To See and to Touch:

God, Honour, and Irony
In Shakespeare’s English Histories

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ABSTRACT

Shakespeare’s second set of history plays begins with the failed rule of Richard II and ends with Henry V’s triumphant victory over France. Despite Richard’s failings as king, his rule is buttressed by the traditional belief in the medieval order. Undermined by Richard’s weakness and attacked by Henry Bolingbroke, this medieval order falls and is replaced with a new regime headed by Henry IV. This new order is established by undermining the traditional guiding political authorities through a series of Machiavellian maneuvers. At the heart of the plays is Hal, whose triumphs as King Harry complete and cement the shift toward Machiavelli’s politics. What is intriguing about Shakespeare’s treatment of Harry is not only that he displays the king’s successes in a far more glorious light than any other ruler, but also that he shows how these deeds are preceded by Harry’s ignoble existence as Prince Hal, an existence that raises questions about the education of rulers. These questions are directly tied to Hal’s relationship with the comic figure of Falstaff, whose words and deeds somehow provides us with what is both a likable and distasteful alternative to the life of political rule while simultaneously reminding us of the ancient world.
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They bring smooth comforts false, worse than true wrongs.

_Rumor, 2 Henry IV, Prologue to Act 1_

Tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings.

_Chorus, Henry V, Prologue to Act 1_

Yet sit and see,
Minding true things by what their mock’ries be.

_Chorus, Henry V, Prologue to Act 4_

**Introduction**

Over Christmas break a chance encounter led to lunch with an old high school pal. As we exchanged news, our current pursuits (he being a lawyer and me being a graduate student) lent itself well to some good-natured ribbing. When the conversation turned to my thesis, my vague description of it — “Shakespeare’s second tetralogy in relation to his political thought” — presented the perfect opportunity. “I would have expected no less” my pal grinned at me. “What do you mean?” I asked, smiling back. His answer trumped all responses except laughter: “Well it doesn’t get much more academic than that.”

His joking words sum up the look on many faces when they hear what I have been working on over the past few months. Yet, in so far as “academic” means a retreat from the world (and it usually does), Shakespeare is far from academic. As human beings, as citizens, and as students of politics we should read Shakespeare, if for no other reason, than because he is the teacher of many great statesmen. Abraham Lincoln was a frequent reader of Shakespeare, purportedly reading his plays aloud, while Winston Churchill is said to have memorized the tragedies, famously bothering Richard Burton during his performance of Hamlet by reciting the lines aloud with him from the audience.²
Shakespeare is the teacher of men who do not retreat from the world. Because such men are at the height of what we profess to study we should not retreat from him. As Leo Strauss remarked:

We have no higher duty, and no more pressing duty, than to remind ourselves and our students of political greatness, human greatness, of the peaks of human excellence. For we are supposed to train ourselves and others in seeing things as they are, and this means above all, in seeing their greatness and their misery, their excellence and their vileness, their nobility and their triumphs, and therefore never to mistake mediocrity, however brilliant, for true greatness.3

Shakespeare accomplishes all these things in his plays, showing us politics and its practitioners as they are. If we are attentive enough, we will be trained to recognize both greatness and mediocrity.

In his second tetralogy,4 Shakespeare presents us with the opportunity to undergo this difficult training, interweaving the lives of Richard II, Henry IV, Hotspur, Hal, Falstaff and Pistol within the context of a struggle for power. This struggle is part of a changing political order in which the medieval understanding of politics is replaced with a modern, Machiavellian approach. Undermining this shift is the comic figure of Falstaff, whose words and deeds remind us of the ancient world.

To fully study any of the events entailed in the clash of these worlds requires consideration of all four of Shakespeare’s second set of history plays – plays that are linked by action and character. The tetralogy begins with the failed rule of Richard II and ends with Henry V’s triumphant victory over France. Despite Richard’s failings as king, his rule is buttressed by the traditional belief in the medieval order. Undermined by Richard’s weakness and attacked by Henry Bolingbroke, this medieval order falls and is replaced with a new regime headed by Henry. This new order is established by undermining the traditional guiding political authorities through a series of Machiavellian
maneuvers, its success represents the establishment of modern politics. At the heart of the series of plays is Hal, whose triumphs as King Harry complete and cement the shift toward Machiavelli’s politics. What is intriguing about Shakespeare’s treatment of Harry is not only that he displays the king’s successes in a far more glorious light than any other ruler, but also that he shows how these deeds are preceded by Harry’s ignoble existence as Prince Hal, an existence that raises questions about the education of rulers. These questions are directly tied to the time Hal spends with Falstaff, a man whose way of life somehow provides us with what is both a likable and distasteful alternative to the life of political rule.

Shakespeare’s ability to play with our desires — to play with what we wish the various characters to be — is evident throughout the second tetralogy. Shakespeare knows what we want and what we think we want our characters to be and he does not divorce us from our opinion. In the same way that Richard’s spectacularly disastrous decisions and Henry’s muted successes leave us with the hope that something greater or more inspiring is hidden in these men, Shakespeare allows us to see Harry as a Christian king and to see Falstaff as a repentant sinner. He allows us to convince ourselves that Falstaff’s humour can be separated from his lifestyle; that Harry’s victories can be achieved in concert with a commitment to God.

In the end, however, what we desire to be true often cannot be held in concert with what is. Shakespeare’s gift is his ability to show things as they are. When read properly, his plays allow us to move through our desires and toward the truth. This task demands that we approach the text open to the possibility that it has something to teach us. To successfully read Shakespeare, we must carefully examine the plays within the
context of every character’s words and deeds. And when these words and deeds appear to be irreconcilable with one another, we must look even closer at the text and at ourselves before deciding whether it is Shakespeare or us who are mistaken.

To fully consider the action and characters of Shakespeare’s second tetralogy requires us to study the four plays together. Hal’s life as prince seems totally removed from his rule as king just as Falstaff’s death seems totally removed from his life and Henry IV’s rule seems totally removed from his successful rebellion. The aim of this paper is to reconcile these apparent contradictions in a way that moves us closer to Shakespeare’s understanding of politics. When properly considered, one part of Harry, Falstaff, or Henry’s life cannot completely come into focus without the other. I attempt to show that, when Shakespeare is studied seriously, such reconciliation is possible – that if we are willing to risk our opinions and our desires, Shakespeare will begin to teach us about politics.

Unfortunately, this task is made all the more difficult by the present state of literary criticism. By prioritizing the reader over the author, literary criticism has removed itself from the possibility that Shakespeare has anything to teach us. As a result, the study of his work becomes mere interpretation – interpretation whose presumptions only allow one to either see what he already believes or to deny that there is anything to see at all. Not surprisingly, this approach struggles to explain why Shakespeare (or anyone) should be read at all. My schoolmate was right. There is nothing more academic – or more demanding of comedy – than this.

Nevertheless, as long as Shakespeare continues to be read he will continue to triumph. Each reading opens up the prospect of discovery. Each reading presents the
opportunity to move through our opinions and our desires toward reality. While this paper makes no claim of accomplishing this highest goal, it does mean to point to it as a possibility.

Vouchsafe to those that have not read the story
That I may prompt them – and of such as have,
I humbly pray them to admit th’excuse
Of time, of numbers, and due course of things,
Which cannot in their huge and proper life
Be here presented.

Chorus, Henry V, Prologue to Act 5
Chapter One

Richard II: How can you say to me I am a King?

Richard II is historically notable because he is "the last king ruling by hereditary right, direct and undisputed, from the Conqueror." He is the last king of the medieval order. The end of this order is more than a historical notation; it is a fundamental shift in politics. Sigurd Burkhardt notes: "For medieval man, order had been created, once and for all, by God. Man's task was not to create but to contemplate, obey and - as the need arose - to imitate." In other words, the existing political order was understood as something that man belongs to. As Aquinas puts it in his medieval account of kingship:

Daniel, commending the providence of God with respect to the institution of the king says: "The Lord hath sought him a man according to his own heart, and the Lord hath appointed him to be prince over his people."

Replacing this understanding is the modern conviction that order is something created by man in his freedom. This new form of politics is established by Harry Bolingbroke when he overthrows Richard and takes the throne as Henry IV. In dealing with this deposing, Richard II examines the shift toward the modern order, exploring both the reasons for such a shift, and its implications.

Because Richard is the embodiment of the medieval order, their failures are one and the same. In explaining why Richard fails as king, critics often argue that his collapse results from certain mistakes that are not permissible for a king to make. Generally, they point to three main events as the cause of Richard's downfall: his part in killing Gloucester, his disinheriance of Bolingbroke, and his actions during the trial of Mowbary. Within the context of the medieval order these are acts of injustice so severe and so explicitly against the medieval order that they effectively overturn it, thereby
ushering in the modern world. Often, this change in orders is used to argue that Shakespeare sides with a particular order in the play. Either he supports the medieval order by revealing the tragic implications of the modern order, or he in is favor of the modern order because he allows it to win. In contrast, my own argument shows the difficulty inherent in the conclusion that Shakespeare is making a judgment between the two orders. Instead, I argue that, while Shakespeare surely uses Bolingbroke and Gaunt to reveal the differences between the two orders, he simultaneously uses Richard’s lack of faith in either of these orders to obscure any clear judgment between them.

*How to Usurp a King*

To highlight the problem of seeing Shakespeare as siding with a particular order, it is useful to review a critic who does. C. G. Thayer’s approach to the play is to view it as the implicit undermining of the Tudor philosophy. For him, Richard’s part in the death of Gloucester is evidence of the impotence of medieval order, proof that it is inferior to the modern in that it allows no remedy to the possibility of tyranny. This understanding holds that, under the medieval order, when faced with an unjust or tyrannical king, one is only left with the possibility of waiting for either yourself or your king to die. Put in stronger terms, under an unjust ruler, obedience ends in death.

This position implies that the only viable action to be taken against a bad king is to usurp him. When one takes this position, Bolingbroke not only emerges as hero, but begins the play as one through his accusation of Mowbary. While on the surface this accusation appears to be an act of loyalty to the crown, it is really an act of subversive rebellion. By accusing Mowbary of Gloucester’s death, Bolingbroke is, by implication,
[Continuous text from the page]
accusing Richard. Holingshed makes it clear that Richard had ordered Mowbary to kill Gloucester, a fact Shakespeare makes explicit through Gaunt’s conversation with the Duchess of Gloucester:

\[
\text{God's is the quarrel; for God's substitute,} \\
\text{His deputy anointed in his sight,} \\
\text{Hath caus'd his death; the which if wrongfully,} \\
\text{Let heaven revenge, for I may never lift} \\
\text{An angry arm against his minister. (RII 1.2.37-41)}^8
\]

Richard’s involvement therefore, is well known among his nobles and Bolingbroke uses this knowledge to subvert his reign. Indeed, Bolingbroke strengthens and makes more explicit his accusation against Richard by cleverly charging Mowbary with not paying back the money given to him by Richard. (RII 1.1.88-102) Because Richard surely does not need to be reminded by Bolingbroke what is owed to him, the reason for this accusation can only be understood as an attempt to tie the lending of the money to the murder, thereby strengthening Bolingbroke’s indictment of Richard. By implicitly yet clearly accusing him, Bolingbroke exposes Richard’s weaknesses while at the same time revealing himself to the nobles as one who is willing to move against him. Most importantly, he forces Richard to throw him out of the kingdom in a manner that smacks of injustice and endears him to the people. Bolingbroke therefore, reflecting the teaching of Machiavelli, always appears virtuous and always maneuvers to achieve and secure power.

Bolingbroke’s ability to make the most of his situation is again revealed when he makes his decisive move against the king. Banished and disinherited by Richard, he has a complaint with which to excuse his return to England. Given this opportunity, Bolingbroke chooses the most opportune time to come back, waiting until Richard is at
his weakest, fighting in Ireland and unable to gain accurate intelligence or strategically maneuver. While this move appears to simply be a natural and justifiable response to his disinheritaence, as Northumberland reveals immediately after the death of York, Bolingbroke has gathered troops and organized an invasion of England prior to any knowledge that he has been disinherited. In seizing this opportunity, therefore, Bolingbroke uses Machiavelli’s teaching that men would rather lose their father than their inheritance to turn the nobles against Richard.\(^1\) Shockingly, since all of Bolingbroke’s hopes for the throne depend upon Gaunt’s death and his own subsequent disinheritaence, it seems that he has been waiting actively and with great anticipation for his father’s demise. Shakespeare, then, provides us with an ironic twist on Machiavelli’s maxim that one would rather lose his father than his inheritance, a twist that leads us through its uncomfortable teaching and toward its fundamental premise that men desire power above all else. For many political actors, this power is founded on and is limited by control of the family and its wealth. For those few men like Bolingbroke, however, these desires extend beyond the family. Bolingbroke is willing to sacrifice both his family and its wealth for the sake of power. A true follower of Machiavelli would give up both his father and his inheritance for the sake of political power.

When Richard finally does return to England, Bolingbroke repeats the pattern of the first scene, pretending to desire justice in the form of his inheritance, but really working toward the crown.\(^2\) In fact, when the maneuvering finally comes to a head, he manages to get Richard to hand over the crown without having to explicitly demand it:

Bolingbroke: My gracious lord, I come but for mine own.
Richard: Your own is yours, and I am yours, and all.
Bolingbroke: So far be mine, my most redoubted lord,
As my true service shall deserve your love.
Richard: Well you deserve. They well deserve to have
That know the strong’st and surest way to get.
Uncle, give me your hands; nay, dry your eyes –
Tears show their love, but wan their remedies.
Cousin, I am too young to be your father,
Though you are old enough to be my heir;
What you will have, I’ll give, and willing too,
For do we must what force will have us do.
Set on towards London, cousin, is it so?

Bolingbroke: Yea, my good lord. (RII 3.3.196-209)

London means the deposing of Richard, a deposing Bolingbroke has achieved without
having to use or explicitly threaten violence. He has left himself in a position (however
believable) from which he can claim that the crown has been given rather than taken.
Bolingbroke is a modern character. Not only does he create an order in which he is king,
he does so in a way that reflects the teaching of the first modern, Machiavelli.

In all these things, it is difficult to see Bolingbroke’s actions as a heroic move
against an inadequate order. In fact, through John of Gaunt, Shakespeare undermines
Thayer’s position by presenting a medieval alternative that seems at least as legitimate as
the actions of Bolingbroke. A loyal subject and a believer in the divine right of kings,
Gaunt is the play’s only character fully committed to the medieval order. Not only does
he loyally assert the divine right of kings when asked to rebel by the Duchess (RII 1.2.37-
39), he also sides with the king over his own son by agreeing to Richard’s decision to
banish Bolingbroke.¹³ Twice we see his faith in the medieval order put to the test and
twice he gives a loyal response.

Despite his loyalty, Gaunt is faced with the problem of a bad king who is often
described as a tyrant. Yet despite the prospect of suffering under such a king, Gaunt
reveals two alternatives to rebellion or waiting passively until death. The first is to turn
to God:
But since correction lieth in those hands
Which made the fault that we cannot correct,
Put we our quarrel to the will of heaven. (RII 1.2.4-6)

This option is clearly endorsed by Aquinas, who writes:

Should no human aid whatsoever against a tyrant be forthcoming, recourse must be had to God, the King of all, Who is a helper in due time in tribulation. For it lies in His power to turn the cruel heart of the tyrant to mildness. According to Solomon: “The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord, withersoever He will He shall turn it.”

Although there may be little difference between passive obedience and passive obedience and prayer, the presence of God as a political player, makes prayer an important qualifier.

The second available option is to try to change Richard’s character, to “give wholesome counsel to his unstaid youth.” (RII 2.1.2) Gaunt has pursued this option throughout Richard’s life, and returns to it in his final scene:

Though Richard my life’s counsel would not hear,
My death’s sad tale may yet undeaf his ear. (RII 2.1.95-96)

On his deathbed, loyal to the end, Gaunt fights for the preservation of the old order, rebuking Richard for despoiling it and reminding him of his place in it:

Why, cousin, wert thou regent of the world
It were a shame to let this land by lease.
But for thy world enjoying but this land,
Is it not more than shame to shame it so?
Landlord of England art thou now, not King.
Thy state of law is bondslove to the law. (RII 2.1.109-114)

Thus, Gaunt rejects the modern criticism of this order, replacing Thayer’s conception of a passive obedience with an active one, a position representative of the understanding that one’s own well being is not to be placed ahead of the order to which one belongs. It is a position of loyalty that is dependent on faith; faith that the authority of Richard is God-given and that one’s own identity both begins and continues through its participation in
the order and tradition that this authority provides; faith that what is preserved by obedience is greater than what is lost. While Gaunt’s prayers, arguments and “death’s sad tale” may fail to change Richard, this failure does not necessarily undermine the medieval order, for Gaunt’s actions may serve as an example to future subjects and future kings. Indeed, according to Aquinas this is the approach in accord with apostolic teaching:

For Peter admonishes us to be reverently subject to our masters, not only to the good and gentle but also the froward: “For if one who suffers unjustly bear his trouble for conscience’ sake, this is grace.”

Shakespeare therefore, presents two characters fully devoted to separate understandings of the world. Gaunt’s actions depend on faith in the existing order while Bolingbroke’s actions depend on faith in himself. Both fully commit to their faith.

*How to Usurp Oneself*

In opposition to both these characters is Richard II. Richard is both the last medieval king and the first modern one. Yet at the same time he is neither. As the blood of Gaunt and Bolingbroke connect the two orders, so too are these orders connected in the person of Richard. And Richard is England. Like England, he is pulled by two orders, and only one can win. In Richard, we see the implications of denying the medieval order.

As noted, the modern exists from the beginning of the play in the character of Bolingbroke who first begins his attempt to establish it through his accusation of Richard. Richard’s response to this accusation is deeply revealing. His initial reply to these most serious of charges is to assume a mocking tone: “How high a pitch his resolution soars!”
Eventually pressed into action, Richard acts in a puzzling manner, initially acknowledging his responsibility to judge Bolingbroke’s accusation and then immediately avoiding such a judgment:

We were not born to sue, but to command;
Which since we cannot do ... (RII 1.1.196-197)

From here, Richard falls back on medieval law, agreeing that Mowbary and Bolingbroke should settle the dispute through a duel, thereby placing the judgment in the hands of Justice (i.e. God.) At the last moment, he changes his mind and proceeds to consult his advisors on what to do. He then banishes Mowbary and Bolingbroke, but not before changing Bolingbroke’s sentence.

That Richard is in a difficult position is undeniable. As evidenced by the tone he takes in the scene, his subsequent banishment of Bolingbroke, and the oath of loyalty he forces him to swear, Richard correctly identifies Bolingbroke as a threat to his rule, even anticipating his rebellious return. Nevertheless, Richard’s choices are limited. Mowbary has accepted some responsibility for Gloucester’s death. (RII 1.2.134-140) Yet if Richard punishes him, he vindicates Bolingbroke’s accusations, thereby strengthening the rebel’s position. At the same time, the possibility of a duel, while potentially beneficial if Mowbary wins, is even more dangerous, for if Bolingbroke wins, his accusations are vindicated by both God and blood. While neither are good prospects, clearly the first is the better of the two options. Unfortunately, Richard immediately undermines this first option by declaring himself unfit to decide. Thus, when he finally returns to it, he has already weakened it substantially, thereby destroying confidence in both his decision and his rule.

This grave misjudgment cannot simply be attributed to foolishness, for there is no
indication that Richard is a stupid man. Rather, as is indicated by his behaviour in the first scene, his final decision in the third scene, and his “toward London” speech, he is clearly aware of Bolingbroke’s calculated political maneuvers. Shakespeare then, leaves us with a significant problem: why does Richard act as he does? The answer can only be that Richard pursues the one option not yet stated – he pursues the duel from within the context of the medieval order. By turning to the duel and trusting in God for justice, Richard denies Bolingbroke’s trap by refusing to accept the possibility that Bolingbroke might win.

Within the logic of the medieval order, Richard seems to initially make a prudent decision. As king, his responsibility lies in protecting the integrity and stability of the medieval order. In the words of Aquinas, this responsibility means the king must concern himself with three key tasks:

First of all, to establish a virtuous life in the multitude subject to him; second, to preserve it once established; and third, having preserved it, to promote its greater perfection.17

In fulfilling these duties, Richard must consider Bolingbroke’s moves as a threat to the medieval order that requires action. On the other hand, he must consider the problem that Mowbary appears responsible (at least in some sense) for the death of Gloucester. This political problem is best dealt with by Richard passing judgment himself. However, since Richard has already undermined this option, a personal judgment might put the integrity and stability of the kingdom at risk, especially since the stability of the kingdom so heavily depends on the support of the nobles.

That Richard actively pursues the nobles’ support is revealed by the circumstances surrounding Mowbary’s answers to Bolingbroke’s three accusations.
Bolingbroke accuses Mowbary of murdering Gloucester, owing the king money and plotting against Gaunt. As already noted, this second accusation works to implicate Richard in the matter of the first. In dealing with the third (as he does in the matter of the second) Mowbary acknowledges the problem that Bolingbroke presents, but states that the matter has already been settled: “I did confess it, and exactly begg’d / Your grace’s pardon, and I hope I had it.” (RII 1.1.140-141) Finally, in defending himself against the murder charges, Mowbary explains that his only fault lies in not fulfilling his duty to protect Gloucester.

Given these explanations, we are inclined to ask why Richard bothers asking for them. As noted, he must already be aware of the matter of the ‘debt’ and surely he has already inquired into the actions surrounding the murder. As for the accusations concerning Gaunt, his response reveals no surprise at hearing them and Mowbary seems to think the matter settled. Richard’s purpose then, is to have Mowbary’s explanations heard by the court, for having Mowbary explain the debt works to protect Richard from Bolingbroke’s implicit charge that the debt is connected to the killing of Gloucester. And if the nobles can be convinced that Mowbary did not kill for money, it will be far easier to convince them that he did kill for justifiable reasons.

Despite these efforts, Richard has allowed himself to be effectively cornered by Bolingbroke. He cannot rule against Bolingbroke without seeming to go against justice, while to rule against Mowbary, especially when he has already undermined such a ruling, might be seen as a ruling against himself. Thus, he turns to his final option – a duel. Of course, this decision can only be seen as prudent if one actually believes that Mowbary will win the duel. But why would Richard make this assumption? Two potential
reasons emerge. The first possibility is that Richard believes that he has had Gloucester killed for justifiable reasons.¹⁸ This reason is supported by the fact that Richard shows no remorse or feelings of guilt over Gloucester’s death. And it is hard to forget that Richard enjoys flatterers and enjoys flattering himself. In fact, until he is deposed it seems that Richard does not even consider the possibility that he can do wrong. Thus, it would not be surprising if Richard simply assumes that he acted justly in ordering Gloucester’s death (whether he did or not.)

The second possibility is that Richard views himself as guilty but sees the crime as inconsequential in comparison to Bolingbroke’s actions against his person. In fact, for Richard not to believe in the inevitability of a Mowbary victory would be for him to see his own involvement as somehow worse than Bolingbroke’s treasonous aims, a possibility that is in no way supported by the text.

If Richard agrees to the duel on the premise that he is protected by the medieval order, the reason he stops can only be a subsequent failure of faith. Put another way, Richard seems to understand the reasons to trust in the medieval order and attempts to do so, but cannot.

When Richard is unable to fully commit to a belief in the protection of the medieval order, he is faced with the possibility that Bolingbroke may win the duel. This is a terrifyingly dangerous possibility for Richard, for not only would such an occurrence strengthen Bolingbroke’s position among the more modern nobles, it would also (and more importantly) weaken Richard’s position among those with any faith in the medieval order. Richard would be seen as condemned by God. Thus, because Richard is unable to commit to a belief in the medieval order, his only choice is to cut his losses and pass
judgment himself. Richard’s problem, of course, is that he has already stated that he cannot judge in this matter. Thus, he has significantly weakened his position, a problem he recognizes and attempts to mitigate by involving advisors in his decision. In an attempt to create order, Richard places his concern for himself over his concern for the order that legitimizes it. In doing so, he attempts to become a modern.

The problem for Richard, of course, is that he cannot be a modern. The only order that he can create is the one that already exists. It is not as though Richard can suddenly declare himself a modern king, for his rule is fundamentally legitimized not by his own power or abilities, but by his position as the natural ruler who is placed there by God. Richard inherently belongs to the medieval order. Thus, while the possibility exists for Richard to deny the medieval order by deposing himself, he cannot fully separate himself from it unless he stops being king, a proposition that is impossible. The impossibility of this separation is shown most clearly in Henry’s recognition that to be fully deposed, Richard must be killed, because he is still (and always will be) seen as the king. That Bolingbroke is correct in this assessment is highlighted by the groom’s referral to the deposed Richard as king [“king, / When thou wert king.” (RII 5.5.72-73)], and even more strongly by Richard’s murderer Exton [“This dead king to the living king I’ll bear.” (RII 5.5.117)] Richard may no longer be King of England, but he is still the deposed king of England.

Richard’s failure then, stems from his inability to have faith in himself and the order that he embodies. Thus, Richard’s denial of the medieval order is tragic not only because it means that he denies himself, but also because he cannot escape from that which he has denied. He is intimately tied to his position, for if he is not the king then he
is nothing. This is why he smashes the mirror, because he sees what he is, a shadow of himself from which there is no escape.

*The Ego of Richard*

In the end, Richard’s denial of the medieval order can only be attributed to his ego. Richard shares much with Aristotle’s sanguine men, who:

> Are confident in danger only because they have conquered often and against many foes. Yet they closely resemble brave men, because both are confident; but brave men are confident for the reasons stated earlier, while these are so because they think they are the strongest and can suffer nothing. (Drunken men also behave in this way; they become sanguine.) When their adventures do not succeed, however, they run away; but it was the mark of a brave man to face things that are, and seem, terrible for a man, because it is noble to do so and disgraceful not to do so.

Richard, as we have noted, surrounds himself with flatterers and enjoys flattering himself. (RII 2.2.85) His handling of Gloucester suggests that he sees few restrictions to his power and that his use of this power has been met with little resistance. Like the sanguine man, he is “confident in danger” only because he has “conquered often and against many foes.” The power afforded him by his kingship has allowed Richard to “think he can suffer nothing.” Yet when he is met with real resistance – with the challenge of Bolingbroke – his confidence quickly wilts.

As noted, when confronted with Bolingbroke’s accusations the correct move is to rule on the matter immediately. However, Richard’s blustery façade overwhelms his duty to prudently protect the medieval order, for it causes him to simply equate everything about the medieval order with himself. This conflation replaces the notion that he is to act in the interest of the medieval order – that he is its protector – with the idea that, since he is king, everything is permissible. Instead of understanding himself as
God’s king – as the protector and executor of His laws – he places himself outside the medieval order. He places himself above God. In other words, Richard mistakes his will for the will of God. As a result, he arrogantly approves a duel that opens up the possibility that Bolingbroke might triumph – a victory that would be devastating to both Richard’s rule and the medieval order. In doing so, Richard rejects his duty to prudently protect the medieval order.

In attempting to put God to the test, Richard ends up testing himself. Richard fails because he abandons his duties for the sake of his ego. He has acted as though his divine right means that anything is permissible – that he cannot fail. Yet this conviction is a hollow one, for Richard does not have the fortitude to match his ego. As a result, he turns away from the duel at the final moment, weakening his position even further. Richard’s failure has more to do with a lack of faith in himself than any faith in the medieval order.

Thus, while Richard’s deposing of himself is the deposing of the medieval order, it cannot be said to be its failure for, by acting in a way that is foreign to the medieval order Richard does not allow it to be put to the test. Indeed, Shakespeare leaves open the possibility that if Richard had placed his faith in the medieval order – if he had devoted his rule to upholding it – he would have enjoyed a successful reign. At the same time, he offers the possibility that the triumph of the modern world was an inevitable and perhaps positive response to the possibility of tyranny inherent in the medieval order. In other words, he holds back judgment on which order is preferable. Yet, this is not to say that Shakespeare provides no insight into either order. Through Bolingbroke and others in the play, Shakespeare does show that man lies at the centre of the modern order. Loyalty in
the modern world depends on faith in man. For Bolingbroke, this loyalty actualizes through his faith in himself. For other characters, such as York, this loyalty consists of having faith in men with power or, more specifically, in men who provide order. In contrast to the modern order lies the character of Gaunt. Through him, the medieval order is revealed as an order that depends on faith in the order to which one belongs (i.e. to God.) Unlike Bolingbroke however, who reveals the modern from both the position of subject and king, Gaunt can only reveal the medieval order from the position of a subject. Shakespeare therefore, opens up the opportunity for a comprehensive examination of the modern order in a way that simultaneously handicaps his ability to fully address the medieval order.

Richard and the Fall of Man

Admittedly, this final point can be met with a devastating critique. For one can surely claim that since Richard was placed in power by the medieval order – since he was placed there by God – his failure proves the failure of the medieval order. Shakespeare, however, clearly parallels the fall of Richard with the Fall of Man through his continuous use of garden imagery. This parallel is most clearly expressed by the Queen, who, upon hearing of Richard’s defeat, protests:

How dares thy harsh rude tongue sound this unpleasing news?
What Eve, what serpent hath suggested thee
To make a second fall of cursed man? (RII 3.4.75-77)

In other words, the problem of why the medieval order fails may be akin to the problem of how sin enters a perfectly created world; is it the fault of the Creator, or of man who disobeys him? While the Bible clearly places the responsibility for this failure at the feet
[Text content cut off]
of man, the legitimacy of this understanding has come under attack—especially by modern thinkers. However, since Shakespeare offers no explicit challenge (at least in this play) to the biblical claim that the fault lies with man rather than in the order to which he belongs, it is impossible to view Richard II simply as the condemnation of the medieval order.

We can conclude, however, that Richard II reveals the implications of the shift from the medieval to the modern order in a way that points to the importance of faith in political life. Through the character of Bolingbroke, who acts both as subject and king, we see that success in the modern order is measured by what one creates. Because what one creates depends on one's actions, success is shown to stem from faith in oneself. In contrast, the medieval order measures success in terms of how well one performs from within the position in which one is placed. Success depends upon having faith in how one is positioned and in doing all that can be done to fulfill the duties of this position. Success in the medieval understanding depends on faith in the order to which one belongs. Under these terms, Gaunt, because he fulfills every duty as subject, is a success. Through Richard, we have the potential to see what this order means from a position of political rule. However, because success for a medieval king requires faith in oneself, and because Richard does not have this faith, the medieval order is ultimately obscured.

So why does Shakespeare leave us with this problem? It is not simply because he does not know the answer. Rather, Shakespeare is revealing that, as moderns, we cannot know the answer. In becoming modern— in becoming the creator of order— man separates himself from his creation; he cannot be part of it. Yet the modern order suggests that man is defined by what he creates. In other words, man creates himself.
Thus, if man is the creator of himself, and to create oneself is to separate yourself from your creation, the modern order puts the possibility of self-knowledge into new terms. Through Richard II, then, Shakespeare shows that the shift from the medieval to modern order represents a change in the possibilities for self-knowledge, a change that can only be fully understood in terms of what has been gained and not in terms of what has been lost.
Chapter Two

HENRY IV: THEN I STOLE ALL COURTESY FROM HEAVEN

In the Henry IV plays Shakespeare explores the implications of the shift toward modern politics, pitting the political life of King Henry, Northumberland, Hotspur and Hal against the life of private pleasure espoused by the misadventurous Falstaff. As king, Henry is faced with the aftermath of his usurpation: a fractious country, and the extremely difficult task of consolidating his rule. His attempt to overcome these obstacles, while successful in certain ways, fails in others. And these failures, which are foreshadowed from the outset of his rule, stem from an inability to truly follow Machiavelli’s teaching.

Although the various alternatives that Richard vacillates between when confronted by Bolingbroke’s accusations may seem to be of questionable legitimacy to the modern reader, Bolingbroke’s actions are not. If Bolingbroke does not accept Richard’s claim to rule as God-given, there can be no theoretical reason not to challenge it and establish a new regime. Yet, practically speaking, the obstacles are enormous. Not only does English history deny precedent for Bolingbroke’s success, but there is no guarantee that the play will work out as it does, for Bolingbroke could not have been certain that he could overcome Mowbary in combat. Bolingbroke, however, does not depend on winning his position by arms, but instead wins it through the manipulation of public opinion. In fact, Bolingbroke’s courtship of public opinion is the defining characteristic of his political career. This courtship is most evident during the trial of Mowbary and in his reaction to Richard’s decision. Commenting on it, Richard contemptuously tells Aumerle:
Ourself and Bushy, Bagot here, and Green
Observed his courtship to the common people,
How he did seem to dive into their hearts
With humble and familiar courtesy;
What reverence he did throw away on slaves,
Wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles
And patient underbearing of his fortune,
As ‘twere to banish their affects with him
(RII 1.4.23-30)

The democratic slant of Bolingbroke’s politics (and many of the nobles’ general contempt for it) continues through his time as king, and is highlighted by Hotspur, who refers to him as the “king of smiles.” (1 HIV 1.3.243)

Having endeared himself to the people and having presented himself as the defender of justice, Bolingbroke relies on his own banishment to strengthen his position. Indeed, even if Richard fully believes his rule to be God-given and forces a duel, the duel is only a matter of arms for an instant, but a matter of honour forever. In becoming Henry IV, Bolingbroke reveals himself to be a cunning master of public opinion and a shrewd pursuer of power who capitalizes on every opportunity.

Although the plays claim that Henry IV is a man beloved by the people – a man so magnificently popular that when it comes time for the war to win England he discovers that there is no one to fight because he has already won everyone over – he does not have that same effect on us. Henry’s victory is won solely by words. Nevertheless, it is an amazing victory, for the overthrowing of England’s established order is an unprecedented achievement that is accomplished with apparent ease. Despite this incredible triumph, Henry’s character seems strangely muted. Indeed, we are compelled to agree with Dain Trafton, who notes: “Shakespeare withholds from Henry the vividness that his story seems to warrant . . . Henry has not been granted the moments
of high dramatic intensity, the triumphs and the agonies, that make a hero.”

This judgment arises mainly from Henry’s time as king. Once Henry assumes rule, he is faced with the reality that, in overthrowing Richard’s rule, he has at the same time destroyed any traditional basis for his own authority. The only basis for power has become power itself. The novelty of this phenomenon is that this power is now completely separate from any traditional claim; it is completely reliant on the action of political actors. The foundation for democratic rule has been laid; now anyone can be king and now political rule wholly depends on gaining the support of others for its legitimacy.

Throughout his rule, Henry finds himself under attack by his former ally Northumberland, who, in questioning the quality of Henry’s rule and in claiming that certain lands have been unjustly denied him, echoes Henry’s claims against Richard. In response, we see Henry make every effort to redivinize his rule and legitimize his family’s claim to the throne through constant appeals to God and the expression of an ever-present desire to visit Jerusalem (a plan that is always somehow delayed by pressing political concerns.) This effort extends to his deathbed, where the name of the room to which he is brought is Jerusalem.

Despite the difficulties he faces, that Henry enjoys some success is hard to deny, for he manages to survive the various rebellions while laying the groundwork for a successful (and peaceful) change in leadership. Following Machiavelli, Henry IV is primarily concerned with gaining and maintaining power and, as king, he carefully grinds out every ounce of power and control that he can, only taking risks when necessary. A somewhat compelling rebel has become a completely boring king, methodically going
about the business of fortifying and legitimizing his rule.

Yet, as Tim Spiekerman points out, despite these efforts, Henry IV is far from a consummate Machiavellian:

Bollingbroke’s subsequent doubt about the justice of his usurpation prevents him from acting as decisively as he should have against his opponents. As a consequence, his reign is dominated by civil war.²

Spiekerman, of course, is referring to Henry IV’s glaring and obvious error: his failure to follow Machiavelli’s teaching that one must kill those who enable you to gain power, as they are the biggest threat to your own rule.³ Shakespeare’s agreement with Machiavelli is foreshadowed by the warnings Richard gives Henry about Northumberland (RII 5.1.62-65), and is confirmed by Northumberland’s effort to seize power. This glaring error problematizes our understanding of Henry as a Machiavellian, forcing us to ask: given the warnings of Richard and his own clear understanding of politics, why does Henry fail to perform this task?

Remarkably, Harry seems not to have understood the reality of political life or the modern world that he has created. In looking back on his rise to power and his relationship with Northumberland, he is genuinely surprised that this Percy, “the man nearest my soul, who like a brother toiled in my affairs”, would actually fulfill Richard’s predictions and turn against him in a quest for power. (2 HIV 3.1.55-74) When Warwick suggests the possibility that “figuring the natures of the times deceased . . . Richard might create a perfect guess”, Henry sadly replies: “are these things then necessities?” (2 HIV 3.1.76-83, 88.) Henry has failed to understand the impossibility of friendship that accompanies political rule. Indeed, while Henry genuinely knows how to achieve power and the many benefits that accompany this power, he completely fails to understand the
tragic and difficult nature of political life. He had not considered what this power costs; he had not counted on the loneliness of the modern world.

That Henry had not fully anticipated the necessary personal or social implications of his rise to power is further illustrated in his inability to follow Machiavelli’s maxim that to be merciful a ruler must be cruel. This failure is first seen in his pardoning of Aumerle’s treason and extends to the light sentence he imposes on his enemy Carlisle – both acts of mercy that can only serve to encourage challenges to his rule. (RII 5.4.130 and 5.6.24-29) Moreover, through his deposing of Richard and his rule as king, Henry struggles with the responsibility of being directly responsible for the death of another.

Henry’s inability to come to terms with the demands of political life is most clear in the aftermath of his command to kill Richard. Ironically, Henry’s order is nearly an identical match with Richard’s order to murder Gloucester that had provided the catalyst for Henry’s ascension to power. The similarity and contrast of these two orders is telling. While both orders are fuelled by political necessity, Richard is confident in the legitimacy of his rule and so is unperturbed by his involvement. In contrast, Henry is dismayed at Richard’s death. If there are any illusions held by Henry (or by us) about justice being the true motivation for his revolution, they are shattered by the death of Richard. Indeed, the murder of Richard is the turning point for Henry, for it forces him to confront what his rule truly means:

Though I did wish him dead,  
I hate the murderer, love him murdered . . .  
Lords, I protest my soul is full of woe  
That blood should sprinkle me to make me grow.  
Come mourn with me for what I do lament,  
And put on sullen black incontinent.  
I’ll make a voyage to the Holy Land  
To wash this blood off from my guilty hand. (RII 5.6.39-40, 45-50)
These words of guilt end *Richard II* and reverberate throughout Henry’s rule, extending to his deathbed, where he privately reveals to Prince Harry:

God knows, my son  
By what bypaths and indirect crook’d ways  
I met this crown; and I myself know well  
How troublesome it sat upon my head . . .  
How I came by the crown, O God forgive,  
And grant it may with thee in true peace live.  
(2 HIV 4.3.312-314, 346.)

Henry then, is a ruler burdened by residues of an order that he has overthrown, an order that he does not believe in and yet still fears, an order that he abhors for its ‘Richards’ and yet still longs for, missing its security and its trust.

In overthrowing an unjust system of politics he has created a politics whose justice depends on the legitimization of injustice. For although Henry may not believe that his usurpation of power was just, his ability to bring peace, law, and order to England very much depends on convincing the people that it was. Or, if this is impossible, he must convince them that, however unjust the deposing of Richard was, in the end it is justified by the security offered by his own rule – that the justice provided by his government justifies the injustice that made it possible.

Why Henry fails in these matters reflects his own inability to fully believe in the necessity of injustice. Henry understood what was wrong with the medieval order but he did not anticipate what his rule would mean or require. Henry could satisfy the people’s thirst for justice by killing Northumberland and placing all responsibility for the death of Richard on his head. That Henry is unwilling to go this far shows him to be either unaware or unaccepting of Machiavelli’s teaching that:
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A ruler who is new to power, cannot conform to all those rules that men who are thought good are expected to respect, for he is often obliged, in order to hold on to power to break his word, to be uncharitable, inhumane, and irreligious. So he must be mentally prepared to act as circumstances and changes in fortune require. As I have said, he should do what is right if he can; but he must be prepared to do wrong if necessary.  

Henry, it turns out, is simply a casual reader of Machiavelli. He is a politician possessing the talents necessary to follow Machiavelli’s advice without the wisdom needed to understand the implications of that advice; he is unable to be “completely bad.” For England, however, the implementation of the Machiavellian project does not depend on this understanding at all, but simply on the overthrowing of the divine right of kings – a revolution that is necessarily accompanied by the delegitimization of the old order.

Henry, though, is no fool. While he may not have fully appreciated the fact that his rise to power would entail the denial of God as a political actor, he is not oblivious to this reality after the fact. Indeed, he attempts to use faith to legitimize his rule, recognizing that a link between God and his government will help secure and stabilize his power. Yet, as seen in his final words to Prince Harry, God has not simply become a political tool for Henry (as he is for Machiavelli), for in Henry there remain remnants of what has been overthrown. Although he may understand that God can no longer be taken seriously as a political actor, Henry nevertheless takes him seriously in his own life. Despite his best intentions, despite his attempts to accept the teaching of Machiavelli, Henry is ruled by his conscience, for Henry still believes in God.
Chapter Three

FALSTAFF: A good wit will make use of anything

As Henry Bolingbroke brings us into the realm of the modern order, Falstaff emerges as its greatest critic. In addition to being one of Shakespeare's most popular characters, Falstaff is also the most difficult to pin down. He has been described by critics as (among other things): Shakespeare's unconscious, a tragic figure and critic of society, a parody of Euphemism, a mock king, a slavish entertainer, and the antithesis of aristocratic virtue, as well as the personification of Appetite, Vicious Age, Fool, Vice, Chiron the centaur and the Forest of Arden. And this is to say nothing of the host of adjectives used to describe how he meets the criteria necessary for such bold and sometimes inventive comparisons.

Present in nearly all these depictions is the understanding that Falstaff embodies the rejection of a conventional existence. This rejection pervasively undermines societal norms, all of which are held together by the requirements of political life. Because of the centrality of politics in our lives and because the study of this requirement lies at the core of Shakespeare's writings, Falstaff is a character of immense interest, for he is the most unique and compelling critique of political life.

But must not a student of Shakespeare also enjoin that this critique is not completely unique — that it is present in all of Shakespeare's political characters — that Shakespeare continuously reveals the tragic nature of political life? Indeed, are we not tempted to extend this claim of tragedy to all of his characters with any attachment to the city? For do not the difficulties, nay the tragedies, of Brutus, Juliet, Lear, Macbeth, Isabelle, Othello, Coriolanus and the characters in our present analysis bear witness to
this fact? And even in the master craftsmen’s wonderful comedies, is not our laughter subject to a hidden fear that it need not turn out or that its turning out might not last or, even more dangerously, to the sneaking suspicion that the turning out is really some sort of fraud predicated on self-deception – on the deception of women by men and men by gods?

Haunted by such intimations, we can only respond in joy when they are incarnated by Falstaff during his interlude on Shakespeare’s stage. But why is this incarnation of intimations, the reminder of these tragedies, so compelling?

_**Falstaff and Socrates**_

The difficulty of how the same critique that produces tears produces laughter is not without precedent, for it reminds us of another, even more ancient, riddle. As the play’s most important critics show, the multitude of metaphors used to describe Falstaff can only come into focus when one discovers what characteristics he shares with Socrates. And as McFarland reveals in his summary of most of these attributes, there are many to choose from:

Both figures, Falstaff and Socrates, bear hallmarks of physical grotesqueness. Falstaff is marked by his obesity; Socrates, by his Silenus features and his snub nose. Both figures are old: Falstaff, “blasted with antiquity” (II Henry IV, 1.2.173-74); Socrates, “more than seventy years of age” (Apology 17D). Both figures are arraigned as deviants from the established social order, and in each case the most important special charge is the corruption of youth: Falstaff is denounced as “that villainous abominable misleader of youth” (I Henry IV, 2.4.446-447), and Socrates – in Jowett’s English – is identified as “this villainous misleader of youth”, as “a doer of evil” who “corrupts the youth” (Apology 24B). . . The Chief Justice affirms that he is “well acquainted” with Falstaff’s way of “wrenching the true cause the false way” (II Henry IV, 2.1.106-7), and these are words that echo the most general of the allegations concerning the social malfunction of Socrates, that he “made the worse appear the better cause. (Apology 18B)”

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Furthermore, the “most noticeable similarity – the one marked by Dover Wilson, whereby Falstaff’s death mimics that of Socrates” – “does serve, whether intentionally or not, to anchor the parallelism between the comic knight and the Greek philosopher.”

Given the already extensive list provided, it is hard to take Wilson’s question regarding Shakespeare’s intentionality with much seriousness. Nevertheless, it does lead us to the pressing question of what Shakespeare’s purpose actually is. And the answer to this latter question does require a response to Dover’s challenge, for the matter of Shakespeare’s self-awareness is a question of immense importance. Thus, we must proceed with the highest degree of caution, exploring both the evidence for the comparison between Falstaff and Socrates and the reasons for it.

Falstaff’s Sense of Time

What Falstaff most obviously shares with Socrates is his complete contempt for convention. Thus, it is amusing that Falstaff enters the play asking the most conventional of questions: [“Now, Hal, what time of day is it?” (1 HIV 1.2.1)] Of course this conventional question is undermined by the tone of Falstaff’s casual address of the prince, and is full of irony, for really it is a meaningless question since, as Falstaff quickly admits to Hal, his life is consumed with the timeless activities of eating, drinking, and visiting whores – activities that require no schedule and no concern for the future. And a life without a schedule – no time to be at home or at church or at work – is a life completely free of responsibility. For time, as it is commonly used, exists only in order to enable cooperation with others. It is a tacit agreement that allows us to meet, to get things done, to plan ahead, to measure relationships, to make agreements, to act correctly,
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to measure the past. Falstaff is a man free from the time of the world and as such he owes no man anything.

*Falstaff and England*

The matter of owing comes to a head in one of the most common charges against Falstaff – the accusation that he is a coward. This charge [a charge that Falstaff denies (1 HIV 2.2.59)] stems from two key episodes – his retreat at Gad’s Hill and his trickery during the Battle of Shrewsbury. In the first episode, as part of a practical joke, Poins and Prince Hal convince Falstaff to help their party rob some travelers. When Hal and Poins abandon the group at Gad’s Hill only to subsequently ambush them and demand the just-stolen-goods from their former companions, Falstaff’s roaring retreat and his subsequent defense of this retreat provide us with what is undoubtedly the most comedic episode in all the history plays.

Although the Gad’s Hill episode is of great importance, the charge of cowardice most obviously stems from Falstaff’s behaviour during the battle of Shrewsbury. Here, in the midst of combat, Falstaff plays dead, escaping an encounter with the fierce and bloodthirsty Douglas. After Hal defeats Hotspur, Falstaff arises and, in a moment of comedy that exceeds tastefulness, stabs the fallen soldier in the thigh, an action he later transforms into the remarkable claim that it was he, and not Hal, that killed him.

This evidence makes it almost impossible to describe Falstaff as courageous. Aristotle, discussing courage, notes: “properly, then, he will be called brave who is fearless in face of a noble death, and of all emergencies that involve death; and the emergencies of war are the highest of this kind.” Given Falstaff’s actions in battle, we can hardly accuse him of this virtue. And even Aristotle’s sharpened definition – the man
“who faces and who fears the right things and from the right motive, in the right way and at the right time, and who feels confidence under the corresponding conditions, is brave; for the brave man feels and acts according to the merits of the case and in whatever way the rule directs”\(^\text{18}\) – can hardly save Falstaff, for even if we maintain that he has feared Douglas at the right time (for he likely would have been defeated) we cannot accept that he does so for the right reason, for to avoid death is hardly noble, and “courage is noble.”\(^\text{19}\) We are also reminded of Cominius’ notation that “valour is the chiefest virtue, and most dignifies the haver.” (Coriolanus 2.2.80-81.) Courage is the chiefest (and thus the most honoured) of all virtues because it is what most obviously saves the city from ruin and it is the most noble because the city is the bestower of honour. Indeed, while Aristotle’s magnanimous man is at the height of the moral virtues, his magnanimity ultimately demands the highest of honours – honours that can hardly be achieved apart from the defense of the city.\(^\text{20}\)

Given this account, we cannot help but tie the question of Falstaff’s courage or cowardice to his critique of honour. This critique is present in almost all his actions, and he most famously gives it voice in his soliloquy preceding the battle of Shrewsbury – a battle he enters with much trepidation:

Falstaff: I would ’twere bed-time Hal, and all well.
Prince Harry: Why, thou owest God a death [Exit]
Falstaff: Tis not due yet. I would be loath to pay him before his day. What need I be so forward with him that calls not on me? Well, ’tis no matter; honour pricks me on. Yea, but how if honour prick me off when I come on? How then? Can honour set-to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery, then? No. What is honour? A word. What is in that word ’honour’? What is that ’honour’? Air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that died o’Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. ’Tis insensible then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it.
Therefore I’ll have none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon. And so ends my catechism. (1 HIV 5.1.126-140)

In this “catechism”, Falstaff rejects the notion of honour on practical grounds. In doing so, he also rejects Aristotle’s argument that the moral virtues should be pursued for their own sake – that one should be courageous because being courageous is better than being cowardly. This rejection does not deny Aristotle’s understanding that moral virtue depends on the city, but rather denies the importance of this dependence. Through his questioning of honour, Falstaff simultaneously questions the traditional understanding of virtue.

Speaking practically, at Shrewsbury the right things, the right motives, the right way and the right time are solely defined by a single rule – the ability to allow Falstaff to continue to live the life that he desires. Under such terms, one fights only the battles he can win and wins only those battles that will aid him in the life he wishes to lead. This rejection of the city’s understanding of courage collapses the tension that permeates the pursuit of honour. Socrates highlights this tension in the Republic, showing that while the timocrat’s (the honour-lover’s) pursuit of honour contains within it the desire to be recognized, both the timocrat and the city understand that this recognition has value only because it entails the recognition of human excellence. Accordingly, the timocrat performs acts of courage not simply because the acts themselves give him satisfaction but also because they allow him to be recognized for his excellence.

Although honour depends on the recognition of the excellence of the man receiving the honour, this recognition is only honouring if it is given by men of excellence. Aristotle’s magnanimous man, for example, despises the honour given by his inferiors, desiring only recognition from the better men of the city (and since they are not
as great as he is, even this may not satisfy him.)\(^{22}\) In other words, honour depends on the excellence of the man giving the recognition as much as on the excellence of the man receiving it. Thus, while the honour lover is fundamentally motivated by the desire to be recognized, this desire is moderated by the understanding that, if recognition is to be satisfying, it must be related to human excellence – not only excellence in oneself, but excellence in the one doing the honoring.\(^{23}\) This understanding (implicitly at least) leans on the acceptance of a standard of excellence, a standard summed up in a rational account that is inseparably connected to and premised on the city and the gods.

By prioritizing practicality over moral virtue Falstaff makes what is useful for himself \textit{the} virtue, allowing him to reformulate Aristotle’s definition of the courageous man (“who faces and who fears the right things and from the right motive, in the right way and at the right time . . . according to the merits of the case and in whatever way the rule directs”), transforming nobility into practicality and civic virtue into self-interest. One is reminded of Socrates’ claim that what is useful is beautiful.\(^{24}\) This alternative is personified by Socrates who, in orienting his life by the pursuit of wisdom, “is ultimately compelled to transcend not merely the dimension of common opinion, of political opinion, but the dimension of political life as such.”\(^{25}\) Put in practical terms:

When Socrates assumes that the wise man is just, he understands by justice transpolitical justice, the justice which is irreconcilable with hurting anyone. The highest form of justice is the preserve of those who have the greatest self-sufficiency which is humanly possible.\(^{26}\)

In other words, the philosopher orients his life not by politics but by wisdom. The implication is that the philosopher cannot be a true citizen because his understanding of justice disconnects it from the law. Since his understanding of justice transcends human law and the demands of the city, it is superior to and separate from the common
understanding of political life whose 'rational' standards are premised on superstitious tradition and common opinion; because he alone completely orients himself by rationality, he is completely unaffected by the standards of honour that define political life. As he does not depend on others to give him satisfaction, the philosopher is self-sufficient.

For Falstaff, as for Socrates, the only measurement of what is worth doing is oneself. This self-sufficiency allows Falstaff to make his own, reasonable decisions about whether to fight Douglas (or the robbers) and die, or fake death (or run away) and live. Such calculations are self-sufficient not only because they rely exclusively on one's own judgment, but also because they remove the concern for honour from the equation. This is important to men like Falstaff and Socrates because, although honour is the recognition of human excellence, this recognition ultimately must be given by others. By living his life according to non-political standards, by standards that liberate him from the consideration of honour (and thus the demands of the city), Falstaff provides us with a way of life that entails radical freedom.

Falstaff and the Humour of Courage

Yet if we are to ascribe this Socratic wisdom to Falstaff – if we are to say that when he seems to act like a coward he is really acting rationally – how are we to account for the roar that seems to define his flight from Gad's Hill? The difficulty of this task tempts us to conclude that perhaps we demand too much from Shakespeare; for who can complain of any sacrifice of consistency while reveling in its final comedic result? This
‘defense’ of Shakespeare’s account of Falstaffian ‘courage’ is exemplified by A.R. Humphreys, who writes:

Falstaff’s vitality confused critics as to the difference between dramatic and real persons. The multifarious material is not to be reduced to a single realistic formula... Is Falstaff inconsistent? Yes, if judged realistically. No, when taken, rightly, for what Empson calls his “Dramatic Ambiguity,” for the figure of dramatic comedy that he is, butt and wit together, equally amusing by his elephantine panic, exuberant fabrications, and comic aplomb in the midst of war. His philosophy of courage is, no doubt, to show as much or as little of it as circumstances require; he might observe, like the practical but not cowardly Bluntschili in Shaw’s *Arms and the Man*, “It is our duty to live as long as we can,” and like Bluntschili he keeps in his holster something better than pistols. Yet Bluntschili would hardly “roar” in flight, as Falstaff does (II.ii.106), and the attempt to fit Falstaff into a formula of psychological realism must finally fail. Brilliant at timely evasions, he escapes this straitjacket as he escapes any other.27

In his oscillation between a rational and irrational reading of the scene, Humphreys underestimates both Shakespeare and Falstaff. By characterizing inconsistency as an inevitable and necessary part of comedy, Humphreys (and Empson) misjudge the essence of comedy and in doing so misjudge the play. For if it is impossible to judge Shakespeare’s character “realistically” how can we possibly judge his play realistically? And if it is impossible to judge the play realistically – if the play (or Falstaff) is ambiguous – why bother judging it (or him) at all? Indeed, it is impossible to see how a writer’s use of “dramatic ambiguity” can lead to anything but absurdity, for without reference points comedy (and life itself) is bankrupt. Nevertheless, although “dramatic ambiguity” can only denigrate art, its counterpoint only enhances it. For, as is shown by Aristophanes, Swift, and Shakespeare, true comedy lies not in “dramatic ambiguity” but in irony, and true irony is not inconsistent. As we shall see, neither is Shakespeare’s greatest comedian.
The importance of the comedy provided by Falstaff's roaring retreat is directly tied to his memorable declaration that he is the cause of wit in other men. (2 HIV 1.2.8-9)

Indeed, it is Falstaff's witiness that initially moves Poins and Hal toward their duplicity at Gad's Hill, for as Poins points out in making the case for his plan to rob Falstaff:

The virtue of this jest will be the incomprehensible lies that this same fat rogue will tell us when we meet at supper: how thirty at least he fought with, what wards, what blows, what extremities he endured: and in the reproof of this lives the jest." (1 HIV 1.2.164-168)

To bring him alongside the scheme, Poins must convince Hal that their robbery of the thieves will be successful. To make his case, demonstrating an astounding instinctual understanding of his companions, Poins argues that the success of his plan is assured by the cowardliness of Peto and Bardolph and the reasonableness of Falstaff:

Well, for two of them, I know them to be as true-bred cowards as ever turned back; and for the third, if he fight longer than he sees reason, I'll forswear arms. (1 HIV 1.2.163-164)

Poins arguments are both convincing and correct, with Falstaff eventually fulfilling his prediction of a reasonable retreat, departing only after being outnumbered two to one and abandoned by his companions.

Yet here again we are faced with the reality that the "roar" with which Falstaff retreats seems to smack of genuine fear (in Hal's account it is a roar "for mercy.") However, in light of Poins' remarks and Falstaff's character as a whole, are we not also forced to admit the possibility that this roar is really the most reasonable of all roars? For Falstaff's roar does allow – nay, it forces – both a subsequent defense against the charge of cowardliness, and a glorious display of wit in himself and in his companions. Indeed, in the end, one must surely conclude that Falstaff is playing along with the joke the whole time. Take, for instance, the overblown insults and charges of cowardliness he
levels against Hal and Poins while approaching them in the dark after robbing the travellers. Do these insults not hint at the fact that Falstaff is suspicious of his companions sudden disappearance from the scene? And in light of this sudden absence and the whole company’s affinity for tomfoolery, must not Falstaff be suspicious of the strangely ‘coincidental’ ambush of the two hidden highwaymen? Moreover, is not his exaggerated defense – his obvious marking of his sword (a marking he flouts to Bardolph, Peto and Gadshill), his use of unreliable witnesses (the same Bardolph, Peto and Gadshill), his ironic and repetitive references to the cowardice of Hal and Poins (before being accused himself), and his absurd inflation and subsequent deflation of the number of robbers – evidence that he has suspected from the very beginning that it is all an elaborate joke? And even if he only suspects such a plot in the slightest, is not the potential for a display of verbal dexterity – dexterity that culminates in Falstaff’s hilarious argument that he fled to save Hal – motivation enough for a roar? For there is great pleasure to be gained from roars such as these and there is nothing to be lost (but honour!)

Because honour does matter to Poins however, this roar is all-important, for it provides him with the grounds to charge Falstaff with cowardice and gives him the chance to discredit him. Here we are reminded of the rivalry that exists between Falstaff and Poins. Poins is Hal’s closest companion and Falstaff never wearies of signaling him out for insult, characterizing him as cowardly and accusing him of spending time with the prince for his own gain. (2 HIV 2.2.107-109) Regardless of the truth of these particular charges, it is not especially difficult to understand why Poins would spend time with the prince. It is, however, much harder to comprehend Hal’s affection for Poins, who,
beyond the facilitation of Falstaff’s humour, is unable to provide much of anything except (if Falstaff is wrong) loyalty. Accordingly, we can only be astounded when Hal, in a moment that hints of sincerity, turns to Poins to discuss the impending death of his father:

Prince Harry: What wouldst thou think of me if I should weep?
Poins: I would think you a most princely hypocrite
Prince Harry: It would be every man’s thought, and thou art a blessed fellow to think as every man thinks. Never a man’s thought in the world keeps the roadway better than thine. (2 HIV 2.2.41-45)

Suddenly, our surprise dissipates, for in the midst of this episode, Hal reveals that he is asking Poins this question, not because they are the closest of friends, but because Poins is “everyman”, the perfect companion for an emerging prince who must concern himself with public support.

Poins then, as common opinion incarnate, is Falstaff’s natural rival, for Falstaff, in true Socratic form, devotes his life to the overcoming of conventional thought. At the same time, Poins rightly sees Falstaff as a considerable threat to his way of life – as a significant threat to England. Poins hints at why he sees Falstaff as such a threat when he discusses Falstaff’s approach to combat (not being willing to “fight longer than he sees reason”), an approach he correctly sees as a significant threat to the city. For, as noted, the city depends on men fighting longer than is reasonable for their own self-preservation, making a noble defense of the city (and not oneself) the proper standard of courage. Because Poins sees Falstaff as a significant threat to this understanding – because his undermining of moral virtue is a threat to what Poins (and England) hold dear and depend upon – he devises a plan to expose the knight’s true self to the prince.
As Poins had anticipated, this plan plays itself out when the events at Gad’s Hill spill into Boar’s Head in the form of Falstaff, who immediately accuses Hal of being a coward. This is the chance Poins has been looking for — the chance to defeat the wit of Falstaff. And it is this chance that is all to Poins, for he has not devised this scheme for the sake of the “incomprehensible lies” that Falstaff will tell but rather in order to give them “reproof”, for in “this lies the jest.”

Poins’ plan, therefore, is not simply to allow Falstaff the opportunity to display his great wit. Rather, Poins’ scheme is intended to reveal his rival as a great coward and liar; it is intended to triumph over Falstaff by making him and his way of life — the reasons for his cowardliness and lies — look ridiculous and dangerous. To do so, Poins has created a scenario that seems to put Falstaff in an indefensible position. From here, Poins intends to give the wit of Falstaff reproof — he intends to defeat the comic’s jests and show that the life of Falstaff is indefensible. It is ultimately an attempt to conquer Falstaff by speech; an attempt to defend the city while proving its superiority.

In many ways the attempted reproof of Falstaff by Poins is akin to the trial of Socrates. For, if ultimately successful, the questioning of what the city holds dear — piety, justice, honour, money, etc. — must finally lead to the conclusion that politics is unnatural and that there is really nothing worth defending in the city. In other words, Falstaff’s rejection of courage is the necessary result of the Socratic understanding. It is not surprising then that, when suddenly confronted by the charges devised by Poins, Falstaff employs the same defense used by Socrates in his own apology, claiming that what he does, he does for the sake of the city:
Prince Harry: And Falstaff, you carried your guts away as nimbly, with as quick
dexterity, and roared for mercy, and still run and roared as ever I
hear bull-calf. What a slave art thou, to hack thy sword as thou
hast done, and then say it was in fight! What trick, what device,
what starting-hole canst thou now find out to hide thee from this
open and apparent shame?

Poins: Come, let’s hear. Jack; what trick has thou now?

Falstaff: By the Lord, I knew ye as well as he that made ye. Why, hear you,
my masters. Was it for me to kill the heir-apparent? Should I turn
upon the true prince? Why, thou knowest I am as valiant as
Hercules, but beware instinct. The lion will not touch the true
prince – instinct is a great matter. I was now a coward on instinct.
I shall think the better of myself and thee during my life – I for a
valiant lion, and thou for a true prince. (1 HIV 2.5.238-252)

Attempting to maintain that he acted as he did for the sake of the prince, Falstaff not only
denies the accusation of cowardice, but also takes on the guise of courage, transforming
the roaring of a coward into the roaring of a lion and demanding the recognition given
Hercules in same way that Socrates demands the honours of Achilles. Moreover, his
dichotomous description of himself as both “a coward on instinct” and a “valiant lion”
(and the dependence of the latter upon on the former) surely reminds us of Socrates’
claim that he is courageous because he is willing to reject the city’s notion of courage.
And in this self-accounting, Falstaff manages to raise the question of whether all that
remains when one overcomes the opinion of the city is instinct.

Whether Falstaff’s defense is successful is one of the play’s most difficult
questions. Given the initial aim of Poins, it seems impossible not to declare Falstaff the
victor, for Poins ultimately fails to achieve his desired result – he fails to make the
reproof of Falstaff’s humour the jest. Indeed, we are compelled to conclude that through
the display of his own wit – in defending himself against the charges of Poins and Hal –
Falstaff proves himself to be the master of comedy and Poins’ wit to be fraudulent.
Illuminating this episode is the ability comedy has to free us from those things that hold power over us. Comedy is essentially a destructive force, a dissembling art that serves to deflate rather than build up. As Michael Platt notes, "Falstaff's wit separated men briefly and ever so slightly from a most powerful force in their lives." We must wonder then, whether the defeat of Poins is due to an over-attachment to the city – an attachment that makes his attempt at comedy poor competition to Falstaff's artistry; for does not this attachment lead to a mistaken understanding of comedy, an error that culminates in his strange hope that the reproof of Falstaff's wit would be funny? Does not his devotion to the city ultimately override and limit his sense of humour? For is it not obvious that it is impossible to out-humour someone who takes himself less seriously than you do?

According to Platt however, our current understanding of this victory, of Falstaff's humour, nay, of Falstaff himself is itself problematic since it brings our claim of Falstaff's self-sufficiency into question:

The entertainer is both a master and a slave . . . To be able to make that [laughter] happen in another person is a kind of mastery. But if the entertainer like Falstaff is a master he is also a slave. . . . For the man who is really witty, who succeeds with his jests, it is even more hard to break the habit than for a dull-witted fellow. Yet each is slavish; the one in a crude, the other in a sad manner. Both need an audience in order to continue their way of life. The case of the man with real wit is the sadder of the two because his great gifts are wasted; he drowns the solitude necessary for mental endeavor, which his wit ought to be able to endure, in perpetual jests. In this way he also becomes the servant or slave of their opinions. Himself a slave, he enslaves others and all the more because of his great gifts.

The element of mastery in making men laugh brings the entertainer close to the ruler; it brings Falstaff close to Henry . . . When a man entertains an audience it is hard to tell the ruler from the ruled. 

At the heart of Platt's argument is the complaint that Falstaff's devotion to entertaining removes the possibility of self-sufficiency from his life, or, to go even further, leads him
to live a life that is primarily fueled by the desire for the presence and love of others. If this is true, Platt is undoubtedly correct that Falstaff's life is not much different (except, perhaps, in its scale) than that lived by the political man, for it too is a life defined by recognition. Yet, cannot this same accusation be made against Socrates? Consider Socrates' words at his own trial:

   The young who follow me of their own accord — those who have the most leisure, the sons of the wealthiest — enjoy hearing human beings examined. And they themselves often imitate me, and in turn they attempt to examine others.

The reason he is followed by the young, Socrates says, is because they enjoy what he says, and this enjoyment leads them to the examination of others. This examination is seen at its greatest heights in the Republic, where Socrates' examination of justice is in turn examined by Glaucon, Thrasymachus, and Adeimantos. Socrates is not only witty in himself he is the cause of wit in other men.

Likewise, it is possible to extend this accusation even further, for the writings of Plato and Xenophon also remind us of the oft-repeated observation that we never see Socrates in conversation with an equal (nor are we ever privy to any mental endeavors he may practice in solitude.) Moreover, Socrates, like Falstaff, is always proving that he is better through conversations, conversations that raise the same possibility that the philosopher is consumed with the recognition of others. As Leo Strauss puts it:

   But if the philosopher is radically detached from human beings as human beings, why does he communicate his knowledge or his questionings, to others? Why was the same Socrates, who said that the philosopher does not even know the way to the market place, almost constantly in the market place?

In response, argues Strauss, one might say that Socrates enters the market place — that he "corrupts the youth" — for the sake of friendship. In other words, because he "cannot help being attached to men of well-ordered souls: he desires 'to be together' with such
men all the time.”^37 Yet since “we realize that only by philosophizing can man's souls become well-ordered,”^38 “the philosopher as such is concerned with nothing but the quest for wisdom and kindling or nourishing the love of wisdom in those who are by nature capable of it.”^39 Thus, like politicians (and all men) the philosopher has an attachment to human beings. However, unlike these men, the philosopher's attachment to others is qualified by his being able to choose the people he converses with. Like all men, the philosopher desires recognition and, like the timocrat, he desires that this recognition be in accordance with what is best. What defines the philosopher, therefore, is not a lack of desire for recognition, but rather that his desire is restricted to private life – it exists apart from the city.^41

It is not surprising then, that Falstaff lives a private life and practices his witty charms on the few – on those he considers capable of producing similar wit. As for those figures in his life who cannot do so, Falstaff pays them no more concern than is needed. Of chief concern to Falstaff is Hal. In fact, in Part One of Henry IV we see Falstaff separated from the prince and in the company of others in only one scene.^43 (3.3)

Although this scene does show Falstaff practicing his wit on Bardolph, Bardolph does not produce any wit in return, showing little evidence that he understands any of Falstaff's jokes, taking everything that he says literally. Bardolph may be a dull-witted man but, if Falstaff is at all concerned with entertainment, his concern it is not with entertaining Bardolph but with entertaining himself (and perhaps with preparing himself to entertain others.) In opposition to Platt therefore, we are finally led to conclude that (however entertaining he is) Falstaff's wit is not purposed toward anything beyond practical goals. For, in this same scene, when Mistress Quickly enters to demand
payment, it quickly becomes clear that Falstaff has used his wit to work himself into a position from which he can demand money from Bardolph, and that he intends to apply his wit in the same way with the hostess. (1 HIV 3.3.40-75) One is reminded of the strange fact that, although Falstaff claims to be an adept thief, he is penniless, in debt to almost everyone he knows, and entirely dependent on his companions for maintaining his supply of food and drink. As Strauss puts it, "the philosopher cannot devote his life to his own work if other people do not take care of the needs of his body."^44

The Choice of the Prince

Even though Poins' attempted reproof of Falstaff's humour is a disaster, Hal manages to rescue it from complete failure. For although the humorous rhetoric of Falstaff may be more compelling than (and thus superior to) the rhetoric of Poins, the position of Poins does have some credibility. Falstaff's close contact with the future king does pose a significant threat to England, for if Hal assumes a Falstaffian understanding of honour as king - if he rejects the fundamental premise of political life - it is questionable whether England can survive. In this light, Poins' accusations are entirely justified. Indeed, they are also (in a certain way) successful, for the actions of Falstaff and his subsequent defense, while proving superior to Poins and his rhetoric, fail to convince Hal who, in play-acting the part of his father, adopts the same famous charge that was levied against Socrates - that he is a "villainous, abominable misleader of youth." (1 HIV 2.5.421) Then, confirming that he sees Falstaff's initial defense as insufficient, Hal returns to the heart of Falstaff's argument (made a full two-hundred lines earlier) and rejects it: "thou art a natural coward without instinct." (1 HIV 2.5.451)
As in all the accusations made against him in this scene, Falstaff rebuffs this puzzling remark, focusing on the premise ("I deny your major"). Since this final accusation of Hal embodies the distinction between Falstaff and himself (a distinction that has been made clear in this scene) – and since everything depends on this distinction – it is not surprising that Falstaff rejects it. For to state that one can be a 'natural coward without instinct' is to argue the supremacy of political life – it is to argue that the life chosen by Hal is superior to the life of Falstaff – it is to argue that the political life is the life according to nature. Hal, then, seems to align himself with the position that the political life is the natural life, making a life lived in strict accordance with instinct (or apart from the city) unnatural and thus ultimately impossible. According to Hal's understanding, because the political life (and not the instinctive life) is natural, it is the standard by which judgments must be made. In such judgments, Falstaff can but appear as a coward.

Yet must we not object that this interpretation is in line with the accusations and underlying concern of Poins – a concern that has already been shown to be weaker than the claims of Falstaff – a concern that has already failed? Perhaps this failure has not been as complete as first thought. But nay, it is a failure. And this failure is recognized by Hal, whose rejection of Falstaff and commitment to politics does not (in opposition to our earlier claim) finally entail the acceptance of its practice as natural, for Hal fully believes that the practice of politics can be transformed. Thus, Hal's commitment to politics can only be understood as a commitment to this transformation. We are forced to consider therefore, the possibility that Hal rejects nature entirely; that, in clear opposition to Falstaff, Hal accepts and devotes himself to the power afforded by politics. According
to Hal’s understanding, because Falstaff is unwilling to commit to this way of life, he is “a natural coward upon instinct.” This reading is confirmed at the end of the scene, with Hal declaring his entrance into political life, a decision reaffirmed not only by his reinvigorated concern for time and for honour, but in his desire to force Falstaff to also accept such a life:

I’ll to court in the morning. We must all to the wars, and thy place shall be honourable. I’ll procure this fat rogue a charge of foot, and I know his death will be a march of twelve score. The money shall be paid back again, with advantage. Be with me betimes in the morning; and so good morrow. (I HIV 2.5.495-499)

Falstaff and the Challenge of Justice

It seems probable then, that Falstaff’s earlier complaint that he has been corrupted by Hal, if at all sensical, is tied directly to his (eventual) involvement in England’s civil war. Falstaff repeats this sentiment under different circumstances when confronted by the Lord Chief Justice (an encounter he seeks to avoid.) As his name suggests, the Lord Chief Justice is the only person in Henry IV’s England who places law and order above all else. Indeed, the other Justices of the plays – Justice Shallow and Justice Silence – are appropriately named, for when they participate in the selection of Falstaff’s army we quickly discover that they are far more concerned with maintaining their old relationships with Falstaff than they are with upholding the law or Henry’s rule. Under Henry, Falstaff’s way of life and Hal’s participation in it has been allowed to flourish, with the only resistance coming from the Lord Chief Justice.

Because of his concern for the laws of England – for the integrity of its justice – the Lord Chief Justice is concerned not only with the life of Falstaff, but also with the
impact this life will have on Hal, the future King of England. Thus, it is not surprising that, when he encounters Falstaff, he immediately accuses him of corrupting the prince:

Lord Chief Justice: You have misled the youthful Prince.
Falstaff: The young Prince hath misled me. (2 HIV 1.2.132-133)

This reformulated charge of misleading the youth (a repeat of the charge leveled against Socrates) emerges out of a battle of words between the Chief Justice and Falstaff that can only remind us of the argument between the Just Speech and Unjust Speech designed by Aristophanes’ in his own satirical account of Socrates.

The plot of Aristophanes’ Clouds centers around Strepsiades attempt to refute some creditors he cannot repay. To do so, he turns to Socrates, eventually (after proving unteachable himself) entrusting his son Pheidippides to the philosopher’s education. The goal, Strepsiades tells Socrates, is for his son

to learn those two speeches:
the stronger, whatever it may be, and the weaker,
which argues the unjust things and overturns the stronger.
If not both, he’s to learn at least the unjust one by every art. 45

 Appropriately, Socrates begins Phiedippides’ education by having him witness a dispute between personified Just Speech and Unjust Speech in which they argue over who is stronger. Eventually, through his attack on the gods, the Unjust Speech proves victorious, but not before he is accused of being “shameless,” “ribald”, a “pederast”, a “parricide”, and “bold.” 46

Because all these adjectives accurately describe Falstaff, and because the name of the Lord Chief Justice is so close to the name of the Just Speech, we must conclude that Shakespeare is well aware of the old charges made by the poets against the philosophers. For instance, the Chief Justice regurgitates the accusation made against Socrates (that he
makes “the weaker speech the stronger”),47 telling Falstaff: “I am well acquainted with your manner of wrenching the true cause the false way.” (2 HIV 2.1.100-101)48 Consider also Falstaff’s insistence that he is younger than the Chief Justice [“You that are old consider not the capacities of us that are young” (1 HIV 1.2.159)], a point of emphasis he shares with the Unjust Speech, who in his defense against the charges of the Just Speech, retorts: “and you are ancient.”49 Indeed, the Falstaff’s defense smacks of the Unjust Speech, for the Speech promotes its way of life to Pheidippides (in opposition to that of the Just Speech) on the grounds that it is the most pleasurable:

For consider, lad, all that moderation involves,  
And how many pleasures you’re going to be deprived of:  
Boys, women, cottabuses, relishes, drinking, boisterous laughter.  
Yet what is living worth to you if you’re deprived of these things?  
Well, then. From here I go on to the necessities of nature.  
You’ve done wrong, fallen in love, committed some adultery, and then you’ve been caught.  
You’re ruined, for you’re unable to speak. But if you consort with me,  
Then use your nature, leap, laugh, believe that nothing is shameful. 50

Shakespeare’s allusions to Aristophanes remind us that, like Socrates, Falstaff is concerned with educating the youth and that this education is a threat to the family. Admittedly, in the Clouds, the Unjust Speech is not Socrates but a tool of Socrates. As Strauss puts it: “in the Socratic scheme the debate between the Speeches is only a stage in the ascent toward the right life.”51 But since personified speeches (despite their dramatic usefulness) can hardly exist in actual fact, this “stage in the accent to the right life” can only take place through a more direct teaching.

Here we must admit that our attempt to extend the parallels between Falstaff and Socrates comes into serious question for, on the surface, the boisterous life of Falstaff seems in contrast to the life of Socrates and more akin to the life promoted by the Unjust
Speech. And as Strauss points out, “the Unjust Speech can not possibly be mistaken for the Socratic way of life” since “the life of sensual pleasures is wholly alien to Socrates, who is continent in every respect.” Nevertheless, tempering the temptation to turn our attention away from the figure of Socrates and toward the Unjust Speech is Strauss’ notation that there is an important distinction between moderation and continence, for the former “consists of piety and justice” while the latter, in concert with endurance, is “required for the study of things aloft”, a study that culminates in the understanding that “the gods do not even exist.” And it is this final understanding that, while implicitly denied by the Unjust Speech, is wholly embraced by Falstaff.

*Falstaff’s Impiety*

Whether Falstaff is impious is hardly a matter of controversy. He is always perverting scripture and teaching Hal to do the same. His talent for this perversion depends on an astonishing knowledge of scripture that allows him to draw on it at any time. Falstaff references scripture almost immediately during his first appearance on stage, telling Hal:

An old Lord of the Council rated me the other day in the street about you, sir, but I marked him not; and yet he talked very wisely, but I regarded him not; and yet he talked wisely, and in the street too. (1 HIV 1.2.74-77)

Here, Falstaff is playing the straight man, setting up Hal’s derisions. It is the best example of Falstaff’s claim that he is the cause of wit in other men, for it comes closest to the essence of his teaching. That he desires to be thus is made most obvious in this description of his encounter with an old lord, for in describing it he all but hands the punch line to Hal. And, when Hal does correctly transform scripture into a punch line
["for wisdom cries out in the streets, and no man regards it" (Proverbs 1:20-24)], Falstaff turns the reference on its head, accusing the prince of corrupting him through scripture:

O, thou has damnable iteration, and art indeed able to corrupt a saint. Thou has done much harm upon me Hal, God forgive thee for it. Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing; and now am I, if a man should speak truly, little better than one of the wicked. (1 HIV 1.2.80-84)

Yet this complaint is corruption itself, for it manages to bring the entire first chapter of Proverbs into question by the very fact that corruption is one of the chapter’s major themes. The purposefulness of this reference not only reveals Falstaff’s vast knowledge of scripture, but his sense of humour as well for, ironically, Proverbs’ first chapter presents an account of wisdom that is in direct conflict with the life of Falstaff. Indeed, since this chapter serves as the introduction to and justification of the book of Biblical Wisdom – Wisdom that scorns the entire life of Falstaff - we can only conclude that he has introduced it in order to put the entire biblical tradition into question.55

The first chapter of Proverbs begins by describing the “beginning of knowledge” as “the fear of the LORD” (vs. 7), asserting the dependence of wisdom on faith. This wisdom is directly tied to what is “right, just and honest” (vs. 3), and emerges from the “father’s instruction” and the “mother’s teaching.” (vs. 8)56 According to Solomon, the rejection of this teaching is the playground of fools who say:

"Come along with us! Let us lie in wait for the honest man, let us, unprovoked, set a trap for the innocent; Let us swallow them up, as the nether world does, alive, in the prime of life, like those who go down to the pit! All kinds of precious wealth shall we gain, we shall fill our houses with booty; Cast in your lot with us, we shall all have one purse!" (vs. 11-14)

This warning weighs heavily against Falstaff, who, reflecting the wooing words of Proverb’s fool, has converted Hal to a life of thievery in which all do have one purse. Moreover, in attributing this chapter to “an old lord of the Council”, Falstaff equates
Biblical Wisdom with the wisdom of the city, a wisdom that is directly tied to the honouring of the family. In doing so, he opens himself to the charge of impiety and, at the same time, connects this charge with his deconstruction of honour.\textsuperscript{57}

This connection is necessary for Falstaff because of the city's traditional dependence on its understanding of the gods. This dependency arises from the fact that religion provides the basis of rationality for both the existence of the city and its preservation. Courage is the greatest virtue because it entails the defence of one's city, thereby affording men the possibility of a secure and happy life. Yet this virtue depends on the belief that what it affords; what it considers virtuous; what it honours; is worth preserving. Indeed, all the moral virtues - all pursuit of honour - are tied directly to a rational understanding of what is good for the city. This rationality is dependent on an understanding of piety. Piety, according to Socrates, is "knowledge of the laws concerning the gods; where there are no laws, there cannot be piety."\textsuperscript{58} In other words, the law gains its legitimacy through an appeal to the gods. The Greeks understood the city to be founded by the gods; a founding which necessarily includes the founding of the city's laws. Because some laws are clearly subject to change, it is a founding that must be understood as the founding of an order (or law) that governs all the laws. As Socrates points out, the laws are a Praising of the order of the gods, and the honouring of the laws is the honouring of the gods.\textsuperscript{59} In other words, one defends the city and its laws for the sake of the gods just as one defends the gods for the sake of the city and its laws. Thus, the definition of what is honourable gains its bearings from a connection to the gods of the city for, in protecting the city, one is implicitly protecting its gods.\textsuperscript{60}
The connection between this understanding and the understanding offered by the book of *Proverbs* is undeniable, for *Proverbs* defines wisdom not simply as understanding, but as understanding that leads to right living; in fact, it asserts the argument that right living need not depend on understanding at all but can simply depend on obeying the rules and the laws set down in its teaching – that wisdom arises out of obedience premised on the fear of the LORD. This wisdom – this fear of the Lord – is deeply tied to politics, for Solomon’s Wisdom takes herself to the street and the open squares (vs. 20), to the crowded ways and the city gates (vs. 21).

It is to these streets that Falstaff attempts to lead Hal, for it is in these streets that Falstaff marked the Council not, and it is in “disdaining” this counsel (vs. 25) that he has removed himself from Wisdom, who declares:

> They call me, but I answer not; they seek me, but find me not;  
> Because they hated knowledge, and chose not the fear of the LORD;  
> They ignored my counsel, they spurned all my reproof; And in their arrogance they preferred arrogance, and like fools they hated knowledge:  
> "Now they must eat the fruit of their own way, and with their own devices be glutted." (vs. 28-31)

Thus, in equating the old lord of the Council with the counsel of Biblical Wisdom, Falstaff attempts to reforge the connection between the wisdom of the city and the gods, thereby characterizing himself as the rejection of both. Like Socrates, he is happy to “eat the fruit of his own way,” accepting that his hubris may lead most men to the conclusion that he is “a fool that hates knowledge”; he knows that because of this conclusion he cannot be one of those who “dwells in security, in peace, without fear of harm.” (vs. 32-33)

As much as the first chapter of *Proverbs* deals with the life and character of Falstaff, ultimately it is centered on the figure of Prince Hal. From its very beginning
Proverbs profoundly connects its teachings to the hereditary monarchy that defines Israel, explicitly noting that its teachings are the teachings of Solomon, son of David. The family figures prominently throughout Proverbs but never so strikingly as in the first chapter. For as this chapter makes clear, while the wisdom of Proverbs is undoubtedly useful to (and meant for) all who fear the LORD, it is wisdom that is especially aimed at Rehoboam – Solomon’s heir and the future King of Israel. (vs. 8 and 10) What makes this fact particularly striking and appropriate in the case of Hal, is not simply that advice is being given to a prince, but that this advice is introduced in the context of the prince making a choice between two ways of life – between following the teachings of his parents and abandoning this teaching for the ways of the Fool. We can also hardly help but remember that the teaching of Solomon – that his own fear of the LORD – was hardly a permanent fixture in his own life, for he fell under the spell of the Fool, deserting Wisdom for the sake of pleasure. It is a decision that the book of 1 Kings views with derision for, in the end, it overrides the original fatherly (and thus political) teaching of Solomon in the eyes of his heir, thereby proving destructive to his own rule.

Ironically, the rule of King Henry IV presents the same pattern in a completely opposite fashion. The establishment of the modern order was done outside and in total opposition to the fear of the LORD, depending on the wisdom of man rather than the Wisdom of God. Yet in the end, much to his political detriment, fearing what he would not trust, Henry abandons his strict adherence to this worldly wisdom and, racked with guilt and dread, is haunted by the fear of the LORD.

Thus, what we are to make of Hal’s remark that “thou didst well, for wisdom cries out in the streets and no man regards it” is cast into new light. His approval of Falstaff’s
rejection of the old lord of the council’s wisdom cannot finally be viewed as akin to Falstaff’s rejection of the same. For while Hal’s dismissal constitutes the elimination of any remaining remnants of the “old” biblical or conventional civic ‘wisdom’ as the proper informants to political rule, this elimination does not include the denial of the importance of politics. Instead, Hal refounds the preeminence of the city on the reasonableness of man, replacing the authority of civic convention – the authority of the family and religion – with the authority of his own reason. We are left wondering whether in separating rule from authority – in distinguishing between his father’s authority and his father’s wisdom – he does not attempt to prove himself greater than Rehoboam; nay, greater than the biblical tradition as a whole.

_Falstaff and the Problem of Death_

Falstaff’s death is the episode most obviously akin to anything we find in Plato, reflecting many characteristics of Socrates’ death. However, it also provides us with the greatest challenge to the argument that Falstaff is England’s Socrates. As we have noted, there are many striking similarities between the death of Socrates and the death of Falstaff. Like the unusual death of Socrates, Falstaff’s death is characterized by a cold and stiffness that begins with his feet and works its way up his body.\(^{63}\) The description of this process is similar to what we find in Plato; in the words of the Hostess the coldness proceeds “upwards and upwards”, while Jowett translates Plato: "and then his leg, and so upwards and upwards, and showed us that he was stiff and cold.” Moreover, we see Falstaff fumbling with the sheets, reminding us that “Socrates uncovered his head – he had covered it.”\(^{64}\)
Problematic to this interpretation, however, is the fact that instead of witnessing the death of Falstaff we hear it recounted by the Hostess, the Boy, Nim, and Bardolph, with the Hostess correcting Bardolph’s story and the Boy correcting the Hostess’. Because of these conflicting accounts, in order to achieve a proper understanding of what really happened, we are forced to weigh the words of each witness against their character. This is the approach taken by Michael Platt – an approach that allows him to argue that the death of Falstaff makes any comparison with Socrates problematic. In making this argument, Platt maintains that the Hostess’ description of Falstaff’s death is highly suspect, pointing to her inability to properly recount Falstaff’s reference to Psalm Twenty Three’s “green pastures” [she says ‘a table of green fields’ (HV 2.3.15)], and her mistaken reference to “Abraham’s bosom” [she says “Arthur’s bosom.” (2.3.10)] These mistakes lead Platt to side with the Boy, “a steadier witness” who reports that Falstaff’s reaction to a flea upon Bardolph’s nose was to describe it as “a black soul burning in hell.” The fear of hell”, states Platt, “cast out all of Falstaff’s gaiety.” For Platt, therefore:

The most obvious difference between the two deaths [is] the terror of Falstaff and the equanimity of Socrates. Faced with death Falstaff cries out; Socrates discourses as he has always done. Falstaff’s terror rests upon a certain kind of opinion or knowledge, available only through revelation. But according to Socrates, we really do not know what follows life; those who fear the afterlife suppose too much; here too our best wisdom is a kind of ignorance. Thus we are reminded of the difference between philosophy and religion . . . the living Falstaff bears some resemblance to Socrates; dying, he resembles Christ.

It is here that Platt’s argument most obviously runs into problems, for Christ surely did not die repenting of sack or women or babbling about green pastures. Nor did he die in guilt-ridden “terror” or “fear.” Indeed, however much we support the approach astutely and properly championed by Platt – reading the scene carefully in light of the strengths,
weaknesses, and aims of the characters – we cannot support his conclusion, for a careful reading reveals that any parallels between a Christian death and the death of Falstaff are purely ironic.

Despite Platt’s assertions, it is not difficult to read this scene as comedy. Although the Hostess begins the tale of Falstaff’s death with sadness, her blunders (however unintentional) infuse it with humor. This humour extends to her conversation with Nim, a dialogue that is almost impossible to hear without an inward chuckle:

Nim: They say he cried out of sack.
Hostess: Ay, that a did.
Bardolph: And of women.
Hostess: Nay, that a did not. (HV 2.4.24-27)

Indeed, the humour and lightheartedness continues throughout the scene with the Hostess punning on the Boy’s “devils incarnate”; with Bardolph punning on “the black soul burning in hell-fire”; with Nim proposing to get on with business; with Pistol kissing the Hostess and showering her in aphorisms before departing; and with the Boy simultaneously mocking the French and his present companions in an aside.

Although we can hardly help but smile at the comedy that runs through the scene, only the words of the Boy can, with any certainty, be read as intentional humour – and his words are spoken to himself. This aside is remarkable not only because it is the scene’s sole example of intentional humour but also because this intentional humour comes from the only character who is not accidentally funny in the scene. Indeed, the Boy seems to be the most serious character in the whole scene, consistently directing and redirecting his companions toward the most somber possible interpretation of Falstaff’s death. The dichotomy between the Boy’s seriousness and humour can only lead us to question the actions and motives of the Boy, for one must wonder about someone who
convinces you of the dreadfulness of his master’s death on the one hand, while making jokes to himself on the other.

In fact, the more looks at the Boy, both in this scene and throughout the plays, the more important his words become. The Boy first appears in *Henry IV Part Two*, where we are told that he has been sent by Hal to work as Falstaff’s page. As his first remark reveals, however, the Boy is not a simple page, for he immediately begins his duties by making fun of Falstaff:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Falstaff:</th>
<th>Sirrah, you giant, what says the doctor to my water?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Page:</td>
<td>He said sir, the water itself was a good healthy water, but for the party that owed it, he might have more diseases than he knew for.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2 HIV 1.2.2-4)

This remark not only compels Falstaff to make his important claim that he is the cause of wit in other men, but also moves him toward a flurry of insults directed both at the Boy and Hal – insults of a quality that were previously reserved only for Hal. As the scene continues, we find that the Page is quite sharp, playing his role carefully during Falstaff’s encounter with the Lord Chief Justice. And when the confrontation between these two foes comes to an end, Falstaff is remarkably candid with the Page, complaining of his physical ailments before calculating how to take advantage of them. “A good wit” he tells his Page, “will make use of anything. I will turn disease into commodity.”

(2 HIV 1.2.26-27)

As the play proceeds, we see the Page brawling with Mistress Quickly while shouting his wonderfully inventive “I’ll tickle your catastrophe.” (2 HIV 2.1.52) In the following scene, he takes the stage dressed so ridiculously that he prompts Hal’s telling remark that Falstaff “had him from me Christian, and look if the fat villain have not transformed him ape.” (2 HIV 2.2.56-57) The Page, however, is unfazed, and
immediately begins to mock Bardolph in such a Falstaffian fashion that Hal, speaking of the Page’s time with Falstaff notes: “Has not the boy profited?” (2 HIV 2.2.69) And that the boy has profited from Falstaff’s education is quickly confirmed when, after mocking Bardolph with mixed up mythological allusions, the Page defends this mix up to Hal with what can only be described as Falstaffian wit:

Bardolph:  Away, you whoreson upright rabbit, away!
Page:     Away, you rascally Althea’s dream, away!
Prince:    Instruct us, boy; what dream, boy?
Page:     Marry, my lord. Althea dreamt she was delivered of a firebrand, and therefore I call him her dream.
Prince:    [giving him money] A crown’s-worth of good interpretation!
There ‘tis, boy. (2 HIV 2.2.70-76)

The Page/Boy then, proves himself to be a great student of Falstaff, for not only is he privy to Falstaff’s teaching, he fully embraces Falstaff’s way of life, denying the importance of honour, cultivating his wit, and using this wit for his survival.73

Given his ties to Falstaff, the Boy has a vested interest in how his master’s death is reported. Indeed, a close examination of the Boy’s description of Falstaff’s death and his correction of the Hostess’ description of that same death reveal that this interest is well at work. Despite this interest, however, we must assume that the Boy reports the facts of Falstaff’s death with accuracy, for to misreport the death of his teacher would not be the work of a true student.

Adding to the Boy’s reliability is the fact that he has been at Falstaff’s side for the longest time. For, as Bardolph and Nim’s questioning of whether it is true that Falstaff “cried out of sack” and of women reveals, they had not arrived until later in his story. (HV 2.3.24-26) In fact, the second scene of Act 2 makes it clear that: the Boy is at Falstaff’s side long before anyone else (for he reports his looming death); the Hostess is
present from the moment she is told of his condition (minus the time spent traveling back and forth); and the entire company is at hand from (at the very soonest) the time the Hostess returns to confirm his condition 37 lines later.\footnote{In other words, the Boy is the most reliable witness not only because he is Falstaff's most faithful follower, but also because he was at his side when others were absent. Nevertheless, except for one comment, the Boy offers little information about Falstaff's death, choosing instead to simply correct the account given by Hostess Quickly, who has a long history of using the wrong words, a history that requires us to carefully scrutinize all that she says.\footnote{For example, we cannot take her account of Falstaff reciting Psalm 23 or his "God, God, God" (HV 2.3.18) as the full story, for it is not hard to imagine the Hostess coming out of Socrates' death scene telling of how he babbled of Hades and the river Styx.\footnote{Thus, while there is no reason to question Hostess Quickly's account of the physical manner in which Falstaff died, a correct account of Falstaff's psychological state can only be entrusted to the Boy.}}

Yet the Boy's remarks seem to support the general account of Hostess Quickly for, even in contradicting her, he too seems to have Falstaff agonizing over his past life:

\begin{verbatim}
Nim: They say he cried out of sack.
Hostess: Ay, that a did.
Bardolp: And of women.
Hostess: Nay, that a did not.
Boy: Yes, that a did, and said they were devils incarnate.
Hostess: A could never abide carnation, 'twas a colour he never liked.
Boy: A said one the devil would have him about women.
\end{verbatim}

\footnote{HV 2.4.24-27}

However, a closer look reveals that the Boy's remarks are full of irony. For if we read his first remark as being an excuse for the second (a clearly Falstaffian maneuver), we suddenly discover that instead of an act of repentance, Falstaff's remark that women are
devils suddenly makes hell an attractive place — a place where the devil will surround him with women. Indeed, that Falstaff is his old self — that he does not take hell seriously — is only reinforced by the Boy’s hilarious report that Falstaff “saw a flea stick upon Bardolph’s nose, and a said it was a black soul burning in hell-fire.”77 (HV 2.3.34-35) Falstaff then, leaves life the way he lived it, witty in himself and the cause of wit in other men; he leaves in the manner of Socrates, allowing both god-fearing and philosophical accounts of his death to flourish.
Chapter Four

HENRY V: NICE CUSTOM'S CURSTY TO GREAT KINGS

In Henry V, King Henry V emerges as the most militarily successful of all Shakespearean kings, expanding his territory and consolidating his power through a campaign against France. Rejecting his father’s doubt-laden method of ruling, King Harry abandons the wanton ways of his youth and transforms himself into Shakespeare’s greatest and most glorious politician. In several amazing victories over the French, Harry overcomes tremendous odds and shows a profound understanding of politics. Like the actions of his father, the actions of Harry reflect the teachings of Machiavelli. Unlike his father, however, Harry completely accepts these teachings, fully understanding what it means to be a modern ruler. He is a man without restraint (except when restraint is needed); an unstoppable king; an enchanting and single-minded prince whose sole aim is the attainment of power. Under his rule, England completes its movement into the modern world.

It is sometimes argued that, because it is a play about a war, Henry V is meant to show us what Shakespeare thinks about war.¹ This in part arises from the fact that all wars are akin in important ways – people die, civilians suffer, power is won and lost. Deeply imbedded in our psyche is the suspicion that wars are inherently unjust, that many who deserve life die while many who deserve death live; there is no denying that war means violent death, a death that is abhorred by all but the few. At the same time, however, men are enraptured by war, recognizing that it is one place where they can hope to prove themselves greater than others and witness those greater than themselves. As the books of history show, war is where the highest honours are gained, for it is the place
where the opposition is fiercest and the victories greatest. Success in war demands human excellence and reveals the courage, fortitude, leadership, innovation, and intelligence of its participants.

Despite the inherent demands of war and the glory it offers, it is not possible to accurately interpret *Henry V* as Shakespeare’s pro or anti-war statement – as a play that is representative of Shakespeare’s social program. To do so is to ignore what is reflected by Shakespeare’s entire volume of work – that war is a danger coeval with political life. In other words, Shakespeare’s writings on the subject do not attempt to legitimize or delegitimize war, but rather present war as it is.

Nevertheless, even this position is limited, for each war is in some sense its own, fought in different ways by different leaders for different reasons with varying degrees of success. In other words, while *Henry V* may include some truths about what war is, it ultimately cannot be read as a play about war, for such a reading would ignore the important political motivations and implications of Harry’s war – factors that reveal not only the character of his war but the character of his rule.

Because wars are a function of political rule, the questioning of Henry V’s rule can only properly be illuminated by the questioning of Henry V’s war. In the same way, however, the war of Henry V is only brought into full light when placed in the context of his rule. Churchill is not Churchill without World War Two just as World War Two could not have been the same without Churchill. War serves as a proof of politics.

War as the proof of politics is never more closely examined than in *Henry V*, with Shakespeare examining King Harry’s rule exclusively in terms of a war. Because Harry approaches and fights this war in a Machiavellian way, the war serves not only as proof
of the nature of Harry’s rule but also as proof of the modern order – of its reality and its implications. By examining the war of Harry – how it is fought and why – we begin to move closer to Shakespeare’s understanding and teaching about the modern order.

The Appearance of Harry

As a great Machiavellian Harry knows how to appear different than he actually is. He has taken to heart Machiavelli’s advice that “men judge more by sight than by touch . . . everyone sees what you seem to be; few have direct experience of who you really are.” It is a technique that makes our job all the harder, forcing us to examine every one of Harry’s moves carefully to discover its reason; for it is easy to become one of those who only sees and never touches. The effectiveness of Harry’s focus on appearances becomes clear in the first few scenes of Henry V (1.1, 1.2 and 2.2.) – scenes dominated by the question of whether England should go to war. The decision to do so is reached by King Harry in the presence of his nobles and appears to be based on the interpretation of biblical law provided in their presence by the Archbishop of Canterbury. (HV 1.2)

As revealed by the previous scene however, the Archbishop’s legitimization of the war is entirely suspect and the timing of it carefully calculated. In this first scene we witness the Archbishop in conversation with Bishop Ely, telling him that Harry had met with him privately in order to ask whether he had the God-given right to rule France. The Archbishop goes on to say that, in the midst of a favorable response, Henry suddenly indicated the pressing need to meet with the French ambassadors and departed.

Although the strangeness of the account given in Act 1 scene 1 is often
overwhelmed by the pageantry and drama of Act 1 scene 2, a close examination of the
first scene entirely undercuts the emotional impact of the second. When Harry enters the
court in this second scene, we discover that his true motivation for interrupting his
collection with the Archbishop in the first scene was to give him the opportunity to
assemble the nobles for, when he requests the return of the Archbishop, he has yet to
speak to the French ambassadors. In other words, once he is assured of a favorable
response, Harry assembles the nobles and publicly requests an interpretation of Salic
Law.\footnote{Similarly, how and why Harry receives this endorsement is itself entirely suspect.}

Harry, we find out, has used the possibility of a parliamentary bill intended to take “all
the temporal lands which men devout / By testament have given to the Church” (HV
1.1.8-9) to pressure the Archbishop into giving him an approving interpretation. (HV
1.1.73-83) And the Archbishop cooperates, declaring the Salic Law that “no woman
shall succeed in Salic land” (HV 1.2.39) irrelevant, arguing that France is not really Salic
land at all. This fact is already recognized by France, he argues, for several French kings
have legitimized their claim to the throne through the lineage of women. Thus, maintains
Canterbury, Harry is free to ignore the Salic Law and act in accordance with Numbers
27:8 [“When the son dies, let the inheritance / Descend unto the daughter” (HV 1.2.99-
100)] by claiming the throne through Edward III, who had made his own claim through
his mother Isabella.

In the end, however, Canterbury’s legitimization of the war is hardly impartial for
it depends on a questionable interpretation of the facts. For example, through his long
and complicated account of French genealogy, Canterbury argues that the claims to the
throne made by the French kings and justified via the inheritance received through women, were actually attempts to legitimate illegitimate claims. (HV 1.2.69-74) Yet at the same time, he uses their example to prove that Harry has a rightful claim to rule France. In other words, the Archbishop uses dubious case law to legitimize Harry’s pursuit of the French throne.6

Thus, upon close examination, Harry’s request for an impartial interpretation of Salic Law in the presence of the nobles emerges as a purely political manoeuvre that gives him both an excuse to wage war and the opportunity to shift the responsibility for the cost of war to the Archbishop:

King Harry: May I with right and conscience make this claim?
Canterbury: The sin is upon my head, dread sovereign. (HV 1.2.96-97)

Based on the endorsement given by Canterbury the nobles are pressured to join the Archbishop in advocating a war against the French. This counsel is useful to Harry, not because of its wisdom, but because it forces upon the nobles responsibility for the war, thereby securing their support. Harry, by arranging others to say the right things at the right time, has gained the war he desires without appearing to have desired it. He has secured the commitment of the nobles in a way that places the responsibility for the war about to be waged on both them and the church. And most importantly, as Pamela Jensen argues, he has forced the church to “acknowledge tacitly, without equivocation or question, that Henry is Edward III’s rightful heir.”7

Upon garnering this support, King Harry calls in the French ambassador and entertains him in a manner that in no way betrays his intentions.8 It is here, after Harry has secured the support of the court, that we discover that he has been provoking the French with claims to dukedoms which, just moments before, he had professed not to
desire if his claim to French land was in conflict with Salic Law. Given free reign by the
king, the French ambassador proceeds to open the French Dauphin’s mocking gift (a
chest of tennis balls) – a response to these previously unjustifiable claims. Beholding
these adolescent toys of leisure, Harry turns insult into political currency, turning the
contempt of the Dauphin into the final cause for the upcoming war:

    For many a thousand widows
    Shall this his mock mock out of their dear husbands,
    Mock mothers from their sons, mock castles down;
    Ay, some are yet ungotten and unborn
    That shall have cause to curse the Dauphin’s scorn. (HV 1.2.284-288)

Having already secured the support of the nobles and the church, Harry uses this
opportunity to bring the people alongside his cause, adding national pride and security to
the case for war, presenting himself as the protector of English honour while, at the same
time, working to undercut the morale of the French through a display of rhetoric that lays
the blame for an unwanted invasion at the feet of the French Prince. While the French
will be fighting on behalf of a foolish leader whose prideful derision has provoked an
invasion of their homes, the English will be fighting for Henry the Fifth, the defender and
friend of the nobles, God and England. Indeed, in transforming an attack on his own
honour into an attack on the honour of England – in making the two indistinguishable –
Harry not only legitimizes the war he wants and rallies his troops, he solidifies the
legitimacy of his rule.

Harry’s desire to go to war is not simply inspired by the desire for dukedoms and
wives – these are simply side issues in comparison with his true intention. Every move
that Harry makes is meant to increase his power. And while his glorious rise from the
streets has given him an aura of greatness, he remains a new king in a new regime – a
king whose power is weakened by its questionable legitimacy. Harry is well aware of the problem that "it is much easier to hold on to hereditary states which are accustomed to being governed by the family that now rules them, than it is to hold on to new acquisitions." Harry is faced with the same problem as his father. With no legitimate claim to the throne, it is difficult to explain why you should rule and not someone else. Unlike the kings of the medieval order, Harry cannot make a credible appeal to a divine right to rule, as all such claims have already been proven fraudulent by his father's victory. With this authority vanquished, all that remains is the power of the individual. Unlike previous monarchs, Harry must exclusively depend on his abilities to gain and maintain power. Because this power stems from the recognition and support of others — from the clergy, from the elite, from the people — Harry must demonstrate his greatness, for his rule can only be defended on the grounds that he is the best man for the job.

In achieving this aim while carefully following the teaching of Machiavelli, Harry sets his sight on a war with France, a war that will gain the support of all three groups:

If a ruler wins wars and holds on to power, the means he has employed will always be judged honourable, and everyone will praise them. The common man accepts external appearances and judges by the outcome; and when it comes down to it only the masses count; for the elite are powerless if the masses have someone to provide them with leadership.10

In Harry we see a practical application of Machiavelli's advice. Although he is fighting the war to gain the support of the masses, in order to gain the support of the masses, he requires the elite to support the war. For without their full commitment and support it will be difficult for the war to succeed. And the elite are not likely to lend support, for they "want to oppress" and "seek to ingratiate themselves with rivals for power." As rivals for power, argues Machiavelli, "they retain their independence from you out of
calculation and ambition." Thus, by compelling both the Archbishop and the nobles to side with his plan for war, Harry both removes them as a threat and moves closer to the war that will give him the support of the people – the true source of power. And by doing so in the manner he does, Harry is able to begin to gain the support of the people prior to the war, again strengthening his position among the elite.

On Machiavelli’s teaching, Harry’s war is important because “men do not truly believe in new things until they have had practical experience of them.” This reading is connected to the interpretation of Hal’s war offered by Tim Spiekerman, who observes: “a crafty politician makes an unjust war seem just in the hopes of making an illegitimate king seem legitimate.” For while Machiavelli ultimately believes that power is gained through fear, he does not discount the importance of appearing good:

You should seem to be compassionate, trustworthy, sympathetic, honest, religious, and, indeed, be all these things; but at the same time you should be constantly prepared, so that, if these become liabilities, you are trained and ready to become their opposites. You need to understand this: A ruler, and particularly a ruler who is new to power, cannot conform to all those rules that men who are thought good are expected to respect, for he is often obliged, in order to hold on to power, to break his word, to be uncharitable, inhumane, and irreligious.

For, whatever distinctions we might make about power being the only proof of legitimacy, as we saw in the political failings of Henry IV, it is impossible to completely transfer this distinction into the hearts of common men. Thus, the ruler “must seem, to those who listen to him and watch him, entirely pious, truthful, reliable, sympathetic, and religious. There is no quality that is more important he should seem to have than this last one.” Harry may finally be judged by the outcome of the war, but the war will not occur if he is not supported, and he will not be supported if he does not appear virtuous to the people. And this virtue – this support – depends on religion for, as Machiavelli
writes:

Indeed, there has not been a single founder of an exceptional constitution for a nation who has not had recourse to divine authority, for otherwise it would have been impossible for him to win acceptance for his proposals. For there are many fine principles that a wise man will acknowledge but that are not sufficiently self-evident to be accepted by ordinary people.\footnote{16}

Since the people’s sense of justice depends on religion, it is not surprising that Harry turns to the Archbishop for his support. And how he garners this support is not simply a display of Machiavellian trickery, for his manipulation of the Archbishop provides a sardonic spin on a Machiavellian teaching that carries Machiavelli’s principle a step further. For in pressuring the Archbishop to give him the interpretation he desires, Harry brings to mind Richard’s failure to follow Machiavelli’s advice to “above all else, keep your hands off other people’s property; for men are quicker to forget the death of their father than the loss of inheritance.”\footnote{17} It is with shocking irony that Harry applies this teaching, undermining the church by showing that it would rather give up its heavenly Father than its property. Harry has taken the first step in the transfer of religious power from the church to the crown – the first step in the elimination of religion.

*Henry, Harry and God*

That Hal would appeal to God while undermining His place in the political realm is not surprising, for it is part and parcel of Machiavelli’s teaching, a teaching that was well applied by Harry’s father. For Henry IV also destabilizes God as a political force, overthrowing God’s ‘divinely chosen’ king in a way that opens up the possibility that God has no interest in politics. As a result, despite his later doubts about his actions, and

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despite all his public remarks about visiting Jerusalem, Henry is the king of an atheistic regime – a regime where the church has been totally separated from the government.

In fact, the only member of the church who appears in the plays dealing with Henry IV’s rule is the Archbishop of York, who sides with the rebels. And when John of Lancaster tricks the rebellion into surrendering, he immediately sends the Archbishop to be executed (something his father had not dared do when he initially became king), marking the purging of any religious presence in England. As Westmoreland reports to the king: “the Bishop Scrope, Hastings, and all / Are brought to the correction of your law.” (2 HIV 4.3.85) Henry, therefore, not only manages to separate politics from religion, he manages to make politics victorious.

It is with great irony then, that Henry is led unto death in the manner of a saint, fulfilling the prophecy that he should die in Jerusalem:

King Henry: Doth any name particular belong
Unto the lodging where I first did swoon?
Warwick: 'Tis called Jerusalem, my noble lord.
King Henry: Laud be to God! Even there my life must end.
It hath been prophesied to me many years
I should not die but in Jerusalem,
Which vainly I supposed the Holy Land;
But bear me to that chamber; there I'll lie;
In that Jerusalem shall Harry die. (2 HIV 4.3.360-369)

Yet, however remarkable this final act may appear to the people of England, those who know cannot help but smile at Henry’s (that guiltful king of impiety) willingness to politic to the end. For Henry must already know the name of the room in which he had collapsed or there would be no reason to ask Warwick about it. And while there is a genuine hint of regard for the prophesy in his words, Henry repeats the pattern of his rule, submitting this belief to his politics (while weakening both at the same time with his
“vainly I supposed.”) Thus, in his final moments, Henry lays the groundwork for his son’s rule, shifting God away from the church and toward the crown.

As noted, Henry IV’s undermining of religion is inextricably linked to his coming to power. Because Richard’s rule was legitimized by the belief that he is God’s representative, Henry’s movement against him can only be understood as the rejection of God’s authority. At the same time, the continued success of Henry’s new regime depends, most of all, on altogether removing God from the political scene, an action that the successful establishment of his regime seems to almost certainly guarantee. However, as seen in the personal struggles of Henry IV, residuals of belief remain in England – politics has not yet been completely separated from God. That it would be extremely difficult to remove God from politics was hardly ignored by Machiavelli, who held that although some could be convinced that God does not exist, most men would remain compelled toward religious belief.19 It is not surprising, then, that he teaches that the prince must always appear pious.

Harry’s own willingness to use God to establish his rule is evident from the time he becomes King Henry V: “for God doth know, so shall the world perceive, / that I have turned away from my former self.” (2 HIV 5.4.55-56) That this transformation has been convincing, is shown immediately in Henry V with the Archbishop remarking:

The breath no sooner left his father’s body
But that his wildness, mortified in him,
Seemed to die too. Yea, at that very moment
Consideration like an angel came
And whipped th’offending Adam out of him,
Leaving his body as a paradise. (HV 1.1.26-31)

Harry’s plan to make his rule even more glorious by emerging from the streets also works to mystify the crown. Indeed, he has been so successful at this project, that the
Archbishop states that all who hear him “reason in divinity . . . would desire the King were made a prelate.” (HV 1.1.39-41)\(^{20}\) Harry is well on his way to transferring religious power to the crown.

For some, this transformation is more than appearances. Spiekerman, for instance, argues that the newly crowned king’s response to Falstaff [“Fall to your prayers” (2 HIV 5.5.47) and “For God doth know, so shall the world perceive / That I have turned away from my former self” (2 HIV 5.5.57-58)] makes it clear that “Hal has changed.”\(^{21}\) However, it is difficult to see how, for Hal maintains throughout his time with Falstaff that he would reject him and that he would turn away from his wanton ways. If anything changes it is us: we are forced to accept that Hal meant all that he said. In the end, Hal is not duplicitous at all in his relationship with Falstaff. Instead it is we who are duplicitous, for we fool ourselves into thinking that Hal may not be as he truly says. Norman Rabkin’s description of Hal in terms of the Rabbit/Duck analogy is true only so far as we realize that it is not that Harry is either/or a Machiavellian prince and Christian monarch (while being both at the same time), but that Harry is always a Machiavellian ruler and we sometimes want him to be a Christian king.\(^{22}\) The distinction is not in the character of Hal, but in the desire of our soul. Hal knows what we desire to see and he allows us to see it.

Harry continues his attempt to make God inseparable from his rule throughout his campaign against the French. Note, for instance, his battle cry; “God for Harry! England and St. George!” (HV 3.1.35) The medieval notion that the throne belongs to God – that Richard is God’s king – has been replaced by the idea that God is for Harry – that God is Harry’s. In a similar way, Harry quickly ascribes his victory at Agincourt to God:
O God thy arm was here!
And not to us, but to thy arm alone
Ascribe we all!” (HV 4.8.101-103)

As John Alvis points out, despite Harry’s repeated insistence that it be acknowledged that “God fought for us” (HV 4.8.114) and that the praise “is his only” (HV 4.8.109-110), such statements allow Harry to gain even more glory:

Despite his efforts to yield his praises to God, the Londoners pour forth to view the man who conquered France . . . Henry V, not God, is known as the victor of Agincourt. But by his repeated disclaimers Henry does earn the credit of magnanimously declining his great honour in obeisance before God.23

One can add that Harry’s disclaimer also allows him to gain more glory because it excludes the possibility that he will have to share the credit for the victory with anyone but God.24 Thus, in distinguishing himself from other men, Harry attempts to make himself the equivalent of God.

Despite his assertion that Harry uses God to gain more glory for himself, Alvis believes that Harry has a genuine faith in God, writing: “Harry’s religion apparently allows him to enjoy an easy conscience (his qualms attach only to his father’s sins) while he perpetuates the sizable injustice of an unprovoked, aggressive war.”25 This position is bolstered by Spiekerman, who points to Harry’s prayer (which he prays while alone on stage) as evidence of his faith in an “active God” – evidence that he “strays from Machiavelli’s script.”26 And Pamela Jensen argues that, in this soliloquy, Harry “begins with an extended and vehement complaint against the false god, Ceremony, and ends with a prayer to the true God, imploring pardon for the past sins he must carry with him.”27

Yet, if this is what is happening in his prayer, must we not view it as disingenuous? For does not the rest of the play clearly show that Harry has not rejected
ceremony at all? In fact, Harry’s description of his remorse and his penance [“five hundred poor . . . who twice a day their withered hands hold up” and the “sad and solemn priests” who “sing still for Richard’s soul” (HV 4.1.280-284)] is such an exaggerated response and so shrouded in ceremony that it borders on comedy. Indeed, when we add Harry’s promise of further ceremony [“more I will do” (HV 4.1.284)] to his embroidered description of what has already been done, and when we consider this promise in light of his previous complaint against ceremony (HV 4.1.220-250), it is hard to take his prayer seriously at all. And, most significantly, the end of his prayer is pure absurdity, for it asks God to bless his fraudulent rule while simultaneously mocking theology by promising to do more “though all that I can do is nothing worth / Since that my penitence comes after ill.” (HV 4.2.285-286) The irony of Harry’s prayer is confirmed when he retakes the stage and garbs the upcoming battle in perhaps the greatest display of ceremony given to us by Shakespeare. Harry may recognize the problem of ceremony, but he does not recognize its limits. He has subjected God to politics (and thereby removed Him from it) in an attempt to make himself the only source of legitimacy for the throne. It is from this position that he puts forward the Hobbesian argument that “every subject’s duty is the King’s, but every subject’s soul is his own.” (HV 4.1.164) In other words, God has no place in politics.

Thus, as Henry V, Harry surpasses his father, bringing Machiavelli’s doctrine to its logical conclusion by linking piety to power in a way that makes God indistinguishable from his rule. And if God’s support can be won through politics, it is one short step to the divination of power. In bringing God into the political realm in an attempt to increase his own glory, Harry simultaneously moves England closer to
Machiavelli's final end – the elimination of God from the world of politics.

*Machiavelli and the Notion of Fear*

While Harry's magnificent display of political skill in the first few scenes of *Henry V* provides us with a telling account of the king's ability to manipulate how he appears, what is equally telling is how he emphasizes the display to others. For as we look closer we discover that Hal's victories over the other political actors are supplemented by manoeuvres that serve to underline his triumph. Note, for instance, how he calls in the French ambassadors and reveals to the Archbishop that he has not yet spoken to them – that his excuse for interrupting their previous discussion was simply a false pretence. And by permitting the ambassador to speak freely, he allows it to be revealed to the nobles that he had already been pursuing a war without their counsel or the counsel of the church. While these two facts may have been discovered anyway, Harry's underlining of them strengthens his rule by demonstrating his superiority. The message is unmistakable: the nobles, the church, the court, indeed England itself, belong to Harry, King of England and he can and will use them as he pleases. It is also the perfect illustration of Machiavelli's teaching that since "few men have direct experience of who you really are, those few will not dare speak out in the face of public opinion when that opinion is reinforced by the authority of the state." In following Machiavelli Harry has emerged from the decision to go to war feared by the elite and loved by the people. He interprets Machiavelli's much repeated teaching that it is better to be feared than loved as the teaching that fear is the highest form of love.

Almost immediately following the decision to go to war we discover that Harry
has become aware of a planned attempt on his life. Even so, Harry seems preoccupied with other things, for he is consulting three of his nobles – Scrope, Cambridge, and Grey – as to what the appropriate punishment is for a drunkard who has “railed against our person.” (HV 2.2.41) Just as we are wondering why Harry is holding conferences to decide the fate of a drunken blabbermouth when he is facing war and assassination, he reveals how the trial of a drunkard can prepare a country for war and strengthen the position of the king.

When Harry tells the nobles that he is inclined to excuse the drunkard’s treasonous remarks on account of his drunkenness, Scrope, Cambridge and Grey strenuously argue that to properly secure his rule Harry should execute him. In a sudden turn of events, Harry decides against his advisors, pardons the drunk, and then immediately hands the nobles papers that reveal their role in a French conspiracy to have him assassinated. The nobles are cornered. By asking the three treasonous nobles how to punish the drunkard Harry has enabled their self-condemnation, for by insisting on a harsh sentence for the drunk, they have left Harry no avenue for absolution. As the king puts it:

The mercy that was quick in us but late
By your own counsel is suppressed and killed.
You must not dare, for shame, to talk of mercy,
For your own reasons turn into your bosoms,
As dogs upon your masters, worrying you. (HV 2.2.76-79)

Thus, by tricking Scrope, Grey and Cambridge into sentencing themselves, Harry is able to punish the traitors with the severest of punishments, while using their own standard to shroud these punishments in the garbs of mercy. For if the appropriate punishment for insulting the king while drunk is death, death for planned assassination can only be
viewed as merciful:

If little faults proceeding on distemper
Shall not be winked at, how shall we stretch our eye
When capital crimes, chewed, swallowed, and digested,
Appear before us? (HV 2.2.53-56)

And even if we view Harry's claim that the punishment is merciful as only hyperbolic, it still provides a useful reminder of Harry's absolution of the drunk. In contrasting this act of mercy against the punishment of the nobles, Harry presents himself as a ruler of mercy and justice thereby endearing himself to the people (and perhaps to us.) In showing mercy to the common man and justice to the nobles Harry performs the near-impossible task of siding with the people without offending the nobles.

Harry, then, reveals incredible political skill and a deep understanding of man. For example, he knows before asking what sentence the traitors will recommend for the drunkard, understanding that most men attempt to please the king by appearing to be his staunchest defenders and that this impulse is all but assured in the case of traitors who are attempting to divert suspicion from themselves. This understanding is further revealed in his address to the traitors and the court following the exposure of the treachery. What is easily forgotten in hearing Harry's judgment speech is that he has had ample time to prepare it. It has been time well spent. The primary objective of the king's speech is to associate his rule with the will of God, for although Harry is officially addressing the three traitors, his speech is really meant for the other English nobles. (HV 2.2.81) To achieve this aim, Harry characterizes the assassination plot as the work of hell and calling his betrayers "savage and inhuman," "English monsters" and "two-yoked devils," and finally describing their treachery as "another fall of man." (HV 2.2.139)

The shock of this sudden turn of events puts Scrope, Cambridge, and Grey in a
desperate situation. By ending his speech with a reference to the judgment of God, Harry has played on the fears of men who must prepare to meet their maker. Attempting to avoid death (for most men hope beyond reason), and having already seen Harry’s mercy in action, the three traitors desperately adopt the language of Harry, accepting and reinforcing his portrayal of their crimes by equating his rule with the rule of God, and consequently admitting that their crime against Harry was a crime against God. In other words, by accusing the traitors of siding with the devil, Harry compels his betrayers to defend themselves (or at least their reputations) solely through an appeal to reconciliation with God. It is an appeal that demonstrates to all in the kingdom that even Harry’s greatest enemies recognize his rule as divinely chosen. That this is the intention of the king is confirmed by his final comments to the nobles, in which Harry effaces the distinction between himself and God thereby furthering the sanctification both of his rule and his war. He declares:

Since God so graciously hath brought to light
This dangerous treason lurking in our way
To hinder our beginnings. We doubt not now
But every rub is smoothed on our way.
Then forth, dear countrymen. Let us deliver
Our puissance into the hand of God,
Putting it straight in expedition.
Cheerily to sea, the signs of war advance:
No king of England, if not king of France. (HV 2.2.181-189)

Given the opportunity for success created by Harry in this scene, one cannot help but be reminded of Machiavelli’s remark that:

There is no doubt rulers become powerful as they overcome the difficulties they face and the opposition they encounter. So fortune, especially when she wants to make a new ruler powerful (for new rulers have more need of acquiring a reputation than ones who have inherited power), makes him start out surrounded by enemies and endangered by threats, so he can overcome these obstacles and can climb higher on a ladder supplied by his enemies . . . when he has put down
his opponents, he will be in a more powerful position. In appearing pious, in siding with the people, in manipulating the elites into an irreversible position in favour of the war, and in showing them that this was no accident—that he is an unmatchable political force that should be feared—Harry not only solidifies his current position as ruler of England, he also places himself in the best position to win the war that will guarantee him even greater power. Yet, however impressive Harry’s orchestration of the court has been, the political capital it affords him can only be short lived, for what has been gained is not glorious.

The Viciousness of Harry

All of Harry’s tactics assure war with France, a war that will allow him to achieve the glory that will both increase and solidify his power. That glory is his aim soon becomes apparent during the siege of Harfleur (a siege that follows an unsuccessful initial attack.) Here, Harry entertains an appeasement offer from the French that includes several dukedoms and marriage to princess Catherine (HV 3.0.30-32) – an offer that shockingly contains in it the very things that Harry eventually gains after much time and bloodshed in battle. (HV 5.2.95-97) Instead of accepting the terms of peace, however, Harry, in a vicious speech, declares his final position to the citizens of Harfleur – he will take the city peacefully or obliterate it completely:

Therefore, you men of Harfleur,
Take pity of your town and of your people
Whiles yet my soldiers are in my command,
Whiles yet the cool and temperate wind of grace
O’erblows the filthy and contagious clouds
Of heady murder, spoil, and villainy.
If not – why, I a moment look to see
The blind and bloody soldier with foul hand
-1.
Defile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters;  
Your fathers taken by the silver beards,  
And their most reverend heads dashed to the walls;  
Your naked infants spitted upon pikes,  
While the mad mothers with their howls confused  
Do break the clouds, as did the wives of Jewry  
At Herod’s bloody-hunting slaugthermen.  
What say you? Will you yield, and this avoid?  
Or guilty in defense, be thus destroyed. (HV 3.3.104-120)

Declaring that the Dauphin’s inability to send aid [“his powers are not ready” (HV 3.3.124)] has removed their hope of a successful defense, Harfleur’s governor surrenders to the Harry and his army. The case with which this capitulation is secured works to gloss over its importance to the English war effort, for as Harry notes, a great deal (and perhaps everything!) depended on a speedy victory as “winter [is] coming on, and sickness growing/upon our soldiers.” (HV 3.3.132-133)

Much then, depends on the speech of Harry. The siege of Harfleur is becoming increasingly difficult and the need for a quick victory is imperative. One is even tempted to go so far as to say that Harry’s Harfleur speech is made in desperation. Yet does not this reveal a weakness in Harry’s plans? Does it not show his victory to be more dependent on fortune than skill? For, since Harfleur has just discovered that reinforcements are not coming, it seems impossible that Harry knows of Harfleur’s weakened position. And if we were to suppose that Harry found out this fact before Harfleur and believes that victory is imminent, we could not then explain why he is having his army dig mines (supervised by Fluellen and Gower).

Moreover, even if we do ignore the digging of mines and suppose that Harry has heard word of Harfleur’s desperate position and the lack of reinforcements, this weakened position could not have been anticipated for, given the Dauphin’s antagonizing
role in prompting the English invasion, one must assume that the French would be better prepared for war. Indeed, that France does not have troops ready to fortify Harfleur is an unforgivable failure that can hardly have been foreseen by Harry. If the French had simply prepared properly, Harry’s position would be grave indeed. Thus, one seems compelled to view Harry’s victory as extremely fortunate, for he placed himself and his troops in a precarious position, attempting to lay siege in winter to a stronghold that, if defended properly, would be extremely difficult to defeat. In other words, Harry’s generalship seems suspect.

Whatever the case, Harry employs the full power of his rhetoric, using the threat of murder, rape and infanticide to achieve victory – threats that prove extraneous when the failure of the French to reinforce Harfleur forces its surrender. If Harry has made mistakes leading up to this moment he makes none in giving the speech he does, for it is a speech that risks nothing for the chance to gain everything. This becomes clear when one considers that, given the failing condition of his army, the possibility of an extended siege seems impossible. Harry is facing either his own defeat or the surrender of Harfleur. With all hopes (both England’s and Harfleur’s) depending on troops from France, Harry surely knows that time is of the essence. In threatening destructive carnage, he forces Harfleur’s hand, compelling them to decide between (a) surrender and life and (b) resistance and possible death. In addition, the violence of the speech establishes Harry as resilient leader who will punish any and all who resist. According to Machiavelli, it is a prudent viciousness that will work to endear him to his troops, for:

When the ruler is at the head of his army and has a vast number of soldiers under his command, then it is absolutely essential to be prepared to be thought cruel; for it is impossible to keep an army united and ready for action without acquiring a reputation for cruelty.31
It is the same strategy he employed at the start of the campaign, when he declared himself to be a ferocious lover of war:

For as I am a soldier,
A name that in my thoughts becomes me best. (HV 3.3.83)

Despite his viciousness, Harry manages to structure his speech in a way that lays blame for any potential slaughter at the feet of Harfleur, while placing himself in a position from which he can take credit for the 'mercy' that will be shown at their surrender. Besides, these threats will almost assuredly never be carried out for, given the precarious state of his army, Harry's main hope for victory and (eventual) glory depends on the surrender of Harfleur.

Although Harry's speech reinforces him as the king of famine, sword and fire (HV 1.0.7), the language contained in it is often dismissed. Harry, we are often told, is simply being rhetorical; we should just read these lines as idle threats that accompany all wars. Yet do not murder and rape also accompany all wars? Are we not compelled to conclude that Harry is not using idle threats but rather is describing what will happen if the English army conquers by force? The sole deterrent to such a terrible exercise (beyond morality) would be the infamous reputation it would afford Harry. This reputation would arise not from the deeds themselves but rather from Harry's very political (and public) use of them. But could not even this reputation be of great use, striking fear into the hearts of Harry's enemies and establishing him as one to be feared? In fact, if carried out, the anathema of Harry's threatened exercise would surely fade, easily effaced by subsequent successes for, as Harry has shown in his ascent to the throne, the people always more acutely remember one's ultimate success than the means
used to achieve it. As Machiavelli says, the people judge by the outcome. Harry’s threats are not the way to maintain a glorious reputation, but they are not a bad place to begin one. Harry has managed to construct a threat that, while extremely motivating to the enemy, is unlikely to be tested, allowing him to gain the benefits of such deeds without committing to their negative reputation.

*Harry’s Good Fortune*

Despite his eventual success at Harfleur it is obvious that Harry gets himself into situations that his father would not. Not only does he risk much during the siege of Harfleur, he also is in a precarious situation at Agincourt, where he relies on the overconfidence of the French and ineptitude of their leaders to give him the opportunity for victory. Indeed, his policy is so risky that we are tempted to wonder whether he is not lucky to have escaped the situation he has created. We must admit, however, that his intrepid moves are ultimately successful – that they (in the words of Machiavelli) allow him “to climb higher on a ladder supplied by his enemies.” Consider what Machiavelli says of Agathocles’ achievements:

> You will not find much that can be attributed to luck; for, as I have said, he did not come to power because he had help from above, but because he worked his way up from below, climbing from rank to rank by undergoing infinite dangers and discomforts until in the end he obtained a monopoly of power, and then holding on to his position by bold and risky tactics.\(^{33}\)

Indeed, Machiavelli not only disassociates luck from bold and risky tactics, he maintains that luck can be defeated by boldness:

> The cautious man, when it is time to be headstrong, does not know how to act and is destroyed. But, if one knew how to change one’s character as times and circumstances change, one’s luck would never change.\(^{34}\)
Thus, following this teaching (and in contrast to his father) Harry is a risk-taker, placing himself in dangerous and difficult situations. Yet the perils he faces are not haphazardly chosen, for by escaping from these situations he gains a greater advantage than ever could have been provided by retreat. What Harry surrounds himself with is not simply the opportunity for success, but the opportunity for greatness. And greatness is all for Harry, for he desires honour above all else.

*The Morality of Harry*

The vast distance Harry is willing to go to achieve victory and honour is confirmed when he orders his soldiers to kill the French prisoners during the conclusive battle, an order surrounded and obscured with such confusion that it is almost inscrutable. Upon hearing that “the French have reinforced their scattered men”, Harry immediately orders: “every soldier kill his prisoners.” (HV 4.6.36-37) Shakespeare then immediately shifts scenes, showing us Fluellen and Gower lamenting the French massacre of the English “poys and the luggage”, crying “‘tis expressly against the laws of arms.” (HV 4.7.1-2) Just as we are about to wonder how the king’s order can escape similar judgment, Harry enters, views the scene, and declares “I was not angry since I came to France / Until this instant.” (4.7.47-48) Then, for the second time, Harry gives the order to “cut the throats of those we have,” (HV 4.7.55) and extends this order to cover all future prisoners. Merely six lines later King Harry is approached by Montjoy, an envoy of the French, who, in only 15 lines, convinces him to end the battle (with the actual order coming 90 lines later.) These events leave us with some significant questions.

If Harry is as angry as he declares why does he immediately enter into
negotiations with Montjoy instead of continuing the battle that he is winning handily? And if we accept that the first order is followed by Harry’s men [for Gower states early in this scene that “the King most worthily has caused every soldier to cut his prisoner’s throat” (HV 4.7.7-8)] why is there a need for a second order at all?

It appears that the answer to this second question can only be that the English have taken a second group of prisoners during the French counterattack. This is confirmed by the presence of the prisoners on stage after the initial order (HV 4.7.46) and the 1500 prisoners we hear reported to Harry in the following scene. (HV 4.8.73) Yet, as Sutherland and Watts note, this interpretation becomes difficult to defend when one considers the effect the first set of mass killings would have on potential future prisoners: “These French prisoners surely did not surrender after Henry gave his ‘kill them all’ command. It would have been suicide to do so.”

However, despite our agreement with this criticism, we are forced to demur from Sutherland and Watts’ premise, and deny the assertion that there actually is a second order. For if one reads the lines carefully, one discovers that the “second order” is really an ultimatum:

If they will fight with us, bid them come down,
Or void the field: they do offend our sight.
If they do neither, we will come to them,
And make them skirr away as swift as stones
Enforced from the old Assyrian slings.
Besides, we’ll cut the throats of those we have,
And not a man of them that we shall take
Shall taste our mercy. (HV 4.7. 50-57 my italics)

This ultimatum, uses the threat of force in an attempt to bring about an end to the battle – either the French horsemen (i.e. nobles) must fight and be defeated, or they must admit defeat and leave.
When united with Harry’s initial order to kill the prisoners and the 1500 prisoners left at the end of the fighting, this threat leaves us with only one possibility – that the first order of execution was restricted to the common soldiers, while the threatened execution refers to the prisoners of nobility. Confirming this reading is the advantage these events give Harry. Common prisoners are but a burden during battle as there is no military advantage to be gained from keeping them alive as they tie up one’s own men and can always turn on their captors if there is a shift in the battle’s momentum. Moreover, unlike the prisoners of name, they can be neither ransomed nor joined to in marriage.

Given Harry’s record as king, it is hard to imagine him giving up the obvious advantages provided by the prisoners of name by killing them. As seen in his parlay with Montjoy, the prisoners of rank reinforce the strength of his position during the negotiations with the French. Moreover, in sparing the lives of the nobles and in juxtaposing this ‘mercy’ with his massacre of the common soldiers, he becomes their master. By holding the greatest of physical powers over the nobles (power he has shown himself willing to use) he has also made himself feared without making himself hated. And even if Harry’s willingness to kill the nobles does threaten to make him hated in the eyes of the French, this danger does not outweigh the many benefits, particularly when one understands that this threat also does the necessary work of covering up Harry’s earlier crime.

Thus, despite his declarations and his threats, Harry is not, nor has he ever been, truly angry. Rather, he uses the opportunity given to him by the massacre of his luggage boys as a pretext for his “anger”, thereby allowing him to reissue his initial order to kill the soldiers, resituating it into a justifiable context. He is, in effect, obscuring history,
hoping the two orders will be confused (as they often are), and that his ignoble acts of murder will be recast as noble deeds of vengeance. Note, for instance, his request to hear only “what prisoners of good sort are taken.” (HV 4.8.69) And Harry has good reason to obscure history, for the murder of the French prisoners has far exceeded his threats at Harfleur (while at the same time proving his seriousness in making them), threatening to stain his victory with infamy. Thus, once again Harry proves himself to be a purely political man who’s every word and action is a calculated attempt to achieve the greatest political advantage allotted by the situation.

The advantage Harry gains in this scene is not without precedence, for it in many ways reflects the actions of Pistol. Just one scene before Harry’s order to kill the prisoners, Pistol shrouds his threats in the guise of anger, ready to kill a French prisoner without a second thought until the moment he discovers (through a series of miscommunications) that his prisoner is a ranking gentleman who can be ransomed for two hundred crowns. (HV 4.4.40-42) The ease with which Pistol is mollified foreshadows Harry’s own ‘righteous anger’: “Tell him my fury shall abate, and I the crowns will take.” (HV 4.4.44) For these two, anger does not outweigh advantage.

Although Pistol’s scene begins as one of general comedy, providing the audience with the stereotypical French coward, its irony deflates its hilarity. The Boy’s sarcastic sending off of the prisoner – “Suivez-vous le grand capitaine” (HV 4.6.59) – serves to underline the reality that, despite the Frenchmen’s declarations, there is little great about Pistol. And when the Boy continues in his remarks, we hear the deepest condemnation: “I did never know so full a voice issue from so empty a heart. But the saying is true: ‘the empty vessel makes the greatest sound.’” (HV 4.4.60-62) In the end, the scene’s irony
turns deadly. Disgusted with Pistol, the Boy leaves to help guard the English luggage and is eventually killed by the French in their response to Harry’s ordered execution of the French prisoners. In a cruel twist, the order to kill these prisoners was communicated to the English by Pistol – an order that immediately follows his bringing of the French prisoner to Harry.

The Glory of Harry

In the end, despite his questionable tactics, Harry emerges with a glorious victory that propels him into the history books as one of England’s greatest kings. That glory is his ultimate aim is unmistakable, for while he certainly desires victory in order to strengthen his hold on the throne, he ultimately desires the throne for the glory it gives him. As Harry says:

I am not covetous for gold,
Nor care I who doth feed upon my cost;
It earns me not if men my garments wear;
Such outward things dwell not in my desires;
But if it be a sin to covet honour,
I am the most offending soul alive. (HV 4.3.24-29)

It is this understanding that proves his superiority to his father. For although both Henry IV and King Harry, following Machiavelli, are primarily concerned with gaining and maintaining power, Harry comes closer to Machiavelli’s teaching. As king, Henry IV pursues power carefully, his rule muted and restrained by fear. Unless accompanied by great deeds, words alone cannot capture the hearts of men through history.

And Henry’s rule is completely devoid of glorious deeds, defined exclusively by shrewd political maneuvers. He is a king that has achieved much through words but nothing through physical action. He is a king who is easily forgotten, for all he has
acquired has been gained without obvious risk, and it is impossible for men to admire
gains not accompanied by risks; the 'King of Smiles' is popular while in power, but
forgettable afterward. While Henry IV likely recognizes this, he is unwilling to take risks
for the sake of glory. Take, for example, the final battle of Shrewsbury in which Henry
has others pose as him on the battlefield. In having others fight as himself Henry IV
creates a situation that is disgraceful. Not only is he seen as cowardly, but also his
position is weakened significantly each time he is figuratively defeated by Douglas on the
battlefield.

Conversely, Harry rules with an extreme boldness that risks everything, including
the power already gained, in order to gain the greatest power – power over the hearts of
men. Like his father, Henry V is the master manipulator of men, knowing when to act
and what to say, always maneuvering to gain political advantage. Yet, in contrast to
Henry IV, he is a risk-taker, placing himself in dangerous and difficult situations; and
escaping from these situations provides a greater advantage than could have been gained
from not placing oneself in them at all. What Hal surrounds himself with is not simply
opportunity for success, but opportunity for greatness. His is a courage that will not go
unrecognized by the people. Hal commits great deeds and is remembered, while his
father’s rule becomes but a footnote to his own.

_Harry and the Family_

The understanding that political life is founded in the desire for recognition
underlies Shakespeare's play and provides an excellent compass of the tension between
Hal and Henry IV. The tension between Hal and his father reflects one of Shakespeare's
constant themes – the inevitable tension between politics and the family. Impossible to hide in any account of hereditary monarchies, Shakespeare makes this problem a primary concern of his second tetralogy, exploring the issue with a depth that (with the exception of King Lear) is unrivaled in his other plays. Not only does this tension cripple Hal’s relationship to his father, it also, in a more pathetic way, pervades Northumberland’s relationship with Hotspur. In fact, one of the most shocking events in the plays is Northumberland’s refusal to reinforce Hotspur’s troops thereby all but ensuring his son’s demise.

The tension between Henry and Hal is explored in a far different way. As we have argued, the rule of Henry IV pales in comparison to his son. Douglas Stewart puts it this way:

King Henry, preaching to his son that he has been “no skipping king” who “ambled up and down, etc.” is rather reminiscent of Plato’s oligarchic man, who is incidentally the worst of fathers, clutching his goods to himself and hostile to all activities, especially pleasures, that involve risk or expense. Power or at least its shadow, office, is King Henry’s equivalent of money, which he regards as a fixed store of goods soon frittered away by overuse and overexposure. What King Henry doesn’t know is that heroes don’t calculate life that way and in fact seem to be living most fully when overcommitted and overextended.41

How this reality impacts Henry’s relationship with Hal is most clear when Henry says that he wishes Hotspur, rather than Hal, was his son. If Henry is an oligarchic man, Hotspur is a timocrat. And while Henry may not have committed himself to a timocratic way of life, he prefers it to the life lived by his Hal, for at least Hostspur lives a life with some recognizable standard of what is honorable. In his first encounter with Hal in the plays, it is the lack of this standard that Henry concerns himself with, telling Hal that he is acting like Richard, “the skipping king”, who “mixed his royalty with cap’ring fools.”

(1 HIV 3.2.60-63, 94)
As his complaint also reveals, it is not just foolishness that Henry is worried about:

Percy, Northumberland,
The Archbishop's grace of York, Douglas, Mortimer
Capitulate against us, and are up.
But wherefore do I tell these news to thee?
Why, Harry, do I tell thee of my foes,
Which art my near'st and dearest enemy? —
Thou art like enough, through vassal fear,
Base inclination, and the start of spleen,
To fight against me under Percy's pay,
To dog his heels, and curtsy at his frowns
To show how you are degenerate. (1 HIV 2.3.118-228)

Although this speech reveals Henry's poor understanding of Hal (who would never side with the rebels), his suspicions are not completely unfounded, for Hal does want to usurp his power. This first becomes clear when Hal defeats Hotspur in battle. Since it is Hotspur's rebellion, in defeating him, Hal is able to take credit for the victory of the entire battle. And since Henry has so thoroughly distanced himself from his son, he cannot take any credit for the victory (not even the credit of a father.) All the work that Henry IV has done to establish himself has been overthrown by one greater than himself and he can take no credit for it, for he did not even raise Hal. Hal, it turns out, has raised himself and, against all odds, has provided his father with an unforeseen and remarkable victory. What Hal says about his victory over Hotspur - that by defeating Hotspur he transfers all his honour to himself - is multiplied a thousand fold in what it does to his father. For in achieving this victory and in preserving England, Hal ensures that the new order (and all its future victories) will be understood as founded on Hal and Hal alone.
Although Henry initially misjudges Hal’s political ambition, after Shrewsbury he does come to realize the threat it poses to his power. This is most obvious during his final scene, when he awakes from his sickness and finds Hal with his crown:

Dost thou so hunger for mine empty chair
That thou wilt needs invest thee with my honours
Before thy hour be ripe?
... Then get thee gone and dig my grave thyself,
And bid the merry bells ring to thine ear
That thou art crowned. (2 HIV 4.3.222-225,238-240)

As on other occasions, upon hearing Hal’s explanation and apology Henry is calmed, his political instincts overwhelmed by the demands of the family:

God put it in thy mind to take it hence
That thou mightst win the more thy father’s love,
Pleading so wisely in excuse of it. (2 HIV 4.3.306-308)

The tension between the family and political life inevitably extends to the life of Hal, who, as in all such things, and in contrast to his father, overcomes the problems it poses. Even with the death of his father looming, his response to Poins’ admonishment of his lack of grief at such a mournful time is to prove to him that there is nothing political to be gained by grief. (2 HIV 2.2.20-48) And when he finally does offer grief at the bedside of his sleeping father, it is offered not for the sake of his father but for the sake of the crown:

Thy due from me
Is tears and heavy sorrows of the blood,
Which nature, love, and filial tenderness
Shall, O dear father, pay thee plenteously.
My due from thee is this imperial crown,
Which, as immediate from thy place and blood,
Derives itself to me. (2 HIV 4.3.168-174)

Hal’s father, nay his entire family, like God, are only important because of what they can give him. Indeed, Harry seems completely intent on eliminating the obligations of the
family from political life, removing John of Lancaster from any visible service to the
crown and making indistinguishable the gaining of a wife from the gaining of power. In the end, Harry manages to completely overcome the tension between public and private life for, as a completely political man, he rules without a family.

Harry and Machiavelli

Because Harry embodies the teaching of Machiavelli and because Machiavelli is the first modern political philosopher, the king’s rule is representative of the modern world. Harry’s standing as a modern ruler is not simply tied to his use of treachery, hypocrisy, ambition or brutality (for politics has always contained these things), but rather stems from the way he uses these things to his advantage – how he subverts the traditional limits on these things in a way that allows his way of life to flourish. This is reflective of Machiavelli’s own political project, which aims at destroying the myths of previous accounts that were meant to provide a limit on politics:

I thought it sensible to go straight to a discussion of how things are in real life and not waste time with a discussion of an imaginary world. For many authors have constructed imaginary republics and principalities that have never existed in practice and never could . . . it is necessary for a ruler, if he wants to hold on to power, to learn how not to be good.

In teaching politicians not to be good, Machiavelli attempts to remove all traditional limits from the pursuit of power – he attempts to remove all traditional limits from politics. In order to facilitate his attack on the justice provided by “the imagined republics and principalities” of religion and pre-modern philosophy, Machiavelli shows how both can be used; he transforms them into political tools. Thus, instead of becoming orienting stars for politics – the ideas by which politics are judged – they become
subservient to politics and are themselves judged by their political usefulness. Subject to political means, these guiding elements necessarily lose their authority. As a result, the only source of authority is political order, order that is created by man.

In Harry, we see this reality in action. In opposition to the medieval order where a king’s legitimacy comes from God, the sole source of legitimacy for Harry’s power is Harry himself, who legitimizes it through his ability to get and keep power. Through him, Shakespeare reveals the dangerous possibilities of a shift to the modern order. Instead of being restrained by the understanding that they are part of an order (or by the political need to defend such an order), rulers are freed to act without restraint, not only in maintaining their grasp on power, but also in their pursuit of honour — honour that can only be achieved through force. For while men have always acted in ways that in some ways reflect the teachings of Machiavelli, these actions were almost always contained by the belief of the people and/or the rulers in God (or gods.)

Shakespeare then, through his portrayal of the modern order in the person and rule of Henry V, raises the immense importance of limits within politics. Indeed, through King Harry it becomes clear that the absence of these limits — of any standards outside our desires — opens the door not only to the possibility that one may pursue and achieve power without restraint, but also to the possibility that this power will eventually remove God and the family as political authorities, thereby undermining the morality that they provide.
Shakespeare and Democracy

The tetralogy's progressive dilapidation of moral authorities cannot help but remind us of Socrates' account of the democratic man. Defined by his appetites, he "does not admit true speech" and therefore honours all desires equally, refusing to differentiate between good and bad desires. As a result, because there is no common standard of human excellence, all that remains is the desire for recognition. Thus, the democratic man follows his appetites wherever they lead him, publicly demanding and giving recognition for whatever he does, and angered by any sense of moderation (including the law.)

Thus, although the democratic man desires recognition just as much as the timocrat does, he is differentiated from him by the loss of any sense of a reasonable standard of excellence. It is these unchecked men, claims Socrates, who fall into the life of tyranny.

The connection between democracy and tyranny is also evident in the modern world, albeit in a somewhat different fashion. As seen in the teachings of The Prince, Machiavelli's project - the destabilization of all authority outside of power itself - inevitably leads, in its beginnings, to tyranny. Devoid of all authority, the assertion made by the rulers that they are ruling on behalf of God or Justice for the sake of others becomes less convincing. In destroying all authority outside of man, this project opens up the possibility that no one's rule is inherently legitimate. Consequently, there are no inherent grounds for restriction from the political realm. One person's claim becomes as good as the next, enhanced only by the support he can garner. As a result, the people will be increasingly inclined to overthrow a tyranny and demand laws that will protect them. It fact, it will become harder to convince the people that they should be ruled at all.
Shakespeare’s recognition of this shift (reflected by the policy of Henry IV and Henry V) is made most explicit in the conversation between a disguised King Harry and the soldiers Williams and Bates. In it, Harry argues that the men should be glad to die “in the King’s company, his cause being just and his quarrel honourable.” (HV 4.1.120) Retorting “that’s more than we know” (HV 4.1.123), Williams puts the legitimacy of Harry’s war (and thus his rule) into question, thereby revealing that little trust remains in the authority of the king. Then, in one of Shakespeare’s most unexpected turns, Williams proceeds to show himself equal to Harry in argument, leaving him sputtering to justify how the king can expect his soldiers to remain loyal while not being responsible for their deaths. As Williams puts it: “Now, if these men do not die well, it will be a black matter for the King that led them to it – who to disobey were against all proportion of subjection.” (HV 4.1.136-138) Unable to properly respond, Harry oscillates from reason to reason, issuing an (unintentional?) ironic appeal to authority [“The King is not bound to answer the particular endings of his soldiers” (HV 4.1.146)], before describing war as a sanctified form of God’s justice [“War is his beadle. War is his vengeance” (HV 4.1.158.)] Finally, Harry attempts to transform this argument into a discussion of the afterlife [“every subject’s soul is his own” HV (4.1.164)] – a transformation that ignores Williams’ point that the king is responsible for deaths that occur in war (unless participation is freely given.)

While Bates may be convinced by Harry’s defence, Williams is silent. And when Harry attempts to rally the party, telling them that he “heard the King say he would not be ransomed” (HV 4.1.177), Williams reveals that he too is aware of Machiavelli: “Ay, he said so, to make us fight cheerfully, but when our throats are cut he may be ransomed,
and we ne’er the wiser.” (HV 4.1.178-179) And if Williams thinks Harry will lie about this to gain advantage, he must also question the war itself. He must question the very notion that Harry means to give anyone advantage but himself. In the end, it is clear that despite all his attempts, Harry has been defeated. Williams has proved himself to be a new breed of citizen. Articulate and completely self-interested he shows an astounding comprehension of the king’s Machiavellian aims. He is one small step away from asserting himself politically, and as Williams proves in his subsequent encounter with Harry, he may already be there.

For when Williams meets up with the king’s party again, he shows no regard for his station, striking Fluellen without any sense of reverence [an insult ignored by Harry (4.8.8-43) despite his praise of Fluellen at (4.1.82-83).] Then, when Harry comes forward to reveal himself as Williams’ earlier interlocutor, Williams does not bow to his rank (as we imagined he would) instead maintaining that his argument with the king was justified:

Your majesty came not like yourself. You appeared to me but as a common man. Witness the night, your garments, your lowliness. And what your highness suffered under that shape, I beseech you take it for your own fault, and not mine, for had you been as I took you for, I made no offence. Therefore I beseech your highness pardon me. (HV 4.8.46-51)

All that is kingly about you, Williams tells Harry, is your ceremony. Without it, you are no different than Bates or myself – without it, we owe you nothing. Indeed, Williams’ rejection of Harry’s amending gift of the crown-filled glove only serves to remind us of his sense of equality.

Shakespeare, then, reveals himself to be more than a superficial student of Machiavelli, correctly showing a final implication of Machiavelli’s project – a political
realm that is full of distrust. It is a realm that, through Williams’ demand for security and equality and Harry’s desire for glory, opens itself to the totality of self-interest in all men — interests that work against one another, keeping each other in check. It is an openness that demands the appearance of equality. That Hal is aware of this inevitable end is hinted at in his encounters with Williams and Bates. Not only does he submit to the questioning of the soldiers, he also initiates it, arguing: “I think the King is but a man as I am.” (HV 4.1.99) Note also his admonition to Fluellen after commanding him to give crowns to Williams: “And captain, you must needs be friends with him.” (HV 4.8.56) Harry recognizes that since his claim to the throne cannot ultimately be justified by God, it must be justified by men. Indeed, he knows that his rule depends on this justification. This is why he appeals to the soldiers so thoroughly, embracing Williams and characterizing all men as his “band of brothers.” (4.3.60)
Chapter Five

HAL AND FALSTAFF: I KNOW THEE NOT, OLD MAN

Ever-present during Falstaff’s time on stage – in his encounters with Poins, the Chief Justice and Hal and the accompanying allusions to the accusations of the city, the poets and religion – is the charge that he is corrupting the youth. The graveness of these charges stems not simply from a concern for the youth, but from a concern for the particular youth Falstaff is said to be corrupting – the future king of England. In examining these charges, we must turn our full attention toward the relationship of Hal and Falstaff, considering what this relationship means to them both.

Upon our first encounter with Hal and Falstaff we bear witness to a lecherous conversation about women, drinking, and the corruption of public office that is an amazing and shocking battle of words and of wits. In this encounter, the bumptious and lowly Falstaff parries on even footing with the prince, overturning his words with puns and misinterpretations. It is not how one normally would speak to a prince. Hal, however, is a full participant, giving back to Falstaff a full measure of irony and belittling insults. The effervescent fierceness of this conversation immediately leads one to the conclusion that these two must either be the greatest of friends or fiercest of rivals in a sport whose limits are known only to the competitors.

Given Falstaff’s declaration that he is the cause of wit in other men, and the pleasure we see him take in his own wit (both when alone and when in the company of the witless), it is clear that he takes great pleasure in the wit of Hal – the only wit which approaches his own. Yet beyond the realm of pleasure, we are witness to a second motive. Three times in their first scene together we see Falstaff turn the conversation
toward the day that Hal will become king and, on each of these occasions, Falstaff sets himself up as a beneficiary, envisioning a new order. First he turns to the legitimization of his way of life:

Sweet wag, when thou art king let not us that are squires of the night’s body be called thieves of the day’s beauty. Let us be ‘Diana’s foresters’, ‘gentlemen of the shade’, ‘minions of the moon’, and let men say we be men of good government. (1 HIV 1.2.22-23)

After Hal rejects this advice, Falstaff recommends leniency toward thieves: “do not thou when thou art king hang a thief.” (1 HIV 1.2.54) When Hal responds “no, thou shalt” it is ironically interpreted by Falstaff to mean that Falstaff is to be judge (replacing the Chief Justice?) But Hal is adamant: “thou shalt have the hanging of the thieves.” (1 HIV 1.2.58)

Falstaff’s attempt to protect himself by influencing Hal’s future rule continues throughout their relationship, culminating in Falstaff’s shocking portrayal of Hal’s father, in which he shows Hal how he (Falstaff) should be regarded by the king:

A goodly, portly man, I’faith, and a corpulent; of a cheerful look, a pleasing eye, and a most noble carriage . . . if that man should be lewdly given he deceiveth me; for, Harry, I see virtue in his looks. (I HIV 2.5.384-388)

Although Hal eventually rejects these arguments, we are nevertheless forced to admit that, in some ways, Falstaff’s project is a success. For when Hal becomes king, Falstaff does not receive the hanging of a thief and is allowed to live his life, given an allowance by King Harry “sufficient to the competence of life.” (2 HIV 5.5.64)

Thus, however much Falstaff may genuinely enjoy his time spent with Hal, we must conclude that he is motivated by the aim of self-preservation. For if Falstaff’s aim is to secure the freedom necessary to the life he lives, is not this aim best achieved by endearing himself to Hal and does not this endearment require Falstaff to appear to love
his company? In other words, what Falstaff seems to do simply for the sake of pleasure may actually be an attempt at self-preservation for, in the final analysis of the relationship, all that Falstaff has gained from his time with Hal is sympathy from the people and amnesty from persecution.²

However, this cannot be a complete account of their relationship, for Falstaff seems to genuinely desire the company of Hal and is attractive enough to Hal that Hal’s eventual rejection of him is moderated. (Hanging out with thieves who were not Falstaff could just have easily fulfilled the stated political goals of Hal’s first soliloquy.) As Allan Bloom points out, this situation is not unique, for it is similar to the relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades, “the young man of great family and unlimited political ambition with whom Socrates spent a certain amount of time and who was certainly influenced by him, although in ways that are difficult to gauge.”³ “Socrates,” he writes elsewhere, “takes a young man tempted by the tyrannic life and attempts to give him at least that modicum of awareness of philosophy which will cure him of the lust for tyranny” for,

Although tyranny and the tyrannic man are in one way the furthest from philosophy, they are in another the nearest to it. This is why Socrates is attracted to those dangerous young men, the potential tyrants, who are the products of the democracy. With some of these young men (for example, Critias and Alcibiades) his training failed, and as a result he was condemned. But with others (for example, Xenophon and Plato) he succeeded, and they have exculpated him.⁴

We must consider, then, the possibility that Falstaff’s relationship with Hal is more than an attempt at self-preservation – that it is an attempt to convert Hal to the life of philosophy; that it is an attempt at friendship.
Hal, Falstaff and the Question of Politics

While it must be noted that England is not Athens and Alcibiades is not heir in a hereditary monarchy, it nevertheless does appear that Falstaff works to undercut the political desires of Hal. When Hal mocks him for being a fat, lazy, homeless, drunk whose sole concerns are food, drink, and sex, Falstaff adds that he is also thief and that Hal has joined him in this profession. And when Falstaff arises from the dead at the battle of Shrewsbury, his strange attempt to wrest honour from Hal is surely meant to make a mockery of the whole affair. Moreover, there is Falstaff's evident disdain for honour seekers – for Hotspur, for Henry IV and for Prince John.

That Falstaff's motives should include friendship is hardly surprising when one considers that Hal does show an affinity for Falstaff's way of life, not only in his wit, but in his eroticism as well. And these two characteristics may be inseparable, for Falstaff and Hal refer to sex often in the plays, using it as the source of much of their humour. Mistress Quickly tells us that Falstaff will sleep with anyone: "If his weapon be out, he will foin like any devil, he will spare neither man, woman, nor child." (2 HIV 2.1.14-15.) During his soliloquy on sack, Falstaff links this eroticism to his humour, criticizing Prince John for being "sober blooded", a condition he says is proved both by John's lack of wit, and by the fact that the "boy doth not love me, nor a man cannot make him laugh." (2 HIV 4.2.80) Indeed, the connection between wit and eroticism is the focus of this speech, with Falstaff linking John's lack of wit to a kind of "male greensickness" and a "lack of skill in the weapon," both of which are signs of "cowardice." (2 HIV 4.2.84, 102) Harry, he says, has avoided these problems, by the "excellent endeavour of drinking good." (2 HIV 4.2.107)
The Rejection of Falstaff

In the end, however, Hal becomes king and banishes Falstaff from his presence with apparent ease. It is tempting to view the disappointment one feels at the banishment of Falstaff in terms of some sort of moral tale about responsibility in which Hal’s termination of his friendship with Falstaff is painful in the same way that growing up is painful – a sad but ultimately positive step that relegates one’s teenage years to the good old days. Underlying this reading is the view that the blame for our disappointment lies at the feet of Falstaff and his rejection of responsibility – that really it is Falstaff’s failure to ‘grow up’ that makes Hal’s friendship with him impossible. While not completely devoid of truth, this explanation ultimately fails, for it ignores the calculating efforts of Hal throughout the relationship.

Although Hal’s rejection of Falstaff may be shocking, it is hardly surprising, for Hal claims at the very beginning of Henry IV Part One that his time spent in the company of lowlifes and thieves is a politically driven maneuver. (1 HIV 1.3.173-195) This point helps make clear Allan Bloom’s argument that Hal and Falstaff’s were never friends in the first place. Bloom’s account places Hal’s rejection of Falstaff into new terms, replacing the notion that the sadness we feel naturally accompanies the sacrifice of something smaller for something greater with the argument that the rejection of Falstaff is representative of the fact that a commitment to the totality of politics necessarily entails a vacuous existence. Contained in this understanding is the difficult teaching that political life (and particularly life as a monarch) is a life without friendship, a teaching that Hal (in contrast to his father) commits to, both in his rejection of Falstaff and throughout his rule as king.
How close Falstaff comes to turning Hal away from his political ambitions and toward a life of philosophy is impossible to tell. The only glimpse of hope we see in the two plays is the fact that Hal spends time with Falstaff and seems to enjoy doing so. Yet when Hal is king he seems to forget Falstaff completely. Indeed, the only man whose absence Hal seems to care about is Hotspur.

Since every action of Hal, whether as prince or as king, can be shown to be a calculated attempt to gain more power, and since his interest in Falstaff cannot be shown to have taken away from this ambition, we must conclude that his time spent in the company of Falstaff is a politically calculated maneuver that goes beyond what is revealed in Hal’s initial soliloquy. On this reading, the time spent with Falstaff can be understood as Hal’s education in the power of words, an education whose usefulness is revealed during his rule as king. Of course, if we take this position we are forced to question why the prince abandons his post with Henry IV in order to spend time with Falstaff. His excuse that he wishes to make his deeds appear more glorious has a certain appeal and Hal is surely right that it is a good political move. Being part of palace life means choosing sides, making political friends and enemies. Being part of Henry IV’s government means being identified as party to all his father does. As his brother shows in his arrest and betrayal of the rebels in the Henry IV Part Two, involvement in his father’s government will likely entail making unforgettable political decisions that can only work to threaten one’s own rule. In comparison, private misdeeds are happily erased from the minds of men by redemptive public acts that can only appear more glorious when weighed against one’s past. In other words, the past misdeeds of private life are redeemable while the misdeeds of public life are not.
Nevertheless, challenging the prudence of the course of action taken by Hal is the tremendous political success of his father. Henry IV's achievements in the political realm — defeating an old political order by overthrowing a ruler of unchallenged legitimacy and establish a new regime with himself as ruler — points to a man of terrific political talent and understanding. Are we not then forced to question whether Hal would not have been better equipped for political rule by studying under his father? Could not the advantages of private life be maintained in concert with secretive political teachings from his father?

Yet such a reading would have to ignore the absolute uniqueness of Falstaff and the education he provides. As Bloom points out in his reference to Alcibiades, the result of the time spent with Socrates is a verbal dexterity and freedom to question that allows Alcibiades to make his other 'father' Pericles look silly. By asking "what is law?" and proving that the city, in the form of Pericles, cannot answer sufficiently, we see the grounds for Alcibiades tyrannical politics that eventually leads him to mutilate the city's gods. In the same way, Falstaff heavily influences Hal's life, teaching him how to manipulate men through words while at the same time undermining the family, the laws, and God in ways that is reflected by Hal when he comes to power (unlike Alcibiades, however, Hal publicly sides with God.)

_Falstaff and the Problem of Impiety_

As noted, the extreme impiety of Falstaff is one of the defining aspects of his character, reflected not only in how he lives his life but also in his articulated rejection of honour, the laws, justice, and the Bible. Despite this rejection, Falstaff is never accused
of impiety, with the only explicit persecution of him coming in response to his thieving. The disconnect between England’s response to Falstaff’s impiety and the response of Athens to the life of Socrates is directly related to the impious rule of Henry IV, for the establishment of the modern order works to undercut all previous accounts of divine authority, thereby normalizing the formerly shocking philosophic challenge to it. In other words, this normalization wears away the possibility of a philosophic education, an education that surely depends on one attempting to defend a belief, a fear, a governing principle, and having that principle put under a scathing critique. And to continue to the end of this critique requires commitment to the principle in the first place.

Hal’s response to Falstaff shares much with the response of England. Hal has witnessed the deposing of Richard, a deposing that provides him with a devastating critique of traditional religious authority, thereby diminishing any awe or fear he might feel toward God. After the success of Henry Bolingbroke, God is no longer defensible politically – he has ceased to be a political player. Put another way, in witnessing the deeds of his father, Hal has the opportunity to reach the conclusions pushed for by Falstaff before being educated by him. And because these conclusions have only been reached on practical grounds, they do not necessarily constitute the rejection of a political life.

Thus, as a result of the shift to the modern order, Falstaff faces the enormously difficult task of converting Hal to philosophy in a world where nobody takes anything (except politics) seriously. Although Falstaff can provide Hal with an even deeper critique of traditional authority than is provided by the successes of Hal’s father, the ability of this critique to facilitate a change in Hal’s way of life has been weakened.
Indeed, the change in orders increases the possibility that Hal will be divided from the restraints of conventional opinion without being divided from his desire for the glory offered by political life. Hal commits to his relationship with Falstaff only so far as will aid him in his pursuit of power.

Yet if the shift to the modern world dehabilitates Falstaff's attempt to convert Hal to his way of life, why does he act in a way that furthers its movement? For, despite the risks, Falstaff chooses to educate Hal, a man who will someday be king. Moreover, however much he may have desired Hal's friendship, Falstaff is constantly conscious of the fact (and constantly reminding Hal) that, as king, Hal will have the opportunity to provide his way of life with great freedom. Here it is useful to return to Socrates and Alcibiades, of whom Allan Bloom writes:

Socrates ruined Alcibiades' life because in Socrates Alcibiades saw a dazzling brilliance that caused him to want to be with him always. But Alcibiades was from top to bottom a political man who delighted in the admiration of the people to whom he wanted to give benefactions and play the god. Socrates created a division in this heretofore unified and self-satisfied man. In contrast to Alcibiades, Harry's life is not shown to be ruined by the time he spends with Falstaff. Indeed, it seems that Falstaff allows Hal to be brilliant by not dividing him from his political ambitions. In order to incorporate philosophy into England, Falstaff avoids making the contrast between philosophy and politics too explicit, fostering a kind of love and admiration for his way of life within the heart of England (and within us.) As a result, Falstaff is allowed to exist safely within England – all that he must do is obey the law. Thus, although Falstaff's education of Hal may threaten to weaken the chance of successfully educating future philosophers, it also allows him the safety and security needed to practice his way of life.
Notes

Introduction

1 For example, see Abraham Lincoln’s “Letter to J. H. Hackett, August 17, 1863.” In The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln. Ed. Roy Basler. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953), vol. VI, 392. As Allan Bloom comments: “On the face of it, the man who could write Macbeth so convincingly that Lincoln believed it to be the perfect illustration of the problems of tyranny and murder must have known about politics; otherwise, however charming its language, the play would not have attracted a man who admittedly did know.” Shakespeare’s Politics. (University of Chicago Press: 1981), 5.


4 “Second tetralogy” refers not to the historical order of the group of plays, but to the order Shakespeare is said to have written his two groups of histories in. Thus, the “first tetralogy” (which is widely accepted to have been written first) consists of Henry VI Parts One, Two and Three and Richard III, while the second tetralogy consists of Richard II, Henry IV Parts One and Two and Henry V.

Chapter One

1 Steel, A. B. Quoted in Tillyard, E.M.W. Shakespeare’s History Plays, (Edinburgh: Peregin Books, 1962.) 253. Here, “undisputed” does not deny that previously there were competing claims to the throne, but rather that each king’s claim to the throne was indeed a direct one; for as Steel goes on to say: “The kings of the next hundred and ten years . . . were essentially kings de facto not de jure, successful usurpers recognized after the event, upon conditions, by their fellow magnates or by parliament.”


4 On Kingship. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1982), Book 1 ch. 6, sec. 42.


6 Ibid., 22-23.


8 Shakespeare, William. The Norton Shakespeare. Ed. Greenblatt, et al. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997.) All references to Shakespeare’s works are from this text unless otherwise noted.

9 This is reinforced when York reveals his knowledge of Richard’s involvement. (RII 2.1.165-170) That Bolingbroke also knows of Richard’s involvement is unquestionable, for Shakespeare confirms this knowledge in Act 4, when Bolinbroke asks Bagot: “What thou dost know of noble Gloucester’s death, / Who wrought it with the King, and who perform’d / The bloody office of his timeless end.” (RII 4.1.3-5)

10 The effectiveness of this strategy is reflected in the actions of Northumberland, who understands Bolingbroke and what he is doing. Northumberland is the most obvious of traitors in Richard II, clearly working hard throughout the play to destroy the old order and create the modern one. As revealed by his readiness to deliver the nobles to Bolingbroke the moment he reaches England’s shore, he, better than any of the other nobles, correctly interprets Henry’s actions.


12 Shakespeare confirms what lies behind each of Bolingbroke’s moves when Richard’s resignation looks to be in doubt and Bolingbroke is forced to press him for the crown (RII 4.1.180-200), and even more obviously when he orders Exton to murder Richard. (RII 5.4.1-10)
We cannot take Gaunt's assertion that he changes his mind about Bolingbroke's banishment (RII 1.3.250-255) seriously, for his actions do not bear it out. While his duty to Richard overrides his duty to his son, it does not override his love for him. What on the surface appears to be a change of heart is really a way to express his love to his son. If he really sided with his son over Richard he would go with him.

On Kingship, Book 1 ch. 6, sec. 51. The 'human aid' that Aquinas speaks of, "is an action to be undertaken, not through the private presumption of a few, but rather by public authority." Book 1 ch. 6 sec. 48.

Richard reveals that he sees Bolingbroke as a threat when he tells Aumerle that he may not allow him to return: "He is my cousin, cousin, but 'tis doubt, / When time shall call him home from banishment." (1.4.20-21)

On Kingship, Book 2 ch. 4 sec. 16-17.

Despite the many failings of Richard, some of his supposedly unjust acts may be excusable. Take, for example, his disinheriatance of Bolingbroke. Since Bolingbroke is perceived as a potential rebel by Richard, for Richard to disinherit him in order to protect the kingdom is hardly unjust. York's criticism of this disinheriatance is perhaps most damaging to Richard. However, York's criticism is highly suspect. Deeply problematic is York's reasoning in the scene. York can hardly be said to be a man of thoughtfulness, often confusing the loyalties and intentions of both himself and others. This scene is no exception. First, he founds his criticism on the idea that Bolingbroke is loyal: "Is not Gaunt dead? And doth not Herford live? / Was not Gaunt just? And is not Harry true?" (1.2.191-192.) Thus, by basing his argument on the incorrect belief that Bolingbroke is loyal, York undermines his own argument. By doing so, he also undermines his unstated self-interested (and unnecessary) concern — that his own son's inheritance is threatened by Richard's act.

Of particular importance is the role of Gaunt. By involving him in the decision to banish Bolingbroke, Richard does as much as he can to quell any talk of an unfair decision.


Chapter Two


3 This applies to when one is helped to power by the elite or a member of the elite (such as Northumberland.) Machiavelli writes:

He who comes to power with the help of the elite has more difficulty in holding on to power than he who comes to power with the help of the populace, for in the former case he is surrounded by many who think of themselves as his equals, and whom he consequently cannot order about or manipulate as he might wish . . . If they retain their independence from you out of calculation and ambition then you can tell they are more interested in their own welfare than yours. A ruler must protect himself against such people and fear them as much as if they were publicly declared enemies, for you can be sure that in adversity, they will help overthrow you. ("The Prince", ch. 9)

4 Here Machiavelli writes:

Well-used cruelty (if one can speak well of evil) one may call those atrocities that are committed at a stroke, in order to secure one's power, and are then not repeated, rather every effort is made to ensure one's subjects benefit in the long run. An abuse of cruelty one may call those policies that, even if in the beginning they involve little bloodshed, lead to more rather than less as time goes by. ("The Prince", ch.8)

5 Even Aumerle's father (York) argues that he should be severely punished for political reasons: "More sins for this forgiveness prosper may." (5.3.82)

6 "The Prince", ch. 18.

Machiavelli writes: "men pursue policies that are neither good nor bad, and these are extremely dangerous. They do not understand how to be either entirely wicked or completely good." (The Discourses.) In Selected Political Writings. Translated by David Wooton. (Indianapolis: Hackett
Chapter Three

4 Frye, Northrop. "Comedy and Falstaff." In Twentieth Century Interpretations of Henry IV Part One, 92.
7 Danby, John. Authority and Appetite, 94
8 Humphreys. "Introduction", xlvii.
9 Ibid, xlii-xliii.
10 Stewart, Douglas, Falstaff the Centaur, 5-21.
11 Norman Rabkin. "Rabbits, Ducks, and Henry V." In Shakespeare Quarterly. 28 (1977), 281.
12 McFarland, Thomas. Shakespeare's Pastoral Comedy, 182.
13 Ibid., 183.
14 The question of whether Shakespeare actually read Plato does not affect whether he could have reached the same conclusions. As Leon Craig writes: "Whether he furthered his [understanding] through first-hand acquaintance with Plato's texts, or second-hand, or through study of other texts, or achieved it simply through his own careful observation, patient inquiry, and rigorous analysis of the world, is a secondary matter. Strictly speaking, how he acquired his wisdom is a biographical question, and as such, philosophically irrelevant - except insofar as we can do likewise." Of Philosophers and Kings: Political Philosophy in Shakespeare's Macbeth and King Lear. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 267-268.
15 One of Falstaff's successes is getting us to refer to the prince as "Hal" even after he becomes king.
16 Samuel Johnson (among others) makes this charge. See: McFarland, Thomas, Shakespeare's Pastoral Comedy, 209.
17 "Nicomachian Ethics", 1115a.
18 Ibid., 1115b.
19 Ibid., 1115b.
20 Likewise, Socrates describes the timocratic man as "a lover of ruling and of honour" who bases his claim to rule on warlike deeds. Plato. Republic. Translated by Allan Bloom. (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 549a-550b. All references to the Republic are from this translation.
21 The timocratic regime contains the best and most admirable standard of honour because it is a rule defined by the highest possible concern for public life. This concern stems from the desire of the spirited part of the soul that is best fulfilled through acts of manliness allowed for by military action. This action is the highest form of public life because it is action that is inseparable from one's position in the city. Socrates praises the timocratic regime because its honour is based on the most rational standard possible in political life, for the city cannot survive without acts of courage by its citizens.
23 Shakespeare's Coriolanus provides us with the greatest and most complete expression of this difficult existence.
24 Greater Hippias, 295c.
Chapter Three (continued)

27 A. R. Humphreys. "Introduction", xliv-xlvi. Given the fact that Falstaff's predates Bluntschili one wonders how Bluntschili becomes the model for Falstaff.
28 Hal reaches this conclusion (subsequently denied by Falstaff) when Falstaff manages to see through the disguises used by Poins and the prince and correctly identify them. (2 HIV 2.4.279-281) The remarkability of this recognition in the context of the Shakespearean universe (where even the most ridiculous attempts at disguise are successful) is almost impossible to overstate.
29 *Apology*, 28b-31c.
30 Aristotle points out that "Socrates thought courage was knowledge." "Nicomachean Ethics", 1116b.
31 *Falstaff in the Valley of The Shadow of Death*, 16.
32 Ibid., 19-20.
33 Platt rejects this comparison: "If Falstaff is in most ways the antithesis of Socrates and classical political philosophy, he is not however the antithesis of all antiquity." *Falstaff in the Valley of The Shadow of Death*, 20.
35 *On Tyranny*, 199.
36 Strauss writes: "While people in general are apt to identify the best possession with the greatest good, Socrates makes a clear distinction between the two things. According to him, the greatest good is wisdom, whereas education is the greatest good for human beings, and the best possession is a good friend." Ibid., 85.
37 Ibid., 201.
38 Ibid., 201.
39 Ibid., 203.
40 Ibid., 203.
41 Emphasizing this point is the possible objection that Falstaff's claim that it was he who defeated Hotspur shows a desire for honor. Yet although he may make the claim for the sake of honour, it is not made because he desires honour. Instead, as he later shows in his encounter with the Lord Chief Justice who notes: "Your day's service at Shrewsbury hath a little gilded over your night's exploit on Gad's Hill," (2 HIV 1.2.136-137) any honour he has gained was not gained for its own sake, but for the sake of his way of life.
42 For instance, he gives no more thought to Mistress Quickly than we can imagine Socrates does to his wife.
43 For obvious reasons we exclude Hal's abandonment of Falstaff at Gad's Hill.
44 *On Tyranny*, 199.
46 Ibid., 908-914.
48 In pointing this out, Allan Bloom writes: "This is not merely an empty accusation. Both Socrates and Falstaff practice such an art, which gives them the freedom from conventional reasoning." *Shakespeare on Love and Friendship*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 135.
49 "Clouds", 915.
50 Ibid., 171-178.
52 Ibid, 32.
53 Ibid, 33.
54 Strauss notes: "The Unjust Speech asserted that Right does not even exist (just as Socrates had asserted that Zeus does not even exist); the Just Speech asserted that Right is with the gods . . . Both Speeches argued on the premise that Zeus exists." Ibid., 30.
55 Given the context it provides, the passage is worth quoting in its entirety:
   The Proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel:
   That men may appreciate wisdom and discipline, may understand words of intelligence;
   May receive training in wise conduct, in what is right, just and honest;
Chapter Three (continued)

That resourcefulness may be imparted to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. A wise man by hearing them will advance in learning, an intelligent man will gain sound guidance,
That he may comprehend proverb and parable, the words of the wise and their riddles.
Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and reject not your mother's teaching;
A graceful diadem will they be for your head; a torque for your neck.
My son, should sinners entice you,
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; wisdom and instruction fools despise.
and say, "Come along with us! Let us lie in wait for the honest man, let us, unprovoked, set a trap for the innocent;
Let us swallow them up, as the nether world does, alive, in the prime of life, like those who go down to the pit!
All kinds of precious wealth shall we gain, we shall fill our houses with booty;
Cast in your lot with us, we shall all have one purse!"--
My son, walk not in the way with them, hold back your foot from their path!
(For their feet run to evil, they hasten to shed blood.)
It is in vain that a net is spread before the eyes of any bird--
These men lie in wait for their own blood, they set a trap for their own lives.
This is the fate of everyone greedy of loot: unlawful gain takes away the life of him who acquires it.
Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the open squares she raises her voice;
Down the crowded ways she calls out, at the city gates she utters her words:
"How long, you simple ones, will you love inanity,
how long will you turn away at my reproof? Lo! I will pour out to you my spirit, I will acquaint you with my words.
"Because I called and you refused, I extended my hand and no one took notice;
Because you disdained all my counsel, and my reproof you ignored--
I, in my turn, will laugh at your doom; I will mock when terror overtakes you;
When terror comes upon you like a storm, and your doom approaches like a whirlwind; when distress and anguish befall you.
"Then they call me, but I answer not; they seek me, but find me not;
Because they hated knowledge, and chose not the fear of the LORD;
They ignored my counsel, they spurned all my reproof; And in their arrogance they preferred arrogance, and like fools they hated knowledge:
"Now they must eat the fruit of their own way, and with their own devices be glutted.
For the self-will of the simple kills them, the smugness of fools destroys them.

56 Given Bathsheeba's tremendously important role in Solomon's life, the reference to the mother's teaching is particularly interesting.
57 Thomas Pangle argues that this is a necessary opposition for a philosopher:
Abram, we may say, could never even entertain the Platonic Socrates' or the Platonic Athenian Stranger's contentions that a truly good and just society would require the abolition of he private family and fatherhood, and that "one should not look elsewhere for the model, at any rate, of a political regime, but should hold on to this and seek with all one's might the regime that comes as close as possible to such a regime" (Plato, Laws 739e; cf. Republic, bk. 5). Abram and the people he founds stand at the opposite pole to the imagined republic of Plato. [Political Philosophy and the God of Abraham. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 133.]
58 On Tyranny, 104. Here Strauss refers to Memorabilia 4.6.2-4 and goes on to say that "the identification of piety with knowledge of the laws concerning the gods is not Xenophon's last word on the subject."
59 Socrates sums up this position: "How am I to please the gods?" The Delphic god replies, "Follow the custom of the state... How then can a man honour the gods more excellently and more devoutly than by doing as they themselves ordain." Xenophon. Memorabilia. Translated by E.C. Marchant (London: Harvard University Press, 1959), 4.3.16.
The connection between the city and the gods is fundamentally defined by Homer. Not surprisingly, in his account, the most honored of all men is Achilles, the epitome of manliness.

62 See Chronicles 12:1. The impact Solomon’s turning away from the Lord has on Rehoboam is explicitly connected in 1 Kings 14:20b-24 and 31, particularly when read in the light of the verses referenced in the previous note.

63 As Platt points out, no other famous death proceeds in this fashion. Falstaff in the Valley of The Shadow of Death, 13.
64 The Trial and Death of Socrates: Four Dialogues Translated by Benjamin Jowett. (New York: Dover Publications, 1992), 117B.
66 Falstaff in the Valley of the Shadow, 7.
67 Ibid., 7
68 Ibid., 14-15, 18.
69 See Ibid., 16-18. Perhaps Platt is thinking of the man next to him.
70 Many modern editors have the Page exit at line 223, but this is supported by neither the Quarto nor the Folio text.
71 A careful reading also reveals the possibility that the Page is also present during Falstaff’s long “soliloquy” at the end of 2 HIV 3.2.
72 In her notes on the play Jean Howard describes the two conflated myths:

It was Hecuba, the Queen of Troy, who, when pregnant with Paris, dreamed she gave birth to a firebrand that set fire to her city. Althea was told that her newborn son, Meleager, would live only as long as a brand in the fire was not consumed, so she snatched it form the hearth. (The Norton Shakespeare, 1325.

73 That the Boy’s continues to be influenced by Falstaff in Henry V is seen in his understanding of courage contained in his departure from Bardolph and Nim (especially when compared to his departure from Pistol.) The Falstaffian nature of this critique is confirmed by his decision to attend to the luggage rather than continue on the battlefield: “The French might have good prey of us, if he knew of it.” (HV 4.4.67)
74 It is not going too far to say that, based on the way the Hostess tells the story and Bardolph and Nim’s response to this telling, it is possible that Bardolph and Nim (and perhaps even Pistol) were not present during Falstaff’s death.
75 In Platt’s words, she is a “scatterbrained” and “a very unreliable reporter. Falstaff in the Valley of The Shadow of Death, 6. For the most examples of this phenomenon see The Merry Wives of Windsor.
76 Phaedo, 112B-114B.
77 The other comment worth taking note of in relation to Falstaff’s death is Quickly’s note about the Whore of Babylon. While the specific reference is vague, Revelations describes her as “The Mother of All Prostitutes” (17:5), a figure who provides the nations with “the maddening wine of her adulteries.” (18:3) It would not be surprising if Falstaff were once again thinking about Eros. These thoughts may not be separate from Hal’s rule, for consider Revelations 17:18: “The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.” The NIV Study Bible. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.)

Chapter Four

1 The Shakespearean actor Alan Howard notes: “People have tried to do Henry V as a play glorifying war, and a play condemning war.” Quoted in Graham Bradshaw’s “Being Oneself: New Historicists, Cultural Materialists, and Henry V.” In Misinterpretations. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 35. Bradshaw goes on to point out some of these attempts: “One might agree, at least in seeing Olivier’s markedly pro-Henry 1944 film as a wartime effort, with significant critical parallels in Tillyard’s Shakespeare’s ’History Plays and Dover Wilson’s Fortunes of Falstaff.” (37) Bradshaw also discusses the 1982 English Shakespeare Company’s attempt to transform the play into a commentary on contemporary wars.
Chapter Four (continued)

3 "The Prince", Dedication.
4 In "Rabbits and Ducks and Henry V" (279-296) Norman Rabkin goes so far as to make the indecipherable argument that Shakespeare (or is it Harry?) is so good at separating the “Christian” Harry from the “Machiavellian” Harry that the two become inseparable.
5 As Sullivan argues: “If, before the ambassador’s appointment, Canterbury and Ely had enough time to expatiate on the miracle of the king’s reformation, as well as on the ramifications of the bill urged by the Commons, then Henry did indeed have ‘time enough to hear’ Canterbury expatiate on the validity of the English claim to ‘the crown and seat of France.’ Princes to Act, 136
6 As Harold Goddard points out, the complicated account given by the Archbishop hides the problematic character of the argument: “The very thing that proves the title of a French king crooked – namely, inheritance through the female – serves, by some twist of ecclesiastical logic, to prove the title of an English king good.” The Meaning of Shakespeare. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 221.
8 The almost impossible possibility that Harry actually does meet with the ambassadors prior to meeting with the nobles (i.e. that he told the Archbishop the truth) would only serve to heighten his manipulation of the scene.
9 “The Prince”, Dedication.
10 Ibid., ch. 18.
11 Ibid., ch. 9.
12 Ibid., ch. 6.
13 Shakespeare’s Political Realism, 125. Spiekerman calls this a ‘skeptic’s’ interpretation of Harry’s actions. That Spiekerman is himself a skeptic is particularly evident on page 136 when he writes: “Letting others appear to be making decisions that are in fact his own is King Henry’s characteristic pose. He is consistently deceitful. The duplicitous behavior he exhibits concerning the war is repeated time and again.”
14 “The Prince”, ch. 18.
15 Ibid., ch. 18.
16 "The Discourses", Book 1, ch. 11.
17 "The Prince", ch. 17.
18 Even if one were to argue that he does not know his own palace better than his nobles, it would still be incredibly difficult to explain why he would ask for the name of the room in which he collapsed (as opposed to some other incident – i.e. where he first became sick, where he collapsed last week, where he now lies, etc.)
19 Machiavelli writes: “Religions are established wherever men are born.” “The Discourses”, Book 1, ch. 11.
20 Canterbury and Ely’s “praise” of Harry can only be properly read as a sarcastic summary of Harry’s “transformation” and the way it has been perceived by the general public. This begins to become clear at line 61 of the scene, when the tone shifts to a matter-of-fact analysis (which continues until the end of the scene) of Harry’s politics. Note, for instance, how Ely suddenly begins to demystify the changes Harry has undergone, arguing: “the Prince obscured his contemplation / under the veil of wilderness.” (HV 1.2.64-65) Canterbury agrees: “It must be so, for miracles are ceased, / And therefore we must needs admit the means / How things are perfected.” (HV 1.2.68-70) Canterbury and Ely, it seems, are those few who actually “touch” Harry. Indeed, the whole conversation parallels Machiavelli’s teaching that: “Everyone sees what you seem to be; few have direct experience of who you really are. Those few will not dare speak out in the face of public opinion when that opinion is reinforced by the authority of the state.” “The Prince”, ch. 18.
21 Spiekerman continues: “Hal has turned away from Falstaff and all that he stands for, and he has turned toward God.” Shakespeare's Political Realism, 138-139.
Chapter Four (continued)

22 Rabkin argues that while both views are persuasive, each requires that “we exclude too much to hold it.” “Rabbits, Ducks, and Henry V”, 279. As John Alvis notes, this has become a typical reaction to difficult plays: “Early critics stage out clear positions for or against the play and protagonist, a later group attempts to mediate by proposing a judiciously mixed view, and finally the work is assigned to the ever-growing roster of “problem” plays which tease us out of thought while assuring us that Shakespeare was as adept at suspending judgment as we are. “Spectacle Supplanting Ceremony”. In Shakespeare as a Political Thinker. Ed. John Alvis and Thomas West. (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2000), 139.
23 “Spectacle Supplanting Ceremony”, 131.
24 In addition to allowing Harry to gain more glory, this ‘disclaimer’ allows Harry to avoid (or at least justify) the responsibility for his order to execute the French prisoners.
27 Katharine Maus points out that Cambridge’s reference to other motivations [“the gold of France did not seduce, / Although I did admit it as a motive / The sooner to effect what I intended” (HV 2.2.150-152)] can be explained by the likelihood that he was “inspired by the conviction that Henry’s title to the English throne was obstructed by the Earl of Mortimer’s daughter, the Earl of Cambridge’s ‘wife.’” For if we use the Archbishop and Harry’s understanding of inheritance through the “female line” that justifies the invasion of France, Cambridge, since he is married to Moritmer’s sister, has a better claim to the English throne than Harry. “In other words,” Maus argues, “Henry employs against the French a principle that, if it were enforced against him, would strip him of both English and French kingdoms.” “Introduction to Henry V” in The Norton Shakespeare, 1449.
31 Ibid., ch. 17.
32 For example, E. E. Stoll writes: “His bark is worse than his bite, we trust.” “Shakespeare’s Presentation of a Contemporary Hero.” In Shakespeare: Henry V. (Brostol: Macmillan, 1969), 100.
33 “The Prince”, ch. 8.
34 Ibid., ch. 25. Machiavelli famously goes on to say: “Fortune is a lady. It is necessary, if you want to master her, to beat and strike here. And one sees she more often submits to those who act boldly than to those who proceed in a calculating fashion.” Indeed much of chapter 25 of “The Prince” can be applied to Harry’s rule. Consider for instance the discussion of Pope Julius II, who “was always successful.” In his first attack he was “ferocious and impetuous”, not waiting “until everything had been arranged”, “placed himself at the head of his troops” And, like Harry “he did not live long enough to experience failure.”
35 Gower’s statement is characteristically exaggerated as the practical difficulty of communicating these orders or carrying them out in the middle of a battle makes it likely that many prisoners survive.
36 This is the position taken by the Norton editors. The Norton Shakespeare, 1505.
38 Machiavelli writes: “a ruler should make himself feared in such a way that, if he does not inspire love, at least he does not provoke hatred.” “The Prince”, ch. 17.
39 Winston Churchill, in describing Henry’s victory at Agincourt, writes:
Agincourt ranks as the most heroic of all land battles England has ever fought . . . Within five months of leaving England, he [Harry] returned to London having, before all Europe, shattered the French power by a feat of arms which, however it may be tested, must be held unsurpassed. He rode in triumph through the streets of London with spoils and captives displayed to the delighted people . . . The victory of Agincourt made him the supreme figure in Europe. “The Birth of Britain.” In The History of the English Speaking Peoples. (Toronto: McClelland and Steward, 1956), 404, 406-408.
40 This section is restricted to a discussion of political power, a fact that does not discount the significance of capturing men’s minds – particularly the greatest minds.
41 Falstaff the Centaur, 15.
42 Note Prince John’s strange absence from Henry V.
Henry's initial suspicions about Hal's way of life prove to be well founded, for Hal's ability to overcome this tension is difficult to separate from his time spent with Falstaff who is a real threat to the loyalties demanded by the family. For despite Falstaff's eroticism, he does not appear to have any children; he has separated sex from recreation. And, in doing so, he has gone against the biblical understanding of sex. Falstaff, it seems, is uninterested in families. Or, put a better way, as his role-playing with Hal suggests, he would (at least in some ways) like to replace them with himself. Indeed, much like his attack on piety, his critique of honour (and courage) cannot be fully separated from his attack on the family; for one partially protects the city for the sake of one's family and one's own honour is deeply connected to the honour of one's family.

"The Prince", ch. 15.
Republic, 561c.
Ibid., 560d, 563d.
Machiavelli reveals this possibility (and its limits) in Book 1, Chapter 47 of his Discourses.
The second tetralogy's first indication of the possible move toward democracy is expressed by Richard:
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,
Made glory base and sovereignty a slave,
Proud majesty a subject, state a peasant. (R1I 4.1.238-242)
Although Bates is more convinced than Williams by Harry's arguments he too admits the possibility that the king is wrong. (HV 4.1.125)
Also of importance is Harry's ability to unite so many nationalities in the war against France.

Chapter Five

As Hal shows when he is king, he has no aversion to hanging thieves. (HV 3.6.93-98)
How Falstaff is spoken of in Henry V is evidence of how much sympathy he has gained. This sympathy cannot be isolated from Hal's leniency with Falstaff.
Shakespeare on Love and Friendship, 135.
On page 1355, The Norton Anthology editors note that "greensickness" is an anemic condition of women cured only by sexual activity.
John Alvis claims that "Harry's true friend is not Falstaff but Hotspur." “Spectacle Supplanting Ceremony”, 113.
Shakespeare on Love and Friendship, 135.
Love and Friendship, 521.
After Hal has become king at the end of Henry IV Part 2, Prince John sums up the arrangement perfectly:
I like the fair proceeding of the King's.
He hath intent his wonted followers
Shall all be very well provided for,
But all are banished till their conversations
Appear more wise and modest to the world. (5.5.90-95 my italics)
Which also allows him greater access to the youth of the city.
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