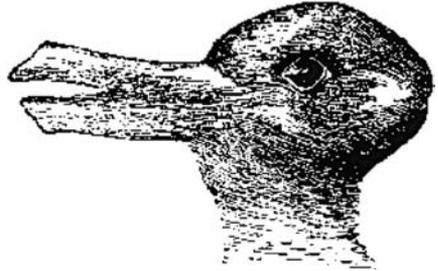


CONFLICTED RECKLESSNESS:
THE JOURNEY FROM PRINCE OF WALES TO KING HENRY V
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In "Either/Or: Responding to *Henry V*," Norman Rabkin poses the ultimate question regarding Shakespeare's historical play *Henry V*: does this drama chronicle the life of an "ideal monarch" or that of a "Machiavellian militarist" (34)? Rabkin approaches the much-debated topic of Henry's character by means of visualization and differentiation. He associates the image on the right, the gestaltist's "rare beast," with Hal's dual identities. This picture portrays two different images: a rabbit and a duck. Rabkin argues that although these two images are contained within the same representation, we, as the observers, are unable to see both images at the same time. We are "either" looking at the rabbit "or" looking at the duck. Rabkin extends this logic to the character of Henry V, suggesting that one of the two identities attributed to him may be accurate, but not both.



While this may be true of the picture presented by Rabkin, it is not an accurate depiction of Henry V. This debate over Henry's character seems to be a never-ending element of Shakespearean criticism, yet a closer look at Henry as a character renders the argument irrelevant. Although Henry is often described in terms of polarities and inconsistencies, I contend that the dual aspects of his identity are inherently connected rather than separate. The construction of his identity is complicated, yet comprehensible when approached from a psychological perspective.

In this essay, I plan to dispute this theory of discontinuity and illuminate the character of Henry V as it is meant to be seen—a human portrayal of a conflicted adolescent. I will examine Henry's character using the lenses of psychoanalytic theory, Lacanian theory, and analysis of his speech to prove that he has human characteristics and therefore cannot be "either/or" but must be instead simultaneously "both." The character of Henry is presented in the historical tetralogy (i.e. four plays), which consists of *Richard II*, *Henry IV, Part One*, *Henry IV, Part Two*, and *Henry V*. His multi-faceted human psyche should not be pigeonholed according to one aspect of personality; instead, it should be analyzed and examined as an all-encompassing homeostatic mystery. This mystery is precisely what Shakespeare provided with his historical depiction of Henry V.

Pairing psychoanalytic theory with the critical theories surrounding this play highlights the conflict within Henry as a human character. The dichotomy of Hotspur and Falstaff is an inevitable topic in critical discussions of the plays. Rabkin briefly mentions the two extremes that these characters represent. In a more accurate assessment, Hugh Dickinson, in his article "The Reformation of Prince Hal," points

out that Hal (young Henry) is the third part of a triangle of extremes (43). Such a triangle evokes images of Freud's structure of the human mind.

In *Theories of Personality*, Schultz and Schultz map out Freud's model of the human psyche. Apply this to the texts; consider Freud's theory on the three parts of the psyche in conjunction with Dickinson's theory about the three major male characters. Falstaff represents the Freudian "id," which is also known as the pleasure principal. This part of the psyche acts on impulse regarding human instincts (Schultz 54). Falstaff is a self-serving character more interested in the pleasures that life has to offer than his moral and political responsibilities.

Waldo McNeir is one of the few critics whose analysis correlates to my perception of Falstaff. In his essay, "Structure and Theme in the First Tavern Scene in *Henry IV, Part One*," McNier argues that,

Hal throughout represents the Aristotelian virtue or mean of rational courage between the two vices or extremes of Hotspur's foolhardiness and Falstaff's cowardice. Avoidance of both the excess and the deficiency of courage is one of the lessons he must learn before he can govern either himself or the kingdom. (71-72)

Examining Falstaff's actions in terms of the id offers insight into his motivations and conduct throughout the play. Falstaff becomes friends with Henry in order to secure his position when Henry assumes the throne. Falstaff indulges in alcohol, claims the victory of killing Hotspur in spite of Henry's true triumph, and does his best to avoid battle. Falstaff acts to further his own interests at all times, neatly embodying the tenets of the pleasure principle.

If Falstaff makes up the indulgent aspect of this personality trio, then it is undoubtedly Hotspur who represents the superego. As Schultz and Schultz outline, the superego controls the morality associated with decision-making. Hotspur is obsessed with honor. In *Henry IV, Part One*, it is obvious that honor and glory are integral parts of Hotspur's character:

O gentlemen, the time of life is short!
To spend the shortness basely were too long
If life did ride upon a dial's point,
Still ending at the arrival of an hour.
And if we live, we live to tread on Kings,
If die, brave death when princes die with us!
Now, for our consciences, the arms are fair
When the intent of bearing them is just. (V.ii.80-88)

Even if he dies, Hotspur will be content as long as his honor lives on through heroic tales of his adventures. In the Elizabethan Era, morality and honor were practically synonymous; it may be inferred that Hotspur acts with this concept in mind at all times, thus exemplifying the second aspect of Freud's model.

Henry fulfills the third and final portion of Freud's construction of the human psyche. Henry serves as a balance between Hotspur and Falstaff throughout the play, tempering Hotspur's overwhelming morality and Falstaff's indulgences. This role

corresponds to Freud's concept of the ego: "To Freud, [the ego is] the rational aspect of the personality, responsible for directing and controlling the instincts according to the reality principle" (Schultz and Schultz 55). In both parts of *Henry IV*, Henry struggles to choose a path for his future. Although his adventures with Falstaff are fun, Henry is aware that this reckless behavior cannot continue. Yet at the same time, he is not ready to adopt the glorified extreme of "moral warrior" suggested by Hotspur. The two extremes of recklessness and moral duty, as presented by Falstaff and Hotspur, ultimately coalesce in Henry. Harold Goddard's perspective of Henry, Falstaff, and Hotspur supports my view. In *The Meaning of Shakespeare*, Goddard states, "Falstaff is the devil who tempts the Prince to Riot. Hotspur and especially Lord Chief justice are the good angels representing Chivalry and Justice, or the Rule of Law" (185).

Freud discusses the ego in terms of the reality principle. Schultz and Schultz describe the reality principle as providing the balance between the id and superego that is necessary to function within society (54-55). Henry does not try to suppress Hotspur and Falstaff as much as he tries to dilute the extreme aspects of their personalities. By confronting these extremes in these men, Henry is able to find an equal balance within himself. His perception of reality and the politics that accompany it leads to his blunt soliloquies throughout the Henriad. This awareness of the future and his approaching responsibilities makes him not only a conflicted, but also a rather astute adolescent.

In general, Henry suffers from an identity complex that results from the conflicting social roles of his personal and political life. More specifically, he suffers from the Freudian concept of "moral anxiety." This concept is associated with the conflict between the id and the superego. Schultz and Schultz describe this in terms of the "conscience-stricken" individual (58). This notion emphasizes feelings of guilt and regret for actions that defy moral standards. This is evident during some of the most ambivalent scenes within the Henriad.

One of the most controversial scenes within the Henriad illuminates this moral anxiety. In *Henry IV, Part Two*, Henry mistakenly believes that his father is dead and puts on the crown to assume his rightful place. He quickly regrets his rash action when he realizes that his father is still alive. His father is wounded by Henry's apparent eagerness to assume his position. In respect to the text, we must assume that Warwick's comment about Henry weeping in the other room is true; there are no stage directions to the contrary. It is moral anxiety that makes Henry plead for his father's forgiveness. This concept of moral anxiety can further explain Henry's inner conflict, which is illustrated by the external turmoil between Falstaff and Hotspur.

Henry's internalization of Falstaff's and Hotspur's more admirable qualities leads to the growth of his character. Due to his young age and conflicting roles, Henry's character has not completely developed; this leaves him unprepared to adequately assess the extremes of recklessness and moral duty presented by Falstaff and Hotspur. As each character falls to the wayside, Henry takes on some of his personality traits:

Hal draws nearer to his rival's courage, further from Falstaff's cowardice and irresponsibility. Yet, because selfishness has characterized his every action from the moment of his oath, he draws away from the self-seeking in both, as if taking from Falstaff the cunning a king must have, and from

Hotspur the courage; qualities which they, as his factors, have engrossed up in his behalf and which, in the death of the one and the rejection of the other, he crops to make a garland for his head. (Dickinson 43)

Henry has learned from the mistakes of his friends and absorbed the positive qualities of each, in moderation, in order to construct himself as a better leader and person.

The eventual absence of the characters of Falstaff and Hotspur has less to do with Henry's good or bad decisions and intentions than it has to do with his development as a "human-like" character. There are regular characters in Shakespeare and "human-like" characters in Shakespeare. Regular characters can be described by means of dichotomy; that is, they may be divided into opposing categories such as good or bad, strong or weak. This corresponds to the "either/or" option that Rabkin suggests. Yet the human-like character does not conform to either restrictive definition; instead, it fulfills many different interpretations simultaneously. While it may be argued that several of Shakespeare's characters fit into this category, including Henry, it is particularly fascinating because of the existing discourse to the contrary.

In "Recovering the Terror of Trifles," Marshall Grossman analyzes this theory of the human-like character in terms of Lacanian theory. Lacan's studies are centered on the idea of the self and recognition and interpretation of the acknowledgment of the self. Grossman specifies that we as readers create a human-like Henry in order to examine ourselves and our own morality as characters: "In a perhaps reversed direction, we are called on to parse the difficult ethos of Prince Harry in terms of when and how he came to identify himself with and as Henry V" (53). This inverted idea of self-examination fuels my defense of Henry. No one human being is perfect; we all have flaws.

If we use the same lens to analyze Henry as we would to analyze a young man who comes of age within our own lives, I am certain that he would be given the benefit of the doubt in relation to his actions because of his ongoing mental, social, and physical maturation. The same contingencies that we would take into consideration regarding our own development should be attributed to the adolescent character of Hal (young Henry) if we truly wish to invert the situation, as Grossman is suggesting. The Lacanian interpretation of self justifies Hal's actions and mistakes through human means of judgment.

This coming-of-age process explains the mentality, actions, and questionable decisions that surround what has come to be known as the "question of Henry V." In his work entitled simply *Shakespeare*, well-known scholar David Bevington devotes an entire chapter to an in-depth look at the coming-of-age process reflected in Shakespeare. Incorporating some aspects of Freudian theory, Bevington discusses the conflict between Hal and his father in the two parts of *Henry IV* and how the conflict relates to this coming-of-age process:

Faced with such a denying father, and caught in a fierce rivalry with a young man his age whom his father would like to call 'son,' Hal does what any young man might be expected to do: he indulges in the exaggerated irresponsibility of youth and chooses as his companion a raffish old hedonist who seems utterly devoted to him. (84)

Bevington also contends that Hal struggles because he must ultimately make a choice between two father figures:

Hal is aware of the problem; that is part of the reason why he is dispirited in much of this play *Henry IV, Part Two*, complaining to Poins of being weary and bored. He knows that he is supposed to be reconciled with his father, and is certainly more distant from Falstaff, but he also knows that if he were to express regret for the King's sudden illness he would be accounted 'a most princely hypocrite.' Everyone expects him to rejoice at his father's death and institute a rule of lawless riot. That is why Hal must be so public about his rejection of Falstaff, in fact. (93)

Bevington continues this discussion by adding that Hal learns from his father despite their strained relationship. He is able to absorb the good qualities of his father while retaining the language and consideration of the layman (94). This not only makes Hal his father's son and a future King, but also his own person.

Edward Dowden agrees with Bevington's coming-of-age theory: "The change which effected itself in the Prince, as represented by Shakespeare, was no miraculous conversion, but merely the transition from boyhood to adult years" (211). Dowden continues that, unlike his father, Henry V is able to face his weaknesses head-on and work through them. As delineated in the play itself, Henry is able to overcome anything and everything:

Turn him to any cause of policy,
The Gordian knot of it he will unloose,
Familiar as his garter; that, when he speaks,
The air, a chartered libertine, is still,
And the mute wonder lurketh in men's ears
To steal his sweet and honeyed sentences. (H5 I.i.45-50)

Due to his intelligence and dedication, Henry V becomes a better king than even his father could have foreseen.

Harold Goddard also touches upon the relationship between Hal and Henry IV. Goddard observes that Hal seems to express the repressed aspects of his father's personality in *Henry IV*; these repressed aspects demonstrate that Hal has a very human-like quality. Goddard quotes Nietzsche to reinforce his argument that, "what the father hath hid cometh out in the son," and then states in reference to Henry IV that, "What he has kept under comes out in Hal, who leads a life of abandon under the tutelage of Falstaff" (168). Henry's reckless abandon represents his attempt to avoid the responsibilities of his father's position, yet when his father becomes ill, this attitude becomes too much, and he must then fully accept the elements of his father into his personality as well.

The easiest way to attest to Henry's growth as a human-like character is to examine his language and semantics in *Henry V*. P.K. Ayers discusses the issue of language at great length. As early as the banishment of Falstaff, a change within Henry's speech is noticeable. Yet an examination of the severity of the scene and its language indicates that his maturation is still in progress and not fully complete at this moment:

Such a context helps to explain the somewhat calculating and apparently mean-spirited tone of what Hal has to say; it is not fully developed, however, until the archbishop's linked celebration of both his piety and language skills in *Henry V*. What Hal here provides is merely the first faltering attempt at the tongue appropriate to one from whom, the archbishop publicly proclaims, the "offending Adam" has been whipped, "leaving his body as a paradise." (Ayers 263)

It is much more plausible that Henry is unintentionally harsh in this scene; this harshness is probably the result of his unfamiliarity with his new "voice" as king.

Throughout *Henry V*, Henry's voice takes on the intonations of a great leader. He begins to emulate the stature of Hotspur, while simultaneously using his art of disguise to gain access to the layman and his concerns. In several scenes in *Henry V*, readers are able to get a clear view of both sides of Henry's newly-developed personality. However, it is only in his discourse with Katherine that he truly completes his identity fusion.

One interesting linguistic detail that Hugh Dickinson mentions is the art of detraction. Detraction is a form of verbal disparagement present in the text and the language of its characters. Dickinson claims that Falstaff and Hotspur eventually reach their downfall because of their constant use of detraction:

All Hotspur knows of Hal before Shrewsbury, he gains at second hand; and so, to him, Hal is "that same sword-and-buckler Prince of Wales", "the nimble-footed madcap"; and his contempt for Hal is so great that it betrays him into thinking the king "loves him not And would be glad he met with some mischance" ... [Now in reference to Falstaff] Indeed, apart from a passing reference to "my hostess of the tavern", one brief speech after the Gadshill jest, and his half-rating, half-toadying terms of address to Hal, I cannot find that Sir John has one word of praise for any but himself in the entire play—and, of course, he has much to say "in behalf of that Falstaff." (40)

This could signify the difference between Falstaff, Hotspur, and Henry. While Henry is a well-developed human-like character who is above using detraction, Falstaff and Hotspur are one-dimensional characters whose function is to add depth and definition to Henry's identity. Linguistic analysis can be used to refine our multi-faceted ideas about Henry.

The end of *Henry V* is particularly significant in the development of Henry's identity. Henry demonstrates intelligence and developing maturity, yet when confronted with adult interaction with a woman, his behavior is rather juvenile. His stumbling attempts to speak French and woo Katherine are both heart-warming and symbolic of his youthful naïveté. Henry has already won France and has no obligation to develop any sort of relationship with Katherine, yet he makes an admirable attempt at the end of the play to win her heart:

Ifaith, Kate, my wooing is fit for thy understanding.
I am glad thou canst speak no better English;
for if thou couldst, thou wouldst find me such a plain king that thou

wouldst think I had sold my farm to buy my crown.
I know no ways to mince it in love, but directly to say, 'I love you.'
(V.ii.121-127)

This is his verbal peak; it highlights the last vestiges of the adolescent prince before he completes maturation through copulation. This also shows the reader that he has finally reached manhood and is engaging in the biggest battle of them all: love. At the end of this scene it is evident that Henry's journey through the coming-of-age process has been completed and that he will now have a well-balanced identity.

The end of the play itself has linguistic significance. Ayers contends that this last scene is not that of warm-heartedness as much as forced submission. Ayers states that:

The imposition of a foreign language provides a particularly interesting metaphorical extension of the process; the conquered, obliged to use the language of the conqueror, are thereby forced to acquiesce in a kind of ritual humiliation, as they publicly acknowledge their larger weakness in terms of their inevitably comic linguistic deficiencies. (254)

Although this supports a feminist reading of the text, a coming-of-age perspective lends different connotations to the text. It is Henry who must undergo humiliation; he is unable to even pretend to be as smooth as Casanova. Romantic banter seems to be the one area in which Henry is unable to excel. This shows that he is completing the coming-of-age process by illuminating his inexperienced way with women.

In applying psychoanalytic theory, Lacanian theory, and linguistics to the binary oppositions and sometimes contradictory traits he exhibits, I have argued that Henry is undergoing an in-depth coming-of-age process that encompasses his struggles as a man, a son, and a king. His inconsistent actions and inexplicable motivations may be attributed to his human-like identity. As I have stated, his multi-faceted personality cannot be defined as either one type or another, because it is innately both: two parts of a whole person. Henry is equally part the "Machiavellian Prince" and part the "Virtuous King." His coming-of-age process exacerbates the confusion about his identity. In the midst of maturation he is attempting to sort out the conflicting dualities within his life. Characters such as Falstaff and Hotspur serve as foils for Henry; compared to these one-dimensional characters, the reader is able to easily differentiate Henry as a human-like character. Although Norman Rabkin does an admirable job of analyzing the interminable dispute about Henry as a character, I think that even Rabkin himself is rather torn as to which personality is accurate:

These multiple allusions force us to see in Henry V the epitome of what the cycle has taught us to value as best in a monarch, indeed in a man; and the King's ability to listen to the soldier Williams and to hear him suggests, like his subsequent fooling with Fluellen in the same fourth act, a king who is fully a man. All that is needed to complete him is mature sexuality, scarcely hinted at in the earlier portraits of Hal, and the wooing of Princess Katherine in the fifth act brings finality to a lively portrayal of achieved manhood, a personality integrated in itself and ready to bring unity and joy to a realm that has suffered long from rule

by men less at ease with themselves and less able to identify their own interests with those of their country. (48)

This passage confirms my argument that Henry is a combination of both of these identities, and more that Shakespeare displays a perceptive realism in a human character comprised of the conflicting qualities of virtue and vice, maturity and immaturity that challenge the adolescent. In the final scene with Katherine, Henry's identity comes full circle. His new journey is no longer about proving himself to men, but will be about successfully negotiating the challenges of heterosexuality and marriage. Therefore, the entire issue of either/or is rendered null and void when referring to a character with such a human-like identity. Henry has risen above the narrow molds supplied by society and has emerged as a well-balanced and believable young man facing his adulthood with pride.

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King Henry V is the character around whom Shakespeare built his Henry IV play. He shows the audience what a prince must go through and learn to become a king. The readers first encounter Henry V as Prince Hal, who is an irresponsible young man. He spends time in the tavern, helps rob travelers at night, and is seen as an outsider by the court. His father is ashamed of Hal's acts and even parallels him to Richard II: unworthy of the crown. This is a transcript from the video series How to Read and Understand Shakespeare. Watch it now, on Wondrium. His chief companion is a fat old knight who symbolizes fun and irresponsibility in the play: Sir John Falstaff. Henry IV, Part 1 picks up the story several months later, with the newly crowned King Henry IV experiencing an unquiet reign, with troubles assailing him from all directions. His intended trip to Jerusalem has failed to materialise due to border disputes with both Scotland and Wales, and adding to Henry's troubles is the behaviour of his son and heir, Hal, the Prince of Wales. Hal has forsaken a political life and instead spends most of his time in taverns with degenerates and drunks. King Henry V, warrior king, shining example of medieval kingship and a living legend. He was born in September 1386 in Wales at Monmouth Castle, the son of the future Henry IV of England and his wife Mary de Bohun. His royal title and privileges were not without contention, as the Prince of Wales was forced to engage in battle when the rebellion by Owen Glyndwr in Wales revolted against the English crown for nine years, eventually concluding in an English victory. His adolescence was markedly impacted by battles and conflicts which erupted during his youth. His military might was tested not only with the Welsh rebellion but when faced with the powerful Percy family from Northumberland at the Battle of Shrewsbury. Henry IV: Part I and Henry IV: Part II focus on the early years of Prince Hal and his boisterous comrade Falstaff (a fictitious character invented by Shakespeare and played by Joel Edgerton in The King that was loosely based on a real man named John Oldcastle, a former friend of Henry's that he later executed for heresy and rebellion). Together, they supposedly spend their time playing pranks, consorting with thieves and drunks, and passing out after long nights at the tavern. When The King opens, Prince Hal is estranged from his father, cut off from the line of succession in favor of his younger brother, completely uninterested in politics and knee-deep in teenage debauchery. Henry V ruled England from 1413 until his death in 1422 and is one of England's most popular kings. Famed for his victory over the French at the 1415 battle of Agincourt, during the Hundred Years' War with France, the king is remembered for his military abilities. Historian Teresa Cole shares 10 facts about the king, from his childhood as a hostage of Richard II to his battles as the young Prince of Wales. | Share on Facebook. Share on Twitter.