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### Counterfactuals and Prefactuals in Shakespeare: Understanding the Human Mind and Human Behavior Through the Literary Analysis of Conditional Mental Simulation Thoughts in the Narratives of Plays

Cierra R. Cowan

*University of New Hampshire*

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Counterfactuals and Prefactuals in Shakespeare: Understanding the Human Mind and Human  
Behavior Through the Literary Analysis of Conditional Mental Simulation Thoughts in the  
Narratives of Plays

Cierra Cowan

Undergraduate Honors Thesis

Advisor: Dr. Dennis Britton

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## INTRODUCTION

While Shakespeare's plays have been immortalized as some of the greatest works of literary history, their legacy within the fields of cognitive psychology and neuroscience remains largely unrecognized and almost entirely unacknowledged. Dr. Matt Dry, a psychologist at the University of Adelaide, is one of the few to hail Shakespeare's important contributions to the domain of science, explaining, "One way to define psychology is the scientific study of behavior. [...] [Shakespeare's] body of work is a fantastic vehicle for thinking about, and understanding, human psychology" (Dry). While many literary scholars and historians have turned to Shakespeare in the hopes of better understanding human behavior, desires, and relationships, few of them have approached the literary analysis of Shakespeare through the lens of cognitive psychology or cognitive neuroscience. This is likely due, in large part, to the relative youth of these fields—cognitive psychology as a scientific discipline has only been around for about 150 years, and cognitive neuroscience, even fewer. As these fields develop and continue to evolve, they constantly offer new approaches to studying and understanding the human condition. More and more, these advances suggest new ways to examine the inner workings of the mind, especially how they relate to behavior. By applying the approaches and frameworks offered by these scientific disciplines to the study of Shakespeare, we can further our understanding of Shakespeare's plays as literature, but just as importantly, strengthen our understanding of the human mind and human behavior.

In this project, I turn to a more recent framework for understanding mental cognition—the theory of counterfactual and prefactual thinking—and apply this approach to the study of Shakespeare. While the philosophical principle of a counterfactual has been around for centuries,

the notion of a counterfactual thought did not firmly emerge until the 1980s<sup>1</sup>. Since then, the theory of counterfactual thinking, and subsequently prefactual thinking, has expanded its presence within mainstream cognitive psychology and neuroscience. The generation of counterfactual and prefactual thoughts is believed to be a constructive mental process, similar to memory and imagination, in which one mentally simulates scenes (of past, present, or future reality) based on action-outcome linkages (Epstude et al. 48-56). In this way, counterfactual and prefactual thoughts can be categorized as conditional mental simulation thoughts.

The role of these conditional mental simulation thoughts in works of literature, however, remains largely unexplored. Most literary applications of counterfactual thinking involve considering how readers imagine alternatives to the events in a story<sup>2</sup> or how counterfactual thinking, in the form of alternative history, informs the creation of fictional stories<sup>3</sup>. Only one scholar, Amir Khan, has pursued a detailed counterfactual analysis of Shakespeare, but his approach aligns with the former, looking at how counterfactual evaluation by the audience can evoke the intended tragic effect of Shakespeare's tragedies (Khan). In my analysis of Shakespeare, I will examine counterfactual and prefactual thinking within the context of the narratives themselves, turning it into a framework for understanding the inner and outer worlds of the characters and the plot.

In the chapters that follow, I present a counterfactual and prefactual reading of specific Shakespeare plays, looking at two different genres. In the first chapter, I echo Amir Khan's focus

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<sup>1</sup> Proposed in Kahneman and Tversky's 1982 article, *The Simulation Heuristic*.

<sup>2</sup> Examples of such works are collected in the book *Counterfactual Thinking—Counterfactual Writing*.

<sup>3</sup> Representative examples of such works include “‘What-If?’ and Beyond: Counterfactual History in Literature” (Singles 180-88) and *Telling It like It Wasn't: The Counterfactual Imagination in History and Fiction*. (Gallagher).

on tragedy and offer my own reading of *Othello*. In the subsequent chapter, I shift to Shakespeare's history plays, specifically examining *1 Henry IV* and *Henry V*, two plays of the Henriad. The differences in genre provide two varied contexts for analyzing the function of conditional mental simulations, with each offering its own unique insights regarding the relationship between mental processes and behavior. The goal of this project is two-fold in nature: Firstly, to use a psychological-neuroscientific lens to understand the underlying forces that drive the narratives of Shakespeare's plays forward, and secondly, to better understand the complex inner workings of the human mind, particularly how mental processes function in driving behavior.

## CHAPTER 1: FROM MENTAL SIMULATION TO MURDER: COUNTERFACTUALS & PREFACTUALS AS THE DRIVING NARRATIVE FORCE IN *OTHELLO*

Storytelling, whether of real or imagined events, is fundamental to the human experience, and has rightfully warranted the deep consideration of scholars across disciplines, as it offers an entry-point into exploring and understanding the human condition. Two components critical to storytelling are imagination and memory. While they might at first seem distinct processes, the idea that they are somehow linked has been observed at least as early as 1798, with Kant noting how remembering the past is used to help envision the future (77). Within the last century, psychological and scientific research has repeatedly observed commonalities in the mental processes of imagination and episodic memory, with each process activating the same brain regions<sup>4</sup>. One theory, the constructive episodic simulation hypothesis, argues that the overlap in activated brain regions is due to the fact that both imagining and recalling a scene are constructive in nature (Schacter 603-13). Emerging from this hypothesis is the widely-held notion that long-term episodic memory functions primarily as a means to plan for the future<sup>5</sup>. Taken together, imagination and memory appear to work in tandem to generate representations of the world in a manner that resembles story-making, where imagined events are formulated from memories of the past to direct behavior in the future.

When these cognitive processes proceed in this manner, they eventually emerge as a single mentally-simulative thought, which psychologists have coined counterfactuals or prefactuals, depending on the specifics of the construction. Colloquially known as ‘what-if’

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<sup>4</sup> Findings reported in Hassabis 299-306 and Summerfield et al. 1501-09.

<sup>5</sup> See studies Klein et al. 13-22, Bartlett, and Mullaney and Maguire 220-34.

thoughts, these thoughts are delineated by their temporal characteristics. A counterfactual thought is a mental representation of an alternative to a *past* event, action, or state, or in other words, a past-focused conditional proposition (Epstude and Roese 168). In contrast, a prefactual thought is a future-focused conditional proposition. It creates a mental representation of a future that may (or may not) occur, depending causally on actions in the present or near-present (Epstude et al. 48). While a counterfactual stipulates that ‘If I had done ‘x’, then outcome ‘y’ would have resulted instead’, a prefactual proposes that ‘if I take action ‘x’, it will lead to outcome ‘y’’. Prefactual thoughts, which are often derived from precursor counterfactuals, and counterfactual thoughts themselves often function to guide future behavior in a goal-driven manner<sup>6</sup>.

While it is only within the past few decades that the study of counterfactual thought (and eventually prefactual thought) has become a focus of the scientific community, for centuries, works of literature and their scholars have approached the study of mental representation from a variety of angles. In particular, Shakespearean studies contain a substantial body of work dedicated to such themes. Garret Sullivan identifies memory and forgetting as concepts important to Renaissance drama, especially Shakespeare, where “the subjective experience and its representation, memory, and forgetting are inevitable objects of dramatic inquiry” (5). Imagination has also received significant attention, although not always in the context of the internal mind. Jerome Mandel argues that “imagination creates *in the world of dream* an experience which is derived from the stuff of the real world” [my emphasis] (63). While Mandel is analyzing the imagination as it is manifested in dreams, he is still concerned with examining

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<sup>6</sup> Studies that derive this conclusion include Mercier et al. 261-69, Epstude et al. 48-56, and Byrne, “Counterfactual Thought” 135-57.

how imagination is a form of representation derived from details of the real world; if we omit the italicized phrase, the middle-man is removed, revealing the foundational link he identifies between imagination and the representation of reality. Of all Shakespeare's plays, *Othello* receives arguably the most inquiry surrounding imagination, with many critics noting that, unlike his other tragedies, the events that set the plot of *Othello* in motion never actually occur (Hopkins 1). Lisa Koen describes how it is "through a careful construction of images in Othello's imagination" that "finally concludes in madness" (3). Given the unique situation of imagination in this play, this chapter will focus on *Othello*, examining the interplay among imagination, episodic details of the past and present, and (internal) representation through the lens of counterfactuals and prefactuals, two types of thoughts that are conditional mental simulations.

To date, only one scholar has offered a "counterfactual reading" of Shakespeare. In his 2016 book, *Shakespeare in Hindsight: Counterfactual Thinking and Shakespearean Tragedy*, Khan examines how readers and viewers imagine and consider alternatives to the events that have occurred in a play. He uses the counterfactual as a reading strategy that allows modern-day audiences to experience the plays in a state of 'presentness' and experience the intended 'tragic effect'. In this paper, I will perform my own type of counterfactual (and prefactual) reading of *Othello*. Rather than applying the process of counterfactual thinking as a means of analysis, I will instead examine how counterfactual and prefactual thinking function within the context of the play's narrative itself. I seek to address the following question: How do conditional mental simulations (counterfactual and prefactual thoughts) shape the mindset(s), behavior(s), and action(s) of the characters to drive the narrative forward? A close reading of *Othello* reveals that conditional mental simulations (counterfactual and prefactual thoughts) function as the driving

narrative force of the play, suggesting the play's underlying concern with how non-real, internal events become transformed into real, external events.

The play opens with Iago outlining his inner desires and intentions for future actions, but in order to understand how this initial scene catalyzes the events of the plot, it is crucial to recognize that Iago's manipulation hinges on the principle of reason. In his monologue on 'virtue', Iago uses the metaphor of a garden to discuss the body, defining one's will as the gardener, arguing, "If the brain of our lives had not one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most preposterous conclusions. But we have reason to cool our raging motions, our carnal stings, or unbitted lusts" (1.3.318-22). Iago projects his inner self as one guided by logical thinking, in this case to convince Roderigo to assist him in seeking revenge against Othello. With this speech, Shakespeare demonstrates that Iago recognizes the importance of ensuring that the arguments and rationale he presents to others are logical, as this will convince them to act in the way he desires. This may also explain how he manages to acquire a reputation of honesty—after all, if his arguments and thoughts constantly make logical sense, there is little reason for others, such as Othello, Roderigo, and Cassio, to question their validity. Iago's successful manipulation of others throughout the play is due to his ability to manipulate reason and logic, which also serves to establish a (false) sense of trustworthiness. Notably, Iago's own inner desires seem rather base in nature, stemming from his hatred and jealousy of Othello, but he structures his thoughts in such a way that reason and logic come to self-legitimize his wish for revenge. Just as he twists reason in his own mind, he manipulates the act of logical thinking in the minds of others, via conditional mental simulations, to direct their behavior.

Extending Iago's metaphor, Shakespeare acknowledges how thoughts rooted in reason, such as prefactuals and counterfactuals, thus function as a means of manipulating the behavior of others through logical thinking. Counterfactuals and prefactuals are a form of logical thinking that rely on the principle of reason in their construction, pivotally defined by their "if-then causal linkage" (Epstude et al. 50). Therefore, it follows that such thoughts have the ability to temper "our raging motions, our carnal stings, or unbitted lusts" and help avoid "preposterous conclusions" (1.3.321-22); Shakespeare suggests what recent neuroscience has confirmed: mental simulations have a powerful influence on emotions, desires, and in turn, external behavior (Smallman and Roesse 845-52). Shakespeare exposes this connection through Iago's monologue to indicate that Iago consciously recognizes the power of reason and logical thinking to persuade and influence behavior. The entire play is concerned with this transformation from inner mental simulation to external behavior, a process that is inherently reliant on reason—and reason is what guides Iago's manipulation. The principle of reason underlies the conditional mental simulations Iago generates in his own mind and the mind of others, which, as I will attempt to show in this chapter, function to keep the plot moving forward. Only by first recognizing Iago's philosophy on reason-rooted manipulation can we fully understand the context through which he generates counterfactuals and prefactuals in his own mind and the minds of others, and from there, how such thoughts are transformed into the external events of the play.

The actions of the entire play are set in motion by the counterfactual and prefactual thoughts Iago generates in the opening scene, which marks the starting point at which inner events become translated into direct acts in the outer world. While jealousy may seem too weak a motivator for Iago's actions throughout the play, I argue that it is merely the internal starting point from which his upcoming external behavior stems. His jealousy is formulated and

translated into action due to the conditional mental simulations he generates. Underlying his entire rationale is the implicit counterfactual, *if Cassio had not been promoted, then I [Iago] would have been promoted*. This then prompts subsequent, more nuanced counterfactuals and prefactuals. Iago laments, “preferment goes by letter and affection / And not by old gradation” (1.1.34-35), informing a counterfactual thought along the lines of, *if I had Othello’s preferment and affection (i.e. favor; trust), then I would have gotten what I want—my promotion*. This represents a type of upward counterfactual, in which the imagined alternative improves upon reality. Such counterfactuals drive future behavior in a corrective, goal-driven manner and correspond to a negative affect (Epstude and Roese 176). His negative affect is clearly indicated by his strong metaphorical language, describing such preferential treatment as “the curse of service” (1.1.33). This counterfactual also drives his external actions, in which he decides “to follow [Othello] to serve [his] turn upon him” (1.1.40). This past experience, witnessing how the followers, in this case Cassio, who “[throw] but shows of service on their lords, / Do well thrive by them” enters his inner world and informs the following prefactual: *If I get Othello’s preferment and affection (i.e. favor; trust), then I will get what I want—my revenge* (1.1.49-50). This almost directly parallels his earlier counterfactual, except now his desired outcome has shifted from promotion to revenge. While it is his counterfactual thoughts that give rise to his hate, it is this prefactual thought which “prepares [him] for subsequent action” (Epstude et al. 52). These deeply internal thoughts propel his revenge-plot into motion, but also the entire plot of the play. Through this opening scene, Shakespeare creates the foundation from which internal events start being translated into events in the outer world.

Although he is now intent on obtaining his revenge, Iago only determines how to translate this inner desire to action in the outside world after he constructs a counterfactual

regarding the past actions of Othello and his wife, Emilia. In his first soliloquy, Iago reveals that the image of his wife and Othello having sexual relations is largely motivating his internal desire for revenge:

I hate the Moor,  
 And it is thought abroad that twixt my sheets  
 He's done my office. I know not if't be true,  
 But I, for mere suspicion in that kind  
 Will do as if for surety (1.3.364-68)

The rumor that Othello has been “twixt [his] sheets” with his wife is directly shaping Iago’s inner world. Whether or not Iago believes that these actions actually happened in the outside world, they enter into his mental representation of the world, and he is then able to generate how we would respond to this alternate version of reality, were it true. He formulates a type of counterfactual: *if Othello had been ‘twixt my sheets’, I would seek ‘to get his place and to plume up my will / In double knavery’* (1.3.371-72). While this is not quite a true counterfactual, for Iago “knows not if’t be true” and cannot confirm this as an alternate, rather than true, version of reality, it can be considered a presumptive-counterfactual, still serving the same function of guiding future behavior. Specifically, this mental image influences Iago to behave in such a way that he “gets [Othello’s] place” and “[plumes] up [his] will”, resolving his inner need for revenge. Iago directly transforms his own internal perception of cuckoldry into direct, external events, formulating exactly how he will obtain his revenge: “to abuse Othello’s ears / That he [Cassio] is too familiar with his wife” (1.3.373-74). This counterfactual thus drives the actions of both Iago and the plot forward, with Iago speaking “knaveish” suggestions and comments to Othello’s ears.

Iago's act to "abuse Othello's ears" is not only guided by his own mental simulation, but also indicates that the events of the plot will continue to progress as a result of Iago invoking particular mental simulations in the minds of others, namely Cassio and Othello. Through the act of speaking, Iago will construct the image of Desdemona and Cassio having amorous relations in Othello's mind. The birthing metaphor a few lines down emphasizes Iago's act of (internal) creation, "Hell and night / Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light" (2.1.381-82). While the "monstrous birth" could be broadly interpreted as Iago's revenge plan, I argue that it more specifically refers to the image of Cassio and Desdemona in Othello's mind. Through his words, Iago will bring this mental simulation into the mind of Othello, "birthing" it into the "world". Similarly, Iago's inner desires will be "birthed" into the external world through the act of speaking. This metaphor highlights the indistinct boundary between the outer and inner realm, where internal events are translated into external events, but also vice versa. This transition is facilitated by language, as it is Iago's words that will construct the mental simulation. Shakespeare demonstrates the power of words in the mind centuries before there was scientific evidence of it, where only recent neuroscientific experiments have confirmed that language plays a critical role in the ability to imagine novel things, which would include the ability to imagine and construct alternatives to reality via mental simulations (Reuland).

The events of the plot are kept in motion with Iago acting to intoxicate Cassio, an external event directly transferred from his internal prefactual thought. Iago uses his inner world to simulate the possible outcome of his behavior:

If I can fasten but one cup upon him  
 With that he hath drunk tonight already,  
 He'll be as full of quarrel and offense

As my young mistress' dog (2.3.41-43)

In this prefactual, Iago simulates a version of the future that depends on his own actions, rather than the actions of Cassio himself. Iago does not, for instance, say, "*If Cassio drinks but one cup more, he'll be full of quarrel*". The self-focused nature of this prefactual allows Iago to envision the outcome of his actions, but it also indicates a deeper self-determination in Iago, where he believes that his actions have the ability to determine his future reality. By using the language of the self-prefactual, Shakespeare portrays Iago's natural tendency to organize and perform actions himself to bring forth the reality he desires. Iago's confidence in his ability to transform his inner mental representations into outer reality is confirmed by his subsequent prefactual, "If consequence do but approve my dream, / My boat sails freely both with wind and stream" (2.3.55-56). If events turn out as Iago has tried to orchestrate them, with Cassio getting drunk, his "boat" will "sail freely". In this metaphor, the boat can be interpreted not only as Iago's revenge-scheme, but also the entire plot of the play. Shakespeare thus uses this metaphor to demonstrate that Iago's mental constructions, his "dreams", are the force responsible for allowing the play to "sail freely" forward—they guide his behavior to manipulate external events, such as intoxicating Cassio, which drives the narrative forward.

Once Othello has reprimanded Cassio, Iago begins to manipulate events in the outer world by invoking a particular prefactual to direct Cassio's behavior with Desdemona. With Cassio lamenting the loss of his reputation, Iago advises, "this broken joint between you and her husband entreat [Desdemona] to splinter [...] this crack of your love shall grow stronger than it was before" (2.3.295-296 & 297-298). While Iago does not specifically use the language of the conditional, he induces a specific prefactual thought, a type of mental simulation, in Cassio's mind: if Cassio appeals to Desdemona to "splinter" things, then his "love" with Othello will be

repaired and “grow stronger”. By constructing this particular representation in Cassio’s mind, Iago successfully manipulates Cassio outward behavior—Cassio decides to “beseech the virtuous Desdemona to undertake for [him]” (3.2.302). Through this prefactual, Iago controls both the inner and outer world of Cassio, determining how Cassio’s inner representations become translated into events of the outside world. Once again, it is conditional mental representations that are driving the narrative forward, only now it is no longer such thoughts in Iago’s mind, but such thoughts in the minds of the other characters.

The plot continues to advance with Iago creating a particular mental simulation in the mind of Othello to shape how he will interpret the outward interactions between Desdemona and Cassio. Iago subtly plants the seed that Cassio and Desdemona may be romantically involved and suggests that Othello observe the behavior of his wife with Cassio, “Receive it from me, I speak not yet of proof: / Look to your wife; observe her well with Cassio” (3.3.194-95). He then guides how Othello will interpret this external behavior by summoning a particular memory in Othello’s mind—Desdemona’s past deception of her father. Iago recounts the past, “She did deceive her father, marrying you; / And when she seemed to shake and fear your looks, / She loved them most” (3.3.204-6). After Othello confirms this memory, “And so she did” (3.3.205), Iago then guides Othello in imagining a reality where Desdemona has deceived him, her husband, in the same fashion that she fooled her father, reasoning:

Why, go to, then!

She that so young could give out such a seeming

To seal her father’s eyes up, close as oak—

He thought ‘twas witchcraft” (3.3.206-9)

By invoking the memory of Desdemona's past deception, rather than her love and loyalty for Othello, Iago prompts Othello to mentally imagine a present (and future) reality where Desdemona is dishonest rather than faithful. While Othello at first seems reluctant to believe this, claiming, "No, not much moved. / I do not think but Desdemona's honest", this mentally-imagined version of reality is plausible, being rooted in true events of the past, and Othello quickly comes to question Desdemona's love and loyalty, lamenting, "Why did I marry?" (3.3.223-24 and 241). Through the use of memory and imagination, Iago successfully crafts Othello's inner world into one of doubt and constructs the plausible mental simulation of Desdemona having an affair with Cassio—a simulation that then informs how Othello will "observe her well with Cassio" (3.3.195).

Through this particular mental simulation of Desdemona's infidelity, Iago is then able to guide how Othello perceives the behavior of others, an instance in which external events are interpreted based on internal constructions. Iago advises Othello to merely observe Cassio and Desdemona's upcoming actions and from them, derive his conclusions:

Yet if you please to hold him off awhile,  
 You shall by that perceive him and his means.  
 Note if your lady strain his entertainment  
 With any strong or vehement importunity:  
 Much will be seen in that. (3.3.247-51)

Since the language of the prefactual conditional establishes a high degree of certainty that 'x' action will result in 'y' outcome (Epstude et al. 54), Iago is able to effectively convince Othello to follow this course of action. Importantly, Iago has ensured that Othello is expecting one particular mental simulation—Desdemona's infidelity—to be proved or disproved. He guides

Othello in mentally simulating a future reality in which he has confirmed Desdemona's infidelity, based solely on his observations of Cassio and Desdemona: Othello will "[see much in it] if "[his] lady [strains Cassio's] entertainment with any strong or vehement importunity" (3.3.249-51). While Othello may not have interpreted Desdemona and Cassio's behavior in this way on his own, Iago guides him towards this conclusion by invoking this particular mental simulation in his mind. Othello's internal representation thus becomes responsible for dictating how he understands future external events, and subsequently, shapes his behavioral response to them, pushing the plot forward.

This process continues with Iago ensuring that Othello generates a prefactual that will cause him to interpret external events surrounding the handkerchief in a way that confirms his internal construction of Desdemona's adultery. After Iago remarks that he observed Cassio use a handkerchief matching the description of Desdemona's, Othello himself begins to formulate a prefactual, postulating, "If it be that—" (3.3.435). However, before he can finish developing this thought, Iago purposefully interjects to ensure that Othello constructs the prefactual in the way he, Iago, desires: "If it be that, or any, it was hers. / It speaks against her with the other proofs" (3.3.436-37). Through his interjection, Iago is able to manipulate Othello's inner world, assuring that he mentally simulates only this version of the future. By specifically repeating Othello's same words "if it be that", Iago creates the illusion that the prefactual originated in Othello's mind, even though it is technically being constructed by Iago and his words. Othello is thus prevented from imagining alternative future realities, where, for instance, Cassio's use of this handkerchief is entirely unrelated to an act of adultery. These prefactuals thereby keep the narrative moving forward by shaping how Othello will respond to the upcoming actions of other characters.

Prompted by the suggestion of these future events, Othello formulates a prefactual to simulate a future reality where he has already interpreted Desdemona and Cassio's actions as indicators of adultery, with this prefactual preparing him for his own personal action. After Iago has suggested that Cassio and Desdemona are having an affair, as well as the observable, external events that will confirm this, Othello imagines his own actions in a future reality where this is true, generating the following prefactual:

If I do prove her haggard,  
 Though that her jesses were my dear heartstrings,  
 I'd whistle her off, and let her down the wind  
 To prey at fortune. (3.3.258-261)

By using the format of a soliloquy, Shakespeare is able to offer the audience direct access to Othello's internal thought processes, and thus the audience can observe the process of transformation from internal thought to external action. Through this prefactual, Shakespeare outlines the upcoming actions of Othello. He will first act to determine her infidelity, which as determined by Iago's previously suggested prefactuals, will involve his assessment of Desdemona's and Cassio's outward behavior, especially regarding the handkerchief. Should he derive such an interpretation, "If [he does] prove her haggard", then he will cast her away, "whistle her off, and let her down the wind to prey at fortune", even if it requires him to send his own "dear heartstrings" away forever with her. The metaphor of his "dear heartstrings" being Desdemona's "jesses" indicates that Othello's own heart, and therefore his life, is intertwined with Desdemona's. This suggests that Othello will be unable to live himself should Desdemona die, yet he will be willing to make such a sacrifice, if required. With this prefactual, Shakespeare

highlights the process through which Othello's inner world is changing and slowly morphing into the outward behavior that will tragically conclude the play.

A cyclic process emerges, as these changes in Othello's inner world now directly guide his external behavior. Due to his previously generated prefactuals, Othello interprets Cassio's possession of the handkerchief exactly as Iago had hoped. He assumes that his prefactually-predicted future has come true, setting his actions to "whistle [Desdemona] off" in motion (3.3.260). When Othello overhears Bianca accuse Cassio, "A likely piece of work, that you should find [the handkerchief] in your chamber and know not who left it there? This is some minx's token", Iago confirms that the handkerchief was the "minx", Desdemona's: "she gave it him [Cassio]" (4.1.142-44 and 165). By purposefully omitting a speculative phrase, such as 'so she must have' or 'it is likely', Iago makes sure that Othello draws the conclusion that his simulated version of the future, where Desdemona is having an affair with Cassio, has become reality. Othello's inner world then consumes his entire being and drives him towards the ultimate, external manifestation of damnation, murder. He vows, "I will chop her into messes! [...] Get me some poison, Iago, this night", and finally, at Iago's suggestion, he agrees to strangle her, "Good good. The justice of it pleases. Very good." (4.1.188, 192, and 197). By repeating the adjective "good" to describe this act of ultimate evil, murder, Shakespeare contrasts Othello's morally-justified inner perception of his actions against the true immoral nature of them in the outer world. This irony further emphasizes the tragic trajectory the play will now follow. Both Othello and the narrative of the play have become subjected to a tragic fate, as a result of the interplay between Othello's inner world, his mental simulations, and his outer world, his behavior.

Now pursuing the task of murdering Desdemona, Othello generates a prefactual that encompasses the goals of his inner world and his perception of external events into a single motivating force, which pushes him even closer to the actual act of murder. Approaching a sleeping Desdemona, Othello asserts, “It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul. / Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars: / It is the cause”, but although he repeatedly refers to “it”, he never actually states what “it” is (5.2.1-3). While some might argue that the “cause” is Desdemona’s infidelity or Othello’s pursuit for justice, I argue that the cause is instead Othello’s quest to transform a certain mental simulation of the future into actual reality. Othello states that “she must die, else she’ll betray more men”, before continuing on with the prefactual, “If I quench thee, thou flaming minister, / I can again thy former light restore” (5.2.6 and 8-9). While the first line is not written in the language of the conditional, it stems from a precursor prefactual thought, *if Desdemona dies, she will not betray more men*. Combined with the subsequent explicitly-articulated prefactual, Shakespeare illustrates the future reality Othello has constructed in his mind, where Desdemona does not “betray more men” and remains pure, her “former light [restored]”. The cause is thus Othello’s desire to make this particular mentally simulated version of the future become reality, simultaneously preventing a future reality where the converse of these conditions become true—where an impure Desdemona betrays more men. Interpreting the cause in this way encompasses both Desdemona’s infidelity, as perceived by external events, and the pursuit of justice, an internal desire, into a single motivating force. Informed by both internal and external events, this inner construction of the world drives Othello to murder, transforming his inner world to outer reality.

This mental simulation also functions to self-justify Othello’s actions, aligning the desires of his inner self with his outward behavior and actions. The second-half of the prefactual is

written in the language of the conditional, stipulating that the future reality Othello envisions depends on the condition that “Othello quenches Desdemona” (5.2.8). This form of a self-prefactual manipulates reason and logic to create a causal relationship where Othello’s own actions will determine which (imagined) version of the future becomes reality. Constructed in this manner, this prefactual allows Othello to self-justify his actions, for achieving the desired future, the “cause”, requires that he kill his wife. Due to this prefactual, the external act of murder is now necessary if he is to achieve the goals and desires of his inner world. Shakespeare purposefully crafts this prefactual thought with conditional language to illustrate the role language plays in shaping how mental simulations drive actions. With this prefactual justifying the murder, Othello at last smothers Desdemona, the moment of climatic arrival in the narrative marking the final transition from his inner world of conditional mental simulations to his outer world, where he has murdered his wife.

Shakespeare furthers the interplay between inner and outer by generating conditional mental simulations in the mind of the audience, regarding the events of the play as a play. The process of transformation from inner to outer world first becomes meta-commentary when Shakespeare constructs a prefactual in the minds of the audience to foreshadow the external events that will soon be performed on the physical stage. Once Desdemona leaves Othello and Iago alone in act 3, scene iii, Othello claims, “But I do love thee; and when I love thee not, / Chaos is come again” (3.3.90-91). In these lines, Shakespeare carefully constructs two, contrasting realities: one where Othello “[does] love [Desdemona]” and one where he “[loves her] not”. Shakespeare then elaborates on the latter, foreshadowing the “chaos” about to consume the plot. Though it is not a conditional statement for Othello, for an audience that (presumably) does not know the ending of the play and cannot know for certain that this causal

relationship is true, it invokes a certain prefactual thought to ponder as the play continues: *if Othello does not love Desdemona, the play will devolve into chaos*. Shakespeare constructs this particular mental simulation in the minds of the audience and hints that this version of the play's future will likely become reality. This act of foreshadowing comes directly before Iago begins to use the power of suggestion on Othello, thereby compelling the audience, even if subconsciously, to notice how the simulation of a world in which Othello does not love Desdemona slowly takes shape as reality. As the actions of the play proceed, this internal image in the audience's mind becomes the external actions occurring on stage. This meta moment emphasizes Shakespeare's concern with the progression from inner to outer throughout *Othello*, and suggests that some of the character's prefactual and counterfactual thoughts also serve the secondary function of foreshadowing.

### ***Othello & Tragic Reflection (Pity)***

For both Othello and the audience, the narrative of the play secures the status of a tragedy only once it successfully prompts evaluation of the plot's actions via the form of counterfactual thinking. The moment of true pity and horror arrives for Othello not once he has killed his wife, but instead when he learns the truth of her innocence. Emilia shatters the simulated version of reality Othello has come to believe as true:

O thou dull Moor, that handkerchief thou speak'st of  
 I found by fortune, and did give my husband:  
 For often, with a solemn earnestness—  
 More than indeed belonged to such a trifle—  
 He begged of me to steal't. (5.2.218-22)

She even directly draws attention to Othello's failure to consider alternative possibilities as to how Cassio obtained the handkerchief, stating, "She give it Cassio? No, alas, I found it, / And I did give't my husband" (5.2.223-24). Not only is his "cause" now completely dismantled, but Iago is also revealed as a Machiavellian manipulator. It is this revelation that spurns the counterfactual ponderings of what could have been '*if only...*', in both the minds of Othello and the audience—this is the moment when pity and horror are born both in the inner world of *Othello* and the outer world of the audience. In *Poetics*, Aristotle defines tragedy as an "[imitation of] actions which excite pity and fear, this being the distinctive mark of tragic imitation" (Part XIII). *Othello* imitates the act of Othello's counterfactual evaluation, the moment his pity and fear are realized, directly in the mind of the audience, which based on Aristotle's definition, confirms the play as a tragedy.

While it is the same act of counterfactual thinking, it is still an imitation, as it elicits pity and fear differently for the audience than for Othello. Othello is consumed by regret and grief imagining what could have been if he had not killed his wife. He pities his lost self, "That's he that was Othello: here I am" (5.2.287). His former identity of self, "he that was", is forever gone. While it is not explicitly stated, I argue that his fear is reflected in by what he says next, "here I am", where Othello is horrified by who he has become. The prospect of continuing life in this new state of self scares Othello, who acknowledges, "For, in my sense, tis happiness to die" (5.2.283). For the audience, it is harder to pinpoint precisely *what* the feelings of pity and fear reflect. When Othello learns the truth about Desdemona, the audience experiences Othello's pity and fear *with* him, as part of the process of narrative transportation; they have become "absorbed emotionally and cognitively...their awareness diverted from the body and the real, here-and-now physical world to the fictional world" (Bailey 3). Yet, things get more complicated when the

audience starts to engage in their own counterfactual thinking, as this brings their awareness back to their own body and mind. At this point, the audience is left to imagine an infinite amount of alternatives to the past events of the play: *What if Othello had not murdered his wife, but what if Othello had not listened to Iago?, Or what if Cassio had not listened to Iago, or Iago to the rumors?*, and so on. With each new counterfactual generated, there comes the accompanying counterfactual emotions—regret, guilt, and shame<sup>7</sup>—in this case, on behalf of the characters, and the play’s tragic effect intensifies for the audience.

The tragic imitation in *Othello*, the mimicry of Othello’s counterfactual evaluation, serves to transform the external events of the inner world of the play into the internal events experienced by the audience in the physical, outer world. The play is heavily concerned with the exchange between internal events in the inner world and external events in the outer world, exploring the role conditional mental simulations (prefactuals & counterfactuals) contribute to this interplay in not only the realm of the play itself, but also the meta-realm of the play-world experienced in the audience’s physical world. The narrative progression of the play is driven by conditional mental simulations constructed and manipulated by the characters. Iago in particular emerges as the master manipulator of prefactuals and counterfactuals, twisting these mental processes to orchestrate the downfall of Othello. After watching the events of the play unfold in this manner, Shakespeare leaves the audience with a troubling thought: Could our own thoughts be used against us?

By provoking this question, Shakespeare reminds us not to underestimate the power of the mind. While it is likely near impossible to avoid counterfactual and prefactual thoughts, the

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<sup>7</sup> Counterfactual emotions are reported and described in Byrne, *The Rational Imagination* 9 and Landman.

more knowledge we acquire about our mental processes, the better suited we are to avoid a fate like Othello's. By reading, attending, and studying plays, we can advance our understanding of mental processes, learning from literature and art to better our own inner and outer experiences. Such acts have the potential to save us from a reality like Othello's and prevent our own thoughts being turned against us. Plays are but one representation of cognitive thought processes, but as evidenced by this close-reading of *Othello*, they are not only accurate models, but also powerful tools for understanding how and why these deeply internal cognitive processes shape our outer world. Recent findings in the fields of neuroscience and cognitive psychology have just barely started to unpack the complicated inner-workings of our mind and body. As these scientists and psychologists continue their journey to find and understand the neural mechanisms underlying our inner and outer behavior, perhaps they ought to consider looking to Shakespeare, who offers a potentially useful wealth of information to inform research questions and experimental approaches.

CHAPTER 2: AN ANALYSIS OF PREFACTUALS & COUNTERFACTUALS IN *I HENRY IV*  
AND *HENRY V*: CONDITIONAL MENTAL SIMULATIONS AS A LINK AMONG  
BEHAVIOR, HISTORICAL NARRATIVE, AND POWER

While the genre of tragedy is intuitively reliant on ‘what-if’ imaginings, there is not such an obvious connection between such thoughts and history plays. Unlike the clear psychological manipulation in *Othello*, the role of conditional mental simulations in history plays appears much less straight-forward, as these plays focus less on individualistic concerns in favor of nationalistic concerns, particularly the idea of history. Although the theory of counterfactual and prefactual thoughts only emerged in the 1980s, the idea that history is a constructive process requiring imagination was proposed much earlier, particularly by R. G. Collingwood in the 1930s. In his book *The Idea of History*, Collingwood argues that the “historical imagination” plays a structural, rather than ornamental, function in the creation of history, where the act of imagining the past provides the narrative for the historian to adorn (Collingwood 241). He then distinguishes between natural and historical processes, contending that “in mental processes, which are typical for human history, the past is retained in the present (Collingwood xxxvi). Extending this, I argue that it is not just the past retained in the present, but also the *idea* of the past (including the past that will come in the future) that is retained in the present, when in the form of mental processes, such as conditional mental simulations.

Given that the idea of history (note that this is the *exact* name of Collingwood’s book) is itself created through the imagination and mental constructions, it follows that counterfactual and prefactual thoughts must also contribute to the generation of historical narrative. The act of counterfactual and prefactual thinking is a process of “creating fictional narratives” (Sunwolf

109), which suggests that these thoughts function similarly in the process of creating historical narratives, or at least in imagining the future construction of historical narratives. Previous scientific research has suggested that the production of stories is one form of argument in decision-making, with narratives being both organizational schemas and interpretative tools<sup>8</sup>. Conditional mental simulations, which produce stories, would therefore seem to influence decision-making through the narratives they create, including the (imagined) historical narratives they construct.

A form of historical narrative themselves, Shakespeare's history plays are concerned with the process of history, including how events and actions are informed by history and then eventually transformed into historical narrative. Derek Cohen argues that *1 Henry IV* highlights the "mythologizing process of history", arguing that real events become part of history when one "[puts] the [event] into the forms of language, [...] in order to simply possess it" (301). Cohen suggests that actions are turned into history when put in the form of spoken narrative, but I contend that this process can also occur internally, when (fictional) narratives are constructed in the mind. This chapter is concerned with exploring the role conditional mental simulations might play in linking behavior and actions with historical narrative. I will shift to a counterfactual and prefactual analysis of Shakespeare's Henriad, specifically *1 Henry IV* and *Henry V*. In these two plays, I trace the development of Prince Hal into King Henry V, examining how his behavior is driven by counterfactual and prefactual thoughts. By using conditional mental simulations, Prince Hal/King Henry V is able to shape the future historical narrative of the past while in the real-time of the present. In these history plays, conditional mental simulations reveal the

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<sup>8</sup> See studies Robinson 58-85, Mandler and Johnson 111-51, and Bennett 1-22.

connection between power and history by suggesting that behavior in the present is driven by the idea of defining the historical narrative of the future.

During the first scene in which the audience meets Prince Hal, act I scene ii of *I Henry IV*, Shakespeare establishes that Hal's behavior is driven by a particular version of the future, in which he has constructed the narrative of his past that grants him the most power. After the common folk have left the tavern, Shakespeare gives the audience direct access to Hal's internal thoughts, with his soliloquy outlining the prince's true inner motivations. Hal details that his behavior in the present and near-future will consist of him acting lowly and associating with commoners: "[I] will awhile uphold / The unyoked humor of your idleness" (1.2.170-71)<sup>9</sup>. This behavior is driven by his desire to attain a certain vision of the future, where he is even more revered and admired as a royal. He envisions:

So when this loose behavior I throw off  
 And pay the debit 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, flittering o'er my fault,  
 Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes  
 Than that which hath no foil to set it off. (1.2.183-190)

Hal has generated the prefactual, *If I act like a commoner and "uphold the unyoked humor of idleness" only to later "throw off this loose behavior", then I will "falsify men's hopes" and "my reformation...shall show more goodly"*. He compares this version of the future to the one

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<sup>9</sup> Until otherwise noted, the cited act, scene, and line numbers refer to Shakespeare's *I Henry IV*.

that would result if he acted admirably his entire life, a future reality where he would “attract [less] eyes”. Hal’s upcoming behavior and actions are all driven by his desire to attain a future reality in which he creates a particular narrative of his past—that of the reformed prince—and thereby gains the most respect from both his father and their subjects. This future depends upon a particular narrative of his past—that of the reformed prince. This prefactual thus shapes how he will act in the present and near-future to achieve his goal of obtaining power. The concluding couplet draws attention to Hal’s direct use of present actions to influence his future historical narrative, “I’ll so offend to make offense a skill, / Redeeming time when men think least I will” (1.2.191-92). His offensive actions in the present are actually “skill”, a tool he is using to “redeem” the future reality he desires regarding his future reputation and the upcoming narrative of his past.

While conditional mental simulations help shape a future historical narrative, they can also function to reinforce a particular narrative of the past, and thereby appoint power. King Henry IV offers a counterfactual evaluation of his past ascension to the throne, reflecting:

Had I so lavish of my presence been,  
 So common hackneyed in the eyes of men,  
 So stale and cheap to vulgar company,  
 Opinion, that did help me to the crown,  
 Had still kept loyal to possession  
 And left me in reputeless banishment. (3.2.39-44)

Here, the king imagines an alternative version of reality had he instead associated with the subjects and become “so stale and cheap to vulgar company”—a reality where he is not the king, but still “in reputeless banishment”. He contrasts this alternative past with what he constructs to

be the true narrative of his past: “By being seldom seen, I could not stir / But like a comet I was wondered at [...] And then I stole all courtesy from heaven / And dressed myself in such humility / That I did pluck allegiance from men’s hearts” (3.2.46-47 & 50-53). The metaphorical language helps the king construct the actual events of past reality in the format of narrative—he compares himself to a “comet”, and then personifies himself as comet, “[stealing] all courtesy from heaven”, “[dressing himself]”, and “[plucking] allegiance”. This counterfactual not only allows the king to imagine alternatives to the current reality, but also to construct his current reality within the context of a particular historical narrative, thereby strengthening his reputation.

This counterfactual further guides Hal in his goal-driven behavior by emphasizing the link between power and historical narrative. The king is attempting to use this counterfactual to steer Hal away from his current behavior, stating, “And in that very line, Harry, standest thou; / For thou hast lost thy princely privilege / With vile participation” (3.2.85-87). The king’s counterfactual clearly affects Hal in some way, as Hal responds, “I shall hereafter, my thrice-gracious lord, / Be more myself” (3.2.92-93). Given that Shakespeare has already revealed Hal’s true self to be power-seeking, his response seems to suggest that the king’s speech has only served to further motivate his goal-driven acts of deception. I contend that the king’s counterfactual evaluation strengthens Hal’s recognition of the power offered by the idea of history. After observing how his father strengthened his own reputation by manipulating the narrative of his past, Hal is even more determined to behave in such a way so that his present actions create his desired past narrative of the reformed prince. It is this strengthened conviction that Hal refers to when he asserts that he will “be more [himself]”.

Hal then mirrors his father’s use of the counterfactual to assert more power, constructing a worse version of reality in his father’s mind to solidify his narrative as the reformed son. The

king confirms that Hal's original, predicted version of the future has become reality when he acknowledges, "Thou hast redeemed thy lost opinion / And showed thou mak'st some tender of my life / In this fair rescue thou has brought to me" (5.4.47-49). Hal's plan has succeeded, for his imagined future has, in part, become reality—the king now greatly admires his son, even more so because of his former "lost opinion" of Hal. Hal then crafts a counterfactual to contrast his actual past actions with hypothetical alternatives: "If it were so [that I hearkened for your death], I might have let alone / The insulting hand of Douglas over you" (5.4.51-53). With this counterfactual, Hal constructs an alternative reality that is worse than present, where the king was killed by Douglas on account of Hal's desires and purposefully inaction. This represents a downward counterfactual and as such, is associated with positive affect (Epstude and Roese 176), further building Hal's reputation in his father's eyes. By portraying a past that is worse than the present, Hal strengthens his current narrative of the heroic, honorable, now-reformed prince, ensuring that this becomes the narrative immortalized in history.

The initial scene of *Henry V* reveals that Hal's desired future has indeed become reality, where he has obtained power and respect by constructing his historical narrative as the reformed son. Archbishop Canterbury and Bishop Ely revere King Henry V, specifically on account of the story of his past. Canterbury asserts Hal's divine ascension as spontaneous and miraculous:

Never was such a student scholar made;  
 Never came reformation in a food  
 With such a heady currence souring faults,  
 [...]—and all at once—

As in this King. (1.1.32-34 and 36-37)<sup>10</sup>

However, Ely then offers a more nuanced interpretation, suggesting the king behaved intentionally to create his desired narrative:

And so the Prince obscured his contemplation  
 Under the veil of wildness, which, no doubt,  
 Grew like the summer grass, fastest by night,  
 Unseen, yet crevice in his faculty. (1.1.63-66)

The king's reputation, and by extension, his power, emerge from the narrative of his own history. Ely's metaphor highlights that the king "veiled" the true story of his past, covering it with a narrative of "wildness" turned regal. By manipulating the narrative of his own, personal history, Prince Hal begins his kingship with a strong reputation and in a position of power. This opening scene of *Henry V* confirms his success in shaping historical narrative to rise to power (a process that played out in *1 Henry IV*). It is this success that motivates his upcoming behavior in the play, as he manipulates conditional mental simulations to further strengthen his authority as monarch.

While *1 Henry IV* illustrates how Prince Hal's rise to power is driven by his conditional mental simulations, *Henry V* portrays how the king manipulates such constructions in the minds of others to direct action through the idea of history. *Henry V* is even more concerned with the relationship between mental constructions and the creation of historical narrative, and opens with a direct appeal to the audience to employ imagination. In the prologue, the chorus commands the audience to imagine a story of greater magnitude than what is performed on the physical stage, instructing, "Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts," "Think, when we talk of horses,

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<sup>10</sup> The paper has now shifted to the analysis of *Henry V*, with the cited act, scene, and line numbers now referring to Shakespeare's *Henry V* for the remainder.

that you see them,” “For ‘tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,” and “Admit me Chorus to this history” (prologue 23, 26, 28, and 32). Notably, Shakespeare not only directly encourages the audience to actively engage in mentally constructing events, but to also use their minds to “admit” the events of this story to history. This opening creates a meta-theatricality, wherein the audience is primed to experience the interplay between mental constructions and the creation of historical narrative in the same way that the characters will in the play. Shakespeare directs the audience to experience and interpret the play in the present so as to define how they interpret the narrative of the history play once the performance has concluded.

Similar to way in which the audience will interpret the present acts of the play, King Henry observes that events in the present will determine not just future reality, but also the narrative of history that will come in the future. Resolved to fight against France, the king constructs two versions of the future, one in which they are victorious and one in which they are defeated:

There we'll sit,  
 Ruling in large and ample empery  
 O'er France and all her almost kingly dukdoms,  
 Or lay these bones in an unworthy urn. (1.2.226-29)

However, he then further elaborates on these future realities, detailing how each version will result in a different story of history, as “either our history shall with full mouth/ Speak freely of our acts, or else our grave, / Like Turkish mute, shall have a tongueless mouth” (1.2.231-33).

The king has constructed two contradicting prefactual thoughts: *if we win, then we will create the historical narrative* vs. *if we lose, then we will have no power to construct the historical narrative*. Taken together, these prefactuals convey the notion that the power to create history is

conditional upon acts and behavior in the present and near-future. It is this desire to control history that drives the king's behavior throughout this play, including his direct manipulation of others.

By constructing a prefactual in the minds of the Harfleur citizens, the king successfully convinces them to surrender, asserting his authority while also ensuring that his English nation will be constructed in a historical narrative of victory. He directly shouts a prefactual at the townspeople, "If I begin the batt'ry once again, / I will not leave the half-achieved Harfleur / Till in her ashes she lie buried" (3.4.7-9). He then uses vivid imagery to construct in detail their future reality, if they do not surrender:

If not, why, in a moment look to see  
 The blind and bloody soldier with foul hand  
 Defile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters  
 [...] Your naked infants spitted upon pikes,  
 Whiles the mad mothers with their howls confused  
 Do break the clouds" (3.4.33-35 and 38-40).

The harsh diction of "defile" "shrill-shrieking", "spitted" and "mad mothers [howling]" evoke a strongly negative emotional response, which is then associated with this future reality. In this instance, the king projects a subtractive prefactual, where this grotesque, barbaric future comes about if the townspeople do not perform an action, the act of surrendering. Subtractive prefactuals are connected more to prevention goals, rather than promotion goals (Epstude et al. 50), and thus decrease feelings of independence and self-autonomy. By using this type of prefactual, the king psychologically steers the power away from the townspeople, strengthening his own rule. He could have instead structured his prefactual in an additive manner, focusing on

the merciful future reality that would result if the townspeople chose to act and surrender, but this would instill a greater sense of autonomy and self-power for the townspeople. Thus, by particularly employing a subtractive prefactual, the king not only persuades Harfleur to surrender, but also does so in a manner that grants him the most power and authority over his new subjects. The Governor submits, “Therefore, dread King, / We yield our town and lives to thy soft mercy” (3.4.47-48). Through this conditional mental simulation, the king has secured his own power and ensures that the history of his England will be a story of victory.

When it comes to inspiring his own English subjects to act, the king returns to the idea of history, crafting a prefactual in the minds of his soldiers where their present actions in battle will create a future reality in which they have become immortalized in history. He instills a sense of English brotherhood, stating, “For he today that sheds his blood with me / Shall be my brother” (4.3.61-62) and envisions a future where they create the historical narrative, “Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot / But he’ll remember, with advantages, / What feats he did that day” (4.3.49-51). The king thus invokes the idea of history to inspire his soldiers, imagining a future where they will retell the events of the battle “with advantages” and create a historical narrative that immortalizes them, being “remembered [...] to the ending of the world (4.3.55 and 58).

Altogether, this speech prompts the following prefactual in the soldiers’ minds: *if I stay and fight with King Henry, then I will have the power to write history in a way so that I am “remembered [...] to the ending of the world.* Compelled by this imagined future reality where they will directly construct history, and thereby obtain power through immortalization, the soldiers are driven to fight. The change in behavior is most aptly demonstrated by Westmorland, who after initially lamenting the upcoming battle, now cries, “Perish the man whose mind is backward now! [...] Would you and I alone, / Without more help, could fight this royal battle!” (4.3.72 and

74-75). Westmorland has been so convinced by the king's prefactual that he desires a future where only he and the king write history. With this speech, Shakespeare illustrates the power of historical narrative, with the king's mental simulations relying on the idea of history to guide his subjects' behavior.

### ***1 Henry IV & Henry V: History's Impact in the Present & Future***

Taken collectively, the examination of prefactual and counterfactual thoughts in these history plays suggests that the process of generating mental simulations directly informs the process of constructing historical narrative, which provides direct access to and manipulation of power. Specifically, counterfactual and prefactual thoughts allow one to determine which events and actions in the present will create the history they desire to be told in the future. In *1 Henry IV*, Hal is driven by his simulated version of the future and the imagined historical narrative associated with it. Being a mental process, counterfactual thinking provides the opportunity to reinforce a particular historical narrative, for "the past is retained in the present" (Collingwood xxxvi), which allows both Hal and King Henry IV to bolster their respective reputations and assert more power. In *Henry V*, the king further builds his own power and the power of England by orchestrating events of the present to build his desired narrative of history, as it will manifest in the future. He is able to accomplish this through prefactuals, influencing the present behavior of others by suggesting a particular future reality. In both of these history plays, power is derived from the idea and narrative of history rather than the actual events themselves, with conditional mental simulations bridging the gap between behavior and historical narrative, and by extension, power.

Throughout the *Henriad*, Shakespeare demonstrates that mental simulations have the ability to construct the historical narrative of the future, but his final remarks in the epilogue suggest a limitation to their power, as they appear to exert little influence when it comes to crafting the future itself. In the epilogue of *Henry V*, the chorus issues a sonnet to the audience, mimicking the ending of a comedy play to reinforce the theme of marriage; it is not just King Henry and Katherine who have become united, but also the nations of England and France. King Henry V has successfully wrote his personal narrative as the “star of England” and brought his vision for a powerful, unified England, what the chorus calls “the world’s best garden”, to fruition (epilogue 6-7). While he has succeeded in shaping the historical narrative of his England, he remains powerless in determining events of the future beyond his time. His son, “in infant bands” inherits the throne, “whose state so many had the managing / That they lost France and made his England bleed” (epilogue 11-12). After his death, King Henry V’s England is undone, wounded and “bleeding”, signifying a future entirely out of his control. The act of bleeding symbolizes the process in which the king’s England is gradually dying away and becoming only a memory of the past. Although the king has dictated the narrative structure this past memory will assume, he has no control over whether or not his historical narrative is *accepted* in the future, just as he has no control in creating the future either. Once again, Shakespeare suggests a clear limitation to the power of conditional mental simulations, as they can craft the historical narrative that arises in the future, but not necessarily secure its presence.

These history plays are largely concerned with the idea of history, especially its influence on actions in the present, actions that seem motivated by an underlying desire for immortalization in the future, despite the fact neither internal nor external behavior can determine the far-off future. Just as King Henry V seeks the lasting legacy of his history, perhaps

Shakespeare does as well. His very last line implores the audience, “In your fair minds let this acceptance take”, urging them to accept the narrative of history, he, Shakespeare, is offering to them through his plays (epilogue 13). Shakespeare recognizes that history and stories only become powerful when “[accepted in your mind]”. So, while we use our mental simulations to access and manipulate the power offered by the idea of history, history would have no power if we did not construct and solidify the narratives of history in our minds first. As a result of this circular relationship, behavior in the present can be shaped by past historical narrative, but only if accepted in the mind. Additionally, the idea of a history to come in the future can also shape behavior in the present. Thus, Shakespeare leaves us wondering if perhaps, the true power lies in creating a story of history that, if we are lucky, those in the future will accept.

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