Mack, Peter. "History in Montaigne and Shakespeare." *Reading and Rhetoric in Montaigne and Shakespeare*. : Bloomsbury Academic, 2010. 106–140. The WISH List. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472544902.ch-005>>.

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5. History in Montaigne and Shakespeare

Ancient and modern historians were major sources for both Shakespeare and Montaigne. Montaigne's *Essais* probably originated in moral and political observations derived from his reading of historians. Throughout his writing life he re-read the historians, adding new examples and retelling stories from history both as evidence to support arguments and to move and please his audience. Shakespeare's reading of English chronicles and of Plutarch's *Lives* provided him with the main plot materials (and many scenes and sentences) for fifteen of his plays. Both Montaigne and Shakespeare thought deeply about the problems of writing and interpreting history. Earlier studies have analysed Montaigne's debts to historians and Shakespeare's contributions to historiography but both writers' use of history has not previously been compared.¹ I shall begin the chapter by looking at the way Montaigne uses two historians who were particularly important to him: Plutarch and Tacitus, with particular reference to *De l'utile et de l'honneste* (III, 1), the first half of which hinges on two examples from Tacitus. Turning to Shakespeare I shall discuss his use of his reading in planning and writing historical plays, his close observation of different kinds of political manoeuvring, his characters' retelling of history for political purposes and his presentation of views from below. Finally I shall compare Montaigne's and Shakespeare's approaches to issues raised by history: the use of exemplary figures, the question of providence, the attitude to war and the value of honour.

Montaigne often tells us that history is his favourite reading matter and the kind he would most recommend for the education of others. Among historians he especially likes Plutarch because Plutarch tells him about the internal motivation of the great men of the ancient world.²

[A] Car j'ay une singuliere curiosité, comme j'ay dit ailleurs, de connoistre l'ame et les naïfs jugemens de mes autheurs. Il faut bien juger leur suffisance, mais non pas leurs moeurs ny eux, par ceste monstre de leurs escrits qu'ils étalent au theatre du monde. J'ay mille fois regretté que nous ayons perdu le livre que Brutus avoit escrit de la vertu ... Mais d'autant que c'est autre chose le presche que le prescheur, j'ayme bien autant voir Brutus chez Plutarque que chez luy mesme. Je choisiroy plustost de sçavoir au vray les devis qu'il tenoit en sa tente à quelqu'un de ses privez amis, la veille d'une bataille, que les propos qu'il tint le lendemain à son armée. (II, 10, V414–5, P435–6)

[A] For as I have said elsewhere I am uniquely curious about my author's soul and native judgement. By what their writings display when they are paraded in the theatre of the world we can indeed judge their talents, but we cannot judge them as men nor their morals. I have regretted hundreds of times that we have lost the book which Brutus wrote about virtue ... yet seeing that the preacher and the preaching are two different things, I am just as happy to see Brutus in Plutarch as in a book of his own. I would rather have a true account of his chat with his private friends in his tent on the eve of battle than the oration which he delivered next morning to his army. (S465)

Plutarch himself suggests that the focus of his interest is the same in his preface to the parallel lives of Alexander and Julius Caesar. He asks the reader's indulgence for failing to record all their great achievements. Because he is writing about the kind of men they were he may find less interest in their most brilliant exploits, which

often tell us nothing of the virtues and vices of the men who performed them, while on the other hand a chance remark or a joke may reveal far more of a man's character than the mere feat of winning battles in which thousands fall, or of marshalling great armies, or laying siege to cities ... it is my task to dwell upon those actions which illuminate the workings of the soul, and by this means to create a portrait of each man's life. I leave the story of his greatest struggles and achievements to be told by others.³

Although Pelling has recently argued that the lives in which the character of the hero is the dominant explanatory feature are untypical of the whole work,⁴ it was Plutarch's analysis and judgement of his subjects' characters which most appealed to Montaigne.

Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* are very varied in approach and content. Some of the variations reflect differences in the sources available to Plutarch, others represent his artistic choices about the most effective way to shape his material. The largest component in all the lives is a narrative of the hero's political and military career, often organized to suggest alternation between periods of success and failure. Sometimes his account of the career is organized more to provide evidence for an analysis of character than to represent the chronological sequence in detail.⁵ Generally, where Plutarch's sources

permit,⁶ the *Lives* also contain stories of the hero's childhood and private life, intended to reveal his character in a nutshell. In some cases there is a conscious posing of the inherited nature of the person, as indicated by his family and childhood, against the rational development of virtuous characteristics through education and deliberate habituation.⁷ The *Lives* usually include a number of striking or characteristic sayings of the hero, intended to provide a pithy summation of his views (and sometimes of contemporary opinions about him). The best of the *Lives* characteristically include vivid descriptions and developed narratives (often including direct speech) of significant scenes in the hero's life. For example there are dramatic accounts of the murder of Julius Caesar, of Antony's speech at his funeral and of Antony's own death. For some readers these great scenes are the most impressive thing about the whole work. Plutarch must have allowed himself considerable freedom of invention in the dramatization of such scenes. Sometimes, too, he includes received stories whose veracity he doubts on chronological grounds but which he approves because they correspond so closely to the manners and nature of the people described.⁸ Almost all the lives also contain shorter sections in which Plutarch gives free rein to his usual intellectual interests, discussing religious or cultural customs,⁹ mentioning and analysing references to the hero in comedy or parallels with Homer,¹⁰ analysing phenomena of the physical world or discussing philosophical opinions.¹¹ Most of the *Lives* also include moral commentary on the hero, using ethical categories to explain the actions of the hero and to judge him. For the most part Plutarch expects the great lives he describes to encourage emulation,¹² but the moral commentary also provides more general reflections which instruct the reader in the nature and consequences of human behaviour. Plutarch offers these comments near the beginning of *Coriolanus*.

His example shows us that the loss of a father, even though it may impose other disadvantages on a boy, does not prevent him from living a virtuous or distinguished life ... On the other hand this same Gaius Marcius's career bears witness to the truth of the view that a naturally generous and noble disposition, if it lacks discipline, will produce both good and evil fruits at once ... Coriolanus's energy of mind and strength of purpose constantly led him to attempt ambitious exploits, the results of which were momentous for Rome, but those qualities were combined with a violent temper and an uncompromising self-assertion, which made it difficult for him to co-operate with others. People could admire his indifference to hardship,

to pleasure and to the temptations of money, which they dignified by the names of courage, moderation and probity, but when he displayed the same qualities in his dealings with his fellow-citizens, they were offended and found him harsh, ungracious and overbearing. (*Coriolanus* 1)

It would seem that to win distinction and high honours too early in life is apt to stifle the ambitions of young men in whom the desire to excel does not go very deep, for then their thirst or appetite for fame, never very intense, is quickly satisfied. But for those strong-willed spirits, with whom ambition is already a ruling passion, the honours they receive serve only to spur them to greater efforts ... But while other men displayed their courage to win glory for themselves, Marcius's motive was always to please his mother. The delight that she experienced when she saw him crowned, and the tears of joy that she wept as she embraced him, these things were for him the supreme joy and felicity that life could offer. (*Coriolanus* 4)¹³

These comments are all derived from *Coriolanus's* life but they use him as an exemplification of broadly applicable moral lessons as much as they seek to explain his conduct by reference to general human characteristics. Some of the characteristic components of the *Lives*, as well as the specific content of some of them, have much in common with Plutarch's *Moralia*, but the aim and narrative shape of the *Lives* enable them to preserve a unity over and above the apparent digressions. The *Lives* also give more prominent opportunities for Plutarch to display his talents for description and vivid narration.

Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* provided Montaigne both with important programmatic encouragement and with narratives and sayings which he could re-use. Montaigne particularly praised the comparisons at the end of each pair of lives ('in these comparisons, which are the most admirable part of the work ..., the faithfulness and purity of his judgements equals their weight and profundity'),¹⁴ though he makes relatively little direct use of them.¹⁵ Most importantly Plutarch encouraged Montaigne in his task of understanding and judging human behaviour. Some of Montaigne's specific judgements were taken over from Plutarch, for example his repeated denunciations of Caesar's 'pernicious ambition'¹⁶ and this view of Alcibiades.

[A] J'ay souvent remarqué avec grande admiration la merveilleuse nature d'Alcibiades, de se transformer si aisément à façons si diverses,

sans interest de sa santé: surpassant tantost la somptuosité et pompe Persienne, tantost l'austerité et frugalité Lacedemonienne; autant reformé en Sparte comme voluptueux en Ionie. (I, 26, V167, P174)¹⁷

[A] I have often noted with great astonishment the extraordinary character of Alcibiades who, without impairing his health, could so easily adapt to diverse manners: at times he could out-do the Persians in pomp and luxury; at others, Spartans in austerity and frugal living. He was a reformed man in Sparta, yet equally pleasure-seeking in Ionia. (S187)

Here Montaigne sees Alcibiades's adaptability as an indication of self-mastery of the kind he would like a pupil to have. He may also have remembered Erasmus's comments on Alcibiades in his adage on the polyp. It is even possible that Montaigne's own much more frequent reference to his personal opinions may have been encouraged by Plutarch's occasional use of his own voice to underline a view which he held strongly but believed not to be widely shared, as in this comment on the elder Cato.

For my own part I regard his conduct towards his slaves in treating them like beasts of burden, exploiting them to the limits of their strength, and then, when they were old, driving them off and selling them, as the mark of a thoroughly ungenerous nature, which cannot recognize any bond between man and man but that of necessity ... For my part, I would not sell even my draught ox simply because of his age, far less turn out an old man from the home and the way of life to which he has grown accustomed for the sake of a few paltry coins.¹⁸

Montaigne often takes sayings of famous men from Plutarch's *Lives*, as when he quotes Cato on the benefits wise men draw from fools,¹⁹ or when Antony said that the greatness of the Roman people was revealed not by what they took but by what they gave away.²⁰ This is the normal use which Renaissance schoolboys were encouraged to make of their reading. We could say the same of Montaigne's extensive use of exempla from the *Lives* to provide evidence in support of his arguments. At the end of *De la coustume* (I, 23) the argument that in times of great necessity the laws may have to be forced to one's will is supported by a series of examples from the *Lives of Agesilaus, Alexander, Lysander, Pericles* and *Philipoemen*.²¹ Sometimes Montaigne retells a story from Plutarch at some length in order to register the nature and meaning

of an action as well as its mere fact, as when he uses this story taken from Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* to illustrate a better response to the danger of assassination than suspicion and pre-emptive violence.

[B] Ce qu'Alexandre representa bien plus vivement par effect, et plus roidement, quand, ayant eu advis par un lettre de Parmenion, que Philippus, son plus cher medecin, estoit corrompu par l'argent de Darius pour l'empoisonner, en mesme temps qu'il donnoit à lire sa lettre à Philippus, il avala le bruvage qu'il luy avoit présenté. Fut-ce pas exprimer cette resolution, que, si ses amis le vouloient tuer, il consentoit qu'ils le peussent faire? Ce prince est le souverain patron des actes hazardueux; mais je ne sçay s'il y a traict en sa vie, qui ayt plus de fermeté que cestuy-cy, ny un beauté illustre par tant de visages. (I, 24, V129, P133-4)

[B] Alexander acted this out even more clearly and rigorously. When he received a letter from Parmenion warning him that his beloved doctor Philip had been suborned by money from Darius to poison him, he handed the letter to Philip to read and, at the same time, swallowed down the medicine that he had just handed to him. Was he not showing his resolve to abet his friends if they wished to kill him? This prince is the supreme example of daring deeds, but I doubt whether there is anything in his whole life which showed a firmer resolve than this nor a beauty shimmering with such lustre. (S145)

Plutarch tells the story with far more circumstantial detail and drama (*Alexander*, 19); Montaigne recounts the most significant facts but lays the emphasis on interpreting the significance of Alexander's actions. Montaigne's praise of Alexander's trust here is all the more striking since in *De l'inconstance* (in a passage also added in 1588) he criticizes Alexander for worrying too much over suspicions that his men were plotting against him and for conducting investigations into their plots with an injustice which revealed his fear.²² Usually Montaigne's retelling of a story is abbreviated in comparison with the version in Plutarch. Conversely the stories which Montaigne retells at length with dramatic embellishment generally come from his own experience, chronicles or recent history rather than from Plutarch. When he mentions the famous climactic scenes from Plutarch he never retells them vividly or at length. Montaigne also uses Plutarch as a source of historical information or in order to explain Roman or Spartan

customs.²³ With some of the great figures of antiquity who particularly interested him, such as Caesar, Alexander and Cato the younger, Montaigne read Plutarch alongside other sources. Because of his training Montaigne used Plutarch's *Lives* mainly as a resource of stories, sayings and moral ideas from which he could take fragments appropriate to the argument he was trying to construct. A few of the less developed chapters from 1580 show Montaigne using selections from Plutarch as the basis from which his own thinking would develop.

At the end of *De l'art de conferer* (III, 8) Montaigne writes three discriminating pages of praise and analysis of Tacitus, whose history he has just read through completely, contrary to his normal practice of dipping in and out of books, on the advice of a nobleman famous for his virtue and ability, probably Louis de Foix.²⁴

[B] Je ne sçache point d'auteur qui mesle à un registre public tant de consideration des moeurs et inclinations particulieres ... Cette forme d'Histoire est de beaucoup la plus utile. Les mouvemens publics dependent plus de la conduite de la fortune, les privez de la nostre. C'est plustot un jugement que deduction d'histoire; il y a plus de preceptes que de contes. Ce n'est pas un livre à lire, c'est un livre à estudier et apprendre; il est si plein de sentences qu'il y en a à tort et à droict: c'est une pepiniere de discours ethiques et politiques, pour la provision et ornement de ceux qui tiennent quelque rang au maniement du monde. Il plaide tousjours par raisons solides et vigoureuses, d'une façon poinctue et subtile, suyvant le stile affecté du siecle. (V940–1, P986).

[B] I know of no author who combines a chronicle of public events with so much reflection on individual morals and biases ... This manner of history is by far the most useful. The unrolling of public events depends more on the guiding hand of fortune: that of private ones, on our own. Tacitus's work is more a judgement on historical events than a narration of them. There are more precepts than stories. It is not a book to be read but one to be studied and learnt. It is so full of aphorisms that, apposite or not, they are everywhere. It is a seed-bed of ethical and political arguments to supply and adorn those who hold high rank in the governing of this world. He pleads his case with solid and vigorous reasons, in an epigrammatic and exquisite style following the affected manner of his century. (S1065–6)

Montaigne praises Tacitus's subject matter for its combination of public and private interest as much as his style. He admires Tacitus's judgements, the ethical and political lessons he draws so astutely and expresses so pithily that later governors can easily remember and reuse them. Montaigne also expresses a few reservations about Tacitus's literary choices and about his judgements but he defends him against moderns who have attacked his disparagement of Christianity and he believes (rather in the manner of Bodin) that the fact that his narratives do not entirely fit with his more consciously decisive judgements proves that they are essentially reliable.²⁵ Some of Montaigne's praise suggests that Tacitus is the kind of writer that he himself would like to be and it is noticeable how easily he shifts from discussing Tacitus's work to describing his own. Montaigne uses material from every surviving book of Tacitus's *Annals* and *Histories*. He draws on them alongside other historians in the lists of examples of suicides (II, 3) and attempts at suicide which required assistance from others (II, 13). Sometimes Montaigne researches Tacitus as a source for the topic of a particular essay, for example on Seneca (II, 32) and his wife Paulina (II, 35) where for two pages he retells the story of their joint deaths from *Annals* XV, 57–64.

The first half of *De l'utile et de l'honneste* (III, 1) is hinged on two examples from Tacitus. In the first which Montaigne retells very briefly, putting the emphasis on the emperor's *sententia* rather than on the story, Tiberius refuses an offer to poison the troublesome German chieftain Ariminus on the grounds that 'the Roman people were in the habit of avenging themselves sword in hand, by overt means not by trickery'.²⁶ Montaigne uses this example as the basis for an argument from lesser to greater. If even the hypocritical Tiberius prefers the honourable to the expedient, how much more strongly should we do so. This leads Montaigne to a personal rejection of *politique* behaviour. Even though vices like ambition, jealousy and vengeance are part of human nature, even though in all states there are vicious duties which need to be performed, he declines to become involved in this type of action.

[B] S'ils deviennent excusables, d'autant qu'ils nous font besoing et que la nécessité commune efface leur vraie qualité, il faut laisser jouer cette partie aux citoyens plus vigoureux et moins craintifs qui sacrifient leur honneur et leur conscience, comme ces autres anciens sacrifierent leur vie pour le salut de leur pays; nous autres, plus foibles, prenons des rolles et plus aisez et moins hazardeux. Le bien public requiert qu'on trahisse

et qu'on mente [C] et qu'on massacre; [B] resignons cette commission à gens plus obeissans et plus souples. (V791, P830)

[B] If [vicious deeds] were to become excusable insofar as we have need of them, necessity effacing their true qualities we must leave this role to be played by citizens who are more vigorous and less timorous, those prepared to sacrifice their honour and their consciences, as men of yore once sacrificed their lives, for the well-being of their country. Men like me are too weak for that: we accept roles which are easier and less dangerous. The public interest requires men to betray, to tell lies [C] and to massacre; [B] let us assign that commission to such as are more obedient and more pliant. (S892)

His apparently modest refusal of this role (he vacillates between depicting those who will take it on as more self-sacrificingly heroic and more flexibly subservient) is then balanced by an assertion of the plain uprightness of the way he conducts himself in political negotiations (presumably he is referring to his role as an envoy between Henry of Navarre and Henry III). The next story from Tacitus, told at more length but still greatly abbreviated from the original, shows Tiberius using an unusual kind of diplomacy to defuse an awkward moral and political dilemma.

[B] Mais continuons nostre exemple de la trahison. Deux pretendans au Royaume de Thrace estoient tombez en debat de leurs droicts. L'Empereur les empescha de venir aux armes; mais l'un d'eux, sous couleur de conduire un accord amiable par leur entreveue, ayant assigné son compaignon pour le festoyer en sa maison, le fit emprisonner et tuer. La justice requeroit que les Romains eussent raison de ce forfait; la difficulté en empeschoit les voyes ordinaires: ce qu'ils ne peurent legitiment sans guerre et sans hazard, ils entreprendrent de le faire par trahison. Ce qu'ils ne peurent honnestement, ils le firent utilement. A quoy se trouva propre un Pomponius Flaccus; cettuy-ci, sous feintes parolles et assurances, ayant attiré cet homme dans ses rets, au lieu de l'honneur et faveur qu'il lui promettoit, l'envoya pieds et poings liez à Romme. Un traistre y trahit l'autre, contre l'usage commun; car ils sont pleins de deffiance, et est mal-aysé de les surprendre par leur art: tesmoing la poissante experience que nous venons d'en sentir. (V796, P836)²⁷

[B] But let us get on with exemplifying treachery. Two pretenders to the throne of Thrace had fallen into a quarrel over their claims. The Emperor stopped their coming to blows; but one of them, under the pretext of a meeting to establish loving harmony between them, arranged for his rival to feast in his house; he then had him imprisoned and killed. Justice required that the Romans should avenge this crime, but difficulties lay in doing so in the normal way: what the Romans could not legally achieve without the hazard of war they therefore undertook to do by treachery. They could not do so 'honourably' but they did so 'usefully'. A certain Pomponius Flaccus was deemed the very man for the job; he ensnared that other pretender with feigned words and assurances and, instead of the honour and favour which he promised him, he dispatched him to Rome bound hand and foot. Here we have one traitor betraying another, which goes against the usual pattern, for traitors are full of mistrust and it is hard to catch them out by cunning like their own – witness the painful experience which we have just had. (S898)

Tacitus had introduced this story as an example of Tiberius's cunning, but he also emphasizes the treachery of Rhescuporis, whom Augustus had installed in one half of Thrace, leaving the rest to Cotys. Rhescuporis's encroachments on Cotys's half are all represented by Tacitus as successes of cunning over credulity. When he is summoned to Rome for imprisoning his nephew, he decides that it would be better to kill him. Tacitus emphasizes Tiberius's cunning in choosing Pomponius Flaccus as an envoy 'chiefly because that veteran campaigner was a friend of the king, and, as such, the better adapted to deceive him', and describes how the military escort which at first looked like a sign of honour became more openly coercive at each stage of the journey to Rome.²⁸ But in Tacitus's hands the story can still be read as a cunning (and bloodless) solution to an apparently intractable problem. Montaigne's abbreviations of the story, his descriptive vocabulary ('trahison', 'soubs feintes parolles et assurances ayant attiré ... dans ses rets') and his choice of descriptive details ('pieds et poings liez') put almost all the emphasis on the treachery of Pomponius Flaccus. Even though the treachery in this story is successful, Montaigne's reaction is to reiterate his refusal of such tasks. He then argues for the prudence of this position by giving examples of treacherous servants who were punished by the princes who benefited from their treachery.

These examples lead Montaigne to two further reflections: that there are times when it is better to die than save your life by obeying immoral commands and that princes, unlike private persons, may sometimes find themselves in situations where the good of the state obliges them to act immorally.

[B] Le Prince, quand une urgente circonstance et quelque impetueux et inopiné accident du besoiing de son estat luy faict gauchir sa parolle et sa foy, ou autrement le jette hors de son devoir ordinaire, doit attribuer cette necessité à un coup de la verge divine: vice, n'est-ce pas, car il a quitté sa raison a une plus universelle et puissante raison, mais certes c'est malheur. De maniere qu'à quelqu'un qui me demandoit: Quel remede? – Nul remede, fis-je, s'il fut veritablement gehenné entre ces deux extremes ... il le falloit faire; mais s'il le fit sans regret, s'il ne luy greva de le faire, c'est signe que sa conscience est en mauvais termes. (V799, P840)²⁹

[B] As for a prince, whenever some urgent necessity or some violent unforeseeable event affecting the needs of his State obliges him to go back on his pledged word, or otherwise forces him from the ordinate path of duty, he must consider it as a scourging from God; vice it is not, for he has abandoned his own right reason for a more powerful universal one, but it is indeed a calamity. So when I was asked, 'What remedy is there?', I replied, 'None: if the prince was really torn between those two extremes, ... then he had to do it; but if he had no regrets about doing it, if it did not weigh upon him, then that is a sign that his conscience has gone astray'. (S902)

The question of the relationship between private good and public necessity is then explored through two further examples from Plutarch: Timoleon (added in C), whose agonized decision to kill his brother because he was a tyrant is eventually vindicated by the justice and prudence of his other decisions, and Epaminondas, who as far as possible refused to do evil, even in battle or when securing the liberty of his people. This leads to quotations from Livy, Ovid and Cicero to the effect that neither civil war nor the national interest overrides individual rights and duties. The chapter concludes with two more examples from Tacitus to illustrate the decline of morality in extended periods of civil war.

[B] Combien peut le temps et l'exemple! En une rencontre de la guerre Civile contre Cynna, un soldat de Pompeius, ayant tué sans y penser son frere qui estoit au party contraire, se tua sur le champ soy-mesme de honte et de regret, et, quelques années apres, en une autre guerre civile de ce mesme peuple, un soldat, pour avoir tué son frere, demanda recompense à ses capitaines. (V803, P844)³⁰

[B] Think what examples can do over time! In an engagement against Cinna during the Civil War, one of Pompey's soldiers unintentionally killed his brother on the other side; from shame and sorrow he killed himself there and then on the field; yet a few years later in another Civil War between the same nations, a soldier killed his brother and then asked his officers for a reward for doing so. (S906)

Tacitus puts these two examples together and draws very much the same moral. It is just possible that the same passage from Tacitus suggested Shakespeare's episode of the son who kills his father in *Henry VI part three*, II.5. This is one of only two possible cases of Shakespeare using Tacitus, but the play is too early for Shakespeare to have taken the story from Montaigne.³¹ While *De l'utile et de l'honneste* includes observations on public morality and fascinating stories about Montaigne's conduct in the Wars of Religion, the major thinking of the essay is provoked by analysis of examples taken from historians.

Whereas historical examples drive the thought and structure of *De l'utile et de l'honneste*, history is not an important motivating force for *De la vanité* (III, 9), but two stories from history support the arguments, making them more memorable and affecting. In a passage of the essay in which, thinking of the wars of religion, he argues that all states ought to retain their established forms of government, he produces an aphorism.

[B] Rien ne presse un estat que l'innovation: le changement donne seul forme à l'injustice et à la tyrannie. (V958, P1002)

[B] Nothing crushes a state save novelty; change alone provides the mould for injustice and tyranny. (S1084)

First he develops this idea to suggest that all attempts at cure result in destruction and to attack those who wish to undertake change at such a cost. The 1595 edition adds a comparison with surgery. The surgeon not only

cuts out what is rotten but he also helps what is sound to grow back and restore the limb. In political terms this means not merely removing the evil (as Brutus thought he was doing when he killed Caesar) but providing for a cure, which, he suggests, will usually be beyond advocates of political change. These reflections are then illustrated by a story from Livy.

[C] Toutes grandes mutations esbranlent l'estat et le desordonnent. Qui viseroit droit à la guarison et en consulteroit avant toute oeuvre se refroidiroit volontiers d'y mettre la main. Pacuvius Calavius corrigea le vice de ce proceder par un exemple insigne. Ses concitoyens estoient mutinez contre leurs magistrats. Luy, personnage de grande autorité en la ville de Capoue, trouva un jour moyen d'enfermer le Senat dans le Palais et, convoquant le peuple en la place, leur dict que le jour estoit venu auquel en pleine liberté ils pouvoient prendre vengeance des tyrans qui les avoyent si long temps oppressez, lesquels il tenoit à sa mercy seuls et desarmez. Fut d'avis qu'au sort on les tirast hors, l'un apres l'autre, et de chacun on ordonnast particulièrement, faisant sur le champ executer ce qui en seroit decreté, pourveu aussi que tout d'un train ils advisassent d'establir quelque homme de bien en la place du condamné, affin qu'elle ne demeurast vuide d'officier. Ils n'eurent pas plus tost ouy le nom d'un Sénateur qu'il s'esleva un cri de mescontentement universel à l'encontre de luy. Je voy bien, dict Pacuvius, il faut demettre cettuy-cy: c'est un meschant; ayons en un bon en change. Ce fut un prompt silence, tout le monde se trouvant empesché au choix; au premier plus effronté qui dit le sien, voylà un consentement de voix encore plus grand à refuser celui là, cent imperfections et justes causes de le rebuter. Ces humeurs contradictoires s'estans eschauffées, il advint encore pis du second Sénateur, et du tiers: autant de discorde à l'election que de convenance à la demission. S'estans inutilement lassez à ce trouble, ils commencent, qui deçà qui delà, à se desrober peu à peu de l'assemblée, rapportant chacun cette resolution en son ame que le plus vieil et mieux cogneu mal est tousjours plus supportable que le mal recent et inexperimenté. (V958–9, P1003)

[C] All great revolutions convulse the state and cause disorder. Anyone who was aiming straight for a cure, and would reflect about it before anything was done, would soon cool his ardour for setting his hand to it. Pacuvius Calavius corrected that defective procedure, so providing

a memorable example. His fellow-citizens had revolted against their magistrates. He was an important man with great authority in his city of Capua. One day he found the means of locking the Senate in their palace; calling the citizens together in the market-place he told them that the time had come when they were fully at liberty to take their revenge on the tyrants who had so long oppressed them. He had those tyrants in his power, disarmed and isolated. His advice was that they should summon each of them out one at a time by lots, decide what should be done to each of them and immediately carry out the sentence, provided that they should at the same time decide to put some honourable man in the place of the man they had condemned so that the office should not remain unfilled. No sooner had they heard the name of the first senator than there arose shouts of universal disapproval. 'Yes, I can see', said Pacuvius, 'that we shall have to get rid of that one. He is a wicked man. Let us put a good man in his place'. An immediate silence fell, everyone being embarrassed over whom to choose. When the first man was rash enough to name his choice there was an even greater consensus of voices yelling out a hundred defects and just causes for rejecting him. As those opposing humours became inflamed the second and third senators fared even worse, with as much discord over the elections as agreement over the rejections. Having uselessly exhausted themselves in this quarrel they gradually began to slip this way and that out of the meeting, each going off convinced in his mind that an older better-known evil is more bearable than a new and untried one. (S1085–6)

Montaigne uses the story as a parable against change. The populace could agree on the people it rejected but found that anyone presented in their place was so unacceptable to some of them as to make agreement on a replacement impossible. Montaigne regards the discord greeting each new name as more damaging to them (and to the state as a whole) than the universal disapproval is to the existing senators. The illogicality of his position (that someone universally hated should be preferred to someone hated by a proportion of the people) reveals the strength of his distaste for change (and perhaps for democracy). In retelling the story this way Montaigne has also had to suppress important aspects of Livy's original.³² Livy made it clear from the start that Pacuvius's proposal was a trick designed to make him unchallengeable within the city. He persuaded the senate to let him lock them in their chamber by saying that he had a stratagem which would save their position if they left

everything to him. Livy calls him a bad man (*improbis homo*) and introduces the story by saying that he had 'started on a plan to save the senate and at the same time make it submissive to himself and the common people' (*rationem initiit qua et senatum servaret et obnoxium sibi ac plebi faceret*). At the end of the story he says that Pacuvius has made the senate subservient to him and now rules unchallenged as all give way to him. In many chapters Montaigne would be opposed both to someone who aimed at complete domination of a state and to anyone who used a trick to achieve his purposes, but here the force of the story as a memorable example of a principle he endorsed overrode any impetus to criticize Pacuvius's behaviour.

Shakespeare either invented or contributed to the establishment of the Renaissance genre of the English history play, to which he devoted more than a third of his plays.³³ His principal sources for the sequence of ten English and four Roman histories (and for some of the tragedies) were Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, in the second edition of 1587, augmented by Francis Thynne, Abraham Fleming and John Stow,³⁴ and Plutarch's *Lives* in the translation of Thomas North, based on Amyot's French translation, using either the first edition of 1579 or the second of 1595.³⁵ In addition to these sources Shakespeare consulted for particular plays other chronicles and ancient historians, earlier plays and poetic treatments of the material.

Shakespeare uses his historical sources to establish a structure for the play, for outlines of individual scenes and characters, and for narrative details and phrases which he incorporates in speeches. At the structural level he adds to the narrative derived from the sources to clarify the shape and to introduce dramatic confrontations. At the local level almost anything from the source may stick in his mind for reuse in the actual writing of the play. For example Samuel Daniel's *First Four Books of the Civil Wars* suggests a soliloquy for Richard II, which Shakespeare writes in a different way, but he uses the ideas expressed in Daniel's soliloquy in writing the dialogue for the meeting between Richard and Isabella in V.1.³⁶

Holinshed's *Chronicle*, like other English printed chronicles of the sixteenth century, was a compilation based on the work of earlier writers, drawing especially (for the reigns from Richard II to Henry VIII) on Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia* (Basel, 1534), a manuscript of Sir Thomas More's unfinished *Life of Richard III*,³⁷ and Edward Hall's *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York* (1548), also known as his *Chronicle*. More narrates Richard III's usurpation of the throne in a sequence

of brightly depicted scenes and polished speeches. He presents Richard as a ruthless and devious manipulator like the Tiberius of Tacitus's *Annals*.³⁸ Hall's *Chronicle* combines materials derived from medieval chronicles with the humanist tradition of historiography, including invented speeches for the principal characters, moral exclamations from the author, proverbs, character sketches and rhetorical flourishes but also extracts from documents, comparisons of versions of events and attempts to assign causes. At times Hall presents a providential pattern of English history from the deposition of Richard II to the accession of Edward VI,³⁹ but he also offers criticism of Richard and non-providential explanations, and records many events which make no contribution to this pattern. For the reign of Richard III Hall copied More's manuscript as far as it lasted (just past the coronation) and chronicle materials thereafter. Holinshed relies very heavily on Hall but he often omits the speeches and usually reduces the exclamations and interpretations. He and his augmenters frequently add further documents, new information and local events from other chronicles. In Holinshed there is much less sense of a governing pattern to the whole history. Holinshed absorbs More and Hall without obliterating their more distinctive voices.⁴⁰

Shakespeare usually supplemented Holinshed with other sources. For example for *Henry VI part two* he must have used Hall and Grafton for incidents not mentioned in Holinshed.⁴¹ Although the sources provide the main events of the play Shakespeare usually alters them to simplify the pattern of rises and falls of different characters and to establish characters early in the play. He may have derived this pattern of rising and falling from the *Mirror for Magistrates* or he may have introduced it because it suited theatrical presentation.⁴² Thus, although More provides many details for the scenes which portray the tyrannized society,⁴³ the real excitement of *Richard III* derives from the scenes Shakespeare invents at the beginning to establish the character of Richard. Where More condemns Richard and jokes at his expense, Shakespeare's Richard confides his own ruthless and hypocritical stratagems to the audience, making his own jokes about his ironic kindnesses to his victims (I.1.119–20, 154–6).

Shakespeare typically builds up the women's roles and invents scenes of family and domestic life, as in his elaboration of Margaret in *Henry VI part two* and of the Yorkist Queens in *Richard III*. Shakespeare makes a major change to the chronicles in placing the fall of Dame Eleanor, wife of Duke Humphrey, after the negotiations for Henry VI's marriage instead of before.⁴⁴ This move allows him to introduce a wider social range of characters

(the magician, the witch and the devil), to introduce an unhistorical but dramatically rewarding rivalry between Eleanor and Margaret, and to dramatize Humphrey's moderation in the domestic as well as the political sphere. In his adaptation of the outline of *Henry IV part one*, whose political plot derives mainly from Holinshed's narrative as selected by Samuel Daniel,⁴⁵ Shakespeare introduces a major comic strand to the play (I.2, II.1–2, II.4, III.3), richly inventing material to illustrate the legendary madcap youth of Henry V. He based some of this material, especially relating to the robbery and tavern life, on the anonymous play *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, which he may have seen in a version different from that first printed in 1598. He elaborated this comedy to the point where celebrating tavern merriment became a major purpose of the play, fuelled by his invention of the character of Falstaff. Shakespeare linked the comic plot to the political narrative by developing the theme of the education of Hal, by making Hal and Falstaff rehearse Hal's meeting with his father, and by bringing Falstaff and Bardolph from Eastcheap to the battle of Shrewsbury. Shakespeare further adds scenes which establish the major characters and groupings early in the play and which provide a domestic life for the rebels, which again serves as a contrast to Hal's private life.

When Shakespeare turns to Plutarch he finds already there much of the personal and domestic material he earlier had to invent. Plutarch provided him with the kind of history he had previously composed for himself. For *Julius Caesar* (1599) Shakespeare read North's translation of Plutarch's lives of Antony, Brutus and Caesar. His reading in Plutarch prompted his decision to base the play around two major scenes which Plutarch describes in detail, the murder of Julius Caesar and the defeat of Brutus and Cassius at Philippi. Plutarch provided Shakespeare with the main outline of the story, with many of the scenes he dramatized and with an extraordinary number of arguments, narratives, names and phrases. It seems that Shakespeare went out of his way to include additional details from Plutarch, even when they might seem to raise a side-issue.⁴⁶ Scenes which one would normally think of as typical of the additions Shakespeare makes to history, for example dramatizing Portia's concern to be taken into her husband Brutus's confidence or the lynching by the crowd of the wrong Cinna, turn out to have been taken directly from Plutarch. Shakespeare makes some additions to Plutarch's account of Brutus's domestic life, building up the character of the young servant Lucius, to whose need for sleep Brutus is at times sensitive. He also establishes the tribunes at the beginning of the play so that they can serve as an image of the suppression of

republican Rome. At the same time he undercuts any such claims by portraying their bullying imposition of a Pompeyan perspective on the common people of Rome, who may well be more attuned to Caesar and Antony.

As in *Henry VI part two* Shakespeare organized the play around a set of rises and falls: the fall of Caesar, the rise and fall of Brutus and Cassius and the questionable rise of Antony and Octavius. The play is articulated in four large movements: the preparation of the conspiracy; the murder of Julius Caesar; the funeral orations, which reverse the fortunes of the conspirators; and the battle of Philippi, with the deaths of Brutus and Cassius. In each half of the play Shakespeare places a major scene of confrontation between Brutus and Cassius: Cassius's temptation of Brutus (I.2) and their quarrel near Sardis and its resolution (IV.3). Shakespeare develops both scenes on the basis of Plutarch's descriptions.

In selecting and adapting material from Plutarch Shakespeare takes particular care to create characterizations which can be argued for and against, criticized as well as praised. Shakespeare's Brutus has many admirable qualities but he is also shown to impose his will on others (in II.1), to make disastrous political errors (especially in his handling of Antony) and to be guilty of moral inconsistency, most notably in asking Cassius for money at the same time as criticizing him for the way in which the money was raised. The reasons he gives for killing Caesar in his soliloquy at the beginning of II.1 rely on conjectures about how Caesar might behave in the future rather than on tyrannical characteristics he has so far showed.⁴⁷ They do credit to Brutus's intellectual scrupulousness but they seem like rather slight reasons for killing a friend. They could be read as retrospective (and tellingly weak) justifications for a decision he has already taken ('It must be by his death', II.1.10). For Shakespeare Brutus is not the straightforwardly exemplary figure he was for Montaigne. Montaigne tells us that he has begun dozens of quarrels in defence of Pompey or Brutus. In contrast to other authors Brutus's very writings declare that he was the man to lose his life in the defence of liberty. Montaigne praises him as a general who loved books and in the final chapter particularly commends the calmness that enabled him to give an hour to reading Polybius at a time when all the world was conspiring against him and the liberty of Rome.⁴⁸ Shakespeare picks up this bookishness in the moment when Brutus finds in his pocket the volume he has asked Lucius to find (IV.2.303–5).⁴⁹

Coriolanus (1608) was a much more unusual choice of subject to dramatize than either the death of Caesar or the career of Antony. Although he respects

Coriolanus's valour in war Plutarch ultimately treats him as an example of the faults which follow from pride, obstinacy and anger.⁵⁰ Montaigne often discusses Caesar and Antony (and many other Roman generals) but never mentions Coriolanus. Shakespeare follows Plutarch very closely basing some major speeches (we looked at Shakespeare's rewriting of Volumnia's speech in Chapter 4) and three important scenes on his source. We must assume that Plutarch's emphasis on the strong mother-son relationship, the flawed hero and the political conflict within Rome attracted Shakespeare to the subject.⁵¹ Plutarch provided him with the plot outline and the essential basis of the battle sequence near Corioli (I.4-10), the meeting with Aufidius (IV.5), the confrontation with Volumnia (V.3) and the death of Coriolanus (V.6).

From Plutarch's narrative Shakespeare develops a plot in five main movements, encompassing two rises and falls for the hero. He adds some scenes which Plutarch narrates briefly (*e.g.*, Menenius's pacification of the plebeians and the scene in which Coriolanus visits the plebeians to solicit their voices) and scenes designed to establish and develop characters (such as Aufidius and Volumnia) who will be important later in the play but are not needed at the beginning of Plutarch's narrative. Providing Coriolanus with a wife whose expressive silence mildly contests the expectation of his mother enhances our understanding of the hero's domestic circumstances. Shakespeare maintains the tribunes and the common people in the audience's view throughout the play, where Plutarch refers to them mainly during the disputes about debt, the colony, food and the consulship.⁵² He follows and develops Plutarch's observations that the keys to understanding Coriolanus's character were his anger and his need for his mother's approval.⁵³

In the central movement of the play, as we shall see, Shakespeare rearranges and adds to Plutarch's account of political arguments at Rome. This section of the play is as much concerned with the political expression of the views of the people and with the contrast between moderate and hard-line senators as with the conflict between senators and plebeians. Shakespeare here takes the opportunity to portray the different factions in a complex political struggle within the city and the consequences of that struggle for the well-being of the city. Towards the end of the play, by contrast, he concentrates more on dramatizing his source and focuses the audience's attention on the fate of the hero. Plutarch gives Shakespeare an outline of Coriolanus's meeting with Aufidius, and an important model for the argument and words of Coriolanus's speech.⁵⁴ Plutarch's account of Coriolanus's death provides the

main outline of the play's final scene,⁵⁵ but Shakespeare makes Coriolanus react to Aufidius's goading ('boy of tears') with anger and pride.

Cut me to pieces, Volscies, men and lads,
 Stain all your edges on me. Boy! False hound!
 If you have writ your annals true, 'tis there,
 That like an eagle in a dove-cote, I
 Flutter'd your Volscians in Corioles.
 Alone I did it. Boy! ... (V.6.111–16)

Shakespeare's adaptation here removes the passivity of Martius's death in Plutarch. For Plutarch Martius here is a wronged victim and his murder a political calamity for the Volscies. Shakespeare allows Coriolanus to reassert his character and reinforces the play's depiction of the troubles caused by his lack of restraint. His Coriolanus is unfit for the society of other men in Antium just as much as in Rome. He offers the audience a choice of explanations for the hero's death, not simply Aufidius's desire for revenge but also the understandable fury of the Volscies at his boastful reminders of the violence he has done to them. Coriolanus's boasts are similar in tone and effect to the words spoken by captured American Indians to the tribes about to execute them which Montaigne's account in *Des cannibales* (I, 31), here borrowing from Lry, so much admires.

[A] Ils le deffient, les injurient, leur reprochent leur laschet et le nombre des batailles perdues contre les leurs. J'ay une chanson faicte par un prisonnier, o il y a ce traict: qu'ils viennent hardiment trtous et s'assemblent pour disner de luy: car ils mangeront quant et quant leurs peres et leurs ayeulx, qui ont servy d'aliment et de nourriture son corps. Ces muscles, dit-il, cette cher et ces veines, ce sont les vostres, pauvres fols que vous estes; vous ne recognoissez pas que la substance des membres de vos ancestres s'y tient encore: savourez les bien, vous y trouverez le goust de vostre propre chair. Invention qui ne sent aucunement la barbarie. (V212, P219)⁵⁶

[A] They defy them, insult them, and reproach them for cowardice, and for all the battles they have lost against their people. I have a song made by one such prisoner which contains the following: Let them all courageously come and gather to feast off him, for they will then be

eating their own fathers and grandfathers, who have served as food and nourishment for his body. 'These muscles', he says, 'this flesh, and these veins are your own, poor fools that you are! You do not realize that the substance of your ancestors' limbs is still in them. Taste them carefully, and you will find the flavour is that of your own flesh'. The discovery of that topic does not savour of barbarism. (S239)

Coriolanus's defiance is less extreme than this, and in contrast to Montaigne's open admiration, Shakespeare's treatment seems more hostile. He certainly read this chapter of Montaigne carefully (in view of his borrowings in *The Tempest*) and may have done so before writing *Coriolanus*.

Both Shakespeare and Montaigne wanted to understand the human side of great historical figures. This is the basis of their shared admiration for Plutarch. Montaigne always favoured anecdotes about the personal habits of great men while Shakespeare was not only drawn to domestic scenes in historical sources (Brutus with Portia, Coriolanus with his mother) but frequently included additional scenes of this type. Perhaps the needs of the actors who specialized in women's roles and the mixed audience of the playhouse encouraged Shakespeare to build up scenes and roles for women.⁵⁷ Where Montaigne expressed the wish to hear Brutus's words and see his behaviour to his friends on the eve of a great battle, Shakespeare gives his audience such scenes. Montaigne might well have disapproved. Although he understood the unreliability of historians and disliked the cult of the old for its own sake, he nevertheless elevated the truthfulness of ancient historians without really considering whether Plutarch, for example, might not have invented words and details for some of the scenes he describes (as it seems he did). The great dramatist will almost inevitably re-imagine his characters from the inside and he may believe that he has more licence to invent plausible domestic details than public events (though Shakespeare was sometimes willing to do that, as with the alteration in the chronology of Eleanor's disgrace and the reorganization of the political struggle in *Coriolanus*).

Responses to the requirements and opportunities offered by the theatre prompt many of the changes Shakespeare makes to historical sources. Especially at the beginning of a play, he adds scenes to establish characters and explain pre-existing rivalries or to maintain in the audience's mind someone who will be important later for the plot. Sometimes he chooses to add scenes which will create correspondences and comparisons within a play (e.g., the two dialogues between Brutus and Cassius, the two large scenes for Queen Margaret and the

Yorkist Queens, the scenes of private life for Hotspur to balance the tavern scenes for Hal). Far from being a dramatic necessity such scenes suggest the kind of intellectual work which Shakespeare wants his audience to do, making comparisons and connections between different parts of the play and different characters. While he is attracted by stories which suggest scenes of conflict he also finds it dramatically rewarding to invent further scenes of this type, such as the confrontation between Hal and Henry IV (III.2), which he then redoubles with its two separate rehearsals in the great tavern scene (II.4) or Richard III's seduction of Anne (I.2), which he then balances with the request for the hand of Elizabeth of York (IV.4.204–361). In a different way the excitement which Richard's outrageous forcefulness creates in the first two scenes of *Richard III* is immediately balanced by two great scenes which focus on the cost of dynastic violence and the fearfulness of death.

Shakespeare's choice of historical subjects and the manner in which he adapted his sources indicate that he was far more interested than Montaigne in exploring the principles of practical politics. In this preoccupation he was also closer to the mainstream of humanist history. Shakespeare's portrayal of nobles jostling for power in the court of the weak king Henry VI depends on Hall but presents a much clearer account of the real fissures among the nobility and the temporary alliances by which Duke Humphrey was removed. By removing the characters in stages at the end of the first scene of *Henry VI part two*, and by allowing characters to comment on the motivations of those who have just left, Shakespeare offers a clear exposition of the rivalries and temporary alliances prevailing in the court. Shakespeare's analysis of the political situation also makes it clear, somewhat against Hall's words, that the instability of Humphrey's position (and by extension, of the kingdom) predated the arrival of Queen Margaret and was a consequence of the individual political agendas pursued by the fractured class of nobles.

Shakespeare's building up of the role of Dame Eleanor enables Duke Humphrey to demonstrate his virtue but produces a more surprising and enlightening contrast in their political analyses. Where Humphrey first advises his wife against ambition and later counsels patience, she offers a more personalized analysis of the political situation which appears more perceptive than his confidence in virtue.

DUCHESS But be thou mild and blush not at my shame
Nor stir at nothing till the axe of death
Hang over thee, as sure it shortly will.

For Suffolk, he that can do all in all
With her that hateth thee and hates us all,
And York, and impious Beaufort, that false priest,
Have all limed bushes to betray thy wings;
And fly thou how thou canst, they'll tangle thee.
But fear not thou until thy foot be snared,
Nor never seek prevention of thy foes.
GLOUCESTER Ah, Nell, forbear; thou aimest all awry.
I must offend before I be attainted,
And had I twenty times so many foes,
And each of them had twenty times their power,
All these could not procure me any scathe
So long as I am loyal, true, and crimeless. (II.4.49–67)

Eleanor's accurate estimation of the political world Humphrey lives in and of his own character (overconfident in his own virtue, unwilling to see the dangers which surround him) makes the audience reevaluate her. The generally held view that she is foolish and ambitious invites others to manipulate her and prevents Gloucester from listening to her good advice. His confidence in his own just conduct corresponds to the historical sources, but Shakespeare's presentation of this dialogue invites the audience to question the wisdom of Gloucester's attitude long before his death.

Shakespeare's adaptation of Plutarch's *Coriolanus* expands the role of the people of Rome. Whereas in *Henry VI part two* and *Julius Caesar* the on-stage crowd was largely manipulated by members of the political class, in *Coriolanus* the people of Rome are depicted as having political goals and debates of their own. In II.2 the difference of opinion between those who think that Coriolanus's deeds merit the consulship in spite of his flaws and those who regard him as a danger to Rome is resolved by the people's realization of how poorly Coriolanus had treated them. It is entirely understandable that part of the population feels that the city's debt to Coriolanus requires that he be appointed consul and also that when they think over the way he has treated them they should decide to withdraw their consent. Thus, although Shakespeare portrays the tribunes as manipulative, he shows that they allow the people's view (here presented as considered and perceptive) to be expressed.

In III.1, Sicinius and Brutus block Coriolanus's way to the capitol. They explain that now that the people have decided to reject Coriolanus's candidacy, he must not enter the market place because of the risk of civil disturbance

(III.1.26–32). Coriolanus angrily denounces their intervention as an attempt to curb the power of the nobility and the patricians attempt to calm him. The scene exposes the fissures within the senatorial party which the diplomacy of the politicians must attempt to restrain, at the same time as arguing their case against the tribunes. Cominius and Coriolanus resent the way the tribunes use the fear of civil disorder to end Coriolanus's hopes of the consulship, but Menenius understands that the expression of this antagonism to the people will have to be restrained in order to achieve a peaceful resolution of the division within the city. In his anger Coriolanus takes the opportunity to express his political theories (III.1.68–73, 80–4). Menenius and the first senator's attempts to restrain Coriolanus and preserve a moderated senatorial authority are attacked both by Coriolanus who wants to express his true opinions freely and by Sicinius who wants to allow Coriolanus to provoke the people's hatred. Coriolanus expresses a coherent political philosophy with considerable force. The sympathy the audience has with Menenius's role as peacemaker is balanced with a resentment of his attempt to restrain the expression of ideas which it wants to hear and see tested.

COR ... This double worship,
 Where one part does disdain with cause, the other
 Insult without all reason: where gentry, title, wisdom,
 Cannot conclude but by the yea and no
 Of general ignorance, it must omit
 Real necessities, and give way the while
 To unstable slightness. Purpose so barr'd, it follows
 Nothing is done to purpose. (141–8)

Although we must understand Coriolanus's forceful words as an expression of his anger, nevertheless we want to consider the question he has raised, to determine for ourselves whether popular suffrage means that the state can never see through hard decisions. This speech expresses a point of view which is usually assumed to be true in Renaissance English justifications of monarchy. But by giving this idea to Coriolanus, shortly after a scene which has demonstrated the political rationality of the people, Shakespeare offers the audience the possibility of understanding them as self-serving. Here using a Roman subject permits Shakespeare to discuss issues, about the political expression of popular opinion and about the role of office-holders elected by the people, which would be unaddressable in an English

historical context. Conversely the audience's view of Coriolanus's words on the dangers of government with popular approval must also be coloured by their understanding of his personal motivation and the tribunes' comments on the implications of what he says.

The next scene (III.2), devised by Shakespeare and entirely independent of Plutarch, explores the personal cost for Coriolanus of his party's attempt to heal the breach in the city by persuading him to stand trial against the tribunes' accusations. After her entry Volumnia dominates the scene. As Coriolanus had expected she hates the plebeians as much as he does but she manages to control her expression of her feelings. She criticizes him for showing his anger before he had secured power (17–23), reminds him that policy can be reconciled with honour in war (42–51), urges him to utter a conciliatory form of words without believing them (54–64) and explains how he should perform them (72–86). When Coriolanus complains that she is asking him to play 'a part which never I shall discharge to th' life', Volumnia replies by promising him for performing the new part the same praise which he says first made him a soldier. Describing his new role to himself Coriolanus reacts against its denial of his truth.

COR Well, I must do't.

Away my disposition and possess me
Some harlot's spirit! ...

A beggar's tongue

Make motion through my lips, and my armed knees,
Who bowed but in my stirrup, bend like his
That hath received an alms! I will not do't,
Lest I surcease to honour mine own truth,
And by my body teach my mind
A most inherent baseness.

VOL At thy choice then.

To beg of thee it is my more dishonour
Than thou of them. Come all to ruin ...
Thy valiantness was mine, thou sucked'st it from me,
But owe thy pride thyself. (III.3.110–12, 117–25, 128–9)

By naming the actions which the parts of his body would need to perform Coriolanus finds that such a degree of pretence would contradict the truth of his own mind. His body's performance would teach his mind dishonour.

The external voice of Volumnia dramatizes his internal struggle. She insists that his obligations to her override any other form of honour. Her claim to have shaped him, by explaining the construction of his inner 'truth', denies its fixity and opens the way for her to denounce his proclaimed constancy as pride. Faced with his fashioner his determined sense of his identity and values collapses. Submission to her will under such conditions hardly equips him to dissemble his feelings before the people, but his alternative ('as if a man were author of himself', V.3.36) is no more sustaining.

Political analysis in *Henry IV part one* depends on the way in which history is represented. Worcester tells Hotspur of Mortimer's claim to the throne and Henry IV's mistreatment of Richard II in order to tempt him into rebellion. When Henry confronts his son, in a scene which Shakespeare invents, partly to explain why Prince Hal is given a position of trust in the battle of Shrewsbury, he retells the story of his winning the throne to set up a pair of comparisons.⁵⁸ Henry contrasts Hal's conduct with his own youthful behaviour, which proved politically effective because it differed so greatly from the frivolity of Richard II. Then he contrasts Hal's actions with Hotspur's (as they had been in Henry's speech in I.1), so that in effect Hal is aligned with Richard, while Hotspur is paired with Henry (not an obvious parallel in all respects) with the implication that Hal runs the risk of losing the throne to Hotspur. The logical structure depends on the topic of opposites and the unreliable corollary assumption that if two things are opposites then what is opposite to the second will be like the first. The force of the speech comes from the descriptive power with which Henry amplifies his four exemplary figures (III.2.39–120). Henry magnifies Hotspur's glory in order to contrast it with Hal's disgrace and conclude that Hal is an even more dangerous enemy to him than Hotspur. Henry applies the rhetorical arts of description, amplification and comparison to the historical record of the past twenty years. He collects the history into four paired exemplary figures, the spendthrift Richard and the politic Henry, the disgraceful Hal and the chivalric ideal of Hotspur. As Henry's eloquence exhausts itself in a caricatured extrapolation of Hal's degeneracy, Hal responds by vividly describing a fictional future scene.

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

And stain my favours in a bloody mask,
Which, wash'd away, shall scour my shame with it (132–7)

Hal's argument depends on his vivid amplification of an imagined scene rather than on any proof he can offer, but his determination, his zest for glory and his eloquence are so unexpected that they win Henry over and restore Hal to a central place of trust. Where Henry recasts the past into a pattern of comparisons, Hal provides a stirring imagined fiction to move his father. The audience are less surprised than Henry because they have heard Hal's first soliloquy.⁵⁹

So when this loose behaviour I throw off,
And pay the debt I never promised,
By how much better than my word I am,
By so much shall I falsify men's hopes;
And like bright metal on a sullen ground,
My reformation, glitt'ring o'er my fault,
Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes
Than that which hath no foil to set it off. (I.2.203–10)

Looking back on that speech from the perspective of III.2, the audience appreciates that Hal's Machiavellian scheme to manufacture public astonishment both was an extension of his father's avowed methods and prepared the way for an effective deception of that father. This is where the parallelism between I.3 and III.2 becomes logically telling. Where Worcester's cunning exploitation of Hotspur's charisma led to civil war, Hal's combination of calculation and glamorous eloquence in the same person regained the lost trust of his father and thereby reclaimed his royal inheritance. Hal's fictional exemplary representation of himself out-argued the scheme of contrasts and implications devised by his father.

Some of Shakespeare's most important elaborations of his sources contrast unofficial views of politics and morality with the established ideology of the political élite.⁶⁰ In *Richard III* I.4, as Clarence sleeps, after relating his guilty dream, his keeper Brakenbury attempts to generalize and sanitize his fears as moral axioms on the play's developing theme of the troubles which come with the crown (I.4.78–83). These provisional conclusions are interrupted by the arrival of the two murderers with their commission. His own casual mention of the last judgement provokes an emotion of remorse in the second

murderer, which is imaged as a liquid washing through his body and ebbing out, with time and at the thought of payment.

- 1 MURD Where's thy conscience now?
- 2 MURD Oh, in the Duke of Gloucester's purse.
- 1 MURD When he opens his purse to give us our reward, thy conscience flies out?
- 2 MURD 'Tis no matter; let it go. There's few, or none, will entertain it.
- 1 MURD What if it come to thee again?
- 2 MURD I'll not meddle with it; it makes a man a coward. A man cannot steal but it accuseth him; a man cannot swear but it checks him; a man cannot lie with his neighbour's wife but it detects him. 'Tis a blushing, shamefaced spirit, that mutinies in a man's bosom. It fills a man full of obstacles; it made me once restore a purse of gold that by chance I found. It beggars any man that keeps it; it is turned out of towns and cities for a dangerous thing; and every man that means to live well endeavours to trust himself and live without it.
(I.4.121–39)

In a move which will later become one of his hallmarks Shakespeare invites low-life characters to think through issues which generically normally concern their betters. Their perspective from below reveals a different side of the argument and conducts it in a different vein. The second murderer envisages conscience as a chemical which overcomes his body. The idea of taking conscience as a physical rather than a mental entity is then extended into a series of jokes. The second murderer anatomizes its affect on his pleasures and wealth. But the mental exercise he has to go through in order to expel conscience indicates the paradoxical hold it still has over him. He presents a world and a profession in which conscience has no place, yet it keeps returning to afflict him. What he sees as misleading and debilitating the audience interprets as a sign of hope. When the murderers accidentally wake Clarence they can hardly bear to confront him, but when he argues that they should refrain from murdering him, they readily find strong counter-arguments from his own actions (183–98). Once Clarence states his position so clearly, the murderers promptly reply with the counter-arguments arising from the particular case. As we saw in the last chapter, stating positions readily generates objections and contraries. Here the contraries derive from Clarence's well-known history of betrayals. The murderers finish each other's

sentences as if they were now, together, Clarence's conscience, and had the audience's insight into his soul. The excitement of the scene arises from the high level of the intellectual contest and the temporary sense that Clarence's life (and perhaps the destiny of his soul) depends on the outcome of the argument. At the same time Clarence's appeals to God's absolute standards and to notions of providence are continually answered by the murderers' recall of the history of the particular people involved. Clarence's false move is to refer his murderers to the support he anticipates from Richard. The shock with which he learns of Richard's real command (reminding us of the way Richard swept him to his death in his dream) emboldens the murderers to dispatch him. And once the crisis of the argument is past the second murderer's remorse is reawakened, as if he can argue his way out of conscience but cannot avoid the strong physical feelings which tie him to a kind of humanity he thought his profession had excluded.

Shakespeare's history plays include servants, murderers, citizens, rebels, officers and gardeners who pursue their own lives but also comment on and intervene in the preoccupations of the great figures. This extends the idea of placing great events in the context of ordinary life from which they emerge but it also involves expanding the range of experience presented (sorcerers, an armourer and his apprentice, cobblers, tavern keepers, waiters, unfortunately named poets) to depict the diversity of the nation but also to present that nation, made up of so many different interests and viewpoints, as a central figure of history. The continuity of the nation can be posed against the eclipse and death of the individual hero. The later Montaigne shares Shakespeare's interest in the experiences and actions of ordinary people. His comments on the heroism of ordinary people are based on his experience in the religious wars. His appreciation of their courage in much more trying circumstances than his own prompts him to draw lessons from them for his own behaviour and for that of the leisured gentry who are his principal audience. It is telling that when, in the final chapter of the book, Montaigne praises the wisdom of everyday life, the examples he chooses are Epaminondas and Socrates. He praises Socrates for his drinking and enjoyment of children's games as well as for his bravery and resilience. 'We should never tire of comparing the ideal of that great man against all patterns and forms of perfection.'⁶¹ The depiction of Socrates as both the supreme moral exemplum and representative of the ordinary man, courageous in war and public life but entering fully into ordinary forms of enjoyment, drives the conclusion of the whole book.

[B] C'est une absolue perfection, et comme divine, de sçavoir jouyr loyalement de son estre. Nous cherchons d'autres conditions, pour n'entendre l'usage des nostres, et sortons hors de nous, pour ne sçavoir quel il y fait. [C] Si avons nous beau monter sur des eschasses, car sur des eschasses encores faut-il marcher de nos jambes. Et au plus eslevé throne du monde si ne sommes assis que sus nostre cul. [B] Les plus belles vies sont, à mon gré, celles qui se rangent au modelle commun [C] et humain, avec ordre, mais sans miracle, [B] sans extravagance. (V1115–16, P1166)⁶²

[B] It is an accomplishment, absolute and as it were God-like, to know how to enjoy our being as we ought. We seek other attributes because we do not understand the use of our own, and, having no knowledge of what is within, we sally forth outside ourselves. [C] It is vain to get up on stilts: for even on stilts we must walk on our legs. And upon the highest throne in the world, we are seated, still, upon our arses. [B] The most beautiful of lives to my taste are those which conform to the common measure, [C] human and ordinate, without miracles though and [B] without rapture. (S1268–9)

Montaigne uses the necessity of bodily functions to equate rulers with ordinary people. Probably he would have sympathized with the second murderer's material understanding of conscience. Shakespeare depicts and listens to ordinary, near-anonymous individuals. Perhaps, as in the Mystery Plays, it was the popular audience who encouraged this or perhaps it was the dramatist's instinct to explore the motivations and feelings which drive everyone framed in the historical scene.

The character of Falstaff takes its origin from an implication of the historical tradition rather than from a record in Holinshed. Since Henry V had a riotous youth he must have had companions in riot, who may well have misled him. *The Famous Victories* develops the character of Oldcastle (which was also Falstaff's original name) to fill this need. Stephen Greenblatt calls Falstaff 'gross, drunken, irresponsible, self-dramatizing and astonishingly witty', arguing that although based on Oldcastle, the character is an amalgam of established theatrical types: the braggart soldier, the parasite, with his limitless appetite for food and drink, and the vice.⁶³ Other critics have made connections with the improvisations of Elizabethan clowns.⁶⁴ Nuttall connects Falstaff with King Arthur, pregnancy and babies.⁶⁵ There may be

a sense in which the character of Falstaff is itself improvised with different aspects coming to the fore in different situations and in response to particular verbal cues. We can describe his effect by registering the impact he makes in different scenes and in individual speeches.

Falstaff makes his first impression by size and grossness, snoring, slowly waking out of a presumably drunken stupor, perhaps belching. The first impression (and one of the longest lasting) is simply of excessive size and consumption. Then one is struck by his linguistic resourcefulness, picking up Hal's exaggerating, ridiculing accusations and overgoing them with quotations and puns. His inventiveness of word and thought feeds off other people's languages, imaginatively developing and reversing their jests and taunts. At other times he builds character and expression through parody of commonly available styles, for example the Biblical and the Euphuistic.⁶⁶ From the first he has an eye to the future and what he might gain from the prince's friendship ('When thou art king'). His speech is filled with boasting and lies, with name-calling and altering, twisting and reversing the meanings of words. Readers of Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* will not hesitate to identify Falstaff with the carnivalesque, the eruption of billingsgate, popular language and festivity onto the stage.⁶⁷ But it needs to be remembered that in particular scenes the accusations and the inventive language often originate with the prince. Falstaff is so adept at adapting himself to the prince's moods that he must also be thought of as the flatterer, the false friend. From the first he is the butt of Hal's jokes. Hal's only reason for participating in the robbery is to hear Falstaff's attempts to lie his way out of Poins's trap. Falstaff plays up to this role and enjoys it, exaggerating his retelling of the robbery past any limit of credibility before evading the trap, 'instinctively'. Falstaff's 'instinct' is for survival and the gusto with which he embraces life remains his most charming characteristic.⁶⁸ At Gad's Hill Falstaff acts like a coward but when the watch call at the Boar's Head to arrest him for the capital offence of highway robbery he surprises us with his willingness to face them, even as he appeals successfully for Hal's protection (II.5.452–5). Sometimes defiance is the best way of arousing pity. II.4 immortalizes his good-humoured acting and resourcefulness even as it exposes his cunning and his expectation of betraying others in order to survive ('banish Peto, banish Bardolph, banish Poins', 431). He is vanity personified and he lacks any scrap of honour, falsely accusing the landlady who dotes on him in order to extract a little extra cash to add to the mountain of debt he already owes her (III.3.44–94).

If the first half of the play celebrates his largely harmless excess with good humour, when Shakespeare decides to bring him from the tavern to the war we see him in a more sinister and serious light. He misuses his power of pressing, weakening the king's army in order to make money. His attitude to his soldiers is heartless and obscene but it voices and personally acknowledges the truth that people with means will put themselves in positions where they escape the penalties of war, for which the poor will pay with their lives (IV.2.11–62). When he explains that the men he has assembled in place of those who bought their way out of service will 'fill a pit as well as better' he speaks an unacceptable truth. In the civil war of Henry IV immorality and counterfeiting are a great help in surviving (just as Worcester's lies condemn many men to death). Falstaff's great speeches on honour question one of the main principles of the lives of Hal and Hotspur.⁶⁹ But, as the cases of Worcester and Northumberland show, it is not necessarily preferable, or even better for survival, to be without honour. Even if honour is no more than empty vanity, vanity itself is a powerful motivation in human affairs.

FALSTAFF I would 'twere bed-time, Hal, and all well.

PRINCE HAL Why, thou owest God a death. [*Exit*]

FALSTAFF 'Tis not due yet. I would be loath to pay him before his day. What need I be so forward with him that calls not on me? Well, 'tis no matter, honour pricks me on. Yea, but how if honour prick me off when I come on, how then? Can honour set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery then? No. What is honour? A word. What is in that word honour? What is that honour? Air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that died a – Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis insensible, then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon – and so ends my catechism. (V.1.125–41)

Hal's reminder of the inevitability of death sets Falstaff on a path of evasion. He has no reason to pay any debt early and besides honour stimulates him to action rather than to thoughts of death. But Falstaff pauses to question his own words: what if honour were to choose him (punning on 'prick') for death or injury? What good would honour be then? Then he applies the techniques of *copia*, envisaging the particular injuries he might suffer and, through the rhetoric of *interrogatio* and the logic of induction, concluding with absurd

literal accuracy, 'honour hath no skill in surgery'. This conclusion prompts him to the more fundamental question (not posed by anyone else in the play) of the nature of honour. Having established that the word is just air (vanity?) he turns to the topics of subject and effect, asking who has it and what good it does them, before concluding with a dilemma: it is no use to the dead, because they cannot feel it, or to the living, because it will always be questioned by the jealous. Falstaff's puns and unexpected questions lead him to an idea about the fragility of glory which is like the argument of Montaigne's *De la gloire* (II, 16), which Shakespeare almost certainly had not then read. Falstaff's false acquisition of honour at the battle of Shrewsbury could almost be an exemplary story from that chapter.

In his final chapter, *De l'experience*, Montaigne almost turns his back on historical examples. The difficulties of applying reason, of making appropriate comparisons and inductions mean that we are thrown back on our understanding of our own experience ('When reason fails us we make use of experience').⁷⁰

[B] Quel que soit donq le fruict que nous pouvons avoir de l'experience, à peine servira beaucoup à nostre institution celle que nous tirons des exemples estrangers, si nous faisons si mal nostre profit de celle que nous avons de nous mesme, qui nous est plus familiere, et certes suffisante à nous instruire de ce qu'il nous faut. Je m'estudie plus qu'autre subject. C'est ma metaphysique, c'est ma physique ... La vie de Caesar n'a point plus d'exemple que la nostre pour nous. (V1072-4, P1119-21)

[B] Whatever we may in fact get from experience, such benefit as we derive from other people's examples will hardly provide us with an elementary education if we make so poor a use of such experience as we have presumably enjoyed ourselves; that is more familiar to us and certainly enough to instruct us in what we need. I study myself more than any other subject. That is my metaphysics; that is my physics ... Even the life of Caesar is less exemplary for us than our own. (S1217-18)

Setting aside exemplary figures encourages him to interrogate further his own experience, but the main learning he derives from experience is to distrust his memory and his reason. His disease has taught him to appreciate relief from pain and the simple moments of bodily pleasure.⁷¹

Without knowing exactly what she will provide he is now confident that Nature will give him the resources needed to complete his life and to die. The aim of living a life in harmony with human nature provides him with a new model, Socrates, whom he praises for his ordinate manner of living and for the delight which he took in simple pleasures. Even as Montaigne's understanding of experience urges him to dispense with all exemplary historical figures, his habits of thinking drive him back to his reading.

Shakespeare has sometimes been accused of taking a Christian providentialist view of history, for example as an exponent of the so called Tudor myth in which the legacy of the deposition of Richard II haunted the reigns of successive kings until Richard III drew into himself all the evil of the realm in preparation for the triumph of Henry VII.⁷² While it is true that some characters in the plays (both Richard II and III would do as examples) speak of God's protection of themselves or his punishment of previous acts of inhumanity, the plays tend to reveal these claims as self-interested and false. Shakespeare's careful representations of political behaviour suggest that he took a pragmatic view of history.⁷³ Montaigne mocks those who see events as the expression of the divine will,⁷⁴ and he finds that history is too varied to promote simple political lessons. Although some lines of conduct can be shown to be mistaken, political success, in his view, owes as much to good fortune as to correct calculation.⁷⁵

Both Montaigne and Shakespeare acknowledge connections between war and politics. Both see war as the final test of noble qualities. For Montaigne it is the duty of the nobleman to go to war at the behest of his sovereign.⁷⁶ Both Hal and Hotspur regard military glory as the decisive index of worth. Montaigne condemns the expansionist wars of the Spanish in America. At home he regards the religious wars as the causes of a breakdown in social morality. At the same time they offer him examples of the heroic suffering of ordinary people. Henry IV presents foreign war as a way of averting internal political violence.⁷⁷ Montaigne can see the force of this political analysis but he regards the conclusion as immoral.

[A] Il y en a plusieurs en ce temps qui discourent de pareille façon, souhaitans que ceste esmotion chaleureuse qui est parmy nous, se peust deriver à quelque guerre voisine ... mais je ne croy pas que Dieu favorisast une si injuste entreprise, d'offencer et quereler autrui pour notre commodité. (V683, P721)

[A] There are many today who use similar arguments, wishing that the heat of the civil commotions among us could be diverted into some war against our neighbours ... but I do not believe that God would look favourably on so wicked an enterprise as our attacking and quarrelling with a neighbour simply for our own convenience. (S776)

Montaigne accepts the primacy of honour among the aristocracy though he can also see it as a type of vanity. But in *De la gloire* (II, 16) he shows the arbitrariness of glory. Of the thousands of men who were killed in battle, only a handful of names have come down to us. The histories of most of the world have vanished (S713, V627). Most of the histories which are written are inaccurate. Fortune allows only a small number of writings about the past to survive. Even people who rightfully earn a reputation often outlive it, suffering the eclipse of their honour and glory.⁷⁸ Since public honour is so transient and arbitrary, people should not chase it so shamelessly. For Montaigne the only true honour is an internal sense that one has done one's duty. For him dissembling is always incompatible with honour, where Shakespeare's characters find many stratagems justifiable. Political activity benefits from the prestige of honour, which can also be seen as an incitement to military valour. At the same time Shakespeare can acknowledge the destructiveness of a proud obsession with honour in *Hotspur* and *Coriolanus* and in the way Brutus's pride in his family name enables Cassius to seduce him. Like Shakespeare Montaigne thought that the suicides of Cassius and Brutus were premature, but he saw their larger consequence as disastrous for Roman liberty. Montaigne's admiration of Brutus reflects his strong commitment to Roman liberty, represented quite narrowly as the liberty of the senatorial class. Shakespeare is more concerned to present the viewpoints of the underclass than to celebrate a liberty that does not include them.