

# Shakespeare's Richard II Essay: The Rape of a Nation

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Richard II - The Rape of a Nation  
By bowing down to the needs of his subjects, a king allows others to dictate his actions and hence compromises the essence of his power. Paradoxically, failing to heed the desires of his subjects transforms a king into a self-indulgent tyrant and propels his kingdom towards ruin and decay. Can a sovereign rule his subjects without considering their general welfare? If a king rules unconscionably, do his subjects have the right to replace him? William Shakespeare's Richard II considers this authoritarian quandary at great length. In particular, John of Gaunt's "other Eden" monologue (2.1.31-68) delves into the perilous nature of unfettered autocracy. Gaunt proclaims that King Richard should relinquish his crown, because he has figuratively raped "mother" England by exploiting the loyalty of his subjects and debasing the grandeur of "this blessed plot" (2.1.50) for his own personal glory. John of Gaunt's speech takes place from his deathbed. This setting heightens the resonance of his denouncement of Richard, for as Gaunt says, "Where words are scarce they are seldom spent in vain / For they breathe truth that breathe their words in pain" (2.1.8-9). By referring to himself as "a prophet new-inspired," (2.1.31) Gaunt realizes his opportunity to speak with immunity, since there is no physical harm Richard can do him. Every disparaging truth he utters is a lethal arrow aimed directly at Richard's overblown sense of power. The first section of his monologue deals explicitly with identifying the nature of Richard's vices. Gaunt alludes to

Richard's character by employing several brief end-stopped aphorisms that rely heavily on metaphors of self-destruction. This staccato like ..... middle of paper .....se very problems not only signified a fundamental change in the concept of autocratic rule in England, it also paved the way for the development of a more socially equitable system of parliamentary democracy, for once the will of the people is finally recognized, kings are reduced to mere anachronisms. When kings the sword of justice first lay down, They are no kings, though they possess the crown. Titles are shadows, crowns are empty things, The good of subjects is the end of kings. --Daniel Defoe Works Cited Defoe, Daniel. The True-Born Englishman 2.313. From Bartlett's Familiar Quotations. 15th ed. Ed. Emily Morrison Beck. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980, 318. Shakespeare, William. Richard II. The Norton Shakespeare. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997, 943-1014.

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