

ABSTRACT

ANDREW GRAY DEGROOT. The Perfect Disguise: Examining the Reconciliation of the King's Two Bodies in the *Henriad* (Under the direction of Professor Crosbie.)

There are few Shakespearean characters outside of perhaps Hamlet and King Lear who have received as much focused attention as Henry V. Critical attention toward Hal before the nineteenth century, however, was minimal. It was not until William Hazlitt's famously paradoxical reference to Hal as "a very amiable monster" in an 1817 essay that led to the current proliferation of conflicting opinions and criticism on the character. But much of this criticism on Hal after Hazlitt has attempted to ascertain his true character without attending to a crucial question raised: specifically, are we talking about Hal as king, Hal as man, or, somehow, Hal as both? Walter Meyers rightly points out that in order to address the character we must first figure out how to address him: "The first problem is what to call him--Hal, Harry, Henry? And the question of his names echoes about the reality of this somehow puzzling character." There has been an unspoken assumption in much of this criticism that we are looking at a static character, an identifiable object, or a unified "Hal" that can undergo character study--when in fact there are multiple Hals.

This project will argue that Henry V's seemingly inscrutable duality can be better understood when viewed as his attempt to reconcile the intractable tensions inherent in the King's Two Bodies, the medieval theory in which the king has two separate bodies--the immortal body politic and the king's own mortal body natural. By examining Hal's rule in the context of the two other rulers in the *Henriad*--Richard II and Henry IV--this essay will argue

that Hal attempts to reconcile these intractable two bodies through means of deception and disguise.