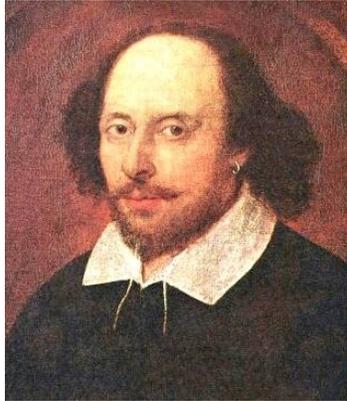


HENRY VI, part 1

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 Joan of Arc shows a decided English bias and differs markedly from the story of her career told by the French and supported by the Catholic Church.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- King Henry VI - Young king of England and son of the heroic Henry V, he is weak and vacillating.
- Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester - Uncle of the king and Lord Protector at the beginning of Henry VI's rule.
- John, Duke of Bedford - Another uncle of the king, and Regent of France; he dies outside the gates of Rouen.
- Thomas Beaufort, Duke of Exeter - Great-uncle of the king, and his guardian; he serves as a sort of chorus, commenting on the action.
- Henry Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester - Great-uncle of the king, a power-hungry and irreligious clergyman who finances houses of prostitution in order to augment his income and lusts for the throne.
- John Beaufort, Duke of Somerset - Leading member of the house of Lancaster and wearer of the red rose.
- Richard Woodville - Lieutenant of the Tower of London, he denies Gloucester entrance on orders from the Bishop of Winchester.
- Richard Plantagenet - Nobleman of the house of York, he later becomes Duke of York; he is the son of the Earl of Cambridge, executed by Henry V, and the father of the man who will later become King Richard III.
- Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March - Richard's uncle, in prison for years for opposing the ascension of Henry IV to the throne; he dies after telling Richard of his family's history.
- Lord Talbot - Heroic English commander who is defeated and captured by the French, is ransomed, wins victories at Orleans and Rouen, is made Earl of Shrewsbury, but later dies in battle.
- John Talbot - His son, who bravely stands by his father in combat and is killed shortly before his father dies.
- Duke of Burgundy - One of Talbot's fellow commanders, he is convinced by Joan of Arc to defect and join the French side.
- Sir John Falstaff - A cowardly English knight who flees in the midst of battle twice, costs the English a victory, and is ultimately banished; he is not the same man as the comic figure of the *Henry IV* and *Henry V* plays (that Falstaff died in the middle of *Henry V*).

- Thomas Montacute, Earl of Salisbury - He is in charge of the siege of Orleans and fights bravely against the French, but is killed by a sniper's bullet.
- William de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk - He captures Margaret of Anjou in battle and convinces her to become Henry's queen, though he would have preferred to marry her himself; through her he hopes to influence the future course of the kingdom.
- Charles, Dauphin of France - Leads the French rebellion against English rule, and later becomes King Charles VII; he falls in love with Joan of Arc after she defeats him in single combat.
- Reignier, Duke of Anjou - King of Naples and one of the commanders of the French forces, his daughter later marries Henry VI.
- Duke of Alencon, Bastard of Orleans - French nobles in the Dauphin's army; the latter introduces the Dauphin to Joan of Arc.
- Joan de Pucelle (Joan of Arc) - She leads French troops in lifting the siege of Orleans, has an affair with the Dauphin, and later is burned at the stake as a witch by the English. In this play she is pictured as manipulative and immoral - apparently the popular view of her in Shakespeare's England.
- Countess of Auvergne - French noblewoman who invites Talbot to visit her castle in order to take him prisoner, but he outwits her.
- Margaret of Anjou - Daughter of Reignier, she is captured in battle and convinced to marry the king of England.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night!
Comets, importing change of times and states,
Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky
And with them scourge the bad revolting stars
That have consented unto Henry's death -
King Henry the Fifth, too famous to live long!
England ne'er lost a king of so much worth.” (Bedford, Ii, 1-7)

“Glory is like a circle in the water,
Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself
Till by broad spreading it disperse to naught.” (Pucelle, Iii, 133-135)

“Hark, countrymen! Either renew the fight
Or tear the lions out of England's coat.” (Talbot, Iv, 27-28)

“And I have heard it said, unbidden guests
Are often welcomest when they are gone.” (Bedford, Iiii, 55-56)

“Civil dissension is a viperous worm
That gnaws the bowels of the commonwealth.” (Henry VI, IIIi, 72-73)

“Done like a Frenchman - turn and turn again.” (Pucelle, IIIiii, 85)

“‘Tis much when sceptres are in children’s hands,
But more when envy breeds unkind division.
There comes the ruin, there begins confusion.” (Exeter, IVi, 192-194)

“The fraud of England, not the force of France,
Hath now entrapped the noble-minded Talbot.
Never to England shall he bear his life,
But dies betrayed to fortune by your strife.” (Sir William Lucy, IViv, 36-39)

“Come, side by side together live and die,
And soul with soul from France to heaven fly.” (Talbot, IVv, 54-55)

NOTES

Act I, scene 1 - The play opens with the funeral of Henry V, struck down in his prime. The signs in the heavens are ominous and the tone is mournful because England has lost its glorious young monarch. Almost immediately conflict breaks out between Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, the Lord Protector, and the Bishop of Winchester, a cynical and worldly clergyman. Bedford calms the fray, but soon a messenger arrives and announces that half of France, conquered by Henry V, had been lost because of a rebellion among the French. The English army had experienced defeat after defeat, being ill-equipped, outnumbered, and discouraged because of disunity among the generals on the home front. Another messenger then arrives and announces that the Dauphin has been crowned at Rheims and that the lords previously loyal to England were rapidly joining his faction. One particular heavy blow is that Talbot, one of the best of the English commanders, had been heavily outnumbered, defeated, and captured. Bedford, the Regent of France, determines to go there immediately with ten thousand men and subdue the rebellious French. Gloucester goes to prepare for young Henry VI’s coronation, while Exeter considers how to protect the new king. Meanwhile, Winchester schemes how he might turn the occasion to his own benefit.

Act I, scene 2 - In France, Charles and his troops try to lift the siege of Orleans but are driven back, despite outnumbering the English ten to one, largely because of the bravery of Salisbury, who commands the siege. Joan of Arc then appears and tells Charles of her visions of the Virgin Mary, saying that God has told her to lead the French armies to victory. Charles is skeptical and challenges her to trial by combat, which she wins rather handily. He then falls in love with her and proposes marriage, but she postpones such talk until after the military victories are won.

Act I, scene 3 - Gloucester arrives at the Tower of London to do his duty as Lord Protector but finds that Winchester has gotten there first and has commanded Woodville, who is in charge of the Tower, to deny him entrance. Winchester appears and he and Gloucester exchange insults, then they and their men exchange blows. The Lord Mayor of London then arrives and stops the fight, decreeing that all must set aside their arms on pain of death. Gloucester and Winchester then part with threats and insults, with the latter warning that he will have the former's head before long.

Act I, scene 4 - The scene begins inside Orleans, where the master gunner and his boy are talking about aiming a gun at the tower where the English go to see what is going on in the city. On that tower, Salisbury and Talbot converse. The former commands the siege, while the latter has recently been released by the French in a prisoner exchange. As they and other lords discuss where to attack the city, shots ring out and Salisbury and another lord fall. As Talbot mourns the death of his friend and determines to take revenge on the French, a messenger arrives to inform him of the French army that has come to lift the siege under the leadership of the Dauphin and Joan de Pucelle.

Act I, scene 5 - The English flee before Joan and the French forces. Talbot meets Joan in combat with neither gaining the victory, but the siege is lifted and the English forced to retreat.

Act I, scene 6 - The French celebrate the victory at Orleans and Charles speaks lavishly of the honors he intends to bestow on Joan.

Act II, scene 1 - Talbot, Bedford, and Burgundy gather outside the walls of Orleans with scaling ladders, determined to retake the city; they believe they have the advantage since the French have been partying all day and night. They indeed succeed, driving out the Dauphin, Joan, and the rest, who are unable to understand how the English gained entrance to the town.

Act II, scene 2 - Talbot, to celebrate the sack of Orleans, intends to bury Salisbury's body in the cathedral and erect a tablet speaking of his glory in battles against the French. He wonders what has become of the Dauphin and Joan, and Burgundy says he drove them from their bed, which they apparently were sharing. A messenger then arrives to tell Talbot that the Countess of Auvergne desires the honor of meeting him at her castle.

Act II, scene 3 - At the castle of the Countess of Auvergne, she plots with her porter to take Talbot prisoner and rid the French of him once and for all. Talbot enters, the porter locks the door, and she tells him that she has tricked him and he is her captive. Talbot, not startled at all, blows his horn and a company of soldiers enters - he was clearly prepared for treachery. She then asks his forgiveness and invites them all to stay for dinner.

Act II, scene 4 - A quarrel breaks out between Richard Plantagenet and the Earl of Somerset over the claims of their family lines. Richard is the great-grandson of King Edward III, but Somerset reminds him that his father, the Earl of Cambridge, had been executed by Henry V for treason. Each plucks a rose as an emblem of his cause - Richard a white one for the house of York, and Somerset a red one for the house of Lancaster. Other nobles then pluck blossoms and choose sides accordingly. The groundwork is thus laid for the Wars of the Roses. The scene also indicates that Parliament will soon be meeting to mediate the dispute between Gloucester and Winchester.

Act II, scene 5 - Edmund Mortimer is brought from prison to meet his nephew, Richard Plantagenet. Mortimer has been in prison for years for opposing the ascent of Henry IV to the throne when Richard II, heir of Edward III, was deposed. Richard asks him about the family history, and he tells him that the Yorkists descend from Lionel Duke of Clarence, third son of Edward III, while the Lancastrians descend from John of Gaunt (Henry IV's father), fourth son of the same king. Mortimer dies, and Richard expresses his intention to go to Parliament and plead the case of his family before that august body.

Act III, scene 1 - Lords of Parliament enter. Richard has prepared his charges against Winchester in writing, but the latter grabs the papers and tears it up. Richard then verbalizes his charges - that Winchester is a usurer, sexually immoral, has twice attempted to take Richard's life, and has designs on the throne. Winchester replies that he would be richer if he were as greedy as Richard suggests, and counters that Richard himself covets the throne. A quarrel then breaks out between Winchester and Gloucester in which other nobles soon join. The young king tries to calm things down, but noise of a riot outside the palace can be heard - the followers of Gloucester and Winchester, forbidden to bear arms, are throwing stones at one another. Gloucester tries to calm his followers, and finally the two enemies shake hands, though Winchester in an aside indicates his lack of sincerity in doing so. The king then makes Richard Duke of York, and Gloucester proposes that the coronation take place in France in order to encourage the troops. Exeter, in a closing soliloquy, expresses his fears of what will come of this internal strife and recalls the prophecy that this Henry would lose all that his father Henry had won.

Act III, scene 2 - The scene begins with Joan of Arc and several French soldiers disguised as peasants sneaking into Rouen to discover its weaknesses and open its gates to the French army. They succeed and the English are driven out; Falstaff again flees in cowardice. Talbot and the other regroup, though Bedford, who is ill, can do no more than watch in his chair. The counterattack is successful and the French are driven out, though Bedford dies after seeing the rout of the enemy. Talbot and the others now head for Paris to see the coronation of the new king.

Act III, scene 3 - Joan's new strategy is to convince the Duke of Burgundy to defect to the French and betray Talbot. She seeks a parley with him and succeeds in turning him to the French side.

Act III, scene 4 - Talbot and his men meet the king and his courtiers in Paris, where Talbot speaks of the many victories he has gained on the king's behalf. Henry then rewards him by making him Earl of Shrewsbury. After they leave, two nobles, Vernon and Basset, quarrel over the rift between Lancaster and York.

Act IV, scene 1 - The king is crowned in Paris, and soon Falstaff enters bearing a letter from Burgundy. Talbot tears the garter from Falstaff's leg because of his cowardice, and hearing of his craven deeds, Henry banishes him. The letter tells of Burgundy's defection to the French cause. Henry sends Talbot to speak to him and try to get him to change his mind. Vernon and Basset then enter and ask permission to try their quarrel by force of arms. Richard and Somerset soon renew their strife and ask to settle matters themselves. Henry rebukes them all and calls for peace. The king puts on the red rose of Lancaster, but also appoints Richard Regent of France. Exeter closes the scene by commenting to the audience on the wisdom showed by Richard in holding his tongue and noting that little good can come when children rule the land.

Act IV, scene 2 - Talbot, before Bordeaux, demands the city's surrender or threatens a siege. The general of the French refuses, but warns Talbot that the French armies under the Dauphin are near, and are determined to end his series of conquests. Talbot, knowing he is outnumbered, encourages his men to sell their lives dearly.

Act IV, scene 3 - Richard gets word that Talbot is surrounded by a much larger force; knowing that the promised aid from Somerset has never arrived, he curses his rival. Richard realizes that if Talbot is defeated, France is lost to the English.

Act IV, scene 4 - Somerset, hearing of Talbot's desperate straits, blames Richard for encouraging him to attack too far in advance of the rest of the army. He knows his troops can never arrive on time, and accuses Richard of wanting Talbot to die gloriously so he can gain credit for his exploits.

Act IV, scene 5 - Talbot's young son John has joined him on the battlefield. He tries to convince his son to escape with his life, but the young man bravely refuses. They then determine to die together and be together in heaven.

Act IV, scene 6 - John Talbot is surrounded by soldiers of France, but his father rescues him. He then again attempts to talk him into fleeing, but again the son refuses.

Act IV, scene 7 - Talbot, badly wounded, speaks of his son's noble death in battle. John's body is brought to him, and he dies as his young son is placed in his arms. William Lucy comes and asks the Dauphin for the bodies of Talbot and his son. Joan speaks scornfully and disrespectfully of them, but Charles lets Lucy have the bodies. The Dauphin then heads for Paris to assert his authority there.

Act V, scene 1 - King Henry, now back in England, receives a papal legate who encourages him to make peace with France. Gloucester tells the young king that the best way to accomplish this is to marry an eligible French noblewoman. Henry says he is too young for marriage, but agrees to follow his Protector's advice. Meanwhile, Winchester, who has now become a cardinal, is determined to advance his own authority and bring Gloucester down.

Act V, scene 2 - The Dauphin hears that Paris is in revolt and is siding with him, but that the remaining English armies have united and are preparing for battle. Joan prepares to go once again to war.

Act V, scene 3 - Joan, facing defeat by the forces of Richard, calls on demonic powers to assist her, finally offering her soul to the devil in exchange for one more victory. She is then captured by Richard's forces. The Earl of Suffolk then captures Margaret of Anjou and instantly falls in love with her. He cannot woo her because he is already married, but decides to woo her for the king. She agrees and her father gives his consent.

Act V, scene 4 - Joan is being taken to the stake. Her father appears, but she scorns him, claiming to be of noble birth, and he tells the English to burn her because hanging is too good for such an ungrateful child. When Richard decrees her death, she tries to prevent it by claiming that she is pregnant, citing three different men as the father of the baby when Richard ignores her pleas. She

is then taken to her death. Winchester then arrives from England to deliver conditions of peace. Charles is to be recognized as Regent of France under Henry's authority. Charles balks since he controls over half the country already, but his courtiers beg him to reconsider. He finally agrees to the terms offered him and peace is obtained.

Act V, scene 5 - Suffolk speaks to Henry of Margaret's beauty and he desires to make her his queen. Gloucester objects because the king is already betrothed to a relative of the Dauphin, but Suffolk wins the argument and the agreement is made. Gloucester fears this will lead to trouble, and the play ends with Suffolk expressing his hope that he can rule Margaret, and through her the king and country.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. In William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 1*, what does Shakespeare see as the primary cause of the loss of English possessions in France? In what way does this analysis set the stage for the remaining three plays in the tetralogy culminating in *Richard III*? In what way is the message of the play relevant to Shakespeare's contemporaries?
2. Although he is not the real focus of William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 1*, Talbot is usually considered the hero of the play. Discuss the nature of his heroism. Is he a tragic hero like those found in Shakespeare's tragedies, or is he more like Henry V, the military hero whose death begins the story?
3. Is Lord Talbot, the hero of William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 1*, to be understood as the epitome of a Christian warrior? What role does his faith play in his conduct of war and in his overall worldview? How do his Christian virtues set him apart from the people with whom he is surrounded in the story? Support your assessment of Talbot's character with details from the play and from Scripture.
4. 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 1*. Consider not only Henry himself, but comments made about his father along with other kinglike figures in the story like Gloucester, Winchester, and the French Dauphin.
5. Discuss the portrayal of Joan of Arc in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 1*. The picture Shakespeare paints obviously differs significantly from the romantic portrayal found in the story of the young French heroine and Catholic saint. Is Shakespeare's picture simply the result of English prejudice against the French? Could it be a reaction against a woman playing a man's role? Or could one find some truth in this picture that the romanticized French legend omits? Be sure to support your opinions with cogent reasoning and quotations from the play.

6. Discuss the concept of the value of the individual versus the value of the nation as it appears in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 1*. Which does Shakespeare think is more important? How do you know? Support your answer with specifics from the play.
7. William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 1* gives considerable attention to the conflict that underlay the Wars of the Roses. In the dispute between the houses of Lancaster and York, which side does Shakespeare favor? How do you know? What might be the reason for his preference? Be sure to cite specific quotations and events to support your conclusion.
8. In William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 1*, the playwright plays fast and loose with the chronology of the events he describes. For instance, Henry VI was only nine months old when Henry V died in 1422, Joan of Arc was burned in 1431, and Talbot's death, the end of the Hundred Years' War, and the marriage of Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou occurred in 1453. Why do you think Shakespeare chooses to do this? Discuss the importance of the chronological structure of this play in communicating the message Shakespeare wishes to get across to the audience.
9. Discuss the treatment of women in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 1*. 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.
10. Discuss the relationship between the struggles between England and France and between the houses of Lancaster and York in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 1*. In what ways do the two struggles influence one another? Which does Shakespeare consider the more important? Why? Support your answer with details from the play.
11. Compare and contrast Talbot and Joan of Arc, the two leading military figures in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 1*. How do their personalities differ? their military ethics? What do you think Shakespeare is trying to say through his portrayal of these differences?
12. Evaluate the personality of the title character in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 1*. 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.
13. In William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 1*, to what extent may one conclude that the loss of territories in France is due more to English weakness than to the strength of the French? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.

14. 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?

15. Compare and contrast the treatment of Joan of Arc in George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan* and William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, part 1*. How would you explain the difference in perspective in light of the more than 300 years that separated the plays? What do the portrayals tell you about the authors and their times?