

CHAOS, ORDER, AND CONTRARIETY: FROM *RICHARD II* TO *HENRY V*

I. INTRODUCTION

“Work, work your thoughts, and therein see a siege” (*H5* III.Chorus 25). Thus the Chorus in *Henry V* begs us to flesh out history with imagination, trusting dramatic effect to our individual creative process. “For ‘tis your thoughts,” says the Prologue, “That now must deck our kings, / Carry them here and there, jumping o’er times” (*H5* Prologue 28-29). But the inflated rhetoric of the Chorus is then undercut by the action, confronted with its opposite. Stage presence fails to match the epic heroism of the muse. Henry appears at times as a calculating Machiavel, at other times as a simpering king whining about the burden he must bear. Indeed, this inconsistency between word and deed has led many to conjecture that Shakespeare had become disillusioned with the form of historical drama, uncertain of his intention and ideology. Still more have insisted upon an implicit dramatic irony debunking the puffed-up plumage of a sinister chivalry. But some patriots, on what John of Gaunt dubbed “this sceptred isle,” have maintained that the second tetralogy exemplifies a linear progression of teleology, a Providential slip and regrip of time, a *felix culpa*, a happy fall. This last reading seems to jam Shakespeare into a state-orchestrated propaganda machine, injecting the plays with an instructive ideological purpose, paradoxically changing the cockpit of subversive theater into a vessel for conveying the queen’s carefully sifted historical facts. Was Shakespeare simply dramatizing the Tudor Myth, arranging history and manufacturing consent?

His intent remains an enigma. But the content speaks for itself. The reshaping of history seems to have been an exercise in discovery for the playwright. And the reproduction of that history can be revelatory for the audience. In setting opposite forces and ideological dichotomies in a scheme of juxtaposition, and developing characters and arguments on behalf of both, an internal dialogue is developed, wherein the ultimate instruction is this: we must transcend the rigid definitions of politics and time if we are to achieve the full human potential. We must make our own judgments.

Certain characters may demonstrate tendencies toward order and chaos, but they are essentially human and must be treated as such, not as means (Kant would say) but as ends in

themselves. Once Falstaff is in motion, he ceases to be an argument. He challenges the preconceptions of social conventions and reaches the audience on a plane of deeper understanding, but he does so as a man, and not as an idea. Likewise, our sympathies are jerked back and forth between paradigms – Richard as divine right, Bullingbrook as the ethic to save the state, Falstaff in his riot, Hal in pursuit of redemption. There’s a “dialectic of ambivalence,” writes A.P. Rossiter, in which incompatible ideas collide and both are *right* and both are *wrong*. We are pulled equally toward order and chaos. Defiance is very appealing to human nature. And yet we understand that order must exist for peace, for life to be sustained. As Norman Rabkin writes, Shakespeare’s vision demonstrates “a dialectic between conflicting ethical systems” (6), which “culminates in a set of questions to which there are no answers” (9). To Rabkin, the Shakespearean canon “presents a universe in which we must decide at every moment which way to choose . . . yet tells us simultaneously that no choice is possible” (7). Essentially, the playwright presents conflicting arguments and allows his audience to play the historian. In this way, paradox is employed as a means of expression.

With the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 and Essex’s rebellion smoldering in the backdrop of the second tetralogy, Elizabethans looked toward the past for answers. As Paul Siegel notes, “We understand the past from the present and the present from the past” (18). Meanwhile Elizabeth’s reign was marked by a cultural shift in historical perspectives, the merging and sliding of interpretations of time. The principal indicator of this shift was a split in the conventional unity between theology and history (Rackin, 103). Events formerly twisted in a rope of order, purpose, and the doctrine of Providential causation (devised by St. Augustine) were reexamined in the light of second causes – real men acting as autonomous agents under the umbrella of divine determination. They raged against prophesy even as prophesy caught up with them.

II. *RICHARD II*

Peace shall go sleep with the Turks and infidels,
And in this seat of peace tumultuous wars
Shall kin with kin and kind with kind confound.
Disorder, horror, fear, and mutiny
Shall here inhabit, and this land be call’d
The field of Golgotha and dead men’s skulls. (*R2 IV.i. 139-44*)

Thus the Bishop of Carlisle explodes his prophesy upon the deposition scene in *Richard II*: if England and “this traitor Bullingbrook” conspire to “wash the balm off from an anointed king,” then the land will soon be infested with the War of the Roses. It’s worth noting that this anachronistic prediction, written long after its accuracy was validated, comes to us dressed in the robe of the Church. Providence seems to have a hand in the workings of time, casting its warnings upon the scene. And yet Northumberland immediately arrests Carlisle for capital treason. It’s clear that Realpolitik will not risk the threat of crazy bishops foretelling the future, because the state’s decisions must be made in the here and now, a series of quick fixes to sustain the shaken order. The immediate causation happens by the chance hand of man.

Elsewhere in Act III, Richard instructs his advisers to “throw away respect, / Tradition, form, and ceremonious duty” (III.iii. 172-73). Such a call for disorder cannot be tolerated. And such a man, despite his eloquence, must relinquish the crown. All the evidence in the first three acts – the preemptive banishment of Bullingbrook and Mowbray, Richard’s seizure of Gaunt’s property, his emotional instability – guides us inexorably toward this decision. We’re confident it’s justified. We’re pulling for Bullingbrook. But then comes the deposition scene. The irresponsible pipsqueak and the symbol of chaos now approaches us as a poet. Richard’s stage presence is suddenly inconsistent with the account of the Tudor chroniclers. Of course he’s disruptive, maybe still the icon of chaos, blurting out images on every neuron impulse, but we cheer him on despite ourselves. We understand, as one critic says, that “a perfectly ordered state is not in itself desirable; it may be, to say the least, dangerous to humanity” (Kleinstuck, 272). And so our instinct draws us toward that defiance, toward Richard’s imagination in the throes of spontaneous creation: “O that I were a mockery king of snow, / Standing before the sun of Bullingbrook, / To melt myself away in water-drops!” (IV.i. 260-62). And the power of that presence summons both respect and admiration. The little runt of pomp and ritual actually has a personality. He’s a man in the measure of becoming, using language to unite the infinite with his imminent doom in what may be the first description of a snowman in English poetry. But his nihilism shakes the grand plan. He may have the freedom of “no name, no title” (IV.i. 255), but he is certainly not “greater than a king” (IV.i. 305) – at least not to anyone but himself. Chaos, too, it seems, is a danger to humanity. Ultimately, Richard fails to make those decisions that

could have defined him. He is at a loss for identity, oscillating “from the highest insolence to the lowest humility” (Coleridge, 19). Like Hamlet, Richard’s paradoxical flux results in an elevated awareness, a revelation of sorts. Yet he exhibits a pathology “whose repeated appeal to the absolute is in fact a compulsive evasion of the real” (Grudin, 5).

Indeed, Richard finds himself in Act V stewing in prison, eking out a metaphorical analysis of his fate. His methodology is one of perpetual comparison. And finally he comes to expose his vital trust in language as a fallacy, an illusion in which “no thought is contented” and reality sets “the word itself / Against the word” (V.v. 9-14). This contradiction hounds him constantly, draining him of sustenance and will, because in his fate he sees a fall of the ages “when time is broke, and no proportion kept!” (V.v. 43). The Providence he leaned on early in Act III has let him fall. His insistence that “the breath of worldly men cannot depose / The deputy elected by the Lord” (III.ii. 55-56) proves itself another illusion. In the end, Richard blames time more than Bullingbrook. He considers himself struck down by that divine causation so essential to his self-definition. And what he loses, we gain in wisdom. Because, as Rabkin points out, “if the burden of the history plays is the tragedy of history, it is Richard who comes closest to our understanding” (94). His recognition of human futility crushes us with its intuitive validity. But this divine determinism still seems compatible with free will and moral responsibility. Because it does not wholly preclude autonomy it calls the conspirators to judgment. In fact, the second tetralogy presents the fall of Richard as a deep cut in time, perhaps even an accident in time, rendered by men who now must clot the wound with their own blood. At the close of *Richard II*, the Heavens above come down to grind their teeth on the free will of man, but never do they devour it entirely. This deposition transpired under the watch of God, and such a sleight of hand, says Richard, puts the whole land out of rhythm, leaving only brief repose to survey the damage:

So it is with the music of men’s lives.
And here have I the daintiness of ear
To check time broke in a disordered string;
But for the concord of my state and time
Had not an ear to hear my true time broke.
I wasted time, and now doth time waste me. (V.v. 46-49)

Meanwhile a Machiavellian settles down on the throne. Bullingbrook moves in with political finesse and public support. This assumption of power is acknowledged as a necessity,

even implicitly by Richard, but it is also repented as a black sin gnawing on the heart of England. Bullingbrook, while “embarked on an action simultaneously good and evil” (Rabkin, 88), feels time slipping from the first, and realizes now he must “make a voyage to the Holy Land, / To wash this blood off from my guilty hand” (V.vi. 49-50). This compulsion to redeem resurfaces in Hal, like a genetic deformity, finding its ultimate validation at Agincourt. But meanwhile, Bullingbrook has the crown, and he must hold it not with the favor of God, but with shrewd political tact. He clings to it like King John, with what Queen Elinor calls “Your strong possession much more than your right” (*John* I.i. 40). It’s not until late in *2 Henry IV* that Bullingbrook acknowledges the inevitable temporality that he has struggled against: “O God, that one might read the book of fate, / And see the revolution of the times / Make mountains level” (III.i. 45-47). However, the implicit circular motion of “revolution” contradicts the linear progression toward the Tudor reign that much of the second tetralogy seems to affirm. Like the starkly non-Providential view of history dramatized in *King John*, the concept of “revolution” here jibes more closely with time in the scope of Ecclesiastes or Numbers – or perhaps, as C.L. Barber reads it, with time as a pagan cycle of the seasons.

III. THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Clearly, Shakespeare’s mechanisms of time operate in an overlapping causal pattern, sometimes in order, sometimes spinning in chains of coincidence, sometimes in direct contradiction. Such a dramatic structure demonstrates a striking ability to embrace and intensify interpretations that clash with one another. This “negative capability,” as Keats phrased it, allows the plays to accept doubt and escape the very claws of temporality “without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.” What we witness, perhaps, is a playwright’s struggle to define his place in history without resort to didactic abstractions. Shakespeare merges ideas into actual events, and stops short of any concrete conclusions. Likewise, the Sonnets demonstrate an overwhelming preoccupation with the power of time. Being is reckoned as coincidental ticking, a passing of history which leads toward no end. “Like as waves make toward the pibbled shore, / So do our minutes hasten to their end” (Sonnet 60). Progeny and poetry remain the only method to transcend “Devouring Time,” so the poet lashes back defiantly in Sonnet 19: “Yet do thy worst, old Time: despite thy wrong, / My love shall in my verse ever live young.” Life is an infinite effort

to exist, and in this effort we define ourselves through art. It is the only ontology we know. “And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand, / Praising thy worth despite his cruel hand” (Sonnet 60).

Following Shakespeare’s model, we may unify critical reading of the plays into a canon of exploration that illuminates our own position in history. Some may posit the shape of history as molded by men acting autonomously. Others may argue it molded by men as agents of Providence. Perhaps it is both, perhaps neither. Convenient answers do not leap from our ability to reckon events and consequences, however sharp and rational our faculties. To understand the complex whole of history, we might do better to put aside this tendency toward rational control. Things happen; we seldom know why. Tolstoy wrote a similar comment in his epilogue to *War and Peace*: “If we admit that human life can be ruled by reason, the possibility of life is destroyed” (1211). In a letter to J.H. Reynolds (3 Feb 1818), Keats wrote:

We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us – and if we do not agree, seems to put its hand in its breeches pocket. Poetry should be great & unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one’s soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself but with its subject.

If we behold the second tetralogy in its poetic aspects, we can see these observations in their ultimate light. We may also notice the shape of dramatic irony, a reading resembling the work of Friedrich von Schlegel and his brother August Wilhelm. In their theories of Romantic irony, language becomes a tool to escape reality, a chameleon of form and logic that defies all definite reason and achieves an immortality. Indeed, Falstaff resembles one of the great ironists, Socrates, in his challenge to conventional mores. Both men, whether in flesh or fiction, possessed the uncanny agility to swim out of any dialectic quicksand. “If reason were as plentiful as blackberries, I would give no man a reason upon compulsion, I” (*IH4* II.iv. 240). In much the same way, a play like *Henry V* works all at once on several levels – as a heroic epic, a specter of nationalism, and an anti-war polemic.

In antiquity, Heraclitus and his “unity of opposites” seem the most plausible source for Shakespeare’s internal dialogue technique. We may never roll our pant-cuffs and wade into the same history play twice, into the same river of cause-and-effect. Heraclitus saw the natural world as a perpetual give-and-take between polarities, a dynamic system of constant change and kinetic creation. In such a physics, knowledge is achieved through the genesis and recognition of

contraries. Indeed, a theory of contrariety seems to have been prevalent in Elizabethan intellectual circles. Numerous texts printed during Shakespeare's lifetime bear evidence to this climate of accepted contradiction. In Philemon Holland's 1603 translation of Plutarch's *Moralia*, the reader was inundated with Heraclitean and Platonic references:

For that the generation, composition, and constitution of this world is mingled of contrary powers, howbeit the fame not of equall force: for the better is predominant: but impossible it is that the evill should utterly perish and be abolished, so deeply is it imprinted in the body & so far inbred in the foule of the univerfall world, in opposition alwaies to the better, and to warre against it (Plutarch, 1307 – Image 660).

In *The Defence of Contraries*, translated into English and printed in London in 1593, Charles Estienne drops a number of allusions to this preoccupation with contraries.

Heraclitus said, that discord, and concord, were the father and mother of all things . . . Plato sayth the like of pleasure, and sorrow, that although they be two things contrarie and repugnant betweene them felues, and can not bee together in one person, yet neuertheleffe, if any one follow and receive the one, he is for the most part ever constrained to take the other: as if they were both in one point and extremitie conioyned and knit together (Estienne, 5-6 – Image 6-7).

Likewise, editions of Plato's dialogues abounded. Most notable was the leading role of the *Phaedo*, wherein Socrates sets out to discover the process of the regeneration of souls: "Let us see therefore if it be necessary that any contrary can have no being in nature, unless from its contrary . . . so that where there are two contraries, there must be also two generations or originals of being produced" (Plato 120-21 – Image 80).

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* were printed in London in 1547 and subsequent editions were at Shakespeare's fingertips. Here Aristotle expounds his theory of contraries with a vision of the golden mean. Contraries are forces of extremes, like those at play in Richard's character, and a man cannot achieve greatness until he learns to seek the middle way – that is, until he learns to *avoid* those extremes.

The dyfficiencies ben in the workes of man: that is to saye, much, lyttel, and mean. And all thes thynges bene contrary amongest theym felues. For lyttell is contrary to muche, and the meane is contrarye to theym bothe . . . ther is a greater contrary from the one extreme to the other . . . Then in al thynges the mean is to be praysed, and the extremities to be blamed (*The Ethiques of Aristotle*, 103-04 – Image 19-20).

In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle elaborates this theory of the physical world:

Things may differ from one another in a greater or less degree, but there is a maximum degree which I call contrariety . . . Contraries, however, are the starting-points and extremes in the passage into each other of things differing in *species* . . . Contradiction is not the same as contrariety . . . Contraries are not composed of one another, and are

therefore starting-points; but of the intermediates *all* or *none* are compounded out of the contraries (*Metaphysics* 313-17).

Shakespeare's contemporaries applied this classical approach to contraries in a Renaissance conception that sought to combine physical, metaphysical, and theological elements into one philosophical model. Among those pursuing such theories were Nicholas of Cusa, Giordano Bruno, and Theophrastus Paracelsus. Because the human intellect falls short of the capacity to attain ultimate truth, we can only find our salvation in the unity of fluctuating forces. Montaigne, with whom Shakespeare was familiar, deliberately employed contradictory arguments to force the reader to shed his preconceptions. So too did Francis Bacon, whose earliest essays were contemporary with Shakespeare. Plato wrote in a dialectic more concerned with asking questions than providing absolute answers. Such ideas were also expounded by Paracelsus (1494-1541), a medical thinker whose revolutionary doctrine of contraries challenged Europe's long dominant Galenic humoralism. Discarding the conception of illness as an imbalance of internal fluids, Paracelsus saw disease as an activity of external forces working on the body. From this notion he was able to forge an interdisciplinary philosophy that sought to recognize and accept the material and ethereal conflicts within the body, in which we are pulled equally toward sensual indulgence and so-called "higher pursuits" of asceticism, academic study, and artistic creation (Grudin 24-25).

In his wide body of work, Paracelsus issued a variety of radical assertions, often contradicting himself and resting his theories upon unsupported assumptions. Regardless, he seems to have been a remarkably creative thinker who stretched the boundaries of academic orthodoxy. Indeed, Paracelsian conceptions are especially relevant to Shakespeare's work in the second tetralogy. We see the internal character of both Richard II and Henry V when Paracelsus writes:

A contradiction dwells in man . . . Namely, the stars in him have a different disposition, a different mind, a different orientation than the lower elements . . . the material body wants to live in luxury and lewdness . . . the ethereal body wants to study, learn, pursue arts . . . Therefore there dwells in each of these bodies an urge to exceed that which is given to it, and neither wants to follow a middle course (Paracelsus, 115).

Elizabethans relished such radical claims, which jibed so well with the nation's history. "If a war breaks out, the cause is that God sends a punishment upon a country in order by such

punishment to renew the world” (Paracelsus, 244). The Tudor Myth quite possibly originated as a mimesis of this Paracelsian conception. For, as the good doctor tells us, “Decay is the beginning of all birth ... It brings about the birth and rebirth of forms a thousand times improved” (Paracelsus, 217-18).

Elizabethans were fascinated by these ideas, partly by political context, partly by intellectual curiosity. Ben Jonson, John Donne, and John Milton all invoke Paracelsian images and undercurrents. In 1585, Richard Bostocke published a study entitled *The difference betwene the auncient phisicke . . . consisting in vnitie peace and concord: and the latter phisicke . . . consisting in dualitie, discorde, and contrarietie*. The French writings of Louis Leroy were translated in 1594 and printed under the title *Of the Interchangeable Course, or Variety of Things in the Whole World*. In both Richard Puttenham’s 1589 printing of *The Arte of English Poesie* and Robert Burton’s 1621 edition of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, the texts abound with references to Paracelsus’ physics. Puttenham even hams it up with the notion of contrariety, a satirical approach which seems to rely on the reader’s possession of a prior intimacy with contraries. “Lamenting,” he writes, “is altogether contrary to reioicing, euery man faith fo, and yet is it a peece of ioy to be able to lament with eafe” (Puttenham, 37 – Image 24). Then he goes on to compare the poet’s art with a Paracelsian vision of healing:

Therefore of death and burials, of th’ aduerfities by warres, and of true loue loft or ill beftowed, are th’ onely forrowes that the noble Poets fought by their arte to remoue or appeafe, not with any medicament of a contrary temper, as the *Galeniftes* vse to cure but as the *Paracelfians*, who cure making one dolour to expel another, and in this cafe, one fhort forrowing the remedie of a long and grieuous one (Puttenham, 39 – Image 25).

In the 1614 publication of Bacon’s essays, the Elizabethan reader would have encountered an essay entitled “Of Nature in Men,” wherein Bacon writes that “if a man haue the fortitude and refolution to infranchise himfelfe at once, that is the beft . . . Neither is the ancient rule amiffe, to bend nature as a wand, to a contrary extreame, whereby to fet it right: vnderftanding it, where the contrary extream is no vice” (Bacon, essay 26 – Image 47). Furthermore, in the 1640 English rendering of his *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, Bacon asserts that we ought to “beare ever towards the contrary extreme of that whereunto we are by nature inclin’d, fo it be without vice. Like as when we rowe againft the ftream; or when we make a crooked wand ftraight by bending it the contrary way” (Bacon, 357 – Image 238).

Milton also conceives of the world as a collection of dualities. In a famous passage from his *Areopagitica* published in London shortly after Shakespeare's death, Milton wrote:

It was from out the rinde of one apple tafted, that the knowledge of good and evill as two twins cleaving together leapt forth into the World . . . what wifdome can there be to choofe, what continence to forbear without the knowledge of evill? . . . Affuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather: that which purifies us is triall, and triall is by what is contrary (Milton, 12 – Image 8).

But perhaps the most eminent contribution to Renaissance contrariety was laid out by Giordano Bruno (1548-1600). In an attempt to derive a self-contained philosophical model, Bruno employed Paracelsian and Heraclitean doctrines in a project of metaphysics and epistemology. Contraries participate in a fundamental war with one another, and knowledge is impossible without ignorance. He envisions an ascent toward truth from material to formal causes, but unlike the Platonists and Peripatetics, Bruno sees wisdom as a balanced acceptance of extremes. Such a conception allows disorder to contribute constructively to the process of order, and chaos translates into a central player in natural causation. Because this theory relies upon the premise that “health and wisdom lie in remaining in touch with both extremes [of a duality],” it also parts drastically from the traditional Judeo-Christian ethics (Grudin, 35). Thus it jibes with Shakespeare's chosen form and may underpin his conception of contraries. Hamlet declares “I must be cruel only to be kind” (*Ham* III.iv. 178). Henry V anticipates “some soul of goodness in things evil” (*H5* IV.i. 4). These statements are consistent with Shakespeare's tendency to “structure his imitations in terms of a pair of polar opposites” (Rabkin, 12). In *Hamlet* reason meets nonreason, revenge challenges mercy; in the histories chaos and order, work and play, free will and determinism, all figure prominently.

IV. HENRY IV

While Bullingbrook “mount[s] up on high” in *1 Henry IV*, Shakespeare begins shifting his focus between the ordered world of the court and the chaotic, timeless scenes of the Boar's Head Tavern. Falstaff is immortalized in comic flexibility and Hotspur swallowed by “Devouring Time,” then Henry IV and his boy are left to reconcile the chaotic contradictions of history. They must define their place in time, carve out the autonomous decisions that will lead England toward its end. Without the illusion of a *felix culpa*, and without the political prowess to engage their nation and redeem their people, all of England would be at a loss for identity. Perhaps this is fallacious

paternalism, but it becomes the dominant discourse in the Lancaster lineage from the minute Bullingbrook seizes the throne. Indeed, Hal's first soliloquy illustrates the conviction:

By how much better than my word I am,
By so much shall I falsify men's hopes,
And like bright metal on a sullen ground,
My reformation, glitt'ring o'er my fault,
Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes
Than that which hath no foil to set it off.
I'll so offend, to make offense a skill,
Redeeming time when men think least I will. (*1H4* I.ii. 210-217)

This speech exemplifies the faith in those Providential fingers that were to pluck up the political landscape, even as it shook with "civil butchery," and tote it through time into the Tudor Myth. And yet the Lancasters do not depend solely upon the hand of God. At Shrewsbury, Henry IV dresses a slew of men in his royal robes to outfox the rebels. Before the forest of Gaultree, Prince John tricks the rebels into dispersing their forces and immediately arrests them of high treason. At Agincourt, the English are vastly outnumbered but have their longbows to mow down the French cavalry. Hal takes the "sport" he once disdained and makes it "cry God for Harry, England and St. George." There may be divinity to credit, but it is reinforced by a quiver full of Machiavellian maneuvers. The Lancasters rule with the force of the lion *and* the trickery of the fox.

But while time trucks bodies to the grave, it also parts its waters for redemption. Hal watches his father wane, hauled off to the Jerusalem Chamber oddly to fulfill his prophecies of death in the Holy Land, bequeathing his obsession with atonement even as he dies. "Be it thy course to busy giddy minds / With foreign quarrels, that action, hence borne out, / May waste the memory of the former days" (*2H4* IV.v. 213-15). And Hal picks up the crown, transforming all at once into the king he has always claimed to be, echoing his first soliloquy: "My father has gone wild in his grave; / For in his tomb lie my affections, / And with his spirits sadly I survive, / To mock the expectation of the world" (*2H4* V.ii. 123-26). And thus Falstaff is banished, and Hal falls into a rigid role defined by time, hurtling England full-tilt toward the Tudor reign.

V. HENRY V

For all of its faults, *Henry V* serves as the conclusion to Shakespeare's stirring work with the War of the Roses. Indeed, it is his last English history until *Henry VIII*, and may suggest his

disillusion with the forces at work. Within the cockpit of this play, writes Mark Van Doren, “the heroic idea splinters into a thousand starry fragments, fine as fragments but lighted from no single source” (144). But I find something appealing in this perplexity. It may be the ultimate commentary on temporal causation. We see a king who is a man of action, crediting all his deeds to God. Yet his brute rhetoric rubs up against the breach at Harflew as if it burst from an ethic fresh out of Christian morality:

The gates of mercy shall be all shut up,
And the flesh'd soldier, rough and hard of heart,
In liberty of bloody hand, shall range,
With conscience wide as hell, mowing like grass
Your fresh fair virgins and your flow'ring infants . . .
What is't to me, when you yourselves are cause,
If your pure maidens fall into the hand
Of hot and forcing violation? (*H5* 10-22)

Henry speaks of secondary causes, making the men of Harflew seem the agents of their fate while reducing the English to apparently helpless automata.

Time and again, Henry V passes his individual responsibility on to Providence and a cocksure faith in fortune. He is like some Nietzschean *ubermensch*, a great-souled man in love with his fate. The subplot of Cambridge, Grey, and Scroop, is stifled before it begins, with Henry arguing two contradictory courses of action within the scope of forty lines. “O, let us yet be merciful” (II.ii. 47). And then: “You must not dare (for shame) to talk of mercy” (II.ii. 81). “We are no tyrant,” he says, “but a Christian king” (I.ii 241), then proclaims his dynastic ambitions to sit as despot over France. He has Bardolph executed while declaring, “When lenity and cruelty play for a kingdom, the gentler gamester is the soonest winner” (III.vi. 112). But what sort of gentle gamester hangs an old drinking buddy from Eastcheap? He calls together his men and tells them, “I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips” (III.i. 31), then next scene shows rogues in the English army cowering from all conflict.

The Chorus bids us apologies for these inconsistencies and spins a tale of such epic heroism that no dramatic form will ever make it manifest. But this allegiance to the chronicles is immediately undercut by the Bardolph-Pistol-Nym plot, and by such episodes as “a little touch of Harry in the night.” King Henry assures his men that they are “but warriors for the working-day” (IV.iv 109), even as they refuse to trust such glorification. “I am afeard there are few die well that

die in battle" (IV.i. 141). The only temporality essential to Bates and Williams is the ticking of this extant life. They have no desire to play roles in the redemption of the *felix culpa*. They know only a Providence of the present. Henry assures them his cause is just and rambles on through forty lines of didactic prose, exposing his own uncertainties and glossing them over with a logic of salvation in the afterlife. Indeed, this speech augments the effort of any one man probing for a grip in history:

Every subject's duty is the King's, but every subject's soul is his own . . . Death is to him advantage; or not dying, the time was blessedly lost wherein such preparation was gain'd; and in him that escapes, it were not sin to think that making God so free an offer, He let him outlive that day to see His greatness and to teach others how they should prepare (IV.i. 176-85).

In the end, the question remains unresolved. Henry reckons himself both in the fixture of divine determination and in the crooked posture of an individual with his own autonomy. His stable self has split into fragments that must be reconciled. They force him to rely on rational explanations of the times, as Shakespeare did, even as he challenges them. At once he carries the torch of hegemony, bearing the full burden of Foucault's "dominant discourse of power," and still he rests this burden on Providence.

Such struggles with temporal and moral frameworks color the problem plays. In *Measure for Measure*, the Duke rationalizes life into a scheme for salvation. "Be absolute for death" (MMIII.i. 5), he says, rely upon inherent goodness to deliver the soul from the body. *Troilus and Cressida* likewise ponders the split between opinion and intrinsic value. Is value merely opinion? No, says Hector, "value dwells not in particular will, / It holds his estimate and dignity wherein 'tis precious of itself" (*Tro* II.ii. 53-55). In the same play, Ulysses instructs his fellow Greeks to seek a golden mean, a degree and dance-like measure in the mechanisms of chaos and order:

O, when degree is shak'd,
Which is the ladder of all high designs,
The enterprise is sick . . .
Take but degree away, untune that string,
And hark what discord follows. (*Tro* I.iii. 101-10)

This musical metaphor hearkens back to Richard's last speech, where said degree is marked by Providential causation. It is the tunemaster that keeps the action twirling toward some

teleological end, even as it intermingles with free will. It may work like a dance – one measure of the divine, one measure of the Machiavellian.

Intuition may have instructed Shakespeare to develop *Henry V* much in the manner of a problem play. Perhaps his designs even tended toward the tragic. Henry may have met an end like Coriolanus, the puffed-up hero tripping on his own plumage. Shakespeare may have detected something sinister in that jingoism pouring like water from the crown, something rotten like the state of Denmark. He may have condemned this patriotism, in the words of Oscar Wilde, as a “virtue of the vicious.” But history furnished Shakespeare with no such conclusions. Indeed, he wrote brutality into Henry’s tongue, modeled him in the shape of Machiavelli’s *Prince* who peers in the glass to see only a soldier. But that same character concludes with a Stratford barnyard innocence. “Thou wouldst find me such a plain king that thou wouldst think I had sold my farm to buy my crown” (V.ii. 124-26). Katharine becomes a convenient political opportunity for the King of England, his “capital demand,” a commodity of flesh, and the woman who will bear his son. The play ends with a marriage, a union of nations, a comic conclusion to a puzzling paradox of form and action.

VI. CONCLUSION

Plato wrote of a singular cause in the shape of Perfect Forms. Everything tends toward its archetypal end, the greater good. But such a causation does little to explain history in a method we can understand. Aristotle responded with a plurality of causes, a doctrine that allows for a conflation of different explanations. He listed four causes in the natural world – matter, form, the source of change, and the goal (or final end). Within this model, the free will of ideas, individuals, and physical limitations interact with one another. But Aristotle’s is not a closed system. Motion must have an underlying cause, a certain set of “unmoved movers,” and among them a first cause that exists outside the natural world. And thus, the Aristotelian model accounts for both Machiavellian autonomy and Providential determination. There are any number of potentials existent in the course of history, but only some of them become actualities. In the second tetralogy, Shakespeare shapes these actual events into dramatic form and fleshes them out with fiction, creating an internal dialogue of chaos and order. This appeal to cause-and-effect is the only exonerating explanation for the paradoxes culminating in *Henry V*. Falstaff was doomed to

fall. Hal was destined to redeem time. There's a passage in Joyce's *Ulysses* that evokes these actual and potential causes. The boys are in the library chewing the fat about Hamlet when Dedalus says, "[Shakespeare] found in the world without as actual what was in this world within as possible" (Joyce, 213). Indeed, history defines the direction of all great literature, unfolding in a timeless moment, commenting on both past and present.

Unsheathe your dagger definitions. Horseness is the whatness of allhorse. Streams of tendency and eons they worship. God: noise in the street: very peripatetic. Space: what you damn well have to see. Through spaces smaller than red globules of man's blood they creepycrawl after Blake's buttocks into eternity of which this vegetable world is but a shadow. Hold to the now, the here, through which all future plunges to the past (Joyce, 186).

However, unlike Aristotle, Plato, and the Judeo-Christian tradition, Shakespeare's metaphysics demand no suppression of one or another contradiction. Instead, like Heraclitus' doctrine of flux, and like the popular explanations of contrariety expounded by his Renaissance contemporaries, Shakespeare creates a world where we doubt in order to be human. Ethical dilemmas do not resolve themselves. The deepest metaphysical mysteries, while often bubbling on the surface, never splash through the foam of uncertainty. Aristotle would condemn the polarities of Richard II and Henry V as "standards for the measurement of being" (Grudin, 16), extremes that must be mediated by a golden mean. But for Paracelsus and Bruno, health and wisdom are attainable only through a balanced awareness of those opposites, an acceptance which reckons the high and the low as necessary components in the same constructive system. With a pagan enthusiasm echoed time and again in Shakespeare's verses, Paracelsus instructs us that "decay is the beginning of all birth" (Paracelsus, 217). He declares that free will and fate can coexist in a world of dual causality. Through self-knowledge autonomy is achieved and this self-knowledge is only possible when contradictions are acknowledged as a part of the whole. Robert Grudin labels this the "dialectical concept of psychology, in which an understanding of the tension between opposed polarities becomes both a source of positive energy and a guide to wisdom" (35). Likewise, writes Norman Rabkin, Shakespeare's fusion of fact and fiction in the same form creates a rhythm of conflicting elements that are "equally valid, equally desirable, and equally destructive, so that the choice that the play forces the reader to make becomes impossible" (13). Hal's growth and transformation to maturity travels through a pinball machine of opposing bumpers

represented by Bullingbrook, Hotspur, and Falstaff. Sometimes he rides on the springs of chaos, beating the war drum into the breach. Elsewhere he invokes the Providential gravity of order, uniting the kingdoms of France and England that were so long in conflict. Ultimately, this juxtaposition of paradoxes gives the second tetralogy its strength. It allows Shakespeare to employ a loose and liquid metaphysics and unite it with a measure of poetry so that the ordinary of human history is illuminated in a perfect clarity of contrariety.

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