SHAKESPEARE'S INTELLECTUAL legacies tended not to be easy ones. The most rewarding of them were encumbered by changing or conflicting points of view. Instead of giving easy answers to philosophical questions, they placed upon Shakespeare the burden of artistic and intellectual resolution. The result is that he was never comfortably bound by a tradition, any more than he was by a source. Indeed, he was compelled to give more to the tradition than the tradition gave to him. Such is the case, in all respects, with the legacy to be explored in the present essay. One of the first legacies to which Shakespeare was impelled to give dramatic form, it is the one of which he was most aware when he was writing his historical tetralogies, and I shall limit its application to these plays. Such a limitation has the advantage of concentrating upon Shakespeare during a period that, for most writers, is formative. He was experimenting with important philosophical problems, including those with lasting effect upon the structure and the manner of achieving the outcome of his later plays.

The philosophical problem that, in its formulation by divines, historians, and soldiers, I consider to be one of Shakespeare's first and most formative legacies is that of the relationship of God, Fortune, and war. In the Renaissance, this legacy emphasized the question of how much latitude could be given to human prowess, as opposed to supernatural ordinance, in determining victory or defeat in battle. This legacy was especially crucial for the history plays because in them military victory or defeat is of ultimate importance. It was equally crucial in the ways it could influence the significance of characterization. If Fortune happened to be dominant, human character would be relatively insignificant in the meaningless chaos of battle. When Fortune came to be placed either in contrast with God or precariously under the control of God, moral confusion occurred, and the resultant tension was conducive, in the hands of a thoughtful dramatist, to a fuller exploration of man's dilemma in trying to be morally responsible in a world still apparently subject to change. When Fortune yielded place entirely to God, victory in battle was determined solely by divine authority, with a reduction in individual responsibility and, usually in the drama, in the importance of characterization. The maximum amount of human importance comes when there is still a belief in supernatural influence combined with a growing, and often conflicting, emphasis upon human involvement in the outcome. This is the stage in the growth of the legacy that proved most conducive to Shakespeare's achievement in the second tetralogy.

Although these stages in the development of the legacy could coexist in time and although Shakespeare was not tied to any single aspect of the legacy that was currently topical, I do suggest that my ordering of the stages has a significant chronological basis. Shakespeare could of course draw upon whatever theory of war was suggested by his historical sources, notably those related to divine providence as recently studied by Henry Ansgar Kelly. More important, he could draw upon the concept, regardless of when he was writing, that was dramatically most responsive to the subject with which he was working. The poet, as Sidney recognized, is philosophically superior to the philosopher and historically superior to the historian.

One may acknowledge all these considerations and still venture to look respectfully at the ways in which England was emotionally and thoughtfully reacting to crucial wars. One may be a topical critic, concerned with the history of ideas, without being a fanatical one. David Bevington has recently guided historical scholars in the proper direction by cautioning against too literal a topical identification and at the same time suggesting that we seek a "polemical norm." I take particular en-
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...couragement, as well as caution, from a controlling idea which disciplines his book: “The burning issues of the 1590’s were relevant to Shakespeare’s career as a dramatist, not in terms of individual identities but of principles.” Shakespeare could ignore these burning issues only by ignoring his audience. He could ignore the principles behind the issues only at the expense of his own development as a dramatic thinker in the mainstream of contemporary thought.

Although it was not at first a crucially topical part of the legacy, the inherited classical tradition of Fortune was to become a vital beginning for Elizabethan thought on the worth of human resourcefulness in war. The writer who spoke most influentially to Elizabethan dramatists on the subject was Seneca. Lines from his Phoenissae (ll. 625–32) are paraphrased in The Misfortunes of Arthur (1587):

Wherefore thinke on the doubtfull state of warres, Where Mars hath sware, he keeps no certayne course. Sometimes he lettes the weaker to prevaile, Sometimes the stronger stoupes: hope, feare, and rage With yelese lott rules all, uncertayne good, Most certaine harmes, be his assured happes.3

The concept was well suited to espousal of bad causes, especially to the confused ethics of civil wars. In this English classical play both Arthur and Mordred have flawed motives, and each chooses to find support only in Fortune. Mordred makes no reference to divine right in his battle oration. He tells the foreign princes to whom he has promised sections of Britain not to fear the field because of his faults, for “Full safely Fortune guardeth many a guilt” (iI.iv.70) and only more than “wonted heate” can hope to prevail in “civill warres” (ll. 74–75). Similarly, Arthur, in his battle oration, renounces all rightful sponsorship: “Thou Fortune henceforth art my garde and guide” (iii.iii.58). A comparable use of Fortune in a doubtful cause in civil war occurs in Thomas Lodge’s The Wounds of Civil War (ca. 1588) when Sylla tells his victorious army:

The blindfold mistres of incertaine chaunce, Hath turnd these traiterous climers from the top.4

This classical tradition is not an auspicious one for deep inquiry into either ethical or tactical considerations of human conduct, and the end it offers is evident in the speech of the defeated Balthazar in The Spanish Tragedy (ca. 1587):

The trespasse that my father made in peace Is now controlde by fortune of the warres; And cards once dealt, it bootes not ask why so?5

Greater plays would have to ask “why so?” In order to ask this important question, they were compelled to rise above a popular tendency to attribute enemy victory to blind Fortune. An anonymous tract called The Spaniards Monarchie (London, 1592), for example, recorded that the English-favored general Don Antonio “came in batell against the said Philip, unto whom the fortune of warre gave the victorie” (sig. A4v). That Shakespeare was able to make a more profound comment upon victory or defeat was due partly to his increasing interest in human responsibility, partly to the superimposing of Christianity upon Fortune in Renaissance thought, with a consequent trend toward a philosophy of war more complex than nationalistic emotionalism.

The Christianization of Fortune came about uncertainly, with much confusion. Even so conventional a document as The Mirror for Magistrates is unable to find an edifyingly stable relationship for God, Fortune, and war. What is achieved is often a separate role for both God and Fortune, a role that under either auspices is equally fatalistic for human virtù. Thus Richard, Duke of York, reflects with resignation:

It is not force of frendship nor of might, But god that causeth thinges to fro or frame. Not wit, but lucke, doth wield the winners game.6

In an earlier work, William Patten’s The Expedition into Scotlande . . . of Edward, Duke of Somerset (London, 1548), the confusion is more painfully meditated. Patten writes with the authority of a soldier, and his perplexity reveals the soul-searching that must have characterized actual warfare. His Preface attempts to give due prominence simultaneously to Somerset’s “valiance and wisdome,” to Fortune, and to “almightie God.” Fortune is used because Somerset was fortunate and because “we must be content in commune speche to use the termes of our formers devised.” Patten first reaches an ambivalent rejection, “re-membryng my religion, and what fortunes force is,” and finally in the body of the work he girds himself to reject Fortune entirely. In the manner of many other practical writers, he attributes the successful outcome both to “gods bounty” and to his hero’s “valiance and pollecie” (sigs. L2v–L3r),...
thereby only anticipating another almost hopeless dichotomy.

Approaching the years when Shakespeare was writing his first tetralogy, we find the role of Fortune diminishing in military thought, though not abandoned—as indeed it never was during Shakespeare’s lifetime, or since. Contemporary writers tended only to place it secondary to God. In *A True Coppie of a Discourse Written by a Gentleman Employed in the Late Voyage of Spain and Portingale* (London, 1589), Anthony Wingfield does not reject the uncertainty of war; nor is he apparently troubled by the emergent and contradictory opinion that God controls war for a corrective purpose. Compelled partially by the unlucky circumstance that the ungodly Spaniards had recently been successful, he retains the earlier agency of Fortune and sees God using it for his inscrutable purposes:

The chaunces of warres are things most uncertaine; for what people soever undertake them, they are in deede but as chastizements appointed by God for the one side or the other. For which purpose it hath pleased him to give some victories to the Spaniards of late yeares against some whome he had in purpose to ruine. (p. 43)

In *The Sea-Mans Triumph* (London, 1592, sig. Cl), the English victors’ reaction to the misery caused by war is similar to that of Shakespeare’s *Henry VI*. They “acknowledged it to be but the chaunce of warres, which was and is, as it pleaseth god.”

In the 1590’s religious writers place Fortune more and more harmlessly under the control of God, pointing out, as does Stephen Gosson in *The Trumpet of Warre* (London, 1598, sig. D4v), that because weapons and “pollicies of warre varie,” it is “best trusting to such an object as cannot varie.” John Norden, in *The Mirror of Honor* (London, 1597, p. 6) argues that merely fortunate men who lack God’s blessing cannot ultimately prevail. Even the able military specialist Robert Barret is convinced “that there is none other fortune but the providence of God,” though he pardonably adds “and the valour and abilitie of man.”7 These authorities are generally speaking from the secure vantage point of the late 1590’s, when Shakespeare was writing his mature history plays. In the vicinity of 1590, confusion as to the roles of Fortune, God, and war was still acute, but a fairly clear assurance prevailed that though Fortune was dangerously potent, God controlled chance. It was in this intellectual climate that Shakespeare wrote the *Henry VI* plays.

Even without topical motivation, he must have recognized that the inherited historical contents of these plays made the choice of Fortune in war as a controlling force almost imperative for achieving philosophical unity in the scattered battles of his sources. Equally important, the wars of *Henry VI* are civil wars, as in *The Misfortunes of Arthur* and *The Wounds of Civil Wars*, and no participant is clearly in the right. Although, therefore, through the person of Henry vi, Shakespeare gradually lets us see that Fortune is to be subservient to God, he does not neglect the opportunity to make a virtue of necessity and to give first a vigorously dramatic rendering of warfare still suggesting chaos rather than design and flawed rather than virtuous characters.

The controlling military (and structural) principle for most of the trilogy is stated early in *1 Henry VI* when the Dauphin speaks of Mars, whose planetary influence was similar to that of Fortune, as causing endless fluctuations in battle:

> 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.8

Almost all of the battle scenes in the three plays are short and humanly meaningless. Numerous stratagems represent the efforts of human ingenuity, but these alternate so rapidly as to make them futile. Rouen unhistorically is both won and lost in a day, not entirely, as Andrew S. Cairncross would have it,9 simply to expand the parts of Joan and Talbot, but to show the unreasonable chances of war. The stratagems before Orleans are especially illuminating as the ascendancy of Fortune over military endeavor, as success comes and goes with a suddenness that mocks the participants. In 1.iv Salisbury is shot by the stratagem of the Master-Gunner; in 1.v after a skirmish Joan gains Orleans; in the next scene, 1.i, Talbot surprises Orleans, mounts the walls, and captures the city; finally, in 2.ii, the Countess of Auvergne tries her stratagem on Talbot and fails. Similarly, much of Part III is an incessant series of stratagems and exchanges of power. The role of Fortune is shown most powerfully in a kind of “mirror scene,” a digression from the raging battle, that illustrates rather than influences the action. This is the scene
(II.v) in which a son unwittingly kills his father and a father kills his son. In the comments of the grief-stricken father, we read not only the woes of civil wars but the mischances that a Fortune-dominated war can bring:

O, pity, God, this miserable age!
What stratagems, how fell, how butcherly,
Erroneous, mutinous and unnatural,
This deadly quarrel daily doth beget!

(ll. 87–90)

The sea, with its changing tides, is one of the dominant images of the trilogy. King Edward threatens Warwick that though “wind and tide” may be his friend, “Wind-changing Warwick now can change no more” (3H6 v.i.53–57). The comparison of war to the sea is most philosophically made by King Henry:

Now sways it that way, like the selfsame sea
Forced to retire by fury of the wind:
Sometime the flood prevails, and then the wind;
Now one the better, then another best;
Both tugging to be victors, breast to breast,
Yet neither conqueror nor conquered:
So is the equal poise of this fell war.
Here on this molehill will I sit me down.
To whom God will, there be the victory!

(3H6 ii.v.7–15)

Henry’s pious conclusion suggests that Shakespeare, after having used Fortune to full dramatic purpose, was shaping the trilogy in a similar direction: God would finally prevail over a Fortune as morally irresponsible as the sea.

The saintly king, consistently attributing events to God, might be superficially seen as a futile and militarily defeated agent in war. Shakespeare did not, I am convinced, so see him. With more historical and religious perspective than any other character in the plays, Henry is aware of the futility not only of human effort but even of the Fortune that mocks it. When he is freed by Warwick, he correctly sees that God was the “author” and Warwick the “instrument” (3H6 iv.vi.18). His most perceptive comment upon human responsibility in a hopeless series of battles is that he will conquer “Fortune’s spite” by “living low, where Fortune cannot hurt me” (iv.vi.19–20). Near the end of the Fortune-ridden confusion, God becomes increasingly mentioned, and, though Henry is aware of his own miserable end, he is wise enough to see that he can at least achieve religiously a kind of freedom from Fortune’s malice and that God will ultimately determine the victory. Shakespeare, even more than Henry, was envisioning the conclusion to the dominance of Fortune; the Henry VI plays, basically interim works, would find their resolution in the fully God-controlled Richard III, in which there is no hint of Fortune.

For the military outcome in Richard III, Shakespeare drew upon the most orthodox but not uninteresting Elizabethan theory of war: that in which God was the sole dispenser of victory. With the respected auspices of the Bible and St. Augustine and with its social usefulness, this theory was almost inassuageable for decades.

As historiography, this theory had prestige as late as Ralegh’s History of the World. According to Ralegh the history of the kings of Israel and Juda has prerogative “above all that have been written by the most sufficient of merely human authors,” for “it setteth down expressly the true and first causes of all that happened; not imputing the death of Ahab to his over-forwardness in battle, the ruin of his family to the security of Jeroboan in Jezriel, nor the victories of Hazael to the great commotions raised in Israel by the coming of Jehu; but referring all unto the will of God, I mean, to his revealed will.” For the historian there is an awesome sense of theme and destiny in such a view of war. But Ralegh concludes this discussion with a sentence that makes this historiographical theory not an unmixed blessing for either the historian or the historical dramatist: “True it is, that the concurrences of second causes with their effects, is in these books nothing largely described, nor perhaps exactly in any of those histories that are in these points most copious.”

Second causes, usually the human agents of warfare, cannot under this benevolent theory be of much importance. Accordingly, not only must the narrative suffer, but less emphasis can be placed upon purposeful character. Nevertheless, since defeat in war is attributed to moral defects in individuals and nations, a more probing social investigation is encouraged.

Also encouraged is an emphasis—rhetorically advantageous for the dramatist but not so advantageous for human responsibility—upon the supernatural agencies employed by God. If the prince is virtuous, according to The Mirror for Magistrates, “god him selfe will fyght with en-
fections & erthquakes from the lande and waters, and with stormes & lyghtnynges from the ayer & skyes” (p. 420). Both the earth and the heavens, as we should remember when we come to Richard II, serve God’s immediate instrumentality: “He hath an armie above in the heavens, the sun, the moone, and the Starres, hee hath another armie in the air, lightning, thunder, haile-stones, and much soulediers. . . . Yea the Lord hath his armies in ditches & lakes, in Frogges and Toades, and hath also his armie even out of the dust & ashes of the eart, Lice, Flies, and vermines.” These results, enjoyed by the victorious Jews, are “not by devised stratagems of their own heads, but by following the commandements of the Lord, which are the onely stratagems of all victories” (p. 66). The commonest agents used by God are angels, for these best display the most important aspect of God’s victory: that it comes by “miraculous meanes.”

Only massive documentation could convey the powerful hold that this wholly nontactical, non-political, and noneconomic theory of war had upon the people. Some idea of its force can be gleaned from writings during and immediately following the Armada crisis. It was then, surely, that theory would be tested in most urgent military and emotional needs. In June of 1588, just months before the Armada, John Carpenter called for an almost totally nonmilitary preparation for the invasion, with prayer and fasting. Weapons and strong walls are meaningless, for “the strength of the Lord is farre above the myght of man.” A representative assurance in this work is that the few and the weak can, with God’s favor, prevail against great odds. In March of 1588, the able biblical scholar John Udall had made the case against military agency even stronger: such preparations and devices “rather make worse that whiche they would helpe,” for they are “framed in the shop of humane policy only.”

Richard III must, politically speaking at least, have been one of the easiest plays for Shakespeare to write, even though it entailed the killing of a king. Tudor historians had amply vindicated Henry Tudor. They had not, however, supplied the dramatically crucial details for the politically “safe” implementation of his success. Shakespeare found this implementation in the pure form of divinely inspired victory just described. In the chronicles, Richmond is not a strong character, but neither is he without virtu and political finesse. He is certainly not militarily a passive instrument. At Bosworth Field, for example, he employs a stratagem so that the sun will be at his back and in the faces of his enemies. No hint of a stratagem occurs in Shakespeare. Richmond seems, as God’s corrective war approaches, to appear out of nowhere, not as an individual ego (which he is in Holinshed) but as a disembodied force whose instrumentality is scarcely needed. He is militarily almost innocent, “never trained up in arms” (v.iii.273). Richard III, by contrast, is a strong fighter, is strategic, and has great numbers on his side, thrice the force of Richmond. He gives detailed, expert orders for marshaling his troops; surveys “the vantage of the ground” (v.iii.19), which in Holinshed had been done by Richmond; and commands (ll. 16–18):

Call for some men of sound direction:
Let’s want no discipline, make no delay;
For, lords, to-morrow is a busy day.

In none of his preparations for war is there any reference to God. Rather, “Our strong arms be our consciences, swords our law” (v.iii.311).

Richmond, on the other hand, refers almost exclusively to God’s total dispensation rather than military concerns. As comfort against the frightening odds, his supporter Oxford states that

Every man’s conscience is a thousand swords,
To fight against this guilty homicide. (v.ii.17–18)

Richmond trusts only in the virtue of his cause:
“God and our good cause fight upon our side” (v.iii.241); and in his prayer before battle he asks God that he may have the self-effacing role of “thy minister of chastisement” (v.iii.113). Not arms, but the “prayers of holy saints and wronged souls, / Like high-rear’d bulwarks, stand before our faces” (v.iii.241–42).

God’s own strategy in battle is visible less in the shock of arms than in the terrorizing of Richard on the eve of battle in an appropriately supernatural scene. Ghost after ghost of Richard’s victims appears before him, and the message of each is “fall thy edgeless sword” (v.iii.135) or “Let fall thy lance” (v.iii.143). The symbolism for the play as a whole is plain: weapons and strategies will be useless in a war that is decided, without second causes, immediately by God as a correction of sin. Possibly the most religiously symbolic line in the play is Richard’s cry for a horse. James Pilkington had written: “Thus do all worldly things, with a goodly outward shew, deceive a man when he trusts most in them. ‘A horse is a deceitful thing,’ says David: and again, ‘Some trust in useless chariots, and some in their horses; but we trust in the name of our Lord God’” (pp. 230–31).

In Richard II, Shakespeare found almost too easily what he was looking for in the purest form of the Tudor theory of war. Especially, he found a suitably symbolic kind of victory, and a possibility to make war a divine correction for sin. Possibly the most religiously symbolic line in the play is Richard’s cry for a horse. James Pilkington had written: “Thus do all worldly things, with a goodly outward shew, deceive a man when he trusts most in them. ‘A horse is a deceitful thing,’ says David: and again, ‘Some trust in useless chariots, and some in their horses; but we trust in the name of our Lord God’” (pp. 230–31).

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On the whole, however, Shakespeare’s thematic use of the legacy of God, Fortune, and war in the first tetralogy had been successful. In the Henry VI plays the legacy had yielded exciting yet meaningful confusion, suitable for an interim work. In Richard III the legacy had taken the ethically lucid form needed for an orthodox outcome for the tetralogy. If the legacy had been all of one piece and unchanging, Shakespeare’s achievement in the second tetralogy might have been more lucid, more orthodox, and much less interesting. Despite his own intellectual advance, he needed the stimulus of a less assured tradition and of an audience responsive to new, disturbing ideas.

Fortunately, the legacy was growing during the 1590’s, growing in terms of military experience, theoretical thought, and difficulty. It was a transitional period of chaos and perplexity, paralleling in some degree the transitional period prevalent in the relationship of science and religion, and leading to a much greater acceptance of man’s responsibility and resourcefulness. This change was due in part to the intractable lessons of modern warfare enforced during the decade, including Parma’s frighteningly methodical successes on the Continent, the increased and not always divinely favored involvement of English troops, and the Tyrone rebellion beginning in Ireland in 1595, the year of Richard II. God’s tactics in dispersing the Armada by the four elements somehow did not seem to work in land warfare, and they were urged after 1595 by only a few die-hard clergymen. Charles Gibbon was perhaps the last of these; writing for the threatened invasion of 1595–98, Gibbon still insisted that God “can alter the determination of the Spanyard before he setteth forth to fight, as he did by Rehoboam. . . . He can intercept his coming when hee is upon the Seas, and drowne hym, as he dyd Pharaoh and his host.” By contrast, most ministers, who usually presented official state policy, were now responding to the dramatic change in Elizabeth’s point of view toward military preparedness. Her reluctance to take purposeful action in the Armada years, though defended on financial and political grounds by historians like Neale and Wernham, changed radically under the more alarming threat of a massive invasion in 1595. In August of that year, Elizabeth wrote her generals that Spanish preparations were greater than in 1588, and “it is not to be doubted but that they intend to invade England and Ireland next summer.”

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No reference to God appears in these directives. Nevertheless, the increasing reliance on second causes did not mean that God was forgotten or that victory should not be piously acknowledged. To report the political realities only is to scart the more subtle, confusing, and theoretical complications that formed the basis for the new official and public Tudor doctrine of the relationship of God and war.
Catholic authorities had early recognized the problem. In 1529, Bishop Antonio de Guevara had celebrated, in his *Relox de Príncipes con el Libro de Marco Aurelio*, the Emperor Gratian who first pacified God with prayers and then resisted his enemies with weapons, though, in the words of his Elizabethan translator Thomas North, "God giveth victories unto princes, more through teares, then through weapons." Guevara evades the real conflict by finally separating the two agencies and drawing an independently practical conclusion not inapplicable to Shakespeare's *Richard II*: "For it were a great infamy & dishonor, that a prince by negligence or cowardnes should lose that, which his predecessours by force of armes had gotten."23 Representing early Protestant theory, Martin Luther was also both practical and ambivalent: God would have men prepare themselves for battle, "and yet he would not have the victorie to be gotten by their sword and labour." "Nevertheless," he paradoxically concludes, "God useth men, swordes, horses, and bowes, howbeit not by the power and strength of them, but by them as by certaine meanes or instruments, he himselfe fighteth & overcometh."24

In England the shaking of the early Tudor position was hesitant, and seems to have been undertaken, not always willingly, mostly by men close to the realities of contemporary warfare. George Gascoigne, a learned soldier, provides one of the most troubled examples of growing perplexity over established doctrine when he tries to account for the shocking fall of Antwerp to the Spaniards. His persistent thesis is a conventionally pious one. Let us, he writes, "learne out of this rewfull tragedie to detest and avoyde those synnes, and prowde enormities, which caused the wrath of God to be so furiouslye kindled"; yet he adds in the same sentence, let us "learne to looke better about us for good order & direction, the lacke whereof was theyr overthrow." Gascoigne refers worriedly again and again to the paradox he cannot resolve: "But whosoever wil therein most extoll the Spanyrdes for their vallure and order, must therewithall confesse that it was the very ordinance of god for a just plague and scourge unto the towne. . . . And yet the disorder and lacke of forsight in the Wallons did great helpe to augment the Spanish glory and boast."25 A more decisive point of view, representing the happy compromise that was to prevail in *Henry V*, is expressed by Henry Haslop in *Newes out of the Coast of Spaine* (London, 1587). Haslop's strictly military reporting concludes that the honor of the victory "we attribute to the giver of all victories, whose name be praysed, and the credit to our generall" (sig. Bl').26 It was not until the early 1590's that this position became confidently fixed. Matthew Sutcliffe, both a divine and the author of a military textbook, wrote in 1593: "I have my self heard of the defects of the Duke of Medina Sidonia the Generall of their Navy, when they came upon our Coast. And although God was the authour, yet I doubt not, but that was some good meanes of their evil succese."27 Thomas Newton, also a divine, wrote introductory verses to one of the considerable number of military treatises during this period that enforced the change of attitude toward God and war. Using biblical examples, he proves that God taught the Hebrews "militare decrees . . . the force of foes to tame."28 And the controversially known captain, Sir John Smythe, prefaced his military treatise by giving similar evidence for God's esposual of tactics: "Not that there was any need or necessitie for almightie God to instruct and teach Moises, and other Princes and Chieftaines of the Israelites in the Arte and Science Militarie. . . . Because it was in the omnipotencie of God, without any such means or help of mans force, only by his word, or other ways as it had pleased him, to have compelled all the nations of the worlde." Rather, God instructed the Hebrews in order that "it might be a continual instruction unto them and all other princes and governours of Nations."29

The acceptance of the new, realistic point of view was characteristically based always on biblical reasoning, and God's ability to prevail without human assistance was never doubted. The radical change in attitude was an increased weight placed upon human obligation for reasonable action. Events were interpreted more and more in terms of the second causes which Ralegh felt were "nothing largely described" in Scripture. The concurrence of religious writers in the new view of history and current preparedness, slow in coming, demonstrated a reluctance to emphasize second causes, but divines did, as inconspicuously as possible, concede almost completely. John Norden, at the time of the crisis that affected *Richard II*, wrote that although the Spaniards are deceived in thinking the English unprepared, "God is seene to bee
strong in weakness: yet for that we stand not upon
myracles now, we no doubt are so sufficiently pro-
vided in all things, as behooveth watchfull Chris-
tians."30 Even the adamant Gibbon, preaching at
the same time, devotes an emphatic section to re-
assuring his congregation of the tactical weakness
of the Spaniards, though he finds it necessary to
add “a more morall reason” for his assurance:
“be he never so mightie, it is but an arme of flesh,
they can do no more then men” (sig. G3v).

The foregoing survey of the change in English
thought up to about the year 1596 is essential to
our understanding of the unprecedentedly com-
plex view of warfare taken in Richard
II. As op-
posed to the simple doctrinal basis of Richard III,
Richard II probably required more wary thought
than Shakespeare ever before or ever after had to
give a play; and much of the wariness was de-
manded by the means through which Richard loses
and Bolingbroke wins.

Two major statements of Tudor doctrine are
made by Richard in the play. One is that no
anointed king can be deposed by man; the other,
closely related, is that God will defend his divinely
ordained king by miraculous means, “for Heaven
still guards the right” (III.iii.62). Both of these seem
to be disproved by the action of the play, and both
are made dramatically disturbing. The second doc-
trinal statement, however, has been generally over-
looked in criticism, whereas it should be of espe-
cial concern because it is Shakespeare’s contribu-
tion to history and because in Holinshed Richard
is not shown to be the militarily inept, passive
figure that he is in the play. He moves expediti-
ously in defense after landing at Barkloughly in
Wales, amazed at the great forces rallying to
Bolingbroke and the hatred of the people. Until
the situation became hopeless he moved with
“good courage.” Holinshed, moreover, attributes
the delay in leaving Ireland, which he considers
the major reason for Richard’s defeat, not to the King
but to Aumerle, though the delay was for a good
strategic reason. Although in Shakespeare there
are, as the religious view of war would approve,
fundamentally moral reasons for Richard’s over-
throw, the efficient cause is certainly a too passive
trust in a good Tudor doctrine. The earth will
help him as it did the Hebrews; for every rebel
soldier, God has “in heavenly pay / A glorious
angel” (III.ii.60–61); God is mustering “Armies of
pestilence” (III.iii.87)—all the supernatural means,
in fact, that we have seen in the early Tudor
treatises. Had this been Richard III, we might have
surmised that Shakespeare was doing to the “his-
torical” Richard II what he had done to Rich-
mond: making him a gentler, passive man in order
to show God’s power more miraculously at work.
And certainly we have here the appropriately
pious words to support such an interpretation. But
God does not intervene for Richard. Instead, a
man who pronounces none of the conventional
pieties; who takes affairs into his own hands; who
instead of glorious angels to fight for him has
“press’d” men; who relies upon “shrewd steel”
and “hard bright steel”; who with sinister, sup-
pressed power has his troops march silently before
the castle, while hinting at the need of laying the
summer’s dust with showers of blood—such a
man, without ever praying to be a minister of cor-
rection, prevails. Indeed, Bolingbroke’s success, as
Irving Ribner has demonstrated, is due to his
being a “true” Machiavellian.31 With so darkly un-
conventional a basis for military success, the play
raises the big question of how Shakespeare meant
us to take Richard’s reliance upon God in his un-
successful war. Respected critics have seen irony
in Richard’s futile dependence, an irony that is
deepened by the arodor with which it is expressed.
In so politically sensitive a play we must rather ask
whether Shakespeare would expose a govern-
mental and theological ideal to ridicule.

Although I have no answer comprehensive
enough to explain the political problems in Shake-
peare’s most hazardous play, I would, at the very
least, suggest that Shakespeare was not subjecting
governmental policy to irony. Had the play been
written several years earlier, the powerful rhetoric
of III.ii might have thrilled audiences with con-
viction, and the subsequent disillusionment would
have been alarming and impious. Richard II is a
later play, later not only in English military ex-
perience but in Shakespeare’s own intellectual de-
velopment, a play more alert to a changing theory
of God and war. A sacrosanct theory is not being
ridiculed. Instead, a nostalgic, almost discredited
theory is voiced by a mistaken character, one who
is repeatedly wrong in his point of view.

Shakespeare assigns the repudiation of the
moribund theory not simply to casual events but
to a religious spokesman, the Bishop of Carlisle:

The means that heaven yields must be embraced,
And not neglected; else, if heaven would
And we will not, heaven's offer we refuse,
The proffer'd means of succour and redress.

(III.ii.29-32)

By 1595, the clergy had changed from the purist view of God's immediate action to a recognition of second causes. And because Elizabeth by 1595 was becoming vigorously active in military policy, we must question the supposition, widely held, that Shakespeare was expressing, through topical identification with Richard, criticism of Elizabeth's weakness in war. On the other hand, Shakespeare is surely depicting the practical success, though not necessarily the moral superiority, of a new breed of king, and it may have troubled Elizabethans that his warfare was not associated with divine auspices. Shakespeare was doubtless emphasizing to full dramatic advantage a disturbing part of his legacy: the period of sharpest transition in point of view.

As a maturing dramatic thinker, he must have welcomed, though not without uneasiness, the change in political and religious attitude. Besides providing dramatic shock and power, it sorted well with his emerging interest in the tragedy of character. The Fortune-dominated warriors of Henry VI had not developed into adequate protagonists, and in Richard III the overriding sense of divine dispensation had not been conducive to the subtle development of second causes in human volition. It is not, then, by chance that what has been considered to be Shakespeare's first successful tragedy of character, Richard II, should coincide with a national tendency toward human responsibility in determining success or failure.

In 1 Henry IV such a dramatically bold clash between the old and new attitudes toward war is lacking. Though the play is full of grimly and comically realistic references to war, the outcome avoids any confrontation between God's help and human agency by having Hal prevail in a cleanly chivalric kind of combat. Militarily speaking, the play is above all an unprecedentedly informed representation of the total mobilization for defense taking place between 1595 and 1599, indicating at least a disturbing background awareness of the new governmental strategy which surely did not rely solely on God. Its prevailing philosophy of war is also determined by the fact that it is an interim play in the military success of the Lancastrians. If it were anything more conclusive morally than an interim play, its most impressive military spokesman could not be Falstaff. Sir John represents not only total agnosticism toward any righteous cause in war; his callous indifference to right or wrong in battle suggests that the old concept of Fortune was still perversely operative, as insensitive to human virtù ("they'll fill a pit as well as better") as to God.

The conclusive victory of the Lancastrians occurs in 2 Henry IV in an episode that has proved more shocking than the cold-blooded coup of Bolingbroke. The episode is John of Lancaster's perfidious victory over the rebels. I have written earlier about this episode, attributing its significance and its dramatic power to a war that taxed the Queen and the people even more than the Armada ordeal—the rebellion in Ireland. I argued that the Queen was secretly condoning the use of bad faith in truces, and that the public was only reluctantly coming to accept a kind of victory unpleasantly different from their proud heritage in clean battle. I only partially coped with what, in the context of the present essay, is the most disturbing aspect of the episode: Lancaster's complacent devoutness about the victory. He concludes the episode, and—to the apparent satisfaction of his brother—the victory, with the order:

Strike up our drums, pursue the scatter'd stray:
God, and not we, hath safely fought to-day.

(iv.ii.120-21)

Under less tainted circumstances, and in a play such as Richard III, the sentiment would have been a model of the purist Christian theory of God and war. The victors have not even presumed to interfere militarily with God's providential arm in battle. Could this possibly, in 1598, have been Shakespeare's intended and unironic meaning? I do not think so. One must, nevertheless, take into account the increasing acceptance by religious spokesmen of guileful strategy in war. This is merely an extension of religious recognition that God uses all of man's resourcefulness in a good cause. One military chaplain, who was well acquainted with governmental sanctimoniousness concerning piratical expeditions, pointed out that although Christians must not ordinarily use "guileful policie," the Bible warrants its use when there is "so good a way with so little blood to take speedie vengeance of Gods enemies" (Harward, sig. D2r). In 1598, Stephen Gosson published a sermon declaring that in the execution of war "al
the means are lawful that are requisite to the attaining of the victory, sleights, shifts, stratagems, burning, wasting, spoiling, undermining, blows and bloud."35

I suspect that some religious expedient, not easily stigmatized as hypocrisy, was becoming increasingly overt if it were for good political reasons. Machiavelli was surely influential, and it is very doubtful that he or his learned English disciples considered his theories to be hypocritical. His recommendations in The Prince for a strategic use of religious auspices are intended for the good of prince and country. Very similar to this kind of strategic use, grounded like Machiavelli in history, was the reasoning of an Elizabethan religious writer that just as the Lord promised Moses and Joshua to go before them in battles, so "the Heathen kings made their souldiers believe, that the Gods taught them stratagems to overcome their enemies" (Lloyd, p. 50).

Lancaster's godly "stratagem" has caused more indignant questioning of his sincerity than any other in Shakespeare. But Lancaster is a gratifyingly simple instance of hardheaded overt policy compared with his elder brother in Henry V. King Henry is surely the most subtly disturbing study in religious warfare that Shakespeare ever created—an outrage to romantic critics and a burden on the student investigating the apparently diverging paths taken by God and war in Shakespeare's developing thought. Superficially, Henry would seem to be a sharp about-turn in Shakespeare's trend toward less reliance on God and more on man's military tactics. In the first tetralogy, stratagems were of little avail; Fortune or God, or both, decided the outcome. In the Henry VI plays the stratagems were numerous, but their very quantity merely served to emphasize their futility. In Richard III there are no stratagems; the successful minister of God arrogated nothing to himself by way of human ingenuity. The second tetralogy demonstrated first, in Richard II, the need for a ruler to be militarily vigilant; and, second, in Henry IV, that there is no divine sponsorship apparent, unless we are guileless enough to believe John of Lancaster. We must conclude that Lancaster marks, despite his possibly Machiavellian piety, a logical extreme, begun by Bolingbroke, of Shakespeare's assigning victory to human resourcefulness.

Superficially, then, Henry V would mark a regression to an earlier mode. He is Shakespeare's most religious hero, the "mirror of all Christian kings," referring all to God and insisting that his army has won "without stratagem" (iv.viii.113) against "an enemy of craft and vantage" (ii.vi.153). If this were so, Henry would be not a favorite hero among modern readers, but certainly a less resented one. What we can never forgive is not a religious simplicity but a religious strenuousness, giving an impression of God-supported arrogance. His is an extremely potent ego, not above vindictiveness in his warfare, or swagger in his wooing. One of the most nakedly revealing speeches is his reply to the Dauphin's "mock" (i.ii.280–92). It is a speech both pugnacious and militarily tangible, with references to "gun-stones," battered castles, and war widows. Yet this furious threat is concluded by a seemingly orthodox resignation of all tactics to "the will of God." What is here interesting and disturbing is the failure to relinquish an egotistic vindictiveness, far removed from the selflessness of Richmond. In God's name, Henry threatens,

Tell you the Dauphin I am coming on,
To venge me as I may and to put forth
My rightful hand in a well-hallow'd cause.

What concerns us most here is the extent to which human endeavor, despite religious explanation, is actually crucial to Henry's success. Earlier historians viewed Henry as blessed by miracle (Kelly, p. 92). Shakespeare's Archbishop of Canterbury may therefore be voicing a central message in Shakespeare's reshaping of the story when he states:

miracles are ceased;
And therefore we must needs admit the means
How things are perfected. (i.ii.67–69)

These "means" are so subtly woven into the action of the play that the modern reader may easily overlook them. Even if he detects some of them, he may miss the import they carried for militarily alert Elizabethans, because they come from some of the most godlessly tactical military treatises of the time. Even if he suspects a Machiavellian attitude toward war suggestive of The Prince, he will most likely overlook the numerous more cold and specific military stratagems taken from the Florentine's Art of War, which, unlike The Prince, had a translation innocently printed and widely circulated early in Elizabeth's reign.36 The important
episode of the apprehending and sentencing of the three conspirators is taken almost detail for detail from this strategic work (pp. 196–97). Similarly, Henry’s translating its meaning from shocking news to a sign of good fortune is spelled out (pp. 138–39), as well as the best way to deal with “seditious and discorde” in general (p. 197). Henry’s savage threat to Harfleur follows Machiavelli’s “manie times for feare onely without other experience of force, cities have bene lost: Therefore a man oughte, when he assaulteth a like citie, to make all his ostentacions terrible” (p. 213). Similarly Machiavellian is the advice to offer amnesty to a town that yields (p. 215). Henry’s orations, a large part of his effective strategy, may owe something to the Florentine’s stress on the classical military maxim that the general must be an effective orator (p. 146). One might easily extend the parallels between the pious Henry and the non-religious Machiavelli. The most significant indebtedness of all, found in the Art of War long before it could even be printed in The Prince, is to the pivotal section to which the Elizabethan translator gave a marginal note apparently untroubled by any possible religious hypocrisy: “Enterprises maie the easelier be brought to passe by meanes of religion” (p. 147).

Henry is unquestionably a religious man. His soliloquy on the night before the battle of Agincourt (iv.i.306–33) cannot be intended for a public impression. Nevertheless one can gravely question whether the war is won, as he repeatedly claims, by God’s arm alone. The stratagems are concealed like the steel beneath the velvet, and are thus all the more effective though not engaging. Henry, in his devotions, remains always a muscular saint. One is left with the impression that he uses God instead of being helped by God. The one thing that could redeem him would be if he could say, as did Gloucester, “I am myself alone,” thereby acknowledging that he has had to rely, in a new age of warfare, upon his own courage and manliness, still giving credit to a God who can scarcely make a divine minister of the son of a tainted ruler.

In this essay I have tried to suggest that Shakespeare’s legacy was complex, difficult, variable, and—not the less for these qualities—crucially formative. As a current of thought, rather than a static idea, the legacy demanded of him a reexamination of his historical materials. This intellectual and topical current was more often alternating than direct, as most intellectual advances tend to be. Certainly, Shakespeare’s own artistic advances in the military philosophy behind the history plays cannot be synchronized with a steady trend of topical change, whether direct or fluctuating. I suggest only that it gave him, at critical moments, important ideas to which he creatively responded and to which he felt compelled to give dramatic form.

If there is any discernible direction in the current, it is toward a greater emphasis upon second causes, especially human responsibility, in determining the military outcome of political issues. This aspect of the legacy was artistically advantageous, for it demanded—at a time when Shakespeare was natively inclined to respond to the challenge—more interesting action and, above all, richer and more enigmatic characterization.

As possibly its greatest service, the legacy encouraged the early Shakespeare to give hard thought to important questions about the roles of God and Fortune in man’s destiny. It was as artistically demanding and formative as other legacies with equally unresolvable conflicts: revenge tragedy interacting with Christian ethics, or astrology and fate interacting with moral choice. In its modest way it prepared Shakespeare for great tragic fictions in which the resolution must be found in outcomes deeper than those of military victory or defeat.

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Notes

3 In Early English Classical Tragedies, ed. John W. Cunliffe (Oxford: Clarendon, 1912), ii.iii.87–92.
5 The Works of Thomas Kyd, ed. Frederick S. Boas
Paul A. Jorgensen


14 Time Complaining (London: T. Orwin, 1588), sigs. A5r, B3v. A similar assurance for this urgent occasion is Edmond Harris' A Sermon Preached at Brocket Hall... for the Trayning of Souldiers (London: T. Orwin f. J. Dalderon and W. Haw, 1588), sig. C4r and v.


17 For the political justification of the overthrow and the important recognition that Richard is the fated scourge of God, see Bevington, pp. 242–43.

18 For an admirable account of this relationship see Paul H. Kocher, Science and Religion in Elizabethan England (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1953). Kocher finds (p. 37) a greater harmony in the coexistence of science and religion, through a kind of separation, than was possible between war and religion, wherein experience coerced some kind of decisive preference. There was, however, a close parallelism in the problem of miracles (pp. 114–15).

19 A Watch-Worde for Warre (Cambridge: J. Legat, 1596), sig. D3r. See also John Norden, A Christian Familiar Comfort and Encouragement (London: T. Scarlet a. J. Orwin f. J. Brome, 1596), sig. D2r, who deplores those who say "we have no leisure to looke into our thoughts, and actions for sinne, or to measure our lives by religion, having matters of warre in hand. We must have more care of Captaines then desire of Preachers; we must stand to the sword more then to the word."


21 Calendar of State Papers (Domestic), 9 Aug. 1595 (iv, 89).

22 Calendar of State Papers (Domestic), 7 Sept. 1595 (iv, 99).

23 The Diall of Princes (London: J. Waylande, 1582), fol. 50r.


26 A similar kind of pious piracy is expressed by one of Drake's seamen in Robert Leng, The True Discription of the Last Voiage of That Worthy Captayne, Sir Francis Drake (1587), ed. Clarence Hopper, The Camden Miscellany, v (Westminster: printed for the Camden Society, 1863), 15.


