The Tavern and the Primordial Space of the City: Voices in Shakespeare's *Henry the Fourth* Plays

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Introduction

In addressing the tavern scenes in Shakespeare's *Henry the Fourth* plays (1596-1597)[1] – and here I will most closely attend to *1 Henry IV*, 2.4 and its context – Shakespeare created a world in which taverns and drinking were part of daily life. The Globe theatre was later located in that world (1599),[2] outside the City of London in Southwark on the Thames' South Bank, an area already packed with popular taverns, such as 'The Elephant', referenced in *Twelfth Night*. Crowds thronged the network of dim, narrow and crime-ridden streets adjacent to the Globe and also to arenas for bear and bull baiting, the brothels, and cock fights, all of which had their own rituals and rules.

Can we speak of this louche aspect of Shakespeare's Elizabethan environment as somehow part of the plays themselves? Has it accompanied

1 William Shakespeare, *Henry IV Part 2*, James C. Bulman, ed., London, Arden Shakespeare, 2016/2024, introduction, pp. 1-148, pp. 133-148. All references are to this edition unless otherwise specified.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 143; James Shapiro, *1599*: *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare*, London, Faber & Faber, 2005, map p. xii, preface pp. xv-xxiv, p. 1, prologue, pp. 1-25, pp. 121-132; Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: Licence, Play and Power in Renaissance London*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988, pp. 26-59.

him into the twenty-first century across the Atlantic? A recent *Washington Post* article by Sophia Solano[3] reports that there are currently some five "Drunk Shakespeare" companies in cities across the United States, including Washington, D.C. This now popular theatrical mode dates from an experimental 2013 New York City production,"R and J: Star-Cross'd Death March" by David Hudson's "Three Day Hang Over" theatre group. Its style is to present Shakespeare's plays with drinking actors in a partially scripted partially improvisational form. "Drunk Shakespeare" emerged from his approach. At some 2000 performances per year, the repertoire now includes *Macbeth*, besides *Romeo and Juliet*. For Halloween, a version of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is performed.

Developed by its Australian producer, Scott Griffin, the concept takes inspiration fron the web series, "Drunk History", and "A Comedy Central Show" where the commentators increasingly season their analyses and discussions with drink. That such an approach patently succeeds in marrying Shakespearean tragedy with popular culture now, it may because it did so four centuries earlier. The rowdy and raucous context of Globe productions is generally acknowledged. Ashley Buchanan of the Folger Institute further affirms: "Ale was consumed by young and old, rich and poor, as it provided essential calories and was, in most cases, safer and more accessible than water…Given the ubiquity of ale in late-16th-century London, it is safe to say that ale was purchased and consumed in the theatre."[4] Whether the actors actually drank on stage or not, drinking and taverns feature in Shakespeare's comedies such as *Twelfth Night*, *Taming of the Shrew*, his late romance *The Tempest*, and in his tragedies, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Hamlet.* Furthermore, it is worth noting that Shakespeare's own father held the office of ale taster to assure the safety of ale sold in Stratford-Upon-Avon.[5]

Usurpation and Tavernisation: Original Sin

In the second part of *King Henry VI* from the first tetralogy of the early 1590s, a complex of rebellion, drinking and usurpation joins to characterise Jack Cade, (*2 Henry VI*, 4.2, 60-65), the populist rebel conscripted to serve

3 Sophia Solano, "The Shakespearean Actor Who Goes Onstage Absolutely Hammered: Behind the Scenes at Drunk Shakespeare Where Lady Macbeth [Marissa Chaffee] Takes Vodka", *Washington Post*, Style Section: Arts & Entertainments, 17 April 2025; The Washington Post>entertainment>theatre.

4 Sophia Solano, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

the treachery of the Duke of York (*2 Henry VI*, 3.1, 349-383).[6] Much as Prince Harry[7] in the *Henry the Fourth* plays, Cade promises equality and free ale for all (*2 Henry VI*, 4.2, 69-72) until he is killed by Alexander Iden in a walled garden (*2 Henry VI*, 4.10, 30-65) the peacefulness of which, together with its simplicity, sufficiency and even its owner's name echo the Garden of Eden. Ironically, Cade who in his recent London triumph commanded "of the city's cost, the Pissing Conduit run nothing but claret wine / this first year of our reign" (*2 Henry VI*, 4.6, 3-4), meets his death when he seeks a "sallet" to cool and feed himself instead of a "quart pot to drink in" (*2 Henry VI*, 4.10, 10-15), declaring himself "vanquished / by famine, not by valor" (*2 Henry VI*, 4.10, 73-74) . Among the Cade rebels'objections to the reign of Henry VI was that the king himself was too impoverished to pay for his own food and drink: the king "hath hadde ffalse counsayle, ffor his londez ern lost, his marchundize is lost, his comyns destroyed, the see is lost, ffraunse his [sic]lost, himself so pore that he may not for his mete nor drynk; he oweth more than evur dyd kynge in Inglond..."[8]

Drinking and taverns feature most famously in the mid-1590's history plays of what has become known as Shakespeare's second tetralogy: *King Richard II*,[9] *1 Henry IV*,[10] *2 Henry IV*,[11] and *Henry V*.[12] The tavern and drinking references coalesce in a semantic cluster that defines a monarchical society tainted by crime, stemming from "the old days of Goodman Adam to the pupil age of this present twelve o'clock at midnight", as Prince Harry observes in *1 Henry IV*, 2.4, 91-3. Falstaff echoes this in "Thou knowest in the /state of innocency Adam fell; and what should poor /Jack Falstaff do in the days of villainy? Thou seest I / have more flesh than another man and therefore more / frailty." (*1 Henry IV*, 3.3, 163-7). The convergence of original sin and drinking is rendered more explicit in the later tragedy of *Hamlet*.[13] Just before his encounter with the ghost, Hamlet suggests that

6 William Shakespeare, *The Second Part of King Henry VI: Part Two, Andrew S. Cairncross*, ed., London, Methuen, 1962/1980. All references are to this edition unless otherwise specified.

7 James C. Bulman, ed., *op. cit.*, introduction, p. 1, note 1 on the nominative preference for Prince Harry over Hal or Prince Hal.

8 Ralph. A. Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI*, Phoenix Mill, Sutton Publishing Limited, 1981/1998, p. 636, pp. 610-665.

9 William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, Charles R. Forker, ed., London, Arden Shakespeare, 2002. All references are to this edition unless otherwise specified.

10 William Shakespeare, *Henry IV Part 1*, David Scott Kastan, ed., London, Arden Shakespeare, 2002. All references are to this edition unless otherwise specified.

11 James C. Bulman, ed., *op. cit*.

12 William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, Gary Taylor, ed., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982/1984. All references are to this edition unless otherwise specified.

13 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, ed., London, Arden Shakespeare, 2006. All subsequent references are to this edition unless otherwise specified.

Claudius's celebration of Denmark's excessive drinking culture mixes with the "dram of evil…wherein they are not guilty" to overflow "all the noble substance…" into "a doubt / To his own scandal.", thus into the appearance of guilt. (*Hamlet*,1.4, 8-12 ,14-38):

Hamlet: The king doth wake tonight and takes his rouse
Keeps wassail, and the swagg'ring upspring reels
And as he drains his drafts of Rhenish down
The kettle drum and trumpet thus bray out
The triumph of his pledge. 12
….though I am native here
And to the manner born, it is a custom 15
More honored in the breach than in the observance.
This heavy-headed revel east and west
Makes us traduced and taxed of other nations;
They clepe us drunkards and with swinish phrase
Soil our addition….
So, oft it chances in particular men 23
That for some vicious mole of nature in them,
As in their birth wherein they are not guilty 25
(since nature cannot choose his origin)
….that these men, 30
Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect….
Shall in the general censure take corruption 35
From that particular fault: the dram of evil
Doth all the noble substance of a doubt
To his own scandal. 38

Hamlet initially refers to a court culture he reviles but then extends his remarks to that of the Danish nation. The ghost and scenes of subterfuge and madness in *Hamlet* suggest a hallucinatory quality which pervades the play – not far removed from the distorted perceptions of drinking to excess. In renewing the corrupt royal drinking rituals, Claudius further contaminates the original taint of human nature with the evil of his murderous usurpation, ultimately drowning not only himself but also the dynasty.[14] Nor is a sense of sin lacking in the historical record of Henry IV: "He was, he said in his will 'a sinful wretch', with a 'sinful soul, the which had never

14 John Gillies,"The Question of Original Sin in *Hamlet*", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 64, 2013, pp. 403-5, cf. "frailty", pp. 409-412, pp. 396-424.

been worthy to be man but through [God's] mercy and His grace; which life I have misspent'."[15]

Tavernisation and Usurpation in Shakespeare's Second Tetralogy

Relationships, language and identities are in constant flux in the second tetralogy once the anointed but inconstant, "skipping King" (*1 Henry IV*, 3.2, 60), has been usurped by Henry Bolingbroke in *Richard II*. The theme of usurpation continues throughout the second tetralogy. Bolingbroke's name itself is infused with liquid as in brook and boil or bull (Bullingbrooke in Q & Holinshed as per contemporary pronunciation), his marshy birthplace at Bolingbroke, Gaunt's rural Lincolnshire castle near Spilsby.[16] The terrestrial power of the bull infuses the turbulent boil or brook further reinforced by the bull language that both Prince Harry and Falstaff share. Prince Harry, himself called "bull's pizzle" by Falstaff (*1 Henry IV,* 2.4, 239) whom he likens to a roaring " bull-calf" (*1 Henry IV*, 2.4, 253) or "roasted Manningtree ox" (*1 Henry IV*, 2.4, 440), appropriate to Falstaff's later presence in the rural Gloucestershire setting of Justice Shallow's farm where, among potential recruits he meets Peter Bullcalf (*2 Henry IV*, 3.2, 173-254). But the rural bull turns to the urban bull as Falstaff later derides Justice Shallow's "wildness of his youth and the feats he has done about Turnbull Street…" near London's Smithfield Market and its slaughteryards (*2 Henry IV*, 3.2, 304-305). Apparently based on the historical figure of Sir John Fastolf, who was an honourable soldier at the Battle of Patay (Fastolf being a family name current in the Yarmouth area of the east Norfolk coast).[17] Falstaff's name also recalls the staff of office emblematic of kingship and the great officers of the kingdom but in terms of usurpation – Fall Staff. Worcester performs that ritual breaking of his staff as he turns from Richard II to support Henry Bolingbroke (*1 Henry IV*, 5.1, 34-38; *Richard II*, 2.3, 26-25). Barbara Hodgdon emphasizes the linkage of impotence-rather ambiguously paralleled by his taste for "leaping-houses" (*1 Henry IV*, 2.4, 8) – and

15 Chris Given-Wilson, *Henry IV*, Yale English Monarchs Series, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2017, p. 525.

16 James C. Bulman, ed., *op.cit*.,"List of Roles": Bolingbroke/ Bullingbrooke, p. 175, pp. 172-178.

17 David Scott Kastan, ed., *op. cit*., introduction, pp. 51-62; James C. Bulman, ed., *op. cit*., introduction, pp. 64-70; "List of Roles" p. 157, "cowardice and deception in battle (false-staff)", "rejection by Henry V (fall staff)", pp. 150-159; Matthew Hovious, "A Fleet of Fastolfs: The Descendancy of Alexander Fastolf, Burgess of Great Yarmouth", *Foundations*, Vol. 3, 2009, pp. 83-107: https:fmg.ac (Foundation for Medieval Genealogy).

chivalric incompetence with the oft-remarked resonance of the Falstaff name with 'False Staff'.[18]

Thus, the stage tavern, a site defined by liquefaction, exposes the fluidities of the kingdom that are otherwise masked by ceremony, language and subterfuge. As a place of the body, appetite and consumption, the tavern is the conduit where the primordial energies of the city flow and bubble through the distorted and coded language of stealing, disease, desire but mainly drinking. The fifteenth-century historical context is infused with the lived reality of Shakespeare's Eastcheap, London.[19] While the Boar's Head tavern no longer exists, the Boar's Head sign has been exhibited at the replica of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre on London's South Bank but the sign is not part of its archive, though still a key cultural artefact of London.[20] For Shakespeare, the space of the tavern is charged with the bodily forces of appetite, sexuality, disease, life and death, nonetheless enigmatic in their power to disarticulate and transform. If chaos is staged in the noise and disorder of the serving and payment framework of the tavern space, it is through Prince Harry's experiments in disrupting the tavern's fatal hierarchies, fragilities and "reckonings" that he develops his abilities to reassert order in the city and the kingdom. The order and rules of the city are both illusory and imperative, apparently chaotic but nevertheless absolute in their requirements. To access the reality of urban dynamics and power, one needs to know how to engage the underlying levels of nature, time, fate and appetite which human beings experience and enact in the resonant space of the tavern.

Taverns, Servants and Kings

Exploiting the legendary place of The Boar's Head Tavern in restless and wayward Eastcheap allows Shakespeare to imbue this corrosive semantic cluster described above with the primordial energies of London. All is made to converge on the conflictual kingship of Henry the Fourth.[21] Structural

18 Barbara Hodgdon, "Endings", first published in her *The End Crowns All: Closure and Contradiction in Shakespeare's History*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1991, pp. 151-166, reprinted by permission in Gordon McMullan, ed., William Shakespeare, *1Henry IV*, J. L. Sanderson text 1962, rev. 1969, Norton Critical Editions, New York, W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 2003, p. 463, pp. 452-469.

19 Anne Barton, chapter 4, "Falstaff and the Comic Community", 1985, pp. 70-90, and chapter 10, "The King Disguised: Shakespeare's *Henry V* and the Comical History", 1975, pp. 207-233, in *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

20 For information contact library@shakespearesglobe.com; for image, see Boars Head Tavern Sign: knowyourlondon.wordpress.com.

21 Chris Given-Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 439-541; Marie Louise Bruce, *The Usurper King: Henry of Bolingbroke 1366-99*, London, The Rubicon Press, 1998 [1986], pp. 194-225; John Julius

repetitions and disruptions effect a semantics of change, disease and sickness. The corrupted atmosphere is established in King Henry's opening words "So shaken as we are, so wan with care", (*1 Henry IV*, 1.1).[22] Henry is later termed by Hotspur "this ingrate and cankered Bolingbroke" (*1 Henry IV*, 1.3, 136), echoing the tavern language of "pox", "plague", "melancholy", "base contagious clouds" (*1 Henry IV*, 2.4, 43, 45, 71, 188). This semantic pattern articulates the poor health that is part of the historical record of Henry IV's reign.[23] Anne Barton notes the tragic arc of this development: "As it was defined by Shakespeare, the tragical history became a serious, and politically a somewhat incendiary, examination into the nature of kingship... For Shakespeare, *Henry V* seems to have marked the end of his personal interest in the tragical history."[24]

The varied locations and tonalities of the second tetralogy converge on the fluid modalities of the tavern where rules, laws, crimes, bodies and bonds are suffused with liquid much as they are in King Henry IV's court[25]. King Henry says that his "blood hath been too cold and temperate," his condition "smooth as oil," which has "lost that title of respect" (*1 Henry IV*, 1.3, 1, 7-8). Hotspur evokes the heroic encounter of Mortimer and Glendower in terms of repeated drinking and breathing: "Three times they breathed and, three times did they drink, / Upon agreement of swift Severn's flood,… Bloodstained with these valiant combattants." (*1 Henry IV*, 1.3, 103-4,107). The tavern nature of this mendacious hyperbole is later confirmed as Prince Harry evokes tavern rituals where drinkers "call drinking deep 'dyeing/ scarlet'...and, when you breathe in your watering, they cry 'Hem' and bid you 'Play it off!'" (*1 Henry IV*, 2.4, 14-16). King Henry rejects Hotspur's inflated story of Mortimer's heroism as lies, "Thou dost belie him, Percy;… Art thou not ashamed?" (*1 Henry IV* 1.3, 113, 117) much as Prince Harry will those inflated heroic claims of Falstaff in the tavern (*1 Henry IV*, 2.4, 246-257): "What trick, what device, what / starting-hole canst thou now find out to hide thee from / this open and apparent shame?" (*1 Henry IV*, 2.4, 255-7). When King Henry leaves his court after denouncing Hotspur's lies, his father Northumberland reacts in tavern terms to Hotspur's inveterate boasts,

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Norwich, *Shakespeare's Kings*, London,Viking,1999, pp. 131-169.

22 Note also King Henry, "Yea, there thou mak'st me sad and mak'st me sin / In envy that my lord Northumberland / Should be the father to so blest a son,…Whilst I, by looking on the praise of him, / See riot and dishonour stain the brow/Of my young Harry." (*1H IV*, 1.1, 77-79, 83-85).

23 Chris Given-Wilson, *op. cit.*, e.g. pp. 292-298, 304-306.

24 Anne Barton, "The King Disguised", *op. cit.*, pp. 232-233.

25 Chris Given-Wilson, *op. cit.*, Chapter 10 "Piracy, Rumour and Riot (1401-1402)" pp. 202-15; Chapter 25 "The King and His Image", tainted by usurpation pp. 401-5, pp. 385-405; Chapter 28, "Nobles, Rebels and Traitors", persistent conspiracies and treason, pp. 439-450.

"What, drunk with choler ?" (*1 Henry IV*, 1.3, 128). Hotspur responds to his father's rebuke in equally liquid terms to assert his loyalty to Mortimer: " Yea, on his part, I'll empty all these veins / And shed my dear blood drop by drop in the dust,..." (*1 Henry IV*, 1.3, 132-133). Again, Hotspur's exaggerated posturing receives a deflating response from his father speaking to Worcester, "Brother, your King hath made your nephew mad." (*1 Henry IV*, 1.3, 137). Worcester too sees Hotspur's posturing in liquid terms, " I'll read you matter deep and dangerous, / As full of peril…As to o'erwalk a current roaring loud /on the unsteadfast footing of a spear." (*1 Henry IV*, 1.3,189-192). Unbeknownst to the court and conspirators, Prince Harry has already proclaimed his ability to cure the kingdom in the primordial – and inflated – terms which grow out of his own tavern apprenticeship: "Yet herein will I imitate the sun, / Who doth permit the base contagious clouds / That,…he may be more wondered at / By breaking through the foul and ugly mists..." (*1 Henry IV*, 1.2, 187-8, 190-191, cf. *1 Henry IV*, 1.2, 185-207). In the tavern, you hear the cries of drinkers apparently more and more desperate for the attention of drawers like Francis and his fellow apprentices. With an ambiguous delay, they arrive to serve in this space where time is both urgent, "Anon, Anon, Sir" (cf. *1 Henry IV*, 2.4, 36-37, 95), yet suspended.[26] Their promises of immediate action echo through diversion and deferral to register the impossibility of performance and thus the impossibility of death and retribution, a refraction of the constant deferrals of King Henry's full accession to the sacred power and glory of heroic kingship. It is Prince Harry, however, who will control time and transform transgression into power: "By so much shall I falsify men's hopes; /…. I'll so offend to make offence a skill, / Redeeming time when men least think I will." (*1 Henry IV*, 1.2, 201, 206-7).

Stephen Greenblatt,[27] and Pascale Doucet,[28] have persuasively argued that the tavern scenes are sites of control where the hierarchy of power and education is asserted over the verbal and social impoverishment of the drawers. While arguing the role of Machiavellian power plays and cruelty in the Henry the Fourth plays, Line Cottegnies features King Henry's denunciation of Prince Harry's conduct in *1 Henry IV*, 3.2, and the drinking

26 Anne Barton, "Falstaff and the Comic Community", *op. cit.*, p. 84.

27 Stephen Greenblatt, "Invisible Bullets", first published in J. Dollimore and A.Sinfield, eds., *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, Manchester University Press, 1985, pp. 18-47; reprinted by permission in Gordon McMullan, ed., *1Henry IV*, *op. cit.*, pp.285-312.

28 Pascale Doucet, "Anon, Anon, Sir: Popular discourse, Syntactical limitations and ideological containment in 1*Henry IV* and *Coriolanus*", *Revue des études anglo-américaines*, Vol. 67, 2010, pp. 261-274.

scene in the Forest of Gaultree in *2 Henry IV*, 4.1.[29] But this focus on the calculated performance of power seems a bit at odds with the frequently revelatory, even prophetic, role of servants and subalterns in Shakespeare. Besides the extensive interaction with the gravediggers and Hamlet's homage to the jester Yorick – and perhaps recognition of himself in the antic Yorick, "a fellow of infinite jest…He has bore me on his back a thousand times… Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft." (*Hamlet*, 5.1, 175-176,178)[30], it is the soldiers of the watch on the parapet in *Hamlet* who see the ghost, and first declare the sickness & rot in the kingdom (*Hamlet*, 1.1, 8-9,1.4,100). The honorable status of "soldier" is reinforced by Young Fortinbras,[31] now heir to the kingdom of Denmark, "Hamlet: But I do prophesy th'election lights / On Fortinbras: he has my dying voice." (Hamlet: 5.2, 339-40, Fortinbras: 5.2, 373-4, Horatio: 5.2, 375-6) who has Hamlet borne off like a soldier (5.2, 379-18):

> Let four captains
> Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage,
> For he was likely, had he been put on,
> To have proved most royal. And for his passage
> The soldiers' music and the rite of war
> Speak loudly for him.

Similarly servants play key roles in *Romeo and Juliet* (e.g., 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 2.4, 5.3),[32] and *Richard II* (e.g., 5.5, 68-116) where they are particularly associated with transgression as well as eating and drinking, thus the dynamics and embodiment that mirror the tragic action of the plays.

Whatever the oppressive charge of power and language in such subaltern, tavern and drinking scenes, Prince Harry's conscription of impoverished but noble younger son Edward Poins[33] into attempting to confuse, and even divert the drawers from their duties in *1 Henry IV,* 2.4, 1-108, attacks the linear structure of time and space in which the drawers function. If the spatial opposition of the Prince's and Poins'voices seizes Francis in their contradictory pulsions, the design of the trick suggests the Prince's own, contradictory dilemma. He is as much caught in the repetitive parroting and

29 Line Cottegnies, '"What trust is in these times" Thinking the Secular State with 'the colour of religion' in Shakespeare's *2 Henry IV*", *Études anglaises*, vol. 71, 2018, pp. 430-436, pp. 424-441.
30 John Gillies, *op.cit.*, pp. 416-417.
31 *Ibid.*, Hamlet's Fortinbras soliloquy, 4.4, 31-65, "Hamlet clearly envies him" p. 419.
32 William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Gordon McMullan, ed., Norton Critical Editions, London, W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 2017.
33 David Scott Kastan, ed., *op. cit.*, "List of Roles", p. 138.

activity as Francis since Prince Harry is immersed in the repetitive network of treachery—as is Richard himself.[34] The rebellion produced by usurpation renders the sacred dignity and power of kingship riotous and parodic. Court scenes then are not foils for the tavern scenes as recognition of their common elements of theatricality, power and betrayal might suggest.[35] If King Henry is "So shaken…, so wan with care" that he desires "a time for frighted peace to pant / And breathe short-winded accents of new broils / To be commenced in strands afar remote." (*1 Henry IV*, 1.1, 1-4), it is to staunch the "thirsty entrance of this soil", his kingdom, that drinks "her own children's blood" as "trenching war channel her fields,..." (*1 Henry IV*, 1.1, 5-7). But that thirst can no more be quenched for the king than can that of the thirsty drinkers in the taverns whose criss-crossing calls distort the order and time of service needed by the drawers (*1 Henry IV*, 2.4, 1-93). In other words, the court scenes display a kingship contaminated by usurpation, a tavernised rather than sacred kingship. King Henry undermined his own legitimacy by not paying the reckoning—i.e. royal burial— he owed to Richard II, a reckoning that Prince Harry now King Henry V knew must be paid to "redeem time" (cf. above, discussion, *1 Henry IV*, 1.2, 207) in a tavernised world:

> …the need to give Richard the burial due to him as king was a clearly appreciated imperative, since only when properly settled in the tomb which he had prepared for himself in the presence of his effective successor could that succession achieve the legitimacy that once belonged to the dead king himself….Henry V was king not by virtue of being his father's eldest son, rather he was heir to the legitimacy enjoyed by his cousin, Richard II, who, it would later be reported, had prophesied Henry's accession to the throne….It was as if his father, who had seized the crown but not given his predecessor proper burial, had been in some way de facto, rather than legitimate king of England.[36]

Aptly enough, historian Chris Given-Wilson in his *Henry IV* volume for the Yale English Monarchs series speaks of "liquid loyalties" as characteristic of the persistent plots and conspiracies that characterised a reign that never escaped the taint of usurpation.[37] Just as in a tavern, reckonings paid and

34 Cf. *Richard II*, 5.5, 32-38; Anne Barton, "Shakespeare and the Limits of Language", 1971, chapter 3, *op. cit.*, p. 62, pp. 51-69; Stephen Greenblatt, "Theater and Power" in Gordon McMullan, ed., *op. cit.*: *1Henry IV*, pp. 296-299.

35 Stephen Greenblatt, *op. cit.*, pp. 300-302.

36 William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, Christopher Allmand, ed., New Haven, Yale University Press, 1997 [1992]: Foreword to the Yale edition, p. xii, pp. xi-xxii; cf.Line Cottegnies, *op. cit.*, pp. 424-429, pp. 436-439.

37 Chris Given-Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 258, inescapable taint of usurpation: pp. 401-405; note also Henry V's successful efforts to escape the taint of usurpation by reburying Richard with royal honours: Allmand, *op. cit.*, pp. xi-xii.

unpaid, monetary values and expenses are constantly at issue and in dispute (e.g. *1 Henry IV*, 2.4, 24-25, 517-535; 3.3, 41-162)[38] so was Henry IV's reign characterised by constant concerns and struggles over money in his politically turbulent kingdom.[39]

Prince Harry's implication in the tavern culture of drinking, robbing and riot is denounced by an aggrieved king in the *Henry the Fourth* plays.[40] But the quarrelling, lockings out and the competitive kneelings of the Duke and Duchess of York and their treacherous son Aumerle (*Richard II*, 5.2 and 3) have already reduced the decorum of Henry IV's kingship to that of tavern ballad.[41] Henry himself acknowledges "Our scene is altered from a serious thing / and now changed to 'The Beggar and the King'." (*Richard II*, 5.3,78-79). Henry's perception of the reduction of kingship to that of the tavern ballad converges with Richard's own: "Sometimes am I king; / Then treason make me wish myself a beggar / And so I am." (*Richard II* 5.5, 32-34). It is apparently "unkinged" Richard (*Richard II*, 5.5, 37) who convokes the round song of beggar and king to his solemnly ironic reflections on his tragic fall (*Richard II*, 5.5, 1-66, 34-38):

> Then crushing penury
> Persuades me I was better when a king
> Then am I kinged again, and by and by
> Think that I am unkinged by Bolingbroke
> And straight am nothing.

Usurpation has emptied out English kingship into tavern ballads; the sacred has been tavernised. Thus *Richard II* haunts and disarticulates constructions of kingship in the *Henry the Fourth* plays[42] and that of the concluding play in the second tetralogy, *Henry the Fifth*, as the reference to beggar indicates in the disguised King Henry V's crisis of conscience before the Battle of Agincourt (*Henry V*, 4.1, 218-272):

> What drinkst thou oft, instead of homage sweet,
> But poisoned flattery? O be sick, great greatness,
> And bid thy ceremony give thee cure….
> Canst thou, when thou command'st the beggar's knee,

38 David Scott Kastan, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 162, note to Prince Harry's "Redeeming Time" speech 1.2, line 199 "And pay the debt I never promised": The language of debt and repayment runs throughout the play". Cf. introduction, pp. 64-69.
39 Chris Given-Wilson, Chapter 19, "The Search for Solvency (1404-1406)".
40 Christopher Allmand, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-58.
41 Anne Barton, "The king disguised", *op. cit.*, pp. 212-214, 228-229, 232-233.
42 Line Cottegnies, *op. cit.*, pp. 430-431.

Command the health of it? No, thou proud dream
That play'st so subtly with a king's repose;
I am a king that find thee, and I know
'Tis not the balm, the sceptre, and the ball,… 248
The farcèd title running fore the king,… 251
Not all these, laid in bed majestical, 255
Can sleep so soundly as the wretched slave
Who with a body filled and vacant mind…. 257
Never sees horrid night, the child of hell,
But like a lackey from the rise to set… 260
And follows so the ever-running year 264
With profitable labour to his grave….
The slave, a member of his country's peace,
Enjoys it, but in gross brain what little wots 270
What watch the King keeps to maintain the peace,
Whose hours the peasant best advantages. 272

While the reference to the powerlessness of kingship and its attributes in terms of poison and ill health has a portentous echo with Henry V's own subsequent early death from sickness, his focus on the contrast between the "poisoned" monarch and the healthy "beggar" / "slave" / "lackey" resonates with the language of disease and sickness that features in the semantic cluster of usurpation.[43] The scornful tone of Henry's references to the "slave" and "lackey" may be for himself as well in the taint of his father's usurpation. Henry V contrasts the slave's "sound sleep" with the sights of "horrid night, the child of hell" that apparently disrupt his sleep. Shakespeare's later develops usurpation again in terms of sleep disturbance in his tragedy *Macbeth* (1606).[44] In Act III, Macbeth refers to "the affliction of these terrible dreams / That shake us nightly." (*Macbeth,* 3.2, 20-21). Perhaps Henry V himself is the "child of hell" of a "horrid night" inherited from his father. In fact, this speech prefaces Henry's own sense of reckoning and his explicit acknowledgment that it is his father's fault and guilt in Richard II's murder that weigh upon him (*Henry V*, 4.1, 276-285):

O God of Battles, steel my soldiers' hearts.
Possess them not with fear. Take from them now
The sense of reck'ning, ere th'opposèd numbers

43 Chris Given-Wilson, *op. cit.*, on the meticulous legal and semantic attention to Richard's renunciation p. 140ff., and a deposition p. 142 "beyond what was strictly required" to empty out "any royal dignity or honour left in him."
44 William Shakespeare, Macbeth, Robert S. Miola, ed., Norton Critical Editions, London, W.W. Norton & Co, Inc., 2004.

Pluck their hearts from them. Not today, O Lord, 280
O not today, think not upon the fault
My father made in compassing the crown.
I Richard's body have interrèd new,
And on it have bestowed more contrite tears
Than from it issued forcèd drops of blood.

Henry V is concerned with two kinds of dangerous reckoning here: that his troops miscount the opponents who outnumber them, and be reduced into fear and that his efforts to acquit the reckoning of his father's "fault" not be counted[45]. The terms in which Henry understands the reckoning are those of liquid, "contrite tears" to repay with addition "forcèd drops of blood" from "Richard's body" that Henry V has "interrèd new", sacred rituals paid as required by the tavern bill of usurpation.

Tavernisation: Francis, Harry and Richard

However, the tavern itself is about productive movement, call and response rather than repetitive circular, or destructive activities and language: the vintner echoes Francis' amazement as the tavern gears grind to a halt: "What standest thou still and hear'st such a / calling? Look to the guests within." (*1 Henry IV*, 2.4, 79). Prince Harry however is about stopping the movement through time and space. When the vinter asks if he should let Falstaff and friends enter (*1 Henry IV,* 2.4, 80-8), Prince Harry answers "Let them alone awhile and then open the door." (*1 Henry IV,* 2.4, 82). This parodic stretching of the delay and immediacy fictions of tavern time prefaces the fictional time and identities of the judgement scenarios then manipulated by Prince Harry and Falstaff (*1 Henry IV,* 2.4, 366-468). But in the repetition of the tavern scene at the same point in *2 Henry IV,* 2.4, Francis and his fellow drawer are in on the time "anon" and action as Prince Harry and Poins unsuccessfully appropriate the identity of the drawers to trick Falstaff. As Falstaff calls for "some sack, Francis" (*2 Henry IV*, 2.4, 284) as he does in *1 Henry IV,* 2.4, 110-121, their imitiation of Francis' delayed and deferred tavern time, 'Anon, anon, Sir!' (*2 Henry IV*, 2.4, 285) is immediately recognized as false by Falstaff as the tricks dissolve into vituperation and denunciation (*2 Henry IV*, 2.4, 286-91):

Falstaff: Ha? A bastard son of the King's—And art thou not
Poins his brother?

45 Line Cottegnies, *op. cit.*, pp. 428-429.

Prince: Why, thou globe of sinful continents, what a life thou dost lead?
Falstaff: A better than thou: I am a gentleman, thou art a drawer.
Prince: Very true, sir, and I come to draw you out by the ears.

This is the only point in any Shakespeare play where characters in disguise are immediately recognized[46] just as are the attempts to interfere with the flow of time and liquids in front of an audience used to drinking and patronising the taverns surrounding the theatres.

There is a certain irony in these efforts to disorder the timely order of the otherwise disorderly tavern by Prince Harry whose reign, like that of his father, will be relatively short (both just over ten years). Rather than an audience reassuringly amused by the humiliation of the lowest in their robotic tasks,[47] these scenes may also contribute to their disturbing experience of a world turned upside down. Repetitive tasks and language and those who perform them have a ritual and incantatory quality. The drawers and their "Anon, anon!" practice the langage and activity which characterises the taverns. As such they inhabit an order within which the embodied and appetitive individual can find fullest expression, beyond the repression of urban conventions and decorum, a certain freedom familiar to an audience likely drinking in the theatre and certainly drinking in its immediate environs. Thus, the audience's probable sympathy with Francis' increasingly desperate "Anon! Anon!" as the contradictory calls of Prince Harry and Edward Poins shuttle him into paralysis (*1 Henry IV*, 2.4,1-99). Prince Harry's sneering identification of Francis with an "o'clock" mechanism, his repetitive cries less varied than a parrot (*1 Henry IV*, 2.4, 90-99) resonates with Richard's self-identification with a "jack'o'the clock" in *Richard II*, 5.5 , 39-62 ff:

Nor I nor any man but man is
With nothing shall be pleased till he be eased
With being nothing. (Music)
Music do I hear?
Ha, ha, keep time! How sour sweet music is
When time is broke and no proportion kept!
So is it in the music of men's lives.
And here have I the daintiness of ear
To check time broke in a disordered string,
But for the concord of my state and time
Had not an ear to hear my true time broke.
I wasted time, and now doth Time waste me;

46 James C. Bulman, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 274, note to line 285.
47 Stephen Greenblatt, *op. cit.*, pp. 296-8.

For now hath Time made me his numbr'ing clock.
My thoughts are minutes, and with sighs they jar
Their watches on unto mine eyes, the outward watch,
Whereto my finger, like a dial's point,
Is pointing still, in cleansing them from tears.
Now, sir, the sound that tells what hour it is
Are clamorous groans that strike upon my heart,
Which is the bell. So sighs, and tears, and groans
Show minutes, times, and hours. But my time
Runs posting on in Bolingbroke's proud joy,
While I stand fooling here, his jack o'the clock.

Richard's conflation of himself with the clock is indeed linked with the primordial clock of Death, then pronounced to rhyme with debt. Indeed death and debt merge in the distorted finances of the sacred and usurper kingship. Both of these coincide with the tavern world of bills and thievery. Richard's inhabiting of the clock mechanism prefaces his enactment of death when he refuses the food offered by his keeper and kills servants in the struggle that ends in his own murder (*Richard II*, 5.5, 95-119).

When Prince Harry identifies Francis with the clock, the match that he has made is with his own descent from Adam, and the midnight hour of thievery with the reckoning of original sin. But the language and design of his cruel humiliation of Francis refracts the mechanism of usurpation from which he cannot yet escape. Prince Harry's is the heritage of the stolen crown, rooted in the sin of Adam, where the violation of the sacred repeats its reckoning in parody, rebellion, treachery, riot, and disease (*1 Henry IV*, 2.4, 84-99).[48]

Poins: Anon, anon, sir!
Prince: Sirrah, Falstaff and the rest of the thieves are at the door. Shall we be merry?
Poins: As merry as crickets, my lad. But hark ye, what cunning match have you made with this jest of the drawer? Come, what's the issue?
Prince: I am now of all humours that have showed themselves humours since the old days of Goodman Adam to the pupil age of this present twelve o'clock at midnight.
What o'clock, Francis?
Francis: Anon, anon, sir. [Exit]

48 cf. "…the fault / My father made in compassing the crown." *Henry V*, 4.1, 280-281).

> Prince:That ever this fellow should have fewer words
> than a parrot, and yet the son of a woman! His industry
> is upstairs and downstairs, his eloquence the parcel of a
> reckoning.

The more that Harry tries to minimise and empty out the structure of time and reckoning in the parodic modes of the tavern, the more that structure and its language of liquefaction, debt and disease is reasserted.

In the automatism of Francis' squawking an undefined immediacy of service "upstairs and downstairs", the drawer performs the up and down movement of Richard's fatal imagery (*Richard II*, 4.1, 184-189):

> Now is this golden crown like a deep well
> That owes two buckets, filling one another,
> The emptier ever dancing in the air,
> The other down, unseen,and full of water.
> That bucket down and full of tears am I,
> Drinking my griefs while you mount up on high.

Similarly, the twists and turns of power (*1 Henry IV*, 2.4, 4-31) in the tavern interfere with the relationship of server and served. Prince Harry's "humility", emmeshed in his "leash of drawers" and the practices of "drinking deep" and breathing "in your watering" brings his kingship low rather than high (*1 Henry IV*, 2.4). In humiliating his "brother", the fragile "puny drawer" Francis to "drive away the time", Prince Harry paradoxically acts out the implacable contamination of his own royal status where he can "never leave calling" for Richard's sacred kingship (*1 Henry IV*, 2.4, 5, 13-14, 20-25, 27-31):

> Prince: I have sounded the very bass
> string of humility. Sirrah, I am sworn brother to a leash
> of drawers and can call them all by their Christian
> names, as Tom, Dick and Francis….
> and when I am king of England I shall command
> all the good lads in Eastcheap….
> But, sweet Ned –
> To sweeten which name of Ned I give thee this
> pennyworth of sugar, clapped even now into my hand
> by an underskinker, one that never spake other English
> in his life than "Eight shillings and six pence", and "You
> are welcome", with this shrill addition "Anon, anon, sir!"…
> to drive away the time till Falstaff come,

> I prithee, do thou stand in some by-room, while
> I question my puny drawer to what end he gave me the
> sugar, and do thou never leave calling "Francis!", that
> his tale to me may be nothing but "Anon"…

Henry's "bass string of humility" sounds the note of his kingship as he witnesses his subjects' practice of drinking deep and breathing. Francis's "tale to me may be nothing but 'Anon'" but echoes Richard's "And nothing can we call our own but death….For God's sake let us sit upon the ground / And tell sad stories of the death of kings…." (*Richard II*, 3.2, 152, 155-6, 144-177). Death, "…the antic sits/Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp, / Allowing him a breath, a little scene/ To monarchize,…" (*Richard II*, 3.2, 162-5). His father's usurpation of Richard's kingdom liquefies the world but excludes the commonality of drinking and breathing together. Scroop has told Richard that it is "Like an unseasonable stormy day / Which makes the silver rivers drown their shores / As if the world were all dissolved to tears,…" (*Richard II*, 3.2, 106-108). Paradoxically this dissolution commanded by Bolingbroke [cf. above, name as "turbulent brook"]] is both flood and weapon " covering your fearful land / With hard bright steel and hearts harder than steel." (*Richard II*, 3.2, 110-11). Richard's response culminating in a list common appetites and emotions results in a subtractive valuation of kingship : "I live with bread like you, feel want, / Taste grief, need friends. Subjected thus / How can you say to me I am a king?" (*Richard II*, 175-7). Where Prince Harry seems to dominate the drinking rituals and transactions, these reflect a kingdom where authority is questioned into the ironic emptiness of triumph and an irremediable dissolution.

Conclusion

As the two parts of Shakespeare's Henry the Fourth plays invite us into the primordial London of his era via the tavern, we encounter disturbances and tensions that are generative rather than destructive. These plays go beyond considering the nature of kingship and usurpation to reflecting on the terms in which we encounter human nature itself.[49] Via these plays and their apparently contradictory relationships and settings, we experience the commonality of history and tragedy, court and tavern, beggar and king. If we can then better grasp the shaping codes of what seems to be random and transgressive, we can locate reparative spaces in the ruined and violent cities of our own era.

49 John Gillies, *op. cit.*, pp. 399-404.