

THE LIFE ABRIDGED: EXEMPLARITY, BIOGRAPHY, AND THE PROBLEM OF METONYMY

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Long before John Aubrey, writers wrote brief lives of their contemporaries and secondhand acquaintances.¹ The four early memoirs of Henry, Prince of Wales (1594–1612) are characterized by brevity, either advertised or real. Their authors cite from among two reasons for this brevity: their failures of skills or lack of firsthand knowledge to encapsulate Henry's experience; and that experience's own failure to offer enough material for a long biography. Charles Cornwallis was one who demurred to write more than a brief Life for a brief life, some eighteen years long. His *Discourse of the most Illustrious Prince Henry* (1626, pr. 1641) was only 5,600 words long because anything longer would be 'unproportionable to so short a life' (Cornwallis 1641: 25; sig. E1r). Like Francis Bacon, whose 700-word eulogium *In Henricum Principem Walliae* (?1613) remained in manuscript until the nineteenth century (Spedding et al. 1860), Cornwallis offers Henry a short collection of observations and reflections, even though 'I wish it were in my power to raise such a monument unto his fame, as might eternise it unto all posterities' (Cornwallis 1641: 29; sig. E3r).

There is another reason for Cornwallis's brevity, though: his principled omission of material 'received by tradition from others' and preference for 'verities knowne to my self' (Cornwallis 1641: 17; sig. D1r). This may be his reaction to either of two far longer biographies of Prince Henry, whose authors were less restrained about his eternal monument: John Hawkins's 19,000-word epistolary *Life and Death of ... Henry Prince of Wales* (1613; pr. 1641); and William Haydon's 11,000-word *True Picture and Relation of Prince Henry* (after 1625; pr. 1634).² Both combine firsthand observations with a range of secondhand reports, and occasionally repeat one another verbatim.

So we can imagine Cornwallis's displeasure when in 1641 the printer Nathaniel Butter attributed Hawkins's *Life and Death* to Cornwallis himself.³ (Indeed we can only imagine it, because Cornwallis died in 1629.) It may have been an honest mistake; a copy of the epistle was among his papers, writes Butter, who 'could not passe by it, as I did the rest' (Hawkins 1641: sig. A2r). Or the attribution was irresistible to

Butter because John Benson had printed Cornwallis's actual *Discourse* the same year. As for Haydon's life of Henry, composed (on the evidence of its prayer for the royal family) after Charles I's accession (1625) and perhaps after the births of Princes Charles (1630) and James (1633), we can only speculate whether or not Cornwallis read it.

To compare each biographer's verbosity with his familiarity and experience with his subject, only Haydon meets Cornwallis's criterion of decorum. He was in Prince Henry's service (as senior groom of the Bedchamber) longer than Cornwallis, who served for only two years (as treasurer). But both men certainly would have known Henry more intimately than Hawkins, his master of weapons and infantry formations; on the title page of his second edition of 1644, Butter insists, as he would, that Cornwallis was 'a man very intimate with him in the whole course of his life, and at his death' (Hawkins 1644: title page).

That death was the essential problem for any biographer aspiring to write a memorial for Prince Henry: his experience promised much, but his unexpected and evidently faultless death from typhoid fever in November 1612 was a conclusion that would hardly inspire anyone to imitate him. The writers of elegies and sermons could agree on few common causes of his death, save for the perfection he embodied that was unsuited to a corrupt world. George Chapman and Arthur Gorges offered elaborate meta-narratives of supernatural causes in their extended elegies, respectively *An Epicede or Funerall Song* and *The Olympian Catastrophe*. But the narrative problem that Henry's death posed went beyond cause, to its foreclosure of the kinds of texts poets had always aspired to write. They often expressed their disappointment in textual terms, mirroring the terms used during his lifetime. 'A booke had beene of thy illustrious deedes', laments William Drummond of Hawthornden (Drummond 1613: sig. A2v). His admirers cast this book as a Homeric epic, an *Iliad* that would realize the future hopes both of the fledgling Stuart dynasty and of King James's militant opponents, as I have written elsewhere (Ullyot 2008).

My argument in this paper centres on this narrative problem of Henry's death, the problem of finding an inspiring moral in a story of failure. Not to overstate the problem, Henry's elegists confront a subject who has manifestly failed to meet their expectations; by expressing their disappointment in textual terms, they recall one form their expectations took. I submit that narrative failure is essential to judging the meaning of Henry's death because of the evidence I will present from his life — evidence that these epic aspirations owed directly to the program of expectations surrounding Henry from a young age.

I will show in this paper how Henry's self-conscious reception and reflection of exemplary qualities were fuelled by writers describing him in textual terms — as a

book, a table of contents, a summation, and an abridgement. These terms reflect Henry's readings of exemplary narratives — of histories and other texts — and his aspiration to deserve them himself after his death. We see this aspiration in his biographers' preoccupation with virtues, with the transferable encapsulations of his desired legacy. And we see in their word usage, particularly of the word 'abridgement', that Henry's biographers conceive of his life as a text. The word reveals that each appreciates the distance between the memoir he offers and a more idealized, complete text.

That complete, aspirational text is always absent from present circumstances, always a distant memory or prospect. The present never quite fulfils or earns it, either because present writers cannot write it or present subjects cannot enact it. Consider the language of Henry's biographers framing their work. Bacon laments that time did not allow Henry to develop his potential into this text. Cornwallis is too decorous to speculate on any ideal text, as it would include matters beyond his experience. But Haydon and Hawkins are less reticent. Examining their language will provoke questions at the core of this narrative problem, namely how to contain and transmit a particular example's legacy through a textual medium.

Both Haydon and Hawkins have an ideal text in mind, using it in their prefaces to apologize for their biographies' inadequacies. Haydon regrets the brevity of his account, despite its length, because he feels that his subject deserves amplification. He may lack Cornwallis's sense of proportionality, but he is no less humble. Acknowledging the disjointed style of his biography of Henry, Haydon offers it as a collection of undigested material that 'shall serue for an abridgement of his life, untill such time as some other shall write and set downe the same more amply'. Until then, the biography is limited by Haydon's desire 'to eschew prolixity' lest the portrait swell to even more unmanageable proportions (Haydon 1634: 2, 30). Haydon's use of the word 'abridgement' means, quite straightforwardly, that his biography of the prince is an abbreviated version of something longer, of what it might become. This brevity owes, then, to the writer's failings, not to the subject's lack; Haydon hopes that 'the same' subject (that is, Henry's experience and qualities) will be amplified by a greater writer.

If Haydon hopes that someone, some day, will write Henry's unabridged biography, Hawkins less concretely hopes that readers conscious of his inadequacies will meditate on this ideal text. He offers the same caveat as Haydon, but his apology is proverbial: '*In magnis voluisse sat est*', or 'In great enterprises the intention is sufficient'. George Herbert offers this conventional disclaimer from Sextus Propertius' *Elegies* (2.10.5) in his *Wits Recreations* (1640: sig. E2v). 'Rather then it should not be done at all', Hawkins asks the reader to 'only use the same as a Ladder to mount up your

thoughts to a far more excellent meditation of his vertues' (Hawkins 1641: 3, 4; sigs. A4r, A4v). For Hawkins, his abridgement is a foreshortening, a 'bridge' across the time between now and then, real and imaginary; it enables the kind of apprehension or understanding between the actual and the ideal that Hawkins suggests with this figure of the ladder. Hawkins looks not to a greater writer but more abstractly to a greater conception or imagining of Henry's virtues, even if it exists largely or entirely in the minds of Henry's admirers. Those virtues are the aspirational text toward which Hawkins' inadequate description gestures, like Drummond's expressly subjunctive 'booke' that 'had been' of Henry's unabridged (lengthened) life.

Both Haydon and Hawkins bemoan not only their limited abilities, but the (equally conventional) inexpressibility of their subject's virtues, and the need for readers to complete their 'great enterprises' — both rhetorical, by meditating on and imitating Henry's virtues; and descriptive, by augmenting Henry's story. Certainly there are those who knew Henry better than Haydon did, and could describe his virtues and qualities more fully than Haydon can; but the absence of their memoirs means that the unabridged life of Henry is only a lost aspiration, a prospect of the *Henriad* that might have been.

Cornwallis is a sobering corrective to these prospects, with his refusal to write more than he has experienced. The brevity of Henry's life renders a greater biography impossible. But an equally forceful cause of these aspirations was the exemplary program that informed Henry's life, fuelling expectations for his future. These expectations encouraged Henry's posthumous admirers to describe his life in commensurate terms, even if the prince's death made this task difficult.

The word combining both of these causes is 'abridgement', as Haydon describes his biography — only to say, in his case, that his material is insufficient to his subject. He uses the word to mean an encapsulation, a narrative containing the germ of a larger text, or the synecdoche of that text. This is the connotation of 'abridgement' that applies to narratives like biographies or histories, in early modern usage. Another connotation, however, applies to lived experience; it means an untimely conclusion, arriving before its expected or rightful moment. This is the meaning that Cornwallis refers to, the brief life that ends before its completion or maturity, leaving a paucity of material — rather than the meaning that Haydon and Hawkins aspire to, the elaboration of a complete and fulfilled subject. I will show that 'abridgement' applied both to texts and to experiences, and that Henry had the misfortune to collapse this distinction. His premature death turned him into the wrong kind of abridgement.

I will outline these valences of the word 'abridgement' and its cognates, as different writers apply these terms to Henry's experience before and after his death. I begin with the positive, exemplary meaning of abridgement, as an epitome that claims

to encapsulate the unadorned essence of a longer text. I consider how these abridgements were used for pedagogical ends, specifically for the purpose of 'profiting' their readers. I turn then to the poets and other writers who encouraged Henry to read textual examples as guides both to his own experience and to his textual legacy. Finally, I contrast the abridgements Henry pursued with those he earned, namely the negative meaning of 'abridgement' as a prematurely concluded text. This provokes my conclusion that a rhetorical example's meaning shifts with different circumstances, and is an unreliable guide for imitations.

The rhetoric of exemplarity can be either positive or negative — urging its objects/audiences either to imitate or to avoid its subjects/examples. Timothy Hampton's seminal work (1990; 1998) on early modern exemplarity has established two foci in the scholarship on this rhetoric: on aspirational, positive exemplarity rather than cautionary, negative exemplarity; and on the literary and biographical formulations of this rhetoric in theatrical or fictional genres like epics, tragedies, essays, prose fiction, scripture, and biblical exegesis (more recent studies include Gelley 1995; Lyons 1989; Rigolot 1998, 2004). I focus instead on occasional texts like dedications, panegyrics, elegies, and sermons — texts that apply aspirational examples to particular and immediate readers, or that turn recently dead readers into cautionary examples. My aims are not (only) to redress a scholarly imbalance, nor to shift attention to the under-appreciated works of William Alexander, Francis Davison, and William Drummond — but rather to historicize exemplarity, as its rhetorical quality demands.

The difficult truth about positive exemplarity, insufficiently historicized by theorists of this rhetoric, is that it must always be a story of failure, of objects failing to imitate their exemplary subjects. Despite their emphasis on rhetoric, past studies of exemplarity place too little emphasis on the realm of lived experience, where exemplarity's objects are supposed to imitate its subjects. That means they must leave out certain details, particularly those that complicate or preclude imitations.

Examples must adapt to the circumstances of their reception if they are to succeed. The fact that they rarely do adapt has much to do with their frequent failure. Exemplarity relies on an ahistorical view of the past, a belief that it can be narrated and cited into digestible and emotive parcels of moral persuasion — to imitate or to avoid a quality or action. Moreover, positive exemplarity relies on ahistorical distortions of past subjects (to make them applicable or transferrable to their present objects), but its present reception is always historical. This disjunction means that any

resemblance between a present object and a past, positive example is aspirational and liable to change.

Exemplary abridgements, making selective excisions from their source-narratives, lack the certainty that their exclusions are complementary rather than contradictory. They suffer from the problem of metonymy, the sense that these parts do an injustice to excluded, contrary parts. Metonymy is necessary to exemplary rhetoric, as Hampton has argued. Rhetoricians make an example both resonant and compelling by creating the 'multitude of discrete metonymically related segments or moments' that constitute every exemplary biography (Hampton 1990: 26).

Our consolation can rest, then, only on the negative purpose of an example: to discourage imitation, by identifying qualities of the example that suggest enough distance to be repudiated, but enough familiarity to be worth repudiating. The infamy of a Nero, a Justinian, a Richard of Gloucester, or any other cautionary example acknowledges that certain aspects (moral qualities) of the past could be manifest in the present; but none relies so heavily on the high standard of replicating entire moral characters, as positive exemplars do. That is why there is a concomitant shift from positive to cautionary models, from imitation to avoidance, when we historicize this rhetoric: because caution is the only universal. It is the only moral position that takes inspiration from failure, that turns metonymy into an epitome.

I rely throughout this argument on Chloe Wheatley's analyses of early modern 'epitome culture' (Wheatley 2011: esp. 9–38; 2005). Wheatley focuses particularly on historical epitomes in narrative poems, but her account of the cultural functions of epitomes is foundational. Her claim that they began as rhetorical exercises in compression or restraint, for example, has informed my conclusion that abridgements are metonymic, not synecdochic — that they are inadequate selections, not perfected encapsulations.

To contend with the volume and variety of texts disseminated by the printing press, humanist readers adopted increasingly pragmatic attitudes. Texts that served for self-improvement and public benefit were more influential than those that were strange and unfamiliar, and those condensed into a readable size were more influential still. Thoughtfully prepared epitomes and abridgements were the search engines of humanist culture (Blair 2010: 1–10).

Their necessity is evinced by their ubiquity. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries there were printed abridgements or epitomes of laws, of Roman history, of John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, and most famously of the chronicles (begun by John Stow). Abridgements of texts were explicitly designed to save readers

the tedium of reading them in full. Thomas Langley, for instance, uses a string of adjectives to distinguish the unpleasant labour of reading the original to the benefits one can gain from his 1551 abridgement of Polydore Vergil:

Although the booke translated might have bene for the diversitie of matter *profitable*: and for the authours high lernyng *laudable*, and finally to a good translature *commendable*, yet in so much, as for the greatnes, it should have bene to the berers *grevous*, and for length to the reders *tedious* (cit. Wheatley 2011: 14, my emphasis).

A '*profitable*' reading with less difficulty than the original recurs as the cited purpose of many abridgements in this period. Consider the King James translation of the preface to the apocryphal *2 Maccabees*, which condenses Jason of Cyrene's story of the Jewish struggle for religious freedom into what the Vulgate calls '*uno volumine breviare*'. The translators describe the purpose of 'this painefull labour of abridging', 'that all, into whose hands it comes might haue profit' (1611, 2:26, 2:25; sigs. 5B2r–5B2v). Thomas Mason's *Christs Victorie ouer Sathans Tyrannie* (1615), 'abstracted' from John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*, offers a similar example. Its author acknowledges that Foxe's book is 'one of the most profitablest Bookes that is for Gods Children, except the Bible'. Mason has reduced it, so that those who find reading Foxe too onerous 'shall reape as much profit by reading this abridgement, as by reading of the Booke at large' (1615, sig. A3r). Mason was following in the footsteps of Foxe's abridgers beginning with Timothie Bright's *An Abridgement of the Booke Acts and Monvmentes of the Chvrche* (1589), giving readers 'an assay, an appetite, to know further, whereof thou maist here take (as it were) the taste' (Bright 1589: sig. ¶2v; for other abridgements of Foxe in this period see Kastan 2002). There is a pleasant and recurring fiction among more scrupulous abridgers, like Mason, that readers will progress from ease to difficulty. Even in Foxe's compilation, whose fourth edition (1583) grew to 3,800,000 words, individual narratives like the travails of Lady Elizabeth during the reign of her sister Mary avoid 'importunate length' by using 'brevity and moderation' for 'the profit of the reader', among other ends (King 2009: xxi, 265–66).

In this way abridgements were similar to miscellanies, or compilations of exemplary material from a wide range of different sources. In *The Schollers Medley* (1614), his discourse on historiography, the raconteur and gentleman-scholar Richard Braithwaite described miscellanies as 'the abridgement of all relations, and in themselues sufficient to produce incredible effects: they require especiall reading, ripe iudgement, and an apt disposition' (Braithwaite 1614). Miscellanies and abridgements were both responses to the humanist textual exercises of *translatio*, *paraphrasis*,

metaphrasis, imitatio, and declamatio, designed 'to supplement reading and encourage eloquence' (Wheatley 2005: 861).

Their editors had a long tradition of offering their services to economize reading and to prevent misinterpretations. The Roman rhetorician Valerius Maximus compiled his *Factorum et Dictorum Memorabilium* (*Memorable Deeds and Sayings*) in ca. 29 AD 'in order that those who wish to embrace the examples may be spared the toil of lengthy research' (Valerius 1998: 12). '*Exempla* were a key mode of moral education for the Romans, for whom history provided a catalogue of actions and sayings worthy of praise or blame', notes his translator, adding that Valerius 'provided such a catalogue with the morals inescapably highlighted by the arrangement and by his own introductions and conclusions to the individual *exempla*' (13).

As abridgements served rhetorical purposes in the Roman Principate, so they served humanist readers undertaking what Braithwaite called 'especiall reading'. Braithwaite's emphasis on 'incredible effects' reinforces the effects of abridgements on readers of suitable judgement and disposition. Early modern writers on pedagogy emphasize the importance of reading abridged accounts of famous exemplars to learn how to behave. But they also underscore the importance of interpreting these texts correctly, reading them with an attitude of detachment from circumstantial differences yet alertness to their moral qualities. This was especially crucial when prescribing texts for impressionable students and future rulers, as Erasmus knew when he advised tutors to illustrate *sententiae* with their exemplars (in *The Education of a Christian Prince*):

The deeds of famous men fire the minds of noble youths, but the opinions with which they become imbued is a matter of far greater importance, for from these sources the whole scheme of life is developed (Erasmus 1997: 145).

While 'famous men' are instrumental to a nobleman's education, he must not read them without guidance, interpreting them as he pleases. His teachers must 'package' ancient books, 'processing them and transforming them from jagged, unmanageable, sometimes dangerous texts into uniform, easily retrievable, reproducible bits of utterance and information' (Grafton 1999: 199).

Condensed versions of long texts frustrated humanist educators for much the same reason they do today. Roger Ascham dismissed them as 'a silie poore kinde of studie', suited only to 'those that be learned already' in a subject – that is, as an aid not to learning, but to memory (Ascham 1570: sig. O2r; cit. Wheatley 2005: 861). He thus called them 'a way of studie, belonging, rather to matter, than to wordes: to memorie than to utterance'. Abridgements were not supposed to replace reading 'the Booke at large', but to judge from these prefaces, that is exactly what they did. The satirist Henry Fitzgeffrey tells us something about who read these texts when he urges the clerks to

'Roule up the *Records of Antiquity*, / To frame *Abridgements* for youth's *Liberty*' (Fitzgeffrey 1617: sig. B4v).

Part of Ascham's objection to abridgements was that they replaced the original texts, and thus the reader put too much trust in them. A pedagogical tool for remembering more nuanced, if more amplified, histories replaced them with simplified formulae. A genealogy of rulers replaced a thousand years of political history, and the particular lessons in statecraft each might impart. Similarly, a hero's purposeful life might downplay his doubts and misfortunes along the way.

Thus in a culture of necessary abridgements, prompted by an excess of available material to read, it was essential that those making abridgements thought carefully about their motives. Their decisions about what to include, what to emphasize, and (concomitantly) what to exclude from a record or a narrative would have direct consequences — would directly affect the reader to perceive and to believe certain things in a story, at the expense of more nuanced or even contrary things. This is the problem of metonymy, which I address in my conclusion: the problem that the chosen parts of an abridged story will often do an injustice to other parts whose selection would convey a different (perhaps opposing) lesson for the reader. It is perilous to read a history that is packaged for your convenience by an intervening rhetorician or educator, unless you are certain to weigh different viewpoints in other histories.

Prince Henry read abridged books, and received dedications of them. With apologies to Ascham, however, his preference for this form was likely due as much to his impatience with reading as to his desire to be similarly epitomized. In 1603 William Willymat dedicated his *Princes Looking Glasse* to Henry, a Latin and English verse-translation of King James' *Basilicon Doron* that excerpts its 'fittest and principallest precepts and instructions' (Willymat 1603: sig. A3r). Henry also received the dedication of *An Abridgement or Survey of Poperie* (1606) by Matthew Sutcliffe, dean of Exeter — a book whose title underscores that 'abridgement' and 'survey' were synonymous, but whose contents are less suggestive about the form.

'Abridgement' was one word that writers used during Henry's lifetime to refer to his exemplars, to the models of virtue and heroism he imitated. But Henry also aspired to earn a similarly selective biography as his posthumous legacy — to become, as George Marcelline described him in 1610, 'The *Index, Abstract, or Compendium* of the very greatest Princes whatsoever' (Marcelline 1610: sig. A2r).

This desire was not for fame as an end unto itself, but to do service to his subjects and prospective readers. Haydon translates the motto Henry chose from Silius Italicus' *Punica*: '*fax mentis honestae / gloria*', as '*Renowne is a furtherer of an honest mind*' (Haydon 1634: 11). (In his *Discoveries*, Ben Jonson claimed to have given the

prince this motto.) Cornwallis repeatedly cites Henry's desire to serve as an example 'imitable to all other Princes', because princes' examples 'are of more force then any Law of letters':

This became to this Prince so great a motive, as hee thought not fit to lose any houres of the life that upon this earth were appointed unto him, but so to bestow them, as they might not onely become profitable to himselfe, but imitable and exemplary to others (Cornwallis 1641: 8, 15; sigs. B4v, C4r).

No doubt his father's conventional warning in *Basilicon Doron* that kings and princes stand 'upon a publike stage, in the sight of all the people', contributed to this (James VI and I 1994: 4). Henry sought to spend his time profitably, a word that (as I have shown) recurs as the motive for many abridged texts offering their services to readers.

Cornwallis also writes that Henry wished to be exemplary to others. This refers to the prince's moral rectitude and proper living, in stark contrast to his father's more licentious court. But his legacy takes a more negative meaning after his early death, to remind others of their own mortality. In one of his chaplains' final sermons for the prince, preached immediately before his fatal illness, Robert Wilkinson refers to the Prince of Wales's other motto: 'what meaneth that *Ich dien*, the word or Imprese of the English Prince, but *I serue*, A Prince, and yet serues'. Referring to the prince's *pluma triplex* device, Wilkinson urges Henry to take pride in his public role, not in his pursuit of fame: 'yea & he shakes vp his feathers, & flourisheth when he speaks it, as if it were his glory as yet to serue' (Wilkinson 1614: 78; sig. L2v).

Henry's ambitions for a future legacy took the specific shape of his textual forebears. Their examples narrowly and specifically evoke their positive legacies, but only by restricting themselves to very selective representations. In 1606 Robert Fletcher offered the prince *The Nine English Worthies*, a domestic rendition of the Nine Worthies consisting of brief biographies of Henry himself, alongside the eight English kings of the same name. Fletcher writes that he expects 'a transparent passage of their vertues into you, and a reflexion from you', as Henry has

(herein) meanes, examples, and leasure to heare, learne, beholde, and obserue the singular goodnesse of God, in that, which hereafter shall be your owne greatnesse and happinesse (1606: sigs. A2v–A3r).

These kings are mirrors to Henry, which 'transparently' reflect his own comparable 'greatnesse'. The volume's longest biography is Henry V's, whom Fletcher praises for fortitude, endurance, and fastidiousness — virtues that will recur in the early

biographies of Henry. By installing the prince in this domestic pantheon, Fletcher's *Nine English Worthies* realizes Henry's aspiration to epitomize his forebears.

Fletcher also signals his preferential treatment of Henry V by invoking Homer, Virgil, and Cicero to write the king's epitaph, just as the worthies collectively propose Wyatt and Surrey as authors of Prince Henry's praise (Fletcher 1606: sigs. F2r–F3r, F4r, K2v). Authorial invocations like these were a familiar part of the humility topos; Hawkins protests at the beginning of his *Life and Death* that he is hampered by 'conscience of my unworthiness, & insufficiencie to performe so high a task, (which rather would become some *Homer, Virgil, Demosthenes, Cicero*, or rather some one in whom all their excellencies are combined, to performe aright)' (3).

Fletcher's emphasis on Henry V also echoes Michael Drayton's description of the prince in 1604. In his *Paeon Trivmphall*, Drayton uses the word 'abridgement' to describe Henry's encapsulation of his ancestors.⁴ Witnessing the Stuart royal family's first royal entry in March 1604, he describes 'the faire Prince' as one

in whom appear'd in glory
As in th'abridgement of some famous story,
Ev'ry rare vertue of each famous King
Since *Norman Williams* happie conquering:
Where might be seene in his fresh blooming hopes,
Henry the fifth leading his warlike troupes,
When the proud French fell on that conquered land,
As the full Corne before the labourers hand. (Drayton 1961: vol. 1, 481; ll. 55–62)

Henry's appearance on horseback 'abridges' these exemplary and 'famous' stories of his ancestors, in Drayton's words. The poet looks forward to a future in which this eleven-year-old prince, who contains both the germ and culmination of Henry V's conquests, realizes his narrative potential.

Narrative terms describing the living Henry reinforce the textual quality of these plans for his future. In 1611, Francis Davison included in his *Poetical Rapsodie* a eulogy "To my Lord the Prince", whom he praises as one 'On whose faire structure, written is the *story* / Of natures chefest skill'. He uses another term to wish Henry everlasting fame after a long life:

Abridgement of all worth, the mighty Ioue,
Long lengthen your good daies, and still your name,
And when you shall haue honoured long this land
Grant you a glorious Saint in heauen to stand.
(Davison 1602: 208; sig. K2v; my emphasis)

Davison uses 'abridgement' to mean an epitome of 'all worth', or at least a summation of the stories of that worth — stories of nature's skill that will persevere after Henry's eventual death. He glances forward to the legacy Henry will earn posthumously, though after a long life.

Davison's projection evokes the second meaning of 'abridgement' in early modern culture, namely a premature conclusion or death. Dramatic texts make frequent use of variations of the verb 'abridge' or the noun 'abridgement', denoting both meanings of condensations and premature ends. The first is with reference to the economics of staging events 'Which cannot in their huge and proper life / Be here presented', as the Chorus to Shakespeare's *Henry V* explains when asking audiences to 'brook abridgement' and allow him to describe events between the acts (Shakespeare 1995, 5.0.45, 5.0.5–6). Shakespeare uses the word apologetically, in the same spirit that he asks the audience to 'Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts'. Elsewhere, Shakespeare uses 'abridgement' more narrowly, for a narrative shortened to distil both its moral and its entertainment value. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Theseus asks Egeus for an 'abridgement' to pass the evening, a term he interchanges with 'masques', 'dances', and 'revels' (Shakespeare 1994a, 5.1.39, 32, 36). In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare encapsulates the two meanings of abridgement, when the eponymous prince describes the visiting players as 'the abstract and brief chronicles of the time' and then, interrupted by their entrance, says 'look where my abridgement comes' (*Hamlet*, in Shakespeare 2006: 2.2.358, 462–63): they are both Hamlet's interruption, and his abstracted chronicles.

When dramatists use 'abridgement' with reference to 'days' or 'lives' rather than to entertainments, the word has overtly threatening overtones. Christopher Marlowe uses variations on this phrase to refer to murder, in *Edward II*, or suicide, in *I Tamburlaine*; and variations on the phrase 'to abridge one's days' are used to imply a premature death in plays, romances, and elegies by Emanuel Ford (1598), William Shakespeare (1600), Thomas Rogers (1603), and Gervase Markham (1607), among others.⁵ Ben Jonson's *Volpone* urges rich men to purchase health with good physicians, so as not 'to abridge the naturall course of life' (Jonson 1607, 2.2). In Philip Sidney's *Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia* (1593), Zelmane laments 'that hatefull death can abridge [human minds] of powre'. Similar phrases appear in romances or moral histories by Henry Roberts (1590), Thomas Beard (1597), and Richard Johnson (1597).⁶ Finally, 'abridge' simply means 'limit' in the anonymous *Life and Death of Jacke Straw* (1593), when Richard II knights the Lord Mayor with the promise that 'Time, shall nere abridge thy fame' (1994: Act 4).

That was what Prince Henry wanted: to earn the kinds of abridgements that time would never abridge. From a literary-critical perspective, much of the pathos of Henry's death comes from his elegists' conventional disappointment at the loss of these prospective narratives. One way to measure the implications of Henry's death was to describe its effect on his future exemplarity, its destruction of hopes that his actions would provide heroic material for unwritten texts.

William Drummond laments Henry's lost biography in particularly ambitious terms:

A booke had beene of thy illustrious deedes.
So to their nephewes aged Syres had told
The high exploits perform'd by thee of olde;
Townes raz'd, and rais'd, victorious, vanquish'd bands,
Fierce Tyrants flying, foyl'd, kild by thy hands.
And in deare Arras, Virgins faire had wrought
The Bayes and Trophees to thy countrie brought:
While some great *Homer* imping wings to fame,
Deafe *Nilus* dwellers had made heare thy name (1613: sig. A2v).

Drummond depicts Henry's heroic future as meriting Homeric treatment. Citing the virgins and poets who might have recounted these 'illustrious deedes', Drummond concedes that the elegy is a poor substitute for the epics Henry's life ought to have inspired. Predictions of his epic appeared long before Henry's death; in William Alexander's *Parænesis to the Prince*, the poet is enthusiastic about the prospect of retelling Henry's narrative:

I (*Henrie*) hope with this mine eyes to feed,
Whilst, ere thou wearst a crown, thou wear'st a shield,
And when thou making thousands for to bleed,
That dare behold thy count'nance and not yeeld,
Sturres through the bloudie dust a foaming steed,
An interested witsse in the field,
I may amongst those bands thy Grace attend,
And be thy *Homer*, when the warres do end (Alexander 1604: sig. C4v).

All that distinguishes Alexander's poem from Drummond's is their verb tenses, with Drummond in 1612/13 substituting what 'had beene' for Alexander's anticipation in 1603 of what 'may' come to pass. Whether either poet was prepared (or qualified) to write this *Henriad* is questionable; in any event, it was a convention of military

biographies to compare them to Homer's war-epic. Samuel Daniel had begun his account of Henry V's French campaign, culminating in the famous Battle of Agincourt, by lauding 'What euerlasting matter here is found, / Whence new immortal Iliads might proceed' (Daniel 1611: sig. K3v).

The difference between projecting and lamenting *Iliads* is that a death liberates you from the obligation to write one. It must be said that after Henry's death it was far easier to bemoan lost epics now that poets could never be expected to write them. Honesty is not a characteristic quality of eulogy, nor of elegy. But death confronts all subjects and poets with a stronger insistence, and the slipperiness of language gives their words a meaning beyond their control.

Elegy is always a reluctant genre, the poor cousin and paltry substitute for those that poets aspire to write. In *An Anatomy of the World*, John Donne ends 'The First Anniversarie' resolved to write more elegies for Elizabeth Drury, though he adds that her life is 'matter fit for Chronicle, not verse' (l. 460) Yet by the beginning of 'A Funerall Elegie', the next poem in this volume, Donne's attitude has shifted:

Can these memorials, ragges of paper, giue
Life to that name, by which name they must liue?
Sickly, alas, short-liu'd, aborted bee
Those Carkas verses, whose soule is not shee. (1612: sig. D3v, ll. 11–14)

Elegies are carcasses and earthly remnants of the souls and names they memorialize. Surveying the hundreds of elegies that disconsolate writers and erstwhile soldiers offered in Henry's memory, John Webster could only agree:

Fames lips shall bleed, but not in such sicke aire,
As make waste Elegies to his Tombe repaire,
With scraps of commendation more base
Then are the ragges they are writ on, ô disgrace
To nobler Poesie. This brings to light,
Not that they can, but that they cannot write,
Better, they had, nere troubled his sweet trance,
So, silence should haue hid their ignorance:
For hee's a reuerend subiect to be pend
Onely by his sweet *Homer* and my frend (Webster 1613: sig. C1r).

Both Donne and Webster disdain these 'ragges' and remnants of their dead subjects, who deserve far worthier textual monuments. When Webster praises Henry as a 'subiect to be pend / Onely by his sweet *Homer* and my frend', he offers the task to

Homer's most recent English translator, George Chapman. (Browne also refers to the same translator as 'My friend' in 1616: 88, sig. M4v.) Chapman's dedications of his 1609 and 1611 translations of Homer's *Iliad* offered Henry no less than a fully-translated epic to guide him toward his potential, and evidently inspired rampant anxiety among Henry's elegists.⁷

The legacy these admirers intended for their 'reuerend subiect', to borrow Webster's phrase, was Henry's transition from heroic conquests to epics chronicling these actions. Chapman sought a prince who would emulate Alexander the Great, turning to Chapman as a modern Homer to inspire his actions and preserve his posthumous reputation. Thus Chapman's *Epicede or Funerall Song* (1612) is unique, as the reflections of a poet who was largely responsible for shaping the Homeric expectations of his future. Chapman marvels at the texts that once seemed guaranteed commissions, when classical models inspired Henry with their abstracted rules of justice and of war:

Of which lawes, thy youth, both contain'd the text
And the contents; ah, that thy grey-ripe yeeres
Had made of all, Cæsarean Commentares,
(More then can now be thoght) in fact t'enroule. (Chapman 1613: sig. C3r.)

His textual schema of Henry's future suggests that these commentaries were acts set out in the table of contents of Henry's youth, and his reading.

These evocations of Henry's life as a text and its contents resurfaced the year after his death. In 1613, Robert Dallington dedicated to Prince Charles his *Aphorismes Civill and Militarie*, a partial translation of Francesco Guicciardini's book of aphorisms and anecdotes applied to history. Dallington's dedication was significant because in 1609 he had presented the same book in manuscript to Henry. His dedicatory epistle underscores Charles's inheritance of his brother's public position and of Henry's reading practices, and offers a textual metaphor for his own life:

All eyes are upon you. Those your sweete graces of nature, and ingenuous dispositions to goodnes, makes men looke upon your worthy Brother in your princely selfe; holding you the true inheritor of his vertues as of his fortunes, and making full account that he had no oddes of you but in yeares. If you wil not have them fall short in their reckoning, this *Imprimis* of your hopefull beginnings, must be continued with many *Items* of vertuous proceedings, and closed up with a *Summa-totalis* of all princely worthinesse (Dallington 1613: sig. A3r).

Dallington uses the image of Charles' life as a book, beginning with an itemized table of his 'vertuous proceedings' and ending with a *'Summa-totalis'* or index of his worthiness. All eyes are upon him, reading his outward actions to compare them with the contents of Henry's life. The trouble with this comparison was that it relied on a very selective reading of very recent history.

As Chloe Wheatley has shown, abridgements often claim to represent their originative texts synecdochically — that is, to encapsulate their essential qualities while stripping away only what is inessential or impure. The early modern rhetorician Thomas Wilson defined synecdoche as a trope by which the reader may *'gather or judge the whole by the part'* (cit. in Wheatley 2011: 22; for Erasmus and Puttenham on the rhetoric of synecdoche see 22–23). But when the part leaves out essential details, like the abridgements that Henry resembled in his lifetime, it is unreliable. Henry V may have been a famous story, but only if you focus on his famous victories and ignore his death from smallpox.

Calling attention to counter-rhetorical facts can miss the point of exemplary rhetoric, however, the purpose of which is not to describe things as they were but to provoke actions that might be. Wilson's example implicitly promises comparable renown to suitably responsive readers: 'It does not pretend to narrate past action', at least in isolation, 'but suggests a possible future narrative'. The object of this rhetoric, Henry himself, can only aspire to such a narrative. In Montaigne's *Essais*, the contemporary text wherein we find the most skeptical judgments of rhetorical examples, the example 'posits a failed representation; it shows the distance between paradigms of ideal behaviour and actual norms of conduct' (Nichols 1995: 54–55).⁸ The friction between this promise (of a future narrative) and this reality (of that narrative's distance from paradigmatic ideals) results from the example's unreality, its neglect of externalities like fortune or collaboration in its focus on the exemplar's singular self-determination. An idealized, exemplary biography will always be more purposeful than the experience of its quotidian readers.

Does this obtain in every instance? Much of my focus in this argument has been on positive exemplarity, exhorting imitation. But examples are also often negative, encouraging their objects to shun the vices or errors that led people to bad ends. If positive lessons rely on metonymy, on selective exclusions of conflicting or unsympathetic qualities, then negative lessons rely on the inspiring power of failures — and on a willingness to restore excisions like indecorous deaths, to restore nuance to exemplarity. Henry V may encourage heroism in war, but he also reinforces the need to remember that kings are mortal. Prince Henry earned more epitaphs than

epics, because he serves equally as an exemplar of mutability as of ambition. His chaplain Daniel Price preached thus two days after his death in November 1612:

Let your *deare* bought *experience* teach you the lesson that *Dauid*, a great *Prince*, gaue to his People; *Trust not in Princes*, for they be *sonnes of men*, there is no *health* in them, their *breath* departeth, and euery one of them *returneth* to his earth; ... If a man may speake any *thing* worthy of the greatest *admiration*, it is this, *Trust not in Princes*, they themselues are not in *safety*; their *sublimitie* is but *sublunary*; they are within the *verge*; ... yeeld them *faithfulnesse* and *obedience*, but settle not in them your *faith* and *confidence* (Price 1613: 479–480; sigs. F4v–G1r).

Price's lesson, drawn from Psalm 146, is to place your trust in providence rather than in your misperceptions of sublunary princes. His negative example confronts the absent dead, rather than conjuring up false presences and comparisons. It confronts the unabridged experience or text, ending in death, leaving readers to recognize it as truly universal.

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NOTES

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² My word counts are approximate, and use the ABBYY FineReader 8.x Engine (for OCR) and the Text Creation Partnership (for transcriptions).

³ Roy Strong corrects the attribution in 1986: 227. This is based on its source, BL. Add. MS 30075; a copy (BL. Add. MS 11532) is dated 1613. A third MS, Folger V. a. 486(1), is very similar to Butter's printed edition, and might have served as its copy-text.

⁴ For other descriptions of Henry in this entry, see Brown and Bentinck 1864: vol. 10, 139; Dugdale 1604: sigs. B2v–B3r; and Bergeron 2003: 36.

⁵ Usage data and textual quotations in this paragraph are from *Literature Online* <<http://lion.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 7 October 2011], using a keyword search for 'abridg*' and limiting the date range from 1590 to 1610.

⁶ In Roberts 1590, Andrugio wishes that he could have been spared his life's torments by poisoned serpents in his cradle (like those of Hercules) 'which might haue abridged my life'. The same expression for a wish for death to relieve suffering appears in Beard's macabre *Theatre of Gods Iudgements* (1597: ch. 20), a translation from the French of various histories illustrating divine reprobation against apostates and other sinners. In Johnson 1597: Part 2, ch. 8, the knight of the Black Castle threatens Saint George that if the English champion's wife and children were present he would 'abridge their liues that thy accursed eyes might be witnesses of their bloodie murthers'. In the same text Rosana laments her mother's death: 'the gloomy fates doe triumph in your death, and abridge your breathing ayre of life' (ch. 6).

⁷ Chapman began publishing his translations from Homer's *Iliad* in 1598, when he dedicated both *Seaven Bookes of the Iliades* and *Achilles Shield* to the Earl of Essex, whose disgrace and execution led Chapman to seek favour elsewhere. He dedicated to Henry his *Homer Prince of Poets... in twelue Bookes of his Iliads* (1609), followed by the complete *Iliads of Homer Prince of Poets* (1611). Both Essex and Henry died before realising the ambitions of those who praised them as Protestant warriors. 'No poet was ever so unlucky in his choice of patrons' (Soellner 1985: 138).

⁸ Nichols focuses on disjunctions between the orator's words and conduct, as mitigated by poetry, but his argument on Montaigne's critique of *historia* in 'De la cholère' (Of anger) is relevant here. Further discussions of Montaigne's irreverent enthusiasm for examples appear in Jeanneret 1998; esp. 573–78; and 1991; esp. 275–83.

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