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Henry V

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Symboles

posted Aug 5, 2013, 11:15 AM by alaa hagag **[updated Aug 5, 2013, 11:15 AM]**

The Tun of Tennis Balls

The Dauphin knows that Henry was an idler before becoming king, and he sends Henry a tun, or chest, of tennis balls to remind Henry of his reputation for being a careless pleasure-seeker. This gift symbolizes the Dauphin's scorn for Henry. The tennis balls enrage Henry, however, and he uses the Dauphin's scorn to motivate himself. The tennis balls thus come to symbolize Henry's burning desire to conquer France. As he tells the French ambassador, the Dauphin's jests have initiated a deadly match, and these tennis balls are now cannonballs.

Characters as Cultural Types

As the Chorus tells the audience, it is impossible for a stage to hold the vast numbers of soldiers that actually participated in Henry V's war with France. As a result, many of the characters represent large groups or cultures: Fluellen represents the Welsh, Pistol represents the underclass, Jamy represents the Scottish, and MacMorris represents the Irish. These characters are often given the stereotypical traits thought to characterize each group in Shakespeare's day—MacMorris, for instance, has a fiery temper, a trait thought to be common to the Irish.

Motifs

posted Aug 5, 2013, 11:14 AM by alaa hagag **[updated Aug 5, 2013, 11:14 AM]**

Male Interaction

There are almost no women in *Henry V*. Catherine is the only female character to be given many lines or presented in the domestic sphere, and most of her lines are in French. With this absence of women and the play's focus on the all-male activity of medieval warfare, the play presents many types of male relationships. The relationships between various groups of men—Fluellen and Gower; Bardolph, Pistol, and Nim; and the French lords—mirror and echo one another in various ways. The cowardice of the Eastcheap group is echoed in the cowardice of the French lords, for instance. Perhaps more important, these male friendships all draw attention to another aspect of Henry's character: his isolation from other people. Unlike most of the play's other male characters, Henry seems to have no close friends, another characteristic that makes the life of a king fundamentally different from the life of a common citizen.

Parallels Between Rulers and Commoners

Henry V presents a wide range of common citizens. Some scenes portray the king's interactions with his subjects—Act IV, scene i, when Henry moves among his soldiers in disguise, is the most notable of these. The play also presents a number of mirror scenes, in which the actions of commoners either parallel or parody the actions of Henry and the nobles. Examples of mirror scenes include the commoners' participation at Harfleur in Act III, scene ii, which echoes Henry's battle speech in Act III, scene i, as well as Act II, scene i, where the commoners plan their futures, mirroring the graver councils of the French and English nobles.

War Imagery

The play uses a number of recurring metaphors for the violence of war, including images of eating and devouring, images of fire and combustion, and, oddly, the image of a tennis match. All of this imagery is rooted in aggression: in his rousing speech before the Battle of Harfleur, for example, Henry urges his men to become savage and predatory like tigers. Even the tennis balls, the silly gift from the Dauphin to Henry, play into Henry's aggressive war rhetoric. He states that the Dauphin's mocking renders the tennis balls "gunstones," or cannonballs, thus transforming them from frivolous objects of play into deadly weapons of war (I.ii.282).

Theme

posted Aug 5, 2013, 11:13 AM by alaa hagag **[updated Aug 5, 2013, 11:13 AM]**

KING LEAR
MACBETH
OTHELLO
ROMEO AND JULIET
SITEMAP.XML
TIMON OF ATHENS
TITUS ANDRONICUS
TROILUS AND CRESSIDA
RECENT SITE ACTIVITY

Power

Shakespeare's history plays are *obsessed* with royal power, especially the question of who has a right to rule and why. Should the throne be inherited by an eldest son? Can anyone just come along and take it by force if they feel like it? In this particular play, the English King Henry V makes a sketchy claim to the French throne and goes to war in order to secure his position as France's next king. Meanwhile, his claim to the English throne is being called into question by those who think he's doesn't have a legal claim to the crown. (After all, Henry only inherited it after his dad stole it away from Richard II.) In *Henry V*, Shakespeare also considers what it is that makes a good king and admits that, sometimes, being a successful monarch often involves being a not-so-nice person.

The Ruthlessness of the Good King

In presenting the figure of its heroic yet ruthless protagonist, *Henry V*'s predominant concern is the nature of leadership and its relationship to morality. The play proposes that the qualities that define a good ruler are not necessarily the same qualities that define a good person. Henry is an extraordinarily good leader: he is intelligent, focused, and inspiring to his men. He uses any and all resources at his disposal to ensure that he achieves his goals. Shakespeare presents Henry's charismatic ability to connect with his subjects and motivate them to embrace and achieve his goals as the fundamental criterion of good leadership, making Henry seem the epitome of a good leader. By inspiring his men to win the Battle of Agincourt despite overwhelming odds, Henry achieves heroic status.

But in becoming a great king, Henry is forced to act in a way that, were he a common man, might seem immoral and even unforgivable. In order to strengthen the stability of his throne, Henry betrays friends such as Falstaff, and he puts other friends to death in order to uphold the law. While it is difficult to fault Henry for having Scrope killed, since Scrope was plotting to assassinate him, Henry's cruel punishment of Bardolph is less understandable, as is his willingness to threaten the gruesome murder of the children of Harfleur in order to persuade the governor to surrender. Henry talks of favoring peace, but once his mind is settled on a course of action, he is willing to condone and even create massive and unprovoked violence in order to achieve his goal.

Shakespeare's portrayal of the king shows that power complicates the traditional distinctions between heroism and villainy, so that to call Henry one or the other constitutes an oversimplification

of the issue. As Henry himself comments, the massive responsibilities laid on the shoulders of a king render him distinct from all other people, and the standards that can be brought to bear in judging a king must take that distinction into account. A king, in Shakespeare's portrayal, is responsible for the well-being and stability of his entire nation; he must subordinate his personal feelings, desires, dislikes, and even conscience wholly to this responsibility. Perhaps, then, the very nature of power is morally ambiguous, which would account for the implicit critique of Henry's actions that many contemporary readers find in the play. But within the framework of judgment suggested by the play, there is no doubt that Henry is both a great king and a hero.

The Diversity of the English

The play opens with the Chorus reminding the audience that the few actors who will appear onstage represent thousands of their countrymen, and, indeed, the characters who appear in *Henry V* encompass the range of social classes and nationalities united under the English crown during Henry's reign. The play explores this breadth of humanity and the fluid, functional way in which the characters react to cultural differences, which melt or rupture depending on the situation.

The catalog of characters from different countries both emphasizes the diversity of medieval England and intensifies the audience's sense of Henry's tremendous responsibility to his nation. For a play that explores the nature of absolute political power, there is something remarkably democratic in this enlivening portrayal of rich and poor, English and Welsh, Scottish and Irish, as their roles intertwine in the war effort and as the king attempts to give them direction and momentum.

Interestingly, this disparate group of character types is not unanimous in supporting Henry. Many of them do admire the king, but other intelligent and courageous men, such as Michael Williams, distrust his motives. It is often seen as a measure of Henry's integrity that he is able to tolerate Williams's type of dissent with magnanimity, but the range of characters in the play would seem to imply that his tolerance is also expedient. With so many groups of individuals to take into account, it would be unrealistic of Henry to expect universal support—another measure of pressure added to his shoulders. In this way, the play's exploration of the people of Britain becomes an important facet of the play's larger exploration of power. As the play explores the ruler, it also examines the ruled.

Warfare

In *Henry V*, Shakespeare dramatizes England's invasion of France and King Henry's success at the Battle of Agincourt (1415). Does the play glorify war and justify Henry's actions, or does it reveal the horrific realities of medieval warfare? These are questions that often divide audiences and literary critics, but there's plenty of evidence to support both views. Shakespeare portrays a wide range of attitudes in the play – from Henry's aggressive stance that war will bring England honor and glory, to the common soldiers' skeptical obedience and desire to simply make it home safely. Regardless of whether or not we believe Shakespeare glorifies Henry's invasion of France, one thing is certain – *Henry V* shows us that warfare (justifiable or not) has some devastating consequences that go beyond the horrific field casualties to generations of families: "the widows' tears, the orphans' cries, / The dead men's blood, the pining maidens' groans, / For husbands, fathers, and betrothed lovers" (2.4.2).

Patriotism

Henry V is one of the most patriotic works of art we've ever come across. The play is chock-full of rousing speeches that have been carefully crafted to portray the English troops as underdogs that overcome overwhelming odds to achieve victory over the French. What's more, Henry maintains that God is on his side, and he insists that fighting the French is a matter of national pride and honor throughout the play. At the same time, Shakespeare also registers a lot of skepticism about Henry's decision to declare war on France and he portrays several English characters in an unflattering light.

Family

This may be a big war play concerned with foreign affairs and national politics, but there's also a whole lot of family drama in *Henry V*. After all, both the English and French crowns are *supposed* to be inherited by lineal succession. (Lineal succession is a fancy way of saying that sons are supposed to inherit the throne from their dads.) It makes a lot of sense that the play is obsessed with all types of things that get passed down from fathers to sons – from entire kingdoms to character traits (like bravery and valor). In some cases, sons even inherit the burdens of their fathers' sins. Shakespeare also shows us how fragile family ties can be. During times of war, parents mourn for their lost sons, children are made into orphans, and wives are turned to grieving widows.

Gender

When Henry V affectionately calls his troops his "band of brothers," it's pretty clear that Shakespeare is mostly interested in male bonds – particularly the kinds of close-knit relationships that are forged among soldiers on the battlefield. Yet, despite the emphasis on male relationships, *Henry V*'s triumphant ending hinges on the fact that Henry gets hitched to the French princess, Catherine, a hook-up that's been designed to unite the kingdoms of France and England. Because it's a union that's been negotiated as part of England's peace treaty with France, the value of this male-female relationship is the fact that it forges a political alliance, not an emotional connection based on love or affection.

Art and Culture

Henry V is one of Shakespeare's most self-conscious plays. Each time the Chorus steps out on stage to set the scene for us, we're asked to pardon the theater's inability to accurately portray historical events (like Battle of Agincourt, the siege of Harfleur, and Henry's journey across the English Channel). After all, it's impossible for a tiny theater stage to "hold the vastly fields of France" or the thousands of troops and horses that marched across the battlefields. Time and time again, the Chorus suggests that the audience must labor alongside the actors (and soldiers). By using our imaginations, we, the audience, are responsible for bringing Shakespeare's play to life. The fact that Shakespeare sees his play as an interactive experience is pretty cool, don't you think?

Society and Class

In *Henry V*, Shakespeare knows that common soldiers experience war differently than the king and the nobility. After all, they're the ones who bear much of the burden of war and, if a battle is lost, they're likely to be killed while the king may be ransomed and his life spared. When Henry V orders his troops to invade France, his soldiers, many of whom are commoners, have no choice but to obey orders. They may not like it, and they may wish that they were back at home with their families or with friends at a favorite tavern, but their options are pretty limited. As a soldier named Williams puts it, "to disobey were against all proportion of subjection" (4.1.23).

Memory and the Past

Because it's the final play in a four-play cycle, *Henry V* is always looking over its shoulder (into the historical past and also into the plays that have gone before it). At times, Shakespeare's characters are haunted by their pasts. (Henry must answer for his wild youth and feels compelled to beg God's forgiveness for his father's mistakes.) As Henry looks forward into his future as the King of England (and potentially the King of France), he forges ahead at the expense of leaving old friends (like Falstaff) behind in his wake. Of course, Shakespeare's preoccupation with the past also means that the play is full of shout-outs to the earlier history plays, *Richard II*, *Henry IV Part 1*, and *Henry IV Part 2*.

Major Characters

posted Aug 5, 2013, 11:09 AM by alaa hagag **[updated Aug 5, 2013, 11:09 AM]**

King Henry V

Though a substantial number of scenes focus on other characters, Henry directly initiates nearly all of the significant action in the play, and he is without question the play's protagonist and hero. Henry is an extraordinary figure who possesses a degree of intelligence and charisma only briefly glimpsed in Shakespeare's two *Henry IV* plays. There Henry V appears as a pleasure-seeking teenage prince who wrestles with his role as an heir to the throne.

Perhaps Henry V's most remarkable quality is his resolve: once he has set his mind to accomplishing a goal, he uses every resource at his disposal to see that it is accomplished. He carefully presents himself as an unstoppable force to whom others must actively choose how to react. This tactic may seem morally questionable, but it is a valuable psychological weapon that Henry uses to pressure his enemies into doing what he wants. Again and again, Henry acts in a manner that would be deplorable for a common citizen but that makes him an exemplary king. For example, Henry often draws criticism from modern readers for refusing to take responsibility for the war in France. He even tells the French governor at Harfleur that if the French do not surrender, they will be responsible for the carnage that Henry will create.

Another extraordinary quality Henry possesses is his facility with language. Henry's rhetorical skill is a forceful weapon, the strength of which nearly equals that of his army's swords. With words, Henry can inspire and rouse his followers, intimidate his

enemies, and persuade nearly anyone who hears him. With Henry's speeches, Shakespeare creates a rhetoric that is, like Henry himself, at once candidly frank and extremely sophisticated. Henry can be cold and menacing, as when he speaks to the Dauphin's messenger; he can be passionate and uplifting, as in his St. Crispin's Day speech; and he can be gruesomely terrifying, as in his diatribe against the Governor of Harfleur. In each case, Henry's words suggest that he is merely speaking his mind at the moment, but these speeches are brilliantly crafted and work powerfully on the minds of his listeners. Henry has a very special quality for a king: the ability to present himself honestly while still manipulating his audience.

Shakespeare does not comment explicitly on Henry's motives for invading France, but it seems clear from his speeches about the weight of his responsibility that Henry is not motivated exclusively by a lust for power or land. Henry clearly takes the mantle of kingship very seriously, and he is dedicated to fulfilling the obligations of his exalted rank. He mourns his inability to sleep the untroubled sleep of the common man, hardly the behavior of a man dedicated to the pleasures of power. It also seems clear from Henry's undeniably uplifting speeches that Shakespeare intends for us to see Henry as a hero, or, at the very least, as an estimable king. Insofar as Henry is a hero, he is made so by his commitment to his responsibilities above his own personal feelings. Along with his faculty of resolve, this commitment makes him the king he is; though it sometimes causes him to make questionable personal decisions, it also helps to mitigate the effect of those decisions in our eyes.

Catherine

The young, pretty princess of France does not play a very active role in the progress of the narrative, but she is nevertheless significant because she typifies the role played by women in this extremely masculine play. The scenes that center on Catherine and her tutor, Alice, depict a female world that contrasts starkly with the grim, violent world in which the play's men exist. While the men fight pitched battles, yoking the course of history to the course of their bloody conflicts, Catherine lives in a much gentler and quieter milieu, generally ignorant of the larger struggle going on around her. She fills her days mainly with laughing and teasing Alice as the latter attempts to teach her English.

The fact that Catherine's scenes are in a different language from the rest of the play's scenes dramatically underscores the difference between her lifestyle and that of the men: where the soldiers speak a hard, rhythmic English, Catherine speaks in a soft, lilting French. These differences point to the fact that, while Catherine's life may be more pleasant than that of the men, the scope of her existence is extremely limited and has been chosen for her: she has become beautiful, pleasant, and yielding because

she has been raised to become whatever will make her desirable to a future husband. These qualities have been determined by the masculine value system around which her culture is structured.

Catherine's father hopes to marry her to a powerful leader in order to win a powerful ally, and thus Catherine has been molded into the graceful and charming woman that a powerful leader is likely to want. Shakespeare uses Catherine's English lessons with Alice to highlight her role as a tool of negotiation among the men. As the English conquer more and more of France, Catherine's potential husband seems likely to be English. Catherine thus begins to study English—not because she herself desires to speak the language (we are given almost no insight into what Catherine herself might desire), but because her father intends to marry her to his enemy in order to end the war and preserve his power in France.

Fluellen

Fluellen, along with Jamy and MacMorris, is one of the three foreign captains in the play. These three characters broadly represent their respective nationalities—Fluellen, for instance, is a Welshman, included in part to represent Wales in the play's exploration of the peoples of Britain. As a result, Fluellen embodies many of the comical stereotypes associated with the Welsh in Shakespeare's day: he is wordy, overly serious, and possessed of a ludicrous pseudo-Welsh accent that principally involves replacing the letter "b" with the letter "p."

However, Shakespeare also makes Fluellen a well-defined and likable individual who tends to work against the limitations of his stereotype. Though he is clownish in his early scenes, he is also extremely well informed and appears to be quite competent, especially compared to the cowardly lot of commoners from England whom he orders into battle at Harfleur. Like Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or Falstaff in the *Henry IV* plays, Fluellen tends to steal the scenes he is in and to win the affection of his audience. The fact that Shakespeare wrote such a role for a Welsh character is a strong sign that Fluellen is intended as far more than a comic compendium of ethnic stereotypes.

characters

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King Henry V

The young, recently crowned king of England. Henry is brilliant, focused, fearless, and committed to the responsibilities of kingship. These responsibilities often force him to place his personal feelings second to the needs of the crown. Henry is a brilliant orator who uses his skill to justify his

claims and to motivate his troops. Once Henry has resolved to conquer France, he pursues his goal relentlessly to the end.

The Dukes of Exeter, Westmorland, Salisbury, and Warwick

Trusted advisors to King Henry and the leaders of his military. The Duke of Exeter, who is also Henry's uncle, is entrusted with carrying important messages to the French king.

The Dukes of Clarence, Bedford, and Gloucester Henry's three younger brothers.

Clarence, Bedford, and Gloucester are noblemen and fighters.

The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely - Wealthy and powerful English clergymen. The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely do not go to fight in the war, but their urging and fund-raising are important factors in Henry's initial decision to invade France.

Cambridge, Scrope, and Grey Three conspirators against King Henry.

Cambridge, Scrope, and Grey are bribed by French agents to kill Henry before he sets sail for France. Scrope's betrayal of his king is particularly surprising, as Scrope and Henry are good friends.

York and Suffolk

Two noble cousins who die together at the Battle of Agincourt.

The King of France Charles VI.

A capable leader, Charles does not underestimate King Henry, as his son, the Dauphin, does.

Chorus

A single character who introduces each of the play's five acts. Like the group of singers who comprised the chorus in Greek drama, the Chorus in Henry V functions as a narrator offering commentary on the play's plot and themes.

Isabel

The queen of France, married to Charles VI. Isabel does not appear until the final scene (V.ii), in which her daughter, Catherine, is betrothed to King Henry.

The Dauphin

The son of the king of France and heir to the throne (until Henry takes this privilege from him). The Dauphin is a headstrong and overconfident young man, more inclined to mock the English than to make preparations to fight them. He also mocks Henry, making frequent mention of the king's irresponsible youth.

Catherine

The daughter of the king of France. Catherine is eventually married off to King Henry in order to cement the peace between England and France. She speaks little English.

French noblemen and military leaders

The Constable of France, the Duke of Orléans, the Duke of Britain, the Duke of Bourbon, the Earl of Grandpré, Lord Rambures, the Duke of Burgundy, and the Governor of Harfleur are French noblemen and military leaders. Most of them are killed or captured by the English at the

Battle of Agincourt, though the Duke of Burgundy survives to help with the peace negotiations between France and England. Like the Dauphin, most of these leaders are more interested in making jokes about the English than in taking them seriously as a fighting force, a tendency that leads to the eventual French defeat at Agincourt.

Sir Thomas Erpingham

A wise, aged veteran of many wars who serves with Henry's campaign.

Captain Gower

An army captain and a capable fighter who serves with Henry's campaign.

Captain Fluellen, Captain MacMorris, and Captain Jamy

The captains of King Henry's troops from Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, respectively, all of whom have heavy accents reflecting their countries of origin. Fluellen, a close friend of Captain Gower, is the most prominent of the three. His wordiness provides comic relief, but he is also very likable and is an intelligent leader and strategist.

Ancient Pistol

A commoner from London who serves in the war with Henry, and a friend of Nim and Bardolph. Pistol speaks with a blustery and melodramatic poetic diction; he is married to the hostess of the Boar's Head Tavern in London.

Bardolph

A commoner from London who serves in the war with Henry, and a friend of Pistol and Nim. Bardolph is a former friend of King Henry from his wild youth. A thief and a coward, Bardolph is hanged in France for looting from the conquered towns in violation of the king's order.

Nim

A commoner from London who serves in the war with Henry, and a friend of Pistol and Bardolph. Like Bardolph, Nim is hanged in France for looting from the conquered towns.

Boy

Formerly in the service of Falstaff, the nameless boy leaves London after his master's death and goes with Pistol, Nim, and Bardolph to the war in France. The boy is somewhat touchy and embarrassed that his companions are cowardly thieves.

Michael Williams, John Bates, and Alexander Court

Common soldiers with whom King Henry, disguised, argues the night before the Battle of Agincourt. Though he argues heatedly with Williams, Henry is generally impressed with these men's intelligence and courage.

Hostess

The keeper of the Boar's Head Tavern in London. Mistress Quickly, as she is also known, is married to Pistol. We hear news of her death from venereal disease in Act V, scene i.

Sir John Falstaff

The closest friend and mentor of the young Henry, back in his wild days. Falstaff doesn't actually appear in Henry V, but he is a major figure in the Henry IV plays. He is a jovial and frequently drunken old knight, but his heart is broken when Henry breaks his ties with him after becoming king. We hear news of Falstaff's offstage death in Act II, scenes i and iii.

Alice

The maid of the French princess Catherine. Alice has spent time in England and teaches Catherine some English, though not very well.

Montjoy

The French herald, or messenger.

Monsieur le Fer

A French soldier and gentleman who is captured by Pistol at the Battle of Agincourt.

Plot Overview

posted Aug 5, 2013, 11:00 AM by alaa hagag **[updated Aug 5, 2013, 11:00 AM]**

The play is set in England in the early fifteenth century. The political situation in England is tense: King Henry IV has died, and his son, the young King Henry V, has just assumed the throne. Several bitter civil wars have left the people of England restless and dissatisfied. Furthermore, in order to gain the respect of the English people and the court, Henry must live down his wild adolescent past, when he used to consort with thieves and drunkards at the Boar's Head Tavern on the seedy side of London.

Henry lays claim to certain parts of France, based on his distant roots in the French royal family and on a very technical interpretation of ancient land laws. When the young prince, or Dauphin, of France sends Henry an insulting message in response to these claims, Henry decides to invade France. Supported by the English noblemen and clergy, Henry gathers his troops for war.

Henry's decision to invade France trickles down to affect the common people he rules. In the Boar's Head Tavern in Eastcheap, some of the king's former friends—whom he rejected when he rose to the throne—prepare to leave their homes and families. Bardolph, Pistol, and Nim are common lowlifes and part-time criminals, on the opposite end of the social spectrum from their royal former companion. As they prepare for the war, they remark on the death of Falstaff, an elderly knight who was once King Henry's closest friend.

Just before his fleet sets sail, King Henry learns of a conspiracy against his life. The three

traitors working for the French beg for mercy, but Henry denies their request. He orders that the trio, which includes a former friend named Scrope, be executed. The English sail for France, where they fight their way across the country. Against incredible odds, they continue to win after conquering the town of Harfleur, where Henry gives an impassioned speech to motivate his soldiers to victory. Among the officers in King Henry's army are men from all parts of Britain, such as Fluellen, a Welsh captain. As the English advance, Nim and Bardolph are caught looting and are hanged at King Henry's command.

The climax of the war comes at the famous Battle of Agincourt, at which the English are outnumbered by the French five to one. The night before the battle, King Henry disguises himself as a common soldier and talks to many of the soldiers in his camp, learning who they are and what they think of the great battle in which they have been swept up. When he is by himself, he laments his ever-present responsibilities as king. In the morning, he prays to God and gives a powerful, inspiring speech to his soldiers. Miraculously, the English win the battle, and the proud French must surrender at last. Some time later, peace negotiations are finally worked out: Henry will marry Catherine, the daughter of the French king. Henry's son will be the king of France, and the marriage will unite the two kingdoms.

Summary

posted Aug 5, 2013, 10:59 AM by alaa hagag **[updated Aug 5, 2013, 10:59 AM]**

When *Henry V* opens, the Archbishop of Canterbury and his sidekick, the Bishop of Ely, are having a private chitchat about a bill that's just been reintroduced by Parliament. If passed, the bill would take a bunch of the Church's land and money and put it in the king's treasury, which means it would probably be used for stuff like feeding the poor and funding the king's army. Canterbury isn't exactly thrilled about the idea of sharing the Church's dough, so he's decided to offer King Henry a HUGE chunk of change to make the bill disappear... forever. The extra cash will come in handy, because Henry is thinking of invading France and making a claim to the French crown, which requires a whole lot of well-funded troops. (Church corruption? Check. Greed? Check. Political intrigue? Check. We told you things were getting juicy.)

Citing a loophole in the Salic Law, Canterbury encourages Henry to invade France and help himself to the throne. Henry, who doesn't exactly need much convincing, totally agrees that

he's got every right to the French crown, in addition to the English crown. After all, his great-great-grandmother was the daughter of a French king, so Henry's basically got dibs. The French should have absolutely no problem accepting this just as soon as Henry explains things to them. (Yeah, right.)

Canterbury's advice couldn't come at a better time, because the French Ambassador just so happens to be visiting England on a diplomatic mission and he's waiting to talk with Henry. It turns out that Henry has recently tried to claim some French dukedoms, so the Ambassador has brought a message from the Dauphin (the French king's son, who is set to inherit the throne) of France. The message goes something like this:

"Dear Henry. Thanks for your recent letter about your plans to claim some French territory. I've thought it over and decided that it's just not going to happen. Your pal, the heir to the French throne. P.S. In place of the dukedoms you so desperately wanted, please accept my gift to you, this giant treasure chest that I've gone ahead and filled with some tennis balls for you to play with."

Oh, snap! Henry is furious. How dare the Dauphin insinuate that he's just a boy who's better off playing a game of tennis than participating in power politics! (Looks like the Dauphin didn't get the message about Wild Prince Hal's transformation into a serious king. Maybe he should go back and read *Henry IV Part 1* and *Part 2*.)

Naturally, Henry's got a message of his own for the Dauphin. It sounds like this:

"Dear Lewis, Thanks for the generous gift! I love it so much that I'm totally going to get medieval on you and your country by turning these tennis balls into *cannon*balls that will rip you and your friends to shreds. Then I'm going to take your father's crown and make him polish my new gold wand while I relax on his throne. Sincerely, the Soon-to-be King of France *and* England."

Taking a break from all this political drama, Shakespeare checks in with Henry's old pal Bardolph, who is still hanging out with his low-life crew (Pistol, Mistress Quickly, and a new guy named Nim) in Eastcheap, the London slum where Henry used to chill when he was a rowdy young prince. The word on the street is that Sir John Falstaff (Henry's ex-BFF and mentor) has been seriously ill. Everybody says he's dying of a broken heart because Henry banished him (back in *Henry IV Part 2*). Before we know it, Falstaff dies (off-stage) of a nasty venereal disease. After Bardolph and company take a few minutes to mourn their loss and argue about whether or not Falstaff is in heaven or hell, the guys run off to France to fight in Henry's army, leaving Mistress Quickly behind to run her "inn" (which is code for brothel).

Meanwhile, we find out about a treacherous plot to have King Henry assassinated by (gasp!) some of his own friends. Apparently, the French have paid three English noblemen (Scrope, Grey, and Cambridge) to kill him. We learn that Cambridge isn't just in it for the money – he thinks this other guy named Mortimer has a better claim to the English throne than Henry does. (Remember, Henry V only got to inherit the throne because one day his dad, Henry IV, took some French money and put together an army to help him snatch the crown away from the then King Richard II.) After playing a few mind games with the traitors, Henry has them executed. Then he hops on a ship and sets sail across the English Channel so he can snatch the crown away from King Charles VI. (You're picking up on the irony of all this attempted crown-snatching, right?)

While this is happening, the French talk about whether or not they should be alarmed that Henry's troops are about to invade France. The cocky Dauphin thinks that Henry and his army are a bunch of clowns – the battle will be a piece of cake (or maybe some other delicious French dessert, like chocolate mousse).

Before we know it, Henry's troops land on the shores of northern France and invade the town of Harfleur. During the siege, we get to hear Henry's famous battle cry, "Once more into the breach dear friends, once more." (Translation: "We've just blown a giant hole in the town's wall so please rush in there ASAP, even though it's dangerous and you'll probably die.")

While this is happening, Bardolph, Pistol, and Nim stand back and remain *as far away as possible* from the action. They say they'd much rather be back at home in London, enjoying a nice "pot of ale" (kind of like beer) at their favorite pub. Before we can decide whether or not we think they're cowardly or just plain smart, we notice that a small group of Captains (Fluellen, MacMorris, and Jamy) are also standing back *as far away as possible* from the fighting. Instead of fighting, these so-called leaders have a lively debate about the *art* of warfare while most of the other soldiers do all the dirty work. (Hmm. Shakespeare is really good at this irony thing, don't you think?)

After the French call an official time out (which is technically called a "parley"), Henry stands before the gates of Harfleur and warns the Governor to surrender now or reap the consequences, which will probably involve his soldiers 1) raping the town virgins, 2) impaling infants on spikes, and 3) bashing in the heads of defenseless old men. The Governor of Harfleur surrenders. (By the way, we think the scariest version of this speech is in Peter Babakitis's 2007 film.

Later, we learn that Bardolph and Nim have been caught looting (when you steal stuff during a

war or a riot) and have been sentenced to death by hanging. (Dang. Henry's old Eastcheap pals are dropping like flies. What's up with that?)

Meanwhile, the rest of the English troops are seriously down and out – they're exhausted and know they're outnumbered by the French soldiers. The night before the Battle of Agincourt, Henry walks through his camp and tries to cheer them up. Then, he borrows some dirty old clothes and disguises himself as a commoner so he can wander around the camp and get the 411 on what his soldiers are *really* thinking. It turns out they're not as excited about warfare as Henry is. They point out that they're the ones who will probably be killed or who will lose important body parts (like heads, legs, and arms) during the fighting. The king, on the other hand, will probably just get captured and ransomed for a bunch of money before the French ship him back to England with his tail between his legs.

Still disguised, Henry gets into an argument with a guy named Williams, who wonders if King Henry's war is even justifiable. Either way, Williams declares that the king is going to be responsible when the English soldiers are slaughtered in battle. This ticks off Henry, who argues that, actually, the king is *not* responsible for the lives of his men, even though they have to follow his orders and he's just ordered all of them to fight a battle they'll probably lose. (Um, okay.) When he's alone, Henry feels sorry for himself and delivers a long, whiny speech about how hard it is to be a king. (Cue the sad violin music.)

The next morning, the French and English prepare to get their battle on. To pump up his small crew of soldiers, Henry delivers one of the most famous motivational war speeches of all time, which includes the following lines: "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers; / For he today that sheds his blood with me / Shall be my brother." Henry convinces his troops that it's actually *better* that they're so outnumbered because, this way, when they stomp all over the French, there will be a lot more honor for each of them. (This is sort of like how sharing a delicious pepperoni pizza with a small group of friends is better than sharing it with the entire school because everybody gets more.)

Miraculously, the English win the Battle of Agincourt and suffer only a handful of losses. Only four English nobles and 25 commoners have been killed. The French, on the other hand, have lost a boatload of men. We're not exactly sure how this happens because Shakespeare leaves the details a little fuzzy, but Henry promptly attributes the victory to God and warns that, if anyone says otherwise, they'll be put to death.

After the battle, Henry goes back to England, where they throw a big parade for him. He then returns to France to work out the details of a peace treaty with King Charles and Queen Isabel

of France. Henry's got a big list of demands, including the right to marry the French princess, Catherine. Then something totally bizarre happens. Even though Henry knows that Catherine will be his wife, he tries to get all romantic and woos her anyway, begging her to marry him (as if she has a choice). King Charles agrees to the terms of the treaty and declares that Henry and Catherine can get hitched ASAP since the union will unite France and England. (Time for wedding cake!)

Unfortunately, Shmoopsters, this triumphant feeling doesn't last long – during the play's Epilogue, the Chorus comes out on stage and says something like, "By the way, we don't have time to show what happens next but it's not good. As we all know, Henry dies and his son, Henry VI, totally loses France. But, we hope you liked our play. Have a good night everyone!"