HISTORICO-TRAGICO-COMICAL KINGS.
GENRE CONVENTIONS AND/AS EMBLEMS OF POWER IN SHAKESPEARE'S *HISTORIES*[1]

MICHELE STANCO
(University of Trento)

"At this point, we are to philosophise, we are to
analyse carefully what feelings Darius must have had:
pride, perhaps, and elation; or, may be,
something like a sense of the vanity
of greatness. The poet ponders this deeply"
(Constantinos Kavafis, *Darius*)

"I live with bread like you, feel want,
Taste grief, need friends – subjected thus,
How can you say to me, I am a king?"
(William Shakespeare, *Richard II* 3.2.175-77)

Introduction:
Emblematic Rulership in Shakespeare's English History Plays

The (un)bridgeable gap between the "wooden O" and the "vasty fields of France" laid bare by the chorus in the prologue to *Henry V* points to the symbolico-emblematic traits of the theatrical sign. The audience is expected to co-operate in transforming the "unworthy scaffold" into battlefields and royal courts.[2] At the same time, the spectators are also implicitly made aware or

[1] I wish to heartily thank Dr. Margaret Squibb for her precious linguistic suggestions. I also very much thank Professor Paola Pugliatti, who generously offered me a pre-print of her *Shakespeare the Historian*.

[2] The symbolico-emblematic quality of the theatrical sign and the need for the spectators' cooperation is also stressed in contemporary treatises on poetry. See, for instance, Sidney's *Apologie*: "Now ye shal haue three ladies walke to gather flowers, and then we must beleeue the stage to be a Garden. By and

explicitly reminded (particularly in the interludes) of the theatrico-fictional elements of the world which is recreated on the stage. They are not merely asked to suspend their disbelief: they are supposed to both believe and disbelieve. An example of this mixture of belief and suspended disbelief can be seen in *Richard II*, where the king's role is half-naturalistic, and half-theatrical: the Richard that we see on the stage 'is' a king who 'acts' the king. The theatrical world emblematises the 'real' world and, vice versa, the 'real' world thus theatricalised becomes an emblem of the theatre and theatricality – "all the world" obviously being "a stage". In this way, the representation of power in Shakespeare's English histories is emblematic as long as the theatrical sign itself is emblematic.

The theatricalisation of a historical world, however, implies further – more specific – emblematic correspondences. The stage representation of a historical past obviously involves a theatricalisation of history. Indeed, we generally represent history to ourselves as intrinsically theatrical. (Aren't Joan of Arc's trial or Mary Stuart's execution 'theatrical' in themselves, independently of their actual stage performances?) In *Richard II*, medievalism and theatricality are evocative of each other. The formal quality and manneristic redundancy of the language is a means of emblematically distancing the action not only as 'theatrical' but also as 'historical'. If, on the one hand, linguistic virtuosity works as a reminder of the theatricality of the action, on the other hand, the ceremonialism of language also has the aim of introducing the Elizabethan audience into a lost and irretrievable historical world. The suggested trial by battle between Bolingbroke and Mowbray is eminently theatrical (because of the display of ceremony and pageantry it involves), as well as typically medieval (judicial combats having fallen into disuse by Shakespeare's day). Theatricality and pastness go well together in Shakespeare's histories.

Although evoking a sense of pastness, history plays also inevitably suggest certain emblematic links between present and past. The representation of cul-

by, we heare newes of shipwracke in the same place, and then wee are to blame if we accept it not for a Rock. Vpon the backe of that, comes out a hidious Monster, with fire and smoke, and then the miserable beholders are bounde to take it for a Caue. While in the meantime two Armies flye in, represented with foure swords and bucklers, and then what harde heart will not receiue it for a pitched fielde?" (Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apologie for Poetrie* [c. 1583; printed 1595], in: Smith, 1904, 1: 148-207, 197).

tural-historical 'breaks' does not exclude, indeed goes along with, a sense of historical continuity. By filtering the past through a present perspective, history plays establish a dialogue between present and past. It is well known that the deposition scene in *Richard II* (4.4.154-316) was only allowed to be printed in the fourth quarto edition of 1608 because it might have suggested a dangerous identification between King Richard and Queen Elizabeth.[3] On the Shakesperean stage, past rulership was, or could become, an (orthodox or unorthodox) emblem of present rulership.

The Elizabethan representation of power can also be defined as emblematic in a more strictly visual and iconographical sense. As has been shown by Tillyard and his school, the Elizabethan world picture rested on a hierarchico-analogical cultural model (1943). This was based on a set of correspondences and microcosmic–macrocosmic relations. Shakespeare's histories undoubtedly exhibit such a visual–emblematic representation of power. However, when scrutinised more closely, these figurative elements – in spite of their conventionality – do not convey an altogether conservative ideology. As can be seen from *Richard II*, the analogical correspondences between king and sun or king and eagle, although they seem to testify to the sacredness of the monarchical institution, do not guarantee the legitimacy of the monarch's person as such. Apparently, royal analogies only apply to the body politic, not to the king's natural body. When Richard is "unkinged", the emblems of monarchy abandon him and are re-inscribed onto Bolingbroke's political body. More important than that, the providential scheme underlying such sets of correspondences is shown as gradually giving way to a sort of Machiavellian political pragmatism. In the hands of Bolingbroke and his supporters, the analogico-providential model is stripped of its metaphysical significance: providential arguments and emblematic correspondences are covertly assimilated into strategies of royal legitimation and political propaganda.

In short, the representation of power in Shakespeare's histories can be defined as symbolico-emblematic from various points of view. In a very broad sense, the stage representation of rulership is intrinsically emblematic because of the em-

[3] Such an emblematic identification was fostered by the Queen herself: her "Know ye not, I am Richard" is no less well known. Parallels between Henry V's dramatic monologues and Queen Elizabeth's public speeches have also been drawn (Montini 1995).

blematic quality of the theatrical sign. In addition, more specific emblematic relations can be found between medievalism (in all its ceremonial aspects) and theatricality, as well as between past and present historical contexts: that is, between medieval and Elizabethan rulers. Finally, the Elizabethan world-view itself – with its analogical cultural models and interpretive patterns – is profoundly emblematic.

However, there is still – at least – one more sense in which Shakespeare's representation of power in his English histories may be defined as emblematic. I will be attempting to show that Shakespeare's 'histories' do not fit into a single, well defined dramatic genre (i.e., the history play) and that their *generic opacity* emblematically suggests a parallel *opacity of power discourse*.

Genre Conventions as Emblems of Power; Emblems of Power as Genre Conventions

The theatrical representation of power, obviously enough, implies a definition – and, eventually, a reshaping – of power in terms of aesthetic categories and discourse. Displaying power on the stage means treating a *political* object from an *aesthetic* perspective. The distinction itself between the king's two bodies suggests the presence of fictional elements in the representation of the royal persona.[4] As a matter of fact, the 'natural' / 'political' opposition which was used in relation to the king's double persona can be regarded as at least partly overlapping with the 'natural' / 'artificial' antonymic pair which was so pervasive in Renaissance treatises on poetry. From such a perspective, the 'political' can be seen as intrinsically 'artificial' – and, therefore, aesthetic. In contemporary treatises on poetry, the poetics of dissimulation, which was proposed by the critics to the courtly poets, makes an aesthetic counterpart to the politics of dissimulation, which was the core of Italian and European treatises on the art of government. It should not be overlooked that government was indeed regarded as an 'art': Thomas Elyot's *The Boke Named the Governour* (1531) or George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), although they deal with different

[4] On the representation of the king as a *persona ficta*, see Montini 1995.

topics – politics and poetics, respectively – undoubtedly exhibit common cultural patterns. Principles or rules such as order, measure and proportion apply equally well to political and poetical arts.

In 1586, Queen Elizabeth said to a parliamentary deputation: "We princes are set on stages in the sight and view of all the world".[5] This is not dissimilar from what the Bastard says of the Angiers citizens in *King John* : they "gape and point" at the kings of England and France "as in a theatre" (2.1.375). As has been observed by Stephen Greenblatt, "Elizabethan power [...] depends on its privileged visibility" (1981, 64).[6] In fact, Elizabethan power was displayed through a number of 'theatrical' celebrations: public processions, ceremonies and, of course, dramatic representations. However, the discursive modes and generic forms through which power made itself visible (in other words, the aesthetics of power) still remain largely unexplored.

Given the patent aesthetic elements in the Elizabethan representation of power, some aesthetic categories – such as those of literary genre – were also bound to contribute towards a definition of power. Indeed, the very existence of genre conventions and stylised speech-forms implies the power of certain discourse types over other discourse types (in this sense, cultural models themselves represent forms of power). More specifically, the *generic forms of power representation* make an essential element in the semiotics and ideology of power.

Literary genres both contribute to the production of power discourse and, in their turn, are part of the very power discourse they have contributed to produce.[7] Therefore, the dramatic use of historico-tragico-comic genre conventions should not be regarded from a merely aesthetic perspective but, rather, as an intrinsic and emblematic constituent of a play's political significance.

Events, of course, are neither tragic nor comic in themselves. The issue of a battle can either be a victory or a defeat, depending on whose perspective is adopted. Representing the battle of Agincourt as a victory and giving it a comic

[5] Quoted in Neale (1965, 2: 119).

[6] On the theatrical display of power in the age of Shakespeare, see also Di Michele 1988.

[7] On the politics of genre, see Tennenhouse 1986.

form obviously implies seeing things from an English and royalist perspective. The same event would presumably have been handled in a tragic form by a French dramatist. Likewise, a royal deposition is not necessarily a negative event; as a matter of fact, its tragic markers may be disrupted by, say, the suggestion that it could pave the way for a better form of government. In other words, comic and tragic patterns implicitly suggest the presence of an authorial perspective and thus orientate the spectators' emotional and ethical response. Conversely, the opacity of – comic or tragic – genre conventions makes the identification of the authorial stance more problematic. In Shakespeare's *histories*, as we have already mentioned, the opacity of genre conventions can therefore be regarded as an *emblematic parallel* to the opacity of power discourse.

As is well known, the thirty-six Shakesperean plays collected in the First Folio in 1623 were subdivided by the editors into three main dramatic genres: *Comedies, Histories & Tragedies*. Such a generic distinction has undoubtedly influenced the way we approach Shakespeare's 'histories'.[8] In spite of the Folio editors' definition, a number of plays which were grouped under the headings of 'tragedies' or 'comedies' could equally well be defined as history plays and, in much the same way, many 'histories' could be labelled as either tragedies or comedies. Moreover, it should be remembered, Heminge and Condell's generic subdivision was not the only one. In *Palladis Tamia* (1598), Francis Meres had already subdivided Shakespeare's works into the two main classical genres of tragedy and comedy (thus implicitly denying the existence of the history play as a genre in itself).[9] A clue to this generic impasse is perhaps indirectly provided by Shakespeare himself. In an oft-quoted speech, Polonius suggests the impossibility of drawing clear-cut boundaries among dramatic genres. Plays can be

[8] A similar generic classification had been proposed by William Webbe who subdivided English poetry into "Comicall, Tragicall, Historiall" (*A Discourse of English Poetrie*, 1586, in: Smith 1904, 1: 226-302, 249-50).

[9] According to Meres, comedies include: *Gentlemen of Verona, Errors, Loue Labors Lost, Loue Labors Wonne, Midsummers Night Dreame, Merchant of Venice*; while tragedies are represented by *Richard the 2, Richard the 3, Henry the 4, King Iohn, Titus Andronicus, Romeo and Juliet* (*Palladis Tamia*, in: Smith 1904, 2: 308-24, 318). As can be seen, Meres's classicistic approach leads him to classify as 'tragedies' those very plays which would later be labelled as 'histories'.

"pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral" (2.2.393-95). Notwithstanding the parodico-ludicrous intent of such a definition, through the character's words the author hints at what is perhaps the most conspicuous aspect of contemporary drama: generic mixture. In fact, Polonius' generic fuzziness applies to the players' repertoire no less than to Shakespeare's dramatic canon as a whole. And, it should be remembered, the mingling of dramatic genres had not passed unnoticed by contemporary critics, both in England and on the continent.[10]

Even a rough reading of the ten plays labelled as 'histories', reveals that they do not form a generically homogeneous group. As some critics have justly argued, "lumping the plays together [...] as histories may be convenient, but it skates over some real difficulties" (Moseley 1988, 82). We should not forget that the titles of the Elizabethan and Jacobean quarto and folio editions of *Richard II* indirectly reveal to us that the play was perceived by Shakespeare's contemporaries not only as a history, but also as a tragedy.[11] Indeed, such uncertainty as to a play's generic affiliation was common in the Elizabethan age.

As a matter of fact, a neat generic opposition between histories and tragedies, or between histories and comedies appears as unmotivated and inconsistent. If, oversimplifying a rather delicate question, we can separate tragedies from comedies on the basis of their respective catastrophes or dénouements, there is no apparent reason why a tragic ending could not be represented in a historical way or a comic ending should not take place in a historical time. In other words, the sense of pastness which we generally ascribe to a history play does not seem to conflict with either a tragic or a comic pattern. In Shakespeare's second tetra-

[10] See, for instance, Sidney's attack on the mingling of "Kings and Clownes" and on "mungrell Tragy-comedie" (in: Smith 1904, 1: 199).

[11] The first part of the titles of Q1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 reads (with minor typographical variations): *The Tragedie of King Richard the Second*, whereas in the folio edition the play's title is *The Life and death of King Richard the Second*. Terming the play *Life and death* instead of *Tragedie*, Heminge and Condell probably intended to emphasise the historical and chronicle – rather than the tragic – elements in it. Needless to say, such a critico-editorial choice is coherent with the inclusion of the play within the section of the "Histories" (pp. 23-45). Differently from Heminge and Condell, Meres regarded *Richard II* as a tragedy (see n. 8, above). As can be seen, the Elizabethans were not in agreement as to questions of genre classification.

logy, the historical mode combines with both tragic and comic genre conventions. It would perhaps be more accurate to define *Richard II* a 'historical tragedy', the two parts of *Henry IV* 'historical *Bildungskomödien*' or 'conduct comedies', and *Henry V* a 'historical comedy'.

The Historical Mode and its Opacity

What is, then, the 'historical' mode, and how does it structurally combine with comic or tragic patterns? A definition of the historical mode in fiction may be conveniently sketched out by means of a double comparison between: i) historical fiction and historiography, ii) historical fiction and other – non-historical – fictional modes or genres.

In the last twenty years or so, the line of demarcation between historiography and fiction has been made thinner by some historiographical schools – notably, "New Historicism". New Historicists – and their pioneer Hayden White – have quite reasonably argued, and shown, that historiographical texts should be regarded as literary artifacts (White 1973 and 1978).

However, the identification of a poetics of the historiographical discourse does not, in itself, imply – as New Historicists have tended to assume – that historiographical prose can or should be assimilated into fiction. As a matter of fact, historiographical texts are supposed to comply with a set of well defined, culturally (i.e., historiographically) accepted strategies of veridicality (Lozano 1987; Eco 1991). None of these are required in fictional texts (Pugliatti 1994). While a historiographical discourse is – or is supposed to be – referential, a fictional discourse is – declaredly – pseudoreferential. Since historiographical assertions are assumed to be verifiable (and to have been verified), historiographical texts must avoid all those discursive (narrative or dramatic) techniques which can only generate unverifiable assertions.

At the origins of historiography, historical records were said to be founded upon direct testimonial evidence. In fact, the very term 'history' is connected with an indoeuropean root (**wid-*, **weid-*) which means "to see".[12] Therefore,

[12] See Lozano's account (1987) of Benveniste's etymological reconstruction of the term *'st-* (1976, 414).

the historian's account was shown as a narrative of what the 'histor' had personally seen.

The testimonial function and the discursive forms which are appropriate to historiographical recording are intrinsically associated with an *external focalisation*. Thus, the historian's view cannot penetrate the historical characters' inner thoughts and feelings or capture their subjectivity.

As has been shown by Genette (1991), there are certain discursive types which are intrinsically fictional and cannot be adopted by historiographical reports: for instance, interior – or dramatic – monologues and, generally speaking, any discursive form which implies or requires an internal focalisation. For very similar reasons, sustained dialogues, such as those of drama, go beyond the possibilities of historiographical recording and thus, at least implicitly, present themselves as fictional.

Historical fiction draws – more or less extensively – on the *historical encyclopaedia*: it re-tells historical facts or topics within discursive forms which are peculiar to fiction. So, in spite of a certain degree of historicity in its contents, historical fiction keeps the *illocutionary status* of fictional discourse. An historical novel or play directly or indirectly shows itself as *a fictionalised representation of historiographical material.*

As is implicitly suggested by Kavafis' poem which we have cited as an epigraph, the task of historical poetry or fiction is to recover some sort of *historical subjectivity*. Such a goal is splendidly achieved, for instance, by the Shakespearean representation of King Richard II. King Richard's speech – "I live with bread like you, feel want, / Taste grief ..." (3.2.175-6) – may be said to emblematise that same sense of the vanity of greatness which Kavafis looked for in the historical representation of Darius. Obviously (as has already been noted), the representation of historical subjectivity exceeds the limits – and the scope – of the historiographical discourse. Indeed, if we interpret the adjective 'historical' in its proper historiographico-testimonial sense, the very syntagm 'historical subjectivity' appears as oxymoronic (since an eye-witness type of report does not allow any introspective representation or discourse). However, whereas the analysis of Darius' or Richard's feelings need not concern the historian, it is essential to the historical poet. It can thus be concluded that one of the scopes – perhaps, the main scope – of historical fiction is to analyse those historical contents, such as

historical subjectivity, which are excluded from the proper historiographical domain by the very discursive form and illocutionary status of historiography.

Although historical fiction and historiographical prose are distinguishable in terms of their respective discourse types, it must be noted that in the Elizabethan age the boundary line between them was made somewhat problematic by some characteristics of sixteenth-century historiography. Elizabethan historiographical reports – such as Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587) – made a certain use of dialogic forms and, if judged in terms of twentieth-century standards of historiographical discourse, could be regarded as fictional. However, it must be stressed that *on the whole* their discursive forms were, and can be, fairly neatly distinguished from those of fiction. As a matter of fact, the difference between the illocutionary status of historiographical and fictional texts was clearly acknowledged by the Elizabethans themselves. As Sidney pointed out, unlike the historian, the poet – and, therefore, the poetic text – "nothing affirmes, and therefore neuer lyeth" (Smith 1904, 1:184).[13] In spite of some fictional elements in them, historiographical texts were thus separated from fictional ones.

If historical fiction has a different illocutionary status (and, thus, also a different scope) from historiography, then the term 'historical', when it is associated with fiction, must be interpreted in a sense which is consistent with the illocutionary status of fictional discourse. Such a definition of 'historical' permits us to distinguish between historical fiction and other fictional modes.

When it is related to fictional discourse, 'historical' does not imply or suggest any historiographical authenticity but rather indicates *a chronologico-cultural distance between the time of representation (or the authorial time) and the represented time*. Here, the authorial time must not be understood as an extratextual category but, rather, as a textual strategy. We are informed about the date of composition of a literary work by means of external or extratextual evidence. In addition to this, a literary work also bears internal or textual evidence of its date of composition. As a matter of fact, the authorial time is textualised in a lot of ways. Historical fiction exhibits a more or less evident *historical incongruity*

[13] Even if diversely from Sidney, also Holinshed emphasised the distinction between historiography and fiction: "My speech is plain, without any rhetoricall shew of eloquence, having rather a regard to simple truth, than to decking words" (*The Third Volume of Chronicles*. London, 1587: Aiii).

between the textualised authorial time or the time of representation, and the historical time represented. For instance, in Shakespeare's Roman plays, this incongruity may be exemplified by the contrast between the Elizabethan language which is spoken by the characters (and which pertains to the authorial time) and their historical Roman condition (which pertains to the represented time).[14] This historico-cultural distance generates *a poetics of anachronism*. Historical fiction is thus based on an anachronistic *interplay of cultural codes between the representational and the represented (con)texts*. Different types of anachronism mark historical fiction: besides linguistic or expressive anachronisms, semantic and para-textual anachronisms can be found as well. Semantic anachronisms can be exemplified by the appellative "ladies" which is attributed to Roman matrons in *Coriolanus* (1.9.5), or by the definitions of "nationalist" and "protestant" which are given to the heroine in G.B. Shaw's *Saint Joan*.[15] In both cases, the represented historical context is – anachronistically – attributed semantic units, and cultural patterns, which pertain to the representational context. Of course, para-textual[16] anachronisms also variously characterise historical fiction. In their pointing to cultural distances – and dialectical exchanges – between two different historical contexts, anachronisms can be regarded as *genre-markers of 'historical fiction'*, as well as *forms of (meta)historical interpretation*.

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[14] Although such conclusions may seem almost self-evident, many Shakesperean critics have incongrously applied historiographical categories to historical fiction. In relation to the two *Henry IV* plays, such confusion has produced an untenable distinction between 'historical' and 'non-historical' scenes. If we understand the term 'historical' in its historiographical sense, there is no single line in these plays which can be regarded as historical. Conversely, if we coherently assume that in fiction the adjective 'historical' has nothing to do with historiographical authenticity but merely denotes the conveyance of a sense of pastness, there is no logical reason for considering the Eastcheap scenes as non-historical. These scenes are historical as long as they represent fragments of late medieval popular culture.

[15] Of course, semantic anachronisms serve different specific functions in historical fiction. A preliminary distinction could be made between 'intentional' and 'unintentional' anachronisms (although, in many cases, such a distinction would be rather problematic). For instance, the anachronisms in *Saint Joan* which we have mentioned above should be regarded as 'intentional', in that they suggest a form of historiographical interpretation: in her being an evolutionary heroine, Joan 'anticipates' nationalism and protestantism.

[16] As to a definition of 'paratext', see Genette 1987.

Since they are essential to historical fiction, anachronisms must be visible and can only partially be dissembled. The narrator of *Ivanhoe* finds it necessary to specify that, for practical reasons, the characters' Anglo-Saxon conversation – which is registered by him in an eye-witness type of report – has been 'translated' into contemporary, nineteenth-century English. Walter Scott was obviously aware of the fact that linguistic anachronism undermines the historiographical credibility or truth value of an assertion. At the same time, of course, he did not really want his characters' speeches to be regarded as real but only as realistic. It is also because of its quasi-overt display of anachronisms that historical fiction is distinguishable from *forgery*. In fact, differently from historical fiction, forgery is based upon the concealment of all those – expressive, semantic and paratextual – elements pertaining to the representational context. After all, a historical novelist or dramatist generally pursues different scopes from, say, the author of the *Donatio Sancti Petri*. Other literary types, such as the 'medieval' findings of some preromantic poets seem to stand halfway between forgery and historical fiction and would need a separate discussion.

The interplay between two different historical (con-)texts which marks historical fiction can sometimes be ambivalent, or opaque. On the Shakesperean stage, the public could see the author's fictionalised perception of the past – that is, one of the ways an Elizabethan represented the Roman times or the English late Middle Ages to himself. Although *Richard II*'s medieval characters speak some sort of Elizabethan English, the Elizabethan audience would not recognise it as the current 1590s language. As a matter of fact, the archaico-ceremonial tone of language emblematically marks it as both 'Elizabethan' and 'medieval'. In more general terms, the cultural models represented in the play are partly Elizabethan, partly medieval (and, therefore, neither properly Elizabethan nor truly medieval). Besides a sense of the 'remoteness' of the historical past, Shakespeare's audience would have simultaneously recognised the 'contemporary' aspects of the various historical plays. As is inevitable, the historical past is represented in terms of present cultural patterns. From this point of view, the so-called "Longleat manuscript" (1595) can be regarded as emblematic: the half-Roman, half-Elizabethan characters acting in *Titus Andronicus* indirectly show how, on the Elizabethan stage, the past was both distanced as culturally remote and anachronistically brought nearer as culturally contemporary (the Roman past being metaphorically 'dressed' in Elizabethan clothes).

A certain ambivalence in the representation of the past can be regarded as an intrinsic constituent of historical fiction. The past, of course, can only be seen from a present perspective. This has its advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, some aspects of the past become clearer when they are viewed from the present. For instance, in modern times, feudalism has undoubtedly become a much better understood economico-cultural phenomenon than it was in the Middle Ages. On the other hand, in viewing the past from the present we inevitably lose a number of things. For instance, we can only have a pale and distorted idea of the actual experience of life in feudal times.

Shakespeare's histories exhibit both a deep understanding of the cultural and feudal alterity of a late medieval past and an ambivalent projection into it of contemporary Elizabethan cultural patterns and policy.[17]

As has been suggested by Graham Holderness, at least three schools of historiography are distinguishable in Elizabethan England. The providential-theological view of history supported by the encyclopaedic chronicles of Hall and Holinshed can be contrasted with the political pragmatism of humanist historiography. On the other hand, both providentialism and humanism – in their common lack of a true perception of the past – can be contrasted with antiquarian historiography, which is conversely marked by a profound sense of the diversity – or pastness – of the past (1992, 1-20).

The Shakespearean history plays reveal a profound, quasi-antiquarian understanding of feudal laws; they "can be read as serious attempts to reconstruct and theorize the past", in that they "embody a conscious understanding of feudal society as a peculiar historical formation" (Holderness, 1992, 13-14). It is also evident, though, that the feudal past which is represented on the Shakespearean stage is deformed – or, at least, recreated – with a view to its pragmatic exempla-

[17] Some critics have regarded Shakespeare's representation of the past as a mirror of *contemporary* culture and policy (Campbell, 1947); others have pointed out Shakespeare's understanding of the *alterity* of the past (Holderness, 1992). Perhaps, the truth is in the middle. Shakespeare's representation of the past could be defined as 'opaque', as a mingling of past and contemporary codes – which is, however, typical of the history play as a genre.

rity[18] or on the basis of a providential interpretation.[19] An Elizabethan audience would feel Shakespeare's recreation of a late medieval setting as both 'remote' and 'contemporary'.

On the one hand, Shakespeare's histories hint at a linear historical paradigm, from chaos following the deposition of a legitimate king to the re-establishment of order and harmony (such a view is in line with a providential scheme). On the other hand, they also suggest a circular or cyclical historical pattern, which implies the 'repeatability' of historical events (this view is in line with humanist political pragmatism). The king's deposition in *Richard II* might be – and was – interpreted by Shakespeare's contemporaries both from a monarchist and an anti-monarchist standpoint. As a matter of fact, it was both – orthodoxically – seen as the representation of an original sin leading up, after a long and inevitable period of anarchy and political turmoil, to the Tudor pacification, and – unorthodoxically – as an act implying the possibility that the present Queen herself might similarly be deposed.[20]

The ambivalence in the historicisation of juridico-political structures is matched by a corresponding ambivalence in the representation of historical subjectivity. Richard II, for instance, is simultaneously a late medieval and an Elizabethan monarch. Although his use of trial by combat is typically medieval, much of his symbolism is eminently Elizabethan.

In conclusion, the present-past relations which characterise the historical mode are opaque, and so is the historicisation of power and public structures as well as the historicisation of the self.

Indeed, as we shall see, the opacity and the openness of the texts which make up the second tetralogy is not merely confined to their historical mode, but also concerns – and combines with – the plays' tragic or comic generic forms.

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[18] As is shown by the Bastard's final speech in *King John*, the past can be used as a source for present moral and political instruction ("Nought shall make us rue/If England to itself do rest but true!": V.vii.117-18). Such a pragmatic approach to the past is a characteristic of humanist historiography.

[19] On the influence of Providentialist historiography (especially of Hall's *Union*) on Shakespeare's histories, Tillyard's work, in spite of its one-sidedness, is still precious (1944, 47-56).

[20] Because of such a subversive implication, as has already been noted, the deposition scene (4.1.154-316) was censored and could only be printed in Q4, 1608.

The Opacity of Tragic and Comic Genre Conventions and the Opacity of Power Discourse

Fictionalising history for a Renaissance playwright meant adapting it to the conventions of tragedy or comedy. The literary patterns of historiographical discourse had to meet with a poetics of dramatic closure. In his dramatic production, Shakespeare conformed to the two most important conventions of his time: a five-act structure and a threefold division of the action into protasis–epitasis–catastrophe (or dénouement) (Snuggs 1960; Herrick 1964).

Far from forming a generically homogeneous group, Shakespeare's 'histories' can be divided into 'historical tragedies' and 'historical comedies', in that their onward movement from start to finish follows a progressive – tragic or comic – scheme. Such a dramatico-theatrical adaptation of the historiographical discourse has obvious political implications. Historical events in themselves do not exhibit the linear, progressive movement of either tragedy or comedy. Encoding a historical event into a historiographical discourse implies overcoding it with ideological evaluations. Adapting the historiographical discourse to a tragic or comic pattern (and poetics of closure) implies further ideologically charging it. The tragic or comic theatricalisation of the historiographical discourse, besides complying with aesthetic rules, also plays an evident ideologico-political role. Thus, genre conventions emblematically cooperate in structuring power discourse.

Even if they conform to tragic or comic generic patterns, Shakespeare's histories – at least partly – question, and disrupt, those very patterns. In fact, the presence of tragic and comic genre conventions is made opaque by a number of anti-tragic or anti-comic elements. The plays' treatment of power is likewise opaque. This point will be illustrated in relation to *Richard II*, *Henry the Fourth, Part One* and *Henry V*. As we have already suggested, each of these plays can be taken to exemplify a particular generic type.

Richard II and 'Historical Tragedy'

Richard II can be defined as a 'historical tragedy'. In fact, the historical events represented in the play are shown as progressively leading to a tragic ending. As

has been pointed out by some critics, the play's historical action is tripartite: the sequence of events falls easily into the protasis, epitasis and catastrophe scheme. Things start evolving tragically for King Richard from the play's very beginning, that is from the moment when he banishes his cousin, Henry Bolingbroke and is faced with the news of the Irish rebellion (1.1–2.1). Bolingbroke's invasion and the transference of real power mark a second step towards tragedy (2.2–3.3). The catastrophe or the culminating moment is represented by the deposition and killing of King Richard (3.4–5.6).[21]

On comparing *Richard II* with what is now commonly regarded as its main historiographical source – Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*, one of the most striking differences can perhaps be found in the very selection of historical events from King Richard's reign. While Holinshed's narrative covers the whole reign of Richard II (1377–1399/1400), Shakespeare only deals with King Richard's final years (1398–1400).[22] The reason for such a choice is plain: the playwright must have thought of the chronicle flux of events in terms of a dramatic development, and a progressive tragic structure. Bolingbroke's banishment is the historical event in Richard's reign which is best suited as a first step towards an overall tragic movement. The action is driven forward by means of a set of fast-moving and slower-moving episodes, which finally evolve into death and destruction.

As is indirectly shown by Falstaff's end in *Henry V* (2.3), death is not intrinsically tragic. In *Richard II*, the events anticipating, accompanying and following Richard's death no doubt inspire a tragic feeling of pity (in the Aristotelian sense) – sometimes, of self-pity – which is uttered throughout the play by many characters, including the king himself. In many respects, as more than one critic has pointed out, Richard's malaise prefigures Hamlet's nihilism.

The king's death is not only tragic because of the emotional response which it evokes, but also because of its ideological implications. Richard's end is – at least partly – shown to be the result of blind necessity: it appears as inscribed *ab*

[21] On the threefold partition of *Richard II* see Melchiori 1979, 14-17.

[22] On the theatrical transcoding of the historiographical sources in Shakespeare's second tetralogy, see Serpieri *et al.* (critical contributions by Susan Payne, Serena Cenni and Aldo Celli) 1988, vol. III.

ovo in the course of events. Queen Isabel prophetically foresees a tragic movement: her "nameless woe" (2.2.40) anticipates the king's deposition and death. In a partially similar way, in *Julius Caesar* Calphurnia foresees Caesar's murder (2.2). In both plays, a sort of premonition of sorrow makes a tragic development appear as unavoidable: "...What can be avoided / Whose end is purpos'd by the mighty gods?" (JC 2.2.26-27). Richard's and Caesar's lives are shown as dominated by Fate. Sorrow is inevitable; above all, sorrow is purposeless. Such a view is profoundly tragic: it is the view of classical Greek tragedy.

On the other hand, *Richard II* also exhibits some providential elements which question its fatalistic model and tragic pattern. Both Carlisle and York, although for different political reasons, give voice to a providential viewpoint. In York's perspective, in particular, Richard's deposition is not shown as a form of purposeless suffering, but takes on a providential justification: "heaven hath a hand in these events" (5.2.37). As has been observed by George Steiner among others, tragedy is alien to the Judeo-Christian justification of suffering.[23] Adopting Steiner's point of view, it could be concluded that the presence of such providential elements disrupts the tragic pattern in *Richard II*.

The providential undermining of a tragic progression has certain political implications. A providential justification of King Richard's deposition is based on the suggestion that, although Richard II is legitimate, he does not embody the ideal king. In the histories, legitimacy does not always coincide with personal appropriateness.[24] Besides being probably guilty of Gloucester's death, Richard II also proves to be wasteful and weak. His many faults are remembered and illustrated in some commentary scenes by a number of 'minor' characters, such as Gaunt (2.1), the gardener (3.4), and others. In short, King Richard's deposition and death make possible the accession to the throne of a new Lancastrian king, Henry IV, who – as is sometimes insinuated, sometimes explicitly stated – promises to be a better king than the dethroned Richard had been.

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[23] In his well known study of tragedy, Steiner (1961) argues that the Christiano-Jewish doctrine of Divine Providence eventually led to the death of tragedy, which is based on the Greek sense of Fate.

[24] Cf. Szőnyi's essay in the present volume. The legitimacy *versus* appropriateness principles as rules governing royal succession are implicitly discussed by King Henry IV, when he states that Percy would make a much better king than Hal: "He hath more worthy interest to the state/Than thou the shadow of succession" (1H4 3.2.98-99).

However, *Richard II*'s generic form and political significance suggest much deeper layers of meaning than those embedded in the fatal/providential opposition. If King Richard's faults – seen in the light of the pervasive garden imagery (Ure 1956, li-lvii; Melchiori 1979, 3-17) – are connoted as a sort of original sin, Bolingbroke's usurpation and regicide take on the connotations of a post-lapsarian fault and a prime historical infraction of the divine and natural law. It is Bolingbroke himself who finally associates the killing of King Richard with Cain's fratricide (5.6.43). Cain's crime, although biblical, is not redeemed by any providential justification. In fact, Abel's – and, partly, King Richard's – deaths symbolically represent a profoundly tragic historicisation of crime and sorrow.

Moreover, other textual elements can be found hinting that York's providential justification of Bolingbroke's usurpation should not be taken too literally. Both fatalism and providentialism present the course of human events as necessary and unescapable. From a different, materialist perspective, human suffering and conflict contrariwise appear as the contingent effect of "social and historical forces focussed in state power".[25] In *Richard II*, rather than hinting at a metaphysics of power, providentialism is used as a repertoire of political arguments. Northumberland's emphasis on "policy" probably best synthesises the spirit of the play.[26] As a matter of fact, the providential arguments produced by Bolingbroke's supporters are implicitly demystified by Northumberland's *realpolitik*. Religious idealism is thus turned into political materialism.

Thus, *Richard II*'s generic opacity emblematises a parallel opacity in the representation of power. In proposing multiple perspectives which – directly or indirectly – undermine one another, the play questions both canonised genre conventions and culturally accepted views of power and principles of rulership.

Henry IV, Part One and the 'Historical Bildungskomödie'

The historical action of *Henry IV, Part One* can similarly, and conventionally, be divided into three parts (1.1–2.4; 3.1–3.2; 3.3–5.5) (Melchiori 1979, 273-

[25] See Dollimore's criticism of Steiner (1989, xvi-xxii).

[26] Northumberland's emphasis on "policy" ("That were some love, but little *policy*": 5.1.84) can be regarded as analogous to the Bastard's stress on "commodity" in *King John* (2.1.597).

75). The action's progressive movement leads to a happy dénouement. The happy ending is represented by the royal victory over the rebels at Shrewsbury. This is made possible by the process of education which the hero undergoes. Thus, the dissipated and unruly prince Hal is gradually transformed, until he becomes capable of recognising and firmly pursuing truly royal tasks. The crucial moment of Hal's growth is marked by his chivalric display of honour at the battle of Shrewsbury against his fierce opponent, Harry Percy (5.4).[27] And, finally, at the end of the play, Hal may be said to fully represent the princely ideal: "[t]he courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword".[28]

A *Bildungsroman* or a *Bildungskomödie* is characterised by the main character's development: at the end, the hero fulfils his objective (an objective which, at first, he had not been able to fully recognise) by gradually reforming his desire and behaviour. From this point of view, *Henry the Fourth, Part One* can be conveniently defined as a 'historical conduct comedy' or a 'comedy of formation'. In fact, it is the prince himself who, speaking about his future "reformation" (1.2.208), indirectly hints at the play's generic structure. This pattern may have been borrowed or suggested by the contemporary vogue of conduct books, many of which dealt with political conduct.[29]

In *Henry the Fourth*, the author, although outwardly conforming to such a model, inwardly undermines it by strewing the text with anti-formative elements. These may be identified: 1/ in some unconvincing aspects in the prince's transformation; 2/ in the fact that all of the Eastcheap characters remain unreformed. Differently from what happens in other types of more conventional *Bildungs*-texts, in *Henry the Fourth, Part One* the 'subversive' elements are not fully or convincingly 'contained' by the conclusion.

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[27] Hal's display of honour at Shrewsbury had been prepared by the scene of his reconciliation with his father King Henry IV (3.2).

[28] These are Ophelia's famous words in *Hamlet* (3.1.153). An apparently analogous conception of the ideal prince is formulated in *Measure for Measure* by the Duke ("a scholar, a statesman, and a soldier": 3.2.142).

[29] Other Shakesperean plays exhibit partly similar formative models: among these, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Tempest*.

From his very first appearance (1.2), Prince Hal is characterised by a dual personality whose conflicting halves are not completely aware of each other. On the one hand, the prince's political self has to stage all those ethico-juridical principles or constraints which act as a guarantee of social and political order (surveillance and repression being obviously part of a ruler's duties). On the other hand, the prince appears as marked by that same anarchy of desire which he punningly suggests should be severely chastised in Falstaff. Surprisingly enough, Hal predicts for Falstaff – or, rather, threatens him with – a future of "gallows" or, at least, of "robe of durance" (1.2.38,42). And he does so when he is still unreformed and guilty of those very crimes he would like to see punished in his comrade. The inflexibility of the ethico-judicial code by which the prince judges his Eastcheap companions, sharply contrasts with the exceedingly self-indulgent judgements which he passes on himself.[30] No signs of repentance or self-criticism can be seen in him (still less any shadow of Hamletic self-horror). Instead of suggesting a process of spiritual growth, the prince's conversion seems rather the result of a strategical self-adjustment to the reasons of the body politic.[31]

Not only this, but the prince's "reformation" is unaccompanied by an analogous conversion of his Eastcheap companions. In fact, the 'low' characters continue with their eating, drinking, sleeping, whoring and stealing. As has been suggested by Greenblatt, they may be said to embody "a dream of superabundance" (1988, 41). The Eastcheap group impersonates a sort of folk carnival humour and release. Carnival, as Holderness suggests, "was a contradictory social institution: its whole *raison d'être* was that of opposition to established authority", yet "it was countenanced, permitted, even fostered by those very authorities".[32] Carnival revelry permits a temporary inversion of social

[30] In many respects, the play's ethico-juridical code is as problematic as it is in *Measure for Measure*.

[31] The play's progressive movement can be said to reveal a sort of freudian *Unbehagen in der Kultur*: the prince's "reformation", taken in its social context, reveals all the hypocrisies, internal contradictions and instinctual repressions of *Kultur*.

[32] Holderness 1985; also in Holderness 1992, 152. Holderness's reading of *Henry IV* is declaredly indebted to Bakhtin (1965).

hierarchy. Such a hierarchical inversion appears as pervasive throughout the play. It is perhaps most evident when Falstaff tries to play the king's role and thus implicitly presents himself as a carnivalesque king of fools: "This chair shall be my state, this dagger my sceptre, and this cushion my crown" (2.4.373-74).[33]

However, although he impersonates a carnivalesque Lord of misrule, Falstaff is – above all – a picaresque rogue. The choice of the inn as a setting for the Eastcheap group is very picaresque. In spite of their embodying "a dream of superabundance", these low-life characters have to cheat or steal in order to survive. This is much more in the picaresque vein than in the carnival custom. Falstaff's picaresque traits are implicitly pointed out by Hal himself: for instance when, on asking him "What a devil hast thou to do with the time of the / day?" (1.2.6-7), the prince calls attention to Falstaff's life-style. Like a picaresque rogue, he has no projects but rather obeys his spur-of-the-moment impulses.

A picaresque reading of the play has a number of socio-political implications. Carnival represents a form of temporary and legalised infraction, the court fool enjoying a sort of legal immunity. Differently from the court-fool, a picaro does not live in the cultural centre of his country. He is a marginal person, as well as an outlaw. Prince Hal's punning threats to Falstaff in *Henry IV, Part One* (1.2.38, 42) are symbolically realised by the hanging of Bardolph in *Henry V* (3.6.104-05). Far from being guaranteed a clown's immunity, picaresque crimes are severely punished. Therefore, the subversive elements of a picaresque action are not so easily reabsorbed or contained as carnivalesque infractions are. Rather than legalised or temporary inversion, the low-life characters of Eastcheap represent a much less authorised alternative cultural model. They make up a subtext of popular culture and 'minor' history which, in its very illegality, radically interacts with court and dynastic history.[34]

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[33] This is analogous to Stephano and Trinculo's mock-coronation in *The Tempest*. Even Richard II, when he loses his royal power, stages this same paradigmatic inversion ("O that I were a mockery king of snow": 4.1.260). Of course, the carnivalisation of the king as fool is pervasive throughout *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. On Shakespeare's fools see Gentili 1978 and Mullini 1983.

[34] On 'minor' and popular history, see Ginzburg 1976. On the Shakespearean representation of popular culture and minor history, see Weimann 1987, Pugliatti 1996, especially 179-245.

Also from the point of view of the play's overall construction, the – typically picaresque – loose and episodic structure of the Eastcheap scenes contrasts with, and opposes, the progressive movement of Hal's "reformation". The 'imperfect' or only partial reproduction of the generic structure of a *Bildungskomödie* suggests a parallel opacity in the representation of power. Even after the prince's repudiation of his former companions, royal and popular – as well as legal and criminal-codes – keep interacting and transfusing into one another. Above all, the play's mingling of picaresque, clownish and kingly aspects within one and the same character, points to the existence of more complex, intrinsically dialogic forms of historical subjectivity than those which were exemplified by more conventional *Bildungs*-structures.

Henry V and 'Historical Comedy'

Henry V exhibits symbolico-emblematic relations between generic opacity and the opacity of power not dissimilar from those which we have observed in *Richard II* and in *Henry IV, Part One*. We have defined the play as a 'historical comedy' because of its historically contextualised happy ending.[35] The historical time theatricalised in "an hour-glass" covers the years from 1414 to 1420, stretching to 1422 in the epilogue. Although the emblematic interludes divide the dramatic sequence into five parts, the story may be said to be structured into three main episodes: the justification of – and preparations for – the military campaign in France (1.1–2.4); the actual expedition to France culminating in the victory of Agincourt (3.1–4.8) and the peace treaty of Troyes with the nuptial agreement between Henry and Katherine (5.1–2). Other episodes (such as the discovery of the plot against the king's life, in the second act), however important they may be in terms of the play's overall ideological structure, are merely digressive and do not speed the action on to its conclusion.

[35] On the one hand, *Henry V* continues the action of the two *Henry IV* plays; on the other hand – in its treatment of the Hundred Years' War – it makes a link with the first historical tetralogy, and especially with *Henry VI, Part One* (as is clearly illustrated by the epilogue).

The presence of the chorus, the opening epic-like invocation to the Muse, the heroico-chivalric tone which pervades most characters' speeches and the providential view of history manifested by King Henry V, all contribute to show the sequence of events – and essentially the English triumph at Agincourt – as theologically and teleologically oriented. In King Henry's words: "O God, thy arm was here, / And not to us but to thy arm alone / Ascribe we all" (4.8.107-09).

However, the hagiographic picture of the battle of Agincourt and of Henry V's behaviour is undermined by a number of seemingly minor and subsidiary themes and textual implications. The question of the legitimacy of the English claims over the French throne is only juridically voiced through the English perspective (the French limiting themselves to invectives). In spite of that, even such an internal or domestic juridical perspective is shown as ambivalent. In fact, Canterbury's 'bribing' demystifies from the inside the "true titles" of the English (1.1.87). As a consequence of that, Henry's behaviour and the credit which he gives to the bishop's arguments ambivalently suggest either political naivety (Henry is deceived by the bishop) or, rather, political opportunism (Henry finds it convenient to let himself be deceived).

Most English treatises on the 'art' of war were published about the same years when *Henry V* was composed. These military treatises had been preceded and influenced by translations of classical and continental works, such as Machiavelli's *Dell'arte della guerra* (1519-20, translated as *The Art of Warre* by Peter Whitehorne, 1560). In military leaders, the chivalric ideals of knighthood were to be inextricably fused with eminently political talents. Such contradictory traits show through in *Henry V*. Is King Henry V a "Christian king",[36] a *homo politicus*, or both? The historical recreation of royal subjectivity appears as rather ambivalent. As a matter of fact, the play seems to advocate a form of 'Christian policy' which proves, in its turn, basically ambivalent. As in *Richard II*, it is not clear whether providential views suggest a metaphysics of power or are to be understood as cunningly dissembled strategies of legitimation. Likewise, the romantic aura which is apparently cast on the wedding between King Henry V and Princess Katherine is demystified by the suggestion that the royal marriage has been inspired by political opportunism. The doubts that the play raises on the legiti-

[36] It is the king himself who suggests such a definition (1.2.242).

macy of the English claims over France as well as the obvious political elements in King Henry's marriage throw a shadow on the happy dénouement.

Moreover, it is the process itself of history-making that is put into question. In the Induction to *The Second Part of King Henry the Fourth*, the very possibility of historiographical falsification "with false reports" (Induction, 8) had already been put forward. Rumour, as the presenter, exemplified referential falsity. The Prologue to *Henry V* analyses, instead, the emblematic transposition of the historiographical discourse into theatrical performance. Besides that, many speeches allude or refer to the play's indebtedness to historiographical sources.[37] The implication is that, either in the chronicles or in their theatrical transposition, historical events may (have) be(en), if not referentially falsified, at least ideologically distorted. In this respect, the very speech of King Henry on the eve of Saint Crispin's day (that is, the day before the battle of Agincourt) is rather ambivalent. The epico-celebrative note which pervades the king's speech is not entirely justified if we judge his words in terms of dramatic realism. Although the battle has not yet taken place, it is evoked as if from the triumphal oral accounts of the English soldiers who took part in it. On showing their scars, the soldiers will say "These wounds I had on Crispin's day" (4.3.48). King Henry's epic fantasy is slightly anachronistic from a point of view of dramatic time: the very words "[t]his day is called the feast of Crispian" (4.3.40), which are used instead of a more plausible "tomorrow will be ...", either reveal an authorial lapsus or – more probably – are a form of (half-hidden) authorial obtrusiveness. Maybe, the king anticipates the result of the battle because – like Fluellen – he is a careful reader of Elizabethan chronicles.[38] More important than that, in the oral historical narrative which is imagined by the king, the English victory will be blown up or remembered "with advantages" by its protagonists (4.3.50). Although seemingly harmless, such a humorous remark hints at a possible ideological distortion of historical events. The speech, therefore, raises a number of questions: what is history? how is a historical event turned into historiographical discourse? is the chronicles' – and the play's – epico-celebrative tone appropriate,

[37] See Fluellen's reference to the chronicles ("as I have read in the chronicles": 4.7.93-4).

[38] See n36, above.

or is it a result of the winner's falsification? above all: what – or, rather, whose (the French or the English) – historiographical version is the audience watching on the stage?

Obviously enough, the following anti-heroic scene (4.4), with its display of plundering and cowardice, further demystifies the king's – as well as the chorus' – epic tone. Pistol's bombastic style and empty eloquence also work as a form of, albeit indirect, criticism of certain types of nationalist and chauvinist historiographical discourse.

So, the play's happy ending is obscured and made opaque by the presence of a (quasi-)parodic treatment of military rhetoric which can be detected under the celebrative surface.[39]

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Although adhering to – and rehearsing – the generic conventions of history, comedy and tragedy, Shakespeare's histories also contribute to transform them. In *Richard II*, the fatal-tragic pattern is partly disrupted by a polyphonic combination of providential elements and political pragmatism. In *Henry the Fourth, Part One*, a flow of picaresque looseness contrasts with – and questions – the progressive scheme represented by Hal's "reformation". In *Henry V*, a parodic, anti-epic undercurrent subverts the celebrative tone of the linguistic surface.

The mingling of dramatic genres and different views of power in these plays gives life to *a new type of historical discourse*. As has been said, the co-occurrence of multiple dramatic voices supporting different points of view suggests a form of *historical multiperspectivism*.[40] Dynastic history finds a *social* counterpart in *'lower'*, and marginal *history*. The very dialogic form of the history play also permits the author to explore the shaping of the historical subject. The histories thus help to invent – or, at least, to give shape to – *new, more dialogic forms of historical*

[39] On the theory and criticism of parody, cf. Billi 1993.

[40] On Shakespeare's historical multiperspectivism, see Pugliatti 1996; on the theory of Shakespearean polyphony, see Serpieri (1986). An analysis of Shakespeare's historical multiperspectivism is also in my critical reading of *King John* (1993).

subjectivity. In representing the public structures of a feudal past, the plays also analyse the way such structures affect the construction of the self. In so doing, they exhibit the core of late feudal subjectivity and its transition into modern consciousness.[41]

The sequence of *Richard II* through to *Henry V* suggests the idea of historical interpretation being a cultural-political construct, a varied and variable social practice whose discursive forms reveal the ideological character of – public as well as private – structures of power and knowledge.

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[41] The Shakespearean history play can be said to 'anticipate' different types of historiographical research and approaches: among these, Ginzburg's attention to social and 'minor' history, or Ariès's and Duby's interest in the forms of historical subjectivity and private life. On the Shakespearean fusion of the public and private aspects of kingship, cf. Gregson 1983, 26-94.

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