***Henry V***

1. Prologue about appearances (the stage) versus reality (a war)

i. Canterbury and Ely: ulterior motives for war

ii. King Henry and Canterbury: concern for cost of war and for justness of war;

King Henry and Ambassador: first contrast between Dauphin and Henry

1. Prologue about preparation for war and inadequacy of stage
2. Nym, Bardolph, Pistol, Mistress Quickly
3. King Henry versus Scroop, Cambridge, and Grey
4. Nym, Bardolph, Pistol, Quickly, and Boy
5. King of France with Dauphin; later, Exeter
6. Prologue about going to France and inadequacy of stage
7. Henry’s address to the besiegers at Harfleur
8. Nym, Bardolph, Pistol, and Boy; later, Gower and Fluellen; then Macmorris and Jamy
9. Surrender of Harfleur to Henry
10. Princess Katherine of France
11. King of France, Dauphin, French court
12. Gower, Fluellen; Pistol; Henry; Montjoy
13. Constable, Orleans, Dauphin, Rambures
14. Prologue about the night before battle
15. Henry; Erpingham, Pistol, Gower, and Fluellen; Williams; Erpingham
16. French camp: scorn for enemy
17. English camp: desire for honor
18. Pistol takes a prisoner
19. French lords: experience of defeat
20. English lords: experience of losses
21. Victory for the English
22. Williams and Fluellen; also, the body count
23. Prologue about going to England and then back again to France
24. Gower, Fluellen, and Pistol
25. Meeting, wooing, treaty, and wedding

Epilogue about Henry VI and the loss of France

Structure of the Play (Juxtapositions and Effects)

In Act I, the first scene shows us the corruption of the church, and the second scene shows us that Henry V has the spiritual priorities (and thus authority) that the churchmen lack.

At the end of the second scene, we see that Henry is superior to the Dauphin.

In Act II, the tavern folk are seen on either side of the would-be assassins; Henry’s grieved but impartial justice toward his kinsmen repeats the treatment he gave Falstaff (kinsmen and Falstaff die from it).

In the last scene of the act, we see that the King of France is superior to the Dauphin.

In Act III, the seven scenes divide into the opening three at Harfleur, the closing three preparing for Agincourt, and a middle one showing us that the French princess is trying to learn to speak English – a symbolic victory for the English. The presence of English Gower, Welsh Fluellen, Irish Macmorris, and Scottish Jamy indicates that the British Isles are united under Henry V.

In Act IV, the battle is dramatized with the same concern for representing both English and French lords and both lords and commoners on the English side as has been true as often as possible in acts II and III. The disguise Henry dons in the first scene of this act is revealed in the last scene.

In Act V, we have the final vindication of Fluellen [remember that Queen Elizabeth I, a Tudor, claims Welsh ancestry and is part of the audience for this play], the final come-uppance for Pistol, and the final wise words from Gower. Large-scale, we have the final triumph for both France (peace!) and England (an assured succession), worked out both personally through marriage and politically through treaty.

Historicity

The would-be assassins are guilty in the play of taking money from France, a clear and contemptible form of treason; in reality, the conspiracy was motivated by the fact that Henry IV (and, therefore, Henry V) had less right to the throne than another branch of the royal family had. In the play, this fact comes up only in Henry’s prayer before the battle of Agincourt, so Henry gets credit for bringing it up.

Harfleur is not sacked in the play; in reality, it was treated exactly as Henry’s speech threatens to treat it. It is the first opportunity to show the audience how immoral war is, an issue postponed to Agincourt.

In the play, Ireland is unified and loyal to Henry; in reality, English control over Ireland was exercised only in a small region surrounding Dublin, and the rest of the island was neither unified nor pro-English.

The battle of Agincourt was, however, just as amazing in reality as in the play. In very round numbers, the English had 6,000 men, of whom 1,000 were men-at-arms, mostly on foot, and 5,000 were archers, entirely on foot; the French had 25,000 men, of whom about 1,000 were mounted men-at-arms and most of the remainder were men-at-arms on foot. The highest figure given by scholars to the English losses is 600 dead, including only two nobles (the Duke of York and the Earl of Suffolk), whereas the lowest figure given by scholars to the French losses is 6,000 dead, including 90-120 nobles (depending on how you define the nobility), plus 2,000 captured and held for ransom.

Character of Henry V in the Play

The play gives Henry a deep concern, expressed in his first appearance in the play, that the costs of war may be immoral in themselves, as well as a fear that the causes of war may be immoral. In his ordering Bardolph’s execution for looting a French church, his sparing Harfleur, and his prayer before Agincourt, we see his concern with the morality of warfare at work.

The prayer follows common Elizabethan-era advice regarding how to pray: Henry addresses God, asking not only for his own gain but for the welfare of others, and he knows that God’s will should be done, whether it answers Henry’s prayer positively or negatively.

By the night before the battle of Agincourt, which looks likely to be an overwhelming defeat for Henry’s army, he has been lied to by his religious superiors, betrayed by his kinsmen, and removed (admittedly, of his own accord) from the tavern-going comrades of his youth. In short, he has been progressively isolated from all sources of support for him. Hence, he attempts to make contact with his fellow-men by disguising himself and going among them. That attempt results in further isolation for him.

Theme of the Play

To some extent, the play reflects the problem that any hereditary monarch is still just a human being. The play dramatizes the solution that the king may be such a good man as this one is. But several issues remain unresolved: the justice of an English king’s claim to the throne of France, the justice of an English king’s claim to the loyalty of the Irish and the Scots, and the loneliness of the man who must be king.

Resolutions to these issues appear in the play, of course: The Agincourt victory settles the matter of Henry’s claim to the French throne by trial-by-combat, and Henry gives the glory to God. The Prologue to Act V admits that the Irish are in rebellion in Shakespeare’s time, but it also suggests what side God should take in that conflict. The love-scene with Princess Katherine suggests that Henry may get some personal happiness that will make him somewhat less lonely.

Film Productions

Kenneth Branagh’s 1989 film is not so much derived from the play directly as it is a remake of Laurence Olivier’s 1944 film. Olivier’s film glorifies war; he made his film near the end of WWII in order to raise the morale of the British public. Branagh’s film is more nearly realistic about war and its costs.