

Shakespeare's *Henry V*

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These study materials are produced for use with the Classic Player's production of *Henry V*.

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SHARING MASTERWORKS OF ART

AN EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH OF BOB JONES UNIVERSITY

An Introduction to *Henry V*

Upon completing *Henry V* in 1599, Shakespeare had written eighteen plays, and nine of them were histories. He was never to return to the genre again, with the exception of his possible collaboration on *Henry VIII* in 1613. The real hero of the histories, looked at collectively, is England. When political order triumphs in her ranks, she is sound and healthy. But when rebellion and unlawful claimants to the crown prevail, she weakens and falters.

Henry V is the most highly-charged, optimistic of all Shakespeare's history plays. It dramatizes the political and personal triumphs that Hal, and indeed all England, enjoy during the reign of Henry V (1413-1422). At the end of *Henry IV, Part Two*, Prince Hal promises to "throw off" his "loose behavior," and in *Henry V* he makes good on that vow by fully embracing the challenges and responsibilities of kingship.

According to Derek Traversi, Shakespeare's theme in *Henry V* is "the establishment in England of an order based on consecrated authority and crowned by action against France." In the words of Max M. Reese, *Henry V* is "an appointed symbol of majesty, and the action of the play is directed with the most elaborate care to show him doing everything that the age expected of the perfect king." Simply put, *Henry V* is Hal's success story.

This is not to say that Shakespeare portrays *Henry V* as less than fully human. From time to time the miserable realities of war unleash his passions. But his earnest concern for his subjects' welfare, his reliance on God, his ability to lead a dispirited army to valorous action, and his awareness of the cost of the conflict overshadow his occasional all-too-human responses to ugly breaches of the chivalric code.

Henry V's inspiring patriotic speeches would not have fallen on deaf ears at the Globe Theatre. Shakespeare's original audience would have easily recognized elements in *Henry V* that parallel national concerns in their own day. Throughout the last decade of Elizabeth's life, war was in the air. In 1599 England was on the threshold of a major military campaign to be led by the queen's favorite, the Earl of Essex, against Ireland. Also like their compatriots at the beginning of *Henry V*'s reign, many Elizabethans at the end of Elizabeth I's reign were eager to gain wealth and power by expanding England's borders.



Jeffrey Stegall as *Henry* in the 2008 Classic Players production of *Henry V*

Henry V's story was a favorite one for Elizabethans even before Shakespeare turned his hand to it. Playgoers would have known the outcome of the plot before they entered the theater. They would still have been delighted, however, with the English victory at Agincourt, the comic strains that run through the entire play, and the witty, romantic ending in which the English conqueror bluntly woos the elegant French princess.

Although some critics today undervalue heroism in general and *Henry V* in particular, the Chorus's opening "O, for a muse of fire!" retains the power to ignite the imagination of a 21st-century audience. The play remains a poetic, passionate and thoroughly engaging rendering of one of England's most stirring stories, penned by her greatest playwright at the height of his powers.

The Battle of Agincourt: The Historical Account

With only a small English army, Henry V utterly routed the French forces at Agincourt on October 25, 1415. The battle was one of the most famous in the Hundred Years' War.

In September Henry had captured the walled town of Harfleur in Normandy. He was returning to England, his men suffering from illness, when the French blocked his line of advance. Even though his men were tired and hungry from an 18-day march, Henry could not avoid the encounter.

The armies prepared to fight at dawn on St. Crispin's day in a field only about 1000 yards wide and enclosed on two sides by woods. The French army greatly outnumbered the English; the range of estimates suggests that it was between three and ten times as large. But it could not use its manpower to advantage at the chosen site.

Henry armed 3000 to 5000 of his troops with longbows, leaving fewer than 1000 of them with traditional hand weapons. An arrow shot from a longbow can pierce through an armored soldier from 500 yards away. At Crecy in 1346, Henry's great uncle the Black Prince had used an archer army to win another famous battle in the Hundred Years' War. Then as in 1415 at Agincourt, hundreds of Frenchmen were said to have fallen at the hands of each skilled English archer.

Henry also employed an ingenious configuration, placing longbowmen in the woods and between wings of armed men. He then provoked the French cavalry to action by hitting its men with arrows at long range.

Besides poor military tactics, the French were hampered by a deep mud that covered the recently plowed field, heavy armor and artillery, and the small space in which thousands of men had to maneuver in mass formation against nimble enemy troops. As a result, many Frenchmen were unable even to raise their lances.

After defeating the French cavalry, Henry armed most of his forces with axes, knives and swords for the fight against the enemy on foot. This second contingent included French nobility, knights and men-at-arms. In the space of three hours, the infantrymen were routed, their losses estimated at 10,000 men. English losses were very light, with estimates ranging from 14 men to 1600. The English victory completely discredited French medieval military strategy.

Historically this single sensational victory did not actually bring Henry V any territorial gains. It took several years and several invasions for England to recapture Normandy. Henry at last reached the gates of Paris in August 1419 and signed the Treaty of Troyes in 1420 to become regent and heir to the French throne. He wed King Charles VI's daughter Catherine in Paris on June 2, 1420.

Shakespeare's presentation of the Battle of Agincourt involves little or no onstage fighting. The details of the military action appear largely in speeches by Henry V and the Chorus. But one of the most effective features of the play is its depiction of two nations readying themselves for war. We are given glimpses of recruits, hired soldiers, noblemen, and even princes preparing for either victory or death.

In this manner, Shakespeare effectively portrays war as a series of individual sacrifices. The soldiers inspired by Henry's command represent the entire British nation: the English, Welsh, Irish and Scots; commoners and nobility; the good and the bad. Taken collectively, the British characters in the main plot are quite affecting as they muse on life and death. So is Henry V's talk, which fosters a deeply-felt camaraderie among them, and his oratory, which places their enterprise in God's hands.

On the other hand, the Boar's Head set of the subplot—Pistol, Bardolph and Nym—have no ideals at all. They are intent on merely surviving and profiting. Sadly, both Bardolph and Nym are hanged for stealing. Bardolph's despicable crime is looting a church vessel used to take Communion to the sick. Pistol also proves degenerate and cowardly. After the battle he purposes to return home and remain a thief: "To England will I steal, and there I'll steal."

Shakespeare's depiction of the French in *Henry V* is arguably just as negative. Louis the Dauphin, son of King Charles VI of France, is arrogant, boastful, overconfident and lax in his duties. On the eve of Agincourt while Henry walks incognito among his weary band, comforting the men as "brothers, friends, and countrymen," the Dauphin frivolously talks of horses and mistresses. While Henry reverently acknowledges God, the Dauphin refers to Him only in swearing. Shakespeare's portrayal of the Dauphin and his cocky noblemen might be seen as a caricature of arrogant indifference, which culminates in the loss of a kingdom and thousands of its subjects.



The Battle of Agincourt, from a mid-fifteenth-century illustration

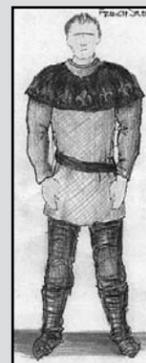
To create Louis the Dauphin, Shakespeare actually compresses three sons of Charles VI into one. The historical Dauphin was too ill to appear at Agincourt. He died two months later. The brother who succeeded him, Jean, died in 1416, and the title "dauphin," or "eldest son of the French king," passed to a third brother, Charles.

Henry V died on August 31, 1422, and his father-in-law, Charles VI, died seven weeks later on October 21. Paris proclaimed Henry V's infant son, Henry VI, king of France. The following month, however, the Dauphin was crowned Charles VII at Poitiers. The Hundred Years' War between France and England raged sporadically until 1475, when Edward IV and Louis XI established a lasting truce.

The Costumes

Costume and set designer Jeffrey Stegall created some 50 costume designs for the Classic Players production of *Henry V*, in addition to adapting the set he designed for the production of *Henry IV*.

From left to right: *Mistress Quickly*, *Grey*, *Cambridge*, *Pistol*, *Bardolph*, *drummer*, *English soldier*, *French soldier*, *French page*, *Charles VI*, and *Alice*.



Henry V

The **SHORT** of It



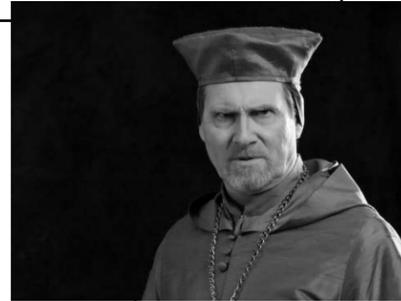
The Chorus appears before each act of the play to set the scene, give the audience key plot details, and describe actions of too great magnitude to be realistically enacted onstage, such as the battle scenes.



The newly crowned Henry V has fully turned his back on his unwholesome cronies at the Boar's Head Tavern and set his sights on the French throne.



The Archbishop of Canterbury conspires to protect the Church's wealth and power by persuading the king that he has a moral and legal right to invade France. He also agrees to appropriate Church funds for the military venture.



When Henry arrives, Canterbury labels as unjust the Salic law, an old Germanic law that bars the passing down of the royal line through a female. Thus Henry V has a claim to the throne of France through his great-great-grandmother Isabella, daughter of Philip IV of France and wife of Edward II of England.

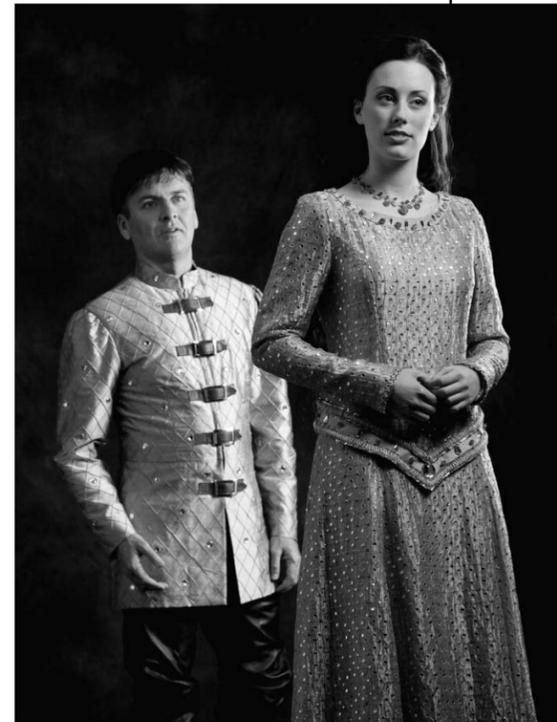
The vain, defiant Dauphin, heir to the French throne, mocks his rival by sending him tennis balls as reminders of Hal's profligate youth. The insulting gift suggests that Henry is competent in sports and revelry but not in the pursuit of the courts of France.



Henry responds by declaring war on France, intending to prove his mettle and claim sovereignty over certain French regions he is convinced are rightfully his.

Bardolph, Nym, Pistol and Mistress Quickly—now Bardolph's wife—discuss the prospects of war and the impending death of Sir John Falstaff.

Before crossing the Channel for France, the king learns that three of his trusted courtiers—the Earl of Cambridge, Lord Scroop and Sir Thomas Grey—have conspired with the enemy to assassinate him. He orders their execution as traitors against the kingdom and rallies his lords for their enterprise in France.



Henry agrees to a peace treaty during a meeting with the French king, Charles VI.

Henry later proposes to Katherine and becomes heir to the throne of France.

Nell Quickly describes Falstaff's dying hour, and Pistol, Bardolph, and Nym prepare to gather the spoils of war in France.

Underestimating their opponents' prowess, the French delay sending reinforcements to Harfleur, and the town, under siege, surrenders to Henry.



Princess Katherine of France takes up the study of English with her attendant and confidante, Alice.

Bardolph is hanged for looting in a French church, and Nym, for theft. Pistol decides to return to England as a professional thief.

Intercepted by the French at Agincourt, the English armies miraculously fight and win the battle, inflicting a loss of 10,000 men to the enemy and losing only 29 Englishmen.

Prevented from retreating to England after their victory at Harfleur, Henry and his enfeebled, outnumbered army prepare to fight the French at Agincourt. On the night before the battle, the king, troubled by his royal responsibilities, disguises himself as a common soldier and converses with his men. The next morning he prays for success and rallies the troops.



Shakespeare's History Plays and the Doctrine of Providential History

Shakespeare's contemporaries considered history, whether on the page or on the stage, both an entertaining and an instructive medium. Works that presented the past as a repository of moral and practical teaching were highly popular in Tudor England.

In his nine history plays, Shakespeare examines the relationship between politics and morality in England over a period of almost three centuries. In doing so, he highlights a pattern of good and evil that corroborates what is known as the doctrine of Providential history.

This theological view of history posits that Providence, or divine direction, propels all events in human history to the effect that God protects His people and punishes evildoers. Based on the Bible and codified by the Christian medieval philosopher Augustine, this influential set of principles was at the center of Tudor political philosophy and historical writings.

In the tragedies as well as the histories, Shakespeare depicts human affairs as a paradigm of divine purpose, with a benign God directing their course. Nowhere is this principle clearer than in *Hamlet*, where the protagonist states it simply and memorably, echoing Christ's words in Matthew 10:29: "There's special Providence in the fall of a sparrow." In other words, God exercises His care and control over such a seemingly insignificant event as the death of a sparrow.

Shakespeare's plays imply that in order to see God's Providential care, we must take the long view of human events. When the tyrant Richard III comes to the English throne, for example, evil temporarily triumphs over good. But God in His wisdom may allow a tyrant to sit on the throne for a time. In the words of Augustine, referring to the Roman emperor Nero, "Power and domination are not given to such men save by Providence of the most high God, when He judges that the state of

Saints Crispin & Crispinian

Crispin and Crispinian are the patron saints of shoemakers. According to 8th-century legend, these brothers from a noble Roman family traveled to northern France to escape persecution. There they engaged in shoemaking for their livelihood. Their trade became the means by which they won many converts to Roman Catholicism.

For their religious activity the Emperor Maximian condemned the pair to death. They were tortured and beheaded around 286.

For centuries members of French shoemaking guilds observed their feast day, October 25, with both solemn processions and light-hearted merrymaking. After Henry V's defeat of the French forces at the great battle of Agincourt on October 25, 1415, Crispin and Crispinian's feast day came to be celebrated as the anniversary of England's victory over France.

human affairs is worthy of such lords. The [Bible] is clear on this matter: 'By Me kings reign, and tyrants possess the land' (Prov. 8:15)."

Eventually Richard III is defeated, and in the process God's judgment passes upon the wicked, rectifying wrongs committed over three or four generations. Richard's opponent, Richmond, on the eve of the pair's meeting at Bosworth Field, appeals to God in a manner that underscores his role as a human instrument of divine punishment:

O Thou, whose captain I account myself,
Look on my forces with gracious eye;
Put in their hands thy bruising irons of wrath,
That they may crush down with a heavy fall
The usurping helmets of our adversaries;
Make us thy ministers of chastisement,
That we may praise thee in the victory!
To thee I do commend my watchful soul
Ere I let fall the windows of mine eyes:
Sleeping and waking, O, defend me still!

On the following day the Lancastrian Richmond kills the Yorkist usurper Richard III in hand-to-hand conflict. Thus he pronounces an end to the War of the Roses and becomes Henry VII, the first monarch in the Tudor line. His subsequent marriage to Elizabeth of York unites the Yorks and Lancasters, bringing to a close 85 years of civil war in England. The pair's most famous progeny is Shakespeare's queen, Elizabeth I.

In *Henry V* the doctrine of Providential history is clearly and simply carried through the play by the character Henry V. The historical Henry V (1387-1422) was a pious devotee to Roman Catholicism and a persecutor of the Lollards, followers of the English reformer John Wycliffe. Shakespeare's Henry, however, voices the orthodox political doctrine of Protestant England under Elizabeth I. Audiences at the Globe Theatre would also have recognized Henry V's rousing patriotic rhetoric and reverent allusions to God as reflections of 16th-century orthodox political and religious thought.

Such seeming discrepancy can be explained by two factors: Shakespeare's own artistic vision of history and the circumstances of his career. As a playwright, Shakespeare did not aim to report history accurately but to create dramatic entertainment. He had no scruples against taking liberties with historical materials. In the histories time is compressed, characters and events are altered and added, and every element is transformed by the playwright's rich dramatic language.

Second, writing some 65 years after Elizabeth I's father, King Henry VIII, removed England from the authority of Rome, Shakespeare was a Protestant who wrote for a predominantly Protestant audience and drew from Tudor dramas and chronicle writings by Protestants.

Elizabethans regarded the rise of the Lancastrian kings and the establishment of the Tudor dynasty through Henry VII as God's will for the

The Agincourt Carol

*Deo gracias, Anglia, redde pro victoria.**

Our King went forth to Normandy
with grace and might of chivalry.
There God for him wrought marv'ulously,
whereof England may call and cry,

Deo gracias.

Deo gracias, Anglia, redde pro victoria.

Then went him forth our king comely;
in Agincourt field he fought manly.
Through grace of God most marv'ulously
he had both field and victory.

Deo gracias.

Deo gracias, Anglia, redde pro victoria.

Almighty God, pray keep our king,
his people and all his well-willing;
And give them grace withouten ending;
then may we call and safely sing,

Deo gracias.

*Give back to God, England, the glory for our victory.

good of their nation. Because of King Henry VIII's break with Rome in 1536, Protestants today still view 15th- and 16th-century British history as a saga of God's Providence.

Shakespeare's Henry V submits himself to God's will in the scene of his very first appearance in the play. He believes that his cause is "well-hallow'd" and recognizes that the outcome of his conflict with the Dauphin "lies all within the will of God." He recognizes the horrible human cost of war but at the same time views it as an instrument of God's judgment, "His beadle, His vengeance."

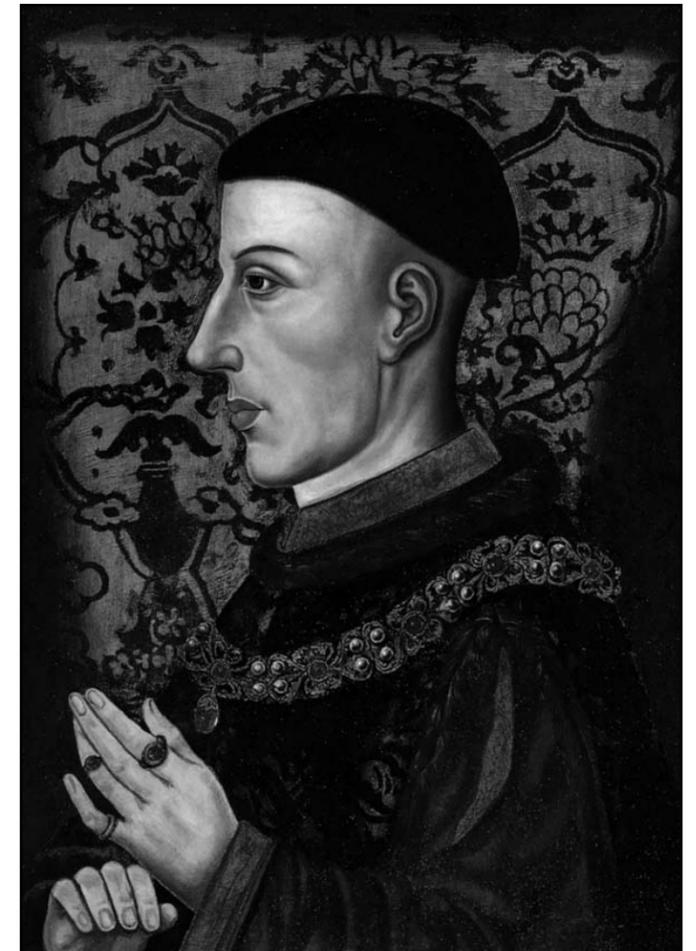
The play ends with the perfect fulfillment of Henry's confident expectations.

At no point is the English king's poetry more majestic than when he gives God the glory for a seemingly miraculous victory over France:

O God, Thy arm was here,
And not to us, but to Thy arm alone,
Ascribe we all! When without stratagem,
But in plain shock and even play of battle,
Was ever known so great and little loss
On one part and on the other? Take it, God,
For it is none but Thine.

It is fitting that Henry then calls for the singing of a psalm from the Latin Vulgate. The English text from Psalm 115 in the Geneva Bible reads,

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give
the glory, for Thy loving mercy and for Thy truth's sake.
Wherefore should the heathen say, 'Where is now their God?'
But our God is in heaven: He doeth whatsoever He will.



Henry V, painted by an unknown 15th-century artist

Henry the King

"Henry V was the blazing comet and apparent lantern in his days; he was a mirror of Christendom and the glory of his country; he was the flower of kings past, and a glass to them that should succeed. No emperor in magnanimity ever excelled him."

Edward Hall, *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustrious Families of Lancaster and York* (1548)

"This Henry was a king of life without a spot, a prince whom all men loved and of none disdained, a captain against whom fortune never frowned nor mischance once spurned; whose people him so severe a justicer both loved and obeyed, and so humane withal that he left no offense unpunished nor friendship unrewarded, a terror to rebels and suppresser of sedition, his virtues notable, his qualities most praiseworthy."

Raphael Holinshed, *The Chronicles of England* (1587)



The Chorus in Sophocles' Greek tragedy Anitogne, 1965 Bob Jones University Classic Players production

What is the **Chorus** in Shakespeare?

A Chorus is a group of characters or a single character in a drama who stands apart from the action and comments on it directly to the audience. The Chorus originated in Greek drama, where it was composed of 12 to 50 members who sang, danced and recited poetic commentary on the action and characters.

By Shakespeare's day the Chorus had become a single actor who makes the same sort of lyrical commentary on the play. His point of view represents a knowledge of events and characters that is superior to that possessed by the actors in the plot.

Shakespeare uses the Chorus figure as a dramatic device in various ways. In only two plays does he designate a character Chorus: *Romeo and Juliet* and *Henry V*. In both plays the Chorus supplies facts and fills in narrative details. He also allows the playwright to confront the audience with a point of view that goes beyond that of the characters in the play.

Shakespeare employs three other categories of figures that serve choric functions. (1) In two romances an actor serves as Chorus but is not so named: the allegorical figure Time who appears once in *The Winter's Tale* to bridge a 16-year gap in the action; and the character Gower, a medieval poet who makes eight appearances as a traditional Chorus in *Pericles*. (2) Two plays—*Troilus and Cressida* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*—are introduced by an allegorical speaker designated as the prologue. In *Henry IV*, the same function is served by the allegorical figure Rumor. Both *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Hamlet* embody a play-within-the-play that is introduced by a prologue. (3) In other plays a character in the plot may comment on a scene without actually stepping out of it. Such figures include the Bastard in *King John* and the Fool in *King Lear*.

The Chorus, especially in *Henry V*, is a metatheatrical device, or an element in the drama that calls attention to the artificial nature of the whole theatrical experience. The successive appearances of the Chorus in *Henry V* remind playgoers that the action before them is theatrical, not real. Thus spectators remain more detached psychologically than they otherwise would.

The characters Shakespeare uses in choric functions often announce that if playgoers do not engage their thoughts and imaginations with the actors, the play will fail as entertainment. The richly descriptive language of Renaissance drama, intended to compensate for the absence of physical scenery, required audience concentration.

In Shakespeare's day theater was also more interactive than it usually is today. Audience members became so engaged in stage action that at times they responded verbally to lines and situations.

The Chorus in *Henry V* repeatedly admonishes the audience to do its part in shaping the story. In the prologue, for example, he says,

Think when we talk of horses, that you see them
 Printing their proud hoofs i'th' earth;
 For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
 Carry them here and there, jumping o'er times.

At later appearances he insists, "Grapple your minds," and "Work, work your thoughts" and invokes imaginary scenes which audience members must "piece out with their thoughts." He also apologizes for the stage's inadequacy to represent the great sweeping events of history, such as the Battle of Agincourt, and fills the audience in on necessary abridgements in the story.

One of the main functions of the *Henry V* Chorus is to describe and interpret events of the plot. His interpretations do not necessarily represent the playwright's point of view. As in classical drama, the Chorus's viewpoint may represent popular opinion of the day. He is a great admirer of the noble Henry, whom he hails as "the warlike Harry," "the mirror of all Christian kings," and "this star of England." The Chorus leaves little doubt where audience sympathy should lie when he contrasts "the confident and overlusty French" with "the poor condemned English."

The Chorus's formal, stylized diction creates an epic mood for the play. The content of his speeches also elevates the action from the level of individuals to that of nations. The effect is that *Henry V* might be viewed as an epic poem celebrating the exploits of its hero rather than a drama that thrusts its protagonist into a significant conflict. By keeping the heroic side of Henry V in the forefront, the Chorus is integral in the creation of Shakespeare's portrait of "the mirror of all Christian kings."



The Chorus in Classic Players productions (left to right):
 Jay Bopp as Chorus in *Henry V*, 2000; Gary Van Buskink as Chorus in *Romeo and Juliet*, 1979; Darren Lawson as Time in *The Winter's Tale*, 1993