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Disease, Age, and Physician Imagery in Richard II and Henry IV, Parts I and II

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Disease, Age, and Physician Imagery
in Richard II and Henry IV, Parts I and II
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BY
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THESIS

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DEVOURING PESTILENCE...
Disease, Age and Physician Imagery
in
Richard II and Henry IV, Parts I and II

In the three history plays, Richard II and Henry IV, Parts I and II, Shakespeare dramatizes the political disorder of England by suggesting that a state of infectious disease exists in which the ill health of the kingdom parallels that of the king. He expresses the diseased conditions by a consistent and constant echoing of three kinds of images: first, those images in which disease of pestilence infects either an individual or the country as a whole; second, those images in which old age is seen as infirm and impotent; third, those images in which a man either needs a physician or tries to act as one.

The political disorder in England in these three plays revolves about the two kings, Richard II and Henry IV. Richard II is guilty of misrule. The specific charges levelled against him include his fratricide, his wanton and frivolous behavior, his excessive and unfair taxation, his choice of poor councilors, and his illegal seizure of Bolingbroke's inheritance. Bolingbroke, in retaliation

for Richard's actions, seizes the throne and is thus, as Carlyle points out, guilty of treason. Carlyle warns the new King that England will suffer from Bolingbroke's usurpation and will undergo a period of constant rebellion that will spread through the kingdom. This state of rebellion, of disloyalty, of chaos and disorder is suggested throughout the three plays by the images centering upon disease.

Numerous critics have noted this imagery. A.R. Humphrey, in his introduction to the Arden edition of Shakespeare's Henry IV, Part II, cites the images of disease and age as linking with "the serious plot in a symbolic rendering of the state of England."¹ Ronald Berman, in "The Nature of Guilt in the Henry IV Plays," also recognizes disease imagery when he states that "... while the entire Lancastrian tetralogy is 'about' politics, it displays also motifs of disease, imposture, and inhumanity."² Berman adds that the motion in the three plays is from "early and almost unnoticed mentions of disease

¹A.R. Humphrey, ed. The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare: The Second Part of Henry IV (London: Harvard University Press, 1966), 1-11.

²Ronald Berman, "The Nature of Guilt in the Henry IV Plays," in Shakespeare Studies, ed. J. Leeds Barrol (Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati, 1965), p. 18.

to a sense of great and epidemic conditions."¹

The epidemic conditions in England are paralleled by the serious state of health of England's king. This link between king and country and disease is not unique to the history plays but it does represent in them its full development. R.J. Dorius tells us that "the well-known association in the great tragedies between images of excess or disease and faults ranging from folly to crime is already developed in the histories."² He adds that

the disease which begins in the mind of this king [Richard] spreads to the body of the state and to its noblemen, and the judicious bleeding and purging of England are delayed through three plays, until the "mood" (and "mode") is changed and the "soil" of Henry IV's dubious achievement goes with him into the earth.³

Shakespeare slowly makes us aware of Richard's responsibility for the origin of the infection, and of its spread to Bolingbroke and thence to other nobles. With increasing imagery of disease and age, he widens our awareness of the diseased state of England and its

¹Berman, 18.

²R.J. Dorius, "A Little More Than A Little," in Shakespeare, The Histories, ed. Eugene M. Waith (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), 18.

³Ibid.

inhabitants in all levels of the social hierarchy. Then, using the same imagery, he indicates the way in which the country is ultimately cured of the disease.

Without actually mentioning disease, Shakespeare manages in the first scenes of Richard II to suggest an atmosphere of unease. The quarrel between Bolingbroke and Mowbray suggests dissention in the kingdom; Richard's inability to command his followers seems to forebode a power struggle; Gaunt's words reveal a sense of futility and fatality. This is best expressed in his comment concerning the shortening of Bolingbroke's exile. Even five years will be too long for Gaunt for, as he says, "My oil-dried lamp and time-bewasted light/ Shall be extinct with age and endless night./ My inch of taper will be burnt and done,/ And blindfold death not let me see my son." (I,iii, 221-223)¹ The emphasis is on man's mortality.

Yet, though Gaunt bewails Bolingbroke's exile for his own sake, he bids his son look at it more optimistically. He says, in words which explicitly introduce the disease imagery of the play, that Bolingbroke is to pretend that "Devouring pestilence hangs in our air/ And thou art flying to a fresher clime." (I,iii, 283-285)

¹G.B. Harrison, ed. Shakespeare: The Complete Works (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1968), 441. All subsequent line references are to this edition.

These lines contain both the suggestion of the mood that will pervade the three plays and the exact words used to delineate that mood. The words "devouring pestilence" are thus highly significant. They suggest the ferocity of the contagion that will be spreading throughout England.

Nearly everyone who comes into contact with the contagion is infected by it. Its ravenous quality--as indicated by "devouring"--strikes a note of fear, for we are well aware of the fatal seriousness of such a pestilence. The suggestion of disease hanging in the air prepares the audience for the increasingly numerous references to disease.

The next reference to disease comes after Gaunt's words of cheer are rejected by Bolingbroke. The son answers, "Fell sorrow's tooth doth never rankle more/ Than when he bites, but lanceth not the sore." (I,iii, 302-303) His words bring to mind an external aspect of pestilence--the sores that cover the body. The idea of a sore, or canker, on man or country is another of the recurring images of the disease idiom.

We see the canker image again when Falstaff is marching his "army of pestilence" across the country. His soldiers are described as "cankers of a calm world." (IV,ii, 32) Falstaff relates that "A mad fellow met

me on the way and told me I had unloaded all the gibbets and pressed the dead bodies." (IV,ii, 39-41) The soldiers are infected to a serious degree. As they pass through the country, they spread the contagion they carry to the inhabitants therein. Thus, they are truly an "army of pestilence."

It is this same army that Richard calls down upon Bolingbroke's head when he warns that "God Omnipotent/ Is mustering in His clouds on our behalf,/ Armies of pestilence; and they shall strike/ Your children yet unborn and unbegot." (III,iii, 85-88)

It is not coincidence that Richard calls down upon Bolingbroke's head the very pestilence that Gaunt had earlier named to Bolingbroke as existing in the air of England. In retrospect, Gaunt's words now appear to be foreshadowing.

Richard had, in effect, invited the return of the exile by his calloused and illegal actions toward the father, Gaunt.

A retainer mentions to Richard that Gaunt is "grievous sick." (I,iii, 54) Richard's unfeeling response is to express the wish that God will put it "in the physician's mind/ To help him to his grave immediately." (I,iii, 59-60) If Gaunt had heard these words, he would have realized

the futility of trying to advise the King. York reminds him that the King listens only to evil counsel. But Gaunt hopes that his words will have an effect on Richard because he speaks with the tongue of a dying man.

Throughout Gaunt's deathbed speech, we can trace the constant reiteration of disease and age imagery. References, which to this point have been isolated, now are combined to bring the full force of the imagery to bear on the formation of the picture of a diseased England. There are references to breathing one's last, to dying men, to breathing words in pain, of "aged" Gaunt, of being "gaunt as a grave," and of sick men playing with their names.

Gaunt, in impassioned rhetoric, speaks of England as being a "fortress built by nature for herself/ Against infection and the hand of war." (II,i, 43-44) Shakespeare has already prepared us for the realization that it is not from without that England needs to be protected from infection and war, but from within. We are aware that a pervasive sort of sickness is abroad in the land, but we are not as yet aware of its focal point. This awareness comes when we hear Gaunt's words to Richard that

Now He that made me knows I see thee ill,
 Ill in myself to see, and in thee seeing ill.
 Thy deathbed is no lesser than thy land,
 Wherein thou liest in reputation sick.

(II,i, 93-96)

The link between king and country is clearly drawn. Derek Traversi notes that "...the disease which Gaunt on his deathbed sees concentrated in the royal person before him is at the same time a symptom of the corruption of order and rule in the body politic."¹ Richard's sickness is made clear in the scene at the same time that the disorder in the body politic is revealed.

Richard's sickness is revealed in his misrule of the realm. This misrule is expressed by Gaunt's comparison of Richard to a pelican that taps the blood of its kin; in Richard's case the kin is a brother. The image links to the disease idiom in that it represents a state of unhealthy and unnatural conditions.

His revelations completed, Gaunt next affirms his "present sickness" and is borne off to his deathbed. Richard says, in effect, good riddance: "And let them die that age and sullens have/ Both hast thou and both become the grave." (II,1, 139-140) York hurriedly tries to patch up the difference between the King and Gaunt by attributing the latter's actions to "wayward sickness and age." (II,1, 142)

¹Derek Traversi, Shakespeare: Richard II to Henry IV (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1957), 22.

Gaunt's "sickliness" is matched by the sickness that infects Richard. Not only is Richard's sickness evidenced in his reputation, but also in his actions. In a conversation between Ross, Willoughby, and Northumberland, the three nobles comment on Richard's infamous actions and on the corruption that now festers in the body politic. The three men wish to heal the country that the King has helped to infect. They decide to throw in with Bolingbroke in order that they may "Imp out our drooping country's broken wing." (I, i, 292) The image is that of healing the injured, another variation of the disease idiom.

Richard does not see their alliance with Bolingbroke as a form of healing. Instead, to him, their rebellion appears as the bursting open of a boil. In a prophecy which "furnishes the idea of disease to which the following plays will allude."¹ Richard warns that

The time shall not be many hours of age
More than it is, ere foul sin gathering head
Shall break into corruption.

(V, i, 57-59)

The foul sin which began as the misrule of a weak king becomes the unlawful usurpation of a divine king. Years later, Bolingbroke, now Henry IV, repeats Richard's

¹Berman, 21.

exact words. He says,

"The time will come that foul sin, gathering head
 Shall break into corruption." So went on Richard
 Foretelling this same time's conditions,
 And the division of our amity.
 (III,1, 38-40)

Henry IV's kingdom, split into rebel and royal factions,
 is now regarded in its division as a diseased body rav-
 aged by a consuming fever."¹ Pestilence is abroad in the
 kingdom and recognizable as such:

Then you perceive the body of our kingdom,
 How foul it is, what rank diseases grow.
 And with what danger, near the heart of it.
 (III,1, 38-40)

Thus does Henry IV lament the ill health of the kingdom.
 He sees it for what it is but, like Richard in his time,
 is merely a helpless observer of a malady that he cannot
 cure.²

The King's advisor, Warwick tries to assure the
 King that the disease has not reached an advanced stage:
 "It is but as a body yet distempered." (III,1, 41)

The King is not reassured, which is just as well,
 for Warwick's words do not penetrate the truth of the
 matter.

The truth is left for Archbishop Scroop to define.

¹Traversi, 116.

²Dorius, 116.

He encourages the rebels to march against Henry IV because "The commonwealth is sick of their own choice." (I,iii, 87) Recognizing clearly the unhealthy condition of the conspirators, as well as that of the commonwealth, the Archbishop states that

...We are all diseased,
 And with our surfeiting and wanton hours
 Have brought ourselves into a burning fever
 And we must bleed for it. Of which disease
 Our late King, Richard, being infected, died.
 (IV,1, 54-58)

In this speech both the origin and the crisis of the disease are explicated. The disease had its origin in Richard, who "being infected, died." The crisis occurs when all England is diseased through her countrymen's surfeits and their personal ambitions and their refusal to accept responsibilities and duties.

With the Archbishop's summary of the state of the commonwealth--"We are all diseased," we begin to understand the implications that Shakespeare is suggesting. Traversi proposes that:

The full meaning of such imagery will only be clear when we have seen, later in the play, that both sides are wrapped in the futility which their dubious past has imposed upon them, undermined by the consciousness of disease. This disease, this rooted preoccupation with an infirmity which those who suffer from it are unwilling or unable to trace to its final causes, is further

related by York to the operations of time and fatality.¹

The Archbishop's entire passage implies not only the sickness of the commonwealth and its excesses, not only the infirmity of the conspirators, but also a "more generalized disgust...a universal distaste."²

The universality of the distaste and of the diseased condition of the country is revealed by the depths of society to which the disease has sunk.

Representative of the lower level of society is Bullcalf, one of the men whom Falstaff is considering drafting into his army. The statement that the country is "all diseased" is paralleled by the cry of this individual, "Oh Lord, sir! I am a diseased man." (III,ii, 191) When Falstaff asks what particular disease Bullcalf has, that shirker of duty answers, "A whoreson cold, sir, a cough." (III,ii, 193) Bullcalf's disease is not a cold, but a refusal to serve his King. In this refusal he is comparable to Bolingbroke who refused to serve his King; thus Bullcalf is illustrative of the spread of contagion to the lower levels of society. A further indication of the conditions of the rural element are the tag names

¹Traversi, 116.

²Ibid., 112.

chosen for Bullcalf's fellow conscripts: Mouldy, Wart, Shadow, and Feeble.

Bullcalf does have the advantage of recognizing his diseased state. Falstaff, who is, perhaps, the supreme embodiment of disease in the kingdom, does not. At our first meeting with him in 2 Henry IV, the page reveals that Falstaff has "more diseases than he realizes." (I,ii, 6) He is gross, infirm, irresponsible and in a state of poverty that reflects the ill health of his mind. One of the major symptoms of Falstaff's disease is his refusal to accept either his old age or his disease.

Falstaff pretends to be deaf when the Lord Chief Justice wishes to speak to him. His counterfeiting of infirmity mirrors his real infirmity. But Falstaff won't acknowledge illness; instead, he accuses others of being sick. "I heard your lordship was sick," he says to the Justice in false commiseration. "Your lordship though not clean past your youth, hath yet some smack of age in you." (I,ii, 108-110) Falstaff is at least of an age with the Justice, but he says: "You that are old consider not the capacities of us that are young" (I,ii, 196-197) This is clearly ludicrous in view of the portrait that the Justice paints of him:

Do you set down your name in the scroll of youth that are written down old with all the

characters of age? Have you not a moist eye?
 A dry hand? A yellow cheek? A white beard?
 A decreasing leg? An increasing belly? Is
 not your voice broken? Your wind short? Your
 chin double? Your wit single? And every part
 about you blasted with antiquity?

(I,ii, 201-208)

Falstaff's old age is also linked with his irrational state. Of his infirm mental condition, Traversi states that "Age, instead of producing insight and control, is associated with a peculiar feverishness and sometimes, with a distasteful senile passion."¹

Falstaff's senile passion is his desire for Doll Tearsheet. She, like Falstaff, is diseased. Upon our first meeting with her, we find her "sick of a calm." Rather than sympathizing with her, Falstaff argues that it is Doll's kind of woman who helps "to make the diseases." (II,iv, 48) In spite of this knowledge, Falstaff is enamored of her, and we find her sitting on his knee, ruffling his hair and giving him kisses. This performance arouses disgust in Poins because he feels that Falstaff's behavior is senile. He asks, "Is it not strange that desire should so many years outlive performance?" (II,iv, 293)

In addition to senile passion, Falstaff's mental state is reflected by his distorted outlook on disease. For

¹Traversi, 143.

Falstaff regards "the human condition as defined by characteristic diseases in time: 'A man can no more separate age and covetousness than 'a can part young limbs and lechery.'"¹ His bitterest comment is that both youth and age are beset with disease: "The gout galls the one and the pox pinches the other." (I,iii, 258-259) Moreover, his irrational conviction that he can "turn diseases to commodity" (I,iii, 277-279) reflects the mental aberrations of his diseased state.

Thus we find that, even when we are in the midst of comedy, Shakespeare is suggesting "issues of great seriousness...pitched upon the connotations of disease."² The imagery of disease pervades all aspects of these three plays.

The disease with which Falstaff is infected has as some of its symptoms the wanton and surfeiting actions that the Archbishop has seen in the country as a whole. This frivolity, this concern for self foremost, and this disregard for the rights and properties of others are traits that Falstaff shares with another diseased member of society. As we have seen, Richard II was infected

¹Berman, 22.

²Traversi, 113.

with the same characteristics. Even as Falstaff is important as the embodiment of disease in the kingdom, so is Richard equally important as the origin of this disease.

R.J. Dorius delineates Richard's responsibility when he states that "the disease which begins in the mind of this king Richard spreads to the body of the state and to its noblemen."¹ Shakespeare himself, through the Archbishop, indicated Richard's responsibility for the diseased state of the country. The Archbishop asserts that the country is diseased as a result of that contagion that Richard "being infected, died" from. However, it is Gaunt who first recognises the state of Richard's illness when he affirms that, though he be on his deathbed, it is Richard who is dying. (II,1, 90-94) The King's deathbed is the realm where he "liest in reputation sick." (II,1, 95-96) There is no doubt whatsoever that Shakespeare connects the sick King with the country that he is infecting.

Richard's illness acts as a sort of paralysis such that he is unable to counter Bolingbroke's rebellion with any definitive action. He reminds one of a sort of manic-depressive who alternates from moments of high elation to overwhelming depression. He dwells on morbidity and mortality: "Let's talk of graves, of worms, of epitaphs."

¹Dorius, 117.

(III,ii, 145) He describes himself as having "an ague fit of fear." (III,ii, 120) His actions throughout the deposition are never those of a healthy, hearty king resisting a usurper; but more those of a terminally ill patient taking deliciously morbid delight in his approaching death.

In his response to the deposition, as in his indulgence earlier in the play in frivolous pleasures, Richard allows himself to wallow in a surfeit of emotion. York recognizes Richard's responsibility for England's upheaval when he warns Richard's queen that "Now comes the sick hour that his surfeit made." (II,ii, 84)

Part of England's "sick hour" is represented by the impotence and infirmity of a series of aging men,¹ of whom Gaunt, York, Northumberland, Henry IV, and Falstaff are the most significant.

Gaunt was the first to try to warn Richard against his greedy, immoderate behavior. He claimed that he was a "prophet new-inspired" (II,i, 31), but his prophetic powers are not sufficiently developed. His optimism merely reveals his lack of wisdom. York does not share Gaunt's optimism, for he realizes that Gaunt is incapable of moving Richard

¹Clifford Leech. "The Unity of 2 Henry IV," in Discussions of Shakespeare's Histories, ed. R.J. Dorius (Boston, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Co., 1964), 59.

to corrective action. He warns Gaunt: "Vex not yourself, nor strive not with your breath,/ For all in vain comes counsel to his ear." (II.i, 3-4) And Gaunt, forced to acknowledge that Richard refuses to change his wilful, diseased state, admits his infirmity and asks to be carried off to his bed, aware that his words have been impotent in effecting a change in Richard.

Equally ineffectual is Gaunt's brother, York, Richard's defender in England. Bolingbroke has ignored his sentence of exile and returned to England, sweeping the country with his powerful force. York is unable to turn the tide of the exile's power, but asserts that if he were still young and powerful as he once was, "Then how quickly should this arm of mine/ Now prisoner to the palsy, chastise thee/ And minister correction to thy fault." (II,iii, 103-105) York blames his inability on a disease that is associated with old age--palsy--thus explicitly asking the connection between age and inability.

Just as York is ineffectual against Bolingbroke, so is Northumberland ineffectual against the same man, now become Henry IV. Berman summarizes the portrait of Northumberland when he states that "It is in the idiom of disease--to become a universal and dominant theme--that

Northumberland is delineated in Henry IV, Part II.¹

Northumberland is not among the conspirators at Shrewsbury, for he claims that he is so sick that the physicians fear for his life. (IV,1, 24) Worcester and Hotspur feel that it is a very bad time for Northumberland to allow himself to be sick. Hotspur wonders how his father has "the leisure to be sick/ In such a justling time." (IV,1, 17-18) Worcester moans, "I would the state of time had first been whole/ Ere he by sickness had been visited./ His health was never better worth than now." (IV,1, 25-27) Hotspur agrees, stating that "This sickness doth infect/ The very lifeblood of our enterprise./ 'Tis catching hither, even to our camp." (IV,1, 27-30) Not only do the words convey the diseased state of England (the time is not whole), but also the infectious nature of the malady that Northumberland has. In addition, Northumberland's disease, by its contagious nature, and because it forces his absence from the coming battle, is disastrous to his fellow conspirators.

Worcester laments "Your father's sickness is a main to us." (IV,1, 42) And Hotspur agrees, "A perilous gash, a very limb lopped off." (IV,1, 43) Hotspur's images are those of battle wounds rather than of incapacities

¹Berman, 19-20.

of illness, but the more violent picture of infirmity better suits Hotspur's character.

Northumberland's portrayal of an infirm, old man is expanded in 2 Henry IV to include the total view of the man as ill and impotent, perhaps even deranged slightly. His reaction to his son's death indicates an unhealthy condition:

In poison there is physic and these news
 Having been well, that would have made me sick,
 Being sick, have in some measure made me well.
 (I,1, 137-139)

A man who finds medicine in poison and an antidote in bad news reveals a serious mental malady. His fellow rebels recognize this ill health, and it produces in them "an extended consciousness of disease."¹ They remind him of the necessity for him to remain well: "The lives of all your loving complices/ Lean on your health, the which if you give o'er/ To stormy passion must perforce decay." (I,1, 163-165)

Moreover, they recognize that the rebellion itself engenders a form of disease among their men: "For that same word, 'rebellion,' did divide/ That action of their bodies from their souls./ And they did fight with queasiness, constrained/ As men drink potions." (IV,1, 194-196)

¹Traversi, 113.

The Archbishop hopes to cure the rebels' queasiness by making the insurrection a holy cause; he "tells them he doth bestride a bleeding land/ Gasping for life under great Bolingbroke." The metaphor is a particularly powerful one—England as a bleeding, gasping body sickened by its diseased king, Henry IV.

Henry IV, as the diseased King of England, is also represented as infirm and impotent. Thus he is another representative of the infirm, aged men in the plays. Since his condition came upon him as a result of his responsibility in Richard's overthrow, he is "physically afflicted as well as morally blemished."¹ His moral blemish is commented on by Gaunt and Carlyle--it is the usurpation of a divinely appointed king. His physical affliction can be seen by the fact that his old age is "dominated by disappointment and by an obsessive preoccupation with infirmity."²

The first reference to Henry's state of health is the comment that "His Highness is fallen into this same whoreson apoplexy." (I,ii, 121) G.B. Harrison notes that the apoplexy is a form of paralysis³ and that we can see

¹Humphreys, 1.

²Traversi, 133.

³Harrison, 661.

a parallel between Henry's ineffectiveness in combating disease and Richard's ineffectiveness in combating Bolingbroke, and also between Gaunt's ineffectiveness in combating Richard, and Northumberland and York's ineffectiveness in combating Henry IV. The paralysis is implied in the case of Richard, but in Henry IV it is made explicit.

Henry's increasing infirmity is revealed in the final three acts of 2 Henry IV. We are introduced to his insomnia and to his illness. Warwick advises Henry to go to bed, for "Your Majesty hath been this fortnight ill,/ And these unseasoned hours perforce must add/ Unto your sickness." (III,i, 104-106)

Henry himself is imbued with a sense of his ensuing death. When Hal removes the crown from beside his father's bed Henry remonstrates angrily because Hal won't wait the little while "Till his friend sickness hath determined me." (IV,v, 81-82)

The same fatalistic view is expressed when he answers his son, who has wished him, "health, peace and happiness," that "health, alack with youthful wings is flown." (IV,v, 229)

Not even good news is able to reverse the condition of the King. When Westmoreland and Barcourt return to court after the episode at Gaultree to rejoice with Henry

that the rebels are defeated, Henry muses, "And wherefore should these good news make me sick?/...I should rejoice now at this happy news,/ And now my sight fails me and my brain is giddy/...Now I am much ill." (IV, iv, 102-111)

There is no cure for Henry IV's disease, and so he is taken to the room called "Jerusalem" to die. "His death...manifests the deep-seated malady of his realm," says Traversi, propounding again the link between king and country.¹ The King's illness is paralleled in the ravages of the country, and health cannot be restored to the realm so long as the King is diseased.

One way of curing disease is to call in the services of a physician. Throughout the three plays, Shakespeare constantly reiterates the link between disease and the physician. He uses the image to increase the audience's awareness of England's diseased state as well as the diseased state of certain individuals. In addition to the need for a physician, he represents several characters as expressing a desire to be a physician to England or to other individuals.

Of prime importance in this form of imagery is Richard II. Richard, who needs a physician, also fails to act as one to his realm.

¹Traversi, 146.

Richard himself recognized the need for him to act as a physician. He commands Bolingbroke and Mowbray, engaged in a heated quarrel, to "be ruled by me—/ Let's purge this choler without letting blood./ This we prescribe, though no physician." (I,1, 153-157)

But the King should consider himself the physician for the realm. In the famous garden scene, the gardeners accuse Richard of failing to act out his proper role.

They say that

Like a physician maintaining a balance among the body's humors, however, Richard should promptly have made a 'deep incision' to purge blood overproud and too rich, just as the precautionary Gardener wounds the bark of his fruit tree. The parallel is explicit; tapping is bleeding and both as gardener and as doctor Richard is negligent.¹

Not only did Richard need to act as a physician, but he also needs one. It is Gaunt who recognizes Richard's need: "And thou, too careless-patient as thou art,/ Commit'st thy anointed body to the cure/ Of those physicians that first wounded thee." (II,1, 97-99) Shakespeare develops an analogy between Richard's choice of poor advisors and the careless patient's choice of a poor physician. Traversi sees this irresponsibility of choice as part of Richard's

¹Dorius, 121.

sickness.¹ A symptom of this sickness is Richard's failure to assume the role of physician: "The doctor who should be bleeding the sick body of the realm, is laid out sick upon it, at the mercy of the physicians who 'first wounded him.'"²

It is not only King Richard who has need of a doctor. Gaunt, of course, needed a physician because he was on his deathbed. Malevolently, Richard hopes that "God will put it in the physician's mind/ To help him to his grave immediately." (I,iii, 59-60) This is a perversion of the healing art and underscores Richard's inadequacy as a physician to his realm.

Northumberland is also constantly requiring the services of a physician. Before Shrewsbury, he sends word that his physicians fear for his life. Medical attention does not seem to aid him a great deal because he is still sick when news reaches him of his son's death. His illness, described as a "crafty" sickness, is partially counterfeit and partially mental and, as such, can not be cured by ordinary medical attention.

Finally, the character who most needs medical attention is Falstaff. One physician attests that he is thoroughly

¹Traversi, 22.

²Dorius, 123.

diseased. (He has more diseases than he knows of.) These are diseases of the body. However, Falstaff's serious illness is not physical. When Bardolph informs the Prince and Poins that Falstaff is "In bodily health," Poins answers "Marry, the immortal part needs a physician, but that moves not him. Though that be sick, it dies not." (II,iii, 111-114)

The Lord Chief Justice recognizes Falstaff's need for a physician to cure him of his immorality, his dishonesty, and his disorderliness, and affirms that "I care not if I do become your physician." (I,ii, 143) Falstaff rejects such an offer, refusing to be a "patient to follow your (the Lord Chief Justice's) prescription." (I,ii, 147)

Others besides the Lord Chief Justice engage to act as physicians, but their concern is for the body of England which desperately needs medical attention. Henry has pointed out to Warwick that "You perceive the body of our kingdom,/ How foul it is, what rank diseases grow,/ And with what danger, near the heart of it." (III,1, 38-40) Putting on the aspects of a physician, Warwick answers: "It is but as a body yet distempered,/ Which to his former strength may be restored,/ With good advice and little medicine." (III,1, 41-43)

"Good advice and little medicine" do not seem to

be an adequate prescription to Archbishop Scroop who also assumes the role of physician to England. The Archbishop's diagnosis of England's malady is very severe: "We are all diseased." (IV,i, 54) He declines the healing role even as he prescribes for the country: "I take not on me here as a physician,/...To diet rank minds sick of happiness/ And purge the obstructions which began to stop/ Our very veins of life." (IV,i, 60-66) The Archbishop hopes that, instead of bloodletting to purge the country of its disease, the King will cure the conspirators by granting them their conditions, and thus heal England. Then the country will benefit and "like a broken limb united,/ Grow stronger for the breaking." (IV,i, 222-223) The image recalls the earlier image by Northumberland of imping "out our country's broken wing." (I,i, 292)

The Archbishop's hopes of a truce go unrealized and England suffers yet more bloodletting. The land is still held in the grips of infection.

Representative of this infection are the inhabitants of Eastchamp, of whom Falstaff is most significant. Humphreys says of these people that they are "too blemished for a prince's health."¹ It is imperative that some of them be removed from society because 'the correction of

¹Humphreys, 1.

a state of disease...is necessary."¹ Falstaff is the ~~embodiment~~ of that state of disease and therefore in him lies the way to health for England. Traversi propounds Falstaff's condition and England's cure:

The more realistic concentration on the grotesque, the deformed and the dissolute answer to the graver infirmity of the social body which harbours him. If he feels his years as a burden, so--almost without exception--do the politicians who have accompanied with approval or dissent, Henry's rise to power; and if he is diseased, we have seen the disease is both the personal counterpart of rebellion and a sign of the disorder which it will be Hal's stern duty to extirpate from the imperilled body of his realm.²

It lies with Prince Hal, now the new King, Henry V, to act as the true physician to England.

At first, it appears as if he is as diseased as his fellows. There are constant references to his preferences for disorder, for low life, for low companionship.

But Hal claims that he is not diseased; he has merely been biding his time. He will now perform acts that will "salve/ the long-grown wounds of my intemperance." (III, ii, 155-156) The healing comes when Hal assumes the throne. Falstaff, delighted that Hal is King, believes that wanton

¹Traversi, 161.

²Ibid.

actions, frivolous behavior, and personal greed will continue to exist in England and in her King as they have existed since Richard II's time. He gloats, "I know the young king is sick for me." (V,iii, 141)

Instead, the young King is sick of Falstaff. He becomes England's physician and cures her of her disease by cutting the canker off the body of England, by lancing the poisoned boil that is represented by Falstaff, by quarantining the country from that center of contagion and rejecting it from his person--and thus the personage that is England. All the disease imagery is implicit in Hal's rejection of Falstaff. "The old blemished order must change; the new King must show himself part of the nation's healthy rather than its failing stock."¹ This Henry V does. Through his rejection of Falstaff and his embracing of justice, he extirpates Richard's disease of misrule and his father's disease of usurpation and Falstaff's disease of personal disorder and thus heals the body politic. Henry V has become the "star of England" and his country is well and triumphant. King and country are cured of disease.

¹Humphreys, 1.

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