

Henry V background:

Date: between January and June 1599, based on internal evidence: viz. the following lines spoken by the Chorus to Act Five:

But now behold,
In the quick Forge and working-house of Thought,
How London doth powre out her Citizens,
The Maior and all his Brethren in best sort,
Like to the Senatours of th' antique Rome,
With the Plebeians swarming at their heeles,
Goe forth and fetch their Conqu'ring Caesar in:
As by a lower, but by louing likelyhood,
Were now the Generall of our gracious Empresse, [2880]
As in good time he may, from Ireland comming,
Bringing Rebellion broached on his Sword;
How many would the peacefull Citie quit,
To welcome him? much more, and much more cause,
Did they this Harry.

2872 - 85

These lines are taken to refer to Queen Elizabeth and her “general” Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex, whom she’d sent to suppress a rebellion in Ireland. Preparations for Essex’s undertaking had begun in 1598, and Essex himself had departed London on March 27, 1599.

Importantly, he returned defeated and in disgrace in late September. Hence, the reference to him returning with “Rebellion broached on his sword” had to be made before then.

Editors have also taken into account other work being done by Shakespeare in the period to determine that a date in early rather than late spring is more likely (Taylor, 5).

The earliest quarto edition dates from 1600.

Sources:

Certain:

Holinshed’s *Chronicles*

An anonymous play entitled *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*

Edward Hall’s *Union of the Two Illustre Families of Lancastre and Yorke*

Probable:

George Chapman’s *Seven Books of the Iliad of Homer* (although the dates are problematic)

A Mirrour for Magistrates

Current criticism most relevant to us: See website.

Style:

Predominantly iambic pentameter. After *Julius Caesar* the most oratorical play we'll read.

Themes or topics of interest:

national stereotyping:

the French, 3.5. 1380 - 1414: from "'Tis certaine he hath past the river Some" to "most loftie Run-awayes"

the English, 3.7. 1768 - 80: from "The Iland of England breedes very valiant creatures" to "fight like Deuils": and, of course, the entire play

the Welsh, through Fluellen

the Irish, through MacMorris

the Scots, through Jamy

In his edition of *Henry V* for the Oxford World Classics series Gary Taylor writes: "No one bored by war will be interested in *Henry V*. In other of Shakespeare's plays battles have the exits and their entrances, wars pass by as the consequences and determinants of political and domestic conflict: but *Henry V* alone wholly dedicates itself to dramatizing this brutal, exhilarating, and depressingly persistent human activity" (1). Taylor goes on to write that "critics almost all divide into two camps: partisans of Henry and partisans of pacificism" (1).

Honour as a commodity to be purchased:

By loue, I am not couetous for Gold,
Nor care I who doth feed vpon my cost:
It yernes me not, if men my Garments weare;
Such outward things dwell not in my desires.
But if it be a sinne to couet Honor,
I am the most offending Soule aliue.

2267 - 73

Royal lineage:

the debate over Salic law that opens the play (most of 1.2)
Exeter's message to King Charles @ 2.4. 970 - 89

Royal prerogative as responsibility rather than as the exercise of power:

4.1. 1936 - 2043: the scene with Bates, Court, & Williams

4.1. 2079 - 2134: Henry's soliloquy continuing to investigate the same subject

5) Your responses to the play?

6) Salic Law:

The Archbishop of Canterbury's speeches in Shakespeare's *Henry V* are taken almost verbatim from Holinshed's *Chronicles*

The justice of Henry's claim to the French throne, and therefore of his war, rests on acceptance of this argument

According to A. R. Humphreys 1968 New Penguin Shakespeare edition, the Archbishop's speech is "unrivalled for tediousness" in the entire Shakespeare canon (26; qtd in Taylor, 34).