

Swipeth from the Introduction to Synopsis and...

INTRO

H5

HENRY V c.1599

The fourth (of 4) plays comprising the Henriad: Richard II, Henry IV (Parts I & II) and Henry V. Though written before these, the plays of Shakespeare's other historical tetraology – the 3 parts of Henry VI and Richard III – pick up the history presented here. Together, the 8 plays complete a cycle covering the years 1398 to 1485.

- 1599 was a Big Year: The rebuilt Globe opened, Shakespeare penned *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Julius Caesar* and this, the final play of the Henriad, all while ramping up to *Hamlet*.
- Focusing on the Battle of Agincourt in 1415, Shakespeare hits on the “miraculous” history here – heavily cutting the number of English casualties, for example – while omitting the more mundane fact of British military might: It was the advent of the longbow that won them Agincourt.
- Only in *Pericles* does a Chorus figure factor so prominently, injecting “meta-theatre,” or theatre about theatre. And the “wooden O” referenced at the outset is the newly-rebuilt Globe. (BTW, it's thought that Shakespeare himself was the first Chorus, appropriately enough.)
- In the 87 years covered in the Histories, Henry V's heroic reign was the high point. Not surprisingly, this uber-patriotic play has long gone down smoothly in England, if not elsewhere: It was not staged in France until the Avignon Festival of 1999. (Note: Mistress Quickly dies of “a malady of France,” or VD.)
- While Olivier memorialized Harry as heroic in his famous film of 1944, this changed, markedly, post-WWII. Modern productions commonly “contextualize” *H5* with reference to current conflict, mixing the message if not perverting the patriotism.
- As elsewhere, the Royals versify while the plebes get prose; but late in *H5*, not only does Henry woo the Princess in prose, he dares a bit of broken French as well.
- Odd, Falstaff's “off-stage” death.
- Productions often pare away Henry's less “heroic” practices: His horrid threats

