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SHAKESPEARE'S BOLINGBROKE: RHETORIC AND STYLISTICS

FROM *RICHARD II* TO *HENRY IV, PART 2*

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements to the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
DeAnna Faye Jensen

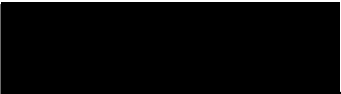
March 2004

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Approved by:


Bruce Golden, Chair, English

02/15/04
Date


~~Renée Pigeon~~

ABSTRACT

Joseph A. Porter acknowledges in *The Drama of Speech Acts: Shakespeare's Lancastrian Tetralogy* that little is written on Henry Bolingbroke. Although scholarship has begun to change since Porter made this observation in 1979, Bolingbroke still remains ancillary to the more colorful characters in *Richard II* and in *Henry IV Parts 1 & 2*.

In order to contribute to the body of work on Bolingbroke and on Shakespeare's development of character, this thesis examines various rhetorical and stylistic methods used by Shakespeare in his creation of the character of Henry Bolingbroke. One of the methods described is how Shakespeare combines historical sources such as Edward Hall and Raphael Holinshed along with his own dramatic license to bring to life the character of Henry Bolingbroke for readers and theater audiences. The thesis also surveys the way Shakespeare uses language and the rhetorical techniques of soliloquy and audience, along with his understanding of relationships, in his exploration of Bolingbroke to allow his audience to connect to the character both emotionally and psychologically. It is the intent of this thesis to show how these methods are important to our understanding of Shakespeare's development

of Bolingbroke from the opening scene in *Richard II* to his death as King Henry in act 4 of *Henry IV, Part 2*.

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This thesis has become more than the means to a goal and I am grateful to all, both named and unnamed, for all their patience and belief in me.

To my parents

JD and Maudell Dickson

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Henry Bolingbroke is the largely ignored linchpin in Shakespeare's three plays that discuss the viability and moral responsibility of monarchy. As the antagonist of Richard II, Bolingbroke is a character of whom little is written in terms of literary criticisms. He is even largely ignored by Shakespearean scholars in the two plays that carry his name as Henry IV.

This thesis will deal with that void in the analysis of these plays by examining the way Shakespeare combines the roles of antagonist and protagonist in one character. Through examination of various rhetorical devices this thesis will look at the way Shakespeare creates Bolingbroke as someone of psychological depth, which allows an audience to both empathize with Bolingbroke's dilemmas and sympathize with the motives that fix the boundaries of his personality. Furthermore, this thesis will look at how Shakespeare defines Bolingbroke as a king through a series of rhetorical constructions and speech acts, as he does for Bolingbroke's adversary, Richard II. Unlike Richard, however, the Henry Bolingbroke character carries the added weight of needing to absolve his guilt as a usurper.

Shakespeare creates a Bolingbroke who touches auditors of the bard's work first as a petitioner, then as a son, an aggrieved heir, a concerned father, and finally, as a guilt-ridden and cunning king.

Of course, the complex characterization of Shakespeare's Bolingbroke is not unique. In all of his plays, Shakespeare's central characters are fully developed; the personalities seem real because there is generally more than one impetus to their actions. We can examine any of Shakespeare's plays and see how he develops the dynamic, living characters; however, these metamorphoses are usually compressed within the confines of single plays. Only in the history plays, and especially in *Richard II* through *Henry V*, do we have the opportunity to observe key characters as they move through extended periods of time and change according to age and circumstance. Hal, Bolingbroke's son and heir, is one, and the implacable Falstaff is another. However, Henry Bolingbroke is the only character we can follow from his introduction in *Richard II* to his death in *Henry IV, Part 2*. This extended dramatic development allows auditors to witness a person who must wrangle with the supposed outrage of injustice to become the center of rebellion against a

reigning king and, at the end of his life, bear the guilty responsibility of the usurper who has no hope of forgiveness. All the while, Shakespeare presents a Henry who has the need and the desire to maintain political control when he advises Hal to "busy giddy minds/ With foreign quarrels" (2H4 4.5.213-214).

Bolingbroke's speeches in *Richard II* and *Henry IV Parts 1* and *2* are often disarming. Through the use of linguistic and rhetorical devices, Shakespeare creates an ambiguity in the character that keeps the audience sympathetic toward Henry despite his crime of regicide. Unlike the stilted historical figure described by Hall, Holinshed and others, Shakespeare presents Henry Bolingbroke as a dynamic and complex three-dimensional character.

CHAPTER TWO

SHAKESPEARE'S USE OF SOURCES IN *RICHARD II*

Between 1595 and 1598, Shakespeare wrote the three history plays that are at the center of this thesis. Most of the source material available to Shakespeare to create the character of Henry Bolingbroke in *Richard II* and the two *Henry IV* plays comes from the historians and philosophers of his era--primarily Edward Hall and Raphael Holinshed. These writers and their contemporaries, pondered and supported the notion that there was a "symbiotic relationship of mutual obligation" between the monarchy and its subjects (Taufers 27). Shakespeare takes this idea of "mutual obligation" and applies it to the actions and dilemmas faced by Henry Bolingbroke as the character moves from subject to king through *Richard II* and the two *Henry IV* plays. While Shakespeare uses these plays to explore the political and civil ramifications of usurpation as reported by Hall and Holinshed, he also examines the personal consequences that confront Bolingbroke by the way he weaves philosophy into practice.

Scholars are aware that Shakespeare does not follow the chronology exactly as laid out by the chroniclers, though he does use and manipulate events that demonstrate

the shift from the medieval God-centered philosophy that placed divine intervention over the actions of people, both rulers and ruled, to what Alison Taufer describes as the "new humanist approach to history with its emphasis on the state" (1). According to Taufer, the writings of the chroniclers were meant to "teach a political lesson in that they demonstrate which behaviors should be avoided and which embraced to insure England's well-being" (29). These are the lessons best symbolized by Shakespeare's treatment of Bolingbroke.

Shakespeare's use of Bolingbroke is pivotal to his exploration of this new humanist shift. Bolingbroke becomes a symbol, not just of the move from the medieval philosophy, but also of the consequences awaiting anyone who would disrupt the order of succession. It is through the use and adaptation of such sources as Edward Hall and Raphael Holinshed that Shakespeare is able to create a multi-faceted figure who moves believably from the role of a principled noble to, despite his mortal sin of regicide, a conscientious king.

According to Geoffrey Bullough, Shakespeare takes his lead for the opening of *Richard II* from Edward Hall who, in "An Introduccion in to the History of Kyng Henry the

Fourthe" begins his own history of Henry IV with the final year of Richard's reign (Bullough 3:362). By beginning *Richard II* with the confrontation between Bolingbroke and Mowbray, Shakespeare picks up on Hall's description of Bolingbroke as, "a prudent and politike persone" in order to present him as "initially loyal" to Richard and place him in a sympathetic light to the audience (Bullough 3:362-3, 383). The direct confrontation between Mowbray and Bolingbroke, and the implied confrontation between Bolingbroke and Richard, are taken and transformed from the beginning paragraphs of Hall's history. Hall describes the enmity between Bolingbroke and Mowbray as a betrayal of a confidence by Mowbray and thus provides a more personal rationale for the argument between the two nobles by describing Mowbray as "a deepe dissimilar and a pleasaunte flaterer" (qtd. in Bullough 3:382).

Shakespeare, on the other hand, replaces much of Hall's opening so that the death of the Duke of Gloucester, rather than concerns about Richard's misrule, supplies the background for the dissention between Mowbray and Bolingbroke. In this way, Shakespeare keeps with the initial sympathetic treatment that Hall and others use to show Bolingbroke and Mowbray both as honorable men against

the backdrop of Richard's half-hearted attempts to reconcile the two without revealing that he "little esteemed and lesse regarded the nobles and Princes of his realme" (qtd. in Bullough 3:383). The sympathetic introduction to Bolingbroke that Shakespeare uses not only accords with other historical records, but in a dramatic sense, sets up the deeper conflicts dealing with the issues bound up in the responsibilities of both the ruler and the ruled.

Hall's *Chronicle* makes up just one of many potential resources, with each author of history or drama prior to Shakespeare's three plays having some bit of information or philosophy to contribute to the final versions. However, Holinshed's *Chronicles* is deemed to be the primary source for Shakespeare. Holinshed's description of the turmoil during the last year of Richard II and the entire uneasy reign of Bolingbroke as Henry IV is much more detailed than the accounts of his contemporaries, and his implication that the "familial struggles for the throne" was a primary source for civil unrest when cousins vying for power created a rift in the loyalties of aristocracy and plebian classes alike (Taufel 24).

Though Hall's account of the conflict between Mowbray and Bolingbroke framed the opening of Shakespeare's trilogy involving the future Henry IV, those elements of Holinshed's chronicles that Shakespeare uses provides the details that shows Bolingbroke's rise to power.

Holinshed's account of Bolingbroke's banishment reported factually, and without comment, that it was a

woonder . . . to see what number of people ran after him in everie towne and street where he came, before he tooke the sea, lamenting and bewailing his departure.

(qtd. in Bullough 3:394)

Shakespeare uses Holinshed's version in Richard's assessment of Bolingbroke's "courtship to the common people" to maintain the audience's sympathy with Bolingbroke at this point, as well as foreshadow Bolingbroke's return to England in Act 2.3 and Richard's eventual downfall at Flint Castle in Act 3.4. Shakespeare repeats Holinshed's report in Bolingbroke's self-evaluation in *Henry IV, Part 1* that "Seldom seen, I was the more wondered at" (R2 1.4.24, 1H4 3.2.). Shakespeare's combination of Holinshed's report with Hall's observation of Bolingbroke as a "prudent and politike persone" at this

junction creates an ambiguity in Bolingbroke's character. In Shakespeare's version, either Henry's behavior at his banishment was carefully orchestrated to assure his success when he returned with the intent to overthrow Richard, or his initial purpose actually was only to reclaim the birthright that Richard seized upon the death of Bolingbroke's father, John of Gaunt.

Shakespeare comes by this ambiguous representation of a Bolingbroke who is potentially vulnerable to the ambitions of Northumberland and the Percys through the way that Holinshed reports that Bolingbroke "swore unto [Northumberland, et al.], that he would demand no more, but the lands that were to him descended by inheritance from his father" (qtd. in Bullough 3:158). Holinshed also reports that Bolingbroke, in an action that evidently was intended to demonstrate the veracity of his words, "undertooke to cause the payment of taxes and tallages to be laid downe, & to bring the king to good government" (qtd. in Bullough 3:158). However, in this same passage, Holinshed also describes Bolingbroke as collecting taxes and gathering an army as he moves from Doncaster to Berkley. Since, as Taufer posits, Holinshed (and the authors who kept up his work)

strove to provide [the] readers with the means to interpret and evaluate the past [. . . they included] as much documentary evidence as possible, thus enabling [the] readers to draw their own lessons from history. (21)

it is possible to see the ambiguity presented to Shakespeare and how he transferred that haziness regarding Bolingbroke and his intentions to the play.

Shakespeare continues to follow Holinshed's chronicles fairly closely in the meeting with York and with the confrontation and subsequent judgment of Bushy and Green, adding dialogue where Holinshed merely reports the events. The addition of conversation to these important events shows the metamorphosis of Bolingbroke from powerless petitioner before Richard in Act 1 to a stronger, more determined figure. Like Holinshed, Shakespeare presents a Henry Bolingbroke who seems to remain loyal to the crown and appears to take up the throne reluctantly and only after he learns that Richard "with willing soul / Adopts [Henry] heir" (R2 4.1.108-109). Shakespeare maintains the sense of ambiguity here because we cannot be sure if Bolingbroke is truly loath to ascend the throne or

if he is merely an adept politician who says what he needs to say, given the situation.

CHAPTER THREE
SHAKESPEARE'S USE OF SOURCES IN
HENRY IV, PARTS 1 AND 2

In the two *Henry IV* plays, Shakespeare is guilty only of following "chronology [for the most part] in his placement of [. . .] events [but. . .] deletes several major historical episodes" to simplify the plot line (Satin 73). It is only from Shakespeare's assessment of time through Bolingbroke that "'Tis not ten years gone," since he ascended the throne and "It is but eight years since" the battle of Shrewsbury do we get a sense of a larger movement in time (2H4 3.1.53,56). Otherwise, Shakespeare adheres more closely with Holinshed's character analysis of Henry and creates a character who is "the mixture of integrity, sternness and guile, characteristics of every successful ruler" (Satin 152).

It is in the dramatization rather than merely the recounting of history where Shakespeare departs from Holinshed in these two plays. By focusing on key events, such as the initial meeting with Northumberland, et al. and the two confrontations and resolutions with Hal, the heir apparent, Shakespeare brings forth a more psychologically rounded character.

The two interviews between Henry and his son, the Prince of Wales, are probably the best examples of how Shakespeare creates characters of depth, and how he creates, through these characters, a glimpse into the turmoil of Henry's private life as it abuts his role as king.

Holinshed spends much time describing both the meeting before the battle of Shrewsbury and the final conversation between father and son just before Henry's death. For example, Holinshed recounts that it is Hal who "got knowledge that certaine of his fathers servants were busie to give informations against him" and came to plead his innocence and "ease [his father's] heart of all such suspicion" (qtd. in Bullough 4:194). According to Holinshed, Hal goes so far as to "deliver unto the king his dagger, . . . [saying] that his life was not so deare to him, that he wished to live one daie with [Henry's] displeasure" (qtd. in Bullough 4:194). Shakespeare would be hard pressed to top such an emotional encounter, but he at least captures its intensity.

Furthermore, Shakespeare manages to weave into Act 3 Scene 2 of *Henry IV, Part 2* a glimpse into the private Henry. First, by sending for Hal, rather than Hal seeking

an audience with his father, Henry stays in a position of power. In Holinshed's account of the incident, Henry is "greevouslie diseased" (qtd. in Bullough 4:194). From this perspective, had Hal wanted to assume the throne, or had not sought to dispel the rumors, Henry would have been too weak to counter either threat. As Shakespeare presents him, however, Henry is the center of attention and we see him not only as a strong and healthy king confronted with insurrection from his former allies, but confronted with perceived rebellion within his own family. What Holinshed indicates as rumors, designed to create discord between father and son, Shakespeare makes fact. To go back to the idea that a usurper's reign cannot be a peaceful one, Hal's behavior must be seen, as Henry himself puts it, as "the hot vengeance and the rod of heaven, / To punish [his] mistreadings" (*1H4* 3.2.10-11).

Another insight into the private Henry comes in the way Shakespeare uses the tirade against Hal to once again present readers and theatergoers with a sense of doubt. Henry's brash comments that

By being seldom seen, I could not stir
But like a comet I was wondered at,

That men would tell their children, 'This is
he!'

Others would say, 'Where, which is Bolingbroke?'
And then I stole all courtesy from heaven,
And dressed myself in such humility
That I did pluck allegiance from men's hearts,
Loud shouts and salutations from their mouths,
Even in the presence of the crownèd King.

(1H4 3.2.46-54)

Shakespeare uses Bolingbroke's outburst to Hal to throw doubt on the veracity of his statement to Warwick in *Henry IV, Part 2* 3.1 that he had "no such intent" to take the crown (68). Compared to Froissart's account that Bolingbroke "was wel beloved with every man" (qtd. in Bullough 3:427), and to Richard's reflection that Bolingbroke "seemed to dive into their hearts [. . .] As were our England in reversion his, / And he our subjects next degree of hope," we are left to wonder if Henry did not, in fact, plan the coup (R2 1.4.25,35-36). It is part of Shakespeare's rhetorical pattern to leave his audience with this sense of ambiguity about Bolingbroke's veracity and the delicate balance between guilt and self-justification that the usurper king maintains and how it

surfaces in both his public and private roles.

None of Henry's condemnation of Hal's behavior is presented in Holinshed's account. Most of the passages that Shakespeare derives and transforms from the *Chronicles* are given to Hal. Shakespeare shifts the focus of Hal's ire from those "certaine . . . servants" to Hotspur and thereby shifts the affair from an internal political/familial vying for favor and power to an external threat against Henry's monarchy and, by implication, against Hal's hope for the throne.

What Shakespeare does retain from Holinshed's account is the reconciliation between parent and child. Henry announces, in Holinshed, "from thencefoorth no misreport should cause [Henry] to have him in mistrust, and this [Henry] promised of his honour" (qtd. in Bullough 4:194-5). Shakespeare repeats this in Henry's vow that Hal "shalt have charge and sovereign trust herein" (3.2.161). The effect of both the historical and the dramatic accounts creates a united front against those who would usurp the usurper.

Of course, in Holinshed, the young prince pled his case in front of "three or foure" witnesses. In Shakespeare's dramatization of history, the meeting between

the two is a private interview. Shakespeare's choice here reverts to Holinshed's sense of internal conflict. In the closing lines of *Henry IV, Part 2* 3.2 when Blunt enters and Henry announces plans to confront the Percys and that Hal will take part in the campaign, Shakespeare presents a witness to the reconciliation that is necessary to legitimize Hal's participation, which goes along with Holinshed's account, though from a different perspective. In both instances, the reconciliation can be seen to represent a state healing as much as a familial one.

Shakespeare also uses Holinshed's narrative as his model for Henry's final scene in *Henry IV, Part 2* as the usurper king lies dying in the Jerusalem Chamber, but he takes the exchange between the waning monarch and the waxing king clearly from Samuel Daniel's *Civil Wars*. The closest that Shakespeare comes to keeping with Holinshed in dialogue is to revamp Henry's "what right I had to [the crown], God knoweth" (qtd. in Bullough 4:279) to "God knows [. . .] / By what by-paths and indirect crooked ways / I met this crown, and I myself know well" (2H4 4.5.183-185). Regardless of the source, Henry's confession, if we can call it that, is vague. We still cannot discern with any certainty the depth of his culpability in Richard's

downfall. From Holinshed's view, the exchange is quite brief, as one might expect of someone fading in and out of a coma and drifting rapidly toward death. For this scene, Shakespeare takes his cue from Daniel and extends Henry's death in order to include the closest we come to a confession and a final reconciliation with his son.

In this, Henry's last scene, the idea to "busy giddy minds / With foreign quarrels, that action hence borne out / May waste the memory of the former days" (2H4 4.5.213-215) keeps more with Daniel's "But some great actions entertaine thou still / To hold their minds who else will practise ill" (qtd. in Bullough 4:284) as does the hope that the crown "shall descend with better quiet/ Better opinion, better confirmation" (2H4 4.5.187-188) with Daniel's "And let the goodness of the managing / Race out the blot of foule allayning quite" (qtd. in Bullough 4:284).

Shakespeare transforms Henry's deathbed "regret" from a sacramental rite to a political lesson and we are once again placed in the uncomfortable position of trying to determine for ourselves just how much guilt Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Lancaster, Earl of Hereford must carry to the grave.

CHAPTER FOUR

SHAKESPEARE'S USE OF NARRATIVE THROUGH SOLILOQUY

Shakespeare's art of storytelling not only entices readers to wrestle with complex issues--such as the role of monarchy and the obligations of subjects, but also invites his audiences to examine the human psyche and the complex interaction between people and how they act or react to others at a particular moment in English history.

Shakespeare creates three-dimensional characters who gossip, joke, plot, and assess themselves and others, and who move the story along through these devices and more. This chapter will explore the way Shakespeare uses narrative, especially in the form of the soliloquy, as a rhetorical device to create a rounded view of Bolingbroke.

David Scott Kastan argues that Shakespeare's method of storytelling "focuses our attention on not only the content of a story, but its motive and method as well," and that this method not only informs us of "how and why a character tells a story" but alerts us to the importance of the "information [. . .] specifically conveyed" (104).

Kastan also makes the point that "narrative [. . .] not only provides information that the teller wants told but information about the teller that he does not realize

himself" (106). As King Henry, Bolingbroke's confrontation with his son provides an ideal example of the way Shakespeare uses this dramatic structure. A primary concern for Bolingbroke is Hal's association with the Eastcheap crowd, all the rumors that are being spread about him, and his failure to attend to the business of state that is his duty as heir to the throne. Shakespeare uses Bolingbroke's angry condemnation to illuminate the deep fear that Hal will cast his lot with the Percys; just as Bolingbroke deposed Richard, his sovereign and kin, he believes that Hal will do the same to him. Shakespeare not only uses this type of conversation to chastise poor behavior, he also includes the speech to create a bond between father and son, and each of the tirades leveled against Hal is met with apology that grows even more sincere as Bolingbroke reveals more of his fear and disappointment. However, Shakespeare's purpose goes farther than to strengthen familial affection; he provides insight into the deeper concerns of the speaker. In Bolingbroke's case, it is the revelation that his own conduct provided the opportunity to steal

all courtesy from heaven,

[.]

[and] pluck allegiance from men's hearts,

[.]

Even in the presence of the crownèd King.

(1H4 3.2.50-54)

These revelations give auditors of Shakespeare's plays the opportunity to understand motives and make decisions about the veracity of the characters.

Another dramatic device that Shakespeare uses as a form of story telling is the soliloquy; it is the story a person tells himself about himself. Traditionally, when we think of soliloquies, what comes to mind are those self-searching speeches in which the character attempts to sort out his personal demons with only the audience to hear his deepest innermost thoughts. However, Shakespeare also uses the soliloquy to create background, recount events, and ponder the future.

Joseph A. Porter defines the expected conditions of soliloquy: "if no character other than the speaker is onstage, nor any [other character] is presumed [in] earshot offstage, then we [. . .] have [a] soliloquy [. . .] of the most familiar kind" (38). However, Porter argues that soliloquy is more complicated than what we have come to expect--soliloquy can occur as an aside "or in a case when

England is in the throes of an ongoing civil war and Bolingbroke's position on the throne is precarious. Those who had helped him to the throne are now his enemies. His son, despite his promise to reform, still mingles with the Eastcheap crowd. Shakespeare has left Bolingbroke's soliloquy purposefully abstract, not addressing a particular event or crisis, in order to highlight the myriad troubles that beset a monarch and how uneasily "lies the head that wears a crown" (2H4 3.1.31).

We can use Porter's extended definition that a soliloquy can also come in the form of an aside to demonstrate how Shakespeare continues Bolingbroke's self-speech when he is met by Warwick and Surrey who bring him news of his former ally, Northumberland. Here, Shakespeare uses the quasi-soliloquy to give us a time sequence. He separates Bolingbroke from his messengers in a reverie to recount how

'Tis not ten years gone

Since Richard and Northumberland, great friends,

Did feast together, and in two years after

Were they at wars. (2H4 3.1.53-56)

and only eight years ago, he counted

This Percy [. . .] the man nearest my soul,

Who like a brother toiled in my affairs
And laid his love and life under my foot

(2H4 3.1.57-9)

What signals this as an aside is the interruption at the end of line sixty when Bolingbroke seems to become aware of others and turns to Warwick to ask if he remembers Richard's now prophetic words that berated and cautioned Northumberland that he would become a

'ladder by which
My cousin Bolingbroke ascends my throne'
[.]
'The time will come'--thus did he follow it--
'The time will come that foul sin, gathering
head,
Shall break into corruption'--and so went on,
Foretelling this same time's condition,
And the division of our amity.

(2H4 3.1.64-75)

Shakespeare's application of these asides, these mini-soliloquies, creates a narrative device to fill in gaps or recall events from the earlier play. We often assume that the soliloquy provides us with information; however, we can tell from the structure of this scene that Shakespeare has

kept Bolingbroke's appeal to sleep purposely vague to use as a foreshadowing device to lead to clearer revelations about the issues that weigh on him moments later in his exchange with Warwick. Even the entrance of Warwick and Surrey doesn't keep Bolingbroke from returning to his anxious reverie about the past. Shakespeare interrupts this preoccupation to acknowledge the presence of others onstage only twice, once when Bolingbroke seems to remember their presence with the unfinished statement, "Which of you was by--" and turns to address Warwick "You, cousin Nevil, as I may remember--" (2H4 3.1.61-2). Again, when Bolingbroke interrupts his account of Richard's prophecy to protest that

Though then, God know, I had no such intent
But that necessity so bowed the state
That I and greatness were compelled to kiss--

(2H4 3.1.68-70)

there is another, though more subtle, shift from the preoccupation on Richard's prediction to a brief awareness of Warwick and Surrey. Shakespeare uses these three lines to remind his audience of Bolingbroke's meeting with Richard at Flint Castle. Shakespeare also uses Bolingbroke's drifting between distracted ruminations about

Richard and his cognizance of Warwick and Surrey to set up Warwick's observation that Bolingbroke "hath been this fortnight ill, / And these unseasoned hours perforce must add / Unto your sickness" (2H4 3.1.100-102). Warwick's lines act as a report not only to tell us about Bolingbroke's illness but also gives us another timeline through which we can track events. At the same time, Shakespeare prepares us for Henry's demise in 4.4.

CHAPTER FIVE

SHAKESPEARE'S USE OF THE ONSTAGE AUDIENCE

Initially, when we think of audience, we think of playgoers or readers of the text. They are, after all, the ultimate objective for the playwright. However, audience is not limited to the theater auditors. Audience also includes the onstage characters who act and react to each other. The dynamics of their interaction helps the theater audience make a connection to the individual characters and to the play as a whole. The main consideration of this chapter is the element of audience and how Shakespeare uses it, in conjunction with word choice and tone, in his development of Bolingbroke's character. Who maintains the power in the conversation, or if that power is shared, is part of the intricate relational dynamics that Shakespeare creates within the play. This is especially true in our examination of Bolingbroke since all three plays deal with how he acquires and maintains power.

Unlike some of Shakespeare's other historic characters, whose audiences can consist of greater numbers of people, Bolingbroke's audiences in *Richard II* and the two *Henry IV* plays remain smaller, more personal, and therefore, more intimate. The one exception occurs in the

Parliament scene in Act 4 of *Richard II*. Otherwise, the onstage audience for Bolingbroke includes Richard, Bolingbroke's father, John of Gaunt, Northumberland and the Percys, and finally Bolingbroke's own son, Hal. Although there are other onstage audiences, these four provide the best insight into Shakespeare's development of Bolingbroke as he moves from petitioner to usurper king. Conversations with these onstage audience members become the backdrop that Shakespeare uses to develop Bolingbroke as a multi-dimensional character.

Bolingbroke's interaction with Richard begins the illustration of the way Shakespeare applies this process. Even though Mowbray is Bolingbroke's immediate target, Shakespeare uses him as the proxy through which Bolingbroke accuses Richard of Gloucester's death. Harry Berger, Jr. asserts that "[while] 'other misbegotten hate' answers to Richard's 'ancient malice' and thus apparently has Mowbray as its object, the vagueness of both phrases gives them a wider sweep [. . . Bolingbroke's] 'misbegotten hate' may refer to the family feud and a motive for revenge" (154). References to the "eight thousand nobles [. . .] detained for lewd employment" that came from the king's treasury (R2 1.1.88-90), and especially to the familial relationship of

Abel's murder (R2 1.1.105), makes Richard, as indirect audience, the instigator, if not the perpetrator, of the crime. This particular layering of audience, tone and word choice, and the indirect approach that Shakespeare uses, maintains a sympathetic connection with Bolingbroke.

If audience can be thought of in terms of recipient of an action, whether verbal or physical, rather than a respondent or observer, then Shakespeare's treatment of onstage-audience fulfills this requirement. As an example, Shakespeare presents the struggle between Bolingbroke and Richard as violence deferred. The seeming agreement to the duel at Coventry, and even Richard's observations of Bolingbroke in 1.4 and again in 3.2 when Richard states that "Our lands, our lives, and all are Bolingbroke's" (151) is one way that Shakespeare builds Bolingbroke's power, as Richard seems to always acquiesce to Bolingbroke's covert threats. Through Bolingbroke's dialogue, Shakespeare is able to create a shift in power within the play by placing Bolingbroke in an ambiguous position with the theater audience and deniability with onstage characters.

In much the same pattern that Shakespeare uses to address Richard through Mowbray in Act 1, Shakespeare

presents a cautious Bolingbroke who understands that his success or failure lies during his face-off with Richard at Flint Castle. Therefore, the words and the tone of the message Bolingbroke sends to Richard must assure the King that he "sends allegiance and true faith of heart" while assuaging Bolingbroke's allies with the order to "Into his ruined ears, and thus deliver" the terms of conference (R2 3.3 34,37).

Richard reads into Bolingbroke's polite words possibly more than the duke initially intended. Though Richard finds an underlying message in Bolingbroke's words, the onstage audience that witnesses the meeting has the opportunity to accept Bolingbroke's protest "My gracious lord, I come but mine own" at face value (R2 3.3.196). The tone and word choice here is especially critical to the way Shakespeare uses audience to create the fragile balance of power and maintain the ambiguity of Bolingbroke's character.

It is through Richard's accepted understanding and consequent response that Bolingbroke remains a force of power to which Richard can only react.. This is most obvious in their final scene together

Bolingbroke

Are you contented to resign the crown?

Richard

Ay, no. No, ay ; for I must nothing be.

Therefore no no, for I resign to thee.

(R2 4.1.199-201)

Here, Shakespeare makes an important shift in tone that changes Bolingbroke from a seemingly loyal subject to a political and social peer; gone is the façade for both men. As action and reaction meet and briefly clash, Shakespeare moves Bolingbroke from petitioner to king and moves Richard from monarch to the spirit that haunts King Henry's uneasy reign.

While Shakespeare uses implied violence to move Richard toward abdication, he applies a much different tactic in garnering allies for Bolingbroke's pursuit to regain his birthright. Because Northumberland and the Percy clan are already poised to remove Richard from power, Bolingbroke's quest provides a kind of legitimacy to their quest. Northumberland, et al. are a willing audience to Bolingbroke's complaisant flattery and veiled promises that

"All my treasury / Is yet but unfelt thanks, which, more enriched, / Shall be your love and labour's recompense" (R2 2.3.60-62).

Again, Shakespeare's word choice is key; as a prudent man, Bolingbroke's character is careful not to overtly challenge Richard's crown. But words like "riches," "rewards," and "treasury," imply more than Bolingbroke's humble behavior would indicate. M. M. Mahood observes that Shakespeare's "Bolingbroke knows his words of promise to his supporters to be pure speculation. There is nothing in the bank, but if the speculation succeeds it will bring him in a wealth of power and authority" (83). Again, Shakespeare reinforces that what is at stake is the acquisition and the maintenance of power. Shakespeare balances strength and humility in Bolingbroke's character by showing him as a charismatic, yet modest man who is able to secure allies and impress upon them a grander purpose than he actually declares.

As with Richard, Shakespeare allows Northumberland and the others of Bolingbroke's audience to interpret meaning beyond what is actually stated. We see this in Northumberland's disrespect of Richard at Flint Castle in 3.3. We see the same misinterpretation when Bolingbroke's

onstage audience turns from trusting to rebellious in *Henry IV, Part 1* when Bolingbroke's allies are confronted by the puppet they thought they had set in place has broken trust. One way that Shakespeare accomplishes this change is partly by Henry's shift in status that is marked by changes in tone and word choice. No longer does he beguile those he now calls subjects. Power and the maintenance of power is foregrounded once more as Shakespeare layers tone and word choice onto Bolingbroke's direct audience to let the auditors of the plays realize the shift in the relationship between conspirators as he warns Northumberland and his company that "I will from henceforth rather be myself / Might and to be feared" (*1H4* 1.3 5-6).

In the opening of *Henry IV, Part 1*, Bolingbroke's attitude toward his former allies is a reversal of his behavior at the beginning of their alliance. The glib manner and vague promises Bolingbroke made on his return from exile marks Shakespeare's keen ability to turn Bolingbroke from peer to monarch. Through word choice and syntactical structure, Shakespeare demonstrates the social and political difference that now separates Henry from his former allies. While both parties have an interest in the kingdom, in the struggle for dominance, Henry's new

position gives him the same control over his confederates that he showed over Richard. During this entire relationship, Shakespeare always keeps Northumberland, the Percys, and others in the conspiracy in the reactive position. They can either support Bolingbroke and go along with his plans or not. Their one attempt to wrest back power in *Henry IV, Part 1* 1.3 is met with failure. Their only recourse is to attempt a second coup on the fields of Shrewsbury.

The final audiences for Bolingbroke that Shakespeare establishes involve Bolingbroke's relationship with John of Gaunt and Hal, the future Henry V. Both of these characters are important as an audience since as family, they are privy to Bolingbroke's feelings of anger and fear. By including Gaunt and Hal in the development of Bolingbroke's character, Shakespeare provides insight into the private Henry that might not be as clearly defined otherwise. The difference in these two characters, in contrast to Richard and the allies, is the way Gaunt and Hal attempt to "handle" Bolingbroke. The family dynamic Shakespeare sets up between Bolingbroke, his father and his son is interesting because it provides the only clear time when Bolingbroke shares the role of audience. The active

and reactive back and forth quality of these family conversations still remains an issue of control and signals the potential ascendancy of one--Bolingbroke's rising power--and the inevitable decline of the other demonstrated by Gaunt's waning influence. This same pattern plays out in reverse in the Jerusalem scene of *Henry IV, Part 2* as King Henry attempts to make his peace with his heir, Hal.

Gaunt, as Shakespeare presents him, provides a two-fold audience for Bolingbroke. As a member of Richard's court and inner circle, Shakespeare uses Gaunt as a bystander to the confrontation between Bolingbroke and Mowbray. As a parent, sympathetic to his son's cause, it is not improbable to believe that Gaunt understands the duality of Bolingbroke's accusations. Shakespeare uses this sympathy to explain Gaunt's apparent inability or unwillingness to control his son. Another important aspect of Gaunt's position is the dual role he plays as an advisor to Richard and father to Bolingbroke. He becomes Shakespeare's symbol of the transition of power from the old medieval order to the new monarchy that is the basis of *Richard II*.

As mentioned earlier, Gaunt is important as one of Bolingbroke's onstage audience because through him

Shakespeare gives us access to the private side of Bolingbroke. Gaunt, and later Hal, are the only two characters in the three plays for whom Shakespeare makes Bolingbroke the audience and exposes the frailty of acquiring and maintaining power.

In the case of Gaunt, this exposure is best illustrated in the banishment scene of *Richard II*. Here, Shakespeare places Bolingbroke's character in the position of audience as he listens and responds to Gaunt's insistence on euphemisms to "call it a travel thou takest for pleasure," and to "Think not that the King did banish thee / But thou the King" (R2 1.3.262,279-280). As a parent, Gaunt is attempting to undo his part in Bolingbroke's exile. Through the active and reactive quality of Bolingbroke in this scene, Shakespeare illustrates that the balance of power is moving from the aging regime represented by Gaunt to the newer generation of government that eschews the flowery speeches of Richard's court and the waning medieval philosophy that words have the power to create power.

As a symbol of the old guard, Shakespeare clearly places Gaunt in the subordinate role; his attempts to secure one word of concession fall on deaf ears as

Bolingbroke's refusal to be persuaded makes him impervious to Gaunt's needs. The shared role of audience between Bolingbroke and Gaunt, presented by Shakespeare in this instance, is the only true fulcrum where the old philosophy of government that Gaunt represents stands momentarily balanced with the new order personified by Bolingbroke. Shakespeare exposes the waning power of Richard's reign in Gaunt's fantasy that Bolingbroke say that his father "sent [him] forth to purchase honour" (R2 1.3.282). With Bolingbroke's references to "a long apprenticeship" and a "journeyman to grief" (R2 1.3.271,274), Shakespeare foreshadows the conflict that begins with Bolingbroke's return from exile and does not really end even upon his death.

Shakespeare continues the image of transition in the two *Henry IV* plays by attaching the issue of audience to the issue of power. Again, here as well as with Gaunt, the sharing of the role of audience, this time between Henry and his son Hal, presents a sense of balance between the waning, illegal monarchy and the future, more legitimate one. As with Gaunt, Shakespeare presents Hal as Bolingbroke's audience who has access to the most personal

part of King Henry, the fears and even the truths the king tells himself.

In the sense that Shakespeare uses King Henry as a pivotal symbol of the metamorphoses from the old regime of Richard to the new kind of monarchy that Hal, as Henry V, will later come to represent, Henry's speeches in 3.2 of *Henry IV, Part 1*, do more than reveal King Henry's fear of losing the throne. Shakespeare's choice of words also compares the folly of the old monarchy "As thou art to this hour was Richard then" (1H4 3.2.94) to Henry's vision of what the new leadership should be "When I from France set foot at Ravenspurgh, / And even as I was then is Percy now" (3.2.95-6). The depth of Henry's character is further developed in the shift from disciplinarian to mentor as Shakespeare moves Hal into the role of confidant in *Henry IV, Part 1*. Here, Bolingbroke's audience takes on a new dimension as Henry brags on his own prowess that allowed him to attain the throne. Shakespeare repeats Henry's doubt about Hal's loyalty as a son and as a subject in *Henry IV, Part 2* as Henry says

Dost thou so hunger for mine empty chair
That thou wilt needs invest thee with my honours
Before thy hour be ripe? [. . .]

Thou hast stolen that which after some few hours
Were thine without offence, and at my death
Thou hast sealed up my expectation.
Thy life did manifest thou lovedst me not,
And thou wilt have me die assured of it.

(2H4 4.5.95-97,102-106)

In each case, Henry's shift in attitude from anger and sadness to acceptance is denoted by Shakespeare's word choice as Henry becomes more assured of his son's fealty and trustworthiness--attributes he is more than eager to attach to a son whom he has accused of "vile participation" just a little while before. As Henry becomes more confident in Hal, Shakespeare changes his tone from disciplinarian to mentor, especially in the deathbed scene in which he instructs Hal on ways to keep peace within the kingdom "to busy giddy minds / With foreign quarrels" (2H4 4.5.213--214) and the politics of kingship.

Yet though thou standest more sure than I could
do,
Thou art not firm enough, since griefs are green;
And all my friends, which thou must make thy
friends,

Have but their stings and teeth newly ta'en out

(2H4 4.5.202--205)

As with Gaunt in *Richard II*, Shakespeare creates another tentative balance in which Henry and Hal become momentary peers. In this brief equilibrium, Hal is the only audience who has access to Henry's confession in both *Henry IV, Part 1* 3.2 and in the scene in the Jerusalem Chamber at the end of the fourth Act in *Henry IV, Part 2* when Henry tells him that only "God know, my son, / By what by--paths and indirect crooked ways / I met this crown" (2H4 4.5.183-185).

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Porter acknowledges that little is written on Henry Bolingbroke stating, "there are good reasons for [this] relative neglect" (79). His rationale includes the limited amount of time given over to the affairs of the palace versus the intrigue of the rebels, Hal's continued interaction with his common cronies, and the antics of Falstaff and his companions. Based on this rather colorful competition, Porter argues that "Henry seems less remarkable than the other[s]" who are showcased in these plays but "nevertheless, [. . .] deserve[s] more attention than he has usually received" (79). Though scholarship has begun to change since Porter made this observation in 1979, Bolingbroke still remains ancillary to the more "remarkable" characters in *Richard II* and in *Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2*, and, as I stated in an earlier part of this work, the largely ignored linchpin to these three plays.

Certainly, Shakespeare has created in Bolingbroke a character who lacks Richard's poetry and even Hal's guile. Stanley Wells calls the character unimaginative in comparison with the "lyrical" Richard. However, we cannot neglect the importance of Bolingbroke or Shakespeare's

purpose in constructing in him the underlying voice of conscience for an entire kingdom. The ongoing ambiguity that Shakespeare writes into this character personifies the dilemma between maintaining the status quo at the cost of bad government or breaking from traditional primogeniture rules of succession in order to create a better government at the cost of civil war and even the cost of salvation.

By ignoring Henry Bolingbroke, Earl of Hereford, Duke of Lancaster, and finally King Henry IV, as a viable candidate for discussion, critics and audiences alike have chosen to overlook these very important aspects of Shakespeare's achievement in these three plays.

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