

HVI

A Tragedy in Three Acts

Working Draft

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Non Nobis, Domine.

The Cast

Five Riot Policemen/ The Chorus/ Security/ Council/ Bomber/Rioters/Reporters/A Lawyer
Chorus Leader/ First Guard/ Royal Counselor/ Bomber/ Dick the Butcher/Reporter
The Warden/ Royal Counselor/ Filthy old Vet/ John Talbot
Joan of Arc/ Eleanor Cobham/ A Widowed Fishwife
Announcer/ Bob the Cobbler
Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester (Humphrey)
Henry Beaufort, Cardinal and Bishop of Winchester (Beaufort)
John Plantagenet, Duke of Bedford (Plantagenet)
Henry VI (Henry)
Margaret of Anjou, Queen (Margaret)
William De La Pole, Duke of Suffolk (Suffolk)
Richard, Duke of York (York)
Richard, Son of York (York's son)
Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset (Somerset)
Jack Cade (Cade)

NOTE: The noble characters refer to each other by their titles from time to time, or by the names of their great fiefdoms. Thus Humphrey might, at times, be called “Gloucester” by his peers, or William De La Pole is called “Suffolk.”

When chorus members take roles, it is suggested that they walk up to the stage from their seats in the audience, put on the badge of their role (dark glasses in the case of Beaufort’s bodyguards, cudgels and signs in the case of Cade’s mob) and return to their seats when their part is through.

A Note on Masks

Masked roles

Five Riot Policemen/ The Chorus/ Security / Council/ Bomber/ Rioters/Reporters/A Lawyer
The Chorus members will wear a mask for each role. They are never without a mask.

Chorus Leader/ First Guard/ Royal Counselor/ Reporter
This actor plays DICK THE BUTCHER, unmasked.

The Warden/ Royal Counselor/Filthy old Vet
This actor plays JOHN TALBOT, unmasked

Eleanor Cobham / A Widowed Fishwife
This actor plays JOAN OF ARC, unmasked

Announcer
This actor plays BOB THE COBBLER, unmasked

All the other actors play their roles unmasked.

The masked roles are archetypes, for the most part – they are not characters as much as they are embodied principles. This play is a historical tragedy, and my use of masks is in keeping with that tradition. The presence of masks is not a license for mummery and ham acting. Please protect your actors from turning into circus mimes.

The masks need not be elaborate, but each role should have its own mask. I would prefer that the masks not obscure or obstruct the lower part of the actor's face. Keep the masks simple and undistracting. Comic book colors and bizarre geometric shapes, or attempts to communicate the roles with cartoonish symbolism are antithetical to the intended spirit of this work. Glitter and feathers are forbidden, and if I have to explain why, I'd appreciate it if you'd drop this script in the nearest trash bin and forget about it entirely.

Prologue

The audience is rudely ushered in by six men in riot police uniforms with shields and flashlight-batons. When the play is about to begin, they will rhythmically beat their batons on their shields as the house lights go down. Police flashers and the flashlights of the riot police are the only illumination throughout the Prologue.

The Riot Policemen remove their helmets and become the Chorus. The Chorus is distributed throughout the audience, quite far from each other. The number of Chorus members who speak each line should correspond to the number of beats in the line. They stand when they deliver their lines and remain standing. While they are speaking, they illuminate their own faces with their flashlights.

The Chorus Leader is one of the Riot Policemen. He will come to the front of the audience to deliver his lines.

Henry (from offstage):

Domine Jesu Christe, qui me creasti, redemisti, et preordinasti ad hoc quod sum, tu scis quid de me facere vis: fac de me secundum voluntatem tuam cum misericordia. Amen.

Chorus:

The king is dead.
And glory shares his shroud.

None dare say so aloud
But fearful sidelong looks reach toward the throne.

The new king has not made the crown his own.
Ambition stoops to test its ragged wings

Chaos churns beneath the feet of kings.
The ancient landmarks shatter,

The charters are in tatters
Yet still, he lives.

Chorus Leader:

The king who's mighty in the cause of law,
Can then afford to show a gentle hand.
He must not thirst for blood, nor pine for peace.
The master of his time, never its slave.

A timid, pious man given to prayer
Now wears the holy crown. It fits him not.
Birth alone has put this ill-starred man
Into the saddle of the nation-state.

Behind the dullard's ineffectual throne
Men of ambition rule by mongering fear.
And any who dare question their misrule
Are told they hate their country and despised.

Blood of the good and brave is spent for nothing
God is invoked to justify their crimes.
Slander is their only spoken language
They grasp at empire in the name of peace.

Chorus:

But nothing's changed.
Man is still wolf to man.

The fractious partisan
Can never bear peace on his bristling back.

His soul must make new demons to attack.
The empire cannot last without the war

Thus blood and tears today – and evermore
Here's where our tale begins.

The first of many sins;
Murdering Joan.

The police flashers go out.

Act I

Scene 1

JOAN is dragged into the theatre by FIRST AND SECOND GUARDS through the audience. She wears manacles and an orange prison jumpsuit. THE WARDEN follows close behind. The other Guards follow. This entire dialogue takes place as the struggling, defiant Joan is dragged toward the stage. Only the Guards' flashlights provide illumination.

Warden:

Walk steady, woman, no one witnessing
This act came here to see a spectacle.

Joan:

The spectacle you motherfuckers made!
Only at the edge of death you grant
Some filthy ration of false dignity!
Go fuck your wretched self, I'm an ingrate!

First Guard:

There is nothing pretty in you, whore.
Your hands drip honest blood and traitor's sweat.
Go to God and then your ration's right!

Joan:

Carry this (*spits on him*) and with it my regard.
I never said I did not merit death
Your kind betrays our faith, then calls on God
That gallows god deserves your loyalty.

First Guard:

Rave all you want. Your next lover's a worm.

Joan:

As by your soul, your mother's first one was.

He kicks her leg savagely. She falls to the floor, laughing at him – a derisive bark. He begins kicking her in the stomach.

First Guard:

You bitch! You whore! Cocksucking piece of shit!

Joan:

Your mother lies before you, eating it.

Warden:

Now have you both forsaken all your wits?
We go to face a hundred-headed ogre
A hundred thousand eyes will gaze on us
And shout to all the world our gaping flaws

To shove into the ever roaring maw
The appetite the public has for Death
As if Death could be kept inside the box
They give their worship, hours, and children's eyes.

Joan:

You have cause to fear your children's eyes.
I was not born a rebel, Blood taught me
To hate the falseness of your foreign laws.
The day will come when all your filthy crimes
Will hang around your neck in public light

The brutal beating escalates, being careful not to hit her face.

You cannot break me. I am always free.
My flesh you poison, but the memory
Of courage and defiance of your rule
Will poison history against your name.

First Guard:

I will cease because I would not grant
One drop of pity from the public eye
To this corrupted, gross inhuman thing
That writhes here in such insufficient pain.

Joan:

Take these chains from me, and face me fair!
I'll soon show you whose pain is lacking here!

Warden:

Cease Joan. You have said all you will say.
I do regret this last indignity.
You must be stopped from speech, vulgarity
Is not appropriate in such a scene.

He shows her the gag.

Joan:

You cannot do this! God! It is the law!
You cannot take my final voice away!

Warden:

Your statement is already sent abroad
To all the public eyes and ears that wait
To hear of your repentance, come too late.
Banalities about your faith in God.
A plaintive, useless plea for clemency.
A maudlin farewell to your family.

Joan:

I never said! I never once did plead!
Oh this is murder, and the corpse defiled!

Warden:

You made yourself the standard of revolt.
The standard has been captured. It is ours
And we will wave it as it suits our cause.

Joan:

No. Please no. You rape my memory.
You ravage what small blessing courage earns.

First Guard:

Speak not of rape. We cannot rape a whore.

Warden:

Play not the fool. The law admits you can.

He gestures. The Guards gag a weeping and spent Joan.

Warden:

Dignity is all that's left to you.
Die bravely, and your death will serve our cause.
Die a coward and you suit us more.

You dared raise up defiance to the crown
That ruled your land by every legal right
So now, you die. A sacrifice to peace,
Obedience and order in our land.
You served a worthy purpose after all.

Our country brought such liberty to yours
That you were free to do all that we wished.
Free to produce, to recreate, and cheer
The spectacles we willingly provide.

But that was not acceptable to you.
An ingrate and a senseless rebel fool.
You wanted to determine your own days.
To choose your gods and rulers for yourselves!

You fond and fickle fools who dare this dream
If your pathetic revolution won
In half a moon or less, you'd be the Warden
And leading a new rebel off to die.

You know so little of the lawful ape
That you would rule with Liberty and Truth.
Rulers and ruled, bedeck it how you may
Is how the ape will have it, and the rule
Is only rule as long as Death and Pain
Remain the loyal ministers of State.

Justice and Liberty are to be rationed,
As our time and necessity allow.
Legitimacy is the whore of power
The world's true history does make that plain.

We do not rule you by a claim of right,
For all the pretty mouthings that we do.
We rule because we can. Because we will.
Our will is done – and by our will you die.

Spotlight DSC on a lethal injection apparatus. Joan is strapped to the gurney, she cries out as the needles are very professionally put into her veins. The gurney is elevated so the audience can see her.

Warden:

By order of the warrant herein read,
Having been sentenced duly for your crimes,

And by the judges lawful order, here
And with consent of the Governor,
You, Joan of Arc, once called Pucelle, will die.
May God have mercy on your mortal soul.

He gestures. A lever is thrown.

We watch her die.

Blackout

Scene 2

A corporate elite conference room. A large conference table with five chairs, SC. A large vase full of white and red roses, on the center of the table. A modern telephone. On the wall USC, a corporate logo "ENGLAND." Two video monitors, USL and DSR. On the USL video monitor, a map of France with the provinces colored either Red (ENGLAND) or Blue (FRANCE). On the other, scenes of modern warfare.

HUMPHREY is seated at the end of the conference table, looking at the monitor, suppressing a small smile.

AN ANNOUNCER appears on the USL monitor.

Announcer:

The terrorist of Orleans, Joan, is dead.
Justly poisoned, by the law's command.
A full day given to thanksgiving prayers
Is ordered by Beaufort, our Card'nal duke.
To give thanks for deliv'rance from this fiend.

Humphrey:

Ah, Beaufort. Fool. Do you believe she's gone?
For years you have infested public chairs
And claimed to be the voice of public weal
You have not learned that martyrs never sleep?

You've merely made a myth into a god.
Alive, a hero can be shoved from grace
Or greasy undersides be well exposed
Or failing that, a sharp, well-crafted lie
Can do what neither blade nor bullet could.

But Joan? Ah, what that cursed warden did,
That half-cocked fool ordered her body burnt
And scattered for the fear some mouldy dam
Might snatch a finger for a relic, Oh!
By ordering such service, he confirmed
Her sacredness. He might have been the Pope!
He's canonized her as the hope of France!

Alive, she could be in one place alone.
Dead, and scattered, all the world's her throat!
Calais to Avignon hears Pucelle's roar
That makes her cry at Orleans seem a bleat
That might have come from such a shepherd girl.

No more! She screams, "Defy the murdering dogs!
That slew me in my martial innocence."

But still, her death will serve my purposes.
Though England is her enemy, at least
She serves me as my ally. Chaos howls
And chaos is my hope, my faithful hound.

BEAUFORT enters, SL. He is a martial man, though dressed in the robes of a cardinal. He is accompanied by two bodyguards in suits and dark glasses, and by SUFFOLK, who is acting as his secretary. He composes himself with some difficulty upon seeing Humphrey. Humphrey smiles benignly. He sits to the right of the head of the table and casts a cold eye on Humphrey.

Humphrey:

Brother of my father! May God save
You from the fate your crimson robes divine.
The Pope, may God keep him – and his – in Rome
Has told you that the scarlet of your dress
Is meant to keep you mindful of your task;
To shed red blood at his – nay Christ's command.

Beaufort:

Indeed. I do what Church and God require;
Take up my cross or sword at the command
Of Christ's vicar on Earth. It is a boon.
In the shadow of a thousand swords
So often is where Paradise is found.

By what right do we shed the blood of men?
Each drop we shed will be accounted for.
I shed them for the cause of Christ on Earth
The sharpest steel held in the deepest faith
So what, dear nephew, do you kill men for?

Humphrey:

Why, for the King, of course, who walks in Christ
And bids me war upon his enemies.
And for my homeland, and my right and blood,
And for the sake of love and loyalty.

My life is simple, Beaufort, and sincere.
I serve no foreign princes, I pursue
The enemies of my twice crownèd king.
And have no woman's blood upon my hands.
There is no witness at the judgment seat

Can rightly turn on me an age-bent back.

But you, your grace, must bear for mother church
The blood of mothers, grandmothers and sons.
The tears of ancient fathers will not quench
The fires of Hell, or Beaufort's righteous fire.
There is no pardon from this prince of peace.
Oh how Christ's vicar should reward your toil!

Beaufort:

Your sneering, envious tone and mocking smile
At mention of my service to the Church
Would make me doubt the fitness of your soul
To hold an office close to our young king.

Humphrey:

You seek praise for this "service" to your lord,
I merely ask that you consider mine.
You have scarce time for our poor youthful king,
While waiting on the holy father's will.

Beaufort:

You dare! You question me? My loyalty?
I would redress this insult, were we not
Inside our king's own residence, you'd pay
In crimson coin for casting doubt on me!

While you were making ill advised match.
With Hollanders and making rude offence
Against our ally Burgundy in France
You served your foriegn princess...and yourself!
And threw all thought of Henry's claims away!

It was my hand that crowned him king of France!
While you stood by and smiled, and smiled, and smiled.
And all the soldiers who lay dead because
Our ally, Burgundy, turned us away
Might well have smiled, as corpses always smile
To hear you mock at me of loyalty!

PLANTAGENET enters, SL. He is an older, distinguished looking man, with the sternness in his gaze that comes from a life spent bearing the duties and perils of a senior officer of state. Both men fall silent and wait for him to speak. Beaufort's security detail stands up a little straighter.

Plantagenet:

I heard you both from ten yards down the hall
Spitting words like drunkards, posturing
Like monkeys fighting over rotting fruit
And boasting of your patriotic deeds.

For shame! The crown has not warmed to the touch
Of our young Henry's head as yet and you,
His kin, his noblemen, his counselors
Are quarrelling, retaining armed men
And threatening the order of the land.

I should find you quarters in the Tower
If there were not worse waiting in the wings
Like vultures shadowing a crippled faun
Waiting to gorge after its piteous fall.

Humphrey:

And now, here comes my duty-driven uncle.
The pillar of the state, it's best support
Upbraiding me for insufficient service.
That wounds me more than common words can say.
My service is unblemished, Agincourt
Was where our glorious King, safe may he rest,
Put down the French and raised my standard up.
And you were there. You saw my open wounds.
You open them again with your upbraiding.

Beaufort:

You ask me now to suffer Humphrey's scorning
And let his great ambition cast a pall
On all that we've built here in our native land?
You ask too much! From England and from me!
Both king and kin have claim upon my service.

Humphrey:

And Pope. Christ's sake! Forget you not the pope!
There is no doubt you serve your family well,
A gaggle of your offspring nest in court
Those nests are feathered well with public funds.
There is no doubt that you serve well your sovereign.
Just some who wonder whom your sovereign is.

Beaufort:

Again you dare to cast a doubt on me!
I swear upon the saints that you'll regret
Your slanderous tongue's wild wagging. On the saints!

Humphrey:

Now see our Cardinal – redder than his hat.
Threatening the king's protecting duke.
How is this Christian? Is this loyalty?

Plantagenet:

This is anger. Hasty words, but deeds
Oft follow them. Beware, nephew, you rouse
A man of patience and of puissant skill.
(*He sees action, OSL*) But cease your bawling, both of you – the King.

A security detail enters SL. All stand. KING HENRY VI enters SL. He is young, and has a mild, unassuming, almost monkish air about him. He greets all with a gentle smile, and looks upon his uncles and great uncles with the deference due from a dutiful nephew, rather than the commanding gaze of a born monarch. He gestures for everyone to sit. Beaufort directs him to the head of the table.

Henry:

Now here is gathered England's loyalty.
I am well pleased to keep such company!

Humphrey:

To please Your Majesty is all our hope.
Princes please kings, and Cardinals please the Pope.

(Plantagenet shoots him a look. Beaufort glowers nigh-murderously.)

Beaufort:

We live in hope, as good Duke Humphrey says,
Some England please, some foreign princesses.

(Humphrey's smile becomes a bit strained.)

Plantagenet:

All gathered here are one in their desire
To do whatever England should require.

(Henry looks at them, growing alarmed during an awkward silence.)

Henry:

But what is this, my friends, my blood. What news?
Your countenances darken like the clouds
That trouble Heaven just before the storm.

Plantagenet:

France, my lord, no doubt. Your rightful realm
That your Grandfather, Charles, the King of France
Left to you - your father's rightful claim
Remains a troubled land, still racked by war,
And this lays heavy on your servant's minds.

Humphrey:

Indeed my lord, these are most warlike times.
Your father knew – Harfleur and Agincourt
Brought France to heel, as all here saw with eyes
Well-sharpened on the broken stones of war.

Henry:

On war? But surely we are called to peace.
In Christ we find the balm for bitterness
And if the Holy Spirit fights for us
What need have we to shed our cousin's blood?
God will give us France. Our cause is just.
Was I not crowned in Rouen, King of France
And England's shepherd too, by Holy grace?
How can the counts of France resist His writ?

Beaufort:

Resist they have, and will, until we find
A concord that will suit our subjects taste.
Your father conquered France, a mighty task.
To govern it will take a Christian grace.

Humphrey:

The Cardinal suggests his lord the Pope
Will surely back your claim with all the force
He has at his disposal – which sits here
Wrapped all in bloody red, but preaching peace.

And you should heed him well, His Holiness
Will not take well the news if you do not
Show proper deference to his delegate
Just back from Germany with honors heaped
Upon the pyre of children and old men
And women that he for the Hussites raised.

Beaufort:

His delegate! You sland'ring, faithless fool!
I did in Germany what justice bid!
And heresy will raise its head no more
In countries where I judged those hell-sworn souls!

Humphrey:

Oh peace! Ha! peace! A Christian peace, your Grace!
And mercy on the Hussites, and the French!
And all the errant souls that wait upon
A greater judgment from a greater throne!

This next section, (triple, interlocking sestina) requires that each speaker rise to his feet to begin, then walk slowly to the next speaker while he delivers his lines, circumambulating the table. When the next speaker rises to deliver his lines, the former speaker will assume the current speaker's seat. The effect should be that of a slow, stately game of musical chairs. Plantagenet, who never sat down at the table, watches it all in sad amazement.

(triple, interlocking sestina)

Beaufort:

Within, without, we live within our wars.
We are all fallen beasts. God's curse on peace.
The law is but a fond, feigned fairy dance
Which hikes its skirts and flees when real men march
To conquer, triumph, and in glory live,
Or, meet with fate and without issue, die.

Henry:

But here, dear Uncle, what would you oppose?
In our royal company you rest
Upon your many victories. Rejoice!
All England has spread gold where e'er you walk.
For my sake, and for the peace, endure.
These family quarrels have no Christian end.

Humphrey:

He will not rest, my Lord. His sort must fight.
A vaunting avarice may never sleep.
And greed admits no element of cheer
It's not to serve your crown the cardinal goes.
Only the air of Rome is fit to breathe!
He'll sell you for his tithe before he's done.

And doubt not - what he starts, he'll truly do!
For all his high-blown words extolling fight
Ask Talbot, if that worthy man still breathes
Who left him helpless! Only conscience sleeps.
Or rather, faints wherever Beaufort goes
To sow discord where better souls spread cheer.

Henry:

Please! My lords, this bitterness must end!
Blood must not be by kindred blood opposed.
You rend my heart! How can I long endure
If with my family I may not rest?
I would in quiet gardens, pray and walk
With both of you, and find cause to rejoice.

Beaufort:

To please the King, I would contented, Die
In any cause, in any royal war.
But under slanderous tongues I shall not live!
I know no rest – Gloucester shall know no peace!
It was a holy task to which I marched
To teach a nest of heretics to dance

When they'd learned proper prayer, and proper dance
Upon my stake of judgment, and to die
I did return, but am prepared to march
Again upon a just and Holy war
Upon those traitors who abuse the peace
And only by my patience still yet live!

Henry:

And in your loyalty I do rejoice.
Dear uncle, mighty Duke, let conflict end
And in sweet concord with good Gloucester walk.
The enemies of Christ that you oppose
Shall rue their heresy, and know no rest
While Beaufort's sword, and our kingdom endures.

Humphrey:

Indeed, my lord, all Christendom should cheer.
What wonders this, our Cardinal has done!
His offerings are mighty – where he goes
All heretics, too old or young to fight
Are sent to God, and given gentle sleep
Not plagued by need to eat, or drink, or breathe.

And such good fortune! Few indeed can breathe
The smoky air that savors of his cheer.
Where Beaufort goes, none but the dead will sleep.
A crimson hat is over all he does.
And all the children butchered in his fights
All sing him Alleluias as they go.

Henry:

You are my father's brother. Pray endure
His jesting, dearest Beaufort. Then, rejoice
All who trust in God shall find the rest
Of all their work comes to a glorious end.
Who will not bend when God and king oppose?
It is a golden, narrow path we walk.

Beaufort:

My king, my nephew, may you reign and live
In gentle company, with song and dance
And every benefit of blessed peace.
But to preserve that bliss, some men must die.
Soft peace grows only where 'tis blessed by war;
In land plowed up by swords, and bitter march.

And when the war is done, we homeward march
To hang trophies – and traitors, and to live
In quiet confidence that brutish war
Secures the peace in which these courtiers dance;
Scorning those who raised their hands to die
And mint their blood to buy a moment's peace.

Henry:

Brave men laid these stones on which we walk.
You are my friend, and my love shall endure
No matter what dire forces shall oppose
I say again, dear uncles, pray rejoice!
For soon laborious war shall find an end
And God shall grant a righteous land its rest.

Humphrey:

But where shall Beaufort go when war has gone?
The air of England is unfit to breathe
For him, unless he finds some other fight
Or grisly execution for his cheer.
Only when his bloody deeds are done
Shall our good Card'nal find a wink of sleep.

But when he does, shall any of us sleep
While everywhere peace loving men shall go
They find that Beaufort's will shall not be done
Till all the souls that vex him cease to breathe?
Send him to France, where he shall find his cheer!
There, he has left unfinished all his fights.

Henry:

Our uncles both have done, as for the rest
As long as we in righteous paths shall walk
We need not fear our conflicts' happy end.
In faith, our cause and nation shall endure.
In love of God all nations should rejoice
And we will not His holy will oppose.

Beaufort:

In God, with God, my king, we shall find peace.
But still, in France we face many a march.
Who gives the lie to Christ and crown shall die
Those who submit to God and king shall live.
To this I swear - I'll join your joyful dance
When peace shall still the cruel cries of war.

The musical chairs stop. The King should be back at the head of the table.

In peace the tunes are played that summon war.
Who marches with me now, will someday dance.
And who in Christ shall die, yet shall he live.

Henry:

Sweet rest of arms, when none shall still oppose
Our Christian rule, we walk with Christ. Rejoice!
And end our battles. May our peace endure

.

Humphrey:

We shall forever go where hope still breathes
When Beaufort's done, then shall our widows cheer
And orphans sleep, and live - til his next fight.

Plantagenet:

Now, lords, and Majesty, let us depart.
The hour grows late, and we have much to do.
The puzzle that is France will take more solving
Than we have wit to 'semble in one day.

Henry:

Quite so, quite so. Will you with me to mass?

(A beat.)

Plantagenet:

I will at your command. I'll join you there.
My duties draw me now to other cares.

Beaufort:

Your faithfulness to God and Church and friend
Inspire me, yet I must to work attend.

Humphrey:

My King, I'd gladly join you there again.
But I must ready for our French campaign.

Henry:

Well then, I'll pray for all my counselors
And pray that peace and harmony be yours.

They stand. He exits SL. Beaufort gestures to his men and Suffolk, and they follow him out. Beaufort gives a withering look to Humphrey, and exits, SL. Humphrey gives a significant glance at Plantagenet, smiles, and leaves, SL. The sounds of battle from the monitors grow louder, then fade. Plantagenet watches the others go. He remains, alone.

Plantagenet:

I am a servant, fortunate in faith.
I served our young king's father, and his sire.
A thousand battlefields have left their mark
Upon my flesh, and brain, and much-tried soul.
Indeed, the wind is colder, my bones ache
And all the wounds of peace feel deeper now
Than bite of blade, or bruises of the mace.

I pray the King of Kings may now forgive
Us nobles for the hours of precious time
We squandered in this petty dance of dukes.
In France the weed of discord grows by day,
The worm of treason gnaws our roots at night.

This wrangle paralyzes hands and hearts
That should be waiting on the king's command!
Duke Humphrey has so addled Beaufort's wits
That he forgets his policy of peace
And calls for war to prove his loyalty!

Duke Humphrey lusts for glory in the war
To hear the rabble cheer him in the street.

And so we war. Divided, we shall lose.
The country will ill-bear the pain of loss
Of all our late king gained at such a cost.
Sometimes I think the wretched face of Joan
Still mocks at us though ashes in the wind.

And we who must to war, or peace, commit
Do neither, and the soldiers pay in blood.
Henry of Harfleur! Look on us and grant
Some of your steel to your too-humble son!
With half a dozen words a king can bring
His fractious subjects to their rightful place.
And silence controversy with a glance.

And will our Henry then make bare his arm
And smite contention, and make fast the reins?
Or has the God of battles given us
A sovereign better fitted to the cloth?
I pray for his and our sake, he will learn.

These many years the Council has kept safe
The crown, and held the royal seals in trust.
But soon, so soon, this boy shall be a man,
And that same day, the pow'r of all the realm.

Henry of Agincourt! Look on your child!
Look on your England, look on wretched France.
Steel up thy son! For his sake, and for ours.
This weakness in the crown summons the tide
Of kindred blood, as your great father knew.
Royal blood and common blood will run
Upon our hands, in France...and here, at home.

Blackout

Scene 3

The Star Chamber. Risers face each other, SL and SR. Between them, USC is a large, elevated chair suggesting a throne, and a smaller chair in front of it, at floor level. There is a table in front of the smaller chair. On the table, a portrait of John Plantagenet, draped in mourning black.

The Chorus members come forward from the house and mount the stage. Red robes with white furred collars await them on their seats. They don them, (Becoming the ROYAL COUNCIL) and sit, waiting impatiently. There is an air of expectation about them. They talk busily, and occasionally, one of them will steal a glance at the unoccupied throne.

A few moments later, Beaufort appears, with SUFFOLK in tow. Both wear the red, fur trimmed robes. Suffolk bears a large armload of papers. All the Counselors rise at Beaufort's entrance. Suffolk is seated at the table, Beaufort remains standing. He considers for a few moments how to say what must be said. This is an important moment. Suffolk prepares to keep minutes.

Beaufort:

You Royal Counselors have kept the faith
This kingdom placed in you for many years
And spread your kindly wings above the head
Of our young king as he grew to his state.

England is grateful, I am grateful too.
And history will praise the work you've done.
But now our holy mission's at its end.
Our late King Henry, how we miss his sword!
Now, God grant that his glory be reborn.

The good Duke John Plantagenet, rest him
In God's good grace, a patriotic man
Was giv'n the care of England, and of France
By our late sov'reign, Henry, from his hand.
And Duke John, wise and careful in his charge
Took care that all the kingdom be preserved
By trusting you, good counselors, to foil
Ambitious plotters, heedless of their blood.

You know my mind, my lords, what now say you?
Do you direct me to release the seals
To put the English state in Henry's hands?

Royal Council (*in unison of word, and gesture.*):

My Lord Beaufort, we thank you for your pains,
But we would give no hasty answer here.

Our diverse thoughts, constituents and ends
Make our agreement painstakingly slow.

For this is a decision of import.
All points of view must be *completely* heard.
We are of many minds on this. We-thinks
Deliberation could take many months.
Deliberate divining of details,
Deliberate debate by disputants,
Deliberating delicate demands...

We all agree, my lord, deliberation
Shall go until we receive compensation
And then, we do our duty to the nation.

Beaufort starts to speak. Suffolk cuts him off, irritated.

Suffolk:

Of course, of course. We would not dream of asking
Such men as you to speak like sheep without
Sufficient time to parse the legal writ.

Of course...of course there are those that would say
Extending this – already decades long
Assignment of the powers of the crown
To men who are not by their birthings, King,
Smells of a lack of faith in Henry's child.

Some would wonder why good men like you,
Who think of naught but England's greater good
Would stand delay if there were no good cause
They'd doubt mettle of late Henry's son!

And how might our young king, or his good friends
Take such a lack of faith in his crowned head?
Might not the King, once given his full force
Ask questions quite embarrassing to us?

Might accounts be called for royal funds
Administered – admittedly with care.
But every jot and tittle? Who can say?
Another residential wing may rise
Upon the Tower of London. Near the block.

The threat sinks in for a moment.

Royal Council: (emphatically)

As we said. Give young Henry his rule.
We never hesitated for a nonce.

The Royal Counselors remove their robes and return to their seats in the house.

Beaufort watches them go. When the last of them has left the stage, he wheels on Suffolk angrily.

Beaufort:

Men such as these will not quickly forget
You rubbing their blue noses in the fact
That you...

Suffolk:

We.

Beaufort:

You! Exposed their venal flaws.

It would have cost us little to delay
A month or two, and save their precious face.
A bill or two, a bit of coin for roads
Through some obscure backwater of a town
That their fat, rich constituency owns,
Would have bought good will, for us, and for
The fledgling king we both are here to serve.

Suffolk:

It is nigh twenty years our "fledgling" king
Has benefited from your tutelage.
If he's not fit to rule the land today
He'll be no fitter in a hundred years.

England needs one hand to guide her fate.
The nobles and the commons want their king.
Like Samuel, would you deny it them?
Give them their Saul. You can prevent it not.

Beaufort:

Now Suffolk tells me what I can prevent?

Suffolk:

This is of no importance. It is done.
Let us discuss the real reason for haste.

Why did you hide your fear from this convention?
There is a name that you were loathe to mention.

Beaufort:

I said no name. I meant to say no name.

Suffolk:

Ne'ertheless, it's Humphrey, just the same.

And you have cause to fear Duke Gloucester's name.
The council knows that Humphrey must be curbed.
He has grown strong, the populace, entranced
Still dances to his warlike, roaring drums.

You and your royal pupil pray for peace
And long for settlement in riven France.
But Humphrey sees his hope in endless war;
To make his name like Caesar, conquering Gaul.

But you have cause, his insult to the pope
Who granted you a dignity most rare
Has borne its fruit – your flowering resolve
To bring an end to his lieutenancy
Of late Plantagenet, and break his power.
To drive a wedge between him and the king
That England may be rid of all his schemes
And you might ride in triumph o'er his shame.

Beaufort:

You do ill to mention ancient foes.
Humphrey shall pay, in both worlds, I have sworn't.
But this is but a benefit, the cause
Of all our work is England's greater good.

Suffolk:

Of course, of course. My gracious Duke. Of course.
I marvel at your selflessness...your grace.

Humphrey hurries in SR. He pulls up short when he sees the chamber empty of all but Beaufort and Suffolk. He is concerned, but puts on his accustomed brave smirk after a moment's composition.

Humphrey:

Ave, good Cardinal. Hail, to your dogsbody.

Beaufort:

Lord Suffolk is a peer. Address him so.

Humphrey:

Shall I? Hail, De La Pole, my lord of Suffolk.
How goes the buffing of the silverware?

Suffolk:

Keep sporting, my dear Duke. We'll have some sport.
Although you're far too late to stand the scratch.

Humphrey:

Ah yes. I was delayed. Coincidence?
Or does this kingly Suffolk rule the winds?

Suffolk:

The winds. The winds have changed, my dearest Duke.
Today the Council...

Beaufort:

Silence. He is not a fool. He knows.

Humphrey:

I knew when I made landfall late, you'd not
Take scruple to give Henry all his rights.
And well-played, too. I know our game is up.
I ask only to serve my sovereign king.
And keep my lands, my offices forfeit.

Beaufort is deflated. His moment of triumph explodes with a wet, soft pop. Humphrey cannot help but smile sadly. He turns to go, then stops.

One thing, old foe, this creature here with you
Will sow a whirlwind in England's house.
His haughty gracelessness wins no new friends
For Henry, or for England, or for you.

I knew defeat when I sighted the shore.
My lord of Suffolk, fear that selfsame sea.
Its weather changes with alarming haste.

He exits, SL.

A long pause

Suffolk:

You know, my gracious cardinal, he must die.

Beaufort:

I do not take men's lives to settle debts.
I said that he would suffer, and he does.
Besides, he is no threat. His foiled schemes
Lie all around his feet, crumpled and dead.

Suffolk:

To resurrect with merest stroke of pen.
The war in France goes poorly, and the fools
That still infest the streets outside these walls
Believe he is the hope of victory.
What if he chooses to address that mob
And tell them Beaufort intervenes for France?

Beaufort:

He would not. Although I loathe his face
I cannot see a traitor in his soul.
He served, as I did, in the war in France
And knew our late King Henry's love and trust.

Suffolk:

And I too served in France, and knew the king.
For fourteen years I served in tortured France
And fought the Dauphin's bandits. This I learned:
To never wound a boar, much less a bear
Then leave it there to follow in your tracks
And seek to salve its superficial wounds
By bathing them in its tormentor's blood.

Beaufort:

I fear him not, be Gloucester boar or bear.
He has no army now, no friendly ear
No plan, his power ended when the king
Achieved his power. There Humphrey's threat does end.

Suffolk:

And thus, my lord, the source of his new force
Will be that very king, who loves him still.
Calls him "beloved uncle," "father's friend."
A nephew's admiration. Touching, still
It still may touch your future, and the state's.

Beaufort:

No cure for that. His blood is drawn to blood.
But I too am “beloved uncle,” sure,
And I more cause to be called “father’s friend.”

Suffolk:

Of course, of course. Beloved. Yes. You are.
But if young Henry’s forced to choose between
Because the mob hates all who work for peace
Who will he exile then to still their cry?
Oh, not brave Humphrey, full of warlike noise.

Beaufort:

Oh fie upon this howling mob of yours.
I fear them not, nor Humphrey, nor the French.
Still. In all your senseless, idle talk
There is a truth hiding among the dross.
If Humphrey should return to his old shop
I fear not for myself, you understand...

Suffolk:

Of course, of course...

Beaufort:

If you say one more time, “Of course, of course,”
I’ll exile you to some far, hopeless place
So distant, far beyond the Western Sea
That civil language never shall be heard.

Suffolk:

Apologies, my Lord. I am a soldier.
These courtly manners stumble on a tongue
More used to cries of war than flattering tones.

Beaufort:

Your blunt and honest vision I desire.
Your ruthlessness and rudeness I despise.
You would do well, for England, and yourself
To be heard less, and seen in action more.

Suffolk:

Ah, Good, my lord. I’ll leave tonight for France.

He stands to go. After a moment, Beaufort gestures for him to return and sit down.

Beaufort:

No. Stay good Suffolk. Much is left to do.
And allies are a rarity these days.

Suffolk:

To stay or go, I wait my lord's command.

Beaufort:

'Tis true. Humphrey remains beside the king.
That is an office he will not relent.
And so he must be put off by the king.
That is the only way we will be safe.
Go you to the court and listen well.
How fondly does the king hold Humphrey's heart?
Then, when you know, report the news to me.

Suffolk:

Of cou...

He catches himself, and smiles.

Beaufort exits SL.

Suffolk:

Humphrey is a strong, and worthy man.
His wounds were real enough at Agincourt.
But now he stands a heartbeat from the throne,
And Henry is a limp, weak-witted child.
Should Henry falter, Humphrey gains the crown.

The people and the petty nobles cry
"Our good Duke Humphrey! Victory and peace!"

But if he rises high, sure Beaufort falls.
And Beaufort is my mentor – and my mule
Who plows the ground I harvest, sowing gold.

The people love you Humphrey, but you love
Once mistress, now a wife – A silly girl.
And given to some rather dangerous games.
There's something that the mob loves more than you –
A scandal. And I'm soon to give them one.

It is no fault of yours that sets me on.
It is no insult – I am armor plate.
But you are in the way, and thus I move
To break your heart, and power, and estate.

Blackout

Scene 4

A woman's scream is heard in the blackout.

Humphrey is alone on a bare stage. His clothes are rumpled and he is unmade. He stands, silently for a long moment.

Humphrey:

For witchery? What childish, foolish haunts!
My lover first, and then my faithful wife,
And now a witch? What idiotic robe
Could sit a'bench and try this unjust case?

Tis me they hate. But still, my royal blood
Protects me from their vengeful, grasping claws.
The talons of an errant justice rend
My heart. Her flesh. My Eleanor. My God.

She was a child when she first haunted me.
A maid in service to my former wife
But still, I loved her – gentle, silly girl.
I loved her for her laughing, hopeful grace.

And for this love, I have remitted much.
My princess wife, my status in the court.
To take a common mistress is no fault,
To marry her is quite beyond the pale.

Ha. Once she asked me if I made of her,
An honest woman, or if by the gift
Of marrying, she made an honest man.
I said that it would take much more than that
To turn a duke into a righteous soul.

She laughed. And then for all my rakish ways
I never touched another woman's face.

ELEANOR appears SR. She is barefoot, dressed in a shift. We cannot see her face due to her long, disheveled hair, which is covered in ashes. She is carrying a candle. She crosses in front of him, and during his next soliloquy, she dismounts the stage and walks through the audience. She walks unsteadily, sobbing.

The chorus members harass her with cries of "Witch!" "Adultrous!" "Slut" "Whore!" "Traitor!"

Humphrey:

Two priests, named as her co-conspirators
Are burnt and hung – dead witnesses to crimes
That never were. Their statements, wrung from them
By rack and red-hot iron were read aloud
In what these days will pass for a true court.

A law that tortures is the devil's law.
It fills the king's ear with the desperate lies
Of those who have good cause to hate the throne.
It fills the shores of Styx with witnesses
To all our bloody sins and brutal hopes.

And my dear Eleanor. They tortured you.
They stripped you, burned you, broke you, even now
Your bare feet bleed on every jagged stone
That you must walk in penitential shame.

Eleanor reaches the back of the house. She turns and walks back to the front of the house, kneels, and waits, sobbing.

Humphrey:

Three times. Three days you walk in penitence.
I see you look up as you pass the house
You once lived in with me, and search the walls
For some last trace of our lost happiness.

It is not there. It lies only with me.
I bear it as my own hard penitence.
How dare I hope that we could hap'ly live
In such a place as this? What fools we were!

I cannot walk beside you. I cannot.
The king forbade it. Oh, he's very kind.
And you shall be imprisoned far away
Until you wither like a shaded flower
And die alone in some dank, distant cell.

He seeks to spare you death, and spare me shame.
Oh kindness! Nephew, may you never see
Such kindness, for your father's sake, I pray.
Now every day, I know she is alive
And waits and wonders for my wretched help.
Twill never come. Twill never come. I know.

Spare you death to bury you alive.
Spare me shame to torment me each day
With every day a failure felt anew.
Oh I am spared the crop to face the scourge!
I will not, cannot bear this wretched state.

He draws a pistol. Studies it meditatively.

Some fear what waits for us. Each last breath blown
Fills sails that bear our barge we know not where.
I say who fears an unknown sea's a coward
And not a worthy sailor in this world.

So why keep all this tiresome windage up
When life loses all semblance of an art
And fades to endless serfdom to the sense
Of this, then this, then this, and thus to death?

Our birth is an offence. Cast on the world
Then hustled into tutelage and work
And some brief couplings in a swerving bed
To pass along the never-ending curse.

And friend and faith and fame are merely bait.
Each fade, then fail, then only farce remains.

Fuck this. I'll play the fool no longer. Bang.
And all the memories, and all the hopes
And cares and guilt and idiot regrets
I'll scatter on the floor, among the curds.

He raises the pistol to his head.

Oh how Suffolk would smile to be here now.

He pulls the trigger. The gun clicks. It will not fire. He tries again. Again and again.

Humphrey:

I am restrained. I hear the laughing gods.
Pronounce their drunken judgment on the wind.

Blackout

Scene 5

The Court. A throne SC. The Royal Counselors are there, in their red robes, milling about, gossiping. Humphrey stands DSR, alone. A few glance and point at him furtively, relishing his downfall. A voice, offstage, shouts “The King! The King!”

Henry enters SL, wearing his crown. He is flanked by Suffolk, who is carrying a large portfolio, and Beaufort. He enters, shakes hands with a few in the crowd. Finally, he reaches the throne, sits, and places the crown on a cushion held by Beaufort. Beaufort hands it to one of the Counselors, who hustles off past Humphrey, SR.

Beaufort stands to Henry’s right, Suffolk to his left. The crowd goes back to their gossip. Beaufort whispers to Henry, who looks at Humphrey for a long moment.

Henry:

My lord, Duke of Gloucester...

The crowd takes no notice. Henry can barely be heard over the general conversation.

Henry:

My lord...

Beaufort looks at the crowd in disgust.

Suffolk (shouting):

THE KING SPEAKS!

They fall silent, in a few moments.

Henry:

(to Suffolk) Thank you.

My lord of Gloucester, much beloved uncle
It brings us joy to see you here at court.
As always your obedience is perfect.
Your loyalty to our fair state and person
In light of all the misfortune you’ve suffered
Inspires us all, and shows unquestioned faith.

Beaufort starts a round of applause. The counselors join in, half-ironically.

Humphrey draws a deep breath. He considers for a brief moment how to respond to his king. He considers pleading for Eleanor, but a glance at Suffolk and Beaufort dashes that hope. Finally, he bows, slightly.

Humphrey:

My king, your kindly notice of a man
So truant from attendance at your court,
Speaks volumes of your kindness and your grace.
I wish you every happiness, and peace.

Beaufort starts the applause again.

Henry:

Dear Uncle, doubled happiness is mine
That I might see your face, to see you smile
Upon the day I first behold my queen.

Humphrey:

Indeed, my sovereign. May you live in peace
A kindly, faithful wife is beyond price.
And missing her, the sharpest pain of all.

Henry:

Indeed, my Uncle. I would have your mind.
(he gestures to Suffolk) The book! The book!
(Suffolk hands him the portfolio.)
Pray, draw near Uncle, here the likenesses
Of all the unwed princesses of France.
I covet your advice. Do I choose well?
We paid a fearful dowry for this hand.

Suffolk:

My Lord, I first laid eyes upon your queen...
...I saw her face...the music of her laugh...
My king, this maiden princess, without peer,
So shines beyond the others in that book
That she is like the sun to twinkling stars
They fade beside her, and cannot be seen.
Her temperament is gentle, and her speech
Though soft, is wise, and far beyond her youth.

Her form and soul, angelic and serene
Make her the model for an English queen.

Humphrey:

I have no need for pictures, sovereign lord.
In your royal eyes I see their light.
I am assured your heart has chosen right.

Beaufort:

You have said well, my Duke. And good, you'll find,
To leave the king, for once, to his own mind.

Humphrey smiles, but says nothing.

Suffolk:

What say, good Duke? The common knowledge says
You know the ways of foreign princesses.

The crowd titters. Humphrey stiffens for a moment. He regathers himself.

Humphrey:

I am here to wish my nephew well.
And nothing more. I bring no goods to sell.

Deprived of their expected sport, the crowd returns to their gossiping with bitter grace.

A voice, offstage, "Her highness, the Princess Margaret of Anjou!"

Margaret enters, SR, in glittering array. She proceeds slowly and gracefully, toward the throne. The crowd reacts with awe. Henry is awestruck. Suffolk stares. Even Beaufort and Humphrey seem moved by this vision of perfect grace and royal presence. She curtsies deeply and effortlessly before the throne.

Henry is frozen. Suffolk starts to step forward, but is checked by a vicious look from Beaufort. Henry recovers from his stupor, and offers his hand to her. She takes it and rises.

Henry:

Be welcome here, dear princess, to our court.

Margaret:

I thank thee, sovereign lord. Your gracious gift
Of your so gentle hand and kindly look
Have put my gift – my small, poor heart – to shame.

Henry:

Oh never! May your heart never be shamed!
Your precious heart will be my dearest jewel.
No gem of England shall be so secure.
No sacrifice shall be too much for me
Or England, to draw forth your radiant smile.

Suffolk looks at her. He is transparent for a moment, then tears his eyes away. He walks DSC, glancing back.

Suffolk (*aside*):
(*Petrarchan Sonnet*)

I've walked in blood and courted death in every field of France.
My memories are scars. Far better armor than cold steel.
And pain was my best counselor. What hurts you is what's real.
The battle was my only bride, the sword taught me to dance.

And still, for all my skill and steel, I never stood a chance.
Against that glorious agony that I began to feel
When her stern sentence fell on me, without hope of appeal.
When Margaret cursed and favored me with one immortal glance.

So I contrived to conquer her who had so conquered me.
I built for her a royal cage, with Henry's arms for bars.
She will be queen, but never shall she pass beyond my sight.

But now, she stands, just out of reach. As always she shall be.
And I, the fool of my own stratagem look from afar
And eat my raw, adulterous heart anew each endless night.

Margaret:
My Lord of Suffolk! I have told the King
And now I say to all this royal court
That I am in your debt forever more
For bringing me to this all-perfect land,
And to the hand of Henry, sovereign Lord.

Oh, I shall be the happiest of queens!
And I shall see that all our royal joy
Comes spilling over to this blessed land
A laughing river which shall ne'er run dry.
My heart is full! Oh let the day be set!

But first, one matter. Honor must not yield
To love no matter how deeply 'tis felt.
And while my heart is full of love and peace,
I ask my sovereign lord – fulfill your word
And grant the bridal price that was agreed.

For peace and love, to your sworn word be true.
Release Anjou and Maine, and take my hand.

Suffolk and Beaufort are stunned. Margaret has forced their hand. This is not the moment, or the method by which they wanted the terms of the agreement revealed. The crowd reacts with shock. Henry is still too smitten to look away from Margaret.

Humphrey:
What's this?!

Suffolk (*brazening it out*):
Both love and peace are dear. Here is the toll.
Anjou and Maine return to French control.

Humphrey:
Return? You fool! Henry's the heir by right!
His father proved that claim in desperate fight!

Beaufort:
Peace has a price that Henry's father bore.
Now it is for his son to end this war.

Humphrey:
Did Henry's father bleed to buy a bride?
For this we spent the blood of England's pride?

Suffolk:
Two provinces. Two to preserve the rest.
And peace. The dream of kings made manifest.

Humphrey:
Oh peace! Our late king Henry went to war
To prove his right to France worth fighting for!

Beaufort:
Your tongue! Duke hold your tongue! The king would...

Humphrey:
I've held my tongue! And now I'll hold my heart.
I'll make of it a beacon, shining light
On all you and this costly queen conspire
To foist upon our Henry's blinkered eyes!
You cannot mean to cast your father out!

Your father bore his soldiers as his sons.
Slept in the cold, and hungered in the rain.
He walked among them like a common man
And marched through France, pursued to Agincourt.
And there he turned to face the Dauphin's might.

You know the tale. And every English boy,
And some not English thrill to hear it told.
The histories, six centuries and more
Will tell of Henry's courage, and his right.
For France was his, and God fought on his side.

The Dauphin's host was well arrayed, and vast
I lost a brother on that bloody day.
My own blood flowed - a dozen dangerous wounds.
Shall I strip as Coriolanus did
And show you on my limbs my bonafides?

But Henry rescued me in my distress.
He bound my wounds with his own royal hands.
I swore that I would serve with all my strength,
And he in turn swore me to serve his son.
And now I serve. Though in Cassandra's part.

No! England will not stand this sacrilege.
This bartering of royal blood for peace
This merchanting of Henry's rightful claim
Will so incense the people and the peers
That you will know no peace. Here, or in France!

Suffolk:

Oh hear! He threatens treason 'gainst the crown!

Humphrey:

I threaten nothing! I will have no part
In so much as a word against my king!
But he gave me the charge to guide his son.
The oath I gave his father still holds good.
But it is trash if I am silent now.

Margaret:

Duke Humphrey, it is good you know your duty.
To see a change to virtue is most rare
In one so steeped in age and habit-bound.

To hear you rail at me for duty's sake
Touches my heart. A shame it touched not yours
When your first wife, a princess, was abandoned
And then your second was revealed a witch.

A shame your sense of duty was so silent
When helpless women wept for lack of aid.

But for those, and others you've neglected,
I will extend a pardon as your queen.

Humphrey:

Oh gracious not-yet-queen, I am most grateful.
But not so grateful as to coin the blood
Of my poor, dead, beloved king for naught.

Beaufort:

You say we are? That we shame Henry's ghost?
I'll make a ghost of you for such affront!

Humphrey:

It's come to this? Gross threats before the throne?
Your Grace, I beg your pardon for the truth.

Margaret:

Again, you are a convert to the good!
Respect for truth is fresh in Humphrey's mouth.

Humphrey:

And love for England far more fresh in yours.

Henry:

Enough! My uncles! Stay your wrath!

'Tis true my father bled for love of France.
He sought to hold it, as a lover holds
The much beloved to his tender heart.
And I would hold what God has given to mine.

'Tis true, we give up claims our father won.
But look what we have gained – both peace and love.
And not a drop of blood shed for the prize.

Bring home our banners from these provinces
And hang them in the church. Our wedding day
Shall mark the union of ourselves and France.
The best of France stands here before my eyes.

Humphrey:

Oh king, my king. You cannot be a boy
Smitten to stupor by a pretty face.
This woman comes not for your royal heart
But for the Dauphin's claim, and Anjou's will.

Henry:

Smitten? Am I so? My father said
A king can ill afford to be in love.
His love must be for England's good alone.
Perhaps we should think further on this match.

Beaufort:

My lord, the peace is all for England's good.
What Christian good is there in endless war?
Your duty is to save your father's state
Not to preserve his costly, bloody fight.

Suffolk:

My king, we cannot leap back o'er the ditch
That we have half-traversed, stranded in air.
You took flight from the side of blood and war
And leapt in faith toward banks of love and peace.
Turn not thy face, lest you fall in the gap!

Henry:

Vexation! By my faith I would not wish
This crown, this state, this choice on any man!
I cannot eat, or sleep, or love in peace
Without this burden pressing on my neck.
Oh Margaret! Oh my father! Uncles, Oh!

Margaret:

Duke Trouble is a constant courtier
To every king, dear Henry. Let me soothe
Your weariness, as one who loves you should.
For I am taken with your tender heart
And hear the call to bear all things with thee.

Humphrey:

Oh Margaret! No doubt, my sovereign lord,
Had you been born a shepherd, small of state
Proud beautiful Margaret would have left Anjou
And set aside the privilege of her house
To throw herself before your spattered boots.

Your father loved this nation all his life,
As he loved your fine mother, and loved you.
No sudden revelation was his love
But constancy to all that duty asked.
And duty is the only love of kings.

Suffolk:

And now we see poor Humphrey's wretched grace.
He was deprived, by justice, of his wife,
And now he would deny the king of his.
Oh, Envy! How you torment and demean
Those who fail to shake your bridle off!

Humphrey:

I'll shake you off this world, wretch. Name the day.

Suffolk:

Oh soon, dear Gloucester. Soon. I'll have my day.

Henry:

Oh peace! Can we not have a moment's peace?

(terza rima)

Humphrey:

My king must not be so in love with peace
That he cannot play court to storm-browed war.
Around the throne, the thunder does not cease.

Beaufort:

A different burden than your father bore
Is laid on you by fate - to turn your cheek
An offering for peace, and open doors.

Margaret:

My lord, a peaceful nature is not weak.
To do what peace requires when others balk
Is courage that suits well the godly meek.

Suffolk:

Indeed! Let all the scoffers vainly talk
Of glorious war, of heroes dead and gone,
My king would rather stand where Jesus walked.

All turn to Henry. The moment has come for the decision. Henry is distressed.

(Rhyme Royal)

Henry:

My father's love was strange to childish eyes.
But now I know the burdens that he bore.
The endless court, the boundless sea of lies
And winds of change the king must sail before.

But this is not the crown my father wore.
So goes Anjou, bound to us and unbound
May future peace and happiness abound.

*A cheer from the crowd, who approach the throne wishing the royal couple well.
Humphrey is grim. Beaufort slips away from the throne to speak quietly with Humphrey,
SR.*

Beaufort:

I swore to you that I would see you hurt,
But now, my vengeance seems quite bittersweet.
The game is up, my brother. You have lost.
But that is done. Shall we now reconcile?

The war is over. You know Henry's heart.
He never could have kept his father's claims.
Better that we lose them bloodlessly
Then in a war lost before it began.

A wedding is a bad place for a grudge.
I would the people see us arm in arm.
The peace will take our guidance to maintain.
Would not our dead king ask us to keep faith?

A long pause.

Humphrey:

And Eleanor. My wife in hard exile.
If I consent, will you then pardon her?

Beaufort:

I... would. I wish with all my heart. I would.
But what would that say to the milling crowd?
Treason 'gainst the crown, the crown forgives.
But treason 'gainst the heavens? Who can say?

Humphrey:

Beaufort can say. The envoy of the Pope.
Truth now. You will not release Eleanor
Because you wish to hold her guarantee.
A hostage to assure my meekness holds.

Beaufort:

Humphrey, that is why she is not dead.

Humphrey:

She is a pawn to you. As is Margaret.
As is the king, and England is your game.
You dice at it for gold, and love it not.
You part its garments for your privileges.

Then have my answer. I will not relent.
Although you send me Eleanor's sweet head
Inside a box of ribbons, come for mine
And you will find me waiting, sword in hand.

But I will have no part in gross revolt.
I will say no more against the queen.
I will keep silent, ask me not for more.
My gorge may rise and spatter Cardinal robes.

Humphrey leaves, SR. Beaufort watches him go. The rest of the crowd is leaving, in a festive mood. Only Margaret, Suffolk, Henry and Beaufort remain, gathered around the empty throne. Henry sits heavily.

Henry:

Humphrey is distressed. I've angered him.

Beaufort:

Humphrey is your subject. He will yield.

Suffolk:

Think you so, Good Cardinal? Will he yield?
You had conference with him. What's his mind?

Beaufort:

He'll keep his peace, say nothing 'gainst the peace.

Suffolk:

And to assure that peace, there's Eleanor.
That sorcerous bitch is useful after all.
Still, Humphrey has the public on his side
Who lick the scars he is so proud to show.

Beaufort:

Your hobnailed tongue must wag. I've known it long.
But temper your remarks before the king.

Margaret:

Should he so? I was insulted here.
My welcome was by Humphrey turned to bile.
He called me goods to market, and you knights
And nobles never raised a hand for me.
Oh, this, I see is English chivalry.

She dissolves in tears.

Henry:

Come now, my dear. Fear not Duke Humphrey's words.
He is a warhorse, fearing that in peace
He's put to pasture. He'll not trouble us.

Margaret:

I am insulted! I am sore ashamed!
What shall my father, Glorious King Rene
Say when he hears that I am unavenged?

Suffolk:

Indeed. My Lord, the danger to the peace
Of both your house, and England are not safe.
If Humphrey should go railing 'gainst this match
The people may rise up, ambitious dukes
Are always saddled, ready to exploit
A public riot to expand their rights
And may make bold to touch your sacred crown.

Beaufort:

Humphrey is no traitor! Hold your tounge!
We have the means to force him to the peace.
What would you do? Bring Humphrey to the Tower
In chains and boat him in through Traitor's Gate?

Suffolk:

Perhaps. My Lord, the safety of the realm...

Henry:

Oh horrors! Suffolk! You would have me raise
My royal hand against the rightful heir
And 'gainst my father's dear and faithful friend?
Forbid! Forbid! I will not shed his blood!

Suffolk:

There is no need to shed your native blood.
The Tower has apartments that are fit
Even for one whose station is as high
As Humphrey's. He's not to suffer there
But merely lodge until these dangerous days
Are over, and the king is safely wed.
I have a man, Lord Somerset who will
Discreetly and most gently lead him hence.

Beaufort:

Humphrey? Go meekly? *(he laughs derisively)* Fond and foolish wish!

Suffolk:

If he will not obey the kings command
In all things, even this, then he has proved
He is no loyal subject of the king.
And thus our grave concern is justified.

Margaret:

My king, I do not think that I could bear
To stand beside you on our wedding day
And see that man, and wonder if he plans
To upbraid me, and scorn me even there.

It is not cruel to see that he does not
Embarrass us, and by the turn, himself.
His piteous grief for Eleanor is plain
It may move him to blot our happiness.

Henry:

A cock should crow. My father's brother chained.
I feel I have betrayed his royal shade
By moving 'gainst his friend and 'gainst our blood.
I would not see my uncle rashly fall
And make an error I could not forgive.

Have his men disarmed by royal writ.
Take him to the Tower. Not one hair
Upon his honored head will be displaced.
See that he abides in comfort there.
We must forbid him letters in and out.

Once our wedding is complete and sealed
Then we will set a day for his release.

Suffolk hands the king an arrest warrant, and a pen. Henry looks at him, realizing that Suffolk was quite prepared for this. He hesitates.

Who gets the order?

Suffolk:

Somerset's the man, my sovereign lord.
A brave young noble of complete discretion.

Henry signs. He stands wearily. Margaret takes his hand and smiles. They leave together, SL. Before they leave, Henry stops, and turns.

Henry:

(to Suffolk)

Not one hair.

Suffolk:

My gracious, noble lord, you have my word.

Henry and Margaret leave.

Suffolk:

(to Beaufort):

You know, of course, my Lord, Humphrey must die.

Beaufort:

Of course...of course.

Beaufort exits, SL. Suffolk prepares to follow him, when Margaret appears, entering SR.

Margaret:

My gracious lord of Suffolk. Have a word?

Suffolk, who just a moment ago was feeling in complete command, is suddenly off-balance. He recovers with difficulty.

Suffolk:

Ah...yes, my lady. How can I serve you?

Margaret: *(she flirts viciously)*

But, William, I came here to ask you that.

You cast me for this part in your fine scheme.

How then did I perform? Do I suffice?

Suffolk:

More than sufficed, my lady. You excel.

Margaret:

Indeed. And how do you, my lord, perform?

Suffolk:

My...lady?!

Margaret:

I wish to know, since soon I will be queen.

And I will cease to be your dainty pawn.

What sort of subject are you to our will?

Suffolk: *(he is quite undone.)*

Oh lady, I will make a gift to thee.

That poison toad, Duke Humphrey, his foul head...

I'll drop it in your lap. A bauble rare.

Margaret:

No greater gift of love. I'll bear a son...
To Henry's honor, and that son shall sit
Upon the throne of England come what may.
And Humphrey, sadly, stands athwart the way.

Blackout

Scene 6

An Inn, near London. A servant's bell is on the table.

YORK, YORK'S SON, and Humphrey are seated. York is an intense man, but he radiates intelligence and a steady determination. He is dressed in an officer's uniform. York's Son is a young teenager, and sits quietly, observantly, listening carefully.

[NOTE: I am aware that York's Son, the future Richard III, was born after Humphrey's death. I made the decision to commit an anachronism to explain the effect that family history and culture had on shaping the young Richard III. In a future play, I'll explore that more thoroughly.]

York:

They will not suffer you to remain free,
The King's besotted with this Anjou bitch.
So blind is he to all his interests
He sees not Suffolk, sniffing at her heels.

For all your selfless work and precious blood
Shed freely to support his father's throne,
This weakling king will shut you in the Tower
At just a whimper from this sniv'ling girl.

Humphrey:

Peace, Brother York. Do not assail the king.
I have had enemies long time before
Fair Margaret graced us with her French disdain.

York:

'Tis true, and I would see them on a pike.
What have you done but serve the English crown?

Humphrey:

Oh, I have done much service to the crown.
But I have made mistakes and missed the mark.
If all is up for me, I'll not complain.
I am not Job, covered in righteousness.

I quarreled with the courtiers for sport.
I should have held my tongue, and did my part.
I sought my glory on the battlefield
Where service should have been my only goal.

And I have oft betrayed the ones I loved.
Oh, womankind, you have a case 'gainst me.

There is a certain justice, dearest friend
In that a woman may yet bring me low.

York:

You need not suffer so. I have command
Of all the crown's strong force in foreign lands.

Humphrey:

And well you should. You do your duty well.
But I'll not flee from furies, or from Hell.

York:

Your martyr's habit does not suit your form.
Come, you were a soldier. Let's away.
I would give all command to you alone
And then you can return in glorious strength.

Humphrey:

Ah York. I would not trust me with that strength.
And glory looks like rags about the old.
That glory is for you, and for your son,
No, I would never cast my shadow there.

Away with you. Your ship is on the tide.
Go forth to battle, back in better times.

York:

I go, but never shall I spare the king
If he disturb one hair upon your head.

Humphrey: (*playfully*)

Ha! You traitor! See to your own head!
The view of York is poor from top a spike.

York:

Jest if you must. But I am still resolved.
Our claim is just, and I will not be stayed.

Humphrey:

To foreign fights with you! To dreamer's isles!
But what then will become of your fine son?
Will he take up the sword with you abroad?

York:

His mother, Lady Cecily has asked
That he stay home to tend upon her needs.

He is too young for war, and is the heir.

Humphrey:

It is too sad for you my boy, to stay
When others ride to test their battle arms.
Add just another summer to your limbs,
And you will beat your father to the van.

York's Son:

I thank you Uncle for your kindly words.
I want no greater death than battle brings.
With sword I'll write my ledger's entry down.

Humphrey:

And may you do. But do not rush the day.
A warrior stock is patience. He will store
Against the day he must in silence wait
For error that will prove the foe's downfall.

(to York)

But now, my well-loved friend, off to the war.
Not a word. We know your loyalty.

York:

Farewell, my noble duke. Son, fare the well.

York's Son:

Godspeed, my father. Strength unto your sword.

Humphrey:

By God, that's nobly said! York, fare the well.

York exits, SL

York's Son:

My mother will be here within the hour
To take me to a distant, drear estate
In hope that all the storm will pass us by.
I think that is a fond and foolish hope.

If York becomes a name to spit upon
The heir of York shall be a corpse e're long.
Although I am too young to bear my arms
I'd not go like a sheep to butchery.

I would stay here and find my fate with you.
Company our king would die beside
Is good enough for me to die among.

Humphrey:

You'll do no dying here, my noble pup.
And fore you bear the harnesses of war,
Stand straight! Your enemies will mock at you
And call you bunch-a-back. (*he straightens*) That's better done.
An unfair thing, some pamphleteer should slander
This figure that contains such noble blood.

York's Son:

I'll stand. I would stand here, and would defy
The stratagems of Suffolk and his spy.

Humphrey:

Obedience. A warrior's other trait.
Obey me child. Your mother should not wait.

York's Son:

She is a woman. It is hers to wait.

Humphrey:

Poor lad. You do not know your mother's kind.
A she-bear. Not a dozen Humphreys, armed
Could e're prevent her from her belov'd cub.

But then, before you go, I would a word.
Now I have heard, in Scandinavian lands
A brutal ancient custom was indulged
When young men left their homes for foreign shores
Their fathers hectored them right to the boat
With righteous words about their friends and debts.

What foolishness! If all his years of growth
Had not sufficed to shape the new-made man,
Then what good all these speeches and old saws?
But if you will forgive a relative
Who had but little shaping of your heart...

York's Son:

Pray speak. I fear I will not hear you more.

Humphrey:

God's teeth! That's plain enough. I'm not dead yet!

But now, I see your mother's lights beyond.
Just time for this: Remember that your friend
Will strike at you tomorrow. Make him strong
And you may well regret your faith in blood.

And as to faith in blood, hold it at naught
Except for when you see it on the ground.
The man who would not shed his kinsman's blood
Will see his own blood tramped on by his kin.

Your mother does approach. Go see to her.

York's Son:

I will obey. Although I would not so.

Humphrey:

And thus you show your courage, man. Now go.

York's Son exits, SL

Humphrey: (*musings*)

That boy. He has a king in him, I think.
Yet still I fear for him. He does not know
A quill can wound more deeply than a blade.
I fear that he may suffer from them both.

He ponders a moment. He rings the servant's bell. He waits, then rings it again, irritably. A third time.

SOMERSET enters, SR, with two soldiers. He sees himself as the consummate sophisticate, and all he does, even to the merest gesture, shows a self-consciousness that betrays his attempts at elegance.

Somerset:

They do not hear you. They will not attend.
None hear you now. A silence closes round
And you are mewed within it, my dear duke.

Humphrey:

Ah, Somerset. Please bring me wine and smoke.
If you would now replace the serving wench
Your cheeks could do with just touch of rouge.
But not too much false face, or I'll mistake
You for your master Suffolk. T'were a shame
To then mistake the dog's dog for the dog.

Somerset:

Your wit is clumsy. And 'tis wasted now.

Humphrey:

It always was, when you two were about.

But tell me, why did Suffolk stay away?
Is he too busy haunting laundry day
To filch dear Margaret's knickers for a sniff?

Somerset:

You always were a vulgar, foolish man.
The king has ordered you - submit forthwith
And come with us to be lodged in the Tower.

Humphrey:

Ah! You and I, we lodge together then?
Pray tell the king that I decline to stay
With such as Somerset. I'll take the rats.
Their scavenging is of a higher kind.

Somerset:

Cease prattling now. On your feet, old fool.
Or would you give me reason to have done
By these good men what I would like to do?

Humphrey:

Oh by no means. *(he stands)* Of course if you
Would care to play at swords with me alone
Then what fine stories you could Suffolk bring!
Or...not... *(he smiles.)*

Somerset:

I'll not indulge your violent senile whims.

(to the soldiers)

Bind him fast.

Humphrey:

There is no need for this.
The order of the king is bond enough.

The soldiers hesitate

Somerset: (*enraged*)

Do you fear some ghost from Agincourt?!
Fear me, you foolish sods! And fear the king!

The soldiers stop. They look on impassively, refusing the order.

Humphrey: (*to the soldiers*)

Do not break my heart, my new-found friends.
Do as the king commands, or I will fear
The crown already trembles in his hands.
For when the common soldier loses faith
What hope is there to keep the nation free?

First Soldier:

The king gave orders that you come with us.
He gave no order that you should be shamed.

Humphrey:

Then let us go. I need no better guard
Than soldiers who would do our sovereign's will.

They start to leave, SR

Humphrey stands DSC a moment. He looks out over the years to the few moments left to him.

(*sestina*)

What have I done for you, oh Babylon?
I am attainted for your many crimes.
I am proscribed – corruption of the blood
Is laid upon my name along with yours.
There is no mercy in the midnight court
In which I mount the bench and stand the dock.

I witness for the state, and in the dock.
What have you done for me, oh Babylon,
Except to number me among your court;
The instrument of this historic crime?
You are not mine, and yet still, I am yours,
Bound by the guilt of minting coin from blood.

You gorged your lawful fill of human blood.
Set thrice accurséd sail, and leave the dock
With ne'er a thought of those that you called yours.
What have I done with you, oh Babylon?

Why am I gallows fruit for ancient crimes?
Why am I so alone before this court?

With tempting dignities you played me court.
And mixed ambrosia with my stolen blood;
Then blended love of duty with our crimes.
And I have seen so many in the dock!
Where have I gone with you, oh Babylon?
Where is the shining gold that once was yours?

And where are all the suitors who were yours?
Whence all the nobles of your once proud court?
Who have we been for you, oh Babylon?
Poor merchants trading wormwood for our blood.
Why am I now alone at traitor's dock
Far past the gate that shuts upon my crimes?

So are we hanged on our own tree for crimes
That fell from that eternal lust of yours.
And you shalt never bear this shameful dock
Or plead for your own life before this court
Or see the ground beneath you drink your blood.
No one shall punish you, proud Babylon.

Your crimes are not attained in this court.
You shall never answer with your blood.
Adulterer of docks, sweet Babylon!

Blackout

End, Act I

Act II

Entr'acte

While the audience is in the lobby between acts, a few minutes before the house lights dim, The Chorus, Chorus Leader, Filthy old Vet, Bob the Cobbler and Dick the Butcher, all in their Sunday best mill among them, passing out pamphlets decrying the decline of morality in society, the need for "Unity under God," "National Pride and Unity," and "God's Law in Troubled Times." All the pamphlets mention a sermon to be given by "Jack Cade," at a "Rally for God and Country."

The cast should, in character, vigorously encourage individuals in the crowd to attend, but when any member of the audience attempts to engage them in conversation, or ask any questions, they respond "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."

While this is still going on, JACK CADE should take the stage in front of the curtain. He is dressed in a smart suit, and is impeccably groomed. He carries a Bible. Militant religious hymns and patriotic songs play loudly, as Cade strides to DSC, waving and smiling. The cast outside gets excited, and begins clapping to the rhythm of the hymns, joyfully encouraging the audience back into the theatre.

Cade begins his speech after the audience has returned. The music fades. The house lights remain up throughout the entr'acte.

Cade:

Brothers and Sisters, Patriots, and especially, those of you still in darkness, seeking the light of truth.

We are brought here tonight in the midst of a storm enveloping our country. Treachery and disloyalty run like poison in the veins of our nation. We are far, far away from the light that shone from heaven on the founding of this, God's favored nation.

Why is such darkness everywhere around us? Why? Why has God taken his mighty hand away? Why does his blessing no longer fall upon us like the gentle rain? Why instead are we in danger of being swept away in a tide of iniquity, sin, and blood?

Hear then, the word of the Lord, your God! The book of the prophet Isaiah.

"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.

A sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.

Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers.

Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.

Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.

And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.”

And what is it that we have done? What have we allowed to happen on this sacred soil that has brought down the wrath of the Lord of Hosts, the King of Kings?

I say to you tonight, you that love your country and your God that there is sin in the camp. And God will not bless a nation with sin in the camp. How much less will he bless a land with sin running rampant, as virulent as disease in its highest councils, in its very highest offices?

But what is the nature of this sin? We know there is lust and license. We have a foreign queen from a land of idolators, fornicators, sorcerers and oathbreakers. What should we expect? We know it is not what God expects.

We have ministers of state that skulk in the Queen’s chambers, while our King blinds himself to dishonor and iniquity in his own house. But what should we expect? We know it is not what God expects.

But “oh!” You might cry. “Oh, Jack Cade! What you say is treasonous!” My friends, my loving friends, the truth is never treasonous. Trying to awaken our nation to the peril of falling into the hands of an angry God is not treasonous! Letting these lambs of God, our children, fall prey to sin and slaughter is treasonous! It is high treason! Treason against the Most High!

Hear the Word of the Lord! From the Pentateuch, the Book of Deuteronomy:

“But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee:

Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. .

Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out.

And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron.

And thy carcase shall be meat unto all fowls of the air, and unto the beasts of the earth, and no man shall fray them away.

The LORD shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart:

Thou shalt betroth a wife, and another man shall lie with her: thou shalt build an house, and thou shalt not dwell therein: thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof.

The LORD shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known; and there shalt thou serve other gods, wood and stone.

And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the LORD shall lead thee.

Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but thou shalt not enjoy them; for they shall go into captivity.

Moreover all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed; because thou hearkenedst not unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee:

Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the LORD shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee.”

The Word of the Lord condemns nations that live in, and tolerate, sin. And the hand of the Most High will smite them with bitterness. The disobedient neck shall be broken, and that without mending. What then shall He bring upon us? What is the warning written on the crooked, dark road ahead?

The Lord tells us in Deuteronomy:

The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand;

A nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour to the young:

And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy.

And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste.

Oh, we have seen that fierce countenance! When the murderous witch Joan slew our best men at Orleans! We have seen the blood of our children shed by idolators, and sorcerers of the warlike race which our late King Henry so nobly fought, and his son so recently took to his bed.

And how shall the Lord reward us for approving this union of his people with the people of Sodom? What shall the fearful day of His wrath bring upon us?

...thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the LORD thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee:

So that he will not give to any of them of the flesh of his children whom he shall eat: because he hath nothing left him in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee in all thy gates.

If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD;

And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone.

And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind:

Is giving up our people to such a fate the act of an anointed King, the shepherd of his people? Why does he heed such evil counsel? Why do men like Suffolk advise the King to surrender what God has given him as his birthright, for the pleasures of a foreign woman's bed?

In a land where the Word of God is not heeded, and His commandments are not kept, evil comes and covers the land as surely as darkness covers all in the absence of light.

Tonight, we must begin to restore the Holy Light of God to our land. We must pray, we must work, we must raise our voices in praise, and we must shout...shout until we are heard that we will not tolerate sin, we will not tolerate idolators and sorcerers in our midst! We will not tolerate traitors who counsel surrender of our King's lands, given to him by the Hand of God, for nothing more than the approval of a foreign queen, herself wanton and licentious with the King's own counselors!

Clearly, sin is mighty in this land! But fear not! For the Lord is with thee! And if Almighty God is with us, who can stand against us?

The cast members begin to sing "Onward Christian Soldiers," and sing until the end of Cade's sermon.

Our Lord has commanded us "...he that hath a purse, let him take it, and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one." Pray and prepare! Work and wait! Our day, the day of the Lord and His righteous judgment, is near! Now let our voices be heard, and let Hell shake with the sound of praise! Let the King hear, and know the Word of the Lord!

The cast members explode into praise and hallelujahs. The lights fade. The cast members exit except for the chorus and the chorus leader, who return to their seats in the audience. The lights fade to black.

Scene 1

The Chorus Leader stands in the darkness.

The chorus members will stand and deliver as before, with the number standing and speaking corresponding to the number of beats in the line, but this time, once Chorus members are standing, they will not sit until after the Volte. I will indicate the number of Chorus Members who should be standing and speaking before each line. If there is only one number, then the same number of people are speaking and standing.

When there are eight beats in the line, the Chorus Leader will join. They will not illuminate themselves this time, this dialogue takes place in darkness.

(Chorus: Thornton's Didactic Fib. Chorus Leader: Quintain)

Chorus:

[2] Where shall we turn?

[3] Our good Duke Humphrey – dead,

[3 standing, 2 speaking] Rebellion burns.

Chorus Leader:

I am afraid. The streets are slick with fear..

Chorus:

[3] And loyal Beaufort's head

[5] Bows down with guilt unto the setting sun.

[5 st, 3 sp.] Who can stand in his stead?

Chorus Leader:

I am afraid. Harsh whispers fill the night.

Chorus:

[5] Soon, Beaufort's time is gone, his service done.

[5 + Chorus Leader] But all of France is lost, and pride will not abide this bitter shame;

[5] The loss of all that Henry's father won.

Chorus Leader:

Ambition claims its wage – and sacrifice.

Chorus:

[5 + Chorus Leader] The sleepless eyes of Suffolk watch, and fear the hungry, climbing flame.

[5 + Chorus Leader] Half-mad with pride, unrighteous lust for power, queen, and shining name.

Chorus Leader:

Amidst the flames he casts the rumbling dice.

Chorus:

[5 + Chorus Leader] And thus his fortune feeds him to the beast he raised but could not tame.

[5] The covetous leave no safe place to run.

[5 + Chorus Leader] And those who lose, and those who win alike will bleed to play the game.

Chorus Leader:

A plague of darkness falls upon their sight.

Chorus:

[5] The gilded wolves surround King Henry's son.

[3] The dooms wait to be said.

[5 sp, 3 st] The bloody end has only just begun.

Chorus:

[3] All the tears we shed,

[2 sp, 3st] And all we'll burn,

[3] Can not revive the dead.

Scene 2

The Throne Room. Henry, Suffolk, Margaret, York, and Somerset are present. Margaret and Suffolk stand beside the throne, where Henry sits, looking lost and disconsolate. Somerset stands near Suffolk. York stands further downstage, looking stern and alone. He alone is wearing a military dress uniform. A portrait of Beaufort hangs nearby. The monitors show only Calais and Aquitaine still remain in English hands.

Henry (to Suffolk):

Still, dear Duke, I cannot understand
How we, lost as we are, can threaten France.
Our debts gape like a lion's yawning maw;
Our soldiers cast their eyes upon the ground.

York:

Forgive me, gracious lord. It is not so.
Your soldiers, though they long for home and hearth
Still fight as did your father's doughty few.
But aimless stratagems and long retreats
Have brought fear and confusion to their minds.

Suffolk:

Ah. Lack of leadership, then *General*?

York:

More lack of purpose and of rightful plan.
The lands which they have bled for many years
Are won by sword, and given back by pen.

Somerset:

Oh this again. Have you heard? Humphrey's dead.
So must we hear his moan from York's lips now?

York:

Aye. Humphrey's dead. God rest his gracious soul.
But he and truth did not divide a shroud.
And here's another truth to gall your guts:
When Humphrey told you that the loss of France
Would lead to war abroad and wreck at home
He could have been Elijah. Look abroad.
The war is raging even to Calais.
The French are casting envious eyes e'en here.
And in the muddling streets the whispered grunts
Of common swine rise to a lion's roar.

Suffolk (*losing his temper*):

And is this throne to fear the roar of swine?
As for the war in France, well, what of it?
What need have we of land in war-bit France?
Let the Devil have the Dauphin's soul
And bugger him with Joan's prodigious cock!

York regards him coldly. Henry looks at Margaret, concerned about the effect of such coarseness on her sensitivities. But Margaret smiles at Suffolk, and says nothing.

Henry:

I weary of all this. I cannot sleep.
France is my mother's home, and too, my queen's.
By right and treaty, we have every cause
And some would say, the duty to rule France.

Our cause is just, and God does speak for us.
Why then do we shed blood and squander wealth?

Suffolk:

Well, my lord, I'd say the time has come
For someone to be held accountable.
The people want to know who fumbled France,
I say we pick our Issac's ram today.

Somerset, you take the field in France.
Take back fair Aquitaine, and hold Calais.
The King desires you take supreme command.

He looks at Henry

Henry (*hesitating*):

Of course...of course.

Somerset is delighted. York looks even grimmer. Somerset walks to York, and gives him a crisp salute. Without waiting for it to be returned, he rips the rank insignia from York's uniform. He smiles, trying to provoke York to rashness.

Henry (*to York*):

No dishonor meant, my dearest friend!

York (*with deadly calm*):

None taken. How could Somerset taint me?
The war will soon show what this creature is.
I wish him fortune - mercy on his troops.

Henry:

As do we all. God's mercy on us all.

Margaret:

Amen, my husband. Now, you've done enough.
The hard labor of statecraft tires you.
Away, and let your fond queen comfort you.

Margaret leads Henry off, SL. She throws a smile at Suffolk over her shoulder. York and Somerset are still at dagger points.

Somerset:

My Dearest Duke of York, what will you do?
Your laurels fade, and now you fade with them.
You have no gift to bring to our wise king,
No talent, save a savage taste for blood.

And now you have no army at your back.
Your king has taken that, and soon takes more.
What will you do? Retire to your estates
And putter with the lawn, or take up golf?

York (*smiles viciously*):

I think I shall. I rather think I shall.
But first a visit to poor Humphrey's tomb.
My kinsman well deserves that small respect
And there, I'll pray that God gives rightful wage
To those who reward service with contempt.

But know this, boy. I will not wait on God.

Somerset flickers. He leaves, SL

Suffolk:

What childish threats. What hollow, bitter wind.

York:

And will you tarry, Duke? The queen awaits.

Suffolk starts to speak, but leaves, SL

York:
(*Rondeau*)

The tide of blood is rushing in.
The moon calls kin to slaughter kin.
The carrion birds in silk and feather
Scent the air and bless the weather.
Let the fatal dance begin.

You may excuse with artful spin,
No man's as clever as his sin.
Stand apart or stand together
The tide of blood comes rushing in.

Oh what a prize ambition wins!
As mortals plan, the devil grins
At amateurs who wonder whether
Their skin or yours will be boot leather.
Let the fatal dance begin.
The tide of blood is rushing in.

Blackout

Scene 3

A public street. DICK THE BUTCHER comes down the aisle, smiling, wiping his hands on his bloody apron. He whistles a patriotic tune as he mounts the stage. As he walks to DSC, he is intercepted by FILTHY OLD VET.

Vet:

Good day, Sir. (Dick doesn't seem to notice him) Sir? That's a nice song you're whistling Sir. I remember it from the war days. I do remember it.

Dick finally sees him. He looks at him with thinly suppressed loathing. After a moment, he sets off, SL, whistling again. The Vet gets in front of him.

Vet:

I remember that song.

Dick (irate):

So what do you want, a medal?

Vet:

No. No thank you. Got plenty of those. Don't know where they went, though.

Dick:

I'm busy.

Vet:

Yes, yes, I can see. Can you help me? I'm...I'm...

Dick:

About to go to jail if you don't leave me alone.

Vet:

That tune. We sang it at Orleans. "Over hill...over dale...we will hit the dusty trail..."

Dick:

So you were at Orleans, eh?

Vet:

Yes. I was wounded there. Shot in the head. Twice.

Dick:

Yeah.

Vet:

You know the tune of that old song. Where did you serve?

Dick:

I didn't. I had things to do.

Vet:

But the song...

Dick:

I love my country. I support the troops. I sell them all the meat they can buy. "Over hill...over dale...we have sausages on sale..."

Vet:

Yes, yes. Can you help me?

Dick:

Yeah. See over there? That burger place is hiring. Get a job.

Vet:

I...I...

Dick:

I'm busy. Fuck off you worthless old faggot.

Vet:

W...wha...I'm a...

Dick:

I said, fuck off. I work hard for my money.

Vet:

I'm a troop.

Dick:

What?

Vet:

I'm one of those troops you say you supp...

Dick shoves him to the ground.

BOB THE COBBLER enters, SR. He is a successful, well-dressed cobbler, President of the local Chamber of Commerce, from the look of him. He is smiling, until he sees the Vet shoved to the ground. He hurries over.

Bob:

Now, Dick!

Dick:

Oh! Hi, Bob. How's business? Good from the look of you. When are they going to clear the streets of all this garbage?

Bob:

That's not very Christian of you, Dick. This man is one of God's children, and a citizen. You were at the Chamber of Commerce Prayer Breakfast this morning. You heard what the Reverend...

Dick:

Yeah, yeah. Well, this stinking, boozy old bum isn't worthy of...

Bob:

All God's creatures are worthy, Dick. (*to the Vet*) God bless you, Brother. Are you all right?

Vet:

I...I'm okay. (He gets up. Bob makes no move to assist him when he has difficulty standing) Can you help me, Sir? I...I need...

Bob:

You need grace.

Vet:

Yes, yes, and...

Bob:

Eternal assurance of your salvation from a loving God.

Vet:

Yes...and...

Bob:

There's a revival meeting at the downtown mission tonight, Brother. I'll be there. So will many others who love you in the name of Christ.

Vet:

That's...good...

Bob:

Silver and gold, have I none, saith the Apostle Peter, but such as I have, give I thee, Brother. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!

Vet:

But I can...*(he struggles to his feet)*

Bob:

And now that you're able, put your trust in God and in hard work, Brother. Faith will make you whole.

Vet:

Give me a fucking dollar.

Bob:

What?

Vet:

Five dollars. Before you started I was hungry. Now I need a goddamned drink.

He glares at them a moment, then limps USL and sits. He pulls out a crude cardboard sign. HOMELESS VET, HURT IN WAR, PLEASE HELP. He sits down.

The WIDOWED FISHWIFE enters down the aisle. She is wearing a patriotic T-shirt, and has red, white, and blue ribbons in her hair. She carries a large tray full of small fish, each with a red, white, and blue ribbon wrapped around it. The front of the tray has a large portrait of a soldier, bordered in black.

Dick: *(toward Vet):*

Filthy ingrate. Who does he think he is?

Widow:

Morning, gentlemen. God bless you! Buy a Freedom Fish in memory of my poor husband?

Bob buys a fish, Dick eyes them suspiciously. Vet gets interested and heads over.

Dick:

Are these foreign, or domestic fish?

Bob:

I'm sure they're domestic. And of the highest quality, too.

Widow:

Thank you, Brother Bob. I'm glad you're sure of that.

Dick and Bob pay for, and bite their fish. They look less than impressed.

Widow:

Aren't they good? Don't they make you feel good?

Bob:

It's...thank you, Sister.

Vet:

Excuse me. May I have...

Widow looks at him and starts to hand him a fish.

Dick:

Hey! I paid you for that! And you're going to give it away to him?

Widow:

But he doesn't have...

Bob:

I have to agree with Brother Dick. After all, "Give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him..."

Vet:

Teach later. How 'bout a bite now? *(he reaches, frightening Widow. Dick punches him, knocks him down. He doesn't move.)*

Widow:

He tried to...tried to...

Bob:

Don't worry, Sister. We all saw what happened. Don't let this concern you. We won't let it effect your ministry.

Dick:

Bum. Filthy old bum.

Bob:

Clearly, Sister, your ministry has a need. These are dangerous times. I know some people who would be more than happy to support and protect your work for a very reasonable share of your...

Dick: *(using a cell phone)*

I'm calling the police. They'll fix this piece of shit.

Widow:

I can't...I can't believe...I was only...I...have to go home.

Bob:

Good idea, Sister. Go home and rest. I'll call you about the services you need.

Dick:

You need better fish. I got fish. Very good fish...yes officer, some bum assaulted a woman on Veteran's Memorial Boulevard. He got what was coming to him. *(to phone)* Yeah. It's none of your goddam business who I am. I'm a goddam taxpayer. Get over here and get this taken care of.

Widow:

Brother Bob, Brother Dick, I feel so...but I can't go home. I have to raise the money for the project. Our heroes are depending on us. But I can't lose half a day. Unless...

Bob *(hesitates):*

Well...I suppose we could...since we're going to be in partnership...

Dick:

And if you're getting your fish from me, in future...

They hesitantly hand her a good sized wad of cash. She brightens.

Widow:

Thank you, Gentlemen! You are truly, truly patriots! Our heroes thank you! My poor, fallen husband thanks you.

Vet *(still not moving):*

Thank you.

Dick kicks him in the stomach.

Dick:

Shut the fuck up, you filthy piece of shit.

Bob:

Dick...

The Vet, intending to beg for mercy, reaches out and grabs Bob's pants leg. Bob shrieks, and begins frantically stomping the Vet. Dick puts in a kick now and then.

Jack Cade enters SR, with two sharply dressed assistants. He sees what is going on, and walks over to where the Vet is being beaten.

Cade:

Brothers, what is this? Peace! Peace!

They stop and look at him. Bob looks ashamed, Dick just looks annoyed at the interruption.

Bob:

He...he...grabbed me.

Dick:

Just some crackhead bum, Reverend. He attacked a woman out here, then grabbed Bob. The cops should be here by now. Where the hell are they?

Cade looks down at the Vet. He crouches down to speak to him, compassionately, and with great patience.

Cade:

Brother, can you see it now? Can you see what living outside of the Lord's plan has brought you to? Look at yourself. Filthy, addicted, knocked down in the gutter. Is this what you want from your life?

Vet:

N...no...but....

Cade:

Then the time has come for you to turn.

He helps the Vet to a kneeling position and kneels with him.

Cade:

Brother, do you want to change your life? Do you want to be assured of the guidance of a loving, all-powerful God, and to be assured of an eternal place in Heaven?

Vet:

I'm hungry.

Cade:

Of course you are. God gives us hunger as a gift – it teaches us to reach toward Heaven in hope and trust for our daily bread. Will you turn toward Heaven today, Brother?

Vet:

But I'm hungry!

Cade:

I promise you, Brother, that if you give your heart to Jesus today, he will see that you want for nothing. His grace sufficeth. I was once poor, too, with nothing to support me, and no one in my life. But God's grace brought me up from the very same gutter you are in now, and look at my life, Brother. I have a fine house, a beautiful car, a sweet, pretty wife and children. God has blessed me because I put my trust in Him.

This is sinking in with the Vet. Bob and Dick are riveted.

Cade:

Are you ready to put your trust in God, Brother?

The Vet nods.

Cade:

The Bible tells us, that if we will confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord, and believe in our hearts in his resurrection, then we will be saved from sin and the grave. Now, is Jesus Christ the Lord of your life, Brother? Do you pledge yourself to his service, as the King of your heart and soul?

Vet (brightening):

Yeah. I do. Yes.

Cade:

And do you believe in your heart, in the center of your soul, that God raised Jesus from the dead to be with Him, and with us, forever?

Vet:

Yes, I do...Yes!

Cade:

Then pray with me, my Brother in Christ.

All bow their heads

Cade:

Lord, this man has humbled himself before you and asks that you look down upon him and wash his sins away in the pure, holy blood of Jesus. He knows he is a sinner, and unworthy of Your Grace, but he pleads the promise of Christ. Make him a new man, clean and holy, and bless his life that he may prosper. In your precious name we ask it, Amen.

“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” Go, my Brother, and walk in the light of Christ!

All rejoice. Bob and Dick shake his hand, Bob in spiritual rapture, Dick a bit suspiciously. The Vet seems genuinely exuberant. Cade takes Bob aside.

Cade:

Brother, you have supported this ministry in the past. I have it laid on my heart that you may serve the cause of Christ again.

Bob:

Anything, Reverend. This was...

Cade:

Yes. Take our new brother and see to it that he gets a hot meal, and some clothes from the thrift shop. Make sure he gets a bed at the shelter. Don't give him any money, of course, but see to it that we provide him what he needs. No more.

He turns to his assistants. He notices the cardboard sign, and motions for one of his assistants to pick it up. He reads it.

Interview Bob, Dick, and that fellow, and put out a press release. Let's not hide our light under a bushel.

He turns to address them all. A crowd begins to build as the Chorus comes back onstage. The Widow returns, selling Freedom Fish.

Brothers and sisters, you see a veteran of our army, a war hero, a survivor of the deadly combat in France. Look at him. He had fallen very low. He was a prisoner of drink, and committed violence on passers by. Now, he rejoices in the Lord. Soon, the Lord will bless him with the bounty that he gives with his right hand to those who walk in His light!

Scattered "amens."

But what of those who walk outside of God's light, determined to live in sin, and to pull others down into the mire of iniquity? What of them?

My friends, the Bible says they shall be cast out into fire and darkness. That they shall not prosper.

Brothers and Sisters, look around you. Does our nation prosper? Are we as strong, and as wealthy as we should be? Does God reward our efforts with a rich harvest, and crown our arms with victory?

No! He does not! Look at your brother, this downtrodden veteran! Look at your stores, your fields, and your businesses! Everywhere, the vine withers, the wheat falls among the briars, and everywhere, our armies meet with defeat. Why? Why are we forsaken, oh Lord?

Some in the crowd ask "Why? Why?"

When a man fails, it is because of sin in his life. When a nation fails, it is because the festering rot of sin is present at the very top. Why has God taken His hand away from us? Because we tolerate, in the very heart of the state, adultery, and treason!

Soon the day will come, my Friends and Soldiers in Christ. Soon the day of wrath will cleanse this land, and make her whole, and clean again, just as this poor, fallen man will be cleansed. Pray for the day, my friends! Pray for the day when God puts his hand upon us and bids us do his righteous judgment!

The crowd erupts.

Now go, my brothers and sisters. Go to the gates of the King's palace and sing the praise of Christ. Let the crowned heads know that our allegiance lies with the King of Kings, and to His righteous law!

The crowd exits SL, excited and happy. Vet is exulting as Bob leads him off. Cade watches them go.

Richard of York enters quietly, SR, dressed in civilian clothes. Cade is contemplating the crowd, and does not see him until he is nearby. Finally, he turns and smiles.

Cade:

God bless you, Brother York. A glorious day
Has dawned when Heaven puts you in my way.

York regards him coldly.

York:

How goes your...work?

Cade:

It prospers, as the work is of the Lord.
And how with you - the king's most faithful sword?

York:

You flatter prettily for no one's child.

Cade:

Why, my good lord, then whose child might I be?

York has a disturbing thought. Dismisses it with difficulty.

York:

I come to gild your present "ministry."
As oft before I have encouraged you
To...how you say...put forth the rights of God
And to rebuke the palace's cankering sins.

He hands him a fat envelope. Cade does not take it yet.

Cade:

Please know that we are grateful, Brother York
That you support us in God's holy work.
But...you must understand that God alone
Must guide this work. It serves his purposes.

York smiles.

York:

Of course, good Reverend Cade. I have no doubt
That your desire serves only God and State
As does my own, a servant of the King
Who lies a prisoner of evil tongues
And of adulterous, impious men.

Cade takes the envelope.

York:

Godspeed you to your destiny, Jack Cade.
May your work prosper with God's holy flock.

Cade:

And you, Good York, may God's grace go with you.

Cade exits SL

York watches him leave.

York: *(as he walks out, up the aisle, through the house.)*

These holy, shouting men, wrapped in God's love
Are never slow to wrap their hands in gold.

God help the fool, Jack Cade. He raises up
A brutal gale and flies his brittle kite
And thinks then that the wind's his to command.
But as for me, I need not rule the wind.
But merely set my sails and reef for storm.

And after storm, there comes the market day
Where Cade's sheep, tired of shearing, choose instead
To serve their lords with mutton, 'stead of wool.
(indicating Cade) You think yourself so clever, since you lead.
You must be the smartest sheep of all.
First to the door of England's slaughterhouse.

Blackout

Scene 4

A command post, somewhere in France. Somerset, dressed as a general, is grimly studying reports and computer monitors. His despair is building. Suffolk, also dressed as a general enters behind him. He watches Somerset for a few moments.

Suffolk:

How goes the fight, my gracious Somerset?

Somerset:

As well as pie, if pie be stuffed with shit.

Suffolk:

How so? We fail. How is it that we fail?

Somerset:

Our troops fight not. They whisper in their camps,
And in the field, they act like frightened sheep.
Our officers can not be led to lead
And common troops make shams and hector home.

Or else they lose their minds and roam the streets
Shooting every shadow til some child
Or old infirm'ed bitch gets in the way -
Another bloody show-corpse for their cause.

The French fight like the coward cannibal.
Our men cannot sleep safe within their bunks
For fear some murderous fanatic creeps
Into their midst and blows himself to Hell.

Suffolk:

Ingratitude. We bring them every boon
That our great land can import to this waste.
So be it. We shall give them Paradise
However long we make their homeland Hell.

TALBOT enters. He is dressed in a dusty, field uniform, in contrast to the dress uniforms of Suffolk and Somerset. He is a high-ranking officer of great personal courage and experience. He salutes.

Talbot:

My General, you sent for a report.

Somerset:

I sent for victories. Do you bring them?

Talbot:

I cannot lie, my lord, the news is grim.

Somerset:

The news is always grim from you, Talbot.
Your visage drawn from too much bloody strife
Your mind shriveled from endless, hard-thought war.
You lack imagination, and élan.

Our soldiers see this grim, unyielding face
And take no heart from this embittered soul.

Talbot:

My lord, I...

Somerset:

Shut up, incompetent. I'm not half-done.
Our arms – the best that modern man invents,
Our troops outnumber them a hundred fold,
Our firepower awes the cowering world.

And yet you cannot stop a primitive
Armed with what he scrapes from battered streets!
My God! What fools I have for officers
Who cannot win with such advantages!

Talbot:

My lord, the tactical...

Somerset:

Shut up! I said shut up you idiot!
What can you say to save you from disgrace?

Suffolk:

You brought him here to issue his report.
It might be best to hear it at some point.
Please, Colonel Talbot, let us hear your news.

Somerset:

Go on, go on. We haven't got all day!

Talbot:

(S.A.L.U.T.E. report)

Thank you, my Lords, How many take up arms
Against our forces, we can hardly know.
They are in civil dress, not uniform.
We only guess how many of them die.

They bomb and snipe in secret at our troops
And at the French who prove friendly to us.
Our losses wax and wane, enough to say
That they are not subdued, and will not yield.

Our enemy is in the streets and homes
Of every neighborhood. The locals here
Hide and protect the enemy from sight.
Right or wrong, the locals are their kin.

There is no firm command among their troops,
Nor any common name, save that of Joan.
No headquarters to raid and end the fight;
No flag to capture, and no citadel.

Near every night the enemy attacks,
And set their deadly traps along the roads.
By dawn they are invisible and go
About the normal business of the day.

They have no power to compete with us.
No tanks, or fighter jets, or guided bombs.
But any weapon will more than suffice
When you've resolved to strike your foe and die.

(this sinks in for a few moments)

Suffolk:

It's naught to us how many French sheep die.
And our brave troops are ours to save or spend.
Our reputations cannot bear a loss.
We must continue, careless of the cost.

Talbot:

We will do as we are ordered, Sir,
But I must be complete in my report.
I am in the field these many months
And seen the battlefield with my own eyes.

Suffolk:

Battlefield? You should see how at home
They tear at me, and bellow their demands.
The rabble howl for instant victory
Yet weep and moan at every fallen man.

Somerset:

And why should that concern us? Sheep are sheep.
Shout louder that the fools who fear the war
Are cowards, traitors, and dupes of the French.
The sheep will trample those who whine for peace.

Suffolk:

And we have done. All the public squares
Are filled with criers in our constant pay.
Yet, as all these years and all this blood
Are spent and spilled, the malcontents grow bold.

Jack Cade lays every mischance at my door.
Points at the Queen, and every palace lip
Now hisses word that sin has cut us down.
What can they know of sin, who've never ruled?

(to Talbot) Tell your men that we will hold this land
Until our interests here are well secured,
And 'til the government we planted here
Knows both it's duty – and its proper place.

No! We will not be moved though countless lives
Are spent, and mountains of the people's gold.
Not even if it takes a hundred years.

Suddenly, a chorus member stands up in the midst of the audience. He opens his coat to show a suicide vest. He holds a detonator in his right hand.

Bomber:

For Joan! For France and for the will of God!

He presses the detonator. The lights go out and there is a tremendous explosion. The lights come up in a moment, red and dim. The set is heavily damaged. Talbot is dead. Suffolk and Somerset are floored, stunned.

Blackout

Scene 5

A public street. A rally is just ending. The crowd is shaking hands with Rev. Cade, he is working the crowd. They bear signs reading "GOD HATES TRAITORS," "NO PAGAN QUEEN," "NO KING BUT JESUS," "SUFFOLK TRAITOR!" and "VICTORY THROUGH FAITH." Some carry guns openly. The Vet stands nearby, dressed in a thrift-shop suit, hair carefully combed, a Bible under his arm. After the crowd has thinned a bit, he addresses Rev. Cade.

Vet:

Reverend, Your sermon...I...I...why...why do you suppose the world has got so bad?

Cade:

The world is bad, my friend. The Bible tells us that if you love the world, you love not God.

Vet (*downcast, confused*):

But Reverend, I killed people for this world. For my country. I killed people.

Cade:

Yes. You did your duty. Your country called you and you did your duty.

Vet:

Yes. But the world has gone so bad...how can I have duty to such bad men?

Cade:

Your duty wasn't to those men. It was to your country. The sinful, evil people who surround our King may dirty her face, but our country is still the beloved of God. You did your best to serve her.

Vet:

Serve...her.

Cade:

You've seen some horrible things, my brother. You've seen blood, and death, and deceit. It's only natural that you feel confused, and sorrowful. Trust God. Listen to His voice within you. He will guide you. I will see you soon, brother. God be with you.

Cade leaves, SL.

Suffolk enters SR, with two aides. He is looking at a sheaf of reports, and does not like what he sees. The Vet notices him, and walks toward him.

Suffolk:

I cannot credit this. It is too wild.
How came we to this sorry, helpless state?
With all the power of the modern world

We cannot loose the death grip of these fools.

And what shall we then say unto the king?
The simple, patriotic, pious prince
Whose throne is slipping out from under him.
Without respect in court, or in the street.

Ah. Honor for the king. I'm good for that.
Oh Margaret, I have one happy thought.
And that is you. And now, back to my home
And to my queen, who soothes all Fortune's wounds.

Vet:
Are you Duke Suffolk?

Suffolk (*distracted*):
I am the man. Do you have word for me?

Vet:
I do. Many.

Suffolk:
Then quickly, fool. I am a busy man.

Vet:
Your errand has a grave end.

Suffolk:
What's that? Yes, yes, I am due with the king.

Vet:
It's what you do with queens that God abhors
I do have words for you. "disloyal, adulterer, traitor..."

Suffolk:
You idiot. (*casually, to his aides*) Cast this fool aside.
I have no time for pious, prattling scolds.

Cade enters SL, working the crowd. He notices the Vet and Suffolk, and begins walking that direction, concerned.

Vet:
I'm done talking.

Cade sees what is about to happen, but is frozen to the spot, silent.

The Vet reaches out and takes a pistol out of a nearby protester's holster and shoots Suffolk three times. He then turns, and hands the pistol to Cade and falls to his knees.

Suffolk falls into the arms of his aide.

Suffolk:

Oh God! Oh God! I'm shot! Dear God, I'm shot!

The aide lets him fall heavily to the ground, and stands over him, smiling.

Suffolk:

What's this? Disloyal dogs! Murdering swine!

Aide:

Such words from traitors hardly sting our pride.
Richard of York sends you his compliments.
As he has sent so much good to us both.

Suffolk:

Of course, of course...Margaret...

He dies

Aide:

Fear not, good Duke, you shall see Margaret.
Or rather, she shall soon lay eyes on you.

They drag him out past the crowd, SL. Some members of the crowd are panicking, some stand silent, some praise God for justice, some spit on the body.

Cade stands among them. The confusion is general, and panic is in the air.

Dick the Butcher:

If you just stand there like a sheep the troops will come and take us all! We'll all be responsible for what this goddam bum has done! They'll hang us all!

Bob the Cobbler:

Please Reverend. What can we do? What can we...

Cade lays his hand upon the head of the Vet

Cade:

Your sins are forgiven by the gracious blood of Christ. Go now, and sin no more.

He contemplates his actions a moment. He turns to the crowd, his Bible in one hand, the gun in the other.

My friends. My brothers and sisters in Christ, what has happened here today was tragic, but as we know, sin has a cost – a just wage, and justly has Suffolk received his wages!

But now, we must be strong, and pursue Justice. The time has come! The time I promised you! The time to bring the Kingdom of God to this land, in this time! Let us go to the King, and put forth our demands in righteous certainty – to exile his traitorous and adulterous queen, to take back our God-given rights in France, and to put aside his evil and impious counselors!

The time is now! The time has come for God's people to take back the ear of their King, and to put God's perfect law ahead of man's corrupt and fallen law! To the palace, in the Holy Name of Christ Jesus!

The crowd surges off, SL, in a frenzy.

The lights fade through red, to black

Scene 6

The red lights come up on Queen Margaret, reading quietly with a lady in attendance. Suffolk's aide enters with a box. Without a word, he hands it to the lady, who puts it in Margaret's lap. She opens it, looks within, and shrieks, again and again. She cradles the box, weeping wildly.

Blackout

End Act II

Act III

Entre' Act

The lobby will have several video monitors playing a newscast in an endless loop. Scenes of war and civil disorder cycle endlessly.

Announcer:

(Pantoum)

The day of wrath is come.
There is no place of safety.
Blood stains the street, fear and bloody riot
Rule instead of our impotent king.

No safe place remains.
The city burns, screams fill the bitter air.
And in its heart, the law stands powerless
Prostituted, bloody-handed, sold.

A fire rages, roaring in their hearts.
Murder wears the name of righteousness.
All order, stripped of dignity, despised.
High born and low alike in savage fear.

In God's name there is slaughter in the streets.
In law's name, our injustice eats the young.
Rich and poor are drowned in terror's wake.
There is no peace, there is no justice now.

In law's name, our injustice eats the young.
Blood stains the street, fear and bloody riot.
There is no peace, there is no justice now.
The day of wrath is come.

Scene 1

A press conference. A podium studded with microphones, and the colors of York. York strides to the podium, wearing a general's uniform. The Chorus, playing the part of the press corps, will ask their questions from their seats in the audience.

York:

I am returned from exile on this day
And will demand that those who dupe the King
And boldly give abuse to loyalty;
Those traitors who prefer the gold of France
And taint the royal house with brazen sin,
Be cast out of the palace, and the state.

I come here asking justice, not revenge,
But I come on in strength with sword in hand.
My army will restore this country's grace!
And if we must our argument in steel
And blood will make our nation safe again.
This I, the rightful heir do promise you:
This debauch will not stand. We shall prevail.

The reporters' hands go up. York gestures toward Reporter 1

Reporter 1:

Gracious Lord of York, I beg to know
Will Henry give the crown away in peace?
Or will he hide behind his foreign friends
And bring a brutal war upon our heads?

Reporter 2 (To Reporter 3)

Oh, brother! What a softball.

York:

I will not touch one hair on Henry's head.
It's my belief that he has been misled.
In childlike faith he follows traitorous rats
Who I will, by the law, exterminate.

But I will not usurp late Henry's son.
God's anointed King may not be struck
For fear impiety may taint the cause
Of those who cry for our deliverance.

Reporter 2 tries to get York's attention, to ask his question. York stares at him for a moment, then indicates Reporter 3.

Reporter 3:

Lord York, there's a lot of buzz around the palace that accuses you as the moving force behind Jack Cade and his followers, as well as the murder of Duke Suffolk. The riots have spread to the capitol. Any comment?

York:

I am not the author of disorder.
It comes from those who desecrate the state.
The honorless, and grasping traitors fail,
And in their failure, chaos is unleashed.

The Reverend Cade, and those who follow him
Are outraged by the rot in England's soul.
But riot is not any tool of right
And order in our streets must be restored.

Reporter 2 tries again to be acknowledged. York stares him down, then indicates Reporter 1.

Reporter 1:

My Lord of York, you mourn Duke Humphrey's loss.
Yet some have said that his convenient death
Was not, as was put out, quite natural.
Do you believe that Humphrey, stout of heart
Did, for no prior cause, suddenly die?

Reporter 2:

I don't believe this!

York:

Good evidence, that I cannot reveal
For fear of giving those who hate our land
Intelligence imperiling our cause,
Suggests great Humphrey did not meet his end
By peaceful means, but I can say no more.

But this I will say. Treason lies in thought.
Those who think to suborn treachery
Or aid and comfort enemies of state
Will share in the full measure of our wrath.
Guard well your thoughts, and doubly guard your words.

Now, we must march, Justice cannot delay.
We ask for prayer from righteous, loyal folk.
As for the traitors that surround our King,
Pray for their souls. They shall meet God e'er long.

He exits, SL

Reporter 2 accosts Reporter 1

Reporter 2:

What the Hell was that? You're a reporter! Not a shill for York or Cade's rabble! You let him stand up there without answering a single question that he hadn't rehearsed.

Reporter 1:

I do not answer to the likes of you.
And when you are ignored by those in power
You have no news to sell, or words to write.
I do not make the news, I write it down.
I have a deadline. I've no time for this.

He leaves.

Reporter 3 approaches Reporter 2

Reporter 2:

He's not a reporter, he's a goddamned whore. And York's mad with vengeance. He'll send Cade's mob into London. They'll burn half the city down. Then he'll turn his army loose to murder anyone who supported Suffolk or Somerset. That's why he's here! To write Humphrey's vengeance in blood! And someone must tell. Someone has to get the story out.

Reporter 3:

You cannot tell what they've no wish to hear.
They want the story clear, the hero plain.
York's men have shaped the story very well.
The people hate the Queen, and Somerset.
They will not hear the truth you have to tell.

Reporter 2:

They have to hear. We have to tell. It's what we do. It's what we're for.

Reporter 3:

Those who pay our checks say what we're for.
And they do not reward those who disturb
The common herd they profitably fleece.
You will meet with silence from York's men,
And your employers will not stand with you.

Do your best, but play within the rules
The powers-that-be have set to run our game.
Or else you will have no more news to tell,

No microphone to speak, no camera's eye,
And worst of all, dutiful lad [lass], no check.

He leaves.

Blackout

Reporter 1:
No check?

Scene 2

A street in London. Dick, Bob, the Widow, the Vet, and several rioters are gathered. Some carry signs or crosses. Many have guns or clubs. The mood is angry, festive, nervous, all in a highly combustible mix.

Bob:

Revered Cade has been gone too long. You don't suppose they've...

Dick:

Forget it. The King's goons don't have the nerve. They know we'd bring the place down around their ears. Cade's probably just sticking around for an extra shrimp cocktail.

Widow:

He wouldn't do that! The Bible says that eating shrimp is an abomination, like sodomy! As bad a sex with a man! No, he wouldn't do that! And he wouldn't eat shrimp! Tell me he's not eating shrimp! "And all that have not fins and scales in the seas, and in the rivers, of all that move in the waters, and of any living thing which is in the waters, they shall be an abomination unto you. They shall be even an abomination unto you; ye shall not eat of their flesh, but ye shall have their carcasses in abomination! If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them."

Vet:

Kill those shrimp eating faggots!

Crowd roars. Things are getting out of hand. Dick and Bob look around anxiously.

Bob:

I don't know how this...where is Cade? We can't hold these people...

Dick:

I can. I know what they need.

exits SR

Bob looks after him, his anxiety increasing. The crowd is getting rowdier by the moment. Glass is heard breaking. A few chorus members run by, bearing stolen appliances. The Widow approaches, a broken stick, studded with nails is in her hand. The Vet follows her.

Widow (ecstatic) :

Oh, Brother Bob! Oh Brother, Brother Bob! Isn't it glorious? Isn't it a glorious, glorious day?

Bob:

Glorious? This is chaos. This is madness!

Widow:

Oh, don't you see it, Bob? Don't you see the wounds of a thousand souls, scratched and clawed by life, by each other, by their wretched little fates, lancing their wounds and bleeding out old, bad blood, pus, and dirt? It's a tide of vengeance, Bob! A tide of wild justice! A million hands will pull down this city and set it ablaze in fury! And it will be the glorious pyre for my husband, and thousands more like him who died for nothing! He died for nothing! He died for this mess, for this state which couldn't stand one day of the anger of its people. Nothing! It is nothing, I am nothing, and we will leave nothing!

Bob:

Sister, I...your sorrow...your

Widow:

Nothing! Nothing! Nothing!

Dick enters SR, with two men who have captured a third man, the LAWYER, who has been badly beaten. They drag him, unwillingly, DSC, and throw him roughly to the ground.

Dick:

Have a good look, everybody. Look at those fine clothes, and that fat, smug face! You want to know who ate your country? You want to know who got fat on your taxes, and turned loose criminals to screw your kids? Here's a goddamned lawyer for you!

The crowd jeers and gestures menacingly.

Dick:

Now some of you might say that we should just string this leech up and let him hang...

Some in the crowd cheer, some seem less enthused. The Widow is raving for blood, Bob looks on silently, horrified.

Dick:

But I say we should give him a trial! That's fair, isn't it? (*Dick grabs the lawyer by the hair, and turns him to face him.*) Are you a lawyer?

Lawyer:

I am a lawyer, curse your murdering soul.

Dick (*Begins strangling him*):

Is that any way to talk to your clients? If you have your way it'll be us that are choking, beaten, twisting, unless you use you use the gift of your lying tongue to get us off. Isn't that right? Isn't that fucking right?

The lawyer is dying. Some in the crowd, including Bob, are horrified, some are cheering Dick on, but none interfere. Finally, Bob looks around, afraid of the crowd, and speaks.

Bob:

D...doesn't...doesn't he get to say something? I mean, if it's a trial, he gets to say...

Dick:

Fine! (he drops the Lawyer, who is nearly unconscious) Speak up you piece of shit! Lie your way out of this one! Go ahead! Beg, fucker! I want to see you beg.

Lawyer:

I never pled for such a pointless cause.
I will not plead to move this mindless mob.
The law is dead. Murder rules your hearts
And only in your hearts could Law endure.

So kill me, I would not live out this day
Where even Law's faint hope is smothered out.
Law is not Justice, Justice is not Law,
But without Law, no hope of Justice lives.

Kill me, and get in line behind the corpse.
Next comes the weak, and then the oft despised,
And then whoever blood desires, it takes
And vengeance makes a hell of every day.

The hell you've earned with your contempt and scorn,
And with your apathy so many years
Then suddenly, with fury and with fire
You rise up, far too late, and far too wild.

Dick: (*quietly, to the Lawyer*)

That's a pretty speech. But you know what? I don't give a shit. I don't give a shit about your laws, or your courts, or your justice. I've seen faggots like you walk all over people like me for too long. And there is no justice. There never was. There's only those that take, and those that get taken. And today, you get taken. I take.

(*loudly, to the crowd*)

D'ya hear that, folks? You've got all the Justice you deserve! Your children are dead, or corrupted, your dreams are burnt to the ground, your money is stolen, and according to this...this...subhuman piece of shit you should be happy about it! You should just go home, be good little sheep, and take whatever you get. Are you happy about it?

The crowd yells, "NO!"

Are you just gonna go home, and wait for them to do it to us, or are we gonna do it to them...and to anybody who tries to stop us?

The crowd screams. Bob hesitates, frightened of the crowd, but then steps forward. The Lawyer is on his knees, with Dick about to strangle him with a short cord. Bob kneels with him, as if to pray. Dick doesn't wait. He tightens the cord, and slowly, sadistically strangles the Lawyer as the crowd cheers wildly. When it is done, the crowd roughs up the dead body.

Cade enters, SL. He contemplates the scene in horror. He goes and pulls Dick from the revelers.

Cade:

What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?

Dick:

Well, you know how church people are, Reverend. You were gone so long, they were getting restless. So I gave them a little justice to do.

Cade:

This isn't Justice!

The crowd has noticed that Cade has arrived. They are listening intently to the discussion. Cade is not aware of them, Dick is. The other cast members should move about, agitating, encouraging members of the audience to yell, "Justice!" and "Death to the traitors!" Hand them signs to wave.

Dick:

This isn't your Justice! This is our justice! This is God's Justice! God's Justice against liars and thieves, and blasphemers, and atheists! God's Justice against anyone who opposes His Justice!

Cade:

And what about the peace of God? What about God's mercy?

Dick:

Let them get the justice, and we get the mercy for a change!

The crowd roars. Cade notices them for the first time. A bit of fear enters his face.

Dick:

What's the matter, Cade? You started this. This monster is your child. Afraid you've lost the handle? Afraid that God can't hear you down here?

Cade (to the crowd):

Brothers! Sisters! Peace! Hear me! Hear the Word of the Lord!

It is far too loud, far too raucous for him to be heard.

Dick smiles. This is his world – chaos – where everything is permitted, and nothing is safe. Cade tries to make himself heard, gives up, and forceably drags the smiling Dick aside.

Cade:

How could you do this? This was a godly movement! We were demanding righteousness! You've turned it into a slaughterhouse!

Dick:

I didn't turn it into anything. It didn't turn into anything. This is what it always was. You were just too caught up in being the messiah of the masses to see it.

Cade:

That's a filthy lie!

Dick:

There's only one reason these people are out here, doing things that they've never done – killing, destroying, burning – it's because in their hearts they've always wanted to. You gave them an excuse. There's thousands upon thousands of people in this city. Do you see more than a fraction of that out here? But that's all it takes. Do you think one person in twenty has been shat on enough, strangled and smothered enough by this asshole of a world to burn down a building? And now you, and your god have given them the excuse to do it.

This riot was always here, in the hearts of those that have been robbed, cheated, spat on, and discounted by the "good people." You just brought it up. You wanted to make people honest? You did it. Rejoice, reverend. *(he laughs)*

Cade:

That's not how it started. This isn't what I wanted!

Dick:

Bullshit! This is exactly what you wanted! You wanted to lead the people to their destinies, and to the will of their god! You got it! Armageddon! Judgment! The punishment of the wicked! There are gallons of savior's blood running in the streets! Hooray for the righteous!

Cade:

How... How could you...know?

Dick:

There's always somebody like me. Somebody who doesn't give a shit, and wants to see the whole filthy, lying, idiotic mess eat itself alive. And there's always somebody like you.

Cade drops him, and looks at him in growing horror.

Dick:

Face up to it, Reverend. It's what you wanted. It's what they wanted. It's even what the filthy, guilty souls up in the palaces wanted, deep in their fat, black hearts because its going to give them permission to do what they always wanted to do to us. Do you hear the tanks? They're coming. Better rally the troops, Gideon.

Cade:

Why?

Dick:

Because we're animals. The worst kind. We eat each other. We eat our children. The world is a curse, and there are not ten good men to spare the city, Reverend. The whole thing is going to shit. Hallelujah.

Cade:

No!...no! no! no! no! no!

He runs to the highest point he can find, and cries out. His anguished cry gets the attention of the mob.

Cade:

Hear me, my brethren, and my people! I had in mine heart to build an house for the Lord, and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building: But God said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood.

We have shed blood, my brothers and sisters! And we shall not build heaven with blood to mortar the stones! We must go now! We must disperse and pray that we have been heard in our might by God's enemies, and forgiven in blood by the righteousness of God! Go home! Go home to your families...your children...your work...and leave all this blood behind.

They are wavering slightly. Some of them are looking around, as if waking from a dream.

Dick applauds, sarcastically.

Dick:

Nicely done, Reverend. You came back from your fancy dinner with the nobility with nothing for us but a sermon about how it's all our fault. *(he turns to the Widow)* That good enough for your dead husband, sacrificed for these money-grubbing, filthy bastards? Tell the Reverend how you feel about being told to go back to your empty home to explain to your children why they don't have a daddy. *(To the Vet)* Tell the reverend how you feel about the way you've been treated after you gave your blood for your country, then got stomped on for your trouble. All of you! Are you going to let them come to your homes, kick in your doors, and drag your loved ones away because you

followed this man, (*he points at Cade*) who claimed to be speaking the will of almighty God?

Cade:

That is false! That is a...

Dick nods at the vet. The Vet stabs Cade from behind. Chaos and panic. The sounds of tanks approaching, sirens blaring. The chorus members scatter. The Widow and Bob go into the audience. The Vet and Dick remain with Cade.

Dick:

Can't jump on the tiger to ride, Reverend, then jump off before the ride is over. You get eaten. I'd stick around to piss on your hypocritical corpse, but I don't think we've got time.

Cade:

Fuck you. (*dies*)

Dick:

And finally, as the lights went out, you said something you really feel. (*he kisses him*). I absolve you, sucker. Go now and sin no more. And don't worry about your final prayer. It's answered. We're all fucked.

He goes into the audience, sits down, smiling.

Vet: (*Addressing Cade's corpse*)

I'm sorry. You were kind to me. You believed in me. Helped me turn around. And I killed you. I follow orders. And I killed you. I'm sorry. But if you were right, shouldn't God have protected you from me?

He goes into the audience.

York enters SL, with five soldiers.

Widow:

Oh, thank almighty God! It's York! He's on our side.

Vet:

He's a patriot! A good soldier!

Bob:

Oh God. Oh God.

Dick laughs

York gestures. The soldiers open fire, killing Bob, Dick, the Vet, and the Widow as they stand in the audience. They keep firing as the lights fade.

Scene 3

The Conference Room. A centerpiece holds red and white roses. Somerset and Margaret are USL, York is DSR. Portraits of Plantagenet, Humphrey, Beaufort, and Suffolk adorn the walls. The dead now outnumber the living. Somerset and Margaret are anxious, as if they are afraid that that York will attack them. York is calm – self assured.

York:

Where is his royal highness, at his prayers?

Somerset:

I hear he prays ambitious men are curbed.

York:

As should we all, lest we should lose our heads
And find them in some too familiar lap.

Margaret (*icily*):

I'll have another in my lap e're long.

York (*smiling*):

I did not think you'd keep it empty long,
I know the King has seldom visited there.

Somerset:

Would I could rip that lying tongue
From out your filthy mouth, arrogant York.

York:

A shame you were not half so bold in France.
We might still hold some scrap there, General.

Margaret:

Your charge against the King's manhood's disproved.
I have his child – an heir to displace you.

York laughs

York:

You brave God's thunderbolt you prattling whore
To speak of treason to the royal bed!
Have you a tatter left of woman's shame?
The King's a monk, the nation knows the truth.
The bastard that you bear has no true claim.

Margaret:

I'll see you dead, pretender. Mark it well.

Somerset:

The King approaches now. Temper your tongue.

Henry enters, dressed in a monk's habit. He moves slowly, with a mournful air.

Henry:

God be with you all, my precious kin,
And save you from this day of blood and wrath.

York:

Your highness need not worry for this day.
The rebels are put down. Jack Cade is dead.

Henry:

Then we must pray for his poor, tortured soul.
Let a mass be sung for all that fell.

York:

Forgive me, Lord, I could not hear you well.
A mass for Cade, when Humphrey died unmourned?

Somerset:

Humphrey died arrested by the crown.
Mourning ill becomes a traitor's tomb.

York:

That unjust slander brought the rain of blood
That stains the city's streets. Who bears that guilt
And was entrusted to keep Humphrey safe?
And France, what proud commander brought defeat
And shame on our late Henry's glorious arms?

My King, I am your loyal subject still,
And as your loyal subject, I implore
Cut out this canker who has blemished us
This Somerset, whose selfish arrogance
Has forced my hand to spill much English blood.

Margaret:

Liar! Those dead rebels in the streets
Were in your pay! You financed discontent
In hopes of gaining glory putting out
The fires you set to blaze in London streets!

York:

How easily an accusation comes
From lips accustomed to a strange caress.
You have some proof to lay before the throne;
Or would you slander more men to their deaths?

Henry:

Oh God! What words! What bloody, bitter words!
Remember faith and peace! Oh please relent!

York:

I will relent, my King, when justice's done.
I have brought peace to London, but my troops
Want more than just this day's too fragile peace.
Ten thousand men in arms are at my call,
And they will not bear Somerset's rank sin.

Nothing less than exile for this wretch
Will satisfy my army's mission here.
The blood shed for his reckless pride in France,
And Humphrey's death cry "Justice yet undone."

As for the queen, let her go back to France
And keep vain faith with her disloyalty.
Though God's true law would scream for her black blood
To be spilled on the ground, I will relent.

Henry:

My queen? My general? My love? My friend?
Or lose the love of my dear father's kin?
I shall retire, and pray all through the night.
Tomorrow, in God's wisdom, I shall say.

York:

Forgive me, gracious king, now is the time.
My men are restless and crave word from me.
Their anger cannot be tamped down again.
The time for prayer has passed. Give me your word.

Somerset:

You dare to stand there and threaten the king?
You gross, inhuman thing! You bloody ape!
I do defy your threats, and to the death
Let us make war. I spit on Humphrey's corpse,
And on all other traitors. Carry this!

He spits on York.

York calmly walks to the table and takes two white roses from the centerpiece.

York:

This pure white rose, the sign of innocence
Has ever been my family's badge of faith.
It flew o'er every battlefield of France,
And flies tonight above our peaceful streets.

He goes to Humphrey's portrait, and puts the rose into the frame.

Its thorns have ever sheltered England's throne.
And I would keep faith with that history.
Choose now, my king, and I will shelter you
From traitors and from shameless harlotry.

But know my mind, my king, I am resolved.
I will purge sin and murder from that crown.
And if you do not choose aright this day
Then you are not my king, nor England's now.

He puts the second white rose in front of Henry.

Margaret:

Red roses are for love, and marked by blood,
They bloom now in defiance of your threats.
Stand up my love, be manful, like a king!
I could not love a coward for a crown!

She hands Henry a red rose. He takes it, trembling.

Henry:

I take this rose, but not for any man,
But for the color of my Savior's blood.
I do not love you, York, any the less,
Nor do I take a cause up with this bloom.

York:

You do. You have. But I will liberate
Your shaking hand, and your unsteady crown.
Arm yourself. Now York comes on in steel.
For all your father loved, I must make war
On those who hold his feeble-hearted son.

Thousands will die. A river of their blood
Will wash away the stain of faithless queens
False counselors will die, choked on the gore
Of innocents and braver, better men.

He turns and exits, SR.

Henry dissolves in tears. Somerset smashes Humphrey's portrait in a rage.

Blackout

Scene 4

Henry's bedchamber. It is spartan, with only a kneeling bench, a crucifix, and a plank bed. Henry is kneeling on the bench, fingering a rosary.

Henry:

Lord Jesus Christ, who created and redeemed me and brought me to where I am: you know what your will is for me: do with me as you will, for your tender mercy's sake. Amen.

During the following, The ghosts of Joan, Humphrey, Plantagenet, Beaufort, Suffolk, Talbot, Bob the Cobbler, Dick the Butcher and Jack Cade come softly to the edge of the light.

(terza rima)

Oh God, why must we live with violence?
Is ancient sin so rank that Adam's get
Must bleed an ocean for our recompense?

And still, the guilt has not been settled yet.
This endless sea of blood and guilt, and tears
Is only a down payment on our debt.

Christ has waited all these bloody years.
Will He not come now, the Prince of Peace,
And rout the shades of war, and end our fear?

Suffolk steps into the light behind Henry. He whispers the following throughout Henry's next speech:

Suffolk:

Domine Jesu Christe, qui me creasti, redemisti, et preordinasti ad hoc quod sum, tu scis quid de me facere vis: fac de me secundum voluntatem tuam cum misericordia. Amen.

Henry:

Poor Suffolk, I forgive, and pray for you.
If you dishonored me with my dear queen
Still, I would not regard your soul untrue.

Pure loyalty in men is seldom seen.
Forgive! Forgive though my cold crown
Turns into bitter thorns and thoughts unclean.

Humphrey, Plantagenet and Beaufort step forward behind Henry, a little closer than Suffolk. They whisper while Henry gives his next speech. Joan begins laughing softly.

Suffolk, Humphrey, Plantagenet and Beaufort:

Domine Jesu Christe, qui me creasti, redemisti, et preordinasti ad hoc quod sum, tu scis quid de me facere vis: fac de me secundum voluntatem tuam cum misericordia. Amen.

Henry:

My father's friends. My uncles dear and wise
I would I had you here to counsel me!
How wretched I must seem in your great eyes.

Oh Humphrey! What great wrong was done to thee.
To die in prison, jailed at my command!
You are avenged in royal misery.

Talbot, Bob the Cobbler, Dick the Butcher and Jack Cade step forward, a little closer to Henry. They whisper during Henry's speech.

Suffolk, Humphrey, Plantagenet, Beaufort, Talbot, Bob the Cobbler, Dick the Butcher and Jack Cade:

Domine Jesu Christe, qui me creasti, redemisti, et preordinasti ad hoc quod sum, tu scis quid de me facere vis: fac de me secundum voluntatem tuam cum misericordia. Amen.

Henry:

My people. God's own sheep, in my poor care.
A useless shepherd, fearful of the wolf.
Their blood o'erflows my heart, drowning my prayer!

The ghosts continue to recite the latin prayer, crowding closer until they are almost touching Henry. He does not see them, but their presence is crushing him. Joan is still at the edge of the light, laughing softly.

Henry:

(rhyme royal)

Oh guilt! And all my heart sought holiness!
No greed or fury stained my soul's repose.
Long hours in prayer I strove for righteousness
I raised no bloody hand against my foes.

It was a blameless, sinless path I chose.
But did I walk it only for my soul,
And sacrifice my kin and country whole?

The ghosts fall silent.

Henry (screaming):
Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?! Father!

He collapses.

Blackout

Scene 5

The throne room. All furniture and decoration is removed, only the throne itself remains. Henry sits alone, despondent, unmoving, silent.

Margaret enters, SR. She looks a bit unkempt. She regards Henry with a mixture of desperation and contempt. She composes herself and approaches him.

Margaret:

My royal husband, God's blessing is here.
My news is wonderful, share in my joy!

Henry does not move.

Margaret:

This wretched war has unknit your poor heart.
You are too gentle for this bitter world.
But if you do not raise your royal hand
You doom us all, your crown, your queen, your child.

Within my womb an heir is quickening.
Usurping York must yield to God's decree
And when this child is born, the world will know,
My son will sit upon this battered throne.

Henry looks at her, barely comprehending.

Henry:

My son?

Margaret:

Yes! Your son! Let York's foul tongue be damned!
Keep the devil's poison from your ears!
Our son! *My son!* A king to rule and reign!
To resurrect this weak and wavering crown!

Oh I would give the world a mighty king,
I will raise him strong, his mother's heart
Is strong enough to carry any crown!
Oh would I were a man!

To Henry

Or that you were.

(ballade)

Oh, be a king! Be not a saint
And by these bloody men abused!
Blood for the throne is not a taint!
A crown was ne'er so badly used.
History will not excuse
Such kindly men their temperance.
You are of fecklessness accused,
And that is your inheritance.

My love for you has flickered faint
My early ardor died unused
And to the night I made complaint
That all my pride and joy lie bruised
And like this land, I lie confused.
No strength to make my heart's defense.
So love and crown we both shall lose.
And this is our inheritance.

Oh husband, king, I must refuse
To wait, Christlike, for more offense.
Vengeance calls out for its due,
And this is their inheritance.

She leaves him there.

Blackout

Scene 6

The chorus is spread along the edge of the light. Each of them holds a black staff.

The dead, facing upstage:

John Talbot stands alone, USR.

Jack Cade, Dick the Butcher and Bob the Cobbler stand together, USC.

Joan of Arc stands alone, USR.

Plantagenet, Beaufort, Humphrey, and Suffolk stand together, CS.

The living, facing downstage:

York stands with York's Son, SR.

Somerset stands alone, SL.

Henry stands DSR, alone.

Margaret stands DSL alone.

Chorus:

(Thornton's Didactic Fib)

So let us end.
And let us shed a tear
For those who live in fear.
Let us attend.

Let us attend.
These mighty dead, the bier
Is laden with the future sacrifice.
For Hist'ry may not shed the same blood twice.
To this, at least, a peer will condescend.

Cain's offering draws near.
Let us attend.

They all strike their staffs on the stage.

Chorus One:

Walking to a spot just US of Cade's group.

The first to bleed for fecklessness in power
Are those who strive to live the day to day
With all their unseen pain and tragic silence
Until, one day the gory muse of his'try
Sets them mad, and makes their blood her tints.

Chorus One taps his staff. Cade, Dick, and Bob form a ring, joining hands, and slowly walk in a circle. Chorus One returns to his place on the perimeter.

Chorus Two:

Walking to a spot just DS of Talbot.

The soldier is a willing, living tool
But still, he owns a soul, and craves the right.
To sacrifice the brave for vanity
Is what fills Hell with Kings and Generals
Go now. You have your orders. March.

Chorus Two taps his staff. Talbot goes and joins the somber ring. Chorus Two returns to his place.

Chorus Three:

Walking to a spot just DS of Joan.

Did France's joy at shattering the yoke
Of English rule find you, scattered abroad?
Your ashes are a plaything of the wind.
Your memory a toy of History.
Go warrior saint. The same as all the rest.

Chorus Three taps his staff. Joan joins the ring. Chorus Three returns to his place.

Chorus Four:

Walking to a spot just DS of Plantagenet's group.

Loyal couns'lors, bitter rivals, fools.
True to your fond convictions and your fears,
But false or foolish in your public trust.
Some kneel to perverse duty, some to lust,
But all have failed, and fallen. Go your way.

*Chorus Four taps his staff. Plantagenet, Beaufort, Humphrey and Suffolk join the ring.
Chorus Four returns to his place.*

Chorus Five:

Walking to SC, just DS from the danse macabre.

And now, the fate of these, the not-yet-dead

Walks to York.

Hail brave York. A warrior in the right.
A vessel of the finest, bluest blood.
Your cause is just. Your quarrel well defended.

Puts a ludicrous paper crown on York's head.

Conspirator. Assassin. Murderer.
What sin have you not done for righteousness?
Margaret will strike your head from you,
The view of York is poor from 'top a spike.

Chorus Five taps his staff. York joins the ring. He turns to York's son.

Young Richard. Warlike, hard, and cold of heart.
Childhood soaked in gore and loveless fear.
No paper crown for you, but one of gold.
And like your father, blood and constant war

I do not sound the dire staff for you.
You stay alive for now, to suffer on
And for a greater playwright to destroy.

York's son stays where he is. Chorus Five walks to Margaret.

Such beauty, says the sage, was seldom seen.
A king, a country waited on your smile.
And for your dowry, you demanded war
A sacrifice that would move Baal to tears.
Thousands of lives to make you more than queen.

So see your son butchered before your eyes,
Your husband mad, and murdered, and despised.
And you to die alone, disgraced and shamed.

Chorus Five taps his staff. Margaret joins the ring. He goes to Henry.

Meek King, who made humility's defense.
Some call you "Saint." Too holy for this world.
Determined not to sin, your sin was vast.

With just a word from your dishonored throne
You could have brought contending sects to heel.
Such little courage could have tamped down flames
Of war that burned unchecked those bloody years.

The crown was roughly dragged from your bowed head.
A royal puppet of the butcher's gangs
Murdered in the tower's lonely dark.
Take your rightful place, wreck of a king.

*Chorus Five taps his staff. Henry goes, and stands facing US, in the center of the ring.
Chorus Five returns to his place. All Chorus strike their staffs hard.*

Chorus One:

(terza rima)

Look not for speech from these, the dead,
Their words and deeds are fully spent.
Their sins are ripe. Their prayers are said.

Chorus Two:

By strength the bow is bent,
But checked until the grip is loosed.
By weakness is the arrow sent.

Chorus Three:

The emptiness inside the noose
Is where the terror lies, and waits.
The rope is fit for any use.

Chorus Four:

In weak and empty hearts the fate
Of souls and nations root and bloom.
In lowest man, in proudest state.

Chorus Five (*to audience*):

Go you, from this empty room
And take some wisdom from this tale.
While your thread lies uncut upon the loom.

Chorus:

Domine Jesu Christe, qui me creasti, redemisti, et preordinasti ad hoc quod sum, tu scis
quid de me facere vis: fac de me secundum voluntatem tuam cum misericordia. Amen.

They strike their staffs in slow time on the stage as the lights fade, until the...

Blackout.

FIN

Finished at the fourth hour of the afternoon, on the feast of Saint Jerome Emiliani. 2010.

Saint Jerome Emiliani, watch over all children who are abandoned or unloved. Give us
the courage to show them God's love through our care. Help us to lose the chains that
keep us from living the life God intended for us. Amen.