From a Corrupt Eden to Bio-power: War and Nature in the Henriad

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In the Henriad, nature and war coexist and their closeness implies deep changes of their conventional understanding. Representations of nature in Shakespeare's mature works differ from those in the works of his predecessors and contemporaries. A crucial distinction is the absence of a Neoplatonic perspective, which informs the works of Edmund Spenser (Waller, 1994: 76-77) and considerably influences also those of other early modern poets, such as Michael Drayton (Ewell, 1983: 515-525), Sir Philip Sidney (Sinfield 1980: 29) or Ben Jonson (Sanders 2010: 33-34; 324-325).

Just one example out of many: in the fragmentary seventh book of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, nature is the origin and principle of the cosmic order (called "*Natures* Sergeant" 7.7.4)[2] and the source of its laws. Although it is almost identified with God ("God of Nature" 7.6.35) and His omnipotence ("all, both heauenly Powers, & earthly wights, / Before great Natures presence should appeare" 7.6.36; "Nature *soone / her righteous Doome arades* 7.7.0), her identity is based on paradoxes ("Great *Nature*, euer young yet full of eld,/ Still moouing, yet vnmoued from her sted; / Vnseene of any, yet of all beheld 7.7.13) and her personification transcends the differences of gender and sex ("Yet certes by her face and physnomy, / Whether she man or woman inly were, / That could not any creature well descry" 7.7.5). As a result, sovereign Nature can graciously tolerate "Mutability," but only as a power helping individual beings on their way to heavenly perfection. Anticipating Hegel's theodicy, Book VII of *The Faerie Queene* represents change in nature as a mere temporary alienation from primeval perfection which must be later overcome by the return of individual beings to their eternal, unchangeable identities ("They are not changed from their first estate; / But by their change

their being doe dilate: / And turning to themselues at length againe, / […] / […] they raigne ouer change, and doe their states maintaine" 7.7.58).

In contrast to this discourse relating nature permanently to its divine origin, the representation of nature in the Henriad is subject to "the revolution of the times," in the course of which "chance's mocks / And changes fill the cup of alteration / With divers liquors" (*2 Henry IV*, 3.1, 45, 51-2).[3] Anticipating theories of chaos, this representation emphasizes fortuitous temporality pervading nature seen as a universal process, which, envisaged in human dimensions, acquires a deterministic character. Warwick's "history in all men's lives" can be grasped as a cumulative representation of the past, a set of diverse temporal processes and events ("Figuring the natures of the times deceas'd;"), whose respectful understanding ("The which observed") can reveal future potentialities of historical development based on general probability – "the main chance of things / As yet not come to life, who in their seeds / And weak beginnings lie intreasured" (*2 Henry IV*, 3.1.75-80).[4] Even though the passage may draw on Renaissance typology, where the past events prefigure the future ones, it completely abstracts from the metaphysical framework of this typology, the Divine Providence. The book which King Henry longs to read is neither the Scripture, nor even the Book of Nature, but "the book of fate" (3.1.44).

The probabilistic as well as determinist framework of universal "history" in *2 Henry IV* informs the representations of nature in the whole Henriad. These are characterized by the growth of their pragmatic character: the shift from Nature as an ideal, which is the source of perfection as well as the objective of all existence, to nature as a power which has to be controlled and exploited for political and military purposes.

In *Richard II* nature is identified with the symbolic authority and "the body politic"[5] of the monarch ("This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle" *Richard II*, 2.1.40), yet this

"body politic" is no longer "a theological idea" (Kantorowicz, 1957: 8ff). It is a presented as a fiction to be unravelled in the course of the play. As Victoria Kahn points out: "Kantorowicz appears more interested in the way Shakespeare imaginatively anticipated the unraveling of the fiction of the king's two bodies" especially in the moment when "the fiction of the oneness of the [fictive] body breaks apart" (Kahn 2009: 86; Kantorovicz 1957: 31)[6] The "duplications" characteristic of the "two bodies of the king" also influence the verbal aspects of the representation of nature: "This fortress built *by nature for itself*" (2.1.43; emphasis added) and its cognates: "This *royal* throne of *kings* (…) /(…) / This *other* Eden" (2.1.40, 42; emphasis added). In this way, seemingly equivalent or "adequate"[7] notions are played "off against each other," confused or balanced again (Kantorowicz, *idem*: 25-26). As a result, Platonic and Aristotelian principles of mimesis are unsettled and "the idea of a legislator" shifts "from the imitator of nature to the creator of laws ex nihilo" (Kahn, *idem*: 87). The last changes mentioned had in most cases led to the glorification of poets and affirmation of the independence of their creation, often called "second nature."[8]

These features, however, do not characterize the representations of nature in *Richard II*. Here, nature as the corrupt "Eden" (2.1.42; "now bound with shame" 3.1.63) and the representation of the gradual loss of Richard's royal power ("the blushing discontented sun" shaded by "the envious clouds" 3.1.62, 64) is replaced by the allegory of a "garden (…) full of weeds" (3.4.44-45), which can no longer represent good government as a model[9] ("Showing as in a model our firm estate" 3.4.42).

Although John of Gaunt still believes that nature's "fortress" can protect "against infection and the hand of war" (2.1.43, 44), war evidently prevails, being identified with a disease, an "infection" (2.1.44) wasting the body politic, caused by the corruption of the king and his advisors. In this way, nature can no longer serve as a bond between the "two bodies of

the king." And since the "body politic" of the king can no longer be represented as the actual location of power, political theology itself has to be transformed by means of fiction, whose "usefulness" consists precisely in dislocating power "from one particular place and one particular body" (Kahn, *idem*: 95).

Anticipated by Kantorowicz, this solution is discussed at some length by Claude Lefort, who suggests that "democracy" is the only form of government representing power as "an *empty place*" and thus maintaining "a gap between the symbolic and the real," in order to show

> that power belongs to no one; that those who exercise power do not possess it; that they do not, indeed, embody it; that the exercise of power requires a periodic and repeated contest; that the authority of those vested with power is created and re-created as a result of the manifestation of the will of the people (Lefort, 1988: 225).

Lefort has also shown that this condition is not new but rather results from a process common to all changes of the representations of political and social power, namely the transfer "from one register to another (…) intended to ensure the preservation of a *form* which has since been abolished" (*idem*, 255). This, among others, implies two rather fatal flaws of democracy: First, the reactivation of the religious fiction, whose "efficacy is no longer symbolic but imaginary, (…) at the weak points of the social" (*ibidem*), where it can generate violent symbolic practices, such as those typical of nationalism or racism. Secondly, this internal instability of democracy appears to be, in Lefort's words, "the unavoidable – and no doubt ontological – difficulty democracy has in reading its own story" (*ibidem*) leading to the fundamental weakness of its political ideologies, where the notions like "n/Nature," or "the people" lose their meaning and performative power. It can almost be said that the ominous

aspect of Lefort's approach consists in his effort to re-establish the "Theologico-Political" as an underlying pattern of all forms of government. In this way, the essential vulnerability of democracy and the imminence of civil war may almost appear as a 'natural' feature of somehow absurdly repeating history, where "falseness" and corruption grow to demand a radical response,[10] "the inward [i.e., civil] wars" (*2 Henry IV*, 3.1.102), as King Henry fears.

In the introductory monologue of the king in *1 Henry IV* the link between nature and war becomes imminent and threatening. "The other Eden" invoked by John of Gaunt (*Richard II* 2.1.42) is not only corrupted, but also destroyed. Personified by a disfigured female body or face, where the mouth is as a mere opening gorged with blood[11] ("No more the thirsty entrance of this soil / Shall daub her lips with her own children's blood" *1 Henry IV* 1.1.5-6), the land is drained ("channelled"1.1.7) and mutilated by "trenching war" (1.1.7).[12] The polarization of the body politic reaches down to the level of strife between individuals ("Those opposèd eyes" 1.1.9). As a consequence, the body politic is no longer that of the king but of the nation, and its near destruction is associated with a cosmic disaster ("like the meteors of a troubled heaven /All of one nature, one substance bred / Did lately meet in the intestine shock" 1.1.10-12). The last line of the passage represents the violence of civil wars by means of the image of a fierce hand-to-hand combat ("furious close of civil butchery" 1.10.13). The metaphor of war as "infection" in *Richard II* (2.1.44) is intensified in *1 Henry IV*: the birth of one of the rebel leaders and the representative of the exotic, 'barbaric' and demonized culture, the Welsh king Owain Glyndŵr, is described as a violent outbreak ("eruption") of disease ("Diseasèd nature oftentimes breaks forth / In strange eruptions" 3.1.25-26). Despite all effort to rectify the stereotyping of Wales and the Welsh in 3.1, the threat of acculturation (Howard, 1997: 1149), is looming large over the civil war in *1 Henry IV* and intensifies its catastrophic representations.

The imagery of war as a disease inaugurates also the scenes of the battle of Shrewsbury ("The day looks pale / At his distemp'rature." 5.1.2-3). Metaphors of the disturbance of cosmic order are repeated in the exchange of the King and Prince Harry with the Earl of Worcester, one of the leaders of the rebels. The metaphorical image of the Earl represents him (and – synecdochically – the whole rebellion) as a star, which was moving "in [an] obedient orb" and giving "a fair and natural light" but has turned into "an exhaled meteor, / A prodigy of fear, and a portent / Of broachèd mischief to the unborn times" (5.1.16-21). This parallel between the disintegration of the body politic and the disruption of the macrocosmic order is extended beyond the limits of the present and near future. War represented as a cosmic disorder becomes a powerful omen of evil haunting "the unborn times."

The representation of war is further monumentalized in Hotspur's speech to his allies which uses the words "instruments," "embrace" and "courtesy" as syllepses, meaning both "musical instruments" and "weapons"; "friendly hug" and "grip in a close man-to-man fight"; "graciousness" and "chivalrous combat"; and ascribes them a cosmic ("heaven to earth") dimension: "Sound all the lofty instruments of war, / And by that music let us all embrace, / For, heaven to earth, some of us never shall / A second time do such a courtesy" (5.2.97-100). In this way, war becomes an ironical and perverted version of a cosmic dance, which at the beginning of *2 Henry IV* changes into a *danse macabre* in Northumberland's eschatological tirade:

> Let heaven kiss earth! Now let not nature's hand
>
> Keep the wild flood confined! Let order die!
>
> And let this world no longer be a stage
>
> To feed contention in a ling'ring act;
>
> But let one spirit of the first-born Cain

Reign in all bosoms, that each heart being set

On bloody courses, the rude scene may end,

And darkness be the burier of the dead!

(*2 Henry IV*, 1.1.153-60)

This over-inflated image of civil war as the self-destruction of nature, order, representation ("And let this world no longer be a stage") and the body politic can be read as a coda of a specific history of representing based on the disintegration of the King's body politic and its transformation into the collective body of the nation. As Jean Howard has shown, further development of this representation will require "a complex illusion of temporal simultaneity" (*idem*, 1149). This is also in keeping with Benedict Anderson's definition of nation as an "imagined community" (1991: 6).[13]

The emergence of Falstaff in this catastrophic situation does not merely represent the debasement of the unity of the humans with nature symbolised by the "grotesque body," the main agency of the "carnivalesque" which, according to Bakhtin, "is not separated from the rest of the world," and in which "the cosmic, social and bodily elements are given (…) as an indivisible whole" (Bakhtin, 1984: 19).[14] Beyond this symbolic function, Falstaff represents the alienation of common humanity from the unity of nature, when he denies its authority, seeing "no reason in the law of nature" (*2 Henry IV* 3.2.297) and valuing nature (and "time") only as random processes and opportunities for aggressive or calculating behaviour.[15]

At the end of the second part of *Henry IV*, nature is identified with death. When the king dies, "He's walked the way of nature" opposed to "our purposes" ("and to our purposes he lives no more"), as Warwick dryly states (5.2.4). In other words, the body politic is no longer represented by the body of the king, but defined by the "purposes" of the powerful, or rather, the strategic nature of power. A similar feature characterizes Falstaff's influence on Prince Hal.

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Falstaff's passionate entreaty, which identifies his obese body with the collective "grotesque body" of the carnival, "Banish plump Jack and banish all the world" (*2 Henry IV*, 2.5.439), is treated by Hal with ironic humour ("I do, I will" 2.5.439), which undermines the carnivalesque subversion of the preceding parodic game.

It can be said that the influence of Falstaff and his companions engenders Hal's pragmatic, strategic approach to politics: "Redeeming time, when men think least I will" (*1 Henry IV*, 1.2.195). Hal comes to understand fairly soon that an efficient political action cannot be based on political theology but draws from an unscrupulous, even criminal, use of "political technology" (Foucault, 1982: 780). He can "offend to make offence a skill" (1.2.194).

When Hal is enthroned and leads the nation into an aggressive war, his actions acquire the features of modern political technologies leading to genocide in later centuries (Foucault, 1978: 137).[16] When he talks in disguise to his soldiers, Williams and Bates, about justice and war, he denies his responsibility for the deaths of soldiers in his military campaign, comparing his subjects to potential criminals:

> Besides, there is no king, be his cause never so spotless, if it comes to the arbitrament of swords, can try it out, with all unspotted soldiers. Some, peradventure, have on them the guilt of premeditated and contrived murder; some of beguiling virgins with the broken seals of perjury; some making wars their bulwark, that have before gorged the gentle bosom of peace with pillage and robbery. Now, if these men have defeated the law and outrun native punishment, though they can outstrip men, they have no wings to fly from God. War is his beadle. War is his vengeance. So that here men are punished for *before-breach of King's laws*, in now the King's quarrel.
> (*Henry V*, 4.1.149-60, emphasis added)

Taking war as a just, though extra-legal, punishment for the potential or undetected crimes committed by his subjects, King Harry subscribes to modern strategy, not yet of the

circulation of power in the network and "network-centric warfare" (Reid, 2003: 7), but to the "strategical model" of power, which has supplanted "the model based on law" (Foucault, 1978: 102; Reid, *idem*, 13), whose representation was also the body politic of the king. In modernity, wars are not waged for the preservation of the king, but, as Foucault points out, "on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity" (Foucault, *idem*, 137): in the latter plays of the Henriad this takes the form of overcoming the threat of civil war. War also becomes an efficient means of policing the population, or in Foucault's terms, managing the "bio-power" (*idem*, 140ff). Seen in this context, King Harry's strategies anticipate the ominous dictum of Carl von Clausewitz: "War is the continuation of *Politik* by other means," where the German word "*Politik*" means both "politics" and "policy," the latter meaning government control of the population (Foucault, 1988: 158-159).[17] As a result, the existence, which is at stake in modern wars, "is no longer the juridical existence of sovereignty" but "the biological existence of a population" (Foucault, 1978: 137).

It is important not to confuse this condition with that of the totalitarian state. As King Harry says, "Every subject's duty is the King's, but every subject's soul is his own" (*Henry V* 4.1.164-65), articulating the position of the individual in a *liberal society* characterized by the responsibility towards the law combined with the freedom of choice. While the first one becomes increasingly problematic (as in Kafka's parable "Before the Law"), the second one is all the more restricted by the allegedly free market.

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[2] All quotations are from Spenser (1995) with emphases added. Numbers of book, cantos and stanzas are in brackets in the text.

[3] All quotes from Shakespeare follow Shakespeare (1997). Abbreviated titles of plays and numbers of acts, scenes and lines are in parentheses in the text.

[4] King Henry's and Warwick's speeches may be said to anticipate the main aspects of recent definitions of chaos: "sensitive dependence on initial conditions" ("the main chance of things / As yet not come to life, who in their seeds / And weak beginnings lie intreasured"), "topological mixing" ("Make […] the continent, / Weary of solid firmness, melt itself / Into the sea" 3.1.46-48) and a number of "dense periodic orbits" ("Figuring the natures of the times deceased"). For mathematical definitions of these aspects see Hasselblatt and Katok (2003: 209-210).

[5] Ernst H. Kantorowicz has identified the source of this representation in Edmund Plowden's transformation of the abstract legal concept of Sir John Fortescue. According to Plowden, "the Body politic includes the [king's] Body natural … [and] these two bodies are incorporated in one person" (Kantorowicz, 1957: 9).

[6] Kahn has also demonstrated Kantorowicz's interest in the "duplications" revealed in the central scenes of *Richard II*: "The duplications [are] (…) all one and all simultaneously active in Richard: 'Thus play I in one person, many people' (5.5.31) (…). Moreover, in each one of those three scenes we encounter the same cascading: from divine kingship to kingship's 'Name' and from the name to the naked misery of man" (Kantorowicz, *idem*, 27).

[7] On mimesis as "*adequatio*" ("the measured quality of proportion to a model" – Hobson, 2001: 138) see Derrida (1981: 219).

[8] "It is therefore of Poets thus to be conceiued, that if they be able to deuise and make all these things of them selues, without any subiect of veritie, that they be (by manner of speech) as creating gods" (Puttenham, 1904: 2). "[T]he artist is a God-like creator of a second nature" (Abrams, 1971: 274).

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[9] "The common-sense relationship between a model and its copy, which is one of cause and priority, is disturbed." This "mime" (Derrida uses Mallarmé's "Mimique") "delivers activity which is reduplication without origin" (Hobson, *idem*, 136). In this way, "law and form" are no longer "in a due proportion" (*Richard II* 3.4.42). However, as Derrida shows in *The Truth in Painting*, the word "model" can also function as a "fetish," that is, as a replacement for something banned or taboo (Hobson, *idem*, 141). In *Richard II*, the "unweeded garden," whose "herbs," are "swarming with caterpillars" cannot present the unity of the "two bodies of the king" and the representation of truth as *adequatio* becomes impossible.

[10] See Warwick's speech in *2 Henry IV*, 3.1.81-87: "Such things become the hatch and brood of time; / And by the necessary form of this / King Richard might create a perfect guess / That great Northumberland, then false to him, / Would of that seed grow to a greater falseness, / Which should not find a ground to root upon, / Unless on you." In terms of political theology, the fortuitous, chaotic process of history, "the hatch and brood of time" (see above) is represented not only as "necessities" (3.1.87), but also as ongoing corruption ("grow to greater falseness"3.1.85) which must be stopped by force.

[11] The ambiguity of the personification derives from the violence of disfiguration which obscures the difference between the face and other body parts.

[12] The word "trench" has been used in its modern military meaning since 1500 and appears frequently in Shakespeare. The original etymology of the verb "to trench" is to maim, mutilate, cut off (*Online Etymology Dictionary*).

[13] Instead of imagining the community in a temporal simultaneity ("along time" as Benedict Anderson has it), which includes both the mythical time and the cycles of growth and cultivation (the gardening and planting metaphors as a model for good government in *Richard II* 3.4.), the country is seen in a "transverse, cross-time" simultaneity, "marked not by prefiguring and fulfilment, but by temporal coincidence" (*idem*, 24-25). Anderson has pointed out that religious communities, including monarchies based on the authority of sacred kingship, are not imagined at certain historical moments but always with respect to the whole course (and end) of time represented in their sacred texts. Every historical moment is simultaneously a moment in the totality of mythical time, which accounts for the spiritual authority of individuals (priests, kings). The links between individual moments are meaningful only because of this mythical time, providential or sacred history.

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[14] "The material bodily principle in grotesque realism is offered in its all popular and festive aspect. The cosmic, social and bodily elements are given here as an indivisible whole. And this whole is gay and gracious (…) contrary to modern canons, the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world" (Bakhtin, *idem*, 26).

[15] "Let time shape, and there an end" (*2 Henry IV* 3.2.298).

[16] "If genocide is indeed the dream of modern power, this is not because of the recent return to the ancient right to kill; it is because power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of the population" (*ibidem*).

[17] Foucault draws on the work of Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi (1717-71), *Grundsätze der Polizeywissenschaft* (*Elements of Police*, 1756), which distinguishes *Politik*, dealing with the internal and external enemies of the state, and *Polizei* as the employment of measures improving the quality of citizen's life. Clausewitz does not make this distinction, using the term *Staatspolitik* which incorporates both meanings (Clausewitz, 1832-34: xi).