

MAKING PAST PRESENT: *HENRY V*
IN CONTEMPORARY
PERFORMANCE

By
ALAINA ELIZABETH JOBE

A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, Shakespeare's *Henry V* is viewed as either pro- or anti-war, but the play actually revels in its own political ambiguity. Thus, in order to make some sort of socio-political statement, directors have to, in effect, make war with the text, compressing and cutting the play in order to fit a certain agenda, no matter what that agenda may be, anti- or pro-war. This thesis is primarily a case study of *Henry V* in production, focusing on the 2009 University of Alabama performance, the choices that were made and the effects of those choices.

Similarly, it explores the ramifications of producing the history plays in contemporary performance. The genre itself can be troubling for contemporary audiences, and the lack of context makes it difficult for twenty-first century spectators to fully grasp it as a history. Instead, contemporary productions rely either on making connections to current events (with mixed success as the play tends to resist such overt parallels) or focusing on the characters themselves as the means of making this play relevant. By using the force of character, productions can in fact appeal to their audiences, creating something that is meaningful, and sometimes something that is in fact political, but in a much more sophisticated (and therefore less obvious way): doing so allows the audience to draw their own conclusions about the kind of issues that we see in *Henry V*, to make their own comparisons between the past and the present, and to perhaps look more critically at the nature of war and politics. In contemporary performances of *Henry V*, the focus tends to shift away from the history of the history play and moves toward how the events presented in the play relate to the here and now.

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ACT ONE
SETTING THE STAGE

The inspiration for this thesis came after sitting down in 2008 with a director who wanted to stage an anti-war production of *Henry V*. Seth Panitch was particularly interested in how the play could be shaped into a political commentary, and for post-9/11 audiences, he argued, the play and its themes would be resonant and compelling in light of the United States' ongoing involvement in Iraq and the global War on Terror. However, over time, the anti-war slant shifted into something else entirely, a production focused "on the very question of leadership itself- both in times of war and peace" and how Henry, for better or for worse, functions as that pivotal leader (Panitch "From the Director"). Panitch is one of many directors who have recently endeavored to stage performances of *Henry V* as reaction to and commentary on the war in Iraq and subsequent events. I was the dramaturg for this production, and while researching the play's stage history, I became intrigued by how this Elizabethan text has been adopted for modern and post-modern theatre, especially those stagings seeking to present some form of anti-war sentiment or critique.

The University of Alabama production falls into a certain tradition, one that consciously seeks to make the play into a definitive political statement. Theatre historian Emma Smith argues that "to stage the play has always been a political act, and most often consciously so" and that is as true today as it was when the play was first performed (1). *Henry V* is overtly patriotic and yet in many ways, it also subverts that patriotism, as evidenced by the Chorus, scenes that explore the tensions and effects of war, and the arguably blind willingness of Henry's men to trudge

through the cold and wet in France and press on at Agincourt, even when the odds are against them. So much of the play juxtaposes the glory of war against the harsh reality of war, so that either a pro- or anti-war reading could, hypothetically, be sustained; directors like Panitch could in fact create an anti-war production. But as rehearsals for the University of Alabama production progressed, an odd thing happened. The production became less anti-war and more pro-Henry: even though the justification for the war on France was questionable at best, the English soldiers were nevertheless willing to follow their increasingly burdened leader, and by extension, so were the audience.

By opening night, I could see little of that critique in which the director had been so invested from the outset. This Henry, played by a young undergraduate actor, Lawson Hangartner, became even more likeable and his more questionable decisions became necessary evils. This was a leader who successfully roused his men, who, at his injunction to join his band of brothers, responded with guttural cries of assent and renewed energy for returning to battle. When he sentenced the traitors, Cambridge and Scroop (Grey was conflated into Cambridge), we believed that Henry was doing what he had to do, even as he turned his back on Cambridge's supplicating look and gestures. One of the most poignant scenes of the entire production—the hanging of Bardolph at the start of intermission—was gut-wrenching and yet had to be done, or so it seemed. We wanted this Henry to be victorious in wooing the petite and charming Catherine in an otherwise troubling scene (one has to wonder if she is an object of conquest and her response to Henry's wooing is just a matter of conventionality or if he truly wins her over in the short space of the scene). On the eve of Agincourt, Henry was genuinely worried about his men and his “upon the King” speech became a moment of responsibility rather than self pity. Such moments only heightened the contrast between boy and king or, the tension between man and

position, juxtapositions that made Henry an admirable figure. In the end, the even more boyish Hangartner received a standing ovation.

As someone expecting an anti-war production, I was perplexed. Panitch had made significant cuts, including the Chorus, Ely and Canterbury's mercenary scheming and observations of the new king's recent change in behavior in Act One, and quite a few of the interactions between the minor characters throughout, especially those deemed more comical. These were cuts that affected the overall tenor of the production but not the lifeblood of the main plotlines. He inserted the Falstaff rejection scene from *I Henry IV* 2.3, which both established the gravity of Henry's later abandonment of his former friends even as it provided an illustration of his development from insouciant youth to responsible king, Hal to Henry. And the production hinged on this developmental shift as it became something that was not anti-war, but rather a portrait of leadership. Later, Panitch admitted to me that he felt he had to change the slant of the production: "I think I began this wanting it to be an anti-war statement but I didn't make that statement because I didn't feel that the text supports it" (Panitch "Personal Interview").

No matter how a production approaches *Henry V*, as a statement on war, leadership, or through any other lens, oppositions must be addressed. This is a play that revels in its own ambiguities, never providing a crystallized moment in which we can say "This. This is what Shakespeare meant." This can either be frustrating or liberating for anyone in the literary or theatre worlds. In the introduction to the play in *The Norton Shakespeare*, Katharine Eisaman Maus enumerates the subsequent anxieties inherent in *Henry V*, both in the play itself and our response to it, when she asks "did Shakespeare intend the play as a paeon to militarism or as an exposé of war's pointless brutality? Is Henry supposed to be a heroic or repellent character? Is the war in France justified or purely expedient?" (1445-6). Such questions form the basis of the

huge cumulus cloud that is *Henry V*'s critical tradition, especially in terms of more current criticism: "in the case of no other play of Shakespeare has critical opinion been so polarised, nor polarisation been more recent" (Pittock 1). Norman A. Rabkin argues that *Henry V* is like the rabbit/duck optical illusion: critics, readers, and directors must see it as either reification or critique: the play "points in two opposite directions, virtually daring us to choose one of the two opposed interpretations it requires of us" (279). He notes that interpretation can vary between readings or even from production to production— this time a rabbit, this time a duck. He suggests that the value of the play lies within its multivalent qualities, in the fact that critics can be so divided into their own insistent either/or camps.

Traditionally, the play has been utilized as a patriotic expression and all potential subversive components stifled by cutting or disregarded altogether. The pro-war, pro-Henry camp stems from conservative readings and early to mid-twentieth century critics such as A.C. Bradley and E.M.W. Tillyard. For these critics, Henry is the pinnacle of political order, especially in regard to the tetralogy as a whole. Tillyard argues that Henry is the fulfillment of Shakespeare's obligation to restore order to the world he had portrayed in *Richard III* and even more importantly, the two parts of *Henry IV*: "Having achieved popularity in showing Henry's youthful dissipation he could not, without scandal, refuse to show Henry in his traditional part of perfect king" (305). In the same way, Shakespeare's "political hero... must be the symbol of some great political principle," which necessarily becomes the Elizabethan political order (Tillyard 305). Bradley points out that Henry "is treated as a national hero" and thus his victory at Agincourt is a national victory (256). This is history that only highlights England's glorious past, and when Henry is held up as a perfect political and even spiritual leader, then the war on France is just and he becomes a reifying reflection of Elizabethan wars, politics, and religion.

Laurence Olivier's 1944 film adaptation is the premier example, containing "the most radical revisions," revisions that make the play into "a rousing patriotic love story" (Loehlin 25). The film bridges the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as both the performative crest of the "official version" of the play, as many critics have termed it, and as the film that marks the move from stage to screen: "virtually all the subsequent productions... consciously positioned themselves against it" (Loehlin 25). Even Kenneth Branagh's 1989 film version of *Henry V*, while making the attempt to portray war in a realistic way is, if not patriotic per se, emotionally stirring.

Productions that, like the nineteenth-century critic William Hazlitt, see Henry as "a very amiable monster" are going to have a decidedly anti-war slant (169). In such a reading, we are supposed to see Henry not as a hero but rather as a ruthless soldier king. For this camp, the play subverts any overtly patriotic moments, through elements such as the Chorus, the primary voice of dissent and even opposition in *Henry V*. Stephen Greenblatt argues that

The play deftly registers every nuance of royal hypocrisy, ruthlessness, and bad faith – testing, in effect, the proposition that successful rule depends not upon sacredness but upon demonic violence – but it does so in the context of a celebration, a collective panegyric to 'This star of England', the charismatic leader who purges the commonwealth of its incorrigibles and forges the martial national state. (56)

In this way, the play "fosters the subversive in order to control it" (Craik 79). By revealing the uncontrollable, control is regained. Along those lines, in "History and Ideology: The Instance of *Henry V*", Alan Sinfield and Jonathon Dollimore argue that "even in this play, which is often assumed to be the one where Shakespeare is closest to state propaganda, the construction of ideology is complex – even as it consolidates, it betrays inherent instability" (211). The play is concerned with fragmentation, and how those fragments can be reconstructed into a whole. And yet, even as it attempts to make that whole, *Henry V* only draws awareness to the disparate pieces and thus even more awareness of the lack of unity and ultimately, lack of control.

Terry Hand's 1975 Royal Shakespeare Company production is an important production of *Henry V*, one that marks the "turning point of the stage history of the play" (Loehlin 49). In his performance history of *Henry V*, James E. Loehlin labels it as anti-war, even though Hand consciously sought to avoid any sort of political statement. Regardless, Loehlin considers Hand's version explicitly anti-war if only because "it provides a vivid example of the ways a production's meaning is generated in a complex negotiation between text, interpretation, audience expectations and the social, political and economic circumstances of the production" (49). In an attempt to boost morale for the nation, Hand's production opened in the midst of financial and political upheaval for not only Britain (which was dealing with the effects of a bad economy, separatism in Wales and Scotland, and several IRA bombings), but also for the struggling RSC, which desperately needed fresh financial support in the midst of the bad economy. Hand wanted his production to "condemn war while keeping the play's celebratory, even patriotic aspect" (Loehlin 50), a direct contrast to Peter Hall's more overtly cynical and Jan Kott-inspired post-World War II performance eleven years earlier. He chose to "sidestep a political reading and focus attention on the theatrical event itself... War and play would be metaphors for each other" (Loehlin 53). Thus the stage was revealingly bare, "made of bare black boards," throwing the focus on the actor and not the set (Loehlin 54). Henry (Alan Howard) was a king who was loathe to make the choices that he had to make; his decisions—invading France and hanging Bardolph—indicated indecision and unease. It was only during "the dark night of the soul before Agincourt" that Henry "reconciled" himself to his role (Loehlin 62).

The production ended in "a genuine love between Henry and Katherine... the final step in Hand's positive, apolitical reading of the play" (Loehlin 69). Due to its near lack of definitive

political bent, Hand's production was particularly effective in engaging audiences in a non-threatening way, allowing them "inform the production with their own response to the subject matter of the play" (Loehlin 69). The Hand production was a definitive moment in the stage history of *Henry V* and any production—anti-war or otherwise—takes its cues from it. There have been a number of recent productions of the Henriad and other Shakespearean plays over the last decade, generally in response to 9/11 and subsequent events, starting in the United Kingdom at places such as Stratford at the Royal Shakespeare Company and even Nicholas Hytner's first production at the Royal National Theatre in London in 2003. Hytner's production was described by reviewers as "spookily topical" (Brown 626) and summarized as "a war play that both glorifies and condemns war; a patriotic play that puts patriotism on trial" (Peter 626). The American Shakespeare Center has scheduled performances of the histories (subtitled "The Rise and Fall of Kings") to run the next few years, including a performance of *Henry V* in 2011. In New York, the American Globe Theatre staged a reading of the play in 2008 and then a full-scale production in the spring of 2009.

While the figure of Henry is usually at the center of such either/or readings and productions, other elements also figure into literary criticism of the play, elements such as the Chorus, other characters, and the actual performance history. Reading the Chorus as a subversive voice can drastically alter the thrust of the play, something I will discuss later, and even how we see minor characters such as Fluellen or Katherine can change the tone of certain scenes, providing a more covert commentary on the play's anxiety about history and how it is remembered, as Diana E. Henderson argues in "What's Past Is Prologue" in her book on the intersection of history and Shakespeare, *Collaborations With the Past*. Sally Beauman writes in her introduction to her book on the RCS's 1975 centenary production of *Henry V* (dir. Terry

Hands), that the play, in times past, has been “a pageant, an excuse for parades around the stage, and spectacle” and “patriotism has been used so often as an excuse for a production of *Henry V*... that [it] fogs the play and obscures its issues” (12). She anticipates the move to something more complicated, a move that came to fruition in Hand’s RSC production. Like many other directors, Hands wanted to tread a fine line between both readings, the anti-war critique and the more conservative nationalism. Kenneth Branagh’s haunting 1989 film adaptation also managed to encapsulate both by “directly involving the King in the moral and physical horrors of the war” and yet “countervailing those horrors by its unremitting personal focus on the King and his transcendence of them” (Loehlin 129).

However, in recent years, directors have been more interested in playing up those potentially subversive voices, but even more importantly, invested in making *Henry V* a statement on contemporary events, creating new tensions. In his stage history of the play, Loehlin writes that

Innovations in theatrical theory and techniques, changing attitudes to war and politics, and new ideas about Shakespeare’s histories have all served to *complicate* the play and make an ‘official’ heroic version increasingly untenable. Modern performance has discovered or created a wealth of hidden secrets in *Henry V*, and rendered what was perhaps Shakespeare’s most straightforward and tradition-bound play one of his most theatrically provocative. (1)

Loehlin is spot on when he remarks that modern performances of *Henry V* tend to complicate the play and create new tensions, tensions that for centuries were ignored. The current trend in performance leans toward anti-war, a trend that has taken on renewed resonance since September 11, 2001. Directors see something in the play that speaks to them, and what they believe, in turn, will speak to audiences of the twenty-first century, making the abstract palpable, visual. And there are certainly elements within the play that resonate with our own present. We can see something of our own leaders in Henry as he perhaps hesitantly questions the Bishops’

justification for the potential English invasion of France, asking “May I with right and conscience make this claim?” (1.2.96). As technology improves, how the media presents war and how we think of/view it may change, fundamentally war stays the same, and the concern over how government is to effectively wage war and still maintain moral rectitude will never go away. Rabkin writes that *Henry V* reflects our own “deepest hopes and fears about the world of political action,” our desire to somehow understand kings, wars, and the inner lives of our leaders (296). In the end “the inscrutability of *Henry V* is the inscrutability of history” (Rabkin 296).

But it is history that makes this play so resistant to any kind of anti-war slant in performance. In order to make some sort of socio-political statement, directors have to, in effect, make war with the text, compressing and cutting the play in order to fit a certain agenda, no matter what that agenda may be, anti- or pro-war. Yet the play revels in its own contradictions, never for a moment providing definitive support for the rabbit or the duck, but rather both at once. Even the University of Alabama production, which tried very hard to be anti-war— or to at least provide a long hard look at the nature of leadership— failed to do what it set out to do: namely, make the audience consider these events with a jaundiced, critical eye. That is not to say that the production was not powerful, moving, or meaningful. It was all three. But what made it powerful, moving, and meaningful was that the audience connected with the characters themselves, and more importantly, the characters’ conflicts, internal struggles, and subsequent successes or defeats. To achieve such connection required a wide range of directorial choices that affected the overall thrust of the performance text: in this way decisions about keeping or cutting the Chorus, including the lines about the boys and Henry’s response become crucial. But as seen in the University of Alabama production, intention is often overwhelmed by the play itself and even more importantly, as Rabkin observes, the inscrutability of history. Thus, in what

follows, I would like to suggest that, in the case of plays such as *Henry V*, what is often considered to be a performative or even directorial failure arises from something as simple as dramatic genre. Something about the history play resists any attempt to establish connections between the events of England's past and our own present. Part of the problem with the history play is that audiences are generally unaware of the history that it dramatizes. As a result, directors often resort to visionary revision, which, especially in a postmodern culture, falls flat, becoming too heavy-handed as "[p]eople, like dogs, tend to cringe when they are shouted at" (Coursen 136). To be effective, any production of a play like *Henry V* must somehow evoke that sense of history, with all of its temporal and spatial removal, but even more importantly, provide different means of connection for the contemporary audience: namely, character and story.

Act Two is therefore a case study of *Henry V* in production, focusing on the University of Alabama performance, the choices that were made and the effects of those choices. Along the way, I will highlight how certain edits and cuts accentuated the focus on the leadership, portraying Henry not as a ruthless warrior king, but rather a man who must learn to bear his responsibility with maturity and grace. I am utilizing both the performance script of the production and my own experience as dramaturg and spectator to analyze the choices that were made. To convey a certain message with a play such as *Henry V*, directors must make war with the text, hacking off parts that do not fit into a specific paradigm, pillaging scenes or ideas from other plays (the second tetralogy in this case), and, if the effect is to be something more contemporary, barracking modern design within a medieval/Elizabethan world. Specifically, I will be looking at the costuming, set design, the staging (which was akin to something like in the round), and how certain fundamental components of the play were handled. In her introduction to the stage history of *Henry V*, Emma Smith argues that any polarized reading or production of

Henry V must take into account several key scenes and elements, elements that “these opposing interpretations coalesce around”:

... the Archbishop’s speeches about the young Prince’s reformation on taking up the throne in 1.1, the reporting of the death of Falstaff in 2.3 and the King’s implication of this in 2.1, the treatment of the conspirators in 2.2, Henry’s threats before the Governor of Harfleur in 3.4, the execution of Bardolph in 3.7, and Henry’s attitude to Williams during and after their meeting before Agincourt in 4.1 and 4.7...[,] Henry’s instruction that the French prisoners be executed (4.7.7) before the discovery of the butchered English boys...[,] The Prologue, Epilogue and Choruses. (4-5)

I would like to key in on a few of these in respect to the university production, conflating them in some instances, as well as add to the list: how the Salic Law is “explained” and then how Henry’s reaction to that explanation affects our view of whether this war is just. Similarly, Henry’s wooing of Katherine can either further problematize this questionable venture or add a neat little bow of happily-ever-after to the successful military venture. Such moments can be points of departure, resulting in very different readings of the play. This section is an extended reading of the performance itself, an analytical review in a sense. Ultimately, my purpose is to establish this production within the stage history of *Henry V* (the UA production made specific choices that were indebted to other various performances, chief among them being Branagh’s 1989 film adaptation), using it as both my case study and my *raison d’être* for a discussion on how this play can or cannot function as a political mouthpiece.

I am using the UA production not only because it provided the basis of this argument, but also because performance is ephemeral, existing only in the moment, and any record of such ephemera is only an approximation, and subjective approximation at that. Other productions of *Henry V* provide examples, but in most cases, I must rely on others’ impressions and analysis. The campus production makes an excellent case study because it manifested many of the points that I wish to explore and, perhaps more importantly, allowed me to experience the play as

spectator rather than second-hand reader, as is the case with reviews and critical analysis.

Therefore all analysis is based on personal experience, both as member of the artistic team and as an audience member.

Act Three then deals with the ramifications of producing the history plays in contemporary performance. The genre itself can be troubling for contemporary audiences, and the lack of context makes it difficult for twenty-first century spectators to fully grasp it as a history. Instead, contemporary productions rely either on making connections to current events (with mixed success as the play tends to resist such overt parallels) or focusing on the characters themselves as the means of making this play relevant. By using the force of character, productions can in fact appeal to their audiences, creating something that is meaningful, and sometimes something that is in fact political, but in a much more sophisticated (and therefore less obvious way): doing so allows the audience to draw their own conclusions about the kind of issues that we see in plays such as *Henry V*, to make their own comparisons between the past and the present, and to perhaps look more critically at the nature of war and politics.

This thesis explores the effects and ramifications of a production that was conceived as anti-war but soon became something else. Panitch called it a commentary on leadership and dealt with the script in a way that reflected that, hoping to evoke parallels to current events and personages. But this ultimately failed, as the production failed to evoke that sense of history so vital to any production of a history play. Because this production emphasized plot over theme, cutting the Chorus, the central mediating voice of history, the characters themselves became the lodestones for the audience. In this way, the production found its success, its point of contact for the audience, choosing to accentuate the narrative part of history rather than the history itself. In contemporary performances of *Henry V*, the focus tends to shift away from the history of the

history play and moves toward how the events presented in the play relate to the here and now. In contemporary performance, *Henry V* is purposefully shattered into individual shards of glass, pieces that will be formed into a new mirror that will reflect modern concerns and issues.

ACT TWO
RISING ACTION

At its core, stage performance is about decision-making, how a director makes war with a particular text, wrestling with its meaning and extrapolating that meaning in a way that moves drama from page to stage, using words as the foundation for images, sounds, actions, and emotions. When he or she wishes to convey a specific interpretative bent in a play as ambivalent as *Henry V*, this warring is only heightened and such choices can profoundly alter the thrust of the production. The director who desires to make the play into a nationalistic paean, something to inspire morale, will approach elements within *Henry V* quite differently from the director whose goal is to draw scathing parallels between Henry invading France and George W. Bush invading Iraq. But what happens when directorial vision falls into the middle, stemming from a desire to “deal with this script so as to evoke conflicting judgments about war and the king even from the same spectator,” as was the case with the UA production (Coursen 136)? In the end, Panitch fell into this category and yet had to grapple with the same elements, the same tensions, the same uncertainties as the director who wanted to do an either/or reading of *Henry V*; the text itself forced him from one directorial vision to another, from anti-war to a critique of leadership. But before Panitch and his actors ever arrived at the moment when they realized that this play did not sustain one particular political bent, as director and script editor, Panitch had to make some decisions on how to approach the text itself in order to accentuate certain things he felt the play had to say to contemporary audiences about politics and the nature of war.

How a director approaches Shakespeare for performance is fundamentally a textual endeavor as he or she cuts, edits, rearranges, and adapts. Alan Dessen argues that directors generally fall into two categories: either they rescript and in so doing make “changes [that are] made by a director in the received text in response to a perceived problem or to achieve some agenda” or they “rewright” and in so doing move “closer to the role of the playwright so as to fashion a script with substantial differences from the original (Dessen *Rescripting Shakespeare* 3). The director who intends to make *Henry V* into a definitive anti-war statement is going to fall into the former category, taking liberties with the script by rearranging scenes, cutting large chunks, and sometimes by imposing elements upon the play that are not otherwise there in order to draw more direct parallels (as was the case with Nicholas Hytner’s 2003 production at the Royal National Theatre which had Henry delivering his Saint Crispin’s Day speech from a military jeep). While few directors like to admit to any sort of wide-eyed conservatism when it comes to Shakespeare, not wishing to be labeled as Bardolatrous, few of them will venture too far left into the realm of “rewriting” either.

In the case of *Henry V*, the wise director notes that the play is resistant to any sort of definitive political agenda, and thus avoiding rewrighting, opts for rescripting, which allows for decisions regarding design, theme, and expediency. For instance, Panitch had a certain tone and look that he wanted the production to convey. He wanted it to be simple and understated, with a muted palette, more about the bodies, the characters themselves and how they interacted than any sort of visual display. Therefore the design elements, which I will describe in a moment, allowed for that sort of highlighting of the actors, the set and props never diminishing or overshadowing the actors. And Panitch had a very specific stage space in mind when he chose *Henry V*. As an actor himself, Panitch is fascinated by the artistry and technique of stage combat and of course,

Henry V can potentially involve a lot of fighting. Panitch choreographed all the fights himself, and he wanted a stage design that would best showcase these fights. The Marian Gallaway, the mainstage space for the UA Theatre Department is a 305-seat proscenium theatre. However, for *Henry V* a new stage was constructed in the center of the space, turning the proscenium seating into something else entirely— what Panitch termed “tennis court style”— with the audience sitting on both sides of the round, raised, dais-like stage. Similarly, he wanted the play to achieve an intended effect, in essence providing some sort of commentary on the nature of leadership, which, as mentioned before, only occurred after rehearsals began and yet seemed to be an organic result of what Panitch had done with the script itself, in terms of both cuts and additions, something I will address throughout this chapter. And finally, he made decisions based on more practical considerations, namely that of target audience— undergraduates— and running time, which also affected script editing.

In terms of design, one of the most interesting choices in this production of *Henry V* was the stage itself. By taking the proscenium space and turning it into something approximating theatre-in-the-round, the stage became a different kind of “wooden O.” A raised, round platform was built in the center of the theatre, with its own specially constructed light grid (one can safely assume that the majority of the budget for this production was spent on this set piece). Seating was on either side of the stage and consequently, half of the seats were in the usual space and half in what would normally be the backstage area. Those on the front rows, heads level with the stage, were, at times, conscious of the very real danger of possibly being hit with a broadsword. No attempt was made to disguise the fact that half the audience was backstage, and no matter where you were sitting, you were peering at the other half of the audience and from a strange perspective. The effect was that we were keenly aware of our fellow audience members.

Similarly, we were distinctly aware that we were in a performative space, one that was unsettled and unbalanced, revealing the usually hidden inner workings of entrances and exits, lighting, and the machinations of theatre in a way that was reminiscent of Derek Jacobi flipping the breaker in Branagh's film version, the light revealing the backstage area of a theatre. This stage space became even more noteworthy during the hanging of Bardolph, which occurred right before the intermission, a profoundly awkward moment; the seating allowed the audience to look at each other for cues on how to act and what to do, a moment I will return to later.

Elegant in its simplicity, the production was spare and props were at a minimum, if only to accentuate the bare, wooden stage, which became a prop in its own right as well as the actors themselves. Retractable surfaces were built into the stage, ones that could be pulled out for tables and chairs, along with a trap door that, when cast with reddish light while opened, signified the campfire. At one end of the space was the French coat of arms, at the other, the English, painted on scrims and with individual spotlights (see photos in Appendix A). Costuming blurred the line between Medieval and Elizabethan, with "chain mail" tunics (textured grey material), knee-high boots, brocade dresses, and a lot of broadswords. During the first part of Act Two and last part of Act Five, Henry wore an unembellished gold coronet, signifying his newly gained and then reestablished authority as he ascended the throne and then negotiated with France and courted Katherine. The design of the production gestured towards the medieval world in which *Henry V* is set and yet maintained a hint of modernity in its simple lines and lack of embellishment, simultaneously placing the production in both the past and the present. A Taiko drum group provided auditory transition between scenes, covering entrances and exits, and the rhythmic pounding not only added a sense of conflict to the battles but also heightened the tension of other key moments, such as when the traitors were sentenced and notably, when Bardolph was hanged.

Wanting to keep his (mostly) undergraduate audience engaged, Panitch kept the production's running time to around two hours, with a fifteen minute intermission. This led to an automatic (for him) cut: the Chorus. He believes that the Chorus serves very little dramatic purpose in that everything it reports is seen in the subsequent scenes. For Panitch, action was everything, and seeing the invasion of France at Harfleur or the English preparing for battle the night before Agincourt was much more important and interesting than hearing about either beforehand. But by only keeping the Prologue— each line spoken by an individual member of the cast as each entered and then circled the stage— the production lost the mediating entity that is the Chorus, a compelling and unusual aspect of the play. Of all of Shakespeare's dramas, only *Pericles* (notably not a history) is similar in that it utilizes a prologue, introductory/explanatory choruses before each act, and an epilogue. And while prologues and epilogues are not uncommon in Shakespeare's works, appearing in some form or variation in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry IV, Part 2*, *As You Like It*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *The Tempest*, *Henry VIII*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, the Chorus of *Henry V* is peculiar in its singular function, using the combined three elements "centrally and... structurally" (Hammond 133). It reveals the play's dramatic function, in spite of and perhaps because of its genre, "actively guid[ing] our awareness that we are watching a historical fiction, with full emphasis on both the history *and* the fiction" (Jones 144).

The Chorus is the primary voice of this history play, and yet is suffused with doubt that it, a cipher to a great account, can ever accurately remember and represent "so great an object" as a nation's history (Prologue 10-1). From the outset, long before Henry enters or the battle at Agincourt even begins, the limits of the stage are clearly delineated:

Can this cockpit hold
The vasty fields of France

Or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt? (Prologue 11-14)

The Chorus makes it clear that this unfolding drama is only a representation of historical events, and a poor one at that. But this representation is clearly dramatic in nature, a historical narrative with an emphasis on story rather than verisimilitude. And the dramatic nature of the play requires that the audience be active participants because the events of *Henry V* will only be small parts of a large whole and “repeatedly, Shakespeare asks his audience to accept a part for a whole, to supply imaginatively what cannot be introduced physically onto the open stage” (Dessen *Elizabethan Stage* 12). *Henry V* only provides short, disjointed moments of history; it is up to the audience to fill in and question the gaps. Thus the language of the Prologue reflects the need for the audience to fill in those gaps, to imagine that the scenes presented onstage are true historical moments in spite of their crudity:

Suppose within the girdle of these walls
Are now confined two mighty monarchies
...
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts;
Into a thousand parts divide one man,
And *make* imaginary puissance;
Think when we talk of horses, that you see them
Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth;
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings... (Prologue 19-29, emphasis mine)

As the emphasis shifts from what the play cannot do to what the audience *must* do, the Chorus gives the spectator clear instructions: the audience is to suppose, to piece, to make, to think. In this way, the spectator is not only part of the onstage action— he or she becomes the maker of that action, a re-memberer of history. But even as the Chorus asks that the audience make a whole out of the performance, it also is the one subversive voice of *Henry V*; it is subversive because it points out the defects of the stage, but also the defects of history and thus becomes the

political mirror of the play. Nicholas Grene has argued that *Henry V* “is Shakespeare’s only fully mediated history play,” arbitrated by the Chorus, which “stands continuously, intrusively, between the audience and the characters and events” (241). While the Chorus does in fact mediate, it accomplishes this mediation by presenting the facts and then letting the audience decide for itself whether or not history and what we think we remember (or even what the play thinks it remembers) are always congruent. The Chorus slyly encourages the spectator to consider historical events in a more critical and discerning light. It invites the audience to look analytically at this version of political history— the differences between the overt propaganda of the play and the actual reality— and to weigh it carefully, considering any and all weaknesses. It presupposes that its audience, an Elizabethan collective marked by more recent conflicts and wars, is smart enough to “make imaginary puissance” by collectively remembering the events onstage, holding presentation against reality (Prologue 25).

But Panitch knew that few of his audience members would be familiar with the contextual history of *Henry V* and chose instead to rely on other factors to connect with the audience, namely the force of character. Knowing that the history plays are a difficult genre for twenty-first century audiences, he clearly elucidated his take on *Henry V* in his director’s notes in the program, in which he acknowledged that the play has often been used as a means of pro- and anti-war propaganda, but also indicated that this production was taking a different route:

In this production, we have chosen instead to focus on the very question of leadership itself— both in times of war and peace. To that end, we are taking a closer look at the leader himself, as much as the action swirling about him... In these precarious times, as a new leader takes the reigns [sic] of a country in turmoil— both domestically and internationally— *Henry V* takes on an even greater resonance. We look to our leaders to charge headlong into the problems before us, but never to disconnect from us. We demand that they lead us into war and into peace, and to know which is called for when. Leaders of this magnitude do not emerge- they are forged, and it is that forging process that we are privy to when we watch a King emerge at the end of *Henry V*. (“From the Director”)

With its emphasis on the titular character and his progression, the production focused less on the politics of the play, becoming more about how a certain person acts once placed within a certain set of situations—namely, a young king in the midst of war. In the case of the UA production, Henry became the psychological lodestone for the audience. As both actor and character, Lawson Hangartner/Henry was the center of the play, its leader, a task that Panitch wanted this young actor to realize in a concrete way:

... I would take him aside sometimes and I would tell him that “this is, this play is called *Henry V* and you are playing Henry and you are not demonstrating that in rehearsal.” So I asked him to be a leader in rehearsal from the first day; I asked him to be the first one off the book, the first one off fight, and he was. He was. So I asked him to mirror, to really lead the acting company, and as a young actor he had a lot of pressure on him to do that, and I think he did a good job of that. (“Personal Interview”)

By modeling leadership in the rehearsal hall, Hangartner transferred that positionality to his role. His struggles as lead aided in his creation of his character, especially in a production that highlighted the move from a boy who doubts his own self to a soldier-king who does everything in his power to maintain and reconstruct peace. This is a common move in contemporary productions of the play: “many recent Henries have had to achieve glory by having it thrust upon them” (Dawson 124). Like so many directors before him, Panitch realized the primacy of Henry’s progression in the drama, subscribing to the principle that Henry’s “coronation at the end of *Henry IV, Part 2* is viewed not as the end of a process, but more realistically as simply a stage from which he must develop further” (Dawson 125).

This realization led to the major change of the production: the insertion of 4.2 of *Henry IV, Part One* immediately after the first eighteen lines (normally thirty one) of the Prologue. Rather than depending on the Bishops’ reports of Henry’s past behavior and his recent reformation, a result of his father’s death, the audience saw a youthful Hal cavorting with

Falstaff and the Hostess. This scene was a smart choice in that it demonstrated the change Henry has undergone in the interim between the two plays, especially for an audience who is unfamiliar with the second tetralogy, and also in that it established the relationship between Hal and Falstaff, adding weight to Henry's later abandonment of his friend in his attempts to cast off his old life and be the kind of king he must be. Through the faux interrogation of Falstaff pretending to be Hal's father, we learned of Hal's carousing, of how Falstaff was a less than ideal influence, and that Hal would soon be king. The playfulness of their playacting shifted to seriousness as Falstaff earnestly pleaded for continued favor, knowing that the prince will soon become king: "banish plump Jack, and banish all the world" (474). Henry's deliberate and grave "I do, I will" ended the scene (2.4.475).

This renunciation preceded the jump to 1.2 of *Henry V*. During the scene transition, his fellow cast members dressed Henry in his royal garments, a tunic with a gold collar and a coronet, signifying his ascension to king. The entire interaction between the Bishops was cut so that the decision to go to war with France was Henry's decision rather than a result of the Bishops' materialistic machinations. The effect was that we saw a perhaps rebellious prince who suddenly found himself in a position of authority rather than a prince engaging in a calculated move toward a more politic role. His first line as king was a directive: "Where is my gracious lord of Canterbury?" (1.2.1). Instead of the long-winded and confusing explanation of the Salic Law that is in the text, Canterbury launched into what was a candid explanation, consisting of only nine lines:

Then hear me, gracious sovereign, there is no bar
To make against your highness' claim to France
But this which they produce from Pharamond:
In terram Salicam mulieres ne succedant,
'No woman shall succeed in Salic land':
Which Salic land the French unjustly gloze

To be the realm of France, [...]
Yet their own authors faithfully affirm
That the land Salic is in Germany. (1.2.33, 35-41, 43-4)

This was delivered without a trace of humor or irony, evoking Henry's sincere and genuinely unsure question of "Can I with right and conscience make this claim?" (1.2.96). It took the combined forces of Canterbury, Bedford, Exeter, and Westmoreland (Bedford was given some of Canterbury's lines and Westmoreland replaced Ely) to convince Henry that the invasion was in fact his kingly right and even his duty as a descendent of other, war-like men:

Go, my dread lord, to your great-grandsire's tomb,
From whom you claim; invoke his warlike spirit,
And your great uncle's, Edward the Black Prince,
...
You are their heir, you sit upon their throne" (1.2.102-5, 115).

Literally sitting on that throne, Henry's certainty grew as he listened to these descriptions of his ancestors' valor and the expectations inherent as their successor— "Your brother kings and monarchs of the earth/ Do all expect that you should rouse yourself" (1.1.121-2). Henry's suggestion that English troops invade Scotland was cut, as was Canterbury's response, so that Henry appeared much more decisive and aware of the situation at hand and therefore less subject to the sometimes disparate voices of advice surrounding him. Standing, he commanded Montjoy (a role conflated with the French ambassador and played by a female actor) be sent in, proclaiming, "Now we are well resolved" (1.2.223). After the tennis ball insult, the decision was sealed and Henry was set in his course: England would invade France.

For this Henry, the war on France was a necessary evil and as time went on, his keen sense of responsibility for his men only grew as the realities of his decision became more apparent. At Harfleur, the rallying cry of "once more unto the breach" was both a command and a stirring call to arms, spoken during a brief lull as his soldiers kneeled in exhaustion, letting

their swords rest on the ground. Taking note of their exhaustion, he charged them to once again find the energy and motivation to fight: “Stiffen the sinews, conjure up the blood.../ Be copy now to men of grosser blood/ And teach them how to war” (3.1.7, 24-5). This argument—culminating in an appeal to nationalism—resulted in murmurs of agreement, ones that became stronger as the speech progressed until every man (and woman) was standing, ready to charge back into the fray for God, Harry, England, and Saint George. This was in stark contrast to the Henry who hurtled threats at the Governor of Harfleur, spitted babes on pikes and all. However, Henry’s genuine relief was evident when Harfleur surrendered to his bluff, adding to the impression that his first concern was for his weary soldiers, not victory at any cost.

Any good leader must maintain the status quo, deal with lawbreakers, and make hard decisions. Two scenes within the UA production best embodied Henry’s authoritative side: the sentencing of the traitors and the hanging of Bardolph. The former was a strange moment, embedded between scenes with Pistol and Nym, whose interactions were comedic in the production, the comedy centering on a rivalry between the two men over Nell (Nym still bitter over losing her to Pistol). These moments only heightened the harshness of the sentencing. Faced with the proof of Scroop’s and Cambridge’s betrayal, Henry became hard and unyielding: “The mercy that was quick in us but late/ By your own counsel is suppressed and killed” (2.2.79-80). His resolve never cracked and the regret evidenced by his “I will weep for thee” was not over his decision, but rather theirs (2.2.140). This interlude solidified Henry’s resolve to go to war with France even as it showed everyone around him (and the audience) that this was a king who meant business.

But nothing was more disturbing than the hanging of Bardolph in 3.6, a scene that was quite literally a show-stopper, occurring right before the intermission, a move lifted from Adrian

Noble's 1984 RSC production, in which Bardolph was executed right in front of the audience and "for the remainder of the scene Bardolph remained fixed in this position at the center of the stage, his hands tied behind his back, occasionally dripping blood from his mouth" (Dessen *Rescripting Shakespeare* 79). Panitch envisioned the hanging as the most concrete example of the effects of war in *Henry V*, what it can drive people to do, and he wanted it to be a very dramatic moment. The actor, Nicholas Shabel, wore a harness and wire that came down from the light grid. The harness was under the actor's costume and the noose covered the wire, so once the hooded Bardolph was strung up, the effect was chillingly realistic. I had seen that moment several times in rehearsal and still was not fully prepared for what was truly a stunning moment. There were a few beats after Exeter performed the execution, marked by utter silence as Bardolph's death throes finally stilled. Finally Henry proclaimed "We would have all such offenders so cut off" (3.6.106). At the end of his monologue, the lights went up, the body still hanging, swaying.

The striking effect of this moment and the transition to intermission was that no one knew how to respond. Because of the seating, we could look at each other across the stage, and in desperate attempts to take cues from their fellow theatre-goers, everyone threw furtive glances at everyone else even while knowing that Bardolph was still hanging right in front of us. It sounds cliché, but we literally could have heard a pin drop. There was no coughing, no applause, no rush to the restrooms. Several of my undergraduate students wrote responses to the production and every single one of them mentioned the hanging and its effect on them as spectators:

The single most impressive scene in the entire play had to be the prelude to the intermission. The hanging of that man [Bardolph] was both powerful and impressive. It was eerie as well, especially as he hung there throughout the intermission. I assume he

was attached to some kind of harness, but I did not see them connect one to him from my angle. It was quite realistic and grim. (Anonymous “*Henry V* Response”)

Another student wrote,

I was impressed by the fact that they had the actor play the execution instead of a dummy. I thought this made everything more dramatic, not to mention more realistic. I think the entire audience felt the same way I did because you could feel the silence between onlookers and sense the hairs stand up on the back of your neck when the body dropped. It was so eerie...I don't think I've ever been part of a more speechless intermission. (Anonymous “*Henry V*”)

Both students use similar language to interpret the tableau: eerie, realistic, moving. This powerful moment in the play is where the audience made something of a connection with that original anti-war statement that Panitch had originally conceived. Because it was so eerily realistic, the audience was forced to look at a grim reality, the reality of death in war. Similarly, it made us realize that this was a Henry who meant business. Bardolph's sin— stealing the pax—is a relatively small one, and certainly not one worthy of execution. But by this point we have a Henry who is concerned with maintaining order, keeping a tight rein on his demoralized troops, and ready to do what he must, former friend or no. The moment lingered, a visual reminder of the consequences of both the war and Henry's part in it.

Gradually, as the moment lengthened, the crowd began to murmur and stir, and at last, stood and exited or turned to his or her neighbor. Within a few moments of the intermission, the actor was brought down and once again, theatrical normalcy was restored. But this moment managed to somehow extend complicity to the audience in a very real way. Faced with a very visual consequence of this war, we were left with the responsibility of dealing with it, and in a way that jolted the audience out of their complacent (and perhaps even bored) spectator roles. In *The Crimson White* review of the production, Karina Croskey, who played Bedford, stated that “A performance invites the audience to become part of the story” (qtd. in Cheek “*Henry V*”

transforms”). In this moment, the audience was jolted out of their removed spectator roles, that ever-conscious knowledge that these are only actors playing a part, and the narrative unfolding onstage will be over after a certain span of time. Because the body was left hanging at the start of intermission, the audience was left with the responsibility of deciding what to do next. A few insouciant students laughed nervously; a few brave souls left their seats anyway. But after a grave silent pause, the majority of the audience applauded as the other cast members took the body down. Instead of more action, there was intermission, throwing the burden of interpretation back on the audience and leaving everyone to wonder, “What do we do?”

And “what do I do?” formed the basis of Act Four, as Henry, the “mirror of all Christian kings,” wrestled with his own moments of doubt and indecision on the eve of Agincourt, the likes of which we had not seen previously, as after the initial questioning of the validity of England’s claim in France, this Henry was very decisive and sure of himself (4.0.47). How a production handles Act Four, Scene One, usually as either a self-pitying or a guilt-wracked moment, can profoundly alter how the audience sees Henry. In this production, however, these moments were evidence of Henry’s sense of responsibility. It was not a moment of self-pity, but rather suggested true concern for his men and what he is asking them to do in the morning. Wandering through the camp in disguise, Henry took stock of morale, settling down by a campfire (an opened trap with a red ellipsoidal reflector floodlight (ERF) shining down into it, giving the illusion of flames) and talking with Williams and Bates, reassuring them that the king will not be ransomed but rather fight alongside them. After they left, Henry became a solitary hooded figure (very reminiscent of Branagh’s *Henry V*), questioning his role as the one who must bear all:

Upon the King! ‘Let us our lives, our souls,
Our debts, our careful wives,

Our children and our sins lay on the King!
We must bear all. (227-10)

In many ways, this speech formed the basis of the production, appearing as an epigraph at the start of Panitch's program notes and as a tagline on the promotional posters. This moment, perhaps more than any other in *Henry V*, reveals the king's angst over his split roles as king and as individual, the burden of responsibility that a leader carries. Much of the tension within *Henry V* arises from this bifurcated role that the king must inhabit by virtue of his position, but Hangartner's Henry was sober in his musings, considering his burden and finally kneeling in prayer, ending with "O not today" (4.1.290). Rather than feeling the guilt and weight of a stolen crown and fearing the consequences of his accession to the throne, Henry's concern was all for his soldiers, and the "not today" referred to his fear that they might lose their courage in face of overwhelming odds (4.1.288-9).

Henry's concerns seemed to have vanished, however, by the time he walked in to hear Bedford, Exeter, and Westmoreland discussing the overwhelming French numbers, admonishing them for their realistic pessimism. Wanting to assuage doubt, Henry moved into the Saint Crispin's Day speech (4.3), perhaps the most stirring call to arms in the English language. As with his "once more unto the breach" speech, Henry's moving invocation for action was met with renewed vigor and zeal, the soldiers cheering in unison as he finished. And it was none too soon; Exeter (who replaced Salisbury) immediately entered with the news that the French troops were preparing to move on them. Once again, Henry was steely in resolve, and when he told Mountjoy that he would not be ransomed, the message was conveyed through gritted teeth: "tell the Dauphin" (4.3.125). His command that the prisoners of war be executed in 4.6 was cut, so when he received the report that the boys had been massacred, his reaction was justified and his anger genuine, providing the impetus to finish what they had started. The production dealt with

the Dauphin's sudden disappearance in Act Four by having Henry meet the French prince in battle, the action telescoping down to these two as they fought, sword against sword, in many ways, an even match. After disarming his fallen foe, Henry paused, either in a moment of recognition or indecision, and then plunged his sword into the Dauphin. Regardless of how Henry felt about his decision to kill the prince, it was one that had to be made and the audience recognized that fact.

As the proverbial dust settled, Henry was incredulous when Montjoy told him that the English had won and especially when he discovered how few of his men he had lost, especially in comparison to the French. *Non nobis* was sung *a cappella* by the company (notably Branagh's arrangement), a moment of thankfulness and celebration. Gradually everyone left until only Pistol was left onstage, a lone figure in dim lighting:

Doth Fortune play the huswife with me now?
News have I that my Nell is dead
Old do I wax, and from my weary limbs
Honour is cudgeled. Well, bawd I'll turn,
And something lean to cutpurse of quick had.
To England will I steal, and there I'll steal. (5.1.81-2, 85-8)

Henry's central premise in his Saint Crispin's Day speech is that by doing this, by going to battle against France, each man will become someone worthy of respect, even if he is of low station. His actions will make him a part of this band of brothers, and even scars will be a means of remembrance and honor. In this moment, Pistol, however, accentuated the hard-earned victory, almost subverting it entirely by making the audience focus on the less positive aspects of war. In addition to the deaths of his comrades-at-arms, Pistol was mourning the death of Nell, a death which, while never explained, was set up so that we understood it was a concrete consequence of this war, a personal loss, and one resulting in Pistol's rejection of any sort of honor. Along with

the hanging, this was the only other anti-war moment in the production, one in which we had to consider if such loss was worth the price of victory.

And yet the production ended on a high note as an endearingly inept Henry wooed the Princess Katherine. Played by Katie Burton, Katherine was delightful, and, along with Erica Hansen, who played Alice, showed remarkable fluency with the French. These two actors provided much of the comic relief in the play as they went through their English lesson, and Burton impressed with her ability to let the audience know what she was thinking without even opening her mouth. Her interactions with Henry were enchanting; he the awkward wooer, she the coquettish but intrigued object. While the two characters never had verbal interaction until 5.2, the blocking of scene changes provided a few moments of Catherine watching Henry leave, quickly casting her eyes downward when he glanced back. The French King chuckled when he left Henry alone with Catherine at the outset of the wooing scene, making the whole thing smack of a set up, but one welcomed by both parties (it must be noted that the actor chose to chuckle at this moment; it was non-directorial). Such choices made that last scene less problematic, Catherine thus having some degree of control within her fate as Henry's ultimate spoil of war, and giving the ending a happy resolution. And if *Henry V* is to be a portrait of character, a story about the development and personal growth of a leader, then such an end is fitting, a heteronormative marriage at the end of political conquest. But this happy ending, something that put a Band-Aid on the entire production and in some ways, undid everything that the production had set out to do. 5.2. is the cliff of each and every production of *Henry V*, the precipice that determines whether it is truly anti-war or not; if the production is meant to be anti-war, there can be no happy ending, especially give the Chorus' epilogue (again cut from the UA production), in which we are reminded that all that has been won will be lost in a few short years. This was the

point of no return for the UA production. Casting the alliance in a positive light, as something welcomed by both the French and the English made the production irrevocably something other than anti-war.

Theatre is a strange magic in that we, as the audience, are more or less handed a certain interpretative experience, one imposed on us by the choices that the production has made, and yet we can still walk away without really experiencing it in the way that it was intended. The director often has a certain vision he or she wishes to concretize but as theatre historian Emma Smith notes, “stage history is as much an account of reception as it is of production, and often audiences do not experience what directors intended them to experience” (2). Panitch was wise enough to see that *Henry V* never would support an anti-war reading; he very quickly realized that his chosen text had something specific to say and that no amount of cutting or rearranging would result in the reading that he wished to impose on it. Knowing that directorial intentionality is sometimes at odds with actuality, Panitch was able to put something on stage that did in fact have resonance and meaning for his audience. Instead of imposing his own ideology on the audience, not giving them the credit to discern for themselves that something about *Henry V* still speaks to us today, Panitch was able to find a means of letting the play speak for itself.

ACT III

DENOUMENT

A Shakespeare play onstage is fundamentally different from a Shakespeare play on the page. Stagings, far from static, reflect directorial, artistic, and acting choices. A performance of any one play can vary from night to night, variances that can be as simple as actors adjusting to certain audience reactions, such as playing up a line for laughs. In the case of the history plays such as *Henry V*, at times indecipherable and irrelevant to contemporary audiences, performance necessitates a different set of expectations. As was the case with the University of Alabama production of *Henry V*, not only is an anti-war critique hard to convey (if not impossible) but the play's historical sensibilities are lost in favor of something else. In modern performance *Henry V* becomes more about the characters and less about the situational history. And yet at the same time, that history provides a way of distancing ourselves from that which we perhaps remember all too well, our own past and present, and the play therefore becomes a means of screening war in a way that makes it easier for any generation marked by conflict, political or otherwise, to deal with its after-effects.

While I do not wish to suggest that every a production of *Henry V* evokes a universal reaction, since an audience is “not a monolithic social unit but a disparate group whose responses were based on individual emotional, intellectual, and political interests,” the play allows for the consideration of how war marks the corporate body of society (Champion 110). *Henry V* is the Shakespeare play to produce whenever there is a war going on. Whether the play is pro-war or anti-war is irrelevant; in contemporary performance this is not a play about war in and of itself,

but rather the bodies involved in war: the characters and the audience. Onstage, *Henry V* employs a different kind of remembering as the audience pieces together its own present through the lens of the past. The kind of historical memory that inundates *Henry V* as text does not “play” on the modern stage. Instead, we make connections through the characters, psychologizing history in order to face the present.

The Crimson White, the UA campus newspaper, featured an article on the production before opening night, highlighting this directorial decision as well as giving the basics of the historical context:

The story of “Henry V” focuses on the events surrounding the Battle of Agincourt during the Hundred Years’ War. Shakespeare’s contemporaries were familiar with the play’s characters and events, but today’s audiences might not have the same knowledge. To remedy this, director Seth Panitch is taking measures to introduce viewers to rowdy Prince Hal, who becomes King Henry V in this play. (Cheek ““Henry V’ transforms”)

Of course, unless the audience members read this article before attending the performance or had read both *Henry IV, Part One* and *Henry V*, the insertion— or rewrighting— of the tavern scene from the former went unnoticed. But while the insertion did not do much in terms of giving the audience a sense of the play’s history, it did give them a sense of personal history; Henry as Hal carousing in the tavern at the beginning of the play was a striking contrast to the Henry who exhibited marked relief when the mayor of Harfleur surrendered before the English army had to follow through on Henry’s threats. After his *Henry V* closed, Panitch candidly admitted that he had to adjust his directorial vision in the midst of rehearsal, from anti-war to an exposé of the trials of leadership. However, he also made it clear that he felt that the final direction of the production was still indeed resonant to the current American political climate, adding that as a director, “ultimately what you want is ... the audience to enjoy the experience of

going to the theatre. However, those things that we come up with are what make us passionate and what drive us. But ultimately, they may be things that only we see” (“Personal Interview”).

Panitch’s observation reveals the tension between directorial intent and audience reaction. What does the audience see? For this particular *Henry V*, shifting the focus from anti-war to a character study in leadership was effective. Student responses (mostly freshmen and sophomores with little to no exposure to Shakespeare in production) indicated that they picked up on Henry’s struggle to be and act the part of king. One student wrote that the play is suffused with questions such as, “How does a king balance the nature of leadership and his moral values?” (Booth “*Henry V*”). As I mentioned before, this Henry did what he had to do, but his initial actions were marked by hesitancy. The Bishops and the lords had to talk him into going to war with France but after time, he became the leader, an active and even willing participant in the unfolding events, in turn encouraging his men forward, to go “once more to the breach.” The Saint Crispin’s Day speech then became the marker of Henry’s maturity as a leader and Hangartner rose to the occasion: “Lawson poured much emotion and passion into his solo scene, possibly the best part of the play” (Anonymous “The Production”). Many of the students also remarked on Henry’s struggles to reconcile his private and public roles, how he “not only [has] himself to worry about, but also all the people of his country” (Booth “*Henry V*”). For this particular student-based audience, the performance was about the characters and how those characters, especially Henry, functioned.

And it is through the force of character that we make our own connections, our own means of understanding this history and the players in it, but in way that is not limited to mere pastness but allows us to garner new meanings for the present. Nicholas Hart posits that

performances of plays such as *Henry V* compel the audience to recognize the role of the past even while emptying out the past in favor of the here and now:

Historical drama makes the past present or it represents, for the player embodies the dead king. The presence of representation is gone even as we say the word. This literal and literary emptying out of the present is one of the primary difficulties that we face in literary criticism and historical writing. Shakespeare's history plays represent the problems of joining world and word, life and art, showing us their relation but distinguishing between them. As the actor plays, the audience identifies actor and role, present and past but at the same time differentiates them. (Hart 97)

No one thinks that the man onstage is really Henry V; such a claim would be ridiculous.

Likewise, spectators do not conflate the historical present of *Henry V* with their own present. At best, the audience, as Panitch suggested to me, makes some sort of unconscious or subliminal connection between the production and their own political world ("Personal Interview"). We are drawn to the historical world that is so far removed from our own through the appeal of psychological mimesis, through characters such as Henry, in effect transposing that world onto our own.

Claiming Shakespeare as "universal" or "relevant" is too easy. The ways Shakespeare are appropriated are complicated by the fact that so much of the context and history of many of his plays have been forgotten and any production seeking to reach new audience must find its own angle, its own adaptive strategy, effectively writing a new text as "'History and performance... maintain their difficult dance'" (Henderson 35). In *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance* W.B. Worthen writes that such adaptations of Shakespeare

evoke a modern confidence in the restorative power of performance, and a modern anxiety as well: the fear that much as performance operates in the here and now, it risks losing a validating connection to the past, a past located in the text that the performance is said to enact, to be *of*. (31)

This anxiety that we are losing the pastness of Shakespeare in favor of our own present is real and indeed worrisome but performance in its very nature is unstable, subject to a plethora of

variances and even while “new meanings... are generated in performance” through the collision with present day concerns, those “new meanings do not require rewriting the text” (Foakes 51). Worthen adds “a Shakespeare play can, or sometimes should, evoke the pastness of the text and what the text represents— early modern values, behaviors, subjects— in the present action of performance” (29). I would argue that unless the audience consists of scholars, literary critics, and historians, few spectators will pick up on that kind of ideological “pastness.” Instead, the text becomes something else, the constituent parts made into a new whole, a way of creating a new dialogue about the future through the past:

A production of the history plays is a *medium*, both as a live version of a script and as a seer through the dark glass of the past of the rock-eyed shapes slouching out of the production, their hours coming round at last as the plays keep saying they will and as history keep telling us they have. (Coursen 139)

By virtue of the fact that these plays, such as *Henry V*, are so foreign, they must, out of necessity, gain new meanings.

When it comes to Shakespeare’s history plays, a director’s choices make a play relevant for contemporary purposes; even decisions about setting and costume can make a world of difference. In *Henry V*, war is stripped down. There are no armies, no horses, and certainly no tanks. And yet that very simplicity allows room for interpretation. Even as directors choose to set the play within a different historical or political context, those bare parts allow for that adaptive quality that makes Shakespearean works continuously meaningful. We are inundated every day with images of war, different visions and versions of the war body through television, the internet, and photographic journalism. As Susan Sontag has suggested, even viewing such images makes us complicit in those acts of violence. Plays such as *Henry V* provide an extended look at war, displaying bodies, both collective and individual, onstage. Through the presentation of what is not a historical past but rather a dramatic present, the audience is invited to consider

more our own wars and history in the making through this removed medium and situation. We too have our own traumas, our own wars that need to be remembered—the gaping hole in New York City is testament to that need. And this play provides the distance to begin thinking about these things, the opportunity to start making parts whole as we rebuild the past so that we can move forward into the future, remembering with advantages, and making past present.

FINAL BOWS

Oftentimes humanity shrinks from looking at war too closely, onstage or otherwise. In his book *A Terrible Love of War*, psychologist James Hillman quotes various national figures such as Donald Rumsfeld, former secretary of defense, and Michael V. Hayden, current director of the National Security Agency, who, at one time or another, both referred to particular acts of war (such as 9/11) as “a failure of the imagination” (Hillman 4). It is a term that occurs throughout military history, one that implies an act so atrocious that so-called “normal” human minds cannot possibly understand or even conceive it. Hillman argues that such an expression and the sentiment it conveys— “I cannot even imagine that!”— is merely a way for us to shrug off our own culpability, our complicity in acts of war and violence, a way of placing blame on those terrorist psychopaths, the Japanese, the Nazis, members of the Taliban or Al Qaeda. According to Hillman, humans have an inextricable relationship and obsessive fascination with war and it is only when we do in fact begin “to understand and imagine” war that its horrors are “abated so that life can go on” (Hillman 5).

September 11, 2001 was a pivotal moment for the United States, marking a shift in American policy, the direct result being our attack on Afghanistan and then the more questionable instigation of the Iraq War. The image of the planes hitting the Twin Towers became an icon of one the most traumatic recent events in our nation’s history, an aggressive act on domestic soil. And no matter what one’s politics are, there is no question that 9/11 marked a turning point not only in US national policy, but in how Americans look at war in the twenty-first century. Of course the parallels between the war on Iraq and the attack on the French in

Henry V abound and these parallels may in fact explain the popularity of the play in recent years. While *Henry V* embodies nationalistic pride through figures like Prince Hal/Henry V, it also interrogates war and politics in a way that is especially pertinent and useful for modern directors and audiences. But taking an entity such as war, either as a reality or as a conceptual element, and estranging it through history is simplistic at best. While the histories— transposed, as they often are, over contemporary events— may in fact allow us to step back and look at war in a different light, the underlying assumption of such thinking is that war and the politics surrounding war are universal and unchanging, at least in terms of the fundamentals and therefore modern performances become representations of the “past... denuded of its difference from the time of performance in significant ways, most notably in the conceptual assumptions made about characters and war itself” (Henderson 204). But wars change; how we wage war changes. What remains the same is how people involved in war react to and process those circumstances.

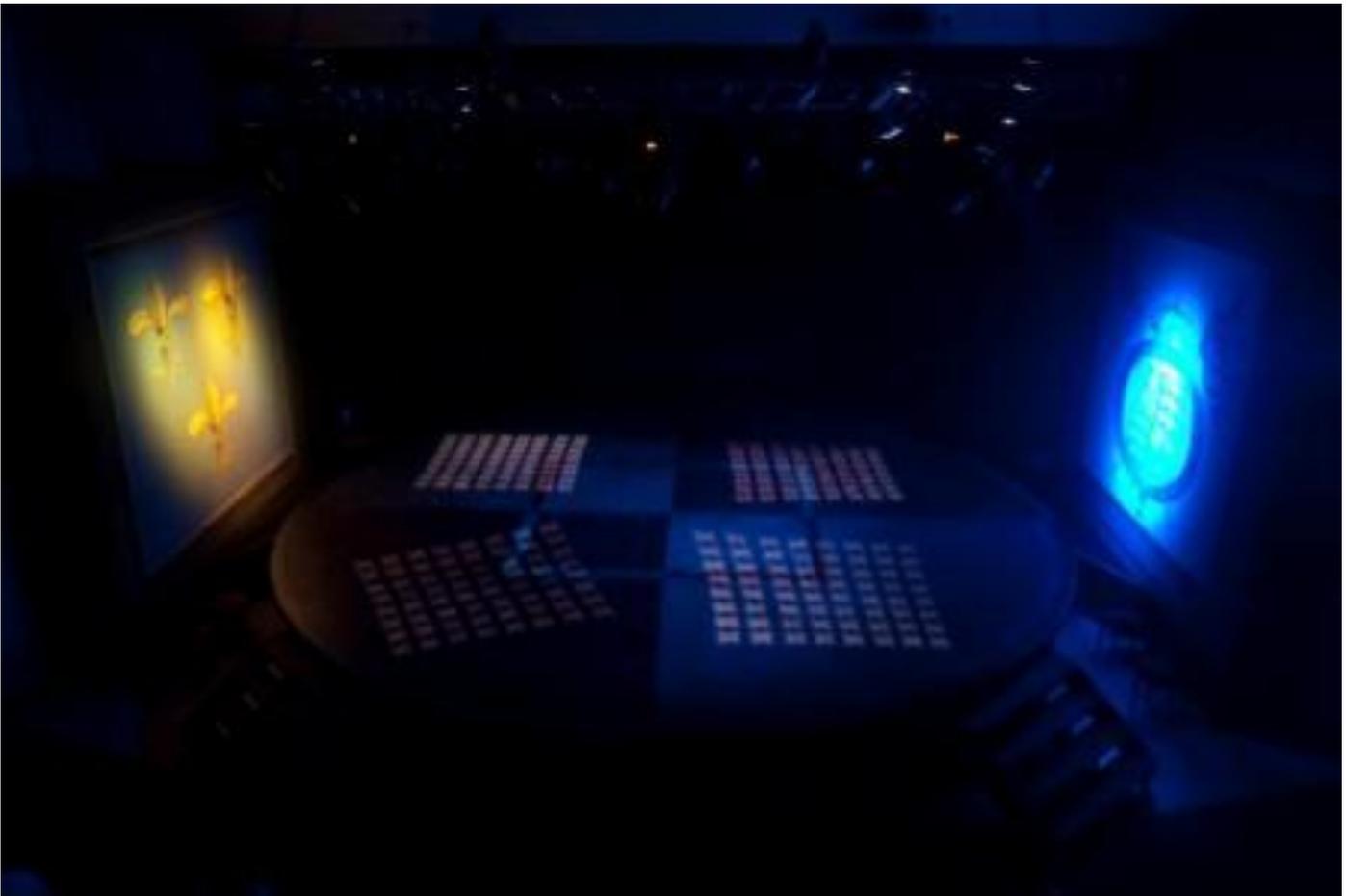
I would, in closing, like to suggest that the stage becomes a liminal place where we can at least *begin* to imagine the unimaginable, to interrogate that which we consider to be unthinkable, to name the unnamable. By recovering, remembering, and staging history, even someone else’s history, we see our own politics, and perhaps even our own foibles and idiosyncrasies. And maybe that is why there is continued interest in plays such as the *Henriad*. While we may need the perspective of years to truly determine the function of Shakespeare during times such as these, it is apparent that his works have become neutral ground for volatile topics, the histories serving as a veil to be transposed over our own history and politics. Ultimately, as a play about leadership and the choices that a government makes for better or for worse, *Henry V* provides an avenue for presenting our own history with all of its gruesome war and ugly politics by subtly

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APPENDIX
PRODUCTION PHOTOS



The stage in the University of Alabama Department of Theatre and Dance's 2009 production of *Henry V*, directed by Seth Panitch. Photo courtesy of the University of Alabama.



Katie Burton as Katherine and Lawson Hangartner as Henry in the University of Alabama Department of Theatre and Dance's 2009 production of *Henry V*, directed by Seth Panitch. Photo courtesy of the University of Alabama.



(From left to right) Lawson Hangartner as Henry, Nicholas Shabel as Bardolph, and Wade Mowles as Exeter in the University of Alabama Department of Theatre and Dance's 2009 production of *Henry V*, directed by Seth Panitch. Photo courtesy of the University of Alabama.



Jake Boyd as Prince Dauphin and Lawson Hangartner as Henry in the University of Alabama Department of Theatre and Dance's 2009 production of *Henry V*, directed by Seth Panitch. Photo courtesy of the University of Alabama.