My Portrait Of Henry V:
A collaboration of fear, intrigue, exploration,
and the modest beginnings of an acting career.

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Abstract

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This paper is about my experience on tour with a Shakespeare company, co-produced by the University of California Santa Cruz theater arts department and Shakespeare Santa Cruz. It chronicles my rise from a young and inept performer to a classically trained Shakespearean lead actor. Tracking key moments in a blossoming career and providing valuable insight into the fragile mind of a young man, finding himself through the role of Henry V. I mature past the vain aspects of performance and delve into the art of acting and the power to incite change and provide mentoring and inspiration for all races, religions, ages, and genders. My Portrait Of Henry V is, hopefully, an inspiring tale to any aspiring actors that may stumble across it in their own search for self-affirmation and the art of acting.
This year I am fortunate to be cast as Henry in Shakespeare To-Go’s production of *Henry V*, a co-production between the University of California Santa Cruz Theater Arts Department and Shakespeare Santa Cruz that tours the Central Coast bringing Shakespeare to high schools and middle schools. This for me, is the crowning achievement of a very busy, energetic, exciting, and at times exhausting, graduate year. The path to playing Henry V this year has been a work in progress. Classical text has long intimidated me as an actor. For a young actor there is a holiness and nostalgia about Shakespeare and his contemporaries that elevates their texts to seemingly unapproachable grandeur. This is not to say that these works are not worthy of such recognition but that classifying them as masterpieces suggests that there is inherently a “right” or “correct” way of performing them, resulting in Shakespeare as an idol rather than mentor. Philip Brockbank, editor of *Players Of Shakespeare*, writes in his introduction, “Much of this confidence is owed specifically to the open mystery of Shakespeare’s art, which is rich in ambiguous effects, resonances and references, often refusing to let the language say one thing at a time” (7).

Shakespeare’s texts can be a language and style all their own. They are groundbreaking and culturally significant pieces of art and poetry that lend themselves to debate. They can provoke thought and resonate through
time, driving generations or, as theater scholar Antonin Artaud states, “Because of this fixation to formal aspects, some masterpieces have lost their capacity to reach the mass or an audience. Hence they become agents for a new form of idolatry” (76).

These “masterpieces” are very different from the comedic sketches of Saturday Night Live or the action and adventure films, such as Indiana Jones, that originally attracted me to acting. Nevertheless, Shakespeare is a cornerstone of acting and theater, and I am hard pressed to find a name that has more international and historical recognition. Thus, the stage is set for the wild and untamed imagination of a young actor, to collide with the scholarly pursuit of classical text and poetry that seemingly transcends time. What results is, my portrait of Henry V: a collaboration of fear, intrigue, exploration, and the modest beginnings of an acting career.

**Humble Beginnings:**

Long Beach City College is where my acting career begins. I begin to take acting classes and enroll in, what I think, is a monologue workshop class. Unbeknownst to me it is a classical text studio that requires Shakespearean monologues to be performed and a scene from Moliere’s Tartuffe, as the final project. The final scene goes well for me; the Richard Wilbur translation we use is easy to follow. I play the hot headed brother...
Damis, well within my limited range as an actor. The Shakespearean monologues, however, cripple me. I select a monologue from the only full play of Shakespeare’s I have read, Macbeth; go home, get on the internet, type “scansion” and “iambic pentameter” into the search engine and begin the painful task of attempting to educate myself. I watch youtube clips of Sir Ian McKellen performing the, “Is this a dagger” soliloquy, until I memorize exactly how he does it. I perform the piece in front of the class, self inducing so much stress, that I lose my voice and am admitted to the hospital the next day with severe strep throat and the equivalent of heat exhaustion.

The lesson from this experience, as painful as it is, is invaluable. After hearing about my post performance hospital visit, my professor pulls me aside, and commends me on my work. His notes are: my volume is too low, and that I suffocate the words and metaphors by keeping them to myself rather than breathing life into them and sharing the text with the audience. He offers his office hour to teach me scansion, iambic pentameter, and the most important element of this lesson in Shakespeare, the subtext, a term used by Constantin Stanislavski defining the actors relationship to the text.

Philip Brockbank again explains in his introduction, “The term subtext was used by Stanislavski about ‘the inwardly felt expression of a human being in a part, which flows uninterruptedly beneath the words of
the text, giving them life and a basis for existing.’ Many use the method and some use the term, but in differing degrees and ways” (7). This definition provides the actor with a natural and organic interaction with the text. If the relationship is void of subtext then it becomes an unnatural and lifeless interaction and performance, as these texts are created to be spoken aloud not merely read and internalized.

I realize that I have impersonated or rather mimicked Sir Ian McKellen’s Macbeth, instead of connecting personally to the text, comprehending Shakespeare’s subtextual message, and giving the words “a basis for living.” It is through this connection that I begin not only to understand Shakespeare’s writing but become infatuated with the skillful use of verse and dynamism in which he captures the human condition and spirit.

New Town, New Perspective:

The “dagger” speech follows me to UCSC when I transfer the following year. I use it as an audition piece for the first audition I attempt on this campus which happens to be that year’s Shakes-to-go, Comedy Of Errors directed by Professor Paul Whitworth. I am called back for several roles but ultimately dismissed. Truth be told I am slightly relieved I am
not cast because I know in my heart that my work and education are still in their infancy.

I do not give up though. I audition the following year for Shakes-to-go’s *Twelfth Night*, directed by Professor Patty Gallagher, and I am cast as an understudy. The first day of rehearsal we are assigned sonnets to quickly memorize and perform within the three hour rehearsal block. My inability to properly “scan” Shakespeare, an acting term, that refers to finding the *scansion* which is defined as: *the metrical analysis of verse*, is now on full display. Until this point I have successfully concealed my inexperience (and what I consider, flaw) by primarily performing loud audacious comedic roles, which seem to come natural to a lifelong “class clown.” The clowns in *Twelfth Night* are well within my limited reach, as long as I learn the language. Although when I read the play I feel drawn towards the love stricken Duke Orsino. The understudy assignments are yet to be assigned and I have no idea what characters I will have to cover. Nevertheless, the sonnets are performed and with the help of my director and fellow cast mate Veronica Tijoe, I am able to partly scan the text, and tune my ear to the “stressed” and “unstressed” syllables of my sonnet. I blindly pour my heart into Shakespeare’s words and for the first time, I hear them sing back. This day’s significance is paramount; two monumental discoveries happen simultaneously.
The director, Professor Patty Gallagher, stops me after rehearsal and comments on my performance. “Until that moment,” she says, “I was going to charge you with covering the comedic roles of Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Malvolio but you just gave me a very honest, heartfelt, and lovely reading and I think you would be a delightful Duke Orsino.” It is a very insightful conversation for how brief it is. I am ecstatic to receive the role I want. I end up covering: Duke Orsino and Antonio (the actor was double cast), Sir Toby, and Sir Andrew. The realization I come to, however, is that I am holding back. She had not considered me to be a worthy Orsino until just now, when I finally opened my heart and gave it to the audience. I fear I am being perceived as a “ham” and what I consider to be an entertainer rather than an actor. It is not yet an art. She is right to assume this about me. I have been unconsciously holding back until now, but why? Marco Barricelli, Artistic Director for Shakespeare Santa Cruz and acclaimed actor, contends in The Cyrano Diaries: an actor’s journey, “You see, believe it or not, it is my conviction that actors are for the most part very shy people; they use their characters to open themselves to the world” (67). Incredibly accurate in my case. I tend to use my sense of humor and vociferousness as a security blanket. If I want to be an artist, not just an entertainer, and open myself to the world I will have to find the courage to bear my insecurities onstage rather than conceal them. I will have to learn to be “real” and “natural” in my
portrayal of every character, giving them a “basis for living” as Stanislavski says. Shakespeare presents a fantastic opportunity for this new found conviction. There is no hiding from Shakespeare’s textual ingenuity. If the actor is inept at operating the mechanics of a Shakespearean play, then the audience will undoubtedly be lost, and the performance as a whole will suffer.

The second epiphany in this moment, of hearing Shakespeare’s words sing, is my leap into classical text. I have learned how to drive the text. I combine my subtextual intentions with my budding knowledge of scansion and iambic pentameter, tune my ear to the musicality of the language, and allow Shakespeare to use me as a vehicle, delivering his lines. I have never felt more vulnerable and yet comfortable on the stage. The text brings out something beautiful in me, in this moment I feel safe, confident in the words that Shakespeare has chosen for me. Author and former actor at the Royal Shakespeare Company, Michael Pennington describes in *Players Of Shakespeare*, a similar event when working on *Hamlet*, “…it seemed the best service we could do ourselves was to lay off and let the play operate on us, through us, in rehearsal” (118). Shakespeare’s timeless transcendence comes over me and I become a disciple in this moment. With my new commitment to the art of acting, not entertaining, and my belief in the greatest playwright and poet of all time, I swear allegiance to the theater and make it my mission to become
classically trained and learn how to operate the heavy machinery of Shakespeare’s canon.

**Summer Schooled; Internship and Enlightenment:**

That summer I receive an internship position and I am cast in *Shakespeare Santa Cruz*’s summer repertory. It was a season of sequels, most notably *Henry IV Part II* because it is the prequel to *Henry V*. I am cast in various ensemble roles to round out the production but also handed two hefty understudy assignments. I am charged with King Henry IV, played by V. Craig Heidenreich, and the Lord Chief Justice, played by Dierk Torsek. These understudy assignments are a dream come true. I am able to study the text in a full production while gaining first hand insight into the process by which these professional actors tackle the text and develop characters. I am extremely fortunate to have such insightful and approachable overstudies, as this is not always the case, that allow me to pester them in the hallways and during smoke breaks, about Shakespeare’s writing and their relationship with the text.

V. Craig Heidenreich schools me immediately in the importance of research when, during a tutorial of the King’s first scene, there is a line, “*Northumberland, thou ladder by which My cousin Bolingbroke ascends my throne,*” (III. 1. 70). He politely asks me who cousin Bolingbroke is, to
the which I respond, “he is the King’s cousin,” his head tilts, glasses slightly draw down the bridge of his nose, one corner of his mouth creeps up the side of his face, “Look it up,” he says. That night I go home and compile a character analysis profile that documents every inch of King Henry IV’s life. I sheepishly approach Mr. Heidenreich the following day after rehearsal and announce my findings, “Bolingbroke is King Henry IV’s last name, it’s the same guy that is talking, it’s you! Plantagenet is your son’s name, Prince Hal or Harry, who later becomes Henry V.” He smiles and replies, “Good. Do your homework before you ask me questions, nobody else is going to do the work for you.” This transaction is as embarrassing as it is helpful. It is a wakeup call to the professional world and the maturation and discipline that it will take to develop a classically trained skill set.

Dierk Torsek also kindly takes time out of his day to educate not only me but other inexperienced actors as well. It is a common sight to find him perched in a chair or on a bench with several actors sitting on the ground, semi-circled around his feet, taking diligent notes. Mr. Torsek is not only an accomplished actor but also a former professor at UCLA. We spend lunches at the studio with which SSC has furnished him and go over all the Lord Chief Justice speeches, review scansion, examine metaphors and he suggests readings and audition pieces for me. He introduces me to what is now one of my favorite plays of Shakespeare’s and a dream role:
Coriolanus. He assigns me homework, a monologue from Coriolanus by Coriolanus, the “You common cry of curs...” speech (III.iii.150), which I recite for him and receive direction. This is significant because I end up using this monologue for the impending Henry V audition.

Henry IV Part II is an interesting play because it is the second in a three part series, which Shakespeare Santa Cruz aptly titled The Making Of A King Series, yet most theater companies shy away from producing it. Companies will gladly produce Henry IV Part I and Henry V because they are full of sword fights and action, whereas Henry IV Part II is a more tame play that focuses on the maturation of Prince Hal. Its primary theme is the inevitability of transition or change. It culminates with the coronation of Prince Hal but the road to the crown is full of the existential questioning mortality and the fleetingness of life, “We have heard the chimes at midnight, Master Shallow,” Falstaff ponders (III.ii.188). Prince Hal loses both his fathers, in King Henry IV passing away and in the exiling, and ultimate condemnation, of Falstaff. After the passing of his father in an amazingly powerful, poignant, tender, and sometimes violent scene (IV.iii.), Prince Hal, now King, is confronted by the Lord Chief Justice, who previously incarcerated Hal for striking him in open court, and in my opinion, delivers the speech that truly enlightens and infiltrates Hal’s psyche:

“... If the deed were ill, Be you contented, wearing now the garland,
To have a son set your decrees at nought,
To pluck down justice from your awful bench,
To trip the course of law and blunt the sword
That guards the peace and safety of your person;
Nay more, to spurn at your most royal image,
And mock your workings in a second body?
Question your royal thoughts, make the case yours;
Be now the father and propose a son,
Hear your own dignity so much profaned,
See your most dreadful laws so loosely slighted,
Behold yourself so by a son disdained,
And then imagine me taking your part
and in your power soft silencing your son...” (V.ii.83-97).

This scene between Hal and Lord Chief Justice is a reflection of the Henry IV and Hal scene, only the message is conveyed differently. Henry IV intimately chastises Prince Hal for his playboy behavior and strikes a personal chord when he bombards him with accusations of wishing for his early departure, and imagines what will happen to his kingdom when the riotous Hal is in charge,

“O, my poor kingdom, sick with civil blows!
When that my care could not withhold thy riots,
What will thou do when riot is thy care?
O, thou wilt be a wilderness again,
Peopled with wolves, thy old inhabitants” (IV.iii.262-266).

Lord Chief Justice demonstrates the importance of upholding law, order, and the sanctity of the King’s decrees. Shakespeare contrasts the messages with the use of “natural” and paternal imagery versus the “artificialness” of law and order. In an instant Hal is confronted with his familial obligations to the crown and namesake along with the duties of state and power. Both Henry IV and the Lord Chief Justice hold a mirror up to Hal
and force him to decide what kind of man he is going to be and, more importantly, what type of King.

These scenes not only resonate with Hal in the text but with me as an actor. I have entrances immediately following both of these impactful scenes and watch joyfully every night from the wings. Dierk Torsek passes me just before his entrances and proclaims, “I’m gonna let him (Hal) have it tonight!” He prompts me to listen to how he lifts the pronouns in his speech, or other nights, how he changes tactics to keep the speech fresh. Watching and listening to this command of character and text is breathtaking and inspiring. I put myself in Hal’s shoes and am near tears with embarrassment and shame. I sit backstage with V. Craig Heidenreich, the departed King Henry IV, during the coronation scene, beautifully staged, lit, and scored, in a triumphant flourish of trumpets and drums, that is also accompanied by the occasional night fog rolling through the redwoods and engulfing the outdoor Glen; we share a glance and I can see, in him, the eyes of a proud father. I carry that image in my mind as I perform Henry V on tour. It is a gift to be able to watch Henry V develop this way. I feel that our fates are intertwined. The character of Henry V and I are on a collision course.

Graduate Studies Begins:
The fall quarter comes and my graduate year begins. After a busy and hectic summer I am glad to be back on campus and itching to audition and perform. I am elated to find out that there is a Shakespeare studio this quarter, taught by Professor Danny Scheie, also rumored to be directing this year’s Shakes-to-go *Henry V*. My heart shatters when I learn that due to scheduling conflicts I will not be able to take this class. I approach Professor Scheie about a remedy to this dilemma and he offers an office hour to me, once a week, for an independent study. This quarter I am also fortunate enough to stumble upon an opportunity to study with Professor Paul Whitworth, who had played Henry V in a production that also included Professor Scheie for *Shakespeare Santa Cruz* in 1987. I am delighted, as I have not worked with, nor taken a class with either of these gentlemen before. Mine and Henry’s lucky stars seem to be aligning.

At the end of fall quarter I audition, using the *Coriolanus* monologue, and am subsequently cast as *Henry V*. My excitement, however, quickly swells into the paralyzing realization that I am now the lead in a very well known Shakespearean play. The stress begins boiling my blood and my throat seizes up again, as I imagine myself in front of an audience delivering the *Saint Crispin's Day* speech or attempting to woo fair Katherine of France. Confidence in my newly acquired skill set, over the past year, morphs into a feeling of woeful inadequacy and despair. I believe that every actor rides this untamed roller coaster of emotion when
he or she is cast. At first, there is an immediate ecstasy as you realize you have been given the incredible gift and opportunity to return to the stage and perform. Then reality sets in, you have a lot of work ahead of you, and though being cast is the thing you wanted the most you are terrified to receive the recognition and responsibility. Lastly, there is the feeling that you are going to disappoint everyone. They will discover your ignorance, expose you as a fraud, and your imagination will succumb to the pressure and evade you. I find solace, however, in reading that even these titans of the stage: actors, Anthony Sher, Marco Barricelli, Michael Pennington, and the many Hamlets interviewed in Mary Z. Maher’s book: *Modern Hamlets & Their Soliloquies* (including Ben Kingsley, Derek Jacobi and Kevin Kline), undergo the same sense of undeserving and self inflicted doubt when cast.

I collect myself from the initial paralysis of paranoia and begin to salivate at the incredible opportunity to bring this role to life. Actor Anthony Sher reminisces in *Year Of The King* on the idea of playing Henry V, “... it’s a part that would be challenging rather than wildly attractive” (21). He is weighing the role of Henry V versus that of Richard III. I agree with him, if Henry V was being done in a traditional or “period” aesthetic; Richard III would be a more attractive role to a man in his position, lending itself to a strenuous physicality and charmingly brilliant villainy. I enjoy villainous roles tremendously, there is a debauched freedom in them. This
version of *Henry V*, however, is being brilliantly crafted by our director, Professor Danny Scheie, into a contemporary baseball themed history play. He explains in his director’s notes:

“The play is troubling. It has been used as a patriotic glorification of war, a justification of righteous military intervention, and also an ironic critique of armed combat, but however one slices it, it is about war, and little else, from the Salic Law (Niger yellowcake anyone?) to "all the youth of England are on fire" (embedded with CNN) to the miracle of Agincourt (so similar to when little Vietnam thumped the United States of America). I have come to believe that all war is savage, and that it is an unfortunate evolutionary hangover from an era when humans could not help themselves from going into the neighboring village and hacking each other to death. And for a long time war plays alienated me with their battle scenes and lists of heroes... Until... The San Francisco Giants won the world series. To have been a citizen of the city-state whose team wins that title was indescribable. When our conquering heroes: Posey and Wilson, Cain, Linecum and Bumgarner, Romo, Affeldt, Casilla and Sandoval, came marching home down Market Street, grown men wept openly. Then I finally understood Homer's Iliad, and by extension Henry V. What divine design! that we can have evolved ourselves to the point where our battles do not by necessity "defile the locks of shrill shrieking daughters" or render "naked infants spitted upon pikes" but rather the "bloody axe" has become a simple elegant piece of wood. The "reverend heads smashed" of the enemy are emblemed in a small ball of white leather and red stitching, which the defense always controls. The corpse-strewn battlefield is a green-lawned park. The rules are fair. There is no clock. And that primal urge is honored without innocent and beautiful young men being sacrificed. The art of baseball gives hope to the human race (in spite of a persistent addiction of certain parties to "foreign exploits") as does Shakespeare, no matter how problematic his subjects.”

The aesthetic and vision of this *Henry V*, provided by Professor Scheie, creates the alluring environment in which I, unlike Mr. Sher, am utterly seduced by the role of Henry V and consumed by its relevance to both contemporary culture and my personal past. As a former college athlete, accomplished baseball player for twenty years of my life, and a lifelong
Giants fan (attending the World Series Championship which Professor Scheie is referencing) it seems that this version of Henry V and I are made for each other.

*My Henry V is born:*

With such a clear and concise vision for the play, my understanding and comprehension of Shakespeare's text is enhanced. My rehearsal process is expedited, as I am able to take direction at break-neck pace, from the energetic and excitable Professor Scheie. His excitement is unrelenting as we converse about Shakespeare, baseball, and Henry’s need to constantly rally his troops, and carry the team (England) on his back. We establish that Henry is the team’s captain, coach, star player, and single greatest form of motivation. He is England’s king but first and foremost he is a soldier, a sentiment that is echoed throughout the play, from his warning to the governor of Harfleur, “for as I am a soldier, a name that in my thoughts becomes me best...” (III.iii.5), to exclaiming to Katherine, “If thou would have such a one, take me; and take me, take a soldier; take a soldier, take a king” (V.ii.166). We also establish that his soldiers, ever daunted by the opposing numbers, need constant reassurance that they can write history themselves if they, “shall see this day and live old age” (IV.iii.44); all they have to do is believe in themselves, their
king, and their chance at immortality through victory. This is reflected and repeated constantly in: “Once more unto the Breach,” “Saint Crispin’s Day,” “Harfleur,” and “Warriors for the working-day,” all famous speeches and calls to arms. If Henry relents for a moment his “army but a weak and sickly guard” (III.vi.154) will disband and either defect or make an untimely retreat. The role demands enormous energy from the actor, urgency, and clear intentions. It is stocked with beautifully written poetic verse and prose, battle scenes, love scenes, charisma, charm, ruggedness, apathy, humor, piety, triumph, humility, vulnerability, and vindication. This role is the consummate lead. It holds the weight and breadth of a fully conceptualized human being and therefore demands that the actor portraying Henry have all the intangibles and tools on hand to properly bring the character to life.

Henry and the actor are both required to “lead.” I feel an overwhelming sensation to lead by being the first person off-book, never late or absent, always prepared and attentive, all the things that actors are supposed to do, but with a heightened sense of being evaluated. Actor Marco Barricelli comments, “As I’ve always said, playing a leading role requires that you ‘lead’ the cast, in a sense, by example” (92). As Henry, I have to lead the cast both literally and metaphorically. My example sets the tone of rehearsal and raises expectations. I must prove to my cast-mates that I am the right man for the job and that they are in good hands.
Also, since the Shakespeare To-Go script is a condensed version of the original, designed to reduce a full length play into a production that is under an hour and fits into a class period, the supporting characters are cut, resulting in only three characters retaining names and identities: Henry, Katherine, and Alice; creating a gap between Henry and what is now the ensemble. The line count balloons into my favor, and though I am not the type to attribute merit or importance to a role based on the number of lines that character has, I do understand how the other actors could feel jilted by this. I feel obligated to counsel them, and a responsibility to keep them engaged. The plot now hinges on how well I am able to communicate the story of Henry’s quarrel with France; the show’s success, however, weighs heavily on their shoulders, as the crown does not make a king, the ensemble does. If I walk onstage and no one bows or does as I order, honestly (not because it is blocked), no amount of costuming or regalia can sell the audience my authority. When performing as a king, the actor must earn their nobility from their cast-mates, as they are not fortuned with divine blood and noble lineage. There is no crown in our production, my leadership and authority is wholly dependent on my interactions and relationships with the ensemble. What results is a beautiful camaraderie created in our cast, and a symbiotic relationship, that exists truthfully on and offstage between us, rather than a manufactured politeness. The leadership role is then dissolved and
distributed evenly among the cast when both the show and tour’s integrity is grounded in mutual respect and admiration for one another.

The most terrifying and extraordinary gift this role affords are Henry’s lengthy and famous speeches because of their continual use and quoting in film and television. To play Henry one can not be short of breath and/or energy. I sit in Professor Scheie’s office and recite speech after speech; paraphrasing passages, cutting lines, defining imagery, and clarifying meaning. I can feel the weight of Henry’s words on my tongue as I begin to piece together the monologues. I drill them for hours in my small studio apartment, frightening the neighbors with the *Harfleur* speech, and then, hopefully, inspiring them with *Saint Crispin’s Day*. Even a Shakespearian novice, as myself, has had some brief encounter with these speeches. Their fame is close to that of any speech in *Hamlet* and therefore they carry a certain expectation of performative value and accuracy. Actor, Michael Pennington recounts his approach to this same dilemma while playing Hamlet:

“Every famous passage and every operatic opportunity for the actor was to be tested against its contribution to the story or to the development of a relationship, and the relationship themselves were to be explored in tight harness to the action. I had to trick myself into being as naive as possible; to grasp simply the A to B of every passage; to try to identify the precise *purpose* of, say the closet scene, and so free myself from its famousness in the hope of approaching Hamlet’s alienation, his struggle with himself and the others, and his particular bravery, only through what lay in front of me on the page” (118).
The idea is to relate to the text and nothing else, though I glimpse now and again at clips of Kenneth Branagh playing Henry V online, I stick to “what lay in front of me on the page,” my delivery being mine rather than imitating Mr. Branagh as I did previously with Sir. Ian Mckellen. My duty is to contribute to the story. With this in mind I barrel into the speeches every performance, compiling motive for the words I’m saying as I go along. Each time is different, as Dierk Torsek said, “To keep the speech fresh.” Sometimes during the “tennis ball” speech, I use the messenger’s tone of voice to set me off, facilitating an intimate and personal threat tailored for him, or other times I use the slanderous remarks the Dauphin is belittling me with, as my motivation to wage war, resulting in an expansive delivery to the chamber. This kind of relationship to the text expels my terror over the famousness of these speeches and no longer leaves my tongue heavy, instead it cracks like a whip.

This idea of “telling the story” resonates deeply with me. Pennington mentions it in the aforementioned quote, Professor Scheie anchors rehearsals with it, and Marco Barricelli touches on it, “An actor’s first obligation is to tell the story, not be emotional. ‘The play’s the thing’...not the actor” (94). Telling the story seems a trivial and redundant remark, considering it is the only reason acting exists, but it is imperative that young actors be reminded. In playing a lead role like Henry the actor must relinquish expectations of personal glory. Success is no longer
gauged by how many laughs are chuckled or tears are dropped; it depends solely on the ability to tell the story and convey its meaning, otherwise nothing works. There are no gags, clowns, musical numbers, fights, or kisses that can operate without meaning, and that meaning is dependent on the plot and its clarity. The importance of telling the story is elevated and multiplied exponentially on a tour since the performance spaces and audiences that occupy them are ever changing and unreliable, the story is all the cast is equipped with.

**Hitting the road:**

The tour is an incredible experience and a proving ground for an actor. I am bringing an abridged version of *Henry V* to middle schools and high schools across the central coast. Thick skin is a requirement of this job. The kids are fantastic but they do not participate as normal audience members do. You hear answers to rhetorical questions posed. Young girls sit in the front row texting while you deliver “Once more unto the breach.” There are hoots and hollers at any and all sexual innuendo, and lustful screams at the kissing of Henry and Katherine. The fighting and executions are cheered by apparently blood thirsty teenagers, not unlike the supposed drunken groundlings of Shakespeare’s time. The stages range from enormous and technologically advanced performing arts
centers, to decrepit, worm eaten wood stages in the middle of the
wilderness, on teachers estates. There are class bells ringing, inadvertent
music playing, class clowns attempting to upstage, time concerns, and
over zealous teachers. You are more than a performer at this point. You
are an ambassador for UCSC and Shakespeare Santa Cruz, an educator, a
mentor, guidance counselor, idol, mild celebrity, harbinger of
Shakespeare, and for some, a possible beacon of light. The tour may be,
for some, the first and only introduction to theater, let alone Shakespeare.
Questions that are asked following each performance interestingly enough
dwell primarily on who we, the actors, are as people. Everyone wants to
know who we are, where we come from, what we study, what brought us
here, why UCSC, why theater, what was your path, etc. I believe this
inquisitive nature into who we are as people is prompted by the strength of
the show because an inadequate show would undoubtedly fail to foster
such intrigue. These moments are perhaps pivotal in these young peoples
lives because it makes performance real and, more importantly,
approachable for them. I feel honored to be afforded the opportunity to
share my story and perseverance with young impressionable minds, to do
it from the vantage of the stage, and to be admired as an actor. However,
none of this is possible without a terrific show prefacing our engagement
with the audience.
Final Thoughts:

In these far off corners of the central coast to which we bring Shakespeare, I am continually struck by numerous epiphanies and monumental discoveries. The settings for the play are so temperate, they afford the opportunity for continual discovery. A speech I have performed dozens of times, when taken from a gymnasium full of hundreds of kids and is transferred to a patch of grass flanked by a handful of sixth graders, can be born anew. Example, “There the sun shall greet them and draw their honours reeking up to heaven” (IV.iii.101), a line rejuvenated by the elements and put into focus for me, after its delivery outside with the sun kissing my face, the way Shakespeare’s theater was originally constructed.

Henry’s ability to rally support and be a people’s king is discovered when I step off the stage and peer through the fourth wall delivering the lines, “And you, good yeoman, Whose limbs were made in England, show us here the mettle of your pasture... Cry ‘God for Harry! England and Saint George!’” (III.i.26-35), directly into the eyes of bewildered and elated young men and women, receiving their earnest smiles in return. This moment becomes a checkpoint in the production and its payoff is the full attention and engagement of the kids. The gap between king and subject is mirrored in the same gap between performer and spectator, but like Henry, I continually attempt to bridge that gap. With a simple gesture to an individual, a ruffle of their hair, or grasping of their hands, I and Henry are
one in the same, striving to embrace the masses and command their respect and attention.

Playing Henry V is changing my life. It has crept into every crevasse of my being and is consuming me from within, from tackling my fears of classical text to finding a new appreciation for the art, and scholarly pursuit, of acting. I am growing closer to Shakespeare than I ever imagined, becoming a fully formed actor empowered with abundant imagination and endless choices, and finding a comfort in myself which allows me to not only exist “naturally” onstage but to share my experiences with younger actors, mentoring them. I usually have horrible reservations when it comes to discussing my inspiration for roles, as if the mere utterance of such things would sap my imagination and scare away my creativity. Philip Brockbank explains beautifully in his introduction to *Players of Shakespeare*:

“The life of a part as distinct from its significance, is the prime responsibility of the actor, and actors have traditionally been suspicious of theory or analysis, ascribing the creation of character in performance to decisions instinctively made, perceptions unconsciously arrived at, fine discriminations mysteriously achieved. ‘Analysis’ said Michael Redgrave, ‘does not come easily,’ and Roger Rees tells us that ‘the act of making a character is a delicate thing, there are no rules.’ The actor feels exposed and vulnerable, both in preparation and performance, feeling that his own personality and human resources are always on the line. In a sense it is so” (3).

Analysis in acting seems foreign to me because to chronicle ones vulnerability goes against human instinct.
Discoveries are so abundant in my time as Henry V that I am reluctant to walk away from it. I read the writings of phenomenal actors, engage in conversation with working professionals, and pester professors for more knowledge than I can retain, until finally, I develop a role that will be a cornerstone of my blossoming career and life. The end of the tour draws nearer with every passing day and the final countdown has begun amongst the cast. While my time as Henry V dwindles, I am forced to contemplate my future. In doing so, I am reminded of a conversation during an office hour with Professor Scheie, in which, he informed me that Shakespeare wrote *Henry V* the same year he wrote *Hamlet* and *Twelfth Night*. He then jokingly challenged, “I’d like to see you do better!” Every “well made play” consists of three parts: an inciting incident, a climax, and a resolution. I believe this challenge is my inciting incident, my climax is being actively pursued, and my resolution will, only be found long after I have heard my own “*chimes at midnight.*”
Bibliography


