

Am I Not Fallen Away:

Surrogate Fathers in Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part 1* and *Romeo and Juliet*

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Griffin King strikes me as the kind of person who cares profoundly about reading and interpreting a literary text. I met him in the fall term of 2017 when he was a member of English 2015: Young Shakespeare. Like many of us, Griffin has a tendency to do his best thinking and writing when he is troubled by something: an unexplained motivation, for example, or a secret hostility, or a misleading set of instructions. That's why the surrogate father turned out to be exactly the right topic for him.

At the outset Griffin takes the optimistic view that, however distasteful a young man's real father may be, the surrogate will be a better friend: "The biological father must restrain and discipline the child," as Griffin puts it, "while the surrogate supports and enables." But the plays Griffin chooses to write about, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Henry IV Part 1*, don't entirely support this hopeful paradigm. Yes, the biological fathers do disappoint: Montague mostly by his absence, and Henry Bolingbroke by his stunningly cold-blooded admission that there are times when he'd rather have Hotspur for a son than Prince Hal. But even if the real dads are awful, the surrogates don't really make things better for their adopted sons. Friar Laurence makes things a whole lot worse, and while it would be easy to say that he does so inadvertently, Griffin is attracted to the less forgiving voices in recent criticism that call him Machiavellian. Falstaff too gets Hal into a great deal of trouble, though it's trouble that both of them thoroughly enjoy and that the prince, at any rate, is able to extricate himself from in the end.

The format of the term paper assignment limited Griffin to working with just two of Shakespeare's relatively early plays; among the strengths of his essay is the discovery of occult resemblances between two strikingly different works. I can't help wondering what Griffin might do if he were now to add

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Hamlet to his enquiry. Claudius desperately wants to be the surrogate father; he claims that he wants to support and enable his nephew. But Hamlet, who knows that “one may smile and smile and be a villain” (1.5.108), is too clever to believe any of this.

—Dr. Ronald Huebert

Exploration of fathers and sons in Shakespeare is a well-developed topic. However, there is a distinct lack of literature on the role of surrogate fathers in Shakespeare. By exploring the role of surrogate fathers, such as Friar Laurence in *Romeo and Juliet* and Falstaff in *Henry IV Part 1*, it can be better understood how these figures can influence the identity of the sons in these plays can be better understood. To properly explore the impact of surrogate fathers, there must first be an analysis of the responsibilities of Shakespearean father figures, and how their responsibility to enforce restrictive behaviour, as well as their dominant personalities, may have separated themselves from their children. Secondly, there must be an exploration of how the sons are made vulnerable by this negative relationship with their fathers. Finally, there must be an analysis of interpretations of the surrogate figures, such as Friar Laurence as a Machiavellian, and Falstaff's role as a fool, and how those interpretations potentially alter their relationships with the sons. Through these three character types, the plays reveal new speculation of how Shakespeare's father figures contributed to the identity of his young male protagonists.

First, the role of the biological father must be defined. By defining the role of the father there can be a comparison

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between the fathers' responsibilities. Ultimately, the role of fathers in Shakespeare is to represent dominance exercised through alienation and behavioural restrictions imposed upon their sons. This alienation is a product of the "tensions" (Macfaul 1) rising between the father and son during the coming of age process. Macfaul asserts that tensions rise because the "son and the father [are] strangely invested in one another" (Macfaul 1) due to the fact that "the son will eventually displace the father" (Macfaul 1). This claim is supported by Tromly, who also asserts that Shakespeare's young men often are "recurrent figures... the designated inheritor of the paternal fortune and reputation" (Tromly 5). If this is accurate, then the son is also destined to inherit their father's identity through their "reputation". Therefore, as these young men are growing into their own identities they must also combat their fathers' identities. As such, the sons struggle against this eclipse of identities and separate themselves from their fathers in order to preserve their sense of self and return to their families only "when he please again to be himself,/[b]eing wanted" (*Henry IV Part 1* 1.2.193-194). Thus, the son will only return to the family once they are able to fully develop and reconcile with the authority of the father. One consequence of the son not being able to develop their personality seems to be death, as is the case with Romeo. Conversely, the son can be reduced to an imitation of the patriarch, exemplified through Tybalt, who is defined by Old Capulet's feud as a central characteristic.

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Furthermore, the patriarch's dominance results in a division of self: the emotional self, and the public self (Macfaul 2). The result of this division is an emotional alienation from the son, much like the son's willing alienation from the father. This alienation is prevalent in *Romeo and Juliet* through physical absence, only appearing in three scenes throughout the play (*Romeo* I.1, III.1, V.3). Yet the Montague family name is prevalent in the play, displaying the importance of the Old Montague to the public despite his absence in his son's life. This alienation is also apparent in Henry IV's absence from his son's life. Henry alienates himself from his son throughout most of the play, even musing that "[t]hen would I have his Harry, and he mine" while discussing Henry Percy, and Percy's son Hotspur (*Henry IV* I.1.90). Henry admits he would rather have his heir be Hotspur, rather than his own son Hal. Henry and Hal's alienation is only resolved towards the end of the play, when Henry and Hal are reconciled and Henry calls Hal his "son" for the first time, but only in the final scene (*Henry IV* V.5.39). In the case of *Romeo and Juliet*, this alienation is never resolved. Romeo dies as a victim without developed identity, while Hal is able to evolve over the course of the play. Regardless, the presence of alienation creates a vulnerability in the young protagonists that is addressed by the surrogates.

The second element of the father's dominance is his role as a restrictor, referencing the archetypal senex. Due to Montague's absence for most of the play he does not appear to be a direct obstacle to the youth in the story.

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However, Capulet admits that Romeo and Juliet are "[p]oor sacrifices of [their] enmity" (*Romeo* V.3.304). The text itself admits that the lovers' deaths is the parents' fault. As the heads of the warring households, Old Montague and Old Capulet are at fault for this tragedy. Additionally, Old Capulet provides first hand evidence of paternal dominance through restriction, by forcing Juliet to marry Paris while exclaiming "[a]n you be mine, I'll give you to my friend;/ [a]n you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets" (*Romeo* III.5.193-194). This threat of dispossession and death hangs over Juliet and serves to exemplify how the fathers control their children in a personal and political capacity. As Macfaul observes, "in Elizabethan drama... fathers can both support and restrain their children" (Macfaul 14). Yet it seems that Shakespeare has divided these responsibilities, much how like how fathers are divided between their emotional and public self. The biological father must restrain and discipline the child, while the surrogate supports and enables. All together, the fathers' role in these plays is revealed. The fathers' role is defined by dominance and an attempt to maintain their power through restriction and suppression of identity, and which results in key conflicts in both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Henry IV Part 1*.

Exploration of father-son relationships cannot be completed without analysis of the sons as well. In the cases of *Henry IV Part 1* and *Romeo and Juliet* the son figures seem greatly affected by their relationships with their fathers, particularly shown by the vulnerability and volatility

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created by the fathers in the sons. Indeed, it seems that Romeo from *Romeo and Juliet* is largely motivated by a vulnerable pursuit to shape his identity, separate from the identity of his father who he "will eventually displace" (Macfaul 1). This motivation to separate himself from his father also results in Romeo separating himself from his family. The first mention of Romeo in the text is from Benvolio, who happened to see Romeo "underneath the grove of sycamore/ [t]hat westward rooteth from this city side,/ [s]o early walking did I see [Romeo]" (*Romeo* I.1.120-122). Similar to how Montague's physical absence reflects his alienation from Romeo, Romeo's isolation also reflects Romeo's alienation from his father. Therefore, Romeo walks alone, separate from his family and free from his father's patriarchal authority. Likewise, Romeo walking "underneath the grove of sycamore" (*Romeo* I.1.120) surrounds him with nature, signifying a place where societal norms no longer hold sway. This nature removes Romeo from his father's sphere of influence and displays the character as not only reflective, but also as an escapist who has removed himself from the restrictions of society. Romeo reveals how he has separated himself from his family while talking to Benvolio, stating that he "has lost [himself]; [he is] not here;/ [t]his is not Romeo, he's some other where." (*Romeo* I.1.196-197). Here Romeo admits that he has separated himself from his former identity, becoming something new. Therefore, Romeo has denied his responsibility to displace his father and refuses to be beholden to Montague's feud with Capulet. Romeo's rapid,

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isolated shift in identity separates him from his father, yet does not reconcile him with a paternal figure. If Romeo is not a Montague, then what is he? Romeo's identity is a blank slate, and desires purpose for his new identity. Friar Laurence takes advantage of this vulnerability and uses this weakness for his own goals.

Like Romeo, Prince Hal from *Henry IV Part 1* is separated from his father. Hal is first mentioned in at the final act of Shakespeare's *Richard II*, where Henry Bolingbroke is embracing his new identity as king. Henry inquires after his son, stating "I would to God, my lords, he might be found./ Inquire at London, 'mongst the taverns there" (*Richard II* V.3.4-5). Like Romeo, Hal's first appearance in the narrative is by mention, not in person. Hal has already separated himself from his father, who has claimed the crown and a new identity for himself. Like Romeo, Hal flees his father's sphere of influence. However, while Romeo can simply leave the walls of Verona, Henry IV's influence covers most of England. To separate himself from his father, Hal then removes himself not from his father's personal space, but his political one. Hal resorts to "loose behaviour" (*Henry IV* I.2.201) to unmake his resemblance to his father. Therefore, Hal removes himself from his father's world to embrace his own identity and to escape his father's domination, brought to the forefront of the play through the war serving as a backdrop. Additionally, Hal also embraces a life of crime to oppose his father's public authority. This volatile behaviour is an exercise of Hal's identity, as it is apparent that he does not

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require his criminal lifestyle to sustain himself, even stating that he will "pay the debt [he] never promised" (*Henry IV* I.2.202). Hal possesses the funds to survive and to pay reparations to those he has affected with his criminal action. As such, Hal's criminal activity is parallel to Romeo's pursuit of purpose through women; Hal's criminal lifestyle is an exercise of identity, acting in opposition to his father's authority. Together these two characters make it evident that the role of the son is to pursue an independent identity. In both cases it seems apparent that the sons must resist their destiny to "displace the father" (1) as Macfaul argues. However, this relationship is complicated further by the presence of surrogate fathers.

Finally, by exploring the previous interpretations of the surrogate father figures in the two plays, Friar Laurence and Falstaff, the purpose of these characters is revealed. First, the interpretation of Friar Laurence as a Machiavellian political entity explains his desire for control (Brenner 57; Weinberger 351). When this desire for control is considered, the desire explains Laurence's motivation for betraying his holy orders and conducting a wedding in secret despite his knowledge that Romeo is easily swooned. Laurence addresses this in Act II scene 3, where he calls Romeo a "young waverer" after agreeing to marry the young lovers (*Romeo* II.3.89). Laurence is even transparent in the motivations for his actions, explaining that "this alliance may so happy prove/ [t]o turn your households' rancor to pure love" (II.3.91-92). Laurence

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reveals that his motivation is not affection for Romeo. Rather, Laurence sees that Romeo's lack of self-identity drives him to find purpose in his pursuit of Juliet, and recklessly marries the two lovers without consideration of negative consequences in order to advance his plans. Yet, by constructing these plans Laurence is removing Romeo's element of agency, which falls under the responsibilities of the father figure.

This forces the reader to reassess their interpretation. If Laurence is removing Romeo's agency, is he helping Romeo develop? No, it seems not. Rather, Laurence's Machiavellian nature motivates him to depose Montague and embrace the role of the true father and its responsibilities. As said above, Laurence engineering the plans for the marriage limits the agency of Romeo and Juliet, even if they desire the outcome. Yet these plans fail, and result in the lovers' deaths. Additionally, when Romeo murders Tybalt, rather than hide the lover in Laurence's cell, Laurence alienates the young man through exile, promising to "call thee back" (*Romeo* III.3.152). Laurence's removal of Romeo's agency, and Romeo's complete trust in the Friar prevent his growth. Without growth of Romeo's identity, and with the death of Juliet, who was the focal point of Romeo's new identity, Romeo loses his grasp on reality. As Romeo stands over Paris' body in the tomb, he remarks "[Mercutio] told me Paris should have married Juliet. Said he not so? [O]r did I dream it so?" (*Romeo* V.3.78-79). Here Romeo is already losing track of his memory. Without Juliet to anchor Romeo's new identity,

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he begins to suffer from dissociation, a more severe version of what he encountered at the beginning of the play, remarking "[t]his is not Romeo, he's some other where." (*Romeo* I.1.197). Due to Laurence's manipulation Romeo has failed to transition into adulthood with an intact identity. The result is confusion, and his death.

Conversely, Falstaff's role as a fool is what allows him to embrace the role of surrogate father by parodying Henry IV. Both characters take crowns, though where Henry IV "seize[s] the crown", Falstaff and his gang "stuff [their] purses full of crowns" (*Richard II* IV.1.181; *Henry* I.2.128). It is Falstaff's clowning in act two, scene four that prompts to Hal reject how Falstaff portrays him. Rather, Hal comes to the realization that he is not destined to "take purses" (*Henry* II.4.397). Instead, Hal declares "I'll play my father" (*Henry IV* II.4.419). Falstaff's parody has helped Hal assert his identity as the Prince, "the designated inheritor of the paternal fortune and reputation" and the man who will eventually "displace [his] father" (Tromly 5; Macfaul 1). Hal will play the role he is destined to play, and this realization of identity reveals Falstaff's narrative purpose to the play. Falstaff and Laurence never share a meaningful exchange with the fathers of Romeo and Hal before the climaxes of their respective plays. As such, it does not make sense to claim that these characters change the father-son relationship. However, they greatly change the father-son dynamic, by providing an alternative source of council while the sons develop into men in their own right. Falstaff is a clown, yes, but he is also Hal's surrogate

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father, able to enable and support his growth, whereas the traditional father may only suppress development.

Together these roles give insight into how Shakespeare viewed the development of young men. Shakespeare depicts the fathers in both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Henry IV Part 1* as repressive figures, stunting the development of their sons into manhood. Conversely, the sons desire to construct a mature identity for themselves, independent of their fathers' influence. In doing so the sons act out against their fathers, such as Hal pursuing his criminal career and Romeo's obsessive behaviour. This behaviour is meant to be reconciled by the arrival of a surrogate father figure to support the sons through this transitory period of life, like Falstaff. However, Romeo is manipulated by Friar Laurence, and does not reconcile his desires with a new identity, resulting in death. In conclusion, Shakespeare introduces the surrogate as a figure intended to support the son through the transition into adulthood by contrasting the domineering behaviour of the biological father. The result is a new dynamic in the development of Shakespeare's young male protagonists. This dynamic explores questions of inheritance, identity, and independence that have haunted young men since Shakespeare's time.

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