

MALCOLM VALE. *Henry V: The Conscience of a King*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016. Pp. 336. \$35.00 (cloth).
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“This is not a biography,” Malcolm Vale announces in the opening sentence of his important and fascinating study, *Henry V: The Conscience of a King*. Nor will this be a book about the familiar Shakespearian hero, as we might expect in the wake of the 600th anniversary of Agincourt (1415). Vale is rightly suspicious of the tendency of historical biographies to reduce their subjects to “absolute, abstract, artificial and often anachronistic criteria” (278). The temptation to slip into nationalistic eulogizing or revisionist critique is particularly strong when it comes to assessing a figure like Henry V, who, thanks to centuries of literary and cinematic glorification, has achieved something close to mythic status in the English national consciousness. Vale seeks to avoid these perils by rejecting a biographical approach to his subject altogether, aiming instead to “discover, explain and understand how and why [Henry] thought and acted as he did” (2) through close analysis of a variety of documents that passed directly under Henry’s hand or eye.

Vale arranges the results into broadly thematic chapters covering Henry’s engagement with administration, language, religion, and art—but notably, not war. One of Vale’s key aims is to chip away at the monolithic image of Henry as the “warrior-king” to reveal a more complex, more human leader, struggling with issues of conscience; receiving petitions from poor subjects while leaning on a cushion after dinner; trying to reconcile the necessity of war with the horrors of violent conflict, or composing a complex piece of polyphonic music for performance during mass. These details, drawn expertly from a wealth of administrative material, diplomatic reports, and correspondence, provide tantalizing insight into the concerns and motivations of the fifteenth-century king.

In an effort to show that there is much more significance to Henry V’s legacy than the conquest of Normandy, Vale is keen to point out that several cultural, bureaucratic, and intellectual innovations usually associated with later periods can be traced to Henry’s reign. For example, Vale suggests that Henry played a decisive role in promoting the use of written Chancery English in government business, a move reflecting the wider cultural influence of trend-setting poets like Geoffrey Chaucer and Thomas Hoccleve (who was also a clerk in the privy seal office), but also Henry’s own canny feel for the subtle distinctions and diplomatic meanings that could be evoked by different languages. The fact that these English signet letters reverted back to French after Henry’s death in 1422 suggests that he was indeed a driving force behind this linguistic shift, and supports Vale’s view of Henry as an unusually hands-on ruler. However, it is difficult to conclude (as Vale does) that these signet letters contain the “authentic voice” of the king, “singularly devoid of artifice and rhetoric” and freed from “the bonds of bureaucratic and scribal convention” (49). The quotations Vale uses to illustrate this distinctive voice are disappointingly mundane and matter of fact, containing little in the way of idiosyncratic language apart from the order to complete the king’s wishes “in all haste” (49). The mysterious letter Henry might have written in English (and in his own hand) to Pope Martin V in response to a perceived diplomatic slight in June 1422 sounds more intriguing given how unusual the use of a vernacular holograph letter would have been for diplomatic correspondence of the time. Nevertheless, Henry’s regular use of a “sign manual” or signature to authenticate royal letters or commands, as well as his endorsement of several documents (including financial records) in his own hand, does indicate a special degree of personal involvement in government business—and perhaps, more evidence of an evolving assumption that personal authorship was intrinsic to the exercise of royal authority. Here again, Vale demonstrates how attention to diplomatics (so often dismissed as dry and dusty) can in fact reveal new, fascinating, and under-explored aspects of political thought and practice.

Perhaps more controversially, Vale argues that Henry V's particular interest in the reform of monastic houses (including the dissolution of alien priories) and his confirmation of earlier statutes restraining papal jurisdiction in England suggest he was "beginning to cast himself in the role of 'Supreme Head and Governor' of the Church in England" a century before Henry VIII (130). Given ongoing concerns about the spread of Hussitism in Bohemia (and Lollardy closer to home) and uncertainty over the extent of papal power in the wake of the Schism, Henry's concern with reform is understandable. Moreover, as Vale himself points out, Henry V was also enthusiastic in establishing and protecting monastic institutions (such as the Brigittine double monastery of Syon and the Carthusians at Sheen), and left them significant provisions (in the form of both money and books) in his will. In light of this, it seems less obvious how Henry V's dissolution of the alien priories (whose mother houses were in lands of French allegiance during the Hundred Years War, and were thus of political as well as financial interest) represented "a smaller-scale prefiguration of Henry VIII's later complete suppression of the monasteries" (149).

Vale covers a lot of ground in his thematic exploration of Henry V's thoughts and actions beyond the battlefield, though it would have been interesting to hear more about the king's letters "in English, in his own hand" to "his own kinsmen or kinswomen" (71–72), which might have revealed an even more personal voice than can be gleaned from his administrative notes. Yet, as Vale himself notes, any attempt to fully capture the lived experience of any historical figure (especially a king, shrouded in layers of bureaucratic ritual and formulaic rhetoric) is doomed to be frustratingly incomplete. Nonetheless, through his sensitive and detailed reading of the surviving archival material, Vale allows us to hear an echo of the king's own voice (and even a pluck from his own royal harp), which would otherwise be lost amid the battle cries of Agincourt.

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JOHN WALTER. *Covenanting Citizens: The Protestation Oath and Popular Political Culture in the English Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. 266. \$100.00 (cloth).
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John Walter's tightly argued and richly detailed *Covenanting Citizens: The Protestation Oath and Popular Political Culture in the English Revolution* is a significant contribution to English Revolution scholarship, and in particular to the scholarship on the outbreak of the Civil War. But that alone does not begin to encapsulate the importance of *Covenanting Citizens*, both historiographically and methodologically. As Walter notes in his short, crisp introduction, Patrick Collinson's nearly three-decade old invitation to historians of early modern England to write "history with the politics put back" (2n2) has taken some time for scholars of the 1640s and 1650s to answer. Walter's study directly addresses that lacunae as it considers the social depth of politics during the English Revolution while also establishing an approach that demonstrates the significant connections between high and popular politics, and the local and national arenas of pre-Civil War England.

The reader interested only in the months before the outbreak of the Civil War will obviously find much of interest here. One of Walter's central aims of *Covenanting Citizens* is to address the abiding question of how and why Parliament was able to mobilize a military comprising of people who might ordinarily consider themselves loyal to their monarch. For Walter, the