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HENRY V

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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Contents

Introduction v
- About the Play v
- Leading Characters in the Play vii
- Family Tree x
- Synopsis xii
- *Henry V*: commentary xv
- Hal to Henry: From Prince of Wales to King of England xxxiii
- Shakespeare's Verse xxxvii
- Source, Date, and Text xxxix

People in the Play xl

Henry V 1

The Sources of *Henry V* 133

What the Critics have said 137

Classwork and Examinations 139
- Discussion of Themes and Topics 139
- Character Study 140
- Activities 142
- Context Questions 143
- Critical Appreciation 143
- Essays 145
- Projects 146

Background 147
- Government 147
- Religion 147
- Education 148
- Language 148
- Drama 148
- Theatre 149

Suggested Further Reading 151

William Shakespeare 1564–1616 153

List of Shakespeare's Plays 155

Introduction

About the Play

Mention *Henry V* nowadays and most people will think of a *film*—either Laurence Olivier's gallant attempt in 1944 to rally a nation exhausted by war but still intensely patriotic; or the more recent (1989) version made for a very different audience by Kenneth Branagh. In both films a distinguished actor-director with great personal charisma (and very sharp cutting-scissors) drove the action at full speed from the city of London to the walls of Harfleur and the plains of Agincourt, thence to the council-chamber of Troyes. But neither of these is Shakespeare's *play*!

Henry V was the last in a group of four related plays (a 'tetralogy') showing the fortunes of the English monarchy between 1398 and 1420. The first of these, *Richard II*, dealt with the downfall of one king and the rise of his successor. Richard II banished Henry Bullingbrook and confiscated his lands. Bullingbrook returned to England, led a rebellion against Richard (who was forced to abdicate), and was himself crowned Henry IV. His reign was restless: he was threatened constantly by insurrection, and greatly distressed by the conduct of the Prince of Wales, his only son and heir. The second part of the tetralogy, *Henry IV Part 1*, is most memorable for the royal tearaway, Prince Hal, who begins to redeem his riotous youth at the end of the play when he fights valiantly in his father's cause against the rebels. The relationship of father and son is further explored (still with the background of civil strife) in *Henry IV Part 2*. Prince Hal distances himself from his old mates, discarding the ringleader of their riots, Sir John Falstaff, and assuming the royal personality. At last he is crowned as King Henry V.

This is the second of Shakespeare's historical tetralogies; the first, mentioned by the Chorus in the closing speech of *Henry V*, consisted of *Henry VI*—in three parts—and *Richard III*. Such plays were very popular in Elizabethan England. As well as themes of perennial interest—greed, envy, lust, the struggle for power and the clash of ideologies—they were able to reveal some aspect of its past to a nation which was searching for its own identity. Henry VIII had severed all links with the Church of Rome when he declared himself head of the Church in England, and now his country was trying to find its own

individuality, distinct from Europe, by learning about its history. 'What is my nation?' (3, 3, 62). Official historians, such as Raphael Holinshed, had been appointed to research the archives and to chronicle events of the past in vast tomes—but these were largely inaccessible to the multitudes (most of whom were illiterate anyway). The popular writers—ballad-makers, pamphleteers, and, above all, dramatists—found themselves with avid audiences and a plentiful supply of source material. A character in one of Ben Jonson's plays, commended for his knowledge of history, disclaimed any academic study and confessed 'I ha't from the *play-books*, And think they are more authentic' (*The Devil is an Ass*, II, iv, 13–14).

Once again, at the beginning of a new millennium, we are at a cultural crossroads. England, together with Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, is a full member of the European Community. Sharing a common future, but possessed of an individual past, we should be one in spirit but distinct in character. And however this ideal may be realized, it is certain that the theatre, with dramatists past and present, will have a very large part to play.

Leading Characters in the Play

Henry V is a play with, unusually for Shakespeare, very few 'in-depth' characters. Mostly they are 'cameo' parts, where one or two pointers are given to direct the actor in his performance, but the actor himself must supply the internal motivation for what he does.

The Chorus however, seems to be more fully characterized than one might expect! The part is traditionally played by a male actor wearing a large cloak—although productions in recent years have 'modernized' him with jeans and sweater, overalls, and rehearsal clothes. His speeches show him to be excited and excitable, very enthusiastic about the events he is describing, and intensely patriotic. He would seem to be a 'gentleman' rather than a 'player': his words are addressed to the 'gentles' and to those who '*sit* and see' (Chorus 4, line 52) rather than to the groundlings who stood around the stage.

King Henry V is the character about whom we know the most. There are no secrets about his past life (as Shakespeare's Prince Hal), and we are given full details of the outward manifestation of his conversion. He is a man with a great mission—called by God (he feels) to confirm the Plantagenet dynasty on the throne of England, and to unite the kingdoms of France and England. He prays for God's guidance in all his actions; and his triumphs are always ascribed to the wonderful power of God's strength. Until the night before Agincourt (*Act 4*, Scene 1) we do not see Henry alone, and his motives might be open to misconstruction, but his soliloquy at the end of this scene leaves no room for doubt as to his personal sincerity. For the Elizabethans, Henry V was the ideal monarch, deserving of comparison only with Alexander the Great, and he featured in many other writings before Shakespeare's play. But by the turn of the century (when this play was written) the mood of the times was changing—and Shakespeare himself was becoming increasingly sceptical. As a result, the character of his Henry is capable of many interpretations.

The two churchmen are also somewhat ambiguous figures. Their respect and admiration for their new king in his conversion *seems* to be from the heart—but how much is their concern for their own Church property? Should the men

of God advocate warfare? Is the Bishop of Ely any more than a 'yes-man' to the machiavellian Archbishop of Canterbury?

The English nobility are barely differentiated. Exeter, the older man, is given most responsibility in Henry's campaigns—and consequently the most lines to his part. The men closest to the king, his counsellors, are also related to him in blood: it is indeed a 'band of brothers'. They are all—except the three conspirators—honourable, trustworthy, and loyal.

The army Shakespeare's introduction of the four captains is unhistorical—but it may have been politically diplomatic and prophetic, anticipating the formation of the United Kingdom. He uses the captains to provide light comic relief with their squabbling, but the issues they raise are quickly abandoned. The English captain is characterized by his quiet reserve; the Scot is taciturn; and the Irish captain is impetuous. Only Llewellyn is developed into a full personality, staunchly defending his nation and his king—whom he greets as a fellow Welshman. He is old-fashioned, strict on the subject of military etiquette—and romantically sentimental. Early editions of the play spell his name phonetically as 'Fluellen'.

The private soldiers, weary of fighting with danger and trudging through the mud of France, are critical of their leader but mindful of their duty. By giving them personal names (rather than referring simply to '1 Soldier' etc.), Shakespeare insists that they are all individuals.

The Eastcheap mob are fairly static characters who have changed little since their first appearance as the companions of Prince Hal. Bardolph's red nose is as spectacular as it ever was, and his end—he is hanged for pilfering—was predicted in *Henry IV Part 1*. Pistol 'swaggers' as much as he did in *Henry IV Part 2*, strong in words and threats but empty of deeds. He sees himself as an epic warrior, but comes at last to a bleak reality of destitution, losing even the ransom money promised by his French captive when the prisoners' throats are cut. Mistress Quickly makes a brief appearance with her elegiac account of the death of Falstaff—but she is needed in this play only as a reporter and not for her character. Falstaff's Boy—the page given to him by Prince Hal in *Henry IV Part 2*—is streetwise, and sees his companions for what they really are.

The French monarchy Contrary to his sources (which suggest that Charles VI was incompetent and even insane) Shakespeare presents the French king as a judicious monarch who takes the English threat very seriously,

controlling his son, the scornful Dauphin, with a firm hand. The part of Katherine, his daughter, is a tricky one for the actress—just as it was indeed for the real princess! Knowing that it is her destiny to marry the English king, Katherine must act out the wooing scene as though she were free to choose or reject her lover, and make a personal relationship out of a political alliance.

The French nobility are shown collectively as being frivolous and boastful—although they are perhaps a little more distinguishable than their English counterparts. Bourbon is the one who excels in silliness on the night before Agincourt (*Act 3*, Scene 8). In the Folio text the lines here assigned to Bourbon are spoken by the Dauphin, and they certainly seem more appropriate for the sender of the tennis balls; but in historical fact the Dauphin was not present at the battle of Agincourt, and in *Act 3*, Scene 6 of the play Shakespeare's character is expressly ordered to remain in Rouen. Burgundy stands out from the rest in honour and dignity, partly because he was historically not of the French king's party but the ruler of an independent power—and therefore best able to act as a go-between at the Council of Troyes.

Montjoy the French herald, is given unusual opportunities to develop a relationship with King Henry. His manner changes from armed neutrality to an almost affectionate respect.

Family Tree : *French and English Royal Families*

All names in capitals either appear or are mentioned in the play

Philip IV of France

Isabella *married* Edward II of England

EDWARD III of England (reign 1327–1377)

Edward the Black Prince (*died* 1376)

RICHARD II (reign 1377–1399) *married* Isabella of France sister to Katherine

Lionel Duke of Clarence

Philippa *married* Edmund Mortimer (*died* 1381)

EDMUND MORTIMER EARL OF MARCH

John of Gaunt Duke of Lancaster

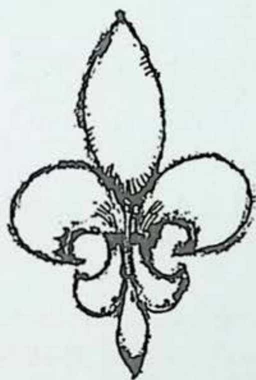
HENRY IV (BULLINGBROOK) (*reign* 1399–1413)

HUMPHREY DUKE OF GLOUCESTER

JOHN DUKE OF BEDFORD

(younger brothers of Henry)

Philip III of France



Philip VI
(*reign* 1328–1350)

John II

Edmund
Duke of York

Charles V

RICHARD
EARL OF
CAMBRIDGE
(*died* 1415)

CHARLES VI
(*reign* 1380–1422)

HENRY V
(*reign* 1413–1422) — *married* — PRINCESS KATHERINE

HENRY VI
(*reign* 1422–1471)

Synopsis

Prologue

Use your imaginations: the Chorus appeals to the audience.

Act 1

Scene 1 The Bishops discuss the new bill presented in Parliament. How will the new King handle this? The Archbishop of Canterbury has a scheme.

Scene 2 King Henry is reluctant to go to war without just cause, but the Archbishop's argument is persuasive; war is declared when the French ambassadors deliver an insulting message from the Dauphin.

Act 2

Chorus Prepare to leave for Southampton: the Chorus directs the audience's thoughts.

Scene 1 Still in London, the King's old friends forget their quarrelling when they are called to the sickbed of Sir John Falstaff.

Scene 2 There are traitors among us! The King forces them to condemn themselves, then departs for France.

Scene 3 The Hostess describes the death of Falstaff to Pistol and his friends.

Scene 4 The French King prepares to defend his country, although the Dauphin is scornful of the English military power. Exeter delivers Henry's challenge.

ACT 3

Chorus	Across to France: the Chorus describes an offer of peace—which is rejected.
Scene 1	King Henry urges his troops forward to the battle of Harfleur.
Scene 2	Pistol and his friends have caught up with the army, but they are no fighters.
Scene 3	National stereotypes: the captains argue amongst themselves.
Scene 4	Surrender of Harfleur.
Scene 5	An English lesson for the French Princess.
Scene 6	The French King prepares for a fresh onslaught.
Scene 7	Pistol pleads for Bardolph's life, but Llewellyn is adamant. King Henry hears the message of the French herald, and returns a defiant answer.
Scene 8	The French lords joke as they wait impatiently for dawn.

ACT 4

Chorus	The night before Agincourt: the Chorus sets the scene.
Scene 1	King Henry visits the English soldiers in their camps, and meditates on the responsibilities of the monarch.
Scene 2	The French anticipate an easy victory.
Scene 3	The English lords are gloomy, but the King is resolute.
Scene 4	Pistol bargains with his prisoner.
Scene 5	The French sustain heavy losses, but they fight on.
Scene 6	Losses on the English side: King Henry orders the killing of French prisoners.

Scene 7 King Henry, angry because the French have ransacked the English camp, prepares to retaliate—but learns from the French herald that the battle is done, and the English are victorious.

Scene 8 Practical jokes in the English camp.

ACT 5

Chorus The King has returned to England—but the audience must remain in France.

Scene 1 Llewellyn takes his revenge on Pistol.

Scene 2 Peace talks are concluded, and a marriage is negotiated: King Henry struggles with his new role as suitor to Princess Katherine.

Scene 3 The Chorus speaks an epilogue.

Henry V: commentary

Act 1

Prologue The 'Chorus' (a part traditionally played by a single male actor, wearing a large cloak) begins a tale of epic dimensions, using language in the 'grand style' appropriate for such an exalted theme. But his tone soon changes as he reminds the audience where they really are, in the little 'wooden O' made by the circular walls of the playhouse. Yet these can be transcended if the audience will only put their imaginations to work!

The Chorus manipulates audience response through the words and rhythms of his speech, contrasting the simple 'cockpit' with the 'vasty fields of France' and the poor 'crooked figure' with 'a million'. In the first eight lines the verse builds up to the horrific vision of a conqueror who can bring total devastation with 'famine, sword, and fire'; and then, with a strongly marked pause (a 'caesura') in the middle of one line, drops down to a humble confession of the actors' unworthiness: 'pardon, gentles all'.

And now, like the 'warm-up man' in a modern television studio, he begins to stir up his hearers to participate in the action, with himself as their guide.

Scene 1 Having prepared ourselves mentally for the excitement of a battle, it is rather disconcerting to find that we are now eavesdropping on a private and highly confidential conversation between two eminent churchmen. They are discussing the perennial problem of money! Church property before the Reformation was enormous, and much of it (having been bequeathed by legacy) was exempt from tax. Successive governments tried to wrest some of this wealth for themselves, to pay for national debts—and now these efforts are being renewed. The Archbishop of Canterbury, head of the Church in England, is acutely aware of the situation, but he has also got hopes of the new king. With awe and wonder he describes the change that has come over the wild Prince Hal since he ascended the throne of England after his father's death. Canterbury's language comes from the Bible and the Prayer Book, presenting the king's reformation as a religious conversion. Henry has

become a model of learning, wisdom, temperance, and prudence—the ideal monarch.

Although it is undramatic, the speech, which has the approval of the Bishop of Ely, serves to prepare the audience to receive his gracious majesty, King Henry V. Regular theatre-goers would remember, and Shakespeare intends that they *should* remember, the impact made by Prince Hal and his unruly comrades in the two *Henry IV* plays; but they must now believe in the transformation that has been accomplished.

As well as accepting, reverencing, and applauding the change that has come over the new king, the Archbishop of Canterbury has also found a means of solving the royal economic difficulties—without damaging the Church's own finances!

Scene 2 In the previous scene the archbishop spoke of some property in France—perhaps even extending as far as the French throne—which the English king might rightfully claim as his own. Now Canterbury comes into the royal presence to explain himself. King Henry is conscious of the seriousness of the enterprise, and the probable cost in human lives if he were to pursue his claim. Is the warfare justified? The archbishop must examine his conscience before he gives the king an answer, and speak with all religious sincerity.

The king speaks in measured terms, in a regular formal blank verse; and the archbishop replies in the same manner. His researches have been thorough, and the results are presented in meticulous detail as he expounds the Salic law and the fallacy that has deprived the English crown of territory that properly belongs to it. He points out that the Salic land is not in France at all, but is a French possession in Germany (between the rivers Elbe and Sala). He argues, moreover, that three French kings have themselves asserted their rights to the crown by claiming descent through a female line—which is precisely what is now being *denied* to Henry.

It is reassuring to know that Henry's claims can be thus validated—but for the reader the archbishop's speech seems tedious and long-winded, whilst in performance the director must decide how to keep his audience entertained.

In Olivier's film the scene was played as comedy, where a flustered archbishop was encumbered with massive volumes of untidy manuscripts and impeded by scurrying clerics. But this is surely wrong! Shakespeare's character may be verbose, but he is by no means stupid. And although he is being a little devious in turning the king's attention

towards France (and consequently away from Church financial affairs), he is a sincere and loyal churchman.

Kenneth Branagh's recent film was, I think, closer to Shakespeare's intentions. This shows a well-briefed archbishop expounding his case, in all its precise legalistic details, to a bewildered audience until eventually the king, no less confused than are his peers, cuts through the verbiage with a curt question:

> May I with right and conscience make this claim?

The question is answered in the affirmative. Canterbury brings the authority of Holy Writ (the Book of Numbers) to endorse his thesis, and urges a precedent in the battle of Crécy (1346), when Edward III and his son, the Black Prince, conquered the French and captured Calais. The other nobles, as if brought to life by a magic touch, join the churchmen in urging the king to fight. Henry still demurs, mindful now of the threat posed by the Scots, who, as they have always done, will maraud into England as soon as the country's defences are removed. His counsellors answer all Henry's objections until at last the Archbishop of Canterbury, taking up a remark from the Duke of Exeter, delivers a speech that is almost a sermon on the subject of the well-ordered state.

Exeter compares the state to a piece of music: the high and the low—both notes in music or human beings in their social ranks—combine to form one perfect harmony. The archbishop develops this notion, using the analogy (first proposed by the Roman poet Virgil) of a beehive, where each individual cheerfully performs the allotted task to the benefit of the whole colony. This leads to the conclusion that it is the king's *duty* to go to war, a moral obligation upon him for the good of his country, 'your happy England'.

Whether or not this poetic argument (commonplace in the sixteenth century) has any force on him, Henry at the end of the oration is fully resolved on action, and he declares his mind with bravura; 'France being ours, we'll bend it to our awe, Or break it all to pieces'.

Calling in the French ambassadors, he listens to the Dauphin's contemptuous message which taunts him by recalling his licentious past. Even the messengers are embarrassed, but Henry, unruffled, replies with a dangerously icy calm that returns the 'tennis ball' image back to the server. Henry's anger, like his other passions, is 'fetter'd' (line 243)—but his spirit is now aroused. Hitherto in this play he has been a man of few words, but here the kingly lion is stretching his limbs and showing what he is made of. He admits the 'barbarous licence' of

his 'wilder days', his neglect and under-valuation of 'this poor seat of England', but he promises henceforth to be 'like a king' and show a 'sail of greatness'. The humility of his confession makes us—and the French ambassadors—take his threats very seriously. The man means what he says!

Shakespeare has here made a significant alteration to the history as it was reported by Holinshed, who says that the 'tennis balls' incident occurred *before* the king had determined to fight for his rights and pursue his claim as far as the throne of France. By making this change Shakespeare ensures that there can be no suspicion that Henry's decision was in any way affected by the personal insult, which is only a spur to urge him forward. The incident also prepares us—audience and readers—to greet the French with hostility. The Dauphin is the immediate target.

After the departure, in silence, of the ambassadors, the tense atmosphere is eased by Exeter's wry comment: 'This was a merry message'. Henry is now businesslike, calling for action—'with reasonable swiftness'. But he does not forget the vocational aspect of his expedition:

> God before,
> We'll chide this Dauphin at his father's door.

With God helping them, the mission will be divinely sanctioned and will indeed be a *fair* action. Rhyming couplets bring the episode, the scene, and the whole first movement of the play to a neat conclusion.

Act 2

Chorus The Chorus returns, eager to tell us of the intense wave of patriotic fervour that is sweeping England. But not all men are loyal. We hear of treachery which must be foiled—or else all will be lost! Carried away by the magnitude of the events he is relating—and by his own importance and cleverness as narrator—the Chorus becomes melodramatic, with a rhetorical question addressed to 'O England'. His word-play ('kind and natural', 'hollow bosoms', 'gilt'/'guilt') gets increasingly self-conscious, and he almost giggles as he assures the audience that in the imaginary sea-crossings between England and France the play will not 'offend one stomach'.

Scene 1 Although, as we learned from the Chorus, 'The king is set from London', the setting of this scene is still within the city—in one of London's most seedy areas, a 'red light' district, where street-violence was common.

Henry IV Part 1 showed this as one of the favourite haunts of Prince Hal, before he became Henry V, and the characters who now assemble belong to the past he has so decisively rejected. By turns squabbling, threatening, joking, and grumbling, they speak a language which is all their own, made up of thieves' cant, bawdy innuendo, vulgarisms, and clichés, and enlightened with snatches of popular songs. Their words—those of Nym especially—often have no precise meanings. Intonation says it all.

Absent from the company is the man who was once the ringleader in mischief, Sir John Falstaff, but his presence is strongly felt. He was the personification of lawlessness, disorder, and misrule—but in another aspect he also represented carefree pleasure, comradeship, and, in a word, fun. All that is past. Now Falstaff is dying, and a few shabby ruffians are all that remain of the life he embodied.

When Henry was newly crowned, he refused to acknowledge Falstaff and publicly rejected his claim for friendship—and also the association with his former mates. We must agree that these are most undesirable companions for a king of England; a knowing audience—those familiar with Prince Hal from *Henry IV Parts 1* and *2*—should feel glad that he is no longer part of such a low-life fraternity. They should rejoice, like the bishops and the nobles, in the reformation (which he had always promised), and look forward to seeing 'what use' he has made of his 'wilder days' (*1*, 2, 267–8) and yet . . . These characters seem to have a warmth that has so far been lacking in the play. They care about each other, and their quick, unruly passions are a welcome contrast to the deliberate calculations of the politicians.

The news of Falstaff's sickness is sobering, and the Hostess's accusation, coming so suddenly, casts a different light on King Henry's much praised reformation. Falstaff is very ill: 'The king has killed his heart'. At the end of the scene Nym's criticism, though imperfectly articulated, cannot pass unnoticed: 'The king is a good king, but it must be as it may. He passes some humours and careers'.

Scene 2 Time has passed whilst we lingered in Eastcheap—long enough for the king to have journeyed as far as Southampton. Before he himself appears, we are given some preparation for the scene that will take place. Although Bedford and Westmorland seem apprehensive, Exeter is confident that the king is fully in control of the situation.

Trumpets sound, and Henry enters with three men who seem to be his very close friends. Apparently he sets great store by their judgements and their loyalty, and each of them, in turn, affirms his devotion to the

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Trumpets sound, and Henry enters with three men who seem to be his very close friends. Apparently he sets great store by their judgements and their loyalty, and each of them, in turn, affirms his devotion to the

king and his cause. Reassured, Henry turns his attention to a minor misdemeanour—verbal abuse from a drunken man. The king is ready to pardon the man, but Scroop, Cambridge, and Gray counsel against such clemency and recommend 'much correction' for the offender, 'lest example Breed by his sufferance more of such a kind'. Henry thanks them for their advice, but for the moment he ignores it and the drunkard is set free. The king turns to more weighty business.

Cambridge, Scroop, and Gray are to rule the kingdom during the king's absence in France, and they are now given the official documents which should—or so they expect—detail the extent of their powers and responsibilities. But when they read the papers they find themselves indicted of the most heinous treachery. They have taken bribes from the French to murder King Henry, and (although little is made of this in the play) they are hoping by Henry's death to secure the throne for the Earl of March and then, since March has no children, for the descendants of the Earl of Cambridge (see 'Family Tree', p. x). In fact the Earl of March himself was loyal to the king—and it was he who revealed the plot to Henry.

The guilty traitors confess their crimes and beg for mercy—but they stand condemned out of their own mouths: the king metes out their punishment with the same strict justice that they themselves recommended for the abusive drunkard. The treachery of Cambridge and Gray angered the king, but he is most cruelly hurt by Lord Scroop's betrayal of his friendship. He denounces Scroop with a passion such as we have never heard from this otherwise self-controlled king: repeated rhetorical questions build to a climax of emotion which dissolves into tears.

With a few words of cold prose, Exeter makes a formal arrest to which all the traitors react with signs of relief, appearing glad that they have been prevented from acting out their own evil schemes. Henry, once more in full possession of himself, briefly points out what would have been the consequences of their crime, not for himself alone, but for his entire kingdom. Sentences of death are pronounced, and the king moves off to war. Surely, he argues, this timely discovery of the conspiracy must be a sign that God is in favour of the expedition.

The director of a production, the actor playing the part of Henry V, or the solitary reader, must determine the extent to which the king is in control of this scene. He instructed the three traitors to expect that their 'commissions' would be given to them now (see line 61), and clearly he introduced the subject of the drunkard to allow them to sentence themselves. But in the denunciation of Lord Scroop—how much of his passion is performance?

Scene 3 Whilst the king's party sets sail boldly from Southampton, a less heroic bunch of warriors in Eastcheap is preparing to follow him. They are leaving behind them a past life that has died with Sir John Falstaff, and they listen in silence to the Hostess's account of the knight's death. They must have heard her words many times already. She speaks a poetic elegy in which her simple grief is emphasized by those idiosyncrasies of her language which, at other times, are so amusing—the homely wisdom ('at turning of the tide'), the mistaken allusions ('Arthur' for 'Abraham') and the 'malapropisms' (verbal misapprehensions—such as 'in carnation' for 'incarnate', 'rheumatic' when she intends 'lunatic'). At last, after brief words of parting, the men begin their trudge to Southampton.

Scene 4 Across the channel the French are preparing to resist the threatened invasion. The French king is taking all precautions, being mindful of previous Anglo-French engagements, but the Dauphin makes light of his fears. He scoffs at the English king, seeing only the wild Prince Hal (whom he insulted with his gift of tennis balls in *Act 1*, Scene 2) and refusing to recognize the reformed King Henry.

In the Dauphin's mind is a picture of the parody king of English folk-festivals, but the French king and the Constable, older and wiser men, are thinking of distinguished precedents—the early Roman Brutus, and the almost legendary Black Prince of England, who was Henry's ancestor. To the French king the English seem as fighting-dogs, bred from a 'bloody (= bloodthirsty) strain' and trained ('flesh'd') on the meat they are to kill. To the Dauphin they are merely 'coward dogs' who make a lot of noise but who will turn tail and run as soon as they meet any resistance.

Exeter comes as the English ambassador—the situation is grave enough to warrant a member of the royal family to perform this function. He makes his demands in formal language, invoking all laws, divine as well as human and international, to sanction Henry's claim to the French throne. And if the king of France will not yield? In calm, measured tones Exeter declares the full horrors of war, and his almost matter-of-fact description makes the threat sound very, very real.

ACT 3

Chorus The Chorus now has the immediacy of a 'live' outside-broadcast on television news: we see through his eyes as through a video-camera. First we focus on the royal party as the king embarks at Southampton Pier, all flags flying. Henry is showing himself in all his glorious

majesty—and the rising sun is a most fitting comparison. We watch the ship-boys who swarm up the rigging to unfurl the great sails, and we can even hear the bo'sun's pipe which gives the orders. The sails billow out and the huge galleons move off. This is (as the Chorus presents it) truly heroic action, and it is impossible to resist the exhortation to become part of it and join the expedition—especially when we look back at sleepy old England!

Before we know it, we are in France and laying siege to Harfleur. The graphic details of cannon pointing at the city speak their threats as eloquently to a twentieth-century mind as ever they could to Shakespeare's audience.

A 'news-flash' of information comes to let us know the official response to the demands made by Exeter in the previous scene. Understandably, the French king is refusing to surrender his crown—but he is willing to compromise with Henry, offering his daughter's hand in marriage (which would secure the throne of France for Henry's descendants) and, as a dowry for her, certain 'dukedoms' (which were described as 'almost kingly' in *1*, 2, 227 but which are now despised as 'petty and unprofitable'). The offer has been rejected, and war is declared. As the Chorus is speaking, we hear the sound of cannonfire.

The speech sounds urgent and impassioned; strong, active verbs and frequent alliterations hurry the lines along at a great pace.

Scene 1 The stage should be alive with frenzied activity (or the impression of this) as soldiers with weapons and ladders charge the breach the artillery has made in the city wall at Harfleur. But their first assault has failed, and they are now in retreat.

Henry rallies his troops, speaking first to the commanders of the campaign (and perhaps meaning particularly the three lords who accompany him). His 'dear friends' now, they must adopt the monstrous appearance of fighting machines. The 'noble English' (the knights and cavalry officers) are reminded of their forefathers, war heroes who must not be betrayed by their descendants: don't let the side down—and set a good example to the men who are (both socially and in military terms) beneath you! The common soldiers, 'men of grosser blood', are not forgotten. Henry speaks to the 'yeomen of England' in the language of farmstock—the language that they, as countrymen ought to appreciate. The exhortations are effective, and the king leads a fresh assault on Harfleur.

The scene—merely an oration spoken against a background of activity—shows us yet another aspect of this new Henry. Here he is the

military leader, the inspiration of his soldiers, who must be able at once to persuade, flatter, and stir up to action. With one of the most famous of opening lines, the speech is by no means easy to deliver!

Scene 2 Once again, the earlier heroics of the flag-waving Chorus and the militaristic king seem to be deflated by the baser realities. Although Bardolph has caught something of the spirit of Henry's fervour, Nym and Pistol are resistant. Nym is frightened and Pistol is too much of a coward to go anywhere near the fighting. The Welsh captain Llewellyn, making his first appearance in the play, rounds them up and drives them to where the action is. The Boy remains behind, alone on the stage. He knows and despises all three—braggarts, cowards, and petty thieves. Any sympathy the audience might remember for these former companions of Sir John Falstaff (and associates of Prince Hal) is quickly being dispersed.

Scene 3 There is still another aspect of war that has not yet been touched upon—the point of view of the professionals. The trio that comes before us now—the Welshman, the Irishman, and the Scotsman—are all of them experienced soldiers.

These three nations were all represented in Henry's French campaigns, and in the Folio text the characters are identified simply as 'Welch', 'Irish', and 'Scot'. Shakespeare has used the national speech-habits to give each man a separate voice—and they all have different ideas about the proper way to do things. Shakespeare does not find the Welsh accent difficult to imitate: a single phrase ('look you'), a few unusual grammatical forms ('is' for 'are', 'is digged' for 'has dug'), and the fairly regular *p/b* substitution are all that is necessary. Llewellyn is formal and old-fashioned, as his language ('beseech', 'vouchsafe') shows; and he works strictly by the book—perhaps even using Thomas Digges's *Stratioticos*, a volume which describes the classical battles of the ancient Romans and their 'disciplines of war'.[1] Llewellyn has no regard for the Irish captain who, he suspects, 'will plow up all, if there is not better directions'.

Macmorris himself is near to panic and throws up his hands in despair: 'there ish nothing done, so Christ sa' me law'. For 'the Scots captain', however, Llewellyn has nothing but praise: 'Captain Jamy is a marvellous falorous gentleman . . . and of great expedition and knowledge in th'anchient wars'. Jamy is a man of few words, but his

[1] This book was re-issued in 1590 by a Stratford man, Richard Field, who subsequently published Shakespeare's poems.

resolution is certain: 'I'll dee guid service, or I'll lig i'the grund for it'. A quarrel is being threatened, but the trumpet-call sounds a truce: for the present, all hostilities will be postponed.

The little episode has served to introduce to the audience three new characters—who will take the places of Bardolph, Nym, and Pistol in providing some prose entertainment and light relief from the epic seriousness.

Scene 4 Henry seems now to have become the bloody-minded fighting monster that he himself described. His threat of the horrors of war is terrible, depicting brutal soldiers who rape and massacre, uncontrolled in their destructive rage which spares no one: old men and infants alike, both mothers and daughters. Thanks to Henry's gracious restraint, the air is clear now; but in a moment, unless the French will yield, it will be dark and thick with gunsmoke and the screams of the victims. Once again, the twenty-first-century audience/reader—educated by television—knows even better than Shakespeare's first audiences that what Henry describes is all too possible. It is frightening to think that one man can unleash such forces!

From the walls of Harfleur (or, in theatre terms, the balcony at the back of the stage), the Governor concedes defeat: the Dauphin has disappointed them, and now the city is at the mercy of the English king. Shakespeare's King Henry is more generous than his historical counterpart. Setting Exeter in command, he orders 'Use mercy to them all': Holinshed reports that in reality the town was ransacked. No victory was more easily won!

The English, when they are rested, will retire to Calais—which at this time was an English possession.

Scene 5 A complete and most welcome change. From the outdoor, very 'masculine', atmosphere of the previous scenes we go inside to the enclosed and 'feminine' world of the French court where the princess (already conscious of her destiny) is learning about the English language from her lady-in-waiting—whose own knowledge is rather uncertain! The parts of speech for the parts of the body meet with girlish giggles. By learning the new language, the princess is preparing to begin a new life.

Scene 6 At the French king's court, things are beginning to look serious. The king himself speaks little, allowing his nobles to give their opinions. The French lords are proud, despising the English as a 'barbarous people

who live in a 'nook-shotten isle' with a disgusting climate, 'foggy, raw and dull'! Even their national drink, 'sodden [boiled] water' making 'barley-broth', is not fit to be compared with the wine which gives spirit to the blood in France. Honour demands that the French lords must demonstrate their superiority in birth, breeding, and manhood. Occasional phrases such as '*O Dieu vivant*', '*Mort de ma vie*' are enough to sketch in the foreign language.

Having heard the counsel of the lords, who are shamed into unanimity, the king responds with an impressive roll-call of French nobility—and a complicated image that likens his forces to an avalanche that will quite overwhelm the English invaders. Confident of victory, the French prepare to fight—but the Dauphin is forbidden to join in the fun.

Scene 7 There has been a skirmish on the road to Calais where the French were trying to block the English retreat by breaking down a bridge over the river Ternoise. The fighting is now over; the French are defeated; and the Duke of Exeter is in command (although according to Holinshed he did not re-join the king until the action reached Agincourt).

Llewellyn speaks highly of the duke, and singles out for high praise 'an anchient lieutenant' who has done 'gallant service'. But when we hear his name, we recognize the man (who comes on to the stage) as the loud-mouthed braggart from Eastcheap—all word and no deed. But Pistol has a heart, and he pleads now for Bardolph. That incurable thief—no more than a petty pilferer (we remember the Boy's observation in Scene 2)—has stolen again. Military rules are strict and must be obeyed: Bardolph must die. Pistol, with a rude gesture, quits the scene.

The incident is based on Holinshed's Chronicles, which describe how

> in this great necessity, the poor people of the country were not spoiled, nor any thing taken of them without payment, nor any outrage or offence done by the Englishmen, except one, which was, that a soldier took a pix out of a church, for which he was apprehended, and the king not once removed [from the place] till the box was restored, and the offender strangled.

Shakespeare, identifying the soldier with his fictional character Bardolph, has changed the 'pix', a box holding communion wafers, to a 'pax', a plate—less valuable and less sacred—kissed by the communicants. With a quick stroke he dismisses another part of the

king's youth. When Henry is told of Bardolph's crime and punishment, he is apparently unmoved: 'We would have all such offenders so cut off'.

As though to allow Henry to demonstrate afresh his new personality, the French herald brings another challenge. Its wording is contemptuous, but it is spoken 'fairly', and the king answers with dignity and courage: the English are in no fit state to fight, but they will not refuse the French challenge. Everything is in God's hand.

Scene 8 The French lords are restive, eager to join battle with the English. Time passes slowly for them, enlivened only by Bourbon's rhapsody on his horse, which is almost a formal rhetorical exercise. His companions tease him—and when he has gone out they scoff at Bourbon's empty boasting. But they are confident of victory.

Act 4

Like the previous one, this act is made up of cross-cutting scenes that move the audience into different parts of the field and show contrasting attitudes to warfare in general and to the battle of Agincourt in particular.

Chorus Now the Chorus beckons us conspiratorially to come to the battlefield. We must create darkness in our imaginations (in the Elizabethan theatre all performances took place in the afternoon), and peer through the night, lit by the occasional campfire, to see the army preparing for the next day's fighting. All is still—but we become aware of a hum of activity. Noises sound louder at night—the neighing of war-horses, the clunk of hammers, the rasp of metal against metal. The sound of the words echoes their sense: 'creeping murmur', 'hum . . . stilly sounds', 'high . . . neighs Piercing'. Every word in this speech adds to the picture in sight and sound.

The Chorus seems to speak louder now, contrasting the two armies who wait, with such different expectations, for morning. Although the night, personified as 'a foul and ugly witch', fills all his men with foreboding, the English king appears unaffected. His presence amongst them gives comfort, light, and life: the royal sun shines on all alike.

Scene 1 Henry is fully aware of the danger of the situation, but although he can admit this to his nobles he must show no signs of panic. He moralizes on the subject, 'gather[ing] honey from the weed' to 'make a moral of the devil himself'. Gloucester and Erpingham listen dutifully and then Henry, disguised under Erpingham's cloak, embarks on a 'walkabout'

His first encounter is with Pistol, who attempts to 'pull rank' as an 'ancient' or standard-bearer (= second lieutenant). Pistol's hostility to Llewellyn is re-introduced, but there is no doubt where our sympathies should lie—especially after Henry's comment:

> Though it appear a little out of fashion,
> There is much care and valour in this Welshman.

So far there has been nothing to worry the king. But three common soldiers (who, unusually for Shakespeare, are given individual names) raise serious problems. How far is a king responsible to and for his subjects? What are the subject's duties to the king, to his own family, to his own soul, and to God? Disobedience to the king is disobedience to God—because the king is God's deputy on earth. But if the king's cause is not just ...?

Henry tries to make the soldiers understand that the king is a man just the same as they are, but they are unconvinced. Accepting a challenge from Williams, Henry watches the soldiers depart and, alone on the stage, meditates on the lonely burden that a king must bear and the inadequacy of empty ceremonious formalities to compensate.

This is the central scene of the play: all the issues seem to come to a head here, and for the moment they are resolved—insofar as they are capable of resolution—in Henry's final prayer. We can now appreciate what has been always at the back of his mind—and which is perhaps the real reason for this entire campaign: Henry's insecurity on the throne! Again we are reminded that Henry, guiltless himself, owes his crown to the murder by Henry Bullingbrook (Henry IV) of Richard II.

Scene 2

In the opposing camp the French are excitedly waiting for the battle to commence. They are fresh, in tiptop condition, and scornful of the pathetic band of British soldiers. Sickness—dysentery—had taken its toll of Henry's army even before the siege of Harfleur; and the march to Calais had taken twice as long as expected. By the time they reached Agincourt the men were exhausted—cold, wet, hungry, and ill—and their horses were in no better state. The French gloat over their expected victims.

Scene 3

The English nobles reckon up the odds against them. The actual numbers are in dispute, but it is certain that the English were heavily outnumbered (perhaps by as many as 30,000 French against 7,000 English). The king enters just in time to hear Westmorland longing for reinforcements. The great speech that follows is one of the finest

dramatic expressions of military patriotism, and celebrates the achievements—as yet unaccomplished—of the 'few': 'We few, we happy few, we band of brothers'. Henry anticipates the festive celebrations that will annually commemorate the glorious victory. Those who fought at Agincourt will be united in a blood brotherhood that will transcend all the social barriers that divide 'high and low and lower' (*1*, 2, 180).

Westmorland is convinced. Now the English are ready to fight—but the French herald interrupts with yet another insulting demand for the king's ransom. Henry, enraged, sends back a proud retort which Montjoy, the herald, hears with respect and addresses him for the first time as 'King Harry'. The quickest of prayers, 'how Thou pleasest, God' ('Thy will be done'), and the battle is on.

Scene 4 The first sign of victory is a parody of conquest: Pistol has captured an unfortunate Frenchman—who is an even greater coward than Pistol and will plead and flatter and *pay* to save his life. The Boy scornfully translates Pistol's empty threats and, before he leaves the stage, makes the apparently irrelevant observation that the English camp is unprotected: 'there is none to guard it but boys'.

Scene 5 With disgust and shame the French nobles contemplate their overthrow, determining to re-join the battle and die with some honour rather than live with such disgrace. Their resolution, because it is expressed with such exaggerated language, is laughable rather than heroic.

Scene 6 The English take time for a moment's grief. Hearing a trumpet, Henry assumes that the French must be about to make a renewed onslaught and, contrary to all conventions of warfare, orders his soldiers to kill their prisoners.

Scene 7 Llewellyn has just heard of an outrage 'against the law of arms' committed by the French, who have murdered innocent civilians and looted the English tents (now we understand the Boy's comment in Scene 4). Lines of communication seem to have crossed—Gower believes that the king had ordered the killing of all prisoners as a form of retaliation, and he applauds the deed as 'most worthily' done by 'a gallant king'. Llewellyn joins in his praise of Henry, reiterating the comparison (see *1*, 1, 46) with the classical model of conquering kings, Alexander the Great. Even the rejection of Falstaff by the newly-crowned King Henry V (see 2, 1, 76 note) is seen by Llewellyn to have its

counterpart in the life of Alexander. But Henry was, as the Welshman himself recalls, 'in his right wits and his good judgements' when he 'turned away the fat knight with the great belly doublet'.

It is interesting that Shakespeare chooses this moment of Henry's greatest triumph to remind us of the price that had to be paid in personal relationships. Prince Hal could only become Henry V by sacrificing his friend—and renouncing all that Falstaff represented.

Another crossed line! The king has only just learned of the massacre of the boys in the camp. His claim to have his emotions well under control (see *1*, 2, 242–3) is momentarily forgotten, and he is now very angry and threatens the French. His language is strong and confident: the alliteration—'skirr away as swift as stones'—makes the task sound easy. Again he orders (apparently for the first time) that the prisoners' throats are to be cut.

The English herald departs—but meets the returning French herald, who presents a very different appearance, 'His eyes are humbler than they used to be'. Henry, still angry, assumes that this is another ransom demand, but Montjoy is submissive now, asking permission for the French to rescue the bodies of their dead—who even in death must observe social distinctions. As though taken by surprise, Henry can only ask who has won the battle!

A kind of light relief is needed here to relax after the tensions of fighting. The king turns to Llewellyn, and they rejoice in their Welsh kinship. Henry, when he was Prince Hal, was fond of practical jokes, and he now sets up a duel (which was in fact prepared for earlier—in Scene 1—when he walked through the camp the previous night).

Scene 8 The joke continues, involving more people. The soldiers' loyalty is praiseworthy, and it seems hard that Henry should take such pleasure in the discomfiture of Williams and the embarrassment of the officers. Williams is dignified in his reproach to the king and in his refusal of the shilling offered by Llewellyn in imitation of the royal gesture. All's well that ends well—but class distinctions, abandoned before Agincourt, seem to be returning: Williams is now 'this fellow'.

The French and English casualty lists are compared. The French seem to have lost more noblemen than common soldiers—truly 'a royal fellowship of death'. The English, however, are almost unscathed: only five men 'of name', and no more than twenty-five 'other men' (the total is taken from Holinshed's reckoning—although the historian remarks that other estimates of the dead range between one hundred and six hundred). God's is the glory, and His must be the praise. Insisting on

this, and claiming a victory won 'without stratagem', Shakespeare's king ignores the role of military tactics and the 'politic invention' described by Holinshed whereby Henry

> sent privily two hundred archers into a low meadow which was near to the vanguard of his enemies, but separated with a great ditch, commanding them there to keep themselves close till they had a token to them given, to let drive at their adversaries . . . [and] he caused stakes bound with iron sharp at both ends, of the length of five or six foot to be pitched before the archers, and of each side the footmen like an hedge, to the intent that if the barded horses ran rashly upon them, they might shortly be gored and destroyed . . . This device of fortifying an army was at this time first invented.

Singing hymns of thankfulness, the army retires to Calais—and then home to England.

Act 5

Chorus The Chorus is now brisk and businesslike: his speech must cover a lot of ground, and account for several years of historical time, for the benefit of those in the audience who are not already familiar with the story of Henry V (from history books, ballads, and from earlier plays). Making the usual apologies for the theatre's inadequacies, he takes the king to Calais—and immediately across the Channel to a vociferous welcoming crowd, then quickly into London. A victorious conqueror should be honoured (as Julius Caesar was) with a triumphal procession, but Henry's religious modesty forbids this.

A sudden change of rhythm and line-length introduces a contemporary allusion—which also ties the date when the play was written to the period between April and September 1599, when the Earl of Essex was commanding the English forces in Ireland (see 'Source, Date, and Text', p. xxxix). After a short time at home—about five years, in fact—the king returns to France.

Scene 1 As so often in this play, the Chorus's formality is broken by a comedy scene. Fighting in France continued for some time after the Battle of Agincourt (25 October 1415). This scene would appear to take place on 2 March, the day after St David's day. The quarrel between Llewellyn and Pistol still goes on, but now there is leisure to settle it. Pistol is most ignominiously defeated, and the news from England—'my Doll is dead

i'th'Spital of a malady of France'—demoralizes him further; he is also penniless (having lost even the promised ransom money when all prisoners were killed). But Pistol, the last of the Eastcheap mob, is irrepressible: punning on 'steal' and 'steal' he exits with characteristic bravado in a rhymed couplet and an allusion to Caesar's *Gallic Wars*.

Scene 2 This time we are really, as the Chorus promised us, with the king at a summit conference in Troyes. The two parties assemble on opposite sides of the stage, 'eyeballing' each other and speaking formal words of greeting.

In the centre of the stage stands Burgundy, lord of an independent French dukedom and, therefore, an ideal mediator between the two kings. He delivers a lecture to the warring factions on the beauties of peace, developing an analogy of the wasteland of a neglected countryside and the uncivilized savagery of a nation at war. The regular rhythms and rich language emphasize the content of his speech.

Delegates are appointed to negotiate terms of conciliation. King Henry ensures that he is represented by all his kinsmen—including the Earl of Huntington, who has not before appeared in the play (although in fact he fought at Harfleur). The French queen accompanies the negotiators to make sure that a woman's voice is heard.

Alone on the stage (apart from the interpreting Alice) are Henry and his 'capital demand', the Princess Katherine. Henry's demands have been considerably modified since he insisted (2, 2, 189) 'No king of England if not king of France'. Now he is asking only that his heirs should inherit the French crown through his marriage to the French princess.

The scene is a tricky one to play. Both characters must know their political roles, yet by teasing and joking they must act out a romantic comedy of love (whose outcome is preordained). Henry is content to make a fool of himself in pretending to be no lover, secure in the knowledge that he is 'the best king of good fellows' and Katherine—by extension of the proverb—'the queen of beggars'. Katherine's French nicety yields to English customs, and their contract is sealed with a kiss: 'nice customs curtsy to great kings'. The counsellors return, having made equally good progress in their negotiations. Burgundy tries to make a joke of the situation with some rather crude humour, and Henry joins in—showing more restraint and wit than the French lord. Finally, when all parties are in full agreement, the French queen speaks a blessing. The stage is left to the Chorus to wind up the history.

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