

Henry V



photo: Charles Gorrill

by William Shakespeare

Theatre Pro Rata
November 5-20, 2016
Performing at The Crane Theater
2303 Kennedy St NE, Minneapolis

The play

Henry V is part of a series of eight plays that covers a critical time in English history: from the reign of Richard II to the death of Richard III and the ascension to the throne of Henry Tudor (Henry VII), the grandfather of Queen Elizabeth.

The first four play sequence, *Henry VI, parts 1, 2, and 3*, and *Richard III* (1589-94) were great hits when first produced, and were certainly part of the impetus for the second four play sequence chronicling the “back story” of the first (*Richard II, Henry IV, parts 1 and 2, and Henry V*). The first source to mention Shakespeare, *Greene’s Groats-worth of Wit*, was published in 1592, and parodies a line from *Henry VI, part 3*.

Shakespeare based his work on history written by Raphael Holinshed (who drew on earlier work by Edward Hall); but these histories were those of the victors, so not all the information was accurate. Later historians have corrected information from Hall and Holinshed that was often as much mythology as history.

Critical facts about Henry V that are reflected in the play:

Born: summer 1386; died 31 August 1422

Ascended to the throne: 20 March 1413

Victory at Agincourt: 25 October 1415

He was the first king of England to grow up speaking and writing fluently in English; previous kings spoke either French or Saxon.

The play was originally written/produced in 1599, and played at the court of King James 1 on January 7, 1605. It was not among the plays revived when the theatres reopened in 1660. Finally revived in the 1730s, it was particularly popular during wars with France (this was an era of much more elaborate scenery and costumes, contradicting the chorus’s speeches, which were sometimes cut as a result); this type of production continued through the 19th century.

Notable films include those by Laurence Olivier (1944) and Kenneth Branagh (1989); the BBC Shakespeare television series (1979) with David Gwillim as Henry, and the *Hollow Crown* series (2012), with Tom Hiddleston as Henry.

20th century productions have approached the text as both a rallying cry for war and an anti-war text; it can be shaped to fit the fashions of the time.

Our production

The chorus in the play indicates just how impossible it is to stage the story we are telling. How, on a stage, can one replicate the amazing flight of arrows whooshing from Welsh longbows toward the French army? It can’t be done

(films are much better at this sort of thing). But the intimacy of the stage allows us to approach the story in other ways: for this production, we chose to explore the idea of the king as representative of his people—and to do this by allowing each of the five primary actors to play the role in one of the five acts. At the same time, they take on all the other roles in the story: royalty and commoners, leaders and followers, soldiers and scallywags, women and men. Each character is a complex individual who sees the world through a unique lens: let them lead you through this remarkable story in a new way.

The history



National Portrait Gallery, London

A few facts that are missing from Shakespeare's plays:

Henry was part of Richard II's court, and remained there when his father was banished in 1398; he accompanied Richard's expedition to Ireland and was knighted by him there. When Henry's father usurped the throne, he was only 12 years old. But he was knighted (again) by his father and was actively involved in his reign. In 1400, he was part of an expedition to Wales to deal with the uprising there, and by 1403 (at the age of 15) he was in full command.

He received a wound in the face at Shrewsbury that he survived only because of the excellent medical care he received and he may (or may not) have been involved in Hotspur's death.

The stories of Prince Hal's life of debauchery in London taverns are probably mostly fiction.

Hotspur was one of Hal's early mentors and was the age of Henry IV rather than Hal's own age.

More info: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_V_of_England

The Battle of Agincourt



The battle of Agincourt, fought on 25 October 1415, was a decisive victory for the English. The English army included 1,500 men-at-arms and 7,000 longbow men. The French forces included about 15,000 in the front lines, with a total of 50,000 including the rearguard, according to a Burgundian eyewitness, Jean de Wivrin. More recent books on the battle dispute these figures (see the Wikipedia link below for details). A key element in the battle was the field

itself: recently ploughed land (muddy because of rain) surrounded by woods, making the field narrow. The longbows used by the English are often considered a crucial element as well, although there is some debate about how successful they would have been against the plate armor worn by the French.

More info: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Agincourt
<http://www.agincourt600.com/history-stories/>

Shakespeare, War, and the 21st Century

Shakespeare's *Henry V* was written at the end of the 16th century; it tells the tale of a king who reigned in the early 15th century. The play itself treats war in all its complexity: the motivations for it, the cost of it, the price of peace. We see issues raised by the king, by his advisors, and by common soldiers. Productions often emphasize different aspects of the play that reflect their own time (Laurence Olivier's 1944 film is one good example). We live in a world where war is omnipresent; while the worldwide conflicts of the 20th century are (perhaps) a thing of the past, the on-going conflicts throughout the world and the crises that are a result bring war into our lives every day.

Does Shakespeare's work still speak to us today? What are our responses to the wars raging in Africa, in the Middle East, and elsewhere? How do we respond to the refugee crisis that is one of the inevitable outcomes of these conflicts? As you watch this production, you may find that a 400-year-old play about events that took place 600 years ago still has something to say to all of us.

Here's just one example:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/30/war-migration-revenge-shakespeare-world-syrian-refugee-camps>



Resources

Internet links

Henry V

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_V_of_England

<https://www.royal.uk/henry-v-r-1413-1422>

Catherine of Valois

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_of_Valois

In addition to being the wife of Henry V and the mother of Henry VI, Catherine was also the grandmother of Henry VII, the first monarch of the Tudor dynasty, through her relationship with Owen Tudor, a member of her household.



Henry V (the play)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_V_\(play\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_V_(play))

A little touch of Data in the night

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyDBvmiragA>



Grad student at U writes about female knights

<http://cla.umn.edu/english/news-events/profile/lady-knight>

Resource books

- Barker, Juliet R.V. *Agincourt: Henry V and the Battle That Made England*
Hosley, Richard *Shakespeare's Holinshed*
Harman, Rosemary *Crispin's Day: The Glory of Agincourt*
Leggatt, Alexander *Shakespeare's Political Drama*
Norwich, John J. *Shakespeare's Kings*
Rofheart, Martha *Fortune Made His Sword* (a novel)
Saccio, Peter *Shakespeare's English Kings: History, Chronicle, and Drama*