

HENRY V

Character Notes

CHORUS

The narrator to the story, introducing us to the principal characters and the action of the play. The Chorus not only relates action, but also comments on the plot, characters and themes, but is the Chorus to be trusted?

KING HENRY V

Son of Henry IV, and newly crowned ruler of England, Henry is unrelentingly committed to the responsibilities of kingship. He is often forced to choose between his personal feelings and the requirements of the monarchy, often making sacrifices to meet the needs of the crown. His primary skill is that of an orator, motivating his followers with inspiring words. At the start of the play his irresponsible behaviour as a young prince is referred to, but the King that we see here has grown up fast. The present of tennis balls from the French reflects their view of him as a playboy ruler.

THE DUKES OF EXETER, WESTMORELAND, YORK AND SALISBURY

Henry's faithful followers and trusted advisors. The Duke of Exeter is also Henry's uncle, and serves as a carrier for messages between Henry and the King of France. He is fiercely loyal to his nephew.

THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

Wealthy and powerful English clergyman. He develops an elaborate and convoluted series of reasons for Henry's invasion of France. This cryptic line of reason, and the huge funds he offers to support the British army, are important factors in Henry's decision to go to war.

BISHOP OF ELY

A confidant of the Archbishop, who acts as sounding board to Canterbury's proposal, and supports him when presenting it to the King.

SIR THOMAS ERPINGHAM

An old and loyal soldier, who supports Henry in his war efforts and, despite his old age, fights beside him with huge courage. He is universally respected by the British army.

CAPTAIN FLUELLEN

Fluellen's pronounced accent reflects his Welshness. He captains King Henry's troops from Wales. He is a comic character, providing moments of relief in the midst of tense fighting scenes, but earns respect through his unquestionable intelligence as a leader and strategist.

CAPTAIN GOWER

A capable army captain who serves Henry loyally in his campaign.

BATES AND WILLIAMS

The night before Agincourt, Henry disguises himself and moves amongst his soldiers, sounding them out on their opinions of the war. He argues with two common soldiers, Bates and Williams, about the war's justification, but develops a respect for their bravery and insight.

BARDOLPH

He is a thief and a vagabond from London who joins the British army and gets into trouble almost as soon as he arrives in France for stealing from a church. A former friend of Henry from the days of *Henry IV (I and II)*, we are shocked when the King condones the execution of Bardolph for the crime of theft.

NYM

Another former colleague of the King, he is angered when his friend Pistol steals his fiancée from him. Despite their mutual antagonism, Nym and Pistol serve in the war for Henry together but Nym dies from wounds received in battle.

SERGEANT PISTOL

Pistol is a rogue who steals his friends' women, gets into fights with his fellow soldiers and displays an immense arrogance with every overblown word he utters. He survives the war, mostly through cowardice, and vows to return to England to continue his villainous existence.

BOY

When his former master, Falstaff, dies, the nameless Boy follows Pistol, Nym, and Bardolph to the war in France where he is slaughtered by the French army.

HOSTESS

The Hostess, aka Mistress Quickly, is keeper of the Boar's Head Tavern in London. She is the former fiancée of Nym, and now wife of Pistol. She dies while her husband and his friends are fighting in France.

CHARLES VI, THE KING OF FRANCE

Unlike his arrogant son, King Charles does not underestimate the threat that Henry poses. He is a capable leader, and gracious in defeat at the close of the play.

ISABEL

The Queen to Charles VI. She does not appear until the close of the play when she gives her daughter to Henry as a wife.

LOUIS, THE DAUPHIN OF FRANCE

The arrogant prince of France. The Dauphin mocks the British, especially Henry, condemning him, ironically, for his youthful inexperience.

KATHERINE

The beautiful princess of France. Henry demands her as his wife as part of the peace settlement between England and France. She speaks little English, and the scene where Henry attempts to woo her in broken French is a charming and funny end to the play.

ALICE

Katherine's maid, who teaches her a smattering of English and giggles with her at Henry's advances.