

War, Politics, Class in *Henry V*

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In *Henry V* almost all the characters are soldiers, and war issues form the central concern of the play from Act 1 to Act 4. As Lily B. Campbell pointed out, it can be obviously seen that “the theme of the play is war” (255). Nevertheless, in twentieth-century criticism, the main focus has been on Henry’s character, kingship, and conquest of Catherine and France. Although recent criticism, particularly since 2000 has paid more attention to Henry’s warfare and justification of the cause of war, perhaps influenced by the Iraq War, there have been no full studies of the play in terms of body politic and social class, which seem to create the fundamental problems behind the war.⁽¹⁾ This play describes three ranks of soldiers (the aristocrat, professionals, commoners), but almost no critic has discussed each of the ranks of the military comprehensively, though some narrower studies have been written.

My view generally concurs with Andrew Gurr and also Constance Jordan, who discuss the body politic and war, following the fable of the bees recounted by the bishop of Canterbury, but these critics’ ideas differ from mine in their grouping of the professional soldiery with the aristocrats. In my view, the professionals are used and disregarded by the nobles for their profit in the same way as the commoners; therefore, the nation is ultimately divided into two, the nobles and the commoners, though the duke of Exeter categorizes them into three as discussed below. Moreover, the plays can be seen to question the social injustice among different social ranks and the political system of the monarchy rather than the justification of the war and Shakespeare’s pacifism, as Stephen Marx, Theodor Meron, and John S. Mebane have suggested. In brief, this paper will discuss the war issues of *Henry V* as a political method to unite the nation and examine the political system in the context of Elizabethan militarism and politics.

To put it more concretely, I will explore the voices of various types of soldiers in the play to clarify how the common people were used by the ruling class for their advantage through war, with reference to military books to identify the Henrician world with Elizabethan; these military books were written as instruction in the arts of war by veterans who had served on

the Continent. The large number of such titles recorded in Maurice J. D. Cockle's *A Bibliography of Military Books up to 1642* suggests how conscious people were of war issues. First, I will examine Henry's views on war and peace in the context of Elizabethan pro-war theory advanced in the military books and suggest that war belongs to the ruling class, who wage war out of self-interest. Second, I will analyze the representation of professional soldiers, especially Fluellen's obsession with the discipline of war, revealing that their comic descriptions undermine chivalry, and that they are simply tools of the noble soldiers. Thirdly, I will investigate the problems of soldiers, namely those of fugitives and veterans, focusing on such rogue common soldiers as Pistol, Nym, and Bardolph, while analyzing the skepticism about war and anxiety about dissolution of body politic due to the war, which are expressed by such innocent characters as Michael Williams and John Bates. Finally, I will conclude that this play questions war as a way to unite the state and resolve social injustice, reflecting the Elizabethan military and political background.

I

The world in *Henry V* seems to maintain a strict distinction of rank, following the conventional idea of the body politic. Regarding the war between England and France and fear of Scotland's attack on England, the duke of Westmorland maintains they should attack Scotland first to win France, and the duke of Exeter, Henry's uncle, argues that higher ranked people should stay in England while the lower ranks should fight in France:

While that the armed hand doth fight abroad,
 Th'advised head defends itself at home.
 For government, though high and low and lower,
 Put into parts, doth keep in one consent,
 Congreeing in a full and natural close,
 Like music. (1.2.178-83)

The theory of the body politic is frequently seen in Renaissance drama including that of Shakespeare and may be traced back to Aristotle. Political unity as musical harmony originates from Cicero's *De Republica*, as Lewis Theobald first pointed out (Taylor 109). The bishop of Canterbury develops this idea with figure of the world of bees:

True. Therefore doth heaven divide
 The state of man in divers functions,
 Setting endeavour in continual motion;

.....
so work the honey-bees,
 Creatures that by a rule in nature teach
 The act of order to a peopled kingdom.

.....
 That many things, having full reference
 To one consent, may work contrariously.

.....
 So may a thousand actions once afoot
 End in one purpose, and be all well borne
 Without defect. Therefore to France, my liege. (183-213)

As with the fable of the belly in *Coriolanus*, the order of the state is expressed in the figure of body parts. In *Coriolanus*, the Senate is compared to the belly, which is an important part, while the great soldier, Coriolanus is compared to “a limb that has but a disease; / Mortal to cut it off, to cure it easy” (3.1.297-99). In *Henry V* the commoner is “the armèd hand” (178), while the ruling class is “[t]h’adviseèd head” (179). In the body politic theory, the king is usually seen as head, whereas the subjects comprise the rest of the parts.

The words “one consent” (181, 206) and “one purpose” (212) indicates the war with France, and suggest that the war is a political means to unite the nation. In the opening scene, the archbishop of Canterbury and the bishop of Ely argue over a bill which has been proposed by the Parliament, but which has not been enacted yet, and attempt to reject it again, because “If it pass against us, / We lose the better half of our possession” (1.1.7-8). Consequently, they offer to aid the king on the issues of France, pronouncing on his succession claim to the throne of France. They succeed in persuading Henry to fight against France to divert attention from the bill issue, while Henry, not knowing their true intention, contends that this war is led by “God” (1.2.303, 07) and “fair” (310), remarking “We are not tyrant, but a Christian king” (241). As Paul A. Jorgensen remarks, secular war tended to be justified by religious authority, and this scene can be seen as a prime example (172).⁽²⁾

The Elizabethan Age saw foreign wars in Spain, France, the Low Countries as well as a domestic one in Ireland. Although war had been accepted by the Church when the cause was “just” (to defend religion), there was a division within humanism: Caxton, Machiavelli, and Guiccardini supported the just war theory, whereas Erasmus, Thomas More, and Castiglione insisted on pacifism (see Freeman 16-25; Marx 49-58; Meron 16-46). Most Elizabethan people

can be seen to have been in favour of war from a number of military books supporting war to defend the nation from Catholic countries (Jorgensen 170; Freeman 16). Sir Philip Sidney, Francis Drake, and the earl of the Essex were popular as military heroes, supporting the claim of the necessity of war to defend their nation and religion, and that peace corrupts the state, while a few people such as James VI, King of Scots and William Cecil were pacifists, believing that God would punish the enemy, and that war only leads to ruin.

Henry V seems to mirror this just war debate as its central theme, and each person in the social classes of “high and low and lower” (1.2.180) has a different view on war. According to Exeter, Henry’s soldiers can be classified into three: the king and dukes (“high”), Fuellen and professional soldiers (“low”), and Williams and Pistol among other common soldiers (“lower”).

In the play, the noble soldiers heroically claim the justice of the war, following the code of chivalry, while the comical arguments of professional soldiers, the bad behavior of Pistol and Bardolph, and Williams’s skepticism undermine the cause. In other words, the world is divided into two, the superior and inferior, and the war belongs to the aristocrat. The play seems to question the friction between the two sorts over going to war.

On the eve of the battle at Agincourt, Henry disputes with a common soldier Michael Williams over the king’s responsibility for the war, disguising himself as a common soldier, to be discussed below. Immediately after this debate, Henry soliloquizes on the king’s role and responsibility in the state and complains that he cannot sleep with worrying for the nation while his subjects such as Williams sleep:

The slave, a member of the country’s peace
Enjoys it, but in gross brain little wots
What watch the King keeps to maintain the peace,
Whose hours the peasant best advantages. (4.1.269-72)

In the context of the debate between Henry and Williams, this passage suggests that Henry justly wages war to maintain national peace, though his subjects do not notice it. Henry does not count the victims of the war, but weighs his suffering as a king, and this suggests Henry’s pragmatic, cold, Machiavellian aspect and at the same time clearly shows his contempt for the commoners and his maintaining of aristocratic privilege, as discussed below. In France, on the other hand, the dauphin thinks peace rots the nation, a common idea among the pro-war theorists. He claims:

peace itself should not so dull a kingdom—
Though war, nor no known quarrel, were in question—

But that defences, musters, preparations
 Should be maintained, assembled, and collected
 As were a war in expectation. (2.4.17-20)

The ideas of Henry and the French dauphin can be traced to Machiavelli, who insisted the prince should be a soldier and the subject must obey his command: “the menne, which are conducted to warfare, by commaundement of their Prince, they ought to come, neither altogether forced, nor altogether willingly” (D1r). Moreover, similar ideas may be seen in the Elizabethan military books. Barnaby Riche argues “although that peace be chiefly to be desired, yet many times by entring into warres it is the more safely & quietly maintayned” (A3v). Geoffrey Gates regards “peace” as a situation in which people “may wax rotten in idlenesse, and become of dulle wittes, slowe of courage, weake hanged, and feeble kneede,” and warns his nation not to delight in peace (20). The earl of Essex asserts, “Now it is no time to make peace with the chiefe enemy [Spain] of our Religion, when a conspiracy is in hand against al the professors of it” (F1v-F2r). He also emphasizes the danger of peaceful conditions: “Our nation growen generally vnwarlike; in loue with the name, and bewitched with the delights of peace: and the Spaniardes corage recouered, together with his strength; which is the naturall roote of all true confidence” (F3r). Sir Dudley Digges insists that “warre sometimes lesse hurtfull, and more to be wisht in a well gouerned State than peace” (96).

In terms of this background, Henry and the dauphin’s attitudes toward war were familiar to the Elizabethan audience. However, it is just an outward excuse for an international war involving their subjects. The war is, in fact, only waged for their power and profit. To the ruling class, war is equal to tennis match or sport, as Henry remarks: “When we have matched our rackets to these balls, / We will in France, by God’s grace, play a set / Shall strike his father’s crown into hazard” (1.2.261-63). Henry thus decides to turn the tennis balls sent from the dauphin to “gunstones” (282). Likewise, in *Henry IV* Hotspur associates war with sport: “O, let the hours be short / Till fields and blows and groans applaud our sport!” (1.3.299-300), and R. A. Foakes states that “[w]ar...could be treated as a sport for young gentlemen” (30).

For Henry, war is also a marketplace where peace and profits including Catherine are exchanged. After the battle the duke of Burgundy complains about the war and urges English and French kings and queens to make peace. As a victor, Henry presents conditions for peace like a merchant or businessman.

If, Duke of Burgundy, you would the peace

.....

..... you must buy that peace
 With full accord to all our just demands,
 Whose tenors and particular effects
 You have enscheduled briefly in your hands. (5.2.68-73)

What “all our just demands” are remains uncertain, but it is certain that “Catherine...is our capital demand, comprised / Within the fore-rank of our articles” (95-97). Historically, the marriage was the first article of The Treaty of Troyes. Although the French queen, Isabella, a pacifist, has formerly remarked, “we fairly hope...this day / Shall change all griefs and quarrels into love” (18-20), lines omitted in the quarto, Henry attempts to sell peace for Catherine and other profit, now that he can control France’s fate. Henry’s mercenary ideas are also found when he sees Williams again. In a former scene, on the eve of Agincourt, they have disputed over the king’s responsibility with Henry in disguise, as discussed below, and promised to duel next time they meet. The king reveals his identity and delivers “this glove with crowns” (4.8.56). Henry has thus bought Williams’s loyalty with some amount of money (Engle 127).

Henry consequently actually wages war for his self-interest (kingship, territory, woman), which is hidden under such rhetorical, chivalric, and patriotic pronouncements as the “Once more unto the breach” (3.1) and St. Crispin’s day’s speeches (4.3). For the two parts of *Henry IV*, Glen Mynott claims that “Hal, like his father governed by *realpolitik*, sees only the political significance of chivalry and the value of fashioning for himself a chivalric identity” and that “[c]hivalry is a symbolic tool of convenience for the ruling faction, which is used to signify power, tradition, legitimacy, and unity without necessarily imposing the constraints of a code of behaviour” (158). If such analysis is applied to *Henry V*, the sequel to *Henry IV I* and *II*, it is clear that now he is king, Hal employs chivalry to display power, justify the war, and unite the nation. The difference between *Henry IV* and *Henry V* is the scale of the war; it has shifted from civil war to an international conflict; consequently, the ideology seems to work more effectively in *Henry V*, in which the people fight with their common enemy as a nation, in Henry’s rhetoric, without distinction of social class.

II

The professional soldiers of the “low” classes, in Exeter’s word, fight for the nation without skepticism about war unlike Williams; however, their descriptions are essentially comical. Fluellen, a Welsh Captain, plays so large a role in *Henry V* that his name became the title of

a play in the eighteenth century (Clouse 270). He is the most comic figure amongst his fellow professionals, especially with his obsessions with “the disciplines of the war” (3.3.5), though it should be noted that most of his argument on such discipline (10-80) is cut in the quarto printing of the play. On the other hand, Macmorris, an Irish Captain, completely ignores discipline in favor of practice. At the battle of Harfleur, Fluellen hopes to discuss “the disciplines of the wars, the Roman wars” (39-40) with Macmorris, but Macmorris refuses since “It is no time to discourse” (48). The other professional soldiers are Gower, an Englishman, and Jamy, a Scot. However, Jamy does not appear in the quarto, perhaps because the character is frequently identified with James VI, King of Scots: Gary Taylor attributes the omission to political censorship (313).

Fluellen displays his knowledge of “the disciplines of the war” throughout the play, particularly those disciplines of strategy and military behavior, such as silence and obedience. From the deep knowledge displayed here of the martial principles, it is highly likely that Shakespeare read military books. Fluellen’s reference to Roman strategy has been viewed as an echo of Thomas Digges’s *Stratycos* (Hotson 118-22; Campbell 300). Moreover, the dispute between Fluellen and Macmorris may allude to the quarrel of two veterans and military writers, Sir John Smythe and Sir Roger Williams. Smythe had an old-fashioned way of thinking on the arts of war, while Williams had a modern attitude. Besides military theory, as mentioned above, military writers discussed the arts of war, especially concerning weaponry. Williams and Humphrey Barwick emphasized the efficacy of guns, while Smythe and Henry Knyvett persisted in advocating the use of the traditional longbow, which had begun to decline because of its increasing price and lack of strong men to master the weapon in the late-Elizabethan period (Cruikshank 102). Regarding Agincourt, where longbows were employed, Smythe remarks, “The famous victorie and battaile of Agincourt, also of later years fought by king Henry the fift against the whole power of France, doeth euidentlie shewe the most excellent effectes & execution of Archers, where with the grace of God and incredible volees of arrows, the French kings army was ouerthrown” (I4v). Considering this background, it is likely that such old and new military views were also held among professional soldiers; Fluellen seems to persist in what the Elizabethan writers may have thought an old-fashioned approach to war, insisting on following the Roman military discipline, which is regarded as “a little out of fashion” by Henry (82). In contrast, Macmorris adopts what many Elizabethans would have regarded as a modern view, claiming that practice is more important than theory (300-05).

Furthermore, Fluellen observes the importance of silence on the eve of the battle of Agincourt. He warns Gower to “speak fewer” (4.1.66) because at “the wars of Pompey the Great” (70), “there is no tiddle-taddle nor pebble-babble in Pompey’s camp” (71-72), and Henry admires his “care and valour” (82). Fluellen also emphasizes the importance of obedience to martial law. On the execution of Bardolph, he asserts “discipline ought to be used” (3.6.55) and shows no mercy to him. When Henry sees Williams, who had quarreled with Henry on the eve of Agincourt, and says to him, “thou hast given me most bitter terms” (4.8.42), Fluellen claims, “An’t please your majesty, let his neck answer for it, if there is any martial law in the world” (43-44).

Silence and obedience were qualities of ideal soldiers. Robert Barret observes, “In encamping an army...it is to be noted, as a thing of great importance, that great silence be kept in the body of the watch, at the least all rumour and lowd noises are to be excluded, and in their conuersations to talke modestly, stilly, and with low voices” (205), and “all the souldiers and officers might beare him [the sergeant] that due respect and obedience” (115). Similarly, Henry Barret claims, “In all places of service suche silence muste be used that soldiers may observe any charge given to their duties appertayninge, in watche, ambushe, or elsewhere,” and “Souldiers of all estates muste be obedient and observe any poynte of service by the officers commaunded nighte and daye” (Hale 247-84).

The above discussions among Fluellen and other professional soldiers parody the contemporary military culture, and the comical descriptions of the characters seem to undermine the Elizabethan ideology of chivalry and war. Showing his knowledge of military terms and problems, Shakespeare probably mocks such Elizabethan professional soldiers as Digges, Smythe, Williams among others, who blindly believe in the justice of war.

This scene describes not only comical episodes among the professionals obsessive with the ideology of war, but sad aspects as well. In nationality, the professionals may have looked miserable; Gower is the only Englishman, but the others are Welsh, Irish, and Scot. The scene suggests the glorious unity of the British Isles to English people, but to the colonized people, their fighting for England may have looked miserable and unsympathetic.⁽³⁾ Also, they seem to be oppressed in terms of social rank. In the military world, such captains as Fluellen and Macmorris are higher in status, and Fluellen sees Pistol, Burdolph, and Nym as “cullions” (3.2.20), though Pistol contemptuously calls Fluellen “great duke” (21, 23), “Good bawcock” (23), “sweet chunk” (24). As ensign Iago’s jealousy of lieutenant Cassio in *Othello* suggests, military rank was of significance to the Elizabethan soldiers. However, to Henry and noble soldiers, the

professionals are “mercenaries” (4.8.86), whose names are not listed unlike those of the aristocrat soldiers when the king sees the document relating the dead number of French armies.¹⁴ To the noblemen, the professionals are their limbs as with the case of Coriolanus. Indeed, despite having praised Fluellen’s “care and valour” (4.1.83) on the eve of the Agincourt, Henry misuses him as his scapegoat; using Fluellen, Henry avoids being beaten by Williams. In other words, the ruling class always uses the lower rank of people, whether at the battlefield or not.

In the military world, the order was stricter than in the rest of society; obedience was strongly demanded, as discussed above; therefore, there was no time to doubt the justice of war. The reason why silence and obedience was needed for ideal soldiers was that they were not to hold skepticism and also to avoid rebellion. In this standard, Fluellen is an excellent soldier, as Henry declares in his praises, but to Shakespeare, the character looks comical and pitiful, to be used by the ruling class like his contemporary professional soldiers; however, miserably, he does not know the facts.

III

The soldiers of “lower” class, in Exeter’s categories, can be divided into two groups: rogues (Pistol, Nym, Bardolph) and innocent soldiers (Michael Williams, John Bates, Alexander Court). Both groups reluctantly go to war, but the former misuses war to make money while the latter are described sympathetically as victims.

There were numerous social and economic problems for soldiers in the Elizabethan period, especially with regard to the plight of veterans and the vices of soldiers, and these problems seem to be reflected in the discourses of the rogue soldiers. They undermine the authority of the noble soldiers, parodying them and abhorring the war, and their attitudes indirectly criticise the Elizabethan military world.

Soon after Henry has finished the patriotic speeches beginning with “Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more, / Or close the wall up with our English dead” (3.1.1-2), Bardolph’s parody of the phrase comes: “On, on, on, on, on! To the breach, to the breach!” (3.2.1). Nym comically replies to this: “Pray thee corporal, stay. The knocks are too hot, and for mine own part I have not a case of lives. The humour of it is too hot, that is the very plainsong of it” (2-4). Boy and Pistol want to go back to “an alehouse in London” (10). Nym, Boy, and Pistol shows their timid intention to fight, but this is the reality of war for the common soldiers: they do not want to die. The vivid contrast between Henry’s speeches and the

idle service of the rogue soldiers suggests chivalry and honor are useless to the ordinary people. In other words, the battlefield is not the place of ideal, rhetoric, and patriotism, but the grave where blood is shed. Bardolph's brief and coarse lines represent the reality where there is no time to make a decorative speech. Henry's ideal chivalry is thus undermined by the behaviors of the rogue soldiers facing death.

The scars of wounds borne by veterans were seen to be honorable at the time. In the Saint Crispin's Day speech, Henry claims that the man who fought on "this day" (4.3.40, 41, 42, 44, 58) will "strip his sleeve and show his scars / And say "These wounds I had on Crispin's day" (47-48). Ironically, Pistol attempts to misuse this idea in a later scene. After he and Fluellen have quarreled, Fluellen strikes Pistol with a cudgel. In the following soliloquy, Pistol laments his aging and decides to return England to be a thief: "To England will I steal, and there I'll steal, / And patches will I get unto these cudgeled scars, / And swear I got them in the Gallia wars" (5.1.80-82). Pistol plans to use "these cudgeled scars" (81) as evidence of his service in the war with France, most probably as an excuse to receive recompense like Falstaff, who also had planned to gain a pension by faking his pox or gout-affected lameness as a wound of war: "'Tis no matter if I do halt; I have the wars for my colour, and my pension shall seem the more reasonable" (2 *Henry IV*, 1.2.239-41). Jean Florence Tinston sees Falstaff's mercenary attitudes undermine chivalry (53), and this idea can be applied to Pistol. His dishonorable behavior compromises the justice of the war claimed by the ruling class.

Elizabethan returning soldiers suffered from economic hardship, since many of them were disabled and could not work, which became a major social problem. According to William Harrison's *Description of England*, there were three sorts of the poor in those days; first, such helpless people as fatherless children, aged, blind, lame, and diseased persons; second, such casualties as the wounded soldiers; third, such idle people as vagabonds, rogues and strumpets (296). The first and second, namely the aged, the sick, and the wounded soldiers were regarded as true poor, while the third were counted as false. Wounded soldiers included "rafflers" ["rufflers"], who pretended to be lame and begged for money, but mostly such poor soldiers really suffered from poverty. Moreover, they were often in fact ill-treated by captains or superiors (Viles 29-31).

Most of the returning wounded soldiers found no job and thus were forced to beg. Although there were three statutes of relief for returning veterans and maimed soldiers (1593, 1597, 1601), these measures did not work efficiently because of their rudimentary nature (Somogyi 142-43; also, Beier 95; Williams 213-4; Nolan 416; Jones 35). Many veterans complained about

their status. For example, in the early 1590s, Matthew Sutcliffe observed “Warres in our times being ended... are the beginning of beggarrie and calamitie to many poore souldiers” (298-99). Also, in the mid 1590s, Thomas Churchyard complained about the neglect of veterans who had once been rewarded: in former times, “Kings gaue them [soldiers] grace, and honor great, / Fame sounded trumpet in their praise, / World placst them in the highest seate, / So that like gods they raigned those daies,” but these days, “When Kings forget to giue good turns / For good desarts: then soldier shrinks, / The lampe of loue, but dimly burns” (B4r).

These veterans are reflected in a number of late-Elizabethan plays, which describe their continual miserable status despite the three acts of relief for maimed and old soldiers. Maimed soldiers are familiar figures and they appear in *A Larum for London*, *The Life of Sir John Oldcastle*, *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, *The Contention between Liberality and Prodigality* among others (Somogyi 11-53).

Pistol's lines about returning to England seem to question these military problems, though these comprise only a small part of the play. The fake veterans and soldiers undermined chivalry and war, using the wounds as a meaning to make money, but at the same time reveal the social injustice; the ruling class wages war for their profit, publicly proclaiming honor and nation, but the commoners suffer and die as their limbs in the battle in vain; therefore, some commoners misuse the war like their rulers. In other words, the ill behavior of Pistol, Nym, and Burdolph is parody of that of the noble soldiers. They are complicit in misusing the war for their own profit, and Pistol's predicted abuse of his wounds is a bitter irony.

The other major problems connected to the wars, the vices of soldiers such as robbery and desertion, are also reflected in this play. At the battle of Harfleur, Boy, who serves to “swashers” (3.2.28) Pistol, Nym, and Bardolph, criticizes their bad behavior: “They will steal anything, and call it ‘purchase’” (40-41). Moreover, in a later scene, Bardolph is executed for the theft of “a pax” (3.6.39). Gates criticizes the soldiers who “go to warre, of purpose more to spoyle, then to serue” (43), and Francis Markham regards “robbery” as a vice together with “Baseness,” “Rashness,” “Murther,” “Rauishment,” “Folly,” “Dulnesse” “Riot,” “Deceit,” “Pride,” “Couetousnesse” and thinks that these “lurke about Armies” (20).

This scene seems to mock Henry as well. In the following scene, at the gate of Harfleur, Henry seriously threatens to destroy the city by allowing its sack by the enraged soldiers if they do not surrender. This description is horrible, but for some audiences it may sound silly if they remember Henry's rogue soldiers on stage a few minutes previously.

Fugitive soldiers were another problem. Again at the battle of Harfleur, Boy and Pistol

express their preference for “an alehouse in London” (3.2.10) to this battlefield:

BOY. Would I were in an alehouse in London. I would give

all my fame for a pot of ale, and safety.

PISTOL. [sings] And I.

If wishes would prevail with me

My purpose should not fail with me

But thither I would I hie. (5-15)

Unlike King Henry and noble soldiers, they do not want to gain “fame” (11) but “safety” (11), indeed they wish for a return to London. This idea would be condemned by the aristocrats, but it is the honest feeling of the common soldiers. The common soldiers apparently tended to be more cowardly and run away from the battle more frequently than aristocrats (Jorgensen 154). Thomas and Dudley Digges state, “ (that most lamentable is) many times it may come to passe, that these impudent Runawaies being escaped (consorting themselues) shal by Rumors, letters, or printed *Pamphlets* perhaps sometimes disgrace those valiant men that resolutely died in the place, rather than they would shame themselues, and dishonour their countrey with a cowardly flight” (18). Ultimately, the commoners fight just out of obedience, not for their ideal; the cause of war does not supply justification enough to make them voluntarily serve. Pistol, Nym, and Bardolph distort the cause as a means to earn money while Williams, Bates, and Court accept the cause with some skepticism.

On the eve of the battle of Agincourt, Henry disguises himself as a common soldier and sees the three common soldiers, Alexander Court, John Bates and Michael Williams. They are ordinary citizens and afraid of the battle coming the next day. Earlier than Williams, Bates offends Henry, complaining about the king’s hypocrisy and envying the status of the king who can go home in exchange for ransom. Henry argues to them, “his [the king’s] cause being just and his quarrel is honourable” (4.1.122-23). However, Williams has doubts on the cause of the war and argues that if the cause is wrong, the king should be responsible for the war, and its victims:

But if the cause be not good, the King himself hath a heavy reckoning to make, when all those legs and arms and heads chopped off in a battle shall join together at the latter day, and cry all, ‘We died such a place’—some swearing, some crying for a surgeon, some upon their wives left poor behind them, some upon the debts they owe, some upon their children rawly left... Now, if these men do not die well, it will be a black mutter for the King that led them to it—who to disobey were against all proportion of subjection. (129-40).

Williams vividly pictures the dead soldiers with “legs and arms chopped off in a battle,” underlining the cruelty of war, and charges the king with responsibility for the dead and wounded, and for the plight of their families, from the point of view of a subject of the king.

This scene is remarkable as it is independent of the play’s sources, Holinshed and *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*. The questioning of the just war theory and emphasis on the responsibility of the king may be taken to reflect a topical argument. Many writers insisted that the cause of the war must be just; Henry Bullynger stated that Christians may wage war at God’s commandment, but the cause of war must be just (A7v). Similarly, Stephen Gosson claimed “As warre must have a just title to make it lawful, so it must also be undertaken by lawfull authoritie” (B8r). Regarding the responsibility of the king for war, Cardinal Allen observed that when war is “vvaged vvithout iust cause,” the “Prince that publishes the vvarre doth principally, and most damnably offend” (A4r).

Consequently, Henry slightly shifts the point to criminals in death and defends himself: “Every subject’s duty is the King’s, but every subject’s soul is his own. Therefore should every soldier in the wars do as every sick man in his bed: wash every mote out of his conscience” (4.1.168-72). Bates and Williams are persuaded by this exposition of the theory, but Williams still doubts that the king may escape for ransom, which leads to the promise of a duel between Henry and Williams. This scene suggests the crisis of the nation through the debate on the king’s responsibility. The image of the chopped bodies implies the dissolution of the body politic. The body of each person is scattered due to war, but the chopped bodies assemble to attack responsibility to the king. They are united as victims of the king, but not as the state. As Exeter and Canterbury believed, war is supposed to be “one consent” (1.2.181, 206) to unite the nation, but Williams believes war could disunite it. To them, the chivalric episode between Suffolk which makes Exeter cry (4.6) has no meaning at all, though most of the people except Williams do not notice the fact.

In the Roman political play, *Coriolanus*, the plebeians cry “The people are the city” (3.1.201), claiming the city state Rome belongs to them. Likewise, Williams thinks the ordinary people are the primary constituent of England. Unlike the plebeians of *Coriolanus*, the people in *Henry V* do not oppose the aristocrats, but some of them including Williams imagine rising against the king for his responsibility for the war. In that sense, Williams is subversive to the state and should be paid more attention as such by critics. In Act 5 the chorus mentions “Caesar” (28), compared with Henry and “the General of our gracious Empress” (30), that is, Essex, and another Roman political play, *Julius Caesar* was written immediately after *Henry*

V in 1599. Shakespeare's interest in political system, or republicanism, whether it is in Rome or in England, may have already been shown in *Henry V*, as Rita Banerjee suggests.

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The above discussion of the soldiers in *Henry V* considers the different attitudes toward war; the king and noble soldiers waging war for their interest; the professionals blindly obeying the ruling class, following military discipline; the rogues and innocent soldiers unwillingly going to war with some skepticism, though the former misuse it, which seems to function as a parody of the aristocrats. These differences of values ultimately question the social injustice between the noble soldiers and the common ones. At the battle of Agincourt, the king has asserted, "he today 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), but when reporting the number of the dead English soldiers, he numerates the names of the aristocrat and counts the commoners as "None else of name, and of all other men / But five-and-twenty" (4.8.103-04). For the dead French soldiers, he discriminates noblemen and mercenaries in the same way. As Graham Holderness points out, Bates and Court may be among the "five-and-twenty," and the king has not exactly asked their names (155). Henry's sense of privilege never changes, as having disregarded the subject as "fool" (4.1.223), "wretched slave" (256), "wretch" (266), "slave" (269), "peasant" (272) in his soliloquy after his meeting Williams and other common soldiers.

Jordan Constance sees Henry's monarchy as categorized into two: "the constitutive parts of British Isles" (Gower, Fluellen, Jamy, Macmorris) and "'ungentle' military yeoman" (Williams and Bates) (113), but they belong to the same group as ordinary people. There seem to be only two groups in Henry's kingdom: the aristocrats and the commoners. In military ranks, the professionals are "low," and the yeomen are "lower," but for the gentry, they are still inferior to them. The professionals ardently serve, but they are mercenaries and nothing but the limbs to the state. Behind this there may be such an idea as Sir William Segar, a herald, suggested. Segar more roughly classifies the people into two, and defined the gentlemen as seeking honor by military skill or knowledge in civil government, while the commoners seek profit by pains and labours (π2r). In short, war originally belonged to the nobles.

In the play, the king and the dukes are those who seek honor while the professionals and commoners seek profit according to Segar, and there is an obvious distinction between these two social ranks: the superior and inferior. Although the professionals seemingly pursue honor, they are actually paid for the service unlike the noble soldiers. The war is, in brief, for

the aristocrats matter of politics, and they use the inferior to achieve their ends under the pretext of honor or chivalry or patriotism; the inferior thus die in vain without being noticed. Similarly, in Elizabethan military culture, the ordinary people were sidelined out of chivalry, which was aristocratic ideology, but every healthy man between the age of sixteen and sixty was recruited and went to war unwillingly, as described in the recruiting scene in *2 Henry IV* (Cruikshank 25). For the Elizabethan audience, most of whom were commoners (Gurr 90), Williams's skeptical comments on the war may have sounded sympathetic, which reminded them of their situation, though their negative feeling for the war probably disappeared soon with Henry's victory and the chorus's praise for Essex. Most critics have focused on Henry as a Machiavellian ruler, but the target of the play was rather the skeptical Williams and other gullible commoners representing the audience, whose fates were controlled by the king. Shakespeare may well have questioned the politics and social ranks in the monarchy through the theme of war, but the gullible audience would not notice it and enjoy it as a patriotic play, considering the fact that this play was popular, and there was neither rebellion against the monarch nor social upheaval under its influence.

Notes

- (1) For a summary of recent criticism, especially after 2000, see Michael Lee, ed., *Shakespearean Criticism* 107, pp.1-3; for criticism from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century, see Joseph Rosenblum, ed., *The Greenwood Companion to Shakespeare* 274-75.
- (2) For more recent discussions on the justice of Henry's war, see Foakes 96-105; Jordan 111-13.
- (3) For discussions on their nationalities and the idea of the unity, see Edwards 74-86; Baker 17-65; McEachern 107-08; Klein 100-01.
- (4) According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first definition for "mercenary" is "A person who works merely for money or other material reward; a hireling. In later use ... a person whose actions are motivated primarily by personal gain, often at the expense of ethics," so the professionals could be counted as mercenaries at that time.

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