

# SHAKESPEARE, SECRET INTELLIGENCE, AND STATECRAFT<sup>1</sup>

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THE sort of mystery tale which Edgar Allan Poe first crystallized into a formula called a *Whodunit* is now very much in vogue in this country and many of our distinguished citizens are addicted to this type of literature. In this paper I intend to analyze very briefly a Shakespearean *Whodunit*, or perhaps it would be better to call it a *Whodidn'dunit*, because the intended victim escapes death, but the plotters are not so fortunate. Thus we do not begin, as *Whodunits* usually do, with a dead body but we end with three of them. Shakespeare's *Whodidn'dunit* tells how the intended victim escapes, but in telling the story he constructs a mystery which he expects his audience to solve without much help from him. The mystery involves a special sort of information now called secret intelligence, and the solution of the mystery may tell us a bit about what Shakespeare knew concerning such intelligence, its usages, and its importance in the practice of statecraft.<sup>2</sup> For this purpose we shall study one of his histories, namely, *The Life of Henry V*, and specifically just one scene therein, Scene 2 of Act II.

For a number of years that scene has fascinated me because it poses a number of questions of some interest to the professional cryptologist.

The scene is set in a council chamber in Southampton and opens with what is obviously a continuation of a conversation among Henry's brother (Bedford), his uncle (Exeter), and the Earl of Westmorland, which had begun before they appear on stage:<sup>3</sup>

*Bed.* Fore God, his Grace is bold, to trust these traitors.

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Louis B. Wright, Director, and the staff of the Folger Shakespeare Library, as well as to other Readers at the Library for assistance rendered me during the preparation of this paper. Of special value was the assistance (via correspondence) of Mr. Kenneth L. Ellis, Lecturer in Modern History in the Durham Colleges in the University of Durham, England.

<sup>2</sup> See Thompson, J. W., and S. K. Padover, *Secret diplomacy; a record of espionage and double-dealing: 1500-1815*, London, 1937. See also footnote 9 below.

<sup>3</sup> All extracts from the play come from Professor Peter Alexander's edition of the *Complete works* (London and Glasgow, 1951).

*Exe.* They shall be apprehended by and by.<sup>4</sup>

*West.* How smooth and even they do bear themselves,

As if allegiance in their bosoms sat,  
Crowned with faith, and constant loyalty!<sup>5</sup>

*Bed.* The King hath note of all that they intend,  
By interception which they dream not of.<sup>6</sup>

*Exe.* Nay, but the man that was his bedfellow,  
Whom he hath dull'd and cloy'd with gracious favours—

That he should, for a foreign purse, so sell  
His Sovereign's life to death and treachery.

In modern editions these are the opening lines of Act II, Scene 2, in which lines 6 and 7 are of special interest because they lead the curious cryptanalyst to wonder about that very revelatory phrase "By interception which they dream not of." The meaning of the word *interception* in Shake-

<sup>4</sup> Deighton's edition of Shakespeare's *Life of King Henry the Fifth*, New York, Macmillan, 1905, says of the phrase "By and by," that "this phrase, like the word *presently*, has somewhat changed its meaning since Shakespeare's day. Then it meant 'almost immediately,' as *presently* meant 'immediately,' 'at the present moment.' Now both mean 'in a short time.'"

<sup>5</sup> In the Quartos these three and the succeeding two lines are omitted. It is now well established that the F1 text is the only authorized version; Q1 (1600) and Q2 (1608 but actually published in 1619) are "pirated" or "reported" versions. I question whether the omission of those five lines from the Quartos is to be regarded as significant. The F1 play is much longer than the Q1 or Q2, so that one could regard the omission of the five lines as a natural consequence of a desire or need for abbreviation or condensation in a lengthy play. On the other hand, it is conceivable that the omission was intentional for reasons other than condensation: in 1600 it was perhaps more dangerous than it was in 1623 to put into print anything about the practice of interception.

<sup>6</sup> In F1, F2, and F3 the line reads: "By interception, which they dream not of." In F4 the comma has been dropped, and in most modern editions it is omitted. However, in the New Temple edition (1935), in the Penguin (Harrison) edition (1937), and in the Sisson edition (1954), the comma has been retained. In view of the fact that questions of punctuation in Elizabethan English present serious difficulties even for experts, the problem will not be dealt with herein. In modern English, of course, its presence or absence at the point indicated would be of semantic significance. When the play was acted on the Elizabethan stage the comma would perhaps serve only as a signal for a pause in speech by the actor playing the role of Bedford.

speare's day was the same as it is today in connection with certain activities in the collection of secret intelligence, namely, some sort of censorship whereby correspondence in transit is temporarily held up, opened, read, and is then either (1) suppressed altogether, or (2), when advisable, copied and allowed to proceed to its intended destination, care being taken to leave no telltale indications of tampering. In the context in which the word interception here appears, it is clear that a conspiracy is afoot against the life of Henry, a conspiracy which is briefly alluded to in the *Prologue* to Act II, spoken by *Chorus*. I then read the rest of Scene 2 very attentively several times and then the remainder of the play. It was interesting to note that neither after nor before that scene (except for what little is said in the *Prologue* to Act II) is there any mention of the conspiracy. This makes one feel that Shakespeare injected that rather lengthy scene in the play for special reasons.

In ruminating upon the length and content of the scene to be analyzed, I began to wonder whether the play is one which accurately reflects authentic history, or rather one which gives us a bit of history in a "doctored-up" version by the inimitable dramatist. Reduced to its simplest terms, my study of the matter involved trying to find the answers to two questions. The first was: What actually did happen in the reign of King Henry the Fifth in regard to the conspiracy? More specifically, what does authentic history tell us as to how the plot was uncovered? To find the answer to this question was relatively easy. I embarked upon some research, seeking out the basic sources that Shakespeare used for his *Henry V*. Practically every authority cites Edward Hall's *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke*, published in 1548 and hereinafter called Hall's *Chronicles*; and the second edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587), the latter having copied liberally and sometimes verbatim from the former, but supplementing Hall with material from other sources.<sup>7</sup> At the moment it is sufficient to note that both chroniclers merely tell us that Henry was "credibly informed" of the conspiracy, but they do not tell us how. They do not even mention the word *interception*.

I then consulted other accounts of the life of

<sup>7</sup> The accounts in Hall and Holinshed with regard to the conspiracy are given in appendix 1. One authority says that Shakespeare may have had both chronicles open by his side as he wrote some parts of this play.

Henry, searching for more details about the conspiracy, and finally learned what I wanted to know. Bearing in mind that some members of this audience may not remember too well the life of the historical Henry V and might like me to refresh their recollection, I ought perhaps at this point indicate just how, according to historical accounts, Henry became "credibly informed." But I think that to do so right now would spoil my story a bit, so I will postpone that part until later. The facts are now fairly clear but they were not known to Shakespeare because they only came to light many years after he died.

The second question was a bit more difficult to answer. What did Shakespeare think had happened in the reign of King Henry in regard to the conspiracy? More specifically, how or why did he get the idea that the plot was uncovered by interception? Did his imagination lead him to construct an hypothesis of his own based merely upon the two words "credibly informed," as stated by Hall and Holinshed? The thesis of this paper is that that is exactly what Shakespeare did, and I shall try to validate it by a careful scrutiny of Scene 2. Perhaps we shall see how Shakespeare wove the magic of secret intelligence into his *Henry V*, and we may also be able perhaps to offer some conjectures as to why he concocts an hypothesis which was quite tenable in 1599, the year in which the play was first presented, to explain something which occurred almost two centuries before and which authentic history explains in a quite different manner.

Let us return to the opening lines of Scene 2 and project ourselves into the Elizabethan audience. As soon as the word "traitors" is spoken by Bedford in the very first line ("Fore God, his Grace is bold, to trust those traitors") we sit up attentively, because we are about to learn more about the conspiracy. The groundwork for such anticipation, as I have already mentioned, has already been laid by the adroit dramatist in the *Prologue* immediately preceding Act II, wherein advance notice is given both of the impending war against France by Henry<sup>8</sup> and of the conspiracy

<sup>8</sup> In Act IV, Scene 5, l. 213-216, of *King Henry IV—Part 2*, Prince Hal is given a recommendation by his father in the deathbed scene: "Therefore, my Harry/ Be it thy course to busy giddy minds/ With foreign quarrels, that action, hence borne out,/ May waste the memory of the former days." It is clear that Hal took his father's advice, for soon after gaining the throne (1413), he commenced preparations for the war on France, which culminated in the great military victory at Agincourt on October 25, 1415.

to kill the king before he sets sail for the invasion of Normandy. *Chorus* then continues for many lines.

I will not quote the *Prologue* save, however, for one line which gives direct evidence of Shakespeare's awareness of secret intelligence. That line states that "The French, advis'd by good intelligence" have obtained reliable advance warning of the impending assault. That is, they were not going to be caught in a surprise attack. Now, it is hardly necessary to mention that collection of secret intelligence is an activity that is as old as history itself, and as we shall soon see, Shakespeare was well aware of its usages in the past as well as during his lifetime. His *Henry V* is by no means the only play in which he refers to such activities.

Getting down now to the thesis of this paper, which will concern itself with Shakespeare's explanation as to how the plot was uncovered, all he had to work with was that phrase about Henry's having been "credibly informed." Shakespeare certainly made the most of that bit when he causes Henry, by astute colloquy, involving duplicity, deceit, and downright trickery, to beguile the traitors, then to lull them into a false sense of security (do you remember the line "By interception which they dream not of"?); and finally he inveigles them, in a cleverly disguised manner, into making statements which foreshadow the sentence that will be visited upon themselves later and by words out of their very own mouths. We watch attentively as Shakespeare causes Henry to operate in a manner reminiscent of Agatha Christie's play *The Mousetrap*. We see how Henry engages in a deadly game of stud poker with Cambridge, Scroop, and Grey, and with rapt attention we wait to see him uncover his "hole card." Since Shakespeare did not know how Henry had been "credibly informed," he had to conjure up a "ploy" whereby the king learns of it by secret intelligence. That ploy, namely that Henry had been "credibly informed" as a result of the interception of correspondence, is Shakespeare's hypothesis and his invention.

What sort of examples did Shakespeare have knowledge of during his own lifetime wherein interception of correspondence for the collection of this type of intelligence was employed in the practice of statecraft? There were several, but I think the one that must have been first in his mind was the live drama played in England less than a dozen years before he wrote *Henry V*. I refer here to an intrigue often called the Babington Plot, the

discovery of which, by interception of correspondence, led to the execution of Mary Stuart. Revelations of intrigue involving secret intelligence in those days must have titillated the minds of literate Englishmen, who undoubtedly were well aware that the Tudor government tampered with private correspondence, and had ways of unsealing, opening, copying, resealing (forging seals when necessary), and sending the intercepted letters to their destination. If ciphers were used, the Crown had in its service men who were skilled in solving them. A rather detailed and carefully documented account of these highly secret activities in the British Post Office during the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries was published by Mr. Kenneth L. Ellis in 1958.<sup>9</sup> As to ciphers and deciphering, Shakespeare must have known that Mary's correspondence was in cipher and that Walsingham's expert, Thomas Phelippes, read it.

It is therefore not hard to understand why Shakespeare adopts his hypothesis that interception of correspondence led to the discovery of the plot, and why he then must proceed to prove that there was interception. Let us see how ingeniously he establishes this proof. It would be interesting to quote the whole of Scene 2 but there isn't time. I can only summarize what Henry says that leads up to the confrontation of the conspirators with their treason. Practically all of this came out of Shakespeare's inventive mind, not out of any chronicles.

Shakespeare begins by having Henry lead the unsuspecting plotters to make statements of indubitable allegiance to him. He then entices them into chiding him for his mercy in pardoning and freeing a man who, in his cups, made derogatory remarks about the king. The drunkard never appears on the scene, and is purely a figment of Shakespeare's imagination, injected into the play for the specific purpose of the enticement. One conspirator (Scroop) says unabashedly of the king's decision to release the man without any punishment: "That's mercy, but too much security." I wondered about that expression "too much

<sup>9</sup> Ellis, Kenneth L., *The post office in the eighteenth century*, Oxford University Press, 1958. See also, by the same author, *British Communications and Diplomacy in the Eighteenth Century*, in the *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 31, Nov. 1958. See also Evans (Higham), F. M. G., *The principal Secretary of State*, Manchester, 1923. In England the collection of secret intelligence from both domestic and foreign correspondence was a well-established tradition and practice for which the Secretaries of State had assumed responsibility by the middle of the sixteenth century.

security" until I looked up its Elizabethan meaning and found that it then meant, in the context in which it is used more than once in Shakespeare, "overconfidence," "lack of vigilance," "carelessness."<sup>10</sup> Henry casts aside their chidings in words which are full of dissembled irony when he reiterates his decision to set the drunkard free (1. 57-59):

Alas, your too much love and care of me  
 Are heavy orisons 'gainst this poor wretch!  
 If little faults proceeding on distemper  
 Shall not be wink'd at, how shall we stretch our eye  
 When capital crimes, chew'd, swallow'd and digested,  
 Appear before us? We'll yet enlarge that man,  
 Though Cambridge, Scroop and Grey, in their dear  
 care  
 And tender preservation of our person,  
 Would have him punish'd.

The king then very abruptly changes the subject and without a pause continues:

And now to our French causes:  
 Who are the late commissioners?  
*Cam.:* I one, my lord;  
 Your Highness bade me ask for it to-day.  
*Scroop.:* So did you me, my liege.  
*Grey:* And I, my royal sovereign.

These lines deserve close scrutiny. First we ask: What does Shakespeare want us to understand by the question "Who are the late commissioners?" Practically all editors of the play interpret the word *late* as meaning *lately appointed*. One modern editor says it means *newly appointed*,

<sup>10</sup> The word *security* has had a rather curious and interesting semantic history. In the *Oxford English Dictionary* the third definition is "Freedom from care, anxiety or apprehension; a feeling of safety or freedom from or absence of danger. *Arch.* Formerly often *specific*. (Now only *contextually*) culpable absence of anxiety, carelessness." Then follow many citations, beginning with 1555. The third one is "1605 SHAKS. *Macb.* III, V, 32. Security/ is Mortals cheefest Enemy." The fourth is: "1647 SPRIGGE *Anglia Rediv.* II. i (1854) 70. As if he intended to surprise the town, thinking to find them in security." In the Bible, Judges (A.V.) 8: 11, is the following:

"And Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents, on the East of Nobah, and Jogbehah, and smote the host: for the host was secure."

The immediately preceding citation is also found in the new Merriam-Webster *Dictionary* (1961) under the definition of the word *secure*: adj. L *securus* free from care, safe, secure, fr. *sed*, se without + *cura* care . . . 1a archaic: unwisely free from fear or distrust: *careless*, *OVERCONFIDENT* <went up . . . and smote the host: for host was secure—Judg 8: 11 (AV)>. Under the definition of the word *security*: n. 1b archaic: carefree or cocky overconfidence <~ is mortals' chiefest enemy.—Shak.>

another, *recently appointed*. A comment by one editor who votes for *lately appointed* implies that Shakespeare adopted a new meaning for the word *late*. Being intrigued with the matter I decided to consult the *Oxford English Dictionary* to see whether it could shed some light on the question. The sixth definition of the word "late" seemed to fit very nicely: "Recent in date; that has recently happened or occurred; recently made. . . ." Then follow the citations—and the first Shakespearean one refers to its use in 1599 in the very sentence we are studying, *viz.*, "Who are the late commissioners?" There are three citations of earlier date, beginning with 1513, but in none of them is the meaning of the word *late* identical with that which editors say it has in *Henry V*. I have no doubt that the word *late* in the context in which it appears in Scene 2 has the meaning editors say it has, but there is another interpretation which I don't think anyone has suggested and I'll introduce it with a question: Why did Shakespeare give a new meaning to an old word in common use? Why didn't he use the word *new*? Why not "Who are the new commissioners?" Since metrical considerations play no part in this situation (*new* would have been as good as *late*, but *lately appointed* would have added four extra syllables and ruined the metre), I shall answer the question with a conjecture: Perhaps Shakespeare used the word *late* in order to put across a very sly double entendre, for the word *late* has another good meaning in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one that Shakespeare must have known quite well because it has had that meaning since 1490 and, moreover, it appears with that meaning in Hall's *Chronicles*, namely, when used in connection with a person, it means *recently deceased*. When Henry asks "Who are the late commissioners?" Shakespeare uses the word *late* with an ironic double meaning—"Who are the newly appointed (*and soon to be late*) commissioners?"<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Walter G. Boswell-Stone in the "Notes" to his edition of *Henry V* (New Shakespere [*sic*] Society, Series II, No. 10, London, 1880) refers, in his note 61 (p. 124), to a comment on the word *late* by Dr. B. Nicholson in *Notes and Queries*, 5th series, 11: 22 (January 11, 1879):

"The only explanation I have seen of this passage [Who are the late commissioners?] is that 'late' means *lately appointed*; that is, that to express a simple fact in English Shakespere [*sic*] used a phraseology which in English expresses the opposite fact. The 'late commissioners' are, in English, those who had lately been so, but who had either fulfilled their office or were commissioners no longer.

Next we come to the word "commissioners," and another question arises. Since there has been no previous reference to a "commission," we ask: "Commissioners of what, or for what purpose?" Unfortunately, Shakespeare is uncommunicative on this point, perhaps because he wants his audience to use some imagination. My own leads me to conjecture that Shakespeare wants us to infer something from the rather obscure clues he buries in the text, as will now be pointed out.

Let us review the foregoing action. When Henry asks his question, "Who are the late commissioners?" Cambridge speaks right up and says: "I one, my lord; Your highness bade me ask for it to-day." The other conspirators respond in a quite similar way. Why does Shakespeare have them indicate that Henry bade them ask for their commissions *today*?

I emphasize the word "today" because this word serves as the key to deciphering an interesting example of Shakespeare's magic as a dramatist. I am convinced that he wants his audience to infer several points. First, that "By interception which they dream not of," Henry had become aware of the plot to assassinate him just one day before it was to be carried out; second, that he had brought about a private meeting with the plotters on the same day that he learned of the plot but disclosed nothing to them about what he had learned that day; third, that by very carefully dissembling his real thoughts and feelings at their private meeting, he had lulled them into a false sense of confidence but at the same time insured that the plot could not be executed the next day as scheduled; fourth, that he also insured that all three conspirators would be "on deck" when he was ready to

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The alteration to *rate*, as derivable from the Latin '*ratus-i*, established, approved, confirmed,' had once suggested itself to me. But no alteration seems required; the Syndici *lati*—, or the *late* commissioners, are, I take it, the *chosen* commissioners—those who had been chosen or selected, but who had not yet received their sign-manual credentials or commissions. Accordingly, Henry proceeds to hand them documents which they take to be the said commissions.

This I believe to be one of the very few examples where Shakespeare followed a fashion of the day. The gallants coined 'newly-minted oaths,' he adopted a new and literate etymology for words in ordinary use."

The first paragraph of Boswell-Stone's comment contains the germ of my suggested interpretation. The fact that Shakespeare again uses the word *late* further down in this same act but in another scene (4, line 31) without a double meaning does not necessarily vitiate my conjecture. Context usually determines whether a double meaning is intended.

confront and denounce them for their intrigue; fifth, that he accomplished the preceding two aims by promising the conspirators something they could not very well refuse without giving themselves away, and that what he had promised them were appointments as commissioners, the appointments being of a nature such as to require some sort of "commissions," that is, official documents attesting thereto; and, finally, that he directed them to ask for "those papers" in person the next day. The audience is not specifically told and can only make a guess as to the nature of the commissions. There are several possibilities,<sup>12</sup> but the special point to note is, that by an extremely clever piece of statecraft involving the use of secret intelligence, Henry not only saves his own life by stopping the assassination plot dead in its tracks, but also gets rid of the persons most dangerous to the maintenance of domestic tranquillity.

Now are there any points in the text that follows which might support a theory that Shakespeare inserted them to corroborate his hypothesis?

To make the first point in the theory, let me quote the lines that follow where I left off, which was just before Henry hands the conspirators their "commissions." Here is what he says:

Then, Richard Earl of Cambridge, there is yours;  
There yours, Lord Scroop of Masham; and, Sir  
Knight,  
Grey of Northumberland, this same is yours.  
*Read them, and know I know your worthiness.*<sup>13</sup>

Henry turns away and tells Westmorland and Exeter "We will aboard to-night," immediately after which he turns back to the conspirators and says with feigned astonishment:

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<sup>12</sup> Various conjectures have been offered as to the nature of the "commissions" Shakespeare may have had in mind. Some editors suggest that they might have been the "sign-manual credentials" or commissions required by the Crown for appointment to a council established to govern England during the king's absence abroad. According to one historian such a council was indeed established immediately before Henry left London for Southampton. Other editors suggest that the credentials might have been of the nature of those required for men who were to serve as commissioned officers to command the military contingents which had been raised by them in their own districts and were destined for military service in France. The latter suggestion appears more plausible than the former, in view of Henry's statement "And now for our French causes" immediately before he asks "Who are the late commissioners?" However, there is another possibility which is much more speculative than either of the one mentioned, so speculative indeed that I shall postpone writing about it until further study.

<sup>13</sup> My emphasis. In view of what follows this line is one of unparalleled, subtle irony.

Why, how now, Gentlemen?  
 What see you in those papers, that you lose  
 So much complexion? Look ye, how they change!  
 Their cheeks are paper. Why, what read you there  
 That hath so cowarded and chas'd your blood  
 Out of appearance?

The dramatic manner in which Henry calls attention to the instantaneous reaction of the conspirators on receiving "those papers," does more than merely intimate that they simply could not have been the sort of documents which they were anticipating. The audience is certain that they were nothing of the sort. But then what could they have been? Writs of indictment, or warrants for their arrest? Possibly. Some editors think so, but if "those papers" were of either of the types mentioned, it is hardly probable that they would have reacted with such surprise, and so quickly. Certainly they were taken aback with astonishment, as noted by Henry. This confirms the clause which follows "By interception" in line 7 of the scene, which, let me remind you, says "By interception which they dream not of." The conspirators either had no idea that there is a way of finding out certain things by interception, or if they did have, they had no idea as to how the interception was done in their case. (The meaning depends upon whether the comma after interception is included or omitted. See footnote 6.) Why should they immediately confess? Even men of mediocre intelligence don't usually confess to having committed serious criminal offenses immediately upon being confronted with a writ or a warrant; no, they want to delay punishment as long as possible by insisting upon going through long drawn out legal procedures. But here we see three men of high degree, and presumably well educated, confessing immediately to having committed treason, an offense punishable by death, and at once abjectly pleading for the king's mercy. "I do confess my fault," says Cambridge, "And do subject me to your Highness' mercy." Grey and Scroop both add, "To which we all appeal." No, I'm sure you will agree that "those papers" were neither writs nor warrants in Shakespeare's play. What I think Shakespeare wants his audience to deduce is that "those papers" were copies of their correspondence which had been intercepted and by means of which Henry was "credibly informed" of the plot. More than that—I think he wants his audience to realize that "those papers" were copies of letters in cipher, with their translations. That is why the plotters immediately confess and plead for mercy. Let us see what leads me to postulate

all this. Perhaps I am reading something more than Shakespeare put into this scene—maybe I have fallen a victim to over-interpreting.

We know that Shakespeare follows Hall and Holinshed quite closely when they tell about what happened to the conspirators after they were unmasked and apprehended: "These prisoners, upon their examination, confessed. . . ." Whereupon Henry without further ado pronounces sentence, "And so immediatlie they were had to execution."<sup>14</sup> The chroniclers do not say that the three men were tried strictly in accordance with the due processes of law before they were convicted and executed, and the reason they don't is that the facts only became known long after they wrote their chronicles, and almost a half century after Shakespeare died.<sup>15, 16</sup> In the chronicles, the king is "credibly informed" of the conspiracy, the plotters are at once apprehended, they confess, Henry pronounces sentence, "and so immediatlie they were had to execution." In Shakespeare's play, Henry discovers the conspirators by interception, tricks them into making indiscreet statements, confronts them with "those papers," which are nothing other than intercepted letters with decipherments of their own ciphers (which they doubtless considered impregnable, as is usually true of persons without experience in cryptology),

<sup>14</sup> See appendix 1, p. 411, for extracts from Holinshed and Hall. For the most detailed account of the conspiracy which I have thus far encountered, see James H. Wylie's *Reign of Henry V*, 1, Cambridge, 1914.

<sup>15</sup> The following comment upon Holinshed iii/548/I/66 is extracted from W. G. Boswell-Stone's *Shakespeare's Holinshed*, 174, London, 1896:

"Neither Holinshed nor, I believe, any chronicler published in Shakespere's day<sup>1</sup> relates that the conspirators were led on by Henry to doom themselves. . . ."

The footnote to the foregoing comment is as follows: "*Saint-Remy*—whose *Mémoires*, from 1407 to 1422, were first published in 1663—says—as do other chroniclers—that the conspirators sought to make the Earl of March an accomplice by offering to place him on the throne, but that he revealed their design to Henry. *Saint-Remy* adds (vii. 488-489) that the King thereupon called a council of his nobles, and after telling them that he had heard, though he could not believe, that some of his subjects were engaged in a plot to deprive him of his crown, asked, if the report were true, what should be done to these traitors. The question was put to each lord in succession, and the conspirators answered that such traitors ought to suffer a death so cruel as to be a warning to others. Every one present having given his opinion, Henry confronted March with the guilty men, who owned their treasonable project. *Waurin* (V: i. 177-179) gives the same account of the conspirators' detection."

<sup>16</sup> *The history of the Battle of Agincourt*, by Sir Nicholas Nicolas (2nd ed., 1832), contains a somewhat different account of the conspiracy.

the plotters at once confess and appeal to the king for mercy, an appeal which Henry rejects in these words:

The mercy that was quick in us but late  
By your own counsel is suppress'd and kill'd.

He follows this rejection with a lengthy and stern homily addressed to the traitors. Practically the entire lecture is Shakespeare's invention, but in one set of six lines (94-99) and in another of eleven (127-137), Shakespeare used language based upon or derived from Holinshed. Henry heaps most of his strictures and scorn upon Lord Scroop:

But, O,

What shall I say to thee, Lord Scroop, thou cruel,  
Ingrateful, savage, and inhuman creature?  
Thou that didst beare the key of all my counsels,  
That knew'st the very bottom of my soul, . . .

Shakespeare's words here reflect what Holinshed says about the man:

"Lord Scroop was in such favour with the king, that he admitted him sometime to be his bedfellow,<sup>17</sup> in whose fidelity the king reposed such trust, that when any private or public council was in hand, this lord had much in determination of it.

As a second point in support of the theory as to what "those papers" really were, let us study three lines (102-104) which follow Henry's vitriolic denunciation of Scroop:

'Tis so strange

That, though the truth of it stands off as gross  
As black and white, my eye will scarcely see it.

By which I think Shakespeare meant to convey the following thought: "The idea that you, the very closest of all my confidants, would even think of joining a conspiracy combining treason and my murder, is so difficult for me to conceive that I wouldn't believe it if the proof weren't right there 'in black and white.'" Here Henry is referring to the intercepted and deciphered correspondence, and we can even imagine him pointing at "those papers" he had handed the conspirators.

As a third point in support of the theory as to the nature of "those papers," note the last three lines of Henry's lecture to the culprits:

<sup>17</sup> *Works of Shakespeare*, Hilliard, Gray and Co., Boston, 1837 (based on Singer's edition of the plays) has this to say (see 4: 138, footnote 1) about the word "bedfellow": "This appellation of *bedfellow* was common among the ancient nobility. This custom, which now appears so strange and unseemly to us, continued to the middle of the 17th Century, if not later. Cromwell obtained much of his intelligence during the civil wars from the mean men with whom he slept."

Their faults are open.  
Arrest them to the answer of the law;  
And God acquit them of their practices!

By the sentence "Their faults are open" Shakespeare intends to convey the thought that the traitors' guilt has been laid bare and completely proved by "those papers."<sup>18</sup>

Thereupon the three men are arrested and Henry promptly pronounces sentence upon them in these words:

Touching our person seek we no revenge;  
But we our kingdom's safety must so tender,  
Whose ruin you have sought, that to her laws  
We do deliver you. Get you therefore hence,  
Poor miserable wretches, to your death;  
The taste whereof God of his mercy give

<sup>18</sup> The idea that "those papers" were intercepted letters, or copies thereof, is suggested by two or three editors, but they do not intimate that the letters may have been in cipher. Even when intercepted letters are mentioned the suggestion is made in a most diffident manner. One editor, J. Dover Wilson (Cambridge edition of *Henry V*, 1947) is apparently unwilling himself to take the blame or the credit for the suggestion, but figuratively points the finger at one of his editorial collaborators, namely, George Ian Duthie. Here is Wilson's note 104, p. 138:

"104. *black and white* Q. 'black from white' (which may be right.) The K. has the intercepted letters in mind [Duthie]."

Boswell-Stone (*The life of Henry the Fifth*, New Shakespere Society edition, 1880) comments:

"As blacke and white] so the Ff. *black from white* Qq. Capell preferred the latter reading, which has been often adopted by editors. The king, I suppose, means that in the papers he has just handed to the conspirators their treason appears in 'blacke and white,' i.e. *in writing*; although there may also be a metaphorical allusion to the contrast between black and white. These papers were, perhaps, intercepted letters written by them to the French king."

Boswell-Stone's idea, embodied in the last sentence quoted directly above, is based no doubt upon certain accounts which postulate that the conspiracy was generated by cupidity. This is referred to by both Hall and Holinshed (see appendix 1) and also is found in the *Prologue* to Act II, lines 20-27:

"But see thy fault! France hath in thee found out  
A nest of hollow bosoms, which he fills  
With treacherous crowns; and three corrupted men,  
One, Richard Earl of Cambridge, and the second,  
Henry Lord Scroop of Masham, and the third,  
Sir Thomas Grey, knight, of Northumberland,  
Have, for the guilt of France,—O guilt indeed!—  
Confirm'd conspiracy with fearful France;"

and by three lines in Scene 2 (1. 155-157):  
"Cam. For me, the gold of France did not seduce;  
Though I did admit it as a motive  
The sooner to effect what I intended."

If "those papers" were, as Boswell-Stone thinks, intercepted letters written by the conspirators to the French king (or from the latter to the former), we may be sure that they were in cipher.

You patience to endure, and true repentance  
Of all your dear offences. Bear them hence.

The three traitors leave the stage under guard and the scene soon comes to a close. Presumably the three prisoners were immediately beheaded, or at least so Shakespeare thought, because Hall and Holinshed so state; but later accounts make it clear that there was a formal trial and from the date on which the conspiracy was discovered until the date of the executions ten to twelve days may have elapsed.<sup>19</sup> However, Shakespeare did not know this and it is to be wondered whether, even if he had known the facts, he would have changed his text.<sup>20</sup> Shakespeare's Henry, alerted by secret intelligence, makes excellent use of it, promptly reaches a decision, and acts upon it without delay or remorse. In fact, having just had three of his dearest confidants beheaded, he puts "cheerly to sea." The behavior of Henry in this scene is meant by Shakespeare to show that his hero possesses certain of the qualifications necessary for success in political life: intelligence, ruthlessness, and ability in promptly reaching and acting upon far-reaching decisions. The late John Palmer in his *Political Characters of Shakespeare* (London, 1945) puts it this way:

Henry . . . unmasks [the conspirators] in a scene in which are displayed some of the more important qualifications of a hero for success in public life—a courage, not quite so careless as it seems; a conviction that he is moved by no private passion but thinks only of the nation; a *disinterested* ruthlessness in the performance of an act of state necessary to his own security. . . .

To which I would add at the end "and to the security of his people."

It is interesting to observe that in all the text that follows lines 6 and 7 in Act II, Scene 2, there is no reference to interception or to the work of the king's secret agents, or to other ways of collecting secret intelligence: Shakespeare credits God for bringing the attempted treason to light, for in line 151 he has Scroop exclaim: "Our purposes God justly hath discover'd . . .," and in lines 185-186 he has Henry himself note:

<sup>19</sup> The duration of the delay is not certain, but it is based upon a careful study of pp. 38-42 of the historical account mentioned in footnote 16 above.

<sup>20</sup> The fourth volume of Professor Geoffrey Bullough's series entitled *Narrative and dramatic sources of Shakespeare* (London and New York, 1962) contains new information with regard to Shakespeare's source materials for his *Henry V*. The new information has an important bearing upon certain questions raised in this paper, but because its analysis requires rather detailed treatment it will be dealt with in a future publication.

Since God so graciously hath brought to light  
This dangerous treason, lurking in our way . . .

Shakespeare was aware of Henry's reputation for piety, which some historians think stemmed from his fear that a just punishment would come to him for the sins of his father. This awareness of Henry's fear-generated piety leads Shakespeare to have Henry credit the discovery of the plot to God, but in doing so it is also possible that Shakespeare wants his audience to know that he knows that it is to the state's interest to hide secret intelligence behind a curtain of impenetrable secrecy, except when disclosure is advisable or unavoidable.

To return now to Shakespeare's version of the conspiracy, I think it warranted to say not only that he understood quite well the uses of secret intelligence in the practice of statecraft, but also that he had an appreciation of its importance in other ways, for example, in regard to some of the lessons it can teach politicians and statesmen. Here let me point out that both in the historical account as well as in Shakespeare's version of the plot the three conspirators had been very close confidants of Henry, a fact which made their treachery all the more keenly resented by the king, who, in his strictures against Scroop, makes this point very clear when he says:

Such and so finely bolted didst thou seem;  
And thus thy fall hath left a kind of blot,  
To mark the full-fraught man and best indued  
With some suspicion. I will weep for thee;  
For this revolt of thine, methinks, is like  
Another fall of man.

Here Shakespeare lays the foundation for some of Henry's remarks about the loneliness, the emptiness, the trials and tribulations, the cares and responsibilities of kingship, as expressed later in detail in his soliloquy in Act IV, Scene 1. In the extract just quoted the principal theme seems to me to be this: Scroop's treachery, disclosed by secret intelligence, brings home several lessons to the king. The first is that from now on every Englishman will be troubled by sneaking doubts about the integrity and loyalty of every other Englishman with whom he has dealings, because proof of misplaced trust breeds suspicion, suspicion is very contagious and can do great damage to the stability of the realm. The second lesson is that from now on Henry will be unable to feel that there is even one man in his immediate circle who will be beyond all suspicion. And the third is that from now on Henry can trust only himself in important matters of state. As Professor John Law-



lor says in *The Tragic Sense in Shakespeare* (London, 1960: 39),

Scroop's revolt is indeed "like / Another fall of man." With the end of misplaced trust the theme of the ruler's sole responsibility sounds more strongly. . . . Now he has the other half of the truth: understanding is not to be looked for; and remoteness is expected of him. The willed separateness begins to perceive that kingship is in fact isolation: it is not dependent upon the King's choosing that all is laid upon the King. . . . The reality is endless vigilance, the sleeplessness that marks the King off forever from the "private" man.

A fourth lesson is that the final decision in matters vitally affecting the state must be made by the Head of State himself, in complete or nearly complete isolation. There is on the door to the private office of a Head of State a sign which figuratively says, in our modern American idiom: "The buck stops here." In fact, President Truman had such a sign on a wall in his private office. The sign summarizes the following thought: "There is nobody to whom I can pass this difficult matter you are bringing me for decision. That is something I alone must make and must be held responsible for making, correctly or incorrectly, wisely or foolishly." The ability to accept this awesome responsibility in matters of highest importance to the welfare of the state and at times requiring immediate decision is what counts. Shakespeare knew this to be an inherent function and responsibility of kingship, and he intimates this in other plays.

Henry learned a fifth and very important lesson indeed, namely, that secret intelligence can bring disheartening and shattering revelations of duplicity and deceit inimical to the well-being of a state, its Head and its people, and its use can be defended on this basis alone. In time of war it is indispensable as a weapon of offense as well as defense.

From our study of Scene 2 it is clear, I think, that Shakespeare was aware of secret intelligence and the fact that it had been used not once but several times during his own lifetime to unveil plots against the crown. By a fashionable anachronism he uses secret intelligence as he knew it to have been employed during his own lifetime to make it uncover a plot which was hatched almost two centuries before he wrote *Henry V*. He employed this sort of anachronism to make his play more topical and to heighten its dramatic effect upon his audience, many of whom must have been aware of the Crown's use of secret intelligence in uncovering and punishing domestic intriguers. In-

deed, there is even reason to believe that the government wanted the intelligentsia to know this and take heed accordingly. But whether Shakespeare knew the full extent to which secret intelligence was used by the Crown in the conduct of foreign affairs before or during his lifetime is problematical. Details concerning the collection of secret intelligence have always been closely guarded, arcane matters in the conduct of diplomatic and military affairs. About such matters in Shakespeare's time much more is now known because of the scholarly work of K. L. Ellis, to whose studies I have already referred. (See footnote 9.)

At this point I shall quote two paragraphs from the Introduction to John Palmer's book to which I have referred above:

(p. vi) It is, indeed, a strange paradox that Shakespeare who, above all other dramatists, was preoccupied with the private mind and heart of the individual, should have written a group of plays unmatched in any literature for their political content.

(p. ix) A politician can find no better handbook to success than the political plays of Shakespeare. Here he can study the flaws of character and errors in policy or practice which may ruin his career. Here, too, he can examine and assess the qualities and habits of mind to be emulated. He will find no better instruction anywhere upon his personal deportment and manner of speech; upon the gentle art of making friends and removing enemies; [and] upon the adjustment of means to ends and of private conscience to public necessity.

To Palmer's list of items that Shakespeare's political plays provide for inclusion in what may be termed "The Statesman's *Vade Mecum*," I should add one that is suggested by an analysis of the scene under scrutiny in this paper. It is obvious, I think, that Shakespeare knew the importance of having sources of what he calls in *Henry V* "good intelligence" in the practice of statecraft, and that such intelligence must be used in a discreet manner, even if this involves duplicity, trickery, and other sorts of conduct usually abhorrent or at least repugnant to an upright public servant afflicted with a sensitive private conscience. The additional item for Palmer's politician's *vade mecum* would perhaps be as follows:

He will find no better instructions anywhere upon the adjustment of means to ends and private conscience to public necessity—even when private conscience cringes at the use of means which must occasionally be employed in collecting secret intelligence vital in the conduct of affairs of state.

Our own late and great Justice Holmes once stigmatized interception as "dirty business" when, in a certain Supreme Court decision, he referred to illicit means such as electronic interception and eavesdropping of any sort in the collection of evidence.

Before closing this paper, let me call attention to another instance of Shakespeare's concept of the utility of secret intelligence. This is in his *Life and Death of King John*, Act IV, Scene 2. A messenger arrives and King John says (lines 106-115):

*K. John:* A fearful eye thou hast; where is that blood  
That I have seen inhabit in those cheeks?  
So foul a sky clears not without a storm.  
Pour down thy weather—how goes all in France?  
*Mess.:* From France to England. Never such a pow'r  
For any foreign preparation  
Was levied in the body of a land.  
The copy of your speed is learn'd by them,  
For when you should be told they do prepare,  
The tidings come that they are all arriv'd.

At this point King John voices a question which in substance was also the one many of us, on December 7, 1941, asked ourselves and one another:

*K. John:* O, where hath our intelligence been drunk?  
Where hath it slept? Where is my mother's care,<sup>21</sup>  
That such an army could be drawn in France,  
And she not hear of it?  
*Mess.:* My liege, her ear  
Is stopp'd with dust. . . .

Regretfully we must note that the same question has been raised several times since 1941, the last as recently as October 28, 1961, by the distinguished American Navy historian Professor Samuel E. Morison, in his *Saturday Evening Post* article, entitled "The Lessons of Pearl Harbor." In the final paragraph of that article is his warning to the American people:

<sup>21</sup> Much has been written about the last word in this line because in F1 the initial letter of that word was printed from a defective piece of type. Some editors read *care*, others, *care*. Furness in his Variorum Edition of *King John* reads *care* and presents a rather lengthy commentary in support of his reading. I have gone into this question quite carefully and hope to present the results of the study elsewhere in due course.

Since World War II the methods of obtaining intelligence and, what is more important, evaluating it and seeing that the proper people get it, have been vastly improved. But we were surprised by the North Koreans in 1950, surprised when China entered the war later that year, surprised by the utter failure of the attempt to invade Cuba this year, and surprised by many, fortunately short of war, moves by Khrushchev. In the cold war such as the one in which we are now engaged, it is vitally important to find out not only the capabilities of our political enemy, but also his intentions.

More than 360 years before Morison, Shakespeare, in his *Henry V*, pointed out similar lessons about the importance of intelligence, not only for Tudor Englishmen but also for all of us in the modern Western World, if we will but heed them.

I began this paper with a question and in the course of it raised a few questions which I tried to answer. I hope you will forgive me if I bring my paper to a close by raising a few more questions.

Did Shakespeare have any private views concerning the ethics of interception, the collection of secret intelligence, and its use in the conduct of public business? I wonder. Did he recognize that it is difficult to reconcile such activities with the democratic ideals of a free and open society that would prefer its government to conduct all its internal or domestic affairs openly, so far as possible, and also to conduct all its external or foreign affairs in the same manner? How far is open conduct of public affairs compatible with the national security of a democracy? What about its conduct in dealings with a closed society? I wonder what Shakespeare's answers to questions such as these might be.

Who shall say that Shakespeare in his determined emphasis upon secret intelligence in his *Henry V* was not intentionally and deliberately pointing out an important political lesson for England as well as for us? Might we not wonder whether one of the reasons why Shakespeare injects into that play such a lengthy scene as the one we have been analyzing, a scene which has little or nothing to do with the action which precedes or follows it, is that he wants to deliver this lesson? Is it possible that he wishes to emphasize the point that the use of secret intelligence uncovered the Cambridge-Scroop-Grey conspiracy, caused it to abort, and led to the very speedy detection and execution of the plotters? Can it be that Shakespeare also wishes to show that secret intelligence and its proper use is one of the reasons why the remainder of the reign of

the historical Henry was free from domestic strife, and that such intelligence is as important and useful for maintaining domestic tranquillity as in the conduct of foreign relations? Perhaps we could gain some clues to the answers to these questions by detailed study of Shakespeare's use of secret intelligence in other of his plays.

## APPENDIX

*Extracts from the Chronicles of  
Hall and Holinshed*

## 1.

Hall, Edward. *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke*, 1548.

[Fol. XLiii, verso]

The third yere.

This noble prince having his navy furnished, and al thinges necessary for suche a royal voyage, perceiving his freshe capitaines to complain that they had lost so many monethes of the yere in the whiche they might have done diverse haute [en]terprices in the landes of theyr enemies, and that nothing was to them and more odius then prolongyng linyeryng of tyme, determined with all diligence to cause his souldiors to entre his shippes and so to depart.

SE the chaunce, the night before the day of departure appointed, he was credibly informed that Richarde earle of Cambridge brother to Edward duke of Yorke and Henry lorde Scrope and syr Thomas Gray knight has compassed his death and fnall destruction: wherefore he caused them to be apprehended lamentyng sore his chaunce that he should be compelled to loose such personages by whose valiantnes and puissaunce he should be more dreadful and feareful to his foes and enemies. When these prisoners were examined, they not only confessed the conspiracy, but also declared that for a great some of mony which they had received of the French kyng, they intended either to deliver the kyng alive into the handes of his enemies, or els to murther him before that he should arrive in the duchy of Normandy. When king Henry hard al thinges opened which he sore desired, he caused al his nobilitie to assemble before his maiestie royal, before whom he caused to be brought the thre great offenders and to them sayd: If you have conspired the deth and destruction of me whiche am the head of the realme and governor of the people, without doubt I must of necessitie thinke that you likewise have compassed the confusion of al that be here with me and also the final destruction of your native cuntry and natural region. And although some private Scorpion in your heartes, or some wild worme in your heades hath caused you to conspire my death and confusion, yet you should have spared that develish enterprice as long as I was with mine army which cannot continue without a capitaine, nor be directed without a guide, nor yet with the destruction of your owne bloud and nacion you should have

pleased a forein enemy and an auncient adversary. Wherefore seying that you have enterprised so great a mischief, so abhominable a fact, to thentent that your fautors beyng in the armye may abhorre so detestable an offence by the punishement of you, hast you to receive the payne that for your demerites you have deserved, and that punishment that by the lawe for your offences is provided.

## 2.

Holinshed, Raphael. *Chronicles*. 2nd Edition, 1587

[p. 548/1] When king Henrie had fullie furnished his navie with men, munition, & other provisions, perceiving that his capteines misliked nothing so much as delaie, determined his souldiors to go a ship-boord and awaie. But see the hap, the night before the daie appointed for their departure, he was credibile informed, that Richard earle of Cambridge brother to Edward duke of Yorke, and Henrie lord Scroope of Masham lord treasurer, with Thomas Graie a knight of Northumberland, being confederat together, had conspired his death: wherefore he caused them to be apprehended. The said lord Scroope was in such favour with the king, that he admitted him sometime to be his bedfellow, in whose fidelitie the king reposed such trust, that when anie privat or publike councill was in hand, this lord had much in the determination of it. For he represented so great gravitie in his countenance, such modestie in behaviour, and so vertuous zeale to all godlinesse in his talke, that whatsoever he said was thought for the most part necessarie to be doone and followed. Also the said sir Thomas Graie (as some write) was of the king's privie councill.

These prisoners upon their examination, confessed, that for a great summe of monie which they had received of the French king, they intended verelie either to have delivered the king alive into the hands of his enimies, or else to have murthered him before he should arrive in the duchie of Normandie. When king Henrie had heard all things opened, which he desired to know, he caused all his nobilitie to come before his presence, before whome he caused to be brought the offenders also, and to them said. Having thus conspired the death and destruction of me, which am the head of the realme and governour of the people, it maie be (no doubt) but that you likewise have sworne the confusion of all that are here with me, and also the desolation of your owne cuntry. To what horror (O lord) for any true English hart to consider, that such an execrable iniquitie should ever so bewrap you, as for pleasing of a forren enimie to imbrue your hands in your bloud, and to ruine your owne native soile. Revenge herein touching my person, though I seeke not; yet for the safegard of you my deere friends, & for due preservation of all sorts, I am by office to cause example to be shewed. Get ye hence therefore ye poore miserable wretches to the receiving of your just reward, wherein Gods maiestie give you grace of his mercie and repentance of your heinous offenses. And so immediatlie they were had to execution.