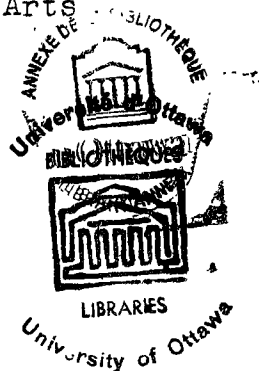


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POETIC AMBIGUITY AND  
POLITICAL DILEMMA IN RICHARD THE  
REDELES

by Daniel Michael Mason

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## CHAPTER I

T.S. Eliot's statement that "all great poetry gives the illusion of a view of life,"<sup>1</sup> succinctly reflects the notion that the province of poetry is nothing less than the whole scope of human experience. This is not to say that poetry and experience are synonymous. In the final analysis, they are separated by the form in which the artist relates that experience. As Mark Schorer states, "the difference between content or experience and achieved content or art, is technique."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the content of art and human experience are inseparable.

Similarly, the study of politics is equally expansive if we give politics its widest possible meaning of contemporary events. It is not surprising, then, that poetry and politics form a common partnership. As Cecil M. Bowra states, "public themes in poetry have for centuries been common in many parts of the world, and conscious avoidance of them is more often the exception than the rule. In our own country [Great Britain] with its crowded record of civil and international wars, of social awakening and revolution, of vigorous and often vicious reappraisals of what man owes to himself, poets can hardly be expected to keep clear of politics in the general sense of contemporary affairs."<sup>3</sup>

All poetry is, of course, not potentially political.

However, it is true that even poetry which is not essentially politically oriented can have peripheral political comment. We would all agree, for instance, that Paradise Lost is a theological poem. Milton is attempting to "justify the ways of God to men."<sup>4</sup> Yet within this larger theological concern, Milton deals with subjects which have an obvious political bent. Satan often addresses his subjects on such topics as rebellion and sovereignty:

"Me though just right, and the fixed laws of Heaven,  
 Did first create your leader—next, free choice,  
 With what besides in council or in fight  
 Hath been achieved of merit—yet this loss,  
 Thus far at least recovered, hath much more  
 Established in a safe, unenvied throne,  
 Yielded with full consent. The happier state  
 In Heaven, which follows dignity, might draw  
 Envy from each inferior; but who here  
 Will envy whom the highest place exposes  
 Foremost to stand against the Thunderer's aim  
 Your bulwark, and condemns to greatest share  
 Of endless pain? Where there is, then, no good  
 For which to strive, no strife can grow up there  
 From faction: for none sure will claim in Hell  
 Precedence; none whose portion is so small  
 Of present pain that with ambitious mind  
 Will covet more! (Book II. lines 18-35)

An understanding of the political presuppositions in Paradise Lost, then, would lead to a deeper appreciation of the poem. It would further our insight into Milton's collective meaning.

It is true, however, that certain poems lend themselves more readily than others to a political interpretation. Dryden's Absalom and Achitophel is probably the best known example of this type of poetry. Such poetry presupposes a closer relationship between itself and certain specific contemporary events of the period in which it was created.

It is not completely necessary for an understanding of the poem to decipher the allusions in the poem in terms of these specifics. At best, such a process is purely speculative; at worst it results in a slighting of the poem as art. But if a political interpretation of the poem can be used as a tool to gain insight into the art of the poem, then a political approach can be a highly rewarding one.

In Richard the Redeles<sup>5</sup> the poet is attempting to interpret the events surrounding the deposition of King Richard II by Bolingbroke in 1399. In terms of time, at least, the poet is in the middle of the action,<sup>6</sup> a position which results in a note of immediacy throughout the poem. Awed by the events, the poet attempts to retain a sense of order in the midst of extraordinary happenings. He tries to find the reasons for Henry's revolt and the possible consequences of it:

Thus tales me troblid ffor they trewe were,  
 And amarride my mynde rith moche and my wittis eke:  
 ffor it passid my parceit and my preifis also,  
 How so wondirffull werkis wolde haue an ende. (Prol.  
 15-18)

Yet in attempting to find the reasons for the revolt, the stance the poet takes toward Richard is somewhat ambiguous. He refers to Richard as "so Riche and so noble" (Prol. 9), and professes, at first, much loyalty to him:

I had pete of his passion that prince was of Walis,  
 And eke oure crowned kynge till crist woll no lenger;  
 And as a lord to his liage though I lite hade,  
 All myn hoole herte was his while he in helthe  
 regnid. (Prol. 23-26)

At the same time, however, the poet quickly turns upon Richard who has been the scourge rather than the benefactor of his people:

Now, Richard the redeles reweth on you self,  
 That lawelesse leddyn youre lyf and youre peple othe;  
 ffor thoru the wyles and wronge and wast in youre  
 tyme,  
 Ye were lyghtlich y-lyfte ffrom that you leef  
 thoughte,  
 And ffrom youre willffull werkis youre will was  
 chaungid,  
 And rafte was youre riott and rest, ffor youre daiez  
 Weren wikkid thoru youre cursid counceill youre  
 karis weren newed,  
 And coueitise hath crasid youre crowne ffor euere!

(Pass.I. I-8)

The poet's inability to deal with his material from one point of view creates an aura of tension in the poem. The most obvious solution to the ambiguous stance is to credit it to an artistic failure. This answer quickly proves unsatisfactory, however, when we look at the poem in

its entirety. The poet's skill seems such that it is unlikely he would have made such a fundamental error. Further, if we can look deeper into the poem and prove that the ambiguous stance is not really accidental, and that it is infused into the whole poem, then the possibility of an artistic failure would be ruled out.

This would take us part of the way to the solving of the problem, but the reason for the ambiguity still exists. Bowra may again provide the clue with his equation of political poetry to periods of political and social upheaval. The answer may be found, then, if we bring the poem to bear on fourteenth century conditions, and those conditions to bear on the poem. We shall attempt to prove that certain changes in the social and political outlook of the fourteenth century results in the ambiguity of the poetic stance in Richard the Redeles.

This method of approach is made more viable by two developments which have only recently come to light in modern historical and literary scholarship. The first concerns the modern view of the Middle Ages. Until the twentieth century, the Middle Ages were thought to be centuries of monotonous homogeneity. Many historians felt that there was little social or political tension in the medieval society because there was very little organic growth. Only recently have historians, looking at new evidence, come to realize that there were massive and

constant changes taking place in the medieval fabric. J.R. Strayer represents the more modern view of the Middle Ages:

There are important differences between the early and the late Middle Ages, but these differences represent different stages in the development of a single civilization. From the fifth to the eighth century the wreckage of an older civilization was slowly cleared away. Europe gradually separated itself from the Mediterranean world and worked out its own independent culture, based on Christianity, survivals of Roman institutions and ideas, and Germanic customs. The ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries were a period of adjustment and experimentation, in which Europeans slowly and painfully discovered the most effective institutional and ideological expressions of their basic beliefs and aspirations. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries were a period of fruition, of full development of all the potentialities of medieval civilization. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries medieval civilization slowly declined under the impact of the new forces which it had created by its own successes.<sup>7</sup>

These changes were not always revolutionary in terms of the time involved, but the growth was constant and, according to Strayer, "slow and painful." Putting the changes on another plane, we can see how the folk heroes, the sum-totals of how a society sees itself, change over the centuries. Beowulf and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight speak of vastly different societies. Such colossal changes could not have been carried out without some degree of social and political tension.

The second development comes from the modern view of the literature of the period. As Robert W. Ackerman states in Backgrounds to Medieval English Literature, "the literature of these four centuries [1100—1500] seems to have responded most significantly to the changes in the social structure—in particular to the rise and fall of the feudal order—and to the emergence of a Christian civilization that was in the cultural mainstream of Western Europe . . ." <sup>8</sup> As the feudal system, the system which gave rise to the romance tradition, declined under new forces, the literature began to reflect the changing values. The pagentry of the thirteenth-century King Horn bears little resemblance to the burlesque humour of the fifteenth-century Tournament of Tottenham. The religious lyric also reflects the facility with which the literature of the period responded to the changes in the period in which it was created. The humble songs of devotion of the twelfth century barely resemble the aureate lyrics of the fourteenth century.

The fact that we are faced with a period of social change and a literature which responds to that change underlines the possibility of a relationship between the ambiguity in Richard the Redeles and the political and social tension of the period in which the poem was created. This is the relationship we are going to explore.

Before we approach this relationship in earnest, we

must turn to the manuscripts, editions and scholarly work already completed on Richard the Redeles.

When Rev. Walter W. Skeat first edited the poem, there was thought to be only one manuscript housed in the library of Cambridge University as MS. LI.IV.I4. According to Skeat, the manuscript was rather a late copy of the poem "written, perhaps, toward the middle of the fifteenth century."<sup>9</sup> The scribe had taken all the Latin quotations in the poem and had written them down as marginal comments instead of leaving them in their proper place in the body of the poem. The only mark by the scribe is at Passus lll, line 281 where "'nota, nota, nota' appears in the margin."<sup>10</sup> There are many other notes "in a later hand,"<sup>11</sup> as Skeat calls it, throughout the manuscript.

Using this manuscript Skeat edited the poem in 1873 and again in 1886 in a new edition of Piers Plowman.<sup>12</sup> The 1873 and 1886 editions of Richard the Redeles were the third and fourth editions, respectively, of the poem. As Skeat points out, "this poem is now printed for the third time. It has already been printed by Mr. Wright, viz. for the Camden Society in 1838 and in Political Poems and Songs in 1859 with the title of 'A Poem on the Deposition of Richard II'."<sup>13</sup>

Skeat changed the name of the poem to Richard the Redeles in his first edition "because it [Wright's title] is somewhat misleading. It is clear from the internal

evidence that the poem was written before Richard was formally deposed; whilst the title given by Mr. Wright is calculated to give the impression that it was written afterwards."<sup>14</sup>

In 1928, however, a manuscript which included Richard the Redeles as a fragment turned up in the West country in Britain. Mr. Sisam and Mr. Hodgson sold the manuscript to the British Museum where it now appears as Add. MS. 4166. Mabel Day and Robert Steele describe the manuscript in the following manner:

In the condition in which it was sold, the manuscript consisted of nineteen leaves of poor vellum, enclosed in a parchment cover 11 1/2 inches long and 8 inches in width. At one time it had been a fairly substantial volume, as the stiffening of its back showed it had formerly been 7/8 inches thick. In the middle of the front cover, the figure 8 suggests that it had been part of a larger collection. On the last cover an inscription reads "the lyff off king Richard ij" in a fifteenth century hand was added by an early owner. There are scribbles on the other pages of the cover and the manuscript had suffered much from dampness. Large portions had fallen off through mildew, the first and last portions of the poem had been lost, together with two leaves from the middle between folios 15 and 16.<sup>15</sup>

Day and Steele assumed that the portion of the poem Skeat had called Richard the Redeles and the remainder of this new manuscript which dealt with the reign of Henry IV were fragments of a single poem. Putting them together as

fragments R and M respectively, they published them as a single work, Mum and the Sothsegger, for the Early English Text Society.

The critical commentary on Richard the Redeles has been sparse. Most of it has centered on two main issues: the relationship of the author of the poem to the author of Piers Plowman and, since 1928, the relationship of the poem to fragment M of Mum and the Sothsegger.

Dealing with what he calls "internal" and "external" evidence, Skeat concludes that Richard the Redeles and Piers Plowman were written by the same author.<sup>16</sup> In the only other major article written on the authorship controversy, Skeat's conclusion is reversed. In his essay in The Cambridge History of English Literature J. Manly concludes, "the resemblances in external form, in dialect, in versification etc. on which Skeat relies, are not greater than might be expected of an imitator, while there are such numerous and striking differences in diction, versification, sentence structure and process of thought from every point of Piers Plowman, that identity of authorship is out of the question."<sup>17</sup> Manly's argument is, perhaps, biased by the fact that he also argues for multiple authorship of Piers Plowman, but as yet, no scholar has attempted to refute his argument. This is where the debate on authorship remains today.

Since the discovery of the manuscript in 1928, there has been some conjecture as to the relationship of fragment

R. to fragment M of Mum and the Sothsegger. Before the manuscript had been found, however, in an article published in 1906, Henry Bradley pointed out that, according to Bale's index in the sixteenth century, the poem we call Richard the Redeles was known to a Nicholas Brigham as Mum-Sothsegger. As Bradley points out, "there can be no doubt of the identity of the piece referred to, for Bale gives a Latin translation of the first two lines."<sup>18</sup>

When Day and Steele edited the manuscript in 1936, taking their clue from Bradley and from certain internal evidence, they assumed that fragments R and M were, indeed, parts of the same poem. According to them, "the identity of the language of this fragment [R] and the newly discovered poem, seems to indicate that the two fragments form part of one longer composition."<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, they are quick to point out the obstructions to this theory. They state, "we are still left with the difficulty that R is solely concerned with the causes of the deposition of Richard, while M leaves him altogether out of account."<sup>20</sup> Finally, they conclude, "assuming as we do, the identity of authorship, the second fragment shows a remarkable advance by the poet over his medium."<sup>21</sup>

Because it has never been conclusively proved that fragments R and M form parts of a single poem, we have chosen to deal with Richard the Redeles as a single and separate poem. Thus all observations and conclusions will

be drawn solely from it.

Other than the research just mentioned, the only lengthy study devoted to the poem was carried out by C. Ziepel in the nineteenth century. Ziepel's study suffers, like much nineteenth century scholarship, from attempting to view the poem as historical commentary. He states, "the author is not a poet in the general acceptation of the word: he describes facts, but does not imagine them, and though, in the stirring events of the time, he may have been a strenuous supporter of Henry of Lancaster, he actually never lets his zeal carry him beyond the limits of truth, but appears throughout a soberminded, earnest, and truth-loving man, worthy of belief in every respect."<sup>22</sup> Other than repeating Skeat's theory on the unity of authorship with Piers Plowman,<sup>23</sup> Ziepel concentrates very little on the poem itself, choosing to deal more with the historical events of Richard's reign.

In an article found in Anglistische Forschungen, O. Eberhard attempts to relate the poem to the political events of the period, seeing the poem as a complaint against unfair taxation<sup>24</sup> and a condemnation of the usurpation of royal power by Richard's courtiers.<sup>25</sup> Eberhard merely mentions the poem as one of many literary pieces whose aura of protest reflect the social tensions of the age.

Only one other scholar has dealt with the poem with any degree of seriousness. J.F. Oakden follows Manly in

assuming that Richard the Redeles is not written by the author of Piers Plowman. He concludes, "the ascription of the poem to the author of Piers Plowman by Skeat is not, however, teneable. Professor Manly dismissed this hypothesis as fantastic many years ago, and there is no doubt that tests of meter and style tell heavily against such an assumption . . . the later poem, Richard the Redeles, has not the dream framework or the vision form, and its methods are singularly different from those employed by the author of Piers Plowman . . ."26

Oakden does go further than dealing only with the authorship controversy. He states, "the work reveals a writer exceptionally alert to the political and national bankruptcy of the moment; a power of expression sufficient to portray the situation in its true colours, and a satirical vein which could make the darts carry."<sup>27</sup> Finally, he carries out a metrical analysis of the poem from which he concludes that it was written in "a South Midlands dialect."<sup>28</sup>

Little else of note has been done on Richard the Redeles, and with the exception of G.R. Owst who sees the poem as "a diatribe against servile councillors,"<sup>29</sup> and A.R. Benham who gives a partial translation of it,<sup>30</sup> the poem has been all but ignored in terms of any major consideration of the work as a whole. Richard the Redeles remains relatively untouched by scholarly hands.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup> T.S. Eliot, "Poetry and Philosophy," Selected Prose, ed. John Hayward (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books in association with Faber & Faber, 1953), p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Schorer, "Technique as Discovery," Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction: 1920-1951, ed. John W. Aldridge (New York: Ronald Press, 1952), p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> Cecil M. Bowra, Poetry and Politics 1900-1920 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> John Milton, "Paradise Lost," Paradise Lost and Selected Poetry and Prose, ed. Northrop Frye (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1951), Book 1, line 26.  
The quotation immediately following is taken from the same text.

<sup>5</sup> All quotations are taken from "Richard the Redeles," The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman. C Text, ed. W.W. Skeat (London: N. Trubner & Co. for the Early English Text Society, No. 54, 1873), pp. 469-503.

<sup>6</sup> W.W. Skeat, "Preface lV—Richard the Redeles," pp. cv-cvii.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph R. Strayer, Western Europe in the Middle Ages (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1955), p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> Robert W. Ackerman, Backgrounds to Medieval English Literature (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> W.W. Skeat, "Preface lV—Richard the Redeles," p. civ.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. cv.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. cv.

<sup>12</sup> William Langland, The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman in Three Parallel Texts together with Richard the Redeless, ed. W.W. Skeat. 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press). This edition together with the notes and comments is the same as the 1873 edition we are using.

<sup>13</sup> W.W. Skeat, "Preface lV—Richard the Redeles,"

p. ciii. Skeat's title is not entirely correct. It was first printed as "An Alliterative Poem on the Deposition of King Richard II." A modern reprint of Wright's edition has been recently reprinted for the Camden Society by AMS Press, Inc., 1968.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. ciii.

<sup>15</sup> Mabel Day and Robert Steele, ed. "Introduction," Mum and the Sothsegger (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. ix.

<sup>16</sup> W.W. Skeat, "Preface IV--Richard the Redeles," pp. cvii-cxvii.

<sup>17</sup> J.M. Manly, "Piers Plowman and Its Sequence," The Cambridge History of English Literature, ed. A.W. Ward and A.R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), II, p. 36.

<sup>18</sup> Henry Bradley, "The Misplaced Leaf of 'Piers the Plowman,'" Athenaeum, I (1906), 481.

<sup>19</sup> Mabel Day and Robert Steele, ed. Mum and the

Sothsegger, p. x.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. xix.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. xix

<sup>22</sup> C. Ziepel, The Reign of Richard 11 and Comments Upon an Alliterative Poem on the Deposition of that Monarch (Berlin: J. Draeger, 1874), p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 23f.

<sup>24</sup> O. Eberhard, "Der Baueraufstand vom Jahre 1381 in der Englischer Poesie," Anglistische Forschungen, 51 (1917), 15-17.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 52-63.

<sup>26</sup> J.P. Oakden, Alliterative Poetry in Middle English. The Dialectical and Metrical Survey (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1930), vol 11, p. 61.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., vol 1, p. 92.

<sup>29</sup> G.R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England  
A Neglected Chapter in the History of English Letters and of  
the English People (Oxford: Basil Blackwell & Mott Ltd.,  
1933), p. 265.

<sup>30</sup> Allen Rogers Benham, English Literature From Widsith  
to the Death of Chaucer (1916; rpt. Freeport, New York:  
Books for Library Press, 1970), p. 185f.

## CHAPTER II

One sound rose ceaselessly above the noises of a busy life and lifted all things into a sphere of order and serenity: the sound of bells. The bells were in daily life like good spirits, which by their familiar voices, now called up the citizens to mourn and now to rejoice, now warned them of danger, now exhorted them to piety.<sup>1</sup>

Johan Huizinga's stirring use of the bell symbol in The Waning of the Middle Ages reflects the long-accepted notion that the Middle Ages was an age of faith, an entire period of history guided by a powerful and pervasive church. Although this conception must be qualified to a great degree, we must admit that few ages have shown such a close integration of an institutionalized religion into the Geist of a civilization. As John B. Morrall states in Political Thought in Medieval Times, "medieval Europe offers, for the first time in history, the somewhat paradoxical spectacle of a society trying to organize itself politically on the basis of a spiritual framework."<sup>2</sup>

The relationship between the secular and the religious spheres changed constantly, however, in response to certain internal and external forces. There was never a period of complete stasis between the two spheres. But the problem of change in society was further complicated by the occurrence of certain periods when the magnitude of change was carried on at an accelerated pace. Such was the case

with the fourteenth century. As A.R. Myers states, "the late middle ages, then, far from remaining static, were characterized by constant change—developments not as rapid as those of our own time, but swift enough to produce in these centuries [the fourteenth and fifteenth] a new culture based, indeed, on the old, but differing markedly from it in fundamentals."<sup>3</sup> The years between the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War and the deposition of Richard II witnessed a reorganization of the relationship between the religious and secular structures of medieval society, a reorganization which changed the very basis of the society. In keeping with this, we shall attempt to sketch briefly the main historical developments of the fourteenth century and then attempt to determine their effects on the social, political and philosophical outlook of the age.

Morrall's observation that medieval society attempted "to organize itself politically on the basis of a spiritual framework" attests to the fact that for many centuries, the Church as an institution, and the Catholic religion as a corporate system of beliefs, represented the guiding force in medieval society. "Christianity alone was left with the task of providing the West with a social unity across its new barbarian frontiers. It did so not by appealing to a political sense of obligation, but to a basis of divinely inspired and commonly shared spiritual fellowship."<sup>4</sup> Most

historians agree that the Church reached its highest point of domination over the society in the twelfth century. From this point there appears to be a decline in the ability of the Church to control lay governments, and a growing unwillingness on the part of the population to accept the Church as the leader in society. "As early as the thirteenth century, the secularization of European society is apparent in every field of human activity, in art and literature as well as in politics and ceremonies," says J.R. Strayer, "and when a society has been laicized, leadership has passed from Church to state."<sup>5</sup>

This growing secularism increased substantially in the fourteenth century, aided by a series of events which compromised the Church's power severely in both the political sense and in the collective mind of the age. As we have stated, the thirteenth century witnessed a decline in the Church's power. Similarly the papacy, the religious and political institution through which the Church exercised its authority over Christendom, had declined in a like degree. In the face of the growing power of the secular and centralized nation states, Boniface VIII tragically attempted to reassert papal authority over secular kings. We may say tragically, for Boniface appears to have been singularly unable to take into account the declining power of his office. Because of this inability, any assertion of a power he did not realistically possess was bound to fail.

As Strayer points out, "Boniface failed to realize that no Pope in 1300 could wield the authority of an Innocent III."<sup>6</sup> Thus, when Boniface protested the taxation of the clergy by Philip of France, thereby reasserting indirectly papal power, Philip reacted strongly, forcing Boniface to retreat from his position. More important, the people of France accepted the denunciation of the clergy rather than the clerical denunciation of the secular leaders. "The Church could no longer be sure of the basic loyalty of the people of Western Europe."<sup>7</sup> The papacy was forced to admit openly to its declining power.

As a partial result of this conflict arose the so-called Babylonian Captivity of 1309-1376 whereby the Pope was forced to reside at Avignon as the virtual servant of the French king. As F.J.C. Hearnshaw states, "the papacy, exiled from Rome and established at Avignon, having been robbed of its temporal suzerainty, lost also its spirituality and sank into a deplorable condition of religious apathy, moral corruption, and intellectual contempt. It also passed under the control of its destroyer, the king of France, and seemed to be degraded to the ignominious position of a mere tool of his policy."<sup>8</sup> Most historians agree that the charge of moral corruption against the Avignon popes has been exaggerated, but the very fact that the papacy had been moved from Rome dispossessed the office of much of its aura of tradition upon which its political and spiritual authority had been based.

The final result of the Babylonian Captivity was the Great Schism of 1378. With popes at Rome and Avignon, the papacy was reduced to political infighting.

The final result of these events, then, was a weakening of the Church's position as the leader of Christendom. The papacy of Gregory the Great and Innocent III which had stood as a stable and unified institution in a political and moral sense and had set itself up as the unifying force in a fragmented Europe, appeared as if it could not order its own affairs. It could hardly be expected to guide a changing Europe. By the end of the fourteenth century, "the pope was still a great figure in European politics; he was consulted on most problems, and taxation of the clergy was easier if his consent was first obtained . . . but the papacy had lost its ability to guide and control Western civilization."<sup>9</sup>

Further, the Black Death ravaged Europe between 1348 and 1349, a catastrophe which had a profound effect on the psychology of the age. The extent of this effect remains open to debate. Hearnshaw states, "the Black Death shocked the ecclesiastical system to its very foundations. It destroyed the faith of the common people in the efficacy of prayer, in the virtue of priestly ministrations, in the benefits of pilgrimages and penances, in the value of piety and in the worth of good deeds."<sup>10</sup> William Rees, in his study of the social effect of the plague in Wales, points to

the same conclusion.<sup>11</sup> However, working with new evidence, Richard W. Emery plays down the socially disintegrating effects of the plague. Placing the mortality rate at "probably exceeding 50% for adult males,"<sup>12</sup> he feels that "the evidence for panic, terror, and general demoralization is entirely lacking . . . the social organization would seem to have remained cohesive, intact and functioning."<sup>13</sup> We must assume like Hearnshaw, however, that the high mortality rate across Europe deeply affected the entire population despite the fact that Emery reaches different conclusions from the rather limited cross-section of society he chose to analyse. Coupled with the declining power of the institutionalized religion which had once shaped the society, then, arose the conception that the old spiritual and moral values as defined by the fourteenth century Church had little to offer man in the midst of a crisis of such magnitude.

Coincident with the declining power of the Church arose the growth in strength of the secular states who began to use the Church for their own purposes. In The English Church in the Fourteenth Century W.A. Pantin brings out some significant observations in his demographic study of the institution. Pantin points out that "at the beginning of the fourteenth century, it is the scholar bishops, of whom Winchelsey may be taken as the type, who are most notable. In the mid-century the civil servants of whom

Wykeham may be taken as the type, predominate. At the end of the century, the aristocratic bishops, of whom Arundel may be taken as the type, are prominent."<sup>14</sup> The trend is clear. The patronage exercised by the king over benefices, especially in the powerful bishoprics, was being used for the benefit of the secular state. The Church was being undermined by the appointment to its most important offices of men whose primary interest was secular. Such practices lead Pantin to conclude that by the late fourteenth century, "the Church was the exploited, not the exploiter."<sup>15</sup>

The fourteenth century, then, witnessed a series of events superimposed upon each other which profoundly influenced the Church, an institution which had for centuries guided the course and values of an entire civilization. In the face of this decline a vacuum was created, a vacuum into which were placed certain attempts to erect standards capable of stabilizing a civilization in a crisis of values. Huizinga describes the crisis as a period in which "a sombre melancholy weighs on people's souls. Whether we read a chronicle, a poem, a sermon, a legal document even, the same impression of immense sadness is produced by them all."<sup>16</sup> He goes on to point out that "the note of despair and profound dejection is predominantly sounded not by ascetic monks, but by the court poets and chroniclers—laymen, living in aristocratic circles and amid aristocratic ideas. Possessing only a slight intellectual and moral

culture, being for the most part strangers to study and learning, and of only a feebly religious temper, they were incapable of finding consolation or hope in the spectacle of human misery and decay, and could only bewail the decline of the world and despair of justice and peace."<sup>17</sup>

Although Huizinga's observations are related to Northern France and to the Netherlands in particular, the inherent cohesiveness of medieval civilization allows us to apply his conclusions to England as well. To return to Huizinga again, then, he states that any civilization can turn to three paths in the face of a universal ennui. According to him, "three different paths, at all times, have seemed to lead to the ideal life. Firstly, that of forsaking the world. . . . The second path conducts to amelioration of the world, by consciously improving political, social and moral institutions and conditions. . . . there is a third path to a world more beautiful, trodden in all ages and civilizations, the easiest and also the most fallacious of all, that of the dream."<sup>18</sup>

Huizinga, of course, sees the latter as the goal of later medieval society, and with much reason, but it is indicative of the turbulence of the century that the two other areas were also chosen by prominent numbers of the populace. It is significant that fourteenth century Europe saw the rise of two diametrically opposed solutions to the crisis of values mentioned earlier. These solutions

were first, a justification for a secular political view of society, and second, the rise of a more individualistic approach to religion. By the latter we mean a system of worship and belief not sanctioned by official Church doctrine. At first glance, these two phenomena seem unrelated, but if we can consider them in relation to the Church, we can see that both are on the same plane.

Before we approach these two responses directly, let us look at one of the trends in philosophy of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a trend that will help us give these responses a wider basis. With the writings of Thomas Aquinas in the late thirteenth century we witness for, perhaps, the first and last time, a synthesis of Christian scriptural writings and the newly acquired writings of the Greeks. To quote a time-honoured phrase, Aquinas' writings represent a fusion of reason and revelation. As David Knowles states in The Evolution of Medieval Thought, "the particular greatness of Aquinas, as a master of technical method, lies in his combination of fearless strength of reasoning with an entire absence of personal bias, and in his ability to recognize and produce harmony and order—to recognize them in the universe, and to produce them in his own thought—to a degree without parallel among the great philosophers of the world."<sup>19</sup>

Yet this synthesis began to break down soon after the

death of Thomas. Beginning with the writings of Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus there arose a split between reason and revelation. We cannot, of course, describe the processes which led Henry and Scotus to this separation, but let it suffice to say that by separating philosophy from theology, both theologians divorced reason and revelation. Theological truisms could not be proven by dialectic; they stood on faith alone.<sup>20</sup>

Scotus was followed by William of Ockham, the father of Nominalism. According to Knowles, "Ockham abandoned . . . every form of intellectual abstraction, in his account of the process of cognition. The mind of the knower does not abstract essence or nature from the thing known because neither the mental process of abstraction, nor the existence of any nature to abstract, can be shown to exist. All that is known is individual and singular, and the process of knowledge is purely intuitional."<sup>21</sup> For Ockham, then, God could not be known through reason, only through revelation or ecclesiastical pronouncements upon Scripture. As Knowles points out, "it was only a short step to reduce revealed doctrine to Scripture alone, and this step was, in fact, soon taken by Wycliffe and his followers."<sup>22</sup>

This split, then, forms the intellectual background to the two responses to the crisis of values. To return to our original point about the rise of a secular view of the

state and a rise of a more individualistic approach to religion, we can categorize the former as a product of a tradition based on reason, and the latter as a product of a tradition based on faith. Let us deal with the latter response first.

Despite the fact that the Church attempted to control individual interpretation of Scripture throughout the Middle Ages, the writings and underlying suppositions of the fourteenth century mystics such as Dame Julien of Norwich, Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton were not entirely foreign to certain precepts of earlier medieval orthodoxy. It should be noted again here that we are using the term "individualism in religion" quite loosely, for there was always a body of doctrine accompanying the mystical tradition. We are merely asserting that there was a movement away from the formalism of fourteenth century orthodoxy, surrounded as it was by a huge body of the intellectualized speculation of the great schoolmen.

At the risk of too great a generalization, let us assume, as does A.R. Myers, that the mystics, symbolic of the new drive for a more intensely personal religious experience, held several views in common. "Firstly, they made little reference to philosophical speculation or to the precepts of scholastic theology and ecclesiastical authorities. Secondly, they were much more concerned with individual scriptural culture. Finally, although

they intended to be orthodox, their emphasis on 'quietest' personal religion and the possibility of an immediate approach to God, and their reliance upon the inner light rather than on an authoritative tradition, all tended unwittingly to undermine belief in a sacramental and sacerdotal religion."<sup>23</sup>

This complete lack of adherence to the authoritative tradition cannot really be seen as a completely original movement. It is merely a return to the more primitive Christianity of Augustine, with its accompanying emphasis on a more direct relationship with the godhead. Augustine, we must remember, "has at no time any interest in analysing or describing either the universe or the microcosm of man. . . . He desires to have knowledge of God and of the soul and of nothing else."<sup>24</sup> It is no accident, then, that in the next great drive to strip away the formalism from Christianity that Martin Luther turned to the writings of this same Augustine.

The mystics, of course, were only one manifestation of this new trend in religious beliefs. As devout a churchman as Thomas Bradwardine reflected the same notion in his De Causa Dei. As Gordon Leff states, "he [Bradwardine] marks a break in kind not merely degree: for it is a logical extension of his own teaching to transfer belief into a personal and emotional experience, as Luther did . . ."<sup>25</sup> In this sense, then, we can look upon the rise

of a new individualism in religion fostered, albeit unknowingly, by the realization of the primacy of the intuitive faculty in matters of religion by the theologians of the day, as a return to older values, to a more simplistic faith and outlook in an increasingly complicated world.

Diametrically opposed to this movement stands the negation of faith as a basis for a Weltanschauung in The Defender of Peace of Marsilio of Padua. As we have already pointed out, Morrall affirmed that "medieval Europe offers, for the first time in history, the somewhat paradoxical spectacle of a society trying to organize itself politically on the basis of a spiritual framework." This is certainly true of the precepts underlying the political thought of Augustine and earlier political theorists who saw the political sphere as only a portion of a larger theologically oriented superstructure which formed the earlier medieval view of the world. The scope of the changes carried out in Marsilio's writing can only be appreciated if we can briefly consider them in the light of the long and powerful Augustinian tradition in political thought.

The City of God dominated the political thought of much of the Middle Ages. All Augustinian thought was based upon the conception that man was a fallen creature, and as such, his whole nature was corrupted. For Augustine, "man is so indeterminate, so discontinuous, so blind in his intentions and haphazard in his attempts to communicate,

that he must be determined by some force outside the horizon of his immediate consciousness—for Augustine, of course, God."<sup>26</sup> Given this view of man, Augustine's idea of earthly government is a rule established over an irrational community by God. Divine order is superimposed upon the world.

"Augustine cites the biblical text which is central to the Christian idea of kingship in the Middle Ages—the heart of the king is in the hand of God."<sup>27</sup> Man must never forget the relationship of king to God. F.R.L. Brown points out that Augustine advises "every soul be subject to the governing powers, for there is no power but God; these powers coming from God are subject to divine ordering."<sup>28</sup> Finally, Brown summarizes Augustine's doctrine of total obedience to civil authority in the following manner:

This does not mean that the powers that be are divinely sanctioned in a crude sense: it is more that they are obeyed for the sorts of reasons that would induce any man to obey any aspect of God's ordering of the world. A man is humble before his rulers because he is humble before God; his political obedience is a symptom of his willingness to accept all the powers and forces beyond his immediate control and understanding. Thus he can accept the rule of a wicked man. This is the doctrine of passive obedience.<sup>29</sup>

The entire body of Augustine's political thought is, of course, much more detailed and complex than the few points mentioned here, but the basis of his political philosophy can be discerned in these few remarks. The Augustinian universe is profoundly theocentric, with man labouring under a divinely superimposed political order. Because that order is sanctioned by God and buttressed by the individual's faith in the godhead, criticism of a political order or its specific institutions is, by association, a lack of faith in the divine order. The political system is sustained by religious orthodoxy. The basis for the creation and the maintaining of a political system is, in Augustinian terms, faith.

In the first part of The Defender of Peace, on the other hand, Marsilio of Padua constructs a political state almost totally without reference to theology in general, or a divinity in particular. Marsilio starts with the natural desires of man, not with the imposition of a divine order, as the basis for the creation of a state. For Marsilio, "the natural is the primitive, not the perfected, it is the original endowment of man, an endowment shared with the animal world."<sup>30</sup> Because of this state, "naturally each individual man pursues his own private desires for a sufficient life, and equally natural he will pursue it too far, so that clashes between warring desires will inevitably

arise."<sup>31</sup> To avoid a complete breakdown due to this natural state of conflict, the state comes into being to allow men to live the sufficient life:

Men, then, were assembled for the sake of the sufficient life, being able to seek out for themselves certain desires or necessities, and exchanging them with one another. This assemblage thus perfect and having the limit of self-sufficiency is called the state. . . . For because diverse things are necessary to men who desire a sufficient life, things which cannot be supplied by men of one order or office, there had to be diverse orders or offices of men in this association, exercising or supplying such diverse things which men need for the sufficient life. But these diverse orders or offices of men are none other than the many and distinct parts of the state.<sup>32</sup>

The state, then, is the collected total of all individual needs and desires, and the individual can further his own interests in furthering public aims and ambitions.

In keeping with this, Marsilio sees the whole people as the legislator. As the creator of the law, the people's sovereignty is unparalleled. "The legislator or the primary and proper efficient cause of the law, is the people or the whole body of citizens, or the weightier part thereof."<sup>33</sup>

But Marsilio is no eighteenth century democrat, for the "weightier part" means "the quantity and quality of

the persons in that community over which the law is made."<sup>34</sup> Marsilio seems to lay more stress upon functional groups in a given society rather than on an individual member. These functional groups, further, can delegate their authority to a leader or king, who has supreme authority "in those cases concerning which the laws cannot speak with certainty."<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, because of his own personal desires, the leader cannot make the law for he will inevitably seek to pervert it for personal ends.

Thus Marsilio, writing in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, has developed a theory of state far different from the older Augustinian conception. There is no reference to a divine law or a divine order. Both law and man are "natural" and the outcome of human interaction is a naturally organic and self-determining entity.

The second section of The Defender of Peace differs fundamentally in concern from the first. Having constructed an ideal state, Marsilio becomes more particular in his discussion, and deals with the reasons why such a state has not heretofore existed in Christendom. For Marsilio, the reason is nothing less than the usurpation of political power by the Church:

The Roman bishop, called pope, or any other priest or bishop, or spiritual minister, collectively or individually, as such, has and ought to have no coercive jurisdiction over the property or person

of any priest or bishop, or deacon or group of them, and still less over any secular ruler or government, community, group or individual, of whatever condition they may be; unless, indeed, such jurisdiction shall have been granted to a priest or bishop or group of them by the human legislator of the province.<sup>36</sup>

The value and strength of Marsilio's thought need not concern us here, but the fact remains that his ideal political state was created without reference to the "spiritual framework" mentioned by Morrall. Marsilio's state is a product of reason divorced from faith, however faulty that reason may appear to be. As Georges de Lagarde puts it:

Philosophiquement, elles [les conceptions politiques de Marsile] sont d'une incontestable faiblesse. . . . La pensée reste hésitante et sans profondeur et l'on comprend qu'elle n'ait pas été, dans ce domaine, génératrice d'un véritable mouvement doctrinal . . . Il faut donc suivre l'auteur sur le terrain qu'il a choisi. Il faut le mettre aux prises avec son véritable adversaire: l'Eglise romaine et toute l'organisation sociale qu'elle patronne. Une moisson de doctrines nouvelles va germer, et nous verrons même les thèses du premier livre prendre un aspect nouveau. Inconsistantes dans le positif elles acquièrent une valeur négative de premier ordre, et deviendront une des plus fortes machines de guerre qui aient été jamais imaginées contre l'action sociale de l'Eglise.<sup>37</sup>

We have witnessed, then, a varied response to the crisis of values. The fourteenth century stands as a period in which a vibrant and individualistic response to a simpler Christianity was mixed with a growing secularism based upon reason divorced from faith. Reason and faith, religion and secularism, all so carefully synthesized into a unified metaphysical fabric by Aquinas in the thirteenth century stood apart in the fourteenth. It was left for contemporaries to choose one or the other, and in this choice lies the dilemma. It is this dilemma that is reflected in the ambiguous stance of the poet in Richard the Redeles.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup> Johan Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages (1924; rpt. Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1954), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> John B. Morrall, Political Thought in Medieval Times (1958; rpt. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> A.R. Myers, England in the Late Middle Ages, 2nd ed., rev. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Morrall, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> J.R. Strayer, "The Laicization of French and English Society in the Thirteenth Century," Change in Medieval Society, ed. Sylvia L. Thrupp (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1964), p. 104.

<sup>6</sup> J.R. Strayer, Western Europe in the Middle Ages (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1955), p. 101.

<sup>7</sup> Strayer, Western Europe, p. 193.

<sup>8</sup> F.J.C. Hearnshaw, "John Wycliffe and Divine Dominion," The Social and Political Ideas of Some Great Medieval Thinkers, ed. F.J.C. Hearnshaw (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1923), p. 196.

<sup>9</sup> Strayer, Western Europe, p. 196.

<sup>10</sup> F.J.C. Hearnshaw, "John Wycliffe and Divine Dominion," p. 197.

<sup>11</sup> See William Rees, "The Black Death in Wales," Essays in Medieval History, ed. R.W. Southern (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968), pp. 179-199.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Emery, "The Black Death of 1348 in Perpignan," Speculum, 42 (1967), 620.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 620-621.

<sup>14</sup> W.A. Pantin, The English Church in the Fourteenth

Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), pp. 25-26.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 44

<sup>16</sup> Huizinga, p. 31.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 32-33.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 37-38.

<sup>19</sup> David Knowles, The Evolution of Medieval Thought (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), p. 256.

<sup>20</sup> Much has been written on the split between reason and faith in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. One of the best summations is in Gordon Leff, Bradwardine and the Pelagians (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), pp. 1-20. See also Knowles, The Evolution of Medieval Thought, Chapter 25 and Henry Osborn Taylor, The Medieval Mind, 4th ed. (London: MacMillen and Co., Ltd., 1938), vol 1, Chapter 43.

- <sup>21</sup> Knowles, pp. 321-322.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 332.
- <sup>23</sup> Myers, p. 85.
- <sup>24</sup> Knowles, p. 34.
- <sup>25</sup> Leff, pp. 85-86.
- <sup>26</sup> P.R.L. Brown, "Saint Augustine, " Trends in Medieval Political Thought, ed. Beryl Smalley (Oxford: Basil Blackwell & Mott Ltd., 1965), p. 3.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 4.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 6.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 6.
- <sup>30</sup> Marjorie Reeves, "Marsiglio of Padua and Dante Alighieri," Trends in Medieval Political Thought, p. 92.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>32</sup> Marsilius of Padua, The Defender of Peace, trans. Alan Cewirth (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>37</sup> Georges de Lagarde, La Naissance de l'Esprit Laïque au Déclin du Moyen Age, 2nd ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), II, pp. 199-200.

## CHAPTER III

The dual response to the crisis of values in the fourteenth century makes a twofold discussion of its relationship to the ambiguity in Richard the Redeles the most logical approach. In keeping with this we shall deal with the poem with two perspectives in mind, each perspective reflecting one aspect of the response. Such a division in the discussion of Richard is, however, somewhat arbitrary for it detracts from the work of art as an organic whole. It is most necessary, then, that we keep in mind the conclusions drawn from the first discussion of the poem, as we move into the second. Only through later synthesizing these two discussions can the reasons for the ambiguous stance by the poet be fully comprehended.

The movement toward building a Weltanschauung on a simpler faith supposes a system of moral and ethical values through which this approach to life can be given a practical application. Conversely, these values can be used as the means by which that application can be judged. Making a judgment on the basis of a religious or moral or ethical standard has, as we have noted in Augustine, a profound effect upon the political sphere. It places politics in the realm of matters of faith. This is one of the standards by which the poet deals with his subject matter in Richard the Redeles. The conclusions he reaches are, of course,

deeply affected by the tools he uses to reach them.

In the "Prologue" and "Passus I" the poet sets out to accomplish two basic tasks. He declares his purpose in writing the poem and he gives his message a specific direction. Bolingbroke's invasion of England has forced the poet to contemplate the government of the realm, and this contemplation leads him to conclude that he must offer King Richard some advice:

This made me to muse many tyme and ofte,  
 For to written him a writte to wissen him better,  
 And to meuve him of mysserewle his mynde to reffresshe,  
(Prol. 30-32)

At first it appears that the advice is to be addressed to King Richard only, but the frame of the address is soon broadened:

Ther nys no gouernour on the grounde ne sholde gye  
 him the better—  
 And euery Cristen kyng that ony crowne bereth,  
 So he were lerned on the langage my lyff durst I wedde—  
 Yif he waite well the wordis, and so werche thereafter;  
 ffor all is tresour of the trinite that turneth men to  
 gode. (Prol. 42-46)

Carrying this movement still further, he takes the poem from the realm of advice to a king, and gives it the widest possible appeal. He addresses it to men of all ages:

ffor witterly, my will is that it well liked  
 You and all youris and yonge men leueste,  
 To be-nyme hem her noyes that neweth hem ofte.

ffor and they mvse theron to the myddwardis,  
 They shall fynde ffele ffawtis ffoure score and odde,  
 That youghthe weneth alwey that it be witte euere.  
 And though that elde opyn it other-while amonge,  
 And poure on it preuily and preue it well after,  
 And constrewe ich clause with the culorum,  
 It shulde not apeire hem a peere a prynce though he  
 were, (Prol. 64-73)

In spite of what the poet has said he would do in the first section, then, the poem is not merely addressed to Richard, nor can it be read only as a treatise on government. The wide basis of appeal as outlined by the poet gives the poem a much broader application.

In keeping with this process, the following two passus present a series of denunciations of more specific abuses committed under Richard's reign, and against the courtiers who have fostered many of these abuses:

Of alegeaunce now lerneth a lesson other tweyne  
 Wher-by it standith and stablithe moste—  
 By drede, or be dyntis or domes vntrewe,  
 Or by creaunce of coyne ffor castes of gile,  
 By pillynge of youre peple youre prynces to plese;  
 Or that youre wylle were wroughte though wisdom it nolde;  
 Or be tallage of youre townes without ony werre,  
 By rewthles routus that ryffled euere,  
 By preysinge of polaxis that no pete hadde,  
 Or be dette ffor thi dees deme as thou ffyndist;

(Pass.I. 9-18)

But again the poets's technique is not to leave himself in the realm of the particular. Although Richard may be to

blame for these abuses and he frankly tells Richard to "Wyteth it not youre counceill but wyteth it more youre-self" (Pass. I. 80), he moves directly to the courtiers themselves. It is upon them that the poet levels his sharpest criticism. The poet declares that fashionable men are the most evil councillors:

ffor ben they rayed arith they recchith no fforther,  
 But studieth all in stroutynge and stireth amys euere;  
 ffor all his witte in his wede ys wrappid ffor sothe,  
 More than in mater to amende the peple that ben mys-  
 led. (Pass.III. 120-123)

Later, the poet decides that men who think of nothing but dress and new fashions have little intelligence with which to guide the king:

Now if I sothe shall saie and shonne side tales,  
 Ther is as muche good witte in swyche gomes nollis,  
 As thou shuldist mete of a myst ffro morwe tyll euen!  
 (Pass.III. 170-172)

Finally, the dress in which the courtiers take such pains "ffor to queme sir pride" (Pass.III. 176), becomes the virtual source for all the evil in the realm:

This makyth men mysdo more than oughte ellis  
 And to stroute and to stare and stryue ageyn vertu.  
 So be clergie, the cause comsith in grette,  
 Of all manere myscheff that men here vsyn. (Pass.III. 188-  
 191)

Although the poet centers most of his criticism upon the dress of the courtiers, and thus on their desire to

"quème sir pride," he does mention in a relatively peripheral fashion, their affinity to partying:

And not to rewle as reremys and rest on the daies,  
 And spende of the spicerie more than it nedid,  
 Bothe wexe and wyn in wast all aboute,  
 With deyntes y-doublid and daunsinge to pipis,  
 In myrthe with moppis myrrours of synne. (Pass.III. 272-  
 276)

The technique of the poet is clear and significant. Rather than dealing purely with definite governmental shortcomings, a fairly large portion of the poem is devoted to a criticism of general vice and corruption summed up in the courtiers' supplication to the demands of Sir Pride. The poet's technique is to use, at certain points in the poem, specific historical detail as a steppingstone to a more general form of criticism.

As in the case of the poet's denunciation of vice, his remedy for the abuses begins with the particular and moves to the general. Chiding Richard for his lack of good councillors, the poet tells him that his government might have been different had Richard chosen "the good greehonde" for his advisor:

But had the good greehonde be not agreued,  
 But cherischid as a cheffeteyne and cheff of youre lese,  
 Ye hadde had hertis ynowe at youre wille to go and to  
 ride. (Pass.II. 113-115)

Exactly who "the good greehonde" was<sup>1</sup> is of no real consequence here. It may be, as Skeat suggests, a certain

nobleman. More important is that the poet elevates the single person of "the greehonde" in "Passus II" to Witt in "Passus III." This is not, of course, a literal association; it is a metaphorical or symbolic association wholly in keeping with the practice of the poet to move from the particular to the general. Thus, not only a certain noble is banished from the court, but the whole concept of wisdom:

Ther was non of the mene that they ne merueilid moche  
 How he cam to the courte and was not y-knowe;  
 But als sone as they wiste that witt was his name,  
 And that the kynge knewe him not ne non of his knyghts,  
 He was halowid and y-huntid and y-hote trusse,  
 (Pass.III. 224-228)

Thus the poet has expanded the whole context of the poem from a specific political and historical level to a more general moral level in which the followers of Sir Pride vanquish Witt who has tried to reform the vice of the court. This is not to say that the particular is completely neglected. The following chapter will illustrate that the use of particular detail plays an important role in another aspect of the poem. The poem is simply the juxtaposition of two levels of discussion of a single problem, corruption and vice.

This tendency to move from the particular to the general is underlined by two more devices which the poet employs. For want of better terms we can call these devices the bestiary motif and the doomsday motif. Let us deal with the

bestiary motif first.

The use of animals to depict character was common in the Middle Ages. As Beatrice White states, "the chief factor in the rise to popularity of the Bestiary can be found in the general outlook of the Middle Ages. . . . It provoked the prevailing conviction that it was the ultimate significance of things that really mattered, that every perceptible object, man-made or natural, was a stepping stone on the road to heaven, a rung on the ladder of 'the upward leading way,' the visible world imaging forth the invisible."<sup>2</sup>

The two main animal symbols used in the poem are the hart, representative of Richard, and the eagle, representative of Henry. The fact that each animal was a heraldic symbol of each man would not be a limiting factor in terms of the significance the image holds for the man. As White's statement leads us to believe, the medieval mind would have no problem in seeing the man in the symbol and the symbol in the man.

According to the Bestiary edited by Rev. Richard Morris in An Old English Miscellany, the eagle is a practical, regenerative symbol. Having grown old, as Morris adds, "the eagle renews itself through its own efforts, and like a man, will soon learn what is needful, and so set his mouth right and procure for himself his soul's food."<sup>3</sup> The Bestiary reads:

Fare he north, er fare he futh,  
 leren he sal his nede;  
 bidden bone to gode,  
 and tus his muth rigten;  
 tilen him so the fowles foðe,  
 thurg grace off ure drigtin.<sup>5</sup>

In Richard the Redeles Henry acts as a regenerative agent in the kingdom. The poet declares that Henry has entered the kingdom to avenge his own wrongs and, in the process, those of the common people:

Henrri was entrid on the est half,  
 Whom all the londe loued in lengthe and in brede,  
 And ros with him rapely to rightyn his wronge,  
 ffor he shullde hem serue of the same after. (Prol. 11-14)

and later:

Thus be the rotus youre raskall endurid,  
 Tyll the blessid bredd brodid his wyngis,  
 To couere hem ffrom colde as his kynde wolde. (Pass.11  
 140-142)

Yet the poet had already elevated Henry from a purely historical person. His use of the bestiary motif merely underlines a movement started earlier in the poem. Expanding the idea of a civil war, the poet describes Henry as an instrument of divine justice as he advises Richard to submit to God's rule:

To ffullfill him [Richard] with ffeith and ffortune  
 aboue,  
 And not to grucchen a grott ageine godis sonde,  
 But mekely to suffre what so him sente were. (Prol.  
 (34-36)

A slightly different effect is accomplished with the hart symbol. Whereas Henry, true to the eagle's nature, acts as a regenerative symbol, Richard, as a hart, symbolically acts contrary to his supposed nature. According to the Bestiary, it is natural for the hart to draw venom from an adder to regenerate itself:

He dragath the neddre of de ston  
 thurg his nese up on-on,  
 of the stoc er of the ston,  
 for it wile therunder gon;  
 and sweleth it wel swithe,  
 . . . . .  
 oc he werpeth er hise hornes  
 in wude er in thornes,  
 and gingid him thus this wilde der,  
 So ge hauen nu lered her.<sup>6</sup>

This is what the poet in Richard the Redeles means when he states that it is against the nature of the hart to attack other animals:

This is clergie hir kynde coltis nat to greue,  
 Ne to hurlle with haras no hors well atamed,  
 Ne to stryue with swan though it sholle werre,  
 . . . . .  
 This was ageins kynde as clerkis me tolde! (Pass.111.  
 26-32)

The use of the hart symbol, then, shows that in going against nature, Richard has committed a moral crime. The emphasis is on the moral, not the historical or political significance.

We have witnessed, then, crimes committed against nature and, most important, a victory for the followers of Sir Pride over Wytt in the court of Richard II. The scene is rife for a victory of divine justice and truth, a victory which the poet has been predicting throughout the poem. This prediction forms what we have called the doomsday motif in the poem. As early as the "Prologue," as we have seen, the poet forecasts the appearance of divine vengeance against Richard's government in the person of Henry. Later, this prophecy becomes more generalized as the poet foretells the fall of all those who follow the ways of evil:

But clerkis knew I non yete that so coude rede  
 In bokis y-bounde though ye broughte alle  
 That ony wy welldith wonnynge vppon erthe;  
 ffor in well and in woo the werld euere turneth,  
 . . . . .  
 For that were euene in her weye if they well ride.  
 (Pass.III. 295-304)

This motif culminates at the end of "Passus III" where we find a general victory for justice and truth over the forces of evil in the world. As the poet points out, there is a universal sympathy for the victory:

Than gan it to calme and clere all aboute,  
 That iche man myghte ho so mynde hadde,  
 Se, be the sonne that so brighte schewed,  
 The mone at the mydday meve, and the sterris,  
 ffolwinge ffelouns ffor her ffalse dedis,  
 Devourours of vetsaile that ffoughten er thei paide.  
 (Pass.III. 366-371)

The poet's technique of generalizing has the effect of placing little direct criticism on Richard or the office of kingship. To be sure, Richard is blamed, especially in "Passus I" for choosing poor councillors, but the emphasis is never placed on Richard as a sinner, but on poor judgment as a sin. Given Richard's original sin, as it were, the focus is then changed to the consequences, thereby leaving the king removed from the most emphatic criticism. We must remember that for the poet Richard is still "oure crowned kynge" (Prol. 24), and that he still professes "pete of his [Richard's] passion" (Prol. 23).

The question of the relationship of this generalized moral discussion to the dual response of the fourteenth century now arises. In the flux between the secularism and the new vital faith of the age, the office of kingship held an especially unique position. Just as Marsilio emphasized the secular nature of any type of political power, so he was forced to de-emphasize that concept which had persisted since the early days of Christianity that kingship was a divine office.

We must again repeat Brown's judgment of Augustine's political cornerstone that "the heart of the king is in the hand of God."<sup>7</sup> Consequently, if the king is unjust, he will be punished by God alone, as will all injustice, but not by man. Despite the fact that Aquinas had revived the

concepts of political man and tyrannicide, thereby giving political government a more secular basis,<sup>8</sup> kingship in the fourteenth century still retained much of the religious aura it had surrounding it for nine centuries. Fostered by the new faith of the fourteenth century, that aura must have gained new support.

Thus by elevating his criticism to a more generalized level, the poet neatly avoids direct confrontation with an institution thought for nine centuries to be related to the godhead. Like John of Gaunt in Shakespeare's Richard III the poet in Richard the Redeles comes to the realization that:

But since correction lieth in those hands  
Which made the fault that we cannot correct,  
Put we our quarrel to the will of heaven,  
Who, when they see the hours ripe on earth,  
Will rain hot vengeance on offenders' heads.<sup>9</sup>

## NOTES TO CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup> See Skeat's note for the possible historical identity of the symbol, p. 510.

<sup>2</sup> Beatrice White, "Medieval Animal Lore," Anglia, 72 (1954), p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. Richard Morris, ed., "A Bestiary," An Old English Miscellany (1872; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1927), p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 10-11

<sup>7</sup> P.R.L. Brown, "St Augustine," Trends in Medieval Political Thought, ed. Beryl Smalley (Oxford: Basil Blackwell & Mott Ltd., 1965), p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> See Walter Ullman, A History of Political Thought: The Middle Ages (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965), pp. 174-180.

<sup>9</sup> William Shakespeare, Richard II, ed. Peter Ure (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1956), I.ii.4-8.

## CHAPTER IV

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, historical scholarship [on the Middle Ages] has steadily become more objective and critical--by some historians called "scientific." Rarely today can any scholarly historical work be classified as part of the traditional rationalist condemnation of, or romantic adulation of, the Middle Ages. Neither Voltaire, who despised the Middle Ages, nor Sir Walter Scott whose novels romanticized them with bold knights and fair ladies, has any disciples today. And yet, in the popular view--as depicted in newspaper editorials and best-selling "historical novels"--medieval civilization remains so much the object of ignorance that Hitler could be called a "feudal dictator," which is simply a contradiction in terms. This misunderstanding is regrettable. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Robert Hoyt's description of later attitudes toward the Middle Ages must be qualified in view of recent historical scholarship, but much misunderstanding does remain. Much of the condemnation of the Middle Ages is a product of the misconception that the medieval mind had only a speculative capacity. The modern man, with his emphasis on the pragmatic, was appalled by the lack of practicality in, for example, the writings of the great

schoolmen.

More recent scholarship has showed that such condemnation was the product of a limited view of medieval accomplishments. Older historians were apt to forget that the same tradition which produced the abstract speculations of Duns Scotus gave birth to such practical and enduring phenomena as the British House of Commons, the nation state, and the engineering techniques which lay behind gothic architecture.

Looking at different evidence, historians like Frederick Artz in The Mind of the Middle Ages have concluded that "medieval political and social thought [as an example] showed everywhere the results of a long historic experience."<sup>2</sup> Artz reflects the more current notion that rather than engaging in abstract speculation for its own sake, the medieval mind had an affinity toward thoroughly examining and weaving traditional knowledge and experience into a more functional tool for contemporary use. The process was slow yet practical, but the medieval mind showed again and again that it would not let theoretical speculation interfere with practical application.

This concern for the practical is brought out in Richard the Redeles. In C. Ziepel's study of the poem, he states, "the whole drift of his [the poet's] reasoning is worldly, he never speaks of Church or saints, and instead

of dwelling upon the sinfulness of vice, he merely exposes the practical consequences of a vicious policy."<sup>3</sup> As the previous chapter shows, this statement must be qualified. There is, however, a great deal of validity in the notion that the poet is interested in the practical or worldly realm. In the poet's concern for the practical he reflects the functionalism that is present, as we have seen, in the secularism of Marsilio of Padua.

As pointed out earlier, the poet, in dealing with the causes of discord in England, elevates his criticism to a general condemnation of vice. This culminates in the doomsday motif at the end of "Passus III." Nevertheless, juxtaposed to this generalized moralizing, the poet deals with a series of injustices committed during the reign of Richard II. The diatribe in "Passus I2 serves as an introduction to this type of discussion:

Of alegeaunce now lerneth a lesson other tweyne  
 Wher-by it standith and stablithe moste—  
 By drede, or be dyntis or domes vntrewe,  
 Or by creaunce of coyne ffor castes of gile,  
 By pillynge of youre peple youre prynces to plesse;  
 Or that youre wylle were wroughte though wisdom it  
 nolde;-  
 Or be tallage of youre townes without ony werre,  
 By rewthles routus that ryffled euere,  
 By preysinge of polaxis that no pete hadde,  
 Or be dette ffor thi dees deme as thou ffyndist;  
 Or be ledinge of lawe with loue well ytemprid.

(Pass.I. 9-19)

Given this general outline, the poet goes on to describe the various injustices in more detail. An ill-chosen council is the first aspect of government to fall prey to the poet's criticism. The poet chastizes the king for not choosing councillors who were of sufficient age and experience to offer well-founded advice and who were not princes of the royal blood:

Whane ye were sette in youre se as a sir aughte,  
 Ther Carpinge comynliche of conceill arisith,  
 The cheuyteyns cheef that ye chesse euere,  
 Weren all to yonge of yeris to yeme swyche a rewme;  
 Other hobbis ye hadden of hurlewaynis kynne,  
 Reffusynge the reule of realles kynde.

(Pass.I. 86-91)

The heaviest and most lengthy criticism is levelled at Richard's practice of granting liveries to nobles who, in turn, abused the privilege. The lower classes of the realm suffered from this abuse:

ffor they acombrede the contre and many curse seruid,  
 And carped to the comounes with the kyngys mouthe,  
 Or with the lordis ther they be-lefte were,  
 That no renke shulde rise reson to schewe.  
 They plucked the plomayle ffrom the pore skynnes,  
 And schewed her signes ffor men shulde drede  
 To axe ony mendis ffor her mys-dedis.

(Pass.II. 28-34)

Carrying on this concept of the gradual impoverishment of the peasantry, the poet points out that the courtiers' addiction to elegant and expensive jewellery has resulted

in a shortage of coin in the nation:

ffor they kepeth no coyne that cometh to here hondis,  
 But chaunchyth it ffor cheynes that in chepe hangith,  
 And settith all her siluer in semitis and hornes,  
 And ffor-doth the coyne and many other craftis,  
 And maketh the peple ffor pens lac in pointe ffor  
 to wepe;

And yit they beth ytake fforth and her tale leued,  
 And ffor her newe nysete nexte to the lordis.

(Pass.III. 138-144)

With this form of injustice, the poet's description of corruption in the courts where such abuses traditionally should have been corrected, is even more poignant:

ffor chyders of chester were chose many daies  
 To ben of conceill ffor causis that in the court hangid,  
 And pledid pipoudris alle manere pleyntis.  
 They cared ffor no coyffes that men of court vsyn,  
 But meved many maters that man neuer thoughte,  
 And ffeyned ffalshed till they a ffyne had,  
 And knewe no manere cause as comunes tolde.

(Pass.III. 317-323)

Finally, the poet deals with taxation, to the medieval mind, the most odious of governmental interferences. Under Richard's reign, further, taxes were exacted wrongfully from the people:

Then ffelle it afforse to ffille hem ageyne,  
 And ffeyned sum ffolie that ffailid hem neuer,  
 And cast it be colis with her conceill at euene,  
 To haue preuy parlement for profit of hem-self,

(Pass.IV. 22-25)

The key to an understanding of these sections of Richard the Redeles is that the poet is less concerned, at this point in his discussion, with causes than with effects. His listing of certain problems such as unfair taxation and injustices in the courts of justice is not an examination but a lament. Because of his concern with effects, specifically, the poet must have a topical or contemporary frame of reference, and base his comments on specific abuses.

In opposition to this criticism, however, appear certain specific alternatives to the system of government as it operates under Richard. Before dealing with these suggestions in greater detail, we should again note that it is unfair to judge the poet as a political theorist in the modern sense of the word. He is first and foremost a poet who is interested in interpreting the political situation. His political theory is purely secondary to this concern, and as such, it lacks detail. Nevertheless, the fact that the poet does have certain definite suggestions and juxtaposes them to practical criticisms, presupposes that he holds certain values which are relevant to the crisis in the fourteenth century. But first, let us deal with these specific suggestions.

The cornerstone of the poet's social and political theory is his sense of the need for order and stratification

in the social and political structure:

ffor tristith, als trewly as tyllinge us helpeth,  
 That iche rewme vndir roff of reyne-bowe  
 Sholde stable and stonde be these thre degres:  
 By gouernaunce of grete and of good age;  
 By styffnesse and strengthe of steeris well y-yokyd,  
 That beth mygthffull men of the mydill age;  
 And be laboreris of lond that lyfflode ne ffayle.  
 Thanne wolde right dome reule if reson were amongis us,  
 That ich leode lokide what longid to his age,  
 And neuere ffor to passe more oo poynt fforther,  
 To vsurpe the service that to sages bilongith,  
 To be-come conselleris er they kunne rede,  
 In schenshepe of souereynes and shame at the last.  
 (Pass.III. 247-259)

Given this basic division, the poet offers more detail on specific structures of government. The governing council should be made up of older men capable of using their experience to help govern the kingdom wisely.

Youths lack experience to do so:

ffor it ffallith as well to ffodis of xxiiij yeris,  
 Or yonge men of yistirday to geue good redis,  
 As be-cometh a kow to hoppe in a cage!  
 (Pass.III. 260-262)

These councillors should be taken from the ranks of the great peers of the realm or the princes of the blood, a class which the poet unquestioningly assumes to have the right to govern. He assumes that "the good greehonde" (Pass.II. 113) and his brothers should have been "cherischid as a cheffeteyne" (Pass.II. 114).<sup>4</sup>

Next, the poet turns to the courts of law which have oppressed the people further. In place of the lawlessness he finds, the poet suggests that the courts should be headed by judges picked for their knowledge, foresight and sense of justice. These qualities should be rewarded with a good salary:

And I were of conceill by crist that me boughte,  
 He shuld haue a signe and sum-what be yere,  
 ffor to kepe his contre in quiete and in reste.

(Pass.II. 88-90)

Finally, throughout the poem the poet returns continually to the concept of rule by law and its prime importance in the movement toward good government.<sup>5</sup> Even the most prominent members of society should adhere to the principle of rule by law:

But to laboure on the lawe as lewde men on plowes,  
 And to merke meyntenourz with maces ichonne,  
 And to strie strouters that sterede ageine rithis,  
 And alle the myssedoers that they myghte ffynde,  
 To put hem in preson a peere though he were;

(Pass.III. 267-271)

It is important to note that the poet has a relatively simplistic and secular view of the law. Possibly due to his lack of education, he does not engage in the detailed arguments on the difference between natural and divine law, arguments which contemporary legists were considering fully at this time.<sup>6</sup> For the poet, law appears to mean a relatively secular system of values in which right and

wrong, as defined by the courts, are rewarded and punished. At no point does he look into this system with any degree of profundity. This secular concept of law, as we shall see later, is in keeping with the poet's view of the purpose of the government and the state.

In Richard the Redeles, then, we are faced with two forms of observations. The poem deals with the political and social system as it exists in the England of his day, and given the poet's suggestions, the system as it should exist. The form of the poem is essentially one of comparison and contrast.

In allowing for a gap between what is and what should be, the form of Richard the Redeles somewhat resembles the form of satire. Yet the form of the poem has a deeper affinity to the satiric method. Each begs the question of the nature of those values presupposed by the author, values which allow him to condemn one form while praising another.

The answer to the question is found in the imagery of the poem. Beginning in the "Prologue," the poet states that he remains completely loyal to Richard "while he in helthe regnid" (Prol. 26). When he tells Richard that he has lost the loyalty of the people, the metaphor is of the same type:

ffor whan ye list to lene to youre owen lymmes,

They were so ffeble and ffeynte ffor ffaute of youre  
 lawe,  
 And so ffeble and wayke wexe in the hammes,  
 That they had no myghte to amende youre greues,  
 Ne to bere byrthen youre banere to helpe.

(Pass.II. 62-66)

Later, he looks for a system of justice which will allow the government "to kepe his contre in quiete and in reste" (Pass. II. 90).

The poet, then, describes the state in physical or organic terms. He appears to be attempting to describe certain parts of the state in functional terms, much as he does in "Passus III," but he never clearly sets up a discernible relationship between the functional and the organic. Nevertheless, what emerges from this type of imagery is the notion that the poet feels a need for order, for the proper functioning of the parts of an organic whole. This is the principle that Marsilio of Padua sees as the basis for the proper ordering of the state in The Defender of Peace.<sup>7</sup> It is against this background also that the poet's vision of a state of total peace and tranquility has a contemporary relevance:

Than gan it to calme and clere all aboute,  
 That iche man man myghte ho so mynde hadde,  
 Se, be the sonne that so brighte schewed,  
 . . . . .  
 Devourours of vetaile that foughten er thei paide.

(Pass.III. 366-371)

The poet carries the idea of the proper working of parts further when he introduces the character of Henry Bolingbroke into the poem. The purpose of Henry's return is described in particularly significant terms:

Henrri was entrid on the est half,  
Whom all the londe loued in lengthe and in brede,  
And ros with him rapely to rightyn his wronge,  
ffor he shullde hem serue of the same after.

(Prol. 11-14)

Later, when he describes the actions of Henry, the same terms are used:

Ryth so the hende Egle the heyere of hem all,  
Hasteth him in heruest to houyn his bryddis,  
And besieth him besely to brenden hem ffeedrin,  
Tyll her ffre ffeedris be ffulliche y-pynned,  
That they heue wynges at her wyll to wonne vppon hille,

(Pass.II. 145-149)

The relationship between the people and Henry is a functional one. Each aids the other, and there will be harmony arising from mutual benefit in the relationship. Though primitive and lacking in detail, this view resembles a type of social contract theory, a functional view of government and society.

This is the standard by which the poet judges the quality of government. The poet's acceptance of this concept also helps us to understand one of the most difficult and, at the same time, one of the most critical sections of the poem, the allegory of the partridge. After explaining

that the young birds recognize their true parent upon hatching, the poet declares that the common people recognize their true parent in Henry Bolingbroke:

Herdist thou not with eeris how that I er tellde,  
 How the egle in the est entrid his owene,  
 And cried and clepid after his owen kynde briddis,  
 That weren anoyed in his nest and norished ffull ille,  
 And well ny yworewid with a wronge leder?  
 But the nedy nestlingis whan they the note herde  
 Of the hende Egle the heyer of hem all,  
 Thei busked ffro the busches and breris that hem noyed,  
 And burnished her beekis and bent to-him-wardis,  
 And ffolowid him ffersly to ffighte ffor the wrongis;  
 (Pass.III. 68-77)

Later, Henry is called "her ffre ffader" (Pass.III. 83). Such statements point to the idea that because Henry upholds the social contract, he has a right to the leadership of the realm.

Any ambiguity in the poet's view of Henry is cleared up when he describes Bolingbroke in the following manner:

ffor he was heed of hem all and hieste of kynde,  
 To kepe the Croune as cronecle tellith.  
 (Pass.III. 92-92)

It would seem that the glossing of "kynde" here is critical. A.R. Benham in English Literature from Widsith to the Death of Chaucer glosses it as "heart:"

For he headed them all and was highest of heart  
 In keeping the crown, as chronicle telleth.<sup>8</sup>

It would be more logical to gloss "kynde" by its more widely

accepted meaning of "nature." This also would fit more closely with the father image used earlier. It would also point to the fact that Henry has a natural right to be king, and the common people, like the young partridges, will follow him naturally.

Finally, Henry's position vis-à-vis Richard is made stronger by the poet's functional view of the position of the crown in government. In her study, The Fourteenth Century 1307-1399, May McKisack states that [in history] "Richard's actions, as the articles of his deposition repeatedly insist, were in flagrant violation of the oath sworn at his coronation to maintain the laws and customs of the realm. From time immemorial the king had been conceived of as a bulwark against injustice and a refuge from oppression."<sup>9</sup> It is obvious that the poet in Richard the Redeles is fully aware of that tradition. His elaborate and heavily metaphorical description of the crown seems to be indebted to it:

Ye come to youre kynȝdom er ye youre-self knewe,  
 Crowned with a crowne that kynȝ vnder heuene  
 Mighte not a better haue boughte, as I trowe;  
 So ffull was it ffilled with vertuous stones,  
 With perlis of pris to punnysshe the wrongis,  
 . . . . .  
 ffor ony cristen kynge a crowne well ymakyd.

(Pass.I. 32-48)

For the poet, then, the crown was a functional entity, the

epitome of law and order, and the binding force of the social contract. Richard has allowed the crown to fall into a state of impotence:

Thus was youre crowne crasid till he was cast newe,  
 Thoru partinge of youre powere to youre paragals.

(Pass.I. 70-71)

The social contract that is the state had broken down.

It remains for us, then, to sum up the relationship of this functional view of the state in Richard the Redeles to the response to the fourteenth century crisis. We have stated that one of the responses to the crisis was a growing secularism, and as such, a retreat from the older medieval concepts of theocracy and divine kingship. In the political sphere in particular, then, it represented a division between political theory and religion and morality, a split summed up in the work of Marsilio of Padua.

The poet in Richard the Redeles has dealt with the state in secular terms. He is concerned with the concrete wrongs of his times, and has offered practical suggestions. The gap we spoke of earlier, a gap which begs the question of the poet's accepted values, is subtly filled by the person of Henry Bolingbroke whose acceptance of the social contract makes him suitable for the office of king.

What is scarcely noticeable is that virtually all the poet's suggestions and observations on the nature of govern-

ment are made without reference to religious values. From his desire to ease the people's burden of taxation, to his feeling for the secular law, to his ultimate decision on Henry's capability of holding the crown, the governing idea appears to be that the realm achieve "quiete and reste" (Pass.II. 90) in the practical, functional sense.

Further, in view of the earlier medieval tradition of theocracy of which Augustine, as we have seen, was one of the earliest theorists, the acceptance of someone as more suited to lead the realm than the anointed king would have been completely at odds with standing religious and political theory. Such a conclusion would have been heretical as well as treasonous. The fourteenth century poet, however, was forced to judge by different standards, and thus reach different conclusions.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

<sup>1</sup> Robert S. Hoyt, Europe in the Middle Ages (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1957), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Artz, The Mind of the Middle Ages. A Historical Survey: A.D. 200-1500 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), p. 270.

<sup>3</sup> C. Ziepel, The Reign of Richard II and Comments Upon an Alliterative Poem on the Deposition of that Monarch (Berlin: J. Draeger, 1874), p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> See Skeat's note p. 510. He assumes these three to be the three powerful sons of Edward III, the Dukes of Lancaster, York and Gloucester.

<sup>5</sup> See Richard the Redeles, I.19; I.39; I.68; II.79; II.86; III.284; III.310.

<sup>6</sup> See M.H. Keen, "The Political Thought of the Fourteenth Century Civilians," Trends in Medieval Political

Thought, ed. Beryl Smalley (Oxford: Basil Blackwell & Mott, 1965), pp. 105-126.

<sup>7</sup> See Marsilius of Padua, The Defender of Peace, trans. Alan Gewirth (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), pp. 8-9.

<sup>8</sup> A.R. Benham, English Literature from Widsith to the Death of Chaucer (1916; rpt. Freeport, New York: Books for Library Press, 1970), p. 195.

<sup>9</sup> May McKisack, The Fourteenth Century 1307-1399 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 497.

## CHAPTER V

Combining the author of Richard the Redeles with T.S. Eliot seems, at best, an ill-contrived union, and one is indeed justified in wondering what the unlearned poet has to do with the scholarly Eliot. Yet, separated as they are by six centuries, and an obvious gap of intellectual capabilities, they do prove useful to each other, the one as an example, the other as an explanation.

In Eliot's critical essays we find echoes of what the poet has attempted to do in Richard the Redeles. Speaking of tradition in the general sense of the word Eliot states, "What I mean by tradition involves all those habitual actions, habits and customs, from the most significant religious rite to our conventional way of greeting a stranger, which represent the blood kinship of the same people living in the same place."<sup>1</sup>

Later, in dealing with the position of tradition in art he observes, "the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done. And he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead in that tradition but of what is already living."<sup>2</sup>

Historically, the poet in Richard the Redeles is

critically aware of what Eliot calls "the present moment of the past." The crisis of values in the fourteenth century resulted in a return to the simpler religious outlook of the earlier Middle Ages while at the same time looking forward to a growing secularism. Both responses had deep and lasting effects on virtually all aspects of later medieval life, not the least of which was the nature of government in general, and kingship in particular. Not even the natural synthesizing tendency of the medieval mind could reunite those tenets which, in another frame of reference, Thomas Aquinas had sought to do in his Summa Theologica.

By choosing to deal with government and kingship, with their long history of theological associations, the author of Richard the Redeles placed himself plainly in the middle of the crisis. A poet of no great intellectual capabilities, he could not be expected to synthesize those views of his day which even the great theologians could not. He does not fall below our expectations.

His response to the nature of kingship is ambiguous. He has constructed a poem which lends itself readily to interpretation on two different levels at the same time. It is possible to see Richard the Redeles as a comment by a moralist on vice in general, and as a topical denunciation of the governmental abuses in the England of his day. The key to his response, as we have pointed out, is that he

has come to a different conclusion on each level. On the moral level we find him harkening back to an older tradition of dealing with politics within the larger context of a moral view. Fostered by a political-moral tradition dating from Augustine, the poet cannot bring himself to a direct condemnation of the king, but elevates his condemnation to a denunciation of vice in general.

Yet, on the practical level, faced with the harsh realities of his day, and given his realization of the shortcomings of Richard's government, he appears to judge Henry as more suitable for the office of king. His judgment is based on the latter's seeming acceptance of the secular concept of a social contract as the basis for the organization of society.

At no point does the poet outwardly call for the retention or deposition of Richard as king, though at times he tends to follow one way, then another. His stance is ambiguous because he is forced to judge by two competing standards arising out of the fourteenth century crisis. Given the indecision of the times, his bewilderment at "how so wondirffull werkis wolde haue an ende" (Prol. 18), is, if not justified, then at least understandable.

Before we leave the poem, two more questions should be answered. The first deals with the older medieval literary tradition of separating the man from the office

when taking a critical point of view toward a person or position of power. The answer lies in what may be called a lack of familiarity with any literary tradition on the part of the poet. Though such a tradition did, indeed, exist, we must assume that the poet knew nothing of it. His response to Richard and kingship seems to have been the product of individual experience.

The second question involves the plausibility of the poet's awareness of the crisis in the fourteenth century, given the lack of learning we have attributed to him. Certainly there is no doubt that he had no knowledge of of the type of split we saw in the works of Duns Scotus or William of Ockham. Indeed, such a split was probably not fully realized at the time. Yet the wider split represented by the growth of secularism, and the return to a simpler religious outlook, must have escaped few contemporaries. It was altogether too far-reaching in its implications. If the poet did not fully understand its causes or ultimate consequences, he might well have been aware of the general drift of the times in which he lived. A lack of in-depth understanding does not preclude general awareness. That the poet in Richard the Redeles is aware of the monumental changes going on in his own day is a surety. The ambiguity of his stance allows us no other conclusion.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER V

<sup>1</sup> T.S. Eliot, "Tradition," Selected Prose, ed. John Hayward (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books in association with Faber & Faber, 1953), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Eliot, "Tradition and Individual Talent," Selected Prose, p. 30.

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## TILSIS ABSTRACT

In Richard the Redeles the poet is attempting to interpret the events surrounding the deposition of King Richard by Henry Bolingbroke in 1399. In terms of time, at least, the poet is in the middle of the action, a position which results in a note of immediacy throughout the poem. Awed by the events, the poet attempts to retain a sense of order in the midst of these extraordinary happenings. He tries to find the reasons for the revolt and the possible consequences of it.

Yet in attempting to find the reasons, the stance the poet takes toward his material is somewhat ambiguous. He professes loyalty to the king yet he also criticizes him for his inability to govern properly. The poet's inability to deal with his material from one point of view creates an aura of tension in the poem arising from the ambiguity.

Because this ambiguous stance is imbued throughout the poem, it cannot be put down to an artistic failure. There must be a purpose or a reason for it.

The reason lies in the period in which the poem was created, the late fourteenth century. The decades between the Babylonian Captivity and the deposition of Richard II saw a reorganization of medieval society, a reorganization in which the Church, as the religious and political head of the society, declined in power. The decline in the former

the society created a crisis of values for the medieval civilization.

The vacuum created from this crisis was filled by two opposite responses, both related to the Church. On the philosophical level the response appeared as a split between reason and faith in the writings of the great schoolmen. On a less intellectualized level, the crisis was reflected in the rise of a secular Weltanschauung, of which Marsilio of Padua was the most prominent exemplar, and in a return to the more individualistic faith based upon the Augustinian tradition.

Both these responses had a profound effect on political outlooks, and on the nature of kingship in particular. Judged by the secular response, the king became a functional official who aided men in their pursuit of happiness, the collective goal of the state. However, judged by the religious response, kingship still retained its older theological associations. Criticism of kingship, then, was criticism of divine ordering.

The poet in Richard the Redeles is apparently aware of both responses, for he employs both in dealing with his material. Given this dual frame of judgment, he cannot possess a unified stance. The political dilemma of the fourteenth century results in poetic ambiguity in Richard the Redeles.