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## **‘Let us [...] / On your imaginary forces work’: persuasion, perspective and hypnosis in *Henry V***

When we think of hypnosis what we are most likely to have in mind is Kaa’s attitude in *The Jungle Book*: the snake using his spiral eyes to lull Mowgli to sleep while it wraps its dangerous coils around the boy.<sup>1</sup> Like the hissing reptile, hypnotizers raise mixed feelings that range from fascination to fear. Indeed they are believed to rob their victims of their liberty and to cause them to do things they would never dream of doing. Yet there are degrees in hypnosis which include fairly ordinary states, as Milton Erikson demonstrated.<sup>2</sup> It may account for what happens to us when we are being seduced or – it is the next step – when we fall in love, when we listen to beautiful music, or read poetry or attend a theatrical performance. It is the sort of ‘mighty magic’<sup>3</sup> that operates when Desdemona listens to Othello’s story. What Samuel Taylor Coleridge called ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ (Coleridge 184) may be viewed as a form of pleasurable and spontaneous<sup>4</sup> surrender of the spectators’ selves to the besieging force of a performance, a besieging force that they decide to yield to from the outset. It is made possible by an ‘inward wish’.<sup>5</sup> Suspension of disbelief places the public in an intermediary state. The attitude they adopt spontaneously—the adverb is important – can be compared to that of children wearing a superhero outfit: they *believe they are* Superman and yet they know they *are not* Superman. It stands to reason that drama is enjoyable only if the public accept for a while to deceive themselves: they ‘forget’ about reality and allow illusion to take over. In an

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<sup>1</sup> Not to mention the famous Jedi mind tricks in *Star Wars*. (Episode 2 *Attack of the Clones*)

<sup>2</sup> Eriksonian hypnosis advocates indirect methods and gives pride of place to suggestion.

<sup>3</sup> *Othello*, 1.3.92.

<sup>4</sup> Spontaneous rather than voluntary, Coleridge adds.

<sup>5</sup> *Canterbury* describes the effect Henry V produces on his listeners (1.1.39).

enlightening article entitled ‘The Theatre of Dreams,’ published in 2015, Andrew Lawrence-King insists that ‘the hallmark of the hypnotic experience is dissociation.’ Drama may be viewed – along with music – as one of the most apt experiences in this respect. Spectators are made to share emotions with the characters and to respond spontaneously to the events that are represented. Accordingly, an exposition scene, a Prologue, or the three knocks in French playhouses,<sup>6</sup> function as the *induction*, that is the process that causes the viewers to slip into some hypnotic state – called the *trance* – while the final applause signals the return to reality. The charm is finally broken.<sup>7</sup> Shakespeare’s *Henry V* is a fascinating play that has mesmerised several generations of (English) spectators that may have felt regenerated by the representation of their heroic ancestor. The powerful words spoken by the conqueror strike a note that finds an echo in the receiving minds. They are so efficient that reading the play may suffice to activate them. Michael Goldman even doubts that ‘anyone can read the play through without reading some of the speeches aloud – and, if at all possible, loudly’ (Goldman 58). The present article will aim to demonstrate that Shakespeare’s last history play combines the hypnotic power of stirring words with the enhancement of the dissociative process that stands at the core of the enjoyment of drama: in other words, it presents hypnotic characters operating in a hypnotic play. This double capacity to seduce<sup>8</sup> owes much to the use of a series of devices amongst which the pervasive Chorus that turns up at the beginning of each new act in the Folio version of the play. The analysis of this choric voice will lead us to consider the rich treatment of ‘perspective sight’ – as the French king puts it – in a play that appears very much like a laboratory of mental perception. But the most magnetic aspect of *Henry V* is probably the character of Henry himself who, as I am going to try and demonstrate, acts, more or less successfully, as a hypnotiser surrounded by manipulators.

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<sup>6</sup> It is also the function of the conventional formula ‘Once upon a time.’

<sup>7</sup> « If we shadows have offended / Think but this, and all is mended / That you have but slumber’d here / While these visions did appear.’ Puck says at the end of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Epilogue, 1-4.

<sup>8</sup> From Latin *seducere*, that is to say to isolate, to appropriate.

## Hypnosis and Elizabethan drama

Though the word *hypnosis* was coined in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there are scenes in Shakespeare's plays that depict ill-meaning characters intent on breaking into their victims' minds. The case of Iago wheedling money out of Roderigo in *Othello* is a clear illustration of the playwright's acquaintance with this practice. The dejected Venetian gentleman who wished to 'change [his] humanity with a baboon' (1.3.316) cannot resist the plotter's persuasive words. The terms Iago uses are as many stings that make the other man's senses go dumb: the villain mentions eight times the need to provide money,<sup>9</sup> adding two more allusions in the same conversation a bit later (364, 371). Roderigo will finally declare: 'I am chang'd' (379) and in the first Quarto version of the text, he adds: 'I'll sell all my land' (379). The character has obviously been transformed by Iago's words. A similar process is at work in *Richard III* when the monstrous hero seduces Lady Anne who does not stand a chance against the mesmerising devil. But hypnosis reaches far beyond the scope of Shakespeare's personal awareness of this sort of experience: Lawrence-King suggests we regard Elizabethan drama as a form of collective hypnotic experience. In 'The Theatre of Dreams', he declares:

What we nowadays call Neuro-Linguistic Programming, the structured and subtle use of complex language to facilitate hypnotic transformations, has its seventeenth-century parallel in Rhetoric, the art of persuasion by rich, heightened language.

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<sup>9</sup> « Put money in thy purse; follow these wars, defeat thy favour with an usurp'd beard; I say, put money in thy purse. It cannot be that Desdemona should long continue her love to the Moor,.... put money in thy purse,.... nor he to her; it was a violent commencement, and thou shalt see an answerable sequestration: put but money in thy purse... These Moors are changeable in their wills: ....fill thy purse with money. The food that to him now is as luscious as locusts, shall be to him shortly as bitter as coloquintida. When she is sated with his body, she will find the error of her choice; she must have change, she must. Therefore put money in thy purse: if thou wilt needs damn thyself, do it a more delicate way than drowning; make all the money thou canst. If sanctimony, and a frail vow, betwixt an erring barbarian, and a supersubtle Venetian, be not too hard for my wits, and all the tribe of hell, thou shalt enjoy her; therefore make money.' (*Othello*, 1.3.338-357)

The critic refers to the ancient concepts of *pneuma* (the breath of life) and *enargeia* (the power of vivid language) in order to stress the capacity of drama to impact the spectators by causing them to forget about the real world and to immerse themselves into a fictional substitute. Not only are the spectators affected by the performance but the actors are also under the spell they cast on the viewers, as is made clear in *Hamlet*.<sup>10</sup>

Good drama is hypnotic. We have seen that plays cause the spectators to ‘forget’ about the real world. – though an early modern audience never quite lost sight of their being in a playhouse especially on cold and rainy days. Suspension of disbelief is not belief. The process in case overcomes the spectators and their enjoyment of the drama depends directly on the success of their surrender to the charm of illusion.<sup>11</sup> In this respect, *Henry V* may be viewed as an anti-*Midsummer Night’s Dream*. As a matter of fact, in Shakespeare’s comedy the incompetent comedians fear that the public might be afraid of the illusion they intend to produce on the stage: ‘And you should do it terribly [roar like a lion], you would fright the Duchess and the ladies, that they would shriek: and that were enough to hang us all,’ Quince says (1.2.70-72). So Bottom and his friends defuse the suspension of disbelief by reminding the spectators that the performance is an illusion. In *Henry V*, the Chorus trades on the public’s capacity to unleash their ‘imaginary forces’ (Prologue 18) and to produce as powerful an illusion as they can: when their eyes see a helmet their minds should see an army (Prologue 13).

The presence of a Chorus that turns up at the beginning of every new act in the Folio version is not conventional. *Pericles* includes one, named Gower, that proposes, as a Prologue, to sing an

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<sup>10</sup> ‘Is it not monstrous,’ Hamlet asks, / ‘that this player here, / But in a fiction, in a dream of passion, / Could force his soul so to his own conceit / That from her working all his visage wann’d, / Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect, / A broken voice, and his whole function suiting / With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing!’ (2.2.553-59).

<sup>11</sup> Some plays are fond of reminding the public that they are attending a play though. For example, in *Twelfth Night*, Fabian declares: ‘If this were played upon a stage, now, I could condemn it as an improbable fiction’ (3.4.125-26).

ancient song to ‘glad [the] ear and please [the] eyes’ of the public (1.4). But the one we find in *Henry V* plays a unique role in that it invites the public to surrender their will: ‘Let us, ciphers to this great account, / On your imaginary forces work’ (Prologue 17-18). This statement is puzzling insofar as the spectators who came to the playhouse to attend the show<sup>12</sup> are sure to ‘know’ how to behave. It sounds as if the Chorus wants the public to become aware of the mechanisms of a spontaneous process that requires no mental effort whatsoever. Moreover these guidelines are not more relevant to *Henry V* than they would be to any other play. *King John*, for example, is a history play including battlefield scenes and yet it features no Chorus. At the beginning of *As You Like It* a Prologue could tell the public to imagine a forest when they see one tree or, in *King Lear*, it could inform them that the bare stage represents an endless stretch of heath. But no such things happen. The presence of the Chorus in *Henry V* is all the more surprising as very few scenes actually take place on the battlefield. The advice given by the Chorus only applies to the opening lines of 3.1 (the siege of Harfleur) and a few sections of Act 4, if necessary at all.<sup>13</sup> The Prologue could be motivated by Shakespeare’s intention to make the spectators aware of the larger process that is about to overwhelm them. In other words, they can watch themselves as the suspension of their disbelief occurs. The spontaneous shift at issue would be made into a conscious attitude and every return of the Chorus would act as a reminder of it.<sup>14</sup> *Henry V* thus makes a point of shedding light on the hypnotic process that stands as the basic requirement of any successful dramatic performance: the magician reveals

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<sup>12</sup> Though as Gurr (2000) and Mullaney (1998) reminded us, a portion of the spectators went to the playhouse for sundry reasons : some were pickpockets, some womanisers, some wanted to be seen, etc.

<sup>13</sup> Even a dozen actors may produce a sense of multitude on the stage by running erratically and shouting their way across the stage – as I experienced as a child in a 1975 production of *Henry V* in Stratford.

<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, at the end of *Richard II*, when the deposed king finds himself alone in his cell, he tries to turn the room into a stage where scenes would be performed: he tries to people the empty cell with a crowd of imaginary characters. But he fails to give his prison the appearance of the real world because no performance is available for him to anchor his thoughts to. No substitute world can be conjured up as suspension of disbelief does not occur: « I have been studying how I may compare / This prison where I live unto the world ; / And, for because the world is populous / And here is not a creature but myself, / I cannot do it. » (5.5, 1-5) Contrary to what happens at the end of *Richard II*, at the beginning of *Henry V*, soul and brain « beget a generation of still-breeding thoughts’ (*Richard II*, 5.5, 1-5).

his trick before he begins his show so that the awareness of the viewers should be optimised. As king Henry V puts it, ‘All things are ready, if our minds be so’ (4.3.71).

We have just seen that the Chorus reveals one of the mechanisms of the suspension of disbelief. What it does not explain is that the acceptation of illusion is propitiated by a specific use of language, especially by the rhythm of the lines that are spoken on the stage. Lawrence-King notes that to be efficient, hypnotic speech must be delivered in a slower-than-normal tempo with downward inflections at the end of sentences.<sup>15</sup> The repetition of lines or keywords also contributes to improving this quality in speech.<sup>16</sup> *Henry V* is punctuated by a long series of ternary sections that provide some mind-rocking melodies, as exemplified below:<sup>17</sup>

- 1.0.7            (Leashed in, like hounds) famine, sword and fire
- 1.2.14           That you should fashion, wrest, or bow your reading
- 1.2.131          With blood and sword and fire, to win your right.

Henry’s powerful line in his Saint Crispin’s speech combines repetition of word with ternary rhythm, together with a crescendo that apotheosises with a repetition of the B sound:

4.3.60 We few, we happy few, we band of brothers.

The tear-compelling description of Falstaff’s death is also punctuated by ternary structures: ‘for after [1] I saw him fumble with the sheets, [2] and play with flowers, [3] and smile upon his

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<sup>15</sup> ‘That strain again,’ Orsino declares in *Twelfth Night*, ‘it had a dying fall’. (1.1.4)

<sup>16</sup> For example, *Richard III* opens with a powerful ‘Now’ which is repeated at the beginning of lines 5 and 10, while a string of ‘Our’ and ‘I’ provides a secondary line of echoes.

<sup>17</sup> See a list of ternary effects in Annex 1 at the end of this chapter.

finger's end, I knew there was but one way,' the Hostess says (2.3.11-13). She reports that the old man said "'God, God, God' three or four times' (16) and the last two sentences of the description also break into three sections:

[1] I put my head into the bed, [2] and felt them, [3] and they were as cold as any stone. [1] I felt to his knees, / [2] and so up-peered and upward, [3] and all was as cold as any stone. (2.3.19-21)

Here classical rhetoric of the kind taught in English grammar schools almost amounts to a 'special effect' that reinforces the hypnotic power of *Henry V*.

### **Looking through and beyond**

The presence of the Chorus, which sets *Henry V* apart from the other plays by Shakespeare, thus helps the spectators tune in to the show. They should not be disappointed by the paucity of the stage that limps after reality, it says. The opening wish 'for a muse of fire, that would ascend / The brightest heaven of invention' is puzzling (Prologue 1-2): as a matter of fact, anything else but invention would dissolve the play. Without invention, the prince would *play* what he *is*. Interestingly, when Henry the king plays 'Harry le Roi,' in 4.1.48 – that is to say *what he is* in French – or when he plays the part of the victimised sovereign in the traitors' scene (2.2), his performances do not go as planned.<sup>18</sup> Though 'all the world's a stage,' as Jaques proclaims in *As You Like It*,<sup>19</sup> the stage must remain a stage and the actors should play what *they are not* in real life.<sup>20</sup> After asking for pardon for the supposed unworthiness of the stage (Prologue 8-15), the Chorus calls upon the 'imaginary forces' (18) of the spectators who are

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<sup>18</sup> As Henry Le Roy he only succeeds in antagonizing his own soldiers. The traitors' scene also reveals the extent of his hypocrisy: we learn, for instance, that Henry asked the traitors to claim the function of commissioners, which made the situation worse for them.

<sup>19</sup> 2.7.139.

<sup>20</sup> *Le Véritable saint Genest* by Jean de Rotrou (1647) trades on the confusion between character and actor.



being taught how to *look* at the show – that they must transform (‘trance-form’?) into a larger world – and how to listen to the words.<sup>21</sup> As a matter of fact, not only are the public invited to *see* what they *cannot see* but they are also invited to *think* they *see* what the text says and cannot *show*: ‘*Think* when we *talk* of horses that you *see* them / Printing their proud hooves i’t’h’receiving earth.’ (26-27) Like the horses’ hooves that are imprinted in the receiving earth, the spoken words must imprint their marks in the spectators’ receiving minds. Canterbury carries this demonstration even further: the listeners should do as if they could hear the words spoken by the hypnotic speech: ‘Hear him but reason in divinity’, ‘Hear him debate’ and ‘List’ he says about the absent king (1.1.38, 41,43). The imperfect theatrical show the Chorus has in mind consists of flickering flames the public must mentally fan into an imaginary fire. Its wish is a visual synecdoche: what the Prologue proposes is a progress from the imperfect and incomplete part to the imaginary whole. It is a rise to perfection the Chorus says it cannot reach; but the public can succeed where the players are bound to fail.

The Chorus teaches an unnecessary lesson in spectatorship. Not only is the lesson unnecessary but it is also quite incomplete. As a matter of fact, the process it presents is just one of the various manners in which the suspension of disbelief operates: no explanation is provided for the dramatic ‘close-ups’ that punctuate the play, namely Falstaff’s death (2.3.10-22), the look of fierceness on the face of Henry’s soldiers (3.1.5-17), and the death of York and Suffolk (4.6.7-27).<sup>22</sup> For example, the Chorus does not explain that when the spectators hear about a terrible eye, an overwhelming brow, set teeth and a wide nostril (3.1.11-15), they must piece together an entire face that becomes every soldier’s visage. Although Grandpré asserts that ‘description cannot suit itself in words’ (4.2.53), even fragmentary descriptions can prove

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<sup>21</sup> This process will be echoed by the effect Henry’s words produce on his listeners as reported by the Bishop of Canterbury: ‘List his discourse of war, and you shall hear / A fearful battle rendered you in music’ (1.1.43-4). These words brand Henry as ‘theatrical’.

<sup>22</sup> We may notice that the death of Bardolph and Nym does not even deserve a description in the play. Four words spoken by the boy only account for their fate: ‘they are both hanged’ (4.4. 57).

successful in giving renewed life to past events. The Chorus does not explain that duplication and hypotyposis go hand in hand in dramatic alchemy. In *Le Détail: pour une histoire rapprochée de la peinture*, Daniel Arasse accounts for a practice that can shed light on the process advocated by the Chorus and that resonates throughout the play. The French critic mentions the way Catholics should behave towards the images representing the wounds of Christ. Indeed, devotional books recommended that the faithful should kiss these mouth-shaped figures while imagining they were Jesus's real wounds (Arasse 85).

This attitude cannot fail to recall the description of York kissing Suffolk's gashes before he kissed his lips in 4.6. The bloody wounds are described as 'yawning' (14) and the soldier kissed them *as if* they were mouths. York then spoke to his dead friend *as if* he were still alive. What is involved here is self-deceit. Exeter's report aims to make the listeners re-enact the scene mentally. His short narrative presents a process that runs contrary to the one advocated by the Prologue. Instead of multiplying what is seen by dividing one man into a thousand (Prologue 24), Exeter's description requires that Suffolk's corpse should be seen through a magnifying glass: the English lord mentions his beard, the gashes, his face, his hand, his neck and lips. The spectators who were taught by the Prologue how to divide a man into a thousand must now be able to turn a series of close ups into a single man.

Exeter's account of the death of the two English noblemen contributes to making *Henry V* a laboratory of mental sight. While the Prologue invites the spectators to *see beyond the performance* the way '*through [...] paly flames / Each battle sees the other's umbered face*' (4.0.9, my emphasis), Henry demands that his soldiers should not look retrospectively *at* the battle; they should look *through* it and see the wonderful<sup>23</sup> work of God. Their success is not theirs, he insists, like John of Lancaster in the Forest of Gaultres,<sup>24</sup> it is God's achievement: 'O

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<sup>23</sup> The adjective 'wonderful' is given pride of place in *Henry V*: see Exeter just before Henry speaks against rejoicing over the victory (4.8.104).

<sup>24</sup> 'God, and not we, hath safely fought today.' 2 *Henry IV*, 4.1.347.

God, Thy arm was here! / And not to us, but to Thy arm alone / Ascribe we all.’ (4.8.98-100).

Both the spectators in the playhouse and the victorious soldiers should ‘look through and beyond,’ like faithful believers worshipping pious images.<sup>25</sup>

The idea of a gaze that sees through things – that is to say a *perspective* look<sup>26</sup> – is a central feature of the character of Henry V: it is epitomized by his desire to *feel* legitimate. The king questions his own legitimacy given that his father usurped the crown he is now wearing. *Alieno in loco haud stabile regnum est*, Lycus says in Seneca’s *Hercules Furens*.<sup>27</sup> Like the spectators in the playhouse to whom the Chorus teaches how to transcend illusion, Henry wants to regard as true what he knows is not and will never be true. His constant references to God and to His miraculous achievements (the unmasking of the traitors, the victory over the outnumbering French) are means for him to appear as the Lord’s instrument and thus as some sort of saint. Did not the bishop of Canterbury say that ‘consideration like an angel c[a]me’ (1.1, 28) to reform the young Hal and turn his body into ‘a paradise / To envelop and contain celestial spirits’? (30-31). If Henry succeeds in talking himself into feeling that he is Christ’s soldier – *miles Christi* – he will rest assured that his cause is right and that his victory is a sign of his legitimacy.<sup>28</sup> As a matter of fact, those who can convince themselves and their followers that they are urged into action by divine Providence, that their ‘War is His beadle, war is His vengeance’ (4.1.152), appear unmistakably as being touched by Grace. This is the reason why Henry is bent on making the unmasking of the traitors and his victory miraculous. In this respect he seems to be more pious – or is it a further sign of his hypocrisy?<sup>29</sup> – than the bishop of

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<sup>25</sup> In *La vraie image*, Hans Belting explains that the faithful must look *through* the icon in order to perceive the divinity it stands for. By so doing they practise self-deceit (Belting 45).

<sup>26</sup> At the very beginning of *La Perspective comme forme symbolique*, Erwin Panofsky says: ‘Item *perspectiva* est le mot latin signifiant vision traversante. C’est en ces termes que Dürer a cherché à cerner le concept de perspective’ (Panofsky 37).

<sup>27</sup> ‘A usurped throne is rickety’ (2.344-45).

<sup>28</sup> On the continent the Holy Inquisition used a similar strategy to ‘prove’ that the women they had burnt alive were real witches: the fact that the Holy Inquisition burnt them indicated that they were real witches, they said. A holy institution could not be wrong.

<sup>29</sup> Etymology reminds us interestingly that the *hypocrite* is the one who ‘hides under.’ [*hupocritês*] In ancient Greece, this word referred to the actor ‘hiding under’ the character he incarnates.

Canterbury who declared, as early as 1.1.67, that ‘miracles are ceased.’ The spectators know better than the apprentice thaumaturge and his observers: they have been warned against belief in miracles by a pair of holy plotters.

Henry’s vain efforts to see ‘perspectively’ are interrupted abruptly by diplomacy. Interestingly, he finally decides to ignore the maiden cities lying in the distance because Katherine’s body is standing in the way. Instead of seeing the cities by *looking through* the ‘French fair maid’ (5.2.284-85), he bypasses perspective and sees the woman *as* incarnating the cities. Katherine’s opaque body now stops his glance and precludes the hitherto systematic prismatic perceptions. ‘You see them perspectively, the cities turned into a maid,’ (5.2.286) the French king says. What the French king calls ‘perspective’ actually corresponds to the end of perspective as it was defined in the play and to a return to a world in which things *are* what they *are*: what eyes perceive no longer stands for things that must be imagined. The mental construction advocated by the Chorus must now be deconstructed and give way to the acceptance of the ‘unworthy scaffold.’

### **Henry, the hypnotiser**

Henry V does not only turn his military victory – achieved with stratagem rather than without<sup>30</sup> – into a miracle. As early as 1.1, the bishops highlighted Henry’s uncommon and somewhat mysterious capacity to seduce his listeners: Canterbury uses twice ‘Hear him’, then ‘List’ to evoke his talent as a speaker, as if the absent king’s voice could be heard (38-43). He adds that Henry can even turn the chaos of warfare into sweet harmony and, like Orpheus, produce irresistible music (44). The way the clergyman speaks about the charismatic king seems to indicate that he happened to find himself under the sovereign’s spell. Henry, he says, has a

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<sup>30</sup> See 4.8.100.

capacity to produce an ‘inward wish’ in the hearers (39). Even the air is seduced by his speeches (48), the ‘all-admiring’ (39) bishop says.

Henry’s words spur his troops into action and he even manages to turn a major weakness – being outnumbered – into a major advantage: the fewer on the battlefield the better. This is due to his talent as a speaker and his eloquent speech in 4.3 is no doubt one of the moments when Michael Goldman feels the text must be read out loudly. The seven occurrences of the name Crispian (or Crispin) are instrumental in rousing the hearers and making them feel indestructible, while the word ‘Day’ which is repeated ten times, anchors them simultaneously in the moment and in the future when the day will become a yearly celebration. All those who fight this battle will be brothers, the king promises, and they will be remembered eternally as heroes. The words have a direct impact on the soldiers who feel regenerated by their power. Rhetoric is in full swing and the king even proves far *too* convincing: after wishing they were joined by ‘one ten thousand of those men in England / That do not work today’ (4.3.17-18) Westmorland is caught up in the spiral of the sovereign’s invigorating speech and wishes he and the king were alone for good to fight the French army. ‘God’s will, my liege, would you and I alone, / Without more help, could fight this royal battle!’ (4.3.73-74) Henry has to temper his subordinate’s excessive enthusiasm: ‘Why, now thou hast unwished five thousand men, / Which likes me better than to wish us one’ (4.3.76-7). Henry playfully mocks his cousin, while also acknowledging in a swift return to reality that for all his soaring rhetoric five thousand men are yet a better option than a couple.

Though Henry is portrayed as a powerful hypnotizer he is also willing to be hypnotised. We have seen that in 1.1 he wants to hear reassuring words about the rightfulness of his claim. But the long speech spoken by the bishop (1.2.33-115) actually produces awkward music: the demonstration is a winding flow of words and the listeners – both on stage and in the pit – are

sure to be baffled. Yet the rambling demonstration causes the walls of Henry's scruples to collapse: it looks as if the bulwark that protected the citadel of the king's supposedly scrupulous mind had been blown up by the bishop's lexical mines. We cannot exclude that the sovereign is just pretending that he has been convinced – hypnotised – by the bishop's demonstration. The whole scene is a play performed before the Lords who were supposed to attend the transformation of their sovereign. The clergyman's speech is a mock demonstration of the power of words: it succeeds only because the listener had decided beforehand that he would be convinced: 'I would be resolved,' he said tellingly (1.2.4). Henry's impatient question: 'May I with right and conscience make this claim?' (1.2.96) indicates that he is disappointed by the other man's inefficiency. Henry does not need lengthy explanations but a call to action. After Canterbury's second speech which now focuses on emulation rather than on a rational demonstration, and encouraged by the support of Ely, Exeter and Westmorland, Henry finally declares: 'Now we are well resolved.' (1.2.222) and a bit later 'Now are we well prepared' (234). The king sounds sincere but the public may be well aware of the artificiality of this claim, especially the well-read spectators among them. As a matter of fact, in *Utopia* (1516), Sir Thomas More mentions an ordinary strategy used by the Utopians to destabilise their enemies. If they fail to get a brother of their enemies' king to claim his crown, 'they raise up the people that be next neighbours and borderers to their enemies, and them they set in their necks under the colour of some old title of right, such as kings do never lack' (More 129). In other words, the use of an old title to assert one's rights over a kingdom was presented as a regular and an unmistakable decoy. Accordingly, one may suggest that Henry V just wants to hear the bishop say that this claim is right and legitimate. Whether it is or not does not make a great difference and an aspect of his transformation may betray its excessive theatricality. The shift from 'I' to 'We' enhances his inner transformation, as if the bishop had planted the necessary 'inward

wish' in him (1.1.39). The king actually pieced out the bishop's imperfect speech with his thoughts (Prologue, 23), working on the 'imaginary forces' of the people around him.

Words can build mental walls or blow up bulwarks. They also have the capacity to open gates that were designed as protections. The siege of Harfleur is conjured up by the king in a forceful 34-line speech (3.1). Then the assault stands as a background to the conversation between Macmorris, Llewellyn and Gower (3.3)<sup>31</sup> before '[t]he town sounds a parley' (3.3.74).<sup>32</sup> After hearing the description of the atrocities Henry intends to inflict to the population,<sup>33</sup> the governor actually surrenders to the enemy. Words defeat swords: the enemy is actually defeated by a verbal siege. 'What is it then to me...?' Henry asks repeatedly (3.4.15, 19) as if he hammered the words into the listener's mind. The final part of this speech is a masterpiece in the use of *enargeia*:<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, you men of Harfleur,  
Take pity of your town and of your people  
Whiles yet my soldiers are in my command,  
Whiles yet the cool and temperate wind of grace  
O'erblows the filthy and contagious clouds  
Of heady murder, spoil and villainy.  
If not, why, in a moment look to see  
The blind and bloody soldier with foul hand  
Defile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters,

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<sup>31</sup> Pascal Brioist reports that the siege lasted for more than one month and that 2000 English soldiers were killed (Brioist 15).

<sup>32</sup> Gower's line implies that Henry's threatening speech is quite unnecessary.

<sup>33</sup> We may also suggest that the Governor does not hear a single word of this long speech. He appears only in 3.3, 44 and Henry might have been speaking alone, addressing a closed gate and, indirectly, his – fascinated – troops all the while. Like an actor on the stage, Henry could be delivering his speech to a non-visible public. The French are his direct yet unseen addressees while the English troop are the visible yet indirect addressees of his show.

<sup>34</sup> *Enargeia* is the capacity of a text to conjure up vivid images in the reader's mind.

Your fathers taken by the silver beards,  
 And their most reverend heads dash'd to the walls,  
 Your naked infants spitted upon pikes,  
 Whiles the mad mothers with their howls confused  
 Do break the clouds, as did the wives of Jewry  
 At Herod's bloody-hunting slaughtermen.  
 What say you? Will you yield, and this avoid?  
 Or, guilty in defence, be thus destroyed? (3.4.27-43)

The words Boy uses to mock Pistol in 3.2.29 may be used to describe Henry's strategy. Indeed, the king has 'a killing tongue and a quiet sword.' The sovereign describes his army as an irresistible storm that will sweep the city away. The description of the horrid scenes is unsurprisingly introduced by the words: 'If not, in a moment *look to see...*' (33) that refer back to the Chorus's opening advice. And the easy-to-remember images flow in, most of them synecdoche: the rapist's foul hand, the maid's defiled locks, the old man's silver beard – not to mention the impaled babes and the shrieking women. Alliterations abound ('blind and bloody soldiers' 34, 'spitted upon pikes' 38, 'mad mothers' 39) and the sounds echo the cries of the women ('shrill-shrieking daughters' 35). The descriptions are precise enough to enable the listeners to picture the tableaux mentally: colours are mentioned ('the silver beards' 36) and the innocent babies are pictured naked (38). This scene makes it clear that 'an eye may profit by a tongue,' as Oliver puts it in *As You Like it*. (4.3, 78) The mention of the mad mothers 'breaking the clouds' (40) as they call on the powers above to witness their unbearable suffering provides a climax in the mental picture and an echo to the 'filthy and contagious clouds / Of heady murder, spoil and villainy' mentioned before (31-32). In addition, Henry is excellent at turning the tables: he makes the Frenchmen feel responsible for the massacre to come. He 'transforms' the besieged army into culprits: 'Will you yield, and this avoid? / Or guilty in defence



be thus destroyed?’ (42-43). The final couplet rhyme (‘avoid’ / ‘destroyed’) and the emphasis on the last word (‘destroyed’) reassert one last time Henry’s ultimatum to the Governor. The King’s powerful words work efficiently on the Governor’s ‘imaginary forces’: it looks as if the Frenchman were following scrupulously the Chorus’s introductory advice. The final decision to let the English in seems to be propitiated by the English king’s emphasis on the image of the opening of gates: he mentions the gates of the city (3), the gates of mercy (10) and in a dense image the gates of conscience and of Hell (13). This may be interpreted as some deft use of the art of suggestion.

One character manages to open the gate of Henry’s heart. Exeter’s account of the deaths of York and Suffolk in 4.6 reaches a secret part of the English king who suddenly reveals his hitherto concealed humanity.<sup>35</sup> As the French philosopher Alain puts it ‘it is not the corpse that conjures up the emotion, it is the emotion that conjures up the corpse’ (Alain 126).<sup>36</sup> Shakespeare knew that to conjure up the object, you must first recapture the right emotion. As he was well aware of the primacy of emotions, the playwright decided *not* to represent the scene on the stage. The spectators and the king coalesce: tears well up to their eyes. The description of the two lords’ death is riveting. The apposition in the first line, ‘In which array, *brave soldier*, doth he lie’ (4.6.7), sets the tempo of the whole speech: it must be slow. The triple alliteration in L (‘lie / Larding the plain’) and the repetition of the rime (‘lie / lies’) reinforce the hypnotic solemnity of the evocation. The description combines words and images, the verticality of grace and the weight of the corpses, the bliss of marriage and the despair of death. What makes this scene fascinating is the visible – and contagious – effect of Exeter’s speech on the king: overwhelmed by Exeter’s description of himself crying over his friend’s corpse, the king has to fight back his own tears:

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<sup>35</sup> Henry’s humanity surfaces also after Montjoy, who has come to speak of ransom, has turned away: ‘I fear thou wilt once more come again for a ransom,’ he says in an aside. (4.3.128)

<sup>36</sup> Alain also says: ‘What we never see is the truth of fiction’, he adds, ‘and what we could see is subtly reduced to the memory of a shadow, which is the shadow of a shadow.’ My translation. (Alain 126)

I blame you not,  
For hearing this I must perforce compound  
With wilful eyes, or they will issue too. (4.6.32-34)

Henry's tears show that he is under a spell. Interestingly, Lawrence-King indicates that 'another sign of hypnosis is increased lacrimation.' (Lawrence-King 11). This contagious process does not fail to affect the spectators both on stage and in the playhouse in a chain reaction. Those who are standing in the playhouse are doubly affected by this report: they are overcome by Exeter's description and Henry's tearful reception of it. The gates of compassion are besieged and defeated by Exeter's powerful words.

The king would love to use a similar strategy to move Katherine to love. In courtship, words are used to get the protections of the beloved to collapse, as Dom Juan explains in Molière's play.<sup>37</sup> But Henry has no access to the mincing words that could enable him to reach her heart: 'I know no way to mince it in love,' he acknowledges (5.2.122). So the bishop of Canterbury was probably wrong when he spoke about Henry's capacity to produce 'sweet and honeyed sentences' (1.1.50). Jean-Marie and Angéla Maguin interestingly suggest that Henry's father, Henry IV, killed poetry when he killed Richard II (Maguin 403-404). In addition, Henry can no longer rely on 'the venom of [his] looks' (5.2.18) to seduce Katherine insofar as peacetime has taken off the edge of his glances. Asking a woman what words are susceptible to seduce her is certainly not a workable strategy, yet it is what Henry does:

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<sup>37</sup> Molière, *Dom Juan*, acte I scène 2. « On goûte une douceur extrême à réduire par cent hommages le cœur d'une jeune beauté, à voir de jour en jour les petits progrès qu'on y fait; à combattre par des transports, par des larmes, et des soupirs, l'innocente pudeur d'une âme, qui a peine à rendre les armes, à forcer pied à pied toutes les petites résistances qu'elle nous oppose, à vaincre les scrupules, dont elle se fait un honneur, et la mener doucement, où nous avons envie de la faire venir. »

Will you vouchsafe to teach a soldier terms  
Such as will enter at a lady's ear  
And plead his love-suit to her gentle heart? (5.2. 99-101)

The barrier of language does not help. Despite this obstacle, Katherine understands that the king is a flatterer: '*O bon Dieu, les langues des hommes sont pleines de tromperies!*' she says (5.2.112-3). So Henry goes straight to the point and says: 'I love you' (123) and proposes a mercantile deal: 'So clap hands and a bargain' (125). Katherine does not accept the deal: she can feel that the apprentice lover has not heaved his heart into his mouth.<sup>38</sup> So Henry fails to do with Katherine what he did with Harfleur: he cannot talk her into opening her gates and surrendering. The brief exchange between the two Kings in 5.2 makes the parallel between seduction and a siege clear:

KING. And you may, some of you, thank love for my blindness, who cannot see  
many a fair French city for one fair French maid that stands in my way.  
FRENCH KING. Yes, my lord, you see them perspectively, the cities turned into  
a maid, for they are all girdled with maiden walls that war hath never entered.  
(283-88)

As he cannot seduce with words, Henry decides to threaten and to show his restlessness. The end of the play presents a final twist in the art of spectatorship. Unlike the spectators who accept to see a prancing horse when they hear about one – a spoken word conjuring up an imaginary horse – Henry accepts to forget about the maiden cities by focusing his eyes on a woman – the

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<sup>38</sup> It is what Cordelia said she could not do in *King Lear* (I.1.91-92).

real woman suppresses the imagined towns. It sounds as if he has learnt an inverted lesson in spectatorship. Eventually he can see what he *sees* (a woman next to him) rather than what is fantasised about (maiden cities to be conquered). But this process is not an illusion: it is an illusion of an illusion. It is a deal that relies on fear and politics rather than on the king's imaginary forces.

### **Conclusion: the apple and the worm**

The sweet tyranny of *Henry V* requires that the spectators should see in their minds what they cannot see with their eyes. The Chorus keeps reminding them of the constant mental efforts they must make if they want to enjoy the play and to turn successfully the ciphers that walk the stage into a great account (Prologue 17). Like Henry who tries to wriggle out of the quicksand of his inherited guilt, the spectators must compensate for the imperfection of the 'unworthy scaffold' (Prologue 10) by elaborating a worthy illusion in their minds. The English soldiers are forced to observe this rule. As a matter of fact, they are warned against saying the practical truth about the fight:<sup>39</sup> they must ascribe the victory to God only and never mention their own bravery if they don't want to be executed (4.8.106-108). The lie is official that warps the minds. This is coercive hypnosis. As for the guilt-ridden king, he wants to be talked into feeling legitimate. To get the necessary 'inward wish' (1.1.39) that will lead him to start 'with conscience' a legitimate war in France, he endows the bishop's words with fake performative power. The king who can save lives or sentence men to death with his divine breath pretends he was trapped by such mighty magic. These aspects enhance the importance of self-deceit in *Henry V*. Both the spectators – in the playhouse and on the stage – and the manipulative characters are invited to see through and beyond the events the play accounts for. Yet we have seen that the inner performances that punctuate *Henry V* were devised by Henry who asserts

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<sup>39</sup> The victory was notoriously achieved 'with stratagem', contrary to what Henry declares (4.8.100).

that they were actually devised by God. So Shakespeare weaves and unweaves the world of *Henry V* as the play unfolds. It appears as a prismatic lens<sup>40</sup> giving access to a ‘worthier’ dimension lying beyond it. Like the English king, the spectators are finally invited to drop the deforming lens before they go back home. A flesh and blood virgin replaces the maiden cities ‘that war hath never entered’ (5.2.288) and the characters on the stage become actors in front of the spectators who are clapped out of their hypnotic trance. From a distance, *Henry V* can be perceived as a beautiful apple whose glossy skin catches the light and bedazzles the hungry observers. But the playwright decided to place a worm in the apple. The attentive readers can analyse and assess the damages caused by the worm: the glorious image of the king is tarnished, the epic tone is undermined by antimilitarist statements, the harmonious strains they expected are replaced by jarring notes, the Christian king also proves to be a tyrant somehow. As for the spectators in the playhouse, they admire the fruit they are eating and just feel on leaving the theatre that there was something acid in it. The hypnotic power of the words that entered their bodies had numbed their senses and all that remains of this bittersweet experience is a strange taste in their mouths. One may legitimately wonder why Shakespeare decided to present a beautiful though cankered fruit. No final answer can be provided but one may suggest, with E.W. Tillyard, that ‘Shakespeare took a perverse delight in writing up something he had begun to hate’ (Tillyard 313). After all, through a few splits in the bristling armour of Henry the Great Shakespeare may have intended to allow the spectators to glimpse the skin of Henry the Pig. As Shakespeare seems to be saying through Henry – who may be commenting on himself as a character after attending silently the performance given by Llewellyn and Gower in act 4 scene 1 – ‘Thou it appears a little out of fashion, there is care and valour in this Welshman.’ (4.1.80-81)

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<sup>40</sup> I would not call this approach *anamorphic* insofar as no ‘right’ vision is deformed, contrary to what anamorphoses require. In *Henry V*, parallel contradictory views are displayed simultaneously. Yet what *Henry V* and anamorphoses share is a common capacity to make the spectators aware of their subjectivity. See Peyré 12.

**ANNEX: ternary effects**

- 1.0.7 (Leashed in, like hounds) famine, sword and fire
- 1.1.55-8 His companies unlettered, rude and shallow  
His hours filled up with riots, banquets, sports,  
And never noted in him any study,  
Any retirement, any sequestration
- 1.2.14 That you should fashion, wrest, or bow your reading
- 1.2.30 For you will hear, note, and believe in heart
- 1.2.34 That own your selves, your lives and services
- 1.2.119 ELY ... my thrice-puissant liege
- 1.2.124 They know your grace hath cause, and means , and might
- 1.2.131 CANTERBURY With blood and sword and fire, to win your right.
- 1.2.180 EXETER For government, though high and low and lower
- 2.1.77. PISTOL. Base is the slave that pays.
- 2.2. 55 KING When capital crimes, chewed, swallowed, and digested,
- 2.4.19 Should be maintained, assembled and collected
- 3.1.40 Cry ‘God for Harry, England and Saint George!’
- 3.4.11 KING. And the fleshed soldier, rough and hard of heart,
- 3.4.32 KING. Of heady murder, spoil and villainy.
- 3.4.17/18/21. KING: complexion / desolation / violation.



[http://www.theatre-classique.fr/pages/programmes/edition.php?t=../documents/MOLIERE\\_DOMJUAN.xml](http://www.theatre-classique.fr/pages/programmes/edition.php?t=../documents/MOLIERE_DOMJUAN.xml)

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