Professor David Peimer | Shakespeare's Henry V: A Study in Leadership

– Okay, thank you so much, Emily, as always, for your kind help. So, hi and welcome to everybody, and hope everybody is well. From a grey, drizzly, rainy little England-land, near Liverpool. So we're going to dive in today, I'm going to look at Shakespeare's "Henry V" and two reasons really, the one is that it links with the history of France very strongly, in terms of the major battles of the English capturing French land, battles over the French throne, the English throne and so on. And secondly, one of the major battles of English history, the Battle of Agincourt, in 1415. And I just want to say at the beginning that I'm going to be talking about Shakespeare's Henry, which has possibly a little bit of reference to the historical Henry, certainly on major facts, but it's not a documentary, obviously, it's a piece of fiction. You know, it happened more or less in 1415, so we're looking at nearly 200 years before Shakespeare writes it in 1599. So it's way after the actual battle, and it's already become part of English, if you like, history, folklore and English cultural memory. And what does Shakespeare do with it and why? And I'm going to look at his play in the context of what I know some others, William and others and Trudy, have been talking about with questions of leadership. The first thing that struck me was, this is not a democratic leader, a leader of a democracy, or this is a leader of a divine right of king, a military dictatorship, basically. It's not even a leader in between, sort of, democracy. And creeping, or return, of dictatorship of various kinds. So it's a leader positioned in that context, in a way. But I think that what Shakespeare suggests has themes which, for me, resonate 500 years later, in our times as well. Not only because it's such a popular play and it's done so often, but what he's really trying to explore, within his own limitations, in staging it in 1599. The Battle of Agincourt, as I'm sure many know, was one of the great historical battles of the English versus the French. Coming late in the Hundred Years' War between England and France, where England already controls a fair amount of what we'd call, today, French territory, French country, and this is part of Henry bringing the English army over to take what he feels is his rightful heritage, which is part of France, if not most of it. And Henry has gone down in English history as, I guess, one of the most enduringly popular historical figures, and certainly Shakespeare's play, like he does with Caesar and so many others, it almost takes over the imagination and one's own historical memory. Where he almost recreates it, or tries to recreate the memory of history through the art, as opposed to the literal history. He's celebrated as one of the great warrior kings of mediaeval England, coming towards the end of the mediaeval period. So Henry V, and this is, on the left, the publication of the very, very first printed edition, in 1600, of his book. And what is important is that it's the "Cronicle History of Henry the fift" because, obviously in those days, there was a historical play, pastoral play, tragedies, comedies, they all had these genre titles which would attract audiences or not. So

it's a history play, and Shakespeare would've seen it in that context. It's focusing on the events immediately before the Battle of Agincourt and after the battle. In the context of the Hundred Years' War between England and France. "Henry IV", which is obviously the historical play Shakespeare wrote preceding this, shows a very different young Henry in his late teens. Where he's a wild, undisciplined young man or late teenager, we'd say today. And it's very different. He's drinking, he's carousing, he's not taking what is probably going to be his legacy, to be the next king, seriously. He's an unformed, immature teenager. But "Henry V," he's matured. It's a very different play of Shakespeare's entirely. And he embarks on the expedition to France with an army which is outnumbered at least five to one, and defeats the French at the great Battle of Agincourt. Henry believes that he is the rightful heir to the French throne. And in fact, the French prince, Charles, is condescending and mocking in the play. You know, when Henry claims he's the rightful heir to the French throne and Charles says he'll give him a gift of tennis balls, "as matching to his youth and vanity." To quote from the play. So this is, if you like, the setting that we have for the beginning of the play.

As I said, I'm going to focus on the play and what I think Shakespeare's trying to get at about some ideas of leadership, which may resonate with us today. Is it what, we would call, are they ideas of real leadership? Or is it Shakespeare's perhaps wishful thinking of what a great leader could be, regardless of his youth, of any age or stage? Is it much more a piece of patriotic propaganda? Because Shakespeare's writing at a time when he's got to please the Queen, he's got to please the royalty of his own time. And he's choosing, okay, it's a character 200 years before, but nevertheless, he's got to show, not only respect, but enormous praise for the idea of divine right of kings, queens and leadership coming from that connection between the king or the queen and God. As I was talking last week, a very different concept to getting the sense of leadership from the people. As one is supposed to in democracy, as opposed to, you know, God has delivered the goods, and I'm merely carrying out God's wishes. It's got nothing do with the people really. That's the political side, but you know, the ultimate source of the franchise is God. So given all of that, we have, the idea for me, is it more the patriotic propaganda, that he feels he has to write? And if so, how is he working within that context to throw out questions of real leadership, and the context of non-democratic and military dictatorship, who has basically been commissioned by God? We have, very clearly, the dedication to war in the country and the dedication to war and patriotism and nationalism in the play. And I'm sure that is intentional from Shakespeare. He's got to please the Queen, as I was saying, and the aristocrats and the royalty of his time. That's his primary audience, financially, and keep his head on his neck, literally. And of course, later to make money and so on, in the theatre. And I think we see an interesting picture portrayed of a Christian king trying to achieve the sort of mythical Christian values

of humility and obsequience or obedience to God, and what God's supposed to be about and so on. Together with a mediaeval sense of leadership. Together with a sense of a youth and passion. And coming out to be a warrior king. You know, much more obsessed with the wars and conquest, and making money through that, rather than domestic affairs. For which he was criticised, partly, as far as we know, in "Holinshed's Chronicles." So as Henry says in the play, "Now all the youth of England are on fire. They sell their pasture to buy the horse, following the mirror of all Christian kings." So it's a crusading, it's a spiritual, it's a religious war. It's a war of nationalism, framed in religious terminology. As I was mentioning last week, that is a big shift. Or it's linked to ancient battles as well, you know, with the gods, whichever god, et cetera. Religion and nationalism. And Henry, regardless of his age, very smartly and cunningly calls the two together to whip up his followers. In Act II, for an example, there's a plot to assassinate him. He uncovers it and treats the conspirators ruthlessly. This is also part of Shakespeare, I think, showing the change from the adventurous, libertine, teenager youth, who's wild, who is pretty immature and not really taking on the mantle of being a leader, let alone a war leader. But here, discovered the plot, the conspirators are treated with ruthless decision and suffer.

Okay, so I'm going to try and tease out different qualities of leadership, and then pull some ideas together later. I'm also going to show a clip from Richard Burton. From a very early stage production, of a very young Burton playing Henry. Then the Olivier movie, and then the Kenneth Branagh movie, the St Crispin speech and a couple of others. And also from a very recent production done, a wonderful production, at the Donmar Theatre in London, where Kit Harrington, the English actor Kit Harrington, acts Henry. And just to give you an idea, a very contemporary way of staging the play. And how it has been so enduring, because, I think, of this debate between patriotic nationalism and trying to really question or look at the qualities of leadership. The French plan at the battle, all of it is a context of war. This is a warrior king. This is a play about war, absolutely. And leadership in times of war. Which, again, I know we're talking about leadership in general, but it may be different to other kinds of leaders, but I think there are absolute qualities that come out. The French plan at Agincourt was to use the cavalry. Most of their army were knights, not, what they would call then, the common soldiers. They were knights on horseback, with perhaps 30-40 pounds of armour on them. And at least five to one they outnumbered the English. And they intended to just use the cavalry charge and decimate the English. But Henry's brilliance was to bring in the longbow and the archers. And he had a French prisoner who had told him, as far as we know, it might have been a spy, we can't be exactly sure, anyway, in the play, before the battle, this was going to be the French army's tactic. So what he did was he put sharpened stakes into the ground in front of all the archers on the battlefields, so that the charging horses would come up

against sharp stakes. And of course, horses will rear back or they'll be horrifically killed, or they will throw the rider, who'll be horrifically killed by the stakes and so on. One can imagine the horror. Because he had that insider information, if you like. Secondly, Henry was aware that it had poured with rain the night before, creating an incredibly muddy field. And these French knights, weighed down with their 40, 50 pounds of armour, swords, all the regalia of being a knight, et cetera, and then coming off their horse and trying to fight, basically, they got stuck in the mud, literally. And a lot of them even drowned in the mud. But you can hardly walk or do anything with all that armour, you know, we can imagine the mediaeval image, and trying to get through the mud. So it just lent itself to the lightly-costumed English army to come out and decimate them. So these are some of the tactics that Henry's aware of, which is part of the cunning, the trickery, the tactical thinking of the young leader. He's not just about raising the spirits, getting the passion going. He's also very smart on, shall we say, insider information. Finding out what's going on. What's the opposition's plans, really. All, for me, essential parts of leadership. What quite a few scholars and thinkers have argued is that this battle and Henry came to symbolise an emerging, strong sense of English nationalism, linked to religion, as I said, but English nationalism. And some have argued that it began to set the stage for the rise of England, and later Britain, as a dominant global power. For all sorts of reasons which I can't go into now, and perhaps one of the reasons Shakespeare chooses it, not only to impress the Queen and the royals watching, but also 'cause he senses he's got to speak patriotically to English nationalism, which is on the rise.

There's so many phrases like that. Henry is tall. He was about 6'3", as far as we can get. He was slim with dark hair, clean shaven, and in one of the chronicles written about him, described as having combination of eyes, which could have the mildness of a dove, or the radiant brilliance of a lion. So we get the sense of the warrior king being portrayed. He also wanted to try and unite the nation of England. And he put aside some of the past differences. You know, Richard II before him was honourably reinterred, and some of those from before, who had done him ill. 1417, 2 years after the battle, Henry promoted the use of English language in government, which was the first time since the Norman invasion of 1066. So back to the battle, I've spoken quite a bit about what happened there. Let's look at some other sides of Henry, not only the cunning tactician, but he ordered, after the battle and he knew he had won, he ordered most of the French prisoners to be put to death immediately. Then later, another battle, taking the town of Cannes, Normandy. And then onto the siege of Paris. And we see him besieging Paris, and there's starving women and children, and they believed that Henry would let them pass out the gates of the city unmolested. He refused. Many of the women and children were killed by his army as they tried to escape the starving city. So the other side of Henry, which is cruel, despotic.

War crime, in our contemporary words. Trying to paint this picture overall of this leader who has gone down in history as a great, popular, patriotic leader. It's always much more complex. And Olivier's portrayal in the film is a classic of nationalism. It was done in 1944, it was shown to many of the troops going forward for D-Day. And it was sort of to rouse the spirits of nationalism and freedom and justice, what they're fighting for. Kenneth Branagh's production much later, the film, really is not so much a celebration of war and the glory, but it reflects what I'm trying to draw in this picture, of the cunning, the trickery, the ruthlessness. And ultimately, what Branagh, I think, focuses on is these leadership qualities, but also the sheer grotesque horror of war. And it's a much more contemporary reading. It's all in Shakespeare though. None of it is rewritten. It's a question of which we emphasise in the interpretation and which lines. It's all there, in this guy's writing. So the real Henry, is he the one who sends the troops out with some of the most inspiring literary images of war, horror, grotesqueness, cunning and ruthless leadership? Is it the one who describes these chilling atrocities which he's going to do and commit, which he can do or threaten with? Is he going to show forgiveness, compassion, understanding? Which Henry are we going to get? And I think different leaders are thrown up at different times of history, as we know, obviously, and I think Shakespeare's open enough in the play that we can see these different qualities. And when we look at a bit of the Olivier and Branagh, we will see it. The hero and the villain is not quite as simple, it's both.

A short scene in the play which is interesting, is where the Archbishop of Canterbury tells Henry that, "Yes, the Church will support you in your attack and invasion of France." Why? Because simply, it's going to benefit the Church financially. It's entirely self-motivated for the Archbishop and the Church. He says to Henry, "My learned Lord, we pray you to proceed and religiously unfold. Why the law they have in France should not bar us in our claim or the land." And then he goes on and on and on. And then, one of the great phrases, "Lord, you awake our sleeping sword of war." And this is the religious leader speaking. It echoes in so many countries and contexts today, "you awake our sleeping sword of war." The alluring fascination and hunger and need for war. On the one hand, it's going to make the Church rich, of course, that's the main aim, but at the same time, such a quality of human nature. So Henry gets the seal of approval from the mediaeval authority of the Church, and therefore the moral authority from God, which is really important. But Henry also, on the eve of the battle, he disguises himself as a common soldier, goes to speak with his men, as they nervously await the dawn. They know they're outnumbered at least five to one. They've got knights on horses against them. They don't know the rain, the mud, the archery, all that, they don't really know the tactics. They're terrified. He's got to do something. And he goes in disguise amongst the men. He's not scared to. Some of them recognise him, but he goes in. The French

prince, on the other hand, Charles, is not even at the battle. He's sitting comfortably, you know, far, far away. So the leader is there amongst the men, understands them, sees how they think, sees their nervousness, and is not scared to take it on, with the great Crispin speech and others. A very different kind of leadership, which of course, we admire, and the bravery. But even that night when he's with the common soldiers, one of them says, "Yes, but when all the legs and arms and heads of us are chopped off in a battle, the king is not bound to answer his soldiers. Every subject's duty is the king's, but every subject's soul is his own." Yes, we owe you your duty, and they're going to cut off our arms and our legs, we are going to suffer for you, but you're not going to suffer. And Henry hears that and faces it. He's not scared to, and addresses it. A quality of leadership, I think, to be admired. During a siege of another town, in the play, prior to ordering the assault, Henry demands the surrender of the town's governor, and he says, and listen, hear the language of war, it's a threat. "The gates of mercy shall all be shut up, and the fleshed soldier, rough and hard of heart, shall range with conscience wide as hell." Conscience wide as hell. "Mowing like grass your fresh-fair virgins, your flowing infants, what is it then to me, if impious war? Of heady murders, spoil and villainy, desire the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters." Doesn't hesitate. It's ruthless and it cuts to the chase. What's going to happen if you don't, basically, give your town to me. "Your father's heads shall be dashed to the walls, your naked infants spitted on pikes, while the mad mothers with their howls confused do break the clouds." I mean, this language is extraordinary. 500, 600 years later, the language of war, it's the language of murder, mayhem, chilling, pillage, rape, everything, as a threat. Well, the brutal threat worked. The town surrendered and he let everybody live. So Henry is a Machiavelli. He's trying to show little bit of, if you give into me, I'll show you Christian humility. Apparent humility, anyway. The ruthlessness needed for war. The wonderful American critic, Harold Bloom, called Henry, "A veiled rather than complex leader." Interesting phrase. He wrote that, "A king is, necessarily, something of a counterfeit, and Henry is a great king, a leader. Henry's veiled nature is exactly what makes him an effective ruler." So he sees him not as a terrible villain, but a veiled rather than complex leader. Quite a simple set of moral values perhaps that Bloom is alluding to.

Now, one of the most important points for me is that Henry does not bask in his sins. Think of Shakespeare's great villains, Richard III, Macbeth. They revel in their ruthlessness, or they get terrified and guilt-struck, Macbeth, you know? But he's not concerned about killing all the people. He's just concerned about his own conscience. Richard III absolutely relishes, murder, murder, murder. Henry doesn't. He relishes in war and conquest for the greatness of England and nationalism and God and all the rest of it, but he doesn't necessarily relish in the gruesome brutality and horror of chopping and cutting people up and smashing and so on. It's not the same as a revelling. He

uses it to whip up the troops and other things, but we don't see him actually, passionately, really loving that side of war. You'll see in one of the clips from Branagh, very, very quickly. And I think that's a huge difference in leadership between the Macbeths, the Richards and the others. And I think it's enormous, because we do have leaders who love the dead bodies, who love where bodies are buried, whether it's in corporate or business today or wherever, we all know the phrase where the bodies buried, you know? Who get a real kick out of it. But we don't get that sense, I think, with Richard. There's a soldier, a guy called Bardolph, who's an ordinary, common soldier, who steals from the church. Henry knows him personally, but because he stole, and from the church, he still must be hung, even though he is a bit of a friend, he knows him. So he knows which way to swing when the choice comes. He's got to act the king. What's fascinating, and that's why I said it's mediaeval times of dictatorship, is that misbehaviour by the knights in Henry's time, if there were knights, it would've been dealt with in chivalry. And we all know those images of the contest. But a modern army, which is most of Henry's army, of common soldiers, it's been argued, would need a king's marshall justice. So he's killed most of the French prisoners, but what's interesting is that in most productions, certainly in Olivier and Branagh, most stage and film productions leave out that vital bit of information from the play, that all the French prisoners from the battle are killed, slaughtered, murdered by the English. But the phrasing of how to kill the French prisoners is in the language of revenge, because the French, before the battle, had raided the English, and killed all the non-combatant English boys who were basically their packhorses, carrying all the supplies and so on. And the French just slaughtered a whole lot of them. So it's out of revenge that that is done. It's not just because, "I love killing and slaughter," for Henry. And then, at the end of the play, finally, we have the Chorus epilogue, which reminds us that success in war and politics is fleeting, because of the ever-present sword of Damocles, called mortality, in all of us. Henry dies a few years later, dies young, and his successors, we are reminded, lost France and made his England bleed. So Shakespeare pulls it together at the end, where he widens the camera, if you like. The zoom is off the characters in "Henry" and everything, to the big picture of war and history and humans, it's never forget the gruesome horror of war. One little point I'd like to make, before showing the clips, is that Harold Bloom also talks about the peerless, charismatic Henry, the charisma of a leader. And that's become, I think, so important in any leader, from ancient times, Henry, going back to Caesar, Alexander, whatever, and in contemporary times. It's the charisma. Maybe even that's the most important, especially in our media-obsessed age. He's a king who understands it. Bloom argues, he understands charisma. And our fascination and our seduction are the combination of intelligence and charisma. It's a pretty lethal cocktail in any leader of any kind, business, corporate, wherever. Okay, can we show the first clip, please? This is Richard Burton doing the St. Crispen speech.

(An audio clip of the 1951 stage production of Henry V plays)

– [Gloucester] Where is the king?

– [Bedford] The king himself is rode to view their battle.

– [Westmoreland] Of fighting men, they have full three score thousand.

– [Exeter] There's five to one, besides, they all are fresh.

– [Salisbury] God's arm strike with us, 'tis a fearful odds.

– [Westmoreland] O, that we now had here, but one ten thousand of those men in England that do no work today!

– [King Henry V] What's he that wishes so? My cousin Westmoreland? No, my fair cousin, if we are marked to die, we are enough to do our country loss, and if to live, the fewer men, the greater share of honour. Gods will, I pray thee wish not one man more. By Jove, I am not covetous for gold, nor care I who doth feed upon my cost. It yearns me not if men my garments wear. Such outward things dwell not in my desires. But if it be a sin to covet honour, I am the most offending soul alive. No, faith, my coz, wish not a man from England. God's peace, I would not lose so great an honour as one man more, methinks, would share from me for the best hope I have. O, do not wish one more. Rather proclaim it, Westmoreland, through my host, that he which hath no stomach to this fight, let him depart! His passport shall be made, and crowns for convoy put into his purse. We would not die in that man's company that fears his fellowship to die with us.

– Hooray!

– [King Henry V] This day is called the feast of Crispian. He that outlives this day, and comes safe home, will stand o' tiptoe when this day is named, and rouse him at the name of Crispian. He that shall live this day, and see old age, will yearly on the vigil, feast his neighbours, and say, 'Tomorrow is Saint Crispian.' Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars, and say, these wounds I had on Crispin's day.

– [Soldiers] Ay!

– [King Henry V] Old men forget, yet all shall be forgot, but he'll remember with advantages what feats he did that day. Then shall our names, familiar in his mouth as household words, Harry the King, Bedford and Exeter, Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester, be in their flowing cups freshly remembered. This story shall the good man teach his son, and Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by, from this day to the ending of the world, but we in it shall be remembered. We few, we happy few, we band of brothers! For he today that sheds his

blood with me shall be my brother. Be he ne'er so vile, this day shall gentle his condition. And gentlemen in England now abed shall think themselves accursed they were not here, and hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks that fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

– [Salisbury] My sovereign lord, my sovereign lord, bestow yourself with speed.

– Okay, thanks, Emily. If we can, the French are coming now. If we could show the Olivier one please, the second film.

– Oh that we now had here, but one ten thousand of those men in England who do not work today.

– What's he that wishes so? My cousin Westmoreland? No, my fair cousin, if we are marked to die, we are enough to do our country loss, and if to live, the fewer men, the greater share of honour. Gods will, I pray thee, wish not one man more! Rather proclaim it, Westmoreland, through my host, that he which hath no stomach to this feast, let him depart! His passport shall be drawn, and crowns for convoy put into his purse. We would not die in that man's company that fears his fellowship to die with us! This day is called the Feast of Crispian. He that outlives this day and comes safe home will stand o' tiptoe when this day is named, and rouse him at the name of Crispian. He that shall live this day and see old age will yearly, on the vigil, feast his neighbours, and say, "Tomorrow is Saint Crispian." Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars, and say, "These wounds I had on Crispin's day." Old men forget, yet all shall be forgot. But he'll remember with advantages what feats he did that day. Then shall our names, familiar in his mouth as household words, Harry the king, Bedford and Exeter, Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester, be in their flowing cups freshly remembered! This story shall the good man teach his son. And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by, from this day to the ending of the world, but we in it shall be remembered! We few, we happy few, we band of brothers. For he today that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother, be he ne'er so base. And gentlemen in England now abed shall think themselves accursed they were not here, and hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks that fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day!

– Me lord, bestow yourself with speed.

– Yes?

– The French are bravely in their battles set, and will, with all expedience–

– Great, thank you, if we can hold it there, Emily. I want to go straight on. Sorry, Emily, could we show the first Branagh? Kenneth Branagh? That one, yeah, slide five. Same speech, Kenneth Branagh.

(A video clip of the 1989 film Henry V plays)

– Where is the king?

– The king himself is rode to view their battle.

– Of fighting men, they have full three score thousand.

– That's five to one. Besides, they're all fresh.

– These are fearful odds.

– Oh that we now had here but one ten thousand of those men in England that do no work today!

– What's he that wishes so? My cousin Westmoreland? No, my fair cousin. If we are marked to die, we are enough to do our country loss, and if to live, the fewer men, the greater share of honour! God's will, I pray thee, wish not one man more! Rather proclaim it, Westmoreland, through my host, that he which hath no stomach to this fight, let him depart. His passport shall be made, and crowns for convoy put into his purse. We would not die in that man's company that fears his fellowship to die with us. This day is called the feast of Crispian. He that outlives this day, and comes safe home, will stand a tip-toe when this day is named, and rouse him at the name of Crispian. He that shall see this day and live old age, will yearly, on the vigil, feast his neighbours, and say, "Tomorrow is Saint Crispins." Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars, and say "These wounds I had on Crispin's day." Old men forget, yet all shall be forgot, but he'll remember with advantages what feats he did that day! Then shall our names, familiar in their mouths as household words, Harry the king, Bedford and Exeter, Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester, be in their flowing cups freshly remembered. This story shall the good man teach his son, and Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by, from this day to the ending of the world! But we in it shall be remembered. We few, we happy few, we band of brothers. For he today that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother. Be he ne'er so vile, this day shall gentle his condition, and gentlemen in England now abed shall think themselves accursed they were not here, and hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks that fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

– Okay, if we can hold that there please.

– My sovereign lord–

– Okay, thank you. So we get a couple of examples. We get the Burton one first, which is very young and passionate, it's obviously from the stage play, it's just a recording, but for me, he's passionate, he's

determined, no matter what, we are going to go, you know, hell for leather ahead. And I think it's combination of some of the qualities I was trying to mention earlier about leadership, of, I am determined, regardless the odds. Maybe they outnumber us five to one, more. They've got all the knights, they've got all the horses, they've got the cavalry, et cetera, et cetera. It seems they have all the advantage, we are the underdog. Interesting, I watched an interview here, on the news a couple of days ago and they were interviewing, You know, there were a couple of people talking about the Ukrainian war. And one interesting point was that the Ukrainian ambassador said, "There's no word in the Ukrainian language for underdog." And it made me think, is there that word in many other languages, not English? Anyway, this is clearly trying to whip up the spirit, as, "We are the underdog," you know, but we will, through our passion, our commitment to each other and to our cause, overcome the odds, however great they seem against us. For me, Branagh, is a much more personal, it's a much more friendly, engaging, smiling, bringing the men in with him, bringing us, the audience, in with him as well. The Olivier one is obviously much more patriotic and grandiose and almost pompous and you know, full of the pride of the nation and England, and he's imbued with that. He's not so concerned about the pure personal. And he's trying to call on the spirit of God, almost, in a much bigger way. Here, Branagh is calling on the spirit of the men, whereas the other, the Olivier, it's the righteousness of the cause of freedom and justice and England, and God is implied in all that. And actually, I was saying earlier, I think also, what for me is fascinating is the language that Shakespeare uses is quite an extraordinary piece of rhetoric. He says, "How are we going to remember this? We're going to be old. We'll have the cuts and the bruises. Maybe some will die, but this is how we will tell the stories to our children, our grandchildren. We're going to make one of the most amazing memories of our lives. We have the chance. If you don't want to come with me, get your passport and depart! And Shakespeare uses the word passport. "Go!" For a leader to say that, you know? All you soldiers, I don't care. If you don't want to do this, you don't have to. You can pack your bags and go. It's okay, I carry on. That's an extraordinary way of throwing down the gauntlet to the soldiers to fight. And it's a risk, but Henry's prepared to do it. Leadership, take the risk, the big risk. I'm going on, some of us, but if you don't, get your passport. Ciao. It's in the speech that Shakespeare writes. And then he talks about the day itself, and the cause and why we are here. And, you'll be with me, we will achieve this, we will do it, we, et cetera, et cetera. And it's not as if to deny the odds, it's embrace the odds. We band of brothers, we few, we happy few, we are happy to be the underdog. We're happy to have a small little army and take on the big guns. You know, the French army is five times the size. They're all knights, which is going to intimidate the common soldiers, obviously, in the battle. We are happy that we are a few because then we are a real band of brothers. You know, for me it's the rhetoric that Shakespeare uses is so clever, and gets so to the core of how to whip

up people to follow. How much can be applied to leadership today in military or non-military situations is obviously for each of us to decide. Couple things are gone. "He who has no stomach for the fight, let him depart." His passport shall be made ready. We would not die in that man's company that fears his fellowship to be with us. We don't want to even die if he, it's so intelligent. It's Shakespeare, but through giving the character this, but he says earlier to the archbishop, "But I will rise in France with glory and I will dazzle all the eyes of France." This is an extraordinary way of the guy writing and then for his characters, this young Henry how to inspire, ultimately I think is the key. And then there's another little phrase which comes from earlier in the play. "We will imitate the action of the tiger, Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood, disguise fair nature with hard favoured rage, then lend I a terrible aspect." So not scared to go into a laser beam ruthless attack, you know, with the mind as well. All these different levels are being touched in one and a couple of other short speeches throughout the play. For me to create a sense of Shakespeare's profound question. What is a good leader in times of war? In this case. "We happy few." And I've spoken about how the French king, and all the soldiers know the French king is sitting at home. He stayed in Paris. The Army's under the leadership of a group of nobles. There's no leader. Huge difference in the approach. Henry is right here and shown in these classical scenes from the movies. It's a vision perhaps of leadership. And I've mentioned the connection to God's and others. He also says earlier on in the play, "France will be ours." "We'll bend it to our awe, or break it in pieces." "We'll bend it to our awe, or break it in pieces." That's what we are going to do. And I think that's more the Richard Burton interpretation. No matter what, I'm going to break it. I'm going to do it and I'll bend it to the awe of us. I think Burton has chosen those kinds of more searing inspirational qualities.

A famous scene separate to these in the play, which I want to really mention, is after the battle, talking about the battles and so on. Anyway, Henry goes to the court of the French prince. And he wants to marry Princess Catherine, the French princess. 'Cause of course that will make France become united under the English rule of Henry. But he decides not just to come in and brutally force her to marry him, which he could do, 'cause he's got the power, he's conquered. He comes to negotiate, he talks about a peace treaty. When of course, it's anything but a peace treaty. He's the conqueror. But he avoids humiliating the French. Clever. He talks about peace and how we'll be united through marriage. Our two great nations. Even though I've conquered and slaughtered all your nobles and your aristocrats in the Battle of Agincourt, yeah, et cetera, et cetera. Henry just put her father out of business. He just put her father out of a job. You ain't going to be King Charles. I'm the king now, the English have taken over. Goodbye your little, French little nation. He's put him out of a job. He's out of business. But he says, come, I'll take the hand of your daughter, Marry her, and we'll be back in business together. I'm

being facetious, I'm being witty here. But, you know, it's there. He's just killed six thousand French soldiers, which is a huge amount in that battle. Most of them nobles. He woos the king. He woos the French as much as he woos Princess Catherine. He says to her, "Fair Catherine, will you let a soldier enter at a lady's ear and plead his love suit to her gentle heart? Other men can rhyme themselves into ladies' favours, I cannot do." You know, I'm just a simple ordinary guy, I can't rhyme, I can't use language, I'm not a poet, and all that. But a good heart I have, Kate. A good heart is the sun and the moon. Or rather, the sun and not the moon. For it shines bright and never changes, but keeps it's course truly. So trying to show that I'm a bit of a clumsy poet, Kate. But I'm trying to woo you. You know, he drops his status. He's not the all conquering, you know, he can just grab Kate or anybody that he wants. He's wooing. One point, and Catherine says, well, she asks basically, how is it possible if she can love the enemy of France? He just conquered, and as I said, put daddy out of a job. Henry replies, "No, you cannot love the enemy of France, Kate, but in loving me, you will love the friend of France, for I love France so well, that I will not part with a village of it. I will have it all mine and Kate, when France is mine and I am yours then yours is France and you are mine." You can imagine Shakespeare writing this and just laughing and enjoying the brilliance of the wooing and the rhetoric and the phrasing and the turning around. You know, I'm sorry I'm not reading it well, but I'm reading it with humour. But I think it's so poignant. And this to me is a mark of the leadership, when to woo, when to be ruthless, when to be cruel, to be kind or just cruel. When to be vicious, when to be forgiving, when to negotiate, when to compromise. You know, I think it was Einstein who said the ability to adapt is the mark of intelligence. I could be wrong here. But Shakespeare shows a young Henry adapting to the circumstance, each time he has an unerring instinct for what is required of the leader. And each situation throws up different things. Instead of just sticking to one thing and I'm going to follow it no matter what. And, you know, ideologically obsessed or religiously obsessed, there's only one answer. That's it. And I can't, you know, be multi-factored. I can't have many identities to play with. And this scene with Kate is short, but it's brilliant and I think it's so important that Shakespeare throws it in, because it's wooing and seducing. When he could just ruthlessly grab her and take her, marry her, rape her, and that's it, you know, game over, France over. And doesn't have to offer daddy the job back. And you can still be a prince or whatever, but you know, under me, et cetera. So I think that Shakespeare is showing all these qualities in the leader here. I think the problem with the Olivier is that it's focus is much more on the patriotic and the nationalist. Obviously it's for 1944 before D-Day, the soldiers, you know, it's written there. Shakespeare in his own time, as I said at the beginning, has to write it to satisfy the Queen and the nobles and the aristocrats. So he is also got to show that patriotic side. But within that, he's trying to point out, well, hang on, there's all sorts of other things of adaptability with

intelligence to be a better king, a better king. Alexander the Great spoke about learning some of this from Aristotle, you know, his great teacher. He said, my father gave me life, but my teacher, Aristotle, showed me how to live the happy, the true life. Anyway, I don't want to get into Alexander. So Henry shows all of these qualities, the dazzling.

And I want to show the last two little clips quickly. One is from the Donmar Theatre production. Just to show you a very contemporary way of staging this, now that we've got much more knowledge of this. If we can show the Kit Harrington one, please, Emily.

(A video clip of the 2022 film Henry V plays)

– We have now no thought in us, but France, we'll bend it to our awe or break it all to pieces.

– He bids you then resign your crown and kingdom.

– Or else what follows?

– Bloody constraint.

– There's not in France that can be with some nimble footwork one.

– No King of England, if not King of France.

– Command my service to my sovereign.

– [Exeter] In fierce tempest is he coming, like a God.

– The game's afoot, follow your spirit and upon this charge, cry God for Harry, England and Saint George.

– I think in this production they were trying, this is just from the trailer, they tried to find a contemporary way in, and I think they hit quite a few of the points. But there's something for me fundamentally missed. I mean, it's fantastic acting and fantastically visual production. But the interpretation of the character, it falls for me a little bit between the gung ho, sort of macho soldier, and the nationalism and the patriotism, and almost the human qualities of Kenneth Branagh. But it's on stage as well, it's not on film. So it's an entirely different approach to making. Fantastic visually and exciting and thrilling certainly. And very contemporary as you can see.

The last clip I want to show is from the Branagh movie, which is a clip at the end, the battle has just ended and they don't even know yet if they've won or not. And I think we see Shakespeare's attitude to the gruesome horror of war. The camera in our minds pans back and

we see the whole big picture of human history, war and human nature. Okay, if we can show it, Emily, please.

(A video clip of the 1989 film Henry V plays)

– Kill the boys and the luggage. It is expressly against the law of arms. 'Tis as arrant a piece of knavery mark you now, as can be offert, in your conscience now, is it not?

– 'Tis certain there's not a boy left alive.

– I was not angry since I came to France until this instant.

– Here comes the herald of the French, my liege.

– What means this, herald? Com'st thou again for ransom?

– No, great king. I come to thee for charitable licence, that we may wander o'er this bloody field to book our dead and then to bury them; to sort our nobles from our common men. For many of our princes, woe the while! Lie drowned and soaked in mercenary blood. Give us leave, great king, to view the field in safety and dispose of their dead bodies.

– I tell thee truly, herald, I know not if the day be hours or no.

– The day is yours.

– Praised be God, and not our strength, for it. What is this castle called that stands hard by?

– They call it Agincourt.

– Then call we this the field of Agincourt, fought on the day of Crispin Crispianus.

– Your grandfather of famous memory, and please your Majesty, and your great-uncle Edward the Black Prince of Wales, as I have read in the chronicles, fought a most brave battle here in France.

– They did, Fluellen.

– Your Majesty says very true. If Your Majesty is remembered of it, the Welshman did good service in a garden where leeks did grow, wearing leeks in their Monmouth caps, which, as Your Majesty know to this hour is an honourable badge of the service.

– [David] Thanks if we can hold it there, please.

– I do believe Your Majesty takes no scorn to wear–

– So at the end, Shakespeare brings a character soldier, Henry discovers he's won it. He doesn't have a clue, he's wandering around the battle, you know. But we are shown it in the acting here in this interpretation with humility. First, his rage, at the French ambassador coming and telling in the news. And then almost a humanity, a humility. Branagh tried to capture the, I think Shakespearean interpretation, of stepping back, the grotesque, the horror, the madness, the craziness of war itself. And tried to capture that in the image. And I think that, all because it's in the play. So one can choose all these different aspects, not only of leadership, but how to interpret this remarkable play in all these different ways. One other quick point is that the other difference with Henry and some of the other, if you like, ruthless war leaders in the Shakespearean canon and others, is that he's able to admit his mistakes. He's able to be honest about it. Like he is with them when he goes to talk to the men directly the night before the battle. And he admits his, his mistakes, and he says, "Yes, we did give ourselves to Barbara's licence." So it's this sense of I gave over myself to Barbarity. I was a barbarian truly, but I was also this and I was capable of so many other qualities. And for me it's that ability not to be a chameleon, but to adapt to different situations that I think Shakespeare is pointing at. When ruthlessness is called for the instinct shows. When risk is called for, when caution, when tactical intelligence is called for, when strategic Trojan horse sort of inside spy information is called for, get it. When the need to whip up the troops who are exhausted, demoralised or pressed whatever, how to do it. Now to face all these different qualities at different times, not to perfection at all. And I think he's a very flawed but ultimately so human character. It is something of what I think Harold Bloom is trying to get at when he calls it a veiled character. You know, he's not the evil, or the villain I should say, who relishes being a villain, like Richard III, Macbeth, who's terrified of it once he's done it, he's obsessed with his own guilt. This guy is trying to find his way to adapt in all different situations. But not ever at the price of the primary vision. Which is to defeat the French, get the land, to win the battle for the greatness and glory of what he represents, which is the nation. So the pride and the nationalism and the religious connection to God is given a context. And I think that human context is what makes this such a great play. The Olivier interpretation is much more, I think, without that. It's much more, you know, and understandably for the times, the grand. Just as a final thought, if I may, I'm drawn back to Homer so often, and the Odyssey. And there are three types of leaders that Homer shows. There's a Odysseus, who, as we all know, has the idea of the Trojan horse. So he's the cunning trickery, in Bob Dylan's phrase. And he's the strategic, cunning thinker, but also very brave and courageous. Then secondly, there's Achilles. And Achilles is action hero, you know, he's out there, physical, demanding, the world is black and white. I'm going to go there and I'm going to defeat them and kill them, I'm the best warrior. I'm the strongest, no matter

what. We have a small army, my army of Achilles, but it's the most powerful, you know, action-adventure hero. And the third one is Agamemnon, who is the king of all the Greeks, and it's his brother Menelaus, he's been betrayed. Anyway Agamemnon is the overall king, but he's full of hubris and pride and arrogance. But he's also an incredibly strong authoritarian leader and he won't brook any difference. And one needs that kind of ruthlessness of Agamemnon, that arrogance almost at times. One needs the trickery and the cunning of Odysseus and the action, risk taking adventure of Achilles. I think that Shakespeare in trying to show Henry as a leader in wartime and maybe other times, that's for us to imagine or talk about another time, but for us to imagine qualities of leadership, that ability to shift between one role and the other, which I think is what Homer ultimately alludes to in the great poem, The Odyssey. And I think what Shakespeare is trying to get at in his exploration of leadership, as he does in so many of his plays, in particular, this one. Okay, thank you so much everybody. We can do the questions.

Q & A and Comments

From Yolande, "The "Cronicle" front cover image, interesting to see how the spelling is so different." I know, I love it. You know, you see these old things going five six hundred years ago and the spelling and the way of writing it, the front, everything, and it's genre driven. It's the historical and the Chronicles et cetera. It's a different PR media image.

Ronnie, "Richard III was the first King coronated in England in 1443." Thank you. Paulette, thank you so much for your kind comment.

Q: Romaine, "Veiled. What is beneath?"

A: What I'm trying to show are these qualities of adaptation. Beneath and I don't think it's comedian, like I don't think it's, you know, totally give up my identity and just fit in with anything. I think it comes from an intuitive, quick sussing of what is required in different situations. When I'm with the boss, when I'm with the soldiers, when I'm trying to woo Catherine, when I'm with Prince Charles, who I've deposed, he won't be the next king, or maybe not. It's when I'm with the soldiers, when I'm with the bishops, et cetera. You know, it's a quick suss of how to play the room in different situations.

Margaret, "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers suggest two qualities, rhetoric and identifying with the common people." Absolutely, and that's why I drew that picture of, the French king is in Paris, but Henry is with the troops in the mud, in the rain, in the tent. And he's walking through the night to pick up the feeling. So he knows what he's got to say before the battle.

Q: Martin, "Is the scene where the king goes in disguise to talk to the common soldiers based on any evidence? Or is it like when Churchill travels the London underground? Completely fictional."

A: Yeah, that's the totally fictional scene in the Churchill movie, Darkest Hours, when Churchill is in the underground. Absolutely. Well, as far as we know, I mean let's remember this battle happened 200 years before Shakespeare wrote the play. So it could be fictional, it could have been folklore in his own time, you know, some sort of cultural memory that goes down and gets turned and twisted, whatever. We don't know. I think Shakespeare is writing it to show what a king can do with the troops as opposed to sitting behind the desk and having tea. Like many of the generals did in the first World War as well.

Q: Maria, "Did they use passports in those times?"

A: Well that's fascinating. I don't know if we, I mean the word is in the play from what I, I keep reading it. I know, it's a fascinating question, Maria. And the answer, it's in the play, what can I say? So some kind of document to be called the passport.

Susan, "Zelenskyy must have read Shakespeare." Well, Zelenskyy is an actor and never underestimate, he's a brilliant actor. I think he has certainly read and knows his Shakespeare, as Churchill did.

Q: Paula, "If I understand you correctly, you believe that of all Shakespeare's Kings, Henry V was the best or the smartest?"

A: No, I'm not saying that he was the best or the smartest of the kings. I'm saying, it's a really good question, Paula, thank you. Because I'm saying that Shakespeare gives him qualities of this, what I'm calling the ability to be flexible, adapt, not stuck to one path, and that's it. Because that's going to lead to the downfall. You know, and we can see dictators and other leaders that will stick to one thing and will not change the plan. It's a psychologically dictatorial mindset. And I think it's his ability to adapt, you know, as the human species, it's maybe even Darwin. But anyway, I think that Shakespeare is pointing out with Henry, this is what is needed of a leader and a smart leader. I don't necessarily think it's the best because I think each play, from Lear to all the others, is so different in content and context. The stories are so different. It's not about soldiers facing overwhelming odds against another group. Ultimately, the battle is the centre of this entire play. It's absolutely the battle of Agincourt, is the play, before and after, and the battle. So I think it's more about a warrior king. And it's these qualities of adaptability. In King Lear, it's a remarkable ability to go from arrogance and hubris and to come all the way down to lose everything. And you're just a naked wretch, screaming on a rain driven field. And just realise

you're nothing but a poor pitchfork of a man. And love and compassion with his daughter.

Yolande, "Stephen Hawking - Intelligence is ability to adapt to change." Ah, was it Hawking? I thought maybe it was Einstein. Anyway, that's great, thank you Yolande.

Ron, "Interesting clips you chose with the three great actors from three different nations." Thank you for picking that up, Ron. Yes. Wales, Richard Burton, England and Ireland, the other two, Olivier and Branagh. Yes.

Q: "Do you think the different styles you described might be to some extent reflective of different national roots?"

A: Branagh, definitely, 'cause he's also made this recent movie, set in Northern Ireland, as we know. Branagh's definitely got an outsider awareness, that's for sure. Olivier, doing it in the forties during the war, not only is he English, but it's absolutely for D-Day, basically. It's for the big day and the English. And then of course Burton, who's also partly an outsider and an insider. I chose it, not only because of the three nations, as you're saying here, but also because I think they are three brilliant actors. Totally different. I watch Richard Burton again and again in some of his later movies, yeah, he's so young, but it's not only the voice, it's the quality of the character behind that voice. You know, I love his acting.

Q: Maria, "In those battles of enormous numbers, dead or alive, how did they know who won?"

A: Maria, a great question. That's what we try to show in the end, the last clip from the Branagh movie. Where, you have to be told by the French, the opposition has to come on a horse and tell you that you've won. Because you're in mud, and rain, and mist, and battled all over. And chaos has happened as usually often in war. Obviously no modern communications. So somebody's got to come and tell you. And he's the leader in the thick of the battle. He's not even on his horse watching. He's certainly not in Paris, like the French king, but he's in the battle and that makes for a totally different kind of young leader. And I think, how did they know who won? Somebody had to tell them, whether on their own side, or the opposition. I guess maybe there was a, a bugle played sometimes.

Q: Jan, "Do you think the Donmar Warehouse production was too gimmicky? I find distracting."

A: Yeah, I think because they hadn't chosen quite the interpretation. They were trying to show a modern production. So that becomes the primary focus, as opposed to the interpretation of the quality of leadership of Henry. And that for me is the primary question, how to

come into staging this play. That's the key, as opposed to a spectacle of contemporary images, if you like. Which is seductive and powerful, but it ultimately, you know, perhaps lacks something of a core interpretation. That's my own personal response. Dennis- But nevertheless brilliant acting. I think it's more the overall interpretation.

Dennis, "I was hoping you'd discuss Tom Hiddleston." Yeah, I know BBC, and the others as well. But great point. I've really got to watch it.

Ed, "We're living through yet another time of battle for land, not for people, obsession with land. Putin, Ukraine, Israel, Kaiser, Wilhelm, Hitler, anti-immigration forces, where all along no land belongs to people. Fascinating point that you're making. Really interesting point that a battle for land not for people. Interesting.

Sam, "The musical, The Fantasticks, used a few lines as a parody." I know, there are lots of wonderful cartoons of parody of Henry and many other Shakespeare's, on the internet.

Barbara, "King Henry was a bit of a King David quality against the French Goliath." Absolutely. So the underdog, the David versus Goliath, archetypal myth, Barbara as you say, is absolutely incited. Shakespeare would've been totally aware of that biblical legend. And I think he's trying to find the qualities in Henry that lead to it. And David, in David.

Bernard, "Seen the Olivier version just before taking my O levels. Got me through to taking an A plus, I'll always remember this. Oh, that's great.

Q: Tom, "Are you familiar with Richard Olivier's book, Inspirational Leadership, Henry the Fifth and the Muse of Fire? He uses it for leadership workshops."

A: No, I'm not, I don't know it, thank you for that. I shall try and get it.

Ed, "Current thinking is that the French were feasting and asleep at the battle, but the English were kept awake all night to build their emotional resistance." Fascinating point. I didn't know that, historically.

Q: Leslie, "How do you feel about opposite genders playing the lead roles?"

A: For me, this is not really, okay there's a scene where he has to woo and seduce Kate. I think it depends if one wants an interpretation, which is more, let's say historically accurate. Or a more contemporary interpretation. I don't have a strong feeling either

way. Because it's fundamentally about these qualities of leadership and war, for me. It's not really about gender so much. So male, female, short, tall, this, that, you know, is less of an issue. Unless it's trying to make a distracting point. Which can distract from a more insightful interpretation about human nature. That would be my area of question.

Okay, thank you very much everybody, and hope you well. And Emily, thanks again. Have a great rest of the weekend, and ciao.