Dramatic Climaxes in the Plays of Shakespeare

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In every well-constructed plot there are two movements, the one the rising or complicating action, the second the falling or resolving action. At a certain stage in the development of the plot the forces will complete its activity, after one supreme effort its energy will become exhausted, it will cease to exert a direct influence over the plot, and immediately or soon the power which is to dominate the falling action will become apparent. This crisis in the rising movement, which is called the climax, is

as logical a division of the plot as are the rise and fall, the exposition and catastrophe, and in more or less dramatic form will appear in every play.

Considered from the standpoint of form rather than dramatic value the climaxes of the plays of Shakespeare, including the pure comedies and history, practically resolve themselves into four groups, as models of which Macbeth, Lear, Julius Caesar and Hamlet may be cited. To the first of these divisions belong Macbeth, Richard III, Romeo and Juliet, King John, Measure for Measure, Troilus and Cressida, and Henry VIII.

In these plays the conflict typically present in every plot is not pronounced. In most cases Nemesis is the agitator of the resolution. The agitator throughout the rising action pursues a certain course with uninterrupted success; opposition is ineffective or absent altogether. Suddenly, when he is at the height of his activity he meets with an unexpected check. he is brought to an abrupt standstill, and at once put on the defensive.

The second group includes King Lear, Alls Well that Ends Well, Two Gentlemen of Verona, Twelfth Night, Troilus and Cressida, and Pericles. The crisis in

these plays marks not the turning-point, but the supreme influence of the will, the apparent supreme power activity to be checked by a force which makes the undemonstrative entrance later in the plot.

In the third group belong Julius Caesar, Midsummer-night's dream, Much Ado about Nothing, Cymbeline, Love's Labour's Lost, As You Like It, Titus Andronicus and Timon of Athens. This group differs from the second in that, although the dramatic force of the climax is due to the intensity of the complication, the reaction is introduced before the end of the scene,

sometimes interrupting the crisis as in Julius Caesar, sometimes, as in a Mid-summer-Night's Dream, fruitfully appearing after it has spent its force.

In the fourth division are found, Hamlet, Othello, The Taming of the Shrew, The Merchant of Venice, The Tempest, Henry IV., Henry V., Richard II and Antony and Cleopatra. In these plays the struggle between contending forces is more evident than in any of the others. The crisis indicates the point at which the opponents, both of whom have been more or less prominent throughout the action, come into direct collision, whereupon the weaker is forced to yield.

As a rule Shakespeare in his climaxes has economized all the possibilities of the plot. Twenty-five of the crisis scenes are in the third act, the majority of them are well defined meeting the requirements we may make of every climax: that it shall be outwardly imposing and spiritually emphatic. (2)

(1) In Comedy of Errors and Merry Wives of Windsor as in all pure comedies there is no central climax, thereby making it impossible to group these plays with the later dramas. Henry VI will be discussed later.

(2) Elizabeth Woodbridge in The Drama Its Law and Its Technique

Hamlet.

Climax: Act III, Scene II, Line 72.
"Now might I do it pat, now he is praying;" - Hamlet.

In Hamlet, the struggle between opposing forces is wholly subjective. The question upon which the plot hinges is this: will the young Prince, when the opportunity presents itself, act the obligation which has been placed upon him? His uncle has murdered his father, seduced his mother and usurped his crown. The son's duty is clear, the ghost has urged it upon him, his conscience has acknowledged it. Another nature would accept the task

with alacrity. - but Hamlets forte is reflection not action. He deliberates, ponders, and procrastinates. Finally after the playduring which Claudius has shown such intense agitation, his only excuse, doubt of his uncles guilt, fails him, at last he seems ready for revenge. "Now could I drink hot blood and do such bitter business as the day would quake to look on." (1) All he awaits is a favorable occasion. It comes and with it the crucial act. Entering one of the castle rooms he chances upon his Uncle at his prayers.

(1) Act III, Scene II, Line 408.

"Now might I do it pat, now he is praying; And now I'll do it / And so he goes to heaven; and so am I revenged" : he hesitates - That would be scanned".(2) The old introspective, fluctuating disposition asserts itself and he is lost. He has failed. The problem & the rising action is solved.

(2) Act III Scene III Line 72.

King Lear.

Climax: Act III, Scene IV Line 113.
"Off, off, ye lendings! Come,
unbutton here." - Lear -

The intensity of many of the scenes in the first two acts of King Lear, especially Scene IV Act II, which as it is would be no insignificant climax, makes the construction of a crisis scene which shall stand out in dramatic relief against the most effective of these situations, no slight task. In the production of the perfect climax found in Scene IV

Act II, the hand of the master has shown itself. The background of the scene is superb and the action is systimatically developed to the crutial point. In Scene II, Act I the cruelty of the heartless sisters is surpassing. One blow after another is dealt the feeble old father. With a last attempt to preserve his knigly dignity, Lear leaves his daughters, and places himself at the mercy of the scarcely more fatiful elements. Wandering about with his fool, on the

desolate heath in the furious storm, he finds Edgar in the deserted hovel. At sight of the Bedlamite comes the break, (1) the mind, long unbalanced, gives way: as far as Lear is concerned the activity of the rising movement is at an end.

(1) Act III, Scene IV, Line 113.

Macbeth

Climax Act III, Scene III, Line 17.
[Fleance escapes].

Until the middle of the third act, Macbeth is the unopposed agressor of the plot of this play. He has prospered marvelously in his bold undertakings. Through his efforts the destiny which the heath hags prophesied, has been accomplished. As he is on the point of making his position perfectly secure he meets with the first check. (1). This climax

(1) Act III, Scene III, Line 17.

is unique. It is plainly merely a mechanical turning point in the hero's destiny. None of the prominent characters of rising or falling action appear. The scene is so short that there is no opportunity for emphasizing the events. Nevertheless the situation is significant. This first failure breaks the spell of Macbeth's success and intimates that he is to yield the aggressive role to Banquo.

Othello.

Climax: Act III, Scene III, Line 444
- "Look here Iago: All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven: 'tis gone." — Othello —.

Although Iago's scheme is definately planned before the close of Act I (1), he does not attack Othello personally until Act III, Scene III. This is the crucial scene. Here the struggle between Truth and Villainy is decided: here the Moor becomes the tool of this wily villain. The issue of the conflict is assumed from the outset. How is

(1) Act I, Scene III, Line 400.
How, how? Let's see: - After some time, to abuse Othello's ear, that he is too familiar with his wife.
- Iago -

Othello a man "of a free and open nature that thinks men honest that but seem to be so" (2) to cope with this veteran intriguer. In sooner is suspicion firmly planted in the husbands mind than he is lost. His resistance steadily grows weaker. In line 444 (3) he succumbs entirely By line 461 (4) the climax has reached its acme and

(2) Act I, Scene III, Line 445.
(3) "All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven." Othello-
(4) "Now by yond marble heaven, In the due reverence of a sacred vow I here engage my words." - Othello -

in line 472 (5) his activity commences.

(5) "Within these three days
let me hear thee say that
Cassio's not alive." — Othello —

Antony and Cleopatra

Climax: Act III Scene X Line 18

"She once being loof'd, The noble ruin of her magic Antony, Claps on his sea-wing, and, like a doting mallard, Leaving the fight in height, flies after her:" — Scarus —

The Battle of Actium is the center of the plot of this play, though there is no scene dramatically representing the climax of the action. Instead of an actual presentation of the situation we have a formal announcement, by one of the unimportant characters in

the play, that the crisis has been reached and passed. (1) Up to this point Antony has shown at least a semblance of regard for his dignity. When Cleopatra sails from the scene of battle, the fatal pressure is brought to bear; manhood, warrior virtue, all yields to his love and the noble ruin of her magic. Antony claps on his sea-wings, and, like a doting mallard, leaving the fight in sight, flies after her. (2)

(1) Act III, Scene X, Line 18.

Timon of Athens.

Climax: Act III, Scene IV, Line 79.

"What are my doors opposed against my passage? Have I been ever free, and must my house Be my retentive enemy, my gaol?"

In Scene IV of Act III the change which the heartless treatment of his mercenary friends has ~~wrought~~ in the character of the generous and gentle Timon becomes evident. Although he does not here assume the extreme attitude which he maintains from Scene IV to his death, he has

evidently awakened to a realization of the situation and planned the revenge (1) of which so dramatic an exhibition is given in Scene II Act III.

(1) Act III, Scene II Line 111. "Go, bid all my friends again, Lucius, Lucullus, and Sempronius: all: all: one more feast the rascals."

Julius Caesar.

Climax: Act III, Scene I, Line 77.
= Et tu Brute! Then fall
Caesar." (dies) - Caesar-

From the moment of the initiation of the conspiracy the atmosphere of the play is done with suspense & excitement. The suspense, which is increased by the numerous attempts to warn Caesar, is relieved only by his assassination. Even then there is no immediate fall. The culmination of the conspirators as, climbing for Liberty, they stop to take their hands in dead Caesars blood, presents

(11 Act III, Scene I, Line 76.

any apprehensible decrease in the intensity of the situation, until the entrance of Antonys servant heralds - the the approach of the following action. 2.

(2) Act III, Scene I, Line 122.

Coriolanus.

Climax: Act III Scene III Line 99.
"; in the name o' the people
And in the power o' us the
tribunes, we, Even from this
instant banish him our
city." — Sicinius —.

During the first two
acts the conspiracy of the
tribunes against Coriolanus,
though active, has met with
but comparative success.
In the climax scene which
culminates in Coriolanus'
outburst = You common cry
o' curs; whose breath I hate
as reek o' common fens" (1)
they become complete masters
of the situation. With this
victory, however, their activity

(1) Act III Scene III, Line 119

cases. Coriolanus is banished, only to appear as the avenger in the act.

Romeo and Juliet.
Climax Act III, Scene I, Line 191.
"And for that offence. Immediately we do exile him hence" Duke.

Both before and after the crisis, the plot of this play is to break down the barriers which the family feud has interposed between the lovers. The climax therefore, is not well taken. Romeo's banishment is not the result of any definite intrigue of the rising action nor does it indicate in what direction the activity of the last two acts is to lie, although it does bring into prominence the force which is finally to conquer, and gives an intimation of the unnecessary catastrophe of Act V.

The Merchant of Venice.

Clue: Act III. Scene II Line 116.
"What find I here?" (Opening the leaden casket) - Fair Portia's counterfeit." - Bassanio. -

The story of Bassanio and Portia forms the mechanical frame-work of this play; to it alone the symmetry of structure is preserved, and to it the fifth act is devoted exclusively. With this main plot the more complicated one in which Antonio and Shylock figure, is closely connected. While the former seems the aggressor of the sub-plot, in reality it

is Baccanio

who, by borrowing of Antonio the means wherewith to present his suit at Belmont, sets the action in motion.(1) He is the complicating force. The climax of the plot is in the scene in which he comes in contact with Portia the resolving force.(2) By choosing the lucky casket he decides not only his own but Antonio's fate. Here his obligations become Portia's

(1) Moulton.

(2) Act III, Scene II.

When she learns of Antonio's predicament and begins to take an interest in him (3) we have the mechanical turning point in the sub-plot. By the fourth scene of Act III she is playing an active part in the reaction and in Scene I Act IV, which is the culmination of the climax of the Shylock plot, through her efforts that issue is closed.

(3) Act III, Scene II, Line 293.
"Is it your dear friend that is thus in trouble?" — Portia —

Titus Andronicus.

Climax: Act III. Scene I. Line 271.

"Then which way shall I find Revenge's cave?" - Titus -

The climax in the plot of this play begins with Titus mid laugh in line 265. Up to this point he has endeavored to bear with patience the punishments which have been heaped upon him - However, this last most horrible monstrosity forces him to change his position. At sight of the heads of his murdered sons to save whom he has sacrificed his hand, his reason totters, from now on revenge is the consuming passion of his life.

Loves Labour Lost
Climax Act II, Scene III Line 206.
"Guilty, my lord, guilty! I confess
I confess." — Biron — "= What?" — King —
= That you three fools lack'd me
fool to make up the mess: Biron —

There is no shade of intrigue
in the plot of Loves Labour
Lost, the struggle is entirely
between will and nature.
The King of Navarre and his
three friends have made
certain vows. The Princess
and her three maids
appear; the beautiful
resolutions are forgotten.
The climax scene merely
gives an exposition of the

triumph of the stronger force. When Brion confesses that he too has broken his oath (1), the number is even, (2) and the exhibition of the failure of the flame with which the rising action concerned itself is complete.

(1) Act IV, Scene III, Line 206

(2) Act IV Scene III Line 211 - illuminis -

The Comedy of Errors.

Climax: Act V, Scene I Line 331.

"I see two husbands, or mine eyes deceive me," - Adriana -

In a play in which the entire plot depends upon the chance combination of ridiculous situations, we cannot expect to find logical divisions of the action. As far as the climax is concerned, not even the suggestion of one appears until in Act V Scene I the complications come to accumulate and the twin brothers are brought face to face. This scene marks no turning point in the action,

Its function is instantly to untangle the intricate web of complications. It can be identified with the mechanical and spiritual center of a symmetrical drama, only in that it stops the progress of the rising action.

Two Gentlemen of Verona.

Climax: Act III Scene I Line 163

"But if thou linger in my territories
Longer than swiftest expedition
Will give thee time to leave our royal court, By
Heaven! my wrath shall far
exceed the love I ever bore my
daughter or thyself." - Duke L."

The real activity of the complicating force in the plot of Two Gentlemen of Verona occupies but little of the first two acts. Too hint is given of the disloyalty of Proteus whose villainy is to precipitate the entanglement until Act II Scene III. While in Act III Scene I, with the success of his intrigue, comes the climax.

Midsummer-Night's Dream.
Climax Act III, Scene II. Line 272.
"Hate me! Wherefore? O me!
What news, my love! Am I
not Hermia? Are not
you Lysander?" — Hermia —
In this play as
in Love's Labour Lost,
the climax scene introduces
no new feature of the
plot. It simply displays
the working of the
perfected complication.
Here the disastrous in-
fluence of Puck's blunders
become evident. The dramatic
height is reached when
it dawns upon Hermia
that she is in truth for-
saken.(1) The resolution

(1) Act III, Scene II, Line 272.

begins in line 55 of the same scene.

The Merry Wives of Windsor.
Climax Act III, Scene III, Line 123.
- I do begin to perceive that I am made an ass. - Falstaff -

The plots of all pure comedies are more or less loosely constructed, but the Merry Wives of Windsor not only has no central climax and no falling action, it cannot even boast a consistently developed rising action. We find a dramatic motif in the determination of the Merry Wives to make an object lesson of Falstaff, and we certainly have the conventional victim in the person of that worthy. Here the similarity to any other of Shakespeare's plots ceases. The action instead

of working steadily up to one specific and all important point divides itself into three independent plots; each accomplishing the common object; each rising to its own climax to be followed by a reversal of the activity. The last of these coordinate intrigues somewhat more elaborate than its predecessors, occupies the final scene of Act II and is followed only by the briefest possible resolution.

The Taming of the Shrew.
Climax Act III, Scene II Line 229.
"But for my bonny Kate, she
must with me. Nay, look
not big, nor stamp, nor stare,
nor fret; I will be master of
what is my own;" - Petruchio.

Petruchio's determination
to master Katherine, forms
the nucleus of the plot of
the Taming of the Shrew.
The climax is in Act III Scene
II where we have the first
decided clash between the
wills of the husband and
wife. The possibilities of the
scene have not been
used to the best advantage

Katherine's rebellion is not as positive as we might expect, indeed some of the scenes which follow are more dramatic. Nevertheless that this is at least the mechanical center of the play is proven by the fact that here Petruchio definitely explains the position he intends to maintain, and wins his first unbiased victory; while Katherine is for the last time ~~again~~ in her resistance. From this point her struggles grow more and more feeble until in Act IV

the transgant 3 Acts I and II is completely subdued, and meekly replies to her husbands rude attack, - Then, God be blessid, it is the blessed sun: But sun it is not, when you say it is not, and the moon changes even as your mind. What you will have it named, even that it is, And so it shall be so for Katharine." (1)

(1) Act IV, Scene V Line 18

Much Ado About Nothing
Climax: Act IV Scene I Line 30
"There, Leonato, take her back again; give not this rotten orange to your friend."
- Claudio -

It then in Act III Scene III the watchmen overhear Conrade and Borachio discussing the intrigue in which they have been engaged at the instigation of don John, the first of the reactionary forces is introduced. The structure of this play is notably faulty in that, although that is the mechanical center of the plot it is not the climax. The influence of don John's activity is not yet perfected. No dramatic

presentation of the working of the intrigue is given until Act IV Scene I where with Claudio's denouncement of Hero (1) the climax begins, and continues with no relaxation of the strain, until when even Leonato is convinced of his daughter's guilt, (2) the assumption of the agressive part by the accused & the resolving agents, interrupts the progress of the rising movement. (3)

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(1) Act IV, Scene I, Line 32.
(2) Act IV, Scene I, Line 152. "Confirmed confirmed"! — Leonato.
(3) Act IV, Scene I, Line 157. "Hear me a little" — Friar —

Twelfth Night.

Except in the marvelous action, of which the critical scene, is Scene II of Act III, there is no central climax in this play. By the middle of the second act, the close complication of the plot has manifested itself; by the end of the third act it has completed its development (2) Olivia has

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Act II, Scene II, Line 34.
"How will this fadge? my master loves her dearly; And I, poor monster, fond as much on him; And she, mistaken, seems to dote on me. What will become of this." Fola-

(21 Fleming.

gone so far as to declare her passion for Viola.(3) Although no dramatic scene has called attention to it the summit of the rising action has been reached at this point, a conclusion which is further emphasized by the fact that the next important scenes, Act II, Scenes I and III, belong distinctly to the falling action. Here by mistaking Sebastian for Viola and somewhat unceremoniously marrying him, Olivia makes the first move in breaking the endless chain which the intricately interwoven

(3) Act III, Scene III, Line 234,
"How with mine honour may I give him
that Which I have given to you." - Olivia-

affections of Viola, Olivia and the duke, have formed: At the same time these scenes stand in quite the opposite relation to the Viola-Sebastian thread of the plot, in which from its nature the complicating circumstances may be expected to accumulate until the end of the fifth act where in Scene I we have the most intense climax in the play.

As You Like It.

Climax: Act III, Scene III, Line 448.

"I would cure you, if you would but call me Rosalind and come every day to my cote and woo me."

The rising action in the plot of As You Like It, unlike those of most plays, in which the comic interest is of so great importance, does not continue to develop to the end of the play. Although some complicating circumstances make their appearance after the third act, the climax is in the center of the plot. The main interest in the comedy

centers about the pretty story of the love of Rosalind and Orlando. Since their first encounter in Scene II of Act I, the intrigue of the rising action has kept the lovers apart. In Act III Scene III Orlando, driven from home by the persecutions of his wicked brother, suddenly comes upon his sweetheart in the forest of Arden, where she, having fled for the court, is masquerading in doublet and hose. This meeting is the crisis in their affairs. Here the influence which has tended

to separate them ceases to prevail
and with Rosalinds proposal
& the device which is to
settle all difficulties (,) the
activity of the resolutory force
commences.

Act III, Scene III, Line 448.

Measure for Measure.
Climax Act III Scene I Line 153.
(Re-enter Duke) "vouch-safe a word young sister but one word!" - Duke -

The function of the climax in Measure for Measure is to introduce the falling action judiciously guided by the Duke. While no immediate discomfiture of Angelo is realized, the success of his villainous scheme is rendered impossible, and a clear intimation is given that his next appearance will be in a defensive role.

The approach of the climax is announced in Line 1-2 Scene I Act III (1) when, as Isabella enters the prison and asks permission to visit her Brother, the duke makes known his determination to conceal himself where he may overhear the conversation between the two. In the scene which follows, at the point where the dramatic intensity is greatest, Isabella is interrupted

(1) "Bring me to hear them speake where I may be concealed." — Duke —.

in the midst of her denunciation of Claudio by the entrance of Vincentio who at once commences to put into play the intrigue which is to effect the final confusion of Angelo.

"All Well That Ends Well.
Climax Act III, Scene II, Line 131.
"Come, night; end, day! For
with the dark, poor thief,
I'll steal away."- Helena -

The agitating force
in the first half of All
Well That Ends Well is
Bertram's determination
not to recognize the
relation which Helena has
compelled him to assume.
In Helena's soliloquy at the
end of Act III Scene II the
influence of this activity
is at its height. This
scene while quite drama-
tic does not present a
perfectly defined climax.
It gives not the slightest
intimation of a change
in the guidance of the

action. As in Cymbeline its interest lies in the portrayal of the effect on Helena of the realization of her husbands discretion. Apparently Bertram has succeeded in his plans, Helena seems to have given up the struggle. But it is not until in the fourth acts, the reaction is so unintentionally introduced that we clearly perceive that this scene was the end of the plot and that, though no immediate check was indicated, the very fact that Betram forces his wife to leave her home leads to the resolution..

Troilus and Cressida.

Climax: Act IV Scene I Line 62.

": there is at hand Paris your brother, and Deiphobus, The Grecian Diomed, and our Antenor delivered to us; and for him forthwith, Ere the first sacrifice, within this hour, we must give up to Diomedes' hand the Lady Cressida." — Aeneas —

In this play the logical lines are indistinctly drawn. Two vaguely connected plots contend for prominence. In the Troilus and Cressida action, the removal of Cressida to the Grecian camp is the turning point. This separation from her lover affords an opportunity for the latent inconstancy of her nature to develop, and causes the tradigy.

3 the Play. as far as
they are concerned.

Pericles

Climax: Act III. Scene I.

This play has no uniformly developed action. As far as symmetry of plot is concerned the theory that the Mariana scenes may be parts of an unfinished drama of Shakespeare's to which the two acts of an older play were prefixed, seems plausible.[1] There is absolutely no dramatic aim discernible in the first half of the action. Naturally in such a plot no well defined climax will appear. Such a crisis as the play does is found in Scene I Act III. As a

[1] C. H. Herford in introduction to Pericles in the Eversley Edition of Shakespeare

definate division of a logical plot. this scene should have no value. It is merely one of a series of incidents which have no apparent relation to each other as complicating force. However. this scene may be considered the critical point in the action, in that it effects the separation of the individuals who are ~~to be~~ reunited in the fifth act.

The Tempest.

Climax Act III, Scene III, Line 79.

"Whose wraths to guard you from — Which here, in this most desolate isle, else falls upon your heads — is nothing but heart-sorrow and a clear life ensuing." Ariel.

That the scene which marks the center of the plot of the Tempest, is lacking in most of the requisites of a climax, is the natural outcome of the fact that the plot is romantic rather than dramatic. There is no real turning point in the play. From the first we realize that there is no decided struggle in Prospero's mind between vengeance and virtue

Ariel's formal declaration [1] of the course he intends to pursue throughout the following action is merely a mechanical crisis.

[1] Act III, Scene III, Line 79.

Cymbeline

Climax Act III, Scene IV.
(Imogen reads Post humus letter).

In Cymbeline the whole plot of Othello is crowded into three acts. The crisis concerns itself not with the success of Iachimo's intrigue against Post humus but with its rebound upon Imogen. Iachimo ceases to play the aggressive role in the second act. It is Post humus himself who has forced the situation which is developed in the climax scene. The most critical moment of the crisis is the one following Imogen's perusal of her husband's cruel

letter. She is silent for a moment as the real horror of its import is sinking into her mind. "What should I need to draw my sword", says Cassio, "the fayer hath cut her throat already." (1) An instant later she breaks out into a first protestation of her innocence. (2) From this point the dramatic build full sway until Line 112 where the reaction begins with Desdemona's suggestion of a possibility of reconciliation.

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(1) Act III, Scene IV, Line 33.

(2) Act III, Scene IV, Line 42.

The Winter's Tale.

Climax: Act III, Scene II, Line 140.

"There is no truth at all i' the oracle: The sessions shall proceed: this is mere falsehood." - Leontes -

The Winter's Tale furnishes a perfect example of the check climax. The main action divides itself into two distinct parts, the first dominated by King Leontes' blind jealousy, the second by his repentance. The exact moment in which this almost instantaneous change in the hero's attitude occurs, may be noted. Regardless of the unanimous opinion of the court, he has shamefully

abused his innocent wife, and misjudged his friend. As the culmination of his unreasoning madness he finally denounces the decision of the divine oracle. (1). As if in direct reply to his profanity, the falling action begins with the announcement of the first of the apparitions (2) which are to cause so sudden and complete a revulsion in his mind. Not more than

(1) Act III, Scene II Line 140.-

2. Act III Scene II Line 145.
"The jewel your son, with mere conceit and fear of the queen's speed is gone."- Servant-

seven lines from the climax the reaction is in full sway (3) and the King's distrust changed to the heart's sorrow which paves the way for the final beautiful scene of reconciliation.

(3) Act III, Scene II, Line 147.
: Apollo's angry; and the heavens themselves do strike at my injustice." - Leontes. -

Henry VI.

In any historical play from the nature of the material, the plot structure is apt to be vague. In Henry VI in which the action is drawn out through fifteen acts, there is hardly a semblance of symmetrical form. The supreme issue of the plot is the contest between York and Lancaster. This struggle does not begin its definite activity until the IIIrd act of the second part. Until this point most of the matter introduced is either expository or superficial in its relation to the main plot. In the conflict proper there is

no dramatic climax.(1) The most evident turning point in the action is in Act III Scene I of Part II. Here the nobles by equipping York with a force to lead against Ireland offer him the opportunity he has long waited. "Well nobles well, 'tis politicly done, To send me packing with an host of men: I fear me you but warm the starved snake who, cherished in your breasts will sting your hearts."(2) From this point the activity of the York faction is most prominent.

(1) In the glorster thread of the plot there is a good climax Act III Scene I, Part II.

(2) Act III, Scene I, Line 341.

King John.

Closing Act III, Scene I, Line 172.

"Then, by the lawful power that I have, Thou shalt stand cursed and excommunicate!"

— Pandulph —

Scene I of Act III is plainly a turning point in this plot. The struggle of the rising movement in between John and Constance who, supported by Philip of France is endeavoring to establish her son's claim to the English throne. In Act II the King arranges a marriage between his niece and the Dauphin. thereby alienating from Constance her chief ally. As he seems about to consummate his scheme he

meets with a sudden check. A new force appears in the person of Pandulph, the papal legate, who, since John persists in his resistance to the authority of the Church, proclaims the ban [1] whereupon, with Philip's return to his former allegiance, the fighting action begins.

[1] Act III, Scene I, Line 172.

Richard II.

Climax: Act III. Scene II, Line 219.
"Discharge my followers: let them hence away,
From Richard's night to Bolingbroke's fair day."
— K. Richard —

Of all the English historical plays the climax in Richard II is most dramatic. Here, as in so many of the histories, Shakespeare has not attempted to handle a vast superabundance of material but has confined himself to one episode in the life of the hero. The plot is simple and united — practically it "resolves itself into a duel between Richard and Henry"[1]

[1] C. H. Herford in introduction to Richard II in Eversley Shakespeare.

The crisis scene opens with the return of Richard from Wales. He has learned of Bolingbroke's treachery, yet his attitude is kingly. He is unalarmed, undeterred of the influence of his presence. "So when this thief, this traitor, Bolingbroke, Who all this while hath revelled in the night Whilst we were wandering with the antipodes, Shall see us rising in our throne, the east, His treasons will sit blushing in his face, Not able to endure the sight of day, But self-affrighted tremble at his sin. (1) In line 63 Salisbury strikes the first blow of the climax. "One day

(1) Act III, Scene II, Line 47.

too late. I fear me, noble lord,
Hath clouded all thy happy
days on earth: O, call back
yesterday, bid time return,
And thou shalt have twelve
thousand fighting men." Richard
is stunned for a moment.
"But now the blood of twenty
thousand men did triumph
in my face, and they are
fled; And, till so much blood
thither come again, Have I not
reason to look pale and
dead?" (3) However the recollection
of his dignity still lends
him confidence "I had for-
got myself: am I not King?" (4).
In line 91 Scrop enters with
the announcement of the
beheading of Bushby and Green

(3) Act III, Scene II, Line 76.
(4) Act III, Scene II, Line 83.

The king is once more dismayed. = Of comfort no man speak: Let's talk of graves, of worms and epitaphs;" (5) Again he rallies only to be crushed by the most appalling news of York's defection. (6) Here the struggle ends - Richard has made a noble stand but at last he despairs utterly. = Go to Flint castle: there I'll pine away; A king, woe's slave, shall kingly woe obey." (7)

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(5) Act III, Scene II, Line 144.

(6) Act III, Scene II, Line 200.
= Your uncle York is joined with Bolingbroke." — Servop. —

(7) Act III, Scene II, Line 209.

Henry IV.

Climax: Battle of Shrewsbury.

Act V. Part I.

The climax in the rebellion against the King's authority which is plotting throughout the whole of Part I of the play, is at the Battle of Shrewsbury. As in most of the historical plays the climax is not as clearly defined as are those of the tragedies and comedies. The interest is not closely enough centered, too often the attention is diverted from the main issue. In Act V Scene V comes the climax in the comedy plot (1) Here Henry shows beyond doubt the position he has assumed in regard

to his former companions.

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(11) Act I, Scene II, Line 44.

"God save thee, my sweet boy!" — Falstaff —

"My lord chief-justice, speak to that vain man."

— Henry —

Henry V.

Climax: Act II, Scene III, Line 88.
"The day is yours" - Montjoy -

The line which has been quoted is nominally the climax of the plot of Henry V in that it decides the question of the success of the English invasion of France. In fact it is impossible to note a single specific dramatic point as the crisis of the action. The dramatic value of the scene at Agincourt to a great extent, ~~is~~ due to the nobility of Character that Henry here displays as he utters one after another of the magnificent speeches Shakespeare has put into his mouth. This is

mided a fitting climax.
in the development of
Henry's Character, begun
in Henry II, and rising
in steady crescendo to
this point.

Richard III

Climax: Act IV, Scene II, Line 47.
"My lord, I hear the Marquis
Dorset is fled to Richmond
in those parts beyond
the seas where he abides."
- Stanley -

Gloster's hesitation to
become a party to Richard's
last most inhuman scheme
prepairs us for the climax
which comes with Stanley's
announcement of Dorset's
flight. Although the
suspense is maintained
to the end of the play
this report is a clear
intimation of the termination
of Act IV. Richard is confident
by nature, from this point
he plays a defensive role

and the progress of the reaction, although not all prominent is steady (1)

(1) Manton.

Henry VIII.

Climax: Act III, Scene II, Line 201.

"Read o'er this; (giving him papers) And after, this: and then to breakfast with what appetite you have." – King –

The thread of interest in Henry VIII is developed fully enough to form a symmetrical plot. To quote from the introduction to this play in the Eversley Shakespeare, "the total effect of the drama is insignificant in proportion to the splendor of detail and the superb power of single scenes." Wolsey is the aggressor in the first half of the play; in Act II he is at the height of his power; in Act III comes the

climax in his career. Without warning, Henry ascends humbly, and the great musician practically passes out of the plot. That this scene is a disappointing climax is the fault of the general plot structure rather than of the treatment of the scene itself. But says Falk is so abrupt, so complete that it does not closely unite the rising and falling actions which are somewhat vaguely connected.