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SHAKESPEARE'S EMERGENT FORM

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A Study of the Structures of the HENRY IV Plays

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INTRODUCTION

In 1787 Edmund Malone suggested Shakespeare might not have been the original author of the three parts of *Henry VI*.¹ Since then a number of scholars, dedicated to the principle that Shakespeare never wrote poorly, have assigned the less felicitous passages of the plays to Robert Greene, George Peele, Christopher Marlowe, or to all three together, and have relegated Shakespeare to the role of collaborator or revisor of other men's work. Now, however, with the exception of a few scholars to be discussed later, it is more generally felt that the three *Henry VI* plays are Shakespeare's apprentice work, and his alone.² In addition, critics are increasingly realizing the plays are more than rude beginnings. Their inequalities of style are seen as suggesting experimentation as much as immaturity, and firm structural principles are discovered undergirding the seemingly episodic plotting and irrelevant spectacles. In the early nineties the "upstart crow" was not the artist he was to be ten years later, but he was already sufficiently skilled to attract the attention, and, as Greene's outburst suggests, perhaps the jealousy of his dramatic competitors.

In fact, there is reason to believe Shakespeare's first play, probably *The First Part of Henry VI*, marked a revolutionary change in the nature of English drama, one that critics are only now beginning to recognize. It was, to begin with, a part of the general transition taking place in the genre during the last half of the sixteenth century. In an important recent book Bernard Spivack argues that Elizabethan drama represents a merging of the symbolic medieval and the naturalistic modern drama, and that it derives its energy and meaning from a happy synthesis of both traditions: "the metaphoric dramaturgy that had preached the timeless crisis of the soul and had enacted its impalpable world gave way, in [Shakespeare's] time, to the dramatic imitation of literal

human life and historical event, marking the beginning of the great cycle of the naturalistic stage which reached its height perhaps in the plays of Ibsen's middle period and shows, in our own time, unmistakable symptoms of decay.³ More specifically, Spivack theorizes that Elizabethan drama combined the older dramaturgy with a new principle of imitation. The didactic and allegorical habits of dramatic composition, the techniques of acting, and even the staging and stage properties of medieval drama were reshaped into a new mode that "ostensibly imitates natural forms" without sacrificing the essentially moralistic intention. The allegorical abstractions became "characters" — naturalistic imitations of man's earth-bound passions who nevertheless retained a residual symbolic function which gave them an underlying ethical coherence.

Moreover, this process of dramatic synthesis, essentially a native English development but influenced somewhat by the precision of the classical dramaturgy of the University Wits, took a new direction when Shakespeare wrote *1 Henry VI*. The result, according to H. T. Price, opened "for modern times a new era in drama": "Shakespeare gives *1 Henry VI* no story or fable, no plot in the sense that Professor Van Doren or anybody else who has a pipe line to Aristotle would recognize as such. For the Elizabethan period his technique was revolutionary. . . . Shakespeare is imposing upon a body of historical data a controlling idea, an idea that constructs the play."⁴ John F. Danby has taken a similar approach: "Shakespearean drama is literally a new organ of thought. . . . Elizabethan drama took an enormous stride in passing from the Morality to the kind of drama Shakespeare was writing. Without throwing aside Morality earnestness, or the Morality concern with abstract ideas, to these Shakespearean drama added flesh and blood: suspense, the tensions that beget and are begotten by choice, awareness of the passage of time, ability to portray growth. The change is momentous."⁵

In addition to marking a completely new departure in English drama generally, the *Henry VI* plays significantly influenced their own special genre, the Elizabethan history, or chronicle, play. Frank P. Wilson (who believes that Marlowe's *Edward II* was written in imitation of the *Henry VI* plays rather than vice versa) concludes, with admitted temerity, "that for all we know there were no popular plays on English history before the Armada and that Shakespeare may have been the first to write one."⁶ Wilson

may be in part correct, depending on how the term "popular" is to be taken. If he means Shakespeare wrote the first history plays to be acted in the public theaters, thus disqualifying those acted in the universities and by the boys of the two Royal Choirs, he might be right. Irving Ribner, however, insists Wilson's thesis can be maintained only if the *Henry VI* plays are moved back into the 1580's, and T. M. Parrott, in reviewing Wilson's book, agrees.⁷ Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that in Shakespeare's hands the chronicle play came to its maturity. Although a few of the previous histories, such as John Bale's polemical *The Troublesome Reign of John* (c. 1535), suggest a growing sense of dramatic purposefulness and thematic coherence, most reflect the episodic continuity characteristic of the more pedestrian prose chronicles. Shakespeare, however, shaped the history play into an instrument for exploring man in his broadly political setting. In his tragedies he was to probe the individual psyche, in his comedies the ephemera of social relationships; but first he wrote histories locating man, both individually and generally, in the ordered universe supposed to be imaged in the body politic.

Thus, the three parts of *Henry VI* are of value to the study of sixteenth-century English drama in at least two ways: they are the initial efforts of England's greatest dramatist, and they probably mark a critical turning point in the history of both Elizabethan and English drama. As yet, however, there is no critical dialectic on these plays. They have been studied intensively for evidence of Shakespeare's intellectual patterns, as indicative of his absorption of the best that was thought and said in his own day, and as minor contributions to the broad sweep of his ten history plays. But they have only occasionally come under careful literary scrutiny as independent works of dramatic art.⁸

The purpose of this study is, therefore, to isolate and describe Shakespeare's achievement in each of the *Henry VI* plays. The emphasis throughout will be upon the Shakespearean structure, the "new organ of thought" resulting from the imposition "upon a body of historical data a controlling idea" which shapes the play. Accordingly, the first order of business will be an exploration of the nature of the Shakespearean history play itself.

FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTION

¹Edmund Malone, *A Dissertation on the Three Parts of King Henry VI, and to Show that These Plays were not originally written by Shakespeare* (London, 1787, 1792 [expanded]).

²The recent trends in the authorship controversy are discussed in more detail in Chapter II.

³Bernard Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil* (New York, 1941), pp. 451-452.

⁴Hereward T. Price, *Construction in Shakespeare*, Univ. of Michigan Contributions in Modern Philology, No. 17 (Ann Arbor, 1951), p. 26.

⁵John F. Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature* (London, 1949), p. 18.

⁶Frank P. Wilson, *Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1953), p. 8. For another denial of Shakespeare's supposed disciple relationship to Marlowe see Irving Ribner, "Marlowe and Shakespeare," *Shakespeare Quarterly* XV (1964), 41-53.

⁷Irving Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge, 1957), p. 95. Thomas Marc Parrott, rev., *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 1954, p. 8.

⁸For the most recent survey of relevant scholarship see Ronald Berman, *Shakespeare's Plays: A Discursive Bibliography* (Chicago, 1964), pp. 7-12. A more thorough, but dated, summary is Harold Jenkins, *Shakespeare's History Plays: 1900-1951*, *Shakespeare Survey*, VI (1953),

CHAPTER I

THE SHAKESPEAREAN HISTORY PLAY

I. Shakespeare as a Historian

There has been some question as to whether Shakespeare wrote "history" plays or "political" plays. The truth is, of course, that neither adjective is by itself adequate. Social history, economic history, intellectual history, all are modern concepts; for the Elizabethans, history was political history. Louis B. Wright has shown, moreover, that in spite of Sidney's argumentative preference for poetry, for the Elizabethans "the reading of history was an exercise second only to a study of Holy Writ in its power to induce good morality and shape the individual into a worthy member of society."¹ It is not necessary here to treat in detail the multifarious varieties of Renaissance historical writing and their relevance to Shakespeare and the history play. F. E. Schelling long ago recognized that "the greatest vogue of the epic historical verse precisely coincides with the period of the popularity of the Chronicle Play," and numerous recent studies have expanded upon the theme.² A few preliminary assumptions should be established, however.

First, most modern distinctions between literature and history have no bearing upon the study of Shakespeare's histories. When Shakespeare chose to write history plays, plays in which political virtue is the controlling standard of reference, and constructed them as political lessons applicable to his own time, he was violating no relevant conception of the function of literature. Rather, he was writing in a larger literary tradition encompassing almost all types of artful rhetoric, purely historical writing included. W. K. Ferguson has pointed out that the Italian humanists considered history "a form of literature, highly regarded by the ancients and presenting attractive opportunities for the exercise of style."³ English humanistic history was not, of course, an exact mirror of the Italian. When it first began to take distinctive shape in the 1530's and 1540's, it was due, according to W. R. Trimble, "not to the influence of Renaissance historians on the Continent, but rather to the forces of religious change, political and military events, and a growing nationalism, which were unified by the strong leadership and exalted conceptions of the monarchy."⁴ Nevertheless, Tudor historiography did learn from the Continent a vigorous secular didacticism and a sense of literary mission. Its purpose was to glorify

England in general and the Tudor government in particular; to trace the errors of the past that they might not be repeated; to rededicate magistrates to their duty and subjects to their loyalty; and to define for Englishmen the ethical responsibilities of citizenship necessary in an ordered society. Moreover, Tudor historiography avoided the heresy of Machiavellian pragmatism by remaining firmly grounded in the medieval Christian philosophy of history; in addition to taking a secular stance, it continued to illustrate the operation of divine providence in the affairs, and especially the political affairs, of men. History, it was felt, provided flashes of insight into that divine plan which, in spite of a vastness and complexity which put it out of the reach of man's tainted understanding, nevertheless functioned in rationally guiding his destinies to a purposeful end.

Thus the works of the Tudor historians were very similar in essential intention to the works of the poets and dramatists who preceded them as sources. No very significant distinctions can even be made on the grounds of *utile* versus *dulce*. Artful rhetoric was an accepted standard for prose histories, and when Samuel Daniel, Michael Drayton, and Thomas Heywood wrote history, when the contributors to the *Mirror for Magistrates* and William Warner filled the past for instructive narratives, they told their stories in prose. And, as the present argument maintains, Shakespeare and his fellow dramatists were working in the historical mode — as the Renaissance saw it — when they recreated upon the stage events in the past, when they gave life and speech and movement to the men and women who had participated in those events. As Ribner puts it, "in the history play the dramatic and historical intentions are inseparable. The dramatist's first objective is to entertain a group of people in a theater. When he goes to history for his subject matter, however, he assumes the functions of the historian as well."⁵ It is, therefore, irrelevant and even misleading to require that Shakespeare's histories be evaluated in terms of some narrowly defined standard of "pure literature." Literature they are, and of every special kind — poetic drama — but they are also a part of a tradition which included the works of Edward Hall and Raphael Holinshed, of Lord Berners, John Bale, John Stow, Richard Grafton, and Foxe, and Sir Walter Raleigh, as well as two other "great products of the high age of Elizabeth with a strong political intention: Spenser's *Faery Queen* and Sidney's *Arcadia*."⁶

As has already been implied, when the dramatist accepted the role of historian he accepted with it the historian's responsibilities

as teacher. Thus another issue enters in, that of didacticism in Shakespeare. The venerable tradition that Shakespeare is "the poet of all times" has too often included the corollary that he was the poet of no one time, and it has long been fashionable to exonerate him of the typical "faults" of his age either by insisting he rose above them, or, following the lead of Dr. Johnson, by explaining them as regrettable concessions to a simple and even barbaric audience. And no characteristic of the Elizabethan age has been subject to more suspicion than its taste for didactic literature. Early in this century H. H. Furness exclaimed, "I cannot reconcile myself to the opinion that Shakespeare ever made use of his dramatic art for the purpose of instructing, or as a means of enforcing his own views." Twenty years ago John Palmer argued that Shakespeare created no truly "political characters," that the expectations of his audience required him to write of the politically powerful in spite of his own interests. Even more recently, Clifford Leech insisted on the assumption that Shakespeare's histories are a dramatic expression of the "simply didactic" sixteenth-century chronicles "is hardly compatible with a recognition of Shakespeare's status as a poet."⁷

But Shakespearean didacticism — or Elizabethan, for that matter — is not something that needs to be explained away. The Golden Age of sixteenth-century literature owes much of its greatness to the confidence with which the writer could speak out, to his assurance that his purpose was the non-personal communication of the universal, the eternal, of the assumed. There were no Elizabethan poems exploring the nature of poetry (as there were to be in the nineteenth century); there were relatively few critical treatises, and with the exception of the Puritan attack, no significant critical polemic. The purpose of the literary artist was to dress up Truth in the "garment of style," to give her "a local habitation and a name." As Rosamond Tuve has said, "the Elizabethan thought of the poet's function as close to that of any other thinker — philosophers, preachers, and orators included. He did see the world as a world in which the ideas of human beings were paramount realities — and images convey a man's ideas movingly to others."⁸

Thus there is no more point in denying Shakespeare's didactic stance than in denying his use of drama as a vehicle for political and historical materials. Only our own age, with its hypersensitive objectivity possibly born of a thoroughgoing scepticism, needs be embarrassed by an outspoken assertion of Truth. The Elizabethan,

to the extent he thought about the matter at all, felt his rational powers were a divine gift intended to help him "repair the ruins of our first parents," and he looked to literature as one of the teachers of rationality and good conduct.⁹

One important qualification must be made, however. Shakespeare was not "simply didactic." His history plays constitute no more shallow dramatic version of the 1574 homily *Against Disobedience and wilful Rebellion* than the *Faery Queen* is just a book whose end is "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline." No other artist has been more aware of the complexities of man's ethical predicaments, and none has more effectively molded his genre into an expression of those complexities. Recently Alfred Harbage correctly, if perhaps too apologetically, explained how Shakespeare "reckons with the craving for justice in moral mankind": "in some of his plays evil misses its mark and is disarmed: the result is happiness. In others the issue is undetermined: such plays present single acts in the larger drama of history which is always unfolding and in which mingled good and evil bring in their train mingled joy and sorrow. There is justice in all these plays in the largest sense, a satisfying concatenation: unhappiness is never the product of good, and happiness never the product of evil."¹⁰ Harbage, however, is oversimplifying; he is assigning to plot alone the didactic function. (Only one result is his reading of the "justice" of the histories as something lying outside the plays.) The Shakespearean play additionally carries a very real, if seldom obvious, complex of ethical meanings in the juxtaposition of its scenes and characters, in the strategic placement of its rhetorical amplifications, in the emotional coloring of its image patterns, even (for the scholar) in what was adopted and what omitted from its sources, and above all in the general impression made by its structure. Shakespeare's judgments upon his material are everywhere implicit, and his plays cannot be interpreted as "a new organ of thought" unless it is first granted that the kind of thinking they embody is essentially moralistic.

Two additional matters need to be discussed concerning Shakespeare as a historian: first, the significance to his own age of his political "message," and second, the extent, as far as it can be estimated, of his historical knowledge.

The details of Shakespeare's political thought will be discussed in the next section of this chapter. For now it is sufficient to say

that in broad outline his central political theme was simply this: social stability, a manifestation of the universal order which was reflected in the hierarchy of rank and degree and crowned by God's lieutenant on earth, the anointed monarch, had to be strictly maintained if the nation was to avoid total anarchy. The fact that Shakespeare's was only one of the many voices vigorously defending the status quo and portraying the horrors of internal dissension attests to the psychological undercurrents of the time. As Reese suggests, "the Elizabethans never really knew security," and "only a century so persistently troubled by fears of rebellion and a disputed succession would have needed to evolve such a rigid theory of obedience and to proclaim it so frequently."¹¹

The threats to order and stability seemed to come in many forms. Thanks in part at least to Henry VIII's grandiose notions of his own destiny, there was at various times during the sixteenth century the possibility of French or Spanish invasion, or worse yet, of mass attack by a much-feared though never formed league of Catholic powers. Under Elizabeth, England was but on the threshold of becoming a European power, and although the victory of 1588 assured Englishmen that their navy, the radically new war machine designed by Sir John Hawkins and Sir Francis Drake, was an effective shield (and one probably more dependable than Elizabeth's international coquetries), the intensity of the English exuberance following the defeat of the Armada is perhaps symptomatic of the nation's fearful anticipation of invasion and of the deep-seated doubts it had had about its ability to defend itself.¹²

Foreign aggression, however, in spite of the emotion with which its possibility was treated in much of the literature, was for most Elizabethans the lesser danger of the time. A country united had some hope of withstanding external pressures, but the internal dynamics of a nation in sweeping transition produced constant possibilities for intense cleavages at home. The Tudor dynasty was born of a quarter century of civil war, and not until well into the sixteenth century could Englishmen feel secure that Bosworth had been the last battle of the Wars of the Roses. There were, however, other battles: between 1486 and 1601 the Crown had to put down a full dozen armed rebellions, three of them (counting the Irish) in Elizabeth's reign. J. K. Lowers has pointed out that the first uprising Elizabeth faced, the one in the North in 1596, was portrayed in the ballads, tracts, and pamphlets throughout the reign as a "mirror" imaging the immorality, destructiveness, and inevitable failure of armed revolt.¹³

To the tenor of the age was added, moreover, multiple factions seeming to threaten imminent organized resistance. The question of the succession, left unsettled by Elizabeth almost up to her death, made any pretender; legitimate or not, a potential rallying point for dissidents, as evidenced by the two political enigmas of Elizabeth's later years, Mary Queen of Scots and Essex. Agrarian discontent, an ominous rumble throughout the century, seemed poised to follow any lead which promised its remedy. Finally, the deep gulf between the religious extremes appeared to presage the most bitter conflict. The Elizabethans probably overestimated the seriousness of the Roman Catholic threat; the differences between Hapsburg and Valois were too far-reaching for mere religion to settle, and the Jesuits smuggled into the country were neither as multitudinous nor as militant as portrayed. But Englishmen had, under Mary, smelled the smoke from Smithfield, and the stringency of the recusancy acts and the summary execution of Campion and his fellows, as well as the urgency of the current anti-papist propaganda, are indicative of the underlying fear of a Catholic revival. For were the Puritans considered harmless; moderate Elizabethans thought they recognized in the Puritanism of their own day potentialities for insurrection that were not to be realized for another half century. As Brents Stirling points out, in the polemical literature "the Puritan movement, a moderate one which resulted in a middle class' revolution, was characterized persistently and quite nationally as a program of mass rebellion dedicated to leveling social gradation and even to 'Anabaptistical' communism."¹⁴ The national intensity generated by religious conflict in the Elizabethan age cannot be overestimated. In the words of Christopher Morris, "bitterness was all the more inevitable because sixteenth-century conflicts were conflicts about the eternal verities. The Reformation . . . ensured that for well over a century our political realities were not mere factions and that their struggles were not solely for place and power and interest but for rival conceptions of man character and purpose."¹⁵

Hence Shakespeare's history plays should be read against the background of an age which saw itself as living from crisis to crisis. Hindsight suggests the sixteenth-century Englishman exaggerated the tensions of his time. The moderation of Elizabeth's temperament provided a broad religious path which could be easily followed by all but the most intense; her ingenuity, flexibility, and at times compassion served to quiet most of the economic and social unrest; and her Machiavellian diplomacy kept the Continental

powers constantly off balance. But the citizen of the day could not of course see the larger pattern. For him the constant change, and worse yet, what seemed to be the ever-present threat of unpredictable upheavals in the immediate future, boded ill for life and property. Karl Brunner probably overstated his case in suggesting that the early histories speak in the voice of "the conservative elements in the population — the old landowners, the well-to-do citizens — just the class from which Shakespeare came."¹⁶ Nevertheless, the early plays do proclaim the message which that class wanted to hear: rebellion against the throne is rebellion against God and will be punished in Heaven as well as on earth; the collective judgment of the establishment, however inadequate and fallible, is far preferable to the ephemeral whims of the rebellious and the ambitious; and, in the words of the often quoted speech of Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida*,

Take but degree away, untune that string;
And hark what discord follows.

(I.iii.109-110)¹⁷

That Shakespeare, even as early as the *Henry VI* plays, was growing into a more philosophic conception of the doctrine of order than the one in the minds of his average contemporaries does not in the least dilute the practical relevance to his audience of his political theme. The product of his age, he was voicing what at the time seemed to be some of the most vital of the verities; and in so doing he was fulfilling the responsibilities assigned to the literary artist.

One final point relevant to Shakespeare as a historian needs to be made, and that briefly. Contrary to the old tradition, long since disproved, that Shakespeare was the unlearned "poet of nature," it is quite evident he knew enough about history to write history plays as the Elizabethans conceived them. This last qualification is of course important. As has already been suggested, in the sixteenth century historiography was not bound by the standards of objectivity and accuracy implicit in the modern term "social science." The historian was not expected to record facts (although that seems to have been the function of the antiquaries such as John Leland) or even to interpret them objectively; rather, he was supposed to construct from historical data a subjective and moralistic argument. Thus when Shakespeare violates strict chronology, mingles several historical events, misplaces historical characters by several decades, or seems to completely misinterpret his-

torical causes, he in most cases can be charged with only the bias which was expected of him, not with ignorance.¹⁸ Recently V. K. Whitaker insisted that when writing the early histories, "Shakespeare was, to put it bluntly, profoundly ignorant of English history but a very good dramatist."¹⁹ However, Whitaker's unquestionably sound thesis — that over the years Shakespeare's learning and intellect matured concurrently with his artistry — commits him not only to proving how much Shakespeare learned, but also to suggesting how little he knew to begin with; and the dangers inherent in such a method are obvious. Shakespeare of course knew more in 1605 than he had known in 1590, but that is not to say he was totally uninformed when he wrote his early plays. On the contrary, he had apparently thoroughly digested, when he wrote the *Henry VI* plays, Hall's *The Union of the two noble and illustre families of Lancastre and York*, and was well acquainted with Holinshed's *Chronicles* as well. Moreover, the concern with political themes in *Titus Andronicus* and *Comedy of Errors* suggests he had meditated deeply upon matters of history and politics even before he started writing plays. Yet even such a firm defender of Shakespeare's knowledge as Tillyard, who argues that "Shakespeare . . . had much the same general equipment of learning as his more highly-educated contemporaries, Sidney and Spencer for instance," feels constrained to add, "though it may have been less systematic, less detailed, and less derived from books."²⁰ But recent investigations into Shakespeare's sources have collectively uncovered evidence of probably vast reading on his part, and although many of the claimed "analogues" may be but coincidental echoes, it has become increasingly clear that Shakespeare was stimulated in his work by wide reading, and that he "read any relevant book on which he could lay his hands."²¹ His erudition was considerably greater than that of the average well-informed middle class citizen, and although he may have been somewhat deficient in the classical learning in which some of his contemporary dramatists took pride, he had absorbed most of what was important in his native culture.

The first section of this chapter has been an attempt to elucidate some assumptions about the nature of Shakespeare's history plays which will be implicit in the structural analyses to follow in later chapters on the three parts of *Henry VI*. What these assumptions add up to is simply this: the plays were written by a dramatist essentially knowledgeable of English history who was working in close harmony with the energetically didactic literary-historical tradition of his age, and, moreover, their political themes were

those that seemed of utmost importance to the Elizabethans. To this a further postulate of special relevance to the *Henry VI* plays should be added: that when Shakespeare was a beginning dramatist just starting to explore his own powers and to find his way in his genre, he was more self-consciously didactic, more obvious in stating his message, than he was to be later when he wrote with the confidence of experience and maturity. The starting point for analyzing the *Henry VI* plays is, rather deceptively, right on the surface; Shakespeare is at times almost embarrassingly explicit in his thematic statements. There is already complexity in the early plays, certainly, but subtlety and suggestiveness are as yet infrequent.

Before the *Henry VI* plays themselves can be considered, however, two further preliminary matters remain to be discussed in this chapter: first, the details of Shakespeare's political theme; and second, the various ways in which the total achievement of Shakespeare's ten history plays has been described.

II. Shakespeare's Politics

Some thirty years ago Alfred Hart asked, with obvious embarrassment, "why did the poet give so much prominence to doctrines favoured by authority and to a system of government which, a quarter of a century after his death, led to a prolonged civil war and the temporary downfall of the Stuart dynasty? Did he believe in the doctrine of the divine rights of kings?" Hart's rather strained answers were that the doctrine is "as logically defensible as the modern worship of a majority," that Shakespeare "probably thought the principle itself and the system of government based upon it not unsuited to the people of his times," and that after all, the companies of actors depended upon the favor of the sovereign and her court for their very existence.²² Hart's quandary is suggestive of the thinking of a long line of critics who found distasteful the idea that Shakespeare may have written of mere politics, and even worse, the evidence that he held to markedly undemocratic biases. Armed with a theory of literature disallowing such mundane concerns and with a theory of history requiring of all sensitive thinkers sympathy with the long struggle of the masses against oppression, they attacked problems of interpretation by assuming Shakespeare shared their own enlightenment and would therefore be likely to say the things they wanted to hear; and they

Henry VI and *The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of York*," *Studies in Language*, LI (1954), 431-442; W. Schrick, "Nashe, Greene, and Shakespeare 92," *Revue des Langues Vivantes*, XXII (1956), 55-64; and James C. anaway, "The Contention and 2 Henry VI," *Brunner Festschrift* (Vienna: Stuttgart, 1958).

J[ohn] D[over] W[ilson], ed. *IH6* and *2H6*. The quotations are *IH6*, pp. xxvii and xlii.

Albert Feuillerat, *The Composition of Shakespeare's Plays* (New Haven), p. 136. For a brief but effective refutation of Feuillerat's criticaliques see Robert Adger Law, "Guessing about the Youthful Shakespeare," of *Texas Studies in English*, XXXIV (1955), 43-50.

Madeleine Doran, *Henry VI, Parts II and III, their Relation to the nation and the True Tragedy* (Iowa City, 1928). Peter Alexander, *Shakespeare's Henry VI and Richard III* (Cambridge, 1929).

M. M. Reese, *The Cease of Majesty* (New York, 1962), n. 1 p. 165.

Exs.: E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, 2nd. ed. (New 1962), pp. 186-227; Robert Adger Law, "Links between Shakespeare's y Plays," *Studies in Philology*, XXXII (1953), 168-187; and Reese, 35-207.

J[ohn] D[over] W[ilson], ed. *IH6*, p. xi; and T. W. Baldwin, *On iterary Genetics of Shakespeare's Plays, 1592-1594* (Urbana, 1959), p.

Actually, the only real evidence of Shakespeare's anticipation of a future ; found in *3H6*: both the amplification of Richard of Gloucester's char- and the unnecessary introduction of Henry of Richmond suggest Shake- was already planning *Richard III*.

Jna Ellis-Fermor, *The Frontiers of Drama* (London, 1945), n. 3 pp. and p. 52.

Hardin Craig, "Shakespeare and the History Play," *Joseph Quincy Memorial Studies* (Washington, 1948), pp. 55-64.

Reese, p. 167.

Hereward T. Price, *Construction in Shakespeare*, Univ. of Michigan butions in *Modern Philology*, No. 17 (Ann Arbor, 1951), pp. 36 and

CHAPTER III THE FIRST PART OF HENRY VI

The theme of *1 Henry VI* is internal dissension, and the central action in which the effects of dissension are illustrated is foreign war.¹ There is a fragmentary plot embodying this theme. Talbot, fighting against large odds because the nobles at home are too busy bickering among themselves to provide him with sufficient men and supplies, nevertheless carries out a generally successful war against the French led by Joan of Arc. He is ultimately overwhelmed by a superior force, however, because Somerset and York, whose personal dispute has been developed as one example of the turmoil at home, quibble over which of them is responsible for sending him relief. Thus "England's best hope" is betrayed by his nation's internal divisions, and his death is followed by an empty truce which represents one of the later stages in England's gradual loss of France. But there is no concatenation of events as in, say, *1 Henry IV*, where the main plot and the sub-plot merge and resolve each other at the battle of Shrewsbury; for there is no pattern of causal relationships developed either in the scenes portraying the wars in France or in those portraying the enmity between Somerset and York. There is no special reason, in other words, for Talbot's falling into the French trap in Act IV, or for Somerset and York sharing at that particular time the responsibility for reinforcing him. Nor is anything resolved by Talbot's death. The war continues in Act V, with the English, still as divided as before, defeating the French, executing Joan, signing the dubious peace treaty, and preparing to bicker over a new issue, the King's decision to marry Margaret of Anjou.

The play, in other words, has no real plot in the sense of sustained sequential action. It does have a design, however, and the kind of movement that can be suggested by design. It has, in addition, a pulse or rhythm expressed in what Geoffrey Bullough has called "the antithesis and interplay between strife and concord, peace and war, at home and abroad."² The key to the structure of *1 Henry VI* is the individual scene and the part it plays in the thematic pattern. *Part 1*, significantly, although the shortest of the *Henry VI* plays, has the largest number of scenes (twenty-nine) of the three.³ Thus its scenes are relatively short, averaging only slightly more than ninety lines in length, with only one (III.i) exceeding two hundred lines. The structural function of each scene is determined by three things. 1) the dramatic materials of which it is

tensive losses in France.⁷ In response to Exeter's query, "What treachery was us'd,?" he gives an unequivocal answer:

No treachery, but want of men and money.

Amongst the soldiers this is muttered —

That here you maintain several factions;

And whilst a field should be dispatch'd
and fought,

You are disputing of your generals. (11.69-73)

The next scene immediately illustrates the dilemma of the English army. The French under Charles, preparing to relieve the siege of Orleans, disdainfully speak of "the famish'd English," "they want their porridge and their fat bull-beeves"; "Salisbury, and he may well in fretting spend his gall — nor men nor money hath he to make war." They are shocked to discover, however, the English are "like lions wanting food"; they are "lean raw-bon'd rascals," and "hunger will enforce them to be more eager." The point is clear: the English are depending upon sheer courage and tenacity to compensate for a lack of supplies and reinforcements.

These few lines also illustrate the controlling motif of the rest of the war scenes: the contrast between the noble heroism of the English and the cowardice and perfidy of the French. The motif is worked out in a quite stylized manner. There are nine war scenes prior to the climactic battle at Bordeaux in which the death of Talbot is portrayed. In three of these the French occupy the center of the stage, in three the English, and in three there are confrontations between the two leaders. Talbot and Joan, the focal points in each of these scenes, stand surrounded by their lieutenants and establish the tone of their respective parties: courage and determination on the part of the English, and treachery, depravity, and insolence on the part of the French.

Shakespeare elaborated and amplified the characters of both Joan and Talbot from the meager record of the chronicles.⁸ As J. P. Brockbank points out, Shakespeare found in Holinshed two versions of Joan: "a 'French' one, stated at length but unsympathetically, 'that this Jone (forsooth) was a damsell divine'; and an 'English' one, owed to Monstrelet, that she was 'a damnable sorcerer suborned by Satan.'"⁹ Some critics have suggested that Shakespeare (or his supposed collaborators) failed to choose consistently between these two interpretations. F. S. Boas, for example, said "she is courageous, shrewd, and convinced of her divine mission to save France.

made, 2) its own structure, and 3) the position it occupies in relation to other scenes in the play.

The scenes of *1 Henry VI* are constructed of four ingredients — four dramatic issues which are developed parallel to and largely independent of each other: 1) the Talbot-Joan conflict, or the wars in France; 2) the Gloucester-Winchester dispute; 3) the Somerset-York dispute; and 4) the incipient threat of York as a pretender. A fifth issue, the ominous liaison between Suffolk and Margaret of Anjou, is added in the last act.

The war scenes portray, with considerable dramatic license, the course of events from the French revolt that followed the death of Henry V in 1422 to the ignominious truce of 1444 that foreshadowed the final loss of France nine years later at Castillon.⁴ The point of the wars is not, as Tillyard suggests, that they are a providential "testing of England, already guilty and under a sort of curse, by French witchcraft," with Joan of Arc being sent by God as "the English scourge."⁵ Rather, the moral of the wars apparently was for Shakespeare the same as it had been for Holinshed: "through dissension at home, all lost abroad." The function of witchcraft in the play will be discussed later; for now it is sufficient to say that witchcraft is something much talked about but never seen until, in V.iii, Joan conjures up fiends in an unsuccessful attempt to forestall the imminent English victory. The French, in other words, do not use magic to defeat the English, nor do the English lose because their energies have somehow been sapped by providence. Shakespeare used the quite historical explanation of Hall and Holinshed:

But heere is one cheefe point to be noted, that either the disdeine amongst the cheefe peeres of the realme of England, (as yee haue heard,) or the negligence of the kings counsell, (which did not forsee dangers to come,) was the losse of the whole dominion of France, betweene the riuers of Somme and Marne; and, in'especiall, of the noble citie of Paris. For where before, there were sent ouer thousands for defense of the holds and fortresses, now were sent hundreds, yea, and scores; some rascals, and some not able to draw a bowe, or carrie a bill. (Hall, 179; Hol., iii.612-613)⁶

Because of the dissensions at home, in other words, there had been a failure in logistics.

This point is made early in the opening scene, when the first messenger interrupts the funeral of Henry V with a report of ex-

On the other hand she is represented as unchaste, coarse of tongue, and in league with the powers of evil . . . no consistent image is presented.¹⁰ There is, however, consistent irony in the delineation of Joan. Almost everything the other characters say about her is equivocal, and their highest praise of her is regularly contradicted within the immediate dramatic context. In II.ii, for example, Talbot calls her the "virtuous Joan of Arc" (I.20), but just before she and Charles, aroused by the English attack on Orleans, had suggestively appeared together in their nightclothes; and a few lines later Burgundy refers to them as "the Dauphin and his trull" (I.28). In another instance, Alencon promises her,

We'll set thy statue in some holy place,
And have thee reverenc'd like a blessed saint.
Employ thee, then, sweet virgin, for our good. (III.iii.14-16)

But Charles immediately sounds a contradictory echo of "sweet virgin" by addressing her as "sweeting." Moreover, Joan herself repeatedly reveals she is a fraud. In the very scene in which she is attempting to convince the French that her "profession's sacred from above," she answers Charles' profer of illicit love with a clearly temporary refusal (see I.ii.111-116); and she concludes her impassioned appeal to Burgundy to desert the English for the good of his native land with a contrastingly impish aside: "Done like a Frenchman - turn and turn again" (III.iii.85). Thus her final degeneration in Act V is but a spectacular demonstration of the unsaintliness which has been implicit in her words and behavior all along. There is nothing contradictory, therefore, about the two views of Joan as Pucelle and as "Puzzel"; each is consistently played against the other for ironic effect.¹¹

Just as Shakespeare's Joan is no saint, neither is she the heroic maid who inspires the entire French nation. Her contribution to the cause is, according to Charles, her "cunning," and according to Talbot her "treachery," although by modern standards she is simply a good tactician. Under her leadership the French relieve Orleans by a surprise attack following close upon the treacherous killing of Salisbury and Gargrave by a sniper (with a canon); they take Rouen after Joan and four soldiers, disguised as peasants, enter the city and locate a vulnerability in the defenses;¹² they weaken the English forces by suborning Burgundy and then destroy Talbot by trapping him against the walls of Bourdeaux. It is such successes as these which draw from Talbot frustrated cries of "witchcraft."

In contrast to Joan, Talbot is delineated as the epitome of frank honesty, headlong courage, and dedicated patriotism. The result is, of course, an extremely flat character, and Talbot's speeches consist of but two things: either noble and courageous sentiments or frustrated rage at the inscrutable wiliness of an enemy that will not stand up to a fair fight. When Shakespeare recorded Talbot's last battle, in three scenes (IV.v-vii.) of immature rhyme and generously ornate rhetoric he portrayed the unselfish sacrifices made by Talbot and his son in the names of honor and of patriotism. The scenes are reminiscent of II.v in *Henry VI* (the "molehill scene"): in the eye of the storm a stylized tableau is momentarily isolated from the rest of the action by a marked shift in style, and the true values which are being violated all around are expansively affirmed. It is significant that scene V, which ends with Talbot's noble resolution,

Come, side by side together live and die;
And soul with soul from France to heaven fly,

immediately follows the scene in which Somerset petulantly refuses to "fawn" on York by voluntarily sending him the troops he needs in order to relieve Talbot. The meaning of the juxtaposition is clear. Talbot and his son are prepared to sacrifice, even though fruitlessly, not only their lives but the familial line to the needs of the nation, while the bickering lords will not even bend their petty pride in the most dire of emergencies.

Another scene, the one portraying the fictitious attempt by the Countess of Auvergne to seduce Talbot into a trap (II.iii), also has special thematic significance. Many critics have considered it an intrusion. Tillyard, for instance, found it a "startling but irrelevant anecdote," and John Dover Wilson decided it was intended to reflect "the lighter side of life in Normandy . . . it seems to be suggested by similar visits [during the Elizabethan wars] of young English officers to ladies in the neighboring castles or even nunneries."¹³ The scene is, however, quite functional. For one thing, it provides another example of French treachery. More important (and what Tillyard and Wilson overlooked), the plot laid by the Countess provides Shakespeare with the opportunity to write an extended figure glorifying the English. She thinks she has captured Talbot, but he insists she has only his "shadow." After some painfully prolonged word-play, in which the Countess dutifully follows up every false verbal lead Talbot lays, the English hero dramatically reveals his meaning. He points to his soldiers, who are entering to prevent his capture, and says,

How say you madam? Are you now persuaded
 That Talbot is but shadow of himself?
 These are his substance, sinews, arms, and strength,
 With which he yoketh your rebellious necks,
 Razeth your cities, and subverts your towns,
 And in a moment makes them desolate. (I.I. 61-66)

Again, the meaning of the scene is clear: the English army in France, officer and private soldier, is irrevocably knit into a dedicated unit under a self-effacing leader, while at home all is division. It is no accident that this scene is followed by the Temple Garden scene in which York and Somerset malevolently align their respective parties at the expense of the shrubbery.

Talbot is in some ways a pathetic figure, for he never fully understands why his army is defeated. By remaining ignorant of the dissensions at home he remains above them, and at no point in the play does he remonstrate against the true causes of his defeats. He does recognize that the desertion of Fastolfe cost him the battle of Patay, and he angrily tears the Garter from the "craven's leg" in IV.i; but at all other times he rages in frustration at the "treachery" and the "witchcraft" of the French.

It is in part this fact which leads Tillyard and M. M. Reese to interpret *1 Henry VI* as a play about England's providential struggle against divinely appointed witchcraft. But Shakespeare seems not to have conceived any clear thematic function for witchcraft in the play; it is simply a spectacular motif echoed throughout. It is first mentioned by Exeter early in the opening scene:

What! shall we curse the planets of mishap
 That plotted thus our glory's overthrow?
 Or shall we thank the subtle-witted French
 conjurers and sorcerers, that, afraid of him,
 By magic verses have contriv'd his end? (I.I. 23-27)

At this point, however, the subject of the wars has not been introduced, nor has Joan even joined the French forces. The "him," the "glory," referred to in these lines is Henry V, and Exeter is asking the traditional elegiac question — "why was the deceased taken from us?" The lines do suggest the attitude taken to the French throughout, and certainly prefigure the later charges of witchcraft, but they are not an explanation for the turned tide of the war. In the war scenes themselves, with but a single exception, Talbot is the only

character who calls Joan a witch until she is tried and executed as a "fell, banning hag" in Act V. (The exception is a speech in which Bedford echoes Talbot's frustration — II.i.16-18.) And as has already been suggested, witchcraft never plays an actual part in the battles; other causes for the French victories, either Joan's strategy or English weaknesses, are always made clear. Joan's personal magic — that which enables her to readily distinguish Charles from among the French lords in I.ii, and which enables her to defeat both Charles and Talbot in single combat — is not functional in the larger course of the wars, and her one attempt to enlist the support of the "fiends" against the English fails (see V.iii). It appears, therefore, Shakespeare had inherited from Holinshed the suggestion that Joan of Arc was a witch, and he used it to achieve spectacular effects. But he does not seem to have integrated the motif of witchcraft with the central idea upon which *1 Henry VI* is built — the idea of "civil broils" and their destructive effects.

Surrounding the central figures of Joan and Talbot are their lieutenants, each a partial image of his leader, who complete the motif of contrast which controls the war scenes. Thus *1 Henry VI* is about, as Alfred Harbage says, "the courage, prowess, and assumed righteousness of the English as represented by such loyal and able leaders as Salisbury, Bedford, Warwick, and, above all, Lord Talbot; and about the opportunism, treachery, and fox-like successes of the French as represented by the fraud and moral depravity of La Pucelle."¹⁴ But the play is also about much more. The war scenes are only one of the five issues incorporated into the design of *1 Henry VI*, and the other four portray England's internal dissensions which negate the efforts of Talbot. Heroism and integrity should prevail over treachery and dissipation, but in this play they do not. And the reason they do not is the subject that is explored, and the theme that is affirmed, in the dramatic structure.

The second ingredient in the design of *1 Henry VI* is the dispute between Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, and Cardinal Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester. Although the dispute appears in only four scenes, and although it sputters out inconclusively in V.i with Winchester's final ominous threat, it makes an important contribution of the tone of the play and to the picture of complete disunity among the English. Just as the French attack in I.ii illustrates the messenger's charge that the army is in "want of men and money," the outbursts between Gloucester and Winchester in I.i and I.iii

illustrate his additional charge that "here you maintain several factions." Significantly, Henry VI's first words in the play are an appeal to Gloucester and Winchester to keep the peace:

Uncles of Gloucester and of Winchester,
The special watchmen of our English weal,
I would prevail, if prayers might prevail,
To join your hearts in love and amity.
O, what a scandal is it to our crown
That two such noble peers as ye should jar!
Believe me, lords, my tender years can tell
Civil dissension is a viperous worm
That knows the bowels of the commonwealth.
(III.i.65-73)¹⁶

Shakespeare, using a device characteristic of the play, interrupts Henry's plea for unity with an outburst between the retainers of the two disputants.

Shakespeare's characterization of Gloucester has often been misinterpreted. M. M. Reese sees him as a "brawler" and suggests "a change of character" occurs when, at the end of the play, he becomes "the good Duke" who opposes Henry's marriage to Margaret of Anjou. John Dover Wilson has even harsher words for Gloucester, calling him a "roaring-boy" who "shows neither dignity nor self-control, but conducts himself like a common brawler, who outbids Winchester in sacrilegious abuse, taxes him now with the attempted murder of Henry V, now with selling licenses to brothels, and threatens to toss his reverence in a blanket, tug his beard and drag him up and down by the cheeks." But Gloucester seems to be portrayed with some sympathy; as Tillyard says, he is "honest but hot-tempered."¹⁶

For all his bluster, Gloucester directs at Winchester the indignation Shakespeare's audience probably would have felt toward the "peeled priest." The charges he levels against the prelate were in fact the charges made by the chroniclers, who in their strident Protestantism found Winchester to be the epitome of Roman Catholic decadence and abuse of authority.¹⁷ Moreover, Gloucester's attitude to the Cardinal is shared by most of the other characters. Even Exeter, the voice of doom whose choric asides repeatedly underscore the significance of the civil broils, relinquishes his usual neutrality when he speaks of Winchester:

What! Is my Lord of Winchester install'd
And call'd unto a cardinal's degree?
Then I perceive that will be verified
Henry the Fifth did sometime prophesy:
'If once he come to be a cardinal,
He'll make his cap co-equal with the crown'¹ (V.i.28-33)

Thus the virulence of Gloucester's attitude seems to be completely justified.

More important to an understanding of his characterization, however, is the way in which Shakespeare portrays Gloucester as always willing to sacrifice his own rancor in order to come to terms with Winchester for the restoration of national unity. In the street brawl between their two parties in I.iii, he is the first to accede to the Lord Mayor's order that the fighting cease; at the outbreak in the court in III.i, he is moved by "compassion on the King" to make peace overtures, while Winchester not only has to be persuaded to accept, but immediately refutes in an aside his promise of amity.

There is more to the dispute, however, than the simple enmity between the good and loyal counselor and the self-seeking opportunist. Shakespeare is already revealing in Gloucester the first signs of his later ability to construct penetratingly ambiguous characters who arouse mixed feelings. Hand in hand with Gloucester's justified indignation at Winchester's ambition and decadence goes an overly inflated sense of his own position and authority. His first response, for instance, when the Warden of the Tower denies him entrance is,

Who willed you, or whose will stands but mine?
There's none Protector of the realm but I.
(I.iii.11-12)

Gloucester had come to the Tower "to view th' artillery and munition" (I.i.168) for the French wars, but for the moment that crisis is forgotten; the injury to his own pride, not the prelate's disregard for the welfare of the nation, is what is shown as prompting his subsequent attack upon Winchester and his retainers. Thus when Gloucester, presents his list of charges against Winchester in III.i, the bishop's refutation is precisely accurate:

No, my good lords, it is not that offends;
It is not that that hath incens'd the Duke:
It is because no one should sway but he;

No one but he should be about the King;
And that engenders thunder in his breast
And makes him roar these accusations forth.

(II. 35-40)

Shakespeare creates of Gloucester a character who, although free of the self-interest motivating the other bickering lords, has like them the overweening pride which is the driving force in the thematic "jarring discord of nobility."

On the other hand, nothing good can be said of the other participant in the dispute; Winchester is conceived throughout as a negative character. Pride and ambition are his mainsprings, and he is never sensitive in the least to the needs of the nation. At the end of I.i, as Exeter, Bedford, and Gloucester leave to prepare for the attempt to redeem the losses in France, he is left upon the stage to speak a soliloquy that establishes the part he is to play in sustaining the theme of discord:

Each hath his place and function to attend:
I am left out; for me nothing remains.
But long I will not be Jack out of office.
The King from Eltham I intend to steal,
And sit at chiefest stern of public weal.

(II.173-177)

Similarly, his final soliloquy — the last occurrence in *1 Henry VI* of his dispute with Gloucester — has special significance. Having just received his cardinal's cap, he says,

Now Winchester will not submit, I trow,
Or be inferior to the proudest peer.
Humphrey of Gloucester, thou shalt well perceive
That neither in birth or for authority
The Bishop will be overborne by thee.
I'll either make thee stoop and bend thy knee,
Or sack this country with a mutiny.

(V.i.56-62)

Characteristic of Shakespeare's technique throughout the play, this speech is irrelevant to the action, for the threat is never carried out. The speech instead — coming as it does immediately after King Henry and the nobles agree a truce should be negotiated with the French — serves as a thematic reminder that although the conflicts abroad are about to end, the disturbances at home will continue.

The third ingredient in the design of the play, and the conflict that leads most directly to Talbot's death, is the dispute between York and Somerset. The pattern is essentially the same as the one Shakespeare used for the Gloucester-Winchester controversy: two characters, one completely negative and the other only partially good, bicker over a vaguely defined issue and become bitter enemies who sacrifice the nation's welfare to their personal feelings. Like Winchester, Somerset ignores the thematically important need for patriotic self-abnegation and acts according to his haughty pride. In the Temple Garden scene (II.iv) he agrees to accept arbitration of his conflict with York, but when the majority rules against him he bursts into bitter recriminations and threats. When, in III.i, York is restored to his birthright, Shakespeare gives Somerset an echoing aside that contradicts the general affirmation and the impression of unity:

All. Welcome, high Prince, the mighty Duke of York!
Som. [Aside] Perish, base Prince, ignoble Duke of York!
(II. 177-178)

And when Talbot is trapped against the walls of Bordeaux, Somerset petulantly refuses to send York the men he needs to relieve the English leader simply because York did not ask him to (IV.iv.30 ff.).

York, on the other hand, seems to have been conceived as a more positive character. Although Shakespeare omits from *1 Henry VI* the cause the chroniclers reported for the dispute, he apparently accepted their judgment that Somerset was the one who had begun it. According to Hall, the trouble began when Somerset, aspiring to be Regent of France after the death of Bradford, became bitter when York was given the position instead. From then on, "by all wates and meanes possible, he bothe hindered and detracted hym, glad of his losse, and sorry of his well-dooing" (Hall, 179; Hol., iii.612). In dramatizing the implications of the chronicle report, Shakespeare consistently created incidents in which York behaves the least reprehensibly of the two. In the Temple Garden scene (which has no source in the chronicles) York's vociferous insistence on the rightness of his side of the argument seems to be justified when the majority rules for him, especially since the point of issue is a question of law and one of those who plucks a white rose is a lawyer. Likewise it is Somerset, rather than York, who appears to be responsible for the failure to relieve Talbot (another fictitious incident). There are also other indications that Shakespeare treated

York with considerable sympathy. After the catastrophe at Bordeaux, it is York who leads the English in their victory before Angiers, who captures and executes Joan, and who energetically objects to the ignoble truce with the French (see V.iii and iv). In addition, he is clearly aligned with the constructive majority against Winchester and Somerset in the confrontation before Parliament in III.i.

Yet York too constitutes a serious threat to English unity, for he is heir to the Yorkist claim to the throne. Because Shakespeare treats his regal aspirations as something separate from his dispute with Somerset, they can be considered the fourth ingredient in the design of the play. The chronicles had reported the death of Mortimer briefly and objectively:

During the same season, Edmund Mortimer, the last earle of March of that name, (which long time had bene restrained from his libertie, and finally waxed lame,) deceased without issue; whose inheritance descended to the lord Richard Plantagenet, sonne and heire to Richard earle of Cambridge, beheaded (as before yee haue heard) at the towne of Southampton. (Hall, 128; Hol., iii.589)¹⁸

From this report Shakespeare apparently created II.v, which Tillyard dismisses as being constructed of "popular material" and intended for "the mediation of sheer fact." This is the scene in which the dramatist portrayed Mortimer, on his death-bed, reviewing for York the indignities their line had suffered under the Lancastrians and declaring him his heir, charging him with the restoration of the family's honor. The scene ends with York speaking the kind of soliloquy usually put into the mouth of Winchester:

Here dies the dusky torch of Mortimer,
Chok'd with ambition of the meaner sort;
And for those wrongs, those bitter injuries,
Which Somerset hath offer'd to my house,
I doubt not but with honour to redress;
And therefore haste I to the Parliament,
Either to be restored to my blood,
Or make my ill th' advantage of my good.
(II. 122-129)

The threat is echoed only once more, in the ominous attitude of York when Henry, attempting to impress him and Somerset with the

pettiness of their dispute, randomly puts on a red rose (see IV.i.176-181). The danger implicit in York's indignation is only suggested in his subsequent speeches, but there is no missing the point; for Shakespeare (in some of the best verse in the play) follows them with one of Exeter's choric comments:

Well dist thou, Richard, to suppress thy voice;
For had the passions of thy heart burst out,
I fear we should have seen decipher'd there
More rancorous spite, more furious raging broils,
Than yet can be imagin'd or suppos'd (II. 182-186)

Thus to the threats to national unity created by the bickering among the various factions is added the danger of a pretender to the throne who, frustrated by the favor shown his enemies and painfully conscious of the besmirched honor of the family name, seems to be waiting for the slightest excuse to establish his claim.

An important feature of Shakespeare's dramatization of these "civil broils" is the thematic focusing he attained by manipulating history. For one thing, he reduced what historically were long-standing and complicated feuds to ephemeral personal altercations. In III.i, for example, he recreated the 1426 Parliament at Leicester (he put it in London) at which Gloucester, according to Hall, "laid certain articles to the bishoppe of Wynchesters charge." The accusations the chronicles reported were based upon a series of events extending far back into the previous reigns and were quite serious, including as they did Winchester's responsibility for several treasonous conspiracies (see Hall, 131; Hol., iii.591). But in dramatizing the event, Shakespeare made Gloucester's indictments appear to be only personal and spiteful. He omitted all reference to the earlier crimes, substituting instead a general imputation of unpriestly covetousness, and he diluted the charges of treason against Henry VI to a vague insinuation of malice toward the King (See II. 24-25). He retained only one of the accusations reported in the chronicles, that affecting Gloucester most directly:

And for thy treachery, what's more manifest —
In that thou laid'st a trap to take my life,
As well at London Bridge as at the Tower?
(II.21-23)

The effect of the shift in emphasis is clear. The broader, but thematically irrelevant, issues are muted so that the personal enmity of the two characters stands out in sharp relief.

Shakespeare's technique is revealed even more clearly in his handling of the York-Somerset dispute. The first cause of their animosity was petty enough; as has already been pointed out, Somerset became piqued when York was appointed Regent for France. But Shakespeare reduced the whole controversy to a disagreement over "a certain question in the law" (IV.i.95), a "nice sharp quillet" (II.iv.17). He let Henry himself put the altercation into proper perspective:

... what infamy will there arise
When foreign princes shall be certified
That for a toy, a thing of no regard,
King Henry's peers and chief nobility
Destroy'd themselves and lost the realm of France!
(IV.i.143-147)

Shakespeare even left the disputed legal question undefined, thus avoiding the confusion of sympathies which might have resulted if the audience was allowed to judge the issue. Both York and Somerset stand convicted by the play's structure of political ethics.

Shakespeare also achieved thematic focus by means of another alteration of history. First, the "jarring discord of nobility" was amplified by a fragmenting of the original factions. Winchester's party, for instance, historically included Somerset and Suffolk, but in *1 Henry VI* each of them is an individual disputant (only in the Temple Garden scene and the Parliament scene is their original alliance adumbrated). Then each discordant element is expanded with followers and retainers. Thus the "blue-coats" of Gloucester and the "tawny-coats" of Winchester brawl in the streets in I.iii and III.i, and in IV.i Vernon and Basset interrupt the coronation of Henry in Paris with a request that they be allowed to assert by personal combat the respective merits of York and Somerset.

The final ingredient in the design of *1 Henry VI* is the fictitious liaison between Margaret and Suffolk that appears only in V.iii and v. This episode seems at first so unrelated to anything preceding it in the play that it has often been considered an afterthought, simply a transition — perhaps written some time after the rest of the play —

to *2 Henry VI*. But the event is anticipated, if incompletely, in the early scenes of the play. Margaret's father, Reignier, is a leading character among the French adherents from the first act (even though, as John Dover Wilson points out, the chronicles do not mention him until "they record the negotiations for Henry VI's marriage").²⁰ Suffolk, likewise, although a minor character appearing in scattered scenes, plays an important part in the Temple Garden scene as the only person who chooses the red rose with Somerset, and his character is there delineated in such a way as to anticipate his part in the marriage negotiations:

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.
(II. 7-9)

More important, the nature of Suffolk's scheme is quite consistent with the selfish ambitions of the other dissidents, so its introduction at the end of the play adds one more threat to the internal security of England. As A. S. Cairncross says, "it is entirely in keeping that the play should end on a note of chaos, showing how far the natural order or degree has been inverted, when Suffolk can say,"²¹

Margaret shall now be Queen, and rule the King;
But I will rule both her, the King, and realm.
(V.v.107-108)

Thus there are five ingredients in the scenes making up the design of *1 Henry VI*: the wars in France, the disputes between Gloucester and Winchester and between Somerset and York, the regal aspirations of York, and finally the liaison between Suffolk and Margaret. As was suggested at the beginning of this chapter, the structural function of each scene — the contribution it makes to the design — is in part determined by which of these dramatic issues went into its construction. But just as important is the shape of each scene itself. H. T. Price, in his analysis of *1 Henry VI*, noted that Shakespeare's "typical scene is a miniature play with its internal logical structure, its beginning, middle, and end."²² When all the scenes are examined, each turns out to be cut from one of four basic patterns. For purposes of analysis, these patterns will be designated as Types I, IIA, IIB, and III.

The Type I structures are most characteristic of the war scenes. Simple in construction, they make a brief, linear addition to the

action and a single-faceted contribution to the thematic design, usually in the form of a recapitulation of the motif of contrast between the English and the French. A characteristic scene is II.i, although it is more elaborate than many others of the type. Talbot, Bedford, and Burgundy, preparing to recapture Orleans, expostulate against the French "deceit, contriv'd by art and baleful sorcery" (II. 14-15). Then the English attack, spectacularly driving the French "O'er the walls in their shirts" (s.d.). The French leaders occupy the stage to bicker over which of them was responsible for the failure of the guard (the implication is clear — Charles and Joan, instead of making their appointed rounds, had gone to bed together), and then are driven off, "leaving their clothes behind" (s.d.), by a single English soldier shouting "A Talbot! A Talbot!" The scene is short, containing only eighty-one lines, and offers a great deal of exciting action. In addition, it glorifies the English and derogates the French. But it stands alone, portraying an isolated incident, like many of the other individual scenes of its type, it could be removed from the play and its absence would be inconspicuous. Also typical of the Type I pattern are the scenes dramatizing such divergent events as the Countess of Auvergne plot (II.iii), York's meeting with Mortimer (II.v), and the reunion and death of Talbot and his son (IV.v-vii). Each briefly and efficiently make a single contribution to the design of the play.

The Type IIA structures, found only in the scenes set in the English court, are the longest, most complex, and thematically most important. Each begins with a meeting of the full council for a specific purpose: the funeral of Henry V in I.i, the resolution of the Gloucester-Winchester dispute and the restoration of York in III.i, the coronation of Henry in Paris in IV.i, and the preparations for the truce negotiations in V.i.²³ In each of these scenes a degree of unity is achieved among the nobles: mutual determination to prosecute the war vigorously in I.i and IV.i, for example, and the hollow peace made between Winchester and Gloucester, as well as the almost unanimous acceptance of York, in III.i. Yet repeatedly, in every scene of this type, this hesitant concord is shattered by an outbreak of violence, a vituperative aside, a choric comment from Exeter, or by all three. Thus there is in these scenes the recurrent "motif of the interrupted ceremony" which reflects the general break-down in order and tradition in the play.²⁴ The funeral of Henry V is marred by the outburst between Gloucester and Winchester, and again by the arrivals of the three messengers reporting the series of

defeats in France. The King's attempt to reconcile his two uncles is suspended when their retainers come brawling into the Parliament, and his coronation in Paris is interrupted by the quarrelsome Vernon and Basset. Moreover, each of the Type IIA scenes contains at least one threat of future violence, uttered either openly or in an aside, by Winchester, Somerset, or York. Finally, a choric comment by Exeter concludes the two most important of these scenes, III.i and IV.i. For example,

... no simple man that sees

This jarring discord of nobility,

This shouldering of each other in the court,

This factious bandying of their favorites,

But that it doth presage some ill event.

'Tis much when sceptres are in children's hands;

But more when envy breeds unkind division;

There comes the ruin, there begins confusion.

(IV.i.187-194)

This rhythm of concord-discord repeated in the structures of the Type IIA scenes is the very heart of Shakespeare's theme, the counter-point against which is played the futile heroism of Talbot and the victories of the united, if decadent, French.

The Type IIB scenes are, as the designation implies, variants of the previous type. In effect, they lack only the court setting and the initial concord of the IIA structures. These are the scenes portraying the "civil broils" in action; thus they include the clash between the parties of Gloucester and Winchester before the Tower (I.iii) and the Temple Garden scene (II.iv). The final scene of the play — in which Henry, in spite of the vigorous protests of Gloucester, dispatches Suffolk to "procure that Lady Margaret" — also seems to be constructed from the same pattern. Quite simple in design but energetically realized, they begin with a conflict and end, nothing having been resolved, with the threat of future dissension. This premonitory note is always underscored in the closing lines:

Abominable Gloucester, guard thy head,

For I intend to have it ere long.

(I.iii.86-87)

And here I prophesy: this brawl to-day
Grown to this faction in the Temple Garden,

Shall send between the Red Rose and the White
A thousand souls to death and deadly night.
(II.iv.124-127)

Margaret shall now be Queen, and rule the King,
But I will rule both her, the King, and realm.
(V.iv.107-108)

As Price points out, "it is part of Shakespeare's construction to lead along to the last speech and make that sum up the scene and fix the impression he wants to leave in our minds."²⁵ Again, the thematic function of the Type IIB structures is clear: they maintain the play's threatening tone and its impression of ubiquitous internal strife.

The Type III scenes, in contrast, are constructed in a way that emphasizes the unity of the French. Mirror-images of the IIA scenes, they depict the French court moving from discord to concord. In I.ii, for example, the French, their morale low because of the defeat they have just suffered before Orleans, scoff at the simple peasant girl who offers to help them. She convinces them of her divine inspiration, however, and the scene ends with the unanimous acceptance of her leadership. Similarly, in III.ii the French regroup after their defeat at Rouen. In spite of their recent loss, Charles promises Joan,

We have been guided by thee hitherto,
And of thy cunning had no diffidence;
One sudden foil shall never breed distrust,
(II.9-11)

and the Bastard and Alencon echo has expression of confidence. The scene ends with the reclaiming of the defector Burgundy and another general chorus affirming Joan's leadership. The clear structural parallel demands that the events portrayed in these scenes be contrasted with those in the IIA scenes.

The design of *1 Henry VI* is created out of the juxtaposition of these four kinds of scene structures and out of the five dramatic issues they portray. To quote H. T. Price once again, "the effectiveness of the single scene Shakespeare further enhances by the opposition or contrast of scene with scene. Just as he flings speech at speech, so he flings scene at scene."²⁶ From this opposition of scenes

emerges a pattern of structural relationships, and that pattern in turn produces an impression of rhythmic progression which gives to the design the life and dynamism of drama.

The pattern takes shape within a complex organization of contrasts. On the most general level, there is the antithesis of larger themes, what Geoffrey Bullough has called "the opposition between two forces or principles, one patriotic and constructive, the other destructive and selfish."²⁷ Thus Talbot's selfish heroism is contrasted to both the petulance of the English nobles and to the treachery of Joan of Arc; the self-indulgence of Winchester, Somerset, and Suffolk to the patriotic, but dangerously proud, behavior of Gloucester and York; and, of course, the concord among the French is the antithesis of the discord among the English. At the other end of the scale, this motif of contrast penetrates to the very heart of Shakespeare's dramatic expression. There is the recurrent juxtaposition of colors — the blue coats against the tawny coats, the white rose against the red.²⁸ There are scattered contrasts of cosmic imagery, as between, for example, Bedford's anxious reference to

Comets, importing change of times and states,
(I.i.2)

and Charles' confident observation that
Mars his true moving, even as in the heavens
So in the earth, to this day is not known.
Late did he shine upon the English side;
Now we are victors, upon us he smiles.

(II.i.1-4)²⁹

Characteristic speeches stand out as significantly different from each other: Exeter's worried soliloquies are complemented by the ominous asides of Winchester, and Henry's quiet pleas for unity by the intense bickering of the disputants. The verse of such thoughtful scenes as the one portraying the meeting between Mortimer and York is imposing and expansive, counterpointing the rapid and energetic style found in the war scenes.

Most important — and this is the point toward which this whole chapter has been moving — out of this multiplicity of contrasts emerges the controlling structural pattern, and that pattern is expressed in the distribution of the types of scenes and scene ingredients which were described in the preceding pages. Those scenes

portraying English disunity (Types IIA and IIB) are grouped together, and they always stand in apposition to one or more scenes demonstrating the contrasting concord of the French (Type III). Thus the play opens with two discordant scenes — the funeral of Henry V and the street brawl before the Tower — framing the alliance of the French under Joan. Similarly, the interrupted coronation of Henry in Paris is preceded by the defection of Burgundy and followed by the determined regrouping, and subsequent victory, of the French at Bordeaux. This same framing technique is used again in Act V, which begins and ends with notes of dissension standing like parentheses on each side of the English successes. The Type I scenes are also clustered, their characteristic brevity creating a series of rapid juxtapositions of French and English, of victory and defeat.

The discussion so far would seem to suggest that *1 Henry VI* is "not so much a Chronicle play as a fantasia on historical themes,"³⁰ or not so much a dynamic work of drama as a static painting to be framed and hung in the study. By its own nature drama seems to move, of course, because the incidents it portrays, regardless of any other relationship they may have to each other, are presented sequentially; and in *1 Henry VI* the sheer density of events provided by the number and brevity of the scenes would in itself give an impression of sweeping action. But the play moves for other reasons too.

To begin with, Shakespeare energized the design, creating out of the pattern expressed in the grouping of contrasting scenes a rhythm which gives a sense of progression. The play surges forward in a series of four pulses which are, I. W. Baldwin not withstanding,³¹ independent of the act divisions (except for the last one, which comprises Act V). These pulses are set off from each other in a number of ways.³² They reveal, for one thing, another distinguishable patterning: each is composed of either one or two clusters of Types IIA, IIB, and III scenes, and these are balanced by a rapidly moving cluster of Type I scenes. More obviously, each pulse concludes a phase of the war, and in these phases what was historically the eventual loss of France is traced. Thus the first pulse ends with the total rout at Orleans of the French, who, it will be remembered, "leap o'er the walls in their shirts" and flee, "leaving their clothes behind." The second, however, ends with the French defeated but ominously undaunted at Rouen. Consequently, the third concludes with the death of Talbot. In the fourth pulse the hollow truce is made, then implicitly broken by the English.³³

In addition, the boundaries of these pulses are marked by distinct shifts in tone. The pleasantry of the Countess of Auvergne incident (suggestive of the recent English victory) is followed by the threatening atmosphere of the Temple Garden scene in which, Reese notes, "we are for the moment in a different world, with the change of climate declaring itself in an apparent change in the calibre of the men who are speaking."³⁴ The patriotic oratory with which Joan reclaims Burgundy precedes the bickering of Vernon and Basset that mars Henry's welcome of the victorious Talbot. Finally, the last two pulses are separated, on the one hand, by the energy and impression of cataclysmic action with which the death of Talbot is portrayed, and on the other by the subdued tone of the English lords as they decide to negotiate a truce.

The rhythm created by these pulses becomes increasingly rapid. As the play progresses more dramatic tensions are added: new dissident parties are introduced and expanded with retainers, and the French grow more formidable. At the same time, the pulses become successively shorter.³⁵ Thus more and more happens in less and less time, giving the effect of dangerous acceleration. The sense of balance between the constructive and destructive principles found in the opening scene, the impression that the forces of order and patriotism are still in command, is gradually upset. As the play moves forward the characters begin to lose control of the course of events, and the tentative concord arrived at in earlier scenes becomes increasingly difficult to establish in the later ones.

There is still another method used to give the impression of progressive action in *1 Henry VI*, and it perhaps is the *tour de force* of the play's construction. The procedure is really quite simple: Shakespeare created an elaborate structure of dramatic suspense by continually prefiguring events which, it turns out, never occur. Four scenes end with Winchester muttering threats of future action against Gloucester, but they are never carried out. York prophesies his quarrel with Somerset "will drink blood another day," but that day is left to be portrayed in later plays, as is York's threatened seizure of the crown. Even the last scene of the play is inconclusive. The war — the only sequence of action brought to any kind of finish — had ended with a tenuous truce, and that truce is here broken. In addition, the final speech of Suffolk points ahead to even greater internal strife in the future.

Thus several catastrophes are promised but not delivered, several violent concatenations threaten to explode but remain inert,

and the play is propelled forward through a restless welter of suspense to a comparatively quiet and inconclusive ending. The impression it leaves is one of ubiquitous and irrevocable discord; "of individuals caught up in a cataclysmic movement of events for which responsibility is communal and historical, not personal and immediate;"³⁰ of a nation being sapped by a malignant disease in its vital organs and dismembered by a swirl of history. Like history itself, the play arrives at no stopping place; it is only an interlude in the course of events. But it is a structured interlude, a piece cut out of time and rendered with its own pattern and rhythm, its own set of meaningful correspondences. Shakespeare kept his theme constantly before him and wove a variegated design which would express it from the loose threads of the chronicles.

The fact the preceding discussion has established, it is hoped, is that *1 Henry VI* is a carefully-constructed play. This does not necessarily mean it is a good play, at least not when measured against the standards Shakespeare himself set in his later works. The style is immature, rising only occasionally to true dramatic poetry and all too often barely escaping rant and doggerel. The characterization is flat and almost allegorical (in the worst sense of the word), with only scattered suggestions of incipient complexity. The action now and then goes to extremes — or as H. T. Price puts it, "loses its dignity" — such as when the cannon is fired at the tower or when Joan conjures fiends. But the structure of the play seems to bear out Geoffrey Bullough's conclusion: "the only writer in the early nineties who possessed the skill to bring such order out of the straggling narrative of the Chronicles, was Shakespeare."³⁷

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER III

¹The nature of war itself is not, it should be noted, a theme developed in the play. Nor is there anything resembling passivism. Although Shakespeare apparently abhorred civil war, this and other plays suggest that he, like his contemporaries, considered an energetically pursued foreign war preferable to a decadent peace. On this subject see Paul A. Jorgensen, "Theoretical Views of War in Elizabethan England," *JHI*, XIII (1952), 469-481; and "Shakespeare's Use of War and Peace," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, XVI (1953), 319-352. Also see G. R. Waggoner, "An Elizabethan Attitude Toward Peace and War," *Philological Quarterly*, XXXIII (1954), 20-33.

²Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Vol. III (New York, 1957), 39.

³*1H6* has only 2,676 lines but twenty-nine scenes, *2H6*, the longest of the three, has 3,086 lines but only twenty-four scenes. And *3H6* has 2,902 lines and twenty-eight scenes.

⁴The authority used throughout this study for the historical dates of incidents portrayed in the *Henry VI* plays is Karl J. Holzknecht's "An Outline of Shakespeare's English History Plays," *Shakespeare Association Bulletin*, XXII (1947), 193-202.

⁵E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1962), p. 187. See also M. M. Reese, *The Cease of Majesty* (New York, 1962), p. 168.

⁶Although Holinshed usually paraphrased Hall in reporting on these years, the page references to both chronicles will be given. The quotations from Edward Hall, *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancastre and Yorke* (1548) are taken from Appendix I, Andrew S. Cairncross, ed. *The First Part of King Henry VI* (London, 1962), pp. 133-169. The quotations from Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles*, 2nd ed. (1587), are taken from W. C. Boswell-Stone, *Shakespeare's Holinshed* (New York, 1896), pp. 205-242.

⁷Shakespeare created the impression of cataclysmic defeat in this scene by condensing into the reports of the three messengers English losses ranging over almost thirty years. See Holzknecht, p. 197.

⁸Andrew S. Cairncross, ed. *The First Part of King Henry VI* (London, 1962), p. xl.

⁹J. P. Brockbank, "The Frame of Disorder: *Henry VI*," *The Early Shakespeare*, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies III (1961), p. 80. The quotes are from Hol., iii. 171 and 172.

¹⁰Frederick S. Boas, "Joan of Arc in Shakespeare, Schiller, and Shaw," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, II (1951), 39.

¹¹For a thorough study of the ironic presentation of Joan see Leo Kirschbaum, "The Authorship of *1 Henry VI*," *PMLA*, LXVII (1952), 809-822.

¹²Ironically, Shakespeare apparently modeled this strategy, which he has Talbot loudly denounce as treacherous, upon a similar ruse the chronicles reported the English had used to take the castle at Cornill (Holinshed labeled it "an excellent finesse in Waure"). See Hall, 197; Hol., iii. 619-620.

¹³Tillyard, p. 183. [John] D[over] W[ilson], ed. *The First Part of King Henry VI* (Cambridge, 1952), p. xix.

¹⁴Alfred B. Harbage, *As They Liked It* (New York, 1947), p. 153.

¹⁵Shakespeare neatly avoided the problems which would have been created by presenting on the stage an infant king (Henry VI was only nine months old when Henry V died) by delaying Henry's entrance until Act III.

¹⁶Reese, p. 175; Wilson, pp. xii-xiii; Tillyard, p. 191.

¹⁷Eg., Hall, 130; Hol., iii. 60.

¹⁸There seems to be some confusion between historical personages here. See Boswell-Stone, n. 5 p. 219.

¹⁹Tillyard, p. 182.

²⁰Wilson, p. x.

²¹Cairncross, p. xliii.

²²Hereward T. Price, *Construction in Shakespeare*, Univ. of Michigan Contributions in Modern Philology 17 (Ann Arbor, 1951), p. 21.

²³To these four scenes could be added a shorter version of the IIA pattern — III. iv, in which the King welcomes Talbot in Paris.

²⁴Price, pp. 27-28.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷Bullough, p. 38. See also Price, p. 28; and T. W. Baldwin, *On the Literary Genetics of Shakespeare's Plays, 1592-1594* (Urbana, 1959), p. 345.

²⁸For a discussion of the color imagery in *IH6*, see Price, pp. 29-30.

²⁹Cairncross, in pp. lv-lvii, discusses the imagery of *IH6* in some detail.

³⁰Bullough, p. 25. This was Geoffrey Bullough's reaction when, in analyzing Shakespeare's use of his sources, he found *IH6* "does not follow the sequence of events in the chronicles but darts about the period in a bewildering way."

³¹Baldwin, in *Literary Genetics*, pp. 345 ff., applies his well-known "five-act structure" analysis to *IH6*. As to these "pulses," Price may be suggesting much the same thing when he points out that "the middle of the play repeats . . . the motifs of the beginning," with III.i corresponding to I.i, and III.ii to I.ii (see pp. 31-32.)

³²The first pulse takes up I.i-II.iii, or the funeral through the Countess of Auvergne episode; the second, II.iv-III.iii, or the Temple Garden clash through the defection of Burgundy; the third, III.iv-IV.vii, or the Paris coronation through the death of Talbot; the fourth, as has been suggested, constitutes Act V.

³³Because the peace arrangements included a contract of marriage between Henry VI and the daughter of the Earl of Armagnac (see V.i.17 ff.), the King's decision to marry Margaret of Anjou constitutes a violation of the truce.

³⁴Reese, p. 173.

³⁵The first pulse covers 821 lines; the second, 692 lines; the third, 602 lines; and the last takes up 561 lines.

³⁶Brockbank, p. 73.

³⁷Bullough, p. 40.

CHAPTER IV

THE SECOND PART OF KING HENRY VI

In addition to a well-wrought design similar to that in *1 Henry VI*, *2 Henry VI* offers a masterfully constructed plot. The action is not, as in the previous play, a series of largely disconnected incidents which are given thematic structure by a liberally used pattern of contrasts. Rather, it is a carefully planned series of complexly interrelated events from which grow, quite organically, the theme and shape of the play. The general theme is again civil dissension, but whereas in the previous play this theme was developed within the context of a foreign war, in *2 Henry VI* it is associated with a more closely related subject matter — political intrigue and the resulting disintegration of law.

Shakespeare plotted the play by telescoping the ten years from Henry VI's marriage in 1445 through the battle of St. Albans in 1455, the first major conflict in the Wars of the Roses. It almost seems as if he reread the chronicles and began over again, for the various factions which sapped the energies of the nation in *1 Henry VI* are redefined in their full historical complexity, and treated with considerably more historical accuracy, in *2 Henry VI*.¹

Shakespeare's delineation of these disputes in the opening scene is masterful. That scene is almost a dramatic "table of contents" to the rest of the play. Shakespeare gathered together upon the stage all the major characters for the arrival of Margaret of Anjou, the King's new bride, and by means of a series of strategically placed exits he deftly outlined the struggles which were to lead, in the subsequent five acts, to York's victory at St. Albans. The atmosphere of nuptial concord suddenly becomes charged when Gloucester, shocked by the ignominious terms to which Suffolk has agreed, drops the marriage contract. Five carefully spaced exits follow, and after each the characters remaining upon the stage conspire against those who have just left.

Although no summary can do justice to the intricacy of the action, here is the complicated plot Shakespeare sketched in clean, bold strokes in barely over two hundred fifty lines: 1) Gloucester incites the lords against the dangerous new coalition between Margaret and Suffolk; 2) Cardinal Beaufort allies with Somerset and Buckingham (Suffolk is included later) against Gloucester; 3)