

King Henry V Study Guide

King Henry V by William Shakespeare

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Plot Summary

King Henry V is the title of the play and also the name of the main character. Henry is securely ensconced on the throne of England but has come to believe that he is also entitled to hold the throne of France based on his ancestry. He offers France the opportunity to hand over several titles but the Prince of France responds by giving Henry a box of tennis balls. The message is that Henry is just a boy and should return to playing rather than trying to do important work, such as ruling a country. Henry is furious. He wants to attack France and take the throne but calls on his closest officials for direction. They advise that he should attack and that's all the urging he needs. Henry doesn't need a great deal of convincing and he makes plans to invade France.

Meanwhile, several soldiers are interacting as they prepare to head off to fight King Henry's war. Pistol, Nym, and Bardolph are in Eastcheap where they are discussing the fact that a former friend and confidante of Henry is near death. The three discuss the situation with Pistol's wife, a woman named Mistress Quickly. She and Pistol bemoan the fact that they can't escape the rumors that they are running a brothel simply because they allow young, single women to live in their boarding house. They actually are running a brothel.

Henry sets out for France but leaves behind a large contingent of men to protect the English boarders from other would-be conquerors. This means the English army is greatly outnumbered on French soil. Henry takes time one evening to wander among his men. He is disguised and hears complaints about his leadership. The French worry about Henry from the beginning, despite their larger forces and home-field advantage. Later, Henry rouses his men to fight by calling on them to band together, as brothers. He points out that they are outnumbered which means they will each carry an even larger share of the glory, once they defeat the French. During the battles, the French and English officers and soldiers have debates and discussions, ranging from the merits of a particular horse to the fact that they'd rather be safely at home. Despite being outnumbered, Henry leads the men to an impressive victory.

Henry presents himself to the King of France and to his daughter, Katherine. He courts Katherine as if she has the right to choose whether they will marry. Henry doesn't force the King of France to step down immediately, but agrees that once the French king dies, Henry or Henry's son will take the throne. Henry's marriage to Katherine will cement the deal.



Act I

Summary

In Act I, Prologue, the play opens and the Chorus appears on stage. The scene is first England, then France. The Chorus points out that the actors are constricted by space and scene. He asks if the stage could possibly hold the “vast fields of France” and reminds the audience they will have to use their imaginations. The Chorus says the actors will talk about horses but the audience will have to imagine that the horses appear on stage. The Chorus ends his speech by asking that the audience be patient and hear the play “gently” and judge it “kindly.”

Act First, Scene I, takes place in “London, An Antechamber in the King’s Palace.” The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely enter the room. Canterbury says a bill that had previously been forgotten because of “unquiet times” has now resurfaced. He says the bill, if passed, will force them to hand off “the better half” of the possessions of the church. Canterbury and Ely discuss how they might avoid giving up so much of the church’s money. Canterbury says Henry V, King of England, is “full of grace” and Ely says that Henry loves the church. Canterbury talks about the change in Henry. He says that Henry had been wild in his younger days but matured and took on the responsibilities of the throne the moment of his father’s death. He says he has never seen such a sudden and complete transformation. Canterbury goes on to cite Henry’s wisdom and knowledge on an array of topics, saying it seems as if Henry has been studious and serious his entire life. Ely compares Henry to a strawberry plant. He says the best strawberries are those surrounded by “baser plants.” Canterbury says he has no better explanation.

Ely asks if Henry is support of the bill and Canterbury says he seems “indifferent” but may be leaning slightly toward the church. Canterbury says he has offered a large sum that Henry could devote to his planned invasion of France and that Henry seems open to the idea. Canterbury points out that Henry has a right to “certain dukedoms” and to the throne of France based on the lineage to his great-grandfather, Edward. Canterbury says he was in the middle of that conversation with Henry when Henry was called away. Canterbury is due to meet again with Henry.

Act I, Scene II, takes place in “The Same, The Presence Chamber.” Henry enters, accompanied by an array of officials and attendants. Canterbury and Ely enter. Henry calls on Canterbury to evaluate his right to claim titles in France. Canterbury cites the “Salique” law that forbids the passing of a crown through a daughter. He says that law doesn’t apply in Germany, meaning Henry has the right to claim the throne in France. Canterbury goes on to cite a Biblical passage from Numbers that says a man’s inheritance shall be handed down to his daughters. Canterbury says Henry will have to fight for that right and urges him to seek out the “warlike spirit” of his ancestors to work up the courage to set out on that fight. Several others chime in, urging the same course of action. Henry knows that he will have to leave a large portion of his army behind to



defend England against the Scots who will be looking for any opportunity to invade. The group discusses this at length and agree that the English forces will have to be divided so that they can continue to protect themselves on the home front.

When the conversation seems to wind down, Henry says they should now call in the French messengers, sent to England on behalf of the Dauphin. When the messengers enter, Henry says he understands the message is from the Dauphin rather than the King of France. The messengers seem anxious and one of them asks if he should speak freely. Henry swears that he is a “Christian king” and urges that they say whatever the Dauphin told them to say. One of the messengers begins to relate the message. He says the Dauphin refutes Henry’s claims to any seat in France, and that Henry is still too young to be taken seriously. The Dauphin says Henry can’t expect to dance into France and make claims. The messenger concludes that he hopes never to hear anything else from Henry.

The Dauphin has also sent “treasure.” Henry asks his uncle, Exeter, what this treasure consists of and Exeter says it’s a box of tennis balls. Henry responds that he will “play a set” that will strike down the king of France. He goes on to say that he will “dazzle” France with his appearance when he arrives there and that many widows will curse the Dauphin after their husbands, sons, and fathers are dead. Henry goes on to say that there are some people who aren’t even born yet who will curse the Dauphin. He then urges the messengers to have a good trip back to France. As they leave, Exeter commends him for the message back to the Dauphin and Henry says no one will think about anything now other than their claim to France. He urges that they begin gathering the supplies and prepare for war.

Analysis

The stages of Shakespeare’s time were devoid of scenery. Where today’s actors of even the most amateur performance depend on backdrops and props to show the setting, the actors of this time are working on a flat stage with no backdrop and only a few minor props, such as swords. The Chorus is actually a single actor who appears on stage in the first moments of the play and at various times throughout the action. The job of the Chorus is to help the audience understand the setting and to prepare them for the action that’s about to take place.

The bill referred to by Canterbury calls for a great deal of the church’s possessions to be spent or given away. Some of the money is to be used for the poor and Canterbury refers to it as support for the “lazers” and old people as well as “indigent faint souls” who are “past corporate toil.” While some of those people may be unwilling to work, it seems that at least some of them are old and unable to work. It seems that the church’s duty would be to offer support for those people but Canterbury is looking for a way to avoid doing that. The bill had been discussed before but had been put aside when national problems overrode interest in the subject.



The presentation of the tennis balls is done with some reluctance on the part of the messengers. The messengers in this case are in a very precarious position. They would be killed by their master, the Dauphin (prince) of France if they fail to obey his orders. But they also know that Henry, King of England, has the power to kill them as well, and they know the message is going to seriously anger him.

Henry is portrayed in previous Shakespeare plays as a wild youngster who gives little thought to his future. He apparently hangs out with a rough crowd and doesn't even try to live right. However, that changes the moment he becomes king. There is some discussion among the characters about the abrupt change that he undergoes when he ascends the throne. They are also somewhat amazed by it. He seems to have wasted his youth, never studying or doing anything that would prepare him to be king. However, when he takes the throne he seems almost magically ready for the role. Related to this, the Dauphin's message that Henry is a child, unable to take any title in France, angers Henry.

Discussion Question 1

What are some of the decisions that have to be made as Henry prepares to invade France?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the role of the Chorus. What is the first message delivered by the Chorus?

Discussion Question 3

Describe how Henry makes the final decision to invade France. What are his motives and what happens to push him into the decision?

Vocabulary

Puissance, monarchies, ciphers, attest, testament, indigent, temporal, celestial, prelate, divinity, mitigation, fain, impediment, approbation, conjuration, usurped, progenitors, chronicle, sinews, epitaph, expedition



Act II

Summary

The Act II Prologue opens with the Chorus on stage. He says the French know that Henry is planning to attack and they are terrified at the threat. They are looking for a way to stop the war and hire three English subjects to kill Henry. They are Richard, Earl of Cambridge; Henry, Lord Scroop of Masham; and Sir Thomas Grey, knight of Northumberland. The three have accepted money to kill King Henry. The Chorus says the audience will see scenes in Southampton and France.

Act II, Scene I, occurs in “London. A Street.” Two soldiers, Corporal Nym and Lieutenant Bardolph, enter the scene. They greet each other and Bardolph asks if Nym has reconciled his friendship with another soldier, Pistol. Bardolph says he understands that Nell Quickly was first engaged to Nym but is now married to Pistol. Just then, Pistol and Quickly enter the scene. Pistol is obviously on the defensive from the first greeting of Bardolph. Quickly says they are trying to run an honest boarding house with about a dozen young ladies who make their living as seamstresses, and that everyone keeps accusing them of running a brothel. Nym and Pistol are on edge with each others, and swords are unsheathed multiple times. Bardolph intervenes, saying he’ll kill the man who strikes first.

A boy enters the scene with news that his master is “very sick.” Quickly says the man is dying of a broken heart because he was wronged by the king. She leaves with the boy to comfort the dying man. Bardolph points out to Nym and Pistol that they are going to invade France together and should save their fighting for that battle rather than fighting each other. They seem to be on the verge of accepting that but then argue again, this time over an unpaid bet. They draw their swords again and Bardolph again promises he’ll kill whichever strikes first. They come to terms just as Quickly re-enters the room. She says “Sir John” has recurring fevers and urges that they rush to his side. They agree and leave the stage.

Act II, Scene II, takes place in “Southampton. A Council-Chamber.” Exeter, Bedford, and Westmoreland are present. Bedford says Henry is “bold” because he has not yet arrested the three men who are accused of planning an assassination. Exeter says the three will soon be arrested. Bedford says they don’t yet know their plan has been revealed to Henry. Just then Henry enters with the three traitors, Scroop, Grey, and Cambridge. The three talk as if they are loyal to Henry. Cambridge says there has never been another king as “feared and loved” as Henry. Henry cites the case of a man who had “railed against” the king. Though treason would typically be punished with death, Henry says the man was obviously drunk and was pardoned. Scroop says that was a mistake. He says it’s fine to be merciful but that the man should be punished before his actions create more who are treasonous against the king.



Henry hands a document to each of the three traitors and asks them to read them. He continues talking but interrupts himself, asking what the three have read that makes them go so pale. Cambridge, realizing that Henry knows about their alliance with the French and their plans to kill Henry, confesses and pleads for mercy. Grey and Scroop follow suit but Henry points out that moments earlier they told him that it was wrong to grant too much mercy. Henry is angry and says he had believed the three men to be faithful and loyal, honorable men who could be trusted. He says he is angry in part because the French will now say that Englishmen can easily be bought. Exeter arrests the three. Scroop says he is guilty. He says he is more sorry that he was involved in the plot than he is for his coming death. Both Cambridge and Grey say they are relieved that the plot was discovered so that they didn't have to go through with their plan.

Act II, Scene III, takes place in "London. Before a Tavern." Pistol, Nym, Bardolph, and Quickly are all there. They discuss the recent death of the man named John Falstaff. Quickly was with him at the end and there is some discussion about his final words. Nym, Pistol, and Bardolph prepare to leave. Pistol warns Quickly to take good care of their business while he is gone. They say goodbye and leave.

Act II, Scene IV, takes place in "France. The King's Palace." The French King and Dauphin enter the room accompanied by two dukes, a constable and some others. The King says the English are nearing and that they need to prepare. The Dauphin says he isn't at all worried and reminds his father that Henry is "a vain, giddy, shallow, humorous youth." He goes on to say that it doesn't hurt to be well prepared to defend themselves. The King reminds them that Henry's ancestors have been fierce in battle against France in the past.

Just then a messenger enters with news that English ambassadors have arrived. Exeter is invited in. Exeter tells the King of France that King Henry wants him to step down from his "borrowed" throne. The King of France asks what Henry plans to do if he refuses. Exeter says Henry will arrive "in thunder and in earthquake" unless he is given the French crown. The French King responds that he wants to think it over for a day. He pledges to have an answer the next day before Exeter returns to Henry.

Exeter says he also has a message from Henry to the Dauphin. He says Henry sends "scorn and defiance." The Dauphin says he wants nothing but "odds with England" and that's why he gave Henry the tennis balls. The King of France says again that he will give Exeter his answer the following day. Exeter says the King shouldn't wait too long because Henry is already in France and might very well come looking for them.

Analysis

There are some inconsistencies and some things that are not explained well in this play. It seems possible that the contemporary audiences would have better understood some of the subtleties and it may be that some of the play is written purely for entertainment value. For example, the first scene of Act II takes place on a random street in London. It's apparently the rougher part of town where Henry spent time running wild as a young



man. There's a convoluted conversation between several people and two men argue over a woman. It seems to have nothing to do with Henry's plans for war though some of these characters will be seen again later in the play. That first act takes place immediately after the Chorus informs the audience that the three men have plans to kill Henry. It's not revealed how they came to be chosen and hired by the French or even how Henry knows of the plan.

There is some comic relief throughout the play, including Mistress Quickly. She's a prostitute and runs a brothel, but she claims that she's running an honest boarding house. She laments the fact that people think poorly of her when she's really just trying to help out some young ladies who work hard and need a place to stay. Her name is also a bit comical, if the reader thinks about it.

There's little doubt that Henry faces assassination attempts and plots all the time. At any given time, there are many people who would kill the king in an effort to take over the throne. Some of the nobility are a bit perturbed that Henry hasn't already killed the men who are threatening the current attack but Henry seems to be determined to create a scene as he thwarts the attempt, probably in an effort to prove that he isn't afraid and to show that he is brave.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the three soldiers who are talking with Mistress Quickly, their relationships and their conversations.

Discussion Question 2

What do the French think about the upcoming battle? Comparing the number of French troops to the number of English soldiers, why do you believe the French are worried?

Discussion Question 3

What do you believe are some of the pros and cons of being king?

Vocabulary

Rendezvous, infamy, quotidian, tertian, dalliance, cloyed, incessant, bounty, cunning, fiend, botch, piety, dub, gait, legions, affiance, garnished, fraught, sufferance, vaunting, blithe



Act III

Summary

In Act III, Prologue, the Chorus enters. The Chorus calls on the audience to once again use the imagination. This time, the Chorus says the audience should imagine having seen Henry arrive at the pier and board his ship. The audience is also directed to imagine the voyage. Young “ship-boys” climb the rigging and there’s a shrill whistling sound that directs the crew to their duties. There are winds that drive the boat onward. It’s revealed that the French King has offered the hand of his daughter, Katharine, in marriage. Her dowry would include “some petty and unprofitable dukedoms.” But Henry has refused the offer. The Chorus concludes this prologue by urging the audience to “be kind” as they fill in the scenes with their imaginations.

Act III, Scene I, takes place in “France, Before Harfleur. Henry enters with Exeter, Bedford and Gloucester. There are also some soldiers carrying ladders. There is a battle raging and Henry calls for the men to continue the fight. He says the men who were born in England have “noble luster” and tells them to make their mothers proud. The scene ends with Henry telling the soldiers what to yell as they charge.

Act III, Scene II, takes place at “The Same.” Bardolph, Nym and Pistol enter, accompanied by a servant referred to only as “Boy.” Bardolph yells for the men to enter “the breach” that has been broken through the French defenses. Nym and Pistol remain where they are, discussing the merits of staying as far away from the fighting as possible. The Boy says he wishes he was back in London where it’s safer, preferably in an alehouse. Fluellen enters and drives Nym and Pistol into the fighting. They object but not too much and all three leave the stage.

The Boy says that Bardolph, Nym, and Pistol each have their failings and he begins listing them. He says Bardolph and Nym are cowards, and that Pistol breaks promises. He says all three are thieves. The Boy says stealing is wrong and that it makes them less men in his eyes. He leaves as Gower and Fluellen enter. They discuss battle strategy. Two additional military leaders, Macmorris and Captain Jamy, enter the conversation. They talk some more about the battle though Macmorris says this is “no time for discourse.” They erupt into an argument before Fluellen puts a stop to the conversation, saying that he knows all about war, and leaves.

Act III, Scene III, takes place “Before the Gates.” The French Governor is on the wall of Harfleur with some of his citizens and the English army, including Henry, are below. Henry announces that they’ll continue to fight unless the French open their gates and allow them inside. He pledges that he will not give mercy if the French continue to defy him. He says the soldiers will “defile” the young women, kill the old men by bashing their heads on the walls, and “spit” the infants on pikes if the English have to fight their way in. The Governor answers that they aren’t able to withstand the English onslaught and that they are willing to surrender. Henry assigns Exeter to take over Harfleur. Exeter is



to set up to defend against the French who might want to regain control. Henry says he and his men will remain in Harfleur long enough to rest before continuing the fight.

Act III, Scene IV, takes place at “The French King’s Palace.” Princess Katherine is present with Alice, who is described as “an old gentlewoman.” The dialogue of this scene is in French. Katherine is asking Alice about learning the English language. Alice tells Katherine the various words for parts of the body, including hands, fingers, and elbows.

Act III, Scene V, takes place at “The Same.” The King of France and his son, the Dauphin, are talking with other officials, including the Duke of Bourbon and a Constable. The discussion centers around Henry and the English army. Each bemoans the successes of the English so far and make threats to leave if they lose the war. The Dauphin says the young French women are rooting for the English. They discuss how Henry got so far. The Constable says that Henry doesn’t have many soldiers and that they are sick and hungry. He predicts that Henry will be afraid when he next faces off with the French. The King calls for Henry’s capture and mentions the ransom they’ll demand for his return to England. He leaves the stage after calling for the Constable to report soon the “word of England’s fall.”

Act III, Scene VI, takes place in “The English Camp in Picardy.” Gower and Fluellen are present, holding a meeting. Pistol enters and says that his friend, Bardolph, has stolen “a pax” and is going to be hanged for the theft. Pistol asks that Fluellen intercede on Bardolph’s behalf. Fluellen says that Bardolph deserves to be hanged, and swears that he wouldn’t intercede even if Bardolph were his brother. Pistol leaves, angry. Fluellen and Gower continue to discuss their situation, including that they’ve taken possession of an important bridge. Just then, King Henry arrives. Henry asks how many men have been lost in the battle. Fluellen says that Duke “lost never a man” but that Bardolph is about to be hanged for stealing from a church. Henry says that nothing is to be stolen on their march across France.

A messenger named Montjoy arrives with news from the French King. He relates the message, indicating that the French may have appeared to be sleeping while Henry raged through the French countryside, but that they remain “defiant.” Henry responds that they have problems to face. He says his men are ill and they don’t have many soldiers, but pledges they will not run away from a battle. He sends Montjoy back to the French King with that message.

Act III, Scene VII, takes place at “The French Camp, Near Agincourt.” The Constable, Dauphin, and others are present. The Dauphin swears that he has the “best horse of Europe.” There is an extended discussion about the horse that turns into a conversation about women and their sexual experiences. The Constable comments on the Dauphin’s bragging. The Dauphin says it’s midnight and that he is leaving to arm himself. The Constable and a French official named Orleans discuss the Dauphin. They discuss what the Dauphin is really like and whether he is truly valiant.



A messenger enters with news that the English are “fifteen hundred paces” from the current camp of the French. The Constable asks who “measured” the distance. The Messenger answers that it was Lord Grandpre. Orleans says it’s sad that Henry has wandered so far from home. The Constable says they should run away, if they were smart. Orleans responds that Henry and his army can’t possibly be smart. Orleans predicts they will “have each a hundred Englishmen” within the next eight hours.

Analysis

There are some scenes that seem abrupt with little in the way of action. Some are very brief, such as the first scene of Act III. Henry is basically spurring his men on to fight harder. He calls out to them to continue to fight, even if they have to fill the breach with their dead soldiers. He reminds them that they are English and that they are great soldiers, but there’s no real action in this scene. These scenes do offer a little more insight into specific characters. In this case, the reader sees Henry as a military leader. This scene is also a brief example of one of the story’s themes. Patriotism is touted in various sections of the book, including this one, with Henry pointing out that they are English, as if that alone is enough to spur them to fight harder.

The confrontation between Fluellen, Macmorris, Gower, and Jamy is meant to be ironic, at least to some extent. Shakespeare writes the dialogue in an obvious attempt to mimic the dialect of the Scottish soldiers. The result is that most modern readers will have an even more difficult time with the scene. Words such as “trompet” and “Chrish” are used throughout the dialogue. Shakespeare also uses words such as “la.” It’s apparently a placeholder just meant to put emphasis on a particular statement. The fact that the men are standing around arguing about their expertise on the battlefield while others are actually fighting the battle is the very definition of irony.

Henry’s threats when he forces the Governor of Harfleur to open the gates are brutally vivid. He threatens severe punishment unless they are allowed inside immediately. He says if they have to keep fighting, the soldiers will be ruthless when they finally get in. Among the threats are that the young maidens will be raped while the old men and babies are murdered. It’s probably not far from the truth, if at all. The Governor’s reply may have been an effort on his part to save face, at least to some degree. He says the Dauphin has informed him that he can’t possibly withstand a siege, indicating that he could have held Henry’s forces off if he’d had the supplies to sustain the people in the city.

The scene between Katherine and Alice is an obvious attempt at humor. Katherine is apparently headed for the altar as Henry’s wife and she is likely hoping to learn some of the English language before then. The reader with no knowledge of French won’t grasp Katherine’s meanings. The fact that Katherine repeats the words several times would have caught the attention and prompted laughter from the audiences of the era in which this was first performed. It should be noted that the scene is written in French. The average reader without a knowledge of French will have to rely on an interpretation to discern the meaning.



Discussion Question 1

Describe the scene in which the English attack France. What is the first city they take and what are Henry's plans after that?

Discussion Question 2

Henry's ruthlessness is seen as he attacks the first French city. What does he threaten to do unless the city surrenders? What does this say about this character?

Discussion Question 3

Describe the scene involving Katherine. What is known about her character from this brief scene?

Vocabulary

Sheathed, mettle, grosser, luster, humility, portage, confounded, eke, nimble, ordnance, cullions, derivations, affability, peradventure, villain, rascal, disputations, pristine, impious, desolation, smirched



Act IV

Summary

Act IV opens with the Prologue. The chorus enters, telling about the situations currently happening at the camps of both the English and French armies. Henry is walking among his men, apparently offering words of encouragement. The French, meanwhile are not at all concerned about the upcoming battle, “proud of their numbers and secure in soul.” The English, however, are very concerned. The Chorus ends by saying that it’s time to look toward the coming battle.

Act IV, Scene I, takes place in “The English Camp at Agincourt.” King Henry enters, accompanied by Bedford and Gloucester. Henry says that there is “great danger” but says that is all the more reason the men should be showing even greater levels of courage. A man named Sir Thomas Erpingham enters and Henry says it would be better for Erpingham to have a pillow for his head than to be forced to sleep on the ground in France but Erpingham disagrees, saying he’s happy with his situation because he is able to “lie like a king.” Henry says it’s good for men to be happy with their situations. Henry asks to borrow Erpingham’s cloak then dismisses everyone in the room.

Henry is alone when Pistol enters. Pistol asks who Henry is and Henry identifies himself as merely a man, hiding his true identity. Pistol asks for Henry’s name and he says that he is “Harry le Roy” and that he is a Welshman. When Henry identifies himself as a relative of Fluellen, Pistol storms off, throwing Henry a rude gesture. Fluellen and Gower are talking in a nearby room and Fluellen warns Gower to lower his voice because the French are near enough to overhear them. Gower says he can hear the French but Fluellen says just because the French are idiots doesn’t mean the English should be as well.

Three soldiers, John Bates, Alexander Court, and Michael Williams, enter the room where Henry is. Courts asks Bates if he can see the dawn breaking, meaning the day of the battle is near. Bates says he can see it but wishes it wasn’t. Williams agrees, saying he doesn’t expect to live through the day. The men notice Henry who identifies himself as one of Erpingham’s men. They ask if Erpingham has expressed his opinion about the upcoming battle and Henry seems to indicate Erpingham is worried. They ask if Erpingham has shared his concerns with King Henry, not knowing they are talking to Henry. Henry says that it’s not appropriate for Erpingham to have that conversation. He says that he believes Henry is “but a man.” He goes into a lengthy speech, saying that Henry smells of flowers just as an ordinary man would, that he has fears and doubts, as any man would. He says the difference is that Henry would never be able to show his fear because an entire army takes their cues from him. Henry says he believes the king would not wish to be anywhere other than in France, about to face a huge battle. Bates counters, saying he wishes the king was alone in France, awaiting a ransom, and that the lives of all the men serving him would be spared the upcoming battle. Henry counters, saying the king’s fight is honorable. Bates says he doesn’t know about that



and indicates that their obedience to the king is more important than knowing that there is an important reason behind the battle. Williams seems to agree, saying that it's on Henry's head if he's fighting for any reason other than an honorable one. He also says that Henry will be responsible for the deaths of all who die on the field of battle, because he ordered them to fight. Henry argues against this. He compares it to a master who orders a servant to move money. If the servant is robbed and killed during the transfer, it is not the fault of the master, according to Henry. He says a king cannot rule without some casualties. Henry says that everyone is bound to do as the king commands but that everyone is responsible for his own soul. Williams agrees and Bates goes farther, saying that he plans to fight to the best of his ability and that the king doesn't need to answer for his fate. Williams says a big difference is that the common soldier will be killed on the battlefield while the king will be captured and ransomed back to his own country. Henry and Williams continue to argue the point and Henry says he would be angry with Williams except that he doesn't have the time. Henry and Williams exchange gloves, agreeing that they will take up the argument after the fight, if they both survive and if they find each other again. Bates admonishes them, saying they have to fight against the French and shouldn't be fighting each other.

The soldiers leave Henry alone. Henry talks at length about the difficulties of being king. He says other people enjoy things that are not available to the king. Among the hardships are "poisoned flattery" and the ability to rest without anything weighing on the mind. Erpingham enters, saying some of the men are looking for Henry and he agrees to meet them back at his tent. Erpingham leaves and Henry prays to the "God of battles," asking that the men be unafraid of the coming fight. Gloucester enters, urging Henry to join them.

Scene II of Act IV takes place in "The French Camp." The Dauphin enters with several men. The Messenger enters, saying that the English are prepared for battle. The Constable says there won't be a need for all the French to join in the battle and predicts the English soldiers will cower in fear and then give up without a fight. He goes on to say that the English have "said their prayers" and are prepared to die. They leave for the field.

Scene III of Act IV takes place in "The English Camp." Several Englishmen, including Erpingham, enters. Bedford says Henry has ridden out to see the French soldiers and Westmoreland says there are sixty thousand. Exeter points out that the English are outnumbered, five to one. Salisbury says it's time to ride out to meet the French. He says he'll see them all later, perhaps in heaven. Some of the men leave and Henry enters. Westmoreland says it would be better if they had more men. Henry says the glory will be even greater when they win the battle with only a few men. He tells Westmoreland that any man who wants to leave should do so. He predicts their names will become "household words" after the coming victory. Salisbury reenters, saying that the French are prepared for battle. Henry goes on to say that there will be some who die on this battlefield, but that they will all be famous for their service. York enters, asking for permission to lead the "vaward." Henry grants the request.



Scene IV of Act IV takes place on “The Field of Battle.” Pistol has a verbal argument with a French Soldier during the battle. The Boy enters and Pistol calls on him to ask the soldier’s name. The soldier identifies himself as Master Fer. Pistol then tells the Boy to translate a threat to the soldier but the boy says he doesn’t know the French words for Pistol’s threats. Pistol says he’ll kill Master Fer. The Boy translates that message and Fer promises a ransom of two hundred crowns. Master Fer says Pistol is “the most brave, valorous, and thrice-worthy signieur of England. Once Pistol leaves with Master Fer, the Boy says Pistol is not a valorous soldier. He then says it’s a good thing the French don’t realize that all the soldiers are fighting, leaving only a few boys to guard the English camp with all their “luggage.”

Scene V of Act IV takes place on “Another part of the field.” The Dauphin enters with several Frenchmen. The Constable says the French soldiers have been overrun but the Dauphin urges them to remain. Bourbon urges that they all die with honor. He says their “shame will be too long.”

Scene VI of Act IV takes place on yet “Another part of the field.” Henry enters with some other men and some French prisoners. Exeter describes the situation on the battlefield, including the deaths of some of the English officers. Their conversation is interrupted by an alarm. Henry orders that all the French soldiers be killed.

Scene VII of Act IV takes place on “Another part of the field.” Fluellen and Goer enter the stage. They discuss the fact that the French invaded the English camp, burning and stealing. Fluellen says it’s good that Henry ordered the deaths of the French prisoners. The two men become embroiled in a debate of whether Henry resembles Alexander the Great and Gower says the biggest difference is that Henry “never killed any of his friends.” Fluellen disagrees, pointing out that Henry is responsible for the death of his friend, Sir John Falstaff.

Just then the French messenger, Montjoy, arrives. Henry expects him to announce that the French are ready to surrender but Montjoy asks that they call a temporary hiatus to the fighting so that the French can gather their dead, separating the nobility from the common soldiers. Henry says he doesn’t know who will win the battle but Montjoy interrupts, saying the English have won. Henry asks the name of a nearby castle and Montjoy says it is called Agincourt. For historic purposes, the battle will be referred to as having been fought on the field of Agincourt. Fluellen says he is pleased to be from England and that he will never be ashamed to be one of Henry’s subjects, as long as he remains “an honest man.” Henry says he prays he will always be honest. Henry asks that someone count the dead.

Williams enters and tells Henry that he has a fight to finish with an Englishman. Henry pretends to consider the request and tells Williams he has permission to do so. He tells Williams to return to Gower and Williams leaves the tent. Henry then asks Fluellen to “wear this favor for me.” He then hands Fluellen the glove he took from Williams but doesn’t tell Fluellen the truth about why or where he got the glove. Fluellen agrees and Henry says that anyone who challenges Fluellen over the glove should be considered Henry’s enemy. Fluellen leaves and Henry sends the Lord of Warwick and Gloucester



after him, making them promise to keep an eye on Fluellen. He says they should not let Fluellen fight over the glove.

Scene VIII of Act IV occurs “Before King Henry’s pavilion.” Gower and Williams take the stage, followed by Fluellen. Williams immediately spies the glove and asks Fluellen about it. Williams hits Fluellen who immediately calls Williams a traitor and promises appropriate punishment. Warwick and Gloucester arrive and Warwick intervenes. Henry arrives with Exeter. Fluellen tells Henry that he’s found the traitor who claims the glove. Henry reveals the truth about the glove and Williams says he didn’t recognize Henry, who “appeared to me but as a common man.” Williams begs forgiveness and Henry orders Exeter to fill the glove with money. When Fluellen realizes what’s happened, he commends Williams for his bravery and gives him some additional money. Williams refuses Fluellen’s money but Fluellen points out that Williams could use some new shoes and urges that he take it. The conversation is interrupted by the arrival of an English Herald. Henry learns that ten thousand French soldiers died in the battle but only “five and twenty” Englishmen are dead. He also lists four English noblemen who died. Henry proclaims that there will be a procession through a nearby village and orders that everyone should participate in “holy rites.”

Analysis

In scene two of this act, the French Dauphin is talking to some of his men. It’s obvious he doesn’t believe there’s going to be a real battle. He thinks the French will just walk out and take the victory, killing off the English and sending Henry home in exchange for a ransom. He isn’t alone in this thinking. The Dauphin says that he wants the Frenchmen to mount their horses and to stab the horses in the side so that they will bleed some. He doesn’t seem to want to seriously injure the horses but says the blood will be thrown into the eyes of their English foes. One of the Frenchmen, a man named Rambures, says he doesn’t think that’s a good idea and the reader probably expects that he’s going to be the voice of reason here. Instead, Rambures says that the French then won’t be able to tell when the English soldiers begin to cry because the blood will mask their tears. Their bravado is ill-founded, as they soon discover, but for the moment they are ridiculously overconfident and take on the attitudes and actions of school yard bullies.

There's a bit of theatrical foreshadowing as the unnamed boy talks after the soldiers leave him alone. He basically says that it's a good thing the French don't realize the camp is manned only by a group of little boys. In modern theaters and movies, that would be a clear indication that the French were going to attack the camp and that's exactly what happens here. In this case, all the boys left behind at the camp are murdered by the French.

There is an interesting discussion between Fluellen and Gower about their opinions of Henry and his decision to kill all the French prisoners. The young boys who were left to guard the camp were slaughtered by the French soldiers and one of the men says those soldiers were actually cowards, running from the battlefield. They compare Henry to



Alexander the Great but disagree on the level of the resemblance. Fluellen points out that Henry is responsible for the death of Sir John Falstaff. It was Falstaff that Pistol and his friends were discussing back in England before they left for France. Falstaff died and some believe that his death is because he is broken hearted that Henry has cast him out of court. There isn't a great deal of information given in this play about Falstaff. While this play will stand alone, there are facts in previous plays in this series that help the reader understand exactly what's happening. An interesting aspect of this section is that modern courts have discussed Henry's decision to kill the French prisoners, and whether it was right, given the time and situation.

The prank Henry pulls on Williams and Fluellen seems incredibly juvenile and out of place, considering the situation. Thousands of French soldiers are dead and the English have lost twenty-five of their own as well as four noblemen. It's true that this is a great victory for the English and Henry may simply be glad for the opportunity to laugh a little. Whatever his reasoning, Henry tells Fluellen a bogus story about the owner of the glove, urging him to consider anyone who confronts him about it as a traitor and Henry's enemy. Fluellen isn't expecting that Williams will be the one to claim the glove and Williams, not recognizing Fluellen, slaps him. Henry fully expects there will be a confrontation between the two men and sends a couple of noblemen to make sure it doesn't get out of hand. Henry explains that it was all just a joke though Williams must have been worried that he would be reprimanded, both for slapping a member of the nobility and for his impertinent remarks to Henry earlier in the day when they exchanged gloves. An interesting aspect of this is that Fluellen says that Williams seems to be a very brave soul and he offers Williams money. Williams seems to be offended by the offer and initially rejects it outright. Fluellen points out that Williams' shoes are worn out and suggests he use the money to buy himself some new ones.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Henry's interaction with Williams, including their difference of opinion over the role of a king when a soldier dies.

Discussion Question 2

What are the attitudes of the French and the English as the battle is about to begin?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Henry order the murder of all the French prisoners? Do you believe his action is justified?



Vocabulary

Superfluous, gallant, embattled, behold, vapor, sheathe, staves, carrions, knavish, covet, convoy, liege, relapse, thrice, perdurable, throngs, chivalry, feeble, espoused, arrant, magnanimous, reckonings



Act V

Summary

Act V opens with the prologue. The Chorus enters and urges the audience to imagine Henry's triumphant return to Rome with all the people applauding his victory. Henry then returns to France.

Scene I of Act V is in "France. The English camp." Gower asks Fluellen why he is wearing a leek, a tradition usually observed only on Saint Davy's day, which is already passed. Fluellen says Pistol had given him bread and salt the previous day and told Fluellen he should eat the leek. Fluellen says he wasn't in a position to fight with Pistol the previous day and is awaiting the chance now. Gower points out that Pistol is arriving and that he is "swelling like a turkey-cock." Fluellen yells at Pistol and tells him to eat the leek, but Pistol refuses. Fluellen hits Pistol multiple times and orders him to eat the entire leek. Fluellen leaves, threatening to make Pistol eat another leek. Pistol bemoans the situation to Gower but Gower says Pistol was wrong to "mock an ancient tradition." Gower leaves. Pistol says he has learned that his wife has died of a "malady of France."

Scene II of Act V takes place in "France. A royal palace." There's a large gathering, including Henry, the king and queen of France, Katharine, and Gloucester. Everyone is overly polite with Queen Isabel referring to Henry as "brother England" and saying she's glad to see him now united with France. She predicts that they will soon all their arguments and hatred turned "into love." After a speech by the Duke of Burgundy in which he calls for peace, Henry says France can purchase that peace by meeting England's demands. Burgundy says the king knows about the demands but has not yet issued an answer. Henry says the peace Burgundy wants depends on the king's answer. The French king responds that he hasn't yet carefully read the demands. He promises to answer once he goes over them with an English official. Henry chooses several men to talk this over with the French king. The queen says she wants to listen in on the discussion and Henry asks that Katharine remain with him.

Henry talks with Katharine through her lady-in-waiting, Alice. Katharine pleads forgiveness for her broken English. Henry says he will gladly listen to Katharine tell him she loves him, even if her English is imperfect. Alice helps interpret when Henry compares Katharine to an angel. Henry says he's glad her English is lacking because he is a "plain king" and if she could fully understand his words she might believe he as nothing more than a farmer. Henry goes on to say that he's a "plain soldier" but asks Katharine if she could possibly love him. Katharine responds by asking if it's possible for her love "de enemy of France." Henry says that is impossible but insists he is a "friend of France." He pledges that France will be hers once she marries him. Henry speaks a few words in French but says it would be easier for him to "conquer the kingdom as to speak so much more French." Henry asks if Katharine could ever love him and she says she isn't certain. Katharine says she will do whatever pleases her father and Henry says



their marriage will please him. Henry tries to kiss Katharine but she says it's not right to kiss before marriage. Henry says "great kings" can do whatever they please.

Others return and the French king announces that he accepts Henry's list of demands. Henry learns that Katharine's marriage to Henry is among the items approved. The French king tells Henry his marriage to Katharine will unite France and England, putting an end to hostility. Queen Isabel says through God Henry and Katharine will wed and have a happy marriage.

The Epilogue opens with an appearance by the Chorus. The Chorus says that Henry and Katharine have a son, Henry VI, who holds both the French and English crowns. The Chorus then says that Henry VI loses France and "made his England bleed."

Analysis

Modern readers may not fully understand the implications of the scene between Fluellen and Pistol when they are arguing over the leek. Wearing the leek in the hat on "Davy's Day" was a tradition the English observed as a point of patriotism. While the fight may very well have aimed at comic relief for this play, the modern reader will likely find the situation humorous as well, but for different reasons. The idea of a man walking around with a leek as an ornament seems ridiculous to the modern reader but even the contemporary audience hearing Shakespeare's play at the time of its release would likely have laughed at the argument, including Fluellen's instance that Pistol eat every bite of his leek, including the skin.

The "malady" of which Mistress Quickly dies is not really detailed in the story though it seems possible that it has something to do with sexually-transmitted diseases. As a point of reference, Pistol doesn't refer to her as Mistress Quickly but only as "my Doll." It's seems likely that he's talking about his wife.

The lengthy conversation between Henry and Katharine is made more difficult by the fact that some of the dialogue is presented in French without interpretation. Speaking in English, Henry insists that he's just a "plain" guy without any real talent for speaking. He goes on about this for some time. He asks repeatedly if Katharine likes him and it seems that Katharine is almost brusque with him, saying that she doesn't really have a say about the situation and that her father will decide if she's to marry Henry.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the situation involving the leek.

Discussion Question 2

What are the main points of the conversation between Henry and Katharine? What are some of the things he asks her and what is her reply?



Discussion Question 3

Describe Isabel's attitude toward Henry.

Vocabulary

Prompt, solemnly, whiffler, broached, lamentation, abridgment, beggarly, lousy, affections, qualmish, astonished, coxcomb, cudgels, predeceased, valor, contrived, basilisks, imperial, fertility, impediment, thistles, teems



Characters

King Henry V

King of England at the time of the events of this play, he is a strong-willed character with depth. Henry is dedicated to England but is also selfish, as is seen in his desire to take additional thrones for himself despite the fact that it means putting the English soldiers in a battle. One evening in the army camp, Henry disguises himself and talks to the men. When someone says the King's attitudes and decisions are wrong, Henry sees that his men aren't wholly behind him. But he doesn't change anything because of this. Instead, he makes a lengthy speech about how difficult it is to be a king and make the decisions for a kingdom. Henry is able to inspire his men toward patriotism as seen in the famous "Band of Brothers" speech. He says that they are a small army with only a small number of soldiers, but he points out that this means each of them will have an even greater share of the glory when they are victorious. An interesting aspect of his character is that he spends some time courting Katharine, the daughter of the French King who is destined to marry Henry. The courting ritual is completely unnecessary in the grand scheme of things because Katharine will be forced to marry Henry, whether she wants to or not. The fact that he's willing to make it more pleasant for her hints at his own desire that she care for him.

Lewis, the French Dauphin

The son of the French King Charles, the Dauphin is named Lewis though he is referred to throughout the play as "Dauphin." He is hot-headed and strong-willed. He dislikes Henry and the English. It's really the Dauphin who pushes Henry into an immediate war. The Dauphin's background is not revealed in this play but it seems likely that he was a serious youngster, always seeking to prepare himself for his role as King of France. That's a strong contrast to Henry's childhood and young adult years when Henry apparently ran wild. When Henry lays claim to a title in France, the Dauphin responds by sending Henry a box of tennis balls. The message is apparently that Henry should go back to playing games and leave the business of running countries to the more serious politicians. When Henry has invaded France, the Dauphin is furious that the French leaders seem worried. He doesn't believe Henry poses a threat at all and he wants the French army to crush Henry and Henry's army. The Dauphin is a haughty character and is somewhat ignored by the French officials who seem to look at him almost as a youngster unworthy of notice. There's no indication of his reaction when his throne is given away to Henry.

Pistol

One of three soldiers featured among the English soldiers. Pistol is not an overly-honorable man and he's not excited about fighting for Henry. He is married to Mistress



Quickly and they run a brothel that's thinly disguised as a tavern and boarding house. Pistol announces near the end of the play that Mistress Quickly has died.

Chorus

A character in the play, the Chorus is actually a single person and his role is to set the stage for the upcoming events. The Chorus repeatedly apologizes for the limitations of the stage. He points out that the action is going to include lots of horses and a huge army, but that there can't be horses and a huge army on the stage. He calls on the people in the audience to use their imaginations as they watch the actors perform.

Katharine

Daughter of the French King and Queen, she is to marry King Henry V. Katharine is prominent as a character only at the end of the book when she is about to meet Henry for the first time. An interesting aspect of their first meeting is that Henry acts as if he needs to court Katharine though she doesn't have a choice about the marriage.

King of France

His name is King Charles and he's the father of both Katharine and the Dauphin. Charles is worried about Henry from the beginning, even when the Dauphin is saying that Henry is nothing but an unfortunate bother to be dealt with quickly. The King agrees to give up the throne upon his death, allowing Henry or Henry's children to take that position.

Michael Williams

The soldier who argues with Henry over the role of a king in the deaths of his soldiers. Williams says the king is responsible for sending soldiers to their deaths and he argues with Henry over the comment, not knowing Henry's true identity. Williams and Henry eventually stop their argument, agreeing to take it up again if they both survive the battle against the French. Williams later sees his glove in the possession of Fluellen and, not recognizing Fluellen as an officer and nobleman, slaps him. He apologizes repeatedly when he discovers Henry has played a trick on him.

Fluellen

One of the English soldiers, he is tricked by Henry over the glove Henry takes from Williams. Fluellen's dedication to Henry is absolute and he immediately calls for Williams' arrest, believing Henry's story that William is really a traitor.



Queen Isabel

The French queen, she is mother of the Dauphin and Katharine. She is overly polite with Henry, calling his marriage to Katharine a wonderful pact that will united France and England.

Montjoy

The French messenger who arrives at the French camp and announces that England has won the battle. He asks permission to remove their dead from the battlefield so they can bury them.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Law Regarding the Church

Described at the beginning of the play, it's noted that this law will require the church hand over more than half of its holdings. The church pledges to stand behind Henry's battle against the French in exchange for Henry's pledge to quash that law.

A Treasure Chest

The item sent to Henry by the Dauphin, it actually contains tennis balls which angers Henry.

Tennis Balls

The items sent to Henry by the Dauphin of France. The arrival of the tennis balls enrages Henry and is the tipping point on his decision to declare war on France.

The Glove

The item traded by Henry and Williams when they are arguing about the role of the king in the lives of the soldiers. When Williams later sees Fluellen with the glove, he hits Fluellen until Henry resolves the issue by saying it was a joke.

The Leek

The vegetable that Fluellen and Pistol argue over with Fluellen ending the argument by forcing Pistol to eat the leek.

A Brothel

The business run by Mistress Quickly and Nym though Mistress Quickly says they are running an honest boarding house for working women.

A Cloak

The item Henry borrows from Fluellen so that he can disguise himself while he walks around with his troops.



A Church

Where Bardolph steals something, prompting the order for his execution.

Agincourt

A castle near the final battle between the French and the English which prompts Henry to declare that battle happened on 'the field of Agincourt.'

Horses

One of the many things the Chorus asks the audience to conjure up with their imaginations because the stage is too small to allow the grandeur described in the play.

Settings

England

Where Henry lives and is seated on the throne at the time of this play. None of the settings are described in Shakespeare's plays and England is no exception. This setting is real and the reader is urged by the Chorus to imagine the countryside, the trip by sea to France, and other aspects of all the settings.

France

Arguably the main setting for the story, this is where the battles take place as the English defeat the French, though the French have much larger forces. The setting is not described other than a few details that have to do with the action. For example, the reader is told that the English break through a particular wall, gaining access to a French town. There is no real description given other than the fact that the breach occurs.

The Stage

Though not technically a setting, Shakespeare makes it one when he uses the Chorus to describe details that are not presented in the actual acting. The stages of this time are bare and the actors have few props of any kind. The Chorus asks the audience to imagine aspects of the settings, such as the trip across the ocean and the sounds of horses engaged in a bloody battle.



Themes and Motifs

Power and the Throne

As Henry seeks to decide if he has the right to the French throne by asking advice of his officials. There is a lengthy description of why Henry is qualified to hold the throne but the end result is that this official believes Henry does have a right to the throne. The holding of thrones is a natural source of power and Henry is apparently caught up in the power of his position. An interesting aspect of this theme is that Henry's father battled for the English throne and that fight is the only reason Henry holds the power. As Henry decides whether his claim to the French throne is solid, officials recount his ancestral line back to the French. Liaisons between countries was a common means of increasing or holding onto the power of the throne and this is seen again when Henry marries the French princess in order to pass control of France down to a direct descendant of the French King and Queen. Another important aspect of this is the controlling of laws and this means that people seek Henry's favor. The church is in danger of being forced to dispose of about half of the church's holdings because of a new law being proposed. The church officials are in favor of Henry's invasion of France and in return hope that Henry will favor their stand on this proposed law. The politics behind the power are convoluted and filled with intrigue. Another interesting aspect of this theme is seen when the French try to stop Henry's invasion by hiring assassins. They hope that stopping Henry before he reaches France will put a stop to the invasion and the threat to the French throne.

The Rigors of War

There are several soldiers who express their displeasure at being involved in the war against France but Henry calls on them to fight their hardest and leads an inferior force to battle. Henry's invasion of France is designed to conquer France and bring that country under the English rule. While Henry has a plan in mind and hopes for a glorious victory, some of the soldiers are not nearly so enthused about the reality. The conditions are difficult and even Henry points out that one of the older soldiers probably wishes he was back in London where he has a soft pillow for his head. That particular soldier, Sir Thomas Erpingham, disagrees, saying he wants nothing more than to be on the battlefield with Henry. Other soldiers say they wish they were back home and when one talks about their inferior forces, Henry points out that the few soldiers will each take a larger portion of the glory if they win the battle. An important aspect of this theme is seen when the French attack the English camp, which is basically left unguarded with only a few young boys there. The French kill the boys and burn the camp. A short time later, Henry calls for the execution of all the French soldiers. There have been modern-day discussions on whether this was merely a fact of the warfare of the time period or if Henry was wrong to order the executions.



Relationships

Henry inherits the English throne from his father but the English officials offer up an opinion that Henry is entitled to the French throne based on a maternal ancestor. This is not typical of the time but shows that the relationships were an important aspect of life, especially for the royalty and those who were entitled to lands, holdings, and titles. There is a famous speech included in this play in which Henry calls his fellow soldiers a “band of brothers.” While no one could claim that Henry had a great deal in common with the ordinary foot soldier of the English army, he claims a kinship based on their shared experiences and hardships. From the rousing speech, it’s clear that Henry feels this kinship on a deep level, but it doesn’t seem likely that this feeling continues once the men are off the battlefield. Another important relationship seen in this play is that of Henry and Katharine. Henry sets out to court Katharine though she will be ordered by her father to go through with the marriage, whether Henry is charming and likable or not. This marriage is touted by Katharine’s mother as a wonderful move for their countries. She refers to the love that will bond Henry and Katharine together though love is not a requisite for these matches, created solely to cement alliances between countries.



Styles

Point of View

The story is written in third person from a limited perspective. The point of view is necessary because action occurs in both the French and the English camps and one person could not have been in all places to witness the happenings. An important example of this is seen when Katharine is learning English from her lady-in-waiting, Alice. That scene takes place without any English people watching and Shakespeare's obvious efforts at humor here would have been impossible without the omniscient perspective. The limitation occurs only with regard to thoughts. For example, Henry learns that three men have been hired by the French to kill Henry. The reader knows that Henry is aware of the murder plot but has no idea what his thoughts are with regard to the situation. It is known that the three men are allowed to accompany Henry as he leaves England for France and it seems to the three that Henry doesn't know about their plan. He even sets up a situation and asks them if a traitor deserves mercy. They answer that the traitor does not and it's only then that Henry reveals he knows about the plan. It seems evident that Henry is toying with the men prior to revealing that he knows about the plot but his thoughts are not revealed to the reader.

Language and Meaning

Shakespeare is notoriously difficult to read, largely because of the sentence structure and antiquated language. King Henry V is no exception. There are words and phrases used outside the common English appearance and spelling. For example, the letter "e" is often omitted from a work so that "framed" is written throughout this play as "fram'd." The British spellings are sometimes used as well, so that valor is spelled "valour." In other cases, the words are contractions of a sort. The King of France makes a speech in which he says that some of them are "enow" marked to die. This is apparently meant to be read "even now." Other words are simply dated and the modern reader, even one with an extensive vocabulary, may find unfamiliar words throughout the play. Henry gives a lengthy speech that includes the idea that there may be English soldiers' bodies that remain behind in France, "leaving their earthly parts to choke your clime." The word clime apparently refers to the climate and Henry is saying the French may have to deal with the stench of rotting English soldiers. To make this play even more difficult to read and comprehend, there are several instances of French dialogue throughout the story. In a few of these cases, the English reader will be able to figure out what's being said but some of the French lines remain a mystery to non-French speaking readers. In addition, there is the typical eloquence common to Shakespeare's works. Some readers may develop a knack for understanding while others may intuitively comprehend Shakespeare's words, but others may struggle with the writing and never fully grasp the meaning.

Structure

The story is written in five acts. Each act includes multiple scenes and each opens with a solo by the Chorus, a single actor who uses narrative to set the scene for the coming act. Most editions of the book begins with a list of characters, or “dramatic personae.” The list is quite extensive, down to Alice, the lady-in-waiting who serves as translator for Princess Katharine. Act I opens with the prologue featuring the Chorus. The first and second scenes are set in London where officials, including King Henry, are discussion several political situations. Act II opens with the prologue by the Chorus. Scene I takes place on a street in London where several new characters are introduced. Scene II moves to a council chamber in Southampton and Scene III returns to a the tavern in London, operated by Mistress Quickly. Scene IV takes the reader to France. The Chorus has called on the audience to use imagination to envision the trip. Act III opens with the Prologue. There are seven scenes in this act and all take place in France as the English attack on the French commences. Act IV begins with the Chorus and has seven scenes. All happen in France and the audience is taken into the camps of the English and the French. The final Act takes place in France where Henry is introduced to Katharine and the French King agrees to all the demands handed down by Henry. There are two scenes in Act V.



Quotes

When we have matched our rackets to these balls, we will, in France by God's grace, play a set, shall strike his father's crown into the hazard.

-- Henry (Act I, Scene II paragraph 33)

Importance: This is Henry's response when he discovers the Dauphin has sent him a treasure chest full of tennis balls. The Dauphin's message is that Henry should go back to playing games and that he is too much a child to run a country, let alone invade France.

Never was monarch better feared and loved than is your Majesty. There's not, I think, a subject that sits in heart-grief and uneasiness under the sweet shade of your government.

-- Cambridge (Act II, Scene II paragraph 11)

Importance: Cambridge makes this speech just moments before Henry reveals that he knows all about their plan to murder him. This is one of the many scenes that drive home the theme of patriotism.

In cases of defence, 'tis best to weigh the enemy more mighty than he seems.

-- The Dauphin (Act II, Scene IV paragraph 5)

Importance: The Dauphin is pointing out that it's better to be overly prepared for the upcoming fight against Henry. All their preparations do nothing to save France and Henry wins that war.

Play with your fancies; and in them behold upon the hempen tackles ship-boys climbing; hear the shrill whistle which doth order give to sounds confused; behold the threaden sails, borne with the invisible and creeping wind, draw the huge bottoms through the furrowed sea, breasting the lofty surge.

-- Chorus (Act III, prologue paragraph 2)

Importance: This is one of several instances in which the Chorus takes the stage and calls on the audience to imagine specific aspects of the play or its setting. The Chorus repeatedly points out that the stage is simply too small to hold the ships, horses, and armies that are so important to the play.

Would I were in an alehouse in London!

-- The Boy (Act III, scene II paragraph 5)

Importance: The boy is saying he wishes he could be back in London rather than on the French battlefield. It's a sentiment echoed by several of the English soldiers.

If I begin the battery once again, I will not leave the half-achieved Herfleur till in her ashes she lie buried. The gates of mercy shall be all shut up and the fleshed soldier,



rough and hard of heart, in liberty of bloody hand shall range with conscience wide as hell, mowing like grass your fresh fair virgins and your flowering infants.

-- Henry (Act III, Scene III paragraph 2)

Importance: Henry pledges that the English will win the war and warns the French that the English victors will be brutal unless they open the gates and surrender at once.

Sorry am I his numbers are so few, his soldiers sick and famished in their march; for I am sure, when he shall see our army, he'll drop his heart into the sink of fear and for achievement offer us his ransom.

-- The Constable (Act III, Scene V paragraph 10)

Importance: The French are still pretty certain they are going to win the war at this point and the Constable predicts that Henry will just give up the moment he sees the French army.

For though I speak it to you, I think the King is but a man as I am. The violet smells to him as it doth to me; the element shows to him as it doth to me; all his senses have but human conditions.

-- Henry (Act IV, Scene I paragraph 56)

Importance: Henry is disguised as he walks among the soldiers and here, he is arguing with Bates and Williams over the king's responsibility toward his men. He says that the king is, after all, just a man.

What, will you have them weep our horses' blood? How shall we, then behold their natural tears?

-- Rambures (Act IV, Scene II paragraph 12)

Importance: This conversation includes the Dauphin and other French officials. The Dauphin has just instructed the men to cut their horses deeply enough that the animals will bleed. The plan is to have the blood hit the English soldiers but Rambures counters, saying if the horses' blood is in the eyes of the English soldiers, he'll have no way of determining when the soldiers are crying.

If we are marked to die, we are enow to do our country loss; and if we live, the fewer men, the greater share of honor.

-- Hery (Act IV, Scene III paragraph 13)

Importance: Henry and the other Englishmen are discussing the upcoming battle and the fact that the English are greatly outnumbered. Henry seems to refer to the battle as a finite amount of glory and points out that since there are so few English soldiers, each will have a greater share of that glory.

Reproach and everlasting shame sits mocking in our plumes.

-- Dauphin (Act IV, Scene V paragraph 4)



Importance: The French have realized their forces are falling to the English, including a major breach in their line of defense. Just a few scenes earlier, these same men were predicting the English soldiers would run home crying and discussing the amount of ransom they would demand for Henry.

Yet leave our cousin Katharine here with us: She is our capital demand, comprised within the fore-rank of our articles.

-- Henry (Act V, Scene I paragraph 14)

Importance: Henry says that he wants to spend a little time alone with Katharine when the King and Queen of France go to discuss the points of their surrender to England. It's an interesting aspect of Henry's nature that he clearly states that he has demanded a marriage with Katharine as part of the peace treaty but he then spends some time after this talking with Katharine, obviously trying to charm her into liking him.