

Berna KÖSEOĞLU*

Shakespeare's Henry V: The Idea of Englishness and the Representation of the King, Henry V

Shakespeare'in V. Henry Adlı Oyununda İngiliz Milliyetçiliği Kavramı ve Kral V. Henry'nin Yanstılışı

Abstract

Henry V, one of the most significant historical plays of W. Shakespeare, reveals the politics of England during the period of the King, Henry V by bringing fact and fiction together. Throughout the play, the idea of Englishness is stressed through the expressions of Henry V, who emphasizes the importance of national spirit and patriotism for the development of the country. Considering the characteristics of the King in the play, it is clear that his actions, decisions and strategies play a very significant role in the political glories achieved. In this study, the tactics employed by Henry V in the work to overcome the enemies and to establish peace in the country will be analysed, therefore the aim of the article is to discuss the impact of the intelligence of the King, Henry V and the devotion to English identity upon the victories of the English nation in *Henry V*.

Keywords: Shakespeare, History Play, Henry V, Englishness, Patriotism

Jel Codes: Y3, Y5, Y8

Özet

W. Shakespeare'in en öne çıkan tarihsel oyunlarından biri olan *V. Henry*, Kral V. Henry dönemi boyunca gerçekleşen İngiliz siyasi olaylarını, gerçek ve kurguyu bir araya getirerek gözler önüne sermektedir. Oyun boyunca, ülkenin gelişimi için ulusal ruhun ve vatanseverliğin önemini vurgulayan V. Henry'nin ifadeleri aracılığıyla İngiliz kimliği vurgulanmaktadır. Oyunda Kralın özellikleri dikkate alındığında, eylemlerinin, kararlarının ve stratejilerinin elde edilen siyasi başarılarda ne kadar önemli bir rol oynadığı açıktır. Bu çalışmada, eserde düşmanları yenmek ve ülkede huzuru sağlamak için V. Henry tarafından uygulanan taktikler incelenecektir, bu sebeple bu makalenin amacı Kral V. Henry'nin zekasının ve İngiliz kimliğine bağlılığın İngiliz ulusunun zaferleri üzerindeki etkisini tartışmaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Shakespeare, Tarihsel Oyun, Henry V, İngiliz Kimliği, Vatanseverlik

Jel Kodları: Y3, Y5, Y8

* Yrd. Doç. Dr., Kocaeli Üniversitesi Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Bölümü İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı (e-posta: berna.koseoglu@kocaeli.edu.tr)

Introduction

Shakespeare's history plays reflect the political, economic and social condition of his time and highlight the acts and attitudes of the English kings. When the situation of Shakespeare's England is taken into account, nationalism and patriotism of the English and the struggles of the nation to stand against the threats of the 'other' can be noticed. In this sense, the English nation can be seen as a union against the enemy under the reign of the King, Henry V, who inspired the nationalistic feelings of people and achieved to encourage the nation to come together for the sake of patriotism. Similarly, Shakespeare's "*Henry V* presents the anatomy of a war. We see the causes and the aftermath, the leaders and the common soldiers, the heroism that live in legend" (Leggatt, 1988: 114). The play arouses the feelings of the public, the idea of nationalism, heroism, and in this sense the characteristics of the King, Henry V play a fundamental role in his accomplishments and in the victories of the English army. Particularly, the king's background and experience during his father's usurpation of Richard II's throne in 1399 contributes to his development considerably (Corbet, 2015: 16). By means of his experiences, he was not only familiar with the issues of the government and the affairs of the king's council, but he was also occupied in combating the rebel of Owen Glendower in his own Welsh principality. Moreover, he was wrestling with the difficult situations of royal finance and the foreign policy (Saccio, 1977: 6). As a consequence, having been trained for the reign of a kingdom, Henry V came to the throne experienced in politics, administration, and warfare.

1. The Change in the Identity of the King, Henry V: From Prince Hal to Henry V

The characteristics of Henry V as a king attach great importance in spreading nationalism and patriotism among the English. In this manner, Shakespeare also combines fact and fiction and reflects the period of Henry V, in his play *Henry V*. In *Henry IV, Part I*, despite Henry V's, in other words, Prince Hal's involvement in the street life of London with the lower class and his wasting time with ordinary people in the taverns; in *Henry V*, as the king of the nation, he rules the country with great responsibility, courage and resolution, but "[h]ow exactly does King Henry IV's disappointing and worrisome son become so great a politician? Are there signs of budding political genius in Hal's early life?" (Spiekerman, 2012: 201). In other words, it is obvious that he has changed, revealed his true identity and turned out to be a determined and self-confident ruler considering the welfare of the nation as the character, Canterbury, indicates as follows:

The breath no sooner left his father's body,
But that his wildness, mortified in him,
Seemed to die too: yea, at that very moment,
Consideration like an angel came,
And whipped th' offending Adam out of him;
Leaving his body as a Paradise. (I, i, 25-30)

Thus, it is clear that the change in Henry V's approach and manners is underlined, which foreshadows his great deeds and achievements at the court and in state affairs. Similarly, in the Palace of the French King, the Constable warns the French Prince

Dauphin about the threat they may be faced with due to the talents and cleverness of Henry V:

O, peace, Prince Dauphin!
You are too much mistaken in this king:
Question your grace the late ambassadors,
With what great state he heard their embassy,
How well supplied with noble counsellors,
How modest in exception[...].(II, iv, 29-34)

In this respect, Henry V bewilders people owing to his skill to cheer his public, to unite the army and to fight against the enemy, as a result heroism, national spirit and patriotism dominate the work. The reflection of nationalism in the play portrays the devotion of the English to their state in history, so for the sake of their nation the English are ready to sacrifice themselves and to dedicate their glory to their country. As indicated by Champion along these lines:

The traditional view of the play is that its "chief shaping attitude is patriotism," its basis, the "growing national spirit." A "heroic folk play with an historical figure as its hero," it represents "spectacular patriotism," in the tradition that "war must be glorious if it is to stir men's enthusiasm." (1990: 17)

Consequently, the strong national feeling arising from English heroism and patriotism, comes to the fore with the efforts of Henry V and owing to his progress as a warrior-hero. English heroism, the glorious background of the nation and the necessity of self-sacrifice can be seen throughout the play.

2. The Emphasis on Nationalism and Patriotism in *Henry V*

As a history play, *Henry V*, thus, combines the realities of English history with fiction and achieves demonstrating the English identity and their efforts to overcome the threats coming from the other countries; it is also obvious in the words of Henry V in the play:

For God doth know how many now in health
Shall drop their blood in approbation
Of what your reverence shall incite us to.
Therefore take heed how you impawn our person,
How you awake our sleeping sword of war;
We charge you in the name of God, take heed:
For never two such kingdoms did contend
Without much fall of blood, whose guiltless drops
Are every one a woe, a sore complaint[...].(I, ii, 18-26)

This foreshadows the glorious actions of the English army against the enemy and the bloodshed that will be sacrificed for the sake of nationalism. Historically, when the turbulent time of Henry V is analyzed, Spanish and French threats and Ireland in revolt draw attention (Barr: 2011, para. 7, 14, 20). Similarly, in the play, owing to the French threat and alliance against the English, the English nationalism and patriotism can be defined as the only means to struggle against the 'other.' The splendid victories of the ancestors of Henry V are also mentioned by the character, Canterbury, in the play:

Look back into your mighty ancestors:
Go, my dread lord, to your great-grandsire's tomb,
From whom you claim; invoke his warlike spirit,
And your great-uncle's, Edward the Black Prince,
Who on the French ground played a tragedy,
Making defeat on the full power of France." (I, ii, 102-107).

In this view, when the English history is taken into consideration, the problem about the possession of the French crown comes to the fore. Edward III, who started the Hundred Years War, claimed a right on the French crown, therefore there appears the legal problem whether the French coronet can be possessed by the English (Smart, 1939: 28). In the play, the wars that occurred in English history as a consequence of the conflict between England and France are mentioned and the triumph of King Henry's ancestors is emphasized. In accordance with the heroic sense and patriotic power of the English predecessors, Henry V performs his task as a nationalist hero with his warlike spirit. So, "the play develops as a succession of epic tableaux that unfold preparations for impending action and the various facets of the great battle itself" (Iser, 1993: 169). In the play, the king is portrayed as a national hero who is self-confident and determined enough to rebel against the foreign threats, so King Henry V points out his power and greatness against the French army as follows:

But tell the Dauphin I will keep my state,
Be like a king, and show my sail of greatness,
When I do rouse me in my throne of France.
For that I have laid by my majesty,
And plodded like a man for working-days:
But I will rise there with so full a glory
That I will dazzle all the eyes of France. (I, ii, 274-280).

In this manner, Henry V's attempt and determination to conquer France and to unify his nation can be recognized, so that he will succeed in the Battle of Agincourt against the French and dazzle the eyes of the French. Therefore, Exeter lets the French King hear about the threat of Henry V in order to warn the French against the English strength and determinism as can be observed along these lines:

And bids you, in the bowels of the Lord,

Deliver up the crown, and to take mercy
On the poor souls, for whom this hungry war
Opens his vasty jaws: and on your head
Turning the widows' tears, the orphans' cries,
The dead men's blood, the pining maiden's groans,
For husbands, fathers, and betrothed lovers,
That shall be swallowed in this controversy. (II, iv, 102-109)

King Henry alerts the French King about the dangers of the war and its outcomes. In such a disorder, Englishness and patriotism can be described as the only way to challenge the 'other.' In the play, national unity, militarist expansionism, and the courage of the English can be noticed in these lines: "Now all the youth of England are on fire, / And silken dalliance in the wardrobe lies: / Now thrive the armourers, and honour's thought / Reigns solely in the breast of every man" (I, ii, 1-4). It is apparent that the nation is united to protect the country, to preserve the unity and to prevent the foreign threats; as a result, all the honourable youth of England are on fire for the sake of nationalism.

3. The Personal Characteristics of Henry V and the Effects of His Strategies upon the Victories of the English Nation

The contributions of Henry V to the progress of the state affairs and to the victories of the English army play a considerable role in the play. Since the king is represented as a courageous, self-determined, self-confident and humble ruler; the country, the state and the public undergo a glorious process, so "the progress of the warrior-hero is the progress of the play" (Holderness, 2000: 255). Under the reign of such a great king, the English army experiences a victorious and magnificence battle against the French. Even the loss of the soldiers in the battle does not discourage Henry V as he emphasizes: "If we are marked to die, we are enow / To do our country loss: and if to live, / The fewer men, the greater share of honour" (IV, iii, 20-22). In this sense, it is clear that nothing disheartens the king as long as the welfare of the country is concerned. Moreover, the king is aware of the fact that national unity, support and eagerness in defending the country are the only means to achieve the preservation of the state progress, nation's peace and safety. The insufficiency of the army and the wrong decisions of the king's captains can be overcome by a ruler like Henry V. Thus, "Shakespeare implies that the fault lies not in Henry's character or leadership, but in the less-than-harmonious working of his captains and in the cowardly, knavish behavior of a segment of his army" (Hunt, 2014: 10). The king's efforts to arouse the spirit of Englishness among the soldiers to help them gain their self-confidence work. As a result,

[i]n war, Henry's men - whether Irish or English, Scottish or Welsh, yeoman or earl - temporarily become a band of brothers, the many differences among them rhetorically and emotionally elided by the moving eloquence of the young king and the common experience they share. (Howard et al 4).

As a result, he motivates his soldiers for the war and leads his small army to success over the larger army of France. Although the soldiers are strangers to each other, they become brothers and support one another for the sake of nationalism. The king's encouraging them for a common goal and their devotion to their king and their country result in heroism. The necessity of commitment to national identity is indicated by Henry to inspire the nationalistic feelings:

In peace, there's nothing so becomes a man,
As modest stillness, and humility:
But when the blast of war blows in our ears,
Then imitate the action of the tiger:
Stiffen the sinews, conjure up the blood,
Disguise fair nature with hard-favoured rage. (III, I, 3-9)

On, on, you noblest English,
Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof:
Fathers, that like so many Alexanders,
Have in these parts from morn till even fought. (III, i, 17-20)

Be copy now to men of grosser blood,
And teach them how to war! And you, good yeomen,
Whose limbs were made in England; show us here
The mettle of your pasture: let us swear,
That you are worth your breeding – which I doubt not. (III, i, 24-28)

In this respect, Henry V heartens the soldiers in order to make them conscious of the importance of national unity, courage and self-confidence. So, the King achieves the sense of Englishness and patriotism by stirring the soldiers. "Henry V gives us the king in his public role first and foremost" (Jones, 1991: 133). In this manner, he inspires the citizens to make them realize the necessity of defending the country without any hesitation and of fighting against the enemy with fervour along these lines:

Defy us to our worst: for, as I am a soldier,
A name that in my thoughts becomes me best,
The gates of mercy shall be all shut up,
And the fleshed soldier, rough and hard of heart,
In liberty of bloody hand, shall range
With conscience wide as hell, mowing like grass

Your fresh fair virgins, and your flowering infants. (III, ii, 5-6, 10-14)

It can be realized that the English is likened to a grass mower, which symbolizes the English power and the unbeatable state of the nation against the French. Moreover, in the play Shakespeare also voices Henry's talent to beat the enemy. According to his stratagem, the first mercy is offered to the enemy (III, ii, 1-5); unless the opposed troop accepts the offer of mercy and peace, this will become a reason to start war, as a result of which terror will take place. In this respect, offering mercy, the English is described as merciful and tolerant; whereas the French is defined as pitiless and cruel due to their refusal of this offer. As a consequence, it can be indicated that the King emphasizes "the rightness of the English cause and the valour of the English armies in contrast with the over-confidence of the French" (Campbell, 1978: 288). In this sense, in order to stress the inevitability of determinism and gallantry for defeating the French army, Henry V visits the English host as mentioned by the chorus in this way:

The royal captain of this ruined band
Walking from watch to watch, from tent to tent,
Let him cry, "Praise and glory on his head!"
For forth he goes, and visits all his host,
Bids them good morrow with a modest smile,
And calls them brothers, friends, and countrymen. (IV, Prol. 29-34)

In the light of these lines, it is noticeable that as the king and the ruler of the country, Henry V attempts to give confidence to his soldiers by visiting their tents and calling them brothers, which will encourage them to be united as a nation against the enemy. "He speaks as a man who has been willing to grunt and sweat under the same weary load as his soldiers. Unlike the effete French generals, he is the working leader of a real working army" (Pearlman, 1992: 164). His communication with the soldiers, in other words with ordinary people, shows his ability to understand the feelings of the ordinary man in public. In this sense, his early life as Prince Hal in *Henry IV, Part I*, his dealing with the company of Falstaff, spending his time in the taverns of London and his communication with the lower class can be regarded as an education process for him, which contributes to his maturity and to the development of his understanding regarding the concerns and the emotions of lower class and ordinary people. As a result, by means of the moral lessons he learns from the lower class under the reign of his father Henry IV, he envisages the community totally and can easily be involved in their lives when he becomes Henry V. Therefore, disguised as an ordinary man, he says: "I am a gentleman of a company" (IV, i, 39). Then, he tries to show that the king is a common man and shares the fears and the worries the common people experience:

I think the king is but a man, as I am: the violet smells to him as it doth to me; the element shows to him as it doth to me; all his senses have but human conditions: his ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness he appears but a man; therefore when he sees reason of fears, as we do, his fears, out of doubt, be of the same relish as ours are: yet, in reason, no man should possess him with any appearance of fear, lest he, by showing it, should dishearten his army. (IV, i, 101-05, 107-11)

Hence, Shakespeare deconstructs the idea of monarchy and demystifies the understanding of kingship, so Henry V becomes Shakespeare's spokesman by demonstrating his modesty and humanity. While the monarchs are generally idealized and put on a pedestal, here Henry V is introduced as an ordinary human being. Consequently, Shakespeare emphasizes that what makes a king powerful is his position, crown, but basically he is a human being. As can be recognized, rather than stressing his authority as the king of the country, Henry V sees his position at the same level with an ordinary individual; this shows his humility unlike the boastful rulers, as a result he has interaction with his soldiers. "He knows the feelings of his soldiers; this is certainly why he prefers to circulate among them in disguise, getting to know them, and persuading them by argument rather than by authority" (Iser, 1993: 181). Unlike the kings who abuse their power upon the powerless, Henry V acts as an unselfish and humble king. While the French king is living in luxury, Henry V is sleeping with his soldiers with the intention of encouraging them. Thus, Henry V can be regarded as the people's king.

Moreover, as a self-assured, sharp and strong-minded king, Henry V can cope with all the difficulties and deprivations in the battle with France. In the play, it is apparent that "[a]gainst disease and overwhelming numerical odds he forges innovative battlefield strategy and an almost fanatical patriotism into a highly effective military machine" (Champion, 1990: 24). Despite the hard conditions and the exhausted position of soldiers in the battlefield, his determination to achieve victory by means of his strategies and owing to patriotism can be realized: "My ransom is this frail and worthless trunk; / My army, but a weak and sickly guard; / Yet, God before, tell him we will come on, / Though France himself, and such another neighbour, / Stand in our way..." (III, vi, 152-156). Thus, he wins the battle with France due to his courage, self-confidence and intelligence. In this perspective, it is clear that Henry V deceives the enemy by concealing the strength of his army, so he deliberately disguises his power and the force of the English army in order not to alarm the French army. In this respect, the French army will not prepare strongly by thinking that the English army is weak. This proves that Henry is an effective strategist owing to the plots he devises against the enemy.

Furthermore, cleverness of Henry is another important characteristics of him that shapes his attitudes and enables him to gain success and eliminate the obstacles on his way. For instance, he succeeds in overcoming the conspiracies against him. Against the alliance of Cambridge, Grey and Scroop with the French, Henry gives them letters in which he reveals that he is aware of their plot, but these three men think that they will be informed of their commissions, then they realize that Henry knows that they are traitors (II, ii). Instead of only giving the order of execution, he plays a trick on them as they do, later they are executed due to their conspiracy. Besides, with the intention of becoming the legal heir of the French throne, Henry V wins the favour of Katherine, the daughter of the French King Charles. Therefore, he becomes the legal heir to the throne not only by the permission of Charles, but also by his marriage with the daughter of the French King. As a quick-witted man, King Henry persuades Katherine to marry him:

Katherine. Is it possible dat I should love de enemy of France?

King Henry. No, it is not possible you should love the enemy of France, Kate; but, in loving me, you should 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. (V, ii, 171-178)

In this perspective, Henry accomplishes to attain the French throne by means of his intelligence and his ability to speak like a rhetorician wooer. It is no doubt that "Henry [...] professes love for his wife-to-be, and his performance is much more convincing. But the play makes it abundantly clear that he is marrying Katherine for political reasons" (Pudney, 2015: 168). His regarding marriage institution as a way to achieve political success also shows that he is clever enough to establish power in the state through marriage. Consequently, he persuades Catherine to realize that France and England are not enemies and their marriage will enable the unity of these two nations. It is apparent that Henry V achieves to strengthen not only the condition of the state but also his own position owing to his stratagems.

Conclusion

To conclude, Shakespeare portrays the condition of the English under the reign Henry V and reflects the achievements of King Henry in his play, *Henry V*. The battle between England and France, nationalistic feelings of the English and their unity against the enemy come to the fore in the play; as a consequence, the characteristics of Henry V as a king contributes not only to the victories of the English army, but also to the progress of the play. By his determinism, self-confidence and cleverness, Henry V performs his task effectively, achieves defeating the enemy and brings the nation together as a whole. Thus, the English witness national accomplishments and feel the national spirit under the reign of King Henry V, as a result combining the history of England with a fictional setting, Shakespeare sheds light on the idea of heroism in English nation and underlines the importance of national spirit for the development of the state.

References

Primary Source:

Shakespeare, William (1599). (1994). *Henry V*. Ed. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson. London: Wordsworth.

Secondary Sources:

Barr, Niall (2011). British History: The Threat of Invasion 1066-1789: An Overview. *BBC*. Retrieved January 10, 2017, from http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/normans/invasion_threat_01.shtml

- Campbell, Lily B (1978). *Shakespeare's "Histories": Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy*. San Marino, CA: Huntington Library.
- Champion, Larry S (1990). *'The Noise of Threatening Drum': Dramatic Strategy and Political Ideology in Shakespeare and the English Chronicle Plays*. Newark: U of Delaware P and London.
- Corbet, Anthony (2015). *Edward IV, England's Forgotten Warrior King: His Life, His People, and His Legacy*. Bloomington: I Universe.
- Holderness, Graham (2000). *Shakespeare: The Histories*. London: St Martin's.
- Howard, Jean E. and Phyliss Rackin (1997). *Engendering A Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare's English Histories*. London: Routledge.
- Hunt, Maurice (2014). The 'Breaches' of Shakespeare's *The Life of King Henry the Fifth*. *College Literature*, 41(4), 7-24.
- Iser, Wolfgang (1993). *Staging Politics: The Lasting Impact of Shakespeare's Histories*. (David Henry Wilson, Trans.). New York: Columbia UP.
- Jones, Robert C (1991). *These Valiant Dead: Renewing the Past in Shakespeare's Histories*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P.
- Leggatt, Alexander (1988). *Shakespeare's Political Drama: The History Plays and the Roman Plays*. New York: Routledge.
- Pearlman, Elihu (1992). *William Shakespeare: The History Plays*. New York: Twayne.
- Pudney, Eric (2015). Mendacity and Kingship in Shakespeare's *Henry V* and *Richard III*. *European Journal of English Studies*, 19(2), 163-175.
- Saccio, Peter (1977). *Shakespeare's English Kings: History, Chronicle, and Drama*. New York: Oxford UP.
- Smart, David A (1939). *Coronet*. (Vol. 5) No. 6. Chicago: Smart.
- Spiekerman, Tim (2012). The Making of A Politician: Shakespeare's Prince Hal at Work and Play. *Perspectives on Political Science*, 41(4), 201-206.