

SHAKESPEARE LECTURE

THE CORRIDORS OF HISTORY:
SHAKESPEARE THE RE-MAKER

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THE title of this lecture is not meant as a pun. Though, as you know, in Italian *re* means king, I do not intend to suggest that in writing his histories Shakespeare was assuming the role of king-maker—what I want to stress instead is that the histories, like all his other plays, are better approached by keeping firmly in mind the fact that Shakespeare was first and foremost not a political thinker but a man of the theatre, a supreme expert in a trade or a business—the show business—that in many of its essentials has not changed much through the centuries. The most notable change perhaps is in nomenclature: now we speak of the media and of mass response, and compile charts on viewers' or listeners' attendance, but in the first Elizabeth's time the only mass media available were the theatre and the preacher. A frequent mistake we make in trying to draw parallels between then and now is that of using as a term of reference the present-day stage, while we should rather focus on film and television.

To be more specific: leaving aside the private or academic shows, the Theatre and the other London playhouses were built in the 1570s and 1580s to provide entertainment as a money-making proposition. What mattered was the effectiveness of the entertainment provided, the story, the action and the acting—not the message or the literary qualities of the show. Of course, some men of letters joined in, but without claiming authorship: they simply contributed their particular skills in exchange for a fee. It took quite a while before popular audiences began to value the names of some theatre poets as a guarantee of a good afternoon's entertainment: the title-pages of plays that got into print counted on the names of the companies that acted them rather than on those of the authors. Shakespeare is a case in point: *Titus*, *Romeo*, *Richard III* and even the first part of *Henry IV* appeared anonymously, and we have to wait till 1598 to see his name on the title-page of a play.

The parallel is once again with the cinema, where the text of the show is a script in which a number of people have a hand (or at least a main finger, as Thomas Heywood was to say about his contribution to the stage),¹ and which is further modified during the 'shooting'. Henslowe's diary from 1597 to 1603 hardly ever records a payment to a single author for a play: this collaborative practice must date back a number of years, though apparently it petered out at the turn of the century, and possibly somewhat earlier in the case of the Chamberlain's men. In one respect the parallel with the cinema does not hold; while the film, once made, is permanently recorded and remains unchanged (except for possible censorial intervention, manipulation by distributors, or damage to the copy), the play changes with each individual performance so that the printed text of a Shakespeare play, as Stanley Wells so beautifully put it, is merely 'the snapshot that got taken'² among the numberless ones that remain unrecorded.

My purpose, though, is to call attention to two common practices in the film industry which were foreshadowed in Elizabethan show business. The best known is that of the sequel or follow-up: when a film has been particularly successful, the same firm and team of actors and script-writers devise new and frequently preposterous adventures for the popular hero, from Tarzan to Frankenstein, from Rocky to Rambo. Incidentally, this has nothing to do with radio or television serials, from the Archers to Coronation Street, to Dallas, to the innumerable and literally endless tele-novellas: these develop from the serial novels of the last century. The sequels instead were certainly practised by the Elizabethans: there would have been no *Death of Robert Earl of Huntington* if his *Downfall* had been a flop.

The second and less noted practice is that of the re-make: when a film has been successful, after a few years a rival company produces a new version of the same subject—especially if drawn from a novel or from history—with a completely different cast and director, possibly a new slant to the story, and hopefully improved technical devices. This is exactly what happened in the Elizabethan or Jacobean theatre, where the rivalry between companies was as fierce as that in the modern film world—and I put it to you that Shakespeare was the greatest expert in re-makes for the Chamberlain's/King's men. We know for certain that at least

¹ In the 'Address to the Reader' in his *The English Traveller* (1633) Thomas Heywood claimed that he 'had either an entire hand, or at least a maine finger' in no less than 220 plays.

² Letter in *Times Literary Supplement*, 18 January 1985.

three major plays of Shakespeare were new treatments of subjects which had been successful on the stage before, when they had been acted by the Admiral's or the Queen's men. The 'ur-*Hamlet*' is unfortunately lost, of the Admiral's *Troilus* there remains only a leaf of the plot, and probably the much earlier *True Chronicle History of King Leir* would never have got into print if Shakespeare had not produced his masterly re-make of it. Unlike the common run of current film re-makes, Shakespeare's are not just forms of revamping past successes: he went back to the sources of the earlier versions and recast the stories his own way, leaving the treatments presented by the rival companies far behind.

It is my contention that Shakespeare acquired his skill as a re-maker at an early stage and more precisely that he was led to it by the popularity of the history or chronicle play on the public stage in the late eighties and throughout the nineties of the sixteenth century. I shall not enter into the question of the much debated relationship between the *Henry VI* plays and *The Whole Contention*, or even between *Richard III* and the anonymous *True Tragedy*: as David Bevington remarks in *Tudor Drama and Politics*,¹ theatrical censorship became much more sensitive to topical references of what we would now call a political nature from 1593 onwards. The feeling of unrest in the country induced the Master of the Revels to put an end to the tolerance which in previous years had permitted the emergence of what I would call 'alternative histories'—plays for the public theatre criticizing the abuses of authority and underlining the rights of the common people. I suggest that Shakespeare's first re-makes are to be seen within this context, which is better defined in theatrical rather than in strictly political terms. I must refer at this point to my experience in editing with Vittorio Gabrieli *The Book of Sir Thomas More*.² There is no time to enter into all the problems set by this play, and I must be content with offering some of the conclusions we have reached. In the first place, far from being an accumulation of stylistically discontinuous fragments, *Sir Thomas More*, once all the additions are put in their proper places, is one of the best

¹ D. Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), pp. 230 ff.

² Our edition was published by Adriatica Editrice (Bari) in 1981, but we are preparing a completely new and augmented one for the Revels Plays series (Manchester U.P.). The references in the present paper are to Greg's edition (Oxford, Malone Society Reprints, 1911). Act, scene, and line numbering in the quotations from Shakespeare's plays (but not necessarily spelling and punctuation) are from the Riverside Shakespeare (ed. G. Blakemore Evans, Boston, 1974).

constructed plays of the age. It is a coherent whole, dramatically effective: the authors of the additions show a fine sensitivity to the needs of the stage, the smooth sequence of the different scenes within a solid framework represented by the traditional pattern of the *De casibus virorum illustrium*. None of the additions is a gratuitous interpolation: most of them act instead as dramatic links tightening up the overall theatrical structure. But there is one inconsistency, not on the theatrical, but on what I would call the ideological level. Throughout the original version of the play in the hand of Anthony Munday the London citizens are shown as justified in their resentment against the aliens. The behaviour of John Lincoln, the leader of the popular rebellion against the insolent strangers, is nothing short of noble, or even heroic:

Then to you all that come to viewe mine end,
 I must confesse, I had no ill intent,
 but against such as wronged vs ouer much.
 And now I can perceiue, it was not fit,
 that priuate men should carue out their redresse,
 which way they list, no, learne it now by me
 obedience is the best in eche degree.
 And asking mercie meekely of my King,
 I paciently submit me to the lawe.
 But God forgiue them that were cause of it.

(*619-28)

Lincoln's death parallels very closely that of More at the end of the play:

I confesse his maiestie hath bin euer good to me, and my offence to his highnesse, makes me of a state pleader, a stage player, (though I am olde, and haue a bad voyce) to act this last Sceane of my tragedie (†1931-4).

In a much earlier scene Surrey and the other noblemen had justified the citizens' resentment against what is described in Holinshed as 'the insolent sawcinesse' and 'the diuelish malice' of the aliens, offending 'against all honestie, equitie, and conscience' (Holinshed, iii. 840).¹

The arguments against the strangers put forward by Lincoln in the famous addition in hand D are of a completely different nature and tone:

. . . he that will not see a red hearing at a harry grote, butter at a levenpence a pounce meale at nyne shillinge a Bushell and Beeff at fower nobles a stone lyst to me (Add. II. 123-5).

¹ References are to the enlarged 1587 edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles*.

... our Countrie is a great eating Country, argo they eate more in our Countrey then they do in their owne (II. 127-8).

... they bring in straining rootes, which is meerly to the vndoing of poor prentizes for what a sorry psnyp to a good hart (II. 130-1).

This is the language of Jack Cade and his followers: the rightly indignant citizens of the earlier scenes, who later, when sentenced to death, are ready to face it with dignity and even a touch of humour, become in the hand D addition an irresponsible rabble in the hands of a clownish demagogue.

Now, from the moment it was suggested that hand D was Shakespeare's—and I share this opinion—attention and praise concentrated on these three additional pages, and the rest of the play was at best disregarded because it did not fit in with the Shakespearean fragment. In other words the paradoxical view was taken that the whole should suit the part, instead of the other way round. My concern here is to enquire into the reasons for this unfitness. I take the *More* fragment to be an early instance of Shakespeare rewriting—not re-making, but the one process is a first step in the direction of the other—a scene written originally by somebody else. It is not a question of the poorer literary or dramatic quality of Shakespeare's addition, or of its interrupting the flow of the action; on the contrary, the passage in hand D is probably from this point of view superior to the lost scene that it replaces: it handles beautifully the rhetoric of persuasion and it is a masterly treatment of a crowd scene. But it does not belong to the context created by the original author of *More*: this is a different crowd from the one presented in the previous scenes. I have attempted elsewhere a conjectural reconstruction of the lost original version;¹ I wish to focus now on *More*'s admirable speech in this addition, which is perfectly structured by dovetailing two main arguments. The transformation of forensic oratory into poetry is achieved by placing a forceful restatement of the Tudor doctrine of the sacrality of kingship within the context of Christian compassion for the oppressed. The pathos of *More*'s plea in favour of the strangers is enhanced if we take into account a further topical context: in 1592-3 there was in London a strong re-emergence of anti-alien feeling, culminating in the seditious rhyme posted on the wall of the Dutch churchyard on 5 May 1593, of which unfortunately we know only the first four lines:

You, strangers, that inhabit in this land,
Note this same writing, do it understand,

¹ 'Hand D in *Sir Thomas More: An Essay in Misinterpretation*', *Shakespeare Survey*, xxxviii (1985), 101-14.

Conceive it well, for safeguard of your lives,
Your goods, your children and your dearest wives.¹

—a threat that was taken so seriously by the Privy Council as to cause the arrest of a number of suspects, among whom was the playwright Thomas Kyd. (A further consequence was the interrogation and indirectly the death of Christopher Marlowe.) The rhyme in the Dutch churchyard ended with an ultimatum to the strangers to leave the country. More's plea, in Shakespeare's fragment,

ymagin that yo^u see the wretched straingers
their babyes at their backs, w^t their poor lugage
plodding tooth ports and costs for transportacion . . .

(Add. II. 197-9)

recalls More's own description of the condition of the evicted tenants in *Utopia*² in order to provide a point by point reply to the rhyme. The reaction of the crowd to the speech, 'letts do as we may be doon by' (a Christian proverb from the sermon on the mount), is exactly the same as had been the decisive argument with which on 23 March 1593 Henry Finch obtained the rejection in the House of Commons of a bill against the aliens in London.³ It reflects exactly the view of the authorities on the question of the strangers in 1593, which I believe is when Shakespeare wrote his addition. I suggest therefore that the rewriting of the scene, replacing what must have been in the original version a more sympathetic presentation of the case for the May Day rebels, was motivated by the events of the time. This is not tantamount to accusing Shakespeare of being a time server: we should take into account that the theatre in the Elizabethan age was the nearest equivalent to the modern mass media, entailing a certain caution in those who work for them, as well as a very different conception of political issues.

My point is that some of the same reasons obtaining in the re-writing of one scene of *Sir Thomas More* were at work also in the early Shakespearean re-makes of popular history plays. But the significant thing is that at least in two instances even the re-made plays got into some sort of trouble of the same nature.

Such considerations seem predominant in the case of *Richard II*, which was undoubtedly intended to counteract the utterly

¹ John Strype, *Annals of the Reformation* (London, 1725-31), iv. 168.

² *Utopia* (Robinson's translation, 1551), sig. C7v.

³ See P. Maas, 'Henry Finch and Shakespeare', *Review of English Studies*, NS iv (1953), 142.

negative presentation of the figure of the king in the titleless anonymous manuscript play, variously known as *Woodstock* or *The First Part of Richard II*. To call Shakespeare's play a re-make is perhaps stretching a point: what I feel is that it was originally conceived as such—as a rival stage presentation of Richard's reign—but the determination to stress the other aspect of the king's figure, his role as victim extenuating his abuses as a morally weak ruler, forced the playwright to focus on later developments in Richard's reign. Paradoxically the intention of presenting the king in a more favourable though necessarily still ambiguous light, though resulting in an extraordinary artistic and dramatic achievement, involved further problems of a political nature, as is shown by the omission of the deposition scene in the first three editions of the play and by much more serious trouble at the time of the Essex rebellion.

Commercial reasons are instead predominant in the decision to re-make a long-standing success of the rival company of the Queen's men, a company that by the mid nineties was in a phase of rapid decline. *The Famous Victories of Henry V* had held the stage triumphantly in the eighties as, among other things, a vehicle for the popular clown Tarlton.¹ Unfortunately the *Famous Victories* that went into print in 1598—probably because of the success of a Shakespearean play on the subject—is a much reduced and wretchedly reported text of a play that originally must have been in two parts. The Chamberlain's men's idea was surely to re-make the original *Victories*, known to them at least through performances, into two plays: one, *Henry IV*, mainly concerned with the youthful private misdemeanours and thorough reformation of Prince Hal, the other, *Henry V*, dealing with the famous victories proper, without forgetting to make the audience merry with Katherine of France. I shall concentrate on the first of these two plays, planned as the company's history for the year 1596 in the same way as *Richard II* had been the history for 1595. The obvious approach was to preserve the general outline of the previous play, describing the pranks of the prince and his companions which were surely responsible for the earlier popularity of the *Famous Victories*, but to turn it into a proper history by injecting into the

¹ John Dover Wilson's argument ('The Origins and Development of Shakespeare's "Henry IV"', *Library*, 4th series, xxiv (1945), 9-11) that *Famous Victories* is an awkward conflation of two separate Queen's men's plays of different dates, which are the real sources of Shakespeare's re-makes, does not prevent us from considering *Victories* as Shakespeare's model, since the two plays are lost.

new version large sections derived from Holinshed's and Stowe's chronicles that should provide the supporting framework. The delicate point was the behaviour of the prince at the beginning of the *Victories*, presented as the personal promoter of such abuses as that of robbing his father's receivers and intimidating them into silence. Three ways were found to attenuate this negative impression: the first and most far-reaching was the creation out of history and legend of a counterpart to the prince among the rebels—the impulsive and heroic Hotspur, over whom the prince was to triumph in the end showing that he was the better man; no historical or other source attributes to the prince the actual killing of Hotspur. A second more direct way was not to let the prince be a robber in his own person: he pretends to organize the robberies but in fact he merely robs the robbers and returns the booty to the rightful owners. Thirdly, the main responsibility for the prince's (attenuated) misbehaviour was attributed to the influence of a more mature 'Councillor of youthfull sinne'.¹ *Famous Victories* had called the most authoritative of the knights who seconded the prince in his enterprises Sir John Oldcastle, familiarly Jockey, though he was also the most moderate among them. Oldcastle therefore became the misleader of youth in Shakespeare's re-make of the play. Shakespeare would be the readier to accept the name for this new creation of his if he had been influenced at some time by the attitude of the English Roman Catholics toward the historical Oldcastle Lord Cobham, in contrast with his celebration by Foxe as a Protestant proto-martyr. This opens up a very controversial field of speculation, which I shall touch upon only very briefly. Ernst Honigmann has recently pointed out the youthful Shakespeare's connection with eminent Lancashire Catholic families,² and I find that the typical interjections of the Hostess in 2 *Henry IV* are reminiscent of, and to be found only in, the language attributed to Lady More by Sir Thomas More's great biographer Nicholas Harpsfield, in a forbidden book widely circulated in manuscript (eight copies are still extant) in recusant households.³ It is worth noticing that Harpsfield had published in Antwerp in 1566 those Latin *Dialogues* (another book treasured

¹ The description is from the Prologue of *The First Part of Sir John Oldcastle*, by Munday, Drayton, Wilson, and Hathway (1599); see P. Simpson's edition (Oxford, Malone Society Reprints, 1908).

² See E. A. J. Honigmann, *Shakespeare: the Lost Years* (Manchester, 1985), *passim*.

³ *The life and death of Sir Thomas More, knight, sometymes Lord high Chancellor of England, written in the tyme of Queene Marie by Nicholas Harpsfield, L.D.* (ed. Elsie Vaughan Hitchcock (Early English Text Society, os clxxxvi), 1932), 92–9.

by recusants) containing a virulent attack against Oldcastle as a pseudo-martyr, which Foxe furiously refuted in page after folio page of his *Acts and Monuments*.¹ I am not suggesting—as has recently been done—that Shakespeare created the character of Oldcastle as a bitter satire of the Lollards and Puritans in general—and I shall not follow Alice-Lyle Scoufos² in her belief that the prince's words in *1 Henry IV*, II. ii, 'Oldcastle sweats to Death, And lards the lean earth as he walks along' is an example of grisly wit alluding to the terrible martyrdom of Oldcastle, hanged in chains over a burning pyre. I think that Shakespeare's first and foremost preoccupation in re-making the first part of *Famous Victories* was that of producing as entertaining a play for the London audience as possible, while providing a much stronger historical background to the events, and at the same time extenuating the prince's misbehaviour by shifting responsibility for it on to a new, much amplified, comic character. In *Victories* the task of providing rough and ready clowning was entrusted to Derrick the Carrier, while Shakespeare transferred it to one of the knights: I am convinced that Will Kemp took originally the role of scarlet-nosed Rossil—the nickname of Sir John Russell, playing on the Italian for 'red'/'rosso', who was later to become Bardolph³—while Oldcastle, developed into a major comic and not clownish part, was taken by an actor with a much wider range than that of the professional clown.

My conclusion is that the history acted in 1596 by the Chamberlain's men was Shakespeare's re-make as *Henry IV* of the first part of the *Famous Victories*, centring on the figures of the prince, of his outsize evil angel, Oldcastle, and of his mirror image, Hotspur, acting as his involuntary good angel. The idea that *Henry IV* was originally not only conceived, but actually performed on the stage as a single play was advocated most forcibly some forty years ago by John Dover Wilson.⁴ Since then, though, it has lost some of its credit. This is surely due in some measure to the habit of looking at Shakespeare's histories as grouped into tetralogies, a sound and helpful notion in the terms Tillyard presented it,⁵ but

¹ See 'A Defence of the Lord Cobham, Against Nicholas Harpsfield' in J. Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (ed. J. Pratt, 1874), iii. 348–402.

² Alice-Lyle Scoufos, *Shakespeare's Typological Satire: A Study of the Falstaff-Oldcastle Problem* (Athens, Ohio, 1979), pp. 76 f.

³ See G. Melchiori, 'Reconstructing the ur-*Henry IV*' in *Essays in Honour of Kristian Smidt* (ed. P. Bilton, L. Hartveit, S. Johansson, A. O. Sandved, and B. Tysdahl, Oslo, 1986), 59–77.

⁴ In the paper mentioned on p. 73, n. 1.

⁵ E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London, 1944), *passim*.

seriously misleading if understood as implying that Shakespeare actually planned in advance to produce sequences of four plays as organic units. If, in order to underline the consistency of the historical sequence, we must speak in terms of tetralogies, let me suggest that the second of them is formed by *Edward III*, a play written not long before 1595, which Richard Proudfoot in his Shakespeare Lecture last year¹ so convincingly claimed as part of the Shakespeare canon—*Richard II*, *Henry IV*, and *Henry V*.

Nobody doubts that there must have existed an earlier version of the *Henry IV* play or plays with Oldcastle instead of Falstaff, but the latest proposal is simply to replace, in Part I of the Shakespeare text as we have it now, the name of Falstaff with that of Oldcastle. Editors who do not follow this injunction, we are told, 'join defenders of the corrupt and derivative Vulgate, against the reforms of Erasmus'.² I am afraid I must be classed with the defenders of the Vulgate, not because I do not believe that in many instances it would be enough to substitute one name for the other in order to get to what Shakespeare originally wrote—I did so myself a moment ago when, in quoting a well-known line from Act II scene ii, I restored Oldcastle's name for the present unmetrical 'Away, good Ned! Falstaff sweats to death'—; in my opinion what Kristian Smidt has recently called the 'unconformities'³ that are scattered in large numbers through both parts of *Henry IV* bear witness to a process of adaptation, rewriting, and especially amplification of materials originally organized in a much tighter and more economic dramatic structure. I have attempted elsewhere a reconstruction of this original structure, what I call the ur-*Henry IV*,⁴ that is to say Shakespeare's one-play version of the history, featuring Oldcastle, Harvey, and Rossill instead of Falstaff, Peto, and Bardolph respectively, as well as the episode of the box on the ear of the Lord Chief Justice, but ignoring altogether the second rebellion and the Gaultree episode and many sections of the comic scenes in the first and practically all those in the second Part of the plays as we have them now.

I have no time to go into details: what matters is that such a play could not have been presented on the stage at a more unfortunate

¹ *Proc. British Academy*, lxxi (1985), 159–85.

² Gary Taylor, 'The Fortunes of Oldcastle', *Shakespeare Survey*, xxxviii (1985), 85–100.

³ K. Smidt, *Unconformities in Shakespeare's History Plays* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, 1982).

⁴ See p. 75, n. 3.

time. Henry Carey, first Lord Hunsdon, the Lord Chamberlain and patron of Shakespeare's company, had died on 22 July 1596, and though the company remained under the patronage of his son, George Carey, second Lord Hunsdon, the office of Lord Chamberlain was transferred to William Brooke, Lord Cobham. It was a short-lived transfer because the Lord Cobham died in March 1597 and the office was then returned to the younger Carey, so that the company was able to resume the name of Chamberlain's men; but these few months were enough for the Lord Cobham, as supervisor of all public entertainments, to be shocked by the success of a play featuring his martyred ancestor Sir John Oldcastle as its main comic attraction (though surely his part was by no means as extended as that of Falstaff in the later versions). The company, now known as Lord Hunsdon's men, was forced to withdraw the play just after discovering the formidable appeal of the newly created character of the fat misleader of youth. To throw away altogether such a promising script would have been a sorry waste. The obvious solution was to produce, as the history for the next season 1597, a re-elaboration of the same play on Henry IV, removing from it the offending presentation of the Protestant martyr, but not the character himself; on the contrary, Falstaff, now no longer identified with Oldcastle, the historical Lord Cobham, should be given ampler scope to delight the London audience: the tavern scenes (now *I Henry IV*, II. iv, and III. iii) were much extended, and his portrait was rounded off with the introduction, at the crucial point of the battle that was to mark the prince's utter reformation and transformation, of Falstaff's catechism on honour (v. i).

The expansion of Falstaff's role entailed the problem of his relationship with the prince. In re-making the first part of *Famous Victories* Shakespeare had attenuated the direct responsibility of the prince, in line with the picture provided towards the end of *Richard II* (v. iii) by Bolingbroke, enquiring about his 'unthrifty son' 'with unrestrained loose companions . . . Which he, young wanton and effeminate boy, Takes on the point of honour to support So dissolute a crew' (ll. 1, 7, 10-11). The ur-*Henry IV* was the story told in unambiguous terms of this wanton boy who, out of a misguided sense of loyalty to loose companions, had gone so far as to box the Lord Chief Justice on the ear; exactly that episode—his acceptance of being sent to prison—marked the young man's awakening to a sense of personal responsibility, the beginning of his reformation, of that crescendo that gave him heroic stature at Shrewsbury, leading to his coronation and the

rejection of his 'dissolute crew'. In the rewriting of the re-make the greater space allowed to Falstaff as an obvious box-office draw entailed the risk of enrolling the prince too firmly on his side in the early scenes, diminishing the credibility of an unprepared revulsion from wanton ways. The solution was to show from the beginning the prince's awareness of his difference from Falstaff and his crew, by underlining that his living as Falstaff's shadow, sharing his language and attitudes, was mere pretence. Hence the introduction of the well-known soliloquy at the end of the very first scene in which the prince appears (now 1 *Henry IV*, 1. ii. 204-26):

I know you all, and will awhile uphold
The unyoked humour of your idleness, . . .
I'll so offend, to make offence a skill,
Redeeming time when men least think I will.

After this self-revelation the scene with the Lord Chief Justice would be out of character, as being appropriate to a misguided boy, not to one intent on redeeming time; so it must go, and be replaced with an action more in keeping with such premisses.

I agree with Harold Jenkins's brilliant surmise¹ that at some point in the writing—or rather rewriting—of the new Act IV Shakespeare must have realized that all the additional material concerning Falstaff and the prince could not be fitted into a single play. There would be no room for the last scenes of the ur-*Henry IV*, such as the death of the king and the rejection of Oldcastle/Falstaff. These scenes, I think, were set aside for possible future use, and the play was planned as culminating in the battle of Shrewsbury, leaving no doubts as to the transformation of the prince into the victorious *Henry V*—and leaving no doubts either as to the retribution of the 'irregular humorists'. The latter objective was achieved by a masterly device that only a professional man of the theatre could have thought of. Taking a hint from *Famous Victories*, where the episode of the box on the ear of the Lord Chief Justice is immediately followed by its comic re-enactment by Derrick the Clown and his partner John Cobbler, in the new *Henry IV* the suppressed scene with the Justice was now replaced with what is known as the play-acting scene (II. iv. 378-481), where the prince, impersonating his father, condemns 'that villainous abominable misleader of youth, Falstaff', and, when Falstaff, impersonating the prince, pleads 'Banish not him thy Harry's company—banish plump Jack and banish all the world', replies in his own person as well as the king's 'I do, I will'.

¹ In *The Structural Problem in Shakespeare's Henry IV* (1956).

I am suggesting that 1 *Henry IV* was written, or rewritten, in 1597, as a self-sufficient play with an open ending. So, if it did not meet with success on the stage, some of the scenes left over from the ur-*Henry IV* could be conflated into the opening scene of *Henry V*, the re-make of the second part of *Famous Victories*—after all in the *Victories* the rejection of the prince's companions, the archbishop's arguments for the English rights to the French crown, the episode of the tennis balls with the declaration of war, and the confirmation in office of the Lord Chief Justice were all rolled into one single scene.¹ If the rewritten play was instead successful, all the material left over and much more could be incorporated in a straight sequel to it. In other words, when *Part One* of *Henry IV* was completed and first performed in 1597, *Part Two* had not yet been planned—it was at most thought of as an open option.

The exceptional number of Quarto editions of *Henry IV, Part One*, shows how well the first Falstaff play was received: the option must be taken, the history for the 1598 season must be a sequel to *Henry IV*. The task was not easy: what was left over from the ur-*Henry IV* could fill at most one act with historical material and a couple of scenes with comedy. The only chance of reinforcing the historical side was to turn once again to Holinshed and include the second rebellion and the unsavoury Gaultree episode—an awkward decision, because, in the hurried replacement of offending names in the ur-*Henry IV*, Shakespeare had picked on that of Bardolph for Russell, but now he could not avoid introducing a duplication, since the historical Lord Bardolph had played a major role in the second rebellion. On the other hand the best way of strengthening the comic scenes was the creation of a host of new characters as well as extending the parts of those who had already appeared: here are Pistol, Doll Tearsheet, Justice Shallow and Justice Silence—allusive names that could figure well in a moral interlude. It is significant that *Part Two* should be introduced by Rumour 'painted full of tongues', the only case (apart from Time in *Winter's Tale*) in which Shakespeare presents on the stage an allegorical personification.² *Part Two* acquires, for better or worse, a new dimension: not history but a revisitation of known events in the key of moral allegory, so that when Falstaff enters it is easy to recognize him as the morality Vice. And, as Lionel Knights

¹ Scene ix in the Praetorius facsimile edition of *Famous Victories* (introd. P. A. Daniel, London, 1887).

² See G. Melchiori, 'The Role of Jealousy: Restoring the Q Reading of 2 *Henry IV*, Induction, 16', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, xxxiv (1983), 327–30.

pointed out,¹ the play in its final form is run through by the theme of time, of man's subjection to time and physical decay, so macroscopically presented in the figure of Falstaff—a different Falstaff from that of *Part One*, as the Lord Chief Justice remarks (2 *Henry IV*, I. ii. 178–86):

Do you set down your name in the scroll of youth, that are written down old with all the characters of age? Have you not a moist eye, a dry hand, a yellow cheek, a white beard, a decreasing leg, an increasing belly? Is not your voice broken, your wind short, your chin double, your wit single, and every part about you blasted with antiquity? and will you yet call yourself young? Fie, fie, fie, Sir John!

Knights recognizes that 'the tone of *Henry IV Part II* is entirely different from the tone of detached observation of the earlier plays', it is 'markedly a transitional play. It looks back to the Sonnets, and the earlier history plays, and it looks forward to the great tragedies.'²

This is true, though the obvious morality element in the earlier group of histories lacked the new complexities of the later one. They offered themselves in fact as mere chronicles, culminating in the monstrous apparition of Richard Crookback, duly defeated by that mirror of knighthood, Richmond, the founder of the Tudor dynasty bringing about—as the historian Edward Hall put it—the union of the two noble and illustrious families of Lancaster and York. History was approached single-mindedly as the record of events full of sound and fury, leading towards one great goal, not—as that misleading historian and schoolmaster, Mr Deasy in Joyce's *Ulysses*,³ was to put it—the manifestation of God, but at least, in Edward Hall's words, the triumph of peace, profit, comfort, and joy in the realm of England.⁴

I think that Shakespeare's occasional collaboration in a play like *Sir Thomas More*, presenting a problematic view of recent history, with so many topical references to current events, must have awakened, or reinforced, his awareness that such a simple conception of the historical process would not hold. Then there came the re-makes, partly motivated—like his contribution to

¹ L. C. Knights, 'Time's Subjects: The Sonnets and *King Henry IV, Part II*' in his *Some Shakespearean Themes* (London, 1959), pp. 45–64.

² *Ibid.*, p. 63.

³ J. Joyce, *Ulysses* (critical edition ed. H. W. Gabler, New York, 1984), 69.

⁴ E. Hall, *The Union of the Two, Noble and Illustre Families of Lancastre and Yorke* (1548), as quoted in G. Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, iii (London, 1960), 17.

More—by the wish, or the necessity, of taking into due consideration the sensitivity of the censor regarding the presentation of the negative side of authority, particularly royalty. *Richard II* is a case in point: in reacting to the negative view of Richard in *Woodstock*, Shakespeare had to alter the focus of history itself, no longer the conflict between the powers of good and those of evil represented in two opposing factions, but a conflict inborn in human nature itself. Richard is a contradictory personality to be explored *per se*.

No less contradictory is his successor, *Henry IV*, at one and the same time a wise and rightful ruler with a noble mission, and a guilt-ridden usurper. *Famous Victories* shirked the problem by leaving the king in the shadow, but in the re-make, where he had the title role, it was solved by feats of eloquence, like the soliloquy, now in *Part II*, III. i, 'How many thousand of my poorest subjects . . . '—paralleling the magnificent oratory of More in Shakespeare's contribution to the earlier play. The most remarkable development, though, is one I have already mentioned: the introduction, in the rewriting of the ur-*Henry IV* as *Part One*, of the prince's self-revealing soliloquy right at the beginning of the play (I. ii. 206–12):

Yet herein will I imitate the sun
Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
To smother up his beauty from the world,
That when he please again to be himself
Being wanted, he may be more wondered at
By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
Of vapours that did seem to strangle him.

The historical prince, in contrast with the tavern-hunting wanton and effeminate boy (*and* with the impulsive and outspoken Hotspur), follows a deliberate policy. His character is ambivalent, but deliberately so, while the inner conflicts of Richard II and Henry IV were presented as part of their natures. Hal is from the beginning the political man—not necessarily the Machiavellian, the deceiver for deception's sake, but rather the statesman who calculates the impact of his behaviour in respect of the interests of the institutions. What emerges here is the relationship between history and politics, a problem that had not been faced at all in the early histories, where the motives of the action were represented by naked thirst for power and conquest, the generous pursuit of national ideals, or the most villainous forms of plotting and counter-plotting. Like T. S. Eliot's Gerontion, Shakespeare has now realized that

History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
 And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
 Guides us by vanities . . .¹

The realization that policy—a word regularly used in Shakespeare's time with negative or at most ironical connotations—could be an instrument in the pursuit of noble ends, conditions both parts of *Henry IV* on the stylistic level as well. From the unified language of *Richard II*, based on the principles of the highest rhetoric, we move to a constant alternance of high and low, a see-saw that in *Part Two* tends to become unbalanced. In fact there the relationship between the prince and Falstaff is completely changed, or rather it hardly exists. The only time—apart from the final scene—they are together in the tavern at Eastcheap (II. iv), the prince appears in another traditionally political role: that of the disguised ruler spying on the actions of his subjects. After which Falstaff becomes a recruiting officer in the provinces (III. ii)—surely a role transferred from the earlier part of the history, where it really belongs²—and this time he recruits soldiers for a war that does not take place because of the 'policy' of prince John of Lancaster, who entraps the rebels at Gaultree with false promises. *Part Two* is the triumph of policy: the last meeting of the prince, now King Henry V, with Falstaff—the rejection scene—is in fact no meeting at all: Henry has become a personification of kingship. In a recent haunting re-make of the two parts of *Henry IV* into one by the Italian avant-garde company Collettivo di Parma, instead of saying 'I know thee not old man', the king stood motionless under a spotlight at the back of the stage throughout the scene, a monument to himself, singing a little Brechtian song underlining his utter alienation.³

The king comes fully into his own of course in *Henry V*, which we all know was the history performed by the Chamberlain's men in the 1599 season. There is no mistaking the dominant figure in this history: apart from those of Hamlet, Richard III, and Iago, that of King Henry is the longest part that Shakespeare ever wrote for one of his characters, 8,338 words according to Marvin Spevack's *Concordance*,⁴ nearly one third of all the words spoken in this long

¹ T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems, 1909–1935* (London, 1936), 37–9.

² This opinion is widely shared by recent editors of the play, and repeated in Kristian Smidt's book referred to on p. 76, n. 3.

³ The performance is amply documented in L. Allegri, *Tre Shakespeare della Compagnia del Collettivo / Teatro Due* (Firenze, 1983).

⁴ M. Spevack, *A Complete and Systematic Concordance to the Works of Shakespeare*, 6 vols. (Hildesheim, 1968–80).

play. History, in it, is physically present in the frequent intervention of the Chorus—the positive side of Rumour in *Henry IV, Part Two*. Without Falstaff, without the English background of tavern, inn, or village life, the comic unhistorical scenes in the play create a new dramatic *genre* which I would call ‘comedy of language’, or rather ‘languages’, with the four captains, Fluellen, Gower, Macmorris, and Jamy and their marked national accents and features, and with the French, from the boastful Dolphin to Princess Katherine, already singled out as a source of merriment in the Epilogue to the previous history. The part of King Henry himself is constantly played on two distinct linguistic registers: the noble oratory of the great verse speeches, based on ample rhetorical patterns of immediate appeal (the proper use of rhetoric is to produce consensus), and on the other hand the subtle dialectical prose speeches, ironical and unashamed of sophistry—a sophistry apparent not only in the wooing of Katherine, but even more in the night scene before Agincourt (iv. i), in which once again Henry takes over the role of disguised ruler.

The dispute over Shakespeare’s positive or negative view of Henry’s character is basically idle, though it has stimulated a variety of lively stage productions. What in fact emerges from the stylistic duality of Henry’s part is not his humanity but the portrait of a statesman, of the *homo politicus*. It is perhaps wiser at this point to let the figures in Spevack’s *Concordance* speak for themselves. The relation between the two registers used in Henry’s speeches, which I mentioned before, is roughly 69 per cent verse to 31 per cent prose. It is interesting to ascertain in which other leading characters in Shakespeare’s plays a similar ratio between verse and prose is maintained, since I believe that the proportion of prose to verse is a revealing, because unconscious, criterion in the construction of character. Other English histories cannot be taken as terms of reference: after *Henry V* Shakespeare wrote none (apart from the collaborative and much later *Henry VIII*). Perhaps the fact itself (Shakespeare forsaking the writing of histories) is intrinsically significant: we should ask ourselves whether it was due to the decline of the *genre* in contemporary theatre, or rather to Shakespeare’s new consciousness of the primacy of the exploration of the individual character and of the motives of human behaviour over the chronicling of events. His last history play, *Henry V*, had yielded him the character of the politician, ambiguous even when pursuing noble ends. The moralized lives of the great Romans presented by Plutarch were better suited to the pursuit of the exploration of individual character in history. The nearest thing

to an English history play after *Henry V* is *Macbeth*, and it is to be wondered if Macbeth's statement that life 'is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing' does not represent the author's ultimate view of history.

Let us go back now to the statistical data, for what they are worth, that can be extrapolated from Spevack's exhaustive *Concordance*. After Hamlet, and apart from Macbeth (who speaks only in verse) and Timon (whose linguistic register is constant to the point of monotony), there are only two other characters who speak over 30 per cent of the words of the plays in which they appear. The first is the duke in *Measure for Measure*—the *deus ex machina* in a sinister story, a ruler in disguise with a vengeance. The fundamental ambiguity of his role is borne out by that of his language, alternating the high sententiousness of his moralizing speeches in verse with plotting and planning—apparently all for good—in prose: and the proportion between the two registers is very close to that which we find in Henry: 69.4 per cent verse, 30.6 per cent prose. Stepping out of history into fiction, the politician follows more devious ways: the disguised ruler pursues justice through the deceits of the bed-trick and the pretended capital execution—through many cunning passages and contrived corridors.

At this point it is perhaps no surprise to find that nearly the same proportion between verse and prose (71 to 29) obtains in another character who, like Henry, speaks over 32 per cent of the words in the play where he appears, though not in the title role: Iago in *Othello*. There is some variation within the registers of his language, the subject of masterly studies such as those of Madeleine Doran or Alessandro Serpieri:¹ sophistry, the rhetoric of negation, reticence and suspension, affect his verse—and especially his extended soliloquies—as much as his prose, and the latter is at times degraded to the coarseness of barrack language. But the outer balance is the same: the variation is in degree, not in kind. Freed from the fetters of history, the politician reveals a deeper layer of ambiguity: 'I am not what I am.'

The parable is complete: from the wanton Prince Hal turned into the victorious Henry V, through the duke of dark corners in Vienna, to the 'ancient' in the Venetian army. Is this the inevitable progress of the politician? I prefer to think that this is the lesson of History. Three hundred years later, Mr Deasy's

¹ M. Doran, 'Iago's *If*—Conditional and Subjunctive in *Othello*' (1970) in her *Shakespeare's Dramatic Language* (Madison, 1976), pp. 63–91; A. Serpieri, '*Otello*': *L'Eros Negato* (Milano, 1978).

statement in *Ulysses* that 'History moves to one great goal, the manifestation of God' was countered by young Stephen Dedalus with: 'History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.' This was written in 1916, and Eliot's 'Gerontion' at about the same time: it had taken Eliot and Joyce the experience of the First World War to discover the deception of History. Shakespeare learnt the lesson as a man of the theatre should: by *re-making* History—turning its deception into dramatic ambiguity, which is the true life of a play.