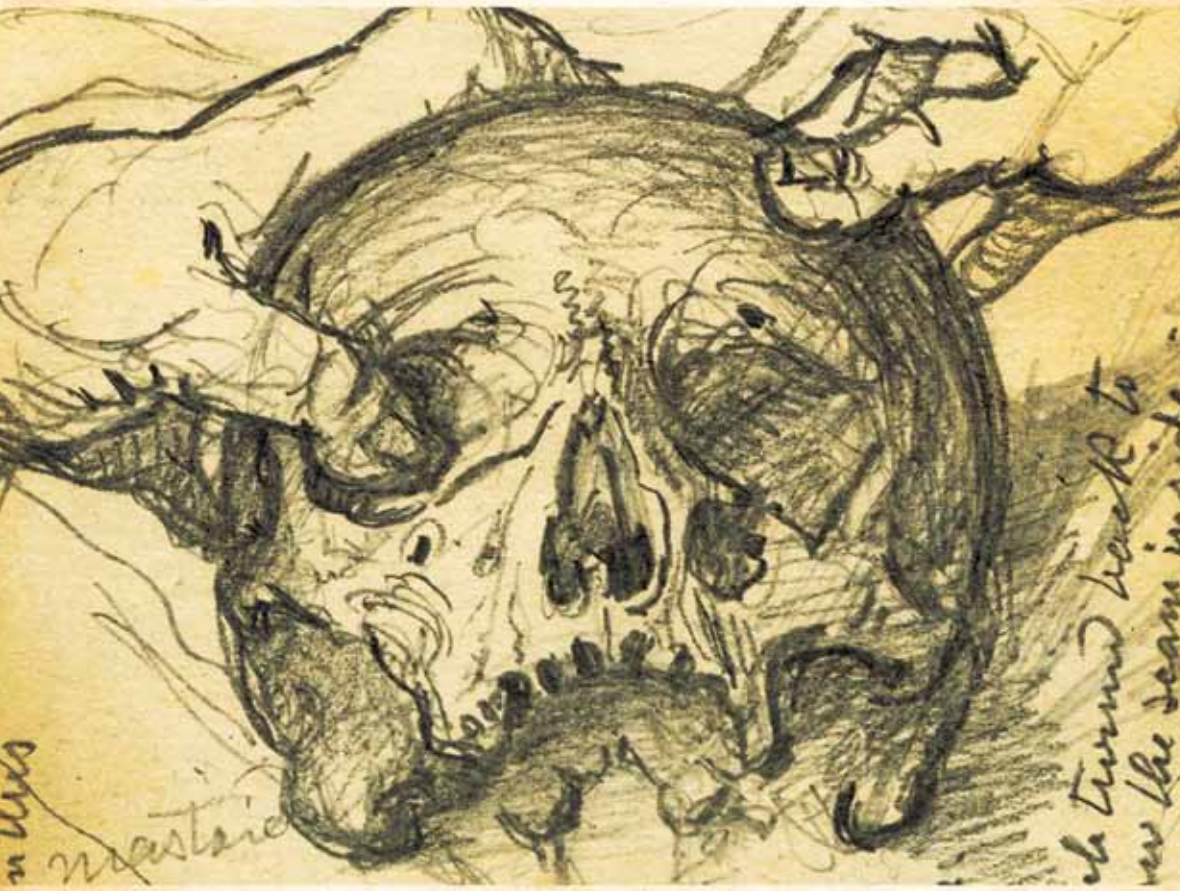
SHAKESPEARE'S HISTORY PLAYS

RETHINKING HISTORICISM



NEEMA PARVINI

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Neema Parvini

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Contents

Acknowledgements vi
A Note on Texts vii

1 Introduction 1

2 New Historicism 10

3 Cultural Materialism 33

4 An Argument Against Anti-humanism 52

5 Solutions 72

6 Shakespeare's Historical and Political Thought in Context 84

7 Personal Action and Agency in *Henry VI* 122

8 Ideology in *Richard II* and *Henry IV* 174

9 Conclusion 215

Bibliography 218
Index 236

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A Note on Texts

All references to Shakespeare's plays are to *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. John Jowett, William Montgomery, Gary Taylor and Stanley Wells, 2nd edn (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), with the exception of the quotations from *1*, *2* and *3 Henry VI* and *Richard III*, which are taken from the New Cambridge editions: *The First Part of King Henry VI*, ed. Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); *The Second Part of King Henry VI*, ed. Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); *The Third Part of King Henry VI*, ed. Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and *King Richard III*, ed. Janis Lull (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Chapter 1

Introduction

Following the publication of Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* in 1980,[1] few observers could have predicted the speed and temerity with which new historicism and cultural materialism came to dominate the study of early modern English literature. New historicism and cultural materialism demystified and repoliticised canonical literary texts by bringing structuralist-Marxist and post-structuralist theory to bear on them. The radical critique of the essentialist humanism to which most previous Shakespeare criticism appeared prone proved irresistible. Awakening from years spent in the apolitical slumber of New Criticism and formalism, the academy was plainly ripe for change. As Catherine Belsey recalls: 'within a very short time [of the publication of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*], it seemed that every American English department needed its resident early modern new historicist, and every Renaissance studies doctoral candidate's research paper began with a historical anecdote'.[2] By 1985, Jonathan Dollimore was able to state in his introduction to *Political Shakespeare* that 'it would be wrong to represent idealist criticism as still confidently dominant in Shakespeare studies';[3] in new historicism and cultural materialism, the so-called 'Crisis in English Studies'[4] finally seemed to have found its solution. The discipline was reinvigorated by the prospect of dissident politics, 'reading against the grain', Althusserian ideology critique, Foucauldian analyses of power, and feminist deconstructions of gender and sexuality; all of which must have felt like a breath of fresh air in 1985.

As Peter Erikson notes, by the mid-1980s new historicism and, by implication, cultural materialism had completed their 'initial phase of development . . . and . . . entered a transitional stage marked by uncertainty, growing pains, internal disagreement, and reassessment'.[5] By the mid-1990s, new historicism and cultural materialism had secured their grip on Shakespeare studies and entered a period of what Hugh Grady calls 'institutionalization and popularization'.[6] Key essays by their

major practitioners were collected in anthologies, and summarised and critiqued in book-length treatments.[7] One seminal volume of criticism, *Alternative Shakespeares*, which included several key cultural historicist essays, even spawned sequels.[8] In 1995, Ivo Kamps declared: 'materialist criticism has successfully entered virtually all aspects of Shakespeare studies'.[9] In short, new historicism and cultural materialism – or 'cultural historicism'[10] for the sake of brevity – became 'the new orthodoxy in many Literature departments'.[11] The bold, pioneering works of the 1980s had become modern classics of twentieth-century Shakespeare criticism;[12] what once provided a radical challenge to the status quo had itself become the dominant approach.

In 1996, Kiernan Ryan noted that the issues surrounding cultural historicism were 'no longer being debated with the same ferocity and frequency' as they were during the 1980s, and while this might have seemed to be 'a sign that their charm has already faded and their credibility is in decline', it was, in fact, a sign of how entrenched and pervasive the cultural historicist view had become.[13] Almost fifteen years later, Ryan's observation still stands and it needs to be taken seriously. Today, as one group of critics put it, cultural historicism is 'overwhelmingly the dominant conceptual matrix of literary study'.[14] Just as the pervasiveness of essentialist humanism before 1980 produced a climate in which critics stopped questioning their own latent assumptions, criticism today faces a similar 'crisis' provoked by the pervasiveness of cultural historicism's anti-essentialist, anti-humanist ideas. If literary critics do not pause to reflect upon their assumptions, intellectual stagnation and acquiescence in the academic status quo become real possibilities. For some critics this has already happened. In the view of Stephen Cohen, for example, 'New Historicism has largely ceased to be a source of theoretical innovation in literary studies'; 'the decades-long hegemony of New Historicism's insistence on the political and ideological implication of literature', he argues, has left us in the 'critical doldrums'.[15] Marcus Nordlund agrees and wonders 'will a new dominant paradigm emerge and rescue literary studies from its increasing disenchantment with postmodern historicism?'[16] Joseph Carroll puts it more bluntly: 'it cannot last'.[17]

It is worth pointing out here that it is not the aim of this book to dismiss the achievements of cultural historicism. We read and write about Shakespeare today, not as the victims of a constricting orthodoxy but as the inheritors of a critical legacy that succeeded in changing the character of Shakespeare studies significantly. New historicism and cultural materialism have been not only instrumental in reinvigorating the study of early modern English literature but also politically vital for a generation of academics and students whose voices might otherwise

have been silenced by the quietism characteristic of New Criticism and traditional historicist scholarship. This book aims to rethink aspects of cultural historicism that have been hitherto under-theorised. It searches for radical political agency in the lives of individuals who face many constraints from a variety of determinants and is consistent with the original aims of both new historicism and cultural materialism.

Furthermore, it seems to me that, despite appearances, a groundswell of change is already well under way. This is not difficult to see if one casts a glance at Table 1.1, where I have mapped out the myriad 'isms' that exist in the current state of Shakespeare studies and listed their leading proponents.[18] Although cultural historicists still hold a significant majority, the 'dissenter' camps have been gaining traction as most of the first-generation cultural historicists have been reaching their late sixties and early seventies. We seem to be on the verge of a sea change.

Ewan Fernie has noted a 'new turn in criticism towards empiricism and the aesthetic',[19] which highlights two major debates in current Shakespeare studies. These are: first, the reopened debate about human nature, which has been triggered partly by the advances made in this area by evolutionary psychology and neurobiology, advances that appear to contradict the radical anti-humanist critique of essentialist humanism; and second, the renewed concern with form and language. In other words, there are two general shifts in focus: the first from culture to the individual, the second from context to text. I wish to centre my study of cultural historicism and Shakespeare's history plays on the debate about human nature. However, before elaborating on my reasons for this, it is worth noting a few features of the 'Revenge of the Aesthetic',[20] or, as Stephen Cohen dubs it, 'historical formalism',[21] not least because they share several of the grounds for my critique of cultural historicism in the first five chapters of this book.

Cohen objects to the 'pan-textualism' of cultural historicism which, despite claims to the contrary,[22] 'render[s] it incapable of satisfactorily accounting for heterogeneity, conflict, or historical change'. For Cohen, the problem is that cultural historicists 'invite the effacing of the formal elements that set the literary text apart from other texts'. He proposes instead a type of criticism which can explore the 'mutual implication' of 'literature's formal individuation and its historical situation'.[23] Richard Levin, who has long struggled with cultural historicists on a variety of issues (see Chapters 2 and 3), has more of a problem with the way cultural historicists treat literary texts. He views their overwhelming concern with 'certain ideological issues' as a narrowing of focus. 'Typically', he says, they 'frame an argument, then turn selectively to passages in one or more texts' to support it – a tendency which limits

Table 1.1

Cultural Historicists		*Dissenters*	
New Historicists	**Cultural Materialists**	**Humanists**	
Text as instrument of state power	'First wave'	Liberal humanists	Evolutionary critics
Stephen Greenblatt (pre-1988)	Jonathan Dollimore	Edward Pechter	Joseph Carroll
Leonard Tennenhouse	Alan Sinfield	Richard Levin	Brian Boyd
Jonathan Goldberg	Catherine Belsey	Graham Bradshaw	Marcus Nordlund
Cultural poetics	Graham Holderness	Harold Bloom	Jonathan Gottschall
Stephen Greenblatt (post-1988)	Richard Wilson	Other humanists	William Flesch
Catherine Gallagher	Michael Bristol	Andy Mousley	
Stephen Mullaney	Feminist 'new materialists'	A. D. Nuttall	
Other new historicists	Dympna Callaghan	Robin Headlam-Wells	
Jean E. Howard	Kathleen McLuskie		
Marion F. O'Connor	Clare McManus	**Formalists**	
Phyllis Rackin	Post-colonialists		
Walter Cohen	Lisa Jardine	'The new aestheticism'	Historical formalists
Louis Montrose	Gerald MacLane	Isobel Armstrong	Patricia Parker
	Jerry Brotton	Simon Malpas	Susan J. Wolfson
	Daniel Vitkus	John J. Joughin	David Rasmussen
	Ania Loomba		Stephen A. Cohen
		Still working within a materialist framework	
		Presentists	'Post-theory' historians
		Hugh Grady	David Scott Kastan
		Terence Hawkes	David Bevington
		Ewan Fernie	Marxists
			Gabriel Egan

stylistic analyses and discourages what Levin calls 'a kind of alertness' to the details and nuances of each play.[24] Kiernan Ryan makes a similar argument; he speaks of 'the tunnel vision to which so much radical criticism seems to be congenitally predisposed', and complains about 'the neglect of formal techniques, structural implications and dramatic parentheses, whose import changes the meaning of the narrative they articulate'.[25]

These are arguments to which I am sympathetic; however, the main thrust of my critique of cultural historicism is theoretical. I believe that many of the problems faced by literary criticism today, especially in Shakespeare studies, are rooted in the anti-essentialist, anti-humanist theoretical framework that cultural historicism adopted in the 1980s. We need to update and, where necessary, overhaul our theories if we are to avoid languishing in the 'critical doldrums' of which Cohen speaks. Since the turn of the new millennium – when David Scott Kastan assumed that he was writing 'after theory', and Terry Eagleton declared 'the golden age of cultural theory' to be over[26] – the references to Antonio Gramsci, Pierre Macherey, Louis Althusser, Raymond Williams and Michel Foucault have slipped from the footnotes along with serious engagement with their respective theories. Yet their influences endure, hidden, disavowed and unquestioned. Scott Cutler Shershow's axiomatic statement that 'Shakespeare, like any other writer, like any other writing or reading or effort of thought, like language itself, can finally be *nothing more* nor less than what Marx calls the "product" and the "presence" of the community'[27] is still tacitly if not overtly endorsed by many in the field of Shakespeare studies. This statement seems to preclude the autonomy of the individual: if Shakespeare is truly 'nothing more' than the product of his community, then his ability to think things through for himself and come to his own conclusions is put into question. In the same volume, Shershow, along with Jean E. Howard, wonders: 'How do we find ourselves at a point in which the realm of the esthetic, last refuge of a universal humanism, has been cordoned off from history and supposedly cut loose from market values?'[28] Humanists might well wonder the same thing: how have we come to a point at which the belief in fundamental human universals has been cordoned off from the discussion of history or politics and ghettoised in the 'realm of the esthetic'?

This monograph will critically assess the anti-humanist assumptions of cultural historicism and their impact on the reading and understanding of Shakespeare's plays. It posits that a writer of Shakespeare's intelligence and complexity requires a mode of criticism sensitive to the many nuances that distinguish his voice from the other voices of his world and time. To this end, I will scrutinise the assumptions and methods of

new historicism in Chapter 2 and of cultural materialism in Chapter 3 to identify the problems they pose in practice. I will then put forward an argument against the anti-humanist assumptions that unite new historicists and cultural materialists in Chapter 4, before proposing an alternative set of assumptions in Chapter 5 that are more conducive to appreciating Shakespeare's startling insights into the issues raised by the question of personal agency in history and ideology. In Chapter 6, with these issues in mind, I will survey the range of views in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century historiography to which Shakespeare might have been exposed, while maintaining that he had agency enough to make up his own mind about such matters. In Chapter 7 I will turn to the *Henry VI* plays to analyse Shakespeare's close focus on individuals and their scope for agency in history; and in Chapter 8 I will turn to the second tetralogy to look at the complex understanding of ideology and power that Shakespeare develops in those plays.

Notes

1. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
2. Catherine Belsey, 'Historicizing New Historicism', in *Presentist Shakespeares*, ed. Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), p. 27.
3. Jonathan Dollimore, 'Introduction: Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism and the New Historicism', in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 4.
4. Peter Widdowson, 'Introduction: The Crisis in English Studies', in *Re-Reading English*, ed. Peter Widdowson (London: Methuen, 1982), pp. 1–14.
5. Peter Erikson, 'Rewriting the Renaissance, Rewriting Ourselves', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 38:3 (Autumn 1987), p. 330.
6. Hugh Grady, 'Why Presentism Now', *SHAKSPER 2007: SHAKSPER Roundtable: Presentism* (updated 29 January 2007) <http://www.shaksper.net/archives/2007/0065.html>, accessed 18 February 2007.
7. H. Aram Veeser (ed.), *The New Historicism* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989); Richard Wilson and Richard Dutton (eds), *New Historicism and Renaissance Drama* (London: Longman, 1992); H. Aram Veeser (ed.), *The New Historicism Reader* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994); Scott Wilson, *Cultural Materialism: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Kiernan Ryan (ed.), *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism: A Reader* (London: Arnold, 1996); Jeremy Hawthorn, *Cunning Passages: New Historicism, Cultural Materialism and Marxism in the Contemporary Literary Debate* (London: Arnold, 1996).
8. John Drakakis (ed.), *Alternative Shakespeares* (New York and London:

Methuen, 1985); Terence Hawkes (ed.), *Alternative Shakespeares, Volume 2* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996); Diana E. Henderson (ed.), *Alternative Shakespeares 3* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008).

9. Ivo Kamps, 'Introduction', in *Materialist Shakespeare: A History*, ed. Ivo Kamps (New York and London: Verso, 1995), p. 16.
10. The term coined by Kiernan Ryan, in 'Literature as History: Shakespeare and the Politics of Appropriation', paper given at the Annual Conference of German University Teachers of English, Halle, Germany, 18 September 2006. It was later used by Andy Mousley, in *Re-Humanising Shakespeare* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 77. I view new historicism and cultural materialism as, essentially, two sides of the same coin. Though there are differences, the theoretical and practical similarities are too patent to overlook. Edward Pechter has described 'cultural materialism' as Jonathan Dollimore's and Alan Sinfield's 'term for the new historicism' ('The New Historicism and its Discontents', *PMLA*, 102:3 (May 1987), p. 299); and Dollimore himself has admitted that there is a 'convergence between British cultural materialism and American new historicism' and moments of significant 'overlap' ('Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism, Feminism and Marxist Humanism', *New Literary History*, 21:3 (Spring 1990), p. 471). Unlike Pechter, however, I do not suggest that cultural materialism is a subsidiary of new historicism and, unlike Jeremy Hawthorn, I do not venture to treat *all* of them as new historicists (see Hawthorn, *Cunning Passages*, p. 4), because it is clear that their geneses are quite distinct. I prefer to view new historicism and cultural materialism as two distinct movements that form distinguishable parts of the same practice.
11. Tamsin Spargo, 'Introduction: Past, Present and Future Pasts', in *Reading the Past: Literature and History*, ed. Tamsin Spargo (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 11.
12. In addition to *Political Shakespeare* and Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, I would count the following among their number: Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983); Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, 3rd edn (1984; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare's History* (New York: St Martin's, 1985); Leonard Tennenhouse, *Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare's Genres* (New York and London: Methuen, 1986); Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor (eds), *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology* (London: Methuen, 1987); Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988); Annabel Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990); Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).
13. Kiernan Ryan, 'Introduction', in *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism: A Reader*, ed. Kiernan Ryan (London: Arnold, 1996), p. ix.

14. Joseph Carroll, Jonathan Gottschall, John Johnson and Daniel Kruger, 'Imagining Human Nature', in *Evolution, Literature, and Film: A Reader*, ed. Brian Boyd, Joseph Carroll and Jonathan Gottschall (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 214.
15. Stephen A. Cohen, 'Introduction', in *Shakespeare and Historical Formalism*, ed. Stephen A. Cohen (Aldershot: Algate, 2007), p. 2.
16. Marcus Nordlund, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Love: Literature, Culture, Evolution* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), p. 11.
17. Joseph Carroll, *Reading Human Nature: Literary Darwinism in Theory and Practice* (Albany, NY: State University Press of New York, 2011), p. 277.
18. The bibliography lists key works from the scholars listed here. For a detailed overview of each of these critical schools see: Neema Parvini, *Shakespeare and Contemporary Theory: New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* (New York and London: Arden, 2012). This table is, of course, by no means exhaustive. There are a plethora of other commentators – John Brannigan, Ivo Kamps, Claire Colebrook, Howard Felperin, Jeremy Hawthorn, Richard Lehan, Jürgen Pieters, Carolyn Porter, Kiernan Ryan and H. Aram Veeser, to name but ten prominent ones – who each have their own allegiances. Five of them consider new historicism and cultural materialism in book-length treatments, Lehan and Porter offer lengthy essays, and the remaining four have all edited collections of cultural historicist work. Their positions are so nuanced that it would be impossible to map and place all of them. It is worth noting that, Felperin, Lehan and perhaps Ryan aside, all these commentators are generally sympathetic to the cultural historicist cause and might expect to be included in their number. Veeser and Kamps in particular adopt a rather celebratory tone when discussing new historicism and cultural materialism in the introductions to their respective volumes. In short, the pro-cultural historicists outnumber those opposed to them.
19. Ewan Fernie, *Shame in Shakespeare* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), p. 4.
20. Michael P. Clark (ed.), *Revenge of the Aesthetic: The Place of Literature in Theory Today* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
21. Cohen, 'Introduction', in *Shakespeare and Historical Formalism*, p. 2. See also: Susan J. Wolfson, 'Reading for Form', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 61:1 (March 2000), a special edition with a polemical introduction by Susan J. Wolfson; David Rasmussen (ed.), *Renaissance Literature and its Formal Engagements* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).
22. For example, Dollimore argues that 'materialist criticism . . . refuses what Stephen Greenblatt calls the monological approach of historical scholarship of the past' ('Introduction', in *Political Shakespeare*, p. 4). This issue is discussed in greater detail in the section entitled '"Arbitrary Connectedness": "The Consequences of the Synchronic – or the Dangers of Spatializing Time"' in Chapter 2.
23. Cohen, 'Introduction', in *Shakespeare and Historical Formalism*, pp. 4, 5, 3.
24. Richard Levin, *Shakespeare's Secret Schemers: The Study of an Early Modern Dramatic Device* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2001), p. 16.

25. Kiernan Ryan, *Shakespeare*, 3rd edn (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 38, 47.
26. David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare After Theory* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999); Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), p. 1.
27. Scott Cutler Shershow, 'Shakespeare Beyond Shakespeare', in *Marxist Shakespeares*, ed. Jean E. Howard and Scott Cutler Shershow (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), p. 262, emphasis mine.
28. Jean E. Howard and Scott Cutler Shershow, 'Introduction: Marxism Now, Shakespeare Now', in *Marxist Shakespeares*, pp. 9–10.

Chapter 2

New Historicism

'Arbitrary Connectedness': 'The Consequences of the Synchronic – or the Dangers of Spatializing Time'

It has been commonly believed that new historicism and cultural materialism constitute 'a reaction against formalism'.[1] The story goes that where the structuralists and New Critics found a self-contained unity in the literary text, the cultural historicists find an expanse of intertextual relations. This is the kind of story Jeremy Hawthorn retells at the end of *Cunning Passages*:

> After decades of literary criticism dominated by the formalisms of the New Critics, the structuralists, and the post-structuralists, the achievements of new historicism and, especially, cultural materialism, are allowing students of literature not just to observe but to take part in the social struggles that literature arises from and gives access to. The opportunity should be grasped. The doors to the ivory towers filled with prisoners taken by fifty-seven varieties of formalism have been unlocked. Let's take a look outside.[2]

Hawthorn speaks here as if the new historicists and cultural materialists have led literary criticism to a new promised land, free from the chains of the structural totalities that characterised the formalist systems that they replaced. And before 'freeing' the students in this way, they scaled the walls of the old academy and shattered the political conservatism perpetuated by an apolitical formalism. Scott Wilson tells a similar tale:

> The cultural materialist academic may no longer function as 'the man of culture' judging and evaluating the great works of a national tradition, the traditional scholar and critic, exposed by Marxist theory as an institutional 'state functionary', the Capitalist lackey of an ideological state apparatus ensuring the uneventful reproduction of an exploitative mode of production for the ruling class.[3]

New historicism and cultural materialism are thus said to supplant liberal-humanist scholarship with its outmoded, diachronic conception of 'a unitary past',[4] and its view of history as a grand narrative of human progress, putting in its place 'the idea of an epistemological rupture' so prevalent in Althusserian and Foucauldian notions of a discontinuous history.[5] Cultural historicism is said to replace the close reading required by the humanist's formalism – which rests on assumptions of unity and ideological pretensions to scholarly objectivity – with the 'methodological anarchy' celebrated by H. Aram Veeser.[6]

However, a brief engagement with other views of the cultural historicist project tells a rather different story. In a seminal essay, Walter Cohen found that new historicism was not as radically opposed to formalism as it appeared to be:

> The strategy is governed methodologically by the assumption that any one aspect of a society is related to any other. No organising principle determines these relationships: any social practice has at least a potential connection to any theatrical practice. Hence new historicist studies of Shakespeare have a radically unpredictable quality. This implicit commitment to arbitrary connectedness produces impressive results . . . yet [this] commitment . . . inevitably limits the persuasiveness of much new historicist work . . . Contradictions between essays arise as a matter of course.[7]

Cohen recognises the assumption in cultural historicism that any two parts of a culture will necessarily have significance for each other on the grounds that they are the products of this same culture. Thus they will share certain ideological or discursive features, and might both be said to reproduce or to resist power. Cohen's key criticism is that:

> The assumption of arbitrary connectedness seems to preclude a systematic survey of the available evidence, leading instead to a kind of synecdoche in which a single text or group of texts stands in for all texts and thus exhausts the discursive field.[8]

Rather than supplanting formalism, in other words, as Jeremy Hawthorn and Scott Wilson suggest it does, cultural historicism might be said to represent the fifty-eighth variety to be manufactured by the formalist factory.

Others since Cohen have gone further, finding in this conception of culture, paradoxically, a type of 'hidden formalism'. Among the most vehement has been David Scott Kastan, whose conclusions about new historicism are similar to Cohen's. Kastan characterises the typical new historicist essay as 'offering some bizarre incident as the point of generation of a cultural principle that is then discovered in a canonical text'.[9] Like Cohen, he sees this move as 'arbitrary connectedness', one that assumes

> a society in which nothing is truly variant or discontinuous . . . The anecdote, however, clearly functions not as evidence but as trope – a synecdoche – assuming . . . that the part can stand for the whole, that culture is radically coherent . . . [New historicism and cultural materialism] are not properly historical at all but rather formalist practices, discovering pattern and order, unity and coherence, in the culture . . . exactly as an earlier generation of formalist critics found them in works of literature.[10]

This scathing assessment extends Cohen's diagnosis of 'arbitrary connectedness' and thraldom to synecdoche by making the bold claim that new historicism finds 'unity and order' in culture. Kastan accuses new historicism of formalism at the level of method. Richard Lehan also criticises new historicism for a perceived formalism, but finds another problem. For him, the new historicist 'drains meaning from history' by subscribing to the anti-humanist notion that history is discontinuous. To subscribe to that notion, Lehan continues, is to 'spatialize time and rob it of sequence, direction, and agency'. He accuses new historicism of locking history into 'part of a tropological frieze', which begs the question of 'how . . . we get from frieze to frieze, or from what Foucault would call episteme to episteme'. Lehan argues ultimately for the recovery of 'the diachronic nature' of history and insists upon 'the belief that meaning is built into time' upon the fundamental logic of cause and effect. His solution is to re-establish 'the idea of historical process' by retracing 'the connection' between epistemes.[11] Despite differences, what Kastan and Lehan have in common is their claim that new historicism is not 'historical' at all and therefore can only, to use Hayden White's phrase, 'give offence to historians in general' as well as reducing, rather than illuminating, the literary texts they appropriate.[12]

Before moving on, I want to ask a series of questions about the underlying assumptions and the consequences of cultural historicism that arise after reading Cohen, Kastan and Lehan. On what basis are the cultural historicists able to connect arbitrarily disparate aspects of culture? Is cultural historicism *really* a type of formalism? If so, can it be said to offer a real alternative to formalism, in the way its advocates announce? What are the consequences of employing a disjunctive theory of history in literary analysis? And to what extent does such a theory serve to deny political agency and rob history of meaning? I also want to ask a couple of further questions that these critics do not entirely take into account: first, what is cultural historicism's relationship with deconstruction and how does this affect its conceptualisation of culture? And second, does this synchronic approach to culture have any worth for the literary critic? With these questions in mind, let us turn to two of the key studies of new historicism: Jonathan Goldberg's *James I and the Politics*

of Literature and Stephen Greenblatt's essay 'Martial Law in the Land of Cockaigne'.

James I and the Politics of Literature

In *James I and the Politics of Literature*, viewed by many as the archetypal new historicist text, 'indicative of the conceptual dilemmas that haunt' new historicism,[13] Goldberg advances the argument that the theatrical works of the Jacobean era reproduce sovereign power. To make this argument he draws principally on Michel Foucault: 'To adopt the voice of power is, in Foucault's definition, to speak beyond oneself, ascribing one's powers elsewhere, saying one thing and meaning another . . . Denying itself, contradiction defines the essence of the discourse of power.'[14] Hence during James I's rule, the poet's work is ascribed to the ruler whose power is always already transcendent. The king and the playwright are inextricably linked by this power relation. Goldberg goes on to demonstrate this in a range of texts, most notably in the chapter 'The Royal Masque: Ideology and Writing'.[15] In this chapter Goldberg introduces his version of the concept of 'ideology' – so thoroughly discredited and disavowed by Foucault's own thought – and he does so without reference to Marx, Gramsci, Mannheim, Althusser, Hall or any other major theorist of ideology. This is most telling in Goldberg's virtual conflation of the state with the figure of the king. Goldberg's study paints a picture of Jacobean England as the virtual extension of the king's will. The Marx of *Capital* might have found something distinctly Hegelian about this landscape:

> To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e. the process of thinking, which, under the name of 'the Idea', he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of 'the Idea'.[16]

Goldberg's theoretically disengaged application of the term 'ideology' leaves his conception of sovereign power open to the charge of idealism. So it is unsurprising when he turns to Ben Jonson, and finds that the Jacobean masque 'represents the king', that the masque and the king mirror each other to reflect 'the mysteries of the state'.[17]

Goldberg's treatment of *Measure for Measure* is virtually identical. Here he announces that 'the crucial note that links theatre and culture in James's time [is]: representation'.[18] The king was always engaged in some form of symbolic action because he 'represented' the state, the theatre was also in the game of 'representation', and the playwrights

who wrote for its stage were also 'representing' things in their plays. Parallels and linkages are seen not only as possible but also as necessary to make. Thus for Goldberg:

> In the Duke [of *Measure for Measure*], Shakespeare has written a role that represents his power as a playwright as coincident with the powers of the sovereign . . . dramatist and monarch represent each other, a doubleness housed in a single person.[19]

So, because Shakespeare, Duke Vincentio and James I all happen to have been engaged in the act of representing something else, they now not only imply each other but also *actually constitute the same person*. And, by extension, *Measure for Measure* is effectively a substitute or 'double' for sovereign power. The substitutions and doubling that occur in the play are seen ultimately as emblematic of this relationship. With this established, Goldberg is able to highlight the ways in which the Duke and James I are similar, not least because they are in effect the same person. Let us not forget that the Duke is also Shakespeare and that Shakespeare is also James I, as if they form some unholy trinity. Hence, given this triple identification, 'the power of authority takes root in language itself'. There is no escape, especially when one considers that language is 'endlessly reduplicative, endlessly representing'.[20] If one extends Goldberg's logic, because James I is the node of representation and words themselves are 'endlessly' representative, all words become ascribed to his power; in fact, all words used in Jacobean England *are* James himself and James I *is* Jacobean England – he has no 'private self'. Alan Sinfield is justified in his conclusion that

> Goldberg sees language . . . as the vehicle of a royal power which has always already incorporated all possibilities . . . Power = representation produces the same outcome as power / subversion: an unbreakable circle of power, proceeding from and returning to the monarch.[21]

This image of monarch-as-representation chimes with Foucault's description of Don Quixote in *The Order of Things*:

> [Don Quixote] is himself like a sign, a long, thin graphism, a letter that has just escaped from the open pages of a book. His whole being is nothing but language, text, printed pages, stories that have already been written down. He is made up of interwoven words; he is writing itself, wandering through the world among the resemblances of things.[22]

Like Don Quixote, Goldberg's James I becomes nothing but the system of representation he aspires to, and, by analogy, so do the Duke and Shakespeare himself.

When faced with such a bizarre circular argument, one must ask what its theoretical basis is. The synecdochic tendency that both Cohen and Kastan recognised is here pursued *ad absurdum*. Given the similarity to his description of Don Quixote, one might suggest that it is Foucault at work here. In *The Order of Things*, he describes 'the madman', who is

> *alienated* in *analogy* . . . he takes things for what they are not, and people for one another . . . for him, the crown makes the king . . . he is Different only in so far as he is unaware of Difference, he sees nothing but resemblances and signs of resemblance everywhere; for him all signs resemble one another and all resemblances have the value of signs.[23]

Against this figure he sets 'the poet', who

> beneath the named, constantly expected differences, rediscovers the buried kinship between things, their scattered resemblances . . . he hears another deeper, discourse, which recalls the time when words flittered in the universal resemblance of things . . . The poet brings similitude to the signs that speak it, whereas the madman loads all signs with a resemblance that ultimately erases them.[24]

It is not clear whether Goldberg is the poet or the madman, but what is clear is that Foucault does not advocate either as a position for serious analysis.

For the time being, we can see that reading Foucault does not necessarily inform Goldberg's method; Goldberg and Foucault are plainly not engaged in the same practice and it would be misleading to present them in that way. As Catherine Belsey explains, 'Foucault commonly contrasts one epoch with another', whereas Goldberg's 'inclination [is] to isolate synchronic moments rather than situate them in a differential relation to what came before and after'.[25] When one considers what Goldberg is actually doing with the figures of James I, Shakespeare and the Duke of *Measure for Measure*, the analysis 'seem[s] close to the formalism of New Criticism'.[26] We might remember Howard Felperin's point that Goldberg's ultimate aim is to show how different Renaissance culture is from our own. Despite this, curiously, contra Foucault and contra post-structuralism, Goldberg takes *similitude* rather than difference as his key analytical tool. James, Shakespeare and the Duke are seen to have many structural similarities, as if they are poetic devices in some wider text. Their relationship is like that of the end words of a tercet rhymed *aaa*, in which the rhyme serves to bind these disparate words together in union: 'Precisely! The[ir] nature is single, one, unified.'[27]

However, Goldberg's position is more sophisticated than that. His insistence upon the 'endlessly reduplicative' nature of language and the virtual fusion of the real James I with the textual, symbolic king

suggests the influence of post-structuralist thought and especially that of Derrida.[28] In *New Literary Histories*, Claire Colebrook describes the key difference between structuralism and post-structuralism: whereas 'structuralism posited the idea of a closed system of signs' (as in Saussurean linguistics), post-structuralism explodes that notion by arguing that it is impossible to find any discursive category that is not always already an effect of structural difference; in other words, there is no 'outside' of the structure which leads to the 'necessarily undecidable' nature of its determination.[29] Even a seemingly concrete concept such as 'being' (a 'true' concept that is beyond doubt in Cartesian empiricism) is only understood in relation to 'nothing', rather than as something intrinsic, tangible and provable. The concept, then, is said to be 'necessarily undecidable' because our understanding of it is a negotiation between it and a second concept; the 'meaning' of *the thing itself* is always deferred. Furthermore, unlike in structuralism, the concepts of both textual unity and binary opposition are discredited, because there are no formal limits to the structural totality. Colebrook argues that in the United States Derrida's 'necessarily undecidable' was misread as 'complete indeterminacy or relativism', to the extent that East Coast American deconstruction 'has been seen to harbour an apolitical, ahistorical and dangerously conservative relativism'. In a system of such complete relativism, 'no meaning is possible and . . . all moral claims are unsustainable'. For Colebrook, American deconstruction is 'a formalist dead-end'. The endless play of difference, and the resultant infinite deferral of meaning, paradoxically limit all reading to the same conclusion: that meaning is endlessly indeterminable. Deconstructionist practice is thus seen as little more than 'a demonstration of the "truth" of this philosophy'. In this way, Colebrook shows how American deconstruction is 'just another form of closed formalism'.[30] Goldberg's study stops short of making such truth claims, but it borrows from deconstruction two key ideas: first, the notion that there are no formal limits to the structural totality, so that binary opposites imply each other, and textual and non-textual discourse merge in the endless doubling of 'representation'; and second, the notion that language therefore offers 'complete indeterminacy'.

Thus, Goldberg inherits formalism from three distinct sources: first, and most explicitly, from the structuralism of Foucault; second, more obliquely, through the institutional formalism of New Criticism, which manifests itself in the way he reads culture like an enormous poem, spotting the moments of emphatic stress or repetition; and third, in the concepts he borrows from the Yale-influenced school of American deconstruction. His practice cannot be accused of the 'arbitrary connectedness' that Cohen complains of, because it has its own internal

logic that links separate figures – the players of a masque and the king, or Shakespeare, the Duke and the king – according to their structural relations. However, Cohen's charge that new historicism 'exhausts' the discursive field through the employment of synecdoche still stands; the king becomes the ultimate synecdoche, who not only 'stands in' for all texts but also *becomes* all texts by ascribing all discourse to his own power. Goldberg's brand of new historicism thus represents a type of formalism, one that is abstracted to the level of 'culture', a realm that draws no distinctions between text and context to the point where different individuals merge under the pressure of culture's structural cohesion. James I is seen as a physical manifestation of the sovereign state and the strength of his discourse is so transcendent that it has the power to transform language itself, and in doing so reconstitutes all it touches – in effect, all of Jacobean culture, and especially the theatre – in its own image.

The key danger of this type of formalism is that it places the text under a grossly distorting lens. Goldberg's logic is coherent, in as much as 'representation' can be seen reproducing itself; but the argument that the sovereign was able to exercise such complete hegemony over the entire category of 'representation' is less convincing. The spread of James's power is predicated on a formalist conception of culture, one that insists that the links between the disparate discursive fields of society (and the texts and individuals that constitute them) are similar, if not identical, to the separate lines or images of a poem. Where the fundamental organising principle for the formalist (whether a New Critic or a structuralist) is the text itself, the organising principle for Goldberg is the text of 'culture'. He takes on board fully the post-structuralist notion that texts and contexts are inseparable and pushes it to its logical conclusion. But in doing so, 'culture' becomes the ultimate formalist text. Goldberg is guilty of reading 'culture' in precisely the way that the New Critics he opposes read literary texts. Edward Pechter argues that in new historicism 'ideology retains a privileged or sub-structural position, preceding and determining discourse',[31] but it is difficult to see any such distinction between 'ideology' and 'discourse' here. For Goldberg, language *is* sovereign power and the discourse *is* the ideology. This can partly account for why he is able to use 'power', 'culture', 'ideology' and 'discourse' so interchangeably, because they all amount to the same thing: the master-text of the Jacobean era.

Quite apart from the problems associated with this kind of formalist analysis *per se*, a further problem emerges when one asks the question: 'does culture really work in this way?' This treatment of culture as a 'master-text' involves a strikingly ahistorical flattening of the diachronic

field because Goldberg's analysis, like any purely formalist analysis, can consider only synchronic relations. Hayden White saw this in 1989:

> New historicism is reductionist in a double sense: it reduces the social to the status of a function of the cultural, and then further reduces the cultural to the status of a text . . . How could one possibly redress the balance of a predominantly formalist approach to the study of literary history by substituting for it . . . a specifically 'synchronic' treatment?[32]

Yet during the deluge of reassessments that new historicism underwent around the same time as White's article, this 'synchronic' treatment was precisely what was heralded as the answer, not only in Alan Liu's famous essay on new historicism, 'The Power of Formalism',[33] but also, ironically, in the work of critics who claimed to be against formalism. These reassessments can be read as a bid to tackle the residue of 'formalist ideology' found in the American academy with an advanced type of formalism in the shape of post-structuralism.

Carolyn Porter offers one of the most prominent critiques. She complains that new historicism continues 'to exhibit the force of a formalist legacy whose subtle denials of history – as the scene of heterogeneity, difference, contradiction, at least – persist'. Porter argues, along similar lines to the above analysis of Goldberg's study, that in new historicism 'the social turns out to be read as we have been trained to read a literary text, that is, in traditional formalist terms'.[34] But, whereas my analysis draws attention to the assumption that culture is a master-text constituted only of synchronic internal relations, Porter is more concerned with the prevalence of 'close reading' (especially in its use of anecdotes) in new historicist practice and its political ramifications. She writes as if 'close reading', because of its associations with New Criticism, which 'has been relentlessly attacked and discredited',[35] is *itself* responsible for this formalist tendency.[36] Porter therefore views formalism as the enemy: 'insofar as new historicist work relies upon the anecdotalization of the discursive field now opened for interpretation, it can only expand the range of the very formalism which it so manifestly wants to challenge'. Porter then makes the paradoxical move of attempting to combat this by proposing a post-structuralist (and therefore still formalist) solution: to construct 'the discursive field as flat' by doing away with the artificial binary oppositions imposed by 'formalist ideology'. She argues that seeing both terms of a binary opposition 'on the same plane would enable us to bring again into view the "memory of hostile encounters" such binaries serve to deny, to erase from memory'.[37] This, in effect, is a deeply synchronic model, which eliminates the possibility of 'vertical' signification along the 'diachronic axis';[38] Richard Lehan's nightmare

vision of a world without cause, effect or meaning is fully realised. It is the replacement of the hierarchical, 'essentially topographical', hermeneutic field with an ever-expanding spatial field that has no readily identifiable limits, that cannot be grasped as an intelligible structure', with 'precise identities assigned on its regional levels'.[39]

The only difference between Goldberg's formalism and Porter's apparent 'solution' is thus a matter of emphasis. Whereas the figures in Goldberg's Jacobean state are simply 'double-voiced', in that they must each deliver a discourse disseminated by an all-powerful monarch, Porter's figures are:

> 'Double-voiced' in Bakhtin's sense . . . they may be understood not as always already neutralised by the ideologies they must speak through in order to be heard, but rather as inflecting, distorting, even appropriating such ideologies, genres, values so as to alter their configuration . . . [These are] multi-voiced discourses in which both dominant and oppositional ideological strains are at work . . . Once they are seen as belonging to the same discursive field as their dominant opponents . . . they cannot be denied agency.[40]

Porter succeeds in overturning the hegemony of Goldberg's all-powerful monarch, but she does so on Goldberg's own terms. The organising principle she must appeal to remains the master-text of culture. The 'multi-voiced discourses' are still linked to 'their dominant opponents' by a purely synchronic relation – that of the 'discursive field' – so, ironically, despite her earlier concerns, Porter ends up extending the very formalism she so staunchly opposes. By making the search for political agency the focus of her study, the wider problem, that this sort of synchronicity is both formalist and deeply ahistorical, goes begging. Porter succeeds in creating a post-colonial and feminist inversion of Goldberg, one that finds a sense of agency for the lost voices of subordination, but the problems that were inherent in Goldberg's method remain intact.

'Martial Law in the Land of Cockaigne'

With this issue in mind, I will turn now from Goldberg and Porter to the 'cultural poetics' of Stephen Greenblatt. Whereas most studies of new historicism take the essay 'Invisible Bullets' as their point of departure, I want to concentrate on another essay in *Shakespearean Negotiations*: 'Martial Law in the Land of Cockaigne', mainly because this subtler essay is more representative of what Greenblatt means by 'cultural poetics' and of Greenblatt's practice in general; furthermore it is less stigmatised by the endlessly quoted maxim 'There is subversion, no end of

subversion, only not for us'. The first thing to say about this essay is that it does not proceed in the standard academic way from coherent hypothesis to stable conclusion. Greenblatt does not work towards making a final grand statement, but opts rather to comment on a number of things in passing. In four loosely connected sections, Greenblatt argues that 'fictive representations have themselves helped to empower [the] practice' of salutary anxiety, and he embarks on a lengthy treatment of a possible source of *The Tempest*, William Strachey's account of a tempest that struck an English fleet headed for Jamestown.[41] He also considers an ostensibly unrelated story told by H. M. Stanley, in which he burns a copy of Shakespeare's *Complete Works* (Chandos edition) in order to save his 'precious notebook, with its sketches and ethnographic and philologic details'.[42] The essay ends on the seemingly understated note that the Stanley anecdote demonstrates that while Shakespeare is central to our culture, 'we should remind ourselves that there are usually other discourses – here the notes and vocabulary and maps – that are instrumentally far more important . . . but without Shakespeare we wouldn't have the notes'.[43] This conclusion bears only the most general relation to the twenty-odd pages that precede it, but it is in precisely this elliptical approach that Greenblatt delights. Indeed, as has been mentioned, for him this scattershot effect is the stuff of 'real life'. However, the first two sections of the essay, which account for the bulk of it, *do* present a fairly coherent set of theses and it is on these that my own analysis will focus.

'Martial Law in the Land of Cockaigne' starts, characteristically enough, with an anecdote about a sermon Hugh Latimer delivered before Lady Catherine Bertie. In the sermon Latimer tells an anecdote of his own about a time when he and Thomas Bliney visited a prison and came across a woman who had been accused of murdering her own child. To summarise this anecdote briefly: the woman claims the child had been sick and died of natural causes. Latimer believes her, obtains a pardon from Henry VIII, and goes back to see the woman who, having now delivered her baby, believes that she is to be executed. As a Catholic, she is fearful of dying without first being cleansed of 'the stain associated with any blood or discharge'. As he is a staunch Protestant, Latimer withholds the pardon until the woman accepts his doctrinal point, only finally revealing it when she relents. This brings Greenblatt to his first major contention: 'I want to suggest that this little story reveals characteristic Renaissance beliefs and practices.' It is already possible to see that the anecdote is being used as a synecdoche in precisely the manner Kastan claims. Greenblatt then proceeds to make a number of observations about the gender relations at work in the anecdote. He suggests that Latimer 're-establishes male dominance in a moment of appar-

ent inferiority' (as the sermon is delivered to Lady Bertie), 'reinforced by Latimer's saving of the woman', and if one follows 'the implied analogical relations': 'the woman is to man as man is to God'.[44]

After making these comments about gender relations, Greenblatt shifts gear once again to bring into focus another claim, the idea that Latimer 'transcoded' the practice of purification from the religious to the civil sphere. This is a move he sees reflected in *The Winter's Tale*, when Leontes denies Hermione '"the child-bed privilege" because he believes her adulterous body is defiled beyond redemption . . . the secularized ritual is disrupted by a primal male nausea at the thought of the female body'.[45] Greenblatt dwells no further on this; it is a brief illustrative point. One might ask why the 'ritual' is 'secularized' here: why is 'the child-bed privilege' necessarily 'secularized'? It is true in the context of *The Winter's Tale* that these lines are spoken in a court of law over which Leontes presides as monarch, which is a secular ritual of sorts. But – given that the ultimate appeal is made to, and judgement passed by, a pagan god, the 'sealed-up oracle, by the hand delivered / Of great Apollo's priest' (3.2.125–6) – in the terms of the play itself there is no evidence either of the pregnant woman's Catholic beliefs or of the transcoding to the civil sphere supposedly carried out by Latimer. Greenblatt's intention here is to draw a quick parallel to demonstrate a similar scenario in Shakespeare before moving swiftly on. Superficially, he finds his parallel; it cannot be denied that Hermione has recently given birth to a child in that scene or that Leontes imprisoned her when she should have been cleansed and resting. However, in Greenblatt's analysis, the ritual is just as 'transcoded' in *The Winter's Tale* as it is in the Latimer anecdote, even though it is not clear that Leontes makes the same move as Latimer. For the analogy to work at all, Leontes must take the role of Henry VIII and the state, and Hermione the role of the woman, but Latimer himself has no parallel in *The Winter's Tale*. Given that Latimer is the agent of 'transcoding' the ritual from the religious to the civil sphere, and given that no such agent exists in *The Winter's Tale*, it can only be concluded that the 'childbed privilege' (3.2.101) Hermione speaks of is neither 'transcoded' nor 'secularized'. The statement that *The Winter's Tale* 'at once symbolically rehearses and reverses the ritual pattern we glimpse in Latimer: the tainting of the female, her exclusion from the social contacts that normally govern her sex, and her ultimate reintegration into a renewed community',[46] is ultimately insubstantial. The two texts are only similar because they share, to borrow Roland Barthes's phrase, 'cardinal functions' on the level of narrative.[47] The deeper political analysis of 'transcoding' truly applies only to the Latimer story. For Greenblatt, the fact that it bears a fairly close

similarity to *The Winter's Tale* is enough for the same analysis to apply to both texts; in short, Greenblatt is guilty of indulging in some subtle 'transcoding' of his own.

This is typical of Greenblatt's strategy throughout the rest of the essay. After the comment about *The Winter's Tale*, within a few words Greenblatt has shifted into another gear. He doubles back on himself to focus once again on Latimer's 'strategic practice' and introduces yet another concept to the analysis: 'anxiety'.[48] What interests Greenblatt about the Latimer story in particular is Latimer's tactic of letting the woman believe she is going to be executed in order to coerce her into accepting his doctrinal point. Greenblatt is reminded of *Measure for Measure*. The Duke employs exactly the same strategy in letting his subjects believe they are to be executed, only to pardon them at the last minute. Given this undoubted and striking similarity, we are told:

> The resemblance between the tales arises not because Latimer's sermon is one of Shakespeare's sources but because Latimer is practicing techniques of arousing and manipulating anxiety, and these techniques are crucial elements in the representational technology of Elizabethan and Jacobean theater.[49]

This is the closest thing to a crux in Greenblatt's essay, and for the long second and third sections it is the hinge on which it ultimately turns. The crucial term here is 'anxiety', which is never prefaced or elaborated upon. One assumes that it is meant in its conventional sense of 'the state of being anxious'. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) defines the most common usage of 'anxious' as follows:

a. Troubled or uneasy in mind about some uncertain event; being in painful or disturbing suspense; concerned, solicitous.
b. Const., *of* an issue dreaded (*obs.*); *for* an issue desired; *about* a thing or person involved in uncertain issues.

Thus, for 'anxiety' to be felt, there is one clear prerequisite: the person must be faced with some 'dreaded' or 'uncertain' event or issue in an unknown future. By this definition, it is beyond doubt that the woman of Latimer's anecdote and (at least) Claudio of *Measure for Measure* experience 'anxiety'. However, Greenblatt makes the term do much more work than that; he turns his attention to 'the staging of anxiety'. And in this wider context – where he is considering Shakespearean theatre in general rather than the single case of *Measure for Measure* – the meaning of 'anxiety' is transfigured to encompass a much wider sphere of reference than the 'uncertain event' of the *OED* definition. A kind of dualism emerges in Greenblatt's description of Renaissance theatre, which is aligned with 'love, courtship, music, dance, and poetry', on the

one hand, and on the other with anxiety, which is seen as 'seasoned by fear, grief, and the threat of shame or death'. 'Fear' and 'the threat of shame or death' reside safely in the domain of 'anxiety', but is it accurate to include 'grief' in the register of 'anxiety'? As the term becomes ever looser, this sense of 'anxiety' as 'grief' soon transforms itself into 'suffering' in general.[50] Greenblatt's dependence on this wider sense of 'anxiety' gives him scope to appropriate any text he fancies for his analysis as long as there is a degree of human pain or suffering involved.

That said, Greenblatt offers a much subtler analysis of Shakespeare's treatment of sovereign power in *Measure for Measure* than Goldberg. Because the social sphere of the theatre is always 'subordinated to the overriding need to give pleasure', it can only offer an ersatz version of anxiety. It produces what Greenblatt calls 'represented anxiety', which amounts to a mere simulacrum of the real thing: 'salutary anxiety'.[51] Due to this crucial difference, Greenblatt offers arguably the closest thing to the subversion of power we glimpse in *Shakespearean Negotiations*: 'If Shakespeare in *Measure for Measure* seems to represent the protagonist's task as inflicting anxiety for ideological purposes, he also clearly calls that task into question.' The Duke's failed attempt to force Juliet to succumb to his doctrine, and the drunken figure of Barnardine at the end of the play, undermine his effort, following Latimer, to arouse 'anxiety'. Through Shakespeare's 'complex ironic scrutiny' 'salutary anxiety' is punctured and shown to be occasionally fallible as a method of control, though it remains none the less an effective technique of coercion.[52] Greenblatt's conception of culture is diverse and heterogeneous enough to make a distinction between the figures and social spheres of James I and Shakespeare, although it still elides James and the Duke.

However, there is also an assumption in his reading of *Measure for Measure* that 'power' exists in culture like an identifiable essence. The assumption is that it is possible to expose the machinations of state power, disseminated as it is throughout culture, by taking any part of that culture and looking for it, 'buried and hidden', in the fabric of its constitution. In this essay, Greenblatt treats the technique of arousing anxiety like a DNA sequence, which contains, 'encoded' within it, the genetic blueprint for the entire organism. In biology, one can find the same DNA 'blueprint' for the entire organism regardless of where it comes from. In principle, at least, whether the object of study is a strand of hair, a piece of skin, a bone or a drop of blood, if it came from the same animal it is possible – through the 'blueprint' – to recreate that animal in its entirety. To cite Belsey once more: 'in its homogenizing impulse new historicism . . . reproduces the values of American functionalism, which implies that the local features of a society all work, in

the last analysis, to maintain the social order as a whole'.[53] This echoes the work of the sociological functionalist, Talcott Parsons, who was hugely influential in America in the 1960s, much more so than Foucault or Althusser.[54]

The functionalist belief that one can compare society to a living organism is precisely what one finds at work in Greenblatt. Greenblatt states that 'the ruling elite believed that a measure of insecurity and fear was a necessary, healthy element in the shaping of proper loyalties, and Elizabethan and Jacobean institutions deliberately invoked this insecurity'. He goes on to demonstrate this with yet another anecdote about the time James I unexpectedly pardoned Lords Grey and Cobham and Sir Gervase Markham on the day of their planned execution. This is followed by the claim that 'the great virtue of this technique is that it blocks *secret* wrath and *inward* grudging'. Then comes the functionalist move: these techniques of arousing 'anxiety' 'are already implicated in cultural practices that are essential to the making and staging of plays . . . The theatre is a virtual machine for deploying these techniques in a variety of registers.'[55] This statement comes as a bolt from the blue, obeying a bewildering logic that will be familiar to readers of Goldberg. The sovereign state uses 'spectacle' in its overt staging of power and mercy, and therefore apprehends and conditions the theatre's use of 'spectacle' and its staging of 'represented power' and 'represented mercy'. The sovereign state is involved in the fashioning of texts for its state legislature, and therefore apprehends and conditions the theatre's fashioning of texts for the stage. The state and the stage are thus complicit (just as in Goldberg), in as much as the latter is in thrall to the former.

The absurdity of this logic becomes apparent when one considers how tumultuous the Tudor and early Stuart periods were. Did the attempted regicide undertaken by Guy Fawkes and his co-conspirators in the Gunpowder Plot merely replicate the state executions authorised by James I? Were the Babington and Ridolfi plots a function of the state's technique of arousing anxiety? The assumptions underlying Goldberg's and Greenblatt's interpretations belittle the struggles and political differences of the period by arbitrarily connecting them and ascribing absurd levels of symbolic power to the sovereign state. However, it is the overwhelming reliance on synecdoche rather than 'arbitrary connectedness' that ultimately undermines Greenblatt's essay. It does not follow that the Stuart sovereign state and theatre 'implicate' each other by virtue of the fact that both were involved in the staging of 'spectacles' or the inducement of 'anxiety'. Greenblatt's analysis displays great subtlety when it suggests that the theatre is different enough from sovereignty to give it a 'complex ironic treatment', but, almost paradoxically, it maintains that

the theatre is also a 'virtual machine' that disseminates the techniques of state power as a matter of course, because it is constituted by those techniques.

Hence it is possible to conclude that, despite marked differences, Goldberg and Greenblatt share the assumption that culture functions synchronically as a massive monolithic text. This assumption is the basis for their linking of seemingly disparate aspects of culture, because, in the final analysis, each aspect of the culture will *necessarily* bear the imprint of the unified whole. In the essay that immediately follows Walter Cohen's in *Shakespeare Reproduced*, Don E. Wayne notes that, by assuming this:

> We run the risk of aestheticizing power in a new formalism that traces relationships among historical documents of various kinds. Such intertextual relations in a given historical moment will then operate in our criticism in the way that generic categories, narrative functions, and stylistic devices did formerly.[56]

James Holstun also recognised this risk in 1989:

> [New historicism] totalizes prematurely by arguing that all cultural conflicts, all exercises of power and resistance necessarily register themselves inside canonical cultural artefacts. This sort of argument assumes that culture is a *logical* structure that can be captured by an artwork forming a structure homologous to it. A view of culture as a *material* entity, on the other hand, studies the relation between the way a subculture articulates itself and the way it is articulated by another subculture.[57]

This analysis goes further than Wayne's in making the suggestion that culture does not have a coherent or logical structure. It recognises that in reality culture does not function like a living organism with a DNA 'blueprint'; it is vast, heterogeneous and multifaceted. Therefore, one aspect of that culture will not necessarily illuminate or have any significance for another.

The implication of this monolithic conception of early modern culture in Goldberg's and Greenblatt's work leaves them both open to a further charge beyond that of 'functionalism': namely, the charge of resurrecting something approaching the essentialism of the 'Hegelian expressive unity of culture'.[58] As Jürgen Pieters explains: '[Greenblatt] conceives of cultural totalities in terms of organized, dynamic systems that are subdivided into separate, through interrelated "zones" (the zone of religions, the zone of economy, the zone of theatre, the zone of politics).'[59] The binding force that maintains unity in this heterogeneous structure is 'the notion of social energy', which Pieters finds 'too underdeveloped' and describes as an 'all too vague concept'.[60] Of course, new historicists

and cultural materialists have always been adamant in their opposition to humanist essentialism. Neither Greenblatt nor Goldberg would object to Dollimore and Sinfield's anti-humanist diagnosis of an earlier manifestation of essentialism, New Criticism:

> Studying 'formal properties' in detachment tends to efface differences between readers and hence makes it easy to absolutize the reading position of the teacher. This has facilitated the assumption, in Englit., of an essential humanity, supposedly informing both text and critic, and hence contributing to the oppression of the out-groups. If a lower-class person, woman, student, person of colour, lesbian or gay man did not 'respond' in an 'appropriate' way to 'the text', it was because they were reading without insight, sensitivity, perceptiveness – i.e. not from the privileged academic position.[61]

It would be inaccurate to suggest that either Goldberg or Greenblatt maintains any notion of an 'essential humanity'. But, if one replaces this concept with that of an 'essential culture' (in a specific historical moment), then the analysis might still stand, with, of course, the marked difference that the only 'out-groups' that new historicism can feasibly be accused of 'oppressing' are those of Shakespeare's own audience and culture. The academic position is 'privileged' in Goldberg and Greenblatt, because the critic has the benefit of hindsight and historical and cultural difference to draw on. The crucial term of Dollimore and Sinfield's analysis is 'detachment'. As Lehan points out, Goldberg and Greenblatt treat the 'formal properties' of culture 'in detachment' from diachronic history in that the cultural moment (or 'episteme') is considered in isolation, as *discontinuous* with those that preceded or succeeded it. The emphasis on 'formal properties' also produces a 'detachment' when considering the individual texts, artefacts and inhabitants of a culture. As I have shown, it 'tends to efface differences' between them, making artificial connections between disparate aspects of culture. It is Goldberg who is guilty of making these connections. Greenblatt can recognise a crucial difference between the distinct discursive fields of sovereignty and the theatre. But, despite this – by transposing his own analysis of anecdotes on to texts whose relationship to those anecdotes is 'arbitrary in the extreme'[62] – his practice still presupposes an irreducibly 'essential' notion of a unified culture. To avoid confusion with the older tradition of essentialism – to which new historicists are plainly opposed – I will follow Catherine Belsey in her adoption of the term 'culturalism' to describe this type of 'cultural essentialism'.[63]

I have already shown how this culturalism can partly be seen as the residue of the academic formalism found in New Criticism and deconstruction in the years preceding new historicism, but the problem is too deep-rooted to be explained away so easily. The question that must be

asked at this juncture is: in terms of theory, where does this culturalism in new historicism come from? Both Lentricchia and Pieters lay the blame at Foucault's door, making the comparison between Greenblatt's underdeveloped notion of 'social energy' and Foucault's similarly mysterious and pervasive notion of 'power'. But the above analysis shows a marked difference in the respective methodologies of Foucault and new historicism: while Foucault's analysis is predicated on an assumption of fundamental *difference* at the level of infrastructure (i.e. something similar to Gramsci, the perpetual confrontation or struggle of 'power-relations'), both Goldberg and Greenblatt work on the assumption of an implied infrastructural *similitude* (i.e. generic traits that pervade a culture). Neither is this an idea inherited from the structuralism of Althusser, whose entire philosophical project was to divest Marx of Hegelian essentialism:

> The reduction of *all* the elements that make up the concrete life of a historical epoch . . . to *one principle* of internal unity, is itself only possible on the *absolute condition* of taking the whole of concrete life of a people for the externalization-alienation of an *internal spiritual principle*, which can *never definitely be anything but the most abstract form of that epoch's consciousness of itself . . . its own ideology . . . its most abstract ideology*.[64]

It is this reading of Hegel that is implied in the Dollimore and Sinfield critique of essentialism quoted above. In such moments it becomes clear that the cultural materialists have the theoretical advantage, or as Felperin puts it, 'an enormous headstart',[65] over their new historicist counterparts thanks to their Marxist origins. As a secondary point, it is worth noting that formalism does not necessitate either essentialism or the maintenance of unity. In so far as they represent a branch of French structuralism, both Foucault and Althusser can be broadly described as 'formalist' thinkers and neither necessarily falls into the same culture-as-unified-text trap in which the new historicists find themselves. Indeed, the work of Roland Barthes is exemplary on this point. In his analysis of Balzac's *Sarrasine* in *S/Z* he characterises the literary text as 'the fragment, the shards, the broken or obliterated network' of structures: in other words, anything *but* a structural unity or 'essence'.[66]

The evidence thus seems to point to Vincent P. Pecora's suggestion that this habit has been inherited from Clifford Geertz. For Geertz:

> Our double task is to uncover the conceptual structures that inform our subjects' acts, the 'said' of social discourse, and to construct a system of analysis in whose terms what is generic to those structures, what belongs to them because they are what they are, will stand out against the other determinants of human behaviour.[67]

Although Geertz dispenses with the concept of a human essence, in the phrase 'generic . . . structures [that] are what they are' there is the implication that there *is* something approaching a cultural 'essence'. His insistence upon 'locality' mirrors formalism's insistence on textual isolation and replicates it at the level of culture. It is already clear how this sort of analysis could lapse into employing synecdoche when it comes to the point of reaching conclusions. Pecora argues that Geertz's analysis of local structures seems incapable of taking a broader historical or political context into account. For example, Geertz's reading of Indonesian history appears blind to the wider context of global politics that invariably informs what goes on inside that country. After a long and impressive account of the Sukarno coup of 1965, Pecora demonstrates that in Geertz 'neither American involvement [in the coup] nor Indonesia's wholesale swing to a pro-Western orientation [afterwards] is ever mentioned'.[68]

It is possible to detect this provincialism in Goldberg and Greenblatt. As Peter Erikson notes, they share 'a reluctance to confront the slime of politics'.[69] Their respective studies provide little in the way of a wider understanding of a cultural or historical context *beyond* the sketches and the anecdotes they draw on. In Greenblatt's 'Martial Law and the Land of Cockaigne', for example, there is no attempt to understand the use of 'salutary anxiety' in the broader context of Europe. And there is no hint at all of an attempt to account for the major political events that occurred between the delivery of Latimer's sermon in 1522 and the writing of *Measure for Measure* over eighty years later. For Greenblatt's analysis to cohere truly, Latimer's 'transcoding' of the purification process from the religious to the civil sphere has to hold fast through Henry VIII's Reformation, Edward VI's harsh Protestantism, the brutal executions of Protestants under the Catholic reign of Mary I, over forty years of relative religious toleration under Elizabeth I, and, finally, a period of monarchic absolutism under James I. Faced with these tumultuous political and religious changes, Latimer's anecdote is given disproportionate importance by Greenblatt. How is it that this seemingly small incident involving a Protestant martyr and an unknown Catholic woman can be given such weight in over eighty years of English history spanning the reigns of five monarchs? Latimer's tactics are taken to be a paradigm of the *entire* episteme of Renaissance religious and political thought. Although this is a bold move, it is also, historically speaking, highly suspect; it effectively flattens the complexity of the political and religious upheavals of England under the Tudors and effaces the explicit and obvious differences between its rulers. As Jonathan Bate remarks, Greenblatt's 'method produces dubious history

but good narrative'.[70] Geertzian 'localisation' is thus reductive on two counts: first, its insistence on maintaining such a narrow scope for its study renders it blind to wider continental or global political contexts; and, second, its formalist search for the 'generic' rules that govern human behaviour artificially flattens history, so that important historical events are, in effect, ignored. When coupled with the deconstructionist insistence on synchrony over diachrony, the problem is compounded.

In conclusion, my analysis has found new historicism to be fatally compromised by the residues of formalism, functionalism and culturalism discernible in its assumptions and methodology – the very things it sought to challenge and defeat in the 1980s. It inherits formalism primarily from three sources: New Criticism, American deconstruction and the structuralism of Foucault. It inherits functionalism institutionally (i.e. indirectly) from Talcott Parsons. And it inherits culturalism primarily from Clifford Geertz. The product of these inheritances is a criticism that is ahistorical, arbitrarily connecting monarchs and playwrights, anecdotes and literary texts, in a practice that relies ultimately upon the unity of a cultural master-text for its findings. It would be wrong, however, to claim that new historicism has no value at all as a mode of criticism. Its main strength remains, as it always has been, the remarkable range of stimulating and unexpected readings it generates. The critic is given a virtually free rein to make the connections that he or she wishes. The problem with new historicism is not in its use of synecdoche, formalist techniques and arbitrary connections, or with the freedom that they afford *per se*, but with the conception of culture that underpins this practice. The synecdoche, for example, can be a powerful analytical tool; indeed, my own study has used two examples of new historicism to make a wider critique. These techniques only run into problems when they are used in conjunction with the implicit assumption that culture has some fundamental, retrievable 'essence'. At worst, new historicism can be reductive and historically misleading and neither of those tendencies is a virtue. However, it is important to recognise what new historicism does well – the ingenuity, suggestiveness and diversity of its readings, its attention to the neglected margins and hitherto silent voices of past cultures, and, above all, its commitment to exploring what lies beyond the frontiers of the literary text in the cultural context that shaped it. But it is also important to divest ourselves of the less helpful and productive assumptions and habits of thought that it has inherited and developed.

Notes

1. Jean E. Howard, 'The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies', *English Literary Renaissance*, 16 (Winter, 1986), p. 14. The phrase 'arbitrary connectedness' was first coined in Walter Cohen, 'Political Criticism of Shakespeare', in *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology*, ed. Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), p. 34. 'The Consequences of the Synchronic – or the Dangers of Spatializing Time' is taken from Richard Lehan, 'The Theoretical Limits of New Historicism', *New Literary History*, 21:3 (Spring, 1990), p. 533.
2. Jeremy Hawthorn, *Cunning Passages: New Historicism, Cultural Materialism and Marxism in the Contemporary Literary Debate* (London: Arnold, 1996), p. 228.
3. Scott Wilson, *Cultural Materialism: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 15.
4. Ewan Fernie, 'Shakespeare and the Prospect of Presentism', in *Shakespeare Survey 58: Writing About Shakespeare*, ed. Peter Holland (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 172.
5. Etienne Balibar, 'On the Basics of Historical Materialism', in *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (rpr. London: New Left Books, 1986), pp. 204–5.
6. H. Aram Veeser, 'The New Historicism', in *The New Historicism Reader*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), p. 8.
7. Cohen, 'Political Criticism of Shakespeare', p. 34.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
9. David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare After Theory* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), p. 29.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
11. Lehan, 'The Theoretical Limits of New Historicism', pp. 538, 540, 543, 542–3, 552.
12. Hayden White, 'New Historicism: A Comment', in *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), p. 294.
13. Jean E. Howard, 'Old Wine, New Bottles', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 35:2 (Summer 1984), p. 237.
14. Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 7.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 56–63.
16. Karl Marx, *Capital*, ed. David McLennan (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 11.
17. Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature*, p. 57.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 237.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 232–3.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 238.
21. Alan Sinfield, 'Power and Ideology: An Outline Theory and Sidney's *Arcadia*', *ELH*, 52:2 (Summer 1985), p. 260.
22. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), p. 51.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
25. Catherine Belsey, *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden* (London: Macmillan, 1999), p. 18.
26. Stephen Mullaney, 'After the New Historicism', in *Alternative Shakespeares, Volume 2*, ed. Terence Hawkes (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), p. 24.
27. Cleanth Brooks, 'The Language of Paradox', in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 68.
28. See Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).
29. Claire Colebrook, *New Literary Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 223.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 225, 234, 223–4, 225.
31. Edward Pechter, 'The New Historicism and its Discontents: Politicizing Renaissance Drama', *PMLA*, 102:3 (May 1987), p. 294.
32. White, 'New Historicism: A Comment', pp. 294, 300.
33. Alan Liu, 'The Power of Formalism: The New Historicism', *English Literary History*, 56:4 (Winter 1989), pp. 721–71.
34. Carolyn Porter, 'History and Literature: After New Historicism', *New Literary History*, 21:2 (Winter 1990), pp. 253, 257.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 254–5.
36. This was the gist of the immediate reaction to Porter's article. See Rena Fraden, 'Response to Professor Carolyn Porter', *New Literary History*, 21:2 (Winter 1990), pp. 273–8.
37. Porter, 'History and Literature', pp. 261, 265–6. As well as drawing on Derrida, Porter draws on quite a number of different critics and theorists for this idea, most prominently: Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', *New Left Review*, 146 (November–December, 1984), 53–64; John Berger, 'The Moment of Cubism', in *The Moment of Cubism and Other Essays* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969), pp. 1–32; and Ernesto LaClau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd edn (New York and London: Verso, 2001).
38. Mullaney, 'After the New Historicism', p. 25.
39. LaClau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 267.
40. Carolyn Porter, 'History and Literature', pp. 268, 269.
41. Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), p. 147.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 130–1.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
46. Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, pp. 132–3.
47. Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978), p. 85.
48. Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, p. 133.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 134, 142.
51. *Ibid.*, pp. 135.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
53. Belsey, *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden*, pp. 17–18.
54. See, for example, Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (1938; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967). For a broader overview of functionalism, see John Holmwood, 'Functionalism and its Critics', in *Modern Social Theory*, ed. Austin Harrington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 87–109. For a comparison of Parsons and his French structuralist counterparts (especially Althusser) see Nancy DiTomaso, '"Sociological Reductionism" from Parsons to Althusser: Linking Action and Structure in Social Theory', *American Sociological Review*, 47:1 (February 1982), 14–28.
55. Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, pp. 135–6, 138.
56. Don E. Wayne, 'Power, Politics, and the Shakespearean Text: Recent Criticism in England and the United States', in *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology*, ed. Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), p. 61.
57. James Holstun, 'Ranting at the New Historicism', *English Literary Renaissance*, 19:2 (Spring 1989), pp. 198–9.
58. Frank Lentricchia, 'Foucault's Legacy: A New Historicism?', in *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), p. 237.
59. Jürgen Pieters, 'New Historicism: Post-modern Historiography between Narrativism and Heterology', *History and Theory*, 39:1 (February 2000), p. 32.
60. *Ibid.*, pp. 33, 34.
61. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 'Culture and Textuality: Debating Cultural Historicism', *Textual Practice*, 4:1 (1990), p. 100.
62. Howard, 'The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies', p. 24.
63. Catherine Belsey, *Culture and the Real* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2005), pp. 9–10.
64. Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (1969; New York and London: Verso, 2005), p. 103.
65. Howard Felperin, *The Uses of the Canon: Elizabethan Literature and Contemporary Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), p. 157.
66. Roland Barthes, *S / Z*, trans. Richard Miller (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), p. 32.
67. Clifford Geertz, 'The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man', in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Sketched Essays* (New York: Basic, 1973), p. 27.
68. Vincent P. Pecora, 'The Limits of Local Knowledge', in *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), p. 258.
69. Peter Erikson, 'Rewriting the Renaissance, Rewriting Ourselves', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 38:3 (Autumn 1987), p. 332.
70. Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 341n.

Chapter 3

Cultural Materialism

Politics and Subjectivity in Cultural Materialism

As we have seen, new historicism is dogged by the problems associated with inadvertently replicating formalism at the level of culture. Cultural materialism, on the other hand, circumnavigates many of these problems by its more rigorous reading of Louis Althusser and Raymond Williams. Indeed, cultural materialism has been characterised as writing explicitly 'under the sway of Althusser'.[1] When Walter Cohen considered cultural materialism he concluded that, of its theoretical sources, 'perhaps Althusser has exercised the greatest influence'.[2] Michael D. Bristol has claimed that Jonathan Dollimore is 'writing in the tradition of Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser and Raymond Williams'.[3] And, of course, the term 'cultural materialism' itself is derived from Williams. The crucial point of convergence between these two very different Marxist thinkers is that they both insist on a specifically *materialist* analysis of culture. Both theorists also recognise Antonio Gramsci as their point of departure. In his conception of ideology, Althusser acknowledges that 'to my knowledge, Gramsci is the only one who went any distance down the road I am taking'.[4] In his use of the theory of hegemony, Williams is similarly indebted: 'it is Gramsci's great contribution to have emphasised hegemony, and also to have understood it at a depth which is, I think, rare'.[5] This common heritage has perhaps led cultural materialists to treat Althusser and Williams as fundamentally compatible, which is at odds with the mutual antagonism between the Althusserians and Williams's allies of the British left, such as John Lewis and E. P. Thompson, which dominated leftist debate in the 1970s.[6]

That said, cultural materialists have used Althusser and Williams in different ways. Jonathan Dollimore, for example, was particularly taken with Althusser's decentring of the human subject and his ardent

anti-humanism.[7] And, throughout her career, Catherine Belsey has echoed Althusser in 'stressing the materiality of ideology, [wherein] beliefs are inscribed in practices, particularly ritualistic practices'.[8] For Alan Sinfield:

> Much of the importance of Raymond Williams derives from the fact that at a time when Althusser and Foucault were being read in some quarters as establishing ideology and / or power in a necessarily unbreakable continuum, Williams argued the co-occurrence of subordinate, residual, emergent, alternative, and oppositional cultural forces alongside the dominant, in varying relations of incorporation, negotiation, and resistance. Cultural materialism seeks to discern the scope for dissident politics of class, race, gender, and sexual orientation, both within texts and in their roles in culture.[9]

Despite this apparent allegiance to Williams, later in *Faultlines* Sinfield ratifies certain Althusserian ideas on a number of occasions: for example, when he argues that 'the strength of ideology derives from the way it gets to be common sense; "it goes without saying"', or when he states that Althusser's idea that ideological subjects 'work by themselves' is 'substantially right'.[10] Hence, we might say that, broadly speaking, the cultural materialist tendency is to use an adaptation of Althusser's 'ideology' (for which, in some cases, such as Richard Wilson's, Foucault's 'power' is substituted) and couple it with Williams's concept of resistance – an unhappy marriage, to say the least.

This underlying tension between Althusser and Williams plays out explicitly in cultural materialism as a constant struggle between power (Althusser's ideology) and subversion (Williams's 'resistance'). It is this struggle, above all else, that has come to dominate cultural materialist studies. So much so that, while cultural materialism has divested itself of many of the methodological problems of new historicism, it produces problems of its own by constantly reducing the texts it studies to the terms of this duality. Michael D. Bristol, a cultural materialist himself, criticises new historicism on the grounds that:

> Power is everywhere, it is insidious, it has a million disguises. Like 'Hegelian spirit' or for that matter like the Old Historicist 'order' it works inexorably and continuously towards its own historical self-regulation . . . A ghostly entity, infused with will and intelligence, that is at once *telos* and unmoved mover.[11]

But this analysis might be turned back on to Bristol and his fellow cultural materialists. The continual search for subversion within a materialist methodology does not in itself remove the concept of an all-pervasive power.

This overriding concern with power and its subversion has given rise

to the charge that cultural materialism is a fundamentally subjective and self-centred type of criticism. Again, we can turn to Scott Wilson for the typical claim that 'cultural materialism . . . does not pretend to neutrality, but declares its partiality or bias', that it is 'a moral thing'.[12] Wilson continues:

> For cultural materialism it is ultimately always a question of the good (or bad) production, distribution and consumption of good goods: good signs, good meanings, positive identities; or bad, ideological signs, cultural tokens, negative images, and so on . . . Cultural materialism normalizes in the absence of a norm, just as it moralizes in the absence of an absolute moral value . . . He, or happily now, she *knows* that God does not exist, but must continue to moralize anyway *in his place*, in his very absence; she, or he, disbelieves the Church's mumbo jumbo about universal, transcendent meetings and timeless value, but is unwilling to get out of the cultural beyond.[13]

It seems strange that Wilson should treat this maintenance of a stringent moral duality – the contrast of 'good' and 'bad', 'right' and 'wrong' – in such positive terms. Wilson's hypothetical cultural materialist *knows* God does not exist but one wonders whether she, or he, also considers Nietzsche's point that: '*To recognise untruth as a condition of life:* that is certainly to impugn the traditional value in a dangerous manner, and a philosophy which ventures to do so, has thereby alone placed itself beyond good and evil.'[14] Implicitly, through its penetrating analysis of ideological formations, cultural materialism should have moved 'beyond good and evil'. What terms could be more ideological than 'good' and 'evil'? However, from Wilson's description, it is difficult to see how cultural materialism is ultimately anything more than a form of atheist (or Marxist) moralism, a dogmatic attempt to oppose its political rivals by countering their truth claims with its own truth claims.

This has been the point of departure for many humanist attacks on cultural materialism in Shakespeare studies. Often taking the form of polemics, the suspicion in these attacks is that, driven by their political conviction, cultural materialists replicate the subjectivity and rigidity of Tillyard's Old Historicism. Graham Bradshaw offers one of the most penetrating and erudite attacks in *Misrepresentations*, which it will be necessary to quote from at length. Like Scott Wilson, Bradshaw spots a disturbing moralistic tendency in Dollimore and Sinfield, but instead of championing them for it as Wilson does, he mocks them for it relentlessly. Bradshaw claims that for cultural materialists there is *always* a 'humanist Enemy', who harbours 'an "essentialist", quasi-theological concern with "man", but that to identify the target in this way is itself a theological move, which creates and demonizes the "humanist" Other'.[15] Marcus Nordlund has also picked up on this tendency

of cultural materialists: 'once they have been defined as essentialist . . . alternative views have typically been associated with a reactionary outlook . . . and then been assigned to the critical dustbin'.[16] Bradshaw accuses Dollimore and Sinfield of developing a fundamentally reductive, 'oppositional caricatured' view of humanism, ignoring the many critiques of Tillyard that came from his contemporaries and from the humanists of the 1950s and 1960s. According to Bradshaw, the cultural materialists do not 'want the past to be intelligent, since the materialist cavalry could not ride so excitingly to the rescue'. Thus Tillyard 'had only to be exhumed, propped up on his horse like El Cid, and sent back to the field . . . We are to believe that blind essentialist mammoths roamed and ruled the literary landscape' until the advent of cultural materialism.[17] He further accuses Dollimore and Sinfield of the same 'one-eyed "What Shakespeare 'really' means" readings' that were typical of Tillyard; he describes them as 'the other side, ideologically, of the same bad methodological coin'.[18] Bradshaw is particularly unforgiving to Dollimore, who

> substitutes an evil, reactionary, and repressively authoritarian Shakespeare [the Shakespeare described in his and Sinfield's reading of *Henry V*, discussed presently] for the good crypto-materialist Shakespeare [the Shakespeare of *Radical Tragedy*] whose true content and intentions were allegedly misrepresented and suppressed by the essentialist-idealist-liberal-humanist Enemy. As ever, the contradiction doesn't matter as long as the critically contradictory readings advance the ideological objective . . .
> . . . Primitive neo-Tillyardian materialists like Dollimore and Sinfield assume, like Tillyard, that *the* Shakespearian Meaning exists, but also assume, since Tillyard is the ideological Enemy, that the Meaning must be somewhere else, or something else. So this approach delivers either the good, subversive crypto-materialist Shakespeare, whom the 'essentialist humanists' appropriate, misrepresent and suppress because They Are Evil; or the evil, authoritarian Bard whom 'essentialist humanists' take to be Good, again because They Are Evil.[19]

It remains to be seen whether Bradshaw's vicious character assassination is justified, but the analysis is clear enough. Cultural materialists view the social milieu in polarised terms, defining themselves as a 'good', marginal subculture against the 'bad' or 'evil' humanist centre; and this polarisation necessarily colours their reading of Shakespeare or any other text. Richard Levin found the same tendency in a similarly ferocious attack, complaining that cultural materialists 'posit a fundamental conflict between right and wrong' and artificially 'conflate this conflict with the opposition . . . associating formalism (and so humanism) with the upper class or patriarchy and their own approach with the victims'.[20]

'History and Ideology, Masculinity and Miscegenation: The Instance of *Henry V*'

With these strong criticisms in mind, this is perhaps the right juncture at which to turn to the primary target of Bradshaw's attack, Dollimore and Sinfield's essay, 'History and Ideology, Masculinity and Miscegenation: The Instance of *Henry V*'. Immediately it is possible to spot major differences between the style and practice of these critics and the new historicism of Goldberg and Greenblatt. For a start, the former are markedly more historical, in the conventional sense. Dollimore and Sinfield do not employ arbitrary anecdotes but rather draw on our historical understanding of the politics and social changes of the period to arrive at their conclusions. This essay, unlike Greenblatt's, also has a coherent structure and through-line. It has three chief movements: first, 'Warring Ideologies', a critique of the humanist academics of the past; second, 'Aesthetic Colonizations', which looks at the attempt made in *Henry V* to establish and maintain a sense of national unity; and third, 'Masculinity' and 'Miscegenation', which analyse gender construction in the play. In terms of methodology, cultural materialism is far closer to Tillyard's 'old historicism' than to the cavalier, 'relatively freewheeling'[21] style of new historicism.

The first section starts, characteristically enough, with a quotation from Tillyard. Dollimore and Sinfield find much to admire in his rejection of universalistic readings of Shakespeare that preceded him but regret 'inadequacies in [his] theorizing of ideology' and his entrapment in 'idealist philosophy'.[22] Contrary to Bradshaw's claims, Dollimore and Sinfield go on to consider the humanists that followed (and opposed) Tillyard's 'Elizabethan World Picture' readings in the 1960s. In particular, they look at Jan Kott's influential existentialist reading in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* and Wilbur Sanders's broadly liberal humanist work, *The Dramatist and the Received Idea*. Despite marked differences between these critics, Dollimore and Sinfield conclude that 'the fundamental error in all these accounts of the role of ideology is falsely to unify history and / or the individual subject'.[23] This leads to the main premise of their study of *Henry V*:

> Theories of the ultimate unity of both history and the human subject derive, of course, from a Western philosophical tradition where, moreover, they have usually implied each other: the universal being seen as manifested through essences that in turn presuppose universals. Often unawares, idealist literary criticism has worked within or in the shadow of this tradition, as can be seen for example in its insistence that the universal truths of great literature are embodied in coherent and consistent characters.[24]

However, they do not posit the exact opposite of this, 'chaos and subjective fragmentation', as an alternative, but call rather for a deeper understanding of 'ideology'.

In the first instance, Dollimore and Sinfield's conception of ideology is essentially Gramscian:

> Ideology is composed of those beliefs, practices and institutions that work to legitimate the social order – especially by the process of representing sectional or class interests as universal ones. This process presupposes that there are other, subordinate cultures that, far from sharing the interests of the dominant one, are in fact being exploited by it.[25]

Compare Dollimore and Sinfield's account with Gramsci's theorisation of 'relations of force' in 'The Modern Prince' section of his *Prison Notebooks*:

> Germinated ideologies become 'party', come into confrontation and conflict, until only one of them tends to prevail, to gain the upper hand, to propagate itself throughout society – bringing about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity, posing all questions around which the struggle rages not on a corporate but on a 'universal' plane, and thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups.[26]

The key difference between these similar theorisations is that in Gramsci the idea that the subordinate groups are being 'exploited' by the hegemonic group is missing. Instead 'the general interests of the subordinate groups' hold the dominant power in perpetual states of 'equilibria'; hegemony prevails but 'only up to a certain point'.[27] In Gramsci power is always kept in check by the prospect of rebellion, which will *necessarily* occur if the dominant power exceeds the parameters of acceptability. This is an idea that was perhaps inherited from Machiavelli's insistence that 'the prince should . . . determine to avoid anything which will make him hated and despised', lest he risk the prospect of 'internal subversion from his subjects'.[28]

Dollimore and Sinfield's 'ideology', however, cannot allow for such a straightforward model of power and culpability, because they add to Gramsci's notion of hegemony and subordinate groups Althusser's theory that ideology has a material existence:

> Ideology is not just a set of ideas; it is material practice, woven into the fabric of everyday life. At the same time, the dominant ideology is realized specifically through the institutions of education, the family, the law, religion, journalism, and culture.[29]

Thus 'ideology' is a more insidious, all-encompassing power than Machiavelli's prince or Gramsci's 'modern prince'.

On top of these two layers, Dollimore and Sinfield place yet another layer: this time, the idea that dramatists and audiences alike in Renaissance England were likely to be interested in and engaged by 'ideology . . . under strain'. So while there are no straightforward limits to power set by the subordinate groups, as in Gramsci, the functioning of ideology is never perfect. Dollimore and Sinfield develop this thesis by drafting in two ideas from Raymond Williams, 'contradiction' and 'conflict'. Contradiction is defined as 'intrinsic to the social process as a whole',[30] which closely follows Williams's own assertion that 'contradiction [is] intrinsic to any conscious life process'.[31] Contradiction is thus seen as a normal and fundamental aspect of ideology and culture. 'Conflict', on the other hand, 'occurs along the structural faultlines produced by contradictions'; it is an 'active struggle' that can come from residual or emergent elements of the culture or from discontent within the ruling class.[32] The key difference between this and the Gramscian conception of resistance is that here there is no direct, causal relationship between the actions of the ruling class and insubordination. The relationship is more fractured, the result of structural imperfection – the *failure* of ideology to function correctly – rather than the discontentment of subordinate classes with the prince. In making this materialist move against 'idealism', paradoxically Dollimore and Sinfield divest themselves of the *Realpolitik* of Gramsci and Machiavelli, becoming more abstract and functionalist in their thinking. This has two main consequences: first, it absolves the ruling class of its accountability to its subordinates because the theory cannot account for government or sovereign action. Second, and again paradoxically, it robs the subordinate classes of their relative bargaining power and the agency that this accountability affords them. Instead, just as in Althusser, and in new historicism, everything becomes a function of ideology. If the subordinate classes are passive, then the ideology has 'worked', and if they resist, this is put down to ideological failure. It is not the case that the subordinate classes have finally found a voice and the will to rise up in rebellion; rather, ideology has finally succumbed to the internal pressures of contradiction and conflict. Dollimore and Sinfield posit a highly nuanced and sophisticated theory of ideology, but one that ultimately replicates the functionalism of Althusser.

They also display in this essay a disconcerting tendency to present their findings about ideology as empirical evidence. In this respect at least, Bradshaw's attack is vindicated. There is a sense in which Dollimore and Sinfield seem to be presenting their argument and their conception of ideology as *how things really are*: culture is fractured, riddled with contradiction and conflict, and it is the job of ideology to

cover those cracks with the façade of unity. It is then the job of cultural materialists to peel away that façade in order to expose the 'truth'. This tendency manifests itself most tellingly in their language.

When they finally turn to *Henry V*, for example, we are told that, in his soliloquy of 4.1, 'what *really* torments Henry is his inability to ensure obedience'.[33] They support this statement with some apt quotations from the text (4.1.240–1, 256–7).

> Henry indicates a paradox of power, only to misrecognize its force by mystifying both kingship and subjection. His problem is structural, since the ceremony and role-playing that constitute kingship are the means by which *real* antagonisms can masquerade as obedience – 'poisoned flattery'.[34]

Dollimore and Sinfield make a convincing case here, but it is certainly not the only way this soliloquy can be read. One might argue that this is a moment where, far from 'mystifying kingship', Henry laments both the emptiness and the necessity of ideology:

> O ceremony, show me but thy worth.
> What is the soul of adoration?
> Art thou aught else but place, degree, and form,
> Creating awe and fear in other men?
> Wherein thou art less happy, being feared,
> Than they in fearing.
> (4.1. 226–31)

Using Dollimore and Sinfield's own definition of ideology, one might suggest that the ritual of royal 'ceremony' that Henry is objecting to here is precisely the 'ideological dimension of authority' which they describe.[35] He is decrying the empty symbolism and 'poisoned flattery' of Richard II's style of court:

> 'Tis not the balm, the sceptre, and the ball,
> The sword, the mace, the crown imperial,
> The intertissued robe of gold and pearl
> The farcèd title running fore the king,
> The throne he sits on, nor the tide of pomp
> That beats upon the high shore of this world –
> (4.1.242–7)

This can be read as a profound moment of ideological self-awareness for Henry, a quality lacking in both his predecessors. It closely echoes the uncrowning of *Richard II*:

> With mine own tears I wash away the balm,
> With mine own hands I give away the crown,

> With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,
> With mine own breath release all duteous oaths.
> (4.1.196–200)

For Richard, the ceremony and the ritual of state define the role of the king. It is ultimately this, 'creating awe in other men' – in other words, ideology – rather than action, warfare or the responsibilities of government that is synonymous with kingship.

Richard frequently equates his role as king with its ideological markers. When the inevitability of his submission finally dawns on him, he can only see 'the name of a King' (3.3.145) in its ideological representations:

> I'll give my jewels for a set of beads,
> My gorgeous palace for a hermitage,
> My gay apparel for an almsman's gown,
> My figured goblets for a dish of wood,
> My sceptre for a palmer's walking staff,
> My subjects for a pair of carvèd saints . . .
> (3.3.146–51)

For Richard, there is nothing else to kingship but the 'structural problem' Dollimore and Sinfield describe, but it is not a 'problem' for him, because he believes utterly in the ideology himself. It should not be forgotten that there is, to quote Althusser, a 'final [ideologically predetermined role] for higher management'.[36] But Henry V comes from a lineage that knows the grittier material reality of sovereignty. His father, a calculating pragmatist, spends much of the two parts of *Henry IV* haunted by the fact that he came to power, not through ideological ritual or 'creating awe in other men', but through cold-blooded murder. The final stages of *Richard II* enact the triumph of materiality, flesh and blood, over ideology.

Towards the end of *2 Henry IV*, in complete contrast to *Richard II*, the King posits an idea of kingship based on action and materiality rather than ideological function:

> Pluck down my officers, break my decrees;
> For now a time is come to mock at form –
> Harry the Fifth is crowned. Up, vanity!
> Down, royal state!
> (4.3.245–8)

Although he is chastising the young prince here, it is significant that Henry IV equates his power with 'officers' and 'decrees' rather than his 'gay apparel' or his 'sceptre'. He speaks of 'form' not in its ritualistic,

ceremonial sense but in the sense of decorum, the proper behaviour for a king, not out of respect for empty ceremony, but for the pragmatic reason that the people would not respect a 'foolish youth' (4.3.224). Henry remembers his own reign in terms of its materiality and its action. He speaks of 'the soil of [his] achievement' (4.3.317) and 'quarrel and . . . bloodshed' (4.3.323). Henry V, on the other hand, unlike his father, sees the necessity of the king's ideological function; but, unlike Richard, he does not embrace it or indeed mistake it for kingship itself. More importantly, he is able to step, momentarily, outside of his ideological role and offer a 'relatively cool analysis'[37] of it.

I have thus offered a reading of the soliloquy in 4.1 of *Henry V*, one that takes *Richard II* and *2 Henry IV* into account, using Dollimore and Sinfield's own practice of ideology critique. In the light of this reading, it is clear that this is an instance where the cultural materialist's appeal to the 'truth' of his or her critique produces a rigid, 'one-eyed' reading of the play under scrutiny. This tendency might be described as the fixity of interpretation, whereby the cultural materialist posits 'evidence' – born of ideology critique – and then uses this evidence to lock the text into a single, definitive reading. In this instance, by reading *Henry V* in the light of their ideas of ideological mystification *only*, Dollimore and Sinfield neglect to acknowledge that Henry might be equally discontented with the burden of being king. In trying to reconcile the contrasting traits of Richard II and Henry IV, it is possible that Henry has a moment of self-doubt and begins to realise he might have taken on too much too soon. As I have shown, Henry demonstrates an impressive, demystifying self-awareness of his ideological role, but Dollimore and Sinfield appear convinced that he 'mystifies both kingship and subjection'. After we read the entirely mystified version of kingship offered by *Richard II*, the argument that the same thing is at play in *Henry V* is unpersuasive, especially when the two monarchs are so different.

In the remainder of this section of the essay, Dollimore and Sinfield go on to read *Henry V* entirely in terms of its contemporary ideological function. We are told that '*Henry V* was a powerful Elizabethan fantasy simply because nothing is allowed to compete with the power of the king.'[38] This is, of course, in contrast to Elizabeth's reign, which was marked by competing factions that served to undermine her power. Dollimore and Sinfield thus establish a dichotomy between the (false) ideology of *Henry V* and the (true) actuality of Elizabeth's reign. For example, when they make statements such as 'thus power, which in actuality was distributed unevenly across an unstable faction of the hegemonic class, is drawn into the person of the monarch',[39] it is not clear whether they mean the 'actuality' of history according to Holinshed or

the 'actuality' of Elizabeth's reign. Again, the partial neglect of the other history plays comes to the fore. *Richard II*, *1* and *2 Henry IV* and all three parts of *Henry VI* show much stronger factions and a much more unstable nobility. It seems that Shakespeare sought to centralise power in the figure of the monarch in *Henry V* to demonstrate not only that he was a strong king but also what a strong king might look like, after offering us so many weak kings.

Dollimore and Sinfield might be right to argue that the play searches 'for ideological coherence' above all else,[40] but their tendency to write as if their findings were substantive facts can only be reductive in so far as it effaces the possibility of further readings. There persists in their work the Althusserian notion that Marxism can produce a 'scientific knowledge',[41] one that alludes to reality, as opposed to ideological knowledge, which can only ever allude to the representation of imaginary relations. Like Althusser, they posit a pseudo-scientific materialism against a totally ideological idealism, under the assumption that the former can expose 'the truth' that the latter has attempted to cover up. This Marxist commitment seems sharply at odds with their self-avowed 'subjectivity'. On the one hand, they seem to be arguing for an ideology critique that can uncover the truth objectively, and on the other, for an overtly subjective criticism in which, as Scott Wilson claims, 'students are . . . asked to read with their genitals, argue with their background, or theorize with their skin colour'.[42] To draw on Raymond Williams myself, these ideas seem in both contradiction and conflict. Alison Assiter demonstrated back in 1990 that Althusser and feminism make unhappy bedfellows.[43] And if one pushes the argument that Althusser's functionalism is, as E. P. Thompson once put it, 'on the theoretical production line of Stalinist ideology',[44] they might even be fundamentally incompatible. Yet Althusser and feminism would appear to find their convergence in cultural materialism, one that has persisted beyond Dollimore and Sinfield and remained, often hidden, in the work of materialist-feminists like Catherine Belsey and Kathleen McLuskie.[45]

This underlying tension is most telling in Dollimore and Sinfield's essay when they turn to look at 'Masculinity'. To use one of their favoured terms, this turn reads like a total 'rupture' in the essay. It is as if the argument they were making – about national unity, the convergence of power in the monarch, and the various ways in which the seams do not quite hold in *Henry V* – simply ends, and a new one begins. This rupture affords them a chance to switch methodologies; they seem to leave Althusser, Williams and ideology critique behind at this juncture in order to provide a fairly conventional feminist account of gender construction in the plays. They read the play through the dichotomy

of masculinity versus femininity, arguing that, though 'it is often said that women have little place in the history plays because the men define themselves against other men . . . the men do this through constant reference to ideas of the feminine and the female'.[46] Dollimore and Sinfield's argument is less convincing in this section of the essay: 'Genders and sexualities are among the potential disruptions that Henry must incorporate or expel in order to appear the undivided leader of an undivided kingdom.'[47] From here they go on to demonstrate the various reasons why this was impossible for Shakespeare in *Henry V*, because femininity is constantly employed to define manliness.

They also explore the various ways in which the representations of England and manliness are conflated and opposed to an effeminised France. The argument that all this shows an internal contradiction in the dominant ideology – one that posits that 'the state cannot be secured against female influence'[48] – amounts to saying that because women exist they must exert influence. This is unconvincing for two reasons: first, because it seems oblivious to the fact that women are themselves ideological subjects, just like other subordinate groups such as the lower classes or the racial Other. Just because a subordinate group exists does not automatically mean that it creates a contradiction. Second, it is inconsistent with Dollimore and Sinfield's own conception of ideology, in which the dominant ideology has 'a material existence' that works through social institutions and, by extension, human bodies. Dympna Callaghan has argued, more convincingly, that materialists should not assume that the female body is an automatic site of resistance.[49] The female body is as subject to ideological construction and appropriation as the gallows or the stage. As such, it is difficult to reconcile this 'feminist section' with their earlier argument about ideological unity and the construction of nationhood in *Henry V*. It is such moments that reveal the messy theoretical amalgam that constitutes the rationale of cultural materialism. Dollimore and Sinfield jump far too readily from a post-Althusserian ideology critique to feminist materialism without warning. There is a strong sense that the feminist section was produced out of political obligation rather than to advance the thesis of the essay.

Marginal Politics?

It is this politically motivated dimension of cultural materialism that I would like to examine further. I want to ask two questions: first, to what extent does this subjective, political aspect of cultural material practice distort the texts it appropriates? And second, to what extent can cultural

materialism still claim to occupy a marginal position in the twenty-first century? Let us return to the humanist polemics of Bradshaw and Levin. Their main criticism of cultural materialism, and of Dollimore and Sinfield in particular, is not its partiality, but the form that partiality takes. Both have complained bitterly that their various criticisms have not been engaged with due to what Bradshaw calls 'group think',[50] a hive mentality shared by feminists and materialists alike. The tendency is to make the issue political so as to avoid discussing it. As Bradshaw argues, 'politicized issues deflect or divert us from discussing Shakespeare plays'.[51] This can clearly be seen at work in the dismissals of Levin as a traditionalist dinosaur, as when Goldberg caricatures him as 'the self-appointed protector of old plays from new readings'.[52] It is not in the interests of this study to take sides in these squabbles, but Bradshaw and Levin have a point when they complain that feminists and cultural materialists do not engage properly with criticisms from 'Dissenters', especially when they proceed from what they perceive to be the humanist Other. In the interests of fairness it is worth at least considering what Bradshaw and Levin are actually saying rather than demonising them as the acolytes of conservatism.

For Levin, 'the materialism of [the cultural materialist] doctrine is highly selective and that selectivity is determined . . . by politics'.[53] The suggestion is that cultural materialists bend history and Shakespeare's plays to confirm the things they oppose to ratify their own politics:

> A common tactic is to assert that some aspect (always a bad one) of Shakespeare's world or the world of his play is basically the same in our world, often translating it into an abstract problem (like class-division) that floats free of history and the many material differences between our society and his. That does not 'matter' so long as their equation of the two worlds enables them to derive from the play a Marxist lesson for today.[54]

If we look at the example of Dollimore and Sinfield, this is not an entirely fair assessment. Their objective seems to be rather to analyse and demystify deeply entrenched critical ideas about the play: the idea that *Henry V* is just state propaganda that establishes national unity, and, later, the idea that the men in the play only understand themselves in relation to other men. Levin had earlier been guilty of misreading the essay as an affirmation of 'ideological unity',[55] a point that Dollimore and Sinfield pick up on rather defensively in the reprinted version found in *Faultlines*.[56]

However, these critical oversights on Levin's part should not overshadow the wider criticism of cultural materialism as seeking to teach us a political lesson. The lesson of the Dollimore and Sinfield essay, for example, is that a literary text like *Henry V* will always reveal ideological

contradictions in a multitude of different ways, regardless of how much it might strive to efface them. In this respect, cultural materialism can be seen as criticism as political instruction, which raises the aforementioned problem that it is the *politics* rather than the text in question that the cultural materialist really wants to discuss. Dollimore and Sinfield want to show, through the analysis of *Henry V*, how attempts to forge national identity or a masculinity divested of its feminine Other must inevitably fail, but one gets the sense that they might have produced a similar reading if they had been discussing the *Henry VI* plays, or indeed any play that touches on these issues. Kiernan Ryan has complained recently of 'endless studies bent on shackling Shakespeare to everything from maps and money to cooking and cosmetics',[57] but it is difficult to see how shackling him to a political position is any better. The problem here is that the text becomes nothing more than a hook on which to hang things and this is due, largely, to the extent to which cultural materialism is subjective. If the primary organising principles at work are the interests of the critic, then it stands to reason that the text itself will be treated in this way. It is important to resist this tendency, because it allows the text very little agency. To quote Fredric Jameson, 'it is the past that sees us, and judges us remorselessly, without any sympathy or complicity with the scraps of subjectivity we try to think of as our own fragmentary and authentic life experience'.[58] This was the reason that he called upon critics to 'always historicize', but how can this happen if our reading of the past becomes nothing *but* those 'scraps of subjectivity'?

Bradshaw's argument, on the other hand, is that for cultural materialists 'any "dissident perspective" is presented as not only superior but transhistorically, transculturally true'.[59] I have already demonstrated this tendency to make 'truth claims' above. What I am interested in here is just how 'dissident' cultural materialism is. Cultural materialism claims to write from a radical position; it tends to define 'the centre' as necessarily '(essentialist-) humanist', and conflates all that it opposes most vehemently under that banner. It might be described as a 'blanket strategy' that functions according to a circular, quasi-theological logic: 'humanists are necessarily wrong and everything we oppose is necessarily humanist, therefore everything we say is *true* and any attempt to ratify a humanist's argument is not only also humanist but also wrong'. By this logic anyone who believes, for example, in the value of maintaining the literary canon *must necessarily* be a humanist as well as being 'wrong'. Yet there is no reason to assume that the establishment and conservation of a canon must be a humanist endeavour. It is perfectly possible to produce a canon based on cultural importance rather than on the text's intrinsic universal appeal and ability to transcend historical

boundaries. Roland Barthes espoused an aesthetic hierarchy in which 'writerly' texts were deemed a superior, more radical form of literature than the 'readerly' texts typified by genre fiction; yet he also famously announced 'The Death of the Author'. Is Barthes to be dismissed as a 'humanist' because he prefers Balzac to other writers?

Taking this example of the canon, let us subject it to further scrutiny and ask: how 'dissident' is it really, in the early twenty-first century, to oppose the aesthetic value judgements and hierarchies that go into the formation of a literary canon? Leah Marcus made the argument in 1988 that it was time to overturn the distasteful 'system of values and institutionalised hierarchies' of humanism.[60] In its place cultural materialism (like new historicism) posits a literature without hierarchy, where no single text is necessarily more important or valuable than any other. Sinfield has recently repeated his commitment to this criticism without aesthetic discrimination:

> Evidently it is true that many of the texts that get to be canonical have a complexity of language and cultural implication that makes them available for both literary and cultural study. Even so, for new historicists and cultural materialists, those texts look more interesting when set along side other writing from their period . . . Shakespeare is, simply, the most provocative point at which to break in to (or is it out of?) the system.[61]

So *Henry V* and *Hamlet* are just two texts among many that are on an equal footing; they exist and are therefore available for analysis. The problem here is not necessarily with Sinfield's argument *per se* but with where he positions it, as necessarily 'marginal', rebellious, against 'the system'.

As I have already noted, cultural materialism can no longer claim to occupy a marginal position in the professionalised space of English Literature as taught at universities. Sinfield, and indeed cultural materialists in general – possibly because of the Marxist strain in much of their thought – sometimes write as if it were the 1950s, when the writing and teaching of English criticism were still the luxury of the cultural elite, the select few who were admitted into universities. At that time cities in Britain were still built around industry, the majority of people still went to church and the local high street was populated with small traders. A brief visit to any modern city, and indeed to any modern university, will demonstrate immediately how times have changed. In short, we have gone from being an industrial culture to a corporate one. Traditional class labels such as proletarian and bourgeois can no longer be easily applied to large portions of the population. When Francis Fukuyama declared 'the End of History', he was referring not only to the end of the Cold War, but also to the fact that capitalism had moved into its final

stage of corporate domination.[62] The 'centre', the dominant ideology, is now represented as much by large multinational corporations as it is by 'the state'. There is a degree to which the ideology of 'unrivalled' consumer choice is now the status quo and institutionalised aesthetic hierarchies, for which generations of scholars from I. A. Richards to Harold Bloom have stood and fought, are marginalised. And in its levelling, anti-canonical, anti-hierarchical philosophy, cultural materialism mirrors this ideology of choice exactly. In short, cultural materialism's insistence on its marginal position is based on an outmoded critique of British culture – the fact that Tillyard remains a target is revealing in itself. Cultural materialists would perhaps do well to question their assumptions about what qualifies as 'radical' in our own cultural moment before declaring its marginality.

To conclude, I have shown that while cultural materialism exempts itself from many of the problems associated with the textualised methodology of new historicism, it runs into its own problems in its theory, politics and self-confessed subjectivity. The theory runs foul of attempting to encompass too many competing ideas under the cultural materialist banner. Although the cultural materialists are far more ready to engage with theory than their American counterparts in new historicism, they are not quite rigorous enough. Their loose application of Althusser to Gramsci, and, in turn, Williams to Althusser, somehow manages to lose what is dynamic in all three thinkers: the accountability of the ruling class and the significance of action in Gramsci, the prospect of a positive but none the less inescapable ideology in Althusser, and the continually shifting residual and emergent ideological forces in Williams. At the same time, they inherit the Marxist habit of positing itself as a science that has seen 'the truth', things as they *really are*. Incongruously, they attempt to add to this already messy model a feminist practice that comes with its own theoretical baggage. The pseudo-scientific discourse of structural Marxism jars with the necessarily 'subjective' criticism of feminism. It is politics above all that informs this model, and, following Levin and Bradshaw, I hope to have shown how it colours and distorts their reading of texts – in this instance, *Henry V*. This leads to two problems: first, it leads to an inflexible form of evidence-based reading that necessarily proves its own thesis, which, more often than not, takes the form of a political position. Second, it leads to the dangerous habit of artificially conflating all opposition into the same 'liberal humanist' Other. Finally, I have suggested how this polarising, oppositional stance can lead to a misdiagnosis of what really counts as marginal or conservative. On the issue of consumer choice, for example, the cultural materialist view is in line with mass culture and its dominant ideology.

Notes

1. Alan Liu, 'The Power of Formalism: The New Historicism', *English Literary History*, 56:4 (Winter 1989), p. 736.
2. Walter Cohen, 'Political Criticism of Shakespeare', in *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology*, ed. Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), p. 27.
3. Michael D. Bristol, *Big-Time Shakespeare* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), p. 20.
4. Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, ed. Fredric Jameson, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), p. 95n.
5. Raymond Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory', in *Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays* (1980; New York and London: Verso, 2005), p. 37.
6. See, in particular, E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory* (London: Merlin, 1978), pp. 193–398, and Louis Althusser, 'Reply to John Lewis', in *Essays in Self-Criticism*, trans. Grahame Lock (London: New Left Books, 1976), pp. 33–100.
7. See Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, 2nd edn (1984; Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), especially the chapter 'Beyond Essentialist Humanism', pp. 249–71.
8. Catherine Belsey, *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden* (London: Macmillan, 1999), p. 6.
9. Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), p. 9.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 32, 165.
11. Michael D. Bristol, *Shakespeare's America, America's Shakespeare* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 205–6.
12. Scott Wilson, *Cultural Materialism: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 16, 38.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 37–8, 44.
14. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (New York: Dover Thrift, 1997), p. 3.
15. Graham Bradshaw, *Misrepresentations: Shakespeare and the Materialists* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 7, 9.
16. Marcus Nordlund, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Love: Literature, Culture, Evolution* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), p. 17.
17. Bradshaw, *Misrepresentations*, pp. 6, 8.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 9.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 16, 23.
20. Richard Levin, 'The Poetics and Politics of Bardicide', *PMLA*, 150:3 (May 1990), p. 492.
21. Don E. Wayne, 'Power, Politics, and the Shakespearean Text: Recent Criticism in England and the United States', in *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology*, ed. Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), p. 52.

22. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 'History and Ideology, Masculinity and Miscegenation: The Instance of *Henry V*', in *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), p. 109.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
26. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1973), pp. 181–2.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
28. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Geoffrey Bull, 4th edn (New York and London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 58, 59.
29. Dollimore and Sinfield, 'History and Ideology, Masculinity and Miscegenation', p. 113.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
31. Raymond Williams, 'Problems of Materialism', in *Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays* (New York and London: Verso, 2005), p. 116.
32. Dollimore and Sinfield, 'History and Ideology, Masculinity and Miscegenation', p. 116.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 119, emphasis mine.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 199, emphasis mine.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
36. Althusser, 'Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus', p. 88.
37. Dollimore and Sinfield, 'History and Ideology, Masculinity and Miscegenation', p. 119.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
41. Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 12.
42. Wilson, *Cultural Materialism*, p. 21.
43. See Alison Assiter, *Althusser and Feminism* (London: Pluto, 1990).
44. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, p. 333.
45. Read more sympathetically, it is possible to find many aspects of Althusser's work, particularly in his theorisation of ideology, that overlap with and have, indeed, helped to form some branches of feminism. I am contrasting Althusser and feminism here from the perspective that Althusser maintains the ambition of producing 'scientific knowledge', whereas feminism must abandon that position as being *itself* overdetermined by a patriarchal empiricism. It is worth mentioning that Foucault helps to short-circuit this problem, because he too abandons Althusser's notion of 'scientific knowledge'. For Foucault, there is no category of knowledge distinct from that of power. As a result, it is common for feminists to utilise Foucault *as well as* the politically more radical Marxist and post-Marxist theory.
46. Dollimore and Sinfield, 'History and Ideology, Masculinity and Miscegenation', p. 128.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
49. See Dympna Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women: Representing*

Gender and Race in the Renaissance (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), especially the discussion of female genitals, pp. 36–41.

50. Graham Bradshaw, 'State of Play', in *The Shakespearean International Yearbook, Vol. 1: Where Are We Now in Shakespearean Studies?*, ed. W. R. Elton and John M. Mucciolo (Brookfield, VT and Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), p. 4.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
52. Jonathan Goldberg, 'Making Sense', *New Literary History*, 21:3 (Spring 1990), p. 457.
53. Levin, 'The Old and New Materialising of Shakespeare', p. 88.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
55. Levin, 'The Poetics and Politics of Bardicide', p. 492.
56. Dollimore and Sinfield, 'History and Ideology, Masculinity and Miscegenation', p. 126.
57. Kiernan Ryan, '*Troilus and Cressida*: The Perils of Presentism', in *Presentist Shakespeares*, ed. Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), p. 170.
58. Fredric Jameson, 'Marxism and Historicism', *New Literary History*, 11:1 (1979), p. 70–1.
59. Bradshaw, 'State of Play', p. 7.
60. Leah S. Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and its Discontents* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1988), p. 30.
61. Alan Sinfield, *Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality: Unfinished Business in Cultural Materialism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), p. 21.
62. See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

Chapter 4

An Argument Against Anti-humanism

Nature and Nurture

For all their differences, new historicists and cultural materialists are united by their anti-essentialist, anti-humanist stance. It is worth summarising what this stance entails before outlining my main objections to it. In short, it is the rejection of any notion of an innate human nature in favour of a form of social determinism. Individuals are said to be conditioned by a set of social, cultural and ideological forces; they are entirely products of their particular place at a particular historical moment. As Clifford Geertz, one of Stephen Greenblatt's acknowledged main influences, states: 'our ideas, our values, our acts, even our emotions, are, like our nervous system itself, cultural products – products manufactured, indeed, out of tendencies, capacities, and dispositions with which we were born, but manufactured nonetheless'.[1] Jonathan Dollimore concurs, rejecting 'the idea that "man" possesses some given, unalterable essence which is what makes "him" human, which is the source and *essential* determinant of "his" culture and its priority over conditions of existence' as an essentialist mystification designed to represent 'sectional interests as universal ones'.[2] In 1980, Catherine Belsey, one of the more theoretically engaged cultural materialists, even went as far as questioning the way that scientists were applying the Theory of Evolution; she refused to accept the idea of an 'essential human nature' based on what she called 'a quasi-biological theory of instincts'.[3] Accordingly, to this day cultural historicists, such as Alan Sinfield, share an 'opposition to *any* notion of Shakespeare as universal and timeless'.[4] It is worth pausing to consider Sinfield's choice of language here; does he really mean '*any* notion'? Are we to accept that there is no aspect of Shakespeare's work with which we share common ground *at all*? This, ultimately, is the claim that some cultural historicists make. And it stands to reason: if we accept that individuals are nothing but cultural products, then individu-

als from different cultures or from different periods in history will have very little in common. As Marcus Nordlund points out, in adopting this stance cultural historicism 'has effectively closed the door on a fascinating array of evidence emerging from biology and the other life sciences'.[5]

However, the idea that individuals are solely produced by culture has been discredited outside of English studies. The cognitive scientist Steven Pinker has presented compelling evidence to suggest that a large part of what makes human beings who they are is biological and genetically inherited. Pinker supports 'the idea that natural selection has endowed humans with a universal complex mind'[6] and puts forward an almost overwhelming amount of evidence from studies in evolutionary and behavioural psychology to support his claims. Among many other studies, Pinker draws on the work of the anthropologist Donald E. Brown, who claims to have found hundreds of human universals observable in all known cultures.[7] These include: broad and general categories, such as conflict and narrative; more specific categories, such as the classification of colours, body parts, kin and sex; emotions, such as envy and fear; basic concepts, such as the division of labour and proper names; common behaviour, such as baby talk and gossiping; cultural taboos, such as those prohibiting incest and rape; and certain seemingly innate human abilities, such as language, logic and planning. Pinker's argument is long and complex, and reasonably well disseminated in the public sphere; I do not have space here to engage directly with his findings. As Pinker says himself, 'human nature is a scientific subject, and as facts come in, our conception of it will change'.[8] I am not a scientist; for my study, all that is important is that there *is* such a thing as human nature, which is inextricably linked with but cannot be reduced to culture, and that this fact is reasonably constant across diverse cultures. A significant body of new scientific evidence is now available, which proves that our actions are indeed influenced by nature as well as by culture. Whatever one makes of Pinker, the clear message from the scientific community is that the cultural historicist conception of humanity is no longer tenable;[9] consequently, and more importantly for criticism, it is no longer possible to claim with an authority bordering on certainty, as cultural historicists have for almost three decades, that there are no universal human capacities or traits.

In *Shakespeare's Humanism*, Robin Headlam Wells disparages critics who have ignored these recent developments in neuroscience and evolutionary psychology, accusing them of political fundamentalism:

> Postmodernism has ignored the rapidly growing body of work in archeoanthropology, evolutionary psychology and neurobiology that has transformed

> modern thinking on social behaviour, the mind, and the mystery of human creativity . . . Just as fundamentalist creationists prefer to disregard the scientific evidence of the fossil record because it conflicts with their religious beliefs, so postmodernists would rather ignore the extensive scientific literature on selfhood, gender, and consciousness because they believe that it's incompatible with their own political ideals.[10]

Wells argues that we should reject anti-humanism and advocates a return to essentialist humanism based on our newfound understanding of human universality:

> Before they are introduced to Theory, university students of English still tend to remark that a particular play has universal themes, or that dilemmas experienced by such and such a character are timeless. Irrespective of whether they get these ideas from their school teachers or from their own intuitions, the fact is that students often seem to feel, not just sympathy for, but an empathetic affinity with, the figures they encounter in literature from earlier centuries, experiencing the joys and sorrows of those characters and responding intuitively to their moods. That's what drew them to literature. It's as if they imagine there's some kind of human bond linking them to the past, or with characters from cultures quite different from their own . . .
> . . . Literature can help to teach us the value of tolerance. But deny that there is such a thing as common humanity, and one of the most powerful arguments for tolerance immediately vanishes. Combine that with postmodernism's extreme relativism – which logically means that in the absence of human universals there can be no rational grounds for preferring one set of values to another – and tolerance acquires a quite different meaning: it means that we are obliged to tolerate regimes that are in themselves brutal and *in*tolerant. It's time we got over our misplaced embarrassment about human nature and recognised anti-humanism for what it really is . . .
> . . . Anti-essentialism, and the cultural relativism that is its corollary, are at the core of postmodernist thought . . . But we don't have to take this route.[11]

Plainly, Wells is in no mood to pull his punches. His argument is as much political as it is based on scientific research in that he sees a concept of human universality as vital to the causes of both tolerance and literature as a socially relevant tool.

Although writing from the point of view of Marxism, Gabriel Egan comes to similar conclusions. Egan thinks that anti-essentialism is 'a view that has done much harm to radical politics'. He takes issue with 'the relativist (that is, anti-essentialist) claim that things we might take for granted as unchangeable aspects of being human (emotions, for example) are in fact historically and culturally contingent'. Egan claims that cultural historicists have relied far too heavily on 'Althusser's theory [of ideology]', which 'attributes so much to the social construction of the individual (by "interpellation") of the individual's sense of herself that it is a wonder anyone can think for themselves at all'.

He continues: 'a grave weakness of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism has been a misplaced confidence that Althusser's theorizing of ideology solved the problems of determination, consciousness, and base / superstructure'. 'Fortunately', Egan says, Geertz, Althusser and, indeed, the cultural historicists have been proved 'wrong' by 'recent anthropological work'. [12]

Andy Mousley has also been a strong critic of anti-humanism. He accuses critical theory of 'flattening the term "humanism"' by artificially reifying it.[13] In a book that Mousley wrote with Martin Halliwell, he states: 'We are not simply suggesting that critical theory's version of humanism is a pure invention, but that humanism has been tidied up, packaged and streamlined by some anti-humanists in such a way as to negate its actual diversity.'[14] 'Although mainstream humanism has often been regarded as a weapon *of* (bourgeois) ideology,' Mousley argues, 'it is possible to locate other expressions of humanism which have acted *against* ideology.'[15] Mousley's work can be seen as an attempt to redeem the idea of humanism in literary criticism from 'the [version of] humanism which was attacked on various grounds by anti-humanists in the 1970s and 1980s', and which has been 'routinely invoked as though it encompassed the whole of the humanist tradition'.[16] For Mousley, the anti-humanist approach to both literature and history serves to strip them of what he calls 'existential significance':

> for if history were to be totally deprived of a 'human interest' element, then why should it matter to us? . . . A form of historicism from which appeals to the human had been totally expunged would be in danger of turning history into just such an externalised, alienated object, voided of any existential significance. Dehumanised history, history denied any kind of human face and scale, would cease to hold any significance for who we are.[17]

Like Wells, Mousley views a concept of human universality as being fundamental to the reading of literature from the distant past; 'for history to matter', he argues, 'it has to resonate with us at some level; it has to produce a sense of the past in which we feel we are meaningfully engaged'.[18] 'Anti-universalism', he writes, 'has discredited the language of human feeling and engagement which we might want to use to describe the experience of literature.' In contrast, 'literary humanism' can reconnect with literature on a human level, by reading it as a 'practical ethics' that helps us answer 'the question: "how to live"'.[19]

Wells, Egan and Mousley find another ally in Joseph Carroll,[20] who has argued for a direct application of Darwinian ideas to critical practice. In *Literary Darwinism*, taking his cue from Pinker and others, he attempts to develop a critical methodology derived from the cognitive

sciences.[21] His previous study, *Evolution and Literary Theory*, which provides a thorough critique and rejection of post-structuralism, including cultural historicism, ends on an optimistic note:

> I predict that within twenty years the Darwinian paradigm will have established its dominance in the social sciences. It will have done so in spite of all prejudice and all entrenched interests, because of the irresistible force of its explanatory power. I imagine that the Darwinian paradigm will take rather longer to establish itself in the humanities and in literary theory, partly because literary theory is heavily dependent on developments in other disciplines, partly because it is far less constrained by empirical findings than the social sciences are, and partly because literary theory is the last refuge of mystical indeterminacy . . . But even in literary theory the need for understanding must ultimately take precedence over beliefs that depend on obscurantism and intellectual obstruction. In any case, whatever happens within the critical institution as a whole, the pursuit of positive knowledge is available for anyone who desires it. Within this pursuit, the opportunities for real and substantial development in our scientific understanding of culture and of literature are now greater than they have ever been before.[22]

In the ensuing decade, Carroll has been joined in his cause by a range of other critics, including Brian Boyd, Jonathan Gottschall and Daniel Kruger, who he characterises 'not as an army, but as a robust guerrilla band'. None the less, in his most recent book he complains literary Darwinism continues to speak with a marginal voice in the discipline and imagines 'what would a Darwinist contribution to a casebook look like?'[23]

While I am not convinced that Carroll's direct application of Darwinian principles to the study of literature is the wisest course of action, there is no denying the strength of the argument he and other advocates of evolutionary criticism put forward.

> For the past thirty years or so, while the social sciences were going through a Darwinian revolution, the humanities have been running in almost exactly the opposite direction. While scientists concerned with human behaviour have been recognizing that human nature is shaped and constrained by an evolved and adapted human nature, the humanities have been proclaiming, flamboyantly but with virtuoso skill in sophistical equivocation, that the world is made of words – 'discourse', 'rhetoric'. This too was a revelation – a breaking free from nature and reality, a last euphoric fling into the varieties of the imagination. 'There is no outside the text!' So Derrida told us. Humans did not exist either as individuals or as a species before we thought of them in that way. So Barthes and Foucault told us. Sex is purely a social construct. So a whole generation told us. None of it was true. Such things are often said, in a tired and routine way, but deep down, nobody has ever thoroughly believed them. We all wake up at some point and feel the massive overwhelming reality of our own biological existence in a physical world.[24]

Brian Boyd puts it another way:

> For many in the modern humanities and social sciences, there is no human nature, only the construction of local culture, and to think otherwise can only endanger hopes for changing what we are and do. This position is confused. Even to deny a universal human nature and insist only on local cultural differences already constitutes a claim about human nature: that the minds and behavior of humans, and only humans, depend solely on culture. This happens to be false: our minds and behavior are *always* shaped by the interaction of nature and nurture, or genes and environment, including the cultural environment.[25]

This position, backed as it is with empirical evidence, seems to me to be eminently more reasonable, sensible and convincing than the cultural historicist anti-humanist view, which is based on little but 'sterile aprioriorism'.[26]

Despite writing from four distinct political points of view, Wells, Egan, Mousley and Carroll (and associates) are each drawing the same conclusion: there remains little reason to hold on to one-dimensional, deterministic beliefs about the social construction of the individual when there is a more viable alternative available.

Catherine Belsey has been at the forefront of the cultural historicist reaction to these arguments. In 1994, she repeated her earlier swipe at 'quasi-biological' theories of instinct by stating baldly: 'I find sociobiology ... deeply distasteful, crude, as well as politically reactionary.'[27] Having dismissed an entire branch of the sciences as 'politically reactionary', more recently Belsey has been more conciliatory in her acknowledgement of 'recent scientific advances'. She explains the apparent neglect of these advances by cultural historicists as follows: 'Cultural critics have unduly neglected these advances, because ... most of the new developments have been defined and explained from the point of view of the scientists.'[28] In other words, according to Belsey, 'cultural critics' do not like the scientific method because they find it reductive and 'functionalist'. She then turns her attention to the ideas about human universality derived from evolutionary psychology:

> This reductive point of view is widely apparent in current popular science, and nowhere more so than in evolutionary psychology, which ascribes the habits of our own society to an unchanging human nature conjecturally shared with the hunter-gatherers who distinguished themselves from our hominid ancestors about 100,000 years ago. But evolutionary psychologists are not alone in this belief. On the contrary, they share with many biologists and neurobiologists the belief that human beings display the same basic inclinations and tendencies at all times and all places, and this is because, like the rest of the animal kingdom, we are ultimately nothing more than survival

> machines, driven by the imperative to live long enough to disseminate our genes . . . It follows from the survival value of all these universal characteristics that individual and cultural distinctions are merely the local manifestation of organically rooted drives we share with all other human beings.[29]

However, Belsey does not turn on these ideas as one might expect. Instead, she hints suggestively at a middle ground: '*Without abandoning the unquestioned insights of this work*, we could now perhaps afford to move towards a more nuanced view of culture.'[30] I have put that phrase in italics because it marks a significant moment. Belsey, an avowed and politically motivated anti-humanist thinker, now acknowledges the 'unquestioned insights' of work that she previously dismissed as 'quasi-biological', 'deeply distasteful', 'crude' and 'politically reactionary' – even if she cannot resist a final dig at evolutionary psychology: 'evidently', she writes, 'the whole of evolution has led inexorably to Walton-on-Thames (or possibly, Westport, CT)'. So Belsey accepts that there is something to be learned from Pinker and company, but objects to the fact that culture has been reduced to a mere instrument: 'Now there is a single determinant of social behaviour, and it is biology itself', she complains, 'culture is no more than the instrument of biology.' Ultimately, Belsey rejects the idea that 'imagination functions on behalf of biology'. She contends that, although imagination is 'rooted in biology in the first instance, the capacity for fantasy takes on a degree of autonomy. It develops a material existence to the degree that it motivates behaviour.' All of this leads Belsey to conclude that, through language, 'culture alters those who internalize it'.[31]

Although Belsey is prepared to concede some ground to the biological determinists, she maintains at all costs the relative autonomy of culture: 'In my view, the biology that constitutes human beings always interacts with the relatively autonomous culture their evolved brains make possible, and culture too exercises determinations.'[32] While this seems a plausible dialectical view of the matter, it begs a number of questions: to what extent does culture determine human beings? Does the fact that biology 'constitutes human beings' reopen the door to some notion of a universal human nature, or is Belsey advocating a new kind of anti-humanism beyond anti-essentialism? Even though Belsey has switched from the lexicon of institutional state apparatuses and subjects to that of 'human organisms-in-culture', her argument that the human imagination develops a material existence which then motivates behaviour retains a distinctly Althusserian flavour. One wonders whether the autonomy of the individual disappears under the autonomy of culture. That said, Belsey is a cultural historicist who is committed to thinking seriously about human agency and about how the findings of Pinker

and others complicate the existing theoretical models. I am working in a similar vein.

Three Types of Determinism

One feature of this debate between the humanists and the anti-humanists strikes me as peculiar: each side accuses the other of crude and reductive determinism while attributing categories such as autonomy and dynamism to their own theory. Take, for example, these two passages on the human imagination in Belsey's essay:

> The science of human nature credits imagination itself with survival value. It permits us to hallucinate specific, identifiable satisfactions for our appetites. Imagination also enabled our ancestors to conjure up images of creatures and situations that could do them harm, as well as to visualize unknown places that might be worth the effort of migration. Thanks to imagination we can empathize with other people, entering vicariously into their perceptions and feelings, and this empathy facilitates the capacity for cooperation that fortifies human groups against predators and natural disasters. We can improvise in unforeseen situations, choose between alternative options, and invent new social skills and technologies. Imagination creates alternatives to the world we know . . .
> . . . In the course of history, that amending imagination has produced some of the best and worst of human achievements. For one thing, it drives the development of knowledge, as science produces hypotheses about what we don't already know, opportunities we could explore, diseases we might cure. In addition, it has brought democracies out of dictatorships. But it has also generated social experiments that involved exterminating swathes of the population. Imagination accounts for both art and pornography; or for Shakespeare's play and Peter Quince's. The ability to imagine a better alternative has fuelled both feminism and the oppression of women . . . the civil rights movement, but also apartheid . . . utopian idealists and suicide bombers.[33]

For Belsey, this power – the power to change the course of history, to determine the future – is ultimately ascribed to culture, or rather, it *is* culture itself: 'the capacity for fantasy takes on a degree of autonomy', which then motivates behaviour. The human imagination takes on a life of its own which ends up controlling the very people who did the imagining in the first place. But Belsey has also, quite knowingly, reproduced the classic humanist argument which maintains that the power to change the course of history is in the hands of individuals and their natural abilities, such as imagination. 'Culture' is a product of that endeavour; or as Pinker puts it, it 'emerges naturally from that lifestyle [of knowledge-using and co-operation]' which comes naturally to humans. For Pinker,

'culture . . . is a pool of technological and social innovations that people accumulate to help them live their lives, not a collection of arbitrary roles and symbols that happen to befall them'.[34]

It would appear, then, that the question of where the real autonomy lies is a matter of emphasis. According to the humanist, human beings use culture as a tool for living and learning; according to the anti-humanist, on the other hand, culture is autonomous and pushes human beings into living and learning in particular ways. The humanist argues that primal human needs and desires are the engine room of innovation and change, whereas the anti-humanist argues that culture is the chief mechanism for instituting change. For the humanist, social determinism denies individuals agency; for the anti-humanist, biological determinism denies culture autonomy. I suspect each is guilty of setting up straw men who are rather more extreme in their positions than their real-life counterparts. The point that Belsey and Pinker are both making is substantially the same: culture is the accumulated by-product of human action and imagination through which humans can achieve their natural potential. The relationship between humans and culture is dialectical. Few evolutionary biologists would deny that culture, along with other external factors, plays a major role in human development. For example, Boyd states:

> That our minds reflect evolution's design does not mean that all is nature and not nurture, that genes are everything and environment nothing. In any sophisticated biological thinking these oppositions have been thoroughly discredited . . . Nature 'versus' nurture is not a zero-sum game, in which nature's *x* percent is 100 minus nurture's *y* percent. Rather it is a product, *x* times *y*, nature *activated* at each stage according to its impact from nurture.[35]

Likewise, there is an implicit belief in cultural historicism, albeit vague and concealed, in some form of basic human autonomy and subjectivity; Mousley calls it 'covert humanism'.[36] When Alan Sinfield says, 'I focus on questions of dissident sexuality . . . because they concern me as a gay man',[37] does he seriously believe that his *sexuality* has been culturally determined, that he was always already born into a dissident subculture of homosexuality? It seems unlikely. In any case, the very existence of a subculture of homosexuality would always already depend on there being homosexuals (or at least homosexual acts) in the first place – it could hardly arise from a group of heterosexual men who had sexual contact with women only.

Notwithstanding these subtleties, as I have suggested, we have been provided with two deterministic models: biological determinism and cultural determinism. Each views the other as fundamentally crude and

reductive, and blind to the nuances that make their causal explanation of choice superior. In fact, we are faced with two grand meta-narratives, of the variety supposedly despised by post-modernists,[38] with which we can explain the majestic sweep of human history. To these we can add a third grand meta-narrative that cannot be reduced to either culture or human nature: geographical determinism. The example *par excellence* of this type of determinism is Jared Diamond's Pulitzer Prize-winning study, *Germs, Guns and Steel*. Diamond attempts to answer the fundamental question of inequality in human civilisation: 'why did wealth and power become distributed as they are now, rather than in some other way? For instance, why weren't Native Americans, Africans, and Aboriginal Australians the ones who decimated, subjugated, or exterminated Europeans and Asians?'[39]

Diamond argues that when the Eurasian civilisations came into contact with the civilisations from other continents, they ultimately conquered them because they had developed guns and steel, and resistance to germs from centuries of breeding domesticated animals, and because they rode on horseback. This begs the question of why it was the Eurasian nations rather than the nations they conquered that developed those things. For Diamond, the answer boils down to the 'questions of ultimate causation':[40] luck, geographical location, land formation, climate, and available crops and livestock. For him, the alternative answers – that it was mainly down to human nature or individual cultures – prove both unpalatable and unfeasible. Diamond's thesis is relatively simple: in order for a tribe of people living as hunter-gatherers to develop into an agricultural society, certain criteria needed to be met. These include the ability to grow sustainable cereal crops that can be stored in granaries for reasonably long periods without perishing and access to more than one of the so-called 'Ancient Fourteen Species of Big Herbivorous Domestic Animals'.[41] With the move from hunter-gathering to farming, not only is there more food for the people to eat (leading to population increases), but also time is freed up for the men and the women of the tribe to spend on tasks other than picking fruit or hunting game. From this point on, barring disasters, the move to the Iron Age and beyond is only a matter of time, although contact with other tribes, trade, exchanges of knowledge, languages, crops, livestock and conflict are vital to progress. According to Diamond, geography provided a 'very unequal distribution' of these key ingredients for development 'among the continents', which, as he puts it, 'became an important reason why Eurasians, rather than peoples of other continents, were the ones to end up with guns, germs, and steel'.[42]

Just as with any well thought out and thoroughly researched

deterministic argument, Diamond's thesis has an almost irresistible explanatory power – at least as irresistible, at any rate, as the 'explanatory power' Joseph Carroll finds so compelling in evolutionary psychology. I bring up Diamond for a reason: geographical determinism proves every bit as seductive as the biological and social variants of determinism. Robin Headlam Wells writes about cultural materialism with typical disdain when he argues that cultural materialists aim to find 'something . . .. clear-cut' in Shakespeare's plays:

> on the one hand a pro-establishment play defending 'the exercise of state violence'; on the other a 'dissident' play about heroic workers exploited by their 'upper-class' rulers . . . If it looks as if the play in question is supporting 'the state', you rewrite it so that it supports the people; if the play is difficult to pin down you get rid of the ambiguities.[43]

But it is not difficult to imagine critics of Pinker or Diamond drawing similar conclusions about the reductive or cruder aspects of their theories.

Diamond's theory is only able to answer certain questions.[44] For example, he is silent on the question of differences between individuals. How is it that two people from the same time and place can have different personalities, tastes, drives and skills? And, perhaps a more ambitious question: why do certain individuals cut such gargantuan figures in history rather than others? Why Lincoln? Why Gandhi? Why Hitler? Why Shakespeare? While evolutionary psychology does not have anywhere near all of the answers to such questions, it can certainly make a better fist of it than either social or geographical determinism. However, by the same token, it is much harder for evolutionary psychology to account for the huge inequalities of wealth and power that Diamond attempts to explain. Likewise, the cultural historicist version of social determinism is apt to answer some questions better than others. For example, Althusserian ideology critique is, on the whole, far more convincing about why the proletarian revolutions that Marx had predicted would occur in industrialised nations never took place than it is on the reasons why the October Revolution did occur; anti-humanists in general have a hard time explaining large-scale social changes.

Deterministic models are, by their nature, prone to making aberrations and awkward problems fit their causal explanation of choice rather than switching to an alternative. This is a weakness found in all three of the deterministic models – social, geographical and biological – that I have been discussing. This is an unfortunate tendency, because it seems to me that all three models convincingly explain aspects of human history. Rather than searching for any single causal explana-

tion for the path human history has taken, we would be better served by acknowledging multiple factors. History is not wholly explicable in terms of either culture, geography or human biology, but is rather the result of their complex interaction, with chance playing a prominent, sometimes decisive role in determining when and how those three participants combine. Despite some of my earlier misgivings about Catherine Belsey's essay, 'The Role of Culture', her reaching for the middle ground, for 'a more nuanced view', is in the right direction. If we wish to answer Kiernan Ryan's 'plea for radical critics to bring a wider range of expectations to bear on Shakespeare's plays' than the assumption that 'Shakespeare's drama is steeped in the oppressive ideas and attitudes of his day', then, as Belsey rightly contends, 'it is the friction between' these different types of causal explanations 'that we need to think about'.[45]

Freedom versus Determinism and Human Agency

Lurking under the nature and nurture question is another issue: the scope for human agency and the related question of freedom versus determinism. This has long underpinned the struggle between new historicists and cultural materialists in the so-called 'subversion-containment debate'[46] which raged in the 1980s and continued well into the 1990s. In 1985, Jonathan Dollimore summarised it as follows:

> Perhaps the most significant divergence within cultural analysis is that between those who concentrate on culture as th[e] making of history [i.e. cultural materialists], and those who concentrate on the unchosen conditions which constrain and inform that process of making [i.e. new historicists]. The former allows much to human agency, and tends to privilege human experience; the latter concentrates on the formative power of social and ideological structures which are both prior to experience and in some sense determining of it, and so opens up the whole question of autonomy.[47]

This is potentially misleading, because it suggests that cultural materialism gives individuals the scope for 'human agency', whereas, in fact, they are as constrained and informed by the unchosen conditions of culture as the individuals in the new historicist model. This is cultural materialism at its most dense and difficult: how is it possible to have a theory of 'human agency' when you deny the concept of individual autonomy? What Dollimore calls 'human agency' might be better described as 'cultural agency' because the 'making of history' is ultimately ascribed to culture rather than to individual human beings.

In his most recent monograph, Alan Sinfield has reiterated Dollimore's sentiments. He opens the book with a firm restatement of cultural materialism's political objectives:

> For Marxism . . . the task is not to transcend material conditions, but to change them . . . Cultural materialism may reiterate with some confidence its claim to be a rational and principled endeavour, connecting textuality, history and politics, in a world where people have purposes and culture has consequences.[48]

Sinfield is motivated partly by Andrew Hadfield's attack on the cultural materialist insistence on a 'dominant-subordinate model' which 'tends to fix political positions as "pro" or "anti" the establishment when they may not so easily fit into this model'.[49] While Sinfield admits that this is 'an awkward tendency', he argues that his recourse to Raymond Williams ensures that 'we should expect the co-occurrence of subordinate, residual, emergent, alternative, and oppositional cultural forces alongside the dominant, in varying relations of incorporation, negotiation, and resistance'. Having said that, Sinfield remains 'convinced that it is helpful to speak of a *dominant ideology*'.[50] Sinfield goes on to posit the crucial question: 'if it is right to focus on the power of ideology, what is the scope for human agency?'[51] His answer to this question and, more specifically, his interpretation of what is meant by 'agency' are paradigmatic of a significant portion of cultural materialist work on Shakespeare. 'Agency' is equated almost exclusively with politically radical action or subverting the establishment. Sinfield criticises 'the climate of intellectual timidity' created by 'conservative commentators from the 1950s to the 1970s', who maintained 'a conservative vision, in which disturbance of established hierarchy was bad'. Against this, Sinfield pits 'dissidence', the central concept of his earlier book *Faultlines*. 'The ultimate issues', he contends, 'are *agency* and *determination* – the extent to which culture has to be seen as subject to social and economic conditions.'[52] A clear dichotomy emerges in Sinfield between determination, conservatism and 'the establishment' on one side, and agency, dissidence and subversion on the other. Sinfield's answer to Hadfield's criticism ultimately recasts the dominant-subordinate model in terms (borrowed from Raymond Williams) that allow a looser interpretation of dominance and greater scope for insubordination. Hence the business of cultural materialism is still a form of 'political struggle' against the dominant ideology, which is 'characterised by hierarchy'.[53]

There are three major problems with Sinfield's model: first, it is entirely self-reflexive in that it can only explain changes in culture by recourse to elements within culture (which begs the question of where

those elements came from in the first place); second, it fails to account for the potential agency of individuals within culture; third, it assumes that agency is always radical in character. All three are problems that Sinfield has inherited from and failed to resolve in his theoretical influences; they stem from his attempt to overcome the limitations of Althusser's theory of ideology with Williams's ideas about residual and emergent culture (see Chapter 3). This is an example of how the rigid and almost dogmatic insistence on working within the constraints of the anti-humanist theoretical framework can lead to an apparent dead end. Louis Montrose, who is one of the more interesting new historicist thinkers on the issue of agency, articulates the central tenet with which neither he nor Sinfield can dispense: 'the possibility of social and political agency cannot be based upon the illusion that consciousness is a condition somehow beyond ideology'.[54] This leads us into a theoretical black hole, which I will address further in Chapters 5 and 6.

But Althusser's totalising theory of ideology proves much less problematic if, following evolutionary psychology, one returns to the notion of universal human capacities and traits (a move, of course, that Althusser himself would have staunchly opposed) and views it for what it is: a convincing explanation of how states are able to maintain order over their populations and why rebellions and revolutions do not occur more frequently. Althusser's theory simply provides us with an analysis of one facet of the historical picture; there is no need to make it do more work than that, especially when it is so plainly inadequate in its account of other aspects of human society. The same can be said for Foucault, Williams and any other variety of the social determinism to which so many English departments have been in thrall since the advent of new historicism. The antidote to the 'dominant ideology' that Sinfield is looking for cannot be yet more ideology or culture; there are other determinants available, including human nature. Cultural historicism's search for agency is destined to be frustrated as long as it remains committed to structural models that under-theorise the human subject.[55]

In a recent essay, Ewan Fernie also broaches this topic:

> Even for moderate modern commentators personal agency is thoroughly conditioned by forces beyond the self. And the 'masters of suspicion' themselves unfold a much more extreme and frightening vision: the human agent turns into a puppet or conduit of larger forces – of the unconscious for Sigmund Freud; of ideology for Louis Althusser; of power for Michel Foucault; of *différance* for Jacques Derrida. Manifold human agencies explode into a ghastly, pervasive 'agentless' agency that possesses and acts through a mere figment of individuality.[56]

The problem here is not with the 'forces beyond the self' but with the one-dimensionality of the theories of each of the 'masters of suspicion' that Fernie names: Freud explains things primarily in terms of the unconscious, Althusser primarily in terms of ideology and so on. That human beings are shaped – biologically, culturally and geographically – is not in question. There is no escape from the situation of determination and I think it is a mistake to look for freedom 'outside' of this situation. An individual's choice to act one way or the other is informed by a huge variety of determinants which may well be in conflict – including factors such as the individual's upbringing and social standing, his or her natural inclinations determined by their genes and hormones, and such seemingly arbitrary factors as the weather and type of food available. The simple fact that there *are* determinants does not dictate the individual's final choice.

Shakespeare, more than any other writer of the Renaissance, palpably struggled with the issue of human agency. The relationship between individuals and the various forces that shape and constrain them is central to many of his plays. Self and circumstance are regularly in conflict; characters wrestle with the constraints placed on them by the structures in which they find themselves. In many ways, Shakespeare's own theorising of the nature versus nurture debate is as complicated as the position articulated by Catherine Belsey. Take, for example, Enobarbus's enigmatic aside in *Antony and Cleopatra*: 'I see men's judgements are / A parcel of their fortunes, and things outward / Do draw the inward quality after them / To suffer all alike' (3.13.30–3). For Enobarbus, people's views of things are shaped by their circumstances. However, his statement also presupposes the existence of an 'inward quality', which suffers 'all alike' with the 'judgements' that were formed by 'things outward'. This might seem like another version of social determinism, but Enobarbus collapses the binary opposition between human beings and their environment by making their relationship dialectical; the fate of 'men's judgements' depends as much on their 'inward quality' as on 'their fortunes' ('things outward'), even though the latter seems to be predominant. Celia and Rosalind's exchange in *As You Like It* elaborates on the difficulty of pinpointing which aspects of humanity to attribute to fortune and to nature (1.2.25–46). When Celia claims that fortune governs the physical features of women and thus, indirectly, their character, Rosalind tells her that she has confused fortune with nature: 'Fortune reigns in the gifts of the world, not in the lineaments of nature' (1.2.35–6). Celia counters this claim with a more complicated formulation as Touchstone the clown enters: 'When Nature hath made a fair creature, may she not by Fortune fall into the fire?

Though Nature hath given us wit to flout at Fortune, hath not Fortune sent us this fool to cut off the argument?' (1.2.37–40). For Rosalind, it is clear that, although nature may bestow intrinsic qualities upon an individual, they are subject to being changed by fortune. Elsewhere in Shakespeare, we find positions that emphasise the autonomy of nature, such as Dogberry's topsy-turvy maxim in *Much Ado About Nothing*: 'to be a well-favoured man is the gift of fortune, but to write and read comes by nature' (3.3.13–14). Ironically, this is a similar stance to that taken by modern evolutionary psychology: the capacity for language is one that comes naturally to humans. Fortune and nature remain as competing but inextricably linked forces throughout Shakespeare's work. In his later career, he shifted his attention from the struggle between fortune and nature to the products of human endeavour, the 'potent art' of Prospero (*The Tempest*, 5.1.50). In Polixenes and Perdita's discussion about art and nature in *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare arrives at the following position: suppose there is, says Polixenes, an art that comes close to matching the beauty of nature,

> Yet nature is made better by no mean
> But nature makes that mean. So over that art
> Which you say adds to nature is an art
> That nature makes . . .
> . . . This is an art
> Which does mend nature – change it rather; but
> The art itself is nature.
> (*The Winter's Tale*, 4.4.89–92, 95–7)

The cultural endeavours of human beings are seen not only as the product of nature but also as a part of it. We can observe similarities between this formulation and Catherine Belsey's ideas about the imagination. Shakespeare was grappling with similar issues to those that are currently central to cultural historicist theory.

Although Shakespeare, like other early modern playwrights, draws on archetypes, his characters are always recognisably human. Their actions are motivated; they have internal struggles; they laugh and joke with each other; they bicker; they compete for supremacy; they contemplate; and, although it is not always in their best interests, they *act*. English literature affords us no better opportunity than Shakespeare's plays to explore the question of human agency in history. And, as I hope to show in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, nowhere is this question more pertinent or more powerfully dramatised than in the history plays, where Shakespeare, relatively free of the generic conventions of tragedy and comedy, could grapple with some of the enduring questions of history on a human scale.

Notes

1. Clifford Geertz, 'The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man', in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Sketched Essays* (New York: Basic, 1973), p. 50.
2. Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, 2nd edn (1984; Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 250; Jonathan Dollimore, 'Introduction: Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism and the New Historicism', in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 7.
3. Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (New York and London: Methuen, 1980), p. 131.
4. Alan Sinfield, *Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality: Unfinished Business in Cultural Materialism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), p. 22, emphasis mine.
5. Marcus Nordlund, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Love: Literature, Culture, Evolution* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), p. 17.
6. Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Behaviour* (New York and London: Penguin, 2002), p. 55.
7. Donald E. Brown, *Human Universals* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991).
8. Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, p. 73.
9. As well as Pinker's *The Blank Slate* and Brown's *Human Universals*, see: Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London: John Murray, 1872); Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, 'On the Universality of Human Nature and the Uniqueness of the Individual: The Role of Genetics and Adaptation', *Journal of Personality*, 58 (1990), pp. 17–67; Carl N. Degler, *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Leda Cosmides and John Tooby (eds), *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Deborah Blum, *Sex on the Brain: The Biological Differences Between Men and Women* (New York: Viking, 1997); Richard Dawkins, *The Extended Phenotype: The Long Reach of the Gene*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Lee Cronk, *The Complex Whole: Culture and the Evolution of Human Behaviour* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1999); David M. Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology: The New Science of the Mind* (Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1999); David P. Barash, *Revolutionary Biology: The New, Gene-Centered View of Life* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction, 2001); Leif Edward Ottesen Kennair, 'Review of *Human Nature and the Limits of Science* by John Dupré', *Human Nature Review*, 2 (January 2002), pp. 7–16; Michael S. Gazzaniga, *Human: The Science Behind What Makes Us Unique* (New York: Ecco, 2008); Michael S. Gazzaniga (ed.), *The Cognitive Neurosciences*, 4th edn (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).
10. Robin Headlam Wells, *Shakespeare's Humanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 193.

11. *Ibid*., 181–2, 202.
12. Gabriel Egan, *Shakespeare and Marx* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 81, 82, 86, 88, 82.
13. Andy Mousley, *Re-Humanising Shakespeare: Literary Humanism, Wisdom and Modernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 19.
14. Martin Halliwell and Andy Mousley, *Critical Humanisms: Humanist / Anti-Humanist Dialogues* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p. 3.
15. Mousley, *Re-Humanising Shakespeare*, p. 23.
16. *Ibid*., p. 14.
17. *Ibid*., pp. 10, 6.
18. *Ibid*., p. 77
19. *Ibid*., pp. 8–9.
20. Note that the following publications also mark a return to the concept of human nature in Shakespeare studies, albeit from widely different perspectives: Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999); Phillip Davis, *Shakespeare Thinking* (New York and London: Continuum, 2007); A. D. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007). A discussion of the books by Davis and Nuttall can be found in Chapter 5.
21. Joseph Carroll, *Literary Darwinism: Evolution, Human Nature, and Literature* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).
22. Joseph Carroll, *Evolution and Literary Theory* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1995), pp. 468–9.
23. Joseph Carroll, *Reading Human Nature: Literary Darwinism in Theory and Practice* (Albany, NY: State University Press of New York, 2011), pp. 5, 80.
24. *Ibid*., pp. 274–5.
25. Brian Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 19.
26. Brian Boyd, Joseph Carroll and Jonathan Gottschall, 'Introduction', in *Evolution, Literature, and Film: A Reader*, ed. Brian Boyd, Joseph Carroll and Jonathan Gottschall (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 8.
27. Catherine Belsey, *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 4.
28. Catherine Belsey, 'The Role of Culture', in *Human Nature: Fact and Fiction*, ed. Robin Headlam Wells and Johnjoe Mcfadden (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 111.
29. *Ibid*., pp. 112–13.
30. *Ibid*., p. 113, emphasis mine.
31. *Ibid*., pp. 114, 115, 116, 118, 120, 122.
32. *Ibid*., pp. 123, 125.
33. *Ibid*., pp. 116–17, 122.
34. Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, pp. 60, 65.
35. Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories*, pp. 25–6.
36. Mousley, *Re-Humanising Shakespeare*, p. 13. To elaborate, Mousley says that,

> although many political critics and theorists since the 1970s have vociferously eschewed essentialist forms of thinking, on the basis that they naturalise what is unnatural and therefore changeable, they nevertheless implicitly share the common view that human beings ought not to be degraded or oppressed. They have, in other words, a concept of what a human being is and the conditions under which he or she might flourish or perish. (p. 12)

37. Alan Sinfield, *Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality: Unfinished Business in Cultural Materialism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), p. 6.
38. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (1979; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), from which the phrase 'grand meta-narratives' is borrowed.
39. Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: A Short History of Everybody for the Last 13,000 Years* (London: Vintage, 1997), p. 15.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 161–2.
43. Wells, *Shakespeare's Humanism*, p. 190.
44. For example, he is unable to account adequately for certain trends in history, such as China's loss of political and technological pre-eminence to Europe despite sharing similar geographical advantages (he puts it down to the greater number of indents and peninsulas found on the European coastline compared with China's (Diamond, *Germs, Guns and Steel*, pp. 410–17). For an alternative account of the development of inequality between nations that emphasises the role played by culture rather than that of geography, which also gives a more convincing answer to 'the China Question', see David S. Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* (London: Abacus, 1999), especially pp. 335–49.
45. Kiernan Ryan, '*Measure for Measure*: Marxism Before Marx', in *Marxist Shakespeares*, ed. Jean E. Howard and Scott Cutler Shershow (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), p. 229; Belsey, 'The Role of Culture', p. 123.
46. Dollimore, 'Introduction: Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism and the New Historicism', p. 12.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
48. Sinfield, *Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality*, pp. 1–2.
49. Andrew Hadfield, 'Shakespeare and Republicanism: History and Cultural Materialism', *Textual Practice*, 17 (2003), p. 462. Quoted in Sinfield, *Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality*, p. 6.
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7, 10. In Chapter 3, I argue that the appropriation of Williams by a broadly Althusserian model of ideology critique is problematic, not least because Williams favoured the concept of 'culture' over that of ideology. See Catherine Gallagher, 'Raymond Williams and Cultural Studies', *Social Text*, 30 (1992), pp. 79–89 for an account of why 'culture' is a difficult and mystifying category for use in literary analysis and how 'Raymond Williams's works encouraged such a mystique' (p. 81).
51. Sinfield, *Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality*, p. 8.
52. *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 9–10.
53. *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 3.

54. Louis Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 15–16. Montrose's solution to the problem of agency, like Sinfield's, is to turn from Althusser's 'closed and static, monolithic and homogeneous' version of ideology to Raymond Williams and more recent theorists, such as Pierre Bourdieu, who provide more 'heterogeneous and unstable, permeable and processional' structural frameworks that explain more adequately social and political change (p. 12). This gives Montrose great flexibility in his subsequent readings in *The Purpose of Playing*, which – at least more than those by Dollimore or Sinfield – make Shakespeare's plays appear genuinely radical in challenging 'traditional modes of thinking' (p. 209). However, the individual still seems remote in Montrose's work – he is prone to talk about structures acting upon structures, of 'discursive orders' (p. 36) rather than real people acting and making decisions. For my general objections to using Bourdieu to remedy the problems found in Althusser, see note 55 below.
55. In the 1970s and 1980s, the problem of the subject in cultural studies was a fiercely contested area. Strong critiques of the totalising aspects of Althusserian Marxism and its failure to account for the individual include: Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-house of Language* (Princeton and Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1972); E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory* (London: Merlin, 1978); Simon Clarke, Terry Lovell, Kevin McDonnel, Kevin Robins and Victor Jeleniewski Seidler, *One-Dimensional Marxism: Althusser and the Politics of Culture* (New York and London: Allison & Busby, 1980); Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). I do not believe the problems discussed in these critiques have ever been dealt with adequately by cultural historicists; in fact, the turn to Foucault made by new historicists compounds them. Neither do I think that later attempts made by broadly structuralist thinkers to account for the subject are successful; these include: Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978); Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Pierre Macherey, *The Object of Literature*, trans. David Macey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Rather than resolving the problems inherent in Althusser, these studies serve to confirm the limitations of structuralism; as Judith Butler says, Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus* 'might well be read as a reformulation of Althusser's notion of ideology' (Judith Butler, 'Performativity's Social Magic', in *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Shusterman (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 126n). Ewan Fernie agrees; for him, Bourdieu's efforts to reintroduce agency to structural theory are 'timid . . . barely a step from Foucault' ('Terrible Action: Recent Criticism and Questions of Agency', *Shakespeare*, 2:1 (June, 2006), p. 97). These problems are circumvented by returning to the notion of human nature.
56. Fernie, 'Terrible Action', p. 97.

Chapter 5

Solutions

The problems with which I have been dealing in the preceding chapters are bound up with the question of history. Reading Shakespeare in itself is an inextricably historical experience, since the plays come to us from the remote past. But they also exist in the present. They occupy a strange dual space: they are simultaneously products of the distant past and objects within the present time that have a history of their own. New historicists and cultural materialists have stressed the need to read historically: to study, above all else, the historical moment from which the plays came. They have argued that history is fundamental to understanding what these plays are about. While agreeing on certain issues, I find the assumptions and methods of both new historicists and cultural materialists problematic. In the chapters that follow, I hope to resolve some of the problems that I have found in new historicism and cultural materialism by turning to Shakespeare's two great tetralogies about English kings: *1, 2* and *3 Henry VI* and *Richard III*, and *Richard II*, *1* and *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V*. These eight plays not only deal directly with historical subject matter but also meditate on the nature of history and, in the process, arguably constitute a unique form of historiography. I wish to advance a method of reading historically that presents a serious alternative to new historicism and cultural materialism. I also wish to come to a better understanding of Shakespeare's own explorations of history and politics as they are manifest in these plays.

Before turning to the history plays, however, in this brief chapter I will summarise the problems I have found in new historicism and cultural materialism and then suggest possible solutions. My critique of new historicism emphasises the following points:

1. New historicist practice is a type of 'hidden formalism' that textualises culture and reads it as a formalist might read a poem.

2. This covertly formalist treatment of culture results in an ahistorical flattening of diachronic history.
3. Accordingly, following Clifford Geertz and Michel Foucault, new historicists tend to study the synchronic field or 'episteme' in historical isolation.
4. Because of this, new historicists seldom seek to make links with previous or subsequent epistemes.
5. When reading these synchronic fields, new historicists have a habit of making arbitrary connections, often by elevating the importance of an incidental anecdote, which then reveals some aspect of early modern thought. As Kiernan Ryan succinctly puts it: 'in the end the eccentric anecdote repeatedly turns out to be a synecdoche, an exemplary illustration of a pervasive cultural logic, which even the wildest imaginations of the age are powerless to escape'.[1]
6. By using anecdotes as synecdoches and making arbitrary connections, new historicists imply that there is a latent unity in the culture in question, whereby all its apparently disparate elements work to the same end; in this way they inadvertently reproduce the functionalism of Talcott Parsons.
7. Stephen Greenblatt's notion of 'social energy' also reveals a kind of culturalism or 'cultural essentialism' in new historicist thought which assumes that there are 'generic structures' in cultures that can be uncovered through analysis. One consequence of this is that it leads to a parochial, localised analysis, which seems incapable of taking wider contexts and influences into account.

Recent critiques of new historicism by other writers have praised it for its creativity and playfulness, especially in its use of the anecdote. For example, Steven Connor argues that new historicism's emphasis on the arbitrariness of the past draws attention to 'the bittiness of things'.[2] Sonja Laden argues that 'new historicism is a mode of "literary history" whose "literariness" lies in bringing imaginative operations closer to the surface of non-literary texts'.[3] For Laden, new historicists employ anecdotes to re-imagine history 'as it might have been' and to demonstrate 'that the primacy of historical evidence over narrative is by no means conclusive'.[4] I am not convinced by these arguments. As I have shown in Chapter 2, new historicists explicitly employ anecdotes to reveal the hidden structures of early modern culture. How can the 'paradigmatic instance' reveal the 'bittiness of things'? The logic of the synecdoche surely relies on homogeneity. And if, as Laden claims, new historicism is simply an elaborate rhetorical game that continually reveals the constructedness of history, then is Shakespeare criticism

really the appropriate arena in which to play it? The primary function of Shakespeare criticism must surely be to illuminate the plays it reads.

To this end, in my own reading of Shakespeare's history plays I will not employ anecdotes or make arbitrary connections, not least because they are not always immediately pertinent to the plays in question. I will also resist the tendency to treat the Renaissance period in isolation. The history plays explicitly refer back to medieval England and, since the time of their writing, have been the subject of over 400 years of critical and cultural reception. Shakespeare's history plays are as inextricably linked to their diachronic contexts as they are to their immediate culture; as Phyllis Rackin has argued, they resist a synchronic understanding of history.[5] I also see no reason to follow the new historicists in their commitment to 'local knowledge', as advocated by Geertz; Shakespeare's England absorbed a range of influences from Renaissance Europe. Furthermore, the country's foreign relations, not least with France, inform the history plays on many levels. Finally, it would be equally ill advised to make any assumptions about the unity of early modern English thought. My analysis will be sensitive to the nuances and fractures that existed in England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries without feeling the need to assert its ultimate heterogeneity – it is entirely possible that the populace were largely united on some issues while being divided or even undecided on others.

My critique of cultural materialism finds fewer problems on the level of methodology. My salient criticisms are as follows:

1. Cultural materialism draws on a diverse range of thinkers such as Althusser, Foucault, Gramsci and Williams, but appears to ignore their obvious differences.
2. Cultural materialists implicitly reproduce the orthodox Marxist habit of claiming their writing to be 'the truth'.
3. They incongruously mix this pseudo-scientific aspect of Marxism with self-consciously 'subjective' feminism.
4. Cultural materialism's avowedly radical political position can distort both its treatment of history and its readings of Shakespeare's plays.
5. It also leads cultural materialists to tar their various opponents with the same 'liberal humanist' brush, which allows them to avoid engaging with any objection to their approach that is raised.
6. Cultural materialism lays claim to a marginal position without sufficiently demonstrating how it remains marginal in the twenty-first century.

The political dimension of cultural materialism has traditionally been the one thing for which it has been consistently praised. For Walter

Cohen, Jean E. Howard, Don E. Wayne and the other contributors to *Shakespeare Reproduced*, British cultural materialism represented a refreshing, politically animated antidote to the perceived quietism of American new historicists. My problem is that cultural materialism appears to put the proverbial cart before the horse; the politics are largely driven by the critic and then either substantiated or contradicted by Shakespeare's plays. If critics already know the political point that they want to drive home, and if their conclusions are already drawn, then why go to the trouble of reading the plays at all? If literature cannot challenge our preconceptions and is reduced to the role of supporting political arguments, then it is stripped of any independent power it might have otherwise had. However, even with these reservations made, no one could deny that cultural materialism has been successful in its most vital tasks: the tasks of debunking the myth of universalism that has been built around Shakespeare's plays and exposing the ways in which the status quo has exploited that myth in the classroom to further its own ends. However, I remain sceptical of the need to attack 'the centre' continuously, not least because it is no longer obvious what constitutes that centre. Governments, corporations, media outlets, celebrities and, increasingly, internet sites vie for people's attention and money; it would take a study in itself to determine which of those fields, if any, has hegemony. One thing is particularly clear, though: E. M. W. Tillyard and his brand of patriarchal British imperialism no longer represent the centre. This is not to suggest that the work of feminists and post-colonialists is done, but rather that they should find new targets in our increasingly fragmented post-modern society.

My chief aim in making these critiques of new historicism and cultural materialism has been to suggest ways in which readers of Shakespeare might move beyond the problems these anti-humanist approaches have encountered. There is a fundamental belief at the core of all historicist thought, regardless of its type or theoretical origin: the belief that individuals are shaped, often intractably, by the social organisations in which they find themselves in their particular world and time, and by the dominant ideas and attitudes of that world and time. At its most basic, historicism in the field of literary studies is founded on a fairly simple logic: societies produce individuals who write texts; therefore, in order to understand a text we need to understand the society from which its author came in all its cultural and ideology complexity. And in order to understand the society from which an author comes we need to understand the history of that society. A fuller understanding of the society and its history will facilitate a clearer understanding of the author and his or her text.

However, over the past three decades 'the author' has disappeared from this model since Roland Barthes declared his 'death'. Instead of texts as the products of socially conditioned authors, we have had texts as social products. As I have stressed, both new historicism and cultural materialism are anti-humanist approaches to literature from which the notion of 'the author' as an autonomous individual has been virtually erased. Indeed, in the work of some of these critics, it is difficult to discern *any* notion of individuality – a charge that feminists and humanists have levelled at them repeatedly over the years. Alan Sinfield has answered this charge directly:

> But thinking of ourselves as essentially individual tends to efface processes of cultural production and, in the same movement, leads us to imagine ourselves as autonomous, self-determining. It is not individuals but power structures that produce the system within which we live and think, and focusing on the individual makes it hard to discern those structures . . . I believe feminist anxiety about derogation of the individual in cultural materialism is misplaced, since personal subjectivity and agency are, anyway, unlikely sources of dissident identity and action. Political awareness does not arise out of an essential, individual self-consciousness of class, race, nation, gender, or sexual orientation; but from involvement in *a milieu*, *a subculture*.[6]

In essence, this is a rehash of a version of Althusser: individuals are ideological or cultural effects. The concept of individuality is itself an ideology, designed to give us the illusion of being free and autonomous in order to fulfil our social functions. To this, Sinfield adds the notion of political resistance. When he turns to Shakespeare, what is seen as important is how the plays in question represent and relate to state power – the same state power that ultimately produced the very conditions in which they were written. As a cultural materialist, Sinfield's avowed aim is to find in Shakespeare's plays 'faultlines', which are contradictions in ideological formations produced by 'sub-cultures' that allow individuals to dissent from or subvert state power. As we have seen, new historicists tend to make arguments for the state's ultimate containment of such subversive efforts, but their focus has been on the same basic issue none the less.

My problem with this anti-humanist strain in new historicism and cultural materialism is two-fold. First, it has given rise to a kind of 'post-theory' empiricism in modern Shakespeare scholarship that has nothing to do with either new historicism or cultural materialism. Take, for example, James Siemon's essay '"The power of hope?" An Early Modern Reader of *Richard III*', which appears in a major collection of essays about Shakespeare's histories. The focus of Siemon's study is on a copy of *Richard III* that was annotated by an unknown mid-seventeenth-

century reader. The question he seeks to answer is 'to what degree did the mid-seventeenth-century reader find the play familiar or alien?' Siemon argues that 'the annotations deserve consideration as pieces in an empirical puzzle that remains far from solution'.[7] Which begs the question: should literary critics be in the business of solving 'empirical puzzles'? While Siemon's essay is undoubtedly interesting (because the annotations are historical curiosities in themselves), it does not go on to *interpret* the play. *Richard III* provides the backdrop to the object that is being studied: the early modern reader who annotated it. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the essay tells us quite a lot about that early modern reader but not very much about *Richard III* – the mid-seventeenth century is not even the contemporary historical context for a play written in the 1590s. This is not cultural materialism or new historicism (or even 'old' historicism) but a plain form of historicism that studies context for its own sake. However, although there are no discussions of Foucault, Althusser, state power, ideology or discursive formations here, whether consciously or not the same anti-humanist principles that underpin new historicism and cultural materialism underpin Siemon's essay, because he assumes that his seventeenth-century reader broadly represents the thought and values of his time. It might be argued that new historicism and cultural materialism have provided the appropriate intellectual and institutional contexts for Siemon to tackle his 'empirical puzzle'. Brian Boyd, Joseph Carroll and Jonathan Gottschall are correct to point out that:

> Many scholars working under the influence of 'New Historicism' or 'cultural studies' now claim they are 'post-theory' because they focus not on theories but on 'empirical' historical data gleaned from archives. In reality, the archivists have not left poststructuralist theory behind but have only internalized it.[8]

Siemon's essay is by no means atypical; it is exactly the type of essay one would expect to find in major collections of modern Shakespeare scholarship. Where once formalists focused on the text in isolation, now historicists are focusing on history alone.

My second objection is theoretical. Gramsci, Althusser, Williams, Foucault and Bourdieu all offer us perfectly plausible explanations for the ways in which we live and think. I am convinced, for example, by Althusser's argument that Marxist revolutions did not occur in the West because capitalist ideologies have been so successful in interpellating individuals. Similarly, I am convinced by Foucault's argument that 'universally widespread panopticism enables [power] to operate, on the underside of the law, a machinery that is both immense and

minute'.[9] But neither of these thinkers can explain why it was Einstein and not someone else who discovered the theory of relativity or why it was Shakespeare and not someone else who wrote his plays. Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* offers us the structural possibility of agency,[10] but it does not explain how, for example, two brothers – say Edward IV and Richard III – might have completely different moral values and abilities. We might all be caught in a web of ideology, culture and power structures which conditions and constrains us, but that does not account for the traits of individuals. Sinfield's concept of 'faultlines', or Williams's theory of contradiction on which it is based, does not answer these questions. Are all of the many differences between individuals produced by 'sub-cultures'? 'In that bit of the world where the sub-culture runs', Sinfield tells us, 'you can feel confident, as we used to say, that Black is beautiful, gay is good.'[11] But what of the black or gay person who wants to say *something else*? And what of the rest of us who might not belong to such a sub-culture? Are we doomed to become capitalist automatons? I cannot help but feel that there is something missing here, something individual and unaccountably *human*. According to Sinfield: 'the essentialist-humanist approach to literature and sexual politics depends upon the belief that the individual is the probable, indeed necessary, source of truth and meaning'.[12] But what of a humanist approach that is not essentialist? To maintain that individuals are fundamentally different from each other for reasons that are not reducible to ideology or power is not to assert a universal truth; it is merely to suggest that there is something more to people than structural effects.

There have been several significant recent publications, beyond those outlined in Chapter 4, that posit a form of 'non-essentialist' humanism: Phillip Davis's *Shakespeare Thinking*, A. D. Nuttall's *Shakespeare: The Thinker*,[13] and, remarkably, Stephen Greenblatt's *Will in the World* – indeed, some readers might be forgiven for gasping at the sight of the father of new historicism admitting that 'Shakespeare was, after all, human'.[14] These studies use a mixture of historical or scientific research, guesswork and imagination to produce strongly suggestive new readings of Shakespeare's plays.

The most radical of these studies is Davis's 'minigraph'. Davis draws on the essays of William Hazlitt and modern brain-scanning technology to suggest why 'Shakespearean thinking . . . somehow feels like no other'.[15] He pays particular attention to Shakespeare's peculiar and distinctive use of words and their physical effects on the reader's brain. For my purposes, however, Davis's most useful suggestions are not about neurological research or 'noun-verb shifts' but about why Shakespeare is a dynamic and original thinker. For Davis, Shakespeare's plays 'are

experiments which call forth a world that comes into being as if for the first time . . . things have to adapt to the places available to them. As characters face each other, the very space between them itself becomes a third presence.' Davis (like Hazlitt before him) thinks of Shakespeare's plays as 'experiments'. Put simply, they are simulations of life in which individuals think and act freely to the extent that they become '*more* than he or anyone can control'.[16] Davis thinks of Shakespeare as an alchemical genius playing with elements without quite knowing what the results will be:

> Shakespeare's experiments are deeply morphological. Everything is thrown into the melting pot to take its chance, and whatever comes out again, under the pressure of contingency, does so anew without explicit intent, lost and found in an improvised replication of life's creative process – a finite full of what is near infinite and almost too much for it.[17]

This is an interesting way of thinking about Shakespeare: as a dramatist who is concerned above all else with *process* – with action and reaction rather than static substance, or in Davis's words, 'a fast-released verb rather than an ever-fixed name'.[18] Andy Mousley echoes these sentiments in *Re-Humanising Shakespeare*, incidentally written the same year as Davis's *Shakespeare Thinking*. He praises 'Shakespeare's inordinate ability to intensify the "existential significance" of otherwise abstract ideas and precepts through human embodiment', which 'presents us with vividly "realised" . . . forms of life, ways of living'.[19] I will return to these ideas later, because I believe they are crucial for understanding Shakespeare's history plays. For now, suffice it to say that, although Davis does not explicitly reject the assumptions of new historicists or cultural materialists (as Mousley does), his view of Shakespeare is a long way away from the ideological state apparatus of Tudor England and its containment strategies.

Nuttall argues that historicism as we know it ignores the cognitive potential of writers:

> I am suggesting that as soon as you allow the poet cognitive or referential power, we enter into a world of analogy in which the social conditions or composition or, for that matter, the psychological genesis remain palpably distinct from the achieved work. The root is not the flower . . . New Historicism now holds sway in universities in Britain and North America (though there are signs that its grip is weakening). Where 'Historicism' means expending all one's attention on the immediate historical circumstances of composition and seeking to explicate the work in terms of those circumstances, I am opposed. The argument of this book is that, although knowledge of the historical genesis can on occasion illumine a given work, the greater part of the artistic achievement of our best playwright is *internally* generated. It is the product, not of his time, but of his own, unresting, creative intelligence.[20]

For Nuttall, it is clear that 'creative intelligence' is not reducible to ideology. There is something more at work in Shakespeare's plays than the process of ideology being reflected back on itself.[21]

As one might expect, Greenblatt's book, unlike Nuttall's, does not position itself against historicism. Instead, it is a playful and imaginative biography of the Bard, or 'Will', as he is called throughout *Will in the World*. Greenblatt's method is fairly straightforward: he tells stories of episodes in Shakespeare's life and then projects the events and people of those episodes on to his plays. For example, at one point he tells us that:

> at some moment in the late 1580s, Shakespeare walked into a room – most likely, in an inn in Shoreditch, Southwark, or the Bankside – and quite possibly found many of the leading writers drinking and eating together: Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Watson, Thomas Lodge, George Peele, Thomas Nashe, and Robert Greene.[22]

Greenblatt goes on to suggest that this group of bohemian university wits formed the basic materials out of which Shakespeare fashioned Falstaff and his crew. 'The deeper we plunge into the tavern world of Falstaff,' he tells us, 'the closer we come to the world of Greene.'[23] The hypothesis is clear: Shakespeare wrote about the people he had met, which is a simple, conventional form of historicism. What is striking about Greenblatt's study is the extent to which he humanises Shakespeare as a remarkable individual in a broadly humanist fashion. Greenblatt speaks of 'Will's own *primal* sense of theatricality' and tells us that he was 'intelligent, quick, and sensitive'.[24] Twenty-four years previously, Greenblatt had likewise written that Shakespeare 'possessed a limitless talent for entering into the consciousness of another'.[25] Again, none of these personal traits can be reduced to ideology or power.

While I would hesitate to follow the approaches of either Nuttall or the Greenblatt of *Will in the World*, which at times wander dangerously close to intuiting the author's intention, I do think that they are right to perceive in his writing human qualities that are beyond explanation in terms of ideology, discursive fields, culture and the social milieu. And to assume on the strength of his plays that Shakespeare was an exceptionally intelligent and imaginatively gifted individual is to expect them to be engaged in more than merely upholding or exposing Tudor or Stuart state propaganda. Accordingly, my aim is to attempt to read the history plays on their own terms in order to determine what they have to say about history and politics, and whether they are still of relevance today. What do I mean by 'on their own terms'? I mean that I will assume that, although he was undoubtedly conditioned by the prevalent ideas of his time, Shakespeare had the capacity to write about his subjects in ways

that had no precedent in those ideas. That is not to suggest that his views of these subjects are transculturally, transhistorically true, but to stress the fact that they had their origins in the creative genius of an extraordinary individual who had engaged with and thought deeply about such pertinent issues as the relationship between society and the individual, the forces that motivate individuals to make decisions and take action, and the forces that determine the shape of history.

Despite the diversity of the readings of Shakespeare's plays that new historicists and cultural materialists offer, both sets of critics are united by their basic assumption that the plays are primarily functions of history or, more specifically, the ideological moment of the turn of the seventeenth century. I would like to start my analysis by making the opposite assumption, which is that the plays are primarily the products of Shakespeare's particular thought processes and expressive power. While those thought processes were undoubtedly shaped and mediated by Shakespeare's world – both directly by his immediate location in London and the theatre, and indirectly through his wider social, cultural, philosophical and political mileux – that world still afforded him sufficient room for the free play of his 'creative intelligence'. I will assume, in other words, to quote Wilbur Sanders, that Shakespeare wrote with 'a mind which could read Holinshed and think otherwise'.[26]

The history plays provide perhaps the best means of comparing the playwright's thinking to that of his time, because the chronicle sources on which he based them provide a concrete basis for comparison. The chronicles of Hall and Holinshed, Samuel Daniels's historical poem, *The Civil Wars*, and the popular historical poem, *A Myrroure for Magistrates*, are texts that Shakespeare certainly or almost certainly read. They are all more politically didactic and ideologically transparent than Shakespeare in their treatment of the period between 1399 and 1485. These contemporary historical texts are both the most immediate and the most appropriate context in which to consider Shakespeare's history plays. Furthermore, the broader context of late sixteenth-century historiography – including European texts that Shakespeare may not have read himself – showcases the wide range of approaches to, and ways of thinking about, history that existed in the early modern period; it demonstrates, moreover, that Shakespeare was not alone in his capacity to 'think differently'. The history plays are not simply a complacent reflection of Tudor ideas and ideals; they reveal a brilliant young playwright thinking critically about the fundamental issues of history and politics: what are the mainsprings of actions and events? How much can be attributed to the personalities and motives of individuals and how much to forces beyond their control? What is the scope of personal

and political agency? Is power bestowed on individuals by God, or is it gained by those with the desire, willpower and ruthlessness to take it? And if it is the latter, which attributes and tactics are needed to succeed, and which ones lead to failure? Why do the majority of people in society accept a situation in which they are being exploited, and what might motivate them to rebel? Indeed, in writing the two tetralogies, Shakespeare was thinking through for himself and palpably struggling with the issues raised by history, ideology and power – the very issues that have preoccupied new historicists and cultural materialists, who ironically seem intent on subordinating Shakespeare's insights into those issues to the history, ideology and power of his time. Rather than using the plays to prove the theories of various political philosophers, I would prefer to read them as engaging in a dialogue with them: as a vital contribution to a philosophical debate that has raged in Western Europe from Thomas Aquinas to Niccolò Machiavelli and Michel de Montaigne to Karl Marx and beyond.

In the following chapters, I will first attempt to gain a firm understanding of late sixteenth-century English historiography as the key context in which to appreciate Shakespeare's dramatisations of history. By identifying how Shakespeare's contemporaries thought and wrote about history it will be possible to make some broad claims about Shakespeare's own treatment of history and the respects in which it is different from this. I will then undertake readings of the two tetralogies, paying particular attention to *2 Henry VI*, *3 Henry VI*, *Richard II* and the two parts of *Henry IV*, in order to draw out Shakespeare's distinctive insights into the fundamental questions posed by history, ideology, politics and the individual.

Notes

1. Kiernan Ryan, 'Introduction', in *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism: A Reader*, ed. Kiernan Ryan (London: Arnold, 1996), p. xvii.
2. Steven Connor, 'History in Bits', <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/english/skc/hist-bits.htm>, accessed 21 December 2007.
3. Sonja Laden, 'Recuperating the Archive: Anecdotal Evidence and Questions of "Historical Realism"', *Poetics Today*, 25:1 (Spring 2004), p. 4.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
5. Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 44–6.
6. Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), p. 37.
7. James Siemon, '"The power of hope?" An Early Modern Reader of *Richard III*', in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works, Volume II: The Histories*,

ed. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 361, 362.
8. Brian Boyd, Joseph Carroll and Jonathan Gottschall, 'Introduction', in *Evolution, Literature, and Film: A Reader*, ed. Brian Boyd, Joseph Carroll and Jonathan Gottschall (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 2.
9. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (1977; rpr. New York and London: Penguin, 1991), p. 223.
10. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) and *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).
11. Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 37.
12. *Ibid*., p. 36.
13. For an interesting companion piece to Nuttall's book, see: Marcus Nordlund, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Love: Literature, Culture, Evolution* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007). Nordlund's approach is closer to that of the evolutionary critics, but his approach has several affinities with my own, particularly in the area of character analysis: 'I talk about Lear . . . as if he were a real person endowed with a psychological depth and motivation that we can try to judge using textual evidence' (p. 13).
14. Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004), p. 216.
15. Phillip Davis, *Shakespeare Thinking* (New York and London: Continuum, 2007), p. 1.
16. *Ibid*., p. 13.
17. *Ibid*., p. 16.
18. *Ibid*., p. 21.
19. Andy Mousley, *Re-Humanising Shakespeare: Literary Humanism, Wisdom and Modernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 10.
20. A. D. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 11, 24.
21. I am thinking of the process described by Macherey, which has proved useful for, amongst others, Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, Stuart Hall and the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, as well as cultural materialists such as Alan Sinfield and Catherine Belsey. See Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978) and *The Object of Literature*, trans. David Macey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
22. Greenblatt, *Will in the World*, p. 200.
23. *Ibid*., p. 216.
24. *Ibid*., p. 30, emphasis mine.
25. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 245.
26. Wilbur Sanders, *The Dramatist and the Received Idea: Studies in the Plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 74.

Chapter 6

Shakespeare's Historical and Political Thought in Context

The Bishop's Prophecy

The Bishop of Carlisle's prophecy, spoken shortly before Richard's deposition in *Richard II*, has long served as the skeleton key to unlock Shakespeare's tetralogies.

> My lord of Hereford here, whom you call king,
> Is a foul traitor to proud Hereford's king;
> And, if you crown him, let me prophesy
> The blood of English shall manure the ground
> And future ages groan for this foul act.
> Peace shall go sleep with Turks and infidels,
> And in this seat of peace tumultuous wars
> Shall kin with kin and kind with kind confound.
> Disorder, horror, fear, and mutiny
> Shall here inhabit, and this land be called
> The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls.
> O, if you rear this house against this house
> It will the woefullest division prove
> That ever fell upon this cursèd earth!
> Prevent, resist it; let it not be so,
> Lest child, child's children, cry against you woe.
> (*Richard II*, 4.1.125–40)

As Nicholas Grene summarises,

> for those who see the eight history plays as a single cycle, this provides a master plan for the whole, looking forward from the moment of the usurpation of Richard's throne by Henry IV in 1399 to the dynastic wars that tore England apart in the century following.[1]

In E. M. W. Tillyard's providential view of Tudor history, the Bishop's prophecy is taken at face value. For Tillyard, Shakespeare's history plays perpetuate 'the Tudor myth', which viewed the Wars of the Roses as a

punishment from God for the murder of a divinely ordained monarch.[2] The historian Nigel Saul puts forward a recent version of this argument:

> To Shakespeare and his contemporaries the history of fifteenth-century England was a commentary on the bishop's prophetic utterance. All the ills that were to afflict the realm . . . flowed from Hereford's (Bolingbroke's) rebellion against Richard . . . [Henry Tudor] providentially healed the divisions by marrying Elizabeth of York . . . Underlying Shakespeare's preoccupation with civil strife was a deeper concern for social order. In the Elizabethan's world view civil discord imperilled the very existence of society. This was essentially the medieval view of the world. Everyone and everything was held to have its allotted place. From the bottom of society to the top, people were linked in a 'great chain of being', which duplicated the order of heaven.[3]

Like Tillyard, Saul assumes that Tudor England shared a monolithic 'world view' to which Shakespeare wholly subscribed.

New historicists and cultural materialists have, quite rightly, opposed this argument. In theory at least, 'new historicists are determinedly suspicious of unified, monolithic descriptions of cultures or historical periods, insisting that there were countless Elizabethan world views but not a monolithic world picture'.[4] And, as we have seen, cultural materialists often exhume Tillyard as the archetypal bastion of 'idealist philosophy'.[5] They chiefly lament his political conservatism rather than his historicist method. Sinfield, for example, disdains the old historicist 'conservative vision, in which disturbance of established hierarchy was bad'.[6] However – discussions of Tillyard aside – generally speaking, for new historicists and cultural materialists, the second tetralogy becomes another stage on which to rehearse their arguments about containment and subversion.

Greenblatt's 'Invisible Bullets', which is about the *Henriad*, is the example *par excellence* of the new historicist case for 'the production and containment of subversion and disorder . . . in . . . plays that meditate on the consolidation of state power'.[7] Naturally, Greenblatt's essay has produced a range of cultural materialist responses that give the plays greater scope for resistance. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen's introduction to Belsey's essay on the second tetralogy, 'Making Histories Then and Now: Shakespeare from *Richard II* to *Henry V*', might serve equally to summarise the responses of Dollimore and Sinfield:

> Greenblatt's model of subversion and containment is seen as inadequate to the complexities of the plays and ungrounded in what we know of Elizabethan history. In its place Belsey offers a reading that gives more credence to resistances within Shakespearean texts, resistances that are inseparable from the 'poetics of Elizabethan power' of which Greenblatt speaks, but which are not always 'contained' by the reaffirmation of that power.[8]

In these new historicist and cultural materialist readings of the second tetralogy questions of history are subordinated to questions of power. This is reflected in Phyllis Rackin's summary of the main differences between the new historicist and cultural materialist objections to Tillyard:

> For many new historicists [Tudor discourse] was finally univocal, a discourse of the elite, shaped by the interests of the dominant classes, whose definitive speaker and audience and ultimate source of authority was always the sovereign. Cultural materialists, on the other hand, have discovered a polyphonic discourse, where even the voices of the illiterate can never be fully silenced. They have emphasised the role of popular transgression and subversion, while new historicists have tended to construe subversion as always already contained – by the dominant discourse.[9]

Rackin wrote this summary in 1990. Since then both schools have developed their thought. As I have shown in previous chapters, new historicists now have a greater interest in multivocality and in producing counter-histories that give voice to the 'forgotten dead'.[10] Cultural materialism, on the other hand, has tended to place more stress on Shakespeare's canonicity, his role in education and the scope for reading plays 'against the grain' in order to subvert long-established conservative readings that have helped to marginalise certain groups such as women and homosexuals. Neither of these developments does much to alter the fact that the history plays are generally read through the prism of containment and subversion.[11]

Let us return briefly to the Bishop's prophecy in *Richard II*, which, for Tillyard and others, is the paradigmatic instance of Shakespeare's advocacy of the providential view of history. Michael Hattaway makes the simple point that 'when the Bishop of Carlisle prophesies in 4.1 of *Richard II* he is giving an account of history that is his own – not one endorsed by Shakespeare – and he is promptly arrested for capital treason'.[12] In this instance, *Richard II* seems to struggle between alternative views of history: the play gives the Bishop's prophecy a voice only to censor it almost immediately – just as, earlier, John of Gaunt eulogised England, 'this royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle' (2.1 40), before his death, the ultimate censor. There is a neat parallel between these oft-quoted speeches. As Graham Holderness reminds us, Gaunt's eulogy 'functions as a diatribe of criticism against the ruling monarch'.[13] Gaunt speaks of a lost England that 'hath made a shameful conquest of itself' (2.1.66); he speaks of a country that has been ruined and abused by Richard. By contrast, the Bishop's prophecy looks forward to a future England ravaged by 'disorder, horror, fear, and mutiny' (4.1.133) because of Bolingbroke's imminent usurpation of Richard's crown.

Despite their differences, both speakers are essentially conservative voices speaking out against the unreasonable actions or planned actions of their current rulers.[14] Furthermore, in their immediate contexts, both speakers are largely ignored and then rebuked – Gaunt by Richard and the Bishop by Northumberland and Bolingbroke – before they are finally silenced. The play briefly considers each point of view before moving swiftly on, leaving the audience in two or even several minds about the issues of history, kingship and providence.

In this chapter, I will argue that this apparent uncertainty about history more accurately reflects early modern historiography and Shakespeare's own thoughts about history than the providential view advocated by Tillyard or Saul. In addition, I will suggest that the complexity of Tudor historiography complicates the new historicist and cultural materialist readings of Shakespeare's second tetralogy that treat the plays primarily as exercises in nation-building. Finally, I hope to situate Shakespeare's dramatic practice in relation to late sixteenth-century historiography in order to build a platform for my own readings of the history plays in the following chapters.

Sixteenth-century Historiography

The first thing to note when considering sixteenth-century historiography is that 'history' did not exist as an academic discipline as it does now. As Ivo Kamps explains, '"History" could in fact refer to an impressive variety of texts. Poems, plays, memorials, biographies, narratives, annals, chronicles, surveys, antiquarian accounts – all could bear the name "history" in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.'[15] To complicate matters further, the term 'history' did not necessarily pertain to actual events and made no distinction between historical and mythical figures. Histories of the sixteenth century often, though not exclusively, prioritised moral instruction over historical veracity. According to Paul Budra, 'history throughout the period [1550 to the early 1600s] was seen as a form of instruction . . . History was regarded as second only to scripture for teaching morality, and it was therefore very popular with the middle class and educators'.[16] Budra overstates the case because he ignores the ways of thinking about history that were changing English historiography in the late sixteenth century, but it is true that many – probably most – readers of the period viewed history in terms of moral instruction.

Another peculiar feature of early modern historiography is the notion that, although it is ostensibly linear, history is also cyclical.

According to Dominique Goy-Blanquet, 'there is no Elizabethan theory of progress'.[17] Both providential and humanist historians believed in the idea that history repeats itself. In Kamps's words, the 'shape of time [in Elizabethan England] was that of a spiral endlessly repeating the drama of rise and fall'.[18] It is not difficult to see how such a view of history might lend itself easily to the teaching of moral lessons. As Goy-Blanquet asserts, 'the past could be used as a mirror to project critical reflections on present realities'.[19] The cyclical view of history was not restricted to providential historians. Machiavelli, for example, rejects the idea that history is driven by God's will, but *The Prince* repeatedly draws political lessons from past rulers, which is to say that the cyclical view of history does not necessarily rely on notions of providence.

Finally, the 'history' produced in the sixteenth century sometimes made little distinction between national and local concerns – the latter often taking the form of anecdotes about local crimes and murders, gossip and bizarre events.[20] As Barrett L. Beer tells us, the 'reading public' of Tudor chronicles 'was predominantly lay and secular in outlook and as much interested in court politics, economics, and bizarre natural occurrences as in the progress of the Reformation'.[21] In many ways, chronicles combined the roles of history books and modern newspapers – which goes some way towards explaining their sharp decline in popularity in the seventeenth century. Indeed, D. R. Woolf argues that

> the most obvious consequence of the advent of print was to rob the chronicle . . . of its function as the recorder and communicator of recent events, that is, as a medium of what would soon become news . . . it is . . . no accident at all that the virtual end of chronicle publication in England . . . coincided with the first wave of corantos and newsbooks.[22]

There was nothing intrinsic to Tudor historiography that made the chronicle its dominant genre.

This rather muddled picture of the status of history in Tudor England reflects what Arthur B. Ferguson has called 'the special ambivalence discernible in much Renaissance thinking about history'.[23] Despite this ambivalence, a few things about history in late sixteenth-century England are clear. First, although history had no dominant form in the sixteenth century, the chronicle was plainly the most popular and widely distributed. Written by and for 'literate individuals spanning a fairly wide cross section of socio-economic groups' that mainly comprised the middle classes,[24] chronicles 'contained, reasonably handily, the latest historical research'.[25] The important thing to note here is that the writers of chronicles were not in the business of producing state propaganda. While it is true that some chroniclers were the beneficiaries

of royal patrons, they also faced censorship.[26] The chroniclers were not establishment figures or wealthy aristocrats but enthusiastic amateurs. According to Geoffrey Bullough, the most prolific chronicle writer of all, John Stow, 'lived for many years on the charity of friends, and even got permission to beg for alms'.[27] The aims and attitudes of these writers were evidently not those of the crown. As Patterson convincingly argues, the belief propagated by Tillyard and others that chroniclers 'were engaged in legitimation of the house of Tudor simply will not stand'.[28] To a certain extent, it is possible to speak of 'Tudor historiography's ideological independence'.[29]

The second thing that is clear about history in the late sixteenth century is that the period saw some of the most radical changes in English historiography to date, which further complicates the description of the history written in the period that I have provided thus far. The emergence of new historiographical methods and ideas from Italian humanists and antiquarian classicists did not immediately displace 'time-honoured medieval practices'.[30] It was a moment of transition for English historiography. Disagreement is still widespread among historians about the extent of the changes that took place, about *when* the changes took place and about which assumptions and practices best represent the status quo. As Kamps puts it, Renaissance historiography has an 'almost schizophrenic character'.[31] For the purposes of the present study, I will outline the broad currents of historiographical thought that existed in the period. I will also note the major differences of opinion among literary historians where necessary and test their claims against original sixteenth-century texts.

By the 1590s, when Shakespeare staged his history plays, there were three main strains of historiography: providential, humanist and antiquarian – to which I will return later. To complicate matters further, there were differing views about the function and nature of history that were debated within and across the different types of historiography. Probably the most important of these debates was about whether history should be morally instructive above all else or simply an objective and accurate record of events. The key thing to note here is that this was truly a *debate* as opposed to a stable, unified position. Compare, for example, William Camden's strong antiquarian manifesto, *Annales* (written between 1615 and 1617), with the note found in *A Myrroure for Magistrates* (1559) about the discrepancies between its sources. Camden writes:

> For the study of *TRVTH,* as it hath been the only spur to prick me forward to this Worke; so hath it beene mine only Scope. To detract from Historie,

> is nothing else than to pluck out the eies of a beautifull creature, and for a medicinable potion, to offer poison to the Readers vnderstanding.[32]

For Camden, moralising only distracts the reader from the chief issue at hand: 'WHY, HOW, TO WHAT END, and WHAT IS DONE'.[33] Camden's *Annales* still starts with a dedication to God, but he insists that he is writing a *history* rather than a sermon. In stark contrast, *A Myrroure for Magistrates* contains the following note about its depiction of the quarrel between Henry Bolingbroke and Thomas Mowbray during the reign of Richard II:

> This tragicall example was of all the cumpany well liked, how be it a doubte was founde therin, and that by meanes of the diuersity of the Chronicles for where as maister Hall whom in this storye we chiefely folowed, maketh Mowbray accuser, and Boleynbroke appellant, mayster Fabian reporteth the matter quite contrary, & that by the reporte of good authours, makyng Bokynbroke the accuser, and Mowbray the appeliant, Which matter sith it is more harde to desise, than nedefull to our purpose, which minde onely to diswade from vices and exalte virtue . . .[34]

The poet acknowledges that a number of his source materials do not agree on whether it was Mowbray who started the argument or Bolingbroke, but then goes on to argue that it does not really matter. His 'purpose' is 'onely to diswade from vices and exalte vertue', so historical veracity is not at all a priority.

There are also many cases in which historians laid claim to objectivity only to produce politically biased accounts of events; Kamps even goes as far as to suggest that it was a 'commonplace'.[35] Samuel Daniel, for example, opened *The Civil Wars* with this claim in 1595:

> I haue carefully followed that truth which is in the Historie; without adding to, or subtracting from, the general receiu'd opinion of things as we finde them in our common Annalles: holding it an impietie, to violate that publike Testimonie we haue, without more euident proofe; or to introduce fictions of [our] owne imagination, in things of this nature. *Famae rerum standum est.* Though I knowe, in these publike actions, there are euer popular bruites, and opinions, which run according to the time & the biass of mens affections: and it is the part of an Historian, to recite them, not to rule the[m].[36]

Yet, as any reader of *The Civil Wars* will attest, Daniel is far from impartial, not least in the significance he gives to the Tudors' role in reuniting the country.

> Yet now what reason haue we to complaine?
> Since hereby came the calme we did inioy;
> The blisse of thee ***Eliza;*** happie gaine

> For all our losse: when-as no other way
> The Heauens could finde, but to vnite againe
> The sev'red Families, that they
> Might bring foorth thee: that in thy peace might growe
> That glorie, which few Times could euer showe.[37]

It is worth noting that Daniel succeeded Edmund Spenser as Poet Laureate in 1599, and became Master of the Queen's Revels in 1603, and later, groom of the chamber to the Queen Consort, Anne of Denmark.[38] He plainly had his own personal interests at stake. Although James Knowles has argued persuasively to the contrary, the most obvious reading of *The Civil Wars* suggests that it is an attempt to rewrite history from a Tudor perspective.[39] Daniel's poem is neither as committed to historical veracity as Camden nor as didactic in its moralising as *A Myrroure for Magistrates* but, like many histories of the period, it occupies an indistinct middle ground. As Rackin neatly summarises the matter, many Tudor chronicles 'conflated providential moralizing with pragmatic skepticism'.[40] It was not uncommon in Renaissance historiography to find blatant theoretical and historical inconsistencies and contradictions with no attempt made to reconcile them.

The Case of Bolingbroke and Mowbray

Such inconsistencies are not difficult to demonstrate. For example, Shakespeare's sources, like those of the author of *A Myrroure for Magistrates*, cannot agree on even the most rudimentary details of a seemingly straightforward event such as the quarrel between Mowbray and Bolingbroke (dramatised in 1.1. and 1.3 of *Richard II*). Sixteenth-century chroniclers such as Hall and the contributors to Holinshed's *Chronicle* often repeated their fifteenth-century sources verbatim without sensitivity to the original author's prejudices. In 1399, Henry IV's usurpation of Richard II's throne was an event that divided the population. Contemporary accounts of Richard's reign, which were often written by eyewitnesses, were thus coloured indelibly by the personal dispositions of individual writers towards Richard. This was clear to John Capgrave in 1399:

> Forasmuch as different writers have given different accounts of the deposition of King Richard and the elevation of King Henry to the throne – and no wonder, since, in so great a struggle, one took one side and one the other . . .[41]

It is useful to note the biases of the major contemporary sources that were used by sixteenth-century historians. Broadly speaking, the

account of Thomas Walsingham of St Albans, the chief source used by Holinshed, is pro-Lancastrian and the trio of French accounts used by Edward Hall, Samuel Daniel and others – those by Jean Creton, Jean Froissart and the author of *Traïson de Mort* – are pro-Richard. Each of these contemporary accounts can only be understood in terms of their singularity. Creton, for example, according to G. K. Martin, 'wrote with a propagandist's fervour in Richard's cause'.[42] And Froissart's chronicles 'provide useful information and insight on people and events . . . [but] on some points [they are] wildly and unaccountably inaccurate'.[43] Some sixteenth-century chroniclers lacked the necessary resources and methodological principles to question their sources, so fourteenth- and fifteenth-century prejudices and inaccuracies invariably filtered down to their work.

Edward Hall's account of the quarrel between Mowbray and Bolingbroke presents Bolingbroke as 'a prudente and politike persone, but not more politike then welbeloued, and yet not so welbeloued of all, as of some highly disdayned'.[44] Hall is generally sympathetic to Bolingbroke and critical of Mowbray. In Hall's account it is Bolingbroke who tells Mowbray of his heartfelt sadness about how Richard had treated the nobles:

> [Bolingbroke] beganne to breake his mynde to [Mowbray] more for dolour and lamentacion, then for malice or displeasure, rehersyng howe that kyng Richarde litle estemed and lesse regarded the nobles and Princes of his realme, and as muche as laie in hym soughte occasions, inuented causes and practised priuely howe to destroye the more part of theim.

Hall goes on to present Mowbray as a self-seeking tell-tale and opportunist, who

> was very glad (as tell tales and scicophantes bee, when thei haue any thyng to instill in to the eares and heddes of Princes) to declare to the kyng what he had heard, and to agrauate and make the offence the greater, he muche more added but nothyng diminished.[45]

It is important to note here that Hall places great emphasis on Mowbray's role as the accuser, using it to underline his sympathy for Bolingbroke. Later, Hall's preference for Bolingbroke makes itself even more explicit after his banishment to France:

> Wondreful it is to write, and more straunge to here, what nombre of people ranne in euery towne & strete, lamenting and bewailyng his departure: As who woulde say that whe[n] he departed, the onely shelde, defe[n]ce & comfort of the co[m]me[n] people was vadid & gone, as though [the] so[n] ne had falle[n] out of the spere, or [the] moone had lapsed fro[m] her proper epicicle.[46]

There can be little doubt as to where Hall's sympathies lie: firmly with the future Lancastrian king, Henry IV. It is worth remembering here that Henry VII had 'claimed to represent the line of Lancaster [because] his mother Margaret was the last of the Beauforts, John of Gaunt's illegitimate descendants who had been legitimated by the pope and Richard II'.[47] In other words, it was natural for Tudor writers to prefer the Lancastrian kings, not only because Henry VII had defeated the last Yorkist king, Richard III, but also because the current monarch's claim to the throne was linked directly to John of Gaunt.

Holinshed's account, which is much more detailed and adds direct quotation, contradicts Hall by making Bolingbroke the accuser: 'Henrie duke of Hereford accused Thomas Mowbraie duke of Norfolke, of certeine words which he should vtter in talke had betwixt them.'[48] Holinshed's handling of the dispute between Bolingbroke and Mowbray is generally much more measured and diligent than Hall's. At one point, for example, Holinshed notes: 'writers disagrée about the daie that was appointed [for Mowbray and Bolingbroke's duel at Coventry]: for some saie, it was vpon a mondaie in August; other vpon saint Lamberts daie, being the seuenteenth of September, other on the eleuenth of September'.[49] Hall simply states that Richard 'assigned the place to be at the citee of Couentree in the moneth of August'.[50] However, this diligence does not stop the chroniclers repeating Hall's account of Bolingbroke's departure from Britain almost verbatim:

> A woonder it was to sée what number of people ran after him in euerie towne and stréet where he came, before he tooke the sea, lamenting and bewailing his departure, as who would saie, that when he departed, the onelie shield, defense and comfort of the commonwealth was vaded and gone.[51]

The wording of this passage is too similar to Hall's for it to be a coincidence. Holinshed's account repeats Hall's not only in its details but also in the author's subjective 'wonder', which is typical of the way sixteenth-century chroniclers interpolated passages from their sources into their texts. Thus, the sympathetic treatment of Bolingbroke found in Hall finds its way into Holinshed – despite the fact that Holinshed makes Bolingbroke the accuser and that much of Hall's immediate reason for preferring Bolingbroke is based on the sycophantic opportunism of Mowbray. The compilers of Holinshed compromise their own fairly rigorous historical methods by including scarcely edited material from an ideologically motivated author like Hall, who treats Bolingbroke as Mowbray's 'victim' to suit his preference for the latter.

Modern historians tend to accept Bolingbroke as the accuser and

Mowbray as the defendant following an account found in the semi-official 'Roles of Parliament', which states:

> Henry duke of Hereford came before our lord the king in parliament carrying in his hand a schedule, and said to the king . . . that the duke of Norfolk had made a number of incriminating remarks to the slander of our lord the king's person.[52]

There is an almost unanimous consensus that this is the correct version of events.[53] The confusion in sixteenth-century histories may have arisen from Froissart, who had written:

> The Earl Marshal [i.e. Mowbray] took particular notice of a remark made with the best of intentions by the Earl of Derby [i.e. Bolingbroke], who meant it as a confidential opinion and never thought it would be repeated.[54]

Indeed, there are enough similarities between Froissart's version of events and Hall's to suggest that Froissart was one of Hall's main sources. However, Froissart does not share Hall's preference for Bolingbroke. Froissart's chronicle also provides a detailed account of the King in private council and offers a unique insight into Richard's thought processes. For example, at one point in Froissart, Richard's advisors tell him:

> Sire, you should not intervene too openly in this business. Say nothing and let them get on with it; they will manage all right. The Earl of Derby is extraordinarily popular in this country . . . and if they saw you taking sides with the Earl Marshal against him, you would lose their favour entirely.[55]

Such details are entirely missing in Hall, where Richard makes his decision almost immediately with no consultation. Hall appears to have handpicked from Froissart and other sources the details that presented Bolingbroke in the best possible light.

It is interesting to trace the other sixteenth-century histories that make Mowbray the accuser – the accounts read like Chinese whispers. Predictably, *A Myrroure for Magistrates* follows Hall, sometimes repeating his peculiar phrasing. For example, just as in Hall, Bolingbroke 'fully brake[s] his mynde' to Mowbray.[56] *A Myrroure* makes Mowbray the speaker and is flatly moralising in its tone:

> Marke with what meede vile vyces are rewarded.
> Through pryde and envy I lose both kyth and kynne,
> And for my flattring playnte so well regarded,
> Exyle and slaunder are iustly me awarded.[57]

There is no question here about Mowbray's role as a sycophantic opportunist. Likewise, in the first edition of *The Civil Wars* (which

Shakespeare almost certainly read), Daniel tells us of 'the faithless Duke [Mowbray] that presentlie takes hold / Of such advantage to insinuate / Hastes to the king, perverting what is told, / And what comes of good minde he makes it hate'.[58] Daniel even insinuates that Mowbray was *lying* about Bolingbroke's complaint. It is not possible to state definitively that the sixteenth-century historians who made Mowbray the accuser deliberately altered the facts – Polydore Vergil, for example, an ostensibly honest historian, also follows Froissart. However, it *is* possible to suggest that writers with Lancastrian sympathies made the most of the situation to vilify Mowbray as a lackey of Richard II and to make a hero of Bolingbroke. This is in stark contrast to less politically motivated historians like John Stow, the compilers of Holinshed, and indeed Shakespeare, who make Bolingbroke the accuser and take a generally more even-handed approach.[59] Thus, even a seemingly incidental detail – such as the question of who started the dispute between Mowbray and Bolingbroke – can reveal in microcosm the complexities of sixteenth-century historiography.

In short, historiography was fragmented and heterogeneous in Shakespeare's time. There was no consensus on the issue of historical accuracy or on the question of whether or not history should be morally instructive. This has led a number of prominent literary historians – wrongly, I think – to give greater weight to one side or the other. Graham Holderness, for example, claims that

> sixteenth-century historians were preoccupied with the problems of truth, in senses still considered proper to modern historiography: truth in historical record and historical recollection; the avoidance of false or forged versions, or what we would now call ideological appropriations of the past.[60]

But, as we have seen, while these claims might hold firm for the histories of William Camden or Thomas Blundeville, they would scarcely apply to *A Myrroure for Magistrates* or the history of Walter Raleigh. Ivo Kamps makes the opposite claim:

> it is wrong to say that early modern men and women had no conception of truth and falsehood, but it is obvious that the differences between them – especially if the problem was couched in terms of 'fact' and 'fiction' – was not of paramount importance when it came to the production of historical texts.[61]

If it is 'obvious' that the difference between truth and falsehood was not important to sixteenth-century historians, then what leads Holderness to draw the opposite conclusion? Annabel Patterson puts a third theory on the table by making the claim that the compilers of Holinshed's

*Chronicle*s were at the cutting edge of late sixteenth-century historiography because of their 'determination to register diversity of opinion'.[62] Patterson argues that Raphael Holinshed, John Stow, Abraham Fleming, John Foxe and others deliberately contrasted contradictory source material, because they were 'dedicated to the task of showing what it might mean to be "all Englishmen" in full consciousness of the fundamental differences of opinion that drove Englishmen apart'.[63] For Patterson, then, it is not so much a question of 'fact' or 'fiction', but rather of respecting the reader's ability to listen to myriad voices in order to reach his or her own conclusions. Holderness, Kamps and Patterson – all experienced readers of Tudor historiography – each come to different conclusions about its commitment to historical veracity. I would suggest that it is not possible to make definitive claims for late sixteenth-century historiography, because it was simply too diverse and fragmented to have a general character. Instead, I would prefer to come to an understanding of the period's three main strains of historiography.

Three Strains of Historiography

The first and most prominent of these strains was the providential view of history inherited from the medieval period, which, as we shall see, endured well into the seventeenth century. As Budra explains, this sort of history 'emphasised the first causes of events, the intervention of God into history'.[64] As late as 1614, Sir Walter Raleigh's *The History of the World*, banned by James I in that year, found 'examples of diuine prouidence, euery where'.[65] Raleigh's preface to the volume puts forward a sustained argument for providence, insisting that God is 'for euer a sufficient and effectuall cause of the world'.[66] In his supplement to Thomas Beard's *The Theatre of Gods*, published in 1642, Thomas Taylor uses divine providence as the chief justification for apparent contradictions between contemporary Christian doctrines and the actions of Biblical prophets and other sainted figures. On the issue of why Abraham and others had multiple wives, Taylor argues:

> Abraham was before either the Law or the Gospell, and in his time *Big[om]y* was not forbidden. Now the punishment of a fault grew from the time of the Law, for it was not a crime before it was inhibited and forbid; so [Abraham] had four wives, which whilest it was a custom was no crime, who as they married not meerly for concupiscence, and to fulfill the lust full desires of the flesh, but rather instigated by providence to the propagation of issue; therefore let no man flatter himselfe by making them their president, for all adultery is damnable, &c.[67]

The message is clear enough: multiple marriages were only customary in Abraham's day because God permitted them and demanded 'the propagation of issue', whereas now God absolutely prohibits them. For our purposes, the examples of Raleigh and Taylor plainly demonstrate that ideas of providence were still fairly widely disseminated by Protestants in the seventeenth century well after Shakespeare's death. This shows that neither the influx of humanist and classicist thought from Italy during the Renaissance, nor the religious upheavals during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth served to dislodge providential thought completely from the public consciousness.

The second major type of historiography in Elizabethan England was the Italian humanist approach inherited from Niccolò Machiavelli, Francesco Patrizi, Francesco Guicciardini and Polydore Vergil.[68] Rackin identifies 'three great innovations, all originating in Italy, [that] were changing English historiography during the second half of the sixteenth century'. She goes on to define these innovations as 'a new interest in causation, a recognition of anachronism, and a questioning of textual authority'.[69] Of these innovations, the most conspicuous was the shift of focus from 'first causes' (i.e. God's will) to the 'second causes' of human action. Even if history was still framed by the theological framework of divine providence, humans were still afforded a degree of autonomy. After all, free will was always a central tenet of Christian doctrine, whatever the denomination (even in the most extreme versions of Calvinism, individuals have the free will to commit acts of evil[70]). None the less, the shift in emphasis lent history an increasingly secular character; the lessons change from moral sermons to political analyses.[71]

The first historian to import Italian humanist ideas and practices to Britain was Polydore Vergil, who questioned the validity of long-established claims that the Trojan leader Brutus founded Britain, which dated back to '*Brut*, the overwhelmingly popular version of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historie Regum Britannie*'.[72] This legend was still widely believed in the early sixteenth century, not least because of the success of William Caxton's *The Chronicles of England*, a translation of the old *Brut* chronicle, which was published in 1482 and was one of Britain's first printed books. *The Chronicles of England* tell of how Brutus 'conquerd Albyon / that after he named Brytayn after his owne name / that now is called Englond after the name of Engyst of Saxon'.[73] Vergil could not corroborate these claims with his own knowledge of Roman history. Goy-Blanquet claims that 'Vergil was a genuine historian, probably the best of the century, the first to use critical judgement, compare sources, and check the veracity of facts.'[74] Kamps, however, argues that Vergil's 'advance [in the procedures of history writing] went unheeded'.[75] It

is also important to remember that there is still a strong providential slant in much of Vergil's work. For example, he still recounts the story of Genesis at the start of his histories, maintaining that man 'should be subiect in obedience bycause he was fashioned after [God's] owne lykenes'.[76] Furthermore, there remains a distinct moral dimension to Vergil's work. For example, he finds:

> *HYSTORIES* of all other writynges be mooste commendable, because it infourmeth all sortes of people with notable examples of liuyng, and doth excite noble men to ensue suche actiuite in enterprises as they reade to haue bene doone by their auncestours, and also discorageth & dehorteth wicked persons from attemptyng of any haynouse deede or cryme, knowyng that suche actes shalbe regestred in perpetual memory to the praise or reproche of the doers, accordyng to the deserte of their endeuoures.[77]

For Vergil, then, history is as much a deterrent with which to discourage 'wicked persons' as it is a source of information and interest. Vergil's chief contribution to the development of English historiography restricts itself to his refusal to accept sources at face value.

Notwithstanding the general impact of Machiavelli's political thought – in which 'worldly politics were shaped not by the City of God but by the will, desire, cunning, virtue, and energy of man'[78] – probably the most important text for the transmission of Italian humanist ideas in English historiography was Thomas Blundeville's *The True Order and Methode of Wryting and Reading Histories*, published in 1574. In this work, as Kamps explains, Blundeville 'yokes together an abridged translation of Francesco Patrizi's distinctly humanist political text *Della Historia Diece Dialogue* (1560) and Giancomo Concio's much more traditional, and medieval treatise' with no apparent attempt to reconcile their obvious differences.[79] Kamps has a point: Concio's section of Blundeville text starts by stating that we should 'acknowledge the prouidence of God' and 'be stirred by example of good to followe the good, and by example of the euill to flee the euill'. The extent of Concio's medievalism demonstrates just how progressive Patrizi's humanism was. Patrizi commits himself 'to tell things as they were done, without either augmenting or diminishing them, or swaruing one iote from the truth'. Patrizi appears to break with the fundamental notion of providence:

> Hystories bee made of deedes done by a publique weale, and such deedes, be eyther deedes of wayre, of peace, or else of seduction and conpiracie. Agayne, every deede, be it priuate, or publique must needs be done by some person, for some occasion, in sometyme, and place, with means & order, and with instruments, all which are not to be forgotten of the writer, and specially those that haue accompanied and brought deede to effect.[80]

This might seem like common sense to modern minds, but to sixteenth-century readers, God would have been conspicuous by His divine absence. To underline his point, Patrizi goes on to make a still stronger humanist statement of what he takes to be the case from the historian's point of view: 'power consisteth chieflye in three things, that is, in riches, in publique authoritie, and in pryuate estimacion'. Such sentiments were not only blasphemous in sixteenth-century England; after the Reformation they would have also constituted treason, because the monarch's power was seen as second only to God's – even more so in the early seventeenth century, when James I invoked the divine right of kings. Patrizi's history makes no mention of providence and omits God from the network of power structures it considers. Patrizi is also surprisingly interested in bibliographical and cultural contexts. 'In wr[i]ting the lyfe of anye man', he says, 'you ought first to shew his proper name, the name of his familie, and of what country he is, and *then* to declare his actes and deedes.'[81] Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Patrizi considers the political and psychological motives of the key players in history: 'sith in every action there must needs be a dooer, a worker, the hystorie must first make mention of hym, and then shewe the cause that mooued him to doe, to what intent and ende, in what place, and with what means and instruments'.[82] It is difficult to find a direct inheritor of Patrizi in the mainstream sixteenth-century chronicles, which – as Patterson points out so convincingly – mix so many conflicting attitudes and materials that it is impossible to ascribe their practice to any single type of historiography.

At this juncture, I would like to suggest that Shakespeare is the true inheritor of Patrizi's form of historiography. The history plays most closely resemble the humanism of Patrizi in three ways. First, in their commitment to context; second, in the way they show that the true nature of power resides 'in riches, in publique authoritie, and in pryuate estimacion'; and finally, in their exploration of the psychological and political motivations of their characters. Although humanist ideas would later merge with antiquarian practices to form the basis of the modern discipline of history in Britain, in the 1590s (with the possible exception of Marlowe), Shakespeare was alone in tapping into the distinctly *human* course of history by showing the kings of England as what they were: flawed men who made politically and emotionally motivated decisions.

Late sixteenth-century England also saw the rise of a third type of historiography called antiquarianism. As Kamps says, the antiquarians 'desired to reconstruct, through study of both textual and physical remnants of the past, an "exact memory" of the objects of antiquity'.[83] This

is what Holderness has in mind when he argues that the Elizabethans were concerned above all else with historical veracity: 'the emphasis', he acknowledges, 'of course goes back to antiquity'.[84] As we have seen, the pioneer who led the first antiquarians in Britain was William Camden. Camden was committed to the pursuit of truth for its own sake; knowledge and understanding, rather than moral lessons or the reiteration of divine providence, become history's ultimate aims. For Camden, 'they, whose mindes doe comprehend no knowledge of former times, deserued not to be called men, in regard they exceeded not children in vnderstanding'.[85] He is consistently scathing about '*IGNORANCE & FALSHOOD*', which are frequently equated in his writings, and about '*PREIVDICE*', which is seen 'as an abuser of the Iudgement'. The preface to the *Annales* has a distinctly defensive tone; Camden seems at pains to show his impartiality, that he is not in receipt of any bribes and that he leaves no place for the '*SVSPICION OF FAVOVR OR PRIVATE GRVDGES*'.[86] Camden seems acutely aware that he is flying in the face of convention and has few scruples about denigrating those who do not share his passion for knowledge of the past. For example, Camden prefaces another book of his, *Britannia*, by pre-empting his critics:

> For I see judgements, prejudices, censures, reprehensions, obtrectations, detractions, affronts, and confronts, as it were, in battaile array to environ me on every side: some there are which wholly contemne and avile this study of Antiquitie as a back-looking curiositie; whose authority as I do not utterly vilefie, so I do not overprize or admire their judgement. Neither am I destitute of reasons whereby I might approve this my purpose to well bred and well meaning men which tender the glory of their native Country: and moreover could give them to understand that in the studie of Antiquity, (which is alwaies accompanied with dignity, and hath a certaine resemblance with eternity) there is a sweet food of the mind well befitting such as are of honest and noble disposition. If any there be which are desirous to be strangers in their owne soile, and forrainers in their owne City, they may so continue and therin flatter themselves.[87]

The important thing to consider here is not that Camden dismisses the opinions of his critics, but that he addresses his study to similar-minded people, 'well bred and well meaning men which tender to the glory of their Native country'. Crucially, Camden equates the knowledge of history with patriotism and the construction of nationhood.

This has been the context in which new historicists and cultural materialists (including Holderness, Dollimore and Sinfield, and, to a lesser degree, Greenblatt) have preferred to understand late Tudor and early Stuart historiography: the attempt to foster a stable notion of English

national identity after almost a century of civil strife. According to Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, for example, 'the interest of the sixteenth-century English in the history of their own country can be seen as one aspect of the complex process by which England was slowly emerging as a modern nation state'.[88] Howard and Rackin go on to read Shakespeare's history plays through this lens of nation-building. They tell us: 'like their historical sources, the plays performed the necessary function of creating and disseminating myths of origin to authorize a new national identity and to deal with the anxieties and contradictions that threatened to undermine the nation-building project'.[89] This position has become almost commonplace when reading the history plays. Derek Cohen, for example, tells us that 'the Elizabethan preoccupation with history was . . . a matter of urgent national interest'.[90] England unquestionably *needed* such redefinition at this time, but it remains unclear whether or not the works of history provided it.

The conclusions of Howard and Rackin, Cohen and others about sixteenth-century historiography, and indeed, Shakespeare's history plays, are by no means conclusive. Earlier, Rackin herself came to a quite different conclusion in stating that Renaissance historiography was 'driven by nostalgia'.[91] In perhaps the most convincing case to date, D. R. Woolf argues that the production of history was driven by economic factors. 'The Tudor chronicle', Woolf explains, 'was at the whim of a market that was to prove both soft and short-lived.'[92] There is certainly enough evidence to substantiate Woolf's claims. The chronicles were large, unwieldy and expensive texts that ultimately proved too costly for the general public. According to Elizabeth Story Donno, the 1587 edition of Holinshed's chronicles consisted of 'roughly 3½ million words', while the first edition 'required a stock of £10,000 at least' to print.[93] Barrett L. Beer shows us that John Stow's chronicles 'reached a larger contemporary readership because of their lower cost and smaller size, and they also speak with the voice of a single scholar rather than as an editorial committee'.[94] Woolf produces an impressive number of tables that show the popularity and prices of individual chronicles from the 1470s to the 1640s.[95] The tables throw up a few interesting facts: first, that shorter and cheaper texts were more popular than longer, more expensive ones. For example, a copy of the 1577 edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles* would cost 26s bound and 20s unbound at retail compared with only 3s for Stow's *Abridgement*. Stow's various historical works, mostly summaries and abridgements, were reissued twenty-five times between 1565 and 1631, whereas Holinshed was reissued only three times between 1577 and 1587. It is hardly surprising to find that price was such an overriding factor in determining the public's buying habits

during the late sixteenth century because, as Patterson notes, it 'was a period of dramatic inflation'.[96] Much more interesting is Woolf's discovery of how sharply the production and sales of chronicles declined in the 1600s. He states:

> whatever the intrinsic merits of [Holinshed's] *Chronicles* and its clear appeal to contemporaries (Shakespeare among them), it was nevertheless part of a genre that was already on its last legs . . . peaking at mid-century, the market [for chronicles] had largely been glutted by 1600.[97]

Woolf suggests that the downfall of the chronicle was caused by a combination of factors: market saturation, the emergence of a number of 'parasite genres' (including Shakespeare's history plays), economic viability and the rise of antiquarianism.

The practice of history writing became fragmented and lost its dominant genre at the very moment when England was supposed to have been urgently reconstructing its own national myth. It seems to me altogether more accurate to describe the process in terms of *transition*. The late sixteenth century finds England caught in a moment of uncertainty, on the cusp of modernity, and unsure whether or not to cling on to its medieval, providential past. Rather than leading England's efforts at nation-building, Shakespeare's history plays feed off this climate of uncertainty. Medieval throwbacks like John of Gaunt, Joan of Arc and the Bishop of Carlisle share the stage with proto-modern Machiavellian pragmatists like Hotspur, Henry IV and Henry V. By showing the machinations of court politics – its self-serving relationships of convenience and its backstabbings – Shakespeare's historical drama demystifies the nation-state as much as it defines it. Shakespeare's sensitivity to human motives implicitly follows Italian humanist historiography in focusing on the 'second causes' of history, but at the same time the history plays give voice to popularly held beliefs about divine providence. The history plays see Shakespeare tapping into the uncertainty that surrounded him and mining it for drama. As a playwright, rather than a chronicler or polemicist, he was under no obligation to find stable conclusions or to resolve the many complexities of late-sixteenth-century historiography.

We should not forget either that these were uncertain times not only for historiographers, but also for the clergy and theologians. The issues at stake in the religious debates during Elizabeth's reign, especially those of free will and predestination, feed directly into Shakespeare's history plays. At this time the Church of England was still very much in its nascent state, and actively forging a doctrinal identity. Thomas Cranmer's attempts to establish a more Lutheran form of Protestantism for England were brought to a sudden and brutal halt under the reign

of Elizabeth's sister, Mary. Questions about the fundamental beliefs of the Church of England were still at stake. The period saw the rise of both Puritanism and the influence of John Calvin, chiefly in the form of Presbyterianism under Elizabeth's successor, James I. Calvin's student, John Knox, who had been banned in England under Elizabeth, profoundly influenced James during his time in Scotland. However, even during Elizabeth's reign we can see Calvin's influence. Two of the key ideas that gained prominence were *sola fide* (or justification by faith alone) common to most forms of Protestantism and Calvin's more extreme theory of predestination derived from the idea of *sola gratia* (or 'grace alone').

> it will be beyond dispute, that free will does not enable any man to perform good works, unless he is assisted by grace; indeed, the special grace which the elect alone receive through regeneration. For I stay not to consider the extravagance of those who say that grace is offered equally and promiscuously to all.[98]

We can see traces of Calvin in the wording of certain items in the *Thirty-Nine Articles* written by Protestant reformers in 1563 under Elizabeth:

> X. Of Free-Will.
> THE condition of Man after the fall of Adam is ſuch, that he cannot turn and prepare himſelf, by his own natural ſtrength and good works, to faith, and calling upon God: Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleaſant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Chriſt preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will.
>
> XI. Of the Juſtification of Man.
> WE are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, by faith, and not of our own works or deſervings. Wherefore, that we are juſtified by faith only, is a moſt wholſome Doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expreſſed in the Homily of Juſtification.[99]

Calvin's theory has serious implications for human free will and accordingly for the idea of personal agency. For Calvin, humans do not have the capacity to perform 'good works' by their own free will and since our ultimate fate in heaven or hell is predestined by the will of God. Individuals play no part in steering the course of their own destiny.

However, England under Elizabeth stopped short of adopting these ideas wholesale. Alongside the rise of Calvinism, the period in which Shakespeare wrote the history plays also saw the rise of Anglicanism, a position much closer to Catholicism, most prominently in the work of Richard Hooker, especially *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie* (1594).[100] Anglicanism is characterised by the idea of *via media* or

'middle way', and it is possible to see this in the very next item of the *Thirty-Nine Articles*:

> XII. Of Good Works.
> ALBEIT that Good Works, which are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Juſtification, cannot put away our ſins, and endure the ſeverity of God's judgment; yet are they pleaſing and acceptable to God in Chriſt, and do ſpring out neceſſarily of a true and lively Faith; inſomuch that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree diſcerned by the fruit.[101]

Although the authors of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* broadly followed Calvin in their stance on free will and the individual's capacity to perform 'good works', here they appear to suggest that although good works will not help us in the Final Judgement, they are at least 'pleasing and acceptable to God' and, implicitly, we are able to perform them by our own free will. This would appear to contradict, or at least complicate, article X but it is a good example of *via media* because it is a concession to vestiges of the Catholic belief still popular at the time.

For the present study, there are two important items of note here: first, the fact that issues of free will and predestination were being debated actively in Shakespeare's own time; and second, that Calvin's ideas of predestination are in many ways a return to beliefs found in the medieval period. To borrow a phrase from Raymond Williams, Calvinism was 'residual' in Elizabethan culture – 'effectively formed in the past, but . . . still active in the cultural process . . . as an effective element of the present'.[102] This is because, as Anthony N. S. Lane tells us, 'Calvin clearly believed that, on a wide range of issues, he was simply restoring the teaching of Augustine.'[103] Augustine believed strongly in the idea of predestination. This idea, principally through the teachings of Thomas Aquinas, gained some prominence during the medieval period and Middle Ages.[104] In the argument that follows, I consistently contrast the residual ideology of divine providence with the emergent humanist view of history. I argue that Shakespeare explicitly rejects divine providence; it goes without saying that this also implies a rejection of the Calvinist view of free will and predestination.

Shakespeare's Humanist Historiography

> In a thousand parts divide one man,
> And make imaginary puissance.
> Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them,
> Printing their proud hoofs i'th' receiving earth;
> For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,

> Carry them here and there, jumping o'er times,
> Turning th'accomplishment of many years
> Into an hour glass – for which supply,
> Admit me Chorus to this history.
> (*Henry V*, Prologue.24–32)

Shakespeare's history plays deal with people. This might sound like an obvious statement (who else could populate a play but people?), but the point is worth stressing – not least because, as Andy Mousley writes, 'one effect of [cultural historicism's anti-humanism] has been to dehumanise history, to empty history of its human interest, scope and scale'.[105] We have seen that Tudor historiography was not a discretely defined practice. Controversial new foreign ideas about politics and statecraft vied with received medieval superstitions about divine providence, often within the covers of a single text. At the same time, cutting-edge antiquarian methods of scholarship competed with moral didacticism for the territory marked 'truth'. England had cut its ties with Catholicism, provoked war with Spain and faced French intrigue in Scotland, which was a constant source of instability for the English throne; the country was moving into uncertain and isolated waters. No doubt, the need for a firm sense of national identity was strongly felt – especially by its government. History is the bedrock on which national identity is built. Thus, the process of national self-identification hinged ultimately on the writers of history.

However, England did not experience the definitive period of self-identification that its authorities sought in the late sixteenth century. History written during this time was heterogeneous. It was disseminated through a wide variety of forms and came to no stable conclusions about how best to understand England's bloody past. As I have argued, the 1580s and 1590s are best understood as a period of transition in English historiography. To borrow a term from Michel Foucault, it was a profound moment of 'discontinuity'.[106] Epistemological breaks are rarely clean, however. It is perhaps more useful, therefore, to think of the historical texts produced in the 1590s in terms of self-*reflection* rather than as marking a period of self-identification. Whether implicitly or explicitly, writers and historians were asking fundamental questions about their nation and about themselves: What does it mean to be English? How have we come to the present state of affairs? Who are the people that have shaped this country? What were their successes and mistakes? What can we learn from the past today?

Shakespeare's history plays pose these questions as strongly as any contemporary chronicle and they do so in a uniquely *humanist* fashion, because they reduce the broad sweep of history to the microcosm of

the stage and 'reduce the political process down to a human scale'.[107] Shakespeare's history is truncated, stripped to its most essential elements: people and their actions. Shakespeare exercises poetic licence with the details of historical events. Whole decades are reduced to a few minutes on stage; history is triturated and poured into 'an hourglass' (*Henry V*, Prologue.31), making the significance of human action available for all to see. As Jan Kott notes, Shakespeare's history is 'cleared . . . of all descriptive elements, of anecdotes, almost of story. It is history distilled of irrelevances'.[108] As individual characters negotiate their way around the poisoned chalice of kingship – scheming, praying, wooing, betraying, squabbling, kissing and killing their way through history – audiences are left to fill in the blanks. We remind ourselves how each action has the potential to affect thousands of people: 'In a thousand parts divide one man' (*Henry V*, Prologue.24). Shakespeare's treatment of history draws our attention to just how much has been determined by the actions and choices of a few men and women, and reminds us of how precarious their privileged positions can be. To quote Annabel Patterson: 'it mattered to Shakespeare . . . who works and who speaks'.[109] But it also draws us into the interpretative process of history: ''tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings' (*Henry V*, Prologue.28). This line may be read as a superficial appeal to the audience to imagine the magnificent robes and gold crowns of bygone kings, but it can also be read another way: the chorus of *Henry V* calls on the members of its audience to awaken from their passivity in order to *judge for themselves* the key figures of fifteenth-century England. We are invited not only to 'deck our kings' in the finest silks, but also to assess critically their performances in the ongoing pageant of history. In short, Shakespeare's historical gaze puts the kings, queens and statesmen of England on trial and asks his audience to act as both judge and jury. When viewed in this way, Shakespeare's history plays constitute nothing less than a radical, humanist form of historicism.[110]

Shakespeare's history is a genuinely human affair in which actions have consequences and personalities matter; it has winners and losers, good ideas and bad ideas, triumphs and blunders, selfish tyrants and innocent victims, ambitious nobles and escapist kings. As Moody E. Prior noted elegantly in 1973, Shakespeare's historical insights 'come to us clothed in their full human significance'.[111] To conclude this chapter and in Chapter 7, I want to take the opportunity offered by the Chorus of *Henry V* to pay particular attention to the actions and decisions of the characters found in *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI*. By so doing, I hope to engage in the process of interpreting history at its most fundamental

level: analysing the key choices and actions of characters in order to discern what has contributed to their accomplishments or downfalls. This is historicism as envisioned by Shakespeare: the very stuff of history brought to life, as if for the first time, in front of our eyes and held up to be considered and judged. Ronald Knowles makes a similar argument:

> Shakespeare not only recreated the empirical conditions of historian as witness, but also freed the past from the fixity of the page. The resurrected personages of history now spoke for themselves and the audience, free from the directives of a didactic narrator, could bear witness to the meaning of experience, rather than accept the truism of precept, by hearing and seeing arguments and actions, words and deeds.[112]

To adapt Stephen Greenblatt's famous phrase, here is a real chance 'to speak with the dead',[113] because the figures of history are being reanimated quite literally on the stage – albeit in an anachronistic and culturally mediated form.

The anti-humanist bent of much new historicist and cultural materialist work has led recent critics to discredit the notion of character as a category for analysis and to focus attention on the extent of anachronism and cultural mediation in Shakespeare's plays. In other words, their emphasis has been on the degree to which social and ideological pressures impinge upon and make themselves felt within Shakespeare's plays. I am much more interested in the degree to which those plays intervene in early modern debates about history and politics in a unique and dynamic way, and in their capacity to challenge audiences to think critically about the historical process. In taking this approach, I would also like put forward the idea that anti-humanist modes of enquiry are ill equipped to deal adequately with Shakespeare's history plays, precisely *because* they are opposed to the very categories on which his historical enquiry is predicated – a matter to which I will return presently.

In centring history on individuals, Shakespeare was, at least in part, opposing long-held beliefs inherited from the medieval period about the primacy of God's will in historical events. Although Phyllis Rackin rightly argues that 'it is impossible to derive a single, coherent theory of history from the plays',[114] it is equally impossible to deny that the plays, as David Scott Kastan points out, 'all too clearly . . . deal with the fallen world of politics'.[115] The plays cannot be made to uphold the received ideas of divine providence and retribution without the gross oversimplification found in Tillyard,[116] not least because Shakespeare's characters repeatedly make claims that dispute providence. In *2 Henry VI*, for example, time and again York cites Henry's *personality* as the cause of England's failings and vows to take matters into his own hands:

> Nor shall proud Lancaster usurp my right,
> Nor hold the sceptre in his childish fist,
> Nor wear the diadem upon his head,
> Whose church-like humours fits not for a crown . . .
> And force perforce I'll make him yield the crown,
> Whose bookish rule hath pulled fair England down.
> (*2 Henry VI*, 1.1.241–4, 255–6)

The suggestion implicit in York's resolve to make a challenge for the crown is that if Henry VI had been of a different 'humour', if his rule had been less 'bookish' and 'church-like', he would not have been forced into action. York cites, as Prior argues, 'the human causes of Henry's failure'.[117]

In the very next scene, the ambitious Eleanor of Gloucester attempts to goad her husband, Duke Humphrey, into action to make a claim on the crown himself:

> Follow I must: I cannot go before
> While Gloucester bears this base and humble mind.
> Were I a man, a duke, and next of blood,
> I would remove these tedious stumbling-blocks
> And smooth my way upon their headless necks.
> And, being a woman, I will not slack
> To play my part in fortune's pageant.
> (*2 Henry VI*, 1.2.62–7)

Eleanor bemoans her husband's lack of ambition and the social restrictions placed upon her sphere of action because of her gender, but she is not content to entrust her future to providence ('fortune's pageant'). One is reminded of Karl Marx's celebrated observation that 'men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past'.[118] Eleanor, no doubt, wishes she could choose her own circumstances, but she is still going to try to play the best hand with the cards that she has been dealt. Like York, she resolves to take her destiny into her own hands in order to try to achieve her aims. In the event, by electing to dabble in witchcraft, she chooses the 'wrong' option and plays a significant part in her own downfall, but her concerns about Humphrey's rivals prove to be well founded none the less. Again, the implication is that, had Humphrey been of a less 'humble mind', he might have survived the play; indeed, the very course of history might have been significantly altered.

Queen Margaret also takes matters into her own hands because of her dissatisfaction with Henry's character:

I tell thee Pole . . .
I thought King Henry had resembled thee
In courage, courtship, and proportion.
But his mind is bent to holiness . . .
I would the College of the Cardinals
Would choose him Pope, and carry him to Rome
And set the triple crown upon his head:
That were a state fit for his holiness.
(*2 Henry VI*, 1.3.45, 48–50, 56–9)

When she agreed to marry Henry, Margaret fell for William de la Pole, the Earl of Suffolk – she fell for his personal qualities – his 'courage, courtship, and proportion'. Henry, who lacks these qualities, has plainly disappointed her. To underline the point, Shakespeare, quite unhistorically, develops an explicit affair between Margaret and Suffolk. Margaret is unwilling to let circumstances get in the way of her goals and desires. If Henry is unwilling to do what is required of him, she will either do it in his place or find a suitable substitute. This becomes a keynote of Margaret's character. She finds herself a proxy lover in Suffolk and becomes both the proxy head of state and the commander-in-chief of the royal army. All the while, she chastises and humiliates the King for his lack of gumption, brazenly kissing Suffolk in front of him and calling him names such as 'wretched man' and 'timorous wretch' (*3 Henry VI*, 1.1.218, 233). The sheer dominance of Margaret over her timid husband maintains the power to shock and surprise in the twenty-first century. She brings to mind the ruthless, individualist ideology of Thatcherite Britain as much as the Elizabethan construct of feminine monstrosity. Whether or not it was Shakespeare's intention to vilify her, as feminists argue, as a 'sustained example of the danger which ambitious and sexual women pose to English manhood and to English monarchy',[119] the fact remains that she pursues her endeavours through force of personality alone. Despite her often spiteful nature, throughout the *Henry VI* plays she consistently makes the best of a bad situation: the daughter of a powerless king, who not only negotiates marriage above her political pulling power, but also, upon finding the King of England a weak and ineffectual man, cuckolds him to satisfy her own needs, leads his armies, successfully subdues her political rivals, and produces a legitimate heir. Without Margaret, the Lancastrian house would undoubtedly have capitulated to the House of York far sooner and more readily – indeed, she is responsible for killing the leader of the opposition, Richard of York. Again, Shakespeare is at pains to show how much depends upon the actions and characteristics of individuals – even those like Eleanor and Margaret who are, in theory, denied agency by the patriarchal status quo.

These women also serve, especially in Margaret's case, as the antidote to the insipidly passive Henry VI, who, more than any other character, throws himself on the mercy of divine providence. If *Richard III* represents a thoroughgoing critique of Machiavellianism, then the *Henry VI* plays surely subject the providential theory of history to equal scrutiny. As Ronald Knowles has suggested:

> [Henry's] Christian faith accepts that what has taken place must be part of God's just providential ordering of the world, however inscrutable that might appear to mere human understanding . . . The chaos which ensues when the monarch puts his complete faith and trust in the efficacy of God in human affairs [serves] ultimately [to] subvert the commonplaces of Tudor Christian ideology . . . An audience is surely left aghast at such single-minded piety which has rendered the king politically blind and lame.[120]

In a world that is plainly governed by human action rather than providence, Henry's court is quickly overrun with ambitious individuals who, as the makers of history, are not content to sit back and wait for things to happen. Henry's placid inaction serves both to focus our attention sharply on the actions of others and to highlight how different things might have been if Henry had taken the decisions he needed to at vital moments. I will return to this theme later. For now it is enough to say that Shakespeare himself was keenly aware of the fact that the War of the Roses could have been averted had it not been for the King's incompetence. However much Margaret is demonised in the plays, at least she is in the business of *steering* the wheel of history rather than letting it spin out of control or letting someone else steer it. After all, what is history but an account of people's actions? Margaret's attempts to steer history are, at their most basic level, attempts to exercise influence and control over other people, the practice we most commonly call *politics*. It almost goes without saying that the politics of the history plays are intensely personal, and each major player in the political game is brought under scrutiny – for examination and cross-examination – before the galleries of jurors who make up Shakespeare's audience. Kings, queens and nobles are put on perpetual trial, much like modern politicians under the spotlight of the media. The collective gaze is brought to bear upon each action, decision and utterance; the audience apportions blame to the individuals responsible for failure and heaps praise on those who achieve success – but only after the event.

This intense focus on individual players in 'fortune's pageant' also lends Shakespeare's treatment of history a sense of contingency and immediacy that cannot be found in studies of prescribed history. We are reminded constantly of how things *might have been* were it not for

certain people. There is an uncertainty as to how events may unfurl, despite the fact that history has already written the outcome. In *2 Henry IV*, Shakespeare underlines this sense of contingency by introducing the device of Rumour, who, from the start of the play, blurs events and raises doubts in the audience about what actually happened in the previous play by spreading the lie 'that Harry Monmouth fell / Under the wrath of noble Hotspur's sword' (*2 Henry IV*, Induction.29–30). We know this did not happen, but in the world of the play it remains a distinct possibility; in the same circumstances, Hotspur *might* have killed Prince Hal. This sense of contingency changes the dynamic of history. Blair Worden is right to assert that 'Shakespeare's instincts are always descriptive, never prescriptive', but wrong to claim that 'he provides maps of political conduct, not tests of political theory'.[121] The image of a 'map' suggests a static landscape with fixed positions, but the history plays are populated by characters who change their allegiances, who adopt different political stances depending on fluctuating fortunes, and whose personalities develop as events unfold and body-counts rise. If anything, abstract political theories *are* put to the test in 'real' situations in which almost anything *could* happen. Without doubt, Shakespeare privileges praxis over theory. Shakespeare's history plays are not simply an account of what happened, but dynamic and probing analyses of historical causality which place the responsibility for the outcomes of events squarely on the shoulders of men and women.

New historicists and cultural materialists would surely baulk at such conclusions, because they run the risk of affording individuals the agency to control (within boundaries) their own destinies and the course of history. After all, the 'declared objective' of anti-humanism is the 'decentring of man'.[122] The principal objection such critics would doubtless raise is that, by centring history on individuals, Shakespeare ignores the historical and social processes that *produce* those individuals in the first place. How can individuals truly effect change if they are caught up in the ideological thought-patterns of their particular place and moment? But Shakespeare also provides part of the answer to these questions: individuals have different personalities. There is only so much that ideology critique can account for. How can one explain the wildly dissimilar dispositions of Henry VI and his father, Henry V, or of Duke Humphrey and his wife, Eleanor? Why was it Clarence and not Richard of Gloucester who betrayed Edward IV? We may point to any number of reasons, but they will undoubtedly be specific and personal rather than general and ideological. It seems too tempting and easy to answer, as Graham Holderness does, that these differences of personality are merely reflections of 'residual and emergent ideologies in a changing

society'.[123] I am not suggesting that the personalities of individuals are inherent or 'essential', because it is clear that most human behaviour is learned; but rather that the external impetuses which regulate human behaviour over time and which constitute 'personality' are far too varied and innumerable to be explained away by general principles. As readers of Pierre Bourdieu will attest,[124] the will to abstraction can lead only to further abstraction: a kind of Russian-doll model in which structural fields merely beget and explain further structural fields. The continental model of advancing theoretical arguments *a priori* has a habit of providing anti-humanists with useful catch-all phrases that can be used to defeat almost any argument. So Jonathan Dollimore, for example, is able to dismiss the medieval theory of providentialism, Tillyard's adoption of it in reading Shakespeare's history plays, the liberal-humanist counter-arguments to Tillyard of the 1960s that centre history on individuals, *and* Jan Kott's brand of secular existentialist despair, on the grounds that they are ideological.[125] All of which begs the question: what is *not* ideological in quasi-Althusserian materialism?

A strong argument can be made in support of the view that Shakespeare's history plays demonstrate that it is individuals and not God who drive history. Yet new historicists and cultural materialists, by recourse to the anti-humanism of Althusser, Foucault and others, would deny individuals their place in history altogether. This is hardly surprising, given that both Althusser's and Foucault's theoretical projects rest on static, closed, discontinuous, synchronic and essentially deterministic models of history, whereas Shakespeare's humanist historical model, which is opposed to determinism, is dynamic, diachronic, contingent and, as Kastan argues, 'open-ended'.[126] In other words, cultural historicism is fundamentally opposed to Shakespeare's own project of humanising history, so it follows that the majority of its practitioners tend to produce readings of the history plays that emphasise their supposed advocacy of the Elizabethan ideological state apparatus while neglecting Shakespeare's close attention to individual characters.

Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield take successive generations of twentieth-century Shakespeare critics to task for making a 'fundamental error' in considering the roles of individuals in the process of history:

> Perhaps the most fundamental error in all these accounts of the role of ideology is falsely to unify history and / or the individual human subject. In one, history is unified by a teleological principle conferring meaningful order (Tillyard), in another by the inverse of this – Kott's 'implacable roller'. And Sanders's emphasis on moral or subjective integrity implies a different, though related, notion of unity: an experience of subjective autonomy, of an essential self uncontaminated by the corruption of worldly process; 'indi-

> vidual integrity' implies in the etymology of both worlds an ideal unity: the undivided, the integral.[127]

When I asked the question 'what is history but an account of people's actions?' above, I did so with this passage from Dollimore and Sinfield in mind, because they assume that history is something else and in doing so beg further questions. Why is the so-called unification of history and the individual necessarily 'false'? Was it not Margaret who brought York to his knees? Was it not Richard III who killed Margaret's son, Prince Edward, and who arranged for the death of his own brother Clarence? What would it mean exactly to separate these historical actions from the individuals who perpetrated them? Dollimore and Sinfield provide their own answer, which is:

> not to become fixated on [the] negation [of the concept of unifying history and human subjects] – chaos and subjective fragmentation – but rather to understand history and the human subject in terms of social and political process. Ideology is composed of those beliefs, practices, and institutions that *work* to legitimate the social order – especially by the process of representing sectional or class interests as universal ones.[128]

From this perspective it was social and political process, rather than Margaret or Richard III or any other person, that was ultimately responsible for the historical events I described above. I have deliberately emphasised the word 'work' here; it is a verb, an action that assumes, one would think, a doer. But the concept of 'individual human subjects' has just been discredited; there is no single person or even group of people responsible for this process; the 'beliefs, practices, and institutions' just *work* 'by themselves',[129] in the abstract. Since we are dealing with Marxist ideas, let us return briefly to Marx's famous aphorism: men make history, but not under conditions of their own choosing. What would become of this in the hands of Dollimore and Sinfield? Their version might read: 'social and political processes make history, under conditions of their own creation'. I would suggest that, by falsely unifying the *historical* process – what people say and do – and conflating it with the social and ideological processes by which individuals function in society, it is Dollimore and Sinfield who have made the 'fundamental error'.

As Annabel Patterson argues, the cultural historicist thraldom to 'certain fashionable forms of anti-humanism [has] seriously inhibited our capacity to talk sensibly about literature'.[130] Patterson is particularly concerned that these anti-humanist ideas efface individuals from the process of history. She locates the problem in the continued influences of Lacan, Foucault and Althusser: 'Lacan's neo-Freudian "qui parle"

denies to the subject the oldest humanist privilege – speech as a sign of rational self-determination – and Foucault's quotation of it extends that denial to history.' And the problem is compounded, Patterson adds, by Althusser's belief 'that economies (and economic theories) can exist in abstraction from the human beings that produced them'.[131] Patterson notes a tendency in these theorists to raise all questions to the level of abstraction; their theses advance from general principles to general principles – a move, as we have seen, repeated by cultural historicists. In the twenty-first century – an era in which politicians and national governments increasingly absolve themselves of personal responsibility by citing economic forces that are beyond their control – the issue of individual agency remains vital. In my readings of the history plays in the next two chapters of this book, I hope to show that similar issues were at stake in the 1590s and that Shakespeare was deeply aware of them. I also wish to demonstrate how, in subjecting the major players of recent English history to such concentrated scrutiny, the first and second tetralogies insist upon a political world of personal culpability that deals harshly with those who would hide behind abstractions.

Notes

1. Nicholas Grene, *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 163.
2. E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1944), p. 321.
3. Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 2–3.
4. Michael Payne, 'Introduction: Stephen Greenblatt and New Historicism', in *The Greenblatt Reader*, ed. Michael Payne (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 3. On the face of it, Payne's assertion contradicts my critique of new historicism in Chapter 2, but this is not the case. My argument suggests that the new historicist propensity for artificially unifying culture is symptomatic of their broadly formalist method, *not* that any of the critics in question would consciously subscribe to the view that there was a monolithic Elizabethan culture. This is one of the chief discrepancies between new historicist theory and practice. In theory, the use of anecdotes resists the appeal to grand meta-narratives and any notion of cultural unity. However, in practice, anecdotes are mainly employed as synecdoches that often reveal 'essential' characteristics of Elizabethan or Jacobean state control. In this sense, new historicism offers an extremely subtle and nuanced version of Tillyard's 'Elizabethan age' argument that substitutes complex structures of power for a monolithic 'world view'.
5. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 'History and Ideology, Masculinity and Miscegenation: The Instance of *Henry V*', in *Faultlines: Cultural*

Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), p. 109.

6. Alan Sinfield, *Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality: Unfinished Business in Cultural Materialism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), p. 9. It should be noted that in this section of his book, Sinfield also targets the 'intellectual timidity' of formalists who worked between the 1950s and 1970s. Sinfield attacks old historicists and formalists alike for their conservatism, despite their mutual antagonism.
7. Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), p. 40.
8. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen, 'Introduction', in *Uses of History: Marxism, Postmodernism and the Renaissance*, ed. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), pp. 12–13.
9. Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 42.
10. See Catherine Gallagher, 'Counterhistory and the Anecdote', in *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 49–74, and *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace 1670–1820* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).
11. That said, there are a number of studies by cultural historicists that place history centre-stage and which will be invaluable for my own readings. These include Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare's History* (New York: St Martin's, 1985); Rackin, *Stages of History*; Francis Barker, *The Culture of Violence: Essays on Tragedy and History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993); Annabel Patterson, *Reading Holinshed's Chronicles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Ivo Kamps, *Historiography and Ideology in Stuart Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Ivo Kamps, 'Possible Pasts: Historiography and Legitimation in *Henry VIII*', *College English*, 58:2 (February 1996), pp. 192–215; Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare's History Plays* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997); Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare: The Histories* (London: Macmillan, 2000); Ivo Kamps, 'The Writing of History in Shakespeare's England', in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works, Volume II: The Histories*, ed. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Malden, MA and London: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 4–25.
12. Michael Hattaway, 'The Shakespearean History Play', in *Shakespeare's History Plays*, ed. Michael Hattaway (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 20.
13. Graham Holderness, *Cultural Shakespeare* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001), p. 60.
14. Bolingbroke is the Bishop of Carlisle's 'current ruler' because, by 4.1 of *Richard II*, he effectively controls the court – Richard's imminent deposition is largely symbolic.
15. Kamps, 'The Writing of History in Shakespeare's England', p. 8.
16. Paul Budra, 'The Mirror for Magistrates and the Politics of Readership', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 32:1 (Winter 1992), p. 3.
17. Dominique Goy-Blanquet, 'Elizabethan Historiography and Shakespeare's

Sources', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays*, ed. Michael Hattaway (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 60.
18. Kamps, 'The Writing of History in Shakespeare's England', p. 12.
19. Goy-Blanquet, 'Elizabethan Historiography and Shakespeare's Sources', p. 61.
20. For several excellent examples of anecdotes in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, see Patterson, *Reading Holinshed's Chronicles*, pp. 42–55.
21. Barrett L. Beer, 'John Stow and the English Reformation', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 16:2 (September 1985), p. 260.
22. D. R. Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 27, 29.
23. Arthur B. Ferguson, 'The Historical Thought of Samuel Daniel: A Study in Renaissance Ambivalence', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 32:2 (April–June 1971), p. 186.
24. Patterson, *Reading Holinshed's Chronicles*, p. 16.
25. Lister M. Masterson, 'English Chronicle Contexts for Shakespeare's Death of Richard II', in *From Page to Performance: Essays in Early English Drama*, ed. John A. Alford (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, 1995), p. 195.
26. For thorough overviews of the censorship of chronicles and other printed texts in Tudor England see D. M. Loades, 'The Press under the Early Tudors', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 4 (1964) and Patterson, *Reading Holinshed's Chronicles*, pp. 234–63.
27. Geoffrey Bullough (ed.), *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, Volume III: Earlier English History Plays* (New York and London: Columbia University Press and Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 13.
28. Patterson, *Reading Holinshed's Chronicles*, p. 6.
29. Peter C. Herman, 'Rastell's *Pastyme of People*: Monarchy and Law in Early Modern Historiography', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 30:2 (2000), p. 302.
30. Kamps, 'The Writing of History in Shakespeare's England', p. 8.
31. *Ibid*., p. 14.
32. William Camden, *Annales the true and royall history of the famous empresse Elizabeth Queene of England France and Ireland &c. True faith's defendresse of diuine renowne and happy memory. Wherein all such memorable things as happened during hir blessed raigne . . . are exactly described*. (London: Printed [by George Purslowe, Humphrey Lownes, and Miles Flesher] for Beniamin Fisher and are to be sould at the Talbott in Pater Noster Rowe, 1625, 1625), [p. 30].
33. *Ibid*., [p. 30].
34. William Baldwin (ed.), *A Myrrove For Magistrates. Wherein may be seen by example of other, with howe greuous plages vices are punished: and howe frayle and vnstable worldly prosperitie is founde, even of those, whom Fortune seemeth most highly to fauour* (London: In aedibus Thomae Marshe, 1559), pp. xv–xvi.
35. Kamps, 'The Writing of History in Shakespeare's England', p. 6.
36. Samuel Daniel, *The Ciuile Wars betweene the Howses of Lancaster and Yorke corrected and continued by Samuel Daniel one of the groomes*

of hir Maiesties most honorable Priuie Chamber (London: Printed by [Humphrey Lownes for] Simon Watersonne, 1609), A3, [p. iii].
37. *Ibid*., B2, p. 2.
38. For a detailed account of Daniel's career see Joan Rees, *Samuel Daniel: A Critical and Biographical Study* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1964).
39. See James Knowles, '1 Henry IV', in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works, Volume II: The Histories*, ed. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 412–33, especially pp. 415–19.
40. Rackin, *Stages of History*, p. 25.
41. Johannis Capgrave, *Liber de Illustribus*, ed. F. C. Hingeston (London: Roll Series, 1866), quoted in Michael Bennet, *Richard II and the Revolution of 1399* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), p. 7.
42. G. K. Martin, 'Narrative Sources for the Reign of Richard II', in *The Age of Richard II*, ed. James L. Gillespie (New York: St Martin's, 1997), p. 64.
43. Bennet, *Richard II and the Revolution of 1399*, p. 4.
44. Edward Hall, *The vnion of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre [and] Yorke, beeyng long in continual discension for the croune of this noble realme with all the actes done in bothe the tymes of the princes, bothe of the one linage and of the other, beginnyng at the tyme of kyng Henry the fowerth, the first aucthor of this deuision, and so successiuely proceadyng to the reigne of the high and prudent prince kyng Henry the eight, the vndubitate flower and very heire of both the sayd linages* (London: In officina Richardi Graftoni typis impress, 1548), p. ii.
45. *Ibid*., p. ii.
46. *Ibid*., p. iiii.
47. G. R. Elton, *England Under the Tudors*, 2nd edn (London: Methuen, 1974), p. 19.
48. Raphael Holinshed, *The Third volume of Chronicles, beginning at duke William the Norman, commonlie called the Conqueror; and descending by degrees of yeeres to all the kings and queenes of England in their orderlie successions* (London: Finished in Ianuarie 1587, and the 29 of the Queenes Maiesties reigne, with the full continuation of the former yeares, at the expenses of Iohn Harison, George Bishop, Rafe Newberie, Henrie Denham, and Thomas Woodcocke. At London printed [by Henry Denham] in Aldersgate street at the signe of the Starre], 1587), p. 493.
49. *Ibid*., p. 494.
50. Hall, *The vnion of the two noble and illustre families* . . . , p. ii.
51. Holinshed, *The Third volume of Chronicles* . . . , p. 495.
52. Quoted in Chris Given-Wilson, *Chronicles of the Revolution: The Reign of Richard II* (New York and Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 86.
53. See Saul, *Richard II*, pp. 399–400, Bennet, *Richard II and the Revolution of 1399*, pp. 116–17, and Michael Senior, *The Life and Times of Richard II* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1981), pp. 163–4.
54. Jean Froissart, *Chronicles*, ed. Geoffrey Brereton (Baltimore and Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 434.
55. *Ibid*., p. 438.
56. *A Myrroure for Magistrates*, p. xiii.

57. *Ibid*., p. xiiii.
58. Samuel Daniel, *The First Fowre Bookes of the Civile Wars Between the Two Houses of Lancaster and Yorke* (1595), in Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, Volume III*, p. 437. Compare his more moderate account in the 1609 edition: Daniel, *The Ciuile Wars*, p. 16.
59. For Stow's version of the dispute between Mowbray and Bolingbroke, see John Stow, *The chronicles of England from Brute vnto this present yeare of Christ. 1580. Collected by Iohn Stow citizen of London* (London: By [Henry Bynneman for] Ralphe Newberie, at the assignement of Henrie Bynneman. Cum priuilegio Regiae Maiestatis, 1580), pp. 528–9.
60. Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare: The Histories* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 46.
61. Kamps, 'The Writing of History in Shakespeare's England', p. 9.
62. Patterson, *Reading Holinshed's Chronicles*, p. 40.
63. *Ibid*., p. 23.
64. Budra, 'The Mirror for Magistrates and the Politics of Readership', p. 4.
65. Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World* (London: Printed [by William Stansby] for Walter Burre [, and are to be sold at his Shop in Paules Church-yard at the signe of the Crane, 1614 [i.e. 1617]], 1617), D2, [p. xxxi].
66. *Ibid*., E, [p. xxxvii].
67. Thomas Taylor, *The second part of the theatre of Gods ivdgments collected out of the writings of sundry ancient and moderne authors* (London: Printed by Richard Herne, 1642), p. 79.
68. One might also include in this list the Frenchman, Jean Bodin, who 'rejected the myth of the Golden age, arguing that humanity has changed since its primitive age: new laws and institutions, new customs, come into being every day' (Goy-Blanquet, 'Elizabethan Historiography and Shakespeare's Sources', p. 60).
69. Rackin, *Stages of History*, p. 5.
70. See, for example: 'Sinners are condemned by their own consciences' (John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), II.V.11, p. 196).
71. See Budra, 'The Mirror for Magistrates and the Politics of Readership', p. 4, and Kamps, 'Shakespeare's England', pp. 12–18.
72. Martin, 'The Narrative Sources for the Reign of Richard II', p. 59.
73. William Caxton, *The Cronycles of Englond* (London: Enprynted by me William Caxton in thabbey of Westme[n]stre by london, fynysshed, and accomplysshed the, viij, day of October, the yere of the incatnacyon of our lord God, M,CCCC,lxxxij and in the xxii yere of the regne of Kyng Edward the fourth [1482], 1482), [p. 4].
74. Goy-Blanquet, 'Elizabethan Historiography and Shakespeare', p. 62.
75. Kamps, 'Shakespeare's England', p. 10.
76. Polydore Vergil, *An abridgement of the notable woorke of Polidore Vergile conteignyng the deuisers and firste finders out as well of artes, ministeries, feactes & ciuill ordinaunces, as of rites, and ceremonies, commo[n]ly vsed in the churche: and the originall beginnyng of the same. Co[m]pendiously gathered by Thomas Langley*, ed. Thomas Langley (Imprinted at London :

VVithin the precincte of the late dissolued house of the Grey Friars, by Richard Grafton printer to the princes grace, the. xvi daie of Aprill, the yere of our lorde M.D.xlvi.; London: Within the precincte of the late dissolued house of the grey Friers, by Richarde Grafton printer to the Princis grace, 1546), p. 8.

77. *Ibid*., p. xix.
78. W. R. Elton, 'Shakespeare and the Thought of his Age', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, ed. Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 17.
79. Kamps, 'Shakespeare's England', pp. 14–15.
80. *Ibid*., p. 156.
81. *Ibid*., p. 159, emphasis mine.
82. *Ibid*., p. 164.
83. Kamps, 'Shakespeare's England', p. 18.
84. Holderness, *Shakespeare: The Histories*, p. 46.
85. Camden, *Annales* . . ., ¶2, [p. 16].
86. *Ibid*., [p. 19].
87. William Camden, *Britain, or A chorographicall description of the most flourishing kingdomes, England, Scotland, and Ireland, and the ilands adjoyning, out of the depth of antiquitie beautified vvith mappes of the severall shires of England: vvritten first in Latine by William Camden Clarenceux K. of A. Translated newly into English by Philémon Holland Doctour in Physick: finally, revised, amended, and enlarged with sundry additions by the said author* (London: Printed by F. K[ingston] R. Y[oung] and I. L[egatt] for George Latham, 1637), [p. 2].
88. Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, p. 11.
89. *Ibid*., p. 14.
90. Derek Cohen, 'History and Nation in *Richard II* and *Henry IV*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 42:2 (Spring 2002), p. 294.
91. Rackin, *Stages of History*, p. 99.
92. Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England*, p. 21.
93. Elizabeth Story Donno, 'Some Aspects of Shakespeare's "Holinshed"', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 50:3 (Summer 1987), pp. 229–30.
94. Barrett L. Beer, 'John Stow and Tudor Rebellions, 1549–1569', *Journal of British Studies*, 27:4 (October 1988), p. 354.
95. See Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England*, pp. 45–6, 52.
96. Patterson, *Reading Holinshed's* Chronicles, p. 74.
97. Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England*, pp. 12n, 21.
98. Calvin, *Institutes*, II.II.6, p. 164.
99. *The 1662 Book of Common Prayer* ([London]: John Baskerville, 1762), [pp. 5–6].
100. Hooker's own views on predestination are difficult to discern without sustained investigation, which is beyond the remit of the present study. He is closer to Calvin than some of his contemporaries; as Nicholas Tyacke says, 'Hooker never broke completely with Calvinism' (*Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), p. 60). For a thoughtful and accessible approach to this topic see Egil Grislis, 'Providence, Predestination, and Free Will in Richard Hooker's Theology', in *Richard Hooker and the English Reformation*, ed. W. J. Torrance Kirby

(Norwell, MA and Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2003), pp. 79–95. For a comprehensive book-length study see Nigel Voak, *Richard Hooker and Reformed Theology: A Study of Reason, Will, and Grace* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

101. *The 1662 Book of Common Prayer*, [p. 6].
102. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 122.
103. Anthony N. S. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Glasgow: Bell & Bain, 1999), p. 38.
104. This view was by no means dominant in the Middle Ages. Aquinas's ideas of predestination were viewed with some suspicion and were less influential in England than, for example, the ideas of Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, who both defended the freedom of will. So there were two strands of thought on the subject in the Middle Ages, and Calvin was reacting strongly against what he saw as the dominant and more popular view, which was broadly Scotist, that humans have free will. For a comparison of Calvin with Scotus and Ockham see Anna Case-Winters, *God's Power: Traditional Understandings and Contemporary Challenges* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1990), pp. 41–6. For a view of how influential Scotus and, in particular, Ockham became in fourteenth-century England, see Michael Allen Gillespie, 'The Nominalist Revolution and the Origin of Modernity', in *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 19–43.
105. Andy Mousley, *Re-Humanising Shakespeare: Literary Humanism, Wisdom and Modernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 76.
106. Foucault defines 'discontinuity' as follows: 'within the space of a few years a culture sometimes ceases to think as it had been thinking up till then and begins to think other things in a new way' (*The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), p. 56).
107. John D. Cox, *Shakespeare and the Dramaturgy of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 99.
108. Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, 2nd edn (1967; London: Routledge, 1991), p. 15.
109. Annabel Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 97.
110. The term 'humanism' is associated with several late sixteenth-century movements and it has had a complex afterlife. My use of it with regard to Shakespeare is specifically historiographical, as outlined in Chapter 6; it should not be confused with 'literary' or 'Ciceronian' humanism, which was a related but distinct project. For a detailed account, see Mike Pincombe, *Elizabethan Humanism: Literature and Learning in the Later Sixteenth Century* (London: Pearson, 2001), pp. 37–57. For a more general overview of the myriad forms of humanism in early modern England complete with selected primary texts, see Joanna Martinade (ed.), *English Humanism: Wyatt to Cowley* (London: Croom Helm, 1985). In her introduction, Martinade states that in historiography humanism is marked by 'the assumption that human nature remains the same, so that

the lessons of history are applicable to the present' (p. 37). For my own view, see Chapter 4.

111. Moody E. Prior, *The Drama of Power: Studies in Shakespeare's History Plays* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 12.
112. Ronald Knowles, *Shakespeare's Arguments with History* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 3–4.
113. Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), p. 1.
114. Rackin, *Stages of History*, p. 27.
115. David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Shapes of Time* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1982), p. 46.
116. See Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*.
117. Prior, *The Drama of Power*, p. 39.
118. Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 300.
119. Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, p. 82.
120. Knowles, *Shakespeare's Arguments with History*, pp. 27–9.
121. Blair Worden, 'Shakespeare and Politics', in *Shakespeare and Politics*, ed. Catherine M. S. Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 30.
122. Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, 3rd edn (1984; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 249.
123. Graham Holderness, 'Radical Potentiality and Institutional Closure: Shakespeare in Film and Television', in *Shakespeare on Television: An Anthology of Essays and Reviews*, ed. J. C. Bulman and H. R. Coursen (Hanover and London: University of New England Press, 1988), p. 221.
124. See, for example, Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, described in: Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 77.
125. For his discussion of providentialism, see Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*, pp. 134–38. For the dismissal of Tillyard, the liberal humanists and Jan Kott, see Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 'History and Ideology, Masculinity and Miscegenation'.
126. Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Shapes of Time*, p. 48.
127. Dollimore and Sinfield, 'History and Ideology, Masculinity and Miscegenation', p. 112.
128. *Ibid*., p. 113, emphasis mine.
129. Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, ed. Fredric Jameson, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), p. 123.
130. Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice*, p. 5.
131. *Ibid*., p. 97.

Chapter 7

Personal Action and Agency in *Henry VI*

The Human Causes of History

A throne is only a bench covered in velvet.

Napoleon Bonaparte

Wolfgang Iser states that 'any present day study [of Shakespeare's history plays] . . . will be confronted not only with the plays themselves, but also with the manifold readings of them. These cannot be dismissed from mind, but will inevitably affect our attitude to the plays'.[1] Although my reading of *2* and *3 Henry VI* is primarily textual, past readings cannot be ignored. These plays have long been regarded by most critics as crude and didactic early attempts at drama by a playwright who was still trying to find his own voice in the Elizabethan public theatre. Accordingly, in sharp contrast to the final play in the first tetralogy, *Richard III*, the *Henry VI* plays were afforded relatively scant attention during the twentieth century compared to the considerable body of work that was produced about the second tetralogy.[2] Aside from tackling the questions of authorship and chronology,[3] as Alan C. Dessen pointed out in 1993, scholars and directors alike have shown only 'intermittent interest in [the *Henry VI*] trilogy other than as a context for *Richard III*'.[4] At best these plays have been seen as promising precursors of better things to come: 'the rich ore out of which the later plays are refined'.[5] The advent of cultural historicism has done little to reverse this trend. Stephen Greenblatt, Leonard Tennenhouse, Alan Sinfield, Jonathan Dollimore and Graham Holderness each pay much greater attention to the second tetralogy in their respective studies.[6] The same is true of the essays collected in the broadly cultural historicist volume, *Shakespeare's Histories and Counter-Histories*.[7] Phyllis Rackin's seminal book, *Stages of History*, and Jean E. Howard's equally penetrating *The State and Social Struggle in Early Modern History* – as well as their collaboration,

the feminist study, *Engendering A Nation* – represent the only sustained, major re-evaluations of all three parts of the *Henry VI* trilogy from a cultural historicist perspective.[8]

In general, new historicists and cultural materialists have approached the plays of the first tetralogy by locating them firmly within the specific historical and political contexts of the 1590s and by focusing on particular sequences or characters. They reject both the Tillyardian view that the plays posit a providential grand narrative, and the liberal humanist tendency, typified in the 1960s and 1970s by Moody E. Prior and Wilbur Sanders,[9] to read them for abstract, transcultural political lessons in the manner of Machiavelli. While cultural historicists disagree with Tillyard's assumptions about the extent of Tudor hegemony and his conclusions about the plays, they have few major reservations about his basic methodology – they are, after all, united with Tillyard at the most general level by 'historicism'. Therefore, although Tillyard remains a perennial target, the cultural historicists reserve their strongest criticisms for the liberal humanists, because they divorce the plays, whether deliberately or not, from their particular historical contexts. According to the new historicist Leonard Tennenhouse:

> For over fifty years these plays have generally been read in one of three ways: as overtly political texts which one can interpret by reference to the historical source material; as dramatic entertainments to be classed as an aesthetic genre comparable with comedy, tragedy or romance; or as part of a process of Shakespeare's personal development which accompanied his youthful comedies and preceded the grand metaphysical tragedies and mature vision of his lyrical romances.[10]

For Tennenhouse, each of these positions imposes modern (bourgeois, essentialist-humanist) distinctions between literature and politics on the past. He argues that notions of genre lead us to read plays in certain prescribed, ideologically fixed ways. He objects in particular to the notion that 'a work's transcendence or referentality made it successful', preferring to concentrate on the ways 'Renaissance drama displayed its politics in its manner of idealizing or demystifying specific forms of power'.[11] The cultural materialist Graham Holderness offers a similar account, arguing that:

> the history plays have often been discussed in terms of an extremely abstract definition of 'politics', conceived not as the specific discourses and practices of power in a particular historical moment, but as a Machiavellian system located in the universal shabbiness of political practices throughout the ages.[12]

Like Tennenhouse, Holderness is fundamentally opposed to any notion of the plays transmitting non-specific, transhistorical ideas. He laments what he calls 'the counter-orthodoxy which constitutes the plays as humanistic treatises teaching the secular lessons of history to rulers and peoples'.[13]

In contrast to their theoretical work, in *practice* the cultural historicists insist upon specificity over generality. This often leads to highly specific, localised readings of the plays.[14] It has also led cultural historicists to prefer reading selected scenes or passages from individual plays rather than reading them together as a tetralogy. Accordingly, they have paid significant attention to the gender politics of *1 Henry VI*, particularly the conflict between Talbot and Joan La Pucelle, and to the depiction of Cade's rebellion found in Act 4 of *2 Henry VI*. More often than not in these readings, Shakespeare is assumed to be the supporter of the official Tudor state ideology, playing on contemporary anxieties about class and gender. For example, in his reading of Cade's rebellion, Richard Wilson accuses Shakespeare of being a sneering, politically partisan apologist for the rich, who gives voice to contemporary fears about workers' revolts; while, in their reading of *3 Henry VI*, Howard and Rackin depict him as a staunchly chauvinist playwright exploiting the 'cultural fantasy of the monstrous Amazonian woman'.[15] The cultural historicist tendency to allow modern political motives to colour their criticism is plainly evident. I would suggest that such readings, which falsely dichotomise the plays and force Shakespeare to choose sides, overlook the complexity of the first tetralogy (there are rarely only two sides to consider) and ignore its internal logic – Shakespeare's dialectically enquiring mind is not prone to partisanship. To quote Moody E. Prior, Shakespeare's *modus operandi* throughout the history plays is 'exploratory rather than doctrinaire'.[16]

Despite this, as Graham Holderness explains, 'it is customary to regard the plays of the so-called "First Tetralogy" – the *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III* – as more direct and straightforward expressions of the "Tudor Myth" than the later plays of the second "cycle"'.[17] The keynote, once again, is providence. I have been suggesting that Shakespeare's treatment of history is avowedly humanist and centred on individuals, but this view has been unpopular in the past. According to Irving Ribner, for example, 'there is little in Shakespeare of Marlowe's humanistic philosophy of history. Richard [of York's] personal abilities avail him nothing in the face of hostile fortune which destroys him in retribution for his sins'.[18] But Ribner neglects to mention the participation of other humans in York's fate: Henry VI's passivity before and during the emergence of this 'hostile' environment and Margaret's not

inconsiderable hand in his downfall. Such factors do not matter to Ribner because, for him, 'the political doctrine of the *Henry VI* plays is simple and obvious'.[19] For Ribner, as for Tillyard before him, the first tetralogy constitutes a flat dramatic update of Edward Hall's chronicle, *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustrious Families of Lancaster and York*. Similarly, for M. M. Reese:

> [The] sequence is essentially didactic[:] ... a straight-forward moralising of the Tudor pattern of history, with only an occasional glimpse of real people and recognisable human predicaments ... In its extreme earnestness it is perhaps the standard example of a poet-historian using drama to teach lessons appropriate to his own times.[20]

Thus, for Reese, the first tetralogy is no different from the providential chronicles of Edward Hall, the didactic poem *A Mirror for Magistrates* or Samuel Daniels's moralising mini-epic *The Civil Wars*. Jan Kott provides a more nuanced, secular version of this argument, which emphasises the relentless march of time in what he calls 'the Grand Mechanism' or the 'great staircase' of history.[21] Kott accepts that Shakespeare has 'an awareness of the extent to which people are involved in history', but insists that, amid the continuous bloodshed and power struggles, 'the faces of kings and usurpers become blurred, one after the other'.[22] To use an old sports aphorism: 'the game stays the same, only the players change'. Kott replaces the cold judgement of divine providence with the nihilistic nightmare of existentialism, which merely updates the Tillyardian tendency to deny the significance of human actions; endless cycles do not permit agency.

As we have seen, new historicists and cultural materialists have not overturned these commonplaces, preferring to focus on class and gender politics, power relations and early modern anachronisms. Indeed, it would be wrong to expect a group of anti-humanists to disregard readings that serve predominantly to deny individuals their place in history. For many critics, these plays 'express the plight of individuals caught up in a cataclysmic movement of events for which responsibility is communal and historical, not personal and immediate',[23] and thus the traditional view holds that these plays do not lend themselves easily to studies in character. But for all the talk of providence, chaos and faceless individuals, when one actually turns to the plays, one cannot fail to be struck by the variety and contrasting political styles of the characters found in the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*. It seems nonsensical to discount as irrelevant (to history) the obvious differences between, for example, Henry VI and Richard III, Margaret of Anjou and the Duke of York, or the Duke of Gloucester and the Earl of Suffolk. According

to Nicholas Grene, 'Shakespeare characterises more than the chroniclers do, but only so far as he needs to characterise for the purposes of his narrative'.[24] But Grene does not account for the numerous moments when Shakespeare simply *invents*, which seems to serve no other purpose than to humanise his characters. As A. D. Nuttall reminds us, even at the very start of his career, 'Shakespeare excels at characterization'.[25]

As noted in Chapter 6, the most explicit example of Shakespeare 'humanising' historical characters is the development of the adulterous relationship between Margaret and Suffolk, which has no concrete basis in the chronicles.[26] As Rackin points out, 'Margaret's adultery has no real impact on the action of *Henry VI* plays';[27] but her love for Suffolk provides personal motivation for her subsequent actions and accounts in part for her increasingly driven, ruthless and eventually demented character in *3 Henry VI* and *Richard III*. There is no reason to doubt Margaret's genuine grief as she nurses the severed head of her lover in *2 Henry VI*: 'Think therefore on revenge and cease to weep . . . my hope is gone, now Suffolk is deceased' (4.4.3, 56). From a few historical details provided by the chronicles – of the 'soft, pitiful, gentle, and easily influenced' Henry VI and his unusually determined, 'forceful and domineering'[28] wife – Shakespeare has very carefully thought through the possible reasons why Margaret behaved in the manner she did. After Suffolk's death, Margaret's frustration with her placid husband is palpable: 'What are you made of? You'll nor fight nor fly' (*2 Henry VI*, 5.2.74). Viewed in this way, Shakespeare's development of the relationship between Margaret and Henry is strikingly modern. The Queen's emotional motivation for much of the first tetralogy seems to be to take command of her relationship with both the King and the country in order to fulfil the expectations of the King's role, to take his place. This she continues to do until the murder of her son at the end of *3 Henry VI*, whereupon, after begging for her own death (5.5.69–80), she metaphorically dies, becoming the ghostly harbinger of revenge found in *Richard III*. Far from being made faceless or irrelevant by the relentless advance of history, Margaret is unique in the Shakespeare canon in that her character is developed over *four* plays.[29]

Besides the affair between Margaret and Suffolk, there are other moments in the first tetralogy that serve no real narrative purpose. One such moment occurs in *Richard III*: George, the Duke of Clarence – a man who, in *3 Henry VI*, was twice traitor to the throne and involved in two usurpations – is imprisoned and it is almost certain that he will be executed on the orders of his own older brother, Edward IV, through the machinations of his younger brother, Richard. Before his imminent death, he meditates on his past 'misdeeds' and prays for God to 'spare

[his] guiltless wife and . . . poor children' (*Richard III*, 1.4.70–2). It is an unusually tender human moment in a play that is marked by brutality. Another such moment occurs in *2 Henry VI* when Eleanor, the Duchess of Gloucester, forced to walk the streets of London barefoot and wrapped only in a sheet, prepares to leave her husband after being sentenced to exile for life on the Isle of Man for 'dealing with witches and with conjurers' (2.1.170). Duke Humphrey, who had earlier stubbornly opposed Eleanor's ambitious plans for social advancement and condemned her dabblings in witchcraft, now displays compassion for his wife, imagining her shame and humiliation:

> Sweet Nell, ill can thy noble mind abrook
> The abject people gazing on thy face,
> With envious looks, laughing at thy shame, . . .
> But soft, I think she comes; and I'll prepare
> My tear-stained eyes to see her miseries.
> (*2 Henry VI*, 2.4.9–12, 16–17)

If these plays were straightforwardly didactic, why would Shakespeare devise a scene (*2 Henry VI*, 1.2) in which to establish the close and loving but ultimately strained relationship between Humphrey and Eleanor and then treat his audience to a tearful 'farewell' scene an act later? Human touches, such as Humphrey's affectionate pet name for his 'sweet Nell' or Eleanor's lines expressing genuine 'shame' (*2 Henry VI*, 2.4.19, 24, 31, 48, 101, 107), serve to complicate the glib moral lessons which critics have assumed to be inherent in Eleanor's descent from naked ambition to witchcraft to exile. Given that Shakespeare invests the relationship with emotional interest, the characters of Humphrey and Eleanor might be read more fruitfully in other ways.

Personal Politics: *2 Henry VI*

In the following analysis of *2 Henry VI*, I hope to show that, contrary to the received critical wisdom, the plays of the first tetralogy do reward readings that pay close attention to character. I also wish to show that the analysis of character in Shakespeare's historical drama is inseparable from the analysis of politics. Political decisions and actions are tightly bound up with the personalities of individual characters. Despite the objections of Holderness and other cultural historicists, this conception of politics resists abstraction, because it takes as its starting point a group of particular individuals in a specific place and time. As Prior argues, their differing ambitions and approaches to the political

situation 'taken together . . . constitute a spectrum . . . an exhaustive separating out of the principal aspects of the central idea of kingship'.[30] Rather than merely reflecting the commonplaces of Tudor political discourse, this spectrum is *internally* generated; its political findings are Shakespeare's own, because his approach to history is empirical, a ceaseless testing of alternative types of politics.[31] Wilbur Sanders perhaps put this argument best:

> In choosing to treat this turbulent stretch of English history, Shakespeare has plunged into the very waters where the concept of kingship was fraught with the profoundest complexities. If he was planning to exemplify the simplified monarchic theory of Tudor propaganda, it was a singularly unhappy choice of subject.[32]

It seems to me that Shakespeare's aim in writing the first tetralogy is two-fold. The first aim – like that of an historian – is to come to an understanding of the attitudes, decisions and actions of the individuals who produced these 'complexities'. And the second aim is to question the effectiveness of their political strategies, both in terms of personal survival and the sustenance of the body politic, which are two ends that increasingly come into conflict.

As the commonly assumed moral centre of *2 Henry VI*, Gloucester is the logical character with whom to start. Most critics agree that the 'good' Duke Humphrey maintains a genuine commitment to the commonwealth in the face of an increasingly self-interested and personal brand of politics. For his characterisation of Humphrey, Shakespeare seems to have taken his cue from John Foxe's description of the Duke found in *Acts and Monuments*:

> Of manners he seemed meeke and gentle, louing the common wealth, a supporter of the poore commons, of wit & wisdome discreet and studious, well affected to religion, and a frend to veritie, & no les enemy to pride & ambitio[n], especially in hauty prelates, which was his vndoing in this prese[n]t euil world.[33]

For the first half of *2 Henry VI*, the various factions of Henry VI's court – Margaret and Suffolk; the loyalist Lancastrians, Buckingham and Somerset; the Cardinal of Winchester, Humphrey's old arch-nemesis from *1 Henry VI*; and the Yorkists, whose ranks at this stage comprise the Duke of York and the Nevilles (Salisbury and Warwick) – are united in their desire to remove Humphrey's influence over the weak King for their own selfish motives. Traditionally, Eleanor's actions have been read as catalysts of her husband's eventual downfall, and her motives for turning to witchcraft are seldom read sympathetically. Sen Gupta,

for example, points out that 'Eleanor's ambition provides Margaret and her accomplices with an excuse for their campaign against Gloucester'.[34] Jean E. Howard goes a step further by arguing that 'indirectly, the ambition of an aspiring and ungovernable woman seems a chief cause of the crumbling of the crowned king's rule'.[35]

Although there is some truth to these claims about Eleanor, there are also grounds for suggesting that Duke Humphrey's stubborn adherence to public service is neither in the interests of self-preservation nor, from his point of view, the nation. Although the avuncular Duke stands as a 'pillar of public order' against the chaos of factionalism,[36] his refusal to compromise his principles by entering the murky world of *Realpolitik* is both idealistic and hopelessly naïve. He is no dupe; Humphrey knows full well that 'these days are dangerous' and that Suffolk's, Winchester's, York's and Margaret's 'complot is to have [his] life' (*2 Henry VI*, 3.1.142, 147). But his unswerving faith in justice and moral integrity prevents him from acting:

> I must offend before I be attained,
> And had I twenty times their power,
> All these could not procure me any scathe
> So long as I am loyal, true, and crimeless.
> (*2 Henry VI*, 2.4.60–4)

And it ultimately proves his downfall. In the long run, Humphrey's refusal to act against his political rivals leads to the violent chaos of Cade's rebellion and *3 Henry VI*, and, indirectly, to the tyranny of *Richard III*. The Duke of Gloucester may seem like a long-sighted thinker, but he proves to be a rigid political strategist, who is defeated by his rivals precisely because of his inability to think ahead; he has no contingency plan. Eleanor's proposed alternative to his inaction, to 'remove these tedious stumbling blocks' (*2 Henry VI*, 1.2.64), may have incurred bloodshed and resentment of the couple in the short term, as Gloucester feared, but in the long term it would have given Humphrey an almost free rein to run England according to his high ideals. Shakespeare shows that politics demands a degree of moral compromise and pragmatic flexibility, in the process bearing out one of Machiavelli's tenets: 'The fact is that a man who wants to act virtuously in every way necessarily comes to grief among so many who are not virtuous.'[37] Humphrey's sense of public duty is at odds with the political moment in which he finds himself; his wife, Eleanor, understands all too clearly what needs to be done, but he does not heed her advice. The Duke's refusal to bloody his hands on moral grounds is akin to a modern politician who thinks he can win an election without using spin-doctors simply by virtue of the fact that he is honest; in short, he is delusional.

As Michael Hattaway observes, 'the political centre of [*2 Henry VI*] is the bond between Henry and Gloucester';[38] it is the fulcrum around which the other major players revolve during the first half of the play. Shakespeare consistently depicts Henry as incapable of ruling the country alone, which is something the King himself realises, leading him to insist on a proxy leader to make decisions and resolve disputes on his behalf. This does not so much create a power vacuum, as is commonly thought, as produce a situation in which the position of Lord Protector becomes the top job in England – the role of king in all but title, rank and hereditary right. When Humphrey scolds Eleanor for her 'ill-nurtured' (1.2.42) ambition, he alludes to the fact that, as a couple, they have already advanced as far as any in England can:

> Art thou not second woman in the realm
> And the Protector's wife, beloved of him?
> Hast thou not worldly pleasure at command
> Above the reach or compass of thy thought?
> (1.2.43–6)

There is no doubt that Gloucester harbours no ambitions to usurp the crown, but this may also be because he is happy in the role of Lord Protector, a fact to which the Cardinal of Winchester points repeatedly in *1 Henry VI*. Humphrey's critical mistake is his refusal to act against his rivals, not his refusal to attempt usurpation; he is already, in practical terms, more powerful than the King.

Aside from highlighting his moral delusions, Shakespeare portrays Gloucester as a committed and serious-minded statesman, who seems harassed by factional quibbling and keen to 'talk of commonwealth affairs' and get straight 'to the matter at hand' (*2 Henry VI*, 1.3.149, 153). In 2.1, he is immediately sceptical when the charlatan Simpcox claims to have been cured of blindness by a miracle and quickly exposes the lie through deductive logic (2.1.11–19). Among other things, the scene shows how important Gloucester is to Henry. Unlike his uncle, the King believes in the miracle from the outset: 'Now God be praised, that to believing souls / Gives light in darkness, and comfort in despair' (2.1.65–6). Henry's default position is to trust the man, whereas Gloucester's is to be more cautious and, ultimately, more cynical. Gloucester is a skilled and able political administrator who, unfortunately yet crucially, does not or will not accept that he is operating in a new political era. Henry, on the other hand, lacks all the necessary skills for public office, and (at this stage) seems oblivious to – or rather, in denial of – the culture of backbiting and one-upmanship that dominates his court; he believes so devoutly in the doctrine of providence that

he does not even question the credibility of a man who claims to have experienced a miracle. The Simpcox scene serves to demonstrate how loose Henry's grip on reality is – had Gloucester not intervened, one can only imagine how the King might have rewarded Simpcox. Shakespeare shows that, as long as Henry remains king, the role of Lord Protector is structurally necessary for England to function.

However, Humphrey is depicted not only as the Lord Protector, but also as Henry's surrogate father, his emotional bedrock as well as his political proxy. In *1 Henry VI*, when a skirmish breaks out between a group of serving men in court, a young Henry, not fully confident of his own authority (as he will never be), immediately turns to Gloucester to resolve the conflict: 'Pray, Uncle Gloucester, mitigate this strife' (*1 Henry VI*, 3.1.116). Henry addresses Humphrey in affectionate, familial terms: 'O loving uncle, kind Duke of Gloucester' (*1 Henry VI*, 3.1.142). In *2 Henry VI*, even as an older man in his mid-twenties, he twice repeats the phrase 'Uncle, how now' (1.1.51), 'Why how now, / Uncle Gloucester?' (2.1.48–9); the familiar, informal tone of this question suggests both his emotional and his political dependence on Humphrey. When Eleanor's dalliances with witchcraft leave Henry no option but to remove Gloucester from office, he is anxious to reassure his uncle that his affection for him remains undiminished: 'go in peace, Humphrey, no less beloved / Than when thou wert Protector to thy king' (2.3.48–9). Henry claims that he will now take up the reins of government himself with only God to turn to for guidance: 'God shall be my hope, / My stay, my guide, and lantern to my feet' (2.3.24–5). There is at least the suggestion that until now Humphrey fulfilled the functions that Henry now ascribes to God. Although Humphrey has been removed from office, in 3.1 Henry will not commence Parliament because 'my Lord of Gloucester is not come'; he thinks first of the latter's welfare: ''Tis not his wont to be the hindermost man, / Whate'er the occasion keeps him from us now' (*2 Henry VI*, 3.1.1–3). Gloucester's many rivals seize the opportunity to sow seeds of doubt about the former Lord Protector in Henry's mind, but the special bond stands firm:

> I shall speak my conscience,
> Our kinsman Gloucester is as innocent
> From meaning treason to our royal person
> As is the suckling lamb or harmless dove:
> The duke is virtuous, mild, and too well given
> To dream on evil or work my downfall.
> (3.1.68–73)

Despite his resolute belief in Gloucester, Henry feels powerless to prevent his arrest and places his faith, as ever, in divine providence: 'My

Lord of Gloucester, 'tis my special hope / That you will clear yourself from all suspense: / My conscience tells me you are innocent' (3.1.139–41). As Gloucester leaves, he already knows that he will soon be dead and the bond is finally broken:

> Ah, thus King Henry throws away his crutch
> Before his legs be firm to bear his body.
> Thus is the shepherd beaten from thy side
> And wolves are gnarling who shall gnaw thee first.
> (3.1.189–92)

These words hit Henry hard. He leaves Parliament saying that his 'heart is drowned with grief' (3.1.198), not only because he realises that he has almost certainly lost his mentor and closest (possibly only) ally at court, but also because he feels a deep sense of personal culpability for having failed his surrogate father:

> Even so myself bewails good Gloucester's case
> With sad unhelpful tears and, with dimmed eyes,
> Look after him and cannot do him good;
> So mighty are his vowèd enemies
> (3.1.217–20)

Despite his unshakable and blind belief in providence, Henry can see that his lone support alone could not save Gloucester at this late hour and he realises immediately that Humphrey's downfall leaves him weak and isolated on the throne – loyalist lackeys such as Somerset and Buckingham offer him scant solace. In the very next scene, after it is revealed that Gloucester has been murdered, the news is too much for the King to bear. After fainting, he is beside himself with grief: 'O heavenly God!' (3.2.37). For possibly the only time in the first tetralogy, Henry loses his temper and rebukes Suffolk: 'Thou baleful messenger, out of my sight!' (3.2.48). As Gloucester correctly predicts, Henry has been left to the 'wolves'.

At first glance, it is not difficult to see why Gloucester's removal from office and eventual death are so desirable for his rivals; as the King's current proxy ruler, he stands between them and power. However, the situation is more complicated than that. Each of the other players in the political game has a personal or strategic motive for his elimination. As Queen, Margaret feels that it is her right to hold the keys to power (with Suffolk by her side). The Duke of Suffolk himself, personal ambitions aside, is one of the few English aristocrats who wanted reconciliation with France during the Hundred Years War. Although Suffolk's brokering of the marriage between Henry and Margaret is

undoubtedly designed to further his own selfish and lustful motives, he does also provide political reasons: '[t]his alliance will confirm our peace, / And keep the Frenchmen in allegiance' (*1 Henry VI*, 5.5.42–3). Gloucester represents one of the last of the older generation of chivalric ideologues embodied by Talbot and symbolised by Henry V's military victories. Suffolk, who prefers the high rhetoric and ceremony of the court to the undignified violence of the battlefield, opposes everything for which they stood. Suffolk wants to complete what John D. Cox describes as 'the transfer of power from successful and heroic warrior aristocrats . . . to mere opportunists and educated courtiers who sap the nation's strength while selfishly and sophistically pursuing their own interests'.[39] The Duke of York, like Gloucester, is outraged by the loss of England's French lands because of the marriage between Henry and Margaret: 'Cold news for me: for I had hope of France' (3.1.87). York is also driven, ultimately, by his superior claim to the throne and wants what is rightfully his; he views Gloucester's removal simply as a necessary by-product of his overall goal. The Cardinal of Winchester's issue with Humphrey is more personal; it is a matter of pride for him. In *1 Henry VI*, Winchester resented Gloucester's high position as Lord Protector and accused him of sitting 'imperious in another's throne' (3.1.44). Gloucester's constant jibes at Winchester's expense ('bastard of my grandfather', 'saucy priest' (3.1.42, 45)) do not help matters. The Earl of Warwick's position is more complicated, and his opposition to Gloucester is merely political. In the famous rose-plucking scene of *1 Henry VI*, he claims to 'love no colours' (2.4.34) and, presumably, sides with York only because – on balance, after considering the relative strengths of his claim to the throne and his personality – the latter is a more attractive and more prudent prospect for leadership than the King. In the dispute between Gloucester and Winchester, Warwick is measured with his comments and edges himself closer to Gloucester, arguing that 'it fitteth not a prelate [i.e. the Cardinal] to plead' and deferring to Humphrey's superior rank: 'Is not his grace Protector to the king?' (*1 Henry VI*, 3.1.57, 60). Shakespeare presents Warwick as a man in a similar mould to Gloucester: as a statesman first and foremost. His father, Salisbury, explicitly likens Warwick to Gloucester:

> Warwick, my son, the comfort of my age,
> Thy deeds, thy plainness, and thy housekeeping
> Hath won the greatest favour of the commons,
> Excepting none but good Duke Humphrey.
> (*2 Henry VI*, 1.1.187–90)

Like Gloucester, Warwick claims to 'love the land / And common profit of his country' (*2 Henry VI*, 1.1.202–3). Warwick is naturally cautious in his political intrigues. He promises to 'one day make the Duke of York a king' (*2 Henry VI*, 2.2.29) only after being fully satisfied of the validity of York's claim and only after it is obvious that Gloucester's days in office are numbered.

From this brief survey of Humphrey's rivals and their reasons for opposing him, an interesting set of political dichotomies emerge along three axes:

1. Public versus personal politics.
2. Pragmatic versus idealistic approaches to politics.
3. Cautious versus impulsive decision-making.

Those involved in *public* politics are interested in the 'commonweal', the 'public good' (*2 Henry VI*, 1.1.186, 196), whereas those engaged in *personal* politics are interested only in their own advancement. *Pragmatists* are willing to make alliances and compromise their beliefs in the short term for their long-term goals, whereas *idealists* tend to stick rigidly to a set of prescribed principles.[40] *Cautious* characters weigh up their options before making big decisions, whereas *impulsive* decision-makers are more likely either to rush into things headfirst or to make snap decisions with very little consideration of the possible consequences. Shakespeare offers us characters of every combination; as Hattaway says, 'no political value is left untested'.[41]

Accordingly, there are characters who epitomise the extremes of these polarised positions. Duke Humphrey of Gloucester, as we have seen, is an idealistic yet cautious politician who insists on dealing with public affairs only. The Nevilles, Salisbury and Warwick also consistently claim to be working for the public good and operate cautiously but, unlike Gloucester, are flexible enough to switch allegiances or to oppose people whom they admire (such as Gloucester himself) as circumstances dictate. Shakespeare contrasts with these state-orientated characters more selfish, vindictive players of the political game, who each seem to have a personal axe to grind. The most obvious examples of these are Winchester, who, out of jealousy and pride alone, seeks his nephew's downfall, and Suffolk, who arranges the marriage between Henry and Margaret on disadvantageous terms for England, mainly because he sees an opportunity for personal power: 'Margaret shall now be queen, and rule the king: / But I will rule both her, the king and realm' (*1 Henry VI*, 5.5.107–8). Winchester's only goal throughout the first two parts of *Henry VI* seems to be to antagonise Gloucester by making derogatory comments about

him; at different times he calls him a 'usurping proditor', 'a foe to citizens', 'abominable' (*1 Henry VI*, 1.3.31, 61, 85), 'too hot' and 'dangerous' (*2 Henry VI*, 1.1.134, 161). Shakespeare makes Winchester the personification of personal vengeance. He seems to have no objective but to bring about the destruction of Gloucester – which is perhaps why he is treated to a guilt-ridden, demented death scene shortly after his aim is achieved (*2 Henry VI*, 3.3), there being nothing left for him to live for.

Suffolk, who rabidly pursues power from the outset, reveals himself as a rigid idealist shortly before his death at the hands of pirates; he appeals to the ideology of nobility. Even when faced with imminent death, he refuses to accept the reality of his situation:

> Suffolk's imperial tongue is stern and rough,
> Used to command, untaught to plead for favour . . .
> . . . True nobility is exempt from fear.
> More can I bear than you dare execute.
> (*2 Henry VI*, 4.1.121–2, 129–30)

Neither Suffolk nor Winchester can really be called a 'pragmatic' politician. However, it should be noted that Winchester cuts, on the whole, a more cautious figure than Suffolk; in *1 Henry VI* he is willing to bide his time and make temporary peace with Gloucester in order to appease the King (see 3.1.134–5). Suffolk, on the other hand, seldom hesitates to speak his mind, even when the odds seem stacked against him – he is more impulsive than cautious.

Both Margaret and Eleanor are also characters who make matters personal, as the third scene of *2 Henry VI* makes clear:

> [*Margaret drops her fan*]
> [MARGARET:] Give me my fan; what, minion, can ye not?
> *She gives the* DUCHESS *a box on the ear*
> I cry you mercy, madam; was it you?
> ELEANOR: Was't I? Yea, I it was, proud Frenchwoman;
> Could I come near your beauty with my nails
> I'd set my ten commandments in your face.
> KING HENRY: Sweet aunt, be quiet – 'twas against her will.
> DUCHESS: Against her will? Good King, look to't in time!
> She'll pamper thee, and dandle thee like a baby.
> Though in this place most master wear no breeches,
> She shall not strike Dame Eleanor unrevenged!
> *Exit*
> (*2 Henry VI*, 1.3.133–46)

It is not difficult to see, as Paul Dean does, that this 'fight is not national . . . but personal . . . [the characters'] motives are selfish and petty'.[42] It is this sort of pettiness that shows personal politics at its worst.

Shakespeare demonstrates that when private grievances drive action in the political arena, characters become prone to making mistakes. Thus, it is immediately after this scene that, probably with her ear still sore from the Queen's blow, Eleanor visits Hume and the conjurer, Bolingbroke (1.4).

Margaret's personal and emotional investment in her dealings with Henry's court also leads her to make poor political decisions. For example, in the run-up to Gloucester's murder, she prematurely shows her hand to York by openly lending support to the joint plan of Winchester and Suffolk to have Humphrey killed:

> SUFFOLK: Here is my hand, the deed [of murdering Gloucester] is worthy doing.
> MARGARET: And so say I.
>
> (3.1.78–9)

It may not seem so at the time, but this is a slip which gives York all the ammunition he needs to set his plans for usurpation in motion and to hoist Suffolk and Margaret by their own petards. The situation is almost perfect for York; it conveniently removes both the heir presumptive and the most senior official of Henry's court, Gloucester (thereby making York both the rightful heir to the throne, assuming that Henry produces no children, and the King's most seasoned military campaigner), and at the same time gives him an excellent excuse to condemn Winchester and Suffolk for their part in Gloucester's murder. York must have known that the death of Humphrey would push Henry to the verge of despair; as Suffolk issues the assassination order, York promptly leaks the information to his co-conspirators, Salisbury and Warwick, who in turn promptly tell the King. As we have seen, Henry is naturally devastated and in a rare moment of resolve and self-assertion banishes Suffolk from England 'on pain of death'. He also stands up to his wife for the first time: 'Ungentle queen . . . no more I say' (3.2.288, 298–9). Margaret's selfish, impulsive support for Suffolk against Gloucester both alienates her from the King and strengthens the Yorkist position, because Henry immediately turns to Warwick for advice: 'Come, Warwick, come good Warwick, go with me; / I have great matters to impart to thee' (3.2.298–9). Margaret's *faux pas* in front of York also has more indirect consequences: with four words, she has eradicated any lingering doubts among the Yorkists about whether the King and Queen are united. York and Warwick obliquely exploit the weakness in Henry and Margaret's marriage at the start of *3 Henry VI* when they broker a deal with the King in which Henry names York his successor 'to cease this civil war' (1.1.99). In so doing, Henry disinherits his and Margaret's son and heir,

Edward, for what he sees as the public good. For this Margaret, perhaps understandably, lambasts him: '[I] would I had died a maid / And never seen thee, never borne thee a son, / Seeing thou hast proved so unnatural a father!' (1.1.218–20). From her point of view, Henry has failed in the one and only area in which he might have proved useful to her: as the father to the future King of England, *her* son. But, from Henry's position, Margaret is no more trustworthy than York or Warwick. After all, she has been an unfaithful wife and openly had a hand in murdering his closest ally and relative. Had she been a little more discreet and a lot less impulsive, Margaret might have been able to manipulate Henry more closely. By this stage, Henry is quite aware that his marriage has been a sham, so it is not difficult to imagine that he associates his son with Margaret and therefore does not feel close to him. The murder of Gloucester and the subsequent exile (and murder) of Suffolk show Margaret utterly outmanœuvred by the more circumspect York.

York himself is an interesting case, because he presents himself, like Gloucester, Warwick and Salisbury, as a champion of the commonwealth, but he is also driven by personal ambition; he sees the crown as rightfully his and wants to 'claim his own' (*2 Henry VI*, 1.1.234). However, even in soliloquy, he seldom puts forward his claim for the throne without couching it in terms that suggest he wants a better future for his nation by installing himself as its king. Put simply, he sees himself as a better candidate for the crown than Henry:

> I am far better born than is the king,
> More like a king, more kingly in my thoughts.
> But I must make fair weather yet awhile
> Till Henry be more weak, and I more strong.
> (*2 Henry VI*, 5.1.28–31)

York is increasingly frustrated with Henry's timid character and his total mismanagement of the country and the court. He is doubly frustrated because, objectively speaking, he *does* have a better claim to the throne than Henry, as Henry himself admits: '[*Aside*] I know not what to say, my title's weak' (*3 Henry VI*, 1.1.134). This sense of frustration is at odds with his cautious, pragmatic nature; in 5.1 of *2 Henry VI*, he knows that he has to bide his time 'awhile' because the situation is not yet ripe for him to strike. His master-plan has many goals: to eliminate Gloucester; to eliminate Suffolk by framing him for Gloucester's murder; to muster an army (which he achieves by being given troops to subdue 'th'uncivil kerns of Ireland' (*2 Henry VI*, 3.1.310)); to destabilise London through Cade's rebellion; and, finally, to give himself a viable and legitimate motive to turn against the King.

> King did I call thee? No, thou art no king,
> Not fit to govern and rule multitudes,
> Which dar'st not, no, nor canst not rule a traitor.
> That head of thine doth not become a crown;
> Thy hand is made to grasp a palmer's staff
> And not to grace an awful princely sceptre.
> (*2 Henry VI*, 5.1.93–8)

Thus, York genuinely combines public and personal politics in a manner almost unique in the first tetralogy (though later his son, Clarence, shows a more conflicted combination of personal and public interests). His ultimate defeat at the hands of Margaret and the barbaric Clifford is not tactical but more a case of ruthless power politics overcoming long-term strategy. After Clifford heartlessly kills York's youngest son, Rutland, York struggles to comprehend the lengths to which Margaret and Clifford have gone in pursuit of their goal: the restoration of Prince Edward as heir to Henry's throne. He attempts to rationalise it by dehumanising Margaret; he describes her face as 'vizard-like, unchanging', calls her 'inhuman' and, in the trilogy's most famous line, 'O tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide', decries her remorseless cruelty (*3 Henry VI*, 1.4.116, 156, 137). Margaret's victory over York is the triumph of a merciless form of *Machtpolitik* over York's brand of vigilant pragmatism.

Transitions

Margaret's victory over York also moves the politics of the tetralogy into new territory. The conflicts of the first two parts of *Henry VI* are played out within certain boundaries – as we have seen, they centre on clashes of personality or ideology – but the ruthless killing of Rutland by Clifford at the start of *3 Henry VI* throws out the rulebook. Clifford, who is 'a curious portrait of radical providentialism in action',[43] has no personal relationship with Rutland; it is doubtful that they have even met before their encounter:

> RUTLAND: Ah, let me live in prison all my days
> And when I give occasion of offence
> Then let me die, for now thou hast no cause.
> CLIFFORD: No cause?
> Thy father slew my father: therefore die. [*Stabs him*]
> RUTLAND: *Di faciant laudis summa sit ista tuae!* [*Dies*]
> (*3 Henry VI*, 1.3.43–8)

Although Clifford's motivation is undoubtedly personal here, the murder of Rutland is also a calculated political act. Clifford is cold and emotionless in his line of reasoning ('thy father slew my father: therefore die'), which momentarily detaches the act from its immediate human significance; this is not the straightforward revenge killing that Clifford claims. It is worth bearing in mind that the author of these lines wrote *Hamlet* less than a decade later. There is something a little too business-like about Clifford's ruthlessness for it to be dismissed as the result of shoddy characterisation. Clifford wants the Lancastrians to defeat the Yorkists and, like Margaret, will stop at nothing to achieve that aim. The hot-headed personal conflicts found in the political world of *2 Henry VI* now serve a harsher climate of Machiavellian power politics in which the means, however cruel, justifies the ends – Rackin calls it 'a Machiavellian jungle' in which 'power becomes an end in itself'.[44] This transition finds its completion in the death of York. Northumberland, a sworn Lancastrian, cannot help but feel compassion for the humiliated Duke: 'I should not for my life but weep with him / To see how inly sorrow gripes his soul' (*3 Henry VI*, 1.4.169–70). But Margaret icily puts paid to the sentiment: 'Think upon the wrong he did us all / And that will quickly dry thy melting tears' (1.4.173–4). Again, the appeal is personal, but Margaret seems devoid of genuine passion of the sort that drove her to give Eleanor a box on the ear or to kiss and, later, weep for Suffolk; these are cool, calculated actions made for political gain. Margaret has replaced the binary of 'public versus personal politics' with a new political category: ruthlessness. This is not to say that there are not ruthless moments in the first two parts of *Henry VI* (there are many), or to say that the characters who populate those plays are comparatively merciful, but rather that this is the first time ruthlessness has been taken seriously as a political doctrine in itself. At some point between *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI*, possibly triggered by Suffolk's death, Margaret must have realised the limitations of the impulsive, personally invested approach to politics which had failed her thus far and cost her lover his life.

After looking in detail at each of the major players of *2 Henry VI*, it is clear that the play does not present abstract political theories but a complex spectrum of political practice, which identifies three areas that have been crucial in the development of the historical events depicted in the play. I have collated my findings in Table 7.1.

From this it is possible to draw a number of conclusions. In the politics of the first tetralogy, there are two objectives that Shakespeare keeps in focus throughout: political survival and the welfare of the state. Shakespeare is first and foremost a realist; he understands that

Table 7.1

Character	*Type of Politics*	*Approach*	*Decision-making*
Henry VI	Public	Idealistic	Impulsive
Gloucester	Public	Idealistic	Cautious
Winchester	Personal	Idealistic	Cautious
Suffolk	Personal	Idealistic	Impulsive
Margaret	Personal → Ruthless	Pragmatic	Impulsive
Eleanor	Personal	Idealistic	Impulsive
York	Public and Personal	Pragmatic	Cautious
Warwick	Public	Pragmatic	Cautious
Clifford	Ruthless	Idealist	Impulsive

these two objectives – which remain fundamental constants in the politics of nations, regardless of ideologies, forms of government, and the cultural or historical moment – are not mutually exclusive. For an individual to tend to the welfare of the state, they must first survive and then get themselves into a position from which they can implement their policies. Therefore, Shakespeare does not, as is often claimed, flatly condemn the personally driven characters, because they have understood at least one of these principles: you cannot begin to think about public service if you are dead! If the plays are critical of selfish characters, such as Suffolk, they are equally critical of well-meaning characters, such as Gloucester or Henry, who do not anticipate moves made against them for power. There is a complicated hierarchical structure of political survival in *2 Henry VI*; personally driven characters defeat publicly motivated characters, pragmatists defeat idealists, and cautious decision-makers defeat impulsive ones. However, for England (and for Shakespeare), it is obvious that politics pursued in the public interest is more desirable than politics driven primarily by personal ambitions.

Thus, in theory, Shakespeare's 'perfect politician' is someone who cares about the state but who is also built for survival, or as Irving Ribner concluded in 1957, 'strong, crafty, and unselfishly devoted to his people'.[45] The character who comes closest to that description is Warwick (public, pragmatic, cautious), but this is perhaps to miss the point. Shakespeare is not looking for the ideal king or leader, but providing a critique of Henry's reign, undoubtedly one of the most disastrous in English history, and accounting for its failings. To an extent, Cox is right to argue that 'the implicit thesis of the *Henry VI* plays [is] that strong central leadership is essential to prevent an inevitable decline into political and social chaos'.[46] Henry's passivity and Gloucester's moral rigidity

are certainly held accountable for Suffolk's limited personal successes. However, York and Warwick are strong leaders but they do not resolve the matter. Their attempt to put York on the throne fails in *3 Henry VI*, because they are blindsided by the rise of a new, ruthless power politics, by means of which even a selfish and impulsive character such as Margaret can take down a tactical mastermind such as York. There is no doubt that Henry VI, as Andrew Hadfield argues, is 'ill-equipped . . . to deal with the harsh realities of political leadership'.[47] But could the same be said of York? It seems unlikely. It is too easy to suggest, as Hadfield goes on to, that 'all fail [in the first tetralogy] because they are incapable of governing with wider horizons in mind than their own dynastic ambitions and factional conflict'.[48] This is simply untrue of Gloucester or York, or indeed of Salisbury or Warwick (whose eventual downfall we encounter later in *3 Henry VI*), because, as we have seen, these characters seem genuinely committed to the 'commonweal'. Even the people with the appropriate attitudes and skills cannot get on with the job of governing the country, because it is too difficult to get into power. Shakespeare's 'perfect politician' ultimately fails. This opens up the radical possibility that Shakespeare questions the basis and structure of monarchy *itself* in *2 Henry VI*.

To conclude, each ideology of the status quo is brought into question by the play: Gloucester's policy of blind loyalty to the throne costs him his life, Henry's belief in divine providence is exposed as absurd, and the principle of hereditary succession is responsible for putting on the throne a man who is plainly inadequate for the task of leading a nation, while at the same time keeping more able men from fulfilling that task. In this respect, *2 Henry VI* anticipates Jean-Jacques Rousseau's eighteenth-century rejection of monarchy as a fundamentally flawed form of government:

> An essential and inevitable defeat, which will always rank monarchical below republican government, is that in a republic the public voice hardly ever raises to the highest positions men who are not enlightened and capable . . . while in monarchies those who rise to the top are often merely petty blunderers, petty swindlers, and petty intriguers, whose petty talents cause them to get into the highest positions at Court but, as soon as they have got there, serve only to make their ineptitude clear to the public.[49]

Rousseau highlights the inadequacy of monarchy to the task of finding the right man for the demanding role of king. This is compounded by the rule of hereditary succession, which, for Rousseau, is one of the chief disadvantages of monarchy, because it risks 'having children, monstrosities, or imbeciles as rulers'. T his fosters a 'lack of coherence' and

'inconsistency', because each new, quite different king 'creates a revolution in the State'.[50] While it would be inaccurate to paint Shakespeare as a fully-fledged democrat, in *2 Henry VI* he seems implicitly to yearn for a more meritocratic system of government, one that might allow people with the right mix of skills – such as Gloucester, Warwick or York – to govern without controversy; one that would, through a rigorous process of rational selection, prevent characters such as Suffolk or Winchester exerting national influence; and one that would not put the nation at risk by electing a person of Henry VI's plainly inappropriate character and disposition to its highest office. Thus, *2 Henry VI* outlines the structural problems inherent in monarchical feudalism, which serve to create inconsistency and to exacerbate crises when they occur – a fact underlined by Cade's rebellion.

Class Politics: Cade's Rebellion

> There's room at the top they are telling you still,
> But first you must learn how to smile as you kill,
> If you want to be like the folks on the hill,
> A working class hero is something to be.[51]

Although kings and aristocrats dominate the action of the first tetralogy, Shakespeare is careful to gauge popular opinion at key intervals. The 'commons' act as a kind of built-in approval rating for the current government, a general indicator of the relative popularity of particular actions or characters at a particular moment, which for the most part is kept in the background. For example, in *1 Henry VI*, during the skirmish between Gloucester's and Winchester's serving men, one of Gloucester's serving men pledges his allegiance to Humphrey in terms that suggest he is doing a good job as Lord Protector. He says that Gloucester has been 'so kind a father of the commonweal' that 'We and our wives and children all will fight / And have our bodies slaughtered by thy foes' (3.1.98, 100–1). No such endorsement is given to Winchester. Later, in *2 Henry VI*, Suffolk intercepts a petition that was intended for submission to Gloucester, which reads 'Against the Duke of Suffolk, for enclosing the commons of Melford', the 'poor petitioner' claiming to be acting on behalf of his 'whole township' (1.3.19–20, 22). It is clear that Gloucester is popular and trusted by the commons, whereas Suffolk is despised. Accordingly, Henry enjoys popularity early in his reign by virtue of his gentle character, because of his association with Gloucester, and, most importantly of all, because he is the king and son of Henry V. But he makes an error at the end of *1 Henry VI*, which proves

costly: he rewards Suffolk for arranging his marriage with Margaret by giving him a sizable portion of tax revenues: 'For your expenses and sufficient charge, / Among your people gather up a tenth' (*1 Henry VI*, 5.5.92–3). This not only adds insult to injury, but also foolishly aligns the crown with Suffolk's imprudent action. York senses that he could use the situation to turn the tide of public opinion against the King, while at the same time increasing his own popularity: 'I shall perceive the commons' mind, / How they affect the house and claim of York' (*2 Henry VI*, 3.1.374–5). York guesses correctly, because in the next scene Henry faces potential disorder when the commons discover that Suffolk arranged for Gloucester's murder: '*The commons again cry*, "Down with Suffolk! Down with Suffolk! . . . An answer from the king, or we will all break in"' (*2 Henry VI*, 3.2.242, 278). Even before Cade appears in the play, public discontent is at boiling point and ready to spill over into the King's court. Shortly before Suffolk's death, the pirates responsible for his murder reveal full-blown public support for the Yorkist cause: 'And now the house of York, thrust from the crown / By shameful murder of a guiltless king' (*2 Henry VI*, 4.1.94–5). It is a reminder that even seemingly insignificant actions, such as Henry's rewarding of Suffolk at the end of *1 Henry VI*, have tumultuous ramifications in the public sphere. Shakespeare makes the commons a force that cannot and will not be ignored; as Theodor Meron states, 'Shakespeare's general message is that rebellion is a serious matter'.[52] Just as in Machiavelli, it is important 'to satisfy the people and keep them content' or else, if pushed too far, they will rebel.[53] This is exactly what happens to Henry VI.

Given the cultural historicist preoccupation with power, subversion and its containment, it is perhaps unsurprising to find that the attention of new historicists and cultural materialists has been drawn to the sequence dramatising Cade's rebellion in *2 Henry VI*. This contains some of the most violent and disturbing scenes in Shakespeare, including one particularly morbid moment in which the severed heads of Lord Say and Sir James Cromer are made to kiss (*2 Henry VI*, 4.7.138). As a moment of genuine insubordination by a group of commoners against the state, it represents a unique opportunity for critics to pin Shakespeare down and brand him with the appropriate stamp: 'conservative' or 'radical'. Most critics – including cultural historicists – have, quite overwhelmingly, viewed the sequence as evidence of Shakespeare's adherence to Tudor state ideology, designed to be interpreted as 'the standard Tudor warning against rebellion'.[54] In his new historicist reading, Stephen Greenblatt follows the orthodox line and insists that Shakespeare depicts Cade and his followers as 'buffoons' who, for

all their bravura, ultimately succumb to state power: 'A few rousing speeches from the aristocrats, with the invocation of the name Henry V and the threat of a French invasion, suffice; the state triumphs, and Cade flees.'[55] Thus, for Greenblatt, Shakespeare's play contains the threat of rebellion internally, draining it of whatever subversive appeal it might have held for its audience.

In his reading of the sequence, Richard Wilson looks at the scenes of Cade's rebellion and ties them closely to contemporary events:

> In 1592 the London clothing workers were fighting a rearguard action against long-term structural changes in their industry . . . Shakespeare is not anticipating Orwell, as critics like to believe, but sniping satirically at the cloth workers' dream of extending the jurisdiction of the Livery Companies to the unarticulated labour in London's extra-mural parishes.[56]

Working on the assumption that he 'wrote *2, 3 Henry VI* between March and August 1592',[57] Wilson goes on to accuse Shakespeare of conservative 'partisanship' in his account of the rebellion.[58] He argues that

> in this very early work, [Shakespeare] laid bare the cultural prejudices he brought to writing . . . [he] used his professional debut to signal scorn for popular culture and identification with an urban elite in whose eyes authority would henceforth belong exclusively to writers.[59]

Wilson suggests that 'Shakespeare's Cade is a projection of the atavistic terrors of the Renaissance rich . . . a juvenile nightmare of worker revolution'.[60] Wilson's argument is rich both in terms of historical research and rhetorical force, but such highly specific attempts to historicise Shakespeare's plays are prone to twist the material to fit the evidence. Wilson's neglect of the episode's immediate dramatic context – the rest of *2 Henry VI* and the first tetralogy – leads him to forget temporarily that Cade is not really a hero of the working class but an agent employed by the aristocratic Duke of York – he is a red herring, a minor ploy in a wider stratagem.

Few critics have challenged the orthodox reading of Cade's rebellion as a conservative Tudor warning against the dangers of popular protest. Michael D. Bristol hints at the radical potential of the scene by suggesting that 'the expression of popular resentment nevertheless escapes being totally repressed', but stops short of saying more.[61] Similarly, Derek Cohen argues that 'the sheer want expressed in the enthusiasm for the idea of enough to eat and drink' is itself an acknowledgement of the fact that there is a problem with Henry VI's government of England, but ultimately assents to the view that 'the poor in Shakespeare's history

plays receive short shrift . . . the working people are seen as so many fools and dolts, easily misled by a villain who promises them anarchy, wealth, and revenge against their enemies, the rich'.[62] Jean E. Howard offers perhaps the most sympathetic cultural historicist reading, aligning the rebels with a long tradition of Christian egalitarianism. Howard argues that 'Cade . . . offers the most radical critique of social inequality [in *2 Henry VI*], [but] is personally vilified and discredited within the play [because] he probably had to be for the drama to be [passed by the censors] and staged'.[63]

Although it cannot be denied that Shakespeare embellishes the severity of the historical Cade's rebellion 'to include as much violence as possible' by drawing on accounts of numerous peasant revolts, including, most famously, the Peasants' Rebellion of 1381 during the reign of Richard II,[64] the question of whether or not he depicts Cade and his rebels as 'buffoons' or 'so many fools and dolts' is open to debate. Neither is the episode as straightforwardly conservative as Richard Wilson and others present it. The first scene concerning the rebellion, 4.2, does not begin with a rabble-rousing speech from Cade but with a brief exchange between two rebels, who complain that 'it was never merry world in England since gentlemen came up' and that it is a 'miserable age [because] Virtue is not regarded in handicraftsmen' (4.2.8–9). This exchange is important, because it establishes the fact that, despite Cade's personal duplicity as an agent of the Duke of York, there are at least some rebels with legitimate grievances who are prepared to fight for a better life. The rebels see themselves as battling against 'sin' and 'inequity' (4.2.21) and therefore see their aristocratic enemies as wrongdoers. What is most significant about this exchange is that Shakespeare depicts normal, working men as voting with their feet. These two men have joined the rebellion out of choice, after coming to their *own* conclusions about the 'miserable' state of nation. They do not seem like fools or dolts.

When Cade finally appears to stir the troops, he begins by making the wrong appeal in the wrong idiom: 'We John Cade, so termed of our supposed father –' (4.2.29). He appeals to a (bogus) aristocratic heritage in order to lend himself legitimacy and speaks using the royal 'we', partly in mock bombast, but also in a bid to lift himself symbolically above the crowd. Shakespeare employs two characters, Dick the butcher and Smith the weaver, to undercut and provide commentary upon Cade's opening address. The passage warrants closer scrutiny:

CADE: We John Cade, so termed of our supposed father –
DICK: [*Aside*] Or rather of stealing a cade of herrings.

CADE: For our enemies shall fail before us, inspired with the spirit of putting down kings and princes – Command silence.
DICK: Silence!
CADE: My father was a Mortimer –
DICK: [*Aside*] He was an honest man, and a good bricklayer.
CADE: My mother was a Plantagenet –
DICK: [*Aside*] I knew her well; she was a midwife.
CADE: My wife descended of the Lacies –
DICK: [*Aside*] She was indeed a pedlar's daughter, and sold many laces.
SMITH: [*Aside*] But now of late, not able to travel with her furred pack, she washes bucks here at home.
CADE: Therefore am I of an honourable house.
DICK: [*Aside*] Ay, by my fait, the field is honourable; and there was he born under a hedge, for his father had never a house but the cage.
CADE: Valiant I am.
SMITH: [*Aside*] 'A must needs, for beggary is valiant.
CADE: I can endure much.
DICK: [*Aside*] No question of that: for I have seen him whipped three market-days together.
CADE: I fear neither sword nor fire.
SMITH: [*Aside*] He need not fear the sword, for his coat is of proof.
DICK: [*Aside*] But methinks he should stand in fear of fire, being burnt i'th'hand for stealing sheep.
CADE: Be brave then, for your captain is brave, and vows reformation. There shall be in England seven halfpenny loaves sold for a penny; the three-hooped pot shall have ten hoops, and I will make it a felony to drink small beer; all the realm shall be in common; and in Cheapside shall my palfrey go to grass; and when I am king, as king I will be –
ALL: God save your majesty!

(4.2.26–59)

At first glance, the asides of Dick and Smith (which are addressed to their fellow rebels rather than directly to the audience) seem to undermine Cade's authority in a crude didactic attempt by Shakespeare to let his audience know that they are dealing with a charlatan. However, York has already prefaced the scene at the start of Act 3; he likens Cade to 'a shag-haired crafty kern' and describes him as a 'devil' (3.1.367, 371), so the audience already knows what to expect when it finally encounters him. It is possible that in pointing out each of Cade's lies, Shakespeare simply ensures that there is no doubt about his lack of moral fibre. It is also possible that the passage provides a much-needed window of light relief before the scenes of brutality that follow. But both of these readings overlook the fact that Dick, who speaks most of the asides, is fully complicit with Cade – after Cade tells him to 'Command silence', he does so at once. Upon closer inspection, rather than undermining Cade, the asides are actually designed to foster support for him.

As I have noted, Cade begins his speech in the 'wrong' register – by making an aristocratically flavoured appeal to his followers. Dick's interjections let the crowd of rebels know that Cade is probably being sarcastic and at the same time underline the fact that he, like them, is a plain-spoken working man from a poor background. When Cade is finally cheered at line 59, it is not because he may or may not be the son of John Mortimer, but because he seems to represent the rebels' interests in a way that no aristocrat could. Phyllis Rackin offers a superb account of just what these interests may have been in the sixteenth century (for she reads the play anachronistically): the wish for 'abundant food, low prices, and the abolition of enclosures' because of 'actual hunger among the poor . . . [that was created by] inflation in an era of rising population, which produced an oversupply of labor and a scarcity of food'.[65]

However, Rackin ultimately concludes that, despite giving brief voice to such interests, Shakespeare forecloses the possibility of genuine, radical political action: 'Despite the vividness of Cade's characterization and the real social ills his rebellion addresses, Cade is finally reduced to a mechanism for ideological containment.'[66] For supporting evidence, she points to Shakespeare's 'flattering' portrait of Alexander Iden, 'the virtuous country gentlemen' who is responsible for Cade's eventual death. Rackin's argument hinges on early modern 'ethical distinctions between the "noble" and the "ignoble" and the generic distinctions between comedy and tragedy . . . that separated "gentlemen" of high birth and character from "clowns" and "villains"'. For Rackin, Cade's rebellion is 'tainted by comedy', and therefore succumbs utterly to the Tudor ideology of class.[67] However, this is to overlook the fact that Shakespeare has already subjected that very ideology to close scrutiny when the pirates apprehend Suffolk in the scene that immediately precedes the rebellion. Suffolk appeals precisely to the notions of 'high birth and character' that Rackin ascribes to Iden:

> Look on my George: I am a *gentleman*.
> Rate me at what thou wilt, thou shalt be paid.
> (*2 Henry VI*, 4.1.29–30, emphasis mine)

The pirates make it clear to Suffolk that they do not care a jot for his rank, and insist instead on judging him by his actions. The lieutenant lists many reasons why the people of England hate Suffolk, including his role in arranging the terms of Margaret and Henry's marriage, his subsequent affair with the Queen and the loss of Anjou and Maine to France (4.1.70–103). Shakespeare does not seem to be making 'ethical' or 'generic' distinctions between a 'gentlemen' and the lower orders here, despite the fact that Suffolk, who is roundly condemned, insists

on maintaining such distinctions until his death. He laments the 'paltry, servile, abject drudges' (4.1.105) who seem intent on cutting through his aristocratic hot air with the cold steel of justice. The attitudes and motivations of the pirates seem to be almost identical to those of the two rebels whose exchange prefaces Cade's rebellion.[68]

If Shakespeare was working, as Rackin thinks, in 'the interests of the elite',[69] why would he insert a scene in which the very assumptions of class and nobility are shown to be vacuous immediately before the rebellion? It is hard to imagine why, only moments later, Shakespeare would about-turn and uphold the same distinctions as Suffolk in his depiction of the rebellion and of Cade's subsequent downfall. Rackin does provide an answer for this by way of reference to 1.3, the scene in which Suffolk intercepts the poor petitioners, which, she argues, serves to 'raise the audience's antipathy toward Suffolk and Margaret . . . [in order to] absolve the older aristocracy, represented by the good Duke of Gloucester . . . of blame for the unpopular enclosures and to fix it on parvenu courtiers like Suffolk'.[70] Rackin thus distinguishes between two types of elite, which appears to resolve the apparent contradiction in her argument – but to what end? As we have already seen, the play shows the rigidly principled 'older aristocracy' of Gloucester to be outmoded and fatally inadequate to the needs of the political moment. It is simply not the case that Shakespeare 'absolves' Gloucester of responsibility: he might not get the blame for enclosure, but he is certainly to blame for his own death and, to a lesser but significant degree, for giving York the opportunity to put his plan into action. With *2 Henry VI*, the play cannot be made to identify itself closely with any one character or ideology, because it delves too deeply into the inner workings of *Realpolitik* and asks too many questions of 'virtuous' characters such as Gloucester. Rackin discerns a didactic dimension in the play that it plainly lacks.

Cultural historicists have been keen to limit the radical potentiality of Cade's rebellion, arguing that, even if the rebels have legitimate concerns, Shakespeare makes their proposals so absurd that their cause is emptied of meaning. To stay with the example of Rackin: '[Cade] proposes a revolution so radical and so ludicrous that it discredits the just grievances it addresses'.[71] This assessment is perhaps guilty of underestimating the rebels. I would like to take seriously, for a moment, A. D. Nuttall's claim that Cade's rebellion is 'proto-communist'.[72] Shakespeare was, of course, writing centuries before Marx, but that does not mean he did not have insights into class conflict.

When the rebellion finally gets under way, the ire of the mob does not focus on the aristocratic elite but on the emergent literate and edu-

cated middle classes. Their first victim is the clerk of Chartham, who is attacked because 'he can read and write' (*2 Henry VI*, 4.2.70). It is significant that the rebels direct their anger towards such middle-class petty officials rather than towards the King. This is something that would not have surprised Antonio Gramsci, who noted in his *Prison Notebooks*:

> The 'people' is aware that it has enemies, but only identifies them empirically as so-called *signori* [i.e. 'gentlemen'] . . . There is [a] dislike of officialdom – the only form in which the State is perceived. The peasant, and even the small farmer, hates the civil servant; he does not hate the State, for he does not understand it. He sees the civil servant as a '*signore*' . . . This 'generic' hatred is still 'semi-feudal' rather than modern in character, and cannot be taken as class consciousness – merely the first glimmer of such consciousness.[73]

This is how Shakespeare presents Cade and his rebels: on the cusp of realising that they are being oppressed, yet unable to direct their aggressive energy meaningfully; they resolve merely to attack civil servants and their means of administration. Cade is specifically concerned with the clerk's literacy:

> CADE: Dost thou use to write thy name? Or hast thou a mark to thyself, like an honest plain-dealing man?
> CLERK: Sir, I thank God, I have been so well brought up that I can write my name.
> ALL: He hath confessed: away with him! He's a villain and a traitor.
> CADE: Away with him, I say! Hang him with his pen and inkhorn about his neck.
>
> (*2 Henry VI*, 4.2.84–90)

Shakespeare explicitly associates writing with education. The clerk is privy to knowledge and skills to which the rebels have no access; Dick points out that the clerk can 'write court-hand' (4.2.77). Evidently, the rebels are resentful of the fact that the written word is used to administer their lives, when they do not and cannot have the means to read and write themselves. Moments earlier, Dick declares war on the law itself, the discourse in which writing and authority converge most visibly: 'the first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers' (4.2.63). This is Foucault's Power-Knowledge in action: 'it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together'.[74] The rebels *themselves* make the connection between written discourse and their own disempowerment. The clerk is a 'villain and a traitor' because he is embedded in, and making a living out of, the exploitative system that is keeping the rebels poor. The rebels' solution is a crude one: simply to eradicate discourse and its practitioners, to 'burn all the records of the realm' and 'not leave one lord, [or] one gentleman [alive]' (4.2.10, 159). Even so, we can

hardly dismiss the thought process behind that solution as 'so radical and so ludicrous that it discredits the just grievances it addresses', especially considering how neatly it maps on to Foucault. As Thomas Cartelli argues, the rebels exhibit 'a politically astute reckoning with a long list of social grievances whose inarticulate and violent expression does not invalidate their demand for resolution'.[75] In Cade's rebellion, Shakespeare shows the limits of class consciousness within the confines of the feudal system.

The rebels do not stop at the level of discourse; they are actually seeking, however unconsciously, to take down an entire ideological system: that of a nascent bourgeoisie. It is not only writing but also education itself, or rather the clerk's particular type of education, to which they object. Later, Cade rants vehemently at Lord Say – the play's embodiment of nascent petty-bourgeois notions of progressive education – for his role in both the education system and the proliferation of writing and reading materials:

> Thou has most traitorously corrupted the youth of the realm in erecting a grammar school: and whereas before our forefathers had no other books but the score and the tally, thou has caused printing to be used, and, contrary to the king, his crown, and dignity, thou has built a paper-mill. It will be proved to thy face that thou hast men about thee that usually talk of a noun and a verb, and such abominable words as no Christian ear can endure to hear. Thou hast appointed justices of the peace, to call poor men before them about matters they were not able to answer. Moreover, thou hast put them in prison; and, because they could not read, thou hast hanged them; when indeed, only for that cause, they have been most worthy to live.
>
> (*2 Henry VI*, 4.7.25–37)

The idea that time spent at grammar school would 'corrupt the youth' may horrify English lecturers, but it will be familiar to readers of Althusser, who argues that 'the bourgeois has installed [the educational apparatus] as its number-one, i.e. as its dominant ideological State apparatus'.[76] Cade is attacking Lord Say for propagating a bourgeois ideology of social mobility, disseminated through the discourse of education ('a noun and a verb'), which subjugates and even condemns the 'poor men' who are not fortunate enough to have been interpellated by it. Say can only react by iterating that same ideology, stating that 'ignorance is the curse of God' and 'Knowledge the wing wherewith we fly to heaven' (4.7.22–3). Shakespeare depicts the two men as classes apart, trapped in their respective ideological spheres; both figuratively and literally, they are not speaking the same language ('He speaks Latin' (4.7.47)). This bears out Gramsci's observation; we are dealing with a feudal (or semi-feudal) state in which true class-consciousness is not yet possible. The

rebels are unable to rationalise their actions beyond a base animosity towards individual civil servants, and Lord Say is unable to understand why they are rebelling in the first place.

It is not long after Say's murder and decapitation that Buckingham and Old Clifford (not to be confused with his son, who appears in *3 Henry VI*) arrive to re-establish order. It is at this moment that the rebels fail to connect their assaults against the petty officials with wider action against the state. As in Gramsci's reading of the Italian working class, they do not *understand* the state. The rebellion is satiating class resentment at a lower level, so it is unsurprising that the rebels succumb so quickly to the glib appeal of 'Who loves the king and will embrace his pardon . . . Who hateth him and honours not his father, / Henry the Fifth[?]' (4.8.13, 15–16), for, in their own minds, the rebellion was never truly against the King. Despite the fact that he is himself in the employ of York, Cade is the only character who demonstrates any degree of class-consciousness; he realises that the population is in thrall to an ideological system that denies individuals freedom and knowledge. Thus, when the King's men first attempt to apprehend the rebels, he calls Stafford and his soldiers 'silken-coated slaves' (4.2.106). Cade can see that the soldiers are as trapped within the system as the commoners. Accordingly, he claims to fight for 'liberty' (4.2.158). When his followers desert him, Cade again appeals to liberty and lambasts them for their cowardice and servility:

> I thought ye would never have given out these arms till you had recovered your ancient freedom: but you are all recreants and dastards, and delight to live in slavery to the nobility. Let them break your backs with burdens, take your houses over your heads, ravish your wives and daughters before your faces.
>
> (4.8.23–7)

It is a withering assessment of how the commoners condemn *themselves* to a life of poverty and exploitation. The rebellion might have failed, but the words of Cade's parting shot surely constitute some of the most openly subversive sentiments in Shakespeare. One can imagine a sixteenth-century cloth-worker sitting stunned at hearing such things being spoken. One can equally imagine the same cloth-worker going home from the theatre that night and thinking to himself that Cade may have a point.

It does not matter that Cade is forced to flee to his death at the hands of the strange petty-bourgeois figure, Alexander Iden, because his point has already been made – his class struggle is lost. Critics have rightly seen Iden as the embodiment of emergent middle-class values of private

ownership; his garden, as Greenblatt points out, is 'enclosed private property',[77] and he is 'ambivalent' towards the royal court (4.10.14–21).[78] Iden's estate is oddly removed from the hurly-burly of London and from the machinations of the King's court, an island of calm amid a sea of chaos; the scene is set away from the main action of the play. This serves to distil the action and heighten the contrast between the two men. Cade has not eaten for five days and steals into Iden's garden to forage for vegetation, having just led a radical, hell-raising rebellion in which he called for the abolition of money ('there shall be no money' (4.2.60)). In complete contrast, Iden is well fed and content with his lot in life; he is happy to live off the 'small inheritance' his father left him and to take 'quiet walks' in his garden (4.10.15–16). When they fight, Cade quickly capitulates, blaming his chronic hunger for the defeat: 'Famine and no other hath slain me' (4.10.54). As Greenblatt states, the contrast between 'a well-fed owner of property and a "poor famished man"' is marked.[79] Rackin notes numerous ways in which Shakespeare supposedly sides with Iden, but the fact that he invokes, for example, 'emblems of an older world'[80] cannot dim the symbolic power of watching a starving man being killed by a sword on stage, especially as Cade's strong indictment of class inequality in the previous scene is still ringing in the audience's ears.

However, Shakespeare's depiction of Cade's rebellion is not best understood through the binary, cultural historicist terms of containment and subversion, because *2 Henry VI* painstakingly deconstructs government. When the leadership of the country is seen as mutable and contingent, subject to the personalities and ambitions of individuals, and constituted at the highest level not by ideology but by action, it is hardly relevant to discuss whether or not it is possible to subvert power, because it has no stable form. The function of the Cade sequence is not to make an abstract moral point about the perils of civil disorder but to underline the fact that the ruling class can ill afford to neglect their civic duty, especially if, as is the case here, the majority of the populace are subject to abject poverty and gross exploitation. The action of the first three acts of *2 Henry VI* emphasises the primacy of pragmatism over idealism and the disadvantages of impulsive decision-making in politics; the final two acts, which deal with Cade's rebellion and its aftermath, show that although personal politics (as practised by Suffolk and Margaret) is effective for short-term survival, it is not viable as a long-term strategy, because it fosters widespread public resentment and risks aggravating class conflict. In the process, Shakespeare offers us a powerful and penetrating account of feudal class conflict in which the commoners are justifiably aggrieved but lack the necessary understanding of the state to

direct their rebellion meaningfully. If the play does conclude that plebeian uprisings are destined to fail, it is not because Cade is morally discredited or shown to be a 'buffoon', but rather because the system does not provide the rebels with the adequate faculties of reasoning needed to organise a serious revolution.

Historians such as Blair Worden may raise the objection that monarchy was so entrenched in Renaissance life that alternative forms of government were almost *unthinkable*.[81] But, as we have seen, this does not mean that an alert individual such as Shakespeare could not see its inherent problems. The end of *2 Henry VI* finds Shakespeare seriously questioning the adequacy of monarchy for the task of governing a nation; he finds a system which is utterly at the mercy of individuals (who may or may not have the prerequisite characteristics for leadership), and which is undermined internally by latent class conflict. *2 Henry VI* is thus both analytical and demonstrative – akin to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract* or the first half of *The Communist Manifesto* – but it offers few solutions. This is not because solutions are beyond the remit of drama, but rather because it is the middle act of a trilogy in which the realist playwright contents himself simply and powerfully with posing problems. For Shakespeare, as for Rousseau after him, 'we know for ourselves that we must put up with bad government; the question is how to find a good one'.[82]

Power Politics: *3 Henry VI*

> Priests pray for enemies, but princes kill.
>
> (*2 Henry VI*, 5.2.71)

Whereas *2 Henry VI* concerns itself with the minutiae of monarchical politics and closely analyses the deficiencies of the feudal class structure, *3 Henry VI* is a study in extremes. As we have seen, the brutal murders of Rutland and York with which *3 Henry VI* starts mark a shift in the political dynamic of the first tetralogy: cautious pragmatism, which was shown as a remarkably effective tactic for dealing with idealists (whether personally or publicly motivated) in *2 Henry VI*, must now make way for ruthless power politics. The political lessons of *2 Henry VI* no longer hold water. The death of York represents the third change of political climate in the first tetralogy. The first occurs between *1 Henry VI* and *2 Henry VI*, when the old aristocratic values of Talbot and Gloucester are replaced with the selfish, personal politics of Suffolk, Winchester, Eleanor and Margaret; the second occurs shortly after Gloucester's

death, when three cautious and pragmatic characters, York, Warwick and Salisbury, outmanœuvre the four selfishly motivated characters; and the third occurs at the start of *3 Henry VI* when a newly ruthless Margaret humiliates and kills York, thereby replacing the pragmatism of *Realpolitik* with hardnosed *Machtpolitik*. As Nicholas Grene puts it, 'as the war goes into its second phase, the war-hardened sons of murdered fathers will abandon whatever Geneva conventions previously obtained to indulge themselves in violence without limits'.[83] In other words, *3 Henry VI* replaces the logic of individual political survival with that of outright war: kill or be killed.

Thus, in the first tetralogy, the question of whether certain political strategies find success or failure depends largely on circumstance. What worked brilliantly for York during *2 Henry VI* now fails him in *3 Henry VI*, because the circumstances are different; there are no universal codes of correct conduct. This principle bears a strong resemblance to a passage in Machiavelli:

> It can be observed that men use various methods in pursuing their own personal objectives, that is glory and riches. One man proceeds with circumspection, another impetuously; one uses violence, another stratagem; one man goes about things patiently, another does the opposite; and yet everyone, for all this diversity of method, can reach his objective. It can also be observed that with two circumspect men, one will achieve his end, the other not; and likewise two men succeed equally well with different methods, one of them being circumspect and the other impetuous. This results from nothing else except the nature of the times . . . This . . . explains why prosperity is ephemeral; because if a man behaves with patience and circumspection and the time and circumstances are such that his method is called for, he will prosper; but if time and circumstances change he will be ruined because he does not change his policy. Nor do we find any man shrewd enough to know how to adapt his policy in this way; either because he cannot do otherwise than what is in his character or because, having always prospered by proceeding one way, he cannot persuade himself to change. Thus a man who is circumspect, when circumstances demand impetuous behaviour, is unequal to the task, and so he comes to grief. If he changed his character according to the time and circumstances, then his fortune would not change.[84]

Here it is possible to spot many of the trends that I have traced in *2 Henry VI*. Machiavelli has favoured the terms 'circumspect' and 'impetuous', where I have used 'cautious' and 'impulsive', but they refer essentially to the same traits. However, there are notable differences. For example, unlike Shakespeare, Machiavelli does not entertain the possibility of there being individuals who are genuinely motivated by civic duty. He assumes personal motives for all political players; characters such as Gloucester and Henry do not exist in Machiavelli's political

reality. Also, Machiavelli seems to preclude the possibility of individuals adapting their personalities and political approaches to changing fortunes, whereas Shakespeare's Margaret, for example, to modify G. K. Hunter's phrase, seems like a 'different Margaret' from one play to the next, because she adapts her policies.[85] Most crucially, Machiavelli takes the prospect of changing fortunes as a virtually guaranteed (abstract) political given and therefore fails to account for what brings about such changes. Shakespeare, on the other hand, who also demonstrates an understanding of changing fortunes, explains such changes by pointing to the human causes of specific events (e.g. Suffolk's brokering of the marriage between Henry and Margaret, York's strategic victory over Margaret, the murder of Rutland and so on). Machiavelli compares fortune 'to one of those violent rivers which, when they are enraged, flood the plains, tear down trees and buildings, wash soil from one place to deposit it in another'. He argues that people are powerless to stop such floods occurring once such rivers are in full stream, but 'it does not follow that when they are flowing quietly one cannot take precautions, constructing dykes and embankments'.[86] Thus, for Machiavelli, humans cannot control fortune but, with the correct contingency plans in place, they can dampen the impact of sudden and drastic changes. As we have seen, Shakespeare prefers the image of 'fortune's pageant' (*2 Henry VI*, 1.2.67), in which individual human action has the power to alter the course and configuration of the procession. Hence, York scoffs at Somerset's claim that 'fortune' was responsible for his failure as Regent over France, suggesting that had *he* been in charge, he would have made his own luck (*2 Henry VI*, 3.1.305). Shakespeare leaves less to chance than Machiavelli.

In *3 Henry VI*, Shakespeare freshly interrogates the political positions he outlined in *2 Henry VI* in the new context of civil war. Circumstances have changed. Most of the major players of the first two parts of *Henry VI* are dead; by 2.1 of *3 Henry VI*, of the ten characters who make up Henry's court at the start of *2 Henry VI*, only Henry, Margaret and Warwick survive. The War of the Roses is now in full swing. Unlike *2 Henry VI*, which contains several factions, in *3 Henry VI*, the characters can be neatly divided between the royal houses of Lancaster and York – the stage is set for a bloodbath. Shakespeare shows the extreme conditions that may give rise to a tyrant such as Richard III. After York's death, a new set of characters come to the fore to try their chances in this new, violent political climate – namely, York's three surviving sons: Edward (IV), George (of Clarence) and Richard (of Gloucester, later Richard III). Interestingly, of these, only Richard can be ranked alongside Margaret and Clifford as 'ruthless'. Edward is selfish, personally

driven and impulsive in the mould of Suffolk, and, like his father, Clarence is cautious and pragmatic and finds himself torn between public and private impetuses. Therefore, in *3 Henry VI*, we can see Shakespeare revisiting character types that we have already encountered in the previous plays in order to subject them to sterner tests in more volatile waters. This is typical of his exhaustive, empirical approach to politics in the *Henry VI* trilogy; if *Machtpolitik* is to become the new *modus operandi*, Shakespeare must first show us if and why it supersedes the available alternatives before outlining whether or not it is itself a sound and sustainable political strategy. That said, *3 Henry VI* is less about the success or failure of particular strategies for individuals than it is about their *desirability* at the 'macro' level of the state; as the scale and viciousness of the violence escalate, wider ethical questions can no longer be ignored.

Of all the characters Shakespeare tests in *3 Henry VI*, perhaps the most closely scrutinised is the King himself. After Gloucester's death and his attempt to disinherit his son in Act 1, Henry finds himself completely isolated and increasingly powerless on the throne. Paradoxically, as he becomes ever more marginalised in political terms, Shakespeare gives him a more prominent dramatic role on stage as the play's self-appointed moral centre in the absence of Humphrey. Shakespeare juxtaposes Henry's simple, unyielding faith with the brutal form of *Machtpolitik* that has come to characterise the politics of the War of the Roses. After York's death, Shakespeare underlines the fact that Henry rules England in title only; his new proxy is Margaret. In 2.2, fresh from her victory over York, Margaret gloats to her husband:

> Welcome, my lord, to this brave town of York.
> Yonder's the head of that arch-enemy
> That sought to be encompassed with your crown.
> Doth not the object cheer your heart, my lord?
> (*3 Henry VI*, 2.2.1–4)

Predictably, Henry is anything but cheered by the news ('this sight irks my soul' (2.2.6)) and worries that the murder has invoked the wrath of God, presumably because it invalidates the sacred oath of disinheritance he made in the opening scene (1.1.196–201). Clifford responds by putting forward perhaps the strongest argument for power politics found in the play:

> My gracious liege, this too much lenity
> And harmful pity must be laid aside.

To whom do lions cast their gentle looks?
Not to the beast that would usurp their den.
Whose hand is that the forest bear doth lick?
Not his that spoils her young before her face.
Who scapes the lurking serpent's mortal sting?
Not he that sets his foot upon her back.
The smallest worm will turn, being trodden on,
And doves will peck in safeguard of their brood.
(2.2.9–18)

Clifford plainly appeals to the dog-eat-dog logic of natural selection. He sees pity as 'harmful' and, in evoking lions and beasts, echoes Machiavelli's famous contention that a prince is forced to know how to act like a beast, that he must learn to be the fox and the lion. In that contention, Machiavelli reasons that 'one must be a fox in order to recognize traps, and a lion to frighten off wolves. Those who simply act like lions are stupid.'[87] Significantly, Clifford neglects to mention the fox, which, as we have seen, is represented in the tetralogy by cautious and pragmatic characters such as York and Warwick. However, at this moment in the tetralogy, lions are in the ascendancy while foxes are down in numbers; Clifford is reflecting the *Zeitgeist* of the political status quo.

Henry's reaction represents an interesting turn in the development of his character and approach to politics:

Full well hath Clifford played the orator,
Inferring arguments of mighty force:
But Clifford, tell me, didst thou never hear
That things ill got had ever bad success?
And happy was it for that son
Whose father, for his hoarding, went to hell?
I'll leave my son my virtuous deeds behind:
And would my father had left me no more!
For all the rest is held at such a rate
As brings a thousandfold more care to keep
Than in possession any jot of pleasure.
Ah, cousin York, would thy best friends did know
How it doth grieve me that thy head is here!
(2.2.43–55)

Henry is unique in the tetralogy because – in stark contrast to virtually all the other leading characters (including the likes of Talbot and Gloucester) – he does not view power as the ultimate goal; instead, his goal is to live virtuously in personal contentment. This passage marks the beginning of Henry's final withdrawal from the political sphere. His wish that his 'father had left [him] no more' than 'virtuous deeds' is not

only a rejection of Clifford's brutality but also a rejection of politics and, indeed, of the role of king itself. When the Yorkists arrive and Edward makes a bold claim to the crown, Henry leaves it to Margaret and Clifford to raise objections. There are some thirty-six lines of dialogue before Henry can muster an utterance: 'Have done with words, my lords, and hear me speak / . . . I prithee give no limits to my tongue: / I am a king and privileged to speak' (2.2.117, 119–20). This brief, half-hearted attempt to assert whatever semblance of authority he has left falls on deaf ears. The other characters all but ignore Henry's request to speak. It is clear to the Yorkists that Margaret and Clifford are the true leaders of the Lancastrian house and that Henry has become at best a ceremonial mascot and at worst an irrelevance. Richard's quip that 'Clifford's manhood lies upon his tongue' (2.2.125) proves true, because Henry does not speak again in 2.2.[88] By the end of the scene, over fifty lines after the King's request for an audience, Edward draws attention to the King's continued silence and resorts to violence: 'Since thou deniest the gentle king to speak. – / Sound, trumpets! Let our bloody colours wave' (2.2.172–3). It is a strange moment in the play; the King requests permission to speak and then says nothing, as if paralysed.

As Michael Manheim says, Henry's 'mental state, revealed more by what he does not say than by what he does say . . . must be considered carefully'.[89] The historical Henry VI famously suffered from mental breakdowns, a fact which Henry's paralysis in 2.2, a critically important scene, perhaps reflects. From this moment on, Henry seems palpably altered. His next appearance is in the famous 'molehill scene' in which he dreams of living the simple life of a shepherd, while the fierce civil war rages on elsewhere; for Edward Berry, it is 'the most important scene in the series [i.e. the first tetralogy]'.[90] It is worth considering at length. Henry's mood at the start of his soliloquy is one of despair:

> Here on this molehill will I sit me down.
> To whom God will, there be the victory!
> For Margaret my queen and Clifford too,
> Have chid me from the battle, swearing both
> They prosper best of all when I am thence.
> Would I were dead, if God's good will were so:
> For what is in this world but grief and woe?
> (*3 Henry VI*, 2.5. 14–20)

This is not only a declamation against civil war by a pious king, but also a depiction of a desperate and isolated man in mental freefall. It is often claimed of Henry that he lacks awareness, that he is a 'holy fool, or just a fool',[91] who 'is always slow to recognise the true motives of both his

enemies and allies'.[92] But, as I have suggested, since Suffolk's death Henry has been keenly aware that Margaret is 'his' queen in name only. It is significant that Henry is only sitting on the molehill in the first place because Margaret has 'chid' him 'from the battle', apparently because she views him as a hindrance. She has given up all pretence of a happily married life. Immediately after pointing this out, Henry wishes he were dead. Since his sudden silence in 2.2, a plethora of things must have dawned on Henry: the nation is at brutal civil war and it is largely his fault; his wife has all but disowned him after he attempted to disinherit his only son; his power has been directly challenged by Edward and, at the same time, he has been marginalised within his own House; finally, on the most human level, he has lacked any form of companionship or friendship since Gloucester's death. It hardly comes as a shock that he yearns for escape:

> O God, methinks it were a happy life
> To be no better than a homely swain;
> To sit upon a hill, as I do now,
> To carve out dials quaintly, point by point,
> Thereby to see the minutes how they run:
> How many make the hour full complete,
> How many hours bring about the day,
> How many days will finish up the year,
> How many years a mortal man may live.
> When this is known, then to divide the times:
> So many hours must I tend my flock;
> So many hours must I take my rest;
> So many hours must I contemplate;
> So many hours must I sport myself;
> So many days my ewes have been with young;
> So many weeks ere the poor fools will ean;
> So many years ere I shall shear the fleece:
> So minutes, hours, days, months, and years,
> Past over to the end they were created,
> Would bring white hairs unto a quiet grave.
> Ah, what a life were this! How sweet, how lovely!
> (*3 Henry VI*, 2.5.21–40)

Henry's incessant listing betrays a mind deeply troubled by realities that are too immense for one man to face. On the surface, the speech is about the benefits of a pastoral, contemplative life, but this is merely a tactic by which Henry attempts to put his true situation out of mind. The repetition of 'how many' and 'so many' and the numbing metric regularity of the lines create a kind of rocking motion: Henry attempts to lull or nurse himself into a daydream. But there is no place for him to hide.

Shakespeare punctures Henry's self-induced trance with one of the tetralogy's most poignant set pieces: the sight of 'a son that hath killed

his father [with the dead man in his arms]' and '[a] father [that hath killed his son] . . . bearing of [the body]' (2.5.54, 79). Henry looks on grief-stricken and wonders about his legacy:

> How will the country, for these woeful chances,
> Misthink the king and not be satisfied! . . .
> Sad-hearted men, much overgone with care,
> Here sits a king more woeful than you are.
> (2.5.107–8, 123–4)

Clearly, it is inaccurate to paint Henry as the innocent dupe.[93] He is all too aware of his own situation: that history will judge his turbulent reign harshly and that, ultimately, the current climate of violent power politics is the result of his own passivity. Henry's reaction is painfully, almost endearingly, human; he buckles under the intense pressure and seeks to escape into idealised fantasy. Fortune can be unkind to men born out of time. The most explicit effect of the 'molehill scene' is to draw attention to the horrors of civil war, which tragically set fathers and sons at each other's throats. However, more covertly, it is a damning critique of Henry's morally aloof, *laissez-faire* approach to politics. Shakespeare builds on the thesis implicit in Gloucester's death in *2 Henry VI*: the idea that the refusal to compromise moral principles in the short term for fear of committing evil deeds oneself can lead to much greater evil in the long term. Henry wishes for a life without responsibility, but, paradoxically, he has already absolved himself of his responsibilities as king through the use of myriad proxies and through his failure to intervene at crucial moments (for example, before Gloucester's murder in *2 Henry VI* (3.1), before York's attempt at usurpation in the same play (5.1) or when confronted by Edward in *3 Henry VI* (2.2)). The cruel irony of Henry's dream of becoming a shepherd is that one suspects he would struggle with the tasks of herding and shearing. By showing the paradoxes and failures inherent in the King's approach to politics, Shakespeare rejects both moral absolutism and the recourse to idealism in the face of material dangers.

In *3 Henry VI* we are shown that pacifism is not a means of defeating violence; a leader such as Henry will almost always come to grief against enemies who do not share the same moral scruples. In an essay written during the Second World War, Mattie Swayne obliquely compares Henry VI's attitude during the War of the Roses to Neville Chamberlain's conciliatory dealings with Adolf Hitler before the outbreak of the war:

> Like Henry VI, our liberal rulers have believed so heartily in the civilizing

> influences of our age and in the capacity of human nature to be regenerated that they have neglected to maintain strong guards against the enemies of civilization. Selfish forces have, nevertheless, been on the alert to take advantage of this very faith in the ideal and to bewilder humanity with its own honest doubts and inarticulate hopes. The resulting confusion of loyalties is equal to that which drove Henry VI to condemn himself with other rulers for their lack of responsibility to the people.[94]

High ideals are misplaced when dealing with 'selfish forces', if they are not backed up by affirmative action. Henry VI and Neville Chamberlain may have been good men individually, but their legacies do not make for happy reading. The primacy of interventionism over appeasement is a key feature of Shakespeare's thought. Shakespeare insists on a world in which individuals are defined by their actions rather than by their ideals. His version of history, as told by the *Henry VI* plays, remembers a king who did almost nothing when he should have been proactive and then weeps when he finds the nation tearing itself apart. Thus Henry VI, despite his apparent saintliness, is for Shakespeare a morally questionable king, who neglects his public duty.

However, it would be inaccurate to suggest that *3 Henry VI* condemns Henry completely, because it juxtaposes his piety with the reckless licentiousness of Edward IV. In his portrayal of the two Kings, Shakespeare presents his audience with a serious moral dilemma: given the choice between a king who neglects his power and a king who abuses it, which is preferable? After Henry is captured in 3.1, Shakespeare immediately shifts the action to Edward's court to analyse the alternative monarch. After seizing the throne, Edward wastes no time in abusing his newly acquired power. In a shocking scene, he attempts to coerce the widow Lady Elizabeth Grey (Woodville) to sleep with him:

> KING EDWARD: To tell thee plain I aim to lie with thee.
> LADY GREY: To tell you plain I had rather lie in prison.
> KING EDWARD: Why then, thou shalt not have thy husband's lands. (3.2.69–71)

When Lady Grey remains undeterred by the material threats, Edward, 'the bluntest wooer in christendom' (3.2.83), apparently driven by lust, proposes marriage. This scene mirrors Suffolk's equally lustful wooing of Margaret in *1 Henry VI* (5.3). Like Suffolk, Edward puts his own immediate gratification ahead of the affairs of state and in both cases the impolitic marriage proves to be monumentally disastrous for the King. However, there are crucial differences between the two marriage proposals. Edward does not even attempt to reproduce the fancy rhetorical tricks with which Suffolk had beguiled Margaret; instead, he relies

entirely on his position as king and issues commands ('my request', 'my demand' (3.2.79–80)). The entire scene hinges on the basic power relation between king and subject: the notions of 'service' (3.2.43, 44) and 'command' (3.2.45, 49). Edward makes no secret of his ultimate goal:

> One way – or other – she is for a king
> And she shall be my love, or else my queen. –
> Say that King Edward take thee for his queen? . . .
> I speak no more than what my soul intends
> And that is to enjoy thee for my love.
> (*3 Henry VI*, 3.2.87–9, 94–5)

It is almost as if Edward wishes to prove a point: he is now king and therefore, by right, should be able to 'enjoy' literally the first woman he sets eyes on. It is one of the most flagrant abuses of power in the entire tetralogy.

Edward's exploits set off a chain of events that effectively extends the War of the Roses for another year. In the immediate wake of the proposal, Richard hatches his master-plan to become king by whatever means possible. Of course, it is possible that Richard would have made a bid for the crown under any circumstances, but Edward's lust seems to trigger the speech:

> Ay, Edward will use women honourably –
> Would he were wasted, marrow, bones, and all,
> That from his loins no hopeful branch may spring
> To cross me from the golden time I look for!
> And yet, between my soul's desire and me –
> The *lustful* Edward's title burièd –
> Is Clarence, Henry, and his son, young Edward . . .
> (3.2.124–30, emphasis mine)

Before this scene, Richard shows few signs of personal ambition. He is consistently depicted as a die-hard Yorkist who is a little overeager for bloodshed (see 1.2.28–34) and who seems genuinely to admire his 'warlike father' (2.1.19), the Duke of York. During the wooing scene Richard seems content to look on and indulge in laddish banter with his brother, Clarence. It is only when he is left alone and after he has witnessed Edward's display of sexual power politics that he begins to lament the deformity that renders the prospect of his own sexual exploits with women a 'miserable thought' (3.2.151). Edward's wooing of Lady Grey seems to tease out a latent bitterness in Richard, which sets him on course 'to dream upon the crown' (3.2.168).

However, the marriage creates a much more urgent situation for Edward, which produces both domestic and diplomatic crises and

unwittingly rehabilitates the defeated Lancastrians. The following scene takes place at the court of the French King, Louis XI, where we find Margaret pleading for aid against the Yorkists, and Warwick on a diplomatic mission to marry Edward IV to Louis's daughter, Lady Bona. Obviously, Margaret's and Warwick's aims are directly at odds. Interestingly, Louis does not care about England's internal politics or about whose claim to the throne is better; he wishes only to deal with Warwick, the representative of the current King, Edward (*3 Henry VI*, 3.3.144–50). Louis maintains a clear distinction between politics and his private life; although he remains a 'friend' of Henry and Margaret, this is business – he will do only what is best for France. In sharp contrast to Edward, whose shameless abuse of power we have just witnessed, Shakespeare makes the French King a paragon of public duty. Louis is ready to marry his daughter to Edward to make peace between the nations of England and France, even at the expense of leaving his personal 'friends' in the cold. Then a bundle of letters arrives, bearing news of Edward's proposal to Lady Grey. What follows is a brilliant exposé of the transient and fragile nature of political alliances, which are as easily broken as they are made. The news transforms the scene; it angers Louis ('Dare he presume to scorn us in this manner?' (3.3.178)) and leads an enraged Warwick to 'renounce [Edward] and return to Henry' (3.3.194). Margaret immediately moves to seal the new alliance:

> Warwick, these words have turned my hate to love
> And I forgive and quite forget old faults
> And joy that thou becom'st King Henry's friend.
> (3.3. 199–201)

Louis, in turn, signals his intent to 'aid' the Lancastrians against the Yorkists with 'five thousand men' (3.3.220, 234). And Warwick cements his commitment to the Lancastrian cause by marrying his daughter, Anne Neville, to Margaret's son (and Henry's heir), Prince Edward. This is quickly followed by the defection to the Lancastrians of Clarence, who is also outraged by the impolitic marriage. With his first act as king, Edward has lost a powerful ally in Warwick, made an enemy of Louis, and has even lost his own brother.

In the face of all this, Edward remains imperious, seemingly oblivious to the collateral damage that his marriage has caused: 'They are but Lewis and Warwick: I am Edward, / Your king and Warwick's, and must have my will' (4.1.15–16). He does not or will not see the responsibilities that define the role of king, preferring to view England as his personal fiefdom: 'It is my will and grant, / And for this once my will shall stand for law' (4.1.49–50). Thus it is evident that, if Henry VI

is morally responsible for the civil war because of his neglect of power, Edward IV is equally culpable for exacerbating the situation through such needless abuses of power – if not more so because, unlike Henry, he does not acknowledge his own responsibility. The final two acts of *3 Henry VI* oscillate between the two Kings, as if to underscore the moral dilemma. Henry is temporarily restored to the throne and promptly appoints Warwick and Clarence as his proxies:

> Warwick, although my head still wear the crown,
> I here resign my government to thee . . .
> I make you both [Warwick and Clarence] Protectors of this land
> While I myself will lead a private life
>
> (4.6.23–4, 41–2)

This reads almost as a parody of Henry's shirking of responsibility; as soon is he back in power, he begins the process of weakening his position again. However, at least Henry has come to terms with his own failures and is ready to leave administration to more capable hands (and none more capable than Warwick). But the new government proves short-lived; Henry is soon recaptured, Warwick is killed in battle and Clarence (pragmatically) switches his allegiance back to the winning side. The murders of Henry and Prince Edward follow, and Margaret, defeated and broken, is exiled to France. Edward wins the war, but at what cost? Edward, typically, is in triumphant mood: 'Sound, drums and trumpets! Farewell, sour annoy! / For here, I hope, begins our lasting joy' (5.7.45–6). But as Susan Bennett argues:

> Edward's short-sightedness is treated ironically; any possibility of lasting joy has already been destroyed during the course of the play. His alienation of the French king through the rejection of the Lady Bona in favour of Elizabeth Woodville and the casual manner in which he ships off the deposed Margaret . . . has ensured him enemies overseas. At home, his preferment of his new wife's relatives has alienated many, including his own brothers.[95]

It is obvious that he cannot look forward to 'lasting joy', not with characters such as Margaret, Clarence and Richard to contend with. His impulsive marriage to Lady Grey, born of an arrogant abuse of power, remains a bone of contention that will perpetually undermine his tenure as king, as Clarence's ominous aside near the end of the play attests (5.7.21–5). Furthermore, Edward's bullish belief in the superiority of his own sovereign will over other considerations means that he is liable to make more political mistakes in the future and is potentially blind to cannier political operators, not least his brothers. However, at least for the time being, the civil war is over and the Yorkists' rule unopposed.

It is worth pausing here to consider the ethical and political implications of the contrast between Henry VI and Edward IV found in *3 Henry VI*. The two Kings pose interesting questions for the audience: without doubt, Henry is an incompetent king whose misrule leads the nation to a bloody civil war, but does it follow that the man who removes him from power is morally justified in doing so? Henry neglects his power, but on a personal level he lives virtuously and always wishes the best for his nation: does this make him morally good, or does the fact that he costs thousands of people their lives morally condemn him? Edward makes mistakes and abuses his power, but he successfully brings an end to the War of the Roses (most of *Richard III* takes place in peacetime) and ultimately defeats all of his enemies against considerable odds. Does this success and the potential stability it brings the nation outweigh his earlier, morally questionable actions? It is clear that Shakespeare is not a straightforward moral absolutist, but neither is he an amoralist or, judging from his implicit advocacy of interventionism, a moral relativist.

Again, the most useful comparison to make is with Machiavelli. In Machiavelli, the key criterion for the moral worth of any action is its outcome. For a prince, the desired outcome of any action must be the welfare of the nation. Thus, Machiavelli distinguishes between two types of cruelty:

> I believe that here it is a question of cruelty used well or badly. We can say that cruelty is used well . . . when it is employed once and for all, and one's safety depends on it, and then it is not persisted in but as far as possible turned to the good of one's subjects. Cruelty badly used is that which, although infrequent to start with, as time goes on, rather than disappearing, grows in intensity. Those who use the first method can, with God and men, somewhat enhance their position . . . the others cannot possibly stay in power.[96]

In this way Machiavelli challenges conventional notions of virtue, because individual actions are not seen as *inherently* good or evil but judged in terms of their end result as effective or ineffective. Thus, Machiavelli is an early advocate of consequentialism, which would later be developed by utilitarian thinkers such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. Would it be valid to place Shakespeare in that philosophical tradition? Certainly, what we find in the first tetralogy aligns him more closely with Machiavelli than with those Elizabethans who believed in the Great Chain of Being. But there is also a marked difference between the political thought of Shakespeare and that of Machiavelli. To begin with, Machiavelli would not devote his attention to a monarch such as Henry VI, because his cynical view of the world does not recognise the existence of such figures. Second, Machiavelli is concerned with outlining a coherent doctrine for the acquisition and maintenance of power,

whereas Shakespeare seems more concerned with the paradoxes inherent in monarchy and with testing divergent positions. Henry's disastrous reign would presumably lead a consequentialist such as Machiavelli to dismiss him out of hand as morally culpable and a failure, but Shakespeare does not do that and instead gives Henry ample time to outline his own moral position. However, the *Henry VI* plays plainly do not align themselves with that moral position, but quite explicitly draw attention to Henry's failures as a king. The two ideas – Henry's morality and the good qualities required for effective rule – are incommensurate. What we find, then, is something approaching 'value pluralism', a concept derived from Machiavelli by Isaiah Berlin. As Berlin explains, value pluralism is the idea that:

> The world we encounter in ordinary experience is one in which we are faced with choices between ends equally absolute, the realization of some of which must inevitably involve the sacrifice of others . . . If, as I believe, the ends of men are many, and not all of them are in principle compatible with each other, then the possibility of conflict – and of tragedy – can never wholly be eliminated from human life, either personal or social. The necessity of choosing between absolute claims is then an inescapable characteristic of the human condition.[97]

Even if Henry's message to live by 'virtuous deeds' (*3 Henry VI*, 2.2.49) is desirable, the realities of nation states and their governance ensure that it is almost impossible for a king to choose that path without, as Berlin puts it, 'conflict' or 'tragedy'. As we have seen, for Shakespeare, in order to be successful, a king must fulfil wide-ranging and disparate criteria which are not necessarily compatible. For example, it is not possible to survive without being to some degree personally driven, but if you are personally driven it follows that you cannot be fully committed to the welfare of the state because your ultimate investment is in your own life and career rather than in the public good. Therefore, rulers who find themselves preoccupied with their own survival cannot hope to live up to the ideal of caring only for the commonwealth; the two crucial factors for a good and successful king – personal survival and civic duty – are at odds. In the *Henry VI* plays, the characters driven by public duty (Gloucester, Henry, York and Warwick) do not survive, whereas those who are driven by personal ambition (Edward, Margaret, Richard) achieve their ends, at least for a limited time. The choice between survival and civic duty, then, does not represent a choice between good and evil, but a choice between two 'goods'. The choice between Henry VI and Edward IV is a choice in the truest sense of the word: for his selflessness and care for the commonwealth, Henry necessarily sacrifices his own survival and fails to intervene when he should, whereas by winning

the War of the Roses and securing his own survival, Edward acts selfishly and provokes both internal and external conflict.

In his reading of *The Merchant of Venice*, Robin Headlam Wells, who also believes that Shakespeare has a pluralist view of ethics, argues that the play 'is about understanding ourselves as moral and political beings, and the irresolvable paradoxes that result from the peculiarities of our humanity'.[98] The same can be said of the *Henry VI* trilogy. This is where the humanism of Shakespeare's historiography is most marked; the political struggles of the past demand moral judgement and these plays put kings and would-be kings on stage to be judged, but, after an exhaustive survey of their characters, political approaches, decisions and actions, they ultimately resist judgement because they are involved – as we are – in the perpetual puzzle of humanity. There are a vast number of options available to us, but it is unclear which way to proceed, because every option taken involves inevitable sacrifice, every door opened closes another. In *3 Henry VI* there is, finally, no ultimate solution to the complex problems that are presented to the human condition by history and politics.

Notes

1. Wolfgang Iser, *Staging Politics: The Lasting Impact of Shakespeare's History Plays*, trans. David Henry Wilson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 1.
2. For further details of the disproportionate amount of attention paid to the second tetralogy in studies produced during the twentieth century, see: Harold Jenkins, 'Shakespeare's History Plays: 1900–1951', in *Shakespeare Survey 6: The Histories*, ed. Allardyce Nicoll (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), pp. 1–15; Dennis H. Burden, 'Shakespeare's History Plays: 1952–1983', in *Shakespeare Survey 38: Shakespeare and History*, ed. Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 1–35; Edward Berry, 'Twentieth-century Shakespeare Criticism: The Histories', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, ed. Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 249–56.
3. See Peter Alexander, *Shakespeare's Henry VI and Richard III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929); John Dover Wilson, 'Introduction', in *1 Henry VI*, ed. John Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), pp. i–lvi, especially pp. ix–xiii; Robert Adger Law, 'Links between Shakespeare's History Plays', *Studies in Philology*, 50 (1953), pp. 168–87; E. M. W. Tillyard, 'Shakespeare's Historical Cycle: Organism or Compilation?', *Studies in Philology*, 51 (1954), pp. 34–9; Robert Adger Law, 'Shakespeare's Historical Cycle: Rejoinder', *Studies in Philology*, 51 (1954), pp. 40–1; Irving Ribner, 'The Tudor History Play: An Essay in Definition', *PMLA*, 69:3 (June 1954), pp. 591–601; Irving Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of*

Shakespeare (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 96–8; S. C. Sen Gupta, *Shakespeare's Historical Plays* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 55–8; Hanspeter Born, 'The Date of *2, 3 Henry VI*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 25:3 (Summer 1974), pp. 323–34; Gary Taylor, 'Shakespeare and Others: The Authorship of *Henry the Sixth, Part One*', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama*, 7 (1995), pp. 145–205; Paul J. Vincent, 'Structuring and Revision in *1 Henry VI*', *Philological Quarterly*, 84:4 (Fall 2005), pp. 377–402; Brian Vickers, 'Incomplete Shakespeare: Or, Denying Coauthorship in *Henry the Sixth, Part 1*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 58:3 (Fall 2007), pp. 311–52. I am broadly convinced by Nicholas Grene's argument, which emphasises Shakespeare's immediate economic interests and draws a parallel between the planning of the history plays and the logic of modern Hollywood sequels (Nicholas Grene, *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 7–30). However, Grene's parallel is imprecise, since it would be more accurate to compare the history plays to the *Star Wars* phenomenon and the culture of *franchise* films its success has spawned. In both cases a boldly innovative new genre piece by a playwright / director becomes an unexpected hit (*I Henry VI* in 1592, *Star Wars* in 1977), which, because of demand, spawns several sequels. The market is plainly ripe for more of the same, but, because the narrative has reached its natural conclusion (the death of Richard III, the death of Darth Vader), the author instead plans a series of prequels (the second tetralogy, *Star Wars: Episodes I–III*). I therefore would reverse Grene's conclusion that the first tetralogy was planned while the second was 'incremental'. It seems more likely to me that, as a young playwright, Shakespeare would not have been so bold in 1591 as to plan four plays in advance – which may partly explain why *1 Henry VI* seems to be dislocated from the other plays in the tetralogy (just as *Episode IV: A New Hope* is the least integrated of the *Star Wars* films). The structural differences between *Richard II*, *1* and *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V* that Grene cites as evidence of Shakespeare's tentative, 'incremental' approach to writing the second tetralogy, might equally be seen as an indication of the playwright's growing confidence in his own abilities and his knowledge that these plays were virtually guaranteed to be commercially successful (just as George Lucas was guaranteed captive audiences for the prequel trilogy of *Star Wars* films). Accordingly, I will treat the eight plays as two tightly interlinked tetralogies, and read them in the generally agreed order of their composition. This also makes sense if one accepts the fact, following the work of Gary Taylor, Paul J. Vincent and Brian Vickers, that *1 Henry VI* was very likely co-authored, which further explains why that play should seem at a remove from the rest of the first tetralogy. As Vickers puts it, *1 Henry VI* has a 'fragmentary relation' ('Incomplete Shakespeare', p. 324) to the two other plays in the trilogy. Because of this, and given the importance of Shakespeare's creative intelligence (and therefore authorship) to my argument, I have focused on *2* and *3 Henry VI* rather than the first play in the trilogy.

4. Alan C. Dessen, 'Stagecraft and Imagery in Shakespeare's *Henry VI*', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 23 (1993), p. 65.
5. Moody E. Prior, *The Drama of Power: Studies in Shakespeare's History Plays* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 9.

6. See Stephen Greenblatt, 'Invisible Bullets', in *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), pp. 21–65; Leonard Tennenhouse, *Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare's Genres* (New York and London: Methuen, 1986); Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 'History and Ideology, Masculinity and Miscegenation: The Instance of *Henry V*', in *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 109–42; Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare's History* (New York: St Martin's, 1985); Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare: The Histories* (London: Macmillan, 2000).
7. See Dermot Cavanagh, Stuart Hampton-Reeves and Stephen Longstaffe (eds), *Shakespeare's Histories and Counter-Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).
8. See Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); Jean E. Howard, *The State and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 129–39; Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare's History Plays* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 43–99.
9. See Prior, *The Drama of Power*; Wilbur Sanders, *The Dramatist and the Received Idea: Studies in the Plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).
10. Tennenhouse, *Power on Display*, p. 2.
11. *Ibid*., pp. 5–6.
12. Holderness, *Shakespeare's History*, p. 26.
13. *Ibid*., p. 26.
14. For a pair of paradigmatic examples, see: Richard Wilson, *Will Power: Essays on Shakespearean Authority* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), pp. 24–44, which is discussed in greater detail in the section below, entitled 'Class Politics: Cade's Rebellion'; and John D. Cox, 'Local References in *3 Henry VI*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 51:3 (Autumn 2000), pp. 340–52, which suggests that Shakespeare embellishes Warwick's role in English history as 'the kingmaker' out of local pride.
15. Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, p. 94.
16. Prior, *The Drama of Power*, p. 9.
17. Holderness, *Shakespeare: The Histories*, p. 109.
18. Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare*, p. 100.
19. *Ibid*., p. 110.
20. M. M. Reese, *The Cease of Majesty: A Study of Shakespeare's History Plays* (London: Edward Arnold, 1961), pp. 165–6.
21. Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, 2nd edn (1967; London: Routledge, 1991), p. 9.
22. *Ibid*., pp. 17, 8.
23. J. P. Brockbank, 'The Frame of Disorder – *Henry VI*', in *Early Shakespeare*, ed. John Russell Brown (London: Edward Arnold, 1961), p. 73.
24. Grene, *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays*, p. 97.
25. A. D. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 46.
26. For a comprehensive overview of the depiction of Margaret in the Tudor

chronicles see Patricia-Ann Lee, 'Reflections of Power: Margaret of Anjou and the Dark Side of Queenship', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 39:1 (Summer 1986), pp. 183–217, in particular pp. 215–16.
27. Rackin, *Stages of History*, p. 158.
28. Lee, 'Reflections of Power', p. 217.
29. Helen Mirren, who played Margaret in the Royal Shakespeare Company production directed by Terry Hands during the 1977 to 1978 season, describes the *Henry VI* trilogy as 'all very alive and very modern; the end of Part Three is really like Absurdist Drama, an incredible mixture of tragedy and something funny'. 'Playing Margaret', she says, 'is marvellous because . . . here is a woman who in a long three-part play keeps developing in fascinating ways' (quoted in Homer D. Swander, 'The Rediscovery of *Henry VI*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 29:2 (Spring 1978), pp. 153–4).
30. Prior, *The Drama of Power*, p. 9.
31. It may be suggested that, rather than adopting a form of proto-empiricism, Shakespeare is actually employing the Socratic method of enquiry, on which he relies in other plays (for example, in the long rhetorical scenes of *Troilus and Cressida*): an argument which relies upon point and counterpoint. This is largely in keeping with what I have said, but I prefer to see Shakespeare's method specifically as 'empirical' because this phrase emphasises the observational and experimental qualities inherent in his work. His is an attempt to observe history and make sense of what is found, rather than a coherent act of formal rhetoric, which is to say that Shakespeare makes *a posteriori* propositions in these plays.
32. Sanders, *The Dramatist and the Received Idea*, p. 76.
33. John Foxe, *Actes and monuments of matters most speciall and memorable, happenyng in the Church with an vniuersall history of the same, wherein is set forth at large the whole race and course of the Church, from the primitiue age to these latter tymes of ours, with the bloudy times, horrible troubles, and great persecutions agaynst the true martyrs of Christ, sought and wrought as well by heathen emperours, as nowe lately practised by Romish prelates, especially in this realme of England and Scotland. Newly reuised and recognised, partly also augmented, and now the fourth time agayne published and recommended to the studious reader, by the author (through the helpe of Christ our Lord) Iohn Foxe, which desireth thee good reader to helpe him with thy prayer. Volume 1 only* (At London: Imprinted by Iohn Daye, dwellyng ouer Aldersgate beneath S. Martins, 1583), p. 704.
34. Gupta, *Shakespeare's Historical Plays*, p. 75.
35. Howard, *The State and Social Struggle in Early Modern England*, p. 136.
36. Grene, *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays*, p. 100.
37. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Geoffrey Bull, 4th edn (New York and London: Penguin, 2003), Ch. XV, p. 50.
38. Michael Hattaway, 'Introduction', in *The Second Part of King Henry VI*, ed. Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 19.
39. John D. Cox, *Shakespeare and the Dramaturgy of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 85.
40. It should be noted here that characters who have been designated 'idealistic' do not all subscribe to the same ideology. Henry and Clifford, for example,

are entirely convinced of the ideology of divine providence, whereas Suffolk and Winchester, though ultimately driven by personal interests, remain committed to belief in the Great Chain of Being, while Gloucester is devoted to the ideology of English nationalism. The term is used here to denote the *rigidity* of the character's approach to politics (as opposed to a pragmatic approach) rather than his or her ideological beliefs.

41. Hattaway, 'Introduction', p. 9.
42. Paul Dean, 'Shakespeare's *Henry VI* Trilogy and Elizabethan "Romance" Histories: The Origins of a Genre', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 33:1 (Spring 1982), p. 38.
43. Cox, *Shakespeare and the Dramaturgy of Power*, p. 93.
44. Rackin, *Stages of Power*, pp. 62–3.
45. Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare*, p. 114.
46. Cox, *Shakespeare and the Dramaturgy of Power*, p. 88.
47. Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics* (London: Arden, 2004), p. 75.
48. *Ibid*., p. 76.
49. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, ed. G. D. H. Cole (Toronto and London: J. M. Dent, 1923), pp. 63–4.
50. *Ibid*., pp. 65–6.
51. John Lennon, 'Working Class Hero', John Lennon / Plastic Ono Band (Apple / EMI, 1970).
52. Theodor Meron, 'Crimes and Accountability in Shakespeare', *American Journal of International Law*, 92:1 (January 1998), p. 5.
53. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Ch. XIX, p. 61.
54. Reese, *The Cease of Majesty*, p. 168.
55. Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 124.
56. Wilson, *Will Power*, pp. 32–3.
57. Born, 'The Date of *2, 3 Henry VI*', p. 334.
58. Wilson, *Will Power*, p. 33.
59. *Ibid*., p. 28.
60. *Ibid*., p. 43.
61. Michael D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (New York and London: Methuen, 1985), p. 90.
62. Derek Cohen, *The Politics of Shakespeare* (London: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 62, 55, 60.
63. Jean E. Howard, 'The First Part of the Contention of the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster (The Second Part of Henry VI)', in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1997), p. 210.
64. David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics: A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 239–40.
65. Rackin, *Stages of History*, pp. 213–14; for her full account see pp. 203–17.
66. *Ibid*., p. 216.
67. *Ibid*., p. 217.

68. For a detailed and penetrating historical analysis of Suffolk's encounter with the pirates, see Thomas Cartelli, 'Suffolk and the Pirates: Disordered Relations in Shakespeare's *2 Henry VI*', in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works, Volume II: The Histories*, ed. Richard Dutton and Jean Howard (Malden, MA and London: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 325–43. Cartelli argues that, in his depiction of the 'assured and righteously indignant' (p. 339) pirates, Shakespeare legitimates popular protest as a viable mechanism for achieving social justice.
69. Rackin, *Stages of History*, p. 219.
70. *Ibid*., p. 219.
71. *Ibid*., p. 219.
72. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker*, p. 44.
73. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1973), pp. 272–3.
74. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge* (1978; rpr. New York and London: Penguin, 1998), p. 100.
75. Thomas Cartelli, 'Jack Cade in the Garden: Class Consciousness and Class Conflict in Shakespeare's *2 Henry VI*', in *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property, and Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Richard Burt and John Michael Archer (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 325.
76. Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus' (1969), in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, ed. Fredric Jameson, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), pp. 103–4.
77. Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse*, p. 125.
78. Worden, 'Shakespeare and Politics', p. 34.
79. Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse*, p. 125.
80. See Rackin, *Stages of History*, p. 216.
81. See Blair Worden, 'Shakespeare and Politics', in *Shakespeare and Politics*, ed. Catherine M. S. Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), especially pp. 28–9, in which Worden dismisses the possibility of republicanism in Shakespeare's work on the basis that it is historically unfeasible.
82. Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, p. 67.
83. Grene, *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays*, p. 85.
84. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 80.
85. G. K. Hunter, 'The Royal Shakespeare Company Plays *Henry VI*', *Renaissance Drama*, 9 (1978), p. 93.
86. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 79.
87. *Ibid*., pp. 56–7.
88. Michael Hattaway reads 'his' in this line differently and takes it to mean: 'that Clifford's tongue is mightier than his sword' (Hattaway (ed.), *The Third Part of Henry VI*, p. 111n). However, the fact that Richard picks up on Henry's use of the word 'tongue' and the following line, spoken by Edward, 'Say, Henry, shall I have my right or no?' may suggest that Richard means that Clifford has dominated and silenced the King.
89. Michael Manheim, 'Silence in the *Henry VI* Plays', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 29:1 (1977), p. 74.

90. Edward Berry, *Patterns of Decay: Shakespeare's Early Histories* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1975), p. 163.
91. Grene, *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays*, p. 111.
92. Manheim, 'Silence in the *Henry VI* Plays', p. 71.
93. Note also Henry's keen analysis of the meeting between Margaret, Warwick and the French King, Louis, later (3.1.28–54). Henry readily understands politics – he even accurately predicts the agendas of, and tactics employed by, Margaret and Warwick – but he rejects it, or rather, puts himself on a morally superior plane above it.
94. Mattie Swayne, 'Shakespeare's King Henry VI as a Pacifist', *College English*, 3:2 (November, 1941), pp. 148–9.
95. Susan Bennett, *Shakespeare: The Elizabethan Play* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), p. 23.
96. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, pp. 31–2.
97. Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 168.
98. Robin Headlam Wells, *Shakespeare's Humanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 66.

Chapter 8

Ideology in *Richard II* and *Henry IV*

The Making and Breaking of Ideology: Long Live the King, 'Amen'

The three parts of *Henry VI* reveal a playwright who seems to be obsessed with personalities, the individual traits of rulers and would-be rulers, and their impact upon the course of history. In Chapter 7, I argued that Shakespeare's exhaustive survey of the political spectrum in *Henry VI* suggests which characteristics are needed for an individual to become, and then reign as, a successful king and which characteristics lead to defeat, civil war and ultimate failure in death. I concluded that, although the first tetralogy in general encourages its audience to make political and moral judgements of the people it dramatises, *3 Henry VI* turns away from conventional ethics by recognising that real human beings often find themselves faced with irresolvable dilemmas. A. P. Rossiter calls this 'the constant Doubleness of Shakespeare's vision in the Histories'.[1] The individual may be faced with a *true* choice between 'two goods' or 'two bads' – Henry VI's way or Edward IV's way – both of which are at once valid and invalid. Such a choice necessarily entails moral, political or personal sacrifice, regardless of which option is finally taken. The *Henry VI* plays are violent, intense, competitive and, above all, *personal* affairs in which there are no hiding places for the participants in the political game; even passive inaction is a choice with real consequences. As Norman Rabkin says, 'Shakespeare's politics is tragic precisely because it will not allow us the luxury of evading action'.[2]

I also suggested that, in the scenes of Cade's rebellion, *2 Henry VI* constitutes an implicit critique of the semi-feudal structure of monarchy by highlighting its inadequacies: the arbitrariness of hereditary right (which concentrates power in an individual who may have all, some or none of the relevant personal qualifications for kingship) and the latent yet ever-looming conflict between segregated classes who do not understand each

other. These scenes in which class tensions serve to highlight ideological imperfections foreshadow Shakespeare's increased interest in the role of ideology in maintaining the structure of power in *Richard III* and the second tetralogy. In the *Henry VI* plays, Shakespeare had explored the intricacies of personal and political action in history primarily from the point of view of individuals. He had already, as it were, written his own dramatic 'ABC of power',[3] which developed a comprehensive practical understanding of political strategy to rival Machiavelli's *The Prince*. In the second tetralogy, there is a widening of the lens, a zooming out which captures not only individuals caught in systems of power, but also the systems of power themselves.

This is immediately evident in *Richard III*, where the political lessons that were demonstrated so comprehensively in the *Henry VI* plays are, for the first time, taken for granted as basic political principles. After reading the *Henry VI* plays, it comes as no surprise when Richard begins the play by declaring openly that he is 'determinèd to prove a villain' (*Richard III*, 1.1.30) by using underhand means to unseat his brother, Edward IV. In fact, such things are almost to be expected; Richard is only perfecting the formula that brought his father, York, so close to the throne. As Jan Kott puts it, 'Richard III is a king who has read *The Prince*'.[4] We have already seen that Edward is an impulsive and tactless king. Thus, in the brutal and warped political world of the first tetralogy, Richard's plot to dispose of his brothers as he 'marr[ies] Warwick's youngest daughter' (1.1.154) seems entirely justified, commendable even – a point underlined by the fact that the audience becomes complicit with Richard's plans as he divulges them in soliloquy. The play is less concerned with the practical question of *how* an individual can become king (because we already know), and more interested in the philosophical or structural question of *what* kingship entails both personally and nationally.

The key scene in this respect is 3.7: Richard's wonderfully stage-managed ascension to the throne, which Andrew Hadfield describes as a 'grotesquely comic process'.[5] The scene starts with a private exchange between Richard and his chief ally, Buckingham. Buckingham has been trying to win popular support for Richard's bid for the crown. Richard asks Buckingham if the crowd cried 'God save Richard, England's royal king!', to which Buckingham replies: 'No, so God help me, they spake not a word' (3.7.24). Richard is irritated and complains about the 'tongueless blocks' who would 'not speak' (3.7.42). The famous set-piece in which Richard appears before the Mayor of London and a crowd of citizens 'between two Bishops' (3.7.94) as 'a kind of latter-day Henry VI'[6] follows. Buckingham outlines the case for young Prince

Edward's illegitimacy before requesting that Richard, as the next legitimate heir to the throne, step into the breach to alleviate the crisis. Richard feigns both modesty and piety and answers as Henry VI might:

> Alas, why would you heap this care on me?
> I am unfit for state and majesty.
> I do beseech you, take it not amiss:
> I cannot nor I will not yield to you.
> (3.7.203–6)

With their new understanding of the situation, the crowd is taken aback at the refusal. As Wilbur Sanders notes, no one is prepared to admit that such devout behaviour is alien to court life and Richard plays on the crowd's hypocrisy. These 'sham moralists'[7] now *want* Richard as their king – and he does not refuse a second invitation.

The scene reaches its climax when Buckingham and Richard finally achieve the desired outcome of their ruse:

> BUCKINGHAM: Long live King Richard, England's worthy king.
> ALL: Amen.
> (3.7.238–9)

Richard now has everything he needs for effective power: military might and popular support or – in Althusser's terms – the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) and the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA). I mention Althusser here with good reason; the final stage of his so-called 'quadruple system of [ideological] interpellation' depends upon both individuals' recognition of themselves 'in ideology' and their subsequent vocalisation of it. This is a complex but none the less straightforward idea. It is worth quoting Althusser verbatim:

> We observe that the structure of all ideology, interpellating individuals as subjects in the name of a Unique and Absolute Subject is *speculary*, i.e. a mirror-structure, and *doubly* speculary: this mirror duplication is constitutive of ideology and ensures its functioning . . . The duplicate mirror-structure of ideology ensures simultaneously:
>
> - the interpellation of 'individuals' as subjects;
> - their subjection to the Subject;
> - the mutual recognition of subjects and Subject, the subjects' recognition of each other, and finally, the subject's recognition of himself;
> - the absolute guarantee that everything really is so, and that on condition that subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be all right: Amen – '*So be it*.'[8]

The key difference between Richard III and his two immediate predecessors, Henry VI and Edward IV, is that he seems to understand that power, and his ultimate position as king, depend not only upon mili-

tary strength but also upon this 'double-mirror' structure. Even though Richard consciously 'play[s] the maid's part' (3.7.50) by initially refusing the crown, his eventual acceptance is as important to the process as the crowd's recognition of Richard as their new king, which they must then register in public discourse (by chanting the slogan 'God Save King Richard'). This last point is crucial: not only does power rest on the mutual ideological recognition of the Subject (the King) and his subjects (the crowd), but it must also be vocalised. It is not enough for ideology simply to exist; to serve the purposes of power, it must be manifested in speech and language (or, in Foucault's terms, 'discourse'). This explains why Richard is so insistent that the crowd cheer his name; as long as they remain 'tongueless blocks', he has no power over them. His transition from ambitious duke to all-powerful monarch can be completed only once his subjects recognise him as their king and he recognises them as his subjects *and* only once those subjects have accepted that situation as the new status quo: 'Amen'.

This 'double-mirror' of ideology on which power depends comes to preoccupy Shakespeare in the second tetralogy. Where the first tetralogy explores the minutiae of politics, the second tetralogy asks more penetrating questions: what is the role of a king? What is it that sets kings apart from those they rule? What force compels people to take to the battlefield and kill each other in war? And, perhaps most searching of all, why do people accept the situation in which they are ruled by another individual, even though it might be to their own disadvantage? There is an increased awareness of the power of ideology throughout the second tetralogy. As Hadfield says, 'the notion of the king as actor assumes centre stage throughout the [second] tetralogy'.[9] But this is not simply to show that kingship requires a certain degree of ceremonial theatricality; it also exposes the fact that the role of king, far from being sacred or divinely ordained, is an artificial, ideological construct – a part played, like any other, by mortal human beings. As Richard II concedes, 'I live with bread, like you' (*Richard II*, 3.2.171) and Henry V tells his soldiers while in disguise, 'the King is but a man, as I am . . . All his senses have but human conditions' (*Henry V*, 4.1.99). However, kingship is also a role *un*like any other in that it is both subject to the demands of power *and* the sole source of that power's legitimacy. If the first tetralogy reads like an 'ABC of power', an attempt to show the particulars of political reality in action, then the second tetralogy reads like an attempt to understand the workings of the entire system. In linguistic terms, we might say that Shakespeare shifts his attention from instances of *parole* to *langue* – that is, from the particular acts of individuals to the systematic principles of power. This is not to suggest that Shakespeare

suddenly becomes abstract in his thought, because he still very much privileges praxis over theory. Rather, by reading the plays of the second tetralogy closely, I hope to show not only that Shakespeare understands the inner workings of power, but also that he is finely attuned to the factors upon which different types of power are contingent and to the means by which they are undermined.

Cultural Historicism and the Second Tetralogy

Since the plays of the second tetralogy are explicitly concerned with the issues of power and ideology, it is not surprising that they have been central in the development of cultural historicism. In many ways, they provided the main site of the major debates between new historicists and cultural materialists throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Stephen Greenblatt's seminal essay on the *Henriad*, 'Invisible Bullets', is still read by many as the paradigmatic new historicist statement. Greenblatt's careful and subtle analysis of the 'relation between orthodoxy and subversion'[10] in the two parts of *Henry IV* and *Henry V* set the agenda for discussion of the history plays for the succeeding two decades. Greenblatt's contention that 'the subversiveness that is genuine and radical . . . is at the same time contained by the power it would appear to threaten . . . the subversiveness is the very product of that power and furthers its end'[11] has been almost as influential as E. M. W. Tillyard's grand conclusions about Shakespeare's advocacy of the Great Chain of Being in the 1940s.[12] Just as readers in the 1950s and 1960s were obliged to accept, adapt or contest Tillyard's thesis, so readers in the 1990s and 2000s could ill afford to ignore Greenblatt's powerful argument. Accordingly, the cultural materialist responses to 'Invisible Bullets' – which include a much-discussed essay on *Henry V* by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (see Chapter 3), an impressive monograph by Phyllis Rackin and several studies by Graham Holderness[13] – undoubtedly represent some of the best work produced on the second tetralogy in the past quarter-century. For all their theoretical shortcomings, collectively the cultural historicists have made an invaluable and lasting contribution to our understanding of the history plays. First, and most obviously, there is an increased awareness of historical context, of how these plays might have been received in the 1590s and early 1600s. Second, there is an increased awareness that the history plays deal at some level with the issue of state power and its containment of potential resistance through covert ideological or discursive methods.

However, these gains have also come at a cost, which I have dis-

cussed in some detail in Chapters 2 and 3. The primary theoretical problem with cultural historicism is the assumption – inherited from anti-humanists such as Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault and Clifford Geertz – that individual human beings are structural effects, born 'with very few useful instincts'[14] and virtually devoid of autonomous thought, and the consequent assumption that texts are little more than the sum of their cultural contexts. In practice, this has had two main consequences for the criticism of Shakespeare's plays: first, there is the tendency to read them either as products of the status quo that serve to underpin the dominant ideology or as products of 'sub-cultures' that seek to undermine the dominant ideology; and second, there is the near-total neglect of their formal and linguistic features. These consequences inevitably compromise even the most lucid and engaging cultural historicist readings of the history plays. Richard Levin views the overwhelming concern of such readings with 'certain ideological issues' as a narrowing of focus. 'Typically', he says, they 'frame an argument, then turn selectively to passages in one or more texts' to support it – a tendency which limits stylistic analyses and what Levin calls 'a kind of alertness' to the details and nuances of each play.[15] Kiernan Ryan makes a similar argument; he speaks of 'the tunnel vision to which so much radical criticism seems to be congenitally predisposed' and complains about 'the neglect of formal techniques, structural implications and dramatic parentheses, whose import changes the meaning of the narrative they articulate'.[16]

One unfortunate by-product of cultural historicism's preoccupation with power has been the emergence of a false dichotomy in readings of Shakespeare's plays. Critics oscillate between the 'containment' thesis of new historicism and its 'subversive' alternative found in cultural materialism, which, to draw on Ryan once more, 'simply reverses the poles of the orthodox view'.[17] Annabel Patterson voices similar sentiments: '[recent readings of the histories] fall simply, even crudely, on either side of the line that divides belief from scepticism, idealism from cynicism, or, in contemporary parlance, legitimation from subversion'.[18] It seems to me that such polarised readings fail to grasp what earlier generations of critics readily accepted as an essential feature of Shakespeare's dramatic practice: namely, the consideration of two contrasting alternatives held in dialectical tension.[19] In forcing the playwright to take sides in the dramas he is depicting, cultural historicists fail to acknowledge what Norman Rabkin calls 'Shakespeare's habitual recognition of the irreducible complexity of things'.[20] The argument that this sort of polarity is the result of a solid understanding of Shakespeare's historical context does not hold water, because it is perfectly possible for a professional historian of early modern England, such as Blair Worden, to accept

the ambivalence inherent in Shakespeare's work.[21] In other words, the dichotomous, polarised view of Shakespeare's historical drama is not a *necessary* consequence of historicism, but simply the peculiar way it has manifested itself in Shakespeare studies of late.

Notwithstanding these criticisms of cultural historicism, the problem is not so much with the focus on 'certain ideological issues', but rather with how these issues are dealt with. In Chapter 3, I demonstrated how Dollimore and Sinfield's selective reading of *Henry V* misappropriates key passages to further its own political ends. This is not to suggest that such readings are discussing the 'wrong' issues, but rather that they are discussing the right issues in the wrong way. The emphasis on historical context can distort texts as much as it can illuminate them, when the context is given priority and the text is reduced to the ideas and values of its historical period. This way of reading does not allow for the exceptional: for the possibility of a playwright who might have ideas at odds with, or even ahead of, his time.[22] Even Terry Eagleton, one of the foremost Marxist critics of his generation, quips that Shakespeare seems to have been 'almost certainly familiar with the writings of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein and Derrida'.[23] When dealing with plays as complex and sophisticated as the histories, it strikes me as more appropriate to study the distinctive features of the texts themselves than to bind and subordinate them to other texts of the period, because Shakespeare's precise understanding and articulation of the issues and ideas that he dramatises are *not* like any other. There may be innumerable points of overlap between the history plays and, for example, Holinshed's *Chronicles* – such as the fact that both sets of texts recount roughly the same narratives – but they are manifestly not the same thing. They are distinguished by genre, form, language, characterisation and, perhaps most of all, by the fact that they were written by different individuals, who clearly had quite different views of the matters they had in common. Thanks to cultural historicism we have an increased critical awareness of historical context and a renewed alertness to the machinations of power, but neither of these developments should preclude critics from paying close attention to the way Shakespeare wrote and organised his plays. For example, we can take from Greenblatt the idea that power can maintain 'the constant production of its own radical subversion and the powerful containment of that subversion',[24] but within a framework that assumes as a basic principle that creative individuals such as Shakespeare are intelligent and endowed with a certain, if limited, degree of intellectual and imaginative autonomy.

It does a great disservice to these plays to read them as partisan statements that champion or challenge the establishment. This way of

understanding the history plays reduces them, as Ryan writes, 'to the ideology they are intent on unravelling'.[25] Rather than seeing them as working to uphold or undermine the dominant ideology, I prefer to view the history plays as a serious attempt (or a series of serious attempts) by Shakespeare to make sense of the past: a unique effort to understand through drama certain aspects of the human condition which cannot be reduced to Tudor ideology or other sets of received ideas. Harold Bloom puts a version of the argument that Shakespeare is the source, not a mere mirror, of meaning much more forcefully:

> Standard scholarly views of literary history, and all Marxist reductions of literature and history alike, have the curious allied trait of working very well, for, say, Thomas Dekker, but being absurdly irrelevant for Shakespeare. Falstaff and the Tudor theory of kingship? Falstaff and surplus value? . . . With Falstaff as with Hamlet . . . Shakespearean representation is so self-begotten and so influential that we can apprehend it only by seeing that it originates us. We cannot judge a mode of representation that has overdetermined our ideas of representation . . . Falstaff is not how meaning is renewed, but rather how meaning gets started.[26]

Characteristically, Bloom pushes the point too far, but he touches on something of great importance: the fact that Shakespeare and Dekker are distinct, individual playwrights, whose plays are equally distinct because – despite working during the same period – they were different people with different ideas and different dramatic and poetic gifts. They cannot be conflated as if they were both avatars of the same monolithic culture, no matter how insidious its processes of containment. As Bloom goes on to say, Shakespeare's plays are 'the product of [his] will over language, a will that changes characters through and by what they say'.[27] In short, Shakespeare had a mind of his own, a mind which is best understood by textual rather than contextual analysis.

Richard II: 'Such is the breath of kings' (1.3.208)

In *Shakespeare from the Margins*, Patricia Parker picks key words or phrases and uses them to unlock the plays from which they are taken.[28] If we were to use a similar method to read *Richard II*, our key word might be 'tongue' or 'speak'. From the very start of the play, when Bolingbroke and Mowbray confront each other before the King at Windsor Castle, we are made to think of conflict primarily in linguistic terms or, more specifically, in terms of speech itself. Shakespeare does not present the quarrel between Bolingbroke and Mowbray as a fist-fight but as a verbal duel, 'the bitter clamour of two eager tongues' (1.1.49).

As Bolingbroke frames his accusations against Mowbray, he is careful to express the wish that 'heaven be the record of his speech' (1.1.30). We are reminded of the ideological 'Amen' so crucial to Richard III's enthronement in the earlier play. Bolingbroke wishes to 'record' his 'speech' in the correct ideological register. However, Bolingbroke is also keen to associate his speech with action. Twice during his opening gambit he affirms that, for him, language is only a temporary substitute for concrete action: 'for what I speak / My body shall make good upon this earth . . . What my tongue speaks my right-hand sword may prove' (1.1.36–7, 46). Even though he has couched his objection to Mowbray in the correct discourse, he is eager to move matters from the linguistic into the physical realm, where duelling tongues can be replaced by 'arm to arm' (1.1.74) combat.

By the time he reaches the end of his charge, Bolingbroke has shifted completely from the realm of speech to a wholly physical world in which the 'blood' of the murdered Duke of Gloucester 'cries / Even from the tongueless caverns of the earth' (1.1.104–5). In such a 'tongueless' world, Bolingbroke relies upon his body to avenge Gloucester's death: 'This arm shall do it or this life be spent' (1.1.108). Richard and Mowbray respond by immediately shifting back to the verbal register as the King transmutes Bolingbroke's domain of 'tongueless caverns' and 'arms' into sound: 'How high a pitch his resolution soars' (1.1.109). And Mowbray urges the King to 'bid his ears a little while be deaf' (1.111–12). From the start of the scene, Richard refers to the conflict exclusively in terms of speech and sound. He asks John of Gaunt whether or not he has 'sounded' (1.1.8) out his son about his accusations against Mowbray before stating that he 'will hear / The accuser and accusèd freely speak' (1.1.16–17). Plainly, 'speech' is the domain in which Richard feels he has the most authority.

When it is Mowbray's turn to respond to Bolingbroke's charge, Richard again emphasises his call for 'free speech' (1.1.123). Of course, Mowbray's speech is anything but 'free'; it is subject entirely to Richard's power. Shakespeare suggests this poetically. Towards the end of Mowbray's answer to Bolingbroke, during which he throws down his gage, his verse breaks out into rhyming couplets: 'In haste whereof most heartily I pray / Your highness to assign our trial day' (1.1.150–1). Richard's next line is designed both to reassert his power and to steer the conflict away from the physical: 'Wrath-kindled gentlemen, be ruled by me. / Let's purge this choler without letting blood' (1.1.152–3). Richard not only drains the conflict of physical violence, but also symbolically rejects Mowbray's rhymes, as 'me' and 'blood' disrupt the sequence of couplets. In the very next line, Richard begins his *own*

sequence of rhymes starting with 'physician' and 'incision' (1.1.154–5). When John of Gaunt replies four lines later, he confirms the couplets with 'age', 'gage', 'when' and 'again' (1.1.160–3). Then Richard commands Mowbray to kneel before him: 'Norfolk throw down! We bid, there is no boot' (1.1.164). Mowbray obeys while submitting to the rhyme: 'Myself I throw, dread sovereign, at thy foot' (1.1.165). Now that Mowbray has accommodated himself to *Richard's* rhyme-scheme (as opposed to his own), Richard is happy to pick up, at least partly, his rhyme 'blood' (1.1.172) with the off-rhyme 'withstood' (1.1.173). When Richard issues the same command to Bolingbroke – 'Cousin, throw down your gage. Do begin' (1.1.186) – Bolingbroke has no option but to play by Richard's rules; he submits to the rhyme with 'sin' (1.1.187). Bolingbroke speaks all his remaining lines in the scene in strict heroic couplets featuring mostly full, masculine rhymes. Bolingbroke makes one final effort to render the conflict in grotesquely physical terms:

> Ere my tongue
> Shall wound my honour with such feeble wrong,
> Or sound so base a parle, my teeth shall tear
> The slavish motive of recanting fear,
> And spit it bleeding in his high disgrace
> Where shame doth harbour, even in Mowbray's face.
> (1.1.190–5)

This graphic image of Bolingbroke ripping out his own tongue with his teeth in order to spit it in Mowbray's face (literally rendering himself 'tongueless' and so the complete man of action) is stripped of any symbolic power it might have because he is forced to speak it in the straightjacket of Richard's poetic form.

In contrast, at the end of the scene, Richard asserts his linguistic supremacy by showing that he is at liberty to break the rhyme scheme at any time he chooses. Just as he does when he disrupts Mowbray's sequence at 1.1.152–3, after Bolingbroke finishes his speech Richard immediately shifts back into blank verse for four lines before restarting the sequence on his own terms at 1.1.200–1 ('arbitrate' / 'hate'). In this scene, Richard is the only person who is truly at liberty to demonstrate 'free speech', because he is the only character who is free to stop and start rhyme schemes as he pleases. He twice halts another character's run of couplets as if tacitly scolding them for starting one in the first place. But no character dares to decline one of Richard's rhymes. In this first scene of *Richard II*, Shakespeare shows how Richard regulates his power almost exclusively through language and its chief instrument, the tongue. He wins the symbolic struggle between 'speech' (or sound) and

Bolingbroke's 'tongueless' world of 'arms' not only by carefully controlling the sorts of images used, but also by asserting his power by dictating the poetic form of the dialogue. Despite this display of linguistic authority, Phyllis Rackin is critical of Richard's handling of the quarrel between Bolingbroke and Mowbray because he is unable to stop it and 'capitulates' by arranging the trial by combat.[29] However, Rackin overlooks the possibility that the trail by combat was the outcome Richard intended. The spectacle of the trial would not only appeal to Richard's sense of theatricality, but also explicitly highlight his authority – a timely reminder to all those in attendance that the King's word is law. That Richard wishes to prevent the action turning from the linguistic to the physical is not in doubt. He not only succeeds in this aim but also does so in the manner that most visibly draws attention to his authority: by throwing down his warder just before the chivalric duel is about to begin. There is everything to suggest that Richard planned this sequence of events from the start, because – in the short term, at least – it serves to augment his authority.

Richard's penchant for ruling by language partly accounts for what Tillyard calls the 'extreme formality' of the play.[30] When Richard issues a command – 'be ruled by me' – it is the formal impetus of his language *alone* that compels both Mowbray and Bolingbroke to act. As M. M. Mahood says, this poet-king has 'faith in words'.[31] Richard makes spoken discourse his dominion and as long as his subjects are caught – or 'interpellated'[32] – in it, he will continue to have power over them. Gaunt, who finds his own 'tongue . . . party' (1.3.227) to this discursive power, finds himself saying things that lead to his own ruin: 'you gave leave to my unwilling tongue / Against my will to do myself this wrong' (1.3.234–5). Elsewhere, York asks Richard, 'how long / Shall tender duty make me suffer wrong?' (2.1.164–5). This is the power of ideology: the power to compel people, without apparent coercion, to say and do things that are not necessarily in their own best interests but in the interests of the sovereign. Foucault is very clear on this point when describing Bentham's Panopticon:

> the major effect of the Panopticon [is] to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power . . . [T]he perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary . . . He who is subjected to the field of [the Panopticon's] visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power . . . he becomes the principle of his own subjection. By this very fact, the external power may throw off its physical weight . . .[33]

Formal language is Richard's discursive equivalent of the Panopticon, because as long as it is spoken in England during his reign the king's

presence is felt and his subjects regulated; the very act of speaking makes Richard 'everywhere present and visible'.[34] As Harry Berger argues, 'this is political, not merely poetic, mastery'.[35]

It is not surprising, then, that the 'duel' scene at Coventry (1.3) which follows shortly should be so anti-climactic and so thoroughly devoid of action. Syntactically, the scene plays out like a series of sub-clauses waiting for the main verb. There is an extended preamble during which there is much fanfare, standing and sitting, and many introductory remarks, but not very much action. Bolingbroke and Mowbray repeat their respective grievances before the King, only to have them repeated again by their heralds. By the time Richard makes his famous intervention by throwing down his warder at 1.3.118, the audience has heard the arguments of both sides a total of *three* times (once from 1.1). Rackin, again, views Richard's handling of the trial in terms of failure: 'when Richard stops the trial by combat he interferes with a symbolic embodiment of his own authority . . . In preventing the symbolic ritual of chivalry, Richard attacks the source of the only authority that makes him king.'[36] But this contradicts the point Rackin herself acknowledges earlier: it was never Richard's intention for Bolingbroke and Mowbray to come to blows. The entire play thus far has built up to this point only for the promise of action between Bolingbroke and Mowbray to be broken at the last minute by a series of decrees spoken by Richard. Physical battles, of the sort that Bolingbroke had been looking forward to, have no place in Richard's poetic scheme. Accordingly, he describes the proposed duel in terms of its jarring sounds, as being 'roused up with boist'rous untuned drums, / With harsh-resounding trumpets' dreadful bray, / And grating shock of wrathful iron arms' (1.3.128–30). Military instruments do not keep time with the beat of Richard's metre. Richard's motives for stopping the duel and exiling both Bolingbroke and Mowbray are well known. First, Richard himself issued the order to kill the Duke of Gloucester. If Bolingbroke were to win the duel, Richard would be in the uncomfortable position of condemning a man who had carried out his orders. However, if Mowbray were to win, Richard would be implicitly admitting that he had sanctioned Gloucester's murder. Second, both Mowbray and Bolingbroke were part of the group of rebels, known as the Lords Appellant, who had risen in arms and defeated Richard in 1387. So ridding England of both men effectively buries the question of Gloucester's murder and secures the throne from powerful lords who have a history of rebellion. But Richard also has more immediate motives. He no doubt fears that allowing the physical conflict to take place would not only give the eventual victor too much power, but also draw attention to their prowess in physical

action, a field in which Richard is weak. The King cannot afford to let action dictate the course of events, because he knows his power depends exclusively on form and language.

The banishments of Bolingbroke and Mowbray show Richard at the peak of his power. His ideological strategy rests entirely on the fact that when he speaks – 'Breathe I against thee' (1.3) – his subjects listen. To return to our linguistic motif: Richard makes England his *langue*, a kingdom in which all utterances spoken in a certain idiom (verse) ultimately signify his power. This is perhaps why *Richard II* contains no prose. Until his death, even the gardeners and common citizens are caught in his ideological web of formal language and therefore speak in blank verse (see 3.4). Thus, even explicit criticism of the King is contained – in Greenblatt's sense of the word – by the fact that it must be articulated in Richard's idiom. Of course, in the presence of the King himself, criticism is simply not permitted. When the dying Gaunt objects to Richard's seizure of Bolingbroke's inheritance, Richard chastises him for speaking out of turn: 'this tongue that speaks so freely in thy head / Should run thy head from thy unreverent shoulders' (2.1.123–4). In any case, the full force of Gaunt's criticism (1.2.93–103) is contained by the fact that he has to speak it in Richard's linguistic prison. Ronald R. Macdonald sums it up nicely: 'in the very act of denouncing flatterers, Gaunt is constrained to use the language of sacred kingship . . . It is not that Gaunt wishes to flatter Richard (quite the opposite), but that the only language available to him contains and supports . . . the system of sacred kingship.'[37] Shortly after Gaunt's death, Northumberland tells Richard he should visit Gaunt. Richard's response is, 'What says he?' (2.1.149). Northumberland's answer – which is to tell Richard that Gaunt has died – is framed in terms of its impact upon speech: 'Nay, nothing: all is said. / His tongue is now a stringless instrument. / Words, life, and all, old Lancaster hath spent' (2.1.149–51). Notice that the image of the 'tongue' as a 'stringless instrument' bereft of 'words' precedes any mention of the loss of 'life'. Language and speech appear to matter more to the King than trifling physical matters such as the life or death of an uncle. Richard rules England as a sort of linguistic dictatorship. Thus, when Mowbray learns of his banishment, his immediate thoughts are not about his imminent dislocation and separation from his family and loved ones, but about language. He makes a series of statements bemoaning the impotence or imprisonment of his tongue: 'Now my tongue's use is to me no more' (1.3.155), 'Within my mouth you have enjailed my tongue, / Doubly portcullised with my teeth and lips' (1.3.160–1). Mowbray views the exile as a symbolic death: 'What is thy sentence then but speechless death, / Which robs my tongue from

breathing native breath?' (1.3.166–7). Richard has not only banished Mowbray, he has linguistically and ideologically castrated him. The inmates of Richard's poetic prison are thus doubly bound: first, by the fact that the realm of speech *itself* asserts Richard's absolute authority through form, and second, by the fact that the prospect of being banished from that realm neutralises any ideological power a subject might possess. On his home turf of language and speech, Richard is almost impregnable.

If Bolingbroke is to stand any chance against the King, he has to wage an asymmetrical war, which marginalises the symbolic power of Richard's poetry as much as possible, while emphasising his weakness in action. By 1.3, whether consciously or not, Bolingbroke has already done much of the groundwork for starting such a war. As I have shown, he persistently attempts to draw attention to the material dimension of his plight. Bolingbroke's immediate reaction to his banishment is marked by the fact that he thinks of the *physical* consequences of moving to another country: 'now our flesh is banished from this land' (1.3.190). Bolingbroke does not share Mowbray's fear of his tongue being 'enjailed', not least because he promised to rip out his own tongue in 1.1 if his accusations against Mowbray proved false. It is safe to say that Bolingbroke sets much less stock by tongues than either Mowbray or Richard, because he is nowhere near the master of words that Richard is. As he prepares to leave his father and the country, words escape him. When Gaunt asks him, 'to what purpose dost thou hoard thy words[?]' (1.3.242), he answers: 'I have too few to take my leave of you, / When the tongue's office should be prodigal / To breathe the abundant dolour of the heart' (1.3.244–6). Bolingbroke seems incapable of articulating his pain; he cannot, as Richard does with aplomb later in the play, 'write sorrow' (3.2.143). Richard alludes a number of times to Bolingbroke's comparative inadequacy when it comes to speaking. For example, during the deposition scene he calls him 'silent king' (4.1.280) and mocks his clumsy usage of the word 'convey' (4.1.307). Nicholas Grene points out that Bolingbroke 'never speaks in soliloquy, never delivers a single line aside . . . we never see him in private, never hear him off the record', which leads him to the conclusion that 'there is an asymmetry of representation' in *Richard II*.[38] In fact, contrary to Grene's claims, Bolingbroke *does* have a private moment with his father, Gaunt, shortly before he leaves England, as we have seen. It is not so much that Bolingbroke is not given a soliloquy that is of note, but rather that he would not know what to say if he was given one. The disparity between the number of lines given to Richard and Bolingbroke reflects a fundamental difference in their characters: Richard is a master

of language whose *modus operandi* as a king is to rule ideologically through speech, whereas Bolingbroke achieves his ends 'with hard bright steel' (3.2.107). I am not convinced by Grene's argument that Bolingbroke 'wears a poker-face throughout' the play as if he were a master strategist,[39] because it seems to me that he has no other option. Bolingbroke cannot hope to beat Richard at his own game, so he must force the king to play his.

Richard's unusual reliance on language to govern England is seen in the play as a break with the practice of the previous King, Edward III.[40] After Richard callously strips the Lancasters of their estates and related revenues, the rebels Willoughby, Ross and Northumberland discuss Richard's reign. Amid the talk of forced loans and grievous taxes, Willoughby wonders where all the money has gone; Northumberland has this to say:

> Wars hath not wasted it; for warred he hath not,
> But basely yielded upon compromise
> That which his ancestors achieved with blows.
> More hath he spent in peace than they in wars.
> (2.1.253–6)

It is safe to say that Richard's purely ideological style of government is not popular because the King is perceived as being inactive. The gardener of 3.4 repeats these criticisms. He calls Richard 'wasteful King' (3.4.56) and laments his 'waste of idle hours'. Thus, Richard's main strength (his mastery of language) leads to his biggest weakness (his failure to act), because he relies so heavily on language and speech to rule. Shakespeare shows that ideology is ineffective if it is not supported by physical action (which, for those in power seeking to maintain order, tends to take the form of violence), because there is nothing to deter subjects from simply breaking rank. Foucault's 'perpetual victory that avoids any physical confrontation'[41] is thwarted if the subjects are able to assert themselves physically. From Bolingbroke's illegal return to England in 2.3 and his decision to challenge the King's word explicitly ('I am a subject, / And I challenge the law' (2.3.132–3)) it is not long before Richard surrenders his grip on the country. Shakespeare shows us the limits of ideological power.

At first Richard thinks he can defeat Bolingbroke using his ideological powers alone; as Catherine Belsey puts it, he 'clings to the imaginary sovereignty of the signifier'.[42] His reaction to news of Bolingbroke's growing military strength is revealing:

> So when this thief, this traitor, Bolingbroke . . .
> Shall see us rising in our throne, the east,
> His treasons will sit blushing in his face,

Not able to endure the sight of day,
But, self-affrighted, tremble at his sin.
Not all the water in the rough rude sea
Can wash the balm from an anointed king.
The breath of worldly men cannot depose
The deputy elected by the Lord.
For every man that Bolingbroke hath pressed
To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown,
God for his Richard hath in heavenly pay
A glorious angel.
(3.2.43, 46–57)

Richard does not entertain, or perhaps does not wish to entertain, the prospect of Bolingbroke simply ignoring the ideological implications of facing an anointed king. Richard quietly attempts to shift the conflict back into the realm of speech. Notice that he says 'the *breath* of worldly men cannot depose' him, but he surely knows that, should Bolingbroke 'lift shrewd steel' against him, no angels will come to his aid.

This is confirmed when Richard goes 'pale' (3.2.71) after hearing Salisbury's report that his Welsh army of 20,000 has deserted him. The news comes as a stark reality-check for Richard and, for a moment, he realises the grave danger he is in. However, after a brief prompt from Aumerle, he recovers and returns to the relative safety of ideological rhetoric: 'I had forgot myself. Am I not King? / . . . Is not the King's name forty thousand names? / Arm, arm, my name! A puny subject strikes / At thy great glory' (3.2.79, 81–3). Richard invokes the point of legitimation on which his entire ideological system rests: the fact that the king, by the divine right conferred on him by his royal birth, has power over his 'puny subject[s]'. However, Scrope soon brings Richard back down to material reality with news of Bolingbroke's growing numbers and the deaths of the Earl of Wiltshire, Bushy, Bagot and Green. It finally dawns on Richard that his power is contingent not on the symbolic power of words, but on material things and, ultimately, on his ability to threaten and employ physical violence to secure his sovereignty. In one of the play's most memorable speeches, Richard comes to terms, for the first time, with the fact that without these things his crown is rendered 'hollow' and there is little to differentiate him from his subjects:

For within the hollow crown
That rounds the mortal temples of a king
Keeps Death his court; and there the antic sits,
Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp,
Allowing him a breath, a little scene,
To monarchize, be feared, and kill with looks.
Infusing him with self and vain conceit,

> As if this flesh which walls about our life
> Were brass impregnable; and humoured thus,
> Comes at the last, and with a little pin
> Bores through his castle wall; and farewell, king.
> Cover your heads, and mock not flesh and blood
> With solemn reverence. Throw away respect,
> Tradition, form, and ceremonious duty,
> For you have but mistook me all this while.
> I live with bread, like you; feel want,
> Taste grief, need friends. Subjected thus,
> How can you say to me I am a king?
> (3.2.156–73)

This is the situation stripped of all ideological superfluities. Richard seems to lament the fact that, as a king, he must fulfil a symbolic role dictated by 'respect / Tradition, form, and ceremonious duty' while being 'subjected' by the mortal trappings of humanity to hunger, desire, sorrow and the need for companionship. Despite Richard's previous excesses, Shakespeare elicits sympathy for him here. If nothing else, we are reminded of the incredible strain that the concentration of so much power in the hands of a single individual must exert. However, it is also worth remembering that Richard's desperate situation is brought about mainly because of his narrow policy of ruling exclusively by ideological means, through language, while neglecting raw, physical power.[43]

For most of the rest of the play, Richard finds himself in the humiliating position of not only being physically overpowered but also transferring to Bolingbroke the symbolic and linguistic powers that he most cherishes. The threat of physical force is enough for Richard to pardon Bolingbroke and officially ratify his return to England. This marks Richard's first real defeat on his home terrain of language. He does not take it well: 'O God, O God, that e'er this tongue of mine, / That laid the sentence of dread banishment / On yon proud man, should take it off again / With words of sooth!' (3.3.132–5). Such backtracking was unimaginable in Act 1. It is almost too much for Richard to bear. He sees in this, his first defeat in a purely linguistic confrontation, the destruction of the entire ideological system on which his identity and authority rest:

> What must the King do now? Must he submit?
> The King shall do it. Must he be deposed?
> The King shall be contented. Must he lose
> The name of King? A God's name, let it go.
> (3.3.142–5)

An extended conceit follows in which Richard promises to exchange the symbolic markers of his royalty for plainer alternatives:

I'll give my jewels for a set of beads,
My gorgeous palace for a hermitage,
My gay apparel for an almsman's gown,
My figured goblets for a dish of wood,
My sceptre for a palmer's walking staff,
My subjects for a pair of carvèd saints,
And my large kingdom for a little grave,
A little, little grave, an obscure grave;
Or I'll be buried in the King's highway . . .
(3.3.146–54)

And what brings on this tantrum? Very little but the news that Northumberland has returned with a message from Bolingbroke. Therefore, we can conclude that the functioning of Richard's royal ideology is contingent upon two factors: first, that no subject shall resort to or threaten physical violence against him; and second, that the ideology is never transgressed. In other words, it is an ideology that relies on all its parts to work as expected at all times. Bolingbroke has already threatened physical violence and now he has made the King reverse a decision, thereby creating a 'contradiction' (3.3.123) in Richard's ideology. From this moment, Richard's defeat is almost inevitable.

Cornered and broken, Richard names Bolingbroke his heir and resigns the throne. All that is left, in Richard's eyes, is the final transference of ideological power by way of ritual.

Now mark me how I will undo myself.
I give this heavy weight from off my head,
[BOLINGBROKE *accepts the crown*]
And this unwieldy sceptre from my hand,
[BOLINGBROKE *accepts the sceptre*]
The pride of kingly sway from out my heart.
With mine own tears I wash away my balm,
With mine own hands I give away my crown,
With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,
With mine own breath release all duteous oaths.
(4.1.194–200)

The 'breath' that could once 'enjail' tongues in seconds is now relieved of its power with equal speed. The double-mirror of ideology is finally smashed, 'cracked in an hundred shivers' (4.1.279), moments later. Bolingbroke's bland, business-like language in this scene contrasts starkly with Richard's elaborate metaphors; it marks the dawning of a new era of leadership driven by physical action rather than by words. Of course, soon afterwards, Bolingbroke has Richard murdered – the symbolic transference of power is not enough for the king of action.

Richard's final soliloquy finds him musing upon both the malleability and the constricted nature of social roles:

> I have been studying how I may compare
> This prison where I live unto the world . . .
> Thus play I in one person many people,
> And none contented. Sometimes am I king;
> Then treason makes me wish myself a beggar,
> And so I am. Then crushing penury
> Persuades me I was better when a king.
> Then am I kinged again . . .
>
> (5.5.1–2, 32–6)

In the prison, with its scant contents and 'populace' (5.5.3) of one, Richard can see how, in the absence of material corroboration, thoughts alone can authorise identity – a king can transform himself into a beggar and back again in a matter of seconds. Gaunt understands this principle at the start of the play, when he tries to persuade Bolingbroke that the severity of his sentence of six years in exile depends entirely on how one looks at it:

> Think not the King did banish thee,
> But thou the King. Woe doth the heavier sit
> Where it perceives it is but faintly borne.
> Go, say I sent thee forth to purchase honour,
> And not the King exiled thee . . .
>
> (1.3.256.12–16)

By the end of the play Richard realises, like Gaunt, that 'bare imagination' (1.3.260) can overturn the constructs of ideology, because ideology itself is the stuff of imagination. The only reason that Richard is not defeated by 'bare imagination' himself is because, as a master of language, he is the play's canniest ideological operator and tries to foreclose that possibility at every turn by controlling the terms and poetic form of spoken discourse. In *Richard II*, Shakespeare exposes the fragile nature of ideologies: no matter how effectively they contain their subjects, they depend ultimately upon individuals to do as they are told and the threat of physical violence. Ideology alone cannot safeguard power from being overthrown.

Henry IV: 'God save the King! Will no man say "Amen"?' (*Richard II*, 4.1.163)

The formal contrast between *Richard II* and the two parts of *Henry IV* could not be more marked. *Richard II* is a play which contains no prose

and in which even gardeners and common citizens speak in blank verse. I have suggested that the formality of the language in *Richard II* reflects Richard's ideological absolutism; every character in the play speaks in the King's chosen idiom as if they were caught in a monolithic Orwellian state that closely regulates language. In complete contrast, *Henry IV* features scenes of sustained prose in which the King's own son, Hal, indulges in the discourse of tavern banter. Henry IV cannot boast the same poetic mastery as Richard II; as he says in the opening lines of *1 Henry IV*, he is more prone to 'breathe short-winded accents' (1.1.3) than to construct exquisite extended metaphors. The discursive heterogeneity of *Henry IV* reflects the King's ideological weakness – he cannot even control his son's behaviour, let alone the rest of his subjects. It is worth remembering that Henry's ideological weakness is exacerbated by the fact that he is a usurper. The official ideology of Richard's reign was not only maintained by the mastery of language but also buttressed by its legitimacy. As Leonard Tennenhouse notes, 'few if any monarchs in the entire sequence of history plays are represented at the outset of their dramas with a more secure claim to the throne [than Richard]'.[44] Rackin makes a similar point: 'Richard is the only king in the two tetralogies with an unambiguous hereditary claim to the throne rooted in an uncontrolled genealogy and ratified by divine right'.[45] By contrast, Henry IV, in Catherine Belsey's words, 'is not morally or legally entitled to the throne he holds'.[46] In 1399, when Richard was deposed, the House of Plantagenet had ruled England uninterrupted for 246 years, during which they had established a strong feudal ideology; this legacy was broken by Henry's usurpation. In effect, Henry has to start again: to build a new ideology that ratifies his authority almost from scratch. If *Richard II* exposes the limits of the ideology of monarchy when it is not supported by physical action or violence, *Henry IV* demonstrates how important ideology can be for those in power. Here is the 'constant doubleness' Rossiter speaks of in action: Richard and Henry are two sides of a classic Shakespearean dialectic. The situation in *Henry IV* is the inverse of that of *Richard II*; where Richard was a king who maintained his power exclusively by asserting his ideological authority, Henry relies on his military might to subdue those who would oppose him. James L. Calderwood makes the astute observation that after Richard's usurpation 'rhetoric, lacking the automatic sovereignty of poetry, earns its keep in action, substituting for inherent validity an achieved validity'.[47] When Bolingbroke becomes Henry IV, language is drained of its ideological significance, because it is no longer in the service of power.

In his first scene as king, near the end of *Richard II*, Henry IV elects simply to eliminate the remainder of Richard's supporters; as one might

expect, he promises to visit 'destruction' (5.4.137) upon them. However, the way he deals with his first real decision as king just prior to this is interesting. York reveals that his son, Aumerle, had been part of a conspiracy to assassinate Henry at Oxford and provides the letter he took from him in 5.2 as evidence (5.3.48). Henry's immediate reaction is to resort to type as the man of action; he draws his sword and threatens to kill Aumerle. Aumerle's mother, the Duchess of York, soon arrives begging for her son's life. When Henry asks, 'What shrill-voiced suppliant makes this eager cry?', the Duchess replies by taking a gamble and rhyming with the King's line: 'A woman, and thy aunt, great King: 'tis I.' She then rhymes her next two lines. In a reversal of Richard's consistent refusal to comply with the rhymes of his mere subjects, Henry immediately accepts the rhyme scheme offered him (5.3.77–80), which continues for the rest of the scene. In his first scene as king, Henry allows one of his subjects to dictate the form of the proceedings – something unimaginable under Richard. The other point of note here is how few lines Henry has in comparison with York and his wife. He has several curtailed lines of only two feet, all of which are repetitions of the same command: 'Rise up, good aunt' (5.3.89), 'Good aunt, stand up' (5.3.109, 127). The intended effect is perhaps comic (as is suggested by the couplet 'Our scene is altered from a serious thing / And now changed to "The Beggar and the King"' (5.3.77–8)), but it is not insignificant that the Duchess not only dictates what the scene has changed into, but also actually *disobeys* the King three times by staying on her knees, despite his repeated command for her to rise. In fact, she only rises once she has obtained and made absolutely *certain* of her objective. Henry first pardons Aumerle at 5.3.129, which prompts both York and Aumerle to rise, but the Duchess stays on her knees and insists that the King 'speak it again' (5.3.131), which he does: 'I pardon him / With all my heart' (5.3.134). Only now does the Duchess rise to her feet. On the face of it, Henry looks in supreme command here. He has three people begging at his feet, one of them more loyal to him than his own son and the other two begging for that son's life. This is enough for Tennenhouse to declare it a display of supreme political mastery: 'in one scene . . . [Henry IV] shows both sides of the coin of power: he vows to exercise unlimited force in the interest of the state, and he displays generosity in the interest of the blood'.[48] However, this overlooks the Duchess's subtle poetic and psychological control of the scene; she demonstrates that Henry's power is malleable. Henry has good strategic reasons for pardoning Aumerle: as Tennenhouse notes in his appraisal, it is an act of mercy to show that he is not a tyrant and it potentially gains him a dependable subject who now owes his life to him. Nevertheless, in allowing the Duchess to speak

some forty-four lines of dialogue – during which she interpellates him into *her* rhyme scheme, disobeys him three times and then manages to get him to repeat a decree – Henry allows himself to be manipulated. In his first ideological test, then, Henry finds himself outmanœuvred, just as he was outmanœuvred by Richard during the first three acts of the play. The contrast between this moment of careless leadership and Richard's masterful poetic command over his subjects (and over his imagination in the remaining scenes of the play) cannot be overstated. If Henry is to have success on the throne, he needs to find both an ideology and an appropriate discourse in which to administer his power.

By the start of *1 Henry IV*, Henry has come to realise more fully the importance of ideology to the task of containing and regulating the disparate competing elements of a nation.[49] As Graham Holderness has convincingly argued, even in 1.1, Henry IV 'demonstrates what we would call in twentieth-century terms a clear understanding of the importance of *ideology* in ruling a state full of internal disharmony and civil conflict'.[50] We find him weary of civil war and yearning for some degree of national harmony. Throughout his opening speech, he emphasises unity and conformity, arguing that his subjects are 'all of one nature, of one substance bred' (1.1.11) and therefore should 'march all one way, and be no more opposed' (1.1.15). Ostensibly, Henry might be wishing for peace for the good of the commonwealth here, but he makes no secret of his true motive for wishing to end the civil conflict: 'The edge of war, like an ill-sheathèd knife, / No more shall cut his master' (1.1.17–18). The 'master' is not England but Henry. As long as his subjects are embroiled in conflict he cannot hope to recreate the pervasive ideological discourse that helped maintain Richard's power while he was king. Henry knows that, unlike his militarily weak predecessor, he can put down rebellions by force if necessary, but he would much prefer to preclude that possibility by the use of soft power. In fact, unless he can bring the rebels to heel by ideological means (so that they do not wish to rebel in the first place), his reign is destined to be a miserable series of trouble-shooting battles, putting down one rebellion here just as another breaks out elsewhere. The need for some measure of ideological support is paramount. However, Henry faces an interesting problem: ideologies are only truly effective at regulating subjects once they are up and running, so having just succeeded in dismantling the old ideology, how does one go about instituting a new one? After defeating such an ideologically proficient king, Henry faces the daunting prospect of coming up with an ideology that has to rival what Richard had to offer.

His plan, concocted at the end of *Richard II* (5.5.45–52), is to play to his strengths and make a virtue out of *action* – the sphere in which

he most excels. He proposes to lead a crusade to Jerusalem, thereby uniting the warring factions of his nation against a common, foreign and heathen enemy. Again, Henry's true motives for this proposed crusade are transparent; they are, as Ronald Knowles notes, 'as far removed from authentic piety as the Jerusalem chamber in which he dies is from Jerusalem itself'.[51] Even though the idea first comes to him as a means of absolving himself of guilt (at the end of *Richard II*), by 1.1 of *1 Henry IV* the only motivate is political. To underline the point, Henry reveals his true intentions to Hal before his death near the end of *2 Henry IV*. He tells his son

> To lead out many to the Holy Land,
> Lest rest and lying still make them look
> Too near unto my state.
> Therefore, my Harry,
> Be it thy course to busy giddy minds
> With foreign quarrels . . .
> (4.3.338–42)

The strategy is clear: distract the subjects at home with the promise of conquest abroad. Whereas Richard based his ideological strategy on formal and ritualistic language, Henry's ideology is based mainly on the spectacle of action and its potential to distract. It is a sort of medieval 'shock and awe' policy: to cause enough carnage abroad for the people eventually to forget the initial causes of the war or cease to worry about such academic matters as how Henry 'came by the crown' (*2 Henry IV*, 4.3.346). The sophistication of Henry's ideological understanding is remarkable. We might even say that Henry's plan anticipates the perpetual war of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.[52] Just as in Orwell's novel, where it does not matter if the war is with Oceania or Eurasia, in the *Henriad* it does not matter if the war is with Jerusalem or France (as it is in *Henry V*). The important factor is that there is a foreign enemy far from home; and, just as in Orwell, Henry's strategy relies on his subjects to 'double-think' themselves not only into wanting to win such a war but also into *forgetting* that he obtained the crown by usurpation.

However, political understanding is not the same thing as political execution. At the start of *1 Henry IV*, the King has been contemplating his crusade for 'twelve month[s]' (1.1.28). Immediately after outlining his plan, Henry receives news that one of his supporters, Mortimer, has been 'taken' (1.1.41) by 'the irregular and wild [Owain] Glyndŵr' (1.1.40) with 'a thousand of his people butchered' (*1 Henry IV*, 1.1.42), which forces him to delay its implementation even longer. Henry, with a hint of irritation, puts his plans for the crusade back on the shelf: 'And for this cause awhile we must neglect / Our holy purpose to Jerusalem'

(1.1.100–1). With his long-term master-strategy on hold, Henry must come up with a plan B for the short term. He is forced to rely on the physical power of his supporters to quell further rebellions militarily while invoking the much weaker ideology of 'honour' to prevent further disharmony. To this end, he praises Harry 'Hotspur' Percy (who at this point is still fighting for him, under the command of Sir Walter Blunt, against Scottish rebel forces) for being 'the theme of honour's tongue' (1.1.80). It is worth pausing here to consider what Henry means by 'honour'. Henry appears to see virtue in Hotspur's exploits in action, on the field of battle. But Percy is honourable chiefly because he is fighting for the King against 'riot and dishonour' (1.1.84). Thus, Henry attempts to create a new ideology of 'honour' of which he is the sole legitimating source. 'Honour' implies engaging in combat – the King's preferred mode of power – on behalf of the King and taking action in arms against the King constitutes 'dishonour'. This is a much cruder form of ideology than Richard II's sophisticated and insidious web of regulatory poetics or Henry's own much-delayed master-plan. But, lacking both time and his predecessor's subtle command of language, Henry has few other options.

The extent of Henry's ideological weakness is demonstrated in the next scene, where we first meet Hal and Falstaff, who are engaged in banter. In this first exchange, Falstaff and the Prince claim to be, not the King's men, but 'the moon's men' (1.2.28) stealing through the night to snatch 'a purse of gold' (1.2.30) with which to buy sack or the services of the local tavern wench. This is as far from the ideology of combat and 'honour', which we have just seen the King trying to institute, as it is possible to get. They go on to mock the changeability of the law. Falstaff jokes about how, once Hal becomes king, he shall be responsible for hanging thieves, to which Hal answers, 'No, thou shalt' (1.2.55). In the imagined realm of Hal's future, the law is as mutable as the imaginary figures of Richard II's cell. As in 5.5 of *Richard II*, where a king can become a beggar in a breath, here a known thief can become a hangman (the law's executioner) or, if we are to believe that Hal has engaged in thieving as well,[53] even a future king (the maker of law) in an instant. We glimpse here an instance of the power of 'bare imagination' (*Richard II*, 1.3.260), of which Gaunt failed to persuade his thoroughly materialist son, the present King, in the previous play. By not taking the law seriously, Falstaff and Hal expose how fragile it can be and how easily it comes undone when it is challenged by those of a criminal mindset.

Neither the trick that Hal and Poins plan to play on Falstaff after his exit (1.2.142–71), nor Hal's cold soliloquy in which he promises to 'throw off' (1.2.186) his current companions once he becomes king,

serves to undermine the fact that Falstaff has just planned a robbery in front of the Prince of Wales. Even if Hal's talk of 'imitat[ing] the sun' (1.2.175) to break through the 'foul and ugly mists' (1.2.180) of his alehouse cronies distances him from Falstaff, it does not bring him any closer to his father. It is, in fact, an oblique allusion to a similar speech by Richard II in which he compares himself to the sun 'rising on our throne, the east', the 'searching eye of heaven' that 'darts his light through every guilty hole' to seek out the 'thieves and robbers' who lurk in them (*Richard II*, 3.2.46, 33–9). By comparing himself to the sun while speaking in blank verse, Hal not only echoes the imagery and formal language of Richard II, but also evokes his style of ideological leadership. As if to underscore the point, Hal ends the speech by demonstrating a flash of poetic mastery: he ends it with a heroic couplet, rhyming 'skill' with 'will'. Hal's linguistic play in this scene begins to rival Richard's. He slips from the laddish prose of tavern banter to quasi-symbolic poetry in a matter of moments. The important thing to note in this scene is that it creates an undertone for the rest of the play (and its sequel); whatever Hal's true motives, his actions and, more importantly, the two discourses in which he has chosen to operate (Falstaff's lawless irony and Richard II's image-laden poetry) are sharply at odds with the ideology of honour in action that his father is so desperately trying to establish. Hal has already displayed at least as much ideological insight as Henry and, undoubtedly, a greater degree of verbal dexterity; all of which suggests that, up to this point, Hal is playing a selfish game. He has his own future image in mind, not the King's. In fact, if either of the discourses that Hal emulates in this scene were to take hold of the popular consciousness at large, Henry would face certain usurpation – which, at this time, does not seem to have occurred to the self-seeking, hedonistic Prince.

With these ideas in mind, the next scene jolts us back into the King's court. Henry is in a foul mood. Still lacking a fully functional ideology, he resolves to be 'mighty and to be feared' (1.3.6). He realises that his mild temperament, 'which hath been smooth as oil' (1.3.7), will not grant him the 'title of respect' (1.3.9) in the climate of honour and action that he has been trying to foster. Henry has chosen this moment to reassert himself as the figurehead of this new ideology of honour, but frustration and anger get the better of him. He suddenly snaps at Worcester, interrupting Northumberland at 1.3.14 to dismiss him in no uncertain terms. Hotspur's refusal to release prisoners, taken at the recent battle in Holmedon, until the King pays Glyndŵr for the ransom of Mortimer, the Earl of March (who had been named as Richard II's heir), causes the King to lose his temper altogether (1.3.76–91). Henry not only demands

the release of the prisoners, but also accuses Mortimer of being a rebel and refuses to believe that he fought with Glyndŵr. Before leaving, he issues a direct order and a veiled threat to Percy: 'Send us your prisoners, or you'll hear of it' (1.3.122). He exits before Hotspur can answer. Here we see the collapse of an incomplete ideology; Henry issues an order and Hotspur not only flatly disobeys it, but also ends the scene resolved to combat the King in order to get his own way. Henry's action-packed defeat of Richard II has created a momentary tear in the ideological fabric of the nation in which power, being maintained by 'might' alone, can be disputed by physical action at almost any time. Hotspur levels a torrent of abuse at the King; he repeatedly attacks his honour, calling Henry 'unthankful' (1.3.134), 'ingrate and cankered' (1.3.135), 'murderous' (1.3.161) and a 'vile politician' (1.3.239). When ideology *works* it moves silently and out of sight, on an unconscious level. If the subjects notice its subtle manœuvrings (before the final moment of 'Amen'), much of its power is undone. Not only is Henry's problem that he is endeavouring to carry out the extraordinarily difficult task of establishing a new ideological dispensation, it is also that, in choosing 'honour' as his model, he has chosen what Raymond Williams would call a 'residual culture',[54] which has an easily identifiable precedent in the not too distant past. Holderness has argued that Bolingbroke / Henry IV himself represents this residual culture, the 'older order', from the start of *Richard II*,[55] but I would argue that Henry only co-opts this ideology of honour in action as a last-minute necessity. This explains why Hotspur feels so at ease in challenging the King on his own ideological turf. He attacks Henry by dismissing his claims to honour – which, earlier, in 1.1, served as the authority that legitimised Hotspur's honour – and supplanting it with his own brand of honour. If the King plans to march 'from the east unto the west' to attack Glyndŵr, Percy promises that his 'honour [will] cross [Henry] from the north to south' (1.3.193–4). He casts *himself* as the saviour of honour, vowing to 'pluck up drownèd honour by the locks' in order to 'redeem her' (1.3.203–4). This is a doubly crushing blow for Henry, because 'gallant Hotspur' (1.1.52) was supposed to be his prototype, the exemplary soldier of the king of action, the 'theme of honour's tongue' (1.180). The one man on whom Henry had pinned his hopes has cruelly rebuffed him, further weakening his position. Plainly, Henry's ideological strategy to date has been a resounding failure.

When Hal visits his father in 3.2, the King is still in a fragile state of mind. Hal's dalliances with 'rude society' (3.2.14), the 'vulgar company' (3.2.41) of Falstaff and his followers, draws attention to the fact that he has failed to bring ideological unity to England during his reign. It

is interesting to see how Henry views his usurpation of Richard. He argues that he 'won' the crown by the 'rareness' of his appearances and the 'solemnity' (3.2.59) of his demeanour and he derides Richard as a 'skipping King' (3.2.60) who 'enfeoffed himself to popularity' (3.2.69) and left himself open to be swayed by flattery. Even in retrospect, Henry is unwilling to recognise Richard's ideological achievements. He plays down Richard's control over his subjects:

> He was but as the cuckoo is in June,
> Heard, not regarded, seen but with such eyes
> As, sick and blunted with community,
> Afford no extraordinary gaze
> Such as is bent on sun-like majesty
> When it shines seldom in admiring eyes,
> But rather drowsed and hung their eyelids down,
> Slept in his face, and rendered such aspect
> As cloudy men use to their adversaries,
> Being with his presence glutted, gorged, and full.
> (3.2.75–84)

Henry's analysis of Richard's reign does not tally with what we saw in *Richard II*. Henry seems to forget Richard's impressive display of ideological power at Coventry (to which he was banished) and how easily he contained his father's (Gaunt's) political objections. Henry seems incapable of distinguishing between conscious personal relations and the unconsciously coercive power of ideology. Richard's subjects may not have been aware of his poetic power, but their spoken discourse had to obey the strictures of its form. Henry glosses over the fact that he defeated the King by using the threat of physical violence and, ultimately, by murdering him.

Even though Henry understands the importance of ideology, his instincts still tend toward action. Henry compares Hal to Richard: 'in that very line, Harry, standest thou' (3.2.85); 'For all the world, / As thou art to this hour was Richard then' (3.2.93–4). As we have seen, the King has a point: when Hal shifts from the prose of the alehouse to the poetry of the royal court, he reflects Richard's image rather than Henry's. The thought is enough to make the King weep. Henry tells Hal that, on current form, Hotspur is a better candidate than him to inherit the throne, because he has acquitted himself in action on the battlefield. Henry emphasises military might as the key ingredient of kingship: the ability to lead men 'to bloody battles, and to bruising arms' (3.2.105). Of course, this is a rearticulation of his short-term ideological strategy of honour in action. It is a simple message: to beget 'never-dying honour' (3.2.106) one must perform 'high deeds . . . in arms' (3.2.107–8) in the

name of the king. After the loss of his favourite general, Hotspur, Henry needs Hal both on side and fully subscribed to his ideology in order to maintain his supremacy in action. He tells Hal bluntly that if he continues to ape Richard II, and to waste time with Falstaff, he might as well 'fight against [him] under Percy's pay' (3.2.126). This goads Hal into action and he promises to kill Hotspur. Henry wastes no time in giving him an army and, after Walter Blunt arrives, gets straight to the business of military tactics. As soon as Hal is on side, Henry is happy to busy himself in action, which is clearly the area in which he feels most empowered. We are even treated to a poetic flourish from him at the end of the scene as he ends his military speech with a rhyme: 'Our hands are full of business; let's away. / Advantage feeds him fat while men delay' (3.2.179–80). With the prospect of battle ahead, the King is in his element, momentarily distracted from the ideological concerns that have long dogged his reign.

However, the play's discursive composition highlights the fact that different ideologies are competing for hegemony and, however much Henry seeks refuge in action, that situation will not change until the King finds an *ideological* solution. A king is revealed in *1 Henry IV* who has a fairly secure grip on the throne in material and military terms but who is, none the less, ideologically weak. In contrast to the relative hegemony of Richard's formal discourse, we have already encountered three subversive discourses that threaten to undo the King's makeshift ideology of honour in action: first, there is Falstaff's cynical, insubordinate wit, which is heedless of the law and can never be pinned down to a stable point of view; second, there is the residual echo of Richard II's linguistic absolutism sounded in Hal's soliloquy, which is diametrically opposed to Henry's ideological mode; and, third, there is Hotspur's rival brand of honour, which inverts Henry's. To these we can add a fourth: the pseudo-mystical accents found in Owain Glyndŵr's Welsh castle – 'a land of miracles and music', as Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin put it, 'an outlandish world of idleness and illicit pleasure'[56] – accents which we hear in one of the strangest scenes in all the history plays. Here, Glyndŵr claims that the earth shook when he was born (3.1.22), while Mortimer's wife sings in Welsh and Hotspur lays his head on Lady Percy's lap. During this scene, the rebels draw up plans to divide British lands between themselves amid incidental talk of commanding 'the devil' (3.1.54). Clearly, there is a culture clash taking place in this scene. In a quick private exchange with Mortimer, Hotspur reveals that he is in two minds about working with Glyndŵr: 'Sometimes he angers me / With telling me of the moldwarp and the ant, / Of the dreamer Merlin and his prophecies' (3.1.144–5). Hotspur is uncomfortable at this mingling of

two distinct discourses, because it shakes his own ideological certainty, it 'puts [him] from [his] faith' (3.1.151). The slow seduction of the Welsh lady's song lulls the English contingent into a passive slumber. It is almost as if Glyndŵr is trying to interpellate his allies into his own ideological fiefdom. The attempt seems to have some effect on Hotspur, because he repeatedly asks his wife to follow suit: 'Come, Kate, I'll have your song too' (3.1.241). After she refuses, Hotspur is insistent, speaking *eleven* lines in an attempt to rouse Lady Percy into song. Again, she flatly denies him: 'I will not sing' (3.1.254). Lady Percy's obstinacy paradoxically intensifies our sense of how quickly and hopelessly Mortimer and Hotspur find themselves succumbing to – or rather being seduced by – Glyndŵr's subversive Welsh ideology. In a single brief scene, Glyndŵr almost succeeds in doing something that Henry IV has failed to do thus far in the play: to convert others to his own ideological system. The suggestion is that – with the right poetic mastery, that is, the verbal control of form, here induced by the Welsh lady's song – it *can* be done.

I have argued that King Henry's chief problem in the two parts of *Henry IV* is ideological. Lacking both the necessary linguistic skills to rule through discourse and the stability to embark on a crusade, he is forced to make do with an ideology of honour that relies on action to be effective. The differences between this conception of honour and Richard II's web of formal language as instruments of hegemony are clear to see. During Richard's reign, the King ruled by decree alone. He was his own source of legitimation, which is to say that he ruled simply by virtue of being king; Richard was *intrinsically* powerful. By contrast, the ideology of honour requires constant action from the king or his representatives to legitimate itself. It is an ideology in which the king is *not* intrinsically superior to his subjects but sits on the throne by virtue of his 'deeds' (*1 Henry IV*, 3.2.107). As an ideological strategy it *relies* on a constant supply of battles in which the king and his men can replenish their stock of honour. Therefore, Henry's mode of power can *only* function in wartime. This is why Henry, despite being embroiled in a civil war for his entire reign and slowly disfigured by leprosy, *still* hankers after his foreign crusade in *2 Henry IV*: 'And were these inward wars once out of hand, / We would, dear lords, unto the Holy Land' (3.1.102–3). However, Shakespeare shows that an ideology that relies on constant action can be easily outmanœuvred by one that relies on discourse. At the start of *2 Henry IV*, the King faces a new enemy: Rumour. Before the action of the play even begins, Shakespeare inserts the personification of Rumour, who relates a spurious version of the events dramatised in the previous play in which Hotspur defeats Hal. Interestingly, the allegorical figure wears a robe that is 'painted

full of tongues' (1.1.1), an image that ties him closely to the rhetoric of Richard II's reign. By introducing the figure of Rumour, Shakespeare not only fosters a sense of contingency in these plays (as I suggested in Chapter 6), but also draws attention to the constructedness and ideological nature of history. Actions and events have no significance until they are recorded by history – the issue of paramount importance is not what happened, but what the 'wav'ring multitude' (*2 Henry* IV, 1.1.19) *believes* to have happened. What matters is not the ability to kill people but, as Falstaff can attest, the ability to make people believe that you have. This is a central tenet of effective ideology, which seems to elude Henry until his death: the ability to control discourses. Henry is made to pay for his neglect of language as a tool of ideological power; his victories in the heat of battle mean little without a corresponding victory in the discourse of domination.

Falstaff

Of all the ideological strategies on offer in the fractured and 'poor kingdom' (*2 Henry IV*, 4.2.261) of Henry IV, Falstaff's is by far the most interesting. As we have seen, in general the dominant ideology works insidiously to ensure that its subjects are constrained in such a way that most of their thoughts and utterances reinforce the power that it serves. When ideology is effective, even conscious dissidents, such as Gaunt in *Richard II*, struggle to articulate their grievances in a way that would have a discernible ideological impact, because they are forced to voice them using the official discourses of power. The only means of defeating ideology that we have seen to date (when Bolingbroke usurped Richard II) is by the threat of action or, more specifically, physical violence. Despite all this, Falstaff seems to see through all ideological illusions. He is unique in the second tetralogy because he appears to do what he wants, when he wants, in the manner of his own choosing. In other words, he seems to occupy a place *outside* of ideology; as he says himself, 'I live out of all order, out of all compass' (3.3.16–17). This is, potentially, radically subversive. Falstaff *could* be taken, as he is by Wyndham Lewis, as a 'psychological liberator';[57] if he were to put his energies toward a social purpose greater than lining his own pockets to purchase sack, he might even incite a rebellion. But, unlike someone such as Jack Cade (who, in a previous play, sought the complete ideological destruction of Henry VI's England), Falstaff relies on *exploiting* the system he understands so well almost exclusively for his own profit, pleasure and social advancement. Falstaff has all the tools an individual

might need to challenge the dominant ideology, but lacks the utopian vision – and the inclination – to do anything with them. Falstaff's unique mode of being is not so much an ideology as it is a self-sustaining *survival strategy* that permits him to do as he pleases.

This survival strategy rests on two points of understanding: first, that ideology is a man-made construct to which there is nothing physically binding him; and second, that ideology relies entirely on what Althusser calls 'the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real existence'.[58] Barbara Hodgdon has argued that Falstaff, 'more than any other, is well aware that the counterfeit – the reproduced image of the authentic – has no value until it is put into circulation and exchanged'.[59] He certainly understands that the value of an object depends entirely on what people think it is worth; hence his ability to 'turn diseases to commodity' (*2 Henry IV*, 1.2.227). But the depth of Falstaff's understanding goes much further than the nature of value; he realises that the law, the aristocracy, the crown, the nation and any other such ideological constructs are fundamentally *imaginary* – they exist inside people's minds. This is perhaps why he routinely transgresses the law and also why he tells so many lies: *perception* is all that truly matters. The best articulation of this realisation is found in Falstaff's famous critique of honour:

> Well, 'tis no matter; honour pricks me on. Yea, but how if honour prick me off when I come on? How then? Can honour set-to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery, then? No. What is honour? A word. What is in that word 'honour'? What is that 'honour'? Air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that died o'Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis insensible then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon. And so ends my catechism.
>
> (*1 Henry IV*, 5.1.129–39)

Falstaff sees through Henry's ideological strategy and grasps immediately the fact that it is not designed with *his* best interests in mind but the King's. By deciding that he will have 'none of it', Falstaff actualises in practice the theory of 'bare imagination' first suggested by Gaunt (*Richard II*, 1.3.260) and developed by Richard II (*Richard II*, 5.5.1–41).

Falstaff's realisation shows how easily ideology can come unstuck. As Catherine Belsey says, he 'consistently represents the refusal of monarchic order'.[60] Throughout *1 Henry IV*, Falstaff mercilessly exploits the King's ideological system, 'misuses the King's press' (*1 Henry IV*, 4.2.12), for his own profit. He avoids a fight with Douglas by playing dead and then claims credit for killing Hotspur by relying on his friend-

ship with Hal. Falstaff shows that, in Henry's system of honour, a combination of clever individual choices and persuasion can achieve the same results as actually doing an 'honourable' deed: 'the better part of valour is discretion' (*1 Henry IV*, 5.4.117–18). Falstaff shows how an individual can slip through the many loopholes in ideology right under the noses of those in power. In *2 Henry IV*, the King has to rely on the *physical* intervention of the Lord Chief Justice to keep an eye on Falstaff – we are a long way from Foucault's Panopticon here. And while the Lord Chief Justice *does* cause Falstaff a new problem in *2 Henry IV*, the latter is still able to claim credit for the capture of Sir John Colville (*2 Henry IV*, 4.2) to swindle Robert Shallow out of 'a thousand pound[s]' (*2 Henry IV*, 5.5.70). It is debatable whether he would get away with such schemes under a more ideologically driven king such as Richard II.

Undoubtedly, Falstaff passes on his subtle understanding of ideology to Hal, albeit through osmosis rather than direct teaching. This is evidenced throughout *Henry V*, where Harry not only successfully synthesises the contrasting strategies of his two predecessors – resurrecting the formal control of Richard II while finally executing his father's master-plan of the foreign crusade – but also puts the skills he learned in the alehouse to good use when dealing with the likes of Pistol and Captain Fluellen. More specifically, he inherits from Falstaff the insight that the *perception* of his subjects is all that truly matters. He is a king who will stop at nothing to 'feel other men's minds' (*Henry V*, 4.1.119). The best example of this is the masterful scene from which that quotation is taken. In it he disguises himself in Sir Thomas Erpingham's cloak in order to gauge the opinion of his soldiers. Harry slips into prose, and probes Bates and Williams about their reaction to the prospect of dying in the forthcoming battle with the French. Shortly afterwards, in the blank verse of soliloquy, we find him echoing Falstaff's attitude when he wonders about the shallow ideological function of royal ceremony:

> And what art thou, thou idol ceremony? . . .
> O ceremony, show me but thy worth.
> What is thy soul of adoration?
> Art thou aught else but place, degree, and form,
> Creating awe and fear in other men?
> (*Henry V*, 4.1.222, 226–9)

Just as Falstaff can see 'honour' for what it is – an illusory tool used to compel men to go willingly to their deaths – Harry is able to demystify the ceremony of kingship. As if to underline the point, Shakespeare links the two speeches grammatically by rephrasing Falstaff's question and answer 'Can honour set-to a leg? No' (*1 Henry IV*, 5.1.130) as 'Canst

thou [ceremony], when thou command'st the beggar's knee, / Command the health of it? No' (*Henry V*, 4.1.238–9). The key difference between Falstaff and King Harry is that the former exposes the ideology of honour and elects to have 'none of it' (*1 Henry IV*, 5.1.139), whereas the latter, despite realising the true nature of ceremony, can understand that it is *necessary* 'to maintain the peace' (*Henry V*, 4.1265) and accepts it as his royal duty.

The question of Hal's rejection of Falstaff at the end of *2 Henry IV* – as well as the question of where the play ultimately intends the audience's sympathies to lie – has long been seen as vital to understanding the second tetralogy. Indeed, as Empson remarks, 'the question of whether Falstaff is a coward may be said to have started the whole snowball of modern Shakespearean criticism'.[61] Stephen Greenblatt's famous argument that the *Henriad* works to contain its subversive elements hinges on it:

> The subversive voices are produced by and within the affirmations of order; they are powerfully registered, but they do not undermine that order . . . Shakespeare refuses to endorse so baldly cynical a conception of the social order [as Falstaff's]; instead actions that should have the effect of radically undermining authority turn out to be the props of that authority . . . We are invited to take measure of [Henry IV's] suffering, to understand . . . the costs of power. And we are invited to understand those costs in order to ratify the power, to accept the grotesque and cruelly unequal distribution of possessions: everything to the few, nothing to the many . . . The play appears to ratify the established order, with the new-crowned Henry V merging his body into 'the great body of our state', with Falstaff despised and rejected.[62]

There are a number of points of contention here. First, Greenblatt writes as if Henry IV's fledgling ideological order – which, as I have argued, is consistently portrayed as being so fragile that the King has to resort to physical violence to maintain control, and consistently exploited by Falstaff – deliberately creates the disorderly and subversive forces that keep Henry awake at night. It seems much more likely to me that Falstaff and others are able to exploit a situation that has arisen because of the King's weak ideological position and his inability to control his subjects without resorting to repressive apparatuses such as the Lord Chief Justice. To say that Henry IV's state 'produces' its own subversive elements is akin to saying that a bank that has failed to secure its vaults 'produces' its own robberies. Greenblatt's assessment vastly overestimates the level of Henry's ideological control over the state. Second, while we are undoubtedly invited to understand the costs of power, it does not follow that therefore we are invited to accept that power. We were also invited in previous plays to 'take measure' of the suffering of

Jack Cade, Henry VI, the Duke of York, John of Gaunt and Richard II, so, by Greenblatt's logic, are we to 'ratify' each of these character's positions despite their being in most cases politically and ideologically opposed? Finally, it is difficult to see how Falstaff's subversive actions have become 'the props of authority' at the end of *2 Henry IV* and debatable whether he is indeed 'despised'.

My view is that Hal rejects Falstaff not because he dislikes him or because he wishes to reject his lifestyle, but for one strategic reason born of the deep ideological understanding he has inherited from his former friend and for one more personal reason. The first is that he could not hope to cultivate the image of ideal monarchy with Falstaff at his court. Hal knows that Falstaff's entire survival strategy is built upon the exploitation of ideology; were he to trust him to enter his circle of power, it would only be a matter of time before Falstaff would exploit and seek to profit from that trust. Hal knows that, however successful he may become in uniting the nation under a single ideological vision, Falstaff will see through it and learn its rules, only to disobey them for his own advantage. It is not so much a rejection as a tacit acknowledgement of the fact that Falstaff is too wily a character to have at close quarters – or even within a 'ten mile' (*2 Henry IV*, 5.5.63) radius – when one is trying to establish ideological hegemony. The second, more personal reason for the rejection is that, as well as thinking for the good of the nation himself, Hal actually has Falstaff's *own* interests in mind. While Falstaff would spell trouble for Hal at court, he would be relatively harmless if left to the taverns and alehouses where his subversive survival strategy could remain self-contained. By leaving Falstaff at the side of the road and banished from his sight, the new King covertly licenses him to carry on living the life to which he has been accustomed.[63]

Greenblatt is correct, therefore, to say that Falstaff is contained at the end of *2 Henry IV*, but only to the extent that he was 'contained' by the terms of his own self-interest at the start of *1 Henry IV*. Falstaff only subverts the ideological order for his own profit and plainly harbours no revolutionary ambitions. However, read within the context of Shakespeare's history plays, Falstaff can be read as 'revolutionary' in a different sense. He explicitly highlights an idea that Shakespeare has been developing throughout the history plays: that ideology is, first, vital for those in power to control and maintain order among their subjects, and, second, only as strong as the degree to which people are willing, consciously or not, to subject themselves to it. This may seem obvious, but it is easier said than achieved; the hardest part of resisting ideology is realising that it is there at all. Thus in *Richard II*, when characters find themselves ensnared in Richard's linguistic web and unable to articulate

their grievances against the King, it is because they are caught in an ideological system of which they are unaware. It is also why Jack Cade's appeal to 'ancient freedom' (*2 Henry VI*, 2.8.23–7) – which explicitly points out what Greenblatt calls 'the grotesque and cruelly unequal distribution of possessions' – falls on deaf ears. Althusser understood this: 'one of the effects of ideology is the practical *denegation* of the ideological character of ideology by ideology: ideology never says "I am ideological". It is necessary to be outside ideology . . . to be able to say: I am in ideology.'[64] Falstaff is a character who can say 'I am in ideology', and in that statement lie the seeds of revolution. Belsey poses the right questions:

> In the 1590s the revolutionary struggle was half a century away. Are the questions posed by Shakespeare's history plays among the conditions, nevertheless, of the possibility of that struggle? If so, we are entitled to read the plays not only as interrogating the absolutist claims of the Tudor present, but as raising a broader issue for the immediate future. This is the question that Brecht was to reformulate in another political crisis: 'who does the world belong to?' Who is *entitled* to property and power?[65]

Falstaff himself may not be a revolutionary, but he consistently exposes ideology as a construct designed to further the ends of those in power, and he resists it because he has more to gain by doing so; he dares to take that to which he is not 'entitled'.

However, the true revolutionary here is surely Shakespeare. He replaces the providential view of history with a Machiavellian, humanist history in which nothing is sacred; there can be no certainties for those in power. Shakespeare's historical drama is both secular and realist; entitlement gained through inheritance is not a divine right granted by God, but an advantage that can be lost by incompetence or maintained by careful strategy. In the first tetralogy, Shakespeare deconstructs monarchic power, showing it to be mutable and contingent, and open to abuse by the fallible individuals upon whom it depends. He shows monarchy to be a system that generates widespread inequality and class resentment, and an inefficient method of placing those publicly minded individuals with the appropriate skills of governance in the seat of power. In the second tetralogy, he exposes the fact that those in power can only survive if they are supported by a manipulative ideology and physical force, both of which can be resisted and challenged. In the 1590s, all this was laid bare on stage for monarchs and commoners alike to view and think about. Shakespeare's is a historical drama that does not seek to ratify or subvert power, but simply to depict the actions of those in power for all to see and in the process demystify power; it

shows what is possible, what has and has not worked for other rulers in the past. What might be taken as a warning shot for those in power might also serve as a call to arms for the disenfranchised or aggrieved.[66] Shakespeare's history plays offer unique and radical insights into the workings of power that can just as easily be used to support rebellions as they can be co-opted by the state. Rather than focusing on the question of whether the plays ultimately support or subvert the Tudor status quo, as cultural historicist studies to date have tended to do, perhaps it is time to turn instead to the question of precisely what those insights are. This cannot hope to be achieved by a critical practice that remains committed to an anti-humanist theoretical framework in which Shakespeare is treated as the symptom or product of wider social matrices, rather than as a creative individual capable of producing trenchant insights into the fundamental questions of historical causation and drawing inferences from the politics of his day that still resonate with the politics of our own time. This book has been a contribution to developing a critical practice that can do justice to the revelations these extraordinary plays are poised to offer us.

Notes

1. A. P. Rossiter, *Angel with Horns: Fifteen Lectures on Shakespeare*, ed. Graham Storey (1961; New York: Longman, 1989), p. 63.
2. Norman Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Common Understanding* (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 81.
3. The phrase 'ABC of power' is taken from a description of *The Prince* in Wyndham Lewis, *The Lion and the Fox: The Rôle of the Hero in the Plays of Shakespeare* (1927; London: Methuen, 1966), p. 107.
4. Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, 2nd edn (1967; London: Routledge, 1991), p. 34.
5. Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics* (London: Arden, 2004), p. 74.
6. Emrys Jones, *Scenic Form in Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 73.
7. Wilbur Sanders, *The Dramatist and the Received Idea: Studies in the Plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 90.
8. Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, ed. Fredric Jameson, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), pp. 122–3.
9. Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics*, p. 60.
10. Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), p. 23.
11. *Ibid*., p. 30.

12. See E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1944).
13. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 'History and Ideology, Masculinity and Miscegenation: The Instance of *Henry V*', in *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), pp. 109–42; Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare's History* (New York: St Martin's, 1985); Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare Recycled: The Making of Historical Drama* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992); and Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare: The Histories* (London: Macmillan, 2000).
14. Clifford Geertz, 'The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man', in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Sketched Essays* (New York: Basic, 1973), p. 48.
15. Richard Levin, *Shakespeare's Secret Schemers: The Study of an Early Modern Dramatic Device* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2001), p. 16.
16. Kiernan Ryan, *Shakespeare*, 3rd edn (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 38, 47.
17. *Ibid*., p. 64.
18. Annabel Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 72.
19. This is not a new idea. In 1905, A. C. Bradley spotted a tendency in Shakespeare's work 'to show one set of forces advancing, in secret or open opposition to the other, to some decisive success, and then driven downward to defeat by the reaction it provokes' (*Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1905), p. 55). For Bradley, Shakespeare's 'general plan' shows two forces in tension with an eventual victor. The supreme expression of this idea is found in the lectures of A. P. Rossiter. Rossiter's argument, unlike Bradley's, states that there is no eventual victor because the forces are held in a *dialectical* tension which constitutes an unresolved ambivalence. For Rossiter, the Tillyardian approach to the history plays is guilty of making 'simplifications which are in danger of diminishing the true complexity of Shakespearean History'. Rossiter argues that Shakespeare employs a kind of parody in the Histories that 'operates by juxtapositions of opposites; by contrasts so extreme as to seem irreconcilable'. Rossiter continues: 'The parallelism is manifest . . . the question of "Who is right, A or B?" is a no-question: the poem is *ambivalent*. It subsumes meanings which point to two opposite and irreconcilable systems of values.' And here is the crucial concept: 'I mean by "Ambivalence" that two opposed value-judgements are subsumed, and that both are valid . . . The whole is only fully experienced when both opposites are held and included in a "two-eyed" view; and all "one-eyed" simplifications are not only falsifications; they amount to a denial of some fact of the mystery of things' (*Angels with Horns*, pp. 44, 46, 50, 51).
20. Norman Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 60–1.
21. See Blair Worden, 'Shakespeare and Politics', in *Shakespeare and Politics*,

ed. Catherine M. S. Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 22–43, especially the following passages: 'All we have on the page are speeches which conform to the characterizations of their speakers. It is hard enough to know how far Ulysses speaking on "degree", or Henry V's Archbishop of Canterbury on the commonwealth of bees, believes in the vision he articulates, let alone to identify the playwright's own "position"' (p. 24); 'When Shakespeare's characters contradict each other we notice how rarely or how little the feelings with which we respond to his plays depend on our taking sides' (p. 28).

22. This is, of course, because cultural historicism is explicitly opposed to the essentialist humanist conception of the 'genius', which, they would argue, has historically been used as a convenient cover for conservative ideology. While this is undoubtedly true, I think the point is irrelevant to the issue of whether or not an individual, such as Shakespeare, can have exceptional ideas that are not derived from the dominant ideology or its main countercurrents. Human history is full of such individuals, and it does not matter whether or not we call them 'geniuses'; what matters is that they exist.
23. Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. ix–x.
24. Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, p. 41.
25. Ryan, *Shakespeare*, p. 47.
26. Harold Bloom, 'Introduction', in *William Shakespeare: Histories and Poems*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), p. 6.
27. *Ibid*., p. 6.
28. See Patricia Parker, *Shakespeare from the Margins: Language, Culture, Context* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
29. Rackin, *Stages of History*, p. 47.
30. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, p. 244.
31. M. M. Mahood, *Shakespeare's Wordplay* (London: Methuen, 1957), p. 73.
32. I will be employing the Althusserian term 'interpellate' throughout this chapter to signify the moment in which an ideology successfully makes an individual its subject through the 'double-mirror' structure I outlined above. However, it is worth bearing in mind that I am using this concept without subscribing to the anti-humanist rhetoric inherent in the theoretical system from which it is taken. Althusser, Foucault, Williams and others give us useful concepts with which we can think about the inner workings of power, but are much less helpful when it comes to describing or understanding the experience of individuals in society. In other words, I think it is perfectly possible to think about ideology and power, forces that clearly play vital roles in human societies, without asserting that individuals are entirely constituted by them.
33. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (1977; rpr. New York and London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 201, 202–3.
34. *Ibid*., p. 205.
35. Harry Berger Jr, 'Psychoanalyzing the Shakespeare Text: The First Three Scenes of the "Henriad"', in *Shakespeare's Histories*, ed. Emma Smith (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 116.
36. Rackin, *Stages of History*, p. 49.
37. Ronald R. Macdonald, 'Uneasy Lies: Language and History in Shakespeare's

Lancastrian Tetralogy', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 35:1 (Spring 1984), p. 27.

38. Nicholas Grene, *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 182.
39. *Ibid*., p. 184.
40. This point warrants elaboration. Following Tillyard, critics have long read *Richard II* as a play dealing with the transition from the divinely ordained world of the medieval feudal order to the dog-eat-dog world of modern *Realpolitik*. In *Shakespeare's History*, Graham Holderness refutes that argument by claiming that the conflict in *Richard II* 'is not a conflict between old and new, between absolute medieval monarchy and new Machiavellian power-politics. It is a conflict between the king's sovereignty and the ancient code of chivalry, which is here firmly located in the older and more primitive tribal and family code of blood-vengeance' (p. 46). Holderness goes on to suggest that Richard, under threat from this residual chivalric code, attempts to assert his authority through absolutism. In Holderness's reading, Henry IV's usurpation represents a step backwards, 'the victorious forces are not new but old: feudal reaction rather than political revolution' (p. 64). I think Holderness is right to argue that Richard's absolutism is a break with the established chivalric codes of feudalism that almost certainly leads to some reactionary opposition, but I do not share his view that Bolingbroke's victory necessarily represents the triumph of that reactionary opposition. I suggest, as Holderness himself later hints in his reading of *Henry IV* (pp. 65–79), that Bolingbroke *does* become a modern Machiavellian politician and so cannot be made to represent feudalism. I would maintain that there is no fundamental break between the reigns of Richard II and Henry IV, no transition from 'old' to 'new' or vice versa, because both kings are consciously engaged in the same political game, albeit using different strategies. The point is: the transition from feudalism to *Realpolitik does* occur, but it happens during Richard's reign rather than after it and there is no subsequent transition back.
41. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 203.
42. Catherine Belsey, 'Making Histories Then and Now: Shakespeare from *Richard II* to *Henry V*', in *Uses of History: Marxism, Postmodernism and the Renaissance*, ed. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. 36.
43. This point is familiar to new historicists, but they often collapse physical action into ideology or discourse. In the hands of Leonard Tennenhouse, for example, 'physical power' becomes yet another ideological 'display': 'in assuming the authority of blood is absolute, Richard neglects those displays of political authority which establish the absolute power of the monarch over the material body of the subject' (*Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare's Genres* (New York and London: Methuen, 1986), p. 77). This is a move that even Althusser, for whom ideology has a material existence, does not make; he maintains a careful distinction between the 'ideological state apparatus' and the 'repressive state apparatus'.
44. Tennenhouse, *Power on Display*, p. 76.
45. Rackin, *Stages of History*, p. 50.
46. Belsey, 'Making Histories Then and Now', p. 42.

47. James L. Calderwood, *Metadrama in Shakespeare's Henriad* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), p. 179.
48. Tennenhouse, *Power on Display*, p. 81.
49. It should be noted that in suggesting that both Richard II and Henry IV come to understand their failings, I have departed significantly from readings such as that found in Laurie E. Osborne, 'Crisis of Degree in Shakespeare's *Henriad*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 25:2 (Spring 1985), pp. 337–59. Osborne argues that Henry 'holds the view that the supremacy of the King must rest on power and practical ability . . . [He] is as blind to the need for the sacred aspect of Kingship as Richard is to the necessity for practical superiority' (p. 343). This conclusion is much too clean-cut. In contrast, I have argued that, by the start of *1 Henry IV*, Henry is quite aware of the need for ideology ('the sacred aspect of Kingship') and that, from 3.2 of *Richard II*, Richard *does* realise that power depends as much on materiality and physical force as it does on form and symbolism, but it is too late for him by then.
50. Holderness, *Shakespeare's History*, p. 67.
51. Ronald Knowles, *Shakespeare's Arguments with History* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 69.
52. George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949; London: Penguin, 2003).
53. The question of whether or not Hal had ever actually committed any petty crimes was the subject of a memorable debate between J. Dover Wilson (who argued that he had not) and William Empson (who argued that he had). See John Dover Wilson, *The Fortunes of Falstaff* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943); John Dover Wilson, 'Introduction', in *1 Henry VI*, ed. John Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), pp. i–lv; William Empson, 'Falstaff and Mr. Dover Wilson', *Kenyon Review*, 15:2 (Spring 1953), pp. 213–62; and a substantially revised version of that essay, entitled 'Falstaff', in Empson's *Essays on Shakespeare* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 29–78. On this issue, I find Empson's argument more convincing, because Dover Wilson's view strikes me as the more 'one-eyed'. Empson is broadly justified in his claim that Dover Wilson 'felt a natural irritation at any intellectualist fuss against a broad issue of patriotism', because 'he felt that *Henry V* is a very good and patriotic play, and the man Henry V is the ideal king, and Falstaff is a ridiculously bad man' (*Essays on Shakespeare*, p. 35). Empson's argument that 'when Dover Wilson winces away from recognising the positive merits of Falstaff, he is blinding himself to the breadth and depth of these plays' (p. 36) seems to me substantially correct. In *1 Henry IV*, the line 'Where shall we take a purse tomorrow, Jack' (1.2.87), spoken by Hal to Falstaff, seems to be said in earnest, with Hal's denial of ever having been a thief almost forty lines later ('Who, I rob? I a thief? Not I, by my faith' (1.2.123)) spoken ironically. To suggest that Hal really means it when he says, 'Well then, once in my days I'll be a madcap' (1.2.127), as Dover Wilson does, is to ignore the discourse of sarcastic repartee that Falstaff and Hal establish in this short scene.
54. Raymond Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory', in *Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays* (1980; New York and London: Verso, 2005), p. 41.

55. See Holderness, *Shakespeare's History*, pp. 40–79.
56. Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare's History Plays* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 168, 174. Note that Howard and Rackin read this scene in terms of the female seduction of masculine authority through sensuality, rather than the radical undermining of the official state ideology, but they do at least acknowledge that there is something subversive going on.
57. Lewis, *The Lion and the Fox*, p. 224.
58. Althusser, 'Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus', p. 109.
59. Barbara Hodgdon, *The End Crowns All: Closure and Contradiction in Shakespeare's History Plays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 160.
60. Belsey, 'Making Histories Then and Now', p. 42.
61. Empson, 'Falstaff', p. 38.
62. Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, pp. 52–6.
63. Note that neither the thousand pounds that Falstaff owes Shallow nor his sudden arrest by the Lord Chief Justice (*2 Henry IV*, 5.5.85) are insurmountable obstacles – we know that these are situations that Falstaff will *somehow* get himself out of.
64. Althusser, 'Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus', pp. 118–19.
65. Belsey, 'Making History Then and Now', p. 42.
66. This is most obviously illustrated by the much-repeated fact that supporters of the Essex Rebellion of 1601 paid for a performance of *Richard II* the night before they took up arms. Upon hearing of this, according to her archivist, William Lambarde, Elizabeth I remarked: 'I am Richard the Second, know ye not that?' (John Nichols (ed.), *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth [To which are subjoined some of the Early Progresses of King James I]*, 4 vols (London, 1788–1821), vol. 1, pp. 325–7).

Chapter 9

Conclusion

This monograph makes a sustained argument against the anti-humanism to which, under the sway of cultural historicism, Shakespeare studies has been in thrall since the 1980s. It puts forward three principal objections. The first of these is that the anti-humanist concept of the individual is both under-theorised and seemingly oblivious to the facts of modern genetics and neurobiology. The view of individuals as having few innate qualities or characteristics and being almost wholly determined by cultural and ideological forces robs them of agency and strips history of human significance. When individuals are enveloped by social forces which determine their thoughts and actions, we are left not with a history of human beings, but with a history of structures working on and competing with other structures, from which the individual has disappeared.

To the anti-humanist, it does not matter *who* became the king of England in 1603, or who wrote *Measure for Measure* in 1603, or who carried out any action in that year; what matters is that these actions were 'produced' in a certain place and time under a set of governing structural forces. For all that it matters to a new historicist such as the Jonathan Goldberg of *James I and the Politics of Literature*, which I analysed in Chapter 2, they might as well have been performed by the same person; what difference does it make when individuals are formed wholly by culture and ideology, and motivated by the same ideas and circumstances? Goldberg's apparent inability to distinguish between James I and Shakespeare exposes the residues of formalism that new historicism has never been able to abandon fully. In new historicist hands, history becomes a synchronic snapshot of a given culture, each part of which is a synecdoche that secretes the nature of the whole. So despite its avowed intention to view history heterogeneously, in practice new historicism arbitrarily connects the disparate fields of a historical moment by assuming that they are governed by the same monolithic cultural

logic. This is the assumption that allows Stephen Greenblatt to 'trans-code' social rituals from one sphere of action to another (for example, from the church to the theatre). The failure to account for individuals leads new historicism to create a theoretical and critical black hole of cultural essentialism that swallows individuals and discursive fields and annihilates difference.

My second principal objection to the anti-humanist approach is that it falls prey to a mode of deterministic thinking, whereby the explanatory power of a meta-narrative is given primacy over other explanations. As a result, anti-humanists are prone to become dogmatic and inflexible. In Chapter 3, I argued that although cultural materialism offers a more sophisticated, theoretically developed and properly materialist model of culture and ideology than new historicism, it appears unable to engage with its critics without accusing them of being the ideologues of essentialist humanism and / or universalism, and thus reprehensible apologists for the patriarchal, class-divided status quo. This renders cultural materialism blind both to valid criticisms of its theory, and to recent developments in science that strongly suggest that individuals are not as passive and susceptible to the lures of ideologies, cultures and subcultures as cultural materialists assume.

The third and most important objection concerns the way that anti-humanists read Shakespeare's plays. Because of their anti-humanism, cultural historicists are disposed to read Shakespeare's plays diagnostically, as mere products of their place and time which reflect only the ideas of that place and time. This effectively limits Shakespeare's authorial agency to a set of established positions attributable to other sources in the period. I have argued that this is an inadequate critical method with which to approach a writer as complex and nuanced as Shakespeare, not only because it is so patently reductive, but also because it blinds us to his trenchant insights into the workings of history and ideology in the history plays – into the very issues with which, ironically, cultural historicism itself is concerned. Even more ironically, as I sought to show in Chapter 7, Shakespeare's own dramatic meditations on history allow a scope for the role of the individual and individual agency in history, which anti-humanist modes of thought find inconceivable. In addition, as Chapter 8 undertook to demonstrate, these plays also display an acute awareness of the importance of ideology for those in power as a means of maintaining control of their subjects and, of particular interest to cultural materialists, an equally shrewd understanding of how ideology can fail in that endeavour.

Since Shakespeare, as I contend in Chapter 6, is a humanist and a political realist, his treatment of history is not constrained by the inflex-

ible determinism that mars cultural historicist commentaries on his history plays, in which he ascribes some decisions and actions to human nature and others to the social milieu. As I argue in Chapter 7, a criticism that proceeds on the assumption that Shakespeare was an exceptionally creative, intelligent and thoughtful individual, who was influenced and informed, but not completely 'produced', by the world and time in which he wrote, is better equipped to do justice to the complexity of his drama. This is not to resurrect the idea of the Universal Bard, but simply to treat the plays of an extraordinarily gifted individual with the same respect cultural historicist critics have afforded the work of Michel Foucault. If Foucault, writing in the twentieth century, could have original, provocative insights into the order of things in his time, why could not Shakespeare writing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? This monograph makes an argument for the agency of individuals in history and for Shakespeare's agency as an individual. In doing so, it produces new readings of the history plays that may facilitate readings of other plays, readings that are historically grounded, theoretically informed, attuned to textual nuances, and committed to the notion that individuals can and will think independently. In writing this book, I hope to have made a significant contribution to the movement to free Shakespeare studies from the shackles of anti-humanism.

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Index

Bold indicates pages that deal with the topic or person's work in detail

Althusser, Louis, 1, 5, 11, 13, 24, 27, 33–4, 38–9, 41, 43, 48, 54–5, 58, 62, 65–6, 74, 76–7, 112–14, 150, 176, 179, 204, 208
  epistemological break, 11–12, 26, 105, 112, 120n
  Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), 176
  interpellation, 54, 77, 150, 176, 184, 195, 202
  Repressive State Apparatus (RSA), 176
anti-humanism, 37, 52–68, 105–14, 215–17
antiquarianism, 87, 89, 99, 102, 105
Aquinas, Thomas, 82, 104, 120n
Assiter, Alison, 43
Aumerle, 189, 194
autonomy of the individual, 5, 58–60, 63, 67, 76, 97, 112, 179–80

Bakhtin, Mikhail, 19
Balzac, Honoré de, 27, 47
Barker, Francis, 85, 115
Barthes, Roland, 21, 27, 47, 56, 76
Bate, Jonathan, 28
Beard, Thomas, 96
Beer, Barrett L., 88, 101
Belsey, Catherine, 1, 4, 6, 15, 23, 26, 34, 43, 52, **57–67**, 85, 188, 193, 204, 208
Bentham, Jeremy, 165, 184
Berger Jr., Harry, 185
Berry, Edward, 158, 167
Bevington, David, 4
Bloom, Harold, 4, 48, 181
Blundeville, Thomas, 95, 98
Blunt, Sir Walter, 197, 201
Bolingbroke, Henry, 85–8, **90–5**, 115, 136, **181–93**, 199, 203
  as Henry IV, 193–4, 196–7, 199–202, 204–6
Bourdieu, Pierre, 77–8, 112
Boyd, Brian, 4, 56–7, 77, 168
Bradshaw, Graham, 4, **35–7**, 39, 45–6, 48
Brecht, Bertolt, 208
Bristol, Michael D., 4, 33–4, 144
Brotton, Jerry, 4
Buckingham, Duke of, 128, 132, 151, 175–6
Budra, Paul, 87, 96, 115
Bullough, Geoffrey, 89

Cade, Jack, 124, 129, 137, **142–53**, 174, 203, 207–8
Callaghan, Dympna, 4, 44
Calvin, John, 97, 103–4, 120n
Camden, William, 89–91, 95, 100
Capgrave, John, 91
Carlisle, Bishop of, 84–7, 102, 115
Carroll, Joseph 2, 4, 55–7, 62, 77
Cartelli, Thomas, 150
Catholicism, 103, 105
Caxton, William, 97
censorship, 86, 89, 145
Clarence, George, Duke of, 111, 113, 126, 138, 155–6, 162–4
Clifford, Lord, 138–40, 151, 155–8, 179

Cohen, Derek, 101, 144
Cohen, Stephen, 2–5
Cohen, Walter, 4, 5, **11–17**, 25, 33, 74, 75
  arbitrary connectedness, **10–12**, 16, 24
Colebrook, Claire, 16
Concio, Giancomo, 98
Connor, Steven, 73
consequentialism, 165–6
Cox, John D., 133, 140
Cranmer, Thomas, 102
Creton, Jean, 92
cultural materialism, 1–4, 6, 10–12, 26–7, **33–48**, 52, 55, 62–4, 72, 74, 77, 79, 81–2, 85–7, 100, 107, 111–12, 115, 123, 125, 143, 178–9, 197, 216
culturalism, 26–7, 29, 73

Daniel, Samuel, 90–5
Davis, Phillip, 78–9
deconstruction, 12, 16, 26, 29
Dekker, Thomas, 181
Derrida, Jacques, 16, 56, 65, 180
Descartes, René, 16
Dessen, Alan C., 122, 168
determinism, 52, 57–63, 65–6, 112, 216–17
diachronic history, 11–12, 17–18, 26, 29, 73–4, 112
Diamond, Jared, 61–2
Dick the butcher, 145–7, 149
dissidence, 34, 46–7, 60, 62, 64, 76, 82, 115
Dollimore, Jonathan, 1, 4, 6, 26, 27, **33–48**, 52, 63, 64, 85, 100, 112, 113, 114, 122, 178, 180
Donno, Elizabeth Story, 101
Dover Wilson, J., 167
Drakakis, John, 6
Dutton, Richard, 6, 115

Eagleton, Terry, 5, 180
Edward, Prince (Edward V), 113, 138, 163–4
Edward III, 188
Edward IV, 78, 111, 126, 161–6, 174–6
Edward VI, 28, 97
Egan, Gabriel, 4, 54–5, 57
Eleanor of Gloucester, 108–9, 111, 127–31, 135–6, 139–40, 153
Elizabeth I, 28, 42–3, 85, 97, 102–3, 161, 164
Empson, William, 206
Erikson, Peter, 1, 6, 28
essentialism, 1–3, 5, 25–7, 35–6, 46, 52, 54, 58, 73, 78, 123, 216
evolutionary biology, 3–4, 23, 52–3, 56–8, 60, 62–3, 65–7
existentialism, 37, 55, 79, 112, 125

Falstaff, 80, 181, 197–9, 201, **203–8**
Felperin, Howard, 15, 27
feminism, 1, 4, 19, 43–5, 48, 59, 74–6, 109, 115, 123
Ferguson, Arthur B., 88
Fernie, Ewan, 3–4, 65–6
feudalism, 142, 149–50, 152–3, 174, 193
formalism, 1, 3–4, 10–12, 15–19, 25–9, 33, 36, 72–3, 77, 114–15, 215
Foxe, John, 96, 128
Foucault, Michel, 1, 5, 11–16, 24, 27, 29, 34, 56, 65, 73–4, 77, 105, 112–14, 149–50, 177, 179, 184, 188, 205, 217
  panopticism, 77, 184, 205
  power relations, 27
  Power-Knowledge, 149
freedom, 29, 63, 66, 151, 208
Freud, Sigmund, 65–6, 113, 180
Froissart, Jean, 92, 94–5
Fukuyama, Francis, 47
functionalism, 23–5, 29, 39, 43, 57, 73

Gallagher, Catherine, 4, 115
Gaunt, John of, 86–7, 93, 102, 182–4, 186–7, 192, 197, 200, 203–4, 207
Geertz, Clifford, 27–9, 52, 55, 73–4, 179
gender, 1, 20–1, 34, 37, 43–4, 54, 76, 108, 124–5
Glyndŵr, Owain, 196, 198–9, 201–2
Goldberg, Jonathan, 4, **12–19**, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 37, 45, 215
Gottschall, Jonathan, 4, 56, 77
Goy-Blanquet, Dominique, 88, 97, 115
Grady, Hugh, 1, 4, 6, 20
Gramsci, Antonio, 5, 13, 27, 33, 38–9, 48, 74, 77, 149–51

Greenblatt, Stephen, 1, 4, 6, 13, **19–28**, 37, 52, 73, 78, 80, 85, 100, 107, 114–15, 122, 143–4, 152, 178, 180, 186, 206–8, 216
  containment, 76, 79, 85–6, 143, 147, 152, 178–81
  transcoding, 21–2, 28, 35, 52, 54, 216
Grene, Nicholas, 84, 114, 126, 154, 168, 187–8
Guicciardini, Francesco, 97
Gupta, Sen, 128, 168

Hadfield, Andrew, 64, 141, 175, 177
Hal, Prince, 111, 193, **196–202**
  as Henry V, 40–1, 102, 111
  rejection of Falstaff, 205–8
Hall, Edward, 81, 90–4, 125
Halliwell, Martin, 55
Hattaway, Michael, 86, 115, 130, 134
Hawkes, Terence, 4, 6
Hawthorn, Jeremy, 6, 10–11
Hazlitt, William, 78–9
Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 13, 25, 27, 34, 180
hegemony, 2, 17, 19, 33, 38, 42, 75, 123, 201–2, 207
Henry VI, 107–8, 110, 130–1, 136–8, 140–1, 143, 147, **155–66**
Henry VIII, 20–1, 28, 97, 115
heterogeneity, 3, 18, 23, 25, 74, 95, 105, 193, 215
historical chronicles, 81–2, **87–94**, 96–7, 99, 101–2, 105, 115, 125–6, 180
historiography, 6, 72, 81–2, 87–9, 91, **95–102**, 104–5, 115, 167
Hodgdon, Barbara, 204
Holderness, Graham, 4, 86, 95–6, 100, 111, 115, 122–4, 127, 178, 195, 199
Holinshed, Raphael, 42, 81, 91–3, 95–6, 101–2, 115, 180
Holstun, James, 25
homogeneity, 23, 25, 73
Hooker, Richard, 103, 120
Hotspur (Henry Percy), 102, 111, **197–202**, 204
Howard, Jean E., 4–5, 15, 75, 101, 115, 122, 124, 129, 145, 201
Hulme, Peter, 85
humanism, 1–6, 11–12, 26, 34–7, 45–8, 52–5, 57–67, 74–80, 88–9, 97–9, 102, 104–7, 111–14, 123–4, 126, 167, 208, 215–17
Hume, David, 136
Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, 108, 111, **127–34**, 136, 142, 156

Iden, Alexander, 147, 151–2
individual responsibility, 111, 114, 125, 148, 160–1, 164, 184
individualism, 109
individuality, 65, 76
Iser, Wolfgang, 122, 167
Iversen, Margaret, 85, 115

James I, 12–15, 17, 23–4, 28, 96, 99, 103, 215
Jameson, Fredric, 46
Jardine, Lisa, 4
Joan of Arc (la Pucelle), 102, 124
Jonson, Ben, 13
Joughin, John J., 4

Kamps, Ivo, 2, 87–90, 95–9, 115
Kastan, David Scott, 4–5, 11–12, 15, 20, 107, 112
Knowles, Ronald, 91, 107, 110, 196
Kott, Jan, 37, 106, 112, 125, 175
Kruger, Daniel, 56

Lacan, Jacques, 113
Laden, Sonja, 73, 82
Lancastrians, 92–3, 95, 109, 128, 139, 158, 163
Lane, Anthony N. S., 104, 120
Latimer, Hugh, 20–3, 28
Lehan, Richard, 12, 18, 26
Levin, Richard, 3–5, 36, 45, 48, 179
Literary Darwinism, 55–6
Liu, Alan, 18
Loomba, Ania, 4
Lords Appellant, 90, 185
Luther, Martin, 102

Macdonald, Ronald R., 186
Macherey, Pierre, 5
Machiavelli, Niccolò, 38–9, 82, 88, 97–8, 123, 129, 143, 154–5, 157, 165–6, 175
Machiavellianism, 102, 110, 123, 139, 208
Machtpolitik, 138, 154, 156
MacLane, Gerald, 4
McLuskie, Kathleen, 4, 43

McManus, Clare, 4
Mahood, M.M., 184
Malpas, Simon, 4
Manheim, Michael, 158
Marcus, Leah S., 2, 4, 35, 47, 53
Margaret of Anjou, 85, 93, 108–10, 113, 115, 124–6, 128–9, 132–41, 143, 147–59, 161, 163–4, 166
Marlowe, Christopher, 80, 99, 124
Martin, G. K., 92
Marx, Karl, 5, 13, 27, 62, 82, 108, 113, 148, 180
Marxism, 1, 4, 6, 10, 27, 33, 35, 43, 45, 47–8, 54, 64, 74, 77, 113, 115, 180–1
Meron, Theodor, 143
Mirror for Magistrates, 81, **89–91**, 94–5
Montaigne, Michel de, 82
Montrose, Louis A., 4, 65
Mousley, Andy, 4, 55, 57, 60, 79, 105
Mowbray, Thomas, 90–5, **181–7**
Mullaney, Steven, 4

Nashe, Thomas, 80
neurobiology, 3, 53, 57, 215
new historicism, 1–6, **10–29**, 33–5, 37, 39, 47–8, 52–8, 60, 62–3, 65, 67, 72–82, 85–7, 100, 105–7, 111–15, 122–5, 127, 143, 145, 148, 152, 178–80, 215–17
Nietzsche, Friedrich, 35, 180
Nordlund, Marcus, 2, 4, 35, 53
Northumberland, Earl of, 87, 139, 186, 188, 191, 198
Nuttall, A. D., 4, 78–80, 126, 148

Ockham, William of, 120n
Orwell, George, 144, 193, 196

Parker, Patricia, 4, 181
Parsons, Talcott, 24, 29, 73
patriarchy, 36, 75, 109, 216
Patrizi, Francesco, 97–9
Patterson, Annabel, 89, 95–6, 99, 102, 106, 113–15, 179
Peasants' Rebellion of 1381, 145
Pechter, Edward, 4, 17
Pecora, Vincent P., 27–8
Pieters, Jürgen, 25, 27
Pinker, Stephen, 53, 55, 58–60, 62
Pistol, 205
Porter, Carolyn, 18–19
Presbyterianism, 103
presentism, 4, 6
Prior, Moody E., 106, 108, 123–4, 127
providential theory of history, 84–9, 91, 96–8, 102, 110, 112, 123, 125, 138, 208
Puritanism, 103

Rabkin, Norman, 174, 179
Rackin, Phyllis, 4, 74, 82, 86, 91, 97, 101, 107, 115, 122, 124, 126, 139, 147–8, 152, 178, 184–5, 193, 201
Raleigh, Walter, 95–7
Rasmussen, David, 4
Realpolitik, 39, 129, 148, 154
Reese, M. M., 125
Reformation, 28, 88, 99
Ribner, Irving, 124–5, 140, 167
Richard II, 40–3, 72, 82, 84–6, 90–5, 114–15, 145, 168, 174, 176–7, **181–205**, 207
Richard of Gloucester (Richard III), 72, 76–8, 82, 93, 110–13, **122–7**, 129, 155, 165, 167–8, 175–6, 182
Richards, I. A., 48
Rossiter, A. P., 174, 193
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 141, 153
ruthless politics, 82, 109, 126, 138–41, 153–5
Rutland, Edmund Plantagenet, Earl of, 138–9, 153, 155
Ryan, Kiernan, 2, 5–6, 46, 63, 73, 82, 179, 181

Salisbury, Earl of, 128, 133–4, 136–7, 141, 154, 189
Sanders, Wilber, 37, 81, 112, 123, 128, 176
Saul, Nigel, 85, 87, 114
Saussure, Ferdinand de, 16
  langue, 177, 186
  parole, 177
Say, Lord, 143, 150–1
Scotus, Duns, 120n
Shakespeare, William
  ABC of power, 175–7
  Anthony and Cleopatra, 66
  As You Like It, 66
  characterisation, 126, 128, 139, 147, 180

doubleness, 14, 174, 193
Hamlet, 47, 139, 181
1 Henry IV, 193–209
2 Henry IV, 41–3, 72, 111, 168, 193–209
1 Henry VI, 124, 128, 130–5, 142–3, 153, 161, 167–8
2 Henry VI, 82, 106–9, 124–60, 174, 208
3 Henry VI, 72, 82, 106, 109, 122, 124, 126, 129, 136–68, 174
Henry V, 36–7, 40–8, 72, 85, 102, 105–6, 111, 114, 133, 142, 144, 168, 177–8, 180, 196, 205–6
humanism of, 99–107
Measure for Measure, 13–15, 22–3, 28, 215
The Merchant of Venice, 167
Much Ado About Nothing, 67
Richard II, 40–3, 72, 82, 84–6, 90–5, 114–15, 145, 168, 174, 176–7, 181, 183, 186–7, 192–205, 207
Richard III, 72, 76–8, 82, 93, 110, 113, 122–7, 129, 155, 165, 167–8, 175–6, 182
The Tempest, 20, 67
as thinker, 78–82
The Winter's Tale, 21–2, 67
Shallow, Robert, 205
Shershow, Scott Cutler, 5
Siemon, James, 76–7, 82
Simpcox, 130–1
Sinfield, Alan, 4, 6, 14, 26–7, 34–47, 52, 60, 64–5, 76, 78, 82, 85, 100, 112–15, 122, 178, 180
faultlines, 39, 76, 78
Spenser, Edmund, 91
Stow, John, 89, 95–6, 101
structuralism, 1, 10, 16–18, 27, 29, 56
subjectivity, 33, 35, 43, 46, 48, 60, 76
subversion, 14, 19, 23, 34, 36, 38, 63–4, 76, 85–6, 143–4, 151–2, 178–80, 201–7
Suffolk, William de la Pole, Duke of, 109, 125–6, 128–9, 132–7, **139–43**, 147–8, 152–3, 155–6, 159, 161
Swayne, Mattie, 160
synchronic understanding of history, 10, 12, 15, 18–19, 25, 29, 73–4, 112, 215
synecdoche, 11–12, 15, 17, 20, 24, 28–9, 73, 114, 215

Talbot, Lord, 124, 133, 153, 157
Taylor, Gary, 168n
Taylor, Thomas, 96–7
Tennenhouse, Leonard, 4, 122–4, 193–4
Thatcher, Margaret, 109
Thirty-Nine Articles, 104–5
Thompson, E. P., 33, 43
Tillyard, E. M. W., 35–7, 48, 75, 84–7, 89, 107, 112, 114, 123, 125, 167, 178, 184
'Elizabethan World Picture', 37
Great Chain of Being, 85, 165, 178

universalism, 55, 75, 216
utilitarianism, 165

Veeser, H. Aram, 6, 11
Vergil, Polydore, 95, 97–8
Vickers, Brian, 168

Walsingham, Thomas, 92
War of the Roses, 110, 155–6, 160–7
Warwick, Richard Neville, Earl of, 128, 133–4, 136–7, 140–2, 154–5, 157, 163–4, 166, 175
Wayne, Don E., 25, 75
Wells, Robin Headlam, 4, 53, 62, 167
Williams, Raymond
emergent, 34, 39, 48, 64–5, 104, 111, 148, 151
residual, 34, 39, 48, 64–5, 104, 111, 199, 201
Wilson, Richard, 4, 6, 34, 124, 144–5
Wilson, Scott, 6, 10–11, 35, 43
Winchester, Henry Beaufort, Bishop of, 128–30, 133–6, 140, 142, 153
Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 180
Woolf, D. R., 88, 101–2
Worden, Blair, 111, 153, 179

York, Duchess of, 194
York, Richard, Duke of, 6, 85, 107–9, 113–15, 120, 124–5, 128–9, 133–4, 136–46, 148, 151, 153–7, 160, 162, 166–8, 175, 184, 194, 207
Yorkists, 93, 136, 143, 162