# INTRODUCTION

## The play and its date

Shakespeare wrote the draft of *Henry V* that became the First Folio text in the early summer of 1599. The evidence for this dating is the reasonably coherent state of the manuscript used to set the Folio text, what is almost certainly a reference to the Earl of Essex's campaign in Ireland in the fifth Chorus (5.0.29–32), the absence of any reference to the play in Francis Meres' list of Shakespeare's works in *Palladis Tamia*, which was entered for printing on 7 September 1598, and the evidence in the play itself that Shakespeare had seen books printed in 1598 or at the beginning of 1599, such as Chapman's first seven books of the *Iliad* and Richard Crompton's *Mansion of Magnanimitie*.[1] The play must have been put on stage by the Chamberlain's Men at the Globe at least a few weeks before 16 October 1599, when Philip Henslowe began a series of payments to four authors for the first part of a new play called *Sir John Oldcastle*. That play, given to the rival company performing at the Rose playhouse near the newly-built Globe late in 1599, seems to have been designed by Henslowe to rub in the Chamberlain's company's embarrassment over its forced change of the name Oldcastle to Falstaff in *1 Henry IV*. It makes some overt corrections not only to the rival company's Henry IV plays but also to *Henry V*.[2]

Shakespeare's play was written as the conclusion of his long series of plays about English history which he started near the beginning of the 1590s. It was a militaristic decade, starting with vivid memories of the Armada of 1588 heightened by a renewed Spanish attempt at invasion in 1592, and marked by the long campaigns that had begun across the North Sea in the 1580s, where English armies were aiding the Protestants of the Netherlands against their Spanish masters. London was full of news about these campaigns, and periodically full of soldiers discharged or on leave. More books about military tactics and the rightful conduct of war appeared in this decade than ever before or after. Since it was in part a religious war, Protestant England fighting Catholic Spain,

1 For a discussion of the manuscript behind the F text, see Textual Analysis, pp. 221–4. For a discussion of Shakespeare's use of Crompton and other source material, see Introduction, pp. 21–6. Gary Taylor's Introduction to the Oxford edition of *Henry V* indicates (pp. 52–4) some phrasings which suggest Shakespeare's familiarity with Chapman's text. They occur mostly in the Chorus and opening scene of Act 4, and come from Chapman's Books 9 and 10, which have a broadly parallel account of the Greek camp on the night before a battle. Attempts have been made to identify 'the general of our gracious empress' as the Earl of Mountjoy, who preceded and followed Essex as commander in Ireland, and to date the play in 1598 on the grounds that Essex's campaign had already been announced then, or in 1600 on the grounds that Mountjoy's prospects of success were high then, but neither is very convincing. The 1600 dating requires the Choruses to have been written and inserted after the rest of the play was on stage. For composition in 1600, see Warren D. Smith, 'The *Henry V* Choruses in the First Folio', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 53 (1954), 38–57, and David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*, pp. 19–20.

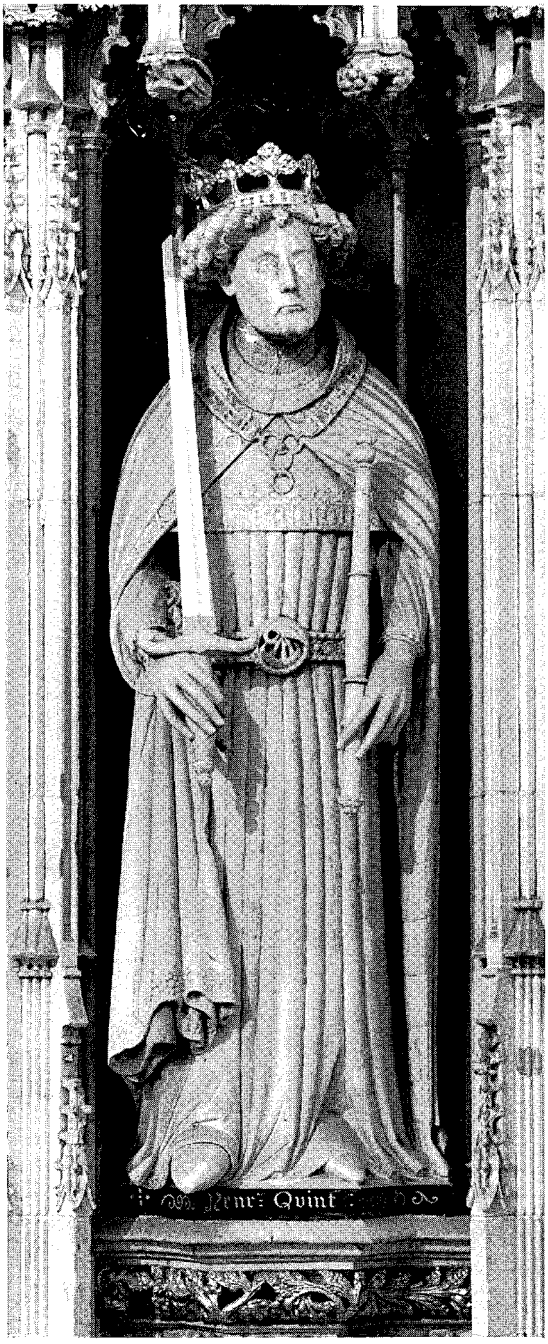
2 For an account of *Oldcastle*, see below, pp. 19–21.

the morality of war became a subject for sermons and numerous books exhorting their readers about the God-fearing man's loyal duty to his country and his monarch. The theatres took an active part in this jingoism, with imitations of conquering Tamburlaine and accounts of English seafaring heroes. On occasion they even offered colourful stage versions of recent battles. A letter-writer in October 1599 told Sir Robert Sidney, whose brother Philip had been killed in a skirmish against the Spanish forces in the Netherlands, of one such performance. He wrote that 'Two daies agoe, the overthrow of *Turnholt* was acted upon a Stage, and all your names used that were at yt; especially *Sir Fra. Veres*, and he that plaid that Part gott a Beard resembling his . . . You was also introduced, killing slaying, and overthrowing the *Spaniards* . . .'[1] That mood changed after Elizabeth's death, and some people may already have been sceptical about the jingoism of the writers and preachers by 1599. In some significant respects *Henry V* offers on its surface the patriotic triumphalism of a Chorus who glorifies Henry's conquests, while through the story itself runs a strong hint of scepticism about the terms and the nature of his victories.

The late 1590s proved a difficult time for the company and its author, and the play shows some signs of discontinuity in its composition. Characters are introduced and then abandoned (Macmorris and Jamy, and some of the nobles on both sides), the Chorus tells of the army shipping from Dover when he has already announced the port as Southampton (3.0.4), and he ignores the comic characters who open Acts 2 and 5, so that their arrival makes nonsense of his announcements about the locality and the passage of time. There also seems to have been some hesitation about which of the main sources to use over the Dauphin's presence at Agincourt. In the earlier plays about Henry V, the Dauphin was the antagonist to Henry's protagonist, and his humiliation was emphasised. Holinshed's account in his *Chronicles* makes it clear that historically there were three Dauphins in close succession through the years of Henry's war in France, and that the Dauphin of the time was not present at Agincourt. The text of the play as printed in the First Folio shows some hesitation over which of the two sources to follow. The Dauphin is written in up to the eve of Agincourt and appears briefly on stage during the battle, but vanishes from the play thereafter.[2]

1599 was a difficult time to be writing plays about English history, and some of these difficulties show up in the ways critics have read the play. For the decade before her death in 1603, Elizabeth suppressed any discussion about who should succeed her on the English throne. James VI of Scotland was the obvious choice, and the possibility that he might be the one to follow Elizabeth must have raised the possibility of England being united with Scotland, although, once Peter Wentworth had been put in the Tower for writing pamphlets urging that James should be named as Elizabeth's successor, it was not a matter for general debate. England had been officially united with Wales for centuries, whatever could be made of Henry IV's and his son's long campaigns against Glendower. More recently England had developed a policy that claimed Ireland as its lawful colony. The further possibility of Scotland also joining England when its king

1 Roland Whyte to Sir Robert Sidney, quoted in E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 1, 322, n. 2.
2 A more detailed account of these and other discontinuities is given in the Note on the Text, pp. 65–8.




1 Henry V, an effigy in the Rood screen at York Minster, made in 1422–7, within five years of Henry's death. Despite some restoration, it is the most likely representation of the real Henry in existence (By kind permission of the Dean and Chapter of York Minster)

became England's king is one of the significant absences from public debate at this time. Once James was on the English throne, through several years around 1605 it became a major political issue, the cause of an early dispute between king and parliament which Shakespeare made use of in *King Lear*. But in 1599, before James did succeed to the English throne, the presence of four captains of Henry's army in France, with an Irish and a Scots company joining the English and Welsh, might easily have been read as a not particularly subtle piece of political prophecy. It was certainly an Elizabethan rewriting of English history. Holinshed notes the presence of Welsh as well as Scottish mercenaries fighting not for the English but for the French against Henry's army.[1] To unite the different domains of Britain into one army was both unhistorical and, in 1599, politically very suggestive. That possibility, together with the awkwardness of having a Scot called Jamy on stage after 1603, is considered at more length below. The use in the play of such a variety of dialect forms of English, like the uniquely large quantity of spoken French, is a related question. Some of these considerations are examined below.

Macmorris and Jamy do seem to be late inserts in the manuscript which was used to print the First Folio text. How late, though, and why they should be added only for the one scene, is a matter for some dispute. Claims have been made that these characters, along with the Choruses, were added after James came to the throne in 1603, possibly for the performance of the play at court in the 1604–5 Christmas revels. This is less than likely. If the Choric speeches had been prepared for a court performance, not only the praise of Essex but the Prologue's overt display of modesty about the theatre would have caused difficulties.

The Chorus, with its emphatic display of modesty about the capacity of the playhouse 'cockpit' to show the 'vasty fields of France', has prompted a lot of speculation about the date of the play's first performance and which playhouse it was written for. If early in 1599, the Prologue's 'wooden O' must have been the Curtain, which Shakespeare's company used while they waited for the Globe to be built. If later in 1599, it could have been the new Globe. The Chorus is either being modest about an inferior old playhouse, built as long ago as 1577, or mock-modest about the grand new Globe playhouse.[2] The Theatre, whose timbers provided the frame for the Globe, was pulled down after Christmas 1598, and the lease for the land in Southwark on which the Globe was to be constructed was signed on 21 February 1599. The builder of the Globe was allowed twenty-eight weeks in 1600 to build its rival, the Fortune, which suggests a similar period of time for the construction of the Globe. So even if it had a shorter building time because of its prefabricated timbers from the old Theatre, the Globe could hardly have opened much before midsummer 1599. Thomas Platter, a Swiss tourist, did see *Julius Caesar*, which was written very soon after *Henry V*, at the Globe on 15 September 1599. *As You Like It*, with its celebration of the seven ages of man quoting what is thought to have been the new playhouse's motto (*Totus mundus agit histrionem*,

1 See below, p. 29.
2 For a circumstantial account of the fraught financial conditions which accompanied the building of the Globe, see Andrew Gurr, 'Money or audiences: the impact of Shakespeare's Globe', *Theatre Notebook* 42 (1988), 3–14.

2 Henry V, a restored effigy of his coronation, on the north side of his chantry chapel at Westminster (The Dean and Chapter at Westminster Abbey)

or 'all the globe's a stage') has a good claim to be the first play definitely written for the Globe. We are unlikely ever to know for sure whether *Henry V*'s Prologue was written either to celebrate the opening or to lament the older venue. It might be better to relate the Chorus's insistent modesty about staging such a heroic subject to other questions about the oddly emphatic role of the Chorus as presenter of such a play.

### The coercive Chorus

The Shakespeare plays are not exactly abundant in choruses. Apart from the prologues to *Romeo and Juliet* and *Troilus and Cressida*, and the Ancient Gower of *Pericles*, there are only the opening Rumour painted with tongues and the apologetic Epilogue to *2 Henry IV*, and the prologue and epilogue and the other four choric prefaces to the five acts of *Henry V*. Jonson was a fellow-member of the company with Shakespeare when he made the Chamberlain's company mock its own Shakespearean repertoire in *Every Man Out of his Humour* in 1599, and later derided the use of choruses which waft you o'er the seas in a belated prologue to *Every Man In*.[1] We might speculate that it was Jonson who made Shakespeare promptly drop the practice. This may be so. It is easy to assume that Shakespeare could be overawed by his younger but more bellicose fellow-poet. But the insertion of Rumour and the Epilogue into *2 Henry IV* and the more extensive deployment of an eloquent presenter of the French war in *Henry V* were innovations, and their origin needs explaining more urgently than the brevity of their life. In different ways and perhaps for different reasons they seem to indicate discomfort with what the plays contained.

It is worth noting first the occasional, once-only nature of the *2 Henry IV* Epilogue, and of at least some parts of the chorus speeches in *Henry V*. Apologising for the Oldcastle mistake in the epilogue to the play in which he was banished was a transient requirement, and the company would hardly have gone on promising to return Sir John in the sequel once that play had been staged with nothing but a report of his death in it. *Henry V*'s Chorus, for all his magnificent verse, would also require some subsequent cutting, at least in the reference to Essex bringing rebellion broached on his sword, which was an acceptable prediction only between March and June of 1599, and became a distinct embarrassment by September of that year. Once he was put on trial for his misconduct in Ireland in 1600, any mention of him was dangerous, and after his execution in February 1601 suicidal. So the Chorus was written for his time and only for his time. He relates uniquely to the period when the play was first composed. And that raises some pressing questions about his uniquely coercive function.

It has been suggested that the Chorus was added to the play late, and that the Q text of 1600, which omits him, represents an earlier step in composition.[2] He does

1 *Every Man In His Humour*, ed. Herford and Simpson, III, 303.

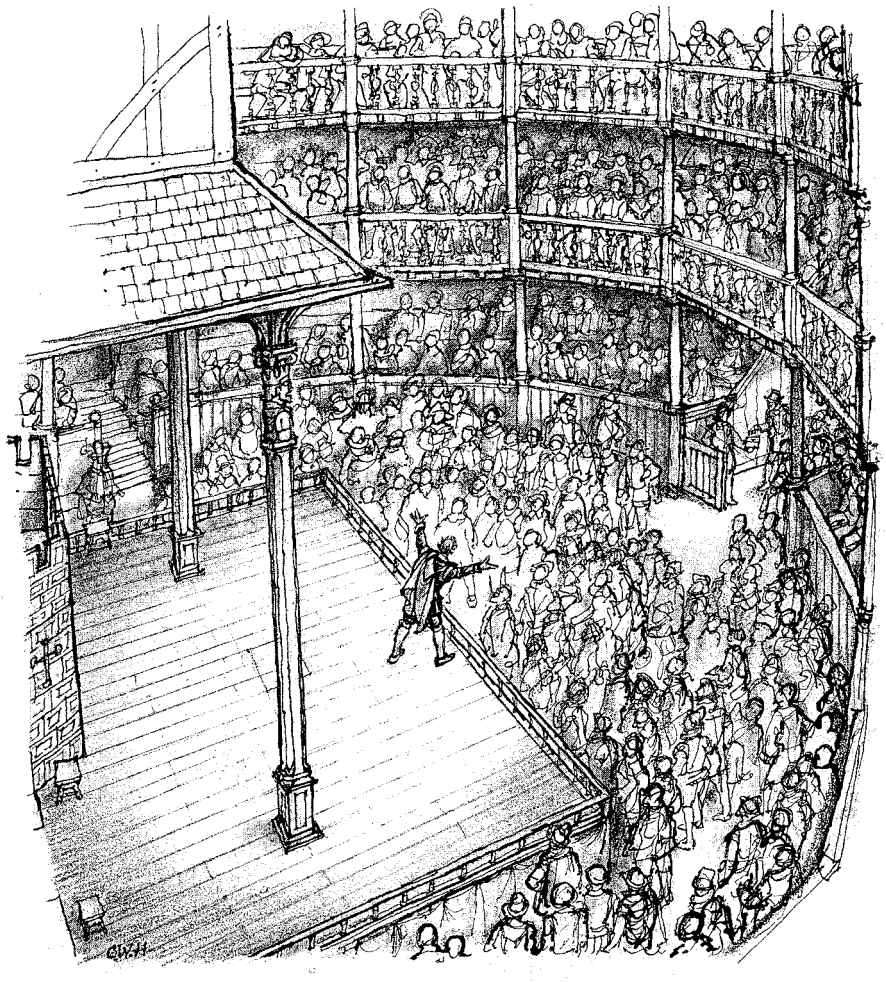
2 For different theories about the function of the Chorus, see G. P. Jones, '*Henry V*: the Chorus and the audience', *S.Sur.* 31 (1978), 93–104; Eamon Grennan, 'This story shall the good man teach his son: *Henry V* and the art of history', *Papers on Language and Literature* 15 (1979), 370–82; Anthony Brennan, 'That within which passes show: the function of the Chorus in *Henry V*', *PQ* 58 (1979), 40–52; Lawrence Danson, '*Henry V*: King, Chorus, and critics', *SQ* 34 (1983), 27–47; Antony Hammond, ' "It must be your

intrude on the story, ignoring the comic scenes so completely that generations of stage performances have felt obliged to reposition the first Eastcheap scene, Act 2, Scene 1, before the second Chorus, and some have done the same with Act 5, Scene 1, putting it in the immediate aftermath of Agincourt. But these features do not stand firm against the fact that the Choruses were in the manuscript prepared early in 1599, the text later printed in the First Folio. It is more likely that the Chorus was fitted to the play fairly early on, to strengthen a celebratory and patriotic reading, providing a means of coercing the audience into an emotionally undivided response to what the Chorus calls 'this star of England'.

The Chorus is certainly unique in Shakespeare in the way he does this. He operates not as a classical Nuntius but as a Prologue to each act. His opening speech ends with him describing himself as 'Prologue-like', a firm hint that he is in fact not an ordinary Prologue and that he will return to do the distinctive job of presenter before each of the succeeding acts. This he certainly does, and very eloquently. But one of the most peculiar features of his appearances is how frequently and consistently he whips up enthusiasm for his *mis*representation of what follows. The Prologue opens with the standard rhetorical trope of modesty about doing Henry's French spectacle on stage. We might expect a declaration that denies the possibility of staging spectacles to affright the air at Agincourt and speaks of imaginary horses and imaginary 'puissance' to be overstating its modesty and preparing us for some ambitious tries at achieving such a spectacle. In the event, the nearest the audience gets to a battle is Henry's speech rallying his retreating troops at Harfleur, a Chorus marked by gunfire, and drums beating the alarm. At Agincourt itself the only flourishing of swords is Ancient Pistol threatening the trembling M. Le Fer.

In varying degrees the events of each act belie the claims made by the Chorus that introduces it. The Chorus before Act 2 declares that 'honour's thought/Reigns solely in the breast of every man' in England (2.0.3–4), apart from the 'nest of hollow bosoms' (2.0.21). The act itself shows first the Eastcheap rogues and Pistol's boast that 'I shall sutler be unto the camp, and profits will accrue' (2.1.88–9), and then the Cambridge conspiracy. For Act 3 the Chorus invites us to imagine the fleet sailing to Harfleur, leaving England to be 'Guarded with grandsires, babies and old women' (3.0.20), despite the insistence at 1.2.214 that the nation's strength be divided into four, with only one quarter going to France, and the later complaint (4.3.16–18) about the small numbers at Agincourt. This Chorus promises glory, flourishing a linstock to fire a cannon, but the act then starts with the retreat from the breach at Harfleur and the failure of the renewed assault. Harfleur does not yield until the Dauphin says he cannot bring up his forces to relieve the siege in the fourth scene. The soldiers brawl amongst themselves, with Llewellyn beating the Eastcheap rogues to the battle and then picking a quarrel with Macmorris. Henry has the only honour in that act.

imagination then": the Prologue and the plural text in *Henry V* and elsewhere', in *Fanned and Winnowed Opinions*, ed. John W. Mahon and Thomas A. Pendleton, 1987, pp. 133–50; and Sharon Tyler, 'Minding true things: the Chorus, the audience, and *Henry V*', in *The Theatrical Space*, Themes in Drama 9, ed. James Redmond, 1987, pp. 69–80.



3 Chorus speaking the Prologue standing front stage, in the centre of the yard. Drawing by C. Walter Hodges

The Chorus to Act 4 is the strangest deceiver of them all. He recounts the story of the night before Agincourt, echoing Holinshed's account of it, but adding to it above all that 'little touch of Harry in the night' (4.0.47) which revives the spirits of the English soldiers. Modestly, he echoes Sidney's *Apology*, published four years before, by mocking the 'four or five most vile and ragged foils' (4.0.50) and the 'brawl ridiculous' with which the glory of Agincourt will be represented on stage. In the event neither the little touch nor any brawl more ridiculous than Pistol's with Le Fer is shown on stage. Henry, after joking with his nobles, and hearing a better joke than his own from Erpingham about lying like a king, borrows Erpingham's cloak and goes in disguise for

his encounters with Pistol and the three plain soldiers. That is hardly the way to cheer anyone up with a kingly appearance.

To these misrepresentations of the stage action in the fourth Chorus can be added the two other choric speeches which pretend that the Eastcheap rogues do not exist and cause some confusion as a result. The second Chorus tells the audience it is being transported to Southampton, immediately before the first Eastcheap scene back in London. The fifth Chorus describes all the events of the years after Agincourt, Henry's return to England and his welcome as victor in London, the visit of the Holy Roman Emperor to London, and Henry's subsequent return to France. But the act that follows opens with Llewellyn ready to repay the debt he owed Pistol from Agincourt, in a scene which ends with Pistol declaring that he will return with his cudgel-marks to England swearing he got them as wounds in the French wars. The Chorus's announcement of the events of the five years between Agincourt and the Treaty of Troyes breaks into the games belonging to the post-battle frolics.

The Chorus is a great painter of pictures, but they are never the pictures shown on stage. As Sharon Tyler puts it, 'for nearly four hundred years audiences have been seeing what is described rather than what is staged.'[1] The Choric poetry is so persuasive that the realities of the story seem to register faintly or wrongly in the mind afterwards. In Shakespeare's own time, of course, the Choric imperatives urging the audience to imagine the spectacle were certainly aimed at willingly receptive minds. In a sermon that Stephen Gosson preached at Paul's Cross on 7 May 1598 he describes the common response to spectacle in Shakespearean amphitheatres: 'in publike Theaters, when any notable shew passeth over the stage, the people arise in their seates, & stand upright with delight and eagernesse to view it well'.[2] That sort of expectation was what the Chorus in *Henry V* worked on. The fact that the stage did not meet such expectations, and yet the play is still thought of as an epic spectacle of military heroics and leadership, is the highest possible tribute to the Chorus's success as presenter. The Chorus is responsible for Olivier's and Branagh's cinema images of epic battle scenes that are not in the play.

Why, though, was the Chorus needed, when he so positively contradicts the stage actions? The one thing the Chorus does most consistently is to praise Henry. The question raised by that is why the play itself should give such ambiguous support to this glorification. Some parts of the story are altered from the sources to support the Chorus, notably the elimination of the tactic with the archers protected by stakes at Agincourt, which Holinshed makes much of and which the earlier stage-play *The Famous Victories* mentions twice.[3] Victory at Agincourt comes from Henry's morale-boosting, not from his military tactics. But the play introduces or re-emphasises other features that do not support the Chorus, most notably Henry's order to kill the prisoners. This is not mentioned in *The Famous Victories*, while Shakespeare's other main source, Holinshed, gives Henry two possible motives for his order, of which Shakespeare presents only the worse. Holinshed notes both the risk of a counter-attack by the French and the attack

1 *Ibid*, p. 76.
2 Stephen Gosson, *The Trumpet of Warre, A Sermon preached at Paules Crosse the seventh of Maie 1598*, C7$^{v}$.
3 See Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

on the English baggage-train, which may have led Henry to give his order in retaliation. In the play Henry gives the order the moment he hears the off-stage trumpet sounding a rally. The revenge motive is attributed to him subsequently and mistakenly by the innocent Gower.

Even more to the point than this modification of the sources is the addition of the lengthy debate with the soldiers before the battle, about the justice of the war, and Henry's subsequent soliloquy of complaint. There is no precedent for this either in the earlier plays or in the Chronicles. What causes these adjustments to the famous story, and the introduction of the cloaking Chorus, must have been some rethinking of the story, and most obviously of the Henry who has grown into this conquering role through the two preceding plays, *1* and *2 Henry IV*.

It is notable that the Chorus which ends *Henry V* makes no mention of Henry's youth. The last lines of that play in fact revert not to the Falstaff story but all the way back to the early Henry VI plays to validate this play. The English nobles after Henry's death

> lost France and made his England bleed,
> Which oft our stage hath shown – and for their sake,
> In your fair minds let this acceptance take.

'Their sake' for which we are begged to approve *Henry V* refers not to the English lords who lost France but to the early plays. The first three of the current tetralogy are completely ignored by the Chorus. In the play itself there is little reference either, except for the death of Falstaff and one reminder to God by Henry in his prayer before Agincourt about his penitence over Richard II's death. The audience is even invited by the sanctimonious Archbishop in 1.1. to regard this Henry as having undergone a conversion like the prodigal son's, a miraculous rebirth from evil ways to good. That is the view of Henry presented in *The Famous Victories*, a play which follows the full syndrome of prodigal son behaviour. Its Prince Henry starts by actually initiating the robbery at Gad's Hill, promising his companion 'Ned' that he can be Lord Chief Justice, playing at robberies with 'Jockey', or John Oldcastle, a companion of his riots, boxing the Justice's ear, and when put in prison for it protesting in high arrogance that it is no way to treat a prince. His conversion there comes suddenly and totally in his confrontation with his father on his deathbed. He then promptly banishes his low-life companions and leads England straight to glory at Agincourt and marriage with Katherine. This model career, idle prince converted into industrious king, a format popular in apprentice moral tales and plays, is plainly set out in the early play.

Shakespeare presents his idle prince differently. In *1 Henry IV* he shows Hal refusing to fall for Falstaff's temptation to become a thief, only joining the Gad's Hill exploit when Poins proposes the double game of robbing the robbers. At the end of that scene, only the second in the play and the first in which he appears, Hal declares that he knows just what he is doing. He will make use of Falstaff as a cloud to hide his sun, and rise the more gloriously as a result. By this statement he is made, explicitly and from the outset, no prodigal. He is an entirely different character from the prodigal son of the conventional and populist stories current in the 1590s, which emphasised