

‘God for Harry! England and Saint George!’: Just War in
Shakespeare’s *Henry V*

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1. Introduction

In Shakespeare's plays, war is ubiquitous. Nowhere is it more present than in the history plays, both in terms of civil war within England and foreign war with other territories. The latter type is especially the focus of *Henry V*. Having been left an England scarred by rebellions against his father King Henry IV, Henry shifts his political focus to the mainland, claiming his right to the French throne and thus going to war with France.

Philosophies and theories discussing the nature and ethics of war have been around at least since Plato and Aristotle (Quabeck, *Just and Unjust Wars* 12). They range from strictly pacifist standpoints such as those of Erasmus, aiming to avoid war at all costs, to militarist standpoints such as those of Machiavelli's *realpolitik*, viewing war as a legitimate and necessary means of those in power to rule and resolve conflict ("Just War Theory" 22). Scholars have interpreted Shakespeare as arguing for (or against) both of these philosophies in his plays. A third philosophy that is increasingly considered in 21st century discussions of war in Shakespeare is the theory of just war. Originating from St. Augustine and refined by Thomas Aquinas, modern just war theory argues that under certain, very strict moral considerations, war can be justified or even be a necessary evil (Quabeck, "Just War Theory" 20). Just war theory generally differentiates between *jus ad bellum* – justice of war – and *jus in bello* – justice in war. Quabeck argues that many of Shakespeare's plays "engage in a deliberate discourse on the ethics of war" and "posit carefully-limited conditions for a just war", so that "the plays ask us to judge individual instance of warfare on the basis of particular circumstances" ("Unjust Wars" 78).

While it is not the goal to show nor would it be rational to assume that Shakespeare wrote his plays solely with the idea in mind to discuss just war theory, it is striking just how closely characters' discourses on war coincide with aspects of just war theory, not least in regard to the distinction of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. This is especially true for *Henry V*, which, as a play that has seen such a big variety of interpretations in the context of war philosophy, offers a good opportunity to discuss just war theory. As the current political developments in Europe show, war is omnipresent, and discourses about the just- or unjustness of war remain relevant not only to Shakespeare's plays or the Late Middle Ages but to this day.

In the course of this paper, it will be argued that while Henry V's war against France can be neither considered fully just nor fully unjust in the framework of just war theory, it becomes clear that Shakespeare intended for Henry's actions to be presented as more

unjust if we carefully consider the criteria. Furthermore, in line with Quabeck's interpretations, it will be shown that King Henry continuously tries to shift the blame from himself to others, being aware that his cause for war is not just (*Just and Unjust Wars* 157, "Just War Theory" 31). However, before it is possible to argue for or against the justness of a war, it is necessary to establish what it means for a war to be just, and which criteria must be considered in the debate. Thus, chapter 2 will give a brief overview of the history and criteria of just war theory. Chapter 3 will then apply this theory to *Henry V*, arguing for and against the war with France and its aspects of just- and unjustness. Both criteria *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* will be taken into account. Additionally, chapter 4 will discuss the aspect of responsibility and the strategies King Henry employs in order to relieve himself of the burden of the war's consequences.

2. Just War Theory

Classical accounts towards war theory are usually attributed to Plato, Aristoteles, and Cicero. Plato argues for the necessity of war, but, being generally considered as unavoidable, especially Aristotle differentiates between just and unjust wars related to the growth and rights of states. Cicero later emphasises the idea of the *casus belli* – the just cause, the existence of which renders a war just (Quabeck, *Just and Unjust Wars* 12). A more modern theory of just war and the theory which remains the most prominent today and which is the focus of this paper originates in the works of St. Augustine and was later refined by Thomas Aquinas. In the beginning of Augustine's theory, war was legitimized through the authority of *jus divinum*, i.e. due to its existence in a world created by God (Pugliatti 25). However, Augustine laid out first ideas of criteria under which a war could be judged as just or unjust independent of divine will. Most importantly to him, war could only be declared by a legitimate authority. Such a legitimate authority had to be a public person with political sovereignty, such as a monarch. Private persons were unable to declare war by themselves (Mattox 36). Furthermore, the person declaring war had to have the right intention. The only intention that Aquinas considered to be right was the (re-)establishment of peace. It should always be the intention to avoid war at all costs, and war was to be seen only as the last resort. If, however, it was absolutely inevitable or necessary, then the only justification for waging war must have been the intention of the eventual return to peace. Aggressive war that was aimed at territorial expansion, looting or coercion, or that was born out of hatred for the enemy, lust for vengeance, or the

intention to kill, was strictly unjust (Quabeck, *Just and Unjust Wars* 16, “Just War Theory” 20).

Aquinas developed Augustine’s theory further and formulated strict principles that could be applied to wars, agreeing on Augustine’s need for a legitimate authority (*auctoritas principis*) and right intention (*intentio recta*). A monarch’s only reason for going to war had to be the return to a state of peace. Additionally, he or she was entitled to declare war on a body or state that threatened the political and public order of his or her own state or kingdom. Thirdly, Aquinas noted the need for a just cause (*justa causa*), which was also present in Cicero’s philosophy. Aquinas explained that “those against whom war is to be waged must deserve to have war waged against them because of some wrongdoing” (Aquinas qtd. in Quabeck, *Just and Unjust Wars* 17). Therefore, a just cause could be a form of punishment or retribution for those who did injustices in the past. A just cause could also be the prevention of likely harm or the immediate response to aggression. One special case constituted religious wars such as holy wars and crusades. Since it was believed that those wars were carrying out divine will, they were legitimized through the appeal to God. However, as Stevens notes, throughout the Late Middle Ages, religion and the Church were increasingly replaced by secular politics, and the rise of Machiavelli’s *realpolitik* and the secularization and politicization of the royal office rendered the argument of divine will as a just cause increasingly insufficient (232).

Just war theory generally differentiates between *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* principles. Legitimate authority, right intention and just cause are *jus ad bellum* principles, meaning pertaining to the justice of war, and were those aspects that had been focused on until the Elizabethan time (Quabeck, *Just and Unjust Wars* 23). They have survived in just war theory until today. Additionally, there are *jus in bello* principles pertaining to justice in war. This distinction is highly important. As Michael Walzer explains: “It is perfectly possible for a just war to be fought unjustly and for an unjust war to be fought in strict accordance with the rules” (Walzer 21).

Arguably the most important principle of *jus in bello* is the principle of discrimination between combatants and non-combatants. The group of combatants consists of those who are actively engaged in warfare, such as soldiers, knights, and generals. They may be targeted, as they have accepted the risk of possible harm upon choosing to take part in the war (Quabeck, *Just and Unjust Wars* 32). Non-combatants, on the other hand, must always be shielded from harm. The group of non-combatants includes mainly civilians,

but also war prisoners, as their surrender gives them immunity and makes them non-active participants from whom harm is no longer to be expected. Intentionally harming non-combatants when it could have been avoided and thus violating the principle of discrimination constitutes a war crime (33). Furthermore, fair conduct in war excluded evil means such as looting, deceiving, torture, and rape (Raupp 161).

One aspect that pertains to both *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* are proportionality and responsibility. Regarding proportionality in *jus ad bellum*, the inevitable negative consequences that war has must be weighed against the evil it aims to prevent in the long run, and only if the latter outweighs the former can the war be considered just. Thus, war cannot be waged on light injustices or personal matters and offenses but must be required for the greater good. Its benefits must outweigh its costs (Quabeck, “Shakespeare’s Unjust Wars” 74). In *jus in bello*, proportionality means that the means employed for warfare are only legitimized if their immediate aim is to end the war and prevent further harm (Quabeck, *Just and Unjust Wars* 29). This is, of course, almost impossible to measure as well as highly subjective.

The last aspect of just war theory that must be discussed especially in the context of *Henry V* is the aspect of responsibility. Who is responsible for war, both in the sense of *jus ad bellum* – declaring war in general – and *jus in bello* – the actions of each individual combatant in battle? In *jus ad bellum*, the responsibility lies with the legitimate authority declaring war (Pugliatti 25). The monarch as the final judge of the intention, justness, and proportionality of the war to be waged is to be held responsible for all consequences. The only exception to this were considered to be holy wars. The claimed divine will of God freed monarchs from the responsibility for soldiers’ harm, since they died as martyrs and were rewarded by God for their service (Quabeck, *Just and Unjust Wars* 18). In *jus in bello*, on the other hand, responsibility pertains to the potential unjustness of combatants’ actions. Again, Walzer explains the point fittingly: “We draw a line between the war itself, for which soldiers are not responsible, and the conduct of the war, for which they are responsible, at least within their own sphere of activity” (Walzer 39). Thus, while a monarch is responsible for the war’s taking place in general and for ensuring that the intention is right and the cause is just, he or she is not responsible for the just or unjust conduct of each of his or her individual soldiers in battle. However, this becomes complicated if the monarch’s cause for war is not just, or if the authority orders unjust conduct in war. This inevitably leads to the question of whether stating that someone was

just following orders is a legitimate argument to free someone from their moral responsibility or not.

Next to the aspects discussed above, some scholars note additional principles in just war theory, such as a reasonable chance for success (Quabeck, “Just War Theory” 21, Mattox 31). The list of principles in just war theory varies, however the above-mentioned aspects form the core of the theory and will be discussed in the following chapter and applied to Shakespeare’s *Henry V* and the war against France.

3. Henry’s War Against France

In the 21st century, just war theory in Shakespeare literature has become more and more frequent. Plays such as the early and late history plays, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Hamlet*, or *Macbeth* have been discussed in the context of just war, and scholars have found support for both militarist and pacifist philosophies in almost all of them, with the general tendency to interpret the early English history plays as more militarist, shifting gradually towards more pacifist views in Shakespeare’s later plays (Quabeck, “Unjust Wars” 68). This chapter will be concerned with just war theory, arguing for or against the justness of Henry’s war against France, split into aspects of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*.

3.1. *Jus Ad Bellum*

Legitimate authority. In order to declare war generally, the king must have legitimate authority to do so. As a monarch, Henry has political sovereignty and thus legitimate authority. The Archbishop of Canterbury, who advises Henry on his decision, does not. As Camerlingo states

The Archbishop of Canterbury advises but does not authorize war. The authority and responsibility of the war fall entirely upon the King. And since the king cannot appeal to any authority, whether spiritual or supranational, other than himself, formal procedure and his own conscience become crucial elements in deciding the war’s justness. (Camerlingo 113)

However, Henry’s legitimacy is questioned if we consider the way in which he has obtained the crown. In *Richard II*, Henry’s father King Henry IV, then Henry Bolingbroke, usurps King Richard through rebellion. The divine right of kings sees rebellion as the evillest crime, as it is aimed at God’s representative on Earth (Wootton 94). However, Bolingbroke justifies his actions through Richard’s unsuitability as a king. Quabeck argues that here, legitimate authority is only obtained through the divine right of

kings as long as the monarch is able to fulfill his or her role sufficiently. The inability to act as a proper monarch thus leads to the forfeit of his or her legitimate authority and allows for a more suitable ruler to take his or her place. Thus, she argues for Bolingbroke's usurpation as just in the face of Richard's actions, as Henry proves himself a more capable king by obtaining the crown without (at first) causing a civil war (*Just and Unjust Wars* 106). Therefore, if we argue on the basis of the divine right of kings, Henry V's rule is illegitimate, but if we view Bolingbroke's usurpation as just, legitimate authority passes from him to his son King Henry V.

Right intention. The ultimate goal of all wars must be to establish peace. By the time Henry was crowned king, England had already been at war with France for 75 years, only interrupted by occasional truces. Such a truce was in place as Henry made his claim for the French throne. Though there were tensions between the territories, Henry's declaration of war led to another phase of armed conflict. Mattox explains that "consistent with the requirements of the just war tradition, Henry's ultimate objective is the restoration of peace" (45). However, Henry's war leads to the end of the peaceful truce, making Henry's intention questionable at best. Additionally, in the very first scene of the play, even before one gets to hear from Henry himself, the audience is presented with a dialogue between the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely. They discuss the issue of a bill that is to be passed by the king, stripping the Church of great parts of its lands (*Henry V* 1.1.7-19). The Archbishop explains that in order to make the king change his mind on the matter, he has made Henry an offer of substantial financial support should England choose to go to war with France (1.1.71-81). As Quabeck notes, the placement of this scene as the exposition of the play is crucial, as it suggests self-interest and a dubious nature from the beginning (*Just and Unjust Wars* 153). Mattox cites Henry's line "May I with right and conscience make this claim?" (*Henry V* 1.2.96) as a symbol for Henry's inward righteousness. Clearly, Henry understands the importance of having the right intention to go to war, otherwise his war would be unjust. And yet, it is true that "Given the Archbishop's revealed economic interest, neither the audience, nor Henry is likely surprised by his affirmative answer" (Contrada 18).

Another aspect to consider is the ongoing civil war within England, which his father King Henry IV had unsuccessfully tried to avoid. In *2 Henry IV*, he gives his son Hal advice from his deathbed: "Be it thy course to busy giddy minds / With foreign quarrels, that action hence borne out / May waste the memory of the former days." (4.5.213-5) He

explains that in order to divert attention away from inner-political conflicts, he had shifted his focus to war against the Holy Land, and now he urges his soon-to-be-king son to employ the same strategy. McEachern notes that “Whereas civil war speaks to divisions within a community, war with a foreign enemy can summon the sentimental appeal of a populace united against a common threat – even if the unity lasts only as long as the threat does” (60). She adds that “Given that in a feudal system subordinate power holders are necessarily (and literally) on edge, primed for battle, successful kingship consists in the ability to export war to foreign shores” (60). Thus, it can be argued that Henry uses the pretence of waging a just foreign war in an attempt to unite his own state.

Just Cause. Therefore, if peace with France is not Henry’s intention of the war, and if France was not threatening England with a breaking of the truce, the only logical explanation is that Henry wages war against France in order to gain French territory – territory which he believes rightfully belongs to him. At the beginning of the play, Henry and the Archbishop of Canterbury discuss Henry’s claim to the French throne. In a long and confusing monologue, the Archbishop traces Henry’s bloodline back to his great-great-grandmother Isabella, who was the daughter and last living child of French King Philip IV and married King Edward II of England. Due to the Salic law active in France, royal titles could not be passed down through the female line, leading to the French crown passing to Isabella’s cousin Philip VI instead of to her son Edward III. However, the Archbishop explains that the Salic law could not be applied to France, since the Salic land was not actually in France but in Germany (*Henry V* 1.2.35-55).

As Perry notes, this claim is dubious at best. After over 100 years of French rule, the French people are unlikely to accept Henry’s claim to the throne (3). Moreover, the fact that the audience was previously made aware of the clergy’s financial self-interest renders his lengthy explanation hypocritical and insincere. As Pugliatti explains, Shakespeare deliberately presents the audience with the clergy’s discussion on how to avert the passing of the bill *before* having the Archbishop give the justification of Henry’s claim to the French throne in order to present Henry’s cause as questionable at best (210).

Camerlingo, in line with interpretations of Mebane and Quabeck, writes that “this new interpretation of the Salic law, accompanied by a conspicuous sum of money to finance the war, is what the prelates offer in order to shift Henry’s attention from a Bill that would transfer their properties to the king” (104). Even if we view Henry’s claim as legitimate, the invasion of France clearly goes against the one true right intention of just

war, which is to re-establish peace. As Malcolm Pittock states in reference to the scene in question: “However much Shakespeare might have wished to believe that the Archbishop’s arguments were sound, not only did he know they were not, but he couldn’t help showing they were not by making them ludicrously tortuous” (183). Pugliatti calls Henry’s attempt as justifying his claim to the French throne a “falsification of the causa[sic] belli” (207). She notes that Henry employs the Archbishop’s divine legitimation and the Salic law in order to hide the true aim of his enterprise – to expand his dominion – which is one of the intentions Aquinas regards as unjust.

Mattox argues that despite the Archbishop’s dubious explanation, Henry truly believes in the justness of his cause as he urges the Archbishop to “justly and religiously” (*Henry V* 1.2.10) make the claim and “God forbid” (13) should he fabricate a cause that is “not in native colours with the truth” (17) and would “make[s] such waste in brief mortality” (28). He even asks the Archbishop outright “May I with right and conscience make this claim?” (96). Clearly, Henry is aware of the need of a just cause and the costs of (an unjust) war. Mattox rejects readings such as those of Quabeck which interpret Henry’s apparent concern for the justness of his cause as simply performative. Whether at this point we can believe in Henry’s true righteousness depends on whether he and the Archbishop are both fabricating this story *together*, based on a mutual agreement over the Church bill to not be passed if the Archbishop as representative of the Church and of God provides Henry’s cause with divine legitimacy. Since we learn in the very first scene that the Archbishop has already made this offer to the king before, such a reading could be justified (Quabeck, *Just and Unjust Wars* 154). In support of this argument, Mebane notes just how many times Henry refers to God during his speech (258). And indeed, Henry appears intent on making it seem to the audience that his cause has divine legitimacy. The emphasis here is on “making it seem”, as this is a mere part of Henry’s strategy to divert the blame of his unjust cause to others – an aspect that will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.

In the same scene later on, the French Dauphin indirectly insults Harry by giving him tennis-balls as a “treasure” in exchange for asking Henry to forget about his claim. This is followed by Henry expressing to the French ambassador that England is now at war with France: “And tell the pleasant Prince this mock of his / Hath turned his balls to gunstones” (*Henry V* 1.2.282-3). Camerlingo notes that in Gentili’s theory on just war based on Machiavellian policy, wars fought for the sake of honour have a special status:

Taking on Machiavelli's principle that power is the first objective for a state to survive, Gentili argues that aspiring to glory and honour is not only legitimate but inevitable for a nation that wants to last in the competitive and aggressive world of sixteenth-century Europe. If honour is injured, therefore, war may legitimately be waged not only to re-establish justice and peace, and to satisfy the sovereign's honour, but to guarantee the political safety of nation and people. (114)

However, honour is no recurrent theme in the play, and Henry had already decided to wage war against France previously in the scene. Moreover, the concept of honour was already discussed at length in *1 Henry IV*, with Falstaff's monologue after the battle of Shrewsbury condemning honour as an empty word. Seeing that Hotspur – a symbolic character representing honour and chivalric values despite his choleric temper – was killed and defeated by Hal, it would be questionable whether in *Henry V* Shakespeare would return to presenting honour as the most important kingly value. Perry and Raupp argue for the Dauphin's insult as a kind of final straw that led Henry to declare war on France (Perry 5, Raupp 161). However, it would be more fitting to say that Henry merely takes this opportunity to officially announce the war to an already present ambassador of France, as the war has already been decided (Quabeck, *Just and Unjust Wars* 159).

Lastly, Quabeck notes that not once in the entire play does Henry consider it necessary to justify his claim to the throne beyond act 1, scene 2 – not to his generals, not to his soldiers, not even to the audience. She notes that if, after the dubious introductory scene, Shakespeare had intended for Henry's cause to be undeniably just, he would have surely made Henry defend it as such at a later point in the play (*Just and Unjust Wars* 168).

Proportionality. In his speech addressed to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Henry makes clear that he is aware of the principle of proportion and that the cause is only just if the positive consequences outweigh the inevitable harm and evil of war:

For God doth know how many now in health
Shall drop their blood in approbation
Of what your reverence shall incite us to.
Therefore take heed how you impawn our person,
How you awake our sleeping sword of war;
We charge you in the name of God, take heed.
For never two such kingdoms did contend
Without much fall of blood, whose guiltless drops
Are every one a woe, a sore complaint
'Gainst him whose wrongs gives edge unto the swords
That makes such waste in brief mortality. (*Henry V* 1.2.18-28)

Again, in the light of the clergy's self-interest, the audience is not surprised to hear the Archbishop agree that Henry's claim to the French throne outweighs the evil that will

follow. The Archbishop even goes as far as to say “The sin upon my head, dread sovereign” (1.2.97), taking responsibility if he was wrong. Mattox claims that it was Shakespeare’s intention to present Henry as a just monarch by not explicitly discussing a possible violation of the principle of proportionality in later scenes of the play (42). But just because the issue is not further discussed does not mean that it should be disregarded altogether. Quabeck notes that war may be waged if a government poses a threat to its citizens, or if the citizens’ basic human rights are violated, which the peace that follows a war would restore (*Just and Unjust Wars* 32). However, the citizens of France are not threatened by their own government, making the establishment of a new monarch or government unnecessary. Thus, Henry’s war clearly brings more harm than good to both his own people as well as to all French citizens, violating the principle of proportionality regarding *jus ad bellum*.

3.2. *Jus In Bello*

Discrimination. The most important principle of *jus in bello* demands that harming non-combatants must always be avoided as well as possible. *Henry V* offers two very crucial scenes in which Henry seems to violate this principle. Firstly, after laying siege to Harfleur in France and hearing the town’s parlay, Henry speaks to the governor and the people. He urges the governor to give up the town and harshly threatens the citizens of Harfleur, explaining in gory detail what will happen if they do not surrender:

If I begin the battery once again
I will not leave the half-achieved Harfleur
Till in her ashes she lie buried.
The gates of mercy shall be all shut up,
And the fleshed soldier, rough and hard of heart,
In liberty of bloody hand shall range
With conscience wide as hell, mowing like grass
Your fresh fair virgins and your flowering infants. [...] (*Henry V* 3.3.7-14)

Any of those actions would clearly violate the principle of discrimination. The governor explains that the town does not have the means to defend itself any longer and will thus surrender to Henry. After this, Henry orders his soldiers to “Use mercy to them all” (3.3.54). The audience is left with the question of whether Henry would have truly gone through with his threats if the town had not surrendered. Was it simply his intention to scare the citizens into submission? In a later dialogue with his general Fluellen, Henry again orders to not mistreat the French citizens or commit war crimes such as looting. He

states that “when lenity and cruelty play for a kingdom, the gentler gamester is the soonest winner” (3.6.110-2). Believing in Henry’s intention not to harm the citizens of Harfleur, Mebane argues that in his threat to the town, Henry displays typical characteristics of a Machiavellian prince who aims to be both loved and feared (262). However, Mebane admits that this does nothing to lessen the evil of the threats. Perry notes that Henry’s speech at Harfleur in a way reiterated the threats to the French Dauphin, explaining that innocent people would be harmed if it came to war (10).

Another aspect that must be considered is the prohibition of deceiving the enemy during battle. If Henry did not intend to harm the citizens of Harfleur, his threat would pose such a deceit. This leads to a crucial paradox: If his threats were genuine, he would violate the principle of discrimination in the most horrifying ways; if they were not, he would be guilty of deceiving the enemy. Either way, he violates a principle of *jus in bello*.

The second crucial scene regarding *jus in bello* is Henry’s order to kill of French war prisoners after the battle of Agincourt. Henry gives the order twice, once immediately after the battle has ended and the French retreated (*Henry V* 4.6.35-8), and once after being informed that the French have slaughtered English boys guarding supplies (4.7.62-4). The killing of war prisoners is strictly against the principle of discrimination. Mattox interprets the order mainly as a reprisal in regard to the killing of English boys, which, as Fluellen puts it, is “expressly against the law of arms” (4.7.1-2). Indeed, this is the point Fluellen’s speech wants to bring across: “’Tis certain there’s not a boy left alive [...] wherefore the King most worthily hath caused every soldier to cut his prisoner’s throat. O, ‘tis a gallant king” (4.7.5-10), which is ironic following not two lines after Henry’s order to kill French prisoners. But Fluellen’s interpretation is betrayed by the sequence of events, which implies that Henry was not aware of the boys’ slaughtering when he first gave the order. Mattox justifies the killing of prisoners through the justification of Henry’s cause itself, given that the French are on the “wrong” side, withholding from Henry his divine and hereditary right of French kingship (49). However, Quabeck rightfully notes Mattox’s confusion of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*, which makes it impossible to justify the breach of *jus in bello* rightful conduct with *jus ad bellum* argumentation (*Just and Unjust Wars* 224). Rather, Henry gives the order in response to an alarm indicating that “The French have reinforced their scattered men” (*Henry V* 4.6.35-6). In this situation, the killing of prisoners is unjust. However, it raises the question of whether this was a strategically necessary action to secure the battlefield.

Perry asks: “Granted that killing surrendered and disarmed soldiers is a horrific thing, bordering on murder, is it really fair to prohibit their captors from doing so in the heat of battle, if they have reason to fear that they themselves will otherwise be killed?” (11). Either way, the killing of war prisoners is a war crime and goes against just war principles both in Elizabethan and modern times.

The last action that will be discussed here is Henry’s sentencing of Bardolph. Bardolph is accused of having looted from a French church, and Pistol’s search for help from Fluellen remains unfruitful (*Henry V* 3.6.52-5). Despite their shared past, Henry does not save Bardolph but explains that “We would have all such offenders so cut off” (*Henry V* 3.6.106). This is undoubtedly Henry’s most clearly just *jus in bello* action, as such a war crime warranted the death penalty. Ironically, it is also the one the audience (at least those who are familiar with the *Henry IV* plays) would condemn the most based on personal feelings towards Henry’s old friend. The tragic irony of this scene is emphasized later when Fluellen compares Henry to Alexander the Great. Gower expresses that “Our king is not like him in that: he never killed any of his friends” (*Henry V* 4.7.39-40), unaware that Bardolph, indeed, used to be his friend.

Proportionality. While proportionality of *jus ad bellum* considers the state of kingdoms before and after war and weighs them against the negative consequences of the battles, proportionality of *jus in bello* pertains to the actions taken during the battles itself. As explained above, from a strictly ethical point of view Henry’s speech at Harfleur is highly immoral. However, it could be argued that it is justified given that it prevents further death and bloodshed. If this is the case, his deceit could be seen as a strategy adhering to the principle of proportionality (Quabeck, *Just and Unjust Wars* 162). Still, we must consider any violation of any of the principles as an unjust act in war, including violating the principle of discrimination for the sake of proportionality.

4. Responsibility in Henry V

The previous chapter attempted to show that the war against France shows more characteristics of an unjust war than of a just war. Yet, Henry is very aware of the principles of just war, as his speech about proportionality to the Archbishop of Canterbury makes clear. How then does Henry deal with the burden of responsibility that comes with fighting an unjust war, given that it is the legitimate authority with whom responsibility ultimately lies? He does so by attempting to shift all responsibility for the

war to others, both regarding *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* – first to the Archbishop, then to the French royals, then to the citizens of Harfleur and to his soldiers, and, ultimately, to God. And by doing so, the unjust nature of Henry’s cause becomes even more evident.

Right from the beginning, Henry’s strategy of shifting the blame regarding *jus ad bellum* is made clear in his speech to the Archbishop. He emphasizes “what your reverence shall incite us to” and urges the Archbishop to “take heed how you impawn our person” (*Henry V* 1.2.20-1). It is the Archbishop who, through his explanation and justification of Henry’s claim, will “awake our sleeping sword of war” (1.2.22). Henry further rids himself of responsibility by asking “May I with right and conscience make this claim?” (1.2.96) and thus counting on the Archbishop’s divine legitimacy to justify and be responsible for his impending war. Quabeck notes that “although his words might indeed sound “moral and humane,” the whole speech is in actual fact a casuistic argument that is supposed to absolve him of the crime of aggression” (*Just and Unjust Wars* 157). The king is still the one to declare war, and this attempt at shifting the blame does not resolve him of his responsibility but rather emphasizes that he is guilty of waging aggressive war.

Henry also accuses the French of being responsible for the war. Firstly, this is the case if we interpret Henry’s response to the Dauphin’s mocking gift as an attempt to shift the blame: “And tell the pleasant Prince this mock of his / Hath turned his balls to gunstones” (*Henry V* 1.2.282-3). Henry states that the French “shall have cause to curse the Dauphin’s scorn” (1.2.289). Thus, he turns the Dauphin’s mocking joke into his own argument for war, putting the responsibility on the Dauphin’s head. In a later scene, through Exeter as the messenger, Henry expresses that all death and suffering will be the French King’s fault for not accepting Henry’s claim to the throne:

And bids you, in the bowels of the Lord,
Deliver up the crown and to take mercy
On the poor souls for whom this hungry war
Opens his vasty jaws; and on your head
Turning the widows’ tears, the orphans’ cries
The dead men’s blood, the pining maidens’ groans (2.4.102-7)

Both of Henry’s arguments are faulty; a joke does not warrant a just war, but it is legitimate of the French to defend themselves in the face of Henry’s aggression (Quabeck, *Just and Unjust Wars* 159).

At the siege of Harfleur, Henry employs the same strategy but concerning *jus in bello*. To the governor he expresses that “What is’t to me, when you yourselves are cause, / If

your pure maidens fall into the hand of hot and forcing violation?" (*Henry V* 3.3.19-21). His reasoning becomes even more clear when he asks "Will you yield and this avoid? / Or, guilty in defence, be thus destroyed?" (3.3.42-3). Again, his argument is faulty, as the responsibility of evil lies upon the aggressor and not on the defending body, and in his threat Henry even takes away the town's right of self-defence. Mattox defends Henry's argument by referring to Henry's claim that he would be unable to control his soldiers once the battle resumed (47). However, as the king he of course has reign over his soldiers' actions, rendering his excuse nothing more than an attempt at shifting the blame once again.

In one of the most crucial scenes, King Henry in disguise speaks with two of his common soldiers. What is striking is that this is the first instance of any of the English to question the justness of Henry's war. Upon his statement that the King's cause is just, William says that "That's more than we know" (*Henry V* 4.1.129). He adds "if the cause be not good, the King himself hath a heavy reckoning to make" (4.1.134-5), rightfully explaining that the King is responsible for the consequences and justness of the war. It is at this point that Henry intentionally blurs the lines of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* to divert and falsify William's argument. He argues that – in line with *jus in bello* – "the King is not bound to answer the particular endings of his soldiers" (4.1.155-6), i.e. the soldiers' action during battle, and "Every subject's duty is the King's, but every subject's soul is his own" (4.1.175-7). However, this is a twisting of the soldiers' actual point about the general justness of Henry's war concerning *jus ad bellum*, which Henry evades. As Walzer notes, "We draw a line between the war itself, for which soldiers are not responsible, and the conduct of the war, for which they are responsible, at least within their own sphere of activity" (39). Since Henry cannot legitimately justify his war to the soldiers, he intentionally blurs this crucial dichotomy of just war theory to shift the blame and rid himself of the responsibility of the unjust war's consequences (Stevens 224).

Lastly, Henry shifts the blame for the war towards God. Quabeck points out that "Henry merely instrumentalises God as the authority to take the blame" (*Just and Unjust Wars* 160), as he does not, in fact, justify his cause to the audience or to himself by referencing God. Henry attributes the victory at Agincourt to God, which he does to legitimize his cause, as any battle's outcome was ultimately just and in the hands of God (Higginbotham et al.). Concerning the link between just cause and responsibility, we can then rightfully say that "[i]f the play in fact attempted to glorify this king and his war, it

could not at the same time make so unmistakably clear that Henry avoids all responsibility for his actions. He is culpable of the crime of unlawful aggression” (Quabeck, *Just and Unjust Wars* 171).

5. Conclusion

It was the aim of this paper to discuss Shakespeare’s *Henry V* and the war against France in terms of war theory. *Henry V*, amongst other Shakespeare plays, clearly engages with moral and ethical questions of war, and, as has been shown, just war theory lends itself especially well to an analysis of the play, since Shakespeare’s characters are keenly aware of the principles both regarding *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*.

It was argued that if we carefully consider those principles, King Henry violates more than he adheres to, presenting the audience with a monarch that fits better to the character of Machiavelli’s prince than to a more traditional, honourable ruler¹. Henry has legitimate authority to declare war, but his intentions are dubious, as he does not seek to establish peace but gain territory. Furthermore, it is almost impossible to identify Henry’s cause as just, since he bases his claim to the French throne on an old French law and complicated family relations that span almost a century, and the costs of his war are not proportionate with its benefits. If we consider *jus in bello*, Henry’s acts are equally questionable. He harshly threatens non-combatants, which must be considered unethical, even if he is not forced to turn rhetoric into action. Finally, the issue of responsibility shows as an overarching thread throughout the play. Henry continuously attempts to shift his responsibility and blame for the war or its consequences to others, including his own counsel and soldiers, the French royals and citizens, and God. He is aware of the principles of just war, but still (or maybe that is precisely why) he confuses *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*, fabricating his war in a way that allows it to appear just once the crucial battle of Agincourt is won.

Being now aware of Henry V’s warfare, it would be interesting to take a look at possible similarities or differences in regard to his father’s strategies and warfare as presented by Shakespeare, especially considering rebellion and civil war within England. Some of Henry IV’s final words to his son “to busy giddy minds / With foreign quarrels” (2 *Henry IV* 4.5.213-4) point towards the implication that the two are, at times, related.

¹ See also Quabeck, “Just War Theory”, for a more detailed discussion of Henry in the context of Machiavelli’s *realpolitik*.

Lastly, it must be noted that what should be taken from analyses of war theory in Shakespeare is not whether they are evidence for Shakespeare's personal support or condemnation of war. Rather, such analyses, especially employing just war theory, show that truly just causes for war are hard to come by, and that war politics constitutes a constant weighing of moral and ethical principles – principles that are and will remain relevant for as long as humankind believes it necessary to wage war.

6. Works Cited

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7. Declaration of Authenticity

I hereby declare that the work submitted is my own and that all passages and ideas that are not mine have been fully and properly acknowledged. I am aware that I will fail the entire course should I include passages and ideas from other sources and present them as if they were my own.



Signature

07.03.2022
Date