

## Shakespeare's Henriad: The Play of History

We'll read the four plays about English history—some have called them Shakespeare's Henriad—that trace the reigns of Richard II, the most lyrical and sometimes most fatuous of rulers; through the troubled times of Henry IV, a king dramatically overshadowed by his rambunctious but also calculating son Hal (and Hal's fat, witty, inventive, doomed companion, Falstaff); through the emergence of the heroic Henry V, in whom we can still see the shadow of the callow, even callous Hal.

In class we'll pay close attention to the language—or, better, the various languages—of the plays, sometimes by reading passages out loud, and by closely, sympathetically analyzing them. It'll be a mixture of discussion and my own off-the-cuff mini-lectures, and I'll encourage the class to challenge me, or one another, or the characters. (Agreements are also welcome.)

Among topics to be considered are: the role of women in a world of battling men; Shakespeare's ideas of rulership and the theatricality of royal rule; the shape of Tudor history and of Shakespeare's dramatic history; power, politics, and providence. I'll try to provide some background (though Shakespeare himself tells us most of what we need to know) and I'll encourage the class to form and express their own ideas about these history plays that are also political plays as relevant and fresh as today's screaming headlines.

Please acquire the individual volumes in the Pelican Shakespeare series, so that we can be (literally) on the same page in class. (Get them at Amazon or in the textbook section downstairs in Labyrinth Books.) We'll read in order: *Richard II* (two weeks), the First Part of *Henry IV* (two weeks), the Second Part of *Henry IV* (one week) and *Henry V* (two weeks)—and in a couple of sessions we'll watch video clips of these most cinematic of plays, by Welles, Olivier, Branagh, et al.

**LEADER:** Lawrence Danson is professor emeritus of English at Princeton University. He has written articles and books (including *Shakespeare's Dramatic Genres*) about Renaissance drama and about Victorian and Edwardian literature.

**WEDNESDAYS:** 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., 8 weeks: February 26 to April 22 (no class on 4/8)

**LOCATION:** PSRC, Maximum 20 seats