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THE HOLLOW CROWN:SHAKESPEARE, THE BBC, AND THE 2012 LONDON OLYMPICS

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Abstract

During the summer of 2012, and to coincide with the Olympics, BBC2 broadcast a series called *The Hollow Crown*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's second tetralogy of English history plays. The BBC commission was conceived as part of the Cultural Olympiad which accompanied Britain's successful hosting of the Games that summer. I discuss the financial, technical, aesthetic, and political choices made by the production team, not only in the context of the Coalition government (and its attacks on the BBC) but also in the light of theatrical and film tradition. I argue that the inclusion or exclusion of two key scenes suggest something more complex and balanced that the usual nationalism of the plays'; rather, the four nations are contextualised to comprehend and acknowledge the regions – apropos not only in the Olympic year, but in 2014's referendum on the Union of the crowns of England/Wales and Scotland.

Keywords: *Shakespeare, BBC, adaptation, politics, Britishness*

During the summer of 2012, to coincide with the London summer Olympics, BBC2 broadcast a series called *The Hollow Crown*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's second tetralogy of English history plays. An additional series, *Shakespeare Unlocked*, accompanied each play with a program fronted by a lead actor discussing the play and the process, illustrated by clips from the plays in which they had appeared ("The Hollow Crown"). The producer was the Neal Street Production Company in the person of Sam Mendes, a well-known stage and cinema director, celebrated not least for an Oscar for *American Beauty*, a rare honour for a first-time film director. The BBC commission was conceived as part of the Cultural Olympiad which accompanied London's successful hosting of the Games. In David Cameron's Britain, the £9m.budget had to be raised independently. Mendes was looking at a huge debt. He complained that the BBC didn't care about Shakespeare. But things are seldom what they seem: the shortage of subvention had to do with such big successes as *Call the Midwife*

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– a popular drama series also by Neal Street Productions.While, in what follows, I shall refer to the financial, technical, aesthetic, and political choices made by the production team in the context of the Coalition government' attacks on the BBC; I shall discuss the adapted plays mainly in the light of theatrical and screen traditions. By screen I understand the large silver one, but also small-screen television versions. It can be now be hard to distinguish them, given the emphasis on the close-up, due to studio planning for the afterlife of films on DVD and thus on television. As I shall show, these adaptations are perfectly suitable in the reverse direction, and there was no restriction on out-door or large-scale indoor shooting. Just as if Mendes were making movies.

As a preface, I must register from how much I owe to a very grown-up seminar held at the National Humanities Center in North Carolina last year. We read English history plays by Shakespeare and Marlowe in their historical chronological order. Rereading Shakespeare's second tetralogy – which treats the years which preceded his first tetralogy – in that stimulating and company of quite disparate specialties (three English literature medievalists, two medieval historians of, mainly, Britain and France; an art historian; a historian of Chinese science; and a philosopher) opened me to unexpected questions, not least about regionalism within nationalism. But before I reach my reading of two scenes which particularly interest me (*Richard II* Act II, scene iv, and *Henry V* Act III, scene iii),[2] I am going to spend some time on the nuts and bolts of making a television series happen, and the context of *The Hollow Crown* within public television in Britain now.

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First, then, here is the BBC's advance pitch to us, the viewers:

> Featuring some of the greatest Shakespearean actors and directors of our time, all four films have been commissioned by BBC Two for their Shakespeare season in 2012 as part of the BBC's contribution to the London 2012 Festival and the Cultural Olympiad. The films were commissioned by Ben Stephenson, Controller BBC Drama Commissioning and Janice Hadlow, Controller BBC Two.
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> Set in the medieval period, these bold adaptations of four of Shakespeare's most acclaimed history plays will produce some of the most ambitious television of recent years. As principal photography begins on *Henry V*, the previously announced Kings – Ben Whishaw, Jeremy Irons and Tom Hiddleston – will be

[2] Both scenes caught my attention in the adaptations because the former (which you never see on stage) is, unusually, there in the television version, and the latter (which is always played), is not.

> joined by a phenomenal ensemble cast ("The Hollow Crown," "Programmes: The Hollow Crown").[3]

We might react with cliché fatigue that they were going to be passionate about their interpretations; that they would battle the elements to shoot outside; and that – no doubt – everything from the costumes to the caterers' awesome cat would be authentic. The soundbites continued, and I recommend the modifiers in what follows to all aspiring writers here, as examples of style to be avoided:

> Ben Whishaw said: "Playing Richard II has been a *hugely rewarding* experience. Working on *this beautiful* play with Rupert Goold and an *amazing* cast has been one of the *most magical and memorable* experiences of my career." Jeremy Irons said: "I am *most* grateful to have this opportunity of returning to Shakespeare, to film under the *experienced* eye of Richard Eyre, alongside such *exciting* actors." Tom Hiddleston said: "I am *incredibly* proud and privileged to be playing Prince Hal and Henry V in these new adaptations. He was one of England's great kings and one of Shakespeare's great men, and it is an *extraordinary* honour to have asked to play him. I will be steeped in mud, blood, and warrior poetry for the next four months, led by two of the *greatest* directors working today, alongside a group of actors I have admired and respected all my life. I can't wait" ("Programmes: *The Hollow Crown*," italics mine).

The cast-lists contain some pretty impressive names from the British theatre, starting with Rupert Goold, Richard Eyre, and Thea Sharrock as the directors; Simon Russell Beale, perhaps the most intelligent speaker of Shakespearean verse and quite the right size for Falstaff; Kings Ben Whishaw, Tom Hiddleston, and, superbly, Jeremy Irons as the failing Henry IV (Rory Kinnear had a briefer role as the young Henry Bolingbroke). Using film- and television-famous actors is a necessary ingredient for attracting viewers to "hard" programming. Among the bit parts, *Downton Abbey*'s Michelle Dockery makes a brief appearance as Lady Percy, the high-spirited Kate to whom Hotspur will confide nothing. The Harry Potter films offer David Bradley (Filch) as Richard II's gardener, Julie Walters as a traditional Mistress Quickly, and John Hurt (Mr. Olivant) as the Chorus of *Henry V*. Quite why it should be held against television that it regularly casts for name recognition is a question: it sometimes seems to suggest the presumptions first, that celebrities can't act, and that, if they can, they're slumming to make them try; second, that viewers are, reductably, susceptible only to bread and circuses.

The traditional repertory system had had similar assumptions: now largely restricted to Stratford, name actors signed up for the season and played a variety

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[3] Despite this publicity, the BBC didn't pay for the productions. Websites are still available for the production ("The Hollow Crown," "Programmes: The Hollow Crown"), and the Wikipedia site ("The Hollow Crown: TV Series"), which is evidently the work of the BBC.

of parts. In films, cameos, those sudden appearances by name actors, have the short sharp shock of recognition for an audience for whose continuous attention casting directors throw out their fishing lines to hook us back to the screen. In fact, Tom Hiddleston, whom we now take for granted from television and his part in the film of *War Horse*, made his theatrical quality clear in 2007, when he played both Posthumus and Cloten in a Cheek by Jowl production of *Cymbeline*.

Screen adaptation is not necessarily cynical calculation – it is also a version of old theatrical spectacle, particularly well suited to the peripatetic appearances and filming schedules of busy, successful stars. Scenes are shot out of sequence, and sometimes out of play, that is, saved for use in another episode. Actors want to return to Shakespeare, and they want to work with good directors and other good actors – The First Part of *Henry IV* gives us a characterization of the ailing king which led broadsheet reviewers to celebrate a forgotten aspect of Jeremy Irons' talent and to speak of a late-career flourishing in serious drama. "High production values" may have been part of his point in taking it on. When Irons is dressing down his son, Tom Hiddleston, for his debauched behaviour, Hiddleston is fiddling with a cap that looks remarkably like the one he wore in the Cheek by Jowl *Cymbeline*. Actors cross over, and they adore in-jokes. The Globe Company for which Shakespeare wrote paid compliments to its devoted audiences by appealing to their knowledge. *Hamlet* has such a moment in the confrontation between the prince and Polonius about acting: when Polonius says he played Julius Caesar the audience were delighted to remember an earlier production of *Julius Caesar*, and that the actor now playing Hamlet had played the Brutus who killed him. Audiences are fond of in-jokes, too, as any Stoppard play or screenplay shows.

Some might paraphrase Shakespeare's sonnet to suggest that "Art is not art that alteration finds," and that theatre's habits are hard to change. Adaptation is now regularly a bridge between tradition and innovation. Early television Shakespeare had not learned to absorb technological change, and directors had not learned to use the language of the camera we now take for granted (though one has also to remember that work was often restricted by a shortage of cameras). Now it, and we, take filmic adaptation for granted, including the language of the camera. Not least, it is only in video production, with all its freedom, that such starry actors can be assembled, since they need not all be there at the same time. And it's cheaper to edit from computer than from film. To add to the mix of demands, the BBC's charter includes a requirement to make high-culture contributions to the national broadcasting system which are subsequently castigated for failing to reach a mass audience or create mass uplift. As elsewhere, in, say, education, what our masters dislike is susceptible to accusations of politicizing those great writers who were, it is somehow posited, above politics. The Henries? Régime change? The Lancastrian Revolution? The broadsheet press joins in, particularly where such authors as Shakespeare are

concerned, when reviewers almost fulminate against television adaptations often to the end that this dumbing down isn't what they studied at school. I have offered examples elsewhere ("Twice Telly-ed Tales"). Wherever adaptation is concerned, the conflicting and contradictory invitations to be "modern," "relevant," "accessible," "cutting edge," while sincerely and authentically bringing The Bard to life, are as much as ever questions of *de gustibus* provoking serious – if short-lived – debate, particularly in periodicals, where the discussion can only as good as the current generation of reviewers. To add a sad coda, as newspapers tighten their belts, television reviewing doesn't improve. As for the blogosphere, there is a widespread failure to supplement watching with reading, and clichés abound there, most squirm-making in the refusal to articulate the prejudice behind colour-blind casting, which accepts, say, Jewish actors Anton Lesser as Exeter and David Suchet, as the Duke of York (who are white and blend in), but refuses Paterson Joseph, also a York, and the king's cousin, because there were no black aristocrats. By contrast, type-casting seems to be as strong as ever, with the inevitable Robert Pugh's Glendower familiar as everyone's crazy Welshman. Equally puzzling, no early reviewers seemed to remark that casting actors with the appropriate regional accents says something about confidence and the long withdrawing roar of Received Pronunciation. In the year's television awards, the series was nominated for fifteen prizes and won nine ("Internet Movie Database: *The Hollow Crown*").

The BBC has a long history of Shakespeare productions, which antedated by some years the ill-received but long-lived *Complete Works* project (UK broadcasts 1978-1985). That series was intended, from the beginning, to offer school and university students a visual accompaniment to their study of Shakespeare texts, a fact also much ignored by reviewers examples in the article footnoted. It was partly financed by Time/Life, and remains used in the US and elsewhere as a teaching tool. It has left a bad taste, not least because the directors were told to use complete texts, and to make programs that were stage-orientated – but a "stage" that was already old-fashioned. Not nowadays. Finally, having overcome the crucial stumbling block, and succeeded in selling the mini-series abroad, The Henries provided an important revenue stream, no doubt to the relief of Neal Street Productions' bank balance. Such exports are crucial for the national broadcaster, which is otherwise entirely dependent upon the Licence Fee. This is worth emphasizing, to remind us that what we may assume is jingoism may not only not be jingoism, but may not be supported by those British institutions sometimes assumed to hold the country on a tight rein. In fact, the £9m. that the four programs cost were in part provided by NBC. So there's a little irony there.

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The aesthetics of adaptation are well illustrated in quotations from two of the directors about Shakespeare the screenwriter. Here is Rupert Goold, who was persuaded that Richard II could be a Christ-figure:

> Theatre is fundamentally a medium about argument, whereas film is a medium about character. Behind all the pageantry, *Richard II* is perhaps the most character-driven of Shakespeare's plays. In terms of story, not a huge amount happens compared to, say, *Henry V* or *Macbeth*. What is happening is the character evolution ("*The Hollow Crown* – TV mini-series").

And here is Richard Eyre, who directed the two middle plays:

> Shakespeare's writing is very filmic. Cutting from the the palace throne room to an Eastcheap tavern was very daring – nobody did that sort of thing back then, so I wanted to make as much of that as possible, without following his scheme entirely because I could cut away without having to worry about scene changes or costume changes. It took some fairly stringent editing, but I've always thought of Parts One and Two as the same story, so we shot them out of sequence. That allowed Jeremy [Irons as Henry IV] and Tom [Hiddleston as Prince Hal] to have the arc of their relationship in mind throughout – you could never get such a cast of this detail and intensity in the theater ("*The Hollow Crown* – TV Mini Series").

These comments in the bonus interview at the end of the DVD *Henry V* reveal, however, that they didn't decide until quite late to ask Hiddleston if he wouldn't like to play Henry as well as Harry. The directors are right when they see Shakespeare as having an eye easily adaptable to the camera, as if he had overheard his characters. Shakespeare knew how to indicate simultaneity by interweaving scenes in different places, juxtaposing different groups to indicate that three strands are happening at more or less the same time. He also knew – long before CGI graphics – how to create the impression of an army with only a few men. Paterson Joseph – whose character is killed at Agincourt – said that his fear during the battle scenes was not method, but real: he didn't know if the enemy he faced was a re-enactor "extra" or a stunt man who could swing that sword ("*The Hollow Crown* – TV Mini-Series.")

Because *1 Henry IV* was paramount among school set texts, it is particularly likely to set off explosive charges in fulminating critics. Like history, Shakespeare is what we remember. Fifty years ago students learned Shakespeare's skill at coding scene shifts as simultaneous action, and I can attest to how new and exciting that discovery could be. In the years since television has solidified its hold on us all, the play's early version of soap-opera multi-plot structure has become a norm. The BBC's wonderfully successful adaptation of *Bleak House* did the same thing, week after week, secure in the assumption that no one who knows anything about television will have the least difficulty following five ten-minute plot strands from episode to episode. With hindsight, and not, I think, only with hindsight, criticism of early television Shakespeares

was quite right: it didn't adapt. It reproduced the stage; it was too word-orientated; too deferentially text-centred; too attached to acts and scenes stabilized by editors over centuries. But one understands a certain early defensiveness because so many critics remember the words and think that they are everything; they are not. Shakespeare is not words alone, but actors' trained bodies expressing words with that full range of emotion-in-action which is the heart of their mystery. Film Shakespeare regularly cuts as many as fifty per cent of Shakespeare's words; its cameras allow actors expressions to be seen in their tiniest movement; camera angles indicate power, reaction, and the presence of multitude. Film and television encourage those nuances of what happens "behind the eyes" which are impossible to see in a large theatre.

The moment of an adaptation is only one of its contexts. Context can be magnified to the detriment of nuance; certainly speeches like John of Gaunt's praise of "this sceptred isle" or Henry V's pre- or mid-battle speeches to rally his kinsmen or his troops have been enlisted in patriotic fervour. This is no doubt the moment to bring in Olivier's film of the play, dedicated to the men and women enlisted more formally in the desperate fight against Hitler. Olivier's movie becomes part of the context of Branagh's. There are scenes one expects to see, speeches one must hear again. Once you have that clichéd combination, John of Gaunt's speech, or Henry V's, loom as targets. Olivier filmed *Henry V* in neutral Ireland, which was a rare source of horses and horsemen during the war. Branagh's film, more ambivalent about wars, nonetheless – like so many other remade adaptations – responds to Olivier's. So, too, did the first ever Paris theatre production, which included wonderful small-scale sets that referred to the battle scenes (Morse, "Gone is Harry in the Night"). Let us consider "*out* of context," such as school speech days, or parliamentary references, where you can make speeches mean what you like; or you can forget that Gaunt's praise of the land of England is quite like Burgundy's praise of the French countryside in *Henry V*, which is so often just *out*, since long and boring speeches will be cut. Thus far I have recognized single plays, so I should remark in passing that John Barton and Peter Hall made an adaptation of Shakespeare's first tetralogy, which they shortened into their *Wars of the Roses* (1963) to emphasize action for the theatre, which was then televised in 1965. In Thatcher's Britain, Michael Bogdanov combined productions of both tetralogies and contextualized them (in a cycle also termed *The Wars of the Roses*) to refer to the Falklands War, winning an Olivier award as best director in 1990. These Henries survive on videotape, with many of the faults of staginess and crude but powerful symbolism that mar so much *théâtre à clef*, or just filmed theatrical productions that have not been sufficiently adapted.

II: Nuts and Bolts

Televisual – like theatrical – Shakespeare requires cutting, and the 2012 series flags the role of the adapters that condensed each play. *Richard II* is famously full of rhyming couplets, its eponymous character famously thespian, almost the King as superstar. Rupert Goold saw Richard's half-mad sense of himself as Christ, and Ben Wishaw played it into Goold's direction. But it was the camera that offered the spectator all the angles, distances, colours, distortions of time that inform its cinematic vocabulary, its codes of emotion and meaning.

I had previously reviewed BBC rethinkings ("retellings") of Shakespeare for the *Times Literary Supplement* ("Gone is Harry in the Night"), so the roots of what I'm to say were well established before I noticed the two details that are my starting point. In print I can only explain – not show – two interesting scenes. Then I shall go back and struggle with discussions of televisual adaptation of Shakespeare, both in the immediate aftermath of the broadcasts and in subsequent specialist writing. At this point, only two years after the broadcasts, there are reviews on the web, but as yet no scholarly writing, at least that I've seen. And that contrast is something to be kept in mind, because, although one gets tapes – now DVDs – of a series, what one writes is constrained by column inches as well as by time, not to mention the slow death of newsprint. And the kinds of questions, with dilations on the answers, require not only time and space, but also that important pause which waits for a site such as the *Internet Movie Database* to hyperlink the names of the technical personnel as well as the actors, so we can discover such tacit information as whether or not directors bring in their usual teams, and especially the camera teams – which make so much difference to the cinematographic effects which most viewers take for granted. In *Henry V*, shooting outside with a very small army of re-enactors and stuntmen posed particular challenges for the visual conventions of sitting-room viewing. One solution gave us a new reading of the Crispin Crispianus speech before Agincourt: spoken intimately by Henry to his closest advisers: Exeter, Westmoreland, Salisbury, York – that make use of an audience whose audience we are in turn. The bonus interviews tell us that the actors didn't have to move, because they were moved. It is important to emphasize that the mover was Tom Hiddleston to his confidants; it was far from the usual scene so loved by rhetorical historiographers in which the prince whips his followers into high testosterone preparedness. For the first time I saw a link to Antony's failed speech before Actium: both leaders know that their chances of surviving the day are small and that whatever Henry's resistance to the gloom of the common soldiers, it is the king who has brought them to this pass.

The kinds of questions currently asked about television Shakespeare include formerly little-posed problems of technical craft (who produces, directs, films, makes-up, designs and stitches, composes). They constrain – but also inspire – what is made. They also liberate, improve, speed up, and thereby

contribute to coming in under budget, that Holy Grail. Though I will not be further concerned with the nuts and bolts of construction, it seems to me important to spend some time there, because we are so prone to overleap them as irrelevant to our own questions, as if there were unconstrained vision rather than television. Nonetheless, indeed, all the more, the ultimate scenarist and author of the screenplay knew what he was doing.

When the English history plays are performed the immediate press reactions are one thing, with their sometimes knee-jerk nationalism. More studied reactions by the politically committed (and the politically non-committed) are something else, including what we might now call slow nationalism. History is always susceptible to propaganda: one person's rousing celebration of the national past is another's ideological trickery, bound upon the wheel of ruling class fire. One might consider that in the last century or more the political, hereditary ruling class's loss of empire and world domination has been impressive (though not in David Cameron's current cabinet); but of course within the islands now, the caste of new rich with their economic banditry is greater than ever before in the history of the four nations – indeed, of the world. I choose these words with care. I mentioned above that the BBC's charter insists on high quality drama. What I did not mention is that successive Tory governments have submitted the BBC to constant abuse and attack: particularly that the BBC is biased and left-wing, whereas the truth is that the press in British media is quite remarkably right-wing. So to return to the Henries in the Olympic year was to take many risks. They were ethical rather than locally political.

III: Two Key Scenes

At the outset of this essay, I mentioned a scene in *Richard II* that is almost never performed, if only because it is redundant. I speak not of the garden scene (here Filch as the critical gardener), which is always retained, although usually much cut, but, rather, a moment when we learn – as Richard will soon after – that his Welsh troops, believing that he has been killed, disband, and leave the king helpless against the followers of Bolingbroke. It ran about 106 seconds. It is redundant because it shows events that, when they are reported to the king and his diminished band of followers soon after, creates fatal consternation. But of course it is not redundant at all. It is one of those moments when a conversation takes place between two characters of widely different status; the lower status character is there to convey information. Such speech was a *topos* of rhetorical historiography throughout the Middle Ages, the articulation by a nameless character of widespread belief. The gardener is another. So is the nameless servant in *Lear* who kills Cornwall in an attempt to save Gloucester's second eye. Recognition of the utility of these anonymous speakers goes right back to Bede, defining "what is believed to have happened" as one of the true laws of history ("The Life and Miracles.") Shakespeare's dramatic economy also

distributes commentary to demonstrate ordinary ethical truth: there are higher loyalties than service; don't torture your host; don't throw your life away for a dead leader's lost cause. I had never seen it before watching the BBC's new version.

But more than this: in this scene the trusty captain reports when the extravagant Glendower took for granted: portents of a dying cause:

> Rich men look sad and ruffians dance and leap,
> The one in fear to lose what they enjoy,
> The other to enjoy by rage and war:
> These signs forerun the death or fall of kings (II,iv,12-16)

The scene shows the rugged Welsh, painted as the northern Picts painted themselves, a force to be reckoned with, and a trusty force by contrast to Glendower's boastful self-recognition as the subject of those the portents the captain sees rather as the "death or fall of kings" or Northumberland's betrayal that leaves his son to die. Far from redundant, this is Shakespeare playing his variations on his themes. These adaptations valorised the regions: Wales (frequently), Ireland, England's northeast and its home shires, London's poor. They surveyed, but did not polemicize.

In a different context, as the British Empire moved into and through two world wars, mid-twentieth-century orthodoxy was to see an arc in the tetralogy toward the making of the nation, with *Henry V* a brief apogee. The last play of the BBC series started with a non-Shakespearean funeral: the king is dead and the king is a new-born baby. "Woe to thee, O Land, when thy king is a child," says *Ecclesiastes* (10.16). This non-Shakespearean action changes the effect of the Chorus's opening "O for a Muse of Fire" speech, and, as in many tragic plots, the Chorus has the last word, and only in the last moments do we see that the voice-over Chorus has been John Hurt (Mr Ollivander), and that the John Hurt we now see as well as hear was once Falstaff's boy, who has somehow survived to be old. We cannot unknow how the end must be, but we can still be surprised, and for the knowledgeable, hear the address to Olivier and Branagh.

Olivier's *Henry V* was released in 1944, explicitly dedicated to the participants in the Battle of Britain in 1941, when for fifteen weeks the Luftwaffe threw everything it had at the island. Even in 1944 it still made sense to cheer up the population, supporting those who fought on when all seemed eminently losable. It was the use of a classic as propaganda. Branagh's *Henry V* was in many ways a reply to Olivier's rousing account of slaughter. Branagh's famous long tracking shot after the battle of Agincourt shows Henry carrying one of the slaughtered baggage lads, not an anonymous boy, but Falstaff's boy: Henry's face shows the cost of what he has ordered. Both in Branagh's film of 1989 and in the BBC *Hollow Crown*, Henry has been the willing tool of the Archbishops, whose desire to protect their wealth is explicit in their plotting

together to send young Harry to France. Nothing like a foreign adventure to distract the prince and his people from home injustices. That's a home truth. It makes Henry of Harry, on the eve of Agincourt when, incognito, he listens to his soldiers. What marks the BBC's tetralogy is precisely that: the cost. The other Harry, Harry Percy, Hotspur, is a short-sighted, short-tempered, loose cannon; his father Northumberland, an old fox, "crafty-sick," willing to sacrifice his son (in this case the actors actually *are* father and son) and his friends to protect his own power and wealth. The assimilation of cause to cost is palpable. It is also in period: needless wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; bodies still regularly shipped home – though the government has suppressed their ceremonial welcome by the citizens of a village the hearses used to drive through. But we, the "home" television audience, may supply that context. The adaptation is most eloquent by virtue of underplaying.

These recent interpretations are also in period in another way: first, the devolution of the nations. A Welsh Assembly, a Scottish Parliament with a First Minister encouraging his fellow citizens to a referendum this month (September 2014) over dissolving three hundred years of union (more or less). So, in context, I turn finally to the "What is my nation?" scene, the one which I proposed as striking in its absence. By contrast to the short scene in *Richard II*, it is longer, has more speakers, is more complex, and is always, always included, not least because of the fondness of audiences for Fluellen, the Welshman who is always concerned with the classical rules of warfare. What we have in this three to four minute scene is an Englishman, a Scotsman, an Irishman, and a Welshman – yes, like one of those national character jokes we all tell with different geographical assignments. Let us look at some the key lines:

> MACMORRIS: It is no time to discourse, so Chrish save me: the day is hot, and the weather, and the wars, and the king, and the dukes: it is no time to discourse. The town is beseeched, and the trumpet call us to the breach; and we talk, and, be Chrish, do nothing: 'tis shame for us all: so God sa' me, 'tis shame to stand still; it is shame, by my hand: and there is throats to be cut, and works to be done; and there ish nothing done, so Chrish sa' me, la!
> JAMY: By the mess, ere theise eyes of mine take themselves to slomber, ay'll de gud service, or ay'll lig i'the grund for it; ay, or go to death; and ay'll pay't as valourously as I may, that sall I suerly do, that is the breff and the long. Marry, I wad full fain hear some question 'tween you tway.
> FLUELLEN: Captain Macmorris, I think, look you, under your correction, there is not many of your nation —
> MACMORRIS: Of my nation! What ish my nation? Ish a villain, and a bastard, and a knave, and a rascal. What ish my nation? Who talks of my nation? (*Henry V*, III, ii,70-84)

The four captains greet each other with military formality, but that is there because we have to know that they come to serve the king from different

countries. In this first excerpt Gower, the Englishman, is mute: that is, he's there and reacting, but silent. The second subject is the ethics of war. Jamy and Macmorris, the Irishman, have just joined Fluellen and Gower, already on the verge of Fluellen's favorite subject – almost as if he were a Jonsonian "humour" character, defined by one obsession. Macmorris, not short of obsessions of his own, is what we might call an engineer, what Othello, too, calls a *pioneer*, in old army slang, a sapper, what the French call a *sapeur-pompier*, a munitions expert who's been interrupted during an attempt to tunnel under the walls of a besieged city so he could blow it to smithereens. He is furious, it's a scandal. "It" is a WMD, a weapon of mass destruction. He has no larger sense of his mole-like role in combat than killing the enemy wholesale. This is not Fluellen's idea of the disciplines of the wars, those Roman wars from which he derives his faith and honor.

It is hard to defamiliarise these lines. Most people have forgotten the stage history of these wonderful characters, often subsequently extracted for other plays (Bartley). Olivier used them as a way of criticizing the Irish, who were neutral in his war, though there were thousands of Irish volunteers in arms. Fluellen is always something of a joke, but he's a man of courage, with a good heart, and Henry so treats him. Captains Jamy and Gower are of less interest. But this scene has been treated as the heart of the play by many directors, including Bogdanov, for whom the play was the right spectacle at the right time: the Falklands.

As I wrote this paper, I reflected upon the malleability of Shakespeare's structures and the sense of recognition that accompanies his characters. Mysteriously, the play's the thing. Sometimes it catches our conscience, sometimes our consciousness, sometimes it's a nice night in on the sofa. I do not underestimate the importance to Sam Mendes of creating – for a grudging BBC – that extraordinary quality, more real than reality, for which the public broadcaster is famous around the world. I found them, and find on watching them again, remarkably good throughout, from ensemble playing to intimate moments alone. That compliments the whole production team.

And the politics of my two scenes? Taking out the scene of the four captains was a solution to allowing it to hijack the whole play, which it so often does. We get, instead, something complex and balanced. The valiant, pedantic, loyal Welsh Fluellen regains his balance against the flamboyant, pretentious Glendower. The nations are contextualized to comprehend the regions; the three regions are subsumed in a larger whole. In conclusion I want to close with the methodological flaw of this paper: within the limits of space one takes one's examples as true of a larger whole. But what a longer study would require would be to look historically at all the cuts, to test whether the patterns whose existence I have posited can be extrapolated to all four plays. Otherwise my observations remain just that.

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