

# History, Patriotism and Religion in William Shakespeare's *Henry V*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Literature is a form of human expression. From the inception of a play in the mind of its author, to the image of it that an audience takes away from the theatre, many hands and many physical elements bring it to life. But when you deal with the play itself, you only have the text. You don't have actors, stage or decoration for helping you to recreate the story. You and your ability to imagine are set alone. It has to be a text powerful enough to take your mind and force her to imagine, to understand, to recreate. And *Henry V* is a text which has these characteristics, this power, the power of Shakespeare's great art.

Drama is an unreal activity which can be indulged only if everyone involved admits it. Here lies some of the fascination of its study. A play always goes far and far away. It is not only a group of words or verses set together to fill *folios* or *quartos*. There are more things behind. You cannot separate a play from the life of his author, from the society in which the play was written. You cannot separate literature and life. You must take into account everything if you want to comment on any aspect of a given play. *Henry V* tells us more things that the mere story of the life and kingdom of one of the greatest kings of England. It also deals with the Elizabethan society, with her attitude towards life, with Shakespeare's own thoughts, with the feelings of a whole nation at that time.

In the 16th Century, England and Spain provided all the conditions necessary for dramatic art. In both nations there were public and private playhouses, audiences of avid imagination, a developing language inviting to a poetic use of itself, a growth of professional acting and a flexible stage. All these characteristics combined, provided the dramatist with the opportunity to create plays of outstanding interest. In Elizabethan London, dramatists wrote in an extraordinary range of dramatic genres. And Shakespeare was there, with all his plays, with his tragedies, comedies, histories and so long. Renaissance problems of order and authority, of passion and reason, of good and evil, were there, and Shakespeare took them to create great plays.

The aim of this paper came out from a close reading of the play and from the curiosity that some aspects of it roused over me. I just want to rough out these three important points (History, Patriotism and Religion) in order to devise a general outline of it within its own contextual sphere.

## 2. HISTORY IN THE PLAY

Shakespeare's history plays deal with late medieval England<sup>1</sup>, but they are also about Shakespeare's own time. The tetralogies show the breakdown of medieval society with the coming of new times, those of Tudor monarchs. But *Henry V* is more than the celebration of the "warlike Harry" (I, Chorus, 5.), and the English army which fought at Agincourt. It's the celebration of the Tudor age, of the national aspirations and feelings of the society who lived in Shakespeare's times. Henry is a figure who can represent the Tudor's aim: a strong king bringing order, a warrior king rousing national feelings.

This resemblance between the Lancastrian Kings and the Tudor Monarchs is well pointed out in my opinion. Both Henry IV and Henry VII came to the throne of England by successful rebellions.<sup>2</sup> Henry IV (the so-called 'Lancastrian Usurpation of the Throne') dethroned Richard II.<sup>3</sup> Even though the truth of what happened was a little bit obscured under the Lancastrian propaganda, it is assumed that when Richard went to Northumberland at Conway Castle, he was forced to resign his throne during that day. He signed a document in which he would wish a Lancastrian to succeed him; he was also indicted for his misrule (thirty three articles of deposition were set forth against Richard, accusing him of misgovernment). Henry IV's first task after his acceptance as a king, was to put down a rebellion threatening to restore Richard. Then, Henry IV had to deal mainly with three problems: The problems in the borders, the troubles with France, and the internal troubles with the house of York.

The rebellion of Owayn Glyndwr in 1402 expressed the deep discontents of a society which was in a very difficult transition from tribalism under the pressure of England. It probably meant the rising of Welsh nationalism. This feeling of different nations is well pointed out by Shakespeare. Henry V's army is formed by men from all the British nations under the English flag against the enemy. Captain Fluellen is Welsh, and very proud of being so:

*Henry.* I wear it [the leek on St. Davy's day] for a memorable honour;  
For I'm Welsh, you know, good countryman.

*Fluellen.* All the water in Wye cannot wash your  
majesty's welsh flood out of your pody, 105  
I can tell you that. God pless it and  
preserve it, as long as it pleases his grace  
and his majesty too!.

*Henry.* Thanks, good my countryman.

*Fluellen.* By Jeshu, I'm your majesty's countryman, (...) 110  
(IV. vii. 102-110)<sup>4</sup>

We have also, Cpt. Macmorris who is Irish, or Cpt. Jamy who is Scottish; let's remember the problems they had (Fluellen and Mcmorris) when Fluellen talked about the meaning of nation:

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<sup>1</sup> A deeper historical treatment of this period could be found in Goodman (1977) and Thomson (1986).

<sup>2</sup> There is a little difference; Henry IV established a new dynasty but he did not really begin a new period of history. In my opinion, Henry VII not only established a new dynasty but also began a new period, a new age: 1485 onwards.

<sup>3</sup> About History and its treatment in *Richard II* and *Henry IV* it is very useful the reading of the following articles: Sánchez Escribano (1995; 1996):

<sup>4</sup> All quotations in this paper have been taken from A. R. Humphreys' edition (1968).

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*Fluellen.* Captain McMorris, I think, look you, under your corection, there's not many of your nation.

*McMorris.* Of my nation?. What ish my nation?. Ish a villain, and a bastard and a knave, and a rascal. What ish my nation?. Who talks of my nation? 120  
(III. ii. 116-120)

Even though Owayn Glyndwr got the alliance of Richard Scroope, archbishop of York, and Percy,<sup>5</sup> he was pushed into the mountains of North Wales and Henry was secure after 1408. But Glyndwr was never captured. Robert K. Shepherd's words are worth mentioning here:

Henry was well aware that the welsh were a force to be reckoned with (...). Welsh and Irish contingents may fight (...) under the British flag but have no intention of forgetting their ancestral differences (...). [They] only fight together because they have no other choice. (Shepherd 1992: 308)

So, Henry V inherits a relatively peaceful land with a state of order in his realm and almost all the problems solved. He began his reign in more auspicious circumstances than any of his predecessors since Edward I. In the last exchequer term of Henry IV's reign, receipts had exceeded expenditure. Since the French were in trouble, the English crown's claims seemed brighter than they have done for over fifty years. Henry had started to gain confidence of all, like his famous great uncle had done before.

He was able to focus all his attention in France. And that is the first historical reference in the play: the claim to the throne of France. This is the main reason for the attack of France. With a long parliament, the Archbishop of Canterbury explains the main reason to reach the claim: the salic law, which is the main barrier, is quickly destroyed by means of "geographic features" and, of course, by God's hand:

*Henry.* May I with right and conscience make this claim?

*ArcBp.* The sin upon my head, dread sovereign!  
For in the book of Numbers is it writ  
when the man dies, let the inheritance descend  
unto his daughter.<sup>6</sup> 100  
(I. ii. 96-100).

Another historical reference is shown in the play by the allusions to Edward III and the Black Prince of Wales. This is a thing to take into account when Henry V "sends you this most memorable line, in every branch truly demonstrative, willing you overlook this pedigree" (II. iv. 88-90). The French king is given a sort of family tree "from his most famed ancestors, Edward III" (II. iv. 92-93). Of Course, Henry is playing a psychological game, using the fame of his relative. To top it all, a few lines before, the French king himself remembered the battle of Crècy:

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<sup>5</sup> Both were executed. Percy's head was displayed on London Bridge and his body quartered, pickled and sent for public exhibition in many parts of England.

<sup>6</sup> Note that the Archbishop omits the words "and have no son". Numbers 27:8, 1611 King James translation says: "If a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter". I have used the very recent edition by Carroll and Pricket (1997).

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And he is bread out of that bloody strain  
that haunted us in our familiar paths.  
Witness our too much memorable shame.  
When Crècy battle fatally struck,  
and all our princes captived by the hand 55  
of that black name, Edward, black prince of Wales.  
(II. iv. 51-56)

Edward III's son, the Black prince, defeated the French. Edward watched the battle from a hill with one third of the English forces, held in reserve and never used. At the end of Agincourt battle, Fluellen, the Welsh captain, will say:

Your grandfather of famous name, an't please your 90  
majesty, and your great-uncle Edward the Plack  
Prince of Wales, as I have read the Chronicles,  
fought a most prave pattle here in France.  
(IV. vii. 90-93)

Henry V and Edward III had a good deal in common. Each had a great responsibility for the Hundred Years' war. The attempt to revive the claim to the French throne was reinforced by the need to strengthen the Lancastrian dynasty. Once the war was begun, Henry's conduct of it entitles him to be regarded as one of England's great rulers. Henry's invasion of France was even more systematically prepared for, than Edward III's expedition in 1316, even though the army that landed in Harfleur was comparatively smaller. Henry V's military experience in Wales had given him a taste for fighting, revealing his gifts as a leader; he seems to have convicted himself that he had the rightful title to the French Throne.

Another important historical mention in the play is that of Richard II. We have explained before how things were handed in Henry IV's reign and how he did the so-called 'Lancastrian usurpation of the throne'. In the heart of the play, when Agincourt battle is going to start, Henry V says a little, but important, prayer which is relevant mainly for two reasons: the mention of Richard II and the religious meaning. About the religious meaning we will talk later on.

Not today O, Lord, 285  
O, not today, think up on the fault  
my father made in compassing the crown!  
I Richard's body have interred new, (...)  
Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay,  
who twice a day their withered hands hold up  
toward heaven, to pardon blood: and I have built  
two chantries where the sad and solemn priests 295  
sing still for Richard's soul. More will I do,  
though all that I can do is nothing worth,  
since that my penitence comes after all,  
imploring pardon. (IV. i. 285-298)

We have a Lancastrian king who asks for divine pardon because of having done wrong. At this critical moment, he, as the Lancastrian king he is, understands the moral problem which underlies in his reign: whether God will visit upon him the consequences of Richard's deposition and murder by Henry IV, or whether his own succession is religiously joined by the faith of his rule. I think there are no elements to prove that he feels guilty. Of course, he is a Christian king after all, and he needs that divine help. There is no evidence that this was done to expiate Richard's fate. It was only a literary

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effect to put some pressure on the audience, who likes to see a king repenting himself. The sin of usurpation (if it is a sin) has to be forgotten, and the good things that the new monarchy established link Henry more firmly with the Tudor State. To end this walk through some of the historical references in *Henry V*, the final note about Henry VI must be taken into account:

Henry the sixth, in infant bands crowned king  
of France and England, did this king succeed, 10  
whose state so many had the managing  
that they lost France, and made his England bleed:  
Which oft our stage hath shown; and for their sake  
in your fair minds let this acceptance take.  
(Epilogue. Chorus. 9-14)

Unlike Edward III, Henry V did not live to see the victory whither in his hand; Henry V died in Paris, August, 1422, leaving a son of nine months. His death left England with its second minority in fifty years and with all the governmental problems that this entailed. This paragraph by William Shakespeare defines so well what happened with Henry VI. And it's worth mentioning the reference to these things "which oft our stage hath shown", in a very clear mention to the three parts of *Henry VI*, written by Shakespeare in 1590-1592.

So, the audience knew the story. Henry VI's reign will see the loss of France and civil war in England. The triumphant French armies invaded Gascony, which had seen few major campaigns under Henry V. By 1453, southwestern France was lost. Only Calais remained of Henry V's empire. The soldiers and others who returned to England from France, regarded the Lancastrian government as responsible for the surrender of what the glorious Henry V had won and the just claims he had supported. In England, Henry VI would soon have to face the consequences of this tremendous defeat. Somebody said that Henry V's reign was a golden time between two dark moments. Henry V is the hero in the tetralogy.<sup>7</sup> He is the national king, the herald of the Tudor dynasty which is no longer a dynasty of the old kind, but something completely different.

### 3. PATRIOTISM IN THE PLAY

The most important characteristic this play upholds (together with the religious facts, I think), is his fully patriotic feeling. The patriotism of *Henry V* has been taken into account for a long time when talking about this play. Even though the patriotism is felt during all the play, I think it starts with the mention of the Scottish problem:

We must not only arm t'invade the French  
but lay down our proportions to defend  
against the Scot, who will make road upon  
us with all advantages. (I.ii.136-139)

A few lines later, the archbishop of Canterbury will name them as "the pilfering borderes" (I. ii. 142), the need to guard against the Scots is visible; we have to remember that the French support to the Scottish army was one of the things that began the Hundred Years' war. Shakespeare himself noted it in Ely's words:

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<sup>7</sup> In opposition, I think, to the main character of the opposite play, *Richard III*, who is seen as the villain of his tetralogy.

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But there's a saying very old and true:  
'If that you will France win,  
then with Scotland first begin'  
For once the eagle England being in pray,  
To her unguarded nest the weasel Scot 170  
comes sneaking, and so sucks her princely eggs.<sup>8</sup>  
(I.ii.166-171).

Once the country is "on fire", as the chorus says in the second Act, the first important mention is located when the English army sieges Harfleur. This is the first time Henry is going to use the rhetoric figure of the speech, to give moral to his army. He is going to use it twice: here, at Harfleur and later on, at Agincourt.

Of course, Shakespeare knows very well what he is doing and using. Since ancient times, the use of the speech has been very important in the History of Literature. The speech is an incitement to action, an assertion of the qualities of the "noblest english", a reminder of ancient military achievements<sup>9</sup>, a call to the army to be worthy of their ancestors. Before the speech at Harfleur, we have been morally prepared by the Chorus in a description of military preparations, which is a glorification of the war too:

Holding due cause to Harfleur. Follow, follow. (III.Ch.17)

Work, work your thoughts and therein see a siege: 25  
behold the ordnance on their carriages,  
with fatal mouths gaping on girded Harfleur. (III.Ch.25-27)

And, at last, the beginning of Henry's words:

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more,<sup>10</sup>  
or close the wall up with our English dead!  
In peace there's nothing so becomes a man  
as modest stillness and humility:  
But when the blast of war blows in our ears, 5  
then imitate the action of the tiger.<sup>11</sup> (III. i. 1-6)

This speech speaks by itself; and I can't but remember Sir Laurence Olivier's words quoted by Graham Holderness (1984: 24) from an interview on the BBC. As you can see Olivier's speech upholds a very shakespearean style:

We will go forward-heart, nerve, and spirit steeled. We will attack; we will smite  
our foes; we will conquer; and in all our deeds, in these lands and in other lands, from

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<sup>8</sup> Some critics point out that there is a hidden lecture in this passage: if the English attack France, they are like the eagle, the king of birds; if the Scots attack England, they are like a coward weasel stealing the eagle's eggs (their lands). I think that this belongs to the 16th century's imagery of war figures (lions, eagles, horses, etc).

<sup>9</sup> In our case, this way of looking back to the past is common in the play, and Edward III's achievements together with the battle of Crècy are mentioned elsewhere.

<sup>10</sup> This beginning has been taken into account by many critics as a target of Irony in the words of Pistol "On, on, on, on, on! To the breach, to the breach" (III. ii. 1) and in Fluellen's ones "Up to the breach, you dogs! Avaunt you cullions" (III. ii. 20). The meaning of the word "friends" is well explained in Shepherd (1992).

<sup>11</sup> Imagery of war animals. See Shepherd (1992)

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this hour on, our watchwards will be: urgency, speed, courage. Urgency in all our decisions; speed in the execution of all our plans; courage in the face of all our enemies; and may God bless our cause.

The parley to the governor and citizens of Harfleur is of great importance. As the Christian king he is, I think he is only threatening:

If I begin the battery once again,  
I will not leave the half achieved Harfleur  
Till in her ashes she lie buried. (III. iii. 7-9)

With conscience wide as hell, mowing like grass  
your fresh fair virgins, and your flowering infants.  
(III. iii. 13-14)

Remember that when the citizens deposed the defence, he “use mercy to them all” (III. iii. 55). It shows that he was only playing a war game. The sentence “the gates of mercy shall be shut up” (III.iii.10)<sup>12</sup> is an assertion that “tell us, that nationality, when it takes the road of violence, may be driven to put off all the gentle attributes of social life, and assuming ‘the action of a Tiger’, have the tiger’s bloodthirstiness” (Knight 1849 qtd. in Quinn 1988: 40). About the facts of mercy, piety, and patriotism I have mentioned here, I think this quotation will sum up:

The theological progress of the dramatist is seen to be from the confusion of patriotism and piety in the histories, to the balance of these two qualities in *Henry V*, through *Hamlet* which points a change in reorientation of religion, and in which there’s found a weird paradox of the presence of religion as circumstance and the absence of it as Faith, and finally, in the later tragedies where Shakespeare is seen to be moving within a context of Christian humanism. (Fitch 1969 qtd. in Wells 1976: 138-139).

After the siege of Harfleur, Henry’s force was no more than 900 men at arms and 5,000 archers, but it was a disciplined and formidable force. So, their force affected by an epidemic, “the sickness growing upon our soldiers” (III. iii. 55-56), and the detachment of a garrison for Harfleur, the English army moved northeast towards Calais, through hostile territory. But near Agincourt, at Artois, not far from the site of Edward III’s great victory at Crècy, a numerically superior army intercepted him. If he could gain the story of Crècy again, so much the better.

According to many critics and historians (and it’s my opinion too) Shakespeare played so much with the battle of Agincourt to cause the effects of patriotism and national feelings into his audience. There are some things in Hollinshed’s book that Shakespeare preferred to forget. It’s clear that Shakespeare makes no attempt to give a plausible military reason for the result of the battle. He wants to give the impression that the English are great fighters (at least, divine ones), and Harry of England a great leader of men, despite being “few, we happy few, we band of brothers” (IV. iii. 60).

And then, the astonishing and wonderful speech. It is a masterpiece inside another. The inner tension is very well measured, structured, with all the typical facts on it: God, fortune, honour, glory, faith, courage, the past, the future, the importance of it later on in history...; Shakespeare drew little

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<sup>12</sup>The use of true and false mercy is used as well in the treason episode in Act II.

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steps to be followed by the audience, to explode at the end of the monologue, to put them on fire with the faith of patriotism.

Agincourt brought no territorial gains, but it made clear, at least to Henry's subjects, that in the eyes of God and of men, the claims had to be taken seriously. We have seen Richard II's and Henry IV's intents, but only Henry V showed a firmness of purpose reminiscent of Edward III. The speech and the whole episode of the battle belong to the patriotic purposes of Shakespeare in that time. We cannot forget that the defeat of the Spanish Armada is present here, and, according to the English side, it has been a victory of a little army against the tremendous power of a greater one, exactly the same that happened in Shakespeare's vision of Agincourt. And to top all the facts about courage, it's worth mentioning the image of Henry and Westmoreland wanting to fight alone: "God's will, my liege, would you and I alone / Without more help, could fight this royal battle" (IV. iii. 74-75). It also has a little touch of romanticism, of epic war: the victorious emperor giving a name to the battle, while the ashes are burning yet.<sup>13</sup>

It is worth mentioning the manipulation of events and figures after the battle.<sup>14</sup> If it has been so bloody, it's almost impossible to believe the results given. But, it's for the glory of England. This is a thing that everybody (in the winning side, of course) has done, do, and will do, in order to show the power of his side.<sup>15</sup> Shakespeare gives the total English dead as 30 and the French dead as 10,000. If we look at Shakespeare's sources, it should be taken into account that Hollinshed gives 500-600 dead as a more likely figure. Of course, the aims of Shakespeare are very clear: he wants the victory to seem a miracle, not only by the extreme number of losses but also by saying nothing about the reasons of the outcome.

And finally, I don't want to end this point without saying a word about the repercussion of this play as a patriotic flag. The people who have taken into account this characteristic of the play have been a lot. In 1991, in a lecture given by Prof. Christopher Bigsby which was held at the University of Oviedo, he talked about British life and Culture in the 80's, pointing out that every time the English feel badly, with a lower moral state, they make a new version of *Henry V* to fill their patriotism. He was clearly mentioning the film by Kenneth Branagh in 1989,<sup>16</sup> and that of Sir Laurence Olivier in 1943. Specially the last one, which was made during the II World War. Laurence Olivier's film was the patriotic spear that the British of the II World War needed; at least, in a certain way, I mean. And sometimes, Henry's speeches at both Harfleur and Agincourt were called by some critics *Churchillians*. Anyone who has seen the film will have noticed that it is dedicated: "To the Commandos and Airborne troops of Great Britain, The spirit of whose ancestors it has been humbly attempted to recapture in some ensuing scenes, this film is dedicated" (Holderness 1984: 31).

A clear allusion to patriotism and to the troops involved in D-Day. It should be taken into account that the part of the film in which Laurence Olivier put more effort, was that of Agincourt. Olivier himself gave a speech asking for the refuelling of national confidence which existed in Shakespeare's poetry. Anyway, both films are masterpieces indeed. But, after all, this patriotic feeling is a marvellous thing in the play, showing the great art of our great writer. And, using the words of G. Wilson Knight, "Shakespeare wrote at a time when, after centuries of civil wars, England first became nationally self-conscious" (Knight 1944, qtd. in Holderness 1984: 29). The voice of the nation was Shakespeare's.

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<sup>13</sup>For an account on the epic tone of this play see Álvarez Faedo (1997).

<sup>14</sup>In Lennox (1976), this fact is also pointed out.

<sup>15</sup>Looking back to the classical world, remember the manipulations done by Caesar when describing the Gallic armies in *De bello Galico*.

<sup>16</sup>About this film see Donaldson (1991). About Olivier's films on Shakespeare, a recent volume has been published (Davies 1994 [1989]). For a comparison between Olivier and Branagh see Willson (1989).

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#### 4. RELIGION IN THE PLAY

G. Wilson Knight (1967: 233) in his book *Shakespeare and Religion* says: “*Henry V* is a good text as any for the revelations of shakespearean tragedy”, and for religious character, I add. I agree with Prof. Knight. The great importance of religious facts is something to take into account when studying Shakespeare’s plays. And, in my opinion, it’s very clear that *Henry V* has this religious character almost in every page of it, although sometimes it could be connected with the idea of patriotism.

*Henry V* is a fully religious work. Prof. Knight himself in page 121 states that religion and patriotism are both the most important qualities of this play, in opposition to other history plays: “The history plays present various types of English royalty, the weak Richard II, the villainous Richard III, the baffled Henry IV, and to crown the sequence the God-fearing patriot-warrior, ‘mirror of all Christian kings’ [II. Chorus. 6] Henry V”.

For Henry V as a king, and for all the persons who surrounded him, God controls chance. For them, there’s no other fortune than the providence of God.<sup>17</sup> And this is very clear in *Henry V*. I am going to point out the most important religious mentions to explain myself better.

We cannot forget the fact that Henry V is a Christian king “and a true lover of the holy church” (I. i. 23). The ideal king, according to this, would be a Christian one who supports the church, who is versed in Theology, learned, just, familiar with the ordinary people, and so long and so forth.<sup>18</sup> In I. ii. we are faced with a series of religious beginnings and endings within the speech of Henry, which are the first mentions of his religious faith:

My learned lord, we pray you to proceed, and  
justly and religiously infold. (I. ii. 9-10)

And God forbid, my dear and faithful lord. (I. ii. 13)

For God doth know how many now in health. (I. ii. 19)

We charge you in the name of God, take heed. (I. ii. 23)

As pure as sin with baptism. (I. ii. 32)

Everything is said in the name of God. This fact clearly reveals how extreme was the importance of God during the Elizabethan Times.<sup>19</sup> Before hearing the Archbishop, in I.ii, he resolved “by God’s help” to start a war, which in certain moments will be taken as a sort of holy war, even a crusade. The king himself declares: “We are not tyrant but a Christian King, / Unto whose grace our passion is as subject” (I. ii. 242-243).

That’s very important for the development of the play because he names himself as Christian king, so he believes in his religious duty as a Christian governor: a defender of the faith. He is now the mirror of christendom. From Tudor England onwards, History was still walking with Theology. Henry V is an epic Christian hero and the agent of God’s plan; therefore, he must be divinely inspired; there’s a traced plan for him in God’s will. At the end of I.ii we read: “But these lies all

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<sup>17</sup>Remember that we have in England the recent defeat of the Armada, with this popular saying going on: “God blew and threw them away”.

<sup>18</sup>“Then shall our names, familiar in his mouth as household words” (IV. iii. 51-52) and later “be he ne’er so vile, this day shall gentle his condition” (IV. iii. 62-63).

<sup>19</sup>That is a way of placing the responsibilities for the war upon Canterbury’s shoulders. Throughout the play there is a sort of game with the throwing of responsibilities, mainly in the relationship Church-King, King-Soldiers, King-Soul, Soldiers-duty, Duty-King, etc.

within the will of God, / To whom I do appeal, and in whose name, / Tell you the dauphin, I am coming on" (I.ii.290-292). And later: "Save those to God" (I. ii. 304); "For God, before" (I. ii. 309).

Then, in II, I found an episode full of Irony but also with important religious view in my opinion: the treason of Scroop, Cambridge and Grey. To start with, we are faced with a delicious ironic dialogue between King Henry and the traitors:

*Scroop.* No doubt, my liege, if each man do his best  
(II. ii. 19)

*Cambridge.* Never was a monarch better feared and loved  
(II. ii. 25)

*Grey.* True (II. ii.29)

*Henry.* We therefore have great cause of thankfulness.  
(II. ii. 32)

What follows is a two-faced use of mercy, which I have referred to previously. The king wants to be merciful, but they advised him not to be so. The traitors then, will appeal to the same mercy they refused a few lines before: "And do submit me to your highness' mercy / To which we all appeal" (II. ii. 77-78).

If the war they are going to start is for defending a holy and just cause, under the good auspicious of God, anyone going against the holy army and the Christian king will go against God. So they are drawn by Shakespeare as the Devil itself: "Two yoke-devils swarn to either's purpose" (II. ii. 106); "all other devils that suggest by treasons" (II. ii. 114). But, "God acquit them of their practises." (II.ii.144). And things go far away because the "devils" themselves (Scroop, Cambridge and Grey) assume that fact: "Our purposes God justly hath discovered" (II. ii. 151); "But God be thanked (...), beseeching you to pardon" (II. ii. 159-160).

As it has been God's work, he sends them to the hands of divine justice : "God quit you in his mercy" (II. ii. 166).<sup>20</sup> The vision of the devil trying to break God's proposals is pointed out by many critics in "his lion gate" (II. ii.122), where they have seen an echo from the holy bible: "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).<sup>21</sup>

God has won through Henry's hand. The holy war has been saved: "Since God so graciously hath brought to light the dangerous treason looking in our way to hinder our beginnings." (II. ii. 185-187). Once more, the Elisabethan view of fortune, God and war, which has been described by Prof. Paul Jorgensen (1985), is clearly shown here.

Exeter will appeal to "God almighty" (II. iv. 77),<sup>22</sup> to introduce Henry's pedigree to the French King. And the victories that the English have obtained are called "the borrowed glories that by gift of Heaven, by law of nature and of nations" (II. iv. 79-80). Another attitude as Christian King in which Henry, again, exercises his royal divine mercy:

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<sup>20</sup>Remember that the king do this because he hasn't got mercy at all: "The mercy that was quick in us but late, by your own counsel is suppressed and killed" (II. ii. 79-80).

<sup>21</sup>This is not the only quotation that Shakespeare could have made on the bible. There are some critics who noted many others. This fact could show the deep knowledge that Shakespeare could have had about the Bible.

<sup>22</sup>Henry will apply to God almighty in IV. i. 3.

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We would have all such offenders so cut off: and we  
give express charge, that in our marches through  
the country there be nothing compelled from the  
villages, nothing taken but paid for, none of the  
French upbraided or abused in disdainful language;  
for when lenity and cruelty play for a kingdom, the  
gentle gamester is the sooner winner.  
(II. vi. 103-109) 105

Another important reference is that of Richard II, which I have mentioned when talking about history in the play. Henry, the Christian king, praying, imploring divine pardon; he is conceived as a strong, good king and great leader also who realises that his position has been touched with sin, with an ancient sin, a *prebirth* sin he has to solve for being in a good Christian condition. The prayer is located immediately after his cleaning of conscience, of soul, when he talked with himself in the night. I think this is not a fact of random: a prayer after a sort of holy confession.<sup>23</sup> And at last, the moment of the fight: "Now, soldiers, march away; / and how Thou pleasest, God, dispose the day!" (IV. iii. 132-133).

There's no doubt that the victory of the English army at Agincourt is taken as an act of divine influence: a divine triumph, "praise be God, and not our strength, for it!" (IV. vii. 85). The defeat of the French army, I think, is a sort of divine punishment; they have been mocking at them, calling them "barbarous people (III.v.4)", "normans, but bastard normans, norman bastards!" (II. v. 10). During the play, they think that their victory is going to be an easy one, "there's not work enough for all our hands" (IV. ii. 17), because they are beggared foes from a:

climate foggy, raw, and dull  
On whom, as in despite, the sun looks pale,  
Killing their fruit with frowns ?. Can sodden water,  
A drench for sur-reined jades, they barley broth,  
Decoct their cold blood to such a valiant heat? 20  
(II. v. 16-20)

They mocked at a Christian army with God in their side. So the victory of the English, although astonishing, was a divine punishment. At the end, "O Diable!" (IV. v. 1), "O signeur!" (IV. v. 2), "Mort dieu! Ma vie!" (IV. v. iii), expressions of despair, and everlasting shame. There is a sentence that explains fairly well their defeat: "Is this the king we sent to for his ransom?" (IV. v. 9). A sentence which joins with the parliament of the Chorus (IV. Ch. 17-19): "Proud their numbers, and secure in soul, / the confident and over lusty French / Do the low rated English play at dice..<sup>24</sup> So, the following punishment is justified. And it's very clear too in:

None else of name; and all of other men  
But five and twenty. O God, Thy arm was here!<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>I have mentioned this prayer previously (IV. i. 283-297).

<sup>24</sup>Some critics have seen here another biblical reference. Remember that the romans played at dice Jesus Christ's clothes.

<sup>25</sup>This passage is a fully patriotic one. The audience would remember the episode of the Armada and would transfer Henry V's words into Elizabeth's mouth. Quoting Pérez Martín (1981): "Shakespeare supo dotar de incalculable poesía y dinamismo a esta nota patriótica que ha seguido haciendo vibrar a cuantas generaciones de ingleses acuden a la representación de sus dramas históricos. Falconbridge en *King John*, John de Gaunt en *Richard II*, el coro en *Henry V*, Richmond en *Richard III*, Crammer en *Henry VIII*, se remontan con vetos de

And not to us, but to thy arm alone, 105  
ascribe we all! When, without stratagem,  
But in plain shock and even play of battle,  
was ever known so great and little loss,  
on one part and on th'other?. Take it, God,  
For it is none but Thine! 110  
(IV. viii. 103-111)

That God fought for us (IV. viii. 119)

And as a good Christian king, "do we all the holy rites: let there be sung Non nobis and Te deum," (IV. viii. 121-123).<sup>26</sup> The chorus itself will describe the battle as a divine triumph, in my opinion, and the lack of vanity of Henry V:

Where that his lords desire him to have borne,  
his bruised helmet and his bended sword  
before him through the city. He forbids it,  
being free from vainness and self-glorious pride, 20  
giving full trophy signal, and ostent,  
quite from himself to God. (V. Ch. 17-22)

And, to finish this point about religion, the last reference of importance I have found: the marriage. As a Christian king, it is desirable for him to be married. He has to marry a woman from the land that God has just given to him. So, God has blessed the union: "God, the best maker of all marriages, / combine your hearts in one, your realms in one!" (V. ii. 351-352); "God speak this Amen" (V. ii. 360).

This fact is seen too in the words "incorporate league" from the verse 58: an alliance which makes them into one body, as in Christian marriage man and wife are said to become one flesh, that is, the holy union of both realms.

I have tried to set clear that *Henry V* has a fully religious content which is important. These quotations constitute a fairly consistent record of my attempt to explore the religiosity in this Drama: "The universe has in fact been stamped with God's signature; and that is how the works of Shakespeare were born" (Knight 1967: 239).

## 5. CONCLUSION

It's obvious that all the important aspects of this play are not present at my paper. I would have been describing for ages important characteristics, aspects, points, which can be treated in further studies, but many things have been slipped due to many reasons. The main character in this paper has been the play itself, Shakespeare's text. I have drawn some conclusions but always taking into account the verses, bringing forward theoretical knowledge to do it better. This has been the work of a reader of Shakespeare who wanted to be a critic for a long while, because that's 'the humour of it', that's one of the secrets for being a good literary critic: being an astonished reader first.

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profecía sobre la triste, difícil, situación presente y proclaman su fé en los destinos de la nación, entonando una apoteosis, unánimes en hacerla depender de la libre voluntad del hombre".

<sup>26</sup>These are the opening words of *Psalm* 115, "Not unto as, O Lord", and of Canticle *Te deum Laudamus*: "we praise thee, O God".

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