

# Visualising Conflict: Shakespeare's Soldiers on Screen

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Visualising Conflict: Shakespeare's Soldiers on Screen

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## 1 Introduction

Shortly after the advent of film, Shakespeare's plays made their way onto the big screen. Although interest for cinematic versions of the texts declined with the introduction of the talkies (Jackson 2, 20), the Bard's oeuvre has proven to be a constant interest in the film industry, living through a Renaissance of its own in the 60s (2).

Although Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies might be more widely accessible as they do not rely on a comprehensive knowledge of English history, the two historical tetralogies left us with two of his more easily recognizable characters – Richard III and Henry V. The former is generally thought of as a personification of evil, a morally corrupt hunchback. The latter, on the other hand, is chivalry in the flesh, an emblem of kingship. There are, however, some similarities. Both of them are Machiavels, if one concedes that Machiavellianism means successfully navigating a particular socio-political environment. Both Henry V and Richard III are introduced as characters earlier on in their respective tetralogies, and both distinguish themselves on the battlefield in civil war.

Chivalry was the reigning secular ideology in the Middle Ages roughly from the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> until the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Keen 1), flourishing particularly in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, when many chivalric orders and knightly confraternities were established (179). The knights, often 'men of high lineage' (2), were bound to their lords and king by solemn oaths (76), and the fact that kings were advised by treatises to select secular officers from their ranks (9-10) testifies to the importance of chivalry and the pervasiveness of its influence. The tourneys and jousts, along with offering opportunity for entertainment, also had their practical value. The historical Richard III was advised to proclaim tourneys and jousts several times a year, as training for knights (236). Tudor England, however, faced many military problems. With outdated equipment and poorly trained men (Adrian 727) the rulers relied on chivalric pageantry as a tool for creating unity (Low 15). And while Henry VIII enjoyed keeping some of the traditions alive (he was a keen jouster) (238), the arrival of university educated men slowly pushed the professional martial men to the social and political sidelines (Rapple 63). To vent their frustration, some wrote military treatises, distinguishable into three main types. Some, like Barnaby Riche and Thomas Churchyard, praised the profession, nostalgic about the idealised chivalric past (63-

75). Others, like Geoffrey Gates and George Whetstone, defended the profession as a necessary one, sometimes even advocating militarisation (76-79). A minority of treatises tackled technical and logistical matters of warfare. The position of martial men was still much more favourable than that of common soldiers. In the Irish campaigns, for example, soldiers were abused by their captains more often than not (Carey 470). Given the frequent delays in distributing clothes and provisions (479), most soldiers were poorly clothed and fed which led to health problems (480-1). They therefore often resorted to selling their weapons and powder to the Irish (479), and the captains were more than willing to take bribes to let them desert (478). The corruption was so deep-set that the captains frequently cheated the soldiers out of the very little pay they earned, and hanged those who complained as mutineers (482). The tension between the idealised chivalric past of the nobility and the reality of warfare is also present in Shakespeare's two tetralogies, primarily in the juxtaposition of the experience of war for the nobility and the commoners in the second tetralogy, but also more implicitly, since Shakespeare is an Elizabethan playwright setting the action of his histories in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

The purpose of this master's thesis is to look at four film adaptations of *Richard III* and *Henry V*. The adaptations analysed will be Laurence Olivier's 1944 *Henry V* and 1955 *Richard III*, as well as Kenneth Branagh's 1989 version of *Henry V* and Richard Loncraine's *Richard III*, released in 1995. The thesis will focus on the importance of the military aspect in the characterization of the titular characters in each of those adaptations. For this purpose, frequent references to the plays will be made, with the aim of gauging more easily how the films establish and develop character. The thesis will then move on to explore the importance of the changes the adaptations make to the titular characters. A secondary aim is to draw attention to consistencies in the portrayal of these two characters, and influence this has on their general image. The first section will, therefore, look at the way the changes to Shakespeare's texts (cutting and borrowing from other plays) influence the characters of Richard III and Henry V, with particular emphasis to their roles as warriors. This will be done by looking more closely at how certain episodes from the plays are adapted, namely the opening soliloquy, the gradual seizure of power, and the battle of Bosworth episode for the character of Richard, and what is scene 1.2 in the play (Henry deciding to invade France), the siege of Harfleur, and the Agincourt episode for Henry V.

## 2 Take a Soldier: The Characterization of Richard III and Henry V

Both *Richard III* and *Henry V* are the last plays in their respective tetralogies. The first tetralogy chronicles the Wars of the Roses and ultimately shows how the Tudors gained the throne, while the second one focuses on the series of events which led to that civil war, namely the usurpation of the Crown by Henry Bolingbroke, who was later crowned as Henry IV. It is in their respective contexts that Richard III and Henry V should be interpreted, as both characters are given two plays' worth of development before being given the spotlight. Much of what they do and why is set up in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> parts of *Henry VI* and the two parts of *Henry IV*, and therefore merits consideration.

### 2.1 Richard III in the Adaptations by L. Olivier (1955) and R. Loncraine (1995)

Richard, before becoming the Duke of Gloucester and later a king, distinguished himself in the Wars of the Roses. His first appearance, in 5.1 of the second part of *Henry VI*, portrays him as very eager to show his support of the York claim, promising to back words with weapons. Given the fact that the subject-matter of the play is historical, the audience knows what this conflict will lead to. It is here, therefore, that the audience are confronted with their first dilemma. How to understand Richard's bold claim? Is his readiness to resort to weapons to be interpreted in line with the dominant propaganda, i.e. as evidence in favour of his violent nature? Or is it, alternatively, to be understood as a mark of chivalry, a system which relied heavily on the integrity of words, with oath- and vow-breaking resulting in dishonour (Meron 141-2)? Richard's defence of Warwick, whom he praises for his bear-like ferocity, earns him an insult, the all too familiar accusation that his soul is as crooked as his body. There is, of course, a plethora of evidence to point to this being the case, but one would expect it to be so as the plays were designed to fit what some call the Tudor myth (Tillyard 9, 29), i.e., justifying the usurpation of the crown by Henry VII and praising the reigning monarchy. However, there are also points in the plays which seem to imply that there is more to Richard than a simple upcycling of the medieval character of the Vice. Part three of *Henry VI* further complicates the reading of Richard's character, by drawing attention at the very beginning to his skill in interpreting and, in so doing, manipulating law, when he attempts to prove to his father that his oath to King Henry (that he will let him reign and only take the crown after the king dies) is null. He again displays his apparent bloodlust in the same scene

(1.2), saying he will not rest until his white Yorkist rose is crimsoned with Henry's blood. This scene once again poses an interpretative problem – is this an inborn bloodthirst, or simply a chivalric avowal to fight for the Yorkist cause to the very last? Up until this point in the narrative, as presented by Shakespeare, Richard is not yet given a soliloquy. The ambiguity of his character holds (or rather, an effort should be made to recognize that the ambiguity exists) until 3.2, when he first expresses his own ambition to reign. He curses Edward and wishes the king infertile, so that the crown would find its way to him quicker. However, he is also aware of Clarence, Henry, Henry's son, and all of their potential progeny standing in his way. He very quickly realises that his wishes are futile, and settles on finding his heaven in union with a woman. Before he even allows himself to fantasize, Richard voices the impossibility of achieving this, with twenty crowns seeming more likely than a woman's affection. The rest of the soliloquy is the point at which the audience gets a break-down of his motivation. Achieving twenty crowns is perceived as more realistic because love abandoned him while he was still in the womb. However, the dualistic reading continues, because Richard uses the verb 'forswear', which could not only be interpreted as 'abandon' and 'reject', but also as 'perjure', i.e. 'swear falsely'. In other words, the two meanings conflate with the effect of 'abandon by perjuring'. He accuses love of bribing nature to disfigure him, with the monetary imagery continuing from 'crowns' and potentially conflating in his mind the ideas of the English throne and love (or at the very least hinting at a complex relationship between the two), and finally settles on working towards achieving the heavenly crown, however thorny the way to it be.

This is also a part of the text that Olivier borrows heavily from in his adaptation (almost half of that soliloquy is added), and integrates it into what is originally Richard's opening soliloquy in Shakespeare's *Richard III*. It is, however, important to note that the first half of the soliloquy, where Richard is seen to struggle, is cut without even being alluded to. In addition, as opposed to the episodes in the last part of *Henry VI*, his military skill is downplayed, by having Richard refer to Edward as 'this sun of York' (*Richard III*, 1.1.2). York's three sons compared themselves to three suns after hearing about their father's murder, and so the 'sun of York' could technically be any one of them, though it primarily seems to be understood to imply Edward. However, Richard is *solus* at this point (the very

beginning of Shakespeare's *Richard III*), so it could be that he means himself. When one takes into the account his many distinguished feats on the field of battle during the Wars of the Roses, the part he took in the murder of Edward (king Henry VI's son), and especially his murder of king Henry himself, this reading is not implausible. His murder of the previous monarch, coming at the very end of the civil war or in other words 'the winter of our discontent' (*RIII* 1.1.1), is the act that turns that winter into summer. With the description of the aftermath of the civil war, Richard's marginalisation in this case seems to carry more weight.

However, in Olivier's 1955 adaptation there is nothing to suggest that Richard (played by Olivier) contributed in any way in the military conflict, or, consequently, to the ascension of Edward to the throne of England. His own ambitions, however, are hinted at several times during the opening sequence. His figure putting on his coronet obscures Edward's coronation, while the throne room is decorated with drapery in the same colour as Richard's clothes – blue and maroon, with elements of black. From the very beginning of the film, therefore, Richard is firmly established (both visually and verbally) as a villain, angry at the world because he was born deformed. There is no space left in the interpretation for any moral grey area, no hint at the fact that an energetic man who distinguished himself in war is now forced by society into the margin and expected to come to terms with passivity and exclusion due to a perceived failing of his moral/spiritual make-up. In Shakespeare's play Richard himself gives the most powerful evidence in favour of this as he says:

And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover

To entertain these fair well-spoken days,

*I am determined to prove a villain,*

And hate the idle pleasures of these days. (*RIII* 1.1.28-31; emphasis added)

These lines were likewise cut from Olivier's Richard's first soliloquy, portraying him as a morally corrupt manipulator, as opposed to a marginalised man who *decides* to behave in a certain way. The two interpretations stand in contrast as the former essentially equates Richard with the figure of Vice and to an extent robs him of his agency (insofar as it presupposes that he simply behaves in accordance with



the inborn evil impulses), while the latter restores that agency by focusing the problem on the element of conscious decision on Richard's part to behave in a certain manner (at the same time drawing attention to the fact that such behaviour is not in his nature, as is hinted at in the episodes from the Wars of the Roses mentioned above). In line with Tudor propaganda, Olivier gives his audience a Richard shaped by love's abandonment which consequently resulted in immorality, rather than a character suffering because he tried to convince people otherwise, but was unable to dismantle the reigning stigma of bodily disfigurement.

Richard Loncraine's 1995 adaptation does visualise Richard's (played by Ian McKellen) involvement in the civil war, but it very much follows in Olivier's footsteps. In a surprise attack on king Henry's headquarters at Tewkesbury, Richard kills not only the king, but also Edward, singlehandedly. Working almost like a hitman, in the general chaos of the attack he specifically looks for the king and his son, and eliminates them. The film's title, 'RICHARD III,' links Richard to murder, with the name being spelled out to the accompaniment of gun shots, one for each letter. This is then followed by alternating shots of Richard and the new royal family getting ready for that night's celebrations. In this sequence Richard is unquestionably associated with a tyrannical impulse through the usage of military power, his uniform contrasting sharply with civilian attire, with the colour-scheme (olive green with black and red elements) possibly already hinting at Nazism. As opposed to Stanley and Richmond, who are wearing the appropriate mess dress uniform, Richard can be seen wearing his service dress uniform. His buttoned-up jacket and high and stiff collar make him stand out in the crowd, a dot of camouflage green moving in a sea of black and white, almost ominously personifying latent aggression and oppression. A series of shots from the banquet is interrupted unexpectedly with a low-angle shot of a group of men, chief among them Ratcliffe, Richard's right-hand man. Even with St. Pancras Hotel towering over them, the men (and especially Ratcliffe in his uniform) next to the cars are the dominant figures in the shot. The uniform therefore visually both infiltrates the civilian space, and is simultaneously superimposed on it, framing and containing it, waiting on the edges of it, with the perspective of the shot hinting at the threat of oppression and the scope of it, and the slight Dutch angle visually creating a sense of imbalance. The general feeling is one of claustrophobia. Picking up from

the dark exterior, the jovial and well-lit interior is then also arrested by Richard, as Clarence is seen to be forcibly escorted out of the hall, and the dancing stops. Cutting through the dancers' applause, a metallic squealing is heard, almost as a warning. Richard taps the microphone, and proceeds to give his speech. He too gives all the credit for stopping the 'winter of our discontent' to Edward. As Richard describes the current, post-war state of affairs, the camera slowly zooms in to his mouth, which seems to twitch with disgust as he says 'Grim-visaged war hath smoothed his wrinkled front. And now, instead of mounting barbed steeds to fright the souls of fearful adversaries, he' (00:10:24-00:10:35), and the scene abruptly changes. We are transported to the gents, and hear Richard thinking out loud as he goes on to comment (seemingly uninterrupted) on his physicality, excluding him from the general pursuit of merriment. Loncraine borrows from the third part of *Henry VI* as well, including only three lines, which refer to Richard's prowess as an actor. It is at this point that Richard notices the camera, and turns to speak to it, stating his intention very clearly: 'And therefore, since I cannot prove to be a lover, I am determined to prove a villain, and hate the idle pleasures of these days' (00:11:53-00:12:03). Once again, without including any of the conflicting thoughts plaguing Richard, or addressing the potential dual reading of his deformity (what is versus what is seen to be), the portrayal of the character is one of an inherently corrupt tyrannical Machiavel.

The spreading of Richard's influence is visualised in both films with both colour and clothes. In Olivier, Richard's combination of maroon, blue, and black is later mirrored by Buckingham and Catesby, made especially obvious when the three of them are seen together at the time of king Edward's death. After Edward's death, Richard can be seen wearing a combination of black and red. As he escorts the young Prince, the future king, to London, the shot of their arrival is full of shades of faded maroon and related brown tones, light blue, black, and vibrant red. As the Prince prepares to enter the throne room, Richard positions himself above and behind the two priests, his black doublet and boots breaking up the red. The ratio of black and red changes as the film progresses, with Richard haunting the council scene wearing almost entirely black, as he does later when the citizens of London come to beg him to accept the crown. Buckingham and Catesby are still wearing the combination of maroon, blue, and black, which Richard reverts back to once he ascends the throne. Tyrell, introduced after Buckingham refuses to kill

the princes, is shown wearing a combination of black and red. Once the princes are dead, Richard adopts a black doublet once again, broken up by elements of red and brown. The colours associated with Richard are propagated throughout the film, making it seem as though he is omnipresent, asserting his control over the events.

Possibly as an homage to Olivier, Loncraine's Richard is wearing a combination of light blue pyjamas with red details under a burgundy robe trimmed with black as he sits at breakfast, and burns the pardon the viewers just saw signed, intended to liberate Clarence. In Loncraine, the immediate threat of this control is visualised in the growing numbers of uniformed men. For example, after Edward attempts to reassure the queen that she is safe from Richard, the scene cuts to a section of marching soldiers, saluting Richard as he passes by. This is also the point at which Tyrell is introduced, shortly to become his right-hand man, intimidated by the fact that Tyrell is feeding a boar, Richard's emblem. The scene of their introduction is one which is used to both show Richard's cruelty and corruption (and possibly self-hate) as he pelts the boar with half an apple, as well as to relate Tyrell to the growing danger and oppression of Richard's power. Moreover, throughout the film, Richard's moral corruption is emphasized by coupling the idea of murder with sweets and chocolates placed in the same shot, like a bowl of vibrant-coloured candy sitting on the table as Richard listens to upbeat jazzy music while looking at photographs of Hastings' hanging, or the box of chocolates he eats while watching his own coronation and which he later offers Tyrell as he asks him to murder the princes. After the princes are safely locked up in the Tower, the soldiers' uniforms change dramatically, which becomes apparent at the meeting which was to settle the date of prince Edward's coronation. The meeting takes place in Richard's headquarters, designed in the art deco style, its geometrical regularity of greyish-white stone and dark metal broken up by armed men wearing black uniforms. With the guards being strongly reminiscent of the Nazi SS, Tyrell's uniform might hint at his purpose. Clearly visible on his collar is the white boar emblem, possibly intended to draw a parallel with the SS Death's Head Units, given the fact that Tyrell is an instrument with which Richard 'cleanses' his immediate environment, first by having him kill Clarence, then Buckingham, and finally the princes in the Tower (which itself is

somewhat reminiscent of concentration camps, as the viewers' attention is drawn to the chain link fence, through which the characters communicate).

The culmination of Richard's oppression is portrayed at a rally, strongly reminiscent of those held at Nuremberg, with Richard climbing onto a podium, the spotlight on him. As the camera zooms out, the shot is invaded by uniformed men clapping as a flag unfurls behind them, depicting a boar's head on a white circle, suspended in red. The next shot is dominated by banners in the same style, as we see a multitude waving red flags and shouting Richard's name. Although he appears content, his smile betrays a flicker of unease. Other than being the visual culmination of Richard's power, the rally could likewise be interpreted as an intimation of Richard's impending demise. Mirroring the banquet from the beginning of the film, the interior setting of the rally not only heightens the sense of claustrophobia, but also introduces the idea of containment. It is in this form that Loncraine retains Richard's military prowess. Although there are instances in the film where the viewers can see that Richard is uncertain and preoccupied, the fact that he is from the very beginning portrayed as a ruthless killer makes it impossible to sympathize with him. Without his resentment being accorded enough space to be completely intelligible to the viewer, his moments of frailty are difficult to decipher. Has he been putting on a show all this time, only to drop his guard now and show his face to the viewers? Should the viewer feel pity, or resentment and disgust, at such a presumption of intimacy? His desire for power has a violent and militant character from the very beginning, as opposed to Olivier's Richard, who apparently simply relies on manipulation without overt application of physical force.

Taking their cue from Shakespeare's play, both Olivier and Loncraine have their Richard drink wine on the eve of Bosworth. Olivier's expressly asks for it, saying he 'ha[s] not that alacrity of spirit nor cheer of mind that [he] was wont to have' (02:16:13-02:16:17). The phrasing itself might simply be taken to mean that Richard is somewhat subdued because he is worried about the outcome of the impending battle, but it could also hint at something rather more complex. The battle of Bosworth is the first time after killing Henry VI that Richard himself is faced and tasked with killing. Meeting Richmond in battle is something he cannot delegate to others. There is another instance in Shakespeare where a soldier asks for wine, but only after a battle, and that is Caius Martius after he storms Corioli and helps

his general defeat the Volsces shortly after that. There, much like here with Richard, the wine is supposed to help the spirits spread throughout the body thus returning to their normal state, after fear has made them rush to the heart in a sort of an early modern understanding of a bodily defence mechanism (Sugg 20).

Although it is not overtly stated that Richard is afraid of battle specifically because of his previous experiences of it, there is room for such an interpretation when one considers the expression 'wont to have'. Does it serve to distinguish his present state from the confidence he has been displaying throughout the play/film, or is it intended to refer to a change of state from his usual optimism in the face of battle? Olivier's adaptation seems to imply the former, creating a sense that Richard begins to feel his end is near, without even attempting to explore the potential fear of battle. Richard's wife Anne mentions his nightmares, and although they are reported and the audience do not hear what he mumbles in his sleep, if his crying out for another horse and a need to bind up his wounds in the subsequent dream scene with the 'ghosts' are anything to go on, one can suppose that they are of war. Clarence also comments on how he himself was left scarred by serving the Yorkist cause (*RIII* 1.4.63-65). By completely eliminating that interpretation, Olivier disregards an important aspect of Richard's character.

The same is true of Loncraine, who already supplies Richard with the wine, without drawing much attention to the need for it. His dream of ghosts is turned into pangs of conscience, as lines already used in the film can be heard over a shot of Richard tossing and turning in his bed. One of the final nails in the coffin of Richard's character is his shooting Tyrell in the head as Tyrell tries to persuade him to escape. This move decisively portrays him as ruthless and volatile, a cold-blooded killer, as has been continually stressed throughout the film by the usage of Nazi imagery, and is finally reiterated in a shot set during the battle, when Richard tries to outrun Richmond. In a monochrome shot, with a strip of white light squeezed between two oppressive black walls, Richard can be seen running towards the audience, away from the light.

In Olivier's adaptation, Richard doesn't dream. His eyes are open as he sees the apparitions, and his calling out for a horse and binding up of wounds seems to be intended to be interpreted as a vision, presaging the impending battle. An absence of the military element as well as any hint at its importance

for Richard's character almost sets one up to expect Richard's defeat, as it makes it seem as though the military context is something foreign to him, as competent as he might appear in organizing his troops. His men follow him because they must, not because he looks confident, and he stays on the side-lines until he absolutely must get involved, i.e. only after Stanley is revealed to be Richmond's ally, at which point he charges directly at Richmond.

Olivier's and Loncraine's portrayals of Richard seem to be in line with the dominant critical analyses of that character. In his introduction to the Oxford edition of the play John Jowett says the following: 'Richard himself draws attention to his physical shape at the very outset, offering it as a cause rather than a symptom' (35). He is perceived (onstage) as one that 'comes from hell to unleash a plague of suffering. His body is the merest hint of an appalling origin' (35) (it is important to note that Jowett gives Margaret's lines from the fourth act as an example, i.e., he cites a source which is not disinterested and/or objective). Further evidence that Richard's deformity is perceived as prophetic even offstage are claims such as 'there is no obvious psychological reasoning for Richard III's malice' (Marshall 140). This is reminiscent of S. T. Coleridge's 'motiveless malignity' attached to Iago, and seems to us to be merely another iteration of the arguments quoted above, equating his physical deformity and his morality.

As opposed to this approach, there is the investigation of the stigma of deformity. However, when discussing stigma in the context of *The Tempest*, Wilson says the following: 'In contrast to Shakespearean characters like Richard III and Falstaff, whose physical abnormalities are configured with impairment and disease, Caliban's deformity is more purely a problem of the social construction of corporeal aesthetics' (148). In my view, what Wilson applies to Caliban is also applicable to Richard. He is impaired, but clearly not to the point where this might present significant difficulties in everyday life, which is supported by the fact that he distinguishes himself on the battlefield in the Wars of the Roses. Peacetime forces him into passivity and watching from the sidelines, as he himself points out in 'But I that am not shaped for sportive tricks / Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass, / [...] Have no delight to pass away the time' (*RIII* 1.1.14-25). In other words, the issue with Richard is not that his physical deformity is 'prophetic,' i.e. that he is inherently immoral because born deformed (it might be used as a literary device, a symbol, marking his future actions as evil, but it is not presented or discussed

as such in the above quotes), but rather the stigma of his deformity. It is the oppression of marginalisation caused by the stigma which prompts him to act out. That is precisely why the element of conscious decision on Richard's part to act in a way that will justify the other characters' perception is important to take into account.

Even though Olivier's and Loncraine's adaptations borrow from the *Henry VI* plays, they seem to simplify Richard's character. The military element is in Olivier practically completely ignored, and in Loncraine only mobilized to add to the tyrannical element of Richard's character, by adding substance and weight to his manipulation via the notion of physical threat. Likewise, by ignoring parts of the text which display Richard's wavering and show him conflicted, both adaptations tend to ignore the awareness Richard has both of his body and of the ways his community's perception of his disfigurement influences his own personal narrative.

## 2.2 Henry V in the Adaptations by L. Olivier (1944) and K. Branagh (1989)

The borrowings from the two parts of *Henry IV* are in both adaptations confined to scenes from prince Harry's time in Eastcheap and are primarily used to emphasize the (emotional) sacrifice he has to make when he ascends the throne. Both also gloss over parts of the text crucial in the development of Harry's character. The first one of those is Harry's soliloquy in 1.2 of the first part of *Henry IV*, where he as good as says that he plans on pretending when in the company of Falstaff, Poins, and the rest, as long as it serves him: 'I know you all, and will awhile uphold / The unyoked humor of your idleness. / . . . when this loose behaviour I throw off / . . . By how much better than my word I am, / By so much shall I falsify men's hopes' (*IHIV*, 1.2.183-199). The whole point of Henry's yobbery and raucousness is to fool everybody into thinking less of him so that he may show his real face when that is required, appearing by contrast more virtuous. His tactics prove to be extremely helpful, as becomes apparent in his later campaign into France. This element of calculation is ignored in both adaptations, as is one of the episodes which sheds a lot more light on his motives for deciding to invade France. Just before Henry IV's death in *Part 2, Henry IV*, the dying monarch advises his son on how to keep a hold on his throne (4.5). By referencing the methods by which he deposed Richard II, Henry IV tells his son to vent the nobility's passions abroad in order to prevent further civil strife and a potential loss of the crown: '. . .

Therefore, my Harry, / Be it thy course to busy giddy minds / With foreign quarrels; that action hence borne out / May waste the memory of the former days' (*2HIV*, 4.5.209-215). Sensing the pressure coming from both the clergy and the noblemen in 1.2 of *Henry V*, the newly crowned king settles on invading France.

Olivier's 1944 adaptation, however, creates a different impression. The Archbishop laying out the facts stutters and fumbles looking for documents to present as evidence. At one point even Henry bends down to pick up a piece of parchment, hands it to the Archbishop, looking politely interested. The inherent comedy of a convoluted explanation being characterized as 'as clear as is the summer's sun' (*HV* 1.2.86) is turned into a farce, instead of being presented as evidence of factual manipulation and the gravity that it has in the context of (military) politics.

The pressure that the king is under is more obvious in Kenneth Branagh's 1989 adaptation, where the Archbishop predominantly speaks to the noblemen, rather than Henry. A look the Archbishop shares with Exeter, whereby Exeter directs him to turn to the king, seems to imply a banding together of the clergy and (at least a part of) the nobility, creating a sense that the king cannot see or is powerless to stop what is happening under his very nose. Instead of using the scene to characterize Henry as an astute ruler, capable of gauging the mood of his nobles and acting accordingly (which seems to be the underlying impression in the play), this adaptation presents him as inexperienced, controlled by his advisors rather than being the one who controls and directs without seeming to. The extradiegetic music heightens the sense of pressure as the Archbishop and the noblemen gang up on Henry, their verbal arguments coupled with their physical presence, squeezing Henry to the very right of the shot. The next shot shows Henry between the two priests, the Archbishop's profile practically hissing in his ear, only getting a reaction from the king at the mention of money. As the French messenger is summoned, the nobles resume their seats and the clergymen stand either side of Henry. The loudness and activity of the noblemen and the Archbishop jars uncomfortably with the quiet whispers and the passivity of the king, so much so that he seems out-played and cornered, and therefore weak. In the aftermath of this exchange, Henry's reaction to the Dauphin's tennis balls likewise seems somewhat unexpected. Moving from an almost (by this point in the film) irritating whisper to somewhat more intelligible speech, Henry rises



from the throne and confronts the messenger. As he does so Exeter looks at him in a way that is difficult to interpret. It is almost as if he is saying 'I knew you had it in you', although given the council scene just witnessed one would be forgiven for thinking that Exeter is simply pleased that everything is going his way. Henry's determination to invade France in this adaptation almost seems to diminish his character, as opposed to being a calculated move to prevent dissension in England.

Once in France, the English military threat is not accentuated in Olivier's version. The first scene in France is set at Court, and Exeter's embassy is clearly simply a diplomatic exchange. The Chorus then shifts the viewers' attention to Harfleur, inviting them to '[w]ork, work [their] thoughts, and therein see a siege' (00:43:55-00:44:01) as a shot of rough sea is superimposed over a shot of an army (that has clearly landed only recently) creating a bottleneck on their way through the craggy landscape, with no fortified building in sight. The next shot attempts to follow the Chorus as it narrates: 'Behold the ordnance of their carriages, with fatal mouths gaping on girded Harfleur' (00:44:02-00:44:07) as a group of men drag a cannon onto the shore, pointing it to what is presumably Harfleur, far away in the depth of the shot. Henry and his army then storm the shot, apparently beaten back (still nowhere near a town that is supposed to be under siege), and the king proceeds to rouse his men, delivering the 'Once more unto the breach' monologue. The stillness and absence of any discernible danger clashes unfavourably with the scene's set-up. The viewers are told to expect a siege, however that is never shown. Henry delivers his speech, apparently at leisure, as the camera zooms out and looks down on the scene. The only part of the siege that is shown is a shot of a cannon being fired, blasting a section of a wall. The British captains bickering among themselves are also set away from the battle. The battle is always fought off-screen, there rather than here, only obliquely hinted at visually. Instead of hearing Henry threaten the city with atrocities, as he does in Shakespeare, Olivier has him rather gentlemanly extend his sword and say he will not tolerate another parley.

Branagh's adaptation emphasizes danger and physical threat even before his Henry sets off to France, by showing him deal with traitors that conspired to kill him at Southampton (a scene which Olivier cut). This is the first time Henry shows he is more than capable of decisive action. However, it could be argued that this episode also weakens the integrity of his character. His anger seems to spring

from Scroop betraying their relationship, rather than it reflecting and emphasizing his political insecurity. The scene focusing on sentimental personal loss, presumably emphasized in order to make Henry more human, inevitably draws attention away from the complexity of Henry's political position. The threat the English invasion poses is visualised in the guise of the Duke of Exeter. With the French council ending on a fearful note, Exeter entering the hall in full armour is a visualisation of the threat. As Exeter leaves the hall, a shot of king Charles' worried and tired face is overlaid by the Chorus' voice, shifting attention to the destruction. The screen goes blank, and the viewers are transported to Harfleur with a bang. The walls of the city breached, rubble lying on the ground, the scene almost entirely backlit by the fires in the city so that little can be seen on this side of the wall but the general commotion of battle.

With the English army seen retreating, Henry comes riding into the shot, his horse threatening to throw him off. As opposed to the mass of bodies moving away from the walls, toppling over one another, the silhouette of Henry with his sword pointing upwards as he tries to stay in the saddle looks impressive in its chiaroscuro drama. His 'Once more' is followed by an explosion from within the city walls, forcing him to ride away from the breach. As he prevents his troops from retreating any further, he delivers the rest of the speech, looking his soldiers directly in the eye. The camera gives nearly as much time to the English soldiers as it does Henry, with some of them obviously eager to continue, and others reluctant. As an explosion is heard from the city and the men collectively flinch, Henry appeals to their heritage, which obviously works as the 'good yeoman' draws his sword, impatient to answer Henry's call. The dramatic succession of close-ups of Henry and shots of the soldiers as they become almost frenzied with expectation works to show a growing bond between the king and his men, to the point where they actually do shout 'God for Harry, England, and Saint George!' (00:45:18-00:45:25) when he asks them to, and proceed to storm Harfleur (with Fluellen encouraging the three who find themselves slightly lacking in mettle). Here the captains debate in the trenches, the constant explosions in the background never allowing the viewer to forget where they are. The general atmosphere is not one of light(ness), gallantry, idyll, and glamour, but rather of oppression, danger, exertion and filth. As his men fall back one more time, Henry makes one last attempt at capturing the city. In a part of the text Olivier choses to cut, Branagh has Henry ride to the foot of the battlements, the camera looking down

on him as his dark figure is isolated amidst the moonlit mud and haze, and in a brave bluff threaten the governor of Harfleur. Although the viewers see the close-ups of Henry, his soldiers, and the governor, the implication of the long shots is that the groups themselves cannot see one another's reactions. The viewers are, therefore, aware of the fact that Henry's threats are empty. This is a considerable step away from the siege as shown in Shakespeare. Much more savage in its full version, the speech (and apparent readiness to fulfil the threats made) need not imply anything about Henry's character. According to the laws of chivalry, should a besieged town refuse to surrender, when it is ultimately taken all of its citizens are exempt from the protection chivalric norms would have accorded them had they surrendered (Meron 72). Henry must adhere to the norms if his campaign is to retain the status of a just one, and he is to maintain his status of an honourable king. In the event that his invasion of France proves to be unjust, France could demand reparations (28), which England could hardly afford to pay. Additionally, Henry could also be trying to shorten his list of sins, aware of the fact that in the case of an unjust war all the innocent lives lost and all the sins committed are on the king's own head (29). Although Olivier cuts Bardolph's execution, Branagh uses it to emphasize the necessity of adhering to chivalric law by showing Bardolph dying, shots of his death throes as he hangs interspersed with close-ups of Henry crying (again, in an attempt to make him more relatable, while in Shakespeare Henry need not be understood to have a significant emotional connection to those low-born men). The English then march on, in the shadow of Bardolph's hanging, which is when the Chorus enters the shot and starts shifting attention to Agincourt, the importance of which is made obvious by the fact that the preparations and the battle comprise nearly half of Branagh's adaptation.

In the play, Henry has only two soliloquies, both on the eve of the battle of Agincourt. In the first soliloquy it is as though he is waging a mental war with the concept of ceremony, as he asks 'And what art thou, thou idol ceremony?' (*HV* 4.1.228) and then proceeds to list its shortcomings. In the second one he speaks directly to God, asking him to steel his soldiers' hearts, and not to hold his father's usurpation against him now, at this decisive time, aware that he cannot undo what his father has done, but promising to do more to balance it out. These two soliloquies show him to be conscious of his responsibilities and the actions they require him to take. He prioritises the stability of the throne, which

circles back to his reasons behind embarking on the French campaign – preventing dissension at home. Seeing as how both directors chose not to draw attention to this, the first soliloquy in both films loses much of its weight, although Olivier manages to retain a degree of isolation and apartness by presenting it as an internal monologue. Branagh is much more successful with the second soliloquy, which Olivier cuts to merely two and a half lines (out of the seventeen). By not cutting the second soliloquy and retaining the reference to Henry IV's usurpation, Branagh again adds the element of political and spiritual pressure on Henry.

Henry's rousing speech before the battle is another substantial intervention into the text of the play. In Olivier's adaptation Henry starts the speech surrounded by the noblemen, but as he moves through the English camp, the rest of his army congregate around him. As he reaches the part where he lists some of the English noblemen present, he climbs up a cart, and the camera starts to zoom out when he says 'This story shall the good man teach his son' (01:28:27-01:28:30), capturing the gathered multitude. Branagh does the same. In the play, Henry enters the scene after the Dukes and Earls with their hosts (*HV* 4.3.0.1-3), not a commoner in sight. The inclusion is emphasized at two points in Branagh, as Henry ascends two carts the better to see and be seen, firstly after he says 'He that outlives this day' (01:31:55-01:31:58), and secondly when he speaks of the memory being alive in all veterans who get to old age, in spite of many other memories fading. With the part of the speech in which Henry portrays himself as honour-hungry cut (from Olivier's adaptation as well), and the quick exchange of shots of Henry and his troops as he says 'And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by from this day to the ending of the world but we in it shall be remembered. We few, we happy few, we band of brothers' (01:32:52-01:33:13), Branagh's Henry is portrayed as much more of a popular king than he is in Shakespeare. Olivier, in comparison, even though he also includes low-born soldiers in that scene, still manages to keep Henry aloof, an orator par excellence, but always distanced.

The battle itself is in Olivier staged with the greatest degree of realism, as it is obviously played out on location, rather than a film stage with a painted backdrop (as all of the previous scenes since Southampton were and all the following ones will be). However, the juxtaposition of the French and English camps is jarring, with the French portrayed as overly-confident and ludicrous, and the English

as solemn and cautious. While this underlines the French military incompetence, it simultaneously (at least fleetingly) lessens the sense of immediate threat. And even though the shots of battle, with close-ups of both men and beast, do show the chaos of battle, the colourful banners and sunny weather take away from the gravitas of the skirmish, adding to the general feel of ritualised, glossy chivalry by invoking images of jousting tournaments (i.e. the show of chivalry). Olivier also includes the sacking of the English camp, making this the cause of his anger, causing him to storm off and engage the Constable. Only then does he demand of the French horsemen looking on from a hilltop to leave the field of battle. These events pretty much conclude the battle of Agincourt. In Shakespeare, however, Henry orders the killing of all French prisoners after he hears an alarum which he interprets as a French counterattack: 'But hark, what new alarum is this same? / The French have reinforced their scattered men. / Then every soldier kill his prisoners. / Give this word through.' (*HV*, 4.7.35-38).

Branagh, however, takes a more naturalistic approach. The dirt, rain and mud that the English have had to contend with since their arrival to France are present in this battle as well. The colour scheme is oppressing, and the frequent use of slow motion along with the low volume of intradiegetic sound (the very beginning of the battle is portrayed with only intradiegetic sound, but as it progresses extradiegetic music is introduced) serve to convey the confusion of battle, especially effectively when coupled with close-ups of men falling one over another into the mud or struggling to kill or avoid being killed. The French are portrayed as equally cautious and tense before the battle, making for a more level field, and maintaining suspense. In the general chaos of the battle, Pistol and Nym can be seen robbing the dead bodies, which also contributes to the objectivity of the portrayal. In Branagh's adaptations, emphasis is made repeatedly on the muck and grime of military conflict. Shots of York surrounded and killed by the French are followed immediately by shots of Pistol crying and holding Nym, who was killed while robbing a body. The attention is then directed at the French nobles, gathered round the Constable, who gradually rally and rejoin the fray after the Constable's death, goaded on by the prospect of eternal shame. Their raid on the English camp seemingly comes out of nowhere, and their killing of the boys angers Henry, however it is at this point that Montjoy enters the scene, the sounds of battle no longer heard. He comes to ask Henry to allow the burial of dead men, and in doing so informs him that

the English have won. Here, again, Henry does not order the killing of French prisoners, tipping the scales of morality to his favour.

A moment's comic relief with Fluellen is quickly overshadowed by Pistol's soliloquy in which he expounds on his plans to turn cutpurse on his return to England. This is yet another element in which Branagh shows the consequences of war, as Pistol is clearly suffering. In Olivier, this episode is conflated with Fluellen forcing Pistol to eat a leek, which again brings lightness, drastically changing the tone of Pistol's speech. Instead of emphasizing his loss and the complexity of his situation, it stays in line with the general feeling of light(ness) pervasive throughout the film, portraying him as a lovable rogue. The vibrant colours and pastel tones of France in Olivier work to distance the subject matter of the play considerably. War is portrayed as clean and gentlemanly, leaving no recognizable trace on the land, and Henry is first and foremost a monarch, very theatrical in his actions and orations, so much so that when he says 'take me. And take me, take a soldier. Take a soldier, take a king' (01:59:49-01:59:57) when he woos Catherine, one cannot help but feel that the order should be reversed. Branagh, on the other hand, is more successful in exploring the importance of the military experience for Henry's character. As opposed to Shakespeare's text, Branagh shows the development of Henry as a soldier. This makes his 'as I am a soldier' (00:48:48-00:48:50) at Harfleur seem somewhat premature, as this is his first battle. In Shakespeare, Henry already has experience, as he was one of the key figures at the battle of Shrewsbury at the end of the first part of *Henry IV*, killing Harry Hotspur. As these events are not evoked in Branagh's adaptation, some of the weight of that claim made at Harfleur is lost. The film, however, successfully manages to show Henry's growth as a soldier and general, which is especially clear in the alternation of close-ups of him and his men, used as device to signal their cohesion as an army.

That being said, both adaptations, through the cuts and additions that are made, give a Henry which is closer to the archetypal chivalric king.

### 3 This Palpable Device: Shaping (Historical) Narratives

Both plays entail an account of war. *Richard III* is set in the aftermath of the Wars of the Roses, and *Henry V* deals with the subject more broadly by presenting a military campaign from its inception

to its end. All four films are also closely related to war, whether by the context of their production (like the two Olivier adaptations), because they wish to explore the ambiguities of their material (like Branagh's *Henry V*), or because they overtly use visuals that tie them to the events which marked the history of the twentieth century (like Loncraine's *Richard III*).

The two earlier adaptations are especially interesting, as one can almost be termed a propaganda piece, while the other apparently cannot escape the shadow of World War Two. *Henry V* was commissioned by the Ministry of Information, who were determined to make 'significant changes' with the sole aim of 'articulat[ing] the propaganda values of the war period' (Aitken 262). This was achieved when 'one third of the original text was edited out,' notably the parts 'which explored ambivalences within the play's principal ideological motifs' (Aitken 262). The original script apparently contained a scene where Bardolph's execution was commented on as well as Henry's orders not to abuse the French (Jackson, 'Olivier's *Henry V*' 3), and was supposed to have shown 'mountains of dead' after Agincourt (4).

The film opens with a playbill, informing the audience that they are about to see the 'Chronicle History' of Henry, containing the battle of Agincourt. This will be played at the Globe theatre, today, on May 1, 1600. At the very beginning of the film the audience's 'now' shifts to the Elizabethan 'then', a very specific 'then', possibly to hint at the importance both of occasion and the story. The date itself implies an arrival of a more affluent period seeing as how it is traditionally related to various rituals intended to ensure crop fertility. Having established the narrative as one of special significance, and mirroring a time of oncoming affluence, the scene shifts to Southampton. The Elizabethan theatre is left behind, and a new kind of visuality takes over, one that lacks linear perspective. The organised chaos of the shots at Southampton also serves to signal a further retreat into the past, and the Elizabethan 'then' becomes the Medieval 'before then'. This decidedly pre-linear, flat visuality pervades the film, haunting it in the tableaux at the French Court, the immured turrets and houses at Harfleur, and the village apparently close to Harfleur which is the scene of captains' bickering and Pistol's shameful punishment (he is forced to eat a leek). The illusion holds so long as the camera does not get too close. Once the long shot becomes a medium shot or a medium close up, once the spatial relations are changed, the

illusion of wholeness crumbles. Tables tilted to the front, crooked walls, and misshapen windows are revealed as simply constituent parts of the illusion, manipulated into fitting into the ‘bigger picture’, but ultimately deformed versions of their real(istic) counterparts. If intended or interpreted as a commentary, this medieval visuality could well be a warning against a perception of history as a static entity, as well as fixating it as such.

The culmination of this medieval pageantry comes at Agincourt, which is also the conflation of all the temporal lines running through the film. It is simultaneously ‘before then’ because of its place in the narrative, ‘then’ due to being framed by Elizabethan theatre, and ‘now’ because most realistic. The battle is the only sequence shot on location, free of both oppressive and busy non-linearity, and a simulation of depth on painted backdrops. The audience can now see real men, fighting and dying against the backdrop of real(istic) sky, real(istic) hills and fields, and real(istic) forests.

Richard III has been vilified since the first half of 16<sup>th</sup> c., portrayed as an immoral Machiavel in Thomas More’s *History of King Richard the Thirde* (1513) and Polydore Vergil’s *Anglica Historia* (1534), and later cemented as such by Tudor chroniclers Holinshed and Hall (Aune 27). The Tudor ideology machine obviously did its work well, as the idea of Richard as an embodiment of evil certainly stuck. Between the two World Wars, *Richard III* was used to comment on the rise of fascism in continental Europe (34), with audiences managing ‘to find references to figures like Hitler’ even without there being any overt connection made in the production itself (43).

Olivier’s Richard evokes the long theatrical tradition by drawing the audience’s attention to the contributions made to the narrative by David Garrick and Colley Cibber (00:00:47-00:00:50). The action is set in Medieval England, but this time, although at times claustrophobic, linear perspective is maintained throughout. Tableaux are used again with the same effect, although not as copiously as in *Henry V*. All of this culminates in the battle of Bosworth. The battle is, once again, filmed on location. Along with giving the battle scope, the jarring naturalism of the landscape seems to evoke reality. In his adaptation, Olivier has Richard killed by a group of soldiers. In Shakespeare’s play he is killed onstage by Richmond, who had come from France to take the crown. In the film, Richmond’s significance is lessened significantly, making him a token figure. This mob battering and butchering Richard is



presumably meant to be understood as triumph of the common people over oppression and, by extension, tyranny. However, Olivier himself saw the role of Richard as apolitical and wanted to place him in 'a more distinctly historical context' (Aune 35).

#### 4. Conclusion

The many iterations and video adaptations of Shakespeare's plays have complicated the relationship between the source texts and the adaptations.

This thesis analysed Laurence Olivier's 1944 *Henry V* and 1955 *Richard III*, Kenneth Branagh's 1989 version of *Henry V*, and Richard Loncraine's *Richard III*, released in 1995. By exploring the differences between the source plays and the films, the paper focused on the treatment of ambiguities in the characterizations of the two titular characters. A secondary aim was to point to consistencies in the portrayal of those characters over time, and thereby draw attention to a dominant (and potentially entrenched) reading of those characters. Seeing as how chivalry plays an important role in the character development of the two protagonists, the military aspect of the plays was emphasized. By examining more closely how the adaptations treat chivalry and military conflict visually, the thesis tracks the changing perceptions of Shakespeare's *Henry V* and *Richard III*.

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## Abstract

There have been many iterations and adaptations of Shakespeare's plays over the centuries. The medium of video has further complicated the relationship between the source texts and the adaptations.

This master's thesis focuses on four film adaptations of Shakespeare's *Richard III* and *Henry V* – Laurence Olivier's 1944 *Henry V* and 1955 *Richard III*, Kenneth Branagh's 1989 version of *Henry V*, and Richard Loncraine's *Richard III*, released in 1995. The primary aim is to explore the differences between the source plays and the films, focusing on the treatment of ambiguities in the characterizations of the two titular characters. A secondary aim is to point to consistencies in the portrayal of those characters over time, thereby drawing attention to a dominant (and potentially entrenched) reading of those characters.

For that purpose, emphasis is placed on the military aspect of the plays, as chivalry plays an important role in the character development of the two protagonists. By examining more closely how the adaptations treat chivalry and military conflict visually, the thesis tracks the changing perceptions of Shakespeare's *Henry V* and *Richard III*.

Key Words: Shakespeare, *Richard III*, *Henry V*, adaptation, chivalry