

Henry V
Five Comparisons Between the Text and Branagh's Film

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1. In Act 1, Scene 1 of the text, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely speak about the miraculous change in character exhibited by young Hal, now Henry V, king of England. In lines 40 through 54, the Archbishop expounds upon Harry's glib tongue and easy facility with subjects ranging from "divinity" and "commonwealth affairs" to the arts of statecraft and war. In director Kenneth Branagh's film version, these lines are omitted. The reason for this, I think, is Branagh's desire to present a far less duplicitous and calculating Harry than appears in the text, someone who is indeed a skilled rhetorician but lacking the self-serving slickness Shakespeare originally intended. Instead, he gives us a Henry V of relatively simple motivations, integrity and introspection. For the same reason, Canterbury's line describing those Hal surrounded himself with in his youth ("his companies unlettered, rude and shallow") is left out. Although there's certainly confirmation of Harry's "wastrel youth" later in the film, the darker shades of it are conspicuously absent. Branagh has largely cleaned up Harry's image, making him a more noble soldier-king and thus more palatable to the uninitiated viewer. In the process, however, a good deal of the richness and complexity of the character is sacrificed.

2. Act 2, Scene 1 is the point in the text where we learn that Falstaff is dying, and then the play continues on to Act 2, Scene 2, which features the arrest of traitors to the crown. In the movie, though, a flashback is inserted and we see Hal reject and "disown" Falstaff by way of a two line voice-over. The first line is Hal's reply to Falstaff's "banish not plump Jack" entreaty - "I do, I will" - and is actually from *I Henry IV* (Act 2, Scene 4, line 477). The second - "I know thee not, old man" - is derived from *II Henry IV*, (Act 5, Scene 5, line 47). Here, it appears the main reason director Branagh has included the flashback with two different "rejection lines" from two separate plays is

less interpretive license than simple utility. He provides background into the relationship between Hal and Falstaff for those who haven't read or seen *I Henry IV* or *II Henry IV*. (Still, it's worth noting that in the text, the second line is delivered as a highly visible rebuke of Falstaff in a very "public place near Westminster Abbey" rather than the intimate confines of a tavern, as depicted in the film. Changing the location of Hal's banishment of Falstaff may imply that Kenneth Branagh sought to avoid, as much as possible, depicting *his* Hal as opportunistic and without feeling, a remorseless practitioner of *real politick*.

3. In Act 2, Scene 2, when the treason of Cambridge, Grey and Scroop against the king is exposed, Harry furiously reproaches Scroop, but in the film, lines 105-136 are absent. In the text, those lines are devoted to Harry's ruminations on the two "yoke-devils" of treason and murder, as well as the expert dissembling of Scroop. I think that Branagh dropped them because, for those who *have* read or seen *Richard II*, *I Henry IV*, and *II Henry IV*, he hopes to distance his more "noble" account of Hal from the treason and murder practiced by the father Henry IV in his ascent to the throne. I'll admit I'm splitting hairs here, but I'm thinking primarily of the loose train of association which can thread its way through the mind of a viewer who knows the full details and events of these plays. To excise as many "unnecessary" lines by Harry pertaining to treason and murder as coherence will allow keeps the informed audience member from crying "hypocrite!" and aids Branagh in his task of "reinscribing" the character of Hal to his liking. Similarly, the exclusion of a good many of those lines dealing with Scroop's "smiling deception" underscores Branagh's desire to disassociate his comparatively uncomplicated, heroic rendering of Henry V from the master of deceit and deft wearer of masks contrived by Shakespeare.

4. In the text, the boy who was formally Falstaff's page and who later accompanies Bardolph, Nym and Pistol to war at Harfleur (Act 3, Scene 2) speaks in soliloquy (lines 27-52) about his companions. His drawing of their collective character is not kind; one by one, he judges them scoundrels. This

entire speech is left out of the movie. The reason for this may be two-fold: utility (again) and, perhaps, an example of Branagh downplaying - if not wholly expurgating - the sometimes unsavory character of an English army he wants to portray as basically honorable. True, the scene from the text in which Bardolph is hung for pilfering remains intact, but it ends up looking more like an isolated incident of thievery than anything else.

5. In Act 3, Scene 6 of the text, Bardolph is hung, as noted, for stealing. In the film, after giving the order to carry out the execution, Hal has a flashback, in which Bardolph says, "Do not thou, when thou art king, hang a thief," and Hal replies with sober foresight, "No, thou shalt." These lines are in fact extracted from an exchange between *Falstaff* and Hal in Act 1, Scene 2 of *I Henry IV*. I think director Branagh attributes them to Bardolph because he wants to clearly define Bardolph as a dishonorable thief deserving of hanging *and* to illustrate his interpretation of Harry as thoughtful and sensitive, someone capable of summoning bittersweet memories and feeling regret for the unhappy obligations he is now charged with as king. Again, Branagh wants to show us a kinder, gentler Henry V, not the often Machiavellian young man who inhabits Shakespeare's original text.

* 6. "Bonus Difference": In the text, the night before his men are to battle the French at Agincourt, Harry disguises himself and engages soldiers Bates and Williams in conversation about what will transpire the next day (Act 4, Scene 1). After trading heated words with Williams regarding the honor of their "absent" king, the two exchange gloves and swear to continue their quarrel later, if both are still alive (195-219). After his side has won the battle, Harry gives Captain Fluellen Williams' glove to wear in his cap, telling him it belongs to a French adversary. He then instructs Fluellen to apprehend any man who challenges him (due to the glove) as an enemy of England. Williams and Fluellen come to blows before Hal reveals his role in the affair and the matter comes to a peaceful conclusion (Act 4, Scene 8, lines 40-72). Harry's elaborate practical joke at the expense of both Williams and Fluellen demonstrates a kind of sophomoric pleasure in making other men look

like fools, and betrays an immaturity ill-suited to a king. It is for this reason, I believe, that director Kenneth Branagh has almost entirely expunged this portion of the play from his film. The altercation between the cloaked Harry and Williams is shown, but the exchange of gloves is missing, as are all the other proceeding incidents. Once more, Branagh wants to delete behavior on the part of Henry V that could be construed as less than flattering; one could argue, for example, that the "practical joke" described above is mere mean-spiritedness masquerading as flippant jest. Such conduct does not fit into Branagh's picture of who Henry V is, so out it goes. (Actually, though I thoroughly enjoyed Branagh's take on *Henry V*, I think the film would have been even better were he to include some of the more disturbing and morally ambiguous aspects of Harry's character...)