

首届莎士比亚人文主题征文大赛“学术类”一等奖

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‘Mirror of All Christian Kings’

As the ‘mirror of all Christian kings’ (Act 2, Prologue, 6), Henry V may be the most beloved monarch in British history, and Shakespeare's beloved king as well. He is a good king of England with ambition and power, and the conqueror of the French with courage and wisdom. Critics tended to study Henry V in the scenes of war, on which the play focused. By contrast, the wooing scene was neglected for its meaninglessness: the marriage of Henry and Catherine was already part of the treaty, so Henry doesn't need to woo her. James Winny (1968, p. 209) argues that Shakespeare designs this scene only to give ‘the last of the histories the form of a happy ending.’ However, this scene is not superfluous or ‘shallow’ as James Winny (1968, p. 209) says, ‘It would be absurd to argue that a scene as shallow and perfunctory in its dialogue could carry any imaginative conviction’. Instead, it is indispensable for showing Henry's character in a panoramic view. As Marilyn Williamson (1975, p.327) denotes, ‘Henry's manner with Katherine is [a] consonant with Shakespeare's total portrait of him and brings to completion tendencies that develop earlier in Henry V.’ This essay is going to argue that Henry's courtship of Catherine illustrates Shakespeare's optimal kinship regarding love.

Henry's courtship is to justify his marriage to Catherine, which reflects the nature of justice as an essential quality of a king. For Henry V, to justify kingship is urgent. Although Henry V is a legal heir of the king of England, he is still in the shadow of his father's usurpation. An illegal usurpation will only lead to a miserable consequence, which can be explained by the ‘latest counsel’ of Hal's father: because his monarch is an ‘honor snatched with boisterous hand,’ the dissenters' voice ‘daily [grows] to quarrel and to bloodshed.’ Thus, he suggests that his son distract the dissenters' mind ‘[w]ith foreign quarrels,’ which ‘[m]ay waste the memory of the former days.’ (Henry IV 2, 4.3.310-46) That is why Henry V takes military action against France. Besides, Henry V attaches great importance to the justice of war. He asks the Church and its representative, the

Archbishop of Canterbury, to justify his military action: '[my] learned lord, we pray you to proceed/ And justly and religiously unfold/ Why the law Salic that they have in France/ Or should or should not bar us in our claim'. (1.2.13) He is not satisfied with the support of the Church; he wants to gain the support from his soldiers as well. Thus, disguised in Erpingham's dirty cloak as an ordinary soldier, the king defends against his motive and courage against Michael Williams and his friends: 'Methinks I could not die anywhere so contented as in the king's company, his cause being just and his quarrel honorable' (4.1.117). These details demonstrate that Shakespeare tends to describe Henry V as a responsible monarch, so he reemphasizes this character of Henry in the wooing scene. Henry V's marriage with Catherine of Valois, as the English's 'capital demand' (5.2.98), is already assured by Catherine's father, the King of France. However, that marriage lacks certain justice for they have not asked Catherine's own willing. Thus, Henry V, who cares about justice the most, woos Catherine, for 'love' can justify a marriage. It is clear that Henry does not actually care if Catherine loves him sincerely or not. He just wants a response or an affirmation from her: 'Give me your answer, i' faith, do; and so clap hands and a bargain. How say you, lady?' (5.2.129). For Henry, Catherine's love (though it does not matter if it is true words or just flattery) is a commodity that will give justification to make the political marriage less 'political.' Jean Howard (1994, p.149) denotes: 'In reality Catherine is a prize of war; in reality, she has no choice as to whether or not to marry Henry; in reality affection probably does not matter.' This scene is designed to downplay 'these facts' or to 'convert rape into romance' (McEachern, Introduction xxxiii). Henry, as a king who cares about justice and legitimacy most, inevitably, proposes to Catherine to justify their marriage. Otherwise, he would be questioned for the wedding's lack of love. As Williamson (1975, p. 329) points out, 'Trying to get Katherine to say that she loves him may be relatively less critical to the marriage than is the support of the Archbishop for the war in France, but it seems to spring from the same motive or need.' The seemingly superfluousness of the wooing scene attracts the audience's attention to how much Henry values justice.

The wooing scene demonstrates Henry V's intelligent and eloquence, and that is essential for an ideal king. When Henry V was still Prince Harry, he was aware that how to 'show

more goodly and attract more eyes' (Henry IV 1, 1.2.184) was to disappoint his father and the court at the beginning, but to reform in the end. Harry says when his 'loose behavior' was 'threw off' and takes the responsibility of becoming a king, he will 'falsify men's hopes' soon (Henry IV 1, 1.2.178-181) for 'nothing pleaseth but rare accidents' (Henry IV 1, 1.2.176). Henry V uses a military strategy that is similar to 'reformation': he pretends to be weak firstly to throw his opponents' off their guard and makes every effort when it is necessary. Donald Hedrick (2003, p.473) denotes that Henry used the 'psychological tactics' of 'confess[ing] to the French envoy the inferior strength and numbers of his troops' to let down French vigilance: 'Though 'tis no wisdom to confess so much / Unto an enemy of craft and vantage' (3.6.129- 30). According to the text, '[o]f fighting men [French] have full threescore thousand' (4.3.3), which is 'five to one' (4.3.4).). With this numerical superiority, French forces have every confidence to defeat their tired enemy: 'Do but behold yond poor and starved band, /And your fair show shall suck away their souls, / Leaving them but the shales and husks of men' (4.2.16-18). There is no direct evidence in the play that the French's arrogance leads to failure, but their disdain for the English somehow puts themselves at a disadvantage. That kind of manipulation applies to the wooing scene again when Henry poses himself as a soldier who is clumsy in speech: 'Will you vouchsafe to teach a soldier terms / Such as will enter at a lady's ear / And plead his love suit to her gentle heart?' While Catherine needs a translator's help to communicate with Henry, he asks her to teach him how to speak. In this way, he puts himself at a disadvantage of a blunt soldier, toning down the fact that he is the king of the victorious nation (Barton, 1975, p.106). However, the audiences know that he is oratorical for he has made a lot of brilliant speeches. In the wooing scene, he shows his talent of speech: he skillfully uses the short form of Catherine to adjust his relationship with her. His greeting to Catherine is '[f]air Katherine' (5.2.101) because it will be rude to use too special a name. When he asks Catherine if she loves him, he changes to calling her 'Kate' (5.2.109). However, he does not get the answer he wants from her for there is a language barrier between them. Thus, Henry retreats using to her full name: 'I said so, dear Katherine; and I must not blush to affirm it'. Then Catherine shows her distrust to him. To mitigate that situation, Henry calls her 'Kate' again to shorten their distance: '[t]he princess is the better Englishwoman. -- I' faith, Kate, my

wooing is fit for thy understanding.’ (5.2.119-20) From then on, he continues to call her ‘Kate’, and Catherine finally consents to his proposal. Though his speech is rhetoric, he reiterates he is as plain as a soldier who has ‘no cunning in protestation, only downright oaths’ (5.2.135). He knows that love words from an unpolished soldier sound more sincere than the ones from a frivolous playboy. This ‘elaborate apology’ (D. Hedrick, 2003, p. 479) for his lack of eloquence, compared with his ‘reasonable measure in strength’ (5.2.132), emphasizes the value of ‘a good heart’ that ‘never changes’ (5.2.161).

Henry meets the requirements for an ideal monarch: he is legitimate and has intelligence and talents. As a king, Henry's marriage is not a personal matter; instead, it links to the whole country's destiny. Though Henry asserts he is an ordinary man wooing his precious girl, he shows his kingly manner in that process. As Peter Phialas (1965, p. 155-175) tries to articulate: in the wooing scene, Henry completes the transformation from Hal into Henry V; it reveals that ‘now that he is king, he can no longer behave genuinely and simply as a man’ (M. Willianson, 1975, p. 327). The wooing scene is designed to tell the audience that an ideal king not only is good at war and politics but also performs well when he courts.

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