



WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE	KING LEAR	HAMLET	MACBETH	OTHELLO	ROMEO AND JULIET	JULIUS CAESAR	CORIOLANUS
CYMBELINE	TITUS ANDRONICUS	TIMON OF ATHENS	TROILUS AND CRESSIDA	ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA	KING JOHN		
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# Henry VI, Part 1

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## characters

posted Aug 5, 2013, 12:34 PM by alaa hagag [ **updated Aug 5, 2013, 12:34 PM** ]

### King Henry VI

King of England and various regions in France. Henry is son of Henry V, a great warrior who won many lands in France, and it has been prophesized that this son will lose the lands his father won. Henry faces great difficulty with his advisors and nobles, many of whom are involved in arguments with each other. Although young and inexperienced, he realizes what damage may be reaped by such dissention among the lords. He marries a French earl's daughter, Margaret, on the advice of Suffolk, though she does not symbolize a politically advantageous match.

### Charles

The Dauphin of France, Charles has himself crowned king and tries to recapture his kingdom from Henry. When he meets the warrior-woman Joan, he engages her in single combat but loses to her. He then wants her to become his lover but she refuses. Charles wins back half his former kingdom after a series of bloody battles, including one in which the English nobleman Talbot dies. However, following this moderate gain, Charles desists in his campaign and agrees to make peace with the English, in order to spare his people from further slaughter.

### Gloucester

Named Protector of the English Realm, Gloucester manages the kingdom until Henry is old enough to rule. He and Winchester disagree, and their serving men fight each other in street brawls. Yet Gloucester and Winchester agree to stop fighting, temporarily, over the course of the play.

### Winchester

Head of the English church and nemesis of Gloucester. Winchester accuses Gloucester of

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wanting to be the sole advisor to Henry, to control him, and eventually to take over the kingdom from him. He grudgingly agrees to get along with Gloucester temporarily, but by the end of the play he purchases the title of cardinal, swearing that no one will have more power in the kingdom than he.

**Richard Plantagenet**

Although his father once had claims to the throne, the young Richard Plantagenet lost all noble titles when his father was put to death. Plantagenet disagrees with Somerset about a point of law, and they each pick a different color rose as emblems of their opposing viewpoints, Plantagenet choosing the white rose, Somerset the red. Later he asks his imprisoned uncle Mortimer about the reasons for his father's downfall. Plantagenet asks the king to restore his titles, and the King Henry makes him the Duke of York. In France, the argument between Somerset and York is revealed, but the king urges them to make peace. He assigns York to control the English troops in France, where his disagreement with Somerset proves fatal when Somerset delays in sending him reinforcements. York is unable to aid Talbot without these extra troops, and Talbot dies.

**Talbot**

General of the English troops in France, Talbot is so feared by the French that, when he is captured, they have archers guard him even while he sleeps. After being released, he conquers many towns and fortifications in France, until he encounters Joan. Joan breaks the Britons' siege on Orléans, but Talbot still beats the French several more times, until he is trapped at Bordeaux, where he and his son John are killed. Talbot represents a dying breed of noble chivalrous soldiers fighting for the honor of king and country. When he falls, the last of a valorous line dies out.

**Joan**

**Also** known as Joan la Pucelle or Joan of Arc, Joan is a French maiden who comes to Charles with reports of her visions of the future of France. She says she will lead his troops in breaking the Britons' siege on Orléans, and her words prove true. Thereafter she aids the French troops in several battles. Before a battle with York and Somerset, she calls to her demons for advice but they refuse to speak to her. Then she is captured by York and put on trial. She tries to save herself by claiming she is a virgin, then saying she is pregnant, but the British burn her at the stake.

**Somerset**

Somerset is an English lord who argues with Richard Plantagenet, later known as York. Their disagreement dates from a scene in the Temple Garden when they both pick roses to signify their opposite sides in a legal argument. Somerset chooses the red rose, Plantagenet the white. Later, in France, Somerset's dislike for York endangers the English campaign when he delays sending cavalry to York. Without these reinforcements York is unable to back Talbot in battle,

[TIMON OF ATHENS](#)[TITUS ANDRONICUS](#)[TROILUS AND CRESSIDA](#)

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and Talbot dies.

### **Suffolk**

Suffolk is an English lord who captures Margaret after the French are defeated and is so impressed with her that he is determined to woo her. But he is married, so he woos her for Henry, and then convinces Henry to marry her. Thus, the new queen is a woman he has handpicked--a woman with whom he is intimate, a woman over who trusts and listens to him: Suffolk plans to influence the British reign by way of this connection.

### **Mortimer**

Richard Plantagenet's uncle, Mortimer has been imprisoned in the Tower of London for years because of his claim to the English throne; Henry's allies have wanted him out of the way. Mortimer tells Plantagenet about this claim but urges him to forget about it because the ruling party is immovable.

### **Burgundy**

Although a French lord, Burgundy fights with Talbot's English forces. However, Joan convinces him to return to the French. His departure from the scene of the battle leaves Talbot weakened, and the French are able to kill Talbot in his next battle.

### **Bedford**

An English general, Bedford rushes off to France to help Talbot at the beginning of the play. Later, at Rouen, he is nearly too old and ill to lead his forces. Yet he does lead them, issuing verbal directions from his chair, and the English win; Bedford dies content.

### **Alençon**

A French lord who fights with Charles

### **René**

A French lord who opposes Charles. Also Margaret's father.

### **Bastard of Orléans**

A French lord who quarrels with Charles and first introduces Joan to him.

### **Exeter**

An English lord, Exeter becomes a kind of commentator, remaining behind at the end of scenes after everyone else has exited and remarking on the problems caused by internal dissention and strife in England and abroad.

### **Warwick**

An English lord, Warwick is called on to serve as judge on various issues, including the dispute between Somerset and Richard Plantagenet and, later, Joan's trial.

**Salisbury**

An English soldier killed during the siege of Orléans

**Gargrave**

An English soldier who meets his death in the siege of Orléans

**Glasdale**

An English soldier who fights at the siege of Orléans

**Vernon**

One of Somerset's men, Vernon resents Basset because Bassett serves the Duke of York, Somerset's nemesis in a dispute over a point of law. Vernon and Basset ask King Henry to allow them to fight it out. Thus, the noblemen's disagreement trickles down to their employees.

**Basset**

One of York's men, Basset gets in a fight with Vernon because he serves York's nemesis Somerset, and the two men ask the king to allow them to fight it out. Thus, the noblemen's disagreement trickles down to their employees.

**Lucy –**

Sir William Lucy is a messenger sent by Talbot to ask York and Somerset for reinforcements. He scolds both men when they are unable to come to Talbot's aid.

**John**

Talbot's son, John desires to learn the art of war from his father but arrives on the battlefield in Bordeaux at just the wrong moment. Talbot urges him to flee rather than be killed in the ensuing fight, since the English are doomed, but John refuses. He says to flee would disgrace the family name; he stays and fights and dies with his father.

**Margaret**

René's daughter, captured by Suffolk. Suffolk is so impressed with her beauty that he convinces Henry to marry her even though her father has no money and only a minor title.

**Countess of Auvergne**

This French woman lures Talbot to her castle, planning to capture him so the French troops can win. But Talbot travels with an army and cannot be so easily trapped.

**Sir John Fastolf**

A coward, Fastolf is an English soldier who repeatedly flees the scene of battle when he fears for his life. Talbot curses Fastolf for lacking the valor and honor of the old generation of knights.

**Woodville**

Woodville is the lieutenant or head warden of the Tower of London. Winchester has ordered him to bar Gloucester from entering.

### **Mayor**

The Mayor of London has his hands full with all the struggles between Winchester and Gloucester's men in the streets of the city. He orders them to not fight with weapons, so they revert to throwing rocks.

### **Master Gunner**

A French soldier who helps Joan bring down the British siege at Orléans

### **Boy**

The Master Gunner's son, the boy helps bring down the British siege at Orléans

### **Governor**

The Governor of Paris

### **General**

The General of Bordeaux

### **Shepherd**

Joan's probable father. When he is brought to her trial, Joan denies she has such low parentage and the shepherd leaves, urging the English to burn her, as hanging is too mild a punishment.

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### **Summary**

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Henry V's funeral is attended by many of his noblemen, who speak sadly of the death of such a great king. Several messengers arrive, announcing trouble in France. Several towns, part of the English territory once won by Henry V, have been lost, the Dauphin Charles has been crowned king, while the English hero Talbot has been taken prisoner. Hearing the news, the noblemen rise to action, each taking on a different task to help reorganize the kingdom and prepare the newly crowned king--the former king's son, Henry VI--for his emergency duties in France.

Talbot's forces lay siege to Orléans, while Charles and his lords try to fight their way out. Yet the English, although exhausted and starving, still beat them. The Bastard of Orléans brings Joan to meet Charles. She says she has seen visions and can lead the troops. Charles

challenges her to single combat and she beats him. She assures the French that she will break the siege that very day.

In London, the Protector of the kingdom, Gloucester, who will rule until the young king is old enough to take over, comes to blows with the leader of the church, Winchester, at the Tower of London. Winchester bars Gloucester from entering the Tower and accuses him of plotting to take over the kingdom. Their serving men join in the fight, but soon the Mayor arrives to split them up.

In France, Talbot has been released in exchange for a captured French lord. The French launch an attack on the English forces, killing important leaders. Talbot and Joan fight, and she gains the upper hand, but she says it is not his time to die, and she leaves him. Joan succeeds in lifting the siege, and the French nobles celebrate her successes. Yet Talbot engineers a sneak attack on Orléans and retakes the city, so that he can bury his dead comrades within the city.

The Countess of Auvergne sends for Talbot. She says she wants to see this renowned man in person. Talbot goes to her castle, where she now declares he has fallen into her trap. But Talbot laughs, saying he is not as small as he looks. Rather, he is just one part of a great army that will never be trapped. His soldiers arrive instantly.

Back in London many lords gather in the Temple Garden outside Parliament to dispute a point of law. Richard Plantagenet and Somerset form the heads of opposing camps, and they pluck white and red roses as symbols of their differing opinions. Their followers do the same. Somerset insults Plantagenet's father and they each scorn each other. Warwick predicts that the argument, though begun over something so small, will end in the deaths of thousands.

Plantagenet goes to the Tower of London to talk to his uncle Mortimer and to ask about his father. Mortimer says Plantagenet's father was once in line to the throne and had raised an army to help him claim his right to power, but he was captured and executed, while the rest of the Mortimer line, including this Mortimer, was suppressed. Mortimer dies, leaving Plantagenet even more anxious to regain his birthright.

All of Parliament soon learns of Gloucester and Winchester's dispute when their serving men crash into the room pelting each other with stones. King Henry urges them not to fight, for civil dissention will weaken the nation. The two men promise to stop fighting for the moment. Warwick presents Plantagenet's request to have his father's title passed on to him. The king grants it, also giving him his uncle's former title, and, thus, renaming him the Duke of York. Gloucester urges the king to go to France to deal with the unrest there, and Henry agrees. Exeter comments on the growing factionalism resulting from the noblemen's quarrels--that of

Gloucester and Winchester and that of Plantagenet (now York) and Somerset--and refers to a prophecy stating that Henry VI would lose all the territories that his father had won for Britain.

Talbot's forces stand outside Rouen, prepared to attack. The French and English forces insult each other repeatedly. Talbot asks the French to meet him in the field and fight a fair fight rather than using their walled city to their advantage, but they refuse. The English forces manage to beat the French forces anyway. Joan tells Charles not to worry about the loss, because she has a new plan to weaken Talbot. Burgundy, a French leader fighting with Talbot, constitutes the only threat to her plan, but she lures him to the French camp and convinces him that he's fighting for the wrong side.

Henry arrives in Paris with his nobles. Talbot goes to meet him, where he receives a message from Burgundy about his change of loyalty. Talbot goes with his forces to try to talk to him. Meanwhile two underlings of York and Somerset ask the king for the right to have an armed fight. This is the first the King learns of the struggle between the followers of the white rose and the red rose. The king urges Somerset and York to put aside their differences while they are in France, for their dissention will make Britain appear weak to its enemy. The king says it shouldn't matter what rose he wears, since he loves both his lords--yet even as he says this he picks Somerset's red rose. York is upset but he keeps it to himself. Henry assigns the two men to new tasks in France, making York the leader of the English troops and putting Somerset in charge of the cavalry.

Talbot prepares to attack Bordeaux, but the city is well defended and Charles' forces approach from behind: he is trapped! A messenger from Talbot asks York to send the cavalry reinforcements to save Talbot, but York has no troops to send. Convinced Somerset has delayed the delivery of the cavalry out of dislike for him, York bemoans the imminent death of Talbot and the loss of the lands hard won by Henry V. The same messenger goes to Somerset, who says York is to blame for sending Talbot into battle without sufficient troops and that York probably did so knowingly, wanting to take over Talbot's post. The messenger says Somerset should have helped Talbot, and his death will be both noblemen's shame.

Talbot's son John arrives on the battlefield, having come to learn about soldiering from his father. But Talbot tells him he has arrived at a terrible moment and urges him to flee rather than die in his first battle. But John refuses, saying he will disgrace the honor of the Talbot name if he flees. The battle begins, and John is wounded; yet still he will not flee. Finally, John is killed and Talbot dies of grief. The English army is defeated.

Back in London, Gloucester reads letters from the pope urging the English to make peace with



the French. Charles agrees to make an offer. Meanwhile in France, Charles' forces are under attack by the united front of Somerset and York. Joan calls to her patron-demons to advise her about the future, but they refuse to speak to her. York captures Joan in battle.

In the course of the battles, Suffolk has captured Margaret, a French girl, daughter to one of Charles' nobles, René. Impressed with her beauty, he wants to woo her, but he is already married. So he decides to woo her for Henry and asks René if he will consent to her marriage to the English king.

York and Warwick hold Joan in trial. They ask if it is true that her father was a shepherd, but she refuses to acknowledge this. She tries to convince them that they should not kill her, for she is a virgin and, thus, able in her purity to communicate with powers on high; they will incur a heavenly wrath if they execute her. York and Warwick nonetheless prepare to have her burnt at the stake. She now suddenly claims that she is pregnant and they wouldn't dare kill a pregnant woman, but York tells her that no matter what she says, she will die. She curses the English and is led away.

Meanwhile, Winchester tries to engineer peace between Charles and the English. At first, Charles resists, but his nobles advise him to accept the peace for the moment in order to stop the massacre of his citizens; they can always break the treaty later.

Suffolk arrives in London and tells the king of Margaret's charms. Henry decides that he will marry her, but Gloucester reminds him he is already engaged to the daughter of a relative of Charles, a match that would soothe international politics. Margaret's father Rene is only a minor earl with no money and, thus, a union with her would offer no real advantages. Yet Henry insists on marrying her and tells Gloucester he must simply forgive his choice. Suffolk has succeeded; now Margaret will rule the king and he will rule Margaret.

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