

Henry IV Part 1 and Renaissance Ideologies

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Shakespeare's histories have long been sites of political contention, appropriated overtly or covertly, completely or incompletely, by differing causes. *Richard II*, read by some moderns as a manifesto of Tudor monarchical orthodoxy, was performed in 1601 to support the Earl of Essex's attempt to seize the throne, Queen Elizabeth herself recognizing the play's aptness: 'I am Richard II, know ye not that?'¹ Laurence Olivier's 1944 film of *Henry V* raised wartime morale by making the Allied invasion of France the antitype of Henry's successful conquest. Kenneth Branagh's 1989 film of the play translates it into the ethos of Thatcherite Britain. The film emphasizes the horror of war, and shows how state affairs are manipulated by vested interests (in *Henry V*, the church), but it treats such abuses with what seems a combination of protest, resignation, and admiration for the skill of the abusers. Branagh's Henry plays a series of conspicuously discontinuous roles – youthful prince seeking counsel, artful dissembler, stern justicer, inspiring general, plain soldier as wooer – and seemingly believes in each role as he plays it; again, the film registers neutrally both the discontinuity and the sincerity. The film thus mirrors the ruthless idealism, or idealistic ruthlessness, of Thatcherism. The skinhead culture of danger and violence ruling in its tavern scenes is not far removed from the thuggish aspect of its nobility; by not quarantining the 'low' persons into a separate comic realm the film effects a Thatcherite alliance between working-class conservatism and larrikin aristocracy.

The controversial potential of the histories would have been a truism for the Renaissance, which held political matter to be encoded in literary texts of all kinds. For Philip Sidney, one use of tragedy was that it 'maketh kings fear to be tyrants and tyrants manifest their tyrannical humours'; for George Puttenham, a characteristic of pastoral was 'under the vaile of homely persons to insinuate and glaunce at greater matters'.² The political repercussiveness of literary discourses was acknowledged in

practice by the machinery of censorship that regulated the Renaissance book trade and theatre and that cut the abdication scene from the first printed text of *Richard II*. Censorship in less direct form left its mark on *Henry IV Part 1* when Falstaff replaced Oldcastle under pressure from Oldcastle's influential descendants. The encoding of the political in history plays was rediscovered for the twentieth century in the studies of E. M. W. Tillyard, who saw the plays as manifestations of an 'Elizabethan world picture', and Lily B. Campbell, for whom they were 'mirrors of Elizabethan policy'. But those scholars assumed a direct and simple correspondence between text and official doctrine, in which the histories restated 'the accepted political philosophy of the Tudors'.³ They did not allow that official Tudor statements on politics, such as the homilies of the Church of England, or semi-official restatements, such as the chronicles of Halle and Holinshed, might represent only one position in an arena of contestation, or one term in a variable play of ideas. Hence they did not allow that Shakespearean texts might incorporate such statements among others without being committed to their authority.

Current studies of Renaissance culture seek to redefine more flexibly the relation between text and context, by dissolving or realigning the boundaries traditionally drawn between literature, politics, and history. On the one hand, the text is implicated in its political and historical context in more diverse and more elusive ways than was once recognized: the approach to the filmic text of *Henry V* sketched above takes account of some of these ways, and shows also how the 'context' includes the conditions of a text's reception as well as the conditions of its production. On the other hand, what we call the political or historical context is itself constructed in part by texts. To know 'English history' of the fifteenth century is for most of us to know in terms dictated by the Shakespearean history plays. The documents or other evidence on which a historian would base an alternative version are themselves texts produced, no less than Shakespeare's, for particular purposes and audiences. In addition, the boundaries of the political have been redrawn for the Renaissance as for other fields to include much that was once excluded, for example the politics of gender as a factor in the production of texts and

in the construction of sexual identity within texts.

A useful tool for understanding the relation between text and context is the concept of ideology. This term has commonly come to denote a political philosophy, as in speaking of the 'ideology' of the Liberal or the Labor party. Strictly defined, ideology refers to a set of more fundamental assumptions, often unspoken and unexamined, that may be shared by seemingly opposed philosophies, as both Liberal and Labor parties share the ideology of parliamentarism or economic growth. The ideology of a society or culture consists of the concepts and beliefs, the institutions and symbols, the practices and values through which it defines itself and its members, and in terms of which its members structure their experience. Ideology is very powerful because largely tacit, existing in areas of deeply held but unexamined assumptions, habits and fears. Its activities are dynamic and complex, confirming the existing social order through 'consolidation', answered by the 'subversion' that challenges the social order and its ideology, and in turn suppressing, neutralizing, or appropriating the challenge through 'containment'. One arena for these activities is literature, which is both shaped by ideology and contributes to its shaping.

Two cognate but divergent approaches to the relation between ideology, literary texts, and literary study have emerged in recent years. One is a renovated Marxism. For orthodox Marxists, ideology projects and validates, while at the same time it masks, the power of an economically entrenched ruling class. The revolutionary overthrow of that class and its ideology will occur by the working of essentially economic forces. The theories of Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser query this process, arguing that revolution may begin with intellectual forces that, by exposing, attacking, and transforming ideology, open up the possibility of reconstructing its economic base. In literary studies, these theories and their radical outcome are evident in the work of the 'cultural materialists':

if we feel ... the need to disclose the effectiveness and complexity of the ideological process of containment, this by no means implies a fatalistic acceptance that it is somehow inevitable and that all opposition is hopeless. On the contrary

the very desire to disclose that process is itself oppositional and motivated by the knowledge that, formidable though it be, it is a process which is historically contingent and partial – never necessary or total. It did not, and still does not, have to be so.⁴

Applied to Shakespeare's histories, the methods of cultural materialism study the dynamics of consolidation, subversion, and containment, emphasizing the radical potential of the plays for both Renaissance and modern audiences. *Henry V*, for example, 'can be read to reveal not only the strategies of power but also the anxieties informing both them and their ideological representation. In the Elizabethan theatre to foreground and even to promote such representations was not to foreclose on their interrogation'. Even in its tendency to suppress subversive voices, *Henry V* opens up subversive possibilities: 'to silence dissent one must first give it a voice, to misrepresent it one must first present it'.⁵

A second approach derives from the work of Michel Foucault, who prefers to term ideologies 'discourses of power'. Power for Foucault is a more elusive entity than for Marxists. Instead of deriving from and being perpetuated by essentially economic class relationships, it exists in and circulates between multiple loci – law and law enforcement, professions like medicine and psychiatry, academic disciplines. These structures and institutions, seemingly natural, in fact serve the interests of their own power, classifying and reifying through their discourses crime and punishment, health and sickness, reality and illusion. Beyond that, power is exercised in every form of social, personal, and sexual transaction: individuals are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. Transferred to literary studies as 'new historicism', this theory holds that texts reflect the infinitely multiple exercises of power inhering in social practices:

the circulation of social energy by and through the [Renaissance] stage was not part of a single coherent, totalizing system. Rather it was partial, fragmentary, conflictual; elements were crossed, torn apart, recombined, set against each other; particular social practices were magnified by the stage, others diminished, exalted, evacuated. What then is the social energy that is being circulated? Power, charisma,

sexual excitement, collective dreams, wonder, desire, anxiety, religious awe, free-floating intensities of experience: in a sense the question is absurd, for everything produced by the society can circulate unless it is deliberately excluded from circulation.⁶

The literary text also participates in this circulatory system. It exercises its own power over its audience, in part by appropriating the cultural power of the materials and practices it represents. In the preceding quotation this process sounds exuberant, but new historicism is more usually sombre or resigned, implying the impossibility of extricating ourselves from the interlocking structures and discourses of power:

1 Henry IV itself insists upon the impossibility of sealing off the interests of the theater from the interests of power. ... Theatricality, then, is not set over against power but is one of power's essential modes. ... Again and again in *1 Henry IV* we are tantalized by the possibility of an escape from theatricality and hence from the constant pressure of improvisational power, but we are, after all, in the theater, and our pleasure depends upon there being no escape, and our applause ratifies the triumph of our confinement. The play operates in the manner of its central character, charming us with its visions of breadth and solidarity, 'redeeming' itself in the end by betraying our hopes, and earning with this betrayal our slightly anxious admiration.⁷

Despite their differences, these critical theories share a number of assumptions and corollaries.⁸ Clearly, they suppose the significance of all texts to be in large part political. In this they subvert the dominant critical ideology that tended to make attention to political significance an impure critical practice – always a difficult position to sustain for texts like Shakespeare's histories. Further, the political significance of a text will not necessarily reside in its overt teaching, even if this could be agreed on. The text itself is not a unitary entity, expressing purely the ideas or vision of a controlling author. Shakespeare's histories were produced by an author but also by other factors not fully separable from the author: state control, through licensing and patronage; theatrical conditions, such as conventions of staging or character types, the composition of the company, and

the preferences of its audience; the pervasive presence of Renaissance and Tudor ideologies, embodied in the foregoing factors and also in such things as the chronicles that were the plays' sources. A text produced in this way will be revealing in marginal actions as well as main action, inconsistencies as well as coherences, missing persons as well as persons represented, silences as well as speeches. Its multiple 'authorship' will complicate its relation to political issues. Ideological consolidation, subversion, and containment will be interwoven, as they are in *Richard II* (making it a weapon for both legitimists and usurpers) or *Henry V* (allowing Branagh's film to mix protest with compliance).

How are history, and the political realm in which it unfolds, constructed in *Henry IV Part I*? In part, by the play's persons, when they proffer explanations of events or justifications of their actions. The doctrine that history and the state are ordered by divine providence, fundamental to official Elizabethan ideology, is voiced, naturally enough, by the play's foremost official personage. In the parley before Shrewsbury, King Henry invokes a classic image of cosmic order, exhorting Worcester to 'move in that obedient orb again/ Where you did give a fair and natural light, / And be no more an exhaled meteor'.⁹ In the private conference between Henry and Hal, the king ponders whether God may be intervening to punish his 'mistreadings' (presumably his usurpation, though even in confessional mood Henry is evasive on this subject):

I know not whether God will have it so
 For some displeasing service that I have done,
 That, in his secret doom, out of my blood
 He'll breed revengement and a scourge for me;
 But thou dost in thy passages of life
 Make me believe that thou art only marked
 For the hot vengeance and the rod of heaven
 To punish my mistreadings. (III.ii.4-11)

Against this ideology of history the play poses sceptical attitudes. Glendower's conviction that supernatural phenomena mark him as extraordinary is countered by Hotspur's naturalistic explanation of such phenomena (III.i.25-35). Hotspur's

exasperation with Glendower's portents – 'A couching lion and a ramping cat, / And such a deal of skimble-skamble stuff' – subverts the reverence for such portents inculcated by Tudor apologists for order. A potent Renaissance antithesis to providential history was Machiavelli's revival of the ancient schema of history as a dialectic of *virtus* (the valour signally exemplified in the Roman republic) and *fortuna* (whose capricious favours could make and unmake kings). The Machiavellian Worcester attributes Henry's rise to *fortuna*, operating through a train of events conspicuously devoid of divine management, and aided by an opportunism conspicuously removed from antique *virtus*:

It rained down fortune show'ring on your head,
 And such a flood of greatness fell on you –
 What with our help, what with the absent king,
 What with the injuries of a wanton time,
 The seeming sufferances that you had borne,
 And the contrarious winds that held the king
 So long in his unlucky Irish wars
 That all in England did repute him dead –
 And from this swarm of fair advantages
 You took occasion to be quickly wooed. (V.i.47-56)

The force of each of these utterances is variously modified by its dramatic context. King Henry is now the beneficiary of the doctrine of cosmic order, but he has become so by disturbing that very order; the enunciation of the doctrine by such a person, and at a moment of political crisis, makes it a rhetorical weapon as much as a received truth. Henry's fear that Hal's waywardness may be a divine scourge for his crimes has been long since negated for the audience by Hal's reassurance that his waywardness is a politic pose; the conference scene further diminishes the part of providence by progressing from Henry's ruminations on divinely ordered history to Hal's revelation of history as a triumph of his own human foresight and human will. Henry's contrite fear of divine retribution proves fugitive: he reverts to his usual pragmatic self as he dwells contemptuously on the shortcomings of a Richard II or a Hal and admiringly on the skills of the usurper, whether his own performance in displacing Richard or the audacity of his own present adversary, Hotspur. Despite Henry's overt piety, the text thus renders it

sceptically. Both in Henry's mind and in the action, history is made by Machiavelli's princely *virtus* seizing the opportunities of *fortuna*.

The king's self-cancelling orthodoxy demystifies royalty and its providential sanctions more effectively than the scepticism of Hotspur and Worcester. Hotspur's ridicule of supernatural portents registers as a passing manifestation of his pugnacity, not a considered position. An audience discounts Hotspur's subversiveness as it excuses his excesses: they bear 'an adopted name of privilege – / A hare-brained Hotspur, governed by a spleen'. Though Worcester's narrative of Henry's opportunism rings true, it is the narrative of one who is himself an untrustworthy Machiavel. Where Hotspur's caprice engenders lack of confidence, Worcester's consistency does the same, since his monochrome cynicism always colours his version of events. Finally, there is the fact that King Henry eventually dies in the Jerusalem chamber of his palace (*Henry IV Part 2*, IV.v.232-40). In fulfilling the prophecy that Henry would die in Jerusalem, history seems to manifest after all a providential ordering. Yet even here doubts arise. Henry directs that he be returned to the Jerusalem chamber to meet his end: is his death an instance of prophetic fulfilment or another instance of his knack for stage management? And if prophecies must be fulfilled in such indirect crooked ways, is the providence that they manifest a useful guide for human life?

The persons of *Henry IV Part 1* are thus engaged in the contestation between virtue and fortune, defining those terms and arguing their place in history. At the same time, history is itself a matter for contestation, the creation of rival texts. The modern discovery of the textuality of history revives an identification well established in the Renaissance and encoded in a convertibility of terms: what we call a story was then usually called a history, and what we call history was then often called story.¹⁰ Knowing history in *Henry IV Part 1* is a matter of devising and propagating one's own story about the past, making history is a matter of projecting one's own story on to the future.

The parleys before the battle of Shrewsbury are preeminently contests in historiography. Northumberland, Hotspur,

Worcester, and Vernon all relate their stories of the past, magnifying or extenuating their own actions. King Henry dismisses Worcester's narrative with the contempt due to seditious rant or popular romance, while recognizing the danger posed to official power by such unofficial history:

These things, indeed, you have articulate,
 Proclaimed at market crosses, read in churches,
 To face the garment of rebellion
 With some fine colour that may please the eye
 Of fickle changelings and poor discontents,
 Which gape and rub the elbow at the news
 Of hurlyburly innovation. (V.i.72-8)

It is a sign and a safeguard of the king's power that he is able to suppress rival stories and promote or enforce others. Henry relies on sheer assertion to suppress Hotspur's heroic story of Mortimer's battle with Glendower: 'Thou dost belie him, Percy, thou dost belie him! ... But, sirrah, henceforth / Let me not hear you speak of Mortimer'. Elsewhere he is a more artful fabulist, opening the play with a hagiographic story of himself as royal crusader, and drawing it to its close with the historian's moral: 'Thus ever did rebellion find rebuke'. When speaking to Hal in III.ii, Henry's story of how he deposed Richard II uses history according to classic Renaissance prescript, through an exemplary narrative teaching his heir political wisdom. Though hypnotically powerful, this intimate story is also self-absorbed and weary, imparting a rare pathos to Henry's role.

There is an element of competition between father and son, king and heir. Hal's story of the prodigal prince vies with King Henry's story of the courteous exile, paralleling it but striving to overgo it. While the king's most eloquent story dwells on the past, Hal's political mastery is measured by the assurance with which he tells and controls a story reaching into the future. This assurance surprises Henry himself, but it works its fullest effect on the play's audience, whom Hal flatters by his confidences and then leaves waiting until a second play to see them fulfilled.

Hotspur's political failure is represented emblematically by a failure to tell his stories or have them accepted. His prodigally brilliant anecdote of the perfumed lord at Holmedon does not

sway Henry on the political point at issue. His epic narrative in defence of Mortimer is rejected by the king. Hotspur rails against 'this forgetful man', but Henry's amnesia is politic, while it is Hotspur's relations that are marred by lapses of memory: 'what do you call the place? / A plague upon it! it is in Gloucestershire'; 'A plague upon it! I have forgot the map'. In composing his testament on the battlefield, death cuts him off mid-sentence, leaving the last word to Hal.

Falstaff too invents a story about the future, and he too attempts, after a fashion to turn parts of it into history and to suppress other parts: 'when thou art king, let not us that are squires of the night's body be called thieves of the day's beauty'; 'Do not thou, when thou art king, hang a thief'; 'I'll be a traitor then, when thou art king'; 'Banish plump Jack, and banish all the world!' Though Falstaff occupies formally the position of the misleader of youth in morality convention, the manoeuvring between Falstaff and Hal is altogether more knowing. Falstaff has a place in Hal's carefully plotted parable of reform, but the fantastic and anarchic story in which Falstaff places Hal can exist only as a story. Similarly, Falstaff's narratives of the past parody the self-serving histories by which other persons justify themselves: 'Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing'; 'But, as the devil would have it, three misbegotten knaves in Kendal green came at my back and let drive at me; for it was so dark, Hal, that thou couldst not see thy hand'; 'I grant you I was down, and out of breath, and so was he; but we rose both at an instant and fought a long hour by Shrewsbury clock'. Hal falsifies these stories of the past and thwarts those of the future, but his getting the last word over Falstaff is not the triumph it may be with Hotspur. In their defiant falseness, Falstaff's stories do not ask to be believed, but they refuse to be discarded; like Sidney's poet, Falstaff nothing affirms and therefore never lieth. In a sense he therefore triumphs over all the contestants.

Shakespeare surely takes pleasure too in telling *his* story of the past, in mastering his audience and commanding its assent. Though he teaches history he also tells a story: 'with a tale forsooth he cometh unto you, with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner'. And though

Shakespeare's efficient mastery is sometimes compared to Hal's, his self-reflexive delight is also comparable to Falstaff's. The private conference of King Henry and Hal, for example, is charged with the portentous power of high historical events. Shakespeare does what historians like Tacitus and Suetonius were praised for doing: he conducts his audience into the privy chambers and secret counsels of the mighty. Yet in seeming to claim such privileged knowledge, the text denies the claim. A public conference translates plausibly enough to a public stage, but in a private one the actors are conspicuously actors, the fictionality palpable.

However masterly or outrageous our stories, we are never entirely in charge of the story we tell. Shakespeare writes his story as an Elizabethan; the Shakespearean text is necessarily implicated in Elizabethan ideology, though it also pushes against its boundaries. One of the ways in which *Henry IV Part 1* speaks and perhaps interrogates Elizabethan ideology is in its concept of 'England'. Like other modern states, Tudor England incorporated and pacified regions with disparate cultures (such as Wales) and conflicting political loyalties (such as the west country, conservative and Catholic, and the north, under the sway of its traditional nobility). The resulting nation state was for many of its inhabitants an alien entity, as its larger and still more disparate successor remains. The Shakespearean histories contributed to the Tudor ideology that defined England as an entity of self-evident political integrity. In plays such as *Henry IV Part 1* and *Henry V*, the definition is based on England's difference from its ancestral foe. France is the 'other', preyed on by devilish powers and oppressed by a rigid system of rank; England by contrast manifests the soldierly virtues of plain speech and fraternity. In *Henry IV Part 1* outlying and recalcitrant regions of England itself constitute the 'other', both threatening and comical, to be brought under the rule of a centralizing monarchy.

The kingdom is evoked in *Henry IV Part 1* in a less totalizing way than in other histories, and more in its geographical and social specificity. Sir Walter Blunt enters the first scene 'Stained with the variation of each soil/Betwixt that Holmedon and this

seat of ours'; the audience hears of Charing Cross and the Wild of Kent, 'the banks of Wye and sandy-bottomed Severn', Coventry and Sutton Co'fil'. In one way this evocation breaks down the unity of the kingdom into its diversified components; in another way it ratifies the incorporation of those places in a unitary political entity. (A similar dialectic operates between the play's highly diverse bodies and the unitary body politic.)

At the play's opening King Henry strives to consolidate his rule or defend his borders on two remote fronts. In Wales, the uprising of 'the irregular and wild Glendower' challenges the integrity of the kingdom from within. As these epithets intimate, Glendower and his uprising are stigmatized as barbaric. Mortimer's dead are subject to 'transformation' (i.e. mutilation) by the women of Wales, in ways that 'may not be/ Without much shame retold or spoken of'. This atrocity story awakens atavistic hostilities and fears. It represents women as (presumably) castrators; it associates the marauding Welshwomen with the 'unnatural' female warriors of barbarically remote nations; in the term 'transformation', it hints, albeit irrelevantly, at witchcraft. The outrage activates as well language taboos, with a hint that in addition to committing unspeakably horrible acts the Welsh possess a grotesquely unspeakable tongue. Glendower likewise is reputedly endowed with powers of infernal magic and boasts and babbles in a strange tongue. Shakespeare draws on familiar conventions for demonizing and ridiculing the other: his Joan de Pucelle is likewise a witch, and his Frenchmen speak (often boastfully) a ludicrously strange tongue.

Hotspur's scoffs are a means to foreground Glendower's otherness, but, in a characteristic Shakespearean countermove, Glendower answers Hotspur with dignity and the scoffs recoil on Hotspur himself. By representing Hotspur in his turn as a rude northern youth, the move marginalizes him and his rebellion against monarchic authority. In some ways, Hotspur's uncouthness represents an 'English' straightforwardness, like that of Henry V the wooer, but when set against the canny, streetwise antics of Hal or Falstaff it turns into a comic rusticity guaranteed to raise a laugh from a metropolitan audience. This ancient source of comedy marries theatrical convenience to

monarchic and national ideology. The partnership is logical, since the comic convention and the political ideology both depend on the existence of a centre of cultural and political power like London.

The Scots are a different proposition again. 'Brave Archibald,/ That ever-valiant and approved Scot' engages Hotspur in a battle that merits description in the high style. At the end of the play he is again honoured as a worthy opponent:

His valors shown upon our crests to-day
Have taught us how to cherish such high deeds,
Even in the bosom of our adversaries. (V.v.29-31)

A history play of course demands heroism, and heroism demands mighty opposites, as Achilles has Hector and Aeneas Turnus. But giving this function to the Douglas has ideological significance. The Scots are still in Shakespeare's time a separate nation, and a Protestant nation; their king is a cousin of England's queen, and possibly her heir. Their identity, not in the 1590s a threat to the integrity of the kingdom, is not a matter of fear or mirth. Yet their future seems to be written for them in the career of the Douglas: to fight nobly but to succumb, like the Trojans and the Rutulians, to a stronger imperial destiny.

The imperial ideology whose formation in England coincided with Shakespeare's career marks *Henry IV Part 1* at several points. If it had been allowable, even a duty, for King Henry to civilize the 'irregular and wild' Welsh by the imposition of English rule, so it would be for Queen Elizabeth with the natives of the Americas or the Indies. The king's opening promise of a crusade, deferred through two plays, is triumphantly fulfilled by the French campaign in *Henry V*. The idea of a crusade had religious meaning in Shakespeare's England through the Reformation vision of England as a new Israel. Its fulfilment in a secular conquest answered to the Renaissance destiny of England as a new Rome.¹¹ The combination of these models in an imperial ideology is voiced when Henry joins a Roman martial ethos (proleptic of *Coriolanus*) to a militant Christianity (proleptic of Milton's faith that when 'God is decreeing to begin some new and great period ... What does he then but reveal himself to his servants, and as his manner is, first to his English-men').¹² The

work of ideological consolidation is witnessed by the unusually graphic religious idiom:

Forthwith a power of English shall we levy,
Whose arms were moulded in their mother's womb
To chase these pagans in those holy fields
Over whose acres walked those blessed feet
Which fourteen hundred years ago were nailed
For our advantage on the bitter cross. (I.i.22-7)

Though territorial conflicts form part of the play's ideological basis, it is dynastic conflict that is foregrounded. Dynastic issues perturbed England throughout the reign of the childless Elizabeth, and their direct influence on particular Elizabethan plays has been traced.¹³ Less direct but pervasive anxieties mark the *Henry IV* plays, with their persistent questioning and fears of what the future holds, surely a displacement of contemporary anxieties. This mood is more marked in *Henry IV Part 2*. King Henry's nightmare vision of England under the misrule of his son (IV.v.119-37) is translated into the anarchic jubilation of Falstaff (V.iii.131-5). Lady Percy's lament for Hotspur as the 'mark and glass, copy and book' of chivalry (II.iii.9-45) gazes backwards towards lost virtue, creating a contrast to the fearful forward gaze, and giving characteristic voice to the melancholy of Elizabeth's last decade. In *Henry IV Part 1*, the fears relate to a kingdom divided between rival claimants. The text hints at such fears in the relation between Hal and his brother John until their battlefield reconciliation, and labours them in the conference when the rebels parcel the kingdom into three jurisdictions.

Most specifically, anxiety over Elizabeth's heir perhaps finds voice in Henry's anxiety over his own succession. When chiding Hal for his waywardness, he doubles Richard II and Hal, himself and Hotspur, holding out the threat of usurpation repeating itself:

For all the world,
As thou art to this hour was Richard then
When I from France set foot at Ravenspurgh;
And even as I was then is Percy now. (III.ii.93-6)

At the play's opening, he toys with the thought of an alternative succession:

O that it could be proved
 That some night-tripping fairy had exchanged
 In cradle clothes our children where they lay,
 And called mine Percy, his Plantagenet! (I.i.86-9)

What seems merely a pathetic attempt to find consolation by turning history into romance could in monarchical times become the matter of dynastic conflict. The legitimacy of Elizabeth herself had in her father's day been subject to contradictory pronouncements, according to religious and dynastic exigencies. The career of the royal impostor Perkin Warbeck had challenged the house of Tudor on the basis of birth stories hardly less fantastic.¹⁴

The overt dynastic conflicts of *Henry IV Part 1* conceal a suppressed dynastic issue. The Percies' candidate for the throne, Mortimer, claimed his title by descent through a female line. The rebellious alliance supporting Mortimer is formed through the marriage of Mortimer to Glendower's daughter, and through Hotspur's marriage to Mortimer's sister.¹⁵ The role of these women in the transmission of political power is acknowledged only tacitly. The silence of the text corresponds to the well documented difficulties of Renaissance men with the concept of a female prince. The role that women do play likewise reveals the ways in which Renaissance and male ideologies deny them autonomy, noble women and common women proving similar in this respect. When the Percies and their allies assemble to plan their rebellion, their wives join them, but they are introduced to the scene only after matters of politics and strategy have been settled. Their part of the scene fills the time while the 'book is drawn', the political treaty is put in writing and prepared for sealing. Against the language of power inscribed in this book, Mortimer's nameless wife is allowed the languages of amorous looks, womanly tears, uncomprehended Welshness, and charming song.

Hotspur's wife Kate shrewdly refuses to match her skills in singing with Lady Mortimer's:

Hotspur Come Kate, I'll have your song too.
Lady Percy Not mine, in good sooth.
Hotspur Not yours, in good sooth? Heart! you swear like a
 comfit-maker's wife

Swear me, Kate, like a lady as thou art,
 A good mouth-filling oath, and leave 'in sooth'
 And such protest of pepper gingerbread
 To velvet guards and Sunday citizens. (III.i.243-6, 251-4)

Though Kate speaks English, the language of power, her speech is discounted by Hotspur's ridicule. By fixing on Kate's mild oaths to degrade her linguistically to the citizen class, Hotspur half denies her the nobility that in fact helps elevate him to his political standing. To prove her rank as a lady, she must be full of strange oaths like a soldier, but to do this would be to forfeit her rank in a different way. When Lady Mortimer avers 'She'll be a soldier too, she'll to the wars', Mortimer decisively consigns her and Kate to the women's place, in the rear of the army. Likewise, when Kate tries to speak of matters military or political, Hotspur refuses to answer or even acknowledge her language, talking across her to his servant and devalorizing by mimicry her language of conjugal concern (II.iii.59-98). He reimposes traditional gender roles by impugning Kate's wisdom, constancy, and secrecy as untrustworthy because womanly (II.iii.103-8). In the event, a nice irony attaches to Hotspur's words, since he is defeated by his own lack of wisdom in prematurely joining battle with the king, and by the inconstancy of his allies.

Disempowered by sexual ideologies, the women's languages nevertheless evince a power of their own. Lady Mortimer and her music cast a momentary spell over turbulent affairs of state and boisterous low-life alike. Enchanted by her amatory, Cymric, and musical languages, Mortimer endows her fancifully with the royal rank that his political rebellion cannot win her:

I understand thy kisses, and thou mine,
 And that's a feeling disputation.
 But I will never be a truant, love,
 Till I have learnt thy language; for thy tongue
 Makes Welsh as sweet as ditties highly penned,
 Sung by a fair queen in a summer's bow'r,
 With ravishing division, to her lute. (III.i.202-8)

Kate regains a measure of power through knowledge. Mastering the privileged language of Renaissance science, she diagnoses

Hotspur shrewdly though indulgently as 'altogether governed by humours'. Though excluded from martial affairs, Kate's intimate observation of Hotspur's disturbed sleep and waking pre-occupation enable an alternative knowledge of warfare, in which its conventional language recedes into a dreamlike gathering of disjointed signifiers:

And thou hast talked
 Of sallies and retires, of trenches, tents,
 Of palisadoes, frontiers, parapets,
 Of basilisks, of cannon, culverin,
 Of prisoners' ransom, and of soldiers slain. (II.iii.47-51)

Like Falstaff's social underworld, but with a quiet insistence that is perhaps more profoundly challenging, Kate's psychic underworld contests the values of court and nobility. Her evocation of the penalties of power foreshadows the king's speech on sleep in *Henry IV Part 2*, but Kate overgoes even Henry in her knowledge that the realm of martial action is a dream, the suffering of its subjects the reality.

The play's other woman, the hostess of the tavern, has on the face of it an autonomy and a place in the world of business denied the ladies of high degree. But in fact she acts in the name of an unseen husband, and Hal, the future king, draws attention to the patriarchal source of her authority: 'What say'st thou, Mistress Quickly? How doth thy husband? I love him well; he is an honest man' (III.iii.90-1). Though she bests Falstaff in a dispute before Hal over his unpaid reckoning, she is bested in turn by the male and knightly camaraderie by which Falstaff has a claim over Hal (III.iii.163-9). No less than the Welsh of Lady Mortimer or the conjugal appeals of Lady Percy, even the language of unarguable justice goes unheard when voiced by the hostess. The text thus treats all its women rather uneasily, recognizing their lack of political power, sometimes allowing them power of a different order – unless we view it as a mere simulacrum of power.

Like the hostess, the common people at large are granted no hearing on matters of justice or rule. Carriers, drawers, and thieves contribute to the social variety that the text celebrates, but not to political debate. Falstaff's troop of common soldiers

is not only unheard, it is even unseen. King Henry's verbal evocation of rebels of low degree – 'fickle changelings and poor discontents ... moody beggars' – is used to discredit Worcester's case. Political power, which is created among the nobility by guile and speech, is imposed on the commons by the gallows that shadow the play. This rift between high and low may be crossed, but only in one direction. The thief Gadshill boasts of being joined by thieving 'great oneyers'. The planning of the Percies' rebellion echoes the plotting of the theft at Gad's Hill. Henry recounts how he 'stole all the courtesy from heaven', making theft an act of Promethean *virtus*. The text thus allows the ethical descent of rebels into thieves, but not the political ascent of thieves or their like into rebels. Noble degradation recurs when Hal promises Falstaff the post of hangman, and Hotspur denounces his elders for acting under Henry as 'the agents or base second means, / The cords, the ladder, or the hangman rather'. Executing the law like hangmen or flouting it like thieves, the nobility is declassified. An emergent monarchical ideology, distinguishing between king and subject, supersedes a residual feudal ideology, distinguishing between noble and vile blood.

Questions of ideological subversion and containment arise most problematically with the person of Falstaff. Flouting law and knightly honour, comically mimicking piety and royal gravity, indulgent and rapacious, Falstaff is the embodiment of subversion. Yet tradition alleges that Falstaff was a favourite of Queen Elizabeth (as he would be of Dr Johnson), suggesting that the representation of subversion in the controlled context of drama may paradoxically contain it, reinforcing orthodoxy or reassuring the orthodox. These contrasting potentials of his role recur with the parallels between Falstaff and others in the play. Falstaff's outrageous hopes for the future voice in frank terms the self-interest that moves the noble personages; his feats of story-telling parody King Henry's feats in creating and legitimating his own history. Such parallels may discredit the values of the great, but they may also justify them as universal and unavoidable.

As a successor of the traditional Vice and as a final exemplar

of the old school of Tudor clowning, Falstaff challenges and delights through his collusion with the audience.¹⁶ In his catechism on honour he examines the audience in the guise of an authority figure such as schoolmaster or parson. But the thrust of his questions overlays the authoritarian role with the innocence of the Socratic inquirer. And his answers on the audience's behalf flout ethical and political authority with a daring that the audience could hardly muster. By this means, he poses the imperative of self-preservation against orthodox ethics, the arguments of the body against mere words. But the means react against the arguments. By appealing to us directly, and hence reinstating us as an audience in a theatre, Falstaff diminishes the force of his subversion; he merely parodies the seditious speeches that Henry IV, and the Tudor authorities, feared. Falstaff parodies everything, even subversion, and the audience receives Falstaff's outrageousness in the spirit of comic paradox and holiday release.

Similarly, Falstaff as the representative of liberty appeals to the audience by his engaging disrespect for authority, his assertion of irreducible human desires, and even his preposterous implausibility: 'Bacon-fed knaves! they hate us youth. Down with them!' This implausibility also contains his arguments. The only person in the play with lines so comprehensively anarchic, Falstaff is the allowed rebel whose threats give delight and hurt not. His subversive appeal is compromised more fundamentally as it becomes clear that his defiance of authority does not spring from a concern for justice but from self-interested licence, 'liberty' in its pejorative Renaissance sense. Paradoxically, Falstaff is most subversive when he is most subservient, expounding Tudor political morality. Finally called to account for his fictions about the Gad's Hill robbery, Falstaff perpetrates a climactic fiction that is at the same time an impeccable statement of political orthodoxy: 'By the Lord, I knew ye as well as he that made ye. ... Was it for me to kill the heir apparent? Should I turn upon the true prince?' To make such an outrageous new lie (as it surely is) the vehicle for his submission is also to discredit that submission. Falstaff demonstrates here the possibility of subverting political order from within, in the act of complying with it.¹⁷ His action typifies the tactics of everyday dissent

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against totalitarian regimes: rendering the system absurd through parodic compliance. *Henry IV Part 1* confirms that though there is perhaps no totally subversive act, subversion may be most successful where least expected.

NOTES

- 1 E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage* (Oxford, 1923), ii, 206.
- 2 Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry*, in *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan van Dorsten (Oxford, 1973), p.96; Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, ed. Gladys Willcock and Alice Walker (Cambridge, 1936), p.38.
- 3 Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London, 1944); Campbell, *Shakespeare's 'Histories'* (San Marino, 1947); the quotation is from Campbell, p.125.
- 4 Jonathan Dollimore, 'Shakespeare, cultural materialism and the new historicism', in *Political Shakespeare*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester, 1985), p.15.
- 5 Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 'History and ideology: the instance of *Henry V*', in *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis (London, 1985), pp.226-7, 215.
- 6 Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Berkeley, 1988), p.19.
- 7 Greenblatt, pp.46-7.
- 8 Not all recent studies of Renaissance literature in its historical and political contexts could be classed as 'historical materialist' or 'new historicist': see for example David Norbrook's valuable study in the empiricist mode, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance* (London, 1984).
- 9 *The First Part of King Henry IV*, ed. M. A. Shaaber, in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, gen. ed. Alfred Harbage (Baltimore, 1969), V.i.17-9. All quotations are from this edition.
- 10 Hence the appellation by early printers of Shakespeare's 'histories', with no implied distinction between a work of scholarship and a dramatic text.
- 11 Frances Yates, *Astraea* (London, 1975), pp.29-87.
- 12 *Areopagitica*, in *The Prose of John Milton*, ed. J. Max Patrick (New York, 1967), p.320.
- 13 See Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies* (London, 1977), esp. pp.111-15 (on *Henry V*).

- 14 When James II was dethroned in 1688, the claim of William III was partly based on the belief that James's heir was illegitimate and had been smuggled into the royal palace.
- 15 As the play puts it at I.iii.156; at III.i.194 she is correctly made Mortimer's aunt.
- 16 Andrew Gurr, *The Elizabethan Stage, 1574-1642*; 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1980), pp.87, 101.
- 17 For a discussion of this strategy in Elizabethan England and for its general sociological ramifications, see Maureen Quilligan, 'Sidney and His Queen', in *The Historical Renaissance*, ed. Heather Dubrow and Richard Strier (Chicago, 1988), pp.171-96.