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'HENRY IV' and 'HAMLET'

G. R. HIBBARD

The hazards inherent in a topic such as this have been unforgettably dramatized by Shakespeare himself. In *Henry V*, as the battle of Agincourt nears its end, Fluellen rashly sets about drawing a Plutarchan parallel between Harry of Monmouth and 'Alexander the Pig' of Macedon, for the edification of Captain Gower. Part of this laboured essay, all too anticipatory of the efforts of many a modern student of literature faced with the odious task of comparison, runs thus:

> I tell you, Captain, if you look in the maps of the 'orld, I warrant you sall find, in the comparisons between Macedon and Monmouth, that the situations, look you, is both alike. There is a river in Macedon; and there is also moreover a river at Monmouth; it is call'd Wye at Monmouth, but it is out of my prains what is the name of the other river; but 'tis all one, 'tis alike as my fingers is to my fingers, and there is salmons in both. (IV, vii, 21–7)[1]

I hope to avoid the more obvious 'salmon-falls'; but a somewhat speculative argument netted from 'the invention-crowded seas' of *Henry IV* and *Hamlet*, either of them an

> Ocean where each [m]ind
> Does streight its own resemblance find,

may legitimately, I think, with apologies to Yeats and Marvell, whose words I have already twisted, claim a touch of 'fishiness' as its right and natural prerogative.

To return to dry land and prose: *Henry IV* and *Hamlet* are both big plays; big not only in the scale of their achievement but also in the simple elementary sense that they are long. And here, to dispose of a much vexed question in summary fashion, let me say at once that I regard the two parts of *Henry IV* as one play in ten acts. I do not think Shakespeare planned it thus. I believe he set out originally to write a play about Hotspur's revolt, but then came to realize, long before that play was complete, that he must continue it because the rich vein of ore he had struck was far from exhausted. Accordingly, he took care to set up the necessary signposts in Part 1 to indicate that Part 2 was to follow; and, by the time he had reached the end of Part 2, Hotspur's revolt had been subsumed into an enormous panoramic view not only of the reign of Henry IV but also of the life of the English people in the days of Queen Elizabeth.

Henry IV and *Hamlet* are long because their author has so much to say, and also because, as I tried to suggest with that reference to the opening lines of W. B. Yeats's 'Sailing to Byzantium', each is impregnated and pervaded by a wonderful fertility, almost a prodigality, of invention. In them the dramatist is like an explorer who has found his way into a new territory that teems with life, and he transmits the excitement of the discovery to us. They abound with themes, with ideas, with actions, and with highly individualized characters, each endowed with his own specific idiom, that manner of thought and utterance which we soon come to recognize as peculiarly and distinctively his. This fertility of invention is evident in the large casts – twenty-seven parts

[1] The text used for all quotations from and references to Shakespeare's writings is that of *The Complete Works*, ed. Peter Alexander (1951).

in *Hamlet*, thirty-five in *1 Henry IV*, and forty-four in *2 Henry IV* – and, above all, in the readiness with which Shakespeare introduces important new characters at a late stage in the action. In *Henry IV*, Shallow and Silence do not appear at all until the second scene of act III in Part 2, nearly half-way through it, and Davy not until the first scene of act V. In *Hamlet*, the last act throws up no fewer than three brand-new figures: the two grave diggers, as earthy as the clay they work in and as dry as the old bones they handle with such familiarity, and the water-fly Osric. In both plays, moreover, there is a fertility and subtlety of design that affects their very texture, making the relationships between some of the leading figures especially intricate and dynamic. By their very co-existence in the same play these figures serve to define and illuminate one another, and, at the same time, to define and give substance to motives and ideas that are of central importance to the drama. Hotspur, Hal, and Falstaff do this for one another and for the idea of honour; Laertes, Hamlet, and Fortinbras do it for one another and for the motive of revenge. In this respect, each play is like a hall of mirrors, reflecting many different yet complementary images of its major concerns and preoccupations.

This wealth of characterization and this richness and complexity of texture, working together to give a potent sense of reality and immediacy to everything that is said and done, are, surely, one of the main reasons why the two plays always have been and still continue to be so popular with audiences and readers alike. But there is, of course, another: each contains a figure who exerts a special kind of fascination because of what he is in himself. Falstaff and Hamlet, dissimilar though they are in other ways, both live by virtue of saying so much and saying it so supremely well: the Monarch of Wit and the Prince of Paradox. Indeed, I should like to suggest that, within the context of Shakespeare's work as a whole, they live in a dialectical relationship to each other. Each is so fully imagined, so instinct with life, so complete and unique in himself, that he begins to take on symbolic overtones. For me, Falstaff ultimately becomes the flesh, not in any allegorical or religious sense, but quite simple as the body, free from all censorship from conscience, morals, or custom, using every resource of wit and intelligence to preserve itself and to gratify its appetites: the flesh, in all its splendour and all its frailty, made articulate as it is nowhere else in literature. And I have Falstaff's own word for this reading of him. Accused by Hal of blatant lying, he retorts:

> Dost thou hear, Hal? Thou knowest in the state of innocency Adam fell; and what should poor Jack Falstaff do in the days of villainy? Thou seest I have more flesh than another man, and therefore more frailty. (*1 Hen. IV*, III, iii, 164–7)

Hamlet – need I say it? – is the obverse of Falstaff: the spirit, subject to conscience, the censor, and using every resource of wit and intelligence, not to stay alive, but to find out the truth, to learn what is the right thing to do, and then to do it. His first words, when he is left alone by himself, are significantly:

> O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,
> Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
> (I, ii, 129–30)

They echo, with a striking shift of emphasis, Falstaff's description of himself in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, as 'a man of continual dissolution and thaw' (III, v, 102–3). The one desires to be free from the flesh; to the other, the loss of even a few ounces of the precious stuff is a cause for complaint and regret.

The two characters have one further thing in common, which may well be a consequence of their proclivities for living in worlds which, though opposite, are both ideal: over the past two hundred years they have obstinately

refused to stay within and be confined by the play world in which they began and to which they properly belong. Hamlet, assisted by Goethe and Coleridge, climbed out of it at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. Falstaff, that skilled and unscrupulous recruiter, having enlisted the aid of Maurice Morgann, had made his escape from art into history somewhat earlier, in 1777, to be precise, some eighteen years before the publication of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. The more austere practitioners of the art of literary criticism, those who warn us against 'the intentional fallacy' and the like, may regret, reprobate, and even attempt to reverse such a development; but is it not thus that the truly great products of the creative imagination have made themselves constituent parts of the modern consciousness?

However that may be, it seems clear to me that it was Shakespeare himself who prepared the way out for each of them by providing him with a quite unusually full and interesting past for a character in an Elizabethan play. One who can say, as Falstaff does to the Lord Chief Justice, 'My lord, I was born about three of the clock in the afternoon, with a white head and something a round belly' (*2 Henry IV*, I, ii, 176–7), cries out for a biographer and stakes his claim to a real existence. What would not Boswell have given for such a piece of information about the birth of Dr Johnson? And then there are all the other details of Falstaff's wayward youth: how he lost his voice 'with hallooing and singing of anthems' (I, ii, 177–8); how he was 'page to Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk' (III, ii, 24–5); how he broke 'Scoggin's head... when 'a was a crack not thus high' (III, ii, 27–8), and so forth. His fleeting reference to 'old Mistress Ursula, whom I have weekly sworn to marry since I perceiv'd the first white hair of my chin' (I, ii, 226–7) is an open and irresistible invitation to the fancy to indulge itself in the pleasures of conjecture. Who was she? Presumably some misguided and gullible woman with money, on whom the old rogue sponged for years. Among my fishier speculations is the possibility that Ben Jonson took pity on the poor deluded ghostly Mistress Ursula, clothed her generously with flesh, and made her the pig-woman of *Bartholomew Fair*, much the most perfect mate in the whole of Elizabethan drama for Doll Tearsheet's 'whoreson little tidy Bartholomew boar-pig' (II, iv, 221–2).

As for Hamlet, the apparently casual bits of information scattered about the tragedy, that fill in so much of his life up to the beginning of the action, are too well known to require rehearsal; but I cannot forbear from mentioning the curious occasion of his birth. It took place, we learn, on 'that day that our last King Hamlet overcame Fortinbras' (V, i, 140) and killed him, which also happened to be the day, 'thirty years' ago, when the First Clown, who acquaints us with these important facts, took up grave-digging as his life's occupation. In Hamlet's case, when he was born is what matters, not what he looked like when he was born, for there is a fateful concatenation of circumstances depending on that date. The Clown, as he says all this, is standing in the grave he is digging for Ophelia. The next grave he digs will, no doubt, be Hamlet's. Like the iceberg and the *Titanic* in Hardy's poem, he and the Prince have been gradually converging for thirty years, just as the young Fortinbras, without knowing it, has been moving nearer and nearer to the throne of Denmark. Seen in this long perspective of retributory history, Hamlet's tragedy begins, not with his father's murder, nor with his mother's marriage to Claudius, but with his own birth. The play has something of a tragic biography about it.

There are then, it seems to me, certain marked similarities between *Henry IV* and *Hamlet*; but I have not got to the root of the

matter yet, for the features of the two plays that I have touched on so far are, I shall now contend, only the more obvious and readily identifiable manifestations of a more profound connection: their pivotal position in the intricate story of the development of Shakespeare's art as a poetic dramatist. At this point I find a text useful, and I take it from T. S. Eliot's essay on John Ford, first published in 1932, and then reprinted in his *Selected Essays*. Eliot writes:

> The standard set by Shakespeare is that of a continuous development from first to last, a development in which the choice both of theme and of dramatic and verse technique in each play seems to be determined increasingly by Shakespeare's state of feeling, by the particular stage of his emotional maturity at the time. What is 'the whole man' is not simply his greatest or maturest achievement, but the whole pattern formed by the sequence of plays; so that we may say confidently that the full meaning of any one of his plays is not in itself alone, but in that play in the order in which it was written, in its relation to all of Shakespeare's other plays, earlier and later: we must know all of Shakespeare's work in order to know any of it. No other dramatist of the time approaches anywhere near to this perfection of pattern, of pattern superficial and profound; but the measure in which dramatists and poets approximate to this unity in a lifetime's work, is one of the measures of major poetry and drama.[1]

We should all agree, I think, that there is a unity of some kind in the Shakespearian *oeuvre*, amazingly varied though that *oeuvre* is, and that this unity embraces the non-dramatic poetry, which Eliot leaves out of count, as well as the plays. But is there anything more to it than our intuitive sense of its presence, and, if there is, in what does it consist, and how is it to be defined? A partial answer to these questions is to say that the unity is there in the voice, in the style, which, while modulating into many tones and many accents as it puts itself at the disposal of a multitude of characters and of almost every form known to dramatic art, nevertheless contrives to retain a distinctive music which is not that made by the voice of Marlowe, or Ben Jonson, or whoever else. Voices are, however, tricky things to deal with; if they were not, there would be no argument over the authorship of *Henry VIII*, for example; and, more to the point, it is not the voice that Eliot writes about; the pattern he refers to is a pattern of meaning.

What he is really on to, though I do not think he puts the matter with the clarity it deserves, is what I take to be the most salient characteristic of Shakespeare's art: the fact that it is pre-eminently an art which is constantly building on itself through a sort of reciprocal process. On the one hand, it is an art that is very open to suggestion. As he writes one work, Shakespeare seems to see the possibility of another growing out of it. On the other hand, it is also extremely self-critical. The links between one play and another are, consequently, of many kinds: some simple and straightforward, others very subtle indeed. The more obvious kind of link is the one I began with: *1 Henry IV* leading to *2 Henry IV*, thence to *Henry V*, and, finally, as I think, to *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. The first sequence of the history plays would seem to have come into being after much the same fashion, and so, with some differences, would the Roman plays. But how did Shakespeare move from the writing of *Henry V* to the writing of *Julius Caesar*, composed in the same year, 1599? Here, incidentally, we can, for once, be reasonably sure about that matter of sequence which Eliot, all too lightly, assumes to be completely established. Much of the answer is, I would suggest, implicit in Fluellen's Plutarchan parallel, for in Plutarch the parallel life to that of Alexander is that of Julius Caesar. Shakespeare had Alexander in mind when writing *Henry V* because he had Caesar in mind, as the Prologue to act v so clearly demonstrates; and my guess is that he had

[1] T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (1951), pp. 193–4.

Caesar in mind, had been reading or re-reading the life, and was already planning a play about him, because Caesar, the Roman conqueror of Gaul, was the classical parallel to Henry V, the English conqueror of France.

There are other connections between *Henry V* and *Julius Caesar* that I should like to touch on briefly for the light they throw on Shakespeare's manner of going to work. Oratory has a large role in both plays; but, while the eloquence of Henry V is an inspiring force binding men together, the eloquence of Antony is a disruptive force, the weapon of the dangerous demagogue. Furthermore, in *Julius Caesar* Henry V himself splits into two, as it were. Hal, the wild prince who shows his real quality at Shrewsbury, becomes Antony, the Roman playboy who shows his real quality as he faces the conspirators immediately after Caesar's assassination; while Henry V the efficient politician becomes Octavius Caesar. The most fascinating thing about *Julius Caesar* in relation to *Henry V* is, however, this: that it is not Caesar's triumphs that Shakespeare chooses to dramatize but his overthrow. It is here that one sees the workings of his creative self-criticism. As a result of writing *Henry V*, he had learnt that success is not so fertile a soil for dramatic cultivation as failure. *Julius Caesar* is about the defeated: Brutus and Cassius, as well as Caesar himself.

The same kind of development, springing from a perception of the other possibility, if I may so describe it, is evident in three other pairs of plays, if not more, in which Shakespeare, having written one play, seems to ask himself the question that Peter's grandfather puts at the end of Prokofiev's 'Peter and the Wolf': 'But what if Peter had not caught the wolf, what then?' In *As You Like It* disguise is a source of strength, enabling Rosalind to stage and control the *dénouement* exactly as she wishes; but in *Twelfth Night* disguise becomes a source of vulnerability, as Viola discovers increasingly as the play goes on, and nowhere more so than in the last scene. *King Lear* and *Macbeth* offer the most striking example of what a reversal in point of view can lead to. Stripped down to the barest essentials of plot, the two tragedies are remarkably alike. But in *King Lear* we see that action from the point of view of Lear/Duncan, whereas in *Macbeth* we see it from the point of view of Macbeth/Albany and Lady Macbeth/Goneril. Something not altogether dissimiliar links *Antony and Cleopatra* to *Coriolanus*. In the one we witness the end of the Roman republic and the beginning of the empire; in the other the infant republic is just emerging from the monarchy which had preceded it. In the one the hero is a middle-aged warrior, in the other a soldier who is little more than a boy. Both are undone by a woman; yet it would be hard to think of two women more unlike than 'the serpent of old Nile' and the Roman matron Volumnia.

I have one further class of connections to add to my list, but before dealing with it I should like to turn back for a moment to T. S. Eliot. He says, you may recall, that 'the choice both of theme and of dramatic and verse technique in each play seems to be determined increasingly by Shakespeare's state of feeling, by the particular stage of his emotional maturity at the time.' I do not think this, as it stands, is very helpful. To argue the degree, at any given time, of Shakespeare's 'emotional maturity' – a rather suspect term in any case in the light of Eliot's essay on *Hamlet* – from the evidence provided by what he was writing at that time is, I think, to engage in idle and pointless speculation. The maturity he seems to have had from a very early stage in his career is artistic maturity, the inner knowledge which either assures the artist that his technical resources are capable of meeting the challenge he is about to subject them to, or warns him against undertaking a task for which he is not yet properly equipped. I mention this artistic

maturity here, because it helps to account for those many occasions in Shakespeare's work when he picks up and explores in much greater depth and detail something he has already handled before. The clearest example is, perhaps, his two treatments of the old story of Apollonius of Tyre, which he uses for the frame plot of *The Comedy of Errors* and then refashions, nearly twenty years later, into *Pericles*; but there are many more. *The Rape of Lucrece*, to go no further, already contains the germs of much that will re-appear, far more fully worked out and charged with new significance, in *Troilus and Cressida* and in *Macbeth*.

There is then, a unity about Shakespeare's work, and Eliot is right when he says that we must ideally see each play 'in its relation to all of Shakespeare's other plays'. More than that, however, as the author of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' rather surprisingly fails to mention, it also needs to be seen in its relation to the whole body of English drama in existence at the time when it was written. The general notion set out in that essay about the way in which each truly new work of art modifies the existing order is peculiarly applicable to Shakespeare's plays, for he was, of all the dramatists of his time, the best informed about English drama of the past, the keenest and most discriminating student of it, and the most skilful in exploiting it for his own specific purposes. Instead of abjuring the 'jigging veins of riming mother wits', as Marlowe had done, he recognized their possibilities and set them to work in the Pageant of the Nine Worthies in *Love's Labour's Lost* and in the 'tedious brief scene of young Pyramus/And his love Thisby' in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

I have one final point to make about Eliot's comment, a point which will take me back to *Henry IV* and *Hamlet*. He writes of 'a continuous development' in Shakespeare's art. That is acceptable enough, provided that 'continuous' is not allowed to carry any connotation of 'steady' with it, for there are plays, quite a number of them, in which the dramatist seems to be more concerned with consolidating and exploiting advances already made than with doing anything radically new; and there are others – *Henry IV* and *Hamlet* are, I think, the supreme examples – in which his art makes a sudden leap forward, plays which the modern technological jargon would, no doubt, dub 'break-throughs', but which I prefer to think of, adhering to the kind of horticultural metaphor that Shakespeare himself was so given to, as 'growing points'.

This subjective impression of the newness of the two plays can gratifyingly be supported by evidence from a most unlikely source: statistics. Back in 1943, Alfred Hart published the results of what must have been a most arduous and painstaking piece of research in the form of two articles in *The Review of English Studies*: 'Vocabularies of Shakespeare's Plays' and 'The Growth of Shakespeare's Vocabulary'.[1] Adopting, with a few modifications, E. K. Chambers's dating of the plays, Hart took the vocabulary of *2 Henry VI* as his base, and then counted, among other things, the new words – new in the sense that Shakespeare had not used them before – that the writing of each play, and of the Poems and Sonnets which he treats as a single unit, had brought with it. The earliest entries in his Table IV, which sets out this 'Inflow of Fresh Words', do not, of course, tell one very much, because the first few plays are needed to establish the basic working vocabulary; but if one takes the total derived from the first tetralogy and a couple of the earliest comedies as a base, what follows is likely to be significant. Ignoring, as Hart does not, such important considerations as the varying lengths of the plays and the number of new words in

[1] *Review of English Studies*, XIX (1943), 128–40 and 242–54.

a play as a percentage of its total vocabulary, I shall now quote a few of the raw figures. *Hamlet*, it will surprise no one to learn, has the largest number of new words, 606. It is followed closely by *Love's Labour's Lost*, with 587. Next comes *1 Henry IV*, with 493; then *2 Henry IV*, with 445; and then, to go no farther, *Romeo and Juliet*, with 413.

Now a large influx of new words into a writer's vocabulary is surely an indication that he is doing something fresh: either handling new material or doing something original and unexpected with material that is not new in itself. It therefore follows that the five plays which head the list must all be growing points of some kind, which is exactly what I take them to be. But in the case of *Love's Labour's Lost* the figures do require to be treated with special caution, for, as we all know, one of the main themes of that play is language itself, its use and its abuse, the difference, to put the matter in a nutshell, between 'guerdon' and 'remuneration' – two words which make their first appearance in it, and which Shakespeare only employed once again in his later writing, 'guerdon' in *Much Ado About Nothing* (v, iii, 5) and 'remuneration' in *Troilus and Cressida* (III, iii, 170). Consequently, while I do see *Love's Labour's Lost* as a very important play in the process of development that I am trying to map out, I would place it after the two parts of *Henry IV* and *Romeo and Juliet*, in terms of its significance for this purpose, rather than before them.

There is one further point to be made about Hart's figures before I leave them: they give absolute support to Eliot's view that the development of Shakespeare's art was a continuous process, for they show that the dramatist went on enlarging his vocabulary right down to the end of his career. *King Lear* led him to use no fewer than 408 words that he had never used before; *Antony and Cleopatra* added 281; and *Coriolanus* a further 280. For *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*, the totals are all in the two hundreds.

In one way, of course, *Henry IV* is the natural and expected sequel to *Richard II*, prepared for and almost promised in that play by such incidents as Richard's prophecy to Northumberland, in v, i, and Bolingbroke's questions about his 'unthrifty son' in v, iii. As Part I opens, the king emphasizes this quality of continuity by deliberately referring back in his first speech to his final words, concluding *Richard II*, in which he promised to 'make a voyage to the Holy Land'; and from this point onwards allusions to Richard II and the usurpation recur again and again until Henry IV is carried off to die in the Jerusalem chamber, the nearest he will ever come to the crusade of expiation that he planned. Moreover, these references to *Richard II* persist into *Henry V*, leading many to conclude that the four plays were planned as a tetralogy. So far we seem to have nothing new. But who in the original audience for *1 Henry IV*, having seen *Richard II* and, perhaps, Shakespeare's earlier histories as well, could possibly have imagined the kind of play that he was about to see? All six of the histories written prior to *Henry IV* are 'tragical histories', and, as befits the dignity of the muses of tragedy and history, they are verse plays. Four of them, *1* and *3 Henry VI*, *King John* and *Richard II* are entirely in verse, except for a five-line proclamation in prose in I, iii of *1 Henry VI*, the only plays in the canon that are wholly in verse. *Richard III* resorts to prose for the murderers of Clarence; and *2 Henry VI* has an unusually high proportion of it, first in the Petitioners' scene, I, iii, then in the Simpcox scene, II, i, and finally and most extensively in the scenes of act IV dealing with Cade's rebellion. Here the prose is, in its own manner, very good indeed, but its primary function is to distinguish the commons from the royalty and nobility.

A further characteristic of the six earlier

histories is that they depend, either immediately, or at second hand, through such intermediaries as the author of *The Troublesome Reign of King John* or Samuel Daniel, on the chronicles for their material. It is true that Shakespeare plays fast and loose with chronology, when it suits him to do so, and that he invents many scenes; but even the invented scenes, such as Richard of Gloucester's wooing of Anne Neville and the murder of Clarence, are at least logical dramatic developments out of historical fact as Shakespeare knew it. After all, Richard did marry Anne, which presumes a wooing of some sort, and, according to Holinshed, Clarence was drowned in a butt of malmsey.

Henry IV, on the other hand, though it is not without its tragical motives and moments, is predominantly 'comical history', for the comedy in it is not confined to the scenes in which Falstaff figures. Hotspur, in particular, makes his own contribution to it as he explodes like a fire-cracker in his scene with Worcester and Northumberland, I, iii, or baits Glendower in III, i. Furthermore, almost half of Part 1, and more than half of Part 2, are in prose, not verse; and most of what happens in these prose scenes has no basis whatever in the chronicles. It is essentially invented by the dramatist; and this observation still applies to the scenes that do bear some relationship to scenes in *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, for the material culled from that source has been so expanded and transmuted as to be almost unrecognizable; out of horse-play and buffoonery has sprung witty exuberant comedy. Paradoxically yet rightly, these invented scenes in *Henry IV* are, it is perhaps worth mentioning, the only scenes in Shakespeare's histories that are taken seriously as history by professional historians. The student of English life and society in the later sixteenth century flies to them like a homing pigeon. Indeed, I have a strong suspicion that Shakespeare, with his keen sense of how the theatre could re-create the past – one remembers Cassius's lines:

> How many ages hence
> Shall this our lofty scene be acted over
> In states unborn and accents yet unknown!
> (*Julius Caesar*, III, i, 112–14)

– knew, when he was writing these scenes, that he was playing his part in the making of a new kind of historical writing which was just coming into being at the time. William Harrison's *Description of Britain* and *Description of England* were only twenty years old when *Henry IV* was first staged, and, since they were part of Holinshed's Chronicle, it seems highly likely that he had read them.

It is, however, in its dramatic and verse techniques, to which I would add prose techniques as well, that the newness of *Henry IV* is most apparent. I spoke earlier about the depth and shadowing that Hotspur, the Prince, and Falstaff give to one another. A somewhat similar technique determines the relationship of scene to scene. It has often been observed how the play-acting in II, iv of Part 1 anticipates, in an ironical manner, the first reconciliation of the Prince with his father, III, ii, and the final scene of Part 2, the rejection of Falstaff. Less notice has, I think, been accorded to the very careful placing of the reconciliation scene. If it had followed immediately on II, iv, it would have been much affected by the scepticism about the sincerity of Hal's reformation which that scene engenders. But between the two scenes comes the rebel council of war. It begins in apparent harmony, but within a few lines of the opening that harmony is broken by Hotspur's contempt for Glendower's belief in omens. Soon they are quarrelling over the division of an England they have not yet conquered; and this quarrel leads, in its turn, to another quarrel about poetry. It is all gloriously funny, but it also has its more serious implications; before it is over, we have grave doubts as to whether a

rebellion led by men as divided as these can possibly be successful. The reconciliation scene reverses the process. It begins with the king and the Prince very much at odds; but, by letting his father talk himself out, something Hotspur never lets anyone do, and then promising reformation, Hal eventually establishes harmony between them. Consequently, the king's assertion 'A hundred thousand rebels die in this' (l. 160) carries real weight with it.

But we have not done with III, ii yet. It closes with father and son making their exit together in unity. No sooner have they gone than we find ourselves in the Boar's Head with Falstaff and Bardolph; but the subject is still repentance and reform, with this crucial difference, that these things are now the target of a devastating mockery and disbelief. The scene opens thus:

Falstaff. Bardolph, am I not fall'n away vilely since this last action? Do I not bate? Do I not dwindle? Why, my skin hangs about me like an old lady's loose gown; I am withered like an old apple-john. Well, I'll repent, and that suddenly, while I am in some liking; I shall be out of heart shortly, and then I shall have no strength to repent. An I have not forgotten what the inside of a church is made of, I am a peppercorn, a brewer's horse. The inside of a church! Company, villainous company, hath been the spoil of me.
Bardolf. Sir John, you are so fretful you cannot live long.
Falstaff. Why, there is it; come, sing me a bawdy song, make me merry.
(*1 Hen. IV*, III, iii, 1–12)

Sic transit contemptus mundi; repentance is having a bad time, and it continues to have it, for when Hal arrives on the scene and eventually tells Falstaff of his reconciliation with the king, which will, he says, allow him to 'do anything', Falstaff's response is: 'Rob me the exchequer the first thing thou doest, and do it with unwash'd hands too' (ll. 181–3). Far from checking this outrageous suggestion, the Prince allows it to stand, and goes on to tell Falstaff that he has procured him 'a charge of foot'. This act of kindness ensures that Falstaff, like the rest, will make his way to Shrewsbury, but it does not lead us to exclaim 'A hundred thousand rebels die in this.' The ambiguities that III, ii seemed to have laid to rest have reared their heads once more. The four scenes, taken together, are like a series of shifting planes, corresponding to the way in which reality presents itself to us in the actual business of living.

Since I have written about them elsewhere,[1] I shall be brief in what I have to say on the new techniques of verse and prose that the writing of *Henry IV* brought with it. No one here will need to be reminded of such extraordinary *tours de force* as the characteristic idioms of Mistress Quickly and Master Justice Shallow, the one chock-a-block with the circumstantial detail of the born gossip, and the other rattling with the repetitions of the old man whose congenital inability to concentrate his mind on anything grows more pronounced with every year that passes. But the achievements that really matter for the future are the poetry of Hotspur and the prose of Falstaff, which stand, I think, in a complementary relationship to each other. Adumbrated to some extent in the relaxed rhythms of the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* and in the incorporation of colloquial diction into the verse of the Bastard in *King John*, Hotspur's verse is marked by its 'unpoetical' quality, its responsiveness to the tones of the speaking voice, and its predilection for imagery that is exact and down to earth – the courtier, for example, whose

chin new-reap'd
Show'd like a stubble-land at harvest-home.
(*1 Hen. IV*, I, iii, 34–5)

It is verse that bespeaks the man, and, unless I

[1] G. R. Hibbard, '"The Forced Gait of a Shuffling Nag"', in *Shakespeare 1971*, ed. Clifford Leech and J. M. R. Margeson (Toronto, 1972), pp. 87–8.