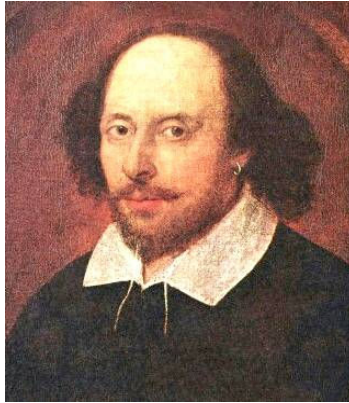


HENRY VI, part 3

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*. As usual, Shakespeare compresses chronology, since the time between the Battle of Wakefield (1460) and the Battle of Tewkesbury (1471) was eleven years.

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. He is twice deposed and once restored, and is finally murdered in prison by Richard, Duke of Gloucester.
- Edward, Prince of Wales - Henry's son and rightful heir, but Henry negotiates away his patrimony in order to remain on the throne. He is eventually captured and murdered after the Battle of Tewkesbury.
- John, Lord Clifford - The queen's most ardent supporter, he seeks revenge on all the house of York because of the death of his father in battle against them; he and the queen kill York after capturing him in battle, but he dies in an ensuing conflict.
- Henry and Edmund Beaufort, Dukes of Somerset; Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland; Ralph Nevil, Earl of Westmoreland; John de Vere, Earl of Oxford - Nobles supporting the Lancastrian cause.
- Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York - Ambitious to enhance the powers of the house of York, he desires the crown for himself and is willing to fight Henry and all Lancastrians to claim it. He is captured in battle by the forces of the queen and is killed by Margaret and Clifford.
- Edward, Earl of March - York's son, he succeeds him as Duke of York and eventually becomes King Edward IV.
- Edmund, Earl of Rutland - York's youngest son, he is killed by Lord Clifford in revenge for the death of his father.
- George, Duke of Clarence - Second son of the Duke of York, he defects to the Lancastrian side and later returns to support his brother.
- Richard, Duke of Gloucester - Third son of York, he is brutal and ambitious and murders both King Henry VI and his son; he ultimately becomes King Richard III.
- Richard Nevil, Earl of Warwick - York's most ardent supporter who goes over to Henry's side when Edward marries Lady Grey while he is seeking the hand of Lady Bona on his behalf. He dies in the battle at Barnet outside Coventry.
- Thomas Beaufort, Duke of Exeter - Supporter of the king who is convinced by York's arguments and changes sides, then later supports Henry again.
- John Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk; John Nevil, Marquess of Montague; Sir John and Sir Hugh Mortimer; William, Lord Hastings - Nobles supporting the Yorkist cause.

- Henry, Earl of Richmond - A young man who is blessed by Henry VI and later becomes Henry VII, the founder of the Tudor dynasty.
- Louis XI - King of France, he sends aid to Henry after Edward reneges on his offer to marry his sister Bona.
- Queen Margaret - Henry's wife, a shrewd and powerful woman; she commands the armies of the king because he is too weak to do so.
- Lady Grey - A widow who marries Edward of York and ultimately becomes Queen Elizabeth when he takes the throne as Edward IV.
- Lady Bona - Sister of the King of France; Warwick tries unsuccessfully to arrange a marriage between her and Edward IV.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“But for a kingdom any oath may be broken.
I would break a thousand oaths to reign one year.” (Edward, Iii, 16-17)

“O tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide!” (York, Iiv, 137)

“Why, I can smile, and murder whiles I smile.” (Richard, IIIii, 182)

“'Tis better using France than trusting France.
Let us be backed with God, and with the seas,
Which he hath giv'n for fence impregnable,
And with their helps only defend ourselves.
In them and in ourselves our safety lies.” (Hastings, IVi, 42-46)

NOTES

Act I, scene 1 - The play begins in the house of Parliament after the battle in which York defeated the forces of Henry VI. York, his sons, and his nobles - Warwick, Norfolk, and Montague - enter Parliament and York seats himself on the throne. Henry VI enters with his nobles - Northumberland, Clifford, Westmoreland, and Exeter. The nobles demand the immediate death of the traitor, but the king reminds them that York has an army outside that controls the city. York demands that Henry abdicate and yield the throne to him. Exeter accepts York's reasoning and declares his support for him. Henry, fearing that all will desert his cause, proposes a compromise - that he reign unmolested until his death, but that the crown then pass to York and his descendants. York agrees, but Henry's nobles are so disgusted by his weakness that they stalk out of the chamber. The queen then arrives with her young son Edward, Prince of Wales, and rebukes Henry for yielding so easily, expressing her fears that he has just signed his own death warrant as well as that of his son. She and Edward then head northward to take command of an army of the king's followers, determined to defeat the Yorkists once and for all.

Act I, scene 2 - At the Duke of York's castle, his sons Edward and Richard, along with Montague, try to convince him to take the throne by force because his oath was of no effect, having been sworn before a usurper. He agrees and prepares to send them around the kingdom to gather his supporters, but then hears that the queen has arrived to besiege his castle with an army of twenty thousand men. He has only five thousand men available, but is determined to meet them in the field.

Act I, scene 3 - Rutland, youngest son of the Duke of York, and his tutor encounter Clifford, hot for revenge against those who killed his father. The tutor is dragged away and Rutland is slain despite begging for his life.

Act I, scene 4 - Queen Margaret and her forces win the battle despite the heroic efforts of York's sons Edward and Richard, and York is captured. Clifford and Margaret mock him, force him to sit on a molehill and wear a paper crown, tell him of Rutland's death, then kill him and fix his head to the battlements of his castle. Northumberland, however, sympathizes with York's grief over the death of his son.

Act II, scene 1 - Edward and Richard see three suns in the sky and watch them come together and believe the sign speaks of the ascendancy of the three surviving sons of York. They then learn of the death of their father and how it occurred and hear that Warwick and his forces were defeated by the queen at St. Albans. They then determine to regather their troops and march on London, but a messenger arrives telling them that the queen seeks a parley.

Act II, scene 2 - Parliament has revoked the king's agreement and made his son Edward heir to the throne. Outside York Castle, Henry mourns the death of York, whose head is on the battlements. Margaret and Clifford ridicule his weakness for mourning the death of his enemy. He then dubs his son a knight. Edward and Richard arrive for the parley and the two sides exchange angry words, threats, and insults. Neither side will yield, so both prepare for battle.

Act II, scene 3 - The Yorkists are losing the battle. Edward, Richard, and Clarence are exhausted and Warwick hears news of the death of his brother. They vow to fight on.

Act II, scene 4 - Richard and Clifford meet and fight. When Warwick arrives, Clifford flees.

Act II, scene 5 - Henry stands aside from the battle, having been told by the queen that she can fight better without him around. He sits down on a molehill, mourns the great loss of life, and wishes he could be a simple shepherd. As he sits there, he encounters a son who has inadvertently killed his father and a father who has unknowingly killed his son (Shakespeare here shows the extent to which this war pits relatives against relatives). Margaret, the young Prince, and Exeter then enter and tell Henry that Edward and Richard have routed their forces and that they must flee.

Act II, scene 6 - Clifford staggers on with an arrow in his neck, faints, then dies. Edward, Richard, and their men arrive and decree that Clifford's head will replace that of their father on the battlements of the castle. They mock the corpse, then head for London for Edward's coronation. Edward makes Richard Duke of Gloucester and George Duke of Clarence. Warwick

goes to France to arrange a marriage between Edward and Lady Bona, sister of the French king, hoping once more to unite the two kingdoms.

Act III, scene 1 - Edward has been crowned and Margaret and her son have gone to France for aid. Henry, after hiding in Scotland, returns in disguise. Two keepers of the forest spot him while they are hunting deer. He speaks of the loss of his kingdom and fears that Warwick's mission to France will succeed while Margaret's will fail. Once the keepers realize who he is they take him into custody.

Act III, scene 2 - Lady Grey, whose husband was killed at St. Albans and his land confiscated by Henry, comes to Edward to plead for the restoration of her lands. Edward then attempts to seduce her, telling her that she will get her lands back if she sleeps with him. She refuses and prepares to leave, but Edward, unable to resist her charms, tells her that he will make her his queen. She is astounded at this and believes herself unworthy, but Edward insists. Edward then gets word that Henry has been captured and orders him taken to the Tower of London. After all leave, Richard speaks for the first time of his ambitions and tells the audience that he intends to remove all obstacles between him and the crown - Henry, the Prince of Wales, Edward, and Clarence, and their children if necessary. In order to do so, he will play whatever role is necessary. Here Shakespeare is revealing the villain who speaks similar language at the beginning of *Richard III*.

Act III, scene 3 - At the French court, Margaret asks the King of France for aid. Warwick then arrives and pleads his case. The two sides quarrel in front of the French king. Louis decides to give his sister in marriage to Edward. A messenger then arrives informing all that Edward has married Lady Grey. Warwick is so upset that he switches sides on the spot and swears to support Henry, even to the point of leading an army from France to invade England. Louis at this point changes his mind and offers help to Margaret. In order to cement the alliance, Warwick offers his daughter to the young Prince of Wales in marriage, to which Margaret and he readily agree.

Act IV, scene 1 - Richard and Clarence are clearly upset about Edward's marriage because it has earned the enmity, not only of France, but also of the previously loyal Warwick. Edward has also been carelessly arranging marriages that favor his new bride's family and giving titles for reasons no better than flattering speeches. Clarence is so disgusted that he defects to Warwick, hoping to win his younger daughter for himself in marriage; Somerset defects also. The other nobles say they will remain loyal to Edward.

Act IV, scene 2 - Clarence and Somerset join Warwick's army, and Warwick agrees that Clarence will marry his daughter. They then plan to surprise the careless Edward with a night attack.

Act IV, scene 3 - Warwick, Clarence, and the others surprise Edward in his tent at night and capture him. Hastings and Richard flee. Warwick takes the crown from Edward's head and goes toward London to release Henry from the Tower.

Act IV, scene 4 - Queen Elizabeth speaks to her brother, Lord Rivers, of the capture of Edward by Warwick. She fears for her own life and that of the baby in her womb, and the two of them flee to sanctuary.

Act IV, scene 5 - Richard and Sir William Stanley go to the estate of the Archbishop of York and rescue Edward. They intend to flee to Flanders.

Act IV, scene 6 - Henry is freed from the Tower and once again wears the crown. He rewards Warwick by entrusting him with the power of the government and makes Clarence Lord Protector; Henry meanwhile intends to retire to a religious life. He raises the question of the succession, but is interrupted by a messenger telling him of Edward's escape and flight to Burgundy. Henry asks that his wife and son be brought back from France. Somerset then introduces the king to a young man, Henry, Earl of Richmond. The king speaks flattering words about Henry's future as the savior of the realm (this is Henry Tudor, later to become Henry VII - a man about whom Shakespeare had good reason to speak well). Young Richmond is to be taken to safety in Brittany.

Act IV, scene 7 - Edward has returned to England with troops from Burgundy and approaches his castle. The mayor forbids him entrance, but he argues that he is still the Duke of York and a friend of Henry. The mayor then admits him, and he immediately proclaims himself king again and prepares to do battle against Henry's forces.

Act IV, scene 8 - Henry hears that Edward has landed and sends his men to raise more armies. After they leave, Edward enters the palace, arrests Henry, and sends him back to the Tower. Armies from both sides plan to gather at Coventry.

Act V, scene 1 - Warwick is in the town of Coventry waiting for reinforcements to arrive. Edward comes instead and demands his surrender. Warwick refuses, and soon the expected reinforcements arrive, except that Clarence asks Edward's forgiveness and again changes sides. Both armies move toward Barnet to prepare for battle.

Act V, scene 2 - Warwick, seriously wounded, is left by Edward to die. Somerset speaks of Montague's death, and tells him that Margaret has landed at the head of an army from France. Warwick then dies.

Act V, scene 3 - Edward's army wins the battle, but hears of the queen's landing and prepares to meet her forces at Tewkesbury.

Act V, scene 4 - The two armies gather at Tewkesbury, and the forces of Edward are victorious. Margaret, her son, Oxford, and Somerset are captured.

Act V, scene 5 - Oxford is sent to prison and Somerset is beheaded. After some hostile banter, Edward, Clarence, and Richard together stab and kill the young Prince of Wales. Richard is ready to kill Margaret, but Edward prevents it. Richard then leaves for London to attend to business in the Tower.

Act V, scene 6 - Richard goes to the Tower of London and murders Henry, but before he does Richard tells him of the death of his son and Henry prophesies that the realm will rue Richard's career. Richard then tells the audience that he intends to dispose of Clarence and Edward as well.

Act V, scene 7 - Edward reigns unopposed, and the kingdom for now knows peace. Elizabeth has given Edward a son, young Edward, now the Prince of Wales. Clarence and Richard kiss the baby, but Richard means him no good. As the play ends, Edward orders Margaret sent back to her father in France.

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 3*. Consider not only Henry himself, but other kinglike figures in the story like Edward, York, Richard, and Louis XI.
2. Discuss the treatment of women in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 3*. 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 3*. 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 3* 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. In William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 3*, 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.
6. In William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 3*, Queen Margaret leads armies into battle on a number of occasions. Compare and contrast her leadership qualities with those of Joan of Arc in *Henry VI, part 1*. Compare the two women with regard to personality, motivation, and leadership skills.

7. In William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 3*, the playwright lays the foundation essential for establishing several key characters that will later play important roles in *Richard III*. Give special attention to the three sons of the Duke of York - Edward, Clarence, and Richard. Why is the character development found in the earlier play essential to an understanding of the action in the later one?
8. In William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 3*, the playwright lays the foundation essential for establishing several key characters that will later play important roles in *Richard III*. Give special attention to the two queens, Margaret and Elizabeth, who appear in both plays. To what extent are their characters in the latter play extensions of what we see of them in the earlier one, and to what extent does the latter play show these women in ways we would not have been led to expect? Discuss the consistency with which Shakespeare portrays these women in the two plays.
9. Analyze the role of unwise marriages in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, parts 2 and 3*. When Henry VI marries Margaret, who has no money and brings no useful political alliance, he is criticized by his nobles, particularly by the house of York. Then Edward IV marries Elizabeth Grey, who has property but no real wealth, while rejecting a political alliance with France in the form of marriage to the king's sister Bona. What is Shakespeare trying to say here? Does he believe that the rulers were wrong to contract these marriages, or were they right to marry for love? Support your conclusion with specific quotations from the plays.
10. Discuss the view of marriage in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, parts 2 and 3*. When Henry VI marries Margaret, who has no money and brings no useful political alliance, he is criticized by his nobles, particularly by the house of York. Then Edward IV marries Elizabeth Grey, who has property but no real wealth, while rejecting a political alliance with France in the form of marriage to the king's sister Bona. Yet in other of his plays such as *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare advocates marrying for love rather than for money or family connections. Is the playwright being inconsistent here, or can you see some common theme that ties together the picture of marriage in his plays. Use examples from the *Henry VI* plays, but you may also introduce material from other Shakespeare plays of your choosing in answering the question.
11. One of the great challenges to the reader of William Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays is to keep people straight. Who is on which side? How do the rapid changes in allegiance affect the action? Making matters worse is the fact that so many characters have the same names - especially Richards and Edwards. To what extent is this confusion part of the effect Shakespeare seeks to create? Could this be part of his message? Discuss the role played by the confusion of characters in the reader's response to these plays, using details from the plays to support your conclusions.

12. Analyze the role of family ties in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 3*. The Wars of the Roses were family conflicts, since the houses of Lancaster and York were both descended from sons of Edward II. In what other ways does the play reflect the damage done when familial bonds are broken or ignored? Use specific examples from the play to show Shakespeare's view of the importance of family loyalty and solidarity.
13. Analyze the extent to which family ties become a metaphor for the unity of the realm in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 3*. To what extent do the family squabbles among the nobles lead to the disruption of the kingdom as a whole? Why does Shakespeare believe that all Englishmen are harmed when their leaders cannot live in harmony? Why was this message particularly pertinent during the reign of Elizabeth, when Shakespeare wrote this play?
14. Analyze the changes that occur in the title character in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 3*. What does the playwright intend the decline of the monarch to symbolize? Discuss both the nature and significance of the king's personality changes in relation to the overall themes of the play.
15. Discuss the character of Richard, Duke of Gloucester in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 3*. What makes him the most interesting character in the play? Consider particularly his use of language. How does this set him apart from the other characters? How does this help him to achieve his goals?
16. Discuss the character of Richard, Duke of Gloucester in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 3*. What makes him the most interesting character in the play? Consider particularly his physical deformity. How does this set him apart from the other characters? How does this help to establish his motivation? How does this influence the way he is treated by other characters?
17. Compare and contrast the Yorkist leaders Edward and Richard in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 3*. Deal with issues like their ambitions, their loyalties, their motivations, and the consistency of their actions.