England is in turmoil when Shakespeare presents *Henry V*, the final play in his two tetralogies of history plays. Uncertainty regarding Queen Elizabeth I’s successor and the threat of invasion by Spain or Scotland make the people uneasy. The intensifying religious conflict between Protestants and Catholics and the war in Ireland have also increased their fear. Together, these issues create a sense of foreboding and doom concerning the future. England wishes and prays for a miracle, or a protector and hero like Shakespeare’s *Henry V*. Instead, the play reflects the growing uneasiness in England and foreshadows a turbulent future for England.

Queen Elizabeth I (“Elizabeth”), like the other Tudor monarchs, believed the monarch to be the absolute authority. She had once declared that Parliament was needed for only three things: “to vote such taxes as were required, to legislate on topics submitted to them, and to give advice on policy when asked” (Bindoff 221). The proclamation virtually eliminated discussion or action by Parliament and the Inns of Court on the succession and the other critical issues of the day (e.g., religious conflict and relations with Ireland). As a result, these issues remained unaddressed and unresolved. Elizabeth’s avoidance of these issues left the people feeling unprotected and increased their fears and concerns for the future of England.

As the monarch, one of Elizabeth’s duties was to protect the people. It was the sovereign’s duty to protect her people from all harm, whether internally inflicted or externally threatened. As Lily Campbell explains in *Shakespeare’s ‘Histories’: Mirrors of Elizabethan*
Policy, the monarch represents the people in achieving justice on their behalf against domestic or foreign enemies:

   The magistrate (or ruler) is the instrument of public vengeance. To him God gives the sword of his justice. The sword so given is to be used to punish trespassers and to destroy open enemies, foreign enemies as well as rebellious and seditious subjects, for the magistrate must not only execute justice upon thieves and murderers, but also upon those evil men who come as ravening wolves.

(266). The monarch is like the shepherd who guards the sheep, she is responsible for the safety of the people. Elizabeth’s failure to name her successor left the people feeling unprotected and fearful of an invasion. In Shakespeare’s early history plays, the audience had seen Henry VI relinquish his duties to the control of regents who ruled England so poorly that they caused a war that lasted for over thirty years. In the second tetralogy, Bolingbroke usurps the throne while King Richard II is away. Henry VI’s and Richard II’s failures to protect the people had disastrous consequences for England.

History plays in the English theater developed at a time when England was becoming a more powerful and a more important player among European countries. According to Philip Edwards, the history plays of the late 16th century were a means by which the people “learned to know who they were by seeing what they had been” (68). Additionally, David Bevington characterizes the history plays as not merely reflections of English history; rather, they were explorations of issues affecting England’s development and addressed questions “on which the government wished to implant its own formula” and “on which every Englishman wished to be heard” (TD&P 25). Shakespeare uses history in Henry V to allude to King James VI of Scotland (“James”) and to address current important issues, such as the succession, religion, and Ireland,
in the context of England’s past. Shakespeare’s first tetralogy began with Henry VI, who became king in infancy (a “cradle king”), and his second tetralogy began with Richard II, who became king as a child. Since neither had reached the age of majority, at which time they would rule as kings, regents ruled in their places. As the plays had shown, mismanagement and bloodshed were the results. James was also a cradle king, and Shakespeare feared that he, too, would bring disaster to England. Due to strict censorship, however, it was necessary for Shakespeare to address these issues in a subtle, indirect way.

Fear of assassination and her distrust of James prevented Elizabeth from publicly proclaiming him as her successor. The death of her mother, Anne Boleyn, was ordered by King Henry VIII (Anne’s husband and Elizabeth’s father) and taught Elizabeth how easily a woman could lose her life. She was determined not to cede power to any man. As a Protestant queen, she was excommunicated by Pope Pius V, who urged her subjects to rebel against her. Over the years, she faced threats of invasion by foreigners and assassination plots, including one involving James’s mother, Mary, Queen of Scots. From her experience, Elizabeth knew that people were fickle and that the future monarch was more popular than the present one. Just as more people “look[ed] . . . to the ‘‘rising than to the setting sun,’” they tended to look more favorably on the successor rather than on the reigning monarch. In Elizabeth’s view, a monarch could not even trust his or her own children, and she was certainly not going to trust a child of Mary, Queen of Scots (de Lisle 17, quoting Spottiswood[e], John, et al. 10-13). Refusing to name her successor allowed Elizabeth to feel some measure of safety and control. However, James was not the only possible successor.

Other eligible candidates to succeed Elizabeth included England’s enemy, Felipe II, the King of Spain. Technically, his claim was stronger than the Tudor or Stuart claims, because
Felipe II was a descendant of John of Gaunt’s daughter by his first wife, while the Tudors were descended from his third wife. When Felipe II died before Elizabeth did, his daughter Isabella became the eligible Spanish claimant. Because she was Catholic and a foreigner, Isabella’s claim to the throne raised the already high fears in England of invasion. Spain was an extremely powerful country, with allies such as the Pope and Catholic France and gold from its conquests in the Americas. England’s navy was not yet as powerful as Spain’s, and England lacked the wealth it would acquire later. The English believed Spain capable of invading England, and the English could all too easily picture the King of Spain conspiring with high-ranking clerics to make plans to invade England. Spain had already attempted several invasions of England during the past ten years and made one final attempt to invade England before Elizabeth died, but that attempt failed, just as all of Spain’s previous attempts had failed. The threat of another invasion by Spain added to England’s fears, since the English at that time were not as wealthy or as powerful as Spain. In addition, as a Protestant country, England lacked Spain’s powerful Catholic allies.

There were also English claimants to the throne. One of the contenders was Edward, Lord Beauchamp, whose parents, Lady Katherine Grey and Edward Seymour, also a descendant of Edward III, married secretly and without Elizabeth’s permission. Because the couple’s marriage had not received Elizabeth’s required approval, they were imprisoned in the Tower of London. Their child, Edward, Lord Beauchamp, was declared illegitimate and therefore was ineligible to become monarch. James’s cousin Arbella was also eligible, but her claim was weaker than James’s, and she did not have as much support as he did. Despite the other claims to the throne, it became clear that James VI of Scotland would likely inherit the throne.
The discussion in Act 1 of the play regarding Henry V’s right to the throne of France and the possible invasion of England contains an allusion to James VI of Scotland. Henry believes he has a valid claim to the crown of France, based on his descent from Edward III through the female line. The French refuse to accept his claim as valid, based on the Salic Law, which bars a female from inheriting a kingdom. Shakespeare reminds us that the Salic Law pertains to certain lands between the Elbe and Saale rivers in Germany captured by the French later and not to France itself: “twixt Elbe and Saale/. . . at this day in Germany called Meissen” (1.2.52-53). In the play, the Archbishop then proceeds to recite a list of French kings (the “begats”) to support his reasoning and to show how even some kings of France argued the Salic Law did not bar their claim to the throne:

King Pépin’s title and Hugh Capet’s claim,

King Louis his satisfaction, all appear

To hold in right and title of the female;

So do the kings of France unto this day,

Howbeit they would hold up this Salic Law

To bar your highness claiming from the female, . . . (1.2.92).

Since the Salic law does not apply to France itself and since some of the French kings also based their claims on the same reasoning as Henry did, the Archbishop concludes that Henry’s claim to be king of France is also valid. Therefore, Henry can invade France to reclaim England’s lost territories.
James’s claim to the English throne was based, like Henry V’s, on descent from Edward III through the female line. James’s supporters argued that the same reasoning supporting Henry’s claim to the throne of France (i.e., there was no Salic Law barring it) also supported James’s claim to the English throne. James’s claim was valid because England did not have a Salic Law prohibiting a female from becoming monarch. In a case of life imitating art, James’s supporters even adapted Henry’s statement in the play that he was “No king of England, if not king of France” (2.2.190) (i.e., no king of Scotland if not king of England, in James’s case) in support of James’s claim to the English throne (Axton 112-115). James’s supporters hoped that using the hero-king’s words implied a similarity between the two men, thus making James more acceptable to the English people and adding support to his claim.

In considering James VI as a hero, Shakespeare’s Henry V and James show some interesting similarities. In Act One, the Archbishop of Canterbury describes the “new” Henry:

Hear him but reason in divinity

........................................................................

You would desire the King were made a prelate;

Hear him debate of commonwealth affairs,

You would say it hath been all-in-all his study;

........................................................................

Turn him to any cause of policy,

The Gordian knot of it he will unloose, . . . (1.1.39-47).

The Archbishop is amazed that the new king, Henry V, has almost overnight become a new man, since Henry had spent his youth with thieves and other unsavory characters. Now Henry is a knowledgeable and wise man in matters relating to religion, government, and politics, among
other things, and the Archbishop wonders how this change could have occurred. Bishop Ely explains the “miraculous” change by comparing Henry with the strawberry plant, which produces the best berries when placed among “fruit of baser quality” (1.1.61-63). Despite unfavorable circumstances, quality will manifest itself.

To Henry, his transformation is neither a miracle nor a controlled act of nature. He describes his transformation as a “sea change”: “The tide of blood in me/Hath proudly flowed in vanity till now;/Now doth it turn and ebb back to the sea,/Where it shall mingle with the state of floods/And flow henceforth in formal majesty” (2 Henry IV 5.2.129-133). Henry’s explanation for the change compares it to the ebb and flow of the sea, an act of nature, but one suggesting constant change, depth, and power, a more complex description than the Bishop’s simple analogy to strawberries.

Norman Rabkin, in his article, “Rabbits, Ducks, and Henry V,” states that people tend to have either a positive or negative view of Henry V in the play. Instead of choosing one of the two, Rabkin chooses to see Henry as both interpretations. At one moment, we see Prince Hal carousing with thieves, while in the next moment we see the serious King Henry V discussing battle plans for an invasion. The Archbishop knows that the wastrel Prince Hal is the same person as King Henry V, but he sees only one version at a time and cannot explain how both are the same person. Rabkin goes on to show how Shakespeare sets up the positive aspects of the play, only to later undermine them. For example, Henry’s miraculous victory at Agincourt contradicts the Archbishop’s statement at the beginning of the play that there are no more miracles. Another example is Henry’s insistence on the Archbishop’s reassurance for Henry’s right to claim the French throne. Henry knows perfectly well the Archbishop’s offer to financially support Henry’s war expenses has less to do with the legality of Henry’s claim and
more to do with preventing a bill in Parliament that would severely deplete the Church’s
treasury. Further, Henry’s joyful speech at the end of the play of the good times to come now
that England and France are united is undermined immediately afterward when the Chorus
reminds the audience of what happened: Henry’s death and the disasters that ensued when his
son, Henry VI, succeeded to the throne. For Rabkin, these instances are ambiguities and part of
human nature; the play’s ambiguities reflect the dual conflicts of people’s hopes and fears: “hope
that society can solve our problems with our knowledge that society has never done so” (296).
Shakespeare suggests that the ambiguities in the play reflect the ambiguities of life in England as
the people anticipate the transition from Elizabeth to James.

James VI of Scotland was intelligent and highly educated. He had been taught by George
Buchanan, one of the foremost scholars of the 16th century. Although lacking Shakespeare’s
style, the description of James by M. Fontenay, Ambassador of Henry III of France, is similar to
Shakespeare’s Henry V: “He has three parts of the soul in perfection. He grasps and understands
quickly; he judges carefully and with reasonable discourses . . . he is learned in many languages,
sciences, and affairs of state” (Stewart 74-5). Despite the contrast in their upbringing, the
similarities between Henry and James imply a favorable connection. Bishop Montagu, upon
meeting James, described him as having the wisdom of Solomon, but added that James was
better than Solomon because “[James] had been steadfast in religion” (Willson 170 quoting
Montagu). James, however, had also been described by a minister to the French King Henry IV
as “the wisest fool in Christendom” (Massie 144), and de Lisle writes that in his teens James
developed a “talent to deceive” (49). That James was described as Solomon-like, a fool, and
deceptive echoes the Archbishop’s confusion about Henry V.
There are other similarities between Shakespeare’s Henry V and James. Both thwart assassination attempts. Both men had close relationships with “father-like” figures: Henry’s father figure was Falstaff, one of his Eastcheap cohorts, and James’s was his primary tutor, George Buchanan, one of the leading intellectuals of the time. These figures exerted strong influence and helped shape the person each would become. Henry’s father, King Henry IV, spent much of his time trying to keep his kingdom intact against mutinous nobles. James was left in the care of the nobles who acted as regents when he was less than one year old (his father was dead, and his mother had abdicated). As his tutor, George Buchanan provided James with an excellent education; however, their personalities were incompatible. After Buchanan died in poverty, James banned and burned all copies he could find of Buchanan’s treatise on the Scottish monarchy, which Buchanan argued was essentially a contract between the ruler and his subjects. (James, however, believed in the divine right of kings.) In this way, James “banished” Buchanan as effectively as Prince Hal banished Falstaff in Shakespeare’s 2 Henry IV.

Another strong influence on James was Esmé Stuart, Seigneur d’Aubigny, a cousin and favorite of James’s, who was described as having “an aura of the brilliance and joie de vivre of the court of France” (Bingham 129). He brought French sophistication into the gloomy Scottish court and gave James the attention the lonely young man lacked. He was also Catholic. At some point, it was made clear to James that he would not become king of England if he were Catholic, and Esmé Stuart left James’s court. For both James VI and Shakespeare’s Henry V, rejection of these “father-like” figures was a crucial moment in their development as kings.

Both shared a pragmatic approach to becoming king. Henry maneuvered the Archbishop into financially supporting and providing the rationale for his invasion, and also had the support of his nobles for the invasion. The battle of Agincourt was not only a miracle; it was also, Juliet
Barker writes in *Agincourt: Henry V and the Battle that made England*, “the culmination of a carefully planned campaign, preceded by years of meticulous preparation” (xii). Thus, what was divinely inspired was also a matter of Henry’s battle strategy: good field position, stakes to disrupt the cavalry, and long-bow archers.

James VI became King of England by “meticulous preparation” as well. He courted both the Catholics and the Protestants (even though he told Parliament his becoming King of England was divinely ordained), never showing outright support for either faction in the beginning, but hinting to both groups he would be their “champion.” James frequently referred to his dead mother, Mary, Queen of Scots, a Catholic (whom he had not seen since his infancy), in order to gain the sympathy of the Catholics, and spoke against the restrictions the English Catholics suffered. James also threatened to invade England, but never did, due, in part, to his secret correspondence with Robert Cecil, Elizabeth’s principal advisor, who groomed James for his role as King of England.

England’s Protestants wanted to be sure that James would protect and defend them in the event of any invasion by France or Spain, which, being Catholic countries, would have support (men, money, and weapons) from Rome. English Catholics wanted a monarch who would protect and defend them from their persecutors (English Protestants) and from any invaders seeking to depose their lawful monarch, whom they believed to be James. In the end, James declared himself a Protestant and betrayed the Catholics’ hopes for a Catholic or Catholic-tolerant king. His lack of honesty toward the Catholics made it clear to them that he was not trustworthy.

An allusion to James in *Henry V* occurs in the Epilogue, which follows the “happy ending” in the final scene of the play. Henry celebrates his upcoming marriage to Katherine and
peace with France: “Prepare we for our marriage. On which day. . . Then shall I swear to
Kate. . . (5.2.355-8). Happy with the settlement with France, Henry looks forward to a long and
happy life. The Epilogue destroys any thoughts of “happily ever after,” because it reminds us
that Henry’s son, Henry VI, became king as an infant (“in infant bands [was] crowned king/Of
France and England. . . ” (Epilogue 9-10), and regents ruled England in his stead. They
governed so poorly that England suffered nearly 30 years of intermittent battles (the Wars of the
Roses), and Henry VI “lost France and made his England bleed. . . ” (Epilogue 12). During the
conflict, England lost her territories in France, King Henry VI was assassinated, and thousands
of people died in the fighting or when their homes and crops were destroyed. Shakespeare’s
reference to Henry VI in his final tetralogy play connects the past and the future by alluding to
James, who also was a “cradle king,” and foreshadows a disastrous future for England with
James as king.

Given their history with Scotland, the English could imagine James invading England,
since there was no physical impediment to keep the Scots out. They pictured James and hordes
of Scots crossing the Border on horseback, as Shakespeare describes, “pouring like the tide into a
breach . . . Galling the gleanèd land with hot assays./Girding with grievous siege castles and
town. . . .” (1.2.149-52). Swarms of Scots had crossed the border and destroyed cropland and
besieged castles many times in England’s past. Taylor notes that the above-quoted lines were
omitted from the Quarto version for being “provocatively topical” for their disparagement of
Scots (312). Portraying Scots in a demeaning way was an aspect of English plays that James had
often complained about in the past. In deference to the likelihood of his being the next king of
England, the negative language was either omitted in performance or deleted.
Another example of typical Scottish behavior underlying the negative opinion of Scots the English had during Shakespeare’s time involved James’s assurances to Elizabeth that he would enforce her measures against the rebellious Irish she was trying to subdue. Not only did he fail to enforce those sanctions, but he did not prevent Scottish aid to the Irish. James also corresponded with the Irish leader, Hugh O’Neill. Meanwhile, in the play, the Archbishop of Canterbury reassures the king that the English are more than capable of defending England successfully against the “dog” Scots (1.2.218). He dismisses Henry’s concerns about the Scottish fighters and calls them merely “pilfering borderers” (1.2.142), thieves in the border areas the English could easily defeat. Henry replies: “We do not mean the coursing snatchers only, / But fear the main intendment of the Scot, / Who hath been still a giddy neighbor to us” (1.2.143-5). Henry’s reply indicates that he refers not just to the Borderers, but also to the rest of the Scots, including the government in Edinburgh. He makes it clear that he does not fear the opportunistic forays of the Borderers, but the broader plans of the Scottish government. James did not keep his agreement with Elizabeth that he would not aid the Irish, and he corresponded with O’Neill. By these actions he confirmed Henry’s view that no Scot was trustworthy.

Richard Dutton argues that Shakespeare’s use of the term “Scot” is ambiguous, because the playwright does not specify whether he is referring to Scots in general, the Scottish king, or the Borderer Scots, who were sometimes allies and sometimes opponents of the Scottish king and government in Edinburgh (186). The Scots on the Border were more immediately worrisome, however, due to their reputation as fierce and fearsome marauders and their proximity to England. However, Henry’s response that he fears the “main intendment of the Scot” is clear that he means the overall purpose of Scots in general, whether they are in the Borders region, the highlands, or Edinburgh. He makes all Scots, no matter their location in
Scotland, guilty by association with the Borderers. That the language was omitted from the play out of deference to James supports Henry’s broad meaning of “Scots” and also serves as an allusion to James, who, as king, ruled from Edinburgh. However, the difference between Edinburgh and the Borders was measured in more ways than just distance.

The Borders area “never formed any kind of actual geographical separation” between Scotland and England, Lisa Hopkins writes in *Shakespeare on the Edge: Border-crossing in the Tragedies and the Henriad*, because there was no natural geographic barrier to hinder crossing. The Borders created “cross-national networks of alliance and friendship,” despite attempts by governments on both sides to curtail such fraternization (73). Over time, both sides had crossed the open space between them numerous times and engaged in violent or friendly exchanges with or without the authority of their governments. The English “may forget or ignore Scotland, and patronize manifestations of Scottishness . . . [but] they are just a little frightened of them” (G. Fraser 23). After numerous encounters over the centuries, the English gradually learned to respect the fighting prowess of the Scots.

Shakespeare’s plays, over time, show a shift in the portrayal of Scottish characters. David Bevington notes, for example, that in an early Shakespeare play, *The Comedy of Errors*, one of the characters, S. Dromio, describes a kitchen maid:

S. Dromio: She is spherical, like a globe. I could find out countries
in her.

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S. Antipholus: Where Scotland?

S. Dromio: I found it by the barrenness, hard in the palm of the hand. (3.2.114-21).
Bevington’s note explains “barrenness” as “callused hardness and dryness (perhaps with a pun on “‘barren ness,’” a barren promontory)” (*The Comedy of Errors*, 3.2.114-21 n. 120). The Norton edition of the play explains that a “moist hand proverbially indicated fertility; hence, a dry hand could connote a lack of fertility” (Greenblatt 710). Then, too, it could refer to miserliness, which was a stereotypical Scottish trait. These were no doubt the types of references to Scots that elicited James’s complaints.

Scottish warriors appear in Shakespeare’s history plays, for example, *1 Henry IV*. In that play, the Earl of Worcester is attempting to reason with Hotspur regarding some Scottish prisoners Hotspur has taken as his own, rather than giving them to King Henry IV to exchange for ransom money. Worcester calls them “noble Scots,” because some of them are of the noble class and/or because they fought well (1.3.212). Hotspur refuses to turn over his prisoners and tells Worcester that “he [King Henry IV] shall not have a Scot of them,” not even “if a ‘scot’ (a trivial amount) would save his [King Henry IV’s] soul” (1.3.214-15). Hotspur uses a disparaging meaning of the word “scot” to show his disrespect not only for the prisoners, but for the king as well, and to make it clear he has no intention of giving King Henry IV what is due the king as victor of the battle.

Later in that same play, a complimentary view of a Scot occurs after the battle between Henry IV and his opponents at Shrewsbury. Prince Hal has captured Lord Douglas, whom he frees because the Scotsman has fought so bravely: “His valors shown upon our crests today//Have taught us how to cherish such high deeds//Even in the bosom of our adversaries” (5.5.29-31). Henry acknowledges that the Scottish warriors have fought well. Such high praise from an Englishman was rare – and noteworthy. Further, in contrast to the negative comments about Scots at the beginning of *Henry V*, Shakespeare pays the Scots the ultimate compliment of
including a Scot as one of four captains in Henry’s army. Historically, according to Holinshed, there were no Scots fighting in Henry’s army, although there may have been Scots fighting for the French. At the same time Shakespeare presents positive images of the Scots, English fears of a possible invasion by Scottish warriors at a time of transition are strong. The lack of a solid border between England and Scotland made invasion easy, and the presence of Scotland’s ally, France, directly across the English Channel, made an invasion threat stronger. In addition to worrying whether James would invade England to take the throne by force or whether he was named Elizabeth’s legal successor, the English worried about James’s plans for governing the union of England and Scotland.

At his accession, James united the crowns of England and Scotland, but it would be another hundred years, as the Stuart dynasty was ending, before the two kingdoms were united officially by Parliament. There are other kinds of unions in Henry V, one of which is Henry’s army. Henry describes his army as a “band of brothers” (4.3.60), a close-knit group of individuals fighting together to achieve the same goal. Another type of union is the impending union of Henry and Katherine in marriage, a real marriage, but one that also symbolizes the union of England and France. While these are positive images of union, in a scene involving four captains of Henry’s army in Henry V, Shakespeare shows a flaw in James’s ideas concerning the union of Scotland and England: Ireland. By including an Irish captain, Shakespeare questions the impact of the union of England and Scotland on Ireland, since Ireland still resisted England’s attempts to subjugate it. Ireland had nothing in common with the others. Its primary language was not English, it followed the Brehon law, not English common law or Roman law (as Scotland did), and it was Catholic. Shakespeare uses the Irishman to suggest that relations with Ireland will be difficult to resolve.
In Act Three of *Henry V*, four captains, Shakespeare’s representations of an Englishman, a Welshman, a Scotsman, and an Irishman (the latter three each characterized by their imperfectly spoken English), meet after the siege of Harfleur to discuss the progress of the battle. Fluellen (“Fluellen” is the English phonetic pronunciation of the Welsh name “Llewellyn”) is the Welsh captain, a soldier who has definite opinions on such matters as how to wage war (the old, Roman way) and how to make an Eastcheap thug respect a Welsh tradition (force him to eat a leek). He is comfortably a part of the union of Wales and England and, coincidentally, Henry’s kinsman. Fluellen appears to be Catholic, based on his curse words, which are derived from the old religion. By Shakespeare’s time, Wales was England’s quiet neighbor and mostly Protestant, though there were still some Catholics in Wales.

The scene opens with Fluellen and Gower (the English captain) discussing the mining activities at the siege of Harfleur. Approaching them are two other captains, a Scotsman and an Irishman (Captains Jamy and MacMorris, respectively), two outsiders to the establishment (Wales and England). Fluellen responds to Captain Jamy’s greeting with: “Good e’en to your worship, good Captain James” (3.3.28). Fluellen is the only one to greet the Scottish captain directly and formally, and his form of address is rather fulsome, even for Fluellen, since both are captains.

Jamy is a diminutive of the name of the Scottish king, James, and a variant of Jacob. Fluellen’s phrase, “your worship, good Captain James,” seems an obvious reference to King James. It has the same name as the king’s in it. It also has in it the words “your worship,” which indicate Fluellen is referring to a person of a high social rank. The use of the diminutive, in my view, alludes to King James, but in a familiar way, which could be seen as disrespectful, as it suggests an immaturity or a lessening in stature. (Jamy is the only captain addressed in this way.)
In addition, Captain Jamy appears to be Catholic, based on his use of swear words with origins in Catholicism. Gary Taylor, editor of the Oxford edition of Henry V, states that the lines in the play regarding the meeting (including the lines referring to Jamy and MacMorris) were omitted from performance possibly due to “political censorship” (313). It is more than possible, it is likely, that these lines were omitted because of political censorship due to the allusions to King James. Like other references, it serves to keep James in the audience’s minds and to remind the English of their involvement with the Scots as enemies in the past and as allies in the future.

I found two interpretations of the scene involving the four captains in Henry V. One interpretation is that the four captains represent the four members of what would become “Great Britain,” i.e., England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. Another interpretation is that of Lily Campbell, who asserts that this meeting of captains illustrates Elizabethan concerns by acting them out on stage and does not symbolize James’s idea to unite the four neighboring countries (295). Instead, she discusses the history plays in terms of the Elizabethan concepts of war. According to Campbell, Shakespeare’s history plays prior to Henry V showed Elizabethans the “conflicts of the age which endangered the state, threatening its peace and security” (295). Unlike the conflicted monarchs of the previous history plays (Kings John, Richard II, and Henry IV), Henry V is a “hero-king” because he believed in the justness of his cause and achieved a victory over the French at Agincourt with God’s help. The tone is one of triumph in a just cause, with an implication of future success. This, to Campbell, makes the play “epic” and miraculous (255).

Regarding the meeting of the four captains, Campbell sees them as illustrating the situation the Earl of Leicester spoke of where ‘many controversies’ caused by a ‘diversitie of language’ occur when ‘sundrie nations’ join to wage war. The Earl of Leicester recognized how
miscommunication among soldiers from different countries and speaking different languages could cause them to misunderstand one another and create internal problems and disruption (295). Any resolution of the problems between soldiers of different countries could not be done privately. Leicester seems to have anticipated Shakespeare’s four captains in terms of problems caused by miscommunication among soldiers of different countries.

James’s plan for the union between England and Scotland envisioned “one king, one faith, one language; one law, one parliament, one people alike in manners and allegiance,” according to James’s biographer David Harris Willson (250). However, James failed to state clearly how these goals would be accomplished. His idea of “one faith” contradicted his guarantee to the [Scottish] General Assembly that uniting the churches was not included in his plan for the union (Croft 164). The plan for union failed to address the concerns of Catholics and dissenting Protestants. It also failed to address how the English and Scottish law systems, based on the common law and Roman law, respectively, were to be incorporated and administered as “one law.” Each of these issues would cause problems for all the Stuart monarchs of England, beginning with James, and would lead to regicide and civil wars. As to manners, the English considered themselves far superior to all the other people with whom they came into contact. Facing such huge changes in their lives and lacking clear guidance as to how these issues were to be resolved, the English people became more concerned regarding the imminent union with Scotland.

As Henry V woos Katherine in the play, he tells her that when they are united in marriage and she is his queen, all his kingdoms will be hers: “England is thine, Ireland is thine, France is thine. . .” (5.2.230-1). Perhaps Henry was still in the flush of victory, but the statement is an invitation to Katherine to be Henry’s partner in ruling the kingdom. In contrast, James saw the
union between England and Scotland as a marriage, in which James “[is] the Husband and all the whole Isle is my lawfull wife” (Croft, 59, *quoting Commons Journal*, vol. 1, 171). What that meant was that the union was no partnership; as king, James was the ultimate authority (the “one king”) in all matters and as king, he was not subject to the English common law. Everyone else, including the church and parliament, had to submit to his will. The subject of absolute monarchy in conflict with English common law only added more fear to the minds of the already fearful English.

“[M]iracles are ceased,” remarks the Archbishop of Canterbury early in Act One of *Henry V* (1.1.68). Such a statement was anti-Catholic and heretical in Henry’s time because miracles were an important part of Catholicism. For the highest-ranking prelate in the English Catholic Church to make such a statement would have shocked the people of Henry V’s England, but not the Catholics in Shakespeare’s time. The Protestants of Shakespeare’s time would have heartily supported it. According to David Willson, there was even a similar phrase in Shakespeare’s time – “the age of miracles is past” – that James was fond of saying (153). Here, Shakespeare has the Archbishop express a sentiment that was in use at the time he wrote the play and thus connects England’s past with Shakespeare’s present. The denial of the existence of miracles reflected the power the Protestants had achieved in England by Shakespeare’s time. Such a statement by the play’s Archbishop of Canterbury caused many Catholics to worry about the future of Catholicism in England with James as king.

Not since before the death of Mary Tudor had the Catholic Church felt itself to be in such a favorable position as it did at the end of Elizabeth’s reign. Assisted by its partners France and Spain, the Church hoped to place a Catholic monarch on the English throne and re-establish England as a Catholic country. James’s overtures to the Catholic Church in Rome appeared to
show that James was, or might become, a Catholic. But bringing England back into the Church’s control would not be easy.

Protestants had made great progress in solidifying their control of the government, since the monarch was the head of the Church of England and the people were required to take an oath pledging their loyalty to the monarch. In their view, Catholics were traitors because they did not recognize the monarch as the head of the church, and traitors were punished with death. Catholics planned to continue their loyalty to the new monarch, as they had been loyal to Elizabeth, whether he was a Catholic or a Protestant, as long as he allowed them to practice their religion. Protestants wanted all the English people to be members of the Church of England and for Catholicism in England to be completely eradicated by any and all means.

Neither faction believed in toleration; it was too much like appeasement. By the time of Elizabeth’s death, increasing unease about the future of England created paranoia and desperation as the Catholics became more secretive in attempting to practice their religion, and the Protestants became more suspicious and intolerant of the Catholics because they were afraid that English Catholics and the Pope were conspiring to invade England and make it Catholic again.

After James ascended the throne, he declared that the primary reason for the union of the two kingdoms was that it was God’s will: “‘It was manifest ‘that God by his Almighty Providence hath preordained it so to be”’ (Croft 58, quoting Commons Journal, vol. 1, 142-3). According to James’s view, it was God who made James the rightful successor to Elizabeth; therefore, there was no reason for gratitude or humility. It contradicts James’s campaign to convince the English that he is the most qualified candidate, and it contrasts with Henry’s pious acknowledgement of gratitude for the victory in the play: “Praisèd be God, and not our strength,
for it” (4.7.82). It is God who chose both of them, but Henry recognizes God’s part in using Henry’s military skills to accomplish the miracle at Agincourt and is grateful for both his God-given talents and God’s aid. Humility is a desirable quality in a king, according to Shakespeare. Henry’s humility in the play enhances his hero status and contrasts with James’s conceit.

*Henry V* addresses the anti-Catholicism of his times in the incident regarding Bardolph’s theft from a French church. Bardolph, one of Henry’s former Eastcheap companions and now a soldier in his army, steals a religious item from a French church and is sentenced to hang. Historically, Henry’s articles of war (which set forth rules of conduct for soldiers during the war), stated that anyone who removed *any* item from a church, unless specifically authorized to do it by the constable of the army, was to be hanged, and the stolen goods returned to the church. An additional provision added that anyone who touched the container holding the sacrament would also be killed (“no one, under pain of death, shall dare irreverently to touch the sacrament of the Eucharist, nor the pyx [also spelled “pix”] (box in which the said sacrament is contained)” (Campbell 293-4). Thus, both the consecrated sacrament and its container were sacred objects not to be defiled by unconsecrated hands. Such strict rules were an attempt to curtail some of the excesses of the invading army.

Pistol, Bardolph’s friend and another of Henry’s former comrades from *1 and 2 King Henry IV*, is now also a soldier in Henry’s army. He asks Fluellen for help in preventing Bardolph’s execution. Pistol admits that Bardolph has stolen a “pax” (3.6.39), but says that Bardolph is a victim of “cruel fate/And giddy Fortune’s . . . fickle wheel” (3.6.25-6) and therefore not responsible for the crime. Not surprisingly, Pistol argues that the stolen object was only a “pax” and that it was “of little price” (3.6.44); therefore, he believes the punishment is excessive.
Fluellen disagrees, arguing that it is a matter of discipline: “For discipline ought to be used” (3.6.54-5). An army’s discipline in wartime is essential. When Fluellen tells Henry of Bardolph’s crime, Henry agrees with the punishment and states: “We would have all such offenders so cut off . . .” (3.6.108). After acknowledging that the punishment for stealing church goods is severe, Henry gives additional orders that as his army progresses through the countryside, they will pay for any goods or items they take from the people without insulting or abusing them: “there be nothing compelled from the villages, nothing taken but paid for, none of the French upbraided or abused in disdainful language” (3.6.110-12). He reasons that respectful treatment of the French will redound favorably to himself and his army, because in a game with high stakes, the more lenient player will come out ahead: “For when lenity and cruelty play for a kingdom, the gentler gamester is the soonest winner” (3.6.112-14). For Shakespeare, the religious conflict between Protestants and Catholics is a serious matter with high risks and far-reaching consequences. Those who treat their opponents with respect and mercy have a better chance of success than do those who intimidate and persecute their opponents. If treated with compassion and respect, Catholics will remain loyal to the monarch and see him as their hero.

Taylor suggests that there may have been a misreading of “pax” for “pyx,” but adds that “Shakespeare may have deliberately reduced Bardolph’s offense” (a pax being less valuable than a pyx), in order to create ambiguity. (Both Hall and Holinshed (Shakespeare’s sources) list the object as a “pix.”) To a Protestant, death seemed harsh punishment for committing a crime involving Catholic property. If it had been a pix, there would be no reason to debate the sentence. If it was a pax, the punishment seems harsh, considering Pistol’s insistence that it was the less valuable object. Because the value of the object is unknown, the punishment appears severe and lacking in mercy or mitigation. At Harfleur, Henry threatens to destroy the town if its people did
not surrender to him. After they surrender the town, Henry orders that the townspeople be treated mercifully. Bardolph received no mercy. After he confirms Bardolph’s sentence of death, Henry orders that the English pay for anything they take from the French people and not mistreat the peasants. Henry’s mercy appears selective, but perhaps because he knows Bardolph, he does not trust him to reform. Another of his former companions, Nim, is also hanged in the play.

The theft of the pax incident is anti-Catholic because it shows a lack of respect for the religious objects of another church, and Henry as king is the absolute authority and must enforce the articles he has written. Pistol’s argument that the stolen object has little monetary value ignores the fact that Bardolph violated Henry’s rule of war concerning the theft of “any church goods” – regardless of price. Thus, Henry orders that Bardolph be hanged. His earlier remark about the value of mercy and leniency does not apply in Bardolph’s case, since it would call into question Henry’s credibility as king.

An audience member’s interpretation of the episode would depend on whether one was Catholic or Protestant, which would determine one’s choice of “pax” or “pyx.” As a play on words, “pax,” which means “peace,” could refer to the peace that Protestants have taken from English Catholics who hoped that their new monarch would reveal that he was a Catholic and restore Catholicism to England, or at least end the persecution of England’s Catholics. Rather than resolving the issue, Shakespeare may have intended the uncertainty to lead to debate and discussion of the issue. Discussion and debate might help alleviate some of the people’s anxiety, even if it did not lead immediately to resolution.

The conflict between Fluellen and Pistol is another example of the anti-Catholic attitude in Shakespeare’s England. Fluellen and Pistol meet at the fighting at Harfleur. Outside the walls of the town, Henry V’s rousing exhortation to his troops to become like wild animals as they
prepare to attack: “Stiffen the sinews, conjure up the blood./Disguise fair nature with hard-favoured rage” (3.1.7-8) has no impact on his former companions, who would rather slink unnoticed into the town. Fluellen forces them toward the fighting. Pistol retaliates for this treatment and for Fluellen’s failure to prevent Bardolph’s hanging by insulting Fluellen’s religious beliefs and traditions and physically assaulting the Welshman. Conclusion of the conflict between Fluellen and Pistol is delayed by preparations for the battle at Agincourt.

At a meeting on the night before the final battle, when the disguised Henry speaks briefly with him, Pistol threatens to “knock his [Fluellen’s] leek about his pate//Upon Saint Davy’s day” (4.1.55-6), but Henry defends Fluellen and warns Pistol: “Do not you wear your dagger in your cap that day, lest he knock that about yours” (4.1.57-8). Fluellen can take care of himself, and he is not without friends. Pistol’s mockery of, and lack of respect for, Fluellen’s religious beliefs and traditions mirrors the behavior of Protestants against Catholics in Shakespeare’s time. The English Catholics hoped James would be their protector from their Protestant persecutors, as Henry was Fluellen’s.

At a later encounter, Fluellen and Pistol goad each other with insults: “scurvy lousy knave” (5.1.15-16) and “base Trojan” (5.1.17), and Fluellen beats Pistol until he eats the leek. The leek was both a political and religious symbol to the Welsh, and Fluellen will not let Pistol get away with mocking this important Welsh symbol. Pistol vows revenge: “All hell shall stir for this” (5.1.62), but Gower, the English captain (and model of tolerance) who has witnessed the episode, scolds Pistol for mocking “an ancient tradition, begun upon an honourable respect” (5.1.64-5). Gower defends Fluellen and tells Pistol he got what he deserved for disrespecting another’s religious and cultural traditions. Shakespeare shows how these incidents mirror the anti-Catholic sentiment prevalent in his time. In his view, the need for tolerance and respect for
religious and/or cultural traditions of different countries or faiths are part of their national memory and an important part of a successful union.

Memory, according to Jonathan Baldo, is critical to “the legitimation and exercise of power” (133). Since history is written by the victors, whoever controls the official recording of events governs how history is recorded for present and future readers. When the Catholic Church was the spiritual leader of the English people, their lives were organized according to a calendar on which were entered the seasonal commemorations of events in Jesus’ life and the lives of numerous saints’ (exemplary people, most of them) who played a role in the people’s daily lives. Over the centuries, certain traditions in various places also became associated with a particular saint, e.g., the Welsh tradition of wearing a leek on St. David’s Day. Going through the year without the Church’s daily calendar to guide them was confusing until the Protestant monarchs replaced the religious commemorations with secular or political ones.

In his speech prior to the battle, Henry assures his soldiers that the victory of Agincourt and the feast day dedicated to Saints Crispin and Crispianus will both be remembered:

He that shall see this day and live t’old age
Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours

Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars
And say, ‘These wounds I had on Crispin’s day.’

But he’ll remember, with advantages,
What feats he did that day (4.3.44-51).
Further, Henry states that the old soldiers will remember easily the leaders’ names: “Harry the King, Bedford and Exeter, Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester” (4.3.53-4). (Any soldier, however, would likely remember not just the royals (elite), but the names of his fellow soldiers.) Gradually, the day will become a remembrance of an important national event.

A calendar is a daily memory device of significant events. Parties to a union make new memories that reflect and strengthen that union by commemorating events both experience. In Henry V, Shakespeare shows us how memory – the process of remembering and forgetting – is transformed through union. For example, the play depicts England’s changing views of the Scots. At the start of the play, Scots are “pilfering borderers” (1.2.142), thieves who raid across the English-Scottish border, as well as “weasel[s]” who sneak into the “unguarded nest” of “eagle England” and devour the “princely eggs” (1.2.169-71). This image of sly invaders who slink into England to steal contrasts with the character of Captain Jamy in the play. Captain Jamy is a Scottish captain in Henry’s army, and Fluellen praises him as wonderful and brave. The change in the English view of the Scots occurs gradually over time, like the changes in the calendar.

Saints were an important part of the calendar before Henry VIII’s break with the Catholic Church. The Protestants viewed the matter of saints as just another popish practice and criticized Catholic veneration of saints as idol worship (though Foxe’s book of Protestant martyrs’ lives was a standard in many Protestant homes). After he separated from the Catholic Church, Henry VIII eliminated some of the saints’ feast days and other holy days. As the Protestants became more powerful, the calendar became a source of contention between them and the Catholics. Elizabeth created “secular and political alternatives” to the religious days, with the non-religious choice taking precedence, according to Jonathan Baldo. In addition, the revised Book of
Common Prayer prepared toward the close of the sixteenth century began to include dates celebrating significant events in the lives of Elizabeth and subsequent monarchs, e.g., accession dates. These commemorations reinforced not only the connection between monarch and subjects, but also the domination of the Protestants (152-3, quoting Cressy 7). In this way, commemorations of secular events gradually replaced saints’ days and religious events on the English calendar.

James understood the importance of memory. In his first speech to Parliament, he stressed his remembrance of the English people’s welcome of him, but he also emphasized that now they must begin to forget the past and create a new future:

> For euen as little brookes lose their names by their running and fall into great Riuers, and the very name and memorie of the great Riuers swallowed vp in the Ocean: so by the conjunction of diuers little Kingdomes in one are all these priuate differences and questions swallowed vp” (144, quoting McIlwain 269).

James’s analogy describes how little streams flow into larger rivers, and big rivers flow into the sea, and thus the smaller bodies of water become part of the larger sea. In the same way, smaller populations are gathered into a larger nation, and the past of each small population is subsumed into the larger nation. As small populations meld with larger ones, memories flow from one group to the other. Over time, as larger groups merge, memories are shared and sifted into a larger collective national memory that incorporates memories from each smaller group. However, some memories are eliminated in the process (144).

Protestants also worked to eliminate popish superstitions like belief in miracles, relics, and indulgences. Miracles and relics were often found to be false, and indulgences were merely a way to extort money from the faithful. As good Protestants, English men and women might not
have termed theirs an age of miracles (except privately perhaps), but they were hoping for what would appear to be two “miraculous” events: 1) that at some point James VI would show that he was, or was about to become, a Protestant; and 2) that upon ascending the throne of England, he would be transformed from England’s adversary into its “protector” against invasions from other nations, particularly Catholic France and Catholic Spain (Axton 112). James ultimately declared he was a Protestant, thus destroying the Catholics’ hopes for restoration of Catholicism.

For Catholics, true miracles were not just a sign of God’s love and presence in human’s lives, but also a sign of hope. Catholics were hoping that by some “miracle” James would announce that he was, or would become, a Catholic, and that the Catholic Church in England would be restored to its former power. Even if James turned out not to be a Catholic, they still hoped he would be their protector and end Catholic persecution. Without miracles, the Catholics feared there was no hope for them to practice their religion and there would be no relief from their oppression once James became king.

Protestants and Catholics each wanted to rule according to their own version of Christianity. Both sides felt they were fighting for their very survival. With the Protestants in power, religion was inseparable from government, and to be Catholic was to commit treason. Extremists in both factions fed the paranoia that led to intolerance and desperate actions. Tolerance and compromise were options favored only by moderates. In Henry V, Shakespeare attempts to inject a little humor to address religious intolerance. Pistol and Fluellen encounter each another throughout the play as Pistol tries to get back at Fluellen for the beating at Harfleur. Fluellen finally has a chance to make Pistol pay the consequences for having insulted Fluellen’s honoring the Welsh custom of wearing a leek into battle. Armed with a cudgel, Fluellen begins beating Pistol and forces him to eat the leek: “If you can mock a leek you can eat a leek” (5.1.33-
4). To add insult to injury, Fluellen then hands Pistol a coin of little value to pay for healing his head wounds, but Pistol tells Fluellen he will use it as a promise of revenge. Fluellen responds: “If I owe you anything, I will pay you in cudgels. You shall be a woodmonger, and buy nothing of me but cudgels.” (5.1.59-61). With a little humor, Shakespeare shows intolerance and disrespect for the religious and cultural traditions of others will not go unanswered.

Shakespeare’s references to religion in *Henry V* provide no indication of the playwright’s religion. They do suggest that Shakespeare believed the religious conflict to be an extremely important matter critical to England’s welfare and in need of discussion and resolution. As Lisa Hopkins states: “Shakespeare saw . . . that the grievances of Catholics represented the most serious obstacle to religious unity and hence to political stability in Britain” (9). With paranoia increasing and Elizabeth reluctant to address religious issues, it was inevitable that matters spiraled out of control. By equating religion and nationalism, England set the stage for future difficulties with its neighbors. England’s failure to tolerate Catholicism ensured its failure in its relationship with Ireland.

Before *Henry V*, Shakespeare does not appear to consider Ireland of much significance. There are very few mentions of Ireland (or the Irish) in the other plays of the tetralogies, and most of them refer to the Irish in a derisive manner. The Irish foot soldiers, known as kerns, receive the most mentions and are variously described as shag-haired or rug-headed, as well as rough and crafty. In Shakespeare’s play, *The Tragedy of King Richard the Second*, King Richard II’s description is typical: “[They] live like venom where no venom else/But only they have privilege to live” (2.1.157-8). His view of them as a lower life form no better than poisonous snakes is not extreme for an Englishman of his time. The reference in *Henry V* to the Earl of Essex’s expedition to Ireland to quell Hugh O’Neill’s rebellion shows Ireland is a more serious
issue. In light of England’s upcoming union with Scotland, Ireland’s resistance to English rule raises greater concerns for the English. England’s treatment of Ireland would create an atmosphere of fear and loathing in both countries and would be a continuing source of death, intolerance, and persecution for centuries.

England acquired Ireland as its colony (without, of course, consulting the Irish) in the same way that Henry V in the play gained support for his plan to invade France to reclaim English territories: collusion with the Catholic Church. Both transactions involved the monarch paying money to the Church. As England’s colony, Ireland’s purpose was mainly to provide resources that England lacked. Given its proximity to England, however, Ireland had become known as “‘the King of Spain’s bridge,’” since Spain used it as part of its numerous (but unsuccessful) attempts to invade England. There was even a saying – nearly identical to the one in Henry V regarding Scotland – that said: “‘He that England will win, through Ireland must come in’” (Ekin 55, quoting Carew in CSPI 277). Defending England by sending troops to Ireland was expensive, however. By the end of Elizabeth’s reign, military expenses for Ireland had nearly bankrupted England and would continue to be costly for subsequent monarchs.

With the increase of England’s wealth and power came an increase in expenditures for Irish matters. During the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, instead of mounting large-scale and costly invasions of Ireland, these monarchs used the “submit and regrant” program to take and maintain control of Irish lands. According to this practice, the monarch claimed certain lands and required the Irish who lived on those lands and claimed ownership of them to appear before the monarch and pledge their allegiance to that monarch, who, in turn, would regrant the lands to them. In this way, Englishmen and later, Scots, worked to expand England’s ownership and control over Ireland, without having to incur the expenses of an invasion. During his reign,
James sold Irish lands in order to raise money to pay his debts. Naturally, the English and Scottish Protestants who settled on these lands later demanded English soldiers be sent to Ireland to protect them from the Irish Catholics whose lands they had usurped. Thus, even without mounting a full-scale invasion, England was still sending troops to Ireland and spending money to maintain order in the Irish territory it controlled.

The issues of union and religion in England had a great impact on England’s relations with Ireland. To be English was to be a member of the Church of England (Anglican). Although the Anglo-Irish were primarily Anglican, some of them were Catholic, as were the majority of the Gaelic Irish. English Catholics were seen as traitors, while Irish Catholics were foreign enemies, and Anglo-Irish were suspected of being more Irish than English (and therefore untrustworthy), whatever their religion.

An Irishman named MacMorris is the fourth captain in Henry V’s army in the play. MacMorris’s name consists of two parts: “Mac,” which is a Celtic prefix meaning “son of,” and “Morris,” which is a variation of “Maurice,” an English name of Norman origin. Thus, the captain is not a native (Gaelic) Irishman. Rather, he is Anglo-Irish, an Englishmen whose ancestors moved from England to Ireland and adopted many of the Irish ways, even to the point that many of them became, in the eyes of the English, “more Irish than the Irish.”

To the English, Ireland was synonymous with Catholicism, although most of the Anglo-Irish remained Protestants. MacMorris’s possible real-life counterpart (Captain Christopher St. Lawrence) laments “‘that when I am in England, I should be esteemed an Irish Man, and in Ireland, an English Man. . .’” (Baker ‘Wildehirissheman’ 38, quoting Collins 133). Many years ago, a Belfast-born, Protestant, and British-passport-carrying acquaintance of the author complained of the same attitude. St. Lawrence was born in Ireland, but served as a captain in the
English army in Ireland. Despite his many years of faithful service in Elizabeth’s army, St. Lawrence was still considered untrustworthy because he was born in Ireland. Elizabeth had become so anxious at the presence of Irish-born soldiers in her army that she ordered them to be dismissed from service, because their loyalty to England was in question (Baker 38).

Shakespeare’s MacMorris in *Henry V* comes across as argumentative and uncivilized (he would rather be cutting enemy throats than discussing Roman battle tactics, Romans being a current favorite subject of Elizabethans). He became the stereotype of Irishmen for centuries (even though he was Anglo-Irish, not native Irish). He is skilled in using dynamite to undermine Harfleur’s walls, which is a current, not a Roman, tactic. MacMorris may not be as knowledgeable as the others about the Romans (or perhaps he is just less interested than they), because the Romans never invaded Ireland or established forts there; therefore, the Irish had no experience of Roman occupation (as did Wales, Scotland, and England). (However, the Romans and Irish were not unknown to each other.) MacMorris emphasizes his disgust with the lack of bloodshed with an oath: “so Christ sa’ me law” (3.3.55), which infers a Catholic background. His being a Catholic, as well as part English, made his loyalty to England suspect.

Gower believes MacMorris is “a very valiant gentleman” (3.3.12). Fluellen disagrees, calling MacMorris “an ass, as in the world” (3.3.15). Gower believes him brave because MacMorris is engaged in mining, which uses gunpowder, but Fluellen dislikes him for using gunpowder, which is not a battle tactic Fluellen favors – Fluellen being partial to Roman warfare methods. When Fluellen persists in his attempt to discuss Roman warfare methods and refers to MacMorris’s “nation” (3.3.62), the Irishman loses his temper and rants: “Of my nation? What ish my nation? . . . Who talks of my nation?” (3.3.63-5). MacMorris is obviously sensitive to the reference, in light of the derisive comments and/or suspicion to which he is usually subjected and
perceives Fluellen’s reference as an insult. Fluellen, in turn, is affronted by the vehemence of MacMorris’s outburst. MacMorris is not easily calmed and threatens to “cut off your [Fluellen’s] head” (3.3.73). MacMorris’s threat shows that he and Fluellen have not communicated clearly, a typical characteristic of relations between England and Ireland.

MacMorris’s outburst appears ambiguous. Most interpret it as referring to the Irish, but I believe that MacMorris’s outburst refers to the union with Scotland. Everyone involved in the union, English, Scot, and Welsh, was concerned about the effect of the union on them personally and on their country. In addition, as the next possible addition to the union, the Irish were concerned about any effects of the union on them. Specifically, the question on every English and Scottish person’s mind is: What will become of us in this “new” nation, once England is united with its neighbors? With regard to the Scots, it was easy to answer that they would gain a great deal in terms of opportunity for a better life. It was more difficult for the English to see positive consequences to themselves in the union. The Welsh and Irish, too, must have wondered – and worried - what England’s union with Scotland meant for them. What would they be in terms of this “nation,” made up primarily of Scotland and England? As yet, no one seemed to have an answer. MacMorris’s question, however, became one that was repeated by natives in all parts of the globe – in Nairobi, in Darjeeling, and in Sri Lanka, as well as colonists in North America – as England began to build its empire. The question of identity was the heart of the union: what/who am I in relation to this union?

In addition to the question of identity for the people in each of the four countries in relation to each other was the question of immigration. The English feared a flood of immigrants from Scotland as a result of the union. To the English, the benefits of union were greater for the Scottish, Welsh, and Irish than they were for the English. Once they were united with England,
people from the other three countries would be citizens of England and enjoy the same privileges as the native English, such as living and working in England.

It is the two outsiders, MacMorris and Jamy, who make important points regarding the establishment of a union. MacMorris raises the issue of identity under the union. Both of them represent countries that have been considered inferior to England, with characters representing Scotland and Ireland periodically being caricatured on the stage. When MacMorris threatens violence against Fluellen, Gower intervenes, and, diplomatically addressing the two men as “gentlemen,” tells them they will “mistake each other” by failing to communicate calmly and clearly (3.3.74). Ironically, Jamy has the final say on the matter: “Ah, that’s a foul fault” (3.3.75). Shakespeare’s use of the word “foul” (i.e., loathsome, detestable, treacherous) to characterize the miscommunication shows how important clear communications between parties must be so that they are not misunderstood. This is an important and overlooked moment in the play. Shakespeare intends irony in having Jamy, the Scottish soldier, speak those words, since James was guilty of miscommunication regarding several topics, particularly regarding the Catholics, in his quest to become king of England.

Taylor notes (313) that most of that scene is deleted, apparently due to “political censorship.” At that time, all plays were reviewed to see if there was any material that would be considered slanderous or embarrassing to the monarch or any other high-ranking person. Because there is uncertainty whether Jamy refers to James, the censors in Shakespeare’s time deemed it appropriate to remove lines spoken by Jamy that could be potentially embarrassing to James. Jamy uses swear words of Catholic origin. James led the English Catholics to believe he was or might become a Catholic, only later insisting he was not one or ever intended to become one. Also potentially embarrassing would have been the recognition of the veracity of Jamy’s
final comment that miscommunication between parties to the union was a serious error, since James had made many contradictory statements, e.g., regarding his religious preference. Luckily, Shakespeare has MacMorris distract the audience.

While I agree with Taylor’s assessment, I also believe those two characters have a specific purpose in the play that goes beyond Dutton’s view that MacMorris and Jamy’s roles were only to keep the audience’s mind on Scottish and Irish matters (193). In addition, I disagree with Dutton’s statement that Fluellen represents the “already safely assimilated Celt” and that the Scotsman and the Irishman represent admirable fellow captains who aspire to be assimilated into England, but have not been assimilated yet. To describe Fluellen (and by extension the Welsh) as “safely assimilated” implies there are dangerous unassimilated Celts (e.g., the Scots and Irish?). “Safely assimilated” sounds like Fluellen and the Welsh have had all their Welshness sucked out of them (cultural lobotomy) in order to make them acceptable to being assimilated with the English and will not in the future consider changing their assimilation status. Further, I disagree with the assumption regarding the non-English captains’ aspirations to be assimilated. This is an English assumption: that all non-English would wish to be united with England if they had the chance and that the Anglo-Irishman speaks for the native Irish. Such an assumption privileges the English and makes the non-English captains irrelevant. In light of the intolerance shown by English Protestants, any aspirations regarding a union of England and Ireland were more like wishful thinking on the part of the English and the more recent Anglo-Irish settlers.

There are other references to Ireland in addition to MacMorris. Taylor (7) states that the other references are Shakespeare’s and that in his preoccupation with the situation in Ireland, the playwright inadvertently substituted or included the word “Ireland.” Could it be possible that his mistakes were not mistakes? For instance, in Act 5 of the first Folio, Queen Isabel addresses
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Henry as “brother Ireland” (5.2.12) right after King Charles addresses him as “brother England” (5.2.10). The errors seem innocuous enough, an error by the playwright. Therein lies the ambiguity.

Another reference to Ireland occurs when Pistol and the Boy encounter the French soldier, Monsieur le Fer. The Frenchman calls Pistol a gentleman of good quality (“le gentilhomme de bon qualité”) (4.4.2-3). Pistol mocks the Frenchman’s speech by speaking words from an Irish song that sound to him like “qualité.” Taylor’s second note to 4.4.4 indicates that the phrase is a corruption of the Irish and translates as “maiden, my treasure,” with the song describing the woman’s physical attributes. Ireland was symbolized as a desirable woman. During the centuries of English rule in Ireland, England had certainly helped herself to the wealth of Ireland. In the play, even the French express contempt for the Irish, with insulting references to the “kern” and “bogs” (3.7.51-5); contempt for the Irish appears to be something the English and French share in the play. Another Ireland-related reference in the play is the reference to the Earl of Essex and his mission to Ireland. These incidents seem accidental; however, they served to remind the audience of the Earl of Essex and the rebellion in Ireland.

Forgetting is the other side of memory, Baldo explains, and is also involved with exercising power (140). Shakespeare shows how forgetting is involved in the play through the ambiguous references to the victor in Ireland. The Chorus compares Henry’s return to London to that of a conqueror whose arrival would be welcomed by large crowds of Londoners: “Were now the General of our gracious Empress / As in good time he may – from Ireland coming,/Bringing rebellion broached on his sword. . .” (5.3.30-2). Shakespeare’s words were written at a particular time (1599) in anticipation of the Earl of Essex’s victory over the Irish rebel, Hugh O’Neill. Taylor’s note states that “the General” of these lines “[a]lmost certainly” refers to the Earl of
Essex. According to Taylor, the lines are also "the only explicit, extra-dramatic, incontestable reference to a contemporary event anywhere in the canon" (7). The specific reference to Essex helps to date the play to a specific historical time when Essex was sent to Ireland to subdue Hugh O’Neill’s rebellion against English domination in Ireland.

Another reference to Essex is found in Act 3 of the play, where Gower describes to Fluellen how some men, after a war, falsely represent themselves as having been soldiers, when they have not: “such fellows are perfect in the great commanders’ names, and they will learn you by rote where services were done . . . who came off bravely, who was shot, who disgraced . . . And what a beard of the General’s cut and a horrid suit of the camp will do. . .” (3.6.72-80). The General referred to is the Earl of Essex, whose beard at the time was quite distinctive. The deceivers will imitate the Earl of Essex’s appearance and wear a beard in the same style as the one he wore during his campaign to Spain, dress in an old and worn uniform, and use appropriate military jargon to con their listeners into believing they were good soldiers doing their duty. The truth more often is that they behaved more cowardly than bravely. They create false images of themselves in the Earl’s likeness to give themselves the appearance of having acquitted themselves well in a war.

The references remind the audience of the Earl of Essex, who was sent to Ireland by Queen Elizabeth with orders to suppress the rebellion of Hugh O’Neill, but who returned with a truce instead and subsequently attempted to force the Queen to publicly name James VI of Scotland as her successor. To remember Essex was to remind the English that Essex made peace with O’Neill, and allowed (by “connivance or dissimulation”), Irish Catholics to celebrate Mass and the Sacraments quite openly, according to Matthew Byrne, editor and translator of the Commentaries of the Bishop of Armagh. Essex also freed imprisoned priests and “some well-
known” Catholics. His reason for doing so was to encourage them to remain loyal to Queen
Elizabeth. Essex made peace with O’Neill and returned to England not with “rebellion broachèd
on his sword” [5.0.32], but in a hurried and passionate attempt to convince Elizabeth that some
tolerance toward Catholics would go a long way to peaceful relations with Ireland. For his
attempts to make peace with Ireland and obtain some mitigation of Catholic oppression there,
Essex was a hero to Catholics. Essex also wished to pressure Elizabeth into naming James
publicly as her successor, because he believed that James would ease Catholic persecution. His
failure to defeat O’Neill and his persistence in arguing with the Queen cost him his life and
paved the way for the continued suppression of Ireland and the Catholics.

Not all scholars accept that the “General” refers to Essex, however. Some argue that “the
General” refers to Walter Blount, Earl of Mountjoy, whom the Queen sent to Ireland to finish the
job of defeating O’Neill. Richard Dutton supports the view that Mountjoy was “the General”
referred to and argues that the final battle, in which Mountjoy defeated O’Neill, was significant
because it ended O’Neill’s rebellion and ended the threat of a Spanish invasion of England from
Ireland in order to claim the throne. Despite severe privations to both sides, no overwhelming
army fought the English, no miracle occurred. He argues that the Choruses, in particular the
Chorus to Act 5, which contains the lines pertinent to Essex and used to date the play to 1599,
may have been added – and the play rewritten – in 1602, after Mountjoy’s victory at Kinsale,
Ireland, in 1601 (197). Taylor, however, states that the lines referring to Essex were part of the
play originally, but “must surely have been removed or replaced in later performances . . .” (15).
In that case, the lines would refer to Essex and not Mountjoy.

The play has been accepted as being written in 1599, and the note in Taylor’s edition
states that Essex is “the General” referred to in the lines. In addition, the phrase: “As in good
time he may . . .” (5.0.31) supports Essex as “the General” referred to, since the language indicates that the matter has not been settled (which was the case in 1599). If “the General” refers to Mountjoy, that suggests a later date for the material being added (i.e., after 1601). In that case, there would be no need to include the above-quoted phrase (“As in good time he may”), since the question of whether Mountjoy returned “Bringing rebellion broachèd on his sword” (5.0.32) in victory would have been settled. Essex’s attempt to demonstrate that a peaceful relationship with Ireland based on toleration for the Irish and Catholics failed. There would be no miracle or hope of reconciliation after that.

Agincourt is an event worthy of commemoration. However, the memory is both happy and sad. On one hand, Agincourt is a reminder of Henry’s victory and the miracle that helped him achieve that victory. On the other hand, it is a reminder of England’s eventual loss of its territory in France, which Elizabeth was still hoping to recover almost fifty years after the surrender of Calais, the last piece of English territory in France (Baldo 137). Both aspects are part of the process of remembering and forgetting that characterize England’s development as a nation.

The defeat of the Irish is also an event worth commemorating. Like Agincourt, the memory of Essex’s failed mission to Ireland and Mountjoy’s later victory has its happy and sad aspects. The English defeated O’Neill and gained a large amount of territory in Ireland. Mountjoy is the victor, and he should be remembered as such. However, Shakespeare has assured a remembrance of Essex through the play’s references to him. Even if one decides that the references are to Mountjoy, the passage still recalls Essex and Ireland to the minds of the English. Any mention of fighting in Ireland would be a reminder of Essex’s failure to defeat O’Neill as well as his granting some freedom to Irish Catholics to encourage their support for
Elizabeth. Just as the Epilogue in Henry V refers us back to the first play in the two tetralogies (The First Part of King Henry VI), so, too, does the language of the Chorus at the start of Act 5 refer us back to Essex. Shakespeare suggests that Essex’s efforts in Ireland was a lost opportunity to create a more peaceful relationship between England and Ireland. A more peaceful relationship would have eliminated the bloodshed that ensued over the next four centuries.

Regardless of whether the reference in the play was to Essex or Mountjoy, the mention of either man was embarrassing to Elizabeth, who ordered Essex to Ireland, and to James, because James owed a great deal to the Earl of Essex, with whom he maintained a correspondence before becoming king. James corresponded with O’Neill at the same time he assured Elizabeth he was supporting her campaign to defeat O’Neill’s army by forbidding trade with the Irish and forbidding Scots in the western isles of Scotland from assisting O’Neill. However, he did not enforce either prohibition. After the Irish rebellion ended, O’Neill accompanied Mountjoy to London to meet with James to celebrate Mountjoy’s victory. As they traveled to London, the two were met by relatives of those who died in Ireland. The mourners shouted abuse and attacked them with mud and stones. One English veteran told how he suffered “‘perils by land and sea, was near to starving . . . and all to quell that man who now smileth in peace’” (Ranelagh 54). The crowds were so hostile that James issued a proclamation against harming O’Neill (de Lisle 197-9). O’Neill led a later rebellion, which also failed. He and other Irish earls involved in the rebellion fled Ireland. Their desertion of their lands in Ireland (and its mostly Catholic population) had severe repercussions for Anglo-Irish relations: the earls left their clans exposed to English conquest and allowed England to take ownership of the lands the earls left behind. During James’s reign, as many as 40,000 acres of land in County Derry were confiscated from
Anglo-Irish landowners who could not provide evidence of a clear title to their lands. The funds from the sale of these lands were used to settle the lands with loyal Scots and newly arrived English (Ackroyd 225). Thus, the groundwork was laid for centuries of oppression, violence, retribution, and retaliation by both sides.

Henry believed in his claim to be king of France, based on the Archbishop’s conclusion that the Salic Law did not bar Henry’s claim and after the English Catholic Church agreed to fund the war in exchange for Henry’s vetoing a proposed bill that would deplete the Church’s treasury. Two hundred years later, England had surrendered its final piece of French property. England also believed in its entitlement to Ireland, based on the dubious legality of its claim to the island, and attempted to subjugate it. Periodically England had to send troops to Ireland to enforce its sovereignty and protect the Scottish and English settlers there. Long after the Stuarts were no longer on the English throne, the English and Irish continued their wars over Irish independence and England’s attempts to eradicate their religion and people.

After the death of Queen Elizabeth, the last of the Tudor monarchs, England faced an uncertain future. Her successor, James VI of Scotland, was faced with important issues: achieve the union of England and Scotland, resolve the religious conflict between Protestants and Catholics, and overcome Ireland’s resistance to England’s claim to sovereignty over it. These unresolved issues increased the people’s feelings of uncertainty and fear regarding the future. In this atmosphere of fear and foreboding, Shakespeare presents his final history play, *Henry V*, a miracle play with a hero. The Epilogue to the play, however, reminds the audience of the disasters that resulted when Henry V died, and his son, Henry VI, became king of England. Shakespeare foresees that James, who is also a cradle king, is no hero and that there will no miracle for England. James united two crowns, but did not fully unite the two kingdoms. He paid
little attention to resolving the issues of religious conflict and relations with Ireland and left these issues for his successors to handle. Their solutions scorched the earth and rained blood on England, Scotland, and Ireland.
Works Cited


Notes


2 For purposes of this thesis, I use the term “Protestants” to refer to the Anglicans (members of the Church of England and the majority of England’s Protestants), who wielded the most power in government and society. There were Protestants who dissented from the Church of England, and they were also persecuted.

3 As part of my research, I reviewed several editions of the play. While each edition stated the stolen object was a “pax,” they each had a slightly different explanation of the object and its value. For example, Bevington describes it as a “metal disk with a crucifix stamped on it, kissed by the priest during Mass.” Shakespeare’s sources, Hall and Holinshed, however, describe the stolen item as a “pix” (pyx), a box where consecrated wafers are stored for communion, and say that the thief ate the consecrated wafers. A pyx was a more valuable item and eating the consecrated wafers was a far more serious offense, according to Taylor.