

The Henry in *Henry V*

Shakespeare's *Henry V* is a play intrinsically associated with war. Though it is often used as a rallying cry, as with Laurence Olivier's 1944 film version, this play reads like a mirror for the public perception of war in the present day. Kenneth Branagh takes a different approach to this play in his 1989 film version of it. The film, on the whole, presents a story much more focused on the psychology of Henry than does the play. This is achieved in large part by Branagh's portrayal of Henry as expressive of his feelings and very emotionally connected to his mission. Another way he turns the film inward is by placing greater emphasis on the story of the tavern characters, and downplaying the comedy in them. Branagh assumes no knowledge of *Henry IV* in his film and thus uses flashbacks to establish the major characters of those plays that continue into *Henry V*. These ~~flashbacks and the choices he makes in the portrayal of these~~ characters create a film which the cost of war is measured by Henry's personal losses and not by those of the nation he conquers. By telling the story of Henry the person and the friends that once were his, the audience loses the feeling of sadness that accompanies the great cost of war as ^{specific} ~~is seen in~~ the play. ^{ant Climax} is seen in the play.

The tavern characters are first introduced in *Henry V* Act 2, Scene 1 with the discussion of Pistol's marriage to the Hostess and the worsening condition of Falstaff. The attention is diverted from Pistol and Nym to Falstaff with the entrance of his Boy and the announcement that Falstaff is ill. In the film, the severity of Falstaff's condition is established as the camera follows the Hostess upstairs to check on Sir John and then when she bids the men come up to him. All the tavern characters are in agreement that, "the King has killed his heart" (Henry IV: Part One,

2.1.88). This is the first mention of Henry, who was once Hal, and it sets the tone for their interactions over the course of the film. In the film, Pistol begins to remember Sir John in his better days. The others are gathered around Falstaff as he stands to deliver a speech comprised of snippets from speeches Falstaff makes in the text of *Henry IV: Part One*. Falstaff describes days when he was "virtuously given" and makes a series of jokes that establish his good humor and his bawdy and dishonest ways, "[I] went to a bawdy house not above once in a quarter – of an hour, paid money that I borrowed -- three or four times" (*Henry IV: Part One*, 3.3.11, 12-24). The double edge of Falstaff is established in this same flashback when Bardolph makes a joke back to Falstaff. Bardolph has been established in the text, and vividly in the film, as having a misshapen nose that is perpetually red from overdrinking. Falstaff replies, meanly, "Do thou amend thy face, and I'll amend my life" (*Henry IV: Part One*, 3.3.18). The previous exchange had been quite true to the text, it was simply pared down to include only the main jokes and establish the character of Falstaff. In the film however, Bardolph storms off after this ^(insult) put down rather than responding to it as he does in the text of the play. The audience sees that Falstaff, as fun as he is, can be mean when his humor gets too close to the truth for comfort.

This feeling is short lived ^{however} in the film, since Hal enters at this moment. The joy on Falstaff's face at this point seems genuine and the returning smile that creeps, seemingly unbidden, into Hal's face suggests a true friendship. Having no other scenes from *Henry IV* to draw ^{upon} from, the audience of Branagh's film would take this to be true. Falstaff then lowers his voice and speaks his speech from Act 2, Scene 4 where he and Hal have been acting out a conversation between Hal and his father. In the text, Falstaff is speaking as Hal's father, but in the film, Falstaff speaks in his own person. Falstaff comes up close to Hal and seems to almost plead with him to stay faithful to their friendship, "banish not him [Falstaff] thy Harry's

huh? unclear.
 1) already have seen as well as mentioned Henry I so it means "the low life characters", first mention "need for that and since no interactions w/ prior Falstaff"

company – banish plump Jack, and banish all the world” (Henry IV: Part One, 2.4.381-2). In a bizarre moment, Hal speaks without moving his lips in an echoing way that often suggests a character is thinking in film, and replies with “I do, I will” (Henry IV: Part One, 4.2.383). That exchange is as written in the play, but the camera pans over to the other tavern goers, who appear to have heard Hal’s reply, and who appear shocked at this response. The camera returns to Falstaff as he sputters in shock at Hal’s reply. Falstaff says in amazement “We have heard the chimes at midnight, Master Harry. Jesus, the days that we have seen” (Henry IV Part II, 3.2.209-10, 214). The first of these lines is actually spoken by Falstaff in the second part of *Henry IV* except the name has been changed from Shallow to Harry. The second line is a response by Shallow before the two exit together bound for dinner. These lines are in character for Falstaff and the mood of the two plays, and sound “right” since they are Shakespearean, but they do not occur in the scene that Branagh has just dramatized and are not an accurate representation of the ultimate rejection of Falstaff. This rejection is important to the story of *Henry V* since the death of Falstaff sets the tone for the relationship between Henry and his former friends.

yes -
called
"voice over"

The tone that Branagh establishes becomes crucial to his film since much emphasis is placed on the interactions of the tavern crew and the now King Henry. It is understandable that the complexity of the Hal-Falstaff relationship is simplified for the flashback—otherwise the flashback would show the whole of both parts of *Henry IV*. Henry’s actual rejection of Falstaff, soon after he has been crowned king, is a bizarre mix of humiliation, half jokes, and sadness over a lost friendship. These two characters have been much more developed through the darker parts of *Henry IV: Part Two*, and the rejection carries overtones about what Henry must personally sacrifice to be an effective king. The film audience loses the more disturbing side of Falstaff, his deception and true thieving nature, and Hal seems much crueler when he casts aside the

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seemingly jolly, simple tavernite Falstaff. Branagh sets up a specific premise for his film: he wants to stress the psychology of Henry the person, and to do so he will emphasize the tavern dwellers and their relationship, current and past, with a man who is now king. Since this is not a scene from *Henry V*, Branagh has created something, based on the “reality” of the plays in the Henriad, which will cast the sympathies of the audience to the side of the tavern dwellers. From this premise, the film continues on to France, and while the war Henry wages against the French is the main plot, the focus on the tavern crew follows the action and shifts focus away from the French costs of war.

The next encounter with the tavern cast that Branagh chooses to include and alter comes at the interaction of Pistol and Fluellen after Fluellen’s return from the bridge. Branagh cuts the discussion between Fluellen and Gower concerning whether Pistol is truly a knave or a valiant soldier and so Fluellen simply rejects Pistol’s request that he speak to Exeter concerning Bardolph’s fate. Pistol is nearly in tears asking for Fluellen’s help in enlisting Exeter. We see true friendship with Bardolph on the part of Pistol. This establishes a deeper bond between these characters than just fun in the bar—a bond that Hal, now Henry V, was once part of. As Fluellen relays to King Henry what has happened with Bardolph, the Duke of Exeter comes out of the mist standing in a cart with Bardolph kneeling next to him. Brian Blessed, the actor who portrays Exeter, is a large and imposing man and is dressed in full armor in this scene. He looms mightily over Bardolph, and it is easy to pity Bardolph in his position. His face is distorted as usual, but also covered in blood. His eyes are open wide and ^{he} looks extremely scared. The camera shifts back to Hal who looks far away and has a flashback to a drinking contest between Falstaff and Bardolph, of which he is the judge. The contest ends and Bardolph, seemingly apropos of nothing, says, “Do not thou, when thou art king, hang a thief” (Henry IV: Part 1,

1.2.47-8). Hal's eyes fall and he replies, "No, thou shalt" (Henry IV: Part 1, 1.2.49). This exchange, in the text, occurs between Hal and Falstaff in the first part of *Henry IV*. Branagh makes the change to Bardolph to increase the poignancy of the moment. Based on this flashback view of Bardolph, the decision to allow the hanging is cast as a much larger personal decision for Henry than just a question of thievery. The camera jerks back to the scene in France just as the cart is pulled away and Bardolph is hanged.

The pathetic aspect of Bardolph in this scene is overwhelming, and the relatively few scenes that involved Bardolph showed him having questionable morals but as mostly harmless fun. With Falstaff, in the earlier flashback, the consensus was that "the king has killed his heart," but in this case, the king actually oversaw the death of one of his old friends. On a personal level, Henry seems very cruel at this point. How could he possibly do such a thing to an old friend? There is a huge moral leap between rejecting low-life tavern buddies when becoming king, though not the most common of situations for the audience to identify with, to overseeing the hanging one of these same friends over a stolen metal disk. The character of Henry the person has become much darker at this point, and it seems unbelievably cruel to watch him give slight nods to speed along the hanging. On the other hand, as a ruler needing to maintain discipline under the rules of war, the personal grief he is willing to take on for his cause is powerful in its resolve. ^{really? Seems a big part of it, I'd say} This feeling is not the focus of the scene, nor should it be; but this ^{hence it is Henry's} same idea recurs in the play and is an interesting part of Henry's character. The play never ^{is Henry's} describes the actual hanging of Bardolph, and it certainly never implies that Henry is present for ^{flashback,} it. However, in his focus on the psychology of Henry, it seems a natural choice for Branagh to ^{not} explore this darker aspect of Henry's character. ^{Bardolph's, for instance...}

After the hanging, Henry, who has been weeping, says in a ragged and barely controlled voice, "We would have all such offenders cut off. And we give express charge that, in our marches through the villages, nothing taken but paid for [...] none of the French upbraided or abused in disdainful language" (Henry V, 3.6.107-11). This moment, in part, reveals the nobility of Henry: he absolutely will not allow his soldiers to act outside the rules of war towards the French civilians. This passage draws attention to the fate of the country that Henry has invaded, and it is a credit to the character of Henry that he insists upon this. Both of these effects are felt strongly in the text, and are present in the film as well, but they are ultimately trumped by the graphic hanging of Bardolph and the flashback that set it up. The emphasis is placed on the cost that Henry, in his grief, and his former friends, with their lives, must pay in order to maintain a kingly invasion of a country. The fate of the French citizens that are crushed underneath the advancing boots of the English is lost in the emotional and moral maelstrom that surrounds the hanging.

nice put!
other?
An unflattering aspect of Pistol is left out of the Branagh film through the omission of the scene between him and Monsieur Fer. This scene would also establish more personal contact with the French for the audience, who have seen mostly the arrogance of the French nobility. In the text of the play, the only 'battle' scene that is dramatized is the exchange between Pistol and Fer. This sequence can be very funny, but is a world away from the wonderful valor of Henry's St. Crispin's day speech. The quick shift between the two shows both sides of the same English coin—in the quality of character and in the want of both kinds of crowns. It is easy to pity Fer, who is no different than any of the English that have been presented to the audience as sympathetic, and find Pistol distasteful in his money-grubbing. *When* Pistol threatens *Le Fer's* life.

"Peasant, unless thou give me crowns, brave crowns, / Or mangled shalt thou be by this my

transit
would seem to cry out for one, esp. since this leads to killing of French prisoners (v. Henry's nobility above)

Here's an example of how the linked description/facts could be more high-level interpretive

sword" (Henry V, 4.4.39-40). ^{he} This is not the fun-loving Pistol who was laughing it up in the bar with Hal and the boys. The Boy has been commenting on this disparity in the text of the play, but the Branagh film does not include these scenes. ^{As a} The result ^{is that} the tavern dwellers seem more like simple, rustic fun, and not truly deceitful. In the text, after the siege of Harfluer, the Boy soliloquizes, "Their villainy goes against my stomach, and therefore I must cast it up" (Henry V, 3.2.51-2). In the Branagh film, the audience loses this speech, and a similar speech that occurs after the incident with Fer, which shows the Boy honestly finds the tavern dwellers distasteful. Their ugly side corresponds to the brutality of the war and serves to offset the valor of Henry's rhetoric with the gruesome reality of an invading force. The loss of these speeches reflects Branagh's choice to undercut the feeling of sadness that accompanies the war and focus instead on Henry. This omission also contributes to the feeling that they are ultimately good, decent men, and makes their destruction seem more tragic. ✓

(also watch "this" & "that")

Branagh, in his dramatization of the battle, does show Pistol and Nym searching the bodies of the slain French and taking their purses. This is certainly unflattering to their ✓ characters, but it is only one shot in a long battle montage and is quickly left. In that same sequence, the camera focuses on Pistol cradling the obviously dead Nym and weeping over him. There is no indication of how exactly Nym died, but it is the grief on Pistol's face that is most striking. Again, Branagh chooses to show a deep friendship between the members of the tavern crew, and the audience can sympathize with the raw emotion seen on Pistol's face. The emphasis that Branagh places on Pistol and his compatriots, even in the singular battle sequence with the French, is ^{yet another aspect} ~~one of the aspects~~ of the film that takes the focus away from the French.

Emphasis, building v. just "adding"

There are relatively few shots showing the losses of the French, which are quite large as evidenced by the reports that Henry reads from Montjoy, "This note doth tell me of then

thousand French / Than in the field lie slain [...] of the which / Five hundred were but yesterday dubbed knights" (Henry V, 4.8.80-1, 85-6). The text of the play does move quickly through the large death toll of the French, and the wealth of numbers creates a numerical accounting of those dead. But there is a moment of poignancy with the mention of the newly made and freshly killed French knights, and there is a weighty sadness at the senseless waste of youth. The film does not dwell on this moment, and after this, Henry picks up the Boy, now dead, and carries him through a field still scattered with bodies. A long tracking shot follows him through the field while a liturgical chorus sings a hymn to the fallen English. The focus is again placed squarely on Henry, and it is significant that he picks up the now dead Boy, ³one that he knew before. ✓ The connection becomes more personal to Henry, given that of all the dead squires, he specifically chooses Falstaff's former page. The long, wide shot gives a greater sense of scale to the scene, but it is Henry, central in the entire shot, who dominates the scene and the attention of the audience.

As the final ending to the story of the tavern goes, Pistol has a brief soliloquy to sum up the fate of the old band of friends. The audience learns that he is the only member of the former group to survive, "News have I that my Doll is dead / I' the' spital of a malady of France, / And there my rendezvous is quite cut off" (Henry V, 5.2.80-2). Pistol is in a pitiable position: he has no friends left in France, and no wife to return to in England. This conclusion is emphasized in the film by the misery that is evident on Pistol's face. This destruction is made more pronounced by the jump to this scene from the joyful exchange between Henry and Fluellen. In the text, there is intervening action, including a comic scene involving Fluellen and the tradition of wearing leeks on St Davy's Day. In the film, the shift to Pistol happens directly after the audience has seen Henry shake in crying from his happiness at the victory. There can be no

forgetting the death of Bardolph or the cause of Falstaff's death, and both Nym and the Boy died during the war that Henry created. Henry has destroyed all his former friends through his rise to the kingship or through his conquest of France, and this point is brought forward in the film by the rearranging of the scenes. The darker ending of the tavern crew and Henry's relationship to it shifts focus to Henry the person, and loses focus on the defeated French.

The final use of flashback in the film comes in the wonderful speech about peace given by the Duke of Burgundy at the meeting between France and England. This speech is a passionate and vivid plea to Henry to allow peace in France. The pain of the land and of the people is felt here, and the audience hears what damage the war has done to the country, "Even so our houses and ourselves and our children / Have lost, or do not learn for want of time, / The sciences that should become our country / But grow like savages" (Henry V, 5.2.56-9). The barbaric nature of war is called to mind in this passage, and is contrasted with the tending of homes and education of children. This speech is meant to shame Henry and establish how ravaged France has been by the invasion of England. The focus of the speech is on the land and the people, but Branagh chooses to shift the focus back to Henry by including a flashback. As Burgundy speaks, music plays and Henry sees images of those now dead. He sees all his dead tavern friends, but only one scene of the French: Orleans with the Constable on the battlefield. The combination of the speech and the images produces a strong feeling of loss. The personal connection between Henry and the people he remembers shifts that feeling until it is focused solely on the losses of Henry. When such life is destroyed, the obvious question is running beneath the surface of the action: victory, but at what cost? This question is suggested by both the text and the film, but the cost addressed by each is very different. The text places the focus on the French losses, and expands the play to encompass ethical questions about the justification

for war. The justness of Henry's invasion is not taken for granted, and there is a powerful sadness that accompanies the picture of destruction that the Duke of Burgundy creates in this speech. In the film, the cost being questioned is that being experienced by Henry himself. The images of his friends raise questions about the quality of Henry's morals, and the price of being a leader, but they miss the larger picture that includes the French costs. By using flashback techniques, Branagh turns the focus of this speech from the French to the psychology of Henry.

A more positive consequence of emphasizing Henry is that the film is very entertaining to watch. Branagh does an excellent job of involving the audience with his characters, and this is made much easier by the narrowing of scope down from the ethical issues surrounding war between two countries. He succeeds in making a wonderfully engaging story about a man who has the ability to act exactly as the occasion calls for it, and who accomplished amazing feats. In this concentration on Henry, Branagh does lose the larger ethical aspects and the sadness that accompanies the war in the text of the play. The tavern characters are particularly emphasized, by adding scenes that align their back-story with Branagh's vision of the characters as they exist in *Henry V*, in order to shift focus to Henry the person. By shifting his emphasis away from the war, Branagh creates a film full of inner turmoil for Henry, and leaves the true turmoil of the battle field for another production.

killer passive here, at a key moment

Well done:
astute, attentive
and for the most
part lucidly written
stylistic conceals
an excellent essay!
aside,
analytic
A(-)
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