

Shakespeare's Henry VI and Depression

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Cindy Chopoidaló

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Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 20.5 (2018)**

Thematic Issue ***Voices of Life, Illness and Disabilities in Life Writing and Medical Narratives.***

Ed. I-Chun Wang, Jonathan Locke Hart, Cindy Chopoidaló, and David Porter

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Abstract: In her article "Shakespeare's *Henry VI* and Depression," Cindy Chopoidaló discusses Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays not only as his first significant explorations of the tragic consequences of war and the price of ambition, but also as his first major treatment of a character who, in both fiction and reality, suffered from what has sometimes been described as severe clinical depression and what would have been known in Shakespeare's time as melancholy. In Shakespeare's *Henry VI*, as well as in his historical inspiration, we see an early counterpart of his later characters who have been linked to melancholy or depression, such as Jaques and Hamlet. Examining the historical and literary character(s) of *Henry VI* in light of both contemporary and modern models of depression, melancholy, and related mental conditions allows us to trace an early Shakespearean treatment of melancholy and depression as well as the ways in which this character type has been codified in various periods of literary and medical history.

Cindy CHOPOIDALO

Shakespeare's *Henry VI* and Depression

As some of his first significant explorations of the tragic consequences of war and the price of ambition, the plays of William Shakespeare's first tetralogy – *Henry VI* and *Richard III* – are centered on themes of grief, loss, and the sadness that comes with them. With this in mind it is perhaps appropriate that these plays also feature his first major treatment of a character who, in both fiction and reality, suffered from what has sometimes been described as severe clinical depression (see e.g. Griffiths 715-19; Hallam 212-15; Jones 136-42, 385 n.1; Knaus and Ellis; cf. Bark; Shaw) and what would have been known in Shakespeare's time as melancholy (see e.g. Heffernan; O'Sullivan). In Shakespeare's *Henry VI*, as well as in his historical inspiration, we see an early counterpart of his later characters who have been linked to melancholy or depression, such as the comic figure of Jaques of *As You Like It* and the tragic figure of Hamlet. Examining the historical and literary character(s) of *Henry VI* in light of both contemporary and modern models of depression, melancholy, and related mental conditions allows us to trace an early Shakespearean example of "basing a character on theories of melancholy" (Heffernan 96) in whole or in part, as well as the ways in which this character type has been codified in various periods of literary and medical history. In addition, the various historical and literary accounts of *Henry VI* and the contemporary and modern medical models through which these texts can be read can also be characterized as different forms of life writing: chronicle, biography, historical drama, and medical case study.

It is through the medium of the history play, which can be regarded as a dramatized type of life writing, that the story of *Henry VI* is perhaps best known to modern readers. However, to read the first tetralogy as a biography of Henry can be seen as, on some level, ironic. This is not only due to the tendency of authors of history plays, such as Shakespeare, to conflate, compress, or even exaggerate events to fit within the time and space of a play or series of plays, but also because even within his three eponymous plays, Henry is frequently left in the shadows of other characters, such as his wife Margaret, his quarrelling uncles Gloucester and Winchester, his rivals Edward IV and Richard III, and the emblematic figures of the English and French armies, Talbot and Joan of Arc. In this respect, Shakespeare's history plays rework the convention of epic poetry and historical drama as "historical and [...] biographical narrative[s], following the life and adventures of one great person from birth to death [...] interconnected with the history of his/her society" (Chopoidaló 33), in part by placing equal, if not greater, focus on the lives of those surrounding their central figure rather than solely on the title character himself. Part of the reason for Henry's position in the background in his own story as told by Shakespeare, particularly in *Henry VI, Part One*, was simply that "[w]hen he was crown'd, [he] was but nine months old" (3HVI I.i.112); indeed, at the time represented in his first onstage appearance in Act III, scene i of *Part One*, he would have been about ten years old, though he is usually portrayed throughout the tetralogy by an adult actor. If we regard Henry as Shakespeare's first great attempt at representing a melancholy or depressed character, a precursor to Hamlet and Jaques, or King Lear and Timon of Athens for that matter, we may also theorize that at this stage in his career, Shakespeare was still experimenting with how best to construct a tragic protagonist whose flaw is "melancholy as a character defect, not [necessarily] an illness" (Shaw 94) as a modern reader might think of depression.

In both life and literature, Henry was known for being scholarly and pious, as Shakespeare first acknowledges in Act V, scene i of *Henry VI, Part One* when the young king expresses his reluctance to marry by reminding his advisors, "Alas, my years are young; / And fitter is my study and my books / Than wanton dalliance with a paramour" (1HVI V.i.21-23), and later in Act II, scene i of *Henry VI, Part Two* as he responds to Simpcox's pretended miracle with declarations of "God's goodness [that] hath been great [...] / Let never day nor night unhallowed pass, / But still remember what the Lord hath done" (2HVI II.i.82-84). Although his love of learning and his strong religious beliefs were considered "culturally appropriate examples of piety" (Bark 419) in late-medieval English society, his fellow nobles regarded these characteristics as unusual for a king, especially for "the son of Henry the Fifth, / Who made the Dauphin and the French to stoop, / And seiz'd upon their towns and provinces" (3HVI I.i.107-09). His chief rival York dismisses his "church-like humours [that] fits not for a crown" (2HVI I.i.247) and his "bookish rule [that] hath pull'd fair England down" (2HVI I.i.259), while his wife – and principal character foil – Margaret summarizes her initial disdain for his bookishness and religiosity, and in turn much of what his opponents in both the fictional and actual worlds have said of him, in similar terms:

[...] all his mind is bent to holiness,
To number Ave-Maries on his beads;

His champions are the prophets and apostles,
 His weapons holy saws of sacred writ,
 His study is his tilt-yard, and his loves
 Are brazen images of canonized saints.
 I would the college of the Cardinals
 Would choose him Pope and carry him to Rome,
 And set the triple crown upon his head –
 That were a state fit for his holiness. (2*HVI* I.iii.55-64)

There may perhaps be glimmers in these characterizations, in the first half of the tetralogy, of the melancholy/depression that has become a defining trait of both the historical Henry VI and his Shakespearean counterpart. However, the historical Henry's fragile mental state was marked by a dramatic onset, as, according to the contemporary *Giles Chronicle*, in August 1453 he "fell by a sudden and accidental fright into such a weak state of health that for a whole year and a half he had neither natural sense nor reason capable of carrying on the government and neither physician nor medicine could cure that infirmity" (qtd. in Bark 418), to the point of failing to acknowledge his son Prince Edward until several months after the latter's birth (Hallam 212; cf. 3*HVI* I.i.215-25). The closest Shakespeare seems to have come to representing this in the plays, however, are Henry's temporary collapse on learning of Gloucester's death (2*HVI* III.ii.32-38), and Margaret's criticism of his decision to pass over the birthright of his own son in favor of the York family (3*HVI* I.i.210-64), alluding to his ignoring the Prince's birth years before that scene takes place, as well as to York's position as regent when Henry was unable to manage his own affairs. Henry's "severe catatonic episode" (Jones 385 n.1) ended almost as abruptly as it had begun when "[o]n 31 December [1454], by the grace of God, the king recovered his health, at Greenwich" (Hallam 214), though he continued to suffer occasional, albeit milder, relapses for the remainder of his life. The Yorkist-friendly contemporary *Historie of the Arrivall of Edward IV in England* even played upon Henry's known reputation for dark moods in its rather euphemistic recounting of his untimely death by claiming that, upon learning of the death of his son and the defeat of the Lancaster family in battle, "he toke it to so great dispite, ire, and indingnation, that, of pure displeasure, and melencoly, he dyed the xxij. day of the moneth of May" (Bruce 38; emphasis mine). This account is in marked contrast to that of another contemporary, John Warkworth, whose assertion that "Kynge Herry, beyng inwarde in presone in the Toure of Londone, was putt to dethe [...] beyng thenne at the Toure the Duke of Gloucestre, brother to Kynge Edwarde" (21) became the inspiration for Shakespeare's depiction of Henry's murder by the Duke of Gloucester, soon to be Richard III, in Act V, scene vi of *Henry VI, Part Three*.

Ralph A. Griffiths notes in his comprehensive biography of Henry VI that "[t]he cause of his illness is unclear and speculation as to its nature is perhaps fruitless" (715); however, he does tentatively suggest either "catatonic schizophrenia" (716) or "depressive stupor" (758 n. 6; cf. Hallam 212-15; Jones 385 n. 1) as possible explanations. From a medical perspective, Nigel Bark claims the former, demonstrating in the process the construction of one type of life writing from others, all of which are produced for different purposes, and in that becoming a non-fictional analogue of sorts to Shakespeare's construction of a dramatized life writing from both historical and literary sources. Bark's essay is a medical case study that reads the life and experiences of its subject in terms of the known signs, symptoms, and characteristics of a physical or mental condition from which the individual has, or is believed to have, suffered. The first and more general type of life writing on which Bark's case study of Henry VI draws is the historical chronicle. It can, perhaps, be regarded as life writing in the broadest sense as it provides a narrative account of the history of an entire society, though it may place emphasis on the deeds of specific individuals, such as a king, noble, or military leader, as necessary, in order to catalogue the impact of that individual and his/her deeds on his/her society as a whole. The second is a particular subtype of the biography of an individual: the hagiography or spiritual biography, which presents the life of the subject in terms of his/her religious and metaphysical experiences as an example for readers to follow or as an argument in favors of sainthood for the subject.

Bark reads the report of Henry's confessor, John Blacman, that the king experienced visions of "the Lord Jesus [...] the Blessed Virgin Mary, and Saints John Baptist, Dunstan, and Anselm" (42-43) not as an account of genuine divine experiences that would typically be emphasized in a spiritual biography such as Blacman's, but as an example of the hallucinations and delusions frequently associated with schizophrenia. This does ironically bring to mind the similar visions of Henry's contemporary and opponent, Joan of Arc, whom Shakespeare treats as a darkly comical figure in *Henry VI, Part One* (see esp. 1*HVI* I.ii., V.iii.1-44, V.iv.). Bark further interprets several of Henry's decisions that Shakespeare presents in *Henry VI, Part Two*, such as the arrest of Eleanor of Gloucester for witchcraft (2*HVI* II.iii.)

and the removal of her husband from the royal court (2*HVI* III.i.) which ultimately leads to his murder (2*HVI* III.ii.). Both of these are interpreted by Bark as examples of becoming "indecisive.... [and] vindictively and cruelly punish[ing] critics" (418), and as acts of paranoia and grandiosity on Henry's part, rather than as the results of plotting by other members of the court as shown in the play. On the other hand, he reads the rumor that at the second battle of St. Albans in 1460, Henry "was placed under a tree a mile away, where he laughed and sang" (Griffiths 873) – a possible inspiration for and converse of Henry's lengthy and beautiful soliloquies in Shakespeare's depiction of the 1471 battle of Towton in *Henry VI, Part Three* on the suffering wrought by war (3*HVI* II.v.1-54, 73-78, 94-102) – as a sign of the king's having become "passive, apathetic, with the loss of drive and interest he clearly had before and with incongruity of affect" (Bark 420). To his credit, Bark acknowledges Henry's contributions to British learning with the foundations of Eton College and King's College Cambridge, as well as the more sympathetic views of historians such as Elizabeth Hallam, who notes that to see Henry "as a foolish and incompetent king who pitched England into the War of the Roses...[or as] willfully a failure...judges him in the light of the last eight years of his life...after his mental collapse" (225). Even so, much of his assessment of Henry's mental fragility stems from the dismissive comments of contemporaries such as Abbott Wheathamstead, Pope Pius II, and the Earl of Warwick (himself a prominent character in the first tetralogy), who respectively referred to him as "his mother's stupid offspring, not his father's, a son greatly degenerated from his father....[a] puppet king...more timorous than a woman, utterly devoid of wit or spirit....[and] a dolt and a fool who is ruled instead of ruling" (qtd. in Bark 419).

Historians such as Ralph A. Griffiths, Elizabeth Hallam (212-15), and Dan Jones (137-42, 385 n. 1) seem to lean more toward depression as a probable cause of Henry's behavior and moodiness. They do however acknowledge that many "[c]ontemporaries, less charitable, called it madness" (Hallam 212), including those whom Bark cites in his not entirely favorable, yet not entirely unsympathetic, "interpretation of the historical course of Henry's reign" (Jones 385 n. 1). A.B. Shaw's discussion of depression in *Hamlet* is a useful counterpoint to Bark's hypothesis of schizophrenia in *Henry VI*, both as an effort to read a Shakespearean play from the perspective of a medical case study and as another example of a case study as life writing, albeit an account of a fictional life rather than an actual one as in the case of Bark's essay. As Shaw acknowledges at the beginning of his essay, "Hamlet is a creature of Shakespeare's imagination, probably drawn from several sources [...] not an actual patient" (92); meanwhile, Bark similarly admits that his assessment is "unashamedly a fifteenth-century 'case' being presented to a twentieth-century readership with as many contemporary descriptions as possible" (416-17). Although Shaw's article regards Hamlet as an archetypal sufferer of "an acute depressive illness" (92), much of what he says of Hamlet can analogously apply to both the historical and the Shakespearean Henry VI as well.

According to Shaw, "[d]epressive illness is characterized by low mood, anhedonia [inability to feel pleasure], negative beliefs, and reduced energy" (92), many of the very characteristics upon which Bark bases his diagnosis, and which are also present, in varying degrees, in many of the historical descriptions of Henry's illness as well as in Shakespeare's dramatic portrait in the first tetralogy. Even John Blacman's hagiographical character sketch of Henry, perhaps the most sympathetic contemporary account of the king's life, presents him as exhibiting what modern scholars may describe as anhedonia, though within context it more immediately suggests an intent to seek loftier goals than it does a lack of ability to feel pleasure at all. Blacman comments that Henry's devotion to both religion and education, and often both at once, came in preference to "handling worldly and temporal things, or practising vain sports and pursuits: these he despised as trifling" (27); he cites the king's embarrassment over a suggestive performance by a group of court dancers as one such example (30). Probably the only time in Shakespeare's first tetralogy in which we see Henry engaged in any sort of "vain sports and pursuits" occurs in Act II, scene i of *Part Two*, as he accompanies the other nobles on an afternoon of hawking, a favorite pastime of royalty and nobility. His commentary in the first portion of this scene transforms the occasion into a sermon or object lesson both on "how God in all his creatures works" (2*HVI* II.i.7) and on how "man and birds are fain of climbing high" (2*HVI* II.i.8) – a sentiment that Gloucester and Winchester immediately seize upon to continue their quarrel from the previous play. This leads to his response to Simpcox's feigned miracle, which begins, as mentioned above, with an expression of piety (2*HVI* II.i.64-84) but soon becomes a combination of indignance at the poor man's irreverence, sympathy for his wife's claim that "we did it for pure need" (2*HVI* II.i.154). And, perhaps, even to a grudging acknowledgement of what humour can be found in the situation, all contained within the single line "O God, see'st thou this, and bear'st so long?" (2*HVI* II.i.151).

Later in the same play, we are given a brief example of the "low mood" and "negative beliefs" (Shaw 92) commonly associated with depression, though in this case it is a response to external as well as internal pressures, or what Gertrude Morin calls a "reactive depression" (5). At the beginning of Act IV,

scene ix, Henry reflects on the expectations that have been placed upon him from an early age, and on the instability in his kingdom resulting from both rebellious commoners and ambitious noblemen who may well be taking advantage of his uncertain mental resolve in order to fulfill their own desires:

Was ever king that joy'd an earthly throne
 And can command no more content than I?
 No sooner was I crept out of my cradle
 Than I was made a king, at nine months old.
 Was never subject long'd to be a king
 As I do long and wish to be a subject. (*2HVI* IV.ix.1-6)

Although he does attempt to defend his title against the challenges of the York family several times in *Part Three* (e.g. *3HVI* I.i., II.ii.), it is his "wish to be a subject" that most strongly informs his soliloquies on the tragedy of war that take up much of Act II, scene v of *Part Three*. These soliloquies provide a contrast of sorts – albeit one made for dramatic necessity – between the historical Henry who "as a result of depressive stupor [...] lost control of his limbs and was unable to speak" (Hallam 215) and who perhaps "laughed and sang" (Griffiths 873) under a tree while observing a battle, and the Shakespearean Henry whose eloquent outpourings of "negative beliefs and pessimism" (Shaw 92) can be read as anticipations of passages in later plays spoken by other melancholy or depressed characters, such as, for example, Jaques' "All the world's a stage" (*AYLI* II.vii.139-66) or Hamlet's "To be or not to be" (*Ham.* III.i.55-89).

Having been essentially a figurehead in the first two plays that bear his name, Henry finally truly comes into his own as a character with his lengthy laments in *Part Three*. This part combines elegy with pastoral poetry – the latter anticipating Shakespeare's use of the pastoral in *As You Like It*, most likely written approximately a decade later – to express grief for the fallen, desire for a peaceful life, guilt and self-blame for the war, and "a public statement of his melancholy" (Shaw 92). As we later see with characters such as Jaques and Hamlet, Shakespeare establishes Henry's melancholy and depression in long monologues, playing to his own strengths as a poet and to those of the actor(s) speaking the lines. This is a result, in part, of the historical Henry's virtual lack of speech and expression while experiencing those same feelings would have been more difficult, and possibly less interesting, to portray on stage. Indeed, as A.B. Shaw notes of Hamlet, but which is equally applicable to Henry, "[t]he needs of the drama preclude a perfect description of depression. [...] Shakespeare's audience would have received badly a central character slow in speech and slower in action" (92).

Over the course of the first two plays, we have seen glimpses of the combination of studiousness, piety, and melancholy that make up Henry's character in both the plays and the historical source texts. But it is within the soliloquies of Act II, scene v of *Part Three* that Shakespeare provides us with the strongest examples in favor of reading Henry as a sufferer of what would most likely now be considered depression. Twice in this scene, for instance, Henry expresses suicidal ideation; the first such reference occurs as he introduces his contrast between the simple life of a shepherd and the complicated life of a king (*3HVI* II.v.21-54) with the lines "Would I were dead, if God's good will were so; / For what is in this world but grief and woe?" (*3HVI* II.v.20-21). In the second, he responds to the son who has killed his father (*3HVI* II.v.55-72) and the father who has killed his son (*3HVI* II.v.79-93) with the cry, "Woe above woe! Grief more than common grief! / O that my death would stay these ruthless deeds! / O pity, pity, gentle heaven, pity!" (*3HVI* II.v.94-96). In both of these passages, he not only blames himself for the war and the dissensions in his kingdom, but wonders whether, even though *his* death would not bring back the victims of the war, it might at least bring an end to the fighting between the rival noble families that is tearing everyday families apart in its wake.

In this we see a common ground between Henry and Hamlet, for both of whom melancholy and depression are defining character traits that can further be seen as their tragic flaws for the purposes of their respective plays (Bradley 121-28; Shaw 92). Hamlet responds to his "loss in his father's death and further disappointment in his mother's almost immediate remarriage" (Morin 5) with a meditation on suicide, the first of many for him, that is very similar to Henry's wish for death that his kingdom might live:

O that this too too sallied flesh would melt,
 Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
 Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
 His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. (*Ham.* I.ii. 129-32)

Hamlet's family tragedies lead him to question his entire worldview, from faith in God to trust in other people to the very idea of what is possible. More than once he "expresses not only despair but a desire to extinguish consciousness" (Morin 5) only to talk himself out of it over the course of his various soliloquies. Henry, on the other hand, does not "dwell on death and suicide" (Shaw 92) as Hamlet often appears to do, and instead derives what comfort he can from religious devotion and study (cf. Blacman 27, 43-44). Though he continues to mourn the dead and lament the strain that the war has placed on his family (*3HVI* III.i.13-21, 28-54), he realizes, "My crown is call'd content, / A crown it is that seldom kings enjoy" (*3HVI* III.i. 64-65), and peacefully accepts his defeat by the Yorks. Upon being restored to his throne, he announces his intention to leave power in the hands of Warwick and Clarence while retiring to "lead a private life, / And in devotion spend my latter days / To sin's rebuke and my Creator's praise" (*3HVI* IV.vi.42-44) – as indeed he does as a prisoner in the Tower in the penultimate scene of *Part Three*.

In light of these modern readings of whatever afflictions may have befallen Henry VI in either history or literature, it is useful to reexamine "an important document of Elizabethan psychology" (O'Sullivan 667) that has, for over a century, been recognized as a potential influence on Shakespeare's melancholy/depressed characters such as Henry VI, Jaques, and Hamlet: the English physician and theologian Timothy Bright's *Treatise of Melancholie*, first published in 1586, about two or three years prior to the first performance of *Henry VI, Part One*. It is interesting to note, however, that despite the evidence in the plays for reading Henry VI as a melancholy character type, Shakespeare uses the word "melancholy" only twice in all three of the *Henry VI* plays, both times in *Part Two* (*2HVI* IV.i.4; V.i.34) and neither time actually referring to Henry.

Both informed by and responding to the theories of humors in the works of Aristotle, Hippocrates, Galen, and other physicians and philosophers of antiquity, Bright's work recognized a "difference [...] betwixt natural melancholy and that heavie hand of God upon the afflicted conscience, tormented with the remorse of sinne, and fear of his judgement" ("Epistle" 4). In other words, recognizing a difference between melancholy as a disease of the body and as a disease of the mind and soul. However, Bright acknowledges that the body, mind, and soul can and do affect one another:

Nowe as it is not possible to passe from one extreme to an other, but by a meane; and no meane is there in the nature of man but spirit: by this only the bodie affecteth the mind: and the bodie and spirits affected, partly by disorder, and partly through outward occasions, minister discontentment as it were to the mind: and in the ende breake that bande of fellowship, wherewith they were both linked to-gether. (38)

We may compare Timothy Bright's distinction between melancholy of the body, of the mind, and of the soul with John Blacman's account of the historical Henry VI's pursuits of spiritual and academic betterment. Blacman states that Henry "cherished a son's fear toward the Lord" (26) with "fear" meant in the more neutral sense of awe, respect, and reverence than in the sense of "the afflicted conscience" Bright describes in his treatise. Furthermore, during the decade in which Blacman had been Henry's confessor, "never throughout that long time had any blemish of mortal sin touched his soul" (27), though the king's "great watchfulness" (27) of both himself and his court (cf. *1HVI* III.i.65-73, *2HVI* III.iii.) is partly explained as being "in view of the displeasure of God" (Blacman 27) as much as out of a desire to do what was right. Blacman's description of Henry's piety that seems almost to border on scrupulosity is in many ways an anticipation of Bright's commentary on

certaine persons which enjoy all the comfortes of this life whatsoever wealth can procure, and whatsoever friendship offereth of kindnes, and whatsoever security may assure them: yet to be overwhelmed with heavines, and dismaide with such feare, as they can neither receive consolation, nor hope of assurance, notwithstanding ther be neither matter of feare, or discontentment, nor yet cause of daunger, but contrarily of great comfort, and gratulation [...] being not moued by any aduersity present or imminent [...] (90)

Even Henry's outward manifestation of simplicity and humility by preferring to dress austere in "wholly black, rejecting expressly all curious fashion of clothing" (Blacman 36) is reminiscent not only of Hamlet's "nighted colour" (*Ham.* I.ii.66) signifying both mourning and depression. It also brings to mind Bright's contrast between the perceived tendency among sufferers of melancholy to prefer dark colors and simple designs, and his suggestion of "seemely ornament[s] [...] which might entice the senses to delight" (264) as a potential counterbalance to both dark clothing and dark moods.

According to Bright, melancholy can also produce "not only phantastically apparitions wrought by apprehension only of common sense, but fantasie, an other parte of internall sense compoundeth and forgoeth disguised shapes which giue great terror vnto the heart" (103). Henry's visions of saints as reported by Blacman (42-43) could thus be regarded as benevolent, even comforting, examples of the apparitions and fantasies that Bright attributes to melancholy. Conversely, within Shakespeare's first tetralogy, Henry never truly experiences the same sort of "phantastically apparitions" (Bright 103) as does Hamlet – or, for that matter, Henry's enemy and murderer, Richard III, late in his own namesake play (*RIII* V.iii.118-206). However, his defiant final words to Richard in Act V, scene vi of *Henry VI, Part Three* (*3HVI* V.vi.34-55) could be read as an apprehension of the "darkenes, perill, doubt, frightes, and whatsoeuer the harte of man most doth abhor" (Bright 104) both within his inner psychological world and, as embodied by Richard, in the external world of the play.

Both the inappropriately cheerful response attributed to the historical Henry VI at the second battle of St. Albans (Griffiths 873) and the mournful monologues of the Shakespearean Henry VI at the battle of Towton (*3HVI* II.v.1-54, 73-78, 94-102) can also be regarded in terms of characteristics Bright associates with various subtypes of melancholy, categorized according to the particular mixtures of humors that were believed to contribute to each subtype. The former appears to be an example of what Bright calls sanguine melancholy, of which he says "If bloud minister matter to this fire, euery serious thing for a time, is turned into a iest, & tragedies into comedies, and lamentation into gigges and daunces" (111). The latter, meanwhile, seems to match more closely with traits of natural melancholy, including "solitarines, morning, weeping, & [...] melancholie laughter, sighing, sobbing, lamentation, countenance demisse and hanging downe, blushing and bashfull, of pace slow, silent, negligent, refusing the light and frequency of men, delighted more in solitarines & obscurity" (Bright 124).

Bright's list of common symptoms of melancholy accounts for many of the traits not only of Henry VI as Shakespeare's first great example of a tragic melancholic figure, but also of his more comic treatment of this character type: Jaques of *As You Like It*. Indeed, Jaques' description of "the condition he evidently considers peculiar to himself" (Heffernan 98) is very reminiscent of Bright's classifications of melancholy as well as those present in the works of other physicians of the time such as André du Laurens (see Heffernan 96-117, 129-35) and, later, Thomas Burton (see Heffernan 97-119):

I have neither the scholar's melancholy, which is emulation; nor the musician's, which is fantastical; nor the courtier's, which is proud; nor the soldier's, which is ambitious; nor the lawyer's, which is politic; nor the lady's, which is nice; nor the lover's, which is all these: but it is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects, and indeed the sundry contemplation of my travels, in which my often rumination wraps me in a most humorous sadness. (*AYLI* IV.i.10-30)

Carol Falvo Heffernan describes Jaques' sympathy for the wounded deer in Act II, scene i, as an example of one of Bright's subcategories, "phlegmatic melancholy" (105). This scene brings to mind Blacman's report that Henry similarly "did not care to see the creature, when taken, cruelly defiled with slaughter, nor would he ever take part in the killing of an innocent beast" (40), which seems also to have informed the Shakespearean king's revulsion at seeing the head of his opponent York mounted on the city gates (*3HVI* II.i.5-8, 43-55). Jaques uses the imagery of nature and animals as a contrast to "The body of the country, city, court" (*AYLI* II.i.59) in a similar way to Henry's use of the imagery of shepherds and sheep – from which the genre of the pastoral takes its name – to decry the strife for which he holds himself responsible (*3HVI* II.v.1-54). Henry's seeking of solace in "religious solitude" (Heffernan 107; cf. *3HVI* IV.iv.42-44) seems on the surface an anticipation of Jaques' similar decision in the final scene of *As You Like It* (*AYLI* V.iv.180-96). Jaques' disdain for society, and even for human companionship, serves as a reminder that "the cloistered life is unnatural" (Heffernan 107). But Henry's wish for "a happy life / To be no better than a homely swain" (*3HVI* II.v.21-22) is both an indication of his pursuit of higher goals than wealth and power and an expression of the overarching theme in Shakespeare's history plays of the expectations and responsibilities of a king to his people (cf. e.g. *2HIV* III.i.4-31; *HV* IV.i.230-84).

Nigel Bark has pointed out that "[c]oncepts of mental illness do change over time and one name may be given to different concepts at different times" (417). This is evident in the multiple possible readings of the historical and Shakespearean characters of Henry VI, and the various sorts of life writings that have embodied and given rise to these readings. Within John Blacman's hagiography and to some extent among Lancastrian supporters in general, Henry's behavior is summarized as extreme piety, whereas the Yorkist supporters tended to regard it as madness, and both ends of this spectrum are present in many of the historical chronicles Shakespeare used as sources. Timothy Bright and other physicians and

philosophers of his time would likely have characterized Henry as a melancholy figure, the interpretation that Shakespeare seems to have favored not only for Henry but for other characters such as Hamlet and Jaques. Many modern historians such as Ralph A. Griffiths or physicians such as A.B. Shaw have read Henry's character traits as depicted in the chronicles, biographies, and plays as indications of depression, while Bark's case study sees him as a sufferer of schizophrenia. Such readings are not exhaustive, and could even possibly encompass some model as yet unknown or unidentified by present-day readers. These various interpretations also serve to remind us that "Shakespeare was acute enough to observe the behavioral phenomena of depressive illness, even though he would not have categorized or explained them the way we do" (Pickering 94), nor would the authors of the source texts from which he constructed his plays. The changes in our understanding of the various forms of depressive illness have also helped to influence views of Henry VI as both a king and a Shakespearean tragic figure. During his lifetime and afterward, he was simultaneously viewed by Lancastrian followers as a martyr and even a potential candidate for sainthood as outlined in Blacman's spiritual biography of him, and by Yorkist followers as an incompetent "who began his rule as a wailing baby and ended it as a shambling simpleton" (Jones xxxviii). In striking a balance between these two extremes, Shakespeare and his immediate sources did much to codify him in the popular imagination as "a kind of one-man chorus on the struggle being waged for lawless power [...] pious and articulate but no less plaintive as he is being crushed by forces he cannot control" (Baker 628). These forces including ambitious and unscrupulous rivals, the internal torments of his own mind and soul, and quite often both. Attempts to regard his personality traits and behavior in modern terms and thus to arrive at tentative diagnoses of mental illnesses such as schizophrenia or clinical depression need not diminish him as an important historical or dramatic figure, but powerfully demonstrate that such illnesses, far from being character defects, are "devastating [...], occurring in all ages and classes, able to destroy personality, family, and life, and able to change the course of history" (Bark 420-21) if left untreated. The various accounts of Henry's life and mental afflictions serve as further reminders that no matter what labels are given to these traits and behaviors, and no matter which form life writings about him take – historical chronicles, spiritual biographies, history plays, or medical case studies – behind them all is a real person whose life story became a source of inspiration for some of the best-known historical poetry/drama in English literature.

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