that Henry's virtue makes him unfit to rule:

In portraying Henry's personal decencies and public failings, Shakespeare does not accept Machiavelli's differentiation of individual and political morality. He does not suggest that Henry's decency is politically irrelevant or a hindrance to political competence, nor does he suggest that Henry would have been more successful had he been more ruthless. Henry is not "too good" to rule; he is unable to translate his goodness into political actions...

Ornstein also recognizes the severe ambivalence of Henry's nature in his acceptance of the role of "ineffectual figurehead," while clinging to his royal position; his uxoriousness and his periodic complaints that nobody will let him speak; his fright at gore, yet his urging Northumberland and young Clifford to perform bloody deeds and then disclaiming the deeds when accomplished; his idealistic yearning for a shepherd's life about which he knows nothing; his holding to the regal position he says he doesn't want and refuses to fill adequately, while a war rages over just that position. As Ornstein says,

Unlike the good yeoman Iden...Henry knows nothing of the contentment of quiet walks... The

\(^{22}\) Ornstein, p. 38.

\(^{23}\) Ornstein, p. 39.
king who could not shepherd his own people creates in his imagination an idyllic world where there is no biting wind, no hunger, no predators...

Yet, Ornstein concludes, there is more to Henry than his irritating ineffectiveness and inconsistency:

Henry must lose his crown to find himself because he is incapable of discerning his true state as a king. Even after the terrible defeat at Towton, he can sigh for the trappings of majesty... Yet his vision lengthens from first to final act. He predicts the failure of Clifford's ethic of violence, and he knows that Margaret's words will not prevail with Lewis... He is even capable of irony when he bids the gamekeepers who capture him not to break their oath of allegiance to King Edward. Thus, the impercipient king, who once marveled at the Simpcox hoax, becomes the seer who can prophesy Richmond's role as England's savior.25

One would assume that Ornstein's perceptions should have influenced subsequent critics at least to the extent of taking into account the manifold nature of Henry as a person and his importance as a character in the plays. Riggs, however, concentrating as he does on the heroic aspects of the plays, dismisses the king's function as being "a projection of orthodox pieties about politics and history as they appear when divorced from any power to put them into effect."26

But he does find a great deal to say about such figures as Talbot and Joan, Gloucester and York, in whom he finds the embodiment of his argument that the "initial achievement"

24 Ornstein, p. 56.
25 Ornstein, p. 57.
26 Riggs, p. 178.
of the plays

lay in preserving the theatrically viable stage
business and rhetoric of heroic-historical drama
while placing it in a richer context of ethical
and political values.27

Of these characters, Riggs does make some important
contributions to our understanding. Most especially he
shows in a different light the character of Talbot, Joan and
York in Part One. The first two are opposites in everything
except martial courage: high-born to low-born; male to
female; content with rank to over-reaching; honest and
honorable to deceitful and sneaky; oratorically dignified
to foul-mouthed and licentious. It is York, significantly,
who destroys Joan, who earlier was able to kill Talbot at
least partly through York's failure to act. York is Talbot
exaggerated and yet reduced: of higher birth but besmirched
by treason; as brave a fighter but incapable of fulfilling a
vital mission; obviously thoughtful but scheming and deceitful.
Unfortunately, Riggs misses the relationship of the regal
characteristics of Henry, Gloucester and York, not only because
he has dismissed Henry so casually but because he is blind
to the ambivalence of Gloucester's character, calling him "a
new type of ideal ruler, the Ciceronian governor,"28 and
setting him up as an ideal of virtuous leadership.

27Riggs, p. 84.
28Riggs., p. 115.
Pierce, unlike the foregoing, promotes a semi-sociological rather than strictly aesthetic or scholarly thesis in his study of the family and state as shown in Shakespeare's history plays. Nevertheless, he is inclined to discuss the characters as individuals and early in his chapter on the *Henry VI* plays he makes this shrewd observation:

...Especially in the first two plays glimpses of a yet-uncorrupted family life contrast ironically with the decline of justice and harmony among the governors. This contrast does not suggest that personal virtue conflicts with political virtue--quite the opposite, though in degree *Henry VI* 's piety cripples his political realism. Still there may be some that hint that his early piety does not run very deep. Certainly his asceticism vanishes quickly at Suffolk's description of Margaret in 1 *Henry VI*. And in adversity Henry gains a real political wisdom, while at the same time his piety becomes more convincing. Better than anyone else in 3 *Henry VI*, he understands the plight of England, including the threat of Richard, Duke of Gloucester; and he foresees England's redemption by the young Richmond. More serious weaknesses than unworldly piety cripple Henry both as king and as husband and father. The key to his character is that he is a partial man and partial monarch.\(^{29}\)

Thus, when we review the major critical works dealing with the plays we find a general lack of interest in character and a strong tendency to disregard the title character and minimize his importance, except perhaps as a type or exemplum of one or another fault or virtue. The fact that Shakespeare's Henry has more than one function and exemplifies contradictory moral views would seem to indicate that he is not so simple as critics would generally have him--

\(^{29}\)Pierce, p. 37.
but this goes unnoticed, and it is this that I shall explore in the succeeding chapters.

To recapitulate the points of my investigation:

--Without dominating the play in the manner of some other Shakespearean figures, Henry VI is nevertheless central to the plays that bear his name, primarily through his role as king, a psycho-mythic role that makes him God's deputy according to medieval political theory, and the physical embodiment of the realm according to ancient human custom, a role that allows the projection of the nightmare vision of his own disordered mind onto the workings of the kingdom.

--Henry provides the main, if not the only, moral perspective of the plays. He attempts, usually, to do the right thing and attempts to see the results of his actions objectively--however much he may fail at it. The major moral questions all concern him (the rights and duties of rulership; the validity of oaths of fealty; the righting of wrongs; the justification of rebellion) and he is the only character to undergo a major change or development.

--Henry provides an important political perspective on the plays, commenting on as well as participating in the main political activities. Henry may err in his moral and political judgments, but he does make judgments and does attempt to hold to standards of piety, peacefulness and justice. Again, he is central to the political machinations--
what happens in the plays, happens to him, or for him, or because of him—and his centrality is best illustrated by the fact that he does not follow a rocket-like course of rising, peaking and falling power, but continues on his bumpy but consistent course throughout the three plays.

—Henry is central to the most important character patterning of the plays (the Lancastrian inheritance, stemming directly from the death of Henry V; the Knights and Schemers, and the triad of himself, Gloucester and York), even if that patterning frequently shows him to be inferior to others or aloof from their problems.

In subsequent chapters I will support these assertions through investigation of (1) the relationship of Henry to the various overlapping plots of the three plays, and (2) Henry's position in the patterning and development of character in the plays and its relationship to the moral and political issues that Shakespeare raises.
CHAPTER II
HENRY VI AND THE DOUBLE-PLOT STRUCTURE

Shakespeare faced two major problems in writing the Henry VI plays: the vast bulk of historical material to be dealt with; and the fact that the central character is a man of passivity and weakness. The first problem he attempted to solve by cutting and rearranging historical material to suit his plots, and by superimposing a meaning and purpose upon the historical events. The second problem he could not and did not solve, but attempted to make into a virtue, something his burgeoning but unpolished talent could not quite manage. It is clear from the superiority of Part Two and Part Three over Part One, and of Richard III over all three parts of Henry VI, that Shakespeare was learning quickly as he put the first three entertaining, but unwieldy, plays together. The later history plays do not attempt to compress so much time and organize so many events into a plot, nor do they bear the burden of a central character who is so weak of will, so passive, so blown about by the political winds he should be trying to control. The lessons learned in the writing of Henry VI can be seen in the absence of similar problems in most of Shakespeare's later plays.

Nevertheless, the plays are not without structure, even if the structure is noticeably inferior to that of Shakespeare's better works. Each play has a double plot, both plots being
linked to each other within the several plays by means of comparison or contrast, and across the plays by critical bridge passages which keep the sequence of events flowing smoothly. Part One is divided into a French war plot and an English court plot, two completely separate and contrasting entities, that gradually merge into a whole that reflects ironically back on the original two plots. Part Two is divided into the Suffolk and York conspiracies, with the first succeeding only to fail and making possible by its success and failure the success of the second. Part Three is divided into battles and more or less peaceful interludes with the varying fortunes of the political factions centered in the former, and the ongoing processes of the realm carried by the latter.

At the same time, each of these dual plot structures is both dependent upon and reflective of character phases in the growth and development of Henry. Henry begins, in Part One, as an infant so tiny he cannot even appear on stage. He appears as a boy in the middle of the play and begins to exert an influence on the realm, first as a kind of puppet of the Protector, but later, in early manhood, directly as in the Anjou marriage. At the beginning of Part Two, he is a husband, and his influence on the government is profound, if distinctly passive. By the end of the play, however, he has made an attempt at becoming his own man and the leader of his
people. **Part Three** comprises his failure as a leader, and his change into a kind of hermit seer. The bridge passages connect the plays by means of significant changes in Henry's life and character: his foolish decision to marry Margaret of Anjou links the first and second; his confrontation with York and his collapse of personality join the second and third.

The connection of plot structures to these character phases is complicated but, I think, of major importance, for the whole pageant of the tetralogy reflects a long political and moral nightmare for the English people, a nightmare that is at least partly caused by Henry and is prolonged by him. The innocent confusion and passivity of childhood is carried over by Henry into the profounder confusion of a young manhood he never seems to escape, into a confrontation with enemies who are in a sense aspects of himself and who are at war with allies who are also part of himself, and finally into the collapse of his personality. By the end, Henry has attained a kind of clear, penetrating insight, but it is mainly of a mystical sort that is of no use in the day-to-day world.

Henry's first appearance in the plays does not occur until Act III of **Part One**, but it begins the gradual merging of the two plots. The French Dauphin has attempted, upon the death of Henry's father, Henry V, to reclaim his crown. The
English claim to the French crown is dynastically solid, but it was mainly the martial genius of Henry V that gave the claim any political substance. In England, the Bishop of Winchester has seized upon Henry V's death to increase his power at the expense of the Protector, Gloucester. Thus, in both cases we have immediate trends towards disorder in the unified realm, both trends equally dependent on the death of Henry V and infancy of Henry VI.

The appearance of Henry in Act III corresponds to a new phase in his character—that of Boy-King rather than Infant. Though he is obviously coached by his uncle Gloucester as to what to say on the state occasions that we view, events occur that were not planned and force Henry to make impromptu responses. In the first case, Henry patches up the quarrel between Gloucester and Winchester, though not without falling into such a fit of weeping that Warwick fears for the king's life. In the second, when the York-Somerset feud breaks into the open, Henry retains better control of himself, but forges ahead with the plan (doubtless suggested in advance by Gloucester) of naming the two enemies as joint commanders of the forces in France. What could have been done instead is hard to say and immaterial, for the point is that Henry is merely a boy, unwise to the world and Gloucester's puppet on these state occasions. But his influence as king is beginning to have an ever greater impact on both the plots. The appoint-
ment of York and Somerset turns out to be a disaster, for they fail, through personal rivalry, to rescue Talbot, the last great English general.

Henry's last appearance in Part One is as the Uncertain Young Man, the phase that is to dominate his behavior for most of Part Two. The occasion is dramatized in the bridge passage that joins the two plays over the matter of Henry's marriage. First Gloucester convinces him that he should marry for the good of the country and to help seal the peace with France that both men desire. This is the first time we see Henry engaged in intelligent discussion rather than obviously mouthing the Protector's words or attempting to make sense of the factional disorder at court, and the indications are not favorable. Though this is to be a real marriage, rather than simply a betrothal with the consummation to occur later, Henry agrees only reluctantly and says that his years are better suited to study than to "wanton dalliance with a paramour." But in a swift turnabout, Henry's passions are enflamed by Suffolk's description of Margaret. He falls madly in love with a woman he has never seen, breaks the Armagnac match and agrees to the humiliating conditions set by Margaret's father, Reignier, the Duke of Anjou and titular King of Naples--and a close ally of the Dauphin. Thus, the degeneration of order that followed the death of Henry V has been increased first by the loss of Talbot and second by the
acquisition of Margaret, which not only insures the defeat by France, but the victory of the enemies of Gloucester at court.

These developments, however, depend on Henry and, specifically, on Henry's lack of personal development. He does not make the full change from boyhood to mature manhood--nor from puppet to master--but stalls at the vague and uncertain stage of early manhood, man enough by contemporary standards to be king and husband, but not man enough to fill those roles fully. As a political leader, he remains uncertain, sapping the power of the Protector without truly exercising it himself, and delegating it instead to the worst advisors and allowing himself to be manipulated by them. As a husband, Henry never advances beyond the realm of loving from afar. Margaret's complaint to Suffolk about him early in Part Two tells all:

I tell thee, Pole, when in the city Tours
Thou ran'st a tilt in honour of my love,
And stol'est away the ladies' hearts of France,
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 weapons holy saws of sacred writs,
His study is his tilt-yard and his loves
Are brazen images of canoniz'd saints.¹

This failure of sexual, psychological and political development is mirrored in the double plot of Part Two. The

¹² H VI, I, i, 50-60.
most immediate effects are the undercutting of the Protector's control of events--never very strong in any case--and the rise of the devious and malignant Suffolk through the influence of Margaret. Just as Henry's mind is disordered by his conflicting, confused passions for Margaret and for holiness, so is his realm further disordered by the growth of government by conspiracy and by the attack on the last bastion of altruism, Gloucester. The Suffolk conspiracy exists on a very superficial--though dangerous--level of power politics based on the king's favor. The Yorkist conspiracy lies partly within the Suffolk conspiracy and partly outside it. The part outside--that which proposes to supplant rather than merely manipulate the king--is far subtler and more dangerous even than Suffolk's.

The conspirators, moreover, are plotting even against each other. Suffolk is interested not only in removing York and Warwick eventually, but his closest ally, Winchester, as well. Somerset and Buckingham express their hopes of becoming Protector instead of Winchester or Suffolk when the plan to overthrow Gloucester succeeds. At first the Nevilles--Salisbury and his son Warwick--are determined to help Gloucester and enlist York to aid them. But after the first trap--that which disgraces Gloucester's wife--succeeds, York converts the Nevilles to his own cause. This seals the Protector's doom, for when Suffolk brings his indictments against Duke Humphrey,
no one defends the duke except the king, who is nevertheless pressured into delivering his uncle into the hands of Suffolk and Winchester. The Nevilles are thus in a position to lead the popular uprising against Gloucester's murder that results in Suffolk's exile; and Jack Cade is able to stage his abortive revolt and York to field his army.

Both the conspiracies depend on Henry's weak and uncertain state of mind. The king allows Suffolk and his circle to bait Duke Humphrey with terrible lies, to take over and mismanage the government, to send the incompetent and cowardly Somerset off to lose the last few possessions in France, to entrap the Duchess of Gloucester in witchcraft (sending four people to their deaths and the duchess in exile while Suffolk escapes unscathed), and finally to impeach and murder the good duke himself. The evil success of the Suffolk circle, in turn, adds the justification York needs to put forward his long dormant claim to the crown. The mismanagement of the realm based on Henry's passivity shows the king's unfitness to reign, and the malignant power of Suffolk is a danger to any peer, and to York and the Nevilles especially.

Psychologically, however, the matter of the conspiracies is deeper still. If we presume that the disordered political situation mirrors the disordered state of Henry's mind, we can see a number of distinct possibilities, all of them disturbing. There is, for instance, the murder of Gloucester, Henry's
father-figure, the Freudian significance of which should be clear to everyone these days. Henry does not cause the murder of his father-figure, but he allows it to happen. He does not seem to mind the incessant sniping at Gloucester by his favorites, and his remarks when Gloucester is impeached prove he is aware of the possible consequences of the Protector's being delivered into the hands of his enemies:

What lowering star now envies thy estate,
That these great lords, and Margaret our Queen,
Do seek subversion of thy harmless life?
Thou never didst them wrong, nor no man wrong;
And as the butcher takes away the calf,
And binds the wretch, and beats it when it strains,
Bearing it to the bloody slaughterhouse;
Even so, remorseless, have they borne him hence;
And as the dam runs lowing up and down,
Looking the way her harmless young one went,
And can do naught but wail her darling's loss;
Even so, myself bewails good Gloucester's case.  

There are two curious reversals in the imagery here—Henry imagines himself in the parent role and Gloucester as the child, and he projects for himself a feminine role—but the connection is obviously not only one of affection but also one of familial relationship. It is important also that the main perpetrator of the murder is Suffolk, who exists as a kind of alter ego for Henry. He is, like Henry, both a child and a man: a child in that he is dedicated to the gratification of his every desire; but a man in that he is capable of satisfying Henry's wife. As a result, he may be viewed psychologically as a projection of Henry's id. When he joins

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2 H VI, III, i, 206-216.
with Margaret in resolving the father-figure problem of Gloucester's protectorate in a violent way that Henry's ego--represented by Henry himself--cannot face, but has taken advantage of, we are confronted with a very disturbed and disturbing character in the king.

The murder of Henry's father-figure has the unexpected short-term benefit of propelling Henry into another character development, that of full-grown Adult, Monarch and Actor. Although his first reaction to the news of Gloucester's death is to faint and his second to weep, he responds forcefully when Warwick, Salisbury and the risen commons demand Suffolk's banishment. He meets that demand, even over the pleading of his wife. He thus overcomes, for the time being, his youthful confusion and uxoriousness, and becomes an adult capable of action--independent and imperial action.

Politically, of course, it is a bit late for Henry's new-found force of personality. While the commons of London are apparently satisfied with the banishment of the Duke of Suffolk, the men of Kent are not. The Kentishmen rise up behind the leadership of Jack Cade, a henchmen of York's, who is at once a serious figure of disorder and comic parody of a demagogue. But the strength that Henry found in dealing with Suffolk carries over into his dealing with the Cade rebellion. His strategy discussions with Buckingham and Lord Say show purposefulness and command. Cade is overcome by the
persuasion of Buckingham and Old Clifford, who are sent by Henry to remind the commons of their innate loyalty to king and country. Thus when York returns from Ireland, Henry's forcefulness has left the duke without an issue on which to justify his marching on London.

Apparently, York had hoped things would go something like this: Cade would rout the ill-prepared royal forces; York would return with an army made up not only of the English forces raised for him by Suffolk, but of the Irish troops whom he was supposed to suppress; York would march on Cade who would then surrender and be forgiven by York; everyone--York's men, the Nevilles and their forces, and Cade and his commons--would then demand that York claim the throne; York would demand Henry's abdication, defeat what few forces the king could raise and be crowned to nationwide acclamation. By the time York arrives, Cade has been defeated and his men have returned to loyalty to the crown. The king reluctantly agrees to the arrest of Somerset, York's other justification for fielding an unauthorized army, and York has no recourse but to dismiss his army. With the king acting like a king, even the imperious York is unwilling to force the issue further.

At this point, however, Henry begins to lose his grip and makes the first of the two mistakes that totally undo him as a person (the other is his compromise with York in 3 H VI, I, i). York, though his desire for the crown is greater than
ever before, presents himself to Henry "in all submission and humility." But the queen has, in the meantime, overruled Henry and released Somerset, even bringing him to the parlay with York. It is a crucial test for Henry and he fails it. Instead of retaining his independence and command, he collapses into deviousness and fear. Instead of reasserting his rule, he says fearfully: "See, Buckingham, Somerset comes with the Queen: /Go, bid her hide him quickly from the Duke." But the queen defies him, York asserts his claim and there is no further room for negotiation or compromise--or for anything except civil war.

Psychologically, the great crisis of Henry's life has arrived and with it the projection of a nightmare onto the entire realm. The murder of Gloucester has forced Henry out of his passivity and dependence. The Cade revolt and the threat of York have found him enjoying the sense of command, importance and activity of kingship (and adulthood). But caught between the military and psychological force of York and Margaret, he collapses and is never able to regain control of himself or his kingdom. The most interesting aspect of the York side of this pincer is what a perfect Jungian Shadow figure York is for Henry. According to Jung, the Shadow is an aspect of the self that gathers all the personal characteristics rejected by the conscious ego. These characteristics

\[3^2 \text{H VI, V, i, 83-34.}\]
may be either good or bad, but they are always threatening to the ego. The Shadow appears in important (or "archetypal") dreams, usually as a kind of dark and unidentifiable person of highly charged but uncertain significance. Adjustment to the Shadow, and thus to all the opposing forces in one's own personality, is a vital step in what Jung calls the process of individuation, the growth into maturity and stability.⁴

The Duke of York is strong, warlike, imperious and choleric; a successful husband and father; a capable general and brilliant politician. We realize that he represents everything—both good and bad—that Henry is not. Henry's relationship with this Shadow should not be one of victory or defeat, for, psychologically, there is no victory, but only resolution. He should adopt or approximate the best characteristics of York—strength, independence, political astuteness—without giving up his own best characteristics—patience, peacefulness, compassion. Ideally, he would have. We can see from the situation at the parley that York is on the verge of being overcome—and the situation resolved—because Henry is facing him with a similar kind of force and independence. Henry is sabotaged, however, by Margaret

who seems herself to be a possible Jungian figure, Henry's anima.\(^5\)

In Jung's theory, the Anima is the feminine side of a masculine personality (the reverse, the masculine side of a feminine personality, Jung calls the Animus). Like the Shadow, the Anima (or Animus) appears as a separate character in archetypal dreams, but as a figure of the opposite sex of the dreamer. Again like the Shadow, the Anima unites a number of traits opposed to the dominant ego, but the traits are of a psychosexual nature. Thus, in a man, the Anima is typically a figure representing the passive, emotional and compassionate side of his nature, whereas in a woman, the Animus is a figure representing her aggressive, violent and logical side. In the Jungian individuation process, the adjustment to the Anima takes place usually after the adjustment to the Shadow, but in neither case is the matter one of victory over the figure. The only victory is in insight into and resolution with the opposing forces of one's character. It is as risky to suppress one's feminine side by being too aggressively masculine (or the reverse for a woman), as it is to suppress one's darker side by pretending it doesn't exist.

It should be clear from this rather superficial outline of a small element of Jungian psychology that Henry's situation

\(^5\)Jung, pp. 148-162.
is very badly distorted. He is already too feminine, and has never, in fact, developed a proper masculine ego. Not only is his Shadow, York, aggressively masculine, but so is his Anima, Margaret. The psychological relationship of the three in these Jungian terms outlines a psychological crisis and breakdown. In this confrontation between two archetypal aspects of his own personality, Henry is unable to maintain the weak personal independence he had achieved. He is caught by uncontrollable psychological forces within him that begin the collapse of personality that continues throughout much of Part Three. The disturbed political, psychological and spiritual elements have thus been unified in Henry as king, man and embodiment of the realm. York and Margaret are thus both enemy and ally: politically because they are doing him both good and evil in forcing the issue; psychologically because they are both aspects of his personality but stronger than his ego; spiritually because they are both trying to save the realm and are tearing it apart in the process. King, man and realm are all enduring the nightmare of a total breakdown just beginning.

This beginning nightmare is the bridge passage which connects the Yorkist victory of St. Albans at the end of Part Two with the parliament at the opening of Part Three. The conclusion of the parliament marks the beginning of another character phase for Henry, that of Failure, and of his ever
greater descent into passivity and distance from the political stage until he emerges in his sixth and last phase--Hermit-Seer. This steady decline into passivity is a regression from the growth he attained during the first two plays. He goes from being a foolish king manipulated by his supporters to nothing more than the Lancastrian claimant to the throne. The change of roles is not as clearly delineated in this regression as it had been in the progression, but the effect is felt when the chaos that dominates his mind is paralleled in the chaos that dominates the country.

Henry's last psychological effort of any direct influence on the plot takes place in the parliament scene. The situation, a confrontation with York over the crown, recalls the similar confrontation before St. Albans. Bouyed by his supporters, but with the queen notably absent, Henry again attempts to overpower York by force of personality and the magic of anointed kingship. However, the die has already been cast. The Yorkists defy Henry and challenge him to defend his title legally. Realizing that his "title is weak," Henry capitulates and offers to name York heir if he be allowed to reign throughout his lifetime. Politically, this bargain is disastrous, for Henry's supporters refuse to accept the deal and abandon him to his enemies, who agree to the terms quickly and enthusiastically.
Psychologically we see further splitting up of the kingly personality. York, the Shadow figure, is supported by allies who are all more or less like him: Warwick and York's sons Edward and Richard. Later, those three draw apart as each becomes dominated by a single excessively masculine characteristic—Warwick's extreme pride; Edward's lust for women; Richard's lust for power. Henry's supporters, by contrast, tend to divide into three figures of conscience and one of maniacal violence. Westmoreland is the least important, but joins with Northumberland and Clifford in decrying Henry's disinheriting his son. Northumberland returns later as the one who cannot see York mocked with his young son's blood without joining in York's tears: his desire for personal vengeance is not as strong as his sense of humanity. The third conscience figure, Exeter, is the one who provokes Henry into offering the bargain to York. Exeter's sense of right and wrong is still strong enough that he must admit that York's claim is better. His is the role of adult conscience overruling childish desire.

Clifford joins in the reasonable outrage at Prince Edward's disinheritance. However, we have seen from his exchange of insults in the earlier confrontation with the Yorkists and in his terrible vow of vengeance that he is somewhat different from Northumberland and Westmoreland in his viciousness. He confirms our judgment when he brutally
slaughters the youthful and unarmed York son, Rutland, and then gleefully joins with Margaret in torturing the captured York with a handkerchief stained with Rutland's blood. Clifford's role is that of vengeance gone crazy. As an aspect of Henry's personality, we are somewhat prepared for Clifford and his bloodbath by his earlier decision for revenge and by Henry's reminders to his followers near the beginning of the parliament scene:

Earl of Northumberland, he [York] slew thy father, And thine, Lord Clifford; and you have both vow'd revenge On him, his sons, his favorites and his friends.  

Henry mitigates this lust for vengeance, but is unable to compel his followers--specifically Clifford and Margaret--to do so. The weakness that made him unable to rule and unable to outface York makes it equally impossible for him to maintain control over the forces that support him.

The uniting of the two most crazed aspects of Henry's life and psyche--Clifford and Margaret--completes the loss of control. Apart, the two were noticeably bitter, proud and vengeful. Together, they show the awful depths of unchecked human cruelty and bloodthirstiness. Thus, when Margaret defies Henry and rides off to regroup the Lancastrian forces to contend with the Yorkists, Henry's defeat is total. No matter which side wins, Henry will be dominated. In the contest for rule (politically of the kingdom, psychologically of the
king's mind), Henry, the ego figure, has lost all chance of winning. In order to fight the Shadow figure, York, who includes all the kingly and masculine characteristics Henry lacks, the king has thrown himself into the power of the distorted Anima figure, Margaret, whose personality includes the worst of masculine aggressiveness and feminine bitterness, and of her maniacal henchman, Clifford. It is not then surprising that Henry is unable to regain control and becomes steadily more passive and aloof from the contest. His psyche is so badly torn that he can no longer function as a person at all, much less as a king.

At this point the Jungian psychological view can be dropped, for the succeeding events have very little influence on Henry's psyche and he has little direct influence on them. He is integrally involved in the war for his throne without being active in it. He begins to talk wistfully about his sad fate and unlucky stars. That he regrets the killing of York and placing of the duke's head over the gates of the city of York shows not only that vengefulness is never permitted to overcome his compassion for long but also how much he valued his close cousin and psychological opposite. It also shows how Henry, so often foolish, has the clearest understanding of how interminable the civil war is to be, for the fight is even then being carried on by York's sons and allies and Henry's side is no better off for the death of the duke.
Henry's last psychological shift, that into Hermit-Seer, is marked first by his insights into the terrible nature of the civil war during the interlude in the battle of Towton. He is later captured by Edward IV and imprisoned, released by Warwick and then recaptured by Edward, but by this time it means little to Henry whether he is in or out of prison. His hermit-like seclusion is simply more constrained and less comfortable when it is forced than when it is voluntary. Near the end of Part Three he makes predictions first about the young Richmond (the future Henry VII) and then about Richard (the future Richard III) that help tie the play to Richard III. Henry's character is of great importance during this time, but it has little direct connection to the plot and thus will be considered more fully in the next chapter with the patterns of character.

When we look back on the three plays, we can see how closely linked are the double plot structures of each play and the two character phases of Henry over the same period, and how well they support the political and psychological development of the plays. Everything has to do with these splits, schisms and doublings: the war of France against England; the feud of Winchester and Gloucester; the feud of York and Somerset; the marriage arrangement first with Armagnac, then with Anjou; the conspiracy of Suffolk and his allies against Gloucester; the conspiracy of York and his
allies against Suffolk; the revolt first of Cade and then York; the war of Yorkist against Lancastrian; the war of Yorkist against Yorkist. The widely scattered psychic disorders of Henry's father-figure, Gloucester, breaks Henry out of his adolescent phase, but it also pushes the Yorkist conspiracy into overt action. The defeat of Jack Cade shows the possibility of stability and command based on Henry's active kingship. But the confrontation with York and the renewed influence of Margaret cause the collapse of Henry's personality both as an individual and as embodiment of the realm. Finally, there is his retreat into the prison of himself with the elemental political passions raging unchecked around him.
CHAPTER III
HENRY VI AND THE PATTERNS OF CHARACTERIZATION

When we realize how intimately the passive, retiring Henry is connected to the patterning of the plots (how, in fact, at one point they become a kind of nightmare state of his mind), we should not be surprised to discover him to be central to the character patterning as well. These are not, admittedly, the subtletest of Shakespeare's plays, but they are far subtler and far more actable dramas than they are regularly given credit for. The quality, imagination and care of their construction is one of the most potent arguments against those who would give the plays in whole or in part to another author or group of authors. Except for Marlowe, none of the men who might possibly have written the plays could have done so without a marked increase in dramatic power. In putting them together, Shakespeare does not display the virtuoso touch of the great tragedies, nor even of the later history plays, but he does show a deft touch and a burgeoning imagination.

There is, first, the matter of Henry's ancestry and the automatic comparison to his father and grandfather. We may presume that Shakespeare, living more than three centuries nearer the events shown in the plays than we and basing them on the highly popular chronicles, felt no need to make explicit what we may fail to think about at all, especially we Americans. The history of one's own country is not
merely a mass of names, dates and important events, but a semi-mythic amalgamation of facts, legends, stories and the human need for meaning. Henry VI's reign was considered by the Tudor chroniclers to be an example of the cycles of history and of the direct influence of God on human affairs. The particular theme that Henry was made part of was connected to the apparent regularity of royal sin with retribution exacted on the third generation. Thus, the decadent Edward II's direct male line of descent ended with the third generation when Edward the Black Prince died before ascending to the throne and his son, Richard II, was overthrown and killed by Henry IV, known as Bolingbroke. This Henry's direct line ended with the third generation when the Yorkist rebels killed Henry VI and his son. The York line ended (one has to stretch matters here because Richard, Duke of York, was named heir but never reigned) with the third generation when the sons of Edward IV were murdered in the Tower. Later writers, especially Raleigh, looking back from the vantage point of Jacobean England, could point out that Henry VII's dynasty also ended with the third generation since none of Henry VIII's children produced an heir. In the first three cases there was a revolt against a legitimate but evil or incompetent monarch, and in each case the dynasty ended after only three generations.
The important relationship in each of these cases, therefore, is that of the last monarch to the first. The concept is something like Original Sin, in that the guilt for the crime was carried by each succeeding generation, but only meted out in full on the third. This is fully in accord with the Old Testament view which speaks of a "jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." Sometimes this is hard to understand completely in connection with English history. Edward II's crime was to be decadent, flightly, misguided and a sodomist; why this should have been considered blood-guilt is unclear, but there is no doubt that the fourth generation representative in the direct line, Richard II, is in some ways a throwback to Edward II. Bolingbroke's crimes certainly make for a clearer example of blood-guilt, for he rebelled against his sovereign, overthrew him, and had him murdered--and his successors, son and grandson, continued to enjoy the fruits of his crime, the ill-gotten crown.

It is evident, therefore, that a large measure of Henry's trouble is derived from Bolingbroke's usurpation. Tillyard would put the blame on Respublica and the punishment meted out on the realm with incidental suffering by Henry VI. Ornstein, more wisely, I think, puts the blame squarely on Bolingbroke, with incidental suffering by the
realm because of the terrible nature of the crime. This incidental suffering becomes extreme by the time of the civil war in Part Three, but it is understandable considering not only the nature of the original crime, but of those that followed. Any political crime is a violation of the order of the state, but rebellion and regicide are crimes against both the political order and the ideal order. Just as ordinary crimes tend to promote personal vengeance if not handled adequately by law, these two great crimes tend to promote the greatest lawlessness, the total breakdown of order, and the justification of any crime or cruelty. It is easier, then, to believe in recurrent cycles of disorder, once disorder is begun, than in simply the matter of providential punishment.

We cannot know for certain whether Shakespeare's view of Bolingbroke at the time he wrote the Henry VI plays was the same as that of a few years later when he wrote Richard II and Parts One and Two of Henry IV, but it should be a fairly safe assumption. His sources, the chronicles of Hall, Holinshed and others, were the same and their views reasonably consistent. The principal issue was the rebellion whereby Bolingbroke got the crown. The ultimate consequences are treated directly in the Henry VI plays even if the man himself is not. There are two major points about the relationship of Bolingbroke and Henry: the guilt that Henry inherits
with the ill-gotten crown; and the precedent set by the rebellion for seizing the crown by force. This latter point becomes the more ironic when we realize how closely parallel are the cases of Bolingbroke, Henry's grandfather, and York, Henry's greatest rival and psychological Shadow figure.

The root question is relatively clear: What to do with corrupt, incompetent or tyrannical kings? This was a major issue of Shakespeare's time and remained so in England for a hundred years. It was intimately involved with the wars of religion. Various theorists, Catholic and Protestant, favored either passive resistance or open revolt against kings of the opposite faith. There was much to be said on either side, with the issue being both absolute (can you ever justifiably revolt against your monarch?) and relative (if you can, at what point does his tyranny justify such a revolt?). But the parallel cases of Bolingbroke-Richard and York-Henry are more complicated than merely textbook examples of a current issue.

Given Richard II's corrupt, incompetent and threatening rule, Bolingbroke faced a series of difficult choices. While in exile, he could accept calmly Richard's seizure of his inheritance, or he could return rebelliously to demand restitution. Rebelling, he faced the choice of trying to cleanse the government of Richard's corrupt associates, or letting them alone to make further attempts against him. If
he chose to clean out the government, he faced the question of leaving Richard on the throne to appoint new toadies and await a chance for revenge, or ousting the monarch completely. By overthrowing Richard, he could claim the crown by *coup d'état* or leave it to the next in line of descent, through Philippe Mortimer, daughter of Lionel, the third son of Edward III (John of Gaunt, Bolingbroke's father, was fourth). Finally, having overthrown the king and seized the throne, he could keep the deposed king imprisoned and risk insurrection, or have the king murdered. According to legend, Richard was not murdered at Bolingbroke's express command, but the result was the same.

Each stage of Bolingbroke's decision-making process is difficult to assess, but the answer is usually easy. The way of both personal safety and the greatest power is the same: revolt, overthrow, seizure of the crown and murder. It is not surprising, nor even altogether wrong, that he made the decisions the way he did. But the first crime led to the second one, so that by the time he had finished he had committed a series of the highest crimes against order, person and property. The immediate effect of this on Bolingbroke was just what would be expected: continued disorder and revolts by various groups, including his one-time allies, the Percys, in favor of the Mortimers. Although he overcame every rebellion, his reign was never easy and his conscience never at rest.
Henry VI's relationship to Bolingbroke is two-fold. He cannot escape his grandfather's crime when it is finally put to a test in the opening scene of Part Three. Though Henry likes to remind people that he is his father's son, the heir of the great and successful Henry V, the grandfather remains something of a skeleton in the closet. Henry is also, ironically, a return to the kind of king against which his grandfather rose up. Yet there are important differences between Richard II and Henry VI. The former was (in Shakespeare's view) a sensitive and poetic man, but corrupt, unwise and headstrong; the latter was foolish, easily confused and manipulated, and much too passive. The effect, however, is the same: a breakdown of order through bad government. The ensuing revolt in either case is basically conservative rather than radical; the intent is to restore lost order, prestige and national power.

If the comparison of Henry to Bolingbroke is indirect and carried mostly by the plot, that to his father, Henry V, is direct and carried by the dialogue. Part One opens with the funeral of Henry V, wherein the chief mourners compete in eulogizing the dead hero. His brother Bedford begins:

Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night! Comets, importing change of times and states, Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky, And with them scourge the bad revolting stars, That have consented unto Henry's death--
Henry the Fifth, too famous to live long!
England ne'er lost a king of so much worth.\(^1\)

His other brother, Gloucester, attempts to outdo the former
in enthusiasm and praise:

\begin{quote}
England ne'er had a king until his time.
Virtue he had, deserving to command:
His brandish'd sword did blind men with his beams:
His arms spread wider than a dragon's wings:
His sparkling eyes, replete with wrathful fire,
More dazzled and drove back his enemies
Than mid-day sun fierce bent against their faces.
What should I say? His deeds exceed all speech:
He ne'er lift up his hand but conquered.\(^2\)
\end{quote}

Exeter adds his bit with a personal note:

\begin{quote}
We mourn in black. Why mourn we not in blood?
Henry is dead and never shall revive.
Upon a wooden coffin we attend,
And death's dishonorable victory
We with our stately presence glorify,
Like captives bound to a triumphant car.
What? Shall we curse the planets of mishap
That plotted thus our glory's overthrow?
Or shall we think the subtle-witted French
Conjurers and sorcerers, that, afraid of him,
By magic verses have contrived his end?\(^3\)
\end{quote}

Winchester, not known for truthfulness, adds his own impor-
tant, but self-serving view:

\begin{quote}
He was a king blessed of the King of Kings.
Unto the French the dreadful judgment day
So dreadful will not be as was his sight.
The battles of the Lord of Hosts he fought;
The church's prayers made him so prosperous.\(^4\)
\end{quote}

\(^1\) [H VI, I, i, 1-7.]
\(^2\) [H VI, I, i, 8-16.]
\(^3\) [H VI, I, i, 17-27.]
\(^4\) [H VI, I, i, 28-32.]
To Tillyard's insights on the premonitions of chaos and misrule involved here, there is nothing to add. But there is another side to the mythic quality here, the myth of the hero "too famous to live long," and the reactions of his subjects to his inevitable early end. While Bedford reviews the unnatural events of the heavens—which, perhaps blasphemously, recall the death of Christ—Gloucester focuses attention on Henry V himself: his virtue; his magic sword; his arms, which he associates with a dragon's wings; and his dazzling eyes. These recall a more ancient age when heroes did not have tawdry problems of court plots and taxes, but were men of the greatest courage, strength and virtue, and fought pure battles against undeniably evil foes.

Henry V is not such a hero, of course, in any real sense. Neither Shakespeare, nor his characters, nor his audience believed that Henry V was more than just a man and a king, albeit a great one. In the play of Henry V, we find a title character with a number of minor flaws, just as we do in Prince Hal of Henry IV. But exaggerations always occur in the human search for meaning, and the extraordinary man who was the victor of Agincourt came to symbolize the pinnacle of English chivalry and to be called the "mirror of all Christian monarchs." He becomes a permanent part of the national self-consciousness of England, mythologized in the way that Arthur was or Richard Coeur de Lion. He also seems
to have escaped the guilt of his father, whether through
great valor or his great piety, or simply as a result of
the grace of Providence. His only apparent punishment is
his early death, though this, as suggested, is not inconsis-
tent with his mythic role as warrior king.

Instead, the punishment devolves on his son, who
inherits the realm (both realms, actually) at nine months,
and with it the difficulties automatically incumbent upon
an infant monarch and uneasy protectorate. While there is
little hope that any succeeding monarch could measure up to
the standard of Henry V, Henry VI doesn't try. He is con-
scious of his father's greatness, for he refers to it when
speaking during the Battle Parliament:

I am the son of Henry the Fifth,
Who made the Dauphin and the French to stoop,
And seiz'd upon their towns and provinces.®

But such references are invariably ironic since he is
such a poor copy of his great father. He has the same osten-
tatious piety that was characteristic of his father (as at
Agincourt), but not his strength of will. He does not desire
power nor its attendant responsibility, but instead shuns the
power and responsibility which he has.

At one point he envies his commoners, "Was never subject
long'd to be a king/As I do long and wish to be a subject."®

®3 H VI, I, i, 107-109.

®2 H VI, IV, ix, 4-5.
At another he envies a shepherd's life, which he imagines to be happy, carefree and easy. Ornstein rightly points out the irony of Henry's envy of a shepherd, when as king he should be the shepherd of his people. But shepherd of the people has a special Christian overtone of the role of priest, which would seem to fit naturally with Henry's piety. His new wife, Margaret, remarks on this bitterly to Suffolk when she says:

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 fit state for his holiness.?

But Margaret, along with many readers of the plays, has missed the differentiation between Henry's holiness and that of the Pope. The triple crown involves as much public duty as secular kingship, and mere piety is no more the sole qualification for the papacy than it is for the parish priesthood or any ecclesiastical rank in between. Henry VI's piety is not priestly but monkish. He resists public responsibility and has no real conception of public duty until his encounter with the Father and Son in Part Three. York recognizes this and points it out, when, in his furious confrontation with the king near the end of Part Two, he says: "Thy hand is made to grasp a palmer's staff/And not to grace an awful princely sceptre."8

2 H VI, I, iii, 59-62.

2 H VI, V, i, 97-98.
The relative values of retreat from worldly temptation (the monk's or nun's life) and confrontation of it (the life of layman or cleric) is not at issue. Shakespeare, as a reasonably solid Anglican, may be presumed to have been opposed to the cloisters, but if he was so opposed his opposition is hidden under the much more important problem of Henry's inability to choose one way or the other. Henry has the piety of his father, but he does not apply it as a lay leader. Instead, he attempts to create a little cloister for himself at court. Had he gone the whole way, given up the world (and with it the crown) and retreated into a monastery, we would be more inclined to appreciate both his piety and his expressed unworldliness. But he clings to the title and its perquisites, even while avoiding its duties and responsibilities, thereby not only depriving the country of its needed focus of power and justice, but undercutting his pretense of holiness as well.

It is in this framework of the king as focus of power that both the pattern of the kings and pseudo-kings and that of the Knights and Schemers operate. The actual kings and the pseudo-kings--protectors, regents, would-be protectors, would-be kings--exist in such multitudes in the three plays as to be a major, if unwieldy, form of character patterning. A look at the dramatis personae of each of the plays shows the extent of this phenomenon. In the first play there are
Henry (king), Gloucester (protector), Bedford (regent),
Winchester (would-be protector, would-be pope), Somerset
(regent), York (regent, protector, rightful heir), Warwick⁹
(king-maker, protector), Mortimer (would-be king); not to
mention the Dauphin of France, Reignier (titular king of
Naples), Margaret (queen) and Joan (putative king's mistress).
The second play includes Henry, Gloucester, Winchester,
York, Somerset, Warwick and Margaret, plus Edward and
Richard, York's sons, both of whom became king; Buckingham,
who has designs on the protectorate; Suffolk, whose relation­
ship with the queen makes him king in two senses of the
word; Jack Cade, a commoner would-be king; and Eleanor, a
would-be queen. Part Three continues with Henry, York,
Edward, Richard, Warwick and Margaret, and adds Edward
(Prince of Wales), Louis XI of France, Clarence (another York
son and co-protector with Warwick), Henry Tudor, Earl of
Richmond and later Henry VII; plus Lady Elizabeth Grey, who
becomes Edward IV's queen instead of Lady Bona, sister of
the French queen.

⁹The Warwick of Part One may be Richard Beauchamp or
it may be Richard Neville, Beauchamp's son-in-law and heir.
I am here assuming that this Warwick is Neville, because
of the close association to York, who was Richard Neville's
brother-in-law. It is of no major consequence which
Warwick it is. A similar situation exists with the Exeter
who appears in Part One and Part Three. I am assuming both
to be Thomas Beaufort since Exeter in Part One is clearly
he and the Exeter in Part Three renews the role of friend
and advisor to Henry.
Some of the foregoing are Knights and some are Schemers, but none are spear-carriers. Few of the major figures in the plays are excluded from the list of kings and pseudo-kings. The Duke of Exeter is one. Talbot is another. The rest have a kingly role assigned to them either by chance or by their own design. The reason for such a plethora of rulers and would-be rulers is clearly the absence of rule by Henry. At first, this is strictly a matter of happenstance. Henry inherits the throne long before he is of an age to exert any rule. Later, however, this oversupply of rulers and would-be rulers becomes more and more a matter of Henry's conscious abdication of the responsibilities of his office with the welcome assumption of them by his associates. Finally, the assumption of responsibility is joined with the assumption of the crown itself in the Yorkist Edward IV.

This problem of rule by proxy is closely related also to the division of characters into Knights and Schemers, and the rise of Machiavellianism as a replacement for chivalry. At first, the Knights (particularly Gloucester, Bedford, Exeter, Old Salisbury, the two Talbots and Lucy) vastly outnumber and outweigh the Schemers, of whom Winchester is the sole representative. The Knights are characteristic holdovers from the reign of Henry V: loyal, honest, valorous and altruistic. The Schemers are just the opposite: scheming, devious, frequently rather cowardly and utterly
selfish. Throughout Part One many of the Knights are killed—Bedford, Salisbury and Talbot specifically—but not replaced. Instead there arise new Schemers to join with Winchester: Suffolk, Somerset, Buckingham and the new queen, Margaret. There are also the mixed figures, those who should be Knights but who, for various reasons, are as much Schemer as Knight.

York is the first and most important of these. He has all the proper qualities of a Knight, but his past grievance and future opportunity color them. If his claim had not been dynastically just and his concern for England's future had not been so manifest, York's behavior would have made him a Schemer pure and simple. As it is, he must be placed either in both categories or in a separate category including characteristics of both. The case of the Nevilles is similar. They also have the qualities of Knights and are ardent early supporters of Gloucester, but various powerful arguments—the justice of York's claim, the misrule under Henry, the danger to their own safety—cause them to throw in with York. Once the conspiracies bear the fruit of civil war, it should be noted, the division between Knight and Schemer is almost completely lost. There are a few echoes of chivalry, as in the dialogue between York and Old Clifford before their single combat during the Battle of St. Alban's, but these become fewer as the civil war progresses. There are also a
few examples of renewed scheming, as in the breakup of the York alliance and the soliloquies of Richard of Gloucester, but these are rare. As the Knights were mostly killed off by the end of Part One, so most of the Schemers—Suffolk, Winchester and Somerset, specifically—are mostly dispatched by the end of Part Two. Margaret remains and is joined by Young Clifford in the maniacal vengefulness that soon characterizes the whole conflict, a kind of behavior that is neither Knightly nor Scheming, but, in truth, half crazed.

Though Henry bears no responsibility for the death of Bedford and Old Salisbury, nor for the scheming of York, he does have the responsibility for the promotion of the Schemers to positions of trust, and for allowing them to wreak havoc on the nation and murder the Protector. Thus, he indirectly has the responsibility for the Yorkist conspiracy that is partly formed to counteract these failings of government. Henry's problem, and that of the realm, is again one of weakness of leadership. Henry belongs neither to the Knights nor to the Schemers, nor to the mixed group. He is clearly not a Knight for he consciously rejects participation in any of the wars fought on his behalf, never gets involved in the court feuds that are a typical failing of the chivalrous Knights, and has no real concept of mutual loyalty and responsibility. He wants the honor due him from the nobles as their liege lord, but does not respond with justice, protection and the maintenance of their mutual feudal holdings
in England and France. The Knights do not expect abstract justice in our modern sense as much as firmness and consistency of leadership, just what Henry finds most impossible to provide.

But he is equally no Schemer. His political naïveté is monumental. Though he senses his power as king and even, at times, seems to enjoy it, he never understands it, nor its proper use. Most especially, he is blind to how he allows others to use his power for him—and use it mainly for their own gain and his (and the realm's) loss. While Gloucester is at his side, Henry gets both the reassurance and good advice he needs. But when he abandons Gloucester's advice for Margaret's, he is abandoning the ethical standards and stability of the Knights for the crass Machiavellianism and instability of the Schemers. Without understanding either group, he moves from one to the other, from stability to instability, an especially critical mistake considering how unstable already are his own mind and rule.

Consideration of these two patterns of characters—kings and pseudo-kings, and Knights and Schemers—leads naturally to the last and most important pattern, the triad of Henry, York and Gloucester. York and Gloucester are both pseudo-kings whose attempt at rule is based on the justifiable motive of maintaining both order and England's greatness. Gloucester is the most political of the Knights, York the most knightly of the Schemers. Gloucester, as Tillyard explains,
embodies two of the great characteristics of rulership, that of the lion (courage) and that of the pelican (what Tillyard calls disinterestedness, that is self-sacrifice). York shares the characteristic of the lion with Gloucester, but embodies that of the fox (shrewdness) instead of that of the pelican. An ideal king—like Henry V—has all three characteristics, but Henry VI has only one, that of the pelican, which, though the best from a Christian view, is also the most vulnerable when surrounded by the lions and foxes at court. But there is more to this comparison that just emblematic character traits, for much of Henry's behavior is presaged by that of his mentor, Gloucester, and contrasted in that of his nemesis, York. A proper understanding of all three requires a reassessment of their actions and functions in the plays and the way their characters develop.

Besides his Knightly virtues, Gloucester has some apparently minor faults. He has an explosive temper which has, as its most frequent target, his uncle Winchester. He also has a proud wife who not only is greedy for power, but is of a very independent and dominating spirit. This first fault is also typical of York, though York is better able to hide his rage than Gloucester. The second is typical of Henry, who is even more overpowered by his proud and conniving wife. The first fault Gloucester attempts with little success to rectify by leaving the scene when his temper gets the
better of him. The second he does not try to correct at all. Through the operation of both we get a clue to the much larger flaw in the character of the Duke, a flaw which Henry exhibits in full measure.

Gloucester's first difficulty with Winchester occurs in the opening scene of Part One. Winchester makes pompous and self-serving remarks about how Henry V's success depended on the Church. Gloucester responds furiously:

The Church! Where is it? Had not churchmen pray'd, His thread of life had not so soon decay'd. None do you like but an effeminate prince, Whom like a schoolboy you may overawe.¹⁰

Gloucester is correct in so far as Winchester's desire to overawe the prince is concerned, but this solemn and tragic occasion is hardly the place for such an outburst. Similarly, when Gloucester goes to inspect the Tower, he quickly flies into a rage when he is defied by the keepers acting on the order of Winchester. When the Bishop arrives, the inevitable argument begins on the main issue--possession of the Tower--but quickly degenerates into a name-calling spree.

Though Gloucester and his men win the battle, the strategic victory belongs to Winchester, for when the Lord Mayor comes with his forces to make peace, Winchester's men are still in apparent possession of the Tower and the rule against the carrying of weapons is applied to both Gloucester's private army, the blue coats, and Winchester's, the tawny

¹⁰ H VI, I, i, 33-36.
coats. As Protector, Gloucester's position is official and kingly, if not quite that of king. The Tower is not only the symbol of royal power in the city, but the armory for southeastern England, and the Protector should not allow it to be possessed by anyone but himself. Similarly, his own retainers should have some official position, but instead have been lumped in with those of the Bishop in the Mayor's ban.

We might suspect that Gloucester does not understand the danger to the realm presented by Winchester, who is already treading very close to treason, but the Duke takes the trouble to present a bill outlining the Bishop's crimes at the opening of the next Parliament. Winchester defies him, tears up the bill, answers the truthful complaints with blatant lies and--most important--works the dialogue away from the crucial political matter of the Bishop's defiance of legal authority, and onto the longstanding personal argument. When Henry finally gets the two to make peace, it is again Winchester who has won, for he has solidified his right to defy legitimate authority and have a say in the government that the Protector must laboriously try to keep in operation.

Finally, when the Suffolk circle has sprung its trap for him, Gloucester reveals that he knew what the conspirators were up to:
Ay, all of you have laid your heads together--
Myself had notice of your conventicles--
And all to make away my guiltless life.\(^{11}\)

Why then didn't he make an effort to check these Schemers
with their dire plots and evil intentions? The answer, I
think, can be seen in Gloucester's relationship with his
wife, of whom Winchester has said, "Thy wife is proud; she
holdeth thee in awe/More than God or religious churchmen
may."\(^{12}\) Winchester exaggerates the extent of the awe
Gloucester holds for Eleanor, but not the existence of it.
When we first encounter Dame Eleanor near the beginning of
Part Two, she is suggesting that her husband should not have
lowly thoughts, but should instead have designs on Henry's
crown in pursuit of which she offers her help. Gloucester's
response is mild and somewhat resigned: "O Nell, sweet Nell,
if thou dost love thy lord,/ Banish the canker of ambitious
thoughts."\(^{13}\)

Eleanor's is the logic of York and Bolingbroke taken
to its extreme: Rights, necessities, grievances are of no
importance; if you can possibly attain the crown by rebellion
or murder, do so. Eleanor is clearly the prototype of Lady
Macbeth, though it is Eleanor who encounters the witches
rather than her husband. The crimes she is here recommending

\(^{11}\) H VI, III, i, 165-167.
\(^{12}\) H VI, I, i, 39-40.
\(^{13}\) H VI, I ii, 17-18.
are the worst imaginable—revolt, treason, regicide—but Gloucester's reaction is a mild rebuke. The Duke does not truly get angry at her until she keeps on pressing the idea, and then he is quickly discountenanced when she begins to pout. Though he does not fall from rectitude, Gloucester is finally as tolerant of his wife's evil insinuations as is Macbeth of his and shows a similar gap of understanding.

Gloucester knows that his wife's overweening ambition is wrong, just as he knows that Winchester's ambition is a threat to the realm and that the king's marriage is a political disaster. But he doesn't do anything about either. He gently chides his petulant wife, who then proceeds with her dark plans through the use of black arts. He squabbles regularly with Winchester, but after his first attempt to check the Bishop fails, he gives up. He refuses to sanction the Anjou marriage, but he refuses also to put up more than token resistance. Gloucester is too tolerant of the evil around him: his wife's, Winchester's, Suffolk's. He knows himself to be innocent and good, and he does not realize that evil may not only succeed but prevail.

This, of course, is also one of Henry's major problems, but increased many fold. Gloucester fights and argues with the evil characters around him, but eventually gives up. Henry gives up without a fight. His understanding of the nature of evil is so much less even than Gloucester's that
he takes the worst men at court into his government. Gloucester's uxoriousness is merely an example of his too-great tolerance for the evil in others, especially those who are close to him. Henry's uxoriousness is the basis of most of his troubles, the sine qua non of the collapse of his government. Like Gloucester, Henry is preoccupied with his own goodness, but again to a more damaging extent. Gloucester believes that as long as he is "loyal, true, and blameless," he is safe from attack. Even when he discovers that he is wrong, he generously says:

And if my death might make this island happy,  
And prove the period of their tyranny,  
I would expend it with all willingness.  

But he has still missed the point. Henry and the realm need Gloucester, no matter how much trouble Henry, the Duke or the realm have in realizing it. Gloucester himself suggests this need a little later when he says:

Ah! thus King Henry throws away his crutch  
Before his legs be firm to bear his body,  
Thus is the shepherd beaten from thy side,  
And wolves are gnarling who shall gnaw thee first.

Henry himself comes to a similar gesture of sacrifice in Part Three when he says of the civil wars, "Oh, that my death would stay these ruthless deeds." But in either case it is already

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142 H VI, III, i, 148-150.  
152 H VI, III, i, 189-192.  
163 H VI, II, v, 95.
too late. The fact is that evil needs active rather than passive opposition, especially by those entrusted with the government. Henry's failure is much greater than Gloucester's, but it is clearly similar and derivative.

Neither passivity nor tolerance for evil is a problem with York, for he is the epitome of activity on the one hand and unconcerned with morality on the other. As noted earlier, if it were not for the legitimacy of his claim, his awareness of present disorder and his concern for the well-being of the realm, he would indeed be the Machiavellian Schemer that some critics consider him and that his namesake son Richard actually becomes. Like Gloucester, whose relationship to Henry is that of psychological and political father, York has a paternal relationship with the King for he is a throw-back to both Henry's father and grandfather.

Like Henry V, York has an old but legitimate claim to a throne based on matrilineal descent. It is one of the inconsistencies of the character of Henry V in his own play, that he does realize the irony of his going to war in support of his claim to the French crown through his great-great-grandmother, after fighting so hard against the similar claim made by the adherents of the Mortimers to the crown he was wearing. There is a difference between Henry V and York in that Henry never has to violate a sacred oath in order to pursue his claim, while York does. But York is compensated
by the fact that his claim was never entirely abandoned, while Henry V's was resurrected after a long interval.

Like Henry IV, in turn, York has reason to overthrow the king because of the mismanagement, injustice and danger that have grown up because of that king. This reason is of nebulous legal basis, but a strong political one. Like all legal systems, that which regulated the inheritance of the kingdom operated on the faith that those in the system would be worthy of it. When they were not, the system tended to fall apart, or needed to be bent to accommodate some kind of correction. Moreover, the political nexus is of at least equal importance to the legal one, if less clearly drawn. This political nexus is what I've called the psycho-mythic role of the king. As I outlined in the second chapter, the difficulties of the English nation in Part One are largely attributable to the infancy and boyhood of the King, while those of Part Two reflect very closely his psychological disturbance and breakdown.

In both cases the king is not only the governor and representative of the realm, but the embodiment of it as well. Mythologically, from Eliot's The Waste Land backward to Sophocles' Oedipus the King, a spiritual disorder in the land may come about from a similar disorder in the king. More practically, when the king out of frailty of health, weakness of character, youth or flightiness, cannot rule
properly, the nation must suffer. Bolingbroke found this disorder in the court of the decadent Richard II, where the worst elements had risen to the top and were taking advantage of and encouraging the king's worst characteristics. York finds the same situation in the court of Henry VI, the same disorder in the land, and the same threat to his own personal well-being and survival. York's relationship to Henry as a kind of Jungian Shadow has already been mentioned and it should also be noted how close their physical kinship was: York a second cousin of Henry V on the paternal side; Henry VI a third cousin of York's mother, Anne Mortimer. This double relationship adds weight to the close connection of the two, who are, as both the Jungian theory and Tillyard's emblematic observation show, in a very real sense two parts of one person. That person is, of course, Henry's real father who, as has been suggested, combined the qualities of an ideal man with those of an ideal king.

York nevertheless has certain special problems to overcome. First of all, he has inheritance difficulties of his own, for his lands and titles--both the earldom of Cambridge from his father and the dukedom of York from his paternal uncle (killed at Agincourt)--have been forfeited to the crown because of his father's treason against Henry V. As a Knightly individual he tends to gravitate to the side of Warwick and Gloucester, in opposition to the side of Somerset
and Suffolk. After accepting the favor of Gloucester in being restored to the title of York, he also accepts the joint command in France with Somerset.

Despite the fact that Tillyard and others follow Sir William Lucy in equally dividing the blame for the fiasco that leads to Talbot's death, it is fairly evident that Somerset is far more culpable. It is Somerset who disobeys orders, disregards strategy and puts York in the position of sending out his infantry without a cavalry screen, a desperate risk that York doesn't take. Nevertheless, we see in York's activities a man desirous enough of glory to go ahead with the obviously foolish divided command, but conscious enough of his chances for the kingship--revealed earlier in the death scene of Edmund Mortimer--not to take any risks that might interfere with those possibilities. Since York's later campaign proves more fruitful and his prescience regarding the peace agreement with France is uncanny, we see that while Henry has grown from infant to boy-king, York has grown from youth and supplicant to general and statesman.

Politically, York cannot be anything but the enemy of Margaret, not so much because of a clash of character, but because of the giving away of Anjou and Maine for her. This is the center of his character, the delicate balance between selfish and generous motives--or, perhaps, the union of the
two. He wants England to be strong and to dominate France, and sees the damage the loss of those two dukedoms does to that dominance. But he also wants England and France for himself. Thus, he becomes a triple conspirator, the enemy and rival of Margaret, Suffolk and their circle at court, secretly in league with the Suffolk circle for the destruction of Gloucester, and even more secretly promoting his own conspiracy with the Nevilles. This is his third role, conspirator, and parallels Henry's third role, immature young man. When the conspiracies break out into the open, York is ready for his fourth role, claimant of the crown, which as we have seen, clashes directly with Henry's manhood and with the emergence of Margaret into a third, conflicting archetypal role.

In his last scene, when he has been captured by Margaret early in Part Three, York achieves an insight that is somewhat parallel to Henry's final insight later in the play. Though York never displays the generalized human and Christian compassion of Henry, he is not so hardened that he cannot weep for the murder of his young son. There is irony as well as pathos in York's position, for the rules of behavior, which stood as a dam against the flood of human cruelty and which have been slowly crumbling, have now been completely washed away. York is partly to blame, for he took advantage of their decline in the murder of Gloucester and he added to it
in the Cade rebellion. Now this flood of cruelty has struck him personally and it makes the kingship and all its power and glory seem like the prize in a trivial game, worthless compared to the innocent blood of a small boy:

There, take the crown, and with the crown my curse; And in thy need such comfort come to thee As I now reap at thy too cruel hand.  

This role of weeping father is the last and greatest of York's roles, and closes out a large part of the political side of the trilogy. Henry, too, finds himself a bereaved father just before he is murdered by Richard of Gloucester, one of York's remaining sons. Thus the relationship of the two men is maintained through to their similar, but far distant ends.

Despite the similarities and patterns that involve Henry with other characters closely or distantly, in many ways Henry is utterly unlike anyone else in the plays. The other characters have difficulty with their political positions, but are utterly straightforward—if often evil—in their characters. Henry has no difficulty with politics because he does not understand it and cares nothing for it, but faces one personality crisis after another. Henry as man or as king cannot see himself from the outside at all. Gloucester views himself and misjudges the power of his innocence. York views himself and exalts too greatly the

\[173\] _H VI_, I, iv, 164-166.
courage and kingly bearing he finds. But Henry has no idea, until it is much too late, how devastating his weakness, confusion and abdication of responsibility have been to his realm.

Henry's failings can be divided into the personal and the kingly, but the most important ones have applications to both aspects of his life. For example, when he falls into a fit of weeping during the argument between Winchester and Gloucester in Act III of 1 Henry VI, his failure is as a person. Certainly such an argument would be upsetting to a boy placed in such a difficult and pressured situation. But the response--such a spasm of tears that Warwick fears for the boy's life--is out of proportion to the event. On the other hand, Henry's misjudging of the seriousness of the York-Somerset feud a few scenes later, his casual selection of the red (Somerset) rose, and his sending the two bitter enemies off to fight the French war jointly is a serious failure as king. He feels confident enough of his power to improvise in selecting his French commanders, as he did in the associated events (the meeting with Talbot, the banishment of the coward knight Falstaff and the receipt of the Burgundy letter), but he blunders nonetheless badly. Still, neither of these episodes has the lasting impact of later episodes; they merely show the trend of the king's weaknesses.

The whole web of circumstances surrounding his marriage to Margaret is far more profound both in its indication of
Henry's failures and in its long-term effects. At first Henry is simply reluctant to marry, reasonable enough in a young man, but not, it turns out, entirely healthy. When Suffolk describes in "wondrous rare description" the charms of beauteous Margaret, Henry is completely overwhelmed. He decides he must marry her. This exercise of will is rare in the king, but typically wrong where it does occur. Though the breaking of the Armagnac troth is a personal breach of faith and the wedding to Margaret a great expense and no gain to England, neither of these failings incurs permanent damage to his reign. But as with the earlier examples cited, the indications foreboding; Henry has totally lost control of himself in his love for Margaret; he has abandoned his political responsibilities; and he has thrown himself into the power of Suffolk.

Henry's crucial, unforgivable crime is to allow Gloucester to be impeached and delivered helpless to his enemies. This crime involves both a failure to help a friend and relative when he could have, and allowing a serious miscarriage of justice. Everyone in the play knows that Gloucester is innocent, but everyone also knows that Gloucester will be arrested because Henry will refuse to help him. Henry has already allowed a number of serious breaches of justice. The disgrace of Eleanor is the most obvious--not because she's not guilty, but because Suffolk,
who has rigged the whole affair, gets away with it--but there have also been the promotion of Somerset to the regency of France and the petitioners with their legitimate grievances against Suffolk and Winchester who are driven from the court. The only instance where justice prevails is the combat of Horner and Peter, and that must be attributed either to Providence or too much drink, rather than to Henry's judiciousness. Thus, well before the impeachment of Gloucester, the nobles are making plans based on its success. They know Henry will be unable to act to save Gloucester, however much he pretends he will do so.

The worst of this is that Henry knows the good Duke to be innocent. He says before Gloucester's impeachment that his conscience tells him "Gloucester is as innocent...as is the sucking lamb or harmless dove," and he repeats himself a few lines later ("My conscience tells me you are innocent.") But Henry refuses to act on his conscience and retreats to his earlier habit of weepy tantrum even as he explains, with all the clarity available to him, the obvious injustice he is doing:

\[\ldots my heart is drowned with grief, \\
Whose flood begins to flow within mine eyes, \]
\[\ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \]
Ah, uncle Humphrey, in thy face I see 
The map of Honor, Truth and Loyalty; 
And yet, good Humphrey, is the hour to come 
That e'er I prov'd thee false or fear'd thy faith, \]

\[182 H VI, III, i, 69-71.\]
What low'ring star now envies thy estate,
That these great lords, and Margaret our Queen,
Do seek subversion of thy harmless life?
Thou never didst me wrong, nor no man wrong;--

... ... ... ... ... ... ...

His fortunes I will weep, and 'twixt each groan
Say "Who's a traitor? Gloucester he is none."¹³

Henry's apparent intention is to make sure that Gloucester is vindicated at his trial. The conspirators, sensing this, determine to have Gloucester murdered. That Henry doesn't suspect this might happen, when they have been sniping at Duke Humphrey for years, is testimony to Henry's utter unconsciousness of the realities of politics. In this, he is the duke's student, exaggerated disastrously. Thus his surprise at Gloucester's death, emphasized by his fainting, is doubtless genuine.

He suspects Suffolk, though he does not accuse him. He turns away from the queen despite her exorbitant grief at Gloucester's death and at her rejection. At the end of the queen's lengthy exercise in hypocrisy, the Nevilles arrive at the head of a large mob of commoners demanding to know if the good duke is really dead at the hands of Suffolk and Winchester. Henry restates his suspicions after the Nevilles leave him momentarily:

O Thou that judgest all things, stay my thoughts--
My thoughts that labor to persuade my soul
Some violent hands were laid on Humphrey's life.²⁰

¹³ H VI, III, i, 198-199; 202-209, and 221-222.
²⁰ H VI, III, ii, 135-137.
Though the "trial" of Suffolk is absurd and the Neville's part in it suspect, it is the only way that justice will be done. Henry remarks on this piously, but inconclusively:

What stronger breastplate than a heart untainted?
Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just,
And he but naked, though locked up in steel,
Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted. 

These are fine sentiments for a sermon or philosophical debate, but Henry has let matters get further out of control, abdicating yet more of his kingly responsibility. Instead of the commons and peers turning to him for an exercise of justice he must turn to them. Under pressure of an immediate popular uprising Henry agrees to act against Suffolk and banishes him from the realm. This has some short-term success in calming the populace and ridding the government of Suffolk, but it has also set another bad precedent of law by clamor and innuendo. Henry let Gloucester be impeached on obviously trumped-up charges and Suffolk be banished on a presumption of guilt. The fact that the latter is guilty instead of innocent does not ameliorate the lack of justice.

Matters continue to disintegrate for the king and we learn from the pirates that the Nevilles, York and the commons of Kent are all "up in arms." Henry is already discovering what will be his continuing curse, that he has

\textsuperscript{21} 2 \textsuperscript{12} \textit{H VI, III, ii, 231-234.}
no friends, but only allies who want him king so that they may have the advantage or that the Yorkists not have it. Banishing Suffolk and cultivating Warwick has accomplished nothing. There is no justice in his land, nor order, nor peace. Not surprisingly, York's henchman and professional rabble-rouser, Jack Cade, has tremendous success in leading the Kentish uprising. Cade is the most amusing of Henry's rivals for kingship and control, and we cannot but agree with Stafford in his judgment of Cade and his followers: "O, gross and miserable ignorance." The rebels' hatred for anyone who is educated, or of gentle birth, is in one sense simply the envy of the have-nots for the haves, while Cade's program is a ludicrous parody of all leveling ideals.

But the root issue is order and justice, not just the order which has failed and produced the uprising, but the need of the rebels themselves for some ordering principle and a man to lead them. The rebels are all simple men, but they do not take Cade or themselves seriously. There are elements of an All Fools' Day lark about the rebellion, but there are also serious grievances: the loss of the French provinces, the exorbitant fees paid Suffolk from tax money, the advantage taken of poor men by usurers and clerks. Nor should we forget the shame of Suffolk's liaison with the

222 H VI, IV, ii, 161.
queen, mentioned by the pirate lieutenant, and the murder of Gloucester; nor the ignored grievances of the petitioners in Act I against Winchester, for protecting a criminal subordinate, and against Suffolk, for enclosing a common field. Henry talks of sending a "holy bishop" or even going himself to talk to Cade. His concern for the "many simple souls" that might be killed in violent suppression of the rebellion is commendable, but misses the point. He is always interested in peaceful parleying after matters have gotten out of hand; what the people need is what they have found at least a parody of in Jack Cade--a strong and personal leader.

By the end of the Cade rebellion Henry has combined his new found manhood with an ominous note of wistful self-pity about his kingship. Before Buckingham's announcement of the breaking of the rebellion, Henry says:

> Was ever king that joy'd an earthly throne,
> And could command no more content than I?

> ... ... ... ... ... ... ...

> Was never subject long'd to be a king
> As I do long and wish to be a subject?\(^2\)\(^3\)

Afterwards he says, in his pardon of the rebels,

> ...Henry, though he be infortunate,
> Assure yourselves, will never be unkind.\(^2\)\(^4\)

\(^2\)\(^3\) \(H\ VI\), IV, ix, 1-2, 5-6.

\(^2\)\(^4\) \(H\ VI\), IV, ix, 18-19.
These words are scarcely out of his mouth, when the message arrives of York's approach with his Irish army. The king again sends Buckingham off to contend with York, while acceding to the demand that Somerset be imprisoned. He shows his fear of York when he says, "In any case, be not too rough in terms,/For he is fierce and cannot brook hard language," and his general despair in his last, sad words before the confrontation with the rebellious duke: "Come, wife, let's in, and learn to govern better;/For yet may England curse my wretched reign."

As was mentioned earlier, the advantage has swung back to the king by the time of York's arrival. The latter knows it is illegal to maintain an army without the king's permission, while the breakup of the Cade revolt and the agreement to imprison and try Somerset has taken away the faint justification he had. The royal forces are being reorganized under the far more capable leadership of Buckingham and the Cliffords. The king himself has shown surprising strength and command. The unexpected loyalty of the rebels has taken the wind out of York's sails and the duke momentarily finds his whole plan in the doldrums.

Unfortunately for Henry, the queen has now recovered from her grief at the death of Suffolk and single-handedly

\[25^2 \text{H VI, IV, ix, 44-45.}\]

\[26^2 \text{H VI, IV, ix, 47-48.}\]
rekindles the Yorkist cause. The king, in one of his better moves, has persuaded York to disperse his forces and reaffirm his loyalty. However tenuous the loyalty may be, it is affirmed, while Henry is at his rare, kingly best in the meeting. But as the queen begins to reassert her resolute, but unclever character, Henry's attempt at leadership crumbles. Margaret boldly overrules the king by releasing Somerset and appearing with him at the parley. Henry's reaction is not kingly, but childish: "See, Buckingham, Somerset comes with th' queen,/Go bid her hide him quickly from the duke." The queen arrogantly and lawlessly defies Henry, and York--with a little justification--becomes enraged enough to unveil his claim.

Henry's strongest reaction in the ensuing confrontation of supporters is to the defection of the Nevilles. After accusing them of the same insanity he attributed to York, he wails:

O! where is faith? O! where is loyalty?
If it be banish'd from the frosty head,
Where shall it find a harbour in the earth?

He asks about their oaths, and they reply that they cannot be bound by a sinful oath--a response the queen rightly calls sophistry. But Henry has forgotten the years of deadly political wrangling that have culminated in this confron-

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27 H VI, V, i, 83-84.
28 H VI, V, i, 166-168.
tation. He expects loyalty without knowing how to give it. He promoted to leadership Suffolk who sent four people to their deaths in order to banish Dame Eleanor, who led the perjured impeachment of Gloucester in order to disarm and murder him, whose mismanagement led to the loss of France and the uprising at home, and who had definite designs on the lives not only of the York family but of the Neville family as well. Henry attempted to divorce himself from this corruption by his passivity, but only worsened it. By not seeing what was going on, he pretended it wasn't there. Henry would now like to have everything go back to its original simplicity, but there have been too many plots, murders and betrayals for that. When this return fails to materialize, he makes an attempt at martial spirit, but when the battle goes against him he resorts to a greater lassitude than before.

Henry's behavior at the parliament is a perfect study of the ambivalence and uncertainty of his character, now about to reach another point of change. He arrives to see York ensconced in the chair of state, and attempts to rouse the vengeful blood of Northumberland and Clifford by reminding them of their dead fathers, killed in the recent battle of St. Albans. Then he pleads patience, both because of the Yorkist soldiers on hand--and to avoid making "a shambles of the parliament-house." He says he will use "frowns, words,
and threats" to make York relent and "kneel for grace and mercy." But it is York whose threats overpower Henry. When called to justify his kingship, Henry admits, in an aside, the weakness of his claim to the crown and the good Exeter speaks it openly. But it is already too late for justice to be done, for there can be no real justice when it is forced at sword's point (as in the case of Suffolk). The opponents of York admit they care nothing for the justice of his claim, they simply will not have him as king. Politically, of course, they would be in some danger if York were to succeed. Whether it is more from spite or more from self-preservation, they have abandoned any concept of right, for the force of power. This, of course, only parallels the situation of York himself.

Henry is revivified by the adamancy of Northumberland, Clifford and Westmoreland, and with new confidence offers the compromise whereby he surrenders the inheritance and the rule of the kingdom to York if he be allowed to reign throughout the rest of his life. The tawdriness of this bargain is immediately evident in the enthusiasm of his enemies, and the curses laid on him by his supporters, who abandon him. Margaret, who has no intention of giving up her source of power, nor the future of her son, attacks Henry bitterly and sets off to reunite the Lancastrian forces under her banner. As she leaves, we see in Henry's speech
a new relapse into passivity:

Poor Queen! how love to me and to her son
Hath made her break out into terms of rage.
Reveng'd may she be on that hateful Duke,
Whose haughty spirit, winged with desire
Will cost my crown, and like an empty eagle
Tire on the flesh of me and of my son!293

But Henry's passive side has become so totally his
political personality that he no longer is anything but
the dummy which bears the Lancastrian crown. He is shushed
openly by Young Clifford, chidden from the battlefield,
hailed along after the defeat at Towton like so much
valuable furniture, brought out of prison in order to
solemnize the success of the Yorkist-Lancastrian splinter
group of Warwick and Clarence and then captured without
fight and carted off to prison again by Edward's forces. All
during this time he repeats various political and moral saws
as a kind of choric commentary on the action. His striving
for aloofness has finally been rewarded in however ironic a
fashion. Though he remains the sometime king, he has no
direct control or influence on the events swirling turbulently
around him. He has become like his subjects, a chip on the
ocean of civil war.

If Henry has become of no account politically at this
point, morally he achieves his greatest importance and
becomes, in fact, the moral focus of the plays. Gone and

293 H VI, I, i, 271-276.
forgotten are characters like Gloucester and Talbot; gone too are the better natures of the few characters left from the previous plays. Those who remain are the sensual and degenerate Edward IV, the crazed Clifford, the malignant Margaret, the devious Richard, the envious Clarence, the proud and treacherous Warwick—all struggling in the quicksand of a state without order, justice or laws, where loyalty is based on opportunity or necessity, and where the main effort of each is to be the one who escapes the quicksand to the firm ground of total power. Compared to the monstrous sins of both his supporters and his enemies, Henry's peccadillos become almost of no account.

Henry has always wanted to be a man of virtue, but like all men, he has always had trouble deciding what virtue is. He has wanted to be a holy man, and that is something nobody knows how to become. He has not wanted to be what he is: king, leader, judge, general, father to his people. He has wanted to escape the latter, to pursue the former, not realizing that it is impossible, that if he is to be virtuous, even holy, he must be so in the role he was born to—or give up that role once and for all. This seems simple and obvious enough to those on the outside, but it is all too human a failing.

Because Henry wants to be a good Christian and pretends to be one, Manheim believes that he is one. But he is as
much (if not as bad) a sinner as anyone else in the plays and unaware, for all his pietism, of his most obvious failings. The Henry of Part One is just a boy, struggling with a kingdom he is expected to govern, his unruly nobility and his own weepy nature, until he is seduced by Suffolk's sensual description of Margaret. While he has made political mistakes to this time, they may be written off to his youth. But his marriage to Margaret affects not only the knotty political in-fighting of the court, but the nation directly. The advantageous marriage to the Earl of Armagnac's daughter is rudely discarded, the states of Anjou and Maine are foolishly given up, and Suffolk is granted a huge amount for his travel expenses. Thus, the profitless marriage to Margaret, which causes great public bitterness, is concluded just to satisfy Henry's ridiculous passion for a woman he's never seen. Yet he then reverts to his pious studies to the dissatisfaction of his bride.

Henry would have us believe in his humility when he refers to himself as God's "far unworthy deputy," but belies it in the tenacity with which he clings to the crown and in his fond remembrance of glory in his mutterings before his capture by the gamekeepers: "No bending knee will call thee Caesar now,/No humble suitors press to speak for right." But he talks at various times of his dislike of kingship, and of

\[3^\text{H VI, III, i, 18-19.}\]
his envy for what he conceives to be the easy life of a shepherd, but he will not commit himself. He uses his position to attempt a monkish life, but refuses both the difficulty of monastic commitment (which might dimly be possible to him in some other country) and a genuine attempt at leadership. If he is not quite a hypocrite, he is at least very much a fool.

Yet for all that, he has many genuine qualities. Though his character is marred by a tendency toward sentimentality and womanishness, Henry does possess a true kindness and compassion for his fellow man. This is not invariable and he falls, as many others do, into a bloodthirsty seeking for vengeance in, for example, his charge to Talbot to punish Burgundy and in his joy at Iden's bringing forth Cade's head in his bitterness at York. Yet his concern for the misled followers of Cade is genuine, as is his remorse for the death of Gloucester and the display of York's head after Wakefield. Moreover, in the scene with the Father and Son he explores the human cost of the civil war in a way no other character does.

The scene opens with Henry describing in ironic metaphors the battle itself--the morning war between dying clouds and growing light and the combat of sea and wind--images that suggest the success and failure of both sides both in that battle and the whole war, and that also suggest the futility
of the war, the internecine struggle of natural elements. Then he repairs to a molehill, the site of York's torment and death at the hands of his viscous supporters, where he creates his fictional pastoral paradise, the shepherd's life, free from all care. As Ornstein points out, the irony mounts because as king he should have been shepherd to his people, and his failure is evidenced in the battle he is avoiding.\(^3\)

The conclusion is pathetic and self-pitying:

\[
\text{Gives not the hawthorn bush a sweeter shade} \\
\text{To shepherds looking on their silly sheep,} \\
\text{Than doth a rich embroider'd canopy} \\
\text{To kings that fear their subjects treachery?}
\]

All which secure and sweetly [the shepherd] enjoys,
Is far beyond a prince's delicates--
His viands sparkling in golden cup,
His body couched in a curious bed,
When Care, Mistrust, and Treason waits on him.\(^3\)

But then, to stop this wallowing in self-concern, appears the Son who has killed his father, a youth pressed into the king's service in London who has unknowingly killed his father, who owed allegiance to the Earl of Warwick. Henry's response to the youth's tears are his own tears finally put to worthy use:

\[
\text{O piteous spectacle! O bloody time!} \\
\text{While lions war and battle for their dens,} \\
\text{Poor harmless lambs abide their enmity.} \\
\text{Weep, wretched man; I'll aide thee tear for tear;}
\]

\(^3\)Ornstein, p. 56.

\(^3\)H VI, II, v, 42-45, 50-54.
And let our hearts and eyes, like civil war,
Be blind with tears and break o'ercharg'd with grief.\textsuperscript{33}

On top of this awful spectacle comes another as bad, perhaps
worse: the Father who has killed his son. Henry again
responds, with some illuminating rays of insight shining
through the excesses of his sorrow:

\begin{quote}
Woe above woe! grief more than common grief!
O that my death would stay these ruthless deeds!
O, pity, pity, gentle heaven, pity!
The red rose and the white are on his face,
The fatal colours of our striving houses:
The one his purple blood right well resembles;
The other his pale cheeks, methinks, presenteth.
Wither one rose, and let the other flourish?
If you contend, a thousand lives must wither.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

Henry has shown three important things here: a will-
ingness to sacrifice his own life to save those of his
countrymen; an undifferentiated prayer for his people, whichever
side; and desire to see one side win--either side--so
that the suffering might end. The self-sacrifice of the
first indicates a true Christian development, a willingness
to follow Christ's ideal ("Greater love hath no man than
this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" -- John
15: 13). At the same time, his supplication for pity is not
automatic or selfish but utterly honest, spontaneous and
sympathetic. Finally, he abandons at last his concern for
the Lancastrian cause in favor of a concern for human lives.

\textsuperscript{33} H VI, II, v, 73-78.
\textsuperscript{34} H VI, II, v, 94-102.
He sees as none other does how unjust the war is, how unnecessary and not worth the pain it causes. He would rather his enemies win than the agony be extended.

Henry's subsequent appearances do not entirely fulfill the promise of these insights. When he is captured by the gamekeepers he is regretting both his fallen grandeur and his wife's futile mission to France. He chides the men for their faithfulness to Edward IV and not to him, using the image of the feather that blows first one way and then the other in the wind. But he has clearly achieved a greater degree of true humility, for he does not long trouble the simple keepers with difficult problems of oaths and concludes with a small pun:

In God's name, lead, Your king's name must be obeyed; And what God will, that let your king perform; And what he will, I humbly yield unto.  

This humility is more completely realized when he is freed by Warwick after the latter's falling out with Edward. He generously pardons the lieutenant of the Tower, thanks God and Warwick for his release, and takes himself off the stage of politics. Henry also concludes his premonitory remarks about the boy, Richmond (the future Henry VII): "Make much of him, my lords; for this is he/Must help you more than you are hurt by me."  

[^35: H VI, III, i, 98-100.]
[^36: H VI, IV, vi, 75-76.]
of duty in his vale of tears by prophesying the even greater damage the demonic Richard will do to England before the carnage ends.

Henry remains then something other than the Christian Manheim would have him, though far more of a Christian by the end of Towton than anyone else in the plays. If his study of piety has made him only slightly less vulnerable to the sins of pride, avarice, gluttony, sloth, lust, violence and envy than before, his unhappy life has made him more conscious of the Pauline virtues of faith, hope and charity. He is unique in expressing his faith openly and actively, if sometimes rather foolishly. A few of the other characters remember God and heaven before their deaths (notably Salisbury, Bedford, Gloucester, York, Warwick). But only Henry seems to have any concept of God as immanent and judgmental to one's ordinary life. And only Henry uses that concept to create in himself a sense of community with other men and a sense of responsibility towards them.

Like his faith, Henry's sense of charity--both in the literal meaning of charity as alms and the more general meaning as loving one's neighbor--is somewhat profound and somewhat foolish. While the Simpcox episode exposes the king's credulity in his easy belief in the hoked-up miracle, the issue is not so clear as it may seem. The issue of denying alms to the underserving is an old one and there is
no easy answer. Simpcox's wife says, "Alas, sir, we did it for pure need," and we are left uncertain whether the exposure of the fraud justified the harassment and presumption of judgment by the cleverer nobles, or whether Henry's foolish belief might be the better state. Of charity in the larger sense, the experience Henry has while sitting on the molehill is unique in the three plays, and of hope, there are his dying words, "O, God forgive my sins and pardon thee"\(^3\) which complement those of his old enemy, York, "Open thy gate of mercy, gracious God,/ My soul flies through these wounds to seek out thee."\(^4\)

Throughout his life, Henry is set upon by a series of situations, almost all of which should be positive, but all of which, through his misguided attempts at goodness, his weakness of will and his confusion of spirit, he makes negative:

--His crown he both wants and does not want. He hates to give up the respect he receives and the perquisites of kingship, not to mention the leisure he quite wrongly obtains from it by allowing others to govern the realm. Yet he soliloquizes about the cares of rulership and his desire for a simpler existence in the midst of the carnage created by his clinging to it.

\(^3\) H VI, V, vi, 60.
\(^4\) H VI, I, ii, 177-178.
--His wife first cuckolds him, then despises and humiliates him publicly, but he remains faithful and loving to her to the end. She seems to care nothing for him--except as the possessor of the Lancastrian claim--and bitterly denounces his unwillingness to fight.

--His followers, first in the Lancastrian government and then in the Lancastrian army, do all manner of vile things in his name and for his ostensible benefit. He is unable to stop them and rarely offers to try. They ravage the kingdom, conspire to murder and begin the butchery that marks the civil war. Yet, though they are his partisans, they have no more respect for him than does the queen.

--His enemies are at first closer to him and of more value than his partisans. Some are natural enemies (the houses of Mortimer and York) inherited with the crown, while others (the Nevilles) are new ones created by the degenerating situation, but it is they who support the king's only real friend, Gloucester, while the king is abandoning him.

--His son is both a joy and a problem to him, for in his compromise with York he callously disinherits the boy, then when called to account by the son, promptly breaks his solemn oath. Had he not had the son, he might have simply given up the crown and found peace and quiet before his imprisonment. He continues to love the prince, even when
the latter indicates that he subscribes to the popular, contemptuous view of his father.

--His people find their loyalties divided because they are unable to look to him for the strength and leadership they need. His name, his rank, his lineage show their magic when Old Clifford uses them to undo Cade; their failure when the gamekeepers refer to him casually as "the quondam king."

The stars, as influences, recur frequently in these plays, indicating ill-luck and malign fortune, particularly Henry's. But if Henry's problems are not quite his own making, they are of his allowing. His weakness of will is exhibited not so much in his tender-heartedness and unwillingness to fight--those are martial failings that have little to do with real moral values--but in his reluctance to decide, to face hard political questions, to make judgments as guided by conscience and learning, and to follow them through to the bitter end. In this he is balanced by the other two major figures, Gloucester and York. The former had great strength of will but in his too great tolerance of evil failed to exercise it properly; the latter also had great strength of will but became too selfish in its use, so that it became an instrument at least partly of evil.

The story of the three plays is the story of Henry's weakness and what results from it. Henry, even at his end, is
less than a saint, and is martyr to nothing but the murderous policies that have run rampant for years. All the sins of the lesser characters depend on the weakness, the passivity, the dependence of Henry. It is ironic that the best charge against the king should be by his most fanatical supporter, Young Clifford, in his dying words:

...Henry, hadst thou swayed as kings should do, Or as thy father, and his father did, Giving no ground unto the house of York, They never then had sprung like summer flies; I, and then thousand others in this luckless realm, Had left no mourning widows for our death; And thou this day hadst kept thy chair in peace. For what doth cherish weeds but gentle air? And what makes robbers bold but too much lenity.\(^\text{39}\)

Edward IV says that the Yorkist claim would have slept but for the chaos wrought in court, and Henry's complaint of the fickle populace who abandon him despite his care for them cuts little ice when we remember the injustice, loss and terror of the reign of Suffolk. Henry is not a saint, but just a man, more foolish than most, perhaps, and tested harder, but subject to the same fears, doubts and sorrows. If he fails in his charge, he at least has the courage to admit it and, at the end, achieve something of the holiness that was his goal all along. His holiness is no greater than that of an ordinary man, but that is all Henry was to begin with.

\(^{39}\) 3 _H VI_, II, vi, 14-22.
Bibliography of Cited Material


