Henry VI, Part 2
William Shakespeare

Henry VI Part 2

Henry VI, Part 2 or The Second Part of Henry the Sixt (often written as 2 Henry VI) is a history play by William Shakespeare believed to have been written in 1591, and set during the lifetime of King Henry VI of England. Whereas 1 Henry VI deals primarily with the loss of England's French territories and the political machinations leading up to the Wars of the Roses, and 3 Henry VI deals with the horrors of that conflict, 2 Henry VI focuses on the King's inability to quell the bickering of his nobles, the death of his trusted adviser Duke Humphrey of Gloucester, the rise of the Duke of York and the inevitability of armed conflict. As such, the play culminates with the opening battle of the War, the First Battle of St Albans.

Henry VI may be viewed as a study in insurrection, which moves from the private and personal jostlings in the court in Part 1 to outright civil war in Part 3.

In Part 2 the discord between prominent state officials, notably Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, and Henry Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester, spreads to the common people, fomenting an abortive rebellion, lead by the rascally Kentishman, Jack Cade. With the death of Humphrey, the period of regency for the naive Henry effectively comes to an end, and the unworldly monarch is helplessly exposed to the interminable strife between the factions of the houses of York and of Lancaster.

The structure of the play differs from the other two parts in that there is a central rustic idyll (Act 4), pop−ulated by clownish characters, which recalls the idyllic centre−pieces of comedies like "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "As You Like It". The plays with the effective deposition of Henry, who is later re−installed as king in Part 3 by the influential Earl of Warwick. Henry VI, Part 2 has the largest cast of all Shakespeare's plays, and is seen by many critics as the best of the Henry VI trilogy.
(Summary by Wikipedia and Algy Pug)

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