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'Communal Heritage vs. Crucible of Honor: The Function of Audience in Olivier's & Branagh's *Henry V*'

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## Communal Heritage vs. Crucible of Honor: The Function of Audience in Olivier's & Branagh's *Henry V*

### Abstract

In a discussion of the two films of Shakespeare's *Henry V* by Laurence Olivier (1944) and Kenneth Branagh (1989), I identify how the function, portrayal, and construction of various audiences in each film manifest the director's ideological attitudes toward Shakespeare. Olivier showcases the Globe audience's delight in the communality of public theatre, and taps into the cinematic audience's fascination with historical recreation and pride in English literary and theatrical heritage. Branagh's portrayal and use of audiences is more interiorized and psychological than Olivier's; for Branagh, audiences constitute a crucible in which the object of their scrutiny must distill and display integrity and personal honor, and maintain these qualities in the face of potential disdain.

Key words:

Audience; film; Olivier; Branagh; Shakespeare; Henry V

This essay explores audiences as interpretive communities both within, and as spectators of, Laurence Olivier's and Kenneth Branagh's films of Shakespeare's *Henry V*, and with the potential influence of the former on the latter. Well-known ideological differences between the two films inform the function and filming of audiences in each production. Olivier's audiences are consistently shot as united groups, whereas Branagh presents audiences via both group shots and isolated series of reaction shots. Both directors employ the device of audience to further their divergent goals. For Olivier in 1944, framing the story with scenes of Shakespeare's Globe showcases the Renaissance audience's delight in the communality of public theatre, and taps into the cinematic audience's fascination with historical recreation. The film's patent awareness of the artifice of performance parallels the awareness on the part of both audiences of what and who are being fêted: Shakespeare, tradition, and English heritage. For Branagh in 1989, audiences constitute a crucible in which the object of their scrutiny must distill and display integrity and personal honor, and maintain these qualities in the face of potential disdain.

Both Olivier and Branagh treat their various audiences in and out of the narrative action as powerful interpretive communities and (illocutionary) forces to be reckoned with.

Laurence Olivier's film, commissioned by the Information Ministry, was an overt bid to boost morale and national confidence in the face of World War II and its wearing and devastating effects. The epigraph of the film reads, 'To the Commandos and Airborne Troops of Great Britain, the spirit of whose ancestors it has been humbly attempted to recapture in some ensuing scenes, this film is dedicated'. The first of Olivier's Shakespeare films, it is a lavish, grand affair, filled with bright lighting, sunny skies, a rich palette of colors, smiling faces, and a notable lack of blood, gore, dirt, or debris. It opens with an aerial pan of England, zooming gracefully in on the Globe,<sup>[i]</sup> and showing an Elizabethan-era performance on the Globe stage, with Olivier as Richard Burbage playing Henry V, and a raucous, variegated Elizabethan audience. From this mode of filmed theatre, which lasts through Act II, the Chorus (Leslie Banks) narrates the shift of action to France as Olivier revels in the magic of cinema by showing a painted cloth background dissolving into an actual filmed scene, which the camera dives into. The Chorus becomes a voiceover—a filmic equivalent of himself—ironically intoning 'There is the playhouse' (2.0.36)<sup>[ii]</sup> just as the Globe audience is left behind while the cinema audience is given access to a scene of the king on a ship, as if Olivier was taking pains to show the quick and thorough scenic changes that were precisely what an Early Modern playhouse could not in fact accomplish. Olivier then injects an undeniably filmic shot of the Chorus fading slowly in, floating against a mystic ethereal background of clouds as he names 'th'invisible and creeping wind' (3.0.11), his image fading as his voice continues, 'our swift scene flies/In motion of no less celerity/Than that of thought' (3.0.1-3). Olivier playfully toys with the interaction between spoken/written word and visual image.

The remainder of the Shakespearean story is shot within the narrative world, with no more depiction of the Globe, and the cross-dressed boy actors are now shown to be women actresses. However, far from attempting a realistic or naturalistic look, Olivier deliberately makes the landscapes, backgrounds, and settings resemble the flatness and storybook hues of a medieval book of hours—specifically, a work called *Les Tres Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*.<sup>[iii]</sup> At the story's close, once Henry has defeated the French and received Katherine as his bride, the camera returns us to the Globe, and the actors bow to the Elizabethan audience, as well as tacitly to the cinema audience.

Branagh's film, made in 1989, with the Falklands War of 1982 still in recent memory, responds clearly to Olivier's in several ways. Opening with a close-up of the Chorus's face lit by a match—the 'muse of fire' (Prologue 1)—and meandering through a film set strewn with lighting and camera equipment, the camera obediently tracks through the wide double doors thrown open by the Chorus (Derek Jacobi) as he exclaims, 'Our play!' (Prologue 34). The rest of the film is jarringly realistic in its depiction of the ugliness and filthiness of war, and closes with the Chorus speaking the rather unnerving epilogue which narrates the loss in the subsequent generation of all that Henry V had gained;

Jacobi somberly pauses after both 'lost France' (Epilogue 12) and 'made his England bleed' (Epilogue 12), overtly inviting the audience to formulate their own judgment at this ambivalent endnote.

Critical assessment of both films has discussed at length how each is informed by its sociopolitical moment: Olivier was responding to an official governmental dictum to use a Shakespeare film to bolster national pride and hope, whereas Branagh's film was made in a post-Holocaust, post-Vietnam, post-Falklands, Cold War era in which war was viewed far less glamorously or justifiably.<sup>[iv]</sup> Critics have also discussed Olivier's influence on Branagh, and the moments in the latter's film that serve as tributes to Olivier as well as those that reconceptualize his predecessor's notions.<sup>[v]</sup> Olivier and Branagh each excel at conveying Shakespeare's language with clarity and beauty, both themselves and through the actors under their direction; moreover, both are adept at blending different modes and 'languages' (the theatrical and the cinematic for Olivier; high culture and theatrical heritage with popular culture and Hollywood for Branagh)<sup>[vi]</sup> to present Shakespeare in original and accessible ways.

Over the past few decades, Olivier's *Henry V* has increasingly grown to seem ideologically unpalatable. James Pinnuck eloquently sums up this shift of opinion:

For a generation to whom the bloody atrocities of regional conflict in the Middle East, Africa, and Europe had become viscerally familiar through the electronic media, and in an age when human rights and international law had assumed an increasing significance in the conception of global justice, Agincourt and its attendant inhumanities had come to be seen as significantly problematic, if not entirely repugnant. (95)

In an age increasingly familiar with and hardened to the horrific images of war, Olivier's sunny, bloodless representation of what has traditionally been seen as a glorious and miraculous English victory now often seems laughable at best, jingoistically inhumane at worst.<sup>[vii]</sup> Additionally, Michael Manheim articulates how Branagh's vision of war and politics speaks more to our time than Olivier's old-fashioned heroism:

Branagh's film ... considers the overpowering human instinct to admire a chivalrous hero alongside the still more overpowering need to rid the world of the horror of war. It is very much a Henry for our time because what once seemed to us like noble image and sentiment—the wartime utterances of a Winston Churchill or a Franklin Roosevelt, the charms of a John Kennedy (who, significantly, much admired Olivier's film)—now seem to many like facades. ('English History Play' 130)

In an era far more cynical toward and distrustful of politicians, Branagh's foregrounding of Henry's flaws and contradictions, in a film that elicits divided and controversial responses,

ironically succeeds for some at rendering him more noble and inspiring than the pious, unbesmirched, traditionally kingly figure Olivier limns.

Much has been written about the (meta)theatrical aspects of Olivier's film, and his filming of an Elizabethan-era audience at the Globe. To date, however, no one has analyzed the use and portrayal of audiences in Branagh's film. I propose herein to consider audiences, variously identified, as interpretive communities, as Stanley Fish delineates them—interpretive communities upon whom both directors confer significant privilege and responsibility. Fish proposes that, 'Interpretation is not the art of construing but the art of constructing. Interpreters do not decode poems; they make them' (144), and adds that people interpret communally, employing 'interpretive strategies that ... have their source in a publicly available system of intelligibility' (147). The conventions and assumptions that constitute a societal 'system of intelligibility' can be analogized to what J.L. Austin defines as 'illocutionary force': in his coining of the notion of the performative in *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), the seminal text that launched speech act theory, Austin defines an illocution as an utterance that draws upon convention to lend it 'force', in addition to or in lieu of its literal meaning. (For instance, the phrase, 'I order you to go to the principal's office' possesses a tone of menace and punitiveness if spoken by a teacher to a young pupil, but not otherwise.) Austin's concepts have in turn been complicated and reimagined by many others;<sup>[viii]</sup> Herbert Clark and Thomas Carlson posit a second level of illocutionary act within the theatre which occurs when the conventions that constitute illocutionary force affect the other hearers of an utterance besides the direct addressee (332). Thus, to combine the notion of illocution with Fish's interpretive communities, the hearers of an utterance as well as those being directly addressed construct their resultant interpretation via conventions and assumptions that permeate and constitute their communal identity. It is in this fashion that I examine audiences in Olivier's and Branagh's films. For Olivier, his filming of the Globe audience draws upon the illocutionary forces of nostalgia and appreciation of literary heritage in order to communicate to the cinema audience their roles as celebrants and witnesses of Shakespeare as icon, tradition, and definer of Englishness. In Branagh's film, onscreen audiences form interpreting bodies that weigh and assess the honor and worth of the objects of their gaze, thus actively constructing their notion of kingship. These onscreen audiences in turn convey to the cinema audience their ability and authority to do likewise: to judge the honorability of Henry V, of Branagh, and of the meaning of Shakespeare in our modern age. Like the traditional figure of the Epilogue in Early Modern drama, both Olivier and Branagh are acutely conscious of their vulnerability in the gaze of their audiences, and present themselves, their plays, and their vision of Shakespeare and society for approval.

In Olivier's day, there was not yet any established tradition of popular Shakespeare films, and so he proceeded to delineate it, using his *Henry V* to sketch not only a glorious past, but a splendid beginning for future film audiences to celebrate their theatrical and national heritage, with Shakespeare and Henry V as twin emblems of greatness. Olivier's decision to use the modern medium of film to portray the insider intricacies of an Early Modern

Shakespeare production implies his interest not in the increased naturalism and realism that film can make possible, but rather, in satisfying the desire he attributes to his 1940s audience for a glimpse of Renaissance life and a day at the Globe, complete with orange girls, musicians, quaintly attired attendees, and actors holding signs adorned with archaic spelling. Historical recreation is one locus of twentieth-century curiosity that the cinematic medium can satisfy, and Olivier revels in it, from the panoramic opening vistas to the somewhat intimate shots of guests cheerily settling in the galleys, to the scene of the groundlings withdrawing during the sudden downpour. Olivier anticipates the twentieth-century viewer's questions, such as: *what did they do back then when it rained?* and provides a pictorial reply. The rain briefly halts the play, and Olivier's filming of an obstacle that existed in Renaissance theatre but not in either twentieth-century theatre or in cinema is gratuitous in terms of his telling the story of Henry V, yet highlights instead the capacities of film over open-air theatre, as his English viewers may have smugly thought, ensconced in a dry movie-house while it likely—being England—rained outside. At the same time, the scene of groundlings in the rain contributes to evoking a charming and quaint sensory image of life in Shakespeare's day, thus fêting theatre in a manner now possible with the advent of film. Olivier provides for his cinema audience, as an interpretive community, several levels of potential interaction with the Globe scenes: they can be read as depicting historical verisimilitude, the excitement that must have attended the very first production of *Henry V*, the privilege of watching Shakespeare in the days of Burbage and the Bard himself, and/or the limitations of Early Modern theatre that the medium of film could now overcome. Olivier thus interpellates the power of nostalgia and national and literary pride to enhance his cinema audience's engagement with his tale.

Embellishing his visual feast for the film audience, Olivier provides voyeuristic glimpses of backstage life: boys cross-dressing, one boy pondering stuffing his chest with oranges, the sly satiric irony of the 'Archbishop' slapping the wrist of the 'Bishop of Ely' for drinking backstage, and all the mayhem attendant upon cues, cramped quarters, and quick changes. These snapshots of life within the Early Modern theatre celebrate the medium of film by representing concepts usually confined to textbooks, such as cross-dressing; furthermore, they convey that excitement of preparation for performance (reinforced by a merry bustling violin melody that plays during the backstage scenes) that Olivier knew himself.<sup>[ix]</sup> These backstage scenes in particular demonstrate Olivier's cheery interaction with the cinema audience: *Look what we can do now with film!* he seems to crow, as the camera darts, cavorts, and zooms among the players. Olivier explicitly interpreted Shakespeare's text as wishing for a better form of technology, such as film; Olivier wrote, 'In *Henry V* more than in any other play, Shakespeare bemoans the confines of his Globe Theatre' (269).<sup>[x]</sup> By excluding the Globe audience from this viewing access and providing the film audience a 'backstage pass', Olivier fuels the glee of the latter audience in their privileged entry behind the scenes.

The confusion and chaos backstage juxtapose the Globe actors' palpable gratification at being on stage, playing to an appreciative (Renaissance) audience attuned to the codes

of performance. Both the Chorus (Leslie Banks) and Henry V (Olivier) address their speeches directly to the audience, accompanying them with grandiose gestures and bows, and speaking in a declamatory style. Both are greeted with enthusiastic applause. This non-naturalistic, pre-Stanislawski style of acting lasted throughout the eighteenth century (when in the heyday of John Philip Kemble it was dubbed the 'teapot school' in ridiculing reference to the common practice of gesticulating grandly with one arm while resting the other at one's waist). W.B. Worthen's explanation of the histrionic practice of 'pointing' illuminates how Olivier communicates to both Globe and cinema audience, as both actor and filmmaker. A 'point' was a moment when the actor detached a usually famous speech from the onstage action, spoke it directly to the audience with all the vocal eloquence and emotion he or she could muster, and repeated it occasionally if the ensuing applause was particularly thunderous. Points were expected and admired, functioning rather like solos in a jazz quartet. Worthen explains, 'The point forced the actor to present a specific passion to his audience ... The formal point voiced and structured a moment of intense emotion, coordinating the passions of actor, character, and spectator' (72). This unity of feeling and mutual enjoyment is an important aspect of the Globe ethos that Olivier so consciously evokes. His filming of an actively participatory and appreciative Globe audience formulates an encouragement to his cinema audience to establish a like appreciative dynamic in the new phenomenon of watching Shakespeare through film. Besides his political and nationalistic messages, Olivier hopefully adumbrates a new mode of Shakespearean discourse that draws on continuity with theatrical tradition. As Douglas Lanier notes, Olivier paints his Globe audience as an idealized, democratized popular culture, displaying unified responses to the play (144). This audience breaks into rousing cheers at the very mention of Falstaff, clearly a favorite character. The film audience, in turn, partakes in the intrigue of witnessing, like time-travelers, a Renaissance audience delighting in an icon of their sociohistorical moment.

Olivier's filming of the Globe audience draws attention away from Shakespeare's narrative, and incites a meta-commentary that celebrates Shakespeare—the playwright and the phenomenon—in both past and then-present eras. This audience applauds Falstaff because he is already known, and known as a creation of Shakespeare. They laugh repeatedly at Ely because they are well versed in theatrical conventions, and happy to be so; the audience figures a celebration of theatre's communality. An example of this occurs when the king says, 'Take heed how you ... awake our sleeping sword of war.-... For never two such kingdoms did contend/Without much fall of blood' (1.2.21-5): Olivier as Henry ignores the Archbishop of Canterbury, the textual addressee, and addresses the Globe audience, delivering this dire image of spilt blood as if it were no more nor less than poetry. The declamatory style the actors use to deliver their lines reinforces the ideological principle that the lines are said by actors to the paying audience, not to the onstage listeners. (Branagh's actors use a much more Method-like, naturalistic manner of vocal delivery.)

The bit of stage business between Canterbury and Ely, the latter scuttling frantically about trying to reorder the pages as Canterbury gamely tries to sustain his dignified recital, is

clearly rehearsed, a pretend confusion intended to elicit howls of laughter.<sup>[xi]</sup> This piece of clowning underscores the relationship between troupe and Globe audience: the central dramatic interaction occurs between players and Globe audience, rather than within the world of the narrative with the fourth wall intact. The narrative audiences throughout Olivier's film, that is, the characters onstage who are auditors and witnesses to various part of the narrative action, seem mere props: for instance, the lords who are meant to be listening attentively to the Archbishop's explication of Salic law show no perturbation at the antics of Canterbury and Ely, which are clearly meant to traverse the fourth wall. The Globe audience attends the show not to imaginatively enter the world of Henry V, but to partake in what we might dub 'Shakespearings'—participating in the currently popular fad of attending entertainments by Shakespeare. The theatrical experience for the Renaissance audience consists of interacting with favorite actors as well as of watching the play,<sup>[xii]</sup> whereas the cinema audience attends the film for the imbricated purposes of watching the story of Henry V, gleaning a glamorous and detailed vision of Early Modern life and thus reveling in the powers of film, and admiring the artistry and abilities of Olivier as actor and filmmaker.

Narrative audiences within the story in Olivier's film function as non-ironic crowds, reinforcing and amplifying the rhetoric of the speaker addressing them rather than providing any critique or alternative points of view. During the climactic St. Crispin's speech on the eve of war, the English soldiers amass into a 'swelling scene' (Prologue 4) as the camera tracks backward to encompass the burgeoning crowd who listen to Henry's rousing pep talk in rapt silence. After the battle, when Henry enters the French court to negotiate terms, an invisible chorus beyond the frame *la la's* with a heavenly sound, like unseen cherubs, projecting joy and peace that are painfully incongruous given the scope of their defeat. The smiling French queen welcomes the handsome Olivier with seemingly no thought for the thousands of her countrymen dead under his orders. Henry leads his smiling bride (Renee Asherson) forward amid one cheerful crowd, and then Olivier as director cuts back to the Globe and to the cross-dressed boy playing Katherine, so that Olivier as actor and the boy can in turn bow to a different crowd—both the Globe crowd as well as the unseen crowd in the cinema.<sup>[xiii]</sup> No one in any of these crowds shows any ambivalence or questioning of Henry's priorities; no one evinces any fear or grief. (Branagh's treatment of crowds is strikingly different.) Audiences confer purpose and joy upon the actors addressing them, and gesture in their communal celebrations toward, respectively, a joyous untroubled future for the conjoined nations (for the narrative audience), a heroic national heritage (for the Globe audience), and a scintillating and lively theatrical heritage (for the cinema audience).

Olivier revels in the camera's ability to shift from large scenes to close-ups, and employs this technique deftly to address the film audience when he depicts the Chorus in close-up at 'On your imaginary forces work' (Prologue 18), thus calling attention to their task of imagining, as well as to the capabilities of the new medium to highlight individual lines in novel ways. The camera tracks majestically backward on 'your thoughts' (Prologue 28),

mimicking the movement of the mind's eye as it returns to the sixteenth-century world.

[\[xiv\]](#) This is the only moment when the cinema audience is addressed so directly. Olivier here conveys the message to them that their active imaginations are needed to enhance the magical capabilities of film.

A generation after Olivier, Branagh uses interiorized Method acting and his trademark brilliance for naturalistic delivery in stark contrast to Olivier's declamatory style to effect an introspective exploration of Henry V's character. Branagh's film reveres Shakespeare in the traditionally bardolatrous manner propagated by the English Romantics: Shakespeare is figured as the master of portraying and apprehending the full range of human nature. Hence, Branagh's desire to emphasize the depth, complexity, and beauty of the characters and issues Shakespeare delineates undergirds his treatment of audiences. By contrast, for Olivier, 'Shakespeare' is an inspirational tradition and icon of national identity, and so Olivier's audiences are not complex portraits of human behavior, but rather, unified bodies paying tribute to 'Shakespeare', the phenomenon. Branagh's differing focus—more interiorized just like his acting: fourth wall intact, disbelief suspended—explains why Shakespeare is not even mentioned in his film; much less is his era recreated. Shakespeare, for Branagh, is the muse, the creative godlike force inspiring and informing this story of profound human truth, unseen but ever present. Correlatively, although Branagh's film does possess self-conscious moments, by and large, the self-consciousness consists of filmic allusions rather than explicit engagement with the theatre-going milieu. Branagh's minimizing of metatheatrical moments enables the audience's absorption into the world of the narrative, which suits his vision of Shakespeare and his directorial project of highlighting the fluctuations of human character. His filmic allusions do not conflict with this agenda; on the contrary, his most obvious allusion—the king's entrance in the style of Darth Vader [\[xv\]](#)—in fact has been read as befitting the king's character by whimsically underscoring Henry's need and desire to achieve a commanding entrance. Olivier's directorial choices are equally in keeping with his attitude toward Shakespeare; his use of audience as a device dovetails neatly with his project of celebrating England's communal traditions and heritage.

For Branagh, audiences serve a more indirect but equally serious function: they exert the pressure and excitement of scrutiny and cause the speaker to look into himself (always *himself*, in this film) to find a position of dignity or personal honor from which to address his hearers. The cinema audience can watch the onscreen audience for cues as to how to assess the honor of the speakers. Branagh employs the quintessential filmic technique—the reaction shot—to display personalities in a manner impossible within theatre. It is his extensive use of reaction shots that showcases Branagh's favoring of audience response, as well as of interiorized acting, for by definition these shots show the characters reacting emotionally to one another, not to the stage or film audience. [\[xvi\]](#) Branagh splices reaction shots of individuals with shots of larger audiences to good effect: Exeter's (Brian Blessed) laconic line, 'Tennis balls, my liege' (1.2.258) is followed immediately by two shots of the lords flanking the king, eagerly and fearfully awaiting his

reaction. These two quick shots are succeeded by a close-up of Henry pondering his next move. After he decides on ringing outrage and challenge as his response, a reaction shot of Exeter follows: he smiles with smug satisfaction. The small but intense gathering of lords is arrayed explicitly *like* an audience: seated and facing the stage of the royal dais. Henry is acutely conscious of being in the limelight and of his need to pass this test; once he does, Branagh the director records an audience member—Exeter—registering the king's success. Branagh's repeated revelations of individual responses indicate his use of audience reaction as one of his principal devices to develop character and advance the storyline.

When Exeter enters the French court, decked out in almost parodic spike-shouldered armor that accentuates his size, solidity, and fierceness,<sup>[xvii]</sup> Branagh pointedly films the heads of two French lords snapping in succession toward Exeter after King Charles inquires, 'Or what follows?' (2.4.96). Exeter rallies gleefully to the challenge of their gaze, delivering his message confidently, deliberately and insultingly calling the Dauphin 'Dolphin', grimacing snidely as he delivers his litany of insults. Exeter's encounter with an audience provides him a chance to prove his bravery, loyalty, proud affection for his king, competence at rendering both letter and spirit of his message—and thus, his fitness to represent his nation. All this composes Exeter's immense personal honor, emphasized by camera angles that underscore the performative aspect of his speech-making, such as the side view of Exeter (emphasizing action over reflection, since the latter is more apparent through a frontal shot of one's facial expression) followed by close-ups of the French courtiers' faces. These displays of Exeter's character then prepare the film audience for Exeter's joyous and triumphant laugh—another reaction shot—when Henry warmly names him in the St. Crispin speech.

Branagh's Mountjoy (Christopher Ravenscroft), by the same token, enjoys numerous long moments in the gaze of the camera and of the English army as he struggles to maintain his dignity and national loyalty in the face of his visibly growing respect for Henry. Branagh first builds the viewer's respect for Mountjoy and then employs the character to provide some of the film's most weighty reaction shots. These long takes of Mountjoy intimate that he is a reflective, intelligent thinker by focusing on his wise, thoughtful eyes and dignified facial expression (contrast Olivier's Mountjoy, whose excessive smiles undercut his seriousness). Branagh deepens and showcases Mountjoy's personality and feelings, as he does with most of the characters. One method Branagh uses to do so is the reassignment of lines and the streamlining of the number of characters. Branagh makes the effective decision to replace the First Ambassador who delivers the tennis balls with Mountjoy, thus eliminating extraneous characters, simplifying the story, and giving Mountjoy more time on screen. Because Mountjoy's honor consists of his ability to be loyal to his countrymen, to act as an efficient and eloquent herald, and yet to respect a noble enemy, the camera lingers on him during Mountjoy's most significant reaction shot as he says to his compatriots on the eve of battle, 'That island of England breeds very valiant creatures' (3.7.135-6)—an assessment met with a respectful silence by his French auditors. Tellingly, this line is given to Mountjoy, not Rambures, as in the text; here,

Mountjoy attests in the face of his French audience his continuing respect for Henry, and thus underscores his own chivalric honor (as well as Shakespeare's fantasy as an Englishman that the French stand always in awe of the English). The honorable Mountjoy is a repeated audience to Henry, who serves to magnify and witness the honor of Henry and the strength and nobility of the English by transmitting these sentiments across national boundaries. Mountjoy's interpretation of events helps solidify in turn the conviction of *his* audiences (the French court and the cinema audience) that the English are noble and admirable.

The behavior of audiences within Branagh's film signals the respectability of both the gazers and the gazed upon. While the French courtiers as an audience visibly fear the burly Exeter, Henry and the English lords in their turn as audience show nothing but calm respect for Mountjoy—again gesturing to the English superiority in bravery and stiff-upper-lip-ness. We may contrast the moment in Olivier's film when Mountjoy arrives to beg permission to remove the French dead: Gloucester sneers, 'His eyes are humbler than they used to be' (4.7.62)—a line Branagh omits. In Olivier's film, the French are consistently portrayed as imbecilically ineffectual, laughable in their defeat. By contrast, Branagh's camera shots imply the honorable nature of both Exeter and Mountjoy, each the object of a collective gaze; the film accomplishes character evaluation through the lens of audience opinion. Branagh's portrayal of audiences' responses to the two heralds also implies the respectability of the two nations, symbolized synecdochically by these two audiences: the French courtiers are sensible for fearing Exeter, unlike the cocky Dauphin, alone in his defiance and disrespect toward the enemy; likewise, the English are valorous and noble for respecting their enemy's herald. Furthermore, in keeping with the inevitable nationalism that characterizes the play's disdainful representation of the French, the French courtiers' fear of Exeter also connotes their weakness and inferiority as a nation. [\[xviii\]](#)

Concomitantly, dishonorable characters are signaled in Branagh's film by either an audience's inattentiveness, or a lack of audience altogether. The opening conversation between Canterbury and Ely takes place in a lurid dungeon-like chamber, in hissing whispers, with no audience. It is not until Henry's threatening rendition of 'Take heed ...' (cited above) that the Archbishop has an audience. At this point, Branagh's shots suggest that the Archbishop fails to handle the moment honorably: once Canterbury commences his Salic law speech, he is shown from behind the heads of the listening court and behind the seat partitions. The shots, tracking, and blocking diminish the seriousness of his droning speech and imply—by their indirectness and busy camera movement—his circuitous underhandedness. Analogously, the Dauphin, hot-headed and naïve like Hotspur, is repeatedly and pointedly undercut by reaction shots of skeptical and disdainful looks on his audience's faces; these reaction shots contrast sharply with the consistent and homogenous group admiration emanating from the English lords after Henry's speeches. For the bishops and the Dauphin, their audiences' lack of respect and of serious attention gestures at the principals' lack of reflectiveness, intelligence, and openness.

Audiences in Branagh's film test one's honesty and courage, whereas in Olivier's film, they reward one's ability to perform. The scene with Williams (Act IV, scene 1) is a case in point, and a crucial one, since Williams is the only character in Shakespeare's play who overtly challenges the justifiability of the king's war. In Branagh's film, the confrontation is violent—Williams strikes Henry with his glove—and prompts the king's agonizing soul-searching on his knees, like Christ in Gethsemane. Olivier's king by contrast withdraws after the interaction with Williams to sit in pensive splendor, the camera and lighting showing Olivier's visage haloed in gold, his thoughts rendered by voiceover in a calm, assured tone, lingering over the mellifluous sounds of the words rather than conveying their painful uncertainty. The foregoing audience of Williams and his companions, in Branagh's film, drives the king to interrogate his own sense of honor; in Olivier's film, it seems rather to highlight the king's dignity, eloquence, and self-containedness. One feels that Branagh's disguised king succeeds in genuinely encountering the 'common man', whereas Olivier's interaction seems to underscore how removed and transcendent the king is from the life of the commoner, and how futile a task it is for him to pretend to be one of them. Although 'Harry LeRoi', as the disguised king styles himself to the soldiers, does not 'win' the argument, the scene in Olivier's film underscores the king's performative abilities, partly by dint of the languid oratorical delivery of the lines, rather than the challenge to his ideology. Pilkington remarks, 'on the night before Agincourt, his disguise [...] clearly marks him as an actor, while the wandering tour of inspection he conducts smacks of a director nervously checking small details before an opening' (121). Olivier's Henry in contemplative solitude echoes not Gethsemane, but the Globe players backstage: a successful scene finished, the actor prepares for his next entrance.

In stark contrast to Olivier, Branagh's filming of audiences concentrates nearly exclusively on audiences within the narrative. He does, though, speak directly to the film audience through the lengthy opening metatheatrical and metafilmic sequence: in the initial shot of the Chorus's face in close-up lit by a match, Derek Jacobi hisses the words in an eager stage whisper while gazing directly into the camera, inviting the cinema audience to share in his wish for a 'muse of fire/That would ascend the brightest heaven of invention' (Prologue 1-2). The subsequent journey as the camera follows the Chorus ranging through the backstage studio area implies by its very length and detailed mise-en-scène, as well as by Jacobi's earnest delivery of his lines, that the cinema audience constitutes an interpretive community whose good opinion and thoughtful reactions are actively invoked and sought. Branagh approaches his film audience much more confidently than does Olivier; at the same time, Branagh's occasional tributes to Olivier (like Olivier, Branagh's Henry delivers his St. Crispin speech from a cart, and includes a striking volley of arrows from the French during the Agincourt battle) serve to acknowledge that his predecessor did much to inaugurate a tradition in which Branagh can address a Shakespearean film audience with this very familiarity.

Even matters of pronunciation differentiate subtly between the audiences addressed by each director. Olivier's pronunciation befits his homage to Englishness. Olivier

pronounces 'Dauphin', 'Calais', and 'Agincourt' in the traditionally English manner: 'DAWϕ-fin', 'CALϕ-is' (to rhyme with 'Alice'), and 'ADGEϕ-in-cort'. His Queen's English elocution dovetails with his project to celebrate Englishness and high cultural heritage, and to communicate with audience members who would share in this homage. Branagh, who acquired his BBC-accent laboriously and stealthily, [\[xix\]](#) pronounces these same words in relatively proper French: 'doe-FAnϕ', 'cal-ay', 'ah-zhin-COORϕ'. Here, Branagh's penchant for mixing and matching accents and ethnic traditions reinforces his more cosmopolitan vision and his project of mingling high culture with low, Shakespeare and English history with Star Wars imagery, resulting in a portrait of an honorable king as mud-beslimed as his followers.

The use and representation of audiences in each film underscores each director's understanding of how Shakespeare can influence culture, and of how English heritage relates to contemporary politics and ideology. Olivier links revered tradition with new technology, implying the power of Shakespeare to unify past, present, and future Britons. Branagh hopes to catch at the hearts of his viewers by inciting them through his reaction shots to identify with the observers of Henry V; to find themselves increasingly engaged by the story and by the characters' flawed humanity (even as the Chorus becomes increasingly emotionally involved in his narration); and ultimately to be inspired by Shakespeare's (and Branagh's) grand and variegated vision of human complexity.

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[\[i\]](#) There is a cinematic wink of whimsy as the camera initially zeroes in on the wrong theatre.

[\[ii\]](#) All Shakespeare citations are taken from the Oxford edition, cited in the bibliography, and are from the Shakespeare text, not from either filmscript.

[\[iii\]](#) This work was produced in the fifteenth century, so was roughly contemporaneous with the Battle of Agincourt. Scholars who have discussed Olivier's explicit evocation of this book include Harry M. Geduld (18-9), Manvell (39), and Anthony Davies (see *Filming Shakespeare's Plays*, chapter on *Henry V*).

[\[iv\]](#) On Olivier, see Donaldson *SFSD*; Jackson 'From play-script' 27; Davies 'The Shakespeare films ...' On Branagh, see Crowl 'Flamboyant' 228; Pursell. On both, see Holderness; Royal; Deats; Donaldson 'Taking on Shakespeare'; Shaw; Manheim (both articles cited at end).

[\[v\]](#) See Burnett 84.

[\[vi\]](#) See especially Crowl on Branagh, and Jackson on Olivier.

[\[vii\]](#) Ace Pilkington gives an intelligent alternate reading to the standard understanding of Olivier's film as war propaganda, yet answers the wrong question: he contends that Olivier's main agenda is not to be patriotic, but metatheatrical. However, Pilkington fails to address the issues that make Olivier's film so ideologically distasteful in more recent years: its *non*-engagement with the ideology of war. Pilkington usefully chronicles and explains Olivier's painstaking choices, yet does not acknowledge that even if Olivier did not intend his omission of 'negative' story elements (the execution of the traitors, the bloodiness of battle) to be patriotic, nevertheless, modern viewers tend to perceive them as ideologically irresponsible. See also Royal 105.

[\[viii\]](#) See for instance the work of John R. Searle, Julia Kristeva, Jerrold Katz, Shoshana Felman, and Richard Ohmann.

[\[ix\]](#) See Donaldson's *SFSD* for a discussion of Olivier's personal life and its effects on his professional priorities.

[\[x\]](#) Donaldson and others discuss Olivier's delight in the medium of film; see Donaldson's 'Taking on Shakespeare' 62.

[\[xi\]](#) Others have discussed how Olivier's comedic rendering of this scene serves to undercut the damning revelation in the Shakespeare text of a preexisting plot between the king and Canterbury to instigate a war. See Deats 286 and Griffin 100.

[\[xii\]](#) Today, this lively, knowing, pop cultural interaction with Shakespeare is kitschily termed Schlockspeare by some, thanks heavily to the work of Richard Burt. See for instance Burnett 84 and 103.

[\[xiii\]](#) See Donaldson's excellent discussion of the gendered metatheatricity that Olivier employs, switching cleverly from the woman playing Katherine (Renee Asherson) to (when the bride turns around) the cross-dressed boy filmed at the beginning (*SFSD*). Ace Pilkington also discusses these gender switches fruitfully.

[\[xiv\]](#) Donaldson points out that Olivier was the first to reverse the practice of filming the climax of a major speech in close-up (*SFSD* 110)—that is, at these moments Olivier often tracks the camera backward to make a long shot coincide with the verbal climax.

[xv] Many scholars have recognized Branagh's penchant for inserting elements of 'low' culture into his productions and thus popularizing the bard. Courtney Lehmann calls attention to the fact that Branagh claimed that he wanted this film to appeal to Batman fans (192). Samuel Crowl eloquently describes Branagh as 'a product of the postmodern moment dominated by a sense of belatedness—a sense that originality is exhausted and that only parody and pastiche and intertextual echo remain' (*Shakespeare at the Cineplex* 28). Regarding the Darth Vader reference, several refer to this, but Michael Pursell provides the most in-depth analysis of the evolution of Branagh's Henry from Vader into Luke Skywalker. See also Burnett 84.

[xvi] Donaldson usefully discusses how Branagh's camera technique produces a sense of privacy and intimacy ('Taking on Shakespeare' 65f). Olivier's film, by contrast, Donaldson terms 'psychologically *static*' (ibid. 68). See also Burnett 84.

[xvii] See Pursell's illuminating discussion of Exeter's resemblance to Robocop and the Terminator (270).

[xviii] Michael Pursell characterizes the contrast between Olivier's and Branagh's portrayal of the French by noting Branagh's ironic and progressive portrayal of the French as sophisticated and civilized, and the English as barbaric (269-70). Several others also identify ways in which Branagh's representation of the French is more sympathetic and complex than Olivier's; for instance, Elizabeth Marsland perceptively pinpoints how Branagh humanizes the French (11). Nevertheless, although few today would dispute Branagh's improvement over Olivier's caricatured characters, I still see Branagh's French as quite negatively represented vis-à-vis the English. The Dauphin is clearly unsympathetic and undeserving of respect, and he is after all Henry's equivalent. Even if the French do seem 'civilized', and much more intelligent than they do in Olivier's version, nonetheless, their evident fear renders them weaker in the viewer's eye, and of course, they still lose the battle catastrophically and ignominiously.

[xix] See Donaldson *SFSD* 20f. for a useful discussion of Branagh's life and particularly his struggle to disavow his Irish origin.

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