

Henry V: A Genius (Ironic) Hoax?

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None of Shakespeare's plays is so persistently and thoroughly misunderstood as *Henry V*, and one is tempted to think that there is no play which is more important to understand . . . Shakespeare can scarcely have intended that force of preconception should, hundreds of years after his death, still be preventing the careful, the learned, and the sympathetic from seeing what he so definitely put down. The play is ironic: that is, I venture to think, a fact susceptible to detailed proof.

- Gerald Gould (1919)¹

Although *Henry V* does not typically make a short list of Shakespeare masterpieces, the critical history of the play is one of the most interesting in the canon, and although it is generally not considered a problem play, it is "by far the most controversial of the histories."² The controversy centers on discerning Shakespeare's intent for the play: is it to present King Henry V as an exemplar, a mirror for other monarchs to emulate, and to glorify his incredibly improbable victory at Agincourt, or is Shakespeare taking his audience in with that outward appearance while his perspective of the action is actually ironic, and is revealed in the subtle but pervasive undermining and subverting of that celebratory view. The dispute is generally acknowledged to have been started by William Hazlitt (1817), the first critic to attempt noticing a chink in the armor of King Henry V, and although Hazlitt's essay often switches between comments pertinent to the *historical* King Henry V versus the *play's* King, he does label the play character "a very amiable monster,"³ which is at odds with him being referred to in the play as "the mirror of all Christian kings" (2.0.6).⁴ During the next hundred years of commentary there arose a few more disparaging comments about the King and the war presented by Shakespeare, including from William Watkiss Lloyd and W.B. Yeats,⁵ but for those who see something beyond a gung-ho war play in *Henry V*, the next definitive milestone in the play's criticism was from Gerald Gould in the essay quoted above, where he unequivocally states "the play is ironic." His position was that although the play appears to be celebratory of King Henry and his Agincourt victory, it is actually "a satire on monarchical government, on imperialism, on the baser kinds of 'patriotism', and on war."⁶ And although commentators by no means jumped onboard Gould's bandwagon, from this point on a review of the criticism on the play will clearly show a noticeable concern with the protagonist King Henry, his actions and his character, and with the war, from the cause and effect of it, to how it is presented. For almost three hundred years the play had been almost beyond reproach seen as a patriotic panegyric to a heroic king and his impossible victory at Agincourt—George Bernard Shaw even termed it jingoistic⁷—but Gould had definitely thrown down a gauntlet challenging this view that scholars deemed necessary to consider and respond to. If you were of a mind to celebrate English hegemony in martial matters, with an accent on their heroic and noble aspects, Gould's essay might be seen as analogous to an opening of Pandora's box: *Henry V's* world hasn't been the same since.

Although there has been a wide spectrum of critical opinions on the play in the hundred years since Gould's essay, his ironic assertion has clearly influenced much of the commentary. On the side of *Henry V* being a patriotic pageant, an almost epic celebration of King Henry V and his Agincourt victory, stand such well-respected critics as John Dover Wilson and J.H. Walter,⁸ while across the aisle stand a small band of also reputable critics led by Gould, Harold Goddard, Roy Battenhouse and a relatively few others.⁹ Today the vast majority of critical views would be in neither the patriotic and celebratory or subversive and ironic camps, yet these polar perspectives still provide a framework out of which many other opinions rise, or at least make use of to contrast against their own. Much of the criticism of the past fifty years has made efforts to reconcile the two extreme views, and there has also been a lot of commentary that asserts the play is simply irreconcilably ambiguous. So while Gould did not necessarily convince many others, his article initiated a closer reading and consideration of the play that continues to expose nuance and ambiguities that confuse how we should respond to it. A broad-stroke overview of the most prevalent ironies attributed to Shakespeare's pen will illuminate the controversy better:

1. Does Shakespeare believe the Hundred Years' War, where Henry renews hostilities after a 25-year lull in the action, a just cause? We find the grounds for the war presented at length in scene 1.2, and throughout the play we also get diverse views of the conflict from commoners, military personnel, nobles and the King alike. The pro-Henry reader will state that Shakespeare spends so much time justifying the war to ensure there is no mistaking the legitimacy of the action, and the detailed explanation of 1.2 illuminates how meticulous and serious a dynastic claim such as predicated the war is taken. The ironist will find evidence the dynastic legitimacy is all just pretense, a paperwork shuffle that everyone understood was necessary (and sufficient) before they undertook what they already knew they would be undertaking. Both sides weigh the same evidence, but with diametrically opposed verdicts.
2. King Henry's rather brusquely dismisses his Eastcheap mates from his prodigal days as Prince Hal and Shakespeare subsequently abuses them as well. Falstaff makes no entrances in the play, only a poignant offstage exit, Bardolph and Nym are hung for stealing, and Pistol is leek-whipped just for good measure. Henry supporters will infer the King, on a humane level, regrets having to depart his former compatriots now that he is King, and they admire the way he understands and accepts he now must be responsible for guiding a nation, and the ill fortune that befalls the Eastcheap crew should be seen as necessary and just. Ironists will take the manner in which Henry rejects Falstaff and company as more calculated and character revealing than just a reflection of the reformed King having to take on his new responsibilities.
3. Shakespeare includes a couple of horrors of war cruelties from the historic Agincourt—the French raiding of the King's camp and murder of the luggage boys, and the English

execution of French prisoners under uncertain circumstances. Those supporting Henry will state Shakespeare was too honest a poet and skeptical a person not to admit factual evidence that war cannot be antiseptic. This collateral damage is being true to reality—*Henry V* is dramatized history, it is not a romantic fairy tale. Those purporting an ironic cautionary tale approach will note he not only chose to bring these incidents up rather than ignore them, he also chose *not* to stage any actual heroics, despite the opportunity to do so—including an account of King Henry’s heroics during the battle found in *Holinshed’s Chronicle*. They will also note how he chooses to foreground and frame these twin atrocities to bring a dramatic emphasis to them instead of treating them as just part of an accounting of the battle scene. How readers choose to think about these events definitely colors their overall understanding of the play.

4. The play contains several instances of alternating low comic scenes versus high serious scenes; the King and his nobles discussing whether to go to war in scene 1.2 is followed by the Eastcheap crew arguing over the affections of Mistress Quickly in 2.1; the King motivating his troops once more unto the breach in 3.1 is parodied by the Eastcheap troops trying to retreat from the breach in 3.2, *etcetera*. Supporters of Henry will typically label the low scenes as foils, providing a *contrast* for viewing the exemplar Henry and the nobles, in the virtue vs. vice, good vs. evil sense. Ironists will take the opposite tack and notice the *comparative* behaviors among the clown characters and the nobility. From a Henry-endorsing perspective, the serious business of the play is relieved with occasional lighter scenes. From an ironist perspective, we re-view the serious scenes in the comic relief scenes, thereby taking the serious scenes less serious, and the comic scenes more serious; (that is to say, we see the serious high issue of war is being brought down by the low character hijinks).

These are just four of the oft-mentioned high-profile arguments forwarded for the ironic interpretation of the play and we also see how they are readily turned about to serve either the Henry supporters or the “Hal-haters.”¹⁰ Further review of all the “celebratory versus ironic” commentary on the play might very well endorse Cade’s aside in *2 Henry VI*, “Was ever feather so lightly blown to and fro as this multitude? The name of Henry the Fifth hailes them to an hundred mischiefs,” (4.7.210–12).

Yet there is an additional important observation relative to the controversy that a number of critics have also noted, as Andrew Gurr discerns:

To a remarkable degree *Henry V* has been a paradigm for the debate about Shakespeare on stage or page. If you take seriously the view that a stage production is a “reading” of the play, a director’s or a small group’s interpretation, then almost the whole history of the play *as performed* amounts to a series of patriotic and emotional readings rather

than the analyses of its ambivalence that *reading the play in private study* has evoked. (My italics.)¹¹

Simply put, *audiences to a performance* get caught up in a celebratory and patriotic play, while *readers* tend to reflect more on the text and are more prone to question the stage reception.¹² In other words, the play in performance stages most credibly as Wilson and Walter read it, Henry as the Elizabethan “star of England,” while some have noted the prevalence of contradictions to the heroic version and taken a closer read; most of these closer reads recognize a sticky web of ambiguities but a few have emerged believing Shakespeare had an authorial intent that his readers experience an ironic view of the action and that the contradictions don’t present irreconcilable ambiguities, but actually provide the correct path through the play—realizing an ironic perspective reveals *Henry V* is a cautionary tale rather than a celebratory play. Along these lines, my study of the play has uncovered persuasive evidence of Shakespeare’s true (ironic) intent with the play, and this evidence is revealed by insightfully interpreting what’s on the page, paradoxically, most of which—as will be readily apparent—is *not* intended to be realized on the stage.

One of the commentators convinced that Shakespeare intended an ironic interpretation for the play was the English playwright John Arden, and he based his commentary on the stage/page discrepancy already highlighted—but he calls the intended ironic realization of *Henry V* a “secret play” via the published text—in parallel with the jingoistic stage action—that deliberately subverts the overt patriotic play.¹³ As he points out, Shakespeare may have decided he needed to be secretive to express his views because he undoubtedly knew he was “treading very delicate ground” and an overt attack on Henry’s character (being held in such high esteem by Elizabethans), could bring “actual danger of imprisonment and torture to the theatre-company.”¹⁴ As this essay will illustrate, Arden was on the right track, because I present some previously undiscovered craftwork by Shakespeare that invariably endorses the idea of a *covert* ironic play *read*. As a detached reader you will be able to take the time necessary to dissect what a theater audience doesn’t have the time to do—and find out some incredibly subversive imagery that puts a definite exclamation point on the assertion that Shakespeare is being ironic in the play—convincingly defying the popular celebratory version.

Before delving into these new discoveries a couple of caveats are necessary. First, what I will show is present requires some liberal imagination—it requires some patience and thinking to piece out what was intended to be covert from the start. We have to allow that Shakespeare is the most studied author in the world (besides the writers of the Bible), so if these discoveries were obvious, they would have been noted long ago and would already be well established in the commentary about Shakespeare—they are not. In this regard, there is a curious aspect about *Henry V* that has been frequently noted that actually endorses my suggestion for a more liberal imagination, and that is the fact that within the play Shakespeare frequently implores his auditors to use their imagination, with the explicit proviso that the stage is insufficient to show the true story. For instance, in the opening Prologue he even writes, “*And let vs, Cyphers to this great Accompt, / On your imaginarie Forces worke,*” (1.0.17–18, Folio text)—a prompt that can be

seen to support readers as ciphers needing to use their imagination to piece out his covert work. While critics usually believe the frequent reminders to use your imagination are because he is trying to stage an epic story on a small stage, I suggest it is because he is encouraging us to engage this play more imaginatively and in that manner we'll more fully experience his play.¹⁵ (It has also been noted he has staged epic stories and battles onstage quite a number of times with no sense of concern about the shortcomings of the stage—the insistence on the necessary imaginative work for realizing *Henry V* is unprecedented.) My second caveat is to forewarn readers that what I have found may offend some or at least be judged as being in extremely poor taste. To put it bluntly, it is quite bawdy—and definitely crude—and the imagery, particularly in the context of the speech, may be outside the comfort zone of many people; it may be judged as incredibly inappropriate or even beyond belief considering already formed impressions of the play and Shakespeare. I would even suggest the imagery is so unexpected, (even shocking), that this helps to explain why it hasn't been previously noted—it is beyond the pale to have thought of it in the context of where it is present. What I ask is that readers initially be open and nonjudgmental to what I present and give it the benefit of the doubt while I fill in further proof in support of my findings—patience and serious consideration will show it is not mistaken. I also hope to give it the appropriate context that it deserves to make it more palatable for disbelieving or reluctant readers.

One of the most surprising considerations of this new evidence is that the most incriminating of it is found in one of the most famous speeches in the play, the King's rhetorically rich motivational speech urging his men, once more, to charge into the breach of the wall made during the siege of Harfleur, scene 3.1. A word-by-word glossing of the speech is certainly not necessary to illustrate my point, but the entire speech is furnished below for the critical eye of each reader to test my observations as much as desired.

King Henry: Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more,
 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,
 Then imitate the action of the tiger.
 Stiffen the sinews, conjure up the blood,
 Disguise fair nature with hard-favoured rage.
 Then lend the eye a terrible aspect,
 Let it pry through the portage of the head
 Like the brass cannon, let the brow o'erwhelm it
 As fearfully as doth a gallèd rock
 O'erhang and jutty his confounded base,
 Swilled with the wild and wasteful ocean.
 Now set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide,
 Hold hard the breath and bend up every spirit
 To his full height. On, on, you noblest English,

Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof,
 Fathers that, like so many Alexanders,
 Have in these parts from morn till even fought
 And sheathed their swords for lack of argument.
 Dishonour not your mothers; now attest
 That those whom you called fathers did beget you.
 Be copy now to men of grosser blood,
 And teach them how to war. And you, good yeoman,
 Whose limbs were made in England, show us here
 The mettle of your pasture; let us swear
 That you are worth your breeding—which I doubt not,
 For there is none of you so mean and base
 That hath not noble lustre in your eyes.
 I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,
 Straining upon the start. The game's afoot.
 Follow your spirit, and upon this charge
 Cry, "God for Harry! England and Saint George!"
Alarum, and chambers go off. Exeunt
 (3.1.1–34)

The intended surface meaning of the speech is relatively straight forward, the stage is set for war heroics when a breach has been made in the city's wall and the King is now inspiring his men to prove their mettle by throwing themselves into the fray at this very dicey, focused point of intense violence (with the French, no doubt, similarly being inspired to stop them from their side of the hole in the wall). What has been missed in understanding this speech, however, is the covert poetic imagery which Shakespeare has deftly started using with the King's appeal to his men's animal "tiger" nature—there is much more going on below than first meets the eye. Woven in parallel with the King inciting the selfless courage of his men, the action being imitated is quite convincingly actually that of a male masturbating. Although camouflaged in oblique inferred language, the intent is physiologically explicit once we grant Shakespeare some poetic license, let loose our own imagination a bit, and recognize the key word associations: *stiffen* the sinews, conjure *up* the blood, *hard*-favored, let the eye pry through the portage of the head, let the brow overwhelm the brass cannon, *etcetera*. Incredibly, he's not using the usual suspects for sexual euphemisms, but is poetically (covertly) describing this self-gratifying action.¹⁶ This is not just some brief colorful or gratuitous sexual innuendo, various aspects of the imagery actually permeate the entire speech. A moment later it is as if Shakespeare himself is pornographically directing Henry to hold off from climax as long as possible, "Now set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide, / Hold hard the breath and bend up every spirit / To his full height. On, on, you noblest English." When we consider the persistence of this imagery throughout Henry's inspired imploring of his men to charge into harm's way—contextually, an incredibly inappropriate moment to say the least—we can judge this speech as particularly filthy on Shakespeare's part. Later in the speech then mirrors the climactic sexual moment, as Shakespeare notes the "noble lustre in your eyes" and "stand like greyhounds" becomes phallic,

where “in the slips” leaves little room to doubt our playwright knows no bounds. Of course, this is also imponderably subversive. Although these sexual associations involve some loosening of our imagination (and a willingness to suspend disbelief), in the aggregate—and considering such imagery *had* to be covert—they enable a compelling *tour de force* within the text we thought we knew—a whole new play is opened up for us and we clearly get a closer connection with Shakespeare, the author.

Although I have very quickly asserted the essence of this speech is a covert reference to male masturbation, it is worthwhile to reconsider not just the plausibility of this statement, but to see it must have been intentional. First, consider the context of the speech. The King is trying to stir his men up to have the courage to assault a breach in the wall around Harfleur, but all the detailed physical description beyond “Stiffen the sinews, conjure up the blood,” quickly seems unnecessary and even distracting from that objective. To illustrate how superfluous the extended physical description is, in the most recent BBC film of *Henry V* over half the descriptive language is deleted from this very famous marital set-piece speech.¹⁷ And the physical description is also difficult to understand. For instance, how do we jut out an eye “like the brass cannon” while we still “let the brow o’erwhelm it”—is that the same as a fierce look and furled brow? Embellishing that by viewing the brow “O’erhang and jutty his confounded base, / Swilled with the wild and wasteful ocean” only seems more physically confusing *until* we consider the covert sexual activity I have pieced out. Then—although inferred—it poetically makes sense; even the word “jutty” invites us to think of a protrusion at this confounded base, where the wild and wasteful fluid is not actually seawater. The speech obviously works rhetorically to inspire us—as 400 years of *staging* it shows—but we have to ask what the very words themselves are describing. After telling us to imitate the action of the tiger, there are actually very few lines that don’t in some way play to the alternative covert bawdy sexual interpretation I have shown is present. The extended physical description is out of place, and while calling for the imitation of a tiger, *in toto*, it does not sound like it is teeth that he is baring here—a reasonable consideration of all the imagery will show he has simply diverted his in-the-moment theater audience by invoking a tiger, while a reader has the time to find him out. As Gurr and others have noted, readers of *Henry V* get a different impression than viewers, and as I will show, this carefully read speech exposes a smoking gun relative to the ironic interpretation of the play—the King has literally been caught *in flagrante delicto*, and we will see how this informs on Shakespeare’s mindset in this play—turning the martial celebration so convincingly *staged* completely topsy-turvy in a *read* and closely studied play.

Not only is this specific sexual self-satisfying imagery present, but thematically the speech also continues to allude to it, and it continues to turn the martial imagery on its head. Consider the sexual activity described in conjunction with “Dishonour not your mothers; now attest / That those whom you called fathers did beget you,” and we definitely sense our author is injecting some covert humor with the imagery—imagine a mother’s witness and the questioning of who fathered you in light of this activity, where, of course, “beget” and “Be copy now” certainly reinforce the image of the fluid in play here. Rather than performing bravely in battle to make

your warrior ancestors proud—“Whose *limbs* were made in England . . . let us swear / That you are *worth your breeding*”—we now sense the martial heritage is not so much being celebrated as calling us to question why we willingly view the impending bloodshed in a heroic light. Becoming “men of grosser blood” who teach others how to war is certainly ironic when juxtaposed with the seed being poetically spilled here, particularly when we consider the impending spilling of blood necessary to take the breach. Clearly, we are no longer so ready to charge into the breach as we stop in our tracks to consider what the text is really prompting—reflection. Consider how Shakespeare knowingly stood up, embraced, these blood-spilling and seed-spilling images related to a death-taking breach as well as an imaginary life-giving breach. It becomes quite easy at this point to recognize the overarching sublime irony of the picture painted: the King describing this self-satisfying activity, while simultaneously exhorting self-sacrifice from his men. As the “mirror of all Christian kings,” consider the Prince of Peace versus *this* prince of piece. Performed *onstage* we experience the thesis of this set-piece moment—the King inspiring fearless bravery for a greater cause. Juxtaposed against this now is the *page read*, and we experience an antithesis—the greater cause, distilled out, is actually the King in a clearly compromising image of self-indulgence and self-interest. The undeniable result is this ultimate test of courage moment has been completely, literally, irreversibly turned 180° on its (ironic) head. Now consider this stunning reversal in light of the controversy of the past hundred years—one of the most divisive cruxes in all of Shakespeare commentary—whether he is being ironic in this play. The speech not only compels us toward joining the ironic commentators, it also encapsulates the ironic thesis: it is a Trojan horse, appearing to celebrate and pay tribute to martial prowess, while hidden in the hold are the seeds of destruction. Shakespeare has worked an incredible sleight of hand here, and given its stunning nature, it’s reasonable we should investigate further in this new direction.

Historically it should come as no surprise that this speech is one of the most well-known and celebrated speeches in the play, and it is frequently anthologized because of its effective rhetoric. As Thomas Carlyle wrote about Shakespeare and the speech in 1840, “‘Ye good yeomen, whose limbs were made in England!’ There is a noble Patriotism in it,—far other than the ‘indifference’ you sometimes hear ascribed to Shakspeare.”¹⁸ More recently, John Barton uses this speech at length in his 1980 film series, *Playing Shakespeare*, including a demonstration of how rhetorically powerful it is, pointing out, “The heightened language so obviously has a dramatic purpose here. It is not just poetic because it’s Shakespeare: the character needs that language to handle the situation and to kindle his soldiers.”¹⁹ Some scholars have also noted the imagery is very masculine and even brutal, but most echo Barton: the situation calls for inspiring rhetoric to motivate immediate action—and Henry theatrically delivers. While recognizing masculine and brutal imagery is not necessarily ironic, at least three scholars have been sensitive to the physical imagery elicited by the language and have used the term “phallic” in reference to the speech. As Barber and Wheeler write:

No other play asks so insistently as *Henry V* for us to make ironic comments—and to puzzle over their pertinence for understanding the protagonist and the heroic action. We can note, for example, that “Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more” is set up retrospectively as an invitation to gang rape. [Quoting lines 7–14, “Stiffen the sinews, conjure up the blood . . . Swille’d with the wild and wasteful ocean.”] What is the appropriate response to the eye here as a cannon, all mutuality of regard left behind with “fair nature”? or to the brow as an overhanging cliff? Standing back, one can notice that this phallic imagery, deliberately ruthless, is not only fearful in the sense of inspiring fear, but also inspired by fear, the base of the rock “confounded.” While “galled” is used in an obsolete, neutral sense, “washed away” (NED, 3), it carries suggestions of “made sore,” exasperated—and this because its base has been “swilled” by the wild ocean, which wastes away form, structure.²⁰

They then connect Henry’s use of sex-war imagery and his martial ruthlessness in this speech with his next scene with Harfleur’s governor, “Henry again has a practical objective in mind when he links the kind of incitement he has used at the wall to its potential consequences in sexual violence.”²¹ Later commentators, Sinfield and Dollimore, while focusing on the contrasting masculine versus effeminate representations in the play, use the same adjective, phallic, in reference to the speech, “The masculine, conversely, is represented as taut, often with phallic connotation: ‘Stiffen the sinews,’ Henry urges before Harfleur, ‘Now set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide, / Hold hard the breath, and bend up every spirit / To his full height! . . . I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips, / Straining upon the start’ (3.1.7, 15–17, 31–32).”²² The third commentator noting phallic imagery is Joan Lord Hall, “(‘bend up every spirit / To his full height!’ is phallic, as are other images connected with the storming of the breach) . . . War in *Henry V* is envisaged as a test of manhood, ranging from the images of virility at Harfleur (‘Stiffen the sinews, conjure up the blood’ [III.i.7]) to the Dauphin’s lament that French ‘mettle is bred out’ (III.v.29).”²³ But while these critics each specifically note phallic imagery, they also cite different portions of the speech, and their comments do not embellish much beyond referring to the imagery as “phallic.” They recognize the word choices as phallic—imagery that is readily seen in an unflattering light—without pursuing the matter further and parsing out the specific sexual activity I have shown is actually present. And consistent with the stage or page controversy surrounding *Henry V*, we find that while the stage performance of the speech may be compelling and even impressive, a thoughtful consideration of the speech on the page—from the hand of Shakespeare rather than from the mouth of Henry—has turned the speech in quite a different direction; specifically, an ironic heading. Some readers may believe they are not easily swayed and my glosses are excessively imaginative, while some may see my interpretation as plausible yet dismiss it as insignificant, but what I have actually shown is how to make the words and images fit—and connect the disparate mixed and/or confused images into a coherent picture. If the path I have shown isn’t taken, the reader is still free to respond however they will to the play, but they also simply miss out on the ironic masterpiece Shakespeare has carefully crafted for his readers, as the rest of my commentary will begin to show.

Although I had noted how crude and even shocking the revelation for the speech might be thought, I have also inferred some sense of humor about it because further study shows that is definitely part of Shakespeare's plan for it. I have asserted the breakthrough I have presented in this speech actually informs on the rest of play, and for those still unconvinced that my interpretation is as intended by Shakespeare, the low character commentary given in *the very next* speeches may provide further insight:

Bardolfe: On, on, on, on, on! To the breach, to the breach!
Nym: Pray thee corporal, stay. The knocks are too hot,
 and for mine own part I have not a case of lives. The
 humor of it is too hot, that is the very plainsong of it.
 (3.2.1–6)

While “On, on, on, on, on!” obviously parodies the King’s martial shake-spear speech (On, on, you noblest English), it is now more explicitly a parody (and grand finale) for the sexual innuendo shake-spear sub-version—it quite clearly parodies the staccato of actual male climax. As for Nym’s “own part,” the humor of it (*humor* being a bodily fluid) is in fact, now too hot—that’s the very plainsong of it.²⁴ It should now be seen these commoners have crossed the line from good natured parody to infer more of a mocking attitude toward the King’s inspired moment (now that the inside joke Shakespeare planted has been made visible). There is no longer a reasonable case that the low characters only foil the nobility for comic relief here, Shakespeare has appropriated their voices to humorously mock the King’s breach indiscretion of a moment earlier. It’s important here to reiterate, I am asserting that Shakespeare—in this play—has made a leap from writing exclusively for the stage, to providing a sense of his own narrative voice on the page via his specific word choices and poetic imagery—which are (ironically) antithetical to the perceived patriotic and heroic activities being rhetorically endorsed on stage. As with all of Shakespeare’s use of a play within a play, this now discernible covert play within the framework of the play comments on, and makes a statement about, the main plot. The correct insight and understanding of this new level of poetic narrative in the play, as I have been showing, is as a reader, rather than being pulled in as an audience is when watching the play in performance. The key is to be detached from the action, rather than our normal emotional and empathetic immersion with the onstage drama. Normally the object of reading a script is to imagine its staging, but it should be clear now that *Henry V* should not be stage-bound in this way—there is much more going on here—and a correct reading of the play goes far beyond its realization on stage.

Significantly, we can not only tune in to the sexual innuendo subtext of the Breach speech in the Bardolph and Nym commentary following it, but Shakespeare provides continuity with the covert sexual bawdy version of the speech in what *immediately precedes* it as well. In the Chorus before the Breach speech, the emphasis from the first to last is to think and use your imagination. Dramatically, he describes the transit from England to France, but covertly all the clues are there to prepare us for the covert bawdy sexual version of the speech to follow. Here is the last part of

the Chorus's speech just prior to "Once more unto the breach":

Work, work your thoughts, and therein see a siege.
 Behold the ordnance on their carriages,
 With fatal mouths gaping on girded Harfleur.
 Suppose th' ambassador from the French comes back,
 Tells Harry that the king doth offer him
 Katharine his daughter, and with her, to dowry,
 Some petty and unprofitable dukedoms.
 The offer likes not, and the nimble gunner
 With linstock now the devilish cannon touches,
 Alarum, and chambers go off
 And down goes all before them. Still be kind,
 And eke out our performance with your mind. *Exit*
 (3.0.25–35)

First we have the repeated emphasis on thinking about what is to follow: "Work, work your thoughts." With a simple wordplay, "seize" for "siege," we know what ordnance is being held, "With fatal mouths gaping on girded [girdled] Harfleur." Then we have the introduction of a female, Princess Katherine, for Henry's liking, but he likes not, and the cannon comes into play, "the nimble gunner / With linstock now the devilish cannon touches," where we already know what the cannon euphemistically represents. The last line of the Chorus then becomes a *modus operandi* for the closely tuned reader: "And eke out our performance with your mind"—Shakespeare is explicitly prompting us *to supplement* the stage performance with our mind in what follows—and this is exactly what is needed to find out the covert activity found out in the Breach speech.²⁵ We might even consider this speech which dramatically focuses on the transit from England to France also covertly enlightens us to transition from an audience watching a stage play to a reader using their imagination to piece out Shakespeare's covert artwork. Given the subtlety, the dissembling and camouflage—the *genius* Shakespeare used to create the Breach speech—and given the wit he then used in alluding to it both before and after the speech, it's pretty clear he has, in effect, thrown down the gauntlet to his readers. One tenet of postmodern theorists is a recognition the reader plays a role in how a text is interpreted, and given what has been shown is present in this play, we might now see our role better defined: in *Henry V* the role we play is in a battle of wits with the playwright (where he has, fortunately, *armed* us for battle).

A couple more examples of how Shakespeare leverages off the subversive sexual activity he has pinned on King Henry will also further illustrate the battle of wits challenge I suggest he has thrown down before his readers. While we hear about Princess Katherine in the Chorus speech, it isn't until after Harfleur surrenders that we actually meet her in scene 3.4. This scene is already well known for some innocent bawdy fun as Princess Katherine gets an English lesson in anatomy from her lady-in-waiting, Alice, and the ladies inadvertently fall into sexual innuendo, "*De foot and de count? Oh, good heavens, those are words that sound wicked, corrupting, and rude, and not for ladies of honour to use!*" (3.4.47–49).²⁶ The truth is, however, our playwright

has already had a field day playfully mocking the King with this innocuous anatomy lesson. Everyone knows the scene's subtext, the Princess is being prepared to be married to Henry as part of the peace settlement, and sure enough the first lesson echoes *the very anatomy* relevant to the covert Breach speech: hand, fingers, nails, arm, elbow—Katherine's introduction to English quite pointedly zeroes in on this unfortunate image of Henry as well. Hand, fingers, nails, arm, elbow—clearly, Shakespeare has, in fact, made the ladies a party to his earlier shenanigans with Henry. Even the scene's opening dialogue particularly invites this *Henry and his breach indiscretion* notice, as Roy Battenhouse observes:

An auditor alert to puns might hear “Le main” as a question about “Man,” or even about “the man” Henry. Such an auditor would then have the fun of understating this opening gambit as follows:

Katherine: What is (the) Man called in English?
Alice: (The) Man, he is called the Hand.²⁷

And, of course, Battenhouse makes this *Henry is called the hand* connection without having known about the covert bawdy Breach speech. The ladies then proceed into the whole lesson: *hand, fingers, nails, arm, elbow*—distinctly mirroring the bawdy subtext of the King's Breach speech. Once more, it is covertly subtle and only becomes apparent for those already in the know—and the overarching impression is of innocent (while bawdy) humor at the King's expense. For another reflection of Shakespeare's genius, consider that the entire scene is in French (which only a limited number of his audience would understand), but it is readily performed in pantomime—Katherine would be explicitly noting, pointing out, each body part for the audience's comprehension, a dumb show for the groundlings' benefit that now everyone can truly appreciate.²⁸ If there was some initial unease about the imagery brought out in the Breach speech, maybe this now evident comic relief allows a greater tolerance of Shakespeare having indulged in bawdy imagery and a greater appreciation of what he is doing (toward his greater cause).

We don't meet up with Katherine again until the Troyes Peace Conference scene, 5.2, but the *Henry and his foul-play hand* association is still evidently in play. In the courting portion Henry spends quite a lot of effort, 181 lines, trying to get Katherine to agree to marry him. After 151 of these lines Kate relents, and says it contents her that they will marry. Henry wants to seal the deal by kissing her hand:

King Henry: Upon that I kiss your hand, and I call you my
 queen.
Katherine: *Laissez, mon seigneur, laissez, laissez! Ma foi, je ne
 veux point que vous abaissez votre grandeur en baisant la main
 d'une de votre seigneurie indignie serviteur. Excusez-moi. je
 vous supplie, mon treis-puissant seigneur.*
 (5.2.242–47)

[“Let go, my lord, let go, let go! On my word, I would never wish you to lower your dignity by kissing the hand of an unworthy servant of your lordliness. Excuse me, I beg you, my most mighty lord.”]²⁹

When Henry attempts to kiss her hand, it’s three times: “Let go!” Although it wouldn’t be clear to the uninitiated, it should be clear to us that Katherine has made a certain association of the hand taking on the added significance we already know about. On the stage, it seems awkward and/or even disingenuous for her to so strenuously object to this flattering gesture of the King deferentially kissing her hand, but given our insider knowledge of how Henry has employed his own hand, it makes for very funny dramatic irony. In fact, earlier in this mating game, Henry had tried to shake her hand, and she avoided that contact also, “Sauf votre honneur, me understand well” (5.2.131). “Saving your reverence, I understand well.” While most editors point out she means she does *not* understand, those who know about the King’s hand shaking in the breach also understand well why she is avoiding her hand collaborating with his. My point here has been to emphasize that Shakespeare has been diligent in both confirming our suspicions about his irony, and that he continues to have fun with the imagery he has put in play. As with the Breach speech, all we need do is recognize that in *Henry V* Shakespeare has intentionally broken down the fourth wall of stage productions and built atop it his (private, ironic, literary) narrative, the considerable challenge is to follow his oft-winking wit. And although allusions to Henry’s breach activity are necessarily covert and subtle, a close study of the text will show they are so frequent and coherent that there should be no question they are by design—and are also fun to “piece out.” From the opening lines, including “And monarchs to behold the swelling scene” (1.0.4) to King Charles’s observation that Henry sees French cities “turned into a maid – for they are all girdled with maiden walls that war hath never entered,” (5.2.309–10),³⁰ Shakespeare has woven a consistent and coherent *covert* ironic masterpiece—with the King, essentially, as his butt. We will now find it advantageous to stay the course.

Man is least himself when he talks in his own person.
Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth.
- Oscar Wilde

While I have thus far focused on the Breach speech and just a few of the many plausible allusions back to it, there are other similar hijinks being played by Shakespeare that also point to the same comic mocking of the King *modus operandi* that endorses an overall ironic view of the heroic warrior action and celebratory play we thought we were witnessing. Another stunning example of the wordplay fun Shakespeare is capable of will further affirm this new view of the play. The night before the battle of Agincourt Shakespeare has Henry put on a cloak that prevents his men from recognizing him as king, and in this way he has unvarnished discussions with his men prior to the battle, the scene referred to by the Chorus as “A little touch of Harry in the night” (4.0.47). To complete setting the scene, the King *in disguise* finds himself in discussions with his troops and he obviously wants to put them at ease, where the subtext is the

incredibly dire straits they are actually in—the French with insurmountable odds in their favor are essentially forcing the English to fight the next day. While the chronicles have Henry busy doing everything within his martial powers to level the playing field, Shakespeare has the King hoping to shore up morale (where the level of difficulty is raised significantly by putting him in disguise). In his third encounter of the evening he tells the common soldiers, Alexander Court, John Bates and Michael Williams, he serves under Sir John Erpingham, and Williams asks him what Erpingham thinks of their chances.

King Henry: Even as men wrecked upon a sand, that look to
be washed off the next tide.

Bates: He hath not told his thought to the King?

King Henry: No, nor it is not meet he should. For though I
speak it to you, I think the King is but a man, as I am. The
violet smells to him as it doth to me; the element shows
to him as it doth to me. All his senses have but human
conditions. His ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness he
appears but a man, and though his affections are higher
mounted than ours, yet when they stoop, they stoop with
the like wing. Therefore, when he sees reason of fears, as
we do, his fears, out of doubt, be of the same relish as ours
are. Yet, in reason, no man should possess him with any
appearance of fear, lest he, by showing it, should dis-
hearten his army.

(4.1.95–109)

The King answers Williams with a wonderfully poetic and poignant yet stoic sentiment (95–96), but then we note how Bates *bait*s the King to bring the King himself into the discussion, (97). Both the surface meaning and the impression made in the King's response seem pretty clear-cut (98–109); paraphrased: no, Erpingham wouldn't tell the King his fatalistic outlook because the King is just like any of us, and if he recognized the truth he'd be scared like the rest of us (and that would be as bad for morale as the imagery behind the Breach speech). The audience responds positively toward Henry because he speaks plainly and truthfully with his soldiers, we're all fearful about tomorrow, showing a humble self-effacing common humanity with them, and he's witty given his disguise: "for though I speak it to you, I think the King is but a man." I note only one plausible ironic revelation: we wouldn't want anyone to *actually* level with the King being a policy endorsed by the King himself is ironically humorous. *But-* with just a slight tweaking of wordplay by the reader (my bold italics), the speech becomes downright dumbfounding:

King Henry: I think the King is **butt** a man, **ass** I am. The
violent smells to him as it doth to me; the element shows
to him as it doth to me. All his senses have **butt** human
conditions. His ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness he

appears *butt* a man, and though his affections are higher mounted than ours, yet when they stoop, they stoop with the like wing. Therefore, when he sees reason of fears, as we do, his fears, out of doubt, be of the same relish as ours

You might actually distill and gloss this speech *wit*’ two words: something stinks. Editors tend to gloss “stoop” relative to hunting with a falcon, referring to the bird’s dive, but as the wordplays show, in the context of pre-battle nerves, it fits like a glove considering the *fear – butt – violent smell taking wing* wordplay I’ve shown above, which is also both more in context and is consistent with the subversive and adversarial attitude the ironic read reveals. Serendipitously, one OED citing for “shit,” (to void excrement), precisely reflects the King’s point: *Castle Perseverence* (a1450), “Ðei schul schytyn for fere” [They shall shit for fear].³¹ To fill in the blanks a bit more we might say the King’s affections for his higher mounted throne don’t leave him less vulnerable to the fear of battle, where stooping, bending, is appropriate both as a gesture in deference to the King and in preparing to defecate. Consider the superimposed wit here: it’s the King (disguised) speaking wittily of his self-effacing humble self, unconscious of the *actual* wit Shakespeare has emanating from his mouth. It’s really quite an artfully crafted speech, once more, all the more impressive given its effectiveness as a covert four hundred year old time bomb. Throughout the scene the soldier named Williams (sharing a name with Shakespeare) has friction with the King and they eventually agree to fight after the battle to settle their differences (if they both live through the battle). The obvious problem is a commoner cannot fight a king, such that later in scene 4.8 Williams is in jeopardy of treason to have challenged the disguised King, but he manages to defend himself, “Your majesty *came not like yourself*. You appeared to me *but* as a common man” (4.8.49-50, my bold italics)—and the subtle but readily discernible allusions to both the Breach speech and the earlier fireside chat become apparent for those aware of Shakespeare’s prior buffoonery *wit*’ the King.

As with the Breach speech, Shakespeare subsequently leverages off his covert playfulness. After having *the King* bring up “ceremony” as the only difference between royalty and the common man—“his ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness he appears but a man”—we have later in this same scene, 4.1, Henry alone and in a reflective mood, making his only soliloquy of the play. Evidently thinking about his earlier “the King is butt a man” speech he now returns to the theme of empty ceremony. “And what have kings that privates have not too, / Save ceremony, save general ceremony? / And what art thou, thou idol ceremony?” (4.1.226–28). Privates, of course, has a bawdy innuendo, and used in conjunction with “idol ceremony” infers a certain image in light of the Breach speech. And the way he reduces ceremony to just the requisite clothes and props, “the balm, the sceptre and the ball, / The sword, the mace, the crown imperial, / The intertissued robe of gold and pearl” (248–50), translates the difference between kings and the rest of humanity (naked truth-wise), is that kings get to dress in (worthless) ceremony. Continuing, “O ceremony, show me but thy worth, / What is thy soul of adoration?” (232–33) summarily distills ceremony down further: “O ceremony, show me *butt* thy worth,” echoing the earlier ceremonies aside, the King is butt a man in his nakedness. While this may seem like an

example of critical ingenuity where my imagination exceeds that of Shakespeare's, there is compelling evidence we're actually on the Bard's trail here, because the next line is not, "What is thy soul of adoration?" it is "What? is thy Soule of Odoration?" In other words, "What, is ceremony's soul butt of odor?" now mates up quite nicely with the earlier speech. (Of course, editors emend "Odoration" to "adoration" because they are obviously unaware of the wordplay allusion.) And while the entire soliloquy is worth a close read relative to the bawdy and ironic vein I have been showing is present in the speech consistent with the earlier examples—*what are thy Commings in?*—I leave it for readers to take a look (4.1.218–72) to piece out what they will from the rest of it.

O Ceremonie, shew me *but* thy worth.
What? is thy Soule of *Odoration*?³²

From what I've shown in these examples, we should now realize Shakespeare is actually playing a game with his readers in *Henry V*—as previously stated, we are in a battle of wits with him—and if the studious reader does not *engage* in that battle, they miss out on *Shakespeare's* play.

* * *

I began this essay reviewing the critical history of *Henry V* relative to the claim of Gerald Gould almost 100 years ago that Shakespeare is being ironic in the play, and after illuminating some of the claims of ironic commentators on the play, noted the observation of Andrew Gurr and others that the play in performance comes across as celebratory and patriotic, while readers discern more ambiguity and even irony in the play. The playwright, John Arden, even suggested Shakespeare had hidden the ironic play within the script to avoid repercussions from the authorities that held Henry in high esteem as a great monarch and exemplar of a warrior-king. Given this 100-year crux relative to interpreting the play, I have focused on two speeches that—*with a close reading and some imagination applied*—reveal stunning *covert* imagery that completely subverts what we thought the speeches conveyed. In each case the imagery is not only persistent and contextually coherent, but that by tuning into Shakespeare's wavelength we find he has leveraged off this covert imagery elsewhere in the play, and each also convincingly supports an ironic interpretation for the play—particularly since they each endorse a playful comic-mocking (and adolescent) attitude toward the King. What I've shown in this essay are not

a series of inconsequential anomalies—they were written by Shakespeare with the intention that they be found out and carefully considered, where following his lead we find there is much more beneath the surface of this patriotic and celebratory war play than previously imagined—and going through the entire play shows this to be astonishingly true throughout. While hoping not to appear overly polemic and intolerant of diverse opinions regarding how to appreciate *Henry V*, my intent has been to illuminate just a couple of truly unique and revelatory findings about the play that reasonable considered should cause pursuit in a specific direction for understanding Shakespeare’s play: he is being ironic—it is a cautionary tale about power and war. It is apparent by a close reading of the play—alert to the subtle and subversive irony, with an accent on bawdy hijinks—that the celebratory stage play is nothing more than a hoax—intended to take us in—while Shakespeare’s most outrageous wit is hiding behind it, *ridendo dicere verum*, “laughingly speaking the truth.”

It is yours that reade him. And there we hope, to your diuers capacities, you will finde enough, both to draw, and hold you: for his wit can no more lie hid, then it could be lost. Reade him, therefore; and againe, and againe: And if then you doe not like him, surely you are in some manifest danger, not to vnderstand him . . . And such Readers we wish him.

- *First Folio* Preface

The author lives in the Pacific Northwest and has been reading and studying Shakespeare for many years. He has also written a more broadly ranging essay on the ironic Henry V, “Once More: The Case for a (Mindful) Reading (Ironic) of Henry V” that can also be found free on the Internet, as well as a comprehensive book on the ironic interpretation of Henry V titled, A Genius Hoax: Shakespeare’s Trojan Horse War Play.

¹ Gerald Gould, “A New Reading of *Henry V*,” *The English Review*, 29 (July, 1919), 42.

² Edward Berry, *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, ed. Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986), 255.

³ William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays* (London: C.H. Reynell, 1817; citing reprint, Charleston: BiblioBazaar, 2006), 173.

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from Shakespeare’s *Henry V* are from *Oxford World Classics: Henry V*, ed. Gary Taylor (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982). For other Shakespeare quotations, I cite *The Oxford Complete Works*, Wells and Taylor, general editors, 2nd Ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

⁵ William Watkiss Lloyd, *Critical Essays on the Plays of Shakespeare*, (London: George Bell and Sons, 1875; citing facsimile reprint Boston: Adamant Media Corp, 2005), 251–67. William Butler Yeats, *Ideas of Good and Evil* (London: A.H. Bullen, 1903), ch. “At Stratford-on-Avon,” 142–67.

⁶ Gould, 44.

⁷ Bernard Shaw, *Shaw on Shakespeare: An Anthology of Bernard Shaw's Writings on the Plays and Productions of Shakespeare*, ed. Edwin Wilson (London: E.P. Dutton, 1961; citing reprint New York: Applause, 2002), 96–97, 102.

⁸ John Dover Wilson, ed., *The New Shakespeare: King Henry V* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1947). J.H. Walter, ed., *The Arden Shakespeare: King Henry V* (London: Methuen & Co, 1954). The Dover and Walter editions represent patriotic readings without reservation, and no edition of *Henry V* has ever endorsed an “author intended” ironic view. (Taylor’s *Henry V* edition dismisses the ironic interpretation on page one of his Introduction.)

⁹ For example: Harold C. Goddard, *The Meaning of Shakespeare*, (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1951), v.1, 215–68. Roy Battenhouse, “*Henry V* as Heroic Comedy,” in Richard Hosley, ed. *Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama in Honor of Hardin Craig*, (Columbia, MO: U of Missouri P, 1962), 163–82.

¹⁰ “Hal-haters” is a pejorative term coined by Michael Manheim to discredit Henry’s critics, *The Weak King Dilemma in the Shakespearean History Play* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1973), 194. Although Manheim recognizes Henry’s Machiavellian traits, he ironically uses the expression to disparage those who are too critical of the King’s character.

¹¹ Andrew Gurr, ed., *King Henry V* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), 37–38.

¹² Of course, productions tend to edit the text to suit their interpretation. For instance, both the critically acclaimed Olivier and Branagh films each cut over 50% of the text. We should always consider we are seeing a particular production of *Henry V*, and not necessarily a good interpretation of *Shakespeare’s Henry V*.

¹³ “[In *Henry V*] I believe the ‘secret play’ is a deliberate attempt by Shakespeare to contradict his overt play for political reasons,” John Arden, *To Present the Pretence: Essays on the Theatre and Its Public* (London: Methuen & Co, 1978), 195–208, esp. 196.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 198.

¹⁵ Shakespeare gives frequent prompts to give leeway to your imagination when considering the onstage action in *Henry V*. Critics near-universally interpret these as referring to the inadequacies of the performance making it necessary to allow some liberal embellishment via the imagination in order to accurately reflect the celebrated victory at Agincourt; I argue otherwise. Here are the frequent references to enjoy a more cerebral experience; ironically most are from the Chorus, who is unrelenting in promoting Henry’s greatness while also illuminating the problem of reconciling appearances with reality (bold italics added):

And let us, ciphers to this great account,
On your *imaginary forces* work. (1.0.17–18)

Piece out our imperfections with *your thoughts*: (1.0.23)

For ’tis *your thoughts* that now must deck our kings. (1.0.28)

Therefore let every man now *task his thought*, (1.2.309)

Holding due course to Harfleur. Follow, follow!
Grapple your minds to sternage of this navy, (3.0.17–18)

Work, work your thoughts, and therein see a siege. (3.0.25)

Still be kind,
And eke out our performance *with your mind*. (3.0.34–35)

Now <i>entertain conjecture</i> of a time	(4.0.1)
<i>Minding true things by what their mock'ries be.</i>	(4.0.53)
<i>All things are ready, if our minds be so</i>	
Perish the man, whose <i>mind</i> is backward now.	(4.3.71–72)
Heave him away upon <i>your wingèd thoughts</i>	(5.0.8)
You may <i>imagine</i> him upon the Blackheath	(5.0.16)

But now behold

In the quick forge and *working-house of thought* (5.0.22–23)

¹⁶ The speech is not completely devoid of words having connotations as sexual euphemisms. For example, Shakespeare has previously used “spirit” as a euphemism for both penis and semen; see Gordon Williams, *Shakespeare’s Sexual Language: A Glossary* (New York: Continuum, 1997), 284–85. So we have here (although it has not been glossed this way previously), “Bend up every penis to his full height.”

¹⁷ Considering lines 7–17 as those describing physically how the soldiers should prepare to charge into the breach, this production cut lines 9–14. *The Hollow Crown: Henry V*, DVD, directed by Thea Sharrock (2013; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios, 2013); Henry is played by Tom Hiddleston.

¹⁸ Thomas Carlyle, “The Hero as Poet” (1840). Available in Rolls, Albert, ed., *Bloom’s Shakespeare Through the Ages: Henry V* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010), 110.

¹⁹ John Barton, *Playing Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1984), 58. *Playing Shakespeare* is a filmed Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) workshop for actors with an accompanying book. The Breach speech is discussed at length, first for its metrical construction, 27–29 and 42–43, and then for its dramatic function, 57–58.

²⁰ C.L. Barber and Richard P. Wheeler, *The Whole Journey: Shakespeare’s Power of Development* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1986), 219–20.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 220.

²² Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1992), 131. Also available online: <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft3199n7t4/>

²³ Joan Lord Hall, *Henry V: A Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 82.

²⁴ “My own part” speaks for itself, “hot” refers to semen, “knocks” echoes the staccato, “On, on, on, on, on” and “case” as bawdy is covered in Eric Partridge, *Shakespeare’s Bawdy* (London: Routledge, 1947; citing 3rd Edition, 1968), 76–77. The humor of it is not only too hot—it is now outrageous.

²⁵ To “eke” means “an addition, increase; a piece added on; a supplement.” So Shakespeare is clearly acknowledging we need to add in or supplement the stage performance with our imagination. “eke, n.1.” OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.spl.org:2048/view/Entry/60055?rskey=HiUQou&result=1> (accessed July 27, 2015).

²⁶ Gurr’s note: “The French term Katherine hears is *foutre*, to fuck. Alice’s attempt to say ‘gown’ comes out as French *con*, English ‘cunt’,” 130n.

²⁷ Roy Battenhouse, *Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama in Honor of Hardin Craig*, ed. Richard Hosley, (Columbia, MO: U of Missouri P, 1962), ch. “*Henry V* as Heroic Comedy,” 163–182, esp. 181.

²⁸ A “pantomime” emphasizing each body part mentioned is exactly how Emma Thompson performs the scene in the 1989 Kenneth Branagh film of *Henry V*.

²⁹ Gurr’s translation, 205n.

³⁰ Some commentators have noted that Shakespeare characterizes war as being similar to sexual conquest, but given the specific sexual imagery found out in the Breach speech it goes well beyond that.

³¹ “shit, v.”. OED Online. September 2016. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.spl.org:2048/view/Entry/178329?rskey=LgWf3L&result=2>
(accessed October 04, 2016).

³² Although rarely used, “Odoration” actually is a word, meaning: “the action or process of smelling, or of emitting a smell; an instance of this.” “odoration, n.”. OED Online. March 2016. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.spl.org:2048/view/Entry/130467?redirectedFrom=odoration>
(accessed April 04, 2016).