EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES

From War Crimes to 'Truce Thinking' in Shakespeare's *Henry V*

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Shakespeare's *Henry V* (1600) concludes with a treaty between England and France, enabled through the marriage of King Henry and Princess Katherine, the compromises of France and Burgundy, Queen Isabella's advocacy and even Henry's own willingness to let his delegates speak on his behalf. Although the final scene dramatizes the historical treaty of Troyes (1420), the play's Epilogue implies that the agreement produced not a lasting amity, but rather a temporary peace, a truce, an interlude between one war and another, 'which oft our stage hath shown' (Epi.13).[1] This essay investigates the principles of what philosopher Nir Eisikovits has called in his timely *A Theory of Truces* 'truce thinking' in *Henry V*. I suggest that the play's complex disquisitions surrounding Henry's own alleged war crimes prime viewers to accept the principles of 'truce thinking' and the concluding settlement as a necessary, civilizing, and welcome respite from war even if this settlement turns out to be a truce rather than a peace.

Eisikovits identifies as truce thinking the frame of mind in which one can work towards peace for all time by beginning with peace in our time, rather than imagining the truce, armistice, or cease-fire as a sop, an appeasement, a mitigation, or 'what Israeli philosopher Avishai Margalit called "rotten compromises"'.[2] Synthesizing analyses of famous cease-fires and reconciliation processes such as the 'Christmas Day cease-fire' in World War I or the Truth and Reconciliation commission in post-apartheid South Africa with the political philosophies of Camus, Hume, Kennan, and others, Eisikovits isolates five core principles of 'truce thinking', the first three moral or ethical, the

[1] References to *Henry V* come from William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, ed. by Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, Rebecca Niles (Washington: Folger Shakespeare Library, n.d), except where otherwise indicated.

[2] Nir Eisikovits, *A Theory of Truces* (London and New York: Palgrave, 2016).

second two pragmatic or tactical. Truce thinking demands three moral qualities: first, the belief that circumstances may change in the future and thus peace may ultimately be possible, that is, **optimism**; second, 'a belief that… modest arrangements or agreements can alleviate living conditions for those involved in chronic conflicts and improve mutual attitudes', that is, **humility**; and third, **tolerance**. The fourth and fifth qualities are pragmatic: the understanding that 'waging war in the name of abstract… principles… may make wars longer and bloodier than they have to be',[3] or **tactics**; and finally, truce thinking believes that truces can offer fighters a chance to rest before further struggle, that is, **efficiency**.

In this sense, *Henry V*'s treatment of truce recalls the pattern identified by Timothy Hampton in the *Henry VI* plays, in which drama most effectively expresses diplomacy and in particular the actions of truce because of its relationship to time.[4] Analyzing early modern political theorists such as Hugo Grotius, Hampton suggests that truce offers a liminal space of 'conflicting temporalities', an imagined 'war and not-war', an uneasy present and future peace that contains the threat of past and future war.[5] In readings of Cervantes and Corneille, Hampton further argues that the truce provides space out of time for the profound dissection of character in both its casual sense (a personage) and as a moral attribute, in particular as denoting heroism. Truces fall apart, he suggests, when each side must lay bare its fundamental differences of opinion on what constitutes character and on who or what possesses it and is fit to wield power. Peace thinking can emerge from truce thinking only when both parties agree on who is enough of a hero to lead.

Henry V juxtaposes Eisikovits's five principles of truce thinking alongside the qualities of early modern appeasement and 'soft diplomacy' despite the play's ostensible, even jingoistic, interest in war and its famously ambiguous hero.[6] Particularly difficult to

[3] Ibid, p. 3.

[4] Timothy Hampton, 'The Slumber of War: Diplomacy, Tragedy, and the Aesthetics of the Truce in Early Modern Europe', in *Early Modern Diplomacy, Theatre, and Soft Power*, Nathalie Rivère de Carles (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 27-45.

[5] Ibid, pp. 28 and 30.

[6] On early modern 'soft power', see Timothy Hampton's *Fictions of Embassy Literature and Diplomacy in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009) and the discussions in *Early Modern Diplomacy, Theatre, and Soft Power*, ed. by Nathalie Rivère de Carles (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). 'Soft power', a term first coined by political theorist Joseph Nye in the 1980s and the title of his 2004 book on the subject, uses cultural, moral, and other non-military incentives to convince foreign powers of a nation's superiority, rather than military or financial threats. Rivère de Carles suggests that early modern 'soft power' takes the form of three tools of appeasement: 'truce, marginal agency, and diplomatic coup d'etat' (p. 5), while Hampton's essay in the same volume identifies particular dramatic

reconcile with peacemaking or the just or righteous war is Henry's injunction that 'every soldier kill his prisoners'(4.6.38), which for a theatrical audience seems to come without provocation. It is only in the following scene, through Fluellen, that we learn that the French have 'kill[ed] the poys and the luggage', an act 'expressly against the law of arms' (4.7.1-2). Scholars have variously suggested that this inconsistency derives from haste in composition, textual corruption, or that the retroactive justification highlights the problems Henry faces in claiming that he is waging a 'just war', whether we believe the play bolsters that case, diminishes it, or hedges uneasily between the two.[7]

I am less interested, however, in these insoluble questions surrounding intention than in their effects on the audiences for the conflated text still used for most live productions and film adaptations. British and US governments have wielded this play as a weapon of war through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, from the Second World War to the Falklands conflict to the so-called War on Terror, as Imelda Wheelan and Deborah Cartmell, Sara Munson Deats, and, most recently, Diana Henderson have explored.[8] I

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entertainments as interventions in poetic, dramatic, and real temporalities that allow a space and time for negotiation, compromise, and peace to emerge (p. 11).

[7] On the debates surrounding the so-called 'just war', especially with regard to Shakespeare's works, see Paola Pugliatti, *Shakespeare and the Just War Tradition* (Farnham, Surrey: Palgrave, 2010), Franziska Quabeck, 'Shakespeare's Unjust Wars', *Critical Survey* 30.1 (2018), 67-80, and John Henry Mattox, '*Henry V*: Shakespeare's Just Warrior', *War, Literature, and the Arts* 12.1 (2000), 30-53; on chivalry and the just war, see Theodor Meron, *Bloody Constraint: War and Chivalry in Shakespeare* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); on religion and the 'just war' tradition in *Henry V*, see John S. Mebane, '"Impious War": Religion and the Ideology of Warfare in *Henry V*', *Studies in Philology* 104 (2007), 250-66; on wartime ethics and the ethics of espionage, see David L. Perry, 'Just and Unjust War in Shakespeare's *Henry V*', in *Partly Cloudy: Ethics in War, Espionage, Covert Action, and Interrogation*, Scarecrow Professional Intelligence Education Series no. 6 (Lanham, MD, Toronto, Plymouth, UK: Scarecrow Press, 2009), esp. pp. 57-69; on the ways in which the 'Salic Law' speech borrows from Holinshed's 'popularity and perceived legitimacy', see Mikaela LaFave, '"With rough and all-unable pen": Source Study and Historiography in Shakespeare's "Henry V"', p. 4, 'The law Salick:" A Comparison between Holinshed and Shakespeare' in *Focus on 'Henry V': Navigating Digital Text, Performance, and Resources'*, in Sujata Iyengar and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin (ed.) (Online: Scalar, 2019, https://scalar.usc.edu/works/henry-v/the-law-salick-a-comparison-between-holinshed-and-shakespeare-lafave?path=with-rough-and-all-unable-pen-source-study-and-historiography-of-shakespeares-henry-v). This list is not exhaustive.

[8] On the tradition of interpreting *Henry V* as a patriotic epic and Olivier's use of that tradition (in particular, through the judicious use of cutting) see, for example, Imelda Whelehan and Deborah Cartmell, 'Through a Painted Curtain: Laurence Olivier's *Henry V*', in *War Culture: Social Change and Changing Experience in World War Two Britain*, ed. by Pat Kirkham and David Thoms (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), pp. 49-60, and Sara Munson Deats, 'Rabbits and Ducks: Olivier, Branagh, and *Henry V*', *Literature/Film Quarterly* 20 (1992), 284-93; on the play's being gifted to troops in

suggest that the theatrical construction of *Henry V* – where we are unsure who has broken the rule of honor first and whether Henry's response is justified – encourages the audience to question the value of war for 'abstract… principles' and of a perfect peace process. Moreover, the play's final scenes critique the so-called just war and praise the value of even the temporary peace enabled by the treaty and truce in both the "high" and "low" style, through political drama, romance, and farce.

The comic scenes with Fluellen and Pistol such as their mock-truce (5.1) debunk high-minded, abstract justifications for war because they present as their ongoing ethnic conflict Pistol's mockery of Fluellen's Welsh leek. The treaty or truce between Pistol and Fluellen concludes when Fluellen insists that 'if [Pistol] can mock a leek, [he] can eat a leek', cudgels him, pays him a groat, and bids him a gracious 'God be wi' you' in farewell (5.1.39-40, 70-71). In contrast, 5.2 teaches audiences the value of the 'truce thinking' brought by Burgundy and France: peace that 'nurse[s the] arts, plenties, and joyful births' (5.2.36), (Burgundy, conditions 2 and 4); an imagined peaceful future where 'all griefs and quarrels' shall change 'into love' (5.2.20; Isabella, condition 1); a distance from stubborn ideology, where Henry's mere 'request shall make [the King] let it pass' (5.2.356; both the King of France and Henry, condition 3); and an eye to better positioning in future negotiations as Henry fantasizes 'compound[ing] a boy…that shall…[fight] the Turk' (5.2.216-217; Henry, condition 5).

The play suggests that the achievements of truce in 5.2 are worthwhile even when, as the epilogue itself reminds us, such peace is a temporary truce rather than a permanent settlement and even when they involve compromise and negotiation. At the same time, *Henry V* alerts us to the dangers that compromises will become 'rotten' or corrupted, and suggests that truces motivated by tactical considerations above moral ones will fail sooner rather than later.

Truce Thinking

Eisikovits's five principles of truce thinking, as mentioned above, comprise optimism, humility, tolerance, tactics, and efficiency. Eisikovits also distinguishes among different levels or types of truce-making or peace-making. The *armistice* ends immediate warfare and attacks but contains no provision for soft diplomacy, embassy-building, or stable

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Afghanistan and Iran, see Diana Henderson, 'Meditations in a Time of (Displaced) War: Henry V, Money, and the Ethics of Performing History', in *Shakespeare and War*, ed. by Ros King and Peter Franssen (Houndmills, Basingstoke, UK and New York: Palgrave, 2008), pp. 226-42.

geographical borders. The *cease-fire* ends assaults temporarily and does not require the consent of all the warring parties. *Avoidance* diverts insoluble ideological conflicts by minimizing contact and raising the stakes of going to war (the Cold War and mutually assured destruction) or by creating coalitions and dividing territory. Truce thinking 'aims low' and where 'peace thinking' looks ahead two or even three generations, truce thinking privileges the present moment and the immediate resolution of human suffering. In this sense it resembles the 'contingent negotiations' that Hampton expertly locates on an early modern continuum between high-minded angelic visitation and the ruffianly ministrations of the pimp or bawd.[9] Eisikovits calls truce theory a 'non-transcendental theory of conflict reduction', as opposed, he says, to Kant's assertion that if there still exist unsolved problems that might cause future conflict, then what you have cannot be peace. Above all truce thinking, unlike peace thinking, says Eisikovits, believes that 'War is too irresistible to be eliminated'.[10]

Truce thinking thus resembles what Nathalie Rivère de Carles has called an Elizabethan 'poetics of appeasement' whose crucial tools include 'truce, marginal agency, and diplomatic coup d'état'.[11] 'Marginal agency' includes the 'soft power' of women (as Elizabeth Pentland has suggested),[12] and the use of entertainment and interlude, as both Hampton and Rivère de Carles have argued. 'Coup d'état' is understood as both the intrusion of a marginal time and space into political or historical time, in Hampton's terms, and as a method of combining political and diplomatic peace-making, as Rivère de Carles asserts. Drama, Rivère de Carles suggests, provides the perfect vehicle with which to investigate what is necessary for peace by compelling viewers to deploy 'double vision'. Dramatic double vision allows ambassadors and monarchs to envision alternative realities and to fashion different versions of themselves and their countries.

In these terms, the concluding truce in *Henry V* is imperfect, temporary, shifting, double, and a fundamental test of character in its moral senses. A famous essay by Norman Rabkin from 1977 compares the play's eponymous hero to a well-known optical illusion that looks like both a duck and a rabbit: King Henry is ambiguously a military hero and a war-monger.[13] Many critics have noted the difficulties of presenting

[9] Hampton, *Fictions of Embassy*, op. cit., p. 6.

[10] Eisikovits, *A Theory of Truces*, p. 19.

[11] Nathalie Rivère de Carles, 'The Poetics of Diplomatic Appeasement in the Early Modern Era', in *Early Modern Diplomacy, Theatre and Soft Power*, pp. 1-24 (p. 5).

[12] Elizabeth Pentland, '"I cannot speak your England": French Women in *King John* and *Henry V*', *EMLS Special Issue* 27, European Women in Early Modern Drama (2017): https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/journal/index.php/emls/article/view/380/288.

[13] Norman Rabkin, 'Rabbits, Ducks, and *Henry V*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 28.3 (1977), 279-96.

this play in a way that does *not* glorify war, although Ramona Wray elegantly points out how some recent performances on stage and screen use flexible time-schemes to undercut the 'New American Militarism'.[14] Even Kenneth Branagh's storied attempt to present the barbarism of both the king and the marauding armies – using documentary-style film techniques and historical evidence to capture the dirt, stench, putrefaction, and loathsomeness of medieval warfare and judicious editing to show viewers the execution of Bardolph and the heaped young corpses of the murdered boys – found itself stymied by both the rhetoric and the mise-en-scène of the 'Crispin's Day' speech. As Sarah Hatchuel has written, Branagh's film makes 'war… deeply ambivalent since it is made at the same time disgusting and heroic, hellish and glorifying, repulsive and attractive'.[15] We can extend this analogy to the concluding truce: If Henry is a righteous king fighting a war imagined to be just, he brings a triumphant peace; if he is a cruel tyrant, he offers a truce, a short break in an ongoing aggression.

Killing the Prisoners

As part of its ambivalence, Branagh's film included the king's order to kill the French prisoners, although it did not present those executions on screen. The inconsistencies surrounding the slaughter of the French prisoners have received extensive editorial and critical attention, and are somewhat tedious, but I must review them again briefly here. The problem is three-fold, admirably summarized by John Sutherland and Cedric Watts, and by Charles Edelman.[16] First, why does Henry give the order to 'let every soldier kill his prisoner', seemingly unprovoked, when prisoners-of-war presented potentially valuable commodities, especially if they were nobly born? Second, why does he give the same order later on, 'to cut the throats of all we have' – weren't all the prisoners killed the first time, or have the English taken more prisoners in the meantime? Third, if the prisoners have been killed twice, how come Henry still has so many 'prisoners of good sort' to exchange for ransom in 4.8?

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[14] Ramona Wray, '*Henry V* after the War on Terror', in *Shakespeare and War: Shakespeare Survey* 72, ed. by Emma Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 1-15.

[15] Sarah Hatchuel, 'The Shakespearean films of the 90s: Afterlives in transmedia in the 21st century', *Actes des congrès de la Société française Shakespeare* 33 (2015): https://doi.org/10.4000/shakespeare.2945, p. 198 of .pdf.

[16] John Sutherland and Cedric Watts, *Henry V, War Criminal? & Other Shakespeare Puzzles* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2000); Charles Edelman, '"Then every soldier kill his prisoners": Shakespeare at the Battle of Agincourt', *Parergon* n.s. 16.1 (1998), 31-45.

Sutherland returns to Holinshed's justification of Henry's order. Holinshed explains that French horsemen had attempted to plunder the unguarded rear of the base camp and killed the English servants:

> certeine Frenchmen on horssebacke…to the number of six hundred horssemen, which were the first that fled, hearing that the English tents & pauilions were a good waie distant from the armie, without anie sufficient gard to defend the same, either vpon a couetous meaning to gaine by the spoile, or vpon a desire to b[e] reuenged, entred vpon the kings campe, and there spoiled the hails, robbed the tents, brake vp chests, and caried awaie [b]askets, and slue such seruants as they found to make anie resistance.[17]

Henry, therefore, according to Holinshed, demanded 'that everie man (upon paine of death) should incontinentlie slaie his prisoner'.[18] Sutherland says that the scene with Fluellen in which the latter explains that the French have 'killed all the poys and the luggage' against all the rules of war 'looks like *ex post facto* or special pleading'.[19] He observes that there is no dramatic way for Henry to have known before he gave the order – and therefore Henry must have been motivated by 'military prudence, not condign reprisal'.[20] As for how many and which prisoners were killed, Sutherland offers three solutions: first, that Shakespeare did not care, and assumed his audience would not care; second, that only a few prisoners are killed, for reasons of expediency and time; third, that only the ordinary prisoners are killed, while the nobles are left alive to be ransomed.

Sutherland does not return to the anonymous *Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*, but if we do, we find some support for his view that the nobles are spared. In Scene 16, when the King asks how many of his army have been slain in battle, Oxford replies:

> An it please your majesty, there are of the French army slain above ten thousand twenty-six hundred, whereof are princes and nobles bearing banners. Besides, all the nobility of France are taken prisoners. Of your majesty's army are slain none

[17] Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (London: 1577 and 1587), repr. online in *The Holinshed Project*, ed. by Ian Archer, Felicity Heal, Paulina Kewes, Henry Summerson (Oxford University/EEBO-TCP), *Chronicles* (1587), volume 6, p. 554.

[18] Holinshed, *Chronicles*, p. 554; Sutherland, op. cit., p. 112.

[19] Sutherland, *Henry V, War Criminal?*, p. 113.

[20] Ibid., p. 113.

but the good duke of York and not above five or six and twenty common soldiers.[21]

This parallel play, however, also includes in the scene immediately following this one a shockingly comic, and callous, interlude with John Cobbler and Robin Pewterer, common soldiers who comment approvingly on the barbarity of the king's actions:

Enter John Cobbler, and Robin Pewterer.
Robin: Now, John Cobbler, didst thou see how the king did behave himself?
John: But, Robin, didst thou see what a policy the king had? To see how the Frenchmen were killed with the stakes of the trees!
Robin: Ay, John, there was a brave policy.[22]

Janet Clare notes the 'plebeian' sensibility of *Famous Victories*, with its emphasis on 'clowning, thieving, cowardice, and bragging' over heroism.[23] *Famous Victories* also includes the retroactive announcement of the French attack on the English camp, as well as an origin for the dialogue between Pistol and Le Fer (an unnamed French soldier and the English soldier Derrick in *Famous Victories*) and the wooing scene between Henry and Katherine. Clare identifies the low-ranking comic characters in this play as 'small-scale profiteers', and concludes that in contrast to both the Quarto *Henry V* and the *Famous Victories*, the Folio *Henry V* 'subtly casts doubt on the justness of [Henry's] war'.[24]

Gary Taylor's single-volume Oxford edition of *Henry V* calls for an even more 'cold-blooded' Henry.[25] Taylor suggests that there are two groups of prisoners – the first group is captured, then there is a French attack, those prisoners taken during the attack are slain, the English beat back the French again and capture more prisoners, and Henry plans to cut the throats of those prisoners.[26] Taylor urges directors to have the prisoners killed in full view of the audience, on stage, in a show of bloodshed that even Branagh's so-called 'gritty' *Henry V* abjures, although it includes the order to kill the prisoners

[21] *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* (London: Printed by Thomas Creede, 1598), sig. F1r. A peer-reviewed modern edition, ed. by Karen Sawyer Marsalek and Mathew Martin, is available from the Queen's Men Editions, https://qme.uvic.ca/doc/FV_Q1/scene/Titlepage/index.html.
[22] Ibid., sig. F2r.
[23] Janet Clare, *Shakespeare's Stage Traffic: Imitation, Borrowing, and Competition in Renaissance Theatre* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 158.
[24] Clare, *Shakespeare's Stage Traffic*, p. 162.
[25] Gary Taylor, 'Introduction', in *Henry V*, ed. by Gary Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 32.
[26] Ibid., p. 33; see also Edelman, esp. p. 39.

(clearly justified in the film, though not in the play, by the murder of the boys).[27] I have not been able to find many examples of stagings or film adaptations that show Henry himself killing the prisoners, a notable exception being Kevin Kline as Henry in 1984 at the Delacorte Theatre in New York. In that production Henry 'personally slit the first French throat at hand'.[28]

Edelman astutely notes that there are two accounts in Holinshed 1587, and that these accounts conflict.[29] Holinshed both has the Englishmen attack their noble prisoners, following Hall's Chronicle, and then, following Titus Livius, has the king merely *threaten* death to the prisoners *if* the French do not yield. Here is the full version of Holinshed's first account:

> 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 eares, he doub|ting least his enimies should gather togither againe and begin a new field; and mistrusting further that the prisoners would be an aid to his enimies, or the verie enimies to their takers in deed if they were suffered to liue, contrarie to his accustomed gentlenes, commanded by sound of trumpet, that euerie man (vpon paine of death) should incontinentlie slaie his prisoner. (marginal note: All the pris[o]ners slaine).[30]

And here is the conflicting account in Holinshed:

> some write, that the king perceiuing his enimies in one part to assemble togither, as though they meant to giue a new battell for preseruation of the prisoners, sent to them an herald, commanding them either to depart out of his sight, or else to come forward at once, and giue battell: promising herewith, that if they did offer to fight againe, not onelie those prisoners which his people alreadie had taken;

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[27] The sobriquet 'gritty' applied to Branagh's film is ubiquitous online, and seems to have been so from its earliest reviews; see, for example, '*Henry V*', *Variety*, 31 December 1988, https://variety.com/1988/film/reviews/henry-v-2-1200427962/; Benedict Nightingale, 'FILM: *Henry V* returns as a monarch for this era', 5 Nov. 1989, https://www.nytimes.com/1989/11/05/movies/film-henry-v-returns-as-a-monarch-for-this-era.html; Alex von Tunzelmann, 'Kenneth Branagh's Henry V: right royal entertainment', *The Guardian*, 'Reel History', 28 July 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/jul/28/henry-v-kenneth-branagh; or 'Kenneth Branagh: From Bard to Thor', CBS News, n.d., https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/kenneth-branagh-from-bard-to-thor/3/.

[28] Arthur Ganz, '*Henry V* in New York', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 35.4 (1984), 4.

[29] Edelman, 'Shakespeare at the Battle of Agincourt', 36.

[30] Holinshed, *Chronicles*, volume 6, p. 554.

> but also so manie of them as in this new conflict, which they thus attempted should fall into his hands, should die the death without redemption. (Marginal note, 'A right wise and valiant challenge of the King').[31]

In Hall's chronicle, the English soldiers, not Henry, 'fearing least in this new fielde they should fight both with theire prisoners, and their enemies', slaughtered their prisoners regardless of rank, including the rich and noble ones; 'few prisoners or none were saved', Hall tells us.[32] In Titus Livius, 'manie', but not all prisoners, were killed, and when the French capitulate, those remaining prisoners, mostly noblemen, are ransomed. Edelman goes back still further, to Hall's source itself, the French historian Le Fevre's *History of Charles VI*. Le Fevre has Henry's soldiers refuse to carry out the cruel and senseless orders to kill the prisoners and claims that Henry needed to appoint a special archer to perform these executions.[33] It makes most sense, says Edelman, to follow recent historians and argue that 'even if the real Henry V had ordered [the killing of the prisoners]… and even if the order had been obeyed, not many prisoners, and certainly not the majority, would have suffered that unhappy fate'.[34]

Edelman argues, like Rabkin, that there are two versions of Henry, but unlike Rabkin he says that we have to choose between the duck and the rabbit: each version of Henry is incompatible with the other, and which Henry you pick will depend upon 'the uses to which particular readers are putting the text'.[35] Holinshed, I would argue, picks a bloodthirsty and venal Henry – the marginal glosses note 'All the prisoners slaine' for the first account and characterize this execution as a 'lamentable slaughter', a 'dolorous decree… and pitifull proclamation'. Our narrator adds:

> pitie it was to see how some Frenchmen were suddenlie sticked with daggers, some were brained with pollaxes, some slaine with malls, other had their throats cut, and some their bellies panched, so that in effect, hauing respect to the great number, few prisoners were saued.[36]

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[31] Holinshed, *Chronicles*, volume 6, p. 554.

[32] Edmund Hall, *The Union of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre [and] Yorke [Hall's Chronicle]* (London: Richard Grafton, 1547), repr. Early English Books Online, 'The third yere', Fol. 1v. [misprinted; fol. 19], sig. H6v, p. 55/675.

[33] Edelman, 'Shakespeare at the Battle of Agincourt', 43.

[34] Ibid., 44.

[35] Ibid., 45.

[36] Holinshed, *Chronicles*, volume 6, p. 554.

In contrast, the gloss for the second account, the mere threat of execution, praises the King's 'right wise and valiant challenge' because it caused the French to leave the field and the English to sound a 'retreat' that they classified as a 'happie victorie'.[37]

I quote these gory selections because they show that there is no confusion, to my mind, about Henry's ferocity in Holinshed. As Diana Henderson has noted, however, even the grisliest productions or films, and even those that focus upon Henry's sorrow at the slaughter he occasions, merely 'update Henry as the very model of a modern military leader' engaged in wars against his will.[38] Henderson suggests that a concentration in performance upon the monetary motive for Henry's actions in this play, including not only the possible ransoming of the prisoners but also his 'ignoble bargaining' for Katherine's hand, could allow us to see beyond the coming-of-age-story often mapped on to Henry's development and to escape a 'deterministic' notion of history.[39] And I think that including the justification for the slaughter – that the French have killed the boys and the luggage – after the fact could maximize audience members' sense of shock so that we do not feel that this mass execution was politically necessary to broker a peace and instead see how corporatized warfare becomes a perpetual-motion-machine of slaughter.

Truce as Skeptical Peace or 'Rotten Compromise'?

Maintaining the senselessness and venality of the massacre could ready us for the truce thinking that emerges in the final scenes of the play. Isabella imagines a future utopia in which 'English may as French, French English embrace one another' (5.2.379-80, the radical optimism of condition one). Burgundy pleads in favor of 'the naked, poor, and mangled peace, / Dear nurse of arts, plenties, and joyful birth' (5.2.35-36), identifying conditions two and four of truce thinking; two, modest or humble achievements ('naked and poor and mangled' peace) and four, the practical good that peace will afford the country. The King of France and Henry call for toleration (condition 3): notably, the Queen goes with the lords to negotiate the treaty, in case 'articles be too nicely urged upon' (5.2.96). Pentland suggests that French women in both *King John* and *Henry V* are 'meant to avert further bloodshed and secure a lasting peace between two warring nations', even at the cost of Isabella's disinheriting her own son.[40]

[37] Ibid, volume 6, p. 554.

[38] Henderson, 'Meditations in a Time of (Displaced) War', 235.

[39] Ibid., 236.

[40] Pentland, 'French Women in *King John* and *Henry V*', 17.

Both Henry and the King of France agree to let their agents compromise, behind the scenes. The only item to which the King does not subscribe—the naming of Henry his heir—he makes Henry request in public, to which Henry agrees:

> *King of France:* Nor this I have not, brother, so denied
> But your request shall make me let it pass.
> *King Henry:* I pray you, then, in love and dear alliance,
> Let that one article rank with the rest,
> And thereupon give me your daughter. (5.2.355-9)

The only cautionary note is sounded by Henry, who anticipates future negotiations or even conflict and wishes to shore up his position with his marriage:

> Prepare we for our marriage; on which day,
> My Lord of Burgundy, we'll take your oath,
> And all the peers', for surety of our leagues.
> Then shall I swear to Kate, and you to me,
> And may our oaths well kept and prosp'rous be. (5.2.382-6)

The hint of danger in 'may our oaths well kept and prosperous be', and the deferral of the oaths of fealty until the marriage oaths are sworn, suggest Henry's caution and eye to his long-term position. It suggests that this peace is skeptical, a truce rather than a peace, a suggestion carried through in the final chorus, the epilogue:

> Henry the Sixth, in infant bands crowned king
> Of France and England, did this king succeed,
> 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, 9-14)

That phrase 'for their sake' seemingly refers back to the earlier *Henry VI* plays, as if to say (to adapt in irony the twentieth-century advertising slogan): 'if you liked those plays, you'll simply love this one!'

But the downbeat ending still seems like an odd way to conclude, in that it reminds us of past theatrical successes that retell England's future political failures, and asks us to accept a peace in the foreknowledge of future war. It suggests that the condition on which we accept Henry's and England's victories is only as a temporary truce, not a

permanent peace – but that a truce, even if temporary, enables for a time the flourishing of happiness – 'small time, but… most greatly lived' (epilogue 5). Eisikovits identifies this state of temporary truce as the *modus vivendi*, an alternative to political thinker John Rawls's theory of liberalism. Where the latter focuses upon 'rights', suggests Eisikovits, the former finds this a dead end that gives too much power to the judiciary. *Modus vivendi* forces us instead, argues Eisikovits, to come up with 'flexible, context-dependent' solutions to impasses.

In light of current challenges to democracy worldwide, however, isn't any truce or *modus vivendi* a 'rotten compromise', in Margalit's terms, requiring us to 'torture, humiliate, or dehumanize' other persons, leading us to consequences that ultimately prolong war and disease, and that destroy more lives? In contrast to Margalit, Carl von Clausewitz argued that any compromise was worth taking, rather than prolonging war, because, he suggests, most people are naturally peaceable, and

> a number of sparks are always extinguished which would have smouldered on quietly, and the excitement of the passions abates, because all those whose minds are disposed to peace, of which in all nations and under all circumstances there is always a great number, turn themselves away completely from the road to resistance. Whatever may take place subsequently, we must always look upon the object as attained, and the business of War as ended, by a peace.[41]

I find it hard to approve of citizens 'turn[ing] themselves away completely from… resistance' to any authoritarian or dehumanizing regimen, or one that, say, engages in genocide (as in the Second World War and many wars since) as a good thing. But René Grotenhuis suggests that peace-making must function as a preliminary step in what he delineates as a necessary process of 'nation-building', which again must happen before 'state-building'. Just like 'peace-building', which, he argues, is distinct from 'peace-making', 'building' nations and states must come after making, which, 'constantly evolving', requires sustained, 'open-ended' commitment and dialogue.[42] And indeed, the few peer-reviewed methods so far found to reduce political polarization include the

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[41] Carl von Clausewitz and J. J. Graham (trans.) *On War* (Champaign, Ill: Project Gutenberg, 2020), p. 29, http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=2009343&site=eds-live. I thank the anonymous reviewer who suggested I consider Clausewitz's perspective.

[42] René Grotenhuis, 'Peacemaking as the Preliminary Step towards Nation-building and State-building', in *Nation-Building as Necessary Effort in Fragile States* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), pp. 93-100, p. 98, doi:10.2307/j.ctt1gr7d8r.9.

exchange of "civil" yet informal opinions among people who have been first shown what they have in common with each other.[43]

Thinking only of the last two qualities of truce thinking, tactics and efficiency, says Eisikovits, can indeed lead us to rotten compromises. But the first three qualities of truce thinking can help us seek out instead those with whom we can develop a *modus vivendi*: those who can share an optimism for the future and a belief in the healing power of time; modesty or humility in our goals; and tolerance or at least avoidance of ideological disagreements. As Pentland points out, Katherine's and Isabella's truce-making – although seemingly doomed – bore long-term fruit. After the death of Henry V, Katherine married Owen Tudor, and her grandson ousted Richard III to become Henry VII and to launch the Tudor dynasty; 'her great-great grand-daughter was Elizabeth I, Shakespeare's queen'.[44] Henry VI in his 'infant bands' at the end of *Henry V* thus reminds us not only of the failure of his father's peace, activated as it was by tactical concerns just as his war was founded upon the legal language of the Salic Law (the Rawlsian discourse of rights rather than the *modus vivendi*) but also of the cycle of hope and potential for peace ushered in by each new generation.

[43] Stefano Balietti, Lise Getoor, Daniel G. Goldstein, Duncan J. Watts, 'Reducing opinion polarization: Effects of exposure to similar people with differing political views', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 118.52 (2021), e2112552118; DOI: 10.1073/pnas.2112552118

[44] Pentland, 'French Women in *King John* and *Henry V*', 19.