The Drama of Speech Acts

SHAKESPEARE'S LANCASTRIAN TETRALOGY

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❀ Introduction

I

This study is concerned with the subject of language and speech in *Richard II, 1* and *2 Henry IV,* and *Henry V,* the four plays comprising what is known as Shakespeare's Lancastrian tetralogy. Considering the subject both thematically and dramaturgically, I shall attempt an integrated description and assessment of conceptions and uses of language in these plays. Several initial caveats, explanations, and apologies are in order.

First, there is the question of the propriety of even talking about a "tetralogy," that is, of considering the group as a large aesthetic unity. The question is legitimate in that four plays covering continuous history might not comprise an aesthetic unity like the one I shall discuss here; and indeed that seems the case with the *Henry VI–Richard III* plays. But if the question is so far legitimate, the proof is in the pudding: the Lancastrian plays are a unified tetralogy if one can discover and feel the nature of the unity. And one discovers whatever unity there may be by assuming, in the first place, that there *is* some. If then one's attempt to discover its nature succeeds, the assumption is justified; if not, the question remains open.

It is conceivable, of course, that one might discover evidence of aesthetic *dis*unity; but this seems a riskier claim than unity. With the Lancastrian tetralogy the strictly aesthetic arguments against unity are unconvincing,[1] whereas those studies hypoth-

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[1] These arguments mostly concern apparent disunity in the two parts of *H4*. For a survey of views of the relationship between these two plays, see Harold

esizing its existence have demonstrated enough to justify the assumption.[2] This appears to be the legitimate answer to the question, and one would like to be able to say no more about it and get on with the business at hand.

Unfortunately I must say a little more. For, it may be objected, I have simply disregarded the strongest argument against taking the tetralogy as an aesthetic whole, namely, the fact that it is difficult or even impossible to imagine that in writing *R2* Shakespeare envisaged the remainder of the tetralogy as we have it; that, indeed, there is good external evidence for supposing that it was not until after the success of *1H4* that he even considered writing the kind of sequel we have. I can anticipate such objections because they have been raised with worrisome frequency before in commentary on the plays. What is worrisome is that such arguments are in fact not strong at all. They seem so, I suspect, because of the large and sophisticated body of bibliographical and historical evidence and deductions they marshal. The evidence is in itself impressive, but not seriously telling against the assumption. To believe that it is presupposes a view of literary creation which naively ignores the possibility of discovery and progressive ordering on the part of an author.

It may well be that in writing *R2* Shakespeare did not foresee the remainder of the tetralogy. But it may also be—and seems likely—that parts of *R2* were written even before other parts of the same play were foreseen. What the "strong" arguments against taking the tetralogy as a whole disregard is that, whether or not Shakespeare had *H5* in his mind as he wrote *R2*, he certainly had *R2* much in his mind as he wrote *H5*. It is true that initially he would have known that he was beginning a play, *R2*, and might not have known he was beginning a tetralogy, but this simply means that one must posit a different kind of aesthetic unity, one perhaps resulting to a greater extent from exploration and discovery, progressive and retrospective ordering,

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Jenkins, *The Structural Problem in Shakespeare's Henry the Fourth*, pp. 2–5. Full references to this and other works cited can be found in the Selective Bibliography.

    [2]See, for example, Joan Webber, "The Renewal of the King's Symbolic Role," and James Winney, *The Player King*.

for a tetralogy comprising relatively self-sufficient plays than for a play comprising scenes which are not at all self-sufficient.

In the four chapters on the individual plays that follow I try as far as possible to maintain the sort of double vision needed to do justice both to the integrity of the tetralogy and to that of each play, using a certain amount of systematic ambiguity or alternation of focus between play and tetralogy. There is also a degree of flexibility in distribution of attention within the chapters on the individual plays which would be inappropriate were the large design of the tetralogy not also in view. For instance, in the chapter on *1H4* Falstaff is somewhat slighted; but the slight is at least partly remedied by the attention given him in the chapter on *2H4*. On the other hand, the different formats of these chapters are intended to reflect the self-sufficiency of the four plays, as well as the changing requirements of the reader of this study (e.g., the chapter on *R2* is long because there the reader is introduced to my methods).

Since building up an integrated description of ways of conceiving of and using language in the tetralogy will involve attention to a large number of details and considerable close analysis of portions of the text, and thus the unity might not always be apparent, I shall make use of a frame of reference consisting of three "summary metaphors" or analogues for the action.

The first of these derives from Tillyard's view that the tetralogy represents or enacts the historical movement from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance.[3] Tillyard uses this metaphor as a convenient handle for summarizing the changing conceptions of kingship and social order in the tetralogy; here I shall use it more to summarize changes in ways of conceiving of and using language—changes analogous to the demise of the universal authoritative language of Latin and the concurrent rise of the vernaculars.

The second analogue is closely parallel to this. It is the story of the building of the Tower of Babel and its fall with the proliferation of tongues. Of the three analogues, the Babel story will be invoked most often, for, while neatly encapsulating much of the

[3]E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*.

same material as the medieval-Renaissance analogue, it also adds a moral dimension, with its suggestion that the proliferation of tongues is a retribution for presumption.[4]

This element of morality is also present in the third analogue, that of the Fall, whose story summarizes certain ways in which Richard's linguistic situation is analogous to that of Adam in Eden, with his privileges of talking with God and of assigning names to the parts of creation. It also summarizes ways in which the Henrys' linguistic procedure is more time-conscious and less absolutist than Richard's.

The discussion of the tetralogy in chapters 1 to 4 does not depend on the assumption that these analogues were present in Shakespeare's mind or that they should be in ours as we regard the plays. However, in Chapter 5 I consider the question of whether more ought to be made of them, especially the two Biblical stories. The Fall is directly alluded to on a number of occasions in the tetralogy; and, while Shakespeare never, I believe, alludes directly to the Babel story, there are several passages suggesting that he had this story in the back of his mind as he wrote these plays. Nevertheless, at least until Chapter 5, these three analogues can be taken as mere expository conveniences.

[4]The Babel story:

> Then the whole earth was of one language and one speech. And as they went from the East, they found a plaine in the land of Shinar, and there they abode. And they said one to another, Come, let us make bricke and burne it in the fire, so they had bricke for stone, and slime had they in stead of morter. Also they said, Goe to, let us builde us a citie and a tower, whose top may reach unto the heaven, that wee may get us a name, least wee be scattered upon the whole earth. But the Lord came downe, to see the citie and tower which the sonnes of men builded. And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they all have one language, and this they begin to doe, neither can they be stopped from whatsoever they have imagined to do. Come on, let us goe downe, and there confound their language, that every one perceive not anothers speach. So the Lord scattered them from thence upon all the earth, and they left off to build the citie. Therefore the name of it was called Babel, because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: from thence did the Lord scatter them upon all the earth.
> (Gen. 11:1–9; from the 1599 Genevan Bible in Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.)

I shall also, in chapters 1 to 4, be using a conceptual machinery derived from recent developments in British and American linguistic philosophy, of which the central notion is that of "speech act" taken from the work of J. L. Austin.[5] This conceptual machinery is in no sense an expository convenience like the "summary metaphors," but rather is essential in the methodology. In using this conceptual framework I try to keep the study as free of unfamiliar terminology as possible, but when much of the argument is fairly technical analysis, a certain amount of technical terminology is unavoidable. Therefore in the second half of this introduction I expound Austin's idea of the "speech act." This provides a basic conceptual apparatus to which I make additions as needed in the body of the work.

In Chapter 5, after the reader has seen this conceptual framework used extensively and in detail, I try to place my approach in relation to certain more familiar kinds of approaches current in Shakespeare criticism. Finally, in Chapter 6, I return for a last look at the tetralogy, summarizing and tying up loose ends as I consider the overall design of the work "metadramatically," that is, as manifesting an argument about language with respect to the genre of drama.

Textual citations throughout for the Lancastrian plays are from the New Arden editions,[6] a choice that reflects the audience to whom this study is directed—not exclusively specialists (who, in any case, should find these texts manageable and much of the supplementary material useful), but also other serious readers of Shakespeare for whom, at present, these are the most helpful editions available.

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[5]Primarily from *How to Do Things with Words*, but also from *Philosophical Papers*.

[6]*King Richard II*, ed. Peter Ure; *The First Part of King Henry IV*, ed. A. R. Humphreys; *The Second Part of King Henry IV*, ed. Humphreys; *King Henry V*, ed. J. H. Walter. For the other plays mentioned, I have used *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Charles Jasper Sisson. Regarding the supplementary material—introductions, notes, appendices—on the basis of which the editions of the tetralogy were chosen for textual citation, Walter seems the most solidly helpful. Ure sometimes interprets and glosses with an assurance perhaps better suited to a critical study than an edition. Humphreys sometimes arbitrarily burdens his notes with information of questionable relevance.

II

. . . 'tis a kind of good deed to say well,
And yet words are no deeds.
            Henry to Wolsey in Shakespeare's Henry VIII

. . . this artistic miracle can only occur if the playwright
finds words that are spoken action.
            Luigi Pirandello[7]

The present study depends heavily on the concept of the "speech act" which comes from the work of the British philosopher J. L. Austin, "the most influential (from a methodological point of view) of ordinary-language philosophers."[8] Austin's work has been so influential that "speech act" is recognized by philosophers as a semitechnical term; but even to them, it is only semitechnical, and its import remains partly discretionary.

A speech act is an act performed in speech. The concept was isolated and discussed intensively by Austin in *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). He begins by analyzing utterances of the form "I hereby christen (deny, accuse, etc.) . . . ," calling these utterances "performatives." They interest him because they cannot be accounted for by a traditional—and to Austin, simplistic—view of language, a view according to which either an utterance is true or false (i.e., "descriptive"), or it falls into a category of "emotive-expressive-nonsensical" utterances such as "Ouch!" or "That's a splendid Van Gogh." An utterance like "I hereby christen this ship the *Queen Mary*" may go right or wrong in various ways, but it is properly neither true nor false (no one could object "That's not true") nor yet "emotive-expressive-nonsensical."

Austin notices two further things about performatives. First, they are *acts*—christening, denial, accusation, and the like—done in speech. (This is related to their lack of truth or falsity: an act may be successful, proper, etc., but not true.) Second, in a performative the act is done *explicitly:* we make the act of chris-

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[7]From an article "Spoken Action" ("Azione parlata") written in 1899, translated by Fabrizio Melano for *The Theory of the Modern Stage,* ed. Eric Bentley (Harmondsworth, Eng., 1968).
    [8]Richard Rorty, "Preface," *The Linguistic Turn;* see n. 5.

tening explicit when we do it with the word "christen." However, as Austin points out, the acts which are done explicitly in performatives may also be done nonexplicitly. Christening, for instance, might be done with the sentence "This ship is now the *Queen Mary*." What is constant, whether or not it is made explicit, is the *force* of the utterance, or the *kind of act* it does—christening, in the examples here. Austin calls such acts "speech acts." He also calls them "illocutionary acts," since they are performed *in* speech.

It is important to note that in performing an illocutionary act a person also performs the act of uttering a sentence, the simple act of speech itself. Austin terms this the "locutionary act." Thus the illocutionary act of (explicitly) urging may involve the locutionary act of uttering the sentence "I urge you to X." Furthermore, in performing both these acts one may be performing a third, namely, the act of persuasion. Persuasion is an example of what Austin calls a "perlocutionary act," one done *through* speech. (That it is not done *in* an utterance, as is, say, denial, is suggested by the impossibility of finding an explicit act of persuasion; that is, we cannot say "I hereby persuade you to X.") Anything like a systematic description of this third sort of act—involving not only the speaker but also typically the reaction of the hearer—seems impossible, at least at present.

"Speech act," then, as Austin usually means it, and as I shall mean it, is of the illocutionary act type in Austin's paradigm:

> . . . Locution
> He said to me "Shoot her!" . . .
> . . . Illocution
> He urged (or advised, ordered, &c.) me to shoot her.
> . . . Perlocution
> He persuaded me to shoot her.[9]

Austin's work thus provides a way of considering the action done in speech, and does so systematically insofar as (1) in almost every utterance, as he suggests, some speech act is done, and speech acts are done only in speech; and (2) since it is done only in language, speech action (unlike nonverbal action) is patterned in basically linguistic ways—for instance, a speech act, as

[9] *How to Do Things with Words*, p. 101.

we have seen, is either explicit or inexplicit, depending on whether or not it is performed with a word that names it. Or, to put the matter another way, Austin's work defines a realm—speech action—in which verbal drama takes shape, and describes some of that realm's primitive elements—features such as explicitness-inexplicitness. Or, to put it a third way, Austin's work is of potential value to us here because he is dealing with *dramatic* facts about language (even using examples from Shakespeare). In this respect his work contrasts with several other recent additions to our understanding of language, some within literary criticism, such as studies of iterative imagery, and some without, such as the theory of transformational generative grammar.[10]

However, some obstacles to fulfilling the promise of Austin's work are immediately apparent. First is the incompleteness of Austin's own discussion of speech acts: he seems to raise more questions than he answers. The central, basic part of his theory is set forth clearly and with certainty, but concerning other parts Austin himself had doubts. We do not have a fully articulated and developed theory-machine ready to put to work.

Philosophers have, of course, discussed Austin's work and in some cases developed it further[11]; nevertheless, pursuing commentary on his work in philosophical journals has not proved useful. Even in Austin himself there are certain aspects of the theory which, though of considerable importance within linguistic philosophy, are not of great concern to the literary critic. And the commentary on his work seems (perhaps inevitably) to criticize, assess, and elaborate the theory in ways that lessen its usefulness for us. This is to an extent the case even with John R. Searle's *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (1969) which, since it is the fullest and most elaborate development and critique of Austin's theory, I have taken into consideration and at one point (Chapter 4) used in some detail. Nor, in any

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[10]That conceptual machinery is used occasionally (sparingly) in the present study.

[11]Rorty, with four articles on Austin and an introduction in which he is discussed at some length, presents a good introductory picture of what other philosophers have made of Austin's work. John R. Searle, especially in *Speech Acts*, seems to have developed Austin's theories most fruitfully.

case, is Austin's theory yet "complete" in any generally accepted sense.

Yet all this is to say that Austin's theory, his body of related insights, is well suited for our purposes, because it has a breadth of applicability of which we may take advantage. Furthermore, because Austin's theory is in a sense unfinished we can the more easily have a good conscience about developing it to meet our needs, as I now attempt to do.[12]

We need not concern ourselves, as Austin does, with contrasting illocutionary force with truth-value; for that contrast, of however great relevance to the philosophy of language, is not especially relevant in the criticism of drama. We want a dramatic rather than a philosophical theory, and to achieve this it will be helpful to define speech action further than Austin does, using the following contrast. While acts such as christening and denial are done *in* language, there are also others done as it were *on* language—acts such as punning, rhyming, and the like. The former seem in conception to involve essential reference to the speaker-hearer axis; this is clearly true of acts like urging and welcoming, and a case could also be made for an act like christening. By contrast an act like punning seems conceptually to involve essential reference to the speaker-utterance axis. Now, while punning could presumably be included under the rubric "speech act," I shall not do so, because there seems to be nothing essentially dramatic about the speaker-utterance relation. The speaker-hearer axis, on the other hand, does seem essentially dramatic, and therefore my rule of thumb will be to keep that relation in view and to consider only those "speech acts" which in conception involve essential reference to it.

A second criterion which makes roughly the same distinction is the ability of the verb naming the act—when there is such a verb—to take a personal (direct or indirect) object. Thus the speech acts with which I am concerned can be referred to in

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[12]Since the present study was begun, a number of other writers have addressed themselves to questions of the usefulness of speech-act theory in literary criticism. For a good overview (with a speech-act analysis of *Coriolanus*), see Stanley E. Fish, "How to Do Things with Austin and Searle." The first book-length essay in speech-act criticism (I have not seen it) is Mary Louise Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse*.

sentences like "He warns you," "He told you." The "speech acts" I exclude are without such objects: those ordinarily referred to in sentences like "He puns," "He ranted."

Matters can be clarified further. Given the idea of speech acts, what interests us is their dramatic parameters—the dimensions in which they exist. I have already mentioned one such parameter, *kind of illocutionary force.* Austin, in the final sections of *How to Do Things with Words,* divides speech acts into five provisional categories according to illocutionary force, so that this parameter is five-valued.[13] The problem here, however, is that the taxonomy is only a sketch and, even more, that the five kinds tend to shade into one another, making the parameter indeterminately many-valued rather than five-valued; all this uncertainty and indistinctness lessens the value of the parameter.

A different parameter expounded by Austin is that of *explicitness.* And this parameter is clearly two-valued: a speech act is either explicit or inexplicit and there seem to be no borderline cases. Another parameter, one of great importance in dealing with the drama and yet practically ignored by Austin, is *direction of address.* If we think of the speaker, the act can be directed to anyone on stage or, with apostrophe, to anyone or anything, so that this parameter might seem to be indeterminately many-valued. However, from the standpoint of a hearer, the parameter can be distinctly two-valued: either an act is directed toward him or it is not.

In general, then, for the sake of simplicity and clarity, I shall be considering two-valued parameters of speech action; others will be used more cautiously.

Such, and so modified, is J. L. Austin's theory on which I depend more or less continually (even through long stretches where I do not allude to it) in the pages that follow. And, more than might be apparent, I look also to Austin's writing for the example of its spirit and style—unassuming, stubborn, and friendly.

[13]For later taxonomies of illocutionary force, see Searle, "A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts"; Richard Ohmann, "Instrumental Style"; and B. G. Campbell, "Toward a Workable Taxonomy of Illocutionary Forces."

CHAPTER ONE

❈ *Richard II*

Much more than the rest of the tetralogy, *Richard II* has struck commentators with the important role played in it by the subject of language, and attention in this direction has increased steadily, especially in recent decades.[1] Changing contexts warrant different justifications for pursuing an investigation: whereas earlier the subject of language in *R2* might have seemed questionably narrow and separate from the "major issues" of the play, by now, with the increasing awareness that language is in fact a "major issue," one needs to defend the traversing of ground that may already seem well-trodden. My justification is the belief that the uncharted portion of the territory is large enough to admit much further exploration, including that undertaken here.

Richard's situation represents a starting point not only politically but also linguistically for the entire tetralogy—a thesis for the dialectic of the remaining plays. Therefore I shall be most concerned here to get at the nature of this thesis, which is by no means simple.[2] Most of this chapter, then, consists of analysis of

[1]See, for example, Richard Altick, "Symphonic Imagery in *R2*"; Wolfgang Clemen, *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery*; Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*; Eric La Guardia, "Ceremony and History"; Molly Maureen Mahood, *Shakespeare's Wordplay*; Derek A. Traversi, *Shakespeare from Richard II to Henry V*; and James Winny, *The Player King*. More recently, this direction of attention appears in "*Richard II*: The Fall of Speech," the last chapter of James L. Calderwood's remarkably suggestive *Shakespearean Metadrama*.

[2]Calderwood, for example, calls it a "metadramatic" handling of problems of

Richard's speech alone. Even without regard to the remainder of the tetralogy, such an emphasis would be justified by the king's predominance in the play. Still, *R2* is not a "monodrama," and I shall naturally consider the other characters and the action in general in the course of dealing with Richard.

I

Talk of name, naming, title, and the like constitutes easily the most prominent body of references to language in the play.[3] Indeed the topic arises so frequently in the dialogue that one can trace the general course of the action in terms of it, and so provide a basis for further investigation, as follows.

Bolingbroke—the future Henry IV—and Mowbray come before Richard "to appeal each other of high treason" (I.i.27).[4] Bolingbroke is perhaps the initiator of the action, since his "appeal" is mentioned first (ll. 4, 9). This word introduces the topic of name: as a noun it means something like "accusation," but with Bolingbroke's "Come I appellant" (l. 34) we see that at least in this world accusation is essentially name giving. Bolingbroke makes this still clearer as he goes on to say

> Thou art a traitor and a miscreant,
> . . . .
> Once more, the more to aggravate the note,
> With a foul traitor's name stuff I thy throat.
>   (I.i.39–44)

Gages are exchanged. The proof of the appellation is to come in a tournament; the "happiness," to use Austin's term,[5] of the

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the degradation of poetry by the genre of drama and, as such, the culmination of a dialectic traced through *Titus Andronicus, Love's Labour's Lost, Romeo and Juliet,* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

[3]And the one most discussed in the criticism: see especially Winny and Calderwood.

[4]Textual citations throughout, unless otherwise noted, are from the New Arden editions (see Introduction, n. 6, and Selective Bibliography).

[5]For Austin, a speech act is "happy" or "felicitous" if it goes right, is not, for example, vitiated by attendant circumstances:

> A good many . . . things have as a general rule to be right and to go right if we are to be said to have happily brought off our action. What these are we may hope to discover by looking at and classifying types

respective namings is to depend on the outcome of the fight. God is to determine the giver of the right name by making him victorious; the name "traitor" is to apply to one of the combatants at his death. Although the name has been uttered, it does not yet apply—is not yet recognized by the society as applying. It seems to hover in the air waiting to alight and stick. Further, there is a peculiar reflexivity about the name, since to call someone a traitor falsely is to be a traitor oneself. Richard suggests that one of them must be guilty:

> We thank you both, yet one but flatters us,
> As well appeareth by the cause you come,
> Namely, to appeal each other of high treason.
> <div align="right">(I.i.25–27)</div>

His remark is interesting incidentally because of his "namely" and more importantly because it shows that to him the misdeed is not treason but flattery—the first of many characteristic oddities of thought which we shall note in him.

Such, roughly, is the opening action. Perhaps it is better termed a "situation," since the accusations had been made before the time of the opening scene; but they become official as we hear them delivered in the king's presence. In any case, Richard's first clear "action"—one difficult to fathom—is an attempt to reconcile the opponents. This is to say that he attempts to halt the name's "taking hold" even when he assumes that one of the opponents "but flatters" him. "Wrath-kindled gentlemen, be rul'd by me" (l. 152) he says, and "let this end where it begun" (l. 158). He and Gaunt tell the opponents to throw down one another's gages, but neither obeys, not even when Richard commands a second time, "throw down we bid, there is no boot" (l. 164).

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of case in which something *goes wrong* and the act—marrying, betting, bequeathing, christening, or what not—is therefore at least to some extent a failure: the utterance is then, we may say, not indeed false but in general *unhappy*. And for this reason we call the doctrine of *the things that can be and go wrong* on the occasion of such utterances, the doctrine of the *Infelicities*.

(How to Do Things with Words, p. 14)

For elaborations of Austin's theory of the happiness of speech acts, see the following writings by John Searle: *Speech Acts*, "A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts," and "Indirect Speech Acts."

Both men claim that they are unable to obey. Richard has in a sense asked them to do the impossible, to reverse or ignore time. Once the name is out in the open, something must be done with it. Unless it is made to apply, the situation is intolerable. Nor can the name be taken back by either appellant, for to do so is virtually to accept it oneself. Mowbray's

> Myself I throw, dread sovereign, at thy foot;
> My life thou shalt command, but not my shame.
> The one my duty owes, but my fair name,
> Despite of death . . .
> To dark dishonour's use thou shalt not have
> (I.i.165–69)

puts these aspects of the matter eloquently.

Much of the reciprocal accusation in this scene concerns the death of the Duke of Gloucester, Richard's and Bolingbroke's uncle and the former's severest critic. Though Gloucester's death at Calais while Mowbray was there in command seems to have been an execution ordered by Richard, the king never admits any responsibility for it, so that the event remains somewhat ambiguous throughout the play. It may be that Richard seeks to maintain this ambiguity in attempting to reconcile Bolingbroke and Mowbray, since the shame of the title "traitor," whether it applies to his lieutenant or to his cousin, redounds to an extent on Richard himself. In any case, both Bolingbroke and Mowbray are more willing than Richard to trust in the will of God, and in spite of the king's "bid" they will not be reconciled. Thus the opening scene ends with Richard's lamely commanding that which apparently cannot be otherwise:

> Be ready, as your lives shall answer it,
> At Coventry upon Saint Lambert's day.
> . . . .
> Since we cannot atone you, we shall see
> Justice design the victor's chivalry.
> (I.i.198–203)

There follows a short scene of dialogue between Gloucester's widow and John of Gaunt. Gaunt appears certain that Richard is responsible for Gloucester's death, but he, like his son, urges,