

LIQUID ASSETS: THE FUNCTIONS OF FORGETTING  
IN SHAKESPEARE'S SECOND HENRIAD

by

JONNI KOONCE DUNN

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

DECEMBER 2012

Copyright © by Jonni Koonce Dunn 2012

All rights Reserved

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An awareness of how much I owe to so many people humbles me even at this time of deep personal satisfaction. I am hopelessly indebted to Kevin Gustafson, whose serendipitous remark about forgetfulness and whose indefatigable encouragement and cogent advice while supervising this project have been indispensable. The other members of my committee, Jacqueline Stodnick and Amy Tigner, are also due my heartfelt gratitude, the former for prodding me through Anglo-Saxon English when I wanted to drop out, and the latter for insisting that I foreground my own arguments. Other members of the UTA faculty who generously shared their knowledge with me throughout my graduate study are Johanna Smith, Stacy Alaimo, the late Simone Turberville, Tom Porter, Laurin Porter, and Rajani Sudan. I will resist the temptation to thank every teacher I ever had, but Dr. Joe Cash, formerly of Abilene Christian University and recently retired from McNeese State, deserves my thanks for reading my essay aloud in 1965 and kindling a lifetime interest in English. My children, Cassel Dunn Talley and E. Fletcher Dunn, have been enthusiastic supporters of my academic efforts, sacrificing in their own lives to see that I complete this long-desired goal. I am grateful to my late dear mother, Genevieve Vickers Koonce, who taught me to love reading, and my extraordinary father, Phil Barrett Koonce, who taught me not only the value of perseverance but also, through his confrontation with Alzheimer's, the deepest meaning of forgetfulness. I thank my husband, Riley Dunn, for his unflagging encouragement and love that have been more instrumental in my achievements than he knows. My sincerest acknowledgement is the debt I owe to God, who "makes my feet like the feet of a deer; He enables me to stand on the heights." (Psalm 18:33).

November 8, 2012

LIQUID ASSETS: THE FUNCTIONS OF FORGETTING  
IN SHAKESPEARE'S SECOND HENRIAD

Jonni Koonce Dunn, PhD

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2012

Supervising Professor: Kevin Gustafson

This dissertation examines Shakespeare's second historical tetralogy, in which the playwright employs forgetfulness despite its pathologized position in early modern culture and its seeming incompatibility with history. In *Richard II*, the King's forgetfulness attempts self-stabilization while his sustained forgetfulness, in response to the historical sublime, results in tragic poetry. Nietzschean ideas of judicious forgetfulness and plasticity, Langerian concepts of comedy, and the Andersonian notion of a unifying national amnesia inform a comparison of the functions of forgetfulness for Henry IV, Prince Hal, and Falstaff in *1 Henry IV*. In *2 Henry IV* forgetfulness first deploys in the figure of Rumor, who uncovers the constructed, amnesic nature of history, and then in nostalgia that mirrors national amnesia, and culminates with the rejection of Falstaff. In *Henry V* the forgetful official history given by the Chorus is contrasted with the play's action, forgetfulness of guilt proves essential to the King's pursuit of greatness, his amnesic rhetoric to his army functions to craft a "band of brothers," and the benefits of judicious forgetfulness are shared with Katharine by Henry V. Often using images of liquidity, Shakespeare foregrounds the beneficial role that forgetfulness plays in the negotiation of life's traumas, in the achievement of greatness, in the creation of national unity, and in historiography itself.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
Chapter	Page
1. EARLY MODERN FORGETTING, HISTORY AND THE SECOND HENRIAD.....	1
1.1 Memory and Forgetting in Early Modern England.....	3
1.2 Early Modern Views of History and Historiography.....	9
1.3 Forgetting in Shakespeare: A Scholarly Opportunity.....	13
1.4 Critical Views of the Second Henriad.....	17
1.5 Founding Principles of the Argument.....	22
1.6 An Overview of Chapter 2 <i>Richard II</i> .....	23
1.7 An Overview of Chapter 3 <i>1 Henry IV</i> .....	25
1.8 An Overview of Chapter 4 <i>2 Henry IV</i> .....	28
1.9 An Overview of Chapter 5 <i>Henry V</i> .....	29
2. <i>RICHARD II</i> .....	33
2.1 The Abridged Richard.....	34
2.2 Unsettling Historiography: Uncertainty and Making Choices.....	36
2.3 Double Amnesia: Fair Succession and England's Landlord.....	38
2.4 Forgetting and the Shattering of Identity.....	42
2.5 "Who Do You Think You Are?": Richard and Experimental Identity.....	48
2.6 Language, Literature, and the Creation of Tragic Art.....	49

2.7 “Whose Idea Was This in the First Place?”:	
Richard Jump-Starts the Future .....	51
2.8 The Historical Sublime and Forgetting .....	53
2.9 “He Thinks He’s Jesus Christ!”	
Richard and Christological Identification .....	61
2.10 Richard and Self-Incrimination .....	64
2.11 Richard Onstage: Self-Disintegration as Performance Art.....	66
2.12 “The Lamentable Tale of Me”: <i>De Casibus</i> to Take Away .....	70
2.13 “And Now for Something Completely Different”:	
York Family Values .....	72
2.14 The Tragic Artist Talks About His Work: Imagery and Timing .....	73
2.15 “But Will It Play in Peoria?”: <i>Richard II</i> as History .....	75
2.16 “What Just Happened?”: The Meaning of Richard’s Death .....	76
3. <i>1 HENRY IV</i> .....	79
3.1 “The Center Cannot Hold”: Decentralization in <i>1 Henry IV</i> .....	80
3.2 Why Nietzsche Now? .....	81
3.3 What Nietzsche Says About History and Forgetting .....	82
3.4 Shakespeare’s New Deployment	
of Forgetfulness in <i>1 Henry IV</i> .....	85
3.5 Forgetfulness at the Court of Henry IV.....	87
3.6 Falstaff: The Poster Child	
for Early Modern Forgetfulness .....	95
3.7 “If You Have to Explain It, It’s Not Funny”:	
Falstaff and Comic Theory .....	96

3.8 The Play Extempore: The Best Days of Their Lives .....	100
3.9 Hal and His Own Private Forgetfulness .....	102
3.10 The Long-awaited Encounter:	
Hal vs. Henry, Who Never Sees It Coming .....	106
3.11 Forgetfulness at Shrewsbury:	
Separation and a Unified Account.....	110
3.12 Hal, the Best at Being Vast .....	113
4. 2 <i>HENRY IV</i> .....	115
4.1 Rumor and False History.....	116
4.2 The Eternal Sunshine of the Perpetual Present.....	119
4.3 “No, Really. Who’s Dead?”	
The Blurring of History and Fiction.....	120
4.4 “Old Men Forget”—And That’s Really Important.....	121
4.5 Goodbye to the Boar’s Head and Falstaff .....	124
4.6 “Take Him Out!” “Leave Him In!”	
Critical Response to the Rejection .....	127
4.7 Andersonian Imagined Community .....	136
5. <i>HENRY V</i> .....	140
5.1 The Apologetic, Patriotic Chorus .....	142
5.2 <i>Henry V</i> and Epic Proportions .....	144
5.3 “His Lips Are Moving”: The Chorus as Historian .....	146
5.4 Andersonian Imagined Community Made Simple .....	147
5.5 The Amnesic Rhetoric of Henry V .....	149

5.6 Failure Is an Option: Harry Le Roi vs. Williams.....	152
5.7 “One More Time, with Feeling”:	
Henry and the St. Crispin’s Day Speech.....	157
5.8 A Double Debt to Amnesia: Traitors and Multinational Captains .....	164
5.9 “Plotted Exculpation” Means Never Having to Say You’re Sorry .....	167
5.10 Nietzschean Plasticity: Just How Far Can It Stretch? .....	178
5.11 Why Is [Katharine] Here? .....	181
6. ERASURE, RE-IMAGINATION, AND RE-INSCRIPTION.....	187
REFERENCES .....	192
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION .....	204



## CHAPTER 1

### EARLY MODERN FORGETTING, HISTORY, AND SHAKESPEARE

An ardent valorization of memory and a consequent pathologizing of forgetting are reflected in much of the theological, medical, philosophical, ethical, and fictional literature of the English Renaissance. During the past decade or so, scholarship devoted to this period has written quite extensively about the role of memory, but only recently have we begun to turn our attention to forgetfulness, primarily because the subject previously has been disregarded as the mere antithesis of memory. However, as Garrett Sullivan, Christopher Ivic, and Grant Williams have noted, forgetfulness is not merely the absence of memory but rather an erasure conducive to re-imagination and re-inscription.<sup>1</sup> The recent acknowledgement of forgetting as a fertile space for re-imagination and re-inscription provides wide opportunity of investigation for Shakespeare scholars, since the playwright is not particularly diligent in actually staging memory, most notably in the later history plays.

Jonas Barish affords Shakespearean scholars interested in memory study the following moment of mildly embarrassing deflation: What deeply interests Shakespeare, according to Barish, is not memory but rather “our shameful proneness to blame [forgetting] for our own evil actions, to use it to plead diminished capacity, as though such a plea could absolve us at one stroke of all guilt and nullify all possible penalty.”<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare, he bluntly opines, shows “no curiosity” about the *artes memorativae* which figure so prominently in much medieval literature

---

<sup>1</sup> Garrett Sullivan, *Memory and Forgetting in English Renaissance Drama*, (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge UP, 2005). *Forgetting in Early Modern Literature and Culture: Lethe's Legacies*, ed. Christopher Ivic and Grant Williams (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Jonas Barish, “Remembering and Forgetting in Shakespeare.” In *Elizabethan Theater: Essays in Honor of S. Schoenbaum*. ed. R. B. Parker and S. P. Zitner (Newark: U of Delaware 220.

and to which early modern writers often refer.<sup>3</sup> One may quibble with Barish's assessment as to the degree of Shakespeare's lack of interest in memory, or may consider his opinion as being commentary on the playwright's treatment of guilt only, but, in light of the paranoid climate of the Renaissance about forgetting, Barish deserves our thanks for causing our awareness of the playwright's plentiful use of forgetfulness.

The ubiquity of forgetfulness seems quite incongruous and therefore even more noticeable in Shakespeare's later history plays, a genre in which we might expect to encounter determined efforts to resurrect the past for the use of the present. That is, in fact, the claim made for historical drama by Shakespeare's contemporaries, such as Thomas Nashe, who maintains that plays are "a rare exercise of virtue" that resurrected England's valiant ancestors from "the Grave of Oblivion" in sharp reproof to "these degenerate, effeminate days of ours."<sup>4</sup> Despite Nashe's assurance of the virtue of historical drama to sustain the past, and in the midst of a milieu almost hysterically devoted to memory, William Shakespeare's second tetralogy of history plays moves against these recuperative tides, exploring the unconscious and conscious suppression and subsequent re-imagination of the past on both the individual and national levels. On the individual plane, we find the intensely personal and introspective forgetfulness of a deposed Richard II, the raucous, self-forgetting disorder of Falstaff and Hal, the studied amnesia of the usurper Henry IV, the faulty nostalgia of Justice Shallow in rural Gloucestershire, and the calculated erasure by Henry V of his former self and its companions. These instances of the expungement and re-inscription of personal memory mirror the forgetfulness revealed on a national plane in Shakespeare's staging of English history, and threaded throughout is a growing awareness of the prospects for empowerment that attend strategic forgetfulness. Recorded events from Holinshed and other sources are severely truncated, the ultimately tentative and partial nature of history is self-consciously foregrounded, and the factionalism of noble families, alien territories, and social classes is subsumed in an amnesia that proves generative of a

---

<sup>3</sup> Barish, 219.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Pennilesse His Supplication to the Divell*, 1592.

national identity. Flowing throughout the plays are images and themes of liquidity—tears, blood, melting snow, all the water in the Wye, small beer—and Adrian Poole draws our attention to the association between liquids and forgetting that has can be traced back to classical antiquity.<sup>5</sup> These images and themes of liquidity often connect to the functions of forgetfulness that can be detected in Shakespeare's second Henriad.

The significance of the forgetful nature of these four history plays will become more apparent if we examine certain early modern attitudes—first, toward memory and forgetfulness, and then toward history and historiography.

### 1.1 Memory and Forgetting in Early Modern England

In the first half of the sixteenth century, the greatest part of English culture sanguinely believed in a providential view of history that also embraced legends about its Trojan roots and accepted as fact the studious repetitions of virtually unverified information. Paradoxically, the culture was, at the same time, almost frantically devoted to memory, which is reflected in much of the literature of the time by an ardent valorization of memory and the consequent pathologizing of forgetting. The esteemed position of memory in early modern culture may be seen in this 1605 passage from Pierre de la Primaudaye.

[T]he *Imaginative* virtue... is in the soule as the eye in the bodie, by beholding to receive the images that are offered unto it by the outward sences: and therefore it knoweth also the things that are absent, and is amongst the internall sences as it were the mouth of the vessel of memorie, which is the facultie and virtue that retaineth and keepeth whatsoever is committed to the custody therof by the other sences, that it may be found and brought forth when neede requireth. Therefore, *Memorie* is as it were their treasurer to keepe that which they commit unto it, and to bring it forth in due time and season.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Adrian Poole, "Laughter, forgetting, and Shakespeare," in *English Comedy*, ed. Michael Corder, Peter Holland, and John Kerrigan (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 94.

<sup>6</sup> Pierre de la Primaudaye, *The Second Part of the French Academie* (London: George Bishop, 1605), 146-147.

Here Primaudaye presents the then-prevailing view of memory as not only a receptacle but also the treasurer that oversees whatever is entrusted to it, producing its riches for use when the time is right. It follows, then, that failure to remember would be equivalent to the loss of treasure entrusted to memory.

Forgetfulness, however, seems to have been imagined by the early moderns as being less a cognitive or psychological condition than a negative somatic state. As a mode of action—and sometimes inaction—it was regarded as having serious social implications. The early modern extrapolations of forgetfulness include lethargy, excessive sleep, a lapse into hedonism, particularly inordinate sexual desire, and an ultimate loss of identity, all of which were regarded as markers of an undisciplined body that was seen as a threat to itself and society as well. For example, among the numerous cautionary tales against any forgetful lack of bodily discipline, we find a *de casibus* historical exemplum of a late edition of *Mirror for Magistrates*, the first-person narrative of King Iago, who died of lethargy. He himself recounts how an abundance of rest, peace and wealth during his reign “made mee forget my Iustice late well vsde” so that he abandoned his previous virtue and indulged in misgovernment and vice.<sup>7</sup>

The abhorrence of forgetfulness and its extrapolations was certainly not limited to fictive writing. Treatises on ethics blend psychological, medical, and theological discourses in their consideration of the necessity of memory for the preservation of a desired solidarity of self and society because this disintegration first of self and then of society were feared as constituting a cascading pattern. Furthermore, these theoretical treatises, such as Primaudaye’s *French Academie* and Pierre Charron’s *Of Wisdom*, assert that to know oneself—*nosce te ipsum*—is the true and perfect care of the soul, while its converse is not mere ignorance of self but is rather

---

<sup>7</sup> *Mirror for Magistrates*, ed. John Higgins, 1574, 236.

forgetting of self.<sup>8</sup> It is significant that Thomas Rogers' 1576 *Philosophicall Discourse, Entituled the Anatomie of the Minde* cautions as follows:

Know thy self, and thou shalt not offend; forget thy self, and what wilt thou not do?  
Neither reason from wickednesse, nor religion from ungratiousnesse can hold thee back.  
Art thou an *Aristides* for uprightnesse? forget thy selfe, and what art thou but an *Acteon*  
for couetuousnesse? A *Lucretia* for chastetie? forget thy selfe, and thou shalt be a  
*Messalina* for incontinencie. A *Caesar* for clemencie? Forget thy self, and thou art a  
*Nero* for crueltie.<sup>9</sup>

Rogers not only warns that to “forget thy self” amounts to the failure to know oneself; he also demonstrates that such self-forgetting entails a monstrous transformation. While “forgetting of self” becomes shorthand for profligacy and anti-social behavior, it is likewise tantamount to loss of self, a kind of living death worse than death. Such self-forgetting may be mental carelessness, but its consequences are paid with the body, the purview of medical science.

Therefore, it is not unusual that an influential source of the pathologizing of forgetting is the medical discourse of the early modern period. Anatomically, memory is located in the “hindmost ventricle of the brain” while forgetting, of course, has no physiological location, and such placelessness is suspect in the early modern period.<sup>10</sup> Unmediated forgetting is frequently discussed in medical discourse as metastasizing into actual disease as lethargy, described in Philip Barrough's *Method of Physick* with the symptoms of sluggishness and an overwhelming desire for sleep, which is considered an ally of forgetfulness. Medical treatises of the period diagnose that lethargy arises from a moist, cold humor created when the animal spirits in the brain are hindered by a superabundance of phlegm. Since females are moist and cold, a man

---

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Ivic and Grant Williams, Introduction to *Forgetting in Early Modern English Literature and Culture: Lethe's Legacies*, eds. Christopher Ivic and Grant Williams, (London: Routledge, 2004), 6.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Rogers, *Philosophicall Discourse, Entituled the Anatomie of the Minde*, 1576, Preface.

<sup>10</sup> Sullivan, “Lethargic Corporality On and Off the Early Modern Stage,” in *Forgetting in Early Modern Literature and Culture: Lethe's Legacies*, ed. Christopher Ivic and Grant Williams (London: Routledge, 2004), 41.

suffering from lethargy was believed to undergo a feminization, something the early modern adult male would have strenuously avoided.<sup>11</sup> Inordinate sleep was considered akin to this pathologized lethargy, often traced to pernicious forgetfulness. In John Willis's 1661 *Mnemonic; or, The Art of Memory*, "sleep [which] offendeth Memory" is mentioned on the same page with drunkenness and gluttony and is observed to pose an assortment of problems. "Therefore they that sleepe a great part of the day...it is no marvel if they be unhealthful in their bodies, and in wit, like the horse and mule in whom there is no understanding."<sup>12</sup> This comparison links the recalcitrant body of the lethargic sleeper with that of the beast, in which the control of the will has been vacated. Not only might this lack of control lead to hedonism, but in a culture that cherished the active life, the lack of will could mean a lack of action, for as Barish has observed, "Meaningful, purposeful action doesn't hinge on just stated intention but rather on memory."<sup>13</sup> Of course, Montaigne waggishly claims that his poor memory has kept him from being ambitious in public affairs and has required him to think for himself because he cannot remember the opinions of others that he has read.<sup>14</sup> For sixteenth century English medicine, however, forgetfulness was no laughing matter.

In addition to medical discourse, yet another source of the further stigmatizing of forgetting is biblical commentary that chastises forgetting as transgression of Old Testament injunctions to remember God's commandments. The Pentateuch and the prophets make it clear that it was the forgetting of God's commandments that led to the idolatry and disobedience of the people of Israel. While it should be noted that this reproof of forgetting was applied by theologians to the failure to remember God and His commandments, it was easily transferred to the denunciation of forgetting in other aspects of life. Religious justifications for the castigation of

---

<sup>11</sup> Sullivan, "Lethargic Corporality On and Off the Early Modern Stage," 43-44.

<sup>12</sup> John Willis, *Mnemonic, or, The Art of Memory, Drained out of the Pure Fountains of Art & Nature*, (London: Leonard Sowersby, 1661), 140.

<sup>13</sup> Barish, 219

<sup>14</sup> Michel de Montaigne, "Of Liars," in *Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, trans. Charles Cotton. Project Gutenberg. EBook #3600.

forgetting are not limited to commentary on the Old Testament alone. Lina Bolzoni has pointed out the centrality of memory to Christianity.

The memory question...infuses the Mass, the liturgy, and the individual life of the Christian. To remember (and keep alive) Christ's sacrifice, to remember the awful sufferings of Hell and the delights of Paradise, to remember one's own sins to confess, to remember at least a few prayers and the essential contents of the faith—all this is essential, and it is on all this that salvation or eternal damnation depends.<sup>15</sup>

Bolzoni's emphasis is on the role of memory for the mass of illiterate people because what cannot be refreshed by examination of a printed text as reminder is easily perverted if memory fails. The institution of the Eucharist is accompanied by the command of Christ Himself that it be done "in memory of Me," while His promise of the Holy Spirit after Christ's death contains the assurance that the Comforter will bring all things to the apostles' remembrance.

Closely conjunctive to biblical commentary on the undesirability of forgetfulness are the vehement charges of moral corruption made by anti-theatrical treatises of the period that allege that the theater serves as "an agent of forgetting to transform the spectator's body from one known by 'virtuous labor' to one constituted by idleness."<sup>16</sup> This idleness is manifested first by the inactivity of the hours spent in regarding the spectacle of the play, and then in the slothfulness of those who emerge from the playhouse altered in a substantive way, such as reciting lines they have heard or the re-enacting of bits and pieces of what they have just seen. William Rankins' *Mirroure of Monsters* (1587) blames the drama for corrupting not only the audience but the players as well. Speaking in a marginal gloss about the players, Rankins says that "Playes make *them* forget GOD." Of the audience, he asserts,

The drinking of the wyne of forgetfulness, which seemed unto them more sweete than  
*Nectar*, and farre more pleasant than Manna from Heaven, to digest the diversitie of theyr

---

<sup>15</sup> Lina Bolzoni, "The Play of Images. The Art of Memory from Its origins to the Seventeenth Century," *The Enchanted Loom: Chapters in the History of Neuroscience*, ed. Pietro Corsi (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 20.

<sup>16</sup> Sullivan, "Lethargic Corporality On and Off the Early Modern Stage," 49-50.

daintie dishes, they tempered theyr tongues, and outward gesture with such talke, that theyr action might be uniforme to the rareness of theyr banquette.<sup>17</sup>

Metaphorically, the play itself is wine at a banquet of carnal excess that encourages the audience to replicate what they have seen onstage. Having been passive during their time spent at the theater, the audience members are contaminated with idleness that Rankins characterizes as “so contagious, that as the Ryver Laethes maketh hym that drynketh thereof, presentlie to forget his own condition and former deedes, so this damnable vice of idleness, so besotteth the sences, and bewitcheth the myndes of menne, as they remembred not the profitable fruites of vertuous labor.”<sup>18</sup> For the English Renaissance, writes Sullivan, memory is equated with discipline and order through which one is “inserted into the social realm,” while forgetting is a mode of existence associated with humoral, spiritual, and social disorder, leading to oblivion and nothingness.<sup>19</sup> One’s place in life, his or her physical, mental, and spiritual health, and, indeed the integrity of society all hinge on the ability to remember rather than to forget and lapse into oblivion and nothingness. It was just such oblivion and nothingness from which the classical texts had been rescued.

These rediscovered classical texts provided Renaissance rhetoric with exemplars for approved conduct, the efficacy of which was certainly dependent on memory. Whenever an individual was urged to remember an exemplar, whether of the distant or recent past, the act of remembering was understood as manifested in bodily comportment and praxis. Sullivan draws our attention to just such a situation as recorded in Richard Mulcaster’s account of the coronation entry of Queen Elizabeth I into London in 1533:

In Cheapside, Her Grace smiled; and being thereof demanded the cause, answered, “For that she had heard one say, “*Remember old King HENRY VIII!*” A natural child! which at the very remembrance of her father’s name took so great a joy; that all men may well

---

<sup>17</sup> William Rankins, *A Mirrour of Monsters* (London: I. C. for T. H., 1587), C3r.

<sup>18</sup> Rankins, C4r-C4v.

<sup>19</sup> Sullivan, “Lethargic Corporality On and Off the Early Modern Stage,” 48.



think that as she rejoiced at his name who this Realm doth hold of so worthy a memory, so, in her doings, she will resemble the same.<sup>20</sup>

The young queen is urged, not just to recall fondly a deceased parent, but rather to emulate him “in her doings.” This is Mulcaster’s attempt to shape the behavior of Elizabeth I in relation to the monarchy and the ideology of right rule. For the early moderns, an exhortation to remember a past exemplar made a claim that sought to mobilize the subject to behave in a certain fashion, to take up particular social practices.<sup>21</sup> Those who defend the theater, such as Thomas Heywood in *An Apology for Actors*, hold that the plays of the time had a positive effect on the audience by provision of positive exemplars.<sup>22</sup> This same ideal of positive models from the past was seen also as the primary benefit of reading history, which is inherently connected to memory.

Recognizing early modern attitudes toward memory and forgetfulness is essential to understanding of how unusual what Shakespeare does in the second Henriad is, but because they are history plays, it is equally helpful to consider early modern notions of history and historiography. Early modern notions of the moral instructiveness of history are threatened by Shakespeare’s revelations about the historiographical process and its forgetful, piecemeal processes.

### 1.2 Early Modern Views of History and Historiography

Historical drama in the English Renaissance was based *on* history, but the playhouse audiences actually considered it *to be* history as well.<sup>23</sup> The word *history* appears to have been an unstable term during the early modern period, applied quite liberally to works as diverse as plays, poems, biographies, surveys, political narratives, chronicles, antiquarian accounts, and narratives of current events. In fact, *history* did not always pertain to actual events and did not

---

<sup>20</sup> [Richard Mulcaster,] “The Passage of our most dread Sovereign Lady, Queen Elizabeth,” *Tudor Tracts 1532-1588*, ed. A. F. Pollard (New York: Copper Square, 1964), 393.

<sup>21</sup> Garrett Sullivan, *Memory and Forgetting in English Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge, NJ: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 9-10.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* (London: Nicholas Okes, 1612), F3V.

<sup>23</sup> Ivo Kamps, “The Writing of History in Shakespeare’s England,” in *A Companion to Shakespeare’s Works, Vol. II: The Histories*, ed. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 5.

distinguish between historical and fictional figures. Moreover, during the first half of the sixteenth century, Tudor historians, such as Richard Brathwait and Edmund Bolton, did not necessarily studiously research past events to discover new perspectives or unearth inconsistencies; rather, the established historical tradition was generally assiduously re-written by each subsequent author with frequent quotation from the previous work serving as a model.<sup>24</sup> Paola Pugliatti observes that a text's reliability was supposedly guaranteed by its openly declared intertextuality with its source rather by engagement in actual historical research.<sup>25</sup> Conforming to the approved version of information is illustrated by Daniel in his 1595 Dedicatory to his *Civil Wares*:

...I have carefully followed that truth which is delivered in the Historie; without our common Annalles: holding it an impietie, to violate what publike testimonie we have, without more evident prooffe; or to introduce fictions of our owne imagination, in things of this nature.<sup>26</sup>

Daniel assures his reader that what he has written is the truth because it comports with the previous account and because he is unwilling to introduce something he has conjured up in imagination. Despite the appearance of uniformity that this might suggest, early modern attitudes toward history and historiography were actually quite far from monolithic, particularly in the last decade or so of the sixteenth century, as Warren Chernaik points out in noting that "the extent to which sixteenth-century historians felt a need to shape and select their material varied greatly."<sup>27</sup> Accounts of the past were popular with literate early modern citizens, but such readers did not peruse history with an eye to its methodology or its veracity. Instead, the value of an historical account was to be found in its provision of moral instruction for the reader, and the special fitness of the history play to bestow such instruction on its audiences was frequently marshaled in defense of the theater against the onslaught of charges of spreading spiritual corruption.

---

<sup>24</sup> Paola Pugliatti, *Shakespeare the Historian*, (New York: St. Martin's P, 1996),32-38.

<sup>25</sup> Pugliatti,32.

<sup>26</sup> S. Daniel, *The Civile Wares between the Howses of Lancaster and Yorke*, (London, 1609; first published 1595), A2.

<sup>27</sup> Warren Chernaik, *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare's History Plays*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 3.

Historians themselves, however, could not come to agreement about whether it was of greater importance for historiography to be morally instructive or accurate. Neema Parvini writes that this lack of consensus has led many literary historians to give greater weight to one side or the other of these debates on veracity. Graham Holderness, for example, claims that early modern historians were concerned with truth and the avoidance of “ideological appropriations of the past” while Ivo Kamps claims the opposite in saying that early modern historians did not put much emphasis on veracity.<sup>28</sup> Annabel Patterson offers that Holinshed, Stow, John Foxe and others intentionally give contrasts of contradictory sources in order to record the variety of opinion that separated Englishmen.<sup>29</sup> Patterson is not so much interested in the issue of veracity, says Parvini, as she is in noting how Holinshed is allowing readers to listen to many voices and make up their own minds. Parvini then notes that if three such experienced readers of Tudor historiography can each come to different conclusions about the period’s commitment to veracity, perhaps “it is simply too diverse and fragmented to have a general character.”<sup>30</sup> Acknowledging that the commitment to veracity was fluid is valuable for our reading of the history plays as history. Despite the confusion about the need for veracity, however, we can say with more certainty that the early modern period had three somewhat divergent schools of historical theory—providentialism, Italian humanism, and antiquarianism—that directed the attitudes of late sixteenth century historians.

The most pervasive view, inherited from medieval writers, was the providentialist vision of history, which attributed all events to God’s master plan. Such a view of the past interpreted history as an unfolding of the will of God that had not only decreed England’s survival as the progeny of ancient Troy, but also quite possibly preferred her among the nations. The fact that this providential view of history continued into the seventeenth century shows, according to

---

<sup>28</sup> Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare: The Histories* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 46. Ivo Kamps, “The Writing of History in Shakespeare’s England,” in *A Companion to Shakespeare’s Works, Vol. II: The Histories*, ed. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 9.

<sup>29</sup> Annabel Patterson, *Reading Holinshed’s Chronicles*, (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994), 40.

<sup>30</sup> Neema Parvini, *Shakespeare’s History Plays: Rethinking History*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2012), 95.

Parvini, that “neither the influx of humanist and classicist thought from Italy during the Renaissance, nor the religious upheavals during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth served to dislodge providential thought completely from the public consciousness.”<sup>31</sup> As to the religious upheavals, no doubt each side saw itself as the agent of God’s providential plan for England, fighting against those who opposed His will, and Italian humanist thought was frequently accommodated into providential orthodoxy as easily as had been the legend of Brut.

However, Italian humanism, which was transmitted by the works of Niccolò Machiavelli, Francesco Guicciardini, Francesco Patrizi, and Polydore Vergil, was actually a somewhat different approach to historiography. This vein of historiography gave greater weight to the actions of mankind rather than God as the cause of human events, positing that an examination of the past could give guidance for behavior in the present. Phyllis Rackin notes that three Italian innovations particularly affected English historiography in the second half of the sixteenth century: a shift from divine causes to the “second” causes of human actions, recognition of anachronism, and a questioning of textual authority.<sup>32</sup> The most notable of the innovations—the shift in emphasis of causation from God to man—gave history a more secular character even as it often continued to be scaffolded by the idea of divine providence.

A third approach to historiography in the late sixteenth century was antiquarianism, which attempted to reconstruct the past from actual physical artifacts such as coins and documents. The antiquarian scholars eschewed the practices of many of the chronicle writers who merely replicated previous sources in order to be merely accumulative, and the antiquarians insisted on the use of original research in which they compared and sometimes discounted individual sources. However, the antiquarians had little interest in reconstructing the past for the purpose of didacticism nor did they wish to make the past applicable to the present, being engrossed in the past for its own sake in its own time. A relatively small group of well-off men who worked in an

---

<sup>31</sup> Parvini, 97.

<sup>32</sup> Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare’s English Chronicles*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990), 5.

organization called the Elizabethan College of Antiquaries, these were the historiographers described by Sir Philip Sidney as being obsessed with “mouse-eaten records” and “better acquainted with a thousand years ago than with the present age.”<sup>33</sup> Although such antiquarian research increased in popularity during the sixteenth century, history was still identified with narrative. In the nineteenth century, the positivist conception of history as formulated by Leopold von Ranke proposed that the historian should adopt the objectivity of the scientist, and limit himself to “a straight presentation of the facts,” thus transmitting what happened as well as avoiding any corruption by the writer’s values or personality. Such a conception of history was virtually unknown in Shakespeare’s day, according to Chernaik.<sup>34</sup> Renaissance historians sought out coherence in the events they recounted, but they believed this pattern to be embedded in the events themselves, and not imposed by the historian. By the end of the sixteenth century, however, there were those who came to recognize that the writing of history could be shaped for particular agendas, and Shakespeare’s second *Henriad* is filled with frequent revelations of the tenuous and constructed nature of the historical account.

### 1.3 Forgetting in Shakespeare: A Scholarly Opportunity

Despite the negativity of early modern attitudes toward forgetting, there has been little examination of it in Shakespeare’s work in the past twenty years or so, apart from Jonas Barish’s 1996 essay on remembering and forgetting to which I already have alluded and Adrian Poole’s essay on laughter and forgetting, which I will consider in a later chapter. We can point to Robert C. Jones’ 1991 book, *These Valiant Dead: Renewing the Past in Shakespeare’s Histories*, which does take into consideration how the characters in the history plays make use of or ignore the past, although Jones’ major interest is in memory and “the valiant dead.” One of his passing observations on memory is what several others have noted—the fact that the first tetralogy seems interested in the preservation of the past while the second does not, but he also points out

---

<sup>33</sup> Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry* (1595), ed. J. A. Van Dorsten. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1966), 30.

<sup>34</sup> Chernaik, 5.

that people's neglect of the past can prove at least as instructive as the use of it. Jones also draws attention to Richard II's attempt to live solely in the present. Although Richard responds to York's admonition about the heroics of the Black Prince with blankness, Jones notes that York is trying to show him that his identity as king is rooted in succession from rulers of the past. Richard never learns anything about historical consciousness, despite his burgeoning self-awareness, while Bolingbroke actually does pay attention to the past until he becomes king. In Jones' view, power often involves amnesia as well as corruption. Hal becomes a triumphant king, but he "never calls on history at all."<sup>35</sup> Jones does not attempt a purely heroic reading of *Henry V* because he is aware of the ambiguity and complexity of the play. He points out that the Chorus's evocations of an heroic past are undermined by what actually happens onstage. However, the central argument of the book focuses on the functions of commemoration rather than on forgetfulness.

Aside from Ivic's chapter in on *1 Henry IV* in the book on forgetting in early modern literature that he co-edited with Grant Williams in 2004, there has been virtually no discussion of forgetting in the second Henriad for over ten years.<sup>36</sup> That is, until the appearance this year of Jonathan Baldo's very fine book, *Memory in Shakespeare's Histories: Stages of Forgetting in Early Modern England*. Happily for me, our paths diverge in a fairly spacious fashion, allowing each of us to pursue different interests within the four history plays. We share an interest in demonstrating that "the later plays tend to explore creative uses of forgetting for answering traumatic loss and for establishing a sense of national unity."<sup>37</sup> However, much of Baldo's concentration is given to investigating how the Protestant Reformation engendered forgetfulness in sixteenth century England, and although I acknowledge that such a psychological atmosphere

---

<sup>35</sup> Robert C. Jones, *These Valiant Dead: Renewing the Past in Shakespeare's Histories*, (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1991), 100.

<sup>36</sup> Christopher Ivic, "Reassuring fratricide in *1 Henry IV*," In *Forgetting in Early Modern English Literature and Culture: Lethe's Legacies*. Edited by Christopher Ivic and Grant Williams. London: Routledge, 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Baldo, *Memory in Shakespeare's Histories: Stages of Forgetting in Early Modern England*, (London: Routledge, 2012),3.

existed, I focus instead on Elizabethan attitudes toward forgetfulness itself. I want to present a brief overview of each of Baldo's chapters on the four plays, followed by a comment about how our arguments diverge, and then provide the trajectory of my own argument on the second Henriad.

His first chapter, "Birth of a Nation from the Spirit of Tragedy," proposes that the traumatic deposition of Richard II mirrors the losses suffered by England as a result of the Protestant Reformation, and that Richard, already given to a course of forgetfulness about the past, bequeaths to his Lancastrian successors an amnesic political policy that they employ to great success in the solidification of the nation-state. My discussion of the second Henriad occasionally crosses paths with Baldo's work simply because we examine the same plays, and like Baldo, I consider Richard's various modes of forgetfulness to be the results of the traumatic shattering of an identity. However, while Baldo chooses to focus on the transformation of historical modes in *Richard II* and lays claim to a new forgetful approach to kingship, which he sees as being inherited by Richard's successors, I examine instead the transformation of Richard himself that results from self-forgetfulness. Baldo holds that Richard's new politics of amnesia explains the occlusion of historical events throughout the play, such as the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, the Irish campaign, and the murder of Gloucester, while I contend that these historical circumstances are ignored in the interest of foregrounding Richard alone. I am indebted to Baldo in particular for his examination of traumatic loss and the historical sublime, but unlike Baldo, I do not see Richard as the progenitor of a fortuitous political amnesia adopted by the two Henries—although they reveal themselves as masterful practitioners of such convenient forgetfulness. I agree with Baldo about the tumultuous effects of the Protestant Reformation on the English early moderns. This unhinging was part of the psychic disturbance of Lynn White Jr.'s characterization of the period. However, I intend to consider *Richard II* rather as Shakespeare's revelation of what it might be like to experience one's identity and its sudden loss inside the already determined confines of history.

Baldo's second chapter devoted to *1 Henry IV* again places emphasis on the effects of the Protestant Reformation in the controversy over Shakespeare's appropriation of the Lollard martyr Sir John Oldcastle as Falstaff. Baldo holds that Falstaff/Oldcastle is a character whose memory would accentuate the deep divisions in Elizabethan religious life. Because memory is unavailable as a unifying force for Henry IV—he does not want his people to remember his usurpation—the rebels lay claim to the rights of memory. Shakespeare, says Baldo, presents an England in the throes of separating itself from medievalism and dynasticism reflective of the Protestant Reformation. The idea of a nation is underpinned by the same spirit of reinvention from which Oldcastle/Falstaff emerges because Falstaff is consistent with the kinds of forgetfulness found in historical memory. Furthermore, his forgetfulness would remind the audience of their associations of Protestantism with willful forgetfulness. Unlike Baldo, I give but brief attention to the Oldcastle/Falstaff controversy, preferring to concentrate on who he is within the play itself.

Baldo's third chapter, "Washed in Lethe' : Laundering the Past in *2 Henry IV*," discusses *2 Henry IV* in terms of its patchwork of memory that evokes nostalgia for a "merry old England" that is beyond retrieval, the medieval world of Catholicism. The play is filled with "doubleness," says Baldo, as echoes of speeches or actions from Part 1 reappear in Part 2. Multiple versions of the past, particularly in terms of personal memories, fill the play rather than sharply opposed historical accounts, and because there is no national narrative due to the aversion to the past which Henry IV demonstrates, the private account moves into the void. I likewise consider the nostalgia of *2 Henry IV*, which is the proof of Hal's later assertion that "old men forget," but I also examine the rejection of Falstaff as the ultimate act of Nietzschean forgetting, necessary for Hal's achievement of legitimate rule at the expense of his profligate past and its companions.

Baldo's fourth chapter, "Wars of Memory in *Henry V*," originally appeared in 1996, and I had made use of it in my chapter before Baldo's book appeared. The premise of Baldo's chapter is that *Henry V* rehearses several "wars of memory" that Elizabethans would recently have experienced. The playwright's frequent foregrounding of Calais in the campaign in France would



have reminded the English of their last defeat there and the subsequent loss of Calais. Another “war of memory” would have been the Irish campaign, which, at the first performance of the play, was as yet a soon-expected victory that turned sour when Essex was forced to come home in defeat. Baldo also points out that the St. Crispin’s Day speech with its emphasis on the calendar would have reminded English Protestants of the appropriation of the ecclesiastical calendar and the erasure of the numerous Catholic saints’ days and their replacement by the dates of English military victories. Although Baldo makes mention of Benedict Anderson’s idea of national amnesia in previous chapters, he does not make it central to his discussion of *Henry V*, devoting only a little over two pages to it. My argument proposes that Henry’s rhetoric that forgets social class is instrumental in the creation of an amnesic band of brothers, and that Henry V’s utilization of forgetfulness also extends to his own place in the historical record as he contrives to free his reign from any taint of blame.

#### 1.4 Critical Views of the Second Henriad

Before providing a general idea of my position on the second Henriad and the functions of forgetting in it, I first present an overview of what past criticism has had to say about these plays as a group, and then show how my work makes a contribution to the ongoing discussion about the second Henriad.

Writing in the 1940s, E.M. W. Tillyard argued that Shakespeare’s view of English history expressed an overarching scheme that was fundamentally religious, with events emerging under God’s providence and with Elizabethan England the acknowledged culmination. Tillyard called this the “Tudor myth,” by which the destruction of prolonged civil war is ameliorated with the accession of the Tudor line of rulers. He also saw the two tetralogies as telling one long continuous story (despite the fact that Shakespeare wrote the second half first) with the story’s end being the triumphant rise to the throne of Henry VII, the grandfather of Elizabeth I. In Tillyard’s view, the plays are didactic and supportive of a conservative ideology intended to teach the audience the virtue of knowing one’s place and the evil of disorder and rebellion. For several

years this view of Shakespeare as an advocate of Tudor orthodoxy received wide acceptance, and does so even today among some critics. A second, less accepted aspect of Tillyard's formulation is that the two tetralogies comprise a unified pattern, illustrating divine retribution for the sin of Henry IV's usurpation as visited on generations to come in the bloody civil wars lasting into the reign of his grandson Henry VI.<sup>38</sup>

Because he was writing in wartime England, it is not unusual that Tillyard saw the plays as purposefully didactic concerning the evil of disorder, but the next generation of critics challenged Tillyard's providential, conservative reading, being more interested in investigating the ambiguities of the plays. Critical work conducted in the 1960s and 1970s pointed to Italian humanism as a substantial influence on Shakespeare as it attempted to counter the providential formulations of Tillyard. Some subsequent criticism has contended that, although Italian humanism was innovative, its single most significant historiographical premise—that history can teach us about the present because history repeats itself—actually resembles the medieval concept of cyclical time. The speculation that early modern historical thinkers had a more modern grasp of what Graham Holderness calls “the pastness of the past” than what Italian humanism provided has culminated in the view that Shakespeare was capable of juggling a wide range of historical perspectives that situated the drama into an ideological give-and-take between disparate ways of talking about the past.<sup>39</sup> A. P. Rossiter (1989) points to “a constant Doubleness” in the history plays, which he posits as revealing Shakespeare's approach to history and to the construction of the drama as dialectical, “juxtaposing opposites, without submitting to urges...to obliterate or annihilate the one in the theoretical interests of the other.”<sup>40</sup>

Beginning in the early 1980s, new historicists find the history plays primarily interested in power, although it often seems that they are divided as to whether Shakespeare is repressive and

---

<sup>38</sup> E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1944). Also *The Elizabethan World Picture*, (New York: Vintage, 1959) First published in 1943.

<sup>39</sup> Graham Holderness, “Shakespeare's ‘whole History’ : Drama and early modern historical theory,” *Rethinking History: the Journal of Theory and Practice*, August 8, 2008, 21.

<sup>40</sup> A. P. Rossiter, “Ambivalence: The Dialectic of the Histories,” in *Angel with Horns*, ed. Graham Storey, (London: Longman, 1989), 15.

authoritarian or oppressed and subversive. Stephen Greenblatt's influential essay "Invisible Bullets" argues that the relationship between Hal and Falstaff is illustrative of a general premise that, in the body politic, genuinely radical subversiveness "is at the same time contained by the very power it would appear to threaten" and that such subversiveness "is the very product of that power and furthers its ends."<sup>41</sup> Cultural materialists Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield take a similar position to the new historicists, stating in an essay about *Henry V* in *Alternative Shakespeares* that the role of materialist criticism is to unveil what the literary text seeks to conceal. They further write that "ideology has always been challenged, not least by the exploited themselves, who have resisted its oppressive construction of them and its mystification of their disadvantaged social position" while materialist criticism "attempt[s] to recover the voices and cultures of the repressed and marginalized in history and writing."<sup>42</sup> However, they are less concerned with recovering repressed voices than in showing, in the case of *Henry V*, how the play serves an Elizabethan state ideology in strategies of containment. Similarly, Richard Helgerson (1994) writes that the second Henriad demonstrates Shakespeare's gradually narrowing "obsessive and compelling focus on the ruler" to the exclusion of the commoner throughout the composition of his English history plays. Helgerson asserts that the playwright attempts to nullify the ideology with which the first Henriad began, "as though he wanted to efface, alienate, even demonize all signs of commoner participation in the political nation."<sup>43</sup> Helgerson's analysis seems to argue by absence: if there is less focus on commoners and more on an individual who is a King and the title character of a play, then it must follow that Shakespeare is excluding, nullifying, alienating, demonizing commoners.

Other recent critics emphasize the subversive potential of the plays present in the playwright's "polyphony," which means no one perspective dominates the others. In *Stages of*

---

<sup>41</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 30, 52.

<sup>42</sup> Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, "History and Ideology: The Instance of *Henry V*," in *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis, (New York: Methuen, 1985), 206-207.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 214.

*History*, Phyllis Rackin (1991) writes that dramatic performance, by its very nature, allows the voices of those not part of the dominant discourse to be heard.<sup>44</sup> In *Engendering a Nation*, Jean E. Howard and Rackin (1997) note that the first tetralogy presents a number of prominent roles for women who wield power in ways that threaten a patriarchal hierarchy, such as Joan La Pucelle and Margaret of Anjou, whereas the second tetralogy places women in a space away from public action, treating them as objects of exchange or trophies of victory.<sup>45</sup> Again, comparison with the first tetralogy is marshaled to support the view that Shakespeare is moving toward greater association with a paternalistic hierarchy that marginalizes women.

With the new millennium, however, some critics have begun to chafe under the obligation to choose sides between historicism's thesis of containment and cultural materialism's thesis of subversion. Richard Levin, Kiernan Ryan, and Annabel Patterson have all commented on criticism's narrowing focus on power, and the tendency of such readings to the creation of a false dichotomy that understands the plays as either products supportive of a dominant ideology or products seeking to undermine that dominant ideology. New historicist and cultural materialist appraisals of the second tetralogy seem to concentrate on the connection of *Richard II* to the Essex rebellion or the significance of various historical events that are omitted by the playwright—thus making a presence by an absence—or on the negligible role of women, or on the questions of race and class connected to the Irish, Welsh, Scottish characters as well as the underclass of the Boar's Head Tavern rather than the play as a whole. More recently, some critics have been seeking alternative lenses, such as perspectivism and presentism, to allow for what Norman Rabkin calls "Shakespeare's habitual recognition of the irreducible complexity of things."<sup>46</sup> Michael Hattaway calls perspectivism "a dramatic cross-examination from differing points of view,

---

<sup>44</sup> Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (London: Routledge, 1991), xi.

<sup>45</sup> Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, (London: Routledge, 1997), 29.

<sup>46</sup> Norman Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 60-61.

embodied in different dramatic styles, of the issues raised and events enacted on the stage.”<sup>47</sup> As mentioned earlier, A. P. Rossiter’s influential work *Angel with Horns* first made reference to the ambivalence present in Shakespeare’s work, defining it as a procedure whereby “two opposed value-judgements are subsumed as both valid,” calling it “two-eyedness.”<sup>48</sup> Such a theoretical approach reveals that Shakespeare, like Bottom, is bent on playing all the roles, trying on all the hats, speaking in many voices, and observing the swelling scene of history from every point of vantage.

Presentism’s engagement with Shakespeare and his view of history is grounded in the acknowledgement that none of us can negotiate beyond time. In reply to new historicism’s concern with the interference of our own “situatedness” in relating to early modern works, Terence Hawkes reasons that our placement in time and space cannot contaminate our relationship with the past because it is the only means through which we could possibly connect to that past and hope to have some understanding of it. Presentism, says Hawkes, yearns not to speak with the dead *à la* Greenblatt, but rather to talk to the living, particularly connecting with critical responses that emphasize the performance of a play—what it does now in the theater—as well as or even in contrast to what it communicates about the world to which its written version refers.<sup>49</sup> Much of what Hawkes says is pragmatic and self-evident. A live performance is the text newly created, and what matters to us about it is what it says to us today. Presentists are truly correct in recognizing that we cannot escape our situatedness and its limitations. However, it is to be hoped that Hawkes and other presentists are aware that, due to the ephemeral nature of our life in the present, we ourselves are soon to be the past.

These plays as a group have been the subject of critical commentary for a very long time—much longer than the half-century or so that I have briefly outlined—but as can be seen,

---

<sup>47</sup> Michael Hattaway, “Introduction” to *The Second Part of King Henry IV*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 1.

<sup>48</sup> A. P. Rossiter, “Ambivalence: The Dialectic of the Histories,” rpt. in *Angel with Horns*, ed. Graham Storey (London: Longman, 1961), 51.

<sup>49</sup> Terence Hawkes, *Shakespeare in the Present*, London: Routledge, 2002), 3-5.

there are very few works dedicated to the examination of the function of forgetfulness in the second Henriad, and none that I am aware of that engage in a consideration of forgetfulness in terms of its connections to subjectivity or its illumination by Nietzschean theory as I do in this work. This discussion is my initial contribution to what I anticipate to become a topic of interest for further scholarship on forgetfulness in Shakespeare and other early modern works. It should also prove beneficial as a respite from debates about the containment of subversion or the dissidence of marginalized groups. It is certainly not my intention to set at naught any of the new historical or cultural materialist work that has preceded mine. Much good has been derived from an awareness of the historical context of Shakespeare as well as from the inclusion of the scholarship of those whose voices and concerns have been unattended or marginalized in the past. However, I do have a concern that the plays themselves are sometimes ignored in the push to make political or cultural statements related to our own time that are founded on clever but contrived generalizations about Elizabethan culture and Shakespeare.

### 1.5 Founding Principles of the Argument

My work has been predicated on the following positions: first, moving from the Henry VI plays to the second Henriad, the plays demonstrate an increasing awareness of the unstable and constructed nature of history, and while the playwright based his history plays on historical accounts, he does not repeat them in full; second, because the early modern theater was a place of forgetfulness, the dramatization of forgetfulness in navigating one's relationship to identity could be achieved; third, despite the cultural stigma against it in his times, forgetfulness is mobilized in productive fashion in these plays, and functions as the means through which human beings encounter trauma, pursue greatness, and assemble the record of the past. Although these functions of forgetfulness vary from play to play, one particular constant is the presence of images of liquidity that can connect to forgetting and the River Lethe.

## 1.6 Overview of Chapter 2: *Richard II*

New historicists in particular have sought to examine *Richard II* in terms of its faithfulness to its historical sources. Source-study criticism privileges the historical record over the aesthetic experience of Shakespeare's play, searching out every divergence from Holinshed to discuss what a particular lack of correspondence signifies by its absence. My discussion of *Richard II* contends that many historical events are "forgotten" by Shakespeare—that is, they are not part of the dramatic action of the play—to narrow the focus on Richard II himself and his intense dramatic interiority.

Furthermore, it appears that the new historicists, despite their predilection for avoiding the privileging of literary texts, find intriguing the anecdotes linking the play, the Essex Revolt, and Elizabeth's identification of herself with Richard II precisely because they position Shakespeare in the middle of Elizabethan politics and connect the theater with rebellion, illustrating the theater's subversive power.<sup>50</sup> I neither support nor reject the assertions concerning that single commissioned "Essex" performance of the play, preferring in this project to examine the text itself. While I acknowledge that this is a history play and that what happened in the Essex Revolt is "history," I feel no particular inclination to analyze the historical event, which is within the purview of historians, literary or otherwise. I plan to show that rebellion and usurpation in the play are triggered by Richard's heedless amnesia of the requisite proprieties of his place as King and of the past and its ancestral succession that made him a King.

I am indebted to the scholarship of many who have preceded me in writing about *Richard II*, and I make use of some of their ideas in support of my own. However, as R. Morgan Griffin points out, the history of Shakespearean scholarship itself sometimes impedes our examination of this play because "the fossilized remains of older and often unsupported critical paradigms" still show up in recent criticism. The contributions of Tillyard and Kantorowicz to the critical history of the play, says Griffin, are so imbricated in the way we think about *Richard II* that, even though

---

<sup>50</sup> R. Morgan Griffin, "The Critical History of *Richard II*," in *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Richard II*, ed. Kirby Farrell (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1999), 29-30.

their conservative viewpoints have been disavowed, we often use their unsupported preconceptions without realizing it, particularly in writing about the contrast between Richard and Bolingbroke.<sup>51</sup> Much of the criticism of the past fifty years has concentrated on the Richard and Bolingbroke dichotomy, in which Richard is evaluated as a weak, almost-effeminate king of poetry who is enmeshed in language and medieval ceremony who is pitted against the uncommunicative but physical Machiavellian Bolingbroke. This contrast is pursued despite the numerous instances throughout the play in which each character violates the tidy formulations of his supposed nature. Others disavow such a convenient and simplistic analysis, questioning the view of Richard as weak and effeminate, arguing that such a stance overlooks Richard's conviction of the sacred nature of his kingship, and challenging the hypothesis that the play is meant to evoke the medieval days when the king's two bodies were united.<sup>52</sup> My position is that there is certainly a dichotomy between Richard and Bolingbroke, but there is always a contrast that can be made between any two persons. My contention is that their particular dichotomy should not be predicated necessarily on relative degrees of weakness or femininity and masculinity but rather on their abilities to employ productive forgetfulness. This view positions the initially imprudent forgetfulness of Richard against the dynamic amnesia that Bolingbroke learns to employ, neither of which is specific to gender.

I aim to show that the rebellion leading to deposition ignites a crisis of authority in Richard, resulting in the traumatic shattering of his identity. The playwright's exposure of the King's subjectivity as it endures sundering of self and identity documents Richard's transformation into a lyric poet, the consequence of his encounter with an historical consciousness that Hayden White and others before him have described as "the historical sublime."<sup>53</sup> Ultimately, the intense

---

<sup>51</sup> Griffin, 24.

<sup>52</sup> See F. W. Brownlow, "Richard II and the Testing of Legitimacy," in *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Richard II*, ed. Kirby Farrell (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1999), 58-80, and David Norbrook, "'A Liberal Tongue': Language and Rebellion in Richard II," in *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Richard II*, ed. Kirby Farrell (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1999), 121-134.

<sup>53</sup> Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1987), 68.



interiority of a tragic artist is pitted against the opportunism and efficient amnesia of a spiritual forerunner of the “new man,” such as William Cecil, who rose to power in the Elizabethan reign.

*Richard II* is Shakespeare’s revelation of what it might be like to experience traumatic loss dictated by the unthinkable historical sublime, all the while trapped in the already determined confines of history. Of course, one does not use the word *identity* in discussion of early modern works without causing consternation. My utilization of *identity* is borrowed from Linda Charnes, who has defined it as the “artificially constructed ‘thingness’ of self as it has been constituted in the past.”<sup>54</sup> An identity is discernible to the one who claims it as well to others who recognize it as being *idem*, the same as what it has been in the past in performative terms of class and gender, and having lineaments belonging to it and not to another. Connected to identity is *subjectivity*, one’s experience of his/her relationship to a particular identity in the present. While subjectivity also could mean being “subjected” to determining forces, it also involves the experience of negotiating a relationship to those forces.<sup>55</sup> Richard’s experience of his relationship to kingship is negotiated by a particular kind of forgetfulness associated with trauma involving an unrecoverable loss.

While I certainly acknowledge the value of historicist and materialist criticism, there still remains room and necessity for consideration of the play from other viewpoints. My examination of this play considers the interiority of Richard II found in his own speech and its connections to forgetfulness rather than discusses Richard as superior or inferior to Bolingbroke or as the avatar of dominance or subversion.

### 1.7 Overview of Chapter 3: 1 Henry IV

In discussing *1 Henry IV*, I continue the examination of the playwright’s deployment of forgetfulness, which shifts away from its function in *Richard II* as revelatory of the shattering of identity and its relationship to art and the historical sublime. In *1 Henry IV*, forgetfulness proves

---

<sup>54</sup> Linda Charnes, *Notorious Identity: Materializing the Subject in Shakespeare*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993), 8.

<sup>55</sup> Charnes, *Notorious Identity*, 8.

politically constructive, a source of plasticity and self-actualization that leads to achievement in the affairs of state.

I do not re-examine the Oldcastle/Falstaff controversy, which many critics make the focus of their arguments.<sup>56</sup> I prefer to give my attention instead to what Falstaff is inside the play, regardless of his name. My passing over the well-known replacement of Oldcastle with Falstaff is not due to ignorance of the situation or to sloth, but rather due to the fact that it is thoroughly and thoughtfully discussed in terms of its relationship to forgetfulness and the religious upheavals of the Protestant Reformation in Baldo's book. It is not due to the situation's ill fit for my topic that I do not give attention to it. However, based on Shakespeare's politic revision of the character's name from that of the Lollard-sympathizer who was an ancestor of Lord Cobham's wife, many critics have gone on to make sweeping and perhaps unwarranted assumptions, particularly about the oppressive censorship of Elizabeth's reign, a view which others have questioned.<sup>57</sup> I will leave the issues of censorship and its connection to the perhaps recalcitrant, haphazard expungement of a character's name for others to investigate.

Stephen Greenblatt's influential "Invisible Bullets" (1985) famously contends that the second Henriad in particular is "centrally and repeatedly concerned with the production and containment of subversion and disorder."<sup>58</sup> Cultural materialist responses came from Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, Phyllis Rackin, and Graham Holderness, and the debate has not only

---

<sup>56</sup> For both views, see Baldo, *Memory in Shakespeare's Histories: Stages of Forgetting in Early Modern England*, 51-72; Ellen M. Caldwell, "'Banish All the World': Falstaff's Iconoclastic Threat to Kingship in 1 Henry IV," *Renascence*, Summer 2007, 219-245; Jonathan Goldberg, "The Commodity of Names: 'Falstaff' and 'Oldcastle' in 1 Henry IV in *Reconfiguring the Renaissance: Essays in Critical Materialism*, ed. Jonathan Crewe (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1992), 76-88; Gary Taylor, "The Fortunes of Oldcastle," *Shakespeare Survey* 38 (1985): 86-100; Charles Whitney, "Festivity and Topicality in the Coventry Scene of 1 Henry IV," *English Literary Renaissance* 24 (1994): 410-48; Harry Berger, Jr. "The Prince's Dog: Falstaff and the Perils of Speech-Prefixity," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (Spring 1988): 40-73.

<sup>57</sup> Cyndia Sue Clegg, "Censorship and Problems with History in Shakespeare's England," in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works Vol. II The Histories*, eds. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard, (New York: Blackwell, 2005).

<sup>58</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, "Invisible bullets: Renaissance authority and its subversion, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*," in *Political Shakespeare: New essays in cultural materialism*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985), 18-47.

increased awareness of historical context and contemporary receipt of the plays but also has exposed issues of the marginalization of women and others.<sup>59</sup> The plays have also provided cultural materialists writing in the new millennium with areas of consideration relating to the functions of the material, such as clothing and coinage in presenting versions of the person of the monarchy and the power that attends it.<sup>60</sup> Where these connect with forgetfulness, I make use of their observations.

I choose to concentrate on how the decentralized structure of the play makes room for Shakespeare to examine forgetfulness in Henry IV, Prince Hal, and Falstaff. Formerly incapable of forgetting present trials as a banished combatant, the new King reveals himself as attempting to solidify his position through a prototypical Nietzschean forgetfulness of his usurpation even as his forgetful ingratitude to those who helped him to the English throne leads to civil strife. Falstaff, who plays both father and son in the play extempore, does indeed function as a middle term of forgetfulness between the two Henries, being self-forgetful in terms of profligacy as well as a comedic version of Nietzschean plasticity. The self-forgetful impropriety of Prince Hal serves, as he intends, as cloud-cover for his impending emergence as a man of valorous action, able to reinvent himself through forgetfulness in the pursuit of fame and power. An incipient national unity as envisioned by Henry IV colors the Anglo-Scottish-Welsh conflicts as a civil war, or even as a mere single combat between the English brothers Hal and Hotspur. The play thus maps early modern characteristics onto pre-modern society, and presents memory, both personal and political, as an impediment to unification in an Andersonian imagined community of Englishmen marching all one way.

---

<sup>59</sup> Parvini, 178.

<sup>60</sup> See Jesse M. Lander, "'Crack'd Crowns' and Counterfeit Sovereigns: The Crisis of Value in *1 Henry IV*," *Shakespeare Studies* 30 (2002), 137-161; Vimala C. Pasupathi, "Coats and Conduct: The Materials of Military Obligation in Shakespeare's *Henry IV and Henry V*," *Modern Philology*, Vol. 109, No. 3 (February 2012), 326-351; Ellen M. Caldwell, "'Banish All the World': Falstaff's Iconoclastic Threat to Kingship in *1 Henry IV*," *Renascence*, Summer 2007, 219-245. Caldwell takes the play's notion of the counterfeit image of the King in a slightly different direction from Landers', writing that the threatened banishment of Falstaff actually means the removal of what is human from the Lancastrian myth of kingship, a false religion of the state that Falstaff repeatedly punctures.

### 1.8 Overview of Chapter 4: 2 Henry IV

My examination of *2 Henry IV* focuses first on the play's demonstration that the production of any historical record always necessitates some degree of forgetting. This widely-overlooked or perhaps avoided aspect of history is brought to the fore when Rumor appears as a fantastical, forgetful historian of sorts. The competing histories of the battle of Shrewsbury and the faulty, nostalgic reminiscences of Shallow and Silence illustrate that accounts of the past are always shot through with forgetfulness. I contend that the ultimate act of forgetful obliviousness, the rejection of Falstaff is, despite intense critical disputation, a Nietzschean imperative for Hal's transformation into a man of action, and the play's end offers the first true glimmerings of a national amnesia leading to an imagined community as described by Benedict Anderson.

Both Parts 1 and 2 have produced an enormous amount of criticism devoted to the nature of Falstaff, who has been seen alternately as a descendant of the medieval Vice or the Lord of Misrule. The greatest point of interest concerning Falstaff in Part 2 is the rejection by a newly-crowned Henry V, which Edward Berry finds "true to the emotional and intellectual complexities of the men and issues involved."<sup>61</sup> David Bergeron (1991) considers the several strands of history that are at work in *2 Henry IV*, observing that they intersect in Falstaff, who brings narrative history and narrative fiction together so that history is examined and constructed through independent lives in the fiction of the play that assist an investigation of how history is made.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> See Edward. I. Berry, "The Rejection Scene in *2 Henry IV*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*. Vol. 17, No. 2 Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama (Spring 1977), 201-218; David M. Bergeron, "Shakespeare Makes History: *2 Henry IV*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, (Spring 1991), 231-245.

<sup>62</sup> See David M. Bergeron, "Shakespeare Makes History: *2 Henry IV*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, (Spring 1991), 231-245. Loren Blinde, "Rumored History in Shakespeare's *2 Henry IV*," *English Literary Renaissance* (Winter, 2008):34-54; Meredith Evans, "Rumor, the Breath of Kings, and the Body of Law in *2 Henry IV*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 60, Number 1, Spring 2009, 1-24.

Another focus of criticism for *2 Henry IV* is Shakespeare's rather anomalous character, Rumor. I consider Rumor as the embodiment of the playwright's idea that history is fundamentally imaginative, concurring with those who hold that the delineation between history and fiction is much less clear than modern conceptions would have it, and taking issue with those who view Rumor as dramatizing the formation of a sovereign state, mounted securely on individual virtue and charismatic power.<sup>63</sup> *2 Henry IV* focuses on possible alternative histories, upending memory in favor of imagination and multivocality as illustrated by the nostalgia of *Shallow and Silence*, which is a miniature version of the play's larger focus on national history.<sup>64</sup> Thus, the play's representation of political authority is less centralizing and celebratory than is often acknowledged.

#### 1.9 Overview of Chapter 5: *Henry V*

Criticism of the last play in the tetralogy most frequently has been divided on its assessment of Henry himself. While some take him at patriotic face value as "the model of all Christian kings," others have seen him as being coldly Machiavellian, urging poor men into the breach in order to achieve his own ends. In a now widely quoted 1977 essay on *Henry V*, Norman Rabkin compares Shakespeare's equivocal conception of Henry V to an optical illusion that permits the viewer to see either a rabbit or a duck, but not both at the same time. Henry may be either a scheming Machiavellian or the personification of all that is best about England, but he cannot be seen as both at the same time, says Rabkin. However, each view of Hal and the play itself is plausible because, says Rabkin, Shakespeare recognizes that reality is "intransigently multivalent."<sup>65</sup> Rabkin's essay should be read by all scholars who intend to comment on *Henry V*. Perhaps there would be fewer simplistic breathless paeans and acerbic condemnations. As

---

<sup>63</sup>For a counter to the view of Rumor's connection to the state, see Loren Blinde, "Rumored History in Shakespeare's *2 Henry IV*," *English Literary Renaissance* (Winter, 2008):34-54; Meredith Evans, "Rumor, the Breath of Kings, and the Body of Law in *2 Henry IV*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 60, Number 1, Spring 2009, 1-24.

<sup>64</sup>Naomi Conn Liebler, "'And Is Old Double Dead?': Nation and Nostalgia in *Henry IV Part 2*" *Shakespeare Survey* online. Cambridge University Press. 2011. Vol. 63, 78-88.

<sup>65</sup>Norman Rabkin, "Rabbits, Ducks, and *Henry V*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* Vol. 28, No. 3. Summer 1977, 279-296.

things stand, many seem incorrigibly prone to waving exclusive banners emblazoned solely with either duck or rabbit.

Noting that even in discussion of hegemony, the ambivalence of the play often centers on the personality of Henry, Claire McEachern (1994) asks to shift the discussion from Henry's personality to the question of why the play and its place in Elizabethan culture so frequently makes "personableness" the currency of criticism. She argues that the presentation of power in terms of personhood comes from a similar inflection in early modern discussions of communality. The Elizabethan personification of the crown and Henry's "person-ality" share tropes of subjectivity that are productive of the political affect of corporate identity—the nation. McEachern rejects the idea that the exercise of state power must stand in a negative relationship to human bonds, and she asserts that the segregation of personhood and power was not the Elizabethan habit. In fact, both tyranny and social mutuality were described in terms of the ruler's personhood.<sup>66</sup> I find McEachern's ideas to be refreshing because they are a well-reasoned and historically-based argument against the anti-humanist considerations that turn Henry V into a mere stock character in a Marxist morality play.

In *Henry V*, I consider how social amnesia is engineered for the consolidation of the nation, specifically in Henry's rhetorical attempts to transform his diverse army into an amnesic band of brothers, a first generation of the British nation-state retroactively constructed in the sixteenth century. I do not share Richard Helgerson's view of *Henry V* as the height of Shakespeare's ever-contracting focus on the ruler, arguing instead that the King's nation-building virtually depends on the active cooperation of the common people, which creates a greater complexity of response than the patriotism called for by the Chorus.<sup>67</sup> I offer an alternate consideration of what Henry V is up to other than Helgerson's idea that the King is part of an attempt by a social-climbing Shakespeare to expunge his own bourgeois roots.

---

<sup>66</sup> Claire McEachern, "*Henry V* and the Paradox of the Body Politic," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 1, Spring 1994, 33-56.

<sup>67</sup> Alison Thorne, "'Awake Remembrance of these Valiant Dead': *Henry V* and the Politics of the English History Play," *Shakespeare Studies*, 2002, Vol. 30, 162-187.

I then discuss how the play's self-conscious erasure of two well-known historical circumstances of Henry's reign serves to uncover them even as it seems to ignore them—the connection of the Cambridge conspiracy to Edmund Mortimer, and the subsuming of the four captains into a seemingly homogenous Englishness. Some criticism holds that the impossibility of seeing the nation as unproblematically English requires that its community be called out of the past through bloodlines, nostalgic memory and the summoning up of spirits of the past, such as Edward III and the ancestors of commoners, all of which places emphasis on the function of memory in the play.<sup>68</sup> While I agree that there is a place for bloodlines and ancestors in Henry's rhetoric for the creation of community, I find Henry V unmoved by an appeal to ancestors, such as Edward III, primarily because the connection to his grandson Richard II could be seen as a de-legitimization of Henry's own rule. I find no evidence that Henry V wants to re-create himself in the mold of Edward III, the Black Prince, or even his own father. He may wish to repeat victorious outcomes, but it is his own achievement and not the repetition of theirs that he seeks. One might contend that Henry V would seek other worlds to conquer if that were true, rather than re-visiting the ancestral quarrels with the French or the battle of Crécy. I submit that this is evidence of his judiciousness because he chooses a territory to which he may actually have some claim (albeit a rather convoluted one) rather than launching out against Spain, for example. Foreign wars were his father's idea for keeping the country unified, of course, but Henry seems to know how to pick his battles. We cannot make a satisfactory assessment of the proposed war against the Turk that never actually materializes, but it perhaps would have been a son's last fulfillment of his deceased father's expiation rather than Henry V's own imperialist objective.

My penultimate point is that Henry attempts to engineer his own amnesic exculpation for the war with France. Bradley Greenburg (2008) notes in *Henry V* the King's deliberate campaign

---

<sup>68</sup> Philip Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004); Also Anthony Guy Patricia, "The Courses of His Youth Promised It Not;" *Henry V* and the Play of Memory," *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium*, 2009, Vol. 9, 61-80.

to engineer his own exculpation in regards to four pivotal scenes, making use of a guilt-management strategy that invites shame to diminish the guilt of the Lancastrian usurpation.<sup>69</sup> I admit a great debt to Greenburg for his isolation of these four events, but I take them in a different direction in that I regard them as instances of Henry's skillful neutralization of guilt for the express purpose of achieving a Nietzschean brand of forgetfulness. To avoid the crippling guilt that ultimately stymied his father's rise to greatness, Henry V engages in a thorough and relentless campaign of forgetting aimed at expunging any taint of blame from his own conscience, from the minds of his contemporaries, and from recorded history.

In making my final point, I note that the play's concluding equivocal wooing has been seen as either inappropriate for the genre of the history play or as a thinly veiled political rape.<sup>70</sup> I propose to consider the scene in terms of the Tudor Welsh connection, Henry's humanity, and an invitation to Katharine to experience for herself the empowerment achieved through far-sighted forgetfulness.

I show that Shakespeare reveals in the second Henriad the instability of historical narrative by foregrounding the existence of alternate versions of events, each unreliable in its own way because each is created by some degree of forgetting. In addition to the revelation of the function of forgetting in the manufacture of the historical narrative, a calculated deployment of multiple forms of forgetfulness enables the playwright to examine the positive utilities of such forgetfulness for both individual and national purposes. In the second Henriad, these modes of forgetfulness range from self-delusion to self-actualization to national cohesion.

---

<sup>69</sup> Bradley Greenburg, "O for a muse of fire": *Henry V* and Plotted Exculpation," *Shakespeare Studies*, 2008, Vol. 36, 182-206.

<sup>70</sup> See Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*. London: Routledge, 1997, 65; Peter Parolin, "Figuring the King in *Henry V*: Political Rhetoric and the Limits of Performance," *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium*, 2009, Vol. 9, 43-60.



## CHAPTER 2

### *RICHARD II*

“Remember who you are.”(3.2.83) Aumerle’s unusual exhortation to Richard II could be just a tactful but cautionary aside, encouraging his distraught royal cousin to comport himself in public with a dignity and self-restraint befitting a King in spite of the defection of his troops to Bolingbroke. According to the *OED*, “to forget oneself” could mean “to behave unbecomingly” as well as “to lose remembrance of one’s station, position, or character; to lose sight of the requirements of dignity, propriety, or decorum.” However, in view of the negativity associated with self-forgetting and its extrapolation to self-disintegration in the early modern period, Aumerle is probably concerned with something more than a minor impropriety of behavior unbecoming to a King. He notes with alarm the erratic tone of Richard’s grief-stricken speech, and therefore urges him to remember himself. Richard’s unusual response—“Am I not king?”—correctly replies, not to an admonition about decorum, but rather to an existential directive: Do not lose sight of who you think you are, of your identity as King of England.<sup>71</sup> Charnes observes that this kind of forgetfulness of self or self-erosion appears in drama at “moments that threaten to destabilize or even shatter an identity.”<sup>72</sup> For Richard II, it is but the first of several moments of such forgetful destabilization, and it is the history of the shattering of that identity that Shakespeare dramatizes in this first play of his second historical tetralogy.

However, the first manifestation of forgetfulness that I consider appears on the part of the playwright himself, the conscious truncation of the historical record of Richard II. That truncation

---

<sup>71</sup> My definition of *identity* follows Linda Charnes: “the artificially constructed ‘thingness’ of self as it has been constituted in the past.” Linda Charnes, *Notorious Identity: Materializing the Subject in Shakespeare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 8.

<sup>72</sup> Charnes, *Notorious Identity*, 9.

coupled with shifting perspectives early in the play provides the audience with an awareness of the instability of the historical record. A second implementation of forgetting is Richard's own self-forgetfulness of the proper conduct of a ruler, which is possibly the result of his studied neglect of the past and its "fair succession" that have made him a King. Then, before continuing discussion of the playwright's other purposive uses of forgetfulness, I will follow Baldo in making use of both Hayden White's idea of the historical sublime and Frank Ankersmit's formulation of forgetfulness related to trauma in order to build a platform for the rest of my argument. I then move to a consideration of the playwright's unflinching anatomization of the King's interiority as it undergoes the forgetful sundering of self and identity, culminating in his transformation into a lyric poet engulfed by the historical sublime. Scattered throughout *Richard II* are instances of liquid imagery signifying forgetfulness and its connections to the River Lethe that I will note, and I also plan to point out, as each instance arises in the course of the discussion, how historiography in various states of formulation re-invents, forgets, and asks us to make choices about what we will accept as the way things happened.

### 2.1 The Abridged Richard

Shakespeare undertakes in this play a very radical approach to historical drama: he omits most of the history. In fact, the playwright himself seems forgetful in ignoring virtually all of the record of Richard II, focusing almost exclusively on events that transpired during the last two years of the King's reign. There is no mention of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 during which the brave boy-king faced the rabble and successfully dispersed them, and there is no staging of the events involving the Lords Appellant, who managed his realm during his nonage, eventually executing several of Richard's closest advisors. The fact that Gloucester's murder and Richard's banishment of Bolingbroke and Mowbray are retaliations against three of those five Lords Appellant is omitted. This paring down of the historical record serves the interest of foregrounding Richard.

As I noted in the introduction, new historicists often examine *Richard II* in terms of its faithfulness to its historical sources, affording the historical source material primacy over the literary text in order to interrogate any divergence from the record. It has become *de rigueur* to at least mention Elizabeth I's recognition of herself as Richard, and from that anecdotal identification, the historicists position Shakespeare in the middle of Elizabethan politics and subversion.<sup>73</sup> Jeremy Lopez (2008) has questioned new historicist assumptions about *Richard II*, noting that Shakespeare's use of Holinshed's historical record is "unsystematic" and "imprecise" because he and the chronicle writer were handling the same material for rather unrelated purposes. Lopez continues that "the pedagogically and critically convenient rhetorical formulations of source study and New Historicism inevitably frame the search for a historical drama's ideological implications in terms of the existence—verifiable in the antecedent documents—of 'history itself.'"<sup>74</sup> Allowing that the historical record was "instrumental in the play's conception," Lopez nevertheless judges that the plot of *Richard II* is not dependant on the historical record, and that Shakespeare's achievement is the creation of something out of nothing—"a wafer of Holinshed becomes the spirit of Richard."<sup>75</sup> Just as the communion wafer represents a higher mystical reality, so the selected bits from Holinshed facilitate the apprehension of Richard II as Shakespeare imagined him. To those who fault the play's lack of a "complete" historicity that they believe would shed light on Richard's behavior, I would suggest that the playwright may not be attempting to provide a full historical account—which might have taken three plays, as it did with Henry VI—and he does not justify Richard's damaging, self-forgetting behaviors. Shakespeare seems to eliminate many of the events of history surrounding Richard II, making him the sole object of our attention as he undergoes the irreversible and traumatic loss of an identity that Richard believes constitutes the truth of his own existence.

---

<sup>73</sup> Griffin, 29-30.

<sup>74</sup> Jeremy Lopez, "Eating Richard," *Shakespeare Studies*, Vol. 36. 2008,220.

<sup>75</sup> Lopez, 223.

## 2.2 Unsettling Historiography: Uncertainty and Making Choices

One should not settle comfortably into a theater seat to see *Richard II*, expecting a smooth narrative of the story. Besides curtailing the events that the play will present, Shakespeare also forces the audience to experience an awareness of the instability of the historical record. Although *Richard II* is a history play, it begins abruptly in the middle of things, seemingly forgetting that we in the audience are new on the scene, and giving us little expositional framework within which to interpret the combat that is about to take place. While we gather that Gloucester's murder is the point of the combat, the circumstances of who did what and why remain nebulous. The numerous charges and counter-charges concerning Mowbray's supposed role in Gloucester's death that are hurled by Mowbray and Bolingbroke make it difficult to know who is telling the truth. Both combatants seem equally incensed at the disparagement of their honor, and both appeal to God to witness the rightness of their causes. From the play's outset, Shakespeare introduces us to a rarity in orthodox history—uncertainty about the side with which we should identify in the present moment. Baldo observes that the audience is made to feel as if we have arrived at the performance a few minutes late and have missed exposition that would clarify the characters' motivations.<sup>76</sup> We gamely join the experience, only to have the stylized bravado of the trial by combat between Mowbray and Bolingbroke thwarted when Richard abruptly throws down his warder and douses the excitement of those both onstage and in the theater audience. Richard's at first inexplicable banishment of two men who seemed willing to fight each other to the death in his defense adds to the uncertainty we feel about this King, and makes us question whether we know all we need to know. Our uncertainty is well-founded, as Richard's protestation that his action is to spare the country the shedding of civil blood is revealed as patently false as soon as he is alone with his coterie of youthful advisers. The heretofore solicitous monarch who deigns to "descend and fold [Bolingbroke] in our arms" (1.3.54) drops his feigned concern for his cousin Harry of Hereford, and Richard's leading questions concerning

---

<sup>76</sup> Baldo, *Memory in Shakespeare's Histories*, 17.

Bolingbroke's departure elicit Aumerle's sarcastically triumphant "good-riddance-to bad-rubbish" response. Richard's lack of a rebuke to Aumerle's gloating and his own derision of Bolingbroke's conduct toward the cheering crowds of commoners reveal to us the King's true feelings toward his banished cousin—he mistrusts his popularity and wants him out of the picture. The audience quickly becomes aware of two important aspects of this play: first, if we want history, we should be prepared to gather it on the fly, and second, it will not be easy to know whose side we should be on or with whom we are meant to identify. The ambiguity for the audience in choosing allegiance is illustrated below in Shakespeare's presentation of the Lancastrian version of the past.

The audience may as yet be unsure, but the Lancastrian characters appear to believe unequivocally that Richard II was complicit in the death of his uncle Thomas, Duke of Gloucester. When Gloucester's widow urges John of Gaunt to revenge his brother's death, Gaunt's reply indicates that he also certainly believes Richard to be at fault in his brother's death. He says that "correction lieth in those hands / Which made the fault that we cannot correct" (1.2.1-2) and that he cannot take revenge against the substitute and deputy of God. This reply can hardly be read as anything other than an indictment of Richard II. Although Gaunt's son Bolingbroke does not publicly accuse the Lord's Anointed, he does, however, impeach Mowbray, who carried out the King's orders, and in that accusation, Bolingbroke describes the blood of Gloucester as being "like sacrificing Abel's, [which] cries / Even from the tongueless caverns of the earth, / To me for justice and rough chastisement"(1.1.104-106). In this case, Poole's suggested connection between liquid, as in blood, and forgetfulness is not made by the playwright. Instead, the blood goads on memory in an expectation of revenge for the past. Indeed, there is an obligation for Bolingbroke to avenge a kinsman's blood, but the allusion to Abel cannot cast Mowbray as the murdering Cain since Abel was killed by his near kin. The reference to Abel, in other words, indicts Richard, not Mowbray.<sup>77</sup> Concerning the accusation of the complicity of Mowbray and

---

<sup>77</sup> Calderwood, "Richard II: The Fall of Speech," 195.

Richard II in the death of Gloucester, Agnes Heller holds that “men believe to be true what is in their interest to believe,” and that Richard’s guilt “is very unlikely, but nothing is entirely excluded.”<sup>78</sup> While it might be in the political and historical interests of the Lancastrians falsely to blame Richard and Mowbray for the death of Gloucester, since it would provide grounds to move against him, it is equally plausible that Richard and Mowbray are actually culpable. Shakespeare appears to find their guilt at least somewhat credible. Of course, Heller may be right in viewing the accusations of Bolingbroke and Gaunt as merely convenient for their purpose of a long-planned usurpation.

Nevertheless, Shakespeare shapes the dispute in such a way that, from our perspective as viewers of a history play, the absolute truth about Gloucester’s death is impossible to discover, and the most important revelation given by the Lancastrian account is about the nature of history. We may believe the accusations of the house of Lancaster, but Shakespeare seems to want us to recognize that it is a choice that we ourselves make. No Claudius-like confession during unsuccessful prayer will confirm Richard’s complicity for us. The Lancastrians will soon be in power and therefore in possession of the historical account for a time, but in *Richard II* at least, Shakespeare refuses to provide anything that would unequivocally indict Richard for Gloucester’s death. Even as he presents a minimalist version of history in this play, Shakespeare glances at the constructed nature of any historical account. There are often multiple versions of a past event, but only one becomes history. Calculated forgetfulness sees to it that the other versions are marginalized or relegated to total oblivion.

### 2.3 Double Amnesia: Fair Succession and England’s Landlord

Although Richard is the title character and this is “his” history play, he initially seems curiously vapid, self-absorbed and politically foolhardy. How are we to respond to this articulate yet callous young monarch, who banishes both ostensibly loyal noble combatants, refuses the dying counsel of “old John of Gaunt, time-honored Lancaster,” and before the body is cold, seizes Gaunt’s

---

<sup>78</sup> Agnes Heller, *The Time Is Out of Joint: Shakespeare as Philosopher of History*, (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 164.

possessions to finance a campaign in Ireland? It is hard to believe that any audience, either early modern or our own time, would respond positively to apparent injustice, disrespect of the dying elderly, and greedy confiscation. Northumberland's politic explanation for Richard's erratic behavior is that the King is not himself. To say one is not himself is another way of saying he is behaving in a manner counter to what is normally expected of him—he has forgotten himself. I want to interpret this initial self-forgetting in light of the first OED definition of the phrase: “to lose remembrance of one's station, position, or character; to lose sight of the requirements of dignity, propriety, or decorum.” This loss of remembrance is precisely Richard's case as the play begins, as he has lost sight of the requirements of his position as King, and has alienated the common people as well as the nobles by his forgetful, reckless behavior. However, for Richard himself, his history is emplotted by means of what Hayden White calls the aesthetics of the beautiful, for he is soothed by the assurance that angels guard his sovereignty, and his perceived narrative of his royal acts moves as pleasantly as he could wish. As Heller puts it,

[T]his young man is the anointed king, the legitimate heir of his father, legitimately occupying the English throne. He does not feel himself threatened in his majesty; that he is a king is his nature. At the very beginning of the play he understands the word “natural” in this sense. He never reflects on what he is doing. He is certain that whatever he is doing is right because he is the one doing it. His majesty means that he is always in the right, and all his decisions are right.<sup>79</sup>

Richard's reign is legitimate, for he is the successor of well over two-hundred years of Plantagenet rule. It is his nature, his very identity, that he is king of England, and whatever he chooses to do is the right course of action. Baldo points out that Richard seems oblivious of the past which has made him king.<sup>80</sup> He never makes reference to his heritage and ancestral lineage from his grandfather Edward III or his own father, Edward the Black Prince. It is as if Richard imagines himself to have emerged *sui generis* without any connection or obligation to the

---

<sup>79</sup> Heller, 164.

<sup>80</sup> Baldo,

Plantagenet kings who preceded him. Brownlow notes that a king is the chief symbolic idea of monarchy, representing an emotionally-sensed national unity, and that a good reign is known by his understanding of his realm and the unselfishness with which he serves it.<sup>81</sup> Shakespeare writes Richard as a king who is deficient on both points: he neither understands nor serves his realm unselfishly, and there is little “emotionally sensed national unity” among his people.

Richard may speak of his impartiality and the “unstooping firmness of my upright soul” (1.1.121), but his self-forgetting deviation from society’s expectations for a good King becomes only more readily apparent. He has spent lavishly on an extended court, and he has become dependent on the revenues from making England, as Gaunt calls it, “a pelting farm.” Unadvisedly, he projects the necessity of further milking the nobles to finance his campaign in Ireland, the account of which is also truncated by the playwright. We learn from Richard’s own lips of the plan for Ireland as well as his previous and intended improvident behaviors that are in violation of the principles of ideal kingship.

*K. Rich.* We will in person to this war,  
And for our coffers, with too great a court  
And liberal largess, are grown somewhat light,  
We are enforc’d to farm our royal realm,  
The revenue whereof shall furnish us  
For our affairs in hand. If that come short,  
Our substitutes at home shall have blank charters,  
Whereto, when they shall know what men are rich,  
They shall subscribe them for large sums of gold,  
And send them after to supply our wants,  
For we will make for Ireland presently.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> Brownlow, 59.

<sup>82</sup> All references to Shakespeare are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).



That Richard is deficient in his regal responsibilities often has been noted. Thomas Betteridge agrees that Richard is a failing King from the beginning because he lacks wise counsel, which has been replaced with the “lascivious meters” of his sycophantic young advisers.<sup>83</sup> Samuel Weingarten similarly observes that Richard’s uses language about “the duties of a king that would mark him as an effective ruler, were there anything on the factual level of his performance to correspond to them.”<sup>84</sup>

Richard acknowledges his “liberal largess” to a sizeable court, and his remedy involves farming out his kingdom and giving blank charters to his surrogates with which to squeeze money out of “what men are rich.” Withstood to the face by the dying John of Gaunt, Richard has already caustically brushed aside the charges without denying their truth. Richard’s self-forgetting of his responsibility as King is vouched for by Nigel Saul, Richard’s most recent biographer, who supports Shakespeare’s rendering of the King, and considers Richard to have been a narcissist.<sup>85</sup>

Kirby Farrell writes that, during the last two years of his reign, Richard II’s behavior became

extravagant, sharpening the conflict between his conception of godlike majesty and his incompetence as a ruler. In 1397 the King launched a political and territorial revolution that strengthened the monarchy even as his self-aggrandizement alienated his subjects.<sup>86</sup>

Saul and Farrell’s assessments would seem not only to verify the truth of Gaunt’s condemnation of Richard as an incompetent ruler but also Shakespeare’s depiction of him as self-forgetful and self-deluded concerning the impregnable nature of his reign. To have become disengaged from what actually determines one’s identity is inherently dangerous, but Richard lacks just such self-awareness. Shakespeare’s purpose for the first two acts is to create the atmosphere in which

---

<sup>83</sup> Betteridge, 58.

<sup>84</sup> Weingarten, 541.

<sup>85</sup> Nigel Saul, *Richard II*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1997), 459-67.

<sup>86</sup> Kirby Farrell, Introduction, *Critical Essays on Shakespeare’s Richard II*, ed. Kirby Farrell (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1999), 5.

deposing a King can occur. The relatively shallow and unsympathetic performance of imprudent kingship given by Richard early in the play enables Bolingbrook's opposition.

#### 2.4 Forgetting and the Shattering of Identity

Due to Richard's self-forgetful incompetence and abuse of power in the first two acts, the King returns from Ireland in Act 3 to find a similar rebellion brewing at home, and he regards the situation as so overwhelming that he must be told by Aumerle to remember who he is. For Richard, this crisis of authority causes an unsteadiness in his subjectivity that is connected to self-forgetting. In other words, if he cannot hold fast to his identity as King, his reaction to that loss of identity will be some form of forgetfulness. Richard's situation is precisely what Garrett Sullivan is talking about when he says that forgetfulness in the theater appears at moments that threaten to destabilize or destroy identity.<sup>87</sup> In fact, drama, elaborates Charnes, is the dominant means by which the performative and contingent nature of one's subjectivity can be represented.<sup>88</sup> In drama, we find that people talk to themselves as we listen in and they say things about themselves in fascinating, revelatory, often poetic ways that people rarely, if ever, employ in everyday speech—or at least we do not perceive it as such. The urgency of time in a drama—"the two hours' traffic of our stage," more or less— makes us pay attention to what is said and done because we know it somehow will have meaning. The performative and contingent nature of one's subjectivity [is ] being represented. For this reason, like Aumerle, we give heed to the way Richard comports himself. Even before Richard loses the crown, we notice that he begins to behave in erratic ways that suggest that he is forgetting who he "is," and it is highly significant that we do not actually see his dramatic interiority until Richard II's self-identification as King is threatened.

One cannot read the second scene of the third Act, in which Richard weeps for joy on his return to England, comparing himself to a "long-parted mother" reunited with her child (4-8), without wondering what happened to the disdainful, high-handed Richard of the first two Acts.

---

<sup>87</sup> Sullivan, *Memory and Forgetting in English Renaissance Drama*, 13.

<sup>88</sup> Charnes, *Notorious Identity*, 8-9.

Fluidity and forgetfulness are linked in Richard's comparison of himself to the tearful mother of English soil, suggesting to the early moderns a forgetful slide from stable masculinity into the implied instability of femininity, the "leaky vessel" of Gail Kern Pastern's formulations concerning early modern attitudes toward the female body.<sup>89</sup> Critics who disavow Tillyard's conservative politics nevertheless employ his dichotomy in which Richard is a weak, almost-effeminate king contrasted with the uncommunicative but physical Machiavellian Bolingbroke. This reduces the two characters to such a degree that the voluble combatant Bolingbroke, who will not imagine his banishment in optimistic terms, is subsumed by the more polemically useful taciturn usurper, and the decisive King of the play's opening scene is conveniently overshadowed by the garrulous but powerless Richard of the deposition.

Others disavow such a convenient and simplistic dichotomy. F. W. Brownlow (1977) questions the attitude toward Richard as weak and effeminate, arguing that such a view overlooks Richard's conviction of the sacred nature of his kingship.<sup>90</sup> David Norbrook (1996) also has challenged the emphasis on the differences between Richard and Bolingbroke and the hypothesis that the play is meant to evoke the medieval days when the king's two bodies were united. According to Norbrook, the fear of an unrestrained despot far exceeded early modern apprehension about usurpers, and therefore the play stages aristocratic resistance for an early modern audience for which such resistance was unlikely if not impossible.<sup>91</sup> Rather than the relative masculinity and femininity of these two, our attention should be on the contention of early modern culture that forgetfulness *always* equates to instability, which is gendered as female. This view positions the initially imprudent forgetfulness of Richard against the dynamic amnesia that Bolingbroke learns to employ. The playwright's ability to present this double-perspective that sometimes forgetfulness is unstable and imprudent and yet sometimes wise and powerful

---

<sup>89</sup> Gail Kern Pastern, *The Body Embarrassed*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993).

<sup>90</sup> F. W. Brownlow, "Richard II and the Testing of Legitimacy," in *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Richard II*, ed. Kirby Farrell (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1999), 58-80.

<sup>91</sup> David Norbrook, "A Liberal Tongue: Language and Rebellion in Richard II," in *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Richard II*, ed. Kirby Farrell (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1999), 121-134.

illustrates the recognition eventually recorded by Nietzsche— that it is important to know when to remember and when to forget.

Whether Richard's tears are truly joyful or relieved or fearful is somewhat uncertain at this particular point in the play, but their linkage to forgetfulness seems fairly clear, since Aumerle must tell Richard to remember who he is only a few lines later. As further evidence of a transformation in progress due to self-forgetting, a brief glance at the length of Richard's speeches in the last three acts, contrasted with those of the first two acts, reveals a floodgate of speech. Richard's growing prolixity will receive attention later in this chapter, but the increasing duration and poetic nature of his speech are the first indicators that the subjectivity of the King is in flux, and the change is marked by his forgetfulness of a previous way of relating to himself as well as of his habits of public speech.

In a certain sense, however, Richard II does remember; he "re-members" the past, which is to say he conveniently forgets some of it as he reconstitutes his perception of it. One salient demonstration of his forgetfulness of self is in his relative obliviousness to his role in bringing about the rebellion of his subjects. It is true that he makes one or two throw-away references to his wasteful past, but for the most part, he forgets that he has behaved in violation of the expectations of the norms for a good King. And yet at the risk of dismantling my own argument, it is important to point out again that, although Richard II himself obviously forgets his exploitation of the commons and nobles, even Shakespeare gives Richard's failures as King a rather cursory treatment. Yes, he may be implicated in Gloucester's death. Yes, he is insincere with his cousin Bolingbroke, and he is curt and insensitive with the dying John of Gaunt. He ruthlessly confiscates a dead Gaunt's property—something Machiavelli warns that princes should never do. Yet Shakespeare does not present him as a vicious, ruinous tyrant, because he will soon make him a lyric poet. Nevertheless, there must be some provision for a justification of sorts for Bolingbroke's return from banishment and his subsequent usurpation. In a few places throughout the play, Richard himself admits of his own guilt somewhat obliquely, but for the most part, he

does what many people do with their own guilt: he forgets about it. Engle has noted that such forgetting is not an amnesic blank, and that in acts of forgetting, something always remains: "the half-remembered is the half-forgotten."<sup>92</sup> Barish suggests that many times in Shakespeare's plays, forgetting actually "comes down to a refusal to remember, a conscious act of denial, often a self-serving shutting out of something inconvenient or unwelcome...a willed amnesia masquerading as an inability to possess one's past."<sup>93</sup> Barish's characterizations of the nature of forgetting shed considerable light on the subjectivity and consequent behavior of Richard II in the final three acts of the play. At first, perhaps, the King is ignoring something inconvenient or unwelcome, such as his subjects' dissatisfaction. Eventually, however, Richard refuses to remember his "crimes," even when he is asked to read an official record of them.

T. S. Eliot could have just as easily been discussing the last three acts of *Richard II* rather than *Othello* when he noted that "nothing dies harder than the desire to think well of oneself," applauding Shakespeare for his ability to expose "the human will to see things as they are not."<sup>94</sup> Of himself and his Kingship, Richard avows:

*K. Rich.* So when this thief, this traitor Bolingbroke  
Who all this while hath revell'd in the night,  
Whilst we were wand'ring with the Antipodes,  
Shall see us rising in our throne, the east,  
His treasons will sit blushing in his face,  
Nor able to endure the sight of day,  
But self-affrighted tremble at his sin.  
  
Not all the water in the rough rude sea  
Can wash the balm off from an anointed king;  
  
The breath of worldly men cannot depose

---

<sup>92</sup> Engle, "The Decay of Memory," 22.

<sup>93</sup> Barish, 216-217.

<sup>94</sup> T. S. Eliot, "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," In *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950), 110-111.

The deputy elected by the Lord. (3.2.47-57)

Richard imagines that his majestic return, like the sun rising in the east, will abash Bolingbroke, and his re-assertion of place and identity are made in terms of the inefficacy of “all the water in the rough, rude sea” to wash the balm off an anointed King of England, a repudiation of forgetfulness that Richard later will disavow in the deposition scene, for although all the water in the sea cannot remove the sacred balm, the flowing tears of a grief-stricken, humiliated King prove equal to the task: “With mine own tears I wash away my balm.” At this point, however, he continues to think well of himself, forgetting his crimes as King, and secure in the knowledge that the divinity of his Kingship will awe Bolingbroke and set a hedge about the King. Yet only a few lines later, upon learning that the Welsh army has gone over to Bolingbroke, Richard declares despairingly that time has set a blot on him. Such bipolar oscillation suggests the destabilization of identity, and therefore Aumerle must urge him to remember who he is. A relieved Richard responds that he had forgotten himself, thus enfolding the two meanings of *self-forgetting* into one: his lapse into despair is unseemly, and also he has momentarily lost sight of his true identity, forgetting himself, which the *OED* credits as the earliest use of the term in this sense. His next question should give us pause. “Am I not King?” he asks. On one level he seems to be reasserting himself as King, as in “Isn’t it reality that I am the King?” However, another reading of this rejoinder is “Am I not-King?” That is, “Am I truly no longer the King?” There is an echo of Gaunt’s earlier accusation concerning his misgovernance: “Landlord art thou now, not King” (2.1.113). As a result of Richard II’s debasement of England into a pelting farm, Gaunt declares that Richard is not a King but a common landlord.

Feeling his own inability to think and act decisively, Richard demands that his identity, “coward majesty,” awake, thus connecting himself and his identity with a much-dreaded lethargic sleep and possible oblivion. Richard then declares that *the name of King* equates to twenty thousand soldiers. It is the name, not the man, which constitutes Kingship. Here Richard certainly could be seen as referring to what Kantorowicz would later formulate as the idea of the king’s two

bodies—the physical man King Richard and the corporation sole of Kingship. One body can be in physical danger and die, but the other outlives the generations of its merely mortal representatives.<sup>95</sup> Speaking to this majestic identity as if it were a sentient and impervious exoskeleton in which the man Richard might safely encase himself, he reports to it that “a puny subject strikes at thy glory” (3.2.86). Richard has temporarily forgotten himself as King and must awaken that sleeping (and therefore forgetful) identity so that he may safely return to it. His remarks suggest that Richard is unable, not only to determine which body of the King is forgetful, but also which one he is. His self-affirmations of majestic impregnability are not sufficient to sustain his fortitude, and Scroop’s hint of forthcoming bad news sends Richard reeling back into the despair of not-King. Forgetting his claim of the angels who will fight for him and the twenty thousand soldiers his name can rouse, Richard seems to begin to pop in and out of the identity of King.

*K. Rich.* Say, is my kingdom lost? Why, 'twas my care,

And what loss is it to be rid of care?

Strives Bolingbroke to be as great as we?

Greater he shall not be; if he serve God,

We'll serve him, too, and be his fellow so.

Revolt our subjects? That we cannot mend,

They break their faith to God as well as us. (3.2.95-101)

Verbalization of the loss of his kingdom might suggest that Richard is aware that such a defeat is possible, but whether he is fully cognizant of what that means in terms of his identity as King is uncertain.

While resisting the temptation to weigh Richard against Bolingbroke that has sometimes bogged down earlier scholarship, it is nevertheless significant to note that Richard’s own comparison of himself with Bolingbroke brings to mind the contrast evident in how the two

---

<sup>95</sup> Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1957), 24-41.

respond to a threatened destabilization of identity. When Bolingbroke is banished, Gaunt urges him to think of his condition as other than it is, to adopt a subjectivity that can respond to the identity of banished subject in ways other than despair: "Go, say I sent thee forth to purchase honor...or suppose devouring pestilence hangs in our air and thou art flying to a fresher clime" (1.3.282-283). Bolingbroke refuses to imagine things as being other than what they actually are. In other words, he refuses to forget, even for a moment, what the reality of his condition is. "O, who can hold a fire in his hand / By thinking on the frosty Caucasus?" (294-295). Conversely, Richard, when faced with the impending loss of the kingdom, attempts to deny that loss with an expression that the news is not bad because it is not the worst.

### 2.5 "Who Do You Think You Are?": Richard and Experimental Identity

Richard is more than willing to "see things as they are not," exculpating himself from any blame for the rebellion and morphing quite easily into a sinless victim of the unrighteousness of others. As the identity of King begins to slide away from Richard, he frantically grasps for a place to stand, eventually seeing himself in a series of "endlessly interchangeable roles."<sup>96</sup> Upon learning that Bushy and the rest did not betray him but already have been executed, like an elegiac bard he proposes talk of "graves, of worms, and epitaphs," and ultimately invites his auditors to "sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the death of kings" (3.3.145, 155-156). History in its horrific sublimity coupled with personal grief at the sudden, violent death of his friends begins to elicit tragic lyrical poetry unlike the ceremonial poetry of the first act. Dorothea Kehler believes that the loss of his friends is indeed an emotional turning point for Richard, and that "the doomed, weeping king crosses over the boundaries of ceremony and historical circumstances into the domain of the psychological and universal."<sup>97</sup> She further asserts that by mid-play Richard knows "he is going to die, and soon: a deposed monarch is unlikely to live long."<sup>98</sup> The certainty of his death Richard previously has chosen to disregard, to see it as other

---

<sup>96</sup> Farrell, 15.

<sup>97</sup> Kehler, 11.

<sup>98</sup> Kehler, 7.



than what surely must happen. According to Kehler, “Kingship, prolonging solipsistic childhood, has shielded him from recognition of his own mortality.”<sup>99</sup> The deaths of Woodstock and Gaunt did not evoke any reflections on mortality for Richard, but now the growing rebel forces and the executions of his young friends make plain his circumstances. His “response to the experience” of being King allows him now to talk of death and its connection to kingship. Richard’s suggestion that he and the nobles sit on the ground and tell sad tales about the death of kings is one of many indicators that he is losing hold of his identity, first because he seems to objectify kingship, especially his own, as a past condition, and also because such an action is counter to the behavior expected of majesty.

#### 2.6 Language, Literature, and the Creation of Tragic Art

Richard turns increasingly to language to wrestle with the reality of his falling condition. Symptomatic of the sluggishness and inaction of lethargy, his seated story-telling of the death of kings is also reminiscent of the alleged idleness of the playhouse, and like the playgoers of Rankins’ earlier indictments, Richard begins to “temper his tongue” to mirror the behavior found in such sad tales. Furthermore, when Shakespeare has Richard II invoke the “sad stories of the death of kings,” he is alluding to a very familiar historical mode, the tradition of *de casibus* literature that was written in direct imitation of Boccaccio’s *De casibus vivorum illustrium*. This work was one of the most influential versions of history produced by the Renaissance, and its demonstration that a falling pattern is typical of the lives of great people was accomplished by the accretion of an overwhelming number of biographies illustrative of that pattern. English works in the *de casibus* tradition include John Lydgate’s second-hand translation of Boccaccio from the French called *Fall of Princes*, Chaucer’s *The Monk’s Tale*, and William Baldwin’s edition of *The Mirror for Magistrates*, which under subsequent editors continued to be published alongside Shakespeare’s plays. The *Mirror*, asserts Paul Budra, has been misapprehended by modern critics who merely mine it for allusions in Elizabethan drama or regard it as inferior proto-drama.

---

<sup>99</sup> Kehler, 8.

*Mirror for Magistrates* should rather be seen as history writing crafted in the vein of *de casibus* wherein the amassed biographies castigate the political failings that violate the public good.<sup>100</sup> Shakespeare's early history plays *Henry VI Parts 1, 2, and 3* present history in a manner closely kin to the *de casibus* tradition. However, the second tetralogy begins with a play that stages Richard II's attempt to get outside the confines of the historical record to escape the inexorable fate that *de casibus* presents as a foregone conclusion. The playwright knows how the historical record ends, but he wants to know what it was like for an actual human being trapped inside a life always already destined to be the *de casibus* account of a fallen prince.

Richard no longer sees himself as God's favorite whom thousands of angels will defend but rather as one of many tragic *de casibus* royal figures duped by the arch comedian, Death.

...for within the hollow crown

That rounds the mortal temples of a king

Keeps Death his court and there the antic sits,

Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp,

Allowing him a breath, a little scene,

To monarchize, be fear'd and kill with looks,

Infusing him with self and vain conceit,

As if this flesh which walls about our life,

Were brass impregnable, and humour'd thus

Comes at the last and with a little pin

Bores through his castle wall, and farewell king! (3.2.165-175)

Death wears the crown, keeps court, and laughs at a mortal kin's pomp and state. By the end of the speech he provides proof to himself and his subjects that he is dislodged from the social network and cannot actually be King because he is "subjected" to the true king, Death.

---

<sup>100</sup> Paul Budra, *Mirror for Magistrates and the de casibus Tradition*, (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2000).

Cover your heads and mock not flesh and blood  
With solemn reverence: throw away respect,  
Tradition, form and ceremonious duty,  
For you have but mistook me all this while:  
I live with bread like you, feel want,  
Taste grief, need friends: subjected thus,  
How can you say to me, I am a king? (3.2.176-182)

Richard rejects all show of deference to him, noting his humanity rather than his royalty. If, as noted in the introduction, forgetting for the early moderns embodies a mode of existence associated with humoral, spiritual, and social disorder, we can surely say all of the three forms of disorder are now made manifest in the lethargic, God-forsaken, self-deposed (and therefore placeless) Richard. Although Richard's permanent loss of crown and identity are still to come, and with that loss the fullest experience of the historical sublime, the flood of lyric poetic speech has begun as the disordered Richard can discern the lineaments of the looming trauma. When he responds to Northumberland's request that he come down to meet Bolingbroke in the base court, Richard's reply reads like the speech of a figure in a *de casibus* tale. "Down, down I come, like glist'ring Phaëton, / Wanting the manage of unruly jades" (3.3.178-179), for Richard recognizes his condition as that of a falling prince. However, Shakespeare's King bears little resemblance to the *de casibus* Richard II of *A Mirror for Magistrates*. The latter is a rueful ghost who speaks resignedly of his past crimes of mismanagement and lasciviousness while the former prowls about the cage of history, looking for a way to escape his fate.

### 2.7 "Whose Idea Was This in the First Place?": Richard Jump-Starts the Future

In the third scene of Act 3, Richard chides Northumberland's failure to kneel, seeming to reassert a claim to reverence for his majesty and to fault Northumberland's forgetfulness of place.

*K. Rich:* We are amazed; and thus long have we stood  
To watch the fearful bending of thy knee,

Because we thought ourself thy lawful king:

And if we be, how dare thy joints forget

To pay their awful duty to our presence? (3.3.74-79)

Having witnessed the previous scene's despair, we suspect that such bravado is the mere performance of an already relinquished identity, and indeed, it is Richard himself who first broaches the subject of his removal as King, a suggestion that, in some productions, meets with shocked reactions from some of the characters onstage. The only way anyone could get the sceptre out his hand, says Richard, would be through usurpation, an act about which no one else has even dared to breathe.

Despite the fact that no one has even suggested his "dismissal from [his] stewardship," Richard shadow-boxes against the still absent specter of deposition and again lays claim to divine protection for himself in the face of usurpation. Moving farther away from a royal identity and becoming again the historical bard who spoke of sad stories of the death of Kings, Richard offers his lyrical prologue to the future civil strife. Before Bolingbroke's crown—which Richard asserts is his cousin's true object—"live in peace," there will be "ten thousand bloody crowns of mothers' sons" that "ill become the flower of England's face" (3.3.97-100).

Northumberland makes Bolingbroke's case, sworn upon the tomb of their mutual grandfather, by the royalty of *both* their bloods, by the dead hand of John of Gaunt, and by all Bolingbroke's honor, that he intends nothing further than the recovery of his "lineal royalties." Bolingbroke's detractors might seize upon this speech as evidence of his Machiavellianism by claiming that Northumberland's address is actually putting forth Bolingbroke's credentials to be King. His descent is from Edward III, just as is Richard's, and therefore his blood is likewise royal. His father is now dead, which signals the timeliness of succession to his royal lineage. The argument could be made that this "royal lineage" is a covert claim, not for the title of Lancaster, but rather the crown itself. The suppressed idea hovers about the moment, and then Northumberland makes offer of Bolingbroke's faithful service if he is freed from banishment. All

may know this is a sham performed for public consumption, but it is not yet fully revealed as such. As he begins to see what the loss of his identity as King will mean in actuality, Richard grieves

O that I were as great  
As is my grief, or lesser than my name!  
Or that I could forget what I have been,  
Or not remember what I must be now! (3.3.140-143)

### 2.8 The Historical Sublime and Forgetting

In this longing for forgetfulness, Richard recognizes that what he once was is now lost forever, an experience of what Hayden White has termed “the historical sublime,” a period of swift upheaval and horrific moral chaos in human existence. White argues in “The Politics of Historical Interpretation” that nineteenth century efforts to make history an academic discipline required the suppression of the aesthetics of the sublime for historical writing, promoting instead the aesthetics of the beautiful.<sup>101</sup> Slavoj Žižek explains the Kantian formulation of Beauty and Sublimity in which Beauty quiets and soothes while Sublimity stimulates and terrifies. Beauty, says Žižek, is stirred when the Idea beyond the senses appears in a sensuous yet harmonious materiality. Sublimity is connected to chaotic, frightening, limitless phenomena, such as the raging sea or immense mountains. While beauty provides pleasure, the sublime object is met with a pleasure that is only attainable through displeasure.<sup>102</sup> The beautiful, as manifested in history writing, produces histories that are so well narrated that the reader’s experience is pleasurable and intellectually satisfying, whereas apprehending the sublime in history means confronting the inexpressible chaos of the moral world.<sup>103</sup> In Friedrich Schiller’s 1801 essay “On the Sublime,” he writes that such an encounter with the sublime in human experience produces tragic art that re-creates “the terrifying spectacle of change which destroys everything and creates it anew, and destroys again—of ruin sometimes accomplished by swift undermining, sometimes by swift

---

<sup>101</sup> Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1987), 68.

<sup>102</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, (London: Verso, 1989), 202.

<sup>103</sup> Baldo, *Memory in Shakespeare’s Histories*, 37.

incursion.”<sup>104</sup> Facing the historical sublime of catastrophic loss of kingship, Richard II speaks in tragic lyrical poetry.

Reactions to trauma often involve forgetfulness. Baldo notes that connected to White’s concept of the historical sublime are the formulations of Dutch history theorist Frank Ankersmit, who proposes four kinds of forgetting, the last two of which are associated with traumatic loss, such as experienced by Richard II. The first kind of forgetting lacks any real importance to one’s identity—what was for dinner yesterday—and is based on neglect. The second type of forgetting involves life’s mundane detail that we may think is insignificant, but later re-evaluate as unexpectedly momentous, such as in undergoing psychoanalysis or in writing a record of a collective past. The third kind of forgetting is the intentional repression of traumatic events, such as the experiences of the Holocaust, whether by survivors or the German people. This kind of forgetting results in a bifurcation into a conscious and unconscious self, and although the trauma is banished from conscious memory, the person will be seriously affected, even handicapped by it.<sup>105</sup> However, this is not the traumatic forgetfulness of Richard II.

The fourth type of forgetting is linked by Ankersmit to White’s historical sublime. This forgetting appears at times when people enter a completely new world, but only provided that they forget a previous world and shed a previous identity. The Renaissance was certainly just such a time, as indicated by Lynn White, Jr., who has famously termed the Renaissance “the most psychically disturbed era in European history,” the result of the rapidity of cultural change coupled with natural disasters. Lynn White, Jr. notes that this spiritual trauma was healed by the emergence, in the minds of ordinary people, of an absolutely novel and relaxed attitude toward change.<sup>106</sup> This relaxed attitude is a forgetfulness of the shocks of the past, resulting in greater ease of accommodation to change. For Ankersmit, the difference between the third and fourth kinds of forgetting, both of which are connected to traumatic experience, is that the third type

---

<sup>104</sup> Quoted in Baldo, *Memory in Shakespeare’s Histories*, 37.

<sup>105</sup> Baldo, *Memory in Shakespeare’s Histories*, 38.

<sup>106</sup> Lynn White, Jr., “Death and the Devil,” in *The Darker Vision of the Renaissance*, ed. Robert Kinsman, (Berkeley: U of California P, 1964), 26.

admits a closure of the suffering, but in the fourth, trauma remains a permanent presence. For the third, there is a resolution of tension and an adaptation of the trauma into the story of one's life, and so the painful character of the event is eventually subsumed into who a person is. In the fourth, however, there is no reconciliation between event and identity. Instead, a chasm opens between existence and knowledge as the person now discerns that what once has been is now irrecoverable, and therefore the previous lost identity emerges as an object of knowledge only. The new identity consists completely of the trauma of the absence of the former identity. While the third type of forgetting is the temporary loss of part of one's identity, the fourth type of forgetting means the disappearance of the entirety of a former identity.<sup>107</sup> Richard II experiences just such a sundering of identity, and the ordeal itself and its aftermath are met with Ankersmit's fourth type of forgetfulness as Shakespeare stages the overwhelming of beautiful history with the sublime. In the chapter on *1 Henry IV*, I consider another kind of forgetting by examining Nietzsche's formulation of amnesic plasticity. However, this formulation in which people of "vast" or "immense" nature assimilate the past, making it part of their blood while forgetting anything that hinders, does not yet operate in Shakespeare as it will in the last three plays of the second Henriad.

The chasm between existence and knowledge opens as Richard now perceives that what once has been is moving toward complete severance, and therefore his previous but now lost identity becomes only an object of his knowledge, something that he longs to forget. His new identity of not-King consists completely of the trauma of the absence of the former identity of King. This shattering of an identity enables the playwright to flesh out Richard even as in another sense this same identity-shattering destroys him.<sup>108</sup> Frequently, as is the case here for Richard, forgetfulness of self is imagined as a longed-for release from what Barish calls the "intolerable

---

<sup>107</sup> Baldo, *Memory in Shakespeare's Histories*, 37-39.

<sup>108</sup> Sullivan, *Memory and Forgetting in English Renaissance Drama*, 12.

pressure of an unbearable reality.”<sup>109</sup> To forget that what one has been is now lost is perhaps the only anodyne to the pain of such a trauma.

In the outburst of existential misery of 3.3.140-143, Richard longs for another identity, one that is as great as the grief suffered by his humiliation or one that is of less magnitude than the name he has borne. Failing that, he invokes complete forgetfulness of his past and the degraded future he faces. While he is a forgetter of the past, and a self-forgetter in behavior as well, he forgets the wrong things. He again ignores his own misconduct as King and does not even offer what he suggested to Bolingbroke and Mowbray as a remedy—forgive and forget. He only glancingly refers to his own misdeeds as King, and he never asks forgiveness for them of anyone. As I discuss in more detail in the next chapter, Nietzsche posits that the strongest natures possess a plasticity that enables them to develop in such a way that restores lost power or leads to its achievement. Richard remembers only an immediate past made up of wrongs done to him, and the more distant past from which he might draw strength and resolve appears to be one that recalls only murdered or deposed kings. Moreover, unlike Nietzsche’s man of power, which I will discuss in more detail in the next chapters, Richard seems unable to incorporate into himself anything from previous experience, or to heal his wounds or to replace anything he feels he has lost. He lacks the strong, innermost roots that would allow him to, as Nietzsche puts it, “more readily assimilate and appropriate the things of the past.”<sup>110</sup> Unlike the most powerful and tremendous nature that knows no boundary at which the past can overwhelm it, Richard cannot subdue adversity by forgetting appropriately.

The increasing destabilization of Richard’s identity enables Shakespeare to explore further the relationship between identity and the subjectivity that emerges when identity is threatened. When Northumberland returns with Bolingbroke’s response, Richard preempts him with words of surrender spoken in the third person that at first seem to set the disgrace at arm’s length:

---

<sup>109</sup> Barish, 217.

<sup>110</sup> Nietzsche, Translated by Hollingdale, 62.



What must the king do now? must he submit?

The king shall do it: must he be deposed?

The king shall be contented: must he lose

The name of king? I' God's name, let it go: (3.3.148-151)

The identity of King perhaps seems at this moment to be something from which he willingly may separate himself. This is a far cry from “not all the water in the rough rude sea can wash the balm off from an anointed king”(3.2.54-55). We recall Rogers' self-forgetter who loses his identity and thus can subsequently be transformed into something unrecognizable and unpredictable. Richard begins a frantic search for a place, an identity to which he can relate and in which he can at least stay alive. In poetic language that contrasts in metric flow and imagery with the rote nature of the ritual speech of the play's first scenes, Richard suggests that he could become a beadsman or pilgrim.

*King Rich.* I'll give my jewels for a set of beads,

My gorgeous palace for a hermitage,

My gay apparel for an almsman's gown,

My figured goblets for a dish of wood,

My sceptre for a palmer's walking staff,

My subjects for a pair of carved saints (3.3.152-157)

If death cannot be avoided, perhaps he may meet it as a martyr, another trial identity. Feeling more sinned against than sinning, Richard fears his unappreciated martyrdom would receive no shrine but rather, “a little, little grave”(3.3.159), suggesting that Richard will be not be properly memorialized. Such a forgotten, uncommemorated state is a “proscription from participating in history...that is often ethnic and gender specific.”<sup>111</sup> In other words, there is a slide from masculinity, the gender that accomplishes things and gets significant commemorative recognition, into unremarkable femininity, the nameless, powerless, unrecorded underclass, or something like

---

<sup>111</sup> Ivic and Williams, 5.

Henry V's Turkish mute. Finally aware of his own human frailty and mortality, Richard is desperately willing to relinquish the kingship in order to retire to a monastery as an ordinary man, but even this is not possible. When his speech turns maudlin and provokes nervous laughter ("Well, well, I see / I talk but idly, and you laugh at me.") (3.3.175-176), Richard leaves off his list of possible alternate identities and momentarily abandons poetry for practicality. Only hinted at in his suggestion of martyrdom as a possible future identity, the question now materializes: "Will Bolingbroke let Richard live?" "What says King Bolingbroke? Will his majesty / Give Richard leave to live till Richard die?" (3.3.178-179). On some level, Richard surely knows the answer to this question.

Even if one no longer has possession of a particular "thingness of self," it is very difficult to cease thinking the thoughts necessary for the maintenance of that identity. If one ceases "to be" one identity, one must find a way to stop thinking of oneself as that "thingness" and find another if he is to remain sane. With Richard's entry into the hall of judgment, his pained relationship to his vanishing identity continues: "Alack, why am I sent for to a king / Before I have shook off the regal thoughts / Wherewith I reigned?" (4.1.170-172) Indirectly commenting on the falseness of the defecting court, Richard declares he has not acquired the fawning behaviors of a court subject as yet and must be given time for sorrow to teach him to abase himself. Even if he cannot yet emulate their actions, Richard declares he remembers how many of those present at this moment were wont to curry favor with him in the past. He again tries on the crown of thorns of Christ, referring to how the Lord found only one of his twelve unfaithful, while he can find loyalty in none out of twelve thousand.

The duke of York served Richard II poorly as a surrogate during his absence and proves himself to be one who rewrites the past as it best preserves his peace of mind. Despite what he has witnessed first-hand, he characterizes the imminent change of power as being the result of Richard's "tired majesty" that made him "offer" the crown to his cousin. Richard's invitation to his cousin to "seize the crown," followed by his tantalizing "Here, cousin" are his demonstration to the

court that it is a seizure of the crown, not a surrender, that is taking place. Bolingbroke senses where Richard's play lies and responds laconically, "I thought you had been willing to resign" (4.1.199). Again Shakespeare shows us the result of the disintegration of Richard's identity when Richard declares he is willing to resign the crown, but "still my griefs are mine" (4.1.200). He struggles to maintain some semblance of Kingship with "You may my glories and my state depose / But not my griefs; still am I king of those" (4.1.201-202). As Richard attempts to prolong his experience of Kingship with wordplay about his cares, Bolingbroke interrupts with the peremptory question about whether Richard is content to resign the crown. His answer serves to encapsulate the dissolution of identity that Richard undergoes and the subsequent reconfiguration of memory.

*K. Rich.* Ay, no; no, ay; for I must nothing be. (4.1.210)

The possibilities for the performance of this single line are fascinating. Certainly, it is more profound than a mere vacillation of yes-no-no-yes, as in, "Are you contented to resign the crown?" "I? No! No. Ay." It could be construed as, "Are you contented to resign the crown?" "I know no I, for I must nothing be." The homophonic *ay* opens the door for a number of readings, but it cannot be denied that the conclusion of the line communicates Richard's imagination of himself as nothing if he is not King. If one is nothing, he cannot even say no.

Through the name of king, Richard has existed above the judgment of other men and has fully expected to be championed by the angels who preserve his throne. Weingarten posits that it is this loss or enforced forgetting of the *name* of King that is the most agonizing for Richard II because it is essential to his subjectivity. It is a word from which he cannot disassociate himself. Weingarten continues that "the name of king (without any consideration of the duties and obligations) is precious to him as a symbol."<sup>112</sup> Theodore Spencer suggests that "the traditional glorifications of his position have become the essence of his being, and he lives in an unreal

---

<sup>112</sup> Weingarten, 536.

world in which he thinks of these glorifications as the only reality.”<sup>113</sup> While Weingarten is correct in his assessment of Richard’s fixation with the name of King, it is equally true that it is only through names and language that Richard or anyone else, for that matter, has identity. As Charnes has put it, “we all enact—whether we ‘will’ or not—versions of our own prescribedness.”<sup>114</sup> Judith Butler has phrased it in this way:

To persist in one’s own being means to be given over from the start to social terms that are never fully one’s own. These terms include a linguistic life for the “one” who speaks prior to any act of agency, and they remain both irreducible to the one who speaks and the necessary conditions of such speech.<sup>115</sup>

*Richard II* illustrates an awareness of what Charnes and Butler are asserting, which is that all identity, both famous and obscure, is the enactment of prescribedness in “social terms that are never fully one’s own.” The problem for Richard is that he is a King, and the “traditional glorifications” of his position in medieval society are such that he has been crowned a sacred King, sacred to himself and to his realm. Had he proved better in the expectations for his identity, the deposition would not have taken place, and Bolingbroke, if he is as much a Machiavellian as Heller believes, would have had to resort to outright assassination, and there would have been no time for the shattering of Richard’s identity.<sup>116</sup> Richard’s desperate attachment to the name of King as constituting “who he is” is further elaborated by Kirby Farrell, who characterizes Richard’s behavior in the middle scenes of the play as hysterical oscillation between the two extreme positions of “immortal monarch” and nothing. Richard’s voice gradually accomplishes what all people eventually are able to do in childhood—that is, “manage the split between infantile omnipotence and abjection.”<sup>117</sup> Both infantile omnipotence and abjection are intolerable poles, and

---

<sup>113</sup> Theodore Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* (New York: MacMillan, 1961), 74.

<sup>114</sup> Charnes, *Notorious Identity*, 151.

<sup>115</sup> Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 28.

<sup>116</sup> Heller, 172

<sup>117</sup> Farrell, 9.

to manage the territory between them suggests an emergence of humanity in which we may tolerate if not embrace Richard.

### 2.9 “He Thinks He’s Jesus Christ!”: Richard and Christological Identification

Earlier in the play, when he mistakenly thinks Bushy *et al.* have defected to Bolingbroke, Richard makes his first reference to himself as a type of Christ, a self-pitying experience of his relationship to a soon-to-be-lost identity that eventually will allow him to perform the apotheosis of the last act.

*K. Rich.* O villains, vipers, damn’d without redemption!

Dogs, easily won to fawn on any man!

Snakes, in my heart-blood warm’d, that sting my heart!

Three Judases, each one thrice worse than Judas! (3.2.129-132)

Richard seems to count betrayal of him a worse sin than the betrayal of Jesus Christ, but Richard came of age hearing himself actually described as the Savior of England.<sup>118</sup> Richard begins the play as what I said was a “curiously vapid, self-absorbed and politically foolhardy” young man, but by this point in the deposition scene—“For I must nothing be”—a great many in the play’s audience have been won over by his lyric poetry, the tragic art created in response to a confrontation with the sublime, particularly in this case, the historical sublime. Richard’s poetry expresses the deep soul-sorrow of the irretrievable loss of his self-identity as King. For some in the audience, the depth of his spiritual agony or the valor of his performance on the existential stage grants him superiority over Bolingbroke as a man if not as a King.

However, there is one aspect of Richard’s connection to the identity of King that modern audiences may not understand, and that is his belief that his identity is indeed a sacred office. Such a self-conception is so far-removed from our experience today that some members of an audience may share to a more or lesser degree the following view:

---

<sup>118</sup> Saul, 18.

Everyone agrees that [Richard] is vain, foolish, posturing, callous, melodramatic, selfish, self-pitying, neurotic, mean-spirited, and untrustworthy, a poor excuse for a King and a poor excuse for a man.<sup>119</sup>

It is a rather damning list of weaknesses, all of which Richard demonstrates at one time or another—as does every other human being. Brownlow calls the above remark “extreme” but somewhat characteristic of those whose resistance to style of the play is “translated into a nervous dislike of the character.” The writer of that remark, says Brownlow, is so immune to the lyricism of the play that he seems to believe Shakespeare meant the language “to be laughed off the stage as evidence of posturing and shallowness.”<sup>120</sup> William Butler Yeats found a similar distaste evident in the books he perused in the Stratford-upon-Avon library almost a century ago. There he noted the presence of

an antithesis, which grew in clearness and violence as the century grew older, between two types, whose representatives were Richard II, “sentimental,” “weak,” “selfish,” “insincere,” and Henry V, “Shakespeare’s only hero.” These books took the same delight in abusing Richard II that schoolboys do in persecuting some boy of fine temperament...And they had the admiration for Henry V that schoolboys have for the soldier or sailor hero of a romance in some boys’ paper.<sup>121</sup>

Yeats associates the mocking misapprehension of the nature of Richard with the reductionist immaturity and absence of discernment that are characteristic of adolescents. What Yeats points out is also illustrative of the dichotomy of Richard and Bolingbroke that was discussed earlier. Brownlow holds that what provokes this rather sophomoric attitude in some readers is their obliviousness to the fact that Shakespeare is portraying Richard II as a sacred king—sacred to others but also sacred to himself. “It is,” says Brownlow, “as if Shakespeare, having begun his histories ‘in the midst of things’ with the reigns closer to the confusion and realities of his own

---

<sup>119</sup> John Halverson, “The Lamentable Comedy of *Richard II*,” *ELR* 24 (1994), 344.

<sup>120</sup> Brownlow, 61.

<sup>121</sup> William Butler Yeats, “At Stratford-on Avon,” *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 103-105.

times, worked himself backwards in time and imagination to the mystery of kingship and its loss."<sup>122</sup> In the medieval coronation rite, the most important moment was the anointing with balm because a change in the king's person occurred, and only then was it proper to place the king's regalia upon him. So sacred was this balm that even the newly-crowned King himself could not touch his own head for several days after his anointing. When one understands this highly spiritual attitude toward the anointing, Richard's declaration of the permanency of the balm of an anointed King no longer sounds like obstinacy or conceit. It is not only self-identity but also the anchor of his spirituality. Bolingbroke may assert, "In God's name, I'll ascend the throne," (one can never be certain whether this is a profane oath or an appeal for God's approval), and he may receive an anointing from the golden ampoule, but the sacredness of his reign, founded as it is on usurpation, must ring false to anyone accustomed to the medieval view of coronation.

Shakespeare took for granted the idea of a divine sanction for the monarchy, but like today's readers, he saw the monarchy as a thing to be defined by political science and symbolized by the crown, the sign of the singleness of the state. The most important moment in the king's life and the sentimental life of the realm in the early modern period becomes instead the actual coronation, as the theological and metaphysical of the sacred gives way to the almost wholly secular. If one does not know about the medieval coronation rite and the doctrine of sacred kingship, and if Richard's emotionally-charged language about the previously unthinkable deposition of a sacred king is off-putting, then, says Brownlow, Richard's behavior becomes merely the manifestation of unmanliness as some conceive of it: he can't compete for power with other men.<sup>123</sup> In light of this understanding of sacred kingship, it is hardly proper to call his actions histrionics.

Thus, Richard repeatedly associates himself with Christ, for the medieval coronation ceremony's five anointments of the King's body correspond to the five wounds of Christ, and the liturgy of the ceremony frequently invokes Christ the King, making a close association with the

---

<sup>122</sup> Brownlow, 60.

<sup>123</sup> Brownlow, 59-60.

royal person of the temporal king of the coronation. Imagery from the passion of Christ fits well with the humiliation of Richard II.

*K. Rich.* I give this heavy weight from off my head  
And this unwieldy scepter from my hand,  
The pride of Kingly sway from out my heart.  
With mine own tears I wash away my balm,  
With mine own hands I give away my crown,  
With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,  
With mine own breath release all duteous oaths.  
All pomp and majesty I do forswear. (4.1.210-220)

Christ asserted that no man took His life from Him but rather that He gave it up willingly. His divine confrontation with sublimity resulted in huge tears of sweat that fell like blood drops and a sorrow-sickness “unto death.” Richard’s deposition is to him a sacrilege, and therefore it is almost the equivalent of a spiritual suicide that Richard asks the court to watch as he undoes himself. Richard himself methodically removes the outward vestiges of monarchy in an agony meant to evoke Gethsemane.

#### 2.10 Richard and Self-Incrimination

Northumberland instructs Richard that no more remains for him to do but to read “these accusations and these grievous crimes / Committed by your person and your followers / Against the state and profit of this land” in order that his confessions will assure men that Richard is “worthily deposed” (4.1.232-234). Heller holds that Richard repeatedly thwarts Northumberland’s attempts to force him to read the catalogue of accusations and crimes because he will not confess to things he did not do.<sup>124</sup> She compares his position to that of the accused in Moscow show trials that require confessions to trumped-up charges. Her insistence on Richard’s innocence is odd, however, since he seems to acknowledge that the document contains the

---

<sup>124</sup> Heller, 181.



record of his true offenses, which would cause him shame to read “in so fair a troop.” While his failures as a King remain as mere marks on a page, Richard can continue to forget them or at least regard them as crimes that only God can judge. To speak his own guilt aloud amounts to torture for a man of Richard’s growing enmeshment in language. The experience of his relationship to his lost identity overwhelms him in tears that blur both his physical and introspective vision. Replying to Northumberland’s request for him to read the charges, Richard seems to be making a tepid confession of sorts.

*K. Rich.* Must I do so? And must I ravel out  
My weaved-up follies? Gentle Northumberland,  
If thy offenses were on record,  
Would it not shame thee in so fair a troop  
To read a lecture of them? (4.1.238-242).

Turning the focus from his own crimes to Northumberland’s deposition of a king, Richard’s forgetfulness allows him to shift from being a sinner who would cringe to read a public catalogue of his faults to being a type of guiltless Christ. The onlookers are divided, he says, between those who openly bait him in his wretchedness and the hand-washing Pilates who only show “an outward pity” but have actually “here delivered [him] to [his] sour cross.” He then numbers himself among the traitors: “Nay, if I turn mine eyes upon myself I find myself a traitor with the rest, / For I have given here my soul’s consent / T’ undeck the pompous body of a King” (4.1.258-261). A divided self becomes for Richard both traitor and victim.

Richard may be not-King now, but he retains enough majesty to rebuff Northumberland’s rough urgings to read the confession with “No lord of thine, thou haught insulting man.” He judges himself to be “no man’s lord” and to be in possession of no name, no title, not even his baptismal name. All has been usurped so that he knows “not now what name to call [himself].” To express his desire for complete oblivion as an escape from the psychological trauma of the loss of identity, Richard wishes for the forgetful liquidity of a snowman: “O, that I were a mockery king of

snow, / Standing before the sun of Bolingbroke / To melt myself away in water-drops!" (4.1.271-273). This image depicts a slow self-disintegration that thaws, melts, and resolves itself into dribbling streams of water-drops that signify forgetting and the ease of oblivious nothingness.

### 2.11 Richard Onstage: Self-Disintegration as Performance Art

Richard's sense of being nothing cannot be entirely accurate, since he has commanded the audience's attention since his entrance for the first scene of Act 4, relegating Bolingbroke to silence for nearly seventy lines since his last question. Richard's demeanor is dramatic—or over the top, or melodramatic—depending on how an actor reads him, and Richard's theatricality can serve to remind us that it takes place within a play being performed within an actual theater—the very site of lethargy and self-forgetting that the anti-theatrical pamphleteers abhorred. Several have argued that Richard is actually in control in the deposition scene, orchestrating what happens onstage, perhaps even bringing about his removal as King.<sup>125</sup> Heller, for example, offers

It is true that in 3.3 it is Bolingbroke who sets the stage. But this is the stage of sheer political theater. Bolingbroke wants to get it over with quickly. Richard should abdicate and do it smoothly without much ado...Henry has no doubt he will achieve his goal. But the thing he could not take into account is the personality of his adversary—his new personality. This Richard was unknown to him as he was for himself and for us.

Bolingbroke makes a mistake: he organizes the stage for political theater with himself as the ascending star. But in fact he organizes the stage for the world theater where Richard will be the real hero, outdoing Henry, who will shrink to a royal nobody in his presence.<sup>126</sup>

Comparing Bolingbroke and Richard, Heller grants Richard superiority on the existential stage over Bolingbroke, who had prepared for a political stage. Richard has become an unrecognizable

---

<sup>125</sup> See, among others, Lois Potter, "The Antic Disposition of Richard II," *Shakespeare Survey* 27 (1974) 33-41; Samuel Schoenbaum "Richard II and the Realities of Power," *Shakespeare Survey* 28(1975)1-13; and Miriam Gilbert, "Richard II at Stratford: Role-Playing as Metaphor," in *Shakespeare: The Theatrical Dimension*, ed. Philip C. McGuire and David Samuelson (New York: AMS Press, 1979), 85-101.

<sup>126</sup> Heller, 176.

other, which is what Rogers predicted about those who forget themselves: Richard is the adversary for whom Bolingbroke has not planned. Heller's assessment of the preeminence of Richard in the deposition scene is correct, but it is hard to see what other choices there could be, dramatically speaking. Richard repeatedly identifies himself with Christ, and therefore, perhaps Shakespeare could have made Richard more closely imitative of Christ at his trial before Pilate, giving terse responses and finally falling into silence. However, Richard must take center stage in Act 4, and he will be talking. Richard's prolixity and his enmeshment in language have been the subject for a good deal of criticism, and Weingarten notes that this gift for poetic speech is not found in the source accounts, but it is a significant aspect of his character in this play.<sup>127</sup> Betteridge also says that Richard is one of Shakespeare's most talkative characters and that "the more power Richard loses, the more he talks, the more incessant his association with theater images."<sup>128</sup> Richard's association with the theater, that place of self-forgetting, has become more and more pronounced, culminating in his stealing the show at his own trial.

Harry Berger, Jr. agrees that Richard is very effective in theatrical terms and upstages Bolingbroke throughout the play, but Berger goes further to assert that "he is equally effective in political terms, given what [Berger takes] to be his project: to get himself deposed, pick out a likely 'heir' to perform that service, reward him with the title of usurper, and leave him with a discredited crown and the guilt of conscience for his labor."<sup>129</sup> Richard, says Berger, enacts a "complex mode of cultural and institutional disenchantment," a wavering between "the impulse to aggression against others and the impulse to aggression against oneself" that sets up the psychological framework within which the chief actors of the *Henriad* are forced to perform.<sup>130</sup> Richard does display an impulse to aggression against others, as testified to by his previous behavior to the nobles and the commoners for which he is being deposed. Furthermore, this aggression is most evident in the ease with which he sees others as traitors worthy of caustic

---

<sup>127</sup> Weingarten, 536.

<sup>128</sup> Betteridge, 62.

<sup>129</sup> Berger, 169.

<sup>130</sup> Berger, 169.

rebuke, if not physical punishment if it were in his power. The aggression against himself is manifested in the many times he collapses into despair and self-loathing, and these impulses contribute to the psychological framework within which others must deal with him. However, Berger's assessment that Richard contrives to get himself deposed, leaving Bolingbroke holding a stinking bag of usurpation, seems to ignore the fact that Richard calls the years of his rule with Isabel "a happy dream" from which they have only recently awakened (5.1.18). It is possible he is only using the phrase "happy dream" to console his wife and to cover the tracks of his own attempts (witting or not) to subvert their reign and bring about his own death. However, there is little evidence in Acts 1 and 2 that he wants a way out of his kingship. He has reigned improvidently, but that is self-knowledge he perhaps will never fully apprehend. As Heller has said, he thinks whatever he does is right because he is the King who does it. Furthermore, Richard's complicity in his own downfall runs counter to his obvious lack of self-awareness and his great propensity for forgetting any culpability for the circumstances of his own life. Having ridden rough-shod over his people at the instigation of his young counselors, and more than likely having ordered the murder of his uncle Gloucester, Richard is brought up short by rebellion. That the rebellion will lead to trouble for all the rebels is less a function of Richard's conscious retributive machinations than it is the consequence of the conspirators' greed and jealousy. His so-called prophecy to Northumberland is less an actual prophecy than a belated recognition of the dynamics of political power.

In what may be the most famous moment in this play, Richard calls for a mirror so "that it may show me what a face I have / Since it is bankrupt of his majesty" (4.1.275-278). While a modern audience might consider that the grasp on one's identity must be tenuous indeed if a reflected image is needed to establish certainty, an Elizabethan audience would have recognized this act as having a direct connection to the literary tradition of *speculum principis*, the genre of discourses that offer advice to princes, such as *Mirror for Magistrates* and Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Barish's observation that forgetfulness of self transforms the self-forgetter into "something

unpredictable” is quite applicable here. Once Richard’s loss of kingship becomes a virtual certainty, the court cannot predict what he will do. He becomes someone they do not recognize, which perhaps explains his call for the mirror. Even he cannot believe he will look the same if he no longer feels the same.<sup>131</sup> Stripped of its royal moorings, his subjectivity fractures as he shatters the mirror.

*King Rich.* A brittle glory shineth in this face.

As brittle as the glory is the face,

*(He breaks the mirror.)*

For there it is, cracked in an hundred shivers,

Mark, silent king, the moral of this sport:

How soon my sorrow hath destroyed my face.

The breaking of the glass is not an act of denial but rather an attempt to make a correspondence between the image in the mirror and the subject he is now—fragmented and unstable. There is nowhere for Richard to turn for sustenance of a sense of who he is, since, pursuant to the deposition, there is no longer a person named Richard II. In his place we find “a player playing at not being a king.”<sup>132</sup> Bolingbroke interrupts with a cynical quip. With the word *shadow*, often used to denote an actor, the “silent king” Bolingbroke (who speaks fewer than a hundred words from the entrance of Richard until the end of the scene) curtails Richard’s performance: “The shadow of your sorrow hath destroyed the shadow of your face” (4.1.303-304). Farrell believes that Richard is using theatricality to moralize his overthrow in order to arouse pity and guilt in his enemies, but the impassivity of Bolingbroke interferes with Richard’s “incantation.”<sup>133</sup> Bolingbroke’s remark is the verbal equivalent of slow, solitary, sarcastic applause. For Bolingbroke, the tears and unpredictable behavior of Richard are mere theatrics and self-deception, an amnesia of present circumstances as well as the past. In *Richard II* a King-turned-

---

<sup>131</sup> Sullivan, *Memory and Forgetting in English Renaissance Drama*, 16.

<sup>132</sup> Betteridge, 62.

<sup>133</sup> Farrell, 13.

actor finds that his “external manners of laments / Are merely shadows to the unseen grief / That swells with silence in the tortured soul” (4.1.307-310). If, as Charnes says, the theater permits the emergence of subjectivity so that it may be read by the audience, Bolingbroke serves as the pragmatist critic who disallows Richard’s self-forgetting. This particular show closes after one performance, and Richard is willing to go anywhere “so I were from your sights” (4.1.328).

#### 2.12 “The Lamentable Tale of Me”: *De Casibus To Take Away*

Seeing his face in the mirror that ought to reflect reality, the deposed King is surprised that there is no physical alteration in his face despite the grief he has undergone. Yet on first sight of him on the way to the Tower, his young queen actually does note a physical transformation brought about by “hard-favored grief,” and she compares him to the ruins of Troy or to the tomb of King Richard rather than the man himself. Richard, like Gaunt to banished Bolingbroke, urges her to forget the reality of their situation and “think our former state a happy dream / From which awaked, the truth of what we are shows but this” (5.1.18-19). With his Kingship wrested from him, Richard surveys anew the disorder of his life and responds with the Ankersmit’s fourth kind of forgetfulness that claims the former condition as something unredeemable, a happy dream, but still the admitted product of careless, even lethargic, forgetful sleep. The truth that must now be embraced is Richard’s imprisonment and eventual death, while the young queen’s future is only slightly less confining. She is to seek asylum “in some religious house,” which gives Richard hope that their future conduct will gain “a new world’s crown, / Which our profane hours here have thrown down” (5.1.24-25). His hope still is for the restoration of a crown in the afterlife since earthly hours have seen the forfeiture of his temporal crown and his place as King it once signified. Richard engages his wife to tell the “lamentable tale of me” to “good old folks,” whom he imagines as being moved to deep sorrow.

Isabel, whom Shakespeare calls only “Richard’s queen,” presents an illustration of the playwright’s sometimes subtle use of forgetfulness. Helen Ostovich has connected Isabel to the Virgin Mary. Although the play makes no allusion to her as pre-pubescent, the historical Isabel

married Richard when she was seven years old, and Ostovich notes that she exists in the play as virgin, wife, widow and mother. Her garden scene connects to the iconographical Marian *hortus conclusus*, and her grief and pity for the suffering Christological Richard places her in the role of the comforting Madonna of the *pieta*. Ostovich maintains that it is in response to Isabel's loving encouragement that Richard returns to the kingly lion that fights to the death at play's end. Thus, according to Ostovich, Isabel has a similar relation to Richard's humiliation, his "sour cross," and his ultimate kingly revivification as that of the Virgin to Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.<sup>134</sup> These Marian remnants of the old faith illustrate that, while the English Reformation strove to eradicate Catholicism, its half-forgotten Mariolatry continued in half-remembered vestiges that place a pitying virgin queen in a garden and bring her forth to comfort a self-identified Christological figure. Although I have chosen not to focus on every aspect of forgetting that relates to the old faith because the subject is so thoroughly covered by Baldo, the Marian influence of Isabel deserves notice here because it provides a partial explanation of Richard's actions in the play's penultimate scene.

The dying lion that Isabel so passionately urges to put forth his paw and wound the earth in his fury (5.1.29-30) is caged nevertheless by history. In speaking of historical figures for whom fame has secured a particular version of history, Charnes has said the following: "Moving through textual terrains that relentlessly confront them with what is already 'known' or disclosed about them, these figures symptomatically enact the desire to be, in Coriolanus's words, 'authors of themselves.'"<sup>135</sup> Everywhere that Richard turns, he is confined by his own historical limits, and yet he, like Shakespeare's other characters of "notorious identity," sincerely desires to write the lamentable tale of me. Isabel overheard a version of Richard's story earlier when the gardeners discussed news of the disordered state and her husband's caterpillar cronies. Her furious response to the news of his ensuing deposition would suggest that the historical account she will

---

<sup>134</sup> Helen Ostovich, "'Here in this garden': The Iconography of the Virgin Queen in Shakespeare's *Richard II*," in *Marian Moments in Early Modern British Drama*, eds. Regina Buccola and Lisa Hopkins, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate2007), 21-33.

<sup>135</sup> Charnes, *Notorious Identity*, 6.

provide will gloss over Richard's failings and may contain significant forgetful omissions. Shakespeare, it seems, never misses an opportunity to point, albeit subtly, to the forgetful nature of the historical record. For Richard, his sundered identity of "rightful king" exists only in a fireside *de casibus* narrative.

### 2.13 "And Now for Something Completely Different": York Family Values

Although it finally has become acceptable to acknowledge that *Richard II* is one of Shakespeare's most ambiguous plays, criticism has often taken the route of Charles Kean. In 1857 the theatrical manager and actor produced the only successful staging of *Richard II* between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries, but he cut the play in half and reduced characters' roles, leaving only Richard and Bolingbroke untouched while adding songs, dances, animals and over five hundred extras to his four-hour spectacle.<sup>136</sup> In similarity to Kean's revision, readers often excise the perplexing aspects of the play by merely ignoring them because they do not fit with their hypotheses.

In view of the above-mentioned critical predilection for omitting inconvenient parts of the play that do not fit one's argument, and before discussing the culmination of Richard's lyrical response to his encounter with the amnesia-producing historical sublime, I wish to touch briefly on the late scenes with York, his wife, and Aumerle. Audiences and critics alike have long wondered whether we are meant to laugh or gasp at the knee-crawling duchess and the sword-brandishing York as they elbow one another aside in their attempts to make their contrary pleas to the new King Henry IV. For my purpose, the focus of this scene will not be the sometime-slapstick marital fisticuffs of York and his wife but rather the unusual response of Henry to the situation. Here we find York warning him of a plot against his life in which his cousin Aumerle is complicit, and his aunt pleading for her son's life, and disobeying the King's urgings/commands to stand rather than kneel. Yet, in the face of disobedience and planned assassination, Henry seems strangely preoccupied. One might guess that the new "intertissued robe" of monarchy is

---

<sup>136</sup> Griffin,23.



still unfamiliar to him or that he is distracted by the earlier reports of the behavior of his “unthrifty son.” While both of these explanations have merit, I would like to suggest that Henry also is thinking about forgetting. For his reign to succeed, significant forgetfulness must be mobilized, particularly in his subjects. He who could not forget the reality of the present when he was banished by Richard at the beginning of the play now must look, until the end of his life, only to the future, and never to the past. His almost absent-minded pardon of Aumerle suggests that forgetting of past sins—both his and others’—is on his mind.

#### 2.14 The Tragic Artist Talks About His Work: Imagery and Timing

While Henry must now bear the burdens of kingship, Richard languishes in the Tower. Alone in his cell, the tragic poet reveals his creative process: “I have been studying how I may compare / This prison where I live unto the world” (5.5.1-2). Unfortunately, the figurative comparison is not quite working for him because “the world is populous / And here is not a creature but myself.” It is not only that there are no others to populate his world: the poet himself has no identity, but he will try to hammer out one from his teeming thoughts. Solitary though he may be, those “still-breeding thoughts” subject Richard to inward disorder, which was understood as forgetfulness in early modern times, since memory’s matter is not obliterated but is certainly inaccessible due to that disorder.<sup>137</sup> His brain and soul are the progenitors of “a generation of still-breeding thoughts,” his only companions and the multi-humored people of his little world. Religious consolation, doubt and despair, embryonic escape plans, and rueful resignation to a not-uncommon fate intermingle in a flash-mob of thought. Each provides a temporary yet unsatisfactory identity and subjectivity: “Thus play I in one person many people / And none contented” (5.5.31-32). Betteridge observes that this imagining of a world of people puts him back into his condition at the beginning of the play. The crucial difference is that now he is creating the imaginary world instead of relying on his flattering advisors to do so. This escape into the poetic kingdom is only an illusion, says Betteridge, because even in his fictional realm he is haunted by

---

<sup>137</sup> Sullivan, “Lethargic Corporality On and Off the Early Modern Stage,” 47.

the loss of his crown.<sup>138</sup> Again it is apparent that his condition is that of Ankersmit's fourth type of forgetting in that his new identity consists completely of the trauma of the absence of the former identity.

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 am I kinged again, and by and by

Think that I am unkinged by Bolingbroke,

And straight am nothing. (5.5.32-38)

Having lost the identity of king and as yet without a satisfactory alternative with which to connect, Richard veers from king to beggar and back again to kingship and his recent deposition by Bolingbroke, which Richard finds has made him nothing. But whatever I am, says Richard, I will never be pleased until I accept the release that comes with being nothing—that is, in utter oblivion, the state of total forgetfulness.

The imprisoned Richard hears music, but the musician's inability to keep the proper time irks and then convicts the former King of his own failure in time-keeping, a form of forgetfulness that does not apprehend the present. He did not have, for the "concord of my state and time," an "ear to hear my true time broke" (5.5.48-49). In ancient Greek thought, time could be viewed in a political sense, *kairos*, the right time for acting. The man of action seizes the right moment to do something, for if it is done too early or too late, the prize is lost.<sup>139</sup> Machiavelli speaks cogently of the significance of time in politics. Asking whether God or fortune governs worldly events, he declares in Chapter Twenty-five of *The Prince* that fortune rules half of man's actions but permits him to govern the other half. "The prince who relies entirely on fortune is lost when it changes," but Machiavelli sees further that a prince "will be successful who directs his actions according to

---

<sup>138</sup> Betteridge, 62.

<sup>139</sup> Heller, 5.

the spirit of the times, and that he whose actions do not accord with the times will not be successful.”<sup>140</sup> Thus, if the times change, even a formerly successful political figure can perish if he fails to notice that everything is disordered, that the time is out of joint. Richard II is only one of Shakespeare’s political actors for whom this proves true.<sup>141</sup> He himself confesses not only his forgetful waste of time for which time now wastes him but also that he had not the ear to hear the broken meter of his time. In this, Richard comes close to something half-remembered: in some nebulous way he senses that he bears some responsibility for what has happened. But again “the half-remembered is the half-forgotten.” Richard can only characterize his error as wasting *kairos*, which the Elizabethan audience would pathologize as a strain of lethargy, the insidious cousin of forgetfulness and oblivion. Richard is slightly mistaken in his half-remembered, half-articulated confession, however. It is not just that he ignored the murmurings of the changing times and now rouses to find himself in a political time-warp. The King who forgot himself thrust into his cousin Bolingbroke’s hand the means to deposition.

#### 2.15 “But Will It Play in Peoria?”: *Richard II* as History

If we address the question of how well Shakespeare has “done” history with this history play, it should be apparent that what is sometimes actually being asked is “How well did Shakespeare transmit the events recorded in his sources?” The playwright does steer close to Holinshed as far as the events he records. He merely does not stage all that Holinshed sets down about Richard’s reign. Perhaps unwilling to accord the play the name of “history,” Betteridge pulls back the curtain to point to Shakespeare’s machinations in the following comment:

Is not all this the imaginary thoughts of a poet—is not Richard just the stuff of Shakespeare’s mind? Isn’t the temptation to let these material words spoken by an actor clog the ear of history so truth can no longer be heard? As Richard fills the stage with signifiers about himself, what happens to history, the truth about the past? Richard offers

---

<sup>140</sup> Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince and Other Writings*, Translated by W. K. Marriott (New York: Fall River Press, 2008), 122-123.

himself as an object for historical gaze, a subject fit for a sad tale. His endlessly self-reflective words fill the space of history.<sup>142</sup>

The “history” of Richard II, says Betteridge, has been occluded by Shakespeare’s imagination of him, particularly due to the lyrical poetry that is not part of the chronicled record. However, this is precisely Lopez’s previously-noted counter to the charges of faulty historicity in the play: the wafer of Holinshed becomes the Richard of Shakespeare’s imagination. Although there is much in Betteridge’s remarks with which to agree, a satisfactory counter-balance can be found in Charnes, who says that “Shakespeare doesn’t want to reproduce cultural mythology in his plays. He wants to demonstrate what’s involved for the figures of famous names as they experience being re-written.”<sup>143</sup> Shakespeare’s perception that the facts of history may be variously construed leads him to focus specifically on those who are in a very real sense the *dramatis personae* of the historical account. Betteridge has proposed that in the *Henry VI* tetralogy, theater aims to produce historical truth, but in *Richard II* history is merely one of many narratives that can be exchanged by forgetting one version and adopting another. Richard himself can turn historian, telling sad tales that can be endlessly re-written because he considers the past as a “purely relative thing, a matter to be narrated, but in the process the truth disappears.”<sup>144</sup> The fact that such tales can be endlessly re-written, ultimately making the apprehension of truth impossible undermines any English Renaissance conception of history as a set of established facts that must be meticulously repeated in any historical account. Perhaps what actually happened at any given time is unknowable or at least is so vast and unwieldy as to defy human conception. For Shakespeare, the microcosm of Richard is world enough.

#### 2.16 “What Just Happened?”: The Meaning of Richard’s Death

In *Richard II*, Shakespeare focuses on a man trapped by who he is in the “always alreadiness” of the accomplished “historical” past. An encounter with sublime history results from

---

<sup>142</sup> Betteridge, 63.

<sup>143</sup> Charnes, *Notorious Identity*, 1-2.

<sup>144</sup> Thomas Betteridge, *Shakespearean Fantasy and Politics* (Hatfield, Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2005), 64.

Richard's own self-forgetful, improvident behavior that leads to rebellion and deposition, and thus produces an identity dogged by forgetting and fragmentation, and yet ultimately productive of tragic poetry. Richard's death scene, however, elicits a swarm of questions. Does Shakespeare allow him to redeem himself for all time with a few well-placed sword thrusts against Exton's men? Why not bare his breast to Exton's sword while spouting some lovely poetry, since Richard has welcomed death as the ease of being nothing? Or why not starve himself to death as Thomas Walsingham's historical account reports?<sup>145</sup> By presenting Richard's exit in terms of a swashbuckling violent episode, is Shakespeare merely playing to the cheap seats?

I am unwilling to deprive anyone else of a feel-good attitude toward Richard at the close of Shakespeare's play. Some valiant swordplay against a gang of assassins, a feisty "Go thou and fill another room in hell," and the audience can feel reasonably comfortable with Richard's downfall. In this sense, the play provides an aesthetics of the beautiful—an intellectually satisfying end. After all, there is closure and justice of sorts: the murderer will be disavowed by Henry IV, and the hapless usurper will have to lug that load of guilt into the next two plays and leave it for his son to try to clean up. Most critics grant approval to Richard's last stand, and a generation ago, Richard's death was largely viewed as "kingly" or "restoring the full involuntary esteem of the audience."<sup>146</sup> What is important for the Henriad is that the manner of Richard's death simultaneously provides motive and introduction for the succeeding plays of the tetralogy.<sup>147</sup> However, no matter how aesthetically "beautiful" a history or how fitting a segue into the next plays it may be, I nevertheless had been nagged for a long time by dissatisfaction with this ending until I came across a remark by Kehler. She suggests that in his final moments of violent self-defense Richard is given a reprieve from fear and despair—"not that he conquers fear but that, blessedly, *he forgets it*."<sup>148</sup> The intended sense of her remark is merely that at this

---

<sup>145</sup> Kehler, 15.

<sup>146</sup> Karl F. Thompson, "Richard II, Martyr," *Shakespeare Quarterly* Vol. 8, No. 2 (Spring, 1957), 161.

<sup>147</sup> Thompson, 165.

<sup>148</sup> Kehler, 17.

moment Richard “blessedly” forgets to be afraid, but Richard’s forgetfulness is also larger than that. Earlier, Richard forgets himself as King and must be urged to remember who he is. Attacked by Exton and his men, Richard perhaps now forgets that he is the not-King. Regardless of his previous desire to be a “mockery king of snow” that could thaw, melt and resolve itself into a dew of death, Richard takes self-preservative action against the assassins that does not comport with Ankersmit’s fourth mode of traumatic forgetting, perhaps because few in Ankersmit’s model ever actually get such an opportunity. Mortally wounded, Richard castigates his assailant Exton that his hand “hath with the king’s blood stained the king’s own land” (5.5.114). The liquidity of blood connects to his forgetfulness of fear as well as of his loss of Kingship. For this brief moment, he reclaims the identity of King, and his experience of his relationship to that problematic identity is expressed in the euphoric violence of a fight to the death. Richard enters into Nietzsche’s “mist of the unhistorical”—which is outside the consciousness of living in any relationship to historical annals and societal censure—in order to retrieve something from the past, and, “as it were, transform it into blood.” What he retrieves is a sense of Kingship and its attendant kingly graces, including valor. Its sustenance of Richard is only momentary, fluid as blood, but it appears that it lasts long enough. Its dried residue will be scraped off the stones and offered as a martyr’s relic—the blood of a King from the floor of Pomfret Castle.

## CHAPTER 3

### *1 HENRY IV*

There are two elephants in the room concerning *1 Henry IV*. The first is its title, which acknowledges not only its relatedness to a second part but also might suggest its incompleteness. The second elephant is that *1 Henry IV* is more about Hal and perhaps even Falstaff than Henry IV, and I address this figurative pachyderm later in this chapter. There was a time when attending to that first elephant would have been regarded as overlooking a grand scheme of the two Henriads as expressed by E. M. W. Tillyard. As Edward Pechter explains, the two tetralogies were for Tillyard

a single, unified work, with a beginning in Richard's deposition and murder, a middle describing the providential punishment visited upon England in civil wars, and a conclusive ending in *Richard III* with the final purgation of the guilty generations and the restoration of divine favor in the form of the accession of the Tudor dynasty that is and was and—so an audience is presumably meant to feel—shall be evermore.<sup>149</sup>

Therefore, according to Tillyard's view, the title loses any stigma of dependence because all parts are less than the whole. However, recent dissatisfaction with Tillyard's stance has noted that it does not take into account the order of composition of the plays or the lack of any performance history that suggests that the plays were actually presented as a group to Elizabethan audiences, and so the question of why the story of Henry IV has two halves again emerges. It might be

---

<sup>149</sup>Pechter, 213.

argued that the explanation is that the story of Henry IV was just too long to fit into one play. That justification might suffice except that when the action takes up again in *2 Henry IV* we find that the two plays are quite different, as Pechter claims, in “tone, texture, and strategy.”<sup>150</sup> *1 Henry IV* draws our attention to its incompleteness by its title, but all of Shakespeare’s histories are incomplete by their very nature—there is always more to the story than has been told, and therefore they all end somewhat inconclusively.<sup>151</sup> If we acknowledge that the play’s title does not dictate dependence on a sequel for meaning and that the ending is not finality but instead points to the future, we are free to employ our efforts to consider its unusual structure in terms other than its being part one of something else.

### 3.1 “The Center Cannot Hold”: Decentralization in *1 Henry IV*

I noted in the previous chapter that the audience for *Richard II* is unsure about which faction to support, Mowbray or Bolingbroke. A slightly different dilemma appears in *1 Henry IV* in that the audience lacks even a center of authority—not just a King but a dramatic hero as well. In fact, there may be too many heroes. Hal is the structural and technical hero, but Falstaff has our hearts. We are pulled toward and away from these two so that their interaction reproduces within the audience a kind of self-division. There are other figures as well, such as Hotspur, who are in some way admirable or attractive, but they too are in some way repellent or lacking. Pechter has written very persuasively that *1 Henry IV* is structured to create an experience of civil war for its audience as factions struggle in the rebellion and no hub of authority appears. “The competing characters represent not only particular claims to the throne, but conflicting points of view” about freedom, law, and honor.<sup>152</sup> Pechter’s view of the structure of the play as reproductive of the atmosphere of civil war within the audience is quite interesting—we always want to know how we ourselves are involved in something. However, the lack of a clear center of authority sets this play apart from other history plays in which a king serves as the dramatic focus. Shakespeare’s

---

<sup>150</sup> Pechter, 211.

<sup>151</sup> Various authors have made this point, including Samuel Johnson, Northrup Frye, and David Kastan.

<sup>152</sup> Pechter, 216.



structure not only emphasizes the precariousness of Henry's throne but also foregrounds the forgetful methods through which the missing solidification of Henry IV's position is sought. Decentralization enables the playwright to contrast Henry IV's struggle to maintain his throne via forgetfulness with the similar efforts at forgetting made by his son and Falstaff. The forgetfulness of both Henry IV and Hal will be addressed through a consideration of Nietzschean plasticity and its relationship to memory, and Suzanne Langer's formulation of comic elasticity will facilitate my discussion of Falstaff's clowning version of forgetfulness as it connects to his relationship with and ultimate rejection by Prince Hal.

### 3.2 Why Nietzsche Now?

My justification for viewing the plays of the second Henriad through the Nietzschean lens is relatively simple: I believe Shakespeare was beginning to think about history in a similar vein—to consider the consequences of skepticism toward historiography and to entertain the possibility that forgetfulness rather than commemoration could be productive of power. What the playwright explores in the second Henriad is part of the revolution of English historiography taking place from about 1550 to the early 1600s. We have seen that throughout the entire sixteenth century, history was regarded as instructive and morally useful, second only to the Bible, and quite popular with the public. Although history itself retained this popularity, ideas about it began to change. While the earlier part of the century focused on the initial causes of events, such as the intervention of God in man's history, the late sixteenth century began to concentrate instead on the agency of man in history. By the turn of the century, the lessons of history became increasingly secular and applicable to the public, not just the mighty. The rise of the Cecil family to prominence and power in Elizabeth I's court is but one example of the increasing status of the "new men" whose position and power were the result of mercantilism and the fortune it generated. Such new men forged upward while ignoring their commoner roots and eventually garnering gentility and titles to obfuscate their humble pasts. Such forgetfulness was productive of power and influence.

Shakespeare's deployment of forgetfulness in the second Henriad dramatizes what Nietzsche proposes nearly three centuries in the future—the necessity of acting in “the mist of the unhistorical” in order to accomplish something of significance. I agree with Charnes that it is easier to see “the long range transmission of community from one age into another” when past anomalies reappear in the present, but “temporal anomalies from the future, however, sometimes land on the surface of a text not prepared for their arrival.”<sup>153</sup> She calls such textual circumstances “wormholes” in which we detect “an idea whose time arrives in advance of its actual historical context.” She further notes that both Lacan and Žižek have argued that “the truth of the past always arrives from the future, that history is always constructed retroactively.” The future shows up in fits and starts, well in advance of our ability to recognize it as the future. “[F]uture ideas must in some way be ‘embedded’ in the texts of the past in order for us to discern their emergence from the position of hindsight.” I show that the efficacy of forgetfulness was recognized by Shakespeare, who demonstrates its potential for significant achievement well in advance of Nietzsche's formulation.

### 3.3 What Nietzsche Says About History and Forgetting

A brief glance at Nietzsche's formulations of the beneficial aspects of forgetfulness will prove helpful in understanding Shakespeare's mobilization of forgetting in the next three plays. Published in 1874 and the second of his *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche's *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* is his response to what he saw as the stultifying employment

---

<sup>153</sup> All references in this paragraph are to Linda Charnes, “Reading for the Wormholes: Micro-periods from the Future,” *Early Modern Culture: An Electronic Seminar*. Special Issue 6, “Timely Meditations.” <http://emc.eserver.org/1-6/issue6.html> (2 March 2011). Charnes' reference to Lacan and Žižek may be found in Slavoj Žižek's *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, (London: Verso, 1989), 141-142.

of history in nineteenth century German culture. However, his position is not a rejection of historicism *per se*. One need only glance at its first page to see the following:

We need history, certainly, but we need it for reasons different from those for which the idler in the garden of knowledge needs it...we need it, that is to say, for the sake of life and action, not so as to turn comfortably away from life and action...We want to serve history only to the extent that history serves life; for it is possible to value the study of history to such a degree that life becomes stunted and degenerate.<sup>154</sup>

There are various ways of “doing” history, says Nietzsche, who finds some to be beneficial and others enervating. For example, insofar as a knowledge of history encourages the present man in his endeavors for the future, Nietzsche pronounces it valuable, even vital for life and action. However, in his usual contrarian fashion, he asserts that it is also necessary to be able to forget the past in order to act. Happiness and benefit depend on one’s being able to forget at the right time as well as to remember at the right time, on discerning with strong instinctual feelings when there is the need to experience historically and when unhistorically. Man must enter into the “mist of the unhistorical” to accomplish anything in the present. The extent to which one should engage in this type of forgetting is determined by what Nietzsche calls the “plasticity” of a man or a people or culture. This plasticity is “the power distinctively to grow out of itself, transforming and assimilating everything past and alien, to heal wounds, replace what is lost and reshape broken forms out of itself.”<sup>155</sup> He notes that it is possible to live without memory and be quite happy, but “it is altogether impossible to *live* at all without forgetting.”<sup>156</sup> Thus, there are two key Nietzschean assertions concerning the past and forgetting with which I would like to underpin my argument concerning Shakespeare’s second *Henriad*. The first relates to the previously-mentioned degree of the historical sense or recuperation of the past that he finds extremely detrimental and actually

---

<sup>154</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 59.

<sup>155</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, Translated by Peter Preuss. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), 10.

<sup>156</sup> Nietzsche, Translated by Hollingdale, 62.

fatal to a living thing, whether an individual, a people or a culture. Concerning this degree of the historical sense, he says

To determine this degree, and therewith the boundary at which the past has to be forgotten if it is not to be the gravedigger of the present, one would have to know exactly how great the *plastic power* of a man, a people, a culture is: I mean by plastic power the capacity to develop out of oneself in one's own way, to transform and incorporate into oneself what is past and foreign, to heal wounds, to replace what has been lost, to recreate broken moulds.<sup>157</sup>

The second of Nietzsche's observations that prove fruitful flows out of the first. Nietzsche holds that there are some men who have so little of this plasticity that they are devastated by a single experience whereas there are those who possess it to such a great degree that they can remain unaffected by terrible disasters and "even by their own wicked acts." Of such men, Nietzsche says

The stronger the innermost roots of a man's nature, the more readily will he be able to assimilate and appropriate the things of the past; and the most powerful and tremendous nature would be characterized by the fact that it would know no boundary at all at which the historical sense began to overwhelm it; it would draw to itself and incorporate into itself all the past, its own and that most foreign to it, and as it were transform it into blood.

That which such a nature cannot subdue, it knows how to forget.<sup>158</sup>

The flexibility of such a man of power is so immense that he is relatively unaffected by calamitous experiences—or even his own wicked behaviors. Such a man of action possesses a "colossal" or vast nature beyond the capacities for achievement present in others. He has strong inner roots, and "the stronger the roots of the inmost man, the more of the past will he appropriate or master." The nature of such a man of action and power would have no limit at which the past could harm it. This nature, says Nietzsche, "would draw its own as well as every alien past wholly into itself

---

<sup>157</sup> Nietzsche, Translated by Hollingdale, 62.

<sup>158</sup> Nietzsche, Translated by Hollingdale, 62.

and transform it into blood.” Moreover, “what such a nature cannot master it knows how to forget.” Whatever is forgotten in this way no longer exists for such a man, and it therefore enters into oblivion—as if it had never been.

For Nietzsche, it is possible for a person to live without memories, but it is impossible to live or achieve anything at all without forgetting. While acknowledging that there is a place for what he discusses as the monumental, the antiquarian, and the critical approaches to history, Nietzsche finds counterproductive and even dangerously destructive the inappropriate or excessive application of any one of those approaches. There is a degree to which one may possess the “historical sense which injures every living thing and finally destroys it.”<sup>159</sup> Determining a necessary balance between history and forgetting is not easy. Nietzsche observes that there are some men who possess this plasticity to such a low degree that they “bleed to death over a single experience.” Hotspur is such a character. His inability to forget or sublimate in the slightest degree the offenses of Henry IV against his family renders him susceptible to fits of rage during which he is deaf to all reason. In other words, he is unable to grow out of himself or heal wounds or reshape broken forms.

The man of colossal nature knows how to forget at the right time as well as how to remember when necessary. In the chapter on *Richard II*, the dichotomy I proposed between Richard and Bolingbroke/Henry IV was based on this difference—the inability to recognize when it was time to remember and when it was time to forget. Of course, Henry IV is a man of a certain degree of power who, as we have already seen, generally knows how to remember as well as forget when it suits his purposes. But is he equivalent to the vast nature proposed by Nietzsche? The answer to this question, as we will see, is yes—and no.

#### 3.4 Shakespeare's New Deployment of Forgetfulness in *1 Henry IV*

*1 Henry IV* opens with what appears to be a rather straightforward deployment of forgetting. In the initial lines, Henry IV provides those in the audience who do not know the

---

<sup>159</sup> Nietzsche, translated by Pruess, 10.

previous play a quick update on the recently concluded internecine strife that is at an end, apparently because the King so pronounces it. The forgetful liquid imagery appears immediately as Henry declares that “no more the thirsty entrance of this soil / Shall daub her lips with her own children’s blood.” Civil broils will now give way to fraternal national harmony as Englishmen “march all one way” toward a crusade in the Holy Land. Those who know the previous play will recognize this as the campaign that Henry IV has earlier promised as an expression of penance for his supposedly unintended part in the death of Richard II. It is perhaps less apparent at first what Henry IV is hoping to achieve in this opening speech, which is the amnesia of his people concerning a most inconvenient truth. Henry IV is a usurper, and the “lovely rose” Richard II died while in his custody. To promote that most-essential national amnesia, Henry IV proposes a ploy of epic misdirection, the Holy Land crusade. It is his own implementation of a diplomatic maneuver that the King eventually will reveal as a legacy of sorts to his son in the next play of the tetralogy. On his deathbed, Henry IV will advise Prince Hal to keep disgruntled nobles occupied in a foreign war against a common enemy. Struggling together against an alien foe, the nobles and the commoners fighting abroad will forget their domestic quarrels and complaints against the crown.

However, before the plan can come to fruition in this first scene of *1 Henry IV*, Westmoreland reports the arrival of a post from Wales with news of additional “intestine” strife, thus unexpectedly cancelling out Henry IV’s intended mission to the Holy Land and thwarting our own expectations. Rather than launching into a project utilizing national forgetting as a component of nation-building, Henry IV is faced with more serious internal broils that must be resolved before he and his united subjects can march all one way to Jerusalem. Henry IV’s plans for a national forgetting that would promote the fantasy of a united England will continue to tantalize the audience throughout the two *Henry IV* plays, but its actual attainment will have to wait until *Henry V*. Quite swiftly, Shakespeare creates his own process of misdirection by first

offering one implementation of forgetting, only to replace it with another more subtle and profound.

Shakespeare does not return to his use of forgetting in disclosing the subjectivity of Henry IV as he did for King Richard II in the first play of the tetralogy. Instead, the playwright begins consideration of how forgetting is necessary to consolidate personal power to attain greatness. Baldo suggests that forgetfulness of the past is a strategy adapted by Henry IV from the methods of Richard II.<sup>160</sup> However, it seems unlikely that a successor would employ the strategies of his failed predecessor. Although Richard shows little awareness of the past and its function as the virtual guarantor of his identity as King, he does not actively employ forgetfulness as a strategy for achieving greatness. Henry IV's application of forgetfulness may have its roots in his realization of how he must function as King, having attained the throne through usurpation. References to the past and traditional lineage will not work in his favor. Not merely a single clever instance of misdirection for occasionally manipulating the masses, his forgetting is a habit of mind, a way of reconfiguring circumstances for one's advantage that the playwright envisions as being ultimately productive of immense power. As we have seen, Nietzsche calls such capacity for forgetting *plasticity* (*die plastische Kraft*). This kind of forgetting is employed to different degrees of success by the two Henries, whereas Falstaff practices a similar brand of forgetting, a comedic elasticity that allows him to serve as a middle term of comparison between the "plasticities" of the royal father and son.

### 3.5 Forgetfulness at the Court of Henry IV

While both Henry IV and Prince Hal attempt to make use of forgetting to achieve more than "imaginary puissance" in *1 Henry IV*, their respective efforts take place in very distinctive worlds—Henry IV's in the court and Hal's in the demi-monde of the Boar's Head tavern in Eastcheap. Although the playwright has skillfully balanced the play's action between the court and Eastcheap, delightfully counterpoising events, I will discuss the implementation of forgetting

---

<sup>160</sup> Baldo, 25.

by each of the two figures of power and Falstaff prior to the battle of Shrewsbury separately. On the eve of Shrewsbury the worlds of father and son will intersect, and Falstaff will be, both literally and figuratively, in their midst. Eventually, even Falstaff will be part of what must be forgotten by the young prince upon his accession to the throne.

At the beginning of the play, the worlds of father and son could hardly be more dissimilar. At the court of Henry IV, Westmoreland's remark that Hotspur's battlefield exploits in Wales have yielded "a conquest for a prince to boast of" reminds King Henry of his own disreputable son Harry, a frequenter of taverns and brothels rather than the battlefield where honor is won. After wishing that his Harry were a changeling for the valiant Hotspur, the King decides simply to forget his son for the time being—"Let him from my thoughts"—and concentrate on his suspicions about the pride of Hotspur in denying the King his Scottish prisoners. To defend his family against the King's displeasure, Worcester hints at the King's willful forgetfulness. He reminds Henry of his indebtedness to the Percy family whose hands helped to bring about his greatness (1.3.10-13), and it is clear that Worcester and his family deplore such forgetfulness. When they are peremptorily dismissed from the King's presence, Hotspur too reads Henry IV's demeanor as forgetfulness of the role the Percy family played in helping him regain his title and ascend the throne, and rails upon "this unthankful king," "this ingrate and cank' red Bolingbroke," "this forgetful man" (1.3.136-137).

There is a certain irony in Hotspur's rage at Henry's forgetful ingratitude, since Hotspur himself has lapses of memory, especially when he is angry. The first of those lapses of memory may be a convenient fabrication to avoid royal punishment, since it occurs in Hotspur's defense of his refusal to render up his prisoners to Henry IV. As Hotspur tells it, all of a sudden, a non-combatant perfumed like a milliner appeared, demanding prisoners and complaining about the stench of battle. As he makes this defense, Hotspur admits that, amid the carnage on the battlefield, he had perhaps "answer'd neglectingly," having said that Henry should or maybe should not have the prisoners—he just cannot remember what he said to the dandified courtier.



With calculated disingenuousness, Hotspur claims not to know exactly how he responded because he was still exhausted from fighting and was surrounded by the wounded and dead. Once out of the King's presence, Hotspur rages against Henry's treatment of him, and in his furious rant he forgets where he "first bow'd [his] knee/ Unto this king of smiles":

*Hot.* In Richard's time—what do you call the place?—

A plague upon it, it is in Gloucestershire—

'Twas where the madcap duke his uncle kept—

His uncle York—where I first bow'd my knee

Unto this king of smiles, this Bolingbroke—

'Sblood!

When you and he came back from Ravenspurgh—

*North.* At Berkley castle. (1.3.242-249)

He also famously forgets the map on which the division of the spoils of Henry IV's overthrow will be made, only to have it produced from the clutter by a sharp-eyed Glendower. Poole credits Hotspur's faulty memory in part for his being "doomed but likeable."<sup>161</sup> Perhaps every act of forgetfulness could have a psychological root: maybe Hotspur forgets the map because he does not really want to divide the territory with the other rebels—except he has not forgotten the map, only misplaced it. He cannot remember where he first gave Bolingbroke his loyalty because he is repressing the memory of an egregious error—except he openly acknowledges the mistake his family has made in supporting Henry. It is more likely that these last two episodes are mere cognitive lapses, and although they are wonderful touches of characterization by the playwright, they are not the kind of monumentally callous forgetting of which he (Hotspur) accuses Henry IV.

While Henry IV is accused of forgetting those who helped him into power, in a more profound sense he certainly *has not* forgotten them, and they know that. What Hotspur and the

---

<sup>161</sup> Poole, 92.

others mean by their accusation is that Henry IV is now conducting himself as *if* he has forgotten them. This is obvious in Hotspur's admonition to his father and uncle that they should

Revenge the jeering and disdain'd contempt  
Of this proud King, who studies day and night  
To answer all the debt he owes to you  
Even with the bloody payment of your deaths. (1.3.1183-186)

It is most certain that Henry IV has not forgotten their role in his usurpation. He once told them as they neared Berkley Castle before he was made King: "I count myself in nothing else so happy / As in a soul rememb'ring my good friends, / And as my fortune ripens with thy love, / It shall be still thy true love's recompense" (*Richard II* 2.3.46-49). Knowing that Henry has not forgotten their role in his rise to power, Worcester characterizes the situation aptly when he says that the King will always feel himself indebted to them and consider them as unsatisfied under his rule (1.3.286-288). Apparently, the Percies believe the late King Richard II was correct when he previously warned Northumberland that Henry "shall think that thou, which knowest the way / To plant unrightful Kings, will know again, / Being ne'er so little urg'd, another way To pluck him headlong from the usurped throne" (*Richard II* 5.1.62-65).

Hotspur is not only incensed at the forgetful ingratitude and disdain of Henry IV toward those "that set the crown / Upon the head of this forgetful man, And for his sake wear the detested blot /Of murderous subornation" (1.3.160-163). Hotspur further suspects that the Percy family name will not be protected in any favorable royal version of their actions in the official history that typically shields a King's supporters from the truth. Consequently, Hotspur is grieved at the ignominy that he suspects will accrue to his family's name in the historical record to come.

Shall it for shame be spoken in these days,  
Or fill up chronicles in time to come,  
That men of your nobility and power  
Did gage them both in an unjust behalf

(As both of you—God pardon it!—have done)  
To put down Richard, that sweet lovely rose,  
And plant this thorn, this canker, Bolingbroke?  
And shall it in more shame be further spoken,  
That you are fool'd, discarded, and shook off  
By him for whom these shames ye underwent? (1.3.170-179)

The historical record will recount not only his family's complicity in the usurpation, but also what Hotspur suspects the future holds—the eventual rejection of his family by the ingrate Henry IV. Redemption of their “banish'd honors” and the restoration of the reputation of the name Percy must be accomplished by rebellion against Henry IV.

Henry IV's ingratitude toward the Percy family is not the only instance of a perceived forgetting on his part. He seems to have conveniently forgotten a vow limiting his pursuit of power. In *Richard II*, when Henry returns to England from banishment to lay claim to his deceased father's title of Duke of Lancaster, he asserts that he comes only to have his banishment repealed and his lands restored to him. Northumberland, not Bolingbroke, assures Richard II that Bolingbroke's “coming hither hath no further scope / Than for his lineal royalties” (*Richard II* 3.3. 112-114). However, on the eve of the battle of Shrewsbury, Hotspur and Worcester make separate assertions that Henry IV has obviously forgotten his vow to take no more than what is his. This forgetting of both Percy friendship and his vow of restraint is the lynchpin of the following remarks by Worcester made directly to Henry IV.

*Wor.* And yet I must remember you, my lord,  
We were the first and dearest of your friends.  
You swore to us,  
And you did swear that oath at Doncaster,  
That you did nothing purpose 'gainst the state,  
Nor claim no further than your new-fall'n right,

The seat of Gaunt, dukedom of Lancaster.  
To this we swore our aid.  
And from this swarm of fair advantages  
You took occasion to be quickly wooed  
To gripe the general sway into your hand,  
Forgot your oath to us at Doncaster. (5.2.32-33, 41-46, 55-58)

If we know *Richard II*, we may well ask what produced such an amnesic alteration in Henry IV, formerly the brash young Bolingbroke, who as a banished combatant could not and would not forget his circumstances by merely imagining them to be otherwise. He perceived his banishment as an injustice, and John of Gaunt's suggestions of ways to re-imagine, to forget, the reality of his expulsion were all rejected. Why is it, then, that he in God's name ascends the throne, marches sadly after Richard's coffin, and becomes a cipher "wan with care" in this play bearing his name? For any who might find the use of the term *cipher* for Henry IV somewhat harsh, it is worth recalling Edward Pechter's argument that, for the audience of Henry IV's two namesake plays, there is no center of authority because we lack a dramatic hero.<sup>162</sup> In true cipher fashion, he will be ably performed by others—by the prince and Falstaff in the play extempore as well as by the various men marching in his coats on the battlefield at Shrewsbury. The Bolingbroke of *Richard II*, whether a valiant man of honor or a conniving Machiavellian who was always intent on stealing the crown, seems altered once the crown is placed on his head, and he is somehow diminished in this change of circumstances. His self-assurance is all but vanished, and he will eventually resort to telling his son about the glorious past when he was carried along on a tide of national popularity that he once knew how to manipulate. Here is that second elephant in the room concerning this play: Henry IV becomes almost a supporting role in his own plays, overshadowed by Prince Hal and Falstaff. Nor do we in exchange for his loss of certainty see into the depths of his heart to witness its turmoil the way we did in the previous play with Richard II. Shakespeare is

---

<sup>162</sup> Pechter, 216.

attempting something quite different with Henry IV. He at last fails to forget to the required degree. Both Henry and his son will make assay at greatness through a kind of forgetting that ultimately will resemble Nietzsche's plastic power. This plasticity achieved through calculated forgetting is "the power distinctively to grow out of itself, transforming and assimilating everything past and alien, to heal wounds, replace what is lost and reshape broken forms out of itself."<sup>163</sup> It is the son, not the father, who ultimately will achieve the kind of agility in forgetting to which Nietzsche attributes the attainment of greatness. The father's eventually inadequate attempt to carve out a secure possession of the crown serves as a bridge between the reigns of Richard II and Henry V, not only temporally but also in the development of Shakespeare's exploration of how judicious forgetting leads to power and the realization of eminence.

Shakespeare first presents Bolingbroke at the outset of *Richard II* as a man who cannot and will not forget. In this way he is somewhat like young Hotspur, a comparison Henry himself will make in the climactic scene between father and son in the third act. Bolingbroke cannot forget the injustice of his banishment or reconfigure it in his mind as merely a quest abroad in search of honor as proposed by his father. Perhaps there are incipient glimmerings of this colossal nature contained in the advice given him by his father, John of Gaunt, who urged as beneficial the re-remembering of his banishment, but Bolingbroke would have none of it at the time. Later confronting Richard II's minions Bushy and Green in *Richard II*, Bolingbroke demonstrates an indefatigable memory that allows him to easily recite his complaints against them concerning the "disparking" of his parks, the deforestation of his woods, the rasing of his impresa, all of which give him room to reinvent himself on the ruins of his old, obliterated state. Perhaps at this point Bolingbroke realizes the possibilities for power inherent in a loss of memory, and as I have argued in the chapter on *Richard II*, preoccupation with the consideration of the merits of forgetting for the achievement of power may have colored his behavior in the scene in *Richard II* in which York, his wife, and Aumerle jockey for his attention. Once he becomes King, he gives

---

<sup>163</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, Translated by Peter Preuss, 10.

evidence of his ability to forget not only who helped him at his return from banishment but also the vow he made that would have forestalled his accession to the throne. Forgetting on such a grand scale could perhaps be seen as meeting the Nietzschean criterion for the man whose colossal nature knows how to forget what it cannot master, but the heavy-handed way in which Henry IV mobilizes it also exacerbates the dissatisfaction of the Percy family, thus all but neutralizing the advantage. Henry IV makes an attempt to contain the Percy family, who have been fighting Welsh and Scottish insurgents on his behalf, but a rather convoluted coil of events involving their in-law Mortimer and Hotspur's heroics on the battlefield against the Douglas provokes a confrontation. Henry's uneasiness about Mortimer's claim as the rightful successor to Richard II is so much intensified by their endless repetition of his name that Henry forbids them to speak of Mortimer. This perhaps justifiably clouds not only his certainty of the Percy family's continued loyalty but also his judgment in all matters relating to them. He can wish the valiant Hotspur his own son while at the same time sensing disastrous rebellion in the Percy refusal to surrender the prisoners.

Herein lies the problem for Henry IV in the successful achievement of the status of the Nietzschean man of action and power: he cannot forget or overmaster the fact that he is a usurper. That unforgotten guilt overshadows everything he does. Having read the chronicles, Shakespeare knows Henry IV pulled off a dexterous usurpation but was not successful ultimately in unifying his nation. Henry IV himself finally acknowledges that such an achievement will belong to his son, and as previously noted, Henry IV is relegated to playing a supporting role in his own play. Ultimately, he will come to pin all his nameless hopes for redemption, glory and national unity on Prince Hal, a turn of events certainly unanticipated at this play's outset as well. It is the debt Hal "never promised."

I address the further forgetfulness of Henry IV demonstrated on the eve of Shrewsbury after my discussion of the manifestations of forgetfulness found in Falstaff and Prince Hal at the Boar's Head tavern. In actuality, the decentralized structure of the play allows Shakespeare to

shift his focus from Henry IV to his son with relative ease, and this decentralization even allows Falstaff to take his place in turn as the center of the play where he performs a delightfully raucous yet eerie parody of the power tactics of forgetfulness deployed by Henry IV and ultimately by Prince Hal.

### 3.6 Falstaff: Poster Child for Early Modern Forgetfulness

Although such forgetting by Falstaff facilitates his survival in the tavern at Eastcheap, it certainly does not lead on to the achievement of power and influence at court but instead necessitates his rejection by Hal. In the same way that the playwright seems to delay our acquaintance with the young prince by foregrounding Falstaff in the first tavern scene, I will utilize him as a middle term of comedic parody of the degrees of forgetfulness employed by Henry IV and Hal.

The theater of the English Renaissance was an arena in which alternatives for society were frequently examined, much to the dismay of the anti-theatrical writers who charged that the spectators' mere presence in the venue led to idleness, lethargy and unavoidable profligacy. On that alternate plane of existence most frequented by Prince Hal and his band of rowdy friends, the Boar's Head Tavern in Eastcheap, those same transgressions of lethargy and hedonism are paraded shamelessly. Shakespeare seems quite tenacious in his campaign to feature the self-forgetfulness railed against by the anti-theatricals. Again the playwright thwarts our expectations as he even goes so far as to give such forgetfulness a temporary ascendance at center-stage over the prince about whom the audience has such curiosity. The first time we actually see Prince Hal, his opening speech deliberately calls our attention, not to himself, but rather to the recalcitrant body of Falstaff. Hal uses the imagery of forgetful liquidity to chide Falstaff as being so full of "old sack" that he has forgotten to ask what he really wants to know. Both the playwright and Hal seem determined to focus on Falstaff as being lethargic, "fat-witted," given to "unbuttoning after supper" and "sleeping upon benches," and hedonistic excess involving sack and "leaping-houses." He is the very personification of the forgetful somatic horrors of

drunkenness, gluttony, and excessive sleep already mentioned as being catalogued in John Willis's 1661 *Mnemonic: or The Arte of Memory*. Despite the attempts by many modern critics to reduce him to a more sophisticated version of the medieval Vice or the *miles gloriosus*, Falstaff is greater than the sum of his quips. He, too, is a practitioner of a forgetfulness produced primarily by laughter but also by aspirations to power similar but ultimately not identical to that of the two Henries. It is power over life and its grand feast as well as over death that leads Falstaff on in his comic amnesia. Obese, lecherous, prodigal, self-serving, and excessively fond of drink, Falstaff nevertheless displays dazzling wit and is the self-proclaimed cause for wittiness in others, particularly in the young prince. Indeed, some have been moved to say that he is the actual star of the Henry IV plays, perhaps the most delightful character that ever spoke Shakespeare's lines.<sup>164</sup> Although—or perhaps because—the irrepressible Falstaff violates all societal norms, shows no respect for authority or social station, and blames others for his misdeeds and disgrace, Hal and the audience revel in his company. He is the fulfillment of the fantasy of the unregulated body, the bad boy who does what we dare not. A thumb in the eye of mainstream Elizabethan attitudes toward forgetting, he is self-forgetting writ large, but rather than provoking revulsion, he provokes laughter, and laughter has often been connected axiomatically to forgetting. Of this, Poole has observed that laughter and forgetting are both forms of waywardness that “outrage the desire for total mastery.”<sup>165</sup> Falstaff's ability to forget and laugh away his troubles is the key not only to his charm, but also to his survival.

### 3.7 “If You Have to Explain It, It's Not Funny”: Falstaff and Comic Theory

To understand Falstaff's relationship to forgetting in this play as well as in *2 Henry IV*, we need to examine his connection to laughter by first glancing briefly at the classical conception of comedy and then by a more thorough consideration of Suzanne Langer's more recent formulations concerning humor. Moody E. Prior writes that “virtually all critics of whatever

---

<sup>164</sup> Robert H. Bell, “The anatomy of folly in Shakespeare's “Henriad,”” *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*. 2001, Vol. 14 Issue 2:187.

<sup>165</sup> Poole, 89.



persuasion are in accord that Falstaff is one of the great comic characters of literature.”<sup>166</sup> However, the laughter elicited by Falstaff is not fully explained by the classical conception of comedy, which proposes that the source of the comic is in some deformity or perversity that provokes laughter when exposed. Thus, the comic experience supposedly produces a corrective not only for the butt of the comedy but also for society as well. While it is true that Falstaff’s girth and moral defects are chided in the play and often “corrected” by Hal, he is not a classical comic butt or victim, and instead of producing disdain or supercilious revulsion in us, he engenders affection and perhaps even admiration to a certain extent as he emerges triumphant—at least near the end of the first Henry play. Prior points out that, in contradistinction to punitive comic theory, Susanne Langer proposes in *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* that what underlies comedy is “the pure sense of life” that emerges from vitality and from the adaptation to an environment that continually threatens or frustrates. According to Langer, “all creatures live by opportunities in a world fraught with disasters,” a world in which man survives through “brainy opportunism in the face of an essentially dreadful universe.” Brains alone will not suffice, however; man needs luck, says Langer, emphasizing the element of chance in enabling comic survival. Langer maintains that comic action is “the upset and recovery of the protagonist’s equilibrium in the world and his triumph by his wit, luck, personal power, or even humorous, or ironical, or philosophical acceptance of chance.” She provides a description of the buffoon, “the indomitable living creature fending for itself, tumbling and stumbling,” getting into all sorts of trouble and getting out again, and arousing a degree of warmth for this comic figure to whom we give our sympathy rather than to those who oppose him, even when his behavior is less than respectable. Even if he has victims, they must not engage our interest. It should be apparent that Falstaff fits Langer’s criteria in *1 Henry IV*, and indeed she herself has chosen him as the perfect example of the comic character endowed with humanity, the indomitable creature making his way through life. Her formulation of “brainy opportunism in the face of an essentially dreadful universe”

---

<sup>166</sup> Moody E. Prior, “Comic Theory and the Rejection of Falstaff,” *Shakespeare Studies*. 1976. Vol. 9:159-171.

certainly describes the tenuous existence of Falstaff amid the denizens of the Boar's Head as he schemes his way through Mistress Quickly's cellar and larder. In Falstaff's case, the element of chance that enables comic survival is his good fortune in having the King's son as his boon companion, which offers hope for a less desperate existence sometime in the future—a hope to which he often alludes in conversation with the young prince. Langer's description of “the indomitable living creature fending for itself” sounds rather similar to the Nietzschean idea of the vast nature that either assimilates or jettisons the unmastered aspects of life as needed, and this is what Falstaff accomplishes throughout the play through forgetting.

Falstaff's resilience achieved by forgetting is one of his chief qualities because he is constantly recovering from one humiliation or disaster. In point of fact, many of the examples of his recovery arise from situations created by Prince Hal precisely in order to witness Falstaff's creativity. When Hal and Poins join in the Gadshill robbery, for example, their chief goal is supposedly to expose Falstaff's cowardice and to hear the outrageous lies he will tell. The comic climax takes place when Falstaff is confronted with his lies and we all wait to see how he will get out of the dilemma. The whole scheme is but a ploy, not so much to humiliate Falstaff, but rather to give Falstaff an occasion on which to display his wit. The punitive comic exposure of a dupe is turned by Shakespeare into the comedic recovery of a brilliant humorist.

If the present proves disheartening and does not further the comic hero's purposes, it sinks beneath his consciousness as it becomes the past. The comic hero nearly slips on the ice, but he flails his arms and recovers to proceed on his way, twirling his umbrella with Chaplinesque élan, and in essence forgets that there has been a near-disaster. Langer's formulation of comedy shares some of Nietzsche's valorization of the ability to adjust, to grow and change, to adapt, and to live unhistorically. This same forgetfulness in the service of life is very similar to what Nietzsche has offered as productive of the man with a vast nature, and it is manifested *manqué* by Falstaff throughout the play. Two examples will serve to illustrate Falstaff's comic, forgetful elasticity. Falstaff's happy ability to forget can be seen in his brushing aside of the debts he owes to

Mistress Quickly. The bar tab, the provisions, the dozen shirts she had made for him are all either dismissed out of hand or denigrated as being unworthy of his repayment. Falstaff's maintenance by the long-suffering hostess while staving off making reimbursement resembles a crass version of Henry IV's forgetfulness concerning the benefits provided to him by the Percy family. Once the provisions are in Falstaff's belly, he suffers no guilt in criticizing what a reluctant Mistress Quickly has set before him *gratis*. Similarly, once in possession of the crown, Henry IV feels free to excoriate Northumberland. Both Falstaff and Henry IV have convenient memory lapses concerning their indebtedness to inferiors, but that which Henry IV forgets is a political debt. There are no feelings of warmth and sympathy attached to his actions by the audience. For many, Bolingbroke is a mere Machiavellian, either admired or loathed, depending on one's view of that term. Falstaff, however, must forget that he owes the hostess in order to maintain the equilibrium of the most basic needs of life, and in this, Langer has said, we find amusement and even affection.

A second instance of Falstaff's employment of forgetfulness for comic survival is the previously mentioned defense of his behavior at the Gadshill robbery. His vivid account of his valor against those who took the spoils of their crime evaporates when he is confronted by Hal and Poins with the truth of their role in the counter-theft. Without missing a beat, Falstaff asserts that he knew the attackers to be Hal and Poins and allowed them to subdue him in deference to Hal's royal lineage. The humiliation of being revealed as a liar and a coward vanishes into the past as Falstaff doggedly pursues his new version of the truth. He does not brood over his disgrace or seem to harbor resentment toward Hal and Poins but instead regains his equilibrium to maintain his fellowship with them. Like Nietzsche's man of a vast nature, Falstaff overmasters what he can and forgets the rest. Poole has noted that "laughter is hard put to remain innocent of prepositions—laughing at, laughing for, laughing off."<sup>167</sup> Falstaff embraces them all by being witty

---

<sup>167</sup> Poole, 85.

in himself as well as the reason that wit is in other men, that is, the lovable butt of their humor.

### 3.8 The Play Extempore: The Best Days of Their Lives

Despite our affection for Falstaff, our knowledge of history or at least the way things work in this world alerts us to the fact that Hal and Falstaff cannot continue in their present relationship. Pechter observes that, after Act 2, the rest of the play is designed to bring us around to accept Hal's unavoidable rejection of Falstaff by the use of elements that make Falstaff seem less and create Hal as a more endearing figure.<sup>168</sup> In the play extempore, Shakespeare gives us a double-feature comedic preview of the encounter that we all sense is coming—Hal's reckoning with his father. The audience is allowed to laugh as good King Falstaff-as-Henry IV, enthroned on a three-legged stool, wearing a cushion for a crown, questions whether Hal could even be his son. His mother's claim and Hal's "villainous trick of thine eye" and the hanging of his lower lip have made Henry accept him as son. (As we soon see, Falstaff's rendering of Henry's fatherly scolding is quite similar at first to that delivered by Henry himself.) Decrying his "son's" association with bad company that contaminates like pitch, King Falstaff praises his companion, the "goodly portly man" of some fifty, well, sixty years whose name escapes him. The rest of the scoundrels should be banished, but not Falstaff. Hal's assertion that Falstaff does not speak like a King and that Hal will replace him brings about the unsettling, rebuking reference "Depose me?" that rankles on some level, being a reminder of the means by which Henry IV gained the throne and therefore, Harry his principedom, but then it vanishes in the business of the exchange of the throne by Harry ("Well, here I am set") and Falstaff ("And here I stand"). Harry's rendition of Henry IV serves as a stalking horse whereby he unleashes a humorous yet torrentially vicious attack on the "tun of man" who is Hal's companion in Eastcheap. Falstaff fends off the assault with pretended ignorance—"Whom means your grace?"—and then acknowledges that he does know the man but defends him as sweet, kind, true, valiant Jack Falstaff, whose banishment would mean the banishing of all the world. There is comedy in the satirically carnivalesque rendering of the

---

<sup>168</sup> Pechter, 227.

trappings of monarchy—the throne as a stool, the crown as a saggy cushion—and also in Falstaff’s shameless self-glorification, but there is a kind of desperation behind his plea against the banishment of the goodly portly man. Hal’s ominous “I do, I will” sends an unsettling chill into the warmth of the tavern, which, unlike the fleeting reference to deposition, is not quite relieved by the knocking at the door and the ensuing kerfuffle of the entrance of the sheriff and his men. After “I do, I will” and Bardolph’s explanation of the knocking, the play shifts in its direction, and upon the entrance of the forces of public order, the play as Falstaff intends it is over. He may plead “Play out the play!” but “[g]one now is our giddy absorption in playing extempore, replaced by a sense of the play’s temporariness and dependence.”<sup>169</sup> Pechter has written quite thoughtfully about what the end of the play extempore means for the audience, and, to my purpose, what it means in terms of the efficacy of Falstaff’s forgetfulness.

But [nothing] can do justice to the complexity of feelings we are made to experience at [the end of the play extemporare]...We have enjoyed an exhilarating condition of privilege, the access to a seemingly infinite variety of self-validating roles. We have known what it feels like to be anything we can be called, to realize any identity we can project (or participate in imaginatively)...But no more, now; from this condition we shall be banished.<sup>170</sup>

We have reveled in Falstaff’s comedic version of the plasticity of Nietzsche’s formulation, but we realize ruefully that it is, after all, productive only of free drinks for him and laughter for us at his generous expense. Ellen M. Caldwell (2007) writes that the threatened banishment of Falstaff actually means the removal of what is human from the Lancastrian myth of kingship, a false religion of the state that Falstaff repeatedly punctures throughout *1 Henry IV*. For Caldwell, what Hal hopes to expunge through the promised removal of Falstaff is the persistent mocking voice that unmask the prince’s disguise and the hypocrisy of a usurped crown. Banishing Jack Falstaff, she says, removes humanity from the Lancastrian myth of kingship, creating a king who

---

<sup>169</sup> Pechter, 226.

<sup>170</sup> Pechter, 226.

is estranged from interaction with his people.<sup>171</sup> In countering the view held by Caldwell, Prior holds that the strategy to come in Part 2 separates Hal and Falstaff both physically and emotionally, preparing the audience for the rejection, and demonstrating that a rise to power sets a man apart, calling for sometimes distressing actions.<sup>172</sup> I would add that the disguised Hal with whom Falstaff is most familiar is the profligate drinking companion, and therefore the unmasking of that disguise would reveal the King who banishes him. Moreover, without the hypocrisy of a usurped crown, Falstaff can have no hope of having the laws and the funds of the Exchequer at his commandment, for his only entrée into the court circle would be through the usurper's son. If by "removing humanity," Caldwell means the kind of humorously profligate behavior we associate with Falstaff, it would seem that the bar for what constitutes humanity is rather low. Hal's assertion that "if all the year were playing holidays, / To sport would be as tedious as to work" aptly characterizes Falstaff. We laugh with him and at him, but incessant jesting and dallying can wear thin. Falstaff's comedic plasticity may puncture the Lancastrian myth of kingship, but it is utterly ineffective in the attainment of the wealth and leisure that he imagines to accompany political power, which is Falstaff's repeatedly expressed desire. We are not yet done with forgetful, protean Falstaff, but "the play" Falstaff has in mind is now over even though he does not know it.

### 3.9 Hal and His Own Private Forgetfulness

Turning at last to consider Prince Hal and his forgetfulness up until the eve of the battle of Shrewsbury, we might first note how little he resembles the other models of forgetting encountered thus far in the tetralogy. His father's accusations to the contrary, he is not the kind of profligate self-forgetter that Falstaff is. King Henry IV can accuse his son of "vile participation," which certainly could include everything of which Falstaff is guilty, but while Falstaff may have his Doll Tearsheet, we never see—at least by the playwright's stage direction—Hal involved with

---

<sup>171</sup> Ellen M. Caldwell, "Banish All the World': Falstaff's Iconoclastic Threat to Kingship in 1 Henry IV," *Renascence*, Summer 2007, 219-245.

<sup>172</sup> Moody E. Prior, "Comic Theory and the Rejection of Falstaff," *Shakespeare Studies* Vol. 9, 159-171.

women who live by the prick of their needles, and even the degree of his drunkenness while in the Boar's Head is a matter of an actor's interpretation, as in, for example, scene 4 of the second act when he tells Poins of his carousing with the young drawers and tavern guests. I will allow that the frenzied, erratic nature of the speech as it reads does lend itself to the performance of an inebriated Hal, but his euphoria could also be the result of his success at winning the good opinion and loyalty of the drawers or perhaps even an elation in expectation of his impending transformation. Rather than a genuine self-forgetter engaged in lascivious behavior, Hal is our proxy in that demi-monde of forgetfulness, the Boar's Head, while Falstaff is the literal embodiment of the forgetful man, modeling enthusiastically what forgetting does to a person, as asserted by Willis and other writers of the period. Aside from the Gadshill robbery, which results in a fine trick on Falstaff but no actual loss of money for the victims, Hal's vile participation seems to consist mostly of the sin of hanging out in disreputable places with low-class people. He is accused repeatedly of forgetting himself by being in violation of society's expectations of the heir-apparent, but even the self-forgetting enacted in his rebellious body actually works to subvert the Renaissance idea of the undisciplined body as destructive, for the prince asserts that he is actually making judicious use of his time in the tavern learning about his fellowman. Some might see this behavior as calculated politicking meant to assure public support, much like that his father had acquired. Others might consider it a sincere effort at gaining a feel for the way common people think. In either case, he is preparing to be King.<sup>173</sup> When the time is right, he will cast off his profligate behaviors and be so much more the man for the transformation. Alone on the stage at the end of 1.2, Prince Harry says

I know you all, and will awhile uphold

The unyok'd humor of your idleness (195-196).

---

<sup>173</sup> Pechter, 220.

While obviously directed at the absent Falstaff and the other denizens of the tavern, these lines are also directed at us, the just-now present spectators.<sup>174</sup> He declares his knowledge of us and our undisciplined nature while watching the play in idleness. He is in effect upbraiding our “rush to judgment” about him because we believe in our own omniscience as spectators. The carousers at the Boar’s Head are mistaken in their reading of Harry, and even though we also may have been misconstruing him, he now lets us in on his calculated deception. The sun, he explains, merely “permits” its scarf of “base contagious clouds /To smother up his beauty from the world”(1.2.108-199) so that when he “please again to be himself” he will be all the more spectacular. The heir-apparent has only seemed to forget himself in riotous living, but the time will come for him to throw off his loose behavior in order to “pay the debt [he] never promised” (209). We may anticipate Act 5 in which Hal warns the Douglas, “It is the Prince of Wales that threatens thee, / Who never promiseth but he means to pay” (5.4.42-43). Even the unpromised debt will be settled. Harry never contracted with anyone for greatness, but it will be required of and perhaps is even desired by him, and he assures us he will prove extraordinary, a man of a colossal nature such as Nietzsche imagines and to which his father aspires—but not just yet.

Although the audience witnesses Hal’s sociable tavern behavior, his self-revelation to these spectators is limited. In this respect, Hal is quite unlike like the first forgetter of the tetralogy, Richard II. Despite his revelation in soliloquy concerning his plans for transformation, we are never given a sense of seeing into the depths of his being as we do with Richard II. What is Hal’s true experience of his identity, his subjectivity? Richard II spoke copiously, but with Hal, we have precious little to go on, and what we do have we can easily mistrust as lacking authenticity because we have seen already his duplicity with Falstaff and his insincerity with the Boar’s Head crowd. There may or may not be yet another unrevealed layer beneath what he unfolds to us in soliloquy. Perhaps the playwright suspects that such introspection, while evocative of poetry in

---

<sup>174</sup> Marjorie Garber, “‘What’s Past Is Prologue’: Temporality and Prophecy in Shakespeare’s History Plays,” in *Renaissance Genres; Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation*, ed. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986), 330.



*Richard II*, would impose upon Prince Hal a paralysis detrimental to the kind of decisive action that Shakespeare foregrounds in these two Henry plays. It is as Nietzsche has said: forgetting is essential to action, and both Henry IV and Hal seem to appreciate the value of action over contemplation.

Even in the apparent midst of idleness, Hal reveals that his preparation for action is well underway, and further declares that the expectations of his folly and failure in the future will be subverted. His reformation will be a re-formation “like bright metal on a sullen ground” that will contrast with his previous calculatedly loose behavior. Hal announces that for the time being he will “so offend, to make offense a skill, /Redeeming time when men think least I will”(1.3.216-217). One reading of this is that he eventually will make up for hours he now acknowledges have been wasted, but perhaps we should remind ourselves again that Hal’s profligacy is inauthentic—it is the cover under which he is redeeming the time by learning “to drink with any tinker in his own language.” As noted earlier, Pechter posits that some may find that Harry is calculatedly spending his time among the commoners of the Boar’s Head in order to understand the common people so as to be a better King.<sup>175</sup> While this may be true—and I question his devotion to the common people further in chapter 5—it certainly appears that the prince has little respect for the company in the tavern—he calls them loggerheads or blockheads—and may instead be learning how best to take advantage of them when he becomes Henry V and needs cannon fodder to charge once more unto the breach. Declaring himself sworn brother to the drawers whom he can call by their “christen” names, he seems to be making fun of their artlessness and easily won affection.

They take it already upon their salvation that though I am but Prince of Wales, yet I am the King of courtesy, and tell me flatly that I am no proud Jack like Falstaff, but a Corinthian, a lad of mettle, a good boy (by the Lord, so they call me!), and when I am King of England I shall command all the good lads in Eastcheap (2.4.9-16).

---

<sup>175</sup> Pechter, 220-221.

This calculated intelligence-gathering seems more in line with the pursuit of a course of self-forgetting and Nietzschean plasticity. This same manipulation of the common people's affections will be the subject of the lesson in how to rise to power given by Henry IV when father and son meet, and it again will figure highly in *Henry V*—though perhaps not as successfully as hoped—with a little touch of Harry in the night.

### 3.10 The Long-Awaited Encounter: Hal vs. Henry IV, Who Never Sees It Coming

At last the father and son are brought face to face in 3.2 before the battle of Shrewsbury in the encounter of which the play extempore made a double parody—first with Falstaff as Henry IV and then with Hal as his father. Shakespeare now makes possible the close comparison of these two men, particularly in terms of the plasticity afforded by Nietzschean forgetting. As was predicted by Falstaff's version of the meeting, Henry IV does in fact deliver a diatribe against Hal's self-forgetfulness among the tavern crowd, but rather than questioning Hal's lineage as Falstaff did, Henry acknowledges him as his son in truth, an instrument of God's revenge brought forth out of his own blood for "some displeasing service," which neatly skirts the issue of usurpation. Although Henry's "mistreadings" were not a part of Falstaff's version of his indictment of the prince, the excoriation of bad companionship was. King Falstaff speaks of bad companions and pitch while King Henry IV decries the sully of Hal's princely blood with such low companionship, asserting that Hal has forgotten who his ancestors have been. Hal's actual response to his father's charge mirrors the answer Falstaff-as-Hal made: the reports of his behavior have been lies. Hal quite diplomatically allows that perhaps he has wandered, but he meekly asks pardon for that. At this point the encounter takes a turn not dreamed of by Harry or Falstaff in the play extempore, and it serves to point up a significant difference in attitudes toward the achievement of power. Henry recounts with greater candor his strategy for attaining the throne, undertaken when he was about Hal's age, and in so doing, delivers a tutorial on how majesty manipulates the people through prudence rather than force. What he says reveals much not only about his political ideology but also about his implementation of forgetting. Because

Henry IV has neither seen his son living in Eastcheap nor heard his vow of re-formation, he is unaware that Harry already has acquired substantial skill in both reading and influencing people as well as in expunging the past in the pursuit of power so that much of what Henry says is already part of the prince's political nature. What Henry unfolds to his son is the political concept that the best way to tame men to monarchical government is through prudence rather than force, a strategy best undertaken through the regal use of language and— particularly for Henry IV—spectacle.

Again Henry IV seems unacquainted with the true potential of his son, since he lectures him on the benefits of regal language and spectacle. The audience already is privy to Hal's views about making a splashy entrance on the public scene despite common expectation, and in the rest of the scene we become keenly aware of his rhetorical skill. Wayne A. Reborn declares that monarchical rule during the Renaissance was highly reliant on "rulers' use of language and spectacle to generate and maintain the allegiance of their subjects."<sup>176</sup> He further states that Shakespeare shares Machiavelli's larger view of rhetoric as encompassing the persuasive force of spectacle, as is demonstrated by his Machiavellian kings.<sup>177</sup> While still hesitant to think of Henry IV as purely Machiavellian, perhaps due to a sense that the term is sometimes merely pejorative, I agree with Reborn's assessment that Henry IV "elaborates a decidedly rhetorical theory of Kingship" in his counsel to Hal. Recounting how he manipulated "Opinion" by appearing only seldom in public, Henry reveals that he believes that "the realm of politics is the realm of custom and contingency, where 'Opinion' rather than inherited rights, let alone truth, determines who will be king."<sup>178</sup> Reborn's use of the word *truth* in juxtaposition to opinion suggests that some form of forgetting is substituted for truth. Reborn points out that Henry's language presents the King as an actor performing a show, dressed in humility, maintaining his person or *persona*/ mask in newness. His presence has become a "robe pontifical," a garment to be donned

---

<sup>176</sup> Wayne A. Reborn, *The Emperor of Men's Minds*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995), 51.

<sup>177</sup> Reborn, 56.

<sup>178</sup> Reborn, 56.

and then removed. Since the ornaments of rhetorical style were often spoken of as clothing, Henry's personal appearance becomes a trope of persuasion. According to Rebhorn, "[w]hat is striking in Henry's theory is what is omitted: he says absolutely nothing about *words*."<sup>179</sup> No matter how intimate the contact Henry may have had with the crowds, he actually functions at a removed symbolic distance. As described by York in *Richard II*, importance is attached to the visual effect the King creates as well as to his theatrical gestures and behavior. According to York,

Then, as I said, the Duke, great Bolingbroke,  
Mounted upon a hot and fiery steed  
Which his aspiring rider seem'd to know,  
With slow but stately pace kept on his course,  
Whilst all tongues cried, "God save thee, Bolingbroke!"  
You would have thought the very windows spake,  
So many greedy looks of young and old  
Through casements darted their desiring eyes  
Upon his visage, ...  
Whilst he, from the one side to the other turning,  
Bareheaded, lower than his proud steed's neck,  
Bespake them this: "I thank you countrymen." (*Richard II*, 5.2.7-15, 18-20)

Henry, perceiving his goal to be persuading the people to transfer fealty from Richard to him, uses the language of assault in plucking allegiance from men's hearts, but rather than the use of rhetorical skill, Henry's theory depends on a visual assault to make them forget their former loyalty.

The scene between father and son gives Henry IV the greater share of lines, almost a monologue in which he relays his theory of kingship, compares Hal to the ineffective Richard in

---

<sup>179</sup> Rebhorn, 58.

his ubiquity and likelihood of losing the crown, and finally asserts that Hal might even fight on Hotspur's side against his father. Reborn is certainly correct in calling Hal's response to his father "masterly." In fewer than thirty-one lines, Hal expresses his love for Henry, vows to make up for his past sins, and swears to defeat Hotspur in defense of his father's throne. Hal's speech alters his father's opinion in drastic degree, gaining, says Reborn, what persuasion always seeks to gain—belief and the transformation of the auditor.<sup>180</sup> This masterly speech also derives power from its revelations concerning Hal's implementation of forgetting in order to make the "re-formation" he earlier declared would take place. Echoing his father's language about robes pontifical, Hal says in that in "the closing of some glorious day" of battle for Henry's cause, Hal "will wear a garment all of blood / And stain my favors in a bloody mask, / Which wash'd away shall scour my shame with it" (3.2.135-137). That is, his performance on the battlefield will instigate forgetting in those who have known his past failings. We have already noted that Poole points out that liquid, particularly blood, is associated with forgetting, with such association most likely arising primarily from the idea of the River Lethe and the amnesic qualities of its waters.<sup>181</sup> The cleansing liquid of his foes' blood will wash away Hal's past shame, which then will be replaced by the glorious deeds amassed by Hotspur acting on Hal's behalf as mere factor. They will then be rendered up to Hal or the prince will tear them from Hotspur's heart. That same image of the heart was used by Henry IV in recounting his plucking of allegiance. Such imitation cannot but please Henry, who declares his complete trust in the formerly suspect prince. As Reborn puts it, "What [Hal] has done is to exercise a form of rhetorical kingship—and to succeed with it against his father!"<sup>182</sup> This rhetorical mastery is in line with my assertions concerning Hal's superiority over his father in employing strategic forgetting in the pursuit of greatness.

Unlike his father, who in his youth could not forget and only learned to do so when he discovered the political value of such a course, Hal comes into our ken from the very beginning

---

<sup>180</sup> Reborn, 60.

<sup>181</sup> Poole, 94, 96.

<sup>182</sup> Reborn, 61.

as a forgetter. We first encounter him as a self-forgetter engaged in profligacy, but then we perceive that it is merely a masquerade, the purpose of which is either to make his reformation all the more stunning or to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of the commoner of the tavern or perhaps both purposes at once. Rebhorn has pointed out that Hal's short response to his father in this scene does more than merely echo his imagery and win his approval. He also subtly corrects Henry's assessment of Hotspur in relation to Hal. While allowing that Hotspur is a military hero, Hal undercuts his father's admiration for this rival, recasting himself in the role Henry had assigned to Hotspur—that is, Henry himself—and relegating Hotspur to the contemptible parallel with Richard II. Rebhorn writes, "Although such a move clearly flatters Henry, it also constitutes an implicit rebuke, a suggestion that the clever, supposedly clear-eyed king is not so clear-eyed after all. In doing so, it also reveals to us what Henry's conversion confirms in other ways: Hal, not his father, is the real master of rhetorical kingship."<sup>183</sup> The proof of Hal's rhetorical mastery will become evident after his father's death. In *Henry V* the new King will marshal his verbal skills to engender among his troops in France a mode of forgetting that will achieve the long-sought national unity.

### 3.11 Forgetfulness at Shrewsbury: Separation and a Unified Account

1 *Henry IV* ends with the battle of Shrewsbury, the account of which enables the playwright to accomplish two significant goals related to the working of memory and forgetting: first, to lessen our attachment to Falstaff as a comic hero, thus laying the groundwork for his rejection/forgetting by Hal in 2 *Henry IV*; and second, to provide a commentary on the constructed nature of history itself, which must "forget" certain versions of the story if it is to be coherent—and thus beautiful. Falstaff is the instrument who facilitates both goals. In the self-incriminating soliloquy of 4.2, he confesses to "misus[ing] the King's press damnably" by initially drafting men with the means and strong motivation to buy their way out of military service. The playwright lets us begin to see Falstaff in a different light—as the selfish manipulator of the hapless poor. If Hal's

---

<sup>183</sup> Rebhorn, 62.

earlier declaration that he will banish and so forget plump Jack is to be successful in gaining acceptance from the audience, the congenial ties that have connected Falstaff so pleasantly with the audience must be subtly loosed. (However, despite Shakespeare's best efforts at rendering him a less sympathetic character, there has always been an outcry against what could be seen as one of the Prince's greatest tests of his forgetful plasticity—the forgetting/rejection of Falstaff, which will be discussed in the next chapter.) While Falstaff lines his pockets through bribery and then stoops to conscripting the poor unfortunates who are unable to pay, his graphic yet heartless description of them creates pity for his troops in all but the most cynical audience members. Thus he violates one of Langer's requirements for maintenance of comic sympathy—no victims. His ragged troops, who “march wide betwixt the legs, as if they had gyves on” (4.2.40-41) and are regarded by him as able to fill a pit as well as their betters, somehow touch the hearts of the audience, and his lack of compassion for their plight casts a shadow over the previously-humorous petty larceny of Falstaff. What has given pleasure and amusement in the past concerning Falstaff begins to pall in its stark contrast to the seriousness at hand when men like Sir Walter Blunt fight to the death, or when Hotspur declares that life is short and therefore should not be spent in baseness. More importantly, his compatriot in past roguish escapades, the young Prince, bleeds but will not retire from the field—“God forbid a shallow scratch should drive /The Prince of Wales from such a field as this, / Where stain'd nobility lies trodden on” (5.4.11-13). Amid such chaotic yet valiant conflict, Falstaff's prank substitution of a bottle of sack for his pistol proves irritatingly inappropriate. Most would agree with the prince—this is not a time to jest and dally. Such high-jinks reveal Falstaff to be ill-attuned to the course of greatness that Hal must now pursue, and the Prince (prematurely) eulogizes him as one for whom he should have “a heavy miss.../If I were much in love with vanity!” ((5.4.105-106). Although many are glad to see Falstaff rise after his supposed demise at the hands of the Douglas, affection for him is all but extinguished when he desecrates the lifeless body of Hotspur and brazenly declares Percy's death to be Falstaff's own triumph. Ivic asserts that “Falstaff's stabbing of Hotspur's lifeless body

elicits laughter from the audience,”<sup>184</sup> a laughter that he finds “inclusive” and contributory to transforming a mere aristocratic history into a national history. Such laughter is perhaps more nervous than “inclusive,” for, if it happens at all during a performance, it responds to an act that is in stark contrast to the tender respect with which Hal treats the body of his defeated adversary. Of this swift *volte-face* in the audience’s attitude toward Falstaff, Pechter has said that “our instinctive revulsion from Falstaff as he mutilates Hotspur’s corpse constitutes a total repudiation of the character and a repudiation, further, of precisely the kind of dramatic experience we had shared with him in the earlier part of the speech.”<sup>185</sup> Hotspur’s lifeless body represents noble qualities that once existed and will endure, says Pechter, and unlike the comic moments in the tavern, the play once again becomes a serious reflection of real life in which actions have real consequences. The freedom previously enjoyed vicariously in Falstaff becomes at this point not only “undesirable, but intolerable.”<sup>186</sup> Such estrangement through distaste is necessary to bring about the eventual banishment of Falstaff from the *Henriad*.

A second purpose served by Falstaff’s behavior in the last act of the play is to present the tenuous connection between history and truth and to illustrate how truth is sometimes easily forgotten in the recorded historical account. The once-amiable Falstaff prevaricates outrageously about his role in another man’s death—not some hypothetical character in one of his fanciful tavern fictions—but the death of Hotspur, whose valor was witnessed in the combat against Prince Hal. Nevertheless, although the Prince of Wales does somewhat half-heartedly assert that he himself killed Percy, he does not expend much effort to expose Falstaff as a liar or lay vigorous claim to the glorious deed of which he has made prophecy. Perhaps it is obvious to all that Falstaff could not have slain Percy, thus making Hal’s correction unnecessary. Whatever the reason for the Prince’s generosity to Falstaff, this situation draws attention to the chimerical

---

<sup>184</sup> Christopher Ivic, “Reassuring fratricide in 1 Henry IV,” In *Forgetting in Early Modern English Literature and Culture: Lethe’s Legacies*. Edited by Christopher Ivic and Grant Williams. London: Routledge, 2004, 108.

<sup>185</sup> Pechter, 228.

<sup>186</sup> Pechter, 228.



nature of the historical record. What can really be known about what has happened in the past? What else has previously been forgotten or falsely recorded? Upon the death of Hotspur, Hal covers the corpse's "mangled face" with his scarf, thanking himself for the kindness and desiring that Hotspur's "ignominy sleep with [him] in the grave, / But not rememb'ed in [his] epitaph" (5.5.100-101). Some part of the record, says Hal, is best forgotten. This is a commentary on the nature of history as well as on Hal's emergence as Nietzsche's man of vast character who takes into himself the useful aspects of the past and makes them part of his blood. Although Hal says he is "not yet of Percy's mind," (99) it is obvious that he understands the nature of Percy very well. Pechter says that "[w]hat is good in Percy will be assimilated into Hal's great sponge of a consciousness, another voice, another style, another role in the ever-expanding repertory with some traces of humor in it, another one from among the totality of human types ('all humors') that will collectively authorize Hal's final role as king."<sup>187</sup> Such an assessment underscores the Nietzschean assimilative capacity of Hal.

Forgetfulness functions here as a significant aspect of the account of an historical event—the death of Hotspur—and Falstaff's prevarication gestures to the possibility that the historical record may sometimes forget what happened. Falstaff's cynicism in soliloquy adds another nuanced commentary on the constructed nature of the historical record. Honor, says Falstaff, is the property of the recently deceased, the man who does not feel or hear of it in the tomb and is dependent for any share of honor on those who create the narrative. Moreover, says Falstaff, honor does not accrue to the living because a man's detractors will not allow him to retain it. In the first case, the deservedness of the honor can be uncertain, and in the second, jealous forgetfulness triumphs. In either case, the historical record is incomplete.

### 3.12 Hal, the Best at Being Vast

Both Henry IV and his son have been seen to employ the strategy of Nietzschean forgetting in their pursuit of eminence, but as the play draws to a close, Hal begins to edge

---

<sup>187</sup> Pechter, 221.

beyond his father. He champions and even rescues his father on the battlefield, and is now positioned in ascendance over his father in the last scene. The young Prince has succeeded in donning the mask of blood, which, when washed away, expunges his profligate past, and he has vanquished Hotspur, his rival for fame and his father's admiration. Thus far, the decentralized structure of *1 Henry IV* has provided the rather rare opportunity for the playwright to contrast Henry IV's struggle to maintain his throne via forgetfulness with the similar efforts at forgetting made by his son and Falstaff. Like the three-legged stool that served as Falstaff's throne at the Boar's Head, Shakespeare's decentralized organization based on the forgetfulness of three characters rather than a single central character makes it easier for the audience to accept Part 1 as a stand-alone experience. (The Dering manuscript copy of the play, which was made by Edward Dering in about 1613, is the earliest handwritten Shakespearean text, and telescopes the two parts of *Henry IV* into a single abridged play, although most audiences have encountered Part 1 as self-sufficient.<sup>188</sup>) However, there is no further closure afforded by a summative epilogue of loose ends, such as the Chorus at the conclusion of *Henry V*, and at the last moment Shakespeare subtly points toward the future. In the last action of Part 1, Hal is granted permission by his father to dispose of the captured Douglas, and he unexpectedly frees him in recognition of his valorous efforts in the field. The irony, historically speaking, is that, according to Holinshed, Henry IV freed the Douglas, not Hal. By assigning the deed to Hal, perhaps Shakespeare is already setting the table for what will happen in the second part of the Henry IV play—Hal's emergence as the Nietzschean man of colossal nature, culminating in his accession to the throne. Although Hal was speaking the following words to Harry Hotspur, they also apply to the forthcoming ultimate ascendancy of Hal over his father in achieving greatness: "Two stars keep not their motion in one sphere, / Nor can one England brook a double reign" (5.4.65-66). Two *Henry IV* plays we certainly may have, but eventually there must be only one king.

---

<sup>188</sup> Note to *Riverside Shakespeare*, 881.

## CHAPTER 4

### 2 *HENRY IV*

No sequel can escape comparison with its predecessor, and the sequel usually suffers in that comparison. Occasionally, as is the case with Parts 1 and 2 of *Henry IV*, we find that each work has its own merits to commend it while retaining a symbiosis of dramatic action. Nevertheless, Pechter is indeed correct to observe that “the two plays are very different in tone, texture, and strategy.”<sup>189</sup> The second play is darker, even in its comic moments. Somehow the Boar’s Head seems sleazier without the constant sparkling repartee of Hal and Falstaff. Even when they finally meet again at their old haunt in Act 2, Hal behaves like a man out for one last night on the town, and Falstaff uncharacteristically admits he is old. Structurally, of course, there is the Induction by the flamboyant, allegorical Rumor while *1 Henry IV* has no such Induction, and the strategy of Part 2 not only separates Falstaff from Hal but also reconciles the young prince with the Chief Justice, whom Hal adopts as “the father of my youth.” Prior notes, “This is not the kind of strategy that provides appropriate preparation for the triumph or survival of the comic hero.”<sup>190</sup> Such storm warnings have been in evidence throughout *1 Henry IV*, but the unfamiliarity of this play’s “feel” elicits a greater uneasiness not found in the previous play.

As was the case with the first two plays in the second Henriad, we can, however, take further note of the commonality of Shakespeare’s utilization of forgetfulness. Both Prince Hal and Henry IV persevere in their efforts to attain the greatness Nietzsche attributes to the man of vast nature. Such a man cultivates the ability to forget judiciously, which facilitates the achievement of power and greatness, but the King’s deathbed remarks reveal his recognition of his own failure in

---

<sup>189</sup> Pechter, 211.

<sup>190</sup> Prior, 170.

his attempt. Although he earlier protests to Warwick in 2.2 that the usurpation was not his intent and that necessity compelled him and greatness to kiss, by Act 4 the King confides to Hal that God knows the “by-paths and indirect crook’d ways” by which he became Henry IV. He is unable to erase the memory of his usurpation. However, Hal’s conversation with his dying father and his demeanor after his father’s demise indicate a redoubled effort to attain that greatness, eventually culminating in the most difficult of all acts of forgetting, the rejection of Falstaff. As was the case with *1 Henry IV* in following *Richard II*, the playwright alters his deployment of forgetting by adding something new in order to examine the subject through a still slightly different lens in *2 Henry IV*. He incorporates the scenes of nostalgia involving Justices Shallow and Silence—not merely as caricatures of comic senility but in counterpoint to the greater historical record being constructed. Bergeron holds that “nowhere is the evidence of making history [constructing history] more apparent than in *2 Henry IV*.”<sup>191</sup> Because the production of any historical record necessitates some degree of forgetting, I first examine specifically the unusual role of Rumor as a fantastical, forgetful historian of sorts and then turn to Shakespeare’s other applications of forgetfulness in the play—the competing histories of the battle of Shrewsbury, the faulty and nostalgic reminiscences of Shallow and Silence, the rejection of Falstaff, considered first as the subject of intense critical disputation and then situated as the consequence of a Nietzschean imperative; and finally, the first true glimmerings of the creation of a national amnesia that leads to what Benedict Anderson terms “imagined communities.”

#### 4.1 Rumor and False History

As the fantastically-clad Rumor asserts, who can ignore him when he speaks?<sup>192</sup> His very presence is an anomaly in Shakespeare, and his garment “painted full of tongues” informs us from the outset of the play that things are going to be somewhat different from what we have

---

<sup>191</sup> Bergeron, 231.

<sup>192</sup> Rumor’s gender is variously construed. See Frederick Kiefer, “Rumor, Fame and Slander in *2 Henry IV*,” *Allegorica: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Literature* 20 (1999), 4-5 and Harry Berger, Jr. “Sneak’s Noise or Rumor and Detextualization in *2 Henry IV*,” *The Kenyon Review* N. S. (Fall 1984), 58-78, esp. 64

seen in Part 1.<sup>193</sup> Rumor's speech takes us backward in the action to the time of Shrewsbury battlefield right before *1 Henry IV* ends, bruiting about a different outcome from what we ourselves have witnessed in the previous play. His speech is vividly powerful and persuasive, yet a completely dissimilar history from what we ourselves know to be true—at least within the confines of Shakespeare's previous history play. Rumor seems to wield a power to move us almost to disbelieve our own eyes. However, if we look beyond the wardrobe and listen to his words, we find we already have met his spiritual *doppelganger*, one who spoke of a belly full of tongues and who likewise falsified the historical record in claiming that he was the vanquisher of Henry Hotspur. I speak, of course, of Falstaff and his fractured version of the events at the end of *1 Henry IV*. It is no accident that Shakespeare both ends *1 Henry IV* and begins *2 Henry IV* with patently flawed history in which actual events are in effect forgotten.

Rumor interjects himself into “fresh” history with his false account of the battle of Shrewsbury just concluded. Bergeron has noted that “constructing history underscores its fictional quality,” and that into today's current debate about the function of the narrative in the writing of history—perhaps even the blurring of the lines between fiction and history—“Shakespeare had already stepped several centuries earlier by means of his dramatic fiction.”<sup>194</sup> Likewise, Loren Blinde asserts that “*2 Henry IV* draws attention to the “theatricality inherent in the ‘making’ of history, whether written in a chronicle, endorsed by the monarch, or dramatized at the Globe,” and that the playwright's use of Rumor as a historian of sorts “encourages the audience members to include a fundamental sense of unreliability in their thinking about history.”<sup>195</sup> This unreliability in history can manifest itself as forgetfulness, whether willful or careless, in the

---

<sup>193</sup> Loren Blinde, “Rumored History in Shakespeare's *2 Henry IV*.” *English Literary Renaissance* (Winter, 2008): 37. There are prologues to *Romeo and Juliet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Henry V*, *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. The only other time the term “Induction” rather than “Prologue” is used is in *The Taming of the Shrew*, which has two “metatheatrical” scenes with multiple speakers. Time in *The Winter's Tale* is also an allegorical figure, but does not open the play as Rumor does. “In sum, no other Shakespearean character does what Rumor does from the position Rumor has.”

<sup>194</sup> David M. Bergeron, “Shakespeare Makes History: *2 Henry IV*,” *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* (Spring, 1991), 231.

<sup>195</sup> Blinde, 35.

production of the narrative that becomes the historical account. Blinde contends that Rumor's speech embodies and transcends a conflict between narrative and visual display in order for Shakespeare to demonstrate that "history is fundamentally imaginative."<sup>196</sup> The use of the word *imaginative* (besides making association with faculty psychology and the image-producing faculty) connects to current theories of memory production, which posit that each and every memory is a new imagination of the past event. Our own experience shows us that our memories as re-imagined often do not quite match up with those of others present at a past event, whether due to our inattention or, as is sometimes the case, our suppression/forgetting of impressions. Memory theory also suggests that our re-imagined memories are often reinterpreted as we move up the ladder of memory production from the emotional and factual levels to the interpretive level, where what is imagined can take on newly insightful meaning.<sup>197</sup>

While I am intrigued with both Rumor as well as rumor, the phenomenon he portrays, it is important to remember that his influence eventually is dispelled by more reliable, if less than perfect, witnesses. Rumor itself not only has no staying power—it also has no power in this play. Meredith Evans (2009) challenges readings that see Rumor as dramatizing the formation of a sovereign state, mounted securely on individual virtue and charismatic power. Able to manipulate truth and elude stability, Rumor appropriates the spectral authority of the state and foregrounds the actual precariousness of seemingly deathless institutions. Tracing the affinity of Rumor with Henry IV, Falstaff, and the Lord Chief Justice, Evans argues that the real transference of power occurs not between Henry IV and Hal but between Rumor and the Lord Chief Justice. Thus, the play's representation of political authority is less centralizing and celebratory than is often acknowledged. By submitting to the Chief Justice's counsel, Hal gains the political legitimacy that his father lacked. At the same time, this submission puts a constraint on monarchic rule and

---

<sup>196</sup> Blinde, 35.

<sup>197</sup> Edmund Blair Bolles, *Remembering and Forgetting: An Inquiry into the Nature of Memory* (New York: Walker and Co., 1988), xi.

begins a transition to the state as abstract personality.<sup>198</sup> Such a step would seem necessary in order to move toward the kind of community that exists in the minds of its citizens.

#### 4.2 The Eternal Sunshine of the Perpetual Present

Whether we come to the history play in knowledge of or in ignorance of the historical account, our experience of any performance is what it is with any other play—occurring within that very moment. The fact that the play’s action is reflective of historical events is inconsequential in terms of when we experience it. Recognition of this aspect of historical drama has implications for our perceptions of history. The first is that history is not as final as we may sometimes regard it to be. Blinde writes that the history play takes place in the “perpetual present,” that is, is made up of events that are happening for the first time even as they make use of the audience’s knowledge of what has preceded them. This perpetual present suggests that history is not yet concretized and that other accounts are indeed possible.<sup>199</sup> A second implication provided by our experience of a history play is an awareness of its narrativity, its constructedness which requires a narrator. This view coincides with Hayden White’s assertion that historical narratives are indeed fictions with contents that are “as much invented as found” and that have more in common with literature than science. Invented contents may even displace the actual. While acknowledging that the historical events themselves are story elements, White says that they are not the story until made into such by “the *suppression* [italics mine] or the highlighting of [events].”<sup>200</sup> The suppression exercised by the historian constitutes the forgetting of those elements. Shakespeare, says Blinde, is “problematiz[ing] early modern conceptions of the delineations—and overlap—between history and fiction” and “disturb[ing] the link between history and memory by emphasizing rumor’s role in historiography, or at least in this play’s

---

<sup>198</sup> Meredith Evans, “Rumor, the Breath of Kings, and the Body of Law in 2 *Henry IV*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 60, Number 1, Spring 2009, 1-24.

<sup>199</sup> Blinde, 36.

<sup>200</sup> Hayden White, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact,” in *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*, ed. Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki. (Madison: WHAT PUB?, 1978), 42.

historiographic argument.”<sup>201</sup> Shakespeare moves counter to the early modern historiographers who sought to “preserve” history by his overt demonstration of its half-remembered, half-forgotten nature. Nevertheless, Shakespeare allows the political and military factions of the play to attempt the production of an account of national history and to make judgments about its meaning. Of his battlefield exploits, Falstaff requests that they “be booked with the rest of this day’s deeds” (4.3.45-46). Part of the purpose of *2 Henry IV* is this “booking” of national history.<sup>202</sup> Thus, the play produces a history, but since various narratives of history can displace each other, there is often a struggle between competing narratives, such as that which we witness in the play’s opening scene.

#### 4.3 “No, really. Who’s dead?”: The Blurring of History and Fiction

The jostling of competing historical narratives becomes particularly apparent as Northumberland anxiously solicits the battle report of Lord Bardolph, who says that Hotspur has killed Prince Harry. Before giving credence to the report, Northumberland questions its source: “How is this derived?” When Northumberland’s man Travers returns with a report that contradicts Bardolph’s, the historical stalemate remains until the arrival of Morton, his face as legible as a written record of what has transpired. “Yea, this man’s brow, like to a title-leaf, / Foretells the nature of a tragic volume” (1.1.60-61). Unlike the other two accounts, Morton’s is that of an eyewitness, and, according to Bergeron, “eyewitness interpretation drives out rumor, thereby making possible a credible report of the past.”<sup>203</sup> Like a researching historian, Northumberland sorts through the disparate reports to achieve a history of sorts of the battle at Shrewsbury. Yet even Morton’s account must be incomplete. He has not seen, and therefore cannot know, all. He may have seen Hotspur fall at Hal’s hands, but he is likely unaware of the eulogy Hal delivered for his enemy as well as of Falstaff’s claim to the kill. Even an eyewitness account is only partial. The unsettling speech of Rumor, with its reference to “false reports,” “continual slanders,” and

---

<sup>201</sup> Blinde, 36-37.

<sup>202</sup> Bergeron, 234.

<sup>203</sup> Bergeron, 235.



“smooth comforts false,” seems expressly designed to discomfit the audience, making us suspicious of any account of past events and aware of the tentative hold on the whole truth held by even an eyewitness. Louis O. Mink has said that “narrative form in history, as in fiction, is an artifice, the product of individual imagination.”<sup>204</sup> This blurring of history and fiction is precisely what Shakespeare does in making history through drama, and rather than viewing history as “the didactic instrument of classical humanism,” the playwright employs it for “historicist self-reflection.”<sup>205</sup> By foregrounding Rumor and his blatant efforts to cloud the historical record, Shakespeare does not merely mirror a cultural debate about history but rather intervenes and adds to the efforts to re-imagine the past and discover how it is reconstructed. The character of Rumor is Shakespeare’s way of indicating that forgetting has much to do with historiography.

#### 4.4 “Old Men Forget”—And That’s Really Important

In the midst of this play about famous figures of power and the larger-than-life ahistorical character Falstaff, we unexpectedly encounter two of what Naomi Conn Liebler humorously calls the play’s “representations of ‘geezerdom,’” Justice Shallow and his cousin-in-law Justice Silence. The question Rumor poses (“Why is Rumor here?”) may be asked concerning these two aged, rusticated justices of the peace: why indeed are Shallow and Silence here? Are they mere prey for Falstaff’s wit and greed, as he suggests with “If the young dace be a bait for the old pike, I see no reason in the law of nature but I may snap at him” (3.2.330-323). One might contend that they are mere comic relief, for they are indeed humorous in the idiosyncratic speech patterns of the crotchety elderly.

*Shal.* By cock and pie, sir, you shall not away tonight. What, Davy, I say.

*Fal.* You must excuse me, Master Robert Shallow.

*Shal.* I will not excuse you, you shall not be excus’d, excuses shall not be admitted, there is no excuse, you shall not be excus’d. Why, Davy.

---

<sup>204</sup> Louis O. Mink, “Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument,” in *Historical Understanding*, ed. Brian Fay, Eugene O. Golob, and Richard T. Vann (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 199.

<sup>205</sup> David Quint, “Alexander the Pig’: Shakespeare on History and Poetry,” *Boundary 2*, 10 (1982), 50.

*Davy.* Here, sir.

*Shal.* Davy, Davy, Davy, Davy, let me see, Davy, let me see, Davy, let me see.

Yea, marry, William cook, bid him come hither. Sir John, you shall not be excus'd.

Yet to dismiss Shallow and Silence as mere comic butts would be to mistake their greater purpose. Liebler points out that they make their first appearance at the very center of the play in the second of the two scenes that make up Act 3, and the importance of a central scene may be noted by comparison with what is found at that location in other plays. For example, scene two of Act 3 of the previous Henry play contains the exchange between Prince Hal and Henry IV in which Hal reconciles with his father and promises to redeem his past by washing it away in a mask of blood spilt in battle, certainly a scene of crucial importance. Likewise, scene 2 of Act 3 of *Julius Caesar* contains Antony's famous funeral oration, and scene 3 of Act 3 in *Othello* presents Iago's implantation of the seed of jealousy in the Moor and his attainment of Desdemona's handkerchief. Thus, in this play the location alone of the Justice Shallow scene should invite us to consider it more deeply. In the midst of the large issues of usurpation, succession, and civil war, Shakespeare focuses more narrowly on the issues of the passage of time and the construction of memory with the two justices.

*Shal.* I was once of Clement's Inn, where I think they will talk of mad Shallow yet.

*Sil.* You were call'd lusty Shallow then, cousin.

*Shal.* By the mass, I was call'd anything, and I would have done anything too, and roundly too. There was I, and little John Doit of Staffordshire, and black George Barnes and Francis Pickbone, and Will Squele, a Cotsole man. You had not four such swingebacklers in all the Inns a' court again; and I may say to you, we knew where all the bona robas were and had the best of them all at commandment. Then was Jack Falstaff, now Sir John, a boy, and page to Thomas Mowbray, duke of Norfolk.

After Falstaff's arrival, Shallow continues his reminiscence of youth: "Ha, cousin Silence, that thou hadst seen that that this knight and I have seen! Ha, Sir John, said I well?" If we were not already skeptical of the veracity of Shallow's recollections of his wild college days at the Inns of Court, Falstaff's endorsement—"We have heard the chimes at midnight"—could seem less than enthusiastic. Falstaff's comment may make lovely, nostalgic prose, but it is hardly a resounding verification of Shallow's claims. After the old justices leave the stage, the solitary Falstaff speaks, giving his version of Shallow's youth.

*Fal.* Lord, Lord, how subject we old men are to this vice of lying! This same starv'd justice hath done nothing but prate to me of the wildness of his youth, and the feats he hath done about Turnbull Street, and every third word a lie duer paid to the hearer than the Turk's tribute. I do remember him at Clement's Inn, like a man made after supper of a cheese-paring. When 'a was naked, he was for all the world like a fork'd radish, with a head fantastically carv'd upon it with a knife. 'A was so forlorn, that his dimensions to any thick sight were [invisible]. 'A was the very genius of famine, yet lecherous as a monkey, and the whores all call'd him mandrake. 'A came [ever] in the rearward of the fashion, and sung those tunes to the overscutch'd huswives that he heard the carmen whistle, and sware they were his fancies or his goodnights. And now is this Vice's dagger become a squire, and talks as familiarly of John a' Gaunt as if he had been sworn brother to him, and I'll be sworn 'a ne'er saw him but once in the Tiltyard, and then he burst his head for crowding in among the marshal's men. I saw it, and told John 'a Gaunt he beat his own name, for you might have thrust him and all his apparel into an eel-skin. The case of a treble hoboy was a mansion for him, a court, and now has he land and beefs!  
(3.2.303-328)

It is painfully obvious to the audience that Justice Shallow's memory of the past bears little resemblance to Falstaff's humorous but humiliating record of it. Yet it may be that Justice Shallow is not, as Falstaff has said, calculatedly lying. If so, he is taking the chance that Falstaff will

contradict his account of the past. Instead, he turns to Falstaff for validation of his fantastical account. It is as Henry V will say in the next play of those who survive the battle of Agincourt: "*Old men forget* [italics mine]; yet all shall be forgot, / But he'll remember with advantages / What feats he did that day" (*Henry V* 4.3.49-51). Shallow certainly fills his nostalgic reminiscence with "advantages," for he has conveniently forgotten his awkward, lecherous, poorly dressed youth in favor of a vibrant "saving lie" that makes life more bearable in the present, filled as it is with the decrepitude and death of Shallow's remembered peers such as Jane Nightwork and old Double. However, as moving as the scene is, poignancy alone cannot explain fully the presence of the two justices. Liebler aptly suggests a deeper purpose for the exchanges between Shallow and Silence. Their nostalgia is

a microversion of the play's larger concerns with history. It is not the same story, of course, but a story about the story...Shallow and Silence's reminiscence, however silly, is one instance of the "examined life." Hearing it in relation to Richard II's, Henry IV's and later Henry V's more somber recollections of prior acts reminds us that a similarly "examined" and remembered *national* life is presented across the four panels of the tetralogy.<sup>206</sup>

While the early modern period may have valorized *nosce te ipsum*, Shakespeare demonstrates with Justice Shallow that one's "knowledge of self" may be flawed, and if it can be flawed for an individual, so likewise for the entire nation and its notions about itself. This convenient yet necessary national amnesia, first desired by Henry IV in Part 1, and still not yet achieved in Part 2, receives the playwright's full attention in *Henry V*.

#### 4.5 Good-bye to the Boar's Head and Falstaff

The previous chapter of this project dealt at length with Nietzsche's formulations concerning the attainment of supremacy through judicious forgetting, and we have noted how Henry IV and Prince Hal have made use of forgetting up to the point of victory at Shrewsbury

---

<sup>206</sup> Naomi Conn Liebler, "'And Is Old Double Dead?': Nation and Nostalgia in *Henry IV Part 2*" *Shakespeare Survey* online. Cambridge University Press. 2011. Vol. 63,83.

against the rebels to achieve personal preeminence. The audience has borne witness to Hal's defeat of Hotspur in *1 Henry IV*, which covers the young prince in blood, exactly as he promised his father, and the Prince of Wales "never promiseth but he means to pay." Consequently, the shame of his previous self-forgetful behavior in Eastcheap is to some extent scoured away by his bloodied valor on the battlefield with the defeat of Hotspur. However, the first time we see Prince Hal in *2 Henry IV*, he is again in the company of Poins, his confederate in the Gadshill robbery, desiring small beer, that amnesic libation he may have quaffed to excess in the past. It could seem that Hal has relapsed into wantonness, abandoning his pursuit of greatness, but what happens is more a case of returning briefly to a place where he has once been at ease. Beer and forgetfulness had once been Hal's release from responsibility and propriety. His fondness for small beer, obviously a *gaucherie* for one of his station, makes him "out of love with my greatness" (2.2.12), but that does not mean he will abandon that greatness. He admits that it will be a disgrace to him tomorrow to know Poins and how sparse Poins' wardrobe is. That is because tomorrow he will have to resume the pursuit of greatness facilitated by wise choices concerning what should be forgotten. In a rare moment of emotional honesty, he reveals to Poins not only his deep sorrow at his father's serious illness but also the burden he bears in being unable to express his sincere grief because it would be misinterpreted as hypocrisy—a cruel double-bind that Poins confirms to be true. Small beer, Poins, pranks upon Falstaff—indeed Falstaff himself—all will have to be forgotten if Hal desires to be a man of extraordinary power and achievement. Moreover, his father's death is imminent and will signal Hal's receipt of the crown of England and the burdens that accompany it.

Undoubtedly, the most moving instance of forgetting in this play occurs when the newly crowned Henry V declares, "I know thee not, old man" to Falstaff, his former partner in crime and carousal. Readers or spectators have been expecting, even dreading, this rejection ever since the second act of *1 Henry IV*, when Falstaff-as-Hal pleads with Hal-as-Henry IV not to banish "plump Jack," to which Hal very clearly replies, "I do, I will" (2.4.479-481). The forgetfulness that

empowers Hal and even Henry IV is constantly employed to destructive ends by Falstaff. Plump Jack has always been given to a denial of unpleasant truths, such as his age, his debts, the very real tragedy of his wasted life of debauchery, but his willfulness in blatantly ignoring Hal's plainly stated intention to banish him appears almost a narcissistic and self-destructive denial. Indeed, when he is told of Hal's accession, he seems strangely oblivious to even the slightest possibility of rejection by the new King. Falstaff perversely makes furious haste to reach Hal at his coronation, letting fly a stream of overblown predictions about the wealth and promotion that await him and any who are his friends.

*Fal.* What, is the old King dead?

*Pist.* As nail in door. The things I speak are just.

*Fal.* Away, Bardolph! Saddle my horse. Master Robert Shallow, choose what office thou wilt in the land, 'tis thine. Pistol, I will double-charge thee with dignities.

*Bard.* O joyful day! I would not take a [knighthood] for my fortune.

*Pist.* What? I do bring good news?

*Fal.* Carry Master Silence to bed. Master Shallow, my Lord Shallow—be what thou wilt, I am Fortune's steward...I know the young King is sick for me. Let us take any man's horses, the laws of England are at my commandement. (5.3.120-131, 135-137)

Even the most pragmatic in the audience must cringe in apprehension of what is to come when the sweat-stained Falstaff disrupts the solemnity of the coronation, but we have been amply forewarned of what to expect. Having witnessed Hal's soliloquy in the previous play, we know of his intent to "uphold the unyoked humor" of his profligate friends of the Boar's Head Tavern but for a while, after which he is planning to throw off his loose behavior and pay the debt he never promised—the debt of greatness. Hal has made assurance to his father that he will achieve a victory over Hotspur and the rebels that will cover him in blood and wash away all his past misdeeds. Prince Hal himself is certainly aware of the eventual parting of the ways that must come, and perhaps there could be relief in finding the supposedly dead Falstaff on the field at

Shrewsbury near the end of *1 Henry IV*, as if Fate has released him from the inevitability of banishing Falstaff. His premature eulogy declares, "I could have spared a better man / O, I should have a heavy miss of thee / If I were much in love with vanity!" (5.4.104-106) Edward I. Berry says that, as Hal stands over the "fallen" Falstaff, "he achieves a balance between affection and moral detachment, between wit and wisdom that seems true to them both."<sup>207</sup> We should remember this moment when we are pained at the rejection of Falstaff in Act 5 of the second play, for it communicates beforehand with more gentleness Hal's feelings toward the break that must come.

#### 4.6 "Take Him Out!" "Leave Him In!": Critical Response to the Rejection

The rejection of Falstaff is the latest and most difficult of Hal's practice of the forgetfulness that characterizes the Nietzschean man of power, and this assertion may serve to ameliorate some of the controversy surrounding the rejection scene, which has caused disagreement for a very long time. Certainly, Berry is correct in saying that it is hard to get one's mind and heart all around the rejection scene.<sup>208</sup> As early as the eighteenth century, critics began lining up on to take Falstaff's part or to side with Hal, but dissatisfaction with the rejection may have been anticipated by the playwright himself. The Epilogue to *2 Henry IV* seems to promise that if we are not "too much cloyed with fat meat," the story will continue with Falstaff perhaps dying of a sweat. Of course, Falstaff's death is only reported in *Henry V*, but his Boar's Head cronies agree with the Hostess that "the King has killed his heart," which may indicate a similar public response to Hal's rejection of him. In *Henry V* amid the smoke and chaos of battle, Fluellen takes time to justify the young King's action in breaking the relationship with Falstaff. He has been comparing Henry V favorably with Alexander the Great, and concludes by noting that "as Alexander killed his friend Clytus, being in his ales and cups, so Harry Monmouth, being in his right wits and good judgments, turned away the fat knight with the great-belly doublet; he was full

---

<sup>207</sup> Edward I. Berry, "The Rejection Scene in *2 Henry IV*" *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* Vol. 17, No. 2, Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama (Spring, 1977), 207.

<sup>208</sup> Berry, 201.

of jests, and gipes, and knaveries, and mocks; I have forgot his name" (*Henry V* 4.7.44-50). Fluellen's defense of Harry Monmouth's rejection of Falstaff suggests that there may have been objection to it from the very beginning.<sup>209</sup> Some of that objection may have been felt by the playwright himself. Writers of fiction often have a difficult time "killing off" one of their favorite creations, and despite his roots in the historical Lollard knight Sir John Oldcastle, Falstaff is indeed Shakespeare's own creation.

A large body of earlier criticism concerning the rejection of Falstaff falls into what has been called the sentimentalist view. One of the earliest recorded expressions of this view of the rejection, voicing the resentment of many critics who regard Hal and his father as cold-hearted Machiavellians, is given by Nicholas Rowe in 1709. He asks if there were not at least some audience members who had enjoyed the "diversion" provided by the irrepressible Falstaff and who were "sorry to see his friend use him so scurvily when he came to the crown in the end of the Second Part of Henry IV."<sup>210</sup> Dr. Johnson spoke early for the "moralistic" view when he gave approbation for the rejection as follows: "if it be considered that the fat knight hath never uttered one sentiment of generosity, and with all his power of exciting mirth, has nothing in him that can be esteemed, no great pain will be suffered from the reflection that he is compelled to live honestly, and maintained by the king, with a promise of advancement when he shall deserve it."<sup>211</sup> Dr. Johnson might be expected to have appreciated Falstaff's wit, but these remarks reveal that he also regarded him as lacking in generosity of spirit, and in need of enforced reformation.

In the twentieth century A. C. Bradley, advocating the sentimentalist view, accepted the political necessity of the rejection, but he was disturbed by the severity of Hal's manner: "He had a right to turn away his former self, and his old companions with it, but he had no right to talk all of a sudden like a clergyman; and surely it was ungenerous and insincere to speak of them as his

---

<sup>209</sup> Prior, 170.

<sup>210</sup> Nicholas Rowe, *The Project Gutenberg E-book of Some Account of the Life, &c of Mr. William Shakespear* (1709).

<sup>211</sup> Samuel Johnson, *Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. Arthur Sherbo, Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, VII (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 521.



'misleaders', as though in the days of Eastcheap and Gadshill he had been a weak and silly lad."<sup>212</sup> Critics subsequent to Bradley move beyond seeing Hal as an insincere clergyman to regarding him as a purely unsympathetic figure of hypocrisy. E. E. Stoll decries Hal's "priggish speech and harsh conduct" while John Middleton Murray calls him "an ingrate and a hypocrite." Robert Ornstein finds him worse than his deceitful brother John, and Thomas McFarland asserts that Hal's behavior is illustrative of the "Machiavellian illusion" that destroys any "golden world of pastoral hope."<sup>213</sup> In a sense, these expressions of the sentimentalist reading of Hal's behavior are also "moralistic" in that they transfer guilt from Falstaff to Hal.<sup>214</sup> Perhaps these reactions are a reflection of the tendency of late twentieth century readers always to sympathize with the subversive rebel against the personification of order and decorum.

Countering Bradley *et al.* and speaking for the moralistic view, John Dover Wilson held that, although a modern audience might feel resentment, an Elizabethan audience would have recognized the political necessity of Hal's rejection speech.<sup>215</sup> However, as Prior puts it, "It is always risky to theorize, as occasionally some have in support of particular interpretations of plays of Shakespeare's age, that its inhabitants were deficient in qualities that experience leads us to suppose are fairly common in ourselves."<sup>216</sup> As we have seen from Rowe, a century later people were distressed to see Falstaff "used so scurvily," and there is no reason to suppose that a hundred years earlier that sentiment was not shared by at least some audience members, even if they recognized, as most contemporary criticism does, the political necessity of the rejection. Falstaff is Misrule personified, convinced that "the laws of England are at my commandment" (5.3.136-137), which certainly would constitute a problem for any king, much less the new ruler of a country recently divided by civil war, and it is difficult to conceive of any proper role for Falstaff

---

<sup>212</sup> A. C. Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1909), 249.

<sup>213</sup> All are cited in Edward I. Berry's essay, 205.

<sup>214</sup> Berry, 205.

<sup>215</sup> John Dover Wilson, *The Fortunes of Falstaff* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943), 122.

<sup>216</sup> Prior, 169.

among the troops at Agincourt. Nevertheless, despite our rational acceptance of the necessity of Falstaff's fall, we cannot escape the awfulness of the rejection scene.

*Fal.* My King, my Jove! I speak to thee, my heart!

*King.* I know thee not, old man, fall to thy prayers.

How ill white hairs becomes a fool and jester!

I have long dreamt of such a kind of man,

So surfeit-swell'd, so old, and so profane;

But being awak'd, I do despise my dream.

Make less thy body (hence) and more thy grace,

Leave gormandizing, know the grave doth gape

For thee thrice wider than for other men.

Reply not to me with a fool-born jest,

Presume not I am the thing I was,

For God doth know, so shall the world perceive,

That I have turn'd away my former self;

So will I those who kept me company.

When dost hear I am as I have been,

Approach me, and thou shalt be as thou wast,

The tutor and the feeder of my riots.

Till then I banish thee, on pain of death,

As I have done the rest of my misleaders,

Not to come near our person by ten mile.

For competence of life I will allow you,

That lack of means enforce you not to evils,

And as we hear you do reform yourselves,

We will, according to your strengths and qualities,

Give you advancement (5.5.46-70).

Despite their sympathy for Falstaff, sentimentalists do not seem to be moved by the what cannot be construed as other than emotionally draining trials that beset the new King in the time between this most awkward moment and the time he last saw Falstaff. Notwithstanding his battlefield heroics, which included saving his father's life, Hal has been bitterly reproached by his dying father and accused of wishing him dead so that he could take the crown. Almost immediately after their father's death, Hal's brothers' mistrust necessitated his assurance that they need not fear him, and the Lord Chief Justice reminded the new King of the righteousness of his past correction undergone in the interest of true justice. Henry V, new-crowned, must now appear before the citizens of London, whose fickle nature already has been demonstrated in the tetralogy by their varied receptions of Richard II and Bolingbroke. Berry writes, "Surely this is an inopportune moment for Falstaff to bellow out his intimate terms of endearment—'God save thee, my sweet boy!'"<sup>217</sup> The King attempts to avoid trouble by instructing the Lord Chief Justice to speak to Falstaff—to silence him at this most inappropriate juncture, but experience has shown us that Falstaff cannot easily be silenced. Even more so than the episode with the bottle of sack in Falstaff's holster, this is an unseemly time "to jest and dally." The procession that Falstaff has interrupted is part of a religious ceremony in which Henry V has been crowned an anointed Christian king. Remembering the solemnity with which Richard II regarded the balm of the Lord's anointed deputy, Hal's language of a clergyman to which Bradley objected is therefore actually quite fitting for this situation. However, unlike Richard II, the new King recognizes that his position as monarch carries with it not only a religious sanctity but the responsibility for the welfare of the nation as well. The play acknowledges that the assumption of power sets a man apart, necessitating acts that may be justified politically but are nevertheless distressing if judged by the standards of amiable humanity.<sup>218</sup> The world of the *Henry IV* plays is not one of pure comedy where all's well that ends well but rather the world of history and political power. The official

---

<sup>217</sup> Berry, 204.

<sup>218</sup> Prior, 170.

political version of the rejection, applauded by Prince John and the Chief Justice, approves the new King's renunciation of his wanton past as testimony to his dedication to his new responsibilities. The truth, as Shakespeare shows us, is never quite so tidy.

There has been a special relationship between Falstaff and the young prince, one that the audience has thoroughly enjoyed. Having helped to create the Falstaff we have known, Hal now repudiates him, not only as his tempter, but for the audience, also as his collaborator in comedy. In spite of Falstaff's embarrassing insubordination at the coronation, something is not quite right, and pathos is created when a sympathetic character is humiliated. Moody E. Prior suspects that Shakespeare was not oblivious to the highly charged nature of the meeting between Falstaff and the new King, "the confrontation of irreconcilable claims which must end in the triumph of the embodiment of power over the embodiment of the free spirit of comedy."<sup>219</sup> It is that embodiment of power to which Hal has aspired ever since his revelatory soliloquy in Part 1. At that point Hal claimed "I know you all" in speaking to his Eastcheap cronies, but now to Falstaff the new King declares, "I know you not," and his rejection includes those Eastcheap denizens and Hal's former self as well. This intentional "failure to recognize" is the kind of forgetting of which Nietzsche speaks when he asserts that

the most powerful and tremendous nature would be characterized by the fact that it would know no boundary at all at which the historical sense began to overwhelm it; it would draw to itself and incorporate into itself all the past, its own and that most foreign to it, and as it were transform it into blood. That which such a nature cannot subdue, it knows how to forget.

Falstaff cannot be subdued and remain Falstaff, and Hal as the man of "the most powerful and tremendous nature" knows how to forget him: "I know thee not, old man."

While some may maintain that the new King makes kind provision for Falstaff's livelihood so that he will not be reduced to a life of serious crime, the fact remains that Falstaff is instructed

---

<sup>219</sup> Prior, 170.

to reform himself before he will be allowed into the King's presence. It is doubtful that anyone seriously believes that reform will ever happen, and therefore the rejection is permanent. Shakespeare has laid before us the essence of the kinds of decisions one must make if he aspires to power, the very process of which Nietzsche writes much later. Hal does not allow the history of his father's usurpation or his own past with Falstaff to "overwhelm" him. When Henry IV tells Hal, "How I came by the crown, O God forgive, / And grant it may with thee in true peace live!" Hal's response shows that he does not intend to allow the guilt of his father's usurpation to engulf him. He responds, "You won it, wore it, kept it, gave it me; / Then plain and right must my possession be" (4.5.218-219, 221-222). In addition, Hal has taken the past spent with Falstaff into his own nature. Warwick asserts that Hal has learned much during his time in Eastcheap, which is to say that his nature has drawn into himself and incorporated into himself from that past even the elements that were most foreign to his own experience and nature and transformed them into his very life's blood. In seeking to reassure the dying Henry IV, who sees "in forms imaginary, th' unguided days / And rotten times" that Hal's accession will unleash, Warwick interprets Hal in this:

*War.* The Prince but studies his companions  
Like a strange tongue, wherein, to gain the language,  
'Tis needful that the most immodest word  
Be look'd upon and learnt, which once attain'd,  
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 other,  
Turning past evils to advantages. (4.4.68-78)

Hal's experiences with Falstaff and the rest of the Boar's Head crowd, says Warwick, will only be remembered as patterns or measures against which the young prince will govern other people, thus turning the "past evil" into an innate life's advantage, a wisdom that in true Nietzschean manner is absorbed to become part of Hal's very nature. That this judicious utilization of the past is not always unproblematic will become apparent in *Henry V*, as in Henry V's prayer "Not to-day, O Lord, / O not to-day, think not upon the fault / My father made in compassing the crown!" (*Henry V* 4.1.292-294).

The sentimentalist view of the rejection is generally too harsh in its indictment of the young King for the severity of his manner in rejecting Falstaff. While some sentimentalists even question the need for the renunciation, others grudgingly acknowledge the necessity of a break with Falstaff, even as they grumble about whether Hal "had to do it in that way." Such attitudes minimize not only the significance of the very public and religious nature of the coronation encounter—a time and place not chosen by Hal but by Falstaff himself—but also the total unsuitability of Falstaff as a companion for the King. He really does not know "when to turn it off," for even as the King is banishing him and refers to his girth necessitating a grave three times wider than that of other men, it appears that Falstaff regards this as his opening for familiar witty banter, and therefore he must be silenced by the King's stern rebuke of "Reply not to me with a fool-born jest." It seems that only the caustic manner to which the sentimentalists object can be effective with Falstaff.

However, the moralistic view, at least as expressed by Wilson, does not appear to take into account the possibility that the rejection would require herculean effort on the part of Hal in order to establish himself as a man to be respected in his kingship. To say that the rejection is politically expedient and therefore Hal performs it with surgical precision is to overlook Hal's eulogy on the battlefield at Shrewsbury. Hal has already expressed his feelings concerning parting with Falstaff when he speaks over what he believes is the body of the slain knight: "I could have better spar'd a better man. / O, I should have a heavy miss of thee / If I were much in love

with vanity!” That Hal feels the loss of his friend is reflected in his declaration that he could have more easily lost in combat some other man who was better perhaps in morality or nobility than Falstaff. However, Hal knows that his own his destination is the throne of England and that he cannot be “much in love with vanity.” If he were to continue in the irresponsibly pleasurable life of Mistress Quickly’s tavern, Hal would certainly miss a deceased Falstaff, but he realizes that he must forgo any future life at the Boar’s Head because he must become King of England. From now on, he is strategizing not only how best to dazzle his subjects when that moment arrives but also how to govern them wisely. After the death of Henry IV, Hal says

The tide of blood in me  
Hath proudly flow’d in *vanity* [italics mine] till now;  
Now it doth turn back and ebb back to the sea,  
Where it shall mingle with the state of floods,  
And flow henceforth in formal majesty.  
Now call we our high court of parliament,  
And let us choose such limbs of noble counsel  
That the great body of our state may go  
In equal rank with the best govern’d nation (5.3.129-137).

The liquid imagery of a tide of blood that once flowed proudly in vanity but now turns back to merge with the sea reminds us of its connection to forgetfulness. If we consider the prodigiouness of Hal’s actions—first, his early soliloquy detailing his recognition that soon he must renounce his past misdeeds, then his battlefield valor undertaken to scour away his disgrace, his various declarations of his purpose to “rase out rotten opinion” and “mock the expectation of the world,” and his turning away of his former self and those who kept him company—we can more fully appreciate the strength requisite for achieving the “most powerful and tremendous nature” or plasticity of which Nietzsche has written. As expressed in folk wisdom: “If it were easy, everyone would do it.”

#### 4.7 Andersonian Imagined Community

The playwright makes another significant deployment of forgetting in both Parts 1 and 2 of *Henry IV* that is begun by fits and starts and not fully realized until *Henry V*. In *1 Henry IV*, the King speaks of the end of rebellion against his rule as concluding intra-national conflict and unifying the factions as formerly squabbling brothers who will now march all one way to the Holy Land, forgetful of their King's usurpation. While the King himself regards this as merely a strategy to unify his people against a common foe, keeping them busy "lest rest and lying still might make them look / Too near my state" (2 *Henry IV* 4.5.211-212), it is clear that a larger purpose unfolds. In *1 Henry IV* the new rebellion against Henry IV by Welsh and Scottish forces and the Percy uprising are all subsumed into a civil war between purely English brothers. Henry IV describes it thus:

Those opposed eyes,  
Which, like the meteors of a troubled heaven,  
All of one nature, of one substance bred,  
Did lately meet in intestine shock  
And furious close of civil butchery,  
Shall now in mutual well-beseeming ranks,  
March all one way and be no more oppos'd  
Against acquaintance, kindred, and allies. (*1 Henry IV* 1.1.9-16)

This forgetting of the true nature of the rebellion and its recasting as a civil war between English brothers exemplifies the national amnesia proposed by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*. The preface to the revised edition of the book discusses what he calls "the amnesias of nationalism."<sup>220</sup> While Anderson deals primarily with nationalism as a post-Enlightenment phenomenon, his work enables us to consider other avenues by which we may examine the early modern English text and its participation in the construction of imagined

---

<sup>220</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London: Verso, 1991), xv.



communities. In the chapter on memory and forgetting, which is one of two Anderson added to the second edition of *Imagined Communities* in 1991, the author discusses a passage from French historian and biblical scholar Ernest Renan. “The essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things... Every French citizen has to have forgotten the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, or the massacres that took place in the Midi in the thirteenth century.”<sup>221</sup> Anderson finds these sentences to be “bizarre,” not only in that they communicate the author’s belief that forgetting historical tragedies is a contemporary civic duty, but also in that they demand that the readers “have already forgotten” something that Renan certainly presupposes that they as Frenchmen actually remember. According to Anderson, “it was precisely the need for forgetting that preoccupied [Renan].”<sup>222</sup> For Anderson, this presents a significant element in the “construction of national genealogies,” which is that those genealogies are brought into being by and interconnected with communal acts of forgetting. These events are now described to subsequent generations as a sort of family history of French brethren. For the purpose of my discussion, the salient point from Anderson is that there are elements and events of the past that must be forgotten in order for a nation to unify its factions.

Consequently, Shakespeare is laying the groundwork for the consideration of warring factions among the inhabitants of the British Isles as being merely fratricidal, and ultimately, the civil war shrinks even further into a single fraternal combat, characterized by Sir Richard Vernon as a brother daring another brother “to gentle exercise and proof of arms,” between the two Harries—Hal and Hotspur—contending for one England (*1 Henry IV* 5.2.51-54). Of course, Shakespeare’s alteration of the ages of Hal and Hotspur to make them about the same age (Hotspur was actually closer to Henry IV’s age, being Hal’s senior by twenty-three years) and his creation of a scene in which Hal slays and eulogizes his foe (the sources are silent on this) both make for a better dramatic story, but it should be obvious that in rewriting the historical record, the

---

<sup>221</sup> Quoted in Anderson, 200.

<sup>222</sup> Anderson, 199.

playwright also provides a different account of the battle of Shrewsbury in place of official history. In this account, both personal and national forgetting figure highly.

While its main concentration is on Hal's reformation, accession to the throne, and the separation from Falstaff, *2 Henry IV* builds upon the desire for national amnesia begun in Part 1 and points toward its fuller development in *Henry V*. The ailing Henry IV again mentions his aborted plans for the Holy Land that he will resume at the conclusion of "these inward wars," although possibly suspecting that such a mission will never be undertaken. The Archbishop of York unknowingly echoes Henry's immensely influential deathbed advice to Hal, for while Mowbray and the other rebels maintain that the King will never cease to suspect them of sedition even if they make peace with him, the Archbishop of York argues against their fears.

*Arch.* No, no, my lord, note this: the King is weary  
Of dainty and such picking grievances,  
For he hath found to end one doubt by death  
Revives two greater in the heirs of life;  
And therefore will he wipe his tables clean  
And keep no tell-tale to his memory  
That may repeat and history his loss  
To new remembrance; for full well he knows  
He cannot so precisely weed this land  
As his misdoubts present occasion.  
His foes are so enrooted with his friends  
That, plucking to unfix an enemy,  
He doth unfasten so and shake a friend, (4.2.194-207)

Although the Archbishop completely misreads Prince John—the conspirators are all arrested and executed—he is correct in his assessment of Henry IV: he must wipe his tables clean and keep no tell-tale to his memory to history his loss. This is confirmed by Henry's dying advice to Hal,

which is “to busy giddy minds / With foreign quarrels, that action, hence borne out, / May waste the memory of former days” (4.5.213-215). “The memory of former days” of infighting and rebellion must be forgotten amidst new pursuits that will unify the English nation. After the coronation and the rejection of Falstaff, Prince John makes speculation that “ere this year expire, / We will bear our civil swords and native fire / As far as France” (5.5.105-106). Having turned away his former self and Falstaff, Henry V has made judicious use of forgetfulness to emerge finally as a man of the Nietzschean “powerful and tremendous nature.” His greatest challenge will begin when civil swords and native fire coalesce under his leadership at Agincourt.

## CHAPTER 5

### *HENRY V*

Throughout *Henry V* Shakespeare creates dissonance between the ostensibly official history given by the engagingly articulate Chorus and our own witness to the events themselves, occurring in the real time of the play's performance. Without any heavy-handed sign-posting of the forgetfulness—and sometimes outright error—of the official history represented by the Chorus, the playwright engineers our recognition of the Chorus's elision of various elements of what the play's action makes claim for as "the way things really happened." Rather than taking note of the dissimilitude between the two versions of events in order merely to demystify Henry V, I want to consider how Shakespeare increases our awareness of the forgetfulness of the Chorus in his *res scripta* of official historiography. Despite his expressed desire for a muse of fire, the absence of a cloak of painted tongues, and his plea for our participation in the creation of a fulfilling performance, the Chorus ultimately is only slightly different from the figure of Rumor, who introduced *2 Henry IV*. It is true that Rumor gloats at our perverse unwillingness to close our ears to his voice: "Open your ears; for which of you will stop/ The vent of hearing when loud Rumor speaks?" (1. Induction.1-2), while the Chorus self-effacingly asks us, "Admit me Chorus to this history" (1.Prologue.32). Rumor is brash and self-assured in his ability to speak effectively while the Chorus diffidently claims inadequacy for fully presenting events. Nevertheless, both actually require the participation of their auditors for success. Both are engaged in the production of a form of history, neither of which is faithful to the events which the audience witnesses, because each employs forgetfulness in his final product. The Chorus may be more self-effacing than Rumor, but he is hardly more reliable.

Next I examine how Henry utilizes troop-rousing rhetoric filled almost exclusively with social amnesia in attempting to transform his diverse army into a band of brothers, a first generation of the British nation-state retroactively constructed in the sixteenth century. Further, I discuss how the action of the play self-consciously uncovers two circumstances veiled by the mobilization of national amnesia. The first is the connection of the Cambridge conspiracy to Edmund Mortimer, and the second is the subsuming of the four captains of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales into a seemingly homogenous Englishness. The last section of this chapter on the function of forgetting in *Henry V* will consider how, as the epitome of Nietzschean plasticity, Henry attempts to engineer his own amnesic exculpation for the war with France. Throughout the play, in order to avoid the crippling guilt that ultimately stalemated his father's rise to greatness, Henry V engages in a meticulous and inexorable campaign of forgetting aimed at expunging any taint of blame from his own conscience, from the minds of his contemporaries, and from recorded history.

The character Henry V is contested in sometimes heated disputations in which both he and the play bearing his name are the objects of critical ambivalence. He is excoriated variously as a coolly calculated Machiavellian, an "amiable monster," or at best a flawed human being, and *Henry V* is billed in a frequently cited Rossiter evaluation as "a propaganda-play on national unity: heavily orchestrated for the brass."<sup>223</sup> Vietnam-era criticism and performance as well as that of the more recent years of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have interpreted the play in terms of jingoism and militarism only barely salvaged by a recuperative message of derived pacifism. Despite those efforts at "rehabilitation," *Henry V* is often charged as being irrecoverably complicit with the nationalist rhetoric of the Chorus and the myth of English solidarity that it posits. This analysis has been made notably by Richard Helgerson, who regards the play as the conclusion of Shakespeare's gradually narrowing "obsessive and compelling focus on the ruler" to the

---

<sup>223</sup> William Hazlitt, "Henry V" in "The Characters in Shakespeare's Plays" in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols. (London: J. M. Dent, 1930-1934), 4: 286; Rossiter, 57.

exclusion of the commoner throughout the composition of his English history plays. Helgerson asserts that the playwright attempts to nullify the ideology with which the first Henriad began, “as though he wanted to efface, alienate, even demonize all signs of commoner participation in the political nation.”<sup>224</sup>

However, it may be that Shakespeare is attempting to do almost the opposite, for the play illuminates the often problematic process of the creation of a national identity in which the commoners, far from being alienated or demonized, are absolutely vital participants in the national forgetting central to Benedict Anderson’s formulation of “imagined community.” In fact, Baldo maintains that nowhere in the Shakespeare canon is there a play more illustrative of “the uses of forgetting for the consolidation of national memory, an essential process in the formation of the modern nation-state.”<sup>225</sup> With this final play of the tetralogy, Shakespeare concludes a strategy deployed throughout the previous three plays that examines the functions of forgetfulness in both human behavior and historiography.

### 5.1 The Apologetic, Patriotic Chorus

At first glance, plenty of evidence from the play supports the periodically popular but rather simplistic denunciation of *Henry V* as Shakespearean state propaganda. Early in the play, the factionalism of the nobles and the popular insurgency of the earlier plays seem to vanish almost miraculously in a virtually unanimous support of Henry’s French ambitions. Exeter communicates this solidarity of support with “Never King of England / Had nobles richer and more loyal subjects, / Whose hearts have left their bodies here in England, / And lie pavilion’d in the fields of France” (1.1.126-129). The Chorus adds that “now all the youth of England are on fire...Now thrive the armorers, and honor’s thought / Reigns solely in the breast” of those who yearn to follow the mirror of all Christian kings (1.2.1, 3-4). In true propaganda fashion, Henry V himself is comfortably insulated from any debate over his entitlement to the English as well as the French

---

<sup>224</sup> Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 214.

<sup>225</sup> Jonathan Baldo, “Wars of Memory in *Henry V*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (Summer, 1996), 134.

throne. Falstaff, who regularly skewered the legitimacy of Hal's father's crown and would have made carnivalesque the "patriotism and piety" of the present play, has decamped to Arthur's bosom or some other region in proximity.<sup>226</sup> All of the foregoing seems to implicate the play in the Chorus's efforts, as Andrew Gurr phrases it, to "coerc[e] the audience into an emotionally undivided response" in support of Henry V and monarchy in general.<sup>227</sup> The play itself, however, actually takes a position apart from the Chorus's, not so much by what is said but rather by what Rackin has called a "metadramatic self-consciousness" that exposes the various uses made of the past.<sup>228</sup> Considered in relationship to what has gone before in *1 and 2 Henry IV*, *Henry V* deserves a more nuanced evaluation than its being merely heavy brass and saber-rattling.

Part of the problem with the play is that some take the Chorus at his word. When the Chorus tells us what we are about to witness, some cooperative audience members seem to think that they actually do witness what he previews, when more often than not, his optimistic reportage is far afield from what actually happens onstage. Perhaps this is due to the very nature of the theater that generally engages us by our willing surrender. The Chorus's infectious persuasion in the Prologue—that we see horses and the like when none are there—works almost too well on some members of the audience. Other audience members disapprove of his pep-rally style enthusiasm for war and are therefore disinclined to see anything in the intervening action of the play that questions that enthusiasm. In fact, the 1600 Quarto, motivated by theatricality or politics or both, omits the speeches of the Chorus as well as the King's soliloquy and certain parts of the council scene (1.2.115-35), and these omissions simplify the play and make it less

---

<sup>226</sup> Alison Thorne, "Awake Remembrance of these Valiant Dead': *Henry V* and the Politics of the English History Play," *Shakespeare Studies*, 2002, Vol. 30, 163.

<sup>227</sup> Andrew Gurr, Introduction to *King Henry V* by William Shakespeare, ed. Andrew Gurr, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 7.

<sup>228</sup> Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 71.

complicatedly patriotic.<sup>229</sup> When patriotism is in fashion, such as when one's nation is under assault as England was during World War II, the objections to it are fewer.

Usually present in today's performances, the Chorus generally invites sincere enthusiasm, and his rousing speeches attempt to create a temporary fellowship among the spectators, whom he addresses without discrimination as "gentles all."<sup>230</sup> Collaborative efforts are mightily wooed by the Chorus's instructions to busy individual imaginations in order to behold collectively the scenes he describes. There are profuse apologies for the bare platform, the wooden O, those famous ragged foils, but most especially for the flat, unraised spirits so presumptuous as to attempt the play. Now, if he (or the playwright who scripts his words) just had a better muse—one of fire who could ascend the brightest heaven of *inventio*—and maybe if he had a kingdom for a stage, princes to act, monarchs in the audience, then perhaps justice could be done to the events about to be presented.

### 5.2 Henry V and Epic Proportions

The prodigious elements that the Chorus proposes as being essential for an adequate performance suggest that this history play, unlike its predecessors in the tetralogy, is epic in scope. The invocation of a muse of fire is clearly an epic element, and in speaking of Henry, the Chorus presents him "in a realm far different from that of any of his dramatic predecessors," as an epic hero, "the warlike Harry" who will "assume the port of Mars" in command of Fame, Sword, and Fire (Prologue 6).<sup>231</sup> Herschel Baker believes that Shakespeare had in Henry "a hero much too wise and brave and just for real dramatic presentation," and the situation was exacerbated by

---

<sup>229</sup> Annabel Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 76-77.

<sup>230</sup> The Chorus often has been portrayed as female, particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Charles Kean's production (1859) the Prologue became Clio, Muse of History, as played by Mrs. Kean, and the later Chorus speeches were delivered by her as a crowned Britannia clad in red and blue. My use of the masculine is in admiration of the Choric performances of Derek Jacobi and Mark Rylance that I have witnessed.

<sup>231</sup> Derek Royal, "Shakespeare's Kingly Mirror: Figuring the Chorus in Olivier's and Branagh's *Henry V*," *Literature Film Quarterly*, 1997, Vol. 25, Issue 2, 104; David Bevington, "Introduction to The Life of King Henry the Fifth," *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Glenview: Scott, 1980), 874; *Port* is variously glossed as "deportment" or a rendering of the word *part*.



the grand scale of the action to be recounted.<sup>232</sup> This initial gesture toward an epic presentation of Henry V is maintained throughout the play, particularly in the playwright's use of parallels between Henry V and Alexander the Great. For example, in describing Henry's facility in matters of policy, the Archbishop of Canterbury compares him to Alexander in loosing the "gordian knot," "familiar as his garter" (1.1.45-46). Flewellen famously compares Henry to Alexander the Pig, noting that it is obviously significant that both were born in cities near rivers (which he asserts are actually the same river), and finding that if one marks well the life of Alexander the Great, he will find that "Harry of Monmouth's life is come after it indifferent well, for there is figures in all things" (4.7.25-27). Here we find a parody of sorts of the Elizabethan craze for exemplars from history. The comparison of the two epic figures takes a dark turn when Flewellen reminds us that Alexander the Great killed his best friend Cleitus, and

As Alexander killed his friend Cleitus, being in his ales and his cups, so also Harry Monmouth, being in his right wits and good judgements, turned away the fat knight with the great belly doublet. He was full of jests and gypes and knaveries and mocks—I have forgot his name (4.7.36-40).

Here the audience is reminded not only of Falstaff and Henry's denial of him, but also the untimely death of Alexander the Great at the height of his reign, which portends ominously for Harry of Monmouth. Also scattered throughout the play are mythological images of Henry, such as Exeter's description of him advancing on France "in thunder and in earthquake like a Jove" (2.4.100), and the Chorus's prologue to Act 5 continues the epic treatment of events by comparing Henry's reception by London's citizenry to that of "conqu'ring Caesar," fetched in by the senators and plebeians of Rome. The Chorus vigorously attempts to maintain an epic atmosphere, and the main concern in his opening speech seems to be with the inadequacy of his medium for presenting an account of such magnitude.

---

<sup>232</sup> Herschel Baker, Introduction to Henry V in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 934.

In fact, as he opens the play, the Chorus expresses uncertainty as to whether it is even possible for the epic sweep of Henry's military action, complete with horses and terrifying helmets, to be crammed within this wooden O. According to the Chorus, at this critical moment the audience's labor is desperately needed to make up for such doubtful inadequacy. Their imaginations will supply what is missing in what the actors present. The audience must "work, work" their thoughts, and these common efforts mold these unacquainted strangers into fellow-laborers, an Andersonian "imagined community," which parallels Henry V's coming conjuration of a nation-state from his heterogeneous army. Without the collaboration of commoners, both the Chorus and Henry fail. Rather than being effaced or demonized, as Helgerson and others contend, "popular participation is shown by Shakespeare's English history cycle to be an essential component in the making of the modern political nation," and *Henry V* reveals the extent to which the King's efforts at nation-building are dependent on the collaboration of the commoner—not only in the drama itself but also in the theater in which it was staged.<sup>233</sup> What Henry will ask of his soldiers is also asked of the audience, and the success of that strategy is often witnessed today hundreds of years after the need has evaporated when audience members spontaneously join in the cry "For God, Harry, and St. George!"

### 5.3 "His Lips Are Moving": The Chorus as Historian

However engaging the Chorus may be, the audience really ought to notice that there is often a disparity between what he says and the action of the play that follows. The revelation of noble conspirators engaged in treason is promised, but instead Pistol and other tavern barflies appear onstage. An amiable touch of Harry in the night is supposed to provide comfort that dispels his army's fear, but instead the disguised King is rebuffed by Williams and his friends. Eamon Grennan helps to bridge this peculiar disconnection by pointing out that the play manifests a genuine concern with the art of making history, the "written record which shapes the

---

<sup>233</sup> Thorne, 165.

past into significant, useful patterns.”<sup>234</sup> *Henry V*, says Grennan, provides insight into both kinds of history makers—the King as maker of *res gesta* and the official historiographer as maker of *res scripta*. The Chorus can be understood as the maker of *res scripta*, providing the official and favorable view of the monarch and his reign. No mere detached stage-manager who simply comments on what transpires, the Chorus is “an engaged character within the action of the play” who, despite his encouragement of the audience to use its imagination, nevertheless attempts to censor by his narrative what is seen and heard by the audience.<sup>235</sup> The Chorus provides an unproblematic sense of history that is evident in his grammar, heavy on the indicative and imperative moods, through which the playwright offers a revelation of the nature of official historiography.<sup>236</sup> In making narrative historians of the audience through repeated instructions to see, the Chorus invites them to turn their minds into instruments of sight only rather than of evaluation that might question the events presented.<sup>237</sup> In other words, the Chorus is a kind of official version of what happens, but the play allows us to be eye-witnesses whose perceptions may not match the “significant, useful pattern” of the history of the Chorus. No matter how hard he tries to tell the audience what they see, their own vision and its intellectual perceptions usually are not completely suspended. From the forgetful gaps between what the Chorus narrates and the action of the play emerge new insights that this chapter will address. In the same way that the Chorus labors to engage the cooperation of the audience in imagining the play, Henry V labors rhetorically to engage the cooperation of his soldiers in imagining the nation. Forgetfulness is essential to both endeavors.

#### 5.4 Andersonian Imagined Community Made Simple

To understand more clearly the significance of Henry V’s rhetorical labor, it will be helpful to refer more fully to Benedict Anderson’s concept of what constitutes a nation as well as to

---

<sup>234</sup> Eamon Grennan, “‘This Story shall the Good Man Teach His son’: *Henry V* and the Art of History.” *Papers on Language and Literature*, Fall 79, Vol.15, Issue 4, 370.

<sup>235</sup> Grennan, 371.

<sup>236</sup> Grennan, 372.

<sup>237</sup> Grennan, 371-372.

enlarge on Ernest Renan's idea of the centrality of national amnesia to the formation of a nation. Defining the nation-state as an "imagined community," Anderson connects its emergence to the decline of the "divinely ordained hierarchical dynastic realm" and its replacement by a sense of horizontal community powerful enough to create kinship among strangers and across social division—similar to what happens with an engaged audience in a theater. For Anderson, the nation is

imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible...for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.<sup>238</sup>

I earlier noted that Anderson and others locate the beginning of nationalism in the Enlightenment and consider it a particularly modern phenomenon associated with the advent of industrialism and capitalism, while others hold that the forerunners of the nation-state are evident in the sixteenth century. Liah Greenfield, in making a case for the sixteenth century origination of English nationhood, suggests that it grew out of the convergence of the interests of the commoners and the monarchy. As the focus of English nationalist feeling, the crown was a symbol of English distinctiveness to the commoners. Repeatedly in a position of dependence on the good will of these subjects, the Tudor rulers found it prudent to support their subjects' increasing national consciousness.<sup>239</sup> Speaking of the connection between such national consciousness and *Henry V*, Baldo observes that the play "continually reminds us of the communal amnesia that helps to produce and support the sense of nationhood."<sup>240</sup> The production and support of a sense of nationhood were elusive dreams in both parts of *Henry IV*, but Shakespeare presents the *kairos* as here and now for Henry V.

---

<sup>238</sup> Anderson, 7.

<sup>239</sup> Liah Greenfield, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), Ch.1, esp. 50-51, 65.

<sup>240</sup> Baldo, 141.

This communal amnesia and its role in the formation of a national identity were delineated in 1882 in a lecture entitled “What is a nation?” presented at the Sorbonne by the French historian Ernest Renan, whose ideas about nationalism have been put to good use by Anderson. Mounting an opposition to ethnographers (particularly the Germans, whom he characterized as the forerunners of expansionism), Renan points out that “nations are made by human will” and are not subject to “naturalistic determinism” by their “language, geography, race, religion or anything else.”<sup>241</sup> Although Renan notes that the possession of a legacy of memories is one of the “spiritual principles” of a nation, he adds, “Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationalism.”<sup>242</sup> Renan postulates that a people must not only forget but also forget that they have forgotten in order to become a nation. The consolidation of the collective memory was a particularly challenging issue for England in the 1590s, a period of fluid self-definition. It should come as no surprise that a Shakespeare play of this period would examine as well as mirror that concern with the collective memory, which obviously requires the engagement of the minds of virtually all the people of the nation, the majority of whom are commoners.

### 5.5 The Amnesic Rhetoric of Henry V

As Prince Hal, Henry V was no stranger to commoners—at least those found at the Boar’s Head Tavern—and the demotic “vile participation” of his youth is evident throughout Henry’s political career, particularly when he begins to deliver the rhetoric of amnesic, classless fraternity essential to his engineering of the nation’s self-image.<sup>243</sup> Prince Hal’s prowess as a rhetor was previously demonstrated in *1 Henry IV* when his persuasive skill restored his father’s faith in him as a worthy successor to the throne of England.

---

<sup>241</sup> Ernest Gellner, “Nationalism and the two forms of cohesion in complex societies” in *Culture, Identity, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 8.

<sup>242</sup> Ernest Renan, “What is a nation?” (1882), trans. Martin Thom, in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha, (London: Routledge, 1990), 19 and 11.

<sup>243</sup> Thorne, 167.

In his first rhetorical effort in *Henry V*, made necessary by the stalemate at the siege of Harfleur, the King urges his troops to charge once more unto the breach or it will be closed up with “our English dead.” There is no differentiation between the corpses of nobles or commons in the words “our English dead,” such as that of the protestation made by the French when noble bodies lay drenched in mercenary blood. Falstaff earlier remarked that his conscripts could fill a pit as well as any other man, and the corpses of the English dead will be used indiscriminately like so much cordwood by the French to close the breach in the city’s wall made by Henry’s cannons. It is here at the siege of Harfleur that Henry makes his first oblique references to the possibility of a wartime suspension or forgetting of accepted social norms in which commoners ordinarily would be obliged to “stillness and humility.”<sup>244</sup> There is a terrible sense of physical strain inherent in Henry’s command to his soldiers as they “bend up every spirit / To his full height”(3.1.16-17). Imitating the action of the tiger, stiffening the sinews, conjuring up the blood, disguising fair nature with hard-favor’d rage, lending the eye a terrible aspect, setting the teeth, stretching the nostrils wide, and holding hard the breath are all exhausting to read about, much less to perform, and Michael Goldman has demonstrated that Henry’s description of their terrible physical strain actually betrays the King’s recognition that surpassing one’s designated place in the social hierarchy—again, the idea of forgetting oneself—would actually constitute monstrosity.<sup>245</sup> This model can be connected to Thomas Rogers’ 1576 *Philosophicall Discourse, Entitled the Anatomie of the Minde* previously discussed in the Introduction, which treats forgetting one’s place as constitutive of monstrous transformation.<sup>246</sup> While the twenty-first century may find Henry’s commands as merely an encouragement to “get your game face on,” the early modern audience could well have interpreted his instructions to mean a physical transformation that mirrors the mental activity that Henry’s speech begins to call forth—the forgetting of one’s place in the social hierarchy.

---

<sup>244</sup> Thorne, 176.

<sup>245</sup> Michael Goldman, *Shakespeare and the Energies of Drama* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 58-73.

<sup>246</sup> Rogers, Preface.

To induce a degree of amnesia of social status, Henry delivers specific encouragement first to nobles and then to commoners, but the differentiation between the two strata is counterbalanced by the King's deft use of words such as "noble," "base," and "mean," originally demarcations of rank that were increasingly used to designate relative morality. The "noblest English" are conjured first as those whose blood derives from warrior ancestors, and they are urged to be exemplars to their comrades-in-arms, men of "grosser blood," to teach them to make war. The appeal to his soldiers' warrior ancestors reminds us of Canterbury's similar invocation of the lions of Henry's blood, which suggests that Henry recognizes the allure of such an urging despite his own dispassion toward it. However, in Henry's usage the meanings of the words "blood" and "breeding" undergo slippage from their hereditary contexts of arising from noble parentage and having a required quality of breeding to an expanded usage that encompasses anyone born and bred in England.<sup>247</sup> While there is at this point still a differentiation between the noblest English and the commons, the suggestion that the commons are in a sort of apprenticeship to the noblemen softens the distinction between them, if only temporarily. He reminds the yeomen that their limbs were made in England, a unique good fortune made probative by demonstrating English breeding with battlefield mettle. Although they do not have noble blood—a condition that Henry's next speech will remedy by "gentling" it—they have "noble luster" in their eyes, which gestures toward a forgetful colloquy of nobility among his troops. Apparently, Henry regards their spirits as already in solidarity, for he commands his men to follow the singular "your spirit" upon the next charge, united in the invocation of "God for Harry, England, and Saint George!" According to the King's Harfleur speech, all Englishmen are entitled to inclusion in his fellowship, provided that their valiant actions demonstrate their worthiness.

Although his next rhetorical effort is aimed chiefly at obtaining the governor's surrender of Harfleur, the status-forgetting fraternity of his soldiers is again implied but given a macabre turn that recalls the monstrosity of forgetfulness of self. Asserting that he is himself a soldier in

---

<sup>247</sup> Thorne, 176

command of soldiers who will not leave the city half-achieved, Henry V warns of the dire consequences to come if “the flesh’d soldier” enters the gates. Forgotten now are the references to noble breeding and noble luster in the eyes in his gruesome elaboration of the undifferentiated mayhem that will result from the assault of “my soldiers,” whether noble or common. United in spirit on the charge unto the breach, they are now evoked as being united as well in their unrestrained savagery against the enemy’s vanquished citadel.

#### 5.6 Failure Is an Option: Harry Le Roi vs. Williams

Before examining Henry’s St. Crispin’s Day speech, his final rhetorical attempt at creating national fellowship through the manipulation of memory and forgetting, I consider first the events of the eve of the battle of Agincourt. Here we encounter some of the play’s most serious faultlines relating to historical veracity and the porous nature of King Henry’s memory. First we have the Chorus’s speech, through which, says Grennan, “Shakespeare manages to reveal, without value judgments, the nature and procedures of official historiography.”<sup>248</sup> Painting a powerfully evocative image of the armed camps at night, complete with the “paly flames” of the campfires and the clanging of armorers’ hammers, the Chorus then announces that the “poor condemned English” are about to receive a visit from their King.

O now, who will behold  
The royal captain of this ruin’d band  
Walking from watch to watch, from tent to tent,  
Let him cry, “Praise and glory on his head!”  
For forth he goes, and visits all his host,  
Bids them good morrow with a modest smile,  
And calls them brothers, friends, and countrymen.  
Upon his royal face there is no note  
How dread an army hath enrounded him;

---

<sup>248</sup> Grennan, 372.



Nor doth he dedicate one jot of color  
Unto the weary and all-watched night;  
But freshly looks, and overbears attaint  
With cheerful semblance and sweet majesty;  
That every wretch, pining and pale before,  
Beholding him, plucks comfort from his looks.  
A largess universal, like the sun,  
His liberal eye doth give to every one,  
Thawing cold fear, that mean and gentle all  
Behold, as may unworthiness define,  
A little touch of Harry in the night. (4.1.28-47)

According to the Chorus, Henry goes with “cheerful semblance and sweet majesty” from tent to tent, calling his soldiers brothers, and spreading courage that thaws cold fear. Although it is lovely language filled with appealing imagery, this is not the sequence of events that transpire in the scene that follows. Perhaps it is assumed that the King has already performed the Chorus’s aforementioned congenial visits from watch to watch and tent to tent, graciously greeting his men and inspiring valor prior to the events of scene 1 of Act 4, and that what occurs in scene 1 is only the last of several encounters with troops before the call to arms brought by his brother Gloucester’s voice. It more likely that the playwright has given the Chorus’s optimistic official version of the eve of St. Crispin’s in order to create a sense of incongruity as the scene unfolds. This is the “beautiful” historical version of events. Such disparity between narration and performance causes the audience to question the Chorus’s historical narrative and to seek a more nuanced view of the dramatic action.

Certainly, what happens onstage during the opening scene of the fourth act makes a significant challenge to the official historical account given by the Chorus, but it is a much greater threat to the imagined community of brothers that Henry has sought to create. There are no

congenial campfire visits that provide comfort and thaw cold fear. Instead a cloak-shrouded and unrecognized Henry meets three common foot soldiers, and rather than rousing their spirits, as the Chorus glowingly narrates, the King darkly intimates that his commander, by improvisation made out to be Sir Thomas Erpingham, views their position against the French as an imminent and hopeless disaster. Henry defends his commander's decision against telling the King of his dire evaluation by claiming it avoids disheartening him, a reference made to Henry V's humanity to invoke the idea that the King is only a man, thus perhaps deepening their sense of the horizontal comradeship of his Harfleur speech. Soldiers Williams and John Bates will have none of it. Imagining himself removed from the King's fellowship, John Bates sincerely wishes Henry happily alone at Agincourt and his army, including Bates, safe at home. The King, perhaps using these three as a focus group for tomorrow's speech, replies that as a common soldier he could not die anywhere so contented as in the King's company, reiterating the theme of military fraternity. While that part of what he says meets with less argument, his sanguine afterthought concerning the "just cause" and "honorable quarrel" of the King piques sharp resistance from Williams, who protests that the soldiers are ignorant of the justice of the cause that has brought them to France. Neither Williams, who questions the morality of the undertaking and thus is openly (at least in this conversation with an equal) in rebellion against the enterprise, nor Bates, who espouses blind obedience because they are the King's subjects, demonstrates any feeling of the forgetful fellowship of equality invoked in Henry's speech at Harfleur.

Perhaps in echo of Henry's siege pronouncements concerning the limbs that were bred in England, Williams finds the King responsible for all the chopped off arms, legs, and heads that shall join together on Judgment Day to indict Henry not only for their agony on the battlefield but also the misery of their destitute families in England. When Williams taxes the King with culpability for the men who do not die well—and "few who die in a battle die well"—Henry sees an opening. He seizes upon the phrase "die well," and steering the argument away from the King's responsibility for the physical death of his soldiers, Henry turns the question of his polemic into

whether the King bears any blame for the preparedness of his soldiers' souls for eternity. Because he is unwilling to hold the King responsible for the eternal deposition of his men, even the contentious Williams makes no rejoinder to Henry's assertion that "every subject's duty is the King's, but every subject's soul is his own" (4.4.176-177). Distracted by Henry's use of the hypothetical son who drowns while on his father's business and the servant who is killed by thieves, the soldiers forget what constituted the focus of their original argument, and Williams validates Henry's special pleading by declaring that the King does not bear responsibility for "every man that dies ill." The King is encouraged by his success, and Henry then attempts to make the patriotic but self-congratulatory point that the King has refused to be ransomed. Williams deflates it with scathing skepticism, observing that the King could ransom himself after his soldiers' throats are cut and they would be none the wiser. When Henry's wit leads to a scuffle with Williams, Grennan detects that "royal patience wears thin and wounded authority peeps through rents in the soldier's cloak concealing the King's majesty."<sup>249</sup> According to Thorne, Williams and the others have "drive[n] a wedge into the self-serving myth that the monarch and his common subjects are bound together not so much by political expediency as by their shared humanity and commonality of interests."<sup>250</sup> Henry may think that he is like other men, but Williams and company remind him that his is a different kind of hard condition.

Henry's soliloquy that follows this encounter demonstrates that he has felt the sharp rebuke and humiliation of his failure in his primary objective with Williams and the others. In this soliloquy Henry exercises his considerable powers of forgetting by perversely mingling the things with which he has been charged—lives, debts, wives, children—with the things for which Williams and the others held him blameless, the very things that he himself interjected into the argument—souls and sins.

Upon the King! let us our lives, our souls,

Our debts, our careful wives,

---

<sup>249</sup> Grennan, 375.

<sup>250</sup> Thorne, 177.

Our children, and our sins lay upon the King! (4.1.230-232)

Gone is the fellow-feeling of the Harfleur speech, and for Henry “we” now only means “I.” Henry’s rhetorical energies are radically reoriented as he reinstates social distance between himself and others. They are no longer his “brothers, friends, countrymen” but are now rearranged in the taxonomy of royal contempt and displeasure as “lackey[s],” “wretched slave[s],” and “ignorant peasants.”<sup>251</sup> Henry finds that his is a “hard condition, twin-born with greatness” that makes him “subject to the breath of every fool whose sense no more can feel but his own wringing!” (4.1.233-236). His characterization of Williams as a self-centered fool is quite revelatory because few in the audience would label this ordinary soldier as such. In fact, throughout this soliloquy it would seem to be Henry himself whose sense can feel nothing but his own wringing. Having forgotten the sleepless, battle-worn, anxiety-ridden soldiers with whom he has just spoken, Henry proceeds to contrast their states with his. According to Henry V, as common men they have infinite heart’s ease, sleep soundly in Elysium, live through the ever-running year with profitable labor, and finally end their peaceful lives in the grave. Henry believes that the “gross brain” of the common man little realizes how the King’s watch allows his people to live their lives in peace. Such a speech might have rung well on another occasion, but for the audience members who have just heard his disputation with Williams, the soliloquy is almost laughable—especially the part about his battle-bound soldiers supposedly living in peace—except that it communicates an appalling obliviousness of reality. Either Henry has forgotten that he has proposed (and will so propose again tomorrow) an amnesic horizontal fellowship of soldiers, or he has been manipulating memory in Nietzschean fashion as it serves his purpose to assuage his hurt pride.

Despite his claim that he has learned from his days of wantonness to drink with any tinker in his own language, the King reveals that he cannot always connect with ordinary men who disagree with him in truly equal fellowship—at least not with sober ones. He is, however, a master of forgetting, and the sleepless, dread-filled condition of his troops does not find its way into his

---

<sup>251</sup> Thorne, 177.

prayers. Perhaps it is because his discussion with Williams and the others concerning divine judgment puts him in mind of another guilt that, though not exactly his own, still adheres somewhat to him and his reign and dominates his prayer. He continues to be painfully aware of the nagging culpability that clogged at his father's heels and ultimately defeated his ascent to immortal distinction. Appealing to heaven's God of battles, Henry asks that God "steel [his] soldiers hearts," making them fearless and incapable of calculating their insufficiency in numbers against the French. Most importantly, because he is aware that it is impossible that God would forget the usurpation of Henry IV and the murder of Richard II, Henry asks that God at least think not on it today, an amnesia that only briefly can relieve. He seeks to replace the memory of his father's transgression with the catalogue of contrition that Henry V has demonstrated in tearfully reburying Richard's body in his rightful place, in building chantries where masses for the murdered King's soul are sung, in hiring five hundred poor to pray for the forgiveness of the crime. Most of all, he begs God not to exact retribution from him tomorrow on the field of battle. Grennan suggests that "in his response to the summons to the simple activity of battle, we may sense the relief of one who cannot or must not confront the potentially tragic implications of those choices that have made him what he is."<sup>252</sup> This assessment of Henry's relief at Gloucester's call underscores Henry's habitual mode of forgetting in order to take action.

#### 5.7 "One More Time, with Feeling": Henry and the St. Crispin's Day Speech

With the coming of the dawn, Henry V finds himself once again forced by circumstances to enlist the participation of the commoners whose social consequence he dismissed so peremptorily a short while before. (Unlike Elizabeth I's perhaps apocryphal speech at Tilbury, which was either not available or not created until the seventeenth century, the non-Shakespearean Henry V, according to Holinshed, did deliver a speech somewhat similar to that which the playwright provides.<sup>253</sup>) Amnesia of social class is again mobilized in the King's St. Crispin's Day speech, but his encounter with Williams and the others has had its effect: Henry

---

<sup>252</sup> Grennan, 375.

<sup>253</sup> Bright, 15; Gurr, Appendix 2: Historical Sources—Holinshed's Chronicles, 233.

judiciously makes some adjustments. In response to Westmoreland's wishing for the reinforcements of "one ten thousand of those men in England who do no work today"(4.3.18-19), Henry makes prominent use of the word *we*, sometimes signifying the army in total and sometimes denoting Henry himself in the royal sense of the word. His assertion that "if we are marked to die, we are enow to do our country loss" unites Henry and all other members of his force, noble or common, in one limited yet privileged fellowship that Henry declares will share in either death or the coveted and limited prize of honor. Even when Henry speaks of himself as the royal *we*, he uses the word *fellowship* to name the relationship between him and his troops. "We would not die in that man's company / That fears his fellowship to die with us" (4.3.38-39). Thorne views Henry's rhetoric skeptically, contending that the use of the word *we* is actually always the royal *we* "since the community envisioned turns out to be little more than an expansion of the regal persona."<sup>254</sup> She further discredits Henry's remarks as reflective of a feudal hierarchy based on honor and pride of place that would be highly individualistic rather than nationalistic: "All Henry's rhetorical dexterity cannot smooth away the class tensions inherent in the goal of national unification that, ironically, are thrown into greater prominence by his attempts to reconfigure aristocratic idioms for popular consumption."<sup>255</sup> However, I would offer again Anderson's evaluation of the nature of the imagined community in which "regardless of the *actual inequality and exploitation* [italics mine] that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately, it is this fraternity that makes it possible...for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings." Inequality and exploitation are the realities, but the perceived fellowship produces patriotic self-sacrifice.

In the second half of his speech, Henry reminds his men that the day on which they will encounter the enemy is the feast of Crispian. Henry depicts the future-in-the-present, evoking occasions on which St. Crispin's Day will be mentioned with the result that the victorious survivors of the battle stand taller and straighten their shoulders in pride. Yearly the veterans will feast their

---

<sup>254</sup> Thorne, 177.

<sup>255</sup> Thorne, 173.

neighbors on the nightly vigil and show their scars, regaling their audiences with accounts of battlefield exploits perhaps remembered with slight exaggeration.

This day is call'd the feast of Crispian:  
He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,  
Will stand a' tiptoe when this day is named,  
And rouse him at the name of Crispian.  
He that shall see this day and live old age,  
Will yearly in the vigil feast his neighbors,  
And say, "Tomorrow is Saint Crispian"  
Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars,  
And say, "These wounds I had on Crispin's day."  
Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot,  
But he'll remember with advantages  
What feats he did that day (4.3.40-51).

Shakespeare offers further insight into the nature of history in that even the private historical account of an eyewitness or a battle participant cannot be fully credited since old men forget and will embellish their contributions to the battle's victorious outcome. Thorne allows that "imaginatively projecting this annual event as a popular domestic scene, combining the functions of an aural history lesson with a convivial feasting of the neighborhood, is another brilliant touch, in that it presents an image, at once homely and heroic, with which the common soldier can hardly fail to identify."<sup>256</sup> Henry situates the battle in prodigious superiority to everything else that the soldiers will achieve in their lives hereafter, portraying what they do on this day as the last thing ever to be forgotten, even in their dotage. Baldo asserts that Henry's speech works psychologically to mark the coming battle and its as yet uncertain outcome as being already a remembrance that helps to give the event "the safe and settled quality of something already

---

<sup>256</sup> Thorne, 178.

accomplished, preserved, sheltered, even sacralized by memory.”<sup>257</sup> In contrast to Richard II, who agonizes over a deposition that is yet to occur, Henry urges his men to savor in the uncertain present the sweetness of victory and comfortable reminiscence that awaits them in the future.

Henry’s emphasis on St. Crispin’s Day, marked in red on the French calendar (as well as that of other Catholic nations) in honor of Christian martyrs Crispin and Crispian, could resonate with sixteenth century Englishmen as a reminder of another ongoing national triumph. Gradually, the state had appropriated from the Catholic Church one of the chief means of national remembrance, the calendar. The ecclesiastical calendar of Catholicism had been diminished since the reign of Henry VIII, and therefore saints’ days, such as St. Crispin’s, were no longer marked in red on the Elizabethan English calendar. Controversy over the calendar during the reign of Elizabeth was somewhat limited due to the ambiguity of her true attitudes toward the regulation of traditional pastimes, but part of the Queen’s strategy was the development of new secular and political alternatives to the feast days of the Catholic year, such as the commemoration of military victories. *Henry V* shows an astute awareness of the utility of festivals and the institutionalization of memory for fostering national cohesion.<sup>258</sup> Henry’s speech, which predates the actual abandonment of Catholic saints’ days, links one of the most celebrated victories in English history with the ecclesiastical calendar. As Baldo notes, “Henry’s speech at Agincourt reenacts the transformation of the calendar, which was so crucial to Elizabethan England’s emerging concept of itself as a nation,” and “is an attempt to weave together ecclesiastical, patriotic, and even private forms of memory into a unified and centralized national memory.”<sup>259</sup> Although the Catholic calendar is yet to be jettisoned in the future reign of Henry VIII, Henry anticipates the unification that could ensue if his band of English brothers were all to remember and celebrate the same things on the same days.

---

<sup>257</sup> Baldo, 156.

<sup>258</sup> Baldo, 153.

<sup>259</sup> Baldo, 156.



As the King draws his St. Crispin's Day speech to a close, a barely noticeable faultline appears. Having made a commitment of national fellowship with his troops, and having conjured up the future as a memory to be deeply savored in days to come, Henry proceeds to catalogue the names that then will be recalled. They are "our" names—the names of nobles. "Harry the King, Bedford and Exeter, Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester" are evoked in "their" flowing cups—the liquid-filled, forgetful cups of the reminiscing commoner veterans. While this could be seen as Henry's imagining some brotherly name-dropping on the part of the common soldier, since Henry characterizes the names of nobles as being as familiar in the mouth of the musing veteran as household words, it can also be viewed as condescending disparagement of the commoner who exaggerates his intimacy with his betters. Perhaps it is even an unconscious manifestation of myopic self-importance, reflecting how the King and his nobles see themselves as surely being the focus of the daily conversation and admiration of common people. Whatever the case, there is a noticeable absence of commoners' names in this fraternal catalogue of comrades in arms that Henry says will be invoked on the battle's future anniversaries. The absence of the names of commoners foreshadows the moments after the conflict when Henry refers to the twenty-five commoner casualties as being "none else of name." This seemingly peremptory dismissal of their deaths as inconsequential might only mean that none of the remaining casualties were of noble families, but in view of Henry's declaration that all who shed their blood with him will become his noble brothers, it resonates as a stinging lack of royal remembrance that unsettles the imagined community of Englishmen.

Despite what will happen after the battle, as he concludes the St. Crispin's Day speech, the King renews the dream of leveling fraternity by declaring that the good man will pass the story of this battle on to the next generation. While a good man, as in "a man of righteous nature," can be either noble or common, the term can also be heard as *goodman*, signifying a householder, a plebeian. One implication of this is that the notion of fellowship achieved in Henry's service in France may be transmuted into subsequent generations of commoners, so that the imagined

community evoked in the father is part of the inheritance of his son. When Harry returns to the idea of the calendrical recurrence of St. Crispin's Day,—“from this day to the ending of the world”—it is the inclusive rather than the royal *we* that he invokes. *We* shall be remembered on St. Crispin's Day, and to make certain that the auditors know of whom he speaks, he makes it even more clear: “we few, we happy few, we band of brothers” (4.3.60). The King then raises all his troops to noble status by declaring that any man who sheds his blood with him today will be the King's brother in spite of the “vileness” of that man's social station. As the viscous blood flows, forgetfulness of former separations based on hierarchical place and wealth flows with it. This battlefield brotherhood constitutes the precise expression of Anderson's formulation of the “deep horizontal comradeship” that exists “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail” in the imagined community. Such fellow-feeling is infectious for the audience, but something rankles almost imperceptibly. We have heard the application of the word *brother* like this before—when Hal laughed at the naiveté of the Boar's Head drawers to whom he was “sworn brother,” and who regarded him as the finest young fellow in the world. Despite the intensity of the moment, with its impending encounter with violence and death, our experience of Henry's previous “brotherhood” and his flippant dismissal of their credulousness make us unsure of the sincerity of this new pronouncement of fellowship.

This battlefield fraternity is forged by the raising to the rank of gentleman the social condition of those who will shed blood with the King. However, the fraternity is actually more exclusive than might first appear. The audience has previously been told that the support for Henry's cause was so complete that all the nobles and the youth of England were on fire and sought to be involved in the French campaign, but the Archbishop of Canterbury encouraged the King to divide “happy England into four” and take only a quarter of the force to France, leaving the other three parts to defend against a Scottish incursion. Perhaps it is these unfortunate gentlemen of the remaining three-fourths who are the slugabeds to whom Henry refers when he mentions those who will “hold their manhoods cheap”—even if they are gentlemen in truth—

whenever any man speaks who fought “with us upon Saint Crispin’s Day.” The foregoing declaration would suggest that the word *us* is intended to refer to the band of brothers and not just Harry the King, but it actually is also slightly counter to the creation of a sense of national identity. Anyone who does not participate in the battle at Agincourt—women, children, old men, members of the three other parts of the English power at home—is excluded from the incipient national fellowship, making “we few” a most narrow horizontal comradeship after all.

The speech ends, but the rhetoric of fraternity based on the forgetfulness of station continues in Henry’s response to the French herald. Montjoy arrives to ask if the King is now prepared to negotiate his own ransom and encourage his men to make their peace with God before being slaughtered in the inevitable conflict. Nothing would more completely constitute a dissolution of the deep horizontal comradeship than this: the King buys his way out of danger while his men have no choice but a hastily absolved death in combat on foreign soil. Having previously gentled the blood of all his soldiers, thus raising them to a condition nearer his own, Henry now re-situates himself as being one with the men of his army, a band of “poor fellows” and “warriors for the working day,” thus lowering noble status in pursuit of an egalitarian comradeship. His failure in the previous night’s disputation with Williams now informs Henry’s speech, for, while the assertion of the King’s membership in ordinary humankind “besmirched with rainy marching in the painful field”(4.3.110-111) is made once more, and the King reiterates his refusal of ransom, he does not mention the justice of the King’s cause. After the battle, as previously noted, Henry’s memory of egalitarian comradeship fails as he makes roll call of the dead, both French and English. Although there are only four ostensibly noble British casualties listed (Davy Gam is a Welshman), the King also solemnly intones the names of fifteen French nobles killed in the battle, marveling at the enemy’s “royal fellowship of death,” and yet mentions not a single English commoner of his erstwhile band of brothers. To overlook this omission by Henry V is to miss one of the most powerful and poignant comments in the play about the true

nature of imagined community for the King—his imagined community consists of fellow nobles, and not the cannon fodder that fought so passionately for God, Harry and St. George.

#### 5.8 A Double Debt to Forgetting: Traitors and Multinational Captains

In addition to the forgetful rhetoric of Henry V, the action of the play also subverts remembrance by alternately masking and unmasking the debt both Henry and the nation owe to forgetting.<sup>260</sup> One such instance is found in the account of the plot by the traitors Cambridge, Scroop, and Grey. While simplifying the historical record may be a theatrical necessity and therefore the conspiracy is streamlined to provide maximum dramatic threat to the King while avoiding possible tediousness, the play ostensibly forgets the well-remembered Edmund Mortimer, whose claim to the throne the traitors were supporting. If the Chorus can make an Epilogue's allusion to the earlier *Henry VI* plays as shorthand for what happens to Henry V's son, it can be expected that the majority of Shakespeare's audience would remember that it is Edmund Mortimer who initiates the Yorkist claim to the throne rehearsed in those same *Henry VI* plays. However, Mortimer is expunged from *Henry V*. The traitors are portrayed as merely a "greedy nest of hollow bosoms" suborned against the King by French gold. The erasure of Mortimer is not complete, however, for Cambridge's words gesture toward his true motive—"For me, the gold of France did not seduce / Although I did admit it as a motive / The sooner to effect *what I intended*" [italics mine](2.2.155-157). This is as close as the play comes to recalling that there was a rival claimant for Henry's throne. Karl P. Wentersdorf calls this "a conspiracy of silence" concerning Mortimer, whose dynastic claim would cloud Henry's entitlement not only to the English crown but that of France as well. Wentersdorf holds that many early modern spectators would have been keenly aware of the implications of what is unspoken and thus portrayed as forgotten when Henry makes no mention of it during his imprecations against the conspirators.<sup>261</sup> The play's self-consciousness of its historical amnesia is evident in that

---

<sup>260</sup> Baldo, 135.

<sup>261</sup> Karl P. Wentersdorf, "The Conspiracy of Silence in *Henry V*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 27 (1976), 264-87.

Cambridge's veiled phrase "what I intended" is allowed to linger in the text, in all probability an intentional signpost of the forgetting that must be mobilized to unify a nation.

While the play's studied obliviousness to Edmund Mortimer is significant, another equally important instance of national forgetting that underpins the play is personified in the four captains Fluellen of Wales, MacMorris of Ireland, Jamy of Scotland, and Gower of England. They are testimony to the increasing Elizabethan conviction that their nation was not England only but rather England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland.<sup>262</sup> In his first speech to his English Parliament, King James I stated that, in order for the Project for Union to take place, England had to pursue a policy of forgetting. Speaking specifically of the Union, James said, "For even as little brookes lose their names by their running and fall into great Rivers, and the very name and memory of the great Rivers swallowed up in the Ocean: so by the conjunction of divers little Kingdoms in one, are all these private differences and questions swallowed up."<sup>263</sup> *Henry V* was written before the accession of James I, but even far in advance of his Project for Union, the English were aware of the necessity of forgetting as both the instrument and the achievement of colonization. Speaking specifically of Irish colonization, Sir Thomas Smith noted the English aims in 1565 as being "to augment our tongue, our laws, and our religion in the Isle, where three be the true bands of the commonwealth whereby the Romans conquered and kept long time a great part of the world."<sup>264</sup> Edmund Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596) supported policies that would extinguish loyalty to the head of the clan so that an Irishman would soon "learn quite to forget his Irish nation."<sup>265</sup> *Henry V* shares the desire to engender a cultural amnesia productive of a union, and Ireland appears in the play to be the "little brooke" that is marked for more complete absorption. The Irish Question remained unresolved at the time of the play's composition and first

---

<sup>262</sup> Baldo, 146.

<sup>263</sup> James I, *The Political Works of James I*, ed. Charles Howard McIlwain (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918), 269.

<sup>264</sup> Quoted in Mary Dewar, *Sir Thomas Smith: A Tudor Intellectual in Office* (London: The Athlone Press, 1964), 157.

<sup>265</sup> Edmund Spenser, *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, ed. W. L. Renwick (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 156.

performances, as evidenced by the Chorus' references to the Earl of Essex, whose expected triumphant return from quelling Irish rebellion in 1599 is compared to the reception Henry receives on his return from France. Instead of "bringing rebellion broached on his sword," however, Essex slinks back home after his failed campaign.

Shakespeare's creation of the four captains serves as an anachronistic tribute to the Tudor concept of a united Britain launching forth into the conquest of the French. Although there were Irishmen and Welshmen among Henry V's troops (there were Welsh and Scottish mercenaries among the French army as well, there were no Scots (except James I of Scotland, who had been Henry's prisoner since age eleven).<sup>266</sup> Of the four captains, the Welsh Fluellen and the Irish MacMorris are the most memorable because they have the largest amount of stage time, providing amusement with their strongly written accents and liveliness of interaction. The greater length of Fluellen's role in comparison to MacMorris's is probably due to the Tudor connection to Wales, and Fluellen may be more memorable for the audience because MacMorris may be viewed as complying with the erasure of his country's memory, whereas Fluellen echoes Henry's language of remembrance, especially concerning the Welsh connection to England.<sup>267</sup> This compliance of MacMorris is often mistaken for a manifestation of Irish quick temper. When Fluellen tries to engage MacMorris in a debate about the proper disciplines of the war in relation to the placement of mines, the Irishman retorts that "it is no time to discourse," to which Fluellen begins, "Captain MacMorris, I think, look you, under your correction, there is not many of your nation--." MacMorris's fiery response is "Of my nation? What ish my nation? Ish a villain and a bastard and a knave and a rascal? What ish my nation? Who talks of my nation?"(3.2.122-124). Philip Edwards explains that MacMorris is taking exception to the phrase "your nation" because it seems to imply that MacMorris as an Irishman is the member of a separate nation from Fluellen as a Welshman. Edwards contends that MacMorris is not daring Fluellen to insult his people once more but rather is incensed at the implication that the Irish are a separate nation from the British

---

<sup>266</sup> Gurr,4 : Baldo, 145.

<sup>267</sup> Baldo, 147.

nation to which Fluellen obviously regards the Welsh as belonging.<sup>268</sup> This view, as Baldo notes, is certainly “consistent with the amnesiac nature of power in the play, which is shown quietly forgetting anything that might challenge it: all the more powerfully, forgetting under the cloak of a rhetoric of remembrance.”<sup>269</sup> Although the incensed Irishman threatens in stereotypical fashion to cut off Fluellen’s head, the play presents him (and Ireland by synecdoche) as a sort of unruly younger brother to Fluellen and Wales, a member of the horizontal brotherhood whose assimilation is not yet quite complete, thus confirming the colonialist view that Ireland needs English rule. It is likely that all four captains are auditors of Henry’s demotic rhetoric that, oblivious to geographical origin and social standing, subsumes his troops into a homogenous English band of brothers.

#### 5.9 “Plotted Exculpation” Means Never Having to Say You’re Sorry

Both Henry IV and Henry V have been characterized in this project as engaging in the kind of forgetting that Nietzsche espouses as essential to the most tremendous natures that are capable of achieving greatness. While the inability to forget the guilt of his usurpation encumbers Henry IV, his son surpasses him, partly because of his remove from the trespass and partly because he possesses a greater degree of the plasticity that facilitates liberation from the past. Although he is a virtuoso of forgetfulness, Henry V is not a total amnesiac. As Nietzsche suggests, a man of his nature assimilates what the past has to offer and exercises its utility in forging the present. From his father, Henry V has learned the expediency of busying his nobles’ minds with foreign quarrels, and Hal surpasses his father by actually prosecuting the foreign campaign to emerge a victor. Likewise, Henry V also appropriates from the past the cautionary tale of his father and debilitating guilt. Anthony Guy Patricia maintains that Shakespeare demonstrates clearly throughout the second Henriad that “the memory of Richard II lingered so palpably and so tenaciously after his death that Henry IV never felt totally secure on the

---

<sup>268</sup> Phillip Edwards, *Threshold of a Nation: A Study in English and Irish Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 75-76.

<sup>269</sup> Baldo, 148.

throne.”<sup>270</sup> Consequently, throughout the play, Henry V takes great pains to establish in his own mind as well as the minds of others the certainty of his innocence in his acts of sovereignty. For Henry V, exculpation means the right to forget personal responsibility in events of state. Bradley Greenburg points to four key scenes in *Henry V* where the King engages in “plotted exculpation” by which he manages to transfer accountability to others at crucial moments of decision-making, often without their awareness of its happening. Greenburg treats of these four scenes as illustrative of “a conspicuous habit of avoidance or, alternately, a proactive confrontational response to the exigencies of kingship.”<sup>271</sup> I consider them rather as demonstrating an implementation of a self-defensive, amnesic plasticity necessary to future achievement. The four instances to be considered are: the establishment of claims to the French throne by manipulation of the Church and the insult from the French Dauphin; the defeat of the conspiracy of Cambridge, Scoop, and Grey; the threat to Harfleur’s governor of personal blame for the mayhem that will follow his refusal to surrender; and the debate with Williams on the eve of Agincourt.

The opening scene of *Henry V*, which is actually somewhat of a let-down following an enthusiastic invitation by the Chorus to kindly judge “our play,” finds the bishops Ely and Canterbury in an earnest conversation. Baldo holds that it works to establish the alliance between official memory and forgetting.<sup>272</sup> The King will expediently forget a proposed law necessitating the surrender of much of the Church’s wealth to the crown if, in addition to a hefty contribution to the war chest, the Archbishop can present a compelling recitation of historical memory that will disallow the application of Salic Law, thus legitimizing Henry V’s French claim.<sup>273</sup> For Henry V, there are two essential courses of action to be taken simultaneously, a foreign quarrel to busy giddy minds and the avoidance of culpability. Greenburg holds that the rhetorical strength of Henry’s invitation to the Archbishop to make interpretation of the Salic Law comes from Henry’s

---

<sup>270</sup> Anthony Guy Patricia, “The Courses of His Youth Promised It Not;” *Henry V* and the Play of Memory,” *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium*, 2009, Vol. 9, 76.

<sup>271</sup> Greenburg, 184.

<sup>272</sup> Baldo, 156.

<sup>273</sup> Baldo, 156-157.



“success in sounding the drum of humility over and over again.”<sup>274</sup> However, this strength could just as easily be located in the King’s dogged persistence in avoiding the burden of guilt. He is most severe in his admonition to the prelates concerning their argument in support of his pursuit of the French crown, so much so that no one could doubt his almost obsessive diligence in avoiding the slightest taint of blame. He demands that they “justly and religiously” present their argument against the applicability of Salic Law to his claim, and enjoins them from “opening titles miscreate, whose right / Suits not in native colors with the truth” (1.2.16-17). Warning that the prelates should “take heed how thou impawn our person”(21), Henry demonstrates that he knows exactly what will be the result of their favorable explication—there will be “much fall of blood.” Henry V removes the responsibility far from himself by referring to his own sword of war as currently sleeping and by locating the blame in a nebulous, unnamed “him whose wrongs gives edge unto the swords / That makes such waste in brief mortality” (1.2.27-28). The Archbishop’s memory-taxing recitation is both a metatheatrical device that emphasizes the monarchy’s immense interest in the recorded memory of a pedigree and also a way to call attention to the skillful manipulation of national memory that Henry now oversees. As Baldo puts it, “Canterbury’s speech suggests that the Church has been relieved of its role as caretaker of the collective memory...[T]hough the bishops may have bought some time before their lands are transferred to the crown, the titles to collective memory have, even as they speak, been signed over to Henry and his heirs.”<sup>275</sup> Following Canterbury’s rehearsal of the lengthy ancestry, Henry’s fastidious query “May I with right and conscience make this claim?” is met with the prelate’s almost exasperated retort: “The sin upon my head, dread sovereign!” This answer could be understood as evidence of frustration (and fear that he may have to go through that long memory-draining lineage again), but it is precisely what Henry is goading him to say in front of a throne room (and theater) filled with auditors. Canterbury, not Henry, publicly assumes the moral responsibility for

---

<sup>274</sup> Greenburg,190.

<sup>275</sup> Baldo,157.

the invasion of France. Exeter, Westmoreland, Ely and Canterbury all assert the allegiance and financial support of both nobility and the Church.

Although Henry diffidently raises the concern of Scottish opportunism if he leads his army to France, Exeter and Canterbury offer a strategy whereby Henry will take one-fourth of his powers into France and the rest will guard the homeland. The King now has successfully transferred responsibility for this enterprise from himself onto the nobles as well as the clergy, and protects himself and his reign from blame. By so doing, Greenburg says, Henry breaks “the inherited chain of association between illegitimacy, rebellion, and deposition.”<sup>276</sup> Some would characterize this strategy as pure Machiavellianism, but the focus just as easily could be on Henry’s fixation on the avoidance of guilt rather than the exercise of power. Bussing the nobles with foreign quarrels is a family tradition, and if unshackled by guilt, Henry V can surpass the greatness achieved by his father. Following Henry’s declaration that he will bend France to his awe or break it all to pieces, his emphasis is on his place in history, perhaps as fellow in epic magnitude to the likes of Alexander the Great. No half-achieved goal will do. Henry determines either to rule France in “large and ample empery”

Or lay these bones in an unworthy urn,  
Tombless, with no remembrance over them.  
Either our history shall with full mouth  
Speak freely of our acts, or else our grave,  
Like a Turkish mute, shall have a tongueless mouth,  
Not worshipp’d with a waxen epitaph. (1.2.228-233)

Although Canterbury and the French king both emphasize Henry’s familial connection with Edward, the Black Prince, and his victory at Crécy, Henry himself is strangely silent about him, working instead in the “mist of the unhistorical,” doing what he does without any intimidation by the past. Perhaps he senses that the evocation of the Black Prince would also conjure the

---

<sup>276</sup> Greenburg,190.

memory of his son, the murdered Richard II. However, Henry does invoke the memory of the illustrious ancestors of his fighting men, those who fought valiantly and ultimately sheathed their swords for lack of argument, but their inspiration resulting in victory is part of his plan for his own achievement of greatness. Henry V's true greatness is to be found in the yet-to-be-written history of the rapidly approaching and defining moments of the future. The concern that his history shall be spoken freely and with full mouth may be an impossibility, given his and our awareness of the always partial account that constitutes history. If Henry's history indeed speaks freely of him, it will be free and with full mouth at least in the sense that it is untainted with guilt. Such blamelessness coupled with the magnitude of historical awe attending the "large and ample empery" sought by Henry V should be seen as the absolute fulfillment of the man of vast nature.

The King is not satisfied with shifting the blame for the war with France onto the clergy and the nobility, and therefore he also entraps the unsuspecting Dauphin in culpability. The Dauphin's taunting gift of tennis balls makes a frontal assault on Henry's character, gesturing through this particular gift not only to his reputation for sporting dalliance but also to his inadequacy of virility.<sup>277</sup> Handicapped by outdated information based on the King's past, the Dauphin misconceives of him as a folly-debilitated Prince Hal dressed in undeserved finery, more engrossed in dancing and drinking than in politics. Henry's measured response that he is not a tyrant but rather a Christian king whose passion is now subject to his grace invokes his past prodigality at Eastcheap, which we—and now increasingly the ambassador—recognize as having been a calculated ruse by which his emergence as himself will appear "more goodly." In an attempt to counter Henry's unexpected dignity and equanimity, the embassy tenaciously reports that the Dauphin believes him to "savour too much of his youth" since "there's naught in France/ That can be with a nimble galliard won: / You cannot revel into dukedoms there" (1.1.250-253). Justly famous for its force and tone,<sup>278</sup> Henry's answer filled with threat and thunder is nevertheless similar to that given to the Archbishop in that it is careful to make the Dauphin's

---

<sup>277</sup> Greenburg, 192.

<sup>278</sup> Greenburg, 193.

misstep an opportunity to exculpate the King of England from any guilt in the pursuit of war with France. Foreseeing the anguish and death resultant in such a conflict, Henry adroitly shifts the responsibility to the Dauphin:

And tell the pleasant prince this mock of his  
Hath turn'd his balls to gunstones, and his soul  
Shall stand sorely charged for the wasteful vengeance  
That shall fly with them; for many a thousand widows  
Shall this mock out of their dear husbands;  
Mock mothers from their sons, mock castles down;  
And some are yet ungotten and unborn

That shall have cause to curse the Dolphin's scorn (1.2.281-288).

Responsibility for Henry's incursion against the French is now shared by his prelates, nobles, and the arrogant and miscalculating Dauphin. Again a strategy of forgetting informs Henry V's actions, providing him with exonerating of debilitating guilt.

The second instance of Henry V's avoidance and forgetting of the burden of blame is found in relation to the plot of Cambridge, Scroop, and Grey. On the surface, guilt anxiety might seem a most inappropriate reaction for a man who has only just escaped assassination. Perhaps anger or relief would seem more fitting, for the patriotic Chorus, the prelates, and Exeter have all previously made assurance that Henry is unanimously supported and admired for the glorious transformation he has accomplished since accession to the throne. In fact, the discovered plot emerges as a half-remembered possibility from some other play but seems quite incongruous here. While bribery is given as the motivation for the treason, Henry V must exonerate himself to himself and to us for any blame that would justify the conspirators' actions, transferring the onus of the betrayal onto the depraved and avaricious traitors themselves and the French who suborned them. Henry's entrapment and subsequent interrogation of the conspirators serves to display their fault while presenting the King as having a virtually Christological blamelessness.

They are, in their infamy, “English monsters” who have forgotten the love and loyalty due to this star of England. To Cambridge, whose connection to the Mortimer claim to the throne has been discussed previously, Henry recounts the wealth, honor, and privilege he has given to Cambridge, a traitor who ungratefully repays his King with attempted murder. Lord Grey is yoked with brief mention to Cambridge, but it is Lord Scroop whose disgrace receives the King’s most severe censure. Henry’s account of the perfidy of his bedfellow, the man “that didst bear the key of all my counsels”(2.2.96), employs terms like *cruel*, *ungrateful*, *savage* and *inhuman*. Scroop’s betrayal is described by Henry as “another fall of man,” the very inception of human faultiness itself, so that Scroop’s treachery against the King is depicted as equivalent to Adamic rebellion against God, subjecting all mankind, including the audience, to the curses endemic to human existence. Henry delivers their death sentences as consequences of the havoc their treason would have visited upon the people of England rather than as the punishment for the intended assassination of Henry himself: “Touching our person seek we no revenge” (2.2.174). The conspirators are condemned for what Henry asserts is greater villainy—of seeking to sell England’s nobles into French servitude, her subjects to the tyranny and contempt of France, and the English nation to desolation. God is credited with bringing to light the treachery of the three, and His providential care of the blameless Henry V, balanced against the massive guilt of the plotters, negates any possibility of fault for the King. However, there is vestigial evidence of the play’s metadramatic self-consciousness even in such an apparently straightforward chain of events. Prior to the conspirators’ indictment, Henry ironically asserts to them that he is quite sure that all who sail for France with him as well as all who remain behind, including these commissioners, “wish success and conquest to attend on us” (2.2.23-24). The little-noted traitor Thomas Grey replies that “those who were your father’s enemies / Have steeped their galls in honey, and do serve you / With hearts create of duty and of zeal” (2.2.29-31). This assertion is a complete falsehood, since those who were his father’s enemies are now his enemies and actually support the claim of Edmund Mortimer to the English throne. The factionalism of the nobility of the

previous two plays has not been forgotten after all but apparently merely driven underground. Factionalism is elided from the national memory that *Henry V* constructs, but it hovers about the edges of our awareness. The Cambridge plot indeed emerges as a half-remembered possibility from some other play—the deposition and murder of Richard II. Although the Cambridge conspiracy serves the theatrical and affective purposes of foregrounding Henry's blamelessness, the similarity remains between those who are in collusion to murder Henry V and the earlier confederates Bolingbroke and the Percy family, who deposed and murdered Richard II. Small wonder that Henry is anxious to set cheerily to sea and to advance the signs of war on French soil.

Once landed in France, Henry runs a brazen bluff on the governor of Harfleur, initiating the third instance in which the King shifts guilt for an impending calamity onto another person. Warning that this is “the latest parle we will admit”(3.3.2), Henry utilizes the gambit of a final offer to urge the governor to surrender to the King's “best mercy” or stigmatize forever himself and his citizens as “men proud of destruction.” Refusal will be interpreted as a haughty challenge to “defy us to our worst,” which Henry graphically elaborates in terms of revolting violence against “fresh fair virgins,” naked infants, and aged fathers. The King rejects any notion of this unrestrained brutality as being his personal responsibility:

What is it then to me, if impious War,  
Arrayed in flames like to the prince of fiends,  
Do with his smirch'd complexion all fell feats  
Enlink'd to waste and desolation?  
What is't to me, when you yourselves are cause,  
If your pure maidens fall into the hand  
Of hot and forcing violation? (3.3.15-21)

Henry asks what can possibly restrain vengeful licentiousness once it begins its rampage, noting that it would be as impossible for him to forestall the destruction and mayhem as to order

leviathan ashore. He thus depicts himself as personally powerless to determine what will happen to Harfleur, and appeals to the governor and his train to take pity on their own people. After another explicit depiction of the impending carnage, Henry demands that they yield and avoid it or, “guilty in defense,” allow their city to be obliterated. Whatever happens to Harfleur will not weigh on the King’s conscience, since its fate is determined solely by the governor’s compliance or lack thereof. Should the governor refuse, the horrors visited upon the city will be the “fell feats” of “impious War,” not of Henry V.

The last instance in which Greenburg notes Henry’s engagement in “plotted exculpation” is the conversation with Williams, John Bates, and Alexander Court in 4.1. This scene’s illustration of the discrepancy between the historical version enunciated by the Chorus and the events portrayed onstage was considered earlier in this chapter as was the scene’s connection to Henry’s forgetful rhetoric produced in hopes of forging a national unity rooted in “horizontal comradeship.” I now focus more closely on this scene in terms of Henry’s attempt to exonerate himself of any answerability for the physical and spiritual fate of his soldiers.

The discussion with Williams takes an unexpected turn for Henry when he discovers that these three soldiers (and perhaps a great many others) are unconvinced of the justness of the King’s cause for which this military campaign has been undertaken. Williams’ straightforward denial “force[s Henry] into the danger zone of dramatic dialogue.”<sup>279</sup> Grennan opines that “Henry cannot cope directly with the moral can of worms that Williams opens when he says that ‘if the cause be not good, the King himself hath a heavy reckoning to make’ (135-136) nor with the emotional demands created by the soldier’s styleless but powerful evocation of the horror of ‘all those legs and arms and heads, chopped off in a battle’” (136-146).<sup>280</sup> This case is unlike the first instance of exculpation in which the prelates voluntarily took upon their own heads the sin of claiming the French throne, or the second in which the conspirators readily owned up to their treason, or even the third in which Henry deftly transferred the blame for violence onto the victims

---

<sup>279</sup> Grennan, 374.

<sup>280</sup> Grennan, 374.

themselves. This fourth occasion, in which Henry seeks to distance himself from responsibility for his soldiers' deaths, does not proceed smoothly. In response to Williams' evocation of dismembered bodies confronting their King at Judgment Day, Henry employs what seems a hastily concocted defense, in which his analogies involving a son sent on an errand of merchandising and a servant dispatched with a sum of money do not parallel the predicament of Henry's soldiers in the advancement of the war. In both hypothetical cases, the son and the servant were involved in harmless commerce that was thwarted by accident and crime, and Henry deploys a rather transparent circular reasoning in assuming his war efforts are as blameless as the merchandising of the father and the financial transaction of the master. In an almost imperceptible shift, the masquerading King, warming to his cause, according to Grennan, "tacks a brilliantly digressive course into the calmer waters of divinity, where he demonstrates the orthodox truth of personal moral responsibility."<sup>281</sup> If the father is not responsible if his son dies unabsolved of his sins, and if the master is not culpable for the "irreconciled iniquities" with which his servant faces eternal judgment, then the King is not at fault if his men die bearing their own moral burdens. This concern, of course, is not the crux of Williams' indictment of the present military campaign. Nevertheless, noting the impossibility of the King's pursuit of a military action with morally immaculate soldiers, Henry contends that many of them may even be criminals who have escaped justice in England, but "they have no wings to fly from God" (4.1.168-169). According to Henry V, the King is no more answerable for their deaths in estrangement from God than he was for their actual sins. In a rather startling reversal of the King's imagery, war is no longer the impious double of Satan, arrayed in flames and performing foul deeds as evoked at Harfleur. War is now God's beadle, the agent of divine justice.

Having reaffirmed the realization that every man bears responsibility for his soul's deposition after death, Henry can devoutly urge that every soldier make himself clean of his soul to prepare for eternity. If death is not his fate in the impending battle, his survival is God's merciful

---

<sup>281</sup> Grennan, 374.



blessing to allow the fortunate soldier “to teach others how they should prepare” (4.1.185). What remains unaddressed is the very issue Williams first posed—does a just cause precipitate this conflict in which the King’s soldiers face injury and possible death? In championing his own situation, Henry works mightily to push from himself the guilt for the agony and death of tomorrow’s conflict, and his apparent self-justification is that these ills will be the result of God’s will, not the King’s. Henry’s theology, which ascribes every human event to divine Providence, seems incompatible with benignity and mercy, given that the straining of that logic pronounces the Holocaust and the most horrific villainies and devastating natural disasters to be the fulfillment of God’s inscrutable, unavoidable will. Henry’s campfire rhetoric is a sleight-of-hand whereby God, not the vast, ambitious nature of Henry V, is the compelling force behind the looming warfare. Although the soldiers concur with “Harry Le Roy’s” assertion that every man’s soul is his own responsibility, they remain unpersuaded about the justice of the King’s cause.

It is possible that Henry V begins to realize that he may indeed be culpable for the result of the battle, and thus, after the scuffle with Williams, the solitary Henry appeals in soliloquy to God on whom he has transferred his guilt, begging Him not to hold Henry accountable for his father’s sin of usurpation. Later, having publically blamed God for the individual outcomes of the war, Henry V in victory, and perhaps with relief, gives God the credit for the seemingly impossible English victory, with the command to sing “Non Nobis” and “Te Deum” and the pious affirmation that “God fought for us.”

Of all the instances in which Henry V eludes the crippling burden of guilt, this last seems to be the most emotionally demanding. Forgetting responsibility for the injuries and slaughter that may occur appears to be harder than Henry conceived it would be, perhaps because he is attempting this vindication as a supposed equal among equals rather than as their King. Henry apparently has underestimated these ordinary men and thus employed a sort of rhetorical shortcut with them in seeking acquiescence in the French campaign, and his slipshod efforts meet with resistance. These are the peers of Francis and the other drawers, who, said Hal in 1

*Henry IV*, supposedly think him a fine young fellow and whose language he claims to speak fluently. Earlier the ecclesiasts and the nobles were skillfully led into making Henry's case for an invasion of France for him while he feigned reticent indifference. The King does not attempt such a convoluted and sophisticated strategy with the common soldiers but instead makes simplistic patriotic assertions of loyalty that he expects his soldiers to ratify wholeheartedly. Henry's self-pitying soliloquy in which he complains of being subject to "the breath of every fool" reflects growing fatigue with the maintenance of exoneration. This exchange presents the most severe trial of his plasticity thus far. That he is able to utilize the night's experience to his advantage to inform the Saint Crispin's Day speech is testimony to his ability, as Nietzsche describes it, "to heal wounds," especially psychological ones such as those inadvertently inflicted by Williams, "to replace what is lost," perhaps his self-assurance in his ability to motivate his soldiers; and "to reshape broken forms," such as his shattered certainty of his innocence in advancing the war as well as the horizontal community of his countrymen.

#### 5.10 Nietzschean Plasticity: Just How Far Can It Stretch?

Although there are undoubtedly several possible explanations of what Henry V is in this play, one of them is Shakespeare's version of the man of action and of vast nature, capable of overcoming the crippling aspects of the past and taking decisive action in the mist of the as yet unhistorical moment, facilitated in this by the plasticity afforded by forgetfulness. Nietzsche's discussion of plasticity was not limited to the individual but rather also applied to "a people." Henry V's efforts at uniting his subjects into a nation-state, the Andersonian "imagined community," are undertaken with the same strategy he utilizes for his own unity, which is the national amnesia of factionalism described by Ernest Renan. This similarity of strategy becomes clear when we return to Nietzsche and concentrate on this now-familiar passage in terms of the nation-state instead of a single individual.

To determine this ...boundary at which the past has to be forgotten if it is not to be the gravedigger of the present, one would have to know exactly how great the *plastic power*

of a man, a people, a culture is: I mean by plastic power the capacity to develop out of oneself in one's own way, to transform and incorporate into oneself what is past and foreign, to heal wounds, to replace what has been lost, to recreate broken moulds.<sup>282</sup>

The ability of a nation-state to rise above the factionalism of its past requires forgetting, and Nietzsche describes this ability in terms of a nation's "capacity to develop out of [itself] in [its] own way" as well as its incorporation of what was formerly "foreign" (such as the Irish and the Welsh). The formation of a nation-state entails likewise the healing of the wounds of past animosities and the replacement of "lost" or subsumed customs and languages with a new national memory in which the factions coalesce in Anderson's horizontal brotherhood or "imagined community."

Yet, true to the metadramatic self-consciousness that Rackin finds characteristic of *Henry V*, the band of brothers created by an amnesia of social status seems about to be "disbanded" by the play's final scene. The occurrence is first hinted at by another of the faultlines that make apparent the self-consciousness of the play. Williams' line "I warrant it is to knight you" opens 4.8, giving his speculation as to why Captain Gower is summoned into the King's presence by Fluellen. However, rather than resulting in Gower's knighthood, the scene degenerates into the rather unfunny business of the King's glove that Henry left with Fluellen to make him the target of Williams' physical attack. The purpose of Gower's summons, like the elision of social rank among Henry's troops, is peremptorily forgotten, and Gower is no more gentled beyond the temporary and figurative degree he received during the King's speech. Again this subtle textual signpost points self-consciously at the fissures in the play's claims.

In the scene in which Henry woos Princess Katharine, new amnesias displace previous circumstances that the play seemed determined to bring about. The term *brother*, used to such effect in the St. Crispin's Day speech to his troops by Henry V, is now applied to his foe, Charles of France. While it might be contended that this term is merely used in the sense that Exeter used it in speaking of the expectations of Henry's "brother kings," the audience cannot help but

---

<sup>282</sup> Nietzsche, Translated by Hollingdale, 62.

remember its relationship to the formation of the band of English brothers, its near sacredness in its connection to the shedding of blood by the King's troops. In fact, both the French Charles and his wife Isabel use the term *brother* in referring to Henry, and this would seem an intentional overuse of the word to emphasize its previous application to the common yeomen in the English army at Agincourt. Helgerson and others might consider this an illustration of their contention concerning the effacement and alienation of the commoners. However, one can also view the employment of fraternal language among the royals as monarchist blather, as when American office holders refer to their bitter political rivals as "good friends" or "esteemed colleagues." It might be maintained that Henry's use of the language of brotherhood toward his former enemy is made in the cynical certainty that the commoners of Henry's army will be—as Williams said of their awareness of Henry's possible ransom after their throats were cut—none the wiser. Baldo disparages Henry's conduct: "A democratic sense of brotherhood or familial connection across social classes but within national boundaries yields to a rhetoric tied to dynastic descent and deployed to foster solidarity within a social class and across national boundaries."<sup>283</sup> In Baldo's eyes, Henry is "willing to jettison" his oratory of the nation-state when it blocks his political ends, such as at the moment of entry into a dynastic marriage with Katharine of France. Certainly it is true that, despite the King's rhetoric about gentling their blood, none of the common soldiers will appear at court or overhear the negotiations with the French. Nevertheless, the question remains: what do Henry's critics actually expect the playwright to have the King do concerning the commoners? Henry's St. Crispin's Day speech has instituted a yearly reunion of memory to be held each October 25<sup>th</sup>, during which the veterans will commemorate the victory in their own ways, but surely none of these men anticipate that Henry will show up for dinner at their homes or invite them to his. That is because for even Henry's men themselves, the band of brothers is an "imagined community," not a literal one, and, for men drawn from widely separated provinces, their annual reunions will be largely psychological rather than physical gatherings. Charnes'

---

<sup>283</sup> Baldo, 142.

concept of the arrival of an idea from the future is most applicable here in that we have no difficulty in recognizing the demotic fellowship of Henry and his soldiers before Agincourt as it plays out in a sixteenth century theater. It resembles our own experience of relatively easy movement among various people in modern society. The castigation of Henry V for the failure to maintain such an egalitarian relationship after the battle overlooks the strange newness of such a relationship in early modern times. Rather than appreciating Shakespeare's rare vision of an imagined community centuries in advance of its time, critics vilify his ideas for crawling instead of running.

In time, the feudal order of Henry's reign fades away, and the new nation that is emerging in Elizabethan times will take its place. Baldo judges that the play's final scene with the French princess attempts to reconcile the rhetoric of a dynastic realm and the rhetoric of the nation-state that the play has presented in full, but he maintains that this reconciliation is an uneasy one.<sup>284</sup> This unease is possibly intentional, thereby drawing attention to the inherent difference between the two versions of the nation. However, if the recognition of the difference between the two conceptions of the nation were all that Shakespeare intended to accomplish, he could have left Katharine out of things and had Henry V merely conduct business with her father and Burgundy, and "there an end."

#### 5.11 "Why Is [Katharine] Here?"

The Chorus of act 5 is noticeably silent about Katharine, although before the siege of Harfleur in 3.1 he mentions that the French king offers her and a dowry of "some petty and unprofitable dukedoms," but Harry does not like this offer—at least not yet. We do not know if Harry has ever met Katharine before the infamous "wooing scene," and although "love at first sight" is not an uncommon occurrence in Shakespeare, such romanticism seems so out of place that the scene has elicited an assortment of critical responses. Dr. Johnson's view was that the playwright just ran out of material and did not know when to quit, making Katharine part of a

---

<sup>284</sup> Baldo, 142.

superfluous blemish on the play. Henry is not wooing Katharine, says P. K. Ayers (1994), but rather telling her that her submission is required as the symbolic and literal submission of France. Ayers finds that Harry's linguistic genius is actually somewhat of a curse because he does not reflect himself in his speech but rather what those to whom he speaks are expecting, so that he himself becomes largely invisible. Hal-Harry-Henry will be what those around him want or need to be. The lack of a core "identity" often found by considering a person's speech is thus frustrated in the case of Henry V in Ayers' view. Such shape-shifting speech is the source, says Ayers, of the "cacophony of critical voices that surrounds the figure of Henry in all his guises." The split between ironic and heroic interpretations of Henry becomes irrelevant because both the play and its protagonist are created by ambiguity and contradiction that preclude either view alone and encompass both.<sup>285</sup> While I allow that Ayers' attitude toward the wooing of Katharine could be defended by what is present in the text, the same text does not preclude taking a less cynical view of this scene. Howard and Rackin condemn it as enacting a "symbolic rape" of Katharine sanctioned by a paternalistic system. While they consider marriage in the earlier histories as affirmations of the medieval dynastic structure, they view it as transformed by what they see as the prevalence of rape in *Henry V* that "illuminates the dark underside of the emergent conception of marriage as the proof of manhood and the necessary basis for patriarchal authority."<sup>286</sup> One is unsure why they choose to date "the emergent conception of marriage as the proof of manhood and the necessary basis for patriarchal authority" to the sixteenth century. Nor is exactly clear how Henry's arranged marriage to Katharine differs from most arranged marriages that preceded it. While women are usually viewed as the victims of such loveless but politically expedient unions, the same possibility often existed for a young heir betrothed to a bride while both were but children. While I will allow that Katharine is not truly in a position to play coy, feminist denunciation of his speech to her as threatening rape and violence seems to be looking for such

---

<sup>285</sup> P. K. Ayers, "'Fellows of Infinite Tongue': Henry V and the King's English," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* (Spring 1994), 253-277.

<sup>286</sup> Howard and Rackin, 196.

speech to confirm their assertions. Henry V tells Katharine—and us—that he will speak to her “plain soldier.” It seems naïve to expect tender Petrarchan conceits. There are other ways to answer the question of Katharine’s presence in a less condemnatory light.

One way to view her presence is to recognize that she is an ancestor of the Tudor line, having married Owen Tudor after the death of Henry V. Henry VII, founder of the Tudor line, was her grandson, but the claim of Henry VII to the English throne actually derived, like Henry V’s claim to France, through the female line from his mother, Lady Margaret Beaufort, a great-granddaughter of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster and the third son of Edward III and his third wife Katherine Swynford. She was Gaunt’s mistress for many years, and when they married in 1396, they already had produced four children, including Henry VII’s great-grandfather, John Beaufort. Thus Henry VII’s claim to the English throne was actually somewhat fragile: it was from a woman as well as by illegitimate descent. All of these historical resonances would have been apparent to the Elizabethan nobles and particularly to the Queen herself and would have more than justified the appearance of Katharine of Valois in the play’s final scene. Shakespeare’s shorthand for this, which may be intended for the commoners who might be less aware of the convolution of royal descent, is to make the Welsh blood of Owen Tudor flow backwards and into the veins of Henry, Katharine’s first husband, allowing him to claim to Fluellen, “I am Welsh, you know,” despite the fact that he was not. Fluellen is so delighted with Henry’s acknowledgement of his Welsh blood that he asserts that “all the water in the Wye cannot wash Your Majesty’s Welsh blood out of your pody”—an intriguing twist on the imagery of liquidity and forgetfulness. Welsh river water is judged incapable of producing forgetfulness of Henry’s non-existent Welsh blood. Philip Schwyzer has said that “from the perspective of later British nationalism, Henry V has no future; he merely embodies the usurping Anglo-Saxon bloodline rushing towards its ultimate and deserved dead end.”<sup>287</sup> The subtle conflation of Henry V and Owen Tudor—both husbands of

---

<sup>287</sup> Philip Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 127.

Katharine of Valois—connects the subsequent Tudor line with Henry's famous victories and their patriotic fervor.

Another way to justify the presence of Katharine in this final scene in terms of amnesia is to consider that the playwright seeks through forgetfulness to allow Henry V some degree of the share in common humanity to which he laid claim as he talked with Williams and the others the night before Agincourt. In so doing, Shakespeare accomplishes what Henry himself could not: he makes him emotionally accessible to the common man. Forced to forget love and family life during his relentless pursuit of greatness, Henry seems now to find time to enjoy some of life's best pleasures, and we discover that this man of vast nature is indeed very like his fellowman after all—clumsy with women, unhandsome, and woefully bad at speaking French. However, we previously have seen Henry pretend to be worse than he is in the scenes at the Boar's Head when he adopted a profligate barroom persona in order to shine more brightly in his reformation. This "plain soldier" who can "lay on like a butcher" and wants to "clap hands" to seal a marriage bargain with Kate may be using another ploy. Shakespeare is scripting what actually may be feigned incompetence, but this is a play, after all, and this part is perhaps a fantasy for the common man who recognizes his own inadequacies in the studiedly awkward wooing.

In his pursuit of the French princess, Henry seems to have forgotten his intent to bend France to his awe or break it all to pieces, and he delegates the negotiations with his conquered foe to his brothers and the English nobles. Surprisingly, the result of their agreement reveals further amnesia. Henry receives not the demanded crown of France but rather the inheritance of the throne as "our dear son Henry, King of England and Heir of France."<sup>288</sup> Henry either forgets his intentions toward France expressed in his declaration of "No king of England if not king of France" (2.2.192), or he considers this conciliation merely a politic postponement of that accomplishment. Moreover, in the manner of true Nietzschean forgetfulness of what cannot be utilized productively for action in the present, it seems to have slipped Henry's mind that the

---

<sup>288</sup> Riverside footnote to lines 239-42, 971.



French are the very people who earlier tried to have him killed, both by assassins and on the battlefield. It is clear, nevertheless, that his notions of vast nature and achievement are not extinguished because he expresses his desire that he and Katharine should “compound a boy, half French, half English, that should go to Constantinople and take the Turk by the beard” (5.2.206-209). Having navigated his way through the French conflict without the memory of any lasting contamination of blame, Henry is making plans for a climactic expiation of his father’s guilt—he will father a son who will fulfill his grandfather’s penitential vow of pilgrimage to the Holy Land to deliver it from Turkish control—and increase his dynastic achievement by once again busying giddy minds with a foreign quarrel. His hope for a son, half-French half-English is expressed, not as a command but as a request at best, as an expressed hope at worse. An answer that she will be Henry’s wife will receive his declaration that England, Ireland, France, and Henry are hers. However, if Katharine is to be the mother of the half-French, half-English boy who will achieve at last the guilt-assuaging campaign against the Turk, she, too, must possess an extraordinary nature. Here is Howard and Rackin’s desire for marriage as the affirmation of dynastic succession as well as their valorization of pure bloodlines that endow the maternal figure with the capacity for subversion. Henry reveals the possibility of her own vast nature to Katharine when he declares that “nice customs cur’sy to great kings,” but the impunity of forgetfulness extends to her as well.

Dear Kate, you and I cannot be confin’d within the weak list of a country’s fashion. We are the makers of manners, Kate; and the liberty that follows our places stops the mouths of all find-faults, as I will do yours, for upholding the nice fashion of your country in denying me a kiss; (5.2.268-274).

A freedom accrues to their places, yet it is not only the independence from adherence to a country’s manners. It is also the freedom to forget whatever in the past cannot prove useful. Perhaps having escaped fear of clogging guilt, Henry now declares liberty from all fault-finds and the blame they might seek to assign. Here Henry offers Katharine his priceless possession, his

secret to success—a vastness of nature that can be attained, just as Henry's was, through judicious forgetting.

The Chorus returns to conclude the story, but there is no glossing over inconvenient truths. Henry V died young, and his son's kingdom was so mismanaged that the territory his father acquired in France was lost. The war that ensued made his England bleed.

Henry the Sixt, in infant bands crown'd King  
Of France and England, did this king succeed;  
Whose state so many had the managing,

That they lost France, and made his England bleed (5 Epilogue 9-12).

But who is the antecedent of *his*? We can choose either "Henry the Sixt" or "this king." Shakespeare again asks us to make a choice and consider the consequences of that option. There is a slight but more evocative difference if we choose Henry V as the antecedent. If "his England" is Henry V's England, it is the imagined community of subjects that he once labored to build with amnesic rhetoric, and its flow of blood points to the connections between the fluidity of liquids and forgetfulness. It is Shakespeare's subtle parting reiteration of what the second Henriad has had to say about any historical account, including even this last succinct reportage of the Chorus. All history is the potent relic of both memory and forgetfulness.

## CHAPTER 6

### ERASURE, RE-IMAGINATION, AND RE-INSCRIPTION

Intellectual attitudes inherited from the Enlightenment often have nudged us into assuming that, through evidentiary examination, the past, like everything else, is knowable, and it is only within the last few decades that we have come to question the stability of the evidence on which that judgment has been made. Shakespeare demonstrates through his later English history plays that there have always been many sides to a story of human events, and often the alternate accounts of that story have been occluded or even obliterated by whoever maintains the orthodox record. In the place of that erasure, another account emerges through re-imagination and re-inscription. Shakespeare reveals to the audience of his history plays that history is therefore constituted as much by what is forgotten as by what is preserved through his use of circumstances such as the deliberate omission of widely recorded events in the reign of Richard II, the ditzzy nostalgia of Justice Shallow, the flamboyantly costumed personage of Rumor, the brazen commandeering of another's heroism by the charming yet self-seeking Falstaff, and the overtly contradicted *res scripta* of the Chorus. The plays demonstrate that, whether fraught with the psychological survival of trauma or the arduous attainment of illustrious greatness, a person's way through life can be facilitated by forgetting. Moreover, it is apparent that the anti-theatricalists were right—the theater is indeed a place of forgetfulness, and happily so. It is clear by the end of *Henry V* that Shakespeare has absorbed the artistic benefit inherent in the forgetfulness of the audience. He can ask the audience to “work, work [their] thoughts” or imagine that they see horses or “do but think [they] stand upon the rivage,” and through this process the play, which was at first the presentation of the troupe of actors, becomes the joint creation of the actors and

the audience—"our play." The temporary community that can be created by spectators through their forgetfulness during a play is likewise possible for a strangely comfortable fellowship in a nation willing to undertake amnesia of previous division and rancor.

In terms of critical scholarship, the function of forgetfulness in Shakespeare's second historical tetralogy has been for me a very fruitful area of study, but I certainly do not lay claim to having exhausted the possibilities. There is a wide range of investigation to be done in Shakespeare's comedies. Grant Williams and Christopher Ivic's *Forgetting in Early Modern English Literature and Culture: Lethe's Legacies* contains Zakariah Long's chapter about forgetfulness in *As You Like It*, and Garrett Sullivan's *Memory and Forgetting in English and Renaissance Drama* has a chapter on forgetfulness in *All's Well That Ends Well*, but I doubt that they would lay claim to exhausting the topic in those plays. Many other comedies as well remain to be examined in terms of forgetting. The forgetfulness of the scholars' vows in *Love's Labor's Lost*, the dream-induced amnesia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the ameliorative effects of forgiveness that also forgets past hurts in *Much Ado About Nothing*, and Olivia's struggle against forgetfulness of her brother in *Twelfth Night* are but a few instances of forgetting that await examination in Shakespeare's comedies.

Equally fascinating opportunity awaits the exploration of forgetfulness in the tragedies. *Hamlet*, that precursor of *Richard II* and eponym for remembering, is paradoxically rife with instances of forgetfulness that are possibly quite different in nature and intent from those I have presented in this project. A forgetfulness of self similar to what I focus on in *Richard II* deserves scholarly attention for *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *King Lear*, filled with broken promises and senile amnesia, likewise appears very fertile territory for work devoted to forgetfulness. The Sonnets provide a wealth of opportunity to consider forgetfulness: "So I for fear of trust, forget to say / The ceremony of love's rite (XXIII, 5-6); "Where art thou, Muse, that thou forget'st so long,/ To speak of that which gives thee all thy might?" (C, 1-2). A covetous nature makes me wish for Marlowe's world enough and time to address all of these fascinating possibilities.

I have chosen in this project to consider forgetfulness as functioning in a positive, productive way—primarily because such a view is counter to the Elizabethan penchant for pathologizing and vilifying forgetfulness, but also because there has already been much study given to the valorization of memory and commemoration in Shakespeare. However, forgetfulness as annihilating oblivion also deserves investigation, although one would hope that it does not wander into a mere explication of memory turned inside out. Robert N. Watson's *The Rest Is Silence: Death as Annihilation in the English Renaissance* is testimony to the depth of thought that consideration of forgetfulness and its extrapolation to oblivion can elicit.<sup>289</sup> I have equal admiration for Stephen Greenblatt's *Hamlet in Purgatory*, which considers the causes and consequences of forgetfulness of the dead for the living in Protestant Reformation England.<sup>290</sup>

The strategies of forgetfulness that Shakespeare mobilizes in the second Henriad are not alien to our own time. In fact, in *The Protean Self* (1993), Robert Jay Lifton, known for his studies of the psychological effects of war and violence, observes that such a protean self enabled by beneficial plasticity indeed is evolving for mankind today. Proteanism, from the shape-shifting Greek god, has as one of its three manifestations the ability to hold a multiplicity of varied and even antithetical images and ideas at any one time—which is very similar to, if not the same as the perspectivism of Shakespeare. According to Lifton, such proteanism is what makes it possible to survive in our own “age of fragmentation,” one which he finds very akin to the Renaissance.<sup>291</sup> Reinventing oneself amid changes of jobs, cross-country moves, and the cultural upheaval endemic to our time requires the ability to re-evaluate and forget what is dysfunctional or outdated in our present condition. However, despite its applicability for today, such protean forgetfulness sometimes is paradoxically rendered difficult in our own time by the ease with which one's past can be summoned up by technology, for although one may outlive his accomplices, YouTube

---

<sup>289</sup> Robert N. Watson, *The Rest Is Silence: Death as Annihilation in the English Renaissance*, (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994), 1-416.

<sup>290</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, (Princeton: Princeton U P, 2001), 1-322.

<sup>291</sup> Robert Jay Lifton, *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation*, (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 3,8.

videos apparently last forever. Given our situatedness in an age of fragmentation similar to that of the sixteenth century, we can, perhaps more so than any time since their creation, identify with the attempts by historically-trapped characters to navigate their own existences through forgetfulness.

Peter Burke notes in an essay on social memory that the old maxim about history being written by the victors should be expanded because “it might also be said that history is forgotten by the victors.” Victors, says Burke, “can afford to forget, while the losers are unable to accept what happened and are condemned to brood over it, relive it, and reflect how different it might have been.”<sup>292</sup> The truth of Burke’s statement concerning the forgetful historiography of winners is clearly illustrated in the second Henriad and is underscored particularly in *Henry V* with what Rackin calls its “self-conscious meta-theatricality.” Shakespeare enables the audience to apprehend the obviously forgetful and constructed nature of the victors’ historical record through the speeches of the Chorus. He is the personification of the reality that the winners write history, and through the various incongruities created between what he narrates and the events the audience witnesses, there arises a growing awareness of the partiality (both in quantity and nature) of the *res scripta* of the Chorus. In the midst of the forgetful victors’ account, the losers in Shakespeare’s second Henriad “brood, relive it and reflect how different it might have been.” The deposed Richard can only hope that Isabel will disseminate the *de casibus* “lamentable tale of me.” Hotspur’s ignominious defeat will die to history along with his valor, and the vanquished French must live in “shame and eternal shame, nothing but shame.” As conquerors in control of the historical record, the Lancastrians easily can forget or at least re-characterize their own “mistreadings” and have their “naughty bits taken out”—except that Shakespeare keeps showing the audience the meta-theatrical puppet strings and trap doors.

Memory and forgetfulness seem somehow inextricably connected to assessments of victory and defeat in life, whether it be the bloodied battlefields of Shrewsbury and Agincourt or

---

<sup>292</sup> Peter Burke, “History as Social Memory,” in *Memory, History, Culture and the Mind*, ed. Thomas Butler, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 106.

the reminiscences of a very old man. The French at Agincourt cannot disclaim the historical fact of their defeat, and yet, despite Burke's assertion about the inability of those who are defeated by life to forget, sometimes the obscure losers in life actually are able to forget their personal failures, and like Justice Shallow in his cups, to re-imagine their pasts in such a way that their disgraces morph into nostalgic successes. Shakespeare's second Henriad reveals that powerful, restorative benefits are afforded an individual or a nation that engages in judicious forgetfulness.

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1991.
- Ayers, P. K. "'Fellows of Infinite Tongue': Henry V and the King's English." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* (Spring 1994): 253-77.
- Baker, Herschel. Introduction to Henry V in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *English Literary Renaissance*. 2008: 55-82.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Memory in Shakespeare's Histories: Stages of Forgetting in Early Modern England*, (London: Routledge, 2012),3
- Baldo, Jonathan. "'Into a thousand parts': Representing the Nation in *Henry V*."
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Wars of Memory in *Henry V*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* (1996): 132-159.
- Barish, Jonas. "Remembering and Forgetting in Shakespeare." In *Elizabethan Theater: Essays in Honor of S. Schoenbaum*. Edited by R. B. Parker and S. P. Zitner. Newark: U of Delaware P, 1996.
- Barroll, Leeds. "A New History for Shakespeare and His Time." In *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Richard II*. Edited by Kirby Farrell. New York: G. K. Hall, 1999.
- Bell, Robert H. "The anatomy of folly in Shakespeare's 'Henriad,'" *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*. 2001, Vol. 14 Issue 2:187.
- Berger, Harry Jr. *Making Trifles of Terrors: Redistributing Complicities in Shakespeare*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Sneak's Noise or Rumor and Detextualization in *2 Henry IV*." *The Kenyon Review* N. S. (Fall1984):58-78.



- Bergeron, David M. "Shakespeare Makes History: 2 *Henry IV*." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* (Spring, 1991): 231-245.
- Berry, Edward I. "The Rejection Scene in 2 *Henry IV*." *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* Vol. 17, No. 2, Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama (Spring, 1977), 201-218.
- Betteridge, Thomas. *Shakespearean Fantasy and Politics*. Hatfield, Hertfordshire: U of Hertfordshire P, 2005.
- Bevington, David. "Introduction to The Life of King Henry the Fifth," *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Glenview: Scott, 1980.
- Blinde, Loren M. "Rumored History in Shakespeare's 2 *Henry IV*." *English Literary Renaissance* (Winter, 2008): 34-54.
- Bolles, Edmund Blair. *Remembering and Forgetting: An Inquiry into the Nature of Memory*. New York: Walker and Co, 1988.
- Bolzoni, Lina. *The Gallery of Memory: Literary and Iconographic Models in the Age of the Printing Press (Stanza della memoria)*. Trans. Jeremy Parzen. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Play of Images. The Art of Memory from Its origins to the Seventeenth Century." In *The Enchanted Loom: Chapters in the History of Neuroscience*, ed. Pietro Corsi. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Bradley, A. C. *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Oxford UP, 1909.
- Breight, Curtis. *Surveillance, Militarism and Drama in the Elizabethan Era*. New York: MacMillan, 1996.
- Bromwich, David. "What Shakespeare's Heroes Learn." *Raritan* (Spring 2010) Vol. 29 Issue 4:132-148.
- Brownlow, F. W. "*Richard II* and the Testing of Legitimacy." In *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Richard II*. Edited by Kirby Farrell. New York: G. K. Hall, 1999.

- Budra, Paul. *A Mirror for Magistrates and the de casibus Tradition*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2000.
- Burke, Peter. "History as Social Memory," in *Memory, History, Culture and the Mind*, ed. Thomas Butler. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989.
- Butler, Judith. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997.
- Calderwood, James L. *Metadrama in Shakespeare's "Henriad": "Richard II to "Henry V."* Berkley, CA: U of California P, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Richard II and the Fall of Speech." In *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Richard II*. Edited by Kirby Farrell. New York: G. K. Hall, 1999.
- Caldwell, Ellen M. "'Banish All the World': Falstaff's Iconoclastic Threat to Kingship in *1 Henry IV*." *Renaissance* (Summer 2007): 219-245.
- Carroll, William C. "Theories of Kingship in Shakespeare's England." in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works Vol. II: The Histories*. eds. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard. New York: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.
- Charnes, Linda. *Notorious Identity: Materializing the Subject in Shakespeare*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Reading for the Wormholes: Micro-periods from the Future." Early Modern Culture: An Electronic Seminar. Special Issue 6, "Timely Meditations." <http://emc.eserver.org/1-6/issue6.html> (2 March 2011).
- Chernaik, Warren. *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare's History Plays*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007.
- Clegg, Cyndia Sue. "Censorship and the Problems with History in Shakespeare's England," in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works Vol. II: The Histories*. eds. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard. New York: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.
- Coffman, George R. "John Gower, Mentor for Royalty: Richard II." *PMLA* (Sep., 1954): 953-964.

- Cohen, Derek. "The Culture of Violence in *2 Henry IV*." *Shakespeare Studies*. XXI (1993): 55-71.
- Daniel, S. *The Civile Wares between the Howses of Lancaster and Yorke*, (London, 1609; first published 1595), A2.
- Dewar, Mary. *Sir Thomas Smith: A Tudor Intellectual in Office*. London: The Athlone Press, 1964.
- Dollimore, Jonathan and Alan Sinfield, "History and Ideology: The Instance of *Henry V*," in *Alternative Shakespeares*. ed. John Drakakis. New York: Methuen, 1985.
- Edwards, Phillip. *Threshold of a Nation: A Study in English and Irish Drama* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979.
- Eliot, T. S. "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca." In *Selected Essays*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950.
- Engle, William E. *Death and Drama in Renaissance England: Shades of Memory*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The decay of memory." In *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Richard II*. Edited by Kirby Farrell. New York: G. K. Hall, 1999.
- Evans, Meredith. "Rumor, the Breath of Kings and the Body of Law in *2 Henry IV*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* (Spring, 2009): 1-24.
- Farrell, Kirby. "Prophetic Behavior in Shakespeare's Histories." *Shakespeare Studies* XVIII (1987): 17-40.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "*Play, Death, and History in Richard II*." In *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Richard II*. Edited by Kirby Farrell. New York: G. K. Hall, 1999.
- Forgetting in Early Modern English Literature and Culture: Lethe's Legacies*. eds. Christopher Ivic and Grant Williams. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Frye, Northrup. *Anatomy of Criticism. Four Essays*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957.

- Garber, Marjorie. "What's Past Is Prologue': Temporality and Prophecy in Shakespeare's History Plays," in *Renaissance Genres; Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation*. ed. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986.
- Gellner, Ernest. "Nationalism and the two forms of cohesion in complex societies." In *Culture, Identity, and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987.
- Gilbert, Miriam. "Richard II at Stratford: Role-Playing as a Metaphor." In *Shakespeare: The Theatrical Dimension*. ed. Philip C. McGuire and David Samuelson. New York: AMS Press, 1979.
- Goldman, Michael. *Shakespeare and the Energies of Drama*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972.
- Grady, Hugh. *Shakespeare, Machiavelli, and Montaigne: Power and Subjectivity from Richard II to Hamlet*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. *Hamlet in Purgatory*. Princeton: Princeton U P, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Invisible bullets: Renaissance authority and its subversion, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*." in *Political Shakespeare: New essays in cultural materialism*. ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Shakespearean Negotiations*. Berkley: U of California P, 1988.
- Greenburg, Bradley. "O for a muse of fire": *Henry V* and Plotted Self-Exculpation." *Shakespeare Studies* (2008): 182-206.
- Greenfield, Liah. *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993.
- Grennan, Eamon. "'This Story shall the Good Man Teach His son': *Henry V* and the Art of History." *PLL* (Fall, 1979): 370-82.
- Griffin, R. Morgan. "The Critical History of *Richard II*." in *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Richard II*. ed. Kirby Farrell. New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1999.
- Gurr, Andrew. *King Henry V* by William Shakespeare. ed. Andrew Gurr. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992.

- Halverson, John. "The Lamentable Comedy of *Richard II.*" In *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Richard II.* ed. Kirby Farrell. New York: G. K. Hall and Co., 1999: 262-284.
- Hamilton, Donna B. "The State of Law in *Richard II.*" *Shakespeare Quarterly* (Spring, 1983): 5-17.
- Hattaway, Michael. "Introduction" to *The Second Part of King Henry IV.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991.
- Hawkes, Terence. *Shakespeare in the Present.* London: Routledge, 2002.
- Hazlitt, William. "*Henry V*" in "The Characters in Shakespeare's Plays" in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt.* ed. P. P. Howe. 21 vols. London: J. M. Dent, 1930-1934.
- Helgerson, Richard. *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994.
- Heller, Agnes. *The Time Is Out of Joint: Shakespeare as Philosopher of History.* Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002.
- Heywood, Thomas. *An Apology for Actors.* London: Nicholas Okes, 1612.
- Holderness, Graham, "Shakespeare's Whole History," *Rethinking History: the Journal of Theory and Practice*, August 8, 2008.
- Howard, Jean E. and Phyllis Rackin. *Engendering a Nation.* London: Routledge, 1997.
- Ivic, Christopher. "Reassuring fratricide in *1 Henry IV.*" In *Forgetting in Early Modern English Literature and Culture: Lethe's Legacies.* eds. Christopher Ivic and Grant Williams. London: Routledge, 2004.
- James I. *The Political Works of James I.* ed. Charles Howard McIlwain. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1918.
- Jenkins, Keith. "'After' History." in *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice.* August 8, 2008. 7-20.
- Johnson, Samuel. *Johnson on Shakespeare.* ed. Arthur Sherbo. Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, VII. New Haven: Yale UP, 1968.

- Jones, Robert C. *These Valiant Dead: Renewing the Past in Shakespeare's Histories*, Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1991.
- Kamps, Ivo. *Historiography and Ideology in Stuart Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Writing of History in Shakespeare England," in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works Vol. II: The Histories*. eds. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard. New York: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.
- Kehler, Dorothea. "King of Tears: Mortality in *Richard II*." *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* (1985): 7-18.
- Kezar, Dennis. "Shakespeare's Guilt Trip in *Henry V*." *Modern Language Quarterly* (Sept, 2000): 431-461.
- Kiefer, Frederick. "Rumor, Fame and Slander in *2 Henry IV*," *Allegorica: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Literature* 20 (1999): 4-5.
- Lander, Jesse M. "'Crack'd Crowns' and Counterfeit Sovereigns: The Crisis of Value in *1 Henry IV*," *Shakespeare Studies* 30 (2002): 137-161.
- Levin, Richard. "The Two-Audience Theory of English Renaissance Drama." *Shakespeare Studies* (1986): 251-275.
- Liebler, Naomi Conn. "'And Is Old Double Dead?': Nation and Nostalgia in *Henry IV Part 2*." *Shakespeare Survey* online. Cambridge UP. 2011. Vol. 63.
- Long, Zackariah. "'Unless you could teach me to forget': Spectatorship, self-forgetting, and subversion in antitheatrical literature and *As You Like It*." In *Forgetting in Early Modern English Literature: Lethe's Legacies*. eds. Christopher Ivic and Grant Williams. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Lopez, Jeremy. "Eating Richard," *Shakespeare Studies*, Vol. 36. 2008: 209-229.
- Machiavelli, Niccolo. *The Prince and Other Writings*, Translated by W. K. Marriott. New York: Fall River Press, 2008.

- Maslen, R. W. "Editorial: Imagining the Past, Remembering the future." *Journal of the Northern Renaissance* Spring 2010. <http://northernrenaissance.org/>.
- McEachern, Claire. "Henry V and the Paradox of the Body Politic." *Shakespeare Quarterly*. Vol. 45, No. 1. (Spring 1994): 33-56.
- Mirror for Magistrates*, ed. John Higgins. London: 1574.
- Montaigne, Michel de. "Of Liars," in *Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, trans. Charles Cotton. Project Gutenberg. EBook #3600.
- Mulcaster, Richard. "The Passage of our most dread Sovereign Lady, Queen Elizabeth." *Tudor Tracts 1532-1588*, ed. A. F. Pollard. New York: Copper Square, 1964.
- Nashe, Thomas. *Pierce Pennilesse His Supplication to the Divell*, 1592.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*. Trans. by Peter Preuss. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life" in *Untimely Meditations*. Trans. by R. J. Hollingdale . ed. Daniel Breazeale. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.
- Norbrook, David. "'A Liberal Tongue': Language and Rebellion in Richard II." in *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Richard II*. ed. Kirby Farrell. New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1999.
- Ostovich, Helen. "'Here in this garden': The Iconography of the Virgin queen in Shakespeare's *Richard II*." In *Marian Moments in Early Modern British Drama*. eds. Regina Buccola and Lisa Hopkins. Burlington, VT: 8, 2007.
- Parolin, Peter. "Figuring the King in Henry V: Political Rhetoric and the Limits of Performance." *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium*. Vol. 9. 2009: 43-60.
- Parvini, Neema. *Shakespeare's History Plays: Rethinking History*. Edinburgh: Edinburg UP, 2012.
- Pasupathi, Vimala C. "Coats and Conduct: The Materials of Military Obligation in Shakespeare's *Henry IV and Henry V*." *Modern Philology*, Vol. 109, No. February 2012: 326-351.

- Patricia, Anthony Guy. "‘The Courses of His Youth Promised It Not:’ *Henry V* and the Play of Memory." *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium*. Vol. 9. 2009: 61-80.
- Patterson, Annabel. *Reading Holinshed’s Chronicles*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989.
- Pechter, Edward. "Falsifying Men’s Hopes: The Ending of *1 Henry IV*." *Modern Language Quarterly*. 1981): 211-230.
- Poole, Adrian. "Laughter, forgetting, and Shakespeare." In *English Comedy*, eds. Michael Corder, Peter Holland, and John Kerrigan. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994.
- Political Shakespeare: New essays in cultural materialism*. eds. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985.
- Primaudaye, Pierre de la. *The Second Part of the French Academie*. London: George Bishop, 1605.
- Potter, Lois. "The Antic Disposition of Richard II." *Shakespeare Survey* 27 1974:33-41.
- Prior, Moody. "Comic Theory and the Rejection of Falstaff." *Shakespeare Studies*. Vol. 9: 159-171.
- Pugliatti, Paola. *Shakespeare the Historian*. New York: St. Martin’s P, 1996.
- Rabkin, Norman. "Rabbits, Ducks, and *Henry V*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* Vol. 28, No. 3. Summer 1977: 279-296.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- Rackin, Phyllis. *Shakespeare and Women*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Stages of History: Shakespeare’s English Chronicles*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1990.
- Rankins, William. *A Mirrour of Monsters*. London: I. C. for T. H., 1587.
- Rebhorn, Wayne A. *The Emperor of Men’s Minds*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1995.
- Renan, Ernest. "What is a nation?" (1882). Trans. Martin Thom in *Nation and Narration*. ed. Homi Bhabha. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Rogers, Thomas. *Philosophicall Discourse, Entituled the Anatomie of the Minde*. London: 1576.



- Rossiter, A. P. "Ambivalence: The Dialectic of the Histories," in *Angel with Horns*. ed. Graham Storey. London: Longman, 1989.
- Rowe, Nicholas. The Project Gutenberg E-book of *Some Account of the Life, &c of Mr. William Shakespear* (1709).
- Royal, Derek. "Shakespeare's Kingly Mirror: Figuring the Chorus in Olivier's and Branagh's *Henry V*," *Literature Film Quarterly*, 1997, Vol. 25, Issue 2: 104.
- Saul, Nigel. "Richard II and the Vocabulary of Kingship." *The English Historical Review*. (Sep., 1995): 854-877.
- Schoenbaum, Samuel. "*Richard II* and the Realities of Power." *Shakespeare Survey* 28 1975:1-13.
- Schwytzer, Philip. *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004.
- Seelig, Sharon Cadmon. "Loyal Fathers and Treacherous Sons: Familial Politics in *Richard II*." In *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Richard II*. Edited by Kirby Farrell. New York: G. K. Hall, 1999.
- Sidney, Philip. *A Defence of Poetry* (1595), ed. J. A. Van Dorsten. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1966.
- Sinfield, Alan and Jonathan Dollimore, "History and Ideology, Masculinity and Miscegenation: The Instances of Henry V." In Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992.
- Spencer, Theodore. *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*. New York: MacMillan, 1961.
- Spenser, Edmund. *A View of the Present State of Ireland*. ed. W. L. Renwick. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970.
- Sullivan, Garrett A. Jr. "Lethargic corporeality on and off the early modern stage." In *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Richard II*. Edited by Kirby Farrell. New York: G. K. Hall, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Memory and Forgetting in English and Renaissance Drama*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge UP, 2005.

- Schwyzler, Philip. *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004.
- Thompson, Karl F. "Richard II, Martyr." *Shakespeare Quarterly*. Spring, 1957:159-166.
- Thorne, Alison. "'Awake Remembrance of these Valiant Dead': *Henry V* and the Politics of the English History Play," *Shakespeare Studies*. 2002. Vol. 30: 163-187.
- Tillyard, E. M. W. *The Elizabethan World Picture*. New York: Vintage, 1959. First published 1943.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Shakespeare's History Plays*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1944.
- Turner, James. *The Politics of Landscape: Rural Scenery and Society in English Poetry 1630-1660*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1979.
- Warren-Heys, Rebecca. "'Remember with Advantages': Creating Memory in Shakespeare's *Henry V*." *Journal of the Northern Renaissance* 2.1.(Spring 2010) Memory. <http://northernrenaissance.org/>.
- Watson, Robert N. *The Rest Is Silence: Death as Annihilation in the English Renaissance*. Berkley: U of California P, 1994.
- Weidhorn, Manfred. "The Relation of Title and Name to Identity in Shakespearean Tragedy." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* (Spring 1969): 303-319.
- Weingarten, Samuel. "The Name of King in *Richard II*." *College English* (Apr., 1966): 536-541.
- Wentersdorf, Karl P. "The Conspiracy of Silence in *Henry V*." *Shakespeare Quarterly*. 27 (1976): 264-87.
- White, Hayden. "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact." In *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*, eds. Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1978.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality." *Critical Inquiry* (Autumn, 1980): 5-27.
- White, Howard B. *Antiquity Forgot*. Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978.

- White, Lynn Jr. "Death and the Devil." In *The Darker Vision of the Renaissance*. Edited by Robert S. Kinsman. Berkley: U of California P, 1974.
- Williams, Grant and Christopher Ivic. "Introduction: Sites of Forgetting in early modern English literature and culture." In *Forgetting in Early Modern English Literature: Lethe's Legacies*. Edited by Christopher Ivic and Grant Williams. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Willis, John. *The Art of Memory As It Dependeth upon Places and Ideas*. Amsterdam: Da Capo, 1973.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Mnemonica, or, The Art of Memory, Drained out of the Pure Fountains of Art & Nature*. London: Leonard Sowersby, 1661.
- Wilson, John Dover. *The Fortunes of Falstaff*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943.
- Yeats, William Butler. "At Stratford-on Avon." In *Essays and Introductions*. London: Macmillan, 1961.
- Žižek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 1989.

## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Jonni Koonce Dunn received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Abilene Christian University in 1969, a Master of Arts degree in English from The University of Texas at Arlington in 1999, and a PhD in English from The University of Texas at Arlington in 2012. She plans to continue her research into English Renaissance theater.