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Carnival and Puritanism in Falstaff

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Introduction

"Counterfeit? I lie, I am no counterfeit. To die is to be a counterfeit, for he is but the counterfeit if a man who hath not the life of a man; but to counterfeit dying, when a man thereby liveth, is to be no counterfeit, but the true and perfect image of life indeed. The better part of valour is discretion, in the which better part I have saved my life".

(*1 Henry IV*, V, iv, 113-9)

This study is focused on the analysis of the character of Falstaff in Shakespeare's history plays *1* & *2 Henry IV*; in addition I will study Falstaff's role in *The Merry Wives of Windsor.*

This topic aroused my interest when I attended a series of lectures on Shakespeare's history plays at the University of Glasgow. Falstaff is a central character in Shakespeare and one of the most successful comic creations of the history of theatre. Harold Bloom claims that "only a few characters in the world's literature can match the real presence of Falstaff, who in that regard is Hamlet's greater rival in Shakespeare"[1]. The element shared by Hamlet and Falstaff is undoubtedly the superb wit; their common feature is the complexity of their consciousness and their incomparable dramatic presence. Falstaff, "the rouge", the "trunk of humours", "that huge bombard of sack", "that reverend Vice", rules the comic sub-plot in the history play. The main historical plot of *Henry IV* is the decadence of the illegitimate kingship of Henry IV under the threat of rebellious forces. Falstaff's depraved lifestyle is in opposition to the court values, especially to the concept of honour, strongly present in *1 Henry IV* in the valiant character of Hotspur. Falstaff's values, on the other hand, are licence, "sack and sugar", sex, deception, and his major vocation: "purse-taking". His immorality is undeniable and shameless; however, his ability with language and his comic splendour exceed the moral concerns, and it is not by chance that he is one of the most loved Shakespearean characters.

Falstaff's devotion to a wide range of low pleasures, and his deformed physicality led some critics to associate him with the bakhtinian concepts of the carnivalesque and of the grotesque body. Mikhail Bakhtin based his theory of the

[1] Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare, The Invention Of The Human*, New York, Riverhead Books, 1998, p. 279.

carnivalesque on the study of the popular forms in Rabelais' work. He described the carnivalesque as the spirit of temporary licence, the popular inversion of the established hierarchy and order. The grotesque is strongly connected with the carnivalesque; it is focused on the bodily functions and represents the spirit of perpetual metamorphosis and generation. Falstaff's body is grotesque, because he is fat, "a huge hill of flesh", old, and indulges in body pleasures.

Yet, Falstaff is not only a carnivalesque figure: his complexity introduces many possibilities for the analysis of the character. In addition to the carnivalesque features, criticism has underlined the theme of Puritanism as a possible perspective for reading the Henriad plays. Several studies consider Falstaff's association with the figure of the "grotesque Puritan": a stereotyped characterisation of the Puritans emerged in the late sixteenth-century, from a new satirical style in pamphlets and drama. My main interest is to provide a coherent analysis of the most relevant characteristics of Falstaff. The difficulty lies in putting together the several sides of his "gigantic" presence on stage: Shakespeare seems to have merged in Falstaff several traditional "types". The rouge is linked with the Vice of the morality plays, with the Lord of Misrule, with the stage fool, with the grotesque Puritan, and with the *miles gloriosus*. The most important point, in my opinion, is how to understand Falstaff's purpose on stage and in the plays: Shakespeare's aim was the parody of Puritans or, perhaps, the parody of kingdom and social rules? Or did he simply follow the legend on Prince Henry's dissolute youth with the subversive Sir John Oldcastle, the historical "father" of Falstaff?

In the first chapter I will provide a general introduction to Shakespeare's second tetralogy of history plays, which include *Richard II*, the two parts of *Henry IV* and *Henry V*. A part is centred on the political aspects of *Henry IV* and on the historical sources upon which Shakespeare's based the plays. The theme of politics is important, because Falstaff, in his role of Lord of Misrule, opposes established order and kingship. With respect to the theme of politics, I have taken in consideration mainly the works of Holderness, Tillyard and Spiekerman, who examine in depth Shakespeare's historical plays. After the general introduction on the plays, I will present the character of Falstaff, showing his remarkable "career" in vices, and his relationship with the Prince Hal. Merry Jack, though, in the early representations of the play was not called Falstaff, but John Oldcastle an historical figure lived during Henry V's reign and executed for

heresy. I will devote a section of the chapter to this figure, clarifying why Falstaff was recognisable as Oldcastle by the Elizabethan audience. In conclusion, I will illustrate the Marprelate Controversy, a religious "war" fought on the battlefield of satirical pamphlets from 1588 to 1589. This controversy between Puritans and anti-Puritans was fundamental for the grotesque style of *Henry IV* and for the "birth" of the stereotype of the grotesque Puritan.

The second chapter is centred on the carnivalesque, popular festivities and the grotesque. In the fist section I will introduce the carnivalesque, its commitment to ancient rituals and its presence in Medieval Age and in Renaissance under new forms in religious festivals. Shakespeare's comedy is committed to artistic popular traditions, such as dances, mock ceremonies and dumb shows. The fool, for instance, is present in many Shakespearean works as a figure strictly connected with popular culture. The central part of the chapter is focused on the carnivalesque, which, according to Bakhtin, is a temporary suspension of rule, a time of mirth and jollity connected with regeneration and rebirth. Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque is illustrated in *Rabelais and His World*, a reading of Rabelais' novel *Gargantua, Pantagruel*. The novel insists upon the carnivalesque, celebrating licence, misrule and the materiality of the body; Bakhtin considers it as an example of "carnivalesque writing". After the section on the carnivalesque, I will consider the theme of laughter and comedy, following the studies of Indira Ghose and Salingar. Ghose observes the different approach towards laughter in ancient times, when it was not necessarily linked to positive feelings, but instead considered a symbol of lasciviousness. Salingar analyses the definition of comedy as a "mirror hold to nature". A brief section is devoted to laughter and the body: at the time, in fact, it was a common belief that laughter was originated from a specific part of the body and influenced by it according to the humour theory. The final section is centred on the grotesque. I will illustrate Bakhtin's theories of the grotesque body and of the grotesque realism; to conclude, I will explain the origins of the grotesque, and the way in which it became a literary style, thanks to the new forms of satirical writings of late sixteenth-century England. This topic is very fascinating, and Neil Rhodes provides a very shrewd study of it in *The Elizabethan Grotesque*.

The third chapter is centred on the Puritanism. The chapter is divided in three sections. In the first section I will provide a general overview of Puritanism: the

movement and its main features, for instance the obsession for salvation, the strict relevance to the Scriptures and the inconoclasm. The second section concerns the Puritan attitude to laughter and comedy. It is acknowledged that religion and laughter have always been in conflict and that Puritans were in general hostile to laughter. Finally I will consider the difficult relationship between Puritans and theatre. Puritans, in fact, banished the arts in general, because, according to their opinion, art is fake, an useless and ungodly simulation of reality. We will see, though, that some Puritans were involved in theatre and used plays to spread the Puritan faith.

In the fourth and final chapter I will study in depth the character of Falstaff. The chapter opens by considering Falstaff in *1 & 2 Henry IV*. I will underline his function as the Lord of Misrule, and as the "king" of the comic sub-plot. I will show many contrasts (but also parallels) between the tavern plot and the serious historical pattern. Furthermore, I will consider the carnivalesque in the historical frame: Falstaff's carnivalesque attitude subverts and opposes the established order and political concerns. The time of the Carnival, though, must finish to allow the restoration of hierarchy and order. If Falstaff represents Carnival in *Henry IV,* his banishment at the end of *2 Henry IV* is inserted perfectly in the tradition. In this section I follow Barber's considerations on the relationship between Hal and Falstaff: as already seen, Falstaff is the world of holiday, while Hal can be seen as the everyday. Hal at the beginning moves in the realm of licence, but his intent is to banish the holiday to honour his historical role. A section of the chapter is devoted to the theme of the "world upside down" in *Henry IV*. In Falstaff's world the values are inverted: the time is not made of minutes, hours or clocks, but of cups of sack; the government, also, is not the "good government", but the kingship of robberies, drunkenness and material body. A very interesting subject of investigation is the way in which Hal and Falstaff play several different roles throughout the play. They both counterfeit, but Hal's character is fixed, because he belongs to history; he will be a (beloved) king in the future, and turn into a mythical figure. Falstaff, instead, is free: he has his own "consciousness", his core is independent, and he can explore all the dramatic possibilities. One of Falstaff's dramatic possibilities is the parody of Puritans. He quotes several times the Scriptures, and he uses the typical rhetorical style of the Puritan sermons. In the section devoted to Falstaff and Puritanism, I will consider in particular the works of Kristen Poole, who

focuses mainly on the similarities between Falstaff and the stereotype of the grotesque Puritan, very common at the end of the sixteenth-century. Davies, on the other hand, interprets the whole play as "protestant", and Henry V as a proto-Protestant king. The last section of my thesis analyses *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. This comedy has suffered in the past from poor consideration by criticism because of its identity as a "sequel" or a minor "appendage" of the Henriad plays. In addition, the character of Falstaff present here is quite far from the Falstaff of the Boar's Head tavern. Falstaff's wit appears to be lowered: he is no longer a successful fraud; in *Merry Wives* he is the deceived one. This aspect can be disturbing, because Falstaff is a appreciated for his wit, but it is important to underline that *Merry Wives* cannot be read in the same way as the Henriad plays. In *Merry Wives* the true protagonist is not a king, or a witty fat knight full of sack, but an entire social class: the emergent bourgeoisie. Falstaff is thus introduced in a quite different society and context.

Chapter One

Introduction: *Henry IV*, Falstaff, Martin Marprelate Tracts

Introduction

In this chapter I will introduce the play *Henry IV* and I will provide a general overview on what are Shakespeare's history plays. I will give some hints on Shakespeare's sources and a reflection on what historiography did mean in Elizabethan age, considering that it was so different from our idea of it. Later on, I will focus on Shakespeare's political thought, following the twentieth century criticism which studies the dramatist as a man interested in public life, power, aristocracy and society in general. After this general overview I will introduce Falstaff, the main subject of my study, the infamous protagonist of the comic sub-plot of the play and king of misrule. The character is connected to a real historical figure, Sir John Oldcastle the leader of an unsuccessful Lollard rebellion and also a friend and fellow-soldier of prince Henry, the future King Henry V. I will explain why and how the two "knights" are linked. In conclusion, I will focus on the so-called Marprelate Controversy and on the introduction of the Puritan character into Elizabethan popular literature.

1.1 Introduction to the play

Henry IV, Part One and *Henry IV, Part Two,* were written sometime around 1597-1598, and they were part of a sequence of four plays, a tetralogy, written between 1595 and 1599. This tetralogy is called "The second tetralogy" or "Henriad". These plays are strongly connected to each other as E.M.W. Tillyard states: "Shakespeare conceived his

second tetralogy as one great unit"[2]. The events that Shakespeare puts on stage in these history plays cover the reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, and Henry V. *Richard II* focuses on the deposition of Richard II and Henry Bolingbroke's rise to power; the two parts of *Henry IV* explain the dissension that accompanied Henry's reign and Prince Hal's dissipate lifestyle during his youth. *Henry V* represents Hal's kingship and the war against the French. Shakespeare's earlier history plays, the three *Henry VI* and *Richard III,* actually follow the events after the reign of Henry V. Together, the two tetralogies dramatize the fortunes of the English monarchy from roughly 1398 to 1485. It is very important to keep in mind all the connections between the history plays in order to utterly understand *Henry IV*. For instance we cannot explain King Henry's turmoil in *Henry IV* if we do not know his part under the name of Bolingbroke in the previous play *Richard II.* At the same time Shakespeare's accurate depiction of Prince Hal's youth in 1 *Henry IV* is essential in view of his rise as a great king in Henry V[3].

Henry IV, Part One became Shakespeare's most frequently published play, appearing in seven solo "quarto" editions before the publication of his complete works in the First Folio. In its first edition it was called *The History of Henrie the Fourth; With the battell at Shrewsburie, betweene the King and Lord Henry Percy, surnamed Henrie Hotspur of the North. With the humorous conceits of Sir John Falstalffe*. This title gives no indication that this is the first of three plays about Prince Hal: it puts attention on other popular characters, Hotspur and Falstaff, and to the battle that represents the climax of the play in the fifth act.

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[2] E. M.W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, Harmondsworth, England, Penguin Books Ltd, 1986, p. 240.

[3] G. Baldini, *Introduzione a 'Enrico IV'*, Milano, Rizzoli Editore, 2009, p. 5.

1.2 Shakespeare's History Plays

The Henriad tetralogy is considered as historical drama, which includes that group of plays based on the English chronicles. Graham Holderness proposes to extend the "historical" status to the idea that these plays could represent a type of Renaissance historiography[4]. He underlines, though, that the plays would be accepted as historical evidence only in a very limited sense:

> As the record of an intellectual's view of his own society, mediated through fictional reconstructions of that society's past…They could be judged relevant to history insofar as they adhere to works of historical record and interpretation as sources; the closer the plays approximate the written records…the nearer they can be judged to approach the actual history[5].

If we consider Shakespeare's drama through the parameters prescribed by modern historical thought, we must acknowledge them as a "loose and confused mixture of historically authenticated facts and imaginatively-invented fictions"[6]. To summarize, if we look at these plays from the perspective of modern historiography, they would not be considered historiography at all. They belong to a literary world without a proper historiography, and to a culture that mingles legend and fact, myth and reality. This culture is based on tradition rather than on reliable sources, a world "unable, in short, to see the past as anything other that a distorted reflection of its own contemporary present"[7].

Tillyard, who represented a very influential school of criticism established after the Second World War, developed a comprehensive system of Elizabethan thought in *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1943). He applied it to the role of the state in the universal order in *Shakespeare's History Plays,* first published in 1944. According to his study, Shakespeare's historical ideas were put within the frame of a culture

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4 G. Holderness *Shakespeare Recycled, the Making of Historical Drama*, Worcester Harwester Wheatsheaf, 1992, p. 1.

5 *Ibidem*.

6 Ivi, p. 2.

7 *Ibidem*.

dominated by the heritage of medieval Christianity. Holderness summarizes Tillyard's suggestion describing the Elizabethan world-view in this way:

> a philosophical system in which the state, or 'body politic', was never considered as a particular form of social organization, developed from and subject to change – but as one of the functions of an universal order, created and supervised by God, and ruled directly by the machinations of divine providence. A state of human society occupied a median position in a cosmic hierarchy (the chain of being) with God and the angles above, and the animal and plant kingdoms below. The structure of a well-ordered state was itself a microcosm of the hierarchal cosmos, containing within itself a chain of being, from the monarch at the head, through the various gradations of social rank down the lowest orders. The ruler of a body politic possessed power which reflected, but was also subject to, that of God: a king therefore ruled by Divine Right. The natural condition of a state, like the natural condition of the cosmos, was 'order', defined primarily in terms of the maintenance of this rigid hierarchy. Any rupturing of this pattern would produce disorder or 'chaos'[8].

I will analyse closely the theme of the violation of the natural order later, when I will focus on the carnivalesque. It is however interesting to anticipate some hints now. In order to clarify Tillyard's observations, we can add that in Elizabethan society the state was a rigid part of the natural pattern and subsequently any alteration of it could not be accepted as legitimate. Some of these forms of alteration, such as the deposition of the king and the usurpation of the throne, would be considered as a total violation of the order. That is why it is impossible not to consider the theme of the carnivalesque (in addition to the idea of merrymaking and misrule) as a representation of the overturning of hierarchies and natural divine order. Considering though that, the disruption of the divine order will be punished by vengeance of God, Holderness points out that, according to Tillyard's analysis, the whole sequence of English chronicle plays are an illustration of divine providence ruling human affairs: the deposition and murder of a legitimate king, Richard II, starts a disruption of the universal order and consequently social chaos and civil war. War and chaos are the punishment for the disruption of divine right, and this process will finish only with the succession of Henry VII to the English throne[9]. The Tudor dynasty then, is the legitimate one to the throne, a symbol of political stability, hardly a chance considering that a Tudor queen was ruling in those

[8] Ivi, p. 3.

[9] G. Holderness, *Shakespeare Recycled, the Making of Historical Drama*, *ibidem*.

years. Holderness highlights that Tillyard's school of criticism (together with other authorities such as L.C. Knights and G. Wilson Knight) tends to focus only on a selective range of sources. These sources are works of government propaganda, homilies against rebellion and especially Tudor apology. These works, according to Holderness, do represent Elizabethan *dominant ideology*, but they are not able to describe the whole society with its contradictions and complexity[10]. In fact, more recent historical scholarship asserts that Tillyard's system was only one of the aspects of Elizabethan society. It was the official ideology, imposed by state and church, yet also in Shakespeare's plays we have examples of dissidents. Protestants, Catholics and Puritans, people who supported absolute monarchy and opponents of it (Falstaff is an example of them).

Turning to the sources for Shakespeare's history plays, we should mention Edward Halle's *Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York* (1548), Holinshed's *Chronicles* (first edition in 1577, second in 1587), Jon Stow's *Annales* (1580), Samuel Daniel's *Civil Wars* (1595). These sources were very complex; considered as Tudor historiography, they were also connected with Lancastrian and Yorkist myth, all generated in the period of 1399-1485, and then transmitted to early Renaissance historians[11]. Halle's chronicle is considered as a major source of the providential theory of the England's history from 1399 till 1485, and of Tudor myth as well. In spite of the contradictions and arbitrary information, these chronicles offered to the Elizabethans a huge repository of historical evidence.

Considering more specifically *Henry IV*, Holderness notices that Shakespeare moved from "the pure chronicle-play style to a drama constructed on a confrontation of chronicle and popular-comic historical discourses"[12]. This form makes free use of the conventions of drama, and gives the author the possibility to move from the roles dictated by the written history. The dramatist can introduce festivity and a Saturnalian pattern, and the characters can be freed from their historical destiny. In *Henry IV* this fusion is present between two dimensions: the chronicle-history and the popular-comic-history. The first dimension is represented by the king himself and the continuous facts presented in *Richard II*; on the other hand, the comic element is dominated by Falstaff,

[10] Ivi, p. 4.
[11] Ivi, p. 6.
[12] Ivi, p. 18.

while Prince Hal stands between the two, between order and misrule.

1.3 Shakespeare's Politics

Shakespeare has always been acknowledged as the poet of emotions and a shrewd observer of human psychology; his reputation as author concerned with politics is more recent. In *Shakespeare's Political Realism,* Tim Spiekerman says that the word "politics" does not even occur in Shakespeare: until early in this century the common feeling was that Shakespeare was not interested in politics at all[13]. Twentieth century criticism rejected the idea that Shakespeare was not interested in politics; the dramatist was actually a shrewd observer not only of men in their private lives, but also of public relations and society. He wrote about aristocratic life, courts, law, kingship, abuse of political power and rivalry. But, as Spiekerman suggests, with the only exception of *Macbeth*, his works do not seem to be noticeably about politics[14]. If he we turn to Shakespeare's history plays we must consider that they are all named after "politicians", and they are focused on the themes of kingship and rule. In particular in *1 Henry IV* and *2 Henry IV,* Shakespeare seems to be concerned with the crisis of legitimacy caused by the ascension of an illegitimate regicide to the English throne. Spiekerman considers that Richard II was king by divine right, whereas Bolingbroke, after defeating the legitimate king, does not seem to make any divine claim for himself:

> apparently disabusing Englishmen of the belief that their king must be anointed by God. But while Henry is characterized in *Richard II* as a new kind of ruler, a rational alternative to the Christian king he deposed, the lingering importance of religion in everywhere evident in Henry IV[15].

This is evident since the opening lines of *1 Henry IV*, where Henry pleads for a Crusade

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13 T. Spiekerman, *Shakespeare's Political Realism: The English History Plays*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2001, p. 1.
14 Ivi, p. 2.
15 Ivi, p. 91.

to the Holy Land in order to absolve the country for the guilt of Richard's death: "Therefore, friends, as far as to the sepulcher of Christ- Whose soldier now, under whose blessed cross, we are impressed and engaged to fight" (*1 Henry IV,* I, i, 18-21)[16]. Henry is hesitant; he is not a strong king because he is aware that his crown is not legitimate. The skepticism about his kingship is parallel to Falstaff's skepticism about religion and rule. Falstaff's "entertaining iconoclasm"[17] is possible, and emphasized in the play because of the political instability of the realm.

In line with the theme of "Shakespeare's politics", it is interesting to look at Hygh Grady's study: *Falstaff: subjectivity between the Carnival and the Aesthetic.* According to him (and to the new historicist views in United Kingdom and United States over the last twenty years) we can consider these plays as involved in a study of early modern political power. In particular, *Richard II,* which preceded the Falstaff dominated histories, portrays a sort of crisis of Machiavellianism and the rise of Bolingbroke's skillful power.

In respect to the theme of Machiavelli's political realism, I would like to briefly point out that, according to modern criticism (Spiekerman as well), there is no indisputable evidence that Shakespeare read Machiavelli, or if he did, that he was answering to the Italian intellectual. According to Spiekerman, we cannot easily reply to the question "What does he think about Machiavelli?"; but we notice that, they are both concerned with the theme of acquisition and maintenance of power. They share political realism, beginning from "the premise that the struggle for power is more central and more reliable that the struggle for justice"[18].

Returning to Grady's work, he states that in *1 and 2 Henry IV* we can find a modern response to the ethical vacuum provided by the skilled power mentioned above, a turn to subjectivity. Falstaff plays a crucial role in this new pattern. I quote Grady to clarify:

> Here specifically the potential of selves unfixed from traditional roles and world views to imagine and act out new roles and potentialities as an alternative to now outmoded religious ones…Falstaff is an experiment in a kind of imagined autonomous autotelic

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16 Shakespeare William, *King Henry IV Part 1*, David Scott Kastan (ed.), London, The Arden Shakespeare, 2002.

17 Spiekerman, *Shakespeare's Political Realism: The English History Plays,* p. 92.

18 Ivi, p. 57.

subjectivity[19].

Falstaff could have been designed to be a sort of possible alternative to the Machiavellian logic of power (but he also represents a huge paradox, which is the reunion of this sort of post-Reformation subjectivity with the expression of pre-existing theatrical, folk and literary types). Falstaff represents a sort of "no doctrine"; he is interested in what he cares about, and in what he makes fun of. We should remember that he is a sort of a teacher for Prince Hal, who spends all his time with him instead of his father the king; but his teaching is decidedly anti-political[20]. He is against honor ("What is honor? A word", *1 Henry IV,* V, i, 134-5), ambition, law, family and also against any sort of morality. He rejects everything that represents the foundation of political order and stability. Falstaff's skepticism is so strong to come across as hedonism and a turn to private pleasures. That is why Grady suggests that he represents a new form of subjectivity: he is able to abstain from fixed social roles.

1.4 "Plump" Jack Falstaff

The character of Sir John Falstaff could be described in a lot of different manners: "old rascal" and "fat rouge", as he is often called in the play, but also according to J. Dover Wilson "the merriest and one of the most fascinating characters in literature"[21]. Tillyard describes Falstaff as the "epitome of Seven Deadly Sins"[22] while to Holderness he is "a corrupt and iconoclastic figure, unmarried obese alcoholic"[23]. In the play John is oddly presented as a knight, yet he does not have the usual characteristics of a "Sir": he is a coward, fat, lascivious old man. Falstaff is a companion to the young Prince Hal as a non-judgemental father-substitute: he replaces the King as a primary influence and mentor. His conversation is full of biblical allusions, but it is impossible to state exactly

[19] Hygh Grady, "Falstaff: subjectivity between the Carnival and the Aesthetic", *The Modern Language Review*, 96:3, (2001), p. 610.
[20] Spiekerman, *Shakespeare's Political Realism: The English History Plays,* p. 113.
[21] J. Dover Wilson, *The Fortunes of Falstaff*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1964, p. 15.
[22] Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, p. 270.
[23] Holderness, *Shakespeare Recycled, the Making of Historical Drama,* p.105.

whether he is atheist or not. He seems to scorn everything, and religion is not excluded; he also critiques firmly the concept of family as he refuses to marry or to limit his sexual appetite. He is Hal's guide because the young prince spends most of his time in Eastcheap, especially in the tavern, amongst lowly companions; Falstaff does not hide his contempt towards the king as a father and moral educator.

The play includes many references to usurpation and robbery as well as parallels between the fat knight and the king: they are both thieves. The King stole the crown (and Falstaff alludes to it very often); on the other hand, a robbery takes place during the play in the first act, and Boar's Head tavern, attended by Falstaff and Hal, is pervaded by a general spirit of lawlessness. Falstaff could also be considered as a kind of usurper: he steals sons from their fathers, manipulating them and making them like himself. This consideration leads us to ponder the problem of establishing a respect for law and state when the king is known for being an usurper. I consider this point as very important especially if associated with the relationships between Hal and Falstaff. Hal bears the burden of having a "criminal" father, and this could lead him to feel to be as somehow above or beyond the law. And this attitude could justify his attachment towards that degenerate old man and his fraud company.

Falstaff, together with the other "rouges" of the Eastcheap company, is the expression of the comic under-plot parallel to the historical one. While the Prince is wasting time drinking and joking at the tavern, or organizing robberies, his father the king is facing a civil war. Falstaff is dependent upon Hal's favour, and Hal's favour is determined by that young man's attitude towards his responsibility as heir to the throne of England. The king is aware of Hal's dissolute lifestyle, and he also compares him with the valiant Henry Percy Northumberland, called Hotspur, young as the prince but already devoted to politics and war:

> Yea, there thou mak'st me sad, and mak'st me sin, In envy that my Lord Northumberland should be the father to so blest son- A son who is the theme of honour's tongue, amongst a grove the very straightest plant, who is sweet Fortune's minion and her pride- Whilst I, by looking on the praise of him, see riot and dishonor stain the brow of my young Harry (*1 Henry IV*. I, i, 77-85).

We are introduced to the character of Falstaff in the second scene of *1 Henry*; he

asks Hal what time it is, and the Prince deftly sketches his old friend:

> Thou art so fat-witted with drinking of old sack, and unbuttoning thee after supper, and sleeping upon branches after noon, that thou hast forgotten to demand that truly which thou wouldst truly know. What a devil hast thou to do with the time of the day? Unless hours were cups of sack, and minutes capons, and clock the tongues of bawds, and dials the signs of leapinghouses, and the blessed sun himself a fair hot wench in flamecoloured taffeta, I see no reason why thou shouldst be so superfluous to demand the time of the day (*1Henry IV,* I, ii, 2-11).

The tone used by Hal is offensive and scornful; during the play the two insult each other with regularity, and their banters are often witty attempts to offend. Falstaff's response to Hal highlights another aspect of his personality; he is an unrepentant thief:

> Marry then sweet wag, when thou art king let not us that are squires of the night's body be called thieves of the day's beauty: let us be Diana's foresters, gentlemen of the shade, minions of the moon; and let men say we be men of good government, being governed as the sea is, by our noble and chaste mistress the moon, under whose countenance we steal (1 *Henry IV*, I, ii, 22-28).

Even though Falstaff during the play implies that Hal corrupted him, it is clear that he is able to involve others in his level of mirth; this could be what actually attracts the prince to him. Holderness implies that Falstaff is a "master corrupter […] he must corrupt others in order to enjoy himself. Falstaff is a teacher with an agenda, near the top of which there is his own pleasure"[24].

What does he actually teach? Except drinking sack, swearing and all other aspects of a dissolute "career", a notable thing is maybe his critique of honor. On the battlefield Falstaff is definitely far from being valiant. As Holderness notices in true iconoclastic fashion, he calls his ode to self-preservation a "catechism"[25]. According to Sir John, honor brings only death:

> Can honour set 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 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

[24] Ivi, p. 111.
[25] Ivi, p. 108.

> dead. But will 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 (1 *Henry IV,* V, i, 131-140).

Here Falstaff unveils his religion: being against all virtues and against constraints that prevent us from reaching bodily pleasure. He stands for pleasure not for honorability. He is anti-political because the order requested by the state obstructs his dissolute lifestyle. Hal seems to accept this "religion" (even if there are hints in his words and monologues that demonstrate that he is pretending), but at the end he rejects it, choosing political life; he acts as a valiant soldier and respectful son first, and secondly as a resolute and machiavellian king. Falstaff will be eventually banished by Hal as king Henry V in *2 Henry IV*, when the distance between the two becomes vast.

Henry IV is a historical play, and there is some historical evidence for the existence of the "model" for the inglorious character of Falstaff; the famous lollard Sir John Oldcastle. I turn now to the Oldcastle-Falstaff controversy.

1.5 Oldcastle-Falstaff Controversy

The character of the cheerful Sir John Falstaff is shaped on the historical figure of Lord Cobham (John Oldcastle), the leader of an unsuccessful Lollard rebellion and also a friend and fellow-soldier of prince Henry. The resemblance between the fat and merry Falstaff and the militant religious leader is obvious if we take in consideration the historical facts surrounding this figure. Oldcastle was a pretty famous cultural figure in Elizabethan England: his trial and death were recorded in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, Stowe's *Annales,* Holinshed's *Chronicles* and elsewhere[26]. The opinions on Oldcastle were discordant; according to someone he was a valiant martyr, for others he was a heretic who betrayed his friend and king Henry.

The Elizabethan audience easily recognized Falstaff as a caricature of Oldcastle

[26] K. Poole, "Facing Puritanism: Falstaff, Martin Marprelate and the Grotesque Puritan", in: R. Knowles (ed.), *Shakespeare and Carnival After Bakhtin,* Basingstoke, Macmillian Press, 1998, p. 97.

and we know that in early performances the character was actually named Oldcastle. During his lifetime, though, John Oldcastle was not officially known as Lord Cobham (as L. J. M. Gibson points in his essay *Shakespeare and the Cobham Controversy: the Oldcastle/Falstaff and Brooke/Broom Revision),* and was summoned to Parliament between 1410-1430 only as "John Oldcastle, chivaler", before being condemned and imprisoned in the Tower of London[27]. In sixteenth-century Protestant polemical works such as John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments of these latter and perilous dayes* (1563), he is called "Lord Cobham" or "the good Lord Cobham". The problem with the name appeared when the company discovered that the martyr's wife was the venerable ancestress of the Cobhams, powerful lords very influent at Elizabeth's court[28]. In addition to that, there was a further problem: one of the influent Cobhams, Sir Wiliam Brooke, was Lord Chamberlain since 1596.

The name was changed then to placate the outraged Lords Cobham, but also to appease a Protestant audience, who praised Oldcastle as a hero. The name "Oldcastle" was retained for private performances, including in court; many authors show that Falstaff was still considered as alias for Oldcastle[29].

Kristen Poole in *Saints Alive! Falstaff, Martin Marprelate, and the Staging of Puritanism*, states that the Protestant bishop John Bale, sixteenth-century chronicler, describes Oldcastle as a pious innocent who was condemned to a horrible death[30]. In Oldcastle biography, included in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (1563), there is the report of Oldcastle trial and the description of Lollard insurrection. Bale, writing in 1544, wanted to show the horrors of Oldcastle's inquisition and to establish him as a martyr.

A Lollard, according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, was a follower in late medieval England of the philosopher and theologian John Wycliffe[31]. His religious doctrines are considered to be the ones that anticipated somehow those of the sixteenth-

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27 J. M. Gibson, "Shakespeare and the Cobham Controversy: the Oldcastle/Falstaff and Brooke/Broom Revision", *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England: An Annual Gathering of Research, Criticism and Reviews,* Vol. 25 (2012), p. 102.

28 J. Dover Wilson, *The Fortunes of Falstaff*, p. 16.

29 K. Poole, "Facing Puritanism: Falstaff, Martin Marprelate and the Grotesque Puritan", p. 97.

30 K. Poole, "Saints Alive! Falstaff, Martin Marprelate, and the Staging of Puritanism", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 46:1 (1995), p. 47.

31 'Lollard', Encyclopaedia Britannica. *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 2015. Last visited 23 nov. 2015
<http://www.britannica.com/topic/Lollards>.

century Protestant Reformation. The word apparently comes from a Dutch word, *lollaert*, which means "mumbler". Around 1370s in Oxford, Wycliffe started to promote his doctrine: first of all he denied transubstantiation, which is the idea that "accidentals (appearances) of bread and wine remain even as the substances are miraculously transformed into the body and blood of Christ…in Eucharist"[32]. He also rejects iconography, defined as idolatry by the reformers, stresses the importance of Scripture, and does not consider papacy as legitimate. Wycliffe was obviously condemned as heretic in 1378; he was never brought to trial and continued his preaching until his death in 1384. Wycliffe had some following between his colleagues in Oxford, and the sect continued to multiply even between gentry and a few members of the House of Commons. In 1399, though, Henry IV took the power, and started a repression against heresy. Sir John Oldcastle in 1414 led a Lollard rising but was quickly defeated by Henry V. The movement continued underground, and in 1500 the Lollard tradition encouraged the spread of Protestantism.

It is natural to wonder why Shakespeare took the figure of the noble martyr Oldcastle and transformed him into the Rabelaisian coward Falstaff. Poole points out that some critics maintain that Shakespeare simply "picked a name out of an historical hat, a name that happened to have unfortunate political consequences[33]". In a more plausible way, others consider that the author wanted to satirise Lord Cobham William Brooke, or his inept son Henry. If we look at the Henriad plays in the context of Elizabethan culture, we notice that the depiction of the Lollard Oldcastle made by Shakespeare is in line with the tenor of the late sixteenth century anti-Puritan literature[34]. A strong example of the anti-Puritan literature is represented by the Anti-Marprelate Tracts, together with the stage performances of the Marprelate controversy (1588-90). The Puritans were depicted as grotesque, and Falstaff emerges as a parody of Puritan preachers. Shakespeare's representation of Oldcastle "transposes him into a register of religious/political language, familiar to his Elizabethan audience"[35]. Even his name "False staff" could have been read as a parody of Puritan names of the time, such

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[32] E. M. Caldwell, "Banish all the World: Falstaff's Iconoclastic Threat to Kingship in I Henry IV", *Renascence*, 59:4 (2007), p. 220.

[33] K. Poole, "Facing Puritanism: Falstaff, Martin Marprelate and the Grotesque Puritan", p. 98.

[34] *Ibidem*.

[35] *Ibidem*.

as More Fruit, Faint Not, Perseverance, Deliverance[36].

1.6 The Marprelate Controversy

The so-called anti-Marprelate Tracts are a series of satirical pamphlets against the aggressive and irreverent Puritan who wrote under the pseudonymous of Martin Marprelate. According to Kristen Poole, the pamphlet warfare of Martin Marprelate represents the introduction of the Puritan character into popular literature. At the end of 1580s Puritans had lost all hope for a strong and complete ecclesiastic reform. The 'popish' tradition was not excluded in the English Church; in addition, in 1583, a man who was openly anti-Puritan, John Whitgift, became the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Puritan community, more marginalized, was forced to move discretely in underground and started to publish illegally pamphlets against the clergy. At that point the ecclesiastical authorities decided to replicate, publishing *Defense of the government established in the Church of Englande for ecclesiasticall matters* in 1587, written by John Bridges and Dean of Salisbury[37]. The large quarto volume of 1,400 pages proved useless and the anti-prelatical attack continued. In 1588 the works by the young preacher John Penry were published, such as *Exhortation*, against the bishops, and John Udall's *The State of the Church of England laide open* against episcopacy. Robert Waldegrave was the printer of many of these works; and his printing press was destroyed in the April of that same year. But Waldegrave apparently could save some of the types, and with them he started the above mentioned pamphlet warfare. In October 1588 the first tract, *The Epistole*, was published; it quickly became very popular in London. *The Epistole* was the introduction to *The Epitome,* a summary of Bridges' *Defense.* In the pamphlet the priests were mocked with an irreverent and comic tone, at the opposite from Bridges' pompousness. Under the pseudonym of Martin Marprelate, the authors claimed that the only way to respond to *Defense* was to play the fool,

[36] Ivi, p. 99.
[37] *Ibidem*.

considering the absurdity of the text. Poole notices that:

> Marprelates's chief weapon is rollicking ridicule. Rather than confute the biblical basis and authority of an episcola church government (the standard approach of most Puritan pamphleteers), Martin endeavours to martheprlates with personal insults[38].

Basically Marprelate's works were based on mocking the clergy, using insults and gossip as well. His style was that of stage monologue, with frequent references to current events and people of popular rumor. His intent was to lead people to be unable to take seriously the clergymen, and also thanks to the use of a vernacular language; the tracts became very popular, and soon they brought the Puritan cause to be well-known and widely discussed.

The ecclesiastic authorities had to face the Puritan wit, and again decided to answer on the same ground through the pens of young writers: John Lyly, Robert Greene, Anthony Munday, and Thomas Nashe (Penry's schoolmate at Cambridge). They studied Martin's style and learned how to imitate it; for the next six months, from each side, new and always more explicit and irreverent pamphlets were published. In Martin's work the prelates are called "carnal and senseless beasts", "monstrous and ungodly wretched"; the bishops are "swine, dumb dogs", "adulterers, drunkards, cormorants, rascals". The anti-Martinists changed the tenor and amplified the grotesque tone of the tracts, introducing some elements of carnivalesque and grotesque body. I will focus in depth on the themes of grotesque and carnivalesque (and on the famous studies by Bakhtin) in the following chapter. Briefly, we can consider the carnivalesque as festive license and the inversion of maintained social order as a form of catharsis. The image of the grotesque body is connected to this because festive comedy is centred on the body, on the belly and on all body functions, on the lower sphere in general, as it undermines the upper level of court life. Going back to the Controversy, Martin's strategy then is turned against him, and he became "an ape" who "copulates, vomits, drinks, gorges himself and gives birth"[39]. Martin Marprelate became then the archetype of Bakhtin's grotesque body: he "exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy,

[38] Ivi, p. 100.
[39] Ivi, p. 102.

childbirth…eating, drinking or defecation"[40]. But the performances were too offensive and deplorable; even the anti-Puritan authorities together with some intellectuals (including Francis Bacon according to C. Barber in *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*[41]) were annoyed and claimed for censorship. The Lord Mayor of London, together with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Master of Revels were asked to enlist the censorship of theatre. The bishops finally succeeded in silencing Martin and containing the disorders; the press was seized and in October 1589 *The Protestacyon*, the last of the Marprelate Tracts was published and the controversy ended.

Anti-Martinist caricatures became the typical image of the sixteenth-century Puritan; such caricatures became soon characters on stage. One of the actors who played Martin was Will Kemp, who is supposed to be also the first one who impersonated Falstaff. His presence could have served as a visual reminder of the Marprelate connection. We should keep in mind that the Marprelate controversy took place merely six or seven years before the production of *1 Henry IV* and remained in the collective memory long after the silencing of the tracts. With the introducing of Oldcastle/Falstaff on stage the author revived Martin and his cultural figure. Poole writes that if Oldcastle was widely identified as an early Puritan, and stage Puritans were widely expected as grotesque figures, then the depiction of Oldcastle as the grotesque Falstaff was not only natural, but even expected[42]. Falstaff could be considered as a continuation of the representation of the Puritan established with the staging of Marprelate Tracts. It is interesting to notice the match between the theme of the Puritan and the theme of the carnivalesque: these two aspects seem to be opposite, but in the grotesque figure of Falstaff they apparently coexist.

As I have already pointed out here, in the character of Falstaff carnivalesque and grotesque elements are very strong; they serve the peculiar comedy style of the sub-plot. Indeed, the next chapter will be focused on the theme of the carnivalesque and grotesque body, putting aside for a while the theme of Falstaff as puritan figure. I will give some hints on Elizabethan popular culture and explain in depth what is carnivalesque according to Bakhtin.

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[40] *Ibidem*

[41] C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy, A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom,* Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 2011, p. 18.

[42] K. Poole, "Facing Puritanism: Falstaff, Martin Marprelate and the Grotesque Puritan", p. 105.

Chapter 2

The carnivalesque and the grotesque body

Introduction

In this chapter I will introduce the theme of the carnivalesque and how this mood could be connected with festive license. Since Falstaff is considered as a typical carnivalesque character, it is fundamental to provide an overview of the theme in order to understand why he belongs to this kind of spirit, and how the Saturnalian pattern is expressed by merry Jack. In the second section I will observe how festivity worked, even during a period in which festival calendar was radically changed because of the religious innovations consequent to the Act of Supremacy of 1534 and the radical renovation of the English Church. Then I will turn to Shakespeare's approach to the carnivalesque and festivity in his works; an important reflection concerns how he was able to combine popular elements with refined and cultivated influences. After this general overview of carnival and festivity, I will focus on Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque; his work on this theme is considered to be fundamental, and unavoidable, even though subjected to criticism. An important reflection however has arisen from Indira Ghose's study on the theme of laughter connected to Shakespeare. I will dedicate a section to laughter and to the differences between laughter and comedy. Later on, a brief explanation on the theory of the bodily humour will follow, and eventually a part devoted to the theme of grotesque realism and the body, according to Bakhtin.

2.1 The carnivalesque

The carnivalesque represents excess and misrule in the context of holiday indulgence and licence: feast, entertainment, disguise, indulging in sex and in everything opposed to the usual hierarchy, prohibitions and constraints. According to Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), who studied the theme of festivity and carnival in depth in his book *Rabelais and his World,* the carnivalesque is "a spirit of temporary licence; the populist topsy-turvy inversion of normal hierarchies and the predominance of physical bodily humour"[43]. Laughter generated from carnival merry spirit enables the parody of sacred or political form and transforms carnival as a time of freedom from authoritative patterns and beliefs. Contact with life uncrowns what we usually limit through hierarchical equilibrium. The carnivalesque spirit has its origins in antiquity; for instance, in Ancient Greece we can mention the festival of *Dionysia* in honour of Dionysus the God of fertility, wine and ecstasy.

In Roman times the most important festival was the *Saturnalia* during the winter solstice, whose most significant element was the inversion of hierarchy: conventional social relations were turned upside down, serves became masters and vice-versa, people wore masks, money was distributed to poor people, freedom of speech was granted to everyone and banquets and shows took place; every moral restraint was removed. This custom was called Saturnalian because its intent was to be a transitory imitation of the "Golden Age", the ancient society ruled by the God Saturn, and described as a society of peace, fertility and common wealth, where slavery did not exist[44].

In Medieval age the Saturnalia gave way to Christmas. The focus of the carnivalesque celebrations shifted to Mardi Gras which anticipated the "farewell to flesh" period of Lent. The rejected "flesh" represented both sexual intercourse and meat. In late medieval England the tradition of carnivalesque festivities was still popular, connected with liturgical feasts of the Catholic Church as well as at older

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[43] Bickley Pamela, Stevens Jenny, *Essential Shakespeare: The Arden Guide to text and Interpretation*, Bloomsbury, London, 2013, p. 11.

[44] G. Holderness, *Shakespeare Recycled, the Making of Historical Drama,* p. 132.

traditions related to the cycle of seasons and fertility. The inversion of hierarchy was also fundamental: common people were crowned and boys were elected bishops; authority in general was questioned. The authorities "feared" carnival because the carnivalesque inversion of order generated chaos among the low social classes; as a consequence festivities became political and turned into rebellions (however we will see later that, some critics show doubts about this). The carnivalesque shows the relativity of any role/position in society and linguistic code, and with its topsy-turvy nature can undermine authority.

A number of these festivities survived the Reformation, which actually tried to banish them completely.[45] In England the most important festivities were Epiphany (6th of January), the Carnival period from Epiphany to Ash Wednesday, St. George's Day (23rd of April), and Midsummer's night (23rd of June) during the summer solstice.

2.2 Festivity and popular tradition in Elizabethan Age

Festivity can be considered as a social manifestation connected with natural and seasonal cycles, with its roots in an archaic vision of time and cosmos; these popular traditions were not necessarily linked with written word and oral transmission. Since very ancient times, in the English countryside mimed dramas, ballads and performances had been sung and acted, not until the second half of eighteenth century had they been collected and written down[46]. That is why we cannot have a faithful description of what a Masque or a Dumb Show could have been at Elizabeth's court. Most of the documentation on the many festivities is drawn, to use Laroque's words, from "parish registers, judicial and ecclesiastical court hearings, sermons and homilies or other books

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[45] P. Bickley, Stevens J., *Essential Shakespeare: The Arden Guide to text and Interpretation*, p. 10.
[46] F. Laroque, *Shakespeare's Festive World: Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 3.

of a solemn and joyless nature"[47]. Laroque starts with the idea that the Elizabethan age in England was pervaded by the spirit of festivity, both in aristocratic and popular form.

We cannot underestimate, though, the effects on festivals provoked by the many changes which took place in religious and political domains over the years. We could start by considering, for instance, Henry VIII's decrees which stopped the religious festivals observed for centuries. When the old Catholic calendar is reconsidered, new forms of festival were being created; the theatres in London were having a huge success and a lot of theatrical companies were touring the provinces. Festivity, even under continuous protests from Puritans, persevered to underline the days and seasons in countryside, animating civic processions in towns and to enliven court life. Renaissance festival tradition was far from the Medieval one, as a consequence of the emancipation of national Church from the Rome, leading to the suppression of cults of saints, and to many changes in liturgies and ceremonies (for example the Latin service was replaced by the Book of Common Prayer) and also to a reduction of the feast days, as for instance Corpus Christi (during which dramatic performances took place) and the pageant of Saint John's Day (Midsummer Watch) abolished respectively in 1547 and 1539[48]. Actually all of the reforms adopted in the first half of the century could be assimilated and applied only later in the century, considering the lack of centralized bureaucracy and local resistance. This leads also to the difficulty in unveiling the actual impact of these prohibitions over the country, in a period exhausted by instability and the upheavals from 1535 to 1558. Queen Elizabeth however introduced stability and moderation "in the face of the two extremes of Catholic reaction, on the one hand, and iconoclastic Puritan zeal, on the other"[49].

During Shakespeare's lifetime, England became conscious of holiday custom as it had never been before, in the very period when (as I have pointed out before) in many areas it was in decline. Some banned Catholic festivities would be transformed or moved to another date, as for instance the Midsummer Watch, which survived as Lord Mayor's Show celebrated on 28 October in London; there was the need to institute an Anglican calendar in opposition to the Roman one. Elizabeth favored the perpetuation of civic festivals (now freed from dependence upon the Church) and she revived

[47] *Ibidem*.
[48] Ivi, p. 7.
[49] Ivi, p. 8.

festivities. All court activities and the Queen's visits coincided with symbolic dates, leading to the idea that royalty ruled the annual rites and all of celebrations that took place in the provinces at all social levels. As Laroque points out, "the monarchy usurped the place of the Church"[50]. Under Elizabeth and James I festivity became a tool for government as much as a means of amusement. The intent was to remove religion from traditional celebrations; a result of this trend was increased an internalization of the sacred: the religious feeling was not openly exposed in the streets, but it was more austere and individual.

The popular culture of Elizabethan England is characterized first by its general commitment to a world of merriment, a joyous world of masques, music, dancing. Festivity, the carnivalesque and misrule were obviously connected to the popular tradition because they worked within the rhythm of an agricultural calendar, and they aimed to undermine social order, in particular the one of the upper classes. In the Elizabethan Age, plays and players were, like preachers (their sort of rival forms of entertainment), very important components of mass culture yet popular drama was sophisticated and writers often tended to turn to literary sources. The elements of high Renaissance culture were imported and shown in public playhouses, and mixed with folk forms, energies of carnival and oral culture. The contrast were unavoidable also because of the social situation in England at the time, where prosperous urban and the small-scale landowners were economically distinct from popular strata, oppositions between different age-groups, sexes and between the town on the one hand, and the countryside on the other; it is impossible to categorize the domain of popular festivity[51].

The clown is the chief representative and spokesman of popular culture. He embodies the triumph of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque spirit and includes all of the fundamental elements of it: the parody or uncrowning, the predominance of material nature, and the supremacy of ambivalence, which meant the co-existence of contraries. According to Laroque, the clown was different from the Fool, whose madness, real or not, was somehow professional, patterned to provide laughter to kings and the élite in general. The clown was basically a comical country bumpkin, an "earthy creature close to material things of life and a great one for faux pas, verbal bloomers and obscene

[50] Ivi, p. 9.
[51] Ivi, p. 32.

puns"[52]. This naive figure was freed from all inhibitions, interested in sex and food and far from every kind of intellectual attempt. His function in the Elizabethan drama was to add a comic element, confusion and grotesque effect.

2.3 Shakespeare's festivity and the Saturnalian pattern

Shakespeare used the resources of a sophisticated theater to express, in his comedies, the experience of Saturnalian release. The Saturnalian pattern could be connected to some artistic and social traditions, such as the cult of fools, clowns or Vice. Release, on the other hand, is expressed by making the whole experience of the play similar to merrymaking. Shakespeare in his comedies refers to the seasonal celebrations which provided mirth through dances, mock ceremonies, masques and so on, assuming that his audience was familiar with them and with the tradition. His method gives a Saturnalian frame to his work and puts his characters in the position of celebrants[53].

Festivals that worked within the rhythm of agricultural calendar, in village or market town, did not fit urban society, where the Puritan ethic was growing. As Barber suggests in *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, Saturnalian traditions resisted unselfconsciously in the countryside[54], whereas in the complex and many-minded world of city and court under Elizabeth, holiday was celebrated in different ways; under James, courtiers strongly defended festive license against Puritan repression. Barber notices that our dramatist who came from a market town in relatively unselfconscious 1570s and 1580s, wrote his festive plays in the 1590s, when a reunion of the major

[52] Ivi, p. 42.
[53] C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy. A study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom*, p. 6.
[54] Ivi, p. 16.

English elements took place, leading him to be perfectly fit to express both a countryman's participation in holiday and a city's man consciousness of it[55].

The great festivals celebrated throughout Western Europe during the Middle Ages and Renaissance were those of Easter, May, Withsuntide, Midsummer, and Christmas Season. The chief feature was almost always a variation on an ancient pagan ritual. The general tendency was to organize the festivals under leaders, a lord and a lady, with attendants who equaled the functionaries of a castle or a court. Generally participants generally were involved in dancing, sports and contests, with the festival king or queen awarding prizes. Who was talented in dancing, singing or acting, could participate in group dance, mummers' play, or even dramatic performances. Fools and daemons were very important during the festivals, at times also as leaders.

The Lord of Misrule was one of these leaders. The Lord of Misrule burlesqued majesty by promoting license under the forms of order, and the tradition seems to be a secularized version of the Feast of Fools[56]. Barber states that

> early in his career Shakespeare made brilliant use of the longstanding tradition of comic accompaniment and counterstatement by the clown. Now suddenly he takes the diverse elements in the potpourri of the popular chronicle play and composes a structure in which they draw each other out. The Falstaff comedy far from being forced into an alien environment of historical drama, is begotten by that environment, giving and taking meaning as it grows…here misrule is presented along with the rule ad along with the tensions that challenge the rule. Shakespeare dramatizes not only holiday but also the need for holiday and the need to limit holiday[57].

According to Barber, in the *Henry IV* plays we find relations of comedy to similar symbolic actions in folk rituals; we can find in complex literary works patters analogous to myths and rituals, regarded as archetypes. This approach could be misleading though, if it results in equating the literary form with primitive analogues the primitive can be fully expressed only on condition that the artist can deal with it in a most civilized way, and Shakespeare shows patterns close to magic and ritual in the process of redefining magic as imagination and ritual as social action[58]. Shakespeare's plays are full of action

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[55] Ivi, p. 17.
[56] Ivi, p. 25.
[57] Ivi, p. 192.
[58] Ivi, p. 193.

patterned in ritualistic way, yet celebrations are usually interrupted and rituals perverted or succeed in an unexpected odd way. The effort of living through ritual fails; as we will see later, Falstaff is an example of such failure. With words a man could create his own ritual and gain power, but words could become "things" only within society. Shakespeare expressed the awareness of limits through ironies; plump Jack is clearly very expert in using the words as a weapon, but at the end he will fail anyway, and accept the infamous banishment.

Another important element in Shakespearean comedy was the role of the stage fool, in particular of the wise fool. I have already remarked a distinction between the clown and the fool, which is in particular to be found in the professionalism of the latter. Indira Ghose observes that the stage fool gained popularity, and a predominant position in the early modern theatre, with the progressive decline of the court fool started with the social crisis of the late sixteenth century. The court fool is tied to the medieval tradition, when lords surrounded themselves by *fools naturall*, people with real mental or physical disturbs, or *fools artificiall* (who simulated some forms of folly) in order to be entertained by them. The court fool lived providing his jokes and naivety (true or presumed) to the court and he was lord's ownership. According to Mullini, it is from the death of Charles I that the court fool's actually started to disappear. His decline, as pointed before, started al the end of Elizabethan age, when a confused society did not rely on the overwhelming supremacy of kings and their divine order anymore; in a world dominated by Puritan theories and new urban lifestyle, the medieval court fool was an obsoleted figure[59]. Shakespeare, though, recollected the figure of the court-fool, introducing it in his drama. During the years of the fragmentation of order and hierarchies, he reconsidered a comic element which appeared to be the most appropriate to represent the right to transgress rules. At the same time, since this character is tied to an old tradition, it can be successfully used to reflect the new society and its flaws as an external commentator. Shakespeare's fools comment on the events and convey the omnipresent metaphor of the stage as a mirror hold up to nature. Among many other Shakespeare's fools we can mention Feste (*Twelfth Night*), Lavatch (*All's Well that Ends Well*), the merry devil Launcelot Gobbo

[59] Roberta Mullini, *Corruttore di parole, il fool nel teatro di Shakepseare*, Bologna, Clueb, 1983, p. 24.

(*The Merchant of Venice*), Touchstone (*As You Like It*) and Launce (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*).

Since ancient times, fools were kept in large households and could have real mental or physical deformities (dwarves were very popular as domestic entertainers), or being jesters or buffoons; a very important duty for the fools was to mock their masters. Ghose also points out that in some cultures, in particular in Eastern Europe and in the Islamic world, folly was associated with wisdom; the fool was often seen as a prophet. Also, in the stage fool there was a true mixture of nonsense and wisdom at the same time; the fool provided laugh but also hidden inconvenient truths. In late medieval times and in Renaissance he becomes the "spokesperson" of the moral and social satire[60].

I have already quoted the Lord of Misrule (an amateur, chosen by the community to reign during particular festivities) as a form of folk fool in popular festivity in England, and this figure is also associated with the Vice. The latter was the main comic character in morality drama, and was usually represented as a comic figure that accompanied the devil, in halfway between a conman and a commentator of the action. Later, in Elizabeth times, according to Roberta Mullini, the Vice is decisive for the structure of the plot because he enlivens the *fabula* and takes position through his tricks aimed at the positive character. He is not any more a simple allegory of the capital sins, as it appeared to be in the morality drama: he gains the role of criminal mastermind, and monopolizes the scene, involving and reproaching also the audience[61].

In Shakespeare the stage-fool, one of the *dramatis personae*, is the one who impersonates the court-fool. This stage fool, a new level of personification, is a professional fool, a *fool artificiall*; according to Ghose, the period from 1580s to the 1620s, the age of Tarlton, Will Kemp, and Robert Armin, was the "golden age of the stage fool"[62] as a professional comedian. This "age of the fool" began with the popularity of Dick Tarlton, apparently the first celebrity performer in early modern age, who exploited to comic advantage his physical features such as a flat nose and a squint. He was also a playwright, ballad-maker, fencer, tumbler and a dancer, and his reputation lasted for long time after his death in 1588. His success, though, could have

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60 Ivi, p. 12.

61 Ivi, p. 75-76.

62 I. Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter. A cultural History*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2011, p. 95.

come, according to David Wiles, from the ability to exploit the mood of a specific historic moment. His chief act, in a period of huge urban immigration, was actually based on a person who moves from the countryside to the city[63]. He uses a lot of jokes about the country bumpkin transferred to the metropolis, using anxieties and themes very common among the Londoners, who, by laughing at others outsiders, were able to gain a sense of community. In this way he became popular also outside the city, and a national figure that apparently contributed to a new sense of English nationalism. On the other hand, William Kemp, Tarlton's successor, had as his main device that of the plain Englishman. He held all of the main comic parts in Shakespeare's plays until 1599, especially, as I have stated in the previous chapter, the role of Falstaff. His departure from the Chamberlain's Men to go to Worcester's Men marked a shift from his comic style; they had to add jigs to the plays to fulfill his several abilities as comedian and dancer. Kemp is an example of the typical stage clown during his time, following all the central conventions: he played members from the lower classes, spoke in colloquial prose, and was strongly linked with his roles. Following these conventions was fundamental to give to the popular audience the idea that he was a common man who filled the space between reality and the play. These conventions drastically changed, though, when Robert Armin, the wise fool par excellence, entered the company. He was more oriented on proverbs, mock catechism, aphorisms, and rhyming moral tags, and he never presented himself in his performance as the common man; his stage fool cannot be considered in terms of social class or origins. He did not address the audience as a community he belonged to; he was an outsider: "his language is far too elaborate to be colloquial…his language sets the fool apart from plain ordinary men"[64]. He does not function as a mouthpiece for the audience. The character of the wise fool then, as presented by the collaboration between Shakespeare and Armin, was that of a total outsider, cut off from reality but also from the play. He was a radical individualist: "like Erasmus' Folly, he mocked the values the play world offered as normative –without taking up a decisive stance on any issue"[65].

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63 I. Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter. A cultural History*, p. 97.

64 Ivi, p. 98.

65 *Ibidem*.

2.4 Bakhtin's Carnivalesque

Since the publication of *Rabelais and his World* in 1965 (translated in English in the 1968), Mikhail Bakhtin's work has been very influential, not only in literary criticism but also in history, anthropology, linguistics and philosophy. His work, though, during the years, has been seen from different perspectives, following the natural evolution of social, cultural and political thought, but also the diffusion of his writings, which has been gradual and discontinuous (probably also because of the difficulty in dealing with the Russian translation). Bakhtin appeared as the celebrator of carnival in late 1960s and early 1970s and, later, as theorist of the novel form and critic of Sausserean linguistics and Russian Formalism. According to Simon Dentith, he can now be seen as "providing a profound, socially and linguistically grounded history of the novel"[66].

According to Caryl Emerson "the weakest, least consistent, and most dangerous category in Bakhtin's arsenal is the concept of 'carnival'"[67]. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin provides a study of the work of a particular author in the popular cultural forms that surround him, and carnival in depth. He refers carnival to a huge range of popular-festive life of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and he goes further, talking of carnivalized writing: in writing the carnival spirit is introduced and reproduces within its own structures and by its own practice, including inversions and parodies[68]. Bakhtin's work is a reading of Rabelais' sixteenth-century novel, *Gargantua, Pantagruel* and the two other books (1532-51), which draw in depth upon the popular-festive life of early modern Europe. Bakhtin points that Rabelais' work is insistent upon the concept of materiality of the body and carnival, and it celebrates the grotesque elements of the Renaissance popular culture. According to Bakhtin, the Renaissance "sees the flowering of an affirmative, and militantly anti-authoritarian attitude to life, founded upon a joyful acceptance of the materiality of body- though Bakhtin does not of course asserts that this is the only attitude to life to be found a that time"[69]. Later on,

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66 S. Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader*, London, Routledge, 1995, p. 9.
67 Quoted in: S. Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader* p. 65.
68 Ivi, p. 65.
69 Ivi, p. 66.

in Europe this attitude became fragmented under the influence of rationalism and modernity from seventeenth century onwards. Bakhtin takes Rabelais as the supreme example of this attitude but he mentions very frequently also Shakespeare and Cervantes. It is important to underline that in his work Bakhtin does not provide an exhaustive study of Rabelais' writing; he is interested in the relations between the text and the surrounding popular forms, working by accumulation of material and suggestions. The most important of these linking categories is the so-called "grotesque realism" that could be summarised in giving emphasis to the material body, a body which eats, digests, copulates, vomits in a grotesque way. Bakhtin identifies a distinction between two types of body: the above-mentioned grotesque body, and the classical body. The grotesque body is unfinished, irregular, with the orifices made evident, while the classical body is rounded, finished and perfect. This uncompleted material leads us to Bakhtin as philosopher of becoming, and he uses the term "gay relativity" to point at this celebration of fragmentation, inversion, parody:

> This gay relativity, this ambivalence in which affirmation springs from degradation, is the context in which to place the various striking formal features which Bakhtin describes in Rebelais' writing, and which find their appropriate context in the popular-cultural life which surrounds him…the language of the market place, banquet imagery, the grotesque body, and the images of the "material bodily lower stratum"…common to both Rabelais' writing and the carnival forms is an attitude in which the high, the elevated, the official, even the sacred, is degraded and debased, but as a condition of popular renewal and regeneration[70].

Bakhtin's work leads to disagreement when considering the actual role of carnival forms in Rabelais. A controversial matter concerns the "emphasis" put by Bakhtin on the carnivalesque at the expense of learned humanist culture. Rabelais's work is certainly committed not only to popular forms, but also to learned culture. Actually, as Dentith notices, he recognises the influence of learned culture in the novel, for instance in the Thélème episode or when he indicates Gargantua's classical education by Ponocrates. These acknowledgements, though, are not sufficient to reach the right balance between the carnivalesque and élite culture. His working is

[70] Ivi, p. 68.

"overwhelmingly towards playing up the popular cultural elements and playing down the influence of élite culture"[71].

The strongest objections to Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, though, are focused on considering if the energies released by carnival were actually as strong as he thought. In addition, critics object also that carnival was an anti-authoritarian power against official culture, but it could be also part of that culture: it would be better to see it as, using Dentith's words, a "safety-valve, which in some overall functional way reinforces the bonds of authority by allowing for their temporary suspension"[72]. This Bakhtinian tendency has been largely criticized as being "utopian". According to Roland Knowles,

> the utopian and idealized representation of the *volk* is apparent. The binary division into official/unofficial, low/high, dialogic/monologic echoes the principles of structuralism which Bakhtin was sceptical of and resisted. There is evidence to show that various levels of medieval society took part in carnival. Violence was endemic to carnival, but it is largely overlooked by Bakhtin[73].

He considers carnival as a basis of the progression of popular culture because in ancient times there was a homogeneity community. He thinks that "there could be no sharp distinctions between official and folk culture, as later appeared in Middle Ages"[74]. To him the original wholeness fell because of the class division of culture (Bakhtin lived in the Soviet Union under communism). But the assumption that it is possible to separate popular culture from official culture in the Middle Ages cannot go unchallenged. In addition to this, the context in which Shakespeare's plays were born is hard to accommodate within Bakhtin's paradigm: festival cannot be seen as progressive, because the land-owning aristocracy started to use rites associated with land to claim for authentic Englishness, against the urban Puritan movement[75]. Shakespeare's plays were performed at court according to the festive calendar, while in the city they were performed according to the sabbatarian rhythm of the Reformation. The carnivalesque

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71 Ivi, p. 73.

72 Ivi, p. 73.

73 R. Knowles, *Shakespeare and Carnival after Bakhtin*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 1998, p. 6.

74 Ivi, p. 63.

75 R. Knowles, *Shakespeare and Carnival after Bakhtin,* p. 6.

dimension is closer to the aristocratic audience than the popular one. Ghose also notices that carnival inversion is not so revolutionary as Bakhtin thought: it was a comic motif which embodied a conservative impulse to restore the order. Ghose states that "Bakhtin's view is flawed by an anachronistically literalist reading of carnival as a celebrations of the state of inversion itself"[76].

All of the evidences gathered by modern historians on the élite being involved in popular festivities were unavailable to Bakhtin, probably unaware that popular festive forms were shared by the society tout court. What distinguished the literate in that society was not the exclusion from popular forms, but the commitment also to another learned élite culture. The different strata of society shared all cultural and social values, from nationalism, religion, hierarchy, patriarchal ideas and the rule of law.

In conclusion, then, we should keep in mind the evidence that at the time the élite was committed to a wide participation in carnival. Furthermore, for my work on Falstaff, the rebel unconventional knight, it is important to consider the fact that many carnival degradations functioned to reinforce the accepted communal hierarchical norms, and as a consequence considering whether Shakespeare wanted to use his character and his fall to underline this concept: festive licence must remain temporary, and the restoration of power is fundamental. I will focus on this point in depth in the fourth chapter, studying Falstaff's carnivalesque attitude in *1 Henry IV*.

2.5 Laughter and comedy

Indira Ghose gives further evidence that comedy cannot always be associated to laughter. She notices that nowadays laughter is associated to positive feelings such as pleasure, humour and fun; this is in contrast with ancient times when the association was with folly, the fallen and low state of humanity (angels for instance never laugh)[77]. Christianity in particular equates laughter with folly; it was even claimed that Plato, like Jesus, had never laughed, a view dominant also in the Renaissance. Laughter was linked with three deadly sins (lust, sloth, and pride) and was a sign of lasciviousness

[76] I. Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter. A cultural History*, p. 65.
[77] Ivi, p. 2.

and depravation. It is for this reason that laughing was considered as typical of women, marking their frivolity and sexual voraciousness. On the other hand, though, laughter was a sort of social discipline used to taunt the transgressors of social norms, as symbol of the double nature of human beings: fallen state and rational state. Ghose quotes Montaigne, who summarizes this paradox stating that "our specific property is to be equally laughable and able to laugh"[78]. In Shakespeare's works as well laughter evokes folly and triviality, but the effect is quite often ambivalent. He presents situations in which characters laugh and the result is brilliantly risible, but if we take in consideration the scene of the deceiving of the tedious Puritan Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* the device could turn sour, and boisterous laughter is not accepted anymore. The author however in his career has provided a huge amount of superb comic characters (Lance, Bottom, Dogberry, Feste and our rouge Falstaff) and amusing comic plots.

According to Cicero and the humanists, comedy was the imitation of life, the mirror up to nature. This mirror, as Leo Salingar notices has a double meaning: a mirror is used either to reflect or to correct the appearance[79]. This definition however ignores or contradicts the fact that "many of the plays it refers to are fantastic or remote from ordinary life"[80]. Also the plot conventions inherited from Plautus and Terence's New Comedy were not based on common situations of real life, but schematic episodes from romance or myth and stylised versions of practical jokes. Since Aristophanes, the dramatists have focused on merrymaking and exalted youth, luck and wit, instead of sobriety and moral virtue[81]. For this reason, many Renaissance moralists attacked comedy as immoral. Comedy plots are often "remote from ordinary life" because the events must follow some conventions, as for instance the passage from distress to happy ending. The accidents of life, instead, are casual and heterogeneous. This does not mean that comedy is not committed to reality at all: the developments are verisimilar but often predetermine by conventions. Shakespeare too acknowledges that the purpose of playing (not limited to comedy) is to "hold the mirror up to nature" with the function of enlighten and adjusting moral behaviour. Some events Salingar states that:

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78 Quoted in ivi, p. 3.

79 L. Salingar, *Shakespeare and the traditions of Comedy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1974, p. 1.

80 *Ibidem.*

81 Ivi, p. 2.

> the critical problem with regard to his comedies would not have remained active if his sense of human reality was not omnipresent and so powerful. We seem to be left with the paradox that Shakespeare, in his abounding vitality, constantly reflects, or rather illuminates, the world outside the theatre, constantly imagines lifelike feelings and impulses in his characters and yet as constantly mixes reality with convention or artifice; in brief, real people in unreal situations[82].

In conclusion, Salingar suggests that in general we should admit that comedy could be read on two different planes: as a representation of real life, imitating speech and action in a more or less literal way, and, on the other hand, as something with its own purpose. A comedy can correspond to a ritual, a celebration, pastime, but its meaning lies on the particular occasion, on actors performing in front of an audience. The two levels of meaning are perceived together, as generic and particular, in this sense as performance and as representation. However characters, situations, plots in comedy do not seem to come from author's imagination only; there is always a link to the tradition of performance; Shakespeare is influenced by tradition as well, and his artificial conventions in plot and speeches are linked to it.

2.6 Laughter and the body

Before turning our attention to the theme of the "grotesque body" and "grotesque realism", I will focus here on the interesting theories of early modern thinkers on laughter linked with the body. Theorists of the time were fascinated with the idea that laughter and joy originated from a particular part of the body.

Laurent Joubert, a well-known expert of the time, published in 1579 a study on laughter in which he focused on the widespread idea that laughter is related to tears. To him laughter was an expression of both joy and distress. According to him laughter was originated in the heart, centre of the emotions and stated that:

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[82] Ivi, p. 7.

> Laughter is a movement caused by the jubilant mind and the unequal agitation of heart, which draws back to mouth and the lips, and shakes the diaphragm and the pectoral parts with impetuosity and broken-up sound, through all of which is expressed a feeling over an ugly thing unworthy of pity[83].

Paraphrasing his idea was that laughter is originated from a rapid contraction of the heart, generating the movement of diaphragm; the latter accelerates the rhythmic expiration that, together with vocalization, produces the laughter. This kind of dissertations on laughter in a physiological dimension were very frequent, especially connected with the study of melancholy, because this feeling was strongly linked with mirth. Shakespeare as well exposes this belief in his works; Ghose quotes *Twelfth Night* as an example, when Maria turns to Malvolio saying "If you desire the spleen, and will laugh yourself into stiches, follow me (3.2.65-6)" [84].

There were other theories about laughter and its origin. For instance, the French doctor Nicolas Nancel, in his treatise *De risu* (1587) stated that the head was responsible for laughter. The important thing to notice, though, is that all those theories have the roots in ancient times and shared the belief that laughter had a therapeutic value, According to Galenic physiology, agitation of the body (in heart, spleen or diaphragm) was good for health. The theory widely acknowledged that the body was "humoral", characterised by corporal fluidity: all humours, blood, semen, milk, sweat, tears and the others were constantly changing into one another. Consequently, bodily agitation caused by laughter contributed to the achievement of the ideal balance of humours. Mirth was prescribed then as a remedy for melancholy, and jests and merry tales were ideal tools to stimulate happiness.

Some experts however were more cautious in assuming that mirth was completely healthful. Joubert for instance, remarked that laughter could lead to be fat: "those who laugh more easily are inclined to become fat…fat people laugh more easily"[85]; this point leads us to our "fat as butter" and "merry" Falstaff. This theory came from the theory according to which fat consisted of excessive blood not converted into either choler or semen. In conclusion, his observation was that laughter was not

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83 Quoted in: Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter. A cultural History,* p. 52.
84 Quoted in: Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter. A cultural History*, p. 53.
85 Quoted in: ivi, p. 55.

totally good for health, but part of a series of things that could be either healthy or unhealthy in connection to their use or abuse. In the next chapter I will focus on the grotesque body, connected with Falstaff, the "trunk of humours".

2.7 Grotesque realism and grotesque body

The concept of grotesque realism is central to Bakhtin's study. His discussion of it starts with an opposition between the classic and the grotesque. As I have outlined before here, by the grotesque Bakhtin alludes to that typical emphasis in archaic and folk art (not only in Europe) on representing the body as unrestrained, in perpetual metamorphosis, connected with its past and future. To use Bakhtin's words: "the inner movement of being itself was expressed in the passing of one form into another, in the ever uncompleted character of being"[86]. Bakhtin's carnivalesque body with all of its orifices, protuberances and excretions is connected to the flow of the self-renewing cosmos, while the hermetic classical body is individualized and sterile. Carnival, as already suggested, is specifically linked in its narrow sense to the body, and in particular to the body that must be mortified during Lent: the typical image of this grotesque body is a fat man who bloats to death[87].

According to Bakhtin, existence is a process of becoming and the grotesque is an essential expression of this carnivalesque attitude to life, based on the biological continuity of people's body. It is important to underline that the body is collective, of the "people": Bakhtin insists on the fact that the expression of grotesque in popular art until Renaissance is not private, not individual as the bourgeois subject developed from the seventeenth century. He also observes that the cultural change, collective spirit to subjectivity, influenced the vision of the grotesque and its representations. Especially in Romanticism actually the interest in the grotesque became private, losing its gaiety and affirmation on collective biological life.

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[86] Quoted in: S. Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader*, p. 80.

[87] D. Wiles, "The Carnivalesque in A Midsummer's Night's Dream", in R. Knowles (ed.), *Shakespeare and Carnival After Bakhtin*, Basingstoke, Macmillian Press, 1998, p. 64.

Bakhtin does not provide a clear distinction between the general concept of grotesque realism and its particular manifestation with the grotesque body; he underlines the idea of "degradation" as its aesthetic activity. He analyses in depth the concept by studying *Don Quixote*, introducing the figure of Sancho Panza as a complete expression of the grotesque realism:

> Sancho's materialism, his potbelly, appetite, his abundant defecation, are on the absolute lower level of grotesque realism of the gay bodily grave (belly, bowels, earth) which has been dug for Don Quixote's abstract and deadened idealism. One could say that the knight of the sad countenance must die in order to reborn a better and a greater man[88].

In this way, grotesque realism could be perceived as a sort of artistic practice moving either from the upper to the lower level of the biological body, and from heaven to earth, bringing eventually these reversed levels together, degenerative and regenerative at the same time.

It could be easier perhaps to understand the notion of the grotesque realism by considering *Gulliver's Travels*. Degradation and material are central in the text, and the body is repeatedly presented in all sort of grotesque and exaggeration: from Gulliver's huge body from the point of view of little Lilliputians to the colossal Brobdignagians. Indeed Swift's eighteenth-century grotesque is almost cast under a negative light and disgusting and the regenerative impulse seems neglected.

The focus of the grotesque realism is clearly the grotesque body, and the representations of the body during different ages have important implications to understand the historical consciousness of it. According to this idea, the sense of our own body is influenced by the historical consciousness the body itself, the collective consciousness pointed out above. To understand even more the concept of Bakhtinian grotesque realism we should turn again to his considerations of Sancho. His body is the centre of two versions of the same downward movement: from the upper to lower bodily stratum and from the upper to lower medieval hierarchy. The grotesque body then is the realm in which religious and social hierarchies can be inverted in a symbolic way. Dentith in his study points out that this Bakhtinian body is foremost gendered as

[88] Quoted in: Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader*, p. 81.

female: the body is the one of generation, the belly could indicate a pregnant belly, a mother earth towards which the grotesque realism returns[89]. Bakhtin, as already pointed out, operated a strong distinction between the open grotesque body and the closed classical body, implying that the latter is a site in which "high" human attributes, intellect and reason, are displaced and replaced by the lower stratum (organs of reproduction, digestion, expulsion). This reversal of body hierarchies, then, turns into the reversal of political order during carnival. The grotesque body, again, is the focus for all kinds of inversions. I will now consider the theme of the grotesque in the Shakespearean age, in a general view, detached from Bakhtin's study.

The grotesque, like many other concepts in literary criticism, comes from the history of art, where it refers to two main types: a classical style of ornamentation and a medieval style of decorative painting and sculpture[90]. The *Oxford Universal Dictionary* defines grotesque as "a kind of decorative painting or sculpture in which portions of human and animal forms are fantastically interwoven with foliage and flowers"[91]. The Renaissance grotesque had its origins in a medieval spirit, created "simulating and modifying influences that come from discovery of classic forms of the imagination in the ancient world"[92]. From its Romanesque beginning, like all medieval art, in general it counts on the survival of late classic forms, among which we find monsters like centaurs, sirens, mermaids. Medieval grotesque represents an expression of imaginative freedom not allowed in other forms of art of the time. The tradition that forms the medieval grotesque can be found in the decorative conventions known as the inhabited scroll; the late classical vine or leaf scroll ornament was used with animal or human figures (or both). A typical subject could be found in the pagan Bacchic vintage, used in relation to vine symbols, cupids called "putti" in Renaissance and pastoral scenes. Although monstrosity here is not a theme, it is present in the types of Roman decorative wall painting found in Pompeii or Roman ruins in general. These decorations could have led to the two terms used in Renaissance: "grotesque", French form for the Italian

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89 Ivi, p. 83.

90 Frances K. Barasch, "Renaissance and Baroque, Grotesque Construction and Deconstruction", *Modern Language Studies*, 13:2 (1983), p. 60.

91 Quoted in: James Schevill, *Notes on the Grotesque: Anderson, Brecht, and Williams*, in: ed. Harold Bloom, Blake Hobby (2009), "The Grotesque", Bloom's Literary Criticism, New York, p. 2.

92 W. Farnham, *The Shakespearean Grotesque: Its Genesis and Transformation*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971, p. 5.

"grottesca" from the word "grotta", i.e. "grotto" used to call the buried chamber of ancient buildings; "antic", English form for the Italian adjective "antico", to refer apparently to something grotesque[93]. The monstrosity in these kind of decorations is provided by the deformation of nature, and the presence of beasts; animal, bird, human undergo partial changes into vegetation. In the Renaissance there is a closer connection with the classic tradition. The rediscovery of the classical grotesque in Renaissance led to an imitative style, familiar to us through Pinturicchio's copies in the Piccolimini Library in Siena and Raphael's designs in the Vatican Loggia[94]. These works of art portray pagan or Christian history, and Raphael's paintings are framed by panels of foliage, populated by satyrs, cupids, fruits, festoons, and bows. Farnham, instead, quotes the decorative borders used for books' title-pages, which were useful also to publishers to differentiate their works from those of others. In Renaissance the classical tradition is strong blended with Medieval spirit. One typical theme of medieval grotesque was the battle engaged by humans and monsters or animals, within and against an entanglement of vegetation.[95] This theme is opposite to the classical one in the terms of movement, because in classical grotesque the same figures were still and the vegetation was framing or supporting them. In particular, reshaping nature in a fantastic way provides grotesque spirit. Together with animals or vegetation, which actually exist, one could have vegetation stylized, animals that act as men, monsters and men that act as animals. The grotesque, then was expressed by presenting unfinished images, which interacted with one other in a violent way, unfinished or monstrous figures. The grotesque in art very often reminds us that the body, with its disgusting smells, wastes, appetites and deformities, challenges human pretensions. In the church-regulated culture of Christian Middle Ages, human soul had precedence over the body, because the body was corrupt and would rot, whereas the soul would survive forever. For this reason people were supposed to tame the impulse of the flesh. Focusing on the weakness of human body could produce graphic displays of bizarre and horrific figures, for instance the disturbing, but fascinating, gargoyles of Gothic cathedrals, or in general

93 Ivi, p. 8.
94 Frances K. Barasch, "Renaissance and Baroque, Grotesque Construction and Deconstruction", p. 61.
95 W. Farnham, *The Shakespearean Grotesque: Its Genesis and Transformation*, p. 11.

the above mentioned creatures combining human and beasts[96]. Images such as the *memento mori*, were used to remind the observer of death, and these images included bodies in several stages of decay. People were afraid of nature and of the unknown, but they seemed to overcome these fears with the invention of embattled monsters and disgusting creatures.

Medieval drama provided a vibrant way of expressing the grotesque. The mainly illiterate audience was delighted with bursts of slapstick, obscene language and occasional political invectives. Ribald songs and stories contained the desire to eat, drink, and in general to be merry. Also the *fabliaux*, short comic tales, were full of vulgarities and references to sex. According to John Kerr, medieval grotesque articulates some important patterns carried into Shakespeare's theatre. First of all, the grotesque conveys elements of what Kerr calls "gross", that is bodily noises and excesses. Secondly, "while most literally tied to the body, the grotesque can serve more broadly to undermine our attempts to reduce the world to a strict sense of order"[97]. Interestingly, Shakespeare very often presents the bodily monstrous characters as threats to the established order (Caliban in *The Tempest* and King Richard in *Richard III*). Thirdly, art can be used as a tool to display grotesque countercultural energy to a public; dramatic performance is central in this regard, in particular for the low classes audience. The stage turns to be the centre of the experience of cathartic elements which the society usually tries to overcome. The grotesque provokes a type of laughter that equates its observers or readers, the type of laughter that celebrates the bizarre and disturbing elements of life. The world in which the grotesque operates is not the everyday world of established order. The grotesque low dimension is disgusting, yet at the same time acceptable and even appealing. Humanity recognizes lowness in its decadent condition and yet is drawn to it. The recognizing of the low is fundamental in order to determine and to honour the high, because the latter can be identified in opposition with its contrary. The low in drama, as in grotesque in general, is comical because it appears in a world that honours the high, but it becomes even more comical when it tries to take high place. Farnham quotes John Skelton's *Magnificence* (c. 1516) in which the character of Fancy, a Vice, in the play is the representative of wanton

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[96] John Kerr, "The Grotesque in Henry IV, Part 1", in: Harold Bloom, Blake Hobby (ed.), *The Grotesque*, New York, Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2009, p. 98.
[97] Ivi, p. 99.

excesses; he is accomplice in the fall and defeat of Magnificence, the King, by turning him away from Measure. He himself asserts in the play that he is a fool, and that his wits are weak; nonetheless in one scene he enters with an owl on his fist and tries to demonstrate that the animal is a beautiful and exceptionally gifted hawk. His clumsy attempt to arise the low provoked laughter and scorn towards the stage fool[98].

Neil Rhodes situates the grotesque in the new styles of comic prose developed during the 1590s, which will be very important for new dramatic forms. Rhodes underlines the importance of this transitional period and states that:

> The educational expansion of the sixteenth century had produced, by its close, a superfluity of highly articulate your men who lacked the money and social connections to support themselves; some were Londoners, while others, such as Marlowe, Nashe and Shakespeare, migrated to the metropolis in the hope of earning a living through the press and the theatre. In these circumstances the first generation of professional writers in England was formed[99].

Penniless intellectuals arrived in the city together with wealthy country gentlemen, provoking among writers like Nashe a sense of the city as the new subject for literature. This period was marked by post-war penury, plague, famine and inflations and the senseless ostentation of the young rich led to a consideration of this new urban society as both repulsive and fascinating. Satirical journalism was born, but its forms were not clear; usually the sermon was used to attack vice, and the tone of these early satirical journalist tracts stood halfway between the pulpit's invective and the verbal frivolity of clowns. In this way the comic prose of 1590s, which moves towards journalistic satire, is the product of the relationship between sermon and carnivalesque, priests and clowns. Rhodes suggests that some antecedents of this kind of grotesque literature can be found in the works of Langland and Skelton. Martin Marprelate's writings, on the other hand, were actually very important for the creation of comic prose. Martin's style was a mixture of evangelism and buffoonery and it was so popular that the clerical establishment was forced to enlist young professional writers to deal with his irreverence. Thomas Nashe, one of the writers who served the anti-Martinist cause, employed extensively in the years following the controversy that particular satiric style

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98 W. Farnham, *The Shakespearean Grotesque: Its Genesis and Transformation*, p. 34.

99 Neil Rhodes, *Elizabethan Grotesque*, New York, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 2014, p. 3.

and became very popular. Quite soon, other young writers such as Lodge, Dekker and Middleton, adopted his grotesque style, which appeared to be the "appropriate instrument to describe the common and appalling spectacles of human dereliction which the city afforded"[100]. Interesting satire was also encouraged by the publication in 1580s of Aretino's comedies and dialogues, which represented another immediate influence for Nashe's style. Aretino's sophisticated satire was focused on urban everyday life, pervaded by a grotesque tone which later became a typical feature of satirical journalism and drama. It is at the end of the century that these new developments started to influence the drama. Rhodes considers the two parts of *Henry IV* to be among the first plays pervaded by Nashe's grotesque style.

Rhodes focuses then the attention on identifying exactly what grotesque meant in the late sixteenth-century culture. He starts from leading the attention on an important concept associated to the grotesque, the burlesque, quoting Heinrich Schneegansm, who defined the burlesque as a degrading mode

> in which the comedy derives from the demeaning of a lofty subject by an inappropriately lowly style, while the grotesque is an exaggeration of the inappropriate to monstrous dimensions. The burlesque is 'that flippant mode which, without reason, drags the sublime in the dust', whereas the grotesque, being 'an impossibly exaggerated caricature of something which should not exist in reality', has moral and satirical impact which the burlesque lacks[101].

Rhodes underlines how wrong it is to assume (as Schneegans and also Bakhtin did) that satire and Saturnalia are completely detached from each other, and that the grotesque must operate within one or another of these modes. According to Rhodes, in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries satire, the Saturnalian and the sermon frequently fitted together, and it is in the relationships between these forms that the grotesque is generated. As reported early in the section, grotesque is a word originally applied to visual arts, not to literary works; it is essentially visual, a representation of hybrid, heterogeneous and bizarre elements. In order to understand how the visual grotesque reached the literary technique Rhodes quotes Bruegel's paintings. His fascination with weird and monstrous images is well expresses in his designs for seven

[100] Ivi, p. 4.
[101] Ivi, p. 6.

deadly sins (1556-7), or the bizarre portraiture of Stimmer and Acrimboldo. Stimmer's "Gorgoneum Caput" (1571) is a profile head of the Pope constructed from various objects; for the Catholics Arcimboldo portrayed Calvin: the nose is a frog, the mouth a fish's head and his beard is a tail. In English literature an example of these grotesque descriptive techniques could be found in Nashe's *Pierce Penilesse* (1592):

> On the other side, Dame Niggardize, his wife, in a sedge rug kirtle, that had been a mat time out of minde…an apron made of Almanackes out of date (such as stand upon Screens , or on the backside of a dore in a Chandlers shop), and an old wives pudding pan on her head…[102]

The image presented by Nashe is an example of grotesque original heterogeneous composition. In this case, Dame Niggardize is a person made by objects, and the image evokes many effects in the reader, both frivolity and a sense of awkwardness. It is fundamental to draw attention to the fact that the sixteenth-century grotesque derives from the body, from the various organs, their functions and their resemblance to other kinds of "gross" physical matter (fruits, animals, etc.). Rhodes affirms that probably in no other century medicine and the human body have been elements so pervasive in cultural activity *tout court*. Furthermore, at that time medical terminology was not already a specialised jargon, and the surgery and anatomy works published shared the "vocabulary and general assumptions of the popular plague remedies or quasi-medical character sketches"[103]. Consequently, it is not easy to operate a distinction between technical and entertaining works. The grotesque body, as already pointed out extensively, is deformed; Rhodes uses a passage of Nashe's *Christs Teares* to show how physical and moral deformity were at the time considered as mutually dependent: "well did *Aristotle*, in the second of Phisickes, call sinnes Monsters of nature for as there is no Monster ordinarily reputed, but is a swelling or rebelling against God"[104]. Preachers and moralist needed to give sin a physical reality; people wanted to associate a body to what is abstract, to have a clear image of depravity, and at the same time to provide an image of hell, and of all the horrendous punishment for sinners.

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[102] Quoted in: Neil Rhodes, *Elizabethan Grotesque,* p. 9.
[103] Ivi, p. 11.
[104] Quoted in: Neil Rhodes, *Elizabethan Grotesque*, p. 14.

A central aspect for the development of the Elizabethan grotesque is the urban context. The grotesque in Rabelais, for instance, celebrates the community of physical experience and is connected with popular festive forms. In Nashe and in the other comic writers the rabelaising grotesque is still present, with its insistence on the body, but the acquires new meaning in the context of an expanding metropolis like London. Rhodes observes that "saturnalia drifts towards satire, and the festive violence which is so typical of Rabelais is charged with the purgatorial spirit of contemporary didactic literature"[105]. As already shown, the popular rituals of holiday were not entirely banished; they surely undergo some modification, but they continued to influence with their motifs comic drama even in seventeenth century. With the experience of the plague, associated with the increasing tension about succession, and the fear of civil war, Londoners were even more surrounded by feelings of death and decline. It was alleged that God decided to punish Londoners with the plague for their dissolute lifestyle. The grotesque deformity and sickness of the body reflects the depravity of the soul.

In this chapter I have focused my attention on the carnivalesque spirit and the grotesque body with their implications on festivity and recreation. The carnivalesque as an attitude towards license, merrymaking and catharsis, goes back to ancient times but has survived until the Renaissance converted in new forms. The carnivalesque represents the inversion of authority, rules, the opposition to religion and political power. The character of Falstaff can be integrated in the carnivalesque pattern with an eminent role. His fat body, fits perfectly in the so-called grotesque body scheme, studied in the last paragraph of the chapter, a concept strictly linked with the carnivalesque. I will show the fourth chapter of my work how Falstaff is a carnivalesque character, providing examples and considering as well the way in which this carnivalesque pattern works in the play alongside another apparently opposite scheme, Puritanism. We will see later that this interconnection is quite complex and has a lot of implications. The next chapter is devoted to Puritanism in Renaissance and in particular to the relationship between Puritanism and theatre.

[105] Ivi, p. 16.

Chapter 3

Puritanism and theatre in Elizabethan Age

Introduction

This chapter is focused on the theme of Puritanism, relevant to the study of Falstaff also as parody of the puritan. It is quite difficult to explain what Puritan and Puritanism meant at Shakespearean times because of the reluctance of the Puritans themselves to use these terms. The problem lies on the fact that these words were used mostly by the opponents to this religious movement, in order to mock or to criticize the participants and their faith. Despite the difficulty with the terms, the movement have some features that mark it clearly. After the introduction to Puritanism, I will concentrate on the connection between puritanism and laughter, two elements that could appear to be opposites. In conclusion, I will focus on the difficult relationship between puritans and theatre.

3.1 Introduction to Puritanism

The controversy around the noun and adjective "Puritan" has been going on for over 400 years. The difficulty is to reach a common ground for the definition of it. The debate was already alive in the Tudor and Stuart age. Even at that time it was not clear what could be identified as "Puritan", who was a "Puritan", and the nature of early-modern "Puritanism" itself. Considering the apparent impossibility to resolve the debate, some have suggested to banish the terms "Puritan" and "Puritanism"[106]. The

[106] C. Durston, J. Eales , *The Culture of English Puritanism 1560-1700*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 1996, p. 1.

first reason that explains this confusion is that these words became immediately used for mistreatment. Indeed one of the very first people to use the term apparently was Thomas Stapleton, a Catholic exile, in a publication of 1565, against his English Protestant opponents[107]. This led to the fact that people were very reluctant in associating themselves with these terms; there were also exceptions such as Samuel Ward, preacher of Ipswich from 1603 until 1635, who wrote in a sermon that he wanted to serve God according to "Puritanism". Few individuals also used the term in private, for instance Sir Robert Harley, who in 1621 described the Puritanism during a debate in the House of Commons[108]. A lot of others, later regarded by historians as Puritans, rejected the term and labelled themselves as "the godly", "professors", "true gospellers", "elect". Indeed, this denomination was used by the enemies of a certain puritan movement, not by the participants to it. Durston and Eales quote Patrick Collison who states that Puritanism was "a term of art and stigmatization, which became a weapon of some verbal finesse but no philosophical precision"[109]. A widespread belief was that Puritans were merely hypocrites led by rebellious feelings. Durston and Eales further suggest that another problem for an exact definition of puritanism is that this movement has never been independent, but eagerly oppositional, in conflict with secular and ecclesiastic authorities.

During the first thirty years of Elizabeth's reign, Puritans were strongly involved in a political campaign to bring a further reformation of the new structure and liturgy of the recently established English Protestant Church. In the 1590s, Elizabeth's advisers managed to silence the most radical exponents, such as Presbyterians, yet the request for a radical change in ceremonials and liturgy was vigorous. In 1604 the Hampton Court Conference took place, called by James I: it failed to reach a true reformation. A more conciliatory approach during was adopted towards those who refused all of the Elizabethan Settlement's ceremonial and liturgical elements. It was only around the mid-1620s that Puritans were linked with more subversive political turmoils following the anti-Calvinistic English Arminianism. During the 1630s, "Puritan" became a pejorative label, always linked to a revolutionary spirit against monarchy and established religion, and started to include also a huge number of moderate people. In

[107] Ivi, p. 2.
[108] Ivi, p. 3.
[109] Quoted in: Durston, J. Eales , *The Culture of English Puritanism 1560-1700*, p. 3.

1642 the English Civil War exploded against Charles I and the constituted church; for a very short Interregnum, Puritanism was the religious and political establishment, but with the Restoration in 1660 it was severely dismissed[110].

Many of the aspects usually considered as strictly Puritan were actually shared by the majority of the community. During Elizabeth's reign, for instance, a very strong hostility towards Roman Catholic Church grew inside English Protestantism, especially regarding the pope. By early seventeenth century anti-Catholicism and anti-papalism were two of the main elements of English culture. Another very important feature was the theory of the overwhelming divine Providence, and the belief of the existence of a few elected with a special relationship with the divine. Some historians also stated that Puritanism is related to the doctrine of predestination: implicit in Martin Luther's thought but elaborated lately by John Calvin, is related to the belief that humankind is split in two groups, the elect or saved, destined for heaven, and the reprobate, or damned, who were destined for hell. According to this doctrine, human beings have no rights on their fate and no free will, which is a crucial idea for the Roman Catholic Church. Some scholars, such as J. F. H. New, J. Sears McGee, R. Greaves and Peter White, have hinted that this is the marker to describe Puritanism, while others, such as Nicholas Tyacke and Peter Lake suggested that between 1560 and 1625 the doctrine of predestination was largely accepted by the Church of England, with no difference between Puritans or non Puritans[111]. In addition, according to Durston and Eales, the Puritan minister Josias Nicholas of Eastwell in Kent "claimed in print that, as well as sharing an aversion to idolatry and superstition and a firm commitment to royal authority, Puritans and their opponents both preached 'one Faith and Substance of doctrine'"[112]. The problem could have been the tendency of Puritans of interpreting the doctrine too literally, the degree of the involvement in it, rather than the doctrine *per se*. It is important to remember also that Puritans were very often in complete disagreement among themselves on doctrinal, organisational and liturgical matters.

The most distinctive part of early modern Puritan culture was connected with their peculiar relationship with God. According to John Calvin, the father of Puritanism, there was a huge gulf between fallen humanity and the omnipotent and sometimes

110 Ivi, p. 6.
111 Ivi, p. 7.
112 *Ibidem.*

vengeful God, and he repeatedly underlined that human beings were utterly devil and perverted. This negative and austere view conveyed the feeling that it was impossible for the individual to achieve salvation, in the constant preoccupation to find a way to mitigate God's rage. That is why Puritans persisted in self-examination and discipline, linked also with collective humiliation. Moreover, an important feature of Puritanism was the constant emphasis on human unworthiness, which led to obsessive introspection. When this belief was mitigated by a sort of confidence in Christ's saving grace, it resulted into the need for great productivity and the commitment in material profit. Any success gained was a step closer to salvation. For this reason some historians, such as Richard Tawney and Christopher Hill, connected this attitude to be very productive with the early grow of Puritanism.

As to the theme of "personal spirituality", Puritanism was a movement focused on the revealed Word of God as it is transmitted through the scriptures. In general, in the Protestant movement the importance of the individual study of the scripture was fundamental. The Bible was the only and complete source for doctrinal and moral truth: in 1605 the bishop William Bradshaw wrote that the Word of God in the Bible was "of absolute perfection and the sole canon and rule of all matters"[113]. Some Puritans pursued a society strictly in line with the literal interpretation of the Ten Commandments and the other prescriptions of Mosaic Law. It was very common for Puritans to have a copy of the Bible or at least easy access to one, and the majority of them were also able to read it themselves. The most popular version was the Geneva Bible, printed in 1560 with Calvinist notes in its margins. Puritans devoted a lot of time in the reading the Word of God, and as a consequence had a vast knowledge of the scriptures. A typically Puritan characteristic was to be able to quote extensively Old and New Testament texts, even the most rare and complex; their enemies used this feature as a tool to mock them. Durston and Eales quote John Earle who, referring to a female Puritan, wrote: "She overflows so much the Bible that she spills it upon every occasion, and will not cudgel her maids without Scripture"[114]. This tendency was connected with the assertion of spiritual authorization, or what Hornback described as "opinion of

[113] Quoted in: Durston, J. Eales, *The Culture of English Puritanism 1560-1700,* p. 16.
[114] Quoted in: Durston, J. Eales *The Culture of English Puritanism 1560-1700, ibidem*.

equality of authority"[115], meaning that Puritans seemed to consider themselves as preachers, teachers and interpreters. Their exegesis was depicted as self-authorized enthusiasm opposed to the hierarchical authorities' learned tradition. According to John Morgan, the Renaissance was a period of continuous conflict between enthusiasm and reason for the dominance in religion[116]. Puritans were labelled as opponents to human reason, natural reason and to everything in the frame of the human learning. They "advocated an infusion of the Spirit (enthusiasm or inspiration), which would, they believed, allow what they deemed 'right reason', that is, a divinely-augmented, 'regenerate reason'"[117]. The anti-intellectual Puritan who wanted to be wise and consequently gain salvation, needed to reject natural reason and embrace revelation; for them intellectuals were only able to speculate on abstract knowledge, while Puritans knew the truth, in their hearts and trough the divinely-inspired experience. Their spiritual learning was actually a Counter-Renaissance, because it was in conflict with the humanist project of promoting knowledge. To Puritans, the Humanist-oriented learning was non-inspired, and for this reason damaging; they condemned humanists, because theology was not pure inspiration but intellectual speculation. Anti-puritan satirists described Puritans as having a senseless, self-righteously arrogant hostility toward learning. Puritans' constant references to "the spirit" were portrayed by anti-Puritans as mere irrationality and as madness, adding a further reason to mock the movement and to label it as ridiculous. This emphasis on the Bible led to the total rejection of the so-called *adiaphora*, those beliefs and practices which had no biblical injunction. According to Puritans, it was a sin to indulge in something that was not expressively prescribed by God's Word in the Bible. This tendency towards the literal and totalizing reading of the scriptures caused the condemnation of the Anglican liturgy and the request to replace it with a simpler, reduced and more austere form. Even the Book of Common Prayer of 1559 was appraised: the majority of Puritans wanted to use it in a selective way neglecting the wrong parts, and a small group even rejected it completely.

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115 R. Hornback, "'Verie Devout Asses': The Stupid Puritan Clown"*, Renaissance and Reformation*, 28:3 (2004), p.103.
116 Ivi, p. 104.
117 *Ibidem.*

A very important debate concerned the ceremonies, in particular those connected with birth, marriage and death. Puritans want to mark these events, but not with the rites of the Prayer Book. For instance, as regards baptism, they disapproved some features of the Prayer Book service; they wanted baptism to take place at the front of the church rather than privately at the font. At the same time they opposed the signing of the cross on the baby's forehead, because they considered it a relic of popery. Also the music in the church was a bone of contention: Puritans outlawed all music instruments and the only singing accepted were monotonous metrical psalms. The place of the celebration was important as well; churches should be decorated in a modest way and the communion tables were made of wood. Connected with the ceremonies there is the Eucharist controversy. This debate centres on whether the sacred, Real Presence, could be present in material objects like bread and wine (the classic belief of the old church), or whether the ritual of transubstantiation was to be considered as simply evocative, just to call the divine original, but in itself without any kind of divine power, as in the most radical reformist position[118]. The Anglican Church adopted a compromise, the Calvinist solution, blending elements of memorialism with the belief in a true divine presence. The problem, however, was to be found in artistic representation: it was impossible to portray the divine which was considered idolatry, and any attempt to do so was marked as lying.

In connection with the above mentioned problem of the representation of God, I focus now on a famous Puritan aspect, "iconophobia" and inconoclasm, which invested everything, from furniture to paintings, sculptures, and stained glass. After 1560 Puritans were responsible for a series of spontaneous attacks in order to destroy perceived idols. Even though the most extreme acts of image-breaking were led by Puritans, and which played a role in the outbreak of the Civil War, we should observe that not all of the people against images in churches were Puritans. On the other hand, not everyone who thought that any religious image could become an idol felt the need to physically damage it. Indeed, the crusade against idolatry in traditional religion had already gone far from 1560. Under Edward VI in 1547-8, and under Elizabeth, this iconoclastic need for destruction was already animated, in particular the cause against papal idolatry; Cranmer, in his *Catechism* of 1548 and the *Book of Homilies,* stated that

[118] I. Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter. A cultural History*, p. 132.

there was to be no imagery in the place of English worship[119]. With a sort of fury for the physical elimination of past faults, statues of saints, carved rood figures, service books, vestments and vessels had been removed from churches, while the church paintings had been whitewashed over. Sometimes it is not clear exactly what, according to Puritanism, could be charged as idolatrous or not. For instance, the crucifix had been at the centre the debate for image-reform, because it was the central symbol of Christianity. But if some Puritans did accept the crucifix, there was general agreement on the opposition to the image of Trinity, including the depiction of God the Father as an old man. This kind of representation was considered dangerous, because it could mislead people and cause them to believe that God had physical properties, while in the scriptures it is clear that no man can see God alive and that God cannot be imaged[120]. Official inconoclasm continued with Elizabeth's reign. Puritans were undoubtedly the most zealous in persecuting the idols, considered to be dangerous to the soul and monuments of superstition. While the Protestant standard work Foxe's *Book of Manners* had been illustrated in the mid-century, by 1600 to be found in the possession of a picture, almost any picture, could lead to the accusation of being a Catholic[121].

One of the most important features of Puritanism was the idea of religion as a social activity. The communal aspects of the religion experience were fundamental, and Puritans often socialised often through sermons and fasts. If we consider the Psalms, for instance, they were sung not only in the church during the celebrations, but also during the way to church by the entire group of devotees. On Sunday, preaching was essential; yet they also attended many other sermons during the week and were prepared to travel long distances in order to find a parish with a suitable minister. During the travel these groups spent the time not only singing but also discussing extensively religious matters. Another central aspect of Puritan communal experience was the public fasting inherited by Christianity and Judaism. Protestant reformers criticised the Catholic tradition of fasting during specific and expected times, such as Lent and in general on Fridays for the abstinence of meat, but they also continued to regard fast-days. During Elizabeth's reign fast-days were called by the authorities in occasions of popular crisis, for instance

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119 M. Aston, "Puritans and Iconoclams 1560-1660", in C. Durston, J. Eales (ed.), *The Culture of English Puritanism 1560-1700*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 1996, p. 92.
120 Ivi, p. 96.
121 I. Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter. A cultural History*, p. 132.

in 1563 and 1593 during the plague, and in 1588 for the Armada crisis[122]. Puritans, however, were very committed to fasting, to the point of creating unauthorised fasting days besides the ones hold by the realm. These fast-days were usually entirely devoted to praying, psalms singing, sermons and a simple meal at the end of the celebrations. Fasting was important for Puritans because these days were dedicated to the collective sense of "humiliation", the meditation upon the triviality and depravation of human beings opposed to the power and greatness of God, which is as we have already seen at the core of protestant thought.

Puritanism has been connected with the idea of a "reformation of manners", an attempt to reform moral standards of the country. There was a desire to be distinguished from those less zealous, but this did not lead Puritans to be completely separated from them; by 1640, actually, the majority of puritans believed that the sanction of excommunication should be invoked only against the most persistent sinners. Social control and puritanism have been linked, according to Durston and Eales:

> One well established school of thought has suggested that puritanism was the key driving force behind attempts to control the more unruly behaviour of the English people during the early–modern period, and that the primary reason why periodic attacks were launched against irreligion, drunkenness, sexual immorality and popular festivities was that these phenomena were deeply offensive to influential puritans on religious grounds[123].

Many historians, though, are careful in identifying Puritanism with the attempt to control unruly behaviour, because this desire to reform the society was not exclusively Puritan; these similar attempts to control society took place in pre-Reformation England and Counter-Reformation Europe. Historians also presented another theory: the need for a repression of immoral inclination was economic as well as religious. For instance, actions against illicit sexual activity were taken also in areas with a weak Puritan influence, especially during periods of economic decline. It is possible that this tendency was lead by the fear of pre-nuptial pregnancy and the consequent number of illegitimate children who would became a charge for the parish. It is acknowledged that in general the attempt to reform unruly behaviour was not a Puritan exclusive; however

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[122] C. Durston, J. Eales, *The Culture of English Puritanism 1560-1700,* p. 21.

[123] Ivi, p. 24.

some aspects of this tendency were distinctly Puritan, in particular the opposition on drunkenness and the traditional festivities. Patrick Collinson quotes in his essay *Elizabethan and Jacobean Puritanism as Forms of Popular Religious Culture* the puritan Book of Discipline of 1580s which states that "holidays are conveniently to be abolished" [124]. Many Puritans were completely against any kind of immoral behaviour and license; contrary to the lifestyles of their ungodly neighbours and scandalised by popular festivities when leisure and drunkenness were the rule. Puritans attempted to banish the festivities and in general all moral transgressions also because they were worried of being contaminated by depravation. This led to tensions in the villages where Puritan presence was strong because Puritan wanted to be separated from the ungodly for the fear of being corrupted. It was only with the victory of the Civil War that puritans obtained the possibility to impose their moral reformation more at large.

3.2 Puritans and laughter

Religion and laughter have always been in conflict. We can think for instance of the Medieval custom to eliminate potentially dangerous books only because of their comic contents, or their (alleged) depraved themes. Puritans, as Ghose notices, were probably true heirs of those monks who blasted away a considerable number of amazing works of any genre and any age and they did everything that they could to boycott laughter[125]. Obviously, a strand of Christianity was hostile to laughter. The Bible is quite unclear on the matter, even if in many passages the exhortation is certainly not to laugh but to weep, in line with the central idea of life on earth as a vale of tears[126]. In general, in the Bible laughter is derision, a sign of pride and of lack of humility in front of God. On the other hand, if used to laugh at enemies of the just and legitimate religion, it is accepted and even acclaimed. Ghose provides a good example of this

[124] P. Collinson, "Elizabethan and Jacobean Puritanism as Forms of Popular Religious Culture", in C. Durston, J. Eales (ed.), *The Culture of English Puritanism 1560-1700*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 1996, p. 32.
[125] Quoted in: P. Collinson, "Elizabethan and Jacobean Puritanism as Forms of Popular Religious Culture", p. 129.
[126] I. Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter. A cultural History*, p. 128.

tendency quoting Calvin's support for Viret, a Swiss reformer, who proposed to deploy humour in his work *Disputation chrestiennes.* In order to support his theory, Viret turned to the Book of Kings, enlisting Elijah's laughter with satire and teasing in defence of faith. Calvin wrote a preface to the book in which he claimed that "it is permissible to laugh at error, but good doctrine must be expounded with great seriousness"[127]. Who was against laughter evoked the theory, already pointed out, that Christ never laughed and the Evangelists had never mentioned it; the argument against laughter, then, was based on the fact that Scriptures were not explicit on this. The supporters of laughter, instead, took from the classics a lot of specific arguments to support their cause. One of the most influential and important point was Aristotle's claim that laughter is a distinctive feature of human beings, and the puritan divine William Perkins considered the theme in his guidelines for proper speech, *A Direction for the Government of the Tongue According to God's Word* (1593):

> As for laughter, it may be used: otherwise God would never have given that power and faculty unto man: but the use of it must be both moderate and seldom, as sorrow for our sins is to be plentiful and often…This mirth must be joined with the fear of God…secondly with compassion, and sorrow for God's people in affliction and misery…Thirdly, it must be sparing and moderate…fourthly, it must be void of the practise of sin[128].

To summarise, laughter is accepted, but in a moderate way, and it is not allowed if used to mock the weak. Perkins trusted the standard position on laughter based on classical precepts, the ones of Aristotle and Plato, for instance, were very influential for Christianity. For Perkins and the moderate puritans in general, the key to a virtuous behaviour was moderation. In Medieval times, though, there was a strong difference between religion precepts and everyday practice, if we think of the carnivalesque forms of mirth during religious popular festivals. Ghose mentions the French Feast of Fools, where lower clergy took the place of bishops, and dressed with vestments worn backwards performed a parody of the Holy Supper. Monks are not excluded from this, as they fought against laughter as a form of idleness: there are collections of jokes

[127] Quoted in: I. Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter. A cultural History,* p. 28.
[128] Quoted in: I. Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter. A cultural History, ibidem.*

compiled by them known as *joca monacarum*[129]. In a classic essay, *The Place of Laughter in Tudor and Stuart England*, the Renaissance historian Keith Thomas noticed that laughter could be a revealing guide to "past tensions and anxieties…and to areas of structural ambiguity" in a determined society[130]. Ambiguity leads to a sense of anxiety, according to sociologists, and humour can be used as a way to "clarify boundaries" to minimize this ambiguity and give a sense of relief. Hornback clarifies this argument stating that

> a frequent tactic in joking for resolving the perceived threat of an ambiguous other, then, is to stereotype the butts of jokes as identities who are significantly incompetent, and whose ineptness distinguishes them from us, reinforcing our own identity. Not altogether surprisingly, just such put-down humour and stereotyping were means of defining occasionally ambiguous doctrinal and ideological boundaries in post-Reformation England, when dis- crediting opposing religious views was often achieved by associating one's opponents with laughable ignorance[131].

It is well known that many Renaissance puritans claimed that their doctrine was rational, while the Catholic Church was pervaded by superstition and ignorance; they also promoted a learned self-image. English Protestants as well employed what Tiffany Grace describes as "'I'm a rubber, you're glue' style of argument"[132], marking Puritans as silly and ignorant; this characterization became stereotypical, together with Puritan censoriousness and hypocrisy. These accusations appeared very often in a similar way in Renaissance English drama. We will focus on the theme of Puritans and theatre in following, keeping always in mind that very often critics on laughter have been associated with critics on theatre during Elizabethan times as well.

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[129] Ivi, p. 131.

[130] Quoted in: R. Hornback, "'Verie Devout Asses': The Stupid Puritan Clown", p. 95.

[131] *Ibidem*.

[132] Quoted in: R. Hornback, "'Verie Devout Asses': The Stupid Puritan Clown", p. 96.

3.3 Puritans and theatre

The Puritan fight against drama is linked with the diffusion of commercial theatre in 1570. The arts in general were attacked by Puritans, because they were considered to be fake, nothing more that lying. For this reason the theatre was obviously a huge target, for it distracted the audience from thought on the contemplation of God. Plays were a web of lies and acting was a simulation and a parody of God's creation of man; in addition, on stage there were boys dressed as women, who transgressed the injunction against wearing clothes of the opposite sex. Theatre was the cradle of idleness and carnal pleasure, and in addition it stole people from their work. However it is reductive to consider anti-theatricalism as an attitude displayed only by Puritans. Early Tudor Protestants tended to use theatre as propaganda; Calvin himself approved theatrical performances of secular and religious plays. John Bale, one of the most important reformers, was himself a playwright and a performer, and so was Theodor Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva. In the first phase of Reformation, Puritans supported theatre companies for propaganda purposes, then in the second phase (from late 1570s), these cultural forms were discarded as idolatrous. In the third and last phase, we find a peculiar Protestant aesthetic, shown widely in Protestant culture, and a massive rejection of cultural practices; these restrictions towards laughter were not new, but the novelty was the attack on theatrical mirth. This led to an early separation of the secular from the sacred[133] encouraged by Elizabethan laws that punished who treated religious or political matters on stage evicting laughter from high subjects. William Perkins underlined this stating that "it is no safe course to play with holy things…it is not meet, convenient, or laudable for men to move occasion of laughter in Sermons"[134]. Francis Bacon as well treated the theme: "as for jest, there be certain things, which ought to be privileged from it; namely, religion, matters of state, great persons, any man's present business of importance, and any case that deserveth pity"[135]. This approach to the theme did not remain a Protestant feature: the Counter-Reformation

133 I. Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter. A cultural History*, p. 133.
134 Quoted in: I. Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter. A cultural History*, *ibidem*.
135 Quoted in: I. Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter. A cultural History*, *ibidem*.

rephrased some of the reformed religion's precepts; the Bishop of Verona, Gian Matteo Gilberti, condemned preachers who told "ridiculous stories and old wives' tales in the manner of buffoons' and made their congregation roar with laughter"[136]. Again we should remember how the Catholic Church, before Reformation, has tried to use dancing, music and popular mirth within the framework of religious festivities; consequently, the attack made by reformers entailed not only an assault on old corrupted faith, but also the attempt to separate the godly from the old degenerate lifestyle.

Curiously, writers against theatre were often involved in the theatre business themselves. Stephen Gosson, a well-known antitheatrical critic, who, later made a career in the established Church as critic of Puritans, was a playwright and a player himself[137]. While the Puritan moralist Anthony Munday called the London playhouse "chapel of Satan", some Puritans were more tolerant and others even participated in theatre, trying to replace perverted dramatizations with the staging of virtuous behaviour. Munday himself was a playwright: despite his condemnations of the 1590s and early 1600s of playhouses, he produced moral drama with the Admiral's Men in support of the Puritan movement. Some of his plays, such as *Sir John Old-castle*, and the *Earl of Huntingdon* series, produced around 1600, sought to glorify puritan martyrs such as Oldcastle[138]. According to the historian Peter Larke, the anthiteatrical debate is to be considered more as a competition for popular audiences, a polemic that involved pulpit, press and theatre in a sort of "incipient mass media fighting for a share of the same market"[139]. Church and theatre could appear to be opposites, but indeed preachers exhibited themselves in convincing performances, employing a vast range of rhetorical devices and their printed tracts were bestsellers. The main features of antitheatrical pamphlets (for instance Stubbes' *Anatomy of the Abuses*) were the warning against the purchase of commodities, greed, low desires and social mobility; all of these concerns surrounded the metropolis, an assemblage of sins and depravity. Antitheatrical writers saw theatre as the representation of this tendency to gain commodities, pleasures,

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136 Quoted in: I. Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter. A cultural History*, *ibidem*.

137 Quoted in ivi: p. 138.

138 T. Grace, "Puritanism in Comic History: Exposing Royalty in the Henry Plays", *Shakespeare Studies* (1998), Literature Resource Center, Web. 12 September 2015. <http://go.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.strath.ac.uk/ps/i.do? >.

139 I. Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter. A cultural History*, p. 138.

conspicuous consumption and commercialized sex; theatre not only displayed society, but it also shaped it. The stage was based on commercial exchange relations, not on ties of obligation, and it supplied mirth and corruption.

From 1580s the radicalization of the movement increased with a vocal demand for the introduction of Presbyterianism in ecclesiastic governance, rejecting the authority altogether. At the same time, the Queen herself took part in the anti-Puritan alliance, which also included Archbishop Whitgift and Sir Christopher Hatton, leading to the censorship of Puritan presses, while Richard Hooker, outlined the *via media* of Anglican Church in *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. This was the background in which the already mentioned Marprelate Controversy took place, with very important implications: "the emergence of a public sphere created by the press, where incipient polemic journalism made an appeal to a newly constituted public opinion"[140]. Martin's tracts were attacks on episcopal greed in the form of satirical pamphlet, nothing new in the critique of the established Church, the innovation was represented by the writer's funny inclination and humoristic vitriolic style. These pamphlets are a clear example of the justified use of laughter for higher purposes, as Martin writes:

> Perceiving the humours of men in these times (especially of those that are in any place) to be given to mirth, I took the course. I might lawfully do it. Ay, for jesting is lawful by circumstances, even in the greatest matters. The circumstances of time, place and persons urged me thereunto. I never profaned the word in any jest. Other mirth I used as a covert, wherein I would bring the truth into light. The Lord being the author both of mirth and gravity, is it not lawful, in itself, for the truth to use either of these ways when the circumstances do make it lawful[141]?

Martin is not a sinner for he uses mirth to show the truth (God's truth), taking advantage for his rightful cause of the demand for laughter in an entertainment's market. The pamphlets of the London wits, who had the task to fight back Martin, were converted into plays and staged, creating the image of the stage Puritan using the carnivalesque features of gluttony and lust. These plays had a huge success; the authorities, exasperated by the extremely offensive tone, decided to stop the controversy. At that point, however, the epithets used by Martinists to scorn episcopacy were ironically etched onto the public mind and associated with Puritans themselves. This controversy

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[140] Ivi, p. 146.

[141] Quoted in: I. Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter. A cultural History*, p. 146.

was the true birth of the image of the Puritan as a hypocrite. If that image of Puritan still resists today, some of the connotations got lost: the aspect of a carnivalesque way of life voted to gluttony and lechery associated hypocritically with outward professions of pious virtue[142]. The most common image of the stage puritan nowadays is Malvolio as the puritan zealous "killjoy"; at that time, the carnivalesque glutton figure was certainly the most common, as for instance Jonson's Zeal-of-the-Land Busy. Ghose concludes by considering Falstaff, more than Malvolio, as the major epitome of the late Elizabethan stage Puritan. We will consider Falstaff's Puritanism, alleged or authentic, in the next chapter. As Grace Tiffany notices, Shakespearean Puritans were quite often objectionable and extremists, but never "unsympathetically rendered or wholly unattractive"[143].

Another typical feature of English stage Puritans was, as already hinted in the past paragraph on laughter, their proverbial ignorance and stupidity. In the anonymous play *The Puritan* of 1606, Puritans were "proud Cocks-combes…pure-starch'd foole" while in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), they were not only glutton hypocrites but also "a herd of…proud ignorants"[144]. Stupidity was indeed a stereotypically Puritan characteristic, and in the Cambridge play *The Pilgrimage to Parnassus* (c. 1597), the characters ridicule the Puritan "stricte Stupido" for his stupidity, calling him also "a speaking ass, a walking image and a senseless stone". In the above mentioned works we notice that the "stupid type" is prominent with respect to the "carnivalesque grotesque type" and the "zealous type"; stupidity was sufficient to provide a recognizable stage Puritan. It would be interesting to understand how this situation could be possible: Puritans presented themselves as the illuminate, the learned, fighting against ignorant papists involved in false rituals; on the other hand, society seemed to have a contrary consideration of them, labelling the as the ignorant. Hornback tries to clarify, starting from the character of Stupido himself. The first important Stupido's tract is its connection with Martin Marprelate, and the character himself allude to Martin: "Sell all these book, and buy a good Martin, and twoo or three hundreth of chatechismes of Jeneva's printe, and I warrant you will have learning enough. Mr. Martin and other

142 Ivi, p. 148.
143 T. Grace, "Puritanism in Comic History: Exposing Royalty in the Henry Plays".
144 R. Hornback, "'Verie Devout Asses': The Stupid Puritan Clown", p. 96.

good men tooke this course"[145]. This clearly represents a way to underline the Puritan promotion of the reading of the Bible as the only possible vehicle of knowledge; it also suggests at the same time the limitations of this partial inclination. The Martinist satire was so famous that Christopher Hills describes the episode as the "biggest scandal of Elizabeth I's reign", and together with being popular it was also very effective because it led to a backlash of anti-Puritan stereotyping. In a way, Martinists resurrected and used the popular idiom of the lower class rustic stage clown, notoriously represented by Dick Tarlton who died in early September 1588 just few weeks before the publication of the first tract. Martin himself praised Tarlton in his tracts, because of his satire against corrupt bishops. This attempt of being linked with Tarlton's stage type was first successful because of the actor's huge popularity; however, it turned quickly against Martin when his opponents compared him with a clown. Since Martinists had used a low language and the craftsmen's slang in order to address the common people, the anti-Martinists used this to label Martin as a "cobbler by occupation"[146], extending later this portrait to the puritans in general. According to Hornback "the puritan Martin's clownish preaching persona had invited such 'scoffing at the artisan-provincial base of the movement'"[147]. In addition, we should remember that he employed quite often malapropisms and misspelling, as for instance "outcept" for *except,* "argling" for *arguing*, and "ingram" for *ignorant*, emphasising in this way his clownish ignorance in order to demonstrate that even an ignorant could show the bishops' lack of authority. This strategy was funny, yet trying to enlarge his public as presenting himself as a lowly persona worsened the anxiety surrounding his radicalism. Using that kind of language, full of errors and mis-terming, recalled lower-class radicalism and the association of Martin with Anabaptist radicals who had risen in Germany, Switzerland and Netherlands against existing order.

As already implied by Ghose, there were different types of "stage puritan", as well as many different "puritan *persona* types". The most common type, Malvolio, is not sufficient to understand the matter, nor the most significant one for Elizabethan drama. At the start of the chapter we observed some of the most prominent characteristics of Puritan movement, between some difficulties, due to the non-

145 Quoted in: R. Hornback, "'Verie Devout Asses': The Stupid Puritan Clown", p. 97.
146 Ivi, p. 98.
147 Ivi, p. 99.

homogeneous features of it; the participants to it were not even inclined to give themselves a universally accepted denomination. We focused on the importance of the individual reading of the Scriptures as the only important thing to study, and the consequent rejection of humanist learning. This aspect was one of the factors that led to labelling the puritans as ignorant and stupid. This religious war based on pamphlets conveyed many aspects of society towards the public sphere manipulated by the press, but also shaped the stage figure of the Puritan as being grotesque, stupid, and ignorant. Shakespeare was certainly aware of the controversy while creating Falstaff. This infamous character, though, is way more complex: in the chapter that follows we will focus on Jack in depth, from both aspects, the carnivalesque and Puritanism, observing how they often intersect each other.

Chapter 4

Carnival and Puritanism in Falstaff

Introduction

The last chapter of my study is centred on the character of Falstaff and on the many elements that converge in this figure assigning him his huge complexity. Falstaff has been often inserted in the carnivalesque tradition and studied under the light of Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque; in addition, though, many critics focused their attention on a particular, and somehow unlikely, feature of old Jack, his Puritan wit. Falstaff can be studied as a parody of a Puritan, as a tool to satirise Puritans, and for some critics even as a Puritan himself. All of these elements contribute to add complexity to the matter. I will try to convey all of these features in order to provide a clear picture. Firstly I will introduce, again, the character, showing his major features and how he rules the comic sub-plot in the *Henry IV* plays. The second section is centred on the presence of the carnivalesque mood in *1 & 2 Henry IV* and how it can intersect with rule and power in a historical play. In the third section I will focus on the inversions of natural order present in the play (in the carnivalesque style) starting from the deformation of the concepts of time and of good government displayed by Falstaff but also by Prince Henry. A section will be devoted to the concept of the play-within-the-play, considering, how the characters are linked to specific parts or fixed in their historical existence. Additionally, I will consider the theme of the grotesque, in particular in reference to Falstaff's body. A section is centred on the idea of Falstaff as a parody of a Puritan and his relation to the Marprelate controversy and the grotesque Puritan. To conclude, I will refer to *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, the last play in which Falstaff is present with his inclination to low desires.

4.1 Falstaff in *1 & 2 Henry IV*

> Hal: There is a devil haunts thee in the likeness of an old fat man; a tun of man is thy companion. Why dost thou converse with that trunk of humours, that bolting-hutch of beastliness, that swollen parcel of dropsies, that huge bombard of sack, that stuffed cloak-bag of guts, that roasted Manningtree ox with the pudding in his belly, that reverend Vice, that grey iniquity, that father ruffian, that vanity in years? (*1 Henry IV*, II, iv, 435-42).

This description of Falstaff, made by his fellow Prince Hal, easily justifies François Laroque's theory, according to which, by creating Falstaff, Shakespeare got as close as he could to Rabelais's style of comedy centred on the body and its functions[148]. At the same time this approach to comedy arises from the carnivalesque celebration of life, speaking of taverns, sack, scuffles, merriment and fat rouges. As already demonstrated in the previous chapters, the low sphere is the centre of this grotesque licence; its purpose is not only to provoke laughter, but also to represent a mirror which reflects and weakens authority and the established law, embodied by the Lord Chief Justice. Falstaff, though, is not only a comic monster: his awareness of his wit and of his own vulnerability are humanizing elements totally new to the grotesque tradition. According to John Kerr, "the largeness of Shakespeare's creation of Jack Falstaff is that he looms larger in our cultural memory than any of the other characters in *1 Henry IV*"[149]. Kerr adds also that scholars have often claimed that Falstaff is the greatest comic character in the history of drama. Undoubtedly, he is a key figure in the context of literary grotesque, with his gluttonous, alcoholic wit.

In the *Henry IV* plays, in particular in the *Part One*, Falstaff serves the comic sub-plot. King Henry IV is oppressed by serious concerns about the kingdom, with rebellious forces fighting his authority and a war to lead. At the same time Shakespeare guides the spectator to the atmospheres of wine, sex, frauds, robberies and merriment at the tavern, attended assiduously not only by Falstaff but also by the heir to the throne

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[148] François Laroque, "Shakespeare's 'Battle of Carnival and Lent': The Falstaff Scenes Reconsidered (1&2 Henry IV)", in: R. Knowles (ed.), *Shakespeare and Carnival After Bakhtin*, Basingstoke: Macmillian Press, 1998, p. 83.

[149] John Kerr, "Grotesque in Henry IV, Part 1", in: Harold Bloom, Blake Hobby (ed.), *The Grotesque*, Nwe York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2009, p. 97.

Prince Henry. The author remarks the distance between these two strata, the higher and the lower, also through the linguistic medium he chooses for each. The nobles at court and on the battlefield speak in verse, while in the tavern the characters speak in prose. Falstaff fits very well in his role as part of the commons, even if he is a knight; he rejects high values, especially honour. Even characters who are supposed to act following higher values, sometimes act with no greater moral attitude than that Falstaff possesses: Henry IV is a king who has usurped the throne, and the young Henry Hotspur, the valiant soldier and leader, dies as a traitor: "The petty intrigues at the lower end of society serve to mirror the deeper and more insidious intrigues of the court"[150]. Throughout the first three acts of *Part One*, Falstaff's comedy is responsive to the serious action[151].

There are many parallels and contrasts between the sub-plot of the tavern and the serious plot of the court; these connections, though, are not explicit. The first scene ends with a sense of urgency, when the King says "come yourself with speed to us again, for more is to be said and to be done" (*1 Henry IV*, I, i, 104-5). The second scene, instead, opens with Hal underlying how Falstaff should not ask about the time, since he spends his days drinking and not working. The parallels also run between "Hotspur's heroics and Falstaff's mock-heroics"[152]. In the third scene, Hotspur speaks of "an easy leap to pluck bright honor from the pale-face'd moon" (*1 Henry IV*, I, iii, 200-1); Falstaff in the robbery scene complains that "eight yards of uneven ground is threescore and ten miles afoot for me, and the stony-hearted villains know it well enough. A plague upon it when thieves cannot be true one to another" (*1 Henry IV*, II, ii, 23-7). Falstaff is certainly the centre of the comic sub-plot, provoking laughter as a pleasant and amusing fool; his chief weapon is not the sword of a knight, but his wit, together with the ability to have the response ready at hand. When Henry and Poins decide to outsmart Falstaff, disguising themselves and stealing from him what he has just snatched from the travellers, he cowardly runs away without fighting. Later when he arrives in the tavern, in one of the play's funniest scenes, he retells the events in his own way: "I am a rouge if I were not half sword with a dozen of them two hours together

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150 Ivi, p. 98.

151 C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy, A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom*, p. 199.

152 Ivi, p. 200.

[…] I never dealt better since I was a man" (*1 Henry IV*, II, iv, 158-160; 163). Obviously he puts on a show to his audience, his fellows of the tavern and Hal, pretending to have fought bravely. He claims first that he held off two men, then four, and so on up to eleven, until Hal highlights how Falstaff's lies are like "their father that begets them, gross as a mountain, open, palpable" (*1 Henry IV*, II, iv, 218-9), revealing the true story of the robbery. Falstaff promptly invents a device to escape from that "open and apparent shame", replying that he already knew that it was Henry, and did not dare to attack him:

> By the Lord, I knew ye as well as he that made ye. Why, hear you, my masters: was it for me to kill the heir apparent? should I turn upon the true prince? why, thou knowest I am as valiant as Hercules, but beware instinct; the lion will not touch the true prince. Instinct is a great matter; I was now a coward on instinct. I shall think the better of myself and thee during my life - I for a valiant lion, and thou for a true prince. (*1 Henry IV*, II, iv, 258-66).

Plump Jack has a prompt justification for his cowardice, whereas the "true Prince" cannot be touched. It is interesting how Falstaff here, with his inevitably comic tone, alludes implicitly to the possibility that Henry is not the heir apparent because his father was an usurper. In fact Falstaff presents himself as a valiant knight, but he is not, and at the same time he refers to Hal many times as the "true prince". As carnival inverts the roles and shows a different world, Falstaff's incessant tricks and indulging in depravation are perfectly in opposition to the serious historical sequence of events. Falstaff and his constant avoidance of responsibilities provide the comic counterpart to the political plot moved by the representatives of order.

4.2 History and Carnival

Falstaff and his carnivalesque dimension represent an opposition to ethical conventions, political concerns, and to the established order embodied by the hegemony of the king, prince Hal and the court. The hostility conducted by Falstaff has many analogies with the political subversive forces (the Percies' rebellion and the conspiracy of the Archbishop of York) at the centre of the historical plot. These political forces undermine Lancastrian dynasty, and are connected with a sort of hostile propaganda, which rulers tend to supress in order to guarantee stability to the hegemonic class. Falstaff's opposition, though, could be associated to "kinds of social practices which were afforded a legitimate space in medieval culture"[153]. The temporary suspension of rule and order was by ecclesiastical and political establishment, in order to incorporate and control these tensions; the final aim of this controlled misrule was to reconfirm authority. This annual period of licence was a common element in pre-Christian European religions, but condemned by Christianity. The early fathers of Christianity disapproved Roman Saturnalian, and in the sixteenth century Puritans through their war against morality attacked also these surviving rituals previously adopted and incorporated into Christian custom. As already pointed out, these practises were not only an occasion to feast, dance, and drink, but also a suspension of hierarchy and order. Saturnalia and the medieval rituals were a sort of interregnum, during which ordinary law and authorities abdicated in favour of a new monarch, a puppet king, who led the community during the time of carnival licence. Interestingly, carnival mocks authority and satirises institutions, religion and powerful personalities, yet it is permitted and even encouraged by those very authorities. Holderness observes how only a very "rigid, hierarchical and static society needs such organized released […] only a very stable, confident society can afford to permit them"[154]. As explained previously in my study, since the late sixteenth century, Puritans with their moral principles led the major attacks to rituals. The religious authority was precarious, and not freed from critics itself; consequently any attempt to ridicule religious matters was considered

[153] Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare recycled: the making of historical drama*, Worcester, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992, p. 130.
[154] Ivi, p. 134.

inconceivable. At the same time several attempts to quickly change the fixed social structures, provoked disorders, leading to the complete rejection of the world turned upside-down. Later, during the years of the Civil War, Saturnalian inversions turned to be a tool for serious revolutionary social criticism. According to Bakhtin, carnivalesque customs expressed and integrated oppositional ideologies, as well as the undermining of authorities. Carnival, from the point of view of the common people, was the utopian world, of equality and freedom, in which the uncrowning of authority took place, together with the crowing of the low. For the establishment, it represents instead a way to include and control the subversive forces. The relationship between authorities and low classes is fundamental to understand the role of Falstaff. Previously, in the chapter dedicated to the carnivalesque, I explained how for Bahktin the body was the centre of carnival attitude. The laughter provided by grotesque realism and the grotesque body "materializes" the spiritual and the ideal into the physical. The lower strata replaces the upper strata. The carnivalesque and the grotesque provide the possibility to divert the attention on the conventions, and on the power, showing new aspects of life and offering a new outlook on the world. Falstaff obviously serves this function in the play; he constantly opposes everything that is official, serious, authoritarian. He mocks power and king, consecrating his life to Bacchanalian revelry, in a world made of sack, appetite, satire, humour and licence. He is also the Lord of Misrule, the fool who reigns in the tavern as sovereign. In the play-within-the-play, he impersonates the king in one of the funniest moments. To this extent he is located in that particular carnivalesque popular tradition defined in depth by Bakhtin. Falstaff bears the characteristics of the typical *oppositional* figure of popular traditions; he can be associated, indeed, to ancient fertility gods, mythical figures (Silenus), the *miles gloriosus*, and many similar figures of popular drama. At the end the *1 Henry IV* he also undergoes a comic resurrection. His language is connected to a specific tradition, that is, the anti-Puritan parody. Even when he quotes the Scriptures, he instils humour and laughter.

Falstaff is the Bakhtinian material body principle; his size and his endless appetite show him as a collective force rather that an individual. His self-descriptions are pervaded by a grotesque style of exaggeration: "Have you any levers to lift me up

again, being down?" (*1 Henry IV*, II, ii. 34-35)[155], or in *2 Henry IV* "I do here walk before thee like a sow that hath overwhelmed all her litter but one" (*2 Henry IV*, I, ii. 11-12). Prince Hal underlines how the enormous concreteness of Falstaff's body has no space for non-material entities: "Sirrah, there's no room for faith, truth nor honesty in this bosom of thine: it is all filled up with guts and midriff" (*1 Henry IV*, III, iii, 151-154). Bakhtin identifies the grotesque body as something in transformation, which contains both the processes of creation and dissolution. Falstaff is a perfect example of this ambivalence, because he is physically inert, lazy and clumsy, but at the same time he is a witty man, with a vivid imagination. Falstaff is old, yet his mind is childish; he cannot show seriousness even in the most tragic moments of the play, on the battlefield in front of corpses. Sir Jack displays his fervid imagination in the Gad's Hill robbery, when he acts, hidden by darkness, as a young agile knight, assaulting old, obese men:

> Strike! Down with them! Cut the villains throats! Ah, whoreson caterpillars, bacon-fed knaves! They hate us youth! Down with them, fleece them! ... Hang, ye gorbellied knaves, are ye undone? No, ye fat chuffs, I would your store were here! On, bacons, on! What, ye knaves! Young men must live! (*1 Henry IV*, II, ii, 79-81; 83-85)

This image of a pathetic old man acting as a young shows the carnivalesque tendency to open up to the co-existence of the opposites, such as youth and age, life and death.

If Falstaff is a subversive force in the play, it is interesting to consider to what extent carnival succeeds over the order. Carnival is a temporary disposition and for this reason it must end to restore hierarchies. The reign of the Lord of Misrule must come to an end and Falstaff must be rejected by the Prince when his reformation will come. Prince Hal is a clear example of the above-mentioned "restoration of order", because he indulges in a carnivalesque lifestyle with his merry mentor Falstaff; he will later fulfil his task. Interestingly he declares at the very beginning his intentions, clarifying that he is merely playing a role among his tavern companions. According to Barber, the relation of Prince Hal to Falstaff represents the relationship between holiday and everyday[156].

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155 All the direct quotes from *1 Henry IV* and *2 Henry IV* are in: W. Shakespeare, *King Henry IV Part 1*, David Scott Kastan (ed.), London, The Arden Shakespeare, 2002; W Shakespeare, *King Henry IV Part 2*, A. R. Humphreys (ed.), London, The Arden Shakespeare 2007.

156 C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy, A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom*, p. 195.

The material for the play came to the dramatist in the form of *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* and for this reason the character of the prince was displayed as the traditional prodigal son, surrounded by disreputable companions, who acted as tempters, in the frame of the Vice in the morality plays. In the Shakespearean play the structure is more complicated and the implications are multiple. There is an interregnum, but the Lord of Misrule must leave the scene; if otherwise, this could lead to the depravation of the entire kingdom under a dissolute king. As stated previously here, Hal opens early in the play to the audience, exposing his secret intent in a monologue:

> I know you all, and I will awhile uphold, the unyoked humour of your idleness…If all the year were playing holidays, to sport would be as tedious as to work; but when they seldom come, they wish'd for come…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. (*1 Henry IV*, I. ii. 185-6; 194-6; 198-205)

Hal is perfectly aware of his role in the kingdom; he is playing a character, the part of a dissolute young boy who indulges in low pleasure. This game must finish like carnivalesque merriment. Hal takes power after the guilty reign of Bolingbroke, a successful usurper, whose opportunistic conduct of affairs has weakened the legitimacy of the conception of a divinely ordained kingship. Even Richard II, before Bolingbroke, put doubts about the rituals of kingship, trying to use magic and acting foolishly. Barber considers Hal's expulsion of Falstaff to be not only political, but also ritual[157]. As during the rituals of carnival mock kings, after they have presided over the revels, are turned down by their followers, and accompanied away, Falstaff must be dismissed serving his role as scapegoat. Through the sacrifice of Falstaff, and his deposition as Lord of Misrule, Hal can free himself from the sins, the "bad luck" of Richard's reign and of his father's reign, to lead a kingdom in which chivalry and sense of divine ordination are restored. During the battle of Shrewsbury, Hal finds a bottle of wine in Falstaff's case, and he dismisses him: "What! Is it a time to jest and dally now?" (*1 Henry IV*, V, iii. 56). The prince here establishes his sovereignty and provides hints of his future reformation.

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[157] Ivi, p. 206.

In *1 Henry IV* Falstaff rules as the Carnival, while in the second part of the play he is put to trial. To uncrown Carnival, to exile him, to burn its effigy or to bury is, in popular culture, a way of restraining, through a ritual, the impulses released by carnival. Following Barber's suggestion that the relation between Hal and Falstaff can be associated to the connection between holiday and everyday, misrule operates only in relation to rule, and a mock king derives his meaning from a legitimate king; consequently, misrule works only to consolidate the rule. In a monolithic society the parody of hierarchy does not seriously endanger social values because people cannot consider any alternatives to the established order. Barber acknowledges, in respect to this, that Falstaff represents a potentially subversive force in the diverse and rapidly changing society of Elizabethan England in which scepticism was spreading especially in London:

> A Lord of Misrule figure, brought up, so to speak, from the country to the city, or from the traditional past into the changing present, could become on the Bankside the mouthpiece not merely for dependent holiday scepticism which is endemic in a traditional society, but also for a dangerously self-sufficient everyday scepticism. When such a figure is set in an environment of sober-blooded great men behaving as opportunistically as he, the effect is to raise radical questions about social sanctities[158].

Falstaff's banishment in *Part Two* then, according to Barber, is essential in order to remove this threat. Holderness quotes Barber's theory of the necessity rejection, but observes that Barber do not admit that Falstaff embodies a power which the play

> can barely contain because the historical contradiction it brings into play by confronting popular and establishment discourses are so sharp and insoluble: to do so would break down the sustained effort to achieve and maintain 'balance'[159].

Holderness refers, in addition, to Robert B. Heilman, editor of Arden Shakespeare texts of *Henry IV*, who supports Barber's idea that in Saturnalian comedy misrule functions to reinforce rule. He acknowledges Falstaff's comic opposition, but also states that Shakespeare was not "amoral" or "infinitely tolerant"[160]. According to Heilman, in the plays there is not only comedy but also history, and history and politics demand

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158 Ivi, p. 214.

159 Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare recycled: the making of historical drama*, p. 144.

160 Ivi, p. 145.

responsible decisions. To summarise, he insists on the idea that Shakespeare endorsed good government and political morality, and for this reason he banished his master of comedy. As a consequence of Barber's and Heilman's theories, Falstaff can be easily placed within the popular tradition of carnival, connecting his banishment with the demise of carnivalesque licence. Holderness, though, claims that this categorization can be easily contradicted. According to Holderness, at the end of *Part Two* the character of Falstaff has turned to be close to Bakhtin's "isolated bourgeois ego":

> I have a whole school of tongues in this belly of mine, and not a tongue of them all speaks any other word but my name. An I had but a belly on any indifferency, I were simply the most active fellow in Europe. My womb, my womb undoes me. (*2 Henry IV*, IV, iii, 18-23)

Holderness claims that the exaggerated egoism displayed by Falstaff is not carnival; the collective popular voices have disappeared, reduced into monotone ones. The "isolated bourgeois ego" has secured complete totalitarian rule over the multiform carnivalised community. In *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature*, John F. Danby states that in a country dominated by merciless fraud, Falstaff is absolutely not a serious opposition, but the most pitiless of characters himself. He is a corrupt character, moved only by appetite and power[161]. In a Marxist analysis of Sir John, Elliot Krieger reaffirms Danby's theory; Falstaff is an egoistic individual who opposes only the authority forces that limit his own autonomy. After the exposition of both theories, Holderness suggests that Falstaff in his complexity could be a combination of the two: he begins as the "'ever-growing, inexhaustible, ever laughing principle', and ends as 'the isolated bourgeois ego'"[162]. Conventional criticism, though, tends towards Barber's (and also Dover Wilson's) considerations of Falstaff as inserted in the popular tradition, and *2 Henry IV* is usually considered as the history of the character's degeneration towards rejection. Holderness concludes by claiming that indeed Falstaff is full of contradictions, and the relation between these opposite forces is unstable and mutable. Ghose suggests that it is not correct to consider Falstaff only as a carnivalesque figure representing the popular voice[163]; Falstaff is a knight who exploits the commons when he has the occasion and,

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161 Quoted in: Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare recycled: the making of historical drama*, p. 146.
162 *Ibidem*.
163 Ivi, p. 156.

at the same time, he is proud of his higher status, if we think of his pompous epistolary address to Hal: "Sir John Falstaff, Knight, to the son of the King nearest his father, Harry Prince of Wales, greeting" (*2 Henry IV*, II, ii, 112-14).

Falstaff, whose only value is the pursuit of pleasure, is a personification of uncontrolled individualism. As already pointed out, Shakespeare creates his "fat as butter" knight borrowing from the grotesque tradition connected to Nashe's style, but he also drew from the tradition of the Vice in morality plays[164]. Ghose underlines how the Vice has the vocation to mislead, without any sense of sympathy for his victims; at the same time, however, he lacks emotions such as hate: his one and only motivation is the chase of pleasure. Falstaff clearly shares many features with his predecessor, and he plays many roles. Occasionally, the Vice is punished or banished, but the audience is aware of the fact that he is everlasting, "a true comedian never dies[165]". Falstaff also seems invulnerable; Shakespeare resurrects him from death in the last scene of act five of *1 Henry IV*; Hal sees Falstaff's body on the battlefield, but the rouge, who has faked his own death, reappears and when the Prince asks him if he is really alive or a fantasy he replies: "I'm not a double man; but if I be not Jack Falstaff, them am I a jack". In the epilogue of *2 Henry IV* there is an allusion to the death of Oldcastle, but suddenly it is specified that it is not the same person: John Oldcastle was a martyr, Falstaff obviously not. Shakespeare, in addition, promises the return on stage of merry Jack:

> If you be not too much cloyed with fat meat, our humble author will continue the story with Sir John in it…where, for anything I know, Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless already a be killed with your hard opinions. For Oldcastle died martyr, and this is not the man. (*2 Henry IV*, Epil., 26-30)

Falstaff shall die of sweat, which is a term for both venereal diseases and the plague. Long live the Vice then, since if in *Henry V* Falstaff actually dies, he will come back in the comedy *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, as promised to the audience.

164 *Ibidem.*
165 *Ibidem.*

4.3 The world upside down

Shakespeare provides very early in the plays the idea of the world of Falstaff as opposed to the established order. The author uses the image of time to clarify immediately how Falstaff's world is corrupted.

> Falstaff: Now, Hal, what time of day is it, lad?
>
> Hal: Thou art so fat-witted with drinking of old sack, and unbuttoning thee after upper, and sleeping upon benches after noon, that thou hast forgotten to demand that truly which thou wouldst truly know. What a devil hast thou to do with the time of the day? Unless hours were cups of sack, and minutes capons, and clocks the tongues of bawds, and dials the signs of leaping houses, and the blessed sun himself a fair hot wench in flame-coloured taffeta, I see no reason why thou shouldst be so superfluous to demand the time of the day. (*1 Henry IV*, I, ii, 2-11)

The emphasis in Hal's words is put on the physical body, in particular on the usual carnivalesque condition: "unbuttoning", "sleeping". The focus is laid on the physical appetites, of eating, drinking and sex ("old sack", "capons", "fair hot wench") and on the degradation of the intellectual into the physical: "fat-witted". The time is inverted, because Falstaff lifestyle rejects the discipline of the hour; the signs of time ("hours", "minutes", "clocks", "dials", "the blessed sun") are freed from the common social meaning, usually connected to work, and lowered to the dimension of physical pleasure. Prince Hal apparently privileges the time as structure of social order. His speech has been seen as a moralistic reproach; his playful manipulation of the signs of time, the ones which guarantee social order ruling work and daily duties, demonstrate that he is equally excited by carnivalesque inversion. Holderness claims that the Prince's speech is a fantasy, quoting Rosemary Jackson who describes fantasy as based on "an obdurate refusal of prevailing definitions of the 'real' or 'possible'"[166]. Fantasy, just like the carnivalesque, inverts conventions taken to be normative, thus revealing that reason and reality are arbitrary. Holderness adds, though, that fantasy does not change at the core

[166] Quoted in: Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare recycled: the making of historical drama*, p. 147.

human experience and social order, but only its constructs. Hal's imagination, following Jackson's definition, is a fantasy as well; he "participates in a discourse which calls into question the very rules and conventions on which he is to base his ultimate power as king"[167].

Falstaff's reply restates the freedom of language provided by the carnivalesque inversion, and turns the world upside down into a fantasy.

> Indeed, you come near me now, Hal. For we that take purses go by the moon and the seven stars, and not by Phoebus, he, 'that wand'ring knight so fair'. And I prithee, sweet wag, when thou hart king, as, God save thy grace – majesty I should say, for grace thou wilt have none - …when thou art king let not us that are squires of the night's body be called thieves of the day's beauty: let us be Diana's foresters, gentlemen of the shade, minions of the moon; and let men say we be men of good government, being governed as the sea is, by our noble and chaste mistress the moon, under whose countenance we steal (*1 Henry IV*, I, ii, 12-17; 22-28).

Falstaff and Hal, according to the fat knight, live under the influence of the moon rather than the sun; their inverted world is darkness, not light (under daylight people usually work, while Falstaff do not follows this natural rhythm). Kerr notices that the reference to the moon is significant, because in Shakespeare's times the moon was connected to the never-ending turns of Fortune, which Falstaff will experience later[168]. During the night deception and illusion take place, hidden by darkness: Falstaff and his companion disguise to do the robbery, Henry and Poins also disguise themselves to trick Falstaff. Even the "good government" is reversed in a kingdom of thieves; Falstaff wants to be free to live under his values. Falstaff and Hal represent a counter culture, as they are labelled as thieves by the established law; they have their own ethics and their own occupation in their reverse kingdom ("knights", "squires", "minions"). In this kingdom, Falstaff's ability to use language is the feature that provides a positive connotation to vice and appetite, the only accepted values.

Holderness observes that critics have focused on the problem of the "real attitude" of Prince Hal towards Falstaff:

> The real question is not: how does the Prince really regard Falstaff? But rather: what kind of dramatic relationship is constituted by this sharing of a fantastic discourse?

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167 *Ibidem*.

168 J. Kerr, "Grotesque in Henry IV, Part One", p. 104.

> Carnival does not merely "rub off" onto the Prince when he is in Falstaff's company: he can command its language in his own right[169].

In other words, Hal does not depend on Falstaff, and his dramatic role, as well, has its own theatrical potentialities. According to Jonathan Hall, the Prince "theatricalizes even his own participation in the carnivalesque action by appropriating it to his intended plot"[170]. Hal's true intentions are clear from the start, in the soliloquy at the end of the first scene in *1 Henry IV*: "I know you all, and will awhile uphold the unyok'd humour of your idleness" (*1 Henry IV*, I, ii, 185-6). *Part Two* shows his increasing disgust towards his low companions, as a symptom of his remorse and imminent reformation. In *Part Two,* Hal's awareness of his duties grows stronger; his disrespect towards his tavern's companions is manifest many times. For instance, talking to his fellow Poins he claims: "What a disgrace is to me to remember thy name! or to know thy face tomorrow!" (*2 Henry IV*, II, ii, 13-14). At that point Hal is considering his rule as Prince, also in the light of his father's illness:

> By this hand, thou thinkest me as far in the devil's book as thou and Falstaff, for obduracy and persistency. Let the end try man. But I tell thee, my heart bleeds inwardly that my father is so sick; and keeping such vile company as thou art hath, in reason, taken from me all ostentation of sorrow (*2 Henry IV*, II, ii, 42-47).

Following this confession of his own feelings he clarifies why his sorrow is "inward". Poins admits that if the Prince did manifest his sorrow he would consider him as a hypocrite:

> POINS: I would think thee a most princely hypocrite.
> HAL: It would be every man's thought… And what accites your most worshipful thought to think so?
> POINS: Why, because you have been so lewd, and so much engrafted to Falstaff. (*2 Henry IV*, II, ii, 51- 52, 56 – 58)

Falstaff is the master corrupter, and Hal his companion, but he, the future king, wants to dissociate himself from the old man; when he will reject him later, he appears to be

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169 Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare recycled: the making of historical drama* p. 148.

170 Jonathan Hall, *Anxious Pleasures: Shakespearean Comedy and the Nation-State*, London, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995, p. 218.

undergoing the denial also of a "constitutive element of himself or of his dramatic role […] he also renounces, from himself and from his theatrical potentialities, the liberating power of fantasy"[171].

In the most overtly carnivalized scene of *Henry IV,* in Boar's Head Inn, in which royal authority is parodied by Hal and Falstaff, there is an anticipation of the necessary banishment of the Lord of Misrule. The Prince knows that he will be soon scolded by the King, and decides with Falstaff to play a pantomime, since he should "practise an answer": "Do thou stand for my father and examine me upon the particulars of my life" (*1 Henry IV*, II, iv, 366-7). Falstaff is the traditional carnivalesque king, and Hal underlines it: "thy state is taken for a joint – stool, thy golden sceptre for a leaden dagger, and thy precious rich crown for a pitiful bald crown" (*1 Henry IV*, II, iv, 367-9). Falstaff has the occasion to praise himself: in the role of the king he underlines that the Prince has dissolute companions, apart form the name of the only virtuous man between the tavern rascals. This man, of course Falstaff himself, is described as "a goodly portly man […] of a cheerful look […] and a most noble carriage". Later, the mock king highlights Falstaff 's honesty and suggests to do not banish him:

> If that man should be lewdly given, he deceiveth me; for, Harry, I see virtue in his looks. If then the tree may be known by the fruit, as the fruit by the tree, then, peremptorily I speak it, there is virtue in that Falstaff. Him keep with, the rest banish. (*1 Henry IV*, II, iv, 414-8)

Here is the typical carnivalesque inversion: Falstaff, who is clearly incompatible with social order, not only plays the role of the supreme delegate of the law, but also depicts himself with features opposite to his true nature. In addiction, Shakespeare announces Falstaff's actual end, with him pleading against the banishment. The carnivalesque is also present with the necessary "uncrowning" of the mock king. Hal, the legitimate hair to the throne, restores the order according to carnival's norms: "Dost thou speak like a king? Do thou stand for me, and I'll play my father" (*1 Henry IV*, II, iv, 421-2). Interestingly Falstaff replies "depose me?" with a subtle reference to the deposition made by Hal's father to gain the throne. This funny moment is concluded by Hal with a bleak prophecy:

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171 Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare recycled: the making of historical drama*, p. 149.

Falstaff: If sack and sugar be a fault, God help the wicked! If to be old and merry be a sin, then many an old host that I know is damned. No, my good lord, banish Peto, banish Bardolph, banish Poins; but for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant being as he is old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry's company – banish plump Jack and banish all the world.

Hal: I do, I will. (*1 Henry IV*, II, iv, 458-68)

It is noticeable that Falstaff defends "sack and sugar" in a similar way to the one in which Sir Toby responds to the Puritan Malvolio "Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?" [172] (*Twelfth Night*, II, iii, 110-11). Falstaff is involved in a festive play, with sack, sugar and merriment, and Hal in his personal stage-managed plot; the banishment of Falstaff can be interpreted as the self-repression by the Prince, and, in addition, as a ritual to free the realm from "anarchic bodily desire"[173]. In the next section I will focus the attention on the theme of the roles played by Falstaff and the Prince.

4.4 Kings and clowns: the dramatic roles in *1 & 2 Henry IV*

Hal's denial of the carnivalesque is a very important feature in *1* and *2 Henry IV*. According to Grady, he is one of those "legendary" characters like Brutus, Cleopatra or Antony, who turns into a legend after a deep investigation of the self. Hal loses his subjectivity, and accepts his fixed identity of the "legendary" character[174]. Falstaff, on the other hand, displays a protean subjectivity. Grady clarifies the term "subjectivity", which contains many meaning, and some of these are inappropriate to Falstaff. He is obviously the opposite of a solitary self - reflective character, for he is always involved

[172] William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, in Stanley Wells (ed.), *William Shakespeare, tutte le opere*, Vol. II, "Le commedie", Milano, Bompiani, 2015, p. 1786.

[173] J. Hall, *Anxious Pleasures: Shakespearean Comedy and the Nation-State*, p. 224.

[174] Hygh Grady, "Subjectivity between the Carnival and the Aesthetic", *The Modern Language Review*, 96:3 (2001), p. 612.

in friendship and communal mirth, yet he cannot be associated to the "puritan subjectivity" neither:

> If by 'subjectivity' we mean the thought process characteristic of a solitary inner life, such as in the versions of Protestant asceticism associated by Weber with an emerging modernity, then Falstaff seems the very opposite of subjective in that sense. Indeed, Kristen Poole's study of Falstaff and the anti-Marprelate materials…suggests that he is in fact an important part designed as the very opposite of the Protestant ascetic: communal, pleasure-loving, and self-centred rather than solitary, penitential and self-denying[175].

Grady considers Falstaff's "subjectivity" as his ability to surpass the fixed social roles, the ones that force the Prince to be a dutiful son, and that would force Falstaff to be just a tavern parasite and a pitiful knight. He refuses to be tied down to a single identity; this ability has been called "theatricality", because he can play many roles, and doing so, he can resist constraining order and social impositions.

I have already quoted the famous soliloquy in which Hal signals his intention to "reform", abandoning a dissolute life and disprovable companies: "I know you all, and I will awhile uphold the unyoked humour of your idleness" (*1 Henry IV*, I, ii, 185-6). Holderness asserts that the mode of the soliloquy should be

> recognized as determining the dramatic effect of the Prince's confession. By soliloquizing, a character expresses a clearly defined individuality, an isolated singleness expressing a formidable self-consciousness. Falstaff is often associated with the individualism of soliloquy, since some of his most memorable utterances belong to the mode[176].

Holderness notice how for the majority of his lines in the first part of *1 Henry IV*, Falstaff hardly uses the pronoun "I", but always speaks of "we" and "us", by doing so he inserts himself as a member of a collective. Hal, instead, employs the first person singular, and when he is alone he can turn aside from the action and "address to the audience directly, displaying his capacity for detachment and egoistic self-assertion"[177]. In Shakespeare's theatre the soliloquy was actually a colloquy with the audience, which suspended the dramatic illusion and left the public in front of an individual, a character

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175 *Ibidem*.

176 Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare recycled: the making of historical drama*, p. 150.

177 *Ibidem*.

separated from the action in which he took part. Hal, can, here, detach himself from the collective drama and show his individuality. This attitude is strongly opposite to Falstaff's habit of overt self-dramatizing. This happens because the Prince, unlike Falstaff, asserts himself in an authentic identity, totally independent from his dramatic position. Falstaff, instead, never lays claim to an authentic self, but he exists only as a succession of dramatic roles. He refers to himself as to a Gargantuan collective creature, and never invokes a specific personality. When he addresses the audience he never shows a sort of individuality and he even reveals himself as a theatrical figure:

> The brain of this foolish-compounded clay, man, is not able to invent anything that intends to laughter more than I invent, or is invented on me. I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men. (*2 Henry IV*, I, ii, 5-10)

Falstaff differs from Hal in a very important feature: he is not part of history. Hal is constrained in the fixed process of historical plot. Even if he wastes a lot of time in Eastcheap, his true and predetermined destinations are Shrewsbury and Agincourt. The company of Falstaff represents for the Prince the possibility to experience a limited free role, far from his historical collocation. Nevertheless, Hal is perfectly aware of his future; speaking to his father he anticipates the recovery of his true role as part of history: "I shall thereafter, my thrice, gracious lord, be more myself" (*1 Henry IV*, III, ii, 92-3). Noticeably, when he recovers his predetermined role, he loses all individuality and independence, submitting to the tyranny of historical determinism. In the description of his endeavour on the battlefield he is transformed in a figure of heroic myth:

> I saw young Harry with his beaver on, his cuisses on his thighs, gallantly armed, rise from the ground like feather'd Mercury, and vaulted with such ease into his seat as if an angel dropp'd down from the clouds to turn and wind a fiery Pegasus and witch the world with noble horsemanship. (*1 Henry IV*, IV, i, 103- 9)

This description dissolves Hal in a sort of "chivalric romance, beautiful but banal, eloquent but empty"[178]. Falstaff, on the other hand, has no historical destiny, nor a pre-determined role. He has an actual historical origin; by his connection with his real

[178] Ivi, p. 153.

counterpart John Oldcastle is obscure and contradictory. The Prince has only one role, and only one destiny: "a splendid figure of chivalric myth, the apotheosis of an antiquated culture already rendered archaic"[179]. Falstaff, instead, plays many parts; in *1 Henry IV* he is a perfect coward, in *2 Henry IV* he plays the mock-hero.

Falstaff is a very complex figure exactly because of the many dramatic possibilities in which he is involved. Holderness reminds that, even according to Dover Wilson, Falstaff merges many stock-figures: the morality Vice, the bragging soldier, and the parody-Puritan. The problem, according to Holderness, lies in the fact that for Wilson, and many others, this heterogeneous background "points nonetheless to a consistent dramatic design and to a unified character with a coherent symbolic role in the play's ideological structure"[180]. At the core of Wilson's criticism there is a contradiction, that is the attempt to isolate from the complex character its various identities, (to free the actor from his roles); yet, at the same time, Wilson claims that it is correct for Falstaff to be described exclusively in terms of the above mentioned roles[181]. In other words, Wilson recognizes the fluidity of this character, and its many dramatic possibilities, but he insists on the point that the actor must be punished for his evil features of some of his roles. In fact, if we think of Falstaff as to professional player, like the licensed fool, it should be possible to determine the differences between the actor and his characters on stage. Wilson's difficulty probably is to be found in his attempt to deal with the element of Puritanism in Falstaff, who tends to use Puritan specific idiom, language and theological concepts. Wilson fails, according to Holderness, in trying to incorporate this Puritan pattern into an ideal coherent character. He states that the Puritan (mocking) features adopted by Falstaff are supposed to be part of Prince's dramatic repertory in a genuine way: as Prodigal Son, he should be the moral pillar in the play. The problem, however, is that showing the heir to the throne as a repenting figure, implies that he has done something of which to repent: "Since Henry V is the ideal king of English History, Shakespeare must take great care, even in the days of his 'wildness', to guard him from the breath of scandal"[182]. Shakespeare, then,

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[179] *Ibidem.*

[180] *Ibidem.*

[181] *Ibidem.*

[182] Quoted in: Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare recycled: the making of historical drama*, p.154.

transfers the role of repentant to Falstaff to protect the Prince's reputation, and here we find the contradiction between moralistic and theatrical interpretation:

> If Falstaff is arbitrarily handed the role of Puritan- which exists therefore only as a specific and transient relation between actor and audience at a particular moment of the drama- then similarly all Falstaff's role could be regarded as separable from his character. Is Falstaff, perhaps, not so much a character who acts in certain ways, according to type, but rather one who has the character of an actor? That is not of course a punishable moral offence – unless Falstaff were to be consigned not to the Lord Chief Justice, but to the evangelical zeal of the theatre's enemies, Phillip Stubbes and William Pryanne[183].

We face again, then, the concept of the "theatricality" of Falstaff, while A.R. Humphreys in his Arden edition of *1 Henry IV*, thus clarifies it in a noticeable passage:

> Who, in fact is 'he'? 'He', really, is the comic personality given a chance by the dramatist to revel in a comic role…To schematise Falstaff's shotsilk variety into stable colour is absurd; his dramatic sphere of popular comedy allows a rapid shifting of attitudes…The attempt to fix Falstaff into a formula of psychological realism must finally fail. Brilliant at timely evasions, he escapes this strait-jacket as he escapes any other…The king stands for rule, Falstaff for misrule, and Falstaff, like the rebel lord, is to be suppressed[184].

I will focus more in depth on the Puritan features of Falstaff's character later. I will consider the theme of the grotesque, strictly connected with the carnivalesque and Falstaff's body.

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183 *Ibidem*.

184 Quoted in: Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare recycled: the making of historical drama*, pp. 154-5.

4.5 Falstaff and his grotesque body: large as the drama itself

The concepts of the grotesque and of the grotesque body, as already seen in the second chapter, are fundamental for Bakhtin and his study of the carnivalesque. According to Bakhtin, the grotesque body is unrestrained and in perpetual metamorphosis, a site of renewal and rebirth. The grotesque celebrates all of the body functions, even the most disgusting; the lower part of the body, the belly and the genitals, are elevated, since the lower strata replaces the higher stratum: sex, eating, defecation replace reason and intellect. It is clear that merry Jack Falstaff can be considered as a grotesque figure. Falstaff is very fat, a "huge hill of flesh" according to the Prince (*1 Henry IV*, II, iv, 236) and this aspect is constantly underlined by the other characters and by himself as well, for instance when he claims: "my womb, my womb, my womb, undoes me" (*2 Henry IV*, IV, iii, 21). Everything about him is connected to the lower stratum, to an earthly attachment to everything, which is depraved and low. Falstaff is monstrous, aging, disorderly, drunk, and committed in grotesque "unsavoury similes" and "base comparisons" (*I Henry IV*, II, iv, 243). In the typical grotesque feature of the mixture of animal and men, he is frequently presented with animal-like features: he is a "roasted Manningtree ox" and "Pharoah's lean kine" (*1 Henry IV*, II, iv, 440; 461). Barasch also notices Hal's dehumanizing invective, which blends Falstaff's body with inanimate objects[185]: "trunk of humors, that bolting hutch of beastliness, that swollen parcel of dropsies, that huge bombard of sack, that stuffed cloak-bag of guts" (*1 Henry IV*, II, iv, 437-40). Through this reverse-transubstantiation of the grotesque, the man becomes flesh, becomes object, becomes vice; in *Part Two*, at the last metamorphosis he becomes sick meat. At the beginning of the play he is anxious about the state of his urine, and complains about the various evils that plague him, such as gout and the pox. Falstaff's diseases are also the symptom of the disease of the kingdom, for King Henry is dying too, so that while jests about Falstaff's age and infirmity pervade the tavern world, they correspond to events in the royal play. The Elizabethan grotesque derives from disturbing images of flesh. At the beginning of *1 Henry IV* the King provides a grotesque description of the horrors of the war:

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[185] Frances K. Barasch, "Renaissance and Baroque, Grotesque Construction and Deconstruction", p. 64.

> No more the thirsty entrance of this soil shall daub her lips with her own children's blood...those opposed eyes, which, like the meteors of a troubled heaven, all of one nature, of one substance bred, did lately meet in the intestine shock and furious close of civil butchery, shall now... be no more oppos'd. (*1 Henry IV*, I, i, 5-15)

The war is butchery, an intestine strife that destroys the kingdom, evoking images of cannibalism. The bodily grotesque is also expressed by the mention of carnage in Westmoreland's report to the King: "Upon whose dead corpse there was such misuse, such beastly shameless transformation, by those Welshwomen done as may not be, without much shame retold of spoken of it" (*1 Henry IV*, I, i. 43-6). The world of the court admits what Falstaff rejects, whereas the devastation of the body which will die and rot. At the same time Falstaff, through his life devoted to pleasures, identifies the pitiless illusion of grandeur in the nobles' willingness to die for a honorable cause[186]. Hotspur, at the end of *1 Henry IV,* when he his mortally wounded by Prince Henry, indulges in a physical consideration on death:

> Hotspur: O, Harry, thou hast robb'd me of my youth! I better brook the loss of brittle life. Than those proud titles thou hast won of me; they wound my thoughts worse than sword my flesh: But thought's the slave of life, and life time's fool; and time, that takes survey of all the world, must have a stop. O, could prophesy, but that the earthy and cold hand of death lies on my tongue: no, Percy, thou art dust and food for—
> Henry: For worms, brave Percy. (*1 Henry IV*, V, iv, 76- 86)

Hotspur's great ambition and his failed attempt to influence history give way to recognition of the horror of the flesh. The grotesque, which mixes low and high, is functional here to convey the idea that all men are equal in the death, and that a valorous young prince will be "food for worms" at the same time as a fat-as-butter old rascal such as Falstaff. Henry, in front of the dead body of Hotspur, delivers a generous eulogy for the valiant knight:

> Fare thee well, great heart! Ill-weaved ambition, how much art thou shrunk! When that this body did contain a spirit, a kingdom for it was too small a bound; but now two paces of the vilest earth is room enough: this earth that bears thee dead bears not alive so stout a gentleman. If thou wert sensible of courtesy, I should not make so dear a

[186] John Kerr, "Grotesque in Henry IV, Part 1", p. 102.

> show of zeal: but let my favors hide thy mangled face; and, even in thy behalf, I'll thank myself for doing these fair rites of tenderness. Adieu, and take thy praise with thee to heaven! thy ignominy sleep with thee in the grave, but not remember'd in thy epitaph! (*1 Henry IV*, V, iv, 86- 100).

Hotspur's wide ambition can now be contained in "two paces of the vilest earth". At the end of the passage, though, he recalls the Christian dichotomy between the body and the soul: Hotspur's ambition dies with his mortal body, but his honor will rise to heaven. Soon after, Hal turns the attention to another body, this time not of a honorable knight but of Falstaff, who was cowardly (and perfectly in his style) faking his own death to avoid being killed in the battle. On the contrary, for Jack, Hal does not mention the afterlife, nor does he speak of the soul; rather "Falstaff's large corpus signifies the meager fate of life devoted to the body"[187].

> What, old acquaintance! could not all this flesh keep in a little life? Poor Jack, farewell! I could have better spared a better man: o, I should have a heavy miss of thee, if I were much in love with vanity! Death hath not struck so fat a deer today, though many dearer, in this bloody fray. Embowell'd will I see thee by and by: till then in blood by noble Percy lie. (*1 Henry IV*, V, iv, 101-9).

Prince Henry underlines again that Falstaff is incredibly fat, and advocates no legacy for him; merry Jack now is now just flesh and thus he will be "embowell'd". During his life Falstaff has never shown high values: his grotesque attachment to carnal reality and the continuous critique of abstract values lead to a grotesque death, in line with his life. The grotesque then, in *Henry IV*, is not a theme exclusively tied to the character of Falstaff: it pervades the whole work, in particular the scenes on the battlefield. *Henry IV Part One* and *Henry IV Part Two* are, in fact, as pointed out in the second chapter, among the first literary works influenced by Nashe's grotesque style. Rhodes claims that Greene's pamphlets, tavern scenes, and Nashe's satire, provide the raw material for the comedy sub-plot in *Henry IV*[188]. It is important to notice that the historical play, after a quite conventional opening scene, has a "shocking" second scene: a major character, a knight, is introduced as lying on the floor, drunk, waking, while he addresses the Prince asking

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187 Ivi, p. 103.

188 Neil Rhodes, *Elizabethan Grotesque*, p. 99.

for the time. There is nothing respectable in a character supposed to be serious, but, nonetheless, this shameful behavior did not create moral concern in the audience. Rhodes notes that:

> probably for the first time in English drama an audience is not expected to shake their heads in disapproval before an exhibition of prodigality. And thus is due, in part at least, to Nashe's exploitation of the disreputable as a source of comedy[189].

Hal's taste for lewd word play can also be considered as scandalous, and grotesque as well, because a Prince should not pronounce scandalous banters:

> Hal: is not a buff jerkin a most sweet robe of durance?
>
> Fal: How now, how now, mad wag! What, in thy quips and quiddities? What a plague have I to do with a buff jerkin? (*1 Henry IV*, I, ii, 41-4)

The grotesque similes follow, and Falstaff addresses Hal saying: "Thou hast the most unsavory similes, and art indeed the most comparative, rascalliest, sweet young prince…and art indeed able to corrupt a saint" (*1 Henry IV*, I, ii, 76-8; 87-8). Obviously Falstaff, who is the master of "quips and quiddities", wants to share his faults with others and then describes the Prince. This kind of pungent verbal display, introduced by satires and pamphlets, as explained in the second chapter, is at the base of the low style in Elizabethan comic prose, and therefore of the grotesque. According to Rhodes, the play is the "culmination of the developing taste for the low style that we find in Aretino, in Marprelate controversy, in Donne's satires"[190]. During all the play Falstaff and Hal are involved in verbal fights, and the form that the grotesque word game takes on in *1 Henry IV* is flyting. As for the grotesque insistence on the horror of the flesh, the comic invective in the play is not a prerogative of the low world of Eastcheap. The conflicts between Hal and Falstaff are repeated for instance in Hotspur's violent attacks on Glendower: "He is as tedious as a tired horse, a railing wife; worse than a smoky house; I had rather live with cheese and garlic in a windmill, far, than feed on cates and have him talk to me"(*1 Henry IV*, III, I, 155-9). The combination in Falstaff of wit and gross-

[189] Ivi, p. 100.
[190] Ivi, p. 101.

looking physicality convert him into the supreme embodiment of the Elizabethan grotesque. The first description of Falstaff provided by Hal is "fat-witted", which means simply "stupid". Falstaff is clearly not stupid at all, but "fat-witted" in a larger sense. Hal blends the verbal and physical in Falstaff, addressing him with "Peace, chewet, peace!" (*1 Henry IV*, V, i. 29). "Chewet" could be both a jackdaw (any chatterer), but also a meat pie. Falstaff's huge belly and his brain are connected one to another, and Hal points out this feature while he reveals the true story of Gadshill's robbery: "These lies are like their father that begets them, gross as a mountain, open, palpable. Why, thou claybrain'd guts, thou knotty-pated fool" (*1 Henry IV*, II, iv, 218-220). Also here, Hal has the intention to show how foolish it is of Falstaff to say such blatant lies; Rhodes quotes Nashe to show how his comic style was borrowed by Shakespeare: "Had they been wittie lies, or merry lies, they would never have greev'd mee: but palpable lies, damned lies, lies as big as one of the Guardes chynes of beefe, who can abide?"[191]. The effect provided by both writers is a paradox: the verbal medium produces its grotesque effects from a striving towards physical embodiment[192]. Clearly in the play the grotesque comedy is Falstaff's own body, and the ways in which Hal and Falstaff himself refer to it. Rhodes focuses the attention on sweat and grease as grotesque elements. Hal observes after Gadshill trap that "Falstaff sweats to death and lards the lean earth as he walks along" (*1 Henry IV*, II, ii, 105-6). He also adds that when Falstaff drinks, he resembles the sun melting a dish of butter: "Didst thou never see Titan kiss a dish of butter – pitiful – hearted Titan – that melted at the sweet tale of the sun's? If thou didst, then behold that compound" (*1 Henry IV*, II, iv, 115-8). The dissolution of the men's body is typical of the grotesque style, in which the body, as already seen, is in perpetual metamorphosis. It is interesting how the description of Falstaff sweating to death gains, in the carnivalesque mood of the play, the connotations of fertility:

> The grease, which is the token of his decomposition, replenishes and gives life to 'the lean earth'; nothing better fits C.L. Barber's description of him as the Carnival lord whose ultimate sacrifice brings health to an ailing, sterile community[193].

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191 Quoted in: Neil Rhodes, *Elizabethan Grotesque*, p. 105.

192 *Ibidem*.

193 Ivi, p. 106.

Falstaff's grotesque body and exudation also provide laughter. As explained in the chapter dedicated to carnivalesque, in the sixteenth century it was a common belief to consider laughter as positive for health, and also that fat people were more inclined to laughter. Falstaff is the first one to provide grotesque images of his own body during the play: "if I fought not with fifty of them, I am a bunch of radish" (*1 Henry IV*, II, iv, 179-80); "I am a peppercorn, a brewer's horse" (*1 Henry IV*, III, iii, 8); "If I be not ashamed of my soldiers, I am a sous'd gurnet" (*1 Henry IV*, IV, ii, 10-11). Falstaff's witty employment of his own corpulence suggests a fusion of mind and matter, what Rhodes calls "fatwittedness"[194]. It appears, though, that Falstaff lacks of a sense of physical integrity; we have an example when Hal tells him to lie down during Gadshill, and Jack's reply is "Have you any levers to lift me up again, being down?" (*1 Henry IV*, II, ii, 32-3). He presents himself as an inert heap of flesh, unable to move, directed towards physical self-destruction, for instance during the play-within-a-play when he claims: "hang me up by the heels for a rabbit-suckes or a poulter's hare" (*1 Henry IV,* II, iv, 424-5). Frequently, in Elizabethan grotesque, according to Rhodes, images drawn from the butcher's shop resurface in culinary form[195]; in act five Falstaff asserts that if he comes in Hotspur's way during the battle "let him make a carbonado of me" (*1 Henry IV*, V, iii, 58). In the following scene, while he is faking his own death, he can clearly hear Hal promising to embowel (embalm) his corpse. The point of all of his grotesque metamorphoses is that these manipulations of his own physical parts lead him to the status of comic hero[196]. Since he is not the typical passive fool who accepts physical violations; he takes part in his body's manipulation. It is in the second part of *Henry IV* in which critics generally agree that Falstaff and his body degenerate. As already anticipated previously, in the second part, Falstaff is afflicted by age and diseases; he is no more a carnival figure, but a scapegoat condemned to death. Rhodes points that it is not clear, though, whether this degrading process has actually moral significance. It is clear, according to Rhodes, that Falstaff still has a very own sense of his comic role in the play, and he quotes the first image of the rouge provided in the *Part Two*:

> Men of all sorts take a pride to gird at me. The brain of this foolish-compounded clay,

194 Ivi, p. 108.
195 *Ibidem.*
196 *Ibidem.*

> man is not able to invent anything that intends to laughter, more than I invent or is invented on me. I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men. (*2 Henry IV*, I, ii, 5-9)

His "theatricality" is still present, as well as his fervent wit, despite the disease of the body. Even his shameless attitude towards telling lies and upending the truth is not reduced, if we think of his answer to Lord Chief Justice: "your that are old consider not the capacities of us that are young" (*2 Henry IV*, I, ii, 169-70). According to Rhodes, Falstaff is aware of his comic potentialities and not subject to moral judgment: Hal is the one who must confront moral matters.[197] Falstaff's grotesque participation in *Part Two* is more an evolution than a degeneration. In the two parts we can identify a different description of gluttony; in the first part it is a celebration, associated with Carnival, and Falstaff's belly is celebratory as well. In the second part, instead, grotesque gluttony is associated to physical waste, obscured by the more serious tone of the play. Falstaff, with his wit, tries to reinforce the carnivalesque spirit, but this does not stop ageing, nor does it treat disease; he is forced to admit that he is old: "I ye will needs say I am an old man, you should give me rest" (*2 Henry IV*, I, ii, 210-11). The grotesque represents the attempt to deal with the inevitable idea of human body as subject to an inexorable process of decay, and Falstaff can only react to this grim matter by trying to avoid the loss of his comic advantage because of the disease: "A good wit will make use of anything. I will turn diseases to commodity" (*2 Henry IV*, I, ii, 241-3). Carnival dominated the first part, while the second is pervaded by a Lenten mood. Falstaff is also associated to the image of a Carnival knight by Laroque:

> Falstaff's rebellion is first and foremost that of the belly and it is made to look like the general leading Carnival's army against the soldiers of famine and the spare practitioners of Lent[198].

The more frugal mood is determined by the perception that the world of holiday is not timeless. The prophecy that Falstaff may "die of a sweat" in the epilogue of *Part Two* is very interesting, and ambiguous at the same time: it implies, on the one hand, the image

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[197] Ivi, p. 114.

[198] François Laroque, "Shakespeare's 'Battle of Carnival and Lent': The Falstaff Scenes Reconsidered (1&2 Henry IV)", p. 87.

of Falstaff "larding the lean earth and expiring[199]"; on the other hand it recalls venereal disease, "sweat", the way to cure it, "a sweating-tub". Falstaff's flesh now needs purgation; physical purgation was a central theme in Elizabethan satire. The importance given to the purgation of the body developed from the fact that the sins of the flesh were considered as actual physical disease; these illnesses could be eliminated only through the mortification of the flesh. All of the sickness imagery of *2 Henry IV* announces both the end of Carnival and of Falstaff himself through his banishment.

4.6 Falstaff's Puritan wit

Many critics have remarked the possibility that Falstaff presents the connotations of a Puritan, in particular with respect to the Oldcastle controversy. In the first chapter I have already considered the history of Sir John Oldcastle, the leader of a Lollard rebellion against the king Henry V. Oldcastle/Lord Cobham died hanged and burnt as a heretic and traitor according to the historical sources Shakespeare drew upon, such as Holinshed's *Chronicles* and Stowe's *Annales of Emgland*. The Protestant Bishop John Bale was the first to provide an alternative version of the facts in *Brefe Chronycle Concernynge the Examinacyon and Death of the blessed martyr of Christ Syr Johan Oldecastell the Lorde Cobham* (1544); his attempt was to recover Oldcastle's reputation and to present him as a proto-Protestant martyr[200]. If Oldcastle was in the fifteenth century legend regarded as a rebel punished by a prudent king, after the Reformation, Anglican writers such as Halle, Foxe and the already quoted Bale, tried to associate his figure with an example of early Protestant. According to this tradition, he was not a rebel, but only against episcopacy and the Pope in particular. Foxe added a part on Oldcastle to his edition of *Actes and Monuments* of 1570: *Defence of Lord Cobham*. In the anonymous play *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*, in circulation from the 1580s, Oldcastle was present as a friend of the prodigal Prince Henry, but in his old characterisation of riotous rebel; also in the earliest acted versions of *1 Henry IV*,

[199] Ivi, p. 117.
[200] I. Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter, a Cultural History*, p. 148.

Falstaff's character was called Oldcastle. For this reason Oldcastle's descendants, in particular Lord Cobham, Master of the Revels at Elizabeth court, asked Lord Chamberlain's Men to change the name of that shameful character. In the meanwhile, Lords Cobham commissioned the play *The True and Honourable History of the Life of Sir John Oldcastle* to reconstitute Oldcastle as a Protestant martyr and an ideal feudal lord, completely far from any kind of militant inclinations. For some, Oldcastle was the valiant, victimized religious martyr of Bale's and Halle's chronicle; for others, he was a devious, schismatic heretic and traitor who betrayed his friend and king, Henry V. Elizabethan Puritans hailed Oldcastle as a proto-Puritan and the opponents of Puritanism also placed the source of this evil in the Lollard[201].

Shakespeare's depiction of Oldcastle is perfectly in line with the tenor of late sixteenth century anti-Puritan literature, in particular with the anti-Marprelate tracts and the burlesque stage performances of the Marprelate controversy[202]. I have already considered how the typical image of the stage Puritan of the time was a grotesque individual, connected with low pleasures and carnivalesque disposition, and how these satirist tracts were full of obscenities, with the insistence on the body and its functions. The *Henry IV* plays are pervaded by carnivalesque festivity, gluttony and lechery, together with the inversion of all the norms; Hal and Falstaff repeatedly indulge in games of comic flyting, for instance Hal describes Falstaff as "this sanguine coward, this bed-presser, this horse-back-breaker, this huge hill of flesh" (*1 Henry IV*, II, iv, 235-7). Falstaff responds with "'sblood, you starveling, you eel-skin, you dried neat's tongue, you bull's pizzle, you stockfish!" *1 Henry IV*, II, iv, 238-9). All of the fighting between Hal and Falstaff provides reminiscence of the Marprelate controversy, and of that pamphlet war based on grotesque insults. Ghose states that Falstaff's speech is full of parodic references to Puritanism: he laments how Hal's bad influence has corrupted his precious virtue saying "thou art able to corrupt a saint", when "saint" was a common denomination for Puritans[203]. He also uses "vocation", a keyword for Puritans, stating that "'tis no sin for a man to labour in his vocation" (*1 Henry IV*, I, ii, 100-1); the point is that Falstaff's "vocation" has nothing to do with religious affairs, nor with the pursue of salvation, but it refers to a crime, the "purse-taking". Falstaff quotes a lot from the

[201] K. Poole, "Saints Alive! Falstaff, Martin Marprelate, and the Staging of Puritanism", p. 48.
[202] K. Poole, "Facing Puritanism: Falstaff, Martin Marprelate and the Grotesque Puritan", p. 98.
[203] I. Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter, a Cultural History*, p. 150.

Scriptures and in *Part One* alone there are twenty-six references made by him[204]. He frequently makes preachy airings in which he claims for redemption: "I must give over this life, and I will give it over. By the Lord, an I do not, I am a villain. I'll be damned for never a king's son in Christendom" (*1 Henry IV*, I, ii, 92-4). Falstaff's propensity to repentance is too easily reversible, since he says this just before enthusiastically agreeing to "take a purse tomorrow". At the end of *Part One,* his last words are the promise to repent, and his clear hypocrisy creates a hilarious effect: "I'll purge and leave sack and live cleanly, as a nobleman should do" (*1 Henry IV*, V, iv, 158-60). Michael Davies also recognizes as a characteristic of Falstaff's wit his

> penchant for the mocking of religion, a sure sign of what Elizabethan divines, like Perkins, would recognize as indicative of a 'reprobate sense'. Thus, clearly cognizant of Scripture…Falstaff also patently understands the orthodox terms of the Reformed doctrine of salvation, and demonstrates this most often by deriding them whenever he can[205].

According to Ghose, for an Elizabethan audience, Falstaff, a hypocrite, coward, lecherous and greedy windbag, with his skilled style in sophistry, would have certainly being recognisable as a Puritan[206]. But this raises questions on why Falstaff, in spite of being an outrageous parody, was so appealing. His immediate and huge popularity among the audience is well known, and Ghose wonders: "When does aggressive laughter at an object of mockery change into laughing with an engaging comic figure?"[207]. In order to answer to this question, Ghose turns the attention to the dynamics of laughter in the theatre. She observes that in the theatre the laughter is *with* the entertainer figure, and there is a sense of gratitude towards the comedian who provides moments of merriment[208]. The Elizabethan audience was perfectly aware of the difference between the actor and his role, and, therefore, the audience laughs with the comedian at the subject of his mockery, in this case the Puritans. And Falstaff embodies, above all, the professional player, the entertainer, so that the audience can

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204 *Ibidem*.

205 Michael Davies, "Falstaff's Lateness: Calvinism and the Protestant Hero in Henry IV", *The Review of English Studies*, 56:225 (2005), p. 355.

206 *Ibidem*.

207 I. Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter, a Cultural History*, p 150.

208 Ivi, p. 151.

"admire the player playing Falstaff, and […] laugh at the parody of the Puritan"[209]. However, if the audience identifies with the satiric butt, the parody is not funny anymore. Distance, according to Ghose, is fundamental in the evocation of laughter: distance between the comedian and his role, and distance between the audience and the comic butt. The necessity of distance was fundamental also for the Puritans in the audience; the spectator could laugh at Falstaff, but only excluding, at the same time, himself from the specific Puritan type taken in consideration as object of the joke. This is important because it leads to the fact that Falstaff always reminds us that we are seeing a play in which he is the star entertainer: "The brain of this foolish compounded clay, man, is not able to invent anything that intends to laughter more than I invent" (*2 Henry IV*, I, ii, 6-9). The parody of a Puritan is only one of the roles he plays, and his main impulse is the pleasure in playing: "shall we have a play extempore?" (*1 Henry IV, II,* iv, 271). In Hal and Falstaff's play-within-the-play scene, it is Falstaff who produces an impressive performance arousing laughter not only among the audience, but even on stage: the hostess chuckles "O Jesu, he doth it as like one of these harlotry players as ever I see!" (*1 Henry IV,* II*,* iv*,* 385-6). The extemporaneous parody of the king, of Hal, and of the kingdom, that Falstaff builds for the occasion, is a burlesque of euphuistic theatrical rhetoric and Puritan cant:

> Harry, I do not only marvel where thou spendest thy time, but also how thou art accompanied; For though the camomile, the more it is trodden on, the faster it grows, yet youth, the more it is wasted, the sooner it wears. That thou art my son I have partly thy mother's word, partly my own opinion, but chiefly a villainous trick of thine eye and foolish hanging of thy nether lip that doth warrant me. If then thou be son to me here lies the point: why, being son to me, art thou so pointed at? Shall the blessed sun of heaven prove a micher and eat blackberries? A question not to be asked. Shall the son of England prove a thief and take purses? A question to be asked. There is a thing, Harry, which thou hast often heard of, and it is known to many in our land by the name of pitch. This pitch, as ancient writers to report, doth defile; so doth the company thou keepest. For, harry, now I do not speak to thee in drink, but in tears; not in pleasure, but in passion; not in words only but in woes also. (*1 Henry IV, II,* iv, 388- 406)

Interestingly, here, Falstaff uses a very popular joke at the time, that is listing the reasons which persuade the king that Hal is actually his son, and not illegitimate. Obviously a kingship based on "partly thy mother's word" and on mutual ugliness is not

[209] *Ibidem*.

very solid. Here Falstaff goes further, glancing at the issue of the legitimacy of kings, in a scathing way[210]. He goes on with petulant queries on "why thou being son to me, art thou so pointed at…". In addition, the common comparison of the sun to royalty, and blackberries (whereas the heir to the throne acting like an idle schoolboy), in an ironical way it calls to mind Hal's soliloquy of the first act: "I know you all, and will awhile uphold the unyoked humour of your idleness. Yet herein will I imitate the sun, who doth permit the base contagious clouds to smother up his beauty from the world…" (*1 Henry IV*, I, ii. 185- 9). As already observed previously in the chapter, Falstaff alludes to the theme of "legitimacy" quite often, for instance in the same scene, when he finds a justification for his cowardly at the robbery: "I for a valiant lion, and thou for a true prince. (*1 Henry IV*, II, iv, 266-67). It is clear that presenting himself as a "valiant lion" is one of those lies that are "like their father that begets them, gross as a mountain, palpable", and as a consequence, even Henry could not be presented as a true prince. But it is not hard to clarify if Hal is not the true king because his father's kingship is illegitimate, or because he does not act, for now, as a prince. Ghose notices that Falstaff's parody of a king Henry suddenly

> slips into a devastating comment on Hal himself. Hal's glamorous trajectory from prodigal to ideal king – figured by himself as a narrative of resurrection and redemption ('Redeeming time when men think least I will') (*1 Henry IV*, I, ii, 205) begins to look somewhat tawdry. 'Shall the son of England prove a thief and take purses? A question to be asked', the counterfeit king continues. This is precisely the question that the Gadshill episode raises, serving as a foil to highlight the similarity between the crooks and the court[211].

In other words, if the qualities of kingship are innate, but hidden by Hal in abeyance, this question briefly arises "as to what precisely these qualities are in Hal which destine him for kingship[212]". We know that Hal's kingship will come through the "reformation" and the final banishment of Falstaff. Some critics consider Hal's transformation as the

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[210] Ivi, p. 153.
[211] *Ibidem.*
[212] *Ibidem.*

dramatization of Calvinist conversion, apparent in the banishment "sermon" at the end of *2 Henry IV*[213]:

> I know thee not, old man. Fall to thy prayers. How ill white hairs become a fool and jester! I have long dreamt of such a kind of man, so surfeit-swelled, so old, and so profane; but being awake, I do despise my dream. Make less thy body hence, and more thy grace. Leave gormandizing; know the grave doth gape, for thee thrice wider than for other men. Reply not to me with a fool-born jest. Presume not that I am the things I was, for God doth know, so shall the world perceive, that I have turned away my former self; so will I those that kept me company. When thou dost hear I am as I have been, approach me, and thou shalt be as thou wast, the tutor and feeder of my riots. Till then I banish thee, on pain of death… (*2 Henry IV*, V, v, 46-62).

Davies claims that many critics found this speech "offensive", not only because it banishes from the stage one of Shakespeare's most loved characters, but in particular because of its "religious" tone[214]. Davies quotes Jonas Barish, who states that Hal has turned away his former self to become a 'preaching humbug', using hypocritical sanctimoniousness, in the typical 'Puritanical harshness[215]'. The speech is similar to Elizabethan sermons, exhorting the rouge to reform and abandon his dissolute life. Davies' critic is based on the idea of considering *Henry IV* as a specifically Protestant drama, and, as a consequence, the rejection of Falstaff as a fundamental point for the development of the Prince as one of the greatest proto-Protestant kings. With the banishment of Falstaff, we see the long-awaited reformation, based on the promise made in the soliloquy of *1 Henry IV*. According to Davies, there is nothing surprising here, because Shakespeare's principal historical sources extensively reported how Henry V underwent a miraculous change upon his becoming king[216]. His conversion was legendary among Tudor chronicles. Davies quotes Halle's *The Vnion of the two noble and illustre families of Lancastre & Yorke* (1550) in which Henry soon after his crowning was "determined with himself to put on the shape of a new man…and waueryng vice into constant vertue"[217]. Holinshed reported how the newly crowned Henry V "determined to put on him the shape on a new man […] banished" all of his

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213 M. Davies, "Falstaff's lateness: Calvinism and the Protestant Hero in Henry IV", p. 351.
214 Ivi, p. 352.
215 *Ibidem*.
216 Ivi, p. 364.
217 Quoted in: "Falstaff's lateness: Calvinism and the Protestant Hero in Henry IV", p. 365.

former "misrulie mates of dissolute order and life"[218]. Davies' conclusion is that, in presenting Henry V as a proto-Protestant solid hero, Shakespeare highlighted Falstaff's final insubstantiality in that otherwise apparently solid bulk of a character. According to Davies, Falstaff then, in the Puritan frame, is not a parody of a Puritan, but a flabby and unreliable type of Protestant hero who announces several times reformation, but whose passivity prevents him to reach it. He remains an impenitent reprobate, and while Henry V becomes a legendary king he dies alone offstage[219].

Davies' critic can be certainly considered quite reductive of many elements that are involved in the characterisation of Falstaff. More interesting is the focus on Falstaff and his, many times exposed, rejection of established power and rules, with him committed, using his rhetorical wit, to the exposure of the histrionics of monarchs and magistrates. Grace Tiffany recalls how Puritans in 1580s and 1590s were associated with the technique of sophistical argument to expose royal theatrics[220]. We have already considered how the audience could soon connect Falstaff, with his grotesque body and apparent vices, to anti-Martinist Puritan type; yet his grotesque and carnivalesque tracts were accompanied with his exposition of the "theatrical unreality of the dignities of office that Elizabethan Puritans were beginning to condemn"[221]. Grace quotes Patrick Collins, who writes that in the 1580s, Puritan lawyers "were able to parade a useful array of legal quibbles to confuse the process of ecclesiastical discipline"[222], and, as already seen, Falstaff is a true master of that specific rhetorical style. His brilliant sophistic skills, linked with his overt shameless depravation so far from the true Puritan lifestyle, form his comic charm. Puritan sophistry will be used later by Hal, in his performance of the repentant prince in the second part of *Henry IV*: Falstaff uses this sermon-like style to mock authority and monarchy, while the same authority borrows and perfects it. Puritan sophistry in the way in which it is performed by Falstaff is actually always directed at winning the argument by verbal dazzle, and, if necessary, in disadvantage of the truth. Even in front of the Lord Chief Justice he uses his rhetorical wit trying to distract the listener, and the officer addresses him with: "Sir John, Sir John,

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218 Quoted in: "Falstaff's lateness: Calvinism and the Protestant Hero in Henry IV", *ibidem*.
219 Ivi, p. 378.
220 T. Grace, "Puritanism in Comic History: Exposing Royalty in the Henry Plays".
221 *Ibidem*.
222 Quoted in: "Puritanism in Comic History: Exposing Royalty in the Henry Plays", *ibidem*.

I am well acquainted with your manner of wrenching the true cause the false way" (*2 Henry IV,* II, i, 107-9). His infamous speech on honour is also a clear example of that repetitive and pedagogic style employed widely by early modern puritan preachers, in which quite often there was incorporated a question-and-answer format:

> 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 I 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. (*1 Henry IV*, V, i, 133-140)

Falstaff's puritan associations are, as Poole claims, "pervasive and unmistakable"[223]. Clearly the discrepancy between the Falstaff's gluttonous lifestyle, and the abstemious conduct expected of a reformist, found the basis for a satire that runs throughout both parts of *Henry IV*. Also the discrepancy between the belligerent martyr Oldcastle and his stage (implied) representation, or at least reference, in the fat-witted Jack Falstaff, is a source of satire and comedy. However, Falstaff is not only a satiric rendition of the historical Oldcastle, but a satirist himself; he is the center of the carnivalesque plot, in which he turns established hierarchies upside down, and he takes the liberty to criticize and mock the Prince, the King, and the idea of kingship itself. In this way, thanks to jests that respect neither rank nor social order, he is close to Martin Marprelate, the symbolic author of "unruly written texts, which did evade censorship and authoritative control[224]". These characterizations are strong, but not exclusive, and Falstaff's Puritan wit can only be added to the list of his many features, which are boundless as his grotesque body.

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[223] K. Poole, "Saints Alive! Falstaff, Martin Marprelate, and the Staging of Puritanism", p. 67.
[224] Ivi, p. 70.

4.7 Falstaff and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

The dating of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is uncertain; the received belief is that *Merry Wives* was commissioned by Lord Hunsdon to be performed in his 1597 Garter election on April 23, on St. George's Day, during Elizabeth's Garter Feast[225]. That probably explains why some of the action takes place at the Garter Inn in Windsor. It is not clear whether the play would have been new at that point, or if Shakespeare's company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, had already performed it. However, many scholars therefore think that *Merry Wives* dates back to about 1596-97, while others claim that it might be as late as 1600 or 1601. Until recently the comedy did not meet the same critical favour as the other "Falstaff" plays, perhaps not only because of its (maybe unfair) identity as "sequel" or appendage, but also for the legend circulating from the beginning of the eighteenth century that Shakespeare wrote it to please Queen Elizabeth. According to this theory, the Queen wanted to find in a new play Falstaff "in love"; actually Falstaff in *Merry Wives* is not in love at all, considering that he certainly does not act for sentiment but for money[226]. This theory lacks solid evidence; it is certain that the play has suffered for being an occasional play, trivialized by its connection to a ceremonial occasion[227]. Perhaps, to mark the holiday of the occasion, according to Katz, Shakespeare restaged Falstaff relocating him from historical plays in a civic comedy[228]. The audience would have easily recognized Falstaff and his compatriots in the play (Pistol, Bardolph and Nym), thanks to their huge popularity from the Henriad plays. In *Merry Wives* Falstaff is transferred from the Boar's Head Tavern and the battlefield of Shrewsbury, to the much more peaceful town of Windsor. At the background of Sir Jack's new endeavors, Shakespeare puts real Windsor's location, such as the Garter Inn, Windsor Park and Frogmore. The location of the play is fundamental, not only because this is the only Shakespearean comedy in which all the

[225] Barbara Freedman, "Shakespeare Chronology, Ideological Complicity, and Floating Texts: Something is Rotten in Windsor", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 45:2, (1994), p. 193.
[226] Shakespeare William, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Giorgio Melchiori (ed.), The Arden Shakespeare, London, 2000, pp. 1-2.
[227] Leslie S. Katz, "The Merry Wives of Windsor: Sharing the Queen's Holiday", *Representations*, No. 51 (1995), p. 78.
[228] *Ibidem.*

action takes place in England, but also because Falstaff appears to do not fit well in his new location.

The Merry Wives of Windsor is a unique comedy in Shakespeare's production because it belongs to an independent stylistic category. The play contains a romantic subplot, that is the love story between the rich and young lady Anne Page and her three suitors; but it can be categorized as the only citizen comedy in his vast production[229]. Shakespeare sets the events not in the usual far locations, such as Italy, in Arden's forest, or in a fictionalised Illyria, but in the domestic reality of Windsor. Even if Windsor evokes obvious associations with the English crown, the plot is entirely developed in town, in the elegant houses of the *nouveau riches*. In the play there are many references to real locations and even to real local chronicles. According to Alessandra Petrina, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* present similarities with the then popular domestic tragedies, "jealousy plays" based on real events. The title of the play unveils the fact that, at the center of the plot there are not the lovers, nor old Jack, but two clever women, mistresses, wives and mothers. These women are moved by the desire to ridicule the old reprobate, but also the unreasonable jealousy of a husband, the almost pathological Mister Ford. The action explores many comic possibilities, from the Plautine tradition of the *senex amans* and Ford's *fabliau,* to the identity exchange in the final scene with the typical play-within-a-play through the prank at Falstaff's expense[230]. We will see later how the "sanguine coward" and unrepentant rouge, seems to have a marginal role, disoriented by the wives, who appear to be cleverer than him. His weakness seem to match with the weakness of an entire social class, in favour of a new, more resourceful one, the emergent bourgeoisie. The focus of the comedy is not only on a character but on a social class. Probably the natural inclination would be to focus the attention on Falstaff, being mindful of his huge complexity and comic potential in the Henriad plays; however, here, the coral element of the play is substantial. For instance, B. Evans draws the attention on the complexity of the plot, in which all the characters move on different patterns[231]. Even Mistress Quickly, despite her stupidity, is relevant for the plot. I will study Falstaff's role in the comedy, and the

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229 Alessandra Petrina, *Le Allegre Comari di Windsor*, (Italian Translation) Alessandra Petrina, in *William Shakespeare, tutte le opere*, Vol. II, "Le Commedie", Milano, Bompiani, 2015, p. 1047.
230 Ivi, p. 1048.
231 Ivi, p. 1056.

differences between the *Merry Wives'* Falstaff and the Henriad's Falstaff, in order to define the developments of the rouge in his last part on stage.

According to Rhodes, even if we attend to his death only in *Henry V*, the Jack Falstaff of *The Merry Wives* is already "a little more than a ghost of his former self, albeit a rather substantial ghost"[232]. Bradley's view, instead, is far too extreme, when he claims that "'Falstaff was degraded by Shakespeare himself. The original character is to be found alive in the two parts of *Henry IV*, dead in *Henry V*, and nowhere else'"[233]. In *The Merry Wives* Falstaff is no more the witty Lord of Misrule and fraud, but a victim himself of wicked tricks. Jeanne Addison Roberts wonders if, in the play, Falstaff is a social menace that endures a well-deserved punishment, or a nearly-innocent scapegoat in the hands of devious women[234]. Roberts suggests that in Shakespeare's carefully fabricated pattern, apparently Falstaff is both; he is a menace for Windsor families, but at the same time a hilarious amusement. Old Jack does not steal the scene this time; the dramatic balance is perfect, and he is constantly related to a group: "as an individual he arouses sympathy in his downfall, as a member of the community he is threatening and must be controlled"[235]. On the other hand, even the process of controlling him has a specific function: his final punishment is useful to reunite the social group together and to obtain a new harmony.

In *Merry Wives* Falstaff seems to be the victim of his own obesity; his flesh is no more a source of so much "verbal inspiration", to use Rhodes' words, and it is now just an affliction, the main cause of his humiliation (together with his age). He is unable to provide a witty answer to Pages's scornful description of him as "Old, cold, wither'd, and of intolerable entrails" (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, V, v, 152)[236]. If his wit has not entirely faded, his comic remarks on his body are tinged with self-pity; at the end, after many physical humiliations, he confesses "see now how wit may be a Jack-a-Lent when 'tis upon ill employment" (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, V, v, 125-7). According to Rhodes, Falstaff's reduced power in *Merry Wives* is in part the result of the restrict

232 N. Rhodes, *The Elizabethan Grotesque*, p. 122.

233 Quoted in: N. Rhodes, *The Elizabethan Grotesque, ibidem*.

234 Jeanne Addison Roberts, "Falstaff in Windsor Forest: Villain or Victim?", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 26:1 (1975), Folger Shakespeare Library, p. 9.

235 *Ibidem.*

236 All the direct quotations are taken from: Shakespeare William, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, in: Marenco Franco (ed.), *William Shakespeare, tutte le opere,* Vol. II, "Le Commedie", Milano, Bompiani, 2015.

social base of the characters; despite the rural location, it is a citizen comedy without the extended social range of the urban locations of other plays of the same genre[237]. Usurers, cheats and drifting gallants do not test the middle-class values nor in Windsor there is the "tavern lifestyle", made of sack, robberies and tricks. For this reason Falstaff and his old companions seem to be out of place, because they are far from their social context, trapped in a pattern dominated by the values of a defined, and strong, social group; those values are unfamiliar to them. Rhodes maintains that this lack of a wide social range prevents the possibilities of the inversion of social roles, experimented by Shakespeare with characters such as Jack Cade, Petruchio, Christopher Sly, and at the basis of *Henry IV*. With the absence in the play of political context, the grotesque, so strong in Falstaff before, now lacks its fundamental nourishment, that is heterogeneity: diversity of social types, associations of life and correspondences between the body and the state[238].

The structure of the plot is also determinant for Falstaff's more passive temperament. Shakespeare elaborates the motif of the relatively inflexible Italianate story of the young lover, forced to escape discovery by a jealous husband. With his repellent corporeality and his age Falstaff provides a variation in the rigid scheme, because he becomes a sexual failure. At that point there is the addition of another rigid plot motif: the Italianate *lazzi*. The victim, Falstaff in this case, endures many *lazzi*, practical jokes; at the end there is final humiliation of public disclosure. In *Henry IV* Falstaff was Gargantuan, gigantic, physically but also a witty presence at the center of the scene. In *Merry Wives* he is contained, physically in all of the attempts to hide himself, and as a character in general. It is important to underline, though, that in *Merry Wives* Falstaff is not present on stage as he was in *1 & 2 Henry IV*; the are many narrative patterns in the Windsor play and his participation is contained in order to balance the plot.

If in the Henriad plays the comic effects were provided by his sheer expansiveness, now he provokes laughter in his attempts to accommodate his fat-witted body in confined spaces: crammed into a buck-basket, Falstaff is "compass'd like a good bilbo in the circumference of a peck, hilt to point, heel to head' (*The Merry Wives*

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237 N. Rhodes, *The Elizabethan Grotesque*, p. 123.
238 *Ibidem.*

of Windsor, III, v, 102- 103); Ford says that "he cannot creep into a halfpenny purse nor into a pepper box" (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, III, v, 133-135). Falstaff serves the role of the comic butt, and for this reason he must suffer all the time; in this unfortunate role he is not the overflowing Carnival, but Jack of Lent (by his own admission)[239]. Rhodes, observes that "we have been prepared for this ultimate image of desiccation by his earlier, maudlin reflections upon vanished ingenuity"[240]. He complaints after the "bath" in the Thames that "if I be serv'd such another trick, I'll have my braines ta'en out and buttered, and give them to a dog for a new-year's gift" (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, III, v, 6-8). However later, disguised as a woman, after another trick, he is cudgeled by Ford, and he fears that if the court should hear of this humiliation "they would whip me with their fine wits till I were as crestfallen as a dried pear" (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, IV, v, 93-4). The degeneration of his verbal wit is connected with his physical subjection; he is beaten and silenced and after the Windsor Park experience, traumatized, he yelps, and wonders: "Have I laid my brain in the sun, and dried it, that it wants matter to prevent so gross o'er-reaching as this?" (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, V, v, 135-7).

In *1 & 2 Henry IV* Falstaff represents the challenging counter-culture, a threat to authority, with a huge theatricality. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor* he is involved in a plot dominated by another type of culture, according to Jonathan Hall:

> In *Merry Wives*, the old Fat Man appears as an external threat to households and ladies alike, but not quite as external as these defenders of propriety affirm. These defenders are the so-called 'merry' wives (the term is Mistress Page's), and the pleasures of laughter afforded by the play are largely, though certainly not exclusively, organized by them. Like Prince Hal, they too organize the plot, though this no longer has the dimensions of national history[241].

For instance, when Mistress Ford asks angrily "What tempest, I trow, threw this whale, with so many tuns of oil in his belly, ashore at Windsor?" (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, II, i, 61-2), it could almost be Prince Hal speaking of "Manningtree ox". The verbal focus on the oldness and fatness is still persistent in this play. Another constant,

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239 Ivi, p. 124.

240 *Ibidem.*

241 Jonathan Hall, "The Evacuations of Falstaff (The Merry Wives of Windsor)", in R. Knowles (ed.), *Shakespeare and Carnival After Bakhtin,* Basingstoke: Macmillian Press, 1998 p. 130.

here, is the concept of revenge. Both wives, Ford and Page, are obsessed with the revenge against the depraved man who tried to woo both of them. The wives want to punish and reform Falstaff, or at least, they self-justify with this purpose to feel legitimate to trick him. Virtuous or not, the plotters are always deceitful, with the intention to make the vice manifest and as a consequence to punish him or her. The revenge is against that grotesque invasive body, with the desire to stop the carnivalesque. This attempt of banishing the invasive body is supported by a language of domestic cleaning; Mistress Page explains her stratagem to expel Falstaff joking with cleansing procedure words "Look, here is a basket, if he be any reasonable stature, he may creep in here; and throw foul linen upon his as if it were going to bucking" (*The Merry Wives*, III, iii, 120-3). Mistress Ford, as well, uses the metaphor of washing: "I am half afraid he will have need of washing, so throwing him into the water will do him a benefit" (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, III, iii, 172-4).

The two wives share anger and desire for revenge, but their motivations are not the same. Mistress Ford's response to Falstaff's woo is the more direct one:

> Perceive how I might be knighted. I shall think the worse of fat men as long as I have an eye to make the difference of men's liking. And yet he would not swear, praised women's modesty, and gave such orderly and well-behaved reproof to all uncomeliness that I would have sworn his disposition would have gone to the truth of his words. But they no more adhere and keep place together than the hundred and fifty psalms to the tune of 'Greensleeves'. What tempest, I trow, threw this whale ... ashore at Windsor? (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, II, i, 53- 62).

She accuses Falstaff of being a hypocrite; she consider him to act apparently according to the social decorum, and she wants to prevent him misleading other people; "her anger expresses and installs a desire for distance and a repudiation of an attention that has until recently been acceptable, on condition of its decorous guise"[242]. Mistress Ford's motivation is complementary but distinct from Mistress Page's. Mistress Ford is outraged because she fears that Falstaff could have misconstrued her innocent words, on the other hand, Mistress Page is led to an immediate, general hostility to men: "Well, I'll exhibit a bill in Parliament for the putting down of men. O God, that I knew how to be revenged on him! For revenged I will be, as sure as his guts are made of puddings"

[242] Ivi, p. 134.

(*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, II, I, 26-30). In the same way, later, talking of Falstaff's idea of sending two copies of the same letter, she states: "Well I will find you twenty lascivious turtles ere one chaste man" (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, II, i, 77-8). Page seems to be afraid of being actually attracted somehow by Falstaff, and for this reason she reacted so furiously, in order to erase the shame. According to Hall,

> she is the very epitome of a self-assertive bourgeois cleanliness, for which even the suspicion of impropriety is itself a contamination and provocation to anger. In short, Mistress Ford finds a hypocritical duplicity in Falstaff, whereas Mistress Page, suspects and negates an unwilled complicity in herself[243].

The rage of the wives moves the plot with all of the tricks against Falstaff, and he his certainly punished properly. Even if Falstaff is certainly not a saint, but a deceiver, in the play there is a feeling that he could be considered a victim, a ageing fool, pranked by the entire community. His idea of sending identical letters to two wives is outrageous, in particular considering that it was not for romantic feelings but for money. Also his agreeing to act as a pander for "Mr. Brook" is preposterous; yet all these frauds seem harmless compared with Ford's scheme to deceive his own wife. As Roberts observes, "the Falstaff of the buck basket is deservedly ridiculous, while the half-drowned old man pouring down sack to counteract the Thames water is hilarious, but pathetic"[244].

All their efforts to destroy him could even appear to be unjustified: Falstaff is not a serious threat himself. What differentiates the Falstaff of *Merry Wives* from the Falstaff of the Henriad plays is that, in the Windsor comedy, he provokes mockery, which distances and objectifies him. This kind of mockery is motivated, and shows the desire to expel him, "from the self or from the bourgeois household, by representing him as an unclean invader from the outset"[245]. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Falstaff is banished with the collective taunting at the end, as well as he was banished at the end of 2 *Henry IV*; here, the realm to be defended from the Carnival is the bourgeois household. In *The Merry Wives* his rejection is not proclaimed by a king through a solemn speech; he is banished by the community after a hunt. In the smaller confines of

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[243] Ivi, p. 136.

[244] Jeanne Addison Roberts, "Falstaff in Windsor Forest: Villain or Victim?", p. 9.

[245] Jonathan Hall, "The Evacuations of Falstaff (The Merry Wives of Windsor)", p. 137.

the domestic comedy, order is already pre-established; his grotesque body is not celebrated as a symbol of carnival and license, but scorned and rejected from the start. Whether in the composition of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* Shakespeare did or did not answer to a royal command to call back Falstaff on stage, depicting him in love, it is clear that he is, indeed, brought back to a world very different from the one of the Henriad plays; in the world of Windsor bourgeois values predominate and the historical conflicts of *1 & 2 Henry IV* are over. Falstaff, here, has turned out to be a ritual scapegoat, and in this play, "lacking a dramatic basis in sermon, satire, or festive celebration, Falstaff's grotesque effusions…are, indeed, his swan-song"[246]. This does not mean, though, that Falstaff's presence in *Merry Wives* represents the failure of a lessened character. In this play his participation to the action is reduced, to balance the sub-plots; in *1 & 2 Henry IV* his outsized wit led the scene, while in *Merry Wives* his features are consistent with his role.

In this last chapter I have tried to convey the elements that shape Falstaff's complexity. Falstaff can be studied as carnivalesque Lord of Misrule, a parody of a Puritan and as the Vice of Morality Play. In the first part I have examined Falstaff and his main features in the Henriad plays, focusing on the importance of his body, the grotesque exaggerated center of the comic sub-plot. I have also considered how Falstaff represents a carnivalesque counter force in the kingdom and how he inverts order and roles. In the frame of historical serious events, such as the tired king dealing with rebellions and betrayals in *Henry IV*, the grotesque Falstaff lowers the tones and his belly becomes the centre of the scene. Even on the battlefield, the attention is put on the coward knight who drinks sack and feigns his own death in order to escape the fight. More interesting is the relationship between Falstaff and Hal and the way in which the Prince anticipates his future "reformation". From the start, with Hal's soliloquy, there is the idea that Carnival must come to an end; at the conclusion of *2 Henry IV* the newly crowned king banishes his old fellow. Considering the idea of reformation, I have studied also the "Puritan" aspect of Sir John. Many critics have focused the attention on how Falstaff can be a representation of the grotesque stage Puritan, from the tradition of the Martin Marprelate Controversy, and also how Prince Hal will become a proto-Protestant king. Even here, in the field of religious considerations, it is hard to reach a

[246] N. Rhodes, *The Elizabethan Grotesque*, p. 127.

conclusive point: Falstaff speaks as a Puritan, but he is a parody of a Puritan, while he satires Puritans, and invokes a personal reformation that will never come. In addition, Shakespeare, provides another Jack Falstaff in the different context of a new play, far from the historical Henriad plays. The last part of the chapter is focused on *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, his last appearance on stage. Falstaff in Windsor is quite different from the Falstaff in Eastcheap: in spite of being an experienced fraud he is cheated and humiliated; his wit remains (lowered), but it is not at the centre of the scene anymore. In Windsor, even his body is not celebrated but confined. The feeling is of a character brought back from banishment to be banished again, after many humiliations. Here, I have examined the Falstaff in Windsor in comparison to the Falstaff in Eastcheap to provide a sort of "parable" of the many possibility of the character. However, it is important not to judge *Merry Wives* as an appendix to the Henriad plays, but as a separate comedy, considering his uniqueness in Shakespearean production. In *Merry Wives* we witness one of the innumerable roles played by Falstaff, the fake suitor, maybe too old and fat to be credible, and for this reason perfectly hilarious.

Conclusion

In my thesis I have explored two main critical approaches to the analysis of Falstaff: the bakhtinian carnivalesque and the Puritan perspective. These elements blend in the character of Falstaff in a complex and uncommon way; in fact, the Puritan zeal seems to discredit the carnivalesque attitude.

In Falstaff the carnivalesque is the most manifest of the two aspects. The starting point of my study has been Bakhtin's theories of the carnivalesque and of the grotesque. His work on the carnivalesque elements in Rabelais is renowned since 1960s, and literary criticism now widely acknowledges Falstaff as a carnivalesque figure. On the other hand, the Puritan elements and the connection to the grotesque Puritan are less evident and have been examined in depth more recently. Considering Falstaff's overt devotion to a dissolute lifestyle, it is clear why the association to Puritanism is vague and less easy to recognise. The additionof a discordant element, such as Puritanism, to the carnivalesque provides further complexity to an already heterogeneous character.

Bakhtin's carnivalesque is easily identifiable in Falstaff as already widely demonstrated: licence, misrule, disguise and sack are his major interests. At the same time, Falstaff represents a counterculture, the subversive force that opposes the kingship and rules. The carnivalesque, according to Bakhtin, has the power to subvert hierarchies, but this idea has been frequently considered utopian: the energies released by carnival are not able to overturn the established order, because the misrule of holiday is temporary. *Henry IV*'s endgame is in line with the return to order of the popular festivals: Falstaff's final banishment includes also the rejection of a carnivalesque lifestyle, because Henry must undertake his historical role as a king. Hal, at the end of *2 Henry IV,* dismisses his old friend and with him, the dissolute lifestyle of his youth. He openly admits this: "believe me, I beseech you, my father is gone wild into his grave, for in his tomb lie my affections" (*2 Henry* IV, V, ii, 121-3). Falstaff, though, does not only represents the carnivalesque. We have seen how some critics, for instance Holderness and Ghose, observe that Falstaff does not always play the role of the Carnival: he cannot represent the popular voice, because even if he spends his time at tavern among thieves, prostitutes and drunkards he is a knight. Obviously, he does not act as a proper knight at all, but he exploits common people as soon as he has the

occasion, and sometimes he underlines his "higher" status; for instance, in the pompous letter to Hal he writes "Sir John Falstaff, Knight, to the son of the King nearest his father, Harry Prince of Wales, greeting" (*2 Henry IV*, II, ii, 111-13). Bakhtin's carnivalesque is a communal cathartic experience shared by the entire community. Falstaff, instead, operates for himself and has no commitment to the kingship, to public values, nor to any abstraction such as power, virtue, and honour: he promotes the idea that it is better to be a coward still alive than a dead hero (such as Hotspur). Falstaff has his own values, which are unconformable with the ones of the "good government" of the kingship, yet he is not entirely part of the commons. Carnival is the major of his roles but not the only one. He refuses to be tied down to a single identity and explores many possibilities, and for this reason it is very difficult to categorise him.

Another important aspect of the carnivalesque is the concept of the grotesque. Falstaff's body is the grotesque body *par excellence*: he is very fat, "a huge hill of flesh", and in addition he is old. Throughout the play the characters (and Jack himself) insist on Falstaff's body, his sweat, his fat, his body functions; they often compare him to animals. The grotesque body is exactly this, opposite to the perfect classical body, finished, complete, with no imperfections nor orifices. The grotesque is often disgusting, but also provides laughter; the way in which Hal describes Falstaff's body can certainly be risible. The grotesque in the play is also present with the constant references to the disturbing images of the flesh: the corpses on the battlefield, the blood, the "war carnage", and the "civil butchery". With the rejection of the carnival there comes the rejection of the grotesque body: in *2 Henry IV* we find Falstaff worried about his health; his sick and old flesh must be purged. He is afflicted by disease and age, and in the second part of the play he seems to be no longer carnival, but the scapegoat condemned to death (even if he has preserved his wit). This is linked with the tone of the play: *2 Henry IV* has a more serious tone, being pervaded by a Lenten atmosphere, connected with the King's illness. If in *1 Henry IV* Falstaff's gluttony and belly are celebrated, now the body represents physical waste, the idea (always remembered by the grotesque) that all men die. The frugal mood is connected with the idea that the time of holiday (of "sack and sugar") is ending.

With regard to the Puritan element, I have considered two aspects: firstly the Oldcastle controversy, secondly the anti-Marprelate Tracts and the grotesque Puritan. In

the early representations of the play the character of Falstaff was called Oldcastle. This issue clearly links Falstaff to the rebellious Lollard, who lived at the time of Henry V. After the English Reformation Oldcastle has been rehabilitated, under the influence of Bale's works first, and by the "orthodox" historians after. In the official historiography, before the Reformation, he was depicted as a heretic traitor, but later, Protestant tradition turned the rebel into a virtuous martyr: his life and death were a symbol of the opposition to a corrupt clergy. It is impossible to identify the true motivations that led Shakespeare to associate his bacchanalian rouge with a personality such as Oldcastle. He was certainly aware of the legend of his martyr, and also that Oldcastle was an ancestor of Lord Cobham, Lord Chamberlain at the time. It is more interesting to consider that Lollardism, in the 1590s was not considered anymore as a proto-Protestant movement at the basis of the Anglican new norms, but as proto-Puritanism. At the time in which Shakespeare wrote the play, Lollards, and, consequently also Oldcastle, were appointed as the predecessors of the subversive sectaries who were trying to undermine the Anglican Church. Both Lollards and the Puritans had failed to achieve the reformation they strongly wanted. Falstaff, as we have seen, speaks as a Puritan: he quotes extensively the Scriptures, and uses Puritan jargon and rhetoric style. The style of the "godly" was often parodied and stereotyped as pompous, sanctimonious, and we have seen that many times his speeches have that features (for example in the play-within-the-play at the tavern). He also uses words associated to the Puritans, such as "vocation", "reform"; he states that he would like to be a "weaver" in order to "sing psalms" (*1 Henry IV*, II. iv, 127-9). It is undeniable that Falstaff refers consciously to Puritanism, but all of his mentions to the movement are highly stereotyped; there is an overt incongruity between his dissolute lifestyle and Puritan frugality. Consequently, his references to Puritan elements are identified as a parody. However, there is further contradiction: Falstaff is recognized as Oldcastle, who at the time was depicted as a proto-Puritan, but, at the same time, he parodies the Puritans. According to this view, Falstaff mocks the movement to which he is supposed to belong. In order to resolve the issue, Kristen Poole suggests that Falstaff should not be considered as a character that makes fun of the Puritans, but a parodied depiction of a Puritan himself. This conclusion in not satisfying, though, because there are no elements in Falstaff's characterisation, apart from the use of sanctimonious language, and the references to

reformation that link him to a Puritan; actually, he is the opposite of a Puritan. But there is another element to be added to this complex pattern: the idea that at the time there was another concept of Puritan. The common idea of the Puritans nowadays is not exactly the same of Shakespearean times. The contemporary concept of Puritan is the post Restoration image: repressed and zealous individuals, similar to the hypocrite Malvolio of *Twelfth Night.* However, as illustrated in my study, in late sixteenth century, Puritans were linked also to another stereotype: the grotesque Puritan.

The discrepancy between Falstaff's gluttonous temperament and the Lenten conduct of the Puritans results in a satire; also the juxtaposition of a famous martyr to a coward drunk man provokes satire and laugher. Falstaff is a satiric rendition of Oldcastle, but also a satirist himself; he represents the carnivalesque, that is, the subversive force that inverts the hierarchies and order. With all the difficulties to provide a unilateral description of Falstaff, considering him as a merely satirist, means not to recognise the complexity of the social and religious associations of this figure. This point leads the discourse towards the legacy of the Marprelate Controversy and to the grotesque Puritan. The audience of the time identified him with the popular representations of the parodied stage Puritan, and they not only laughed with him, but also at him.

I have examined the theories on Martin Marprelate as the origin of the character of the grotesque Puritan. According to critics such as Rhodes, the Marprelate Tracts are at the basis of the new satiric style of the late the sixteenth century, promoted by the works of Nashe, Greene and Munday. Shakespeare's grotesque style impersonated by Falstaff, and expressed in the Eastcheap tavern, has certainly borrowed something from that style. Critics suggest that the pens behind the anti-Martinist Tracts were young professional writers: Nashe and Munday are mentioned to be among them. Martin's pamphlets against the established church and episcopacy were irreverent and offensive. Anti-Martinists borrowed his scornful style, and added to it further grotesque elements. Martin turned into a victim of satire himself. As we have seen, the controversy was very popular, and the tracts became plays: the stereotype of the grotesque Puritan was born.

Falstaff has some characteristic in common with Martin. He is irreverent, and has no respect for the hierarchies nor social order. The difference between Falstaff and Martin is that merry Jack uses the oral speech, which cannot be easily overcome by

censorship: he must be banished. Both Martin and Falstaff address the authorities without respect, lowering the style and levelling social status: in Martin's writing the prelates are "carnal and senseless beasts", and bishops are "swine, dumb dogs"[247]. In anti-Martinists tracts he is transformed in the grotesque body *par excellence*: he is the "ape, the dronke, and the madde"[248]; he copulates, vomits, drinks and he gorges himself. Falstaff represents the grotesque body as well as Martin, and refers disrespectfully to the Prince as his "dog" insulting him very often: "you starveling, you eel-skin, you dried neat's tongue, you bull's pizzle, you stockfish!" (*1 Henry IV*, II, iv, 237-8). He even tells him to hang himself, and in addition, he implies that he is not the legitimate heir to the throne: "hang thyself in thine own heir-apparent garters!" (*1 Henry IV*, II, ii, 41). Even towards the Lord Chief Justice he is shameless: he scorns him, and constantly tells lies. Falstaff, as Martin is at the same time satirist and butt of the satire. Falstaff has his roots in precedent popular and literary forms, but simultaneously his representation is the staging of a contemporary performing model: the new grotesque satire towards Puritans.

In conclusion, it is perhaps impossible to provide a linear and uniform image of this immense character. Falstaff's identity is too complex and slippery to be properly defined. His ancestors are many literary and popular types; he shares characteristics with all of his "precursors", the Vice of the morality plays, the Lord of Misrule, the *miles glorious*, the court fool and the clown among others. He represents all of them but none in particular. As we have seen, Falstaff plays a series of dramatic roles throughout the plays; he counterfeits, lies, takes disguise and is the centre of a subversive play-within-a-play. With his "theatricality" he is able to use many identities and to play many roles because he is a free character: he is not depending on a fixed historical *persona* such as Hal. He is even freed from the rhythm of the hours and minutes. He is free also in the society, but only for the limited holiday granted by the carnivalesque. It is not a chance that Harold Bloom, one of the greatest "admires" of Falstaff, associates our rouge to Hamlet depicting them as the freest of Shakespearean characters, because they are the most intelligent and witty. Falstaff, thanks to his wit and heterogeneity, can

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247 Quoted in: K. Poole, "Facing Puritanism: Falstaff, Martin Marprelate and the Grotesque Puritan", p. 102.

248 Quoted in: K. Poole, "Facing Puritanism: Falstaff, Martin Marprelate and the Grotesque Puritan", *ibidem*.

release himself from his historic counterpart, from his role and responsibilities in society and from his folk and literary ancestors.

And it is only by constantly playing roles that he gains his own evasive individuality. He is not forced by literary tradition, history, religion or popular forms. The addition of the Puritan element to Falstaff is the most interesting; it provides the overwhelming complexity to a character that could have resulted to be as merely a carnivalesque glutton or a new version of the Vice. It is impressive how two elements that seem to be opposite have been reunited in one man to form one of the greatest comic characters of the history of theatre. Thanks to the Puritan perspective, Falstaff connects his performance in the contemporary context of Shakespearean culture. Falstaff belongs to a play set in a different age, but he represents a new popular type of satirical writing. The reunion in his big belly of the contrasting various elements provides the functioning of the character, but at the same time he becomes too ambiguous to be categorised. His grotesque boundless body is the metaphor for this heterogeneity. The heterogeneity allows him, not only, to be so appealing, but also dynamic; in fact, Shakespeare inserts him in a totally different play, that is *Merry Wives of Windsor*. In his last performance he is inserted in a new context, in a different society, and he adds a further role to his endless dramatic possibilities.

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Riassunto

La mia tesi di laurea ha come tema lo studio del personaggio di Falstaff nella seconda tetralogia dei drammi storici shakespeariani. La tetralogia in questione comprende *Richard II*, le due parti di *Henry IV*, e *Henry V*. Falstaff è presente sulla scena solo nelle due parti di *Henry IV* e viene nominato in *Henry V*. Falstaff è stato ripreso successivamente da Shakespeare ed inserito nella commedia *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

La prima e la seconda parte di *Henry IV* furono scritte da Shakespeare attorno al 1597-1598. Le parti della tetralogia sono strettamente legate tra loro e, allo stesso tempo, si allineano alla prima tetralogia shakespeariana, quella che comprende le tre parti di *Henry VI* e *Richard III*. Le due tetralogie assieme coprono gli eventi storici della corona d'Inghilterra dal 1398 al 1485 circa. Questi drammi sono considerati "storici" perché Shakespeare si basa sugli avvenimenti descritti nelle fonti storiche dell'epoca: *Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York* (1548) di Edward Halle, *Chronicles* (1577) di Holinshed, *Annales* (1580) di Jon Stow e *Civil Wars* (1595) di Samuel Daniel. Graham Holderness propone di considerare questi drammi come un prototipo di storiografia rinascimentale. Naturalmente la storiografia del tempo è molto diversa da quella attuale. Da una prospettiva storiografica moderna l'accortezza storica delle fonti del tempo risulta minima; la storiografia rinascimentale appare come una serie di fatti uniti a mito e leggenda, piuttosto che un resoconto preciso degli avvenimenti. La storiografia moderna rispecchia una cultura che considera la storia come lineare e soggetta a cambiamenti continui; nella cultura rinascimentale invece, la politica e la monarchia non rappresentavano forme sociali soggette al cambiamento, bensì un ordine universale, statico e governato dalla provvidenza divina. Tillyard nota che in una società rigida di questo tipo, ogni cambiamento o inversione genera il caos. Ciononostante, bisogna ricordare che l'idea di una società così statica può risultare fuorviante, perché non si tiene in considerazione che le fonti ufficiali della storiografia non dipingevano la società nel suo insieme. Le forze dissidenti che rivendicavano un cambiamento erano presenti, ed i Puritani ne erano un importante esempio. *Henry IV* si può considerare un'opera che parte dall'essere puro *chronicle play*, ma che si allontana dalle fonti ufficiali arricchendosi di forme popolari.

I drammi storici shakespeariani interessano vicende politiche, ma è solo dal ventesimo secolo che Shakespeare è studiato anche da questa prospettiva. Prima, infatti, si riteneva che il suo interesse nei confronti della politica fosse nullo; in realtà l'esistenza stessa dei drammi storici confuta questa teoria. Shakespeare ha trattato nella sua produzione anche temi come la monarchia, il potere, la crisi di governo, e l'usurpazione della corona. In *Henry IV* queste tematiche rappresentano il *plot* di natura storica e sono parallele alle vicende comiche della taverna.

Il re della taverna Boar's Head Inn è certamente Falstaff. Sir John Falstaff (inspiegabilmente cavaliere) è un vecchio alcolizzato, grasso e dedito ad una vita dissipata. Allo stesso tempo rappresenta una figura paterna per il principe Hal con il quale trascorre molto tempo a Eastcheap tra furti, scherzi, bevute e compagnie discutibili.

Falstaff nelle prime rappresentazioni dell'opera si chiamava Oldcastle. John Oldcastle fu un personaggio realmente esistito all'epoca di Henry V. Oldcastle era ricordato nelle cronache inglesi come capo di una rivolta dei Lollard, e di conseguenza processato e condannato a morte in quanto eretico. I Lollards erano dei seguaci del filosofo John Wycliffe, il quale, a partire dal 1370, sviluppò un movimento religioso che voleva riformare la chiesa. In un certo senso le teorie di Wycliffe anticiparono la riforma protestante; la sua dottrina si opponeva alla teoria della transustanziazione ed all'iconografia, sottolineando invece l'importanza dei testi delle sacre scritture come unico centro ed ispirazione dell'esperienza religiosa. Il pubblico elisabettiano riconosceva sicuramente Falstaff come parodia di Oldcastle, e Shakespeare dovette cambiare nome al personaggio per le pressioni di Lord Cobham, un discendente molto influente di Oldcastle. Oldcaste all'epoca di Shakespeare era considerato da alcuni un ribelle eretico, da altri, un martire proto-protestante. I puritani, in particolare, lo consideravano un combattente valoroso, anche grazie a Bale che volle riabilitarlo nelle sue opere, dissociandolo dalla descrizione di violento e sovversivo comunamente attribuitagli nelle cronache precedenti.

Secondo Poole, Falstaff rappresenta una parodia del puritano grottesco, uno stereotipo molto comune all'epoca. La figura del puritano grottesco si è diffusa in particolare con l'enorme successo degli anti-Marprelate Tracts. Questi *pamphlets* vennero diffusi per per contrastare le opere satiriche firmate da un certo Martin

Marprelate che insultavano le autorità ecclesiastiche. In risposta, la Chiesa Anglicana decise di far pubblicare *Defense of the government established in the Church of Englande for ecclesiasticall* nel 1587*,* scritta da John Bridges e Dean Salisbury. L'opera non ebbe però il successo sperato, e i trattati anti-ecclesiastici continuarono ad essere pubblicati. Le autorità ecclesiatiche affidarono il compito di "rispondere" alle ingiurie di Martin a dei giovani scrittori, come Robert Greene, John Lyly e Thomas Nashe. Questi utilizzarono lo stesso stile irreverente ed osceno dei trattati di Martin Marprelate, estremizzando ulteriormente i toni. Nell'ottobre del 1588 venne dato alle stampe il primo *pamphlet* contro Martin, *The Epistole*, che divenne subito molto popolare a Londra. Lo stile utilizzato da Martin era estremamente irriverente; l'autore insultava apertamente i sacerdoti, definendoli "cani" e "stupidi" e citava fatti di cronaca e dicerie per screditare le autorità. Nei *pamphlets* a difesa della Chiesa Anglicana, invece, i puritani erano descritti come figure grottesche, depravate, che vivevano in comunità dissolute. Questi trattati ebbero moltissima popolarità, tuttavia le autorità nel 1589 decisero di porre fine alla controversia per via del livello eccessivamente osceno dei contenuti. La popolarità dei *pamphlets* però si mantenne a lungo, grazie alle svariate trasposizioni teatrali che si diffusero durante la controversia.

Il carnevale, secondo Bachtin, era il trionfo di un sentimento di liberazione temporanea dalle autorità e dall'ordine prestabilito; l'abolizione provvisoria di tutti i rapporti gerarchici, dei privilegi, delle regole e dei tabù. Il carnevale era un momento festivo, dedito agli eccessi, che celebrava il divenire, il rinnovamento e la fertilità. Mikhail Bachtin (1895-1975) ha studiato a fondo il concetto di "carnevale" e "carnevalesco" nella sua opera *Rabelais and his World,* pubblicata in russo nel 1956 per poi diventare popolare nel 1958 grazie alla traduzione in inglese. Il carnevale è pervaso da uno spirito gioioso, liberatorio, e il divertimento scaturisce dalla parodia del sacro e delle autorità. Durante il carnevale ogni uomo è libero, e avviene un'inversione di ruoli gerarchici. Lo spirito carnevalesco ha le sue origini nell'antichità; sono da ricordare ad esempio i *Dionisya*, in onore del dio della fertilità Dioniso in Grecia, e i Saturnalia dell'antica Roma. Nella festa dei Saturnalia, che avveniva durante il solstizio d'inverno, l'elemento predominate era l'inversione dell'autorità: gli schiavi potevano mangiare a tavola con i padroni e persino insultarli. Tutte le relazioni sociali era invertite, le persone indossavano travestimenti, e ci si dedicava ad abbondanti banchetti. Alcune di

queste festività popolari antiche riuscirono ad arrivare al sedicesimo secolo, sopravvivendo alla religione cattolica ed anche alla riforma anglicana. La tradizione popolare dell'Inghilterra rinascimentale era molto diversa da quella medievale come conseguenza dell'Act of Supremacy. Con il "divorzio" dalla Chiesa Cattolica romana, vennero soppressi molti culti dei santi, ed apportati innumerevoli cambiamenti alle liturgie ed alle cerimonie. La regina Elizabeth I, tuttavia, favoriva il mantenimento delle celebrazioni; tutte le attività di corte e le visite della regina coincidevano con giornate simboliche, per trasmettere l'idea che i riti e le festività fossero controllate e promosse dalla corona stessa. Nel Rinascimento dunque, le tradizioni carnevalesche dell'antichità e del Medioevo, furono inglobate ed adattate alla cultura contemporanea. Anche nel teatro shakespeariano sono presenti alcune forme popolari. Shakespeare certamente faceva riferimento a tradizioni culturali elitarie, ma nel suo teatro gli elementi sofisticati si intrecciano con il carnevalesco e la tradizione popolare. Il *fool* per esempio è una figura ricorrente delle opere shakespeariane, così come riferimenti a varie festività stagionali e celebrazioni rituali, con danze, pantomime, *dumb shows*.

A partire dalla pubblicazione di *Rabelais and his World* le teorie di Bachtin sul carnevale hanno influenzato non solo la letteratura, ma anche l'antropologia, la filosofia e la linguistica. Bachtin identifica il carnevalesco con una serie di festività popolari, ma considera anche il concetto di "scrittura carnevalesca", ovvero uno stile letterario che ingloba elementi come la parodia e le inversioni grottesche. Un esempio di scrittura carnevalesca è proprio il punto di partenza dello studio di Bachtin ovvero l'opera cinquecentesca di Rabelais: *Gargantua, Pantagruel*. L'opera attinge alla tradizione popolare dell'Europa del tempo. Bachtin evidenzia come l'opera sia pervasa dallo spirito carnevalesco e dal concetto della materialità del corpo che consiste nell'insistenza sul corpo sotto ogni aspetto: dall'anatomia, al funzionamento fisiologico fino alla morte.

Al centro della teoria del carnevalesco c'è il concetto del realismo grottesco e la rappresentazione del corpo grottesco, in ogni sua forma e stato: l'insistenza ricade sulle protuberanze del corpo, sulle sue caratteristiche anche oscene o disturbanti. Bachtin opera una distinzione tra due tipologie di corpo: il corpo grottesco ed il corpo classico. Il corpo grottesco è indefinito, enorme, irregolare, con orifizi evidenti; il corpo di natura classica invece è rotondo, perfetto, finito. Il corpo grottesco è il corpo del divenire,

perché è in perpetuo mutamento; è un corpo collettivo, nel senso che espandendosi inghiotte gli altri corpi e ne rigenera di nuovi. Il corpo carnevalesco di Bachtin, con i suoi orifizi, protuberanze ed escrescenze, è connesso al flusso del perpetuo movimento cosmico, mentre il corpo classico è sterile, non è rigenerante né in metamorfosi. Bachtin ritiene che l'esistenza umana sia un processo del divenire e il grottesco ne è espressione fondamentale, perché basato sulla continuità biologica del corpo. Un esempio di realismo grottesco si individua nell'opera *Gulliver's Travels*; nell'opera il corpo è ripetutamente presentato come esagerato: a partire dal corpo enorme di Gulliver dal punto di vista dei Lillipuziani, fino ai colossali abitanti di Brobdingnag. Nel corpo grottesco si attua un movimento dall'alto verso il basso, l'inversione di ciò che è elevato con ciò che è basso e volgare. Il corpo grottesco è il regno nel quale le gerarchie religiose e sociali si invertono in maniera simbolica. L'inversione delle gerarchie corporee si trasforma nell'inversione dell'ordine politico durante il periodo del carnevale.

Il grottesco, deriva in realtà dall'arte visiva e si riferisce a due stili: uno stile ornamentale classico ed uno stile decorativo medievale pittorico e scultoreo. In questi stili decorativi parti di animali e di esseri umani sono intrecciate in maniera bizzarra con fogliame e fiori. Il grottesco deriva dalla deformazione della natura, e dalla presenza di belve e mostri. Un tema tipo del grottesco medievale era la battaglia tra umani e mostri o animali, all'interno dell'intreccio della vegetazione. L'arte grottesca pone al centro dell'attenzione il tema della morte e del decadimento corporeo, descrivendo deformità, appetiti, e disgustose escrezioni. Nel teatro medievale il grottesco era espresso con successo tramite linguaggio osceno, farse ed occasionali invettive politiche; erano inoltre molto popolari le cosiddette *fabliaux*, brevi racconti comici a sfondo sessuale. Mettendo in scena il grottesco il teatro propone energie potenzialmente sovversive: il palco diventa centro di esperienze catartiche normalmente frenate dalla convenzioni sociali. Il grottesco opera in un mondo che non è quello ordinario della vita quotidiana, ma quello del carnevale. Nella dimensione del grottesco, infatti, elementi disgustosi ed immorali non solo sono accettati ma addirittura attraenti.

Neil Rhodes riconosce il grottesco nello stile di un certo tipo di prosa comica sviluppatasi alla fine del sedicesimo secolo in Inghilterra. Secondo Rhodes questo periodo è fondamentale, non solo per la nascita del suddetto stile comico-grottesco ma

anche perché la prosa comica iniziò ad estendersi verso il giornalismo satirico. Questa satira è il frutto del rapporto tra sermone e carnevalesco, tra clowns e preti, tra basso ed alto. In aggiunta, la controversia dei Marprelate Tracts fu fondamentale per lo sviluppo di questo stile e molti degli scrittori che si ritengono aver preso parte alla controversia erano i promotori dello stile comico-grottesco di cui sopra (basta citare Nashe, Middleton, e Greene).

Per quanto riguarda il tema del puritanesimo invece, è bene dare una spiegazione sulle principali caratteristiche del movimento. Innanzitutto è bene sottolineare come le parole "puritano" e "puritanesimo" siano controverse. Gli esponenti del movimento non amavano essere definiti puritani, perché inizialmente la parola era utilizzata dai loro oppositori in senso dispregiativo. Apparentemente uno dei primi a utilizzare il termine fu Thomas Stapleton, un cattolico in esilio, in una pubblicazione del 1565, riferendosi ai suoi oppositori protestanti. Naturalmente erano presenti eccezioni, come per esempio Samuel Ward, predicatore di Ipswich dal 1603 al 1635, che scrisse in un sermone di voler servire dio secondo il "puritanesimo". In linea generica i puritani preferivano definirsi i "devoti", "professori", "evangelisti" e gli "eletti". Durante i primi anni del regno di Elizabeth I il movimento era impegnato in una campagna politica molto forte che promuoveva una riforma radicale delle strutture liturgiche della Chiesa Anglicana. Negli anni '90 del sedicesimo secolo i consiglieri della regina si occuparono di eliminare i gruppi più estremisti, come i presbiteriani, ma nonostante ciò le pressioni per delle riforme continuarono. Frequentemente, tuttavia, si cade nell'errore di determinare come strettamente "puritane" alcune credenze che di fatto al tempo erano diffuse in generale tra i protestanti. Durante il regno di Eliszabeth, per esempio, era molto diffusa l'ostilità nei confronti della Chiesa Romana, in particolare nei confronti del Papa. Agli inizi del diciassettesimo secolo sentimenti anti cattolici ed anti-papali erano aspetti centrali della cultura inglese in generale. La teoria fondamentale invece del movimento puritano era la concezione della divina provvidenza, considerata come dominante, e l'idea secondo la quale solamente pochi eletti avessero uno speciale rapporto con il divino. Inoltre, il puritanesimo era collegato alla dottrina della predestinazione, implicita nel pensiero di Lutero, ma elaborata successivamente da Calvino. Uno degli aspetti centrali del puritanesimo era l'insistenza sulla centralità delle scritture, come unica fonte di conoscenza e di avvicinamento Dio.

Spesso le religioni non hanno ottimi rapporti con le arti ed il divertimento, e il puritanesimo è tra queste. I puritani in particolare non avevano un buon rapporto con il teatro. Le maggiori proteste iniziarono con la diffusione del teatro commerciale nel 1570. In generale l'arte era bandita, perché considerata come qualcosa di finto ed immorale che distraeva le persone dal pensiero e dalla contemplazione di Dio. Il teatro secondo i puritanI non era altro che una trama di bugie e la recitazione una sorta di simulazione e di parodia del divino. Naturalmente è riduttivo sostenere che solo i puritani fossero contrari all'arte teatrale, così come bisogna sottolineare che alcuni di loro erano essi stessi attori o drammaturghi. Il teatro, secondo alcuni, poteva essere una buona fonte di propaganda religiosa, e Calvino stesso approvava performances teatrali purché fossero a tema religioso. L'ostilità nei confronti del teatro da parte dei puritani crebbe in particolare dalla seconda fase del movimento, a partire dagli anni '70 del sedicesimo secolo. Fu questo il periodo in cui le forme artistiche iniziarono ad essere considerate come immorali e dannose, fino ad arrivare al completo rifiuto con la chiusura dei teatri del 1642.

Andiamo ora ad analizzare la figura di Fastaff secondo il tema del carnevalesco e successivamente in rispetto agli elementi puritani individuati nel personaggio.

Falstaff è indubbiamente un personaggio che si può descrivere come carnevalesco. Secondo alcuni critici, Falstaff è il personaggio shakespeariano più vicino allo stile carnevalesco di Rabelais in assoluto. Falstaff vive in un mondo carnevalesco, nel senso che il suo stile di vita non è minimamente conforme alle norme sociali, in particolare a quelle che dovrebbe seguire un cavaliere. Le sue giornate sono indubbiamente dedicate alla celebrazione della dissolutezza sotto ogni forma, a partire dal consumo di alcolici fino ad arrivare al furti. Falstaff è il re del *sub-plot* comico di *Henry IV*: mentre il re è impegnato nella repressione di ribellioni intestine al regno, Falstaff ed il principe Hal regnano con le loro regole nella taverna. La distinzione tra i due gruppi sono chiari anche a livello linguistico: a corte e sul campo di battaglia i personaggi parlano in versi, in taverna invece in prosa. Falstaff è una forza sovversiva e carnevalesca anche perché rifiuta ogni valore, in particolare l'onore. Una delle sue caratteristiche principali, infatti, è la codardia e durante la battaglia di Shwresbury arriva al punto di fingersi morto pur di non combattere. In effetti la sua arma migliore non è la spada bensì il suo celeberrimo umorismo e acume. In realtà nell'opera sono presenti molti parallelismi tra il mondo

della corte e quello carnevalesco della taverna. Falstaff è senza dubbio un impostore, ma anche il re Henry IV lo è, ha usurpato la corona a Richard II; Falstaff è un elemento sovversivo così come lo sono i ribelli che tramano contro alla corona. Uno degli elementi che rendono Falstaff un personaggio potenzialmente sovversivo è proprio il fatto che ricorda spesso, anche se implicitamente, il tema della legittimità del trono. Uno degli aspetti centrali del carnevale è proprio la possibilità di mettere in risalto nuovi aspetti della cultura e del potere, di conseguenza anche di notare aspetti controversi delle autorità. Falstaff deride non solo Hal, ma anche il re: la celeberrima scena del *play-within-the-play* alla taverna Boar's Head lo ritrae mentre si finge re ed apostrofa Hal, utilizzando l'occasione in realtà per elogiare se stesso. Falstaff può essere associato a tradizionali forme popolari di "opposizione all'ordine" come dio della fertilità, a figure mitologiche come il sileno, al *miles gloriosus*, al Lord of Misrule, al clown e al Vice dei *morality plays*. In *Henry IV* la dimensione carnevalesca di Falstaff lo pone inevitabilmente in diretto contrasto con la monarchia e i valori tradizionali. Falstaff rappresenta all'interno del *sub-plot* comico quello che i ribelli rappresentano nel contesto della trama storica dell'opera: opposizione alla gerarchia e all'ordine prestabilito. Se Falstaff rappresenta il carnevale, la sua messa al bando finale è perfettamente in linea con la tradizione carnevalesca popolare. Il periodo di festa e di licenza deve giungere al termine per far spazio alla Quaresima. Falstaff rappresenta una minaccia per il regno perché la sua influenza su Hal potrebbe portare al disordine; il principe è costretto ad abbandonare la dissolutezza del carnevale, per adempiere ai suoi doveri di erede al trono prima, e di re poi. Barber sostiene che il rapporto tra Hal e Falstaff rappresenta il rapporto tra la vita ordinaria quotidiana e festività. Falstaff vive perennemente in uno stato di licenza e coinvolge il giovane principe in uno stile di vita fatto di eccessi di ogni genere; ciononostante il periodo di "vacanza" deve terminare per permettere la restaurazione dell'ordine. Hal è consapevole della necessità di una sua futura redenzione, ed esprime da subito nel celeberrimo soliloquio della seconda scena del primo atto il suo progetto: abbandonare la condotta dissoluta e pagare il suo debito di responsabilità, per poter così essere apprezzato ed ammirato. Hal utilizza il sacrificio di Falstaff, il Lord of Misrule deposto e poi bandito dalla comunità al termine del periodo del carnevale, per liberarsi dai propri peccati.

Falstaff rappresenta il corpo grottesco bachtiniano per eccellenza. Il suo corpo gargantuesco rappresenta il corpo grottesco, collettivo, insaziabile ed in mutamento. Non a caso tutti i personaggi commentano spesso il corpo di Falstaff, sottolineando la sua grassezza e la sua età; Falstaff stesso parla del suo corpo in termini grotteschi ed ironici. Falstaff rappresenta il corpo grottesco anche in virtù del suo essere contradditorio e di contenere forze opposte: il suo corpo è inerte, pigro e goffo, ma allo stesso tempo la sua personalità è affascinate e possiede una fervida immaginazione. Inoltre Falstaff si contraddice in rispetto al tempo ed all'età; è un uomo vecchio, e ciò viene continuamente ricordato nell'opera, ma si comporta in maniera infantile, mentre scansa ogni possibile responsabilità. Falstaff racchiude in sé tutte le caratteristiche del carnevalesco ma Holderness nota che alcuni aspetti del personaggio non sono conformi con lo spirito collettivo della festa popolare. Falstaff in realtà è un personaggio che si dimostra spesso molto egoista e non di certo vicino al "popolo". Non si muove per valori collettivi e popolari, perché gli unici valori che conosce sono i suoi interessi personali e la ricerca del piacere. Inoltre non fa parte della classe sociale a cui si accompagna, perché è un cavaliere, anche se non si comporta affatto come tale. Falstaff non perde occasione per sfruttare i più deboli e talvolta sottolinea in maniera pomposa la sua appartenenza gerarchica.

Il rifiuto del carnevale da parte del principe Hal è molto interessante perché mette in risalto le possibilità drammatiche di Falstaff. Hal appare (ed è) una figura del mito, leggendaria, come lo sono altri importanti personaggi shakespeariani come Cleopatra , Antony o Brutus. Hal progressivamente perde la sua soggettività, ed accetta l'identità fissa e invariabile che deriva dalla sua appartenenza alla storia. Falstaff, invece, presenta una soggettività multiforme e mutevole. Risulta opportuno chiarire che anche la parola "soggettività" racchiude varie sfumature, e alcune di esse non sono assolutamente associabili al personaggio. Falstaff non è un personaggio solitario, così come non appare particolarmente riflessivo essendo sempre dedito a svaghi in compagnia. Falstaff è lontanissimo da uno stile di vita ascetico improntato sulla riflessione religiosa e sull'abnegazione, tipico della soggettività puritana. La sua soggettività consiste nell'abilità di superare ruoli sociali prefissati, gli stessi che forzano Hal nella figura del figliol prodigo prima, e di re giusto e risoluto poi. Falstaff

rappresenta piuttosto la teatralità, si muove da un ruolo all'altro sfuggendo da identità limitanti.

Il secondo aspetto che ho approfondito nella mia tesi è l'elemento del puritanesimo in Falstaff. Molti critici hanno notato che Falstaff presenta dei connotati puritani, in particolare in rispetto alla controversia sul suo possibile antenato storico John Oldcastle. Oldcastle venne riabilitato come martire proto-protestante inizialmente dal vescovo protestante John Bale, in *Brefe Chronycle Concernynge the Examinacyon and Death of the blessed martyr of Christ Syr Johan Oldecastell the Lorde Cobham* (1544). Foxe e Halle seguirono la tradizione di Bale e lo inserirono nelle loro cronache come pio martire e non come eretico ribelle e violento. Anche i discendenti di Oldcastle, i Lords Cobham tentarono di riabilitare la sua figura con la pubblicazione del dramma *The True and Honourable History of the Life of Sir John Oldcastle*. All'epoca della stesura di *Henry IV*, dunque, la figura di Oldcastle era controversa, perché taluni lo consideravano un martire, altri un eretico. In realtà, la rappresentazione di Oldcastle proposta da Shakespeare è in linea più che con una di queste due tradizioni storiche, con la tipica letteratura anti-puritana dell'epoca, quella derivata dalla controversia dei Marprelate Tracts. I puritani, secondo quetso particolare stile comico, erano descritti come figure carnevalesche, avide e depravate. Falstaff rientra, come già visto, perfettamente nella categoria della figura grottesca e carnevalesca, ma allo stesso tempo si esprime come un puritano. Cita innumerevoli volte le scritture (solo nella prima parte ventisei volte), e utilizza spesso termini tipicamente puritani, come "vocazione" e "redenzione". In aggiunta, Falstaff impiega frequentemente il tipico stile sofistico e retorico dei puritani (come per esempio nel discorso sull'onore nel quinto atto). L'accostamento tra caratteristiche puritane e lo stile di vita di Falstaff, che non ha nulla di puritano, risultano immediatamente in parodia con un effetto altamente comico. Falstaff utilizza la sua brillante retorica non con nobili fini o per diffondere determinati valori, ma per essere vincente nel dibattito, per dimostrare il suo acume, anche a scapito della verità.

La presenza di riferimenti al puritanesimo nell'opera è inequivocabile. Tuttavia l'evidente discrepanza tra la vita dissoluta di Falstaff e la condotta richiesta ad un puritano sta alla base di un effetto parodico e satirico. Allo stesso modo la lontananza tra le descrizioni storiche di Oldcastle e la sua rappresentazione in *Henry IV* (o quanto

meno riferimento) sul palcoscenico sfocia in comicità. Tuttavia Falstaff non è solo una parodia, ma un brillante comico lui stesso: regna nel *sub-plot* comico, rovescia le gerarchie, e si prende la libertà di deridere il re, il principe ed il concetto stesso di monarchia.

Shakespeare nell'epilogo della seconda parte di *Henry IV* fa la promessa di riportare John Falstaff sulla scena. In realtà nel successivo *Henry V* Falstaff non fa la sua comparsa sulla scena; viene però riproposto da Shakespeare in una commedia non legata con i drammi storici: *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. La datazione di questa opera è piuttosto incerta e fonte di dibattito, ma il pensiero più diffuso è che sia stata commissionata per essere rappresentata il 23 aprile 1597 durante le celebrazioni dell'Ordine della Giarrettiera a Windsor. A questa teorie si aggiunge una leggenda, ormai screditata, che l'opera sia stata voluta dalla regina Elizabeth, che avrebbe chiesto di rivedere Falstaff sulla scena in un contesto amoroso. L'opera negli anni non ha goduto di molto successo nella critica, probabilmente proprio per questa leggenda e per il fatto di essere considerata come semplice "appendice" dei ben più complessi drammi storici. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in pubblico ritrovò non solo Falstaff, ma anche altri suoi compagni della taverna di Eastcheap, come Pistol, Barloph, Nym e Miss Quickly. In questa commedia però, Falstaff non si trova a confrontarsi con questioni politiche e storiche, né con la corte; il nostro cavaliere è inserito nel contesto di una tranquilla cittadina di campagna. L'ambientazione della commedia è unica nella produzione shakespeariana: la trama si svolge in un contesto "domestico", in Inghilterra, e non in luoghi remoti o immaginati come era solito nelle altre opere (Illyria, Italia o la foresta di Arder per esempio).

Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* è impegnato nell'impresa di corteggiare contemporaneamente due donne sposate, Mistress Ford e Mistress Page, ma viene scoperto e reso vittima lui stesso di raggiri e scherzi. In questa commedia Falstaff ha un ruolo marginale, non è più il personaggio ingombrante dei drammi storici. L'opera infatti si focalizza più che su alcuni personaggi, su un'intera classe sociale: l'emergente borghesia cittadina. Approcciandosi alla commedia la tendenza naturale sarebbe di rivolgere l'attenzione a Falstaff, memori della sua superbia arguzia e del suo potenziale comico, ma qui l'aspetto corale e l'intreccio perfettamente bilanciato della trama sono più rilevanti. Il Falstaff che ritroviamo in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* è un personaggio

sotto certi aspetti "diminuito". Ciò non significa che il buon vecchio Jack abbia perso completamente il suo spirito, ma che la sua performance risente inevitabilmente sia del fatto di essere un personaggio non centrale, così come dell'ambientazione. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor* la scena è dominata dalla borghesia, che muove le redini della storia e ha come scopo punire Falstaff, che qui appare come una sorta di capro espiatorio più che come l'emblema del carnevale. In *The Merry Wives* Falstaff è oggetto di scherno ripetutamente per il fatto di essere grasso e vecchio, così come lo era in *Henry IV*, tuttavia, qui il suo corpo non è più celebrato, l'ilarità non deriva più dalla forza inesauribile del carnevale; la risata proviene piuttosto dai pietosi tentativi di Falstaff di accomodare il suo enorme corpo in spazi angusti mentre tenta di nascondersi. La messa al bando di Falstaff è presente anche in *The Merry Wives*, ma ha un significato diverso: Falstaff è un invasore nelle case dei nuovi ricchi cittadini, non fa parte della loro società.

In conclusione, è impossibile fornire una descrizione lineare di un personaggio come Falstaff. Falstaff ha le caratteristiche di tutti i suoi "antenati" della tradizione popolare e teatrale, (il Vice, il Lord of Misrule, il *miles glorious* e il *fool* tra i vari), ma pur rappresentandoli tutti non è nessuno in particolare. Falstaff interpreta molti ruoli, finge, si traveste, mente ed è protagonista assoluto del *play-within-the-play* alla taverna. Il suo punto forte è proprio la teatralità, la capacità di muoversi liberamente assumendo varie parti, e questo gli è possibule per il fatto di essere un personaggio libero, non dipendente da un contesto storico. Falstaff è libero non solo dalla storia, ma anche dalla tradizione letteraria, teatrale, popolare e dalla religione, ed è interessante come il fatto di giocare con molti ruoli diversi gli permetta di guadagnare una sua individualità, sfuggente perché difficile da collocare. La presenza dell'elemento del puritanesimo è indubbiamente interessante perché ha aggiunto ulteriore complessità ad un personaggio già eterogeneo. Falstaff in questo modo si allontana dall'essere puro emblema del carnevalesco o una nuova versione del Vice dei *morality plays*. Inoltre, grazie ai riferimenti al puritanesimo, l'opera si inserisce in un contesto contemporaneo alla sua rappresentazione, proponendo un stile comico particolarmente popolare grazie ai Marprelate Tracts e agli scrittori come Nashe e Greene.