

**Banish All the World:
The Necessary Isolation of Monarchy**

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The unofficial subtitle of this paper is "Why King Henry has no friends." Friendship is a common theme throughout Shakespeare's plays, but he more often interrogates than upholds the classical ideals of the homosocial bond. Shakespeare often seems to be asking if classical perfect friendship, in the mode of Aristotle and Cicero, is really all it's cracked up to be, and if the world might not be better served by relationships that better balance the emotional, the intellectual, and the sexual. When it comes to kingship, however, the lines are fairly well-drawn: while alliance is a necessity, friendship is a hindrance. None of Shakespeare's plays illustrate that quandary so well as the plays of the Great Tetralogy. Through Prince Hal, later Henry V, Shakespeare explores what it means to be a good king – not a good friend, and perhaps not even a wholly good man, but a good king – a smart king, a canny king. A king cannot have any true friends because a king has no equal.

Briefly, a look at the classical traditions which helped to shape the early modern view on idealized friendship: Aristotle, in *The Nicomachean Ethics*, provides the basis of the concept of friendship as an expression of virtue and beneficence. Aristotle begins these essays by stating that friendship is "most necessary with a view to living. For without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods" (192; bk 8, chp 1). Aristotle differentiates friendships based on need, advantage, or utility from a friendship based solely on feelings of goodwill. The ideal friendship, according to Aristotle, is not only between two men of equal virtue, but also of equal age and equal social status. Friendships between men of *unequal* status, Aristotle perceives as essentially unstable – though not impossible to reconcile with his overall concept of friendship. From the *Nicomachean Ethics*: "In all friendships implying inequality the love also should be proportional, i.e. the better should be more loved than he loves, and so should the more useful," and so forth (203-204; bk 8,

chp 7). This correction, in Aristotle's estimation, maintains the balance which ought to guide a friendship (202; bk 8, chp 6). The lesser man gives more of himself in love and devotion, and he benefits from the greater status, greater virtue, or greater ability of his friend. The greater man, then, ought to receive more in love than he gives, owing to his higher worth; Aristotle champions love "in proportion to the merit of the parties" (204; bk 8, chp 7).

Much of the *early modern* perception of friendship originated with the Roman author Marcus Tullius Cicero, who in 44 BCE published his *De Amicitia*, "*On Friendship*." English translations of *De Amicitia* appeared in 1481, 1530, 1550, 1562, and 1577, and thus certainly would have been available to Shakespeare. In many ways, Cicero's views echo Aristotle's: Cicero agrees that friendship is vitally important to human existence, as well as dwelling on the importance of goodwill to maintaining friendship. His relation of virtue to friendship is more succinct than Aristotle's, however; his simply put statement that, *amicitia nisi inter bonos esse non potest*, "friendship can only exist between good men" becomes, in later centuries, a touchstone of the philosophy. Like Aristotle, Cicero differentiates relationships based on need from those that spring from mutual admiration and understanding (143). Cicero has more trouble, though, untangling the interplay of *status* and friendship. While Aristotle thought it proper that a greater man be more loved than a friend of lesser status, Cicero believed that friends ought to treat each other *as* equals despite any disparity in rank: "The superior should put himself on a level with his inferior, so the latter ought not to grieve that he is surpassed by the former in intellect, fortune, or position" (179-181). His motives for promoting a more egalitarian view of friendship possibly derive from his personal background, as the plebeian son of an country equestrian who grew up to socialize with some of the most important patrician families in Rome.

The reality, however, is rarely so neat, and despite his ideals, Cicero recognized the challenges that friendship presented to leadership. Many of his examples from history and legend

outline the stress that a power imbalance puts on a friendship, and he notes “Therefore, true friendships are very hard to find among those whose time is spent in office or in business of a public kind. For where can you find a man so high-minded as to prefer his friend’s advancement to his own?” (175). That question of advancement plagues Shakespeare’s kings in histories and tragedies alike.

Moving to Shakespeare, a note on his use of the word “friend” and its cognates: Throughout his plays, the word “friends” is generally synonymous with “allies” – a form of friendship that the classical authors would have deemed inferior to perfect *amicitia*. In this, the plays of the Henriad fit a pattern with the rest of Shakespeare’s canon, where the plural “friends” operates quite differently from the same word in the singular. “Friends,” in the plural, almost never refers to a one-on-one bond between two men; rather, the term refers nearly exclusively to large groups, often political factions or military allies. As such, it is no surprise that the term occurs far more often in the history plays than in the comedies, whereas all subgenres represent “friend” (singular) more or less equally. Both words, “friend” and “friends”, occur over 400 times in the canon; by contrast, the words “ally”, “allies”, and “allied” occur less than ten times each across all of the plays, and “alliance” only sixteen times, scattered more or less equally across the genres – this despite that the words were by no means uncommon in the English language of the time. Shakespeare seems, then, more interested in the dramatic possibility of *friendship* and its connotations over those of *alliance*.

To the tetralogy and the evolution of Hal as the friendless king: The arc begins with and in *Richard II*, who stands as an important counterpoint to Hal’s decisions regarding his status and his control over his environment. Richard not only wants friends, he needs them – a natural inclination in a man, but one which proves inappropriate for a king. The close association Richard has to Bushy, Bagot, and Green incites jealousy among the nobles; one reason a king cannot have friends is because, as Thomas MacFaul notes in his 2007 book *Male Friendship in Shakespeare and His*

Contemporaries, "any attempt to choose a close friend leaves a king open to charges of favouritism," a theme we also see played upon in Marlowe's *Edward II* (121) and in the personal life of Queen Elizabeth I. For this reason, Richard's friends become the "caterpillars of the commonwealth" that Henry IV and his associates determine to eliminate (*Richard II* 2.3.165). Banishment is not enough; to be truly cut from the king, they must be executed (as we also see with Gaveston and Spencer in *Edward II*).

The loss of his friends is the beginning of the end for Richard; after he learns of their executions, he begins to relinquish his own kingship. He himself calls attention to the fact that a need for friendship, among other things, makes a king no better than a common man:

Throw away respect,
 Tradition, form, and ceremonious duty,
 For you have but mistook me all this while.
 I live with bread, like you; feel want,
 Taste grief, need friends. Subjected thus,
 How can you say to me I am a king?
 (3.2.168-173)

Friendship is, to Richard, as vital as air and food, its own form of sustenance. From this point onwards in the play, Richard vacillates between asserting his royalty and flinging it away; his desperation for companionship is his undoing. He cannot both hold himself to the mandates of divine kingship *and also* feel and act as other men feel and act, particularly in the matter of friendship. It is an untenable contradiction. Ultimately, Bolingbroke and the other rebels seem to take Richard at his word: he is a man with common needs, and therefore, he *is* no king.

Henry IV, by contrast, stands too aloof from his allies. He overcorrects Richard's fault, and admits to doing so (though of course he sees it as a virtue) in his admonition to his son in Act Three, scene two of *1 Henry IV*. The bulk of that speech is a contrast between the behavior of "the skipping King" Richard who "enfeoffed himself to popularity" and his own, that "won by rareness

such solemnity.” He cautions Prince Hal to be more like himself than like King Richard, worried that Hal is forfeiting “princely privilege” by being so “lavish of [his] presence, so common-hackneyed in the eyes of men, so stale and cheap to vulgar company” (3.2.39-88 *passim*). Further, Henry draws a direct connection between overfamiliarity and lack of military prowess, comparing his own strength to Hotspur’s, Richard’s inability to command to the faults he believes will make Hal incapable of inspiring men to action.

Though there is some wisdom in his advice to his son, there is also danger. Henry IV seems to perceive cool, composed distance as the best way to assure loyalty – but he forgets to pay where he promises. In failing to deliver sufficient rewards to those who helped him to the crown, Henry IV foments rebellion, and the rebels call upon that seeming-friendship in their *casus belli* in Act Five, scene one. In defending his actions to the King, Worcester notes, “We were the first and dearest of your friends. / For you my staff of office did I break / In Richard’s time” (5.1.33-35). Henry shrugs off their accusations as unfounded: “Never yet did insurrection want / Such water-colors to impaint his cause,” but nonetheless declares that any of the rebels who lay down arms immediately “shall be my friend again, and I’ll be his” (5.1.79-80, 108). The language of friendship is as the coinage of inflation to Henry IV, worth less the more easily it is struck. The pattern repeats in *Part 2*, as when Archbishop Scroop notes that Henry’s “foes are so enrooted with his friends / That, plucking to unfix an enemy, / He doth unfasten so and shake a friend” (4.1).

Henry seems to recognize the fault in his logic towards the end, when bestowing his “very latest counsel” to his son. He laments then the “by-paths and indirect crook’d ways” he took to the throne. He speaks of the early allies who turned on him and rightly notes “all my reign hath been but as a scene acting that argument” – as indeed, for Shakespeare, it has been. He further cautions Hal: “though thou stand’st more sure than I could do,” thanks to his direct succession, “thou art not firm enough, since griefs are green; / And all my friends, which thou must make thy friends, / Have but

their stings and teeth newly ta'en out." He suggests to Hal that the best way to deflect internal strife is with foreign war; Hal will, of course, take this advice and run with it in his own particular way.

In both parts of *Henry IV* and in *Henry V*, Hal stands in stark contrast to his forebears. Though Hal appears to embrace friendship, even with those of common birth as Richard does, Hal keeps a piece of himself apart, never relying overmuch on *anyone*. Rather than elevating his "unrestrained loose companions," thus making them figures of jealousy and resentment among England's aristocracy, Hal lowers himself to their level (*Richard II* 5.3.7). These associations, however, can only endure so long as Hal remains the heir, the young prince. When he assumes his throne and becomes that which he had "never promised," Prince Hal must become Henry V free of entanglements (*1 Henry IV* 1.2.187). Again from Macfaul, "The Eastcheap fellowship allows him to return to court with mystique and authority even over his brothers... Hal will rule alone, and his Eastcheap milieu has merely enabled him to avoid entanglements and obligations at court" (125-126). As he so aptly predicts for himself while still in his youth, Henry V is "more wondered at" for having risen out of ignominy (*1 Henry IV* 1.2.179).

The closest relationship Hal has to anyone is to Falstaff, his boon companion and his surrogate father-figure. In his 2000 book *Shakespeare on Love and Friendship*, Allan Bloom calls this "a parody of Aristotelian friendship," claiming that the Prince and Falstaff appreciate each other only for themselves, though it is far from the mutual recognition of *virtue* required by Aristotelian and Ciceronian standards (Bloom 132). Where this argument fails, however, is in Falstaff's constant awareness of Prince Hal's impending ascension to the throne. From their first scene together, Falstaff wants to know what his position will be in Henry V's England. His first line familiarly addresses the prince as "Hal" and "lad," yet the very next time he speaks, he brings up the future: "When thou art king" (*1 Henry IV*, 1.2). His awareness continues throughout their association and is both most comic and most potent in Act Two, scene four of *Part 1*, when he and Hal take turns

playacting the very scene Hal and Henry will enact in truth in Act Three, scene one. Falstaff paints himself as a beneficial influence, and moreover, a critical one: "Banish plump Jack, and banish all the world," to which Hal replies, "I do; I will." Chilling, poignant, sorrowful, resigned – the precise coloring of the line depends upon an actor's interpretation, but it is ominous in any reading, and Jack seems to recognize it as such, reluctant to relinquish the scene without a more satisfying resolution.

Tellingly, though Falstaff uses the term "friends" or "friendship" with Hal several times, Hal never returns the gesture of vocabulary except in negation. (In Part 1, Act Five, scene one, responding to Falstaff's imploration, "If thou see me down in the battle and bestride me, so; 'tis a point of friendship" with the jab, "Nothing but a colossus can do thee that friendship.") Hal does, however, use the term once with Ned Poins, and several times in the sense of "allies", an echo of his father's usage.

By *Henry IV, Part 2*, Hal has already begun dissociating himself from Falstaff and the rest of his Eastcheap associates; he shares far less stage time with them in *Part 2* than in *Part 1*, more often appearing in the company of Poins or his brothers, and Falstaff more in the company of Bardolph, Pistol, and Doll Tearsheet. Nonetheless, Falstaff celebrates Hal's ascension to the throne because he sees in it a promise of advancement for himself and punishment for his enemies: "Blessed are they that have been my friends; and woe to my Lord Chief Justice" (5.3). Falstaff clings to this delusion of reward for his friendship even after Henry spurns him: "Look you, he must seem thus to the world. Fear not your advancements; I will be the man yet that shall make you great" (5.5). The new Henry V, though, could not be more clear about having discarded his past: "God doth know, so shall the world perceive / That I have turned away my former self; / So will I those that kept me company" (5.5). This is the fulfillment of what he vowed in *Part 1*; "plump Jack" does indeed stand in for all the world that he banishes from his heart.

Though Falstaff never appears in *Henry V*, members of the former Eastcheap crowd relate his offstage death, which is, like so much of Falstaff, entwined with his relationship to Hal: he dies because "the King has killed his heart" by disavowing him (2.1.79). Shakespeare gives no indication, however, that Henry ever looks back at what he abandons. The language of friendship persists, though; it is a point of concern for Hal-turned-Henry as he follows his father's advice by making war in France. Disguised in Act Four, scene one, the king twice responds to the call of "Who's there?" with "A friend", once from Pistol and once from Michael Williams – blurring the distinction of the term between friend and ally. He is no longer, however, any man's friend in truth. The jest he plays on Williams, regarding the glove and the cap, rings hollow, false. Henry is no longer the lad who can play at pranking alongside commoners; the distinction of his rank is now too much a part of him, even when he is disguised, and his Act Four, scene one soliloquy, lamenting the "hard condition" of kingship, shows it. That soliloquy demonstrates how much he is not like Richard; Henry V perceives the person of the king as far different from the common man, with greater burdens, needs, and desires – and friendship is listed nowhere among them.

Shakespeare thus presents in Henry V a king who recognizes the Aristotelian reality of a leader's isolation. Friendship cannot be a true part of his life, but rather a tool for his military and political purposes. He calls his soldiers "friends" (and, more famously, the even more intimate "brothers") to spur them on to victory, and he promises Princess Katherine that he will be "a friend to France." Henry can use the outward trappings and vocabulary of friendship in a way that, thanks to his youthful Eastcheap associations, feels more genuine than his father's stodgy proclamations. Through the language of friendship, he can win esteem from his subjects without any danger of falling victim to an ambitious friend's manipulation or to jealous in-fighting among his aristocracy. By distancing himself from Falstaff and the rest of his former companions, Hal proves himself a false friend, but a wise – if ruthless – king.

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