

New Approaches to Henry V – Abstracts
Seminar Leaders: **Emma Atwood** and **Jennifer Feather**

Joseph Sullivan

‘Creeping Murmur and the Poring Dark’: Collective Hindsight Bias and *Henry V*.

Adaptive learning has served humanity well; unfortunately, there are glitches in the system. In some eras, cognitive biases strike us as curious inconveniences, comfortably tolerated during periods of intellectual and creative discovery. In other eras, perhaps the current one, these same phenomena, confirmation bias, to cite one example, seem potent and pervasive enough to dismantle our society and way of life. We wonder, “If THIS is how people ‘think,’ how have we survived so long as a species?” Another such side effect is hindsight bias, or the “I-knew-it-all-along-effect.” Once we learn the outcome of an event, our perception of its likelihood skews toward greater foreseeability and inevitability. Demonstrated originally by Baruch Fischhoff and colleagues in an attempt to understand public reactions to the Six-Day War (1967) and Yon Kippur War (1974), hindsight bias has proven over the decades to be a robust phenomenon embedded in our processes of causal reasoning (Klein et al 2017). Researchers have devoted attention to the ways skewed perceptions of the past activate collective blame and recrimination (McDermott et al 2020). This line of inquiry is important because recent studies have documented evidence of group hindsight bias, a “we-knew-it-all-along” effect (Choi and Choi 2010; Oeberst et al 2018) which opens the door for HB’s presence in collaborative enterprises, such as theatrical production and reception. Exacerbating the problem is the key role our belief systems seem to play in the polarization of perceptions (Hom and Van Nuland 2018).

The playtext of *Henry V* itself, its performance history, our professional critical reception of it, as well as the general public’s reception of it, all bear distinct traces of hindsight biases. Although arguments for the importance of character study to the Histories (e.g. Alice Dailey 2018) are valid, our perceptions of the tetralogies’ plots remain worthy of note, particularly since the cycles’ culminations suggest disparate providential (*RIII*) and contingent (*HV*) cosmologies. We should acknowledge that artists, readers, and viewers sometimes do view the plays as reenactments of real-world occurrences, rather than what Grace Tiffany (2012) has persuasively described as secular theatrical miracles. While literary and theater scholars typically interpret Henry V to be a complicated, often troubling, character, it is not unusual to hear him described by the general public as a “sophisticated example of enlightened ethical leadership” (Herbel 2015). That last quote was found in a journal aimed at public administrators.

Crucial to our attempts to mitigate hindsight bias is counterfactual thinking, the consideration of alternative plausible outcomes that might restore a more accurate perception of probability. An interesting example of counterfactual storytelling in the Histories can be found in *The King* (2019). The screenwriters, which included the actor portraying Falstaff, not only sent Sir John off with Harry to invade France, but additionally recast his character into one who resembled the historical Oldcastle as much as he did Mistress Quickly’s largest tab. We can ask if this change made better sense of events.

While the lion’s share of attention is often devoted to the sudden, unexpected victory at Agincourt, the *Hallow Crown* episode of *Henry V* (2012) rather interestingly bookends focus on

the sudden, unexpected death of a vibrant young monarch. That latter matter may be the causal question which most elusively haunts the play. Not, “how did you defeat the French at Agincourt?” Rather, “how did it all go away so quickly afterwards?” Patrick Gray (2018) recently compared the actions of Henry V favorably to those by George W Bush, attributing them to “flashing-eye,” “fire-in-the-belly,” albeit “reckless emotional engagement” (19). Gray compares other presidents, Barack Obama and Jimmy Carter, to the “feckless” Henry VI due to their “refusal to engage in power politics” (18). Perceptions of the probability of past events depend upon what temporal boundaries we erect around them. Was Agincourt a defining exclamation of victory, or instead a “Mission Accomplished” sign strung up prematurely before Henry preceded Charles VI in death? Was the Iran Hostage Crisis in 1979 a definitive humiliation for Carter, or a preliminary event in a long career that launched *Habitat for Humanity*?

Kate Myers

Counterfeit Honor: The Persistence of Falstaff in *Henry V*

Two related perennial issues inform interpretations of Shakespeare’s second tetralogy: Harry’s reformation from Hal-the-prodigal to Henry-the-King and his character’s essential continuity or development across the Henriad. Both issues are tightly entangled with the clashing critical and sympathetic interpretations of the Prince’s rejected friend Falstaff, whose weight in the *Henry IV* plays is undeniable from either position. As the Prince’s tutor in debauchery or as a repentant rogue, Falstaff’s influence is dangerous enough that he must be exiled from King Henry’s company, his character sturdy enough to stand as a convenient scapegoat to pay the debt Hal never promised and transform the wayward Prince into a respectable monarch. Despite Shakespeare’s promise that Falstaff would return after *Henry IV, Part Two*, the old knight is conspicuously missing in *Henry V*, remembered only in the secondhand accounts of other characters.

Yet markers of Falstaff’s presence persist in *Henry V* such that even in his relative absence Falstaff’s presence haunts the play. In this essay, I aim to explore how the play’s language prolongs Falstaff’s influence on Harry that began in the opening act of *Henry IV, Part One* and whether this may account for the enduring critical attention on the issues of ambiguity in *Henry V*. The play thematizes Falstaff’s lingering lessons in echoes of his ethical discourse on honor and piety that earned him much of his negative critical reception. Traces of Falstaff’s counterintuitive views press on in the banter of his old Eastcheap companions and endure in Harry’s passionate attitudes as King toward his friends and foes alike, prompting the need unravel the ties between these affective intensities and the national identity they helped to fabricate.

Linda McJannet

Physical Theatre and *Henry V*

Since I began working on dance and physical theatre approaches to Shakespeare, I have had the pleasure of engaging with compelling productions that foregrounded choreographed movement and the actor’s body. While Kathryn Hunter and other proponents of this form of theatre assert—with much justification—that *all* theatre is physical, the use of the body and bodily movement by companies such as Cheek by Jowl, Not Man Apart, and SITI typically departs from a realistic

aesthetic. It is not surprising, then, that the productions of Shakespeare's plays by thirteen "up-and-coming" physical theatre companies include comedies, tragedies, late plays and romances but no English history plays. The only exceptions were productions of *Richard II* and *Henry V* by the Fight or Flight Theatre Company, a peripatetic troupe that performs plays on trapeze. While Peter Brook famously included traditional trapeze and other circus arts into his celebrated production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1970, Fight or Flight uses the single-point trapeze that enable the more complex movements of "aerial dance." Both these productions in the early 2000s, and one or two outliers from previous decades, I hope to show, created an aesthetic in which national myth-building (and myth-challenging) was compatible with and well served by acrobatic movement.

Andrew D. McCarthy

Shakespeare's PsyOps: *Henry V* and the Global War on Terror

In his award-winning collection of short stories, *Redeployment*, Phil Klay contemplates the wide-ranging dangers of weaponized language in "Psychological Operations." Tracing the conflict that emerges on a college campus between a veteran of the Iraq wars and his freshman classmate, Klay uses the short story to reveal the U.S. military's use of psychologically traumatic language as a technique for luring insurgents into the open. This story is hauntingly similar in many ways to Henry's speech at Harfleur in Act 3, scene 3 of Shakespeare's *Henry V*. In both cases, an invading army deploys psy ops to achieve their larger objectives and in doing so, cast doubt on the moral and ethical nature of their undertaking. What I am interested in exploring in this paper is the double-edged nature of turning language into a weapon. Both Klay and Shakespeare are aware that there are multiple psychological operations at play in war—each of them violent. Not only is language made violent in the threats made to Iraqi insurgents or the Governor of Harfleur, but a similar sort of violence is invoked before a single shot is fired. Both the novelist and the playwright also appear to argue that the perpetrators of such operations have also been victims themselves, thus they are better able to talk in blood having tasted it on their own tongues.

Catherine Lisak

"*Henry V* and the Process of Argument"

It is not only the chorus that appeals to the audience to cooperate in mental acts of instantiation. Henry also induces the audience to take part in another form of thought experiment by crossing the play as a probing mind. Henry quizzes, examines and revisits through debate the validity and soundness of a set of argument, on the right of inheritance, just war, mercy, and a king's duty. He traces the process of the argument by engaging others in dialogue, pressing them to express their viewpoint before formulating his own. This paper argues that the staging of this dialectical process of argument leaves the audience with the acute sense that, as the play unfolds, it puts to the test theatre and its power to bridge (*concordia*) ideological, moral religious angles of cleavage (*discordia*). The resulting effect, I argue, is one of repositioning but also uncertainty surrounding the nature of judgment; I examine how we are left feeling the questions addressed remain "open", not only in our mind but also for the characters themselves. In this study, I revisit Catherine Belsey's notion of the "interrogative text", an argument according to which "the positioning of the 'author', inscribed in the text, if it can be located at all, is seen as questioning or as literally contradictory" (1980: 91). I also consider the way the play constructs a sense of

public opinion by leading us through different viewpoints and common sense narratives. I frame my argument in terms of meta-ethics and G.E. Moore's The Open Question Argument as formulated in his *Principia Ethica* (1903).

Fayaz Kabani, Allen University

"When Blood Is *Their* Argument": The Mystification of Class in *Henry V*

Williams's declaration in *Henry V* that "few die well that die in a battle...when blood is their argument" has rightly been read as a sober and anti-aristocratic critique of war and its costs on commoners. However, his comment also suggests a class-based difference over the meaning and importance of "blood." While nobles and gentles considered "blood" to be indicative of "breeding" and family, "blood" more generally refers to livelihood and life itself others for commoners. The aristocracy's abstraction of "blood" arises in part to foster their self-narratives justifying their power. To justify their social positions, they mischaracterize the motivations and desires of the people they rule while at the same time propagating and allying themselves to idealistic narratives of their own inherent greatness. Thus, despite evidence to the contrary, aristocrats, particularly Henry V, insist on mis-taking the commoners they encounter to naturalize the vagaries of the very social hierarchy they often deny in their discourse of English blood-sameness.

Eric M. Johnson

Shakespeare's Warrior: A Proposed Synthesis

There are at least three separate discourses about *Henry V* and its namesake: in literary scholarship, performance, and military history. Literary scholarship and performance sporadically address each other, but military history – specifically the subset which is focused on late medieval European warfare and its religious, political, and social ramifications – largely keeps to itself, and the other dialogues seldom ask it any probing questions.

This is unfortunate, because Shakespeare's play can speak to the military historian about the England of King Henry's day and his own. The imaginative portrayal of Henry's army and its stunning triumph at Agincourt is a plausible reconstruction of what the combatants were thinking and doing on that battlefield, and during the events before and afterwards. Conversely, the work of scholars and performers could benefit from accurate, historically grounded knowledge about the facts of Henry's life, and the relevant aspects of Shakespeare's contemporary context in which he wrote. Even if a scholar's approach is not historicist, or a production is set in another time and place, this knowledge would surely be useful for interpreting what is, after all, a history play.

This essay will propose ways in which these three discourses could establish better speaking terms, using Shakespeare's own synthesis of the interplay between words, performance, and history as a point of reference. Although the "vasty fields" of this scope might seem overly ambitious for a relatively short paper, this will be a quick sketch of what an integrated approach to *Henry V* might look like.

James Loehlin

Henry V Performance in the 21st Century

A quarter-century ago, I wrapped up my performance history of *Henry V* with these vague words: “The explorations of the second half of the twentieth century have given *Henry V* an enhanced status as a play full of problems and possibilities, a play worthy of continued reinvention” (*Henry V*, Shakespeare in Performance, Manchester UP 1996, 169). How has that reinvention proceeded in the years since? In many ways, major productions have continued prior trends. *Henry V* is often done by the major national companies of Great Britain, often as part of a large-scale cyclical exploration of history plays, as at the RSC under Michael Boyd and Gregory Doran. Sometimes these productions celebrate the play’s quintessential Englishness; Dominic Dromgoole’s Globe version was the British entry in the 2012 Shakespeare Olympiad. Others extend the edginess of Vietnam- and Falklands-era productions, as Nicholas Hytner’s Gulf War version did for the National Theatre. *Henry V* remains relatively rare outside the English-speaking world, though it has now entered the French repertoire, and there have been interesting productions in Asia. Canadian productions continue to explore the play’s fraught cultural and linguistic terrain. But there have been a number of smaller-scale, stand-alone productions that have brought the play into engagement with the issues of the twenty-first century in ways that challenge its long-inherited traditions.

Mark Houlahan

Theatre/Nation/NZ

Since its first performances at the Globe in Southwark in 1559, audiences have been drawn to *Henry V*’s irresistible use of tropes of theatre and nation. Those tropes have been used at times not just as generic meta-theatre but also to celebrate the specific theatre in which the play was staged. That was clearly the case in 1599. In 1997, when Shakespeare’s Globe premiered with its own, much discussed version of *Henry V*, those tropes came to life again. Again this was London come to life on stage. Again the stage was shiny with wood, from the Thane of Cawdor’s estate. Yet, as the play travels the Globe (as when for example Propeller Theatre took their all-male *Henry V* around the globe nearly ten year ago) what sense can we make of these English theatre/nation tropes? Can the play speak as far from London as Aotearoa/New Zealand?

The prime objective of my paper is to answer this question by describing a specific production in 1972, which launched the James Hay Theatre in the Christchurch Town Hall – a noted postmodern, world class performance venue. This was directed by Ngaio Marsh, famous as one of the Queens of Crime fiction and who in New Zealand directed high quality Shakespeares for several decades. The production, using 60 actors and featuring professional actors Marsh had trained who returned from England to perform, was a pinnacle of her production style. Marsh’s meticulously prepared promptbooks, housed in the National Library of New Zealand, show every cut and in some scenes, every move sketched by Marsh in advance. The Marsh archives also document reviewers reactions and recollections from the company. None of these have been digitised, though Marsh’s script for her 1943 modern dress *Hamlet* (the first such performance in New Zealand) has recently been published. My paper will show how useful these materials might be to calibrate the resonance of theatre and nation in the play.

Michael Friedman

“I am but a fool, look you”: Will Kemp and the Performance of Welshness

Many scholars believe that actor Will Kemp left Shakespeare's company in early 1599, prompting the playwright to omit Kemp's character Falstaff from *Henry V*. This essay proposes that Kemp stepped down as a shareholder but remained with the Lord Chamberlain's men as an actor through the summer and autumn of 1599, taking small parts in *Julius Caesar* and the role of the Welsh Captain Fluellen in *Henry V*. This contention is supported by evidence that one of Kemp's acknowledged parts, Launce in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, was written to be performed as a figure of Welsh descent. I suggest that Shakespeare planned to exploit Kemp's ability to portray a stage Welshman, as well as his complex identity as both his current character and all of the other clown figures he had played in the past (particularly Falstaff), in his depiction of Fluellen in *Henry V*.

Andrew Fleck, UTEP

"*Henry V* and the Walls of Troy"

This paper argues that in *Henry V*, Shakespeare makes enough references to the Trojan Wars to suggest that he was more familiar with the *Iliad* than has been previously acknowledged. These references allow him to characterize the French as modern Troy and Henry and his troops as the Greeks who will eventually defeat a supposedly invincible foe. Making this argument, the paper shows that Shakespeare draws on the Chapman's partial translation of Homer's epic, illustrating several key borrowings. The paper contextualizes this argument by placing Chapman's prefatory material in the two printings of partial Homer translations with other dedications to the Earl of Essex in the mid-1590s and suggests that while Shakespeare and Chapman shared the popular enthusiasm for the flashy English soldier, Shakespeare ultimately arrived at a different assessment of Essex than his fellow poet.

Natalie K. Eschenbaum

Bloody Disgust in *Henry V*

Although I have taught *Henry V* for two decades, I haven't written on this incredible play since my undergraduate thesis, which focused on filmic presentations of masculinity in the *Henriad*. I'm now looking ahead to a manuscript tentatively entitled "Ewww, William: Shakespearean Disgust," and want to explore blood, disgust, love, and war in *Henry V*. Although *Henry V* isn't the bloodiest Shakespeare play, it oozes with the stuff, as both signifier of nationality and as literal, physical effusion. Kenneth Branagh's cinematic *Henry V* (1989) and David Michôd's pacifist *The King* (2019) both depict the battle of Agincourt as a muddy blood bath, with dirty, blood-smeared Henrys emerging triumphant at the conclusion of Act 4. My study will center on Exeter's report of the deaths of the Earl of Suffolk and the Duke of York: "Suffolk first died, and York, all haggled over, / Comes to him where in gore he lay insteeped, / And takes him by the beard, kisses the gashes / That bloodily did yawn upon his face" (4.6.11-14). York, who Henry just described as "all blood" (4.6.6) on the battlefield, dies in bloody espousal to Suffolk. I am interested in the scene because the depiction of hacked bodies and gore should disgust, but doesn't. We see one haggled, or mangled, body, kissing the open wounds of another body, steeped in gore. The scene is sexual, masculine, nationalistic, and possibly eucharistic, but certainly vile and beautiful. The recent research on disgust shows that revulsion can be perversely attractive, and that the overcoming of disgust is often a sign of love or devotion. My aim is to trace the blood lines in *Henry V* to discover how disgust defined Englishness,

masculinity, humanity, and love. And, I hope to consider the film adaptations' use of disgust to revolt and attract in ways that reflect their historical moments of production.

Yan Brailowsky

Conjecture in *Henry V*

In Act 4, just before Agincourt, the Chorus asks us to “entertain the conjecture of a time”, speaking in terms reminiscent of *Genesis*, suggesting Henry’s victory was about to re-create the world, finding light in darkness. In this paper, I would like to explore the manner in which the play has ‘thrown together’ contrasting — but also generative — readings and performances by examining editorial, performance, and critical history. As the play repeatedly invites us to fill in the blanks and compensate for staged drama’s institutional deficiencies, it suggests that the creation of meaning rests upon our individual and collective memories (also occasional deficient, or skewed), making us responsible for whatever conclusions we draw from the theatrical experience — even against our better judgment. The result is a paradox best summed up by Nym: “There must be conclusions. Well, I cannot tell.” (2.1.22)

Meghan C. Andrews

The Young Prince: Recent Film Adaptations of *Henry V*

My seminar paper will focus on two relatively recent film adaptations of *Henry V*: *The King* (2019, Netflix) and the *Henry V* filmed as part of the BBC’s first *Hollow Crown* cycle (2012). In some ways the adaptations are similar; both cast a young, up-and-coming Hollywood darling as Henry V (Tom Hiddleston in *The Hollow Crown* and Timothée Chalamet in *The King*), creating a frisson of energy between actor and character; both employed a host of well-known actors in secondary roles, including Joel Edgerton, Robert Pattison, Ben Mendelsohn, and Sean Harris (*The King*) and Julie Walters, John Hurt, and Richard Griffiths (*Hollow Crown*, with even more well-known British luminaries in the previous installments). Both were also lavishly produced, filmed on location with relatively large budgets. Yet for all that they are separated by just seven years, they were produced in vastly different historical moments: *The Hollow Crown* was designed to be part of the celebrations surrounding the 2012 London Olympics, while *The King* was filmed after the 2016 US election and the overall rise of the “alt-right” and nationalistic/anti-global movements in many countries.

This essay will compare and contrast these two adaptations of *Henry V*, identifying some surprising similarities between them. It will explore both adaptations’ portrayals of (toxic) masculinity, warfare, and British identity to analyze what they can tell us about the place of Shakespeare in the rapidly-changing global landscape of the 2010s, as well as what they can reveal about our own cultural moment.