

**“A History of Possibilities”:
The Use of History in the Interpretation of
William Shakespeare’s Second Tetralogy**

by

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Abstract

During the second half of the twentieth century, scholars and literary critics have tried to escape master narratives, the epic stories of European supremacy, set in place by historicists like Leopold von Ranke. The most significant effort to destabilize these historicist totalities in literary studies today is that of the New Historicists, who have turned their attention to the marginalized—the accidents, the defects, and the abhorrent—in history. Unfortunately, they have only been able to replace one totality with another, leaving the readers trapped in the same predicament. This thesis examines how the historiographical assumptions of the last two centuries have affected the way history is used to analyze William Shakespeare's Second Tetralogy. Finally, it returns to Stephen Greenblatt's promise to combine the traditional and subversive elements of a culture, in this case chivalry and the Machiavellian doctrine, in order to produce a more complex interpretation of the literary texts.

Resumen

Durante la segunda mitad del siglo veinte los académicos y críticos literarios han tratado de escapar de las narrativas maestras, las historias épicas de supremacía Europea, posicionadas por historicistas como Leopold von Ranke. Al día de hoy el esfuerzo más importante para desestabilizar las totalidades historicistas en los estudios literarios es el de los nuevos historicistas, quienes le dedican mayor atención a los márgenes de la historia—los accidentes, los defectos, y lo detestable. Desafortunadamente, estos tan solo lograron cambiar la vieja totalidad por una nueva. Esta tesis trata de examinar como las suposiciones historiográficas de los últimos dos siglos han afectado la manera en la cual se utiliza la historia para analizar la segunda tetralogía de William Shakespeare. Finalmente, esta regresa a la promesa de Stephen Greenblatt de combinar los elementos tradicional y subversivo de una cultura, en este caso los valores de la caballería y la doctrina de Machiavelli, para producir una interpretación más compleja de estos textos literarios.

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Chapter One
“From celebration to rebellion to subversive submission”:
Historicism and the Problem of Interpreting
the Second Tetralogy

I will put Chaos into fourteen lines
And keep him there; and let him hence escape
If he be lucky; let him twist and ape
Flood, fire, and demon — his adroit designs
Will strict to nothing in the strict confine
Of this sweet Order, where, in pious rape,
I hold his essence and amorphous shape,
Till he with Order mingles and combines.
Past are the hours, the years, of our duress,
His Arrogance, our awful servitude:
I have him. He is nothing more or less
Than something simple not yet understood;
I shall not even force him to confess;
Or answer. I will only make him good.
- Edna St. Vincent Millay¹

...this book is intended to be open-ended. So I
make no claim to have said the last word on the
subject. And one final remark: I have tried
within the limits of my power not to become a
prisoner of the syndrome I am describing.
- Henry Rousso²

On February 7, 1601 a staging of Richard II arranged by friends of the Earl of Essex served as a preface to an ill-fated *coup d'état*.³ Feeling misused by the Council, Essex planned to detain the Queen and force her to call a Parliament that would arraign his enemies, but the reckless manner in which the conspirators gathered support for their uprising alerted the authorities. Discovered, the rebels made their intentions public in the streets of London, only to find that they lacked the support they needed to succeed. The

¹ “I will put Chaos into fourteen lines.”

² The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory since 1944. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991. 11.

³ William Shakespeare’s *Richard II* was staged on the eve of the Essex rebellion. The deposition scene was not published for some time after this (Blakemore, Richard II 803-804).

uprising failed: the authorities suppressed the unruly subjects and arrested the leaders without much effort (Somerset 536-545). A month after the inopportune rebellion, the Queen complained that she was Richard, the deposed-Plantagenet king, and that the play had been staged forty times in “open streets and houses.” It had actually been presented only once at the Globe Theater. However, the power of fiction in Elizabethan society was such that the deposition scene in the play used by the rebels was not published for quite some time after (Blakemore, Richard II 803-804). The Queen’s exaggeration and the exclusion of the deposition scene demonstrated the threat that this story represented for the Elizabethan order. This interaction between the theater and the political reality of the time has captured the attention and perhaps the imagination of literary critics.

Among William Shakespeare’s plays, those that make up the Second Tetralogy⁴ (Richard II, 1 & 2 Henry IV, and Henry V) are the ones that seem to have attracted the most interest in history and politics; an interest that has dominated the interpretation of the plays since they were first staged.⁵ And as time has passed and critics have become estranged from the world of Elizabeth and Shakespeare, the use of historical information to interpret the literary texts has increased. Unfortunately, tangled up with all this information were the preconceptions and limitations of the discipline of history. The preconceptions of a well defined hegemonic culture in particular, the belief that there is a set of ideas and assumptions held as true by everyone at the time that the plays were written and staged, have kept critics in a “Cold War” of sorts, with the commentary

⁴ The term originally referred to the four plays (three tragedies and a satyr play) submitted by the Greek playwrights who competed at the Greater Dionysian festivals in Athens in the fifth century. Today a “tetralogy” can be any four connected works. For example, eight of Shakespeare’s ten History Plays are divided into two tetralogies: (1) Henry VI (Pts I, II, III) and Richard III; (2) Richard II, Henry IV (Pts I and II) and Henry V (Cuddon 907).

⁵ Richard II, the first play of the tetralogy, was first staged in 1595.

gravitating around two interpretive poles: one that sees the tetralogy as a morality play and one that sees no morality in the tetralogy, only politics. This polarization very clearly responds to historical periodization, the division of historical time into homogeneous units (ages), with one pole originating in a *medieval Christian* perception of the play and the other originating in a *modern secular* one. Which of these realities do the plays belong to? What assumptions can we make about Shakespeare and his audience?

The problem here is that time does not have natural frontiers to delineate when one period ends and the other begins. While George Holmes, editor of The Oxford History of Medieval Europe, and C. Warren Hollister, author of Medieval Europe A Short History, place the end of the Middle Ages near the year 1500,⁶ leading medievalist Norman F. Cantor argues that in England the Middle Ages ended a hundred years earlier, around the time that John of Gaunt, “the last of the medieval knights,” died and his son deposed the anointed king. Yet even though Cantor argues for the importance of the political, intellectual and cultural focus of history, he points out that there are those, who focusing on the economy, seem to stretch these historical boundaries even further (217-219).⁷ From these examples alone it is clear that the periodization of history is inaccurate and to a certain degree arbitrary, and despite criticism, the problem has persisted in the literary disciplines. Why does this problem persist?

⁶ By 1500 the authority of the Papacy had been displaced by the emergence of strong monarchies in England, France, and Spain.

⁷ March Bloch proposed that feudalism, the cornerstone of medieval society, had its continuation. The manorial system and serfdom lasted until the seventeenth century in England and in France until the eve of the French Revolution (448). Braudel argued for that an economic system based on the seafaring trade of precious metals lasted from the fourteenth century to the year 1750 (123-125). Based on these observations we can easily conclude that the reality of the peasantry and the middle class essentially remained unchanged for much longer than that of the ruling class.

The answer to this question is found in Cantor's last observation: that by emphasizing a specific aspect of society, politics, culture, economy, etc., the length and content of the period can change. The problem persists because most literary critics are only concerned with the symptom and not with the condition. They still view periodization as a problem with the division of historical time and have to a great degree neglected the historiographical problem of selecting the material that should be studied. What aspects or artifacts from the past do we consider historical? While we might not realize it, the selection of the material to be studied can predetermine the interpretation by highlighting certain aspects and elements of the literary text over others. Whichever may be the case, the ultimate answers as to what is historical are diverse as are the resulting interpretations. Let us take as an example the origin and meaning of Falstaff from the two parts of Henry IV.

In his "Introduction to *Henry IV 1 & 2*" in the Riverside Shakespeare, Blakemore explains that the character of John Oldcastle was renamed Jack Falstaff in deference to the descendant of the historical Sir John Oldcastle, Sir William Brooke, Lord Cobham. This change would have been perfectly logical since Lord Cobham was also Lord Chamberlain and, most importantly, master of the Master of the Revels. And so focusing on highly placed political figures and the power of the state to monitor its subjects (which can easily be verified in governmental documents and the testimony of well-connected individuals) Blakemore seems to provide an explanation which should be enough to satisfy all readers of the play. However, this explanation does not seem to be enough.

Gary Taylor, arguing for the return of *1 Henry IV* to its original version on the basis that it would restore "an important dimension of the character [Oldcastle] as first

and freely conceived,”⁸ suggests that Shakespeare very likely sympathized with Catholics and was willing to assume their point of view, so that the character of Falstaff not only lampoons Oldcastle, but, more importantly, places him, a celebrated Protestant martyr, in an unflattering light (“The Fortunes of Old Castle” 147-149). And, while David Scott Kastan agrees that the character of Falstaff indeed presents an attack on Oldcastle, he disagrees with Taylor’s reconstruction of the origin and direction of such an attack. He explains that Shakespeare’s audience would have seen this depiction as “the mark of a Protestant bias rather than a ‘papist’ one,” since by the end of the sixteenth century the voices of Anglican polity had disassociated themselves from the Lollard heterodoxy to which Oldcastle belonged, connecting it with nonconformist sects like the puritans (157).

Another critic, Grace Tiffany, argues that the change from Oldcastle to Falstaff responds to Shakespeare’s commercial interests and not to the influence of Lord Cobham; that Shakespeare’s audience contained a number of Puritans and Puritan sympathizers, people that had yet to abandon the playhouses, and it was the possibility of offending this sector of the paying public which most likely pushed the playwright to change the character’s name (2-4). Subsequently, she pays little attention to the lampooning of the historical Oldcastle, connecting the character of Falstaff instead with the caricatures of the anti-Marprelate tracts that were published during the 1580s, which depicted Puritans as sophists, “anarchic, self-aggrandizing, hypocritical windbags” (5-6). This offensive allusion to Puritans, she explains, is ultimately balanced by Falstaff’s role in destabilizing a monarchy’s claim to intrinsic authority, acting out the powerful suggestion “that the

⁸ This line is taken from William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion. There Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor explain that even though Shakespeare had come to terms with “the new name when he characterized Falstaff in later plays, it made its entry into *I Henry IV* as a response to the unsolicited censorship” and “The editorial restoration of ‘Oldcastle’ is the first stage in a process which will restore its familiarity in a play where it, in precedence to Falstaff, belongs” (330).

king is not the man born for the task, but the man who currently plays the role” (8). Returning the marginalized Puritans to historical significance, Tiffany advances an interpretation of the character of Falstaff and the plays that is radically different from that of other critics. These different recordings of Falstaff and the Second Tetralogy provide only a glimpse of the diverse uses of the various historical records and their effects on the interpretation of a literary text. The use of different materials results in radically different perceptions of Fat Jack, his function, and his appeal. It is this diversity that has made it essential for every critic to enter the debate about what constitutes relevant historical background, or at least be aware of the significance that the selection of historical material has.

The problem of periodization and the selection of material were made worse by the existence of the historicist dichotomy which gives theoretical grounds to the interpretative polarization of the tetralogy discussed above. In this chapter, I will try to expose and dismantle the dichotomy and propose an alternative to it based on the confrontation of opposing material. More importantly, I will outline the historiographical position from which I approach the material and the history / literature dynamic that affects the composition and performance of a text.

The Problem of Talking About Historicism

In order to describe my position concerning the question of history I need to narrow the discussion from history to historicism. Historicism, the English translation of the German “historismus,” refers to the historiographical movement that developed in nineteenth-century Germany as a reaction to the expansion of the revolutionary ideas of

the Enlightenment. In particular, this movement opposed the “Enlightenment Mechanism” (White, Metahistory 70). While the historians of the Enlightenment provided their readers with a succession of human types classified according to categories such as rational and irrational or positive and negative (67), the historicists, starting with protohistoricist Johann Gottfried von Herder, maintained that all historical periods are distinct. For them each person is unique and no moment repeats itself in the same way. It is in this complete heterogeneity that the historicists see true unity emerge: the unity of a process in which each phase—each individual person or event—contributes equally to the whole. The task of the historian was to address the particular by describing the formal cohesion that it shows with the whole (74-75). Historicists did this by empathetically assuming the position of their subjects and reconstructing their picture of reality (Gilderhus 43). These basic assumptions as proposed and defended by Herder inform to varying degrees the enterprise of historicists throughout the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth century.

Nevertheless at the end of the twentieth century this definition of historicism came under close scrutiny. The term has been used so often with so little regard for its origin that it is now considered useless. This abuse has made the examination and discussion of historicism, the historiographical theoretical movement referred to above, extremely difficult. For instance, in his extensive study of the critical idiom entitled Historicism, Paul Hamilton provides two definitions of historicism that might seem similar but point at different groups of theoretical works:

- 1) A model for the explanation of social and cultural diversity which differed from the law-governed paradigm of the Enlightenment in its emphasis on the

contextualization of statements and its suspicion of the particular interest of the historical figures and the modern historians (2-3);

- 2) The process of studying and selecting from the possible interpretations of the past based on the historian's contemporary preoccupations and biases (19).

While vague in its description of the origins and the original ideas of the "model," the first definition, which directly connects and possibly restricts historicism to the philosophers and historians who opposed the Enlightenment, could be considered adequate. The second definition, which is even less specific and could arguably refer to the process that all historians undertake in researching and writing history, ultimately confuses historicism with history. Unfortunately it is this second definition, the less appropriate one, that seems to direct his own efforts in the book. Under it he includes Marx and Nietzsche (Chapter 4) who were normally not considered historicists, while scarcely mentioning Ranke, the major representative of what today we call historicism. It is evident that Hamilton is more concerned with providing a comprehensive study of New Historicism than historicism, since many of the nonhistoricist figures who are included in his book, Marx and Nietzsche in particular, are influential philosophical figures in the assumptions of the twentieth-century school of thought. Indeed Hamilton's book provides a fair survey of the historiographical and philosophical tradition that contributed to New Historicism, but it fails as an introduction to historicism as a whole, potentially creating more confusion between the discipline and the school of thought that searched for the spiritual unity in the heterogeneity of each historical period.

It is essential that the distinction between history and historicism be made clear. It must be clear that even when we refer to a historian who predates the nineteenth

century as historicist (as we did above with Herder), we only do so because he follows the same, or at least extremely similar, assumptions to those of the German historians and philosophers who opposed the Enlightenment's conception of history in the nineteenth century. Yet this distinction is not enough to define historicism accurately. Distinguishing between history and historicism is not the only obstacle that we have to overcome in order to reach the theoretical circumstances behind this project. In the late twentieth century the amalgamation of historicist theories and practices that had accumulated for over a century was divided into two simple categories, "old" and "new."

The old / new dichotomy is grossly uneven and unrepresentative of the views that each category is made to contain. Ultimately, the dichotomy contributes to the confusion that already exists on the topic by erasing the differences between the various practices that are found under the category of historicism. One of the practices that was erased is the one proposed by Wesley Morris in his book Toward a New Historicism. Written in 1972, some time before the dichotomy had formed, Toward a New Historicism does not share the cohesive focus provided by Greenblatt's influential construction of New Historicism. Consequently, Morris views historicism in a different way and proposes a new historicist practice that exposes the oversimplification of the dichotomy.

In his discussion of historicism Morris admits that there is no consensus on the existing varieties of this historical thought, some historians and critics arguing that there are seven and others that there are five variations. He settles for four variations which he categorizes as the "types of traditional historicism," the old forms of historicism: "metaphysical," "naturalistic," "nationalistic" and "aesthetic."⁹ The first, "metaphysical historicism," proposes that a unifying principle can be sought in a transcendental

⁹ Morris borrowed the terms metaphysical, naturalistic, and aesthetic from Hayden White (n9).

timelessness through intuition and rational projection, and by understanding the fulfillment of historical progress one can understand the significance of each moment in history (9). In complete disagreement with this line of thought, the second form of historicism rejects any theory of transcendental order and instead tries to locate meaning in empirical facts. For “naturalistic historicism” all human experience is reduced to documentary evidence (10). “Nationalistic” and “aesthetic” historicisms on the other hand look for meaning in less reliable sources. “Nationalistic” historicism, which concentrates on politics and folk-oriented studies, finds meaning within the confines of national interests. And “aesthetic” historicism finds meaning in the actual creative act of the individual (11-12). Making no distinction between the historian and the novelist, Hayden White, the major exponent of this form of historicism, explains that a set of casually recorded events, even historical events, only becomes a history when they are “emplotted” in a specific way: when the historian suppresses and / or manifests certain events according to the literary genres. Hence, it is through the application of literary techniques, the use of characterization, point of views, and other elements of literature that historian discovers the meaning of history (White, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact” 84-85).

These four very distinct forms of historical practice provide a more accurate depiction of historicism and reveal to some extent the significant differences that were phased out in order to construct a monolithic historicism against which New Historicism could define itself. On the other side of the dichotomy we are making the same mistake when we speak of New Historicism as if it refers to a single theory and/or practice.

Morris' new historicism,¹⁰ for example, which calls for the recreation of the creative process so that the reader is able to know his present as the artist knew his (209-216), has strong characteristics of the historicist endeavor, yet it is significantly different from what we know to be New Historicism. Hence, neither category of this dichotomy provides the critics with an accurate depiction of the complex overlapping that constitutes the field of theories of history.

Despite knowing the problem created by the dichotomy, critics have continued using the terms historicism and new historicism as they are used presently, which has made it easier to mask the assumptions that direct the interpretations of the literary texts. This is particularly important in the case of Shakespeare's works, which have received a lot of attention from critics using history, and have been the victims of both schools of thought, making it hard to follow and be part of the debate. Instead critics have focused their attention on the less important problem of the expectations that the "New" in New Historicism creates. In his article "Commentary: The Young and the Restless," which serves as a conclusion to H. Aram Veesser's anthology The New Historicism (1989), Stanley Fish addresses this issue and suggests a perspective of New Historicism that potentially solves all the problems created by the dichotomy. Here he explains that the frequent attacks on New Historicism's claim to "newness" result from the idea of opposing dichotomies:

historicism could be new is by asserting a new truth in opposition to...a truth previously asserted by someone else; but that newness...will not be *methodologically* new, will not be a new (non-allegorical, non-excluding,

¹⁰ Morris' new historicism appears here in lower case in order to distinguish it from Greenblatt's Poetics of Culture which is the form of historicism commonly recognized as New Historicism.

non-forgetting, non-boundary-drawing) way of doing history, but merely another move in the practice of history as has always been done. (313)

This description of the place that New Historicism has in the study of historicism, the latest move in a long academic process of understanding the past, breaks with idea of a rigid dichotomy, which leaves us simply “older” and “newer” forms of historicism, a label which allows us to speak more accurately about the individual forms, indicating that each one might share a number of assumptions, without phasing out their differences. Hence we will refer to the forms of historicisms that we discuss in this chapter simply as older and newer forms.

[Old] Historicism

The most notable older form of historicism, what most people today refer to when they use the term—when they talk about old historicism—was that practiced by German historian Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886). According to Hayden White’s study of the historiographical writing of the nineteenth century, Ranke’s historical vision could be characterized as following a comedic pattern, a series of conflicts that finally resolved themselves into harmony (Metahistory 167-168). In order to reach this resolution Ranke, like Herder, had to search for the unity that existed in the diversity of things. He achieved this through the establishment of two points of integration: the first was the nation and the other was Europe. The idea of the nation provided a governing mechanism for the internal adjustment of the relations between the State, the Church and the people, and the idea of Europe provided a governing mechanism for the adjustment of the relations between the nations (171). In other words Ranke argued for the existence of

two frames that would allow the historian to study the different nation-states of Europe on their own and as part of an imaginary European totality. This freedom from the borders of any particular national history gave Ranke the chance to remain focused on the achievements of each century; he could avert his eyes from the failures of any particular nation-state and celebrate the achievements of European totality. While the reassuring aspect of his comedic vision certainly contributed to its acceptance in a century filled with revolutions, it was the authority with which he endowed his historical works that left a lasting mark on the understanding of history.

Ranke and his followers through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries lived for the demands of absolute realism that were best expressed in Ranke's infamous remark that even though the historian's mission was to judge the past and instruct the present in benefit of the future, he did "not aspire to such a high office...[he]...only want[ed] to show how it had really been—wie es eigentlich gewesen" (qtd. in Gilderhus 44). The historian's detachment from the material of his work provided the growing discipline of history with a claim to objectivity that made historical tracts a valuable means for explaining the world. In the positivistic nineteenth century, it was not long before this objective history rose to a position that was on a par with religion. Ranke himself reintroduced a moralistic perspective to historiography, arguing that "the finger of God" could be perceived in all the decisive moments of history (Fontana 129). By turning history into a discipline that satisfied the scientific sensibilities of the time without giving up the powerful sense of order provided by beliefs, historians were doing more than talking about what had happened with total precision; they were talking about what was supposed to happen, what had to have happened.

Acutely aware of the potential power of history as a discipline, the European states were quick to incorporate it into their systems of coercion. Even Ranke found himself directly under the service of the Prussian government when he was made editor of the short-lived, government-sponsored periodical published explicitly with the aim of attacking progressive ideas (Fontana 128-129). Yet, notwithstanding any deviation or protestation, Ranke and his numerous influential disciples continued to assume the role of high priests for the modern European states, creating their myths which were upheld as true and unquestionable by their authors' claim to an impartial approach and their privileged access through it to the divine. The inclusion of God into a scientific conception of history, which was ultimately placed at the service of the *status quo*, constituted the "teleological narratives of progressive emergence," as Brook Thomas describes them, which justified European imperialism as well as the victories of individual nations (189). It was this form of historicism that provided the principal assumptions of historians during the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century.

Despite its apparent dominance of the field of historical studies in the first half of the twentieth century, Ranke's historicism was struggling to survive the brutal historical negations of its principal assumptions and the emergence of a competitive historiographical school of thought. The first came in the form of two catastrophic World Wars, the tragic resolution of years of international and ethnic tensions which marked the end of the European era—an unquestionable reality that disproved the optimistic belief in a comedic pattern in history and rendered the idea of Europe unfeasible.¹¹ After 1945 Europe found itself in ruins; the European nations that had once been the principal

¹¹ During our time we have seen a reemergence of the Idea of Europe with the formation of the European Union.

political powers of the world now had to concede that position to the United States and the Soviet Union. And the division of the continent finally found an undeniable physical representation in the Berlin Wall.¹² It was impossible for the historian following Ranke's assumptions to provide a satisfactory explanation for the post-war conditions of Europe and the European nation-states. Yet, it was not the collapse of the *status quo*, the idea of nation-states and Europe, which they had once served, that broke the historians' faith in their traditional approach. It was the horrifying acts of aggression witnessed in the last war: "The extirpation of European Jewry, the Nazi bestialities in Eastern Europe, the uprooting of tens and thousands of men, women and children...and finally the atomic holocaust of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, made it impossible...to view the course of history with the old complacency" (Barracough 3). Ranke's historicism had failed and there was a need for alternative forms of historical understanding.

The interest and influence of Communist thought which had risen steadily through the twentieth century, thanks to the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1917 and the Soviet Satellite States of Eastern Europe after the Second World War, brought a change in perspective to historical studies. For Marxist the proper material for the historians to study was the economic relations of the different social classes.¹³ The

¹² There is no single source for the information about the end of the European era, but for further information on the topic see Felix Gilbert and David Clay Large's The End of the European Era, 1890 to the Present (4th ed. New York: Norton, 1991).

¹³ Marxism proposes that history is the history of class struggles: the struggle between different orders of society, the oppressors and the oppressed, which ultimately results in the revolutionary transformation of society or the complete ruin of the contending classes. However, when this revolutionary transformation occurs, it does not assure the end of class conflict, but rather just a change in the classes and the conditions of the struggle. For example, thanks to the establishment of modern industry and the universal market, the bourgeois, which in its origins had been oppressed by the sway of the feudal nobility, was able to replace it in its position of political power and take exclusive control of the modern representative State, which now dedicated itself solely to the management of the common affairs of this class (Marx and Engels 203-206), ultimately becoming a new tool of oppression against the newly oppressed proletariat. Hence, we see how the bourgeois simply changes its position in the class struggle, from oppressed to oppressor, which

political changes, they would explain, being only a result of economic changes. This attack on the validity of political history set the ground for the major change in the historicism of the twentieth century.

Following the Marxist destabilization of the predominance of political history, members of the historicist tradition, in particular Friederich Meinecke, a disciple of Ranke, and Ernst Simmel and Wilhelm Dilthey, proposed that the expansion of the scope of history would help them get a fuller grasp of the past. As the latter two demonstrated through their work:

[if] there could be no question of the historian knowing ‘facts’ in an empirical way, if his only hope of understanding the past was to ‘re-live’ it, then why confine himself to political events? Did not the novels of Balzac, for example, throw as much light on social condition in Restoration France as dry-as-dust documents from the archive? But, more important, was not the historian’s central concern...the idea by which men lived, and particularly the climate of ideas in which statesmen and politicians operated? (Barracclough 9)

Even though the change brought cultural documents like literature to the same level as the historical (“archival”) document, the nature of history remained the same. The historicist’s interest remained political and the historian’s ultimate goal remained the objective reconstruction of the past in the form of a unified age. The only thing that had changed was the means through which they gained access to history. It is this form of

according to Marx would only culminate in the victory of the proletariat and the end of class antagonism (225-228).

historicism, an expansion of the one Ranke proposed in the nineteenth century, which was practiced by historians and borrowed by many literary critics until the mid 1950s.

In 1953 Isaiah Berlin gave a lecture, later published under the title of Historical Inevitability, where he condemned the condition in which history found itself. Berlin points out the dangers of advancing empirical arguments for historical determinism: how the belief in impersonal forces that curve human action, like the so-called spirit of the age, relieved us from any responsibility. If the men and women in our past were the product of their milieu; if they acted in accordance with the system of values of their generation, then it would be unfair for the historian to judge, criticize or praise, them. And so the work of the historian has been reduced to the description of facts. Before this logic that tells historians not to “judge Charlemagne or Napoleon, or Genghis Khan or Hitler or Stalin for their massacre,” or even Harry Truman for the atomic holocaust in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Isaiah Berlin responds: “to accept this doctrine is to do violence to the basic notions of our morality, to misrepresent our sense of our past, and to ignore the most important concepts and categories of normal thought” (76-77). It is clear from Berlin’s lecture that objectivity had become a luxury that historians no longer had. Ranke’s historicism had failed.

A Brief Discussion of the Influence of Historicism in Literary Studies

Relying on the assumptions of this influential form of historicism, the literary critics of the nineteenth century began to see literature as the reflection of an ordered reality provided by history. Among these critics the best known figure is Matthew Arnold. In his essay “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time,” Arnold places the

influence of the context at the center of the creative act and charges the critics with the responsibility of creating an environment that is conducive to the birth of literary genius of the stature of Pindar, Sophocles, or Shakespeare. English critics, according to him, needed to leave the pragmatism of the time in favor of the ideal (822). They needed to seek out objectively the best that was known in the “great confederation” of Europe and make it accessible (824). The function of criticism was to construct the milieu in which the artist could find inspiration and material for his work. Without this milieu of excellence the artist is not able to create a masterpiece, no matter how talented they might be. As an example, Arnold discusses the difference between Goethe and Byron, two poets with great productive power, was the environment to which they had been exposed. Goethe was “nourished by a great critical effort” that allowed him to come to know “life and the world...much more comprehensively than Byron” and which ultimately resulted in his poetry having much more “endurance” (809).

Although at a certain point Arnold claims that “for the creation of a master-work of literature two powers must concur, the power of the man and the power of the moment,” the premise that he pursues through his discussion is that a masterpiece “is a work of synthesis and exposition, not of analysis and discovery,” the artist’s work consists of capturing the essence of an age (808-809). In other words, the ultimate goal of the artistic enterprise is to integrate a “current of ideas” found at a specific time and place. If the artist’s final product is essentially a condensed, heightened reflection of reality, then the best way to interpret great works of art is through the examination of the historical moment where the source of inspiration and the material can be found.

Walter Pater, who published The Renaissance less than ten years after Arnold published his essay,¹⁴ carries on a similar argument in which he explains with greater clarity what this conception of artistic endeavor implies for the critic. The function of the critic is to separate and analyze the means through which the personality of a character in a book produces pleasure, “to indicate what the source of that impression is, and under what condition it is experienced” (xxi). In order to accomplish this, the critic must not only examine the prominent personalities and their aesthetic charm or the results of the intellectual and the imaginative effort (the actual works of art) he must also attend to the general spirit and the character of the time. Since there are eras of “favorable conditions” in which “artists and philosophers and those whom the actions of the world have elevated and made keen, do not live in isolation, but breathe a common air and catch the light and heat from each other’s thought,” so that there is “one complete type of general culture” (xxiii-xxiv). It seems that for Pater the Renaissance was one of these periods where a unity of spirit affected all products and the study of any product called for the study of this unity. And here, in the views of Arnold and Pater, we can see how it was not only history that was introduced into the literary criticism of the nineteenth century, it was historicism.

Historicism continued to be a part of literary criticism even after the popularity of this historiographical school waned among historians. In the twentieth century E. M. W. Tillyard’s Shakespeare’s History Plays (1944), Lily B. Campbell’s Shakespeare’s Histories: Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy (1947), and Erich Auerbach’s Mimesis The

¹⁴ Matthew Arnold published The Function of Criticism in 1864 and the first edition of The Renaissance came out in 1873. There were four revised editions of The Renaissance published during the author’s lifetime.

Representation of Reality in Western Literature (1946)¹⁵ provide examples of the less and most efficient uses of this tradition. Following the traditional assumption that great art is a work of exposition that captures the essence of the age, Tillyard performs an extensive survey of the intellectual material during the time of Shakespeare in order to paint what he calls the “Elizabethan World Picture,”¹⁶ the picture of how Elizabethans saw the world, how Shakespeare represented this common vision of reality in the history plays. This picture included a medieval conception of the order of the world, the universe as the perfect creation of God, a unity in which everything had its place, and which was often found represented by images of a chain, a series of corresponding planes, or a dance to music (11). In Shakespeare’s work, Tillyard points out, this conception of order is represented most clearly in Ulysses’ speech to Agamemnon in *The History of Troilus and Cressida*, where,

The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre
Observe degree, priority, and place,
Insisture, course, proportion, season, form
Office, and custom, in all line of order;
And therefore is the glorious planet Sol
In noble eminence enthron’d and sheper’d
Amidst the order; whose med’cinable eye
Corrects the [ill aspect] of [planets evil],

¹⁵ The dates given above refer to the year in which each work was first published. For the latter see the works cited page.

¹⁶ *The Elizabethan World Picture* is the title of a book published in 1943 where Tillyard fully explains and provides evidence of Elizabethan use of the metaphors of the chain of being, the corresponding planes, and the cosmic dance. I have concentrated on his subsequent work which deals specifically with Shakespeare’s histories and makes a more aggressive attempt to establish his perspective over other possible forms of thought.

And posts like the commandment of a King,
Sans check, to good and bad. But when the planets
In evil mixture to disorder wander,
What plagues and what portents, what mutiny!
What raging of the sea, shaking of earth!
Commotion in the winds! frights, changes, horrors
Divert and crack, rend and deracinate
The unity and married calm of states
Quite from their fixture! O, when degree is shak'd,
Which is the ladder of all high designs,
The enterprise is sick. How could communities,
Degrees in school, and brotherhoods in cities,
Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
The primogenity and due of birth,
Prerogative of age, crowns, scepters, and laurels,
But by degree stand in authentic place?
Take but degree away, untune that string,
And hark what discord follows.

*(Tro 1.3.85-110)*¹⁷

And even though this explicit acknowledgment of the harmonious order of the Middle Ages was absent in the history plays, Tillyard argues that it was there nonetheless, since it was the “thought-idiom of his age,” and the “only way that he could have avoided that idiom was by not thinking at all” (8). In other words, a different conception of the world

¹⁷ Tillyard only refers to the speech. I have decided to include part of it here.

was inconceivable for Shakespeare and his contemporaries, and even if it were conceivable, to include such a perspective in his play would make them incomprehensible for his audience. Following the medieval conception of an orderly world it becomes evident that Shakespeare's history plays, in particular the second tetralogy, which seemed to be ruled by disorder, are really an illustration of the movement towards natural order. Hence, the cycles of history follow a moral pattern beginning with prosperity and ending with a renewal of prosperity and the disorder that is found in between is the result of human actions (261-269).

While performing an extensive survey of the intellectual material of an age in order to reconstruct the world in which the author wrote seems like a legitimate use of history, Tillyard demonstrates the opposite. A large part of Shakespeare's History Plays is spent discussing the historical material and here is where most of the argument takes place as he constructs a picture of the medieval inheritance of Elizabethan England. Unfortunately the discussion of the historical material is fraught with inconsistency and prejudice. As we mentioned before, Tillyard states that it is impossible to avoid the "thought-idiom" of the age, that to avoid it is "not to think at all." However he later corrects himself by explaining that there was an alternative to the "thought-idiom" that Shakespeare could have used, the doctrine of Machiavelli. He also admits that Shakespeare and his contemporaries were more than familiar with this doctrine and they very likely used certain elements of it in their work (22). The very possibility that Shakespeare might have integrated Machiavellian thought into his work is particularly threatening to Tillyard's interpretation, since it essentially proposes that disorder is the natural state of man and that civilization is a matter of expediency. The Machiavellian

doctrine diametrically opposes the medieval concept of order that he contends the history plays reflect. Hence here is where there is the greatest need for argument, but surprisingly he withdraws from this topic after fewer than five pages of discussion, resting his case on the fact that Machiavellian thought was relatively new and was not institutionalized, and consequently there was no need to pay much attention to him. In Tillyard's own words, "His day had not yet come" (21-23).

Tillyard's almost desperate dependence on the monological "thought idiom" reveals the major problem of the historicist practice: that there is no complete general culture. In order to create the unified essence of an age the critics must favor the traditional conservative ideas and exclude any potentially subversive idea that might have existed at the time. For example, the ideas of Machiavelli had become accessible to educated Englishmen¹⁸ since 1560, when the works of the Italian were translated into Latin (Adams 237) and to the less educated class in the latter years of the century when unpublished English translations of The Prince circulated in England (Clegg 185). Shakespeare had the opportunity to read either one of these versions long before he wrote his first history play,¹⁹ 1 Henry VI (1589),²⁰ yet Tillyard excludes them effortlessly. The arbitrary delimitation of the intellectual milieu in which Shakespeare worked makes this survey suspicious to present-day critics and historians who are very conscious of their intervention in the constructions of history. Indeed, the disregard shown here to a crucial counter-discourse calls into question the authority that the Elizabethan World Picture is

¹⁸ When we talk about the educated Englishmen we are referring to the Englishman who had access to books and time to read them. This included the emerging middle class whose position in society depended on their college education.

¹⁹ For a full discussion of the accessibility that the playwright had to Machiavellian ideas see the 3rd Chapter.

²⁰ The date for the first performance of 1 Henry VI comes from Blakemore's "Chronology and Sources" in the *Riverside Shakespeare* (48).

supposed to have. From here it becomes obvious that Tillyard's extensive historical survey is too limited, expressing only his own conservative view of the historical world, not the view held by those that lived in it. What is worse, his use of history is not only arbitrary, but, since he does not give the same level of importance to all of the material in his survey, it is also misleading. Thus he also falls into the historicist trap of turning motivated world views into a simulacrum of historical background.

Although the works of many historicists are afflicted with these problems, not all of them illustrate so clearly the flaws of their practice. In all fairness many historicists are able to deal with the problems inherent in creating this unified vision of age and construct strong arguments around it. For example, Lily B. Campbell's Shakespeare's Histories: Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy (1947), which also includes an extensive survey of historical material (this time on the historiographical thought of the age), does an excellent job of showing impartiality towards the material being considered. In the case of Machiavelli, she admits that he "was the pioneer" who showed the sixteenth century the political significance of history, "but the most important contributor to the development of the study of history for its political usefulness was Jean Bodin" (29), who believed that everything was determined through providence. Quickly shifting the focus of her discussion here, she is able to introduce the political usefulness of history through Bodin and avoids having to present and reconcile the "abhorrent" "Machiavellian doctrine" (as Tillyard describes it) with the conservative historiography on which her interpretation depends. Campbell shifts focus again when the discussion turns to the traditional view of the plays as cycles. Here she argues that even though Machiavelli

explained the cyclical nature of history through the eternal sameness of men, “Christian historiography added the eternal sameness of God”:

While there was, of course, talk of Fortune’s wheel in this connection, even Fortune was considered subject to divine law and bound to turn her wheel in accordance with the demands of divine justice. The cycles of history were, therefore, mapped out by the Elizabethans in moral terms as recurring patterns of sin and punishment. (121)

Hence, through a surprising analogy between Machiavelli’s conception of history to Christianity’s belief in providence, Campbell is able to assimilate convincingly the idea of the cyclical patterns of fortune into conservative Christian historiography. By shifting focus and through the use of analogies Campbell is able to maintain the illusion that she is impartially including all the historical material of the time. Nevertheless, she is far from the best use of historicism. We find a more confident and efficient use of the historicist ideas of a unified age in the interpretations of Eric Auerbach.

Eric Auerbach’s Mimesis was written in Istanbul during the Second World War, a place poorly furnished for European studies and a time when the exchange of material with the academic institution in neighboring countries was obstructed. This is the principal reason for the scarce use of periodicals and the omission of the most recent research on the texts discussed in the book (556-557). Even though the circumstances very clearly shaped this work, it is very important that we recognize the historicist theoretical background that in many ways made it possible for the audience to accept this type of study.

In his “Introduction to the Fiftieth-Anniversary Edition” of Mimesis, Edward Said takes note of the influences of Giambattista Vico and Wilhelm Dilthey on Auerbach’s work. Vico, an eighteenth-century proto-historicist, argued that each age shared a set of features that was “appropriate to their appearance,” and which determined the way—the metaphors through which the members of this society view and describe reality. Therefore, the knowledge of “primitive times” “is the projection of the barbaric mind—fantastic images of gods based on fear, guilt, and terror,” and it is not until this time has passed and a greater degree of abstraction and rational discursivity becomes possible that Plato develops his thought. And so to understand their articulation, the expressions of any particular age, which come to us in textual form, we have to assume the place of the author (xii-xiii). Dilthey, who, as stated above, was particularly important in the historiography of the first half of the twentieth century, added a especial emphasis on literature, explaining that in the world of the written text, the literary masterwork was preeminent. The lived experience of the age found so intensely in its literature could be recovered through erudition and a subjective intuition of the inner spirit of the work (xi).

Auerbach explains how this change in the academic vision of the time, a shift from politics to literature—to the mundane, made his massive work possible. He describes this shift as “a transfer of confidence”:

[Now] the great exterior turning points and blows of fate are granted less importance; they are credited with less power of yielding decisive information...[while]...in any random fragment plucked from the course of a life...the totality of its fate is contained and can be portrayed. There is greater confidence in syntheses gained through full exploitation of an

everyday occurrence than in a chronological well-ordered treatment which accompanies the subject from beginning to end...[confidence]...that the interpretation of a few passages from *Hamlet*, *Phèdre*, or *Faust* can be made to yield more information about Shakespeare, Racine, or Goethe and their time than would a systematic and chronological treatment of their lives and work. (547-548)

This approach was translated into a very specific “essayistic style”: beginning with a long quotation from a work cited in the original language followed immediately by a translation, from which “a detailed *explication de texte* unfolds at a leisurely and ruminative pace” that eventually develops into an insightful commentary about the relationship between the rhetorical style of the text and its socio-political context (Said ix-x). Auerbach was moving from the literary text to the historical background, limiting his discussion of the background to what was necessary. This approach and the consequent style he followed in all the chapters of *Mimesis* (and which New Historicism later adopted) allowed him to address the specific motifs directly in the literary text that he wants to talk about, without having to reconcile contradictions or risk turning his study into a historical tract, without entering into arguments that might cost him the reader’s trust.

Relying then on the careful reading of principally primary sources and the use of his particular “essayistic style,” Auerbach was able to complete an extensive study of the representation of reality in literature, covering texts from Homer and the Bible to Virginia Woolf. *Mimesis* hinges on the change in the world view and the subsequent mixing of literary styles in the Renaissance; two changes that have a significant importance on the

development of historicism and of course this project. In Chapter 13 (“The Weary Prince”) Auerbach explains that during the sixteenth century there was a recession in the Christian-figural view of human life. The belief that as part of an all-embracing scheme of events that includes the Fall, Christ’s birth, the passion and the Last Judgment, all earthly actions find their resolution in heaven was losing its power. The confidence that human conflict resolved itself on Earth brought a dignity and significance to human action that allowed it to be represented as tragic (317-318). Indeed the conception of the “Everyman” as tragic is abandoned and tragedy is reserved for the aristocracy (314 & 328). Even in 2 Henry IV, a play in which the coexistence of the tragic or epic and the comic is the most evident and where, according to Auerbach, Shakespeare directly satirizes the strict separation between the sublime and the mundane, the tragic and comedic, with the lower class characters represented in the latter style (312-313, 328).

Here Shakespeare and his work are seen as modern yet conservative; he sees a world in which the idea of divine intervention has receded but where the values and the actions of the dominant class are still the only ones worth noticing, only the actions of the aristocracy are consequential enough to be deemed tragic. Thus Auerbach is able to avoid having to explain where every potentially subversive line of thought, like the “Machiavellian doctrine,” fits into the narrative of stylistic development and the triumph of realism; he leaves that to the historians, and he concentrates on the sediments of historical realities embedded in the literary texts.

As we have seen through the discussion of these examples the critics who practiced the older form of historicism in the twentieth century continued to see literary works as a reflection of their age and for the most part they continued to approach them

through the thorough examination of the intellectual material of the time. As a consequence, the major problems with this approach remained, especially the impossible task of establishing of what the spirit of the age was composed. In this lengthy process the critics favored the conservative values of the dominant class. In particular, Tillyard and Campbell both performed extensive historical surveys in order to demonstrate that the Elizabethans were essentially living in a medieval society and therefore the interpretation of Shakespeare's plays should take into account the presence of doctrines of divine intervention. Here Auerbach differs significantly.

While Auerbach staunchly believes that literary works are a result of their age and an age is composed primarily of the conservative values found in the ruling class, he views Elizabethan theater and Shakespeare's plays as modern. This shift in the categorization of the age very likely comes as a result of the influence of a Marxist conception of history. Marxist emphasis on class relations and capital rather than on our relation to the divine saw a momentous change during Elizabeth's reign that loosely connected the men of that period with men in the modern era. This change in the conception of the Elizabethan Age, from medieval to modern reveals a very clear connection between Auerbach's work and that of the newer forms of historicism.²¹ This shift in the categorization of the period is the first example of the problem of periodization that we will pick up later in our discussion.

Indeed, the reliance of *Mimesis* on periodization and the faith in the unifying spirit of each period connect it with the older form of historicism, but many of its distinctive characteristics are also present in the new forms of historicism that appeared during the

²¹ In his Introduction to *The New Historicism Reader* (13-14) Veenser explains the various reasons why the Renaissance is the focus of the first new historicist and why it is viewed as modern by them.

1980s: the view of the Elizabethan Age as early modern, which I have already mentioned, the essayistic style with its use of an opening fragment, later an anecdote, the scarce use of secondary sources, literary criticism, and even Auerbach's apologetic tone, starting with Andrew Marvell's line, "Had we but world enough and time...", revealed a self-awareness of the shortcomings of his work which can easily be seen as the antecedent of the New Historicists' scrutiny of their own work. In Practicing New Historicism Greenblatt himself acknowledges the influence that this work had on those writing literary history in the 1970s, saying that they felt an affinity for both its existential pessimism and its method, which they "self-consciously emulated" (Gallagher and Greenblatt 35). This connection makes Auerbach a transitional figure in historicism, providing the link between the old and new forms of historicism that enforces our conception of historicism as a continuity. However, this transition was not immediate; the conditions for newer forms of historicism to appear would not be present for another twenty or thirty years.

A New Form of Historicism

Like the older forms of historicism, the new forms which developed in literary studies during the 1970s and 1980s present such a diverse group of practices that when one makes an attempt to define them, to provide a definition that can explain what one refers to when using the term "new historicism," we can only come up with a set of shared characteristics, such as the five key assumptions that Veenser provides in the introductions to his two anthologies, The New Historicism and The New Historicism Reader:

1. that every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices;
2. that every act of unmasking, critique, and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes;
3. that literary and non-literary texts circulate inseparably;
4. that no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths or expresses unalterable human nature;
5. finally (...) that a critical method and language adequate to describe culture under capitalism participates in the economy they describe.

(“Introduction” xi)

Yet, while these assumptions might allow us to identify the work of some critics as new historicist, they do not provide a method or a theory that a critic might follow. From these five characteristics we cannot discern the process that new historicist critics undertake, or the expected results of this process, as we can with other critical approaches. In order to discover this methodology we need to limit our discussion to one specific form that follows these assumption and goes beyond them, the form that is considered by most to be the referent of the term “new historicism” and the form that concerns our study, the *poetics of culture*.

On more than one occasion Stephen Greenblatt has made it clear that new historicism or the *poetics of culture*²² came about as a result of “an impatience with American New Criticism, an unsettling of norms and procedures, a mingling of dissent

²² I have decided to use this term to refer to Greenblatt’s approach for two reasons: 1) Greenblatt refers to his approach as a “poetics of culture” in 1980 (*Renaissance Self-fashioning* 5) at least two years before he coined the term “new historicism” (Cox and Reynolds 5), which leads me to believe that this was the intended name for it from the very beginning, and 2) to privilege Greenblatt with this term would be to go back to the old/new dichotomy ignoring the existence of a wide variety of new historicist approaches, including that of Wesley Morris’ which had claimed the name for itself ten years earlier in 1972 (See the earlier discussion of Morris’ work). Then for the sake of clarity I will substitute the term “New Historicism” for “Poetics of Culture” when appropriate.

and restless curiosity” (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2). For this reason there is a need to designate a particular point of origin. Even though the restrictiveness of formalist methodology was the force that pushed him (as well as others) to search for an alternate approach towards literature, the theoretical principles and methodology that they transformed into a new practice found their origins in a series of historiographical and historical changes that preceded this critical “impatience” with formalism. Probably the most important change was the fall from prominence of Rankean historicism and the rise of other historical practices.

In Main Trends in History Geoffrey Barraclough describes 1955 “as the year in which the ‘battles for history’...were finally won” by the French school of the *Annales*, which replaced German historicism and set the agenda that future historians were to follow (35). French historian François Furet described the situation of those that worked in the field of history as amenable. Historians constituted a homogeneous group. They easily found positions that gave them the time to read and write and their work was well received both at home and abroad. During the 1950s and 1960s the discipline became liberated, claiming that “history was to be freed to wander in every field” (1-2). This brought the topics and methodologies of the social sciences, economics, demography, and ethnology, to history (8).²³

The inclusion of ethnology into historical studies was quite a radical change since the two disciplines were believed to have studied contradictory subjects: the first, humanity in its infancy, primitive societies without a written language, and the second,

²³ The social sciences were also integrated into the discipline of history in America, yet historians there were more interested in the new technology-oriented methodology, than in the new set of topics and concepts, which is what the poetics of culture typically draws upon. The technology-oriented American social sciences didn’t play a significant role in the formation of the new historicist approach under consideration.

humanity at a stage of civilization including written language that could leave records, taken to be the authoritative voice of the past. Yet with the realization after the war that modern civilization had lost its sense of superiority over so-called primitive societies, French intellectuals like Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault undermined these authoritative voices and began to approach their own society as ethnologists had approached “primitive societies.” For example, Foucault set out to consider European culture from a Jivaro²⁴ angle in an attempt to dispel its presence, any preconceptions and prejudices that he had of it, and turn it into a scientific object (Furet 31-35). Ultimately it was this perspective, the marriage of these two formerly opposed disciplines which rejuvenated historical studies and caught the attention of the literary critics, who were looking for alternatives in approaching the literature that western culture had already canonized. Thus the French historians and critics of this time had a tremendous influence on new historicism and especially the poetics of culture. Among these scholars, the one who seems to loom the largest in the new history is Michel Foucault.

According to The Archeology of Knowledge, the summation and reformulation of his methodology, Michel Foucault makes it clear that the main objective of his career is not to impose a structuralist methodology on historical studies, but to uncover and fully apply the tools and concepts of structuralism that have naturally emerged as useful in this field. The use of structuralist analysis in the history of knowledge would allow him to escape the anthropologism (or anthropocentrism) and the cultural totalities of history, to refrain from the use of world views or the spirit of an age (15-16). Foucault avoids the use of these concepts—concepts that traditionally predetermine the study of history, and

²⁴ Ancient Indian tribe of South America.

so is able to break through the superficial layer that they created and examine the complex structure, the world of contradictions, beneath it. Unlike Ranke and his followers who only wanted to show how things had really been, Foucault wanted to discover how things could have been how they were. Consequently (as we said before) he ignored the authority of the document, of the content and the voice in it, as the final resource for historical research, and focused instead on the “archive,” “the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events,” accumulating them in accordance with their multiple relations, creating and distinguishing between discourses, and determining which of these statements and / or discourses is preserved longer. For him this system is the appropriate object of historical study. Here is where the discursive rules that explain the very existence and significance of any document, the reason and effects of the things said in it, are found (128-129). Then it is through the exploration of these archives that one can unearth the deep structure of discursive power as it comes into view, justified by tradition and reason, to regulate desire and define individuals within an age or any other totality. In traditional history, Foucault explains, contradictions are suppressed within a unity, a world view, with only their unattended residuals left, which are then negatively described as “accidents,” “defects,” “mistakes.” Whenever they are referred to in history, these moments of subversive individuality are contained, presented as the exception that proves the rule so that there really seems to be nothing outside the totality. A good example of this is Tillyard’s “Elizabethan World Picture,” which can only conclude that Shakespeare viewed the ideas of Machiavelli as abhorrent, trapping the creative genius of the playwright within the parameters of the dominant world view or discourse. Foucault, who knows that it is impossible to describe exhaustively the archive

of a culture or a period (130), concentrated on the neglected irregularities, the contradictions that have been discussed above. His approach views these contradictions as ruptures in the continuity of traditional, causal history and attempts to determine the extent and form of the gap that these ruptures create between discourse practices. Through these fractures one can determine the form that each practice assumes and the relation that they have with each other (150-156). The result of Foucault's "archeology," the product of this method, is what Catherine Gallagher calls "counterhistories."

"Counterhistories" refer to the attacks on master narratives and the historiographical methods that construct them. These attacks presented themselves in a variety of forms during the 1960s and 1970s, from poststructuralist negativity, the recovery of the *longue durée* and the history of the losers, to the envisioning of counterfactuals and provisional worlds (Gallagher and Greenblatt 52-53). As we discussed above, Foucault's "counterhistories" in particular were created through the examination of the archive, the system that governs appearance and assimilation of contradictions within the traditional unity, yet the contradictions have received as much attention as the concept of the "archive". These contradictions, found very often in the form of anecdotes, are fragments that exist complete unto themselves without the need for history and so defy the historical successivity on which the master narratives of progress are established (49-50). More noteworthy perhaps is the fact that the chosen fragments are characteristically subversive. They are endowed with a sensation of terror and awe and pushed forward with the intention to shock. In Foucault's own words:

What shall be read here [in The Life of Infamous Men, another one of his works] is not a collection of portraits: they are snares, weapons, cries,

gestures, attitudes, ruses, intrigues for which the words have been the instruments...[and they]...have effectively been risked and lost in these words. (qtd. in Gallagher and Greenblatt 69)

Hence, the Foucauldian anecdote not only contradicted the totalities of historicism by its existence outside the master narratives, but by virtue of its status as marginal discourse, its content, which evidenced a break with the social norms. Foucault never really seems content with just discussing daily life, as many other “counterhistories” do; he searches for those things that leave an indelible impression, and this is probably one of the reasons for the popularity of his work.

New historicism adopted all of these assumptions. It rejected anthropocentrism and the traditional periodization in favor of an “archival” system and the subversive gestures it contained. For the literary critics who have adopted this practice the author, it seems, has become an impersonal medium that manipulated the cultural material and channeled the social energies in it; his personality did not play a major role in his creation of the text—in fact even his physical existence sometimes seems to be irrelevant, as can be seen in Greenblatt’s “Fiction and Friction,” where we find no real explanation as to how incidents of cross-dressing and hermaphroditism in France make their way to Shakespeare in England, no attempt to demonstrate that Shakespeare had access to the material in which these foreign incidents were recorded (Shakespearean Negotiation 66-93). The “period” had ceased to exist as a source of condensed, comprehensive information that could explain everything. The only insightful explanation comes from an examination of the system, the network, “a shared code, a set of interlocking tropes and similitudes that function not only as the object but as the conditions of

representation” (86). And like Foucault, new historicists paid special attention to anomalies in literary texts and in historical realities, following the circulation of energies from one zone (non-artistic/real) to another (artistic/fictional) (Greenblatt and Gallagher 12-13). The main deviation from Foucault’s approach is in the way that the poetics of culture accesses the real in the anecdotes, through the use of “thick description.”

“Thick description” is a term often used by anthropologists to refer to the sorting out of structures of signification, the process of locating any particular act within a network of cultural meanings. Among the anthropologists using this technique, Greenblatt identifies Clifford Geertz as a major influence on his critical approach. In *Practicing New Historicism*, he explains how the acceptance of distant cultures as texts, a written, narrative representation of an event, which allowed them to assume a privileged position over the members of that culture, came to them through Geertz and the structuralist rather than the historicist. And it was precisely this view of culture as a text that made it possible for them to discover meanings through interpretive strategies of literary criticism that the members of that culture “could not have articulated” (8). Indeed, the use of “thick description” creates and discloses what Greenblatt calls the “effect of compression,” which is what allowed Auerbach “to move convincingly from a tiny passage to a sprawling complex text.” The anthropologist and / or the critic takes “bits of symbolic behavior” found in the anecdotes that he collects and expands into the vast intricacies of the culture (26), the network: the complex system of meanings and life patterns. It is this technique, “thick description,” with its claim to reality—the reality of the mundane, that the poetics of culture uses to destabilize and reopen the readings of canonical works of literature.

Hence the poetics of culture is a combination of the Foucauldian perspective, his sensibility—his attraction to the subversive, the “Geertzian” methodology of thick description and Auerbach’s essayistic style. More specifically, this practice consists of mapping the circulation of social energy that enters and leaves the literary text at certain specific points, which can only be described as anomalies, things that cannot be explained through authorial intent or the influence of the spirit of the age. Critics like Greenblatt locate these instances in the artistic text and try to find a potential place of origin in non-artistic texts by contextualizing and exposing its cultural significance through “thick description.” Let us consider an example from Stephen Greenblatt’s Shakespearean Negotiations that will both illustrate the practice and illustrate the new historicist’s characteristic view of the Renaissance as modern.

In “Invisible Bullets” Greenblatt explains the existence of non-traditional governmental practices in William Shakespeare’s 1 & 2 Henry IV and Henry V by tracing them from the plays through Thomas Harriot’s “A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia” to a “Machiavellian hypothesis” about the origins and nature of the relation between the divine and the state in Europe. Here he begins with a “thick description” of “A Brief and True Report” (an anecdote), connecting it with other texts that reveal the way in which Harriot was inadvertently testing (and proving) with the Algonquian Indians one of the most subversive beliefs of his culture, that in every society, including those of Europe, the lawgivers resorted to divine authority to assert their laws. The true goal of religion was not salvation but civil discipline and thus the people who articulated these beliefs were jugglers and actors, an idea that is prominently found in the writings of Machiavelli (21-39). After showing the significance of this

anecdote, the meaning that this document has in the context of its culture, he explains how this “significance” circulates through the plays featuring Prince Hal (or Henry V). This highlights the (hypocritical) performative nature of power and the recording of alien voices (40-56) found in both anecdote and literary text that ultimately question orthodoxy. Yet, according to Greenblatt, the questioning of monarchical power in the plays is subsumed with the final rise of Henry V as an ideal king. It is impossible for Henry V to be “successfully performed as subversive...[since]...the very doubts that Shakespeare raises serve not to rob the King of his charisma but to heighten it, as they heighten the theatrical interest of the play”—an element that was also key in the reign of a monarch whose principal instrument of power was “privilege visibility” (63-64), as can be seen in the courtly masques and the tournaments held during Elizabeth’s reign. Hence, through these plays Shakespeare confirms the disturbing hypothesis proposed by Machiavelli. He draws his audience to an acceptance of it (65), shattering the picture of Elizabeth’s England that Tillyard had created for readers of the Second Tetralogy.

The recognition of the power of the Machiavellian hypothesis suggests that the Elizabethans possessed a sensibility, a skepticism in matters of faith that came from what Greenblatt describes as the existing “crises of doctrine and church governance, of the social function of religious belief” (24), which is intrinsically characteristic of the contemporary man who lives in a secular society, and, consequently, reveals Greenblatt’s view of the Renaissance as modern. Such an approach which confessedly studies the period by analogy to contemporary experiences (Veesser, “The New Historicism” 18) was common among most new historicists. In fact the reason that this period became the center of new historicist discourse was the numerous potential connections that existed

between it and the present. Critics saw in the Renaissance the origins of subjectivity and individualism, the origins of our disciplinary society, the moment in which the rigid institutions and the hardship of the Middle Ages gave way to new practices (13-14). This fascination with the potential modernity of the Renaissance and disregard of its continuity with medieval society soon created a new authoritarian totality that hid the former one. In the same way that Tillyard and Campbell at some point avoided seriously discussing the potential influence of modern thought, Greenblatt avoids a serious discussion of the existence and potential use of the traditional material, so that for those who subscribe uncritically to new historicism the Renaissance becomes uniformly modern. Hence, notwithstanding their protest against the coercive totalities of traditional history, critics find themselves operating under similar restrictions as older forms of historicism did, unwittingly appealing to a totalizing world picture.

Albert Rolls exposes this problem in his book The Theory of the King's Two Bodies in the Age of Shakespeare, where he accuses the new historicists of arbitrarily imposing their beliefs on the Renaissance, arguing that all of the connections that Greenblatt makes in "Invisible Bullets" with the subversive elements of modernity can be made within the orthodox elements of the Middle Ages, for example, by substituting John Dee, the most famous English "magus" (magician) during Elizabeth's reign, for Machiavelli. Making no distinction between the two fields of studies, Rolls is able to turn the correlation from early modern to late medieval (18-20). And even Machiavelli and the Machiavellian prince, Rolls goes on to argue, could be seen through the medieval perspective, as Bishop Gardener and Cardinal Reginald Pole did, the former praising him as an imitator of God who is both merciful and severe, and the latter by simply accepting

his evil existence, which would inevitably facilitate the appearance of the Antichrist, in fulfillment of the scriptures (45-46). Yet, even after exposing the omissions of the new historicist picture and debunking its place of authority, he finds that he cannot return to the old forms of historicism and their orthodox perspective since they too are incapable of fully explaining Shakespeare's text—not to mention the fact that the theoretically conscious literary critics of today view this perspective as naïve. Here he gets to the real problem of his project and mine, the existence of an inadequate dichotomy of perspectives for the Renaissance from which the critic must choose. His solution promises a combination of perspectives—the acceptance of elements of both the modern and the medieval—yet it does not deliver. The “modern medievalism” that he develops throughout his work (286) is an oxymoron that refers to the absence of characteristic values, the gap created by a recession—the withdrawal of the medieval and a lack—the absence of the modern. Even with its modern sophistication this perspective remains essentially medieval and therefore it can only serve to illustrate the persistence of the dichotomy rather than to fracture it.

Rolls' attempt to combine perspectives and/or the elements of different perspectives based on the traditional historical epochs in order to solve the problem of the dichotomy is naïve, since the very idea of an epoch, as we know from historicism, presupposes the existence of an all inclusive unity, a coercive spirit that denies the possibility of the contradictions that such a combination would create. Rolls' attempt here failed because he was looking for both the problem and the solution at the superficial level, discussing the result of the critical endeavor, in particular Greenblatt's “Invisible Bullets” and Tillyard's Shakespeare's Histories Plays, which are only the

product of a very specific set of theoretical assumptions, a series of discursive rules that allowed their authors to come up with certain interpretations that would be accepted and discussed within their community. These rules and/or assumptions determine everything that the critics say or omit and it is here that both the problem and the solution lie. While at first glance the problem seems to be the result of historical periodization, we need to take notice that the newer forms of historicism have rejected the “period”—“the spirit of the times,” as an inadequate form of organization, yet they have not been able to avoid the problem. New historicists have turned the Renaissance into a uniform part of the modern age. It is clearly not enough consciously to reject periodization, since the problem originates at the moment that the critic decides on the material that he will work with. Indeed, the principal characteristic of both schools of historical-literary criticism is the privileging of very specific sources and types of historical material: Rankean historicism privileged the State and the Church, while the new forms of historicism privilege the abnormal and the disagreeable: “accidents,” “mistakes,” and “defects.” If we examine the examples discussed above, we will find evidence of this at the superficial level: Tillyard and Campbell are able to present the Elizabethan society through their perspectives by paying more attention to the documents that supported such a view and marginalizing or completely omitting those that threaten it. Even Greenblatt and the new historicists who reject the use of the spirit of an age end up creating a uniform Elizabethan world view through the same type of preferential selection of aberrant sources. In this manner the literary critics of the nineteenth and twentieth century have gone through “a shift from celebration to rebellion to subversive submission” (Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning 8). They have not made any real improvement in the use of

history in literary studies. The problem of the historicist totalities is still there. The solution for this problem it seems lies now in resisting the desire to privilege any particular type of historical material.

Therefore this project will use conflicting materials and honor the contradictory systems of beliefs, giving equal or near-equal weight to each. In this case the historical material will be that which best explains the presence and form of Chivalry (Chapter II) and Machiavelli's *real politik* (Chapter III) in the Renaissance and in William Shakespeare's Second Tetralogy, Richard II, 1 & 2 Henry IV, and Henry V. This discussion will principally concentrate on determining the significance of both systems and describing how their significance finds expression in the literary text. Then, in the Chapter IV, I will examine how each of these world views is positioned in the plays: the idealistic rigid code of conduct that served as the backbone of society as intended by God and the cynical pragmatic guide of a society ordered by men; examine the conflict and tension created by their coexistence, and whether this conflict finds a resolution. By centering the conclusion of our discussion on the conflict of two cultural systems rather than the affirmation of one, this project will not only provide an interpretation that is potentially appealing to the critics that subscribe to either perspective, medieval or modern, but it will also serve as an example for other projects to follow in order to break with the dichotomies of perspectives.

Chapter Two

“In England the most valiant gentleman” Chivalry and the Lancastrian Kings

Chivalry and chivalric themes have not waned in critical discussion of the Henriad because of the shift in historiographical paradigms. Old and new historicists (and virtually everybody else who studies these plays of English medieval misconduct) address the issue of chivalry in one way or another. Scholarly interest in chivalry should not come as a surprise, since this was an essential part of the political and/or artistic culture of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. What perhaps might surprise us is the fact that the critical “debate” that originates from this interest (or just from the inevitability of addressing a subject that is central to the plays) lacks the tight cohesion that academic debates, with their mandatory cross-referencing, usually have. Very often these critics seem to be barely talking to each other and sometimes it is not clear that they are talking about the same thing. For example, C.W.R.D. Moseley dissolves his discussion of chivalry in the medieval Christian beliefs of the universe, like St. Augustine’s neo-platonic idea of *ordo*. Hence in his book Shakespeare’s History Plays (1988) chivalry is only mentioned twice, once referring to the trial by combat between Bullingbrook²⁵ and Mowbray (114) and then comparing Hal to Hotspur (132), yet Moseley spends a great deal of his time highlighting some of the values that characterized chivalry in the plays: loyalty, honor and justice. This is enough to reveal his perspective of chivalry; how chivalry is a sign of the prince’s closeness to God and his rightful place in social hierarchy which endows him with authority. Chivalry is something that

²⁵ In other editions of the plays Bullingbrook is spelled Bolingbroke.

somebody has and can discover in himself, as Moseley points out, “the theme of [Henry IV] Part 1 is the revelation in the prince of an honour and chivalry....Thus this part of the play is less strictly about the education of the prince...than the qualities that education should develop” (132).

Another critic with a different perspective of chivalry is Theodor Meron. In Bloody Constraint: War and Chivalry in Shakespeare (1998), Meron strives to demonstrate how Shakespeare uses the “law of nations” and the rhetoric of chivalry in his works to appeal for a renewal of those medieval values. Referring to rules and laws in existence during the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the American Civil War and even the late twentieth century, he depicts chivalry as the origin of our own system of international military conduct concerning human rights. Here chivalry has very little to do with the prince’s closeness to God or the divine source of his authority. In fact it is quite the opposite. Meron argues that “Shakespeare’s characters challenge war through a combination of legal and literary means;” they “articulate the requirement of a just cause for war...[and]...demonstrate the inescapable futility of war” (22). Here chivalry is a pragmatic and even necessary normative system originating from the awareness of the horrors of war and humanitarian pacifism, which ultimately serves to limit the power of the king and his lords. Succinctly, the chivalric spirit was not something that could be earned but rather something that was bestowed.

A third critic, Cajsa C. Baldini, presents yet another perspective of chivalry that both demystifies and simplifies it by reducing it to the rituals and ceremonies performed by kings to retain the divine right to absolute rule over their subjects. In fact, Baldini directly criticizes Richard II for adhering to the “demands of chivalry” which she

describes only as an outdated feudal system of government (56) in which it seems the King “needs to please no one but God” (61). She argues that it is Richard’s adherence to this unrealistic political theory that led to his deposition (66-67). Unlike Moseley and Meron, who believe in the efficiency of chivalry, Baldini, who reduces chivalry to the theory of the king’s divine right to absolute rule over his subjects, sees it only as a façade, a useless spectacle. These examples demonstrate the major problem with the study of chivalry in these plays: the elasticity that the term “chivalry” has acquired. Like historicism, which we discussed in the previous chapter, the term chivalry can be used to refer to many things. In order to solve this “problem” we will turn again to historiography, to the major discursive underpinnings of chivalry. Through this brief analysis we will demonstrate that chivalry is a complex cultural system that still held political value in the Renaissance and from which Shakespeare could draw to answer one of the most relevant questions of his time: whom should we follow?

The Dichotomy of Chivalry

When we move to the historiography beneath the criticism we find that there are two distinctive views of chivalry. The most recent and, perhaps, currently the most popular among scholars and critics is the secular view presented by Maurice Keen, which sees chivalry as the term used to refer to the ethic of the warrior class of the Middle Ages, a well-refined political system that could be enforced in order to maintain control of the most powerful and dangerous sector of medieval society.

Keen begins his book, Chivalry (1984), with a simple definition of a knight—a *chevalier*: “a man of aristocratic standing and probably of noble ancestry, who is capable,

if called upon, of equipping himself with a war horse and the arms of a heavy cavalry man, and who has been through certain rituals that make him what he is— who has been ‘dubbed’ to knighthood” (1-2). Notwithstanding his protestation that the definition of *chevalier* is not the same as that of chivalry, and that in no way does the former suggest suggests that there is a succinct definition for the latter, he maintains the plain functional perspective given above throughout the rest of his study. Through this perspective he is able to see pass the flamboyant chivalry of the fifteenth century and the piously Christian chivalry of the crusades, with their romantic allure, to discover its roots in the needs of the Germanic warrior bands.

Keen points out that when the earliest chivalric poems (like the *chansons de geste*) are stripped of what is immediate of the age, one is left with a set of qualities that are not that different from those found in the heroes of the Germanic epics: “Martial prowess, liberality, and pride of loyal service” (51 & 104), the core of the chivalric ethos. The elaborate ceremony of dubbing²⁶ he connects with the ceremony of the delivery of arms and homage²⁷ performed among Germanic tribes. The first consisting quite simply

²⁶ Detailed descriptions of the different aspect of the dubbing ceremony and its symbolic meaning can be found in many chivalric texts, for example, in the “Ordene de Cheveliere,” a poem by an anonymous author, we find a captured knight, Prince Hugh of Tobary, perform this ceremony for Saladin. As seen in the poem, dubbing a knight consisted principally of dressing and arming a man. Hugh dresses Saladin in a scarlet gown, dark shoes, and a tight white belt and arms him with spurs, a double-edged sword and a coif. Each of these items had its appropriate symbolism and function in the instruction of the new knight, but the two that concern us most are the gown and the sword. The scarlet gown served as a reminder of the knight’s commitment to shed blood in the service of God and the Church and the double-edged sword represented the blend between “right and loyalty.” According to the poem, the dubbing ceremony was completed with a blow, which Hugh doesn’t dare give to the Saracen while he is his captive. Nevertheless, he makes it clear that “the stroke” is a “memory-stirring thing / Of him who hath ordained the Knight.” Marc Bloch explains, “a box on the ear was one of the commonest methods, sanctioned by the legal customs of the time, of ensuring recollection of certain legal acts.” This could also be seen in the church ceremony of ordaining the clerk, where the Bishop struck the clerk. To this procedures Bloch adds the performance of an athletic display (312).

²⁷ Homage as described by Bloch in *Feudal Society* is a very simple ceremony: a man kneels before his lord who holds his hand while he utters a few words acknowledging himself as his man, a gesture followed by a kiss that symbolizes their friendship (146).

in arming a man with shield and spear in the public council and the second consisting of a pledge that committed this man to aid his lord in battle (66-68). Their objectives were not markedly different: principally, the distinction of a class of warriors and the consolidation of allegiance and loyalty. Keen is very clear that like the Germanic pagans, “the goals of chivalric society...were not at all idealistic” (190).

This apparent skepticism does not mean that the high values of chivalry, like the pursuit of virtue and honour, were false. On the contrary, “the pursuit of virtue in chivalric culture was quite real” (177): a pursuit that saw its sentence passed through a system of promotions and demotions. In chivalry men were subject to promotions according to degree of difficulty of the action through which they distinguished themselves. For example, a soldier who did great deeds on the field of battle was worth more than someone who performed a courageous feat in the siege of a castle, because the former was considered more dangerous and consequently harder to accomplish.²⁸ If someone broke the chivalric rules of conduct by showing cowardice, dishonoring women, or by breaking their pledge of faith they could be demoted and/or subjected to a number of punishments. The knights who had been released from imprisonment to raise their ransom and defaulted on their payment could have their coats of arms displayed in public places, reversed for breaking their pledge, and those who showed cowardice could be suspended and even expelled from their Order (169-175). This way the system efficiently instilled the desired values and regulated conduct without having to appeal to the religious or mythical form with which it was later endowed. For Keen, at least until the beginning of the sixteenth century, the point at which he ends his study, chivalry “was a secular upper-class ethic which laid special emphasis on martial prowess, not an inner

²⁸ Geoffroy de Charny explains this scale of values in greater detail (85-103).

religion of the heart” (199); and the men that are remembered as part of the flourishing of knighthood “earned their name and fame hard, in face of real and ugly dangers” (223).

Keen’s secular view of chivalry has been adopted unabashedly by some critics. In the introduction to his book, Meron concurs with Keen:

[C]hivalry performed an important social function...[without which] the endemic wars of the Middle Ages would have led to even more chaos, injustice and bloodshed. Thus, despite the occasional violation, such as at Agincourt, quarter was normally granted in the Anglo-French wars dramatized in Shakespeare’s Histories. (6)

For him chivalry was not only a functional system for the people of the Middle-Ages, it represented a culture of individual responsibility that would be of great use to contemporary society. Meron ends his book with a call for the reinvigoration of the concepts of chivalry. Other critics like Peter T. Haldorn have adopted this view indirectly through the works of writers like Frances Yates, Roy Strong, Alan Young, and Richard C. McCoy, who have argued that chivalry was practiced in earnest during the Elizabethan period, being an important means by which monarchs and aristocrats could consolidate power (45).

The secular and pragmatic view of chivalry advocated by Keen and these critics was constructed in response to Johan Huizinga’s influential theory of chivalry. In his book, The Autumn of the Middle Ages,²⁹ Huizinga argues that chivalry was a romance, a veneer for the brutal reality of the world, part of a beautiful life into which the wealthy men and women of the late medieval world could escape. This brief, inadequate explanation of Huizinga’s argument has become the hallmark for most critics who oppose

²⁹ Also translated from the Dutch as The Waning of the Middle Ages.

and even some who have adopted the view, reducing a complex interesting argument to a cynical observation. Indeed, from literary criticism and to some degree from other forms of scholarship, Huizinga seems to have the same condescending view that modern man often assumes towards “more primitive societies.” If we rescue the argument that supports this older view of chivalry we will find that this does not exclude Keen’s version and that the supposed dichotomy of chivalry comes as a result of this simplification.

According to Huizinga, every society yearns for the achievement of a beautiful world—a better life; a life that was only attainable through three paths: the path of denial, the path of real improvement and the path of fantasy. The first path, which consisted of denying the world, is seen only as a distraction from the beautiful life promised in the world beyond. This path was very successfully instilled in Christian culture. The second path is taken through the embrace of labor, being “virtuous in one’s own profession.” For those who lived in this path, the serfs and the peasants, social change would be interpreted as a return to tradition or restitution for abuses. There was no striving for political and social reform in this path. The ideal life is only slightly distant from the life of labor. And finally, those on the last path—the aristocrats and the knights—change life into forms of art, stylizing and ennobling every act by contextualizing them within rituals and ceremonies (36-39). In this way excitement is “standardized” and experienced through an “intellectually pleasing presentation.” The original meaning of customs and ceremonies had been displaced by an aesthetic meaning (53).

Chivalry continued to exist in the fifteenth century, but it was principally in the form of parody (77), a genre that emphasized the falseness of this literary subject matter. A number of studies of this period have demonstrated that while chivalry was part of the

culture, the political and social development was controlled by the priorities of trade and profit. The period of genuine chivalry had ended two centuries earlier (61). Still, Huizinga admits that chivalry retained real power in at least some aspects of life, as evidenced by the tragic blunders that the notions of chivalry brought upon the kings and lords of Christendom (104-105). Such blunders revealed a more complex dynamic between the romance of chivalry and the crude reality of the times than the simple recession of chivalric values that has often been what critics have hastily taken from The Autumn of the Middle Ages. Vows exemplified the co-existence of the two worlds:

[V]ows might have religious-ethical meaning that place them at the same level as clerical vows; [while] their content and meaning can also be of a romantic-erotic sort; and, finally, the vows may have degenerated into a courtly game without any significance other than that of passing time... [So that] the idea of the vow vacillates between the highest dedication of life in the service of the most solemn ideals and the most conceited mockery of the elaborate social game that found only amusement in courage, love and concerns of state. (Huizinga 97)

This is the nature of chivalry in the fifteenth century, an unstable interaction between the sincere and the sardonic, varying in different people and different occasions so that even if it finds itself depleted at times, it is not completely wiped out. In fact, chivalry, according to Huizinga, seemed to have remained a literary theme as late as the sixteenth century (124-125).

In his article “Huizinga, Kilgour and the Decline of Chivalry,” Keen agrees that power, like all other aspects of medieval life, has to be “standardized,” yet he adds that

this standardized expression of power had a real effect on late medieval politics. No matter how unstable the relation with the dream might have been; there was always real need to make power tangibly evident through it. The elaborate ceremony which kings and princes prepared allowed them to display their wealth and the military prowess of their men, reminding friends and foes alike of their power and their authority and in doing so retaining their allegiance. Indeed, politics had as much to do with the elaboration of ceremony as the desire to create a heroic illusion and live that beautiful life (10). The example *par excellence* of chivalry as an outdated social form, the extravagance and emptiness of the Vows of the Pheasant, at the banquet held at Lille in 1454, has a sincere, pragmatic political justification. Philip the Good, the Duke of Burgundy and host of the banquet, was genuinely concerned with the war against the heathen and had the intention of going on a crusade. The banquet and the vows were “a carefully thought-out attempt to launch an enterprise that was seriously intended with a maximum *éclat*, so as to ensure adequate support.” Planning a Burgundian crusade continued till Philip’s death (12-13). Using this example, Keen elucidates the interaction:

[T]here is an almost insuperable difficulty in the way of distinguishing, in the elaboration of its ceremony and ritual, between that which is inspired by an illusory dream of heroism and that which has serious purpose: They are too often two sides of the same coin. This is true not only of Burgundian chivalry, but of late medieval chivalrous culture, generally.

(13)

Here we find the reconciliation of the two views: chivalry remained a dream of a more beautiful world which inspired pragmatic political purpose. What we need to keep in

mind now is that chivalry can only be perfect as a dream and like any dream it is not absolutely binding and loses its luster when it finds expression in reality, so we cannot expect to find it at that moment in the same state we find it in our imagination.

It is clear that Huizinga does not simply present chivalry as a veneer for the brutal reality of the late Middle Ages; for him chivalry is the dream that holds the anxieties and desires of medieval culture in balance; a dream with which men had a complex relationship. In his book Ideology: An Introduction, Terry Eagleton defines the basic features of these formative dreams, the organizational forces of society: the beliefs, values, and institutions that give meaning and allow the perpetuation or the contestation of a specific way of life; dreams which in our science-oriented, post-enlightenment world we have come to know as ideologies.³⁰ The first and perhaps the most important of these aspects is that ideologies and myths which are generally perceived as false must have their roots in lived experiences:

[I]t is surely hard to credit that whole masses of human beings would hold over some extensive historical period ideas and beliefs which were simply nonsensical. Deeply persistent beliefs have to be supported to some extent, however meagerly, by the world our practical activity discloses to us...[and so]...we can generally assume that they encode, in however mystified a way, genuine needs and desires. (12)

This does not mean that ideologies simply embellish the desires and wants of society, that they are like rear-view mirrors reflecting reality and making certain dreams seem closer than they are. It would be a mistake to simplify the relation between ideologies and

³⁰ Like so many other sciences, ideology refers to both the study of ideas and the specific body of ideas that it studies.

reality in this way. Ideologies transform the hopes and needs that are already part of society, reshape them in accordance with their perspective of the world, and return them to their subjects as if they were their own (14-15). Ideologies change the very metaphors—the figures and symbols in which we dream and through these new metaphors channel our energies to serve their purpose. For example, during the Middle Ages the dream of social advancement was epitomized by the figure of the knight. The metaphor of the honorable knight contained the ambitions and aggressions of the young and channeled them in a manner that was conducive to the perpetuation of the social order, like a crusade. Today, career soldiers are not the representatives of social mobility and it is very unlikely that the modern-day warriors could reach the status and have the power that they had then. What we find at the end of the rags to riches stories, the story of the American dream, is the ruthless pirate-like entrepreneur³¹ or the charming sophisticated college graduate.³² Each of these metaphors inscribes the dream (the desire and hope) of social advancement with a set of expectations that is specifically beneficial to the dominant culture of its own time. Hence, living under similar circumstances, it should not be a problem for us to accept the theory that chivalry is a dream or an ideology, a set of ideals or ideas, and to understand the way in which these ideals permeate and control social life. The problem here is that we are living in a postmodern world where we are all “much too fly, astute and streetwise to be conned by our own official rhetoric,” and are more than reluctant to accept the social significance of ideologies (Eagleton 39). It is this near-sighted point of view that allows us to look down on medieval culture, to see chivalry simply as naïve or consciously ironic.

³¹ An example of this type of entrepreneur is Bill Gates.

³² An example of this type is former President of the United States of America: Bill Clinton.

In response to this reluctance to accept the presence, the social significance, of ideology in contemporary society, Eagleton points out that modern capitalism “for which truth means pragmatic calculation continues to cling to eternal verities”—the more utilitarian the society, the more its members seek the idea of the transcendental (155). The United States of America, the model for many of the capitalistic democracies in the western hemisphere, hangs on to the “American Dream:” the dream of “the national democratic development that includes individual hopes for everybody in achieving success, equal opportunities, and the pursuit of happiness” (Shestakov 584). And, while this “Dream,” which clearly emanates from the ideas inscribed in the Declaration of Independence, has been appropriated and developed by different groups throughout the history of the nation (584), the basic principles, especially those of equality and social justice, are still present in the culture as evidenced by the laws of affirmative action. The necessity of legally ensuring that minorities have access to the opportunities that the most privileged ethnic or social groups have not only reveals the failure—the transparency—of the dream, it also demonstrates its persistence, since these laws supersede the conflicting capitalist principle of *laissez faire*.³³ Dreams, beliefs and values, are an important part of the policies and the institutions that govern society. Eagleton adds to this that they do not—cannot do so completely and arbitrarily. In modern capitalistic societies the citizen might estimate freedom, justice and individualism to be precious values, but they “also believe...[that]...it is when religion starts to interfere with your everyday life that it is time to give it up” (156). Citizens must be both a part of the dehumanizing system of

³³ The U.S. government had very notably broken with the ideal of *laissez faire* before. During the Great Depression the government intervened in hopes that, as Franklin D. Roosevelt put it, they could “create a new frontier by which the small businessman, the true individualist of capitalistic society, once again would be able to grow” (Winks 12). Hence, this breach was also excused by the expectations that the American Dream had placed on society: the expectation of having the opportunity to succeed.

production and consumption and ethically responsible individuals; as a result they find themselves vacillating between the ideal and crude reality, or as Eagleton puts it, “moralism and cynicism” (39). This last description of the relation between ideology and human beings in an advanced capitalistic society such as ours is not that different from the one that Huizinga and Keen give in their explanation of chivalry.

The major problem with Huizinga’s view now seems to be the confusion created first by the simplification of his argument and second by the (historicists’) claims that this simplified argument represents the unity of an age.³⁴ Historians and critics find it hard to accept that chivalry would affect everyone in society the same way. Keen’s final description of the Duke of Burgundy seems to demonstrate this disparity between men: the Duke being a master of theater and an ambitious politician who knows how to use the dream of chivalry to get his way while other men who take the dream seriously are only players in his play (“Huizinga, Kilgour and the Decline of Chivalry” 16-17). According to Keen’s final description, the Duke is not that far from the renaissance Machiavel, an idea that will be addressed in the next chapter.

Chivalry in the Renaissance

On the final point of discrepancy between the two views of chivalry, the year in which this dream and practice ceased to exert its power, we cannot find any reconciliation between Huizinga and Keen. It is impossible to agree with Huizinga that medieval culture disappeared in the fifteenth century, since many of the values and institutions that were part of this society still exist today. The Roman Catholic Church is still a major influence in Europe and the western world as Pope John Paul II

³⁴ This claim is made in the “Preface to the First and Second Dutch Editions,” p. xx.

demonstrated through his life and in his death;³⁵ the universities remain a center for learning; and, even though it might be considered old-fashioned by most people, chivalry still conditions the expectations that we have about the relations between sexes. The spirit of the Middle Ages has outlived the body of events that make up its period for so long that it seems wrong to set its end at such an early time. Keen, who wraps up his survey of chivalry in 1500, explains that knightly culture did not end in the sixteenth century. There were definitely no signs of this decline at the beginning of the century. Instead what takes place is a transformation led by changes in the military and the political roles of the nobility (Chivalry 237-242). Without disavowing these changes, we need to acknowledge that there is evidence that during the Renaissance, especially during Elizabeth's reign, that chivalry essentially remained what it had always been: the ethos of an aristocratic warrior class and a common theme in literature.

In The Rites of Knighthood, a book whose title comes from Shakespeare's Richard II, Richard C. McCoy explains that chivalry existed thanks to a compromise between Queen Elizabeth and her knights, which allowed them, through the rites of knighthood, to share the ceremonial stage. Chivalric ceremonies and rituals, like the tournament, provided knights with much more than a chance to release their aggressive energy; they offered the chance to display their military prowess in public and to acquire honor and satisfy their pride in a controlled environment (14-24). Yet the central importance that the tournament has for McCoy's argument should not mislead us into believing that Elizabethan knights merely played games, which according to Huizinga are

³⁵ Pope John Paul II had an important role in the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and political leaders acknowledge the spiritual and political influence that he had when he died in 2005. His funeral was attended by heads of state from all over the world, including those of chiefly Protestant countries like England and the United States.

only a façade of chivalry. The three knights discussed in his book, the Earl of Leicester, Sir Philip Sidney, and the Earl of Essex, not only contended against the Queen for their chivalric rights and a central place in the ceremonial stage, but at some point during their lives also provided her with military service. The Earl of Leicester, who was very likely the most successful of the three in acquiring the Queen's favor and rising to equal standing with powerful men like the Duke of Norfolk, head of the College of Arms (and Leicester's enemy), was perhaps the least successful in actual war, marring his chivalric reputation with his inadequate attempts at military glory (45-46). During his time in command of the English troops fighting the Spanish in the Netherlands, Essex clashed with his seasoned soldiers and promoted those who were untrustworthy (48-49). His military campaign and his political bid to become the leader of the Protestant faction were not fruitful and at the end he became a joke in England where he was defamed long after his death (52-54).

If Leicester was a disappointment, his nephew, Sir Philip Sidney, was not. In both poetry and war Sir Philip Sidney strove for the ideals of chivalry, and among his contemporaries he was very likely the one who came closest to reaching them. As a poet his work showed an interest in politics, especially the politics of conduct that had been the central subject of the medieval treatises on knighthood. The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia, Sidney's famous poem to his sister, for example, was a serious romance that dealt with "kingship and its duties, the proper conduct of public affairs, and vexed problems of personal ethics"³⁶ in the Renaissance. While works like this explored contradictions and compromise and above all endorsed chivalric heroism (McCoy 64-73),

³⁶ Ringer's "Introduction" to The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney, xxxvi-xxxvii.

Sidney's clearest commitment to the dream of chivalry is found in his comparison of the poet and the historian, in The Defense of Poesy.³⁷

the best of the historian is subject to the poet; for whatsoever action, or faction, whatsoever counsel, policy, or war stratagem the historian is bound to recite, that may the poet (if he list) with the imitation make his own, beautifying it both for further teaching...For indeed poetry ever sets virtue so out in her best colours, making Fortune her well-waiting handmaiden, that one must needs be enamoured of her. (225)

This was the wisdom of the age: to favor the powerful examples of literature (fantasy) over the plain examples of history (reality). The most important kind of poetry was the one that upheld the feats of chivalry:

the heroical, which is not only a kind, but the best and most accomplished kind of poetry. For as the image of each action stirreth and instructeth the mind, so the lofty image of such worthies most inflameth the mind with desire to be worthy, and inform with counsel how to be worthy. (231)

Ironically, and tragically, Sidney provided in his real life an example that matched, if it did not exceed, those of his fictional characters.

Appointed Governor of Flushing, one of the two ports that the Queen had the right to garrison (Weir 358), Sidney crossed the sea that had protected England for centuries to fulfill the duties of his social station. Determined to fight the armies of King Philip II, the Catholic sovereign of those territories, he plunged into the fray near Arnhem without the protection of his whole suit of armor. Generous or perhaps overconfident of

³⁷ The "Defence of Poesy" was first published in 1595.

his military prowess, he had lent the leg piece to a friend who did not have his own,³⁸ and like an English Achilles he fought and was mortally wounded in that one vulnerable spot. The Battle of Zutphen was won by the English. Sidney rode to camp bleeding and proclaiming his allegiance to the Queen, and twenty-six days later he died. The English court mourned for the dead hero who returned home “in a ship with black sails, and [was] given a state funeral in St. Paul’s Cathedral” (370-371). Loyal, brave, and generous, Sidney’s commitment to the dream did not relent. Even when he was faced with death, he remained “the epitome of the chivalric ideal” (Weir 371).

While fighting in the Netherlands had a high price for English chivalry—costing the Earl of Leicester his reputation and Sidney his life—the foreign war had served as a stage for the rite of passage of the third man discussed in McCoy’s book, Robert Devereux, the second Earl of Essex. It was there, after fighting valiantly in the Battle of Zutphen, that Essex was initiated into knighthood. As an aristocrat and a knight, Essex led the Queen’s men on more than one occasion: the most notorious, and perhaps the one that made his fortune, was the raid on the Spanish port of Cadiz, where some of the ships that were meant for the invasion of England were waiting to sail (Weir 422-423). These ventures had earned him the title of chivalric heir to Sidney.³⁹ And with the knowledge of his colossal popularity the Earl tried to remake the chivalric compromise.

In Tudor England, McCoy explains, there is no proportion in the relation between the sovereign and subject. Whenever there is a real conflict between their interests, the only feasible compromise is the one offered by the sovereign, in other words, the only

³⁸ Fulke Greville, who wrote a slightly different version of this story in the years between 1604 and 1614, says that Sidney, seeing the lightly armed marshal of the camp and not wanting to venture with any inequalities, cast off this piece of armor (329). Here it is not generosity, but pride that undoes our hero.

³⁹ In his *Eclogue Gratulatorie*, George Peele declared Essex, who was good at both war and war games, the chivalric heir of Sidney (McCoy 79-80).

solution is obedience. Essex believed that there should be a proportion “between the Queen and her powerful subjects that would constitute a balance of power as well as honors” (95), and, tragically, his actions were in keeping with this belief. His persistent insolence towards the Queen finally resulted in his exclusion from the court and from the Accession Day tilt. However, the Earl’s insolence was not the only predicament that the compromise faced. By 1600 Elizabeth was finding it more and more difficult to share the ceremonial stage with her increasingly insubordinate subjects (98). The knots of chivalry, which had tied sovereigns and nobles together for centuries, were loosening. In 1601 the arrogant Earl led a misguided rebellion. As the champion of chivalry, he believed that it was his duty to rescue the kingdom from upstarts (like Cecil) and he intended to do that by taking control of the Queen. The rebellion failed and Essex died a traitor.

“The heroes of Elizabethan chivalry,” McCoy concludes, “lived on in a melancholy and nostalgic afterglow in the first decade of the next reign,” the reign of James I, yet after the death of his son, Prince Henry, the English could not find another ardent chivalric champion (157-158). These memorable heroes—Leicester, Sidney, and Essex, in particular—demonstrate that chivalry was still an important part of the culture during the late sixteenth century. Subsequently we need to acknowledge that the audience of the four plays that make up the Henriad (staged between 1595 and 1599) would recognize the representation of chivalry and its practices and would be affected by such representation.

At least till the end of the sixteenth century chivalry remained the dream that shaped men of noble birth. It was a dream that articulated their aspirations and provided

them with a frame of reference by which they could evaluate their actions and those of others, and, like any other scale used to measure the members of a society, it had a great deal of power, political and otherwise. The question that we must ask ourselves is; how was this cultural scale used in the plays? How do the social energies of chivalry circulate through them? And how did the representation of chivalry affect the audience?

However, before we set out to find the answer to these questions, we need to give an explanation of what the Elizabethans might have known as chivalry. Until now we have talked about our contemporary conception of chivalry, which, perhaps, allowed us to avoid the simplifications and the subsequent misconceptions that are often a necessary part of traditional history. We know that chivalry was a powerful part of the Elizabethan imagination, but what was it exactly that Renaissance men believed and practiced?

The Beliefs and Practices of Chivalry

In 1484, over a hundred years before the first play of the Henriad was staged, William Caxton published an English translation of Ramon Lull's popular treatise on chivalry entitled The Book of the Order of Chivalry and Knighthood. This book offered such a powerful frame of reference that "it became the classical account of chivalry" (Keen, Chivalry 8-11), leaving a lasting impression in medieval culture, one that very likely overtook the Elizabethan men as it has overtaken the contemporary scholar, for whom the book still holds authority.

In this depiction we find the role of the knight in society very clearly defined. Knights were a privileged class of warriors whose purpose was the defense of the Church and the government of other men—lower men—through the threat of force. It was the

fear of being destroyed that motivated the common men to cultivate the land and honor the lord under whose protection they worked (29-31). At the same time these knights were the means through which the lord provided protection for the lower classes. They were especially charged with the defense of women, widows, orphans, etc (35). These knights would in turn be lead by their lords, Emperors and Kings, who following the chivalric code of conduct provided examples to inspire them (99). In this manner, knights were at the center of the relation of interdependence of medieval society, both receiving and providing service from both princes and common men. The question now is how did chivalry contribute to stabilizing these relations?

From the very beginning of this chapter we have talked about the ethos, the system of values and virtues that determines the conduct of knights, but until now we have not specified what these virtues are. According to Lull there are seven virtues that knights should practice: the theological virtues—Faith, Hope and Charity—and the cardinal virtues—Justice, Prudence, Strength and Temperance (77). Faith is the first among these:

A knight without Faith may not have good habits and customs, for by Faith a man sees the spiritual God and his work, and believes in the Invisibles...[and]...has Hope, Charity, and Loyalty; and is the servant of Verité and Truth...[and does not]...fail to believe in his works and in the invisible things which a man without Faith may neither understand nor know. (78)

Indeed, Faith was the quintessence of chivalry. The knight's Faith in God, in his divine justice, gave meaning to their unpredictable profession, justifying their wars when they

were victorious, and perhaps explaining their defeat when they could not overcome their enemies. The principle of faith is most evident in trial by combat, a chivalric rite that Lull does not mention, but one that was evoked by more than one knight.

According to Peter Speed's book, Those Who Fought: An Anthology of Medieval Sources (1996), the "judicial duel" was a legal procedure in which innocence or guilt was determined through combat between the accuser and the accused, "the idea being that God would side with the party that was in the right and grant him victory" (Speed 124). In Germany this procedure was defined by the Constitution of Melfi. This constitution restricted trial by combat to cases of treason and murder through secret means; cases where there was not enough evidence for a judge to rule, and regulated the combat in such a way that the contestants would be as evenly matched as possible (125-126). The right to be judged by God (alone) was one of the most powerful elements of chivalry, especially for those who were innocent (or just the mighty). English knights did not fail to exploit this right when necessary or convenient. For example, in 1182, when William Marshal faced malicious rumors of an adulterous relation with the wife of young Henry, the heir to the throne, he offered to settle the matter by a judicial duel. He would "confront the three most valorous champions that can be found, one after the next," with one finger cut off, and suffer "death by hanging" if he lost. Unfortunately, nobody accepted his challenge. Marshal's accusers were allowed to smear him unopposed and, knowing that his rights had been violated, the proud knight had to leave the service of his lord without the chance to prove his innocence and with the trust between them broken (Duby 51-52). Henry would only take Marshall back without prejudice when the sire of Lusignan offered to have the matter settled through combat (114). Perhaps a better

known example of the English use of this practice occurred in 1399, when the Duke of Hertford accused the Duke of Norfolk of treason. Without conclusive evidence of the guilt or innocence of either man, the committee that was investigating Hertford's accusation decided that the dispute should be settled through trial by combat. As we know, despite extensive preparations, the actual combat never took place. Richard stopped it as soon as it began (Saul 399-401). It is clear that the judicial duel was not sacred—the rights to it and the rules that regulated its practice were not always respected—and the duels could easily be abused by the mighty, or the mightier, yet for this practice to survive for so long there had to be a certain degree of faith in it—a sincere belief in divine intervention.

A complex representation of the judicial duel can be found in Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale." Here the fictional Knight of the Canterbury Tales tells the story of Palamoun and Arcite, two young nobles, cousins, who were found among the dead after the war between Thebes and Athens, and were brought to Athens as prisoners of war. In Athens, the two Thebans saw and instantaneously fell madly in love with Emelye, who had come to the Greek city with her sister Ypolita,⁴⁰ the wife of Theseus, Duke of Athens. During their time incarcerated the cousins admired Emelye from a distance and squabbled about who was the one who truly loved her, but when they met outside of prison⁴¹ the only way they could settle their argument was through combat. Only God could tell what was in their hearts: who had loved her first? Who loved her the most? To whom did she belong? Hence Palamoun and Arcite agreed to meet in the woods and fight each other to the death, but the judicial duel was little more than a brawl. As we can

⁴⁰ Ypolita is also the Queen of the Amazons.

⁴¹ Arcite was freed without ransom thanks to the request of Perotheus (a friend of Theseus) and Palomoun escapes from prison by giving his jailer a sleeping potion.

see in the question that Theseus poses for the Thebans when he discovers their secret confrontation: “what myster men ye been, / That been so hardy for to fighten heere / Withouten juge or oother officere” (1710-1712), the duel between knights had to be supervised by a figure of authority, someone who would make sure that the rules were respected. Without the sanction of this officer, the winner of the martial contest could claim little more than his life. He was more likely to be branded a murderer than a victorious knight. In order to prevent these young nobles from falling victims to their own recklessness in such a manner, Theseus arranges for them to have a proper judicial duel. Paramoun and Arcite and the small host of knights that each has been charged with gathering would meet in battle, but only under the very specific rules established by Theseus:

No man therfore, of peyne of los of lyf,
No maner shot, ne polax, ne short knyf,
Into the lyste sende or thinder brynge;
Ne short swerd, for to stoke with point bitynge,
No man ne drawe, neb ere it by his syde .
Ne no man shal unto his felaw ryde
But o cours with a sharpe ygrounde spere;
Foyne, if hym list, on foote, himself to were.
And he that is at mischief shal be take
And noght slayn, but be broght unto the stake
That shal be ordeyned on either side;
But thider he shal by force, and then abide.

And if so falle the chieftyan betake
On outhere side, or elles sleen his make,
No lenger shal the turneiynge laste.

(2543-2557)

Following these rules, which were meant to protect the royal blood of Thebes, Arcite defeats Palamoun and is betrothed to Emelye, “That by his fortune hath hire faire ywonne” (2659). Yet, this event is immediately followed by an incident that questions the principles that uphold judicial duels. After his victory, Arcite’s horse is startled and he is thrown from it, receiving an injury that eventually kills him. Even though the characters in the poem accept this “accident,” as they do the outcome of the battle, as the will of “The First Moevere,” the reader can not. The reader cannot accept that both events—the victory and the death of Arcite—are the result of providence, when the intervention of the gods is only clear in the latter. Chaucer does not mention the gods during the fight. No god is seen protecting or guiding the hand of Arcite when he defeats Palamoun, as they are seen in the Iliad. All the reader sees during the judicial duel are mortal men. In contrast the role of the gods is completely clear in Arcite’s “accident.” If all is the work of Jupiter, “The First Moevere,” as Theseus explains in a long sermon at the end of the story, then what is the need for a judicial duel here? What is the special significance of this rite? Is trial by combat a means through which knights could appeal to divine justice? Although it is very easy to sympathize with Palamoun, the one who ends up marrying Emelye, Chaucer does not seem to give his reader any straight answers. Instead, The Knight’s Tale illustrates the ambivalent feeling, the belief and the suspicion, that medieval men had towards the chivalric rite of trial by combat.

In addition to faith in this divine-military-intervention, knights had to have faith in the invisible work of God. They have to believe in His order, which Lull describes as starting with God:

who has dominion over the seven planets....[and]...has the power and dominion in governing and ordaining the terrestrial and earthly...kings, princess, and great lords who ought to have power and dominion over knights [and, like we discussed before, also be knights]. And the knights who ought to have power and dominion over the masses of people. (1)

The faith in this order, which not only put them above the common man, but also put princes and kings above them, was, to a great degree, the source of the knight's loyalty and obedience. And loyalty to their secular lord was essential to the preservation of the allegiance between princes and knights that were at least expected to be self-sufficient, having enough riches to maintain their lifestyle, including a lot more than a horse and the equipment (armor and weapons) of the cavalry man (37).⁴² In other words, chivalry was a system of individual responsibility. Each knight, especially those who held vast territories and wealth as was expected of them, responded to their lord more out of a sense of loyalty and honor than necessity. While the promise of further expanding their wealth and honors through the prince's largesse had an undeniably strong appeal, the truth is that wealthy lords like John of Gaunt did not need to be loyal, as the Dukes of Burgundy (a subject of the French King) demonstrated during the Hundred Years War.

The traditional depiction of chivalry presents a knight, a higher class of man with the means to sustain himself and his military career, whose function in society is to protect and govern those who are weaker. In turn he is bound to those who are often

⁴² Lull explains that knights ought to have a castle, towns and cities.

more powerful: princes, barons and/or lords, to whom he owes fealty due to a code of conduct that above anything else emphasizes willing obedience (faith and loyalty) and restraint (justice, prudence and temperance). Ultimately, the allegiance that maintains the order of society, at least among men of nobility, relied on trust that men were sincerely loyal and true—more precisely on *trawþe*. Rooted in the Christian ambition for perfection in faith and work, thought and action, *trawþe* represents the commitment to the positive social values of society in a perfect unity, the balanced interrelation of mental, physical, spiritual, and social qualities (Barron 18-19). It is the expectation that a man should be true in all aspects of his life, and the assumption that if he fails in any of these aspects he fails in all of them (48). If a man does not have faith in God, for example, he does not have the hope needed to reinforce his courage, courage that permits him to persevere through trials and adventures, and gives him the strength to overcome his enemies (Lull 78-79), therefore vacillating on a spiritual quality will have its effect on the mental and physical qualities of the person. In Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, *trawþe* is represented by the pentangle, a figure formed of five points connected by a continuous line forming a star. The eternal unity of the five points is exemplified by the integrity of Sir Gawain:

to his word most true

And in speech most courteous knight,

And first, he was faultless in his five senses,

Nor found ever to fail in his five fingers,

And all his fealty was fixed upon the five wounds

That Christ got on the cross, as the creed tells;

And wherever this man in melee took part,
His one though was of the this, past all things else,
That all his force was founded in the five joys,
That the high Queen of heaven had in her child.⁴³

(638-647)

The pentangle is the emblem that adorns the young knight's shield. And, as we discover throughout the poem, his *trawpe* is the only protection that he has against the perils that he might face on his journey. It is the exchange of the shield for a magical object, the girdle, which ultimately results in the shameful failure of his purpose: to exemplify the chivalric ideals of Camelot. Sir Gawain sets aside this chivalric ideals the moment he accepts a girdle under the presumption that when worn on "his body...he could not be killed by any craft on earth" (1852-1854). He no longer believes that God can protect him and he puts his faith in something else. It seems that not even the "noblest knight" is able to maintain this integrity. As unrealistic as this expectation might seem, the chivalric charge of achieving this unity, a holistic integrity, appears as the pillar of medieval society. Allegiances were based as much on the integrity of the men that had entered into them as the promise of what they could give each other. These beliefs and characteristics, which are not only found here but in similar treatises of the fifteenth century, seem the most common and were still present in Shakespeare's times.

The chivalric epic of the English Renaissance, Edmund Spenser's The Faerie Queene, was written in the last decade of the sixteenth century, the decade during which Shakespeare wrote the Henriad. The Faerie Queene is preceded by a letter of intent⁴⁴ that

⁴³ Translated by Marie Borroff.

⁴⁴ The letter is addressed to Sir Walter Raleigh.

clearly shows the importance of the author's task: to "fashion a gentlemen or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline." Spenser aimed to educate young Englishmen on the appropriate conduct that they must maintain in their society, by providing them with the most excellent example of Arthur, "the image of a braue knight, perfected in the twelue priuate morall vertues, as Aristotle hath deuised" ("A Letter of the Authors" 15). We only have six of these twelve books, each of which contains the story of a different knight who exemplifies a particular virtue: "Holinesse," "Temperaunce," "Chastitie," "Freindship," "Iustice," and "Covrtesie." For example, "Holinesse," which seems to correspond to the spiritual qualities—the principal virtues of chivalric society—that we have been referring to here as *trawpe*, Faith, and Loyalty is represented by the story of the Red Cross Knight.

The Red Cross Knight has been sent on a quest to the kingdom of Lady Una, where a dragon keeps her parents, the King and Queen, hostage. Through this journey we discover that the Red Cross Knight has the physical strength, the military prowess, to complete his quest, as he demonstrated in his confrontation with the monstrous Errorr and the heathens Sans Foy and Sans Joy, but he lacks spiritual or moral resolve. The "faithful" knight is easily pushed to doubt and quick to abandon the lady whom he had sworn to protect and the quest that he had set out to complete. When facing *Despair*, the dark morbid creature that reminds him of all his shameful chivalric failures, the Red Cross Knight goes so far as to consider abandoning life, killing himself with a knife (*FQ* I.IX.46-52). Noticing this weakness and knowing that "her knight was feeble, and too faint...[and]...vnfit for bloody fight" (X.2.2-6), Una takes him to the "House of Holinesse," where Dame Cælia lives with her three daughters, Fidelia, Speranza, and

Charissa. Here, under the guidance of Cælia's daughters, he is instructed in their "heavenly learning" and "vertuous rules" and he undergoes a spiritual transformation (X.18-67). The Red Cross Knight purged himself of sins and developed the spiritual strength to face and defeat his next opponent, the dragon. Without the spiritual strength that he gained in the House of Holiness, he would not have been able to defeat the dragon, since "all the good is Gods, both power and eke will" (X.1.9). In this manner Spenser dedicates the First Book of his poem to confirming the importance of what Lull calls the theological virtues: Faith, Hope, and Charity, and the connection (the unity) between the theological (spiritual) virtues and the cardinal virtues, in particular strength, the "fleshy might" that is expected of knights.

But let us consider a text that is more explicitly a guide for the conduct of the Renaissance man, like The Book of the Courtier. In the The Book of the Courtier Baldesar Castiglione describes the nightly entertainment that takes place in the court of the Duke of Urbino, in particular a game led by the Duchess and her appointed game master, Emilia, whose ultimate objective is to have the gentlemen describe the perfect courtier. Like the chivalric "games" of the fifteenth century, the game played at the court of Urbino was a very serious one, since it dealt with the relations and interactions between the members of the court and the monarch, or a powerful lord. And the qualities and the behavior agreed on in this fictional game were followed by many during the Renaissance. In fact after its translation into English in 1561, Castiglione's courtier had very clearly become the model by which gentlemen of the Elizabethan court lived, and so he became the "successor" of the medieval knight (Bull 13-14). However, the truth is that the courtier was not that different from the knight.

While the term “courtier” could have been used to describe anyone whose fortune depended on the services, any type of services, provided for a prince, Renaissance men seemed to have used the term to refer to the members of a privileged class whose main vocation was military and who possessed the qualities to rule over other men. The first thing that Castiglione points out in his discussion of the ideal courtier is the advantages of noble lineage when entering the services of a prince. “[S]ince it stands to reason that good should beget good,” that under the right circumstances, brought up appropriately, men tend to equal or exceed the achievements of their ancestors; descending from a line of distinguished men served the courtier to make a good first impression (54-57). These high expectations, realistic or unrealistic, assured the nobles that they would be well used; that they would be given positions that would allow them to advance in court and to expand their wealth and influence. In order to maintain this distinction between nobles and common people, Castiglione warns that the former should not mix with those who are below him, that he should not engage in competition with them. Whenever a noble engages in competition with a peasant he risks the shocking indignity of being beaten and/or upstaged by the peasant (117-120), revealing the inadequacies and the artificiality of the system that upholds their privileges. And so the courtier came from a group of people who received access to certain political and social positions as part of their birthright, but as courtiers their privileges depended on the services that they provided their lord.

The principal service that these noblemen provided as courtiers was military, since “the first and true profession of the courtier [still] must be that of arms” (57). The courtier, Castiglione explained, should engage and exceed in all the activities that are

useful practices for a soldier: he must know how to wrestle, how to ride, and how to tilt and joust, and for recreation he should engage in sports that resemble warfare, like hunting (62-63). Their objectives as military men remained the same as those of the medieval aristocracy: to defend their prince (57-58) and subjugate the infidel (312). It is clear that courtiers dedicated most of their time and energy in developing their martial skills, yet they also had political responsibility, like Sir Philip Sidney, who served as governor in Flushing (the Netherlands). Hence courtiers also had to have the qualities to govern other men, the knowledge of justice, generosity, magnanimity, etc. As involved in government as they were in war, the aristocrats of the sixteenth century must have had more than sufficient occasion to show and test their ability to rule others. The experience these men had in the various aspects of government made them ideal role models for young princes. For this reason, Castiglione charges the courtier with introducing their prince to these virtues. In the same way that Lull had elevated knighthood, by requiring that emperors and kings know the order of chivalry and practice its virtue, Castiglione had elevated the courtier. Renaissance princes were expected to nourish and practice the virtues that their courtiers taught him (319).

However, while the courtier retained the basic characteristics of the knight, new expectations were set on this figure. Now the courtier had to be more than a warrior in order to advance. The favor that a prince might grant his subjects depended as much on their ability to impress the court (which had long since been transformed from a war camp into the cultural center of the realm) as it did on his military prowess. For this reason the courtier had to be well-educated in the humanities and well-mannered: they had to be kind, modest, eloquent—able to carry on a pleasant conversation, and dance

gracefully. Indeed, if they wanted to be successful, the courtier had to participate in all the entertainments of the court, like the gentlemen and the ladies at the court of Urbino. Here Castiglione takes a poke at traditional chivalric society, that of the French, which “recognize[s] only the nobility of arms and think[s] nothing of all the rest...[neglecting that]...in war what really spurs men on to bold deeds is the desire for glory...glory that is entrusted to the sacred treasury of letters” (88-89).

The second major difference that cannot be avoided is that the system of virtues that the courtier should try to maintain is not clearly outlined, and it is then more subjective than that of chivalry. According to Castiglione, the courtier should forego definitions and discussion of the worth of the virtue of the soul and simply try to be a man of honour and integrity, which implies prudence, fortitude and temperance, “and all the other qualities proper to so honourable a name” as that of a courtier (87-88). Succinctly, here, as in his discussion of Justice (295-296), “virtue may be defined more or less as prudence and the knowledge of how to chose what is good, and vice as a kind of imprudence and ignorance, which leads us into making false judgments...[since]...men never choose evil deliberately but are deceived by a certain semblance of good” (292).

From this it seems that the courtier had complete liberty to decide his actions and could escape guilt, but in reality he has very little room to make decisions beyond the interest of his Prince. And since recognizing the disgraceful deeds that might bring shame to themselves and their prince is very hard, Castiglione explains, the courtier should abide by the orders of their lord. Like the Knight, the courtier above all must obey and further the wishes of those he serves. The importance of these characteristics, loyalty and obedience, is such that its preeminence is not only found inside the game that

the court plays, on the topics they discuss, but it is also found in the importance they give the rules of the game, as Emilia and sometimes the Duchess reprimand the gentlemen in the court, telling them that “a single transgression leads to any number of others. So the one who sins and gives a bad example, as Bernardo has done [by breaking the rules: asking a question rather than contradicting the speaker], deserves to be punished not only for his wrongdoings but also for that of the other” (64). Here we find again a system of individual responsibility that relies on the feelings of guilt and shame that the breach of the social expectations might place on the reputation of the transgressor. Society is still held together by a system of interdependence. The courtier willingly offers his services to the prince in exchange for a position in his court; loyalty in exchange for direction; the power to act in exchange for absolution from their actions. For all the emphasis on obedience, the courtier can leave his prince when he feels that the demands of his service might be disgraceful and his prince is not in danger (131-133).

Indeed, as George Bull points out, The Book of the Courtier could receive very little credit for the originality of its ideas since it was mainly a compilation of the medieval ideals of chivalry, the classic virtues and humanistic aspiration (12). In particular, society still functions thanks to the trust that one man had in the other, trust that “men never choose evil deliberately.” The allegiance between prince and courtier was not that different from that between the king and the knight. Whether they called themselves knights or courtiers, men of stature in Elizabethan society lived and practiced chivalry like those of the previous centuries.

The Second Tetralogy

We have seen two things so far in our discussion: 1) that chivalry is neither fantasy nor reality, but the result of the interaction between these two realms, a middle ground in which the ideal meets the necessities of the circumstances and 2) that chivalry is very clearly present in Renaissance culture; that despite the change in names, from knight to courtier, Shakespeare's audience would have been able to recognize and react to the values and conduct presented on stage. And so in the Henriad he is able to revive chivalry in the classic form and put it to the test. The question that needs to be answered is: how did Shakespeare use this material? What effect could it have had on his audience?

As we approach the cycle we need to acknowledge that each play, when read individually, is concerned principally with one of the key values of chivalry: *Richard II* with the value of Faith; *1 Henry IV* with Strength, military prowess; *2 Henry IV* with Prudence, and *Henry V* with Justice.

All the values of chivalry are displayed in various degrees in the plays that make up the Second Tetralogy, but the principal concern of the story of usurpation and rebellion is loyalty: solving the problem of obedience / disobedience, of whom should be followed? It is under the dark storm cloud of this question that the Lancastrians rise to the English throne. Most, if not all, the characters in the play are faced with this very serious dilemma and their struggles with the problem of loyalty reveal the anxieties of Shakespeare's culture and the appeal of the plays.

Raphael Falco has already recognized the presence of this question in *Richard II*, and in his article, "Charisma in Conflict: Richard II and Henry Bullingbrook," he

examines the competition that exists between King Richard and Bullingbrook for the love and loyalty of the men of England. Here the competition is determined by the varying forms of charisma, the appeal that each contestant has. Richard, for example, has very clearly defined types of charisma, the charisma that emanates from the “myth of the sacred vials,” the belief that a certain bloodline is magically blessed, and the charisma that comes from the connection with the transcendent through his royal position. On the other hand, Bullingbrook, the winner of the competition, relies on personal charisma: his ability to create or transform himself into a charismatic experience that everyone wants to participate in. The problem with this explanation of Bullingbrook’s sources of power is that they are not clearly defined in the article. Falco seems to suggest that it is intrinsically connected with the exchange of vows and the sense of class consciousness that is characteristically found among knights, but he never clearly states that chivalry is Bolingbroke’s charisma and that in the following three plays, chivalry is the principal determinant in acquiring the support of the aristocracy.

Generally, Henry Bullingbrook, Duke of Hereford, has been characterized as a master of *real politik* and the tetralogy as a satire of chivalric society. The acceptance of political pragmatism as the sole means for success in the dysfunctional medieval system of government has resulted in a disregard of the political value of chivalry. Critics have ignored the introduction of Bullingbrook, in which he calls upon the “rites of knighthood” to prove that the Duke of Norfolk, Thomas Mowbray, has abused his office and is responsible for the murder of the King’s uncle, the Duke of Gloucester. The main point of focus in this scene has traditionally been in the controversy of the charge against

Mowbray, which both the audience and the characters know involves King Richard II.⁴⁵ Considering the fact that this point can explain the hidden motives behind the actions of Richard and even Bullingbrook, the interest in it is understandable, yet if we are to examine chivalry in the text, we also need to see how these actions are articulated. How is the accusation made? Bullingbrook's accusations come "In the devotion of a subject's love, / Tend'ring the precious safety of my [his] prince" (*RII*, I.i.31-32) with the confidence that what he says his "right-drawn sword may prove" (46). As ironic as it may be, we need to acknowledge that the accusation comes in defense of the King and that Bullingbrook makes it as a knight, a "subject" who is willing to prove his truth (loyalty and truth) in trial by combat. He makes no reference to his place in the royal family. In fact when Mowbray refers to Henry's royal lineage, he sets aside his "high blood's royalty" (71), stressing the position that he has decided to take as a loyal subject; a position that the audience would certainly have recognized. If they did not in this scene, they had to in the third scene of the act (I.iii), where the "rites of knighthood" are even more explicitly invoked.

Trial by combat was a public display of the chivalric ethos. We can imagine knights in their shining armor, sitting on their horses, being called to identify themselves, which they do solemnly with all their titles, making their accusations, receiving their weapons, and finally riding hard against each other. Certainly, Richard directs the spectacle, but all eyes are focused on the knights, ignoring Richard who sat on his throne doing nothing. This spectacle is not Richard's show; it is Bullingbrook's. Knowing this, Bullingbrook makes sure that his position as a knight, as the champion of the king, is

⁴⁵ At least Bullingbrook's suspicion of Richard's complicity is evidenced by the discussion between Gaunt and the Duchess of Gloucester in the following scene (*RII*, I.ii)

clear when he asks the “Lord Marshal,” who oversees the ceremony, “let me kiss my sovereign’s hand / And bow my knee before his Majesty” (I.iii.46-47). The two men embrace in front of all there, a gesture that cannot help but be interpreted as a sign of favor to Bullingbrook, similar to those made by ladies for their champion in tournaments. Even after Richard throws in his scepter like a perfumed handkerchief to stop the trial by combat, the attention remains focused on Bullingbrook. Now he provides another spectacle for his audience, the unjust parting of father and son. So Bullingbrook consolidates his position among the English.

In addition to this, the audience and perhaps some of the characters are privileged with further evidence of the young Duke’s chivalric value, since they know that he is also the champion of the widowed Duchess of Gloucester, who after failing to get Gaunt to avenge his brother’s murder puts her hopes on her nephew, exclaiming,

O, [sit] my husband’s wrongs in Hereford’s spear,
That it may enter butcher Mowbray’s breast!
Or if misfortune miss the first career,
Be Mowbray’s sins so heavy in his bosom
That they may break his foaming courser’s back
And throw the rider headlong in the lists,
A caitive recreant to my cousin Hereford!

(I.ii.47-53)

The Duchess’ support of Bullingbrook in the trial creates a connection between the characteristic task of the knights, to “defend women, widows and orphans, men diseased; and those who are neither powerful nor strong” (Lull 35). Here there is no controversy

that might cast doubt on his role as champion of the chivalric ideals, as with the staged, artificial championing of the King. Hence, by the end of Act I, Bullingbrook has established himself as the flower of chivalry in the eyes of England and his audience. But is Bullingbrook's chivalry the reason the other lords follow him?

The first thing that we need to notice in answering this question is that Bullingbrook presents himself here again as the champion of the King, an agent of justice, sworn to defend him against the "caterpillars of the commonwealth" whom he intends to "weed and pluck away" (II.iii.162-167), a promise that definitely must have seemed appealing to the lords of England, who depended on the fair distribution of the king's attention. Secondly, most of the proceedings are performed within the boundaries of chivalry and custom. Even Bullingbrook's return finds reasons within these customs, as he explains to York,

My father's goods are all disdain'd and sold,
And these, and all, are all amiss employed.
What would you have me do? I am a subject,
And I challenge law. Attorneys are denied me,
And therefore personally I lay my claim
To my inheritance of free descent.

(131-136)

A "petition to the monarch" is one of the four ways short of rebellion in which the English nobility expressed their discontent with their monarch's policies (Joseph 193-194), and so it does not constitute a breach in order. Initially, the loyal York, who has personally felt the despair of seeing the lords of England justly come braving arms,

disagrees. He reprimands them because they “Cherish rebellion” (147), but considers joining them not long after (168-171). What is it that makes York change his mind?

According to Bullingbrook, now King Henry IV, his reputation played a major role in facilitating his return to England and his ascension to the throne, for without it, without the good “Opinion” of his peers, he would have remained dispossessed of his inheritance and its benefits, “A fellow of no mark or likelihood” (*1 HIV*, III.ii.42-45). This “good opinion,” the Duke’s reputation is described very briefly to Thomas Mowbray’s son by Westmoreland:

The Earl of Hereford was reputed then
In England the most valiant gentleman.
Who knows on whom fortune would have then smil’d?
But if your father had been victor there,
He ne’er had borne it out of Coventry;
For all the country in general voice
Cried hate upon him; and all their prayers and love
Were set on Hereford, whom they doted on
And bless’d and grac’d and did, more than the king

(*2 HIV*, IV.i.129-148)

Therefore we find a “valiant” young man who is beloved by all to the point that they would follow him in even the unlawful murder of another man, in this case Norfolk. Then the chivalric role that he has assumed and the value of it definitely were crucial in the persuasion of the lords, especially York, in favor of his cause.

Not all of Bullingbrook's actions are indisputably positive and permissible by the dominant ideologies of the time. The hardest to fit with the depiction of the good knight are also of course the most controversial, the deposition and murder of Richard. It would be naïve to argue that on his long journey to Flint Castle he did not develop any intention of assuming control of the kingdom; that the crown, the responsibility to rule, just fell on him.⁴⁶ Whether this ambition had long been nurtured or had suddenly come with his reception on English shores; and whether they included the possession of the crown or not, seems quite irrelevant for our argument, since either way the breach is committed and the shining reputation of our ideal knight has been tarnished. Yet having explained already how men can only strive to fulfill the dream of chivalry with incomplete success, we need not make any excuses for Bullingbrook, who has lived up to the ideal better than any other in the kingdom. What we should notice is Bullingbrook's preoccupation with his actions. Unlike Richard, who sees nothing wrong with ordering the murder of his uncle or with stealing from his cousin's estate, Bullingbrook is mortified till the end of his life by his breach. Bullingbrook, now crowned Henry IV, is anxious to make restitutions for his sins and his penance is archetypically chivalric, the staging of a crusade, "As far as to the sepulcher of Christ...to chase these pagans in those holy fields" (*1 H IV*, I.i.19-24).

If Henry's (Bullingbrook) chivalric reputation is the reason that the lords follow him as we have demonstrated above, his breach of the code and the laws of the land serve then as the justification for them to rebel. Certainly this is the case in the rebellion led by Hotspur. The immediate cause for this rebellion is the exclusion of certain aristocrats from the favor of the king, especially Mortimer, whom the king refuses to ransom from

⁴⁶ Moseley suggests this.

Glendower, but the reasons “Proclaim’d at market crosses, [and] read in churches” (V.i.73) by the rebels were Henry’s breach of the oaths made in Doncaster, one of which guaranteed that his return had no other purpose but the demand of his rightful inheritance (41-71). Morton brings up Henry’s slip from chivalry again when he talks about the persuasiveness that their cause now has with the support of the Archbishop of York:

This word, “rebellion,” it had froze them up
As fish are in a pond. But now the Bishop
Turns insurrection to religion.
Suppos’d sincere and holy in his thoughts,
He’s follow’d both with body and with mind,
And doth enlarge his rising with the blood
Of fair King Richard, scrap’d from Pomfret stones;
Derives from heaven his quarrel and his cause;
Tells them he doth bestride a bleeding land,
Gasping for life under great Bullingbrook;
And more and less do flock to follow him.

(2 *HIV*, I.i.199-209)

Here we find the conscious use of Henry IV’s past disobediences and betrayal to “enlarge” their cause. By invoking and appropriating the past in the form of Richard, this man of the cloth, who is only “Suppos’d” to be “sincere” and “holy,” turns the king into a rebel and the rebels into avenging knights liberating England. This will be enough to make their men fight with all they have. Here both Morton and Northumberland agree that by making Richard into a martyr, a victim of Bullingbrook’s disloyalty, they would

be able to give their men the confidence needed to overcome their enemies. Above anything else, for these men it is conviction that determines war.

Finally, it is the rebels' belief in chivalry that allows a peaceful resolution to their uprising. When the rebels—the Archbishop of York and the lords Mowbray, Bardolph, and Hastings—meet with the leaders of the royal forces they accept their offer from the king, because they are confident of their military strength and the King's weakness. But once they disband their forces, as requested by Lancaster, their only assurance is the trust that they have in the “princely word” of their enemy. In the end it is the promise made by the prince on the honor of his blood and the significance that this has in the chivalric culture, which brings the rebels quietly back into the fold. Unfortunately, this time they are only lambs being led to the slaughterhouse. Whether for good or ill we can see the definitive role that chivalry played in Bullingbrook's career as both knight and king, giving or taking away the willing support of his peers. We will find something similar with the other Lancastrian King in this tetralogy, Henry V.

Our discussion of the second Lancastrian King will further expose chivalry's detachment from reality, the looseness that allowed the deposition and eventual murder of the last Plantagenet King. The character of Henry V (also referred to in the plays as Harry of Monmouth and as Hal, Prince of Wales) demonstrates without a doubt that chivalry is not part of a natural order but a cultural system: a social drama that one may or may not engage in, consciously calling up and even controlling the power that the dream of knighthood has: the power to rally the support of others, which, we will find, had not diminished one bit. In fact, through the use of the discourse of chivalry, Hal is able to secure the loyalty of his subjects and consolidate his position as king.

Like Bullingbrook's break with chivalry, the liberties that Hal takes with his expected role as heir-apparent create problems for the government. Hal is unable to provide the security that the kingdom needs and so in 1 Henry IV all hopes are moved to Hotspur. We learn of this complaint from the King's mouth:

For all the world
As thou art to this hour was Richard then
When I from France set foot at Ravenspurgh;
And even as I was then is Percy now.
Now, by my scepter, and my soul to boot,
He hath more worthy interest to the state
Than thou, the shadow of succession.
For of no right, nor color like to right,
He doth fill fields with harness in the realm,
Turns head against the lion's armed jaws,
And being no more in debt to years than thou,
Leads ancient lords and reverend bishops on
To bloody battle and to bruising arms.
What never-dying honor hath he got
Against renowned Douglas! Whose high deeds,
Whose hot incursions, and great name in arms
Holds from all soldiers chief majority
And military title capital
Through all the kingdoms that acknowledge Christ.

The characterization of Hal as the “shadow of succession” reveals the feeling of insecurity that the subjects of England felt towards the established dynastic order in which Hal, viewed here not only as lacking the substance to sustain his privileges, but also as something that is ominous and uncertain, is next to inherit the throne. This feeling has already been expressed by the King, who in a previous scene laments that all he sees in his son’s brow is “riot and dishonor” (I.i.85) and in Falstaff’s expectations of the Prince of Wales’ reign in an England without gallows where no thief will be hanged (ii.57-62). The problem of the prince’s “unruliness” and the fears that this has created are accentuated by the presence of Hotspur, referred to here as Percy, a subject that has a “worthy interest to the state” and “never-dying honor,” and who has successfully organized men into victorious armies, as he has done now against the King. The true danger that the Lancastrian succession faces comes from Hotspur’s reputation, not from his armies. The King knows very well that he did not need to fight any battle to win the crown from Richard; all he needs is the support of his peers. By framing the rivalry between Hal and Hotspur as part of an ongoing contest of reputation which started with Richard and himself; the king is making it clear that this cannot be won solely through lances and swords; it has to be won through chivalrous conduct on a public stage.

Indeed Harry begins to draw rebellion out of the rebels long before he unsheathes his sword through his chivalric conduct and appearance. When Sir Richard Vernon brings news of the first sight of the royal forces, Hotspur asks about the “the nimble-footed madcap Prince of Wales,” clearly hoping to have a chance to trash his rival with the rebels, but his depiction of the prince sharply contrasts with the one given by Vernon:

saw young Harry with his beaver on,
His cushes on his thighs, gallantly arm'd,
Rise from the ground like feathered Mercury,
And vaulted with such ease in his seat
As if an angel [dropp'd] down from the clouds
To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus
And witch the world with noble horsemanship.

(IV.i.104-110)

Here we see how the Prince presents himself for the first time as a *chevalier*, a fully armored man with equestrian skills, and how this display bewitches those around him, making them believe in chivalry. Vernon, who later witnesses Harry challenge Percy to single combat, is under the spell of the young knight to the degree that he cannot be discreet and keep his praises for the Prince to himself, but goes on to declare,

let me tell the world,
If he outlive the envy of this day,
England did never owe so sweet a hope
So much misconstrued in his wantonness.

(V.ii.65-68)

And with these words he vindicates the Prince as heir apparent and takes away the breath of the rebels who no longer can claim this as one of the faults of the House of Lancaster. At this point Harry has already won the battle of reputation: the rebels will only fight half-heartedly, as we later find out when Morton describes the battle to Northumberland (2 *HIV*, I.i.192-200). There is no need for rebellion, since the Prince has proven himself

to be the embodiment of chivalry and a most honorable heir to the throne. They no longer have to fear the shadow of uncertainty. The following victories, the rescue of the King from Douglas and the defeat of Hotspur, which set him up as the knight champion of England, are only minor details. Hal's conduct has already defeated the heat of rebellion that proud Hotspur and the deceitful Worcester have started in their hearts. It is only a matter of time before all the subjects submit to the King, King Henry V.

At the time that Harry becomes King Henry V and publicly cuts off all the bad influences and plucks out all examples of misbehavior from his life and the public eye, the discourse of chivalry again grows roots in English society, assuming the colors and textures of nature so that men accept it as the norm without question. The description of the realm of England that the [Arch]Bishop of Canterbury offers at the beginning of Henry V, does not in any way demonstrate that chivalry has changed from a cultural to a natural system, from a man-made social artifice to the divine order set by God. Nor does this description suggest that men inescapably have to participate in it. The King still, if only more discreetly, meets and converses with his common soldiers and is able to have a laugh at the expense of Fluellen and Williams. What we should take from this depiction is simply that it is easy to forget the flaws and slips of men when they are not constantly present, or perhaps that Henry now directs everyone in the same social drama. Whichever is the case, the reign of Henry V was seen as a reign of chivalry.

With the cooperation of the church Henry V is able to do something that neither of his two predecessors had been able to do: lead his military forces to foreign lands to fight foreign enemies. The [Arch]Bishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely provided the King with the funds and just cause to lead an expedition against the king of France.

Canterbury argues extensively in front of the court against the French misuse of the Salic Law to bar his rightful claim, and based on the Book of Numbers he incites the King to stand for what is his (*HV*, I.ii.33-95, 97-114). And the lords present follow on the clergyman's example, telling him that the monarchs expect him to rouse himself like "the former lions of your blood," since they know that he has "cause, and means, and might" (122-125). For the first time in the tetralogy, the English set out for battle fully secure that their cause is just.

The English fought and won their first battle in France under this security, but the confidence that this might brought them did not last long so that when, sick, tired and depleted, they come upon the fresh French army on their way to Calais, some let the danger get the better of them. Bates, for example, supposes that the King wishes himself in England rather than there and as he himself does (*IV.i.113-117*), and Westmoreland wishes that he had with him "one ten thousand of those men in England / That do no work to-day" on St. Crispian Day (*iii.16-17*). But Henry "would not lose so great an honor / As one man more, methinks, would share from me, / For the best hope I have. O, do not wish one more!" (*31-33*). Here we find an argument that had already been used unsuccessfully by Hotspur when his father sends word that he cannot join them (*I HIV*, *IV.i.75-83*), that their reputation shall increase according to the difficulty and risk of their task. This was the underlying logic behind the scale of chivalric feats to which we referred above, in which the distinction in a tourney was not the same as the distinctions acquired in the field of battle (de Charny 85-95), yet, how much could the ordinary soldier, the common man, who would never participate in a tourney, care about these

distinctions? For them Henry had the promise of good company in the memory of man,
the inspiration of the most memorable speech in the tetralogy:

He that shall see this day, and live old age,
Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbors
And say “To-morrow is Saint Crispian.”
Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars.
[And say, “These wounds I had on Crispian’s day.]
Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot,
But he’ll remember with advantages
What feats he did that day. Then shall our names,
Familiar in his mouth as household words,
Harry the King, Bedford and Exeter,
Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester,
Be in their flowing cups freshly rememb’red.
This story shall the good man teach his son,
And Crispin Crispian shall ne’er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remembered—
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne’er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition

(*HV*, IV.iii.44-63)

What is more important for our argument is that the speech, with its reference to brotherhood and its promise to “gentle” or ennoble them, seems like a massive knighting. It was common to dub men knights before a battle in order to encourage them to fight (Joseph 38). And so graced with the spirit of chivalry the English meet the French and win against the odds.

One incident at Agincourt that deserves mention is the dishonorable murder of the French prisoners. In our previous discussion of Henry IV and Hal we had argued that chivalry was a sword with two sharp edges: in the same way that it could secure the loyalty of others, it could, whenever dishonorable behavior put the system in question, discourage sincere allegiance. Yet we find that Henry V escapes this rule. Even though Henry gives the order to kill the prisoners as a rash reaction to the French’s reinforcing their scattered men (*HV*, IV.vi.35-38), his subjects believe this order comes as retaliation for the French slaughter of the boys who bear the luggage:

’Tis certain there’s not a boy left alive, and the cowardly rascals that ran from the battle ha’ done this slaughter. Beside, they have burn’d and carried away all that was in the King’s tent; wherefore the King, most worthily, hath caus’d every soldier to cut his prisoner’s throat. O, ’tis a gallant King!

(IV.vii.5-10)

Among the praises that the King receives for the “slaughter,” the abusive use of violence against his prisoners, we find contradicting images of the battle: the first presents the French soldiers running to the field and the second the French soldiers running from the fields. These images create a picture of the confusion of war in which nobody knows

who is coming or going. Believing in the chivalry of their King, the English soldiers who have to make sense of all of this confusion, do so in such a manner that they connect the right events together to maintain the dream that makes it possible to engage in senseless violence. Henry V has acquired enough “chivalric capital”—his reputation is such—that when his subjects cannot determine the worthiness of his actions, as we have seen above, they will give him the benefit of the doubt. In this manner, with the unswerving support of his subjects, Henry won France. Unfortunately, he could not leave this chivalric capital to his infant son, who, as the Chorus tells us, “lost France and made his England bleed” (Epilogue 22).

Nevertheless, the Henriad validates the political value of chivalry and presents it as the true, constant source of power of the monarch. As we have seen Bullingbrook / Henry IV and Hal / Henry V succeed in the diverse roles that they take on during the plays, courtier, prince and heir apparent, or monarch, according to the degree to which they can project themselves as the epitome of chivalry. Thanks to the production of socio-political treatises like The Book of the Order of Chivalry and Knighthood and The Book of the Courtier, which provided a prescription of the values and practices of the ideal subject, Shakespeare’s audience would have been able to recognize the role that chivalry played in the story of each of these characters. And for them the success of the first Lancastrian kings answered a very relevant question: *whom should we follow?* At the time during which Shakespeare lived and these plays were staged, the security of Elizabeth’s position as monarch seemed to be under siege from all sides and it would be understandably difficult for her subjects to discern whom they should follow. Shakespeare gave a straight answer that avoided the discussion of dynastic and religious

disputes; drawing instead on the traditional culture that all Englishmen shared: they should follow the one who maintains the chivalric system, which Elizabeth I supported throughout most of her reign. According to the texts discussed in this essay, one of the principal functions of the knight was to protect women. In Renaissance texts in particular, women require more than the protection of their knights. There they assume a position of authority, leading and instructing the knight in chivalric values. For example, in the First Book of the Faerie Queene, the Red Cross Knight has sworn his fealty to the Faerie Queene and to Lady Una. Lady Una, as we discussed above, is the one who leads the Red Cross Knight to the House of Holiness, so that he can prepare for the battle against the dragon. We find the same situation in The Book of the Courtier. Here it is the Duchess of Urbino and Emilia who lead the men of the court in a discussion of the characteristics of the perfect courtier. In this book Emilia, the person in charge of the discussion, not only reprimands Gaspare for his misogynistic comments, but at a certain point names a champion who will defend the honor of women, Magnifico Guiliano (Castiglione 200). In sixteenth-century England, Elizabeth exploited the position that women had by adopting the symbols of the Virgin Queen. The symbology of the Virgin Queen highlighted the knights' obligation to defend her honor. And thus the cycle served to reaffirm and support the established cultural system and government of the time. The plays reassured their audience that this system worked and that they were safe within it.

Chapter Three

“With some suspicion”

Machiavellianism and the Lancastrian Kings

It is easy to understand the appeal that chivalry had for Renaissance society. During the years of the Reformation, the propagation of divergent religious ideas and practices had fractured the monolithic voice of the Roman Church, thus undermining the power with which it had reassured Catholics that what was bound on earth would be bound in heaven. This is not to say that there were no committed Catholics and Protestants who believed their religion would provide them with guidance to lead a good life and be saved. There were enough martyrs from both sides to prove religion was a powerful force in society, but was it still a positive force, an agent of order? It seems as if religion had become a new source of strife, a new reason for the Princes of Christendom to fight with each other. Now, at a time when the Pope promoted rebellion against protestant Princes and there was tension and civil war across Europe, the only thing that Christians seemed to agree on was how to fight. The one thing that was consistent among Catholics and Protestants was the code of conduct that originated in the martial class.⁴⁷

By the fifteenth century the culture of chivalry had become the single unifying force across Europe, promising everyone that if this code of conduct was followed they could live in a world of considerable stability, where the powerful were bound by honor and motivated by a desire for loyalty and justice. Shakespeare’s audience would certainly have noticed the depiction of this collective dream in the tetralogy. They must

⁴⁷ See second chapter.

have watched, waiting restlessly for Bullingbrook to charge and face the treacherous Moubray in trial by combat before the King, gasped when Douglas physically threatened the elusive Henry IV and sighed when young Prince Hal dashed in to defend him, and their patriotism would have been stirred by Henry V's St. Crispian Day speech. Indeed, here it seems easy to agree with Tillyard, whom we have criticized above, in that the play presented a medieval world-view. We cannot ignore the fact that other ideas, ideas that had been concealed till then because they conflicted with the Christian world view, had the chance to surface. The most notorious of these ideas were the ones advocated by the Florentine politician, Nicolo Machiavelli. The presence of the Machiavellian doctrine and its potential influence on Shakespeare's play is easily accepted by many critics today, who are quick to advance rather simplistic interpretations of the second tetralogy.

G. Noon's article "Richard Versus Bolingbroke: Heaven Versus Machiavelli?" is a good example of this. According to Noon's argument, the medieval view that the universe was properly ordered according to a "Great Chain of Being" in which the King stood as God's deputy had been disproven during the reign of Elizabeth's father. Henry VIII had "dislodge[d] the Holy Father from his spiritual position and install[ed] *himself* as Head of the Church in England...[a transgression that]... marked a 'profound act of treason' against the Divine Order" and which *should* have had "direct consequences" for his realm. Yet it did not have such dire consequences. Henry lived to a ripe, old age and ruled till he died. Nobody deposed him. Later, the Pope tried to excommunicate "heretic sovereigns" and encourage rebellion among their subjects with little success, revealing that the strict medieval system was no longer accepted without question (44-45). Shakespeare's depictions of Richard and Bullingbrook in Richard II do exactly that:

question the system. By acknowledging a more Machiavellian view of human affairs, Noon goes on to argue, the text challenges the established medieval system (51-52). While there was enough historical distance for the Elizabethan audience to notice this wrinkle in the great divine plan expounded by the Church, it is very doubtful that Elizabeth's loyal subjects accepted the possibility that they were under the rule of a dynasty that had abandoned the grace of God. Some may have feared it, but to believe the whole of England, or even a majority, despaired of God's grace, is to project, as Greenblatt did in "Invisible Bullets," a secular mentality similar to the one that exists today in most of the democracies of the western world. The problem here is that this type of mentality is rare even in our time, when the State and the Church are supposed to be separate entities. If Shakespeare's audience had not taken a peek behind the curtains, if they still believed in Christian Cosmology, how can we claim that they would have understood the play in the way that Noon describes?

Jack D'Amico offers another argument for this same interpretation. In his article, "Moral and Political Conscience: Machiavelli and Shakespeare's Macbeth and Henry V," he explores the "paradox of the political conscience," which would allow the Princes to transcend morality in order to create laws, since "The extraordinary and usually violent deeds they commit inspire fear but also create that awareness of good and evil" (32). Yet this does not give the sovereigns license to commit random acts of cruelty. While there is a need for brutal, immoral acts, the damage that these actions create must be balanced by the stability of the new order that the sovereign established (35). Quite simply, the end *must* justify the means. Henry V demonstrates this "political conscience" in the last play of the tetralogy, when, following "law of Machiavellian statecraft," he sets out with an

army to invade France, putting his subjects in harm's way, in order to keep his crown. However, he does not live long enough to secure his new imperial order: he "has not completely mastered fortune" (39). And so Henry V presents a Machiavellian world where everything is subject to ruthless fortune. Here there is no real room for the Christian world view, which, in fact, is barely mentioned in the article. Ultimately, D'Amico, like Noon, believes Shakespeare's audience susceptible to Machiavelli's charms and to the plays that valorize *real politik*.

Other critics view the plays of the Second Tetralogy less as a challenge and more as an exploration of the paradox, the contradiction and the reconciliation between the Christian and the Machiavellian systems. One of the critics who advances a more complex interpretation of the plays, which does not require an exclusively secular mentality, is Sukanta Chaudhuri. According to Chaudhuri's article, "The New Machiavelli: Shakespeare in the Henriad":

The New Monarchs derived their authority not from hereditary claim—so much as from *virtu*, the driving force of assertive personal rule...their sense of the innovative and contingent nature of their rule...[— their capacity to]...work out new strategies of survival and domination, heavenly oriented to their own personalities, the personalities of their rule, and the realities of the political life and conduct. (123)

In other words, kings were kings because they were able to adapt and evolve in order to survive in whichever circumstances they might find themselves. In the Renaissance the circumstances required the sovereign to be more in touch with reality than with an ideal (142). A king had to be a "king" and a "man" since his success depended on the

connection he had with those that he ruled (142-146). It is this paradox between the heavenly and the worldly prince that Shakespeare balances in the Henriad.

In “Shakespeare’s King and Machiavelli’s Prince” (1964), Leslie Freeman provides a very similar argument. Here she demonstrates how Shakespeare explores political expediency in the second tetralogy, validating the political sagacity of Henry IV and Henry V. Henry IV is forced by the circumstances surrounding his ascent to power “to rely exclusively on Machiavellian tactics,” but these are not the same circumstances under which Henry V receives the crown (26-27). The latter Henry had inherited the crown and so had the “religious sanctions” that his father lacked (27): he did not have to break any vows (40), and consequently he does not have the same need to put into practice the teachings of Machiavelli. Yet, noticing their effectiveness, he never shuns them. It is in the figure of Henry V, Shakespeare’s ideal king, that “what at first appear to be totally antithetical conceptions are reconciled,” the divine and the political, the heavenly and the worldly conceptions of kingship (42).

Indeed, “pro-Machiavellian” criticism is composed of two general strands. The first, followed by critics like Noon and D’Amico, is based on the confident assumption that Machiavellian dogma saturated the Renaissance and the plays stood as a challenge to the drowning Christian world-view. The second strand, exemplified here by Chaudhuri and Freeman, give some credit to the resilience of Christian beliefs and approaches Machiavellianism as part of a paradox. Within each outlook, the arguments really do not seem too divergent. Both strands of criticism deal with the plays as if they were political tracts, forgetting that they *are* plays, and their interpretations leave the reader wondering how the audience would respond to the play they describe in their article. How would

Shakespeare's audience respond to a cycle of plays that celebrate their ruthless oppression? If these plays celebrated the sovereign's domination of their people through trickery and violence, could they be as popular as they were? Without dismissing the fact that art often reflects and comments on the social reality in which it is created, this chapter concentrates on the use of Machiavellian principles to create a sense of unease in the audience. This effect, rather than the political and religious dogmas enlisted to produce it, explains the tetralogy's popularity.

A Brief Discussion of Machiavellian Thought in the Renaissance

Like the critics discussed above we must enter the fictional world of the play through the historical world of Shakespeare, and this requires that we expand our discussion of Machiavelli's influence on Renaissance society and on Shakespeare's work. Did Shakespeare know Machiavelli's works? Could he have included these doctrines in his plays about late medieval English kings? To what degree?

Even though the dam that had contained the religious and political ideas that conflicted with the Roman Catholic Church had cracked, there still were a number of other obstacles—agents, conditions and circumstances—that could have kept the politician from the playwright. Following the outline of the reception and development of Machiavellianism that Robert M. Adams provides in the Norton Critical Edition of The Prince, we find that from very early on Machiavelli and those who seemed to propagate and follow his ideas were literarily demonized. Writing in 1539, seven years after the first publication in Italy of The Prince (1532), Cardinal Reginald Pole accused Thomas Cromwell of serving Satan by recommending a copy of the book (that had yet to

be published) to Henry VIII, who, as we said above, eventually broke off with Rome. This demonization of Machiavelli was further confirmed by the circulation of a popular etymology connecting “Old Nick” to Niccolò Machiavelli. In time the two sinister figures became interchangeable: Machiavelli was “regularly described as devilish” and the devil was “described as Machiavellian,” and ultimately, this connection resulted in the criticism and censure of his work by both Catholics and Protestants.

In 1559, nine years after the publication of a collection of Machiavelli’s works, the Catholic Church placed the Florentine author on the Index of Prohibited Books, which had been expanded to include documents that violated morality and manners in general. The reasons for this are more than obvious: as we have seen above, Machiavellian doctrine ignores, even rejects, the influence of God on the political sphere of human action and unabashedly promoted amoral conduct. The Protestant rejection of Machiavelli followed the treacherous Massacre of St. Bartholomew, the campaign of murders conducted by the Catholic leaders of France, which was seen as the result of the machinations of the Queen Dowager, Catherine de Medici, an Italian, a papist, and above all a reader of Machiavelli (237-238). And in this manner the shadow of Machiavelli was cast all across Europe. Very soon the men of the Renaissance came to see Machiavelli as the Machiavel, the snake in the garden, hiding, hissing, whispering, teasing and tempting others to commit horrible crimes. This sinister characterization heralded the actual works of the Florentine politician, so that in places like England, where The Prince was not published in English until 1640 (Adams 237), the population in general had already heard of his work.

However, these negative references should not lead us to believe that these ideas were completely excluded from society, in that they did not circulate under another guise which allowed them to be taken seriously. In 1585, Alberico Gentili, an Italian jurist who ended his career in England, explicitly referred to Machiavelli in a positive light, explaining that the misunderstood politician had deliberately and satirically exposed the powers of the prince with the objective of warning against its excess. Four years later Giovanni Botero wrote a book entitled Ragion di stato, “Reason of State,” which presented a watered down version of Machiavelli’s doctrine on the prince’s special authority. The new term was immensely popular. Its use hinted at the reality that lawyers could not avoid the ideas of Machiavelli, having to acknowledge the fact that in order for the state to survive, the prince had to make use of extraordinary means (Adams 239).

Felix Raab’s study of the reception of Machiavelli in England reveals a far more diverse attitude towards the Italian politician than the popularity of the Machiavel would seem to suggest. The English, Raab admits, were indeed appalled and indifferent, but they were also intrigued and fascinated. On the Tudor political scene there were men like Richard Morrison, ambassador to the court of Charles V, and William Thomas, the Privy Council Register, who accepted Machiavelli’s secular view of politics. Yet this did not mean that they abandoned the traditional understanding of the universe. They adopted a “dualist view” in which the practice—politics—was kept separate from the theological justification. Through this they were able to take on the “practical details of analysis,” his realist approach to problem solving, without having to deal with his more controversial principles (48-51). This compromise opened the door for the serious

consideration of the Machiavellian doctrine, which quickly spread down to the rest of the population.

By the middle of the 1580s the English were reading Machiavelli (53) and, as Raab points out, “In doing so, they automatically widen the spectrum of choices which lay before them in everyday affair...The very fact that a purely secular rationalization of politics was before them broadened (or narrowed, but in any case altered) the perspective within which they saw themselves acting” (54-55). This is not to say that Machiavelli had trumped the Christian world view, that the Elizabethans had finally accepted his doctrine or had seen it as a real alternative, as most critics believe. At best, it seems, the few people who recognized the value of it did so only grudgingly, wishing for the best, but ready for the worst (55).

Overall, at the end of the sixteenth century, the most common reaction to the Machiavellian doctrine continued to be horror (56), but the type of horror that you feel compelled to look at, the horror that we can not look away from. Indeed, while most Englishmen might have found the views of Machiavelli “abhorrent,” as Tillyard argues, they did not ignore them. They were well aware of the Machiavellian doctrine. The controversy surrounding the ideas of the Florentine raged most fiercely when “the wider implications of his doctrine came to be more clearly understood” (67). What did this mean for the arts? Did the idea of a secular political world infiltrate the theater?

In H. S. Bennett’s introduction to The Jew of Malta and the Massacre at Paris, he points out that Machiavelli was indeed an “omnipresent and important” part of Elizabethan theater and identifies Thomas Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy and Christopher Marlowe’s The Jew of Malta as his point of entrance (12). Marlowe had been directly

exposed to the teachings of Machiavelli at Cambridge. It was the contact he had with the ideas of the Italian writer, Bennett argues, that permitted him to create his most famous characters (Tamburlaine, Faustus, and Barabas, the Jew of Malta) (13).

Marlowe's heroes clearly bore the mark of Machiavelli, but the audience and other artists saw the influence of Machiavelli most clearly in the distorted depiction of the man himself in the Prologue to The Jew of Malta. Here, the Machiavel,⁴⁸ the caricature of Machiavelli, confesses his connection to the French butchery, gloating:

Albeit the world think Machiavel is dead,
Yet was his soul but flown beyond the Alps,
And, now the Guise is dead, is come from France
To view this land and frolic with his friends.

(1-4)

The Machiavellian knave was the template for numerous dramatic characters. This devil-like figure that absorbed Machiavelli and his doctrine became the most potent representation of evil in the culture, and it is no surprise that the greatest writers of the time alluded to it. However, they did not have to stop with this caricature. Raab compares the works of Machiavelli during the last decade of the sixteenth century to a "like snake: for every one you see there are a hundred others hidden in the undergrowth" (Raab 52), and consequently Machiavelli's ideas and their implications with a greater degree of gravity. As a result of this, many Elizabethan writers expanded their use of

⁴⁸ Innocent Gentillet, a French Protestant, has traditionally been accredited with the creation of the Machiavel. However, Felix Raab argues that "the stage villain was nothing more than a continuation of a tradition which was well established before Gentillet wrote" (57). Whichever might be the case, we know that the character by Marlowe in The Jew of Malta must have been the most familiar to Shakespeare, since the play, which was first staged around 1589 (at least a year before any of Shakespeare's plays), definitely influenced The Merchant of Venice.

Machiavellian doctrine in their work and treated it more seriously. One of these artists was Sir Philip Sidney.

In “The aunt’s atheism refuted by the niece’s divinity,” Sidney describes the character of Cecropia, an old woman who comes to try to persuade her niece, Pamela, to marry her son, as a Machiavel, a wicked, underhanded creature, ready to fearlessly make use of her wit to gain what she wants. Here Sidney goes beyond tainting the characters of Cecropia with the colors of Machiavelli; he includes, through her argument, the ideas and the logic of the infamous Italian politician. In her attempt to secure the marriage, Cecropia not only argues that she should take full advantage of her beauty then, while she is young, but, most shockingly, she argues that Pamela should enjoy it regardless of her father’s wishes, for the divine order that gave him authority over her did not exist. So their discussion of beauty quickly turns into a debate on the existence of God and the divine order of the universe. And in both parts of the conversation the aunt shows no hesitation in alluding to Machiavellian principles. In fact, the essence of Cecropia’s argument is Machiavellian. According to her, the existing social order was the result of fear, “foolish fear—and fearful ignorance,” which made men turn their attention from the natural to the supernatural, forgetting that miracles are merely accidents. As an alternative to this superstition she proposes that her niece let wisdom be her god, for “to think that those powers (if there be any such) above are moved either by the eloquence of our prayers or in a chafe by the folly of our actions carries as much reason as if flies should think that men take great care which of them hum sweetest, and which of them flies nimblest” (269-267).

But, as the title of the dialogue avows, Cecropia does not have the last word. Outraged, Pamela responds with a convoluted argument that negates her aunt's blasphemy. Furthermore, Sidney, like Pamela, rejects the Machiavellian logic, by discrediting Cecropia through her association with the evil Machiavel. In this rejection we need to see two things: first, that a man of the stature of Sidney was familiar enough with the workings of Machiavelli to include his arguments, and, second, that he found them threatening enough to write a response as direct as this one. Here we can see how the degree to which the ideas of Machiavelli were included and treated seriously varied, going from the caricature of the Machiavel to Sidney's more serious response to his arguments.

This movement is very clearly evidenced in the works of Shakespeare, who refers to Marlowe's invention, when the Duke of Gloucester (Richard III) complains that he "can set the murderous Machiavel to school," but he cannot get a crown (3 Henry VI, III.ii.193). The "murderous Machiavel" he speaks of is the same Machiavel who in Marlowe's play has consorted with Guise, one of the leaders of the Catholic faction in France, the one responsible for the slaughter of thousands of Protestants. There can be no doubt that Shakespeare knew Machiavelli, even if only through this dramatic distortion. In fact, many of the critics who have excluded a serious consideration of Machiavelli from their analysis of Shakespeare's work would say that this dramatic distortion was all the playwright knew, or all he would acknowledge. Either Shakespeare did not have access to the subversive political ideas of his day or he, like any other horrified Elizabethan, associated them with villainy (as clearly seen in Henry VI, Richard III, Othello) and excluded any other consideration of them from his works.

There is no real reason for us to believe Shakespeare could not get his hands on The Prince. There is no reason for us to believe he would chose to avoid the circulating copies, or that even after he acquired one of these copies, he would completely reject the arguments found there. Shakespeare was writing about princes. This meant he had to have an interest in any document dealing with the conduct of royalty, and a special interest in contemporary political controversies. Shakespeare could have read Machiavelli in various languages: Latin, French or Italian (Wineke 17-19), as well as in English from an unauthorized version of The Prince published by John Wolfe in 1584 (Clegg 183).

In Shakespearean Negotiation Stephen Greenblatt addresses the subject of the artistic freedom of the Renaissance. Shakespeare's works, Greenblatt explains, appear to be the result of the confrontation between an all-embracing social structure and an independent artist: a society in which everything is connected, ordered and controlled by an elite and an individual that is truly free at the moment of creation (2). Yet, these two categories are misleading. There is no "total artist," because "the theater is manifestly the product of collective intentions" (4). Even at the moment when the writer sits down to put the words on paper, when he seems to be completely by himself; he does so in the company of other writers, past and present. This is clearly the case with Shakespeare, who regularly made use of outside sources and traditional stories in his plays. The theater depended on "a felt community," which would ultimately guide the artist's pen at the moment of writing and would affect the performance (5). And there is no "totalizing society," because all the Renaissance writers, even those who desired to speak from a monolithic, seemingly homogeneous point of view—the point of view of the elite—

produced texts that were “sites of institutional and ideological contestation,” where “conflicting and ill-sorted motives” were evident (2-3).

The institutional, ideological, literary, and linguistic (not to mention financial) restraints that Renaissance society placed on the theater created boundaries within which the playwright worked. But within these boundaries there was still enough space to play, and Shakespeare played. While he could not have Prince Hal lose the battle of Agincourt, he could have him try on the crown at his father’s deathbed during their last meeting. In fact, the plays of the Second Tetralogy are filled with private moments which are not recorded anywhere in history, and which were developed from a variety of popular legends that flourished during the sixteenth century.

Shakespeare had a surprising number of choices in his work. One of these choices is evidenced in King Lear, where he has Cordelia die in King Lear’s arms, distinguishing his version from all other retellings of the Lear story. Even though these choices might have not been “purely subjective or individual or disinterested, they were choices” (16-17). It is safe to say, then, that Shakespeare was not a mechanical part of the Tudor propaganda machine: he handled material with a degree of freedom. But the question remains: did Shakespeare have the disposition seriously to explore the ideas of Machiavelli on stage?

Critics cannot answer this question with complete certainty. Following Greenblatt’s example, Donald Wineke accepts the complexities of the situation and approaches Shakespeare as a real, complex human being. He opens the possibility that the dramatist’s personal ethic and his understanding of political reality, his view of how things should happen and how things actually happen, were not the same (19).

Therefore, his work does not have to be viewed as a direct representation of his personal beliefs. This distinction, the “depersonalization” of the artistic text, is particularly true for theater where the power of the play depended on its immediate reception by the collective audience—“a felt community”—and where the staging of the next production depended on the financial success of the previous one. For instance, Shakespeare could have been a loyal subject and still mock the institution of monarchy, as he does with Falstaff. If this is the norm, then, the playwright’s use of different political views, in particular Machiavellianism, could have changed through time, depending on a wide variety of factors surrounding him and his audience. In fact, Wineke notes, an examination of the history plays will reveal that the “portrayal of the Machiavellian character-type changed markedly during the 1590s, as he moved from the caricature of Machiavellism in Richard III to the more realistic characterization of Bullingbrook in the second tetralogy” (20). This change, Wineke seems to suggest, is due to the political maturation of the playwright (17-19). There is no reason for us to doubt this maturation, since it is parallel to the maturation of the rest of the English population, as we discussed above.

Even though there is no external proof that Shakespeare read and treated Machiavelli seriously, the Florentine’s doctrines are widely represented in the plays themselves with an increasing degree of seriousness. After all, there were others who were more closely connected to the socio-political system of the time who made use of these ideas. Sir Philip Sidney, as we discussed above, refuted Machiavelli in a fictional debate. This was not Marlowe, who was accused of atheism: it was Sir Philip Sidney, who had died valiantly while in the service of the Queen. And if Sidney had dealt with

Machiavellianism seriously, why not Shakespeare? No longer can critics claim that the Machiavellian doctrine was abhorrent to Elizabeth's loyal subjects; that it was not part of their "thought-idiom." Based on the evidence, it seems that the most likely possibility is that Shakespeare knew the ideas found in The Prince directly and would have engaged them in his plays.

Machiavellism, Machiavellianism, or Machiavellian Doctrine

At the beginning of his study Felix Raab warns his reader that there is a lot of confusion in Machiavellian studies today. Scholars have come to use the term "Machiavellism" loosely, referring to a wide variety of subjects: the effect that Machiavelli's thought had on the political environment of any society, the influence that his writing has on men of power, or the opportunistic conduct of men in general, independent of whether they have heard of or read the works where his thoughts are expressed (5-6). In order to facilitate the discussion of the plays, we need to establish exactly what we mean when we talk about Machiavellism, Machiavellianism, or Machiavellian doctrine.

Until this point we have made it clear that when we talk about Machiavellianism we are talking about a lot more than a political theory. It is clear we are not just talking about opportunism. Like many other literary critics, we use this term to refer to a secular, pragmatic view of society that contradicts the Christian view of a divinely organized, perfect universe. More precisely, our project is concerned with the presence of the Machiavellian world-view within the chivalric society of Renaissance Europe. This

means that our discussion will pay more attention to the aspects of the Machiavellian doctrine which clash with the chivalric system.

In “The Originality of Machiavelli” (1953), Isaiah Berlin’s influential essay on the power of Machiavellian thought, we find a modern interpretation of the innovative doctrine, a perspective that has allowed the critics to accept this as one of the pillars of the modern world. For centuries the major problem that scholars and politicians have had with Machiavelli arose principally from the misinterpretation of his teachings as being essentially amoral. This is certainly the case during the Renaissance, as we can see in the characteristics and the actions of the Machiavel. During the time in which this perception of Machiavelli persisted, there seems to be no open acceptance of the influence of his work in politics. This is perfectly understandable, since no one will really admit to following an amoral, or, worse, immoral, leader. Even today, when the Church and the State exist as separate institutions in most democratic societies of the west, strong moral values are expected of those that are in charge of the government. The truth is that Machiavelli is neither amoral nor immoral; he just chose a different type of morality, based on a pagan—a pre-Christian Roman code of ethics (Berlin 54).

Berlin points out that the objective of the Christian ethic (which includes humility, kindness, sacrifice, mercy, forgiveness, holiness, etc.) was to keep men on the path of spiritual salvation. Its preoccupation was with the afterlife, and those who chose to remain bound by these rules of conduct were rejecting the world. Machiavelli knew that the “Christian virtues” were incompatible with successful political action: it was impossible to combine, “for example meekness or the search for spiritual salvation, with a satisfactory, stable vigorous, strong society on earth,” like those of Athens and Rome

(45-47). For this reason he chose to base his teaching on the pre-Christian ethical system that had permitted the foundation of these civilizations, a system whose ultimate objective was earthly, the foundation and preservation of the state. The values of this system: “courage, vigour, fortitude in adversity, public achievement, order, discipline, happiness, strength, justice, above all assertion of one’s own proper claims and the knowledge and power needed to secure their satisfaction” (45), are the values that contemporary societies, at least republics like the United States, cherish and promote in their citizens. For us, this is simply civic duty, the reason why thousands need to travel across the world to die in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq—the need to protect the state (civilization). But for the Christian Renaissance, the promotion of pagan values, or even the belief that there existed a choice between Christianity and paganism, that the latter was an alternative as a good way of life, was not acceptable. As Berlin explains:

The great originality and tragic implication of Machiavelli’s theses seems to me to reside in their relation to a Christian civilization. It was all very well to live by the light of pagan ideals in pagan times; but to preach paganism more than a thousand years after the triumph of Christianity was to do so after the loss of innocence – and to be forcing men to make a conscious choice. The choice is painful because it is a choice between two entire worlds. Men have lived in both, and fought and died to preserve them against each other. (63)

Furthermore, the very existence of this choice implies the simultaneous coexistence of two ways of life, and “undermines one major assumption of western thought,” that there is somewhere a definitive answer to the “question of how men should live” (76). It is

from this choice and its implication that the power and terror of Machiavellianism, the uneasiness that Berlin identified, emanates.

Berlin is right: Machiavelli was not advocating the egotistical pursuit of power or the random use of violence; he was arguing in favor of a system of values that had as its ultimate purpose the creation of a stable, secure state. The problem with this interpretation is that the power of Machiavellianism cannot simply be explained through its connection with paganism, since Christianity had already accepted and absorbed a pagan system of values, chivalry. As we discussed in the previous chapter, chivalry was rooted in the needs of the Germanic warrior bands. The ethic of the Germanic warriors brought to Christian society, to its ruling class, an exaltation of many of the same virtues that Machiavelli favors: discipline, strength, courage, and justice. And the exercise of political and special military labor was seen as a means of acquiring salvation for the soul. Consequentially, Berlin's simplification of the Christian system within which Machiavelli wrote conceals the true source of the power, the dread, of his doctrine. Even if the reformation had made the Church more sensitive to the paganism present in Machiavelli's idea, there is a simpler, more terrifying aspect of his teachings, which threatened the men of the Renaissance and makes men today immediately suspicious when someone is called a Machiavellian. The source of this terror can be found packaged in his most infamous work, The Prince.

The Prince was written in 1513, at a time in which a divided Italy faced political and military pressure from foreign nations. In the face of such adversities, Florence, the principal city of Tuscany, had come to depend on the support of the French and the use of mercenaries to defend themselves against the Spanish and neighboring city states.

Niccolò Machiavelli, the author of The Prince and a politician in the service of Florence, had protested the blind devotion to the French, which persisted even when the French troops were leaving. Machiavelli was right and, unfortunately, it would not be long before everyone could see this, and they found themselves abandoned and betrayed. After the departure of the French, the Florentines were defeated by the Spanish, and the Medici returned. Shortly after this Machiavelli was allowed to retire to the country where he wrote the political treatise that would scandalize western society and shape the politics of generations to come (xii-xiii).

Even though The Prince has become a pillar of modern society, it is very clear that the book was written for the people of Renaissance Italy. Among other things, Machiavelli wrote about the failures of Florence, the problems he had to deal with during the end of his time as part of the republican government. He did not intend to change the political mentality of Europe. His aim was never to shock and terrify his reader. From his dedication and his conclusion it seems as if he was trying to rally his readership, hoping to gain two things: the foundation of a stable, independent state that could expel the “barbarians” and, perhaps more immediately, a position in the court of the Duke of Urbino. Unfortunately, the state of things in Italy was so dire that achieving these goals, especially the first, required radical, revolutionary, means.

Most critics have defined the Machiavellian prince by the use of “trickery” and have failed to acknowledge the fact that for Machiavelli the prince was still, above all else, a warrior (40), and his strength was determined by his ability to assemble an adequate army and fortify his city (30). On this topic the Florentine does not really offer anything new. He warns the prince of mercenaries and auxiliaries and advises him to

raise his own army by arming his subjects. Giving them weapons, Machiavelli, argues, “their arms become yours; those who were suspect become your faithful supporters, and those who were faithful before continue so, and from merely being your subjects become your partisans” (57). And when the prince conquers a new kingdom, he should arm the citizens that assisted him in that enterprise, even if only temporarily, since they too “must be rendered soft and compliant” (58). Hence, the relation between the sovereign and his soldiers remained the same, down to the underexplained, pseudo-magical exchange of arms for allegiance, and the exchange of service for rewards. In fact, Machiavelli seems to be arguing for text-book feudalism, explaining that “Those you select for your special favor will think themselves obliged to you, and the others will forgive you, judging that men deserve special rewards when they assume special risks and obligations” (57).

Even though Machiavelli admittedly had lost faith in the “old methods of warfare,” the methods that were at the center of chivalric society, he had not completely lost his faith in the adjacent social order. The reason the system had failed to work in Italy was the stubborn arrogance of the Italians. According to him, there was no need from military prowess in Italy:

Only look at the duels and tourneys where a few men are involved, and you will find that the Italians excel in strength, in dexterity, in mental agility; but when it is a matter of armies, they don’t stand the comparison. This all comes from the weakness of the heads; because those who know what they are doing cannot enforce obedience. Each one thinks he knows best, and there has not been anyone hitherto who has raised himself, by

strength [virtu] or fortune to the point where the others will yield to him.

(71)

The crisis that Machiavelli deals with is one of general disobedience and disloyalty, which had nothing to do with the absence of religion or morality. Nobody was questioning the type of relationship between men: one man would arm another and subsequently reward him for his loyal service. The question that remained unanswered until then was the identity of the man who would arm and lead the Italians. The problem in The Prince is the absence of strong leadership. Unfortunately, the solutions that Machiavelli proposes to repair the chivalric system, trickery, cruelty, and stinginess, are characteristically unchivalric.

According to the code of chivalry, leadership is determined through strength (military prowess) and proper conduct (knowledge of the right course of action). But this system requires that men have a willingness to concede to the superiority of others, that they trust others know best, which the Italians did not. In the world of Machiavelli, where all men think they are right, who is to say which one is the strongest or what the right course of action is? It would be impossible for the prince to fight and/or convince all men to follow him. In the light of this necessity, Machiavelli proposes that the prince transgress the system, if only momentarily, “and learn how not to be good” by exercising the virtues of chivalry selectively (42-43). Among these virtues, the one that seems to be alarmingly absent throughout most of The Prince, and the one that we are interested in the most, is faith.

The most commonly recognized sign of subversion in his work is the absence of religious faith, the secularization of politics. In The Prince, Machiavelli points out that

the princes of the Church, “Instituted as they are by God, and sustained by him,” are not burdened by the political, earthly, concerns of the other princes (32). They hold their position on earth through providence and moral superiority. Standing above the political games of the time the princes of the Church should have no need for political advice. Yet, during this time, the popes demonstrated “how much can be [and has been] done in that office with money and arms” (33). Like any other state, the ecclesiastical states, which are supposed to be subject to divine forces, bound and protected by them, gained their power through politics, “money and arms,” not prayer.

Through these observations Machiavelli not only condemns the popes for their misbehavior, but he threatens one of the principal beliefs of the Church and chivalric society in general. By juxtaposing the Church’s theoretical dependence on God and their real dependence on money and arms, Machiavelli is exposing the absence of divine intervention, divine justice. If there was any order in the world, it was not divine. The exclusion of God from the political discourse of the time was unusual enough for it to be noticed by his readers. But this exclusion was more conspicuous when one takes into account his commentary on the pragmatic use of religion in the Discourses. Coupled together, these shrewd observations led people to believe that he was advocating atheism. It was Machiavelli’s stress on the apparent absence of God in the world, the absence of a moral center, that caused so much fear. Berlin would say that it was not the absence of morality but the rejection of Christian morality for pagan morality which condemned the Italian to infamy. Whichever might be the case, it was his rejection of a Christian view of the universe that gave Machiavellian doctrine its power.

While both of these characteristics would have been shocking enough during the early sixteenth century, they do not explain how, even today, almost five hundred years after The Prince was written, when religion plays a far smaller role in society, the very name, Machiavelli, still can muster dread in the minds of men in position of power. Indeed, the supposed atheism and/or paganism of Machiavelli was reason enough for his contemporaries to rebuff him, but when we contrast the Machiavellian world view with chivalry, it becomes clear that his subversion went beyond, or perhaps we should say below, religion, to pull out and replace the keystone of European society. It was not Machiavelli's rejection of the Christian God or religion, but the bold rejection of loyalty and the faith in men's goodness, the rejection of the belief that "men never choose evil deliberately," which has caused such long lasting dread.

Machiavelli exhorts the prince to abandon idealism, the ideals which structures religion and chivalry, and act according to reality. And in reality, he explains, men should not be trusted. Men in general are "ungrateful, fickle liars and deceivers, fearful of danger and greedy for gain" (46), and during moments of crisis they forget all their vows of devotion (30). For those who wish to rule over others, there is no use trying to adhere too strongly to goodness, since "Any man who tries to be good all the time is bound to come to ruin among the great numbers that are not good" (42). Under these circumstances, the prince must resort to "trickery."

The prince cannot tie himself to his word. In order to succeed, he has to be ready to break any promise and conceal the reasons for his breach. Appearances are everything in politics, where very few can see what one really is and "the masses are always impressed by the superficial appearances of things" (49). Knowing this, Machiavelli

encourages the prince to be “a liar and a hypocrite” (48), so that he will be able to “manipulate the minds of men craftily” (47).

Machiavelli accepts the relation of service and rewards that existed in chivalric society as the legitimate form of exchange between the prince and his subjects, but he does not recognize the high degree of trust that was implied in the exchange. The Machiavellian world is ruled by uncertainty and suspicion. When he says the prince should arm his own subjects, because through this action he will gain their support, he only means to say that he has more to gain and less to fear from those who work under his eye, than those who had not. Those the prince decides to arm will not be allowed to rise too high, because “the man who makes another powerful ruins himself” (11).

However, the uncertainties that Machiavelli created by excluding the Christian *Ordo* did not provoke so much terror as the certainty that men are generally evil. In a world where faith in others was essential, the idea that men were untrustworthy, seriously developed through a logical argument as it is in The Prince, was bound to make many uncomfortable. While Christianity had long believed in the human potential for evil (original sin), what Machiavelli proposed was far more radical. For he was absolutely certain men were evil. This is where the fear comes from. It is the fear of what we are capable of doing—the fear of what others can do to us. This uneasiness is what Shakespeare’s audience must have felt. Above anything else, mistrust and the fear of others characterize the teaching of Machiavelli, therefore the audience would have recognized the influence of the Italian’s world view in Shakespeare’s work, and we are able to determine to some degree their reaction to it.

The Second Tetralogy

The role of Machiavellianism in Elizabethan society was greater than many critics believe, but it was not absolute. Machiavellianism is not the definitive influence on Shakespeare's history plays, let alone on the Henriad, which had a well-known source. The playwright could not escape historical facts which would bring forth the medieval feudal, chivalric system and we have no reason to believe that he wanted to avoid the dramatization of that system. If Shakespeare represented Machiavelli's doctrine as if it were the norm at the time, if he did not provide something with which the audience could contrast the Italian's radical ideas, he would be nullifying part of its effect: its power to shock and create discomfort among the members of the audience. The presence of the chivalric system in the play reminded the audience that there was indeed an alternative to the world that Machiavelli proposed, an alternative that could easily be lost. Hence, it is a mistake to interpret all four of the plays in the tetralogy as Machiavellian by arguing that they are a dramatization of this political doctrine. This is evident from the very start of the tetralogy, since Richard II is not a representation of the Machiavellian world.

The argument that Richard II is a representation of the rise of Machiavellianism in England is based on the belief that Bullingbrook is a master of *real politik*, a Machiavel who breaks the promise he made in Doncaster and tricks everyone into supporting his deposition of the defenseless Richard. But the truth is that there is not enough proof in this play to sustain any of these conclusions. As we saw in the previous chapter, Bullingbrook gains the support of his peers by becoming the ideal knight. He rises to the throne through the lawful exercise of his chivalric rights. The closest he comes to

showing a hidden design for the crown is when his uncle warns him, “Take not, good cousin, further than you should...The heavens are over our heads,” to which he simply responds that he will not oppose the will of God, “I know it, uncle, and oppose not myself against their will” (III.iii.16-19). The Duke’s failure to give a definitive answer that could dispel the audience’s doubts about his intentions has led some to claim that he always planned to seize the crown. In this case, his reference to divine intervention does not reveal a sincere belief in the Christian or the chivalric principle. It was obvious that he would come out victorious in a confrontation with the defenseless Richard. Instead of saying yes or no, Bullingbrook used the opportunity to set up the grounds for his claim, laying his imminent victory on the hands of God, an act that would legitimize his profane ascent. Hence, his devotion to the judgment of God, like all of his other chivalric acts, is exposed as nothing more than a show put on for the benefit of his peers, or, more precisely, for his own benefit. Like the Machiavellian prince, Bullingbrook maintained appearances and created a farce that would cover his true intention, his wicked nature. Unfortunately, for those who would see a Machiavel in the play, there is nothing more than this ambiguity. The only way the audience can view the play as Machiavellian is if they ignore Richard’s responsibility for his fall and Bullingbrook’s persistent use of traditional chivalric practices, specially the judicial duel, in an attempt to solve the question of loyalty and justice.

It is not Bullingbrook’s transgressive ambition that poses a threat to Richard but his own reckless, sometimes unlawful conduct. From the very beginning of the play the audience watches Richard’s list of crimes unfold. He murders his uncle, refuses his cousin his inherited rights and then unjustly exiles him, and he greedily bleeds his

subjects to enrich the hated flatters whom he chose to favor. The threat of this increasingly tyrannical behavior is finally articulated by York, who warns Richard not to rob Bullingbrook of his hereditary rights, since his title had also come through the inviolable right of “fair sequence and succession” (II.i.199). If Richard denied Bullingbrook his inheritance, he would “lose a thousand well-disposed hearts” (201-208). Indeed, the Duke has no need to persuade or trick anyone into breaking their allegiance. By the time that Bullingbrook landed at Ravenspurgh he found Englishmen ready to support him against their tyrannical king, as Northumberland demonstrates by his irreverent reference to King Richard as simply “Richard” (III.iii.5-6). Like Northumberland and the rest of Richard’s subjects, Shakespeare’s audience had a more amiable attitude towards the deposition of the king and so they tended to be more forgiving towards Bullingbrook.

This forgiving disposition is further encouraged by Richard’s behavior in the moments leading up to his “confrontation” with Bullingbrook. The King returns from Ireland a frantic, indecisive leader, shifting between optimistic confidence and dismal pessimism, and ultimately relinquishing any hope of retaining his position. Richard discharges his forces:

go

To ear the land that hath some to grow,

For I have none. Let no man speak again

To alter this, for counsel is but vain.

(III.ii.211-214)

It is impossible for such a man to muster the support of his subjects (or the sympathy of the audience) in a society whose principal values are faith and strength. It is clear that Richard has not lived up to the position that God had bestowed on him. And despite his persistent use of the term “deposition” to refer to his fate, his willingness to concede the crown without any real confrontation, makes it almost seem like an abdication. York, presents the transition of power on these much more positive terms:

Great Duke of Lancaster, I come to thee
From plume-pluck'd Richard, who with willing soul
Adopts [thee] heir, and his high scepter yields
To the possession of thy royal hand.
Ascend his throne, descending now from him,
And long live Henry, fourth of that name!

(IV.i.107-112)

The transition from Duke of Lancaster to King of England becomes lawful in the mouth of the trustworthy Duke of York, the first Englishman other than the distraught Richard to refer to him as King. In this manner, through Richard's inadequacies and York's words, the effect of the deposition is defused. Bullingbrook might have committed a horrible crime, but he is far from falling into the villainy associated with Machiavelli.

As King Henry IV, Bullingbrook relies on the methods provided by the traditional social system to resolve the problems of the kingdom. There is no real evidence in the play that the reign of the new prince is Machiavellian. For Henry, it seems, England is still a chivalric society. Hence, when accusations against Aumerle arise during the investigation of Gloucester's death, the matter is set to be settled through combat

(IV.i.105-106). And when Aumerle asks the king “to have some conference with your Grace alone,” Bullingbrook agrees (V.iii.27-29). Despite the fact that Aumerle was one of Richard’s supporters, a man accused of participating in the assassination of a member of the royal family, Bullingbrook does not have a problem being alone with him in a locked room (V.iii.36-38). He does not show any suspicion or fear of a man who has more than one reason to hate him and who indeed has conspired to destroy him. This kind of trust is characteristic of the chivalric system and inconsistent with the world view in which Machiavelli’s political strategy is founded.

In Richard II, there is no substantial evidence that Bullingbrook is a Machiavellian prince. This theory fails to explain the character’s dependence on the chivalric system of values and practices in the play. Nevertheless, we are not claiming that Henry IV does not reveal his Machiavellianism in the following plays. He does. In fact, in 1 Henry IV, when he reprimands his son for losing his “princely privilege” he explains:

Had I so lavish of my presence been,
So common-hackney’d in the eyes of men,
So stale and cheap to vulgar company,
Opinion, that did help me to the crown,
Had still kept loyal to possession
And left me in reputeless banishment,
A fellow of no mark or likelihood.
By being seldom seen, I could not stir
But like a comet I was wonder’d at,

That men would tell their children, "This is he";
Others would say "Where? Which is Bullingbrook?"
And then I stole all courtesy from heaven,
And dress'd myself in such humility
That I did pluck allegiance from men's hearts,
Loud shouts and salutations from their mouths,
Even in the presence of the crowned king.
Thus did I keep my person fresh and new,
My presence, like a robe pontifical,
Ne'er seen but wonder'd at, and so my state,
Seldom but sumptuous, show'd like a feast
And wan by rareness such solemnity.

(III.ii.39-59)

Henry's description of his ascent to the throne demonstrates a Machiavellian understanding of the political world, where appearances are more important than reality. Power lies in the hands of those who can manipulate the perceptions of others. Even the "solemnity," the awe and wonder that surround the divine figure of the king, is up for grabs for these tricksters. This description shared between father and son seems to disperse any doubt about the sincerity of Henry's conduct. Now the audience must come to terms with the fact that his chivalric acts in Richard II were nothing more than that: a cleverly planned act. Bullingbrook is a Machiavellian prince. This is not to say that the audience should ignore the characterization in Richard II. Those who ignore this layer of the character, paying attention only to what they see in the two parts of Henry IV, do not

notice the element of revelation that exists in the speech quoted above. The four plays were written and staged in a sequence: Richard II (1595), 1 Henry IV (1596-7), 2 Henry IV (1598), Henry V (1599). For this reason, the audience of the plays, and anyone who read the tetralogy in sequence, would not come to learn of Bullingbrook's use of Machiavellian strategy until the middle of 1 Henry IV (III.ii). At this point the audience has to deal with more than the realization that Henry is a Machiavellian prince with all the negative implications this has, but that they have been cheering for him all along. Hence the characterization of Bullingbrook in Richard II and King Henry in the two parts of Henry IV contrasts. In the first play of the tetralogy he appears as the epitome of chivalry whereas in the following ones he appears as a shrewd, perhaps dishonest, politician. The sudden change highlights the colors of Machiavelli in the latter plays, enhancing the discomfort of the audience. This is the principal goal of a work of art, as we discussed above, to affect the sensitivity of the audience, to provoke certain feelings, not to advocate a specific political or social philosophy.

It is impossible to interpret the whole tetralogy as Machiavellian. Even the two parts of Henry IV, where characters like Henry, Hal, Falstaff, and Worcester bring the political reality discussed in the Italian treatise to the forefront of the play, are framed by the traditional chivalric system. What the audience gets to see through these characters are moments of Machiavellianism, moments in which the self-interest of others leads to deceit and trickery and a break with the principles of chivalry. The Machiavellian moment is only that, a moment. After this private meeting between father and son passes, Henry goes back to being a king in medieval (chivalric) England. The figures

who receive the greatest amount of attention for their Machiavellian tendency in these plays are the Prince of Wales and Falstaff.

Prince Hal presents a reversal of Henry IV's transformation: instead of slipping down from ideal to crass reality, he climbs up. When he is first introduced to the audience through his father's complaints in Richard II, he is described as "unthrifty," a "plague," and "wanton and effeminate" (V.iii.1-10)—a spoiled, immoral, rebellious youth—, the opposite of the chivalric ideal. Yet, by the time the play ends, Hal has redeemed himself. Appearing before his father and the English peers as an example of true knighthood, he is ready to settle the dispute by challenging the leader of the rebels, fierce Hotspur, to single combat (*IHIV*, V.i.94-100), the kind of definitive judicial duel his father never achieves. Defeating Hotspur on the battlefield serves to overthrow public opinion and secure the Lancastrian succession to the kingdom. While the story of the prodigal son is not normally considered Machiavellian, Hal's transformation from truant to dutiful son (prince and knight) is preceded by a soliloquy in which the prince reveals the artificiality—the premeditated nature of this transformation:

when this loose behavior I throw off
And pay the debt I never promised,
By how much better than my word I am,
By so much shall I falsify men's hopes:
And like bright metal on a sullen ground,
My reformation, glitt'ring o'er my fault,
Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes
Than that which had no foil to set it off.

The transformation is set up as if it were a play, a social drama, with a “foil” that might highlight the hero’s achievements. The way he speaks it seems as if he has complete control over his appearance and public opinion. Even when public opinion is bad, it is only so because he wants it. The prince leaves his audience with the impression that he controls everything, even what others might think of him. The King, Falstaff, and even Hotspur appear to have been cast in supporting roles in the prince’s redemption. It is this control of the world around him, or at least the appearance of everything around him, that seems to be his greatest achievement. The chivalric displays and the defeat of Hotspur seem to be only minor victories compared to his use of trickery to win popular support.

This soliloquy is the only real moment of clear Machiavellianism for Prince Hal. Shortly after the Prince covers himself in a cloak of chivalry, a disguise, perhaps, which defines him. No matter his offense or deviation from the martial code of conduct, he never seems to abide by the guidelines of Machiavelli again. In fact, most of the misbehavior of the young prince is credited to the company of Sir John Falstaff.

Falstaff, the comedic character of the prince’s reckless years, has often been associated with a Machiavellian self-seeking amorality, quick wit and verbal dexterity—skills which he exercises healthily in the plays. There are a lot of examples of Falstaff’s Machiavellianism, but most of these seem confined to the lower sphere of society, the margins, where it cannot affect the regime. Throughout the plays the biggest threat that Falstaff presents to the Lancastrian dynasty is his influence on the Prince, or the disrepute that his company might bring to the heir to the throne. However, there is one instance during the battle of Shrewsbury in which this proximity to heir allows him to threaten the

victory upon which the prince will base his legitimizing redemption. After Hal has faced and killed Hotspur, who with his last breaths admits openly, “those proud titles thou hast won of me” (V.iv.79), Falstaff stabs the rebel’s corpse in the thigh and carrying it on his back, he comes forth claiming his reward:

There is Percy [throwing the body down]. If your father will do me any honor, so; if not, let him kill the next Percy himself. I look to be either earl or duke, I can assure you.

Prince: Why, Percy I killed myself, and saw thee dead.

Falstaff: Didst thou? Lord, Lord, how this world is given to lying. I grant you, I was down and out of breath, and so was he, but we rose both at an instant and fought a long hour by Shrewsbury clock. If I may be believed, so; if not, let them that should reward valor bear the sin upon their own heads.

(V.v.139-150)

Falstaff mocks the achievement of the prince and calls into question the place that his chivalric deed has earned him. Through his verbal dexterity Falstaff develops a story that is false but plausible. Using the confusion that exist on the battlefield, Falstaff takes credit for the slaying of the rebel leader, saying that Hotspur still lived after the prince had fought him, a mistake that war-weary Douglas had made earlier. It is hard to determine the achievements of any one person on the chaotic field of battle, an essential part of a society that was dominated by a martial class. However, this rip in the chivalric system is rapidly closed by John of Lancaster and the Prince, who give the story no credence. Falstaff’s apparently harmless, comedic Machiavellism, which makes him

rather appealing to the audience, also makes him a perfect foil. Falstaff serves as a foil not only inside the play, releasing Hal from any responsibility before the other characters, without really putting him in any danger, but also as a foil for the audience, who easily accept the prince's reformation once he vanquishes the fat knight (2 *HIV*, V.v.60-65), and forgetting that he had chosen the character of Madcap Prince himself, as well as his role in Hal's emplotted redemption.

The real danger of the Machiavellian world view is represented in the two parts of Henry IV by Worcester. Already in disfavor with Henry for his presumptuous boldness, the Duke takes advantage of the situation, the conflict between the king and his hot-tempered nephew over the ransom of Mortimer and the distribution of the Scottish prisoners, to talk Northumberland and Percy into a rebellion that would allow their house to retain the place it deserved in court. As he explains to his more powerful relatives:

The King will always think him in our debt,
And think we think ourselves unsatisfied,
Till he hath found a time to pay us home.
And see already how he doth begin
To make us strangers to his looks of love.

(1 *HIV* I.iii.286-290)

Worcester's plan requires them to break their allegiance to the King of England to join his enemies—their enemies: Douglas and Glendower, the Welsh sorcerer who had captured Mortimer. This “easy” change in allegiance, the change from friend to enemy, enemy to friend, reveals the artificiality of the bonds that hold men together. Here convenience overpowers any sense of sincere devotion. Even devotion—the concern

Worcester seems to demonstrate for his house, his family—fades as soon as the situation changes. Even when it is clear that a peaceful resolution is the best choice for everyone (especially the rebels who face the king's army without the support of Northumberland, Mortimer, or Glendower), even after the king has offered his enemies forgiveness, promising "every man / Shall be my friend again, and I'll be his" (V.i.107-108), the self-seeking lord still opts for a military confrontation:

My nephew's trespass may be well forgot,
It hath the excuse of youth and heat of blood,
And an adopted name of privilege,
A harebrain'd Hotspur, govern'd by a spleen.
All his offenses live upon my head
And on his father's. We did train him on,
And his corruption being ta'en from us,
We as the spring of all shall pay for all.
Therefore, good cousin, let not Harry know,
In any case the offer of the king.

(V.ii.16-25)

Knowing he would later have to face the consequences of his actions alone, he throws aside all concern for the other members of his family, especially for Hotspur who had a promising future under the service of the King. In order to avoid finding himself in this position, Worcester keeps the offer of mercy from his nephew and tells him instead that "There is no mercy in the King...[who]...calls us 'rebels,' 'traitors'" (V.ii.36-40). There is little doubt that Worcester is the true Machiavel in the plays. Even after Hotspur lies

dead and the rebel army has been defeated, he adheres to the new political practices, confessing: “What I have done my safety urged me to. / And I embrace this fortune patiently, / Since not to be avoided it falls on me” (V.v.11-13).

Of the opponents the Lancastrians must face in the tetralogy, Worcester is the one who is the most clearly evil. There are no ambiguities—no redeeming qualities that might earn him the sympathy of the audience. His function in the plays, like every other supporting character, is to serve as a foil—a scapegoat for Henry. Worcester’s Machiavellism is so blatant because it must serve to distract the audience from the Lancastrian Machiavellism. In comparison, the Machiavellian acts of the King and the Prince of Wales are mild, even illusory. The heroes of the famous English epic are never fully exposed. Nevertheless, there are moments of insight into these characters’ methods (the conference between Henry and Hal, and Hal’s soliloquy) which raise suspicion, throwing the shadow of a doubt over their actions, past, present, and future. For a moment, the two belief systems (chivalric and Machiavellian) are set next to each other, the contrast is made clear, and the audience has to deal with the possibility that everything they have seen so far, everything they will see, is propaganda. The last act of clear Machiavellianism in the tetralogy, John of Lancaster’s convenient breach of his word, demonstrates this point.

After the defeat at Shrewsbury the King divides his forces and sets them out to subdue the absent rebels. Westmoreland and John of Lancaster meet the Archbishop of York, Hastings, Mowbray, and the rebel forces in the north. There the Lancastrian prince listens to their grievances and reassures them:

I like them all, and do allow them well,

And swear here by the honor of my blood
My father's purposes have been mistook,
And some about him have too lavishly
Wrested his meaning and authority.
My lord, these griefs shall be with speed redress'd;
Upon my soul, they shall.

(2 *HIV* IV.i.54-60)

Under the impression they have reached a peaceful resolution, that they are finally safe, the rebels disband their army. Once defenseless and at a disadvantage, they fall victim to Lancaster's trickery, who arrests them for high treason, claiming "God, and not we, hath safely fought to-day" (121). Like Henry IV in the vicinity of Flint Castle (where Richard once hid), he lays his victory, his achievements, in the hands of God, legitimizing his breach. But the prince's breach not only throws a new light on the actions that lead Henry to power, dispersing, perhaps, some of the ambiguity, they also call into question the honesty with which he offered mercy to the rebels at Shrewsbury. If the actions of Lancaster were an indication of his father's policies, as they seemed to be, then Henry's offer was not to be trusted. Was Worcester, our Machiavellian villain, right? There is no clear answer to this question; there is only doubt. Again, after this sudden revelation, the audience is left to wonder whether they have been cheering for the right person. Is there anyone in the play, in their romantic world, they can trust? The discomfort is only momentary. The second part of Henry IV ends with the death of the King and the rejection of Falstaff and in the following play, the last play of the tetralogy, John of Lancaster is nowhere to be found.

In Henry V the offenders have disappeared and Hal has been reformed. The only part where Henry's actions seem to be particularly Machiavellian is when he must confront Cambridge, Scroop, and Grey for treason. Knowing these three have already accepted payment from the French to assassinate him, he tricks them into giving up any claim to mercy and feels free to offer none when he sets their punishment. Here the trick is not what reveals the prince's Machiavellianism, since through it he is exercising his rights and duties as sovereign: to impart justice. Unlike the previous occasion, where the trickery helped the Lancastrians reach a certain position, the trick is really unnecessary and consequently irrelevant. He might have just approached the men and presented them with the evidence, arrested them, and sentenced them to death. What comes out as Machiavellian is Henry's comment about Cambridge's betrayal: "And thus thy fall hath left a kind of blot / To [mark the] full-fraught man and best indued / With some suspicion" (*HV* II.ii.138-140). This observation seems to suggest an extension of the Machiavellian perception of the political world late to this play, but there really are no moments in which trickery and / or deception play a significant role in the development of the action. The suspicion—the mistrust that Henry talks about here—is not evident in the play. In fact, this is the only play in the tetralogy where treason is not a central subject. However, it is also impossible to ignore the Machiavellian techniques that Henry V used in the previous plays and not wonder whether he is using them again when he is considering in court the rights that he has over the French crown, or when he disguises himself to converse with his soldiers, or when he kills the prisoners. Here, as in Richard II, the answer to whether his actions are Machiavellian or not is quite irrelevant. What matters for the audience is the possibility, the fact that they can at some point look at

Henry V, even while they are cheering him on stage, and have the sense that they have been tricked. What matters is the relentless suspicion that Henry V, like his father, is a Machiavellian prince.

At the end it is clear that the tetralogy does not ask its audience to accept the Machiavellian doctrine; it only demands that the audience confront it. Shakespeare was giving the crowd a dose of Machiavelli, as much as they were able to digest—just enough but not to turn their stomach. In this manner, even if only for a moment, he was able to get his audience to seriously consider subversive ideas, and he was able provoke a sense of dread and discomfort, which seems to have characterized the fascination with the teachings of the Florentine politicians. Did Shakespeare advocate the Machiavellian world view? As mentioned above, there is no final answer to this question, but it seems that like most artists he was an advocate of the possibilities.

Chapter Four

**“We sincerely hope you will not be able to say what it all adds up to;
if you could, we would have failed.”⁴⁹**

...but if I make the Pearly Gates
I'll do my best to make a drawing
Of God and Lucifer, a boy and girl
An angel kissin' on a sinner
A monkey and a man, a marching band
All round the frightened trapeze-swinger
Sam Bean, *The Trapeze Swinger*

This book is the result of a necessarily incomplete study. I know in advance that its conclusion will be examined, discussed, and replaced by others, and I am glad of it. That is how history progresses and must progress.

- Fernand Braudel⁵⁰

The belief in “a history of possibilities,” where the mundane, the neglected, and the marginalized is considered worthy of remembrance, where the subversive can touch and vandalize the perfect picture of the past, is not new. The idea that there is a different way to see the past, that there is still something hidden or forgotten has been the driving force in the work of many scholars in the second half of the twentieth century. Unfortunately, these critics seem to have deserted their commitment to the collective, the orthodox. In their effort to exhume the texts that contain these subversive moments, to bring them to the forefront of academic studies and destabilize our understanding of the world, they have forgotten to give credit to the orthodoxy within which the heterodoxy makes sense. By omitting the orthodox they have turned the subversive into the norm.

⁴⁹ The title for this chapter is the last line of the introduction to Catherine Gallagher's and Stephen Greenblatt's *Practicing New Historicism*.

⁵⁰ *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II*. Trans. Siân Reynolds. New York: Harper and Row, 1972. Page 18.

Now, it seems, there are no other possibilities. We are trapped with them in another totality.

The intention of this project from the very beginning was to escape this totality, returning to the promise to combine an interest in “the isolated scandal, the idiosyncratic vision, the transient sketch” with an interest in the collective (Gallagher and Greenblatt, Practicing New Historicism 16). Here is where the power, the meaning, of the text is found, in the conflict between the subversive and the orthodox. It is this argument that Roland Barthes follows when he explains that the value of the works of modernity “proceeds from their duplicity”:

By which it must be understood that they always have two edges. The subversive edge may seem privileged because it is the edge of violence; but it is not violence which affects pleasure, nor is it destruction which interests it; what pleasure wants is the site of a loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the *dissolve* which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss. (7)

We are looking for this “site of loss,” the moment in which the subversive becomes disruptive, tearing the continuities. In order to understand how this rupture might have affected the perception of the literary texts of the time, we need to do more than disclose the subversive act; we need to describe what this act threatens: the orthodox.

Exploring the orthodox world-view is of particular importance for the texts of William Shakespeare which were written over four centuries ago at time of transition between the Middle Ages and modernity. Literary historians need to reconstruct this world which is lost in a distant age and completely foreign to the present day reader. The second chapter represents an attempt to do exactly that: to reconstruct the orthodox

world, describing chivalry, the system of values that controlled the self perception and interactions of the nobility throughout the late medieval society into the Renaissance. From this discussion it became obvious that Shakespeare's audience was bound to notice the use of the chivalric practices and the endorsement of medieval values which were featured prominently in the plays. There is no use ignoring the orthodox in favor of the subversive, the violent, or the shocking.

Once aware of the presence of the orthodox in the tetralogy we are forced to approach any subversive modern elements from this perspective; looking for that "site of loss," the place in which, in this particular case, the political principle expounded by Machiavelli in The Prince threatens chivalry. In this manner our attention turns from the absence of faith in God, the apparent atheism of the Machiavellian doctrine, to the absence of faith in men. Here is where the Italian's political theory cuts the deepest, calling into question the feasibility of the medieval social system. This is the moment of subversion. Yet subversion is not what we are looking for, since the destruction of the culture, the violence, is not where the power of the text lays. The power, the erotic, the pleasure of the text, as Barthes puts it, is found in the "intermittence:" "the staging of an appearance as disappearance" (10). Subversion, then, appears only momentary. The audience only glimpses at the Machiavellian world and is left with the sense that they can see more than what is in the surface, the suspicion that they can see more in the actions of Bullingbrook and Henry V.

The Second Tetralogy can be described as the dramatization of a medieval story of monarchic subversion with a moment that titillates and threatens modernity. But the main goal of this project is not to provide a simple, definitive interpretation. The goal of

this project is to open the discussion of Shakespeare's plays by accepting and encouraging the use of conflicting historical materials. If our understanding of the past is to "progress," and with it our understanding of literature, we need to resist the desire to privilege any particular world-view and accept all possibilities. Then, between the orthodox and the subversive, we will find a solution to the interpretative problem of the literary text written in the distant past. There, in the contradictions, the conflict between belief systems, we will find the power of the texts. At the end, this study is the persistent reminder of the unfulfilled promise; of "a history of possibilities."

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