

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

SHAKESPEARE'S MORTAL IMMORTALS: Epic and Mock-Epic
in Troilus and Cressida and the second Henriad.

by

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled, "Shakespeare's Mortal Immortals: Epic and Mock-Epic in Troilus and Cressida and the second Henriad" submitted by James Gregory Randall in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Shakespeare's second Henriad has been classified as English Renaissance epic, but this classification has been made from limited premises. Shakespeare does not merely celebrate an English Aeneas in Henry V, but in fact has devised a comprehensive hero who combines civil and domestic qualities with battlefield achievement. In Troilus and Cressida, epic events are presented with a satirical coloration, showing the "immortals" of Greece and Troy to be merely mortal. This thesis examines the techniques used, in Troilus and Cressida and the second Henriad, to scrutinize reputations, to assess the virtues called upon in war and peace, and to present Henry V as an English worthy. These techniques contribute to a fusion of the epic and the mock-epic modes, and this thesis argues that this fusion is uniquely Shakespearean.

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INTRODUCTION

In certain of his plays, Shakespeare uses epic themes and narratives. For instance, many commentators have noted the Troy story in Hamlet and Troilus and Cressida, and some critics, including E. M. W. Tillyard, J.H. Walter, and John Dover Wilson, have suggested that Henry V is the English Aeneid. My purpose is to analyze selected Shakespearean plays not only for their epic but also for their mock-epic content.

In his use of derived epic material, Shakespeare seems skeptical about the ability of human beings to achieve or maintain epic stature. Troilus and Cressida, for example, is a story without a hero. The same may also be said of an extensive part of the second Henriad -- Richard II, the two parts of Henry IV, and Henry V. In Henry IV, Parts One and Two, heroism is a concern and we are shown numerous alternative heroes as Shakespeare analyzes heroism and develops his eventual hero, Henry V.

One parallel between Homer and Shakespeare lies in their definition of a true epic hero as one with

representative qualities and a balance of military and civil (domestic) virtues. Of all the alternative heroes, heroic claimants, and pretenders in Troilus and Cressida and the second Henriad, Henry V perhaps best achieves the military and civil balance that entitles him to the status of hero. However, while I would argue that Henry V is Shakespeare's epic hero, I do not do so for the same reasons as Tillyard, Wilson, and Walter.

The conventional view of Shakespeare's use of the epic is (or perhaps I may say was) presented by Tillyard in The English Epic and in Shakespeare's History Plays, by Wilson in his Introduction to the New Cambridge edition of Henry V, and by Walter in the Arden edition of Henry V. This view was also re-affirmed by Alvin Kernan in a 1969 Yale Review essay, "The Henriad: Shakespeare's Major History Plays," where, as Paul Merchant writes, "Kernan argues that in describing the passage from Richard II to Henry V, from Middle Ages to Renaissance, Shakespeare was doing for England something comparable to Vergil's Roman Epic" (Merchant 81).

These critics generally believe that Shakespeare viewed and used the epic with consistent seriousness. Tillyard concludes that the history plays "shared the epic impulse of the Elizabethan age" (Epic v). He associates Shakespeare with Sidney and Spenser and assumes that since they wrote epics, Shakespeare also would have wished to

write one. Tillyard also proposes that the history plays are great enough to be epic, and would be epic if written in narrative rather than dramatic form (Epic 65); he does not mention that the choruses in Henry V are narratives. He believes that although the histories do not quite fit the epic mold, they are "[o]ne of the main manifestations of the epic spirit in the age of Elizabeth" (Epic 213). Tillyard argues that these plays have the potential to be epic, and he compares them with two other "important but imperfect epic attempts," Spenser's Fairie Queen and Sidney's Arcadia (Epic 260). He writes:

It must suffice to say that [the history] plays do express, uneconomically and fitfully it must be granted, but in the end better than any other works, the temper of Elizabethan England (Epic 260).

By emphasizing their heroic spirit and nature, Tillyard establishes the plays as conventional epic, a position with which I will differ.

Reaffirming much of what Tillyard has to say, Alvin Kernan also acknowledges that the history plays are not epic in the usual sense. He argues, however, that they

possess that quality which in our time we take to be the chief characteristic of epic: a large scale,

heroic action involving many men and many activities, tracing the movement of a nation or people through violent change from one condition to another.

(Kernan 2)

So while the history plays technically are not epic, they have epic-like qualities which push them beyond the limits of conventional drama.

Wilson and Walter, rather than dealing with the historical tetralogies as a whole, focus on Henry V. The theme and history of Henry V's reign clearly call for the epic, says Wilson (New Cambridge 492), and Walter asserts that Henry's reign "was fit matter for an epic" (Arden xiv). Wilson writes that the years covering the reigns from Richard II to Henry V "possessed something of an epical quality." They

embraced the martyrdom of a king, the efforts of a usurper to establish his rule, the brilliant episode of Henry V's victories over the foreign foe, the downfall of government and the reign of chaos during the quarrels of the rival dynasties and finally, the restoration of order at the hands of a new dynasty, heir to the claims of both houses.

(New Cambridge 404)

He sees considerable epic potential in the historical matter of the plays and praises Shakespeare for exploiting that potential.

Walter notes similarities between Aeneas and Henry. Both heroes "neglect their duties for pleasant dalliance," but "are recalled to their duty by divine interposition" (xxiv). Each one is obedient to the divine will and is laid open to the charge "of priggishness and inhumanity" (xxix). Walter, like Tillyard, Wilson, and Kernan, takes Shakespeare's epic allusions seriously and does not make any allowances for the possibility that he might be incorporating elements of the mock-heroic into his work.

It seems natural that Shakespeare should be associated with the epic, as his stature in English letters makes it difficult not to compare him with either Homer or Virgil. However, since he is principally a dramatist, his use of the epic goes beyond epic's narrative bounds. He has infused his epic allusions with drama and undergirded his drama with the strength and majesty of the epic, thereby adding credibility to his depiction of the plight of individuals in cruel and often hostile environments. There is also in his work an undercurrent of the mock-epic. Tillyard, Wilson, Walter, and Kernan fail to address this anti-heroic mode of Shakespeare's. Harold C. Goddard, on the other hand, argues in The Meaning of Shakespeare that irony -- not the epic qualities -- forms the basis for a

true reading of Henry V (215-216). Without this irony, he suggests, Shakespeare would be nothing more than a jingoist. Goddard's explication of this play is so different from Tillyard's, Wilson's, Walter's, and Kernan's that it encourages a re-evaluation of received interpretations.

In Henry IV, Parts One and Two, Shakespeare uses epic conventions and "epic atmosphere" to give his play an expansiveness of time, setting, and action. Apparently well aware of the amplitude, scope, and inclusiveness of the epic, he employs those conventions which are most appropriate for the task at hand: the entertainment of his audience. The use of epic qualities and conventions helps elevate this play above a mere chronicle. In addition, he dramatizes what H.R. Coursen calls "the disposition of political power" (The Leasing Out of England 12). Kernan writes that "What Milton presents on the scale of the universe, Shakespeare presents on the scale of the kingdom and the individual" (7). By offering to the audience in the two tetralogies the fall of John of Gaunt's England and the emergence of Henry the Fifth's, Shakespeare dramatized England's political fall from grace, but unlike Milton's Paradise Lost, "beyond Shakespeare's Second Henriad waits no ultimate reconciliation, no proof of a 'fortunate fall.'" The final chorus of Henry V predicts what Shakespeare has

already dramatized at length -- the Wars of the Roses" (The Leasing Out of England 11).

Although the history plays are not epic in the conventional sense, they do have epic content and characteristics. While Tillyard and Wilson agree with Walter that Henry V is clearly and intentionally epic (with Henry as England's Aeneas), I think a problem of perspective arises if one does not take into consideration Shakespeare's version of the Troy story found in Troilus and Cressida. If Shakespeare is as seriously "epical" in the second Henriad as the above critics suggest, then why is he so satirical in Troilus and Cressida? One might argue that perhaps Shakespeare changed his mind between the history plays (c. 1597-99) and Troilus and Cressida (c. 1602). However, since Shakespeare is usually consistent, he may be consistent across these plays, and the second Henriad may be looked at through the glass of Troilus and Cressida -- that is, from Goddard's perspective, and from mine. The action of Troilus and Cressida has its basis in epic literature, but Shakespeare takes a revisionist approach to the reputations of his epic heroes, demythologizing them. In this play, his most thorough treatment of an epic theme, Shakespeare is skeptical about the glorious figures of The Iliad, The Odyssey, and The Aeneid, questioning why the sack of Troy took ten years when there were such apparently-capable men to carry out

the operation. There must have been some mismanagement or turpitude in the Greek camp that allowed this campaign to drag on for so long. While looking for the second *Henriad's* epic content, one must keep in mind the undercurrent of skepticism with which Shakespeare adopts matter from Homer and Virgil. If one forgets Troilus and Cressida in any consideration of Shakespeare's use of the epic, there is a danger of missing Shakespeare's unique variation upon the epic design, and of taking seriously what is meant to be taken with tongue in cheek.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ILIAD AND THE SECOND HENRIAD:

Parallelism in Form and Theme

Homer's Iliad, Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida and the second Henriad have a common form and theme. Each begins in a stalemate, focuses on the search for a leader, and ends in a state of chaos, with Henry V preparing the way for the Wars of the Roses. Thematically, they concentrate on society's need for an epic hero who will bring redemption and restoration. It may be said that Troilus and Cressida and the second Henriad are "epics" in search of a hero, and that Troilus and Cressida never quite finds one.

Homer begins The Iliad in the Greek camp with Zeus punishing the Achaians because Agamemnon has refused to return Chryseis, his concubine, to her father, a priest of Apollo. Shakespeare begins Troilus and Cressida in Troy, with Troilus, one of Priam's sons, disarming. In the first

lines of the play, Troilus says to his servant that he will fight no longer:

Why should I war without the walls of Troy
 That find such cruel battle here within?
 Each Trojan that is master of his heart,
 Let him to field -- Troilus, alas, hath none.

(I.i. 2-5)

Homer's epic opens with pestilence sent by the gods as punishment for human sexual misdemeanors, and Shakespeare's tale of Troy begins unheroically with the love-sickness of Troilus and the self-protective flippancy of Cressida, who is caustic about her uncle Pandarus' "epic catalogue" on the Trojans who file by them (See I. ii. 169-233).

The first scenes of The Iliad show the attempt of the Greeks to determine why their campaign has stalemated. Shakespeare's drama starts in Troy with the complaints of a lover, the playful and coy teasing of his beloved, and the attempts of a pander to maneuver the two young people into bed together. Shakespeare's Greeks, as a result, do not address the war until scene iii, while Homer's heroes determine immediately that someone has sinned and that the gods need to be propitiated. Ulysses in Troilus and Cressida suggests that a lack of respect and a disregard for authority are the cause of the stalemate. In The

Iliad, Achilleus attempts to end the plague on the Greek camp by calling together an assembly of the princes, who then force Agamemnon to return Chryseis to her father. Agamemnon angrily insists that he be given someone else's concubine in exchange. Achilleus refuses, and in retaliation Agamemnon orders that he is to be given Briseis, the concubine Achilleus had been awarded. Consequently, Agamemnon offends Achilleus, the only hope the Greeks have of defeating the Trojans, and Achilleus withdraws from the camp. Shakespeare's Achilles refuses to fight, not because he has been disgraced but because he is in love with Polyxena, Hector's sister, and does not want to offend her mother Hecuba by fighting against her son and the Trojans.

The Henry IV plays also begin with indecision during a temporary halt in a war. The king hopes to establish peace for the country by leading a crusade to the Holy Land, but his plans are hindered by civil strife. In spite of the setbacks, he is convinced that, with such a crusade, "The edge of war, like an ill-sheathed knife, No more shall cut his master" (1 HIV I. i. 17-18). In this opening scene, Shakespeare tantalizes his audience with the prospect of a crusade, but quickly focusses on the story of Prince Henry, an unlikely hero who will grow to epic stature. Clearly, Henry IV is not the usual matter of epic, and the audience

must wait until Henry V for an idealized king to defeat an enemy on foreign soil.

The Iliad continues with the Greeks trying to sack Troy without a leader capable of bringing them victory, and it ends with Achilles accepting the responsibility of leading them out. Achilles is a hero with a dilemma. The mortal in him wants to live a long and fruitful life of peace, but he knows that fate has decreed he is to die before the walls of Troy. Edith Hamilton writes:

[Achilleus] had been told by his mother: "Very brief is your lot. Would that you could be free now from tears and troubles, for you shall not long endure, my child, short-lived beyond all men and to be pitied."

(Mythology 183)

So Achilles puts off arming himself until Hector kills Patroclus. Like Achilles in Troilus and Cressida, he does not enter the war until grief and the desire for revenge overwhelm him. Shakespeare's Achilles does not enter the war to bring redemption and restoration to his confused fellows and king, but to avenge the death of his lover.

Homer's Achilles is an epic hero with a battlefield specialization. He functions best in a theatre of war, and like Achilles is anomalous and uneasy during the long stalemate. It seems rather contradictory that his shield

carries depictions of civil and domestic life -- representations which the Archbishop in Henry V (I. ii 183-204) could be remembering as he describes a king's functions and duties. Whether or not civil virtues are ironical on Achilles' shield and in the cynical Archbishop's mouth, references to these values are integral to Shakespeare's depiction of epic heroism. In Henry IV, Prince Hal is required to bring restoration to a community afflicted with anarchy, greed and corruption.

While both Homer's and Shakespeare's Achilles' are men of war who enter the battlefield without any apparent concern for community life, the two Hectors have strong domestic aspects. But Homer's and Shakespeare's Hectors are denied the opportunity to nurture that side of their personalities by a fate which has decreed they are to be killed before they can save Troy. The tragedy of Homer's and Shakespeare's Troy stories is that there is no epic hero to whom the people can look to end the cycle of violence that plagues them. Shakespeare carries over a sense of that tragedy to the second Henriad, where Hal is the one character with the potential for maintaining peace in his land and in the lives of his people.

Troilus and Cressida presents two young lovers whose wish to live in love is thwarted because there is no one to protect them from Pandarus and Diomedes, who embody the corruption in Troy and Greece. Troilus and Cressida

represent those whom a true epic hero ought to shield, and their victimization illustrates what happens when an epic hero cannot be found, or when he neglects his duty.

However confused (and, to the audience, confusing) Troilus and Cressida may appear to be in their initial appearances in the play, when they come together for the first time, their love-making is a refreshing change from the entropy and vindictiveness inside and outside Troy. The irony, though, is that this most natural expression of what it means to be human in a cruel and devastating world lasts only briefly before politics separates them. Of the lovers' plight, Paris curtly says, "There is no help; The bitter disposition of the time / Will have it so" (IV. i. 49-50). Paris' disregard for their situation and his unwillingness to protect them reveal his heartless nature and the general callousness of the world around the lovers.

As Troilus and Cressida come to terms with the arrival of the dawn after their one night together, a knocking, as ominous as the knocking at Macbeth's gate, begins. Like Macbeth's world of self-imposed darkness, the lovers' world is vulnerable to intrusion. Pandarus goes to the door and tries to prevent Aeneas from entering. Here Shakespeare reduces the epic hero of The Aeneid to a mere functionary: in the two scenes of the play where we see Aeneas, he acts as a messenger. He first of all brings Hector's challenge to the Greek camp, then he delivers news

of Cressida's exchange for Antenor. The machinery to remove Cressida from Troy is now in motion, and Pandarus is unable to do anything to stop it. Troilus and Cressida have fallen in love in the wrong place at the wrong time. They have become the victims of war and their short-lived love is nothing more than an interlude in the reality of strife and political scheming. When Aeneas and Troilus are brought together, Aeneas is able to tell about the unfortunate exchange. Troilus responds by saying, "How my achievements mock me" (IV. ii. 69)! He has worked very hard to win Cressida, only to lose her. His experience of futility and frustration is endemic in the play.

There is a parallel between Troilus, who yearns for a woman outside the Trojan walls, and Shakespeare's Achilles, who yearns for a woman within them. Both men have been aroused, but because of the war they are separated from their women and unable to express themselves in wholesome relationships. When Hector kills Patroclus, Achilles' homo-eroticism also is without outlet, and he has a double onslaught of bi-sexual frustration, which cannot find release and erupts. Achilles is cut off from his male lover, Troilus from his female lover, and Troilus fears betrayal by Cressida. It is as if some of the erotic permutations of Sonnet 144 have been dramatized:

Two loves I have of comfort and despair,
 Which like two spirits do suggest me still:
 The better angel is a man right fair,
 The worser spirit a woman colour'd ill.
 To win me soon to hell, my female evil
 Tempteth my better angel from my [side],
 And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,
 Wooing his purity with her foul pride.
 And whether that my angel be turn'd fiend
 Suspect I may, yet nor directly tell,
 But being both from me, both to each friend,
 I guess one angel in another's hell.

The pain of the sonnet's lover, extrapolated to the play,
 is an addition to the Troy story that we do not see in
 Homer. It appears that since none of the lovers, in sonnet
 or play, can find a fulfilling sexual relationship, all
 are doomed, both as instruments and as objects. The
 conflict in the play begins with and continues from the
 theft of Helen by Paris ("The issue is embracement," IV. v.
 148), and its result, without a hero to bring about
 reconciliation and restoration, is devastation.

In Act IV, scene iv of Troilus and Cressida, Pandarus
 tries to counsel Cressida to be more moderate in her
 distress over her separation from Troilus. She replies

that she is unable to restrain her sorrow because her grief is in the same proportion as her loss:

The grief is fine, full perfect, that I taste
And violenteth in a sense as strong
As that which causeth it (11.3-5).

When Troilus enters, she embraces him, and their fate is so pathetic that Pandarus stumbles haltingly into verse. He quotes from a poem which explains that even though his love for them is genuine, he is powerless to help them in their time of need. He too feels a sense of futility when he views the distressing circumstances of their love. Pandarus can only stand by and offer shallow condolences as they are wrenched apart. Cressida realizes this to a much greater extent than Troilus does and with that knowledge her grief is more poignant than Troilus'.

While Cressida encourages Troilus' wooing, she resists Diomedes' advances. Diomedes is not concerned for her and sets about with grim determination to capture her. His war-like nature is carried over into the seduction of Cressida. In a sustained attack upon her chastity, he lays siege to her. The Trojan citadel and the Greek besieger, represented by Cressida and Diomedes, become the war in microcosm and, like the war, its causes or "issues" are disrespectable. Diomedes' conception of love is defiled by

lust, and rooted in selfishness. He has no regard for Cressida's feelings and is bent solely upon conquest. The situation is a serious counterpart to the comic siege described by Parolles in All's Well That Ends Well:

Par. Are you meditating on virginity?

Hel. Ay. . . . Man is enemy to virginity, how may we barricado it against him?

Par. Keep him out.

Hel. But he assails, and our virginity, though valiant in the defense, yet is weak: unfold to us some warlike resistance.

Par. There is none: man, setting down before you, will undermine you and blow you up.

(I. i. 110-19).

Women are to be beleaguered and their resistance is in vain, Parolles thinks; Cressida the Trojan falls as Troy will fall. She is vulnerable to both Troilus and Diomedes, and without her father or the man she loves has no protector. Even in Troy she is at risk, being the daughter of a man turned traitor. At the end of Act I, Scene ii, she reveals her defensive instinct by explaining why she is not responding to Troilus' love-suit:

Yet hold I off: women are angels, wooing;

Things won are done -- joy's soul lies in the doing.

That she beloved knows nought that knows not this:

Men prize the thing ungained more than it is.

(I. ii. 272-5).

She must also employ her defenses while she is in the Greek camp, where she is viewed as the Trojan strumpet. In both places, then, her position is precarious. The difference is that in Troy her feminine wiles are an asset, but in the Greek camp they are a liability. When she arrives at the Greek camp (IV. v.), the generals surround her as the Myrmidons will surround Hector before he is slaughtered (V. viii), and each kisses her. This siege of kisses foreshadows Diomedes' ruthless conquest of her, with Ulysses speaking disparagingly of her as she leaves the stage after the exchange for Antenor:

There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip,
Nay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirits look out
At every joint and motive of her body.

(IV. v. 55-58)

It really does not matter whether or not this wantonness is in Cressida; her danger is that the Greek soldiers' perception of her is what they want to see in her. That opinion is more a reflection of how lust has infected and distorted their view than a confirmation of her immorality. The healthy eroticism enjoyed between two lovers

degenerates quickly into lust and physical violence when love and compassion are exchanged by one or both of the partners for selfishness and greed. Such a degeneration can be seen in the conquest of Cressida by Diomedes.

Cressida's resistance to Diomedes goes unnoticed by Troilus, Ulysses and Thersites. Under siege, she uses indirect tactics to defend herself from Diomedes' frontal attack. Her ploy works in the short term, but buys her only a little time. The men who view her epic encounter with Diomedes (it is, after all, a single combat and a paradigm of the greater war, with Shakespeare on the side of the loser, not the victor) are soldiers who see Cressida as a wanton who should never have allowed herself to get into such a predicament and Diomedes as wooing her the way they would do had they the chance.

In her attempt to hold Diomedes off without frustrating him completely, Cressida is forced into a compromising situation. She offers him her most valuable possession, the sleeve which Troilus gave her as a token of his love. She does not want Diomedes to depart in anger, yet is reluctant to admit to him that she is forsworn, realizing that her availability makes her even more valuable to Diomedes. Her need to protect herself forces her into collaboration with her enemy.

True love and false love, faithfulness and wantonness, and romantic idealism and practical expediency

are portrayed as inseparable in this play. By dramatizing the negative aspect of love and order, Shakespeare moves away from the traditional matter of the Troy stories and deals with the underside of human life, rather than with the admirable and noble. He shows that all human beings, including both the Greek and Trojan heroes, are susceptible to lust, petty behaviour, and contemptible acts. The inevitability of Troy's ruin is a given in Troilus and Cressida. Ulysses forecasts it most explicitly, and in erotic terms:

My prophecy is but half his journey yet;
 For yonder walls, that pertly front your town,
 Yon towers, whose wanton tops do buss the clouds,
 Must kiss their own feet.

(IV. v. 216-21).

Troilus and Cressida, like Troy itself, are fated to have their private lives destroyed by political forces and by lust. Unlike Homer, who shows Menelaus and Helen returning to each other after ten years of separation, Shakespeare has Troilus and Cressida remain as cuckold and whore. As surely as Helen's chastity was assailed and overcome by Paris and as surely as Troy will be sacked by the Greeks, so shall Cressida be conquered by Diomedes. Trojan horse and Trojan whore are of a piece -- the Greeks make both.

While it is true that Troilus and Cressida is a Shakespearean treatment of epic themes and epic protagonists, one need only look at the discursive portrait of society in The Iliad's description of Achilles' shield to realize how deliberately limited and sparsely presented Shakespeare's tale of Troy really is. He focuses principally on war while Homer deals with domestic life within the context of war. Where Troilus and Cressida is compressed, Henry IV, Parts One and Two amplify by including domestic life in the treatment of the events leading up to the Wars of the Roses. In the second Henriad, Shakespeare illustrates the susceptibility of domestic life to intrusion from outside, presenting such domestic incidents as the gardeners in Richard II and the Boar's Head and the Justice Shallow scenes in Henry IV, Parts One and Two. The garden interlude offers an allegory of civil order, while the Shallow scenes depict the rural life of "land and beeves," orchards and pippins, and yokes of bullocks at the fair (2 HIV III. ii. and V. iii.). The Boar's Head has connotations of epic feasting: Falstaff is a roasted Manningtree ox with a pudding in his belly; he is guts, ribs, and tallow, a huge hill of flesh; as he sweats, he lards the lean earth as he walks along (2 HIV II. iv. 223, 239, 445-454). He is, in effect, a hecatomb and a libation -- fit to offer up at an occasion such as Hector's funeral.

But Shakespeare's rendering of Falstaff's mighty festive associations is mock-epic as well as epic. The dramatization of life in the Boar's Head has mock-heroic parallels with Homer's description of Achilles' shield in The Iliad (xviii. 478-607). and the patrons of this tavern in Eastcheap are representative of proletarian Elizabethans. While describing the shield Homer depicts the earth, sky, sea's water, sun, moon, and constellations; and Shakespeare brings such characters as Falstaff, Poins, Bardolph, Pistol, Doll Tearsheet, and Mistress Quickly to life. Homer deals with the communal events which take place in two cities, and Shakespeare focuses upon those characters whom society would rather ignore or forget. In one of Homer's two cities (depicted on the shield), there are marriages, feasts, and dances. There is also a civil dispute between two men over the blood-price of a man who has just been killed. In the other city, the inhabitants defend themselves against a siege, and do not give way to the attackers who are hubristically deciding what to do with the spoils once they win. There is a description of a field outside the city. It is "the pride of the tilled land, wide and triple-ploughed, with many ploughmen upon it" (xviii. 541-42). The ploughmen are given honey-wine to encourage and nourish them at the end-strip of the field they are working. There is a depiction of harvesters reaping grain, and of the king watching his subjects at

their labour. The heralds are trimming a great ox and making a feast ready for the hard-working men and women. Young men and girls are picking grapes in the vineyard, and grape bearers run along the path. Music and dancing are present in this pastoral life, but there is also the description of two lions catching a bull and gulping its black blood before the herdsmen and their dogs can do anything. In this Homeric description of an idyllic life, there is a panorama of human experience that includes both pleasure and pain. Homer, unlike Shakespeare, does not deal with life's seamy side. In Shakespeare's dramatization of epic themes and characterization of epic heroes, there are laughter and sorrow, love and lust, health and disease, and discord and reconciliation. In Henry IV, Part Two, Shakespeare dramatizes the ever-increasing disruption of the lives of the patrons of the Boar's Head by the continuation of civil war.

Falstaff, Pistol and their parallel in Troilus and Cressida, Ajax, all have the qualities of a miles gloriosus, and each of them is a parody of an epic hero. Unlike the simple Renaissance braggart whose function is to make the audience laugh, Shakespeare's braggarts present a distorted mirroring of the qualities of epic heroes, and because of that, the audience must reflect momentarily on the characteristics of a true hero. The true hero possesses extraordinary abilities which he uses for the

common good. Ajax, in contrast, is vainglorious and struts up and down the stage in his battle gear without ever going to battle. Hotspur, who also has the qualities of a miles gloriosus, exalts daring and courage and has these latter qualities in abundance and even to excess, yet the only conflict we see him win is when he and Kate are arguing. Even there his victory is questionable because he walks out on her. Pistol goes to war to make a profit; he is not interested in honour, just money. The true epic hero is prepared to die in battle for honour as Hotspur admittedly does, and unlike Ajax is willing to do more than just wear his armour and look the part. But the Shakespearean epic hero has a domestic side to him, and unlike Hotspur is able to communicate in the terms of civility and love, not just those of war. And he goes to war to serve the interests of his king and his fellow citizens. He does not go to war, like Pistol, to get rich; nor does he divide and quarrel over the spoils before winning them, as Hotspur and his fellow-rebels do (1 Henry IV III. i).

Falstaff is the embodiment of all these mock-heroic heroes. But he is more than just "the traditional type of crude braggart who struts through Roman comedy, and [has] nothing characteristically English about him" (The Fortunes of Falstaff 83). Shakespeare's parodies of epic heroes work because their milieu is rendered so well. John Dover

Wilson's explanation of the difference between Falstaff and the traditional miles gloriosus is admissible:

while there are traces of the braggart in his behaviour, he is a different kind of soldier altogether. This difference may be put in a sentence: whereas the others, from the original in Plautus downwards, are all sham soldiers, who brag of their exploits beforehand and are exposed to open and apparent shame when their pretensions are put to trial by battle, Falstaff is, as Morgann first called him, 'the old soldier', up to all the tricks of the trade, which he has presumably learnt from previous campaigns, and very well knows how to turn to his own advantage.

(Fortunes 83)

Falstaff and the others are experienced soldiers who are seen in the battlefield, but who are tripped up by their pretensions and greed.

Shakespeare's sometimes-bewildering movement between heroic and mock-heroic is nowhere more clearly illustrated than in his juxtaposition of Hotspur and Falstaff. The former is heroic -- militarily accomplished, brave, chivalric, dashing. He is also rebellious, rash, uncivil,

egotistical -- at times, even a buffoon. Falstaff is militarily unaccomplished, cowardly, wily in the face of danger. And he is rebellious (in the sense of being subversive of order), uncivil, selfish -- and a buffoon. Yet he pretends to heroism and is accepted as a hero and the killer of Hotspur, whose honour he steals from both Hotspur himself and Hotspur's true conqueror, Prince Hal. Hotspur and Falstaff are both milites gloriosi; their many differences serve to highlight their similarities.

Falstaff, very obviously, is the antithesis of everything Hotspur deems important in life. He consciously undercuts the heroic and chivalric code, while Hotspur undercuts it in spite of himself. Both Hotspur and Falstaff would rather ride a horse to battle than go on foot. In describing which horse he shall ride to Shrewsbury, Hotspur says to his servant: "That roan shall be my throne" (1 HIV II. iii. 71). And later, when he is saying goodbye to Kate, he asks her, "Come, wilt thou see me ride? And when I am a-horseback I will swear I love thee infinitely" (ll. 101-102). Hotspur is obsessed with horses and cannot, it seems, love or make war without them. Falstaff cannot live without horses either, because he is so out of shape that he cannot carry his own weight for any distance. During the Gad's Hill robbery, Hal steals Falstaff's horse, and forces him to go on foot. Falstaff complains: "If I travel but four feet by the squier further afoot, I shall

break my wind" (1 HIV I. ii. 12-13), explaining that "eight yards of uneven ground is threescore and ten miles afoot with me" (ll. 24-26).

Both Hotspur and Falstaff go to war to rob the king. Hotspur rebels against Henry IV to improve his family's standing and to divide the kingdom. In Act III, scene i, as mentioned, Hotspur Mortimer, and Glendower meet to determine their share of the spoils when they have defeated the King. In Act IV, scene ii, Falstaff acknowledges to Bardolph that he has neglected his responsibilities, thereby disobeying the King. Instead of impressing men capable of defending the King's cause, Falstaff impresses those men who are too poor to buy their way out of the fighting. They are a beggarly company of "pitiful rascals" (IV. ii. 64), and Falstaff is the opposite of what a good captain with soldiers under his command should be. He was given the responsibility and money to impress a group of men who would aid the King's cause and instead has robbed the exchequer. As a result, Falstaff has a poverty-stricken company of old soldiers who had retired from service, and derelicts who should never have been enlisted in the first place. He acknowledges that he has "misus'd the King's press damnably" (IV. ii. 12-13), but he does not waste the opportunity to profit from the charge Hal obtained for him. Falstaff seems embarrassed about the men under his command, calling them "the cankers of a calm

world and a long peace" (11. 29-30) and selfishly implying that a long peace is unhealthy for society. War for him is desirable if he can profit from it. He also has little regard for the lives of those he has forced into service. When the Prince makes the comment that he has never seen such pitiful rascals, Falstaff replies

Tut, tut, good enough to toss, food for powder, food
for powder, they'll fill a pit as well as better;
Tush, man, mortal men, mortal men.

(11. 65-67)

The only value these men hold for him is the money that they will bring in, and the sooner they are killed the sooner he can collect their pay as his own. Falstaff has no commitment to the conflict against the Percies. Shakespeare uses him as a foil to chivalry and patriotic heroism.

Falstaff sees nothing honorable in going to war to risk life and limb. Honour for him is other-worldly and has little value in this life. He asks of what practical use it is:

Can honour set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or
take away the grief of a wound? No. Honour hath no

skill in surgery then? No. What is honour? A word.

What is in that word honour? What is that honour?

Air. A trim reckoning!

(V. i. 131-35)

While honour may inspire Hal and Hotspur to encounter one another, Falstaff sees it as a destructive fantasy which compels young men to go off to war to kill and be killed. When Falstaff in Act V, Scene iii sees the dead Sir Walter Blunt, who had disguised himself as the King, he continues the catechism he began in Act V, scene i. He says to the audience that

I like not such grinning honour as Sir Walter hath.

Give me life, which if I can save, so; if not, honour comes unlooked for, and there's an end.

(V. iii. 58-61)

Falstaff, like most men, prefers the joy of living to battlefield honour. With the wisdom of the writer of Ecclesiastes, Falstaff sees through the epic ideals of chivalry and patriotism: for him "a living dog is better than a dead lion" (Eccl. ix. 4).

Yet because of his pretence that he has killed Hotspur (he simply stabbed the corpse), Henry IV, Part One concludes with Falstaff, and not Hal, emerging as the hero

to whom all England appears to look for the defeat of the rebels. In Henry IV, Part Two, Falstaff explains just how desperate the English are to find someone they can look up to:

There is not a dangerous action can peep out his head but I am thrust upon it. Well, I cannot last ever; but it was alway yet the trick of our English nation, if they have a good thing, to make it too common.

(I. ii. 212-16)

For the present, he is the hero who killed Hotspur, and although better judgement cannot accept Falstaff as a hero, the "fond many" (2 HIV I. iii. 91) would have him as a hero rather than have no hero at all.

After Falstaff's own death in Henry V, Pistol grows in stature as a miles gloriosus, the blowhard who sets the true epic hero in relief. In the scene just before the English force leaves for France, Pistol declares that his only purpose in going on the expedition is to suck blood like a horse-leech. He is not motivated by the honour which the Chorus says, with traditional enthusiasm, "Reigns solely in the breast of every man" (HV, II. Prol. 3).

Gower describes Pistol as "an arrant counterfeit rascal," and "a bawd, a cut-purse" (HV III. vi. 61-62).

Pistol boasts of his ability, but is nothing more than a sham hero who struts about the stage and who goes to France "to grace himself at his return into London under the form of a soldier" (III. vi. 68-69). As mentioned before, Pistol's principal motivation for going to war is profit. He reconciles himself to Nym in Act II, Scene i and says "for I shall sutler be / Unto the camp, and profits will accrue" (ll. 111-14). Pistol shares many characteristics with Falstaff, who is "busy upon a number of disreputable devices for raising money" (Fortunes 84). Wilson goes on to say, in a passage which can be applied to Pistol, that Falstaff went to "battle for what he could get out of it, and preferred to be paid in gold not lead" (Fortunes 85). In France, Fluellen gives an account of Pistol's supposed bravery during a skirmish, calling him "as valiant a man as Mark Antony" (III. vi. 12-15). But Pistol is only a braggart, and either the French are more cowardly than he, or Fluellen has been taken in, or both.

Insofar as they are epic, the King Henry plays have in common with Troilus and Cressida the fact that, for a major part of the action, they are without a hero, as I have suggested. England languishes without a suitable king to lead her towards peace. Hal, who has the most potential for becoming an epic hero and who temporarily earns this status by overcoming Hotspur, must still defeat Falstaff before going on to victory at Agincourt. But even so, as

Coursen asserts, he leaves only a legacy of war for his infant son.

While for Shakespeare the epic hero is characterized by humility, discretion, and magnanimity, Shakespeare's milites gloriosi are infected with hubris. It is clear in Troilus and Cressida that those "heroes" who refuse to listen to common sense are characterized as fools. The Prologue sets the tone by describing the whole Trojan war as a conflict between a cuckold, an unfaithful wife, and her lover:

Sixty and nine that wore
 Their crownets regal, from th' Athenian bay
 Put forth toward Phrygia, and their vow is made
 To ransack Troy, within whose strong immures
 The ravished Helen, Menelaus' queen,
 With wanton Paris sleeps - and that's the quarrel.

(11. 5-10)

With this reduction of the Trojan War to a sexual dispute, Shakespeare ridicules both the Trojans and the Greeks for pursuing personal ends through the continuation of a war that is without justification. Helen is not worth the price in human lives for the retrieving and the keeping of her. However, since the Greeks have vowed to regain her, and the

Trojans to keep her, and since neither side is willing to back down, the war must go on.

In a marriage of true mindlessness, both sides feel compelled by their honour to remain true to their obsessions. The Troilus and Cressida Prologue refers to the vow the Greeks made to ransack Troy and return Helen to Menelaus. Troilus refers to the Trojan obligation to back their words with actions when he defends the keeping of Helen against the wisdom of Hector and Helenus (II. ii.). Hector does not think Helen worth all the trouble that she has caused and his reason tells him to return her. After all, she is the wife of Menelaus and there is no bond more sacred than the bond between a husband and his wife. Hector says that to persist in keeping Helen violates the law of nature and nations, and will only exacerbate the wrong, making matters worse for all of Troy:

If this law
Of nature be corrupted through affection,
And that great minds, of partial indulgence
To their benumbed wills, resist the same,
There is a law in each well-ordered nation
To curb those raging appetites that are
Most disobedient and refractory.
If Helen then be wife to Sparta's king,

As it is known she is, these moral laws
 Of nature and of nations speak aloud
 To have her back returned. Thus to persist
 In doing wrong extenuates not wrong,
 But makes it much more heavy.

(II. ii. 173-88).

Part of Hector's tragedy, and consequently the tragedy of Troy, is that he listens to Troilus' defense of the war, his dismissal of reason and logic, and his appeal to the Trojan sense of honour and glory.

Hector's easy surrender to Troilus has a parallel with Cressida's surrender to Diomedes; they both know the good that they should do, but do otherwise (Romans vii. 21-24). They both reject reason and succumb to their desire. After giving in to Diomedes' demands, Cressida bids Troilus farewell:

One eye yet looks on thee,
 But with my heart the other eye doth see.
 Ah, poor our sex! This fault in us I find,
 The error of our eye directs our mind;
 What error leads must err - O, then conclude
 Minds swayed by eyes are full of turpitude.

(V. ii. 105-10).

She is in the same dilemma as Hector, and her divided soul enervates her. Hector and Cressida are struggling to do good and not sin, and are aware of the agon within themselves. Like Troy and the Greek army they are internally divided as human drives -- vanity, affection, lust, anxiety -- war with honour, duty and faithfulness. This division in the political and individual worlds of Troilus and Cressida is the Pauline war between the law in the mind and that other law "in the members" (Romans vii. 22).

Shakespeare's Hector and Cressida, then, as well as those around them, have Homeric associations but are merely "mortal immortals." That is, they are epic figures with clay feet and with conventional reputations which turn out to be over-estimated. Thersites, for example, addresses Achilles and says, "Why, thou picture of what thou seemest, and idol of idiot-worshippers. . ." (V. i. 6-7). Achilles may appear like the most glorious of the epic heroes and the only one who can salvage the Greek cause, but in reality he is enslaved to passion. Thersites announces that Achilles' soldierly heroism is only a store-front to disguise the turmoil inside. In short, though Achilles has an epic reputation, he is subject to inner conflict, and is merely human. While Ulysses is in the process of besieging Achilles from the outside, and attempting to force him to re-enter the battle, Achilles is beset and torn three ways

between his sense of duty as a Greek soldier, his vow to remain true to Polyxena, and his obsession with Patroclus: to paraphrase Sonnet 144, already quoted, three spirits do suggest him still. After agreeing to meet Hector in battle, Achilles receives a letter from Queen Hecuba, reminding him of his oath, and he says to Patroclus:

I am thwarted quite
 From my great purpose in tomorrow's battle.
 Here is a letter from Queen Hecuba,
 A token from her daughter, my fair love,
 Both taxing me and gaging me to keep
 An oath that I have sworn. I will not break it.
 Fall Greeks; fail fame; honour or go or stay;
 My major vow lies here; this I'll obey.

(V. i. 35-41)

While Achilles struggles to sort out his loyalties and determine his course of action, there is hope that he may choose to do good and follow the way of love in opposition to the chivalric code that has cost both the Greeks and the Trojans so very much. Once this inner conflict is resolved, the outer action is determined with the inner conflict as a precursor to, or a harbinger of, things to come. As long as Achilles is indecisive, there is hope that he may prove an epic hero like Hector, whose heart is

with his wife and children and their safety¹. However, when Achilles becomes consumed with rage and blood-lust, he hinders the epic movement towards redemption and restoration. In satirizing Achilles' dishonorable actions, Shakespeare is re-defining the epic hero as one who seeks fame through the safe-guarding of public peace instead of going to war for personal satisfaction.

Even Hector, who prefers peace to war, feels compelled by his sense of duty and honour to enter the lists. The only character in Troilus and Cressida who is truly consistent in the pursuit of peace is Cassandra, and she is ostracized and ridiculed for her outlandish beliefs. Shakespeare has transformed her from being (as in Homer) a prophetess whom no one believes to one whose beliefs are opposed to the prevailing attitudes in the world around her. Her wisdom is disregarded by those who prefer folly and whose values are turned upside down by the chivalric tradition which tells young men to pursue honour and fame through death on the battlefield, rather than through works of peace and love.

The tormented inconsistency which besets the mortal immortals of Troilus and Cressida is also present in Henry IV, Part One, where the king has accepted the

¹There is a parallel in The Iliad where Hector's love for his wife and son Astyanax is evident (vi. 390-482).

responsibility to maintain domestic order but is frustrated by his past. He is determined that

No more the thirsty entrance of this soil
 Shall daub her lips with her own children's
 blood,
 No more shall trenching war channel her
 fields,
 Nor bruise her flow'rets with the armed hoofs
 Of hostile paces.

(I. i. 5-9)

However great Henry IV's desire is to keep his country safe from war, this play is about his inability to resist the forces he set in motion when he seized the crown from Richard. By basing his claim to the throne on power politics without divine or legal sanction, Bolingbroke has given thieves and robbers a stronger place in society.² In Richard II the England Bolingbroke returns to from exile is one where relations between men are defined in political terms only. The emphasis is upon power, not morality. The pursuit of honour and glory is tempered by a machiavellian concern for victory. Hypocrisy, opportunism, and treachery

²Coursen writes that "Bolingbroke has spawned, it seems, precisely what he returned to England to eliminate, prodigality and criminality that extend the commercial metaphor to its logical negative conclusion. The words 'taverns,' 'narrow lanes,' 'watch,' and 'passengers' introduce a new area of England that Henry IV's accession has suddenly made visible" (Leasing 80).

are the new code of ethics, a code which Bolingbroke accepts and develops. The times are uncertain because England has been plunged into anarchy, and the past, when the king had absolute control, is wistfully reflected upon. Richard II recognises the new ethics when he meets Bolingbroke at Flint Castle: "They well deserve to have / That know the strong'st and surest way to get" (R II III. iii. 200-201). By seizing the crown from Richard, Bolingbroke has compromised the ideals and values he had intended to protect from Richard's dishonesty, and Henry IV, Parts One and Two dramatize the frustration he experiences as a result of his choices. Bolingbroke is an ambitious nobleman who returns to England to protect his inheritance from the King who had confiscated it. As a professed champion of property rights and the feudal system of John of Gaunt's England, Bolingbroke ironically becomes instrumental in the destruction of the world he says he wants to defend (The Leasing Out of England 77).

In a soliloquy at the end of Act I, Scene ii of Henry IV, Part One, Prince Hal, the apparent prodigal, outlines his desire to rule England well, and says that his association with Falstaff is part of a strategy to make his rule as King more sure:

I know you all, and will awhile uphold
the unyok'd humour of your idleness.

Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
 Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
 To smother up his beauty from the world,
 That, when he please again to be himself,
 Being wanted he may be more wonder'd at
 By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
 Of vapours that did seem to strangle him. . . .
 So when this loose behaviour I throw off,
 And pay the debt I never promised,
 By how much better than my word I am,
 By so much shall I falsify men's hopes;
 And like bright metal on a sullen ground,
 My reformation, glitt'ring o'er my fault,
 Shall show more goodly, and attract more eyes
 Than that which hath no foil to set it off.
 I'll so offend, to make offence a skill,
 Redeeming time when men think least I will.

(I. ii. 190-212)

Hal's plan, then, is to "imitate the sun" by allowing the
 likes of Falstaff, Poins, and Mistress Quickly "To smother
 up his beauty from the world." He tolerates their company
 so that his future reformation will appear that much more
 startling. He is not a layabout abdicating his duties as
 the Heir Apparent, but is actively preparing for his future
 responsibilities.

In the scene where he catechises Francis (1 HIV II. iv), Hal asks the apprentice if he dares to "be so valiant as to play the coward with [his] indenture, and show it a fair pair of heels, and run from it" (II. iv. 46-48). As Heir Apparent, Hal may be tempted to run from his own indenture, but like Francis he remains dutiful, accepting the responsibility to rule his country well, and wishing to see his subjects perform their duties. Unlike Falstaff, who robs the exchequer, Hal does not abuse his charge, but fulfills his duty to keep order in the land so that domestic life can flourish. By jesting with Francis the Prince discovers the common bond he has with his subjects. At the beginning of this scene, Hal "sounded the very base-string of humility" by drinking with a trio of drawers, whose language or argot he became proficient in after just a few minutes. In Tennyson's "Ulysses," Ulysses claims that "I am a part of all that I have met" (l. 18), a line which sums up the comprehensive nature of the epic hero. Hal's proletarian contacts, and the lessons he learns from them, foster this comprehensiveness in the prince.

The true epic hero is protective as well as comprehensive. He is a guarantor of the quality of life and of goods. The king, likewise, ensures that there is a consistent standard across the land. When Falstaff enters after the Gad's Hill robbery, he complains of lime in the sack (1 HIV. II. iv. 121). In the England of Henry IV, the

King does not have the power and authority to guarantee the quality of goods that are bought and sold, and as a result corruption is ever-present. This king is unable to maintain the standards because he is himself fraudulent.

In Act V, Scene iii of Henry IV, Part One, Douglas fights Sir Walter Blunt, who is disguised as the King. This sham king is the culmination of a series of counterfeits that have run through the play. Under Henry's rule many fakes have surfaced and it is difficult to tell the true from the false. In the Boar's Head, the wine has lime in it and cracked crowns are passed as current. People wear clothing made of gummed velvet and pretend to be something or someone they are not. A spirit of deception, lies, and dishonesty pervades the kingdom, and it began with the King himself. He ("this king of smiles" I. iii. 243) took the crown from Richard while deceiving his accomplices, and he falsely wears the robes of the legitimate King.

When Henry IV chastises the Prince for neglecting his duties (1 Henry IV III. ii.), he contrasts himself and his son with Richard II. He believes that historical processes are at work, and if Hal is not careful, history will repeat itself. The King describes Richard as "The skipping king" who "ambled up and down, / With shallow jesters" and "Soon kindled and soon burnt, carded his state, / Mingled his royalty with cap'ring fools" (III. ii. 60-63). According

to Henry, Richard II neglected his duty and "degraded his dignity by indiscriminate mingling" (Humphreys 103). While one sees Henry IV's ineffectiveness in quelling the rebellions and uprisings of the Percies, it also should be acknowledged that he tries to do his duty in spite of the odds against him. Hal learns from his father how weighty the burdens of the crown are, but through his own apprenticeship he also learns how to carry them.

Henry sees a parallel between Richard II and Hal. He sees Hotspur as a threat to Hal's throne in the same way that he was a threat to Richard's. He says:

For all the world
As thou art to this hour was Richard then
When I from France set foot at Ravenspurgh,
And even as I was then is Percy now.
Now by my sceptre, and my soul to boot,
He hath more worthy interest to the state
Than thou the shadow of succession.

(III. ii. 93-99).

Henry chastises his son for neglecting his duty as the Heir Apparent and suggests that if Hal does not become more diligent, he will lose his throne to Hotspur. The King has accurately determined the two greatest threats to Hal's prospects: Falstaff and young Percy. What he has not

noticed is Hal's strategy in dealing with these threats. First of all, Hal is learning to redeem the time by associating with Falstaff. As Coursen suggests, if Hal can learn how to control Falstaff, he can run the country as king:

Hal's efforts to learn "how to handle" Falstaff constitute the best possible apprenticeship for a "modern kingship" that must succeed in the midst of "evil days."

(The Leasing Out of England 139)

Falstaff is representative of the life of greed, drunkenness, and gluttony at Eastcheap and hence is a microcosm of rebellious England. If Hal can rule him, he can rule anyone.

Hal is also redeeming the time by getting to know Hotspur well. He knows Hotspur's strengths and limitations, and understands that while he may be a dangerous opponent, Hotspur's headstrong nature and disregard for the views of others make him unfit as a military strategist. Hal also knows that, since Hotspur is violent and obsessed with war, he is incapable of ruling during a time of peace because he has little appreciation for domestic life. His comprehensive assessment of Hotspur

is given in his ironic yet accurate portrait of his enemy at home:

I am not yet of Percy's mind, the Hotspur of the north, he that kills me some six or seven dozen of Scots at a breakfast, washes his hands, and says to his wife, "Fie upon this quiet life, I want work." "O my sweet Harry," says she, "how many hast thou killed today"? "Give my roan horse a drench," says he, and answers, "Some fourteen," an hour after; "a trifle, a trifle." I prithee call in Falstaff; I'll play Percy, and that damned brawn shall play Dame Mortimer his wife.

(1 HIV II. iv. 99-108)

In contrast to Hal's perceptiveness about character, King Henry does not know his son.

The confrontation between Hal and his father in Act III, Scene ii ends with Hal's vow to defeat Hotspur. He says to his father,

I will redeem all this on Percy's head,
And in the closing of some glorious day
Be bold to tell you that I am your son,
When I will wear a garment all of blood,
And stain my favours in a bloody mask,

Which, wash'd away, shall scour my shame with it;
And that shall be the day, whene'er it lights,
That this same child of honour and renown,
This gallant Hotspur, this all-praised knight,
And your unthought-of Harry chance to meet.
For every honour sitting on his helm,
Would they were multitudes, and on my head
My shames redoubled! For the time will come
That I shall make this northern youth exchange
His glorious deeds for my indignities.
Percy is but my factor, good my lord,
To engross up glorious deeds on my behalf,
And I will call him to so strict account
That he shall render every glory up,
Yea, even the slightest worship of his time,
Or I will tear the reckoning from his heart.
This in the name of God I promise here,
The which if He be pleas'd I shall perform,
I do beseech your Majesty may salve
The long-grown wounds of my intemperance:
If not, the end of life cancels all bands,
And I will die a hundred thousand deaths
Ere break the smallest parcel of this vow.

(III. ii. 132-59)

This is the only "public" promise that Hal makes in Henry IV Parts One and Two and Henry V, and in it we see an epic hero in the making. Like Hector, Achilles, and Hotspur, Hal is the one soldier who can bring victory for his side. Hal, like Hector, is a better epic hero than either Achilles or Hotspur because he has both a domestic and a military side to him. He is not a narrow specialist like Hotspur, but a man who understands the lives of his subjects and knows at least some of the problems that beset them. His victory at Shrewsbury underlines his determination to keep the promise that he made to his father, and his banishment of Falstaff in Henry IV, Part Two further emphasizes that resolve. Hal is being turned into an epic hero with military genius and a concern for domestic life.

Henry IV, Part One ends in a melee of blood and killing. Wounded, Hal earns much honour by refusing to leave the field, and protects his father from Douglas, who cannot distinguish the true king from a false one. By killing Hotspur, and by allowing Falstaff to usurp the honour that should have been his, Hal becomes the son his father wants him to be, a prince fit to be an epic hero (though Henry only passingly recognizes this fact). That Hal allows Falstaff to claim the honour due him for killing Hotspur only increases his honour: "The true hero, and the true prince, does not heap up honor for himself: instead,

he confers it. His bounty 'is as boundless as the sea'; the more he gives the more he has to give" (Black 373).

At the end of Part One, then, the domestic world portrayed in Homer's description of Achilles' shield and in the snapshots of civilian life at the Boar's Head is still menaced by the civil war. The conflict is still undecided even though Hotspur is dead and Douglas captured. At least one more battle -- "such another day" (V. v. 42) -- is in prospect. King Henry IV and his Heir Apparent are to be the protectors of their kingdom; yet they have fallen short. Shakespeare does not take seriously all the claims that are made on behalf of the epic, and he challenges his audience to see how the chivalric code affects the lives of those whom the king is to protect. His characterization of epic heroes in Troilus and Cressida and the history plays has served to undermine those heroes' received reputations. The true hero, Shakespeare seems to suggest, is the ordinary man who accomplishes extraordinary deeds, or the man who represents many ordinary men. Shakespeare also seems to suggest that the role of the king is to serve his people and that there is no higher calling to which the Prince of Wales can devote his life. This ideal is not exactly Henry IV's conception of kingship. Henry is obsessed with a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and counsels his son to send an expedition abroad. He has this cynical way of addressing his obligation to maintain order and

nurture domestic life, arguing that by exporting war he is saving England from disaster. This argument ignores the suffering that his policies will bring. I think that here we have the essence of Shakespeare's skeptical attitude towards political war-games; human lives are infinitely more important than national honour or the conquest of "a little patch of ground / That hath in it no profit but the name" (Hamlet IV. iv. 18-19). Many battles are fought over trifles, and those kings who concentrate their attention on waging war abroad most often neglect their duty at home.

The England that Hal has inherited from his father is, like the world of Troilus and Cressida, afflicted with disease, corruption, sickness and entropy. In fact, the whole of Henry IV, Part Two has the morbid atmosphere of a death watch as the citizens from every level of English society wait for Henry IV's death. There is such enervation in this society that only an epic effort will bring England to life again.

Hal represents all stations of English life, from the low-life patrons of the Boar's Head in Eastcheap through the bourgeoisie of the Cotswold scenes in Gloucester, and the nobility at Windsor. His responsibility is to provide each of these estates with the stable base of government, and his agenda for achieving this ideal is through the restoration of honour and the redemption of the time. Ironically, Hal's agenda is exactly the same as Hotspur's.

In Act I, Scene iii of Henry IV, Part One, Hotspur says to Northumberland and Worcester:

Why yet time serves wherein you may redeem
Your banish'd honours, and restore yourselves
Into the good thoughts of the world again.

(ll. 178-80).

But the difference between Hal and Hotspur is that while Hotspur seeks the redemption and restoration of his honour through revenge, Hal seeks honour through the unifying of England, and achieves that honour -- for England -- in the victory at Agincourt and in a reconciliatory betrothal to the Princess of France.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NESTOR FACTOR: Shakespeare's Treatment of Ancientry in
Troilus and Cressida and the Second Henriad.

The epic's celebration of the past, or "tribal memory," is epitomized in The Iliad's Nestor. Homer presents Nestor as worthy of respect, describing him as "the fair spoken. . . , the lucid speaker of Pylos, from whose lips the streams of words ran sweeter than honey" (I. 247-48) as he describes the heroes of his youth. Shakespeare also gives a positive account of Nestor's eloquent gravitas in The Rape of Lucrece, where Lucrece, after her violation, recalls in her grief a "skilful painting, made for Priam's Troy" (l. 1367), in which

There pleading might you see grave Nestor stand,
As 'twere encouraging the Greeks to fight,
Making such sober action with his hand,
That it beguil'd attention, charm'd the sight.
In speech it seemed his beard, all silver white,
Wagg'd up and down, and from his lips did fly

Thin winding breath, which purl'd up to the sky.

(1401-1407)

But in Troilus and Cressida and the second Henriad Shakespeare is not as reverential in his treatment of ancients. In Troilus and Cressida Nestor has a selective memory and his numerous speeches are self-aggrandizing. At his first entrance in he "is anxious, like many elder statesmen, to parade his gifts as an orator" (Muir 69). After Ulysses' diagnosis of the Greek stalemate outside the walls of Troy, Nestor responds to Hector's challenge by asserting his own former prowess as a warrior:

Tell him of Nestor, one that was a man
 When Hector's grandsire sucked. He is old now;
 But if there be not in our Grecian host
 One noble man that hath one spark of fire
 To answer for his love, tell him from me
 I'll hide my silver beard in a gold beaver,
 And in my vambrace put this withered brawn,
 And meeting him, will tell him that my lady
 Was fairer than his grandam, and as chaste
 As may be in the world. His youth in flood,
 I'll prove this true with my three drops of blood.

(I. iii. 288-98)

Like Homer's, this Nestor is trying to shame the Greeks into acting valorously, but the challenge that his lady was fairer than Hector's grandmother is so foolish and bathetic that it destroys any serious response. Shakespeare's Nestor is a ridiculous figure whose selective recollection of the past blinds him to present reality, and makes him unfit for involvement in the future. The true epic hero, in contrast to Nestor, must have an accurate memory of the past so that he can be prepared for what is to come. The King of France, Hal's future father-in-law and therefore a character whom Shakespeare treats with respect, has a sense of history which forces him to prepare for the English invasion. History tells him how dangerous the English can be.

In Homer, one never doubts the accuracy of memory, but in Shakespeare memory is not always to be trusted. In The Iliad, Homer's regard for memory is evident in his characterization of Nestor who unlike Troilus and Cressida's Nestor is a venerable general still respected as a commander and a counsellor. Homer's sympathy for the old soldier is evident throughout Nestor's attempt to defuse the argument between Agamemnon and Achilles at the beginning of The Iliad. Like Shakespeare's Nestor, he recalls an age when soldiers were real men, but his invocation of the past is without boasting or amplification. He establishes his credentials before

counselling Agamemnon not to take Briseis away and
Achilleus to obey his commander:

In his [Nestor's] time two generations of mortal
men had perished,

those who had grown up with him and they who had
been born to

these in sacred Pylos, and he was king in the third
age.

He in kind intention toward both stood forth and
addressed them:

'O, for shame. Great sorrow comes on the land of
Achaia.

Now might Priam and the sons of Priam in truth be
happy,

and all the rest of the Trojans be visited in their
hearts with gladness,

were they to hear all this wherein you two are
quarrelling,

you, who surpass all Danaans in council, in
fighting.

Yet be persuaded. Both of you are younger than I
am.

Yes, and in my time, I have dealt with better men
than

you are, and never once did they disregard me.
Never

yet have I seen nor shall see again such men as
these were,

men like Peirithoös, and Dryas, shepherd of the
people,

Kaineus and Exadios, godlike Polyphemos,

or Theseus, Aigeus' son, in the likeness of the
immortals.

These were the strongest generation of earth-bound
mortals,

the strongest, and they fought against the
strongest, the beast men

living within the mountains, and terribly they
destroyed them.

I was of the company of these men, coming from
Pylos,

a long way from a distant land, since they had
summoned me.

And I fought single-handed, yet against such men no
one

of the mortals now alive upon the earth could do
battle. And also

these listened to the counsels I gave and heeded my
bidding.

(I. 250-74)

In this passage, Nestor asserts his authority as a mature counsellor who knows how the world works and who has dealt (he says) with men far stronger and more capable than either Agamemnon or Achilles. He lists the strongest of "earth-born mortals," and suggests that since these men heeded his counsel Agamemnon and Achilles ought to do the same.

Shakespeare's characters who celebrate the past range from the straightforward "Nestorian," (that is, a character who is much like Homer's Nestor) John of Gaunt, whose disinterested apotheosis of the past is found in the "This royal throne of kings" speech in Richard II (II. i. 31-68),

through such benign Nestorians as the comic Mistress Quickly and Fluellen, to Shallow and Falstaff who consciously distort the past to glorify themselves. Between these extremes lie a group of Nestorians (Hal, Henry IV, the French King, Lady Percy) whose vision of the past determines their action in the present and their hopes for the future. Shallow, and Nestor in Troilus and Cressida epitomize Shakespeare's mock-heroic characters who celebrate the past because they have no future.

John of Gaunt's vision of the past focusses upon an England that probably never was but which is far removed from the one which Richard II rules and Henry IV will rule. His conception is of a prelapsarian land -- "this other Eden" -- still under grace, where honour and bonds of duty have significance. This England rests on moral absolutes; men's actions are guided by honesty and integrity. There is a stately order where the King is still God's deputy, where ceremony is infused with the spiritual vitality of sacrament and there is substance to ritual. John of Gaunt's apotheosis of England in Richard II is a creation of an England without moral or political sin. It is the dream of an England that existed before Richard II provided Bolingbroke with the pretext for seizing the crown (The Leasing Out of England 25). It also is an ideal state to which Henry IV aspires to bring his country, but which he is incapable of attaining. Like a newly-inspired prophet, John of Gaunt nostalgically invokes an England which he

wishes existed, a demi-Paradise which Richard II is about to lose:

This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this
England,
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
Fear'd by their breed, and famous by their birth,
Renowned for their deeds as far from home,
For Christian service and true chivalry,
As is the sepulchre in stubborn Jewry
Of the world's ransom, blessed Mary's son.

(R II. II.i. 49-56)

Contrasted with his vision of an unfallen England, Gaunt also sees an England that "is now bound in with shame, / With inky blots and rotten parchment bonds" (ll. 63-65). Gaunt is able to maintain the idealistic vision only momentarily. The thought of what the King is doing to the country destroys this imaginary creation of what England could be. Like Homer's Nestor, John of Gaunt is distressed with the current state of affairs and finds comfort in an England far different from the one in which he is living; but unlike Nestor who is lost in the past, Gaunt sees the terrible condition his country presently is in, and wishes that Richard would care for his people.

In Henry V, there are benign Nestors who are as well-intentioned as John of Gaunt, but whose recollections are

so befuddled that they become comic. In Act II, Scene i of Henry V, the boy enters the Boar's Head to tell Mistress Quickly, Pistol and Nym that Falstaff is dying. In this dramatic narrative, the boy and the hostess apotheosize Falstaff. Their exaltation of him illustrates the general tendency of human beings, even in the comic world of the tavern, to stylize reality and pattern it after their own conception of what life should be like. Quickly's apotheosis of Falstaff is cloudily based on biblical narrative (she mistily recalls the parable of Dives and Lazarus). Her tale of Falstaff's illness, with its confusion and unconscious comedy, is sincere even though it is not highly polished. In her grief and concern for Falstaff, the Hostess glorifies him.

Her description of Falstaff's death has parallels to Exeter's account of the gallant deaths of York and Suffolk (HV IV. vi.). York volunteered to be in the vanguard and in his bravery had been fatally wounded. He dies a death at Agincourt that Falstaff only feigned at Shrewsbury. Falstaff cheats death on the battlefield to die on his bed in the Boar's Head where his exploits shine and his brand of heroism is honoured. In contrast, York and Suffolk die on the foreign field at Agincourt where "sword and shield, / In bloody field, / Doth win immortal fame" -- to quote a plain-song sung by Pistol (HV III. ii. 9-11). Although Suffolk and York have received posthumous honour

for their valour, their present state seems no better than Falstaff's, who thought honour a scutcheon: "Who hath it? He that died a- Wednesday" (1 HIV V. i. 136).

Shakespeare stresses Falstaff's death by using the epic device of pathetic fallacy: having him die at the turning of the tide. In quasi-biblical and mythological language, the Hostess asserts that Falstaff has not gone to Hell:

Nay, sure, he's not in hell: he's in Arthur's bosom, if ever man went to Arthur's bosom. A' made a finer end, and went away an it had been any christom child; a' parted ev'n just between twelve and one, ev'n at the turning o' th' tide: for after I saw him fumble with the sheets and play with flowers and smile upon his fingers' end, I knew there was but one way; for his nose was as sharp as a pen, and a' babbled of green fields.

(HV II. iii. 9-17)

The use of pathetic fallacy to make human affairs seem important occurs frequently in the second Henriad. When Richard II lands on the coast of Wales, after his expedition to Ireland has been cut short by Bolingbroke's

sudden return to England, he falls on his knees and prays to the earth, attributing sensibility to it. He says:

Dear earth, I do salute thee with my hand,
 Though rebels wound thee with their horses' hoofs. .
 . .
 Feed not thy sovereign's foe, my gentle earth,
 Nor with thy sweets comfort his ravenous sense,
 But let thy spiders that suck up thy venom
 And heavy-gaited toads lie in their way,
 Doing annoyance to the treacherous feet,
 Which with usurping steps do trample thee;
 Yield stinging nettles to mine enemies;
 And when they from thy bosom pluck a flower,
 Guard it, I pray thee, with a lurking adder,
 Whose double tongue may with a mortal touch
 Throw death upon thy sovereign's enemies.
 Mock not my senseless conjuration, lords:
 This earth shall have a feeling, and these stones
 Prove armed soldiers ere her native king
 Shall falter under foul rebellion's arms.

(R II III. ii. 6-26)

Richard attributes moral outrage to nature, suggesting that it will rise up in his defense against Bolingbroke if the nobles do not, just as in The Iliad (xxi. 211-382) the Skaman'dros river fights against Achilles and frustrates

him. Similarly, in Act I, Scene iii of Henry IV, Part One, Hotspur employs pathetic fallacy in describing the confrontation between Mortimer and Glendower. He says,

Three times they breath'd, and three times did they
drink

Upon agreement of swift Severn's flood,
Who then affrighted with their bloody looks
Ran fearfully among the trembling reeds,
And hid his crisp head in the hollow bank,
Bloodstained with these valiant combatants.

(ll. 101-106)

In this passage Hotspur piles one lie upon another in his narration (one of several accounts of supposed fights in 1 HIV; the others are by Falstaff) of a battle which probably never took place. Shakespeare's use of pathetic fallacy is both epic and ironic -- he makes it a mock-heroic device used by Mistress Quickly to glorify the death of the father of lies, Falstaff, and used by another fantasist, Hotspur, to celebrate a pretender, Mortimer.

In Act III, scene vi of Henry V, Fluellen, another benign Nestorian, recounts the "very excellent services committed at the bridge" (ll. 3-4). Fluellen says Exeter is "as magnanimous as Agamemnon" (ll. 6-7), a rather doubtful compliment if one remembers that Agamemnon "pulled rank" to get Achilles' concubine, Briseis, for himself.

As with Mistress Quickly's confusion of Arthur and Abraham, Fluellen mistakes Mark Antony for Horatius in his description of Pistol, who "keeps the bridge most valiantly" (III. vi. 11). It seems improbable that Pistol, whom the audience knows to be nothing more than a braggart and a profiteer, has done anything else but show off. Fluellen's narration of Pistol's action on the bridge illustrates how well-meaning people can be gulled by heroic swaggering. Fluellen has been taken in momentarily, but will right himself before the play is over. The point that Shakespeare may be making in this scene, as in the description of Falstaff's death, is that when the present is seen through the veil of the past, strict truth cannot be expected.

In Act IV, Scene vii, Fluellen recounts the story of the slaughter of the innocent boys who were watching the English soldiers' luggage. The horror is tempered somewhat by the comedy of Fluellen's comparison of Henry V with Alexander the Great; however, the effect of the scene with its mixture of carnage and Fluellen's incongruous humour is disturbing. Fluellen constructs "a 'comparison' following the accepted rhetorical order" (Walter 124) in praise of Henry for having "caused every soldier to cut his prisoner's throat" (HV IV. vii. 9-10). Fluellen finds similarities between Alexander and Henry because they were born in cities with rivers and "salmons". They are also

similar, he claims, because while the drunken Alexander slew his best friend Cleitus, the sober Hal "turned away the fat knight with the great-belly doublet" (ll. 49-50). In this narration Fluellen glorifies Henry and suggests the killing of prisoners was the only thing he could do under the circumstances. Fluellen has taken a brutal incident and tried to turn it into something fit for epic remembrance. The tenuousness of his comparison may suggest the difficulty, and absurdity, of glorifying brutish acts.

In Act II, Scene iii of Henry IV, Part Two, Shakespeare dramatizes a caustic exchange between Lady Percy and her father-in-law, Northumberland. The latter feels compelled to go off to the battlefield because his "honour is at pawn" (l. 7), and argues that nothing but his going will redeem it. Lady Percy contends that his honour has been lost since he broke his word to her husband. She knows that honour is meaningless to him, and she does not want Northumberland to insult Hotspur's memory by remaining true to others after deserting his son. In her anger and grief, she glorifies her husband by remembering him as "the glass / Wherein the noble youth did dress themselves":

He had no legs that practis'd not his gait;
And speaking thick, which nature made his blemish,
Became the accents of the valiant;
For those that could speak low and tardily

Would turn their own perfection to abuse,
 To seem like him. So that in speech, in gait,
 In diet, in affections of delight,
 In military rules, humours of blood,
 He was the mark and glass, copy and book,
 That fashion'd others. (II. iii. 21-31)

Like Nestor, she distorts the truth by remembering certain events and forgetting others. Although her apotheosis refers to Hotspur's impetuosity in speech, it -- quite understandably -- overlooks his treason. Certainly Hotspur may have been the model for his generation in his wife's eyes, but one cannot forget that he is both a representative and a caricature of chivalric ideals. Instead of making the best of Henry IV's England and trying to improve a less than ideal state, Hotspur sought to destroy it, and so becomes for Shakespeare a mock-heroic epic hero whose glorification by Hal in Part One (V. iv. 86-100) contrasts Hotspur's limited military virtue and Hal's increasing (indeed, at this moment, mature) military and civil virtue. In recollecting Hotspur's military superiority, but ignoring his neglect of civil duty, Kate unconsciously illustrates how traditional epic heroes are remembered. Their heroic deeds are magnified, but their infirmities and faults are ignored. While we may admire the heroes' exploits in an epic context, the ordinary affairs

of men and women in the real world are what truly matter. The drama in the Boar's Head is closer to reality than that in Windsor Castle, and Hal learns more from its patrons than he does from the courtiers surrounding the King.

In Henry V, the French make preparations for an English assault. Rather than quaking in fear as the chauvinistic English Prologue proposes, the French king swiftly dispatches various lords "To line and new repair our towns of war / With men of courage and with means defendant" (II. iv. 7-8). His knowledge of history compels him to be wary of the English, for they have proven to be a formidable foe; and he tells the story of Edward III's victory at Crecy:

Think we King Harry strong;
And, princes, look you strongly arm to meet him.
The kindred of him hath been flesh'd upon us,
And he is bred out of that bloody strain
That haunted us in our familiar paths;
Witness our too much memorable shame
When Cressy battle fatally was struck,
And all our princes captiv'd by the hand
Of that black name, Edward, Black Prince of
 Wales;
Whiles that his mountain sire, on mountain
 standing,
Up in the air, crown'd with the golden sun,

Saw his heroical seed, and smil'd to see him,
 Mangle the work of nature, and deface
 The patterns that by God and by French fathers
 Had twenty years been made. This is a stem
 Of that victorious stock; and let us fear
 The native mightiness and fate of him.

(II. iv. 48-64).

The French king reflects upon past events to show that if his countrymen do not prepare themselves history will repeat itself. He is apprehensive of the English and wants to spur his troops into action to protect their homeland. Like Nestor in The Iliad, this king is able to function in the present, for he has an accurate understanding of the past and does not allow illusion to distort what he knows to be true.

The Dauphin, however, disregards him, and like a disreputable prince jeopardizes his father's cause. The Dauphin, whose interest (like Hotspur's) lies more with the epic accoutrement of horses and armour than in looking after his future subjects, does not share his father's concern about the threat the English pose. He thinks that Henry V is "a vain, giddy, shallow, humorous youth" (II. iv. 28), a mistaken account Hal's father would have agreed with at the beginning of Henry IV, Part One.

In Act III, Scene v of Henry V, the French lords, who have not taken their king's advice seriously, are beginning to learn the lesson he had tried to teach them. The Dauphin cannot believe that "a few sprays of us, / The emptying of our fathers' luxury" (ll. 5-6) should be able to march through France undefeated. The Constable of France cannot understand where the English get this mettle. It certainly does not come from their climate or their diet. In their defeat, the French return to conventional epic values and sentiment to shore up their flagging spirits. They associate honour with patriotism, and military action with sexual exploits, a parallel not to be found in the Prologue. The Constable appeals to "the honour of our land" (III. v. 22), and the Dauphin says that "Our madams mock at us, and plainly say / Our mettle is bred out" (ll. 29-30).

At Agincourt, Henry prays to the God of battles to "steel [his] soldiers' hearts" (HV IV. i. 295), asking the Lord not to think upon his father's fault in seizing the crown from Richard II. While he used historical precedent to justify his expedition against the French, (I. ii. 9-32) he feels threatened by the history of his claim to the throne. Rather than disregarding a true account of the past he tries to deal with it as best he can, without lying to himself or to others. Like the French king, Henry V's

sense of the past helps him cope with the present and prepares him for the future.

In the choruses to Henry V, Shakespeare often gives what seems to be the official or publicly-accepted version of the events before and after the victory at Agincourt. While the Prologue narratives provide a version of the story that is purged of its embarrassing elements, the dramatic account (the play itself), in what I think is Shakespeare's unique contribution to epic literature, includes the self-serving side of human affairs. His Prologue prays "for a Muse of fire" (I Prol. 1. 1) to fill the stage with kingdoms, princes, monarchs, and scenes of war, and talks of horses "Printing their proud hoofs i' th' receiving earth" (I. Prol. 1. 27) -- all epic paraphernalia. In a note to this passage, Walter illustrates the customary critical response to the epic nature of the play by saying: "Shakespeare's epic-like invocation embraces the fiery, war-like nature of his theme, the divine origin of poetry, and the sublimity of the conception he hopes to achieve" (Walter 5). The Prologue also refers to a monolithic hero, "the warlike Harry," who would assume "the port of Mars" (ll. 5-6). In the next sentence, the Prologue humbly expresses a profound sense of unworthiness, of inability to dramatize "So great an object" (l. 12). Coursen suggests that this "apology" is ironic and not humble because Shakespeare "could depict

a battle," but the purpose of this "disclaimer of his mimetic abilities" is to focus "our attention on those of Henry V" (The Leasing Out of England 151), leading to further reflection on Henry as an ideal king.

The chorus to Act II presents a glossed-over precis of the scenes suitable to its epic aspirations. It makes no reference, as a result, to the comedy in scenes one and three. They simply have no epic potential. The Chorus instead speaks of the patriotic fervour that is sweeping England as a result of the hostilities between the French and the English. With the English youth all "on fire, And silken dalliance [put away] in the wardrobe" (l. 2), the armorers are thriving and pastures are being sold to buy horses (a process that seems rather impractical). The Chorus also describes Henry as the ideal of gallantry and chivalry who is "the mirror of all Christian kings" (l. 6), a description that compares to Lady Percy's of her husband as a glass "That fashion'd others" (2 HIV II. iii. 32). Ironically, Hal's disregard for military honour is shown after the victory at Agincourt when he insists that God is to be given the glory for their victory. Henry's other demonstration of disdain for military glory was when he allowed Falstaff to have the honour of killing Hotspur. For Hal, battlefield honour is of minimal importance.

When the Chorus finishes its account of the scenes to follow, Shakespeare surprises the audience with some comedy

that the Chorus has not mentioned. Shakespeare's unique use of comedy in this dramatic epic serves a number of important purposes. It counters the jingoism towards which the narrative tends, and it provides Shakespeare with a platform for criticism of the epic ideals of patriotism, honour, and glory. By furnishing an integrated contrast to the main scenes of the play, Shakespeare questions the value of dying for politics, challenges the boasting of many of the characters, and deflates their pretensions.

The chorus to Act III of Henry V continues in the epic strain. It describes the movement of troops across the channel and prepares the audience for the siege of Harfleur. The drama in the scenes, however, undercuts the epic sentiment in the Prologue and Henry's epic call to arms. The soldiers portrayed here are unwilling to die and do not want to be buried in France. Of the four patrons of the Boar's head, Pistol, who returns to England using the wounds he received from Fluellen as medals of honour and bravery, is the only survivor. The boy is slaughtered by the French, and Bardolph and Nym are hanged.

Of the remaining Nestors with whom I would like to deal, Falstaff is a Nestor crossed with Sinon -- he is described as the father of lies (1 HIV II. iv. 220) -- and Shallow is a Nestor who lives only in the past. Falstaff gives an epic account of a battle which did not occur when

he tells the story of how he had to fight against twelve men in buckram:

I am a rogue if I were not at half-sword with a dozen of them two hours together. I have scaped by miracle. I am eight times through the doublet, four through the hose, my buckler cut through and through, my sword hacked like a handsaw -- ecce signum! I never dealt better since I was a man: all would not do.

(1 HIV II. iv. 161-68)

Falstaff boasts of his encounter with a band of robbers which grows in number as the story is being narrated, and he urges an on-stage look at the "proof" of his prowess as a soldier; however, Falstaff's heroism has the same substance as words without deeds. Like Shakespeare's Nestor, he consciously distorts the truth to amplify his own heroic stature .

In Henry IV, Part Two, Act III, Scene ii, the Justice Shallow scene set in Gloucestershire has mock-epic aspects. Shallow, yet another Nestor, sees everything in retrospect. He fondly recalls his student days at Clement's Inn where, he thinks, "they . . . talk of mad Shallow yet" (ll. 13-14). Silence remembers that in those days Shallow was called "lusty Shallow" (l. 15), "a comic-pathetic contrast

to Shallow's present condition" (Humphreys 96). In a mock-epic catalogue (epic in form, proletarian in content), the spare Shallow recalls his old friends and brags of their exploits together:

By the mass, I was called anything, and I would
have done anything indeed too, and roundly too. There
was I, and little John Doit of Staffordshire, and
black George Barnes, and Francis Pickbone, and Will
Squele, a Cotsole man -- you had not four such
swinge-bucklers in all the Inns o'Court again; and I
may say to you, we knew where the bona-robas were,
and had the best of them all at commandment.

(2 HIV III. ii. 16-23)

Shallow's reminiscence of his student days has a parallel in the pre-Agincourt speech of Henry V where the King consciously (and oxymoronically) becomes a youthful Nestor and cheerfully encourages "Nestorism" by using the pure epic strain of a formal catalogue to hearten his men. Henry V basically says that this is an occasion about which they will be entitled to bore their grand-children with exaggerated stories:

He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,
Will stand a tip-toe when this day is nam'd,

And rouse him at the name of Crispian.
 He that shall see this day, and live old age,
 Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours,
 And say, "Tomorrow is Saint Crispian":
 Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars,
 And say, "These wounds I had on Crispin's day".
 Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot,
 But he'll remember with advantages
 What feats he did that day. Then shall our names,
 Familiar in his mouth as household words,
 Harry the king, Bedford and Exeter,
 Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester,
 Be in their flowing cups freshly remember'd.

(HV IV. iii. 41-55)

The veterans of Agincourt will remember Saint Crispin's Day and like Shallow, who brags of his glory days when he used to be called "anything," will remember "with advantages" (that is, with compound interest) their battle-field exploits. Shallow looks fondly to the past when he had a glorious future ahead of him: and now, with all that glorious future gone, he can only look backwards and reminisce about a time that never was.

Many commentators on the Cotswold scene take it as a straightforward dramatization of English rural life. Humphreys quotes Tillyard, who says:

From first to last Shakespeare was loyal to country life. He took it for granted as the norm, as the background before which the more formal or spectacular events were transacted. . . . Far from being a satire, the Gloucestershire scenes in Henry IV complete the picture of England and put the emphasis where Shakespeare meant it to be: on the life of the English countryside.

(2 HIV 95)

It is difficult to accept this view of Shallow and the Gloucestershire scenes when one thinks of Shallow's account of Falstaff as a young rascal. He actually remembers Falstaff fighting. Shallow recalls when "Jack Falstaff, now Sir John, [was] a boy, and page to Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk" (2 HIV III. ii. 24-25):

I see him break Scoggin's head at the court gate,
when a was a crack, not thus high; and the very
same day did I fight with one Samson Stockfish, a
fruiterer, behind Gray's Inn. Jesu, Jesu, the mad
days that I have spent!

(III. ii. 27-33)

Not only is the thought of Falstaff fighting ludicrous, but the image of a "'crack' Falstaff'" "chastising 'Scoggin' at the palace gate" and a "'lusty' Shallow" "giving battle to a costermonger" (Humphreys 97) is a parody of epic encounters.

There is a tendency among all the Nestors or superannuated milites gloriosi of the second Henriad to make epic boasts or vaunts. Since Falstaff uses them, these boasts must be doubted; we should consider their source very carefully. Such characters as Homer's Nestor, Henry V, and even the French King brag to encourage their men, but other characters boast only to embellish their lies.

Throughout the plays, there are many characters who praise past days, saying that there no longer are warriors to compare with those of England's Golden Age. They all reminisce about a past that never was in the search for a hero to take them out of the troubles that they are in. In the second Henriad and Troilus and Cressida Shakespeare appears to stress that it is better for people in trouble to look to the future rather than to the past. Although celebrating the past may be comfortable, the true epic hero must look to the future if he wishes to make the present a better place to live.

CHAPTER THREE

HENRY V: The Emergence of a Domestic Hero

Throughout Troilus and Cressida and the second Henriad, the primary concern of the leaders is public disaffection. Agamemnon, Priam, Henry IV, and even Henry V are threatened by anarchy, enervation, rebellion, and corruption. Agamemnon and Priam face the same situation, shown from different angles. Both are ineffectual, and delegate the responsibilities of their rules: Agamemnon to Ulysses (and Nestor), and Priam to Hector. Henry IV wishes to depend upon Hal, who is busy in the tavern learning about life. Only Henry V quickly deals with civil unrest, thereby maintaining his integrity.

While the Greeks are bored and insubordinate, the Trojans are beset by a lethargy which issues in sexual double-talk. Agamemnon explores the stalemate of the siege, and with Ulysses' help determines that insubordination is weakening their campaign. Priam would like to defeat the Greeks and get on with life, but his

people have lost their initiative because of the war, and virtually have accepted the siege as a normal condition. Only Troilus and Cressida express any outrage at the dislocation of domestic life, but they are powerless to do anything. Henry IV's reign is troubled by the rebellion of the Percies, and although he would like to channel national energies into a crusade or pilgrimage, only his son will be able to "busy giddy minds with foreign quarrels" (2 HIV IV. v. 213-14). Even Hal's success in putting down the rebellions which frustrate Henry IV's desire to rule well does not complete the cleansing of his land. So, although Henry V is England's Aeneas, he is unable to transform his country into the society idealized on Achilles' shield and described in the Archbishop's beehive speech in Henry V.

In Troilus and Cressida, the Greeks encamped outside Troy had intended to sack the city as quickly as possible, return Helen to Menelaus, and sail back to Greece and their wives and families. But the war has lasted seven years and they are understandably dispirited. To make matters worse, their greatest warrior, Achilles, languishes in his tent over Hector's sister. The once-great man of war now pines for Polyxena, the lover he cannot have and Patroclus, the lover he is soon to lose, and wastes his time in mocking the generals. In Act I, Scene iii, Agamemnon heartens his men by suggesting that "the protractive trials of great

Jove [are] To find persistive constancy in men" (l. 20). Both he and Nestor fall back upon truisms and sententia, asserting things like "In the reproof of chance / Lies the true proof of men" (l. 32). It is not until Ulysses stands up and delivers his speech on order that the actual reason for Troy's survival is addressed: "The specialty of rule hath been neglected" (l. 75). Agamemnon is unable to command and the result is disarray in the camp. The fact that Shakespeare has Ulysses and not Agamemnon explain the situation confirms Agamemnon's inadequacy. He needs to be a ruler who can command the respect of Achilles, Patroclus, and Thersites, who represent the military, sexual, and social corruption with which all commanders must deal. Since Agamemnon does not inspire loyalty there is confusion.

Priam must deal with a people who are bored by a stalled siege. The Trojan's response to the siege resembles that of the Greeks. As I have mentioned, both Trojans and Greeks let their attention wander from military concerns to sexual maneuvers. In fact, the very first line of the play is Troilus' refusal to fight. Troilus says, "Call here my varlet: I'll unarm again" (I. i. 1). Rather than involve himself in the mending of "this gear" (l. 6), Troilus in his love-sickness contrasts the Greeks' strength with his weakness, suggesting that only those Trojans who are masters of their hearts should enter the field.

Because of the siege, Trojan society is weak and listless. Kenneth Muir proposes in a note on Act III, Scene i that the atmosphere of the Trojan court is "sentimental and enervating" (p. 109) -- hardly the atmosphere of a city in the midst of a siege. Aeneas' contrast of the Trojans in peace and in war has little resemblance to the Trojans we see in the play. Once they were

Courtiers as free, as debonair, unarmed,
 As bending angels -- that's their fame in peace.
 But when they would seem soldiers, they have galls,
 Good arms, strong joints, true swords, and -- Jove's
 accord --
 Nothing so full of heart.

(I. iii. 232-36)

But now most of the Trojans bear a close resemblance to Falstaff and his fellow patrons of the Boar's Head, who would rather "foin like any devil, [sparing neither] man, woman, nor child" (2 HIV II. i. 16) than risk their lives on the battlefield.

Even Hector, the hero in whom the Trojans place their hope, has no interest in the war. In Act I, Scene iii of Troilus and Cressida, Aeneas delivers Hector's challenge to the Greeks. Hector is bored with "this dull and long-continued truce" (l. 258), and wants some excitement to pass the time; he does not enter the match in a serious

attempt to dislodge the Greeks from the plains outside Troy. Act IV, Scene v begins at the site prepared for the duel between Hector and Ajax. Ajax enters with the Greek lords; he is armed and, impatient to get the match under way, tells the trumpeter to blow for Hector "till thy sphered bias cheek / Outswell the colic of puffed Aquilon" (ll. 8-9). However, instead of Hector coming to the lists, Diomed arrives with Cressida, and the expected passage of arms turns to a sexually-suggestive encounter. Instead of swords, there is a meeting of lips. Cressida kisses the Greeks, anticipating Hector's summary of the thwarted duel: "The issue is embracement" (T&C IV. v. 148). This business illustrates that the Greeks, like the Trojans, are more adept at sexual than at military campaigning (though even here the hapless cuckold Menelaus is rejected by Cressida). As I have suggested above, the Greek besiegers "attack" Cressida -- a single Trojan who has left the safety of the fortress -- with kisses, carrying out a form and parody of assault. When Hector finally does meet Ajax on the field he uses their distant kinship as an excuse to call off the fight, and they leave the field embracing as brothers. They bid farewell to arms, and do not enter the field again until the savagery of Achilles and Troilus forces them to do so.

When we first meet the Greeks and the Trojans they are engaged, as mentioned, in petty bickering, adolescent

grudges, and lewd double-talk. As the play develops, the pettiness and grudge-holding are changed into savagery. The sexual suggestions intensify into the obscenities that spill out of Thersites' mouth as an indicator of the moral corruption in the Greek camp and in Troy. Goddard describes Thersites as "the most scurrilous figure in the play, the most nearly sewer-mouthed character he [Shakespeare] ever created. . . who seems at times to be the author's mouthpiece, acting as a sort of chorus and commentator on the action and the other dramatic persons" (The Meaning of Shakespeare 389). Thersites' function is to draw the events of the play into perspective. He best performs this function in Act V, Scene ii, where he sees through the falseness and the hypocrisy of the chivalric code that professedly is the central motivation of the characters but is not, and says: "Lechery, lechery, still wars and lechery! Nothing else holds fashion" (ll. 194-95). He reminds the audience that all is not what it appears to be: that violence and lust, not a love for true honour and glory, are the principles that guide men's lives. Thersites tells the audience that epic heroes are not all they are made out to be. His commentary is designed to strip the false show of virtue away from the characters who wrongly assume it and to show that these immortals are mortal.

Shakespeare's dramatic presentation of Achilles in this play underscores the lack of a leader who is able to direct personal and social energies. Achilles is a model of those personal (that is, sexual) energies which need to be expressed in healthy relationships if they are not to fester. He is also a symbol of the military energies that can veer into rebellion and anarchy if a leader is not able to control them. As a result, Achilles resembles Hotspur in a number of ways. Each is an individual in whom his leader hopes. Each resists authority and enters into the war with his own timetable and agenda. Each is a superb soldier but has an underdeveloped social or domestic side. Achilles would like to nurture his love-life, but fate has denied him the opportunity, while Hotspur is so self-centred that he hardly realizes his wife's existence. And finally, these are men who must be ruled by their kings if the kingdom is to be renovated. Achilles allows places in the Greek camp to Patroclus and Thersites, who would otherwise have no rights there. Hotspur consumes so much of Henry IV's energy that Henry is unable to order England or embark on his foreign adventure. (In Henry V, Shakespeare dramatizes the futility of such a reformist dream anyway. Pistol survives the French campaign and returns to England even more corrupt than before.)

Henry IV, Part One dramatizes the plight of an ineffectual or frustrated king whose reign is upset by

rebellion. In Act I, Scene i, the audience is presented with Henry IV, who has accepted the responsibility to maintain domestic order. Though he is determined that

No more the thirsty entrance of this soil
Shall daub her lips with her own children's blood,
No more shall trenching war channel her fields,
Nor bruise her flow'rets with the armed hoofs
Of hostile paces (I.i. 5-9).

The play shows the King Henry's inability to check the forces he put in motion when he seized the crown from Richard. The first scene of Henry IV deals with typically-epic incidents. The characters talk of war and its disruption of domestic life. They speak of battlefield carnage, the bravery of such men as Hotspur and Archibald, and of spoils and prizes -- there is an epic catalogue of Hotspur's prisoners. They also speak of honour, and we see the king yearning for his son to be as heroic as Northumberland's. The second scene is set not far from the palace but in a milieu beyond the King's influence. The Boar's Head is a mock-epic feasting place where drunkenness, lust, and gluttony are praised more than virtue, and thievery more than honesty. In this tavern, the epic values of honour, glory, courage, and oaths are countered by dissoluteness. If the king is to rule his

country well, he must be able to curb the excesses that occur in Eastcheap, as well as the rebellion of his nobles; however, in Henry IV the king expends his energies fighting one set of rebels, the Percies, while ignoring the rebellious subjects in the Boar's Head.

In Act I, Scene iii of Henry IV. Part One, Shakespeare presents Hotspur as a symbol of those military forces which tend to go out of control without strong leadership. Hotspur, who usually commands centre stage, "operates on outmoded premises that doom him" (The Leasing Out of England 88). In the age of gunpowder, he is obsessed with horses and armour. Possessed by the spirit of war, he is so consumed with deposing Henry IV and placing Edmund Mortimer on the throne that his "stomach, pleasure and . . . golden sleep" are taken from him (1 HIV II. iii. 42) . He has banished his wife from his bed, and given up all that is truly important. When Kate insists he tell her what is troubling him, he rebukes her, and denies her her conjugal rights.

Hotspur will use any pretext to fight for honour. In Act I, Scene iii, while he is raging over the rebuke he received from the King, Northumberland and Worcester give running commentaries: "Imagination of some great exploit / Drives him beyond the bounds of patience" (ll. 198-99), and "He apprehends a world of figures here, / But not the form of what he should attend" (ll. 207-208). They are as

exasperated with his headstrong nature as Kate is, but since he is essential to their victory, they must tolerate his excesses. It appears that in Shakespeare, as in Homer, the hero's domestic side is equal to the heroic side in assessing the value of heroic metal.

Act II, Scene i of Henry IV, Part One has correspondences with Homer's technique of showing daily life on the hero's shield. The scene opens with a carrier getting the horses ready for the day's work; it is "not four by the day" (l. 1) and "yet our horse not packed" (l. 3). He gives the ostler directions to "beat Cut's saddle, put a few flocks in the point" (ll. 5-6) because the "poor jade is wrung in the withers out of all cess" (ll. 6-7). A second carrier enters and they begin to contrast the old with the new: "this house is turned upside down since Robin Ostler died" (l. 10). The world for them is in transition, their nostalgic talk about the way the inn used to be before the sudden rise in the price of oats killed the old proprietor has reference to the country as a whole under its new proprietor Henry IV. The new innkeeper "[allows] us ne'er a jordan, and then we leak in your chimney, and your chamber-lye breeds fleas like a loach" (ll. 18-20). The kingdom under the new management, or mismanagement, is like the weed-choked garden described in Richard II. Henry IV wants to administer his country well,

but is unable to do so because of the cycle of rebellion and violence which he has initiated.

Richard II was hardly a model ruler, and in Richard II there also were commoners who lamented over a house turned upside down. The gardener outlines a model of kingship when he is asked

Why should we, in the compass of a pale,
Keep law and form and due proportion,
Showing, as in a model, our firm estate,
When our sea-walled garden, the whole land,
Is full of weeds, her fairest flowers chok'd up,
Her fruit trees all unprun'd, her hedges ruin'd
Her knots disordered, and her wholesome herbs
Swarming with caterpillars?

(R II III. iv. 41-47)

The gardener replies:

O, what pity is it
That [the king] had not so trimm'd and dress'd his
land
As we this garden! We at time of year
Do wound the bark, the skin of our fruit-trees,
Lest, being over-proud in sap and blood,
With too much riches it confound itself;
Had he done so to great and growing men,

They might have liv'd to bear, and he to taste
 Their fruits of duty. Superfluous branches
 We lop away, that bearing boughs may live;
 Had he done so, himself had borne the crown,
 Which waste of idle hours hath quite thrown down.

(ll. 55-66)

In this rustic scene where the Gardener teaches his underling how a royal "garden" is to be cultivated, Shakespeare illustrates the role of the king maintaining order by keeping the nobles in check. The king's duty is to rule well, and the entire Henriad from Henry VI to Henry V dramatizes the disastrous consequences that occur when he fails.

The second carrier in Henry IV, Part One Act II, Scene i gives for a moment a prospect of the political macrocosm. Shakespeare's gardeners and carriers (like his clowns) have the ability, conscious or otherwise, to offer a glimpse of larger vistas. They know that their world is turned upside down and needs a gardener, a Robin Ostler, manager, or inspirational leader. In Shakespeare's ideal epic hero these quotidian and transcendent qualities are apprehended; they are, so to speak, part of the hero's equipment.

In the hostelry scene of Henry IV, Part One, during an exchange between Gadshill and his informant the

Chamberlain, Shakespeare deals with the larger social issues within the insignificant context of an informant telling a thief of wealthy travellers in the inn. The Chamberlain tells Gadshill, " I know thou worshippest Saint Nicholas, as truly as a man of falsehood may" (II. i. 62-63), and refuses to count on a share of the booty. He realizes that he cannot expect a dishonest man to be honest with him. In this sentence the Chamberlain refers to the contradiction of a false man being true. A few lines later, when Falstaff discovers that his horse has been removed, he voices a similar idea: "A plague upon it when thieves cannot be true one to another" (II. ii. 28). By killing Gloucester and allowing Bolingbroke to steal his crown, King Richard infected English morality with the dishonesty and oath-breaking that infiltrate all levels of society. Even the rebels at Shrewsbury cannot be true to one another, for Worcester and Vernon withhold the truth from Hotspur.

In Act II, Scene iv, Shakespeare returns to the Boar's Head. Hal has just come back from the wine-cellar where "With three or four loggerheads, amongst three or fourscore hogsheads, [He has] sounded the very base-string of humility" (ll. 4-5). He recounts to Poins how he is able to laugh and drink deeply with a leash of drawers named Tom, Dick, and Francis. These drawers, from whom Hal learns to "drink with any tinker in his own language during

[his] life" (ll. 19-20), describe him as "the king of courtesy" (l. 10). They contrast him to Falstaff, saying he is "a Corinthian, a lad of mettle, a good boy" (ll. 11-12) and they seem to know intuitively that Falstaff is an unlikely companion for the Prince. They say that Hal is "no proud Jack like Falstaff" (l. 11). He has no pretensions, knows how to have fun, and unlike Falstaff does not need to assert his superiority. John Dover Wilson writes that "Falstaff must be clearly seen for what he is, viz. an impossible companion for a king and governor, however amusing as jester to the heir apparent" (Fortunes 39). Falstaff is representative of the irresponsible consumption which Hal as king will have to discipline and control, because part of the Sovereign's responsibility is to set and enforce sumptuary regulations. Another part of sumptuary control is the setting and enforcement of standards in courage (in the play's terms, both "metal" and "mettle"), in commodities (no "false stuff") and in behaviour (no more lawlessness). Hal knows that if he is to restore real standards to English society he has no choice but to banish Falstaff, who is Excess, false stuff, and a counterfeit of heroism.

Falstaff insists that he is the real stuff. "Never call a true piece of gold [that is, himself] a counterfeit," he earnestly pleads (II. iv. 485-486). He has wonderful presence: "Thou knowest my old ward -- here

I lay, and thus I bore my point" (II.190-92); and "I [am] a valiant lion' (II. iv. 270). He has magnificent narratives of his exploits, delivered with epic attention to numbers and duration: "These four came all afront, and mainly thrust at me; I made me no more ado, but took all their seven points in my target, thus" (II.iv.196-99); "we rose both at an instant, and fought a long hour by Shrewsbury clock" (V. iv. 147-48). He becomes a national hero: "There is not a dangerous action can peep out his head but I am thrust upon it" (2 HIV I. ii. 212-14). But the flourishes are grandiose as well as grand: Falstaff is a counterfeit hero and his exploits are not heroic but mock-heroic.

Bathos is a major rhetorical device in mock-heroic writing. In Henry IV, Part One, Shakespeare uses bathos to undercut the grandiloquence of chivalric rhetoric. Hotspur's brilliant manifesto of glory, where he resolves to dive to the bottom of the sea or soar to the moon in quest of honour, is wryly assessed for what it is -- an adolescent daydream:

Hot. By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap
 To pluck bright honour from the pale-fac'd moon,
 Or dive into the bottom of the deep,
 Where fathom-line could never touch the ground,
 And pluck up drowned honour by the locks,

So he that doth redeem her thence might wear
 Without corrival all her dignities:
 But out upon this half-fac'd fellowship!
 Wor. He apprehends a world of figures here,
 But not the form of what he should attend.

(1 HIV I. iii. 199-208)

Hotspur has the epic music, but he simply is not paying attention to the real world of plots, strategic lies and disguises, and of dirty fighting where scavengers mutilate noble dead (as the Welshwomen do Mortimer's troops, I. i. 42-6, and Falstaff does Hotspur at Shrewsbury, 1 HIV V. iv. 126; Achilles and the Myrmidons violate Hector in the same cowardly way in Troilus and Cressida). Hotspur wants to live in a world of sustained climaxes -- always horsed, accoutered, charging, clashing. He cannot see that life -- especially political life -- has many more anti-climaxes than it has climaxes. His own end is an anti-climax to his dreams as, dead, he is "horsed" at last on Falstaff's back, a spectacle both pathetic and bathetic.

Hotspur's end is grim mock-heroic. Another instance of this serious kind of Shakespearean mock-heroic is the entrance of Falstaff and his bedraggled company right after Vernon's hymn of praise to Hal's chivalric corps of officers. Hal and company are all furnished, all in arms,

glittering in golden coats and "As full of spirit as the month of May" (IV. i. 101). Falstaff's conscripts are

ancients, corporals, lieutenants, gentlemen of companies -- slaves as ragged as Lazarus in the painted cloth, where the glutton's dogs licked his sores: and such as indeed were never soldiers, but discarded unjust servingmen, younger sons to younger brothers, revolted tapsters, and ostlers trade-fallen, the cankers of a calm world and a long peace, ten times more dis-honourable-ragged than an old fazed ancient; and such have I to fill up the rooms of them as have bought out their services, that you would think that I had a hundred and fifty tattered prodigals lately come from swine-keeping, from eating draff and husks. A mad fellow met me on the way, and told me I had unloaded all the gibbets and pressed the dead bodies.

(IV. ii. 24-38)

There is a similar parallelling in Troilus and Cressida. We first see the armed Prologue, then Troilus and Aeneas in armour (but not fighting). Then in the next scene (I. ii.), the epic heroes pass before Pandarus and Cressida and after them a line of common soldiers, who are described, and probably seen, as

Asses, fools, dolts! Chaff and bran, chaff and bran!
 Porridge after meat! I could live and die i'th' eyes
 of Troilus. Ne'er look, ne'er look; the eagles are
 gone; crows and daws, crows and daws! I had rather
 be such a man as Troilus than Agamemnon and all
 Greece.

(I. ii. 229-33)

Hotspur's youthful military dreams of glory and Pandarus' elderly civilian ones are grounded in epic. But Shakespeare also supplies a realistic counter to these grand illusions.

Yet there is a place for the so-called chaff and bran on Achilles' shield, and in Henry V. Homer and Shakespeare treat individuals with respect and one need only think of such characters as Eumaios in The Odyssey (Books xvi and xvii) and Michael Williams in Henry V (IV. i. 85 f.f. and IV. vii. 124 f.f.) to see the dignity and worth such characters can be given. Besides, when epic heroes refuse to do their duty, the responsibility to protect the land falls on the shoulders of those who should themselves be protected. It probably is significant that Hal's involvement with low life extends to his seeing and appraising Falstaff's recruits. Falstaff's company are "Toms, Dicks, and Francis'" down on their luck -- they

include "discarded unjust serving-men, . . . revolted tapsters and ostlers trade-fallen" (IV. ii.), who could have come from Eastcheap and Robin Ostler's former inn. Still they are Henry IV's soldiers, albeit the king's press has been "misused damnably"; once again the king's duty of quality-control has been skimped. Hal's reaction to the sight of these men is to say they are "pitiful." Of all the aristocrats, only he sees the common soldiers. As Henry V he will command men like these in France, a "poor and starved band, . . . the shales and husks of men" (HV IV. ii. 16-18) who await the battle of Agincourt "like sacrifices" (IV. Prol. 23). Subduing his own fears and overcoming his weariness, Henry V walks around the camp -- in disguise, as at Eastcheap -- talking to every soldier in his own language until "every wretch, pining and pale before, / Beholding him, plucks comfort from his looks" (IV. Prol. 41-2).

The potential tragedy of the Henriad is the lack of a champion to lead England out of the devastation of the Wars of the Roses. In Henry IV, Hal, who has the most potential to become an epic hero, must still defeat Falstaff before going on to victory at Agincourt. Even after Agincourt he leaves a legacy of war for his infant son. Shakespeare never allows his audience to forget the ephemeral quality of the Lancastrian claim to the throne, a claim which has

as its basis Bolingbroke's deposition of Richard II. John of Gaunt's idyllic world will never be regained.

As I have suggested, Hal has the potential to become the English epic hero precisely because of his "common touch." He is aware of who his subjects are and of their value as human beings. The English soldiers in France represent virtually every level of English society: with low, middle and high life present (and Scots, Welsh, and Irish, too). They are apprehensive, and so is their leader. Here the second *Henriad* parallels The Iliad.

Charles Beye explains how Homer personalizes his story of battle by giving "small anecdotal descriptions of the men in combat" (p. 94). Beye then lists the major themes of these anecdotes, which occur just before or just after the individual is killed: "the status and wealth of the man, the circumstances of his birth, his place of origin, the circumstances of his marriage, and prophecies about him" (Beye 94). The effect of these anecdotes is to impress upon the audience the essential humanity of each of the casualties. They are innumerable, but each has worth in human society, will be missed by someone when he dies, and is never just a statistic. Homer also emphasizes the humanity of his characters in his similes which describe a world that is more homely than heroic (Beye 108). He fills these similes with "the little people caught up in the necessary details of their existence" (Beye 108). So

Homer emphasizes the horror and devastation of warfare by reminding the audience of its impact upon the family and of the life in peace that they could be leading. Along with the Richard II garden scene and the hostelry and orchard episodes in Henry IV, one of Shakespeare's most vivid portraits of rural life is the Archbishop of Canterbury's "bee-hive" speech in Henry V. This speech is Homeric not only because it has parallels with a famous epic simile in The Iliad (II. 84-89) but also because it conveys an "Achilleus'-shield" picture of social order under good government. The bees,

have a king and officers of sorts;
Where some, like magistrates, correct at home,
Others, like merchants, venter trade abroad,
Others, like soldiers, armed in their stings,
Make boot upon the summer's velvet buds;
Which pillage they with merry march bring home
To the tent-royal of their emperor:
Who, busied in his majesty, surveys
The singing masons building roofs of gold,
The civil citizens kneading up the honey,
The poor mechanic porters crowding in
Their heavy burdens at his narrow gate,
The sad-ey'd justice, with his surly hum,

Delivering o'er to the executors pale
The lazy yawning drone.

(HV I. ii. 190-204)

Of course this passage is ironical. The political Archbishop is encouraging war with France, and so he glorifies warfare as cheerful pillage and merry marches. But even the irony helps develop the impression that civil and peaceful life are highly desirable.

Henry V's epic-straining Chorus, whose narrative gloats over the Agincourt victory, briefly re-introduces the bee-swarm of citizens:

How London doth pour out her citizens.
The mayor and all his brethren in best sort,
Like to the senators of th' antique Rome,
With the plebeians swarming at their heels,
Go forth and fetch their conqu'ring Caesar in.

(V. Prol. 24-28)

But in the play itself, immediately after the French herald Montjoy concedes that the victory has fallen to the English, the tone changes to light-hearted comedy with the focus shifting to the relationships between individuals. Henry V continues the joke that he started with Williams the night before the battle and tricks Fluellen into

receiving the blows that were meant for him. Williams is a commoner who has dignity and honour. He is unafraid to stand behind his word. When the King confronts him with abusing his majesty, he replies that

you appeared to me but as a common man; witness the night, your garments, your lowliness; and what your highness suffered under that shape, I beseech you, take it or your own fault and not mine: for had you been as I took you for, I made no offence; therefore, I beseech your highness, pardon me

(HV IV. viii. 51-57).

Henry then pardons Williams and rewards him by filling his glove with crowns. Williams, Fluellen, and Sir Thomas Erpingham represent the "care and valour" (IV. i. 85) which Henry appreciates in his followers. They share the glory of Agincourt with their king, the comprehensive hero, who recognizes his soldiers' achievement by speaking of "we few, we happy few, we band of brothers," giving the "we" a corporate, not a royal, emphasis.

In the wooing scene of Act V, Henry is a robust lover whose respect for Katherine is apparent. He is patient and politely wins her consent. His wooing has many parallels with Hotspur's relationship with his Kate, Lady Percy. Hotspur's tongue is thick and he dislikes poetry; Henry V

also is unaccustomed to love-making, and says he prefers the battlefield. He confesses to Katherine:

I have neither words nor measure, and for the other,
I have no strength in measure, yet a reasonable
measure in strength. If I could win a lady at leap-
frog, or by vaulting into my saddle with my armour on
my back, under the correction of bagging be it
spoken, I should quickly leap into a wife. Or if I
might buffet for my love, or bound my horse for her
favours, I could lay on like a butcher and sit like a
jack-an-apes, never off. But, before God, Kate, I
cannot look greenly nor grasp out my eloquence, nor I
have no cunning in protestation; only downright
oaths, which I never use till urged, nor never break
for urging.

(HV V. ii. 136-49)

Shakespeare thus ends his dramatic epic with his English Aeneas embarking on an epic journey -- a home-coming with the promise of marriage and a new beginning. Hal has excelled for the most part as a military leader, and now must further develop the domestic side of his character if he is to become a true Shakespearean epic hero. His wooing of Kate shares the difficulties but mutual delight found in the relationship between Mortimer and his wife, Owen

Glendower's daughter who speaks only Welsh. These lovers share the language of love, a language for which Hotspur had no ear and no use. We see Hal at the close of the second Henriad making the last steps towards becoming a comprehensive epic hero by learning how to live in conjugal harmony. In the "breach" oration at Harfleur (III. i. 1-33), we heard him talking of the virtues of peace; here we see him putting these virtues into action. Dramatically, the second Henriad closes with all the promise of a Shakespearean comedy: it ends in the successful pursuit of love. The Chorus' last sad forecast of the Wars of the Roses is rather anti-climactic, but the portrait of the second Henriad's true hero definitely is not anti-heroic.

CONCLUSION

The wooing of Katherine by Henry V at the end of the second Henriad seems to sum up Shakespeare's evaluation of the epic. For him, the true spirit of the epic is to be found in as much domestic and civilian harmony rather as in military fanfare. Battlefield exploits are an aberration, though at times necessary. Certainly Henry V is a military genius, but he has a domestic side which he nurtures and develops. His strength lies not only in his soldierly expertise, but in the way he uses his extraordinary abilities for the common good. Like Telemachus who fulfills his father's responsibilities to maintain the household at Ithaca, Hal is a domestic hero with the common touch. He treats his subjects with respect, and values them as people, not objects to be exploited.

The true epic hero wants to nurture the life of peace. Both the "Achilleus' Shield" account in The Iliad

and the Archbishop's "Bee-hive" speech in Henry V provide pictures of ordinary life. It is interesting to note that neither picture excludes human suffering in its idealization of people going about their daily business. The epic hero, though unable to make human life free from conflict, is given the challenge to keep society running as smoothly as possible. In The Iliad, Trojan society is disrupted by the siege, and their hero, Hector, is unable to save his city. In contrast to the social picture on the shield, Greek society is represented by the soldiers' camp in a state of confusion on the plains outside Troy, with their hero, Achilles, unwilling to help them. In the Henriad, England is disrupted by civil war and there is no hero to lead her out of chaos. Both Homer and Shakespeare see the vulnerability of domestic life to outside intrusion; consequently, neither is a pacifist. However, they both stress that the epic hero is to foster social stability and order.

Both Homer and Shakespeare prefer peace to war, even as they recognize the proverbial wisdom which says that "Peace is the dream of the wise; war is the history of man." Those characters who function best in war and try to profit from it are limited in their development: they have no real place in peacetime society.

Shakespeare's contribution to epic literature is to combine the heroic and the mock-heroic. Troilus and

Cressida and the second Henriad are satirical of the aspirations of characters who have immortal reputations, dreams or memories, but who are "desperately mortal" (Measure for Measure IV. ii. 147). This satirical intent expresses itself in the mock-heroics of comic action, bathetic speeches and reductive parallelisms such as those between Hotspur and Falstaff, or between the siege of Troy and the siege of Cressida. But while it is notably anti-heroic, the second Henriad is also epic in its celebration of a comprehensive epic hero who has a grasp of civil as well as warlike responsibilities and an unswerving commitment to reconciliation as well as to glory. Combining in his character qualities of comic self-awareness and victorious majesty, Henry V embodies the uniquely Shakespearean achievement of "mock-heroic epic," and is as close to being an immortal mortal as Shakespeare seems to wish to come.

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