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ENG463: Shakespeare
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Henry IV, Part I Film Review

Following the first episode of Shakespeare's historical plays, *Richard II*, in the PBS series, *The Hollow Crown*, screen-play writer and director Richard Eyre delivers a truly immersive interpretation of the historical dramedy, *Henry IV, Part I*. The second episode of the award winning miniseries was released on September 27th, 2013.

Eyre's *Henry IV, Part I* is a rambunctious, soniferous film with plenty of heart and wit. While capturing the jovial nature of this play, he masterfully navigates the quiet, masked moments of introspection that explore the nature of duality within man. The scene that explained the essence of the film was Prince Hal's soliloquy. In this scene, Eyre gives us both an objective and subjective first person camera perspective to take us into the mind of the Prince. When the lighthearted Prince of Wales (played by Tom Hiddleston) delivers a voice-over of the "I Know You All" soliloquy, we see the faces of the tavern-folk he spends his time with. In the background, solemn music plays while the camera moves in slow motion, capturing the faces of the commoners who he sees as the "contagious clouds" (I ii 187-88) that would get in the way of his imitation of the sun (I ii 186). They smile at him while he gives half of one back, almost forlorn, as if he can see through their facades, and continues out into the street where he is greeted by the passerbyers. It is an impactful scene nurtured by the dialogue, objective/subjective camera perspective and score, providing the viewer/audience with the understanding that the Prince of Wales is a man not only of jest and boisterous wit, but a wise and humble apprentice to the throne, guided by his observance and insight of the people he is to lead.

In order to distinguish the contrast in mood and tone throughout the film, Richard Eyre heavily depends on lighting to emphasize the difference between King Henry IV and Prince Hal.

The scenes with King Henry IV (played by Jeremy Irons) have darker, unsaturated lighting in large, hollow rooms. It sets a cold and empty atmosphere in the court of the king, where the majority of his scenes take place, that almost foreshadow the death in sickness to come on him later in the film/play. The atmosphere of the king's court is juxtaposed to the early scenes featuring the prince, where the scenes are set in the small, intimate setting of the tavern, supplied by warmer lighting, which present an air of hope and optimism for Hal in his future which we see come true in the end of the film.

The film/play is set in the 1400s following the deposition and death of Richard II. Similarly to the reign of Richard Plantagenet, during the latter years of King Henry IV, civil unrest was spreading throughout the kingdom. During this time, the king planned a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in order to atone for the death of the previous king (www.bl.uk). Having this understanding of the historical context of the play justifies the uprising of the clan Percy, who's uprising against Bolingbroke served as the poetic spirit of revenge of Richard II, however similarly met the same fate.

Jeremy Iron delivered a depiction of a king troubled and impacted by his son's decisions. Tom Hiddleston portrays Prince Hal as a noble, mischievous man who is as kind as he is cunning. Simon Russell Beale's interpretation of Falstaff was quite honestly my favorite. I was really entranced by his performance as he consistently made a way for the faults and broken nature of his character to shine through.

All in all, the film *Henry IV, Part I* leaves the audience with the question: what does it mean to be king? The heart of the play lies in the tension within man to lead with his heart (as portrayed through Prince Hal), his mind (King Henry Bolingbroke), or his body (Hotspur). Richard Eyre delves into both the question and the tension through emphasizing the themes of

duality in language and appearance in his use of lighting, music, and careful consideration of dialogue and camera perspective. This film is both priceless in its comedy just as it is invaluable in its drama.