

Story Brown, Guy.  
Six's Hist. Intro. to the Intro. of 146 and  
The English Histories Macon, GA: Mercer  
2012

## Introduction

“Will Nothing Turn Your Unrelenting Hearts?”

Some Questions of Shakespeare's *Joan of Arc*

The only appearance of Joan of Arc, “La Pucelle d’Orleans,” in the thirty-six or -seven plays that have come down to us as Shakespearean occurs in *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth*, the English history play about the end of the Hundred Years War and the beginning of the Wars of the Roses. In this play, England is divided. *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* is also divided: its scenes and events alternate between England and France. The story takes place in two places at once. And France, too, is divided, not in the houses of Lancaster and York but into those of Orleans and Burgundy. The white armbands of the Armagnacs presage the white rose of York. What is more, the church itself is still divided between the heirs of the Urbanists and the Clementists, who had originally split in the Great Schism in the West (1378–1379) at the beginning of the reigns of Richard II in England (1377) and Charles VI in France (1380). What is called the “major tetralogy” of Shakespeare’s English history (*Richard II–Henry V*) thus spans with tolerable precision the reign of Charles VI Valois in France, who died in 1422, as well as the Great Western Schism up to the election of Pope Martin V (1417), following a treaty signed in London between the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund and King Henry V of England (1416). In this respect, as well as chronologically, *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* is associated with King Henry V, which it immediately follows. Not the play, but the character, as has often been asserted, of King Henry V has a certain “dual nature,” as perhaps befits one who is called a “mirror” of Christian kings (*Henry V*, II. Prolog). A mirror or image of a thing is of course not the same as the thing itself. This character is, also, not without controversy, and this controversy foreshadows much that is controversial in *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth*. Was he a Christian king, it is

asked, or a crafty political adventurer like Alexander or Caesar, bent on earthly glory?

In *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth*, Joan of Arc, "La Pucelle," is obviously the prime figure on the French side, or in the French aspect of the story, and Henry VI is the prime figure on the English side. The primacy of Henry (or any other), however, could seem to be challenged by the figure of Talbot. "The struggle between Talbot and Joan...is the main motive of the play."<sup>1</sup> Certainly, Talbot could appear in some scenes (for example, much of the second act) to be the great rival of Joan. Some have even gone so far as to suggest that this first of all of Shakespeare's plays was reworked altogether by Shakespeare out of an earlier play by someone else about Talbot, and that it could almost, if only almost, be called "The Tragedy of Talbot," even as it now stands.<sup>2</sup> Yet, apart from the fact that Talbot has not been seen by writers as a tragic figure in the play, La Pucelle has rivals enough besides Talbot and the English in *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth*. Joan has many rivals. For her part, it may be observed, she does not particularly notice Talbot among them. She certainly (even famously) does not linger over him for so much as a moment once he is dispatched in the fourth act (by others, not by her), any more than she does over any of the dramatic setbacks Shakespeare invents for her and the French. On the contrary, in their only single combat, she spares Talbot: as he emphasizes, he cannot overcome her (I.v.8-13). Rather, it is only Talbot who, like certain others, come after her—or, as the case may be, rivals who fly away from her and are conspicuous only by their absence when she (or France) needs them. She is always resourceful and about her business in the play. The English are only some among all the other rivals of hers. As for Talbot himself, the English chronicles' "terror of the French" (if not particularly of Joan), one must consider whether Joan is his rival or whether it is not, rather, Falstaff, the English coward who is ever so crucially defective and absent, who is the true rival of "brave Talbot." In any case, as Henry is, by the supposition, king of France as well as of England, his primacy must thus include the French part as well as the English part. Hence it is agreed all around that the play must justly bear his name.<sup>3</sup> English

patriotism, of which one hears so much in the discussion of the presentation of Joan of Arc in *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth*, would surely bear nothing else. Yet, in her closing statements Joan herself famously lays claim to the most royal blood. Given the con-tested blood of England and of France, her own claim might, at least as she may intend it, include the English side in some sense, as well as the French side. In other words, she may in some as yet unclear sense be the center of the English as well as of the French side.

If Dr. Johnson's statement is true that *The Second Part of King Henry the Sixth* "begins where the former ends, and continues the series of transactions of which it considers the first part already known," and therefore the Henry VI trilogy is a whole, it is equally true that the particular organization of the *First Part*, which has been the subject of so much scholarly criticism and comment since Malone, is not necessary to the story of Henry or of the Hundred Years War, or of the Wars of the Roses.<sup>4</sup> That particular organization or composition is hardly recognizable from what are called Shakespeare's "sources," much less determined by them.<sup>5</sup> Nothing in any source compels it. The story of the *First Part* develops around the story there of Joan of Arc: that is what organizes the play, even if it is not and even if it should not be entitled "Joan of Arc."<sup>6</sup>

The organization of *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* around the presentation of Joan of Arc—La Pucelle—will emerge more clearly than it otherwise might if it is borne in mind that the presentation of Joan is obviously not historical and that Shakespeare obviously lets us see on its surface that it is not historical. This is, of course, a commonplace. No student of the histories can possibly overlook it, or ever has overlooked it. Even the more elementary Shakespearean compendia observe it. The first act alone "is as much of the real Joan of Arc's life as the play reflects." "Act II does not so much as play havoc with historical fact as ignore it altogether." The rest is "entirely unhistorical" and "fictitious."<sup>7</sup> Yet much of what occurs in the first act is also not positively historical. It is true, of course, that much of the presentation or surface of the whole play is not precisely or positively historical, but that presentation should

be seen in the light of the presentation of Joan from the beginning. For it is not enough to say merely that the presentation of Joan of Arc in *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* is not historical. One must go on to emphasize that, for the most part, what Shakespeare organizes around Joan of Arc did not ever happen and was never believed by anyone to have happened in the manner in which it is presented. In a manner beyond all other historical Shakespearean personages—captains, kings, queens, senators, commons—Shakespeare's Joan of Arc and the events he presents around her is invented. She is Shakespeare's Joan of Arc. It is necessary, then, to ask why this is so, and what it means. The answer to this question is the heart of the play, and, thus, of more than merely this first Shakespearean play.

\*In other words, in order to understand *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth*, one must understand his Joan of Arc. Or, to put this another way, how we understand his Joan of Arc is how we will see and understand the play—and the plays that are associated with it, the Shakespearean history plays, or, in short, Shakespearean history. This means in the first place, at least, that we must see Shakespeare's invention for what it is. It is to this primary end that the outline here is mainly devoted.

In beginning this outline, however, it is hard to know where to begin. Naturally, we must begin at the beginning. Yet, *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* is among Shakespeare's most difficult plays, if it is not the most difficult. As we shall see, it may be very hard to see what the true beginning is. In any case, before we can even ask this question in its fullness, it is necessary to notice the variety of scholarship and commentary over the centuries even on the very canonicity of the play itself and the date of its authorship.<sup>8</sup> These subjects were not ingenious distractions. The grew out of conventional perceptions of the play (along with the light shed by such "evidence" as items from Henslowe's diary) and, primarily, out of the figure of Joan of Arc herself, including the admitted controversy about that figure.<sup>9</sup>

Some of the scholarly debate about the authenticity, unity, and dating of *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* has been inspired less by

the play itself (or by the subsequent second and third parts on the folio) than by the existence of quarto editions of the later Henry VI plays early in the folio of 1623 (the "First Folio," gathered and published by Shakespeare's most intimate friends and colleagues), which itself is explicitly and emphatically meant (apart from the curiosity of dating) to be decisive on all such points (folio, "To the Great Variety of Readers").<sup>10</sup> Because the extant quartos include parts two and three together (under different titles), it has been supposed that they perhaps constitute a two-part play and that the first part is independent, etc. This opinion, in one aspect, and derived from other kinds of considerations pertaining to the contemporary public's perception of the Wars of the Roses, perhaps has some weight. As Dr. Johnson writes of the third part, it "is only divided from the former for the convenience of exhibition, for the series of action is continued without interruption, nor are any two scenes of any play more closely connected than the first scene of this play with the last of the former." Still, he holds that the first part is closely connected to the second for similar reasons, and that they make an internally consistent dramatic whole. (He is writing in part in answer to one who has doubted the coherence of the Henry VI plays.)

To help resolve any serious issue on these points beyond what Dr. Johnson has said, recall that still other quartos showing other things confirming the folio of 1623 might have been lost, after all, and, more importantly, to see that the existing quartos clearly understand and present the second and third parts as containing the substantive maturity of the Wars of the Roses. They may (implicitly) associate the first part primarily with the end of the Hundred Years War. In any case, we here pay no attention to these quartos not only because their texts are inferior to that of the folio of 1623 but also because they do not present or understand Shakespeare's tetralogies—or, if you like, their immediate purposes are such that they are unconcerned with the minor tetralogy. Once this overarching feature is considered, the unity of these parts is evident, just as Johnson, Schlegel, Sarrazin, Henneman, Alexander, Mincoff, and many others of otherwise diverse views have indicated. However, it is not yet enough to observe that the three parts

of *King Henry VI* constitute an intentional trilogy, for this "trilogy" constitutes the large part of an intentional quartet or tetralogy—and more: the most essential part of both the English historical tetralogies, from *Richard II* through the Henrys (the so-called "Henriads") to *Richard III*. Of these, the three parts of *Henry VI* are certainly the earliest, and of these, the first part is the earliest, and hence must be the primary guide.<sup>11</sup> It provides the true origin and deepest clue to Shakespeare's English history plays.<sup>12</sup>

*The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* is in certain respects the masterpiece of the "minor tetralogy of which it forms the first part, immediately following *King Henry the Fifth*, if not of all the English history plays. This claim will doubtless seem unusual if it is forgotten by critics bored with "drums and trumpets" that actual stage success is also some significant part of a playwright's mastery. The first known piece of Shakespearean review or commentary, often quoted and standing at the head of centuries of who knows how many Shakespearean commentaries are other Shakespeareana, is precisely about the great stage of success of *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth*. Many have noted that, so far as anything from this first historical reference might be inferred, *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* was apparently an extremely popular work, showing to "ten thousand spectators at least (at several times)." It is said that "it is even likely that in its earliest production *1 Henry VI* was the theatrical hit of the year."<sup>13</sup> (And, apparently, when the Joan and Talbot scenes are not excised but left intact, it has seemed popular whenever it has been acted thereafter.)<sup>14</sup> After Shakespeare's own time, when *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* has been less in evidence (significantly due to controversy about the portrayal of Joan of Arc), laurels for his historical mastery often go to *Richard III*, the last play of the minor tetralogy, concluding the part of the octet begun by *Henry VI*, or, more usually, to *King Henry the Fifth*, the last play of the major tetralogy, immediately preceding *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth*. There, in *King Henry the Fifth*, the crucial controversy (such as there is) is all about the character of the king, upon which, apparently, all hangs. The dual quality of this character (and hence, in another form, the critical

controversy) is extended in *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* to the whole subject or matter of the play itself, which is, therefore, unclear.<sup>15</sup> Shakespeare's Joan of Arc is the guide to the matter.

Shakespeare's historical octet presents his interpretation of Plantagenet or Angevin politics as it bears on Elizabethan England from the reign of Richard II or before to that of Henry VII Tudor, or after, who traced his Lancastrian claim through John of Gaunt (*Richard II* l.i.1), and who was, furthermore, also the grandson of Katherine of Valois, wife of Henry V, and Owen Tudor. His marriage will unify the houses of Lancaster and York (and Valois) and end once and for all the Wars of the Roses, as Henry V had wished his marriage to unify France and England and end once and for all the Hundred Years' War (*Henry V*, V.ii.347ff; *Richard III*, V.v *ad fin*). Most of the perceived inconsistencies in plot and characterization of the problemata that might seem worthy of mention in these plays will, I believe, be resolved once the plays are seen as all constituting one internally consistent whole and, also, as distinct from chronicle history. (Of course, it goes without saying that they were not all written at once or staged at once, although they may well have been conceived or outlined at once.) We have observed that the peculiar organization of *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* is not compelled by history or by Shakespeare's sources. We may go further, and, indeed, we should go further to say that the story of Joan of Arc in particular is altogether unnecessary to tell the story of the Wars of the Roses (especially as it concerns the Yorkists) or that of the reign of Henry VI. These stories could be told without ever having heard of Joan of Arc—this is, after all, commonplace in contemporary surveys of English history—the more especially as they are thought ultimately to be representative merely of English dissension. Hall's *Union of the Two Noble and Illustrious Families of Lancaster and York*, which tells of the noble death of Talbot, "the thirteenth day of July in this year," 1453, at Bordeaux, as much as possible does so, to say nothing of Grafton, Fabyan, or, obviously, Foxe. Even Holinshed himself minimizes her story in his account of these years. Compared to Shakespeare's dramatic account, she takes up relatively little space in his *Chronicle*—at least until

French scenes, by way of preparing for the then imminent first appearance of Joan of Arc herself. Shakespeare (who presents no explicit reference at all to English *Chronicles* of Holinshed or others) has a certain one of the French dukes refer explicitly to the *Chronicles* of Jean Froissart, the innovative, impartial, dialogical, wandering minstrel or chronicler and so-called "Herodotus of the Hundred Years War." Of course, the work of the Benedictine Froissart (among other things) particularly chronicled the court of Edward III, as well as the birth, reign, and death, of Richard II, and the assumption of the English throne by Henry IV, Bolingbroke. (Froissart himself explicitly associated this assumption of the throne by Lancaster with things written in the *Roman de Brut* and hence with Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*.) Shakespeare's French duke describes Froissart's *Chronicles* as, in a certain way, themselves applicable at the moment and to the action of *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth*. Froissart is the only literary or historical authority (save one) who is explicitly referred to by name in the work. The reference to his *Chronicles* is not an unimportant one, and we will return to it at the proper place to consider its applicability. For the moment it is enough to have established clearly that the author is fully "self-conscious" in his authorial pursuit of the larger unity represented by the octet already even in the beginning part of the first act of *1 Henry VI*. Nor is the end of the Hundred Years War the only way or even the primary way in which *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* completes the account of Henry of Monmouth or *King Henry the Fifth* itself. We will return in due course to this question, as well.

First, however, it will be useful to return briefly to the point noted earlier according to which *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* might conceptually and dramatically be independent of the *Second Part of Henry the Sixth* even though these compose the first two parts of a whole trilogy: *King Henry the Sixth*. That is, it is necessary to see precisely how it is that *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth*, while being part of a larger whole, also in a sense stands alone and independent of the whole of which it is a part. This exercise will help us begin to see the *First Part* for what it is. We can see this apparent independence easily by first

her trial, when Holinshed goes out of his way to cite various (and conflicting) sources from here and there as to the precise manner of her capture and some of her statements before her judges. In this, he presages on a small scale what Shakespeare will go well out of his way to set forth in an elaborately complete English history play on the subjects referred to above. Shakespeare dramatically achieves (and simultaneously masks) this sweeping detour, or apparent detour, by the invention of the great stage hero and noble victim, Talbot. Talbot is easily the "loudest" character in the play—and Talbot's story the most immediately absorbing—if not in all the English histories. As the audience of *2 Henry IV* loves to laugh at the gipping and knavish Falstaff, the audience of *2 Henry IV* love to weep at the proud and earnest Talbot. From beginning to end, Talbot's story in *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* is organized around the story of Joan of Arc. Their relation is the essence of the Shakespearean history play. The exaggerated Talbot is the stalking horse, not to say the Trojan horse, of the story of Joan of Arc, the centerpiece of Shakespeare's history of England.

In a celebrated work of the last century, Professor Ulrici observed that "The *First Part* [of *King Henry the Sixth*] forms the real conclusion to *Henry V*, for it is here that we have the termination of the war which was there represented."<sup>16</sup> This statement is both more and less true than Ulrici means. He means that the play extends from the death of Henry V in 1422 as far as 1453 as the death of Talbot at Bordeaux (Chatillon), where Edward III had held court and Richard of Bordeaux (Richard II Lionheart) was born. This period is counted the English defeat or end of the Hundred Years War, and of the whole of which the success of Henry V represents the English peak. Yet the Hundred Years War is not only represented in *King Henry the Fifth*. It is represented also in both parts of *King Henry the Fourth* and in *Richard II*. What is called the Hundred Years War was begun by Edward III, whose reign is recalled in one or another way throughout the octet. *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* thus in some sense represents the culmination of all these earlier plays, not only *Henry V*. We are alerted to this fact, for example, in the beginning of the second scene of the first act, the first of the play's

omitting the *First Part* altogether and directly comparing the last scene of *King Henry the Fifth* with the first scene of the *Second Part of King Henry the Sixth* (Dr. Johnson asserts: "the voice of Shakespeare himself...refers to the second play [2 *Henry VI*] in this epilog to *Henry V*." Yet, setting aside this harmless assertion about the epilog, these scenes go together. They mirror one another. They reveal one another, like heads and tails. The last scene of *King Henry the Fifth* portends a great political and, what is more, an apparently happy domestic marriage, and agreeably concludes, for Henry, the very favorable terms for it. The first scene of *The Second Part of King Henry the Sixth* portends an unhappy marriage from every point of view, and reveals the terms that actually brought the end of the Hundred Years War and ensured the Plantagenet civil war of the Roses. The opening scene of the latter play is an obvious and, from the point of view of the more veteran principals like Gloucester, also a bitter parody of the last scene of the former play, *King Henry the Fifth*, politics, as well as Henry's myopia, which are shown to everyone and apparently fully accounted for in the first scene of the *Second Part of King Henry the Sixth* itself quite as well as they are by anything in the play that actually does precede it. The Hundred Years War of the major tetralogy, one might say, is internalized as the Wars of the Roses of the minor tetralogy. We do not need the play that actually precedes it to explain any of this in the context of the terms of Margaret of Anjou's marriage with Henry VI. That play stands independently in this sense, and thus could be withdrawn in this sense from the minor tetralogy. Many have argued that this is exactly what should be done, and some editors have actually gone so far as to take the last part of the last scene of *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth*, where it is believed to be "tacked on," merely "an afterthought," and so on, and put it into the beginning of the *Second Part of King Henry the Sixth*.<sup>17</sup> Yet, if the *First Part* does not need the *Second Part* for anything, the *Second Part* (and the plays that follow) does need the *First Part*. We shall see that, if the *Second Part* does not need the *First Part* to explain itself in the sense just described, it still needs the *First Part* to understand itself fully—to answer the question,

for example, of how affairs got so precisely from just a fine and happy marriage at the very end of *King Henry the Fifth* to such an ugly, unhappy one at the very beginning of the *Second Part of King Henry the Sixth*. Where was the mistake, if the question may be put so? The answers would be worth knowing.

These rather slight considerations about a certain perceived independence of *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* help prepare us to see more clearly what the precise character of the independence of the play is. As we have indicated, it is widely noted that the events of the play span the first thirty-one years of the roughly fifty-year reign of Henry VI, as Shakespeare presents it, from the death of Henry V and the proclamation of Henry VI in 1422 to the death of the Talbots in 1453. However, we may suggest that this observation, which is widely held, and understandably so, given the onstage presentation of the play, contains an oversight. The events spanned by the play include an event that occurred in 1456. The event has been overlooked by writers because they have not noticed any reference to it in the play. The reference in question occurs in the antepenultimate line of the first act, which is held by all to be the most accurate portion of the play, historically, as it concerns Joan of Arc, and the portion of the play that, as a whole, depicts the triumph of Joan of Arc. There (I.v.28–29), the French king, Charles VII, proclaims that "No longer on Saint Denis will we cry / But Joan La Pucelle shall be France's saint." This is not an historic proclamation by Charles VII at any time in Joan's life or his own, at Orleans or elsewhere. It is beyond his royal prerogative, if not a poet's. (In any case, for his own part, Charles VII again calls on Saint Denis already at III.ii.18–19. Saint Denis was the popular patron saint of France; Joan of Arc herself was of course not canonized as a saint for another 325 years or more after Shakespeare wrote *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth*.) The statement appears to allude, rather, to the historic proclamation made not by Charles VII but by Calixtus III in 1456, speaking for the church (including the church in England, as well as France) and not for France, that Joan of Arc was innocent of all the charges that had been brought against her, and that the charges were

null and void. The appellate review leading to this finding had been instigated not by Charles VII or his court but by Joan's mother, Isabella, and surviving brothers. If this observation is accepted, and if it is recalled, as well, that Charles VI, father of Katherine, wife of Henry V, and of Charles VII, died a little over one month after Henry V, in 1422, then we can say that *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* spans roughly the public life of Joan of Arc from 1422, just before her first vision and her first trip to Vaucouleurs (cf. Shaw, *Saint Joan*, scene I) to 1456, twenty-five years after her execution and three years after the death of the Talbots, when she was declared innocent of the charges that had been brought against her, and that this is the essential reason for the organization and structure of *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth*. It accounts for why the play is, in a sense, independent of the whole of which it is otherwise an intimate part. (The second part spans from the marriage of Margaret of Anjou and Henry VI, just before her coronation, May 30, 1445, to defeat of the Roses at St. Albans, May 23, 1455). In any case, the reference just cited represents the first time in a significant popular document in the English language that Joan of Arc is referred to as a Christian saint.

It is almost too well known to bear further repetition that the status of *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* became increasingly controversial in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly in regard to the role of Joan of Arc. It has become a commonplace that her portrayal was found "repellant" and "depraved," and hence unshakable. The same view is taken in the twentieth century by no less a figure than Shaw. In the preface to his *Saint Joan* (regarded by most writers as his greatest play), he remarks that *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* "grossly libels her in its concluding scenes in deference to Jingo patriotism," and he refers to the play as "supposedly tinkered by Shakespeare." By way of excuse, it has mainly been held by critics that Joan was necessarily an unpopular figure in Elizabethan England, of course, and Shakespeare merely went along with the common opinion, and that, on top of this, the composition of the play in any case belongs

to the period of Shakespeare's youthful apprenticeship as a playwright, and he may well have merely tinkered, to use Shaw's term, perhaps along with several others, with someone else's play. These assertions are feeble and do not reach the issues indicated in the general reaction against the portrayal of Joan in the play. If Joan of Arc was so unpopular in Elizabethan England, after all, then there is obviously no reason to have brought her story forward in the first place, which the play so manifestly does, against the authority of the chronicles, given the latitude of dramatic necessity and license. To argue otherwise, one would have to take the position, which cannot find any basis in the play itself, that Shakespeare's intention is to go well out of his way to portray her, either for its own sake or merely as a useful foil for the English, as a figure of cheap fun and common English mockery over an imaginary public life of twenty-five years. Yet, to say nothing of other things, in the play she is mocked quite as much by the French as by the English, and such an intention would in any event amount to no more than obsequious malice—which Shakespeare is able to dramatize for what it is effectively enough in this play as well as others. With respect to the second point, that Shakespeare was green and inexperienced, etc., it is not borne out by the play, which is, after all, contained in the First Folio itself, any more than the first point. Besides, no one is interested in the opinions an immature second-rater may have about anything, even a merely allegedly immature second-rater, least of all about how to portray a Christian saint. This is, admittedly, not an easy task, if it is not the most difficult task a serious dramatist could set for himself. Hence, we want to know why Shakespeare, acknowledged the greatest dramatist since Sophocles and Aristophanes (and, by no less an authority than Dryden, even claimed a greater), handled a Christian saint in such a manner, whenever he may have written the play.

The only way to do this with any hope of satisfaction is to interpret the play carefully from the beginning.—

*The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* is the only one of the Plantagenet history plays to begin at a funeral. It is the only play by

Shakespeare to begin at a funeral. It is an auspicious beginning. The atmosphere is funereal (the stage directions in later editions call for a dirge). It begins in death. Surely things can only improve. How could they get worse? At a funeral in Westminster Abbey (the Bishop of Winchester is present), we naturally think of faith and hope and resolution, of the resurrection and eternal life, of the reward for having fought the good fight and freedom in the eternal truth. The only way things could get worse would be if there were no hope, is no hope, no true hope, but only the sound and fury of the hurly-burly. Hence, in our weakness, we may falter and seek for signs to confirm hope: we may yearn for signs. Bedford, Regent of France, the speaker who opens the play, speaks of signs. The signs of which he speaks are not personal, however, but of political import. This is not simply a funeral, a personal funeral such as awaits all, but what is called a state funeral. Where we might have expected (setting aside the author's epilog) to see the sumptuous state wedding and coronation of the new queen promised at the end of the prior play, the last play of the first half of the octet, we here, in the first play of the second, get in their place a state funeral and dirges. All hopes, and such high and fine hopes they were, unglimped almost anywhere else in the histories, are dashed in unrelieved gloom. In what can we place hope now? Little wonder the Regent Bedford speaks of signs. The promised wedding and coronation of the new queen must be put off until the beginning of the next play. The new king is now only nine months old, and not yet even proclaimed, much less crowned. (His mother is moved out of the way by the historical guardianship of Exeter and Winchester, which is here dramatically conflated to the guardianship of Exeter.)

John Plantagenet (or Angevin) of Lancaster, Duke of Bedford, brother of the dead king, uncle of the young prince, has played a long if not leading role in arriving at this ominous moment in the octet. He has appeared before us in the first and second parts of *King Henry the Fourth* (as Prince of Lancaster), and in *King Henry the Fifth*. He has risen now to the position of Regent of France. He is not the king of France, but, as we should say, the "acting" king of France. It is in this capacity that he has

the honor of opening this play, and his doing so reminds us that Charles VI, king of France, is, like Henry V of England, also just dead. At the beginning, Bedford speaks, or would speak, for France as well as for England, although he emphasizes England. This Regent of France himself will not outlive this play, but will die in the fateful city of Rouen. He already foresees many changes. In some of the most well-known lines in the play (for reasons of style, Coleridge famously doubted they could have been Shakespeare's), he implores heavenly bodies to right the disorder that is in the heavens. His wish in the opening lines of *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* is reminiscent of the earnest wish of Henry IV, if it is not simply identical to it, in the opening lines of *The First Part of King Henry the Fourth* as he prepares to set out on his promised journey to Jerusalem (cf. *Richard II*, end). He has "taken the cross," and pledged to undertake a Crusade. Where Bedford implores heavenly bodies to sustain the order Henry V achieved, Henry IV implored the "meteors of a troubled heaven" to sustain the order he had, by overthrowing Richard II, achieved himself as he begins to make his way to Jerusalem (*1 Henry IV*, I.i. 9-16). As it turns out, he is prevented. He does not make the promised journey. In the earlier Henriads, the closest the king is ever able to come to Jerusalem is at least to die in Jerusalem (the "Jerusalem Chamber" in this same abbey [*2 Henry IV*, IV.iv-v]). Henry V leaves this promised journey to Jerusalem to his son, just as he leaves the throne of England to him (*Henry V*, V.ii.200-203). Looking forward, we see that the king with Henry IV's crown will begin his own nominal trip to Jerusalem here, rather, in *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth*, with his betrothal to Margaret, daughter of Reignier, Duke of Anjou and Maine, King of Naples, Sicily—and Jerusalem, although it will not be completed until the parody of Henry V's state wedding in the first scene of the next play. It is only a paradoxical journey to Jerusalem. The "Christian prince, King Henry," as Reignier calls him (*1 Henry VI*, V.iii.171-72), who is of unquestioned of somewhat bookish religiosity, will not visit Jerusalem any more than he will rule England or even his own house (cf. *3 Henry VI*, V.v.6-7).



But who will be murdered? The case is apparently not so clear as that of *Julius Caesar*. Yet, obviously, Henry VI will be murdered—fifteen acts later in the last act of the trilogy (3 *Henry VI*, V.vi.57-58), in the same tower where some of those now speaking will soon struggle (I.iii). Much of the opening and closing sequences of the first scene of 1 *Henry VI* concern who will ultimately control him, and with him the kingdom. As it turns out, he is murdered as a “prophet” in the midst of his prophesying. But, whatever else he may be, Henry VI is obviously not a Caesar, and Caesar is not a prophet who dies in the prophesying. Shocking and damnable as it surely is, Henry’s is not even regarded by the dramatic principals as the most shocking and damnable murder in the trilogy. The most damnable murder is said to be that of the young prince, Edward, as much as the young Talbot as his own father is unlike the elder Henry, and rightful heir to Henry’s crown. This murder, says the queen, of a brave young innocent of the true blood by a usurper, is worse than the murder of Caesar. In comparison with this, according to her, “They that stabbed Caesar shed no blood at all, did not offend, nor were not worthy of blame” (3 *Henry VI*, V.v.53-54). This murder is as much worse than the murder of Julius Caesar (for, according to the queen, it shed the true and innocent blood of a child and of divine right; cf. Hooker, Book VIII, *Ecclesiastical Polity*) as the soul of Henry V is greater and brighter than the star of Caesar. Was Caesar a political savior or a usurper? How is Henry V’s soul brighter than Caesar’s? In any case, the murder of Prince Edward and his mother’s comparison of his murderers with the murderers of Caesar prepares the way, as do the sons who kill fathers and the fathers who kill sons in the *Second Part*, for the murder of King VI at the end: “Pardon me, God, I knew not what I did: / And pardon me, Father, for I knew not thee” (3 *Henry VI*, II.v.69-70).

Yet, whatever his blood, Prince Edward is obviously no more a Caesar than his father or the young Talbot. And, Gloucester, the Protector, who is among those immediately present at the trilogy’s opening and who is also murdered among rumors of dreams and sorcery (2 *Henry V*, III.i-ii), is himself more the elder Talbot than anything resembling Julius Caesar. There are many indications that might lead

Bedford is fearful, the time is out of joint, and, although it could perhaps at first seem in some sense “anachronistic,” however identical the sentiments of Bedford and Henry IV may be on the point just noted, no reader of Shakespeare after the publication of the Folio can think of “comets, importing changes of times and states” at the beginning of 1 *Henry VI* without also thinking at once of all the signs and portents that characterize his *Julius Caesar*, the play about the greatest of his ancient princes, not to say his play about signs and portents. There, the ominous signs and portents signal and portend division and disorder in the republic as in nature, and seem to foretell every kind of change. Exeter, who speaks almost immediately after Bedford in the first scene, also thinks of Romans: he compares those present at the funeral to conquered captives in a Roman triumph before speaking of “planets of mishap” (19-24; compare *Henry V*, prologue, 24-28). Certainly, Bedford himself, at least, specifically has Julius Caesar much in his mind in thinking of the dead English king. At what turns out to be the conclusion of the brief opening exchanges of the play’s first scene, he refers again to the struggle of the heavenly bodies and implores the soul of Henry V to hold the heavens in order: “A more glorious star thy soul will make than Julius Caesar, or bright” (55-56). Henry V is like Julius Caesar, only greater. Gloucester compares Henry V to the sun shining at midday (12-14; cf. *Henry V*, IV.i. 37-47). The author almost in his own name calls him the “star of England” in the epilog to the prior play—a reference that in one sense is not yet even seventy-five lines away from Bedford’s comparison of Henry’s star with Caesar’s star. Henry V is England’s Caesar. Bedford’s lines about Henry V and Caesar’s stars close the opening exchanges of the play, which Bedford had begun, as the author had closed *King Henry the Fifth*, by speaking of comets and stars. Yet, it is impossible to leave it as this, for the signs and portents of *Julius Caesar* signal and portend civil broils, but not only civil broils. Above all, they also portend murder, if a controversial murder of state, as it were. They portend the murder of Julius Caesar.

We may wonder then, whether the movements of the heavenly bodies described by Bedford and Exeter do not portend some murder.

"sorcerers" may have brought about Henry's death through some spells or "magic verses."

These opening exchanges at the funeral are interrupted at a certain moment not by comets but by unexpected messengers, not to say angels, three of them, one after the other. These messengers announce news of changing affairs in far-off France, the Plantagenet regent Bedford's own realm. Although she is not mentioned by name, the news borne by the unexpected messengers is above all and throughout news about Joan of Arc and her consequences. La Pucelle has arrived. Is it she whom the heavenly comets portend?<sup>18</sup> Can this presentation of such news in the middle of the funeral of Henry V, the state funeral of the supposed mirror of Christian kings, ruler of this empire that already compares itself to Rome, in some way be the sign we have mentioned? Admittedly, the news portends no more than Bedford's references to struggling heavenly bodies already portend. Yet, it is evident to everyone that the messengers speak prophetically, or rather angelically, in announcing a jumble of events still long in the future as already having taken place in the past. It is also evident that the message they bring completes the funeral and brings it to a close, returning those who had unwillingly but apparently inexorably glorified the victory of death if not to life, at least to some kind of action.

Certainly, we will need to return to all of these points in the course of our study. For the moment, it is enough for us to see that all the stars and signs appearing in the first scene may point to Joan of Arc, who will appear in the second scene. In the second scene, the French king at the beginning also speaks of heavenly bodies and at the end then explicitly identifies Joan of Arc as one of them now on earth (ii.1-2, 144). The first scene, whatever else it is, is above all the preparation for her appearance in the second scene.<sup>19</sup> We are thus at least to some extent prepared to hear her say when she finally appears in the middle of the second scene, while she is calming and encouraging the French before beginning the relief of the siege that "now"—i.e., now that she has arrived—it is she and none other who is, in a sense, like Julius Caesar: "Now I am like that proud insulting ship which Caesar bear at once" (ii.

any reasonable man to suspect Gloucester may be the victim of crime, including, perhaps above all, the superstitious ambitions of his own wife, but none of them are portents. Along with those of Rutland and York, these are the great murders of the trilogy, and none save the murderers of the putative representative of divine right are explicitly compared and contrasted with the murderers of Caesar, and none of the murders, including the murder of the king which others prepare, resembles that careful assassination in the very heart of the republic. They are not controversial murders but only wicked and hence shocking. They all reveal the depths of wickedness and selfish ambition, but they do not illumine the perspective from which wickedness can be seen. Is any particular murder portended, then, by the struggling heavenly bodies at the beginning of the trilogy, or do the comets there betoken only the discordant changes of time and state—including whatever murders may lie in the train of such changes, all and none?

Bedford, Regent of France, compares Henry V with Julius Caesar. He prays that the soul of Henry, brighter than Caesar's star, will sustain order after his death as the star of Caesar did not, but only left the way sure for civil war, even though Bedford observes in the play's first line that with Henry's death day is now turned to night, and himself practically prophesies every kind of civil disorder. Surely now, if ever, light is needed: otherwise there is only shadow without substance. Yet Caesar was murdered; Henry V was not. In this, Henry V and Julius Caesar are very different, and it is just this point that Bedford raises in his speaking of "bad revolting stars," and that Exeter almost immediately takes up in speaking of the "planets of mishap" (23-27). To have died in his prime and with such a plenitude of happiness ahead of him and for all those around him is-almost like a murder. One looks for someone to blame. After thinking of captives in a Roman triumph, Exeter thinks of France in connection with the movements of heavenly bodies. More philosophical than Bedford, or perhaps only less dreamy, Exeter wonders whether struggling heavenly bodies are to be blamed more than the subtle-witted French—out of fear, he suspects, French "conjurers" and

138-39). One may doubt, whatever (if anything) she may have thought of Henry V, whether Joan of Arc, herself rustic and unlettered, ever heard of Julius Caesar. This speech is not Joan of Arc; it is Plutarch, that is, it is Shakespeare, who tells us that she is "like" Caesar, who would not be drowned or blocked from his course, as recorded by Plutarch, yet whose ship, like the *White Ship* in 1120, did not come in. It is she, Joan of Arc, the new ship like Julius Caesar's, to whom the signs point. One is thus also prepared, then, for the genuinely terrible thought that, like Julius Caesar, Joan of Arc may be murdered. Is Joan in some way a prophet who is murdered in the midst of her prophecies, like York says of the English King Henry VI? Is she like an innocent child defending divine right against all wickedness and vicious usurpers, as the English prince Edward? What would the murder of Joan of Arc mean?

Joan's actual or historical trial was private; *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* as a whole, including her trial, is, to say the least, entirely public. Her trial is among the most public of all trials—and it is certainly the most public Shakespearean trial. It is only her historic death, which was actually or historically public, that (like Gloucester's) Shakespeare does not show but removes off scene. The trial is the thing. The audience must judge, and shall—Shaw has been anticipated, and more: his preface, play, and epilog together. No serious reader is free from this responsibility. As is perhaps typical when attempting to test saints, one is actually most tested oneself. In discharging this responsibility it is necessary not only but ever to bear in mind what may be taken as the central theme of the play—the simple motto of the Order of the Garter of Saint George founded by Edward III and described by Froissart: "*Honi soit qui mal y pense*." And, after all, like Bedford at Henry's funeral and Talbot before Bordeaux, for example (and here for the moment setting *Henry VIII* entirely to one side), both Henry VII and Richard III advance on Bosworth field with the cry of "Saint George"; it would be useful to be able to discriminate reliably between such claims and appeals (*1 Henry VI*, I.i.154, IV.ii.55-56, vi.1; *Richard III*, V.iii.270, 349-50). For this, one must actually learn oneself from the beginning. *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* itself is the essential guide provided

by Shakespeare for this learning. It is not by an immature hand. Certainly, we need not be either superstitious or suspicious but only deliberate and alert in looking forward warily from Bedford's portentous comets and Caesarian stars and Exeter's planets of mishap and subtle French magic in the play's opening lines ultimately to the murder of Joan of Arc by usurpers. This event and all that it means and implies is the true and principal subject of *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth*.

To begin to see how this event is connected to the story of King Henry VI, whose birth or fine promise the comets might have foretold but did not, however much they presage his death at the conclusion of the trilogy fifteen acts later, it is necessary to return again to the beginning.