

Writing in History – Formative Assignment 2

This explores Henry's speech as a propagandist tool rather than a dramatic display of heroism. 'So much for pragmatism' the critic quips, when referring to Henry's chances had the whole battle been only hand to hand combat; however, as most of Shakespeare's information on Henry V was taken from Edward Hall's Chronicle ^[1], the information could have already been altered in order to show the King in a better light, as those were still the days of heavy censorship. In which case, Shakespeare was portraying correct historical information as far as he could. In this way, the critic's approach is problematic, as it detracts from the original intention for the play, which was to entertain as well as contradicting the whole idea that the English were victorious in their conquest against France.

At the start of the passage, the critic mentions the king as 'an actor', criticising Shakespeare's character as disingenuous. However, despite their basis in historicism, the critic seems to fail to take into account that most people, especially the monarch, would rather play a role when facing battle than display their bare emotion. Even into modern times, the monarch is doubtlessly the biggest role model to their countrymen, and therefore they are required to assume the ideal emotions. This approach is both useful and problematic. From the perspective of the critic, the critic assists the reader in seeing the multiple sides of Henry, enlightening his ever-shifting persona and the impossibility of some of the claims he makes in his famous speech in Act IV Scene 3. In one sense, maybe Shakespeare overplays the different faces of Henry and therefore conveys a less convincing personality, but overall it is simply an attempt to create a believable but respectable character. As far as history is concerned, we shall never know if the character Shakespeare portrays is accurate, as Henry V was two centuries before Shakespeare's time, and as aforementioned, the heavy censorship in the 15th century would have prevented his true personality from being public knowledge.

This idea is elaborated upon in the fourth paragraph of the critical essay. The feudal relationship Henry has with his soldiers is compared to a 'soon-abandoned propaganda poster of the Second World War', highlighting the blatant indoctrination of the soldiers' minds