



Teaching Shakespeare's Greatest Plays & Sonnets

with Dr. Joshua Avery

Lecture 8: Henry V

Outline:

Henry V

- Big picture issues in Henry V
 - Can one be an effective ruler and be virtuous? Or do these two things oppose each other.
 - Some read Henry as the mirror of Christian princes. Some would argue that he is dazzling with rhetoric but also duplicitous. The Machiavellian view would be that he is both.
 - There is also the problem of rhetoric itself. You have the question of what it means to have a good ruler.
 - Is Henry the mirror of Christian princes, or not? What is a Christian prince (what are the ideals)?
- Prologue
 - What is the prologue requesting of the audience?
 - “Oh for a muse of fire.” This likens the play to an epic poem.
 - Shakespeare is doing the equivalent of epic for the English theatrical tradition.
 - This theme is lofty. This is drawing you up.
 - The burden goes to the audience.
- Act I, Scene I
 - What is the first thing we are seeing as Canterbury and Ely discuss what’s happening with the politics and how much money is coming to the church? They are talking about how much they are going to get.
 - Refer to Henry IV: This is not a genuine conversion. The quickness of the reformation that sounds highly spiritual is really political machinations.
 - Does God intervene and allow the English to win? Canterbury says that miracles do not happen. Is there divine activity in the human realm? Is it helpful to assume that there is divine activity in the human realm?
- Act I, Scene II
 - Natural law debate: We have diversity, but that diversity must find unity (harmony – image of bees). How can you get unity in diversity?
 - The whole speech is a praise of the monarchy.
 - What is tyranny (Plato’s *Republic*)? The tyrant is the soul whose passions run amuck. Is Henry V really in command of his passions?



- Henry is a model of political cunning.
- Act II, Chorus
 - Is Henry V, “The mirror of all Christian kings?”
 - What kind of honor? Honor for England. Honor also means something like conscience. The word honor is multifaceted.
- Act II, Scene I
 - Let the students compare the language to the language of the court.
 - This is not poetry, it is more colloquial.
- Act II, Scene II
 - What makes Henry V a smooth political operator?
 - Henry is showing everyone that this kind of conspiracy mirrors the point that Dante makes at the end of *The Inferno* where he has the fraudulent at the lowest section of Hell.
 - The fraudulent are breaking bonds that allow for trust.
 - You now distrust every person around you.
 - Henry uses anaphora (so didst thou) for outrage, expression of rage against evil and injustice.
 - Henry impersonalizes it, and says that this is about the salvation of England. This is what the king should say.
- Act II, Scene III
 - Part of the irony of the whole scene is the complete cluelessness of the hostess who did have affection for Falstaff.
 - A good death is important. The hostess says it was a good death. Falstaff may have been praying, quoting the Psalms. Falstaff is actually in terror, dying in fear of damnation. He is praying, but he is not in a state of peace. The scene invites pathos.
- Act II, Scene IV
 - So much of this play is about power of political rhetoric done well.
 - There is natural dispensation that the monarch reflects.
 - Rhetoric: Open with a very succinct phrase.
 - Henry V is being imaginatively likened to a god.
 - This is natural law. Have compassion on your own people. Surrender is love of them.
- Act III, Scene I
 - Henry’s speeches have complexity. He says it is not always the time for war, sometimes are for stillness and humility. He shows us the distinction of sometimes being the tiger, and sometimes not.
 - He implants confidence and national pride in his troops.
- Act III, Scene II
 - It shows a kind of power in Henry’s success that you have the Welsh and the Scottish under the English banner (later this is shown that it is not so simple).
- Act III, Scene III
 - Henry says, if you make us fight, after we win, my soldiers are going to be out for blood and rape, and there isn’t anything I can do about it



even if I could. Could he really not reign them in? This is a terrifying and nasty threat.

- Act III, Scene VI
 - Henry frames it as saying that he is honest. It portrays dignity and humility. He is not bragging about capacity to fight, but insists on their willingness to do so.
 - Henry profoundly understands image.
 - Is Henry V really so humble?
- Act III, Scene VII
 - We're being invited to enjoy a stereotype.
 - How are these Frenchmen portrayed and why?
- Act IV, Scene I
 - When something bad is occurring, this is an opportunity for virtue. Don't immediately fall to complaining.
 - Henry wants to know what his men think (unlike King Lear).
 - People in war are not in a moment of piety. The king has to answer for all those souls. Does Henry make a good argument in reply?
 - Is the king responsible for the souls of the soldiers? He presents it in a more modern vein. The role of your political leaders is purely and only the physical level. What does this imply about politics?
 - The soliloquy of Henry: He is like a man divided. Henry knows he is not a legitimate king. Henry is not going to give up the crown. Have the students catch these ironies.
- Act IV, Scene III
 - He is spiritualizing honor. You've got to make the war as noble sounding as possible.
- Act IV, Scene VII
 - There is a terrible atrocity of the slaughter of noncombatant children, and there is the response of slaying of prisoners.
 - How does escalation in war happen? How does escalation work?
- Act V, Scene I
 - What is the point of this? Through all of the comedy, what is actually happening here?
 - Why is this here? What does it have to do with the war? Where does violence come from?
- Act V, Scene II
 - Henry V makes such a big point of lacking eloquence. What is the rhetorical effect of saying that you lack eloquence?
 - We are the makers of manners. This reflects the very ambitious and confident spirit of Henry and the conquest of France.
 - The successors to Henry lost everything Henry had gained. England suffers for it. What does this mean? Does it show something about the problematic ambition of empire itself?