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Love is a Battlefield

In *Henry V* by William Shakespeare, the titular character of King Henry V has one goal in mind throughout the play: taking over the throne of France, which he believes to be rightfully his. Upon doing so, he takes on a new challenge: wooing the Princess Katharine of France, despite the fact that she has already been promised to him. His strategies in conquering France and Katharine are remarkably similar, with only a few key differences. Taken separately, Henry's speech at Agincourt is moving and inspirational, while the wooing scene is funny and romantic. When one is viewed in context with the other, however, both reveal the less than admirable tactics Henry employs throughout the play, in both battle and courtship. Though Act 5 Scene 2 is typically seen as a comedic ending to the play, it is clear that there is a good amount of manipulation involved on Henry's part. Likewise, Henry's Saint Crispin's day speech is rife with emotional manipulation. In both scenes he also masks his level of confidence, appearing very confident in the face of near-unavoidable defeat in contrast with the way he acts in front of Katherine. While the battle of Agincourt is Henry's way of securing the French throne for himself, the wooing of Katherine is unnecessary confirmation of King Henry's victory.

The ability to manipulate others is central to Henry's strategy in rallying his troops. The entire Crispin's day speech is full of emotional appeals, and if the outcome of the battle is

any indication his appeals are successful. The most notable of these comes near the end of the speech when he declares,

> This story shall the good man teach his son;
>
> And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
>
> From this day to the ending of the world,
>
> But we in it shall be remembered. (4.3.56-9)

Perhaps what makes Henry's speech so effective is that he invokes the idea of everlasting glory. By associating St. Crispin's day with the battle, he guarantees that henceforth on every Crispin's day people will be reminded of the battle, and those who were there will be able to boast about it, and tell their sons and their sons' sons that they contributed to such a great victory. They will go down in history and achieve the only immortality attainable to man. This appeal is a very clever manipulation of the mens' emotion and desire for glory, and Henry only drives his point further home when he says, "And gentlemen in England now-a-bed / Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here" (4.3.64-5). While he does allow anyone in the army to leave if they are afraid, with this line he makes it very clear what they will be missing out on—anyone who does not participate in the battle, should the English win, will forever regret not being there to share in the honor of the victory.

His manipulation of Katharine is slightly different. From the beginning of their interaction he twists her words, intentionally misinterpreting her questions and statements to give them meaning that suits his own needs. Their first misunderstanding is as follows, "King Henry: [...] Do you like me, Kate? / Katharine: *Pardonnez-moi*, I cannot tell vat is 'like me.' / King Henry: An angel is like you, Kate, and you are like an angel" (5.2.106-10). His manipulation lies

in the fact that, although he clearly can tell that Katharine is asking about the meaning of the phrase “like me,” he blatantly ignores her implied question and uses the mistake to flatter her. These deliberate mistakes on his part happen several times throughout the scene, and all serve to encourage her feelings for him. She later asks if it is possible that she could love an enemy of France and he replies, “No, it is not possible you should love the enemy of France, Kate. But, in loving me, you should love the friend of France, for I love France so well that I will not part with a village of it. I will have it all mine. And, Kate, when France is mine and I am yours, then yours is France and you are mine” (5.2.168-73). He is only no longer “the enemy of France” through a technicality. He has forcibly taken over the country and is soon to be its leader rather than enemy, but in the minds of the French people and Katharine herself he is still on the opposing side, though through this argument he hopes to convince her otherwise.

As with before, he uses clever turns of phrase to help his cause, which serve to confuse Katharine and potentially persuade her into agreeing to marriage, something she has no choice but to acquiesce to anyway. This quote also embodies Henry’s entire view on Katharine and France as they correspond in his mind. He wants France, wants to have it “all his,” and Katharine is clearly encompassed in that statement. One of Henry’s most effective strategies in leading his army is the way he so masterfully appeals to and manipulates the emotions of his men. With Katharine his manipulation is focused on appealing to her in the more romantic sense, though she seems to remain fairly unimpressed with him throughout the scene, as in the end it is only his assurance that her father will be happy with their marriage that convinces her to accept his hand.

At Agincourt, Henry delivers his famous speech with great confidence. He does not wish for reinforcements or that his army was bigger, and even says, “...he which hath no stomach

to this fight, / Let him depart" (4.3.35-6). A man without at least the facade of confidence would not encourage those in his army, already so small in numbers compared to their enemy, to leave without consequence. He cannot know what will happen when the battle begins, but in that moment he emboldens his troops with his assertiveness. With Katherine, however, he pretends to be self deprecating and lacking in confidence even though the outcome of the encounter has already been assured. He says,

> But, before God, Kate, I cannot look greenly nor gasp out my eloquence, nor I have no cunning in protestation; only downright oaths, which I never use till urged, nor never break for urging. If thou canst love a fellow of this temper, Kate, whose face is not worth sun-burning, that never looks in his glass for love of any thing he sees there, let thine eye be thy cook. (5.2.141-7)

He openly admits his ineptitude for poetry and romantic declarations and disparages his own appearance in his appeal to her. It seems strange, however, that he would make such a claim about his lack of "cunning in protestation." The fact that he is speaking in prose and not blank verse seems to lend some credibility to it in the moment, but before this scene Henry speaks almost entirely in verse and gives several long winded speeches that are most certainly poetic.

In fact, the most prominent skill of Henry's that is expressed throughout the play is his ability to deliver a speech. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "protestation" as, "a (public) declaration, typically made in response to an explicit accusation or an implied doubt." His speech at Agincourt embodies exactly this; it is a public declaration of his feelings, made in response to the doubts his of his army about the outcome of the battle. His confidence becomes less

concealed as the scene goes on, to the point where he says, “Come, I know thou lovest me: and at night, when you come into your closet, you'll question this gentlewoman about me; and I know, Kate, you will to her dispraise those parts in me that you love with your heart: but, good Kate, mock me mercifully; the rather, gentle princess, because I love thee cruelly” (5.2.192-7). At this point he seems to believe that he has already “won,” and that Katharine does, without a doubt, truly love him. Because of this, describing himself as loving her “cruelly,” a word with a clear negative connotation, is very apt. The OED provides several definitions for the word, and while it is clear that Henry uses it in a way that means “fiercely,” the foremost definition designates it as a word meaning, “with indifference to or delight in another's suffering.” In many ways Henry is indifferent to Katherine’s suffering during this scene. She still sees him at least in part at France’s enemy, and he has been deliberately misinterpreting her words throughout the entire scene. She is clearly uncomfortable, a fact which Henry refuses to acknowledge. He is so focused on being victorious that he does not give up no matter how Katharine resists.

By the end of *Henry V* King Henry has conquered France and been engaged to marry Princess Katharine. While he certainly deserves some credit for the victory at Agincourt and his highly effective speech, it would certainly be incorrect to say that these same tactics were successful at winning Katharine over. She is not fooled by his manipulations, nor is she moved by his strange mix of humility and confidence. In the end she consents to be married because it will please her father, which Henry is perfectly fine with even though the entire scene could have been avoided if they only waited to hear the King of France’s decision, which would grant Henry Katharine regardless of whatever private agreement they had come to. Katharine is only an

extension of Henry's victory, and by approaching her wooing with the same strategies he utilized in battle it is clear that she is just another prize for him to win.