

“ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH, DEAR FRIENDS...”: OLIVIER AND BRANAGH’S *HENRY V* OR TWO CONTEXT-DEPENDENT RENDERINGS OF THE SHAKESPEAREAN ORIGINAL¹

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Abstract: This paper intends to explore the intertextual relationships established between both films in an attempt to expose the context-specific manipulation done by Olivier and Branagh. Pointing out some of the various formal and structural alterations that Olivier imposed on his *Henry V* to make it a proper film for a post-war moment, and comparing them to Branagh’s openly cinematic interpretation, we will try to reflect upon the plausible reasons for such divergences, bearing in mind that cinema is, and must be, a vehicle of social critique.

Keywords: adaptation, cinematic space, *mise en scène*, camera movement and authorial intention.

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Resumen: Este trabajo pretende explorar las relaciones intertextuales que se establecen entre ambas películas con el fin de exponer la manipulación de sus directores, motivada por el contexto en el que las producen. Para ello llamaremos la atención sobre las diversas estrategias, tanto formales como estructurales, que Olivier impone a su obra con la intención de adaptarla al contexto post-bélico de los años 40, y compararemos dichas estrategias con las empleadas por Branagh en su versión, claramente más cinematográfica. Partiendo de la premisa de que el cine es, y debe ser, un vehículo de crítica social, intentaremos ofrecer una explicación para dichas divergencias.

Palabras clave: adaptación, espacio cinematográfico, puesta en escena, movimientos de cámara e intención autorial.

Many critics have highlighted the evident connection between the 1944 movie and the 1989 one, as if Branagh, when attempting to produce a new vision on *Henry V*, could not help drawing on classical sources as well, even though he criticised that very aspect of previous adaptations. Considered by many a “great compiler”, whose greatest achievement as an artist lies in being an incredibly gifted synthesiser, Branagh’s adaptation of many Shakespearean plays should not be so openly diminished. Olivier, on the other hand, stands at the altar of the first performers who dared to adapt Shakespeare to film, and criticism

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upon his cinematic production tends to be rather magnanimous for this reason. Thus, this paper will attempt to break away from previous dogmas and point out both works' rights and wrongs, in a conscious effort towards demystifying Olivier and redeeming Branagh before scholarly eyes.

I have chosen two movies that constitute a sort of Shakespearean baptism for their directors in that both Laurence Olivier's first more or less successful adaptation of Shakespeare was *Henry V* and it is precisely another *Henry V*, that of Branagh, the one that preludes a glorious creative phase for its director and, at the same time, it inaugurates a highly interesting era of cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare. It is significant to note that both authors claimed to be choosing *Henry V* out of deep, heartfelt sentiment rather than motivated by technical or more mundane matters. While Branagh claims that his textual arrangements were made "on the altar of instant understanding", Olivier simply states:

I had a mission. My country was at war; I felt Shakespeare within me, I felt the cinema within him. I knew what I wanted to do, what he would have done. (Donaldson, 1990:5)

It is a well-known fact that all film adaptations constitute both an interpretation and an appropriation of the very work they seek to transpose into the cinematic medium, since every filmic rendering of a written work is necessarily shaped by the director's decision of which cultural implications, political statements and even narrative elements should be brought to the forefront and which should be left behind. Such decisions are taken on the basis of each director's mental hierarchy, i.e. their actual reading of the piece in question, as far as the different elements that make up the written piece, both ideological and thematic, are concerned. Taking into account the multiple complexities embedded in Shakespearean plays, it might be important to stress that, as García Landa (2005:182) acknowledges:

There is no question, then, of privileging faithful over other types of adaptations as a matter of course. Instead, the adaptation should be seen as having, by definition, a different agenda from the original [which results into] a retroactive transformation of the original, not in se, but rather as it is used and understood in specific contexts and instances of communicative interaction.

Traditional academic research has justified Olivier's pervasive static camerawork and the excessive declamation of the lines as a mere following of the fashion of the period, ignoring his tampering with scene order and speech deliverance in what many critics have considered not an adaptation of Shakespeare to the screen, but an adaptation of Shakespeare to his personal considerations. Bearing these considerations in mind, this essay will endeavour to point out some of the various formal and structural manipulations that Olivier imposed on his *Henry V* to make it a proper film for a post-war moment, and to compare Olivier's and Branagh's depiction of violence, reflecting upon the plausible reasons for it, in an attempt to go beyond the justification offered by Lanier (2002:160), who claimed that "New times bring about new cinematic ways of transcoding Shakespeare".

To begin with, one would not be fair to both productions if their shared humanistic emphasis was not highlighted, that is, the fact that they are deeply influenced by E.M.W. Tillyard's *Shakespeare's history plays*, published in 1944, in the midst of Britain's war effort. Tillyard's approach reinforces the consolidation of Shakespeare as a national poet, as the symbol of a lost organic harmony in British society – precisely the kind of myth of national unity which was invoked throughout the Second World War, not least in Tillyard's own book, with the joint aims of defeating fascism and trying to forge the unification of the bitterly divided Britain of the 1930s (Holderness, 1992:178-79). These joint aims are taken over by Olivier in the 40's and further reinterpreted by Branagh in the decade of the 1980's, where the play becomes the paradigm of a king who led a united nation to conquer a foreign land. However, the radical difference between both films is their ideological positioning towards violence and the war effort: whereas Olivier romanticises it, praising England's military prowess, Branagh dismisses it and chooses to delve into the human cost of conflict. In light of this, it does not seem surprising that there have been several attempts to belittle Olivier's version for its patriotic presentation of the Shakespearean text, which Davies (2000:166) explains as being motivated by three key factors: firstly, the historical context in which the film was produced, since it was logical for a film to reflect the tide of national sentiment experienced after the emotional mayhem of World War II; secondly, the circumstances in which the film itself was produced, because historical records prove that Olivier was summoned by Jack Beddington, the Information Ministry official in charge of showbiz propaganda at the time, and enlisted to produce a version of Shakespeare's *Henry V* suitable for the period. Finally, the association of Olivier himself with public morale-boosting acts during the early 1940's was well established. As Buchanan (2005:194) acknowledges:

There was reportedly a ministerial flavour to some of Olivier's real-life off-screen work as well. Part of his war work included delivering Shakespearean speeches such as 'Once more unto the breach, dear friends' (III.iii. 1ff) as a crowd-pleasing morale booster, [and] this too he did in grandiloquent Churchillian vein.

Many critics, like Davies (1998), Holderness (1992) and Warner (2007), have pointed out the fact that, on a general basis, the 1944 *Henry V* may be considered a sort of treatise on the difference between cinema and theatre as media for the expression of drama. The playhouse that opens the action, immediately identified with The Globe, serves the purpose of highlighting the theatricality of the tale itself, something which seems to be reinforced by the characters' constantly looking at the audience, their forced, high-pitched voices so that everybody can hear and, finally, their excessive body language, which clearly establishes the connection to medieval drama. Setting, props and costume design together with music endow the initial scenes of Olivier's rendering with a medieval allure which can only be understood as homage to the context of production of the play itself. Setting himself in opposition to Olivier's over-respectful manners when adapting the setting and *mise en scène*, Branagh designs a much more sober space, where no idealisation of the Middle Ages is to be found whatsoever, and a mere depiction of the crudeness of a rather undefined Elizabethan era is offered instead.

The handling of the credit sequence clarifies Olivier’s and Branagh’s position while introducing some of the colour allegories that will be consistently present throughout both films. As an initial consideration, I would like to emphasise that, in both movies, the very first thing we see on screen will be the explanation for many of the movies’ deviations from the Shakespearean original. In the case of Olivier’s *Henry*, the audience is presented with a medium shot (henceforth, MS) of a text carved in stone, as if belonging to a monument, which clearly states that the movie’s being dedicated to the commandos and airborne troops of Great Britain, “the spirit of whose ancestors has been humbly attempted to recapture in some of the ensuing scenes”, without any music at all to enhance the impact of the words themselves. Thus, this opening scene already hints at Olivier’s highly context-specific use of *Henry V*: in post WWII Great Britain, the violence of the play will be reduced to the minimum in order to portray the gentle side of war. Once the war motif has been introduced as a glorious one, the shot drastically shifts to an old-fashioned-looking poster that announces a theatrical performance, accompanied by lively music and introducing quite bright colours on screen. When the wind moves the paper sheet, we are presented with an extreme long shot (henceforth, ELS) of a London model, and immediately after the camera starts moving in a tracking shot until it abruptly tracks down to take us into the actual theatre house.

The gleeful atmosphere and lively music of Olivier’s credits stands in a totally antagonistic position to Branagh’s inaugural scene: here, music is slow and transcendental, already carrying undertones of death and pain. We only see the words *Henry V* in bright red versus the black background. No allusion to any performance at all, no allusion to a moment of war or to the movie being a pacifist manifesto. This lack of ornament will be one of the defining features of the movie and seeks to focus the viewer’s attention on the facial expressions and body language, key elements when deciphering what is going on in Branagh’s *Henry V*. As it happened with Olivier’s film, Branagh is also writing in a post-Falkland war context, but instead of erasing any violent allusions and parts of the play that might hurt the audience, he chooses to enhance them so as to pour in a bitter statement regarding a political system he perceives as corrupt. Comparison of both opening scenes thus helps us perceive both directors’ diametrically opposed intentions: whereas Olivier is appropriating Shakespeare for the War Effort, Branagh is consciously contesting both Shakespeare’s and Olivier’s heroic view of war, and emphasising its human dimension instead. As Donaldson (1991:61) puts it:

Olivier’s attitude towards its predecessor (Shakespeare) is *incorporative* rather than competitive, and tends toward and effacement of differences between historical periods and artistic media. Olivier’s artistic practice aims at the incorporation or incarnation of the past, while for Branagh the making of a film enacts a struggle or competition for power. This distinction is crucial for understanding [...] the divergent personal and cultural projects they instance.

Both Olivier’s and Branagh’s use of the Chorus is consistent with their movie-making intentions in what some critics² have labelled as a metatheatrical/metacinematic distinction: Olivier, who follows a classical model that seeks the romanticisation of Henry, presents us

² See Donaldson (1991) and Aragay (1999) for deeper considerations on the role of the Chorus.

with the prototypical theatre Chorus: in its first appearance, it comes into view before the play begins and acknowledges the limitations of theatre while pompously moving around the stage. All throughout its speech, the camera remains rather static, only offering a few close ups (henceforth, CU) of the Chorus's face at some given moments. Moreover, the Chorus does not look at us, the spectators behind the camera, but at the audience at The Globe, so that the connection with film viewers is greatly undermined. Although it will appear at the end of each act, Olivier presents it in a highly detached way, as when he decides to make it appear floating in mid-air against a pitch-black background before the English attack on Harfleur. The significant thing about Olivier's Chorus is that it follows the classical model of neither belonging to the world of the play nor to the world of the spectator, acting as a link between both.

Olivier's drastic "suppression of the medium of film", in the words of Donaldson (1991:62) constitutes the starting point from which Branagh disrupts the very presentation of the Chorus at the beginning of his film. The Chorus, masterfully interpreted by Derek Jacobi, wanders around and literally illuminates an empty film studio while commenting on the limitations of the theatrical mode. By means of this, Branagh is setting himself in opposition to Olivier's excessively theatrical cinematography, and, at the same time, calling out attention to the very act of filming, since the Chorus's own language directs the audience's attention to the very fact of theatrical performance. More significantly, Jacobi, dressed in contemporary clothes, does look straight into the camera, thus establishing eye-contact with its viewers, who feel involved in the cinematic interaction as they catch a momentary glimpse of a camera on screen. What is more, the Chorus's later appearances also constitute a filmic innovation, since Branagh gets him to actually take part in the action, wet and muddy at Agincourt, sad and regretful after the hanging scene. However, several critics have criticised this gradual introduction of the choric figure into the filmic action as being inconsistent and erasing, in the words of Holland (1994:51), "precisely the denial of theatrical separation that the treatment of the opening Chorus so well achieves". In my opinion, such introduction does not constitute an inconsistency per se, but rather supports Branagh's defiance of conventional theatrical patterns.

I would like to now move on to the comparison and contrast of a series of scenes from both movies that exemplify the different orientations taken by Branagh and Olivier. Firstly, let us consider the opening scene where Henry is talking to the Bishops of Canterbury and Ely about whether he has a legitimate right over the throne of France. We have already described how Olivier presents the first two acts of the play in a stage, thus pointing out the close connection between his way of conceiving cinema and the theatrical mode, and ultimately manipulating the spatial elements so that the "visuals take on the credibility of the cinema without losing the consciousness of theatre" (Davies, 1998:54). A long shot (henceforth, LS) presents the two bishops departing and, as the camera zooms in, we realise that instead of looking at each other, they are constantly looking at the audience, waving arms with highly affected moves. To reinforce the humorous aspect of the scene, we even get to hear the audience laughing and, through a shot/reverse shot of them we witness their whole scheming in a deeply amusing way. The whole scene design distills theatricality, and so does costume design, which is thoughtfully prepared: since Olivier wants to create a comic environment that will reach its peak in the following scene, his Bishops sport tunics

similar to those worn by medieval harlequins, with wide white sleeves that immediately call to mind the Venetian comic theatre. What is more, Ely's hairdo is slightly reminiscent of a clown's wig: bright blond, quite short, sporting no hair in the middle and very curly. Thus, when these two bishops enter into the main room, i.e. the lower part of the stage to deliver their speech to Henry, the audience cannot feel any respect for them. They are reduced to a mere archetype.

A general round of applause is heard as the King makes his entrance, consequently strengthening the feeling of a distended atmosphere and reverence for his Majesty. The camera remains again quite static, action is portrayed through rather long shots that expose the situation as being inherently melodramatic: we see a MS of the King and of the Bishops talking to him; then, the camera revolves and follows Canterbury as he delivers his speech. The farcical mood reaches its summit as we see Canterbury constantly looking up for names in his papers, up to the point that they fall to the floor, where Ely keeps pointing to the approximate place in the sheet where the specific name may be, grimacing from the beginning until the end of the sequence. Once more, we hear the audience laugh as these two bishops-turned-to-jesters finish their speech and ceremoniously pick their papers up from the floor, kneeling beside the King as in pious reflection.

When the shot finally changes, a CU of Henry's face sitting on the throne, slightly inclined to the left, reveals his apparently serious countenance. The camera tracks back as he stands up and raises his voice in a Messiah-like manner, lifting his arm and pointing his finger to the vacuum in front of him. He revolves around the stage, followed by the camera, and one cannot help but notice how his speech is delivered in an excessively affected manner, maintaining the pointing to "somewhere" all the time. Finally, accompanied by increasingly loud overtones of medieval-like music, Henry finishes his speech, the camera tracks backwards, offering a LS of the whole stage, while the King exists and the curtain eventually draws.

This initial sequence constitutes a whole declaration of intentions on Olivier's part: the open manipulation intended by the Bishops, which Shakespeare clearly reflects in his play, is totally distorted here to provide a farcical side of the scene. Such manipulation is consciously targeted at justifying war in a comic manner and turning the otherwise dramatic moment into a parody of Henry's craving for the throne. Furthermore, he is mystified as a sort of chivalric hero, an alteration which constitutes the first of Olivier's steps towards the creation of the patriotic feeling and the idealisation of war that pervades its filmic adaptation.

The very same opening scene is treated totally differently by Branagh in his effort to produce a politically-engaged film that will attest to the real pain and suffering ensuing from all wars. Such a scene is no longer brilliantly lit or accompanied by cheerful music, but it is presented to us in a big, undefined, dimly lit space, where the multitude of shadows equates with the number of secrets people in the castle hide. The Chorus begins its speech by opening a huge wooden door and beckoning us to "enter into the play", and, in the next shot, a CU of the two bishops whispering is offered. They look around as in fear of being overheard and, through the use of a shot/reverse shot we notice their plotting how to trick Henry into accepting their premises on France. In opposition to Olivier's, these bishops

are dressed quite plainly in black, with tiny head bonnets that resemble the Puritans of the time, a feature which ascribes to them a somewhat fearful quality.

In this scene, lightning is scarce yet very intelligently used: the bishops' faces are illuminated by the tilting light from the fire so that their features remain only half-lit, as if part of their identity was being concealed, but also pointing out their working towards a common end, each half of their faces fusing into a single one. This kind of lighting of the bishops' faces can also be examined in terms of its connection to Shakespeare's way of producing connections in the play: as we know, Shakespeare used a lot of proleptic sentences in his works that anticipated things which were to happen in the following acts. This defining characteristic of his theatre has been transposed here to present the viewer with a proleptic shot that will be repeated (shot size, composition, position of the characters, lightning and meaning produced by it) when the conversation between Henry and the Bishops takes place. Thus, we could say that Branagh is adapting Shakespearean conventions and introducing them into his filmic language to further reinforce the connection with the playwright.

Once the scene changes, we see the palace hall, again quite empty and sober, through a LS. The space is poorly lit, except by the light coming from a huge open door. All of a sudden, Henry appears through that door and briefly stops on the threshold, so that he is lit from the background, acquiring a quasi-mythical, yet menacing quality, because his features are concealed and darkness becomes his moral and physical defining attribute. He walks towards the camera so that his shadow becomes bigger and bigger until the whole quantity of light coming from the door is blocked by his body. Then, tension is released as the camera pans to a MS of the different members of the council.

The first time we get to see Henry's face is when he sits on the throne: perhaps purposefully echoing Olivier, he sits inclined to the left. Nonetheless, although the body posture may be the same, the attitude could not be different: the costume worn by this Henry is plain and sober, not like Olivier's, which looks like a fancy dress when compared to its 1990's counterpart. Furthermore, Henry's countenance is deeply serious, and we perceive no hesitancy in him when the Bishops enter and he inquires about the state of affairs in France. Once the Bishops start delivering their speech, the interpretative difference with respect to Olivier's bishops-turned-to-clowns becomes more acute: Branagh's bishops, like Shakespeare's, don't shout but keep their voices in a low, funereal tone that matches the requiem-like background music. The papers in Canterbury's hand are there just as a secondary source to a speech which is carefully planned. While Ely remains serious, a series of tracking shots portray the different reactions of the members' of the Council to what is being said. Once Canterbury has directly gazed at all these men, the camera rotates and he walks slowly towards Henry, finally kneeling in front of him. Only when one analyses this scene in depth does he or she realise that the kneeling of Olivier's bishops to pick up the sheets of paper is a conscious manipulation of Shakespeare's lines, acting as a smokescreen to divert the viewers' attention from the moral question of Henry's actual legitimacy to march over France.

Standing in total opposition to this Voltairesque presentation, the Henry played by Branagh speaks in a low hoarse voice, and remains still on his throne, not moving around like as if in some schemed choreography. Instead, a CU of his face reveals that he is determined to invade France. Branagh positions the camera in an angle that allows him to have

all the characters who are debating within a single frame, disposed along a transversal line that goes from Branagh himself, the one who is closer to us, to the Bishop of Canterbury, passing through Exeter and finishing with the Duke of York. At this point, the director makes use of what I have previously labelled as "proleptic shot". The music grows gloomier as the bishops approach Henry to make their final point regarding the question of France's invasion. Each of them is placed at one side of Henry's throne, and we are offered a CU of the three, the bishops' positioned looking at Henry, not at the camera, so that we only get to see half of their faces, in a visual effect that brings to mind the idea that their faces are a single entity divided into two. The feeble lightning coming from the fire enhances the feeling of insecurity and concealment, further reinforcing the notion that viewers are not seeing everything that needs to be seen.

These series of strategies strengthen Branagh's presentation of Henry's background as one of pervasive corruption. It seems safe to assume that Branagh's orchestration of this scene clearly transposes into film a Henry who is thirsty for imperial influence, eager for conquest, in the same way as his Bishops are, so that they all end up being portrayed as degraded representatives of the same vicious principle: power. Despite the effectiveness of these strategies in building up the exact atmosphere which Branagh wants to create, critics like Quinn (1969) and Greenblatt (1985) have pointed out the fact that Shakespeare's text is notoriously ambivalent at this point. Although it is clear that Shakespeare is aware of the dubiousness of Henry's political manoeuvres, he presents it in a rather obscure way or, as Greenblatt et al (1997:1449) claim "the point is made so obliquely that only a spectator cognizant of the tangled Plantagenet genealogy is likely to catch it". Therefore, we could conclude by saying that, whereas Olivier chooses to silence Shakespeare's words for the sake of Henry's moral status, Branagh opts for expanding them in order to visibilise the dark side of the king.

As a final remark to this scene's analysis, I would like to point our attention to the persistent use of CUs, a clever decision on Branagh's part, which productively fulfils the goal of showing Henry's hard countenance whilst transmitting an impression of intimacy, of being closer to what he actually thinks. Reflecting on this fixation with the face and its expressions, Buchanan (2005:193) explains that

The image of a human face on screen has, from the early days of the medium, been experienced as offering a privileged access to the actor, with whom one instinctively feels more intimately acquainted than is typically possible in the theatre. This sense of privileged access is, of course, ultimately illusory.

Camera movement is much more dynamic than in Olivier's *Henry*, and the more adequate mise en scène adds a disturbing, malevolent touch to a scene which, compared to its 1944 counterpart, perfectly exemplifies how the theatrical mode needs to be abandoned in order to transcode Shakespeare into film in a more effective and successful way.

Such a detailed comparison between both scenes may seem pointless, but it certainly helps envision the different concerns that shaped both directors' adaptations of the Shakespearean material: whereas Olivier's emphasis was placed on the genteel side of the armed conflict in which the Bishops are involved, Branagh's is more of a social nature: in all armed

conflicts, the high number of non-elite people forced to get involved in it, both emotionally and physically, originates a palpable tension between solidarity and distinction. Lane (1994:34) relates these dynamics to *Henry V*, and concludes that

The unequal allocation of burden and danger according to class ranks threatens to discredit the legitimacy of the entire structure, engendering the skepticism reflected in the soldiers' arguments. The anxiety over these class dynamics is an important impulse behind the rhetoric of unity in Act I, providing as it does imaginative visions of difference forced into harmony.

Following such a line of thought, the next scene I'd like to focus on is the attack on Harfleur. Since Olivier was filming his *Henry* as a tribute to the English soldiers dead in WWII, he had to be very careful when portraying the attacks in France, because they'd immediately ring a bell in the contemporary audience's head to Normandy. Whereas the Shakespearean original provides plentiful description of the campaign and its harshness, Olivier chooses once more to tone down the inherent violence and he offers viewers what looks more like a "boy scout mission" rather than a real attack on Harfleur. In discussing the technique of filming moments of strong Shakespearean rhetoric, Olivier justified himself by claiming that to accommodate the gestural and vocal expansiveness of "Shakespearean climax", the camera must be pulled back to a distance from the actor. Such a technique was employed as a means of reconciling theatrical style with cinematic mobility to a good effect in his *Henry V*.

Nevertheless, while the aforementioned technique affords the actor's rhetorical projection to its natural shape, the camera's withdrawal inevitably makes its own statement, as Davies (1998:47) acknowledges. This is what happens in the stirring speech that Olivier so passionately delivers before the conquest of Harfleur, where he is presented as a chivalric hero, mounted on a white horse and proudly wearing the blue and red of the English coat of arms with the golden Lion embroidered on it. As Henry's rhetoric gathers force (something which triggers a somewhat uncomfortable rise of his voice), the camera retracts and moves up so that at the speech's climax Henry is framed from a high-angled position, stressing his smallness in relation to the actual physical surroundings whilst opposing it to the grandeur of his words. Although Olivier intended to endow the scene with a romanticized air that would elevate Henry to the status of the hero-king who courageously fights for his country, the final composition looks fairly artificial for a contemporary audience. The scene ends with an ELS of the troops getting ready to march over Harfleur: such camera position allows the director to present a dehumanised view of the soldiers, thus reducing the images of pain and blood to the minimum. Harfleur falls to Henry, but the only signs of struggle that we get to see through a series of MS of the setting are a cannon firing, lots of smoke and a wall crumbling down. The décor of the Harfleur city walls links the cinematic development of this scene with the stage at The Globe that started the film, reinforcing the theatricality of the whole scene. Indeed, we could say that Olivier is making use of pictorialism to idealise the presentation of war as something aesthetic rather than as something physical. This idealisation is supported by the scene's soundtrack: although we actually hear the cannon firing once, we don't hear the expected yells or sounds of battle, as the clinging of swords

or screams of fear. Instead, soft, idyllic music accompanies the city’s deceptively peaceful surrender to Henry, who makes its triumphant entry absolutely clean, followed by his immaculate army, none of whom sport visible signs of fight whatsoever.

In striking contrast to Olivier’s sentimental and wholly unrealistic depiction of the Battle of Harfleur, Branagh anticipates the techniques he will later be using to film Agincourt and presents the viewer with crude images of war, complemented by grim sound effects and the pervasive presence of smoke and fire, to hint at the destruction caused by any war. In line with this, the difference in costume design is again meaningful: even though the rest of his soldiers and men of arms are dressed with armours and plain outfits, sporting the colours of the English coat of arms in flags, Branagh attempts to deconstruct Sir Laurence’s hero once more and wears a similar military outfit to the one Olivier wore, yet more sober and dirty. It gives the impression that Branagh is using elements from the 1944 *Henry V* and subverting them so as to expose both the latter’s lack of fidelity to the original text and his director’s political propaganda. In fact, in the introduction to his printed adaptation, Branagh discusses his film in contrast to Olivier’s, blaming his seeming nationalistic and militaristic emphasis for “having created a great deal of suspicion and doubt about the value of *Henry V* for a late twentieth-century audience.” (Breight, 1998: 133)

As we have been discussing, Branagh shoots the battle of Harfleur exposing all the details of the bloody campaign. Through a low-angled pan shot we see the city walls surrounded by smoke. From this moment onwards, a quick succession of shots emphasises the chaos of battle, with rain and mud being the defining elements of the visual composition. To reinforce this idea, an ELS of the walls quickly changes to a series of MS matched on action to portray different soldiers fighting and people escaping from the doomed city. The soundtrack underlines the almost claustrophobic feeling of war, as screams of pain, the sound of cannons and the twinkling of swords surround viewers, who cannot take their eyes off of the screen and its rapid flow of throbbing moments. What is more, Branagh’s soldiers are stained with mud and blood, standing out as a caustic reference to Olivier’s neat “boy scouts” in Harfleur. In yet another subverted echo to the 1944 production, we are faced with Henry mounting a white horse at the city entrance, dirty and bloody, and the camera zooms in to offer a MS of him while he lifts his sword and shuts:

“Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more,
Or close the wall up with our English dead.” (*Henry V*, III.i.)

In maintaining these lines, Branagh succeeds in showing the audience that all wars suffer casualties. Once again, a series of quick shots succeed to maintain the atmosphere of chaos and confusion. In the aforementioned introduction to the printed adaptation, Branagh also congratulates himself for having included some of the scenes that Olivier had left out for obvious reasons, such as the savage threat to the Governor of Harfleur. I consider it vital for Branagh’s adaptative purposes to have maintained the king’s reference to the plausible rapes and infanticides ensuing from the attack, thus underlining the vicious aspects of the English campaign. In a clear exercise of self-coherence, Branagh is choosing not to ignore the dirty aspects of military paraphernalia and to use cinema as a tool to expose the inher-

ent cruelty and pointlessness of wars, while at the same time delving into the dark side of Henry and his rage for domination.

The use of camerawork is very interesting in this scene: Branagh is on top of his horse, standing before the walls of Harfleur and, when the Governor of the city appears, both are shot from low-angled positions in a shot/reverse shot sequence. Apart from obvious motivations caused by height that may justify the use of a low-angled camera position, we may take such decision as a hint towards the moral degradation of the king because of the massive killings and the subjected position of the governor now that Harfleur is under British rule. The final ELS shot portrays the English troops entering Harfleur, all tired and aching from the battle, dirty and injured. This is not a glorious, welcoming entry as Olivier's, but a reward achieved through a costly price. Mist blocks our vision and the scene dissolves, silently transitioning to the next scenario, in an obvious reference to the way in which consciences and memories are silenced and blurred after a painful military struggle. By leaving the English victory unexplained and only briefly alluded to, Branagh is once more advocating the need to reflect upon the actual human cost of military campaigns. His strategy certainly works, since the spectator cannot help but feel a bitter taste when admiring what Olivier otherwise depicts as a truly triumphant victory.

After having analysed in depth two scenes that I consider pivotal when understanding the different concerns and techniques which make these two adaptations of *Henry V* entirely different in nature and in purpose, I would like to briefly compare the Battle of Agincourt scene in both productions. Olivier presents the viewer yet again with a static depiction of the knights, colourfully arrayed, getting ready for battle. I will not enter into further considerations about the essentially opposed quality of the speech prior to the battle, because both the camerawork and each director's intentions in staging it are consistent with what has been previously stated about the Harfleur speech. Let it only be said that both speeches delve into the patriotic feeling, maintaining the references to Crispian's day and how they will all be remembered with glory and reverence that are found in the Shakespearean text. In the same way, the representation of the battle follows the same criteria by which both directors abided to film the Harfleur battle. Following Breicht (1998:138), we may say that “Shakespeare's willingness to subvert the memory of Agincourt by invoking the ever-present Elizabethan policy of summary execution by martial law for even minor offences” is totally overlooked by Olivier, and feebly addressed by Branagh.

In Olivier's case, he depicts a detached battlefield, using long shots that don't really allow details to be perceived, very few CUs of the soldiers fighting and resorting to a total blurring of diegetic sound in favour of a light music that seeks to humanise the battle. Branagh, on the other hand, provides us with more detail of the actual battle, portraying the soldiers as they fight and die, and making use of slow motion to add relevance to the moment, eventually asking for a reflection upon the cruelty of what viewers are witnessing.

After the slow-motion shots, the climactic scene is Henry's trudge across the battlefield, carrying the boy's corpse in “one of the longest tracking shots in cinema history, Tarkovskian in its post-apocalyptic sweep”, according to Hedrick (1997:54). The “Non Nobis” dismally sounds as Henry's “victorious” army walks towards the city, rising in crescendo to match the high emotional content of the images. If Olivier's scene finishes with an ELS of the army heading towards the city in dignified march, with little bruises and blood seen,

Branagh really gives it all in this last shot of Agincourt, claiming for a revision of our moral considerations about war and its consequences.

As we have been discussing throughout this paper, both Laurence Olivier and Kenneth Branagh depart from the same text and produce two opposing visions of it, using different cinematic conventions and privileging certain readings that distort Shakespeare's original intention. What remains clear is that the context in which Olivier's film was produced greatly influenced his alterations of the text, justifying his changes on the basis of the recreational quality of film and idealising war for an audience who didn't need more suffering. Yet cinema is much more than a visual pastime and must be conceived, in the same way as literature is, and in the same way as Shakespeare clearly intended it, as a vehicle of social critique and denouncing. Thus, Branagh's reading of *Henry V* is not only more faithful to the original text in formal terms, but also in ideological ones. A more thorough comparison with the Shakespearean original text might be interesting so as to expand our arguments regarding the presentation of war and Henry's moral corruption in Branagh's version. However, this remains out of the scope of the present paper, but will certainly remain to be explored in the future.

Cinema being naturally a self-reflective medium, various examples have been provided about how Branagh takes the Olivier film and uses it as a departing point for a totally different interpretation. Contrasting with Olivier's "static" rendering of the king, Branagh's famously grittier, muddier version of *Henry V* is the story of a young man's sometimes painful development—in literary terms, a Bildungsroman, as Warner (2007:3) puts it.

Both movies constitute a point of reference when considering Shakespearean adaptations on film because they provide us with different tools for discussing a series of topics, ranging from the use of spatial and temporal references, to costume design and setting or the adaptation of the ideological stock hidden behind Shakespeare's lines that are not only deeply fascinating but also truly enriching as far as perception of directorial intention is concerned. Olivier's constant drifting from the theatrical space to the cinematic one can be quite fuzzy, and ends up obscuring the meaning he intends to transmit. Camera innovations, although rather scarce, cannot fail to be mentioned, but always bearing in mind that Olivier's main reference is the theatrical deliverance of the text, not the cinematic one. Branagh's interpretation, on the other hand, results more visually appealing, but it also fluctuates in a rather uneasy way between the personal and the political in its promotion of the spectator's identification with the psychological analysis of Henry's craving for power and the political commitment towards the implications of war in a post-Falkland war context. If we were to summarise both directors' choices, we would say that differences in the orientation of *Henry V*, at least as far as the discussed scenes are concerned, lie in the decision of including "baseless fabric vs potent art", borrowing Bueno Alonso's (2004:19) terminology, as the basis for cinematic interpretation. Where Olivier knowingly fails to transmit Shakespeare's full range of implications because he subjects content to his personal context-dependent interpretation of *Henry V*, Branagh, on the other hand, manages nonetheless to remain closer to the play's original message, despite being apparently more detached from the original text due to his abundant use of cinematic innovations.

Mannheim (1994:129) explains such divergence by arguing that while Laurence Olivier created a duplicitous, Machiavellian *Henry V*, Branagh creates a complex Henry

for the 1990s, one who "radically divides our sympathies", since he "focuses our eternal schizophrenia about wars and heroes". Whether we agree or not with Mannheim's considerations regarding character-building in both productions, it cannot be denied that they stand as perfect examples of a context-dependent manipulation of the original story, exemplifying the modern idea of cinema being able to surpass all frontiers, even those of authorial intention.

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