

# “A little less than kin, and more than kind”: kinship and motherhood in Shakespeare’s *Henry V*

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## ABSTRACT

Shakespeare’s theatre addresses the problem of survival in a world on the brink of collapse. Since traditional consanguinity – including maternal ties, framed by the legal maxim *mater semper certa* – proves no guarantee of stability, survival and agency are achieved through violent conquest rather than familial bonds. Where kinship is divorced from kindness and the care of offspring, justice and safety are also lacking, with tragic consequences. Yet *Henry V* allows for a different reading, drawing on the critical work of Donna Haraway. In the play, imaginary mother figures, though not physically present, seem to instill in warring men new modes of survival based on the cultivation of deliberate connections with beings worthy of care. This foreshadows the creation of alter-communities and alter-families, forging kinship without biological reproduction – making kin without making babies. While real mothers, like Princess Katherine in the play’s final act, remain trapped in a dead-end world, other figurations of motherhood can chart an escape. They provide inclusive spaces for achieving self-knowledge through Haraway’s concepts of ‘symbiogenetic kinship’ and ‘response-ability’. *Henry V*, with its lights and shadows, thus becomes a site for narrating alternative forms of kinship and reimagining survival through post-human entanglements and symbiotic assemblages. In this reading, Shakespeare and Haraway shed light on each other: both take our ailing ecosphere as a starting point to propose innovative, inspiring approaches to ‘staying with the trouble’ – facing and enduring adversity in order to envision a better future. Their work highlights the transformative potential of forging non-biological bonds in the face of hardship.

## Keywords

Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, Donna Haraway, mother, kin-making, posthuman

## 1. Shakespeare in the “New Normal”

It is undeniable that “the way [...] we interpret Shakespeare’s plays [...] [has] real consequences as well as real causes in [our] present” (Rackin 2016, 14). We are now living on the edges of the post-pandemic ‘new normal’ and have to rethink our fragile transcultures to develop a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of our world. Donna Haraway’s provocative motto “Make Kin Not Babies” (Haraway 2016, 5-6) encourages a broader understanding of kinship that goes beyond genetic relatedness to encompass multiple forms of relationships and responsibilities, promoting a more inclusive and ecological approach. It was after reading *Hamlet* that she first thought of the incongruous intersections between the words ‘kin’ and ‘kind’, and we believe that an idea inspired by Shakespeare can be used to engage with a Shakespearean play in a critically original way. Shakespeare, after all, is a

perfect spyglass for looking at our present, and possibly at the future, while dealing with the past.

*Henry V* treats moral and political issues related to leadership, war, national identity, language, gender, and historical representation. My contribution proposes to interpret it as survival literature because it discusses the pursuit of continuing to exist and thrive in the face of challenges and adverse conditions, via forceful action as well as adaptation and perseverance. At the heart of the play lies the journey of its eponymous character from a carefree youngster to a revered king and a military hero, a journey that grapples with moral dilemmas. Depending on the way we interpret the play, Henry's renowned Saint Crispin's Day speech resonates with various meanings:

We few, we happy few, we *band of brothers*.  
For he today that sheds his blood with me  
*Shall be my brother* [italics added]. (291: IV.3.60-62)<sup>1</sup>

This passage contains a reference to brotherhood, which, according to critics, may be deemed as either inclusive or partial, formal or substantial. A reading of this brotherhood, much in line with Haraway, can be provided by maintaining that it has the power to instill in belligerent men versions of survival based on the promotion of connectedness and willful interaction. Surprisingly, the Shakespearean language of war makes room for expressions of "sympoiesis", that is, an invitation to "make-with" each other, to build elective tentacular networks and jumbled identity assemblages, through deliberate mingling and advocated contamination (Haraway 2016, 58-98).

*Henry V* challenges conventional notions of kinship by portraying relationships that transcend biological ties and emphasizing the forging of exogenous bonds through shared responsibility. Drawing on Haraway's coveted creation of alter-communities, it is argued that Shakespeare anticipated the vital need for a survivalist discourse that has more recently expanded across multiple disciplines to include issues such as forced migration, ethnic cleansing, and climate change crises. While Haraway and Shakespeare operate in entirely different intellectual traditions and historical contexts, there are interesting connections that can be drawn between their works.

This essay explores how Haraway's concept of 'symbiogenetic kinship' provides a theoretical framework for understanding the alternative forms of kin-making within the play's narrative, and how Shakespeare anticipates the thorny issues of sustainable survival in an unjust and troubled ecosphere. Moreover, Haraway's concept of 'situated knowledge' seems closely related to Shakespeare's vision of motherhood. The mother's perspective becomes a way of generating care, responsibility, and relational thinking in a world marked by ecological and social crises.

The idea of survival associated with new ways of ‘becoming-with’ informs the texture of the play because of the looming figures of fantasied mothers, who are capable of inculcating a relational awareness into the narrow scope of a male-dominated world. These shadowy mothers have no actual presence on stage; they are just spectral figures, aptly conjured up as the carriers of a broadened perspective on humanity. When Adele Clarke asks “who – which women and which mothers – get to own their bodies and their children” (2018, 20), she calls for a rejection of the “intensely racialized and classed [...] dynamics” typical of both past and present history. Similarly, in Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, this maternal spectrality becomes the origin of inclusive communities capable of caring for present and future generations (Clarke 2018, 28) by fostering “other-than-biogenetic kindred” (Haraway 2018, 69).

The topicality of motherhood can, of course, be traced to the historical context of early modern England in which the issue became highly contentious (Adelman 1992). It intersected questions of power, religion, and the stability of the monarchy, as exemplified by the intertwined fates of Elizabeth I and Mary Stuart (Mazzola 2000). There was widespread ambivalence about real and imagined mothers in relation to the survival of the royal dynasty and to the definition of national identity.

Elizabeth had created a sort of personal myth associating herself with legendary virgins like Diana, the goddess huntress, and Mary, the mother of Christ (Hackett 1995); unlike the latter, however, the ‘Virgin Queen’ had remained unmarried and childless, so that her position in the patriarchy posed challenges and uncertainties regarding succession. She strategically used her unmarried status to her advantage, positioning herself as the caring mother of her country: the epitome of purity, dedication to the state, and unwavering commitment to her nation. Her Catholic cousin, Mary Stuart, threatened her Protestant rule since she had a legitimate claim to the English throne, which made her a focal point of several conspiracies. The most striking example of what it meant, in that context, to be kin but not kind, as in the famous quote from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* retrieved by Haraway, was probably Elizabeth’s imprisonment and sentence to death of her cousin, allegedly because of her implication in one of those plots. Mary had to yield to her opponent, but symbolically she triumphed as a mother: her only son, James, would later ascend the throne of England, marking the rise of the Stuart dynasty.

In *Henry V*, figurations of motherhood, as well as the oblique imagery of kin-making springing from them, belong to the reign of imagination rather than to the hard core of reality. They are set outside or, at most, on the edge of history; when they break in, they take the shape of a potential which, while promising, can hardly be fully developed. Eventually, at the end of the play, when a victorious Henry courts Princess Katherine, the future mother of his son, it becomes clear that the real world in fact betrays expectations: one might then say that human reality is proving difficult to reconcile with posthuman visions. Or rather, if one opts for

a more nuanced understanding, as suggested here, this can be read as an invitation to adopt a continuum perspective that encompasses both limits and potentials, hopes and fears – humanity and posthumanism.

Several studies on ‘Shakespeare and Posthumanism’ in fact feel the need to re-define their field of inquiry. In his introduction to *Posthumanist Shakespeares*, Herbrechter, for instance, maintains that he does “not want to be dogmatic about the resurfacing of the human and humanism”; he then aims “to show ‘care’ for the human, humanness, humanity but also to embrace the new plurality and the new questions that are put to humanism, anti-humanism, posthumanism, even transhumanism alike: questions of human survival” (Herbrechter 2012, 4-5). To me, this looks much like an overhaul of the original critical perspective. Braidotti described posthumanism as “the historical moment that [marked] the end of the opposition between Humanism and anti-humanism” (Braidotti 2013, 37); now, paraphrasing her compelling argument, one could argue that the new normal may well be the historical moment that marks the end of the opposition between humanist and posthumanist trends, taken as distinctive and mutually exclusive.

After all, as some critics maintain, “posthumanist does not imply a simple turning away from, [...], but rather a continued ‘working through’ [...] of humanism” (Herbrechter 2012, 3); “it is inevitable that with ‘the invention of the human’ the posthuman as one of his or her ‘others’ also [...] [became] thinkable” (Boehrer 2012, 58). The early modern period did much to both shape and challenge the idea of the human. Shakespeare, the preeminent offspring of that period, seems to suggest that what we now call ‘posthuman’ might simply mean ‘more human’ – at least ‘more humane’, acting with greater compassion, empathy, and care for others – rather than ‘more-than-human’.

## 2. Troublesome Fathers and Looming Mothers

In *Henry V*, a female progenitor plays a major role, though she is absent from the stage. This foremother is no less important than male ancestors insofar as she provides solutions to the problems posed by men. Father figures are presented as troublemakers, starting from the boisterous and comedic Falstaff, whose influence had guided Prince Hal during his wild and irresponsible youth, but who must be kept at a distance when Henry becomes king. While Falstaff is dying of a broken heart because of the ungratefulness of his former friend, Henry must come to terms with his legacy, which earned him a bad reputation in France and elsewhere. Moreover, he has to cope with another uneasy paternal inheritance: that of late King Henry IV, a usurper.

Burdened with his father’s sin, Henry needs to prove himself virtuous through his own actions, in the prescribed path of Protestant ethics.<sup>2</sup> Where fathers have failed, a foremother comes to his rescue: Isabella of France, the mother of his ancestor, the Black Prince Edward

III. Isabella was the origin of the glorious war that Henry is about to resume, as Edward III had claimed the French crown through his mother's lineage. To Henry, the newly begun war with France is truly a matter of survival; he seeks counsel from the Archbishop of Canterbury, who explains that the prohibition of female inheritance inscribed in the Salic Law (Tokumi 1999) does not apply to the situation at hand:

Yet their own authors faithfully affirm  
That the land Salic is in Germany,  
Between the floods of Sala and of Elbe,  
Where Charles the Great, having subdued the Saxons,  
There left behind and settled certain French,  
Who, holding in disdain the German women  
For some dishonest manners of their life,  
Established then this law, to wit, no female  
Should be inheritrix in Salic land. (132-3: I.2.43-51)

The law was first enacted to reinforce the notion that some mothers were degraded beings who lacked the competence to manage inheritance effectively, a notion that current critics would recognize as emblematic of social injustice. The Archbishop retraces several instances of descent from the female line in the genealogy of the French monarchy: not only does this confirm the legitimacy of Henry's claim, it can also be seen as a confutation of male-chauvinistic degradation of motherhood. The English king is then metaphorically invited to rely on mothers if he cannot turn to fathers.

Since the war will somehow be fought under the banner of Isabella, men's belligerent language will then be filled with multiple references to women and, especially, to mothers, as it happens in the tennis balls scene:

[...] for many a thousand widows  
Shall this his mock mock out of their dear husbands,  
Mock mothers from their sons, mock castles down,  
And some are yet ungotten and unborn  
That shall have cause to curse the Dauphin's scorn. (150: I.2.285-289)

The onomatopoeic word "mock," mimicking the sound of tennis strokes and repeated each time with a different meaning – which demonstrates the remarkable pliability of early modern English – attaches importance to women's experience of war. Henry assigns to the Dauphin a limited understanding of warfare: it is necessary to expand the perspective, encompassing viewpoints which may seem minor and marginal but which, in fact, are not so. The theatre audience is similarly invited to transcend boundaries by embracing multiple minds, multiple bodies, and multiple gazes, with an eye to mutual interdependence and care.

A soldier's mother matters no less than her fighting son; the combatants should indeed always bear their mothers in mind and act accordingly. Rallying his troops to jump "once more

unto the breach” of Harfleur (201: III.1.1), the king addresses his “noble English” (202: III.1.17) with these words:

Dishonour not your mothers; now attest  
That those whom you called fathers did beget you. (203: III.1.22-23)

The noblemen are invited to fight manfully for the honor of their mothers, first, and then for that of their fathers. The order in which the parents are mentioned seems to reflect the absolute certainty of a mother’s bond with her child, whereas paternity is culturally assumed but biologically uncertain. Dishonoring a soldier’s mother would therefore strike at the heart of his identity. The most distinguished members of the army are also compelled to “be copy now to men of grosser blood/And teach them how to war” (203: III.1.24-25): Henry instills in them a relational approach to their lower-ranking comrades-in-arms. All English fighters are then urged to identify with a multiplicity of subjects and objects, including fierce animals and deadly weapons:

[...] 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 galled rock  
O’erhang and jutty his confounded base,  
Swilled with the wild and wasteful ocean. (201-2: III.1.3-17)

Warriors are then provided with a hybrid-like identity, which critics have discussed in the light of posthumanism. As Henry switches glibly between naturalness and artificiality, matching human beings, wildlife animals, natural elements, and military equipment, a transcorporeal imagery takes shape: various beings, objects and environments move through the human body just as that body does through them, so that they all become continuous, not distinct, almost borderless. Cohen observes that the medieval knight merges with his weapons, armour, and horse, originating a “chivalric assemblage”, a “network of meaning that decomposes human bodies and intercuts them with the inanimate, the inhuman” (2003, 71; 76).

Martin maintains that Henry “exhorts his soldiers to embrace [a] cyborgian metamorphosis” (2015, 83). I would rather suggest that he is encouraging them to develop a symbiotic relationship involving cooperation, interdependency, and mutual benefit. As the bearer of a hybridised identity that is “smart and imaginative about and with human and nonhuman peoples”, the English warriors prefigure new “multispecies patterns of cohabiting beings” (Haraway 2018, 98, 79). The king invites his men to make “oddkin, off-category kin both inherited and cobbled together anew” (Haraway 2018, 70).

While the French soldiers display an individualistic notion of honor, emphasizing personal glory and solitary reputation, the English, headed by their king, prioritize a collective pursuit.<sup>3</sup> Despite reiterating the late-medieval class distinctions, Henry invites his men to forge strong bonds of camaraderie, treating one another like a family. In his powerful speech before the final battle, the king refers to his soldiers as a “band of brothers” (291: IV.3.60), reinforcing their sense of belonging. Developing non-biological practices of extensive care and inclusive interaction is the only effective way to “resist the curses and blandishments” (Haraway 2018, 67) of a war for survival.

It is therefore not surprising that, in a subsequent scene, kin-making is evoked, together with the mother’s viewpoint, to signify an expanded sense of humanness. This scene, related by the Duke of Exeter, describes the heroic and moving death in battle of two noble English cousins, the Duke of York and the Earl of Suffolk:

Suffolk first died, and York, all haggled over,  
Comes to him, where in gore he lay insteeped,  
And takes him by the beard, kisses the gashes  
That bloodily did spawn upon his face.  
He cries aloud ‘Tarry, dear cousin Suffolk!  
My soul shall thine keep company to heaven.  
Tarry, sweet soul, for mine, then fly abreast,  
As in this glorious and well-foughten field  
We kept together in our chivalry.’  
[...] So did he turn, and over Suffolk’s neck  
He threw his wounded arm and kissed his lips,  
And so, espoused to death, with blood he sealed  
A testament of noble-ending love.  
The pretty and sweet manner of it forced  
Those waters from me which I would have stopped,  
But I had not so much of man in me,  
And all *my mother* came into mine eyes  
And gave me up to tears [*italics added*]. (307-8: IV.6.11-32)

Exeter’s final identification with the maternal viewpoint reminds us that soldiers are sons, brothers, and friends – each with unique connections to loved ones. The motherly perspective further remarks that the emotional bonds forged in combat serve as a mechanism for creating kinship. While York and Suffolk are indeed cousins by blood, their bond transcends mere consanguinity, leaning towards inclusiveness, as suggested by the homoerotic undertones. Their death symbolizes a transcendence of individuality in favor of a sense of unity with others.

The scene portrays the mortal body as an object worthy of care and concern, echoing Haraway’s assertion that “pain at such losses is intrinsic to living and dying well with each other as entangled tentacular critters of a rich earth” (Haraway 2018, 69). The ‘good death’ of York and Suffolk is very different from “the surplus killing of ongoingness, the wanton surplus extinction of kinds” produced by the overwhelming power of dominant ideologies, which Haraway (2018, 69) refers to as the “double death”.<sup>4</sup> Exeter’s display of piety deals a blow to

master narratives by advocating for a sympoietic maternal perspective, one that engages with the complexities inherent in a relational understanding of the world.

This new, more emotionally interconnected version of identity aligns with the ability of Elizabethan actors not only to embody various roles, including female characters, but also to embrace diverse experiences through identification and empathy. When, in another Shakespearean play, *Hamlet*, the protagonist “reflects on the charged power of the tragic theatre, the figure who haunts his imagination is Hecuba” (Pollard 2012, 1060), a wife and a mother. Grieved widowhood and wounded maternity, therefore, become symbols of the sympathetic identification required by early modern stagecraft, seen as a pre-figuration of the performative nature of identity and as a world capable of ‘worlding’ other, far better, worlds (Haraway 2018, 89).

When Exeter says that he cannot avoid crying like a mother, he does not conform to conventional notions of stoic, unemotional masculinity; instead, he acknowledges that affective vulnerability can be a part of anyone’s experience, regardless of gender. Fictional maternity then becomes a familiar space of identification, accessible to anyone who needs to take on a new, more inclusive form of identity. Fantasy maternal figures offer a canvas for transcending the limits of embodied subjectivity and the frame of social conventions. On the other hand, real mothers, grounded in history, resist such open-ended interpretations as they come with their own lived experiences and societal roles. This, at least, is the case of the French princess Katherine.

### 3. Mother of an English King

In the play, Katherine makes her first appearance in Act III, Scene 4, where she is taught an English language lesson by her lady-in-waiting. This interlude, almost entirely written in French and meant to provide relief from war scenes, suggests her upcoming political and sexual submission: the princess, who is “preparing to be occupied, although her occupation [...] [will] be called marriage”, has to translate “her body in preparation for sexual consummation” (Crunelle-Vanrigh 2013, 60-1). Katherine resists linguistic degradation with dignity and will still prove anything but submissive in the wooing scene that takes place after Henry’s victory.

If the lesson scene seems not only modelled on early modern language primers but also inspired by Aretino’s *Ragionamenti* (1534-36), “a dialogue in which an older prostitute lectures a younger one about erotic possibilities and positions” (Mazzola 2000, 413), the wooing scene may be read as a free reworking of the biblical annunciation, often depicted in art.<sup>5</sup> In the Gospel of Luke, the angel Gabriel greets Mary “with a blessing and invites her to take on” the role of the Mother of God; she displays surprise, “makes inquiries and ultimately accepts the invitation” (Baker 2016, 761) by saying: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38).<sup>6</sup> Mary’s willing acceptance of God’s plan is a testament to



her faith but also “a prototype of courteous conversation” for Renaissance etiquette manuals; the scene provides a model of courtesy, defined as “the employment of hospitable language to press another towards some end” (Baker 2016, 761).

Although Henry won the war, he seems genuinely interested in making the union with Katherine more than a mere political alliance; he therefore uses courtly rhetoric to express his affection for the princess. Among the requests made by him there is one which is particularly relevant in view of this analysis: that of giving birth to a son who will prove a worthy soldier:

KING HENRY V

[...] If ever thou  
be'st mine, Kate, as I have a saving faith within me  
tells me thou shalt, I get thee with scrambling, and thou  
must therefore needs prove a good soldier-breeder.  
Shall not thou and I, between Saint Denis and Saint  
George, compound a boy, half French, half English,  
that shall go to Constantinople and take the Turk by  
the beard? Shall we not? what sayest thou, my fair  
flower-de-luce?

KATHERINE

I do not know dat (359: V.2.200-209).

In attempting to impose the unchosen role of a warrior's bioparent on the French princess, the king presents himself as an advocate of Haraway's “double birth”, “a parody of the grace of making and nurturing new ones of any species” (Haraway 2018, 69). The begetting of that necessarily male child – “forced life for [...] [military and political] value production” – shows that what is touted as consensual reality is in fact “a specific, situated kind of modeled abstraction that works at a crafted scale”: a reality that would apply to “everyone, but not equally, symmetrically, or exclusively” (Haraway 2018, 69-70). Needless to say, this looks like an aberration: in an ideal world where “babies are rare, nurtured, and precious” and where kin is “abundant, surprising, enduring, and treasured” (Haraway 2018, 91), no one should be mass-produced in the mould of a soldier. Persons and people should be ‘composed’ with care rather than ‘accumulated’ or, worse, subjugated (Haraway 2018, 93).

Katherine, then, does not perform to the script: though Henry addresses her in a courtly language, there is hardly any courtesy on her part. She avoids “collusion [...] through the minimalist strategy of one-line replies – the least that courtesy requires” (Sinfield and Dollimore 2002, 224). Pressed to accept, she simply says that she does not know; later on, she will decline “to joining in the pretence that her preference [...] matter[s]” (Sinfield and Dollimore 2002, 224), dryly remarking: “Dat is as it sall please *le roi mon père*” (361: V.2.244).

Henry concludes that he has not yet won Katherine's heart since she did not freely comply with his requests.<sup>7</sup> Had she complied, she could have possibly become a proper wife, but not a proper mother, if motherhood is interpreted not just as sticking to a script and

conforming to expectations but as a prospect of survival for future generations: a prospect which gives preeminence to kin-making and symbiotic assemblage. It is then no surprise that Henry and Katherine's biological son, lacking the leadership qualities and human engagement of his father, should lose France and rule a reign marred by mismanagement, as the epilogue hints at.<sup>8</sup>

The ending may sound gloomy; yet, it is less a betrayal of the model of humanity presented earlier in the play than a reminder that the conscious, performative act of creating connections and interdependencies requires an uphill struggle, arduous but worthwhile. Viewing motherhood through performativity reveals its fluid, constructed, and dynamic nature, shifting focus from maternal identity to the *actions* of mothering. This reframing transforms motherhood into an open, inclusive practice that transcends biological or essentialist boundaries. In line with Haraway's provocative critique of the overemphasis on human reproduction, Shakespearean motherhood is not merely an individual condition uniquely tied to biology or femininity, but part of a broader 'sympoietic' process – sustaining life and nurturing relationships. This view challenges traditional, patriarchal, and capitalist interpretations, recasting mothers as agents of radical world-making. Ultimately, the play resists simplistic solutions or escapist narratives, urging instead an engaged and responsible presence in the face of worldly difficulties.

For Haraway, it is necessary to "stay with the trouble of a heritage [...] [that we] cannot disavow if it is to be reworked" (Haraway 2018, 90). Staying with the trouble means recognising how dominant narratives and perspectives are shaped by power dynamics, cultural biases and historical contexts. It also means promoting a more inclusive understanding of the planet and humanity's place within it, unleashing "our utopian, risky imaginings and actions for earthlings on a mortal, damaged, human-dense world" (Haraway 2018, 99). *Henry V* challenges the notion that procreation alone ensures a lasting legacy or defines one's worth. Instead, the play suggests that embracing kin-making and adopting the multifaceted perspective of Shakespearean motherhood are more meaningful pursuits. Ultimately, for those seeking a lesson on what it means to be more human, even beyond the boundaries of a single embodied existence, one may always turn to Shakespeare, a figure of shared kinship.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> From now on, all quotes from Shakespeare's *King Henry V* ([1599?] 1995) will be in parentheses.

<sup>2</sup> According to the doctrine of predestination, unconditional election is not based on any merit or action of the individuals, but solely on God's sovereign will and grace. Those who are truly among the chosen few will be able to demonstrate it through their actions, their continued faith, their righteousness and, above all, their thriving over the course of their existence: fortune smiles on them in this life and in the next. McEachern interprets Calvinist predestination as, "among other things, a paradigmatic structure of dramatic irony" and maintains that "the search to discover what ending might be informs the affective experiences both of English Protestant experimentalism and of Shakespeare's plays" (McEachern 2021, 184-5).

<sup>3</sup> In Act III, Scene 7 the nobles of France prefer words to deeds: they boast of their own prowess and their sumptuous attire, seemingly more concerned with winning over individual accolades and fame than with the success of their common army. By contrast, Henry's soldiers do not seek personal achievement: they are banded together by their loyalty to their king, country, and comrades-in-arms.

<sup>4</sup> Haraway borrows the term from Australian anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose who, in the context of environmental and extinction studies, defined 'double death' as an "amplification of death, so that the balance between life and death is overrun, and death starts piling up corpses in the land of the living" (Bird Rose 2006, 75). There are striking parallels between this concept and Shakespeare's depiction of warfare in the final part of Act IV, where massacres follow one another.

<sup>5</sup> Historian Ainsworth observes that Henry V, like his father, "used the motto [...] 'Ma Sovereynne' [...] on his charters" (Ainsworth 2006, 13). Ainsworth then wonders about its meaning: "Might the motto be [...] adopted in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary? Plausibly so, though one might also conjecture that [...] [it refers] to Catherine de Valois, with whom the young Henry appears to have been deeply preoccupied from the time that he was first made aware of her" (Ainsworth 2006, 13). In Shakespeare there is no record of any long-time infatuation, but the supposed replaceability of the French Princess to the Virgin Mary in Henry's motto is a thought-provoking idea worth delving in to further discuss the theme of motherhood.

<sup>6</sup> The *Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible* is here used. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%201%3A37-39&version=AKJV> (last accessed October 2024)

<sup>7</sup> "Our tongue is rough, coz, and my condition is / not smooth, so that, having neither the voice nor the / heart of flattery about me I cannot so conjure up the / spirit of love in her that he will appear in his true / likeness" (364: V.2.283-287).

<sup>8</sup> "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" (371: Epilogue 9-12). Shakespeare had dedicated a previous history play to King Henry VI.

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