

ABSTRACT**THE CURRENCY OF THE KING-CHALLENGERS:
THE POLITICS OF PROFIT IN SHAKESPEARE'S HISTORY PLAYS****HYACINTH MAVERNIE SIMPSON**

This thesis outlines a new political construct for the analysis of Shakespeare's politics by examining the histories written between 1585 and 1601. By focusing on context - Shakespeare's sources, Elizabethan economic and political climate - language and metaphor, the study reveals that economics form the base for the discussion of politics and political leadership. On this point, the thesis builds on the argument of earlier works which have their genesis in the late 1980s. However, an important change has been made which affects my discussion as well as my conclusion. Whereas all other studies have seen the king as the point of departure, I have argued that the king-challenger is the focus of these plays because the context and the language validate him. The resultant effect is that a new kind of Elizabethan political leader as epitomized by the king-challenger emerges. Also, the traditional interpretation of kingship which takes Shakespeare's 'political orthodoxy' as an accepted fact has been challenged.

Close attention is given to the use made of economic terms, coinage and the language of exchange. Each term as used is explained. The web of association which

exists between these terms and which forms the background for the presentation of political characters is analysed. Major as well as minor characters are valued based on their weighting in this economic context. The character who appropriates the language of economy, who understands and lives by the rules of exchange, is the one who triumphs. This study has paved the way for a fuller discussion of Shakespeare's politics as well as other aspects of human relationship whose treatment has been similarly affected by the Elizabethan preoccupation with economics.