

# Stubbs, Steel, and Richard II as Insane: The Origin and Evolution of an English Historiographical Myth

GEORGE B. STOW

*Professor of History  
La Salle University*

---

One of the more enduring problems of later medieval English history centers on the character and personality of King Richard II (1377–99). It has long been thought that “Richard’s personality—his natural or inherited character considered apart from the important actions of his life—was the chief cause of his downfall.”<sup>1</sup> Whatever its perceived importance, the character of Richard II has defied precise definition, and it is a curious thing that Richard remains even in the present age a mysterious and misunderstood monarch. At the mid-point of the twentieth century Vivian H. Galbraith observed that “the key to Richard’s failure lies in his character, in the sort of man he was: and about that there is no agreement.”<sup>2</sup> A few years later George Holmes went even further, noting that although Richard’s personality was “the most important factor” in his reign, “just what his personality was is much more difficult to determine. . . . [Richard II] remains the most enigmatic of the kings of England.”<sup>3</sup>

Although his character has undergone several metamorphoses across nearly six hundred years of historical scholarship, by far the most damning—if not the most far-fetched—is the twentieth-century depiction of Richard as a madman, whose gradual lapse into insanity led to his tragic end. This portrayal first achieved notoriety in Anthony Steel’s *Richard II* (1941). In Steel’s view, Richard was disadvantaged from the start because his was “a schizoid mind”; and he became in his

---

<sup>1</sup> Reginald Rankin, *The Marquis d’Argenson and Richard II* (London, 1901), 146.

<sup>2</sup> Vivian H. Galbraith, “Richard II in Fact and Fiction,” *The Listener* (22 April 1954), 69.

<sup>3</sup> George Holmes, *The Later Middle Ages 1272–1485* (London, 1962), 186, 279. It must be noted, however, that the very recent appearance of Nigel Saul’s brilliant—and no doubt definitive—*Richard II* (New Haven, 1997) will render ideas like these totally anachronistic.

later years an “unbalanced widower, half-hearted autocrat and pitiful neurotic.”<sup>4</sup> At the very end of his reign, Richard had turned into a “mumbling neurotic, sinking rapidly into a state of acute melancholia, in which he could offer only the feeblest of resistance from the first, while before long it would be totally impossible to rouse him.”<sup>5</sup>

Steel’s depiction of a neurotic Richard II proved irresistible to later students of Richard’s reign, and it was eagerly adopted as the standard description of the king’s character. In Joan Evans’s *English Art: 1307–1461* (1949), for example, we learn that Richard was “a neurotic character, alternating between bouts of melancholy and bouts of extravagance, capable of energy and determination, but quick to despair when faced by reverses.”<sup>6</sup> A.R. Meyers’s *England in the Late Middle Ages* (1952) followed suit with the idea that “the favourite explanation of Richard’s failure is that he was always mentally unbalanced and finally mad.”<sup>7</sup> The most complete incorporation of Steel’s depiction, however, appeared in May McKisack’s *The Fourteenth Century, 1307–1399* (1959). In McKisack’s opinion, “Richard II had become dangerous, perhaps dangerously mad. His final breakdown is . . . tragic. . . . The malice and cunning with which he carried through his acts of revenge, his mounting recklessness, his dark suspicions . . . all suggest a sudden loss of control, the onset of a mental disease.”<sup>8</sup> In similar fashion William H. Dunham and Charles Wood argued (1976) that, among the “crimes” for which Richard II was deposed was the charge of “insanity.”<sup>9</sup> Most recently, in a work entitled *The Madness of Kings* (1993),

<sup>4</sup> Anthony Steel, *Richard II* (Cambridge, 1941), 8.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

<sup>6</sup> Joan Evans, *English Art: 1307–1461* (Oxford, 1949), 84.

<sup>7</sup> A.R. Myers, *England in the Late Middle Ages*, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth, 1952), 35.

<sup>8</sup> May McKisack, *The Fourteenth Century: 1307–1399* (Oxford, 1959), 497–98. McKisack adds, “If Richard was sane from 1397 onwards, it was with the sanity of a man who pulls his own house about his ears” (*ibid.*; and cf. 436–37, 441, 490–91). Later views, like that of Basil Cottle, say that “those closest to Richard had noticed in 1397 and thereafter his mounting madness” (*Triumph of English: 1350–1400* [New York, 1969], 302). Michael R. Powicke notes, too, that after 1397 “it has been thought that [Richard’s] mind had become unhinged by the experiences to which he had been subjected” (*The Community of the Realm* [New York, 1973], 23).

<sup>9</sup> William H. Dunham and Charles T. Wood, “The Right to Rule in England: Deposition and the King’s Authority, 1327–1485,” *American Historical Review* 81 (1976), 744. As their source Dunham and Wood cite a reference to the term *vecordia*, listed among charges leveled against Richard in *Chronicon Adae de Usk*, ed. Edward Maunde Thompson (London, 1904), 29. Despite the reading of Dunham and Wood, however, it must be pointed out that the term *vecordia* refers usually to foolishness or folly, or even perhaps to cowardice—but not to insanity. Moreover, Usk certainly knew insanity when he saw it, as he refers to Edmund, eldest son of Henry III, as ineligible for the succession “propter

Vivian Green observed that "it seems probable that Richard II suffered from a moderate, even possibly an acute, depression which bordered at times on manic-depressive insanity."<sup>10</sup>

Notwithstanding their popularity, it has been frequently pointed out that depictions of Richard II as insane are unsupported by fourteenth-century accounts of Richard's character. In *The Royal Policy of Richard II*, Richard H. Jones observes that careful consideration of contemporary sources should "suffice to raise serious questions about explanations of Richard's fall which concentrate on his defects of personal character and to discredit imputations of insanity altogether."<sup>11</sup> Anthony Tuck, *Richard II and the English Nobility*, adds that the evidence "is insufficient to permit an assumption that Richard had lost his mental balance . . . a diagnosis of insanity is difficult to make on the evidence now available."<sup>12</sup>

This but begs the question: If Richard II is nowhere described by his own contemporaries as mentally troubled, then at what point in the Ricardian historiographical corpus did the myth of his insanity first appear? Until the present study this problem has never been the focus of sustained analysis. Indeed, where considered at all it has been traditional to assume that the idea of Richard's insanity sprang *de novo* from the mind of Steel. Thus, after noting in his review of Steel's biography

---

ipsius fatuitatem," and he describes the well-known malady of Charles VI as "regis Francie infirmitate" (ibid., 30, 105.)

<sup>10</sup> Vivian Green, *The Madness of Kings: Personal Trauma and the Fate of Nations* (New York, 1993), 57–59. Green is of the opinion that the defeat of Richard's forces in 1387 "must have been psychologically traumatic." Richard plotted his revenge, but "more and more his mind appeared warped, twisted by the humiliations he had suffered, into an unnatural exaltation of majesty, which moved easily enough into the realm of fancy" (ibid., 57–58). Green then adds, "What seemed to be signs of incipient madness in John, Edward II, and Richard II were in fact pronounced personality traits, in part inherited, in part a result of upbringing, in part an effect of the personal and political stress they experienced as kings . . . the private distemper of these three kings had public consequences which significantly affected the future of English history" (ibid., 59–60, 278–79).

<sup>11</sup> Richard H. Jones, *The Royal Policy of Richard II* (Oxford, 1968), 122.

<sup>12</sup> Anthony Tuck, *Richard II and the English Nobility* (London, 1973), 224. For additional refutations see Vivian H. Galbraith, "A New Life of Richard II," *History*, n.s. 26 (1942), 226–27, who says that the assumption that Richard was falling into madness in the last years of his reign "can be accepted only at the too high price of throwing over the testimony of all the contemporary evidence, favorable and unfavorable" (ibid.); M.H. Keen, *England in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1973), 299; John M. Theilmann, "Stubbs, Shakespeare, and Recent Historians of Richard II," *Albion* 8 (1976), 117. The latest rejection of the idea of Richard's insanity is found in Nigel Saul's *Richard II*, 462–64. For more on this subject, see my "Chronicles Versus Records: The Character of Richard II," in *Documenting the Past: Essays in Medieval History Presented to George Peddy Cuttino*, ed. J.S. Hamilton and Patricia J. Bradley (Wolfeboro, New Hampshire, 1989), 155–76.

that Steel's "picture is so 'new,'" Vivian H. Galbraith makes the point that "this new psychology, it will be observed, depends upon two separate but convenient propositions—that Richard began life a physical weakling, and died a madman (schizofraenia)."<sup>13</sup>

Nothing could be further from the truth than to cite Steel as the originator of the Richard-II-as-insane myth. So far from representing the *beginning* of this tradition, Steel stands rather at its *end*. Indeed, the myth of Richard's insanity can in fact be traced back to the Victorian era, and to a most surprising and unlikely source: Bishop William Stubbs's *Constitutional History of England*. How Stubbs, of all people, got it wrong—and why—constitutes the first part of this study. In more precise terms, the intention here is to establish connections between Victorian notions of psychology—especially new theories concerning biological causes of insanity—and changes in how historians assessed the personalities and characters of historical figures. How Stubbs's false notion was so unquestioningly accepted by later historians and transmitted down to Steel makes up the second part. In this case the objective is to reveal how, in spite of professed claims to adhere closely to original sources in interpreting the past, turn-of-the-century historians in England not only failed to test the accuracy of received depictions of Richard II as insane against fourteenth-century accounts, but also—and even worse—fell under the spell of newly emerging "psycho-historical" theories of history.

## I.

At first blush it appears daunting, if not heretical, to allege that Stubbs originated the false historiographical tradition of Richard II as

---

<sup>13</sup> Vivian H. Galbraith, "A New Life of Richard II," 224–26. In a later study Galbraith made a more emphatic repudiation of "this new psychology" by pointing out that "all these theories make use of psychological analysis, which is no doubt a new and valuable tool for the historian. But we must surely be chary of explaining the men of a remote age by the psychological types of today; for these are the result of 600 years of further social development" ("Richard II in Fact and Fiction," 691). For a similar indictment of Steel see Edouard Perroy, whose review of Steel's *Richard II* points out some contradictions inherent in Steel's portrayal of Richard's alleged insanity after 1394: how could the king have maintained, for six years, a "Policy of Appeasement"? how could he have the prudence to install by degrees the "Second Tyranny"? (*Revue Historique*, 196 [1941], 352). For similar views see Caroline Barron, "The Tyranny of Richard II," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 41 (1968), 17. Barron adds that "Richard's measures were too extreme to be the work of policy, too well organized to be the acts of a madman." See also John Theilmann, "Stubbs, Shakespeare, and Recent Historians of Richard II," 110.

insane. After all, the name of Stubbs has become virtually synonymous with the highest standards of historical research in England. As an early and eager student of Ranke, Stubbs was instrumental in introducing into England the Rankean model of reliance upon original sources and primary authorities as the only sure guide to knowing the past "as it actually happened." Stubbs, Oxford's "first professional historian," was, as Thomas William Heyck points out, part of a new school of history that included Green, Freeman, and Stubbs. Although all three insisted that history "had to be a research activity done in the original sources," it was really Stubbs "who did the most to consolidate the new idea of the historical enterprise."<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, Stubbs's *Constitutional History of England* has been nearly universally praised as a monument to historical accuracy and impartiality. According to J.G. Edwards, the *Constitutional History* merits praise for at least two qualities: its mastery of original sources; and its cautious analysis of past events. In Edwards's view, "The book overflowed with indications that its author had an unusual familiarity, not only with existing secondary works, but also—and more particularly—with the relevant original authorities that were then in print. Throughout the book it was to these original authorities that the main attention was steadily directed."<sup>15</sup> So overwhelming has been the admiration for the *Constitutional History*, that Dom David Knowles could say that "few historians would be the worse for reading Stubbs's *Intro-*

<sup>14</sup> Thomas William Heyck, *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England* (New York, 1982), 144. See also: Doris S. Goldstein, "The Professionalization of History in Britain in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *History of Historiography* 3 (1983), 10; and Rosemary Jann, *The Art and Science of Victorian History* (Columbus, Ohio, 1985), 216–17.

<sup>15</sup> J.G. Edwards, *William Stubbs* (London, 1952), 6. Edwards adds, "The second quality of Stubbs' work, as pervasive as its great learning, was its characteristic caution, which became almost proverbial to his readers" (*ibid.*, 7). For a description of the *Constitutional History* as a "brilliant synthesis," and as "one of the most astonishing achievements of the Victorian mind," see John Kenyon, *The History Men* (Pittsburgh, 1984), 152. See additionally E.A. Freeman, "The Use of Historical Documents," *The Fortnightly Review*, n.s. 10 (1871), 331, who adds that "we have seldom seen a single volume which was, so thoroughly and almost without a figure of speech, a library in itself. It is hardly too much to say that Mr. Stubbs has here got together all that anyone can want to know on his subject, unless he is going to write a book about it, and that, if a man is going to write a book about it, he will find in Mr. Stubbs's volume the best possible guide to his materials." For additional hymns of praise see F.W. Maitland, "William Stubbs, Bishop of Oxford," *English Historical Review* 16 (1901), 423; Robert Brentano, "The Sound of Stubbs," *Journal of British Studies* 6 (1967), 1–14 (especially p.1); Helen M. Cam, "Stubbs Seventy Years After," *The Cambridge Historical Journal* 9 (1948), 129–47; and R.W. Southern, *The Shape and Substance of Academic History* (Oxford, 1961), 12.

*ductions* and vol. II of the *Constitutional History* once every four or five years.”<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, Stubbs and the *Constitutional History* have not altogether escaped criticism. Far and away the most strident critics of Stubbs the historian—and of the *Constitutional History*—have been “Clio’s Bad Boys,” H.G. Richardson and G.O. Sayles. After lamenting “the inflexible cast of his mind,” Richardson and Sayles deign to observe of Stubbs that “it is, indeed, evident that he had little capacity for thinking clearly about the nature of historical truth and of its attainment”; Stubbs “was disabled by the weakness he had for approaching a problem with the solution already in his mind. . . . Having adopted his conclusions, Stubbs found that the facts fitted.”<sup>17</sup> As for the Great Book, Richardson and Sayles argue that Stubbs had too many interests and too little time to produce a solid study: “Projected in 1868, Stubbs wrote rapidly, . . . during these ten years Stubbs was busy with much other work and, extraordinary as his powers were, these three large volumes could not be the fruit of great original research”; thus, the *Constitutional History* was necessarily laced with inaccuracies, and the wonder is that “not only its errors and misconceptions, but its large deficiencies for so long escaped remark.”<sup>18</sup> Richardson and Sayles further note that Stubbs’s “illusions were the current historical anachronisms from which he failed to free himself, the consequence, not of political bias, but of insufficient critical discernment.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, “what original thought there was in the exposition was straitly conditioned by the outlook of Stubbs’s own epoch”; and the faults of the *Constitutional History* have been “largely unperceived because they were the faults of Victorian scholarship.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> M.D. Knowles, “Some Trends in Scholarship, 1868–1968, in the Field of Medieval History,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 19 (1969), 144.

<sup>17</sup> H.G. Richardson and G.O. Sayles, *The Governance of Medieval England from the Conquest to the Magna Carta* (Edinburgh, 1963), 3, 5, 6. Richardson and Sayles add that “Stubbs was little concerned with testing the authenticity of his sources: he needs must be superficial in this matter or the tasks in hand would never be completed” (*ibid.*, 13).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 20, 16. For an especially cynical assessment, see J.B. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge, 1981), 300: “Macaulay will presumably not lack readers for a good while to come, and Stubbs will enjoy affectionate and respectful remembrance in the small circle of medievalists. But on the whole the great Victorian histories now seem like the triumphal arches of a past empire, their vaunting inscriptions increasingly unintelligible to the modern inhabitants: visited occasionally, it may be, as a *pissoir*, a species of visit naturally brief.” For a rejoinder, see James Campbell, *Stubbs and the English State* (Reading, 1989), 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Governance of Medieval England*, 5, 20.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 19. Even more, Richardson and Sayles conclude that the *Constitutional History* is

What *were* these “faults of Victorian scholarship”? Perhaps the most prevalent “doctrine” inherent in Victorian historiography was the Whig view of the past. Convinced of their place at a self-conceived pinnacle of British history, and impressed with the fruits of their technologies and “progress,” Victorians utilized the past to explain and rationalize their successes. In the words of Rosemary Jann, Whig interpretations resulted in a distorted view of the past. In defining the “progress” unique to English institutions “by nineteenth-century priorities and evaluating past events in terms of their contributions to the present’s triumphant political balance, the Whigs proved as myopic as the *philosophes*.”<sup>21</sup> The most all-inclusive critique of Whig theories, however, is offered by Sir Herbert Butterfield, who notes that “it is part and parcel of the Whig interpretation of history that it studies the past with reference to the present; and though there may be a sense in which it is inescapable, it has often been an obstruction to historical understanding because it has been taken to mean the study of the past with direct and perpetual reference to the present.”<sup>22</sup>

It is generally agreed that Stubbs’s approach to the past was driven by Whig perspectives. Stubbs, according to Heyck, was just as “Whigish” as Hallam or Macaulay; all three “celebrated the progress of the English nation . . . towards the constitutional liberty and parliamentary institutions that graced nineteenth-century England.”<sup>23</sup> As worked out

---

in reality “an inadequate and misleading book . . . but the wonder is perhaps that, scattered here and there in the *Constitutional History*, good honest compiling from the sources is to be found, dealing quite adequately with incidents, isolated problems: wheat among the chaff. But in the mountain of chaff the wheat is now of little account, and the chaff is fit only to be thrown away” (ibid., 21). As might be expected, Richardson and Sayles have received plenty of criticism for their harsh treatment of the venerable Stubbs. John Le Patourel, for example, dismisses the bulk of their criticisms, conveyed in their first chapter as “simply an emotional outburst, difficult to take entirely seriously. . . . As a prelude, this chapter does nothing to inspire confidence” (*English Historical Review* 88 [1965], 115–16). More pointedly, Le Patourel wonders whether it is fair to lambaste Stubbs for failing to free himself from Victorian biases: “To criticize Stubbs as though he were writing now, and to claim by implication that it is possible for any historian to live outside his own age . . . is beyond reason” (ibid.). For similar comments see B. Wilkinson’s review in *American Historical Review* 69 (1964), 428. A more balanced reading is presented by William Huse Dunham. After admitting that Richardson and Sayles may have, in the end, produced a *libellus famosus*, Dunham concedes that “despite its perversity and petulance, this ‘little book’ . . . contains much that is creative, fine, and refreshing. . . . Richardson and Sayles perform the complete autopsy (Chapter I) on the bishop’s scholarship” (*Speculum*, 39 [1964], 561).

<sup>21</sup> Jann, *Art and Science*, xxvii.

<sup>22</sup> Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London, 1931), 11. See also Peter Clark, *Henry Hallam* (Boston, 1982), 86.

<sup>23</sup> *Transformation*, 143. The same view is held by John Kenyon, *The History Men*, 152:

in the *Constitutional History*, Stubbs meant to place special emphasis on the uniqueness of the steady progress of the English nation toward parliamentary sovereignty. As Norman Cantor has put it, "Stubbs claimed that . . . the history of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in England was centered on the struggle to preserve the established constitutional system, already at least the embryo of the distinctive English form of government."<sup>24</sup>

In more immediate terms, Stubbs's Whiggism meant necessarily that he would tend to take a dim view of heavy-handed monarchs like Richard II, who might threaten the progress of medieval liberties. Thus, according to J.W. Burrow, Stubbs's position parallels "the standard seventeenth-century Whig position—the original Whiggism: the ancient constitution was popular; the kings who threatened it were innovators."<sup>25</sup> Little wonder, either, that Stubbs would adopt a pro-Lancastrian bias in his study of the later Middle Ages. Described by Helen M. Cam as "the most pervasive and far-reaching contribution of Stubbs to the interpretation of later medieval history," this approach "identifies constitutional progress with 'the Lancastrians'; at first a party, and after 1399 a dynasty . . . it was Richard II, in fact, who created the Lancastrian legend."<sup>26</sup>

Consistent with Whig theories, Stubbs necessarily portrayed Richard as the enemy of the constitution and therefore worthy of deposition. From a constitutional point of view, Stubbs observed that what really brought Richard down was his decision to seek revenge on the former Appellants in 1397: "There can be little doubt that the proceedings of 1397 and 1398 were the real causes of Richard's ruin. . . . He had resolutely and without subterfuge or palliation, challenged the constitution."<sup>27</sup> This "grand stroke of policy," continues Stubbs, "has a remarkable significance. It was a resolute attempt not to evade but to

---

"This Tory churchman embraced with ease the Whig theory of the Ancient Constitution, with his own amendments and improvements." See also P.B.M. Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism: Parliamentary and Constitutional Development in Whig Historiography and in the Anti-Whig Reaction between 1890 and 1930* (London, 1978), 158.

<sup>24</sup> Norman Cantor, *William Stubbs on the English Constitution* (New York, 1965), 5.

<sup>25</sup> Burrow, *A Liberal Descent*, 139.

<sup>26</sup> Helen M. Cam, "Stubbs Seventy Years After," 137, 142. See also Robert Brentano, "The Sound of Stubbs," 4: "[Stubbs] was a Lancastrian Tory and an Anglican. . . ." Stubbs in fact admitted his Lancastrian leanings. In a letter dated 3 January 1877, to E.A. Freeman, Stubbs says, "I forget whether you are a Yorkist or not; reading Gairdner on the *Paston Letters* makes me more Lancastrian than ever" ("Letters of William Stubbs, Bishop of Oxford, 1825–1901," ed. William H. Hutton, *The Quarterly Review* 202 [1905], 175).

<sup>27</sup> William Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1874–78), 2: 507.



destroy the limitations which for nearly two centuries the nation, first through the baronage alone and latterly through the united parliament, had been labouring to impose upon the king."<sup>28</sup> Richard, in Stubbs's eyes, had stated that "his royal power was supreme. He condescended to no petty illegalities, but struck at once at the root of constitutional government. . . . No king urged so strongly the right of hereditary succession; no king maintained so openly the extreme theory of prerogative. He challenged the determination of his people in the most open way."<sup>29</sup>

Having found Richard worthy of deposition on constitutional grounds, Stubbs sought to account for Richard's offensive actions through an analysis of the king's perceived flaws of character. This interpretation was no doubt derived from the prevailing Victorian preoccupation with morality and character. The Victorians were nothing if not nearly consumed by concerns about morality. Walter E. Houghton notes that the decline of Christianity and "the prospect of atheism," to use Houghton's words, had a curious effect on Victorians: "It was then assumed, in spite of rationalist denials, that any collapse of faith would destroy the sanctions of morality; and morality gone, society would disintegrate."<sup>30</sup> Correlatively, Gertrude Himmelfarb makes the point that what actually happened was that, once religion was removed as the criterion of normalcy, the Victorians filled the void with an emphasis on morality: "It is as if the Victorians, by giving to mankind what they could no longer give to God, hoped to atone for the gravity of their sin and the pain of their loss. Their morality was a displacement of religion—which may explain the fanatical quality of their morality, their need to create a Religion of Humanity."<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 499.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 499–500. Nor should Richard II be compared with either Edward II or Edward III. For Stubbs, although "Edward II had no kingly aspirations, Richard had a very lofty idea of his dignity, a very distinct theory of the powers, of the functions, and of the duties of royalty" (ibid., 506). As for Edward III, whereas Edward "was content with the substance of power, Richard aimed at the recognition of a theory of despotism, and as has so often happened both before and since, the assertion of principles brought on their maintainer a much more severe doom than befell the popular autocrat who had practiced them, however little he was loved or trusted" (ibid.).

<sup>30</sup> Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830–1870* (New Haven, 1957), 236. As a result, according to Houghton, "the emphasis on moral character allowed little or no consideration for intellectual and aesthetic virtues; and the moral side itself was judged without regard to the mixed nature of human beings, or the relative gravity of moral failings. . . . the Victorian tends to divide ideas and people and actions into tight categories of true-false, good-bad-right-wrong; and not to recognize the mixed character of human experience" (ibid., 162).

<sup>31</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Victorian Minds* (New York, 1968), 303.

Like the Victorian public at large, historians at Cambridge and Oxford in the 1860s expressed considerable interest in morality and character. T.W. Heyck points out that “all of the Victorian historians believed in the didactic function of history, but many of them believed that historical lessons had to do less with specific political issues than with moral law . . . the past was regarded as illustrating moral law.”<sup>32</sup> V.H. Galbraith concurs, adding that “the Victorians proper . . . were very medieval; they were, for example, almost as obsessed by the notion of an abstract moral standard divorced from realities as the chroniclers themselves. . . . Their historical judgments were then—like those of the middle ages—in the last resort, moral, even religious, judgments.”<sup>33</sup>

But why were Victorian historians given to moral didacticism? This was because it slowly dawned on the new “professional” historians—as opposed to mere “literary” historians—that they were becoming alienated from the Victorian reading public. For, say what we will about the literary historian’s lack of objective research, he was more in touch with Victorian sympathies, if only because he at least convinced the reader of the moral lessons of history. Insofar as the professional historian separated himself from both reader and “amateur” historian, he ran the risk of the loss of readers, and, as Rosemary Jann puts it, “The winning of professional authority at the expense of this cultural authority was an outcome few early professionals were willing to accept.”<sup>34</sup> In other terms, according to Jann, “The general audience might be willing to acknowledge the authority of professional expertise, but insofar as they saw it as by choice exercising no relevant power over their lives, they withheld the cultural authority of the historian from men who were to them ‘merely’ scholars.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, concludes Jann, Victorian historians’ “continuing allegiance to history’s preeminent importance as a moral and political guide in the service of a wider society prevented many Oxbridge historians from becoming alienated from the needs and interests of a more general public in the sense that many American and European scholars did.”<sup>36</sup>

But this proved to be something of a Pyrrhic victory. It is true that by focusing on moral lessons in history, Victorian “professional” histo-

<sup>32</sup> Heyck, *Transformation*, 124.

<sup>33</sup> Vivian H. Galbraith, “Good Kings and Bad Kings in English History,” *History* 29 (1945), 127. Galbraith concludes that “these too-moral judgments are altogether less convincing; for the Victorians seem to have felt that at all costs they must teach a moral lesson and edify their public” (*ibid.*, 132).

<sup>34</sup> Jann, *Art and Science*, 223.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

rians obviated criticisms from the public at large, and continued to serve their "needs." At the same time, however, through an over-emphasis upon moral didacticism, the new professionals, of necessity, merely looked through their fingers at the credo of original research and document-based narratives of the past. As Jann sees it, "the triumph of the research ideal was in many ways more apparent than real; especially at the ancient universities, the enduring vitality of liberal education provided a medium in which traditional assumptions about history's practical and moral importance continued to thrive."<sup>37</sup>

Victorian historians were also driven to considerations of morality and character for a totally different set of reasons. In large measure this was caused by a large and hostile reaction to the appearance of Thomas Buckle's *History of Civilization in England* in 1857, which "burst like a rocket on the public consciousness."<sup>38</sup> In essence, what Buckle proposed was nothing less than a science of society based on the ideas of John Stuart Mill and Auguste Comte. In this view human behavior could be analyzed and understood in much the same way that the scientist studies natural phenomena; man's actions were driven by "laws" that could best be understood from a determinist perspective. By applying this conception to the study of history, argued Buckle, developments in the future could be confidently predicted: "I hope to accomplish for the history of man something equivalent, or at all events analogous, to what has been effected by other inquirers for the different branches of natural science."<sup>39</sup>

Buckle's book, in the view of T.W. Heyck, "caused a furor in the English literate public."<sup>40</sup> What really got under the collective skins of the mid-to-late Victorians was their feeling that Buckle "had run afoul of a powerful need in the Victorian psyche to believe that human beings are independent agents in the historical process . . . that history demonstrates the reward of the virtuous and the punishment of the wicked."<sup>41</sup> From the Victorian perspective, instead of reacting blindly to predetermined laws of nature, man was instead blessed with a Will; and it was as a consequence a person's morality that determined his fate. We can see this reaction in the works of eminent Victorian historians like J.A. Froude, whose view of this attempt to reduce the behavior of man to a science was negative in the extreme: "The world is built somehow on moral foundations; that, in the long run, it is well with the good; in the

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Heyck, *Transformation*, 133.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted *ibid.*, 135.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 137.

long run, it is ill with the wicked.”<sup>42</sup> Charles Kingsley held similar views. In his inaugural lecture as Regius Professor at Cambridge in 1860, Kingsley said, “For not upon mind, gentlemen, not upon mind, but upon morals, is human welfare founded. . . . So far from morals depending upon thought, thought, I believe, depends on morals.”<sup>43</sup> Yet another reaction against Buckle was voiced by Goldwin Smith. In his inaugural lecture Smith called attention to what he termed a “historical, in contradistinction to an absolute, morality.”<sup>44</sup> Smith goes on to note that “if it could be said that there was no progress in human character because the moral law and the moral nature of man remain the same in all ages, it might equally be said that there could be no variety in character because the moral law and our moral nature are the same in all persons. . . . But the variety of characters which our hearts, bound to no one type . . . acknowledges as good, noble, beautiful, is infinite, and grows with the growing variety of human life.”<sup>45</sup>

Stubbs, too, joined in the chorus of criticism of Buckle’s determinist interpretations. Stubbs was motivated by a particularly personal resentment against Buckle’s attempt to popularize the idea that history could be considered a science. One part of Stubbs, his High Church side, was revulsed by the notion that man is not possessed of a moral will. As Stubbs himself expressed it (1877), “History repeats itself we know, parallels and cycles recur, the speculative mind can evaluate the curve in which political progress moves, trace the contortions of the unruly spiral, and eschew a cusp as a historic anomaly. But the dealings of human wills, in countless combinations, and circumstances which no theory can ever exhaustively calculate, are not the field for dogmatic assumption or for speculative classification.”<sup>46</sup> In a more general sense, Stubbs denied any attempt to reduce the study of the past to a purely scientific scheme. In a letter to his friend Freeman, Stubbs wrote: “Have you seen Buckle on Civilisation, Vol 1? . . . I do not believe in the Philosophy of History, and so do not believe in Buckle.”<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Heyck, *Transformation*, 124.

<sup>43</sup> Charles Kingsley, *The Limits of Exact Science Applied to History: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered to the University of Cambridge* (London, 1860), 28.

<sup>44</sup> Goldwin Smith, *Lectures on the Study of History Delivered in Oxford, 1859–1861*, 2d ed. (Oxford, 1865), 79.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Seventeen Lectures on the Study of Medieval and Modern History* (Oxford, 1887), 90–91.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1836–1886* (Cambridge, 1986), 77. Levine adds a clarifying point: “His dismissal of Buckle is particularly interesting in the light of his respect for the scholarship of Ranke . . . for Stubbs, it was the method rather than the

In a roundabout way, then, Stubbs's repudiation of the Positivist brand of scientific history in favor of the view emphasizing man's free will—in conjunction with prevailing Victorian emphases upon character—induced him to consider character-traits of past figures, especially Plantagenet kings, as critical factors underlying their actions. In addition to scattered references in lectures, we find Stubbs's preoccupation with character manifested in various editions in the Rolls Series. In the preface to the second volume of *Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi Benedicti Abbatis* (1867), Stubbs remarked, "It is almost a matter of necessity for the student of history to work out for himself some definite idea of the characters of the great men of the period he is employed upon. . . . The heart of kings is unsearchable. . . . In them, as in no other men, can the outward conduct be safely assumed to be the unrestrained expression of the inward character."<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Stubbs noted the relevance of this idea to the Plantagenets: "All the Plantagenet kings were high-hearted men, rather rebellious against circumstances than subservient to them. But the long pageant shows us uniformly under so great a variety of individual character, such signs of great gifts and opportunities thrown away, such unscrupulousness in action, such uncontrolled passion. . . ."<sup>49</sup>

---

philosophy of the German thinker which commanded his interest" (ibid., 76–77). See also Michael Chauncey Martin, *History as Cultural Apologetic in Victorian England: J. N. Figgis and the Value of Historical Study* (Ann Arbor, 1991), 299–302. For a thorough review of those for and against Buckle see Giles St. Aubyn, *A Victorian Eminence: The Life and Works of Henry Thomas Buckle* (London, 1958), 158–89.

<sup>48</sup> *Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi Benedicti Abbatis*, 2 vols. (London, 1867), 2: viii. In his personal correspondence Stubbs occasionally mentions his interest in character. In a letter dated October 1868 to "Mr. Edwards," author of "The Life and Times of Sir Walter Raleigh," Stubbs writes that he is "delighted with the way in which you bring out . . . his character. . . ." ("Letters of William Stubbs," 155).

<sup>49</sup> *Gesta Henrici*, x. Whatever his abiding interest, Stubbs's attempts to assay the characters of the Plantagenets were doomed from the start. For Stubbs, and a good many other historians as well, what mattered most was not an accurate portrayal of character, but how that character measured up to Victorian expectations. Take, for example, Stubbs's portrait of King John. In the view of V.H. Galbraith, "Stubbs' verdict, which is really independent of what any historian to-day would call 'the facts,' amounts to this: because John was a monster of wickedness, nothing but evil could have come from his reign had his people not risen against him" ("Good Kings and Bad Kings," 128). The same is said of Stubbs's portrait of Edward I: "Stubbs' rather *a priori* portrait of Edward, for instance, is tinged with the wrong sort of hero-worship, and he fails to come to grips with all the facts. We feel he ought to have known better. I sometimes think he did, but that the bishop prevailed over the historian when it came to writing it down" (ibid., 132). And in the estimation of Richardson and Sayles, "Stubbs had difficulty in regarding Henry II, John, Edward I and Edward II, as men of their day; he saw them rather as figures appropriate to the parts allotted to them in his imaginary drama of the constitution. Stubbs' Edward I is fictitious: the others suffer not only from the artificial environment in which they play their parts,

It is little wonder, then, that Stubbs would pay undue attention to flaws of character in his overall estimation of Richard II. Stubbs's interest in Richard's emerging character-development was fully explored in the *Constitutional History*. Beginning cautiously, Stubbs acknowledged that an accurate rendering of the king's character represented a difficult undertaking: "His personal character is throughout the reign a problem; in the earlier years because it is almost impossible to detect his independent actions; and in the later ones because of its surprising inconsistencies; and both earlier and later because where we can read it it seems so hard to reconcile with the recorded impressions of his own contemporaries."<sup>50</sup>

Stubbs was especially interested in the development of Richard's character in the early years of his reign. In commenting on the young king's emerging character as evidenced during the Peasants' Revolt, however, Stubbs observes, "Richard had certainly shown in the crisis both address and craft; and it is somewhat strange that after he had given such proof of his ability, he was content to remain for some years longer in tutelage."<sup>51</sup> In answer to this problem, Stubbs suggests that the fault lay with the court and its detrimental effects on the youthful and impressionable Richard: "Neither the court nor the country was in

---

but from Stubbs's weakness, the weakness of his times, for moralizing out of season. If there are kings who do not suffer so badly as these at his hands, he is no safe guide to character or to motive" (*Governance of Medieval England*, 18). Richardson and Sayles were not alone in their criticism of Stubbs's attempts to delineate character. Charles Petit-Dutaillis, for example, notes that "Stubbs, who was shrewd, did not fail to show for each period the chain of facts and the historic figures. But, like many Englishmen, he had little imagination, and I wonder whether he fully understood such characters as Henry II, John Lackland, Edward I, Henry V, and what manner of men the chiefs of the baronial opposition were" (*Studies and Notes Supplementary to Stubbs' Constitutional History*, trans. W.E. Rhodes [Manchester, 1908], 310). Even Stubbs's panegyrist, William Hutton, is forced, in the end, to concede that Stubbs sometimes missed the point in his efforts to reconstruct the personalities of medieval figures. On the one hand, according to Hutton, Stubbs's "interest in human nature was inexhaustible, and his insight into character—as indeed any one who remembers the admirable historical portraits he has drawn will expect—was profound and subtle" ("Letters of William Stubbs," 145). Nevertheless, Hutton continues, "it is not in this direction that Stubbs found employment for his greatest abilities. He lacked the essence of form and colour which makes the painter, and the strength of real or feigned feeling which makes the orator. . . . The want of warmth and artistic power is very noticeable in his portraits of great men. . . . Touches of fancy occasionally occur. . . ." (ibid.). Hutton concludes that "behind all these painstaking estimates of character one perceives some uncertainty in the writer's mind. His grasp of personality and personal action is hardly adequate: he seems to require something more solid than human disposition to use his best tools" (ibid., 23).

<sup>50</sup> *Constitutional History of England*, 2: 499.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 463.

a condition to encourage any noble aspirations on his part. His tutors and early advisers had been chosen for their accomplishments and reputation rather than for their political character. . . .”<sup>52</sup> It could be argued, according to Stubbs, that Richard’s years of tutelage may have contributed to his warped sensibilities later in life: “He had been brought up in an atmosphere of luxury and refinement, kept back from public life rather than urged on into premature attempts to govern, and yet with the highest notions of prerogative; perhaps both the dissipations of his maturer years, and the untoward line in which his mental activity developed when it freed itself from the early trammels, indicate an amount of mismanagement which can hardly be described as accidental or merely unfortunate.”<sup>53</sup> Concluding that it was really the early period of tutelage under which Richard was restrained that was responsible for his developing character, Stubbs notes, “Capable of energetic and resolute action upon occasion, Richard was habitually idle, too conscious perhaps that when the occasion arose he would be able to meet it.”<sup>54</sup>

For Stubbs to emphasize Richard’s character in estimations of his reign is one thing; but it is something else again to impute insanity as the cause of Richard’s downfall. What was it that induced Stubbs to portray Richard *for the first time* as mentally unstable—in the face of both contemporary and post-contemporary accounts that nowhere even hint at Richard’s alleged mental condition?<sup>55</sup> What makes this

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 464.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 465.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 464.

<sup>55</sup> As even a superficial survey of the Ricardian historiographical tradition reveals, nowhere in the entire six-hundred-year corpus of Ricardian literature until Stubbs is there any indication of mental instability in Richard II. Consider, for example, the description of Richard’s character in the *Vita Ricardi Secundi*, the most complete contemporary account. Here we learn that Richard was “of the common stature, his hair yellowish, his face fair and rosy, rather round than long, and sometimes flushed; abrupt and somewhat stammering in his speech, capricious in his manners . . . prodigal in his gifts, extravagantly splendid in his entertainment and dress, timid as to war, very passionate toward his domestics, haughty and too much devoted to voluptuousness, as fond of late hours that he often would stay up half the night engaged in drinking and other activities not to be mentioned” (*Historia Vitae et Regni Ricardi Secundi*, ed. G.B. Stow [Philadelphia, 1977], 166). Thomas Walsingham, too, who was well aware of the mental affliction of Charles VI, nowhere describes Richard II as insane: “In this year the king of France, as is said, was struck with a mental illness and thrown into a frenzy . . . and he remained in this sad state for as long as the feverish state lasted” (*Historia Anglicana*, 2 vols., ed. H.T. Riley [London, 1864], 2: 212). Nor does the Monk of Westminster—also familiar with insanity in the example of Charles VI—anywhere refer to Richard II as mentally troubled; cf. his description of Charles VI’s lapse into a “transport of insanity” (*The Westminster Chronicle*, ed. L.C. Hector and Barbara Harvey [Oxford, 1982], 500).

problem so crucial is the point, already noted, that Stubbs has been nearly universally revered as a historian of exacting standards, especially in his strict adherence to primary sources. What is needed, there-

---

Nor, for that matter, do we discover any references to Richard's alleged mental problems in sources ranging from the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries. Under the Tudors, it was repeated over and over again that Richard got into trouble because of the "frailty of his wanton youth"; in William Baldwin's *A Mirroure for Magistrates* (London, 1578), Richard was depicted as "a King, who ruled by Lust . . . in false Flatterers reposing all my trust . . ." (*A Mirroure for Magistrates* [London, 1578], fol. 17). For Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Richard the Second* (London, 1595), III, ii, ll. 54–57, Richard was cast as rather a poor thing, vacillating between self-pity and resolution; but the strongest vision of Richard is more along the lines of Divine Right kingship:

Not all the water in the rough rude sea  
Can wash the balm off from an anointed king.  
The breath of worldly men cannot depose  
The deputy elected by the Lord.

In the next century Richard was again cast in the mold of a prince worthy of deposition. Sir Robert Howard, for example, argued that Richard bore most of the responsibility for his deposition, since he had "abandoned himself to sloth, and lay plumped in the soft, but destructive Charms of pleasure. . . ." (*The Life and Reign of Richard the Second by a Person of Quality* [London, 1681], 174–75). Enlightened historians adopted variations, mostly negative, of previous views of Richard II. For them, Richard was the enemy of Parliament and for that reason alone deserving of deposition. Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, saw Richard as a "violent, haughty, obstinate and weak prince," who "had brutality and a good opinion of himself; one of which might have betrayed him into a discovery of what it was his interest to conceal, if the other had not made him incapable of doing it, even on reflection" (*Remarks on the History of England* [London, 1730], 67). But David Hume's *History of England* (1761) was more sympathetic; after all, Lancastrian writers could be expected to harbor an animus against Richard. Nevertheless, and after making all proper allowances, Richard "appears to be a weak prince, and unfit for government, less for want of natural parts and capacity, than of solid judgment and a good education. He was violent in his temper; profuse in his expence; fond of idle show and magnificence; devoted to favourites; and addicted to pleasure. . . ." (*The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, 6 vols., ed. W.B. Todd [New York, 1893], 2: 324). Moreover, in narrating the events of 1396, Hume remarks that Richard's "personal character brought him into contempt. . . . Indolent, profuse, addicted to low pleasures; he spent his whole time in feasting and jollity, and dissipated, in idle show, or in bounties to favourites of no reputation, that revenue which the people expected to see him employ in enterprises directed to public honor and advantage" (*ibid.*, 205).

As a rule, nineteenth-century views of Richard II *until* Stubbs were driven by Whig perspectives of the past. In the eyes of most Whig historians, Richard II was the model tyrant, and therefore an enemy of the Commons. Typical of this point of view was that put forward by Henry Hallam, who considered Richard's deposition a landmark in the history of constitutional development. As for Richard the person, Hallam felt that, although Richard was "a man of considerable talents," these qualities rarely surfaced, and we should rather remember that "extreme pride and violence, with an inordinate partiality for the most worthless favourites, were his predominant characteristics" (Henry Hallam, *View of*



fore, is an analysis of causal factors that might have led Stubbs to shoot so wide of the mark in his portrayal of Richard's character.

It must be understood at the outset that Stubbs, as a mid-Victorian, was surrounded on all sides by nearly incessant conversations concerning theories of insanity. For a good part of the nineteenth century, Victorians prided themselves on their ability to determine their own destinies. In this view, as we have seen above, man was seen as a free moral agent, blessed with a sense of his own Will, and responsible for his actions. In particular, the shaping of one's own moral character was considered not only within the grasp of each individual, but absolutely necessary for success in the hurly-burly world of a developing industrial society. The extremely popular works of Samuel Smiles attest to the Victorians' interest in the idea of character-building as a means to success. Smiles observes that "the best sort of character . . . can not be formed without effort. There needs the exercise of constant self-watchfulness, self-discipline, and self-control . . . if the spirit be strong and the heart be upright, no one need despair of ultimate success. . . . Character exhibits itself in conduct, guided and inspired by principle, integrity, and practical wisdom."<sup>56</sup>

Whatever the confident assertions of Samuel Smiles, lurking beneath the placid surface of Victorian society was the ever-present fear of insanity. An underlying fear of creeping insanity was a constant concern to the Victorians, who likened the age-old problem of aberrant mental behavior to "forces of social anarchy and disorder . . . ready to break loose."<sup>57</sup> And they had good cause to be concerned. In the eyes of Marlene Arieno, "one startling phenomenon of the century was the continuing rise in the proportion of the population officially recognized as insane."<sup>58</sup> Arieno backs up her contention with some interest-

---

*the State of Europe during the Middle Ages*, 2 vols. [London, 1818], 2: 271). Contemporaneously, a popular study by James Mackintosh presented a rather romanticized version of Richard's character. After charging the king with a "conspiracy" against his subjects, for which crime there could be "no pretense for acquitting Richard," Mackintosh added, "nor can it be doubted, that he united an irascible temper with deep, lasting, and watchful revenge. These black qualities are very odiously blended in his character with the lighter defects and better-humoured vices which were spread over his manners, and served in ordinary times to hide the internal dispositions which broke out as soon as those opportunities of revenge presented themselves, for which he could lie in wait for half a life" (*The History of England from the Earliest Times to the Year 1588* [Philadelphia, 1834], 145).

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Vieda Skultans, *Madness and Morals: Ideas on Insanity in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1975), 9.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>58</sup> Marlene Arieno, *Victorian Lunatics: A Social Epistemology of Mental Illness in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (Selingsgrove, Pa., 1989), 11.

ing data, attesting a progressive increase in percentages of the British population considered insane: in 1807, 2.26 cases in every 10,000 of the general population; by 1844, 12.66 cases; and by 1890, 29.63 of 10,000.<sup>59</sup>

As the nineteenth century progressed, changing assessments of the *causes* of insanity began to erode the Victorians' confidence in the individual's ability to control his own destiny. In the view of Martin J. Wiener,

Science seemed to be making it clearer that natural phenomena exhibited predictable regularities and that causation in nature followed invariant laws. In physics and biology, the dominant paradigms reinforced a sense of a determined system of mechanical causation in which there might be much room for chance, but not for conscious will, a system of large forces and units in which the individual counted for little. At the most fundamental level, new scientific theories were making it hard to imagine the human world as exempt from the sway of natural law. Individuals, however free and effective they might feel themselves, were seen to be dependent upon the operation of forces and the constitution of structures beyond the control of their will.<sup>60</sup>

Particularly important in undermining Victorian concepts of man as a free moral agent were emerging theories that stressed biological conditions affecting character-development, along with increasing attention to biological causations of insanity. In 1835, J.C. Prichard, an early member of the new fraternity of "alienists" (psychiatrists), coined a new definition of insanity: "moral insanity." According to this definition, "the problem of insanity was redefined as one of loss of self-control, not loss of reason or intellect, and the task of alienists was to stimulate personal efforts of will to regain self-mastery."<sup>61</sup> In the 1840s, according to Reba Soffer, further scientific advances began to erode belief in moral free will, and "transitional psychologists" began in the 1850s to place increasing emphasis on the scientific diagnosis of character.<sup>62</sup>

Truly significant strides were taken in this direction with the publication of several scientific studies. In one of these, Bucknill and Tuke's *Manual of Psychological Medicine* (1858), associations were made between insanity and character change: "The most striking feature of Insanity in general, and the strongest proof of the presence of any of its

---

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Martin J. Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal: Culture, Law, and Policy in England, 1830–1914* (Cambridge, 1990), 160.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>62</sup> Reba Soffer, *Ethics and Society in England: The Revolution in the Social Sciences 1870–1914* (Berkeley, 1978), 128.

forms, is the change which takes place for the worse in the individual's character and habits."<sup>63</sup> Bucknill and Tuke further argued that the source of many mental abnormalities was most likely some disturbance in the brain: "The brain, like every other organ of the body, for the performance of its functions, requires the perfect condition of its organization, and its freedom from all pathological states whatever. Consequently, the existence of any pathological state in the organ of the mind will interrupt the functions of that organ, and produce a greater or less amount of disease of the mind—that is of insanity."<sup>64</sup>

A more crucial development occurred after the mid-point of the nineteenth century. In the estimation of Vieda Skultans, there occurred "an intellectual reappraisal of the nature of insanity. Whereas earlier writers are interested in 'moral force' and 'will,' later writers are interested in 'heredity endowment' and 'character' . . . which acquires popularity among physicians in the latter half of the century."<sup>65</sup> This changed perspective is best epitomized in the writings of Henry Maudsley, whose *Physiology and Pathology of Mind* (1867) established new frontiers in the study of insanity. Instead of the earlier and more optimistic view that individuals could, by sheer force of will and adherence to sound morals, pull themselves out of insanity, Maudsley stresses instead the more pessimistic sentiment that individuals are in reality helpless in the face of inherited characteristics. Throughout his writings Maudsley uses the term "heredity neurosis" to describe this condition. Referred to as the "tyranny of organization," this approach is typified by Maudsley's article in the *Journal of Mental Science* (1867) in which he notes that "mental derangement sometimes appears as the natural issue of all the precedent conditions of life, mental and bodily. The outcome of the individual character is affected by certain circumstances; the germs of the disease have been latent in the foundations of the character, and the final outbreak is but the explosion of a long train of antecedent preparations."<sup>66</sup>

<sup>63</sup> John Charles Bucknill and David Hack Tuke, *A Manual of Psychological Medicine*, 4th ed. (Philadelphia, 1879), 243. In addition, works like Alexander Bain's *The Senses and the Intellect* (1855), ed. Daniel N. Robinson (Washington, 1977); *The Emotions and the Will* (1859), ed. Daniel N. Robinson (Washington, 1977); and *On The Study of Character* (London, 1861) placed increasing emphasis on the scientific diagnosis of character. For more see L.S. Hearnshaw, *A Short History of British Psychology 1840–1940* (London, 1964), 10.

<sup>64</sup> *Manual of Psychological Medicine*, 353.

<sup>65</sup> *Madness and Morals*, 2, 16.

<sup>66</sup> Henry Maudsley, "On Some of the Causes of Insanity," *The Journal of Mental Science* 12 (1867), 489. As Skultans puts it, "caution and watchfulness are needed to guard against the hidden enemy. At bottom, however, men are helpless in the face of insanity. . . ." (*Madness and Morals*, 22).

It was perhaps inevitable that the mid-to-late Victorian preoccupation with the problem of insanity was bound to spill over into the world of arts and letters. In *Retreat into the Mind: Victorian Poetry and the Rise of Psychiatry*, Ekbert Faas seeks to explore “the new psychological poetry in its relationship to contemporary mental science.”<sup>67</sup> As Faas sees it, “one can hardly exaggerate the impact early mental science, once it established itself as an accredited discipline, exerted on literature and most other cultural domains.”<sup>68</sup> Similarly, in *Tennyson and Madness*, Anne C. Colley explains that the Victorians’ interest in madness “does not abide solely in . . . imaginative and metaphoric enclosures in fiction or poetry”; rather, madness “is part of those enclosures because the nation’s consciousness pushed it there . . . they are extensions of the nineteenth-century sensitivity to madness—a madness that was a pressing and threatening reality.”<sup>69</sup>

What is especially relevant for our purposes is the emergence in the 1860s or thereabouts of specialist literary studies—primarily Shakespearean—suggestive of Shakespeare’s interest in insanity. Bucknill’s separate study of *The Mad Folk of Shakespeare* (1859), for one, delved into Shakespeare’s peculiar fascination with “abnormal conditions of mind.”<sup>70</sup> Moreover, in his *Shakespeare’s Delineations of Insanity, Imbecility and Suicide* (1866), A.O. Kellogg observed that “so great was Shakespeare’s intuitive psychological knowledge, that everything in his characters is in perfect keeping. If he wished to draw insane characters, he first exhibits them as surrounded by the predisposing and exciting causes of the disease, and insanity follows as the natural result of what had preceded it.”<sup>71</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Ekbert Faas, *Retreat into the Mind: Victorian Poetry and the Rise of Psychiatry* (Princeton, 1988), 5.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 7. A particular manifestation of the influence of the new mental sciences in the world of literature appeared in what Faas calls “the dramatic monologue.” As he argues, the dramatic monologue, represented in the writing of luminaries like Tennyson and Browning, had as its focus, concerns “of a psychological nature. . . . Victorian critics . . . viewed the dramatic monologue as essentially the poetry of psychology” (*ibid.*).

<sup>69</sup> Ann C. Colley, *Tennyson and Madness* (Athens, Georgia, 1983), 10.

<sup>70</sup> John Charles Bucknill, *The Mad Folk of Shakespeare* (New York, 1859), x. Bucknill noted that in Shakespeare’s day “every one must have been brought into immediate contact with examples of every variety of mental derangement. . . . Opportunities of crude observation would, therefore, be ample; it only required the alembic of a great mind to convert them into psychological science” (*ibid.*).

<sup>71</sup> A.O. Kellogg, *Shakespeare’s Delineation of Insanity and Suicide* (New York, 1866), 14. In “On the Effects of Neurosis from Moral Shock,” *Journal of Mental Science* 15 (1869), 485, D. de Berdt Howell noted that “Shakespeare has not overlooked the effects of neurosis from moral shock. Although he has not actually declared or indicated them, they will be found to lie at the root of the conduct of some of his most interesting characters.”

Most instructive of all are studies devoted to Shakespeare's interpretation of Richard II's character, some of which note that Shakespeare may have considered Richard as mentally unbalanced. In A. Mezière's *Study of Shakespeare* (1860), for instance, we find the following reading of Shakespeare's portrayal of Richard's intellect: "The mind of Richard II is not perfectly sane. There is something bizarre in his sentiments, and more than once he comes very close to madness in the disorder of his thoughts."<sup>72</sup>

Historians, too, began to insinuate considerations of the insane into their study of past figures. Thomas Carlyle wrote in 1843 that "the higher the Wisdom, the closer was its neighbourhood and kindred with mere Insanity; literally so;—and thou wilt, with a speechless feeling, observe how highest Wisdom, struggling up into this world, has oftentimes carried such tinctures and adhesions of Insanity still cleaving to it hither! All Works, each in their degree, are a making of Madness sane. . . ."<sup>73</sup> Buckle was similarly fascinated with considerations of insanity. He wrote, "There are four kinds—Moral Insanity, Monomania, Mania, and Incoherence. . . . The progress in cases of moral insanity is often more unfavourable than in other forms of mental derangement."<sup>74</sup>

As with specialist literary studies, it is useful to call attention to one particular historical study that perhaps had something to do with Stubbs's portrayal of Richard's alleged unfortunate mental state. In *History of England* Sharon Turner observed that

it is impossible not to pity this unfortunate monarch. The celebrity of his father was his first misfortune, for it interfered with that disciplined education which lays the true basis for human rectitude. The accession to a crown at the age of eleven, was a contingency of nature which completed the moral deterioration which the last years of dotage of his grandfather were not adapted to prevent. Whatever therefore may have been his natural capacity or disposition, all the causes of corrupting *and weakening his mind*, that courtly pleasure or pride could furnish, were from his situation in full operation upon him at that age when their influence is the least resistible and the most pernicious.<sup>75</sup>

With theories of insanity "in the air" in the later 1860s—and with occasional speculations in works of literature and history about Rich-

<sup>72</sup> A. Mezières, *Shakespeare: ses Oeuvres et ses Critiques* (Paris, 1860), 185.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London, 1870), 256.

<sup>74</sup> *The Miscellaneous and Posthumous Works of Henry Thomas Buckle*, ed. Grant Allen (London, 1885), 250.

<sup>75</sup> Sharon Turner, *History of England*, 2 vols. (London, 1815), 2: 254 (my italics).

ard II's mental state—it seems likely that, at the very least, Stubbs began to consider possible insanity in the king's character. It is important at this juncture to make two points. First, it was precisely during the years when Stubbs began to develop his theory of Richard's insanity (the later 1860s and early 1870s) that new theories regarding the causes of insanity, most notably the theories of Henry Maudsley, began to surface. Stubbs began producing editions of chronicles in the Rolls Series in the mid-1860s, was appointed Regius Professor in 1866, and by all accounts began to think of the *Constitutional History* in 1868.<sup>76</sup> As well, it is safe to say that Stubbs was at least familiar with the science of psychology. In his inaugural lecture (1867), Stubbs said the following in reference to students of Modern History: "every day adds a new development of the old elements, he feels that he is living in his subject, it is living all around him. And this being so, he is conscious that he is working with a different set of mental powers from those which he works with on the old world; I speak under correction, for I do not pretend to look at the subject as a question of psychology, simply for the moment as one of education."<sup>77</sup>

Although not fully developed until the publication of the *Constitutional History*, Stubbs's portrayal of an insane Richard began to trickle out in the context of a series of lectures presented after his appointment as Regius Professor at Oxford in 1866. Addressing the topic of comparative European constitutions, Stubbs wrestled with the topic of royal deposition. In the instances of Edward II and Richard II, Stubbs observed that "there was in neither case a simple act of deposition uncomplicated by actual treason or rebellion: in neither case was there a fair trial: in both the subsequent murder of the deposed king must be regarded as a proof that the usurping successor was not destroyed."<sup>78</sup> After further noting that "in fact the obtaining of a fair trial for a king the condition of either Edward or Richard was impossible," Stubbs concluded that "the theory of deposition may exist involved in the theory of election; but the power has never on that ground been constitu-

<sup>76</sup> *Seventeen Lectures*, 17. For Stubbs's familiarity with the language of the sciences in general, see Burrow, *Liberal Descent*, 145.

<sup>77</sup> Edwards, *William Stubbs*, 10. Stubbs began producing additions of chronicles in the Rolls Series in the mid-1860s, was appointed Regius Professor at Oxford in 1866, and began work on the *Constitutional History* in 1868: *ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Lectures on Early English History*, 280. It seems safe to date this lecture to the year 1869 since, in the preface to his *Seventeen Lectures*, p. vi, Stubbs says that some lectures have been omitted from this collection: "Those for 1869 on Comparative Constitutional History . . . are, as a matter of necessity excluded."

tionally used, it is not in the nature of things that it should be. The only case in which it is conceivable that it would be is the case of insanity, and *there may have been insanity in Richard II, although he was not deposed for it.*"<sup>79</sup>

It was in the *Constitutional History*, however, that Stubbs laid out his novel theory that insanity was the root cause of Richard II's fall. It is interesting to note at this point that, as presented in the *Constitutional History*, Stubbs's picture of a mentally troubled king bears some similarities to Henry Maudsley's theory of "the tyranny of organization." In other words, Richard may have been the victim of a "hereditary neurosis"—and "the germs of the disease have been latent in the foundations of the character, and the final outbreak is but the explosion of a long train of antecedent preparations."<sup>80</sup> Thus, Stubbs noted some subtle alterations in the king's character—suggestive of incipient mental imbalance—as the reign progressed into and through the 1390s.

In an effort to account for Richard's moderate rule after declaring his majority in 1389, Stubbs initially wondered whether the king's apparent policy of good faith with the opposition in the early 1390s was genuine—or whether Richard "dissembled." On reflection, however, Stubbs felt that "such a theory is extremely improbable; he was young, impulsive, and at no period of his life capable of self-restraint in small matters."<sup>81</sup> The period of tranquillity soon came to an end and was replaced by renewed political tensions. Anxious to explain the sudden volte-face, Stubbs was struck by "a change in Richard's behaviour, which, whether it were a change of policy or a change of character, seems to have begun to show itself early in 1394."<sup>82</sup> As for precisely what caused this "change in Richard's behaviour," Stubbs thought that it had something to do with the death of Richard's beloved Queen Anne, who died unexpectedly in 1394. Stubbs had earlier noted that, at least in the realm of foreign policy, "the influence of queen Anne of Bohemia may also, as was believed at the time, have led Richard to cultivate the arts of peace."<sup>83</sup> But "the death of the queen removed one good influence about Richard"; and Richard's violent assault on the

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. (my italics). Stubbs made the same observation in his *Germany in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1908), 143: "In France we have the unfortunate Charles VI, not merely, like Richard, liable to a suspicion of insanity, but actually stark mad, and his kingdom for many years ruined by the results of his malady."

<sup>80</sup> See above, n. 66.

<sup>81</sup> *Constitutional History of England*, 487.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 489.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 487–88.

earl of Arundel during Anne's funeral at Westminster was interpreted by Stubbs as "a bad omen."<sup>84</sup>

In Stubbs's opinion, then, it may have been the loss of his queen that was ultimately responsible for a noticeable alteration in Richard's character. Accordingly, in describing Richard's reactions to two events late in his reign, Stubbs inched closer and closer to an outright assessment of mental incompetence on the king's part. The first episode concerned Richard's introduction to the court of his French rival, Charles VI, as a consequence of his marriage to Charles's daughter, Isabel. In describing the gradual deterioration of affairs in Richard's court in the mid-1390s, Stubbs was struck by what he saw as a psychological alteration in Richard's character following the marriage: "From the very moment of the marriage, Richard's policy as well as his character seems to have changed: whether it was that the sight of continental royalty, even in so deplorable a state as that into which it had fallen under Charles VI, wrought in him, as in James V of Scotland, an irresistible craving for absolute power, *or that his mind, already unsettled, was losing its balance altogether. . .*"<sup>85</sup> It may have thus been a natural consequence that, in his heavy-handed actions in convening the "Revenge Parliament" of 1397, Richard may not have been of sound mind. In Stubbs's estimation,

the king's proceedings in this parliament show that, however we may be inclined to account for the temerity of his design by mental excitement or passion . . . [or] whether the result was obtained by long waiting for an opportunity, by labour, and self-restraint and patience, combined with unscrupulous craft and unflinching promptitude of action, or whether it was, *like the cunning of a madman, a violent and reckless attempt to surprise the unwary nation, conceived by an excited brain* and executed without regard to the certainty of a reaction and retribution, it is hard to say.<sup>86</sup>

## II.

Stubbs's reputation and influence among late-Victorian historians were enormous. As V.H. Galbraith has observed, "Our history of medieval England comes to us at least as much from the great reconstructions of Stubbs and Maitland as from the sources direct. They were our teachers, and we are still deeply impregnated with the prejudices of their

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 490.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. (my italics).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 494, 499 (my italics).



period.”<sup>87</sup> Moreover, as Dom David Knowles has pointed out, the *Constitutional History* “made [Stubbs] the master of all those who later broke new ground, and he became as it were father and grandfather of his pupils and pupils’ pupils who developed new trends.”<sup>88</sup>

Of more particular concern is the influence of the Stubbsean portrait of a mentally troubled Richard on historians writing after the appearance of the *Constitutional History*. In the estimation of John Theilmann, “Bishop Stubbs’ *Constitutional History of England* established the orthodox dogma for the interpretation of the reign of Richard II.”<sup>89</sup> As a consequence, the first serious misreadings of Richard’s character were registered even among his own contemporaries. In *A Short History of the English People* (1869), J.R. Green pointed out that “the brilliant abilities which Richard shared with the rest of the Plantagenets were marred by a fitful inconstancy, an insane pride, and a craving for absolute power.”<sup>90</sup> Several years later, in the first volume of his *History of the English People* (1877), Green coupled traditional views with the novel approach of Stubbs. Richard was described on the one hand as “handsome and golden-haired, with a temper capable of great actions and sudden bursts of energy but indolent and unequal.”<sup>91</sup> On the other hand, language remarkably reminiscent of Stubbs was employed to characterize Richard’s behavior after his marriage to Isabel in 1396: “The match was hardly concluded when the veil under which Richard had shrouded his real temper began to be dropped. His craving for absolute power, such as he witnessed in the Court of France, was probably intensified from this moment by a mental disturbance which gathered strength as the months went on.”<sup>92</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Galbraith, “Good Kings and Bad Kings,” 127.

<sup>88</sup> Knowles, “Some Trends in Scholarship,” 144.

<sup>89</sup> Theilmann, “Stubbs, Shakespeare, and Recent Historians,” 109.

<sup>90</sup> John Richard Green, *A Short History of the English People* (London, 1869), 261.

<sup>91</sup> John Richard Green, *History of the English People*, 4 vols. (London, 1877–80), 1: 498; and cf. *ibid.*, 509–10.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 510–11. As an analysis of relevant publication dates reveals, there can be little doubt that Green borrowed Stubbs’s ideas concerning Richard’s character. The first point to be established is that, as we have seen, Stubbs first broached the topic of Richard’s insanity in a lecture delivered in 1869. Secondly, Green’s earliest work, the *Short History*, appeared five years later “at the end of 1874” (*Dictionary of National Biography*, 8: 490). Here, Green makes no connection between Richard’s French marriage and the onset of a mental disturbance; he does, however, incorporate Stubbs’s insinuation of Richard’s insanity. We can, in fact, date nearly to the day the exact time when Green wrote this passage, for he remarks in a letter to E.A. Freeman, dated 11 October 1872, that he had just written “from the end of the Peasant Revolt of 1381 to the end of the ‘New Learning in 1520’” (*Letters of J. R. Green*, ed. Leslie Stephen [New York, 1901], 331). Third, Stubbs’s

The notion of Richard II as mentally weak, popularized by worthies like Stubbs and Green, began to crop up in other works, as well. In J. Langton Sanford's *Estimates of the English Kings* (1872), we find this analysis of Richard's fall in 1399: "The reaction from tutelage had been too great, the suspense of the long-coveted revenge had been too long for not merely his moderation, but his common sense. His mind seems to have given way under the trial and the consummation. . . ." <sup>93</sup> Sentiments similar to these are found in a curious little book, first copyrighted in 1886. In *Richard II*, Jacob Abbot described Richard II's mental state on the eve of his deposition: "While these measures were pending, Richard's mind was in a state of dreadful suspense and agitation. Sometimes he sank into the greatest depths of despondency and gloom, and sometimes he raved like a madman, walking to and fro in his apartment in his phrenzy, vowing vengeance on his enemies." <sup>94</sup>

It might be expected that those historians swimming in Stubbs's enormous wake might be powerless to resist the attraction of his false image of Richard II. But there is really no excuse for historians writing in the 1890s and around the turn of the twentieth century to adopt a similar course. For by that time the practice of history in England had taken a decided turn toward the factual and the scientific; contemporary sources and original evidence carried more weight than ever as the basis for solid history. It has been pointed out that "by the 1880s, histo-

---

*Constitutional History* began to appear two years after this date, although a point worth noting is that Stubbs's radical ideas on Richard's character are found in the second volume—and this did not see the light of day until 1875: *Dictionary of National Biography* (supplement), ed. Sir Sidney Lee, 3 (1912), 447. Fourth, the first volume of Green's larger study, *History of the English People* (1877–80), did not appear until two years after 1875—or in 1877. Here again Green's correspondence is helpful in proving that Green derived his ideas about Richard from Stubbs. In a letter to E.A. Freeman, dated 11 November 1875, Green says: "I went to one of his [i.e., Stubbs's] private lectures, and learnt an awful lot about the politics of Richard II.'s time. . . ." (*Letters*, 423). Then, in a letter to his future wife dated nearly two years later (26 May 1877), Green says: "I have just been finishing and giving the last touches to the close of vol. 1, that is Joan of Arc and the Wars of the Roses. It is a mercy to have really got down so far. This last part from Richard II to 1460 has been a stiffer job than I counted on" (*Letters*, 464). The point is that in each instance where Green attributes Richard's difficulties to some sort of mental disturbance Stubbs had previously—by at least two years—articulated nearly identical ideas. For a useful analysis of Green's approach to the past, see Anthony Brundage, *The People's Historian: John Richard Green and the Writing of History in Victorian England* (Westport, Connecticut, 1994).

<sup>93</sup> J. Langton Sanford, *Estimates of the English Kings* (London, 1872), 154–55. But the older view of Richard's character was still alive in William Smith, ed., *A Smaller History of England* (New York, 1875), 88: "He was not destitute of ability, but a weak judgement and a violent temper rendered him unfit to govern."

<sup>94</sup> Jacob Abbot, *Richard II* (Philadelphia, 1904), 338.

rians had taken several steps toward forming an organized professional discipline in Europe and the United States. . . . Professionalization went hand in hand with the project for a scientific history; professionalization was supposed to guarantee a scientific attitude of detachment. . . . Historians of the end of the nineteenth century conceived scientific history as objective because it was not concerned with philosophy or theory. The facts got priority."<sup>95</sup>

Three major figures in English historiography espoused this new ideal: J.E.E. Dalberg-Acton, Lord Acton; J.B. Bury; and T.F. Tout. Each endeavored to render history a more objective and unbiased enterprise; and each was influenced by prevailing anti-Whig sentiments at work at the turn of the century. Acton argued for a more fact-oriented kind of historical writing, and he was convinced that he had provided historians both "chart and compass for the coming century." As Gertrude Himmelfarb has pointed out, Acton's ambition was "to write a post-Rankean history; a universal history firmly grounded in primary sources, a history combining the largest vision with the most detailed and comprehensive research."<sup>96</sup>

For his part, upon assuming the post of Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge in 1901, J.B. Bury delivered his inaugural lecture on "The Science of History" (1902). In it Bury insisted that "history is a science, no less and no more."<sup>97</sup> His real heroes were "German scholars, principally Niebuhr and Ranke," who had "com-

<sup>95</sup> Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York, 1994), 75. Consider, for example, Mandell Creighton's prefatory note in the first volume of the *English Historical Review* (1886), 4: "The object of history is to discover and set forth facts, and he who confines himself to this object, forbearing acrimonious language, can usually escape the risk of giving offense."

<sup>96</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Victorian Minds* (New York, 1952), 173. As he informed contributors to the *Cambridge Modern History* in a letter dated 12 March 1898, Acton thought that future historians would rise to the new challenge of "the scientific demand for completeness and certainty. . . ." (ibid.). For an analysis of what Acton wanted, see Parker, *English Historical Tradition*, 95: "the scientific demand for completeness and certainty could now be met by scholars using the abundant primary material now available . . . the consequent composite narrative could be so free of bias that, in the oft-quoted words, 'nothing shall reveal the country, the religion, or the party to which the writers belong.'" Consider as well William H. McNeill's remarks in *Lord Acton: Essays in the Liberal Interpretation of History* (Chicago, 1967), xviii: "Acton's influence . . . was far greater than might be expected. More than any other single man, he transplanted German thoroughness and historical method across the Channel. As a result, in the English universities writing history from anything but primary sources became unprofessional after Acton's time." See also Kenyon, *History Men*, 140.

<sup>97</sup> John Bagnell Bury, "The Science of History," in *Selected Essays of J. B. Bury*, ed. Harold Temperley (Amsterdam, 1964), 13.

bined the scientific method with a passionate interest in the national past to make the new history."<sup>98</sup> In the view of Christopher Parker, what really mattered for Bury was that the new history should be based exclusively on causality: "history was a study of causes . . . such study had to be based on 'systematic' and 'minute' analysis of sources and 'microscopic' criticism of those sources."<sup>99</sup> T.F. Tout, steeped in the scientific approach to history by his Oxford tutor Stubbs, also ardently championed the new history. In an article entitled "An Historical 'Laboratory'" (1910), Tout argued that the ideal of the experimental sciences "is no less applicable to history than to physics and chemistry . . . one way of raising the level of the academic study of history in this country is to follow more closely the methods by which British exponents of the physical sciences have made their mark."<sup>100</sup>

In spite of these lofty pronouncements for a new, more accurate, and scientifically oriented approach to the past, historians in the 1890s clung stubbornly to the Stubbsian and post-Stubbsian image of Richard II as mentally imbalanced. For example, Samuel Rawson Gardiner made the point in *A Student's History of England* (1892) that "whether Richard was mad or not, he at all events acted like a madman."<sup>101</sup> Again, during the last decade of the nineteenth century Stubbs's original theory—that it was the death of Queen Anne that might have induced some obscure psychological change in Richard's mind—was adopted by S.D.H. Holton. In a piece entitled "Richard the Redeless" (1896) Holton was of the opinion that "one of the chief causes no doubt of the lamentable transformation in the character of the reign is to be found in the death of 'Good Queen Anne.' Her influence had consistently urged peace, clemency, and self-restraint, and Richard so

<sup>98</sup> Heyck, *Transformation*, 146.

<sup>99</sup> Parker, *English Historical Tradition*, 95. In an essay on "Darwinism and History," Bury put it this way: "Once history is envisaged as a causal process, which contains within itself the explanation of the development of man from his primitive state to the point which he has reached, such a process necessarily becomes the object of scientific investigation and the interest in it is scientific curiosity" (*Selected Essays of J. B. Bury*, 27). For a revisionist assessment of Bury as "spokesman and advocate of 'the science of history,'" see Doris S. Goldstein, "J. B. Bury's Philosophy of History: A Reappraisal," *American Historical Review* 82 (1977), 896–919.

<sup>100</sup> *The Collected Papers of Thomas Frederick Tout*, 3 vols. (Manchester, 1932–34), 1: 79–80. For a good assessment of Tout's concept of a "scientific method" as "an unsystematic, commonsense approach, learnt from experience like a craft, and dependent as much on a disciplined 'imagination' as on induction for any conclusions it might draw from the available facts," see Parker, *English Historical Tradition*, 93. For Tout's assessment of the character of Richard II see note 131, below.

<sup>101</sup> Samuel Rawson Gardiner, *A Student's History of England* (London, 1892), 283.

deeply felt her loss that his mind was perhaps unhinged by the intensity of his grief. The course of extravagance into which he plunged after her decease, and which of course did but complicate his difficulties, may well have been a symptom of his mental suffering. . . .”<sup>102</sup>

In addition, some of Richard’s more sensational episodes were increasingly interpreted as signs of mental imbalance. For instance, in *England in the Age of Wycliffe: 1368–1520* (1899), George M. Trevelyan gave an account of Richard’s behavior in 1384 after having been informed by a Carmelite friar of a suspected plot against his life by John of Gaunt. Trevelyan says that so furious was Richard that he “burst into hysterical fury, threw his cap and slippers out of the window, and flung himself about the room like a madman.”<sup>103</sup> Even more, Trevelyan used similarly slanted language to describe how Richard was forcibly restrained from running through the archbishop of Canterbury during an encounter on the Thames in 1385. A tragedy was prevented, we are told, only by the actions of Michael de la Pole, who “had the good sense to prevent such insanity.”<sup>104</sup>

At the dawn of the twentieth century the discipline of history—not to mention the myth of Richard’s insanity—was influenced by yet another aspect of the increasingly appealing sciences, in this case, the new psychological sciences. This was partly owing to the enthusiasm of philosophers. Following on the heels of Positivism and Darwinism, philosophers like Nietzsche, Bergson, James, and others “discovered a realm of secret, irrational powers and undercurrents behind the stream of consciousness, the ineluctable presence of attitudes, interests, purposes, and unconscious drives behind the facade of reason.”<sup>105</sup> This was also owing to the efforts of historians like Wilhelm Dilthey. Dilthey

<sup>102</sup> S.D.H. Holton, “Richard the Redeless,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, n.s. 10 (1896), 128. A more restrained view was offered by Agnes Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England from the Norman Conquest*, 16 vols. (Philadelphia, 1902–03), 2: 291: “It is probable that if the existence of this beloved queen had been spared, the calamities and crimes of Richard’s future years would have been averted by her mild advice.”

<sup>103</sup> George M. Trevelyan, *England in the Age of Wycliffe* (London, 1899), 276. Trevelyan could not have known that the editor of the *editio princeps* of Malvern’s *Polychronicon* continuation had provided a faulty transcription of the text. For a nearly identical reading of the passage in Malvern, see Sir James Ramsay, *The Genesis of Lancaster 1307–99*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1913), 2: 214. Trevelyan’s later (1926) description of Richard’s character is presented below, p. 22. n. 130.

<sup>104</sup> *England in the Age of Wycliffe*, 283–84.

<sup>105</sup> Hans Meyerhoff, *The Philosophy of History in our Time* (Garden City, New York, 1959), 15. For an informative overview of the interconnections between philosophy and history at the turn of the century see Ernst Breisach, *Historiography* (Chicago, 1983), 341–42.

strove both to maintain the momentum of the new historicism, and to employ new psychological insights in the study of historical figures. What he meant to develop was a “descriptive and analytic psychology,” with special emphasis upon “the dynamic interconnections of psychological process, upon meaningful patterns in perception, thought, and behavior, and upon structural units and types as the characteristic modes of the mind.”<sup>106</sup>

Even more influential in the long run in calling attention to psychological dimensions in the study of history was the pioneering work of Sigmund Freud. What Freud is most well known for, of course, is his role—however unintentional—in launching a new approach in historical studies known as “psychohistory.” As William McKinley Runyan points out, “the history of psychohistory is traditionally defined as beginning with Freud’s study *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood* (1910).”<sup>107</sup> Anxious to account for Leonardo’s bruited homosexuality, Freud based his analysis upon one of Leonardo’s childhood memories: “. . . while I was in my cradle a vulture came down to me, and opened my mouth with its tail, and struck me many times with its tail against my lips.”<sup>108</sup> When examined “with the eyes of a psychoanalyst,” the meaning of this revelation was quite plain: “The phantasy, of a vulture opening the child’s mouth and beating about inside it vigorously with its tail, corresponds to the idea of an act of fellatio, a sexual act in which the penis is put into the mouth of the person involved . . . this reminiscence . . . has been transformed by the man Leonardo into a passive homosexual phantasy.”<sup>109</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Meyerhoff, *Philosophy of History*, 17. In his own words, Dilthey put it this way: “Life, experience of life and the human studies are . . . constantly related and interacting. It is not conceptual procedure which forms the foundation of the human studies but the becoming aware of a mental state in its totality and the rediscovering of it by empathy. . . . The secret of personality lures us on to new attempts at a deeper understanding for its own sake” (cited in *Meaning in History*, ed. H.P. Rickman [New York, 1961], 79, 111). A detailed look at Dilthey’s incorporation of psychology into his study of the past is afforded in Jacob Owensby, *Dilthey and the Narrative of History* (Ithaca, New York, 1994), 108–09.

<sup>107</sup> *Psychology & Historical Interpretation*, ed. William McKinley Runyan (New York, 1988), 12.

<sup>108</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, trans. Alan Tyson (New York, 1964), 32.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 35–37. Freud continues: “What the phantasy conceals is merely a reminiscence of sucking—or being suckled—at his mother’s breast. . . .” (p. 37). Leonardo so loved his mother, according to Freud, that her death drove him to an “obsessional neurosis” (*ibid.*, 55). From all of this Freud can only conclude that “the homosexual situation in his phantasy of the vulture” has only one meaning: “It was through this erotic relation with my mother that I became a homosexual” (*ibid.*, 56). Freud had already set out in this twisted direction in his “Character and Anal Eroticism” (1908), *Standard Edition*, 9: 167–75.

In the case of Leonardo, what Freud suggested was that “the discovery of the *unconscious* part of the mind, the larger part, and its working gave the psychoanalyst a scientific framework for studying history.”<sup>110</sup> In other words: “I perceived ever more clearly that the events of human history . . . are no more than a reflection of the dynamic conflicts between the ego, the id, and the superego, which psychoanalysis studies in the individual. . . .”<sup>111</sup> For psychohistorians, then, “the central position of the unconscious mind in psychoanalysis and psychohistory cannot be overemphasized.”<sup>112</sup>

Not long after the publication of Freud’s *Leonardo*, often referred to as the first example of psychohistorical analysis, biographical studies written according to the new vogue of “psychohistory” began to make their appearance.<sup>113</sup> One of the earliest of this genre was Preserved Smith’s “Luther’s Early Development in the Light of Psychoanalysis” (1913). After remarking that “nowadays in all lines men are turning less than formerly to dramatic incident, and more to psychological struggle; less to the outward phenomenon and more to the inward cause,” Smith observed that “the sexual life of the child begins sooner than is realized by most adults, cut off from their infancy by a curtain of amnesia. . . .”<sup>114</sup> In Luther’s case, Smith observed that “Luther is a thoroughly typical example of the neurotic, quasi-hysterical sequence of an infantile sex-complex; so much so, indeed, that Sigmund Freud and his school could hardly have found a better example to illustrate the sounder part of their theory than him.”<sup>115</sup>

But when, and in what form, did Freudian psychoanalysis first make its appearance in Britain? According to R.D. Hinshelwood, “the first indication of [Freud’s] psychological interests was an account of the first Breuer and Freud paper (published in Vienna in January 1893)

<sup>110</sup> Philip Pomper, *The Structure of Mind in History* (New York, 1985), 29.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 30. Summing it all up, Breisach has put it in these terms: “Psychohistorians were not the first to discover that the inner world of human beings helped shape events. . . . Nevertheless psychohistory is a thoroughly modern endeavor which owes its present status to the quest for a science of human behavior, to the strong individualism in contemporary Western culture, and to the inclination to view order as originating at least to a high degree in the mind of the observer rather than being a feature of the observed world. In such a view psychological forces assume overwhelming importance because they in a sense create the ‘outside’ reality and its order” (*Historiography*, 341).

<sup>113</sup> Runyan, *Psychology*, 12. For a judicious review of the case for and against the use of psychoanalysis in historical study, see Peter Gay, *Freud for Historians* (New York, 1985).

<sup>114</sup> Preserved Smith, “Luther’s Early Development in the Light of Psychoanalysis,” *American Journal of Psychology* 24 (1913), 360.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

that was given some three months later by F.W.H. Myers at a general meeting of the Society for Psychical Research and printed in their *Proceedings* for June of that year."<sup>116</sup> Freudian theories were first introduced into clinical practice only in 1905 by Ernest Jones, described by Hinshelwood as "virtually the creator of the therapeutic practice of psychoanalysis in Britain."<sup>117</sup> It was Jones, in fact, who in 1913 created the London Psycho-Analytical Society, which was disbanded in 1919 and then renamed the British Psycho-Analytical Society.<sup>118</sup> By 1914, as L.S. Hearnshaw has noted, "however much denigrated by the medical profession, psychoanalysis had taken root in Great Britain . . . psychoanalysis silently percolated into the ken of British psychologists, medical men and philosophers in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of the First World War."<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, it was the Great War itself that spurred on further development of psychoanalysis, with its creation of "shell shock" cases among soldiers; "psychoanalysis was to become in the post-war period of the 1920's and 1930's a major intellectual movement, by no means confined to medical circles."<sup>120</sup>

Another British group interested in Freudian theories of psychoanalysis was the Society for Psychical Research. In 1912, Freud published a paper in the Society's *Proceedings*, and it seems likely that it was through his contacts with the Society that J.C. Flugel, a psychologist at University College, London, first developed an interest in psychoanalysis.<sup>121</sup> Flugel's study "On the Character and Married Life of Henry VIII" (1920) marked the first real application of psychoanalytic theories to the study of English kingship. Early on, Flugel observed that, in an attempt to uncover a "common cause" for "the long series of Henry's matrimonial experiences" it occurred to him that one such cause "is to be found largely in certain constant features of Henry's mental life and character, the proper understanding of which concerns the psychologist as much as the historian."<sup>122</sup> What does Flugel have in

<sup>116</sup> R.D. Hinshelwood, "Psychoanalysis in Britain: Points of Cultural Access, 1893–1918," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 76 (1995), 135.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> L.S. Hearnshaw, *A Short History of British Psychology 1840–1940* (London, 1964), 164–65.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>121</sup> Hinshelwood, "Psychoanalysis in Britain," 141.

<sup>122</sup> J.C. Flugel, "On the Character and Married Life of Henry VIII," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 1 (1920), 24–55; as cited in *Psychoanalysis and History*, ed. Bruce Mazlish (New York, 1963), 125.



mind? Operating on the mind of the youthful Henry were not only the struggles of his father to maintain power, but also the realization that his parents' marriage was not a happy one. Considered together we see that "the conditions were thus favorable . . . for the development of a powerful Oedipus complex—i.e., the desire to get rid of the father and possess the mother in his stead. . . ." <sup>123</sup> Saddled with this powerful, yet unconscious, complex, Henry was therefore bound to experience an unhappy love life. For a long time Henry was able to exclude knowledge of Catherine's "loose living" from his conscious mind. But "when this knowledge did at length enter consciousness, he was overcome by his feelings, in much the same way as the bringing to light of unconscious factors in the course of psychoanalysis will often give rise to an emotional crisis." <sup>124</sup>

Against the background of these increasingly influential psychoanalytical theories it is instructive to note some subtle alterations in descriptions of Richard II's mental state. What is most apparent is the description of many of Richard's actions in new, psychological terminologies. For instance, in pondering the question "Did Richard II Murder the Duke of Gloucester?" (1902), James Tait wondered aloud whether Richard's mind was "ill-balanced, perhaps diseased." <sup>125</sup> Then, in a curious work by Reverend Lacy O'Leary, *England Under Richard II* (1908), we learn that "undoubtedly Richard had a taint of mental weakness, which showed itself in fits of passion, and, in his later years, by periods of profound depression." <sup>126</sup> Consider as well Arthur D. Innes's *History of England and the British Empire* (1913): "For Richard, a brain specialist could make out a very good case for insanity of a subtle order, based upon his sudden irrational outbursts of passion, the abnormal ingenuity of his cunning, and the violent alterations between what the Greeks called hybris . . . and helpless despair." <sup>127</sup>

A more disturbing assessment of Richard as insane was offered in Kenneth Vickers's *England in the Later Middle Ages* (1914). First of all, Vickers copied and repeated Trevelyan's idea that in the matter of the Carmelite friar's story in 1384, Richard's behavior was all too typical of his mounting madness: "Unfortunately he expended much of his energy

---

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 137–38.

<sup>125</sup> James Tait, "Did Richard II Murder the Duke of Gloucester?" in *Historical Essays by Members of Owens College, Manchester*, ed. T.F. Tout and James Tait (London, 1902), 197.

<sup>126</sup> Rev. De Lacy O'Leary, *England Under Richard II* (London, 1908), 109.

<sup>127</sup> Arthur D. Innes, *A History of England and the British Empire*, 4 vols. (New York, 1913), 1: 383.

in ungovernable fits of temper, in which he would throw his hood or his boots out of the window, and behave in every respect like a maniac."<sup>128</sup> Again repeating an earlier notion that began with Stubbs, Vickers thought that the death of Queen Anne in 1394 marked "a change in the king," but that the real change in Richard's behavior occurred only in 1397, when the king suddenly struck against his enemies in the so-called "Revenge Parliament": "though he was undoubtedly unbalanced, his vagaries were no more than can be accounted for by the intoxication of success acting on a character that had never known real discipline."<sup>129</sup>

Interpretations of Richard's mental state underwent even further alterations in the 1920s. Thus, the notion popularized earlier by Stubbs, Holton, and Ramsay that Anne's death in 1394 had precipitated some sort of psychological change in Richard's character was revived by two histories published in these years. In *History of England* (1926) G.M. Trevelyan followed rather closely these earlier views: "Richard, indeed, had already governed well for half-a-dozen years, so long as his violent passions had been restrained by his affections for his first wife, Anne of Bohemia. But after her death some obscure psychological change destroyed his nerve and judgement. . . ." <sup>130</sup> True to form, Trevelyan's depiction, down to the very words, was afterward adopted wholesale by

---

<sup>128</sup> Kenneth H. Vickers, *England in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1914), 267. Vickers's casual approach to his sources is revealed in yet another way. In addition to citing Malvern's text in Higden's *Polychronicon*, Vickers also cites "*Anominal Chron.*, 202." Unfortunately, no reference to this sensational episode is found in *The Anonimale Chronicle, 1333–1381*, ed. V.H. Galbraith (Manchester, 1927). See, however, Charles Oman, *Political History of England* (New York, 1918), 150–51, where no mention is made of Richard's mental illness: Richard's "temper on any given occasion was incalculable. Energy and apathy, over-confidence and abject depression came to him at the inappropriate moments. . . . He was a creature of moods, and his moods always visited him at the wrong time."

<sup>129</sup> *England in the Later Middle Ages*, 294, 289. In a work published only a year earlier, however, less emphasis is placed on Anne's death. See Ramsay, *Genesis of Lancaster*, 1: 295: "her premature death deprived the King of a gentle soothing influence, and left him free to run his mad career. His passionate grief betrayed the petulance of a spoiled child."

<sup>130</sup> G.M. Trevelyan, *History of England*, 3 vols. (New York, 1926), 1: 334. What with this mechanical parroting of earlier wrong-headed views of Richard's character, one wonders how this squares with the assertion of his latest biographer that "all his life Trevelyan insisted on the primacy of original, archival research, as the only way in which historians could hope to find what they were looking for: the truth about the past. . . . From first to last Trevelyan considered himself a research historian, and while others have disputed this claim, he was in essence correct" (David Cannadine, *G. M. Trevelyan: A Life in History* [London, 1992], 185). For a concurring view, see Henry R. Winkler, "George Macaulay Trevelyan," in *Some 20th-Century Historians*, ed. S. William Halperin (Chicago, 1961), 33.

Clive Bigham, *The Kings of England, 1066–1901* (1929): “[Anne’s death] caused an immense scandal, and from this moment some obscure psychological change seems to have destroyed Richard’s nerve and judgment; for the rest of his reign he made almost every mistake possible.”<sup>131</sup>

This brings us to Anthony Steel’s *Richard II*. Looking back over a seventy-year tradition of Richard as mentally disturbed, Steel must have thought it only natural to limn his subject’s portrait in psychohistorical terminology. Consider, for example, Steel’s analysis of the youthful Richard II. Although Steel says little about Richard’s relationship with his mother, of Richard’s father—the Black Prince—we are told that Richard “admired him far too much.” And, although “Richard cannot in fact have seen very much of his father . . . he could not help being brought up under the shadow of a name not only great, but great in certain specific respects.”<sup>132</sup> For, just as the Black Prince had distinguished himself in feats of knightly prowess, so would he raise his son in his own image, “despite the physical incapacity suggested by the surviving portraits, which seem to indicate a build too slight for the requirements of knight errantry, and despite the nervous temperament which he can hardly have failed to observe.”<sup>133</sup> So “the imposition from an early age of his father’s standards of physical prowess as the sole avenue to distinction must have weighed heavily upon him,” and since “Richard possessed a sensitive, and far from unintelligent, but at the same time a lazy and profoundly conventional mind, and it would not have occurred to him at any time to reject what all his circle not

<sup>131</sup> Clive Bigham, *The Kings of England, 1066–1901* (London, 1929), 171. See also Charles Petit-Dutaillis and Georges Lefebvre, *Studies and Notes Supplementary to Stubbs’ Constitutional History*, 4 vols. (Manchester, 1911–30), 3: 310: “Richard II was unbalanced.” The notion of Richard II as mentally troubled even inspired a new play, *Richard of Bordeaux*, by Gordon Daviot (Elizabeth MacKintosh) (New York, 1933), 73. Under yet another pseudonym (Josephine Tey), MacKintosh published the enormously successful *The Daughter of Time* (New York, 1951). At nearly the same time there appeared a novel based on the life and reign of Richard II: Gillian Oliver’s *The Broomscod Collar* (London, 1930). In a hilarious misreading of her sources, Oliver has neither Richard, nor the friar, but *Robert de Vere* “seizing his hat and shoes and hurling them out of the window” (p. 47). Unlike his more theatrical contemporaries, T.F. Tout, while admitting that “one primary cause of Richard’s failure was his personal character,” was reluctant to venture too far beyond that—certainly not into the twilight world of alleged insanity. Thus, says Tout, “Some kingly qualities he undoubtedly possessed, but he lacked the elasticity, the pertinacity and the common sense required for a successful ruler” (*Chapters in the Administrative History of Mediaeval England*, 6 vols. [Manchester, 1920–33], 4: 32). More to the point, Tout refrains from assigning to Anne’s death the inception of any sort of mental disorder (*ibid.*, 231–32).

<sup>132</sup> Steel, *Richard II*, 40–41.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

only admitted but insisted on. . . . So the conflict of two ideals incompatible in his case remained to torture him all his days. . . .”<sup>134</sup>

All of this was bad enough. Even worse, Steel then proceeded to incorporate *nolens volens* into his narrative earlier psychological interpretations of key events in Richard’s reign. Accordingly, Steel became convinced, no doubt influenced by the earlier, Stubbsean idea that the real crisis in Richard’s life was the loss of Queen Anne in 1394. Steel notes first of all that the “great series of shocks to Richard’s theory of the regality, the one fixed point in his life to which he clung to the end,” represented by his encounters with the Appellants in the mid-to-late 1380s, “even apart from his peculiar and solitary childhood and the violent disturbance of his adolescent life in 1381, would be more than enough to cause the growth of a neurosis. . . .”<sup>135</sup> But the drift toward a mental breakdown, “checked at first by the support and sympathy of Anne,” became “much more rapid in its development after her death,” and

in any case a schizoid mind of Richard’s type suffers in times of mental stress from a feeling that the outer world has less and less reality. . . . By 1394 Anne was probably the only feature of the outside world which was altogether real to Richard, and could therefore, intermittently at least, make other features real to him, that is give to reality a life deserving some consideration apart from his own fantasy. Anne’s function was therefore not to keep Richard morally “good” or constitutionally orthodox but to keep him sane. After her death the neurosis deepened rapidly. . . .”<sup>136</sup>

Steel further observes that so morose had Richard become after Anne’s death that he ordered the partial destruction of her favorite manor-house, in which she had died; for Steel, this is evidence that Richard had become “progressively more unbalanced, reckless and impatient after her death than he had ever been before it; his neurosis rapidly took hold. . . . the course of Richard’s mental disease was certainly accelerated from 1394. . . .”<sup>137</sup>

So rapidly and profoundly, continues Steel, did his neurosis take control of him, that Richard wobbled out of control in the later period of his reign, eventually losing all touch with reality. When confronted

---

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 41–42.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 174–75. For more of the same, cf. *ibid.*, 213: “Richard was by this date probably neurotic, and his disease may well have led him to exaggerate his precautions against a renewal of the commission of 1386 and of the merciless parliament.”

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 203–04.

by the allegations contained in Thomas Haxey's petition in the January parliament of 1397, Richard's "most deep-seated neurosis was galvanised at once into activity, and his fear and fury . . . his sudden and impulsive temper, or perhaps the progress of his disease, prevented him from being satisfied with anything short of extreme measures. . . ." <sup>138</sup> Then, when finally captured by Bolingbroke at Flint castle in 1399, Richard "had fallen into a waking coma from which he never wholly emerged. . . . It was the last stage of his illness; the regality had grown until it had swallowed the entire world. . . . In August 1399 at Flint the magic mirror was broken and it is probable that the force of the reaction turned Richard into a mumbling neurotic, sinking rapidly into a state of acute melancholia, in which he could offer only the feeblest of resistance from the first, while before long it would be totally impossible to rouse him." <sup>139</sup>

To sum up. In the final analysis this study has illuminated not only the historiographical tradition of Richard II as insane in particular, but also Victorian and early twentieth-century approaches to history in general. We have seen that Victorian historians, not least among them William Stubbs, were initially interested in morality and character-development. They soon became infatuated with evolving nineteenth-century notions of psychology, and with the possibilities latent within them for a better understanding of the characters—and thus the motives—of important figures in history. Surrounded by these all-pervasive ideas, Stubbs succumbed to their influence—and to scattered, veiled hints concerning Richard's weak mental condition. No wonder, then, that the false idea of Richard's insanity was originally conceived in the mind of William Stubbs. Then—owing principally to Stubbs's powerful reputation—the Stubbsean description of Richard's troubled mental state was eagerly adopted as the orthodox portrait of Richard's character by Stubbs's impressionable contemporaries and successors.

Notwithstanding the inadequacies of the later Victorians, this study has cast nearly equal doubt on the historiographical practices of their more modern twentieth-century counterparts. At the dawn of the twentieth century, Lord Acton self-confidently asserted that the new science of history could only mean that "we approach the final stage in the conditions of historical learning."<sup>140</sup> Contrary to all expectations, however, and in spite of their professed interest in a more objective assessment of the past, it could be argued that twentieth-century histo-

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 225, 227.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 278–79.

<sup>140</sup> Parker, *English Historical Tradition*, 95.

rians were even more guilty than their Victorian forebears in perpetuating the myth of an insane Richard II. It was bad enough that, in blind-following-the-blind fashion, twentieth-century historians accepted and passed on Victorian distortions of Richard's character. But it was even worse that moderns succumbed to the seductive allure of Freudian theories of psychohistory. As a result, twentieth-century "scientific" historians have produced in the end a portrait of Richard's character more bizarre, surreal, and far-fetched than anything that preceded it. The case of Richard II and his character would seem to corroborate, then, the remarks of Sir Herbert Butterfield concerning the ultimate failure of twentieth-century historiography:

In spite of all the things we say about the victory of the scientific method and the superiority of the twentieth century over its predecessors, it is possible that in these days the reading of history has become less critical than it once was, the reviewing of books less scientific, and the faith in accepted "authorities" more unthinking.<sup>141</sup>

---

<sup>141</sup> Sir Herbert Butterfield, *George III and the Historians* (London, 1957), 8.