

## Romance in *Henry V*

JOANNE ALTIERI

In the midst of the battle of Agincourt in *Henry V*, Shakespeare turns from the noblemen who conduct the war to a conversation between two of Henry's captains, Fluellen and Gower. They discuss the French slaughter of the luggage boys and Henry's order that the prisoners' throats be cut in retaliation for the boys' deaths and the destruction of "all that was in the king's tent." Through their view of the events—or at least Fluellen's, Gower being a staid soul—they seek to understand Henry's decision by developing a parallel between Henry's nature and Alexander the Great's:

*Flu.* If you mark Alexander's life well, Harry of Monmouth's life is come after it indifferent well; for there is figures in all things. Alexander, God knows and you know, in his rages, and his furies, and his wraths, and his cholers, and his moods . . . did, in his ales and his angers, look you, kill his best friend, Cleitus.  
*Gow.* Our king is not like him in that. He never kill'd any of his friends.

*Flu.* . . . As Alexander kill'd his friend Cleitus, being in his ales and his cups, so also Harry Monmouth, being in his right wits and his good judgements, turn'd away the fat knight with the greatbelly doublet. He was full of jests, and gipes, and knaveries, and mocks. I have forgot his name.

*Gow.* Sir John Falstaff.

(IV.vii.30–48)<sup>1</sup>

The conversation is a good example of the problems inherent in the play as a whole. On the one side we see Henry in the best of all possible lights, an heroic Alexander, adored by his men; on the other we are reminded of his rejection of the man who loved him best (and we loved best in the plays that went before this one); and on yet another we, being less

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The author is a lecturer in English at the University of Washington, currently at work on a study of the relation of genre and political idealization in the pre-operative drama that depends from the masque and Elizabethan heroic romances like *Henry V*.

<sup>1</sup>All citations to *Henry V* in my text are to *The Complete Work of Shakespeare*, ed. Irving Ribner and George Lyman Kittredge (Waltham: Xerox, 1971).

caught up in Henry's mystique than Fluellen is, have to wonder about the morality of the order to assassinate the prisoners. We wonder even more when Henry, who gave the order at IV.vi.37 as a reaction to French reinforcements coming on the field, gives it again at IV.vii.60. This time the motive seems to be that imputed to him by Gower—revenge for the boys' slaughter and the tent's plundering.<sup>2</sup> At least it is presented by Henry as a response generated by his Alexandrian anger.

While there are always textual hypotheses about the sort of repetition that occurs here in Henry's two orders—surely if Shakespeare had read proof he would have eliminated either vi.37 or vii.60—the fact that both were written at all indicates the natures of the problem Shakespeare had before him in the characterization of the king. The first line is a straightforward practical military decision, the second, embedded as it is in a heroic speech, complete with trumpet and Assyrian sling, following the Fluellen-Gower Alexander parallel, is the infuriated, classically heroic extreme reaction of a feeling, indeed enraged, man. Neither is, I suppose, an admirable motive by modern standards, but responding to practical military necessity does have a calculated air about it quite different from the fury of an Alexander.

All the forces that swirl around Henry's character here—the practical decisive leader, the heroic conqueror, the betrayer of old friends, the beloved king—recur, recede, intensify throughout the play, but they never coalesce for the modern reader.<sup>3</sup> We can find the reason for the lack of cohesion in the mixture of elements out of which Shakespeare has constructed both the play and the character, a mixture which has proved misleading, confusing, and at points self-contradictory. The play is in the first place a generic puzzle. Is it best understood as comedy, as part four of an epic that began with *Richard II*, or as an "implicit"

<sup>2</sup>It is not a problem to be solved by pointing to the need for textual emendation or to be excused because "it is not noticed in the theater." The first begs the question, and the second allows a fair number of the things we regard most highly in Shakespeare to go by the boards.

<sup>3</sup>Modern interpretation of the play has tended to stress either Henry's heroic nature or his expediency, to bifurcate into readings at one or the other pole but ignore or explain away the conflicts. One of the best recent examples of the former is Moody Prior's *The Drama of Power: Studies in Shakespeare's History Plays* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1973). The weight has, however, been on the other side and includes most influentially Alvin Kernan's "The Henriad: Shakespeare's Major History Plays," in *Modern Shakespearean Criticism*, ed. Alvin B. Kernan (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1970) and D. A. Traversi's earlier reading in *Shakespeare: From Richard II to Henry V* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1957). An interesting attempt to deal directly with the problem of integration is Norman Rabkin's "Rabbits, Ducks, and *Henry V*," *SQ* 28 (Summer 1977): 279-96, which will be dealt with in some detail below.

tragedy? These divergent possibilities have been put forward, disputed, insisted upon by any number of critics over the past thirty years.<sup>4</sup> The “history play” is presumably no more definitive a genre for us than it was for some of Shakespeare’s printers, so we try to subsume each of them under more universal categories—an easy process for *Richard III* and *Richard II* and for *1 Henry IV*, but one that becomes more problematic with *2 Henry IV*, and almost impossible with *Henry V*.

Perhaps it seems most reasonable simply to think of the play as another example of the *genera mixta* of which Rosalie Colie has convincingly demonstrated Shakespeare to be a master.<sup>5</sup> Yet that, too, is unsatisfactory because, of course, the genres of a successful mixed generic piece do not ultimately contradict one another; but if one follows the critics of *Henry V*, they do here. The contradictions are precisely the sort that one could anticipate arising from a critical disagreement about genre or a lack of decisiveness about genre in the work: if each genre represents, as Colie has argued in another context, a frame or “set” upon the world and mixed genres organize these sets into a larger collective vision,<sup>6</sup> then a critical failure to see or a writer’s failure to make comprehensible this larger vision will probably result in a lop-sided or incomplete view that distorts the work as a whole by elevating one of its perspectives at the expense of the rest and taking it to be the controlling focus and source of form in the work.

I think this is precisely what has happened with *Henry V*. We have become almost totally dissatisfied with the idea of the play as straightforward comedy, celebrating a brilliant king and a golden moment in English history; and we have instead insisted upon connecting the play to its three antecedents in terms not only of epic plot but also of thematic

<sup>4</sup>For example, for Kernan the play is tragic epic, for A. P. Rossiter failed comedy (*Angel With Horns* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1961; London: Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd., 1961)), for Herbert Lindenberger (*Historical Drama* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. 78-80 & passim) “ceremonial drama,” a public and simplistic—because communal—form which Shakespeare has “worked” as complexly as the form allows. For the critic who has most influenced our judgment on such questions, categorizing the play generically remains elusive. In the *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 284, Northrop Frye generalizes on the histories’ approximation to tragedy, allows that they also have much to do with comedy, though that relation is often “subversive,” and (pp. 220-21) characterizes *Henry V* as “implicitly tragic,” on the grounds, really, of the repressed historical facts. Howard Felperin in *Shakespearean Romance* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), follows Frye, pp. 73-74.

<sup>5</sup>Rosalie Colie, *Shakespeare’s Living Art* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1974), passim, but especially pp. 243-316.

<sup>6</sup>Rosalie Colie, *The Resources of Kind. Genre-Theory in The Renaissance* (Berkeley:

congruence, so that it becomes impossible to believe that Hal, sharply undercut by his treatment of Falstaff in *Henry IV*, is being presented to us in *Henry V* as anything like the unqualified noble heroic figure he must be if the play is to succeed as unalloyed comedy.<sup>7</sup> The perspective on the play which has become progressively more entrenched has stressed quite the opposite "set."

This paper attempts to regain the comic perspective. It does so by examining the mixture of major elements in the play and stressing one of the play's recognized generic resources, romance, which I believe has been neglected. While romance has been commented on by a number of critics, usually in a brief overview of the play's form as an adumbration of the romance mythos we are most familiar with in Northrop Frye's notion of the "green world,"<sup>8</sup> the extent of Shakespeare's reliance on romance in *Henry V* goes much further than that, a fact that our interest in Shakespeare's political naturalism has obscured. For romance exists here in somewhat uneasy solution with several other pervasive elements: a hero of classically epic proportion and characteristics, of Virgilian stature and destiny; an historical plot that, once taken beyond the limits of the play proper, creates a shape opposite to comedy's; a political theme, far less readily definable than the other elements, emergent from them, and including a high degree of naturalism in its development. The crux of interpretation is, of course, what one makes of that theme.

Yet it seems pointless to go on simply providing thematic interpretations of the play when we already possess the means by which the two poles of current interpretation can be made equal partners in arriving at

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Univ. of Calif. Press, 1973), pp. 18-21. Fredric Jameson ("Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre," *NLH 7* (Autumn 1975):135-63) deals at far greater length with the problem of meaning in genre and in romance in particular. His distinction between the structural and the semantic features of genre — between its form and its mode — brings lucidity to an often confusing subject. I have sought to be consistent with his verbal distinctions.

<sup>7</sup>At least, in the last thirty years this has been the case. Though one can find great distrust of Henry all the way back to Hazlitt, Una Ellis-Fermor's remarks on Henry's shortcomings begin the modern explanation of his — and the play's — ambiguity ("Shakespeare's Political Plays," *Frontiers of Drama* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1946), pp. 34-55): the man who would be king must, in Shakespeare's view, sacrifice his selfhood to the public welfare. The recognition of the loss entailed in this sacrifice causes for Ellis-Fermor an undercurrent of "recoil" which has grown, in the succeeding decades, into a full-blown subversive underplay.

<sup>8</sup>As already mentioned, Frye himself suggested the idea. Others besides Felperin have followed him, including Norman Rabkin in *Shakespeare and The Common Understanding* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 100.

the ultimate indeterminacy of Shakespeare's vision. Presumably everything between the poles could be absorbed as well. Norman Rabkin has argued that *Henry V* is a supreme instance of Shakespearean "complementarity" (a thematic notion perceptibly looser than Colie's application of *genera mixta* to Shakespeare's work, but springing perhaps from the same sense of multivalence), presenting its audience with a gestalt of the world at once a "rabbit" and a "duck": upon seeing the play "Shakespeare's best audience knew terrifyingly that they did not know what to think."<sup>9</sup> The rest saw either the rabbit (centering on Henry as a perfect king) or the duck (Henry as prisoner-executing war-monger) and missed the meaning of the play's contrasting "our hope that society can solve our problems with our knowledge that society has never done so." While Rabkin's reading may strike one as anachronistic, the essay makes salient the point on which critical disagreement on the play has turned. There are apparently two plays here—an historical comedy and an ironic commentary on historical events—and neither can fully dispel the other. For Rabkin, the rabbit and duck are integrated by the "best" audience into an implicitly tragic awareness of the divergence between the ideal and the real, between the green world comedy and the more bitter truths of the play's political realities. With the help of the epilogue, an alert audience perceives that the "inscrutability of *Henry V* is the inscrutability of history."<sup>10</sup> But Rabkin's interpretation depends upon a clear opposition between two strains which are neither as clear nor as clearly opposed as he suggests. What we now call the green world, given the hindsight bestowed on us by *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, was still in the process of development in this play by an extension into an explicitly political world. By imposing on the play a theme more appropriate to the tragedies, a theme which does not correlate with the obvious facts of dramatic structure, Rabkin avoids the problem of specific thematic evolution with an assertion: the play's darker aspects constitute a "terrible subversiveness with which Shakespeare undermines the entire structure."<sup>11</sup>

By insisting upon a coherent intentional role for these "subversive" elements, Rabkin ignores not only this play's structure but also the experimental nature of Shakespeare's craftsmanship, which in *Henry V* seems intent upon bringing an illusionistic portrayal of the political realities (episcopal simony, the need for civil order even in war) into integral union with an idealized perception of political order, for such

<sup>9</sup>"Rabbits, Ducks, and *Henry V*," p. 285.

<sup>10</sup>"Rabbits," p. 296.

<sup>11</sup>"Rabbits," p. 288.

the implications of the romance form seem to be. That he tries to do this through the strength of his protagonist's characterization as an epic hero is not strange, for the Renaissance had already produced several effective mixed generic idealizations of the social world and its constructive hero by combining epic and romance;<sup>12</sup> however no one had done so with the commitment to naturalism which marks Shakespeare's work. Tasso, Spenser, Sidney, even Ariosto instead opt for a more or less consistent point of view, excluding naturalism in favor of an essentially romantic perspective. Shakespeare chooses the opposite approach and tries to naturalize romance. ("Chooses" is perhaps a disingenuous word, since the nature of theater itself virtually excludes the degree and consistency of romance enjoyed by the poets. The choice was perhaps thrust upon him by the fact of actors and a stage, a fact the Chorus bemoans frequently as *Henry V* progresses.)

The naturalizing begins at the first level — of subject matter and plot. For the play, while it follows roughly the pastoral "green world" pattern common in romance (extrusion — sojourn in a natural environment — return in increased strength), does so through the least pastoral of subjects — war. Yet the war, quite paradoxically, serves the same function that life in the forest or the sheeppcote serves in traditional pastoral: it is the restorative agent which recreates society in a sounder, more vigorous form, brings to all the characters (who survive it) a richer sense of the social order and their parts in the hierarchical world which pastoral takes as its norm. While the play focuses almost unremittingly on the central figure who both makes that order possible and embodies it in his role, it also expends a significant effort on depicting the layers of society that make up the "band of brothers" who miraculously defeat the French army because "O God, thy arm was here" (IV.viii.100).

Nor does Shakespeare show us very much of war itself, as the Chorus apologetically reminds us. Agincourt is at least as memorable in the play for its "little touch of Harry in the night" as for any battling we see. The "little touch" is justly celebrated, because it is the dramatic image of the incarnational model of kingship which is at the heart of *Henry V*. Released by his disguise from the heroic role, Henry is humanized for us to a greater degree than anywhere else in the play: "I think the King is but a man, as I am. The violet smells to him as it doth to me; the element

<sup>12</sup>I follow A. Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and The Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1966) and Colie in this designation. It has been argued that such a genre never existed: Josephine Waters Bennett, "Genre, Milieu, and the 'Epic-Romance'," *English Institute Essays*, ed. Alan S. Downer (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1951), pp. 95-125.

shows to him as it doth to me; all his senses have but human conditions" (IV.i.97-101). The ambiguity of such a speech is very rich, for it is Henry who is saying this and not some soldier of Sir Thomas Erpingham as we, though not Bates, Court, and Williams, know. It does point up Henry's recognition of his own humanity (in contradistinction to Richard II's tragic misapprehension), but it also underscores the fact that the soldiers do "little wot / What watch the king keeps to maintain the peace." Like the delicate poise of Rosalind's femininity and identity in Rosalind playing a boy playing Rosalind, the King playing a common man playing (through empathizing) the King emphasizes difference as surely as it does identification, adumbrates hierarchy while it dramatizes democracy. Like Odysseus long before him and Vincentio shortly after, Henry here fulfills the practical need to know those whom he leads and serves, those whom he serves by leading, and they come to understand better what is involved not only in being a king, but also in being a subject. For some (Bates) conviction is immediate; for others (Williams) it requires the more elaborate stage-managing of the glove challenge; for one — the always present sole hold-out of Shakespearean comedy — it never comes: Pistol joins the ranks of Jaques, Malvolio, et al. in exclusion from the vision of unity and harmony realized dramatically in the ultimate union of the whole. The union is made to embrace not just the disparate social and national elements of Henry's army, but France and England themselves in the concluding marriage. And after the wedding the cast will leave France to return to England's quotidian reality, rounding out the harmony of marriage and political unity with the re-entry into the "real world" we now expect of Shakespearean romance.<sup>13</sup>

This description of the dramatic pattern, as is so often the case with mythic archetypes, may seem at best only partially relevant to the play because, while it traces the general movement accurately enough, it does so at the expense of a number of important specifics, not the least of which is the setting itself. Burgundy may see France as "this best garden of the world"; he also sees that the loss of peace has corrupted the garden "in its own fertility" (IV.ii.36, 40), and we are led to see military and political France largely as embodied in the asinine Dauphin, whose main concern throughout the play seems to be his horse.

<sup>13</sup>In fact they were back in England between acts IV and V, but we are not allowed to see that. Shakespeare keeps the setting unified in France once we have been moved there.

Yet pastoral, a central mode in romance for much more than its green world pattern, enters here as well. The conversations among the French lords, replete with shiny armor, fiery horses, and smutty jokes, are played off in their triviality and vainglorious irresponsibility against the honest doubts, fears, and naturally "noble" commitment of the English fighting men. The contrast, which brings the play's representation of the two sides in the war perilously close to the schematic paradigms of *Henry VI*, is one of the least illusionistic constituents of the play and threatens to dissolve its politics into sheer wish-fulfillment. As is usually the case with such constituents in *Henry V*, it has its roots in pastoral, in the *paragone* of court and country, of artificiality versus naturalness, plumes against leeks, the same *topos* on which Shakespeare drew when he decided to cast Henry as "plain soldier" in his address to Katherine.

For the play does not end with the wedding proper, but instead with a truncated wooing which must accomplish in one scene what usually takes five acts: winning a wife. The scene presents Henry in what for many readers is a new and discomfiting guise, because Shakespeare has again shifted from the illusionism we expect and desire to romance's pastoral mode. The heretofore fluent orator is suddenly the plain, downright Englishman, fit to woo by his own admission (V.ii.120-25) only a woman who does not speak English very well herself: "I cannot look greenly nor gasp out my eloquence, nor I have no cunning in protestation; only down-right oaths. . . . I speak to thee plain soldier" (V.ii.140f., 146). Because Henry claims it, the most common explanation for this apparent break in characterization is that Shakespeare chooses to present Henry as a soldier here, and soldiers are traditionally men of action, little given to "taffeta phrases, silken terms precise." Or a reader stressing the subversive under-play will hold Henry up here as an obvious self-dramatizer, dishonestly or at best expediently, playing the role that serves him best in the situation. Yet it bothers very few that after four acts of sparkling wit and clever poetry, Berowne chooses the same role or, in a more fully developed comedy, Bassanio finds it thrust upon him, "bereft" as he is "of all words" by Portia's admission of love. It is here in the romantic comedies we should be looking for explanatory parallels rather than in the tradition of the downright soldier, since Shakespeare must give us in the short space of a final scene not simply a political union but a marriage of two lovers if he is to fulfill the comic purposes the shape of the play portends. Nor is it in fact any more inconsistent with the romantic portrait of Henry the play develops than with the more obviously romantic Bassanio, though the specific contextualizing of romance in this case makes it problematic.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Colie, *Shakespeare's Living Art*, pp. 248-51.



The corruption in the garden lamented by Burgundy also finds its parallel in romance. The romantic epic is particularly fond of the garden as an image of the earthly paradise,<sup>15</sup> an image that Shakespeare had dwelt upon in *Richard II* and returns to in the final Lancastrian play. Henry V is a far cry from Sir Guyon, the garden of good government from the Garden of Adonis, yet like Spenser's hero, Shakespeare's has been on a quest through three plays, in an often hostile world, a quest whose ultimate goal was not simply to realize Shakespeare's portrait of the perfect ruler but to return the polis to the garden state. Looked at in this way, the green world becomes less a place than a possibility, a band of brothers in a potential garden, or perhaps a band of brothers who themselves constitute a garden, stripped by its political weight of the solipsism of traditional romance, yet no less idealized. Such a reading is not out of keeping with Shakespeare's customary manipulation of the pastoral and of romance in general, which always involves naturalizing the artificialities of the genre and subjecting its underlying myths to critical scrutiny, yet usually concludes with a picture affirming the ideals involved.<sup>16</sup>

Quite uncustomarily, this play provides us with a mediator who makes specific claims for the picture of reality that the play is developing. In a move we associate more with Jonson's distrust of the audience than with Shakespeare's celebrated self-containment, Shakespeare supplies *Henry V* with a Chorus, a figure who stands both within the play world and outside it, uniquely situated to comment on the relationship between the play's reality and our own. To do so, the Chorus relies on a theory of the imagination that sounds very much like Sidney's; and, as if he were aware of Sidney's injunctions against breaking the unities, he develops part of his position directly from denials of their importance, taking a stance more logical than Sidney's and more radical: if the play's reality depends from the first on an audience's ability to "piece out our imperfections with your thoughts," then the same thoughts can "carry them here and there, jumping o'er time" (Prologue, 23, 29) "and well digest / Th' abuse of distance" (II. Chorus. 32) because the only boundary is the imagination: "Thus with imagin'd wing our swift scene flies, / In motion of no less celerity / Than that of thought" (III. Chorus. 1-3)—imagination, that is, reined in by the truth of the reality imaged: "Yet sit

<sup>15</sup>Giamatti, *passim* and especially p. 237.

<sup>16</sup>Felperin discusses some implications of this reasonably well known idea in his first chapter. *As You Like It* is the clear example, and it is worth noting that that play was probably written right along with *Henry V*, many of whose formal properties it shares. (They were entered in the Stationers' Register on the same day).

and see, / Minding true things by what their mock'ries be" (IV.Chorus.52-53). It is in this context that Henry is called "the mirror of all Christian kings," acting the imaginative fulfillment of perfected leadership that the play as a whole does of an historical episode.

When the drama is over, the Chorus once again enters the space between the play's imaginative projection and our reality and speaks an epilogue reminding us that what we have seen is a construct placed upon history, and that history was not so kind as "our bending author." Just as the poet hopes to suggest "the full course of their glory," even having confined his heroes "in little room," so Henry's greatness was confined in "small time," yet in that time "the world's best garden he achieved." The reference to the garden may remind us only of France in Burgundy's speech, which this echoes, or it may push us back further to the far more extensive gardening imagery of *Richard II*, which Burgundy echoed, or, since the garden is the "best," it may push us back to the Edenic analogue. At any rate, the quatrains paralleling the small space of the stage and the small time of Henry place the value of "this Star of England" outside of space and time, in the realm of the imagination. Like the stage, Henry is supposed to be something outside the merely real, a "true thing"; and while the turn of the sestet must admit that history destroyed it, the garden was "achieved," and that is the point the play itself ends on.

We can put aside what the Chorus says as merely the excuses of an anxious playwright worried about the insufficiencies of his Wooden O, or we can take them seriously. If we take them seriously, we must recognize first Shakespeare's sense that this particular play needed a self-conscious mediator between audience and play world, and second that the mediation includes directions about how we are to understand the stage representation: as a reconstruction in the imagination of the play's ideal meanings. In at least one sense, the play is treating the world of history on the ideal plane of perfected principles (in terms of which it is as important for the Chorus to remind us that Henry returned between acts IV and V a "conqu'ring Caesar," "giving full trophy, signal and ostent / Quite from himself to God" as that some time passed and certain events occurred in that interim). The dramatic mode which can best encompass this intention is romance, with its ability consistently to range beyond verisimilitude towards the ideal whose reality it seeks to mirror.

While the play in its form, then, and in a number of subsidiary motifs is dependent on that paradigm of the creative imagination we call romance, it extends romance into an area less susceptible to absorption into idealization than we (or the Renaissance?) are accustomed to. For in constructing Henry's romance, Shakespeare chose to include some constituents that strike us as antagonistic, that perhaps destroy the

romance's consistency—most notably the naturalistic approach to the political. The fact that he chose to do so should not seem strange from our vantage point. Howard Felperin has discussed at length Shakespeare's proclivity for averting escapism in his later romances by the use of illusionistic techniques for "transcending reality while recognizing its claim."<sup>17</sup> However in *Henry V*, a play well antecedent to and therefore, presumably, part of the development towards *the Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*, the mixture of modes remains problematic. The first point at which a modern reader usually experiences modal tension is in the scene with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely (I.ii.7ff.). It seems that the Archbishop has been cast in a role reminiscent of Northumberland's in *Richard II* or John of Lancaster's in *2 Henry IV*, that of the king's surrogate in political machinations. Heroic readers of the play often subtly assume any evil intentions are the Archbishop's: "the clergy take all upon their consciences," Irving Ribner explains.<sup>18</sup> But Shakespeare explicitly makes the latter an impossible interpretation when he gives Henry several speeches in the scene that develop the king's thinking in detail: the nobles and clergy urge undertaking the war, but Henry makes the choice (I.ii.14ff., 115-42); the clergy do not take all on their consciences, Henry puts it there:

For God doth know how many, now in health,  
Shall drop their blood in approbation  
Of what your reverence shall incite us to.

(I.ii.18-20)

This may be sophistry, but Henry is fully cognizant of every move being made and remains fully in control of the proceedings.

Those who, at the other pole, concentrate on the subversive realities insist upon the sophistry and take the scene as an exposé of the worldliness of the clergy and Henry's complicity in it. And it is true that if one decides that both Henry and the Archbishop are being negatively defined as Machiavellian politicians, there is nothing said in the scene that can't be integrated with that view. However, the total context makes such a position untenable: it fails to resolve the anomalies which surface with the French ambassador in whom Shakespeare introduces no worthy foe with a serious mission but a carrier of adolescent insults from the Dauphin, a reminder—one of many in the play—of the Hal we once thought so highly of. If the act to that point was ambiguous, the tennis

<sup>17</sup>Felperin, p. 53 and passim.

<sup>18</sup>*Complete Works*, p. 839.

balls knock us into Henry's court with a chauvinistic vengeance. And shortly God is to reappear, for the first time since *Richard II* in the history plays, as the king's only true cohort. Throughout the play, Henry's sense of his relationship to God is presented in a way that has to be taken seriously. To the suggestion that Henry is following Machiavelli's rules, one must reply that in soliloquy Henry appeals to God in exactly the tone and terms he uses publicly. Had Shakespeare intended us to see in this the manipulating Machiavel, he has gone about it in a way no Elizabethan, at least, could have recognized. What is more important, Henry's faith in God and his relation to Him is borne out by the play's movement and events. What we should recognize in this first act is neither an ironically conceived picture of a manipulative establishment nor a sheltered hero-king whose bishops do his dirty work. It is simply a naturalistic portrayal of political life into which a central figure is introduced who is conceived on a model at once heroic and romantic, a model too absolute to fit comfortably into its environment.

A second early instance of the same quality in Henry's characterization occurs in II.ii, the scene that establishes order at home before the movement to France. When the English traitors are marched before Henry to be tried, he is again absolute authority and sole actor, so he must personally—and not, like his father, through some Northumberland—unveil their guilt and pronounce their doom. Nor does he carry any of the human ambiguity in his character that made it possible for Bolingbroke to play out Aumerle's treachery as a comedy balancing Richard II's tragic end. He only makes eminently clear to the audience the full justice of what he is about to do by impressing us with the strength of his will and intelligence as he weaves their moral entrapment. While shades of Richard III seem to hover in the background, Shakespeare seeks to dispel them by raising his Aeneas to a higher plane and in the process thoroughly romanticizing him. It is here that God comes back into play, Henry first committing the traitors to His mercy and then the country's strength into His hands—making himself God's lieutenant (a role he calls up frequently as the play progresses). Next, the traitors themselves “see the light”: they go rather happily to death, thanking Henry for having discovered their faults in time to prevent an unfortunate murder. Perhaps only a Prospero could make a modern audience accept this as the way traitors would behave in such a situation. In fact, Prospero does just that. This mingling of heroic rigor and romantic idealism is based on God not because Shakespeare is intent upon giving dramatic form to a “Tudor myth,”<sup>19</sup> but because he has to ground

<sup>19</sup>That possibility has been put to rest by the demolition of “the Elizabethan world picture” as a reigning force in the history plays in Moody Prior's *Drama of Power* and

his vision of political order on something capable of bearing the weight. If he is to successfully mythicize (some might say re-mystify) the king, he must do so through a conceptual pattern that can have meaning for his audience. As Ernst Kantorowicz has made eminently clear, the natural place for an Elizabethan to go for such a concept is to that strange and elaborate nexus of political-theological-legal ideas that Tudor jurists elaborated ad infinitum: the separation of the king's body natural from the king's body politic and, more specifically, to the christological parallel that formed its basis.<sup>20</sup> Two of the reigning images of Henry in the play—the dispenser of Justice (here in II.ii, at the gate of Harfleur, remarking upon the hanging of Bardolph) and the incarnated King (at Agincourt: the more than human become merely human, taking on man with Erpingham's cloak)—are readily available in that nexus. This is not to say, any more than Kantorowicz did in his reading of *Richard II*, that Shakespeare was a student of jurisprudence, but to insist that the ideas were current and represent a theory of kingship perfectly suited to Shakespeare's dramatic needs. The "king's body politic" was understood to be just such a "mystical body" as Shakespeare envisions in the union depicted in *Henry V*—both what it includes and what it rejects.<sup>21</sup> That body depended for its validity upon the incarnational model of kingship, the king as *vicarius dei* or *vicarius Christi*, the role Henry casts himself in and that Shakespeare casts him in as well, assimilating the godlike to the heroic in a secularization of the mystical notion quite parallel to the jurists' own.

Does this mean, as Moody Prior feared, that in *Henry V* Shakespeare turned his back on the knowledge implicit in his naturalistic treatment of politics in *Richard II* and *Henry IV* and returned to the political perspective of the Yorkist tetralogy? In a sense, yes, but only in a sense. Insofar as the original perspective depended upon a notion of the supra-human in social order, he did. But he has transvalued the suprahuman and made it dependent, like all avowedly fictive orders, on the nature of its specific embodiment. Thus the play is not a preachment for divine

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Robert Ornstein's *A Kingdom for A Stage* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972). Prior's study and Ornstein's first chapter are the most effective destructions of the "Tudor myth" in general, though Prior himself worries that *Henry V* marks a return to the providential reading of history associated with that myth (ch. 14).

<sup>20</sup>Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957).

<sup>21</sup>Kantorowicz finds the terms virtually synonymous, p. 15. Jameson, pp. 142–43, on the historical role of romance is apposite: "The fate of romance as a form is dependent on the availability of elements more acceptable to the reader than those older magical categories for which some adequate substitute must be invented."

right, but an idealized perception of an ideal political order; and thus, too, the play is at pains to define Henry as opposite to Richard II, the last Shakespearean king who called himself *vicarius dei*, but who proved a very ineffective deputy indeed.

Henry is nothing if not effective—to the limit of romantic idealization, in fact. Shakespeare constrains the idealization in two ways: by an effort to assimilate within it the troublesome historical facts and by forcibly including the remnants of Falstaff's cohorts in Henry's social context. As a major example of the first, Henry does order the slaughter of the French prisoners on the remarkably equivocal motivation we noted at the outset. Is it a military decision or revenge for the boys (and the tent)? Shakespeare apparently didn't decide, and neither can we. We can note that the first motive is supplied by Holinshed, who was as troubled by the decision as any modern reader,<sup>22</sup> and that Shakespeare found the suggestion for a slaughter of the boys (a fictitious event) in the same passage, allowing him to motivate Henry on less humanly reprehensible grounds.<sup>23</sup> All we can *know*, all the dramatic guidance we are given throws the weight of the action on the heroic parallel between Alexander's rage and Henry's. And right after Henry's expression of anger (IV.vii.52–62), the victory of Agincourt is announced. So the great moment of the play, seen by Henry as the result of divine concern ("Praised be God and not our strength for it," line 84), is seen by us as issuing from a combination of remarkable fortune (a romantic miracle, if you like) and a heroic leader endowed with the ability and strength of purpose to capitalize on both what fortune puts in his path and what he creates of fortune, thereby molding a national destiny.

<sup>22</sup>Contrary to the notations of editors such as Ribner who, to save Henry's heroic grandeur, claim that it would not bother an Elizabethan at all.

<sup>23</sup>The Holinshed passage describes a series of events Shakespeare could easily telescope and transpose into the scene vii treatment, though it remains inconsistent with vi: after a description of the plundering of the English tents, which included killing any servants who made resistance, Holinshed continues: "But when the outcrie of the lackies and boies, which ran awaie for feare of the Frenchmen thus spoiling the campe, came to the kings eare, he, (doubting least his enimies should gather together againe, and begin a new field; and mistrusting further that the prisoners would be an aid to his enimies . . . ) contrarie to his accustomed gentleness, commanded by sound of trumpet, that euerie man (vpon paine of death) should incontinentlie slaie his prisoner. When this lamentable slaughter was ended. . . ." *Holinshed's Chronicle*, ed. Allardyce and Josephine Nicoll (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1927), pp. 82–83.

It seems to dodge the issue at a point like this to say that the rabbit-seers among us behold an Alexander, the duck-seers an ex-bully king who now hangs those he once drank with, and the wise an effective ruler with his value undercut by our knowledge of his amoral expediency. All these possibilities are suggested one by one in the materials of this succession of scenes, but the materials remain disparate; they do not come together to form a coherent larger vision.<sup>24</sup>

A similar disjunction occurs, though not so patently, around the part Prince Hal's old friends play—or fail to play—in *Henry V*. From the report of the death of Falstaff, through Pistol's plain-song with Nym, Bardolph, and the Boy, to the news of Bardolph's hanging, and finally the report of Nym's having joined him, Shakespeare cuts off all members of the old troupe one by one, even stopping in the conversation between Henry and Pistol to remind us of the lost legendary good fellowship of "the lovely bully" and these men (IV.i.44–48), a fellowship which it is notable that Pistol never, in fact, enjoyed. Because these characters retain their noisy naturalism, readers have often taken their dismissal as the sign of a kind of incipient totalitarianism in Shakespeare's garden-state, its leader having divorced himself from fellowship, good will, and the affection that he once had for men like Pistol. And perhaps it was a gamble that Shakespeare lost, bringing together his romantic ruler and naturalistic subjects (as perhaps also with Falstaff in *2 Henry IV*). Yet it is reasonably evident that if Henry is to be the personification of an ideal England, then the communal bond which he engenders and supports must itself be significant. What it means to Pistol is neatly expressed in his abandoning the luggage to the boys—and the boys to their subsequent slaughter (IV.iv.70–73).<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup>If Shakespeare had intended to guide us to a multivalent perception of Henry, he has handled the soliloquies strangely. Usually a major vehicle for the conflicts within or around a central character, here such conflict is limited to Henry's eve of battle fear that God may not yet be satisfied for the sin Henry's *father* committed in "compassing the crown" (IV.i.276–92) and to the difficulties of the regal role (IV.ii.217–71). The difficulties do not include generalized political ambiguity but, as Kantorowicz noted by opening his reading of *Richard II* with several lines from this speech, the weight of bearing the king's two bodies. The speech seems designed more to reverse the vision of kingship Richard II cherished than to throw any ambiguous light on Henry's thoughts or actions in this play. ("Ceremony" is a mere idol. The responsibilities, not the perquisites, of kingship define it for Henry.)

<sup>25</sup>Rossiter, pp. 58–61, presents the most deceptively "large-minded" rejection of my point of view when, in the course of quite correctly rejecting academic historicism, he rejects history as well. Like many Shakespearean commentators, he assumes that ideas of national unity are regressive medievalism and therefore incompatible with Shakespearean "modernity."

It has often been remarked that the replacement of Falstaff and his remnant by Fluellen, Gower, Macmorris, and Jamy as the group forming Henry's connection with the common man is an unfortunate idealization of the kingly role. Whether or not it is unfortunate, it is an idealization, as all essentially utopian pictures are. Perhaps even the scent of totalitarianism inevitably accompanies such dreams. The somewhat sanctimonious nature of the new group has lost enormously in sheer humor and intensity of effect compared to what was possible in Falstaff's grittier world. (To mention the Boar's Head Tavern in the same sentence as the weak practical joke of the glove incident seems ridiculous.) Yet Shakespeare does try to create around Henry and his cohorts a new sense of fellowship, honest to the constraints of the kingly role, but not devoid of human sympathy.

That we cannot accept the replacement says something about either Shakespeare's success in dramatizing it or our own expectations about political drama, our unwillingness to entertain seriously romantic conceptions of political subjects. Insofar as our difficulty with the play is one of conflicting decorums, it is a historical and theoretical problem. Shakespeare has tried to do in this play what he continues to attempt for several years: to bring a naturalistic representation of life's seamier qualities under the idealizing umbrella of a comic perspective. But the idea was problematic in his own time: theories of *genera mixta* were continually altered and enlarged to include just such efforts, though it is questionable that theory helped. Sidney, at least, would have been as uncomfortable as we are with the likes of Henry beside Nym and Pistol—for ostensibly different reasons, of course.

Insofar, however, as our difficulties with the play spring from a rejection of the play's idealism, we can only recognize that that is the case or, at most, re-examine our own preconceptions. We resent the idea that Caliban must go to school, Shylock to church, and Bardolph to the gallows. But Shakespeare probably thought they must. At least his plays say so. What imperfections this play contains—and there are some—are the result of a relative failure in accommodating naturalistically conceived characters and events to the fabric of the play, which is predominantly romantic. Romance is in many ways antipathetic to verisimilitude, particularly when its symbolic structure runs counter to what we “know” of the reality which makes up its content. By leaning on the epic hero in order to form a political romance without sacrificing political naturalism altogether, Shakespeare created a play world with precisely the sorts of fissures a post-Romantic critical generation would leap into. Given the intensity of our belief in the indeterminate nature of human reality and, therefore, the best literature, it was inevitable that what Una Ellis-Fermor first perceived as the beginning of Shakespeare's “recoil” from the perfect king, Alvin Kernan would go on to find a picture



of the loss of the “essential ‘I’ . . . as the man disappear[ed] in the role his work demands,” from which it is a short leap to Rabkin’s insistence that ideal plus subversive equals gestalt, predictably a gestalt that makes a virtue of confusion by declaring it indeterminacy.

The next step, not yet taken so far as I know, will probably be the application of Howard Felperin’s modernist method to the play.<sup>26</sup> There are a number of “archaic narrative forms” within the play from which we will be able to witness Henry working himself free to issue forth the tragic figure whose humanity is insured by his achievement of indeterminacy. Such a reading will have the virtue of accepting all those moments when Henry repels us as warmonger or cold fish, moments which here are regarded as the unfortunate result of jarring dramatic modes. What will have been lost is not only the political romance—oxymoron though that sound in a Shakespearean context, but also a crucial step in the development of Shakespeare’s manipulation of romantic materials. While it is certainly true that the history plays introduced and elaborated themes and situations that required the tragedies for their completion, it is also true that the Henry plays, comic in themselves, are the source of comic ideas that continued fruitful. Technically the most important seems to be how to represent the “real” world, more broadly and more naturalistically enacted than in the comedies through *Twelfth Night*, in a comic shape. Part of the solution is prefigured in the role Henry plays here, a role that is the progenitor of Vincentio’s and Prospero’s. The shift in the artificer’s status from that of a Portia or Rosalind to the ruler of the play world made it possible for Shakespeare to expand enormously the content of his comedies, the realms controlled by that central figure who legitimately combines both worldly and transcendent power.

That shift in status is ultimately responsible for the play’s moving from the plane of comedy proper into romance. This paper has argued in effect that the narrative form with which Shakespeare works in *Henry V* is not “archaic”; it is merely old—old and undergoing evolution in the use to which Shakespeare puts it. Perhaps this then qualifies Shake-

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<sup>26</sup>A method demonstrated, often brilliantly, in Howard Felperin, *Shakespearean Representation* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977). Felperin himself has little to say of the Henry plays, since the book deals almost exclusively with tragedy. But he speaks of Falstaff significantly—and predictably—as the most “realistic” character of the Lancastrian plays. Like Shylock, Malvolio, and Caliban, Falstaff (according to Felperin) exhibits a “realism” born of the fatal discrepancy between archaic role and present reality which is the hallmark of tragic figures. That ontological insecurity is central to tragic experience, minimal in comic, is not ignored by Felperin, but it has been by many of *Henry V*’s commentators.

spare's use as a "re-presentation, with a difference, of inherited models or constructs of 'nature,' 'life' and 'experience.'" However, the play does not seek to break through "the mediations of art and become spontaneous and unprecedented 'life'" in anything like the sense that Felperin uncovers in the tragedies.<sup>27</sup> In fact, it espouses its status as rough and fallible mediator. Perhaps the distinction exists because romance is less interested in representing "life" in its unmediated fullness than in creating a descriptive picture of our desire for order. When Felperin notes that the early comedies seem to use internal plays to recognize the close resemblance between literature's old constructs and the play's "reality" rather than, as the tragedies do, their discrepancies, he is admitting the extent to which the comedies' treatment of inherited literary forms escapes his categories and the extent to which Shakespearean tragedy and comedy part company in deconstructing their own pasts. It is part of the inherent conservatism of comedy to accept human understanding of human life, just as it is part of tragedy's point of view to recognize the insufficiency of such understanding, and with that its forms. When we seek to explain Henry as an incipient Octavius Caesar, we express more surely our own tragic sense of political history than Shakespeare's view of the king whose garden was "achieved," albeit only in the idealizing mind.

<sup>27</sup>The consanguinity between Shakespearean tragedy, in its psychological realism, its interiority, has made the tragedies since at least the time of Schlegel susceptible to novelistic interpretation in the sense epitomized in Michael Holquist and Walter Reed's "Six Theses on the Novel— and Some Metaphors," *NLH* 11 (Spring, 1980):413-23, where the subversive is once again the sine qua non of modernist literature. Felperin himself takes Schlegel on romance as his point of departure in his recent reading of the remystifications of the romance mythos which create a novelistic reality for *The Tempest*: "The play and the protagonist are caught up within an endless and dizzying dialectic between self-mystification and demystification for which no final or stable synthesis seems possible," Howard Felperin, in "Romance and Romanticism," *Critical Inquiry* 6 (Summer 1980):698.