

Truth and Perspective:
Holinshed's Contribution to Shakespeare's Artistic Method

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William Shakespeare's first tetralogy represents his first effort to write history plays. In the 1580s, during the creation of the *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III*, Shakespeare relied on the aid of the available histories such as Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* and Edward Hall's *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York*. While the latter helped Shakespeare to develop a large portion of 2 *Henry VI*, Holinshed's *Chronicles* is the history which helped Shakespeare formulate his artistic method.

The goal of Holinshed's *Chronicles* was to create a narrative history of England by which to educate the public. The *Chronicles* seemed to be popular when it was published, but has since lost most of its readership, as Annabel Patterson argues that contemporary "knowledge of the *Chronicles* is merely ancillary to Shakespeare studies, since they were merely the raw material on which genius drew" (Patterson 154). While some critics, such as Michael Taylor, see the first tetralogy as subversive and anti-establishment, others, such as Donald Neil Friesner, see Shakespeare as a conservative, who supported monarchical government. Each of these viewpoints can be defended with examples from the plays, so neither are fully convincing. Shakespeare sought to bring the history of England to the public by educating and providing "many an Englishman with his only knowledge of medieval history" (Taylor 18). Shakespeare's goal in writing these plays was not as specific as either Taylor or Friesner suggest.

Of course, Shakespeare's intent in his early history plays is irrecoverable, in part because there is not a chorus to voice his opinion as there is in his later history play, *Henry V*, which Shakespeare uses to divulge his views of Henry V. Due to the lack of authorial voice, the true meaning behind his early history plays has been widely debated.

The critics who consider the first tetralogy a subversive critique of the English monarchy, and especially that of the late sixteenth century, draw comparisons between the action on the stage and the workings of the Elizabethan court. In “Emergent Shakespeare and the Politics of Protest”, Chris Fitter goes into great detail comparing the characters of 2 *Henry VI* and those in Queen Elizabeth’s court. Fitter believes that “the subtext of 2 *Henry VI*...seethes with topical political angers, brazenly foregrounds resistance theory, and indicts the leading statesman at the court of Elizabeth” (Fitter 130). He declares that “Shakespeare had found a period in the *Chronicles* which neatly paralleled much in contemporary national crises” (Fitter 131) and, through the use of Holinshed’s work, he subverted and criticized the actions of the government. “Many in the earliest...audiences of 2 *Henry VI*,” Fitter argues, “must have found their own contemporary grievances, military, political, and economic, channelled with eloquent anger into the play” (Fitter 153). This method of criticism was not lost over the years; in 1987, the English Shakespeare Company, or ESC, performed a “self-styled radical production” (Martin 91) of 3 *Henry VI* in which June Watson played Queen Margaret as a critical representation of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher: “Faced with [Thatcher’s] open contempt for the performing arts and her government’s funding cuts, [the ESC] could not resist satirizing the she-warrior of the Falklands through Margaret of Anjou” (Martin 91). Similarly, in his own time, Shakespeare’s criticism of his contemporary British court caused many critics and performers to interpret him as a subversive playwright.

“Shakespeare’s career opened...with a political critique and a public pessimism” (Fitter 153); Fitter argues that Shakespeare was unhappy with government actions and censorship, so he wrote a play that was able to mask its criticism with a *façade* of

nationalism and historical education. In his introduction to the Oxford World's Classics edition of *1 Henry VI*, Taylor writes that "dissent, criticism and disrespect...permeate the *Henry VI* plays" (29). The first tetralogy's "stance towards official history, unlike nearly all other history plays of the time, is a questioning, complicating one, critical, subversive, and ironic" (Taylor 25). It appears, then, that Shakespeare is taking the history chronicles and moulding them to his purpose. Taylor believes that Shakespeare chose certain sections of the chronicles that dealt with the machinations of the courtiers to suit their personal ends in an attempt to criticize the current Elizabethan monarchy, as well as the timeless inability of men to overcome their own greed and lust for power.

While some critics see Shakespeare's first tetralogy as subversive, others portray him as a conservative monarchist writing his history plays as nationalist propaganda for Elizabethan England. Even Fitter notes that "on its surface, the work wears the appearance of a loyalist drama, fitting topical realities into a pattern of orthodox...political loyalties, royalist and hierarchical" (Fitter 129). Shakespeare displays the "horrors loosed by dynastic destabilization and the brutality of popular revolt" (Fitter 130), which can be interpreted as Shakespeare's attempt to condemn social uprising and support an "imperiled Elizabeth" (Fitter 130). Neil Friesner argues that "Shakespeare's involvement with his milieu was always of a conservative nature, especially in matters political and religious" (170); therefore, according to Friesner, Shakespeare is not producing subversive plays condoning rebellion, but condemning Cade's rebellion and the ambition of courtiers. Shakespeare's alleged conservative monarchical views culminate in the final play of the tetralogy when "the conflict, woe, and ultimate chaos resulting from a breach of the divinely ordained order reach their height in the

Machiavellian portrait of Richard III” (Friesner 171). By establishing Richard as the “embodiment of all the political vices abhorred in a ruler” (Friesner 171), Shakespeare critiques any deviation from a strict monarchical system. Friesner writes that “Shakespeare’s conservative political philosophy appears in his first play, and can be found in every play of the canon up to and including the last” (Friesner 177). Shakespeare “broadens the scope of the Wars’ impact [on England], insisting on the destruction of community values at all levels of society” (Martin 48) due to the upheaval of lineage. The Yorkist claim to the throne, which exemplified what happens to society when proper lines of descent are disrupted, maintained contemporary relevance when Shakespeare was writing his early plays. Because of the fact that Queen Elizabeth I was “unmarried and childless, the succession was not determined, and there were natural fears that on her death civil war between the rival claimants might break out” (Warren 27). The historical situation had convinced many critics to assert that Shakespeare’s choice to write about the reign of Henry VI made Shakespeare a propagandist for the Tudor monarchy.

During the post-World War II era, the argument that Shakespeare was a royalist and supporter of monarchical governing re-emerged. E.M.W. Tillyard was the most influential critic of Shakespeare’s history plays in the early twentieth century and wrote *Shakespeare’s History Plays*. As Roger Warren points out in his introduction to *2 Henry VI*, Tillyard “interpreted [the first tetralogy] as presenting a providential view of history in which the Wars of the Roses were England’s bloody expiation of Henry IV’s crime in deposing an anointed king” (27). This ‘Tudor myth’ was propagated by the Tudors to justify the deposition of Richard III. Tillyard bases his reading of the tetralogy on this myth, and places Shakespeare in the position of propagandist for the Tudor dynasty:

The greatest bond uniting all four plays is the steady political theme: the theme of order and chaos, of proper political degree and civil war, of crime and punishment, of God's mercy finally tempering his justice, of the belief that such had been God's way with England. (Tillyard 200-201)

Shakespeare reinforces the idea that only God should appoint the king, and when a usurper is successful in taking the throne, he must be removed by God's servant. Tillyard believes that "Shakespeare is perfectly clear in making Richmond the emissary of God" (Tillyard 156). Throughout the course of the four plays, the problems that the house of Lancaster face result from its deviation from God's divine plan. This deviation results in loss of territory in France, rebellion in England, and full-scale civil war. Richmond is presented as divinely ordained to end the civil war and restore England to its national glory. Although a usurper himself, he is seen as a hero. "The main business of [*Richard III*] is to complete the national tetralogy and to display the working out of God's plan to restore England to prosperity" (Tillyard 199). Clearly, Tillyard supports the idea that Shakespeare is writing the first tetralogy to support the Tudors' divine right to the throne of England.

Since these plays can be read as both supporting and subverting the monarchical system, neither reading represents Shakespeare's clear intentions in writing them. Moreover, Shakespeare's true intentions are irrecoverable. The diverse readings of the plays may have developed out of the multiple perspectives in the plays, which Shakespeare uses to question the univocal representation of history. In Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Shakespeare found a multivocality that would influence his own writing and enable him to question the univocality of many contemporary history chronicles.

Patterson is responsible for the idea that Shakespeare derives his use of multiple perspectives from Holinshed. Patterson writes that “Holinshed in his preface to the reader...gave notice that he had ‘rather chosen to shew diversitie’ of opinion among his predecessors than ‘by over-ruling them...to frame them to agree to [his] liking’” (35). This diversity allowed Holinshed to create a historical narrative that did not limit itself to one opinion, allowing for a more fully developed, even contradictory, description of history. Because Holinshed was the editor of a vast quantity of historical material, he was responsible for taking multiple accounts, sometimes of the same event, and formulating them into a narrative. Indeed, “it is partly this trust in eyewitness testimony that...gives the Chronicles their unique and often eccentric flavour. The effect is of many different representatives of the ‘I’ addressing the reader directly” (Patterson 38). By using more than one person to give an account of a certain event, presenting multiple perspectives, Holinshed created a fuller picture of history and enabled a broader understanding of events in English history. Patterson writes that “given the nature of post-Reformation experience...a national history should not and could not be univocal, but must shoulder the responsibility of representing diversity of opinion” (7), which is why Holinshed sought multiple perspectives to develop his *Chronicles*. However, in formulating a history from multiple perspectives, Holinshed’s work lacked a cohesive structure. Robert Adger Law writes that “Because Holinshed’s narrative is loosely constructed...Shakespeare naturally would feel constrained to unify the chronicler’s account” (Law 689), giving Shakespeare’s plays a more cohesive structure. Shakespeare adopts Holinshed’s use of multiple perspectives and refines it to produce a more cohesive account of history that questions univocality.

The first tetralogy exemplifies Shakespeare's use of multiple perspectives. From what is arguably his first play, *1 Henry VI*, Shakespeare uses multiple perspectives to drive the plot. Throughout the play, he draws attention to the disputes between Gloucester and Winchester, the animosity between York and Somerset, and the ignorance of Henry VI to the multiple motives of the members of his court. This idea of multiple perspectives is carried into the next play, *2 Henry VI*, in which the perspectives of the different members of the court become apparent through their motivations. Queen Margaret, the Dukes of Buckingham, Suffolk, Somerset, and York, and Cardinal Beaufort scheme to murder the Duke of Gloucester, yet they all have their own motivations for, and therefore perspectives on, their actions. Shakespeare's multiple perspectives create a plot filled with courtly intrigue and double-dealing.

Patterson's concept that Shakespeare is writing a multi-vocal tetralogy can be seen in the way he correlates the use of truth with regards to each character's perspective. There are two forms of truth that develop over the course of the tetralogy. One form is a subjective truth, which the majority of the characters in the plays seem to adhere to. This form of truth can be appropriated and manipulated to fit with a character's perspective. The truth is derived mainly from a self-interested perspective on events. The second form of truth is absolute, the truth that exists for characters such as Henry, a form of truth that can be neither manipulated nor distorted for personal use, but always remains absolute. Throughout the first tetralogy, Shakespeare links truth and perspective together because perspectives and subjective truths are adopted to justify self-interest. Each character judges truth based upon his own perspective. While the characters in the play are not always truthful to their fellow characters, they are unable to lie to the audience which

often becomes privy to the inner machinations of characters such as the Duke of York or his Machiavellian son Richard. As the plays progress, the manipulation of subjective truths become more apparent. In *1 Henry VI* there is very little falsehood, but as the plot unfolds in *2 Henry VI* and many courtiers make attempts at sullyng the honour of Duke Humphrey, the truth becomes a tool for characters to manipulate. The characters seek to justify their actions in relation to their perspective. The correlation between truth and perspective links all four plays together thematically.

Holinshed's influence allowed Shakespeare to create psychologically complex characters who manipulate and convey subjective truth in a manner that coincides with their perspectives. Thus, Shakespeare presents three different ways in which truth is distorted by perspective. The manipulation of truth to convert the masses is the crassest and most obvious way in which subjective truth is used to fit with the perspective of certain characters. Jack Cade, the Duke of York, and others use subjective truth to convince fellow countrymen to adopt their perspectives. The manipulation of the masses leads to and sustains the civil war, about which Shakespeare is writing. The distortion of truth allows characters to create their own subjective truths to adhere to their own perspectives, and then impose those perspectives upon others. At a more psychological level, moreover, characters adopt perspectives that align with their self-interests. They may be able to hide their motivation from other characters on stage, but the audience learns their true purpose in soliloquies. Motivation will cause a character to adopt a subjective truth that fits with his perspective. Finally, a character who falls prey to his own propaganda and motivation will often become self-righteous. Characters believe their own perspective to the point that it begins to obstruct their access to truth, leading

them to become self-righteous, even self-deluded. The self-righteous no longer manipulate subjective truth to coincide with their perspective, because they simply conflate their perspective with truth. Henry VI remains an anomalous character because he does not manipulate truth to fit his perspective. A saintly figure, Henry believes in an absolute truth and remains uninvolved in the courtly intrigue. It is due to his uninvolvedness, or lack of self-interest, that Henry is able to distinguish absolute truth from a subjective perspective. He does not manipulate truth to fit his perspective because he does not need to deceive or manipulate anyone. By adopting Holinshed's method of multi-vocal writing, Shakespeare reveals the functioning of perspective itself. He is able to create some of the earliest psychologically complex characters in drama through his depiction of the correlation between truth and perspective. Shakespeare's first tetralogy lays the foundation for his future masterpieces, filled with complex characters with multiple perspectives.

Chapter I: Perspective in the Manipulation of the Masses

Many of Shakespeare's characters in the first tetralogy employ both propaganda and a subjective truth to convert the masses to believe their perspective. While propaganda was used by the English to further their ambitions in their war against France, as the need to manipulate others becomes more focused within England, characters such as Jack Cade and the Duke of York must use a combination of propaganda and subjective truth to convince their fellow countrymen to adhere to their perspectives.

In its original use in the seventeenth century, the word "propaganda" indicated the propagation of a particular doctrine; such was the function of the Congregation of Propaganda created by the Roman Catholic Church, for instance. Over the years, the word has found a new meaning. The *Oxford English Dictionary's* third definition of propaganda is the "systematic dissemination of information, especially in a biased or misleading way, in order to promote a political cause or point of view" (*OED* sb.3). This newer definition of propaganda is recognizable within the context of Shakespeare's first tetralogy, even though its first recorded occurrence is not until 1622. Shakespeare creates characters that use propaganda to convince their fellow countrymen that they must adhere to their "political cause or point of view", which is to say, their perspective. Even as the first play of the tetralogy begins, England is in the midst of the Hundred Years War in which the people of England have been led to believe that their kings have the right to the French throne. In *1 Henry VI*, Talbot is represented as a figure of English propaganda. As the "scourge of France" (*1 Henry VI* 2.3.14), Talbot is heralded as the one man who can defeat the French. His name becomes a rallying cry when the English are hard pressed in

battle. The soldiers yell “À Talbot” (*1 Henry VI* 2.1.39) as they retake the city of Orléans and defeat the French. By the end of the scene, the French are so afraid of the mere mention of Talbot that a soldier shouting his name scatters them. The unnamed soldier states: “The cry of ‘Talbot’ serves me for a sword” (*1 Henry VI* 2.1.81). When Talbot takes part in the battle, the English seem to fight harder, believing the English propaganda that Talbot will defeat the French; when he is killed in battle, all hope seems lost for the English and from that point onward they are systematically evicted from France.

Yet while many of the English seem to believe the propaganda, the legend of Talbot is also undercut throughout the play. When Talbot is brought before the Countess of Auvergne she is surprised by his small stature. English propaganda suggests that Talbot is “some Hercules, a second Hector”, but the Countess finds the “report [to be] fabulous and false” because Talbot is merely a “weak and writhled shrimp” (*1 Henry VI* 2.3.18-22). King Henry himself does not even recognize Talbot, his greatest warrior, when he is obliged to ask “is this the Lord Talbot, uncle Gloucester, / That hath so long been resident in France?” (*1 Henry VI* 3.4.13-14). While the propaganda seems to be wide-spread, Talbot fails to live up to his reputation and falls in battle against the French, unable to reclaim the territory for England. Although he is a fierce soldier, Talbot is used as a tool to inspire the hearts of the English soldiers as they continue what seems to be an unceasing war. This propaganda is accepted by both the French and the English, thereby initially unifying multiple perspectives.

One of the best examples of propaganda occurs in the Cade rebellion of *2 Henry VI*. Jack Cade is a simple clothier convinced by the Duke of York to start a peasant revolt

in Kent. York uses this uprising to “perceive the commons’ mind, / How they affect the house and claim of York” (2 *Henry VI* 3.1.374-375). Cade gathers a fair-sized army by using propaganda to convince them to join his side. By offering to bring a complete overhaul of the class structure of England, Cade gathers the lower-class workers to his cause, promising that “when I am king...there shall be no money, all shall eat and drink on my score, and I will apparel them all in one livery” (2 *Henry VI* 4.2.64-69). This speech merely attempts to rally the peasants to his cause, and, much like his other promises, it has no truth to it. His appeals to the commons become absurd when he says, “in England seven halfpenny loaves [will be] sold for a penny, the three-hooped pot shall have ten hoops, and I will make it felony to drink small beer” (2 *Henry VI* 4.2.60-62). When his claim to the throne is questioned by Stafford in scene two of act four, Cade recites the lineage of the Duke of York with a slight deviation to include his own parentage. Stafford asks Cade’s followers if they believe “this base drudge’s words / That speaks he knows not what” and all present answer “Ay, marry will we” (2 *Henry VI* 4.2.141-143). These lies, while not fooling the nobility such as Stafford, are not questioned by the commoners, who flock to Cade’s side. Cade’s lies have convinced the people to rise up, but his propaganda relies on perspective to succeed and to fully convince the masses, Cade must move away from the use of propaganda, and begin to use subjective truth to manipulate his targets.

From the perspective of the upper class, Cade’s ideas are absurd because he declares that those who “can write and read and cast account...[are] monstrous” (2 *Henry VI* 4.2.78-80); however, from the point of view of the lower classes the literate were indeed monstrous. The commons hated the literate because the only time they came into

contact with the written word was in a contract that was being used against them. Cade states that it is “a lamentable thing...that parchment, being scribbled o’er, should undo a man...for I did but seal once to a thing, and I was never mine own man since” (2 Henry VI 4.2.72-77). Literacy was thus used as a tool of oppression against the peasantry.

Therefore, the lower classes are more likely to adhere to Cade’s ideas because, from their perspective, his rebellion will directly benefit them. By stating that “all the realm shall be in common” (2 Henry VI 4.2.63) and by destroying all those who are literate, the lower class citizens could become the equals of the upper classes, and the class system would be erased. Cade’s use of subjective truth convinces because his perspective coincides with the desires of the masses, who seek justice, and not abuse, from the upper class. His only failing is that he relies upon those who are easily swayed. When Buckingham and Clifford confront the rebels in London, Clifford incites the name of Henry V to convert the masses away from Cade’s rebellion. After his death, Henry V’s name became a rallying cry for the English, as he had represented a noble and valiant king, both in battle and in politics. In this particular scene, the mob changes sides so many times that Cade asks, “was ever feather so lightly blown to and fro as this multitude?” (2 Henry VI 4.8.55-56). This passage exemplifies the peasants’ mindlessness and the ease with which they can be swayed. Cade is unable to compete with the older propaganda of loyalty to Henry V that has been drilled into the minds of the peasants, and is forced to flee and abandon his rebellion. Cade uses both propaganda and a manipulated subjective truth to convince the common citizens of England to follow his perspective. He promises things that the commons would naturally agree with, and looks to create a society that caters to their needs.

Cade's rebellion is only the precursor to the great civil war that York instigates through a further use of subjective truth. Before the Duke of York can claim the crown of England for himself, he has to spread the rumours of his lineal right to the throne. If York is to become king, he must convert the citizens of England to his perspective. Therefore, he begins to dispense his rumours. The first the audience hears of York's claim to the throne is through the voice of a commoner and occurs in the third scene of *2 Henry VI*, in which Peter Thump, the armourer's man, petitions "against [his] master Thomas Horner, for saying that the Duke of York was rightful heir to the crown" (*2 Henry VI* 1.3.27-29). This slight reference to the slow creeping of York's perspective may seem, at first, an insignificant rumour, but it is the first signal that York's plan is underway. But, as is seen during the Cade rebellion, the commoners are easily swayed to adopt a new perspective in support of York. His true challenge becomes the conversion of his fellow noblemen to assume his perspective. The first allies that York seeks are the Earls of Salisbury and Warwick. After inviting them for dinner, York truthfully describes his lineage, which causes the Nevilles to change their perspective and become "the first that shall salute our rightful sovereign" (*2 Henry VI* 2.2.60-61). As the rumours of York's right to the throne spread, more and more people join the Yorkists in their claim to the throne, because York's claim is the better of the two. The rumours spread so profusely that by *3 Henry VI* even King Henry is questioning his own claim to the crown. After being confronted by York and Warwick about his right to be king, Henry says in an aside, "I know not what to say, my title's weak" (*3 Henry VI* 1.1.135). Once Henry has been swayed to view his own reign from York's perspective, all is lost for the Lancastrians. Moments later, Exeter converts his perspective to that of the Yorkists, conceding "His [York's] is the right" (3

Henry VI 1.1.149). York's use of a subjective truth spreads his perspective, allowing him to gain enough support for a civil war.

Perspective finds its political expression in civil war, with different sides taking different perspectives on the same events and manipulating them to fit their ends. Each side uses both propaganda and the distortion of subjective truth to stir up rebellion for their cause. Those with vested interests in the civil war manipulate the truth or propagate their views so that they are able to gain a following, but once the propaganda is no longer able to change the minds of certain members of society, then civil war and violence is the next step in realizing their perspective. By *3 Henry VI*, the opportunity for peaceful manipulation is over, and the Yorkists have resorted to violence to prove their point. This is the point at which the process of perspective leading to action is reversed. Characters begin to adopt perspectives that justify their actions within the civil war. In the first scene of act two, after the untimely death of the Duke of York at Wakefield, Warwick pronounces that

King of England [Edward] shalt be proclaimed

In every borough as we pass along,

And he that throws not up his cap for joy

Shall for the fault make forfeit of his head. (*3 Henry VI* 2.1.194-197)

The manipulation of the masses is discarded as the Yorkists are no longer using it to persuade people to their cause, but merely using threats and force, while maintaining their same version of events. This in turn leads to a schism in society that forces men into perspectives that they would not normally adhere to. An example of this is the battle at Towton in act two when Henry witnesses the heartrending scene in which a son kills his

father and a father kills his own son. When the first son realizes that he has slain his father he recounts that “from London by the King was I pressed forth. / My father, being the Earl of Warwick’s man, / Came on the part of York, pressed by his master” (*3 Henry VI* 2.5.64-66). Martin’s note on the text states that “pressed” means “forced to enlist. An issue of life and death for many Elizabethan spectators” (Martin 216). These men did not choose to adopt a certain perspective and kill their own relatives, but have been forced to fight for a cause they do not believe in, becoming a “piteous spectacle [during] bloody times” (*3 Henry VI* 2.5.73). By the time that perspective breaks into civil war, propaganda is no longer persuading citizens to its cause through the manipulation of truth, but the use of force; therefore threats become a more useful manipulation of truth.

Shakespeare enables his characters to manipulate subjective truth in order to convince others to adopt their perspectives. While the name of Talbot as English propaganda is useful for a time, by placing all their faith in one man the English falter when he is slain in battle. Cade’s manipulation of the peasantry through propaganda and subjective truth works well because they are so easily swayed to his perspective, but due to this very fact the commons are converted back to loyalty to Henry through the use of older English propaganda. York succeeds in propagating his perspective and unleashes a civil war upon England, but once the manipulation of truth has no use for the Yorkists, they reject argumentation and resort to violence to reach their ends.

Chapter II: Perspective in Self-Motivation

Not only do characters promulgate their perspectives to manipulate others, they also adopt perspectives, manipulating themselves and manipulating truth. Perspectives are adopted to justify motivation. A character will often distort the truth to fit his or her point of view because of his motivation to achieve his goals, adopting a certain perspective to fit his motivation. Shakespeare uses a character's historical perspective to provide that character's motivation and Shakespeare's psychologically complex characters use that motivation to create their own subjective truths within their perspectives. Throughout the first tetralogy truth is manipulated to fit the motivations of the person who is using it. Alternatively, he or she will adopt a version of subjective truth according to his or her motives or take half-truths and manipulate them to fit his or her perspective.

The play that deals most heavily with the effect of motivation on truth is *2 Henry VI*, a play filled with courtly intrigue and false testimonies. A large portion of the play's rising action revolves around Duke Humphrey of Gloucester, the Lord Protector of England. Many of the courtiers wish to see him deposed and use deception and half-truths to attain their goal. The Duke of Suffolk, for instance, manipulates the king to further his ambitions. In the final scene of *1 Henry VI*, Suffolk convinces the king to annul his betrothal to the Earl of Armagnac's daughter and to take the hand of Margaret of Anjou, but he has a hidden agenda, revealed to the audience in the last words of the play: "Margaret shall now be queen, and rule the King; / But I will rule both her, the King, and realm" (*1 Henry VI* 5.6.107-108). However, the Duke of Gloucester stands in the way of Suffolk's plans; therefore Suffolk goes to great lengths to slander Gloucester's

name before the king and fellow courtiers. Speaking before the king, Suffolk claims that, since Gloucester has been Lord Protector,

The commonwealth hath daily run to wrack,
The Dauphin hath prevailed beyond the seas,
And all the peers and nobles of the realm
Have been as bondmen to thy [Gloucester's] sovereignty.

(2 *Henry VI* 1.3.125-128)

These accusations are misleading half-truths. While Gloucester was indeed Lord Protector, Suffolk himself is the reason that the Dauphin has the duchies of Anjou and Maine in his possession. Throughout the play Suffolk attempts to persuade King Henry that Duke Humphrey is over-ambitious, “a man / Unsounded yet, and full of deep deceit” (2 *Henry VI* 3.1.56-57) who must be stopped, but his attempts are unable to sway Henry, who has a great affection towards his uncle. Failing to convince Henry, Suffolk has the Duke murdered. Shakespeare uses Suffolk to demonstrate the exploitation of subjective truth, which Suffolk manipulates to fit his motivations. Suffolk adopts a perspective that allows him to use half-truths to defame a man to advance his machinations.

Suffolk's illicit relationship with Margaret influences her perspective, motivating her to adhere to his perspective and to slander the Duke of Gloucester. Shakespeare invents the relationship between Margaret and the Duke of Suffolk; Holinshed makes no mention of an affair. However, this fictive relationship does help motivate Margaret's dislike of the Duke of Gloucester and allows her to take on the perspective of her lover, the Duke of Suffolk. Early in the play, even before she confronts Duke Humphrey, she accuses him of selling land in France and becomes the first to threaten his life. She uses

her proximity to the king to her advantage, speaking ill of Gloucester at every opportunity. Speaking to Henry, she says

Can you not see, or will ye not observe,
 The strangeness of his altered countenance?
 With what majesty he bears himself,
 How insolent of late he is become,
 How proud, how peremptory, and unlike himself. (2 *Henry VI* 3.1.4-8)

Her accusations are followed by another lie, meant to sway Henry to believe her intentions are pure: “the reverent care I bear unto my lord / Made me collect these dangers in the Duke” (2 *Henry VI* 3.1.34-35). She attempts to manipulate Henry into thinking that her motivation lies in his safety, but she shares a motive with Suffolk: their relationship motivates both of them to have Gloucester eliminated. Margaret no longer uses half-truths as Suffolk did, and her motivation causes her to manipulate subjective truth into lies as she attempts to persuade Henry to rid himself of the aid of the Duke of Gloucester.

From the outset of the first tetralogy, Cardinal Beaufort and the Duke of Gloucester fight. The animosity between them is witnessed from the first scene of *1 Henry VI* until their deaths in *2 Henry VI*. Although it is remarked in passing that Cardinal Beaufort is an “arrogant...[and] haughty prelate” (*1 Henry VI* 1.3.23), Shakespeare does not demonstrate this until *2 Henry VI*, when Beaufort begins to slander Gloucester. A man of the cloth, the Cardinal should be an exemplary character in the plays, but, corrupt and ambitious, Beaufort is willing to lie to achieve his goals. Beaufort insinuates that Gloucester is only upset with the king’s marriage to Margaret of Anjou

because Gloucester “is the next of blood / And heir apparent to the English crown” (2 *Henry VI* 1.1.150-151). Beaufort wishes to convince the other courtiers that Gloucester is unfit for the position of Lord Protector because, as Somerset points out, “if Gloucester be displaced, [Beaufort will] be Protector” (2 *Henry VI* 1.1.176). Beaufort’s lies reveal his ambitious motives and self-interest, and the other noblemen take note, but this does not stop him from continuously lying about the Duke of Gloucester. Only two scenes later, he defames Gloucester to his face, saying “the commons hast thou racked, the clergy’s bags / Are lank and lean with thy extortions” (2 *Henry VI* 1.3.129-130). While these allegations sound more convincingly to be the crimes of a priest than those of a politician, they may also be half-truths that Beaufort is manipulating. While the clergy’s coffers would be much more easily emptied by a high-ranking man of the church than they would by a government official, Gloucester is in the midst of funding a war and may have increased taxation. Beaufort may be using Gloucester as a scapegoat to take the blame for crimes that he himself has committed, or he may be using these half-truths as a way to seem more convincing in his manipulation. Cardinal Beaufort’s lies compound each other and with the final addition of the weight of murder upon his conscience, Beaufort goes mad. In the throes of madness, he implicates himself in the murder of Gloucester: “bring me unto my trial when you will. / Died [Gloucester] not in his bed?..O torture me no more, I will confess” (2 *Henry VI* 3.3.8-11). However, while he confesses that he was a conspirator in the murder of the Duke of Gloucester, he damningly fails to seek absolution. Beaufort uses a combination of lies and half-truths to appear more convincing. His willingness to lie to achieve his motives exemplifies his attempt to

convince others to adopt his perspective. If other characters begin to believe Beaufort's lies and half-truths, they will begin to adhere to his perspective.

Duke Humphrey himself is an interesting character with regards to the relationship between motivation and truth. Throughout the plays he seems to use absolute truth to further his perspective, but he does not manipulate it. Gloucester merely allows the truth to speak. Upon returning to the stage after facing an onslaught of slanderous comments from his fellow noblemen, Gloucester asks that truth be his only witness against the claims of his peers;

As for your spiteful false objections,

Prove them, and I lie open to the law.

But God in mercy so deal with my soul

As I in duty love my King and country. (2 *Henry VI* 1.3.156-159)

Gloucester does not manipulate truth to fit his motivation; on the contrary, he relies on it. Again in act three, as he is being prosecuted for his failures as Protector of the Realm, Gloucester turns to the truth to validate his motivation. For every wrong that the other courtiers accuse him of, he answers with truth, saying he is faultless in these crimes and has done all he can for the good of England. Frustrated with the exaggerated claims against him and the state of the court, he denounces at length the insubordination of his peers and each of their motivations:

Beaufort's red sparkling eyes blab his heart's malice,

And Suffolk's cloudy brow his stormy hate;

Sharp Buckingham unburdens with his tongue

The envious load that lies upon his heart;

And dogged York that reaches at the moon,
 Whose overweening arm I have plucked back,
 By false accuse doth level at my life.
 And you, my sovereign lady, with the rest,
 Causeless have laid disgraces on my head,
 And with your best endeavour have stirred up
 My liefest liege to be mine enemy.
 Ay, all of you have laid your heads together –
 Myself had notice of your conventicles –
 And all to make away my guiltless life.
 I shall not want false witness to condemn me,

Nor store of treasons to augment my guilt. (2 Henry VI 3.1.154-169)

Gloucester speaks only truth to justify his actions and clear his name. Because he remains truthful, Shakespeare allows him to perceive the manipulation of half-truths and draw out the motivations of other characters in the play. He is able to see through the lies and manipulations of each nobleman, from his perspective as something of an outsider within the court. He exemplifies this trait in an earlier scene when he sees through the deception of the blind man being healed, telling him that “if thou hadst been born blind, / Thou mightst as well have known our names as thus / To name the several colours we do wear” (2 Henry VI 2.1.124-126). Gloucester, as one of the few honest characters in 2 Henry VI, is gifted with the ability to see through deception and falsehood to interpret the true motivations of his fellow characters.

Shakespeare's characters manipulate subjective truth so that they can advance their ambitions. Truth is distorted to adhere to perspective throughout the plays as characters like the Duke of Suffolk, Cardinal Beaufort, and Margaret of Anjou manipulate half-truths and use lies to their advantage. Duke Humphrey of Gloucester seems almost alone in remaining truthful, which is perhaps why Shakespeare grants him the ability to see through the falsehood of his fellow courtiers and discover their motivations. However, as *2 Henry VI* ends and civil war breaks out in England, each character's motivation is known to all by the side that he chooses in the war. Characters are relying less on the manipulation of a subjective truth because there is less of a need for subtlety in a civil war. Deception becomes obsolete.

Chapter III: Perspective in Self-Righteousness

While some characters resort to lies in an attempt to convert others to their perspectives, other characters adopt half-truths that adhere to their perspectives and manipulate them to convince others. However, because such characters have manipulated the truth so often, it not only begins to convince others, but it also convinces the characters who are manipulating the truth, leading them to believe their own perspective. As characters manipulate subjective truth over the course of the first tetralogy, they begin to believe their own machinations. Their propaganda becomes not an attempt to manipulate truth to fit their perspectives, but their absolute truth within their perspective. Shakespeare creates characters who have fallen prey to their delusions of grandeur and only see their own perspective as absolute truth, no longer manipulating it, but truly living and believing it.

Religion, in particular, threatens to make people self-righteous. Believing oneself to have been chosen by God leads to a sense of self-importance. Shakespeare uses Joan of Arc to display this religious self-righteousness in *1 Henry VI*. Joan begins the play as a modest shepherdess who has come to plead with the Dauphin to listen to the message she believes is divinely inspired. Her message from the Virgin Mary “willed me to leave my base vocation / And free my country from calamity” (*1 Henry VI* 1.2.80-81). As she begins to accomplish her goals in battle and help the French gain back territory from the English, however, she becomes boastful and arrogant. Her achievements reinforce her sense of being chosen by God and result in her becoming self-righteous. Her self-delusion is constantly reinforced by her fellow Frenchmen. Charles the Dauphin calls her a “divinest creature, Astraea’s daughter” (*1 Henry VI* 1.7.4) reinforcing the sense that she

is holy and spiritual, almost otherworldly. The Duke of Alençon says to her that “we’ll set thy statue in some holy place / And have thee revered like a blessed saint” (*1 Henry VI* 3.3.14-15) making her a saint to be prayed to. The compliments and praise that Joan of Arc receives from her countrymen reinforce her sense of self-righteousness, making her appear delusional with regards to her actual upbringing. Though she admits to being “by birth a shepherd’s daughter” (*1 Henry VI* 1.2.72), by the end of *1 Henry VI* she is claiming that she is

Not one begotten of a shepherd swain,
But issued from the progeny of kings;
Virtuous and holy, chosen from above
By inspiration of celestial grace
To work exceeding miracles on earth. (*1 Henry VI* 5.5.37-41)

When faced with her own father, she says she does not know the man and has never been a shepherdess, which is obviously false. As an English writer, Shakespeare may well harbour animosity towards the historical figure of Joan of Arc and uses her as a figure of self-righteous delusion and insanity. Joan is obviously not chosen by God to free the French because she fails, is captured, and is burnt at the stake. Joan has manipulated truth to the extent that she believes it whole-heartedly and it becomes her entire perspective.

Social status can make people believe that they are better than those surrounding them, leading them to become self-righteous. In *2 Henry VI*, the Duchess of Gloucester becomes self-righteous as she sees herself deserving of a higher status than she currently has, and her ambitious nature leads her to believe that she deserves to be queen.

Immediately, in her first scene, she attempts to convince her husband, Humphrey Duke of

Gloucester, to “put forth thy hand, reach at the glorious gold” (2 *Henry VI* 1.2.11) that is, England’s crown. She believes that they are better than all their countrymen and should “both together lift our heads to heaven / And never more abase our sight so low / As to vouchsafe one glance unto the ground” (2 *Henry VI* 1.2.14-16) as if they were reigning. She wishes to rule so much that she has convinced herself that it is her right and that she deserves to be the queen. Her self-delusion puts her in a constant state of self-righteousness, and her plans encompass both her waking and sleeping hours. She informs Duke Humphrey of a dream she had in which “I sat in seat of majesty...in that chair where kings and queens are crowned, / Where Henry and Dame Margaret kneeled to me, / And on my head did set the diadem” (2 *Henry VI* 1.2.36-40). She not only believes that she is of a higher social standing, but she also carries herself in that manner. Queen Margaret notes that “she sweeps it through the court with troops of ladies / More like an empress than Duke Humphrey’s wife. / Strangers in court do take her for the queen” (2 *Henry VI* 1.3.78-80). But, much like Joan of Arc, the Duchess of Gloucester falls through ambition and self-righteousness. In attempting to present herself as more than she is, the Duchess attracts the animosity of other courtiers, and especially Queen Margaret, because the Duchess is attempting to usurp her position. The Duchess becomes ensnared in a medieval sting operation and is banished from England for the remainder of her life. In the end she wishes for “death, at whose name I oft have been afeard, / Because I wished this world eternity” (2 *Henry VI* 2.4.90-91). The Duchess of Gloucester’s ambition results in her becoming self-righteous, believing that she is better than her fellow countrymen and deserves to be the queen. Her perspective becomes a view in which she is of a higher social status than her peers, and results in a delusional self-righteousness.

The Duke of York is one of Shakespeare's greatest creations in the first tetralogy. Ambitious and self-deluded, York is a great example of a man who falls prey to his own manipulation of subjective truth. In his attempts to overthrow the Lancastrian family and take the throne for himself, York becomes a believer of his own machinations. After learning his lineage and right to the throne from his uncle Edmund Mortimer in *1 Henry VI*, York begins to manipulate the truth to adhere to his perspective. As soon as *2 Henry VI* begins, York formulates a plan in which he can regain his rightful crown. In a soliloquy in the first scene, York expresses his sadness over the loss of Maine and Anjou, stating that he is the only one who truly lost because that territory was rightfully his. In this scene the audience witnesses the beginnings of York's self-delusion and the blossoming of his self-righteousness. Believing England rightfully his, York convinces himself of his lineage and right to the throne. When he invites the Nevilles for dinner so that he can convince them of his lineage, he states that he has the rightful "title, which is infallible, to England's crown" (*2 Henry VI* 2.2.4-5). His belief that his right is infallible signifies that he has fully given himself to believing his own subjective truth.

York's idea that he is more worthy than Henry to be king of England reinforces his self-righteousness. In the final act of *2 Henry VI*, York returns from Ireland, and along the way convinces himself of his worth. Firstly, he states, "I am far better born than is the King, / More like a king, more kingly in my thoughts" (*2 Henry VI* 5.1.28-29), but this statement is made in an aside, which would imply that he is attempting to convince himself. Hoping that his beliefs are well-founded, York makes his opinions known to his fellow noblemen. Berating Henry, York says:

Thou art not king,

Not fit to govern and rule multitudes...

That head of thine doth not become a crown;

Thy hand is made to grasp a palmer's staff,

And not to grace an awful princely sceptre.

That gold must round engird these brows of mine,

Whose smile and frown, like to Achilles' spear,

Is able with the change to kill and cure.

Here is a hand to hold a sceptre up,

And with the same to act controlling laws. (2 *Henry VI* 5.1.93-103)

His speech is not only meant to convince those around him, but also to reinforce his own courage in what he is doing. Fuelled by conviction and anger, York convinces himself that he is wholly deserving of the throne, similar to Shakespeare's Hamlet, and he should instigate what would become known as the War of the Roses.

The problem that characters encounter once they give themselves over to self-righteousness is that they become mad with their delusion. Although his claim to the throne is well-founded, York is no exception from the madness of self-righteousness. Upon his return to England from Ireland, York expects the citizens to herald him as the true king of England. In the first scene of act five York proclaims

From Ireland thus comes York to claim his right

And pluck the crown from feeble Henry's head.

Ring bells aloud, burn bonfires clear and bright,

To entertain great England's lawful king. (2 *Henry VI* 5.1.1-4)

His delusions have convinced him that his claim is so solid that all of England should recognize that York is the rightful king. This idea is absurd, seeing as there are only a few people who support him. After declaring his intentions to King Henry and his courtiers, York expects that everyone should know he is the rightful king; therefore, when Clifford enters and bows to Henry, York says “We are thy sovereign, Clifford, kneel again. / For thy mistaking so, we pardon thee” (2 *Henry VI* 5.1.127-128). York’s presumptuous madness is apparent, and Clifford remarks “to Bedlam with him, is the man grown mad?” (2 *Henry VI* 5.1.131). Even York himself sees his own madness, such as when he says “you put sharp weapons in a madman’s hands” (2 *Henry VI* 3.1.347) when his fellow noblemen give him an army to quell an uprising in Ireland. His madness is fostered within his self-righteousness and leads him to make risky endeavours so that he can secure the crown for himself. At Wakefield, when he says “five men to twenty: though the odds be great, / I doubt not, uncle, of our victory” (3 *Henry VI* 1.2.71-72), he becomes overconfident, his forces lose the battle and he is killed. However, even within sight of death, York does not falter in his self-righteousness, believing his right to the throne until the end. York says “my ashes, as the Phoenix’, may bring forth / A bird that will revenge upon you all” (3 *Henry VI* 1.4.35-36). York’s madness is caused by his self-righteousness, which in turn results from embracing his perspective as though it were truth itself.

In his first tetralogy, Shakespeare creates characters who have become self-righteous, no longer manipulating truth to fit with their perspective, but having their perspective become the absolute truth for them. Characters become believers of their own version of truth because they accept the propaganda that they push on others. These

characters who become self-righteous are led to their downfalls and even maddened by their delusions of grandeur and self-importance. Joan of Arc, the Duchess of Gloucester, and the Duke of York all present key examples of how Shakespeare creates characters who become self-righteous and therefore meet their demise.

Chapter IV: Perspective in Righteousness

The one anomaly that presents itself within this play is Henry VI, who does not manipulate truth to further his motivation or perspective. In fact, Henry operates with a completely different perspective than the majority of the other characters in Shakespeare's first tetralogy. While they make truth subjective, for Henry it always remains absolute. To Henry, truth cannot be manipulated to adhere to a perspective because it can only represent the truth itself. Henry is fatalistic, seeing life as based on God's divine plan that cannot be altered. Therefore, what is to come will happen no matter how he reacts. Henry has correspondingly little interest in the politics of the court, merely performing his duties because he has been placed in the position of a king, a position he does not even desire. Henry informs his audience that his wish is to be king no longer: "was never subject longed to be a king / As I do long and wish to be a subject" (2 *Henry VI* 4.9.4-5). His lack of desire for power places him at odds with the other characters in the play who constantly use and manipulate truth to further their ends and aid their perspective. In the midst of the battle at Towton, Henry contemplates the simple life of a shepherd, saying "methinks it were a happy life / To be no better than a homely swain" (3 *Henry VI* 2.5.21-22), while armies fight for his crown. This exemplifies his total lack of interest in kingship; he thinks it better to be a mere shepherd tending a flock than to rule a kingdom and have power over thousands.

Since he has been raised with complete power over others, Henry lacks a lust for power, and is therefore immune to the vices to which men succumb to obtain it. The only reason he returns to England in the latter half of 3 *Henry VI* is to return to the land that he loves, stating that "from Scotland am I stol'n ev'n of pure love / To greet mine own land

with my wishful sight” (3 *Henry VI* 3.1.13-14). Henry is also a very pious man. He constantly meditates on spiritual things, yet he does not fall prey to the self-righteous habits of other spiritual characters, such as Joan of Arc. Because he lacks the ambition to control others through the manipulation of truth, Henry does not become self-righteous. To become self-righteous, one must be psychologically invested and be motivated by one’s perspective, and since Henry lacks motivation to advance his perspective he is immune to self-righteousness. Instead, Henry becomes humble and saintly, and the crown he wears “is called content. A crown it is that seldom kings enjoy” (3 *Henry VI* 3.1.64-65). Henry is impervious to the vices of his courtiers, making him an outsider in his court and an anomaly within the realm of duelling perspectives.

With the aid of Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, Shakespeare created a series of plays in which the characters manipulate subjective truth so that it advances their particular perspectives. Shakespeare took Holinshed’s perspectival accounts of historical events and added a psychological complexity to the historical figures, making them more interesting characters. As the plays progress, the ways in which the characters use truth to fit their needs become more sinister. In *1 Henry VI*, the truth is rarely manipulated, but in the second part, truth becomes merely a way in which courtiers can obtain their needs. By *3 Henry VI*, the distinction between subjective truth and lies is nearly obsolete, as civil war has embroiled the country and there is little need for subtlety and courtly intrigue. The use of subjective truth and lies to convince people to adopt certain perspectives results in the deterioration of society so much that by the final play of the tetralogy, Richard Duke of Gloucester manipulates everyone in the play so that he can gain the throne for himself, murdering and lying to reach his goal. *Richard III* is the culmination of all the lying and

manipulation that occur in the previous three plays. Truth becomes a weapon for Richard to fulfill his needs. Even the correlation between truth and perspective breaks, because Richard is not attempting to convince anyone to adopt his perspective, but merely manipulates truth to fool his peers into a false sense of security. Truth has become nothing but a means of power and it is no longer truth, but the manipulation thereof, that has become absolute.

Patterson's concept that Shakespeare creates a world based upon perspective is seen in the way that he links his characters' use of truth to their particular perspectives. Each character correlates truth and perspective to reach their goals. Shakespeare's characters use subjective truth in three ways to serve their perspectives. Characters such as Talbot, Cade, and the Duke of York use propaganda and a manipulated subjective truth to convince the masses. Propaganda helps to sustain the War of the Roses, and gives political voice to multiple perspectives. Political motivation becomes a driving force behind the manipulation of truth by the noblemen in King Henry's court. The Duke of Suffolk, Cardinal Beaufort, and Queen Margaret all manipulate subjective truth in an attempt to convince Henry that the Duke of Gloucester is unfit for his position as Lord Protector. Motivation leads the courtiers to deal in courtly intrigue and to use truth as a tool to facilitate their perspective. Those characters who entirely convince themselves of their own perspective become self-righteous. Self-righteous characters such as Joan of Arc, the Duchess of Gloucester, and the Duke of York are all convinced by their own delusions of grandeur, which cause them to view their own perspectives as absolute truth, no longer manipulating subjective truth to fit their perspectives. The one character who seems to remain outside of the manipulation of truth is King Henry VI. Shakespeare

portrays him as an innately good person who is too morally sound to manipulate truth. Yet it is the psychological complexity that Shakespeare bestows upon his characters that allows each of them to make their own decisions with regards to the way in which they will act when given an opportunity. While the majority of Shakespeare's characters seem willing to manipulate others to get ahead, some are presented as a moral standard by which the audience may measure the other characters. By adopting Holinshed's perspectival method, Shakespeare created plays with complex characters and layered plots. This early effort allowed Shakespeare to discover a method of writing that would help him create such psychologically diverse characters as Hamlet, Macbeth, and King Lear. Due to Holinshed's influence, Shakespeare developed a style of writing based on perspectivalism.

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