

Holy War in *Henry Fifth*

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Joel Altman calls *Henry V* 'the most active dramatic experience Shakespeare ever offered his audience'.¹ The experience climaxes at the end of the final battle with the arrival of news of victory. Here the king orders that two hymns be sung while the dead are buried, the 'Non Nobis' and the 'Te Deum'. In his 1989 film, Kenneth Branagh underlines the theatrical emphasis of this implicit stage direction. He extends the climax for several minutes by setting Patrick Doyle's choral-symphonic rendition of the 'Non Nobis' hymn behind a single tracking shot that follows Henry as he bears the dead body of a boy across the corpse-strewn field of Agincourt. The idea for this operatic device was supplied by Holinshed, who copied it from Halle, who got the story from a chain of traditions that originated in the event staged by the real King Henry in 1415. Henry himself took instruction from another book, the Bible.²

The hymns which Henry requested derive from verses in the psalter. 'Non Nobis' is the Latin title of [Psalm 115](#), which begins, 'Not unto us, O lord, not unto us, but unto thy Name give the glorie...'. This psalm celebrates the defeat of the Egyptian armies and God's deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea. It comes midway in the liturgical sequence known as The Egyptian Hallelujah extending from [Psalm 113-118](#), a sequence that Jesus and the disciples sang during the Passover celebration at the Last Supper and that Jews still recite at all their great festivals.³ Holinshed refers to the hymn not as 'Non Nobis' but by the title of [Psalm 114](#), 'In exitu Israel de Aegypto' ('When Israel came out of Egypt').⁴

The miraculous military victory commemorated in the 'Non Nobis' is the core event of salvation in the Bible, the model of all of God's interventions in human history. That event is recalled and recreated in other psalms, in accounts of military victories like Joshua's, David's, the Maccabees', and archangel Michael's, and in stories of rescue from drowning like Noah's, Jonah's, and Paul's. Most scholars agree that the original source of these tales of deliverance is found in what they identify as the earliest Biblical text, 'The song of the Sea' in [Exodus 15](#): 'I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously...The Lord is a man of war, his name is Jehovah. Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea...Thy right hand Lord, is glorious in power: thy right arm Lord hath bruised the enemy.'⁵ Like 'The Star Spangled Banner', this song defines national identity by commemorating a miraculous underdog battle victory.

The place of the Agincourt story in Shakespeare's English History cycle resembles the place of the Red Sea victory in the Bible: it fixes the central moment both remembered and prefigured: 'Just as the first tetralogy looks back to *Henry V* as emblem of lost glory that shows up the inadequacy of his son's troubled reign, the second looks forward to his glorious accession...'. The progress of the two tetralogies, then, is a progress back in time to a dead hero...'.⁶ Agincourt creates a national hero like Moses, but more important it testifies to the intervention of God on our side: 'O God thy arm was here; And not to us, but to thy arm alone, Ascribe we all!...Take it God for it is none but thine' (4.8.106- 112), says Henry, once again quoting scripture: 'For they inherited not the land by their own sword: neither did their own arm save them. But thy right hand and thine arme...'([Psalm 44:3-4](#)). Under penalty of death, all the euphoria and relief of victory must be channelled toward God: 'Be it death proclaimed through our host / To boast of this, or take that praise from God / Which is His only (4.8.114- 16).'⁷

Henry is known as both the most religious and the most warlike of English kings. In this essay, I will explore some of the relationships between war, religion and politics that connect Shakespeare's play to the depiction of holy war in the Bible. After a discussion of Henry the Fifth's pious fashioning of foreign policy from Biblical models, I will examine Shakespeare's treatment of Henry's Machiavellian uses of religion to gain political power. Then I will reconcile the contradiction between pious and cynical understandings of holy war with references to Machiavelli's own interpretation of Biblical history and politics. I will go on to show that this reconciliation stems from the inner holy war in Henry's personal relationship with God, a conflict illuminated by the notion of the Mystery of State developed by seventeenth century French apologists for Machiavelli. I will conclude by comparing the rhetorical strategies of Biblical and Shakespearian holy war narratives and their effects on later audiences.[8](#)

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Alone in prayer, Henry addresses his deity as 'God of Battles' (4.1.288). In the Hebrew Bible, God is referred to more than fifty times with the formula, 'Yahweh Sabaoth', the Lord of Hosts. This title was derived from earlier Canaanite and Babylonian deities who were described as leaders of battalions of followers warring against enemy gods or monsters to bring forth creation. Biblical usage of 'Lord of Hosts' at some times refers to God at the forefront of troops of angels and at others as the chief of the armies of the Israelites.[9](#) Yahweh's war god manifestations range from miraculous interventions as a destroyer of Israel's enemies to mundane advice on logistical procedures.

In the latter four books of the Torah, God functions as the king of the emergent Israelite nation and is so addressed. In the later books of Samuel and Kings, the role of kingship descends to anointed human rulers like Saul, David and Solomon. Yet in the language of address and in the manifestations of royal behaviour, the demarcations separating these two levels of kingship are often blurred. No matter what level, the essence of kingship is sovereignty or rule, and rule is conceived as the exercise of military power. 'King' is synonymous with 'general' or 'warlord'. Yahweh's power is established by his victory in battle.

Miller, following von Rad, labels this underlying principle of Biblical holy war as 'synergism': 'at the center of Israel's warfare was the unyielding conviction that victory was the result of a fusion of divine and human activity...while might of arms and numbers were not the determining factors...It was yet possible for the people to see themselves as going to the aid of Yahweh in battle ([Judges 5:23](#)). Yahweh fought for Israel even as Israel fought for Yahweh.Yahweh was general of both the earthly and the heavenly hosts.'[10](#) Shakespeare's opening chorus proclaims this elision of god, king and general in a blithely syncretic mixture: 'O... should the warlike Harry, like himself / Assume the port of Mars, and at his heels / Leashed in, like hounds should famine, sword and fire / Crouch for employment' (1.0.1-8). The chorus specializes in such rhetoric of deification, referring to Henry as 'The mirror of all Christian kings', suggesting a 'King of Kings' godlike supremacy and instructing us to 'cry, "Praise and glory on his head'." Exeter employs similar hyperbole when he warns the French King of Harry's approach, 'in fierce tempest is he coming, / In thunder and in earthquake, like a Jove...' (2.4.99-100). Mixing pagan and Biblical references to a storm god, Exeter here alludes to the Yahweh of [Psalm 29:3-5](#): 'The voice of the Lord is upon the waters; the God of glory maketh it to thunder...the voice of the lord breaketh the cedars.'

In addition to being Godlike, like Moses or Joshua or Saul, the King claims God's authorization and backing for what he does. The Archbishops assert that 'God and his angels guard your sacred throne.' As opposed to the French who only use God's name to swear, Henry continually invokes His help and blessing, and his war cry in battle is 'God for Harry, England and St. George' (3.1.34). Specific Biblical references and proof texts are offered as justification for his decisions. The Book of Numbers, the only Biblical text mentioned in all of Shakespeare, provides support for the priests' interpretation of the Salic Law, and the rules for siege warfare in [Deuteronomy 20](#) provide the guidelines for Henry's threat against and subsequent treatment of Harfleur.[11](#)

The attack against France is by implication a substitution for his father's oft-repeated intention to lead a holy crusade to liberate Jerusalem from the Turks. Crusade is a form of holy war that involves a different

variation of the synergistic collaboration between God and humans. Rather than manifesting God's support of man, it is the human enactment of God's will on earth. Crusade undertakes to right wrongs, reestablish justice, punish evildoers and express God's wrath through human agency. It is waged by the faithful against those who have rebelled against God.¹² In addressing the French king, Exeter casts Henry in this role of God's agent: 'He wills you, in the name of god Almighty /t hat you divest yourself, and lay apart / The borrowed glories that by gift of heaven, by law of nature and of nations, / 'longs to him and to his heirs--namely the crown...' (2.4.76-81). 'Henry Le Roy' represents the King this way to Williams, Bates and Court: 'War is his [God's] beadle, war is his vengeance; so that here men are punished for beforebreach of the King's laws in now the King's quarrel' (4.1.169-71). His war is holy not only because it collectively punishes his evil-doing opponents, but because it individually mortifies his sinful subjects. This notion of war as the Scourge of God justifies unlimited brutality against those who resist but insists on mercy to those who accede and beg mercy. It is this principle that not only authorizes but requires Henry's cruel threats to French noncombatants in his initial declaration of war and at Harfleur.

However, though the King insists that the victory of Agincourt is not his but God's, Shakespeare's depiction of Henry and of the way events unfold suggests otherwise. Henry follows his father Bolingbroke's footsteps in thinking and behaving as if the outcome of events is decided by his own courage and cleverness. The elder Henry plans a holy war against the Turks as a means to quell civil war at home and to ease his conscience for usurping the throne, and his dying words include the advice to his son to 'busy giddy minds with foreign quarrels' to solidify his shaky regime (*II Henry IV* 4.5.213-14). And immediately following the Chorus's opening invocation of Henry's divine mission, we eavesdrop on a backroom conversation revealing that he has secured the Archbishop's sanction for the invasion of France in return for his agreement to block the bill in Commons that would force the church to pay taxes to support the sick and indigent.

Incidents like these suggest that Shakespeare exposes holy war as a device manipulated by Kings for political ends, confirming what Stephen Greenblatt calls '...the most radically subversive hypothesis in his culture about the origin and function of religion'.¹³ That hypothesis was formulated by Machiavelli in his account of the ancient Roman practice of securing popular support for the state with the pretence of piety. The wisest leaders, Machiavelli claimed, are those who 'foster and encourage [religion] even though they be convinced that it is quite fallacious. And the more should they do this the greater their prudence and the more they know of natural laws.'¹⁴

The most popular critical solution to the apparent contradiction between Henry as holy warrior and as Machiavellian Prince is what Harry Berger labels 'the historico-political approach'. This explains Henry's manipulation of religion as the outcome of "'a passage from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance and the modern world," ...the familiar story of disenchantment in which religious attitudes toward history and politics give way to secular and humanistic attitudes...a fall from sacramental kingship to a Machiavellian conception of kingship...'.¹⁵ But as Berger points out, such a reading fails to take account of the genuine spiritual conflicts and concerns experienced by Henry--and, one might add, by his father, by Falstaff on his deathbed, and by all of those who continued religious warfare throughout the seventeenth century. Rather than demonstrate opposing Biblical and Humanist perspectives in *Henry V*, it may be more instructive to show how the Bible itself provided both Machiavelli and Shakespeare with a model for ambivalent attitudes toward holy war, kingship and the relationship between politics and religion.

Like *Henry V*, the Biblical text is itself a 'site of contestation'.¹⁶ The God of Deuteronomy through 2 Kings rewards those who obey His commandments and punishes those who don't. The God of Job states that assuming this, as the comforters do, is punishable heresy. Jesus states we should turn the other cheek, but also that he comes to bring the sword. Such inconsistencies are largely attributable to conflicting outlooks of previous 'traditions' or documentary sources of the final canonized text: priestly vs. prophetic, tribal vs. centrist, rural vs urban, Northern vs. Southern Kingdoms.¹⁷ Similarly, Shakespeare's histories are redactions of layers of documentary sources from Froissart to Halle to Holinshed, each the expression of different ideologies.

One of the contradictions most relevant to Shakespeare's histories is the Bible's dual view of kingship. The Henriad alternates between propounding the Tudor myth of divine ordination and royal infallibility and acknowledging 'that the crown is always illegitimate, that is, always an effect of social relations and not their cause, and therefore must (and can) endlessly be legitimated by improvisations of each wearer'.¹⁸ Likewise, in the Bible, the institution of kingship was a gift of God to the Israelites--'I will send thee a man...to be governor over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hands of the Philistines: for I have looked upon my people and their cry is come unto me' ([I Sam 9:16](#))--or an expression of the people's rebellion against God: '...they have cast me away, that I should not reign over them...', a rebellion in face of the warning that the king will exploit and manipulate them for his own purposes: 'He will take your sons, and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen...he will appoint him captains over thousands and captains over fifties; and to ear his ground and to reap his harvest and to make his instruments of war... And ye shall cry out that day because of your King whom ye have chosen you and the Lord will not hear you at that day' ([I Sam 8:7-18](#)). And like all of Shakespeare's kings, the individual kings of the Bible are portrayed under profoundly ambivalent judgement. Saul is a charismatic general who succeeds in securing territory by uniting the tribes against the Philistines, but he arrogates too many powers to himself and is driven insane. He is succeeded by David, God's favourite and beloved by the people, but after displaying the self-abnegating loyalty to his master, the brilliance in battle, and the genius in diplomacy to build a great empire, he is punished for betraying God and his subjects in a scandalous sexual intrigue. David's son, Solomon, builds on his father's achievements and attains distinction as the wisest of men, turning the Empire into a showpiece of wealth and culture, but his glory is eclipsed when his sons once again divide the kingdom and plummet it into civil wars which eventually result in foreign conquest. An analogous reversal is reported in the epilogue of *Henry V*:

This star of England fortune made his sword;
By which the world's best garden he achieved,
And of it left his son imperial lord...
Whose state so many had the managing,
That they lost France and made his England bleed;
(6-12)

The approach to Shakespeare's Histories with a providential-historical or religious-secular dichotomy also breaks down when one notes how Renaissance humanists discovered that the Bible contained a political history as rich and revealing as those written by Romans and Greeks. Machiavelli himself found a precedent for his own remorseless value judgements in the Bible's often brutal portrayal of authority, rebellion and war. In the Moses of the Pentateuch, Machiavelli discovered an ideal hero, a model of the qualities that inhered in those who founded durable institutions: 'Of all men that are praised, those are praised most who have played the chief part in founding a religion. Next come those who have founded either republics or kingdoms.'¹⁹ Moses was the only one in Machiavelli's history who did both. 'But to come to those who have become princes by their own virtue and not by fortune, I say that the most excellent are Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, Theseus and the like...'. In common with all those political leaders who form new states, Moses faces a dual challenge: he must defeat enemies and maintain unity and support among followers. This is foreshadowed in the Biblical story of Moses killing the Egyptian taskmaster who was beating a Hebrew slave ([Exodus 2:11-14](#)). Next day, when he returned to try to get two Hebrews to stop fighting each other, they denied his authority and asked whether he planned to kill them as well. The only way that Moses can take control to achieve God's purpose of forming a nation strong enough to beat the Egyptians and conquer their own territory is by producing belief--in enemies, credibility; in followers, faith. This is also the task of Henry the Fifth as he takes the throne in an England on the edge of invasion and civil war, and reluctant to accept his rule. The means to succeed in this endeavour are enumerated both in the works of Machiavelli and in the Bible.

One such means is to supply legal justification for the appropriation of territory. This is provided to the Hebrews by the contractual agreement Moses reports that God made with their forefather Abraham to grant his seed the promised land. The Archbishops provide Henry with a similar covenant in 'the Law Salique', which 'proves' that he can 'with right and conscience make this claim' (1.2.96) of the territory of France. Such legal

justification is largely for home consumption, since it is unlikely to be persuasive to those who presently occupy the land, but the next means--that of intimidation--is addressed equally to followers and opponents. Threats must be rendered convincing with terror tactics, both to weaken enemy morale and to buttress one's own side's confidence. God tells Moses to punish Pharaoh with plague after plague to demonstrate the strength of the Israelites and he repeatedly hardens Pharaoh's heart to make him responsible for the suffering of his own people: 'Then there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as was never one like, nor shall be. But against none of the children of Israel shall a dog move his tongue neither against man nor beast, that ye may know that the Lord putteth a difference between the Egyptians and Israel' ([Exodus 11:6-7](#)). After justification, Henry also resorts to intimidation, in a series of threats against the French which emphasize the suffering of noncombatants. First he instructs the ambassadors to '...tell the pleasant prince...his soul shall stand sore charged...for many a thousand widows / Shall this his mock mock out of their dear husbands; / Mock mothers from their sons...' (1.2.281-6). Through Exeter he bids the French king 'in the bowels of the Lord / Deliver up the crown...take mercy / On...the widow's tears, the orphans' cries, / The dead man's blood, the privy maidens' groans...' (2.4.102-107). And finally he utters directly to the citizens of Harfleur the familiar litany of lurid atrocities which brings about the town's surrender (3.3.7-43).

Brutalizing of one's opponents like this also addresses the problem of 'murmurings' among one's followers that constantly troubles Moses--the 'lukewarmness' that Machiavelli observes in citizens of new states. Henry also uses intimidation among his own men to enforce discipline, letting them all know that he is willing to hang his former friend Bardolph for unauthorized plundering, and at the same time claiming that such rigour is mercy rather than cruelty: 'We would have all such offenders so cut off...we would have none upbraided or abused in disdainful language, for when lenity and cruelty play for a kingdom the gentler gamester is the soonest winner.' (3.6.107-13) The king agrees with Machiavelli who insists that cruelty is merciful: 'A prince...so as to keep his subjects united and faithful, should not care about the infamy of cruelty, because with very few examples he will be more merciful than those who for the sake of too much mercy allow disorders to continue...' [20](#) Rather than contrasting this cynicism with Biblical morality, Machiavelli substantiates his claims with the example of Moses: 'He who reads the Bible with discernment will see that, before Moses set about making laws and institutions, he had to kill a very great number of men who...were opposed to his plans.' [21](#) Here he refers to incidents of rebellion, like worship of the Golden Calf, or Korah's revolt which Moses responded to with mass executions. It is these God-sanctioned actions that validate the Machiavellian maxim that the end justifies the means. [22](#)

One of the most effective of such means is dissimulation: 'The princes who have done great things are those who have taken little account of faith and have known how to get around men's brains with their astuteness...it is necessary to know well how to...be a great pretender and dissembler.' [23](#) The Bible approves countless examples of such shifts: Abraham and Isaac's deception of Pharaoh and Abimelech, Jacob's deception of his father and uncle, Joseph's protracted deception of father and brothers, Ehud's assassination of the Moabite King, Eglon, David's feigned insanity, Nathan's entrapment of David into confessing his own guilt. Jesus himself tells his disciples they must proceed with the wariness of serpents ([Matthew 10:16](#)) and constantly dissimulates his own weakness. Trickery is a skill that Henry learns from both his father figures, Bolingbroke and Falstaff. Henry IV feigns loyalty to the king he deposes and then solicitude for the one he executes, and he triumphs over his enemies in battle not by valour but with the stratagem of dressing many in the king's coats. Falstaff is the father of lies and disguises. Likewise, just as he robs the robbers and confuses his fathers' spies, Hal deceives the whole kingdom both with appearances of prodigality and of holiness.

Dissimulation serves to disorient and confuse those over whom one wishes to gain power, but it also serves as a device to gather intelligence. Moses is commanded to send spies into the promised land to report on enemy strength; Joshua sends spies into Jericho to recruit Rahab to spy for them; David constantly spies on Saul, and his general Joab maintains surveillance in all camps. God spies on his enemies in Babel and Sodom and on his subjects, like Adam and Eve, Abraham, Jacob and Job, as he tests their loyalty with temptations and ordeals. So Henry V spies on his subjects in the Boar's Head tavern, on his captains and foot soldiers on the night before battle, and on his close friends, Cambridge, Scroop and Grey, at the outset of the French campaign.

According to Machiavelli, to produce the belief required for political rule, it is as important to be sceptical oneself as to manipulate the faith of others. Religious deceptions are required because most people are not rational enough to accept the real truths which such deceptions support: 'Nor in fact was there ever a legislator, who in introducing extraordinary laws to a people, did not have recourse to God, for otherwise they would not have been accepted, since many benefits of which a prudent man is aware, are not so evident to reason that he can convince others of them.'²⁴ Though it is his intelligence system that has discovered the plot against him, Henry construes his rescue as miraculous evidence of God's special protection and parlays that evidence into a morale- raising prediction of future success in battle: 'We doubt not of a fair and lucky war, / Since God so graciously hath brought to light / This dangerous treason, lurking in our way...Then forth dear countrymen. Let us deliver / Our puissance into the hand of God...' (2.2.185-90) Here he follows Machiavelli's advice about the efficacy of miracles in creating the 'synergistic' alliance between divine and human energies. Astute leaders will both try to create miracles and more important will reinforce faith in earlier miracles to buttress belief in their own miraculous powers.²⁵ In secret, the Archbishops admit that they no longer believe in miracles: 'It must be so, for miracles are ceased; / And therefore we must needs admit the means / How things are perfected.' (1.1.67-69) They nevertheless also construe Hal's conversion as a supernatural transformation: '...a wonder how his Grace should glean it / Since his addiction was to courses vain' (1.1.53-54). Their wonder is the outcome intended by Henry's overall strategy of dissimulation. To frustrate expectation either by feigning weakness or bluffing strength is as strategic in politics as in poker. Mystification and hiding is a rhetorical means of amplifying the power of revelation. God's obscurity in the Bible, his invisibility and remoteness, makes his voice that much louder when it speaks, whether in thunder on Sinai, out of a whirlwind in Job, or at those moments in the New Testament when he drops the disguise of mortal poverty and is suddenly recognized as a divine presence.

Such appearances and removals of disguise are experienced by the citizenry as another species of miracle. When Hal unmasks his own knowledge of the traitors' conspiracy, they admit their sins and condemn themselves to death. When he reveals himself after the robbery at Gad's Hill as one of the 'men in buckram', Falstaff manages to cover any trace of wonder, but when finally 'breaking through the mist of foul and ugly vapours that did seem to strangle him (I HIV 1.2.202-3)', Henry takes on the mantle of the true King at the last-judgement- like coronation, even the fat man responds by getting real religion. Both playful and awesome, these are the kind of tricks that Hal, like the God of the Bible, seems never to tire of playing.²⁶ Shakespeare himself also seemed never to tire of plot incidents about dissimulation and of power figures who use such deceptions to produce belief in order to rule others. Some practitioners of this art, like Iago and Edmund, are evil. But more often, the dissimulator adopts a benevolent stance to improve or educate those who are too corrupt or deceived or stupid to recognize the truth in its own terms. Ranging from Rosalind, Viola, and Paulina to Duke Vincentio and Prospero, what they all have in common, and what perhaps accounts for Shakespeare's fascination with them is their theatricality, their association with himself as author and dramatist, a figure who like the author of the Bible is identified with the Word as creative principle, human protagonist, and book itself.

But Machiavelli's paradox about truth hidden in the lies of state religion hints at a conception of God richer than mere subterfuge. Though he rejects the Christianity of his own day as 'effeminate...due to the pusillanimity of those who have interpreted our religion', he affirms a religion like that of the Romans or Hebrews that 'permits us to exalt and defend the father land...and to train ourselves to be such that we may defend it'.²⁷ Machiavelli's own 'God-Talk' includes serious references to personalized cosmic forces--whether the seductive Fortuna of *The Prince* or the God who is a 'Lover of strong men', or the 'heaven' who involves himself in human history by choosing strong leaders.²⁸ Seventeenth century commentators made much of this aspect of Machiavelli's writings, defending him as being a theologian of the Divine Right of Kings whose outlook was perfectly commensurate with the Bible's rather than an atheistic Machiavel.²⁹ Their interpretation links Machiavelli to the ancient and medieval doctrine of The Mystery of State--the notion that royal dissimulation is not only a requirement for rule but in itself a divine and divinity-generating activity. Kings are in possession of magic powers by virtue of their access to secrets and occult wisdom withheld from their subjects: 'It is specifically the violence, obscurity and ineffable quality of the gods that must be imitated..the

coups d'etat are princely imitations of all those attributes of divinity that were thought to be either beyond human power (like miracles) or beyond the laws and moral prescriptions that bound men but not God.³⁰

Although he practises dissimulation throughout the play, Henry's most sustained enactment of the Mysteries of State occurs during the moonlit scene before the final battle. The 'ruin'd band' of the 'poor condemned English', who 'like sacrifices, by the watchful fires / Sit patiently and inly ruminate / The morning's danger' (4.0.22-5) are experiencing the dark night of the soul which represents the 'original rendering of 'holy war' in Christianity... the point at which the devotee is forced to fight with all his strength against despair, against creeping doubts concerning the meaningfulness of his past life and previous sacrifices'.³¹ The king, in Godlike fashion, with 'largess universal like the sun...thawing cold fear' bestows comfort with 'a little touch of Harry in the night.' But after his morale-raising banter with the lords, Henry's warmth is shown to be a pretence when he asks Erpingham for his cloak and admits that he needs to be alone for a while before he can continue encouraging the other officers.

The cloak's new disguise serves him in several ways. First he uses it to spy on the men, in order to determine the strength of their support and to root out their murmurings and weak morale. This he must do in mufti, for he knows that if he appears as himself, his subjects will tell him, like any higher power, only what they think he wants to hear. Eavesdropping on Pistol, Gower and Fluellen produces evidence of their full support, and so he moves on. The conversation between Court, Bates and Williams is less reassuring and requires intervention. He tries to counter their hopelessness with assurances of the King's exemplary valour and their cynicism with Biblical parables and Jesuitical casuistry justifying the righteousness of the war, but none of these efforts work to produce belief.

This is the one time Henry fails, and he is so frustrated that he almost blows his cover with a threat against Williams (4.1.206). The frustration arises not so much from the inconsequential political setback, as from the failure of another motive covered by his cloak: he too needs a little touch of warmth. For Henry himself experiences an interior holy war, his own dark night of the soul. Upon leaving Erpingham, he had admitted that 'I and my bosom must debate awhile' (4.1.31), and to the soldiers he utters a lengthy description of the King's personal vulnerability: '...I think the King is but a man, as I am...when he sees reason of fears, as we do, his fears, out of doubt, be of the same relish as ours are; yet in reason, no man should possess him with any appearance of fear, lest he, by showing it should dishearten his army' (4.1.101-12). The disguise here is thinning. Harry Le Roi speaks more frankly than Henry the Fifth ever could, but, ironically, the soldiers react to his plea for their support as if it were only manipulative dissimulation.

During the play's first scene, the Archbishops had used the language of holy war to describe Henry's earlier identity crisis as a scourging crusade: '...wildness mortified in him, / Seemed to die...consideration like an angel came / and whipped the offending Adam out of him / Leaving his body as a paradise / T'envelop and contain celestial spirits / ...reformation in a flood...scouring faults / ...hydra-headed willfulness so soon did lose its seat' (1.1.26-36). According to Canterbury, Henry's motivation and ability as a general/king/god was cultivated through his preparatory defeat of the forces of that Great Satan, Falstaff, in a coup d'etat much like the one his father staged to topple Richard and his supporters. Developing the personality of a King required killing, whipping, and a scouring flood. But on this eve of battle we see his internal enemies not as wildness but as fear, doubt and guilt.

As he moves away from the soldiers to confront these opponents, Henry uncloaks himself fully. Heard only by the spying audience, in soliloquy he reveals the mystery of state. His royalty, his godlike divine right, is mere dissimulation performed by monarch-actor and applauded by subjects-spectators. His unceremonious encounter with Williams, Court, and Bates has taught him that he is nothing without ceremony, that ceremony itself is at once king and god, and that all are Baconian idols: 'And what have kings that privates have not too, / Save ceremony, save general ceremony? What kind of god art thou, that sufferest more / Of mortal griefs than do thy worshippers?' (4.1.239-242) His acknowledgement resembles the tormented recognitions of other Shakespearian military leaders who have lost faith in their own self projections--tragic protagonists like Hamlet,

Lear, Antony and Coriolanus--and it also alludes to the tragic portrait of the suffering servant in Isaiah and the Gospels, in particular the internal struggle of Christ during his vigil at Gethsemane. This identification is itself another Mystery of State, what Donaldson calls 'a royal kenosis':

The prince, imitating a divinity who put off his divinity in Christ in order to achieve the salvation of the world, puts off an ideal and otherworldly goodness in order to achieve the safety of the people, exchanging contemplative perfection for morally flawed action...the idea that the king is an imitator of God...includes mimesis...of those modes of divine action that entail a lowering of the divine nature... 'It is only a good prince who will hazard his own salvation to seek that of the subjects whom he governs'.[32](#)

Reconceiving his despair and weakness as itself an attribute of divinity, Henry can again dissimulate authority in a brief encounter with Erpingham, who interrupts him for a moment to remind him of his officers' need for the King's presence.

Alone once more, perhaps having returned the cloak to its owner, the King addresses God directly in a mode of discourse even less performative than soliloquy, prayer. We see him encountering the existential reality of God-in-the-trenches rather than projecting the ideological spectacle of 'God for Harry.' And yet what does he seek at this moment of truth? 'Steel my soldiers' hearts, possess them not with fear.' His request is for morale--the very thing that his own public performance is expected to produce, the very thing that the soldiers and the lords ask of him, and that he, as Harry Le Roy, has asked of them. His 'God of Battles' is imagined not as one who will bring victory through a miraculous defeat of the enemy, but rather as one who will succeed where Henry has just failed, in buttressing his men's courage and faith. As if to instruct God, he specifies the means by which this effect can be achieved: 'Take from them now / The sense of reck'ning [if] the opposed numbers/Pluck their hearts from them'(4.1.290-292). It is to blind them from the truth, to cloud their thinking, to reinstitute ceremonial dissimulation. This request for falsehood slides into another uncomfortable revelation of truth: 'Not today O Lord, / O not today, think not upon the fault my father made in compassing the crown' (297-299). He again begs God to hide the truth, but now from Himself. In other words, Henry prays that God will help him deceive his own conscience, like the King in *Hamlet*, 'a man to double business bound'(3.3 41). But also like Claudius, Henry is again frustrated. Instead of being granted forgetfulness, he is further reminded of his guilt and failure: 'I Richard's body have interred new / And on it bestowed... contrite tears... / ...I have built / Two chantries... / More will I do; / Though all that I can do is nothing worth. / Since that my penitence comes after all, / Imploring pardon'(395-305). No matter how he tries to cover them, the King cannot escape the knowledge of the secrets he keeps. Sanctimonious action, whether in the form of daily penances of solemn priests or the holy war against France, fails to produce a feeling of innocence. Both God and King must rule by the art of dissimulation. and yet never be themselves deceived. This is the burden of the Mystery of State that will keep him forever imploring pardon. But simply setting it down for a moment in private allows him to gather the strength to carry it further. For that burden is also a magic instrument, an occult wisdom that gives him the sense of superiority over all other humans.

Machon illuminates the tension in the closing lines of Henry's prayer with this frank analysis of moral frailty and strength:

When I hide to attend to my natural functions, is this not to dissimulate the human weakness that is in me? When I do not speak all reveries that are in my mind and the extravagances that present themselves there without my consent, is that not to dissimulate, since my words are other than my thoughts and I reveal only the hundredth part of them? When I deny the vices

I am accused of, hide my bad humor, am generous against my will, do not speak to women of the favors which in my heart I desire of them, forget myself before those to whom I owe respect, and since all my life, like those of other men is merely constraint, and ceremony, is it not to dissimulate, is it not in fact to practice what people want me to condemn in words? What would the world be without dissimulation? What would become of prudence, shame, modesty, discretion, reserve, honesty, civility, pleasure, estimation, reputation, honor, glory, reward, love, clemency, compassion, good deeds and all the best virtues that temper our malice and cover up our infirmities and our faults?³³

Like Machon's true confession that falsehood is necessary, Henry's honest acknowledgement of his secret guilt makes it possible for him to continue dissimulating. Now he can respond to his importunate brother Gloucester by saying, 'I will go with thee./ The day, my friends, and all things stay for me'(4.1.307-8).

The nighttime victory in his inner holy war powers Henry's morning speech on St. Crispian's Day. So effective is this in awakening faith and producing belief that the men express a sense of privilege in being able to participate in an engagement where they are five times outnumbered. In several ways that speech leads back to the original scene of holy war in the book of Exodus. Promising victory to the frightened Israelites on the night before their departure from Egypt, Moses delivers instructions for celebrating this as a feast day with a blood sacrifice and a shared meal that is to protect, mark and bond them:

...Let every man take unto him a lamb according to the house of the fathers...then all the multitude of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at even. After they shall take of the blood and strike it on the two posts, and on the upper doorposts of the houses where they shall eat it. And they shall eat the flesh the same night...(Exodus 12:3-9)

Likewise, Henry proclaims that 'This day is call'd the feast of Crispian' and that '...he to-day that sheds his blood with me / Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile / This day shall gentle his condition' (4.3.61-63). Both speeches prophesy the participation of future generations in the upcoming events by incorporating instructions for ritual commemoration of the event even before it happens. Thus Moses, And this day shall be unto you a remembrance: and ye shall keep it an holy feast unto the Lord throughout your generations: ye shall keep it holy by an ordinance forever...for that same day I will bring your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore ye shall observe this day throughout your posterity by an ordinance forever. (Exodus 12:14-17)

And thus Henry,

He that shall see this day, and live old age,
Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbors,
And say, 'Tomorrow is Saint Crispian'.
Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars...
...Then shall our names...
Be in their flowing cups freshly remembered.
(4.3.44-55)

Though embedded within their historical narratives, both speeches explain future ritual repetitions with reference to the tale that is about to unfold. Moses says,

And when your children ask you what service is this you keep?
Then ye shall say, it is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover which
passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when
he smote the Egyptians and preserved our houses. Then the
people bowed themselves and worshipped...
([Exodus 12:26-27](#))

And Henry commands,

This story shall the good man teach his son;
And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But in it we shall be remembered.
(4.3.56-90)

Such breaks of the narrative frame--endlessly repeated in the Biblical accounts of the Exodus--anticipate what is to come, both within the stories themselves and in their later reception.

The anticipatory breaks in Biblical and Shakespearean epics of holy war have complex functions. They recursively include readers and auditors as participants in past actions while at the same time instructing them how to make those actions come to pass in the present and stay alive in the future through imaginative reenactment. These functions are shared by Shakespeare's Chorus in its urgent direct addresses to the audience.³⁴ The Chorus insists that collaboration between author and auditor 'in the quick forge and working house of thought' (5.0.23) is required to make the illusion real, thereby producing stronger belief, but also acknowledging the fictive nature of the history. The audience is thus both partaker and participant in the Mysteries of State that are enacted in the play. As opposed to the peasant slave whose 'gross brain little wots / What watch the king keeps to maintain the peace' (4.1.282-3), the 'discerning' reader of both the Bible and of Shakespeare is in on the secret and can share with Harry the power and the guilt of the holy war.³⁵

Footnotes

1 "'Vile Participation': The Amplification of Violence in the Theatre of *Henry V*", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 42:1 (Spring 1991), 2-32; p.2.

2 Citations in this essay are from *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition* with an introduction by Lloyd E. Berry (Madison WI, 1969). I have modernized spelling.

3 Referred to by Matthew (26.30) and Mark (14.26) as 'The Passover Hymn'.

4 Holinshed, Raphael, et. al. *The Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*. 3 vols. in 2, 1587; ed. H. Ellis, 6 vols., 1807-8. p. 555, reprinted in *Shakespeare's Holinshed*, ed. Richard Hosley (New York, 1968), pp. 133-4.

5 See Gerhard von Rad, 'The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch', in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (New York, 1966), pp. 1-78, also Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (New York, 1960), and G.E. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation, The Origins of the Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore, 1973).

6 Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (Ithaca, 1990), p. 30.

7 G. Blakemore Evans, editor, *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston 1974). All later references to this edition.

8 Much attention has been paid to Biblical references in Shakespeare, most recently in a three volume series, *Biblical References in Shakespeare's Comedies*, *Biblical References in Shakespeare's Tragedies* and *Biblical*

References in Shakespeare's Histories, by Naseeb Shaheen published by the University of Delaware Press. But very little scholarly study is available on the literary relationships between Biblical and Shakespearean works. One notable exception is an address by James Black entitled "'Edified by the Margent': Shakespeare and the Bible," issued by the University of Alberta Press. I have yet to find a scholarly treatment of the manifold connections between Biblical and Shakespearean historiography and politics.

9 See Patrick D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (Cambridge MA 1973), pp. 154-5. In *Yahweh Is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel* (Herald Press, Scottsdale PA, 1989), Millard Lind points out that the identification God, king and general was a common ancient near east convention, as witnessed in a proclamation by Assurbanipal, King of the Assyrian empire 'Not by my own power / not by the strength of my bow / by the power of my gods, / by the strength of my goddesses / I subjected the lands to the yoke of Assur'. p. 30.

10 Miller, p. 156.

11 'When thou comest near unto a city to fight against it, thou shalt offer it peace. And if it answer thee again peaceably and open unto thee, then let all the people that is found therein, be tributaries unto thee and serve thee. But if it will make no peace with thee...thou shalt smite all the males thereof with the edge of the sword'. ([Deuteronomy 20:10-13](#))

12 See Roland Bainton, *Christian Attitudes toward War and Peace: A Historical Survey and Critical Re-evaluation* (Nashville, 1960), pp.44-50 and David Little, "'Holy War" Appeals and Western Christianity: A Reconsideration of Bainton's Approach', in *Just War and Jihad*, ed. John Kelsay and James Turner Johnson (New York,1991), pp.121-141.

13 Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and its Subversion in *Henry IV* and *Henry V*. In *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (New York, 1985), p. 2.

14 D. I.12.3, p. 244. Citations of Machiavelli as follows: D=Leslie J. Walker trans. and ed., *The Discourses of Niccolo Machiavelli*, 2 vols. (London, 1950); P=*The Prince, A New Translation with an Introduction* by Harvey C. Mansfield Jr. (Chicago, 1985).

15 'On the Continuity of the Henriad'. In *Shakespeare Left and Right*, ed. Ivo Kamps (London and Boston, 1991), p. 229.

16 For a discussion of the ways conflicting perspectives and attitudes are juxtaposed in Shakespearean texts, see Louis Adrian Montrose, 'The Purpose of Playing: Reflections on Shakespearean Anthropology', *Helios*, n.s.7 (1980):50- 73. For a discussion of the debate between pacifist and militarist politics in *Henry V*, see Steven Marx, 'Shakespeare's Pacifism', *RQ* 45, Spring 1992.

17 See W. Lee Humphries, *Crisis and Story: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Mt. View CA, 1991), pp. 50-53, 120-121 and Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians: the Hebrew Bible and History*, (San Francisco, 1988).

18 David Scott Kastan, "'The King Hath Many Marching in his Coats", or What Did You do in the War, Daddy.' In *Shakespeare Left and Right*, ed. Ivo Kamps (London and Boston, 1991), p. 256.

19 D. I.10.1, p.236.

20 P. XVII, p. 65-66.

21 D. III.30.4, p. 547.

22 'Reprehensible actions may be justified by their effects...when the effect is good, ...it always justifies the action...I might adduce in support of what I have just said numberless examples, e.g. Moses, Lycurgus, Solon, and other founders of kingdoms and republics...' D. I.9.2-5, p. 235.

23 P. XVIII, p.69-70.

24 D. I,11, p.237.

25 'It was owing to wise men having taken note of this that belief in miracles arose and that miracles are held in high esteem even by religions that are false; for to whatever they owed their origin, sensible men made much of them and their authority caused everybody to believe in them.' D.I.12.3, p. 244.

26 Only Michael Williams resists this form of Revelation trick. After the battle, when Henry tries to elicit his awe, repentance and gratitude by disclosing that the 'gentleman of a company' to whom Williams had expressed disbelief in the King was actually the King himself, Williams is not impressed.

27 D. II.2.6-7, p.364.

28 P. XXV, pp. 98-101 ('Fortuna'); *Martelli Tutti gli opera* p. 626 cited by Anthony J. Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos* (New Haven, 1992), pp.57, 56 ('Heaven'); D. II.29.1, p.444-5 ('Lover of strong men').

29 Peter Donaldson, *Machiavelli and the Mystery of State* (New York, 1988). In his final chapter, 'Biblical Machiavellism: Louis Machon's *Apologie pour Machiavel*', Donaldson unearths and analyzes an obscure seventeenth century reading of Machiavelli and the Bible. A work of close to 800 pages commissioned by Cardinal Richelieu, it defends those passages in *The Discourses* and *The Prince* most often attacked for impiety. 'One may cease to be surprised', says Machon, 'that I draw parallels between Holy Scripture and the works of Machiavelli and that I propose that his strongest and most formidable maxims were drawn from the book of books...if one considers that this sacred volume, which should be the study and meditation of all true Christians, teaches princes as well as subjects...' 1668 preface, pp. 1-2, trans. and cited by Donaldson, p. 188.

30 Donaldson, p. 172.

31 James Aho, *Religious Mythology and the Art of War: Comparative Religious Symbolisms of Military Violence* (Westport CT, 1981), p. 146.

32 Donaldson, pp. 215-216 summarizing and citing Machon 1668, p.778.

33 Machon 640-1, cited by Donaldson, p. 200.

34 As Altman says, he 'extends the [participatory] relationship of prince and subject as portrayed in [*Henry V*] so that it becomes a relationship between player/king and audience/subject...' p. 15.

35 Both Greenblatt and Altman have drawn attention to some alarming implications of these converging suspensions of disbelief: '...the first part of *HIV* enables us to feel....we are..testing dark thoughts without damaging the order that those thoughts would seem to threaten. The second part of *HIV* suggests that we are ... compelled to pay homage to a system of beliefs whose fraudulence somehow only confirms their power, authenticity and truth. The concluding play in the series, *HV*, insists that we have all along been both colonizer and colonized, king and subject'. Greenblatt, p.42. '...amplification ambiguously reassuring and threatening, which offers up ../images of rational accessibility juxtaposed with those of imperial closure...revelation and mystification, both the articulated and concealed forms--the exquisition of causes, of effects, and of parallels, the emblems and personifications--fill the imagination only to make more illustrious Harry's darkly enigmatic nature. One must always feel anxious about such a king, since one can never fully possess him....From dim and unexpected places he will make claims upon one's mind and body that cannot be eluded'. Altman, p. 24. I

believe the mentally colonizing rhetorical strategies discovered by these scholars are modelled in the history of the Bible.