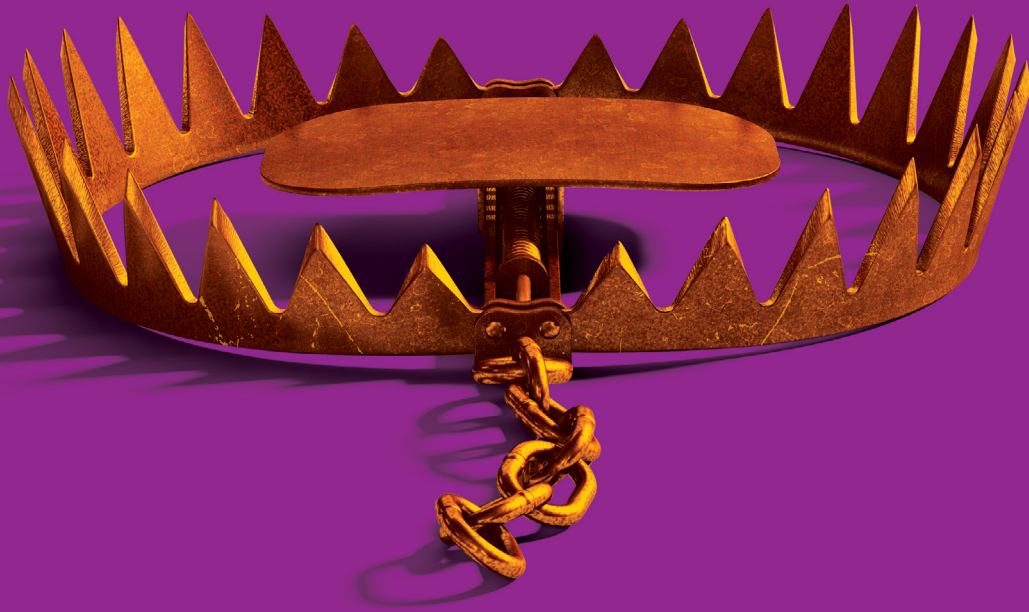




GUTHRIE
THEATER

Play Guide

2023-2024 SEASON

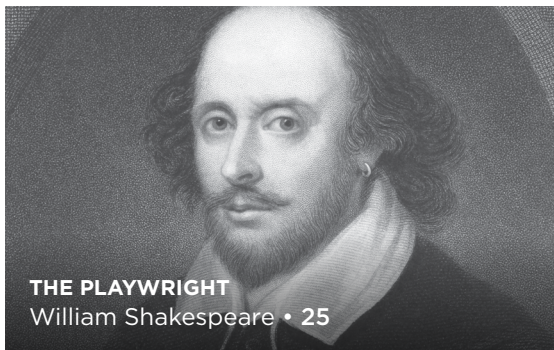


RICHARD II
HENRY IV
HENRY V

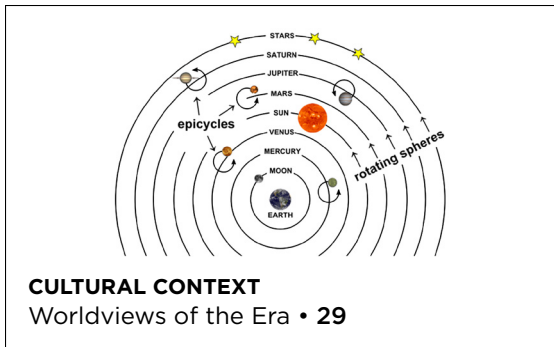
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Richard II, Henry IV and Henry V

by **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**

directed by **JOSEPH HAJ**

March 23 - May 25, 2024

Wurtele Thrust Stage

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THEATER**

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The Guthrie creates transformative theater experiences that ignite the imagination, stir the heart, open the mind and build community through the illumination of our common humanity.

Guthrie Theater Play Guide

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**“For within the hollow crown
That rounds the mortal temples of a king
Keeps Death his court, and there the antic sits
Scoffing at his state and grinning at his pomp”**

- King Richard II, Act Three, Scene Two, *Richard II*

PHOTO: TYLER MICHAELS KING IN *RICHARD II* (DAN NORMAN)

About This Guide

This play guide is designed to fuel your curiosity and deepen your understanding of a show's history, meaning and cultural relevance so you can make the most of your theatergoing experience. You might be reading this because you fell in love with a show you saw at the Guthrie. Maybe you want to read up on a play before you see it onstage. Or perhaps you're a fellow theater company doing research for an upcoming production. We're glad you found your way here, and we encourage you to dig in and mine the depths of these extraordinary stories.

NOTE: Portions of this play guide are reprinted or repurposed from previous productions at the Guthrie.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Thanks for your interest in the History Plays (*Richard II*, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*). Please direct literary inquiries to Resident Dramaturg Carla Steen at carlas@guthrietheater.org.



PHOTO: WILLIAM STURDIVANT, TYLER MICHAELS KING AND DAVID WHALEN IN *RICHARD II* (DAN NORMAN)

RICHARD II

Synopsis

Old events haunt King Richard II as he presides over an accusation brought by his cousin Henry Bolingbroke against one of Richard's former allies (and by implication, against Richard) about the murder of their uncle, the Duke of Gloucester. In the name of justice — and serving his own political needs — Richard banishes Bolingbroke for six years. Soon thereafter the king takes advantage of Bolingbroke's absence to seize his family's substantial estate to fund military activities in Ireland. When Bolingbroke returns early to reclaim his rightful inheritance, he quickly gains support from sympathizers unhappy with Richard's tempestuous rule, including the powerful Percy family. With his grip on the realm slipping and the country's stability at risk, Richard returns from Ireland to the stark reality that he must choose between combating the rebellion or giving up the crown — the only identity he's ever known. [G](#)

SETTING

Various locations in England and Wales, 1398-1400

CHARACTERS

Richard II, the king of England

Queen, his wife

Sir Henry Green, favorite of Richard

Sir John Bushy, favorite of Richard

Sir William Bagot, favorite of Richard

John of Gaunt, Richard's uncle

Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Herford, son of John of Gaunt, Richard's cousin

Duke of York, Richard's uncle

Duchess of York, his wife

Duke of Aumerle, their son, also Richard's cousin

Duchess of Gloucester, widowed sister-in-law to York and Gaunt

Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, a wealthy northern lord

Harry "Hotspur" Percy, his son

Lord Ross

Lord Willoughby

Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, appellant before the king

Owen Glendower, a Welsh captain

Sir Stephen Scroop, a knight loyal to Richard

Earl of Salisbury, a noble loyal to Richard

Lord Berkeley

Abbot of Westminster

Bishop of Carlisle

Sir Pierce of Exton, a knight

Lord Marshal, a court official

Gardener, at York's house

Groom

Keeper of the Prison

York's Servant

Gardener's Servants

Exton's Servants

HENRY IV

Synopsis

Five years after taking the throne, King Henry IV has found the job grueling. His hope to lead an expedition to the Holy Land — in part to atone for misdeeds in obtaining the crown — is hindered by civil discontent in England. His former allies the Percys, fearing their own safety and resentful at scant rewards for helping Henry to the throne, launch an open rebellion against the king, putting their weight behind another claimant to the crown, Lord Mortimer. Meanwhile, the king's oldest son, Prince Hal, reluctant heir to the crown, spends his time in London participating in pranks and robberies with father-figure Sir John Falstaff and other boisterous companions. The Percys, led by young, hotheaded Hotspur, admired for his skill on the battlefield, and the royal forces clash at the Battle of Shrewsbury, where Henry fights for his crown and Prince Hal for redemption amid swirling uncertainties of allegiances and succession. [G](#)

SETTING

Various locations in England and Wales, 1405–1413

CHARACTERS

Henry IV, the king of England, earlier known as Bolingbroke

Prince Henry, Prince of Wales, his oldest son and heir, known as Prince Hal

Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, his youngest son

John, Prince of Lancaster, his third son

Thomas, Duke of Clarence, his second son

Earl of Westmoreland

Sir Walter Blunt

Earl of Warwick

Earl of Surrey

Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, a wealthy northern lord

Harry “Hotspur” Percy, his son

Thomas Percy, Earl of Worcester, brother of Northumberland, Hotspur's uncle

Lady Percy, Kate, Hotspur's wife

Sir Edmund Mortimer, Lady Percy's brother

Owen Glendower, a Welsh captain



PHOTO: WILLIAM STURDIVANT IN *HENRY IV* (DAN NORMAN)

Lady Mortimer, Glendower's daughter and Mortimer's wife

Sir Richard Vernon

Travers

Lord Morton

Earl of Douglas, a Scottish noble

Ned Poins, a friend of Prince Henry

Sir John Falstaff, a knight

Nym

Bardolph

Pistol

Peto

Davy, a boy

Hostess Quickly, hostess of the Eastcheap tavern

Doll Tearsheet

Lord Chief Justice

Lord Chief Justice's Servant

Henry IV's Page

Hotspur's Servant

Traveler

Messenger



PHOTO: DANIEL JOSÉ MOLINA AND THE CAST OF HENRY V (DAN NORMAN)

HENRY V

Synopsis

King Henry V, having transformed into a paragon of piety and grace, takes his father's advice to turn his country's attention to foreign conquests. Renewing his family's claim to the French crown, he lays the groundwork for invasion when his demands are rejected by France. Old civil strife dating to his father's time rears its head when an assassination plot is uncovered shortly before his army sails across the Channel. Henry leads his stout but ever-dwindling forces in a successful siege of Harfleur, but the English are forced to fight the French at the Battle of Agincourt, where they are vastly outnumbered and woefully undersupplied. The eve of the battle, Henry meditates on the wrongs of the past 15 years as his soldiers' lives, his own life and the future of his reign are at stake. [G](#)

SETTING

Various locations in England and France, 1415-1420

CHARACTERS

Henry V, the king of England

Duke of Exeter, his uncle

John, Duke of Bedford, his brother

Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, his brother

Earl of Westmoreland

Sir Thomas Erpingham, a knight

Archbishop of Canterbury

Bishop of Ely

King Charles VI, the king of France

Queen Isabel, his wife

The Dauphin, their son and heir

Princess Katherine, their daughter

Alice, her lady-in-waiting

Duke of Orleans

Duke of Bourbon

Duke of Burgundy

Constable of France, general of the French forces

Montjoy, a herald

Governor of Harfleur

French Soldier, captured by Pistol

Sir Thomas Grey of Northumberland

Edward, Lord Scroop of Masham, earlier known as Ned Poins

Richard, Earl of Cambridge

Hostess Quickly

Doll Tearsheet

Pistol

Nym

Bardolph

Davy

Gower, an English captain

Macmorris, an Irish captain

Jamy, a Scottish captain

Fluellen, a Welsh captain

Michael Williams

Alexander Court

John Bates

Who's Who in Which Play

	R2	H4	H5
PLANTAGENETS			
RICHARD II , king of England (r. 1377–1399), aka Richard of Bordeaux (his birthplace); son of Edward the Black Prince, grandson of Edward III, from whom he inherited the crown.	●		
QUEEN , wife of Richard, (daughter of Charles VI of France). Richard was married twice, and Shakespeare blended the two women into one.	●		
PLANTAGENETS, LANCASTER BRANCH			
JOHN OF GAUNT , Duke of Lancaster; third son of Edward III, uncle to Richard, father to Bolingbroke, richest of the dukes. (His birthplace was Ghent.)	●		
HENRY BOLINGBROKE aka Duke of Herford, Earl of Derby; son of John of Gaunt, cousin to Richard. Becomes Duke of Lancaster upon Gaunt's death and later HENRY IV (r. 1399–1413). (Birthplace was Bolingbroke Castle in Lincolnshire.)	●	●	
PRINCE HENRY aka Prince of Wales/Harry/Harry Monmouth/Hal; oldest son of Henry IV, later HENRY V (r. 1413–1422). (Birthplace was Monmouth, Wales.)		●	●
JOHN, PRINCE OF LANCASTER aka Prince John; third son of Henry IV, younger brother to Hal, later DUKE OF BEDFORD .		●	●
Prince HUMPHREY, DUKE OF GLOUCESTER , fourth son to Henry IV, younger brother to Hal.		●	●
Prince THOMAS, DUKE OF CLARENCE , second son to Henry IV, younger brother to Hal.		●	
Thomas Beaufort, DUKE OF EXETER , son of John of Gaunt, brother of Henry IV, uncle to Henry V.			●
PLANTAGENETS, YORK BRANCH			
Edmund of Langley, DUKE OF YORK , fourth son of Edward III, uncle to Richard and Bolingbroke. (Birthplace was King's Langley in Hertfordshire.)	●		
Joan Holland, DUCHESS OF YORK , his wife. Shakespeare makes her Aumerle's mother, not stepmother.	●		
Edward, DUKE OF AUMERLE , aka Earl of Rutland; son of the Yorks, cousin to Richard and Bolingbroke. Older brother to Richard, Earl of Cambridge.	●		
Thomas, LORD BERKELEY , fifth Baron, serves the Duke of York. The person was real; the actions in the play are invented by Shakespeare.	●		
PLANTAGENETS, GLOUCESTER BRANCH			
Eleanor de Bohun, DUCHESS OF GLOUCESTER , widow of Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester (fifth son of Edward III). Aunt by marriage to Richard, Bolingbroke and Aumerle.	●		
MOWBRAYS			
THOMAS MOWBRAY , Duke of Norfolk, distant relation of Richard.	●		

	R2	H4	H5
RICHARD II'S COUNCILORS			
SIR JOHN BUSHY , Sheriff of Lincolnshire, Speaker of the House of Commons, member of Richard's regency council.	●		
SIR JOHN BAGOT , Sheriff of Leicester, member of Parliament, member of Richard's regency council.	●		
SIR HENRY GREEN , member of Parliament, member of Richard's regency council.	●		
RICHARD II'S SUPPORTERS			
John Montagu, third EARL OF SALISBURY , tries to rally the Welsh forces.	●		
Thomas Merke, BISHOP OF CARLISLE , politician and churchman.	●		
SIR STEPHEN SCROOP , a soldier loyal to Richard, younger brother to the Earl of Wiltshire (an offstage character in <i>Richard II</i>).	●		
ABBOT OF WESTMINSTER ; the person was real, but Shakespeare adjusted his actions and death.	●		
THE PERCY FAMILY AND THEIR REBEL FRIENDS			
THOMAS PERCY, EARL OF WORCESTER , steward to Richard II's royal household, younger brother to Northumberland, uncle to Hotspur.		●	
HENRY PERCY, EARL OF NORTHUMBERLAND , greatest of the northern lords.	●	●	
HARRY PERCY , aka Hotspur/Lord Percy/Henry Percy; son to Northumberland, brother-in-law to Lord Mortimer. Shakespeare adjusted his age and death to parallel Hal.	●	●	
Katherine, LADY PERCY , Hotspur's wife, sister to Lord Mortimer; Shakespeare changed her first name from Elizabeth.		●	
SIR EDMUND MORTIMER aka Lord Mortimer; grandson of Lionel of Antwerp (Edward III's second son), brother to Lady Percy, first cousin once removed to Henry IV. Shakespeare made this character (not his same-named nephew) Richard's heir.		●	
OWEN GLENDOWER , a Welsh captain and leader of the Welsh rebellion.	●	●	
LADY MORTIMER , Glendower's daughter and Mortimer's wife.		●	
EARL OF DOUGLAS , aka the Douglas/Lord Douglas; head of a noble Scottish family.		●	
SIR RICHARD VERNON , landowner and relation to the Percys.		●	
LORD MORTON , friend to Northumberland.		●	
TRAVERS , servant to Northumberland.		●	
BOLINGBROKE'S OTHER SUPPORTERS			
William, LORD ROSS , seventh Baron, member of Parliament, Knight of the Garter.	●		
William, LORD WILLOUGHBY , fifth Baron, member of Parliament, Knight of the Garter.	●		
SIR WALTER BLUNT , knight and soldier.		●	
EARL OF WARWICK , nobleman.		●	
EARL OF SURREY , nobleman.		●	

	R2	H4	H5
LORD CHIEF JUSTICE , highest official representing the law.		●	
Ralph Neville, EARL OF WESTMORELAND , soldier and in-law to Henry IV.		●	●
THE EASTCHEAP CREW			
SIR JOHN FALSTAFF , knight and companion to Hal, captain at Shrewsbury. Shakespeare's creation.		●	
NED POINS , companion to Hal; in our plays, later EDWARD, LORD SCROOP OF MASHAM , Treasurer of the Royal Household (nephew to the Archbishop of York), among the traitors to Henry V.		●	●
BARDOLPH , longtime friend to Falstaff, later a lieutenant in Henry V's army in France. Shakespeare's creation.		●	●
HOSTESS QUICKLY , landlady of the tavern in Eastcheap, later wife to Pistol. Shakespeare's creation.		●	●
DOLL TEARSHEET , a hanger-on at the Eastcheap tavern, sometime companion to Falstaff. Shakespeare's creation.		●	●
PETO , one of the Gad's Hill thieves. Shakespeare's creation.		●	
DAVY , a boy who works at the Eastcheap tavern, then as Falstaff's page and accompanies the Eastcheap crew to France. Shakespeare's creation.		●	●
NYM , companion to Falstaff, later a corporal in Henry V's army in France. Shakespeare's creation.		●	●
PISTOL , an ensign among the Eastcheap crew, later in Henry V's army in France, marries Hostess Quickly. Shakespeare's creation.		●	●
CLERGY ADVISORS TO HENRY V			
Henry Chichele, ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY .			●
BISHOP OF ELY			●
TRAITORS AGAINST HENRY V			
RICHARD, EARL OF CAMBRIDGE , son of the Duke of York, younger brother to Aumerle, godson to Richard II, brother-in-law to Lord Mortimer.			●
SIR THOMAS GREY OF NORTHUMBERLAND , Knight of Northumberland, a northern noble, son-in-law to Westmoreland.			●
FRENCH COURT			
KING CHARLES VI , French King (r. 1380-1422), father of the Dauphin and Katherine (and Richard II's queen, Isabel).			●
THE DAUPHIN , son and heir of the French king. Shakespeare blended three real people.			●
PRINCESS KATHERINE of Valois, aka Kate; younger daughter of the French king (and historically sister to Richard II's queen, Isabel).			●
ALICE , attendant to Princess Katherine.			●
DUKE OF ORLEANS , nobleman and leader in the war.			●
DUKE OF BOURBON , nobleman and leader in the war.			●
Charles d'Albret, CONSTABLE OF FRANCE , general of the French army.			●


	R2	H4	H5
QUEEN ISABEL of Bavaria, Katherine's mother.			●
MONTJOY , herald from the French king.			●
DUKE OF BURGUNDY , Philip the Good, neutral party in the French-English war.			●
THE CAPTAINS IN THE ENGLISH ARMY			
FLUELLEN , a Welsh captain. Shakespeare's creation.			●
JAMY , a Scottish captain. Shakespeare's creation.			●
MACMORRIS , an Irish captain. Shakespeare's creation.			●
GOWER , an English captain. Shakespeare's creation.			●
ENGLISH ARMY			
SIR THOMAS ERPINGHAM , a member of Henry V's royal household and commander of the archers.			●
JOHN BATES , an English soldier. Shakespeare's creation.			●
MICHAEL WILLIAMS , an English soldier. Shakespeare's creation.			●
ALEXANDER COURT , an English soldier. Shakespeare's creation.			●
OTHERS			
RICHARD II	HENRY IV	HENRY V	
LORD MARSHAL , a royal officer. SIR PIERCE OF EXTON , murderer of Richard II. GARDENER , in Duke of York's employ. KEEPER OF THE PRISON at Pomfret. GROOM , of Richard's former stables. YORK'S SERVANT GARDENER'S SERVANTS EXTON'S SERVANTS Attendants, Officers, Londoners and Soldiers	TRAVELER , robbed at Gad's Hill. KING HENRY'S PAGE HOTSPUR'S SERVANT LORD CHIEF JUSTICE'S SERVANT Lords, Travelers, Soldiers and Rogues	GOVERNOR OF HARFLEUR , in France. FRENCH SOLDIER , captured by Pistol. Chorus Messengers, Soldiers and Attendants 	

PHOTO: LANISE ANTOINE SHELLEY AND JIMMY KIEFFER IN *RICHARD II* (DAN NORMAN)

Scene by Scene

RICHARD II

ACT ONE

Scene One

In Richard's court at Windsor, Henry Bolingbroke, the king's cousin, accuses Thomas Mowbray of several crimes, including the murder of the Duke of Gloucester. Mowbray denies the charges and each challenges the other to a duel. Unable to persuade them otherwise, Richard sets a date for a trial by combat.

Scene Two

Gloucester's widow tells her brother-in-law John of Gaunt, Bolingbroke's father, that she wants revenge for her husband's death and she holds Richard accountable. Gaunt says as king, Richard is untouchable.

Scene Three

Just as the combatants prepare to fight, Richard stops the duel, instead choosing to banish Mowbray for life and Bolingbroke for 10 years. For Gaunt's sake, Richard reduces the sentence to six years. Bolingbroke says his farewells.

Scene Four

The Duke of Aumerle, Richard and Bolingbroke's York cousin, recounts an (on his part) insincere goodbye to Bolingbroke. Upon news of Gaunt's ill health, Richard determines to seize his wealth to fund his own expedition to put down rebellions in Ireland.

ACT TWO

Scene One

John of Gaunt and his brother, the Duke of York, lament the current state of England. When the king arrives, Gaunt tries to talk sense to him, then dies. Richard indeed seizes Gaunt's estate (and Bolingbroke's inheritance) and names York as his regent, as he intends to go to Ireland in person.

Friends of Bolingbroke discuss Richard's latest tyranny. Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, says Bolingbroke is returning with an army to claim his inheritance. The Lords Ross and Willoughby lend their support.

Scene Two

One of Richard's councilors, Sir Henry Green, reports to the Queen that Bolingbroke has returned to England in the king's absence. York tries to take charge to protect the Queen and defend the realm. Green and fellow councilors Sir John Bushy and Sir William Bagot seek safety but acknowledge Richard's unpopularity.

Scene Three

Having landed in northern England, Bolingbroke is now in Gloucestershire, and his support grows. Northumberland introduces his son Hotspur to Bolingbroke. York meets them and tries to remain neutral, insisting Bolingbroke's mere presence is unlawful but that Richard has behaved poorly. Bolingbroke resolves to root out Bushy, Green and others who have misled Richard.

Scene Four

Glendower's Welsh army has waited 10 days for Richard to arrive from Ireland in order to lend their support. They disperse, assuming Richard must be dead.

ACT THREE

Scene One

At Bristol Castle, Bolingbroke sentences Bushy and Green to execution, then Bolingbroke prepares to fight Glendower, whom he doesn't know has deserted Richard.

Scene Two

Richard returns from Ireland and is shaken by the Welsh defection. When he learns that most of the country now supports Bolingbroke, Richard despairs. An attempt to give him hope fails when he learns that York has also joined Bolingbroke. Richard dismisses his men and retreats to Flint Castle in northern Wales.

Scene Three

Outside Flint Castle, York reminds Bolingbroke's supporters that Richard is still king and deserves respect. Bolingbroke insists he only wants his rightful inheritance and to have his exile revoked. Hotspur reports that the king is in the castle. After a parley, Richard first asserts his position as king then puts himself in Bolingbroke's care to travel to London.

Scene Four

While in safekeeping at York's house, the Queen learns from gardeners of Richard's "seizure" by Bolingbroke and that Richard will likely be deposed.

ACT FOUR

Scene One

Bolingbroke presides over Parliament in London, where York reports that Richard has named Bolingbroke his heir and resigned the crown. Bolingbroke is now Henry IV. When Bolingbroke attempts to take the throne, the Bishop of Carlisle makes an eloquent defense of Richard, then is arrested for treason. Richard is brought in to abdicate in public. He uses the platform to chastise his enemies, asks for a mirror, questions his own identity, then gives the crown to Henry. Richard is sent to the Tower. Aumerle, Carlisle and the Abbot of Westminster, still supporters of Richard, plot against Henry.

ACT FIVE

Scene One

The Queen finds Richard on the street as he's led to the Tower. He tells her to go to France and consider him dead. Northumberland arrives with news that

Bolingbroke changed his mind: Richard is to go to Pomfret Castle in the north of England not the Tower. King and Queen part with kisses and tears.

Scene Two

At the York house, Aumerle (now downgraded to Earl of Rutland by Henry) arrives and raises his father's suspicions. York discovers Aumerle's plot against Henry and leaves to warn the king. Aumerle's mother tells him to get to Henry first to plead his case.

Scene Three

Henry wonders where his son Harry is when he's interrupted by Aumerle's arrival. Aumerle begs his case to Henry, then York and the Duchess also arrive. Henry pardons Aumerle, in part for his parents' sake, but vows to execute the other plotters.

Scene Four

Sir Pierce of Exton thinks Henry asked him to kill Richard.

Scene Five

In a Pomfret Castle dungeon, Richard waxes philosophic and hears about Henry's coronation from a sympathetic groom from his stables. When Richard doesn't eat his poisoned food, the dungeon's keeper lets in Exton and his servants. Richard fights, but Exton kills him.

Scene Six

In Windsor, King Henry learns the plot against him has been ended and pardons Carlisle. Exton brings in Richard's body. Henry is not pleased and banishes Exton. To atone for his part in Richard's murder, Henry resolves to go on crusade to the Holy Land.



PHOTO: MELISSA MAXWELL AND THE CAST OF RICHARD II (DAN NORMAN)

HENRY IV

EDITOR'S NOTE: Act and scene numbers have been altered for the Guthrie production and don't align with published scripts. *Henry IV, Part II* begins in Act Two, Scene Six.

ACT ONE

Scene One

Five years after taking the throne, King Henry IV tasks his council to prepare for a crusade to Jerusalem. The Earl of Westmoreland reports that it looked promising until they got the news that Welsh leader Glendower captured Lord Mortimer. Blunt has brought news that Harry "Hotspur" Percy battled Douglas of Scotland. Henry is not happy that Hotspur has withheld his Scottish prisoners.

Scene Two

Prince Henry, called Hal in Eastcheap, is with Sir John Falstaff when Ned Poins arrives with news about a thieving opportunity at Gad's Hill. Hal is reluctant to join until Poins privately outlines the larger plan is to set Falstaff and the others up and then to steal from them. Falstaff's versions of events will provide much entertainment. When left alone, Hal promises to change his ways and that the world will wonder at it.

Scene Three

Henry calls the Percys to court to explain why Hotspur hasn't turned over his prisoners. Hotspur claims the message about the prisoners was poorly delivered and he didn't deny prisoners. But still he refuses to turn them over until Henry ransoms Lord Mortimer (Hotspur's brother-in-law) from Glendower. Henry counters that Mortimer is a traitor, having married Glendower's daughter, and Hotspur needs to send his prisoners. Left alone, the Percys discuss a plot against Henry: They can get the Scots (Douglas), the Welsh (Glendower) and the Archbishop of York on their side.

Scene Four

At Gad's Hill for the robbery, Poins hides Falstaff's horse. Then he and Hal hang back while Falstaff, Nym, Bardolph and Peto attack and rob some travelers. Disguised, Poins and Hal attack the thieves, robbing and scaring them off. They go back to London to hear Falstaff's version of the robbery.

Scene Five

As Hotspur reads a letter from a would-be rebel, his wife, Lady Percy, asks him why he's so distracted. He doesn't tell her, though she suspects it has to do with her brother Mortimer.



PHOTO: WILLIAM STURDIVANT AND DANIEL JOSÉ MOLINA IN *HENRY IV* (DAN NORMAN)

Scene Six

In Eastcheap, Poins and Hal hear Falstaff's version of the Gad's Hill robbery, in which Falstaff was heroic and fought with dozens. When Hal calls him on it, Falstaff says he knew all along it was Hal and his instinct prevented him from hurting the Prince of Wales. A messenger brings word of the Percy rebellion. To prepare Hal to go to court, Falstaff and Hal each take turns playing the king interviewing Hal. The Lord Chief Justice arrives looking for the Gad's Hill thieves and knows Falstaff to be among them; Hal vouches for him. Later Hal says he'll return the stolen money and everyone will have to go to war.

Scene Seven

The rebels meet in Wales, and Hotspur and Glendower bicker. They and Lord Mortimer agree to divide Britain into thirds. Mortimer and Hotspur say goodbye to their wives as they prepare for battle.

Scene Eight

Henry chastises Hal for his behavior, saying it threatens the stability of the crown. When compared unfavorably to Hotspur, Hal promises to make everything right and make his father proud.

Scene Nine

In Eastcheap, Hal arrives to tell Falstaff that the theft is repaid and that Falstaff has a captain's commission for the war.

Scene Ten

The rebels meet and are optimistic until word comes from the Earl of Northumberland (Hotspur's father) that he is ill and won't be sending forces. More bad news arrives when they learn Glendower needs two more weeks to gather his forces. Hotspur figures that if they win, there'll be more glory in it.

Scene Eleven

Falstaff has recruited the worst fighters with his commission, but they will die as well as anyone else and he'll make £300. Hal and Westmoreland pass him on the way to join the king at Shrewsbury.

Scene Twelve

The rebels are divided about whether to fight tonight and which side has the advantage. Blunt arrives to parley and hear their grievances. Rather than send his original hotheaded response, Hotspur decides to take time to craft a message to Henry for the morning.

ACT TWO

Scene One

The rebels send Worcester and Vernon to a parley, and Worcester restates their grievances. Hal challenges Hotspur to single combat, and Henry offers a pardon to all to stop the bloodshed.

Scene Two

Worcester convinces Vernon to withhold the king's offer of a pardon from Hotspur because he doesn't trust Henry. The battle is on.

Scene Three

Douglas kills Blunt, who is disguised as the king. Falstaff and Hal encounter each other near Blunt's body.

Scene Four

Hal is injured but won't leave the battlefield. Henry is attacked by Douglas and saved by Hal. Hal fights Hotspur and wins. Falstaff, who had been playing dead, claims he killed Hotspur.

Scene Five

The king's side wins the day. Worcester and Vernon are to be executed. Though Douglas is captured, Hal frees him without ransom in admiration. Now the king's forces have to finish off Glendower and Mortimer in Wales and the Earl of Northumberland up north.

Scene Six

After learning from Travers and Morton that Hotspur has been killed, Northumberland resolves to fight. Lady Percy, grieving her husband, chides Northumberland for wanting to fight now and not when his son needed him.

Scene Seven

Falstaff enjoys his reputation from Shrewsbury, though the Lord Chief Justice still pursues the Gad's Hill

robbery. They talk of the king's ill health and Falstaff's bad influence on Hal.

Scene Eight

A sleepless Henry meditates on the burden of being king and talks about his diseased country and its future with the earl of Warwick. Richard prophesied that Northumberland couldn't be trusted, and now Henry's forces are to fight with Northumberland.

Scene Nine

Hal, too, is weary and frets over his father's illness and his inability to show what he truly feels because his reputation would suggest he's a hypocrite. Davy arrives with a letter from Falstaff. Hal and Poins will visit Falstaff in Eastcheap.

Scene Ten

Pistol wants to speak with Falstaff. Doll Tearsheet dislikes Pistol, and his swaggering worries Hostess Quickly. Hal and Poins observe Falstaff with Doll; then Nym brings word that the king is fading.

Scene Eleven

An ailing Henry hears good news about the defeat of the rebels and optimistically still hopes to go to Jerusalem. Surrounded by his other sons, Henry asks for Hal, who is in Eastcheap. Henry worries about England when Hal is king. The others leave Henry to sleep; Hal arrives and sits with Henry, then thinks he's died. Hal accuses the crown of having killed his father and takes it away with him. Henry wakes, misses the crown and chides Hal, who apologizes and explains he thought he'd never see his father again. They reconcile. Henry will die in the Jerusalem chamber, fulfilling a prophecy.

Scene Twelve

Hal is now king. The Lord Chief Justice assumes that Hal will now punish him for having arrested Hal in an (offstage) episode. Instead, Hal puts everyone's fear to rest by promising to govern well.

Scene Thirteen

Pistol brings news to Falstaff that Hal is king. Falstaff expects to do great things when he's in the king's inner circle.

Scene Fourteen

Falstaff and his friends wait in the street for King Henry V to pass by. The new king banishes Falstaff from his presence, but Falstaff is hopeful the real Hal will send for him later. John of Lancaster and the Lord Chief Justice approve of the king's new behavior and expect war with France soon.

HENRY V

PROLOGUE

The Chorus prepares the audience for the stage play and asks their assistance to fill out the production with their imaginations.

ACT ONE

Scene One

The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely discuss a bill in Parliament to strip the church of some of its wealth, how changed the young king is and that French ambassadors have arrived at court.

Scene Two

King Henry V asks the archbishop to tell him how he may make a rightful claim to the French throne. He responds with a detailed legal description that there is no bar to Henry's claim. French ambassadors bring tennis balls from the Dauphin, who wants to mock Henry's youth. Henry responds that he will invade France.

A Chorus describes England's preparations for war.

ACT TWO

Scene One

In Eastcheap, Bardolph reconciles Nym and Pistol after Pistol has married Hostess Quickly. Pistol, Bardolph and Nym plan to go to France to fight and make money. Davy brings word that Falstaff is very sick.

A Chorus describes France's defenses and how the French have bribed three Englishmen to assassinate Henry.

Scene Two

In Southampton, Henry draws in and catches the traitors Scroop (formerly known as Poin), Cambridge and Grey, and he sentences them to death.

Scene Three

The Eastcheap crew mourn Falstaff and say their goodbyes to Hostess Quickly and Doll Tearsheet. Davy is also going to France.

A Chorus describes the city of English ships as they leave Southampton for Harfleur.

Scene Four

The king of France makes defensive preparations while his heir, the Dauphin, continues to ridicule and underestimate Henry. The Duke of Exeter arrives with



PHOTO: DAVID WHALEN AND BILL McCALLUM IN *HENRY V* (DAN NORMAN)

a parley and a threat. The French take time to consider a response.

A Chorus says the French king's response was to offer his daughter Katherine and some little dukedoms, which Henry rejected. The English begin a siege on the city of Harfleur.

ACT THREE

Scene One

Henry gives a rousing speech to rally his troops to continue to siege.

Scene Two

The Eastcheap crew hang back but are beaten into participating by Captain Fluellen. Davy notes the thievery and poor skills of his companions.

Scene Three

Captains Gower (English), Fluellen (Welsh), Jamy (Scottish) and Macmorris (Irish), representing factions of Henry's army, discuss the mines under the city's wall. Fluellen wants to debate Macmorris on the disciplines of war.

Scene Four

Henry threatens Harfleur with unbridled violence, and the governor surrenders. Exeter will take charge of the city while the army will move on to Calais before winter.

Scene Five

French Princess Katherine asks her lady-in-waiting Alice for an English language lesson.

Scene Six

The French king and his nobles discuss the English progression through France. They encourage him to allow them to fight, and he agrees.

Scene Seven

After the English have captured a bridge, Pistol asks Fluellen for help saving Bardolph, who was sentenced to death for thievery. Henry carries out Bardolph's execution. Montjoy arrives with a message from the king of France that they'll crush the weaker English army and he should surrender. Henry refuses.

A Chorus describes how both armies are camped near Agincourt, close enough to hear each other.

Scene Eight

The French nobles discuss horses and armor as they impatiently await battle.

A Chorus describes how Henry walks among the English forces as they await a battle they are likely to lose.

ACT FOUR

Scene One

During his walk, Henry visits his brothers and Sir Thomas Erpingham, whose cloak he borrows to continue his walk disguised. He encounters Pistol, observes Fluellen and Gower, and then debates with soldiers Bates, Court and Williams whether their deaths and sins in battle fall on the king or on themselves. Henry and Williams quarrel and agree to resume it after the battle, exchanging gloves as tokens to recognize each other later. When he's alone, Henry ruminates on what it means to be a king and takes the long view back to Richard and the wrongs done to him.

Scene Two

In the morning, the French nobles prepare to join the battle.

Scene Three

The English get ready to fight. Henry overhears Westmoreland wishing they had more men. The king gives a rousing speech about how they'll all remember the day they fought together on St. Crispin's Day. Montjoy offers a last chance to surrender, which Henry declines.

A Chorus says the battle now begins and apologizes that they can't aptly capture it onstage.

Scene Four

Pistol encounters a French soldier who wishes to surrender. Pistol gets Davy to translate for him. Pistol will get a handsome ransom for the capture. Left alone, Davy notes that both Bardolph and Nym have been hanged, and for his own safety, he'll hang out with the lackeys and the luggage.

Scene Five

French nobles note the battle's not going well but now they'll use chaos to their own benefit.

Scene Six

Exeter describes to Henry how the Duke of York and Earl of Suffolk died together in battle. New alarms sound of a French attack.

Scene Seven

Fluellen laments how the French attack on the boys and luggage left the boys dead, including Davy. Henry is furious. Montjoy arrives and announces England has won, asking for permission to bury the dead. With Gower, he draws up a list of the dead. Only a handful of English soldiers have died. Henry presents the glove to Williams, and after scaring Williams, fills it with coins. They sing "Te Deum."

ACT FIVE

Scene One

Fluellen and Pistol fight over Fluellen's leek, a symbol of Wales. Left alone, Pistol notes all his friends are dead, so he'll become a thief in England.

Scene Two

The Duke of Burgundy brokers the peace talks between England and France. When Henry and Katherine (and Alice) are left alone, Henry woos Katherine, with her speaking broken English and him broken French. The French King agrees to the peace terms: Henry and Katherine will be married, and their son will become king of England and of France.

EPILOGUE

The Chorus hopes the play was pleasing and gives a glimpse into the future of King Henry VI. [G](#)



The Entry of Richard and Bolingbroke Into London by James Northcote

IMAGE: COURTESY OF ROYAL ALBERT MEMORIAL MUSEUM

Based on a True Story: History Plays as Genre

By Carla Steen
Resident Dramaturg

When the films *Oppenheimer* and *Killers of the Flower Moon* are nominated for Academy Awards, TV’s “The Crown” details the lives of British royalty and true-crime podcasts are abundant, Shakespeare’s history plays today may feel “old hat.” But in the 1590s, the history play was quite new and original — having emerged as a literary genre earlier in the century — and was just reaching an apex.

A history play, as defined by scholar Irving Ribner, depicts actual historical events and uses those events to convey a political theory that has resonance for its immediate political world. In more recent times, Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* is an example: His depiction of the Salem witch trials conveys political ideas that are meant to be applied to then-

contemporary McCarthyism and the Red Scare.

Shakespeare was neither the first nor the last playwright to try his hand at the genre, but he was arguably the best — and *Richard II*, *Henry IV* and *Henry V* represent a pinnacle of the form. The Tudor monarchs had a vested interest in recording the events of the

preceding two centuries, and Elizabethans viewed the purpose of history as nationalistic glorification, analysis of contemporary affairs and a guide to current political behavior. So Shakespeare had both the source material and an audience eager to put it to use.

Weighing heavily on the minds of Elizabethans was their heirless,



Shakespeare was a dramatist, not a historian, and he sometimes served his artistic sensibilities first. While his plays often accurately reflect the actual events, when something didn't satisfy his sense of the dramatic, he adjusted the story accordingly.

aging monarch. By the time Shakespeare wrote *Richard II*, Elizabeth I was 62 years old, childless and the last of her father's children. The questions of dynasty, stability and national pride that run through all three of these History Plays would have had immediate resonances for an Elizabethan audience.

The three main sources Shakespeare used for his History Plays are Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*, which provided the basic historical information; Edward Hall's history of the Wars of the Roses (on which Holinshed drew heavily), from which Shakespeare takes his attitude and understanding of that history; and the anonymous play *The Famous Victories of Henry the fifth*, which supplied a dramatic structure and the inspiration for the nonhistorical Eastcheap thread in *Henry IV* and *Henry V*.


Shakespeare was a dramatist, not a historian, and he sometimes served his artistic sensibilities first. While his plays often accurately

reflect the actual events, when something didn't satisfy his sense of the dramatic, he adjusted the story accordingly.

For instance, in *Richard II*, he purposely omits some trickery by Northumberland to get Richard to surrender to Bolingbroke. Shakespeare instead introduces darker and ambiguous aspects to their characters later in the play. And that coup de theatre deposition scene in which Richard speaks directly to Parliament, derides his former supporters and gazes at himself in a mirror? Never happened. Historically, Bolingbroke would have been a fool to allow Richard that spotlight; theatrically, Shakespeare would have been a fool to omit it.

Henry IV takes advantage of the legend of Henry V's reckless youth to include a second plotline to contrast the political story of Henry IV and the rebels. To make this more satisfying, Shakespeare adjusts the age of Harry "Hotspur" Percy — actually a smidge older than Henry IV —

to be Henry V's contemporary and nemesis. Shakespeare could also unleash his imagination, as the denizens of Eastcheap are original creations. Having devoted substantial space in *Henry IV* to investigating dynastic issues, Shakespeare lets go of the topic in *Henry V*. The historical motive of the traitors against Henry V — putting Mortimer on the throne — is ignored and becomes bribery by the French. The focus of this play is on foreign affairs, and Shakespeare rigorously sticks to that. Through all three plays, he compresses time so the stories better fit a dramatic structure.

We live under significantly different circumstances today than the Elizabethans, but the plays still retain lessons, warnings and entertainment value for us. How leaders come to power and how they wield it is as pertinent as ever. That we're paying attention to the reigns of monarchs from 600 years ago demonstrates the value of understanding and applying history — and the power of theater to tell that history. 

Responses to the History Plays

EDITOR'S NOTE: One of the great joys of engaging with the plays of Shakespeare is the multiple ways they can be interpreted and understood. Below are some reactions to *Richard II*, *Henry IV* and *Henry V* by significant artists and critics. Some of them align with ideas explored in the Guthrie's History Plays; others may be entirely contradictory to the themes in our productions. All are included here to provide a wide view of opinion about the plays.

It was during Shakespeare's lifetime that the English nation first became fully conscious of itself, and this consciousness found its highest expression in his great sequence of eight chronicle plays. ...

This period of English history seemed crucial to Shakespeare. It showed the horrors of civil war and the value of the unity and stability which had been won through so much suffering. It showed too what Englishmen could achieve when they were united. These were Shakespeare's chief points of interest in dramatizing the main events of the eighty-seven years from 1398 to 1485 in his cycle of eight plays. Unfortunately, it is uneven. The last four plays in it (the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*) were written before Shakespeare's maturity. But the tetralogy which covers the earlier period (*Richard II*, the two parts of *Henry IV* and *Henry V*) is work of his maturity and his finest achievement in the chronicle play.

As the culmination of this great tetralogy, *Henry V* has a specially heroic tone. The Chorus strikes the epic note at the outset and compensates for what Shakespeare seems to have thought of momentarily as the limitations of his theatre by a direct appeal to the audience's imagination. And whereas the world of *Henry IV* is the world of practical politics, of squabbling factions, the world of *Henry V* is the world of high endeavor, of united effort.



PHOTO: MELISSA MAXWELL, TYLER MICHAELS KING AND TRACEY MALONEY IN *RICHARD II* (DAN NORMAN)

Richard II is a play in which one king is deposed and another takes his place. What is remarkable about the depiction of this momentous transfer is that we don't really know whether it was a good thing or not. The great unanswered question of the play is whether it was right — historically, politically, ethically, personally, dramatically — for Bolingbroke to take the throne from his cousin Richard. This question insinuates itself into the plays' imagery and choreography and hangs over its stage history and critical reception — and the following sequence of history plays struggle with its unquiet legacy. Is Richard the rightful martyred king, or is he hopelessly, recklessly, inadequate to the task of government? Does Bolingbroke represent might, right or modernity? ...

Richard II is a signal example of Shakespeare's simultaneous interest in politics and his avoidance of the partisan. It's this feature of his writing that has enabled the plays to be co-opted for very different ideological agendas. ... It is impossible to derive any stable sense from *Richard II* of Shakespeare's own view on the conflict between Richard and Bolingbroke. On one hand, Richard is the legitimate king, but/and he is solipsistic, selfish and potentially tyrannical. On the other hand, Bolingbroke is a usurper, but/and he is pragmatic, charismatic and widely supported.



David E. Jones

"Shakespeare and Henry V," originally published in the Guthrie Theater's program for its 1964 production of *Henry V*



Emma Smith

This Is Shakespeare,
Pantheon Books, 2019

Apart from *King John*, which deals with events at the turn of the thirteenth century, Shakespeare's Histories deal with the struggle for the English crown that went on from the close of the fourteenth to the end of the fifteenth century.

They constitute an historical epic covering over a hundred years and divided into long chapters corresponding to reigns. But when we read these chapters chronologically, following the sequence of reigns, we are struck by the thought that for Shakespeare history stands still. Every chapter opens and closes at the same point. In every one of these plays history turns full circle, returning to the point of departure. These recurring and unchanging circles described by history are the successive kings' reigns.

Each of these great historical tragedies begins with a struggle for the throne, or for its consolidation. Each ends with the monarch's death and a new coronation. In each of the Histories the legitimate ruler drags behind him a long chain of crimes. He has rejected the feudal lords who helped him to reach for the crown; he murders, first, his enemies, then his former allies; he executes possible successors and pretenders to the crown. ...

This scheme of things is not, of course, marked with an equally clear-cut outline in all Shakespeare's Histories. It is clearest in *King John* and in the two masterpieces of historical tragedy, *Richard II* and *Richard III*. It is least clear in *Henry V*, an idealized and patriotic play which depicts a struggle with an enemy from without. But in Shakespeare's plays the struggle for power is always stripped of all mythology, shown in its "pure state." It is a struggle for the crown, between people who have a name, a title and power. ...

It is this image of history, repeated many times by Shakespeare, that forces itself on us in a most powerful manner. Feudal history is like a great staircase on which there treads a constant procession of kings. Every step upwards is marked by murder, perfidy, treachery. Every step brings the throne nearer. Another step and the crown will fall. One will soon be able to snatch it.



Jan Kott

Shakespeare Our Contemporary,
W.W. Norton & Company, 1974



William Shakespeare reciting a work before the court of Elizabeth I, 1600

IMAGE: COURTESY OF BRITANNICA

Concerning the idea of Elizabethan tragedy and my own, I could speak for many hours. Central to Shakespeare's tragedy is the idea of the Fall, which implies social stature of a royal level. ...

I too see the Fall as a critical aspect of tragedy, but our world has changed, and it is no longer possible to think of the Fall as that of a socially elevated person exclusively. But social status, to my mind, was and is only a superficial expression of a deeper Fall, so to speak, namely, the destruction of a man's idea of what he is by forces opposing him. Any class is thereby given entrance to the precincts of the tragic, and so it is in a democratic society. Under Elizabethan feudalism this notion was unthinkable if only because none but the royal had the alternatives of seemingly absolute choice, the liberties of the masses being hedged about by all sorts of rigid prescriptions. Today we are all "free" to aspire to any height, we have the hero's necessary alternatives. My moral object, therefore, is to attempt to direct the efforts of men toward the clear appreciation of reality, exposing the illusory in order that man may realize his creative potentialities. In another context, Shakespeare was attempting the same thing, as in the history plays where the catastrophe derives from the impossible ambitions of the monarch or those of the subjects against the monarch. A certain ideal order is therefore implied as having been violated in his work, and in mine. His ideal was feudal; it supposed that life would be good when men behaved in accordance with their social position and neither lapsed into a lower level, (Prince Hal), nor created havoc by attempting to crash into one above them, (The King in *Hamlet*).



Arthur Miller

From a recently discovered letter to student Barbara Beattie about the genesis of *Death of a Salesman*, October 1949; reprinted in *The Atlantic*, February 2024



Prince Henry, Hotspur and Falstaff,
Thomas Ryder I, 1746-1810

IMAGE: COURTESY OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Many of Shakespeare's characters are indeed based on historical figures, but Shakespeare himself was never invested in natural realism.

A young white male was the first person to ever play his Black and quixotic Cleopatra. The fiery-tongued Queen Margaret in *Richard III* was played by a boy actor. Shakespeare's theatre company was subject to all of the conventions of the day where boys played the parts of women, where instead of seeing horses during a performance of *Henry V*, the audience would be accustomed to imagining them there instead. But original performance practices are still not even the reason anybody can play Shakespeare in theatres around the world. The plays lend themselves to diversity because of their creation within the context of racial formation. Black characters, and those from a range of ethnic minorities, are the subject of some of the plays *because* Shakespeare's England was populated by people from many racial and geographical backgrounds. It's hardly a stark intervention for a Black man to play Hamlet, or a Black woman to play Henry V or Richard II.

By statutes dating back to 1352, it was treasonable "to compass or imagine" the death of a king or queen or of the principal public officials.

The use of the ambiguous term "imagine" left the government wide latitude to decide whom to prosecute, and it would certainly appear that the performance of *Richard II* at the Globe [at the request of the Earl of Essex's supporters in 1601] was treading on very dangerous ground. After all, Shakespeare's play staged for a mass audience the spectacle of the toppling and murder of crowned king, together with the summary execution of the king's principal advisors. Yet the events depicted occurred in England's past, and by a tacit agreement, such distance in time provided a certain immunity, so that actions in a contemporary setting would instantly arouse the censor's furious wrath and that might lead to criminal prosecution could be represented without great risk to the playwright and his company. ...

It is impossible to know what went through [Essex's steward] Meyrick's mind when he watched *Richard II* that afternoon, but we do know how at least one person at the time understood its meaning. Six months after Essex's execution, Queen Elizabeth gave a gracious audience to William Lambarde, whom she had recently appointed Keeper of the Rolls and Records in the Tower of London. The learned archivist began dutifully going through an inventory of the records, reign by reign, that he had prepared for the queen. When he reached the reign of Richard II, Elizabeth suddenly declared, "I am Richard II; know ye not that?" If her tone betrayed a touch of exasperation, it may be because the antiquarian seemed to have his nose so exclusively in the past, while she, like everyone else, was reflecting on the dark parallels between the events in the fourteenth century and Essex's attempted coup. Thinking on his feet, Lambarde quickly grasped that the key point lay in "imagining" the ruler's death. "Such a wicked imagination," he told the queen, "was determined and attempted by the most unkind Gentleman, the most adorned creature that ever your Majesty made." "This tragedy," Elizabeth responded hyperbolically, "was played forty times in open streets and houses." It is the theater — Shakespeare's theater — that offered the key to understanding the crisis of the present.



Farah Karim-Cooper

The Great White Bard: How To Love Shakespeare While Talking About Race, Viking, 2023



Stephen Greenblatt

Tyrant: Shakespeare on Politics, W.W. Norton & Company, 2018

The [*Henry IV*] plays present many antitheses. One, reflecting an interest in circular time, is youth versus age. On the one hand, there is youth in Hotspur, Hal, John, Falstaff's page; on the other hand, there is age in the King, Northumberland, Mistress Quickly, and Doll Tearsheet. Prince Hal is young physically, but not in mind. Falstaff is old physically, but he is like a child in refusing to live historically. Falstaff dominates, however, and our sense of the meaning of history is enhanced by having a hero who denies it meaning and acts as a mirror to it. Another antithesis is the sophisticated versus the naïve. Hal and Falstaff are sophisticated in respect to each other and naïve also. Falstaff understands things that Hal doesn't, Hal understands things about history that Falstaff doesn't. Henry IV is sophisticated, so is Worcester. Hotspur, Blunt, Chief Justice ... — they are all naïve. Pistol is naïve, though he thinks himself sophisticated. Yet another antithesis is the old order versus the new order. The old order believes in the decentralized, liberal, feudal state. It is composed of the North and West, including the Percys and Glendower, who are even further outside the mainstream, coming from an even older culture that is still allied to magic. Opposed to them is the more efficient, less liberal, more cynical decentralized monarchy of the new order, consisting of Henry IV and his sons, the South and East, and London. ...

Prince Hal. Yes, he is the Machiavellian character, master of himself and the situation. ... Hal has no self. In talking with Poin, he despises himself for wanting small beer: "Doth it not show vilely in me to desire small beer?" He can be a continuous success because he can understand any situation, he can control himself, and he has physical and mental charm. But he is cold as a fish. Hal says to Poin, "What wouldst though think of me if I should weep" for my father, and Poin answers, "I would think thee a most princely hypocrite." ... Hal plays with Falstaff's love, as he plays with the conspirators Cambridge, Scroop and Grey. He is capable of gratuitous cruelty. ... He knows how to talk to anyone. He can speak to the troops en masse, "Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more," and differently in disguise with Williams, an individual soldier. He can talk to a depressed noble, he can threaten a town with sacking and he can express bogus piety.



W.H. Auden

Lectures on Shakespeare,
Princeton University Press, 2000

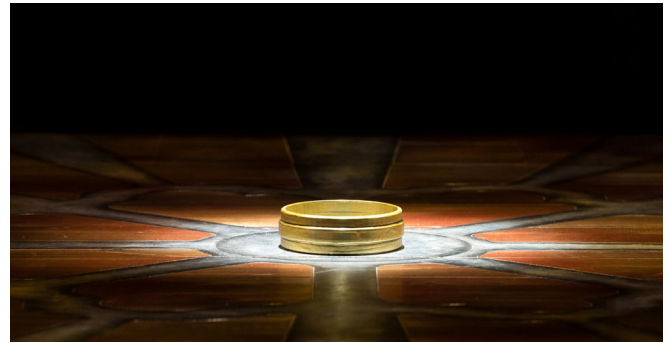


PHOTO: THE CROWN IN *RICHARD II* (DAN NORMAN)

The two parts of *Henry IV* are really a single drama in ten acts. ...

The richness and complexity of this double drama may be seen in the fact that any one of three men may with reason be regarded as its central figure. If we think of it as a continuation of the story of Henry Bolingbroke who deposed and murdered Richard II, then King Henry IV, as the title implies, is the protagonist. If we conceive it as background and preface to *Henry V*, Prince Hal is central. But if we just give ourselves to it spontaneously as the spectator or naïve reader does, the chances are that the comic element will overbalance the historical. Sir John [Falstaff] runs away with us as some critics think he did with the author. In that case these are "the Falstaff plays," and Falstaff himself the most important as he certainly is the most captivating figure in them. ...

In *Richard II* Shakespeare interred the doctrine of the divine right of kings. In *Henry IV* he tries out what can be said for the opposing theory. The twentieth century has fought two wars at enormous cost of life and treasure to avert the threat of the "strong" man. It is a pity that it could not have paid more attention in advance to Shakespeare's analysis and annihilation of this type and theory. ... Henry, whatever he became, was natively neither cruel nor tyrannical, but a man of intelligence and insight and not devoid of a sense of justice. His story for that reason approximates tragedy. ...

From the moment Henry gave the hint that ended in Richard's death to the moment of his own death at the end of *Henry IV*, his life became a continuous embodiment of the strange law whereby we come to resemble what we fear.



Harold C. Goddard

The Meaning of Shakespeare, Volume 1,
The University of Chicago Press, 1951



PHOTO: JIMMY KIEFFER, ERIN MACKEY, TRACEY MALONEY, BILL McCALLUM AND DANIEL JOSÉ MOLINA IN *HENRY IV* (DAN NORMAN)

A lifelong Falstaffian at eighty-six, I have come to believe that if we are to represent Shakespeare by only one play, it ought to be the complete *Henry IV*, to which I would add Mistress Quickly's description of the death of Falstaff in act 2, scene 3, of *Henry V*. I think of this as the Falstaffiad rather than the Henriad, as scholars tend to call it.

Shakespeare never surpassed the alternation between the royal court, the rebels, and Eastcheap in these three plays. The transition between high and low are so deft they seem invisible.

Is there in all Western literature a portrayal of ambivalence to match Hal/Henry V? In regard to both the King, his father, and to Hotspur, his rival, the Prince is a whirligig of contraries. Toward Falstaff his long gathering ambivalence has turned murderous. Hal's imagination is haunted by the wishful image of Sir John Falstaff on the gallows. The wretched Bardolph is hanged by his new King and former companion, in *Henry V*, without regret. Had Falstaff not departed for Arthur's bosom, Mistress Quickly's poignant mistake for Abraham's bosom, he would have dangled by Bardolph's side.

More than a few scholars of Shakespeare share Hal's ambivalence toward Falstaff. This no longer surprises me. They are the undead and Falstaff is the everliving. I wonder that the greatest wit in literature should be chastised for his vices since all of them are perfectly open and cheerfully self-acknowledged. Supreme wit is one of the highest cognitive powers. Falstaff is as intelligent as Hamlet. But Hamlet is death's ambassador while Falstaff is the embassy of life.

Again and again in [*Henry V*] we will hear language and see actions that echo and correct the pattern of *Richard II*. Richard's inward wars become outward wars. Richard's weakness with traitors becomes a necessary and merciless execution of malefactors. Just at *Henry IV Part 2* echoed and balanced *Part 1*, so will *Henry V* repeatedly echo and balance *Richard II*: (1) the King who thought he was Christ ... will be contrasted with King who followed the example of Christ (eating and drinking with commoners; going in disguise, as an ordinary man, among his fellows) without self-conscious theatricality; (2) the narcissistic, private, inward-looking moment when Richard II calls for a mirror in the deposition scene, only to dash it to the ground in anger, frustration and self-disgust, is transmuted into the triumphantly public moment when Henry V is described, by the choric voice ... as "the mirror of all Christian kings"; (3) the pattern of banishment and exclusion, sometimes playful and sometimes dead serious (and sometimes both at once), is continued and expanded; and (4) the new King's stern sense of political necessity has been prefigured in the previous plays. ...

What has died with Falstaff? It is useful to compare the death of this Sir John to that of another iconic figure, John of Gaunt, in *Richard II*. The old fat man and the old thin man have a good deal in common. Both deaths signal the passing of an order long in power, the "other Eden" world of John of Gaunt, medieval, feudal and hierarchical, and the world of Misrule of Sir John Falstaff. The death of Falstaff reported in the second act of *Henry V* is a counterpart, and fallen echo, of that earlier defining moment.



Harold Bloom

Falstaff: Give Me Life,
Scribner, 2017



Marjorie Garber

Shakespeare After All,
Pantheon Books, 2004



PHOTO: THE CAST OF *HENRY V* (DAN NORMAN)

Henry V is the most popular of Shakespeare's plays. It offers opportunity for ringing, thrilling patriotic declamation, pageantry and comedy scenes, which play a great deal better than they read. Alternation of grave and gay, lively and quiet, fast and slow, majestic and vulgar, is, as always, arranged with immense aplomb.

But is Henry V really the embodiment of all that a hero ought to be? He plays cat and mouse with the three traitors — Cambridge, Scroop and Gray — in a manner which makes an effective theatrical scene but which is not at all the behaviour of a likeable, even respectable, person.

His speech at the breach at Harfleur, stripped of its marvellous rhetoric, is simply an exhortation to his soldiers to forget their humanity and behave like savage beasts. It is also, like much else which Henry says and does, totally at odds with a Christianity which elsewhere he repeatedly and sanctimoniously professes.

At the gates of Harfleur, he warns the Governor what he may expect if he does not offer unconditional surrender. ...

Finally, the love-scene with the Princess of France passes off charmingly because the Princess plays it in a daze of girlish hero-worship for a matinee-idol. In fact, Henry's words are those of a vulgar, swaggering bully; ... political and dynastic necessity simply compel the girl to put up with him.

Did Shakespeare intend the audience to think Henry a vulgar, swaggering bully? Absolutely not.

But we think he thought him so and was well aware that with the aid of theatrical glamour he could conceal his opinion from all who did not seek it diligently. [G](#)



Sir Tyrone Guthrie

"The Director Comments," originally published in the Guthrie Theater program for its 1964 production of *Henry V*


William Shakespeare

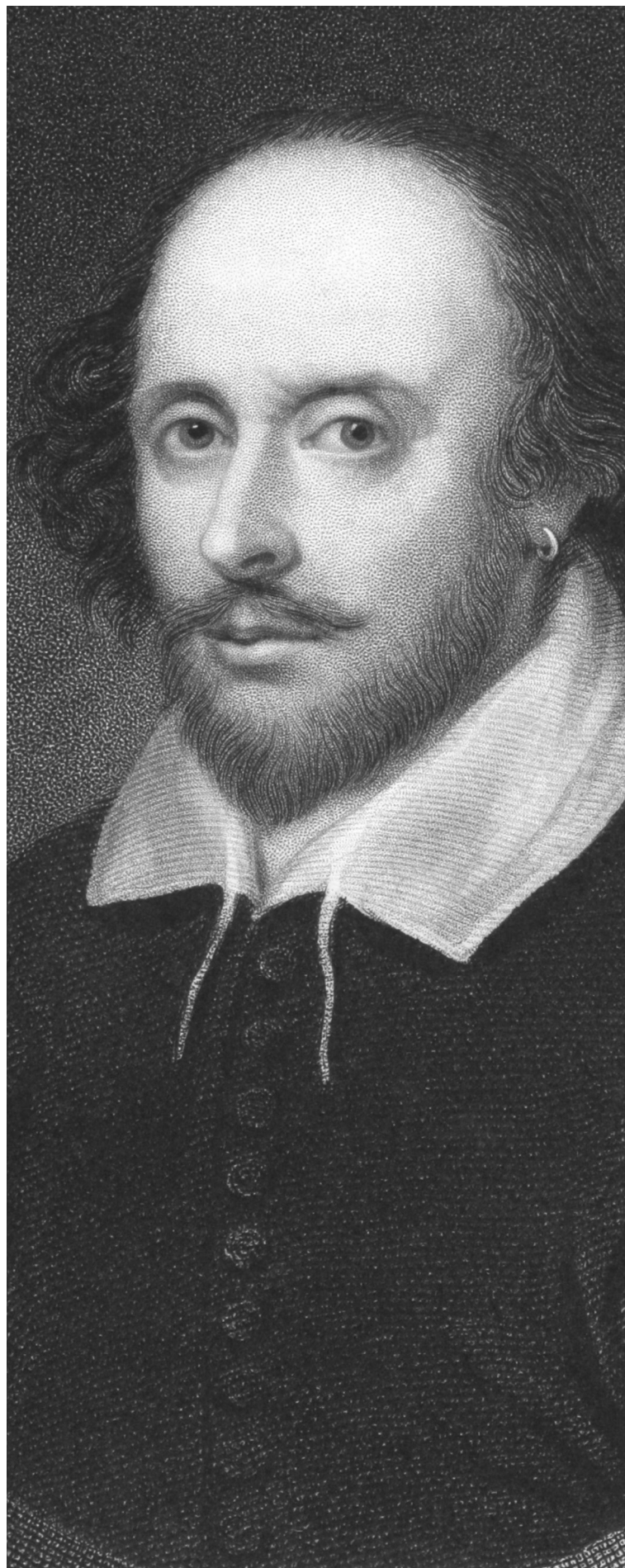
William Shakespeare was born in 1564 to John and Mary Arden Shakespeare and raised in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, in England's West Country.

Much of the information about him comes from official documents such as wills, legal documents and court records. There are also contemporary references to him and his writing. While much of the biographical information is sketchy and incomplete, for a person of his class and as the son of a town alderman, quite a lot of information is available.

Young Shakespeare would have attended the Stratford grammar school, where he would have learned to read and write not only English, but also Latin and some Greek. In 1582, at age 18, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, and the couple had three children: Susanna in 1583 and twins Hamnet and Judith in 1585.

After an eight-year gap where Shakespeare's activity is not known, he appeared in London by 1592 and quickly began to make a name for himself as a prolific playwright. He stayed in London for about 20 years, becoming increasingly successful in his work as an actor, writer and shareholder in his acting company. Retirement took him back to Stratford to lead the life of a country gentleman. His son Hamnet died at age 11, but both daughters were married: Susanna to Dr. John Hall and Judith to Thomas Quiney.

Shakespeare died in Stratford in 1616 on April 23, which is thought to be his birthday. He is buried in the parish church, where his grave can be seen to this day. His known body of work includes at least 37 plays, two long poems and 154 sonnets. 



A Legacy That Continues To Inspire

If one takes those thirty-seven plays with all the radar lines of the different viewpoints of the different characters, one comes out with a field of incredible density and complexity; and eventually one goes a step further, and one finds that what happened, what passed through this man called Shakespeare and came into existence on sheets of paper, is something quite different from any other author's work. It's not Shakespeare's view of the world, it's something which actually resembles reality. A sign of this is that any single word, line, character or event has not only a large number of interpretations, but an unlimited number. Which is the characteristic of reality. ... An artist may try to capture and reflect your action, but actually he interprets it — so that a naturalistic painting, a Picasso painting, a photograph, are all interpretations. But in itself, the action of one man touching his head is open to unlimited understanding and interpretation. In reality, that is. What Shakespeare wrote carries that characteristic. What he wrote is not interpretations: it is the thing itself.

Peter Brook

"What is Shakespeare?" (1947) in *The Shifting Point*, 1987



The Poetry of Shakespeare was Inspiration indeed: he is not so much an Imitator as an Instrument of Nature; and 'tis not so just to say that he speaks from her, as that she speaks through him.

Alexander Pope

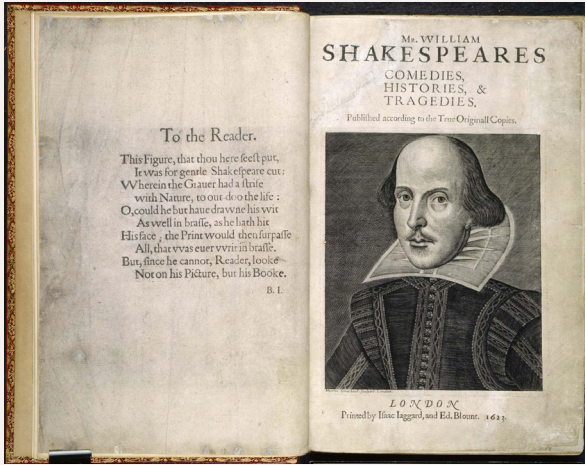
Preface to *The Works of Shakespeare*, 1725



We do not understand Shakespeare from a single reading, and certainly not from a single play. There is a relation between the various plays of Shakespeare, taken in order; and it is a work of years to venture even one individual interpretation of the pattern in Shakespeare's carpet.

T.S. Eliot

"Dante," *Selected Essays*, 1929



[A]lthough each play is a separate and individual work of art, they all generally illuminate one another, and taken together they form an impressive achievement in which each individual play acquires more weight and dignity when placed against the background of the whole corpus. Each play is more or less a landmark in the road along which Shakespeare the artist traveled, or, to change the metaphor, each play is a variation on a number of themes that recur in the poet's work.

M.M. Badawn

Background to Shakespeare, 1981

Every age creates its own Shakespeare. ... Like a portrait whose eyes seem to follow you around the room, engaging your glance from every angle, [his] plays and their characters seem always to be “modern,” always to be “us.”

Marjorie Garber

Shakespeare After All, 2004



Shakespeare's mind is the type of the androgynous, of the man-woman mind. ... It is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or a woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly.

Virginia Woolf

A Room of One's Own, 1929



His characters are intimately bound up with the audience. That is why his plays are the greatest example there is of a people's theater; in this theater the public found and still finds its own problems and re-experiences them. ☑

Jean-Paul Sartre

On Theater, 1959

Shakespeare's Plays

EARLY PERIOD

- ca. 1587–92 *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*
- ca. 1589–90 *Titus Andronicus*
- ca. 1590 *Henry VI, Part II*
- ca. 1590–91 *Henry VI, Part III*
- ca. 1591 *The Taming of the Shrew*
- ca. 1592 *Henry VI, Part I; Richard III*
- ca. 1594 *The Comedy of Errors; Love's Labour's Lost*

MIDDLE PERIOD

- ca. 1595 *Richard II; Romeo and Juliet*
- ca. 1596 *A Midsummer Night's Dream; King John; The Merchant of Venice*
- ca. 1598 *Henry IV, Part I; Henry IV, Part II; Much Ado About Nothing*
- ca. 1599 *Henry V; Julius Caesar*
- ca. 1600 *As You Like It; The Merry Wives of Windsor*
- ca. 1601 *Twelfth Night*
- ca. 1602 *Troilus and Cressida*
- ca. 1602–04 *Hamlet*
- ca. 1604 *Othello; Measure for Measure*
- ca. 1605–06 *All's Well That Ends Well; King Lear; Macbeth*

LATE PERIOD

- ca. 1606 *Timon of Athens; Antony and Cleopatra*
- ca. 1608 *Pericles; Coriolanus*
- ca. 1609–11 *The Winter's Tale*
- ca. 1610 *Cymbeline*
- ca. 1611 *The Tempest*
- ca. 1613 *Henry VIII*
- ca. 1613–14 *The Two Noble Kinsmen*

Authorship and dating of Shakespeare's plays is a subject of much academic debate. These dates are speculative but the "most probable" dating from *The New Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*.

THE HISTORY PLAYS

Richard II, Henry IV (Part I and Part II) and Henry V together comprise Shakespeare's second tetralogy of history plays and encompass the end of the reign of Richard II and nearly the entirety of the reigns of his successors, Henry IV and Henry V. These plays cover an earlier period of history than his first tetralogy (the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*), which tells the story of the Wars of the Roses, the English civil war between the houses of Lancaster and York. For this Guthrie production, *Henry IV, Part I* and *Henry IV, Part II* are combined into one play.

This tetralogy was written during Shakespeare's middle period, which also includes the comedies *A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Merchant of Venice* and *Much Ado About Nothing* as well as *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which tradition says Elizabeth I ordered Shakespeare to write to show Sir John Falstaff in love.

Like the three kings of the tetralogy, Elizabeth I was a descendant of Edward III. Because it was potentially dangerous for a playwright to write about usurpation onstage, writing about his own country's complicated dynastic history was a daring act of revisionist history, national reckoning and mythmaking. Shakespeare's primary source for these plays was Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*, along with other chronicles, annals and plays. [G](#)

THE HISTORY PLAYS DURING THE 1990–1991 SEASON AT THE GUTHRIE:



RICHARD II

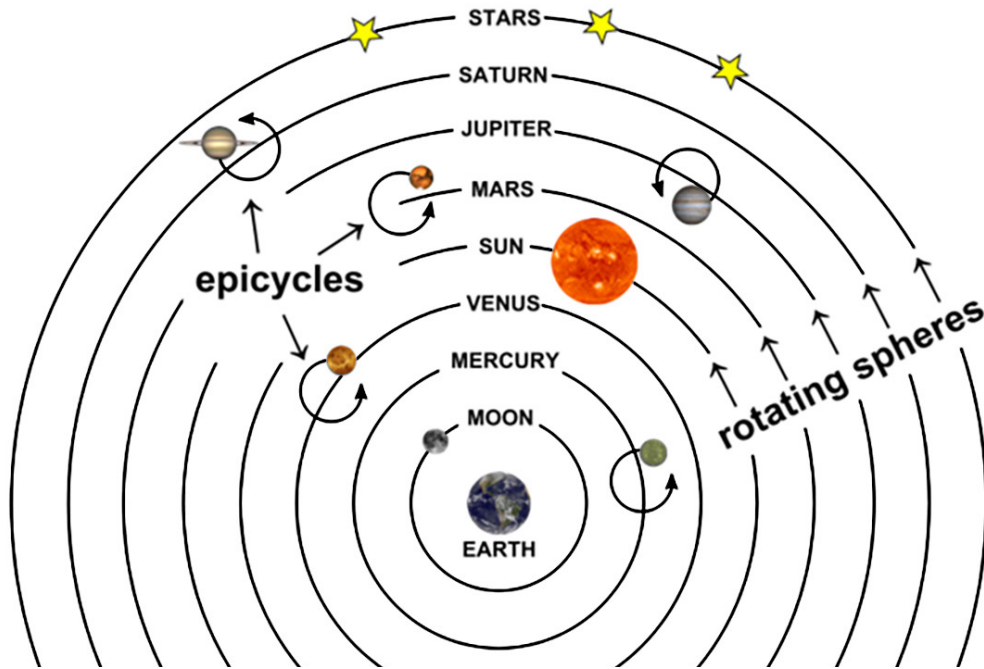


HENRY IV



HENRY V

PHOTOS: STEPHEN YOAKAM IN RICHARD II; THE CASTS OF HENRY IV AND HENRY V (MICHAL DANIEL)



Cosmology and Worldviews of the Characters in the History Plays

THE UNIVERSE: PTOLEMY'S SYSTEM

Medieval and Renaissance people understood the universe from Ptolemy's work in the second century, which put the earth at the center of everything. The earth stood stationary, surrounded by a series of concentric circles along which the planetary bodies moved. The moon was closest to earth and changeable; everything past the moon was unchanging. The final circle contained the stars, and beyond it was the First Mover.

The moving spheres created sound, "the music of the spheres," which was too perfect to be heard on earth in most circumstances.

The earth was composed of only four elements, which were also in layers: at the center was the solid earth, surrounded by a sphere of water (not quite complete,

so dry land poked through), then a sphere of air, and above that a sphere of fire (sometimes visible in lightning).

FORTUNE

The changeable moon became associated with Fortune, which controlled affairs and events in the world, apparently without regard for what was deserved or just. The figure Fortune was frequently depicted as a queen and blindfolded, standing on an unstable ball and turning a wheel. People rose and fell on the wheel on what appeared to be whim, and everyone was subject to her judgment.

EXAMPLE FROM THE TEXT

"And meteors fright the fixed stars of heaven."

- Glendower, *Richard II*, Act Two, Scene Four

EXAMPLES FROM THE TEXT

"And giddy Fortune's furious fickle wheel."

- Pistol, *Henry V*, Act Three, Scene Seven

"Fortune is painted blind, with a muffler afore her eyes, to signify to you that Fortune is blind."

- Fluellen, *Henry V*, Act Three, Scene Seven

HIERARCHY AND THE CHAIN OF BEING

Christian philosopher St. Augustine (354–430 C.E.) put his own stamp on the understanding of this universe by noting that God made a place for everything and put everything in its place. The description of that hierarchy was sometimes described as a ladder and sometimes described as a chain.

Within the broad categories of hierarchy, from God to angels to humans down to minerals, each class was likewise subdivided and had its own hierarchy. Fire was at the top of the elements, diamonds at the top of stones, gold at the top of minerals — and monarchs at the top of humans. Humans, with a material body and a rational soul enabling both reasoning and understanding, were the link between lower creatures (with material bodies) and higher creatures like angels that lived by intellect and intuition.

For the purposes of these plays, an important concept within the Chain of Being is that anything that happens along the chain influences and has consequences for everything else. Sometimes those are small, sometimes big. Earthquakes may be a consequence of unpropitious constellations, or human acts that go against nature can put nature out of whack. Displacing a rightful king from his natural place was a serious event with implications beyond politics.

None of this let people off the hook for their own choices, however. Everyone might be subject to Fortune's wheel and have a place in a hierarchy, but their responses to events and to their lot were their own. This moral freedom was often a theme within literature and drama during this time.

EXAMPLES FROM THE TEXT

“Be he the fire, I'll be the yielding water.”

– Bolingbroke, *Richard II*, Act Three, Scene Three

“I say the earth did shake when I was born.”

– Glendower, *Henry IV*, Act One, Scene Seven

CORRESPONDENCES

The chain and its parallel/mirroring hierarchies lent themselves to metaphorical thinking and language full of imagery. Because each class could find a similar hierarchy in another class, comparisons and correspondences abounded. The king was at the top of the human class, as the lion was at the top of its class, so the lion could

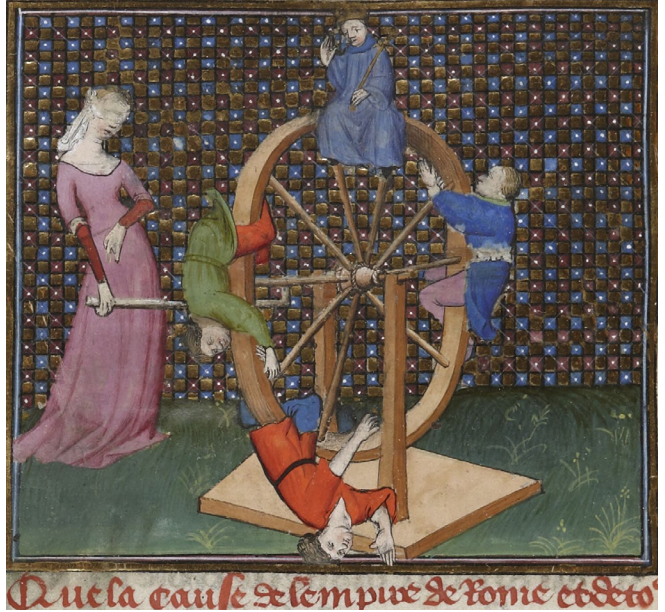


IMAGE: COURTESY OF MANUSCRIPT ART

be described as the “king of the jungle.” Even the human body mirrored the structure of the universe, with the head (reason) at the top of the body's hierarchy, and the State seen in the same terms (e.g., “the body politic”). The result was that everything in the world was both a metaphor and itself (e.g., a bug is a bug, and also a way to describe an easily squashable person), and these correspondences enriched Elizabethan writing.

MEDICAL COSMOLOGY AND THE HUMORS

Elizabethans shared with the ancients an understanding that the body contained four principal humors, or fluids, which correlated with the four elements and affected emotions and temperament:

- Phlegm (cold and moist like water): slow, stolid, phlegmatic
- Blood (hot and moist like air): jovial, lusty, sanguine
- Yellow bile (hot and dry like fire): angry, hot-tempered, choleric
- Black bile (cold and dry like earth): maudlin, languid, melancholic

Ideally, a person had a balanced mixture of all four, which determined their temperament. An imbalance of any would throw their temperament out of whack, leading to diagnosis and treatment (bloodletting, diet, medicine, etc.) based on the imbalance. [G](#)

EXAMPLE FROM THE TEXT

“What, drunk with choler?”

– Northumberland, *Henry IV*, Act One, Scene Three

Sourced from C.W.R.D. Moseley's *Shakespeare's History Plays: Richard II to Henry V, The Making of a King* (1988) and Isaac Asimov's *Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare* (1978).



IMAGE: COURTESY OF NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON


his own holdings, Henry ruled over a significant portion of what is now France. After he received Papal dispensation to bring the Irish Church in line with Rome, he invaded, and in 1171 Irish nobles submitted to Henry, beginning 700 years of English rule in Ireland.

Their son Richard I's (the Lionheart) (r. 1189–1199) long absences on crusade meant his younger brother, Prince John, ran the government (see: *Robin Hood*). John eventually became King John (r. 1199–1216) in his own right and lost Plantagenet holdings in France. The barons forced him to sign the Magna Carta, which defined the rights of nobles, citizens and the church in relation to those of the crown.

John's son Henry III (r. 1216–1272) succeeded at age 9 and reigned for 56 tumultuous years; his blunders and overreach caused the barons to create a privy council to advise the king. His reign's last years were marred by civil war with the barons, during which he was held captive for a few months. But England also invested in its universities, constructed significant church buildings and improved scholarship in his time.

Henry III's son Edward I (Longshanks) (r. 1272–1307) was on crusade when he became king and calmed civil dissent upon succession. During his 25-year reign, he conquered Wales (and began construction of Flint and Harlech castles in Wales). He formalized regular meetings of early Parliament — to ensure that royal authority was protected — and led many legal and administrative reforms. He tried unsuccessfully to unite England and Scotland (see: *Braveheart*, *Outlaw King*) and warred with France.

Edward II (r. 1307–1327) succeeded his father and reigned for 20 years, during which he endured rebellion by the barons, sparked in part by his poor judge of character and tendency to surround himself with friends, including Piers Gaveston (almost certainly his lover; see: Marlowe's *Edward II*) and the Despenser family, who were not good for him or the country. His own wife Isabella of France and her lover Roger Mortimer, a baron opposed to Edward, forced Edward's deposition in favor of his son, Edward III. Edward II was murdered in Berkeley Castle a few months later by, legend has it, a hot poker up the bum. (Many parallels are often drawn between Edward II and Richard II.)

Finally we come to Edward III (r. 1327–1377), Duke of Aquitaine, who fancied himself of Richard the Lionheart's ilk, and the patriarch of the many kings and dukes who appear in Shakespeare's plays. 

The Plantagenets

The monarchs of Shakespeare's History Plays (the titular Richards and Henrys) are members of the Plantagenet family, who had ruled England since 1154, succeeding the Normans who invaded in 1066.

To put the *Richard II*, *Henry IV* and *Henry V* story in a broader context, below is a brief recounting of the Plantagenet kings that came before Richard II. As a family, the Plantagenets were described as volatile, energetic, creative, intelligent, bold and militaristic. Many of the events and issues of the second tetralogy are rooted in or echo events from earlier reigns. For instance, the concern that Richard II surrounds himself with poor advisors ("the caterpillars of the commonwealth") mirrors concerns during Edward II's reign. Henry IV's determination to go on crusade follows in the footsteps of two of his forebears. Henry V's desire for the French crown was shared by earlier generations. Royal overreach, Welsh rebellion, interests in Ireland, conflicts on the Scottish border and the pesky Mortimer family also have roots in previous reigns.

Henry II (r. 1154–1189) was the first Plantagenet and arguably the greatest. He married Eleanor of Aquitaine (see: *The Lion in Winter*). With this marriage and

“Edward’s Sacred Blood”: The Grandfather Looming Over Them All



IMAGE: COURTESY OF NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON

Edward III’s 50-year reign began at age 14 in 1327, when his father was deposed. For three years, his mother Isabella and Roger Mortimer ruled in his name. Edward married Philippa of Hainaut in 1328, a betrothal made years before to secure funds for the Isabella-Mortimer attack against Edward II. Edward III took power for himself in 1330. Mortimer was arrested and executed; Isabella was forced to retire from public life (discretion was shown because she was his mother and Charles IV of France’s sister). Edward III wished to restore England to its strength and position under his grandfather Edward I’s reign.

The events of his reign with most significance for *Richard II*, *Henry IV* and *Henry V* were increasing England’s foothold in France and launching ongoing wars there; regaining English influence over Scotland after it had secured some independence; strengthening England’s relationship with Wales; and having a lot of children.

The dominant event of Edward’s reign was the start of the on-and-off (misnamed) Hundred Years’ War between England and France (1337-1475). The countries had scuffled over English rule in

Gascony (the Aquitaine legacy from Eleanor), with ongoing issues related to French support for Scotland, and English alliances with Flemish cities. War began when Edward III claimed the French throne in 1337 through his mother Isabella, sister to the late Charles IV. The war’s pattern was battles, exhausted treasury, then truce, with a couple exceptions. In 1340, England gained control of the English Channel, allowing transport of an army into France. In 1346, King Edward and his heir Prince Edward led an invasion of Normandy, won a battle at Crécy and successfully laid siege to Calais, which remained in English hands for most of the next century. The war simmered for a few years — lack of money, bubonic plague, a weary House of Commons — until the next significant victory by Prince Edward in Poitiers in 1356. The Treaty of Calais expanded English lands in France, and Edward III gave up his claim to the throne. When the next French king, Charles V, reneged on the treaty, Edward III again made his claim, though he left the fighting to his sons Prince Edward and John of Gaunt, who lost much of what had been won.


English events in France intertwined with its interests in Scotland. Very early in his reign, in 1328,

under pressure from Isabella and Mortimer, Edward resentfully signed the Treaty of Northampton, which made Scotland independent. Under his own power, he took advantage of Robert the Bruce's death in 1329, internal Scottish turmoil and a boy king David II (also Edward's brother-in-law). The English defeated regent Sir Archibald Douglas in 1333 in Northumberland, making Scotland a dominion state again. The French, however, supported David and Scotland. In 1346, not long after Crécy, English forces defeated and captured David II in Durham; he spent the next 11 years held at the English court.

Welsh loyalty to Edward II led to a potential crisis in Wales when Edward III became king, but was averted, and the rest of the century saw a generally stable Welsh-English relationship. Other notable events politically during Edward III's reign include the formal division of Parliament into houses of Lords and Commons; the redefinition of treason to include only seven offenses; and the use of English (not French) as the language in Parliament and law courts.

Edward III was a strong and beloved king who wisely chose loyal councilors and didn't experience rebellion

during his long reign. His marriage to Philippa of Hainault, herself a valued councilor, was a strong one. Together they had 13 children, of whom five sons factor into *Richard II*, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*:

- 1 Prince Edward (called the Black Prince because of his dark armor) died a year before his father, so his young son Richard of Bordeaux (b. 1367) became king upon Edward III's death in 1377.
- 2 Lionel of Antwerp, Duke of Clarence, who died before the events of the plays; Mortimer claims the throne in *Henry IV* as a descendant of Lionel of Antwerp, through Lionel's daughter Philippa.
- 3 John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, father of Henry Bolingbroke and grandfather to Hal.
- 4 Edmund of Langley, Duke of York, father of Aumerle and the Earl of Cambridge in *Henry V*.
- 5 Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, whose death is central to the conflict that opens *Richard II*. 



Edward III Crossing the Somme
by Benjamin West, 18th century

IMAGE: COURTESY OF WORLD HISTORY ENCYCLOPEDIA



A 15th century medieval manuscript illustration showing Richard II of England meeting the rebels of the 1381 Peasants' Revolt in London

IMAGE: COURTESY OF WORLD HISTORY ENCYCLOPEDIA

Previously in English History: Key Events Before 1398

1381: THE PEASANTS' REVOLT

When he was just 10 years old, Richard inherited the crown upon the death of his grandfather, Edward III. His uncles — John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster; Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester; and Edward of Langley, the Duke of York — were the young king's primary councilors. The first major event of his reign occurred in 1381, with the largest rebellion in English history to this point: the Peasants' Revolt.

A combination of stagnant wages despite a labor shortage and a series of poll taxes sparked the revolt, which started in the southeast counties before moving to London. During a frightening few days, the rebels captured and executed two government officials, slaughtered dozens of Flemish traders, razed John of Gaunt's castle and forced the royal household to seek safety in the Tower of London. The rebels demanded the removal of the magnates — the nobility separating them from the king, whom they loved. Richard met

with the rebel leaders and made promises. When events turned ugly, Richard personally rode out to the peasant mob and told them he would be their captain and leader. He then told them to disperse, which they did. The last of the rebellion was put down over the next few months. None of his promises were kept.

With these events, Richard experienced independence in the exercise of royal power, and over the next five years, he sidelined his royal uncles and began to choose his own advisors.

1386: CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP

Richard loved an opulent court and frequently overspent. He also let go of the desire to restore the Plantagenet holdings in France and secure the French crown — a long-held dream of his grandfather — and had unsuccessful forays in Flanders and Scotland. Parliament held Richard's advisor Michael de la Pole responsible and called for his impeachment. Richard

refused to dismiss anyone or to heed Parliament. His uncle Gloucester and others finally convinced him to address Parliament. Richard accepted that reform was necessary. Parliament fired de la Pole and set up a commission to control royal finances and to use the great and privy seals (authenticating official documents) for a year, essentially disempowering Richard.

1387: RICHARD BROODS

Richard was humiliated and furious. He began to plot how to reassert his authority, eventually forcing a few judges to declare that anyone who forced the king to accept the Parliamentary commission was guilty of treason. This set the country on edge. Three of Richard's senior lords — his uncle Gloucester and the earls of Arundel and Warwick — made accusations to Richard that five of his own advisors were treasonous. The Lords Appellant, as they were called, were supported by the Commons. Two junior lords joined as appellants: Thomas Mowbray and Henry Bolingbroke.

1388: CLEANING HOUSE

Tensions ran so high that civil war seemed inevitable, and there were a few minor skirmishes between the king's and the Appellants' forces. The Appellants prevailed and made accusations of mismanagement and threats of deposition. Richard agreed to call a new Parliament, which then tried and found guilty five of Richard's advisors, two of whom were executed, and his household was purged. Richard was again humiliated, but this time played a longer game.

With the aid of John of Gaunt, who had been abroad, Richard righted the ship and eventually was able to appoint his own advisors again. He had to consult with his three royal uncles for all financial issues, but soon the royal coffers increased. Richard pardoned the Lords Appellant so their actions of 1388 couldn't be held against them, and both Bolingbroke and Mowbray were reconciled with Richard and even received more honors from him.

Also during this time, Richard's obsession with the majesty of the king grew, and he began to act more aloof and authoritarian. His first wife Anne died, and as part of a truce with France in 1396, he married Isabel, the 7-year-old daughter of the king of France. Gloucester in particular was unhappy over this arrangement (believing England wanted war, not peace with France), and many felt marriage to a child bride a poor choice for a king in need of an heir.

1397: RICHARD'S REVENGE

Richard bided his time, then sought his revenge: He arrested the three original senior Lords Appellants. His uncle Gloucester was imprisoned in Calais under Mowbray's care. During Parliament that fall, Sir John Bushy oversaw the proceedings, which repealed the pardons of the three original Lords Appellant issued in 1388. As steward, John of Gaunt presided over the trials of the Appellants, balancing his sympathy for the Appellants and his need to protect his son Henry Bolingbroke. Arundel and Warwick were tried and found guilty — the first executed, the latter exiled. Mowbray was asked to bring Gloucester for trial, but he instead reported that the duke was dead. A confession by Gloucester was read, and he was found guilty posthumously. (That he had been murdered was clear to all observers.)

Richard seized the three lords' lands and redistributed them (raising Bolingbroke to the Duke of Hereford, Mowbray to the Duke of Norfolk, Thomas Percy to the Earl of Worcester and his cousin Edward York to the Duke of Aumerle), effecting a huge shift in power and wealth and now indebting many people to him. Richard started to demand forced loans from subjects and pledges of life and property to him. Bolingbroke reported to Richard that Mowbray had told him that their 1388 pardons were being revoked and that either Richard or his loyalists were out to kill Gaunt and Bolingbroke. How much of this plan was true is uncertain, but if true, it made Mowbray guilty of treason, a charge he denied. Bolingbroke eventually added to his charges against Mowbray, including misusing funds and the murder of Gloucester. Because Mowbray still denied them and neither duke would retract, Richard declared a trial by combat. The winner would prove himself the de facto truth-teller.

1398: RICHARD'S DILEMMA

Richard was almost certainly involved in Gloucester's murder, and a victory by Mowbray *might* mean there'd be no nosing about the Gloucester business. But then again, Richard might be more beholden to Mowbray and still suspicious and wary of him. A Bolingbroke victory meant increasing the position of an already-threatening (and popular) presence in a powerful branch of the royal family.

As Shakespeare's play depicts, Richard essentially punted on the question, voiding the trial by combat and exiling both men. **G**

Terms and Ideas in the Plays



Divine Right of Kings — A European political doctrine that emerged from the medieval period which stated that God gave *temporal* political power to a ruler in the way God gave spiritual power to the church. Related but not quite the same was royal absolutism, in which a monarch could not be held accountable by any human authority, such as Parliament, and therefore had absolute authority. It also meant rebellion against the king was a crime and a sin.

As a *political* doctrine, divine right had opponents who believed in a constitutional monarchy and asserted that even if a king wasn't subject to other people, the king was subject to the law. Arguably England embraced divine right — a king was God's vicar on earth — but not royal absolutism; from the Magna Carta onward, English nobles and eventually commoners via Parliament sought to define and establish the limits of royal power.

Heir Apparent — When the succession is clear (e.g., Henry IV to Prince Henry, his oldest son).

Heir Presumptive — When a monarch has no children (e.g., Richard II to Edmund Mortimer, then later to Henry Bolingbroke). The heir presumptive is derived by following the right of succession down the line. During Henry V's jaunt through France, before he marries and has a son, his heir presumptive would be the Duke of Clarence, the oldest of his younger brothers.

Prince of Wales — A title traditionally given to the oldest son of the king and first given to Edward II, the son of Edward I, who defeated the Welsh in 1277. It is both a claim of title (Prince of Wales) and of relationship to the king (the king's oldest son). The Prince of Wales bore responsibility for maintaining English control over the Welsh, and English holdings were ruled from Chester.

Feudalism — A social system that reached its peak in the 9th and 10th centuries but remained an influence on English law and customs until the 17th century (and on culture, arguably longer). A large landholder would grant land to another person, called a tenant or vassal, to hold conditionally in exchange for service

to the landholder, usually military service. That tenant could then do the same thing: give a portion of the land to another person in exchange for service. When the large landholder needed to raise an army, each of those sworn tenants was to come up with the knights and soldiers to wage it for him.

The king was at the top of this social system as, in theory, all the land belonged to him. Duties *and* benefits came with the arrangement. If duty wasn't fulfilled, the benefit could be lost (many a noble family was punished for treason, for instance, by losing their estate). And a warrior class of landless knights developed, supported by noble families. Feudalism declined for many reasons, including the centralization of government, collection of taxes instead of service, payment to soldiers and a diversified economy with more trade options (not just land-based). Lords and vassals swore a two-way oath of fealty: The vassal swore loyalty to the lord and to not harm the lord or damage the lord's property. In return, the lord swore to protect the vassal in body and in law and to provide for the vassal's income.

Higher Versus Lower Nobility — The power and influence of the higher nobility hearkened back generations, and they clung to that power. They often assumed privilege and influence and could be quick to intrigue if crossed. Thus, a king like Richard II might seek advisors among the lower nobility or aspirational commoners, like Bushy, Bagot and Green, because they were less powerful, more dependent on the king's benevolence and ultimately less dangerous to a sovereign.

Clergy — England was a Catholic country during the 15th century, and by the 14th century, the church's administrative authority was solidified, meaning the Pope had more control of the church in Western Europe than ever before. During Richard's reign, the Archbishop of Canterbury claimed the right of himself and other bishops and abbots to be at all Parliaments as peers, and sometimes they outnumbered the peerage and became known as the Lords Spiritual. Estates and other incomes were often donated to the church, which meant that generally speaking, higher officials within the church often lived as comfortably as the high nobility. Through this wealth

and political power — and often their own family connections to noble families — clergy had a status on par with temporal magnates. And their crimes were often tried through church courts instead of secular courts, which also gave them a position apart from others.

Appeal Before the King — An appeal was a formal charge. After it was made, both the accuser (appellant) and defendant needed to appear before the king. They could provide surety — sort of like bail — but if not, they were arrested. For instance, Bolingbroke had friends who provided his bond, but Mowbray was taken into custody at Windsor.

Parliament — During Richard's and the Henrys' time, Parliament was not yet the independent and influential body we know today. It evolved from Anglo-Saxon practices of nobles, clergy and government officials advising a monarch. From the Model Parliament in 1295 through the 1300s, the two houses — Lords and Commons — were established and began meeting and debating separately. Parliament focused mostly on taxation and law issues beyond the scope of regular law courts.

Parliament usually met at Westminster but could meet wherever the king summoned them. During the 14th century, Parliament became a permanent institution, and the House of Commons gained influence by trading financial support for political gains. But in practice, if not in theory, they were greatly influenced by royal and noble needs and usually were a rubber stamp on big decisions. Technically, only Parliament could depose a king (and did so twice in the 14th century), but it was affirming the will of the nobles. Parliament stayed in session only for as long as it took to complete their work.

Military Service — Sons of noble families and knights were trained in mounted combat and other military skills and tactics, but it wasn't quite so dangerous as it might appear. Knights had good armor, fighting was often mostly sieges and their status meant they could be ransomed.

Some skilled soldiers, like archers, siege engineers and foot soldiers, would receive regular wages, but England didn't have a standing army. To go to war, a king had to exact a specific tax which needed the approval of Parliament. This was often a long process, and collecting the tax and paying soldiers and other expenses was often delayed. (This may be the case for Henry IV at the top of the play; he might be asking for Hotspur's ransoms because he was cash poor. Hotspur

may hold onto them because the Percys hadn't been paid for the service as defenders in the north.)

Captains were empowered to forcibly draft (impress) civilians into the army. Falstaff, as he says, abuses this by allowing wealthier citizens to pay (bribe) their way out (he receives £300 to pay the soldiers, plus more in bribes) and exploiting the poor — perhaps a commentary by Shakespeare on then-contemporary corruption. Falstaff also shirks his responsibility toward his soldiers by first considering them food for powder and then in fact leading them where they are “peppered.”

Ransoming of Prisoners — According to the rules of chivalry, a soldier of a certain class who was captured or who surrendered in battle could expect to be treated well and eventually ransomed for his freedom. Ransom was an option only for those who had enough family wealth to pay it. It was also a means for soldiers of any class to earn income by taking prisoners. (In *Henry V*, Pistol would lose his ransom if the king's order to cut prisoners' throats is carried out.) A custom of the time was that the sovereign could claim ransomable prisoners captured in his name to increase the wealth of the crown.

At Agincourt, the Duke of Orleans was captured and taken prisoner in England for 25 years, where he lived a good life. His high rank meant a big ransom, which was hard to raise.

The Mortimer Claim to the Throne — Because Richard had no children (i.e., no heir apparent), his heir presumptive would be descended from his oldest paternal uncle, Lionel, Duke of Clarence, who had only one child, Philippa. Philippa married Edmund Mortimer, third Earl of March, and their son was Roger, fourth Earl, who was killed in Ireland in 1398, a reason Richard went to Ireland in 1399. Roger's son Edmund, fifth Earl, then became heir presumptive. In our plays, this is the Edmund Mortimer who allies with Hotspur and marries Glendower's daughter. Mortimer's claim to the throne is stronger than Bolingbroke's because Gaunt is lower in the birth order than Lionel.


Shakespeare's source conflated this Edmund, who was the heir presumptive and a child at the time of Shrewsbury, with his uncle also named Edmund, who was not the heir presumptive but was Lady Percy's brother and was married to Glendower's daughter. The real heir grew up to be very loyal to Henry V and informed on his brother-in-law Earl of Cambridge's conspiracy before Agincourt, went to France and helped the siege of Harfleur. 



PHOTO: THE CAST OF HENRY V (DAN NORMAN)

Discussion Questions and Activities for *Henry V*

“*Henry V* compels us to examine our place in the world and look at our complex relationship with patriotism. Above all, it speaks of the moral responsibility of our leaders: ‘Every subject’s duty is the king’s, but every subject’s soul is his own.’”

– Shakespeare at the Tobacco Factory

Before the Play

THE ENGLISH KINGS: RICHARD II, HENRY IV AND HENRY V

Shakespeare’s History Plays are a collection of stories that dramatize the intricately interwoven reign of English kings from 1399–1485 during the Hundred Years’ War between England and France. *Richard II* examines a king who becomes a man; crowned since the age of 10, King Richard II realizes his humanity in the face of his own mortality. *Henry IV* shows us how a man becomes a king; Bolingbroke usurps the crown by force to enact vengeance for a stolen inheritance. *Henry V* is the story of a king becoming a hero; Prince Henry’s journey from a wayward youth to a powerful leader is one of the most striking transformations in all of Shakespeare’s plays.

Richard II

Richard II has been king since childhood and surrounds himself with questionable advisors. As *Richard II* begins, the king presides over a complaint lodged by his cousin Henry Bolingbroke about the murder of their uncle, the Duke of Gloucester. Serving justice — and his own political agenda and safety — Richard banishes Bolingbroke and takes advantage of his exile to seize his father John of Gaunt’s estate to fund military activities in Ireland. When Bolingbroke returns early to reclaim his rightful inheritance, he quickly gains a following of sympathizers unhappy with Richard’s rule, including the powerful Percy family. With his grip on the realm slipping and the country’s stability at risk, Richard finds he has no choice but to abdicate and leave behind the only identity he has ever known. Bolingbroke, meanwhile, ascends to the throne as Henry IV.

Henry IV

In *Henry IV*, Henry hopes to lead an expedition to the Holy Land to atone for his part in Richard II's death, but he is hindered by civil discontent in England. Meanwhile, the king's oldest son and heir, Prince Henry, spends his time in London participating in pranks and robberies with father-figure Sir John Falstaff and other boisterous companions. As the political opposition to Henry grows, his former allies seize the opportunity to launch an open rebellion against the king, including young, hotheaded Harry Percy (aka Hotspur), who seeks glory on the battlefield. The two armies meet at the Battle of Shrewsbury, where the king's forces — and Prince Henry — prove successful. As Henry's health declines, Prince Henry wrestles with the loss of his father and finally accepts the weight of the crown.

Henry V

King Henry V strives to gain respect during England's growing unrest, and he takes his father's advice to turn the people's attention toward foreign conquests, resolving to make a claim to the French crown. As the king prepares to set sail for France, an assassination plot is uncovered and England's demands are rejected by France, raising the stakes and increasing the hostility in the air. The resulting Battle of Agincourt is a bold examination of power, camaraderie and courage against all odds as Henry leads his vastly outnumbered army to unexpected victory. The conquest not only turns a divided realm into a unified nation — it secures Henry's place as one of England's greatest warrior kings.

THE PLAY'S THE THING

Henry V utilizes the theatrical convention of a Chorus, an ensemble of actors who address the audience directly to establish context, explain action or introduce characters. The Chorus is full of information, telling us when we change location or explaining unseen action that bridges us to the next scene. *Henry V* opens with the famous Prologue, "O for a muse of fire," in which the Chorus asks the audience to use their imaginations to bring these massive scenes to life and lean into the actors' performances, for it is their imaginations that make the play possible.



WATCH

The Guthrie's 2020 video of the famous *Henry V* Prologue featuring Mark Rylance and Don Cheadle



LINK

Discuss

- What do you think the phrase "O for a muse of fire" means?
- What images came to mind as you listened to this speech? What words stood out to you?
- The actors repeat "with your thoughts." What are they compelling the audience to do with their thoughts? What is the audience's responsibility?

Activity

Read the Prologue from *Henry V* as a class, and then consider the prompts below.

O for a muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention,
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act,
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!
Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,
Assume the port of Mars, and at his heels
(Leashed in, like hounds) should famine, sword and fire
Crouch for employment. But pardon, gentles all,

The flat unraisèd spirits that hath dared,
 On this unworthy scaffold, to bring forth
 So great an object. Can this cockpit hold
 The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram
 Within this wooden O the very casques
 That did affright the air at Agincourt?
 Oh, pardon: since a crooked figure may
 Attest in little place a million,
 Then let us, ciphers to this great account,
 On your imaginary forces work.
 Suppose within the girdle of these walls
 Are now confined two mighty monarchies,
 Whose high uprearèd and abutting fronts
 The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder.
 Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts.
 Into a thousand parts divide one man,
 And make imaginary puissance.
 Think when we talk of horses that you see them
 Printing their proud hoofs i'th'receiving earth,
 For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
 Carry them here and there, jumping o'er times,
 Turning th'accomplishment of many years
 Into an hour-glass. For the which supply
 Admit me Chorus to this history,
 Who, Prologue-like, your humble patience pray,
 Gently to hear, kindly to judge our play.

- What words stick out to you? Are they visually descriptive, or do they have juicy vowels or crunchy consonants? Are they just fun to say? Do you know what they mean? Were they the same words you noticed from the video?
- Look at the last word of each line. What do you think the speech is saying just from those words?
- In small groups, break up the Prologue into sections and summarize it in modern language.
- What are some other examples of prologues or choruses? Think about the introduction to the *Star Wars* movies. What are other ways we see the idea of a chorus show up in art?
- Imagine your life was a movie or play. What would the chorus say? Write a chorus prologue for the movie of your life.

Activity: What Would You Do?

Assign each corner of the room a number (1–4). Read each scenario aloud, along with the options. Instruct students to move to the corresponding corner of the room based on the option they would choose for each scenario. If the class hasn't read or seen the play, they could then predict which choice gets made in the play.

- **Scenario One:** You are a wild and free young person when suddenly you are thrust into a position of power. *What would you do?*
 Corner 1: Decline the position completely — you didn't ask for this.
 Corner 2: Step up and take the position, leaving your former lifestyle behind.
 Corner 3: Begrudgingly accept but continue with your wild-and-free ways.
 Corner 4: Accept the position but delegate responsibilities to someone else.

- **Scenario Two:** Your rival sends you a prank gift, mocking your past. *What would you do?*
 Corner 1: Send an equally insulting gift back — two can play that game.
 Corner 2: Ignore it — you’re more mature than that.
 Corner 3: Throw a tantrum — that was so rude!
 Corner 4: Assemble the army and threaten to go to war!
- **Scenario Three:** You’re a new leader and some of your friends are caught bad-mouthing you and secretly supporting your rival. *What would you do?*
 Corner 1: Send them away — they can’t stay with that attitude!
 Corner 2: Ask them to stop and give them a pardon.
 Corner 3: Use them as an example and order an extreme punishment.
 Corner 4: Do nothing — their opinion doesn’t matter to you.
- **Scenario Four:** Everything hinges on the success of the group you are leading, but morale is low. *What would you do?*
 Corner 1: Succumb to the pressure and hide in your room.
 Corner 2: Give a rousing speech, inspiring everyone to push through and be amazing.
 Corner 3: Stand at the back of the group and hope nobody notices.
 Corner 4: Trust that someone else in the group will step up.

Discuss

- Henry V is new to the throne and the responsibility of running a nation. What is at stake when someone is in charge? What is expected of a leader?
- What does it take to be a good leader? Describe the qualities of good leadership. Who is a leader you would follow or support and why?
- Many characters in the play are burdened by familial and generational expectations. What are your family’s expectations for you? Do they conflict with your own journey and hopes for your future?

After the Play

LOVE AND ROMANCE VS. THE BUSINESS OF MARRIAGE

Western social conventions of love — as a romantic connection often leading to marriage, a legally binding contract — can be confusing. In Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 116,” he refers to a marriage of true minds and likens love to a natural and resilient bond. Using poetic and illustrative language, he makes the argument that nothing should get in the way of true love.

Discuss

- Do you think of marriage as a romantic endeavor, a business agreement or both?
- What are the attributes of a healthy relationship? What makes a good marriage?

Activity

- **Step One:** Read “Sonnet 116.”
- **Step Two:** Read Act Five, Scene Two, with King Henry V and Katherine of France.
- **Step Three:** Consider the questions below and discuss in small groups or as a class.

“Sonnet 116”

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
 Admit impediments; love is not love
 Which alters when it alteration finds,
 Or bends with the remover to remove.

O no, it is an ever-fixèd mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring bark
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come.
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom:
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

Henry V

KING HENRY V

The princess is the better Englishwoman. I'faith, Kate, my wooing is fit for thy understanding. I am glad thou canst speak no better English, for if thou couldst thou wouldst find me such a plain king that thou wouldst think I had sold my farm to buy my crown. I know no ways to mince it in love, but directly to say "I love you." Then if you urge me farther than to say "Do you in faith?" I wear out my suit. Give me your answer, i'faith do, and so clap hands and a bargain. How say you, lady?

KATHERINE

Sauf votre honneur, me understand vell.

KING HENRY V

Marry, if you would put me to verses, or to dance for your sake, Kate, why, you undid me. If I could win a lady at leapfrog, or by vaulting into my saddle with my armor on my back, I should quickly leap into a wife. But before God, Kate, I cannot look greenly nor gasp out my eloquence, nor I have no cunning in protestation, only downright oaths, which I never use till urged, nor never break for urging. If thou canst love a fellow of this temper, Kate, whose face is not worth sunburning, that never looks in his glass for love of anything he sees there, let thine eye be thy cook. I speak to thee plain soldier. If thou canst love me for this, take me. If not, to say to thee that I shall die is true, but for thy love, by the Lord, no. Yet I love thee too. And while thou livest, dear Kate, take a fellow of plain and uncoined constancy, for these fellows of infinite tongue that can rhyme themselves into ladies' favors, they do always reason themselves out again. What! A speaker is but a prater, a rhyme is but a ballad. A good leg will fall, a straight back will stoop, a black beard will turn white, a curled pate will grow bald, a fair face will wither, a full eye will wax hollow — but a good heart, Kate, is the sun and the moon, or rather the sun and not the moon, for it shines bright and never changes, but keeps his course truly. If thou would have such a one, take me. And take me, take a soldier. Take a soldier, take a king. And what sayst thou then to my love? Speak, my fair, and fairly, I pray thee.

KATHERINE

Is it possible dat I sould love de enemy of France?

KING HENRY V

No, it is not possible you should love the enemy of France, Kate. But in loving me you should love the friend of France, for I love France so well that I will not part with a village of it. I will have it all mine: and Kate, when France is mine and I am yours, then yours is France, and you are mine.

KATHERINE

I cannot tell vat is dat.

KING HENRY V

No, Kate? I will tell thee in French, which I am sure will hang upon my tongue like a new-married wife about her husband's neck, hardly to be shook off. *Je, quand j'ai le possession de France, et quand vous avez le possession de moi* — let me see, what then? Saint Denis be my speed! — *Donc votre est France, et vous êtes mienne*. It is as easy for me, Kate, to conquer the kingdom as to speak so much more French. I shall never move thee in French, unless it be to laugh at me.

Discuss

- In “Sonnet 116,” Shakespeare’s language is very romantic. However, in *Henry V*, the English king uses ordinary language to convince the French princess to marry him. He even suggests they shake hands to close the deal. Katherine scoffs at romance, asking how she could love a king who waged an awful war against her country. Why do you think Shakespeare’s language in “Sonnet 116” is so different from Act Five, Scene Two, in *Henry V*?
- What type of language would you use to describe love or marriage and why?
- Remember that Katherine has been instructed to marry Henry, whose country is invading her own. Where in Henry’s dialogue with Katherine do you see support for the business of marriage versus support for a true love connection?



PHOTO: MELISSA MAXWELL, DANIEL JOSÉ MOLINA, LANISE ANTOINE SHELLEY, ERIN MACKEY AND KURT KWAN IN *HENRY V* (DAN NORMAN)

THE COSTS OF WAR

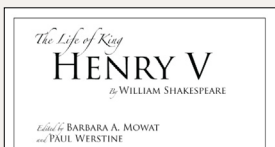
As far as we can look back in history, we see evidence of war — between nations or city states, religions, cultures and ways of life. In a modern context, there is often debate over policy and the role of government, but could people on opposing sides of a political spectrum agree on the ideal qualities of a good leader? Who can be trusted to make the big decisions that impact a nation or the world? How does a political leader justify a choice that may be unpopular with their constituents? In the case of *Henry V*, as with many world leaders, the decision to go to war is complicated and must not be taken lightly. The costs of war far exceed a quantifiable dollar amount.

Discuss

- What are the real costs of war? Does anyone actually win in war? What does it mean to “win” or “lose”?
- How does one nation bring another to its knees? What methods are used in modern warfare that would differ from the battles in *Henry V*?
- Consider the relationship between the boy Davy and King Henry V. What contributions did Davy make to the king’s cause? How did Davy’s death impact the king?
- What other ways do you think conflicts between nations could be solved? If you could put yourself in Henry V’s shoes, what would you have done differently?

Activity

- **Step One:** As a class, generate a list of qualities you observe in modern-day politicians. Consider any world leaders, presidents (past and present), state or local politicians or anyone with great influence and decision-making authority.
- **Step Two:** In small groups, work together to imagine an “ideal” politician and describe their values. What character traits overlap with the list of qualities the whole class made?
- **Step Three:** Design a campaign platform for an imaginary political candidate that embodies as many qualities of your ideal politician as possible.
- **Step Four:** Share your imaginary candidate’s campaign platform with the class.
- **Optional:** Hold a mock election for the different candidates and direct students in debating or advocating for a specific candidate. Who has the most convincing platform and why?



READ THE SCRIPT

A downloadable copy of the play is published online by Folger Shakespeare Library. [G](#)



[LINK](#)



PHOTO: DANIEL JOSÉ MOLINA IN *HENRY V* (DAN NORMAN)

For Further Reading and Understanding

EDITIONS OF THE HISTORY PLAYS

- King Richard II** edited by Charles R. Forker. The Arden Shakespeare, 2002.
- Richard II: The Oxford Shakespeare** edited by Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Yachnin. Oxford University Press, 2011.
- King Richard II** edited by Andrew Gurr. Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- King Henry IV, Part I** edited by A.R. Humphreys. The Arden Shakespeare, 1985.
- The First Part of King Henry IV** edited by Herbert Weil and Judith Weil. Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- King Henry IV, Part II** edited by A.R. Humphreys. The Arden Shakespeare, 1989.
- The Second Part of King Henry IV** edited by Giorgio Melchiori. Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- King Henry V** edited by T.W. Craik. The Arden Shakespeare, 2004.
- King Henry V** edited by Andrew Gurr. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

BOOKS ABOUT THE HISTORY PLAYS

- Falstaff: Give Me Life** by Harold Bloom. Scribner, 2017.
- The Red Prince: The Life of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster** by Helen Carr. Oneworld, 2021.
- Shakespeare's History Plays: Richard II to Henry V, The Making of a King** by C.W.R.D. Moseley. Penguin Books, 1988.
- The Plantagenets: The Warrior Kings and Queens Who Made England** by Dan Jones. Penguin Books, 2012.
- The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme** by John Keegan. Penguin Books, 1983.
- Agincourt: Battle of the Scarred King** by Michael Livingston. Osprey Publishing, 2023.
- The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare** by Irving Ribner. Princeton University Press, 1957.
- Shakespeare's English Kings: History, Chronicle and Drama** by Peter Saccio. Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Shakespeare's History Plays** by E.M.W. Tillyard. Macmillan Company, 1946.

BOOKS ABOUT SHAKESPEARE STUDIES

- Shakespeare After All** by Marjorie Garber. Random House, 2000.
- The Meaning of Shakespeare, Volume 1** by Harold C. Goddard. University of Chicago Press, 1951.
- Tyrant: Shakespeare on Politics** by Stephen Greenblatt. W.W. Norton & Company, 2018.
- The Great White Bard: How To Love Shakespeare While Talking About Race** by Farah Karim-Cooper. Viking, 2023.
- Shakespeare Our Contemporary** by Jan Kott. W.W. Norton & Company, 1974.
- This Is Shakespeare** by Emma Smith. Pantheon Books, 2019.

FILMS

- The Hollow Crown: Richard II; Henry IV, Part I; Henry IV, Part II; and Henry V**, in four episodes, 2013.
- **Richard II**, directed by Rupert Goold and adapted by Rupert Goold and Ben Power. Starring Ben Whishaw as Richard II, Rory Kinnear as Henry Bolingbroke, Patrick Stewart as John of Gaunt, David Suchet as the Duke of York and Lindsay Duncan as the Duchess of York. 141 minutes.
 - **Henry IV, Part I and Henry IV, Part II**, adapted and directed by Richard Eyre. Starring Jeremy Irons as Henry IV, Tom Hiddleston as Prince Henry, Simon Russell Beale as Falstaff, Michelle Dockery as Kate Percy, Julie Walters as Mistress Quickly and Iain Glen as Warwick. 115 minutes and 121 minutes.
 - **Henry V**, directed by Thea Sharrock, adapted by Thea Sharrock and Ben Power. Starring Tom Hiddleston as Henry V, Anton Lesser as the Duke of Exeter, Geraldine Chaplin as Alice, Mélanie Thierry as Princess Katherine and John Hurt as the Chorus. 132 minutes.
- Henry V**, adapted and directed by Laurence Olivier. Starring Laurence Olivier as Henry V, Renée Asherson as Princess Katherine, Nicholas Hannen as the Duke of Exeter, Ralph Truman as Montjoy and Leslie Banks as the Chorus. 1944. 137 minutes.
- Henry V**, adapted and directed by Kenneth Branagh. Starring Kenneth Branagh as Henry V, Emma Thompson as Princess Katherine, Brian Blessed as the Duke of Exeter, Ian Holm as Fluellen, Paul Scofield as King Charles VI and Derek Jacobi as the Chorus. 1989. 137 minutes.

PODCASTS

Shakespeare Unlimited. A biweekly podcast produced by the Folger Shakespeare Library that features interviews with Shakespeare experts on topics ranging from adapting Shakespeare to what Elizabethans ate to discussions about current productions. Recent episodes include “What Happened to the Princes in the Tower,” “400 Years of Shakespeare’s First Folio, with Emma Smith,” “Patrick Stewart on a Life Shaped by Shakespeare” and “Patrick Page on King Lear and Shakespeare’s Villains.”

www.folger.edu/podcasts/shakespeare-unlimited

Such Stuff. A now-completed podcast by Shakespeare’s Globe in London that explores behind-the-scenes stories at the Globe and the transformative impact of Shakespeare on the world.

www.shakespearesglobe.com/such-stuff-podcast

WEBSITES

Folger Shakespeare Library. A wealth of resources, including lesson plans, study guides and interactive activities.

www.folger.edu

Internet Shakespeare Editions. A collection of materials about Shakespeare and his plays, including an extensive archive of productions and production materials.

internetshakespeare.uvic.ca

PlayShakespeare.com: The Ultimate Free Shakespeare Resource.

After registration, receive access to the full texts of the plays, synopses, the First Folio and study aids. An accompanying smartphone app features full texts of the plays.

www.playshakespeare.com

Shakespeare Uncovered. A series that goes in-depth into one play or genre per episode. A host with a personal tie to the play investigates the text and its interpretations and visits companies in rehearsal and in performance. Episodes may be available online. *Richard II*, *Henry IV* and *Henry V* were included in the first season hosted by actors Derek Jacobi and Jeremy Irons. (The episode is not available for streaming but may be available on DVD.)

www.pbs.org/wnet/shakespeare-uncovered



PHOTO: THE CAST OF *RICHARD II* (DAN NORMAN)