# Was *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* Shakespeare's First Play?

by Ramon Jiménez

Since its publication in 1598, the short, anonymous history play *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* has been ignored by nearly all scholars of Elizabethan drama, and roundly disparaged by those who took any notice of it. Except for a single scholar or two, no effort has been made to ascertain its author, its composition date or its subsequent influence. But there is substantial historical, theatrical and literary evidence that it was written by the author of the Shakespeare canon, and that he wrote it in the early 1560s, while still in his teens.

Despite the youth of the author, *Famous Victories* is the most important play to be composed during the first decade of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. It has been called the earliest extant history play to be performed in England, and the first to use the dramatic device of alternating comic scenes and scenes with historical characters (McMillin and MacLean 89; Adams 667; Ribner 74). As such, it is more rightly called a farce within a history play.
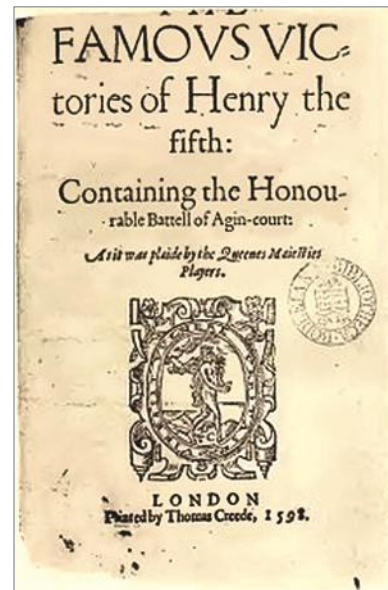
The play is also significant in that Shakespeare based his finest history plays—*1* and *2 Henry IV,* and *Henry V*—on the structure, plot and historic period of *Famous Victories.* These elements in the play align almost exactly with those of Shakespeare's Prince Hal trilogy, except that each episode in the anonymous play has been rewritten and expanded, and many new ones added. Shakespeare also retained the dramatic device of alternating comic scenes with those containing characters from English history, an innovation that first appeared in *Famous Victories* (Ribner 74).

Famous Victories is historically significant in that it is the earliest extant play that can be attributed to Shakespeare. It is also noteworthy for being the first play other than straightforward comedies to include an important comic sub-plot, and to pursue that plot throughout the play in alternating scenes. There are nine scenes in *Famous Victories* devoted entirely to the comic subplot (1, 2, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 17, 19), eight scenes based on historical events (3, 8, 11, 12, 14, 15, 18, 20), and three scenes where there is some combination of the two (5, 6, 9). Another feature in the play is the garbled syntax and mispronunciation of English by foreigners, an unusual dramatic device at the time *Famous Victories* was written.

The play is set in the second decade of the fifteenth century, ending with the invasion and defeat of France by Henry V, and the Treaty of Troyes in May 1420. Among the more than forty speaking characters are a dozen comics who cluster around the young Prince Hal, including Sir John Oldcastle (also known as "Jockey"), Ned Poins and Mistress Cobbler. Another prominent character is Richard de Vere, eleventh Earl of Oxford, a close advisor to both kings.

Famous Victories has a poor reputation among literary scholars. It has been described as "crude," "primitive," "almost imbecilic," a "decrepit pot-boiler" and as "a medley of nonsense and ribaldry" (quoted in Pitcher at 5). One succinct judgment was made by J. A. Symonds, who called it "a piece of uncouth, but honest old English upholstery" (378). Its stylistic shortcomings are readily apparent. Another critic called it "heavily formulaic" with "poor verbal quality and abrupt and jerky action" (Maguire 250–51). Repeated ques-

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tions are used to establish identity, place and situation, and there is a total lack of subtlety and nuance. The play is replete with empty oaths, redundant declarations and observations that refer to action already in progress. Confusing stage directions and speech prefixes and abrupt dialogue suggest a novice playwright.

Nevertheless, *Famous Victories* must have been a popular play. Reissued in 1617, it was one of the few anonymous plays, other than Shakespeare's, that were printed more than once. Its prose has been described as "forceful and straightforward, close to the language of the common folk, and easy and conversational in tone…" (Clemen 194–95). "For all its acknowledgement of the horror of war there is nothing in *Henry V* that catches the stench of a battlefield so acutely as the scene in *Famous Victories* in which one of the clowns steals shoes from dead French soldiers" (Leggatt 16). There are only three speeches that exceed twenty lines, and the plot moves at a rapid tempo. The comic subplot is well-integrated with the main plot in the first half, but then disintegrates into unrelated episodes. The characters do not develop, except that Prince Hal suddenly ceases his bad behavior and abandons his riotous comrades once he becomes King, just as he does in *2 Henry IV*.

The Plot

Famous Victories opens early in 1413, as Prince Hal and his companions, Sir John Oldcastle, Ned Poins, Cutbert Cutter and Tom, have just ambushed and robbed two of the King's receivers of a thousand pounds at Gads Hill in Kent. A second robbery, of two carriers, is then committed at the same location by Cutter. The four then retire to celebrate at an "old tavern in Eastcheap." After "a bloody fray" at the tavern, the Sheriff arrives and arrests them all, including Prince Hal.

At court the following day, the Lord Chief Justice finds the thief, Cutbert Cutter, guilty of robbing the carriers, and says he must be executed. Prince Hal, who has already been released, objects to the verdict and demands that "my man" be freed. When the Justice refuses, the Prince "gives him a box on the ear," and the Justice commits him to the Fleet. After another comic scene, Prince Hal is free again and, impatient to wear the crown himself, visits his father, the King, who is ill and severely distressed with his son's behavior. After enduring a tearful rebuke by the King, Prince Hal repents of all his bad behavior, calling himself "an unworthy son for so good a father," and vows to abandon his "vile and reprobate" companions. Before they part, he begs forgiveness and proclaims that he is "born new again," as the King pardons him.

Two comic scenes later, Henry IV is on his deathbed in the Jerusalem Chamber in Westminster Abbey when Prince Hal enters, finds him asleep and, thinking him dead, takes the crown and leaves. When the King awakens

and finds the crown missing, he sends the Earl of Oxford to find it. When Oxford returns with the Prince and the crown, the King rebukes his son, who declares himself unworthy, and again begs forgiveness. The King quickly pardons him, puts the crown in his son's hands, and dies.

Sir John Oldcastle and his companions greet the new King Henry V with great familiarity, but he urges them to change their way of life as he has his, and then orders them to keep a distance of ten miles from him. The remaining scenes of the play focus on Henry's negotiations with French diplomats, and subsequent invasion of France, interspersed with three comic episodes on the battlefield of Agincourt. Henry V defeats the French and, as he demands the French throne, proposes marriage to Katherine, the French King's daughter. In the final scene, which takes place in May 1420, Henry is designated heir to the throne of France, and his coming marriage to Katherine is announced.

Famous Victories and the Prince Hal Plays

Among Shakespeare scholars, there are roughly four opinions about the relationship between *Famous Victories* and the Prince Hal trilogy:

1. *Famous Victories* is a garbled or abridged version of an earlier play or plays about Prince Hal that was also a source of Shakespeare's trilogy.

2. *Famous Victories* was itself derived from Shakespeare's trilogy—either by memorial reconstruction, or by deliberate abridgement or "dumbing down" for the public theater, or for a provincial production.

3. *Famous Victories* was by another playwright and was a source for Shakespeare's Prince Hal trilogy.

4. Shakespeare wrote *Famous Victories* himself at an early age, and later expanded it into his trilogy. It is this position that is supported in the pages that follow.

Most orthodox scholars contend that *Famous Victories* was by another playwright, and was a source for Shakespeare's Prince Hal trilogy, but there is no agreement about that playwright's identity. Scholars also differ widely about how much Shakespeare used *Famous Victories*. Some say his use was minor, and that his principal source was Rafael Holinshed's *Chronicles*, published in 1577 and reissued in an expanded version in 1587 (Chambers, *William Shakespeare* 1:383, 395; Norwich 139). But many others, such as Geoffrey Bullough, say his debt was substantial (4:167–68), and John Dover Wilson wrote that "a very intimate connection of some kind exists between Shakespeare's plays and this old text" ("Origins" 3). David Scott Kastan wrote that Shakespeare "found the focus of the play [*1 Henry IV*] in the anonymous *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*" (342).

In the most recent Arden edition of *2 Henry IV* (2016), James C. Bulman calls *Famous Victories* "enormously influential on Shakespeare's Henry IV plays," and devotes half-a-dozen pages to detailing the incidents and language that he took from it (14–15, 128–33). In 1954 an obscure American scholar, Ephraim Everitt, attributed *Famous Victories* to Shakespeare, but supplied only general evidence (171–72). Seven years later, Seymour M. Pitcher published a full-scale study of the play, attributing it to Shakespeare and describing in detail its similarity to the Prince Hal plays. His findings are a major source for this introduction.

The connections between *Famous Victories* and the Prince Hal plays are legion, and range from structure and plot to characters, and from language and style to dramatic devices.

Structure and Plot

The fifty-seven scenes in the three Prince Hal plays are a natural expansion of the twenty scenes in *Famous Victories*. The first scene of *Famous Victories* matches the second scene of *1 Henry IV*, and the last scene of *Famous Victories*, in which Henry V woos the French Princess Katherine, matches the last scene in *Henry V*, in which he does the same thing. Thus, the anonymous play might be seen as a rudimentary skeleton within the full body of the trilogy.

The following plot elements occur in both *Famous Victories* and in the Prince Hal trilogy:[1]

- the robbery of the King's receivers at Gads Hill in Kent (*Famous Victories*, sc. 1; *1 Henry IV* II.ii).
- the meeting of the robbers in an Eastcheap tavern (*Famous Victories*, sc. 2; *1 Henry IV* II.iv).
- Prince Hal's "box on the ear" of the Chief Justice (*Famous Victories*, sc. 4; referred to in *2 Henry IV*, I.ii.52–53 and I.ii.187–88).
- the Chief Justice's commitment of Prince Hal to prison (*Famous Victories*, sc. 4; referred to in *2 Henry IV* at I.ii.52–53 and V.ii.67–79).
- the Prince's visit to his sick father (*Famous Victories*, sc. 6; *1 Henry IV* III.ii).
- the reconciliation of the newly-crowned King Henry V with the Chief Justice (*Famous Victories*, sc. 9; *2 Henry IV* V.ii.101–39).
- Prince Hal's former comic companions expecting favors from the new King (*Famous Victories*, Scs. 5 and 9; *2 Henry IV* V.iii.120–35).
- the new King's rejection of his former companions (*Famous Victories*, sc. 9; *2 Henry IV* V.v.46–70).

- the rigorous defense of Henry's right to the crown of France by the Archbishop of Canterbury (*Famous Victories*, sc. 9; *Henry V* I.ii.33–95.).

- the gift of tennis balls from the Dolphin (*Famous Victories*, sc. 9; *Henry V* I.ii.259).

- Henry's reply that he will respond with balls of brass and iron—gunstones (cannon balls) in *Henry V* (*Famous Victories*, sc. 9; *Henry V* I.ii.281–85).

- the episode of forced military recruitment (*Famous Victories*, sc. 10; *2 Henry IV* III.ii).

- the overconfidence of the French about the coming conflict with England (*Famous Victories*, scs. 11 and 13; *Henry V* II.iv.14–28).

- the refusal of the French King to allow his son, the Dolphin, to fight at Agincourt (*Famous Victories*, sc. 11; *Henry V* III.v.64).

- Derick's encounter with a French soldier (*Famous Victories*, sc. 17; Pistol's in *Henry V* IV.iv.).

- the comics' conversation on the battlefield about returning to England (*Famous Victories*, sc. 19; *Henry V* V.i).

- the courting of the French Princess Katherine by the victorious Henry V (*Famous Victories*, scs. 18 and 20; *Henry V* V.ii.99–277).

Not only are all these plot elements common to *Famous Victories* and the Prince Hal plays, they all occur roughly in the same order. One additional similarity between *Famous Victories* and *Henry V* is the complete absence of the historical Henry V's second campaign in France from 1417 to 1420. As one scholar put it, "Shakespeare's trilogy emulates the stagecraft" and follows "exactly the contour" of *Famous Victories* (Clare 113).

Besides the plot elements listed above, there are several dozen specific details of action and characterization that appear in both *Famous Victories* and in Shakespeare's trilogy. For example, the character "Gads Hill" involved in the robbery; Gads Hill as the place of the robbery; the Chief Justice's defense of his sending the Prince to prison; the meetings between Henry V and the French herald; the defiant Henry V telling the French herald that his only ransom will be his worthless dead body; Henry V's assurance that the French Ambassador may speak his mind; Henry V's naming of the battle after the nearby castle; and Henry V's requirement of an oath of fealty from the Duke of Burgundy. The French Captain's claim that the English soldier is lost without "his warm bed and stale drink" (*Famous Victories*, sc. 13) is echoed at III.vii in *Henry V,* where the Duke of Orleans and the Constable of France assure each other that the English cannot fight without beef.

The key interaction between Henry IV and his son is structured in the same way in the *Henry IV* plays as it is in *Famous Victories*. In both versions, Prince Hal reassures his father that he has reformed himself and abandoned his previous misbehavior. But then, in scene 8 of *Famous Victories*, and in IV.v of *2 Henry IV*, he takes the crown from his sleeping father's pillow and leaves the chamber. When the King awakens, he is alarmed that the crown is gone and sends Oxford in *Famous Victories*, Warwick in *2 Henry IV*, to find it. In both plays, Prince Hal is found with the crown and brought back to his father's chamber, where he delivers a lengthy speech of apology and repentance and is immediately forgiven by the King. Again, not only are all these specific details common to both, they occur in the same order.

In addition to the above similarities, there are several incidents and passages of dialogue attributed to historical characters in Shakespeare's Prince Hal trilogy for which there is little or no evidence in the more than twenty historical chronicles available at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign. However, many of them appear in *Famous Victories*—the most notable being the scene in which Henry woos the French princess Katherine in the last act of *Henry V*.

The most important structural similarity among the four plays is the alternation of comic scenes with those based on historical events. Twelve of the twenty scenes in *Famous Victories* are fully or partially populated by comics. A comic subplot reappears in each of the plays in the canonical trilogy, nineteen of the fifty-seven scenes in the three plays being fully occupied by comics, and eight others containing some comic material, an arrangement very much like that in *Famous Victories*. But the six canonical history plays that Shakespeare wrote after completing *Famous Victories* contain no comic subplots, and just a handful of humorous lines. This is further support for the claim that the playwright took *Famous Victories* as his source and template for the Prince Hal trilogy.[2]

Characters

Nearly all the characters in *Famous Victories* reappear in the same roles in one or more of the Prince Hal plays, including seven of the eight English officials and aristocrats, and five of the six French nobility, including King Charles VI, his son the "Dolphin" and Princess Katherine. The Archbishop of Bourges is replaced by an unnamed secular Ambassador.

Most of the comic characters are carried over, and several are exactly duplicated. For the most part, the characters who reappear in the Prince Hal plays say and do the same things that they say and do in *Famous Victories*. The most prominent comic characters in *Famous Victories* who reappear in the Prince Hal plays are Ned (Edward Poins in *1* and *2 Henry IV*), Mistress Cobbler (Mistress Quickly in *1* and *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V*), and the Sir John

Oldcastle and Derick characters, who are combined and transformed into Sir John Falstaff. As the main character in all four plays, Prince Hal's interaction in *Famous Victories* with his comic companions, with his generals, with the French royalty and nobility, and with Princess Katherine are in large part duplicated, but greatly enhanced and enlarged, in the Folio trilogy.[3]

The interactions between Prince Hal and his father in *1 Henry IV* (III.ii) and in *2 Henry IV* (IV.v) are the same as in scenes 6 and 8 of *Famous Victories*, except that Shakespeare rewrote them as extended conversations. But most of the details remain—the music that soothes the King, the King dozing as the Prince takes the crown, the repentance of the Prince as he weeps and returns it, and his promise to safeguard it when he is king. In the words of one editor, "The death-bed scene, above all, shows a kinship [with *Famous Victories*] of conception and even of phrasing, though not of quality."[4]

Henry V's cousin, Edward, Duke of York, appears briefly in scenes 9 and 12 of *Famous Victories*. In scene 12, he requests and is granted command of the vanguard at Agincourt, and three scenes later is reported as a casualty of the battle. In his only two lines in *Henry V* (IV.iii.129–30), he makes the same request, and is later reported killed in IV.viii. Henry V's uncle, Thomas Beaufort, whom he created Duke of Exeter after Agincourt, speaks only four lines in *Famous Victories*, but his role is greatly expanded in *Henry V*.

Richard de Vere, eleventh Earl of Oxford. Aside from the Lord Chief Justice and the two Henrys, the eleventh Earl of Oxford speaks more than any other historical character—eighteen times in seven scenes. He is the first historical character to speak, except for Prince Hal, and he speaks only to Henry IV or to Prince Hal, who is crowned King between the eighth and ninth scenes. More than that, in *Famous Victories* de Vere has been elevated to the place of principal counselor to both Henrys, even though the chronicles report that York, Exeter and the Earl of Westmoreland acted in that capacity. Oxford is beside Henry IV in the most intimate moments between the King and his son. In scenes 3 and 5, he is with the King when the Sheriff and the Mayor arrive, and with him when Prince Hal arrives in his "cloak so full of needles." In scene 8, he and Exeter enter the Jerusalem Chamber while the King is sleeping, after Prince Hal has left with the crown. When the King awakens, Oxford exits and returns with the Prince and the crown, and listens while the Prince explains himself and returns the crown. With Exeter and Prince Hal, he is at the King's bedside when he dies.

Oxford remains as close to the new King Henry V as he had to his father. In scene 9, he is beside him when he admonishes Ned, Tom and Oldcastle to change their behavior, and bans them from his presence. At the King's request, he gives his advice to invade France rather than Scotland, advice the King follows. Two years later, on the field at Agincourt, Oxford asks the King to "give me the vanguard in the battle," but Henry has already assigned

it to his uncle, the Duke of York. In scene 14, he advises the King on the enemy's strength, and then offers to take charge of the archers, a request that the King grants—"With all my heart, my good Lord of Oxford." He is again at his side at the end of the battle, when the King shouts, "our swords are almost drunk with French blood," after which Oxford informs him that more than 12,000 French have been slain.

None of these actions or conversations are reported in any chronicle. Oxford has been placed in an entirely unhistorical role created for him by the playwright. In fact, the eleventh Earl of Oxford is mentioned only twice in Hall's *Chronicle*, the principal source of the play, and only once by Holinshed. Neither writer assigns to him any of the actions he takes or words he speaks in the play, except to say that he was present when Henry landed in France and was with him at Agincourt.[5] This is the first appearance of an Earl of Oxford in any play, but he is the only English aristocrat in *Famous Victories* who is entirely absent from all the Prince Hal plays.

Sir John Falstaff. Of the ten comics in *Famous Victories*, Shakespeare combined two—Sir John Oldcastle and Derick—to create Sir John Falstaff, his most memorable comic figure. Derick appears in six scenes and speaks more than 170 lines in *Famous Victories*, but he and Oldcastle never appear in the same scene, suggesting to some scholars that they were played by the same person (Fiehler 25; Bevington 32). Between them, they appear in nine of the play's twenty scenes, and display the same characteristics, say many of the same things, and interact with other characters in the same way, as Falstaff in the two *Henry IV* plays. The Oldcastle/Derick character bears the same relationship to Prince Hal in *Famous Victories* that Falstaff bears to him in Shakespeare's revisions. In the words of one scholar, "A superficial examination of the two plays [*Famous Victories* and *1 Henry IV*] will show that in each we have a swaggering soldier, in service against his will, aggressive when his enemies are unarmed, and in flight when they are armed; in each he is a coward, braggart, glutton, thief, rogue, clown and parasite; in each he has the same monumental unblushing effrontery and loves a jest even at his own expense" (Monaghan 358). Furthermore, in *Famous Victories* Sir John Oldcastle is a close companion of Prince Hal, and tends to lead him into mischief, the same role played by Falstaff in the *Henry IV* plays. As Robert Weimann suggests, if Kemp acted the part of Falstaff, "he must have done so in much the same way as Tarlton had played Derick in the Chief Justice scene in *Famous Victories*" (191).

As described above, the Oldcastle of *Famous Victories* and Falstaff in II.ii of *1 Henry IV* both participate with several others in a robbery on Gads Hill, although in the latter play Falstaff and three others are then robbed by Ned Poins and Prince Hal. In Shakespeare's revision, Prince Hal and his companions then exchange accounts in an Eastcheap tavern about the two robberies that have just taken place. Falstaff claims that after he and the others robbed

the King's receivers, he was set upon by eleven men, and that he drove off seven of them. Prince Hal replies that only he and Poins assaulted Falstaff and his three companions, and that Falstaff fled without a fight. He accuses Falstaff of hacking his sword to make it look as if he used it to defend himself, and Peto later confirms it. Bardolph reports that Falstaff told them to "tickle our noses with spear-grass, to make them bleed" (II.iv). In scene 19 of *Famous Victories*, Derick's boasts and tricks on the battlefield of Agincourt are nearly identical with those of Falstaff after he and his companions have been robbed by Poins and Prince Hal in *1 Henry IV*. Derick brags to John Cobbler that he was "four or five times slain" and that he was called "the bloody soldier amongst them all" because "Every day when I went into the field I would take a straw and thrust it into my nose and make my nose bleed…"

In a conversation with Oldcastle in scene 5 of *Famous Victories*, Prince Hal notes the prevalence "nowadays" of prisons, hanging and whippings, and adds "But I tell you, sirs, when I am King we shall have no such things" (14–15). In *1 Henry IV*, Falstaff asks of Prince Hal, "Shall there be gallows standing in England when thou art king?" Hal's reply suggests that hangings will be rare (I.ii.56–65). Both Oldcastle in *Famous Victories* (scene 5) and Falstaff in *1 Henry IV* (I.ii) expect that they will prosper when Prince Hal becomes king. Both welcome King Henry's death, but both are among the group that is rejected by the new King Henry.

From George Cruikshank's illustrations for a book entitled The Life of Sir John Falstaff*, published in 1858, "Falstaff, enacting the part of the king".*

In scene 7 of *Famous Victories*, Derick complains bitterly about the meal prepared for him by Mistress Cobbler and calls her a knave and a whore. They clash again in scene 10 and physically assault each other. In Act III of *1 Henry IV*, Falstaff and Mistress Quickly argue at length about money he owes her for food and wine. He calls her "Dame Partlet," a traditional name for a scolding woman, questions her honesty, and suggests that she is a prostitute (III.iii).

Some scholars have attempted to associate Falstaff with one or the other of two historical figures who were prominent in early 15th-century England. The historical Sir John Oldcastle was a friend of Henry V but turned against him and against the Catholic establishment of England and embraced Lollardy, a religious and political movement that advocated a major reform of Western Christianity. In 1408 he married Joan de la Pole, fourth Baroness Cobham, and in consequence, bore the nominal title of Lord Cobham. In 1414 he led a Lollard rebellion that was easily put down and after being excommunicated, imprisoned and then escaping, he was eventually recaptured, tried, and convicted of treason and heresy. He suffered an especially gruesome execution in 1417, being hanged in chains and burnt (Corbin and Sedge 2–6). By the mid-16th century, he was among the pantheon of Protestant martyrs, and was depicted as such in an adulatory biography by John Bale in 1544 (1–59) and in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* in 1563 (3:321–401).

The record is clear that in his revision and expansion of *Famous Victories*, Shakespeare retained the name Oldcastle in *1 Henry IV* (Taylor, "Richard James" 341). But the prevailing opinion is that he was pressured to change it by a person "descended from his title," ostensibly William Brooke, tenth Lord Cobham, who was a favorite of Elizabeth and, for a short time, in 1596–97, her Lord Chamberlain. The connection between Oldcastle and William Brooke was extremely tenuous, however, the former being the stepfather of the great-great-great-grandmother of the latter (Gibson 102). Some assert that the pressure came from prominent Elizabethan Protestants, who were outraged at Shakespeare's portrayal of one of their revered heroes (Corbin and Sedge 9–12; Pendleton 66). The latter claim is more likely, since the appearance of Oldcastle on the stage in two popular plays— *Famous Victories* and *1 Henry IV*—prompted at least two responses in defense of him—*Sir John Oldcastle* (1600), written by Michael Drayton and others, and a poem by John Weever, *The Mirror of Martyrs* (1601).

The other historical character who has been linked to Falstaff was Sir John Fastolf (1380–1459), a soldier and landowner who accompanied Henry V during his wars in France, fought at Agincourt, and was made a Knight of the Garter in 1426. In mid-career he was accused of cowardice after losing a

battle against the French but was eventually exonerated. A Sir John Fastolfe appears briefly in *1 Henry VI*, where he is depicted as a coward (III.ii.105–08), but there is otherwise no description of him. Neither of these men resembles the fat comic and faux soldier in Shakespeare's plays.

In light of the evidence presented in "The Date," below, it is hard to imagine a teenage Oxford, raised as a Protestant, deliberately satirizing a 15th century Protestant martyr. It may be that the slightly humorous name "Oldcastle" appealed to him as a name for his slightly humorous knight/comic. He appears in only one scene and speaks only eight lines in *Famous Victories*. (Under the name "Jockey," colloquial for "John," he speaks only another twenty-three lines.) This thinly drawn portrait of the double-named Oldcastle/Jockey character can hardly be called a serious satire, or even a recognizable portrait, of Sir John Oldcastle. It suggests confusion or carelessness on the part of the author, rather than purpose.

It may be that Oxford came across the name "Fastolf" and found that by rearranging the letters he would have a perfect name for a failing or retreating soldier, a soldier whose staff or banner is falling. And in *1 Henry IV*, he took the opportunity to flesh out, as it were, a portrait of a *miles gloriosus*, a boastful, cowardly, sometime soldier—a stock comic character who appeared first in Greek drama, and then in the Latin comedies of Plautus and Terence. Both Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus* and Terence's *Eunuchus* contained *miles gloriosus* (swaggering soldier) characters, and both were performed on Elizabethan stages, *Eunuchus* at Queens' College, Cambridge in 1564 (Smith 58) and *Miles Gloriosus* before Queen Elizabeth in January 1565 by the Children of Westminster (Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage* 3:20). On the basis of these facts, it is clear that Falstaff is not a historical figure, but a character derived from a composite of Sir John Oldcastle and Derick in *Famous Victories* (Satin 215, n. 2; Bullough 4:171).

Edward Poins. The Edward Poins of the two *Henry IV* plays is identical with the Ned of *Famous Victories*. In all three plays, Prince Hal repeatedly calls him "Ned," and in both *Famous Victories* and *1 Henry IV* they carry out a robbery together at Gads Hill. In *Famous Victories*, they are joined by Tom and Sir John Oldcastle in a robbery of the King's receivers. In *1 Henry IV*, after Oldcastle/Falstaff and three others have robbed and bound the "travellers," Poins and the Prince rob them.[6] In all three plays, Poins speaks familiarly to Prince Hal and is his closest companion.

In scene 9 of *Famous Victories*, Poins suggests to the new King Henry V that he does not grieve over his father's death. Henry then admonishes him to "mend thy manners," and tells him that he must "change" in the same way as *he* has. In a long conversation between them in *2 Henry IV*, Poins calls the new King a hypocrite for pretending to grieve over his father's illness.

Henry responds coolly and suggests that it is the "vile company" of Falstaff and Poins that has caused him to appear unmoved by his father's illness (II. ii.28–55).

Although a Poins family was prominent in the early fifteenth century, no member of it was a close associate of Prince Hal either before or after he became Henry V. The Poins of the Shakespeare plays is a replica of the Poins of *Famous Victories*, and neither is a historical character.

Mistress Quickly. The literary ancestor of the Mistress Quickly in the two *Henry IV* plays is Mistress Cobbler, the wife of John Cobbler in *Famous Victories*. Both women are members of the group of comics associated with Prince Hal before and after he becomes King. In scene 7 of *Famous Victories*, Mistress Cobbler engages in the dispute described above over a meal with Derick. Mistress Quickly has a similar dispute with Falstaff about the bill for his food and wine in *1 Henry IV* (III.iii.65–82). In all three plays, the Oldcastle/Derick/Falstaff character insults and slanders the woman who has served him food. In scene 10 of *Famous Victories*, after Derick and Mistress Cobbler have assaulted each other, he threatens to "clap the law" on her back, and suggests to the recruiting Captain that he "press her for a soldier." In *2 Henry IV*, Mistress Quickly attempts to have Falstaff arrested for debt, and they exchange mutual threats (II.i).

It is clear that Shakespeare has, in the two *Henry IV* plays, simply re-used and renamed the female foil to the Oldcastle/Derick character in *Famous Victories*. He has broadened her role considerably and made her a more believable character, but retained her behavior, her language and her relationship with the fat knight.

Ralph Mouldy and **Francis Feeble.** James C. Bulman called attention to two characters in *Famous Victories* who might have inspired a scene and contributed to the behavior of two comics in Shakespeare's revision (133). In scene 10 of *Famous Victories*, "a captain conscripts two clowns for the wars in France, one of whom, John Cobbler, like Mouldy in *2 Henry IV*, claims that he has too much to do, and begs to be allowed to stay at home, while the other, Derick, like Feeble in the same play, is willing to do his patriotic duty" (III.ii).

Language and Dramatic Devices

Individual words and phrases, images, ideas and dramatic devices in *Famous Victories* reappear throughout Shakespeare's three Prince Hal plays, and in most cases they are associated with the same character or situation as in the earlier play. Nor are they limited to one type of character. They appear in the conversations among the comics; in Henry IV's comments about his illness

and his seizure of the crown; in Henry V's response to the Dauphin's gift of tennis balls; in his remarks on the battlefield in France; in his triumphal scene in the French court; and in the scenes in which he courts Katherine, the daughter of Charles VI.

The text of *Famous Victories* is almost entirely in prose. In the six earliest history plays in the accepted canon (the first tetralogy, *Richard II* and *King John*), Shakespeare wrote primarily in verse—prose accounting for no more than seventeen per cent of the lines in *2 Henry VI*, and less or none in the other five. But in the three Prince Hal plays, prose accounts for forty-seven, fifty-three and forty per cent, respectively, of each play's total lines (Campbell and Quinn 932). These facts supply further evidence that in composing the Prince Hal plays Shakespeare worked from a copy of *Famous Victories*, and largely returned to his earlier use of prose.

An unusual dramatic device that Shakespeare introduced in *Famous Victories*—a parodic re-enactment of an earlier episode, reappears in *1 Henry IV*. After receiving a box on the ear from the Prince in scene 4, the Lord Chief Justice commits him to the Fleet (116–50). Later in the scene, Derick and John Cobbler re-enact the exchange, including the box on the ear, John Cobbler taking the part of the Lord Chief Justice, and Derick that of Prince Hal. They follow this with another thirty or so lines of comic banter before exiting the stage.

Shakespeare omitted this particular episode from *1 Henry IV* when he rewrote *Famous Victories*, merely referring to, but not dramatizing, the box on the ear. But in its place, at the same point in the story, he inserted a comic dialogue between Prince Hal and Falstaff to "practice an answer" to King Henry's expected interrogation of the Prince. In II.iv, Falstaff takes the role of King Henry as he reproves his son for his bad behavior, and at the same time remarks upon the "cheerful look" and "noble carriage" of a certain corpulent companion of his (II.iv.376–82). They eventually exchange places and continue the drollery until they are interrupted by the Sheriff (383–481).

A similar scene appears in III.vi of *King Lear*, when Lear, Edgar and the Fool prepare to stage a mock trial of Goneril and Regan. The connection among the plays is evidenced by strikingly similar language in all three scenes. Half-a-dozen words—*justice/justicer, sit, chair, took/taken, cushion, stand, joined stool*—appear in two or more of them. The device of characters in a play pretending to take different roles, which Shakespeare introduced in his earliest play, was something that he repeatedly used throughout the canon.

Another distinctive device in *Famous Victories* is the garbled syntax and mispronunciation of English by foreigners. Scene 13 consists entirely of a comical conversation among three French soldiers, a drummer, and a Captain. Although the Captain speaks perfect English, the others misuse *me* for *I*,

sh for *ch* and *t* for *th*. Shakespeare re-used this device several times in *Henry V*, first in a similar exchange among four soldiers in Henry's army about the tactics of siege warfare that becomes a celebration of the comic mispronunciation of English (III.ii). Two scenes later (III.iv) Princess Katherine and her servant Agnes engage in a dialogue in which Katherine's misunderstanding and mispronunciation of English culminate in a bilingual sexual pun. Again, in V.ii, she attempts a conversation in English with Henry V in which her mispronunciation of English reaches its comic zenith.

The Author

Nearly all scholars of the period insist that the author of *Famous Victories* is unknown, but several have proposed such authors as Richard Tarlton, who performed in the play (Fleay 67; Hopkinson viii–ix), Henry Evans (Scoufos 179) and Robert Greene (Brockbank 150). But none of these scholars provided more than perfunctory evidence. H.D. Sykes concluded that *Famous Victories* and the prose scenes in *The Taming of a Shrew* had a common author— Samuel Rowley (49–78). But both plays date to the 1560s, and Rowley appears to have been born about 1570.

In 1928, *The Review of English Studies* published an article by B.M. Ward in which he suggested that the play was written late in 1574 by Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford, who was repeatedly cited as an outstanding playwright, but whose name is not associated with a single play. He argued that Oxford wrote the play "as a Court masque" that he "presented to the Queen" a few months after he had secretly and without her permission traveled to the continent, where it was rumored that he planned to join an insurrection. An angry Queen sent one of her pensioners to bring him back, and he returned after about a month. Further associating the play with this episode, Ward also suggested that Oxford wrote *Famous Victories* as an act of contrition, and portrayed himself as Prince Hal, who had misbehaved and defied his father, then repented and was forgiven. As it happened, Oxford met with the Queen and was forgiven.

Ward based his claim of Oxford's authorship on two striking features of the play—the unduly prominent role of the historically obscure eleventh Earl of Oxford, and the parallel between the two robberies in the play at Gads Hill near Rochester and a similar attack on the same highway by three of Oxford's servants in May 1573.[7] Although he was among the most prominent and active Oxfordians of the time, Ward did not, in this article, claim that Oxford wrote the Shakespeare canon, nor did he assign *Famous Victories* to Shakespeare. Oxfordian scholars E.T. Clark (9–10) and Charlton Ogburn (423–25) subsequently endorsed his claim and agreed with his date. The evidence that he wrote it some ten years earlier is supplied in the next section.

Edward de Vere was brought up in a family with a long history of theatrical activities, beginning as early as 1490. His grandfather, the fifteenth Earl, employed the Protestant convert and dramatist John Bale (1495–1563) to write more than a dozen plays for him in the early 1530s (Harris 75). The sixteenth Earl, John de Vere, patronized the Earl of Oxford's Men, a playing company that flourished from the 1540s until about 1563. The seventeenth Earl revived the company in 1580, and it played at court and in the provinces until 1602 (Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage* 2:99–102).

Tutored privately in the home of the scholar and diplomat Sir Thomas Smith from the age of four, de Vere entered Queens' College, Cambridge in October 1558 at the age of eight. In September 1562, on the death of his father, the twelve-year-old was removed from his family's castle in rural Essex and placed in wardship at the London home of William Cecil, Master of the Wards and Queen Elizabeth's Secretary of State.

The strongest evidence that Oxford wrote *Famous Victories* lies in his demonstrated authorship of the subsequent Shakespeare canon. In brief, the case for Oxford as the author of that canon is comprised of four lines of evidence:

- Oxford's contemporaries publicly praised his skill as a poet and a playwright throughout his life, but no play or playlist bears his name.

- Oxford's biography is incorporated in the Shakespeare plays in terms of incident, plot and characterization.

- Oxford's early poetry is used in the Shakespeare canon, and the language in Oxford's private letters can be found throughout the poems and plays.

- Oxford's travels to France and Italy are reflected in a dozen Shakespeare plays in terms of geography, language and culture.

The details of this evidence can be found in any of the half-dozen treatments of the authorship question, the most complete being Ogburn's *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*. Further evidence of Oxford's authorship of *Famous Victories* appears below. But aside from Seymour Pitcher and the critic Eric Sams (180), no orthodox Shakespeare scholars accept *Famous Victories* as a Shakespeare play. In *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare*, Irving Ribner wrote that "the suggestion… that the play represents an early work by William Shakespeare need scarcely be taken seriously" (68). Samuel Schoenbaum called it "a preposterous thesis" (167). But neither scholar offered any rebuttal to the evidence for Shakespeare's authorship, nor any evidence for another author.

The Date

The earliest surviving evidence of the existence of *Famous Victories* is a sentence in Thomas Nashe's pamphlet *Pierce Penilesse*, published in 1592:

> what a glorious thing it is to have Henrie the fifth represented on the Stage, leading the French king prisoner, and forcing both him and the Dolphin to swear fealty. (87–88)

The reference is to the final scene in *Famous Victories*, in which Henry V, having been victorious at Agincourt, demands that all the French nobles "be sworn to be true to me." Some scholars claim that the reference must have been to a different play because in both Quartos of *Famous Victories* it was the Duke of Burgundy, not the French king who was forced to swear fealty to Henry V (Morgan 5, 11; Taylor, ed. *Henry V* 4). Others agree that the reference is to *Famous Victories*, but that Nashe simply misremembered the characters.

Two pages later, Nashe praised "Tarlton, Ned Allen, Knell, Bentlie," suggesting that the play he saw was a performance of *Famous Victories* staged by the Queen's Men at the Bull Inn in Bishopsgate. This performance is referred to in a passage in the 1611 edition of *Tarlton's Jests* (quoted by Pitcher at 180–81) that contains an anecdote about Tarlton playing the Lord Chief Justice and Derick, and William Knell playing Henry V, in "a play of Henry the Fifth." Since Knell died in June 1587 and Tarlton in 1588, the performance can be safely dated to the spring of 1587 or earlier.

Thomas Creede registered *Famous Victories* in 1594 and printed it in 1598, but there is no direct evidence of the play's composition date. The date I propose—1562–63—is based on statements of Oxford's contemporaries about his creative activities and level of education, and on the location of the play with respect to the remainder of the Shakespeare canon.

In a June 1563 letter to Cecil, Oxford's tutor, Laurence Nowell, wrote, "I clearly see that my work for the Earl of Oxford cannot much longer be required," suggesting that the Anglo-Saxon scholar could teach the thirteen-year-old nothing more (Ward, *Seventeenth Earl* 20). In March of the following year, Oxford's uncle, Arthur Golding, dedicated one of his translations to him. Among other complimentary remarks, Golding praised him for his "desire… to read, peruse and communicate with others, as well, the histories of ancient times, and things done long ago… and that not without a certain pregnancy of wit and ripeness of understanding" (Chiljan 6–7). Since Oxford was neither a teacher of history nor a writer of historical chronicles, this suggests that the teenager was writing dramatizations of history for the entertainment of others.

We also know that Oxford was writing competent poetry before the age of sixteen, some of which was published at the time, and is still anthologized today (Ogburn 585). Such precocity is unusual, but not unheard of. There are many examples of substantial literary works produced by teenagers. For instance, Madame de Staël wrote a play, *The Inconveniences of Parisian Life*, at age twelve. Both Victor Hugo and Alfred Tennyson wrote five-act plays at age fourteen. Tennyson's play—*The Devil and the Lady*—an imitation of an Elizabethan comedy, is the same length as *Famous Victories*. When it was finally published in 1930, *The Times* reviewer called it "astonishingly mature."[8] So, it is entirely believable that Oxford was capable of writing *Famous Victories* in his early teen years.

The remaining evidence for a composition date in the early 1560s is the place of *Famous Victories* in the chronology of the entire Shakespeare canon.

The fourteen-year difference between Oxford's birth date (1550) and that of the traditional candidate, Shaksper of Stratford (1564), requires that the orthodox dating scheme be modified accordingly. A convenient starting point is the composition date of the three Prince Hal plays, the third being *Henry V*, Shakespeare's last history play except *Henry VIII*. The orthodox date for the composition of *Henry V* is 1599, and for the *Henry IV* plays, the two preceding years, that is, about midway through the alleged author's

playwrighting career.[9] It is based on a purported reference to the anticipated return of the Earl of Essex from a campaign in Ireland in the summer of 1599.[10] Nearly all modern scholars also agree that the six remaining history plays (the first tetralogy, *King John* and *Richard II*), *Titus Andronicus, The Comedy of Errors,* and nine other plays set in Italy, France and Navarre, were all written *before* the Prince Hal plays.[11] Most Oxfordian and other revisionist scholars are in general agreement with this sequence, but dispute the dating.

In 2001 and 2016, I published evidence refuting the 1599 date for *Henry V*, and demonstrating that Oxford wrote it in 1583–84, and that the reference was actually to the anticipated return from Ireland of Sir Thomas Butler in the spring of 1584,

Thomas Butler, 10th Earl of Ormond (1531-1614) in three-quarter armor, by Steven van der Meulen, in the National Portrait Gallery.

after having crushed the most serious Irish rebellion of Elizabeth's reign.[12] A backdating of *Henry V* to 1583–84 necessitates a realignment of the entire canon about fifteen years earlier, and moves composition dates of at least fifteen plays to the years prior to 1581. It seems highly likely that Oxford wrote some of those plays before 1570.[13]

In *Shakespeare's Apprenticeship* (2018), I published evidence and advanced the argument that five anonymous plays performed during Queen Elizabeth's reign were written by the author of the Shakespeare canon, and were probably his first efforts at dramatic writing. Just as he later rewrote *Famous Victories,* Oxford rewrote four other early plays—*The True Tragedy of Richard the Third, The Troublesome Reign of John, The Taming of a Shrew* and *King Leir*—ten to thirty years after his first versions. Two of the revised versions appeared first in individual quartos, all of them in the First Folio, all of them under nearly identical titles and with nearly the same plots and casts. All five of these anonymous plays are the obvious work of a novice playwright, *Famous Victories* being the shortest and poorest, and most likely the earliest.

Four of the five anonymous plays have concrete links to the Earl of Oxford, and can be dated, on the basis of those links, to the six or seven years of his juvenile period. The paucity of legal issues and legal language in each of them is convincing evidence, but not the only evidence, that he wrote them before his exposure to the law and the language of the law at Gray's Inn, which began in 1567. The fifth play, *King Leir*, is replete with legal terms and concepts, as are all of those in the orthodox canon, but is so similar to the other four in terms of its simple characters and prosaic plot that it clearly belongs in the same period, but near the end of it. The fictional episode of the Falconbridge family in *The Troublesome Reign of John* is an obvious reflection of an incident in 1563, when Oxford was accused of bastardy, and threatened with the loss of his patrimony. The revision and relocation of the anonymous *The Taming of a Shrew* to Italy and to Padua are closely connected to Oxford's visit to that country and to Padua. In two of the plays, *Famous Victories* and *True Tragedy*, the role of the Earl of Oxford has been unhistorically expanded and glorified—a sign of the youthful hubris and pride of the author, a practice that he abandoned thereafter. [14]

It is probable that *Famous Victories* was performed shortly after it was written, most likely at a private house, or perhaps at court. The Queen was well-acquainted with him by this time, and she was known for her fondness for the drama.

The Sources

The historical plot and historical characters in *Famous Victories* are based largely on published and unpublished chronicles. Scholars and editors of the

play have routinely identified the chronicles of Edward Hall (1548), John Stow (1565) and Raphael Holinshed (1577) as those sources. But considering the evidence for the date given above, both Stow's and Holinshed's *Chronicles* were written and published too late to supply source material for *Famous Victories*.

With only a few exceptions, all the historical details in the play can be found in Edward Hall's *Chronicle*, first published in 1548.[15] The play's title echoes the title of Hall's third chapter—"The Victorious Acts of King Henry the Fifth." Some of the details about the Prince's behavior are reported in earlier chronicles, such as the courtroom episode in scene 4, in which Prince Hal demands the release of his servant, then strikes the Chief Justice, and

Posthumous portrait of King Henry V (1386-1422) in the National Portrait Gallery.

is then sent to the Fleet, but the account is much fuller and more specific in Hall's *Chronicle*. Modern historians discount this and similar stories about the Prince's behavior as legendary or greatly exaggerated, but acknowledge that they were widely believed and based on "common fame."[16] But true, false, or exaggerated, Oxford used many of them in *Famous Victories*, and retained most of them in his revision.

Oxford also made use of a Latin history of the reign of Henry V, *Vita Henrici Quinti*, written by Tito Livio dei Frulovisi, an Italian historian who traveled in England in the 1430s. Although this work remained in manuscript until 1716, it was used by both John Stow in the 1560s and Rafael Holinshed in the 1570s, but apparently not by Hall. Among the several details in *Famous Victories* that appeared in Livio's history is the "cloak so full of needles" that Sir John Oldcastle mentions in scene 5.[17] This refers to the occasion when Prince Hal wore a "gown-of-needles" when he visited his father at Westminster Palace. The most commonly accepted explanation of this incident is that it is based on a medieval custom at Queen's College, Oxford, in which needles with silk thread were handed out to students at Christmas so that they could mend their gowns, the intended purpose being to encourage them to be thrifty. Although some scholars discount the story or dispute its origin, it was widely believed, and was interpreted by 16th-century chroniclers as a sign of the Prince's sincere contrition for his unruliness, and his desire

for reconciliation with his father (Romotsky 157). But in *Famous Victories*, where the gown is changed into a cloak, Shakespeare presents it as a sign of the Prince's irritation about his lengthy wait for the crown. "Why, man, 'tis a sign that I stand upon thorns, till the crown be on my head," he declares to Oldcastle in scene 5. But in front of King Henry in the very next scene, Prince Hal dramatically reverses his attitude, begs pardon of his father, and repudiates the cloak—"And this ruffianly cloak, I here tear from my back, and sacrifice it to the devil, which is master of all mischief." His change of mind and repentance of his unruly behavior, perhaps symbolized by the cloak of needles episode, constitute the crux of the play. In his revision, Shakespeare omitted any mention of the cloak of needles, but retained Prince Hal's dramatic reversal of attitude.

Another significant incident in the play, the "bloody fray" in the tavern in Eastcheap in scene 2, can be found in several of the *Chronicles of London*, a series of accounts of events in the capital that was begun in the earliest years of the reign of Henry IV (Kingsford, *Chronicles* viii). One was the so-called *Register of Mayors*, unfortunately lost, which "was clearly a fuller London Chronicle than any of those now extant" (Kingsford, *Early Biographies* 88).

Oxford had access to numerous books and manuscripts in the substantial library of Sir Thomas Smith and in that of Sir William Cecil, in whose household he was tutored and boarded between the ages of twelve and twenty-one. Numerous works in both libraries have been identified as sources of Shakespeare's plays.[18] There were also repeated exchanges of manuscripts among John Stow, William Cecil and Archbishop Matthew Parker, the latter an avid collector of books and manuscripts, especially histories.[19] Parker, in fact, owned the dedication copy of Tito Livio's *Vita Henrici Quinti*, mentioned above, a manuscript now in the Parker Library at Corpus Christi College in Cambridge (Rundle 1113).

As previously noted, several scholars have cited Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577, 1587) as a source of historical details in *Famous Victories*. In 1928, B.M. Ward examined the "incidents and phrases" in the play that also appeared in the first edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles*, and found that in every case but one they had appeared previously in Edward Hall's *Chronicle*, first published in 1548 ("Famous Victories" 278–81). The single exception that Ward identified is an eight-line speech by the Duke of Burgundy in the last scene that is a somewhat condensed reiteration of a paragraph in Holinshed. The speech appears in a longer conversation among Henry V, Charles VI and the Duke of Burgundy, and contains Burgundy's swearing of fealty to Henry V.

However, as Ward pointed out, "Holinshed's authority (quoted by him in the margin) was the Latin history of the reign of King Henry V written by Titus Livius," *Vita Henrici Quinti* ("Famous Victories" 280). Thus, the manuscript

containing this incident, and several other incidents in *Famous Victories*, was in circulation in the mid-sixteenth century and available to chroniclers and to the playwright. Ward also identified "five instances of phrases in the play" that appeared in Hall's *Chronicle*, but not in Holinshed's (279). According to Andrew Gurr, [*Famous Victories*] "certainly uses Hall and not Holinshed" (ed. *Henry V* 235).

The idea that *Famous Victories* was a garbled version of an earlier play or plays about Prince Hal has been advanced by Andrew Cairncross, John Dover Wilson, Gary Taylor and others. "A piracy of the loose type" is the phrase used by Cairncross (144, 148). Taylor considered *Famous Victories* a "memorially reconstructed" play that "debases" an earlier play on the same subject (ed. *Henry V* 4 n.3, 28). In the opinion of John Dover Wilson, *Famous Victories* was a memorial reconstruction of a "highly-abridged and much degraded version" of two other plays about Henry IV and V "written in the eighties" and owned by the Queen's Men. He surmised that the company, in dire straits during the plague years of 1592–94, sold the plays, and that they were subsequently "reported from memory," combined into one, and published as *Famous Victories* (ed. *Henry V* 116–17). Needless to say, there is no trace of the unknown play or plays preceding *Famous Victories*, nor of their unknown author and, as Gary Taylor admitted, "this is all speculation" (ed. *Henry V* 4 n.3). E.M.W. Tillyard made the unusual, if not unique, suggestion that *Famous Victories* "may well be an abridgement—a kind of dramatic Lamb's Tale—of Shakespeare's early plays on Henry IV and Henry V" (174).[20] These "early plays" of Shakespeare fall into the same category as those imagined by Taylor and Wilson, that is, no trace of them can be found. Although Q1 of *Famous Victories* was printed in dingy black letter and contains numerous typographical errors, it comprises a continuous text that does not suggest an abridgement, a reconstruction or a conflation of two other plays.
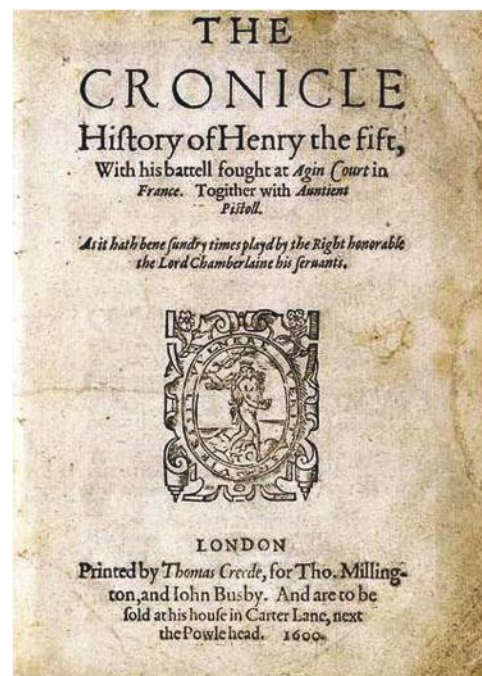
The Publisher

Thomas Creede (c. 1554–1616) registered *Famous Victories* in 1594 and printed it in 1598, in both cases absent an author's name (STC 13072). According to its title page, it had been performed by the Queen's Men, although that company had ceased to exist before either date. In their analyses of the typesetting, both Williams (32–33) and Yamada (192–94) concluded that Creede himself was the principal compositor. The two remaining copies of this Quarto are held by the Bodleian and Huntington Libraries. An early editor of the play speculated that Creede printed an issue at the time of registration, but no copies survive from such a printing (Hopkinson, i).

Although Thomas Creede printed more than thirty different plays during his twenty-five-year career, only eight were by Shakespeare, including two that are as yet unrecognized—*Famous Victories* and *The True Tragedy of Richard the Third.* His assignment of authors' names was irregular, at best. On the title pages of three of his editions of *Richard III* (Q2, 1598; Q4, 1605; Q5, 1612), the author's name was hyphenated as "Shake-speare." (On Quartos 3, 4 and 5, the author's name was preceded by the phrase "Newly augmented by.") His editions of *Romeo and Juliet* (1599) and *Henry V* (1600, 1602) bore no author's name. In 1605, he attached Shakespeare's name to *The London Prodigal*.[21] By 1598, half-a-dozen Shakespeare plays had been printed anonymously, including *The History of Henrie the fourth*, and it was not until that year that any play appeared with Shakespeare's name on it.[22]

Creede worked primarily as a "trade printer" of manuscripts owned by publishers who financed the printing and then sold the books in their shops. He also printed manuscripts for himself, manuscripts that he possessed the rights to print and publish. *Famous Victories* was the only Shakespeare play that he did not print for someone else, indicating that he owned the manuscript (Yamada 241).[23] This conclusion is supported by entries in the Stationers' Register in 1594 recording sales to Thomas Creede of several plays belonging to the Queen's Men, including *Famous Victories*, *Selimus* and *The True Tragedy of Richard the Third* (Arber 2:306, 309).

By the time he obtained the manuscript of *Famous Victories* in 1594, Thomas Creede was well aware of the Earl of Oxford and his literary patronage. During his seven-year apprenticeship to Thomas East, his master had printed several works dedicated to Oxford, including John Farmer's *Plainsong (Diverse and sundry ways)*, and half-a-dozen editions of Lyly's *Euphues and his England*. When Creede set up his own business in 1593, one of the first books he printed was a re-issue of Robert Greene's *Gwydonius, The Card of Fancie*, which was also dedicated to Oxford.

In 1600, Creede printed Q1 of *Henry V* for Thomas Middleton and John Busby, who apparently had obtained the manuscript. This transaction

THE CRONICLE Hiftory of Henry the fift, With his battell fought at *Agin Court* in France. Togither with *Auntient Piftoll.* *As it hath bene fundry times playd by the Right honorable the Lord Chamberlaine his feruants.* LONDON Printed by *Thomas Creede*, for Tho. Millington, and Iohn Busby. And are to be fold at his houfe in Carter Lane, next the Powle head. 1600.

was "unregistered," but "copyright was established by a transfer in the same year to Thomas Pavier," for whom Creede published Q2 in 1602 (Arber 3:63; Chambers, *William Shakespeare* 1:130). The texts of both Quartos are about half the length of the First Folio versions. In his edition of *The First Quarto of Henry V*, Andrew Gurr stated that "The quarto of *Henry V* was not entered for printing in the Stationers' Register in 1600, because Thomas Creede had already entered his copy for *The Famous Victories* back in 1594" (*First Quarto* 6). This treatment of the two plays suggests that they were considered to be the same, or at least written by the same author.

In 1617, Barnard Alsop, who had recently become Creede's partner, issued a second Quarto of *Famous Victories*, the title page on this edition indicating that it had been performed by the King's Men.[24] Of the two issues of Q2 (STC 13073 and STC 13074), both published in 1617, five copies of the former, and three of the latter are extant (Hanabusa xviii). Although there are hundreds of changes in the text of Q2, both corrections and additional errors, they are nearly all typographical variants. Q2 was printed in roman type, black letter being obsolete by then.

Conclusions

The historical, theatrical and literary evidence detailed above demonstrates that *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* was written in the early 1560s by the author of the Shakespeare canon—Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford. On the available evidence, he wrote it while still in his early teens, and living in the London home of William Cecil as a ward of the court. The play marked a turning point in the evolution of English drama in that it may have been the earliest extant history play to be performed in the country, and the first to use the dramatic device of alternating comic and historical scenes. It was almost certainly the first play to portray the heroic Henry V, and to dramatize his sudden conversion from an impatient prankster and braggart to a masterful ruler who took to arms and crushed the army of France at Agincourt. At the play's celebratory ending, Henry is betrothed to the French King's daughter, and named the inheritor of the French crown.

Even more significant is *Famous Victories*' place at the outset of the world's most illustrious dramatic canon. With its simplified history and farcical sub-plot, the play stands as a genuine precursor of the brilliant histories and comedies that Oxford produced during the next forty years. Numerous phrases, dramatic devices and plot elements in *Famous Victories* reappear in later canonical plays besides the Prince Hal plays, such as *Macbeth, The Comedy of Errors, Julius Caesar, Richard III, Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Taming of the Shrew.*[25]

Famous Victories and its transformation into the Prince Hal trilogy was also the first example of at least a dozen major revisions of his first efforts that Oxford undertook, some more than once, such as *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *King Lear*, even to his last decade. Nearly every play in the canon bears evidence of authorial revision.

It is hard to imagine another important literary work that has been as ill-treated by scholars as *Famous Victories*. The play has not only been misattributed or declared anonymous, it has been misdated by more than twenty years, and its substantial influence minimized or dismissed entirely. But the wealth of evidence of its date and authorship, as well as the insights it supplies into the earliest dramatic practices of the author of the Shakespeare canon may well be decisive in the effort to reveal him.

Endnotes

1. All quotations from the orthodox canon of Shakespeare's plays and poems are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed. 1997, G. Blakemore Evans, et al., (eds.).

2. Geoffrey Bullough summarizes many of the similarities described in this section (4:347–49).

3. Quarto editions of each of the three Prince Hal plays were issued before their appearance in the Folio, each about half as long as the Folio texts.

4. Humphries, (ed.). *King Henry IV, Part II*, xl–xli, with additional details.

5. Ward, "Famous Victories" 282; Corbin and Sedge 146. Andrew Gurr wrote that the prominence of the Earl of Oxford throughout the play is "one of its minor peculiarities" (ed., *Henry V* 229).

6. Although the victims are called "travellers," the text makes clear that they are the King's receivers (II.ii.42–43), as in *Famous Victories*.

7. Ward (287–94). Two of William Cecil's servants reported the attack. They also claimed that they were pursued by Oxford's men, who "besett oure lodgynge" (Ward 285).

8. De Ayala and Guéno 38, 72; Tennyson i.

9. These are the dates in three frequently cited chronologies, those of Chambers (*William Shakespeare* 1:246–50), Wentersdorf (164–65), and G. B. Evans et al (77–87).

10. Chambers (*William Shakespeare* 1.148), Taylor (*Henry V* 4–5), Craik (1–2), Evans et al (83).

11. *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Love's Labor's Lost*, *Twelfth Night*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Much Ado About Nothing*.

12. "'Rebellion broachéd on his Sword': New Evidence of an Early Date for *Henry V*" and "An Evening at the Cockpit: Further Evidence of an Early Date for *Henry V*." Also, chapter 1 of *Shakespeare's Apprenticeship*.

13. It should be noted here that all composition dates proposed are for the earliest versions of the play. Many of the extant texts have been revised, some substantially, by Oxford or others.

14. This evidence is detailed in individual chapters in *Shakespeare's Apprenticeship*.

15. Although the actual title of Edward Hall's work is *The union of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre and Yorke*, it is routinely referred to as Hall's *Chronicle*.

16. Mowat 70–85; See also: Kingsford, "English Historical Literature" 263; Allmand 58; Solly-Flood 47–71, 145–52.

17. The text and sources of the *Vita Henrici Quinti* can be found in Kingsford's *The First English Life*.

18. Many of them are listed in the articles by Jolly and O'Brien.

19. Crankshaw and Gillespie.

20. Elsewhere in his study of Shakespeare's history plays, Tillyard suggested that *The Troublesome Reign of John,* another anonymous play of the period, may have been Shakespeare's first version of *King John* (248–49).

21. Details of all Shakespeare, and related, plays are best seen in Bartlett.

22. The title page of *Locrine* (1595) bore the words "Newly set foorth, overseen and corrected, By W. S." (Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage* 4:28.) Although *Locrine* appeared in the Third and Fourth Folios, modern scholars do not consider it a Shakespeare play.

23. The title pages of *True Tragedy* (1594) and Q4 of *Richard III* (1605) indicate that they "are to be sold" by other stationers.

24. E.K. Chambers disputed this claim: "obviously the King's men never acted it, *Henry V* being in existence" (*Elizabethan Stage* 2:202 n. 2.). P. A. Daniel also doubted that "the King's Men… would have retained this poor stuff in their repertoire" (ed. *Famous Victories* v). R. L. Knutson is another doubter (212). But Andrew Gurr suggested that the play passed from the Queen's Men to the Chamberlain's Men, later the King's Men, when the two companies merged in 1594 (*Shakespeare Company, 1594–1642* 25).

25. These are detailed in chapter 1 of *Shakespeare's Apprenticeship*.

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