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Lectures

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Henry VI, Parts One, Two, and Three

[9 October 1946]

Henry James, in a review of some novels, said that "Yes, circumstances of the interest are there, but where is the interest itself?" The first question to ask is what is the interest, the central kind of excitement inducing an author to write a work, as opposed to the wayside stimuli that may have amused him along the way. In the chronicle play, which is historical, not myth or fiction, the central interest is the search for cause and pattern, a depiction not merely of the event, but of the cause of it and its effect. *The Mirror for Magistrates* was the chief Elizabethan example of this kind of history and went through many editions and supplements from 1559 to 1587. It consists of imaginary, homiletic soliloquies by the ghosts of famous British statesmen, from Richard II to Henry VIII. Elizabethans believed that the chronicler's task was to determine causes. What is the pattern of retribution? To what extent is fortune conditioned by extrahuman causes, the stars? How does climate influence politics, how are people affected by the stars and by humors, and by the particular balances of their temperaments? *Our* interest in history is similar in this respect, if not the same. Despite the human given, however—feelings that arise through appetite, passion, and desire—skill and free choice remain the dominant interests in historical writing.

In *The Mirror for Magistrates* the character of Salisbury, who appears early in *Henry VI,* asks himself whether Henry IV's execution of his father for trying to restore Richard II, the rightful king, to the throne, was justified. He decides that his father's purpose was

> good there is no doubt.
> What cause can be more wurthy for a knight,
> Than save his king, and helpe true heires to right?

But he concludes that the means employed were violent and therefore constituted a vice: "God hateth rigour though it furder right." Under what conditions is rebellion against the prince permissible? And what is the proper character of a prince? Elizabethans believed that the King mustn't have ordered the commission of a crime in rebelling against a usurper, and that the longer a king is on the throne, the less

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right there is to rebel. If the king is a tyrant—if he won the throne by violence, in other words—rebellion is proper. In the arguments between Henry VI and Edward IV, the issue of voluntary abdication is thus important.

The characters in *Henry VI* are subordinate to the action. The main interest is the nature of the body politic, what keeps it healthy, what destroys it. *Henry VI* depicts the degeneration of a society. What *is* the nature of the body politic? Today we define "society" as a voluntary association of two or more persons to pursue a common aim: to play a game of chess, for example, or to waltz. It is assumed that the individual belongs to a society through free choice, that he shares its common aim, and that he is willing to live up to its unexpressed obligations—not to lose his temper, for example, if he loses a game of chess. The Greek body politic, the *polis*, a city-state such as Athens, consisted of native, adult males and excluded women, children, slaves, foreigners. The family is a society consisting of adults and babies—the Greeks would have excluded the babies—and parents also form a nonsocial community. Babies, who have no capacity for self-government, must be ruled by force and fraud, force including rewards as well as punishments.

In the medieval body politic, the state was a nonsocial community shot through with streaks of sociality. It was split into estates and composed of people who were not citizens of their own free will, but were people who happened to be in a particular place. Some of them were sovereign, the rest subjects, and rule was by custom and then legislation. A wife was subject to the sovereignty of her husband, a person could be subject to an overlord, and the sovereign could grant liberty to his subjects. The modern view is that the Greek model of society is the desired end point. Medieval social organization is seen as a beginning that dialectically turns into the other and is always a nursery for the other, since the class barriers are upwardly permeable and there is a correspondence between the rulers and the ruled in their way of life.

The Middle Ages see the state as a natural organism, parallel to nature, and the correspondences that are drawn between the two are carried very far. Order is natural, and human society exists as part of a great chain of being extending from God to the beasts and inanimate nature. As John Fortescue argues, there is a correspondence between the high and the low, the hot and the cold, and everything occupies an inferior as well as superior position. Since the whole chain of being is regulated by God, so specifically is the human race. Fortescue maintains that man can descend in the chain and transform himself into the beast nearest his

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own sensuality. Greeks as well as the Middle Ages saw nature as macrocosm, man as microcosm, with a teleological relation between the two. In the Renaissance, outside of Shakespeare, and in the eighteenth century, it was understood that God made nature and man made machines. Today, nature is studied by scientists, man by historians.

Henry VI consists of three plays dealing with breakdown. The ruling class cannot rule themselves. Henry VI can rule his own self, which is immanent, but not other selves, which are transient, and the play shows a society sinking back to a nonsocial herd. Henry V was a success—we'll take up Shakespeare's personal view of him later. Henry IV was a usurper. Richard II was a bad king, but not a tyrant. The child king, Henry VI, affords an opportunity—it is not a necessity for things to go wrong.

In *Henry VI, Part One*, we are initially introduced to two generations. Gloucester and Bedford are brothers of the late king, and Gloucester is a good character. At the beginning, the bad character—he's too ambitious—is the Bishop of Winchester, later Cardinal, who is of a generation before Gloucester. The quarrel between Gloucester and Winchester is ominous. Three messengers appear—as in the Book of Job. The first reports the loss of the provinces, the second the unity of the French and the crowning of the Dauphin, and the third the capture of Talbot through the cowardice of Sir John Fastolfe. At the end of the opening scene, all the characters go off to do good except Winchester, who stays to plot how he can gain power. In the next scene, Joan of Arc is introduced. It is suggested that she has been sent to punish the English and "to be the English scourge" (Pt.1, I.ii.129). In the duels between Joan and Talbot, Joan is represented as alternately a witch and a heroic rival. She shows that she is a witch by reversing the natural order and beating Charles in a duel. The Mayor of London issues a proclamation against the violent quarrel between Gloucester and Winchester. In the three remaining scenes of Act I, Salisbury is killed by a boy's gun, Talbot is worsted in his first duel with Joan through her witchery, and Joan and the French enter Orleans in triumph. In the next act the tables are turned. Talbot makes a sally at night and drives the French out.

We are then introduced to the quarrel between the houses of the red rose of Somerset and the white rose of Richard Plantagenet, later Duke of York. Initially the dispute is not dynastic, but about the restoration of Richard's titles, despite attainder. Somerset says that Richard stands "attainted, / Corrupted, and exempt from ancient gentry" by the execution of his father, Richard Earl of Cambridge, for treason (Pt.1, II.iv.92–93).

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Richard answers that his father "was attached, not attainted; / Condemn'd to die for treason, but no traitor" (96–97), and that he merits the restoration of his titles. He is right in this argument. Suffolk, when asked by Richard to judge the case, excuses himself, saying:

> Faith, I have been a truant in the law
> And never yet could frame my will to it,
> And therefore frame the law unto my will.
>
> (Pt.1, II.iv.7–9)

Warwick gives a foxy argument:

> Between two hawks, which flies the higher pitch—
> Between two dogs, which hath the deeper mouth—
> Between two blades, which bears the better temper—
> Between two horses, which doth bear him best—
> Between two girls, which hath the merriest eye—
> I have perhaps some shallow spirit of judgment;
> But in these nice sharp quillets of the law,
> Good faith, I am no wiser than a daw.
>
> (Pt.1, II.iv.11–18)

But Warwick plucks the white rose of Plantagenet. Suffolk chooses the red rose of Somerset.

The introduction of Richard's uncle, the imprisoned and dying Mortimer, in the next scene (Pt.1, II.v) recalls the atmosphere of an earlier era and an earlier injustice, the usurpation of Richard II's crown by Henry IV and the denial of Mortimer's rights. Mortimer encourages Richard, but Richard still seeks only "to be restored to my blood" (Pt.1, II.v.128). Disorder spreads between the men of Winchester and Gloucester, and Gloucester tries to patch up the quarrel. Richard is restored to his titles, but the feud with Somerset keeps things on the boil. In a battle at Rouen, first Joan triumphs, then Talbot, and subsequently Joan wins over Burgundy with an appeal to French patriotism that does not fit in with the idea of her as witch. In Paris, Talbot strips Sir John Fastolfe of the garter, the English learn that Burgundy has defected to Charles, and we see a quarrel between Vernon and Basset (Pt.1, IV.i), the whole sequence suggesting a contrast between French unity and English dissension. At Bordeaux Talbot and his son are killed because of the rivalry between Someset and York, which prevents their bringing aid to him. Talbot is betrayed now not by cowardice, or the "force of France," but by English civil dissension, "the fraud of England." (Pt.1, IV.iv.36). The wars

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with France had been begun by Henry IV and Henry V to distract attention from the rights of Richard II. Since these wars had not succeeded, an attempt is now made to seek peace with France through the marriage of Henry VI with the daughter of Armagnac. Joan loses power and is captured. Suffolk builds up Margaret of Anjou, his candidate to be Henry's queen, partly out of love for Margaret, partly because he wishes to increase his power by controlling her. Henry makes the mistake of accepting Margaret, thereby alienating both Gloucester and York. Henry's fault is weakness before a more passionate and clever nature than his own. No murder or treason is represented in *Henry VI, Part One*—allowing the death of Talbot is not deliberate.

Part Two is the most dramatically satisfactory of the three parts. It shows the fall of Gloucester, as well as the rise in York's fortune and the decline in his character. Henry VI, York, Gloucester: each has some of the qualities necessary for a good king. York has the best claim to the title and a more powerful character. He combines the lion and the fox. Henry is weak and disinterested, a pelican. Gloucester combines the lion and the pelican, not the fox, and displays overt signs of disloyalty. Two sides are formed: Gloucester, Salisbury, York, and Warwick on one, Winchester, Buckingham, Somerset, and Suffolk on the other. York has separate ends in mind. Both Buckingham and Somerset hope to get rid of Winchester and fight it out between themselves. The marriage of Henry and Margaret of Anjou draws the lines. Witchcraft is now English, not French. The Duchess of Gloucester resorts to witchcraft to gain power, and Suffolk and the Cardinal provide an *agent provacateur* for her. The masses begin to talk of the Duke of York as the rightful heir to the crown. An apprentice accuses his master of high treason for making that suggestion, providing an opportunity for Gloucester to decide that Somerset, not York, should be Regent of France. He thereby alienates York. The Duchess of Gloucester is caught out practicing witchcraft, and the Duke of Gloucester is forced to resign as Protector, against Henry's better judgment. The episode of Simpcox, a poor man whose claim that his sight has been restored by a miracle is easily exposed, juxtaposes the use of false magic, because of poverty, against the use of true magic by the Duchess to gain power. York gets Salisbury and Warwick to acknowledge his right to be king and lets Suffolk and the Lancastrians get rid of Gloucester, who is murdered. Warwick is shocked, and he uses the opportunity to get rid of Suffolk, who is banished. The Cardinal, who is also responsible for the murder of Gloucester, dies in terror. Suffolk is executed by pirates. He had himself behaved like a bandit.

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York then eggs on Jack Cade's rebellion, which provides some of the best scenes in the trilogy. Society ends in the *Lumpenproletariat* with Cade as its leader. He attacks lawyers and proposes a communist utopia to rally his supporters:

> *Cade.* Be brave then, for your captain is brave and vows reformation. There shall be in England seven halfpenny loaves sold for a penny; the three-hoop'd pot shall have ten hoops, and I will make it felony to drink small beer. All the realm shall be in common, and in Cheapside shall my palfrey go to grass; and when I am king, as king I will be—
>
> *All.* God save your Majesty!
>
> *Cade.* I thank you, good people. There shall be no money; all shall eat and drink on my score; and I will apparel them all in one livery, that they may agree like brothers and worship me their lord.
>
> *Butch.* The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers.
>
> *Cade.* Nay, that I mean to do. Is not this a lamentable thing, that of the skin of an innocent lamb should be made parchment? that parchment, being scribbled o'er, should undo a man? Some say the bee stings; but I say 'tis the bee's wax; for I did but seal once to a thing, and I was never mine own man since.
>
> (Pt.2, IV.ii.69–90)

A Clerk is brought in as a prisoner:

> *Weav.* The clerk of Chatham. He can write and read and cast accompt.
>
> *Cade.* O monstrous!
>
> *Weav.* We took him setting of boys' copies.
>
> *Cade.* Here's a villain!
>
> *Weav.* Has a book in his pocket with red letters in't.
>
> *Cade.* Nay, then he is a conjurer.
>
> *Butch.* Nay, he can make obligations and write court-hand.
>
> *Cade.* I am sorry for't. The man is a proper man, of mine honour. Unless I find him guilty, he shall not die. Come hither, sirrah. I must examine thee. What is thy name?
>
> *Clerk.* Emanuel.
>
> *Butch.* They use to write it on the top of letters. 'Twill go hard with you.
>
> *Cade.* Let me alone. Dost thou use to write thy name? or hast thou a mark to thyself, like an honest plain-dealing man?

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> *Clerk.* Sir, I thank God, I have been so well brought up that I can write my name.
>
> *All.* He hath confess'd! Away with him! He's a villain and a traitor!
>
> *Cade.* Away with him, I say! Hang him with his pen and inkhorn about his neck.
>
> (Pt.2, IV.ii.92–117)

Soon afterwards, a soldier is killed for calling Cade by his name:

> *Cade.* Now is Mortimer lord of this city. And here, sitting upon London Stone, I charge and command that, of the city's cost, the pissing conduit run nothing but claret wine this first year of our reign. And now henceforward it shall be treason for any that calls me other than Lord Mortimer.
>
> Enter a *Soldier*, running.
>
> *Sold.* Jack Cade! Jack Cade!
>
> *Cade.* Knock him down there.
>
> *They kill him.*
>
> (Pt.2, IV.vi.1–9)

The crowd, Cade's "rabblement," subsequently loses the power of choice, yielding successively to the speeches of Clifford and Cade. Clifford challenges the crowd to declare their allegiance to the heroic Henry V as well as the present king, and all respond, "God save the King! God save the King!" (Pt.2, IV.viii.19). Cade answers, "What, Buckingham and Clifford, are ye so brave? And you, base peasants, do ye believe them? Will you needs be hang'd with your pardons about your necks?" All then cry, "We'll follow Cade! We'll follow Cade!" (20–23, 35). Clifford again invokes Henry V as well as the crowd's fear of the French, and all cry "A Clifford! a Clifford! We'll follow the King and Clifford" (56). Cade flees and is eventually slain by Alexander Iden of Kent, a contented private citizen who provides contrast and is what Henry VI would like to be if he didn't have to be King. In the last Act of Part Two, York returns in rebellion. Warwick and Salisbury show treachery to Henry, civil war ensues, and the first battle of St. Albans is fought. Old Clifford is killed and his son vows a blood feud. At the end of Part Two, Edward and Richard, the sons of York, appear for the first time.

The third part of *Henry VI* is difficult because it portrays complete disorder and gets a little tedious. Warwick has joined York, and the third part opens with Henry's suggestion that he stay on the throne till his

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death and that York succeed him. Queen Margaret says no, and prepares to fight. At the battle of Wakefield, Margaret achieves victory, Clifford kills the young Earl of Rutland, denying his plea to live, and he and Margaret mock York and finally stab him. Another Lancastrian victory is reported at the second battle of St. Albans. At the battle of Towton, first the Lancastrians then the Yorkists prevail. Young Clifford is killed.

A deliberate parallel is drawn between the molehill upon which York is made to stand at Wakefield before he is killed (Pt.3, I.iv.67–69) and the molehill upon which Henry later sits at Towton as he observes the fluctuating battle and imagines the content he would have if he were a simple shepherd:

> Would I were dead, if God's good will were so!
> For what is in this world but grief and woe?
> O God! methinks it were a happy life
> To be no better than a homely swain;
> To sit upon a hill, as I do now,
> To carve out dials quaintly, point by point,
> Thereby to see the minutes how they run—
> How many makes the hour full complete,
> How many hours brings about the day,
> How many days will finish up the year,
> How many years a mortal man may live.
>
> (Pt.3, II.v.19–29)

Just after Henry's soliloquy, "Enter a *Son* that hath kill'd his Father, at one door, [dragging in the body]" and then "Enter, at another door, a *Father* that hath kill'd his Son, bearing of his Son['s body]" (Pt.3, II. v.54, 78). Shakespeare relies on such ritualistic techniques in the early part of his career, leaves them in his middle period, and returns to them in the final plays.

Henry goes to Scotland, Edward sends Warwick to woo France's daughter, and Margaret makes her own plea to France. Henry meanwhile is captured, and Edward, who has been proclaimed King, woos and marries Lady Grey, a widow—and here it's a demonstration of lust, not weakness. Warwick switches sides, surprises Edward, and removes his crown. Richard contrives Edward's escape. Clarence goes over to Warwick. Edward surprises Henry. At the battle of Barnet, Clarence having switched sides, Warwick is defeated and killed. Queen Margaret and the young Prince Edward are captured, and King Edward, Clarence, and Richard stab and kill the prince in front of Margaret. Richard wishes to

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kill Margaret too, but is prevented. He does, however, kill Henry. "For this (amongst the rest)," he says, "was I ordain'd." He exults as Henry bleeds: "What? Will the aspiring blood of Lancaster / Sink in the ground? I thought it would have mounted" (Pt.3, V.vi.57, 61–62). In the same soliloquy, he also says that he has "neither pity, love, nor fear," and proclaims that

> I have no brother, I am like no brother;
> And this word "love," which greybeards call divine,
> Be resident in men like one another,
> And not in me! I am myself alone.
>
> (Pt.3, V.vi.68, 80–83)

Richard also has a much longer soliloquy in the earlier scene of Edward's wooing of Lady Grey, in which he broods on his future. It is Shakespeare's first great soliloquy. After itemizing the obstacles that lie between him and the throne, Richard says,

> Well, say there is no kingdom then for Richard:
> What other pleasure can the world afford?
> I'll make my heaven in a lady's lap
> And deck my body in gay ornaments
> And witch sweet ladies with my words and looks.
> O miserable thought! And more unlikely
> Than to accomplish twenty golden crowns!
> Why, love forswore me in my mother's womb;
> And, for I should not deal in her soft laws,
> She did corrupt frail nature with some bribe
> To shrink mine arm up like a wither'd shrub;
> To make an envious mountain on my back,
> Where sits deformity to mock my body;
> To shape my legs of an unequal size;
> To disproportion me in every part,
> Like to a chaos, or an unlick'd bear-whelp,
> That carries no impression like the dam.

He concludes the soliloquy by affirming his desire for the crown:

> And I—like one lost in a thorny wood,
> That rents the thorns and is rent with thorns,
> Seeking a way and straying from the way,
> Not knowing how to find the open air
> But toiling desperately to find it out—

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> Torment myself to catch the English crown;
> And from that torment I will free myself
> Or hew my way out with a bloody axe.
> Why, I can smile, and murther whiles I smile,
> And cry "Content!" to that which grieves my heart,
> And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,
> And frame my face to all occasions.
> I'll drown more sailors than the mermaid shall;
> I'll slay more gazers than the basilisk;
> I'll play the orator as well as Nestor,
> Deceive more slily than Ulysses could,
> And, like a Sinon, take another Troy.
> I can add colours to the chameleon,
> Change shapes with Proteus for advantages,
> And set the murtherous Machiavel to school.
> Can I do this, and cannot get a crown?
> Tut, were it farther off, I'll pluck it down.
>
> (Pt.3, III.ii.146–62, 174–95)

Richard is Shakespeare's first big character.

D. H. Lawrence says, in one of his poems, that he marvels when he reads Shakespeare, that "such trivial people" can speak in "such lovely language":

> Lear, the old buffer, you wonder his daughters
> didn't treat him rougher,
> the old chough, the old chuffer.
>
> And Hamlet, how boring, how boring to live with,
> so mean and self-conscious, blowing and snoring
> his wonderful speeches, full of other folk's whoring!
>
> And Macbeth and his Lady, who should have been choring,
> such suburban ambition, so messily goring
> old Duncan with daggers!
>
> How boring, how small Shakespeare's people are!
> Yet the language so lovely! like the dyes from gas-tar.

Lawrence's view of Shakespeare's characters seems to me not altogether unjust, but also not quite satisfying. After all, aren't we all SOB's? Kipling's poems show Shakespeare's characters everywhere, in Sapphic verse.

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Richard III

[16 October 1946]

Henry VI is a general history. *Richard III* concentrates on an individual character: the character of a villain. There is a difference between a villain and one who simply commits a crime. The villain is an extremely conscious person and commits a crime consciously, for its own sake. Aaron in *Titus Andronicus* is an early example of the villain in Shakespeare. Barabas in *The Jew of Malta*, another crude villain, is an example in Marlowe. In appearance these characters—a Jew, a Moor, a hunchback—are all outside the norm. Barabas announces,

> As for myself, I walk abroad o' nights
> And kill sick people groaning under walls:
> Sometimes I go about and poison wells.

Aaron, after his capture, wishes he had done a "thousand more" evils:

> Even now I curse the day (and yet I think
> Few come within the compass of my curse)
> Wherein I did not some notorious ill:
> As kill a man, or else devise his death;
> Ravish a maid, or plot the way to do it;
> Accuse some innocent, and forswear myself;
> Set deadly enmity between two friends;
> Make poor men's cattle break their necks;
> Set fire on barns and haystacks in the night
> And bid the owners quench them with their tears.
>
> (V.i.125–34)

And Richard boasts, as we have seen, in his long soliloquy in the third part of *Henry VI*, that he "can smile, and murther whiles I smile," "drown more sailors than the mermaid shall," "slay more gazers than the basilisk," "and set the murtherous Machiavel to school" (III.ii.182, 186–87, 193).

Richard's opening monologue in *Richard III* is similar to the earlier soliloquy, though there is a slight difference in tone. Saying he is "rudely stamp'd" and wants "love's majesty," he announces that he is not made "to court an amorous looking glass" and has "no delight to pass away the time,"

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> Unless to see my shadow in the sun
> And descant on mine own deformity.
> And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
> To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
> I am determined to prove a villain
> And hate the idle pleasures of these days.
>
> (I.i.14–16, 25–31)

Richard III's monologue is not unlike Adolf Hitler's speech to his General Staff on 23 August 1939, in its utter lack of self-deception. The lack of self-deception is striking because most of us invent plausible reasons for doing something we know is wrong. Milton describes such rationalization in *Paradise Lost* in Eve, both before she eats the fruit of the forbidden tree and afterwards, when she justifies inducing Adam to eat:

> So dear I love him, that with him all deaths
> I could endure, without him live no life.
>
> (*PL*.IX.832–33)

Eve makes this profession of love for Adam at the moment when she is, in effect, planning to kill him.

Villains are of particular interest to artists, and there are more examples of them in art than in life. Because language is the medium of literature, people who are usable in literary works have to be conscious people. They are one of two types: (1) people who are not really conscious but who are made to be so, and (2) actually educated people, for whom artists have a natural bias. That's why most works about peasants are boring—literary works consist mostly of people's remarks. Movies do a better job with less articulate people. Drama accentuates the literary problem: characters in plays must be more verbally explicit than in novels or in life, and if they rationalize, they confuse an audience. Elizabethan drama, in addition, has the convention of characters stepping outside themselves and becoming a chorus. This puts an additional premium on highly aware characters. Richard always displays a consciousness of his ultimate goal as he is getting rid of his enemies: "My thoughts aim at a further matter. I / Stay not for the love of Edward but the crown" (*3 Henry VI*, IV.i.125–26). There is a premium on villains as interesting bad characters rather than on simple people.

Let's look now at Richard's soliloquy in *Richard III* when he awakens at Bosworth Field, after dreaming of the ghosts of people whom he has killed:

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> What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by.
> Richard loves Richard: that is, I am I.
> Is there a murtherer here? No. Yes, I am.
> Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason why—
> Lest I revenge myself upon myself?
> Alack, I love myself. Wherefore? For any good
> That I myself have done unto myself?
> O no! Alas, I rather hate myself
> For hateful deeds committed by myself.
> I am a villain. Yet I lie, I am not.
> Fool, of thyself speak well. Fool, do not flatter.
> My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
> And every tongue brings in a several tale,
> And every tale condemns me for a villain.
> Perjury, perjury, in the high'st degree,
> Murther, stern murther, in the dir'st degree,
> All several sins, all us'd in each degree,
> Throng to the bar, crying all "Guilty! guilty!"
> I shall despair. There is no creature loves me;
> And if I die, no soul shall pity me;
> Nay, wherefore should they, since that I myself
> Find in myself no pity to myself?
>
> (V.iii.183–204)

This soliloquy needs to be glossed. There are two different senses to Richard's continual use of the terms "I" and "myself," and some light can be thrown on how to distinguish them by looking at Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*. When Peer is in the Troll Kingdom seeking to marry the Troll King's daughter, the King tells him that the common saying among men is, "Man, to thyself be true!" but that among the Trolls the saying is, "Troll, to thyself be—enough!" The trolls tie a tail on Peer, they serve him strange food, and they put on a show of ugly dances for him. When Peer reacts by telling the truth about what he sees despite his best intentions, the Troll King tries to persuade him to have his eye cut out in order to become like the Trolls and "cure this troublesome human nature." Peer refuses. He is only willing to do something that he can undo. Truth always creeps in.

There are two poles of the self: the essential self and the existential self. Hunter Guthrie remarks that when he talks of the essence of a thing, he means its nature. The essential self has a personal responsibility to its

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name and must live up to it. The essential self is always potential, a self in the process of realization. It is also a self that, since it is based on a common human nature, is central for communication and is mutually comprehensible and universal. Existence is not necessary to the essential self—characters in books have essential selves, our dead friends have essential selves. It is a characteristic of essence to want to come into being, into existence, and this characteristic is displayed in the anxiety of the weak to become strong, of the potential to become actual. The essential self wishes to be self-sufficient—internally, from compassion, externally, from other selves. Its method for dealing with external threats is to absorb, annihilate, or flee. It desires self-realization. As hunger is to food, and the desire for knowledge is to knowledge, so is the essential self to the potential it wishes to realize. It wants admiration and fears a stronger external object. The ideals of the essential self are also relative. For the Greeks, the ideals of the self were strength, beauty, and freedom from sorrow. The purpose of religious practices, for the essential self, is to prevent the hostile interest of stronger external objects.

The existential self is different: it is aware of being in the world now, it is complete, not potential, and it is contingent and unstable. Existence is not mine, a given, but depends on others. Its anxiety is different as well. The existential self is a lonely self that seeks a stronger other self to which it wishes to be attached. It seeks an infinitely strong outside appearance, it fears other objects as too weak, and it wants to be loved as it is now. Its God is not Greek, but the Absolute, and the ground of its Absolute is not logical—the Aristotelian self-sufficient, unknowable, uncaring Unmoved Mover—but an Absolute that cares infinitely. Hatred is not better than love for the existential self, but it is better than indifference. It has an admiration of quality and a love for a qualitative self. The existential self wants to be known. The essential self wants to know, and it asks for ability, not ethical importance, which is the quest of the existential self.

Look in the mirror. What does one see? One sees an object known by others, an essence. The image lacks the anxiety of the original because its existence is derived from me. What is the fascination of acting? The actor is an existing individual who expresses an essence other than his, but this essence is not anxious and does not need to become real, since the role that is played is only a possibility. Most of us make a compromise between our essential and existential selves. Parents give us affection and respect our merits, so our existential anxiety is assuaged. We seek

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public approval or love, and avoid public disapproval. In return for that, we abandon some objectives of the essential self so as to be loved. Most of us, most of the time, avoid the anxiety of making real choices, either by making our surroundings varied and exciting enough to keep us in a state of passion that can dictate what we do—we have our cake and eat it too—or by repressing all but one alternative so that no choice is available because all others have been repressed. Choice means willing unhappiness.

What about a person in an exceptional situation? As a hunchback, Richard III is exceptionally aware of his loneliness because his self is rejected by others and he despairs of attachment. He must either seek a real absolute to surrender to or he must make one up—make his essential self a not-self and absolutely strong so that he can worship it. His essential self is pushed into competition because it must constantly be tested to see whether it's strong enough. The existential drive of Don Giovanni is indifferent to the individuality of the girls he seduces. He keeps an impersonal list of them. The Greek gods were more selective: people they seduced had to be beautiful, and they forgot about their previous affairs. The existential drive devolves into an infinite series, not to satisfy the essential self, which wants only relief from tension, but—despite corns, tiredness—to satisfy the need for other selves, acquired either by absorption or murder.

Murder is different from other injuries: the thief may repent in a theft, the victim may forgive in a rape. Neither is possible in murder. There is a difference between anti-Negroes and anti-Semites. To anti-Semites, Jews represent a threat to existence, to anti-Negroes, Negroes are a threat to the essential self. The Southerner doesn't wish to destroy all Negroes. He is anxious that they should exist as servants. The anti-Semite wishes the Jews not to be. If the essential self despairs of the possibility of becoming strong, its recourse is the opposite of Don Giovanni's—it wishes suicidally, like Tristan, to annihilate the self and be absorbed into another.

What about Richard III? In the beginning he is a hunchback with a strong physique for whom people feel either pity or fear—fear because his physical appearance must reflect his inner nature. He is the opposite of the actor, who deliberately projects a different personality from his own. Here people draw conclusions that Richard doesn't intend. In the beginning he attempts to imitate his father, whom he admires: "Methinks 'tis prize enough to be his son" (*3 Henry VI*, II.i.20). But he over-

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compensates. Because he feels people will believe what they see him do, not what they hear him say—how could they believe him, looking as he does?—he first distrusts words and believes only in deeds. Thus, as he ostentatiously throws down Somerset's head, he says, "Speak thou for me, and tell them what I did" (*3 Henry VI*, I.i.16), and in the scene in which he kills Somerset, he declares, "Priests pray for enemies, but princes kill" (*2 Henry VI*, V.ii.71).

Richard discovers the power of words when his father decides not to seize the crown from Henry because of an oath he had sworn to him "that he should quietly reign." Richard playfully makes up a specious verbal justification for him to violate his oath:

> An oath is of no moment, being not took
> Before a true and lawful magistrate
> That hath authority over him that swears.
> Henry had none, but did usurp the place.
> Then, seeing 'twas he that made you to depose,
> Your oath, my lord, is vain and frivolous.
> Therefore to arms!
>
> (*3 Henry VI*, I.ii.15, 22–28)

His father immediately grasps at this speech. He watches his brother Edward have a similar initial hesitation when news is brought of their father's death. Edward, for whom the news is horrible and who does not like to think of its advantage to him, says to the messenger, "O, speak no more, for I have heard too much!" But Richard declares, "Say how he died, for I will hear it all" (*3 Henry VI*, II.i.47–48), and he soon persuades his brother to take arms as well:

> Shall we go throw away our coats of steel
> And wrap our bodies in black mourning gowns,
> Numb'ring our Ave-Maries with our beads?
>
> (*3 Henry VI*, II.i.160–62)

There is a complete difference between Richard's monologues and his conversations with others. He starts out his career with people thinking him other than he is—he's fairly decent. *Then* he makes people think him good when he's really bad. Instead of being a true mirror to his self, he is a false mirror, one that makes people look and see what they want to see, as Hastings does in *Richard III*, for example, just moments before Richard has him executed:

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> I think there's never a man in Christendom
> Can lesser hide his love or hate than he,
> For by his face straight shall you know his heart.
>
> (III.iv.51–53)

As a hunchback, Richard doesn't court people to be liked. He knows you exist anyway. "I'll make my heaven," he says,

> to dream upon the crown
> And, whiles I live, t'account this world but hell
> Until my misshap'd trunk that bears this head
> Be round impaled with a glorious crown.
>
> (*3 Henry VI*, III.ii.168–71)

His brother Edward allays his anxiety by chasing one girl after another. Richard is not envious of Edward's success itself—he eventually has his own success with Anne. What he does envy is Edward's easy satisfaction with a love that has nothing to do with his nonqualitative self. Richard really wants to be loved for himself alone—not for his beauty, if he had it, or his cleverness, but for his essential self. Each person desires that. What people are in the habit of calling love is the reflection of their self-love, which is why we love or want to love people like us or like what we want to be. This is impossible for Richard, since he will not ever look like other people.

Following his realization of how his father needs a rationalization for action comes Richard's great soliloquy of the "thorny wood" (*3 Henry VI*, III.ii.124ff.), where he hasn't yet made any plans but is trying to find out what he wants. The problem is crucial for him because what he calls "this weak piping time of peace" in *Richard III* (I.i.24) is near at hand. War solves existential anxiety. The number of suicides declines in wartime. There is a Charles Addams cartoon of a little man with an umbrella—his bourgeois umbrella suggesting a magician's wand—engaged in a life-and-death struggle with a large octopus that has emerged from a manhole in the middle of a residential street in New York. A crowd watches, saying nothing. Behind the crowd, two men with briefcases are walking along without bothering to turn their heads, and one is saying, "It doesn't take much to collect a crowd in New York." The individual exists because he is struggling for existence, the crowd exists by watching—they have both *Schadenfreude* and the feeling that "nothing ever happens to me." The two men exist negatively: whatever the crowd does, they do the opposite. In time of war Richard is needed. His postwar planning is

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more acute because he is more isolated and even more conscious than usual.

Richard is not ambitious in an ordinary sense. He's not interested in becoming king for the position of power, but because becoming king is so difficult. He is not so much interested in simply making people do what he wants them to do: what excites him is that they themselves don't want to do it. The wooing of Anne is a good example. The first stage of his seduction is his frank admission of his murders of members of her family, which appeals to Anne's desire for strength—her existential character. Second, he dares her to kill him and offers to kill himself at her orders, thereby treating her as infinitely strong, with his own existence deriving from hers:

> Then bid me kill myself, and I will do it.
> [*Rises, and takes up his sword.*]
> *Anne.* I have already.
> *Rich.* That was in thy rage.
> Speak it again, and even with the word
> This hand, which for thy love did kill thy love,
> Shall for thy love kill a far truer love.
> To both their deaths shalt thou be accessary.
> *Anne.* I would I knew thy heart.
> *Rich.* 'Tis figur'd in my tongue.
>
> (I.ii.186–93)

When Anne succumbs, Richard exults not in the prospect of possessing her, but in having won her against such odds:

> Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?
> Was ever woman in this humour won?
> I'll have her, but I will not keep her long.
> What? I that kill'd her husband and his father
> To take her in her heart's extremest hate,
> With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes,
> The bleeding witness of my hatred by,
> Having God, her conscience, and these bars against me,
> And I no friends to back my suit withal
> But the plain devil and dissembling looks?
> And yet to win her—all the world to nothing?
> Ha! . . .
> I do mistake my person all this while!
> Upon my life, she finds (although I cannot)

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> Myself to be a marv'llous proper man.
> I'll be at charges for a looking glass
> And entertain a score or two of tailors
> To study fashions to adorn my body.
> Since I am crept in favour with myself,
> I will maintain it with some little cost.
> But first I'll turn yon fellow in his grave,
> And then return lamenting to my love.
> Shine out, fair sun, till I have bought a glass,
> That I may see my shadow as I pass.
>
> (I.ii.227–38, 252–63)

Richard is superstitious. He is anxious about being named Duke of Gloucester: "Let me be Duke of Clarence, George of Gloucester; / For Gloucester's dukedom is too ominous" (*3 Henry VI*, II.vi.106–7). He sees a bad omen in the gates of York being locked:

> The gates made fast? Brother, I like not this!
> For many men that stumble at the threshold
> Are well foretold that danger lurks within.
>
> (*3 Henry VI*, IV.vii.10–12)

And he is very troubled that the sun is not shining at Bosworth field:

> Who saw the sun to-day?
> *Rat.* Not I, my lord.
> *Rich.* Then he disdains to shine; for by the book
> He should have brav'd the East an hour ago.
> A black day will it be to somebody.
>
> (V.iii.278–81)

Superstition treats inanimate objects and accidents as if they were intentional. The greater the success a man has in mastering the wills of others, the greater becomes the importance of the unintentional, the uncontrollable. Very strong-willed people are apt to believe in fate and signs—Carmen reading the cards, for example. In playing cards, if I lose because of my own mistakes in play, I do not mind. But if I lose because of consistently bad cards, I get mad because I am not getting the cards I think I should get. I consider it a good omen for the day if a subway train pulls in just in time for me to board it. If it pulls out of the station just as I come in, I regard it as a bad omen. But I do not think it is the driver who is responsible. I blame the train. For thinking beings are obviously controllable, but inanimate objects are not. Richard is doomed to failure in

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proportion to his success because ultimately if he controlled all souls, he'd be thrown back on existential anxiety: what support can he have for his own existence? So he must always make enemies, for then he can be sure he exists.

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