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Shakespeare and War: a reflection on instances of dramatic production, appropriation, and celebration

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***Abstract:** This article draws on a range of literary, theatre, and printed news sources in order to explore the portrayal of Shakespeare and some of his plays in relation to war. This exploration is timely, given the anniversary of the playwright's birth and of the start of the First World War. Particular attention is given to the society of Elizabethan England, to nineteenth and twentieth century theatre and film productions of Henry V, and other events during the early years of the 1914-1918 war, revealing the many diverse ways in which the man and his work has been appropriated.*

Keywords: Shakespeare; war; theatre; Henry V

Two anniversaries are being marked in 2014: the birth of Shakespeare in 1564 and the start of the First World War in 1914. With both anniversaries in mind, the purpose of this paper is to explore the range of ways in which Shakespeare – the man, his work, and his reputation – has been employed as a tool in conflicting responses to warfare and, in so doing, has become hotly contested cultural property in competing ideologies. In this paper, I consider the reception, appropriation, and context of Shakespeare's work, and find a history in which nationhood, patriotism and propaganda feature strongly. The association of Shakespeare and war is not confined to the 1914-18 war, although that is where it concludes; attention is also given to domestic as well as international conflicts. It begins with speculative biographical claims from just over one hundred and fifty years ago.

I

In the mid-nineteenth century, Robert Lemon, of the State Paper Office, noted the name of William Shakespeare in the 1605 muster roll of trained soldiers in the village of Rowington, in the Barlichway Hundred; a historic division of the county of Warwickshire that included Stratford-upon-Avon and Henley-in-Arden. Lemon informed J. Payne Collier, the controversial Shakespeare editor and forger, of his find and Collier included the information,

inconclusively, in his 1858 edition of *Shakespeare* (Shakespeare 1858). This biographical detail resurfaced in 1865 in the work of the English antiquarian William J. Thoms as the conclusion of one of his *Three Notelets on Shakespeare* titled ‘Was Shakespeare Ever a Soldier? (1859).’ He wanted to prove that Shakespeare accompanied or followed the Earl of Leicester to the Low Countries to fight the Spanish when he sailed from Harwich on 4th of December and landed at Flushing on 10th of December 1585, returning a year later on 3rd December 1586. He prefaced the piece with glowing commendations from the late Lord Lyndhurst and wrote of:

Another noble Lord (still happily among us), who has received the Thanks of Parliament for his ability and judgment displayed in support of great military operations, [who] assured the writer that he had long felt convinced that Shakespeare must have served in the army, and that this belief had been strongly confirmed by witnessing the recent performance of his ‘Henry the Fifth.’ With such opinions in his favour, it will not be considered extraordinary if the writer considers that the question, Was Shakespeare ever a Soldier? must be resolved in the affirmative. (Thoms 1859, p.114)

In addition to this aristocratic support, Thoms made use of a letter from Sir Philip Sidney to his father-in-law Walsingham, dated ‘at Utrecht this 24th of March, 1586’, which included a reference to “Will, my Lord of Lester’s jesting player.” The bulk of his ‘evidence’, however, was drawn from the texts of the plays: he worked through Boswell’s edition of Malone’s *Shakespeare* (Shakespeare 1821) extracting quotations that connect to military life and experience. Any reference to weaponry or rank, however slight, is claimed as an “image drawn from [Shakespeare’s] own military experiences” (p.130) but fortunately for an intelligent reader he stops quoting at *Othello*. “Who can doubt” he asks, “that it was under the inspiration of having shared in the dangers and excitement of a campaign, that Shakespeare put into the mouth of the noble Moor his chivalrous and touching farewell to military glory” (p.135).

Many, of course, have doubted that Shakespeare was a soldier. Although England was at war for over half Shakespeare’s lifetime – and despite the testimonial of the three times Lord Chancellor, Lord Lyndhurst – the whole proposition was subsequently refuted. It was a case of mistaken identity and joined other snippets of biographical conjecture, particularly those

that attempted to fill in Shakespeare's 'lost years' (the naive assumption that absence of evidence is evidence of absence – in the Low Countries or elsewhere) with accounts of the young playwright as sailor, schoolmaster, scrivener, apprentice butcher, engaged in legal work or recusant.¹

Thoms' own military knowledge was negligible: he owned that he was "called upon to shoulder a brown bess" in April 1848 but acknowledged his inexperience, recognising that "if unhappily compelled to use it, it might peradventure prove more dangerous to my Conservative friends than to the noisy Chartists against whom its fire would have been really directed" (p.124). There is a clear assumption that in a domestic military conflict (and here he is writing of the Chartist riots), he, his readers, and Shakespeare himself would have been on the same side against the Chartists. He was perhaps unaware that in 1842 the leading Chartist Thomas Cooper of Leicester had compiled a *Shakespearean Chartist Hymnbook* (Cooper 1897), a collection of political verses sung to hymn tunes during processions and open air meetings, including the following composition by John Bramwich, a stocking weaver, sung to the tune 'New Crucifixion':

All men are equal in His sight,
The bond, the free, the black the white:
He made them all, - them freedom gave;
God made the man – Man made the slave.

There is little here that could be called Shakespearean and indeed the *Shakespearean* of the hymnbook's title owes more to the name of the room in which the Chartists met than to the playwright. However, Cooper was steeped in Shakespeare: he learned whole plays by heart and lectured on Shakespeare to his fellow Chartists. When charged with inciting a riot in the Potteries, Cooper staged a performance of *Hamlet* to raise money for his defence. In civil strife, Shakespeare was being appropriated by working class activists as well as by the establishment, although the relationship between the radicals and the dramatist was a complex one. Gerald Massey, for example, a leading Chartist and Christian Socialist, published two works on the sonnets, which, with Cooper's lecturing and acting, might be

¹ For reliable, evidence-based information about Shakespeare's 'lost years' see S. Schoenbaum's *William Shakespeare: a compact documentary life* (Oxford: OUP, 1987) and his *Shakespeare's Lives* (Clarendon: Oxford, 1991)

read as mainstream educational activities, rather than as acts of subversion. However, elsewhere in the movement, Shakespeare is quite clearly used as ammunition in a class war. The regular ‘Chartism from Shakespeare’ column in the Yorkshire-based and bestselling weekly newspaper the *Northern Star*, found precursors of the People’s Charter in a number of Shakespeare’s plays. It quoted from *King John*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Henry IV*, citing passages as precedents for parliamentary reform and made particular use of some of the citizens’ speeches from the opening scene of *Coriolanus*:

Our sufferance is a gain to them. Let us revenge this with our pikes, ere we become rakes ... Suffer us to famish, and their storehouses crammed with grain ... repeal daily any wholesome act established against the rich, and provide more piercing statutes daily to chain up and restrain the poor (Taylor 2002, p.367)

One of the ostensible oddities of Thoms’ method was the eleven plays that he chose for illustration: *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merry Wives*, *As You Like It*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Othello*. He admits to being interrupted before examining the Historical Plays but nevertheless, in a paper about military matters, the exclusion of *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus* seems arbitrary and unwise. The answer is prosaic. It has little to do with his critical method, and lies in the organisation of the twenty-one volumes of his source text. The editor, Edmond Malone, arranged the bulk of the plays in the order in which he believed them to have been composed, thus not distinguishing between comedies and tragedies but leaving the history plays as a discrete category. He placed in reign order (as in the Folio) after the rest of the canon and before the volume devoted to the poems and the plays that he believed to be co-authored, *Pericles* and *Titus Andronicus*. When Thoms stopped at *Othello*, he had only reached the end of the ninth volume and thus never attended to plays with a more obvious military content or context. His ‘evidence’ (if not his argument) would have been strengthened had he persevered through the whole canon: a quick online word search (on www.opensourceshakespeare.org for example) reveals that ‘war’ is used just 28 times in comedies, 88 times in tragedies and 112 times in the histories; ‘soldier’ occurs 47 times in comedies, 134 times in tragedies and 152 times in histories. Thoms made nothing of the supposed chronological order of composition; neither did he give any consideration to the

differences and the demands of genre or Shakespeare's craftsmanship, despite giving greater, if unintentional, attention to comedies. With his biographical focus, Thoms perhaps felt it was irrelevant or a statement of the obvious to say that 'war'—while occasionally in the background of comedies—is only foregrounded in tragedies and histories where it is an integral part of the plot. Had he progressed through the canon he might have noted the metaphorical use of warfare in the sonnets too (see particularly sonnets 15, 16 and 55) and had he been writing two hundred years later he might also have commented on the gendering of the dramatic genres.

While positing Shakespeare as a soldier fighting overseas, Thoms gave no attention to the problems of the returning soldier. A consideration of context suggests that the dramatist was well aware of the difficulties facing the demobbed fighting man and appropriated contemporary social concerns as the context of his work. A letter from Edward Hext, Justice of the Peace in Somerset, to Lord Burleigh dated 25th September 1596, describes the 'thieves and robbers that are abroad in this County' and the "lewd young men of England ... devoted to this wicked course of life":

The most dangerous are the wandering soldiers and other stout rogues of England ... of these sort of wandering idle people there are three or four hundred in a shire ... [who] do meet either at fair or market, or in some Alehouse once a week. And in a great hay house in a remote place there did resort weekly ... where they did roast all kind of good meat (Hext 1596)

Hext goes on to describe how the soldiers evaded capture and punishment—either by the intimidation of Justices and court officers or "through intelligence of all things intended against them"—which they achieved by attending court disguised as "honest husbandmen" (Hext 1596). Hext is describing a pressing problem: vagrancy and vagabondage were widespread after the Spanish Armada and particularly during the summer of 1589, following the expedition to Portugal. Thousands of demobilised and unemployed soldiers wandered the countryside looting and pillaging to support themselves. Legislation in 1593 eventually provided ex-soldiers with travel licences and pensions after five hundred had threatened to loot Bartholomew Fair but the problem remained. There was a massive population increase in the sixteenth century (some estimates suggest a rise of as much as 40%) and employment was rarely secure. Fluctuations in the cloth industry, enclosures, inflation, continued outbreaks of disease, harvest failure, and the famines of the 1590s forced growing numbers to join the

ranks of itinerant vagabonds, which led eventually to the Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1598 and 1601. Poverty at this period was worse than at any time since the 1340s and social differentiation was greater than it had ever been before. Very speedily the rich were getting richer and the poor were getting poorer. The only recourse for the impoverished soldiers and others suffering the stresses of war and poverty was to roam.

Of all Shakespeare's comedies, *As You Like It* is the one with the greatest interest in people on the move and was written by the middle of 1600. The bulk of the characters in the play are, or become, mis- or dis-placed in the Forest of Arden, the inhospitable area in Warwickshire to the north of Stratford-upon-Avon, reputedly the home of recusants, wild beasts and outlaws. They are disguised, whether 'like Forresters' as the Folio describes the lords in Duke Senior's company or as Ganymede and Aliena, and subsist 'like the old Robin Hood of England' (1.1.110). While warfare in the play is never explicit (the only references to soldiering are made by Jaques in his 'seven ages of man speech' at 2.7.149 and again in his description of his melancholy at 4.1.12), it is hard to believe that the first audiences watching the play were not unaware of Hext's 'lewd young men of England', 'the wandering soldiers', and the 'stout rogues' roasting 'all kinds of good meat.'

Shakespeare makes more explicit use of war and its effects in the tragedies and the histories, where contemporary context is also significant. *Coriolanus*, with a strikingly successful soldier as its eponymous hero, opens as the Chartists observed with "a company of mutinous Citizens with staves, clubs, and other weapons" (1.1 first stage direction) demanding "corn at our own price" (1.1.10) and complaining of "piercing statutes [that] chain up and restrain the poor" (1.1.180-1). The play was written and performed at some point in 1608 or 9 and it is widely believed that this opening scene reflects the rioting that had occurred in 1607-8 (The Midland Uprising) after particularly bad harvests and price rises. William Combe, from whom Shakespeare had purchased his Stratford house in 1605, was High Sheriff of Warwickshire and in that capacity reported his concerns to Lord Salisbury in June 1608:

I am overbold to acquaint your lordship with such grievances as the common people of the county ... are troubled with: *videlicet*, with dearth of corn, the prices rising to some height, caused partly by some that are well stored, by refraining to bring the same to the market out of covetous conceit that corn will be dearer, and by engrossing of barley by malsters (Parker 1994, p.34)

It is not difficult to see these current events reflected in a play ostensibly about ancient Rome. While there is no evidence of performances in Shakespeare's time, some subsequent productions have reflected contemporary affairs; whether the right-wing, anti-plebeian show of John Philip Kemble (Drury Lane from February 1789) reacting against the French Revolution, or the left-wing, pro-plebeian productions that developed in response to the rise of fascism. R.B. Parker, the editor of the Oxford edition of the play, reports that the Nazis banned a translation for radio, exiled the author, and then adopted the play as a schoolbook for Hitler Youth to demonstrate the weaknesses of democracy and to present Coriolanus as a heroic leader aspiring to lead his people to a healthier society "as Adolf Hitler in our days wishes to lead our beloved German father-land" (Parker 1994, p.124). The play was banned by the American army in the early days of the post-war occupation; an interesting example of competing and conflicting appropriations.

II

Part of Thoms' testimonial from his unnamed lord referred to a recent performance of *Henry V* and it is this drama, with its broad social range of characters, which is Shakespeare's best known 'war' play. The performance in question was, most likely, Charles Kean's 1859 production at the Princess's Theatre² that roused patriotic fervour in the aftermath of the Crimean War, the Persian War and the Indian Mutiny. Its jingoistic effect was initiated by Kean's use of his wife as the Chorus, ostensibly personating Clio, the Muse of History, but dressed as a cross between Queen Victoria and Britannia. Kean's biographer, John Cole, pointed to its prescience:

The records of that warlike age, the campaigns in France, make the hearts of Englishmen swell; and are well recalled at a time when a restless neighbour, armed to the teeth, is evidently in search of an antagonist, anywhere, in any pretext; and when constant alarms warn us to be on our guard, and prepared in case of unprovoked attack (Cole 1859, p.342).

Yet the idea that this *Henry V* demonstrated Shakespeare's personal experience of warfare is farfetched: the representation of military life owed as much to Kean's extravagant design as

² The only other candidate is a shortened version of the play that Macready took to Bath and Bristol six years earlier.

the dramatist's skill. He was determined to create a historical verisimilitude in sight and sound, and employed over two hundred extras as soldiers, crowd and choristers. The playbill advertising the show promised fifty singers performing 'The Song of the Victory of Agincourt', 'Chanson Roland' and a 'Hymn of Thanksgiving' at the end of the fourth act, all of which Kean believed to be authentic fifteenth century music, but it was the realism of the representation of military events that caught the attention of reviewers. The *Illustrated London News* of April 12th 1859 clearly approved of an extra-textual (and therefore non-Shakespearian) moment:

As usual, Mr Kean has resorted to the old chroniclers for assistance in illustrating his great argument, and has added episodes to the drama of great historical value, and which, as historical pictures, are eminently interesting. First of these is the siege of Harfleur, which is literally realised on the stage. There is the fitting and fixing the engines and guns under the walls of the town, and against its gates and towers – the blowing forth of stones by the force of ignited powers – the impetuosity and fury of the terrible attack – the scarcely less terrible repulse – the smoke, the confusion, the death, and all the horrors and darkness of the strife, in the midst of which the dauntless King urges on his followers to the breach, until the ruin of the French bulwark is accomplished.
(*Illustrated London News*, April 12th 1859)

A similar attempt at realism and an overtly patriotic rendering of the play was evident eighty-five years later in Laurence Olivier's *Henry V* film, prompted by the Ministry of Information as a project to raise morale on the eve of D-Day.³ The Ministry had wanted modern dress, presumably to stress the play's relevance, but Olivier opted for traditional, period costume and detailed, lavish battle scenes requiring large casts of men and horses. It was, in its way, as extravagant as Kean's stage version and so expensive—at the time the most expensive British film ever made—that it took almost twenty years before it made a profit. The patriotic tone was achieved in part through some careful editing, including cutting Henry's execution of the French prisoners, and Olivier's staging of key speeches. Mounted on a white horse, and having removed his helmet, Olivier delivered the 'Once more unto the breach' speech to

³ See Anthony Davies, 'The Shakespeare films of Laurence Olivier' in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film* ed. Russell Jackson (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), pp163-182.

cheering troops and, in doing so imprinted the language—and the spirit—of the lines in the national consciousness.

In today's society, lines beginning "Once more unto the breach" (3.1.1) are perhaps now less well known than "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers" (4.3.60) following the success of the 2001 Second World War TV mini-series.⁴ At the Last Night of the Proms in 2002, the actor Sam West delivered both speeches to accompany William Walton's *Henry V Suite*, the music composed for Olivier's film, in a fusion of patriotism. The speeches are sufficiently well known for Colonel Tim Collins' eve of battle oratory to 1,000 troops of the Royal Irish battle group at their Kuwaiti desert camp in March 2003 before the invasion of Iraq to be widely compared to Henry's St. Crispin's Day speech.

Both speeches remain familiar enough for parody, such as in 'The New Coalition Academy' (a fictional school) column in the satirical magazine *Private Eye*, in which David Cameron, portrayed as the Headmaster gives a rousing beginning of term speech, supposedly in St Petersburg:

Once more unto the beach, dear friends, and once more, er ... this small sceptre isle, this Game of Thrones, er ... this happy breed of men and women and members of the Transgender community ... this little world power with the sixth largest economy, er seventh, er eighth ... this precious Rolling Stone set in a silver CD [...]

and gentlemen in England now abed shall think themselves accused that they were not here in St Crispinburg ... we few, we happy few, this G20, this Band of Brothers apart from Putin, this is not the end of my speech nor is it the beginning of the end, but it is the beginning of the end ... Cry God for Harry Styles, the England Cricket Team and Prince George!! (*Private Eye*, No 1349, 20 Sept – 3 Oct, 2013)

We are informed that the accompanying picture, Cameron on a white horse (Olivier- and Branagh- like), has been mocked up by the fictional art department: "It was a pity that they labelled it "Hooray Henry V", but I'm sure this was an honest mistake" (*Private Eye*, 2013)

⁴ *Band of Brothers* (2001) TV Mini-Series, co-directed and co-written, and produced by HBO and Dreamworks

From these examples we can see that Shakespeare's words, whether played straight or for comic effect, have become the shared language of warfare, and there are many other instances, including Churchill who supposedly quoted the Bastard from *King John* on the eve of the Second World War ('Mad world! mad kings! mad composition!' - 2.1.561). However, while many stage and film productions of *Henry V* have stressed the patriotism of the piece, such a focus and its almost inevitable glorification of war have offended other directors. In 1986 Michael Bogdanov, of the English Shakespeare Company, was determined to change the focus. In his departure-from-war portrayal of 2.3 Pistol, Bardolph and Nym opened their jackets to reveal Union Jack T-shirts, broke into the 'Here we go' football chant, and unfurled banners proclaiming the intention of the soldiers to 'Fuck the Frogs.' To the strains of 'Jerusalem', the Chorus entered with a football rattle and a placard replicating the notorious 'Gotcha' headline that *The Sun* had used about the sinking of the Belgrano in the Falklands War. Bogdanov's vision was very different from Olivier's:

Imperialism encourages jingoism. So the Falklands. So Agincourt. 'Fuck the Frogs'. The banner hung out by the send-off crowd at Southampton ... grew out of the desire to bridge nearly six hundred years of this same bigoted xenophobic patriotism ... The Last Night of the Proms, the troops getting the blessing at Portsmouth, football fury, all combined in my mind to produce this image. (Bogdanov and Pennington 1990, p.24)

He felt he made his point and went on to quote a letter of complaint: "The use of the word was offensive and the term "Frogs" hardly helps promote racial harmony and dispel old prejudices. I was ashamed to be English.' Precisely. The case rests" (Bogdanov and Pennington 1990, p.48)

III

If Shakespeare could be claimed as a military man and a patriot, and if his works could be appropriated for and against war, how was he employed in the First World War? Some of the history is not unexpected. Senior Shakespearian actors engaged in high profile war work: Henry Beerbohm Tree lectured on theatre at home and in America, which included patriotic addresses. Harley Granville Barker worked for the Red Cross in France and then worked in military intelligence. Frank Benson, knighted in Drury Lane theatre at the end of the

Tercentenary performance of *Julius Caesar* in 1916, staged a patriotic performance of *Henry V*, and then drove an ambulance in France while his actress wife Constance directed a canteen for soldiers. Ellen Terry gave a number of benefit performances in aid of Invalid Kitchens, the Red Cross, the Star and Garter Building Fund, the Concerts at the Front Fund and the American Forces. Gladys Cooper, at the start of her career, spent Christmas 1914 with a concert party in France.

At home, wounded soldiers were entertained with a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Regent's Park in July 1917, sponsored by the War Office, which was filmed and distributed to boost morale.⁵ Other performances, however, were severely curtailed. There was no Shakespeare at the Memorial Theatre (now the Royal Shakespeare Theatre) in Stratford-upon-Avon after Benson's 1916 season and Shakespeare-related films, whose manufacture and distribution were severely affected by the war, slumped from thirteen in 1916 to just two in 1918. Publications were similarly curtailed and the output of the major academic publishers was extremely limited: for example, the Arden edition of Shakespeare only added *Henry VIII* to its playlist during this time.

On a broader scale, beyond the stage and page, the cultural status of Shakespeare and use of his works was complex and contested, not least because of the 1916 celebrations of the Tercentenary of his death and his pre-war reputation in Germany. While he was undoubtedly the 'National Poet' at home, he had been co-opted in Germany as one of their 'big three' joining Goethe and Schiller. For Calvo, the war "exposed a fault-line between Shakespeare the national poet and the universal genius" (Calvo 2012, p.55)

In 1913, Professor Alois Brandl of Berlin University and President of the Deutsche Shakespeare Gesellschaft (the German Shakespeare Society) had been invited to give the annual British Academy Shakespeare lecture and spoke on 'Shakespeare and Germany.' He described the strength of Shakespeare in German theatre, comparing it favourably to the situation in England:

The theatre is the stronghold of the Shakespeare cult in Germany. There are some 180 German companies, and they maintain in their repertoire about twenty-five plays of Shakespeare ... On an average, throughout the Fatherland,

⁵ The Imperial War Museum has a short silent film of this performance. See British Universities Film & Video Council at <http://bufvc.ac.uk/shakespeare/index>

three or four plays of Shakespeare are performed every evening. In Berlin, the theatrical capital, it sometimes happens that on five or six successive evenings as many different plays of his are to be seen (Brandl 1913, p.7).

He identified two distinct Shakespeares – the German and the English – with distinct critical and literary traditions. He clearly favoured the former, and this sense of competition would resurface more explicitly over the next few years. Nevertheless, he concluded with the hope that during the Tercentenary celebrations England and Germany would “stand up like one man, and hail him with one voice, as the greatest creator in literature...*Au revoir* till Shakespeare Day, in 1916!” (Brandl 1913, pp.14-15)

The following year, and three months before the outbreak of war in 1914, the 350th anniversary of Shakespeare’s birth was celebrated in both countries. In England, a Shakespeare Association was founded (largely to plan the 1916 centenary), whilst in Germany, the *Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft* marked the occasion and its own fiftieth anniversary by making King George V and Viscount Haldane honorary members. Brandl’s optimism and plans for co-operation did not survive the ensuing conflict and Shakespeare, particularly surrounding the celebrations of 1916, was co-opted on both sides for the war effort. At home, Sir Israel Gollancz compiled *A Book of Homage to Shakespeare* devised because the war had restricted the planned activities and he wanted a ‘worthy Record of the widespread reverence for Shakespeare as shared with the English-speaking world by our Allies and Neutral States’ (Gollancz 1916, p. viii). The volume contained tributes from 166 ‘homagers’, many from overseas, but also the leading English literary figures of the day: Hardy, Drinkwater, Galsworthy, Edmund Gosse, Henry Newbolt, Kipling; academics such as A.C. Bradley; bibliographers like W.W. Greg and A.W. Pollard; and actors. Abroad, the enemy was anticipating (or hoping for) a debacle and *The Times* of 2nd March, 1914, reprinted a piece from the *Cologne Gazette*:

All Germany will contemplate this celebration with amused expectation and the utmost satisfaction. The English could give us no greater pleasure. The music-hall and cinematograph spirit of the England of today will make such a mess of it that unquenchable laughter will run through the whole of Europe. (*The Times*, 2 March, 1914)

‘All Germany’ was wrong and despite Gollancz’s concerns that public events would be limited there were four days of successful Tercentenary celebrations. 30th April was ‘Shakespeare Sunday’ with appropriate church sermons; Monday was political with a Mansion House meeting attended by members of the government, the church and diplomats; Tuesday’s celebrations took place at Drury Lane in the presence of the King and Queen with a performance of *Julius Caesar*, a pageant and Shakespeare music; Wednesday was Shakespeare Day for schools. The German attitude undoubtedly caused major irritation. *Punch* published a cartoon showing Martin Luther addressing Shakespeare, and saying, “I see my countrymen claim you as one of them. You may thank God that you’re not that. They have made my Wittenberg – ay, and all Germany – to stink in my nostrils” (*Punch*, 16th April, 1916). The prolific playwright Henry Arthur Jones expressed the strength of feeling at the growing appropriation:

With this constant evidence before us of German temper and methods, it will be well for England to be prepared for the characteristic official announcement which will doubtless be made in Berlin on 23rd April on the final and complete annexation by Germany of William Shakespeare ... Meanwhile, we may ask by what insolence of egotism, what lust of plunder, or what madness of pride Germany dares add to the hideous roll of her thieveries and rapes this topping impudence and crime of vaunting to herself the allegiance of Shakespeare? (Jones 1916, pp.3-4)

Most official responses were more restrained. For the celebration of Shakespeare in schools Gollancz provided ‘Notes on Shakespeare the Patriot’ (Gollancz 1916). While stressing Shakespeare’s place on the “roll of British fame” and acknowledging the “universal recognition of his exalted genius”, he wanted pupils to be mindful of how, “at the present time, [] it behoves us as patriots to strive to play our part in war as in peace, and how best to maintain our faith in the ultimate triumph of a noble humanity” (Gollancz 1916, p.11). Shakespeare was clearly regarded as an appropriate figure to inspire patriotism—Gollancz praised his “gentle grace and modesty” and his capacity to “reach all classes” (1916, p.11)—although, as Arthur Quiller-Couch pointed out, the patriotism in his works is largely implicit. “To be sure,” he wrote, “the patriotic orator can always quote to us the lines of dying Gaunt [This royal throne of kings ...] ... Yet I think it is observable that the speech is put into the mouth of a febrile and dying man” (Quiller-Couch 1918, pp.290-322) But he too was

infuriated by German appropriation of Shakespeare and quoted a special prologue that had been delivered before a performance of *Twelfth Night* in Leipzig. Spoken by the Fool, it included the following lines:

Ye unto him [Shakespeare] have been until today
His second home; his first and native home
Was England; but this England of the present
Is so contrarious in her acts and feelings,
Yea, so abhorr'd of his pure majesty
And the proud spirit of his free-born being,
That he doth find himself quite homeless there.
A fugitive he seeks his second home,
This Germany, that loves him most of all
To whom before all others he gives thanks,
And says: Thou wonderful and noble land,
Remain thou Shakespeare's one and only home,
So that he wander not, uncomprehended,
Without a shelter in the barren world. (Quiller-Couch 1918), p.315)

Quiller-Couch was appalled that Shakespeare was being claimed here by a nation “whose exploits it benevolently watches in the sack of Louvain, the bestialities of Aerschot, the shelling of Rheims cathedral” (1918, p.316). While Shakespeare was never a soldier, he was powerful ammunition used by some on each side in the war of words.

Of course, England and Germany were not the only protagonists in the war of the appropriation of Shakespeare. The 1916 Prague Shakespearean Cycle, for example, was intended in part to draw the world's attention to the existence and rights of the oppressed Czech nation. Clara Calvo has argued that France used *Henry V* as a way of cementing its relationship with

England but the evidence – a 1916 speech by the Recteur de l'Université de Nancy – seems slight (Calvo 2012). Much more certain is the use made of Shakespeare to encourage the USA to enter the war. The American Ambassador, the committed anglophile Walter Hines Page, was heavily involved in the planning of the English Tercentenary and it is quite clear that Shakespeare was promoted as a shared cultural heritage with the expectation that a cultural alliance should become a diplomatic and then a military one. Page's invitation to the President of Harvard to represent the US at the celebrations makes his position clear:

The most important duty that now lies on every English-speaking man is to make sure of an active sympathy between the peoples of the United States and the British Empire; for the peace of the world and the maintenance and progress of civilization depend on this sympathy and there is no other basis of hope (in Hendley 2012, pp.25-49)

The situation was inevitably complex. The Easter Rising, close to the Tercentenary celebrations, created a conflict of interest, and there was a strong German presence in the US Tercentenary events. Nevertheless, as M.C. Hendley has demonstrated, Shakespeare was an important tool to mobilise American opinion on the side of the allies.

As a reminder of the enduring interest in Shakespearian biography, I conclude by drawing attention to another 'Soldier Shakespeare.' The 1949 work by Duff Cooper (1st Viscount Norwich), titled *Sergeant Shakespeare*, was a further attempt to demonstrate that Shakespeare served in the army and was prompted by his experience in the First World War. He begins by describing his experience as a Second Lieutenant in the trenches during a suspected gas attack. He asks about casualties and "A sepulchral voice came from the gas mask and replied, 'Only Sergeant Shakespeare, who was killed instantly by the explosion of the shell.' There, on the fields of Flanders, the name seemed to strike some dim echo of the past" (Cooper 1949, p.5). He then tells of reading Shakespeare during moments of respite from the fighting and the relief and pleasure of escape into the forest of Arden, a wood near Athens, and the park of the King of Navarre. It is the latter (*Love's Labour's Lost*) that leads him to investigate Shakespeare's military career.

From a minor nineteenth-century antiquarian to a serving soldier in the trenches, from the intensely private to the public and political, and from stage and screen to a satirical magazine, Shakespeare has been appropriated for affirmation, ammunition, propaganda and comfort.

What sets these appropriations apart from others (by artists, novelists or advertisers), is the fervour, the strength of feeling and the stakes involved in warfare.

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