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## **Silenced Voices: A Reactionary Streamlined *Henry V* in *The Hollow Crown***

Perhaps no other play in Shakespeare's oeuvre has been so misunderstood and bowdlerized as *Henry V*. It is nevertheless one of the most popular of Shakespeare's plays and has been made into several well-known films. The film versions, however, have seen the play streamlined, with the removal or shortening of so-called episodes or "throw-away" scenes with a consequent misrepresentation of the issues of war, patriotism and nationalism. In addition, the minor characters, so key to reaching an understanding of the play in my reading of the work, are often silenced or neglected. I would like to argue that those elements, repeatedly cut from the film versions, actually provide possible alternative readings of the play which turn it from a flag-waving jingoistic celebration of Britain's superiority over France into a profound critique of honour, nationalism and religion used to justify military aggression. I would like to use the latest film version, the final segment from the four-part, critically acclaimed *The Hollow Crown* series, directed by Thea Sharrock in 2012 as a study in point. Although visually spectacular and brilliantly acted, the film once again butchers the play and thereby neglects much of the subversive details and characters.

There are three previous film renderings of the play worthy of note. The first was Laurence Olivier's version from 1944 which he both directed and starred in. The film was unashamedly created as war propaganda and even dedicated to British soldiers fighting in World War II. Deborah Cartmell (96) summarizes the approach succinctly, "Laurence Olivier eliminates half of the play's lines (most notably, episodes which cast doubt on Henry's motives and heroism) and produces the unity which critics had found missing."

The most faithful film rendition of the play is the BBC production from 1979 directed by David Giles and starring David Gwillim. Kenneth Branagh's version from 1989, with Branagh again as director and headliner star, was extremely popular and influential, providing the Northern Irishman with

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world-wide fame. Although willing to explore the darker aspects of the play, it nevertheless cuts a great deal of the plot and includes, in my mind, “mandatory” glamorous battle scenes which imbalance the story.

My reading of the play consequently argues that the episode scenes, these being almost inevitably the ones omitted or shortened in the film versions, serve as mirrors, parallel plots, to the preceding or consequent major scenes featuring King Henry. I refer to this technique as “foreshadowing” when the episode scene occurs before the major scene and “echoing” when it takes place afterwards. These episodes inevitably serve to deflate or ridicule the high-blown rhetoric voiced by Henry and the nobility. Hereward T. Price (102) has a similar observation concerning the plays in general:

Apparently loose detachable scenes, so-called episodes, are frequent in Shakespeare. They vary in function as well as in techniques, but certain features tend to recur. Many of them are [...] mirror scenes, reflecting in one picture either the main theme or some important aspect of the drama. Others offer some kind of contrast to the general run of the action [...]. Others again affect the plot by keying down the suspense.

I would like to make mention of the minor characters in the play and the various techniques for subversive commentary they provide. Falstaff disappears in *Henry V* despite Shakespeare’s promise to include him at the end of *Henry IV Part 2*. We do continue to have, however, Falstaff’s henchmen. Pistol has the largest space in the play with his actions often “aping” the grandiose mannerisms of the King. Pistol, of course, fancies himself a poet and additionally absurdly believes he can speak French. His garbled renditions of French, particularly in 4:4 with Master Fer, are not only amusing but also serve as a wry commentary on the primary action. Nym and Bardolph are also of importance as is the Boy who provides a child’s innocent, but also insightful perspective, on the war and battle events. Mistress Quickly returns with her malapropisms and garbled language, often of a sexual nature, deflating male pretension. Her poignant report of Falstaff’s death, despite her idiosyncratic use of English, is one of the most moving speeches in all of Shakespeare.

The first act begins with a cynical display of power politics on the part of two prominent clergyman, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely. After initiating the proceedings, they appear no more. The so-called traitors, Cambridge, Lord Scroop and Sir Thomas Grey, also have small but not insignificant roles in providing alternative voices to the proceedings.

The play introduces a number of soldiers of various classes from the nobleman on both sides to the captains in Henry’s army each representing one of the nations of the British Isles. The most interesting is the Welshman Fluellen, an amateur historian with an interest in Alexander the Great and a tendency to

mispronounce certain consonants, particularly struggling with B, when speaking English. At the bottom of the social scale are the foot soldiers William, Bates and Court, who provide an eloquent working class perspective on the battle, even getting the upper hand when debating the justifiability of the war with Henry in disguise the night before the battle of Agincourt.

The French characters are not shown in a flattering light. I will focus, however, on Princess Catherine, who oddly decides to begin learning the language of the invading nation. Her initial English lesson under the supervision of her lady-in-waiting, Alice, is bawdy in the extreme. This is obviously purposeful and particularly disturbing when looking at the context. Catherine is also a silenced woman in the play not only linguistically but also at the end of the play when she is essentially sold to King Henry by her father under duress.

Act I of the play, following the opening chorus, is primarily focused on setting the stage for the decision to invade France. The two clergymen, Canterbury and Ely, immediately make reference to what is at stake, namely their own livelihoods in connection with a proposed bill to curtail their property: "If it pass against us, / We lose the better half of our possession" (1:1:7-8). They continue preparing their machinations and devise a scheme to divert Henry's intentions by encouraging him to invade France and claim his supposed birth right; sanctioned by the Church of course. *The Hollow Crown* version opens with Henry V's funeral and a view of his widow Catherine accompanied by her lady-in-waiting Alice with the baby King Henry VI in her arms, heading into the church. The Queen is silent but elegant and the voice-over of the chorus sets the scene. This concludes with a close-up of the deceased Henry (played by Tom Hiddleston, critically acclaimed and considered very handsome, a stark contradiction to his own less than flattering description of himself when wooing Catherine, "the poor and untempering effect of / my visage" (5:2:209-210)).

As the words of the chorus die out, Henry's eyes open and we are back at the beginning of the play with the King in the prime of his life, riding his horse with cape flying in the wind. When the clergy begin act 1 proper they initially speak of the remarkable changes in Henry's character. The film version begins with Ely, taking over Canterbury's lines, "The King is full of grace and fair regard" (1:1:22). The two clergymen continue to discuss Henry's transformation while walking through various corridors, interspersed with close-ups of Henry on horseback obviously enjoying being young, good-looking and healthy. While the play goes out of its way to emphasize the cynicism involved in the decision, specifically the manner in which the Church manipulates the truth involved in Henry's claim to the French throne in order to distract the King from confiscating their own property, the film immediately places Henry at the focus of things, shifting the initial mood from one of corruption and greed to self-aggrandizing adulation. The clergymen in the film finally seem to recall their own potential losses, as if such an important issue had

slipped their minds, when about to enter the assembly hall to meet the King. The overall shifting and shortening of the dialogue between them and the inclusion of the King on horseback downplay the initial impression of the play wherein the Church cynically manipulates political events in order to protect their own skin. Instead *The Hollow Crown* has Henry as the focus, in all of his glory.

The King first appears on stage in the play in 1:2 where he first hears the Archbishop of Canterbury's justifications for invading France and then meets with the French ambassador who presents Henry with the insulting gift of tennis balls from the Dauphin. This only serves to inflame Henry's resolve to conquer France and the scene concludes with a call to arms. The scene contains the extremely wordy and convoluted speech by the Archbishop explaining the cryptic Salic law which supposedly justifies Henry's claim. The speech is obviously designed to be impenetrable as is apparent when the King finally asks in exasperation, "May I with right and conscience make this claim?" (1:2:94). Henry is, in other words, in need of the Church's rubber-stamp in order to justify the act of war. The Branagh film version is fairly faithful in this regard with Exeter, the King's uncle, obviously encouraging the Archbishop to manipulate the King and with Canterbury uttering the lines, "So that, as clear as is the summer's sun," (1:2:86) to the great amusement of the gathered lords of the realm after a long convoluted list of various names supposedly justifying Henry's claim. *The Hollow Throne* cuts all but four lines of the Archbishop's speech of 65 lines thereby erasing almost all doubts concerning the legitimacy and motivation behind the act of aggression. The focus is instead more on the rivalry between the King and the Dauphin. While the play immediately reeks of corruption and deceit, the film is all light and glamour.

The following scene in the play, after the short introductory chorus opening act 2, is the first to introduce Falstaff's scurvy crew. Nym, a new character included in the farcical play involving Falstaff, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, is mooning over Mistress Quickly who has apparently married Pistol. Nym feels he has been treated unfairly and has sworn revenge on Pistol for stealing his love interest. Bardolph attempts to restore peace amongst the two men:

Come, shall I make you two friends? We must to  
France together. Why the devil should we keep  
knives to cut one another's throats? (2:1:81-83)

Nym and Pistol's quarrel over Mistress Quickly (a rather odd prize) is a mirror echoing of Henry and the Dauphin arguing over who holds the rights to the Kingdom of France. I would also draw a parallel between Pistol, the notorious swaggerer always misquoting and garbling lines from various other Elizabethan playwrights as well as foreign language remarks, and the new look of the

patriotic boastful Prince. Just as the King utters terrible threats to the whole of France all at the unveiling of some innocent looking tennis balls, Pistol takes great offence when Nym challenges him to fight one on one: “I would have you solus” (2:2:39). Pistol takes the Latin theatrical word for alone “solus” as an insult, demonstrating the absurdity of his feigned pretense of being a great scholar. “‘Solus’, egregious dog? O viper vile! / The solus in thy most marvellous face” (2:1:40-41).

He goes on and on as usual, with no violence ensuing, in contrast, of course, to the bloodthirsty Henry. The petty thieves, however, end up putting their knives away and are reconciled, in vivid contrast to the royals who plunge their nations into war. This remarkable mirroring has been neglected in the film versions thereby ridding the story of this key satirical perspective. Additionally, *The Hollow Crown* completely neglects this aspect by leaving out part of the text of the chorus introducing act 2 and thereby insinuating that Falstaff’s three cronies are the “three corrupted men” (2:0:22) who are plotting against the King, when these are actually, of course, Cambridge, Scroop and Grey of 2:2. who are executed for their supposed treachery. This creates a severe imbalance right from the beginning in terms of how we view these characters. *The Hollow Crown* actually leaves out the entire 2:2. involving the plot against the King’s life, their confessions and executions. This omission only further imbalances the plot as additional dissident voices are left unheard.

2:1 also includes references to Falstaff being on his death bed and how this might be attributable to heart-break due to having been rejected and perhaps even imprisoned by his beloved Hal. This scene foreshadows the following 2:2 where the three traitors are condemned to death and Henry expresses his feelings of outrage at their doings:

[...] thou cruel,  
 Ingrateful, savage and inhuman creature?  
 Thou that didst bear the key of all my counsels,  
 That knew’st the very bottom of my soul, (2:2:91-94)

all this a mute issue, of course, in *The Hollow Throne*.

Henry’s sentiment in that same scene 2:2 involving continuous references to God is deflated by its placement in-between the accounts of Falstaff’s death. Mistress Quickly’s narrative is a brilliant mixture of humour and anguish:

‘How now, Sir John!’ quoth I. ‘What, man! Be o’ good cheer.’ So a cried out ‘God, God, God’ three or four times.  
 Now I, to comfort him, bid him a should not think of God;  
 I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet. (2:3:6-20)

Mistress Quickly consoles the dying man, assuring him that there is no need to bring God into the matter. This quite honest, humane observation from the mouth of an uneducated inn-keeper contrasts vividly with the self-righteous overuse of God's name in the previous scene to justify not only executing the "traitors" but also the entire, extremely flimsy pretext for invading France. The exclusion of 2:2 in *The Hollow Crown*, however, makes all of this mirroring irrelevant.

Each film version makes much ado about Henry's famed call to arms in front of the gates of Harfleur: "Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more, / Or close the wall up with our English dead" (3:1:1-2). This is immediately followed in 3.2., however, by Bardolph echoing Henry's heroic lines, while presumably urging other soldiers forward while remaining out of harm's way himself, "On, on, on, on, on! / To the breach, to the breach!" (3:2:1-2). This is the most explicit example of mirroring in the play and once again serves as a corrective, deflating the over-blown rhetoric voiced by Henry. Several lines later the boy humanizes the proceedings by uttering what everyone probably secretly wishes for in their heart of hearts and providing a subtle critique of the war propaganda employed in order to motivate the soldiers in their quest for "fame": "Would I were in an alehouse in London! I would give all / my fame for a pot of ale, and safety" (3:2:10-11). *The Hollow Crown* production is faithful to the text at this point. Henry's lines are cut somewhat, but the comic encouragement by the cowardly, or opportunistic, followers of Falstaff is included, only for Fluellen to force them to join in the fray.

After their slap-stick departure, the boy is left presumably alone on stage in the play. The boy has grown understandably weary of the crooked behaviour of the men he serves, making an acute observation as to the manner in which they mask their dirty dealings under a pretense of respectability, "They will steal anything, and call it 'purchase'" (3:2:39). This strategy is actually, however, a particularly apt description of what King Henry is doing on a large-scale, in other words, clothing a brutal act of foreign aggression with high-sounding words such as, "'God for Harry! England and Saint George!'" (3:1:34). *The Hollow Crown* is fairly accurate in this particular scene, but leaves out the last-mentioned observation by the boy. The film actually has the boy included in even more scenes than the play but inextricably fails to provide him with his best lines. The boy even survives the battle in contrast to the original. The next scene, 3:3, involves a discussion between two of the captains, the Welshman Fluellen and the Englishman Gower, only to be joined moments later by the Irish Macmorris and the Scot Jamy. They debate military strategy and even have an interest in classical history with references to "the Roman wars" (3:3:38-39). *The Hollow Crown* simplifies things once again by only including Fluellen and stripping him of his signature pronunciation difficulties, specifically the making of a "p" sound instead of a "b" sound. The Welsh actor Owen Teale plays him

almost identically as his humorless character Alisser Thorne in *Game of Thrones* thereby stripping the role of its comic energy.

The following scene where King Henry voices an ultimatum to the townspeople of Harfleur, warning them of the consequences if they refuse to surrender is one of the most blood-curdling in all of Shakespeare. Here naked aggression is laid bare:

[...] 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 flow'ring infants.  
 [...]  
 If not—why, in a moment look to see  
 The blind and bloody soldier with foul hand  
 Defile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters;  
 Your fathers taken by the silver beards,  
 And their most reverend heads dashed to the walls;  
 Your naked infants spitted upon pikes, (3:3:88-91, 110-115)

One could argue, undoubtedly, that this is mere hyperbole employed in order to frighten the local population and prevent further blood-shed over the long-term. Rape imagery is a reoccurring theme, however, throughout the play. Henry actually seems to be implying that it is the French who are to blame here for the atrocities which are about to be committed. Dollimore and Sinfield (214) provide an insightful comment in connection with this aspect of the play, “With this theory of legitimate versus illegitimate power the responsibility for aggression is displaced onto its victims”. Of additional interest in this speech is Henry’s repetition of the word “hand” as he threatens the citizens of Harfleur with rape, violation and murder. *The Hollow Throne* keeps to the structure of the play at this point although inexplicably the town already seems to have given up when Henry’s utters his threats.

Princess Catherine appears for the first time in the following scene 3:4, learning English words from her waiting woman Alice, who has been to England before and has a rudimentary knowledge of the language:

CATHERINE: Alice, tu as été en Angleterre, et tu bien parles  
 le langage.  
 ALICE: Un peu, madame.  
 CATHERINE: Je te prie, m’enseignez. Il faut que j’apprenne a  
 parler. Comment appelez-vous la main en anglais?  
 ALICE: La main? Elle est appelée de hand.  
 CATHERINE: De hand. Et les doigts? (3:4:1-7)

Catherine is provided with a voice, but of necessity a foolish one. The first word Catherine learns is of course “hand”, the same word repeated in such graphic manner in the previous horrific scene. Feminist critics, such as Howard and Rackin (210) have pointed out the parallel or “mirroring” between the words she is learning in English, i.e. parts of the body, and the rape-threatening by Henry in the previous scene 3:3: “The English word gown becomes in the mouths of the Frenchwomen, ‘le count’ (in the folio) or ‘le coune’ (in the quarto), thus ending the scene with an uproarious sexual joke that unambiguously specifies the purpose of the entire exercise”. The listing of the parts of the body thus contributes to the overall violent sexual objectification of women and the rape of France the country, classically personified as a female in the play.

This disturbing interpretation is reinforced later by Williams’ comments to the disguised King the night before the battle of Agincourt, questioning the moral justification for the entire war:

But if the cause be not good, the King himself hath a heavy reckoning to make, when all those legs and arms and heads chopped off in battle shall join together at the latter day, and cry all, ‘We died at such a place’—some swearing, some crying for a surgeon, some upon their wives left poor behind them, some upon the debts they owe, some upon their children rawly left. (4:1:128-134)

The reference to decapitated limbs and bodily parts serves to echo and throw a new light on the previous, at first glance light-hearted, dialogue between the Princess and her maid. This apocalyptic language lays bare the high-handed rhetoric of a divinely sanctioned war.

The following scene, 3:5, back in the French camp, once again, dwells upon war being equated with violent sexuality with the Dauphin lamenting that

Our madams mock at us and plainly say  
Our mettle is bred out, and they will give  
Their bodies to the lust of English youth,  
To new-store France with bastard warriors. (3:5:28-31)

*The Hollow Crown* once again shifts scenes or events around failing to utilize the richness of parallelism and mirroring. Henry’s victory at Harfleur in 3:3 is immediately followed by Pistol and Nym pleading to Fluellen to intercede on behalf of Bardolph who has been caught stealing a cross, placed in 3:6 in the play. The film version includes Nym in the scene and has earlier shown York arresting Bardolph in the act, an incident which is only referred to in Shakespeare. Then follows the English lesson of 3:4. The proximity of the

bodily parts references is lost, however, and the viewer is not forced to consider the implications of Catherine's choice of vocabulary for study.

In 3:4 Bardolph is executed for stealing a pax, a religious item with a crucifix on it, which can literally be translated as "peace" and is undoubtedly symbolic. Bardolph is thus a scapegoat figure who must be sacrificed for the sins of the entire English army who are intent on stealing the peace of France. Henry's subsequent moralistic appeal for good-behaviour on the part of the soldiers consequently rings more than a little false:

We would have all such offenders so cut off, and  
we give express charge, that in our marches through the  
country, there be nothing compelled from the villages, nothing  
taken but paid for, none of the French upbraided or abused in  
disdainful language. For when lenity and cruelty play for a  
kingdom, the gentler gamester is the soonest winner. (3:6:98-103)

Henry who has just invaded an entire country at the highly questionable urging of high church officials, who are admittedly only interested in money, punishes his friend and then self-righteously voices this ridiculous sentiment only a few lines after threatening to rape and murder the women, children and elderly of Harfleur.

The lengthy scenes with the French officers are either cut drastically in 3:7 or completely in 4:2 in *The Hollow Crown*. This once reduces the rich tapestry of perspective provided by Shakespeare with the spotlight continuously on Henry, with a minimum of troublesome distractions.

"A little touch of Harry in the night" (4:0:47) is a brilliant segment employing a wholly original technique of criticism. Whereas, up until now, the dissident voices have been comic and thus easily passed over, here we are given the direct matter-of-fact critical views of common soldiers debating the rights and wrongs of the war with Henry in disguise. Henry encounters three soldiers: John Bates, Alexander and Michael Williams. Henry begins by expounding how the King is a man just like them, sharing the same hopes and fears. The soldiers counter with grumbling statements about wishing they were all back at home in safety. Henry assures them that the King "would not wish himself anywhere but where / he is"? (4:1:114-115). Bates' rejoinder cuts deep, "Then I would he were here alone. So should he be sure / to be ransomed, and a many poor men's lives saved" (4:1:116-117). In other words, this entire affair is a quarrel between the aristocracy of the two nations with the average soldier merely a pawn in the cynical game. Henry defends himself of this charge in a pompous tone and unwittingly shows his cards, revealing the key dubious moral justification for the entire war, "Methinks I could not die anywhere so contented as in the / King's company, his cause being just and his quarrel honour/able (4:1:120-122).

Williams jumps on this latter statement, “That’s more than we know” (4:1:123). This is a rare instance of the common man, unconsciously, of course, having the opportunity to tell off the person in charge, with no punches pulled, in similar fashion as the fools in the comedies or in *King Lear*. It only gets worse for King Henry as the already mentioned speech by Williams follows, describing the carnage of war and the moral responsibility the King has for it all which concludes with the lines

Now, if these men do not die  
well, it will be a black matter for the King that led them to it—  
who to disobey were against all proportion of subjection. (4:1:136-138)

The soldiers, of course, have no choice but to follow the king, thus all the heavier is the King’s moral responsibility. This extremely pointed argument is deflected by Henry with a boorish discussion of the individual’s responsibility for his own soul which Williams even acquiesces to. The larger issue is avoided, however, namely, the moral justification for the war and the manner in which the powerless are cynically employed in a greedy quest for more power. The discussion ends abruptly when Williams takes offence, and a fight almost breaks out, at Henry’s final mealy-mouthed cliché, “If I live to see it, I will never trust his word after” (4:1:182). William counters that they will be dead anyway, and even if they survive what possible notice would the King take of a commoner’s opinion.

*The Hollow Crown* is faithful to a great degree to the text preserving in almost their entirety the lines of the foot soldiers. It does, however, cut the long-winded theological justifications voiced by Henry to evade responsibility for his decision to lead his soldiers to slaughter. Also, his formulaic soliloquy (4:1:212-266) after the exit of the soldiers is left out, where he amongst other things laments having to be held responsible by the common man for his actions, “O hard condition, / Twin-born with greatness, subject to the breath / Of every fool” (4:1:215-217). These emissions in the film make Henry seem more democratic, more willing to treat the foot soldiers on equal terms.

Scene 4:3 is arguably the most famous in the play with Henry’s classic speeches on St. Crispin’s Day and Warriors for the Working Day with its continual references to honour. The scene ends with Henry’s rejection of Montjoy the herald’s request for a ransom and Henry’s appeal that “God, dispose the day!” (4:3:133). In the film versions this is, with the exception of the BBC version which is almost always faithful to the text, followed by action-packed battle scenes, often with close-ups of Henry committing acts of daring-do and urging his men in to battle. The historical victory, despite the “fearful odds” (4:3:5), was primarily due to a military breakthrough involving the use of the long-bow. This is touched on in Branagh and *The Hollow Crown*, although not in

Shakespeare's play. An individual who had only seen the film versions, with the exception of the BBC production, would be under the impression that the play was action packed. The truth is, however, that all of the battle scenes in the play take place off stage. The only actual semblance of physical conflict on stage (in contrast to *Henry IV Part 1*, where we actually get actors sword fighting at the battle of Shrewsbury) is between Fluellen and Pistol, two supposed allies, or when the French soldier Master Fer gives himself up to Pistol. The latter scene is highly ridiculous with Pistol, very luckily, taking a French knight prisoner and accepting a bribe to let him go. He thinks the French man's name is Dew when the man cries out Dieu in fear for his life, which again echoes the last words of Henry in the previous scene:

PISTOL: Art thou a gentleman? What is thy name? Discuss.  
FRENCH SOLDIER: O Seigneur Dieu!  
PISTOL: O, Seigneur Dew should be a gentleman—  
Perpend my words, O Seigneur Dew, and mark:  
O Seigneur Dew, thou diest, on point of fox,  
Except, O Seigneur, thou do give to me  
Egregious ransom. (4:4:5-11)

Both key words of the previous scene, "God" and "ransom" are consequently seen in a parodic light. And this farcical episode, strangely enough, is the only scene in the entire play which shows an actual confrontation between the warring camps. This scene is cut completely in *The Hollow Crown*. Instead Pistol is shown with his hands shaking unable to fight while Nym heroically battles with the French. In the play, the boy, who acts as interpreter between Pistol and the French soldier, has a soliloquy at the end of 4:4 where he informs the audience that both Bardolph and Nym "are both hanged" (4:4:64), and insinuating that Pistol is headed for the same fate. This is again omitted and the film instead shows the boy cradling the dying York in his arms and being saved from certain death by Exeter. The boy dies in the play while guarding the luggage, an act of treachery on the part of the French which is lamented over in 4:7.

This odd seeming throw-away scene consists of an absurd interchange between the Welshman Fluellen and Gower framed by references to cutting throats and Henry's order in the previous scene to have "every soldier kill his prisoners!" (4:6:37). Fluellen is an amateur war historian and makes a comparison between Alexander the Great or the Pig (instead of Big) in his idiosyncratic pronunciation. Fluellen's reference to how both kings killed their best friends is also poignant:

GOWER: [...] the King, most worthily, hath caused every soldier to cut his prisoner's throat. O, 'tis a gallant king.

FLUELLEN: Ay, he was born at Monmouth, Captain Gower,  
 what call you the town's name where Alexander the Pig was born?  
 GOWER: Alexander the Great. (4:7:7-12)

The use of “porn”, instead of “born”, produces raised eyebrows for a contemporary reader, and secondly, and more importantly, “pig”, instead of “big” or actually “great”. And all this being discussed while the bodies of the dead boys are still, perhaps, actually lying on the stage. Harold C. Goddard (249) is one of the few critics to consider this other than an attempt to make a cheap joke at the expense of the Welsh: “That ‘Pig,’ of course, must have delighted the groundlings. But there is more to it than that. For consider: Alexander the Great has become the symbol for all time of insatiable lust for blood and conquest.” *The Hollow Crown* version leaves this out completely, once again selling short the multi-dimensional perspectives of the play.

Fluellen and Pistol appear for the last time in 5:1, after the battle has been won and only the formalities remain as concerns the terms of the French surrender and the marriage between King Henry and Catherine, in an odd seemingly mere comic scene where Fluellen forces Pistol to eat a leek, the national symbol of Wales, as a punishment for mocking his Welshness:

FLUELLEN: By Jesu, I will make him eat some part of my leek, or  
 I will peat his pate four days and four nights.—Bite, I pray you.  
 It is good for your green wound and your bloody coxcomb.  
 PISTOL: Must I bite? (5:1:36-39)

This scene is again completely ignored in *The Hollow Crown* whereby the viewer missed out on how this physical beating and humiliation serve to foreshadow the events of the following scene where Henry bullies the French King into accepting the terms of defeat and more or less possesses himself of Catherine the princess, who had actually been offered to him earlier in order to avoid war and been rejected. When the Princess shyly says it is up to her father, “Dat is as it shall please de roi mon pere” (5:2:229), Henry replies, “Nay, it will please him well, Kate. It shall please him, Kate” (5:2:230-231). In other words, there is really nothing to be discussed, as the French King is over a barrel, and has no choice in the matter with Catherine’s consent merely a formality. Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin (214-215) comment on this as follows:

First characterized in language that associates her with the conquered cities of France, Katherine is then subjected to a symbolic rape when Henry forces her to endure his kiss. From that moment on, she has not another word to say. Silenced [...] Katherine provides the proof of Henry’s manhood as well as the legitimization of his identity as king.

The silencing of women is taken to an extreme in the *The Hollow Crown* adaptation wherein the character of the Queen of France, who has a number of lines in 5:2, including the penultimate ones, assigned to her husband. She is not even present in this version. Additionally, the moments in 5:2 with Tom Hiddleston as Henry downplaying his looks and charm, while preening and mugging for the camera, as he tries to win the heart of the Princess, come across as ludicrous.

The play ends with the epilogue spoken by the chorus which emphasizes the fact that Henry dies soon afterwards, leaving the kingdoms to his infant son Henry VI, whose reign consists not only of almost constant warfare with France, once again, but also the tragic events of civil strife, the War of the Roses. This reference to having “lost France and made his England bleed” (Epilogue:12) only reiterates the absurdity of the entire campaign and loss of human life wherein Henry takes the advice of his cynical father “to busy giddy minds / with foreign quarrels” (*Henry IV Part 2*, 4:3:341-342). *The Hollow Crown* includes the epilogue recited by the Chorus during the funeral, coming back full circle to the beginning of the film, interspersed with highlights of Henry’s exploits from earlier in the story, once again drawing attention away from the critical tone of the original play.

*Henry V* is a remarkable play but not necessarily for the reasons popularized in the film under discussion. *The Hollow Crown* by streamlining the plot to almost exclusively revolve around Henry rejects the many progressive advances championed by Feminist, Marxist and Cultural Materialist critics, to name but a few. Deborah Cartmell (107) makes a similar point this time in reference to Branagh’s *Henry V*:

There is a [...] gap [...] between Shakespeare criticism and the ways in which Shakespeare is projected on screen. Branagh’s film thereby joins in a ‘holy war’, not with the government (and ‘jingoistic’ Shakespeare), but with academics long fed up with such bardolatry.

I would argue that the gap has widened even further with *The Hollow Crown*. The depiction of the King provided in the film instead fits E.M.W. Tillyard’s (299) description of the popular/populist image of Henry: “Henry V was traditionally not only the perfect king but a king after the Englishman’s heart; one who added the quality of good mixer to the specifically regal virtues”.

Shakespeare’s play provides a rich tapestry of characters of varying classes and nationalities who often critique Tillyard’s idealized picture of the King. Practically each scene in the play serves as a commentary on another section of the play. It is a finely woven tapestry which when performed as a whole should continually call into question the war-mongering sentiments often celebrated in the films. The minor characters and episodic scenes are essential aspects which have to be taken into account in order to do justice to the complexities of Shakespeare’s possibly most misunderstood play.

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