A. J. Pollard, *Henry V* (Stroud: The History Press, 2014), 126 pp., ISBN: 978-0-9524-9763-1 (pbk), £6.99

'I was commissioned to write a short life that was opinionated and "with attitude"' (p. 126). These features of A.J. Pollard's brief shape the whole of his work, and he fulfils them admirably. At only 126 pages in length, his book is undeniably short and punchy. His biography's 'attitude' is just as self-evident; he candidly states that he is 'not a great admirer of Henry V' (p. 126). In the context of the great historiographical affection for Henry V, most notably encapsulated in K. B. McFarlane's remark that he was 'the greatest man ever to have ruled England' (*Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights* (1972), p.133), this is all the more striking. Developing his line of argument from *Late Medieval England, 1399-1509* (2000) (p. 88), where he concluded that Henry's rule was 'brilliant but mistakenly directed', and building significantly on Keith Dockray's *Henry V* (2004), he launches what is perhaps the most pithy, most lucid and most accessible re-assessment of Henry's reputation that has been written to date.

The majority of the work takes the form of a relatively straightforward narrative of Henry's life. Considering the brevity of the book, its scope is commendable – neglecting neither Henry's domestic administration nor his foreign conquests. Likewise, it draws upon an impressive array of sources, including administrative documents, the rolls of parliament, and a multiplicity of chronicles. Pollard is also adept at addressing the 'big questions', such as when Henry decided to revive the war with France (p. 49), and giving key background, as with explaining the complex political geography of early fifteenth century France (p. 50), in the concise manner which the format demands. This means that, whilst his account cannot, and indeed does not intend to, match the thoroughness of Christopher Allmand's biography of Henry, it constitutes an easier, clearer and pacier narrative of Henry's reign for those first encountering the king or simply wishing to gain an outline.

However, for historians it is Pollard's arguments, which develop in the latter part of the book, which pose more interest. His analysis of how Henry's high-handed search for money began to arouse real concerns is both persuasive (pp. 94-6) and a valuable revision to scholarship which once held that Henry's money-raising was 'a major fiscal and administrative triumph' which did not prompt 'plain speech from the commons', as Maurice Keen suggested in *England in the Later Middle Ages* (1973) (p. 377). Similarly powerful is Pollard's case that the Treaty of Troyes 'did more to continue than conclude the conflict' (p. 113), because of how blatantly unacceptable its terms were to the supporters of the dauphin (p. 82). Yet not all of Pollard's arguments are so compelling. Some are undermined within the work itself; it is difficult to square the idea that 'he was not a man known for his liking or generosity towards women' (p. 111) with the notion that 'throughout his life he remained close to his maternal grandmother, Joan' (p. 14). Likewise, many of Pollard's views will undoubtedly remain subject to further debate and revision, as with his claim that, for Henry, 'the end of war was no peace; it was more war' (p. 112).

Indeed, Pollard's final assessment of Henry, and the verdict that his 'ultimate legacy was the bankrupting of his realm and the destruction of his dynasty' is probably the most problematic of all his judgments. This claim sits oddly with the relative stability and success of Henry VI's minority. Although Henry V himself died in 1422, the crown was still solvent in 1437, and Henry VI's claim to the throne was not challenged until 1460, almost forty years after Henry's death. Even if one feels that Henry's legacy was far from perfect, one cannot help but feel that the fall of the House of Lancaster in 1461 was by no means an inevitable outcome of his reign, and that at least some responsibility lies on the shoulders of his son and heir, Henry VI: who McFarlane, in *England in the Fifteenth Century* (1981) (p.239), brilliantly described as a king whose 'head was too small for his father's crown'.[1]

[1] In regards to the crown's solvency and challenges to Henry VI's claim to the English throne, see G.L Harriss, *Cardinal Beaufort* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 264 and J. Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 358-9 respectively.

Ultimately what will irk historians the most, however, is the presentation of the book for the popular market. One might arch an eyebrow at particular turns of phrase, such as Pollard's description of Prince Henry as a 'Hooray Henry' (p. 38), but the greater issue is that the format requires footnotes to be kept to a minimum. This means that many interesting and important sources are not properly referenced – both primary, as when Pollard discusses the formal code of conduct for Henry's army but not where this might be found (p. 111), and secondary, as where he states that 'it has been argued that Lydate's *Troy Book* (1412-20) and *Siege of Thebes* (c. 1422) are coded anti-imperialist, anti-war tracts', but does not state by whom or where (p. 113).[2] There are also a number of minor errors in his 'Further Reading' section, as with his misspelling of John Matusiak's name as 'Matusiac' (p. 125). For those without an existing grounding in the literature of the period, this makes it harder to track down find Pollard's sources and investigate them further.

Yet, whatever gripes scholars may have with the work's format, or queries they might have with its arguments, this is a significant attempt to revise Henry's reputation by a leading historian, which students of his reign should not ignore.

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[2] One assumes this is a reference to G.L. Harriss, 'Introduction' in *Henry V: The Practice of Kingship,* ed. by G.L. Harriss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 1-29 (pp. 20-23)