

# The Shakespeare Newsletter

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Knowing I lov'd my books, he furnished me. . .

Fall 2016

## THE HOLLOW CROWN PART II: THE WARS OF THE ROSES

Kelly Newman O'Connor



Benedict Cumberbatch as Richard III.

Photo by Neal Street. Courtesy of BBC.co.uk

The BBC's second *The Hollow Crown* series, subtitled *The Wars of the Roses*, is unified by director Dominic Cooke and supported by adaptor Ben Power, who takes on the impressive feat of cherry-picking, moving, and reassigning passages from the four Shakespeare texts. In the DVD extra, "The Making of The Hollow Crown", Director Cooke says that the through-line for the three films was the question, "How many bad decisions does it take to put a psychopath in power? And anything that didn't relate to that, we got rid of." A glaring casualty of this approach is the loss of Jack Cade and his rebellion; perhaps its inclusion would have made things even more dizzying, but are we actually getting the *Henry VI* plays if Cade isn't in them?

By focusing the action first on the rivals Somerset (Ben Miles) and Richard of York (Adrian Dunbar), then on York's infamous son, Richard of Gloucester, the films concentrate the *de casibus* nature of the plays, which "[heave] a-high" and "[hurl] down below" not only the nobles but also such commoner opportunists as Joan la Pucelle and Vernon (the latter here is Somerset's killer) (R3, 4.4.86; all quotes are from *The Riverside Shakespeare* [1974]). The films score high with an outstanding cast, though still frustratingly pale, with Sophie Okonedo (Queen Margaret) as the only non-white actor in a major role. Also noteworthy are the frequent and effective cross-cutting between scenes to tighten the plot lines and Nigel Egerton's sumptuous costumes, which beautifully

convey the range of social levels, national biases, and political factions. John Stevenson's scouting for location filming in medieval buildings adds immeasurably to the texture, as does the work of the fight choreographer and the armorer (Andreas Petrides and Hamish MacLeod).

### *Henry VI Parts 1 & 2*

As Power's textual cut is such a patchwork quilt, with rearranged speeches and scenes and reassigned characters, it is difficult to delineate where within Shakespeare's plays the first film ends and the next one begins. For the purposes of this section of my review, I will discuss the first two films as two parts of a longer whole, but the first film ends with a swift compression of the action in 3.2 and 5.1 of *2HVI* that drops the farewell scene between Margaret and Suffolk and that gives Warwick Salisbury's lines. With Warwick's support, York declares his intent to the Lancastrians assembled in the wake of Gloucester's murder with an interpolated line—"We go, but will return to wear our crown"—to which he adds in an undertone, aside to Warwick, an ominous couplet borrowed from York's soliloquy about Jack Cade: "I will stir up in England some black storm / Shall blow ten thousand souls to heaven or hell" (*2HVI*, 3.1.349-350).

The series boasts a wealth of strong

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# Love's Labour's Lost and Coriolanus The Portland Actors Ensemble's Elizabeth E. Tavares (Pacific University)

In the wake of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, it is easy to lose sight of other early modern productions on offer in the Pacific Northwest. One such is the nearly fifty-year-old troupe, the Portland Actors Ensemble, which puts on a mobile Shakespeare-in-the-Parks summer season free to the public. This summer's circulating productions of *Coriolanus* and *Love's Labour's Lost* together proffered an extended meditation on the limits of male camaraderie while making thoughtful use of non-dedicated performance spaces in the city and the country.

Following its 1590s usage (contemporary with the first stagings of these plays) connoting "tent-fellows," both productions made *comrades* of audiences and actors out under the cloudless skies—under the "too high" "roof of" the heavens—and stretched out on blankets and lawn chairs in the "wide fields" of Portland's area colleges and vineyards. *Coriolanus*, directed by Mary Baldwin MFA alum Asae Dean, was hosted primarily in Pettygrove Park at the unexpected height of the Pokémon Go phenomenon. Wedged between downtown high-rises, the production did not benefit from multiple incidents of Pokémon interference, absent-minded dog-walkers (the park has a reputation on Yelp as a negligent dumping ground), and the echo of trapped voices reverberating off of 1970s concrete.

What the production did benefit from was thoughtful use of public space. Pettygrove Park comprises a handful of grassy hillocks encircling a paved promenade and fountain. At its center is Manuel Izquierdo's 1979 sculpture, *The Dreamer*, made of surplus Navy bronze and filled with foam so as to produce a soothing kettledrum sound when it rains. I note the construction because the sculpture was

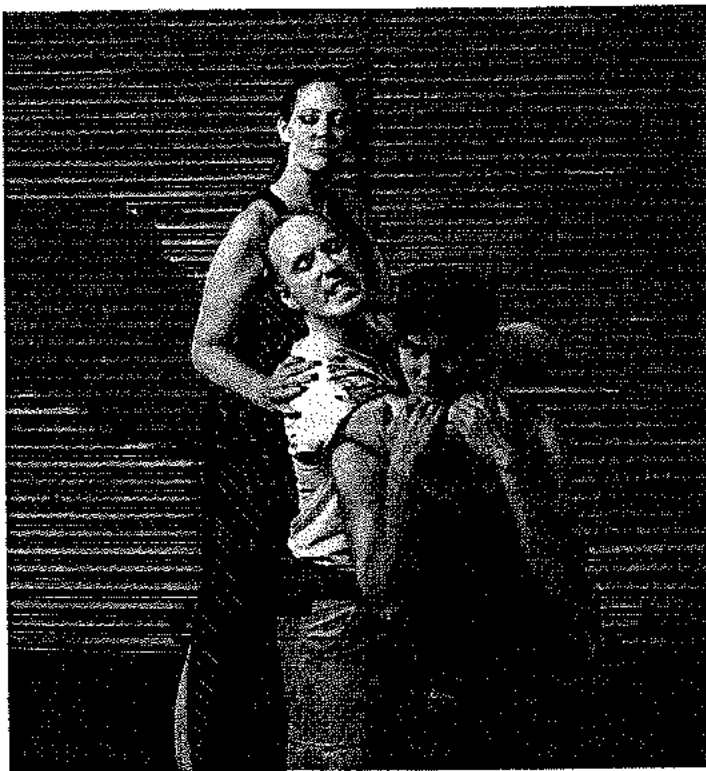
used not only to represent the crowds' and the senators' attempts to manipulate, but also as musical accompaniment to choreographed fighting scenes. A nameless citizen (Soren Gillaspy) was stationed on the sculpture through act three and Coriolanus' departure, overseeing events and playing it with what looked to be concert tom mallets. This addition intensified the battle sequences between Coriolanus (Arthur Delaney) and Aufidius (Ken Yoshikawa), suggesting that these two figures were military and moral comrades from opposite sides of the tracks. It also highlighted the very public way that male competition, especially in political hierarchies, is constructed.

The surprise of the season, however, came in the troupe's 1940s take on *Love's Labour's Lost*. Its famously missing sequel, Kenneth Branagh's rather disastrous film rendering, and the density of the verse makes the play, at least for me, a difficult one to love. In the spirit of an Olympic summer, what is one to do with steroidal couplets and an excess of internal rhyme? Director John Monteverde put them in stunning settings (such as the breathtaking Montinore Estate vineyard in Forest Grove, where I saw the production in mid-August), made strategic use of architectural elements, and informed the verse with thoughtful blocking and gestural work to produce a dynamic and engaging experience.

In Forest Grove, the play was staged on the large, slopping lawn behind the original estate house and facing a windbreak of Italian pines, between whose boughs peaked fruiting rows destined for Pinot Noir. The atmosphere suggested a whiff of the Bordeaux scenery to which the factions of France and Navarre allude. To the left were *ad hoc* stalls selling pastries and local wine at reasonable prices; to the right a water source, the setting sun, and more grapes. The recurring courtly love motif of the chase of the hart for the hind iterated throughout the play (emphasized, too, in a pre-performance dumb-show for the London Globe's 2009 staging) rings a bit longer in your ears in this amorous ambiance.

With such a setting, the architectural elements were kept to a minimum: a gazebo and a pillar supporting a small statue of Cupid taking aim. One of the key dramaturgical challenges of *Love's Labour's Lost* is what to do about the cascading asides called for in the last scene of act four. A tree equipped with climbing apparatus and geological features are often brought in to provide places for the four gentlemen to hide as they watch one another perjure themselves of their initial oaths to reject female infatuation for the sake of study. Not so here. Under Monteverde's thoughtful direction, the gentlemen attempt to hide behind the slim pillar or dive out of a fellow's line-of-sight in order to suggest overseeing with only blocking as their guide. In this way, we were able to see all of their gestures expressing anxiety and, by extension, the stakes of betraying their lord without any prop to interrupt the audience's view. With blocking hyper-exposing the embodiment of anxiety rather than realistically (and merely) hiding, the scene suggests elite camaraderie depends upon whether or not all the men have fallen victim to the same weakness. If so, the stakes are comic. If not, possibly treasonous.

Of especial note were the roles of Berowne (Andy Haftkowiez) and Costard (Jeremy Urann). Haftkowiez was



Allison Anderson as Volunnia, Arthur Delany as Coriolanus, and Ken Yoshikawa as Aufidius. Photo by Gary Norman.

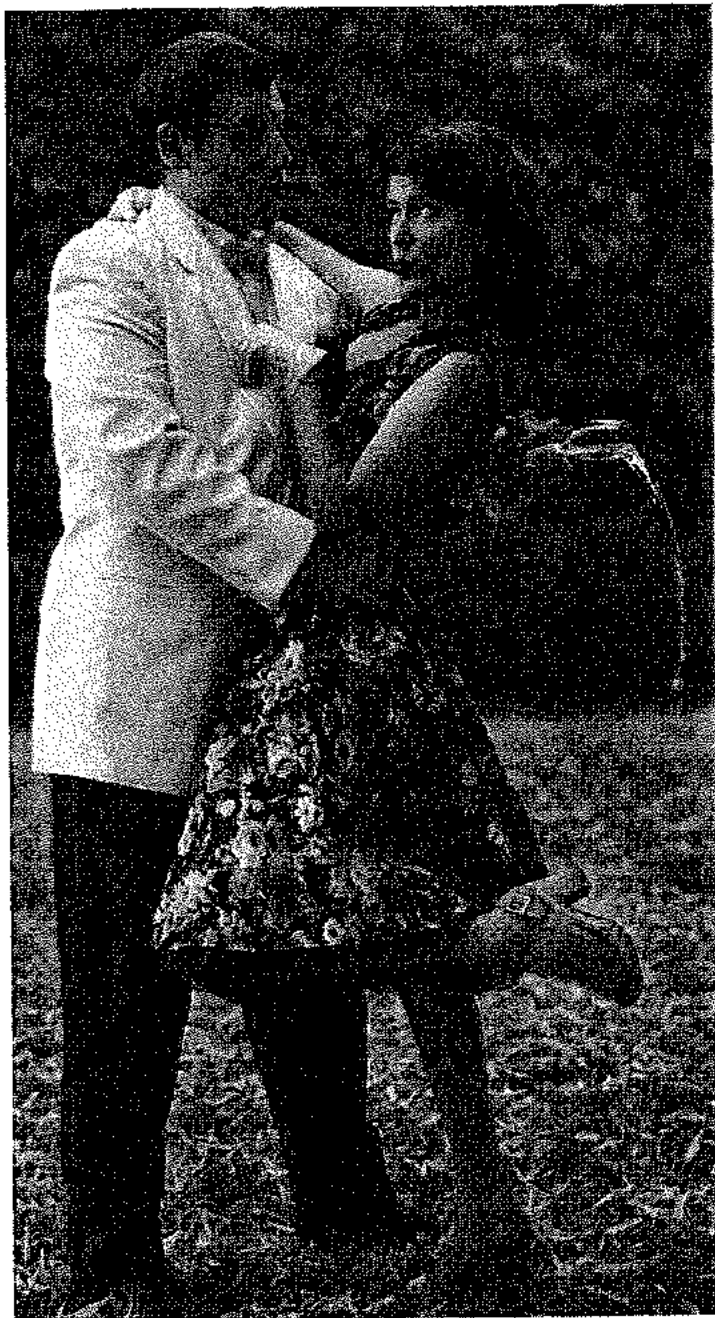


*Company of Love's Labour's Lost. Photo by Gary Norman. Courtesy of the Portland Actors Ensemble.*

able to find a middle ground to develop a Berowne who sees his fellows' hubris from the start, but is not so knowing as to resist the academy of women himself. Urann's stature and hyperbole evoked an impassioned Costard who wasn't quite the simpleton he seemed (or the Herculean thug the play attempts to make him out to be in the end). Their exchange at the end of Act Three, concluding the "remuneration" gag, produced gut-wrenching laughter across the lawn and made me wish there was at least one other wit-smithing moment they could share.

In fact, I have never longed more for the lost sequel to

this play than after this production. I wanted more moments like that of the hornbook, which is often used to note the tools of early modern education to students. With the aid of an actual chalkboard substitute, the hornbook reference is not only a nod to a reality of English education, but also becomes a euphemism: when Don Armado inquires whether or not Costard can read, his page, Moth, responds, "Yes, yes; he teaches boys the hornbook. What is a, b, spelt backward, with the horn on his head?" Moth then draws out the letters "a," "b," and then flips the board over to reveal a sketch of testes and a phallus. Costard is thus made an outsider, shunned by



Andy Hafikowycz as Berowne and Jessica Hillenbrand as Rosaline.  
Photo by Gary Norman. Courtesy of PAE.

both the elite men and the commoners. It is only in the final play-within-a-play, led by Dr. Holofernia, that Costard gains welcome to the household when his performance is remarked upon and approved by the gentlemen spectators. Scene after scene made explicit a range of interpretive options informed by the text, and in doing so gave me the sense that there still remained, even after the play, stones to be unturned.

Ultimately, *Love's Labour's Lost* is a cheater's play. It ends with a question the Navarre ladies implicitly pose to their men: if you've broken a vow to yourselves by falling in love with us, how can we believe you will be honest to these new vows to us? PAE's production suggested that if all four men can either keep or break their promises to perform their designated virtues for the next year, they will, regardless of their observance, meet a desirable outcome.

## IN THE GLASSY MARGENTS WWW.GLASSYMARGENTS.COM

"In the Glassy Margents" is *The Shakespeare Newsletter's* official digital presence. The title represents the multifold purpose of this new online platform.

"In the Glassy Margents" is a phrase borrowed from an early passage in *The Rape of Lucrece*. Shakespeare writes that Tarquin hid his lust "in pleats of majesty" everywhere so successfully "[t]hat nothing in him seem'd inordinate / Save sometime too much wonder of his eye" (94-96). Lucrece "never cop'd with stranger eyes" so could not "read the subtle shining secrecies / Writ in the glassy margents of such books" (100-103). Shakespeare bases his version of this tragedy on the unseen threat of the familiar, as if to emphasize that what matters often lies on the periphery. Once we read "stranger" as a comparative adjective, and therefore discover that all Roman men whom Lucrece had encountered may too have had in the white of their eyes "too much wonder," then we can be reminded that lessons from the margins profoundly and unalterably impact our view of the whole.

*The Shakespeare Newsletter* has and will continue to stand as a hub for early modern scholars, Shakespeare aficionados, performers, teachers, and students alike. The efforts of the blog are in key ways supplemental to those that the editorial staff of *The Shakespeare Newsletter* have and will undertake. Indeed, the blog will sometimes post *The Shakespeare Newsletter* content from recent issues and from our archive.

And yet, as we continue to learn from scholars in the archives and about our worlds, the margins offer space for notable facts, events, theories, discoveries, insights, and questions. So, secondly, our purpose "in the glassy margents" is to plot new terrain for reports, reviews, scholarship, and reflections on topics not readily covered by or accessible within well-established news websites or academic journals. The editorial board will ensure that each contribution demonstrates knowledge of early modern literature, culture, and/or contemporary performance. Whenever seminal books and performances are covered, reviewers will themselves hail from somewhere along the margins when possible: new scholars, retired professors, unaffiliated enthusiasts, Ph.D. candidates, and adjunct scholars.

Given our late arrival to the digital world, this new blog enters into a space filled with a wide variety of websites reserved for all things early modern. If other websites and blogs have become key resources for Shakespeareans and early modern scholars and students, "In the Glassy Margents" is designed to find room in the margins of Shakespearean digital space.

Thomas J. Moretti