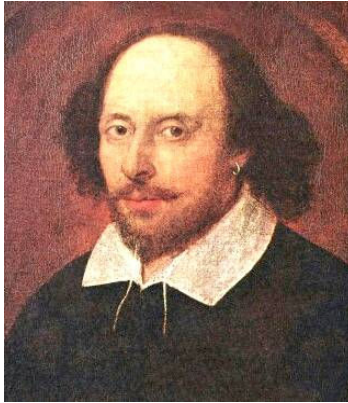


HENRY V

by William Shakespeare



THE AUTHOR

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was born into the family of a prosperous tradesman in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. While in his mid-teens, he was forced to leave school because his family fell into a period of poverty, so that he had only a rudimentary education. In 1582, he married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior and already three months pregnant. The marriage produced three children in three years, but in 1585, Shakespeare left Stratford to go to London to seek his fortune in the big city.

In London, he embarked upon a career on the stage, becoming a popular actor by the early fifteen nineties. In 1591, he penned his first play, *Love's Labour's Lost*. His early plays were comedies, and show nothing of the depth that characterized his later works. His plots were borrowed from a variety of sources, both ancient and contemporary. During his career, he wrote 37 plays, three narrative poems, and 154 sonnets.

His writing brought him fame and popularity, but he continued to act as well as write (critics love to speculate about which of the characters in his plays would have been played by the author). He eventually became a shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men when James I ascended the throne). Most of his plays were performed at local theaters like the Rose, the Globe, and the indoor Blackfriars. When the Globe burned to the ground in 1613 (a cannon misfired during a performance of *Henry VIII*), Shakespeare retired, and died in Stratford three years later on his fifty-second birthday.

Henry V is the last part of a tetralogy of plays dealing with the rise of the house of Lancaster (*Richard II*, *Henry IV, part 1*, *Henry IV, part 2*, and *Henry V*) and centering on the career of King Henry V (Prince Hal in the two *Henry IV* plays), and represents Shakespeare's portrayal of the ideal Christian ruler. It was written in 1599, shortly before the return of the Earl of Essex from putting down a rebellion in Ireland. The incidents described in the play took place between 1414 and 1420, during the time of the Hundred Years' War. As was true with many of Shakespeare's history plays, his principal source of information was Raphael Holinshed's *The Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*. The central plot of the play revolves around the

claim made by Henry to the throne of France, and his subsequent campaign to seize it, culminating in the battle of Agincourt. The interspersed comic scenes, whether involving Prince Hal's former friends from Cheapside or various members of the French court, do little to advance the plot, but certainly manage to keep the audience entertained in a story that otherwise would be little more than a bleak account of warfare. The play has had a wide variety of interpretations, from the vigorous call to arms produced by Laurence Olivier during World War II to the pacifist reading of Kenneth Branagh, in which the king who wages war so successfully evidently hates the need to do so, and longs for nothing more than peace for his realm.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Henry V - The protagonist and only main character in the play, the former Prince Hal now becomes Shakespeare's model of the ideal Christian prince as he asserts his right to the throne of France and wins the pivotal battle of Agincourt, then woos and wins the hand of Princess Katherine.
- Duke of Exeter - Uncle of King Henry and bearer of the King's challenge to France.
- Duke of York - Cousin of Henry V, and one of the few nobles to die at Agincourt.
- Archbishop of Canterbury - Along with the Bishop of Ely, he entices the King to make war on France in order to distract him from confiscating church lands.
- Lord Scroop, Sir Thomas Grey - Along with the Earl of Cambridge, they plot against the life of the King, and are discovered and executed.
- Gower, Fluellen, Macmorris, Jamy - Officers in the King's army, respectively English, Welsh, Irish, and Scottish, they provide comic relief with their banter and their strange accents. Fluellen in particular glories in his Welsh heritage, which he sees as giving him kinship with the King, and whose honor he is willing to uphold with his sword at the drop of a hat (or a leek).
- Michael Williams - English soldier who unwittingly challenges the King to a fight on the night before the battle of Agincourt.
- Pistol - A friend of Henry's from his youth, Pistol has married Hostess Quickly. He reluctantly goes to war, acquits himself badly, and returns to England to become a pimp and thief after he hears of the death of his wife.
- Nym, Bardolph - Two more of the King's former cronies from Eastcheap, both are hanged for stealing while in France.
- Boy - A companion of the Eastcheap crew, he is killed with the other boys when French deserters attack the defenseless camp during the battle.

- King Charles VI of France - He at first minimizes the English threat, but ultimately offers his daughter to the young conqueror.
- Lewis, Dauphin of France - A haughty young man who shows no respect for Henry, sending him a case of tennis balls as an insult; he seems to care more for his horse than for his soldiers.
- Montjoy - The French herald who carries messages between Charles VI and Henry V before and during the battle, he comes to respect young Henry far more than his superiors are able to do.
- Katherine - Daughter of the King of France and fourteen at the time of the story, she is given in marriage to Henry as part of the peace settlement. Their wooing scene is one of the most tender parts of a warlike play.
- Alice - Katherine's lady in waiting, she attempts to teach her mistress English from her paltry knowledge of the language.
- Nell Quickly - Pistol's wife, she describes the death of Falstaff, and later dies of venereal disease.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“Once more into the breach, dear friends, once more;
Or close the wall up with our English dead.” (Henry V, IIIi, 1-2)

“The game's afoot:
Follow your spirit, and upon this charge
Cry ‘God for Harry, England, and Saint George!’” (Henry V, IIIi, 32-34)

“We would not seek a battle as we are,
Nor, as we are, we say we will not shun it.” (Henry V, IIIvi, 159-160)

“If we are marked to die, we are enow
To do our country loss; and if to live,
The fewer men, the greater share of honor.
God's will! I pray thee wish not one man more.
By Jove, I am not covetous for gold,
Nor care I who doth feed upon my cost;
It yearns me not if men my garments wear;
Such outward things dwell not in my desires;
But if it be a sin to covet honor,
I am the most offending soul alive.
No, faith, my coz, wish not a man from England.
God's peace! I would not lose so great an honor

As one man more methinks would share from me
For the best hope I have. O, do not wish one more!
Rather proclaim it, Westmoreland, through my host,
That he which hath no stomach to this fight,
Let him depart; his passport shall be made,
And crowns for convoy put into his purse.
We would not die in that man's company
That fears his fellowship to die with us.
This day is called the Feast of Crispian.
He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,
Will stand a-tiptoe when this day is named
And rouse him at the name of Crispian.
He that shall see this day, and live old age,
Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbors
And say, 'Tomorrow is Saint Crispian.'
Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars,
[And say, "These wounds I had on Crispin's day."]
Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot,
But he'll remember, with advantages,
What feats he did that day. Then shall our names,
Familiar in his mouth as household words -
Harry the King, Bedford and Exeter,
Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester -
Be in their flowing cups freshly rememb'ed.
This story shall the good man teach his son;
And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remembered -
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he today that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother. Be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition;
And gentlemen in England now abed
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day." (Henry V, IViii, 20-67)

"Come, go we in procession to the village;
And be it death proclaimed through our host
To boast of this, or take that praise from God
Which is his only." (Henry V, IVviii, 108-111)

NOTES

Act I Prologue - The Chorus enters and apologizes for the inability of the stage to hold a cast of thousands and the great pageant of warfare, and exhorts the audience members to use their imaginations to remedy the defect.

Act I, scene 1 - The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely are discussing a bill before the House of Commons that would confiscate the temporal lands of the church, and wondering how they can derail it. They then talk about the amazing transformation that the young king has undergone since the death of his father - no longer the wastrel, but now the scholar, wise ruler, and pious supporter of the church. They believe they can convince him to veto the act if they offer to fund a campaign against the French in order to claim the French throne for England.

Act I, scene 2 - In the King's council chamber, the nobles gather, and Henry asks Canterbury to justify his claims on the French throne, warning that the justification had better be sound, or else much blood would be shed for no purpose. Canterbury then launches into a complicated explanation of Salic law and its historical underpinnings, concluding that the French are unjustly using it to reject Henry's claim. Both the churchmen and the nobles encourage Henry to pursue the throne that is rightfully his, and the Archbishop offers to fund the expedition. Henry reminds them that provision must be made to protect the country against the Scots, who will surely invade as soon as the English army crosses the Channel. Plans are made to leave a force at home to protect the borders, then the Ambassadors of France are admitted. They bring a message from the Dauphin - a chest filled with tennis balls instead of the dukedoms claimed by the King. Henry responds to this mockery by telling the Dauphin that thousands will curse his scorn when their husbands lie dead on the field of battle and their cities lie in ruins. He then orders that preparations for war be made in all due haste.

Act II Prologue - The Chorus speaks of English preparations for war, and also tells the audience that the French have bribed three English nobles to assassinate Henry before he leaves England.

Act II, scene 1 - In London, Bardolph and Nym prepare to go to France with the army. They speak of Pistol, who is now married to Nell Quickly (with whom Nym had formerly been in love); when the couple appears, Nym and Pistol prepare to fight, but Bardolph intercedes. A boy then enters and tells them that Falstaff is very ill. After Hostess Quickly leaves, Nym and Pistol square off again, this time over some money Pistol owes to Nym. When the former promises to pay, they make amends. They then leave to see Falstaff, who they believe is sick at heart because he was rejected by his former friend Hal.

Act II, scene 2 - At Southampton, Henry has discovered the treachery of Scroop, Cambridge, and Grey. The three traitors, unaware of the King's knowledge, praise him and affirm support for his enterprise. When Henry tells Exeter to release a man who, in a drunken fit, had spoken against the King, the traitors rebuke him for such softness. He then gives them their "commissions," but the papers contain their death warrants. They beg for mercy, but he gives them the same mercy they would have shown to the pardoned miscreant. They then ask for forgiveness and go off to their deaths. Henry then orders the army to set sail for France.

Act II, scene 3 - Back in Cheapside, Pistol tells his friends that Falstaff has died. Nell Quickly describes the manner of his death, then the three friends prepare to go off to war, leaving Nell to run the establishment alone.

Act II, scene 4 - In the palace of the French King, nobles are sent out to fortify the cities of the kingdom. The Dauphin, however, argues that the need is not urgent because of the folly of the young King of England (“a vain, giddy, shallow, humorous youth”), who deserves no respect and is no real threat to France. The nobles warn him not to underestimate the young King, of whom the French ambassadors had spoken very highly. The French King has no intention of taking Henry lightly. Exeter then appears as Henry’s ambassador, and demands that the King relinquish his throne to Henry, the rightful heir. He then presents a document justifying Henry’s claim, and insists that the blood shed in the coming war will be on the hands of the French King if he refuses to yield. When the Dauphin identifies himself, Exeter conveys Henry’s scorn for his cheap trick of the tennis balls, and vows vengeance at an opportune time. Meanwhile, the King of France promises to give an answer the following day.

Act III Prologue - The Chorus asks the audience to imagine a great fleet setting sail for France, then laying siege to Harfleur. The King of France offers his daughter Katherine in marriage to Henry, along with a few petty dukedoms, but Henry refuses the offer and opens the assault on Harfleur.

Act III, scene 1 - Outside the walls of Harfleur, Henry gathers with his nobles and troops and encourages them to make England proud, reminding them of their warlike heritage.

Act III, scene 2 - Nym, Bardolph, Pistol, and the Boy are malingering outside Harfleur hoping not to get involved in the battle, but Fluellen arrives and drives them forward into the fray. The Boy remains, and tells the audience that his three companions are naught but cowards and thieves. Fluellen (Welsh), Gower (English), Jamy (Scottish), and Macmorris (Irish), brave men all, argue and banter in their various dialects until they hear the news that Harfleur has called for a parley.

Act III, scene 3 - Henry, before the gates of Harfleur, parleys with the Governor of the town. He demands surrender, but says he cannot be responsible for the actions of his men otherwise. If the town is to avoid the slaughter of all its citizens, aged and infants alike, and the defilement of its daughters, it must give in or suffer the consequences. The Governor, having received no help from the dauphin, surrenders the city, and Henry agrees to spare all within and fortify the town against the French, then return to Calais.

Act III, scene 4 - In the palace of the French King, Katherine is trying to learn some English from her maid Alice. They go over the names of various body parts, which both women pronounce very badly. The entire scene is spoken in French.

Act III, scene 5 - The King of France and his nobles are astounded that Henry is making such progress in the war. They wonder where the English, for whom they have little respect, are finding the strength to win such victories. The King decides to send the full strength of his armies against England. Knowing that the English troops are badly outnumbered, tired, and hungry, he

is sure of victory, and tells his herald Montjoy to find what ransom the English are willing to pay after Henry is defeated and captured.

Act III, scene 6 - Fluellen and Gower are discussing the army's progress when Pistol comes to them, begging pardon for Bardolph, who has stolen an object from a church and been condemned to hang for it. They refuse to intercede because they consider the sentence just, and remark at Pistol's bad character. Henry arrives and Fluellen tells him of Bardolph's crime; the King reinforces the judgment and affirms that no English soldier is to take anything from the French without paying for it. Montjoy then appears and delivers the King of France's message, which demands surrender and a ransom equal to the value of the kingdom of England. Henry tells Montjoy that it is his intention to return to Calais and thence back to England. If the King of France will let them pass, fine; if not, then battle will be joined, despite the weakness of the English army.

Act III, scene 7 - Back in the French court, the nobles argue about the virtues of their horses, with the Dauphin praising his to the skies. Their ribald jests show they are not taking the coming battle seriously. They also insult the Dauphin's supposed valor behind his back.

Act IV Prologue - The Chorus describes the night before the Battle of Agincourt - the French, overconfident, playing dice in their tents, while the English, haggard and drawn, sit around their campfires wondering what the morrow will bring. Meanwhile, Henry circulates among them in disguise to sound out the troops and encourage them for the coming conflict.

Act IV, scene 1 - Henry encourages his nobles, then borrows a cloak and goes in disguise among the men. In his travels around the camp, he encounters Pistol, who expresses his love for the King but insults Fluellen; Gower and Fluellen arguing battle strategies; three soldiers, who express a desire to be back in England, and argue that, if they obey the King in an ignoble cause, the blame lies with the King, not with them. Henry responds by arguing that the King intends to use their service, not to cause their deaths. Perhaps they die because God is judging the sins they have committed in the past. So each man should look to his own soul, and make sure he is right before God as he approaches battle. Henry vows he will not be ransomed, but the soldiers do not believe him (not knowing who he is). Williams challenges him, and he and Henry exchange gloves so they can fight after the battle. After the soldiers leave, Henry meditates on the heavy burden placed on the shoulders of kings because of mere "ceremony." Eppingham warns him that the nobles have gathered and await him, and Henry prays that God would not hold his father's sin of usurping the crown against him, speaking of the penance he has done to atone for the crime.

Act IV, scene 2 - In the French camp, the nobles prepare for battle, scornfully suggesting that their page boys could beat the tired and hungry English troops, and worrying that there will not be enough work in the day's fighting for all of them to gain honors on the field of battle.

Act IV, scene 3 - The English, outnumbered five to one, wish more of their countrymen present, but Henry rallies them with a stirring speech conjuring up old men in taverns looking back to the glories of the battle won on this, St. Crispin's Day. Montjoy again appears and begs Henry to offer ransom and save the lives of his soldiers, but Henry refuses.

Act IV, scene 4 - On the field of battle, Pistol meets a French soldier and demands ransom in exchange for the Frenchman's life. The man offers him 200 crowns, and Pistol lets him go. The Boy, who had been translating, returns to join the other boys, who are guarding the supplies with no soldiers to assist them.

Act IV, scene 5 - In the French camp, things are obviously not going well. England is winning despite a huge numerical disadvantage, and the French nobles vow to rush into the battle and lose their lives rather than endure the shame of such a defeat.

Act IV, scene 6 - Henry receives a report of the noble deaths of Suffolk and York on the battlefield, then hears the French rallying cry. He then orders his men to kill their prisoners to keep them from participating in the renewed assault.

Act IV, scene 7 - Fluellen and Gower return to camp and discover that the boys guarding the supplies have been slaughtered by the French. Fluellen then waxes eloquent in his own fashion, comparing Henry to Alexander the Great. When Henry finds out that the boys have been killed, he again orders the deaths of all French prisoners unless they are willing to fight on the English side. Montjoy returns and begs leave for the French to survey the field and take away their dead. Henry, still uncertain of the outcome, asks the herald who has won the battle, and is assured that the English are victorious. Henry calls for an account of the dead. He then calls Williams, who had challenged him to a fight the night before, and encourages him to fulfill his vow when he finds his adversary. Meanwhile, he gives the glove in question to Fluellen, telling him that, if any should challenge him, he is the King's enemy and should be answered in kind. He then tells Warwick and Gloucester to be sure no real damage ensues from the coming confrontation.

Act IV, scene 8 - Williams and Fluellen meet, exchange insults, and prepare to fight, but Warwick and the King intercede. Henry reveals the truth of the previous night's encounter, forgives Williams, and fills his glove with crowns. Montjoy then appears with the casualty list; the French lost ten thousand men, mostly nobles, and had fifteen hundred taken prisoner, while the English lost four nobles and twenty-five commoners. Henry gives praise to God for the victory.

Act V Prologue - The Chorus speaks of Henry's triumphant return to England and the celebrations that ensued. He notes that, in the following year, Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund brokered a peace between England and France (which didn't last very long), and then that Henry returned to France in order to claim his bride.

Act V, scene 1 - Back in France, Fluellen meets Pistol, who had previously mocked his leek, the ensign of the Welsh. Fluellen insists that he eat the leek, and cudgels him until he submits. Pistol, having heard of the death of his wife from venereal disease, determines to return to England and become a pimp and thief.

Act V, scene 2 - Back in the French court, Henry has arrived to negotiate terms of peace. He has presented his demands, and the two sets of nobles retire to discuss them, leaving Henry alone with Katherine and her maid Alice. An awkward and humorous courtship follows as they attempt to surmount the language barrier, and they conclude with a kiss. The nobles return and announce

that France has agreed to all of Henry's demands. The son of Henry and Katherine, then, will become king of both England and France.

Act V Epilogue - The Chorus concludes the play by telling the audience that the son conceived, Henry VI, did indeed become king of England and France, but because he gained the throne as a child, the kingdom was mismanaged by regents to badly that France was lost and England again fell into warfare. The Epilogue is in the form of an Elizabethan sonnet.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. In William Shakespeare's *Henry V*, the playwright clearly intends to picture the young king as the ideal Christian prince. To what extent does he succeed in this endeavor? Pay special attention to the motives Henry ascribes to himself, as well as to his words and actions, then assess these in the light of Scripture.
2. Evaluate the argument between the King and Williams in Act IV, scene 1 of William Shakespeare's *Henry V*. Who is responsible for actions performed in battle and for the deaths of soldiers? Is it the king, or is it the men themselves? Support your conclusions from the text and from Scripture.
3. William Shakespeare's *Henry V* has been interpreted on stage and film in a variety of ways. Most notably, Laurence Olivier's film version is a stirring patriotic revel, calling the British to valor in the face of Hitler's threat to England's sovereignty, while Kenneth Branagh's version of the same story is a powerful anti-war discourse, showing the horrors of the battlefield and crying out for peace. Which, in your opinion, is the more faithful reading of the text? Why? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
4. In William Shakespeare's *Henry V*, Henry often argues that others are responsible for the bloodshed that will ensue if they refuse to give him what he wants. Evaluate this line of reasoning. Under what circumstances would it be valid? When does it constitute bullying or blame-shifting? Answer the question in the light of the specific circumstances in the play where the argument is used.
5. Lord Acton once said that "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Discuss this statement in the light of the character of the protagonist in William Shakespeare's *Henry V*. To what extent does the possession of power improve his character, and to what extent does it lead him to make immoral decisions? Be sure to cite specifics from the play in your argument.
6. William Shakespeare's *Henry V* uses ethnic stereotypes to depict the diversity of the participants in the Hundred Years' War. Do these stereotypes do more to create a sense of unity or a sense of division? In the English army in particular, do the differences among the soldiers ultimately draw them together or drive them apart? Cite specifics from the play to support your argument.

7. Discuss the role of the Chorus in William Shakespeare's *Henry V*. Why does Shakespeare utilize this device, which is rare for him? What does the Chorus contribute to the audience's appreciation of the play? To what extent would the Chorus continue to be needed in a film version of the story?
8. One of the key ideas in William Shakespeare's *Henry V* is the extent to which the protagonist has changed since ascending the throne. Using the dialogue of the play, discuss ways in which Henry has changed. How do these changes inform the reader about the qualities that are essential for a good king?
9. In William Shakespeare's *Henry V*, evaluate the protagonist as a motivational speaker. Assess the effectiveness of his rhetorical techniques, focusing particularly on the speeches before the battles of Harfleur (Act III, scene 1) and Agincourt (Act IV, scene 3). Be sure to deal with specific details of the speeches in your essay.
10. In William Shakespeare's *Henry V*, examine the King's ways of enforcing justice. At times in the play, Henry shows mercy to those who might expect punishment. At other times, he punishes without mercy, ordering the deaths of those who, in his eyes, deserve it. Assess his decisions, and evaluate his sense of justice in the light of Scripture.
11. In what sense is it true that England is the real hero of William Shakespeare's *Henry V*? Discuss the extent to which the main purpose of the play is engender patriotism in those who see it. Be sure to use specifics from the play to support your argument.
12. Discuss the contrast between the English and the French in William Shakespeare's *Henry V*. In what ways are the representatives of the two nations pictured differently? How do these differences help to communicate the major themes of the play? Be specific.
13. One of the themes of William Shakespeare's *Henry V* is that a good ruler is one who must be willing to set aside personal concerns for the good of the nation. To what extent does Henry show his willingness to do this? Choose three instances in the play where the King sets aside personal preference for the good of the people and evaluate his decision in each case. Are these actions truly the works of a good king?
14. To what extent may the protagonist of William Shakespeare's *Henry V* be viewed as a skillful actor? As he encounters different situations, he adapts his language and behavior to the requirements of each. Is this a good quality or a bad one? Is Henry a brilliant ruler or a hypocritical manipulator? Support your conclusions with specifics from the play.
15. Many rulers over the years have put on a show of religion in order to gain the support of their citizens - what in our country is often called "civil religion." Discuss the extent to which the Christianity manifested by the protagonist in William Shakespeare's *Henry V* is civil religion. Do you believe Henry's professions of Christian piety, or do they seem as hollow as those of many contemporary politicians? Support your argument with specifics from the play.