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"Warriors of the Working-day" Class in Shakespeare's Second Historical Trilogy

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**“Warriors of the Working-day”
Class in Shakespeare’s Second Historical Tetralogy**

By

Richard Brooke Morrill Jr.

B.A. Rutgers University, 2002

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

(in English)

The Graduate School

The University of Maine

May, 2004

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Thesis Advisor: Dr. Richard T. Brucher

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented
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In Shakespeare’s historical plays, we find the traditional and politically “top-heavy” historic events of monarchs, aristocrats and patriarchs, of national and international politics and of wars, civil and foreign. This is the type of practice that E.P. Thompson was challenging when he coined the polemic phrase “history from below.” It is necessary, Thompson says, to rethink historiography as a means of creating national identity because of its inherent lack of sociopolitical objectivity, particularly with respect to class. “It is one of the peculiarities of the English,” he writes, “that the history of the ‘common people’ has always been something other than—and distinct from—English History Proper.”¹ In other words, English History has not been the history of the English per se, but rather the history of only the most powerful political, cultural and economic persons and events to affect the country; little room

¹ E.P. Thompson, “History from Below” in *The Essential E.P. Thompson*, Ed. Dorothy Thompson. (New York: The New Press, 2001.)

remains for the so-called common people. Thompson goes on to say that “in English History Proper the people of this island . . . appear as one of the problems Government has had to handle.”² Indeed, Shakespeare’s sources seem to bear this out; however, his plays demonstrate a certain social sensibility that recognizes plebeian characters in ways that markedly deviate from the source material. For example, all of Shakespeare’s more or less non-revolutionary inhabitants of Eastcheap are the author’s own creation and *do not* occur in Holinshed or Hall.³ Jack Cade, who leads a violent insurrection against the aristocracy, however, *does*.

In Shakespeare, English History Proper seems to be enriched by the inclusion of fair and peaceable representations of plebeian classes in a way that increases the dramatic effect of the plays. This part of Shakespeare’s technique is especially prominent in his second historical cycle. It is in these plays that we most see these types of figures in circumstances unlike those afforded us by traditional historiographers. Despite their requisite comic antics, we are allowed to see common people as fleshed out characters who are defined not by their “antagonism to orthodoxy,” but as integral components of a nation. This technique affords us both a fair if not realistic or accurate literary representation of the third estate and the opportunity to witness the political squabbling of the monarchy and aristocracy through the eyes of those who must inevitably fight the wars begun at court.

² Ibid.

Shakespeare's aesthetic sensibility apparently includes a consciousness of the social contradictions inherent in his culture and the limits of any historical worldview that prioritizes economic and political power and ignores the reality of the third estate. This quality infuses the plays with a sense of the social and moral consequences of absolutist monarchy as a subjective ideology. The playwright seems to have been at least tacitly aware that the people whom his society and its historical records considered socially, politically and economically ineffectual actually did have a considerable and very real efficacy in the historical trajectory that created the Elizabethan world. Shakespeare felt it necessary to include them in his public reenactment of the creation of that world—which is to say, in his own historiographic project.

For my grandparents,
Frank George Servis and Arlene Joan Servis,
and for my mother, Cynthia Ann Papiez,
with love and gratitude.

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Finally, I cannot say express deeply enough how much I value the love, friendship, and support I received from my wife, Melanie Morrill. From the very beginning, Melanie was willing to listen to my ideas for this project and discuss them critically, whether I liked it or not. In this paper, as in all aspects of my life, her influence can be found throughout and I am eternally grateful.

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Textual Note and List of Abbreviations

All references to Shakespearean texts come from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, Text. Ed. G. Blackmore Evans. Gen. Ed. Harry Levin. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1974.) I shall refer to the editorial and spelling decisions of this edition throughout with one variance: except in quotation, I will be using the modernized and more conventional spelling of “Bolingbroke.”

Additionally, I will be adhering to the following abbreviations of the titles of Shakespeare’s plays:

MND – A Midsummer Night’s Dream

R2 – The Tragedie of King Richard the Second

1H4 – The Historie of Henry IV, Part One

2H4 – The Historie of Henry IV, Part Two

H5 – The Cronicle History of Henry the Fift

MWW – The Merry Wives of Windsor

Preface

*Let me speak proudly: tell the constable
We are but warriors for the working-day;
(H5, IV.iii. ll. 108-9)*

I have had it in mind to write a serious exploration of Shakespeare's history for a number of years, and I have assumed that I would dedicate my master's thesis to this task for most of that time. However, certain events took place in the historical world that I occupy that shaped the outcome of this project.

I began thinking seriously about this project in the spring of 2003. During this time, the President of the United States was George W. Bush. I do not want to get involved in a sort of ideological critique of Bush and his policies (not here anyway), but it is enough to say that Bush's presidency and its critics, as well as the media, have made copious comparison between current events and the events of Shakespeare's *Henry V*. In the spring of 2003, as I was formulating my thesis idea, George W. Bush made an executive decision to invade Iraq. At the time, Bush's proponents tried to associate the President and the war with flashy and emotionally provocative rhetorical phrases like "once more into the breach, dear friends" and even, horrifyingly enough, references to "owing God a debt."^o Critics of the war were just as quick to identify the president with *Henry V*, citing such details as the fact that

^o For a convenient catalogue of the ways in which Henry V has been used to condemn or promote George Bush see Scott Newstrom's article "Step aside, I'll show thee a President": George W. Bush as Henry V?" (<http://www.poppolitics.com/articles/2003-05-01-henryv.shtml>) See also Harold Bloom's short play "MacBush" which toys with the idea of George Bush as a combination of *Henry V* and *Macbeth*. (*Vanity Fair*, April 2004).

Bush's father, like Henry's, had ruled the country, that a shadow hung over the legitimacy of both Bush's and Henry's "reign," and the fact that, like Henry V, Bush seemed to have made up his mind to invade a country *before* seeking or obtaining a justification to do so. Critics also continue to make much of the possibility that Bush's war with Iraq is meant to "busy giddy minds" and distract the American people from domestic crises such as unemployment and health care.

These references to Shakespeare's play, while clever, do little, I feel, to contribute to contemporary political discourse. In fact, I object to using the plays in a rhetorical tug of war in which both sides argue over sound-bites and the most shallow of readings. Neither side is interested in the play in any sense of historical context, which I believe is the only way in which the analogy would be truly useful. Using Shakespeare to promote or criticize a president, his policies or a historical situation such as a war seems to separate the historical circumstance from its real and current consequences. In other words, by associating what was going on in America and in the World during this time with a few convenient lines from Shakespeare's plays, political discourse, here at least, becomes overly academic and dissociated from real life. While each side wrangles over interpretations of a play and its usefulness in public debate, the fact that real lives are at stake becomes clouded. It is with that in mind that I began to think about the ordinary people who find themselves in the unenviable position of being caught between historical circumstances over which they have little control and the forces of discursive rhetoric and political spin-

doctoring that channel their sympathies, exploit their naiveté, and too often seem to rely on them as cannon-fodder.^o

Since Shakespeare was already being dragged into the discussion anyway, I thought I might ask what role ordinary people played in his representation of history. Since phrases like “once more into the breach” are being used as rhetorical tools today, I wondered how the characters that were present at Harfleur when Henry made that speech reacted to them. Shakespeare’s history plays are, of course, populated with numerous characters from the lower strata of society. Most of the time, these characters are noted only for their comic contributions to the play. This type of reading, I suggest, fails to appreciate the fullness of the characters and the significance of their presence to the historical and aesthetic presentation of Shakespeare’s version of history.

^o It was popular for Bush’s supporters to praise his military acumen by citing his ability to “put boots on the ground.”

Part I
Shakespeare's Historiographic Project.

*For there is none of you so mean and base
That hath not noble luster in your eyes.
(H5, III. i. ll. 29-30)*

The dialectical relationship between Shakespeare's political and social content and his responsibility to the aesthetics of his craft is perhaps most clearly apparent in his historical chronicle plays. It is here that we are able to see clearly what is most distinctly aesthetic about Shakespeare's plays. Most of the events and persons described in these plays are not fictional. Nearly every Elizabethan play can be said to have some manner of literary source material, but these plays, in particular, have a very specific type of source: a large body of well-documented historical data that makes a distinct and important connection to the play's contemporary political culture and environment.¹ As Derek Cohen observes,

Shakespeare and his characters are not, as is sometimes suggested, sophisticated, quasi-modern historians; they do, however, obey the human urge to assemble history out the complex and only partially known and understood raw material of the past.²

¹ Since the history described by the plays and their sources concerns the two hundred or so years preceding Elizabethan England, we must recognize the history play as, in some sense, a reenactment of the cultural and social lineage of Shakespeare's audience as well as Queen Elizabeth's own dynastic lineage. This is not to say, however, that the plays necessarily stage a clear argument for the legitimacy of the monarchy. Looming in the background of each of these plays as well as their sources is the idea of absolutist monarchy as a form of government that had, in the course the history Shakespeare describes, undergone historical events that weakened the political stability of the institution's claim to divine patrilineage and therefore authority.

² Derek Cohen. "History and the Nation in *Richard II* and *Henry IV*." *Studies in English Literature* 12 (Spring 2002) 293 - 315.

In other words, Shakespeare's plays offer us not simply a reworking of history but an interpretation of that history, as the playwright shapes the historical record in his effort to fulfill his aesthetic responsibilities.

In Shakespeare's historical tetralogies, we find, of course, the traditional and politically "top-heavy" historic events of monarchs, aristocrats and patriarchs, of national and international politics and of wars, civil and foreign; the fact that these types of issues make up the vast majority of the orthodox history Shakespeare used suggests not only something about the political bent of those sources, but about the conceptual practice of hegemonic historiography that governs the creation and maintenance of historical products and the distribution of them into cultural consciousness.

This type of practice is what E.P. Thompson was challenging when he coined the polemical phrase "history from below." It is necessary, Thompson says, to rethink historiography as a means of creating national identity because of its inherent lack of sociopolitical objectivity, particularly with respect to class. "It is one of the peculiarities of the English," he writes, "that the history of the 'common people' has always been something other than—and distinct from—English History Proper."³ In other words, English History has not been the history of the English per se, but rather the history of only the most powerful political, cultural and economic persons and

³ E.P. Thompson, "History from Below" in *The Essential E.P. Thompson*, ed. Dorothy Thompson. (New York: The New Press, 2001.)

events to affect the country; little room remains for the so-called common people. Thompson goes on to say that “in English History Proper the people of this island . . . appear as one of the problems Government has had to handle.”⁴ Indeed, Shakespeare’s sources seem to bear this out. Accounts such as those by Raphael Holinshed, John Foxe and Edward Hall all feature scant reference to the so-called “common people” and often only when, as Thompson says, they become a problem for the State.⁵ For example, all of Shakespeare’s more or less non-revolutionary inhabitants of Eastcheap are the author’s own creation and *do not* occur in Holinshed or Hall.⁶ Jack Cade, who leads a violent insurrection against the aristocracy, however, *does*.

The conspicuous absence of everyday citizens and the historical reality of their lives apart from the “burden” they cause to those in power is far more politically significant than Tillyard recognizes in his *Elizabethan World Picture*, which may

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See Rafael Holinshed, *Holinshed’s Chronicle as Used in Shakespeare’s Plays*. Eds. Allardyce Nicholls and Josephine Nicholls. (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc. 1943) and Edward Hall. *Hall’s Chronicle: Containing the History of England*. Henry Ellis, ed. London: J. Johnson, 1809. John Foxe was the author of numerous hagiographic chronicles during the Sixteenth century that contain various references to English Monarchs and other persons of interest to the time. See Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*. Marie Gentert King, ed. (Old Tappan, NJ: F.H.Revell, 1970.) Shakespeare’s had another source for the first tetralogy: Polydore Vergil’s chronicle. See Polydore Vergil. *English History: comprising the reigns of Henry VI., Edward IV., and Richard III*. (London, Printed for the Camden society, by J. B. Nichols and sons, 1844.)

⁶ Falstaff was based on Sir John Oldcastle and although he does appear in Foxe much of what is known of the historical Oldcastle is largely anachronistic lore, particularly in the way that it was used by Shakespeare and other playwrights. I will discuss the relationship between Shakespeare’s Falstaff and Oldcastle in greater detail in a later chapter. See *The Oldcastle Controversy: ‘Sir John Oldcastle, Part I’ and ‘The Famous Victories of Henry V’* Peter Corbin and Douglass Sedge, eds. (New York: St. Martins, 1991.) Furthermore, although Shakespeare’s Falstaff was technically a knight with a real connection to the aristocracy, his presence at the Boar’s Head Inn establishes him as a thoroughly fallen nobleman and a better representative of the plebeian class than of his own birthright.

serve as a twentieth century example of the kind of historical view that Thompson was reacting against. But orthodox historiography does not exclude the third estate simply because it can be assumed for its commonness or familiarity, nor is its historical silence demonstrative of a “conception of order [that] is so taken for granted, so much a part of the collective mind of the people, that it is hardly mentioned except in explicitly didactic passages.”⁷ Jonathan Dollimore, one of the many critics who have criticized Tillyard’s conception of order, writes, “Tillyard’s world picture...was an ideological legitimation of an existing social order, one rendered the more necessary by the apparent instability, actual and imagined, of that order.”⁸ He goes on to say that this

legitimation further works to efface the fact of social contradiction dissent and struggle. Where these things present themselves unavoidably they are often demonized as attempts to subvert that social order.⁹

In Shakespeare, *English History Proper* seems, at first, to be enriched by the inclusion of plebeian representations, which may or may not appear as embodied characters on the stage but nevertheless increase the dramatic effect of the play. However, the subaltern barflies in *Eastcheap*, for example, prove ultimately to be significantly more than mere dramatic cosmetics or whimsical asides. In many cases, socially marginalized voices such as Falstaff and Pistol are what drive the aesthetic of

⁷ E.M.W. Tillyard, *Elizabethan World Picture*. (New York: Macmillan, 1944) 7.

⁸ Jonathan Dollimore. “Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism and the New Historicism,” in *Political Shakespeare*. Eds. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) 5.

the play despite being largely absent from Shakespeare's sources. This part of Shakespeare's technique is especially prominent in his second series of history plays, or "Major Tetralogy."¹⁰ It is in these plays that we most often see these types of figures in circumstances unlike those afforded us by traditional historiographers. Despite their requisite comic antics, we are allowed to see common people as fleshed out characters who are defined simply not by their "antagonism to orthodoxy," but as integral components of a nation. Unlike Shakespeare's first tetralogy of plays written at the very beginning of the playwright's career, the so-called second Henriad,¹¹ because of its conspicuous lack of *plebeian* revolution, affords us both a fair if not realistic or accurate literary representation of the third estate and the opportunity to witness the political squabbling of the monarchy and aristocracy through the eyes of those who must inevitably fight the wars begun at court.

Shakespeare's aesthetic sensibility apparently includes a consciousness of the social contradictions inherent in his culture and the limits of any historical reality

⁹ Dollimore, op. cit. p.7

¹⁰ Charney refers to the second tetralogy of plays as the Major Tetralogy because he feels "Shakespeare learned a lot from writing the four plays of the Minor Tetralogy" and used what he learned to fashion a superior set of plays beginning with *Richard II*. "The Major Tetralogy," he says for example, "is more self-consciously a four-part unit than the Minor Tetralogy." Maurice Charney. *All of Shakespeare*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) 160-1.

¹¹ "Henriad" is a term first coined by Alvin B. Kernan in 1969. Alvin B. Kernan, "The Henriad: Shakespeare's Major History Plays," in *The Yale Review* 54 (Oct. 1969) pp. 3 - 32. Some scholars, such as Harold Bloom, object to this term arguing that, since a linear reading of the plays suggest that all four are in some ways vehicles leading up to *Henry V*, only *Henry V* ought to be called the Henriad. Bloom writes that "...at the end of *Richard II* Prince Hal is merely lamented as a wastrel by his father...and in the two parts of *Henry IV* is secondary to the titanic Falstaff. Only *Henry V* is the henriad..." Harold Bloom. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. (New York, Riverhead Books, 1998) 249.

that prioritizes economic and political power and ignores the Bardolphs of the world. This quality, I argue, infuses the plays with a sense of the social and moral consequences of absolutist monarchy as a subjective ideology. The playwright seems to have been at least tacitly aware that the people whom his society and its historical records considered socially, politically and economically ineffectual actually did have a considerable and very real efficacy in the historical trajectory that created the Elizabethan world. Shakespeare felt it necessary to include them in his public reenactment of the creation of that world—which is to say, in his own historiographic project.

Such a perspective calls into question the very nature of the history play as a genre. As Graham Holderness writes, “Shakespeare, whose interest in history was not merely a search for dramatic ‘source-material’, read Holinshed with understanding” and created a “unique and specific piece of Renaissance historiography.”¹² In other words, Shakespeare’s interest in history was not necessarily an obligatory nod to his betters, but rather an interest in the human drama that surrounded him. His particular historiographic projects results in a holistic representation of the events and persons that created his society at all levels. This is not to say, however, that Shakespeare was necessarily trying to rebuild history as Elizabethan England knew it, but rather to take part in a certain discourse on the representation of the social and

¹² Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare’s History*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985) 41.

cultural components of history while still being true to his responsibilities as a dramatist writing for the stage.

To call a play “history” implies that it engenders a sense of the universal and makes an appeal to collectivity. In other words, the term carries with it certain metonymic meanings that allege to speak for a people. Jonathan Dollimore points out that

those who rule may in fact be serving their own interests and those of their class, but they, along with the institutions and practices through which they exercise and maintain power, are understood as working in the interests of the community as a whole.¹³

Of course, one of those “institutions and practices” is the process, itself, of recording history itself. The kind of history I am interested in seeks to define the social, cultural and political identity not only of the State, but of its citizens. I am talking about a concept of history as informing, creating or maintaining political and cultural identity: what Karl Marx called “the materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing.”¹⁴ The word “history,” like the word “nation,” for example, is mimetic for manifold concepts such as political and economic systems, geography, time, casual events, material culture, and—not to be forgotten—citizenry. To be a citizen is to be a part of a nation and to be a part of a certain history. Unlike memory, which occurs wholly within the realm of the individual, the concept of

¹³ Dollimore, *op. cit.* p. 7

¹⁴ Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach.” in *The Marx Engels Reader*. 2nd Ed. Robert C. Tucker, ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1978) 144.

history *claims* to be collective. History, like nationhood, is a subjectivity that forces itself upon a people by replicating itself in the form of identity. Very often this type of history-*cum*-identity finds very fertile ground in the classes of people that have the least ability to create social, political or economic change (which is, of course, to say “history” in the most time-worn sense).

In his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Walter Benjamin says that “not man nor men but the struggling oppressed class itself is the depository of historical knowledge.”¹⁵ For the lower classes, history is, like national-level political systems (monarchic, democratic or otherwise), a system that is stable insofar as there is little that most individuals can do to control it. Under these circumstances, history transforms into identity more easily. Consider, for example, the bickering officers at the gates of Harfleur in *Henry V* (II.i.). The men, who come from perhaps the higher levels of the lower caste, are precisely what Benjamin calls “the depository of historical knowledge” because they are the most affected by it.

Fluellen. Captain Macmorris, I think, look you, under your correction, there is not many of your nation—

Macmorris: Of my nation? What ish my nation? Ish a villain, and a basterd, and a knave, and a rascal. What ish my nation? Who talks of my nation?

Flu. Look you, if you take the matter otherwise than is meant, Captain Macmorris, peradventure I shall think you do not use me with that affability as in discretion

¹⁵ Walter Benjamin. “Theses of the Philosophy of History” in *Illuminations*. Hannah Arendt, ed. Harry Zohn, trans. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) 260.

you ought to use me, look you, being as good a man as yourself, both in the disciplines of war, and in the derivation of my birth, and in other peculiarities.

Mac. I do not know you so good a man as myself. So
Christ save me, I will cut off your head.

(*H5*, III.ii. ll. 120-134)

Fluellen and Macmorris cannot get along with one another because their identity is defined by the historical (political and cultural) differences between the Welsh and Irish. For the time being at least, these historical differences are laid aside by those at the highest levels of political command under King Henry, but for figures like Fluellen, MacMorris, Captain Jamy and Gower at the lower levels—their social status literally represented by their presence in the mines—these historical differences are more difficult to surrender because they are so integral a part of their subaltern identity. What has created the historical and national identity of the English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish soldiers under Henry V is precisely the same cultural force that defines those in the audience of the play. People are born to a history, and it continues to replicate itself on them and in their identities.

To discuss Shakespeare's plays in such generic terms, however, can be a somewhat tricky business. We need to be very careful when we say that works claim to be historical and perhaps even more careful when we do the same for a genre. For one thing, there is no real objective rule that defines just what is and what is not a "history play." Part of the problem is in the conceptual preoccupation of the plays

that seems to cross traditionally recognized generic lines. As Michael Hattaway points out,

Generic classification was bound to be difficult given that most of the English histories centre their action on the reign of a monarch, the narrative ending with death. It was inevitable that 'history' plays were going to be closely affiliated with tragedy.¹⁶

Indeed, even the playwright himself seemed to have been at times uncertain.¹⁷ The title pages of the very first publications of Shakespeare's plays demonstrate this confusion. In the quartos that were published before the playwright's death, works such as *Hamlet* (1601)¹⁸ and *Taming of the Shrew* (1594) were labeled "histories," as was *Henry IV* (1596). *Richard II* (1595) was titled a "tragedy," *King John* (1597) claims to be the "life and times" of the monarch, while *Henry VIII* (1613) is "a famous history and life." It is not even safe to use the label "historical chronicle" to define a genre, for while Shakespeare uses the phrase in the title of *Henry V* (1599), he also so labels *King Lear* (1606). However, in the nearly four hundred years that have passed since the relatively stabilizing effect of the publication of the first Folio editions in

¹⁶ Michael Hattaway, "The Shakespearean History Play." in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's Histories*. Michael Hattaway, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 3. Lily B. Campbell also addresses this situation in her book *Shakespeare's Histories: Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy*. (San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1947.)

¹⁷ It is much more likely, however, that Shakespeare did not feel as dependent on strictly defined generic categories as we seem to be today.

¹⁸ These dates do not necessarily refer to the first publication of the quarto that the plays refer to, but an approximation of the first recorded performance reckoned by Sylvan Barnett. He says "The dates, necessarily imprecise in some works, indicate something like scholarly consensus concerning the time of original composition" (xvi). I cite them herein because I feel the chronological relationship between the plays is important. Sylvan Barnett, Series Ed. *Signet Classic Shakespeare Series*. (New York: Penquin, 1998.)

1623, the rule most often used for determining an Elizabethan “history play,” Shakespearean or otherwise, has been, perhaps chauvinistically, to apply the generic label only to those plays that chronicle a bona fide historical event occurring in post-Christianized England and that have a clear place in the dynastic lineage preceding Elizabeth.¹⁹ That excludes, of course, Shakespeare’s Roman plays, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear*,²⁰ as well as a host of other chronicle-type works that were being performed on the stage at the turn of the seventeenth century. Of the plays that do fit into this somewhat narrow generic designation, Shakespeare has written ten or eleven (depending on whether or not one accepts the apocryphal *Edward III* [1596] as an authentic Shakespearean drama).

Shakespearean historical drama is also very difficult to discuss generically because the playwright was among the very first of his contemporaries to use drama to present chronicle history in this way. His so-called “first tetralogy,” which describes medieval English history from Henry VI through the Yorkist Kings and the Wars of the Roses to Henry VII, was written very early in his dramatic career; the plays were begun in the late 1580’s, around the same time Shakespeare was writing other relatively immature works such as *The Comedy of Errors* (1588). In addition to

¹⁹ At least one critic, Zdeněk Stribrný, refers to these works as “national historical plays.” Zdeněk Stribrný, “*Henry V* and History” in *Shakespeare in a Changing World*. Arnold Kettle, ed. (Norwood, PA: Norwood Editions, 1974) 86. See also Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare: The Histories*. (New York: St. Martins Press, 2000.)

²⁰ *King Lear* is set in England and draws much of its source material from *Holinshed’s Chronicle* (1577) but nevertheless describes a pre-Christian monarchy and doesn’t connect to any clearly identifiable lineage.

predating his own second series of historical plays,²¹ Shakespeare's first historical series predates many other historical works such as Marlowe's *Edward II* (1592), several plays by Thomas Heywood including his *Edward IV* (1599), and an important though anonymous *Woodstock* play (1592?),²² which details events in the monarchy of Richard II before Bolingbroke's dispute with Mowbray. Drama as a means of historical chronicle—or at least this generation of dramatic chronicles—is very much a Shakespearean invention. Plays such as the ones by Marlowe and Heywood, for example, must be recognized as productions in the tradition of Shakespeare's first tetralogy. Indeed, the dramatic, thematic and conceptual influence of those earlier plays can easily be felt in Marlowe and Heywood.²³

²¹ The *events* described in that second tetralogy, however, predate those of the first.

²² Some scholars, particularly around the middle of the last century, put forth the opinion that *Woodstock* may have been written by Shakespeare. This led to the attachment of the subtitle "the first part of Richard II" to certain editions of the play. This view was evidently not persuasive enough to have survived long and those who hold the opinion that Shakespeare was the author of *Woodstock* have since become a silent minority. See A.P. Rossiter, "Woodstock, not 1 Richard II" in his introduction to *Woodstock: A Moral History*. A.P. Rossiter, ed. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946) 25 – 32.

²³ Until the latter half of the twentieth century, it was assumed that Marlowe's *Edward II* was actually the first Elizabethan "history play." That chronology was called into question, however, when Marlovian scholars such as H.B. Charlton and R.D. Waller argued, along with A.P. Rossiter, that there are instances in *Edward II* that clearly draw from Shakespeare's earliest histories as well as the *Woodstock* play. See Charlton and Waller's introduction in Marlowe's *Edward II*. (New York: Gordian Press, 1930.) See also A.P. Rossiter, *English Drama from Early Times to the Elizabethans; its Background, Origins and Developments*. (New York: Hutchinson University Library, 1950.) and Charles R. Forker "Edward II and its Shakespearean Relatives" in *Shakespeare's English Histories: A Quest for Form and Genre*. John W. Velz, ed. (Tempe, AZ: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1997) 57-9. Another interesting historical play of the period, *Perkin Werbeck* by John Ford, details the reign of Henry VII and echoes the dramatic tradition of Shakespeare's histories. See Keith Sturgess' introduction in John Ford. *Three Plays: 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, The Broken Heart, and Perkin Werbeck*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1970) 11.

The most important principle that links all of Shakespeare's historical narratives, as well as the non-Shakespearean examples, is their concern with a common historical lineage. Marlowe's Edward II is the father of Edward III, the subject of a play that has sometimes been ascribed to Shakespeare. His son, Prince Edward of Wales, the so-called Black Prince, died before the King so that the monarchy was inherited by Edward III's grandson Richard II, the subject of the anonymous *Woodstock* play and Shakespeare's *Richard II*. Shakespeare's second tetralogy begins with the overthrow of Richard II by his cousin Henry IV and follows through the plays to the reign of Henry V. In the first tetralogy we find Henry VI, Edwards IV and V, and Richard III. In the course of the *Henry VI* plays, the Lancaster line, of which Henrys IV, V, and VI are a part, is usurped by the Yorkist Dukes, who give us Edward IV, the short-lived Edward V and finally Richard III. At the end of *Richard III*, Henry VII is crowned the first Tudor King. His son is Henry VIII, about whom Shakespeare also wrote a play, though much later at the very end of his career; Henry VIII is, of course, the father of Shakespeare's own queen and frequent patron, Elizabeth I, whose birth is described at the very end of Shakespeare's last historical play.

This particular lineage is extremely important in terms of political content and aesthetic sensibility and demonstrates the effectiveness of the Folio editor's definition of the genre. These plays, when taken as a cohesive body of work, describe English history from the last half of the fourteenth century nearly to Shakespeare's own day.

Graham Holderness argues that the success of the history play as a genre was dependent on the topical relationship between its subject matter and its audience.

The history being described on the English stage in the Renaissance was

clearly more extensive, and arguably more central to sixteenth century culture, than any other available historiography; and so the Shakespearean history plays can be read as constructing a more integrated metanarrative than those plays that address other historical times and places.²⁴

The history that was a staple on the stage at the end of the sixteenth century wasn't just any history—it was a history of which the Elizabethans were a living part. When Shakespeare has Jacques famously say that “all the world's a stage” in *As You Like It* (1600), he may well have been talking about the relationship of his plays, and especially of the histories, to his audience. Contemporary audiences would have been very much aware that the history they were seeing on stage at the Globe was still being written outside Shakespeare's “wooden O.” One concrete example of this confluence of drama, history and culture would be the oft-cited staging of *Richard II* by Robert Devereaux, the Earl of Essex in 1601, on the afternoon before his failed attempt to overthrow Elizabeth.²⁵ In the English Renaissance especially, literature was understood to have an important connection to its audience because of the ability of drama—and in particular historiographic drama—to participate in the cultural

²⁴ Graham Holderness (2000), op. cit. 5

discourse of political identity. One of the ways that the Shakespearean history play does this is by making historical and cultural connections to its contemporary audience. Samuel Taylor Coleridge observes that “in order that a drama be properly historical, it is necessary that it should be the history of the people to whom it is addressed.”²⁶ Coleridge makes a good point and one that seems to support the taxonomy of the Folio editors, but his phrase “to whom it is addressed” ultimately raises a profoundly un-ignorable question of interest to class-minded scholars.

If the stage as a place of historical chronicle really was a reflection of the historical lineage that led to and therefore included the audiences of these first performances, could the audience expect to find itself onstage? Coleridge, at least, seems to believe it could. He says that the historical drama deletes certain material considerations that may be “taken for granted” and reconstructs the literal chronology of history in order to conform to the aesthetic conventions of literature and the stage.

The effect of the reconstructed chronology is that

the unity resulting for succession is destroyed, but is supplied by a unity of a higher order, which connects the events by reference to the workers, gives a reason for them in the motives, and presents men in their causative character.²⁷

²⁵ While the records show only a play of that title being performed, Jonathan Dollimore suggests that it is indeed very likely that it was the one written by Shakespeare. Dollimore, *op. cit.* 8. S. Schoenbaum, arguably the most influential modern biographer of Shakespeare, agrees. See Samuel Schoenbaum, “*Richard II* and the Realities of Power” in *Shakespeare Survey* 28 (1975).

²⁶ S.T. Coleridge, *The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Volume the Second*. Henry Nelson Coleridge, ed. (London: William Pickering, 1836. Reprinted: New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1967) 160.

²⁷ Coleridge, *ibid.*

This is what Coleridge refers to as the ability of drama to “infuse a principle of life and organization into the naked facts, and [make] them all the framework of an animated whole.”²⁸ But Coleridge’s model fails to recognize the political implications of a work structured in this way. Michael Hattaway updates this formulation. He says that in these plays “attention has been paid not only to larger patterns of action but to values, ideologies, and institutions, and to the accidental or contingent.”²⁹ In Hattaway’s version, the efficacy of the each constituent element of Coleridge’s “animated whole” is fore-grounded.

In the next few chapters, I will be discussing this aesthetic phenomenon and its function in each of the plays of Shakespeare’s second Henriad and finally its effect on the plays when read as a linear, complete historiographic tetralogy. Chapter II, which features a detailed discussion of *Richard II*, argues that Shakespeare was motivated to include non-historical or anachronistic plebeian voices in the play by a confluence of historical trajectories that created a space in which class identities could interact to define each other. Shakespeare took the opportunity created by these historical and political forces to insert plebeian figures into the narrative as an important means of advancing his dramatic and aesthetic objective. *Richard II* is, arguably, the most politically volatile of Shakespeare’s histories. It was, after all, the play in which Shakespeare introduced his most dangerous idea into the dramatic,

²⁸ Coleridge, *ibid.*

²⁹ Hattaway, *op.cit.* p.4

which is to say public, discourse of history. Bolingbroke's deposition of Richard, which occurred with no challenge to Richard's claim to the throne, caused certain and irrevocable damage to the ideology of divinely anointed monarchs. The removal of an unpopular monarch threatened, if it did not destroy, public faith in the belief that the monarch is God's anointed and is above all human law. The historical arc, like the play, then "ceases to confer upon the king the natural, spontaneous right to allegiance."³⁰ While this detail was far from absent in Shakespeare's sources, the inclusion and indeed foregrounding of the sense that the crown is a transient commodity that can be claimed with the right combination of might and popular authorization was indeed powerful political subject matter.

As a direct result of the damage the historical Bolingbroke inflicted upon the absolutist monarchy and the authority it had enjoyed from its assumed divine sanction, the political culture of Shakespeare's age was marked by certain tensions. Despite the so-called Tudor myth,³¹ a legend invented by Henry VII to restore public legitimacy to the crown, faith in the institution of divine monarchy was waning. Indeed, the historical deposition of Richard seems to have signaled this trend. Bolingbroke's revolution as well as its reenactment in a series of plays at the end of the sixteenth century, including Shakespeare's, seem to toy with the idea that Bolingbroke was justified in seizing the crown *because* Richard was a bad king, and

³⁰ Derek Traversi, "The Historical Pattern from *Richard the Second* to *Henry the Fifth*." In Eugene M. Waith. *Shakespeare: The Histories*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1965) 102.

that he was a bad king because of his unapologetic faith in the old order, and his assumption that he was unaccountable for his actions. Richard's deposition represents the indictment not merely of one monarch but of the whole monarchic political and economic system. James Calderwood points out that the "deposition [is] not so much a trial of Richard's conduct as a trial of his concept of the royal office" as a divinely endorsed absolutism.³² Much of the criticism levied at the monarchy was coming from an aristocracy that was, for the first time in history, beginning to be threatened by the rise of the mercantile class.³³ Because of the tension between the monarchy and the aristocracy, the issue of class inter-dynamics was very much a part of the social consciousness of Shakespeare's audience.³⁴ Shakespeare's preoccupation with the third estate and, in particular, his use of plebeian figures to provide a certain type of internal testimony, were motivated by this tension. As Walter Cohen says,

In these three absolutists states [England, France and Spain] tragedy, as well as much tragicomedy and historical drama, depended in particular on the presence of a nation governed by a traditional aristocracy, albeit in a new political form [centralized

³¹ E.M.W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, (New York: Macmillian Co., 1946)

³² James Calderwood, *Metadrama in Shakespeare's Henriad*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979) 17.

³³ See Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*. (London: NLB, 1974) and Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution, 1603 – 1714* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1962) which despite the fact that it is obvious concern with history that occurs a decade or so after Shakespeare's history plays were written and first performed, discusses the political and cultural precursors to the revolutionary events of middle of the seventeenth century.

³⁴ This tension began slightly earlier than the time being described in the history plays and was by no means a settled matter in Shakespeare's day. See Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*. (ob. cit.)

monarchy]. The principal subject of these genres was precisely this class's conduct, and especially its ability to rule.³⁵

The impulse to examine the historical role of the aristocracy may, in part, explain Shakespeare's interest in the "official" historical record, which always has been preoccupied with the deeds of this class. But as we see in Shakespeare's plays, the playwright was rarely content with the political content of the orthodox historiographies he had at his disposal because, I argue, he was aware of the social contradictions inherent in them and the endemic limitations those contradictions caused when history was being staged, and particularly when it was being staged for an economically and socially diverse audience. Shakespeare's solution to this problem was to include meta-narrative scenes in which plebeian characters and interests are represented. This is to say that Shakespeare did not add these characters simply to pander to the groundlings, but rather that he was more or less keenly attuned to the problems of presenting history as literature, as well as to the way his plebeian climate energizes his dramatic forms. The effect of the subaltern presence gives Shakespeare's historiographic project a humanistic dimension not present in his sources and, as a result, his plays bear witness to certain historical phenomena that were occurring both on and off stage at the turn of the seventeenth century.

³⁵ Walter Cohen, *Drama of a Nation: Public Theatre in Renaissance England and Spain*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985) 108.

Part II
The Tragedie of King Richard the Second.

*Sometimes am I king,
Then treasons make me wish I was a beggar,
And so I am.
(R2, V.v.11.31-3)*

W.B. Yeats said that Richard II was an “unripened Hamlet” and that Henry V was a “ripened Fortinbras”; he compared the former to a “vessel of porcelain” and the latter to a “vessel of clay”:

I have often had the fancy that there is some one Myth for every man, which, if we but knew it, would make us understand all he did and thought. Shakespeare’s Myth, it may be, describes a wise man who is blind from very wisdom and an empty man who thrust him from his place, and saw all that could be seen from very emptiness.³⁶

This myth, he argues, is at the core of the dramatic differential between character and living man *and* the prime dramatic force governing the Shakespearean convention of “antitheses”; that is, the playwright’s habit of pitting something in the essential nature of one character (or circumstance) against something in the essential nature of another. In *Richard II*, his contrast is manifested here in the distinction between a King who, despite admitting to having had the luxury of time (“I wasted time, now time doth waste me” [R2, V.v. 1.48]), fails to apprehend the proverbial writing on the wall until it is too late, and a King who seems blessed with an instant apprehension of

³⁶ W.B. Yeats. “At Stratford-on-Avon,” in *Ideas of Good and Evil* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1967) 162.

what lies in the hearts of men. Consider, for example, Richard's dangerous relationship with his flatterers, Bushy, Bagot and Greene, to whom he has leased out control of his kingdom's lands and the power to rule and to tax England's people. Richard's support of these men, along with his involvement in the assassination of his uncle, the Duke of Gloucester, is at the top of the list of his crimes in this play, and even more prominent in the *Woodstock* play. Richard is fundamentally unable to recognize the political problem that his favorites are causing and is even less able to recognize the shallowness of his flatterers' loyalties. He simply accepts their words at face value and fails to recognize that these men are tearing apart his kingdom. He "never understands the real conditions of rule and believes that he is unaccountable."³⁷ Compare this dynamic with Henry V's treatment of the spies, Grey, Cambridge and Scroop (*H5*, II.ii.). Henry has made a far more careful study of people; his youth spent with the working class in Eastcheap has given him the insight to distinguish genuine trustworthiness and loyalty from abject flattery and ambition. As a result, he is protected from these conspirators because he can recognize their moral liabilities and because he has surrounded himself with more honorable and more genuinely familiar hearts. Unlike his father's cousin, Henry V does not take men for granted and does not alienate those most loyal to him. It is not hard to imagine that in the same situation, Richard would have trusted Grey, Cambridge and Scroop for their flattery, executed

³⁷ Allan Bloom "Richard II" in John Alvis and Thomas G. West, eds. *Shakespeare as Political Thinker*. (Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 1981) 51.

the drunkard against whom they testified, and been done with it, never to know the error of his ways while the crown remained on his head.

While Yeats, in general, claims to find weakness in strictly dialectic or antithetical readings of Shakespeare,³⁸ his above formulation describes quite well the relationship between Richard and Henry V and is useful as means of getting at the character of each. Each King has something both circumstantial and essential in common, as surely have Prince Hamlet and Fortinbras. But what is fundamentally different about them are the ways they use experience as an available resource. A more or less traditional reading of the second tetralogy (here at least, Yeats is in many ways traditional) finds that what makes Richard II an especially bad king is precisely what gives Henry V his strength: the ability to communicate effectively and reciprocally that is *lacking* in Richard II but *present* in Henry V. This ability is manifested primarily, though not exclusively, in language both rhetorical and poetic. Harold Bloom responds to the famous assertion that Richard was a “good poet and a bad king” with the following:

Richard is a bad king and an interesting metaphysical poet; his two roles are antithetical so that his kingship diminishes even as his poetry improves.³⁹

³⁸ Yeats, op. cit. p. 144.

³⁹ Harold Bloom. (1998) 249. A decade earlier, Bloom said that Richard “is an astonishing poet and a very bad king.” *William Shakespeare’s “Richard II”: Modern Critical Interpretations*. Ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988) 1. See also Mark van Doren who says “What explains [Richard’s] failure to oppose Bolingbroke at all... is simple. Richard is a poet, not a king.” Mark van Doren. *Shakespeare* (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1939) 89.

Indeed Richard's three most poetical speeches, the first occurring before Flint Castle (III.iii), the second at his so-called self-deposition and Bolingbroke's coronation (IV:i) and the last when he is alone in the Tower of Pomfret (V.v), all chart a dramatic increase in the poetical power of his language as he comes to recognize that he has lost the crown. This trajectory, as Bloom says, is directly and inversely related to Richard's identity as king; as it diminishes, his identity as corporeal man and, not coincidentally as poet, increases. He is a poet only when he is not king, or, to use Bloom's language, he is a "good poet" *because* he had been a "bad king" and lost his crown. At the other end of the tetralogy and the antipode in Yeats' formulation, Henry V is a good king precisely *because* he is a good poet and above all else a good rhetorician; the same could be said of Henry's father, particularly (if not exclusively) as he appears in *Richard II*.⁴⁰ Bolingbroke's rhetorical strength might not be poetical in the sense that his son's is, but it nevertheless reveals a mastery of political speech and gesture. Since his revolution could only have been accomplished with the strength and support of the masses working in a sort of concert with the aristocracy, one must look at what it was that enabled Bolingbroke to gather such support. In Shakespeare, at least, the

⁴⁰ Despite the increasing differential between the two Henrys that develops in the next two plays, one could easily say that the *character* of Henry IV (Bolingbroke) in *Richard II* is at the least anticipatory of the *character* of Henry V. Bolingbroke (in *R2*) was, like his son, a king of the people.

answer would appear to be effective and more or less “pan-caste”⁴¹ communication skills.

In his treatment of *Richard II* in *All of Shakespeare*, Maurice Charney writes of Bolingbroke’s rhetorical acumen with his followers”

Bolingbroke is essentially a political creature with no natural eloquence like Richard, but with an uncanny sense of the right gesture.⁴²

Charney is right to point out that Bolingbroke is not poetical, “but Richard envies him his ability to win political favor easily and spontaneously.”⁴³ Bolingbroke’s political mastery lies in his plain-speaking and plain-dealing with the common people who would naturally have preferred rhetorical statements like “for what I speak / My body shall make good on this earth” (*R2*, I.i.36-7) to Richard’s “Rage must be withstood... Lions make leopards tame” (*R2*, I.i.174-5). Here is Richard’s own account of Bolingbroke’s relationship with plebeians:

King. Ourself and Bushy, [Bagot here and Green,]
Observ’d his courtship with the common people,
How he did seem to dive into their hearts
With humble and familiar courtesy,
What reverence he did throw away on slaves,
Wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles
And patient underbearing of his fortune . . .
(*R2*I.iv. 1.23-9)

⁴¹ I use the term “pan-caste” here to refer to Henry’s ability to read men regardless of class distinction. This is not the same as saying that Henry reads men with no attention to class, for certainly class is an important part of the psychological make-up of these men. Henry understands his subject’s “pan-caste” in the sense that he is able to acutely understand the “true” nature of men from each class.

⁴² Maurice Charney. *All of Shakespeare*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) 165.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

The power of Bolingbroke's rhetoric is that it is not poetical in the sense of being high-minded, but is rather keenly attuned to a sense of audience, effect, timing and, perhaps above all, political understanding.

This type of understanding provides Bolingbroke and later his son with the sources of their strength. This point of view runs slightly contrary to that of Lois Potter, who sees "elaborate language," rhetoric and poetry, in *Richard II*, as "a substitute for action" and "a symbol of weakness."⁴⁴ Potter admits that the language of Bolingbroke (as well as that of Gaunt and the Duchess of Gloucester) has a strength that is evident to the audience but says that rhetorical speech in this play is "disregarded by the other characters." This is partly true, for many of the *staged* characters do not regard Richard's poetic speeches (they seem to give him an especially wide berth in his "looking glass" speech at Henry IV's coronation [IV.i.]); but the truly operative beneficiaries of this type of language have something very much in common with the audience of the play, for they are not on the stage. It is Bolingbroke's "courtship with the common people" and his "wooing [of] poor craftsman," whose presence is as important as it is unstaged, that both anticipate the jingoistic pep rallies of his son in France and enable his own overthrow of the "bad King" Richard. Perhaps more importantly, the effectiveness of this type of language and its effectiveness are the lessons that Richard learns on his route to the tower.

⁴⁴ Lois Potter. "The Antic Disposition of Richard II," in *Shakespeare Survey* 27 (1974) 33-42. Potter's view of poetry as a substitute for action resonates well with Yeats' Hamlet analogy.

The problem for Richard is a matter of audience and of timing. He may know what to say and how to say it, but he is abysmally incompetent at knowing when to say it and to whom. Richard

can prattle about Divine Right, but in his world power is wielded not divinely, but by men, those men in whose presence Richard goes through the rhetoric of public gestures.⁴⁵

In other words, Richard is a very poor communicator and an even worse reader of men. Henry V, unlike Richard, was, even before he is crowned, exceptionally good at self-reflection, and his understanding of men allowed him to maximize his relationships with those around him. It is small wonder that Richard's best poetry is uttered in the solitude of soliloquy; his principal flaw is that he is disastrously unaware that language and politics are each a two-way street. He cannot know what to say to whom or when because he does not know how, to whom, or when to *listen*. Henry V knows how to listen—very purposefully—when others are speaking about themselves and, in doing so, learns to “read” men. Harold Goddard diagnoses Richard's condition. He says

All young men with a poetical gift pass into a stage when they are hypnotized by words. They have not yet grasped the relation between verbal symbols and life.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ S. Schoenbaum, *op. cit.* 11

⁴⁶ Harold C. Goddard. *The Meaning of Shakespeare*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951) 149.

King Richard is an immature poet and an immature monarch. He has not learned to interpret language because he has not yet learned to listen—which is to say, he has not yet learned to study the men around him.

The only listening Richard does is to the “thousand flatterers” who “sit within his crown.” In act II, even before we get our first glimpse of Bolingbroke’s revolution, Northumberland tells his co-conspirators of Richard’s crimes against the state. The first thing he lists is that “the King is not himself, but basely led by flatterers.”⁴⁷ More telling is the scene in which Richard is told of his loss of the Welsh battalions and of the Duke of York’s desertion. At the moment when Richard realizes that all hope is truly lost, his first reaction is to reject his flatterers:

He does me double wrong
That wounds me with the flatteries of his tongue.
Discharge my followers, let them hence away . . .
(III.ii. 215-6)

The distinction between Richard II and Henry V marks the difference between an egocentric and fragile vessel of porcelain and a politically and rhetorically minded vessel of flexible clay. Because he has listened, Henry V is capable of being a Fortinbras standing in a pool of blood at Ellsinore and can understand the most complicated psychological situation even without a Horatio to explain it. What

⁴⁷ II.i. l. 110. See also Bolingbroke’s drumhead trial of Bushy and Greene (III.i) in which he accuses them of having “mised a prince, a royal king” (l. 8) who was “near in my love / Till you did make him misinterpret me.” (ll. 16-7) We can find this in chronicle evidence, of a sort. Richard, speaking from the grave, in *Mirror for Magistrates* (1557), says he “always put Flatterers most in trust.” Lily B. Campbell, ed. *The Mirror for Magistrates*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938) 113.

enables Fortinbras' instant apprehension of the vagaries of tragedy is precisely the same thing that enables Henry to avoid it so successfully: their ability to read men "pan-caste." Both Fortinbras and Henry V have that ability because they have both fought beside men for "a little patch of ground" not worth six ducats: Fortinbras' was in Poland and Henry's was in a pub or on Gad's Hill with Falstaff. Richard, who has spent his life listening to nothing but flattery, has learned nothing of the motivations of the men around him and only comes to understand something of ordinary men as he himself becomes one in the course of the play. It is because of this deficiency that he finds himself alone in the Tower, a confused and frustrated young Hamlet desperately trying to reconcile himself to the loss of his faith in a system that he believed should have protected him simply because it always had before.

Shakespeare, admittedly, restricts the presence of the plebeians on the stage (in this play at least) but nevertheless foregrounds their conceptual presence by describing them through a number of different on-stage perspectives, the first of which comes from King Richard himself when he complains of Bolingbroke's "wooing of the common people" (I.iv. 1.23-9). Whether or not we may trust Bolingbroke's sincerity or believe, as Derek Traversi suggests, that his "virtues of reverence and humility have been transformed into the "craft of smiles," popularity has become an instrument of policy, and the bending of supple knee a means to power,"⁴⁸ we cannot

⁴⁸ Derek Traversi, *Shakespeare from Richard II to Henry V*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957) 21.

deny the fact that his courtship of the common people is a politically effective move accomplished through pan-caste communication skills. Nor can we deny Richard's contempt for Bolingbroke's courtship of the masses. Sidney Finkelstein believes that Richard's "real hatred" for Bolingbroke, in other words, the motivation for his decision to exile him, "is due to the popularity that Bolingbroke courts among the common people, whom the King despises."⁴⁹ If one accepts Finkelstein's position, the entire play must be read as a series of events that have been set into motion by the tension between the monarch and the lower classes.⁵⁰

What is important about this is, of course, that both Kings Henry are willing to communicate openly (or at least with the illusion of openness) with a constituency that King Richard ignores: the so-called common people. Bolingbroke's revolution was *at least* authorized by his relationship with the masses and *at most* forced upon him by them. A.L. French makes a persuasive argument for the possibility that the common people did not follow Bolingbroke, but rather the other way around. French suggests that we may accept Bolingbroke's claim that he returned to England to see that his name be restored and nothing more. The deposition of Richard, he argues, came about as a result of a confluence of forces governed on one side by revolutionaries both

⁴⁹ Sidney Finkelstein, *Who Needs Shakespeare?* (New York: International Publishers, 1973) 79.

⁵⁰ Richard's antagonistic relationship to the lower classes was legendary, and surely Shakespeare and more importantly his audience, would have been aware of this dynamic. Among other things, the Peasant's Revolt of 1381 occurred under Richard II. See V. H. Galbraith, "Thoughts about the Peasants' Revolt" in *The Reign of Richard II: Essays in Honour of May McKisack*. F.R.H. DeBoulay, ed. (London: University of London, Athlone Press, 1971.) For a perspective that is far more sympathetic to King Richard, see Nigel Saul, "The Kingship of Richard II" in *Richard II: The Art of Kingship*. Anthony Goodman and James Gillespie, eds. (New York: Oxford / Clarendon Press, 1999.)

plebeian and aristocratic and on the other by Richard's unaccountable unwillingness to defend himself. Richard was, in fact, the first to suggest to Bolingbroke that he might become king. Bolingbroke, French says, claims to have returned merely to reclaim what is his and to assume his place as the Duke of Lancaster after his father's death.

This is his story, and he sticks to it with dogged pertinacity right up to the point in Act IV where, *after* York has told him that Richard has adopted him heir "with willing soul," he exclaims "In God's name, I'll ascend the regal throne."⁵¹

Indeed, Shakespeare's source for *Richard II* suggests something very similar. In Holinshed's *Chronicle*, for example, the people are shown "lamenting and bewailing" Bolingbroke's exile. We learn that the theft of Lancaster's fortune "gaue occasion of increasing more hatred in the people of this realme toward the king" and that it was the "meaner sort" of people who wrote to Bolingbroke in France "requiring him with all conuenient speed to conueie himself to England; promising him all their aid, power and assistance" in expelling King Richard.⁵² Whether or not we accept French's argument is a matter for interpretation, as he admits.⁵³ However, what is undeniable is

⁵¹ A.L. French. "Who Deposed Richard the Second?" in *Essays in Criticism* XVII (October 1967.) 416. Italics in original. French's quotation includes the following citation from *Richard II*: IV.i.113.

⁵² Holinshed, op. cit. p. 29-30

⁵³ French, it would seem, is one of the "naïve readers" Goddard was condemning when he says, "The naïve reader, encountering this play for the first time, is inclined to give Henry the benefit of the doubt and think that he came back to England from his banishment merely to recover his inheritance, not with his eye on the crown. But no one can believe that for a second when he reads the rest of the story." Goddard. op. cit. 148.

that Bolingbroke's popular support is a significant factor in this play and that it demonstrates the overall preoccupation of the play with class politics.⁵⁴

Shakespeare's retelling of Bolingbroke's relationship with plebeian revolutionaries, so far, does nothing to deviate from the historiographic techniques and practices of his sources. Bolingbroke's deposition of Richard is enabled by his relationship to the common people and comes almost directly from Holinshed, which is to say that Shakespeare's treatment of this theme seems to conform to the orthodox historiography against which E.P. Thompson was polemicizing. As important as Bolingbroke's relationship to the people who would become his subjects is to this play (and to the subsequent two), it does little more than to serve up "English History Proper" in a dramatic form. In this regard, Bolingbroke can be said to be little more than a titled, more successful version of Jack Cade. But, as I have argued in the previous chapter, Shakespeare's is ultimately a different type of historiographic project, one that is "infused with a principle of life" that acknowledges a certain humanism inherent in even the most political of histories. According to Graham Holderness, Shakespeare's "appropriation of Holinshed's materials produced in *Richard II* a historical vision significantly different from either the orthodox

⁵⁴ My argument here contradicts Ralph Berry's position on this play. Berry claims that "Of class interest in the usual sense, there is almost nothing in *Richard II*." With the possible exception of the fact that class is never actually staged, I fail to understand Berry's justification for such a claim. Richard's contempt for Bolingbroke's relationship to the commoners, the latter's popular legitimation, and a number of other instances to be detailed below all suggest a play that is clearly concerned with class to one degree or another. See Ralph Berry. *Shakespeare and Social Class*. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, Intl., 1988) 75.

conceptions of Tudor history, or Holinshed's intelligent version of that history."⁵⁵ Holinshed's account, intelligent as it may be, does toe the hegemonic historiographic line by ignoring the *peaceable* third estate. This omission is partly the result of the literary restrictions of his craft. Holinshed's account is narrated by a third person chronicle voice that cannot hope to escape the fact that it is external to the events described. Shakespeare, since he was, after all, writing for actors on a stage, had the luxury of being able to present his history with the dramatic illusion of internality. The playwright is able literally to give history a voice by having it staged by characters that lived, created, and were affected by it. This dramatic device has important consequences for the dialectic of power that is featured in the play but that does not occur in Holinshed's account. Shakespeare's inclusion of plebeian speakers broadens the discursive historiographic practice, especially in *Richard II*, by staging meaningful engagements between characters that would otherwise never find occasion to share words at moments of significant historical change. In so doing, Shakespeare, in *Richard II*, does not merely show us the adverse reactions of common people to the policies of those in power, as Holinshed does; he also shows us how the powerful react to the people in a way that suggests something significantly more than Thompson's model of "antagonism to orthodoxy" and demonstrates that the

⁵⁵ Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare's History*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985.) 41. See also Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, "History and Ideology: the Instance of Henry V" in *Alternative Shakespeares*. John Drakakis, ed. (New York: Methuen, Inc., 1985) 206-28.

playwright was conscious of the value of the political efficacy of the populace both as receivers and creators of historical change.

There are two important moments in this play in which we are allowed to see figures of radically disparate social classes engaged in dramatic discussions of consequence to the narrative. The first is the famous garden scene, in which three gardeners are shown discussing the fate of the kingdom in highly metaphoric language in the presence of the Queen and her ladies-in-waiting; the second is the penultimate scene of the play shortly before Richard is assassinated at Pomfret castle. Each of these moments contributes immeasurably to the dramatic and aesthetic quality of the play in a way that does not, nor could not, exist in the conventional Elizabethan historical record for reasons both political and literary. The political dynamic here indicates that Shakespeare's aesthetic ear was sensitive to something similar to what modern readers might recognize as Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic, as described in his chapter on Lordship and Bondage in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. According to Hegel, the master consciousness, such as Richard's as monarch, can only retain its power if it is recognized by itself *and* by the slave consciousness. "Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another."⁵⁶ In other words, power can only be *in power* when it is recognized and acknowledged by the subjected. It is not necessary—in fact it is fatal, according to Hegel—for the master to recognize the

⁵⁶ G.W.F. Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. A.V. Miller, trans. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952) 111-112

slave as having any true self-consciousness at all. The master must “supersede the other independent being in order thereby to become certain of itself as the essential being.”⁵⁷ When the master consciousness, such as Richard’s, discovers the other for its self-consciousness—in other words, for its efficacy—revolution occurs. The only way in which a subjectivity can relate to its object is to retain exclusive rights to the formation of its identity *as* an object.

In the scene in York’s garden (III.iv.), Shakespeare presents us with a moment in which master and slave consciousnesses face each other at the instant of the dissolution of the master consciousness as such. Maurice Charney has called this scene “an internal, choral commentary on the play.” Charney is critical of this scene, which he says “doesn’t represent Shakespeare at his best.” He says that what “allies [the garden scene] with early Shakespeare” is that its “literal, allegorical quality,” which demonstrates a more primitive dramatic technique than Shakespeare would achieve in later plays in which the playwright would “embody his meanings much more intrinsically in the dramatic action rather than in symbolic set pieces.”⁵⁸ This may be true, but the significance of this scene comes from the fact that the characters who deliver this commentary are not at all internal to the *action* of the play (nor, I would suggest are they really meant to be) but rather are internal to the social structure being described in it. The garden, as we are about to be told by one of its custodians, is

⁵⁷ Hegel, *ibid.*

⁵⁸ Charney, *op. cit.* 167.

a symbol of “our sea-walled garden, the whole land” and functions as a sort of Eden in which the crumbling of the master-slave dialectic is symbolic of the Fall. Here we see the despondent Queen and a pair of her ladies-in-waiting enter the garden, followed not long after by the three gardeners who have an almost identical dynamic to that of the women. Rarely is Shakespeare’s antithetical technique more plain than when he posits the Queen plus two attendants against a Master Gardener and his two assistants.⁵⁹ Tillyard observes that the effect of the introduction of the gardeners is “clearly to balance the queen and her ladies and through that balance to suggest that the gardener within the walls of his little plot of land is a king.”⁶⁰ The balance between Queen and Gardener-King works to establish the pairing as a sort of Adam and Eve dynamic.

The first really interesting thing about this scene is the Queen’s decision to spy on the gardeners. She declares that “They will talk of state, for everyone doth so / Against a change” (l. 27). It is unclear at this point whether the Queen is interested in

⁵⁹ There is some discrepancy among the editions with respect to the power dynamic between the gardeners. The stage direction in Evans’ *Riverside* edition reads “Enter [*a Gardener and two of his Men.*]” The word “master” does not appear, as it does in Sylvan Barnett’s *Signet* series (“Enter Gardeners, [*one the master, the other two his men*]”). Barnett’s edition claims to draw primarily from Q1 manuscripts, with scene divisions from F and includes various modernizations and editorial decisions made to assist the reader. Evans’ edition also modernizes spelling but remains more faithful to the editorial decisions of the Folio editor. Evans’ textual notes, which are more extensive than Barnett’s, explain that F1 reads “*a Gardiner and his two seruants*” while Q1-5 read simply “*Gardeners.*” The dynamic between the men is extremely important to the structure of this scene which parallels these men with the Queen and her entourage. For the purposes of my argument, I am accepting Barnett’s version of the stage direction as a telling indicator of how we are supposed to understand the gardeners. Harry Levin, gen. ed. *The Riverside Shakespeare*, Text. Ed. G. Blackmore Evans. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1974.) 840. and Sylvan Barnett, series ed. and introduction. *Signet Classic Shakespeare Series*. (New York: Penquin, 1998) 110.

⁶⁰ Tillyard (1946) 249.

what the common people think of the situation or is frustrated at her own limited access to intelligence and expects that the gardeners might somehow have more information than she. In either scenario, what we find is a monarch who is not only interested in the political opinion of her subjects but in their *candid* opinion. The Queen and her ladies hide so that their presence does not inhibit the men from speaking freely. Her decision to do so suggests a duplicitous awareness of her subject's self-consciousness. Her interest in the gardeners' candid opinion does not seem to stem from any suspicion that they might be rebels but rather from an acknowledgement that peasants and servants such as these gardeners have as much at stake in times of political and historic change as anyone in the kingdom. As she listens to the men, what she hears is a political metaphor that is as clear as it is radical.

The Master Gardener says to his assistant:

Gard. Go, bind thou up young dangling apricocks,
Which like unruly children make their sire
Stoop with oppression of their prodigal weight;
Give some supportance to the bending twigs.
Go thou, and like an executioner
Cut off the heads of [too] fast growing sprays,
That look too lofty in our commonwealth:
All must be even in our government.
You thus employed, I will go root away
The noisome weeds which without profit suck
The soil's fertility from wholesome flowers.

(*R2*, III.iii. ll. 37-40)

This metaphor is necessarily weighty because it is being spoken by a figure who, after all, represents the very first real non-aristocratic voice to actually appear on stage in

this play. What is perhaps more important to the political timbre of the play is, of course, that the Queen is hearing him speak in such tones. The Gardener's metaphor would not have been lost on Shakespeare's audience. Tillyard, observes that "the first thought of an Elizabethan audience" in reaction to this speech "would have been: what is the symbolic meaning of those words, spoken by this king of the garden, and how does it bear on the play?"⁶¹ It is not difficult to hear Marx anticipated in the gardeners' words. The Gardener's concern for his country is as much economic as it is political and introduces an important perspective into the historiographic discourse of the play, and it does so at the aesthetic level. Until this scene, we have only understood Richard's reign and Bolingbroke's revolution through the point of view of the prime movers. I do not mean to suggest that the gardeners are merely casual spectators to these events, however. They are subjected persons whose concern for their nation is genuine, as their very lives and material circumstances are dependent on the outcome of these events.

The introduction of the gardeners' commentary infuses the play with a sense of economic and political consequence that extends far beyond the court. The Gardener's metaphor provokes his assistant to begin to literalize the references it makes and to level the charge more squarely against Richard and his favorites:

Man. Why should we in the compass of a pale
Keep law and form and due proportion
Showing as in a model our firm estate,

⁶¹ Tillyard,(1946) op. cit. 249.

When our sea-walled garden, the whole land
Is full of weeds, her fairest flowers chok'd up,
Her fruit trees all unprun'd, her hedges ruin'd
Her knots disordered, and her wholesome herbs
Swarming with caterpillars. (*R2*, III.iii. ll. 41-6)

This last line, of course, invokes for the audience Bolingbroke's description in the last act of "Bushy, Bagot and their complices" as "caterpillars of the commonwealth" (*R2*, II.iii.165-6). In the assistant's response, we get an expansion on the Gardener's concept of "noisome weeds." By concretizing the connection between the walled garden (in which the Gardener is King) and the "whole land," the entire scene takes on a profound economic significance. In Richard's reign, the people have been left to endure the whimsy of a poet-king who is detached from all sense of material concern and have been subjected to the cruelties of Richard's lessees, the "caterpillars" who have, after all, caused the garden, both within the walls and without, to be in the current state of neglect and disrepair. Terry Eagleton points out that "the social order" under Richard "is stitched together by empty words, patched up by financial discourse, which itself stands in for money, and that in turn stands in for material labour."⁶² The text never makes the ownership of the garden explicit. We know that it is in the Duke of York's castle, but we are not entirely certain who is to blame for its current state of neglect. However, a reading such as Eagleton's would suggest that the subtext of the scene and of the metaphor is that the garden and the economic system for which it is a metaphor are "chok'd," "unprun'd" and "ruin'd" because of a

⁶² Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare*. (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989) 11.

neglectful monarchy that has taxed the aristocracy out of the ability to pay workers to tend their landscapes.⁶³ Although it is not explicit, there is a strong sense that the men have been unemployed or underemployed. Richard has failed his kingdom because he has neglected to recognize the role his court and its government have in the social order and in the material concerns of his people.

Shakespeare's garden metaphor establishes an interesting transition for the audience. The garden, which includes the gardeners as well as the Queen, is a place of suspended animation between the dying regime of Richard and the new social structure that will begin with Henry IV. The Queen's very presence there is evidence that the garden is intended as a more or less safe place, removed from the violence of the social and historical changes occurring outside its walls. At the very beginning of the third act, Bolingbroke says to York,

Uncle, you say the Queen is at your house,
For God's sake fairly let her be entreated; (*R2*, III.i.36-7)

We understand from these lines that for her safety York has had the Queen tucked gently away at his castle, where she can be protected from the violence of the rebellion and from the indignity of having to witness it. For the Queen, "the garden is a symbolic paradise from which she and her husband are about to be expelled in a re-

⁶³ The *Woodstock* play spends considerably more time than does Shakespeare discussing Richard's blank charters and their effect on the nobles of England. Richard's Lord Chief Justice Tresilyan announces "These blank charters shall be forthwith sent / To every shrieve through all the shires of England / With charge to call before them presently / All landed men, freeholder, farmers, glaziers, / Or any else that have ability. / Then in your highness name they shall be charged / To set their names, and forthwith seal these blanks; / that done, these shall return to court again, / But cartloads of money soon shall follow them." (*Woodstock* III.i. 15 – 24)

enactment of the original Fall.”⁶⁴ For the audience, the garden scene is a necessary relief from the tension between a series of scenes that show the very end of one regime and a series showing the beginning of another.

Phyllis Rackin observes that the historical arc of this play *creates* its literary tension. She says that this tension is “a conflict between two contrasting worlds—the static picturesque, ceremonial world of Richard... and the active, modern, practical world of Bolingbroke and his successors.”⁶⁵ The action of the play is the confluence of two important historical trajectories: one ending and a new one beginning. The audience is challenged, Rackin goes on to say, “to shift its perspective during the course of the play.” I would add that this challenge very much applies to the gardeners as well as to the audience. The garden scene is precisely located between these two worlds. The scenes that directly precede it chart the final destruction of Richard’s reign and the collapse of his political body. In act three, scene two, Richard is informed of the loss of his military ability to defend himself against Bolingbroke; the scene ends with the first major crack in Richard’s political identity.⁶⁶ In the next scene (III.iii) we see him surrender at Flint Castle. We may assume that Bolingbroke (if not Shakespeare himself) would have been gentleman enough to protect the Queen from having to witness these events. Scene three is the very last time we see anything like

⁶⁴ Graham Holderness, Nick Potter and John Turner. *Shakespeare: The Play of History*. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987) 38.

⁶⁵ Phyllis Rackin. “The Role of Audience in Shakespeare’s Richard II.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 36 (Autumn 1985) 1.

⁶⁶ *Richard*: “Discharge my followers, let them hence away.” (III.ii.216) cited above.

political identity⁶⁷ in Richard. The political body of the King disintegrates when Richard steps down from Flint Castle and says to Bolingbroke,

K. Rich. . . . What says King Bullingbrook?
Will his Majesty
Give Richard leave to live till Richard die?
(*R2*, III.iii.173-4)

By the time we return from the garden, Bolingbroke and his followers are firmly in control of the court and of England.

Of course, none of this is known to the Queen until the common gardeners tell her. The moment in which the Master Gardener finally collapses the garden metaphor entirely and reveals to his assistant that Richard is indeed deposed by Bolingbroke marks the collapse of the protection of the garden from the turbulence going on outside its walls. In other words, as the metaphor breaks down so does the very protection of the walled garden:

Man. What, think you that the King shall be deposed?

Gar. Depressed he is already, and deposed

⁶⁷ I use the term “political identity” in the same sense that Ernst Kantorowicz used the term “body politic” in his book, *The King’s Two Bodies*. Kantorowicz says his term refers to “the state of superhuman ‘perfection’ of [the] royal persona ficta” and is “inseparable from a peculiar aspect of corporational concepts, the corporation sole.” (5) In other words, the body politic is the embodiment of monarchical power in the identity of the king. The King of England is England because he is the embodiment of its political identity. This is in contradistinction to the king body natural, which refers to the man’s earthly body and identity as a corporeal human being. Kantorowicz’s terms come from a similar binary that existed in the Renaissance. Since the Enlightenment, however, when populist values have almost universally replaced monarchic traditions through the West, if only in the intellectual and political value systems, the term body politic has taken on a slightly different dimension and can be said to be a stand in for a sense of popular consensus. For this reason, I am choosing to use the term “political body” or “political identity” throughout this thesis, instead of using “body politic” along with Kantorowicz. Ernst H. Kantorowicz. *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957.)

'Tis doubt he will be. Letter's came last night
To a dear friend of the good Duke of York's
That tell black tidings. (*R2*, III.iii.67-70)

At this point, the Queen has had enough of espionage and comes out of hiding, revealing herself to the gardeners. If the garden is to be read as a sort of Eden, her emergence from hiding is certainly the moment of her Fall, for it is here that she engages the plebeian gardener for the first time and, metaphorically, reveals herself to be naked—to be human, stripped bare of the semblance of political identity. In other words, the Queen not realizing that, with her husband's deposition, she has lost the semblance of authority she has possessed within with the political body, engages in a conversation with a man who little honors her title because he can see her for her corporeal self:

Queen. Thou old Adam's likeness, set to dress this
garden,
How dares thy harsh tongue sound this displeasing news?
Say where, when, and how,
[Camst] thou by this ill tidings? Speak thou wretch.

Gar. Pardon me, madam, little joy have I
To breathe this news, yet what I have to say is true:
King Richard, he is in the mighty hold of Bullingbrook...
(73-84)

When the Queen responds to the gardener's bad news by praying God "the plants thou graft'st may never grow" (l.101) the gardener responds, out of earshot, with a sense of pity that is typically reserved for persons of more or less equal rank.

Gar. Poor Queen, so that thy state might be no worse,
I would my skill were subject to thy curse. (102-3)

It is this moment of pity and compassion—but decidedly not reverence despite the possible pun on the word “state”—that signals the collapse of the gardener’s recognition of the politic identity and along with it the Hegelian master consciousness of the Queen. The Queen’s decision to spy on the gardeners points to the possibility that she is acknowledging one of two things: either that they are capable of their self-consciousness, and thus able to voice candid opinions that will be, the Queen presumes, free of the contaminations of both duplicity and loyalty; or that they may have access to more intelligence than the Queen is currently being allowed. As I’ve said, in either case, the Queen (as an example of a master consciousness) acknowledges the self-consciousness and political efficacy of her subjects. The gardeners become aware of this change in their relationship with the Queen through her revelation at the moment when “the self has come out of the self.”⁶⁸ When she makes herself known to them, she reveals that she has been spying. Her adverse reaction to their “ill tiding” signals a moment in which the Queen appears to them for the first time without the semblance of the political body; she reveals her corporeal identity.

Perhaps an even more telling moment occurs in the penultimate scene of the *Richard II*. As Richard finally faces his fate, he is visited by a lowly groom. Here again we observe the demise of the master’s political body that occurs when the consciousnesses of both master and slave “recognize themselves as mutually

⁶⁸ Hegel, op. cit. 111

recognizing one another.”⁶⁹ Act five scene five finds the deposed Richard alone in the tower of Pomfret Castle, possibly aware of his impending death, coming to terms with his new identity as a common man and, not coincidentally, unfurling his full poetic power. In the tower, Richard becomes what Walter Pater calls “the most sweet-tongued” of all of Shakespeare’s kings.⁷⁰ He has been stripped of any sense of the political body and retreats into corporeal philosophy where he finds the “collapse of the kingship . . . confirmed in the discovery of the physical body of the ruler.”⁷¹

K. Richard. That many have, and others must, sit there;
 And in this thought they find a kind of ease,
 Bearing their own misfortunes on the back
 Of such as have before endur’d the like . . .
 Sometimes am I king;
 Then treasons make me wish myself a beggar,
 And so I am. Then crushing penury
 Persuades me I was better when a King;
 Then I am king’d again, and by and by
 Think that I am unking’d by Bolingbroke,
 And straight am nothing. But what e’er I be,
 Nor I, nor any man that but man is,
 With nothing shall be pleased, till he be eas’d
 With being nothing. (*R2*. V,v, ll.27-40)

The deposed king retreats into the imagination of the body personal and in so doing finds himself, for the first time, a human being with the physical and psychological limitations shared by all and engaged in what Coleridge calls “the sophistry which is

⁶⁹ Hegel, *ibid.*

⁷⁰ Walter Pater, *Appreciations* (New York: Macmillan, 1908).

⁷¹ Stephen Greenblatt, “Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and its Subversion, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*” in *Political Shakespeare*, Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, eds. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) 40.

common to man.”⁷² James Calderwood points out that “in Pomfret Castle, [Richard] realizes that the name of king is merely arbitrary, that he has an identity apart from the name.”⁷³ This is the moment critics point to most when identifying the strength of this play. It is here that Richard proves, as even Tillyard points out, that despite his ineptitude as a monarch “his heart was not utterly corrupted.”⁷⁴ The strength of the scene lies in the totality of his acknowledgement that his claim to power is gone. The semblance of the political body vanishes, and the master consciousness recognizes “the other recognizing.”⁷⁵ Then, a moment later, Richard is joined by the man who once tended his horses:

Groom: Hail, royal prince!

K. Rich: Thanks, noble peer! (ll. 67-8)

In referring to the man as his “peer,” Richard acknowledges commonality with the lowly groom and completes the destruction of the master – slave dialectic.

Moments such as these are crucial to the development of Shakespeare’s historical figures as literary and dramatic characters and even more so to the political

⁷² Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Richard II and the Character of the King” from *Coleridge’s Shakespearean Criticism*. T.M. Raysor, ed. (Cambridge, MA: 1930) reprinted in *Discussion of Shakespeare’s Histories*. R.J. Dorius, ed. (Boston, D.C. Heath and Company, 1964) 17.

⁷³ James Calderwood, *Metadrama in Shakespeare’s Henriad*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 19.

⁷⁴ Tillyard, (1946), 262. See also, Coleridge, who cites this scene and says of *Richard II*, “I know of no character drawn by our great poet with such unequalled skill as that of Richard II.” op. cit. n.42 p. 19 and Larry S. Champion, *Perspective in Shakespeare’s English Histories*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980) p. 71 “Richard II...is a man for who pity—if not terror—comes easily...because of his capacity for sorrow.” See also Lois Potter, “The Antic Disposition of Richard II,” in *Shakespeare Survey* 27 (1974) 40.

⁷⁵ Hegel, op. cit. p. 113

and dramatic argument of the narrative. Shakespeare's aesthetic sensibility demonstrates at least a dramatic consciousness of the social efficacy of the third estate. The groom doesn't appear in any of Shakespeare's sources nor does he appear anywhere else in the play, so what is he doing in that tower? At this moment, we see the erstwhile tyrant, stripped of his crown, arguably aware that he will soon be executed, philosophizing on time and death. Why is it that Shakespeare decided to send in an apparently random person to talk with Richard about a horse? The reason is that the presence of the groom enables the totality of Richard's deposition to be dramatically realized, thus demonstrating a necessary component of Shakespeare's historiographic aesthetic. The holistic dramatic reality that Coleridge describes becomes possible as the gaps in the historical chronicle are filled with what is otherwise conspicuously missing: members of the so-called third estate or, in the poet-critic's language, "the principle of life and organization" in history and on the stage.

It is through the use of characters such as the groom and the gardeners—characters that seem to have no real place in the action of the narrative—that Shakespeare injects class disparity into his otherwise socially homogenous source material. These characters are well placed to provide a crucial service to the aesthetic and political component of the drama. In both cases, we see the dissolution of the political body mediated by an interaction with a member of the third estate. In the garden scene, Shakespeare has manufactured a moment at the historical razor's edge between two radically different monarchies and places in that garden a figure meant

to be as instantly recognizable a stand-in for the king as he is a symbol of the plebeian peasant class. It is through the garden scenes that we see the precise moment of the change in regime and witness the crumbling of the Queen's political body in the supposed safety of an Eden protected from the real horrors and tragical impact of historical change. Shakespeare uses a lowly groomsman to demonstrate the collapse of Richard's historical identity as King and the vacuum that the collapse of his political body has left within him. It is through the groom that we see that vacuum filled with corporeal identity in the moment just before the truest realization of the corporeality (mortality) is effected. For Shakespeare, the political body of the monarchy is absolutely tied to class; Richard's political body exists only within Hegel's master-slave dialectic, and the dissolution of this body collapses the class dynamic.

The next chapter discusses the coming of age of Shakespeare's Gardener and groom as his third estate moves from the relative isolation of a couple of dramatically removed though important scenes to play a central role in the education of a king who is Shakespeare's exemplar of kingship and the focal of point of the Henriad, with a disgraced knight for a surrogate father and a cadre of peasant drunkards as his tutors in the study of politics and humanity. It is in Eastcheap that, like Prince Hal himself, the quality of Shakespeare's dramatic form that relies on the third estate as a vehicle for character development and narrative propulsion matures. In *Richard II*, this technique is in its infancy. In the two plays of *Henry IV*, the technique expands while still largely relegated to a separate "green world" narrative. Finally, the technique

reaches an adulthood of sorts with *Henry V* in which we see the King at Harfleur and Agincourt referring to himself as “a friend” and to his men, no matter how “mean or base,” as his “band of brothers.”

Part III
The Historie of Henry the Fovrth.

*From a Prince to a prentice?
A low transformation! That shall be mine, for in
everything the purpose must weigh with the folly.
(2H4, II.ii. ll. 174-6)*

It is useful when making critical statements about the two plays of *Henry IV* to read them as a cohesive linear unit – perhaps it is even more useful here than it is when we talk of Shakespeare’s tetralogies as such. The narrow temporal space between these two works suggests the kind of distinction we typically see between scenes and acts and not what we might expect between different plays. Because of this quality, we are naturally inclined to read them as one dramatic unit. Samuel Johnson observes that “these two plays will appear to every reader ... to be so connected that the second is merely a sequel to the first; to be two only because they are too long to be one.”⁷⁶

This is not, however, to suggest that the plays are totally dependent on one another and cannot be read separately, but rather that any critical reading of one is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of the other. This is especially true in critical works, such as this one, that explore the types of discourses in which Shakespeare’s plays, as both aesthetic and historical products, participate. Furthermore, I do not mean to suggest that the two plays are necessarily of equal literary quality but rather of narrative commonality and structural cohesion. The very fact of the second play’s

⁷⁶ Samuel Johnson. *Selections from Johnson on Shakespeare*. Bertrand H. Bronson and Jean M. O’Meara, eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) 178.

attachment to the narrative of the first suggests that if a hierarchy exists between the two plays, then surely the first is dominant. Scholars have frequently observed that the first part of *Henry IV* is a much stronger literary production than the second.⁷⁷ Pearlman argues that Part I “is the finest of Shakespeare’s history plays” because it more clearly demonstrates “careful planning and design.” He goes on to say that “all of Shakespeare’s other history plays,” including Part II, which he mentions specifically, “are filled with compromises, accommodations, changes in direction and shifts in characterization.”⁷⁸ M.A. Shaaber argues persuasively that Part II is little more than an attempt to recreate Part I. The structure of Part II, he says, “is almost a carbon copy of the first play.”⁷⁹ *1 Henry IV* appears to be the stronger of the plays, and even with the crash-course provided by Rumour in the Induction of *2 Henry IV*, the second play cannot effectively stand on its own. There is evidence to suggest that the second part may well have been hastily written to capitalize on the success of staged performances of the first, as J. Dover Wilson suggests in his influential book *The Fortunes of Falstaff*.

Shakespeare must have finished Part I before Part II. It is probable also, since he was an actor-dramatist writing for a successful company, always eager for copy, that Part I was put on the stage directly it was ready and enjoyed a run before the ‘book’ for Part II

⁷⁷ See Tillyard’s treatment of this pair of plays in his *Shakespeare’s History Plays*. See also J. Dover Wilson. *The Fortunes of Falstaff*. (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1944) and others.

⁷⁸ E. Pearlman. Op. cit., p. 88.

⁷⁹ M.A. Shaaber. “Unity of Henry IV”, op. cit. p. 229.

could be completed and rehearsed. Part I possesses, indeed, a kind of unity, lacking in Part II, which seems to bear this out.⁸⁰

But despite the secondary literary character of Part II, it cannot be denied that an argument concerned with the manner in which history is represented is well served by treating them together as a whole unit.

The two plays of *Henry IV* were written at about the middle of the playwright's career beginning around 1597. This date is significant because it points to a key moment in the development of Shakespeare's dramatic form. Just a couple a years before he gave us the Boar's Head tavern, Shakespeare was busy tinkering with two important dramatic innovations: the first is the new, more mature version of the English historical chronicle that we saw emerging in *Richard II* (1595); the second is an innovation that would become synonymous with his comedies, the so-called green world that appears for the first time in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595). Shakespeare may well have been writing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the same time that he was working on *Richard II*. It is no great stretch to imagine that he combined what he learned in writing those plays to form the literary structure of the two plays of *Henry IV*, which reflect a continuation of the mature historiography of *Richard II* and a disjunctive narrative that echoes the gap between the court and forest of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

⁸⁰ J. Dover Wilson. op. cit. p 4.

Specifically discussing Part I, Cleanth Brooks and Robert B. Heilman identify a problem that can be said to be true of both plays:

The salient problem in this play must be the problem of unity. To most readers at least, the most important question which presents itself is this: does the play achieve a real dramatic unity, or is it, after all, merely a not-too-interesting "history" play to which Shakespeare has added, in the interest of amusement, the Falstaff tavern scenes?⁸¹

In other words, how does one reconcile the two major narrative components in a play that seems to give more or less equal priority to both? Despite being relegated to their own distinct narrative trajectory (and speaking an entirely different type of language) and despite the overwhelmingly comic quality of that narrative, the characters that appear in Eastcheap and in Prince Hal's private residence serve the overall work at least as much as those that represent English History Proper. Falstaff, Mistress Quickly, Peto, and Bardolph do as much for the aesthetic and dramatic quality of these plays as do King Henry, Northumberland and Hotspur. While the latter narrative thread serves to represent the events that orthodox historiography sees as most important, the presence of the former moves Shakespeare's historiography out of the realm of English History Proper and thus creates a wholly new, aesthetic type of historical representation. In these plays, Shakespeare

⁸¹ Cleanth Brooks and Robert B. Heilman "Dramatic Balance in *Henry IV, Part I*" originally published in their book, *Understanding Drama*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1948) reprinted in *Norton Critical Editions: William Shakespeare's Henry the Fourth, Part I*. James L. Sanderson, ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1962) 158. Title added by Sanderson.

incorporates elements of comedy that gather around Falstaff and his company and elements of tragedy that locate themselves around Hotspur. No longer in thrall to the historians, Shakespeare freely shapes history to his own ends.⁸²

Shakespeare's historiographic project is liberated from the social limitations of English History Proper because of his inclusion of anachronistic literary material in the form of characters and themes that represent the lower social strata of the historical reality he is attempting to recreate on the stage and of the social world inhabited by the Elizabethan audiences that watched these recreations. Shakespeare infuses his presentation of history with the aesthetic sensibilities of a dramatist writing for a thriving theatre company and, in so doing, turns the history he describes into a functional and successful work of art for the London stage. These plays rely on plebeian characters as a means of fulfilling their dramatic intentions by addressing the social diversity of the audience. This feat is accomplished by the incorporation of a green world into the narrative.

The concept of the Shakespearean green world was coined by Northrop Frye in an essay that is largely concerned with Shakespeare's comedies, called "The Argument of Comedy." He writes,

the action of the comedy begins in the normal world, moves into the green world, goes into a metamorphosis there in which the comic resolution is achieved, and returns to the normal world.⁸³

⁸² Pearlman, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

⁸³ Northrop Frye. "The Argument of Comedy" in *Shakespeare: Modern Essays in Criticism*. Leonard Dean, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957) 85.

In other words, the green world functions in the comedies as a place in which an alternate system of world-order is present and can act as the vehicle that drives the resolution of the play's narrative. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, Helena and Lysander find that they can no longer exist happily within the boundaries prescribed by the order of the city (in Frye's terms "the normal world") and retreat into a green world of the forest where Athenian order is replaced by the fantastical chaos of the fairy world. It is there that they have their problems solved. In a green world comedy such as *MND*, the resolution of the problems of the normal world can only be achieved by removal from it.

This convention is not limited to Shakespeare's comedies, although the tradition's background in comedy is powerfully felt in the *Henry IV* plays. The green world in these plays is manifestly comic. This fact, however, does little to diminish the literary and political function and significance of that narrative thread. After applying his case to a historical reading of Spenser's *Fairie Queene*, Frye argues,

Shakespeare too has his green world of comedy and his red and white world of history. The story of the latter is at one point interrupted by an invasion from the comic world, when Falstaff *senex et parasitus* throws his gigantic shadow over Prince Henry, assuming on one occasion the role of his father.⁸⁴

In fact, the necessity of a separate realm of order is even more important in drama that makes historiographic claims. History, after all, claims to encompass a political and social reality that stretches beyond the reaches of the court. In the case of the

⁸⁴ Northrop Frye, op. cit. 87.

Henry IV plays, we see Shakespeare drawing marked divisions between the two realms or two modes of order and, in so doing, arguing for the necessity and viability of both. The green world of the tavern provides a home for the plebeian classes in these plays. These are men who, after all, are conspicuously unlike the nobles and princes that appear in the more traditionally historical scenes and who represent English History Proper. Shakespeare's tavern is filled with plebeian persons: innkeepers, drawers, ostlers, prostitutes and soldiers. Their concerns are with the struggles of plebeian life, which includes at times concerns that are outside the bounds—and laws—of the system of order symbolized and prescribed by the state. Because he is associated with this world that exists “in opposition to legitimate authority,” the Prince, and indeed the play, “takes on a populist energy.”⁸⁵

Perhaps the biggest distinction that Shakespeare draws between the tavern and the court is the different language spoken in this realm. With “trifling exceptions” all of “the scenes relating to the historical matter are in verse, the scenes of Falstaff and his followers in prose.”⁸⁶ This difference is also drawn along class lines and reflects Shakespeare's power as a political aesthetician and creator of literary

⁸⁵ Leonard Tennenhouse. “Strategies of state and political plays.” in *Political Shakespeare*. Eds. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) 121.

⁸⁶ Milton Crane. *Shakespeare's Prose*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951) 83.

products. In every scene of the green world narrative in both plays as well as in *Henry V*,⁸⁷ all speeches are in prose. Milton Crane observes that

In the two parts of *Henry IV*, the simple and familiar contrast of prose and verse within a single scene is expanded to a larger conflict between Falstaff's world of prose realism and the world of verse and nobility, whose ideals and whose very language he derides.⁸⁸

This phenomenon occurs because of the social connotations of prose as a "lower" language than the verse attributed to the upper classes. Here it bears mentioning that in *2 Henry VI*, Jack Cade also speaks prose. But according to George Wright it is not quite that simple. As Shakespeare's craft matured, so too did the frequency of his use of prose:

The order of prose may be rich and wonderful to listen to, but we understand it to be, on the whole, a lower order. ... As if in approval of this metaphorical description, readers have long thought of prose as used consistently in the "lower plot" of Shakespeare's plays and by lower characters. It is obvious, however, that Shakespeare by no means adheres consistently to this neat division of labor.⁸⁹

At the point in his career in which he was writing the *Henry IV* plays, Wright observes, Shakespeare may well have been content to rely on language in this way. It is only later, with characters like "Rosalind, Henry V, Hamlet and King Lear" that he allows "characters from the upper plot" to speak in prose. But, in *Henry IV*, he is

⁸⁷ The linguistic distinction is not so sharp in *Henry V* because while the tavern scenes continue to be exclusively spoken in prose, we find in this play that the "historical" narratives are no longer strictly in verse. In Henry's courtship of Katherine of France, especially, the King speaks in prose.

⁸⁸ Milton Crane. op. cit. p. 5.

⁸⁹ George. T. Wright. *Shakespeare's Metrical Art*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) 109.

careful to preserve a clear distinction between verse and prose as a means of helping to keep the narrative of the green world separate from that of the normal world and still allow for a single figure to represent, to one degree or another, the whole of a class.⁹⁰ Simply put, the distinction between prose and verse in this play, at least, is the same as the distinction between the classes, which by extension is the same thing as the distinction between scenic narratives.

In Shakespeare's historiographic projects, what Frye calls the "normal world" is always the same thing as English History Proper. The characters and events that form the historical narrative in the play (as opposed to the comic one) come almost directly from Shakespeare's sources.⁹¹ But the sources for the two plays of *Henry IV* were more diverse than those used by the playwright for *Richard II*.⁹² In the Henry plays, Shakespeare begins to rely on literary source material as well as on the historical record. *Henry IV* does make significant use of Holinshed's *Chronicle*, but also takes much of its material from other Elizabethan works, including an epic long poem by Samuel Daniel. *The First Four Books of the Civil Wars Between the Two*

⁹⁰ See Brian Vickers, who suggests that frequently readings of Falstaff have "tended to avoid the man himself, and trace out the moral and theatrical traditions of the vice figure tempting the hero; or to use anthropology as a basis for interpreting Falstaff as *the spirit of holiday in a saturnalian inversion of normal order*, or as a scapegoat to be ritually expelled" [my italics]. In the italicized portion, we see Falstaff as a representative of the alternative system of order that Vicker's discusses at length in his book. Brian Vickers. *The Artistry of Shakespeare's Prose*. (London: Methuen, Ltd., 1968) 94.

⁹¹ Shaaber, op. cit. 229. Shaaber discusses the structure of these plays as operating on a series of distinctions between what he calls the "historical plot" and "comic scenes."

⁹² See Samuel Daniels. *The First Four Books of the Civil Wars Between the Two Houses of Lancaster and York*. in Sylvan Barnett, series ed. and introduction. *Signet Classic Shakespeare Series: Henry IV Part One*. (New York: Penquin, 1998.)

Houses of Lancaster and York was first published in 1595, the same year that Shakespeare was putting on *Richard II*. Book III of that poem chronicles English history from the usurpation of the crown of Richard II through Hotspur's rebellion and the battle of Shrewsbury. Like Holinshed's and Hall's chronicles, Daniels' poem strictly toes the line of English History Proper, concentrating its attention only on the most politically powerful persons and on the events that have the most political, economic and historical impact understood in the most conventional sense. None of these sources make any mention of the Prince of Wales and his libertine reputation, to say nothing of Falstaff and the Boar's Head tavern. Shakespeare's other major source, however, does. *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* was an anonymous play first published in the same year that Shakespeare put on his version of the *Henry IV* story, but according to Alice Griffin, it had been performed on the London stage for as many as ten years before its publication. The publication of the *Famous Victories* was "probably to take advantage of Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, part 1 and 2, then on the stage."⁹³ It is from this source that Shakespeare drew his most colorful

⁹³ *The Sources of Ten Shakespeare Plays*. Alice Griffin, ed. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1966) 95.

stories of Prince Hal and of Falstaff.⁹⁴ Shakespeare and his anonymous source both emphasize the legend of Henry V's libertine youth. Shakespeare, at least, used the legend to populate a green world narrative through which political and social, as well as literary, objectives of the play could be met and, through the character of Henry V, created a social history that depended on pan-caste representation.

The green world in the Henry plays is the tavern. Indeed, it is not difficult to see Frye's formulation as applicable to the Boar's Head for there, as in the forest in *MND*, the political order of the state is suspended. Falstaff and his cronies are not a real part of the affairs of state, nor do they explicitly seek to subvert political order; rather, their presence presents an alternative system of order to which a character can escape and resolve the difficulties of the so-called normal world—difficulties that occur not only within the system of order of the normal world but because of it. Eastcheap offers a conceptual reality in which the rules of court are neither present nor especially applicable. From that perspective, the reader is invited to view the politics of English History Proper through new and different eyes. Kenneth Muir has

⁹⁴ That there was an extant version of the tavern legend at the time of Shakespeare's writing does nothing, really, to diminish my assertion that Shakespeare used the tavern as a means of representing the third estate in his historical chronicle. I am arguing that Shakespeare's aesthetic and dramatic sensibilities caused him to rely on characters in this way. That another play, even an earlier one, was doing the same thing only serves to strengthen my assertion. Furthermore, there are scholars, such as Seymour Pitcher, who argue that Shakespeare was, in fact, the anonymous author of the *Famous Histories*. See Seymour M. Pitcher. *The Case for Shakespeare's Authorship of the Famous Victories*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1961.)

called Falstaff “a living criticism of the world of policy,”⁹⁵ not because Falstaff is a vocal critic of his government or the particular political system that it represents, but rather because his presence is a conceptual alternative to the conventions and values implied by state order. Consider, for example, Falstaff’s polemic against honor that appears in *1 Henry IV* (“Honour is a mere scrutcheon” [V.i.]) and his sermon on the virtues of sack, in which he famously promises,

If I had a thousand sons, the first humane principle
I would teach them should be, to foreswear thin
potations and addict themselves to sack.

(*2H4*, IV.iii. ll.123-5).

Indeed, Falstaff’s criticism is not of politics or ideology but, rather, of value systems. Even his dispute with the Lord Chief Justice in *2 Henry IV* is conspicuously non-political. The only grievance Falstaff seems to have is that he isn’t being left alone to be himself.

To be sure, we must keep in mind that Falstaff, at least, is not a member of the plebeian class. In fact, he is, or was, a knight. He makes frequent, though often disposable, references to his social rank. But Falstaff ultimately represents the common man by being the spokesperson for, if not the embodiment of, the narrative thread of the lower classes. James Bulman agrees that Falstaff’s popularity and

⁹⁵ Muir is quoted by A. R. Humphries in “The Unity and Background of *Henry IV, Part One*.” Originally published in Humphries’ introduction to the Arden edition of the play, but reprinted in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Henry IV, Part One*. R.J. Dorius, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1970) 28. The title to Humphries’ contribution was supplied by Dorius.

importance to the play are inextricably linked to his connection to lower classes.

“Audiences paid to see him,” because

in his scenes, Shakespeare dramatizes a social history of the other England – the taverns, brothers and farms – which rivals the official history in importance and surpasses it in the sheer energy and copiousness of its detail.⁹⁶

In Falstaff we see how nobility can become low—at the same time, we see Shakespeare relying on the green world narrative of which the fat knight is a representative to demonstrate a peasant class that was increasingly more visible in the version of history that Shakespeare was presenting on the stage.

In addition to Falstaff’s position as representation of the tavern community and narrative, his military record reveals the social content of the plays. Falstaff represents the common soldiery in exactly the same way that he represents the common tavern-goer, perhaps because these are, from a class point of view at least, exactly the same men. J. W. Draper observes that

Shakespeare clearly intended to show Sir John Falstaff to appear as an army officer; he is shown on a peace footing, with his soldier-comrades and his lady-loves, his food and lodging, his brawling and drinking, his chronic insolvency and his means of evading its consequences.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ James C. Bulman. “*Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2*” in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare’s Histories*. Ed. Michael Hattaway. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 169.

⁹⁷ J.W. Draper. “Falstaff as an Elizabethan Soldier.” in *Norton Critical Editions: William Shakespeare’s Henry the Fourth, Part I*. James L. Sanderson, ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1962.) Title added by Sanderson.

In other words, Shakespeare's Falstaff is not quite the true knight of the realm, or if he is, he "represents the old military aristocracy run to seed."⁹⁸ Falstaff's knighthood is so far removed from any real sense of propriety or viability that the only place in which his title still means anything is the tavern. When summoned back to war, he arrives more as a common infantry-man leading "a charge of foot" than as a real, effective military officer. Indeed, in both plays Falstaff's military service serves as an important detail to help us sort out the ways in which Shakespeare is using his character to make a political statement. While Falstaff, on a superficial level, might seem to have some degree of political power because one of his duties is to draft peasants into the wars, we cannot deny the conspicuous modesty of his role in those battles, both at the planning and organizing stage and throughout. Most importantly, however, even as Falstaff is selecting the men whom he will compel to join his contingent, the plays never let us forget that Falstaff, like his men, is himself being pressed into service against his will. In *1 Henry IV*, for example, we hear Prince Hal talking to Peto of the coming wars with Hotspur:

we must to the wars, and thy place shall be honorable. I'll procure this fat rogue a charge of foot, and I know his death will be a march of twelve score. (*1H4*, II.iv. ll. 546-549)

Falstaff's assignment is a joke that is played on him by Prince Hal, who has real ties to political power. When Hal reveals his plans, Falstaff reacts with the same tempered

⁹⁸ Draper, op. cit. p. 269.

mix of emotion that we see in the soldiers he drafts later on. Falstaff is not interested in the slightest in the political problems of the King, nor does he relish the idea of participating in a war that does not particularly concern him:

Prince. I have procured thee, Jack, a charge of foot.

Falstaff. I would it had been of horse. ... I am heinously unprovided. Well, God be thanked for these rebels, they offend none but the virtuous: I laud them, I praise them.

(*1H4*, III.iii. ll. 192-8)

And later:

Fal. ... O, I could wish this tavern were my drum!
(ll. 211)

Although he resents being pressed into service, he recognizes it is futility to resist. After all, unlike those from whom he takes bribes, Falstaff has no real money to buy his way out of service and, for that reason, he is as compelled as anyone in his company. Compare his words above with those of Bullcalf, who buys his way out of Falstaff's conscription:

Bullcalf. Good master Bardolph, stand my friend, and here's four Harry ten shillings, in French crowns, for you. In very truth, sir, I had as life be hanged, sir, as go. And yet for my own part, sir, I do not care, but rather, because I am unwilling and, for my own part, have a desire to stay with my friends. Else, sir, I did not care, for my own part, so much.

(*2H4*, III.ii. ll.227-34)

Bullcalf's crafty avoidance of the draft demonstrates the same sort of ambivalence that we see in Falstaff. He is neither moved by the cause nor especially impressed with authority. Falstaff's political ambivalence, despite his military position, is demonstrated even more clearly in the second play when he asks the servant of the Lord Chief Justice, whom he is pretended to confuse with a beggar, "doth not the king lack subjects? Do not the rebels need soldiers?" (2H4, I.ii. l. 76-7) Despite Falstaff's position as a representative of an order well beyond the ideological reach of orthodoxy and despite the not-so-subtle political effect Shakespeare suggests by staging bribery, he is not protected from conscription in the wars of the normal world of the state. His resentment at being drafted and the normal world's failure to recognize his position as king of the green world and alternative father to Hal are exhibited in ambiguous political statements which reflect not so much rebellion as grumbling detachment. Since Falstaff is literally the vehicle through which the play introduces his squad of peasant soldiers, we must understand his problem to be that of plebeian soldiers everywhere.

In this way, the play ultimately associates Falstaff, despite his knighthood, with the common man. Milton Crane says that Falstaff is "Shakespeare's most brilliant speaker of comic prose" because he speaks for so many. Crane, observing Falstaff's use of prose, identifies not only something meaningful about the class identifications of that type of language but also about the burden of representation that Falstaff (and through him, Shakespeare) must carry:

But why does Falstaff speak prose? ... Falstaff is a clown, although a nobleman, and must therefore speak prose; he must, furthermore, represent "the whole world" that Hal has to banish before he can become England's Harry, and Falstaff must therefore be opposed in every conceivable way to the world of high action and noble verse in which Hal is destined to move.⁹⁹

Falstaff's years of cavorting with lowly barflies have forever marred his reputation with the nobles. His only recourse is that he is able to believe that he is a king within the walls of the tavern—that is to say, a leader within the alternative system of order. The truth, however, as Hal and Poins consistently demonstrate, is that Falstaff is not at all a king, even in this realm, but rather represents the tavern world by being its most notorious and boisterous celebrity. Moreover, Shakespeare consistently demonstrates that his Falstaff is meant to represent the tavern community by having

⁹⁹ Milton Crane, *op. cit.* p. 84.

the character speak on their behalf. The very first introduction that Shakespeare gives us to his Falstaff tells us exactly who he is:¹⁰⁰

Falstaff. Indeed you hear me now, Hal, for we that take purses go by the moon and the seven stars and not by Phoebus, he, "that wandering knight so fair"... Marry, sweet wag, when thou art king, let not us that are squires of the night's body be called thieves of the day's beauty.

(*1H4*, I.ii.11.12-25)

Falstaff instantly appears as a representative of an order that is far outside the conventions of the state, military or otherwise. There are few Shakespearean characters that freely admit to criminal activity, and fewer still in the history plays.

Falstaff announces his thievery with an air of pride. It is his "vocation," he says, and "tis no sin for a man to labor in his vocation." (*1H4*, I.ii. 1.107)

¹⁰⁰ Shakespeare drew his character from several sources; however, the historical figure at the root of them all, Sir John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham, was a knight and a Puritan who was executed by the Catholic monarchy in 1417 for heresy and treason. Oldcastle was a Lollard and a close follower of the teachings of Wycliffe. He was, in certain circles, regarded as a "Protestant saint and martyr." [Peter Corbin and Douglass Sedge, op. cit. 2.] The deeds of this Oldcastle were recorded by Elizabethan historians including John Foxe in his *Acts and Monument*, which detailed a martyrology of historical religious figures in England, [John Foxe. *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. Marie Gentert King, ed. (Old Tappan, NJ: F. H. Revell, 1970.)] and John Bale who chronicled Oldcastle's trial and execution in his play *Sir John Oldcastle*. [John Bale. *Select Works of John Bale: Containing the Examinations of Lord Cobham, William Thorpe, and Anne Askewe, and the Image of both Churches*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1849.)] According to Professor Wilson, Oldcastle was "historically a friend and fellow-soldier of Prince Hal in the reign of Henry IV, but was burnt as a heretic by the same prince when he became King Henry V." This may be a possible source for Hal's rejection of Falstaff at his coronation, but the real source for Shakespeare's version of the character is *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*. It is in this play that the bawdy fat man of Shakespeare's tavern really appears for the first time. According to legend, the popular character of Oldcastle in both plays so summoned the ire of the historical Oldcastle's descendents that Shakespeare and subsequent editors of the *Famous Victories* were forced to change the character's name to Falstaff. See J. Dover Wilson, op. cit. p. 16. See also D.B. Landt "The Ancestry of Sir John Falstaff" in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 17 (Winter 1966) 69-76.

But there is more to Falstaff and to what he represents than criminal behavior, and this is immediately apparent in that first scene. He distances himself from his erstwhile title when he expresses his concerns—and the concerns of his comrades—for the potential character of the government under Prince Hal's reign. Missing from his suit is, of course, any sense of the decorum typical of those addressing a monarch. But what remains is not exclusively a familiar relationship either, for Falstaff is, after all, pressing his political concerns not at all gently on the heir apparent. Those concerns reflect the interests of someone not of a knightly class, as the Oldcastle version of Falstaff *might* have been, but rather the concerns of a vagabond drunkard of the most socially common variety:

Fal. But I prithee, sweet wag, shall there be gallows
standing in England when thou art king?
. . . Do not when thou art king, hang a thief.
(*1H4*, I.ii. ll.57-61)

Hal replies, "No, thou shalt" (l. 62). We cannot overlook the confusion that ensues from Hal's answer to Falstaff's request that he not hang thieves. Falstaff is aware of the political predicament he is in and knows, as Wilson points out, that his "career is dependent on Hal's favour, and Hal's favour is determined by that young man's attitude toward his responsibilities as heir to the throne of England."¹⁰¹ Falstaff here can be read as nothing more (or less) than any other frequenter of the peasant bars of Eastcheap living on the margins of an ordered society that is fast-moving away from

¹⁰¹ J. Dover Wilson, *op. cit.* p. 15

feudal lordship and toward a new order that is as economically individualistic as it is politically absolute.¹⁰² He is aware that his social survival is inextricably linked to his relationship with Hal, just as the survival of the masses is inextricably linked to the favour of the monarchy in a post-feudal economic system. It is, however, this very relationship that leads to the confusion. Falstaff, oblivious to Hal's irony, forgets his station and misinterprets the prince's plans for him:

Fal. Shall I? O rare! By the Lord, I'll be a brave judge.

Prince. Thou judgest falsely already. I mean thou shalt have the hanging of the thieves, and so become a rare hangman.

Fal. Well, Hal, well, and in some sort it jumps with my humor as well as waiting in the court, I can tell you.
(1H4, I.ii. ll.64-70)

In assuming he is to be made a judge, Falstaff misapprehends both his relationship with Hal and the reality of his social rank. One of the primary social concerns of the plays is Hal's political, social and cultural inheritance. Prince Hal has inherited his father's relationship with the working class. However, just as Bolingbroke's relationship with aristocracy, at least, was proved to be one of convenience and finally disintegrated over the course of his reign, Hal (or at least the plays themselves) seems aware in moments like this that his friendships among the tavern cannot survive into his reign. But Falstaff fails to apprehend the tenuousness of his relationship with a prince. He is surprised to find that if a job is to await him in

¹⁰² See Anderson.

Henry's court, it will be little more than the menial and disagreeable work of a hangman. What becomes clear, if temporarily, to Falstaff is something that is obvious to the audience throughout the plays: despite his protestations, Falstaff's title will get him nowhere, and, what is worse, his relationship with Hal is just as useless in the long term. He is left to the same uncertain fortune that any one else in the tavern must face. Since the plays, beginning even in *Richard II*, seem to show how a new monarchy emerges, for the first time, with the support of the masses over the aristocracy, the tetralogy at large can be read as a gradual realization of the tenuousness of the relationship between plebeians and the monarchy emblemized by a fallen knight who believed that the intimacy he shared with a prince would last forever.

It is by careful study of the usage of these characters and of the ways in which the two narratives interact that the political component of Shakespeare aesthetic craftwork emerges. We also begin to see certain important distinctions between the plays. In part two, we see subtle though important changes in the nature of the tavern narrative featuring characters such as Falstaff and his gang. Shakespeare increasingly presents these figures as an integral part of the aesthetic component of his historical dramaturgy. In Part I, the governing narrative structure forbids any interaction between the green world and the play's presentation of English History Proper. This is not so in Part II. Each consecutive play demonstrates an increasing sense of political efficacy of the third estate, although not always of individual characters. The two

plays of *Henry IV* are no exception. In the subtle changes within the green world narrative thread is where trajectory punctuates itself; it is here that the plays are most like separate works.

In Part I, for example, Falstaff and his gang almost never engage with any members of the real aristocracy and monarchy, save Hal, of course. Shortly before the famous moment in which Falstaff plays at being the King, representatives of the crown come to the tavern seeking Prince Henry.

Hostess. O Jesu, my lord the Prince!

Prince. How now my lady the hostess! What say'st thou to me?

Host. Marry, my lord, there is a nobleman of the court at door would speak with you. He says he comes from you father.

Prince. Give me as much as will make him a royal man, and send him back again to my mother.

(*IH4*, II.iv. ll. 284-90.)

Any interactions between the nobleman and the residents of Eastcheap are kept conspicuously off stage. Later in that same scene, the sheriff and his men manage to enter the tavern seeking Falstaff on criminal charges concerning the robbery at Gad's Hill. *All* of the subalterns, with the singular exception of Peto, who remains dutifully silent, hide from them. Only Prince Hal, the plays' only real social go-between, can communicate with both the Sheriff and the barflies. When Falstaff, the ostentatious representative of this company, appears in the presence of other members of the

monarchy, he remains uncharacteristically invisible. At the battle of Shrewsbury (*IH4*, V.iv.), he appears in the presence of the king but exchanges words only with Prince Hal. When encountered by the Douglas in battle, he fakes a heart-attack to avoid having to fight, but as a not-so-coincidental consequence, he is spared having to exchange any dialogue with his would-be attacker (*IH4*, V.iv. *s.d.* 1.77). Falstaff's invisibility falters slightly only when Prince John responds to Falstaff's story about his made-up fight with Hotspur. He simply says, "This is the strangest tale that ever I heard." (*IH4*, V.iv. l. 154) By distinguishing the narratives of the state, which include the king, the aristocracy and English History Proper, from those of the third estate, represented largely—though not exclusively—in comic scenes in Eastcheap and Gad's Hill, Shakespeare is able to make his green world with an alternative world order that carries the action of the plays forward toward their narrative objectives.

Although the narratives are not quite so segregated in Part II, the green world is still a very real presence. Indeed, throughout Part II, the green world narrative is very much intact, despite the fact that Falstaff and the green world narrative come into increasing contact with the noble class narrative, beginning with the conflict between Falstaff and the Lord Chief Justice in act II, scene I. James C. Bulman points out that "the thread connecting Falstaff to the royal narrative," the narrative of the normal world and of English History Proper, "is his pairing with the Lord Chief Justice, a scrupulously virtuous man who, according to legend, once had Hal jailed for

boxing him in the ear.”¹⁰³ The Lord Chief Justice represents the system of order present in the so-called normal world, although he does, when appearing within the green world narrative, speak exclusively in the language of that narrative: prose. He is, as he says to Henry V at the end of the *2 Henry IV*, “the image of the King whom I presented” (V.ii. 1.78), and it is through him that the two narratives collide. Interestingly enough, this collision occurs within the plebeian green world—on Falstaff’s own turf, so to speak. Falstaff’s page spots him and reminds the audience of the encounter between the Lord Chief Justice and Prince Hal. Falstaff recognizes the man as being not merely a representative of the orthodox system of order, but a representative who has demonstrated himself to be so staunchly antagonistic to the values and conventions of the green world narrative that he has even had the audacity to arrest the King’s heir:

Page. Sir—here comes the nobleman that
committed the prince for striking him about
Bardolph. (*2H4*, I.ii. ll. 56)

Falstaff’s reaction is to retreat into his sanctuary of social seclusion by attempting to recreate the invisibility he enjoyed throughout *1 Henry IV*. His first words are “I will not see him,” which may or may not be a gesture toward the erstwhile invisibility ability to hide and to be ignored that served him so well at Shrewsbury, for example. However, what cannot be denied is his behaviour when cornered by the Chief Justice’s assistant. He feigns deafness.

¹⁰³ Bulman, *op. cit.* 169.

Falstaff. Boy, tell him I am deaf. (l. 69)

Falstaff fails that, he pretends to fail to recognize the man's nobility.

Fal. What! A young knave and begging! Is there not wars? Is there not employment? (l. 75)

Falstaff resists a conversation with the Chief Justice because of what such a conversation represents to himself and to the world for which he is the spokesperson. Falstaff may not recognize it, but lingering in the margins of the play, within the grasp of the audience, is the fact that the Lord Chief Justice represents the power to "banish plump Jack, and banish all the world!" (*1H4*, II.iv. ll.479-80)¹⁰⁴ It may well be that Falstaff is attempting to evade having to answer for his bad behavior, but the consequences to Shakespeare's narrative structure are significant. When Falstaff grudgingly recognizes the Chief Justice for who he is, he effectively turns over control of the green world narrative and betrays the order that governs it.

Fal. My Good lord! God give your lordship good time of day. I am glad to see your lordship is abroad. I heard say your lordship was sick. I hope your lordship goes abroad by advice. Your lordship, though not clean past your youth, hath some smack of age in you, some relish of the saltiness of time in you; and I most humbly beseech your lordship to have a reverent care of your health.

(*2H4*, II.i. ll. 96-104)

¹⁰⁴ Tillyard points out that it is the Lord Chief Justice's assumption of a fatherly relationship with Hal that signals the end of Falstaff. Prince Hal "has to choose, Morality-fashion, between disorder or misrule, and Order or Justice (the supreme kingly virtue) to which he is drawn by his father and by his father's deputy the Lord Chief Justice. And he chooses Justice." Tillyard. (1946), op cit. p. 265.

tavern is not staged.¹⁰⁷ But it is important to note that Shakespeare does not slowly drop the green world tavern from the play, despite Hal's absence from it. On the contrary, Shakespeare even introduces a new sub-plot and new characters to keep that narrative thread alive: Falstaff's hijinx with the Justices Shallow and Silence. This decision suggests among other things the value the playwright placed on Falstaff's world. Because it was a staged version of the lives of the ordinary citizens who made up the bulk of Shakespeare's audience, the green world of Bardolph and Falstaff was wildly popular.¹⁰⁸ As a result, embedded in his historiographic representation of medieval history, Shakespeare includes the very people who were paying to see the play. In the two plays of *Henry IV*, this inclusion was not mere pandering to public

¹⁰⁷ As the King approaches death, he asks his attendants (including Hal's brothers Gloucester and Clarence) "Where is the Prince your brother?" After several attempts to deceive the King and spare his feelings, it is finally revealed that "He dines in London...with Poins and other his continual followers." (2*H4*, IV.iv. ll. 51, 53) This final meal with his companions is never staged. The last time we see Prince Hal in the company of the green world narrative is all the way back in II.iv., when the party is interrupted by "a dozen captains...asking everyone for Sir John Falstaff." (II.iv. l. 368) The interruption signals the call to arms for Hal and his men, but what is perhaps more significant is that it represents the very last time Shakespeare stages a tavern scene in which Prince Hal is present. His last words in the green world are "Falstaff, good night." (l. 375)

¹⁰⁸ Falstaff and the tavern world were extremely popular by all accounts. See Wilson, Tillyard and Bradley, who says "The main reason why he makes us so happy and puts us so entirely at our ease is that he himself is happy and entirely at his ease. "Happy" is too weak a word; he is in bliss, and we share his glory." (Bradley 71) Indeed, Falstaff's world was so popular that, according to a legend, it was the Queen herself "commanded Shakespeare to write a play showing Falstaff in love." Whether or not the legend is true, Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor* is an entire play that takes place in Falstaff's bawdy underworld and, we can be sure, was written in response to the overwhelming success of Falstaff's contribution to the Henry plays. *William Shakespeare's The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Folger Library Edition. Louis B. Wright and Virginia A. LaMar, eds. (New York: Washington Square Books, 1964.) viii – xi.

popularity, but, rather, a careful political strategy.¹⁰⁹ Shakespeare's green world suggests, as does his use of the groom in *Richard II*, for example, that the playwright was keenly aware of the circumstances of the common man and understood such figures to be highly effective political entities. Through the use of his green world convention, Shakespeare is able to posit an alternative world order, steeped in working class values and ethos that does not exist in the traditionally understood historical record, to create a dramatic and literary vehicle to achieve his narrative resolution.

Unlike the traditional use of the green world as it appears in Shakespeare's comedies, it is not necessary to the resolution of the *Henry IV* plays for all of the characters to appear in the green world. Where *A Midsummer Night's Dream* requires that everyone involved enter the forest in order to be "changed" and thus effect the comic resolution, it is enough in *Henry IV* that Prince Hal be the only real go-between appearing in both the green world of the tavern and the normal world of the state. Nevertheless, the green world convention is crucial not only to the dramatic form that governs the narrative sequence in the plays but also to the development and realization of the character of Prince Hal and his subsequent emergence as Henry V.

¹⁰⁹ As it may have been in the case of *MWW*. Scholarly opinion seems to be that the Falstaff of the *Merry Wives of Windsor* is little more than a bastardized version of the character of Falstaff. Harold Bloom refers to the Falstaff of this play to be a "parody" of the Falstaff of the history plays. Harold Bloom. *Shakespeare's Histories*. (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986) 3.

The very nature of his emergence is dependent upon his relationship with plebeian characters. Derek Traversi writes,

Falstaff and his companions are ... no more than living examples of the consequence of "misrule," of the anarchy which [Prince Hal's] father's action has, against his own intentions, promoted but which he has never ... properly understood. Henry V, unlike Bolingbroke, *will* understand it, because he has surrounded himself with it, has with set purpose gone so far as to *live* it in his own person.¹¹⁰

In act IV of part II, the Earl of Warwick explains Prince Hal's relationship to the dying King Henry and in so doing may very well be explaining to the audience the purpose of this play at least insofar as it relates to the next:

Warwick. The Prince but studies his companions
Like a strange tongue, wherein, to gain the language,
'Tis needful that the most immodest word
be looked on and learned, which attained,
Your highness knows, comes to no further use
But to be known and hated. So like gross terms,
The Prince will in the perfectness of time
Cast off his followers, and their memory
Shall as a pattern or a measure live
By which his Grace must mete, the lives of others
Turning past evils to advantages.

(*2H4*, IV.iv. ll.68-79)

Dramatically speaking, the segregation between classes and narratives that occurs because of the green world serves the characterization of the heir apparent throughout these plays and into *Henry V*. As a consequence of its participation in the political, social and historical trajectory of the tetralogy, the green world is crucial as a means of establishing the political and social discourse that appears in them.

¹¹⁰ Derek Traversi, *op. cit.* 107. Italics in original.

Shakespeare's split narrative includes, on one hand, the affairs of state and English History Proper and, on the other, the more or less day to day affairs of the lower class, albeit in comic form. A fundamental political preoccupation of the plays becomes the real consequences that the decisions made by the monarchy have on the plebeian class. These are, after all, the men upon whom the policies of the state have the most serious material impact. Falstaff's conscription scenes demonstrate as much. In this way, the green world of Falstaff's tavern must be understood to represent the lower social strata of Shakespeare's historical project, the inclusion of which demonstrates awareness on the author's part of the social, moral and political significance of these types of characters in a history that has largely excluded all reference to their contribution.

The next chapter traces the development of this aesthetic quality into *Henry V*. The political component of Shakespeare's aesthetic sensibility, I have argued above, was in its very infancy in *Richard II* when Shakespeare used the occasional appearance of a member of the working class to offer an internal commentary that exists simultaneously within and without of the larger plot narrative. In the two plays of *Henry IV*, Shakespeare's craft, in this regard, is seen to be maturing. Instead of a few scattered moments, we now see plebeian voices populating an entire narrative thread that makes up half of all the stage time in these plays and is crucial to the overall resolution of the historical cycle. This narrative, however important it may be, remains largely distinct from the plays' treatment of conventionally understood

history. In other words, while Shakespeare relies heavily on the plebeian green world narrative to achieve the resolution of his play, he ultimately keeps this anachronistic material separated from his historical source material. In *Henry V*, however, Shakespeare's technique is in its fully realized adulthood. Here we have a king who, because of his youth spent with peasants in a lower-class tavern, is able to transcend certain political distinctions by recognizing the political efficacy and self-consciousness of the plebeian men and women he calls subjects.

Part IV
The Cronicle History of Henry the Fift.

*A largesse universal, like the sun,
His liberal eye doth give to everyone,
Thawing cold fear, that mean and gentle all,
Behold, as may unworthiness define,
A little touch of Harry in the night.
(H5, IV. Chorus. ll. 43-7)*

In *Henry V* the two most important unresolved issues of the tetralogy come together and are finally satisfied. These issues are absolutely crucial to the dramatic, aesthetic, and historical components of the play and are, I believe, intricately related both to each other and to the political discourse being argued by Shakespeare's historiographic project. They are the "sin" of Bolingbroke's usurpation of the throne and the realization of the rationale for his son's rejection of Falstaff and the subaltern tavern world he represents. These are both issues that appear to be unresolved—or incompletely resolved—by the end of the first three plays of the series but seem to be justified by the essential nature of the new monarchy and its successes. Since the plays are concerned with a new understanding of politics, monarchy, lineage, and economy that was very much in the hearts and minds of the Elizabethans, Shakespeare's contribution to the historical discourse of his time must be understood to reflect those concerns. The scandal surrounding Richard's deposition and murder, despite having occurred some two hundred years earlier, was still becoming

comprehensible during Elizabeth's reign.¹¹¹ Peter Saccio points out that the "Elizabethans frequently derived from Richard II analogies to their own political problems."¹¹² Part of the reason for this is that many of the political problems faced by Elizabethans stem from Richard's reign and the ramification of its demise. This trend can easily be seen in Shakespeare's second tetralogy. For example, "one of the Renaissance doctrines on which Shakespeare relies in *Henry V*," says Robert B. Pierce, "is moral inheritance."¹¹³ The historical Bolingbroke, by staging a political coup based on criticism of the throne with legitimation of popular support and conspicuously without any challenge to Richard's claim to the crown, fractured the traditional understanding of the divine lineage of monarchs and with it much of the power of the absolutist ideology. Indeed, as early as Henry IV's own reign, we can see the monarchy struggling to regain the old power of the King. Furthermore, since Bolingbroke's deposition of Richard did occur with popular, pan-caste support, a new respect for the political efficacy of the masses as such was emerging in the cultural and historical consciousness of Renaissance England. Despite numerous attempts on the part of various kings to restore traditional legitimacy to the throne, including

¹¹¹ Perry Anderson observes the radical restructuring of Late Medieval England sparked by the "new monarchy" after Richard's death and by an insurgence in Parliamentary power. He writes: "During later Lancastrian regime, aristocratic factions had prominently developed and manipulated Parliament for their own ends, whereas Yorkist rulers had striven amidst the prevailing anarchy to concentrate and strengthen the central institutions of royal power again." Perry Anderson, *op. cit.* p. 118.

¹¹² Saccio, *op. cit.* p. 5

¹¹³ Robert B. Pierce. *Shakespeare's History Plays: The Family and the State.* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971.) 230

Henry VII who perpetuated the so-called “Tudor Myth,”¹¹⁴ the aristocracy and the lower classes alike learned a valuable lesson with Richard’s death, one that couldn’t seem to be erased from history: in certain circumstances, the King could be answerable to the people.

A major problem of Elizabethan historiography, then, was how to reconcile this new sense of political efficacy among the classes with a monarchic tradition that very much wanted to stay in power. The entire social and political structure of England was being reorganized, albeit slowly, and “Elizabeth’s government felt some threat” from these new social “inversions and boundary dissolution[s].”¹¹⁵ Shakespeare’s answer to that problem, I believe, was to contribute to the historical discourse a series of plays that approaches the issue of political efficacy by presenting the third estate with characters that are reasonably authentic despite their comic qualities and who were existing peaceably in a post-Ricardian political environment. At the same time, Shakespeare used them to help reconstruct the image of the

¹¹⁴ “The Tudor Myth” was an invention of the first Tudor king, King Henry VII, who descended from the both the Beaufort and Lancaster lines and whose grandmother was Catherine of France, wife of Henry V (she was married to Owen Tudor after Henry’s death). Henry VII was intensely interested in restoring public faith in divine legitimation. Tillyard says “Not too happy about his title to the crown, Henry VII fostered two historical notions that became great national themes. The first was that the union of the two houses of York and Lancaster through his marriage with the York heiress was the providential and happy ending of an organic piece of history. The second was that through his Welsh ancestry he had a claim to the British throne unconnected either with his Lancastrian descent or Yorkist marriage.” (29) In other words, Henry VII claimed that the Tudor line at once settled the dispute between two competing lineages and separated the crown from them by originating from its own ancient, noble and above-all legitimate claim. See Tillyard (1946), *op. cit.* p. 29 See also Anderson who writes, “Himself a Lancastrian by connection, Henry VII essentially developed a Yorkist administrative practice.” (see note 129 below.) Anderson, *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Leonard Tennenhouse. *op. cit.* 115.

monarchy through a hero-king.¹¹⁶ In other words, since it was impossible to reestablish in the minds of the masses the image of a divinely descended monarch, the only solution would be to use the masses themselves as tools to reconstruct a new understanding of monarchy. Robin Headlam Wells says that “for Elizabethan writers” such as Shakespeare, “a theory of vicegerency is not incompatible with an elective monarchy.”¹¹⁷ It is possible, he says, for the monarchy to continue and even to thrive as a central ideological system even with a politically effective populace. Shakespeare’s histories demonstrate as much. By using members of the third estate in an increasingly visible capacity throughout the plays, Shakespeare relies on them to help restore public faith in the monarchy. Graham Holderness argues that this reliance reflects a unity that already existed in Elizabethan England and suggests that this unity may have issued from Henry’s rehabilitation of the political tradition that had his father had fractured:

Henry V, according to historical legend, unified the nation; Shakespeare reflected and endorsed that triumph by creating a drama of exemplary aesthetic unity; which in turn reflected the social and ideological unity of the Elizabethan state.¹¹⁸

Henry’s victory at Agincourt, with the help of his loyal “band of brothers” no matter how “mean and base,” justifies his relationship with the tavern in *1 and 2 Henry IV*,

¹¹⁶ Tennenhouse has called the play a work of “political hagiography.” Tennenhouse, *op. cit.* p. 120.

¹¹⁷ Robin Headlam Wells. *Shakespeare, Politics and the State*. (New York: Macmillan, 1986) 111.

¹¹⁸ Holderness, et. al. (1987) *op. cit.* p. 68

explains his public casting aside of that lifestyle and his friends, and puts to rest, if temporarily, the sin of Richard's death.¹¹⁹ Derek Traversi writes:

The crime of regicide which had stood between Bolingbroke and the attainment of peace no longer hangs over Henry V—unless as a disturbing memory—and the crusading purpose which had run as an unfulfilled ambition through the father's life is replaced by the reality, at once brilliant and ruthless, of his son's victorious campaign.¹²⁰

In other words, Shakespeare funnels the political, social and historical problems of the plays toward one finite resolution.

As the dying King Henry IV realizes that his reign was a failure because of the way in which he gained the throne, he offers his son hope for better success.

King [Henry IV]. . . . God knows, my son,
By what by-paths and indirect crook'd ways
I met this crown, and I myself know well
How troublesome it sate upon my head.
To thee it shall descend with better quiet,
Better opinion, better confirmation,
For all the soil of the achievement goes
With me into the earth. (*2H4*, IV.v. ll.183-90)

¹¹⁹ Robin Headlam Wells makes an interesting argument. Wells claims that Richard's deposition was not nearly as tragic and dramatic as Shakespeare's would suggest. "When we read these histories [chronicles] we find, not a doctrinaire condemnation of Bolingbroke the usurper, but a careful record of the constitutional procedures involved in the voluntary transfer of power from Richard to Henry." Wells' case appears to argue against the opinion that the history of Richard II, as a deposed and murdered king, had a lasting impact on Elizabethan history. However, from at least a cultural perspective, this does not appear to be the case. Numerous sources, including Shakespeare's play, the use of it, or a play like it, in the Essex rebellion and Queen Elizabeth's famous claim that "I am Richard II, know ye not that?" suggest a preoccupation with a version of the story more closely attuned to Shakespeare's history than to what Wells is positing. Robin Headlam Wells op. cit. 106.

¹²⁰ Traversi, op. cit. p. 166.

But the dying king knows this prediction cannot come true. The sin against Richard and the monarchy does not—and cannot—die neatly with Henry IV. Henry V will inherit the same political complications that plagued his father, as well as the same threat of civil war because of it. The challenge for these Kings, then, is to attempt to cleanse the crown of its sins. The elder King offers his son a Machiavellian strategy to avoid reliving his own fate:

King [Henry IV]. Be it thy course to busy giddy minds
With foreign quarrels, that action, hence borne out
May waste the memory of the former days.
(*2H4*, IV.v. ll. 213-5)

Henry V, after having taken his father's advice, finds himself in the woods of Agincourt surrounded by his sick, war-weary troops on the eve of a battle against incredible odds. In this precarious position he recalls his stake in Bolingbroke's blood-guilt:

King [Henry V]. Not today, O Lord,
O, not today, think not upon the fault
My father made in compassing the crown!
I Richard's body have interred anew,
And on it have bestowed more contrite tears
Than from it issued forced drops of blood.
Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay,
Who twice a day their wither'd hands hold up
Toward heaven, to pardon blood; And I have built
Two chantries, where the sad and solemn priests
Sing still for Richard's soul. More will I do.
(*H5*, IV.i. ll. 295-302)

Interestingly, the consequences that concern the Kings Henry, despite overtly religious language, are not associated with any real or traditional sense of divine

retribution on their soul as we might expect. The immortal soul of the monarch, after all, is the body politic whose immortality is earthly and political. Neither king appears to be especially concerned about God's judgment of their ascension to the throne except insofar as it affects their earthly success as king; what concerns them is the *political* stain that follows the crown and not necessarily the *moral* one. Henry opens his prayer not by seeking God's forgiveness for his father's crimes but by trying to bargain with God by asking Him to "think not on upon the fault [his] father made in compassing the crown" so that He might "steel [the] soldiers hearts." (*H5*, IV.i. ll. 294-8)¹²¹

Henry's concern for his kingdom, when dramatized in such a way, suggests a peculiar combination of concern for his troops, the success of his campaign, and the stability of his kingdom and only a vague sense of a need to atone for his father's faults. But because Shakespeare allows his king to couch his political and military worries in language that invokes the events of *Richard II*, we have no choice but to associate Henry's earthly and political sensibility, which is to say the nature of his reign, with the remorse he inherited from his father, despite the amoral and self-

¹²¹ To be fair, Henry's religion appears to be much more genuine *after* the Battle of Agincourt when he forbids his men from boasting of the success. For an interesting analysis of the ways in which religion is used in this play, see Harold C. Goddard's *Meaning of Shakespeare*. Goddard identifies two key moments in this where God's name is invoked with passion. One is the moment when Henry prays for his soldiers at Agincourt and the other is as Falstaff is dying. He utters "God, God, God! Three or four times." To which Quickly bids him not to think of death. Goddard sees these moments as the intersection of religion and morality in *Henry V*. This intersection crosses "the man who invokes God's aid in an unholy war of conquest" and "the woman who does her best to comfort a conscience stricken and dying sinner (who has wronged her cruelly) by bidding him not to trouble himself with thoughts that she knows can bring him only terror!" Harold C. Goddard. op. cit. p. 232

interested timbre of that remorse. The effect of this connection is that the view of the monarchy being presented in this play takes on a decidedly secular and populist dimension that seems to extend well beyond even the threat of civil revolution. The King seeks to actively exploit the power of the masses to achieve his agenda rather than merely to wait for an uprising against which to defend his reign. King Henry seeks to motivate his men to serve his will by using rhetoric and gesture to get them to associate his will with their own. Implicit in his attempt to exploit the men in this way is an acknowledgement of their political efficacy and self-consciousness. This approach is in stark contradistinction to that of a king like Richard, who had no moral reluctance simply to enforce his will on his subjects without acknowledgment of their own consciousness and self-determination. Since Bolingbroke's successful revolution, which fractured the traditional understanding of the monarch as a divinely descended king, has issued in a new sense that the king is accountable to his people, Henry must take steps to be as un-Richard-like as possible. The problem for Shakespeare's Henry, however, is that he must simultaneously do this while justifying his father's crime, restoring public faith in the crown and in his lineage, and all the while protecting his nation from civil factioning. Shakespeare confronts these problems by tackling them all at once, as though one solution could satisfy all of these challenges. That solution—Shakespeare, like his kings, knew—was making a campaign in France.

As *Henry V* opens, we see the King developing a plan that seems suspiciously similar to the one Henry IV laid out on his deathbed. The question of whether or not

we ought to read Henry's invasion of France as a means of diverting attention away from domestic matters and his questionable legitimacy is a difficult one. While some readers and scholars appear to be willing to give King Henry the benefit of the doubt,¹²² others are quick to condemn his war with France. In his book *Shakespeare's Political Realism*, Tim Spiekerman argues that

Beneath his new moral exterior, skeptics may well see something else in Henry V, namely a battle hardened, sly Machiavellian prince who is only pretending to be a Christian hero-king fighting a just war—all in order to establish a patriotic basis for his illegitimate rule. On this view, both the war and Hal's calculated transformation are designed to solve his legitimacy problem. In short, a crafty politician makes an unjust war seem just in the hopes of making an illegitimate king seem legitimate.¹²³

Indeed, the plays themselves seem to bear out such a reading. After threatening France, Henry clarifies his position to his court in language that is clearly supposed to stand in dramatically for a public declaration of war. What is especially interesting about his announcement is that its rhetorical quality suggests that the war is meant to consume the attention of his kingdom and not necessarily to tax its resources.¹²⁴ After announcing his own state of mind—"We have no thought in us but France"—he commands his Lords to gather "proportions" with the words "let every man now task

¹²² For example, in his treatment of the ways in which history is talked about in this play, Graham Holderness suggests that Henry may be taken at face value and that he is concerned "primarily with analyzing the justice of his cause." Holderness, (2000) op. cit. p. 140. See also Tillyard, who, while skeptical of Shakespeare's transformation of Henry from libertine prince to heroic king, doesn't seem to question the motivation of the French campaign and accepts Henry's hero status as a given in the play. Tillyard, (1946) op. cit. pp. 304ff.

¹²³ Tim Spiekerman. *Shakespeare's Political Realism*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001) 125

¹²⁴ Henry leaves sufficient military resources to handle any potential uprising, particular from Scotland, that may occur in his absence. (*H5*, I.ii. l. 136-8)

his thought / that this fair action may on foot be brought.” (*H5*, I.ii. 304, 309-10) The scene that immediately follows is, perhaps, even more telling. After the Chorus introduces the next act, we get the play’s first glimpse of the tavern.¹²⁵ What we find there explicitly (almost allegorically) demonstrates Henry IV’s dying advice to “busy giddy minds”: the tavern opens with a fight between Nym and Pistol—a fight that, while initially interrupted by Falstaff’s failing health, is only pacified by thoughts of the coming war with France.

The scene begins in a much higher degree of chaos than is normally found in the green world of the tavern. We instantly recognize the hostility between the men to be chaotic according to both the standards of the so-called normal world *and* those of the green world of Eastcheap itself. Pistol has married Nym’s “troth-plight,” Mistress Quickly, and the two men engage in an argument that leads to swords being drawn:

Pistol. For I can take, and Pistol’s cock is up,
And flashing fire will follow.

Nym. I am not a Barbason, you cannot conjure
me; I have an humor to knock you indifferently

¹²⁵ In act II, the chorus raises important questions that are beyond the scope of this study. The chorus makes it explicitly clear that the audience is to imagine itself “transported” to Southampton for “there is the playhouse, there must you sit.” The Chorus has been, in no uncertain terms, leading us to the scene in which Henry confronts Scroop, Grey and Cambridge (II.ii). However, the scene that immediately follows the Chorus’ announcement (II.i) takes place back in London. It may be that the scene order of the Folio edition, used as a primary source for Evans’ Riverside edition that I have been using throughout, reflects a hasty revision of the play. More convincingly, it could be that this fragmentation points to the tavern scene as an added afterthought, written and included after the “historical” scenes had been completed.

well. If you grow foul with me, Pistol, I will scour
you with my rapier . . .

(*H5*, II.i. ll. 55-58)

In her treatment of *Henry V*, Pamela Mason points out that “the antagonism between Nym and Pistol arises from an act of usurpation in their own domestic sphere and it claims priority over national issues.”¹²⁶ This prioritizing occurs because, as I’ve said, the tavern green world represents an isolated narrative and an alternative system of order that, while not explicitly challenging the values of the court, refuse to actively participate in them. In order for the tavern characters to emerge from the chaos of the fight, two things must occur: first, the isolation of their world needs to collapse, which it does when the plays’ dramatic emblem of that world dies; second, a dramatic *raison d’etre* for these characters needs to emerge elsewhere and occupy the void left by Falstaff’s passing. Bardolph’s attempts to separate the two men fail until they become distracted by the solemnity of Falstaff’s imminent death— because “the King hath kill’d his heart.” But even this success is brief until Bardolph is able to finally convince Pistol and Nym to put aside their differences by distracting them with thoughts of war.

Bardolph. Come, shall I to make you two friends?
We must to France together. (l. 94)

¹²⁶ Pamela Mason. “*Henry V*: ‘the quick forge and working house of thought’” in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare’s Histories*. Ed. Michael Hattaway. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 181.

Ultimately, they give in because the war represents a shift in the dramatic structure for these characters, who, as Falstaff nears death, are losing a dramatic space to inhabit. Falstaff's death signals not necessarily the end of their world but the end of the dramatic structure of that world as we have understood it up to this point; the structural void is immediately filled with another emblematic domain in which these characters can continue to represent common persons: the war with France. When Pistol and Nym finally calm down they begin to "task their thoughts" to the pending war, perhaps for reasons all their own, but sure enough for Henry's purposes.

The conscription of the tavern men as a means of placating the chaos of their world stands in for the ability of the French campaign to consume the attention of the national consciousness and distract it from domestic concerns. The success of this endeavor becomes even clearer in their next scene (II.iii), during which Falstaff's death is actually announced. This moment signals an important change in the attitude of the men and in the political perspective of the plays. Falstaff was, as I have argued above, the emblem of the tavern system of world order. His death symbolizes the final dissolution of the independence of that domain. Throughout the plays of *Henry IV*, we have been charting a gradual dissolution of the separateness of the green world narrative. In *1 Henry 4*, the tavern realm had no contract at all, save Hal, with the so-called normal world of English History Proper. In the second play of *Henry IV*, contact between the two worlds increased with Falstaff's antagonistic exchanges with the Lord Chief Justice and Prince John and culminated with King Henry's public

rejection of his erstwhile playmate in the presence of the representatives from both narratives. Falstaff's death in *Henry V* signals the total dissolution of any sense of separation between the two worlds.

What is especially important about Falstaff's demise is that the play never lets us forget what it is that ends his life:

Nym. The king has run bad humours on the knight; that's the even of it.

Pistol. Nym, thou hast spoke the right; His heart is fracted and corroborate.

Nym. The King is a good king, but it must be as it may: he passes some humours, and careers.

(*H5*, II.ii. ll. 124-8)

Falstaff's death as a result of a broken heart caused by the King's rejection is central to the play's treatment of the character and the world that he represents—a world which continues to be a very important presence in the play but only as a memory. With Falstaff, the green world of the tavern, *as we have known it*, dies. The remnants of that world, Nym, Pistol, Bardolph, as well as similar figures who may not have ever appeared in the tavern of *Henry IV* but nevertheless occupy the same social niche (such as Bates, Williams and Court), no longer have Falstaff to represent and emblemize their world and its values. They are “survivors in a world no longer enlivened by Falstaff” and his “order of things.”¹²⁷ William Hazlitt has rightly said that “Falstaff is dead, and without him, Pistol, Nym and Bardolph, are satellites without a

¹²⁷ Traversi, *op. cit.* pp. 175-6

sun.”¹²⁸ Hazlitt’s analogy here, I think, is especially useful. The sun has no authority per se over anyone; however, it does illuminate and define our world, and we would indeed be lost without it. With Falstaff gone, the play no longer has a unifying concept around which to organize the tavern narrative. But the characters remain. Consider the language Pistol uses to announce Falstaff’s death.

Pistol. Bardolph, be blithe; Nym, rouse thy
vaunting veins; Boy bristle thy courage up, for
Falstaff, he is dead, and we must earn therefore.
(*H5*, II.iii.4-5)

This line ends by referring to the money Falstaff brings in to the tavern, but it also speaks to the dramatic problem these characters face. Without Falstaff they must earn their literary keep, or fend for themselves dramatically. In *Henry V*, there is no one to represent their world, and that is precisely the point: the play is left with no alternative but to allow the green world trajectory to be dissolved into the narrative of English History Proper.

The characters who populate of the tavern narrative, which represents the whole of the plebeian presence in the play at least until Harfleur (III.i), are left not without a leader in the strictest sense for Falstaff was never any sort of real authority over these men, but, the narrative is left without an emblem and with it, dramatically speaking, its justification to be on the stage. The characters lack a literary environment in which to continue to define themselves. The play simply reorients

¹²⁸ William Hazlitt. *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays*. (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1845) 139.

them for dramatic reasons. Upon Falstaff's death, the men of the tavern are not to be understood as sheep without a shepherd, rather, quite literally, as characters without a play. But Shakespeare cannot allow these characters to float in limbo for very long, and since they are crucial to the resolution of the plays' political and social components, he cannot jettison them altogether.¹²⁹ Instead, he dramatizes the moment of relocation in a few curt lines after Falstaff's death (II.iii.) The scene is almost jarringly short. Hostess Quickly gives her eulogy in which Falstaff's death is effectively "staged"; the characters share a few short anecdotes and their attention turns abruptly to what they are to do next.

Boy: Do you remember 'a saw a flea stick upon
Bardolph's nose, and 'a said it was a black soul
burning in hell?

Bardolph: Well, the fuel is gone that maintained
that fire: that's all the riches I got in his service.

Nym: Shall we shog? The King will be gone from
Southampton.

(*H5*, II.iii. ll. 41-47)

¹²⁹ In addition to doing much for the political aesthetic that I have been discussing in this study, these characters represent the fulfillment of a promise Shakespeare made at the end of *1 Henry IV*. According to J. Dover Wilson, Shakespeare had every intention to "continue the story, with Sir John in it." (*2H4*, *Epi*. l. 26) Dover writes: "the intention, thus publicly announced" at the end of *2H4*, "amounted to a promise and an advertisement of future delights to an audience whose appetite for 'fat meat,'...had at the end of two plays only grown fat on what it fed on." He goes on to say "why the promise was not, or could not be, fulfilled, we do not know," and later adds that "if Falstaff could not appear, a dramatic explanation for his absence must be provided" because of that promise. The continued use of the characters serves, as I have been saying, the political, social and aesthetic objectives of the text and to a certain degree keeps Shakespeare's promise by keeping Falstaff's memory alive and vivid within the plays by staging the characters most associated with him even after his death. J. Dover Wilson, *op. cit.* pp. 124-5

obscurity, these characters maintain its memory in the play by continuing to represent what it stands for. Bardolph, Pistol and Nym do not forsake the values of the tavern. When they are forced to relocate to the narrative of the King in France, however, they do not surrender their allegiance to the tavern value system and cultural identity (as we well know from Bardolph's robbery of the church for which he is "cut off" [III.iv].) Shakespeare makes it very clear that these characters go to France with the intention of serving their own agenda. Mason goes on to argue that the men's feud at the Boar's Head is overcome by "a recognition of their common cause and of the commercial opportunities offered by war."¹³¹ They do not act to serve the King, nor do they act against him. They join the campaign in order to commit the usual acts of petty thievery, mischief and opportunism that not only have enabled their survival on the margins of society but have served to keep their world a real dramatic presence in the play. Pistol says to his comrades, "Let us to France, like horseleeches, my boys, to suck, to suck, the very blood to suck!" (*H5*, II.iv. ll. 56-7) Indeed, they make good on this promise. At the gates of Harfleur in the next act, we see the Boy giving a soliloquy that "complicate[s] our attitude toward Bardolph, Pistol and Nym" and explains what the men have been doing in France.¹³²

Boy. As young as I am, I have observed these three swashers . . . For Bardolph, he is white-livered and red-faced; by the means whereof 'a faces it out, but fights not. For Pistol, he hath a

¹³¹ Mason, *ibid.*

¹³² Mason, *op. cit.* p. 187

killing tongue and a quiet sword... For Nym, he hath heard that men of few words are the best men, and therefore he scorns to say his prayers, lest 'a should be thought a coward; but his few bad words are matched with as few good deeds, for 'a never broke any man's head but his own, and that was against a post when he was drunk. They will steal anything, and call it a purchase. Bardolph stole a lute-case, bore it twelve leagues, and sold it for three halfpence. Nym and Bardolph are sworn brothers in filching; and in Calais they stole a fire-shovel . . . they would have me as familiar with men's pockets as their gloves or their handkerchers.

(*H5*, III.ii. ll. 27-50)

That the men have been stealing and profiting from the war proves that they are no different than they were when they were taking purses at Gad's Hill. Derek Traversi points out that, for these men, "war and its prospects of plunder are . . . no more and no less than a means of livelihood and an alternative to preying upon one another."¹³³

The play absolutely requires these men to be clear, conspicuous and perhaps above all authentic representations of the third estate because they are crucial to the resolution of the play; the characters need to be identifiable and believable as common people. L.C. Knights argues that what sets Shakespeare's political quality apart from other playwrights of the time is his realism. Knights describes Shakespeare's realism as, "a refusal to follow the abstract and general to obscure the

¹³³ Traversi, *op. cit.* 177

personal and specific.”¹³⁴ Characters such as Bardolph, Nym and Pistol may be at times comic, but they cannot be caricatures. In order to achieve Shakespeare’s political objectives, they must be “real” representations of the subaltern world. Pamela Mason argues that in maintaining the authenticity of these characters “Shakespeare is giving voice to the perspective of the ordinary man and he employs the theatrical vitality of established characters to ensure that Henry will have to work hard to rally support.”¹³⁵

Shakespeare’s political argument requires that the identity of the common person be mated with the office of the King in order to depict something like social harmony in a post-Ricardian kingdom; the *will* of the people, or at least of the army, needs to be mated to the *will* of the King, which is to say, mated to the essential character of Henry V. Shakespeare accomplishes this unity with Henry’s rhetorical speeches and ideological posturing. Since political understanding and the attendant qualities of rhetoric and gesture are among the most weighty attributes of the grown-up Prince Hal, as well as being what several characters (including the King himself) tell us is the purpose and result of his “education” in Eastcheap,¹³⁶ we must understand the achievement of social unity to be a function of the character of the King. S.C. Sen Gupta writes that “it is the King who gives unity unto the play and there is perfect

¹³⁴ L.C. Knights. “Shakespeare’s Politics.” in *Casebook Series: Shakespeare’s Henry V*. Michael Quinn, ed. (Nashville: Aurora Publishers, 1969) 229.

¹³⁵ Mason, op. cit. p. 183.

¹³⁶ Recall Warwick’s speech in the previous play: “The Prince but studies his companions” (*2H4*, IV.iv. l. 67.) In this play, Henry himself proclaims to Montjoy “And we understand [the Dauphin] well / how he comes o’er us with our wilder days, / not measuring what use we made of them.” (*H5*, I.ii. ll. 266-8)

Henry's England—and his mission, it would seem—includes all. By associating the glory and magnificence of England with his men no matter how “mean and base,” Henry effectively turns his claim to France into an egalitarian and multi-lateral push for the common good of all English.

Rhetoric under a reign like Richard's, for example, (which after all did reflect the normative and prevailing political tradition before Bolingbroke) might attempt to rally the troops around the glory of England's stately majesty—the basic idea being that the soldier's *duty* is to fight to protect and propagate the glory of the state. The soldiers win glory in the name of the England. But in Henry's speech the glory of England *is* its people. “For the English,” says Zdeněk Stříbrný, “honor is much more of a national ideal, attainable by all those who deserve it by their deeds.”¹³⁸ King Henry “unifies the dispirited and heterogeneous body under his authority” by personalizing national glory.¹³⁹ In this type of rhetoric, England wins glory in the name of her people. Graham Holderness argues that

Henry's egalitarianism seems to represent, in the theatre at least, an effective challenge to the pre-eminently feudal ideology of war still dominant in the French camp. The French think only of the exploits and honour of their nobility, and regard their common soldiers as “superfluous lackeys” (IV.ii. 26). Henry seems to unite his nation by incorporating his common soldiers into the majesty of the realm . . . ¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Zdeněk Stříbrný. op. cit. p. 89

¹³⁹ Tennenhouse, op. cit. p. 120.

¹⁴⁰ Holderness, et. al. (1987), op. cit. p. 79

Shakespeare's treatment of Agincourt is not necessarily to "recount the course of battle" but to develop the differences between the French and English armies."¹⁴¹ Such a distinction, it must be restated, also dramatizes the differences between the old monarchy of Richard, symbolized politically and socially in this play by the French, and the new one of Henry. The French in *Henry V*, after all, are "concerned with their horses and armor and coming exploits on the field" and are "contemptuous not only of the English . . . but of their own common soldiers."¹⁴² This old regime is contrasted sharply to Shakespeare's hero-king. "Among the English," Sidney Finkelstein says,

Shakespeare's accent is on the common soldiers and Henry's closeness to them, as well as on relaxing the chauvinistic antagonisms that arise among the Welsh, Irish and Scots.¹⁴³

In other words, that the people are included in Henry's vision of England's glory is significant to the play's overall depiction of King Henry as a hero-king who restores legitimacy to his own reign as well as to the institution of monarchy and who reclaims France, all with the perceived help of his men—men who, after all, are the King's "dear friends."

But it is also at Harfleur that King Henry's idea of his subjects begins to depart from Shakespeare's. *Henry V*, even as early as act III, begins to show the weakness in the King's polity. Holderness goes on to point out that Henry's new vision of England

¹⁴¹ Finkelstein, op. cit. p. 94

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Finkelstein, op. cit. pp. 94-5

is limited, if not false. The inclusion of the common soldiery in Henry's speech "is a reconstruction of feudal ideology, not a genuine nationalism; the only ground for this unity of the English nation is the battleground."¹⁴⁴ In other words, it is not the English people that are united under Harry but rather exclusively the military, and even more specifically those soldiers in France at the time. This is quite a bit different from any unity that might enhance or effect the lives of the men of the tavern in any meaningful way. Holderness goes on: "'England' is defined simply in terms of this army: the 'few', the 'band of brothers' whose occupation is to fight and kill."¹⁴⁵ Shakespeare's representatives of the third estate, or at least the ones we have come to know best, seem to recognize this deception. In the scene immediately following Henry's patriotic rally at Harfleur, we see Bardolph, Nym, Pistol, and the Boy, unmoved by Henry's rhetoric, actually backing away from the fray (III.i). The new political ideology espoused in King Henry's speech has failed to connect with these men. The significance of their reaction becomes clear when Bardolph mocks the King and Pistol suddenly becomes a poet:

Bardolph. On, on, on, on, on, to the breach, to the breach!

Nym. Pray thee Corporal, stay; the knocks are too hot; and, for mine own part, I have not a case of lives. The humor of it is too hot; that is the very plainsong of it.

¹⁴⁴ Holderness, et. al. (1987), op. cit. p. 80

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

Pistol. The plain-song is most just; for humors do
abound.

Knocks go and come; God's vassals drop and die;
And sword and shield
In bloody field
Doth win immortal fame.

(*H5*, III.ii. ll. 1-11)

Pistol's poem here illustrates the value system of men from Eastcheap. The war, the politics of international relations, duty and hegemonic power don't make sense to these men, nor does the rhetoric of Henry's rally move them to action.

However, at this point in the play, these men no longer represent the entirety of the plebeian presence. Indeed, from a social perspective in "the latter part of Act Three and all of Act Four, the play expands" and "takes on a new dimension."¹⁴⁶ Because of the specific ideological stance of the play's third estate population and its continued importance to the play as a means of representing a plebeian alternative value system, it is important for Shakespeare to introduce *additional* commoners to the narrative. In other words, Bardolph, Pistol and Nym have heretofore represented the third estate through their particular connection to the tavern community, but because of that connection their usefulness becomes limited. Their association with the specific values of the tavern can no longer satisfy Shakespeare's political objectives. Since part of the playwright's political argument requires that Henry's political rhetoric be persuasive to the common soldiery, Shakespeare must introduce common characters that are free to be moved by those speeches. At Harfleur we meet

¹⁴⁶ Finkelstein, op. cit. p. 94.

Fluellen, Macmorris, and Jamy. These men are instantly recognizable as commoners who speak in dialect, fight over national identity and work underground, digging tunnels under the city. They are, however, ranked military officers whose presence in the play serves to depict the segment of the third estate that is concerned with upward mobility and participates, though from the margins, in the value system of the monarchic hegemony as well as in military convention. Later in the play, Shakespeare adds to his plebeian population three more men—Williams, Bates, and Court. The three men, along with Pistol, Nym and Bardolph (two of whom are dead by the time Bates, Williams and Court are introduced into the play), as well as Fluellen, Macmorris and Jamy, represent the voice of the common man. Mason points out that through these “trios” of men, “the audience is offered a choice of ‘Everyman’ representatives as Shakespeare promotes opportunities through casting to encompass a range of age, background, attitude and experience.”¹⁴⁷ Each trio contributes something meaningful to Shakespeare’s aesthetic representation of common persons, and each trio is given a different relationship to the monarchy and to the war. Bardolph, Nym and Pistol via their association with the tavern world contribute the sense of the independence of the lower classes whose values and concerns are dissociated from those of the State. Fluellen, Macmorris and Jamy represent the new ideals of upward

¹⁴⁷ Mason devotes much of her argument here to a discussion of so-called “trios” of men that are supposed to represent certain attributes of the general audience. These trios include “Bardolph, Pistol and Nym,” “Williams, Bates and Court,” “Fluellen, Jamy and Macmorris” and, interestingly, “Grey, Cambridge and Scroop.” Mason, *op. cit.* p. 184.

mobility and ambition that were beginning to emerge across the classes in an increasingly mercantile Elizabethan world. Finally, Williams, Bates and Court contribute to the political component of the plays by participating in a heated, moral discussion with the (disguised) King in a way that echoes the Queen's conversation with the gardeners in *Richard II*. All of these men ultimately are identifiable as common persons who appear in the idealized and united picture of England that Henry describes in his speeches.

Shakespeare's presentation of Henry's united England comes about as a direct result of the king's relationship with the rich texture of English voices. According to Zdeněk Stříbrný, the "complex unity" of the play emerges "not so much out of a premeditated purpose as out of a true observation of reality."¹⁴⁸ In other words, just as Henry makes use of his relationship with plebeian characters in this play as in prior ones, Shakespeare's artistic quality acknowledges the efficacy of the English, pan-caste. Shakespeare's aesthetic is driven by a "complex unity" that, in this play at least, reflects

The different approach to war by the statesmen and generals, both English and French, and by the common soldiers . . . The Courts, Bateses and Williamses go to war willy-nilly, with a good deal of grumbling.¹⁴⁹

But the political, military and social values of the men serve the King's understanding of them and ultimately his ability to exploit their sympathies:

¹⁴⁸ Zdeněk Stříbrný. op. cit. pp. 98-9.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

To them war is not an arena for winning honour, or profit, but an altar before which they confess their love for England. And the king saves his soul and human face only when he leads them as the brother and father of the whole nation.¹⁵⁰

Once the play starts to engage with battle scenes, the army becomes more and more heterogeneously represented—to the benefit of its presentation of common folk. Williams, Bates and Court represent common interests in the play just as much as Bardolph, Pistol and Nym do. However, once we are “transported” to Harfleur, we can no longer rely on any of these men to carry the burden of representation on their own, or even as a trio. Shakespeare’s dramatic scope has expanded exponentially, calling attention to the diversity of the English commoners and thus establishing an increasingly complex political stance. Shakespeare achieves this expansion of his third estate by staging more and more plebeian moral, social and political attitudes and by demonstrating their role in Henry’s rhetorical invocation of a socially unified England.

This new England and its unity are even more profoundly rendered in Henry’s speech at Agincourt:

King. ... We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he today that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne’er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition.

(*H5*, IV.iii. ll. 60-63)

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Henry's speech includes, of course, a claim that fighting at the battle of Agincourt will lead to greatness, social status and a hero's welcome in England. These are all details that don't seem like particularly extraordinary speech so much as good salesmanship. But what is truly important about the speech is that it reflects an inclusionary ideology that we have seen throughout the play. In order to exploit their sympathy, Henry must recognize and acknowledge the self-determination of his "band of brothers." Political speeches like this one demonstrate not only the rhetorical skill of this King but also a new type of government—a monarchy that at least appears to treat its citizens as more or less autonomous individuals. Henry is, after all, "no tyrant, but a Christian King" (*H5*, I.ii. l. 241), whose speeches so honor the self-determination of his men that he even offers them a chance to quit the army before the big battle. At Agincourt he tells his men:

King. O, I would not wish one more!
Rather proclaim it, Westmoreland, though my host,
That he which hath no stomach to this fight,
Let him depart: his passport shall be made,
And crowns to convoy him put into his purse.
(*H5*, IV.iii. ll. 32-36)

Obviously, these words are designed for political effect, and they are very successful. Although there is no reason to doubt that Henry would honor his offer, he does not expect his troops to leave him but rather hopes to convince them to stay by offering them this way out. Indeed, it is precisely the King's rhetorical skill that convinces the men to march against such grave odds. Because Henry recognizes, and indeed

publicly acknowledges, his men as self-determined, politically, intellectually and morally autonomous individuals, many of his soldiers come to accept his mission as their mission, his interests in France as their interest, and his will as their own.

An argument that claims that Henry's speech is mere rhetoric designed to lure the men to his will certainly has some validity; however, one cannot ignore the fact that Henry's ideology, true or false, is profoundly unlike those of prior reigns. Regardless of Henry's sincerity, Shakespeare did something of great political import by including these speeches in his play. Exploitive as they may be, they do seem to reflect an ideological stance that we see in the King even when he is not on the pulpit, so to speak. Although none of the characters around the campfire before Agincourt recognize him as the King, Henry effectively argues *for* moral self-determination by arguing *against* the King's culpability for his soldiers' transgressions. Disguised as a common soldier, the King says

King. Methinks I could not die anywhere so contented as in the King's company, *his cause being just and his quarrel honorable.*

(*H5*, IV. i. ll. 127-30)

A few lines later we find out the necessity for the emphasized qualification:

King. Every subject's duty but every subject's soul is his own. Therefore should every soldier in the wars do as every sick man in his bed—wash every mote out of his conscience.”

(*H5*, IV.i. l. 181-4)

To this one of the low ranking men whom he is addressing responds,

Williams. 'Tis certain, every man that dies ill, the
ill upon his head; the King is not to answer for it.
(l. 191-2)

Compare the ideological stance of the above exchange with the prevailing political thought during Richard's time. In act I, scene II, of *Richard II*, Henry's grandfather, John of Gaunt, responds to his sister-in-law who makes what even Gaunt acknowledges to be a righteous complaint against the king from the murder of her husband and his brother, the Duke of Gloucester.

Gaunt. God's in the quarrel; for God's substitute,
His deputy anointed in his sight,
Hath caused his death, the which if wrongfully,
Let heaven revenge, for I may never lift
An angry arm against His minister.
(*R2*, I.ii. ll. 37-40)

Gaunt suggests that the people have no place judging the King's morality and owe the monarch their unquestioning loyalty, even at the expense of their immortal souls. It is a far worse sin, Gaunt suggests, to be disloyal to "God's anointed" than to sin on his behalf. This is a type of ideology that appears nowhere in Henry's speeches.

That Henry's words to Williams and his compatriots Bates and Court are spoken in the voice of Harry LeRoi, soldier, and not in the voice of King Henry V is significant. Střibrný points to this scene as one that demonstrates the political strength of Shakespeare's hero-king. "Hardly any other king," he says, "would be able to mix with his common soldiers as freely as Henry does the night before

Agincourt.”¹⁵¹ One could easily say that the King enters into a clandestine conversation with the men in order to survey sentiment among the soldiery and perhaps to spread his political opinion at the level of the commons. In other words, Henry could be said to be trying to participate in, and therefore guide, the opinion of the fighting masses. This may very well be true. However, Harry’s appearance among his soldiers in the forest also has a special significance in relationship to the political aesthetic of the play. The conversation interjects into *Henry V* the political, moral and social opinion of the common soldiery. Here we have common men who have been conscripted to fight against France commenting on their role in the battle. The importance of this inclusion cannot be understated. These men, who are clearly common soldiers and introduce themselves as such, introduce into the play the moral, political and philosophical opinions of the third estate—in other words, they represent the opinion of those conscripted to fight the battles of monarchs:

Williams. But if the cause be not good, the king himself hath a heavy reckoning to make, when all those legs and arms and heads, chopped off in battle, shall join together at the latter day and cry all 'We died at such a place;' some swearing, some crying for a surgeon, some upon their wives left poor behind them, some upon the debts they owe, some upon their children rawly left. I am afeard there are few die well that die in a battle; for how can they charitably dispose of any thing, when blood is their argument? Now, if these men do not die well, it will be a black matter for the king that

¹⁵¹ Zdeněk Štříbrný. op. cit. p. 91

led them to it; whom to disobey were against all
proportion of subjection. (H5, IV. i. 136-49)

To these lines Henry responds, as we have seen, by dismissing the responsibility of the King for his soldiers' moral transgressions; in so doing, he effectively negates the soldiers' moral reflection on the ill effects of war. But it is significant both to the character of the King and to the role of this scene within the play that Williams' catechism does not fall on deaf ears. Indeed, Henry is moved by the man's words in a way that would suggest that his counter-argument was just a front to quell dissent. Henry really seems to consider the concerns of the men whom he is leading to battle against such incredible odds. After the men leave and Henry is all alone, he reveals his true reaction to what he has heard:

King. "Upon the king! let us our lives, our souls,
Our debts, our careful wives,
Our children and our sins lay on the king!"
We must bear all. O hard condition,
Twin-born with greatness, subject to the breath
Of every fool, whose sense no more can feel
But his own wringing! What infinite heart's-ease
Must kings neglect, that private men enjoy!
And what have kings, that privates have not too,
Save ceremony, save general ceremony?
And what art thou, thou idle ceremony?
What kind of god art thou, that suffer'st more
Of mortal griefs than do thy worshippers?
What are thy rents? what are thy comings in?
O ceremony, show me but thy worth!
(H5, IV.i. ll. 235-49)

It is important to note that these lines come immediately before his famous St. Crispin's Day speech before the battle. Henry's political rhetoric is informed by his

rapport with the men achieved and emblemized by exchanges like this one. I have already argued elsewhere that part of Henry V's greatness is his ability to listen to his men.¹⁵² At Agincourt he proves it.

Ultimately, of course, Henry and his men triumph against the French in a heroic battle against impossible odds. The effect of this triumph is that the image of the "hero-king" is established in the historical record and in the play but what is most important is that the play makes it clear throughout that the success at Agincourt was achieved through a socially united English army. The triumph over the French represents the final triumph of a populist monarchy over the old feudal model. While Henry, disguised and temporarily stripped of his political body, was sitting around the campfire discussing the finer points of political morality with his most common men, the French were, after all, bemoaning their "superfluous lackeys" and "peasants," whom the French Constable, at least, accuses of joining the army only to steal glory from the noble officers. He says the French commoners "in unnecessary action swarm about our squares of battle" (*H5*, IV.ii. 1.26). Indeed, even the very announcement of England's success is couched in the distinction between the socially unified army of King Henry and France's out-dated caste system. The French effectively surrender by sending Montjoy to King Henry to make the following request:

Herald. . . . I come to seek charitable license,
That we may wander over this bloody field
To book our dead, and then to bury them;

¹⁵² See Part II above.

To sort our nobles from our common men;
For many of our common princes—woe the while!—
Lie drown'd and soak'd in mercenary blood;
So do our vulgar drench their peasant limbs
In the blood of princes . . . (H5, IV. vii. ll. 73-80)

The French, as I have argued, present the old feudal regime in the play and are associated with Richard and the pre-Bolingbroke English monarchy. That said, Henry's triumph over the French, made possible by his relationship with common men and soldiers (a relationship informed and enabled by his education in Eastcheap) must be read as an ideological triumph: the triumph of new populist monarch over the old absolutist one.

What follows France's surrender is perhaps even more telling. Henry thanks God for the victory and (re)names the field of Agincourt as in effect of a national monument: "call we this the field of Agincourt, / Fought on the day of Crispin Crispianus." (H5, IV.vii. ll. 92-3) At this moment, Fluellen shows up. That a more or less socially marginal character, despite his captain-hood, is the only character given lines congratulating the King or participating in the "celebratory"¹⁵³ afterglow of the English success is significant. Shakespeare could easily have here placed a character that is closer to the King in rank or family relationship, but he doesn't; instead, he relies on Fluellen, a Welsh captain who is most often seen bickering with other common soldiers, including Macmorris, and later Pistol. What Fluellen says here is

¹⁵³ I use this word reluctantly. Henry does, of course, forbid any real celebration at the close of the battle. Nevertheless, the men did just defeat an army much larger than themselves and thus achieved the goal they've had throughout the play—there must be some reaction.

also significant. After recalling the successes of King Henry's great uncle, the Black Prince of Wales, Fluellen invokes the national identity he shares with the King:

Fluellen. If your Majesties is rememb' red of it, the Welshmen did good service in a garden where leeks did grow, wearing leeks in their Mommouth caps; which your Majesty know to this hour is an honorable badge of he service; and I do believe your Majesty takes no scorn to wear the leek upon Saint Tavy's day.

King. I wear it for a memorable honor;
For I am Welsh, you know, my good countryman.
(*H5*, IV. vii. ll. 100-8)

At the very moment of England's great triumph, Shakespeare sends in this relatively insignificant man to banter with the King over matters which might otherwise appear to pale in significance to the fact that the English army has just defeated a French army that is more than five times its size and, in so doing, has won France for England. It is as if with France won, Henry's identity, which had heretofore been intricately tied up with his "historical" character, reverts (somewhat) to the comic Prince Hal of Eastcheap. Indeed, the two scenes that follow this victory revisit the King's comic-tragic demeanor that we know well from *1* and *2 Henry 4*, as Henry goes to some length to play a "joke" on Williams and Fluellen (IV.vii and viii). What is important is that all of this is being done even before the dust of Agincourt has settled and, indeed, even before the body count is delivered. Part of the reason for this may be a problem of staging chronology: the Heralds and Gower having been sent by the king to "bring just notice of the dead / On both our parts" (*H5*, IV.vii. *s.d.*

l.121) cannot very well return after only a few lines.¹⁵⁴ But the effect on the political tenor of the play is that even at the hour of triumph, the populist component of Henry's reign is foregrounded, almost to the point of excluding the so-called historical narrative that recreates chronicle source material.

The socio-political component of Shakespeare's historiographic project is fully realized in *Henry V* and in particular in the triumph at Agincourt. The plays make it abundantly clear that without the presence of characters representative of the third estate, Henry's victory—which is a very important part of the English national myth—would not have been possible. Tillyard observes that in order for Henry V to be Shakespeare's great "political hero" (which for better or worse, he is), he "must be the symbol of some great political principle."¹⁵⁵ Henry's heroism, surely, is his relationship to what gives him his strength—a political acumen that acknowledges the self-determination of marginalized persons and is able to exploit that self-determination to achieve his own agenda. Indeed, the political acumen of Shakespeare's Henry V reflects the strengths, if not polity, of the monarchs of the Tudor dynasty, who "were successful by personal astuteness rather than by

¹⁵⁴ Although this is precisely what happens in both Kenneth Branagh's 1989 film production of the play as well as in Laurence Olivier's 1944 version. Both directors constrict the chronology of this aspect of the play by limiting the hostility between Williams and "Harry LeRoi", in IV.i. and thus negate the need to revisit the dynamic between Williams and the King in IV.vii and viii. Kenneth Branagh *Henry V*. DVD, 138 minutes; MGM Pictures, 1989. Laurence Olivier *William Shakespeare's Henry V*. DVD, 134 minutes; United Artists, 1944.

¹⁵⁵ Tillyard (1946) op. cit. p. 305

exemplifying any principle.”¹⁵⁶ In other words, according to Tillyard, *Henry V* was able to “best stand in for Elizabethan political principle” by representing the social climate of the time. In order to do so “Shakespeare for his hero was obliged ultimately to choose *homo* not *rex*.”¹⁵⁷ Shakespeare’s version of historical fact and legend relies heavily on plebeian voices as a means of achieving the aesthetic and dramatic objectives of his craft. By populating his narrative with characters like Bardolph, Nym, Pistol, Fluellen, Bates and Williams, Shakespeare effectively recreates the social dynamic of his audience. Since his subject matter is not merely historical but historically relevant to the place and time in which he was writing, the inclusion of those characters must be understood as a means of participating in the discursive practice of social and political historicizing. In other words, since Shakespeare was addressing to his audience a historical play that, dramatically speaking, includes them, any study of the ways in which those characters interact with historical and dramatic events must be useful. One important concern of the Elizabethans was the restructuring of English social hierarchy. During the Renaissance, a new “middle” class was emerging throughout England and much of Europe. The reasons for this are industrial, economic, political and cultural. However, the trend may have been understood through the lens of Bolingbroke’s usurpation of the crown that

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

established a new understanding of political order. Shakespeare's second tetralogy demonstrates as much.

An argument that Shakespeare's Henry V exploited his men's sentimentality in his patriotic speeches is certainly compelling. The plays make it clear that Hal's relationship with the tavern community amounts to social research, which would lead to a new sort of politician-king who ultimately uses that research to better understand how to "make use of them," to echo Henry's own description (*H5*, I.ii. 1.268) What this means, then, is that Henry could be understood to be a Machiavellian king who spent his youth as a sort of class-spy gathering intelligence he would one day use to lure those same men into serving his will. As I said, this argument is persuasive. Shakespeare's play seems to suggest that Henry was a great and memorable king because he was able to use the people. But there is a big difference between Henry, the King, who includes the common people in his idealized picture of a unified England, and Shakespeare, the playwright, who does the same thing. Where Henry relied on a public presentation of social inclusion to effect his will and "busy giddy minds," Shakespeare's treatment of those same types of characters was in fact a means of participating in a historiographic discourse that presented social and political subject matter through his aesthetic responsibility to his craft.

Part V
Staging the Historical Epic.

*O, for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention:
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act,
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!*
(*H5*, I. Chor. ll. 1-4)

It has become quite commonplace in modern Shakespearean criticism to consider *Henry V* to be the focal point of Shakespeare's second historical tetralogy of plays.

¹⁵⁸ To do so, from a historicist perspective, makes sense. Not only is it the final episode in the series, it is the thematic, literary and historical resolution to which the cycle has been leading.¹⁵⁹ Zdeněk Stříbrný observes that the centrality of *Henry V* stems from its foregrounding of the principle concerns of Shakespeare's particular historical view. He says that the play

may certainly be considered as central, or at least helpful in revealing his artistic approach to politics, politicians, world-order, kingship, the people, the Elizabethan nation-state, and more generally to war and peace—in a word to history.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ See Harold Bloom. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. op. cit. p. 249ff. Also, Alvin B. Kernan. "The Henriad: Shakespeare's Major History Plays." op. cit. p. 211. Earlier scholars, such as Johnson and Pater and even Yeats, for example, understood the plays through an entirely different perspective, one without the influence of what we now understand as Historicist criticism that treats the plays as works participating in cultural, social and historical discourse. Nevertheless, Johnson, at least, does, at one point engage in a sort of historicist discussion regarding this play. Arguing against another critic who claims that lines of the play "were copied from King James prelates," Johnson dismiss the claim based on his understanding of James' theological dispensation. All of this seems dated to modern scholars who, unlike their counterparts in the eighteenth century, attribute the first performance of the play to a date (1598) that is earlier than James' coronation in 1603. [The identity of James as Elizabeth's successor, while speculated, was a legendarily well-guarded secret before her death. Johnson, op. cit. p. 190.]

¹⁵⁹ And from which the next cycle follows.

¹⁶⁰ Zdeněk Stříbrný. "Henry V and History" in *Shakespeare in a Changing World*. Ed. Arnold Kettle. (Norwood, PA: Norwood Editions, 1974.) 84

It is not enough to say that *Henry V* is the central play simply because it marks the end of a series as such, but rather that it is central in importance because the thematic trajectory of the preceding plays suggests that we will find some sense of resolution in the final installment. Alvin B. Kernan points out the historical trajectory of Shakespeare's project and the political and cultural changes that occurred along that trajectory. He explains that in "historical terms the movement from the world of Richard II to that of Henry V is the passage from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance and the modern world."¹⁶¹ While the two plays of *Henry IV* do much to discuss the political and economic restructuring that occurred during this generation of Lancastrian monarchy and the civil wars associated with those changes, one cannot escape the ubiquitous presence of one figure in particular: Harry, Prince of Wales. The dramatic and literary objectives of all four plays are achieved only through Henry V. It is through the character of King Henry that the sin of Bolingbroke is atoned (at least as far as this series is concerned) and that the reconciliation, for better or worse, of the historical narrative and the comic green world of Eastcheap is achieved. In other words, the plays stage a sort of coming-together of the stately world of the monarchy and the "chaos" of the lower classes by gradually merging two representative narrative trajectories.

¹⁶¹ Kernan, "The Henriad." op. cit. p. 211.

But none of this is to suggest that the first three plays are in any way unnecessary or secondary. Indeed the plays can be read and understood as individual productions in their own right. However, when one is faced with the task of attempting a critical or performative reading of one play, it becomes necessary to consider material from the others. Productions of the plays, whether on stage or film, have often made use of material from plays other than the one being presented. There are numerous examples of these inclusive productions, including, at least, three films produced from this series of plays.¹⁶² The way each play illuminates the others suggests that the historical scope of Shakespeare's project is both expansive and intricately causal. Yeats' says that "the five plays that are but one play, have, when played one after another, something extravagant and superhuman, something almost mythological."¹⁶³ That myth is fully realized in *Henry V*—play *and* character.

As historical products, the plays of the second tetralogy seem overwhelmingly preoccupied with the presentation of a certain political problem and with an attempt at the resolution of that problem over the course of many years and, indeed,

¹⁶² Both Kenneth Branagh (1989) and Laurence Olivier (1944) directed productions of *Henry V* that make use of material from the *Henry IV* plays; in both cases, the directors resurrected scenes and bits of scenes that involve Falstaff and the tavern narrative. In the BBC versions of these plays produced during the 1970s and 1980s, each production begins with an episodic recapitulation of the key events of the previous play or plays.

¹⁶³ Yeats, op. cit. p. 164. This quote appears in a discussion of Shakespeare history plays including *R2*, *1H4*, *2H4* and *H5*. What is the fifth play is unclear in Yeats' statement. It is possible, I suppose, that since he was talking about this particular series (*R2-H5*) and its thematic cohesions that he may have been including the *Merry Wives of Windsor*. I find this possibility to be unlikely, however. More likely, is that Yeats considers all of the plays titled after a certain king to be one play. In this formulation, both "tetralogies" would amount to five plays since there are five kings named in the titles.

generations. Bolingbroke, by deposing Richard, dismantled the old regime and in so doing severely damaged the political ideal of a king's so-called divine right. However, Bolingbroke's own reign, as a result of his deposition of Richard, was so tainted with the sin of that act and the concomitant civil upheaval that no real political nature was ever able to emerge. The dust did not settle, so to speak, during his lifetime. Henry IV's reign was little more than a long series of struggles against factions that kept him from creating an effective monarchy. However, with the crowning of his son, English history saw the true birth of a post-Ricardian monarchy forged in a new, socially unified¹⁶⁴ England—politically stable, not despite the wars in France but because of them.

The most cursory details of the plays come from Shakespeare's historical source material. As such, Shakespeare's audience very likely had more or less full access to the type of historiographic discourse Holinshed, for example, was describing, particularly when it concerned the descent of the crown. Like the historical ballads¹⁶⁵ and folk legends of the time, Holinshed's *Chronicle* is, as I have argued, indicative of the type of historiographic discourse that was common in Elizabethan England:

¹⁶⁴ I use the word "unified" somewhat reluctantly and, ultimately, loosely. For the purposes of my argument here, the definition of the term "unified" reflects the unity of Henry's army in France. While England certainly cannot be said to be completely socially unified, nor can its historiographic products, it is true that Shakespeare's plays are unified in the sense that classes that had been heretofore invisible are made visible.

¹⁶⁵ There were numerous folk ballads available to Elizabethan England that retold the tales of kings, including those of Richard II, Henry IV and V, and others. These ballads were often engaged in the same hegemonic historiography that we see in Holinshed and others. See Joseph Ritson. *Ancient Songs and Ballads from the Reign of Richard II to the Revolution*. originally published in London by Reeves and Turner, 1877. 3rd Edition, W. Carew Hazlitt, ed., (Detroit, Singing Tree Press, 1968).

socially top-heavy, hegemonic, and overwhelmingly concerned with the affairs of political and military leaders at the expense of its representation or even acknowledgement of ordinary citizens.¹⁶⁶ In short, the historical record available to Shakespeare and his audience was precisely what E.P. Thompson called English History Proper.¹⁶⁷ But despite the shortcomings of his source material, Shakespeare's plays are not to be read as mere recapitulations of the so-called English History Proper. While the importance of the political, economic and military concerns of the plays cannot be ignored, we must give proper attention to the breadth of Shakespeare's historiographic sensibility as well as to his responsibility to the aesthetic demands of the stage. His concerns are, as I have argued, multi-dimensional; the plays make certain political, social, literary and aesthetic arguments, all of which appear to culminate in *Henry V*. Střibrný goes on to identify the marriage between Shakespeare's presentation of English History Proper and the aesthetic production of a pan-caste representation, particularly in *Henry V*.

As the historical events, described in chronicles and sung about in ballads, afforded, apart from the battle itself, rather little dramatic matter, [Shakespeare] was both forced and inspired to create a new dramatic genre, what we might call an epic drama.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ By no means do I mean to suggest that this type of historiographic practice was in any way limited to Elizabethan England. Indeed, such discursive practices are very much still a part of modern historical writing and scholarship. Furthermore, I want to acknowledge that not all of Shakespeare's source material was "historical" nor was it all necessarily oriented toward maximum political efficacy and hegemony. As I have noted earlier, one of Shakespeare's sources for *1 and 2 Henry IV* and *Henry V* was an anonymous literary work called *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* and was as concerned with Prince Hal's rambunctious youth as Shakespeare plays are. See Part III above, pp. 54-5

¹⁶⁷ Recall Thompson's formulation in his article "History from Below" op. cit. p. 481.

¹⁶⁸ Střibrný, op. cit. p. 172.

Shakespeare's *Henry V* is, according to Střibrný, the "most epic of all his plays." If the plays can be said to have been making something of a political point, it is here that that point truly comes to fruition. The resolution of the historical cycle is accomplished along with certain other narrative, literary and dramatic concerns that are settled in the play. This play is the crowning work in the series because it is here that Shakespeare's aesthetic, political, dramatic and historical objectives are most fully realized in ways that call into question the adequacy of English History Proper. In the second tetralogy especially, English History Proper is coupled with a textual layer that includes plebeians or third estate representatives: in *Richard II*, this layer includes the groom and the gardeners as well as those un-staged but present commoners to whom Bolingbroke did "dive into their hearts / with familiar and humble courtesy" and who, in response, "revolt on Hereford's side" (*R2*, I.iv.1. 26-7, and II.ii. 1. 89); in *Henry IV* we meet the tragic-comic band of thieves and barflies in Eastcheap with whom the Prince cavorts; finally, in *Henry V*, the narrative world of the commons merges with that of the King, resulting in the greatest military victory in English history up to that point and representing a new and unified socio-political dynamic. What is significant about this quality of Shakespeare's craft is that socially marginalized voices such as Falstaff and Pistol drive the aesthetic of the plays despite being largely absent from his sources. Indeed, these figures are absolutely crucial to the overall resolution of the plays when read together. Despite the comic qualities of

some of these characters, the plays demand that we see common people as fleshed out characters who are defined not by their “antagonism to orthodoxy”¹⁶⁹ but as integral components of a nation and who, ultimately, participate in the salvation of political image and public faith in English monarchic order.

Shakespeare’s historiography, then, must be understood as a wholly different literary product than the socially top-heavy and hegemonic historiographies of Holinshed and Hall. David Riggs observes this innovation in Shakespeare.

It is during the later sixteenth century that English historical writing first begins to display the distinctive features of a modern historiography: the formulation of scientific criteria for validating historical evidence; the cultivation of legal and constitutional, and of territorial and local, history; the periodization of ordinary historical chronology; *the systematic analysis of political authority and its sources*; and the attempt to discover a practical, as opposed to a moral, utility for historical inquiry.¹⁷⁰

In other words, Shakespeare’s historiographic productions, since they demonstrated clearly different conceptions of political and social structure, must be understood to be participating in a new system of historical and cultural discourse. Discussing “the degree to which Renaissance drama was a political activity” and the ways in which Shakespeare participated in that activity, Leonard Tennenhouse suggests that

By exemplifying how he includes recalcitrant cultural materials and dramatises their suppression under the pressure of official strategies of idealisation, we could identify such a subversive Shakespeare.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ E.P. Thompson, op. cit. p. 481.

¹⁷⁰ David Riggs. *Shakespeare’s Heroical Histories*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971) 35. Emphasis added.

¹⁷¹ Tennenhouse, op. cit. p. 125.

It is such a “subversive Shakespeare” that I have tried to describe here. Picture Bardolph, Pistol, Nym and the Boy ducking away at Halfleur in spite of the “idealisation” of Harry’s rhetorical pep-talk. Tennenhouse goes on to say that his “point is rather to suggest that during the Renaissance political imperatives were also aesthetic imperatives.”¹⁷² In other words, by treating third estate characters, for example, as realistic, human, and self-determining individuals, rather than merely tools of hegemony, Shakespeare’s aesthetic sensibility demonstrates a consciousness of the social contradictions inherent in his culture and the limits of any historiography that privileges economic and political power at the expense of ordinary people. This quality, I argue, infuses the plays with a sense of the social and moral consequences of the absolutist monarchy as a subjective ideology. The plays, since they do describe a history that leads to the monarchy of Queen Elizabeth, are concerned with the cultural and political heritage of Shakespeare’s audience. In other words, the plays describing history are of especial pertinence to Shakespeare’s contemporary society and, as such, participate in cultural discourse of political identity. The playwright seems to have been at least tacitly aware that the people whom his society and its historical records considered socially, politically and economically ineffectual actually did have a considerable and very real efficacy in the historical trajectory that created the Elizabethan world. And what is more, Shakespeare felt it necessary to include

¹⁷² Ibid.

them in his public reenactment of the creation of that world—which is to say, in his own historiographic project.

If we are to understand the political and social component of Shakespeare's recreation of history as a trajectory that occurs over the course of the series of plays, we can say that it began with *Richard II*, during which this quality was, as I have said, in its infancy. The aesthetic production of history that we see in *Richard II* depends on characters that the play only allows scant stage time. The gardeners and the groom appear in relatively short, isolated set pieces that nevertheless contain some of the most powerful political commentary in the play. In *1 Henry 4*, those set-pieces expand to become a narrative world that competes with the play's presentation of English History Proper. The tavern world of Falstaff and Mistress Quickly—populated by thieves, oslters, soldiers, drawers and tapsters—establishes the values of the common people as useful, if not always totally validated, alternatives to the order of the state. The next play features the gradual immersion of that separated narrative into the mainstream historical thread of the court. That immersion is complete when Harry and his “band of brothers” restore faith in the legitimacy of the English throne by conquering France in *Henry V*. But this historical—and dramatic—trajectory would not have been possible without authentic third estate characters. L.C. Knights writes,

Shakespeare's political realism is not of course Machiavellian or modern realism . . . but it is certainly based on a clear perception of the actualities of political situations.¹⁷³

In other words, Shakespeare's dramaturgy was aware of the political reality of the third estate and used it not necessarily to create historical change but to create historiographic and dramatic products. The inclusion of plebeian characters, then, demonstrates awareness on the playwright's part of the social utility of the masses as a means of expressing intellectual and cultural identity. Shakespeare's history plays demonstrate a considerable departure from conventional historiographic productions that are concerned merely with English History Proper and not with any sense of pan-caste reality. Because Shakespeare's history plays include the Gardeners and the Grooms, the Bardolphs, Pistols, Williamses and Falstaffs, they do more than recreate English History Proper—the plays stage a history of the English people.

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¹⁷³ L.C. Knights, *op. cit.* p. 229

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Biography of the Author

Richard Brooke Morrill Jr. was born in September of 1973 and grew up in Waretown, which was once a quaint fishing village but is now a cranky retirement community, on the Barnegat Bay in New Jersey. After floating around Southern Ocean County for a number of years, he finally found himself enrolled at Rutgers University where he received a B.A. in English Literature and Religion in 2002. That same year, he married Melanie Seickel and moved to Maine, where they have lived together happily ever since.

After graduation, the author will pursue a Ph.D. in English with a special concentration in the English Renaissance at The University of Connecticut. He is a candidate for the Master of Arts degree in English Literature at The University of Maine in the Spring of 2004.