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SEVEN DIMENSIONS OF SHAKESPEAREAN HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

The article proposes lines of thought about Shakespeare's dramatisations of history, which should bring out the fully dramatic totality of effect involved. In the history plays Shakespeare achieves not the exposition of political doctrines (though these can be offered by individual characters as their own sense of historical process) but humanly felt complex situations in which the senses of time, of place, of community, of animating concepts, of ambivalent values, and of providential ambiguities combine to suggest the full experience of living historical reality expressed with passionately charged verse. Seven possible components of dramatic response are suggested, and the analysis examines how these are made imaginatively real, and how compared with his contemporary dramatists Shakespeare achieves a uniquely full and vivid rendering of location, consciousness of time, context of society, passionate individualism, complex issues, and metaphysical possibilities. In particular, the success of the early historical plays (traditionally thought very inferior to the later) in realising the dynamics of historical action is stressed. An emerging theme in the criticism of the postwar period has been a much stronger curiosity about the qualities of these earlier plays, and the article relates itself to this critical trend which it judges to be the most fruitful area of recent Shakespearean critical investigation.

Among the most fruitful of recent Shakespeare criticism has been that concerned with seeing the history plays in terms less of ideologies like the Tudor Myth, the King's Two Bodies, or the Elizabethan World Picture (valuable though those themes have been) than of defining a total sense of what dramatising history means. To do this involves trying to define the whole range of expectation, tension, commitment, impul-

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sion, and evaluation, which the plays offer, and to embark upon an all-round enquiry into how historical themes are to be rendered in drama, and how Shakespeare renders them in particular. To quote James Winny:

Shakespeare's history plays seem to have been unfortunate in their literary christening. Alone among the poet's works they were given a name which suggests a primary interest not literary but political, and which implies an intention of using drama in order to present an interpretation of historical events.... They have been found to embody Shakespeare's considered views on government, order, and degree; and the two tetralogies, so called in deference to this reading, have been read as Shakespeare's moral commentary on the consequences of deposing a divinely appointed monarch.... A reader content with this estimate of Shakespeare is unlikely to object that such an approach exalts the political and moral elements of work whose first characteristic is imaginative.¹

In *A Kingdom for a Stage* Robert Ornstein pointed out how unconvincing have been attempts to define pre-Shakespearean attitudes to the dramatising of history. Idiosyncratic specimens such as Bale's *King Johan* or Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc* or Legge's *Ricardus Tertius* offer no basis for any generalisation. Peele's *Edward I*, starting fairly well, becomes a travesty. Greene's *James IV* is fantasy, not serious history, indeed, not any history at all, deriving as it does from Cinthio's *Ecatommiti*. It is hard to know where to slot in things like *Jack Straw*, *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*, or *The Troublesome Raigne* except as aspiring chronicle history. And, to quote Ornstein, 'No-one ever admired *Edward II* for its depiction of political realities.'² Of the same play a more damaging dismissal occurs in Wilbur Sanders's study, *The Dramatist and the Received Idea: 'Edward II'*, Mr Sanders observes, 'Fails to address itself to much that is human in us; it uses a shrunken language to tell a tale of men who are less than men.'³ Though one dare hardly ask, 'Is there such a thing as the Platonic Idea of the history play?', one dare ask 'How near can we come to a total historical/dramatic experience?' What recent studies have been asking is, 'What can 'men' be in history plays? What can human life be in a national context under the stress of time? What are the felt thrusts of politics as drama presents them in human living? How does Shakespeare avoid (as he does avoid) creating 'men who are less than men', speaking 'a shrunken language'?' These questions should be asked in full awareness that the play's the thing, the stage's space-time-character realisation of seemingly truthful action.

In *The Idea of History* R. G. Collingwood contrasted the Graeco-Roman philosophers' man, 'controlling his actions and creating his destiny by the work of his intellect', with Christian man, torn by passion and impulse. The Renaissance, Collingwood held, Christianised history as the record of passions, 'those necessary manifestations of human nature'. The historian

must always remember that the event was an action [performed, that is, by human decision and agency], and that his main task is to think himself

¹ *The Player King*, 1968, p. 6.

² *A Kingdom for a Stage*, 1972, p. 7.

³ *The Dramatists and the Received Idea*, 1968, p. 141.

into this action, to discern the thought of its agent, [and to perceive] an historical process in which the past, as far as it is historically known, survives in the present.¹

This is very Crocean and I am not sure I agree with it; but the point is that history is to be viewed as psychology as well as event, initiative as well as conditioning.

Such, certainly, was the manifold instinct by which Shakespeare rendered the thought-shot, action-ridden, chance-propelled actualities of life, in a complex never fully graspable on the stage, a complex of stage and page together, the product, as Coleridge wrote of *Venus and Adonis*, of

endless activity of thought in all the possible associations of thought with thought, thought with feeling or with words, of feelings with feelings,... making everything present to the imagination, [so] that you seem to be told nothing but to see and hear everything.

The special quality of Shakespeare's histories, compared with rhetorical pageants like *Gorboduc*, brisk adventures like *Edward II* and *Edward III* or *Perkin Warbeck*, or at the best, such thoughtful studies as *Woodstock*, *Sejanus*, or *Catiline*, lies in the completeness of their rendering, the fullness of their dimensions. To propound seven of these may seem like mystical conjuration, but all I wish to do is to define some components which, when we can respond fully to the histories in action, are uniquely satisfying. The magnificent seven are as follows :

- (i) The pulse and volume of poetically rendered passion;
- (ii) The imaginative reality of place;
- (iii) The imaginative reality of time;
- (iv) The context of communal life;
- (v) The wealth of animating concepts;
- (vi) The complexity of issues;
- (vii) The ambiguities of Providence.

Philip Brockbank, in his essay 'The Frame of Disorder - *Henry VI*', observes that we seek a rendering of history which provides a kind of fable or myth, that this is very effective for drama, and that Shakespeare's treatment of his material - 'Ideas of providence, historical process, personal responsibility, and the role of the hero'² is the most searching in English literature. Did anyone, indeed, rival it in any literature until Tolstoy? Shakespeare did not need Hooker to advise him on the nature of political life; still, in Book I, section x, of *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* Hooker defines the commonweal in Aristotelian terms which Shakespeare would find congenial, as

the very soul of a politic body, the parts whereof are by law animated, held together, and set on work in such actions as the common good requireth.

¹ *The Idea of History*, 1946, pp. 51, 214.

² In *Early Shakespeare*, ed. J. R. Brown and B. Harris, 1961, pp. 73-74.

Facing such multidimensional drama one is moved to echo Dryden when he tried, delightfully, to put a noose round Chaucer :

There is such a Variety of Game springing up before, me, that I am distracted in my Choice, and know not which to follow. 'Tis sufficient to say, according to the Proverb, that here is God's Plenty.¹

That the action presented should be so embedded in the livingness of place, time, exterior life, and interior passion and concept is the histories' miracle, beyond even that of the tragedies. And that, faced with the problem Henry James adverted to in the Preface to *Roderick Hudson* and his *Notebooks* (when he comments on *Portrait of a Lady*), the problem of choosing from endless possibilities that which will, with the full complexity of life, 'group together' - that, faced with all this, Shakespeare so triumphed is the most remarkable witness to his myriad-minded genius for coherence.

On the first dimension, the pulse and volume of poetically rendered passion, there is little need to dilate, though I suspect that apart from some famous purple passages it is often overlooked. Of the first part of *Henry IV* Bernard Shaw observed that one finds 'neither subtlety nor (for Shakespeare) much poetry in the presentation of the characters'.² Shaw was a virtuoso in coat-trailing, but here he doubtless speaks for a common assumption. There is in fact poetry everywhere in the first part of *Henry IV*, that is, an extraordinarily developed sense of the multiple expressiveness of language in activating, in dramatising, the words to be spoken. The writing has a thrust, a muscle, an exuberant stressing and music, and an exultant mastery over meanings, a mastery all the more triumphant because of the confident wrestling involved. I am not thinking of *Richard II*, in which no-one would dispute the 'poetry' of feeling - though to me it is less remarkable than the poetry of energy in other plays: nor am I thinking of such renowned passages as the interviews between King and Prince in both parts of *Henry IV*, or the great orations of *Henry V*. I am thinking, most immediately, of the electrifying sense of historical personality in the *Henry VIs* resulting from the more-than-Marlovian energies of the verse, energies found everywhere but most dramatically given in York and his son Gloucester, the future Richard III. What I especially mean is the poetry's astonishing wealth of meaning, by sound, movement, tone, metaphor, and amplitude of reference: it is extraordinarily fertile in what it supplies to the mind. The greatest thing in the *Henry VIs* is Gloucester's superb soliloquy in the third part (Act III, scene 2), of which space allows only a sample:

Why, then, I do but dream on sovereignty,
Like one that stands upon a promontory,
And spies a far-off shore where he would tread,
Wishing his foot were equal with his eye,
And chides the sea that sunders him from thence,
Saying he'll lade it dry to have his way;
And so I chide the means that keeps me from it:
And so I say I'll cut the causes off,
Flattering me with impossibilities.

¹ Preface to *The Fables*.

² *Dramatic Opinions*, 1906, p. 426.

[For] I, like one lost in a thorny wood,
 That rents the thorns, and is rent with the thorns,
 Seeking a way, and straying from the way,
 Not knowing how to find the open air,
 But toiling desperately to find it out,
 Torment myself to catch the English crown.

The exploding power of this is characteristic of Shakespeare's histories, a power different from the willed display of Marlowe's or Chapman's monomaniacs, and deserving a full analysis as the dimension which, above all, gives the plays their wonderful hold over the imagination.

To move on, then, to the second dimension, that of the imaginative reality of place. In *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art*, Harley Granville Barker remarked how unconvincing is Marlowe's *Edward II* in geographical location (and as to time, he added, 'there is nothing to tell us whether it is passing quickly or slowly'). Turning again, then, to Part 3 of *Henry VI* (Act IV, scene 8), we find Warwick telling King Henry that Edward of York has assembled forces in Belgium - 'hasty Germans and blunt Hollanders' - and is gathering support as he marches on London, and that he (Warwick) will mobilise Suffolk, Norfolk, Kent, and the Midlands, and make for the rendezvous at Coventry. In *Richard III*, at the crisis when Henry of Richmond is moving against the King, Richard, after a long static scene of fencing with the old Queen Elizabeth over her daughter's hand, sends the Queen away and turns to the campaign - and there is a sudden intentness as to both place and time; Richmond's navy is off the west coast, messengers are sent speeding to the eastern counties, Stanley's troops are in the north instead of the west, and so on. I am not reverting to the old notion that each scene should have a local habitation and a name: what happens is that there is an urgency of reference which convinces us that the land exists, often with a graphic specificity of detail, and exists not as a notional figment but as a real entity, a real theatre of action. This is most vividly true of that vigorous first scene in Part 1 of *Henry IV*, ranging in survey over the turbulent realm, and later in Henry's confrontation with, Hotspur over Holmedon Field and Mortimer's battle on 'gentle Severn's sedgy bank', and the Hotspur-Glendower quarrel over the course of the 'smug and silver Trent' and the division of the kingdom. The poetic activating of place provides for the action a fully sensed local context, not an abstraction. Jack Cade's London, Mistress Quickly's Eastcheap, Justice Shallow's Gloucestershire, John of Gaunt's sceptred Isle of England - these are major evidences, but there are scores of others to confirm our sense that personal lives move in real circumstances. As Gareth Lloyd Evans has said of Shakespeare's sense of place, 'its rich variety of human beings, so much a part of the warp and woof of their surroundings, invites a visual evocation of that from which they have grown.'¹

The third dimension, that of time, is no less telling. Time is not only sequence but impetus, what Dr Lloyd Evans calls 'the undertow beneath chronology'. It has various aspects. They include the retrospections and anticipations which Wolfgang Clemen has notably analysed, the underlayings and superimposings of other eras con-

¹ *Shakespeare II*, 1969, p. 40.

ditioning the present, the force of inheritance (whether prized or scorned), and time's weight as momentum, that onward course which is little felt in non-Shakespearean histories except in *Woodstock* and a few other plays. In his British Academy Shakespeare lecture of 1966 Professor Clemen quoted Arthur Miller's observation that 'how to dramatise what has gone before [is] the biggest single dramatic problem': it has exercised dramatists from Aeschylus to Ibsen, O'Neill, Miller, and Beckett. In *Richard III*, Clemen thinks, Shakespeare overdid its insistence; retrospects and prognostics are, he holds, 'evoked so incessantly [that they] cease to be dimensions of remoteness, [so that] the past... is altogether too present, too obtrusive'.¹ *Richard III* may indeed be too schematic about this, too obviously Nemesis-ridden. Yet one of the great things it is saying is that to declare independence of the past is impossible. One may say, with Mary Tyrone in O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 'The past is the present, isn't it?'. Or, in the words the Archives Building in Washington picks up from *The Tempest*, 'What's past is prologue.' Richard, the pragmatist, thinks that since he - hypocritically - admits his crimes to Princess Anne and Queen Elizabeth and promises redress, he can annul them. Of course he deceives himself:

A sense of community, both of man with his fellows and of the present with the past and future, emerges... as one of the fundamental spiritual forces against which Richard engages himself.²

If the chorus of wailing queens in *Richard III* is, excusably, hag-ridden with memories and obsessive with maledictions, Richard himself is, inexcusably, nonchalant about them until, before his fatal battle on Bosworth Field, he is visited by the ghosts of his victims, presenting past and future as doom-laden.

In a different way Richard II, too, is guilty. John of Gaunt, the old patriotic uncle, recalls past glories in his incomparable 'royal throne of kings' lament for ruined England. Hearing of Gaunt's death, Richard can only comment (Act II, scene 1, 153-5).

The ripest fruit soon falls, and so doth he;
His time is past; our pilgrimage must be.
So much for that.

But age calls for reverence, tradition for honour, and Richard's surviving uncle York warns him (Act II, scene 1, 195-9).

Take from Time
His charters and his customary rights,
Let not tomorrow then ensue today;
Be not thyself - for how art thou a king
But by fair sequence and succession?

This touches on the deepest instincts for continuity. Time is neither mechanical sequence nor, in Bergson's phrase, the pressure which prevents everything from hap-

¹ Shakespeare's Dramatic Art, 1972, pp. 125, 130.

² E.A.J. Honigmann, *Richard III* (New Penguin edn), 1968, p. 42.

pening at once. It is, first, the dynamic thrust of cause into effect; second, the lifeline connecting generations (or perhaps not a line but a depth of strata); and third, a treasury of experienced value. Philip Brockbank's essay already mentioned - 'The Frame of Disorder; **Henry VI**' - offers a good analysis of Shakespearean history's **felt time**, the sensed resonance of other times in the present. Lionel Knights in **Some Shakespearean Themes** sees Part 2 of **Henry IV** as an early sign of 'the great Shakespeare' because its presiding theme is that of time and change.¹ In Act III of that play, as the King and Warwick sweep their gaze over past, present, and future (as do the King and Prince in Act IV, and the Prince as the new King in Act V), Collingwood's 'passion and impulse' in history are offered in rich perspective. By contrast, the late history of **Henry VIII** markedly lacks onward dimension; its great figures rise and fall with inert inevitability.

The Archbishop of York in Part 2 of **Henry IV** invokes the familiar metaphor of 'the stream of time', but this is too passive; time is rather what he himself calls 'the rough torrent of occasion'. John Arthos has put its strenuous onset well in **Shakespeare: the Early Writings** -

What we... become aware of is that time appears to be passing endlessly, that multitudes of persons of the greatest stature and energy give their full strength to managing fortune, and that for all their greatness they are like those other great ones that ebb and flow by the moon.²

Drama must thrust forward. But Shakespeare's thrusts come not from a mere need for further events but from passion and impulse seeking to manage time and fortune. In Part 1 of **Henry VI** (Act III, scene 1), no sooner are Gloucester and Winchester speciously reconciled than each makes it covertly clear that he will break the peace. No sooner (Act III scene 4) does Henry honour Lord Talbot and go out to be crowned than a Yorkist partisan, Vernon, and a Duke of Somerset man, Basset, violently quarrel. No sooner (Act V, scene 1) does the good Duke of Gloucester coax Henry to court the French Earl of Armagnac's daughter than the scheming Cardinal Beaufort is heard soliloquising on his own ambition. What drives present into the future is no extraneous inevitability but 'persons of the greatest stature and energy'.

Prophecy abounds, but it has much less predetermining rigidity than in Greek drama. It proceeds from human judgments foreseeing how life, subject to time, sways, however uncertainly, towards ends prescribed by an inscrutable Providence (the ambiguities of which form the last of my dimensions). As Warwick observes in Part 2 of **Henry IV** (Act III, scene 1).

There is a history in all men's lives
 Figuring the natures of the times deceased;
 The which observed, a man may prophesy
 With a near aim, of the main chance of things
 As yet not come to life, who in their seeds
 And weak beginnings lie intreasurèd.
 These things become the hatch and brood of time.

1 **Some Shakespearean Themes**, 1959, p. 45.

2 **Shakespeare: The Early Writings**, 1972, p. 173.

Past and present sow the seeds of the future, but what will grow is a mystery disclosed only by 'the hatch and brood of time'. The metaphors are of a process not mechanical but of a covert, unpredictable, natural fostering.

Grouping together these first three dimensions results in manifolds of place, time, and passion - 'what groups together' - which are seizingly compulsive. Part 2 of **Henry VI** opens with a high-charged plot by which Suffolk unites King Henry with Margaret of Anjou; in every line we are at the heart of wide-ranging acrimonies, national and international issues, dynastic, factional, and personal rivalries, and past and future instabilities, two hundred lines of imaginative scanning over all repercussions of policy. All the characters then go out save for the Duke of York, who ends the scene with a tremendous monologue beginning 'Anjou and Maine are given to the French', his mind ranging in time and space over events past and future, at home and abroad, and his passions reacting with volcanic energy.

Similar episodes of manifold concentration and expansion abound; Shakespeare so manages the sense of history that every present situation is the focus of all that is relevant to it. Almost as **Richard III** opens there enters to Richard his brother Clarence, on his way to prison; effortlessly Shakespeare evokes their world of hazards, infidelities, intrigues, delusions, scandals, jealousies, apprehended perils, and unforeseeable outcomes. In the play's third scene a hundred lines suffice for the maze of court pitfalls - the King dying, the Queen dreading a harsh future, Richard hypocritically denouncing treacherles; the whole constitutes a felt reality of environment. The start of **Henry IV**, Part 1, is equally comprehensive - urgencies of time and place in news of campaigns and defiance, each instant charged to the limit: then Prince Hal and Falstaff are heard ranging in humorous leisure through tavern and highway frolic in their rich world of personal, local, and temporal life ample with the bounty of Nature herself. As John Arthos observes, Shakespeare projects his characters 'into the fully peopled world, their own minds themselves peopled with all the creatures, all the memories, all the thoughts, of Christendom'.¹

This, then, is the fourth dimension, that of community, the fully peopled world. Two centuries ago in **The Dramatick Character of Sir John Falstaff** that enthusiastic commentator Maurice Morgann peered behind the text of **Henry IV** to find evidence that Falstaff was not a coward, despite the play's contention that he is. The procedure is illicit, yet one sympathises, and indeed can agree with Morgann that

those characters... who are seen only in part are yet capable of being unfolded and understood in the whole; every part being in fact relative, and inferring all the rest.²

This is true equally of the whole social life to which the text gives such ample clues; this is a matter not really of going behind the text but of accepting fully the imaginative extensions the text promotes. Ben Jonson too does this with some success, in comedy with **Every Man in his Humour**, in tragedy with **Sejanus** and **Catiline**; yet about his London and Rome there is something willed, deliberated. Shakespeare works

¹ *Shakespeare: the Early Writings*, 1972, p. 200.

² *The Dramatick Character of Sir John Falstaff*, 1777, p. 61, footnote.

otherwise, seems indeed not to work, but to lavish with creative ease those background gratuities which turn portraits into genre paintings. Nevill Coghill makes the point aptly :

In all the stories he chose to dramatise, the corporate structure of a whole society is always indicated... The histories, crowded as they are with high personages, and affairs of state, make time for their Bullicalfs, their Warts, their drawers, gardeners, porters, grooms, and citizens, and can find place for the consciences of common soldiers, and even of common murderers.¹

But the dimension of community extends beyond the 'bit' parts into a whole society, imaginatively felt to be surrounding the action even though not visibly present, glimpsed by 'the eye of mind' [which] willingly translates the shorthand of imaginative reference into the extended substance of reality'.²

Buckingham's brazen account in *Richard III* of how London's citizens fight shy of Richard's claim to the crown (Act III, scene 1), Hotspur's satire on the 'popinjay' lord and his outbursts over the 'frosty-spirited' ally who deserts him, in Part 1 of *Henry IV* (Acts 1, scene 3, and II, scene 3), the dying Henry IV's vision of a ruined realm in Part 2 (Act IV, scene 5) - such things are more than descriptions or narrations; they are themselves imaginative dramas, panoramas of 'the eye of mind', harmonies and counterpoints deepening a tune. The most enriching of all is John of Gaunt's lamentation¹ in *Richard II* over the ruined 'royal throne of kings, this sceptred Isle' of England.

This collateral dimension is often a matter not of retrospect or prospect but of current context, offstage life bursting richly into onstage action. The third Act of *Henry VI*, Part 1, opens as King Henry presides over a great quarrel between the Duke of Gloucester and the Bishop of Winchester. Their factions riot outside and at last break in, blood-stained, and the episode gathers into itself all that pertains to the explosive situation - the enmities, charges, pleas, premonitions, ironies. The scene ends with the Duke of Exeter brooding that the hatred shown will 'Burn under feignèd ashes of forced love', to fulfil the old prophecy that Henry of Monmouth (Henry V) should win all, Henry of Windsor (Henry VI) lose all. One breathes the very air of trouble, in felt experience.

On the comic side, could one desire stronger evidence of community than Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet provide in the tavern scenes of the *Henry IVs* or Justice Shallow and his companions in the country scenes of Part 2? Shakespeare's histories are dramatic anticipations of the social novel; no wonder Maurice Morgann looked into their inner landscapes and marginal infillings. The context of community includes also, in the way of epics and novels but not of many plays, the theme of reputation - the brave young Talbot in Part 1 of *Henry VI* (Act IV, scene 4) refusing to forsake his doomed father lest 'The world will say he is not Talbot's blood, that basely fled when noble Talbot stood': or John of Gaunt in *Richard II* (Act II, scene 1) evoking a

¹ Shakespeare's *Professional Skills*, 1964, p. 61.

² James Winny. *The Player King*, 1968, p. 14. 'The eye of mind' is taken from *The Rape of Lucrece*, line 1426.

country 'Dear her reputation through the world', or Hotspur in Henry IV, Part 1, urging his friends to restore themselves 'into the good thoughts of the world again' (Act I, scene 3), or, supremely, Henry V exhorting his 'band of brothers' with the thought that

Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by
From this day to the ending of the world
But we in it shall be remembered.

These are among the instigations to understand events 'in the whole'. Shakespeare's characters, it has been said, 'are so full of life that they appear to have a past and future which are no part of their creator's intention or requirement. So have Tolstoy's.'¹

So to the fifth dimension, that of animating concepts - not the concepts of Shakespeare personally, but those of his characters. As Robert Ornstein observes, Shakespeare does not offer ideologies but instinctual urges - 'feudal attachments,... family honor or pride,... ambition, greed, patriotism, or revenge'.² We can agree that a play needs a 'spiritually significant idea',³ and even the earliest histories do in fact offer moving concepts, but concepts so integrated with characters' feelings as to be not detachable ideas but the great urges of living. The concept of Providence in history will be my final dimension, but let me move towards it here by asking what it means if we assume that history is not 'absurd', that the moral confidence of good men is not illusory. Often in the histories

Heaven appears to be no more than a receiving depot for the souls of the massacred.... [Yet] against this pessimistic assumption Shakespeare places in the scales a concept of Providence which is clearly a central part of the action. What, then, are we to make of it?⁴

To this we shall return. The immediate point is that if actions did not spring from concepts we should be animals or machines: 'men who are less than men'. 'Concepts' here means not only moral or philosophical ideas but all the intelligential reactions involved in looking at and conducting human life, and which (to borrow a phrase from a sensitive French critic) turn 'une serie de drames' into 'une oeuvre',⁵ the powerful interpretative colourings which express the experience of being aware. It is through passionate prejudice grounded in a total outlook on life that Queen Margaret, in Part 2 of *Henry VI*, rages to her lover Suffolk about King Henry's soulfulness, the enmity of the great Duke Humphrey, and the hostile influence of Humphrey's wife, Dame Elinor. It is with intense poetic force that the terrifying Lord Clifford, in Part 3, makes clear his whole way of seeing things when he chides King Henry for plying the decapitated head of his rival York spiked over his own 'battle-

1 John Bayley, *Tolstoy and the Novel*, 1968, p. 208.

2 Robert Ornstein, *A Kingdom for a Stage*, 1972, p. 26.

3 Harley Granville Barker, 'From *Henry V* to *Hamlet*'. British Academy lecture 1925, reprinted in *Studies in Shakespeare*, ed. P. Alexander, 1964, p. 81.

4 Wilbur Sanders, *The Dramatist and The Received Idea*, 1968, p. 91.

5 Paul Reyher, *Les Idées dans l'Oeuvre de Shakespeare*, 1947, p. 223.

ments, exhorts him to rival Nature in bloodthirsty force, recalls York's thrusting ambition (so contrary to Henry's mildness), and foretells a future when the dispossessed Prince of Wales will blame Henry, his father, for losing what his forebears had so heroically won. And merely to mention Faulconbridge in *King John* or Hotspur in *Henry IV* is to conjure up figures whose every word speaks his idiosyncrasy. This kind of self-projection differs from the manifesto heroics of the great figures of Marlowe or Chapman; it is the speech of human natures, not of megaphones. The rhetoric expresses the emotional-intellectual complexes of integral passion, in scenes where the poetic energy surges into an oceanic swell which is its own kind of dimension.

As for the sixth dimension, that of complexity of issues, this has come much to the forefront as the plays have been exhaustively studied. A. P. Rossiter entitled one of his essays, 'Ambivalence: the Dialectic of the Histories': Shakespeare, he commented, 'always leaves us with relatives, ambiguities, irony, a process thoroughly dialectical'. This formulation bears the hallmark of the analytical criticism of the 1950s, and it provoked an Indian scholar to a rejoinder, to the effect that all parties in the plays find their cases acknowledged, but not as Shavian dialectical exhibits but as the passionate variants of powerful temperaments, pointing 'to something beyond ambivalence, to the impossibility of reducing the complexity and subtlety of life to a formula... delv [ing] beneath the doubleness of opposed value-judgments to a core of meaning which is revealed through this opposition but is not identical with it.'¹

This kind of multivalent (rather than ambivalent) enrichment has been well defined, though in quite a different context, by Dorothy Van Ghent. Writing on *Don Quixote* she defined a complex form of 'parody', parody in the sense not of a ridiculing imitation but of presentations from different angles concurrently active and provoking a complex evaluation - not so much a dialectic of alternatives but a symphonic co-existence: it is the kind of evaluation needed for, say, the *Henry IV* plays:

Instead of confronting two opposed views with each other, in order that a decision between them may be arrived at, parody is able to intertwine many feelings and attitudes together in such a way that they do not merely grapple with each other antagonistically but act creatively on each other, establishing new syntheses of feeling and stimulating more comprehensive and more subtle perceptions. Parody - except that of the crudest kind - does not ask for preferential judgments and condemnations.²

Henry VI's saintly impracticalities juxtaposed with pragmatism good and bad; Richard II's royalism evaluated against justice; Henry IV's guilt-ridden authority counterpoised with Falstaff's happy anarchism and Hotspur's wilfulness; Henry V's jingoism set in a context of courage, scepticism, and suffering - these and many other juxtapositions call not for an either-or judgment but for something more generous, the kind of assessment needed for *Henry V*:

¹ S.C. Sen Gupta, *Shakespeare's Historical Plays*, 1964, p. 31.

² *The English Novel; Form and Function*, 1953 (reprinted 1961), p. 13.

If, in much of the play. [shakespeare] qualifies the note of majesty with more sombre and reflective tones, the effect of these tones is in part gained by the contrast with the appeal of Majesty itself.¹

This is saying that Majesty is a concept shot through with ironies, even tragic ironies, yet retaining a moving validity which ironies cannot undercut. Wilbur Sanders makes a similar point when he contrasts Edward II's superficial sense of kingship with kingship's inexhaustible emotional and symbolic significances in *Richard II*. It is a complexity borne out by natural human experience.

The final dimension is that of the metaphysical, the providential, and leads us to the Enchanted Ground of near-total ambiguity. Is God's hand seen in history? By convention the Elizabethans were inclined to think so, though their chroniclers have it both ways, mixing with the pragmatism of politics large injections of religious moralising. The oppositions of good and evil are stronger in Shakespeare's early histories than in the later, where the form they take is rather that of justice and injustice (though these are felt not as legal abstractions but as passion-charged rights and wrongs). Some critics have confidently detected a Christian-providential theme in the histories, others as confidently questioned it. Shakespeare offers nothing like doctrine. Yet he does nourish those instincts which seek the glimmerings of moral order, a 'natural providence', 'a Providence which has emerged out of the natural, an enactment of universal moral law',² an obscure yet inherent sway or undertow, an assumed intrinsic divine pressure, like Matthew Arnold's 'enduring power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness'. The plays do not clearly argue for providence in history against amoralism, God's hand against (say) Machiavelli's, yet they do so dramatise the tensions between these conceptions as to leave a balance of assumption, however indefinite, which favours our instincts and desires. We ought to act as if history were morally based; we at least yearn to think it so (like, in respect of Christian faith, the agnostic Thomas Hardy in his poem 'The Oxen', almost renewing the childhood belief that the oxen in the stable kneel down on Christmas Eve - 'Hoping it might be so'). With much ambiguity, what Shakespeare's histories imply is

that God's hand is present in human history, that events, while subject to the free will of participants, are nonetheless overseen ultimately by a Providence through which order will be eventually restored.³

In this sense they lean towards the tragedies, in that enigmatic undertow which, though it allows good men and bad alike to be wrecked along its course, so much recommends the good to us. God and his justice are repeatedly invoked, whether with the assurance of faith (often belied in the event), or as allies of national welfare (as with Henry of Richmond in *Richard III*, or in *Henry V*), or through the passionate desire for divine succour. What dimension does this open up?

The answer lies in the realising force, the compulsive actualising, of the poetry. Shakespeare, admittedly, knew what it was 'to trouble deaf heaven with [his] bootless cries'; that might be all his appellants are doing when they raise their voices to

1 D. A. Traversi, *Shakespeare from 'Richard II' to 'Henry V'*, 2nd edition, 1961, p. 181.

2 Wilbur Sanders, *The Dramatist and the Received Idea*, 1968, pp. 95, 104.

3 R. Williams, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, p. 671.

the skies. Yet if at least they receive only ambiguous answers, the strength of their utterance carries its own measure of conviction. Views so passionately held must, one feels, affect the future by hailing it so urgently. The enormous ritual of incantations by, around, and against the stormy figure of Margaret of Anjou in the **Henry VI's**, or her crime-ridden adversary Richard III, cannot (our instincts suggest) be ineffectual, so much wasted breath: it must somehow magnetise the future with its special kind of pull. However inscrutable, there should be, must surely be, a supernatural auditor, so that prayers, as well as curses,

ascend the sky,
And there awake God's gentle-sleeping peace.¹

The impression is strengthened by the very spectacle of secular wickedness which somehow projects the vision of its opposite. In Part 2 of **Henry VI** the virtuous Humphrey of Gloucester is murdered, though he trusts in Heaven: such is the world's course. Yet fortune, we are bound to feel, must turn against his murderers, and this not just because of compensatory human agency. As has been said, 'the overwhelming prevalence of disorder and perjury... implies reference to order and faith';² 'we are bound to speculate that strange, perhaps spiritual, forces are at work.'³

Richard III is an evident instance of this situation. And **King John**, quite unillusioned about secular policies, evokes, through the very cynicism of Commodity (opportunism), a fervent hope that there is a divine law which Commodity flouts. Wilbur Sanders contrasts Shakespeare's histories with **Edward II** (a play 'without moral anchorage', as he calls it) and thoughtfully modernises the view which Richard Hooker, in Shakespeare's own time, expressed in his third sermon, (and indeed the Bible abounds in it),⁴ that the oppressed good are in better state than the oppressing bad. Sanders remarks:

One is tempted to ask whether some such faith in the essential morality of the universe is not a necessary faith for the dramatist... The problems of affirmation are enormous now, but to be able to assert, from the heart of known injustice, evil, muddle, fortuity, calamity, an order which is still moral, is a great achievement of Shakespeare's art which we cannot regard as irrelevant.⁵

Any significant dramatist will seek to create the imaginative reality of place, time, society, concept, passion, complex issues, and spiritual resonance. Yet if we set other dramatists beside Shakespeare in these respects they shrink. Indeed, set Shakespeare's own comedies, or even tragedies, beside the histories and they, if they do not shrink, suddenly seem a little removed, to a world further from us in real substance, however close to our psychological or spiritual natures. This consideration of Shakespearean dimensions may appropriately end with an Elizabethan reflection (in origin an Italian-Renaissance one), a passage from Thomas Blundeville's

1 **Richard III**, I. 3. 287-8

2 A. S. Cairncross, introduction to **Henry VI**, Part 3 (New Arden edition), p. liv.

3 John Arthos, **Shakespeare: the Early Writings**, 1972, p. 210.

4 Richard Hooker, 'A Learned Sermon on the Nature of Pride', in **Works**, 1888, iii. 610, 633-4.

5 Wilbur Sanders, **The Dramatist and the Received Idea**, 1968, p. 120.

little book, the first separate treatise in English on the art of history, **The true order and Methode of wryting and reading Hystories** (1574). It adapts and abridges two Italian works, Francesco Patrizi's **Della Historla Dieci Dialoghi** (Venice, 1560) and Giacomo Concio's **Delle osseruazioni, et auvertimenti che hauer si debbono nel leger delle historie** (c. 1560-67). Whoever chronicles a human life, Blundeville instructs us, must consider

The name of the man, his familie, his parents, and his Countrye, and also his destinie, fortune, and fore or necessitie (If they seeme manifestly to appertayne to the action), his nature, affections, and election, proceeding eyther of wisdom, passion, or custome, his education, exercises, deedes, and speaches, and also the age, and time, where in euery notable acte was done, and the qualities of his bodye, whither they were signes and tokens of his mynde, or else helps to the actions.... that is to saye, the doer, the causes, the tyme, the place, the means, and instruments, and such lyke, in such sort as the writer in duelye obseruing these circumstances, may set fourth a true and lyuely Image of both lyfe and man.¹

Perhaps it is surprising that dramatic history ever succeeds at all. Its success in Shakespeare's histories is a creative miracle. Well might he, anticipating Henry James by three centuries, have made the same claim - 'What I have done has that unity - it groups together.'

SHAKESPEAR'DE TARİHİN YEDİ BOYUTU

ÖZET

Bu makalede William Shakespeare'in piyeslerinde tarih konusunu sahneleme yöntemleri üzerinde düşünceler yürütülmüştür. Amaç sağlanan etkinin bir bütün olarak değerlendirilmesidir. Tarih piyeslerinde Shakespeare siyasi doktrin açıklamaları yapmaz (yine de bunlar piyeslerde belirli kişilerin tarih sürecini anlayışlarının ifadesi olarak öne sürülür), fakat yazarın asıl abgarısı, zaman, yer, toplum, ülkü kavramları, karşıt değer yrgıları, insan kaderinin akıl almazlığı gibi öğelerin birleşmesiyle kurulmuş ve insanların duygu ve düşünceleri kanalıyla bize aktarılmış karmaşık durumların ortaya konulmasıdır. Güçlü şiirsel bir dille ifade edilen olayları izlerken adeta bütün gerçekleriyle tarihi yaşamış gibi oluruz. Bu yazıda, yitire eserinin kişi üzerinde yarattığı dramatik etkinin yedi değişik ögesi üzerinde durulmuş ve bunların, seyircinin hayal gücünü harekete geçerek nasıl gerçek izlenimi uyandırdığı incelenmiştir. Ayrıca çağdaşlarıyla karşılaştırıldığında, Shakespeare'in yer, zaman bilinci, toplum çevresi, güçlü birey kavramı, sorunların karmaşıklığı ve metafizik olasılık gibi kavramları şaşırtacak bir bütünlülük ve gerçeğe bağlılıkla ele aldığı görüldü. Özellikle, geleneksel olarak, sonra yazdığı eserlerinden aşağı olduğu düşünülen başlangıç dönemi tarihi piyesleri, bu araştırmanın merkezini oluşturmaktadır. Tarih sonrası edebiyat eleştirilerinin önemli bir teması haline dönüşmüş olan bu dönem piyeslerinin incelenmesi, çağımız Shakespeare araştırmalarının en verimli bir alanını oluşturmaktadır. Bu yazı o akımın çerçevesinde ele alınmıştır.

1 Reprinted by Hugh Dick in *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 1940.