

Name

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### **King Henry V**

King Henry V, written and directed by William Shakespear himself, is arguably the reknown writer's most legendary and known works. The play tells the story of the hundred years war that was launched against France by England and the intricacies of England's claim to the French throne. Although the war has been told in different perspectives over the years, it is this work by Shakespear that is used as a standard measure for the accuracy of all other versions.

From the very onset, King Henry is depicted as a mighty king (Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, Chorus, Scene Act I), one whose role should perhaps be played by a different person than was available to the playwrights. Indeed in the text there is information that initially it is Queen Elizabeth I who played this particular role under the guidance of William Shakespeare. The king is very much beloved by his subjects, a fact which is clear in the immense praises in and out of his sight, by ordinary men and even fellow leaders such as the clergy who are in their own right at the helm of power. In the first scene the archbishop of Canterbury speaks of the king as “full of grace and fair regard” (Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, Para 7, Scene 1, Act I) which the Bishop of Ely agrees with stating that he is also “a true lover of the church” (Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, Para 8, Scene 1, Act I). This is without mentioning the titles of rivalry accorded him.

Concerning the war, the king's claim to the throne of France is justified on the premise of his grandfather's entitlement by virtue of his maternal uncle having held the throne (Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, Para 22, Scene 2, Act I). When the idea of waging the war is proposed before King Henry V, he is depicted as being considerate and mindful of the lives of English soldiers (Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, Para 17, Scene 2, Act I) and he later encourages them at the battle field after taking the disguise of a humble person in order to find out the soldiers' true state.

Concerning the war waged on France, there is a general lack of accuracy in the play's entire depiction of events. The author, William Shakespeare, writes from a biased point of reference which is that of the righteousness of England defending a claim passed on from three generations past (Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, Para 22, Scene 2, Act I). The claim is solid to the passing eye but at a closer look, the original claimant and grandfather to King Henry V made the claim in a period where matrilineal claims were not allowed under law. Further, he had relinquished his claims in exchange of vast pieces of land only to rescind this stand after hostilities from France. The English had therefore acted unjustly with regard to the claim to the throne of France. That the King of France sent back an insulting gift (Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, Para 22, Scene 2, Act I) after King Henry V had sent ambassadors is considered even further justification for his cause. In truth the French King's action is justified in so far as King Henry was advancing a direct threat to his leadership and that of his heirs.

The positive bias toward King Henry V is also seen in the heroic nature of his character in the play. The production commences with a pleasant discussion between clergymen who talk of the grace and justness (Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, Para 7, Scene 1, Act I) of the king to

whom they refer with reverend titles even in his absence. He is depicted as thoughtful and consultative when he postpones his decision on whether or not to wage war against until he has opportunity to discuss the matter with the clergy (Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, Para 5, Scene 2, Act I). When they come before home, his humility is seen as he shows reverence to the Archbishop of Canterbury (Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, Para 7, Scene 2, Act I) and as any good leader, emphasizes on the welfare of his people throughout the discussion. He is seen as peace-loving and wary of violent measures and that the villains are actually France for, instead of engaging diplomatically as he has, choose to send him an insulting gift (Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, Para 22, Scene 2, Act I).

The crucial nature of literature is demonstrable in the fact that it serves as a dependable evidence and source of historical events and characters. Since it is a reference for everyone who was not personally part of a particular event, the opinions of the readers is likely to be shaped as depicted in the literature. At the end of the play, King Henry V is referred to as “the star of England” ((Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, Chorus, Scene 2, Act V). This depicts the general tone of the play which is of praise to England and to King Henry V. Until France advances literature which matches this particular one by Shakespeare, audience worldwide are likely to view the events as depicted by Shakespeare and reach the same conclusions as he did.

In conclusion, the story of England's war in France is described as one of righteousness and well-founded in history. However, at the end of the play one is still left with questions as to the legitimacy of the claim to the French throne considering the law at the time that a claim could not arise from a female relation and also the fact that the claim had been relinquished

before. Although the English soldiers fought valiantly and King Henry V forged forward unrelentingly, was the war one which was justifiably fought in the first place? This is a question which is unfortunately only half-answered from the English perspective.

Bibliography.

Shakespeare, William, and Emma Smith. King Henry V. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Print.