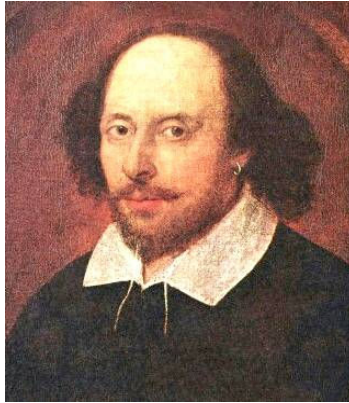


HENRY VI, part 2

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.

The three *Henry VI* plays were written in 1591-2, and thus were the first of Shakespeare's history plays. From an historical standpoint, the *Henry VI* plays begin the second group of four plays spanning the period of the Wars of the Roses; the overthrow of Richard II initiates the conflict between the houses of Lancaster and York, and the defeat of Richard III at Bosworth Field by the man who is to become Henry VII ends the war and begins the Tudor dynasty, of which Elizabeth was the final ruler. Shakespeare's main sources for these were Holinshed's *Chronicles* and Edward Hall's *Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York*. The portrayal of Jack Cade's rebellion is far from historical, incorporating many aspects of the Peasant

Revolt led by Wat Tyler in 1381 and ignoring certain positive aspects of Cade's character, while the story of the counterfeit miracle is taken from John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*; Foxe got the story from works by Thomas More and William Tyndale.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- King Henry VI - King of England; in his private life he is a good man, but he is an ineffective and inactive monarch.
- Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester - The Lord Protector, he acts for the good of England but is stymied by those who seek their own interests, finally being unjustly accused and murdered by Winchester and Suffolk.
- Henry Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester - Lately having purchased a cardinal's hat, Winchester seeks to augment his own power in any way possible; he plots the death of Gloucester, then dies himself after being visited by his victim's ghost.
- William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk - Having arranged the king's marriage to Margaret of Anjou, he hopes to use the relationship to increase his own power. After plotting the death of Gloucester, he is exiled, captured at sea, and beheaded.
- Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset - Advocate of the house of Lancaster, he is the sworn enemy of Richard of York.
- Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York - No longer Regent of France since the peace has been contracted, he is ambitious to enhance the powers of the house of York and desires the crown for himself.
- Richard Nevil, Earl of Salisbury - Conspirator with Richard of York against the crown.
- Richard Nevil, Earl of Warwick - His son and fellow-conspirator.
- Humphrey Stafford, Duke of Buckingham - A supporter of the king and an enemy of Richard of York.
- Sir James Fiennes, Lord Say - A nobleman loyal to the king who for some unknown reason has earned the enmity of Jack Cade. He and his son are captured by the rebel and beheaded.
- Alexander Iden - A gentleman who finds Jack Cade hiding in his garden and kills him in combat.
- Sir John Hume - A priest who has been hired by Eleanor to bring a witch and conjuror to her, but is also in the pay of Winchester and Suffolk to bring her and her husband to grief.

- Bolingbroke - A sorcerer who conducts a seance for Eleanor, and is caught in the act and hanged for treason.
- Jack Cade - A rabble-rouser from Kent who is hired by the Duke of York to stir up a rebellion in England; after many victories, his army deserts him and he is killed while hiding in Alexander Iden's garden.
- Queen Margaret - Henry's wife, she is a shrewd and powerful woman.
- Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester - Duke Humphrey's wife, she covets the crown for her husband despite his lack of personal ambition; she is exiled to the Isle of Man for treason against the king.
- Margery Jourdain - A witch who is burned at the stake for conducting a seance for Eleanor.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“Follow I must; I cannot go before
 While Gloucester bears this base and humble mind.
 Were I a man, a duke, and next of blood,
 I would remove these tedious stumbling blocks
 And smooth my way upon their headless necks;
 And being a woman, I will not be slack
 To play my part in Fortune's pageant.” (Eleanor, Iii, 61-67)

“The duke yet lives that Henry shall depose;
 But him outlive, and die a violent death.” (Spirit, Iiv, 29-30)

“Ah, Nell, forbear; thou aimest all awry.
 I must offend before I be attainted;
 And had I twenty times so many foes,
 And each of them had twenty times their power,
 All these could not procure me any scathe
 So long as I am loyal, true, and crimeless.” (Gloucester, IIiv, 58-63)

“Smooth runs the water where the brook is deep.” (Suffolk, IIIi, 53)

“Ah, thus King Henry throws away his crutch
 Before his legs be firm to bear his body.” (Gloucester, IIIi, 189-190)

“So bad a death argues a monstrous life.” (Warwick, IIIiii, 30)

“The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers.” (Dick the Butcher, IVii, 70)

“Away with him, away with him! He speaks Latin.” (Cade, IVvii, 52)

“Was never subject longed to be a king
As I do long and wish to be a subject.” (Henry VI, IVix, 5-6)

“Come, wife, let’s in, and learn to govern better;
For yet may England curse my wretched reign.” (Henry VI, IVix, 48-49)

“If I do not leave you all as dead as a doornail, I pray God I may never eat grass more.”
(Cade, IVx, 38-39)

NOTES

Act I, scene 1 - The play begins with Suffolk returning from France with Queen Margaret, having married her by proxy on behalf of the king. Henry welcomes her and introduces her to the other nobles. Suffolk carries with him the arrangements for peace with France, including the king’s marriage to Margaret without any dowry and the ceding of Anjou and Maine to Margaret’s father. The peace is to last for eighteen months. Henry readily agrees, though Gloucester disapproves of the pact, believing that England got the worst of the deal. After the king leaves, Gloucester speaks to the other nobles of the shamefulness of the treaty with the French. After asserting that no king of England should ever marry without a dowry while himself giving away two duchies, he stamps angrily from the room. Winchester then schemes to remove Gloucester from the office of Lord Protector, and York closes the scene with a soliloquy in which he affirms his desire to seize the crown from the house of Lancaster.

Act I, scene 2 - Eleanor encourages Gloucester to seek the crown for himself, but he insists that the good of England is his only goal and shuns all such ambition. Gloucester is troubled by a dream in which his staff of office has been broken by Winchester and the heads of Somerset and Suffolk mounted on the sharpened point of it. Eleanor, on the other hand, dreamed that she was being crowned in Westminster Abbey while Henry and Margaret bowed down to her. Gloucester reproves her and tells her to speak such things no more. A messenger then arrives inviting Gloucester to St. Albans to go hawking with the king and queen. Eleanor agrees to accompany him, but privately vows to pursue her ambitions without her husband’s help. She summons Sir John Hume, whom she has paid to bring Roger Bolingbroke, a conjuror, and Margery Jourdain, a witch, to answer the questions she has for them. After she leaves, Hume tells the audience in a soliloquy that he is also in the pay of Winchester and Suffolk to gain Eleanor’s confidence in order to bring her and her husband down.

Act I, scene 3 - A group of petitioners gathers waiting for the Lord Protector, but Suffolk passes with the queen. He takes their petitions, two of which speak of abuses of power by himself and Winchester and the third of which reports a man who said the Duke of York should be king. Suffolk sends them away and Margaret tears the petitions, and the two of them bemoan the weakness of the king. Margaret says he would make a better pope than king and complains that Eleanor is dressed better than she is. They determine to ally with Winchester and others to bring Gloucester down. The king then enters with his nobles and they discuss who ought to be the

Regent of France; some favor York, some Somerset. The factions quarrel, and the conversation turns to accusations against Gloucester by his enemies. He leaves in a huff, and the queen drops her fan, orders Eleanor to pick it up, and strikes her when she refuses. Gloucester returns, having calmed down, and the petitioner Peter, who accused his master of favoring the Duke of York for the crown, is brought in with the accused man. The king asks Gloucester to give his verdict, and he says that Somerset should become Regent to keep suspicion from accompanying York, and that the two petitioners should fight in single combat to decide their dispute.

Act I, scene 4 - Hume, along with Southwell, another priest, brings Bolingbroke and Margery Jourdain to Eleanor to conduct a seance. They summon up a spirit, who tells them in very ambiguous terms about the destinies of the king, Suffolk, and Somerset. Bolingbroke writes down the prophecies. York and Buckingham then break in with a guard, take the participants into custody and accuse them of treason when they see the content of the prophecies. As the scene closes, York invites Salisbury and Warwick, Richard Nevil and his son, to dine with him.

Act II, scene 1 - After hawking, Winchester, Suffolk, and the queen continue to accuse and torment Gloucester. Finally Winchester challenges him to a duel, which the Protector readily accepts. Henry, meanwhile, is oblivious to the whole thing and speaks only of heavenly matters. A man from St. Albans then enters and tells the king that a miracle has happened - a blind man has received his sight. The blind man is brought, is examined by Gloucester, and is proved to be a fraud. Buckingham then arrives with the news of the seance and Eleanor's part in it. Gloucester is ashamed of what his wife has done and tells the king she should be subject to the full penalty of the law if she is guilty. The king orders all to return to London where the matter may be examined fully.

Act II, scene 2 - York meets with the Nevils to argue the case for his claim to the throne. He goes through the complex genealogical information showing that he is the descendant of the third son of Edward III, while Henry VI only descends from the fourth son. The Nevils pledge their support to him, and the three decide to stand by and do nothing while Winchester, Suffolk, and the others try to bring Gloucester down, then make their move.

Act II, scene 3 - Eleanor is brought before the king for judgment. She is to be banished to the Isle of Man while Margery is to be burned at the stake and Bolingbroke, Hume, and Southwell are to be hanged. Gloucester, shamed and grief-stricken, asks leave to resign his office. Henry agrees and says he will henceforth be his own Protector, though he still loves Gloucester dearly. After Gloucester leaves, Peter and his master are brought in for their trial by combat. His master, an armorer, is so confident that he drinks several draughts offered by his friends. He then becomes so drunk that Peter kills him, thus confirming the armorer's treason.

Act II, scene 4 - Eleanor is being taken into exile, dressed as a barefoot penitent. Gloucester comes to see her off, and she warns him that he is too trusting in his own goodness - that his enemies will bring him down if he refuses to look to his own interests. Gloucester is then summoned to attend a session of Parliament and Eleanor is taken by Lord Stanley to exile on the Isle of Man.

Act III, scene 1 - Parliament meets, and Gloucester has not yet arrived. Henry wonders why, and Margaret speaks of his change in mood and fears it bodes treasonous intent. Suffolk states that Eleanor's treason must have been at her husband's request, and that his silence covers lust for the throne. Winchester, York, and Buckingham then chime in to accuse him, though the king proclaims his assurance of Gloucester's innocence. Somerset then enters and declares that all lands in France have been lost. York, in an aside, expresses his disappointment, since he hoped to rule France as well as England. Gloucester then arrives, and Suffolk arrests him for high treason, charging him with keeping money intended for the troops in France and torturing criminals in carrying out his office. He denies both, and the king assures him of his confidence that he will be proved innocent. Gloucester then accuses his accusers of seeking his life in order to augment their own power. He is taken away, and the king mourns the loss of his friend, saying that he can do nothing to help him. Henry then leaves the Parliament, telling the nobles to do as they please. Winchester, York, Suffolk, and Margaret all agree that Gloucester must die for the safety of the realm, though they know they have no charges against him that will stand up in court. Winchester says he will arrange for Gloucester's murder. A messenger then arrives and tells the nobles of a rebellion in Ireland. York sarcastically suggests that Somerset be sent to put it down since he had done so well in France. Despite Somerset's angry retort, York is deputized to lead an army against the Irish. In a closing soliloquy, York wonders at the stupidity of his enemies, who have now equipped him with the only thing he lacked to fulfill his ambitions - an army. He also tells the audience that he has arranged for a wild Kentishman named Jack Cade to stir up a rebellion in England, which he will then be happy to rush home and put down, in the process making himself king.

Act III, scene 2 - Two murderers, having dispatched Gloucester, report to Suffolk, and he tells them he will give them the promised reward. Henry then enters and summons Gloucester for trial only to be told that he has died in his sleep, after which the king faints. When he mourns Gloucester's death, Margaret reproaches him, saying he cared for his uncle more than he cares for her. Warwick then enters with a mob and tells the king that Winchester and Suffolk had Gloucester murdered. The body is brought in and Warwick points out the signs of foul play on the corpse. Suffolk challenges him to a duel for making such a false accusation, and they exchange insults. Salisbury then enters, telling the king that the crowd insists that they will kill Suffolk themselves unless Henry exiles him; the king responds that this is exactly what he intends to do. He orders Suffolk to leave the kingdom within three days. After Henry leaves the queen comforts Suffolk, encourages him to curse his enemies, and tells him that she will plead his cause or join him in exile. A messenger arrives to announce that Winchester is near death, having been visited by Gloucester's ghost. The queen and Suffolk embrace and kiss before they part.

Act III, scene 3 - Henry visits the dying Winchester, who confesses to the murder of Gloucester as he continues to see his ghost, then dies.

Act IV, scene 1 - After a battle at sea, Suffolk, in disguise, is captured. When he reveals his identity in order to try to save his life, the lieutenant who captured him rebukes him for his crimes against England in general and Gloucester in particular and orders him executed, which one of his sailors promptly does.

Act IV, scene 2 - Peasants taking part in Cade's rebellion rail against the aristocracy. Jack Cade arrives, makes claim to aristocratic lineage through the Mortimers (which his followers do not believe for a moment), and makes all sorts of outrageous promises about how life will be so much better when king and nobles are thrown down and he controls England. A clerk who has been captured is brought before Cade, who condemns him to hang because he can read and write. Humphrey and William Stafford approach and demand the surrender of Cade and his forces, telling the peasants that they will enjoy the king's pardon if they leave now. Cade mocks them and his followers refuse to leave, so the Staffords tell them that they can expect no mercy.

Act IV, scene 3 - In the battle that follows, both Staffords are killed. Cade's men move toward London with the intention of emptying all the jails when they get there.

Act IV, scene 4 - In London, the queen enters with Suffolk's head, deeply grieving. Henry, rather than sending an army to slaughter the rebels, requests a parley with their leader. When he hears that the rebels have taken London Bridge and entered the city and that the poor of the city have joined their numbers, Henry and Margaret flee to Killingworth. They encourage Lord Say, with whom the rebels have a particular quarrel, to join them, but he refuses and decides to stay in London incognito, trusting, as Gloucester did, in his innocence.

Act IV, scene 5 - Lord Scales, defending the Tower of London, prepares to face the rebel force.

Act IV, scene 6 - Cade, now clearly mad, declares that any that call him Jack Cade rather than Lord Mortimer should die, and orders the execution of one of his own soldiers who brings him a message in the forbidden name. Hearing that the king's forces have gathered at Smithfield, he orders his troops to go there after burning London Bridge and the Tower.

Act IV, scene 7 - Cade proclaims the destruction of English law and the courts, the disbanding of Parliament, and says that his word alone will be law and that all property will be held in common. Lord Say is captured, accused of horrible crimes like opening schools, printing books, and speaking Latin. He pleads that he has always spoken for the cause of the poor, but his pleas are ignored and he and his son are beheaded. Cade then declares that no woman will henceforth marry unless he enjoys her first, and orders that the heads of Say and his son be carried through the streets on pikes.

Act IV, scene 8 - Lords Buckingham and Clifford meet Cade's mob and offer amnesty to any who will swear allegiance to the king. After hearing Clifford's rhetoric, they cheer for the king. Cade then exhorts him and they determine to follow him. Clifford speaks again, and they again take the king's side. Cade, seeing which way the wind is blowing, curses them all and flees, after which Buckingham puts a price of a thousand crowns on his head.

Act IV, scene 9 - Clifford brings Cade's army to the king, and Henry pardons them all. A messenger then arrives to announce that York has landed with an army of peasants, allegedly to see that his enemy, the Duke of Somerset, is imprisoned. Henry sends Somerset to the Tower for his own protection and sends Buckingham to meet with York.

Act IV, scene 10 - Cade, who has been hiding out for five days, is starving, and emerges in Alexander Iden's garden. Iden doesn't know who he is, but Cade attacks him despite Iden's warning that he is far stronger and more capable. Cade dies in the conflict, but not before cursing Iden. Iden the orders that Cade's head be cut off and taken to the king, and that the body be left on a dunghill for crows to eat.

Act V, scene 1 - York arrives with his Irish army to seize the throne. Buckingham meets him and York insists he has only come to see that the traitor Somerset receives his just deserts; upon hearing that Cade has been defeated and Somerset imprisoned, he tells his army to leave and meet him the next day to receive their wages. Iden then arrives with Cade's head and is knighted by the king. The queen then appears with Somerset, and York reveals his true colors, claiming to be the rightful heir to the throne. Henry challenges him as a traitor, and York calls forth the Nevils, his chief supporters. They determine that a battle will be fought the following day between their forces.

Act V, scene 2 - On the battlefield at St. Albans, York encounters and kills Clifford, then his son Richard kills Somerset. Young Clifford bears his father's body from the battlefield. Henry and Margaret flee toward London.

Act V, scene 3 - York and his forces win the battle, but gain no final victory because Henry still lives and is free.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. Shakespeare's history plays spend a lot of time addressing the issue of what makes a good king. Assess the contributions to this subject found in *Henry VI, part 2*. Consider not only Henry himself, but other kinglike figures in the story like Gloucester, Winchester, York, and even Jack Cade.
2. Discuss the treatment of women in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 2*. The cast contains only three women, but all play significant, albeit small, roles in the story. What do these women have in common? What do their similarities, as well as their differences, communicate about Shakespeare's understanding of the role of women in society? Remember that the play was written during the reign of Elizabeth, the most powerful woman of the sixteenth century.
3. Evaluate the personality of the title character in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 2*. Is he a good man? Is he a good king? What qualities differentiate the one from the other? Support your analysis with details from the play.

4. One of the criticisms leveled at President George W. Bush by his supporters is that he has not succeeded in putting his principles into practice in a way that actually produces change. Many have considered the question of whether moral virtue or competence is the more important characteristic of a ruler. Use William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 2* to consider the question. Which does Shakespeare believe to be the more important? Which do you think is more important? What does the Bible say about the subject?
5. One character in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 2* remarks that Henry would be better off as pope than as king of England. Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with details from the play.
6. In William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 2*, Henry is pictured as a godly man. Does Shakespeare consider this an advantage in a man who would be king? Why or why not? What are the consequences of his godliness? Be sure to use incidents and quotations from the play in answering the question.
7. In William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 2*, Eleanor of Gloucester is willing to do almost anything to secure the throne for her husband though he shares no such ambition. Compare her character with that of the protagonist's wife in *Macbeth*. What do Eleanor and Lady Macbeth have in common? In what significant ways are they different? Be sure to consider the roles they play in the plots of the dramas as well as their personalities and their relationships to their husbands.
8. Compare the prophecies of the spirit in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 2* to those of the witches in *Macbeth*. In your analysis, be sure to consider the language, content, and consequences of the prophecies as they are worked out in the two plays.
9. Compare and contrast the character of Gloucester in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 2* to that of Talbot in *Henry VI, part 1*. Both men are heroes, but of a very different sort. Some critics have suggested that both are doomed because they are anachronisms, belonging to an earlier era. Others have pointed out that the shift in focus from a soldier to a politician indicates something critical about the direction in which English history was going in the late fifteenth century. What conclusions do you draw from the similarities and differences to be found in the two characters?
10. Analyze the rhetoric of Jack Cade in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 2*. Be sure to go beyond the obvious extremism of his statements and consider the positions he is espousing. Do they sound like any other ideas you have encountered in your studies? What do you think Shakespeare is hoping to accomplish by painting Cade in the way he does?
11. William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 2* was written almost two centuries before the founding of the United States. The picture of democracy portrayed in the play, however, shows how many continued to think of it as late as the end of the eighteenth century. What is Shakespeare's view of democracy? Why does he believe in the necessity of a strong monarchy? Use specifics from the play to support your answer.

12. Analyze the system of justice portrayed in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 2*. Using specific instances from the play, show the extent to which the justice system became an instrument of injustice and oppression. What is Shakespeare trying to say about the nature of a truly just government? Would you conclude that his ideas of justice are supported by Scripture or not?
13. In William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 2*, do you consider the nobles or the common people to be the greater threat to the welfare of the kingdom? Why? Support your answer with specifics from the play.
14. In the fourteenth century rebel leader John Ball said, "When Adam delved and Eve span / Who was then the gentleman?" The tradition of anti-aristocratic sentiment among the common people thus existed long before the rebellion of Jack Cade portrayed in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 2*. What is Shakespeare's view of the aristocracy as presented in the play? Does he view the system as corrupt, or merely those who happen to lead it at the time? Why do you think so? Support your argument with specifics from the play.