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# ‘Pocketing up of Wrongs’: the Overlooked Contribution of the Page/Boy in *Henry IV Part 2* and *Henry V*

***Лівінгстон Девід.*** **«Приховування помилок»: недооцінений внесок пажа/хлопчика у хроніках «Генріх IV, частина 2» та «Генріх V».**

*У цій статті досліджується те, як в історичних п'єсах Шекспіра представлені глибокі коментарі персонажів-дітей стосовно війни та насильства, де нерідко артикулюється та незручна правда, яку дорослі персонажі намагаються приховати або замаскувати. І хоча ролі дітей зазвичай не є значними, вони часто подають критичний голос, особливо в часи кровопролиття й війни. Дитячі персонажі споріднені з шекспірівськими блазнями тим, що мають певний імунітет та можуть, принаймні тимчасово, висловлювати критику на адресу старших. Як це часто буває в історичних п'єсах Шекспіра, діти з'являються в тих епізодах, які передвіщають або перегукуються з подіями попередніх чи наступних сцен, або ж навіть в межах однієї сцени за участю головних дорослих персонажів.*

*Основна увага зосереджується на таких персонажах, як Паж в п'єсі «Генріх IV, частина 2» та Хлопчик у «Генріху V». Ці персонажі розглядаються як одна й та сама особа. Загалом Пажу-Хлопчику у двох п’єсах надано близько ста рядків, що робить його одним із найзначніших дитячих персонажів у Шекспіровій творчості. Його майже завжди цікавить мова: спочатку він переймає словесну вправність свого наставника/господаря Фальстафа, а згодом, супроводжуючи Пістоля, Бардольфа і Німа на війні у Франції, він аналізує вживання слів, які маскують злочини та неетичну поведінку. У битві при Азенкурі він навіть виступає перекладачем з французької на англійську для Пістоля. Крім того, в статті висвітлюється дискусійне питання про те, як основні екранізації п’єс зазвичай замовчують, зменшують або применшують значення його голосу .*

***Ключові слова:*** *дитячі персонажі, війна, історичні п'єси, екранізації, історія перформансу.*

## Introduction

Shakespeare’s history plays draw from various chronicles (Hall, Holinshed, Daniels), thus the bare bones of the plots and the main protagonists are fairly established, in contrast to the minor characters

who are usually completely invented by Shakespeare. These minor roles in the plays can therefore provide provocative 'dissident' readings. Characters such as the servants, guards and commoners, often provide a commentary on the main dealings of the plays. The history plays, in particular, give these minor characters a great deal of room for manoeuvring and thereby provide an ongoing 'mirroring' of the 'historical' events of the nobility and aristocracy. The characters often play on the words of the previous or the following 'major' scene, with the less important personages frequently punning on the grand language employed by those in power. I employ the term 'echoing' when a so-called 'episodic' scene[1] takes place after the major one and 'foreshadowing' when it occurs prior.[2] The plays therefore contain a great deal of parallel structures, providing rich material for comparative analysis. Shakespeare also frequently has an onlooker with a 'cameo' role who provides a wry observation on the absurdities of the plot. A classic example of this is in *Richard III* when a scrivener briefly appears and comments on way in which those in power are either naively or out of fear unable to recognise the depravity of Richard's actions in seizing the throne and eliminating his rivals:

*Scrivener:*
Here's a good world the while! Who is so gross
That cannot see this palpable device?
Yet who so bold but says he sees it not? (3.6:10-12)[3]

This approach can also be fruitfully applied to Shakespeare's child characters in the history plays who, like the boy in Hans Christian Anderson's *The Emperor's New Clothes*, often provide the only honest appraisal of the absurd events unfolding in front of them.

## Poor Fools: Child Characters in the History Plays

This section will provide an overview of the arguably most intriguing child characters in the history plays. *Macbeth*, although not a categorised as a history play in the First Folio, has been included as it is also of course based partially on Holinshed, but more importantly

[1] I have borrowed, or better said adopted, the terms 'mirror scenes' and 'episodes' from: Price H. T. Mirror Scenes in Shakespeare. *Joseph Quincy Adams Memorial Studies* / ed. J. G. McManaway. Washington : The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1948. P. 102.

[2] These terms, although my own, have been inspired by the critical approach to the history plays by Goddard: Goddard H. The Meaning of Shakespeare. Volume 1. Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 1951.

[3] References to Shakespeare's works are from: Shakespeare W. The Norton Shakespeare. New York : W.W. Norton & Company, 2008.

includes one of the finest cameo appearances by a particularly observant child. While women have been slowly empowered in Shakespeare performances and adaptations, minorities slowly incorporated despite much resistance, the child characters are often ignored or downplayed in Shakespeare studies and productions. The child protagonists are often silenced, cut from performances, edited or not taken seriously. Like Lear's Fool who 'disappears' after his work is done, but whose absence at the end ('my poor fool is hanged' (5.3: 369)) is telling, the silence of the child characters is often suggestive. Some, however, of the child characters are more active and vocal (usually leading to a premature death). These child characters are often the voice of reason, with their apparent innocence belying their actual wisdom and understanding of the ways of the world. Gemma Miller concurs in her book on depicts of childhood in Shakespare performance when making reference to Marjorie Garber's[4] controversial dismissal of the child characters: 'I argue that the "terrible infants" of Shakespeare are far from mere supernumeraries, but rather key to unlocking the meanings of the plays and, through their manifestation in performance, vital indicators of social concerns.'[5]

One of the most famous children in all of Shakespeare never actually appears on stage; Lady Macbeth's baby. The play does, however, contain additional child characters, most interesting from the perspective of this paper, being the son of Macduff. He appears in a dialogue with his mother in 4.2, immediately prior to their brutal murder by Macbeth's assassins. The interchange between mother and son exemplifies many of the 'cameo' appearances by children in Shakespeare's history plays. Their seemingly innocent banter actually has much in common with the celebrated Socratic method.

> *Son:* Was my father a traitor, mother?
> *Lady Macduff:* Ay, that he was.
> *Son:* What is a traitor?
> *Lady Macduff:* Why, one that swears and lies.
> *Son:* And be all traitors that do so?
> *Lady Macduff:* Every one that does so is a traitor and must be hanged. (4.2:44-49)

Lady Macduff is seemingly repeating the party line propagated by the ruling powers, i.e. the Macbeths. She is repeating what needs to be

[4] Garber M. Coming of Age in Shakespeare. New York : Routledge, 1997.
[5] Miller G. Childhood in Contemporary Performance of Shakespeare. London : Bloomsbury, 2020. P. 7.

said in front of the children in order to keep them out of trouble. She underestimates, however, her son's acumen and persistence.

*Son:* And must they all be hanged that swear and lie?
*Lady Macduff:* Every one.
*Son:* Who must hang them?
*Lady Macduff:* Why, the honest men.
*Son:* Then the liars and swearers are fools, for there are liars and swearers enow to beat the honest men and hang up them. (4.2:50-55)

The boy's insight into manipulation of language adroitly unveils the true nature of the state of affairs in the country, where loyalty is only maintained out of fear of a tyrant. This once again typifies how Shakespeare's child characters are almost always greatly interested in labels and designations and the meaning behind the words used by adults. Macduff's son's precociousness does not save him, however, as moments later the assassin brutally murders him.

The princes in *Richard III*, particularly the younger brother York, also enjoy playing on words in order to insult Richard, their uncle. In the following passage from 3.1, the boy subtly makes reference not only to Richard's character, but also to his appearance. The boy asks if he can take a look at Richard's sword.

*Richard:* What, would you have my weapon, little lord?
*York:* I would that I might thank you as you call me.
*Richard Gloucester:* How?
*York:* Little. (3.1:122-125)

This barbed mocking talk is not lost on Richard, who is, of course, very much aware of the power of words and a master himself at manipulative language. The older brother Edward, perhaps more aware of Richard's potential danger, attempts to brush things over, but to no avail.

*Prince Edward:* My lord of York will still be cross in talk. –
Uncle, your grace knows how to bear with him.
*York:* You mean to bear me, not to bear with me. –
Uncle, my brother mocks both you and me.
Because that I am little like an ape,
He thinks that you should bear me on my shoulders. (3.1:126-131)

York is obviously ridiculing, in feigned innocence, the physical appearance of his uncle which both adults are fully conscious of. The child characters thereby supply a subversive commentary, with their young age providing an excuse for their cheekiness and bravado. This punning on meanings of the word 'bear' is, however, merely a last

gasp at agency on the young prince's part as immediately after Richard gives the order to have them placed in the Tower, where they soon meet their grisly end.[6]

Rutland, the youngest son of York, is executed in *Henry VI part 3* by Clifford, who rationalizes his cruel act by the fact that the York faction has killed his own father. Rutland, despite his youth, draws attention to the absurdity of the ongoing bloodshed and appeals for mercy, not only for himself, but for his would-be murderer.

Thou hast one son – for his sake pity me,
Lest in revenge thereof, sith God is just,
He be as miserably slain as I.
Ah, let me live in prison all my days,
And when I give occasion of offence,
Then let me dies, for now thou hath no cause. (1.3: 40-45)

Their dialogue has much in common with the scene between Hubert and Prince Arthur in *King John* when the would-be assassin finally does not have the heart to carry out the execution. Clifford, in contrast, is blinded by his rage and takes the boy's life, only to be killed himself soon after in battle. Once again the child in his innocence has deeper insight than the adults entrenched in their petty power struggles.[7]

Yet another child character, Prince Arthur in *King John*, finds himself immersed in the brutal world of adult machinations. His saintly behaviour is on display when he expresses his sorrow and pain upon hearing of the bloodshed connected with his claims to the throne of England: 'Good my mother peace./ I would that I were low laid in my grave. / I am not worth this coil that's made for me' (2.1:163-165). When his assassin Hubert is about to blind him, Arthur successfully changes his mind with his heartfelt innocent plea: 'Will you put out mine eyes, / These eyes that never did, nor never shall, / So much as frown on you?' (4.1:56-58). The child is one again here the voice of reason saving the soul, in a sense, of the adult Hubert. All of the child characters discussed above seem to be prepubescent age, while the Page/Boy, in contrast, would appear to be slightly older, in the beginning stages of puberty.

[6] For more on the child characters in this play as well as in *King John*, see: Campana J. Killing Shakespeare's Children: The Cases of *Richard III* and *King John*. *Shakespeare.* 2007. Vol. 3, Is. 1. P. 18–39.

[7] For more on children in the *Henry VI* plays as well as *Richard III*, see: Harper E. "And Men Ne'er Spend Their Fury on a Child" – Killing Children in Shakespeare's Early Histories. *Shakespeare.* 2017. Vol. 13. Is. 3. P. 193–209.

## 'Transformed him Ape': the Page Character in *Henry V*

Jean E. Howard, in her otherwise erudite introduction to the play in *The Norton Shakespeare*, lists all of the new characters introduced in *Henry IV part 2*, but leaves out the Page/Boy completely. This seems to be, unfortunately, symptomatic of the approach taken to the character. There is no clear indication as to the age of the Page/Boy in *Henry IV part 2* and *Henry V*, but the actors in the theatrical and film productions are usually of a pubescent age or even older. We are repeatedly told he is of small stature. There are no conclusive statements as to the exact age of pages during the reign of Henry V, but Anne Curry argues that the age of fourteen would have been the usual turning point for pages becoming squires and that there were certainly pages accompanying knights during Henry's military campaign.[8]

When first introduced in *Henry IV part 2*, he is obviously part of the package Falstaff has received for his 'heroism' at the Battle of Shrewsbury in the previous play. The Page/Boy is seemingly being groomed to take Hal's place alongside Falstaff as the future King begins to distance himself from his former friend and teacher. Very much reminiscent of the kinds of exchanges between the Prince and Falstaff in the first play, the two function as a comic duo, constantly engaging in banter concerned with the latter's lifestyle, age and girth. Falstaff seems to be suffering from some venereal issues and is expecting a medical response to his urine specimen.

> *Falstaff:* Sirrah, you giant, what says the doctor to my water?
> *Page:* He said, sir, the water itself was a good healthy
> water, but, for the party that owed it, he might have
> more diseases than he knew for. (1.2:1-4)

The Page/Boy's function is established early on, to serve as a foil to Falstaff, eventually learning the lingo and engaging in verbal sparring with others. Falstaff is, of course, very much aware of the visual comic contrast between their two figures and the rhetorical role of his new protege: 'If the prince put thee into my service / for any other reason than to set me off, why then I have / no judgment.' (1.2:10-12).

When the Hostess engages the bumbling police to arrest Falstaff for failure to pay his debts to her, among other things, the Page/Boy

[8] Curry A. "Kill the Poys and the Luggage!". Were There Boys at the Battle of Agincourt? *Agincourt 600.* URL: https://www.agincourt600.com/2015/07/26/kill-the-poys-and-the-luggage-were-there-boys-at-the-battle-of-agincourt/.

also displays the precocious verbal skills he has learned from his master: 'Away, you scullion, you rampallian, you fustilarian! / I'll tickle your catastrophe.' (2.1: 49-50). One wonders if he is even aware of what he is saying and the hostess is, one assumes, puzzled and nonplussed by this verbal explosion. When the Page/Boy appears in the following scene, accompanied by Bardolph, bearing a message from his master, Hal makes his strategy in providing Falstaff with the Page/Boy even more explicit.

> And the boy that I gave Falstaff. He had him
> from me Christian, and look if the fat villain have
> not transformed him ape. (2.2:61-63)

After a consequent display of the Page/Boy's new-found verbal skills, Hal declares with a certain self-satisfaction, 'Has not the boy profited?' (2.2.74). Bardolph, not a person you would expect moral statements from, interestingly seems to hint at the tragic ending of the Page/Boy in the following play and implicitly criticises Hal's cynical treatment of those around him: 'An you do not make him hanged among you, the gallows shall have wrong.' (2.2: 84-85). The Page/Boy is treated like another chess piece in the game Hal is playing with his social inferiors, with little regard for how this might eventually impact his fate.

### 'Young As I Am': the Boy Character in *Henry V*

Katharine Eisaman Maus argues in her critical introduction to *Henry V* in *The Norton Shakespeare* that: 'Shakespeare's excision of Falstaff's skeptical intelligence from Henry V means that there is no one within the play to point out the ironies of many of the turns of the plot.'[9] I would beg to differ as there are a number of characters in the play who provide ironic commentary and perspectives on the storyline, the Page/Boy being only one of them. James Shapiro, in his highly successful book *1599*, discusses not only the play, but also its references to Essex's military invasion of Ireland and the parallels between the two military campaigns. He also mentions how 'Shakespeare fills the play with competing, critical voices'[10] and includes a reference in the following list to 'the growing cynicism of a young boy off to the wars'.[11] The Page/Boy character, no longer

[9] Maus K. E. Henry the Fifth. *The Norton Shakespeare* / ed. St. Greenblatt. New York : W.W. Norton & Company, 2008. P. 1538.
[10] Shapiro J. 1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare. London : Faber and Faber, 2005. P. 104.
[11] Ibid..

referred to as the Page, appears for the first time in the play in 2.1 when Pistol and Nym are at each other's throats over their courtship of Mistress Quickly. His report on Falstaff's ill health at least temporarily brings about a truce. Pamela Mason argues for his key contribution to the play: 'The Boy's choric role is established from his first appearance when, as a serious messenger warning of Falstaff's imminent death, he cuts through the in-fighting and squabbling in Eastcheap.'[12] While Henry is about to go to invade a foreign country upon the flimsiest of pretences, the Page/Boy helps bring about a temporary peace between the quarrelling men. Still very much assuming the role held in the previous play, however, he cannot resist introducing a gibe directed at Bardolph's red nose despite the seriousness of the occasion.

> Mine host Pistol, you must come to my master, and
> you, hostess: he is very sick, and would to bed.
> Good Bardolph, put thy face between his sheets, and
> do the office of a warming-pan. Faith, he's very ill. (2.1:76-79)

Two scenes later, we hear of Falstaff's death and once again the Page/Boy relates an observation about women which seems age-inappropriate to say the least: 'Yes, that a' did; and said they were devils incarnate.' (2.3:28). This leads into a typical verbal blunder or malapropism on the part of Mistress Quickly, whereby she seemingly confuses the word 'incarnate' with the colour 'carnation': 'A' could never abide carnation; 'twas a colour/ he never liked.; (2.3:29-30). The Page/Boy does not blink an eye and continues in the same irreverent vein: 'A' said once, the devil would have him about/ women.' (2.3:31). This is followed by yet another off-the-wall comment by Mistress Quickly, setting up the Page/Boy for another dig at his favourite target Bardolph: 'Do you not remember, a' saw a flea stick upon/ Bardolph's nose, and a' said it was a black soul / burning in hell-fire?' (2.3:34-35). Some of Falstaff's legendary wit has obviously been passed on to his young protege, assuming the mantle of the now absent Hal, who is too busy running the kingdom to spend time with his former friends.

All three of the film adaptations discussed herein highlight and dwell upon the much admired, and misunderstood in my opinion, rallying speech to his army by Henry at the battle of Harfleur: 'Once

[12] Mason P. Henry V: "the Quick Forge and Working House of Thought". *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays* / ed. M. Hattaway. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2002. P. 187.

more unto the breach, dear friends, once more, / Or close the wall up with our English dead' (3:1:1-2). In a classic instance of 'echoing', Bardolph practically repeats the words of Henry in the following scene: 'On, on, on, on, on! / To the breach, to the breach!' (3:2:1). He is, one assumes, enthusiastically encouraging his fellow soldiers to engage in combat while he, and his cronies, stay behind in relative safety. This is among the most obvious instances of mirroring in the play and provides a welcome, and amusing, critique of Henry's warmongering bravado. The Page/Boy consequently provides a wry commentary on the how the King is manipulating his soldiers with patriotic references to 'fame', when voicing what all the soldiers present undoubtedly longed for if they were honest: 'Would I were in an alehouse in London! I would give all / my fame for a pot of ale, and safety' (3:2:10-11). The Page/Boy's precocious usage of the word 'fame' typifies his remarkable ear for falseness and empty rhetoric. After his elders are forcibly thrust into battle by the overzealous Welsh captain Fluellen, the Page/Boy is left on stage and is given his longest speech and soliloquy. His characterizations are spot on.

> As young as I am, I have observed these three swashers. I am boy to them all three, but all they three, though they would serve me, could not be man to me; for indeed three such antics do not amount to a man: for Bardolph, he is white-livered and red-faced, by the means whereof he faces it out but fights not; for Pistol, he hath a killing tongue and a quiet sword, by the means whereof he breaks words and keeps whole weapons; for Nym, he hath heard that men of few words are the best men, and therefore he scorns to say his prayers, lest he should be thought a coward, but his few bad words are matched with as few good deeds, for he never broke any man's head but his own, and that was against a post when he was drunk. (3.2: 25-37)

Although obviously accurate in his depiction of these ne'er-do-wells, I would argue that their craven actions serve to mirror the behaviour of the rich and powerful, the nobility and the Church, which has drawn these men into a conflict which is not of their concern. Carol Chillington Rutter puts it as follows: 'Falstaff's Boy in *Henry V*, a disappointed idealist in whom yet traces of the ideal survive, unpacks the myth, exposes the absurdities of chivalric posturing. He is a composite of adult expectation, casual exploitation,

devastating betrayal.'[13] The Page/Boy proceeds to analyse the way Falstaff's men disguise their criminal acts in grand, ambiguous language.

> They will steal anything and call it purchase. Bardolph stole a lute case, bore it twelve leagues, and sold it for three halfpence. Nym and Bardolph are sworn brothers in filching, and in Calais they stole a fire shovel. I knew by that piece of service the men would carry coals. They would have me as familiar with men's pockets as their gloves or their handkerchers, which makes much against my manhood, if I should take from another's pockets to put into mine, for it is plain pocketing up of wrongs. I must leave them and seek some better service. Their villainy goes against my weak stomach, and therefore I must cast it up. (3.2:37-47)

This quite lengthy passage is a remarkable statement chronicling his premature coming-of-age and realisation of the falseness of the men he is forced to serve. Pamela Mason points out his key role in the plot: 'Later in the play his two soliloquies offer both perspective and reflection. He challenges emotional complacency and intellectual laziness. Both speeches of direct address display the Page/Boy's clarity of vision about his elders and betters.'[14] The Page/Boy draws attention to how the word 'purchase', used by his elders to disguised the true nature of their actions, is in reality an acute commentary on how the King has rationalized his decision to invade France by at least feigning belief in the manipulative rhetoric of the church authorities back in England. Henry uses grandiose phrases such as, 'God for Harry! England and Saint George!' (3:1:34) in order to disguise the tawdry nature of his actions involving a murderous attack on a sovereign nation. Harold Goddard also points out how this criticism of the thievery of Nym and Bardolph could also be applied to Henry himself: 'Boy as he is, his sense of mine and thine is more highly developed than Henry's.'[15]

The film versions of *Henry V* all contain a great deal of swashbuckling with close-ups of Henry and his fellow nobles engaged in heroic battle. The play, however, contains nothing of the sort, with the results of the engagements only being reported afterwards. The closest we get to a battle scene (unlike for example

[13] Rutter C. Ch. Shakespeare and Child's Play: Performing Lost Boys on Stage and Screen. London : Routledge, 2007. P. 13–14.
[14] Mason P. Op. cit. P. 187.
[15] Goddard H. Op. cit. P. 237.

the epic battle between Hal/Henry and Hotspur in *Henry IV Part 1)* is the ridiculous interaction between Pistol and Master le Fer. Very little attention has been drawn to the fact that this is actually the only 'battle' scene in the play. Shapiro also points out the lack of actual military action in Shakespeare's play: 'Much of the play, from beginning to end, is composed of scenes in which opposing voices collide over the conduct of the war. In truth, there's not much else to the plot.'[16] The French soldier, seemingly even more cowardly than Pistol and not knowing who he is actually up against, quickly lays down his arms. His exclamation 'Seigneur Dieu!' is misunderstood by Pistol as 'Dew'. This is an obvious parroting and echoing of the invoking of God's name by Henry at the end of the previous scene when gathering his men for battle. Upon realising he is unable to decipher the speech of the Frenchman, Pistol enlists the Page/Boy's help as an interpreter. He successfully communicates to Pistol their adversary's eagerness to pay a bribe or a 'ransom' in order to have his life spared and be granted 'mercy'. Many of these key words are employed in the famous scenes before and after, thereby mirroring previous events and anticipating future developments.

Sarah Werner draws attention to the intriguing possibility that Princess Katherine and the Page/Boy could have been played by the same young male actor, thereby increasing the poignancy of the respective treatment of the characters:

> But the moment that is of particular interest for my purposes is the Boy's work as translator between Pistol and Monsieur le Fer. Although not often commented on, the Boy's translation scene is certainly connected to the play's earlier translation scene between Katherine and Alice. The two moments of onstage French would surely resonate with audiences – a resonance that would be even stronger were the roles of Katherine and the Boy to have been doubled.[17]

Werner supports her argument with the fact that the actor would have to have been able to speak French, but also underscores the shared vulnerability of both of these, seemingly highly diverse, characters. This also suggests an even deeper dimension of mirroring and parallelism.

[16] Shapiro J. 1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare. London : Faber and Faber, 2005. Op. cit. P. 104.
[17] Werner S. Firk and Foot: The Boy Actor in *Henry V*. *Shakespeare Bulletin*. 2003. Vol. 21, No. 4. P. 23.

After the departure of Pistol with his French captive at the end of the scene, the Page/Boy is left on stage once again. He is given a speech where he informs the audience that Bardolph and Nym have both been executed and insinuating that Pistol is headed for the same fate.

> I did never know so full a voice issue from so empty a heart. But the saying is true: "The empty vessel makes the greatest sound." Bardolph and Nym had ten time more valor than this roaring devil i' th' old play, that everyone may pare his nails with a wooden dagger, and they are both hanged, and so would this be if he durst steal anything adventurously. (4.4:61-66)

This is his last appearance in the play and one might draw a parallel here with Lear's earlier mentioned Fool, who, after completing his mission in life (helping redeem Lear), vanishes or is forgotten. Perhaps, in accordance with the theory of Werner, the actor was too busy playing the role of Katherine. In two of the renowned film versions, however, the Page/Boy seemingly escapes the grisly fate of his companions and even continues to appear (both dead and alive).

## Lost in the Shuffle: Depictions of the Page/Boy in Three Film Adaptations

The most well-known film versions make varying use of the Page/Boy. He is played in the classic Olivier version from 1944 by an older actor, George Cole, aged 19 when the film was released. He is provided with his lines in the second act, but not in the first act. He is given the pot of ale line before the battle, but not left alone on stage, but instead sent off to fight. Extensive battle scenes are included, including Henry engaging in single combat on horseback, but there is no Pistol exchange with le Fer and the Page/Boy. A different boy, noticeably younger and easier to pick up, is shown by Fluellen to King Henry as proof of the French treachery.

In the Branagh version (1989),[18] Christian Bale (aged fourteen during the filming) plays Robin the Page/Boy. He is given his lines before the invasion, but not the later soliloquy or commentary on the action of his elder companions. There is once again no battle scene with Pistol. He dies during the French raid on the luggage, which is not shown directly, and is carried off dramatically by Henry at the victorious end of the battle. Sarah Hatchuel comments on this as follows: 'As soldiers start to sing the Non nobis, Henry picks up a

[18] *Henry V*. Dir. Kenneth Branagh. Renaissance Films/BBC/Curzon, 1989.

boy's corpse and makes his way among the ruins of the battlefield. Carrying the dead boy like a cross on his back, he is turned into a Christ-like figure, bearing his soldiers' sins and miseries.'[19] The Page/Boy has clearly been part of the group guarding the luggage. The extended scene with Branagh carrying his corpse on his back provides cheap but effective pathos.

George Sargeant, the actor playing the Page/Boy, was fifteen when *The Hollow Crown* version of *Henry V* was released. The subversive 'battle' scene is left out, involving him translating for Pistol, who is instead shown paralysed with fear while the battle is waged all around him. The Page/Boy is shown in even more scenes than the play, but the film inexplicably fails to provide him with his best lines. He even survives the battle, being transformed into the chorus figure, played by the veteran actor John Hurt, who clutches a memento from the battle with great pathos. Hatchuel comments on the twist to the conclusion of the play:

As the film reaches the Epilogue, the Boy is seen attending Henry's funeral, while flashback images and elegiac music rekindle the glorious moments of this 'star of England'. In an original twist, the Boy is revealed to have grown into John Hurt's Chorus: an old man now, he has been telling his story all along. At this final touching moment, *Henry V* becomes less a play about a king's war than a boy's survival and attempt to make sense of it.[20]

The latter two film versions therefore attempt to provide the Page/Boy with a sense of closure. Curry theorizes that Shakespeare made definite use of Hall and Holinshed's inclusion of references to boys fleeing the French attack on the camp.[21] She points out, however, that the direct period accounts of the battle do not include this detail. One could therefore argue that Shakespeare explicitly included these details for dramatic purposes and to highlight the role and importance of the Page/Boy character. Ann Blake is convinced that this serves a definite dramatic purpose:

Shakespeare's inclusion of this figure gives the Chronicles' episode of the killing of the boys a personal focus and therefore a greater poignancy which serves to enforce a sense of the horror of war. Henry V repeatedly confronts the audience with cross-reflecting

[19] Hatchuel S. Henry V on Screen. *King Henry V: A Critical Reader* / ed. L. Cottegnies and K. Britland. London : Bloomsbury, 2020. P. 111.
[20] Ibid. P. 118–119.
[21] Curry A. Op. cit.

images of war, including the suffering of non-combatants, but none is as unequivocally appalling as the reported slaughter of this good page.[22]

Blake makes a convincing argument, but I would personally argue that the entire invasion is appalling and that Henry, and the ruling powers, are actually indifferent to the Page/Boy's fate in the play. By showing him as one of the casualties of the French attack on the luggage and the pages who are supposed to be guarding it, the film versions provide seeming support for Henry's actions on the battlefield and the execution of the French prisoners. In the play, in contrast, the Page/Boy is forgotten in the hustle and bustle of the victory and no mention is made of him when they read out the list of casualties. The insistence on resolving his fate provides a certain convenient closure to his story, but ignores the brutal reality of war and the sad reality that he is forgotten and silenced in the end.

## Conclusion

Shakespeare almost inevitably provides room for possible alternative readings and space for dissident voices, and the history plays are no exception. The children, although expected to be seen and not heard, are often able to call things as they are, cutting through the propaganda and manipulative cant. Their fates are, however, are almost always tied with the follies of the quarrelling and warmongering adult world. Charlotte Scott points out not only their contribution, but also their unavoidable tragic lots.

> This is a trenchant example of Shakespeare's use of children: they critique the adult world yet are also products of it. There is no other early modern playwright so fascinated and absorbed by the perils and potentials of hypocrisy, paradox, and ambivalence and their manifestations through the eyes of the child.[23]

Shakespeare's child characters not only provide an ongoing critique of the dealings of the adult world, but also draw attention to the language used to dupe and placate society at large. These critical commentaries by children on the violence and machinations of adults are sadly still relevant to our day and age. The Page/Boy, along with other child characters in the history plays and elsewhere, provide a naive truthful voice, unencumbered by societal expectations. He is the

[22] Blake A. Children and Suffering in Shakespeare's Plays. *The Yearbook of English Studies*. 1993. V. 23. P. 304.
[23] Scott Ch. The Child in Shakespeare. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2018. P. 27.

only one unfettered by convention and social pressure, and not only comments on the unethical practices of Pistol and his company, but also on the wider dealings of the royals and Henry in particular. He could arguably be viewed as an alternative 'chorus', with the official one supporting the arguments of the accepted nationalist/patriotic interpretation and narrative. Goddard draws attention to just this: 'Through the Choruses, the playwright gives us the the popular idea of his hero. In the play, the poet tells the truth about him.'[24] Goddard also points out that the off-hand remarks provided to minor characters, like the Page/Boy, often amount to more than meets the eye: 'Yet it is into such casual utterances that Shakespeare is most likely to slip his own opinion.'[25] I would hesitate to dare to guess at Shakespeare the man's actual opinion, but would agree that these throw-away episodic scenes, with ongoing foreshadowing and echoing, can provide food for thought and alternative readings. The Page/Boy character amounts to a truly subversive voice and perspective and surprisingly limited attention has been given to his contribution to the two plays, not even being mentioned, for example, in E. M. Tillyard's classic work *Shakespeare's History Plays*.[26] When commenting on his frustration in his role as page to Pistol, Bardolph and Nym in 3.2, the Page/Boy uses the intriguing phrase 'pocketing up of wrongs'. I would interpret this to mean something along the lines of things being forced to passively stand by while his elders are committing unethical actions and deeds and being tainted by their actions. It is high time to allow his silenced voice to be heard and to rectify the wrongs that have been committed to his fascinating and integral character.

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[24] Goddard H. Op. cit. P. 218.
[25] Ibid. P. 223.
[26] Tillyard E. M. Shakespeare's History Plays. London : Chatto & Windus, 1944.

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