

# Shakespeare and the Cultural Olympiad: Contesting Gender and the British Nation in the BBC's *The Hollow Crown*

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## Abstract

As part of the 2012 Cultural Olympiad celebrating both the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the London Olympics, the BBC launched a season of programs, entitled Shakespeare Unlocked, most notably presenting the plays of the second tetralogy in four feature-length adaptations released under the unifying title *The Hollow Crown*. These plays so obviously engaged with the question of English nationalism suited a year in which the United Kingdom wrestled with British identity in a post-colonial and post-Great Recession world. Through its adaptative and filmic vocabularies, however, *The Hollow Crown* advances a British nationalism unresponsive to the casualties — often women and ethnic minorities — incurred over the course of Britain's self-formation and acts of self-defining. While the adaptation of *Richard II* strives to preserve a complex understanding of woman's role in British history, both parts of *Henry IV* and *Henry V* sacrifice such depiction to the manifest destiny of Henry V's apotheosis. *The Hollow Crown* admits little room for questioning a construction of British nationalism as essentially white, male, and validated by the cultural iconicity of Shakespeare's canon.

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## Colliding Histories

Director Danny Boyle's 2012 London Olympic Games opening ceremony staged post-imperial Great Britain as a raucous collage of icons as varied as Mr. Bean, James Bond, J. K. Rowling, William Shakespeare, and Mary Poppins on a set referencing both J. R. R. Tolkien's idyllic Shire and the grimy, industrial London of a Charles Dickens novel. While Britain may no longer rule the world, Boyle's spectacle celebrated the sceptered isle's cultural heritage and social welfare leadership. Charlotte Higgins, chief arts writer for *The Guardian*, explains: "It was Boyle's impassioned poem of praise to the country he would most like to believe in. One that is tolerant, multicultural, fair and gay friendly and holds the principles of the welfare state stoutly at

its heart" (2012). Higgins articulates the fantasy central to the mythos of the ceremony — a cultured and compassionate Britain as Boyle would like it to be rather than as it exists. Boyle's ceremony climaxed with a choreographed celebration of the National Health Service and asserted a vision of the Good Society that takes care of its own. In its whimsical, generous-minded excess, Boyle's representation navigated between Britain's humane right and its imperialist wrong.<sup>1</sup>

Those opposing histories collided noticeably when the ceremony referenced the nation's Shakespearean heritage. The exuberant display titled "Isles of Wonder" directly quoted Caliban's familiar "Be not afeard" speech from *The Tempest* (Shakespeare 2008, 3.2.130) as source for the evening's theme, assigning the recitation task to Sir Kenneth Branagh. The newly knighted actor, film adaptor, and impresario declaimed the poetry at the foot of a replica Glastonbury Tor and did so costumed as the British engineer and railway pioneer, Isambard Kingdom Brunel. Reciting lines assigned originally to one of the most significant voices of proto-colonial dissent in the Shakespearean canon, the Northern Irish Branagh did so framed visually and aurally by a confounding accretion of "British" hegemonic identifiers: Glastonbury's mythic King Arthur, the Bard from Avon, British industrialism, and Edward Elgar's "Nimrod" variation.

In *Shakespeare Remains*, Courtney Lehmann parses with meticulous care the specter of Irish identity in Branagh's career, demonstrating how the actor-director has relied upon Shakespeare as the mechanism to "subvert his own Irish heritage" (2002, 170). Branagh's ambivalent status as a Northern Irish immigrant to England as well as an interpretive tradition in which Caliban embodies the subaltern Irish only magnified the enticing multi-vocality of Boyle's Shakespearean referencing. Where was Shakespeare in all this over-signification, and what kind of Shakespeare emerged from the histrionics of spectacle? The abundance of heart-thumping metonyms for Britain threatened to render Caliban's lines nothing more than a buoyant welcome to the world at the start of a commercialized athletics competition and thus gloss over any disruptive undercurrents in the Shakespearean quotation. However, Boyle's reliance upon inference and association rather than monolithic singularity opened up richer possibilities for defining the nation and locating the Bard within that national identity.

Standing in as a metonym for the Great Poet, Branagh in many ways replicated the manner in which Shakespeare serves as a metonym for Great Britain. In the Olympic opening ceremony, nationhood emerged by means of metonymy, a slippery chain of references that defer absolute knowing even as the items in the chain invoke concrete specificity. Metonymy's mode of signification clarifies when contrasted with that of metaphor. Metaphor insists that one thing *is* another with an ontological and epistemological assertiveness that metonymy never approximates.

Roman Jakobson explains that in contrast to metaphor, "metonymy, based on a different principle, easily defies interpretation" (1971, 95). Metonymy assumes affinities of contiguity rather than similarity, simultaneously positing proximal connections whilst pointing to absence — the links in the referential chain direct towards a signification that remains just out of reach. While metaphor claims "an innate link between two things" (Menon 2003, 658), metonymy names a series of connections, and, as the *OED* definitions of "contiguity" indicate, a sharing of borders, proximity, and closeness but not always with contact.

In Boyle's Olympic opening ceremony, this chain of referential meaning, in which one object connects to another and another and another without the closure of absolute signification, transformed Shakespeare and his proto-colonial character into the voice of the nineteenth-century industrialism that fueled Britain's imperial consolidation. In this moment, the representation might well have papered over the ghosts of Britain's worst by appearing to strip Shakespeare's lines of their subversive context in which Caliban attempts insurgency against the rule of the Occidental mage Prospero. Or did it? Could the odd juxtaposition of Shakespeare, Caliban, and Brunel actually have been a deeply knowing one recognizing the role of Shakespeare's plays in repressive colonial curricula throughout India and Africa? Numerous post-colonial engagements with the canon have exposed "the complex ways in which Shakespeare's writing was entangled from the beginning with the projects of nation-building, Empire and colonization" (Neill 1998, 168). For example, Gauri Viswanathan (1989), Martin Orkin (1998), and David Johnson (1996) explain the specifically curricular means by which the Shakespearean text served to shore up British imperial authority in colonial territories. Indeed, Branagh's own biography as Northern Irish outsider tacitly epitomized both the artificiality of and ventriloquism necessitated by the fiction of a homogeneous nationality. Furthermore, Boyle's conflicting metonyms actually troubled the viability of any singular British identity. As a result, a more complex and contradictory understanding of Britain (one that recognized the violent imperialism of its history and the strained multiculturalism of its present) prevailed in spite of the ceremony's patriotic functionality.

In the choice to speak through the loose connections and referential significations of metonym, Boyle created a vision of British nationalism that did not silence dissent or assert fascistic certainty (often the dangerous knock-on effect of such celebratory fervor). By naming through metonym (and thus by association and deferral) and by crafting an aesthetic vocabulary rooted not in realism but in fantastical pastiche, Boyle's Olympic opening ceremony serves as a foil to the troubling ways in which much adapted Shakespeare continues to hail the poet's authority and British identity as exclusively white male domains. In fact, the dominant mode of Shakespearean film adaptation championed by Kenneth Branagh himself — the naturalistic

aesthetic of "determinedly inoffensive 'commercial' Shakespeare films" (Sinfield 1994, 271) — could benefit from the anarchic associations of Boyle's display. Boyle's appropriation of Shakespeare instructively demonstrates both the virtue and danger inherent in the act of knowing and naming the nation-state.

### Falling Skies

The months leading up to Boyle's spectacle saw a range of festivities designed to showcase British national heritage and scaffold a millennial epistemology of nationhood. As part of the 2012 Cultural Olympiad celebrating both the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the London Olympics, the BBC launched a season of programs, entitled Shakespeare Unlocked. (To boost cultural capital, the BBC partnered with the Royal Shakespeare Company and its World Shakespeare Festival, as well as the British Museum, in this endeavor.) The season featured a range of programming, including a documentary hosted by Simon Schama, scene performances and analyses by members of the Royal Shakespeare Company, and freshly produced, full-length adaptations. Described on the BBC's companion website as "a season exploring how one man captured so much about what it means to be human," Shakespeare Unlocked most notably presented *The Hollow Crown*, the plays of the second tetralogy (1595-99) in four feature-length adaptations that aired in June and July of 2012, just prior to the opening of the London Olympic Games. In the United States, the BBC's partners at PBS host a website tie-in to the Shakespeare Unlocked programs, titled for American airing as Shakespeare Uncovered, that includes teacher viewing helps and discussion guides. PBS originally aired *The Hollow Crown* as part of the fortieth anniversary season of Great Performances on four consecutive Friday nights, starting 20 September and concluding 11 October of 2013.

Executive produced by Sam Mendes and Pippa Harris of Neal Street Productions, *The Hollow Crown* developed in the shadow of another British icon — James Bond. The Bond series marked its fiftieth anniversary with the Mendes-directed *Skyfall* (2012), a film that increasingly demanded Mendes's attention and left oversight of the Shakespearean adaptation to Harris (Davies 2012). In a year marking the jubilee celebrations of a female monarch whose name conjures the "Golden Age" of another ruling Elizabeth — its literary achievements, voyages of discovery, religious reform, and incipient colonialism — the BBC chose to commission from Neal Street Productions Shakespeare's relentlessly masculinist plays that dramatize the mechanisms by which a nation forms identity and incurs losses endemic to that process. Harris recognizes no potential irony in the choice of plays, enthusing that "The plays seemed particularly fitting for this particular year, with the Olympics but also the jubilee. They are about monarchy, they are about England. They are about British history" (quoted in Davies). Thus, just as the postmodern United Kingdom made its own history

in 2012, the BBC turned to a cycle of plays that constitute "a long, sustained and extra-ordinarily innovative dramatic meditation on the nature of history" (Holderness 2000, 8).

In contrast to the riotous cacophony of Boyle's production, the Henriad of *The Hollow Crown* achieves a more immediately harmonious tonality across the history-making of its four films thanks to its naturalistic aesthetic, an approach to adapted Shakespeare indebted to techniques invigorated in the late 1980s and 1990s by Branagh. This aesthetic attains overall coherence by means of a number of elements designed to make the narrative convincingly "real" and to mute its status as created artwork: rich high-definition visual quality, lush on-location filming, an abundance of "historic" details in "period" costuming and set design, performances calibrated to render the characters accessible to an audience, reliance upon camera close-ups to signal the inner life and motivations of individuated characters, and limited extra-diegetic intrusions that might strike a dissonant note or prompt the question, "What is *that* doing there?"

Sarah Hatchuel describes the role that editing also plays in such naturalism: "The cuts from one shot to another, as well as the camera moves within the shots, are, as far as possible, justified by the logic of the story, by the characters' gazes, gestures, or moves. Therefore, they appear no more like a random act of enunciation but like a logical and natural effect of the diegetic world" (2000). By such means, *The Hollow Crown's* filmic vocabulary ultimately neutralizes attentiveness to the problems of knowing and defining a nation, an epistemological endeavor too often built upon the oppositional strategies of difference that victimize minority populations. Using techniques that market realism and its attendant certainties, *The Hollow Crown* admits little room for questioning a construction of British nationalism as essentially white, male, and validated by the cultural iconicity of Shakespeare's canon.

Bowing under the weight of a celebratory and patriotic agenda, the inherent conservatism of a naturalistic aesthetic, and the traditionalism that Shakespeare's authority provokes, *The Hollow Crown* concludes with a reification of the sexual vulnerability (typified by Katherine Valois's marriage to Henry V) and domestic limitations of females (exemplified by Hotspur's Kate) without any effort to ironize or question that status. Indeed, this tendency of the BBC series to downplay the significance of women in the Henriad corresponds to what Lehmann identifies as a "distinctly cinematic backlash against women in recent Renaissance-period films and Shakespeare adaptations featuring transgressive female characters" (2002, 260). While the adaptation of *Richard II* most notably strives to preserve a complex understanding of woman's role in British history, both parts of *Henry IV* and *Henry V* sacrifice such a depiction to the manifest destiny of Henry V's apotheosis. This article does not aim to establish a direct line of influence between the London Olympic Games opening ceremony, the Cultural Olympiad, and the BBC Shakespeare

Unlocked programing/*Hollow Crown* productions; however, without doubt, these manifestations of the London Olympic moment were interconnected and bureaucratically linked.<sup>2</sup> In governance hierarchy, financial interconnection, and human resources, Boyle's opening ceremony, the Cultural Olympiad, and the BBC Shakespeare Unlocked/*Hollow Crown* productions shared a significant network of influence that shaped the epistemologies of British nationhood emergent in 2012.

Reading *The Hollow Crown* in the context of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the London Olympic Games spotlights William Shakespeare's persistent centrality to the epistemologies of nationhood vying for ascendancy in post-imperial Britain. In contrast to the metonymic signifyings of the Boyle opening ceremony, *The Hollow Crown* advances a British nationalism too often deaf to the casualties — primarily women and ethnic minorities — incurred over the course of Britain's self-formation and acts of self-defining. Furthermore, by relying on a naturalistic aesthetic in contrast to the occasionally incoherent excess of the Boyle ceremony, *The Hollow Crown* asserts its vision of Shakespeare and British heritage as "true" and "real," occluding the means by which a people names the nation. Philip Auslander's careful work with the phenomenon of "mediatization" identifies the profound ways in which performances transmitted "on television, as audio or video recordings, and in other forms based in technologies of reproduction," strongly influence knowing by "shaping the sensory norm" (2008, 4, 37). For Auslander, the technical reproduction of mediatization and the liveness of performance have so thoroughly interpenetrated as to be inseparable from each other and have impacted audience perceptions of the knowable and the real. Auslander's identification of mediatized knowing should prompt not only skeptical examination of the "real" Britain communicated by both Boyle's spectacle and *The Hollow Crown* but also a critical exploration of the modes of narration that construct nationhood in the two broadcasts.

### Shakespeare and the BBC

Over the course of its history, the BBC's appropriations of Shakespeare have repeatedly intertwined the corporation's own status and security with the cultural resonance of Britain's Bard. The BBC's vexed history of Shakespeare adaptation has been thoroughly explored with particular attention paid to *The Shakespeare Plays* (1978-85), the project designed to create a video library of the complete dramas performed to reach a broad popular audience. Holderness explains that the democratizing possibilities of televisual Shakespeare represented by the BBC's filming of the Shakespeare canon "are in practice systematically blocked, suppressed or marginalised by the conservatism of the dominant cultural institutions" (1994, 223), and Olwen Terris argues that the BBC series "conflated the superiority of Shakespeare with its own tradition and created the canon

in its own image — conservative, culturally authoritative, durable and necessary" (2008, 207). Despite these ideological limitations, the authoritative completeness of the BBC series proved a commercial success, as Susan Willis indicates: "By 1982, the series had paid for itself and was even making a profit due to foreign sales" (1991, 8).

The BBC adaptations following in the wake of *The Shakespeare Plays* have been smaller in scope and distanced from the aesthetic limitations of the previous work, but the same reliance upon Shakespeare to heighten the BBC's status and affirm its use-value characterizes those smaller-scale projects and pushes them to the social and political right. One such example, *Shakespeare Retold* (2005-06), adopts a modern and distinctly televisual filming style marketed to update and renovate the schoolroom classics but persists in crafting female agency within the recognizable constraints of romantic comedy film and televisual idiom (Pittman 2011, 135). Both Olwen Terris and Margaret Jane Kidnie have identified the new millennium battles over the BBC's license fee as context for the production of *Shakespeare Retold*. Terris suggests that, "mindful of the fact that its charter was up for renewal and the licence fee might have to be re-negotiated, the BBC once again looked to classic literature to fulfil a cultural remit" (2008, 210). Kidnie elaborates on this context and identifies a White Paper "released in the Spring of 2006" which assigned the BBC the task of "Building Digital Britain" by 2012 as another reason for the series (2009, 131); Kidnie reasons that the BBC could draw upon the cultural status of Shakespeare as an emblem of national continuity even as the BBC transitioned to new millennium modes of broadcast transmission.

In his review of *The Hollow Crown* for *The Guardian*, Mark Lawson also points out the BBC's tendency to resort to Shakespeare during "license fee renegotiation" (2012). Repeatedly, in times of institutional and fiscal vulnerability, the BBC turns to Shakespeare to reaffirm its cultural significance. This need gained urgency in 2012 not only because of the post-2008 recessions but also because of the distributed and proliferated nature of media access, now so decidedly decentralized on the one hand but on the other hand, dominated by an oligarchy of media giants controlling so much television, internet, and radio content.

Just as in the case of *Shakespeare Retold*, *The Hollow Crown* broadcast coincided with another license fee and charter re-negotiation. The BBC initiated its own review of services in July of 2009, anticipating that the next fee settlement would, "be tough irrespective of the complexion of the Government" (Putting 2010, 1). In December 2010, the BBC published a mission document, *Putting Quality First*, with the informative subtitle, "Getting the best out of the BBC for license fee payers," as part of its response to criticisms leveled during the negotiation process. *Putting Quality First* articulates four objectives designed to provide value in exchange for the guaranteed fees: "Increase the distinctiveness and quality of its output"; "Improve the value for money it

provides to license fee payers"; "Set new standards of openness and transparency"; and "Do more to serve all audiences" (3). A number of initiatives followed from this mission document — an investigation into the portrayal of gays and lesbians on the BBC and a diversity strategy addressing inequities in both content portrayal and organizational hiring. *The BBC's Diversity Strategy, 2011-15*, developed as part of the *Putting Quality First* initiative, states as one of the media corporation's objectives the delivery of "high quality programming which reflects modern Britain accurately and authentically" (*BBC's Diversity Strategy* 2011, 1). According to the strategy document, the network of BBC outlets reaches 97% of U.K. "television viewers, audio listeners and web users every week." The BBC recognizes that it must better reflect the increased diversity of that audience: "Quite simply, our determination to visibly increase our diversity on and off air is part of our fundamental commitment to serve all our audiences" (2).<sup>3</sup> The strategy statement prioritizes improving representation on screen — diversity of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, and mental and physical ability — not just in numbers but also in quality:

And this is our audiences' minimum expectation. Not just more portrayal, but a balanced portrayal that reflects their experience in a way that is accurate, authentic and non-stereotypical, across a range of programme genres, and where "difference" is sometimes incidental and not always the primary point to a story we are telling. (*BBC's Diversity Strategy* 2011, 6)

Adaptations of Shakespeare's plays — long a site for the theatrical practice of colorblind casting — might well be ideally suited to that later goal of increasing diversity where "difference" is not necessarily the point of the story. Such a venture would simply cast persons from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds to signal quite visibly that Britain's poet belongs to all its twenty-first-century citizens not just its Caucasian forebears.

Just as, however, the strategy document explains the law mandating better diversity (the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty), it notes a small caveat that renders the BBC exempt from certain provisions that might threaten "editorial independence." One of those "exempt" areas identified is casting — the single most visible means by which the media institution may improve upon its representation of the U.K. populace (*BBC's Diversity Strategy* 2011, 5). Since the diversity strategy acknowledges the continuing disparity in representation of women, it also seems natural to expect that attention to when and how women are portrayed might govern artistic choices.

### Following the Money



Following *The Hollow Crown* money trail underscores the practical difficulties inherent in operationalizing a diversity vision when the production of content is distributed across multiple entities and funding sources. In July 2012, when BBC director general Mark Thompson hosted a gala launch at the British Museum for Thea Sharrock's *Henry V* (starring Tom Hiddleston), series producer Mendes chose to reveal that BBC Worldwide, the broadcaster's "commercial arm," had refused a year and a half earlier to fund the nine million pounds in costs associated with *The Hollow Crown*. License fees supported a portion of the production under the BBC2 budgetary umbrella (approximately 25% of costs), but Mendes won the remaining funds from NBC Universal (Brown 2012). The BBC Worldwide spokesperson explained: "We have to balance every investment against commercial returns including projections from our international sales team" (quoted in Brown 2012).

Though the negotiations that resulted in BBC Worldwide's refusal to finance fully *The Hollow Crown* took place in January of 2011, Mendes only spoke out at the time of the British Museum launch, perhaps resenting the BBC's decision to capitalize on what it now recognized as a going concern, thanks to Tom Hiddleston's film stardom. In addition, the press reported yet another way in which *The Hollow Crown* had become oddly entangled with power-jockeying at the very height of BBC governance. BBC Trust chair Lord Patten announced in July 2012 that George Entwistle would soon replace Mark Thompson as BBC director general; apparently at the time of Entwistle's final interview for the position (June 2012), *The Hollow Crown*'s *Richard II* had just aired (Lister 2012). Lord Patten hailed the film as evidence of Entwistle's suitability to lead the BBC since the then-head of BBC TV had originally commissioned the series: "As reviewers have said, it was probably the best televised Shakespeare there has ever been" (quoted in Lister 2012). Of course, Entwistle's disastrous fifty-four-day tenure as director general might suggest that the Shakespearean litmus test Lord Patten deployed was not a fail-safe deliberative method. Lord Patten's comment also demonstrates the duty to fulfill a British heritage cultural remit still persistent at the highest levels of the corporation's decision-making even as the broadcaster seeks to bring its human resources and artistic content into better alignment with contemporary Britain's shifting demographics.

The BBC's reluctance to risk resources on the Neal Street Productions enterprise it originally commissioned highlights competing instincts at the media giant — both a desire to appropriate Shakespearean prestige value as its own and a bottom-line-driven and familiar anxiety: "Will Shakespeare sell?"<sup>4</sup> Not just a one-off event associated with the year-long celebration of British nationhood, *The Hollow Crown* must generate a revenue stream beyond 2012 through

international broadcast and DVD sales, indeed much as its older sibling, *The Shakespeare Plays*, did. The finance fracas demonstrates a significant barrier to the BBC's diversity agenda and one characteristic of the distributed way in which television programming develops. Money remains the prime mechanism of influence over production content and casting, but as the BBC limits its actual investment in programming development, the influence it can wield over content branded as its own through airing diminishes. Furthermore, since the Parliamentary directive regarding equality of representation excludes casting (for reasons of aesthetic freedom) as an area of enforcement, even legislation can lend no real teeth to the diversity policy at the BBC. If the BBC does not pay the full bill, how then can it enact its stated commitment to inclusiveness and non-stereotyped portrayal of minority ethnicities and women?

The sheer cost of television production necessitates reliance upon outside entities which receive only a portion of their actual funding from the BBC, and yet, by airing programs such as the externally produced *The Hollow Crown*, creating a website tie-in, and positioning the series as the crown jewel of its Shakespeare Unlocked season of programming, the BBC claims the films as representative of its brand and mission. Even performers involved in the production cloud the distinction between production company and BBC brand; on the DVD bonus featurette, "*The Hollow Crown: The Making of a King*," Jeremy Irons (who plays Henry IV) declares: "The fact that these four plays are being done by the BBC in this Olympic year, I think, makes them slightly iconic" (2012). Here Irons parses no distinction between the Neal Street Productions and NBC Universal corporate cultures that primarily financed the films and the BBC that provided partial funding as well as a paratextual context, broadcast event, and airing schedule for the series.

By airing, packaging, and promoting the four film adaptations of Shakespeare's second tetralogy as a sequential unit, the BBC follows a distinctly twentieth-century performance tradition that imbricates the broadcast corporation and its brand within British cultural history and acts of self-definition. No evidence indicates that the history plays were ever performed as a cycle in Shakespeare's lifetime; as Scott McMillin points out, "Nothing from the Elizabethan theatre suggests that the better part of a week of a busy commercial repertory would have been given over to a series of plays in one vein" (1991, 5). The first recorded staging of the Henriad as a cycle of plays actually dates from nineteenth-century Munich and the direction of Franz Dingelstedt (McMillin 1991, 3).

The BBC's cycle packaging harkens instead to another epochal moment for Britain — World War II. Director Anthony Quayle's 1951 cycle production of the second tetralogy (the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Company) staged E. M. W. Tillyard's reading of the chronicle plays as a grand narrative of Britain and established a postwar trend that appropriated the history plays to assert

English cultural dominance after the long battering by Nazi Germany (McMillin 1991, 10, 35-36). Though *The Hollow Crown* relies upon three different directors, production coordination of the four films places them firmly within the postwar cycle tradition and prompts analysis of them as interrelated artworks. The bookend films, *Richard II* and *Henry V*, were directed by Rupert Goold and Thea Sharrock respectively, and the two parts of *Henry IV* were helmed by Richard Eyre but share cast members with Sharrock's *Henry V*. On the DVD bonus featurette, "*The Hollow Crown: The Making of a King*," Neal Street Productions's Harris likewise explains that the directors consulted across the four films to establish continuity, agreeing to the period scene design and visiting one another's sets to establish overall cohesion. Harris elaborates on the production vision and directorial working relationship for the cycle of plays:

We wanted to give each director as much freedom as possible within their own film so that they could choose their own teams — we weren't imposing people on them — but then to be able to link the films together so that as an audience you can watch from start to finish, and it feels like a cohesive whole. All the directors have bought into the fact that this is part of a bigger picture. You know, Thea [Sharrock] has been out on set to see what Rupert [Goold] was filming on *Richard II* so that she could get a sense of his approach, and, you know, we've been cross-casting across *Henry IV* and *Henry V*, which meant that Thea and Richard [Eyre] have been working together on that. So, I think it's a very satisfying blend of the whole lot working together as a cohesive serial ("*The Hollow Crown: The Making of a King*" 2012).

In addition, the four films share an on-location naturalism associated with the Branagh canon of Shakespeare on film. Positioned at a moment of corporate crisis and waning national support for the BBC, *The Hollow Crown* Henriad cycle thus reaches back to multiple sources of cultural authority, both the Golden Age of Elizabeth I and William Shakespeare and the moral high ground of the beleaguered but triumphant World War II Britain. Such traditionalism may well run counter to the progressive politics of a new millennium BBC determined to improve its record on value and diversity.

### The Henriad and *The Hollow Crown*

At first glance, the Henriad may not promise much fruitful ground for the BBC's commitment to diversity of representation, particularly its under-representation of females. As Lois Potter notes, "the histories in general . . . have always had a reputation for being unpopular with women." Potter suggests that the "male-oriented subject matter" and "the limited opportunities" for female actors

may explain that disinclination (2006, 297). Likewise, Rackin describes the histories as "the least hospitable to women" (2002, 73).

Recent critical debate, however, has prompted second-look reevaluations of such received wisdom. On the one hand, Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin (1997) argue that the second tetralogy steadily sidelines women from the stage of history-making and nation-building; the plays' focus on masculine maturation and performative power embodied in the transformation of the laddish Prince Hal into King Henry V necessarily relegates women to positions of lesser significance. Howard and Rackin elaborate on the *Henriad's* progress towards a masculine preeminence achieved at the expense of female agency:

By the time we get to Henry V, even the French women are safely contained at home. The gendered distinction between hearth and battlefield is now fully in place, and no woman appears — or is mentioned as appearing — in any army. Entirely confined to domestic settings and domestic roles, female characters serve only as the objects of male protection and the occasions for masculine competition (206).

On the other hand, Anna Kamaralli argues: "The dominance of masculinity in these plays need not render what female presence there is an inconvenience or an irrelevance" (2010, 174). She continues:

Shakespeare's history plays show a man's world more unequivocally, more inescapably, more impenetrably than his comedies or Romances, perhaps even more than most of his tragedies. Yet when women appear in these plays they are rarely presented as mere victims of the system, or of individual men, but as having agency. Sometimes that agency even extends to become power. (172)

Melissa E. Sanchez likewise offers a recuperative reading of women in the history cycle, focusing on *Richard II*, where women demonstrate the impossibility and inadvisability of divorcing the affective from the political (2012, 96); she points out in contradistinction to Howard and Rackin that the women of *Richard II*, rather than instantiate a powerless domesticated subjectivity, actually further Early Modern debate regarding absolutist and constitutionalist monarchy (99). As Sanchez observes in the conclusion to her searching discussion,

Instead of telling only sad stories of women's progressive and seemingly inevitable marginalization, I propose that we also attend to the ways that women *have* mattered to the stories through which we reconstruct the politics of the past — and imagine those of the future. (112)

Such critical reassessments of women in the history plays might thus render the *Henriad* an ideal place in which to pursue the BBC diversity mandate — forcing viewers to think again about the role women have played in history and the narratives told about those roles.

Unfortunately, this call to mindful reconsideration of gender and the nation in the history plays remains largely unheard by the production team responsible for *The Hollow Crown*, with one exception. The most aesthetically experimental of the four films, Goold's *Richard II*, interpolates multiple scenes of mimetic reproduction depicting an artist in the act of creation — most frequently a painter in the process of producing a portrait. This meta-narrative leitmotif directs viewers' attention to the stories that build a nation and coincides with a more complex exploration of female agency within the confines of the Early Modern play. The other two directors, however, fall into patterns of gender representation that still regard knowing and naming the nation as predominantly masculine enterprises. Three crucial scenes from the adaptations by Goold, Eyre, and Sharrock stage varying degrees of female participation in history-making and instantiate the BBC's fledgling and not consistently successful attempts to strengthen gender diversity through nuanced and non-stereotyped portrayals.<sup>5</sup>

Director Goold's *Richard II* maintains the space for female agency identified in the play text with little teleplay trimming of Richard's Queen Isabella and by preserving act 5's family crisis over Aumerle's loyalty to Henry IV. While the film excises reference to the murder of the Duke of Gloucester and thus the crucial intercessory scene in which his widow pleads with John of Gaunt to pursue vengeance (1.2), Goold's adaptation utilizes the camera to stress the influence of female agents upon history. This is best demonstrated in the Duchess of York's defense of her son. Lindsay Duncan's Duchess of York battles with husband and king for her son's life and does so with the aid and support of the camerawork to emerge as a prime agent — moving literally in the film's imagery from the hearth to the court. The scene begins with traditional gender roles underscored by the Duke of York, who has returned home to recount to his wife the deposition of Richard II. Despite the disparity in knowledge that grants the husband power, the two begin the scene in visual equilibrium, both seated and framed symmetrically on either side of a blazing hearth while the Duke of York (David Suchet) narrates the suffering of deposed Richard. While the husband and wife face each other seated at the hearth, the camera most frequently records their symmetrical positions from the hearth point of view, with the interior's large window (opposite the fire) as the central focal point of shots presenting the two in colloquy (the Duke and Duchess of York on the left and right sides of the frame, respectively).

Once Aumerle (Tom Hughes) arrives and the Duke of York springs into action to expose his son's proposed treason, Duncan's Duchess abandons the hearth to plead with her husband as he prepares for departure to court. She moves closely into her husband's space and pins him against the vestibule wall. Close-ups on her face from a low angle stress her capacity to act and heighten her power, and Duncan controls her voice to a contralto that avoids the too-ready stereotype of shrieking wife. The camera records the frenetic power of the Duchess by contrasting it with a dumb-founded Aumerle, who must be goaded into self-preserving action as the scene rushes to a close with all family members heading to court.

In 5.3, the camera tracks with the Duchess as she strides into the king's presence to intercede at full volume for her son's life. (*A film clip is available in the HTML version of this document.*) When she kneels to make her case to her monarch-nephew (Rory Kinnear), the camera moves to eye-level rather than adopting the high angle point of view on her that would be the standing Henry IV's actual viewpoint. For much of her speech to the king, though she kneels next to her husband arguing against his demands for strict justice, the camera cuts the Duke of York from the frame. After the Duchess has won her case for mercy and the life of her son, Goold even allows a strain of moral superiority to emerge in the mother's parting words addressed to Aumerle: "I pray God make thee new" (*Richard II* 5.3.144). The composition of the scene, which places Aumerle on a bench while Duncan remains standing over him, implies that though she may have saved her son's life, the Duchess of York does not condone his treasonous conspiring.

Perhaps one of the most striking aspects of the scene is that it resists the temptation to mock the Duchess of York and make of her a figure of fun, the silly woman implied by Henry IV's denigrating comment upon her arrival, "Our scene is altered from a serious thing, / And now changed to 'The Beggar and the King'" (5.3.77-78). Comparison with another recent production of *Richard II* (dir. Gregory Doran for the Royal Shakespeare Company, 2013) underscores the significance of Goold's choices in adapting 5.2 and 5.3. Now available on DVD as a filmed stage version, Doran's *Richard II* exploits the humorous potential of the confrontation and in so doing mutes the Duchess of York's impact on history-making. For example, the exasperated, eye-rolling reactions of all three men (Nigel Lindsay's Henry IV, Oliver Ford Davies's Duke of York, and Oliver Rix's Aumerle) when the Duchess of York (Marty Cruickshank) arrives at court undermine her status as a molder of history. With her skirt bustled awkwardly in front from her hasty gallop, the Duchess of York uses her riding crop to silence her husband in a slapstick gesture that elicits chuckles from the Stratford-upon-Avon audience. In addition, when Cruickshank outstretches her arms to intensify her supplication, the Duke of York mimics the gesture with an exaggeration that makes light of his wife's demands (and draws robust audience laughter and even applause).

In contrast, Goold's filming choices silence these elements of humorous absurdity to honor the Duchess's intervention in history.

The play text itself offers in Henry's derision an avenue for treating the Duchess of York with amused diminishment. Rackin points out that the shift from "dignified blank verse" to "doggerel rhymed couplets" upon the Duchess's arrival at court signals a "generic debasement" that highlights the "indecorousness" of her actions (2002, 75). Goold, however, films her intercession with consistent dignity and imagines a woman's domestic role extending to the halls of power. Goold's filming strikingly elevates the Duchess's plea against both the grain of the play text and the tendencies of the sibling films in *The Hollow Crown* cycle. Of the four films comprising *The Hollow Crown*, Goold's *Richard II* works most strenuously to recognize the active role women play in weaving and preserving the fabric of national identity.

In addition, though reliant upon the same richness of on-location setting as the other three films — an approach that unites the four installments — Goold does not allow that verisimilitude to assert an epistemological conclusiveness characteristic of the other three. Of the series, *Richard II* deploys the most visually estranging techniques, ones that remind the viewer of the representation's fictionality: sharply tilted camera angles, extreme close-ups, repeated zip zooms, hand-held shots, and the previously mentioned recurring motifs of mimesis. In a blog posting responding to the original airing, Peter Kirwan noted that Goold's production "was the most inventive" (2012). Goold establishes his meta-narrative perspective with such a stylized initial tableau that the viewer at first imagines that Richard II, rather than holding court in act 1, poses stiffly for a portrait, one reminiscent of the panel image in Westminster Abbey. Ben Whishaw delivers an interpolated voice-over of Richard's lament, "Let's talk of graves, of worms and epitaphs," and continues, "let us sit upon the ground, / And tell sad stories of the death of kings" (3.2.141, 151-52). During the voice-over, the camera pans down from the rafters of St. David's Cathedral (the Welsh cathedral selected by the film crew as location site in place of the text's Windsor Castle) to the great rood and then to the throne canopy and Richard himself, robed, crowned, and holding orb and scepter with regal self-satisfaction. Just as Richard's words invoke the artifice of storytelling, so the visual scene stresses the constructed nature of art; Whishaw sits with absolute stillness and his white, fur-trimmed cloak has been carefully composed for symmetry just as have the golden draperies that create the throne's enclosure mirroring the folds of the cloak.

In addition, Goold transforms Shakespeare's Bushy into a painter, first seen depicting St. Sebastian while Richard observes. The camera closes in on the partially completed image of St. Sebastian and then widens to reveal the model to whom a series of thin leather cords affix into position the requisite wounds and arrow shafts for the martyr's portrait. In case the mechanics of

representational art have been missed, the camera closes again, this time on Richard's finger as he scrapes the model's "wound" and discovers the "blood" to be paint. A later moment in which Queen Isabella poses for her portrait again includes close-up images that display the means of mimesis — bowls, brushes, palette, egg yolk, pigment, and water. Such filmic choices stress the mediating role of art — whether it be the paint palette or the camera — and signal that the making of art does not simply create an image but a truth, and, in the case of history, a narrative that knows and names the nation.

### Kate's Bed and the Place of History

In contrast, Richard Eyre's adaptation of *I Henry IV* delivers an epistemology of nationhood that struggles to validate female agency in the manner achieved by Goold's more self-aware tactics. Eyre's filmic naturalism renders the means of creation nearly invisible as the realistic details of Eastcheap lend exactness and accuracy to the storytelling and assert the absolute truthfulness of a narrative in which women make little impact upon English history. With the tempting comedy found in Mistress Quickly's malapropisms and the sexual eagerness of Doll Tearsheet (a character imported into *I Henry IV* and one whose exposed buttocks serve as her introduction to the viewing audience), the film succumbs to stereotypes of the tavern wench. This leaves Lady Percy, another of Shakespeare's shrewish "Kates," to articulate a counterpoint to the masculine imperatives of history-making. Eyre's approach to the confrontation between a combative Kate and her husband, the rebel Hotspur (2.4), represents the claustrophobic narrowness of a woman's world and the masculine prerogatives that confine the female would-be agent of history.

In contrast to the Duchess of York's sway at court, Lady Percy wrangles for influence in the marginal worlds of her Northumberland castle and, later, of Wales — never at court or on the battlefield of the play. Neither the quarto texts nor the 1623 Folio establish the scene location; this fact relies upon the eighteenth-century editor Edward Capell. Following Capell, the studious realism of *The Hollow Crown's* filming style establishes Kate's marginality by placing her in the visually remote landscape of a northern castle.

Reading literally Kate's reference to "Harry's bed," the *Hollow Crown* scene takes place in Kate's bedchamber and the corridors adjoining it. Cutting back and forth between Hotspur's (Joe Armstrong) agitated letter reading and Kate's (Michelle Dockery of *Downton Abbey* fame) overhearing, the filming critiques Hotspur's temper by recording Lady Percy's reactions. Though stage directions as old as the quarto editions insist that Hotspur enters "*solus*," Eyre's film qualifies focus on the rebel by cutting to Kate for an unspoken commentary. In fact, much of Hotspur's speech is muffled by the filming choice that focuses on the seated Kate, with head in hand, silently



listening to and judging her husband, whose voice we barely overhear at times. When he at last enters the chamber, he sits on the bed beside the naked Kate, who covers herself with bedclothes. She urges confession from him, and by clasping his face in her hands holds him in two-shot until Hotspur calls for the servant. While Hotspur and the servant speak, she sidles to the edge of the bed just barely in shot and shrugs into a dressing gown; two moments in which the servant's eyes deliberately travel to the bed, where the naked back and side of Kate are just visible, underscore the fact of her sexual appeal. At the servant's exit, Kate again demands Hotspur's confidence by standing and asking, "What is it carries you away?" (2.4.68); she thus communicates a sparring yet affectionate tone to the relationship by repeatedly hitting Hotspur to gain his attention.

The filming marks the two as equals, although Kate's influence appears circumscribed by the bedchamber. The stridency of masculine dominance, however, emerges in several details, the first a harsh move in which Hotspur flings Kate on the bed, and the second a deliberate and physical silencing of her. For a total of thirty seconds, Hotspur's hand entirely covers Kate's mouth as he recounts the old saw of female garrulousness. Despite Hotspur's aggression, the two kiss and fall onto the bed one last time before his departure. While much of the scene endeavors to display Kate's determined, even pugilistic, agency and to reveal an unvarnished depiction of how masculinist strategies rely upon the closeting and silencing of women, Kate's confrontation of patriarchal ideology diminishes at scene's end when a stringed orchestra sweetly provides romantic underscoring to Lord and Lady Percy's amorous farewell. In combination with the insistent sexualizing of Kate by means of costume (or lack thereof) and the gaze of the male servant, this romanticized close mutes critique. Furthermore, as will be seen in *Henry V*, forceful containment of female agency may be attributed to an antagonist and northern outlier like Hotspur but cannot be displayed for subversive interrogation in the champion of the *Henriad*, Henry V himself.

Thea Sharrock's *Henry V* presents the wooing of Katherine Valois by Hiddleston's Lancastrian monarch not as a chilling act of conquest but as the gentle postures of a young man desiring mutual affection. While some may read Henry V's unnecessary wooing of a woman already won by conquest and treaty as a mark of his benevolent instinct toward consensus-building, the scene may more cynically typify the Machiavellian monarch's inclination to close off resistance. Such readings exemplify Norman Rabkin's well-known assertion that *Henry V* "points in two opposite directions, virtually daring us to choose one of the two opposed interpretations it requires of us" (1977, 279). As Howard and Rackin have pointed out, Branagh's film version featuring Emma Thompson as "Kate" to the director's "Henry," telegraphs a romantic reading of that troubling scene: "Many viewers knew that the French princess was played by Emma Thompson, who married Branagh

that same year. Thompson's appearance as Katherine encouraged the notion that Henry's love for her was to be 'real'" (1997, 8). In his performance history of *Henry V*, James N. Loehlin similarly notes that the biographical details of the Branagh-Thompson marriage, in combination with a "warmly lit and closely shot" mise-en-scène, underscore the "the inevitability of their union" (1997, 144-45). Such is also the case in the portrayal by Hiddleston, who has worked with Branagh on several projects and whom reporter Serena Davies characterizes as "something of a protégé to Ken Branagh" (2012), although the former's Henry lacks an actor of the strength and presence of Thompson in Katherine's place.<sup>6</sup> Melanie Thierry plays Katherine as a timid and demure virgin innocent, seated with hands in her lap for much of the eight-minute scene and rarely meeting the gaze of Henry or reaching the eye-level of the camera. Hiddleston's halting delivery as the scene commences conveys romantic uncertainty and inexperience, a fact belied by the previous films, which show him sampling with gusto the sexual favors of Doll Tearsheet. Hiddleston echoes the boyish charm exemplified by his off-camera mentor Branagh, and a soundtrack of romantic clichés defangs a moment of troubling domination.

The camera is complicit repeatedly with Henry's act of colonization, almost never allowing Katherine the power of the gaze but always placing her as its object. For thirty-three percent of the scene, the camera films Henry in isolation, while Katherine enjoys only twelve percent of the scene in solo command of the camera's frame. This filmic convention, by which the male figure absorbs prime camera focus at the expense of female agency, has, of course, a long history even at the BBC. Reynolds notes that in the BBC's *Complete Shakespeare* adaptation of *Hamlet* (1980), film angle and focus in the Nunnery scene of Rodney Bennett's production repeatedly sideline Ophelia, so that Hamlet remains the "active, dynamic force" and Ophelia "is presented as passive" (1991, 198). Reynolds continues: "The scene thus constructed becomes almost exclusively a further extension of Hamlet's narrative, his crisis, his betrayal, whilst those of Ophelia are marginalized" (198-99).

Despite the gap of thirty-two years, the BBC still relies on modes of visual communication that downplay female agency. While a rhythm of shot-reaction-shot often brings Katherine back into the frame, she is frequently monitored by the watchful nurse to her right. When all three figures are in the frame, the camera is positioned so that Hiddleston's entire body just fills the full vertical; as a result, Thierry's Katherine appears even more diminished. Furthermore, the differentiated focus keeps Henry in focus and blurs Katherine who stands in the foreground.

### Nostalgia and Critique

By crafting an interpolated bookend, Sharrock posits the fruitful union of the couple and further softens what could be a more strident look at the traffic in women long the *modus operandi* of

dynastic power. Sharrock's film adaptation actually begins with the funeral of Henry V and a voice-over of the Chorus's invocation of the muse whilst a visibly distressed and mourning Katherine stands at her husband's coffin. At the film's end, the final shot of act 5 dissolves from Henry and Katherine holding hands and gazing into each other's eyes to a high angle shot of the widowed Katherine. As she turns from her dead husband, she takes up their child, Henry VI, and embodies the primarily procreative function of women within monarchy. In contrast to Goold's interrogative estrangements, Sharrock's bookend does not invite the same critique of the ways in which modes of telling dictate truth. With soft-focus romanticism and a wistful soundtrack, Sharrock's framing strikes a note of nostalgia that rather longs for the lost hero than questions the stories that create the chivalric paragon.

The film circumvents the untidier ideological implications of its Madonna and Child image and bookended funeral with the plaintive soundtrack tune that scores an elegy for lost chivalry. Taking inspiration from the final Chorus's rueful reminder that Henry VI and his counselors "lost France and made his England bleed," *The Hollow Crown* reveals in its closing shots that the Chorus (John Hurt) is a previously seen boy from the Agincourt battlefield who carries with him into adulthood a bloody token of "This star of England" (Epi. 12, 6). Standing by an empty throne, Hurt's Chorus utters the film's final lines while strings, woodwinds, and brass mute the self-annihilating recursivity of monarchy that the words stress. The visibly aged actor, Hurt, turns to the camera after kissing tenderly his relic and asks, "for their sake, / In your fair minds let this acceptance take" (Epi. 13-14). The insistent pulling of sentimental heartstrings neuters the critical dissonance of those parting lines. Furthermore, by at last rendering the disembodied choric voice-over a living and breathing veteran of the wars (not to mention British stage and television), *The Hollow Crown* invests the editorial voice of the Chorus with the personal subjectivity, affect, and "realness" of Henry's surviving "band of brothers." Thus, Sharrock's conclusion both references and silences the latent ambivalence found in the "hollow crown" series title, which derives from Richard II's famous deconstruction of monarchal pomp: "For within the hollow crown / That rounds the mortal temples of a king / Keeps Death his court" (3.2.156-58). Richard's *memento mori* to kingship paired with the final Chorus of *Henry V* articulate the limits of power, though such self-reflection loses teeth in its context, a BBC series of specials under the Shakespeare Unlocked umbrella designed to celebrate the humanity and insight of the country's greatest poet and featuring many of England's most beloved stage, film, and television actors.<sup>7</sup> The screenplay quietly omits from the Chorus's final sonnet a phrase perhaps deemed inappropriate for film given its direct reference to stage performance, the events "Which oft our stage hath shown" (Epi. 13). But such trimming

undermines the meta-theatricality of *Henry V* and signals a preference for naturalism that effaces the intruding voice of the teller of stories and the maker of national myths. Once again, this dynamic contrasts with what transpires in Boyle's Olympic opening ceremony, which gestures towards problems inherent in nation-building by creating a tantalizing chain of signifiers — Shakespeare, Caliban, Branagh, Brunel, and Britain — that acknowledges the pain and triumph of nationhood and recognizes the role played by both a nation's literature and its industry in that process.

Ultimately, *The Hollow Crown* stakes British identity in a persistently masculinist monarchy even as questions arise about its necessity and even when the prime example of that institution is a female in her Diamond Jubilee year. Rather than wrestle with that central marker of Britishness, the series as a whole resorts to a tabloidism of the male gaze that contravenes the mission statement and commitment to diversity established in the BBC's latest license fee agreement. For the state and its citizens, confronting how national identity forms, who are the victims of such a process, and what to make of that history when looking backward and forward invites real creative imagination and bravery. The Henriad dates from the moment when Britain began to take a recognizably modern form through the writing and re-writing of chronicle histories, the production of maps and chorographies, and the legislative, military, and bureaucratic consolidation of its power in England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales (Helgerson 1992, 2-3; Rackin 1990, 24).

As scholars have repeatedly demonstrated, Shakespeare's history plays contain both celebration and critique of monarchy, not just in the second tetralogy but also in the first cycle, as Leah S. Marcus (1988) has so convincingly shown in *I Henry VI's* elision of Joan La Pucelle with Elizabeth I. Shakespeare's plays expose the fictionalizing and frequently brutalizing processes that make national identity possible even as they find room to celebrate that very identity. In a famous example of this tension, Shakespeare assigns his hero of Agincourt, Henry V, both the brotherhood-of-Englishmen Crispin's Day speech *and* the order to kill the French prisoners without provocation.

If capitalized upon in adaptation, this textual richness and nuance could prove well suited to a postmodern assessment of British history and nationhood. Furthermore, these history plays dramatize women both as agents and victims of an emergent British identity. Too complacent with and/or protective of the received authority of the Shakespearean text and the BBC's own institutional status, *The Hollow Crown* fails to fulfill the media corporation's diversity mandate and neglects the ambivalent questioning of the plays, wedding Shakespearean authority yet again to traditional definitions of who writes, speaks, acts, and shapes British history.

Like the Shakespeare festivals, historical sites, and cultural tourism so ably scrutinized by Graham Holderness (2001), Barbara Hodgdon (1998), Dennis Kennedy (1998), and Douglas Lanier (2002), the 2012 Cultural Olympiad and the BBC's Shakespeare Unlocked season attempt

to conjure an "authentic Shakespeare" and a concomitantly idealized English national history and identity. Shakespeare festivals and tourism promise an escape from the fragmented technologies of self and nation in the postmodern era; however, that act of reaching back always reveals in its very nature the artificiality of the gesture. In his genealogy of arts festivals, Kennedy explains: "Like the restored Olympics at the turn of the century, the arts festivals laid claim to a connection with the quasi-religious festivals of ancient Greece, which for the theatre were idealized as arenas of political, social, and spiritual integration" (1998, 176). Lanier claims that "the imagining of cultural or national community" is central to the festival and historic site ethos (2002, 146); he continues: "Shakespeare offers a symbolic alternative to — and thus potentially a critique of — the alienation and fragmentation characteristic of postmodern life, while at the same time his image and work are drawn into the very processes of reproduction, mediatization, and commodification from which Shakespeare seems to promise escape" (145). In her reading of Stratford as tourist site and a return to origins, Hodgdon dissects the ways in which curating the material remnants of Shakespeare confirms his centrality to "national history" (1998, 195). Likewise, Holderness exposes the necessary fictions grounding the bankside Globe reconstruction, that project yet another harkening after fantasized national heritage at the expense of archaeological fact (2001, 89). Similarly, the films of *The Hollow Crown* become "heritage sites" of their own digital variety, offering access to the cultural iconicity of William Shakespeare and to "then," a Golden Age of Early Modern English expansion and adventure. But no amount of on-location filming or scenic and costuming detail can occlude the reality that this is historical identity shaped and formed by the technologies and ideological cravings of the "now," crafting and fictionalizing the very "then" that is sought.

### Coda

As related manifestations of heritage fantasy, the Olympic opening ceremony and *The Hollow Crown* construct understandings of British nationhood imbricated in technologies of communication — one a referential and metonymic variety that embraces uncertainty and the other an aesthetic vocabulary that affirms certainty. Following Freud and Lacan, Madhavi Menon aligns metonymy with desire (because it is a mechanism of substitution and replacement): "Metonymy is thus the mode by which one indirectly approaches desire" (2003, 658). The aspirations of desire form in the space of absence: we wish for the thing that is not there, much as Boyle orchestrates a metonymic visual chorus heralding the Britain he hopes for rather than that *is*.

Herein emerges the rich epistemological possibility of Boyle's outlandish and muddled spectacle. His opening ceremony may blithely sing the troubling dissonances of the British nation

and its colonial past, present, and future, but never does the display claim monolithic absoluteness. The freeness of its substitutionary logic resists such completeness: for example, Harry Potter's Voldemort meets defeat not at the wand of the boy wizard but rather at the hand of Britain's archetypal nanny-guardian, Mary Poppins. Andrew James Hartley has observed a similar tendency in another popular culture invocation of Shakespeare — the *Doctor Who* episode starring David Tennant and called *The Shakespeare Code*. In much the way Boyle conflates the narratives of Harry Potter and Mary Poppins as metonyms of Britain, so *The Shakespeare Code* irreverently deploys Harry Potter mythology as the unknotting of an imagined Shakespearean plot line: "There is a uniquely British affinity between these icons of high and low culture, which together form part of the national psyche" (Hartley 2009). In his thoughtful analysis of the *Doctor Who* episode, Hartley explains what he regards as a national habit of British self-definition that blends high and low culture, a habit also on display in Boyle's opening ceremony though missing from the more naturalistic adaptative strategies of *The Hollow Crown*.

Substituting one narrative line for another with easy nonchalance, Boyle's production defies any one master-narrative of the British nation. In fact, Boyle's ceremony declares on the one hand that British nationhood exceeds the chain of visual and aural metonyms constructed; its summative meaning remains just out of grasp no matter the heights to which a referential ladder may extend. In the Boyle spectacle, metonymy's borderlands announce themselves as constructed through the very bizarreness of affinities — Shakespeare, Caliban, Branagh, Brunel — an estrangement that invites the viewer to recognize the epistemological uncertainty of British nationhood at the very moment of its celebratory apotheosis.

On the other hand, *The Hollow Crown*'s naturalistic aesthetic obscures the absence that threatens knowing. *The Hollow Crown* cloaks its artifice so thoroughly in a visual realism, thanks to the high-definition quality and the on-location settings, that it runs the risk of a troubling epistemological ascendancy. The signification of Boyle's production rests on the gaps and fissures of metonymy that exponentially expand rather than contract meaning. In contrast, the naturalism of *The Hollow Crown* produces a narratological opacity similar to that which Hatchuel investigates in the Branagh film oeuvre. She asks of this naturalistic style, "Does filmic narration conceal the act of enunciation and forbid any exposing of illusion? Or, can the mechanisms of artistry still be apparent?" Hatchuel asserts that such a style "is shaped to provide the impression of a natural and real world, and the enunciative discourse is drowned into that universe" (2000). Thus, such naturalistic techniques disguise the artifice of the constructed world and assert a false ontology of truth; the mud-spattered soldiers, the oily-haired denizens of Eastcheap, and the black-toothed

tavern-goer at the Boar's Head testify to the "truthfulness" of the film's history, which silences the struggle of women to play a meaningful and agential role in shaping the British nation.

The insistent veracity of such visual detail denies a dissenting perspective on English history. Linda Nochlin's discussion of Orientalism in the visual arts bears upon the aesthetic of *The Hollow Crown*. Nochlin articulates the danger of hyper-naturalism in works such as the paintings of Jean-Léon Gérôme: "A 'naturalist' or 'authenticist' artist like Gérôme tries to make us forget that his art is really art, both by concealing the evidence of his touch, and, at the same time, by insisting on a plethora of authenticating details, especially on what might be called unnecessary ones" (1989, 38). Much as Gérôme crowds the picture plane with evidences of his truth-telling that deny the artifice of his vision, so the makers of *The Hollow Crown*, especially the directors of the final three films, achieve such naturalistic visuals that their overwhelming "realness" declares, "This is how it is," with a certainty that makes one long for the giddy crosscurrents of metonymic nationhood found in Boyle's contribution to Britain's Olympic self-reflection.

Kirwan, too, acknowledges the visual splendor of the series but simultaneously laments the films' tendency to be "conservative in their readings":

The films are beautiful, but smack to me of Shakespeare to be seen and appreciated rather than to be engaged with or provoke conversation. While they are in many ways a resounding success, creating a Shakespeare that will reach the broadest possible audience and latch onto public mood broadly celebratory of individual achievement and ideas of the home nation in an Olympic year, it's perhaps also a missed opportunity for the exact same reasons. (Kirwan 2012)

Battling the compelling sensory authority of *The Hollow Crown*'s filmic mimesis requires an actively resistant hermeneutic that counters: "Perhaps this is *not* how it is." Perhaps, in fact, the Shakespeare of Boyle's conjuring — a poet inextricably linked to Britishness in ways that are contradictorily both oppressive and liberating — can be recuperated from the layers of the past to exorcise the epistemologies of nationhood found in the BBC's *Hollow Crown*.<sup>8</sup>

### Notes

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2. The London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) reported directly to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and oversaw most aspects of the London Olympic Games, including the opening ceremony. The IOC's report on the London Olympic Games explains that "in 2010 a Cultural Olympiad Board was formed as a committee of the LOCOG Board" and chaired by LOCOG member Lord Hall of Birkenhead CBE (*Final Report* 2013, 37). LOCOG provided financing and procured additional exterior funding to support the aims of the Cultural Olympiad, an extra-sport display designed "to showcase the culture of the host nation" (*Final Report* 2013, 37). In addition, Bill Morris, Director of Culture, Ceremonies and Education for LOCOG, served as a member of the Cultural Olympiad Board as did the BBC Director-General, Mark Thompson. The BBC played a crucial role in the visibility of the Cultural Olympiad; its media promotional materials catalogue the range of televisual, radio, and live events under its umbrella, including the alliance with the Royal Shakespeare Company that produced *Shakespeare Unlocked* (London 2012 2014). The Cultural Olympiad enjoyed "over 165 hours of BBC coverage of London 2012 Festival programming (excluding news)" (*Reflections on the Cultural Olympiad* 2013, 22).
3. The document cites a study by the Cultural Diversity Network cataloguing portrayals on U.K. television in 2009: it noted that "Men occupy double the screen time versus women"; and "Black and minority ethnic people represented 10% of the TV population compared with nearly 13% of England's population" (2011, 7).
4. In his standard history of cinematic Shakespeare, Kenneth S. Rothwell (2004) traces the profit anxiety across the oeuvre of the poet's filmed drama.
5. While the focus of this project narrows to the portrayal of female agency in *The Hollow Crown*, the series' inadequate ethnic diversity deserves further reflection than I can give it here. Of the four films, *Richard II* makes the greatest effort to craft a multi-hued cast. Crowd shots include



persons of non-Caucasian skin color, and several minor speaking roles such as the gardener's assistant and the queen's lady are taken by persons of color. One notable and more significant speaking part goes to the Afro-British actor, Lucian Msamati, who plays the Bishop of Carlisle. Both parts of *Henry IV* include no persons of color, and *Henry V* assigns only one part, that of York, to an Afro-British actor (Paterson Joseph).

6. Hiddleston played a supporting role to Branagh in the first two seasons of the BBC drama, *Wallander* (2008, 2010), a series executive produced by Branagh, and Hiddleston took the part of Loki in Branagh's box-office hit, *Thor* (2011).
7. In contrast to the sentimentalized vision of chivalric monarchy in *The Hollow Crown's* conclusion, Barbara Hodgdon argues that the generic divisions and multiple endings of *Henry V* actually "question the ideology that supports kingship" (1991, 186).
8. The persuasive and compelling nature of the films is evidenced by the announced plans for the BBC to air *The Hollow Crown: The War of the Roses* (in production as of 2014), three feature-length films adapted from Shakespeare's first tetralogy. The second installment of *The Hollow Crown*, also from executive producer Mendes, will similarly capitalize on the star-brand status of its cast for domestic and worldwide appeal: the BBC *Sherlock* franchise's Benedict Cumberbatch and Andrew Scott, *Downton Abbey's* Hugh Bonneville, and stage and screen veterans to include Judi Dench and Michael Gambon (Cain 2014). Whether Neal Street Productions and the BBC will rethink the filmic branding of British identity in this second series remains to be seen.

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