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The Battle Speeches of Henry V

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In the attack on Constantinople in 1204, when Peter of Amiens saw Murzurphlus spurring his horse towards him, he shouted to his followers

Now lords, stand firm! We will have a fight on our hands: see the emperor is coming. Take care that there is no one so bold as to run away. But now resolve to stand firm.¹

Such scenes are commonplace in medieval chronicles. As Bliese observed, chroniclers

wrote hundreds of battle orations, harangues to the knights before or during combat, that show in detail the kinds of motive appeals the chroniclers believed would be most effective in building morale.²

One of the most famous battle speeches of all must be that of Henry V at Agincourt, well known not from its chronicle versions but from the stirring words of Shakespeare.³ Shapiro has alerted us to Shakespeare's use of expressions he heard in daily life as well as those he read in the printed histories which informed his works. In the case of the battle speech, Shapiro detects the influence of a sermon delivered to the royal court on Ash Wednesday 1599 by Lancelot Andrewes.⁴ The theme was war, the context the preparations for the expedition of the earl of Essex to Ireland. Andrewes' 'thumping reiteration of "this time" and "this day"', Shapiro argues, inspired Shakespeare's similarly repeated emphasis on 'St Crispin's day'.

Shakespearean scholars have detected other influences on the composition of the speech, ranging from popular sayings,⁵ to biblical passages,⁶ to accounts of other battles in the histories of Hall and Holinshed.⁷ But Henry V's battle speech has a much longer pedigree which can be traced back to the earliest chronicle narratives of the battle. The intention of this essay is to examine how Henry's speech

was expressed in the major chronicles and histories of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It must be emphasised, however, that this is a study of how such works were crafted. It is not an attempt to reconstruct Henry's actual words. That cannot be done.

Doubt has been expressed on whether Henry, as other commanders of antiquity and the middle ages, could have made a speech to the whole army. In Hansen's opinion, ancient and medieval battle exhortations found in chronicles and histories are no more than literary compositions.⁸ Pointing out that the human voice could not carry more than 50 metres, he suggests that it was more likely that commanders made an address to a small group of officers alone.⁹ They might also have shouted a few 'apophthegms' (such as the 'stand firm' of Peter of Amiens) as they traversed the lines of men assembled for the attack. That Henry followed the latter procedure is suggested by the narratives of the Burgundian chroniclers, Jean de Waurin and Jean Le Fèvre, compiled in the 1450s and 60s.

When the king had drawn up his battle and made arrangements for the baggage he went along the battle line on his little grey horse (Waurin omits mention of the horse) and made very fine speeches, encouraging them to do well, saying that he had come to France to recover what was his rightful inheritance, telling them that they could fight freely and securely in this quarrel and that they should remember that they had been born in England where their fathers and mothers, wives and children, were at this very moment. Because of that they ought to exert themselves so that they could return there in great honour and glory, and that the kings of England, his predecessors, had gained many splendid victories over the French and that on that day each should help in guarding him and the honour of the crown of England. In addition, he told them that the French had boasted that if any English archers were captured they would cut off the three fingers of their right hand so that neither man or horse would ever again be killed by their arrow fire.¹⁰

This speech contains several of the 17 'identifiable appeals' which Bliese, in his study of 360 battle exhortations across 92 chronicles written between 1000 and 1250, found to recur with some frequency.¹¹ There is an appeal to martial values and the honour which accompanies them in the public eye. There is emphasis on the justness

of the cause, and the fact that they are fighting for their families and country. There is also an appeal to history through reference to previous English victories. The final sentence emphasises English superiority in arms, another category identified by Bliese. But whilst he notes speeches which encourage soldiers to take revenge for past injuries, he does not cite any examples which threaten mutilation in the battle about to be fought.¹² This theme is also found, however, in the account of Agincourt by Thomas Walsingham, monk of St Albans, although it is not placed within Henry's battle speech but noted as a rumour circulating in the English camp on the eve of battle.

The French had published abroad that they wished no one to be spared save for certain lords and the king himself. They announced that the rest would be killed or have their limbs horribly mutilated. Because of this our men were much excited to rage and took heart, encouraging one another against the event.¹³

It is possible that the account provided by Le Fèvre and Waurin contains some elements of verisimilitude. Le Fèvre, then aged 19, was at Agincourt with the English although amongst the heralds rather than the fighting force.¹⁴ The notion that Henry spoke from horseback makes sense,¹⁵ even if we should interpret his words, as Hansen suggests, not as an integrated and single speech but as shouts of encouragement as the king rode through the assembled lines. Interestingly, Froissart, whose *Chroniques* were a major influence on Le Fèvre and Waurin, suggests a similar procedure at Crécy.

When his three battle lines were drawn up and each of his lords, barons, earls and knights knew what they were to do, the king of England mounted on a small white palfrey, with a white baton in his hand, flanked by his two marshals. Then he rode all along, from rank to rank, admonishing and praying the earls, barons and knights that they should think of and give attention to keeping their honour and defending his right. He said these words (*ces langages*) with laughter, so gently and sincerely that all who were anxious (*desconfortés*) found himself comforted seeing and hearing him. And when he had thus visited all his battles and his men, and admonished and prayed them to do

what was necessary (*bien faire le besogne*) it was the hour of tierce.¹⁶

Similarities of this kind are problematic for the historian. Does it mean that the fifteenth-century writers simply borrowed from Froissart, or was the procedure standard practice in military contexts?¹⁷ Some differences can be detected, not least that Froissart has Edward speaking only to the military elite, although it is also implied that the sight of the king is equally important to hearing him. Interestingly too, Froissart does not give Edward a script (indeed Froissart was not one for long battle orations), whereas Le Fèvre and Waurin provide a whole speech for Henry. They also provide a response:

The English, hearing their king thus admonish them, uttered a great cry saying 'Sire, we pray to God that He will grant you a long life and a victory over your enemies'. Then after the king of England had thus admonished his men, again on his little horse, he put himself in front of his banner and then marched with his whole battle in very good order towards the enemy.¹⁸

At neither Crécy nor Agincourt does the chronicler have battle follow immediately. Edward ordered his men to eat and drink and to rest on the ground so that they could keep fresh as they awaited the French.¹⁹ Henry sent a group of men to negotiate with the French. When nothing came of this, Le Fèvre and Waurin, in common with Monstrelet, have Henry ordering Sir Thomas Erpingham to draw up the archers in front of the army.

Sir Thomas exhorted everyone on behalf of the king of England to fight with vigour against the French. He rode with an escort in front of the battle of archers after he had carried out the deployment and threw in the air a baton which he had been holding in his hand (Waurin adds that he cried 'Nestroque', which was the signal for attack).

Whilst Henry may not have spoken the actual words given to him by Le Fèvre and Waurin, there is enough to suggest that their accounts demonstrate contemporary military practice. These are secular accounts in the vernacular (not known in England until the

post-medieval period). Save for the supposed response of the army to the king, there is no reference to divine intervention. A general hypothesis therefore emerges: the speeches given to Henry in the chronicles were dictated by the background and education of the writers themselves. Not surprisingly, therefore, we find a rather different focus in the works of the monastic chroniclers, as also the humanist authors, writing in Latin. Such writers were heavily influenced by what they read in biblical, classical and historical works. In addition they understood the traditions and preferred forms of rhetoric. They did not need to know what Henry actually said. They could draw on their learning to provide the speech he ought to have made.

The two earliest accounts of Agincourt are found in the *Gesta Henrici Quinti*, an anonymous prose work, and the verse *Liber Metricus* of Thomas Elmham, a monk of St Augustine's Canterbury. Neither can be securely dated but since the *Gesta* ends with the parliament of November 1416 and the *Liber Metricus* with the king's celebration of Easter in Normandy in 1418, the first-named work is deemed to be the earlier. It was the work of an eyewitness – a priest in the king's train – and so has potential to reveal the circumstances and content of any actual battle speech. But we hit an immediate problem: in the *Gesta* there is no such oration. The author simply has the king offering praises to God and hearing masses, then making ready for the field.²⁰ Instead it is in the context of an anticipated battle on 24 October that allusions are made to royal exhortations.

And in the meantime, our king, very calmly and quite heedless of danger, gave encouragement to his army, and he drew them up in battles and wings as if they were to go immediately into action. And then every man who had not previously cleansed his conscience by confession, put on the armour of penitence; and there was no shortage then save only one of priests.²¹

Given the author's own function, the last phrase is significant as is also the opening of his next sentence, 'amongst other things which I noted as said at that time'. This is aimed at giving verisimilitude to the following exchange between the king and Sir Walter Hungerford where the latter expresses his desire for 10,000 more English archers. The king rebuffs the knight:

'That is a foolish way to talk', the king said to him, 'because, by the God in Heaven upon Whose grace I have relied and in Whom is my firm hope of victory, I would not, even if I could, have a single man more than I do. For these I have here with me are God's people, whom He deigns to let me have at this time. Do you not believe', he asked, 'that the Almighty, with these His humble few, is able to overcome the opposing arrogance of the French who boast of their great number and their own strength?' as if to say, He can if He wishes. And, as I myself believe, it was not possible, because of the true righteousness of God, for misfortune to befall a son of His with so sublime a faith, any more than it befell Judas Maccabeus until he lapsed into lack of faith and so, deservedly, met with disaster.

Although this supposed exchange is not strictly a battle speech it is worthy of discussion because of its transmission to form the prompt for Shakespeare's St Crispin's Day speech.²² The transmission was not from the *Gesta* since the work only exists in two copies. Rather it originated from the better-known *Liber Metricus*.²³ The latter notes the king ordering his battle lines and soldiers making confession on 24 October but omits mention of Henry encouraging his troops. The author then continues:

A certain knight expressed his wish that a thousand more archers could be there. The king answered him, 'Thus, foolish one, do you tempt God with evil? My hope does not wish for even one man more. Victory is not seen to be given on the basis of numbers. God is all-powerful. My cause is put into His hands. Here he pressed us down with disease. Being merciful, He will not let us be killed by these enemies. Let pious prayers be offered to Him.'²⁴

Did this exchange take place? Hungerford was certainly present at the battle.²⁵ But the episode is contrived. Life was made to reflect art, or more precisely, Henry's actions were deliberately given biblical approval. The wording is heavily derivative of 1 Maccabees 3: 17–19, all the more so in the versified *Liber Metricus*. The comparison of Henry with Judas Maccabeus is found on a second occasion in the *Gesta*, on the night before the battle of the Seine in 1416.²⁶

Like the famous Maccabeus he prayed to God from a tender heart that He would be mindful of him and his people and take care to deliver and save those of his people who, amid the powers of the enemy, were striving for justice and for the well-being of the kingdom.²⁷

Throughout the *Gesta* the emphasis is on God's will rather than human agency. God is mentioned on more occasions in the narrative of the fighting at Agincourt than any of the soldiers, even the king himself, and the text is littered with prayers and sermon-like passages. The omission of a battle speech for Henry on 25 October further emphasised that the victory was God's alone. Henry's exchange with Sir Walter Hungerford was fabricated to establish the king's debt to the Almighty from the start. These suggestions gain in significance if the *Gesta* was written, as has been suggested, to put Henry in a good light in the eyes of the Council of Constance, held to provide a solution to the papal schism, and of the emperor Sigismund.²⁸ No wonder, then, that the author should take care to remove completely the king's agency in the killing of the prisoners, ascribing it rather to a shout going up, 'because of what wrathfulness on God's part no one knows', that the French rearguard were intending to attack.²⁹ Can it be coincidence that of all Henry's captains to be chosen as the interrogator it was Sir Walter Hungerford who had been an envoy both to Sigismund and the Council in the autumn of 1414, and who was appointed to oversee the Emperor's household during the latter's visit to England in 1416?³⁰

For the earliest known effort to provide for Henry a speech on the day of the battle itself, we must turn to the *Liber Metricus*. Indeed, one of the relatively few differences in content between this work and the *Gesta* is the inclusion of this speech.

The king said to those remaining, 'My fellow men, prepare arms! English rights are referred to God. Memories noted many battles given for the right of King Edward and Prince Edward. Many a victory occurred with only a few English troops. This could never have been by their strength alone. England must never lament me as a prisoner or as to be ransomed. I am ready to die for my right in the conflict. Saint George, George, saint and knight be with us! Holy Mary, bestow your favour on the English in their right. At this very hour many righteous

English people pray for us with their hearts. France, hasten to give up your fraud!' The king, bearing his own arms, put his own crown on his head. He signed himself with the cross, thus giving courage to his men.³¹

Since Thomas Elmham was not present at the battle, he may have relied on what he was told by those who had been there, or he may have made up a speech for Henry, or else what we see is a mixture of both. Although the speech follows the *Gesta's* argument that it is God who will determine the outcome, it does this through an overtly patriotic stance. There are five mentions of England and the English. St George 'saint and knight' is also invoked, as is the Virgin Mary as protector of English rights. There is also an appeal to history through mention of the victories of Edward III and his son.³² The rightness of Henry's cause is emphasised by this link to the past as well as by reference to the lack of justice in the French claim. The king's words are reinforced visually by the immediately following reference to the arms which he bore (France and England quartered) and by his placing the crown on his head. His own centrality is further emphasised by his willingness to fight to the death. This is a speech which shows several of the *topoi* identified by Bliese, suggesting knowledge of other writings, no doubt accessible in the library of Elmham's own house. In particular it echoes the concept of the nation at war, with those at home praying for the success of those on the field itself, something which the author of the *Gesta* also emphasises halfway through his battle narrative.³³ We shall see in a moment how this notion was taken up by other writings in England over the following years, suggesting that it was a theme emphasised perhaps by the church as much as the crown.

Therefore, even if Henry did not say the words ascribed to him, the battle speech in the *Liber Metricus* provides an insight into contemporary attitudes and belief systems. The same cannot be said for what is likely the third earliest account of the battle written in England, that found in the chronicles of Thomas Walsingham, a monk of the Benedictine abbey at St Albans, dated in its final form to 1420–22.³⁴ Walsingham was not an eyewitness. His thin account of the battle is packed out with quotations from classical texts which he drew from *florilegia* in his abbey library.³⁵ This distinctive format may not reflect simply a lack of information, but rather another intention – the desire to elevate Henry to the pantheon of

heroes of old. This is certainly the impression of the battle speech which Walsingham provides. The context-setting ('Borne high on horseback, he goes round the columns, encouraging his leaders and strengthening their resolve for battle') is taken from the Latin *Iliad*. The speech itself is largely derived from Lucan's *Civil War*,³⁶ and contains nothing which would locate it in time and space to 1415 or France. The only contemporary allusion comes in the following passage where Henry orders banners to be raised, and his army to advance 'in the name of the Trinity and at the best hour of the whole year'. 'The best hour' echoes the sentiments in the *Liber Metricus* and *Gesta* that the English people would have been at prayer during the battle. This notion is also found in Henry's speech in one of the versions of the Brut chronicle ascribed to the mid fifteenth century. Here, after drawing up his army, the king asks the time of day. 'They said prime'. 'Then', said our king, 'now is a good time for all England is praying for us'.³⁷

If this notion of timing developed into a tradition concerning the battle, so too did the story of the king's response to the desire for more men, at least in Latin works. The story became an *exemplum* of the success and wisdom of Henry, again emphasising classical parallels. It is found in both the Pseudo-Elmham's *Vita et Gesta Henrici Quinti* (mid 1430s?) and Tito Livio Frulovisi's *Vita Henrici Quinti* (c. 1438).³⁸ However, whilst the overall drift is similar, the ordering of words and form of expression is different. There are few similarities in the Latin, since, as Rundle has argued for the work as a whole, Tito Livio replaces the Pseudo-Elmham's insular Latin with the classically-influenced vocabulary of an Italian humanist.³⁹

The Pseudo-Elmham places the story immediately after Henry has drawn up his army on 25 October and mounted his horse, thereby providing a more public context for the exchange.

When the King heard some wishing that other peers of the realm of England might be present to assist in this business, by God's will, he firmly replied: 'Truly I would not wish that the number should be increased by one single person ...'⁴⁰

The text continues with an extended statement of the king's belief that the outcome of the battle will be as God determines it. Interestingly, whilst the *Gesta* and *Liber Metricus* include only positive views (that God will support the English), the Pseudo-Elmham gives the king

a quasi-philosophical debate on three eventualities. If the English were as many or more than the French, a victory would be ascribed to their strength, but if they lost, it would be thought that God wished to punish them for their sins. But if they were outnumbered, and yet won the day, it would be clear that the victory was God's alone 'and we should render praise to him and not to our number'. The speech ends with the belief that those who enter battle in faith and fortitude will be rewarded. What we are seeing, therefore, is a fuller, more rhetorical, discussion of numbers and God's will than in the earlier Latin texts.

Tito Livio follows essentially the same lines but with some interesting variations.⁴¹ Although he places the speech at the same juncture, he prefaces it with the following sentence:

Thus with everything made ready and set in order, the undefeated king urged his men to battle and to the approaching contest.

He continues:

It is said that a certain man was heard to say, disclosing his prayer to the others, 'If only good God would grant us by his mercy that all those knights who are in England might be with us in this battle.'

The king's reply is essentially as in the Pseudo-Elmham but with some rearrangement and ending on a more jingoistic tone:

Also if we are many, and the enemy win the victory, it would be reckoned that the loss and detriment to our country and to our kingdom would be much greater. But be strong of heart and fight with all your might. May God and the justice of our cause defend us. May he render up to our hands and to our power all the multitude of that exceedingly proud enemy which you can see, or at least most of it.

What Tito Livio has done, therefore, is to transform the exchange into a pre-battle speech and also to introduce elements of patriotism found more explicitly in the *Liber Metricus*. The *Liber Metricus* and the *Gesta* placed Henry's exchange concerning the number of soldiers on the 24 October rather than immediately before the battle

on the following day. Whilst the Pseudo-Elmham and Tito Livio both put it on 25th, they introduced a time lag between it and the opening of the battle by mentioning a parley with the sire de Heilly and others. This may reflect an attempt to reconcile their versions with the earlier texts.

The works so far considered were written in French or Latin. If Henry did give a battle speech it would have been in English. What, then, do the vernacular chronicles provide for him?⁴² Although we have no extant English *Brut* until over 20 years after the battle, it is possible that later texts reflect an oral tradition. In BL MS Harley 53, dating to around 1437, we have the following:

On the morning at about prime the King ordered every man to make himself ready for battle saying these words, 'Sirs. Think this day to acquit yourselves as men, and fight for the right of England. In the name of Almighty God, advance banners. Saint George, give us this day your help!' Then our men knelt down all together and made the sign of the cross on the ground and kissed it, and each put himself at the mercy of God.⁴³

The reference to St George and the appeal to patriotism provide echoes of the *Liber Metricus*. The version of the speech in another mid-fifteenth century *Brut* is similar but, as we have noted, adds more explicit reference to those in England praying at that very moment: the specific link to prime, however, is found only in this vernacular tradition. This is also found in a copy dated to 1478–8.⁴⁴ In the latter, the king is given additional lines which explain the significance of the kissing of the ground referred to in the 1437 text noted earlier.

Then the sun rose and the day began; the king, acting on good advice, arranged his main force and his wings, and charged every man to keep his position (*to keep them whole together*), and prayed them all to be of good cheer. When they were ready, he asked what time of day it was and they said 'prime'. Then said our King 'Now is a good time for all England prays for us. And in remembrance that God died on the cross for us, let every man make a cross in the earth and kiss it as a token that we would rather die on this soil than flee'. And when the king of France saw our king and his people fall down to the ground, he asked 'What are they doing?', and a French knight standing

nearby said 'Forsooth, Sire, they intend to die on that ground today rather than to flee'. And then our king with all his people rose up and said in a high voice, 'In the name of Almighty God and of St George, advance banners, and St George give your aid on this day'.

An amalgamation of themes is found in the battle speech provided for Henry in the version of the *Chronicle of London*, dated to c. 1443, found in BL MS Cotton Cleopatra CIV:

Sirs and fellows, the army yonder intends to block our path. As they will not come to us, let every man prove himself a good man today, and advance banners to make it the best time of the year. For as I am a true King and knight, England shall never pay ransom for me this day. Before any man leave his mortal coil, I shall to death be plighted. Therefore, lords, for the love of sweet Jesus, help maintain England's right this day. Also, archers, to you I pray. Do not flee away before we are all beaten in the field. Think on; Englishmen will not flee in battle, for even though we are outnumbered by ten to one, Christ will help us in our rightful cause. Yet I would prefer it if no blood were spilt. Christ help me now to this end. The French have been the cause of this fault. When Thou sittest in judgment, hold me excused before Thy face, as Thou art God Omnipotent. But pass we all now in fear, be he duke, earl or bachelor. We are made sick by our sins. Gentle Jesus, born of Mary, who died for us on Good Friday, as Thy will was, so bring us to bliss on high, and grant us there a place. Do this and into action.' Our king bid them all good cheer, and so did they at his word, lord, knight and archer.⁴⁵

Here we find expansion of Henry's intention not to be taken alive, which we can trace back to the *Liber Metricus*, as also the notion that it was the French who were to blame for the war. The reference to the English as sinners is reminiscent of phrases in the Pseudo-Elmham and Tito Livio. But there are some unique elements, most notably specific mention of the archers, and the address to the various classes of men in the English army. This betrays the ballad origins of this account. After the speech, the author abandons his

attempts to render his source into prose and continues with eight stanzas which cover the actual fighting and its outcome.

A second poem, also dated to the 1440s, provides a fully versified battle speech.⁴⁶ This is definitely derived, either directly or indirectly, from the speech in the *Liber Metricus* which immediately precedes the order to advance. As in the *Liber Metricus*, this battle speech follows York's request to have command of the vanguard, although it omits the *Liber Metricus*' claim that this was in response to the king's order that he should go to the rear with the baggage. The poem adds drama and movement to the story by having the duke kneel so that the king can bid him stand. The author then provides Henry with four and a half stanzas of speech. The influence of the *Liber Metricus* is seen: in Henry's intention not to be taken prisoner; in the reference to the appropriateness of the time of day (with the poet embellishing this to note that the religious of England sing 'ora pro nobis'); and in the need for every rank to do their duty. St George and the Virgin are invoked as in the *Liber*, but now St Thomas of Canterbury is added, and subsequently 'all the saints that lie in shrine, To God for us they be praying'. The banners ordered to be advanced include those of the Trinity and of St Edward the Confessor. But there is no invocation in this battle speech, or of any other until Shakespeare's version, of St Crispin.

What we are seeing in the vernacular chronicles is the culmination of popular memory of the battle thirty or so years on. Themes provided in the *Liber Metricus* have been embellished and expanded, reflective not only of the aura which came to surround Agincourt but also of the impact of subsequent losses and difficulties in the war, especially after the defection of the duke of Burgundy in 1435. In this context it is interesting that the poem does not include the *Liber*'s appeal to history, omitting completely any mention of the victories of Edward III and his son. This could suggest that the transmission was indirect rather than direct.

What is interesting is that the vernacular texts do not take up the story of the exchange between the king and one of his captains on the desire for more men. This remains solely within Latin writings until the *First English Life of Henry V* (1513).⁴⁷ Given that the *Vita* was a major source for this work, it is not surprising that the battle speech should be placed in the same context and follow the same arguments as in Tito Livio's work. It follows the drawing up of Henry's army on 25 October, and the mounting and arming of the king.

Thus this most victorious king, prepared and disposed to battle, encouraged his people to the field that approached at hand.⁴⁸

The king responded to one of the 'great estate of his company' who expressed a desire for more men (here expressed as 'that every man of war were there with them presently ready arrayed for battle'). The king's answer is essentially an English translation of Tito Livio's Latin version but extending the last sentence to read

But be ye of good courage and fight with all your might, and God and our right shall defend us and deliver into our hands all this great multitude of our proud enemies that ye see, or at the least the most part of them.

The author follows Tito Livio's account of the parley with the sire de Heilly before the king orders the banners to advance, and keeps close to the reading of the Latin text with: 'And he in his person, with his battle in the same order wherein they stood following, exhorted and encouraged every man to battle'. The author admits in his prologue that he also drew on the vernacular chronicles as well as the (recently printed) chronicles of Enguerran de Monstrelet.⁴⁹ Monstrelet did not provide a battle speech for Henry, giving the role of exhortation instead to Sir Thomas Erpingham. The author of the *First English Life* does not, however, choose to include this in his work.

In the same year that the *First English Life* was written, Polydore Vergil composed his account of Agincourt in his Latin *Anglia Historia*, although the text was not printed until 1534.⁵⁰ Polydore is known to have drawn on the *London Chronicles* as well as the *Brut*, probably using the latter through Caxton's *Polychronicon*. The battle oration which he provides for Henry, given in indirect speech, is placed after the king has drawn up his lines. It alludes to past victories by suggesting that the French were 'weak at bearing the burden of a longer fight', and mentions the issue of numbers. But its format and arguments are novel. For instance, Henry tells his men that the battle field was more suitable for a smaller force than a larger, and that in a larger army, there were bound to be more men who were inexperienced and who would obstruct those soldiers who were more brave and energetic. This is altogether a more rational interpretation. It does not seem to be influenced by classical *exempla*.

Divine intervention is reduced to a minimum. Polydore's speech is clearly shaped by what he considered happened in the battle. He does not include the exchange between Henry and one of his men. If Polydore had access to any of the Latin texts which included it (and there are no links evident in vocabulary or form), he chose to dismiss the story. Nor does he use any of the allusions to time of day or to Englishness as found in the vernacular texts. He also gives a unique response to the speech.

While the King was speaking up to this point, the soldiers' ardour began to peak at such a level that with a huge clamour they demanded the signal for battle. The dukes of Clarence, York and Gloucester felt that that should be done quickly, arguing that delay was merely an advantage to the enemy, since new troops were flowing into him from all sides. The King, however, decided to delay a little so that he should not do anything without proper thought.

Polydore is also unique in saying that during the battle, 'when the king saw the standards in confusion and the battle-array wavering, he then encouraged his soldiers with a few words'.

The drama of the occasion is beginning to emerge in Polydore's account but it reaches its full expression in Edward Hall's *Union of the Two Illustre Families of Lancaster and York*, published in 1542.⁵¹ Here not only is Henry given a speech but, uniquely in any English or French text, Hall also writes an oration for the French constable. In reality this serves to provide opportunity for more anti-French feeling, since the constable is given lines such as 'ere keep an Englishman one month from his warm bed, fat beef and stale drink ... you shall then see his courage abated'. Henry's speech, whilst not wholly original in content, is unique in its long-windedness. At the beginning of his work Hall provides a list of the authorities he used. These include Monstrelet (the only French chronicle known in England in the sixteenth century, from which Hall takes the story of Erpingham's command but not the battle speech since Monstrelet provided none), the *London Chronicles* and Caxton's *Polychronicon*, but there is no mention of any of the Latin works of the fifteenth century. Polydore Vergil is also not listed but there is a clear influence, such as in the size of the field being more appropriate for a small army and the response of the soldiers to the speech. However, Hall shows a much

stronger religious element than does Polydore. 'Victory', Hall's Henry states, 'is the gift of God and consisteth not in the puissance of men'. This is reminiscent of the *Liber Metricus*, as is also Henry's intention not to be ransomed. There is, however, no mention of the exchange concerning the desire for more men, another reason for thinking that Hall did not have direct access to the Latin texts in which it occurred.

By contrast, Holinshed (or more accurately, the team of authors who produced the histories which were published in 1586–7) had access not only to Hall's sources but also to Walsingham and to the *First English Life* (which as we saw was derived from Tito Livio), and the Pseudo-Elmhams. These last named works were consulted thanks to copies held by the London antiquarian, John Stowe, as Holinshed himself tells us.⁵² As a result, Holinshed's battle speech is prompted by Henry overhearing one of his host say to another: 'I would to God were with us now so many good soldiers as are at this hour in England'. The short speech which follows is derived exclusively from the *First English Life* and is no more than a late sixteenth-century modernisation thereof.

We have therefore come full circle. Despite Shakespeare's use of Holinshed, the influence of the latter's battle speech was minimal save for the prompt of the exchange concerning more men. This exchange is the only feature which links Shakespeare's battle speech back to the works close to the time of the battle. It was not, however, part of popular tradition but was preserved through Latin works and transmitted to the late sixteenth century through the *First English Life* which was largely a translation of Tito Livio's *Vita Henrici Quinti*. The *Gesta* and *Liber Metricus* had sought to link Henry V to Judas Maccabeus. The author of the *First English Life* urged Henry VIII to emulate Henry V 'to eschew vainglory, lest a man ascribe laud to himself of that thing which is given to him of God'.⁵³ In his articulation of Henry V's battle speech, Shakespeare deliberately linked the military endeavours of 1599 to the glories of 1415. Agincourt was a truly a 'battle for all seasons'.

Notes

- 1 Robert de Clari. *La Conquête de Constantinople*, ed. P. S. Noble, Edinburgh, Société Rencesvals British Branch, 2005 (British Rencesvals Publications 3), pp. 94–5.

- 2 J. R. E. Bliese, 'Rhetoric and morale: a study of battle orations from the central middle ages', *Journal of Medieval History* 15 (1989): 201–26; p. 201.
- 3 Act IV scene iii, lines 18–67.
- 4 J. Shapiro, 1599. *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare*, London, Faber and Faber, 2005, pp. 88–96.
- 5 'the fewer men, the greater share of honour', is considered by G. Taylor (*The Oxford Shakespeare: Henry V*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 228, note to line 22) and by A. Gunn (*The New Cambridge Shakespeare: Henry V*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 166, note to line 22, noting a further proverbial derivation at line 28), to derive from the proverbial 'the more danger, the more honour', although T. W. Craik (*The Arden Shakespeare: King Henry V*, London, Thomas Nelson, 1995, p. 287, note to lines 20–2) sees its inspiration in phrases within Holinshed.
- 6 'Rather proclaim it presently through my host / That he which hath no stomach to this fight, / Let him depart': these lines have been related to 1 Maccabees 3:56, and 2 Maccabees 14:18 (*The Oxford Shakespeare: Henry V*, p. 228, notes to lines 34–6).
- 7 According to Craik, the source for lines 34–6 is the account in Hall and Holinshed of Edward IV's action before the battle of Towton (*The Arden Shakespeare: King Henry V*, p. 289).
- 8 M. H. Hansen, 'The battle exhortation in ancient historiography: fact or fiction', *Historia* 42 (1993): 161–80 (p. 176). For debate, see W. K. Pritchett, *Essays in Greek History*, Amsterdam, J. C. Gieben, 1994, chapter 2, and Hansen's reply, 'The little grey horse: Henry V's speech at Agincourt and the battle exhortation in ancient historiography', www.dur.ac.uk/Classics/histos/1998/hansen.html (9/09/2004).
- 9 On the Shakespearean stage, the St Crispin's Day speech would have been delivered by the king to a small number: the direction at the opening of the scene in the Folio version reads 'Enter Gloucester, Bedford, Exeter, Erpingham with all his host, Salisbury and Westmorland'. Only in the filmed versions is it possible to have the king speak to the army as a whole.
- 10 A. Curry, *The Battle of Agincourt. Sources and Interpretations*, Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2000, pp. 154–5. Full references to editions of works in their original languages are provided in this book.
- 11 Bliese, pp. 202–3, 204. Those in this speech fall into his categories 1, 2, 8, 9, 5 respectively.

- 12 Hansen (pp. 176–7) parallels this threat with the utterances of Gustavus Adolphus II of Sweden during the Thirty Years War, where he told his men that ‘not one single bone would return to Sweden if they tried to run away in the face of battle’, but the sense of the passage in Le Fèvre and Waurin is not wholly comparable. The Swedish king’s various exhortations were gathered together artificially and transferred into a full-blown speech in *Le Soldat Suédois*, published in 1633.
- 13 Curry, p. 51.
- 14 Henry’s actions and speech are not found in the chronicles of Enguerran de Monstrelet, whose account is otherwise very close to those of Waurin and Le Fèvre and has been commonly taken as the source from which they largely borrowed. The exact relationship of the three chronicles to each other remains problematic (Curry, pp. 135–40).
- 15 This is suggested by other writers, including Walsingham, Tito Livio, and the Pseudo-Elmham.
- 16 Translated from *Jean Froissart. Chroniques Livres I et II*, ed. P. Ainsworth and G. T. Diller, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, 2001, pp. 571–2.
- 17 The Roman treatises on war which remained popular in the Middle Ages were quite explicit on the value of exhortations by commanders. See, for instance, *Vegetius, Epitome of Military Science*, trans. N. P. Milner, second revised edition, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1996, pp. 85, 92, and *Iulius Frontinus, Strategemata*, ed. R. I. Ireland, Leipzig, Teubner, 1990, book I, chapter xi: ‘how to arouse an army’s enthusiasm for battle’. Henry V, however, is not known to have owned a copy of either. By the end of the reign a copy of Valerius Maximus’ *Dictorum et factorum memorabilium* was in his possession (TNA E101/335/17, cited in K. B. McFarlane, *Lancastrian King and Lollard Knights*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972, p. 238) but it contains very few examples of battle orations. As king, Henry borrowed ‘chronicles of the crusades’ from his aunt, but alas, we do not know which these were (T. Rymer, *Foedera, conventiones, litterae et cuiuscunque generis acta publica*, London, J. Neaulme, 1704, vol. x, p. 317; cited in McFarlane, p. 117). We cannot be sure whether Henry was able to, or minded to, draw on written sources for inspiration in battle speeches. Allusions in the *Gesta Henrici Quinti* have sometimes been used to suggest that the king and his eldest brother drew their siege plans at Harfleur from Giles of Rome’s *De Regimine principum* (C. Briggs, *Giles of Rome’s De Regimine principum. Reading and Writing Politics at Court and University c. 1275–c. 1525*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 2). In fact, a careful

- reading suggests rather that it was the author of the *Gesta* who knew the work (*Gesta Henrici Quinti. The Deeds of Henry the Fifth*, ed. F. Taylor and J. S. Roskell, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, pp. 40–3).
- 18 Curry, p. 158.
 - 19 It may be this which prompted Monstrelet's comment on Agincourt that when the English saw the French were not advancing, they began to eat and drink (Curry, p. 157). This is not mentioned in Le Fèvre and Waurin, another reason for considering that these authors did not simply lift from Froissart.
 - 20 *Gesta*, pp. 82–3.
 - 21 *Ibid.*, pp. 78–9.
 - 22 Act 4, scene iii, lines 17–19. In the Quarto edition the earl of Westmorland makes the remark, in the Folio edition the earl of Warwick. There is no such exchange in 'The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth', the anonymous play of c. 1588–94, which was also a source for Shakespeare, but there is a short pre-battle speech commenting on numbers, allocating command roles and ordering the preparation of the stakes (*Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. IV. *Later English History Plays*, ed. G. Bullough, London and New York, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962, p. 332). The source of this was likely Hall and/or the vernacular ballads of the fifteenth century which spoke of presences at the battle.
 - 23 *Gesta*, p. xv; A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England II. C. 1307 to the Early Sixteenth Century*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982, p. 210.
 - 24 Curry, p. 45. It has been speculated that Elmham obtained a copy of the *Gesta* (Gransden, p. 206). With regard to this passage, however, there are occasional similarities in vocabulary (such as the vocative 'Stulte' as Henry responds to his interrogator) but also many differences in words and construction which cannot be explained wholly by the fact that the *Liber* is in verse and the *Gesta* in prose.
 - 25 He indented as a knight with 19 men-at-arms and 60 archers (TNA E101/69/368, 425; E 404/31/165, E101/45/5 m. 5).
 - 26 Comparison with the time of the Maccabees was also made in a letter written around the time of the Parliament of November 1415 by someone who called himself 'the devoted chaplain' (Curry, pp. 272–4). Elmham was called 'our chaplain' in a royal letter of November 1414 (Gransden, p. 206). The *Gesta* has also been ascribed to a royal chaplain, possibly John Stevens (*Gesta*, p. xxiii).
 - 27 *Gesta*, pp. 146–7.
 - 28 *Gesta*, pp. xxiii–xxviii.

- 29 *Gesta*, pp. 90–3.
- 30 For his biography see *The House of Commons 1386–1421*, ed. J. S. Roskell et al, London, Alan Sutton Publishing for the History of Parliament Trust, 1992, vol. 3, pp. 446–53.
- 31 Curry, pp. 46–7.
- 32 In Henry's speech in the chronicle of the Religieux of St Denis, there is also an appeal to history, with mention of how Henry's ancestors put to flight Philip of Valois and captured King John. The speech is also presented as being given on 24 October. The French are portrayed as rejecting Henry's reasonable offers. God, it is said, 'often gives the victory to a handful of men rather than to the most mighty armies' (Curry, p. 105). Since this is also close to 1 Maccabees 3:18–19, it would suggest that this allusion was taken up in France, perhaps through knowledge of the propaganda provided by the English at the Council of Constance.
- 33 'Nor was God unmindful of the multitude of prayers and supplications being made in England, by which, as it is devoutly believed, our men soon regained their strength' (*Gesta*, pp. 88–9).
- 34 Curry, pp. 51–2.
- 35 J. G. Clark, *A Monastic Renaissance at St Albans. Thomas Walsingham and his Circle, c. 1350–1440*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2004, p. 182.
- 36 This work was customarily found in *florilegia* even before the fourteenth century. The two extracts used by Walsingham derive from the speeches which Lucan gives to Cato and Pompey.
- 37 Curry, p. 92. 'They' were presumably the priests present. This account of the *Brut* goes on to tell of Henry's order to advance banners, although no specific mention is made of the banner of the Trinity. This banner is mentioned in a poem on the battle dated to the 1440s (Curry, p. 297).
- 38 In the light of David Rundle's convincing arguments that the *Vita* is derived from the *Vita et Gesta*, rather than vice-versa, (Paper to the Fifteenth Century Conference, Oxford September 2006). It is not certain that either author used the *Liber Metricus* or *Gesta* directly. It has been suggested that Tito Livio drew on a Latin *Brut* composed in 1436–7 (C. L. Kingsford, *English Historical Literature in the Fifteenth Century*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1913, pp. 53–4) but Rundle's reordering should prompt a rethink of the sources of both the *Vita* and the *Vita et Gesta*.
- 39 So, for instance, Tito Livio prefers 'peccata' to the Pseudo-Elmham's 'scelera'.

- 40 Curry, p. 70. One of the versions of the *Vita et Gesta* includes a preface to Walter, lord Hungerford, yet does not name him as the interrogator. This suggests that the inclusion of Hungerford in the *Gesta* had been deliberate but that the purpose was no longer relevant by the mid 1430s.
- 41 Curry, pp. 59–60.
- 42 I have restricted discussion to the *Brut* and *London Chronicles* in print.
- 43 Curry, p. 94.
- 44 Curry, p. 95.
- 45 Curry, p. 290.
- 46 Curry, p. 296.
- 47 There are other chronicles and literary works produced in England in the fifteenth century which have no reference to a battle speech at all. These include the chronicle of John Hardyng, also apparently an eyewitness of Agincourt, in both its two English verse versions and in the Latin prose version, all compiled in the late 1450s and early 60s (Curry, pp. 80–85).
- 48 Curry, pp. 214–5.
- 49 Curry, p. 205.
- 50 Curry, pp. 227–8.
- 51 Curry, pp. 237–8.
- 52 *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, ed. H. Ellis, London, J. Johnson et al, 1808, vol. 3, p. 136. Interestingly, there is no battle speech or exchange in Stowe's *Chronicle* of 1580 (Curry, p. 246). This suggests he acquired the copies subsequently.
- 53 Amusingly (in the light of Henry VIII's love life) the author of the *First English Life* also urged Henry to 'continence, which of all men is to be observed and namely of them that be professors to the Sacrament of Matrimony which virtue, as I have heard of credible report, this noble prince, King Henry the Fifth, observed so constantly that from the death of the king his father until the marriage of himself he never had knowledge carnally of women' (Curry, p. 206).