

**The Filial Dagger:
The Case of Hal and Henry IV
in *1 & 2 Henry IV* and
*The Famous Victories***

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English culture and politics in the last decade of the sixteenth century were both patriarchal and patrilineal, in spite of—**L**or, perhaps, in part, because of—the so-called bastard queen sitting on the throne. The prevailing political questions of the day concerned Elizabeth’s successor and the fate of the nation that, so many believed, hung precariously in the balance. Questions of legality, legitimacy, and fitness formed the crux of these debates, but almost all claimants attempted to justify their right by tracing their bloodlines back to either Henry VII or Edward III, the respective patriarchs of the Tudor dynasty and the houses of York and Lancaster.¹ These debates hinged on the 1543 Third Act of Succession, in which Henry VIII stipulated that the heirs of his younger sister Mary (the Grey line) should take precedence over the heirs of his elder sister Margaret (the Stuart line). After Elizabeth suffered a dangerous bout with fever in 1593, these discussions intensified.²

By 1595, when *Richard II*, the first play in Shakespeare’s Henriad, initially appeared on stage, the conversation had spread out from the Court, appearing in public discourse, both in pamphlet and on stage. In December of 1595, the Queen’s Men were replaying an anonymous play entitled *The Famous Victories of*

Henry V. Famous Victories, first performed circa 1586, is, according to Larry S. Champion, “perhaps the earliest extant example of an English history play or . . . the raw material from which Shakespeare fashioned much of the material in his trilogy.”³ Philip Henslowe’s records from the Rose indicate that it played at least eight times that season, suggesting both the play’s popularity and topicality.⁴ In its original context, *Famous Victories* drew a parallel between Henry V’s victories in France and Elizabeth’s ostensible triumph over the Babington conspiracy and Mary Queen of Scots, highlighting the dangers of foreign (especially Catholic) kings and promoting English nationalism.⁵ By 1595, however, the play’s overt propaganda began to ring false; Shakespeare’s *Henriad* sequence deliberately reconstructs its core premise to focus on the performative nature of both father-son and monarch-subject relationships in order to address the increasingly pressing question of who would inherit Elizabeth’s throne upon her death.

Where the earlier, anonymous play depicts the young Prince Henry as openly hostile to both his father and his future responsibilities, only reformed by God as a sign of divine endowment upon his accession to the throne, Shakespeare’s iconic Prince Hal acknowledges and accepts both his filial and princely responsibilities *prior* to assuming the crown. This alteration not only criticizes the ideology of divine right, but suggests that, in spite of the glorious depiction of Hal’s transformation into the “Mirror of all Christian kings” (*H5* 2.0.6), the uncertainty of the Elizabethan succession posed a significant threat to the stability of the English commonwealth.⁶

The earlier *Famous Victories* opens with Prince Henry plotting the robbery of “my father’s Receiuers” (*FV* 10), rationalizing his actions with the argument that the wealth they carry will be his upon his accession.⁷ This justification emphasizes the lack of harm, allowing the audience to sympathize with the prince’s “fun” and minimizing his potential to threaten the commonwealth; however, his actions indicate a lack of respect for the role of king: “I tell you sirs,” he says, “and the King / My father were dead, we would all be Kings” (*FV* 93-94).⁸ Henry’s attitude here reflects that which typically appears among common, rather than noble, rebellions, likely because Henry’s audience is commoners. However, it betrays a misunderstanding of what kingship actually means; according to common law, kingship relies on the ratification and good will of both the nobility and commons. The play recognizes this,

as John continues by saying that if Henry's roguish behavior continues, "I heare say, if he vse it long, / His father will cut him off from the Crowne" (*FV* 116-17). The young Henry's behavior in the early portions of the play threatens the foundations of his society, not simply because his actions are criminal, but because, as Larry S. Champion suggests, they "denigrate monarchy and reflect the plight of the commoners in such a society."⁹ Henry's tendency to thievery in the play contains a criticism of royalty as mismanaging funds in light of the heavy taxation levied in support of the Anglo-Spanish wars starting in 1585; as John Cobler says of Henry, "I dare not call him theefe, but sure he is one of these taking fellowes" (*FV* 112).

As a consequence of this "harmless" robbery, the Lord Mayor of London has Prince Henry thrown in prison. At first, King Henry objects on the grounds that the prince's royalty should excuse him from punishment:

King. I vnderstand, that you haue committed my sonne to prison without our leaue and license. What althogh he be a rude youth, and likely to giue occasion, yet you might haue considered that he is a Prince, and my sonne, and not to be halled to prison by euery subiect.
(*FV* 229-33)

The king argues at first that royalty are not accountable to subjects for their actions. However, the Mayor excuses his actions by placing the safety of society over the prerogative of royalty: "In such a case we knew not what to do, but for our own safegard we sent him to ward" (*FV* 258-59). This excuse prompts the king to rescind his rebuke, authorizing, by implication, subjects' actions against their sovereign (or, at least, their sovereign's heir) should his or her actions endanger the safety of the realm and its subjects:

King. Oh my sonne, a Prince thou art, I a Prince indeed,
And to deserue imprisonment,
And well haue they done, and like faithfull subiects
(*FV* 268-70)

Here, the king admits that the duty of subjects (and monarchs) to the commonwealth supersedes even royal prerogative. Although the prince will later reform his behavior—at least to a certain degree—that his father permits his imprisonment for misdeeds indicates that the author of the play wants to promote the understanding that monarchy is and should be limited for the

betterment and safety of the realm and its subjects from the whims of the monarch.

However, when Prince Henry is brought before the Chief Justice, he echoes his father's earlier attempt to use his status as future monarch to secure unlimited prerogative:

Henry: Why my Lord, I pray ye who am I?

Judge: And please your Grace, you are my Lord the yong Prince, our King that shall be after the decease of our soueraigne Lord, King Henry the fourth, whom God graunt long to raigne.

Henry: You say true my Lord;
And yet you will hang my man. (*FV* 350-56)

Henry repeatedly demands the release of his man (in lines 358, 360, 362, 364, and 366), and when he is just as repeatedly refused, "giveth [the Justice] a boxe on the eare" (*FV* 366.1) in a childish fit of petulance at being denied his will by the law. The Justice responds by rebuking the prince:

Judge: You greatly abuse me, and not me onely, but also your fater: whose liuely person here in this place I doo represent. And therefore to teach you what prerogatiues meane, I commit you to the Fleete, vntill we haue spoken with your father. (*FV* 378-82)

This second instance seems to confirm to the Judge, King Henry, and even the audience that the prince is unfit to rule England, and, upon learning of his son's second imprisonment, King Henry bemoans England's future:

King: Oh my sonne, my sonne, no sooner out of one prison, but into an other, I had thought once whiles I had liued, to haue seene this noble Realme of England flourish by thee my sonne, but now I see it goes to ruine and decaie. (*FV* 532-36)

Here, the play presents us with the problem of primogeniture through the lens of an uncontrolled heir; Henry, should he continue in the present vein of behavior, would further endanger the realm and bring it to "ruine and decaie" by continuing the abuses of power in which he is currently engaged. His father recognizes the danger of such uncontrolled use of power, and laments his son's actions, although he does not address the unspoken alternative—that Henry would not succeed to the throne.

Shakespeare's *1 Henry IV* also contains a scene of robbery, with some significant alterations. First, Hal himself does not participate in stealing from the Travelers, as he and Poins only rob Falstaff (the original thief) of the stolen money, which, as in *Famous Victories*, "tis going to the King's exchequer" (*IH4* 2.2.52-53).¹⁰ The purpose of the episode is thus less to reveal Hal's depravity than to show off his cleverness, made particularly evident even before the robbery itself in his now-infamous confession soliloquy, in which, John Alvis suggests, Hal "chooses to put virtue in the service of glory":¹¹

Prince Hal: So when this loose behaviour I throw off
 And pay the debt I never promised,
 By how much better than my word I am,
 By so much shall I falsify men's hopes;
 And, like bright metal on a sullen ground,
 My reformation, glittering o'er my fault,
 Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes
 Than that which hath no foil to set it off.
 (*IH4* 1.2.198-205)

In emphasizing the self-consciously performative nature of his actions—both robbery and his intended future reformation—Hal's speech foregrounds his social role(s) as deliberate fiction. The intentionality of this performance serves as both a caution and a reassurance: caution because Hal's "true" intentions cannot be fully trusted, and reassurance that he is not "really" a thief and a drunkard. In addition, this soliloquy reveals multiple motivations for Hal's performance: "It allows him to develop a complex understanding of the lower classes . . . and their motivations; it enables him to 'offset' his later goodness; and it represents to the audience the conscious self-construction in which monarchs engaged."¹² In Shakespeare's version, the "real" Hal—the one who speaks directly to the audience—is already transformed; the performance, at least in Hal's own characterization, is that of vice.

It makes sense, then, that in the *Henriad* Hal is not arrested, and his confrontation with his father contains a nuanced discussion of performative sovereignty rather than an exchange of insults. Speaking to his son in *1 Henry IV*, King Henry describes inappropriate monarchical conduct through the negative exemplum of Richard II: "The skipping King, he ambled up and down / With shallow jesters and rash bavin wits"; "And in that very line, Harry, standest thou, / For thou hast lost thy princely

privilege / With vile participation” (*IH4* 3, 2, 60-61, 85-87). By contrast, King Henry clarifies, he cultivated an appearance of humility:

Henry IV: I stole all courtesy from heaven
 And dressed myself in such humility
 That I did pluck allegiance from men’s hearts,
 Loud shouts and salutations from their mouths,
 Even in the presence of the crowned King.
 (*IH4* 3.2.50-54)

Here, the king describes the deliberate construction of a persona, recognizing, David Scott Kastan explains, “that kingship is a role that can—indeed that must—be acted,” rather than a claim of divine or patrilineal worthiness.¹³ It is a pattern which Hal—his father’s spiritual as well as biological son—has already recognized.

The other pivotal father-son exchange from *Famous Victories* altered in Shakespeare’s *Henriad* occurs when the prince walks into the king’s bedchamber “with a dagger in his hand” (*FV* 558.2). King Henry, seeing the weapon, concludes that “these thy doings / Wil end thy fathers dayes” (*FV* 564-65), believing the prince there to kill him, although young Henry insists otherwise:

Henry: Farre be the thoughts of any such pretended
 mischief: and I most humbly render it to your
 Maiesties hand, and liue my Lord and soueraigne for
 euer: and with your dagger arme show like vengeance
 vpon the bodie of that your sonne; . . . tis not the
 Crowne that I come for, sweete father, because I am
 vnworthie, and those vilde & reprobate company I
 abandon, & vtterly abolish their company for euer.
 (*FV* 582-90)

The prince’s repentance—for both the presumed treason of bringing a dagger into the king’s chamber and for his general dissolute behavior—is an abrupt change in character, which Irving Ribner calls “a sudden and entirely unprepared-for reformation.”¹⁴ Like Ribner, Champion is skeptical of Henry’s personal transformation, since “Hal’s first words when in possession of the crown strike neither a note of moral contrition nor of concern for the stability of the country, but one of cold, steely power politics.”¹⁵ Karen Oberer seems to think, like others, that Henry’s transformation in *Famous Victories* is insincere, although she expresses the belief that he was never really that bad—“he never

seriously engages in transgression at the beginning of the play”—which runs counter to the fact that he carries an unsheathed dagger into his father’s bedchamber and never actually *repents* of his behavior.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the king pardons his son, reassuring him of his place in the succession, “Stand vp my son, and do not think thy father, / But at the request of thee my sonne, I wil pardon thee” (*FV* 598-99), such that the prince no longer has even theoretical need of the dagger. Champion observes that “changes that the anonymous author made in his source directly support this reading,” that the prince’s reformation is motivated by power rather than virtue or filial affection: “The playwright *adds* the rowdy company that the king twice bars from the room, *adds* both Hal’s entering the room alone and his carrying a drawn dagger, and *omits* his offering the dagger to the king in a sacrificial posture.”¹⁷ These changes to the historical source material compound a reading of the play as intrinsically orthodox, since Henry is characterized as a proto-tyrant and a Machiavel, rather than as a fun-loving rakehell who has always recognized that, some day, he will need to cast off his companions and take responsibility for his nation (as we do see, at least more so, in Shakespeare’s *1 Henry IV*).

Famous Victories’s Henry *reforms* as a means to secure power (and, presumably, to keep it), where Shakespeare’s Hal uses the opportunity for performance to appear dissolute, thus exposing his (ostensibly) true self as kingly. In the paradigm of *Famous Victories*, monarchy ensures virtue, whether bestowed miraculously by God or conferred by the crown itself as an extension of divine right. In the *Henriad*, although sovereignty is performative, that performance is as much the enaction of duty and obligation as it is the assumption of power.

In Shakespeare’s version, Hal carries no dagger, instead coming to sit by his dying father’s bedside. His error is taking up his father’s crown before the king’s death. Holding it, he muses:

Prince Hal: O majesty!
 When thou dost pinch thy bearer, thou dost sit
 Like a rich armour worn in heat of day,
 That scald’st with safety. (*2H4* 4.5.27-30)¹⁸

While both Richard and Bolingbroke had to come to an understanding of sovereignty once anointed (in the earlier plays of the *Henriad*), Hal already comprehends the complexities of

rule. He recognizes that both Richard's claims of absolutism and his father's own act of usurpation are conflicting ideologies, but that in order to maintain a secure rule, he must somehow maintain both: wear the armor of divine authorization but manage not to be burned by its heat.

When Henry does not respond to Hal's calls of "My gracious lord! My father!" (2*HA* 4.5.33), the Prince assumes the worst and departs with the crown. The king, not yet deceased after all, rouses and chides Hal for his supposition, saying,

Henry IV: Dost thou so hunger for mine empty chair
 That thou wilt needs invest thee with my honours
 Before thy hour be ripe? O foolish youth!
 Thou seek'st the greatness that will overwhelm thee.
 . . .
 Thou hid'st a thousand daggers in thy thoughts,
 Which thou has whetted on thy stony heart,
 To stab at half an hour of my life.
 (2*HA* 4.5.94-97, 106-8)

The "daggers" in Shakespeare's version of the scene are emotional rather than physical, emblematic of treason-by-thought rather than regicide-in-deed. In Shakespeare's retelling of the story, however, Hal's motivations include both ambition (as in *Famous Victories*) and filial duty:

Prince Hal: due from me
 Is tears and heavy sorrows of the blood,
 Which nature, love, and filial tenderness
 Shall, O dear father, pay thee plenteously. (2*HA* 4.5.36-39)

Ostensibly alone (except for the king, whom Hal believes to be dead), Hal's words are trustworthy, and his sorrow at his father's death genuine. Although some critics argue that, in Edmund Taft's phrase, "the prince harbors patricidal wishes," Taft asserts that "there is little room in Hal's meditation for lusting after the crown or for wishing Henry dead."¹⁹ Although it is not the cold, calculating lust we see in *Famous Victories*, I would argue that Hal does, indeed, lust after the crown. In the breath after expressing his grief, Hal says, "My due from thee is this imperial crown" (2*HA* 4.5.40), which he then places on his own head, and proclaims that "put the world's whole strength / Into one giant arm, it shall not force / This lineal honour from me" (2*HA* 4.5.43-45). These

are not words that lack ambition, yet Hal's remorse nevertheless appears genuine, balancing ambition with his duty as a son, a subject, and a (future) sovereign.

As in *Famous Victories*, the question of Henry's timing of his transformation to the moment of—or, at least, the moment immediately prior to—his father's death is one raised repeatedly by critics, such as Jonathan Crewe, who asks, "What is implied by such deferral, resistance or incapacity? What is at stake *in* reform? What is to be understood by the noble change Hal claims to purpose—and with which he is credited by his father at the moment in which the crown changes hands?"²⁰ Placed alongside the scene from the earlier play, Shakespeare's Hal exhibits considerable pathos and contrition, inviting God to "let me in my present wildness die, / And never live to show th'incredulous world / The noble change that I have purposed!" (2*H4* 4.5.152-54). The audience, having witnessed Hal's earlier proclamation of this "noble change" in *1 Henry IV*, is therefore inclined to believe him, as does Bernard Paris, who suggests that Hal's expressions of love and filial tenderness "are evidence of his genuine reformation."²¹ Hal's immediate contrition—and lengthy apology (from lines 138 to 174)—convince Henry of both Hal's sincerity and his future capability as monarch, and concludes with Hal shouldering the "golden cares" of both a loving son and, as king, national *paterfamilias*:

Hal: You won it, wore it, kept it, gave it me;
 Then plain and right must my possession be
 Which I with more than with a common pain
 'Gainst all the world will rightfully maintain.
 (2*H4* 4.5.221-24)

In this enactment of filial duty and patriarchal succession we see inheritance functioning as it was intended by common law. However, in 1598, when *2 Henry IV* came to the stage, a tidy patrilineal succession was not to be, and Shakespeare concludes his tetralogy with an appropriate reminder of an uncertain future, straying yet again from the pattern established in *Famous Victories*.

In *Famous Victories*, once Henry becomes King, he is transformed, never returning to his earlier profligate ways. Henry has defeated the French against the impossible odds of "a hundred thousand, / And we fortie thousand, ten to one" (*FV* 1175-76), since the "quarrel is good, and God wil defend you" (*FV* 1179). Having defeated the French, Henry's final conquest is

in wooing the French king's daughter, Katherine, and taking her as his bride—perhaps a subtle jab at Elizabeth for refusing to marry, perhaps simply the ending expected of a victorious play. Whether or not the audience believes in the sincerity of his reformation is irrelevant; once he determined to play the king, Henry never once altered his course, repeatedly turning away his companions and refusing to engage in un-kingly behavior, conforming to the traditional expectations of conquest and marriage.

Although *Famous Victories* reflects an orthodox depiction of divine right sovereignty, the prince's image, Champion argues, is specifically designed as equivocal:

The Famous Victories of Henry V, in a word, can be viewed as either a glorification of monarchy or as an attack on its corruption, egocentricity, and militaristic monomania. Hal, from one perspective the mirror of Christian kings, is from another an impetuous upstart reflecting the worst of aristocratic disdain for his common subjects. . . . If to some the play depicts a unified commonwealth, to others it reveals an oppressive oligarchy with commoners subject to fear, suppression, and disruption of livelihood.²²

In letter, *Famous Victories* presents the picture of orthodoxy; yet Champion is unsatisfied with the rapidity and seeming completeness of Henry's sea-change, and he is right to be so. The orthodoxy in *Famous Victories* is forced and artificial, a disingenuousness which its audience—which must have included Shakespeare—would have recognized, and which Shakespeare deliberately chose to subvert by giving the audience glimpses of the “tavern persona” his Hal has ostensibly left behind.²³

The first instance of Henry's performative rule that we see is his metatheatrical representation of kingship in a moment of play-acting with Falstaff. At first, he “plays” himself while Falstaff takes the role of Henry IV, but Hal stops him, asking, “Dost thou speak like a king?” (*1H4* 2.4.421). They switch roles, and Hal presages his later conversation with his father and his own actions at the conclusion of *2 Henry IV* by rejecting Falstaff and his other tavern companions, saying, “Thou art violently carried away from grace,” and lambasting Falstaff as a “reverend Vice, that grey Iniquity, that father Ruffian, that Vanity in years” (*1H4* 2.4.434, 441-42). His confirmation of Falstaff's line, “Banish plump Jack and banish all the world” is “I do; I will” (*1H4* 2.4.466-68), which clarifies Hal's already stated purpose of rising above his worldly persona and

ascending to the position of king so often affiliated (especially by James in print and speech) with the sun.

When Falstaff approaches the newly crowned Henry V, Henry rejects him, acknowledging—unlike Richard—the distinction between minions and appropriate counsel, and choosing the latter over the former. He continues, “Presume not that I am the thing I was; / For God doth know, so shall the world perceive, / That I have turn’d away from my former self” (2*H4* 5.5.56-58), enacting the self-transformation that he promised at the beginning of *1 Henry IV*. Interestingly, Hal’s repudiation of Falstaff—which David Bevington terms “politically prudent”—causes audiences considerable anxiety.²⁴ Falstaff was popular, and his dismissal at the end of *2 Henry IV* produces an outpouring of audience sympathy, even as audiences are forced to recognize its necessity.²⁵ In the act of rejecting Falstaff and his own former character, Hal-turned-King-Henry-V assumes the carefully cultivated persona of a Christian king, and, as Bevington remarks, he is successful “because he enacts the role so well.”²⁶

Once transformed, throughout *Henry V* Hal maintains a carefully constructed monarchical image for the benefit of his soldiers, both common and noble. Preceding act 4 of the play, the Chorus describes Henry’s persona from the perspective of his men:

Chorus: O now, who will behold
 The royal captain of this ruined band
 Walking from watch to watch, from tent to tent,
 Let him cry ‘Praise and glory on his head!’
 For forth he goes and visits all his host,
 Bids them good morrow with a modest smile,
 And calls them brothers, friends and countrymen.
 Upon his royal face there is no note
 How dread an army hath enrounded him,
 Nor doth he dedicate one jot of colour
 Unto the weary and all-watched night,
 But freshly looks and overbears attaint
 With cheerful semblance and sweet majesty,
 That every wretch, pining and pale before,
 Beholding him plucks comfort from his looks.
 (*H5* 4.0.28-42)

This image of idealized monarchical performance, as the Chorus explains, helps to reassure the soldiers and secures their loyalty to

Henry and to England. In this description, we also find an echo of Bolingbroke's appearance before the commons in *Richard II* and a recognition of the validity of his advice to his son in the *Henry IV* plays. And yet when the audience sees Henry enact the description in act 4 itself, they are given privileged access to the king's inner turmoil, which does not appear in the public image described by the Chorus.

The night before the infamous battle of Agincourt, Henry borrows Erpingham's cloak and moves unknown amongst his men, testing their resolve and measuring their loyalty—observing them as he once observed the tavern-goers (although unrecognizable as the king). Disguised as a common Welsh soldier, Henry confesses to his (unknowing) men that he shares their anxiety, recognizing that the only thing which divides them is performance: “What have kings that privates have not too, / Save ceremony, save general ceremony?” (*H5* 4.1.235-36).²⁷ The question is, of course, hyperbole, but it nevertheless acknowledges the significance of sovereign performance to the maintenance of power. However, Henry also recognizes that “we must bear all” (*H5* 4.1.230): as with his father, Henry has an obligation to his subjects, and it is duty, rather than privilege, which elevates him to the position of king.

By the conclusion of *Famous Victories*, the transformed King Henry has conquered France, his claim authorized—according to the Archbishop—through a lineal claim through the female line back to Edward III, progenitor of England's kings, including the Tudors and Stuarts. Interestingly, the Archbishop specifically situates Henry's claim through his “great grandmother” as validation for his right to the French throne (*FV* 782); it was also through a maternal great-grandmother that James VI of Scotland would lay claim to England (through his maternal grandfather's mother, Margaret Tudor).

As in *Famous Victories*, Shakespeare's Hal also lays claim to France by means of lineal descent through a maternal line:

Canterbury: Go, my dread lord, to your great-grandsire's tomb,
 From whom you claim; invoke his warlike spirit,
 And your great-uncle's, Edward the Black Prince
 Who on the French ground played a tragedy
 Making defeat on the full power of France.
 (*H5* 1.2.103-7)

Canterbury's justification, like the Archbishop's in *Famous Victories*, explicitly traces Henry's lineage back to Edward III ("your great-grand sire") and to Edward the Black Prince, father of Richard II, thus anachronistically allying Henry with both the houses of Lancaster and York, a figurative move more often associated with Henry VII and the Tudors than with Henry V. Interestingly, Malcolm Pittock notes that "Shakespeare must have realized that Henry V, as the son of a usurper, had no *de jure* right to the English throne and, consequently, could have no *de jure* claim on the French throne. Henry's justification for going to war was entirely without merit."²⁸ Yet despite this, Shakespeare characterizes Henry as virtuous as well as victorious. Shakespeare's Henry embodies limited rather than absolute monarchy; Henry's sovereignty is justified by his actions rather than his (tainted) lineage. As Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield explain, "The alternative to this is not to become fixed on its negation—universal chaos and subjective fragmentation—but rather to understand history and the human subject in terms of social and political process."²⁹ In other words, the breakdown of patrilineal succession was not necessarily cause for chaos and civil war, so long as the monarch who assumed the throne was capable of acting the kingly part. In 1590s Tudor England, Henry's on-stage successes might thus stand for the hope that the next monarch—like Henry, who, argues Joe Falocco, "represents an example of the forces opposed to hereditary monarchy"—would prove to be successful in spite of his (or her) lineage (or lack thereof).³⁰

For Elizabeth's Privy Council, who held themselves responsible for ensuring a smooth interregnum upon the queen's inevitable demise, it was already clear that primogeniture could not provide security. For many—including Robert Cecil and Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex—the leading candidate was James VI of Scotland, but his claim was far from certain, even as late as 1599. In addition to Elizabeth's fear of a "second person," James's claim was corrupted by his family lineage.³¹ First, his accession was barred by Henry VIII's 1543 Act of Succession, and, second, a statute from the reign of Edward III prohibited the accession of a candidate born outside the "allegiance of the realm of England."³² Third, James's mother was Mary Queen of Scots, a Catholic traitor to the English crown executed by Elizabeth in 1587. On all three counts, James's lineage was against him. However, James was nevertheless a descendant of Henry VII, patriarch of the Tudor

line, himself a descendant of Edward III. As the ostensible heir of the Lancastrian line, Henry VII had united the warring houses of Lancaster and York through his marriage to Elizabeth, daughter of king Edward IV. In this context, the conclusion to *Henry V* is both a warning and a comfort; James's family ties to the Stuarts were cause for concern, but the Stuart connection to the Tudors provided the necessary pseudo-fiction which ultimately helped him to secure the English crown.

It is because of this uncertainty that, despite Henry V's victories, Shakespeare concludes his second tetralogy with what Peter Parolin calls "a legacy of loss," a reminder of impending tragedy, a jarring epilogue to his tale of victory:³³

Chorus: Small time, but in that small most greatly lived
 This star of England. Fortune made his sword
 By which the world's best garden he achieved,
 And of it left his son imperial lord.
 Henry the Sixth, in infant bands crowned King
 Of France and England, did this king succeed,
 Whose state so many had the managing
 That they lost France and made his England bleed.
 (*H5* Epilogue.5-12)

It is particularly noteworthy that the epilogue foregrounds not only Henry's death, but the specific failure of primogeniture to secure national stability.³⁴ For although Henry "left his son imperial lord" of England, Henry VI's lineal legitimacy could not guarantee effective rule. Furthermore, "Shakespeare omits what might be considered a prime opportunity to gain Elizabethan favor" by making reference to Henry VII's victory on Bosworth Field, but he does not.³⁵ Instead, "Shakespeare confronts the immanent vacancy of the throne by producing a linguistic vacancy with his omission," leaving the audience—and the Queen—to fill in the role for themselves.³⁶ As such, the epilogue offers mitigated pessimism in response to the Elizabethan succession crisis. Although the line of inheritance is unclear, it suggests, even primogeniture could not provide absolute security from unrest or war. By extension, then, Shakespeare's *Henriad*—unlike the earlier *Famous Victories*—focuses on capability and performance rather than filial inheritance as an index of sovereignty. While Shakespeare's play offers no direct solution—although some have argued its advocacy for various candidates, including James and the Earl of Essex—it does remind its audience that sovereignty is

performative rather than inherent, and that a good king (or queen) is determined through actions rather than bloodlines.

At the close of the sixteenth century, when *Henry V* opened on the public stage, the nation, particularly London and the court, was under considerable stress. The court and Council were debating, Sara Munson Deats notes, “the question of whether to attempt a preemptive strike against Spain” in the midst of three straight years of poor harvests.³⁷ The question of inheritance therefore became increasingly urgent as the Council sought to guard against both invasion and civil unrest. Undoubtedly aware of these anxieties, James VI of Scotland sought to press his advantage with both the queen and her Council, but was never able to secure a promise. Instead, Elizabeth spent the next four years steadfastly refusing to mitigate the chaos which many were certain would be the inevitable consequence of her death. Ultimately, the dire warning contained in the epilogue to *Henry V* was not to pass; on March 20, 1603, Cecil sent a dispatch to Scotland as Elizabeth lay on her deathbed, ensuring that the morning after her death on March 24, James would be proclaimed the “only, lawful, lineal and rightful Liege James the first, King of England, France and Ireland, defender of the faith,” both in spite of and because of his descent from a Tudor king.³⁸

Notes

1. The primary claimants included the Spanish Infanta Isabella; Katherine Grey’s son Edmund Seymour, Viscount Beauchamp; James VI of Scotland; and Arbella Stuart, James’s cousin. There has been some discussion of the supposed claims of Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, but his candidacy did not seem to be taken seriously by either Elizabeth or the Privy Council, and his uprising and subsequent execution in 1601 ended any such discussion permanently.

2. Third Act of Succession, 1543, 35 Hen. 8, c. 1; Leanda De Lisle, *After Elizabeth: The Rise of James of Scotland and the Struggle for the Throne of England* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007), 28; J. Leeds Barroll, *Politics, Plague, and Shakespeare’s Theater: The Stuart Years* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 101.

3. Larry S. Champion, “‘What Prerogatives Meaneth’: Perspective and Political Ideology in ‘The Famous Victories of Henry V,’” *SAMLA* 53, no. 4 (1988): 1.

4. Philip Henslowe, *Henslowe’s Diary*, ed. Walter W. Greg (London: A.H. Bullen, 1904), 27-28.

5. David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics: A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968); Champion, “‘What Prerogatives Meaneth,’” 1.

6. William Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, ed. T.W. Craik, The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series (London: Routledge, 1995). Citations designate the play, *H5*, followed by act, scene, and line numbers.

7. *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*, reprint 1598 (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1994), <http://collections.chadwyck.co.uk/>. Citations designate the play, *FV*, followed by contiguous line numbers.

8. Kristin M.S. Bezio, *Staging Power in Tudor and Stuart English History Plays: History, Political Thought, and the Redefinition of Sovereignty* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), 61.

9. Champion, "What Prerogatives Meanes," 5.

10. William Shakespeare, *King Henry IV Part 1*, ed. David Scott Kastan, The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series (London: Thomson Learning, 2006). Citations designate the play, *1H4*, followed by act, scene and line numbers.

11. John E. Alvis, "Spectacle Supplanting Ceremony: Shakespeare's Henry Monmouth," in *Shakespeare as Political Thinker*, ed. John E. Alvis and Thomas G. West (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2000), 113.

12. Kristin M.S. Bezio, "Drama and Demigods: Kingship and Charisma in Shakespeare's England," *Religions* 4, no. 1 (2013): 41.

13. David Scott Kastan, "Introduction," in *King Henry IV Part 1*, ed. David Scott Kastan, The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series (London: Thomson Learning, 2006), 32-33.

14. Irving Rigner, *The English Play in the Age of Shakespeare* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 72.

15. Champion, "What Prerogatives Meanes," 8.

16. Karen Oberer, "Appropriations of the Popular Tradition in *The Famous Victories of Henry V* and *The Troublesome Raigne of King John*," in *Locating the Queen's Men, 1583-1603: Material Practices and Conditions of Playing*, ed. Helen Ostovich, Holger Schott Syme, and Andrew Griffin (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 174.

17. Champion, "What Prerogatives Meanes," 8.

18. William Shakespeare, *King Henry IV Part 2*, ed. A.R. Humphreys, The Arden Shakespeare, Second Series (London: Methuen, 1981). Citations designate the play, *2H4*, followed by act, scene and line numbers.

19. Edmund M. Taft, "The Crown Scene in *Henry IV, Part 2*," *Iowa State Journal of Research* 59, no. 3 (February 1985): 311.

20. Jonathan Crewe, "Reforming Prince Hal: The Sovereign Inheritor In *2 Henry IV*," *Renaissance Drama* 21 (1990): 226.

21. Bernard J. Paris, "The Disparity between Rhetoric and Mimesis in Shakespeare's Presentation of Prince Hal," in *Essays on Shakespeare in Honour of A. A. Ansari*, ed. T. R. Sharma (Meerut, India: Shalabh Book House, 1986), 186.

22. Champion, "What Prerogatives Meanes," 14.

23. See also Bezio, *Staging Power*, 116-122.

24. Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*, 103.

25. Falstaff was a popular enough character in Shakespeare's time to warrant the composition of a play devoted entirely to him: *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1597c).

26. Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*, 103.

27. See also Bezio, *Staging Power*, 120-21.

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30. Joe Falocco, "Shakespeare, Essex, and Machiavelli," *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium* 2 (2002): 70.

31. De Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 6.
32. Ibid.
33. Peter Parolin, "Figuring the King in *Henry V*: Political Rhetoric and the Limits of Performance," *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium* 9 (2009): 57.
34. Brian Walsh, "'Unkind Division': The Double Absence of Performing History in *1 Henry VI*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (2004): 124.
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36. Ibid.
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38. James F. Larkin and Paul L. Hughes, eds., "Proclamation of James VI and I," in *Stuart Royal Proclamations: Royal Proclamations of King James I, 1603-1625*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 2.