Adaptation, Appropriation, Retroaction: Symbolic Interaction with *Henry V*

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This chapter approaches adaptation from a hermeneutic perspective, specifically from a post-structuralist hermeneutics of discourse informed by symbolic interactionism. The intertextual relationship between a cultural product (e.g. a play) and its screen adaptation(s) is analysed as a performative intervention on an existing discourse formation which includes both the original product or text and the discourses using it, originating it, deriving from it or surrounding it. This intervention amounts to both an interpretation and an appropriation of the original text. Like other intertextual modes (translations, critical readings), adaptations produce a retroactive transformation of the original, not in se, but rather as it is used and understood in specific contexts and instances of communicative interaction. These theoretical issues are explored with a special focus on Shakespearean film adaptations, more specifically on the major *Henry V* films, Laurence Olivier's (1944) and Kenneth Branagh's (1989), and their treatment of violence and war in a variety of contexts. A case for a 'resisting' approach to Shakespearean adaptation is put forward.

Shakespeare and Adaptation

As late as 1994, a collection of studies on Shakespeare on film began with one of the editors' statement that 'theatre remains the legitimate expressive medium for authentic Shakespeare' (Davies 1994: 1). Such certainty as to what is 'legitimate' and 'authentic' is clearly dissolving fast by now, and the study of both theatre productions and film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays is given a prominent place in some contemporary editions, as film and film criticism are nowadays major cultural discourses for the diffusion and 'recycling' of Shakespeare. Film adaptations effect both interpretations and appropriations of the plays, in order to channel (part of) their existing

cultural potential in a given direction, combining it in effect with other discourses.

There is no question, then, of privileging faithful over other types of adaptations as a matter of course. Instead, the adaptation should be seen as having, by definition, a different agenda from the original (aesthetically and ideologically speaking), even if a reuse of the original is included in that agenda. There results also—and here the image of the hermeneutic circle is relevant—a retroactive transformation of the original, not in se, but rather as it is used and understood in specific contexts and instances of communicative interaction—an aspect of significance more adequately studied from the standpoint of social semiotics, ideological critique and reception studies rather than through formalist or aesthetic analysis.

Like any other word, 'adaptation' serves to direct our attention to a common element present in the diverse phenomena it is applied to. In any given case, however, differences between the instances so named may prove to be as relevant or interesting as the similarities between them. That is, each filmic adaptation adapts an original text in a unique way, depending on the specific problems encountered, the solutions given to them, and the different priorities of the adapters besides their common interest in adapting a text. For one thing, an adaptation is an adaptation only if you consider it from the point of view of adaptation. Nothing can come of nothing, and any film script, however 'original', may be analysed from the point of view of the way it adapts previous stories, texts, discourses, myths. That is, me may thrust the issue of adaptation upon any film, although it must be admitted that some films become adaptations once we look at them twice, and some, of course, are born as adaptations.

Shakespeare films would seem to fall into the latter category. But then, what is a Shakespeare film? Consider the ever more diffuse Shakespearean status of Orson Welles's *Macbeth* (1948) and *Chimes at Midnight* (1966)*,* Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000), Ken Hughes's *Joe MacBeth* (1955) and William Reilly's *Men of Respect* (1990)*,* Jocelyn Moorhouse's *A Thousand Acres* (1997)*,* and Disney Productions' *The Lion King* (1994)*.* A working distinction may be adopted here: Shakespeare films identify themselves as adaptations of a previous text through a title which connects them with the source play—more or less tenuously, of course, and more indirectly through allusions to Shakespeare in the promotional material surrounding the

film (prominent references in *A Thousand Acres*; practically none in *The Lion King*).

An aesthetic classification of film adaptations of playtexts popularised by Jack Jorgens usefully sets up three reference points, the 'theatrical', 'realist' and 'filmic' modes (Jorgens 1977: 7-10), in what is arguably a continuum. That is, while Olivier's *Henry V* and *Richard III* (1955) are both 'theatrical', they are not theatrical in the same way, and they are certainly not theatrical in the same way as David Giles's *Henry IV* (1979) for the BBC Shakespeare. Besides, other dimensions of adaptation should be considered, beyond the aesthetic one. The ideological dimension of adaptation could also be assigned three benchmarks: consonant reading, critical re-reading and parodic deconstruction of the original, for instance. Here, as else-where, trying to establish neatly watertight categories, and trying to force any one film into any one of these categories, risks oversimplify-ing the issues (which is not to say that such oversimplifications may not be useful in a given pedagogical or exploratory context). Likewise, fidelity as a criterion to gauge the quality of an adaptation may well be 'misguided' (McFarlane 1996: 22), but still some notion of homology between original and film version must be preserved in order to make them comparable, much more so when the film is defined by its makers as an adaptation, and when it is studied as an adaptation.

Arguably, there is a specific quality in Shakespeare films as against other adaptations. They seem to belong in a choice select group of adaptations with very few equivalents among adaptations of other classical authors—as is to be expected, since Shakespeare is the leading canonical author in the Anglophone sphere, and as such has a unique position in the world's leading film industry. Adaptations of the greatest literary classics may give rise to a number of different films based on the same text. This is a distinct phenomenon, different from sequels (e.g. *Henry V* as distinct from *Rocky IV)*, and different as well from adaptations of popular myths (see e.g. the analysis of the Batman films in Brooker 1999: 196). Remakes are yet another phenomenon, insofar as their reference point is the earlier film, rather than the fiction or play on which that film was based. Remakes tend to focus on box-office spectaculars or, again, on popular fiction or myth. If in films of popular myths and in remakes the original text is usually bypassed, in the adaptations of classics it remains a crucial reference point—and usually a crux as well. This is especially so in the case of

adaptations of classical drama. Austen, Scott or Dickens adaptations are a comparatively minor phenomenon, and besides they are adaptations of novels, a medium which arguably has a less vitiated relationship to film than drama has. Adaptations of dramatic works start from a medium which, in the light of semiotic and linguistic parameters, is arguably closer to film than novels. Still, many critics have emphasised the different spatial and perspectival dynamics which may turn theatre into a 'false friend' for film, with the novel paradoxically allowing the filmmaker a greater scope in reinventing his or her own aesthetic strategy in filmic terms. A significant part of the text of a play can (should/might/had better not) be used directly in the film script, while most of the text of the novel is simply suppressed (as text) and recoded through mise-en-scène and acting. As is well known, thanks to their swift scenic movement Shakespeare's plays are to some extent 'cinematic' and avoid the stifling theatricality of many films based on 'regular' plays confined by the three dramatic unities.[1] Still, the challenge of successfully transposing Shakespeare's speech has often been noted as a major stumbling block for actors and directors alike.[2] Different traditions of mise-en-scène and acting styles in drama and film usually add to the difficulty of successfully adapting drama to the screen.

The major Shakespeare plays have given rise to a number of variant films, with the earlier versions serving as the 'theatrical' reference point which allows later versions to explore more 'realistic'

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[1] On Shakespeare's 'cinematic' qualities, see Ball (1968: 38) and McDonald (1980). They are emphasised by Olivier—Shakespeare 'in a way "wrote for the films"' (Olivier 1984: v). For Kracauer, 'Shakespearean plays … are relatively transparent to unstaged nature, introducing characters and situations which might as well be dispensed with in a strictly compositional interest; and these seeming diversions and excursions evoke, somehow, life in the raw—its random events, its endless combinations' (1997: 219). This would seem to make Shakespeare in a way already cinematic, not theatrical, with his plays finding a most adequate expression in the cinematic medium—or in the TV medium (Coursen 1984, quoted in Davies 1994: 12). Lehmann (2002: 58-9 *passim*) puts forward a far-fetched and well-argued claim to make Shakespeare a cinematic auteur *avant la lettre*—or *avant la caméra,* rather.
[2] Walker (1953: 470-1), quoted in Jorgens (1977: 9): 'the poetic drama does not thrive on photographic realism ... [which] has the effect of making the poetry sound unnatural and self-conscious'. Davies (1988: 5-25) stresses the very different theatrical and filmic approaches to the treatment of space, a serious obstacle to successful adaptation.

or 'filmic' solutions, as well as more critical or deconstructive readings of the play, once the 'straight' (or conventional) one has been appropriated by a previous film. For instance, Franco Zeffirelli's realist *Romeo and Juliet* (1968) both exploits and transcends George Cukor's more theatrical version (1936), and it exhausts the ground in such a way that a major *Romeo and Juliet* after it—e.g. Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996)—needs to be more transgressive both aesthetically and ideologically in order to make its mark. The adaptive moves—in setting, costume, present-day reference, stylisation and intermediality—of Luhrmann's film are therefore far more daring.[3] 'Belated' adaptations, while not necessarily anxiety-ridden, tend to present themselves more explicitly as 'a reading of the text' rather than as 'the text, adapted to the medium of film'.

The existence of previous film versions thus produces a retroactive effect, inviting comparison not just with the original but with previous adaptations as well. According to Russell Jackson (2001: 145), a new Shakespeare film, being an adaptation of Shakespeare's text, is not understood to be a 'remake' of a previous film of the same play. Still, for Imelda Whelehan, it is a 'commonplace observation that subsequent adaptations often refer to earlier versions (either critically or as homage) as much as they "return" to the original' (1999: 14). Thus, Branagh's *Henry V* (1989) measures itself against Olivier's *Henry V* (1944) as much as Branagh against Olivier himself, as noted by several critics (e.g. Buhler 2002: 107ff; Kliman 1989). Actually there is not an either/or dynamics at work between adaptation and remake, here or elsewhere. Shakespeare adaptations have multiple intertextual dimensions, connecting them—unlike most adaptations, or remakes—to the original text, to previous films of the same play, to stage productions—which in turn have an intertextual history of their own—and to other discourse formations which appropriate 'Shakespeare' (academic criticism, popular culture, nationalist propaganda, and so on).

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[3] More daring approaches than mere 'contemporaneity' are thinkable, and they are visible in Luhrmann's film. They are more prominent in Julie Taymor's *Titus* (1999)*.* But some things no one has risked doing yet—e.g. a gay all-male all-naked *Twelfth Night,* an all-black *Othello* with most of the cast in whiteface, a *Julius Caesar* in Hollywood Renaissance costume. Or a Hitlerian Henry V.

Thus, Shakespearean adaptation involves a complex intertextual dynamics. A film's screenplay is of course an adaptation of Shakespeare's play, but in addition many such films are based on a specific theatrical production, which was already an interpretation of the text. This is the case with some of the most celebrated Shakespeare films—Orson Welles's *Macbeth,* Richard Loncraine's *Richard III* (1995)*,* Kenneth Branagh's *Henry V* or *Hamlet* (1996)*,* Julie Taymor's *Titus* (1999). Originally, Shakespeare's dramatic text itself was not a primary means of communication, even if it has subsequently become 'literature' or 'poetry'—in Shakespeare's original conception, it was subordinated to performance, although a play might be published if successfully performed. Moreover, the play was itself an adaptation, a version of a previous literary or historical text written for another medium (most obviously print—e.g. Holinshed's *Chronicles* in the case of *Henry V*).[4] The privileged position of Shakespeare's text as a nexus in the intertextual network may arguably be short-circuited. On the one hand, this might give rise to adaptations which are actually remakes of another adaptation rather than of the Shakespeare play. Shakespeare himself is perhaps too imposing to provide clear instances of this, but there have been films inspired by *Kiss Me Kate* (1953) rather than by *The Taming of the Shrew.* Or, to stick to musicals, Gérard Presgurvic's *Roméo & Juliette: De la haine à l'amour* (2001) seems inspired by Franco Zeffirelli's film rather than by Shakespeare's play. On the other hand, we may find what Michael Anderegg (2000: 155) calls 'retroadaptation', by which the Shakespeare play is reduced to the simple and brief narrative from which it derives—particularly when it is stripped of any trace of Shakespearean language, as in many of the early silent films chronicled by Ball (1968).

Finally, a later adaptation always alters, retrospectively, our perception of both the original play and of previous adaptations, bringing into relief the possibilities of some scenes, or their problematic nature, and the treatment they were given by the earlier adaptation—forcing us, intentionally or unintentionally, to re-read and revaluate.

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[4] This intertextual continuum is already noted by Jorgens (1977: 14). Cf. the 'five Henry V's' in Hedrick (2003: 215-16).

The Interactionist Theory of Meaning

The late twentieth-century paradigm shift away from formalism and structuralism in the direction of reader-response criticism is familiar enough by now to allow me to presuppose it as a basis for the following discussion. Suffice it to note that another prominent paradigm shift, in the direction of cultural studies and ideological criticism, shares much common ground with the shift towards reader-response, as it is through response that the ideological issues of (visual) texts are generated, brought to light, and played against one another. What I would wish to emphasise is a neglected theoretical connection of reader-response criticism: symbolic interactionism, as theorised in the field of social studies already from the first half of the twentieth century by G. H. Mead and H. Blumer. The symbolic interactionist theory of meaning holds that meaning inheres not in the object, or in the mind, but in a social process of interaction. This proposition can be used as the foundation of a theory of reading and interpretation, and also of related intertextual/interactive phenomena like translation and adaptation. The meaning of a 'source' text, like the meaning of any object, is constituted through interaction—it is not predetermined by what is brought to the interaction and certainly not by a formalist or grammatical grid. Meaning is, then, not objective (not 'in the object'), but it is not subjective either, as it cannot be restricted to the subject's isolated mental processes:

> Symbolic interactionism [...] does not regard meaning as emanating from the intrinsic makeup of the thing that has meaning, nor does it see meaning as arising through a coalescence of psychological elements in the person. Instead, it sees meaning as arising in the process of interaction between people. (Blumer 1986: 4)

Blumer's opposition to the notions of either an 'objective' or a 'subjective' anchoring of meaning, if applied to literary interpretation, yields the revolutionary insight—taking into account that this is a mid-twentieth century theory—that the meaning of a literary text is neither stable nor arbitrary; rather, it is remade for use every time through an interpretive process involving social interaction (1986: 5). That the use of meanings involves an interpretative process means that they are not taken as ready-made: 'The actor selects, checks, suspends,

regroups, and transforms the meanings in the light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his action' (Blumer 1986: 5)— 'actor' meaning here of course, when applied to film, not just actresses but also directors, scriptwriters, spectators and critics. The transcendental status of the Shakespeare text as a privileged object for adaptation is a function of just a possible context of action, Shakespeare studies, but other social contexts and projects may focus on different aspects of the resulting film. That is, there is a certain validity of the discourse which demands fidelity to the source text, but that validity is defined in that discourse's own terms, and there is no warrant to establish the absolute priority of that discourse over other discourses surrounding the phenomenon of film.

As a matter of fact, adaptation studies as a whole have moved from a formalist paradigm, still prominent in Brian McFarlane's *Novel to Film* (1996), towards a more ideologically, culturally and contextually informed theory of meaning-making. For instance, Robert Stam's (2000) approach to the dialogics of adaptation usefully complements the approach outlined above. A parallel shift away from formalism can be detected in theoretical approaches to other intertextual phenomena—e.g. the theory of translation resisting formalist assumptions of translation understood as an instrumental decoding and new encoding of meaning. Instead, a hermeneutic approach to a whole ('thick') cultural and historical context needs to be undertaken in assessing the adequacy of a translation. A further connection might be drawn between these developments and the integrationalist critique of formalist theories of text and language (Harris and Wolf 1998). The integrationalists too emphasise the agency of the 'observer's position', drawing attention to the role of the analytic approach in the constitution of the meaning being studied—with the current communicative context bringing along its own unpredictable contingency.

As critics are not neutral observers, caught as they are in the process of meaning recycling and ideological production, there is arguably a built-in bias in the criticism of filmic adaptations, as it is a form of discourse which addresses a different audience from that of the adaptations themselves—even if there is a partial overlap—and which has of course a distinctly different ideological agenda. There is no possibly 'neutral' analysis of the rightness or otherwise of an adaptation; any judgment is mediated by the critical project, and any response to that judgement—e.g. a response to a paper discussing the

adequacy or otherwise of Laurence Oliver's solutions in *Henry V*—is playing on the interface of the critic's ideology and that of the reader of the critical text. A text's ideology is not a pre-existing content packaged in the text, but rather a process of communicative interaction between the text, its critic, and the critic's audience.

Intertextual Retroaction and Appropriation in *Henry V*

Classical literary texts are burdened by their reception history. Adaptations of such texts are not, we have seen, a solitary confrontation between an auteur and an author. Quite apart from the collective dynamics of filmmaking, the hydra-headed 'auteur' is confronting not so much what the text was, as what it has become: the text is surrounded by an intertextual complex of criticism, of attitudes towards the historical period it is set in, etc.[5] As noted above, interpretive retroaction brings to light elements in the text being interpreted which were subdued or subordinated by previous representations. Critical discourse may be more or less aware of its own retroactive bias on this intertextual complex. At least five theoretically distinct levels of interpretive retroaction can be noted in the critique of an adaptation: the retroaction inherent in the interpreter's reading of the source text, in the interpreter's reading of the adaptation, in the interpreter's reading of the adaptation's reading of the text, in the interpreter's reading of earlier texts of which the source text is an adaptation, and in the interpreter's reading of previous critical approaches to all these texts.

An adaptation, or a critical reading, may be valued for the way it brings out valuable elements in the original, retroactively generating a hitherto invisible virtual dimension of the text, of which the original may come to appear as only one possible expression—and an imperfect one at that.[6] This selective revamping may be used, in the case of

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[5] Cf. Whelehan: 'the adaptation process … is already burdened by the weight of interpretations which surround the text in question, and which may provide the key to central decisions made in a film's production' (1999: 7). On appropriation as competition, updating and newfangledness, see also Kamps (1999: 27 *passim*).

[6] Cf. Walter Benjamin's theory of translation (1969), according to which a translation illuminates imperfectly realised elements of the original—or Pound's injunction, 'Don't translate what I wrote', instead, 'translate what I meant to write' (quoted in Jorgens 1977: 14). Cf. McFarlane on adaptations from novels: 'there is also a curious

Shakespeare, to make him more Shakespearean than he actually is (or was). But one man's Shakespeareanisation is another man's sanitisation—as when Kenneth Branagh makes King Henry weep as he hangs his former friend Bardolph. Here Shakespeare gives us only Henry's words, 'We would have all such offenders so cut off' (Shakespeare 1992: 138), unpunctuated by tears. Branagh tries to give us a more palatable Henry, a Henry for our times—an all-out appropriation. From Branagh's admission that he 'was probably cautious/nervous/cowardly about doing something that might provoke the wrong kind of reaction to the character' (Wray and Thornton-Burnett 2000: 172), it is apparent that in his view any attitude on the part of the audience short of emotional siding with Henry—a critical questioning of his motives, for instance—would be 'the wrong kind' of reaction. In making Henry more likeable, Branagh—like Olivier before him—makes the overt, jingoistic dimension of the play more acceptable, while it is arguable that a more interesting reading (or adaptation) would concentrate on the *less* likeable and more problematic aspects of both the character and the play. As Alan Sinfield argues, Shakespeare 'has been appropriated for certain practices and attitudes, and can be reappropriated for others' (1985: 137). The virtual dimension of the text to be brought out through interpretive retroaction need not be one which makes Shakespeare more like us or more palatable (or one consonant with an idealised authorial intent), but one which makes him more disquieting (perhaps by deconstructing the text's ideological articulations, or by resisting idealisations of the authorial intent).[7]

Let us take, and provide, a fuller example of such appropriative retroaction: Olivier's *Henry V*, and more specifically the ideological justification of aggressive war in the first scene of the (filmed) play. Much of the Shakespeare text in this scene is cut, and what remains becomes a comic scene in which the issue is settled quite arbitrarily by an honest King's reliance on the learned Archbishop's

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sense that the verbal account of the people, places, and ideas that make up much of the appeal of novels is simply *one* rendering of a set of existents which might just as easily be rendered in another' (1996: 7). On such 'virtual' dimensions generated by intertextuality or intermediality, see also my 1998 paper.

[7] Cf.: 'One of the merits of a significant Shakespeare film is its capacity to illuminate structures that are not immediately apparent, but which underpin the action in the Shakespeare play' (Davies 1994: 208, commenting on an idea of Lorne Buchman's).

word—although an earlier scene has shown us the King was aware the Archbishop intended to use the war on France in order to buy the Crown's support against a bill which would deprive the Church of many possessions.

Shakespeare's text is notoriously ambivalent at this point, as is his presentation of Henry throughout (see e.g. the various views collected in Quinn 1969; Greenblatt 1985). It is indisputable that Shakespeare is aware of the dubiousness of Henry's political manoeuvres, although he chooses to deal with this issue ambiguously and between the lines, without emphasising the dubiousness of Henry's own legitimacy. As noted by Katherine Eisaman Maus, 'Henry employs against the French a principle that, if it were enforced against him, would strip him of both English and French kingdoms. Yet the point is made so obliquely that only a spectator cognizant of the tangled Plantagenet genealogy is likely to catch it' (Shakespeare 1997: 1449-50). That is, Shakespeare is not exempt from the accusation of Harry-hailing and time-serving, even if he winks at the cognoscenti as he beats the drum.

At first sight Olivier would seem to preserve, in spite of his cuts, the original play's ambivalence as to the King's motives. In fact, though, what is ambiguous in Shakespeare is here conjured away due to a number of factors, of which I will only name a few:

1. Olivier's 'straight' playing of Henry as honest, heroic, open and sincere.[8]
2. The pre-existing dramatic tradition in which Henry was played just thus, with spine-chilling single-mindedness—see Andrew

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[8] Manheim, however, detects a benign Machiavellian side in Henry, resulting from Olivier's artificial mannerisms and controlling presence, which together intimate 'the idea of Henry as actor and image-maker, as creator of political illusions' (1994: 125). This effect results, I would argue, from Olivier's internalisation of Henry's (rather than Shakespeare's) project, not from a critical or ironic views on his part. As Manheim notes, Olivier's 'very 1940s leading-man dash' has dated, which (retrospectively) brings out the lineaments of some of the contained violence in the play (1994: 122). But Manheim wants to keep his cake and eat it, attributing to Olivier some effects which he nonetheless says arise with historical distance. Another variety of 'middle of the road' reading can be found in Jorgens (1977: 126-7), who ascribes his own skeptic view of Henry to Olivier's filmic treatment, giving the film (and perhaps the play too) more ironic credit than it deserves as a critique of Henry's wars.

Gurr's account of the stage history of the play (Shakespeare 1992: 37-55).

3. Olivier's cutting of many later passages which show Henry in a dubious light, and which could have added to the first scene to provide an ironic comment on Henry (see Geduld 1973: 48-49 for a detailed list of such passages).

4. The fact that Olivier's film begins with a filmed reconstruction of a theatrical performance set in 1600, rather than with an unmediated 'contemporary' performance of the play. This would seem to make allowance for an ironic ideological distance, but only until that distance and its potential for irony are suppressed as the filmed play dissolves into a film which makes the play's ideological conceptions its own.

5. Acting out the text (and filming it) involves an interplay between what is spoken and what is shown on the stage or screen. In Oliver's film, there is ideological consonance rather than dissonance, so that the gestures, acting and setting do not add an ironic inflection to Henry's decision to follow the Archbishop's counsel.[9] The Dauphin's insult to Henry is then used to make Henry the best player in the rhetorical tennis game—and from pleasurable identification with a speaker's rhetorical blows we are led insensibly to condone actual violence on a massive scale. Olivier's film provides a neat transition from the symbolic to the actual (Davies 1988: 31)—but it does so in more than one sense.

Now, how is this issue dealt with by critics of the film? Let us take Harry Geduld's commentary as a representative case. According to Geduld:

> Olivier does not want us to become too aware of the duplicities and complex motivations behind the 'justifications' that the Archbishop offers for Henry's invasion of France (Raymond Durgnat has reasonably objected to this scene on the grounds that it gives moral license to jingoism). In addition, Olivier does not wish to bore us with a deadly serious presentation of

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[9] The issue has seemed different to some in Branagh's rendering of the same scene: here the clerics are presented as repulsive characters who manipulate the king, as their mutual gaze of good understanding at the close of the scene seems to confirm. But the Branagh film drops the subject after this scene, and Branagh too plays a 'straight' Harry who is neither manipulated nor Machiavellian—although this treatment of the character is itself highly manipulative.

> the Archbishop's long and important but dramatically very dull speech on the Salic Law. So the prelates become amusing characters and the long speech is almost lost amid the buffoonery over the documents. And so too Olivier actually leaves in the specious justification for Henry's invasion, but plays the scene so that we hardly notice its speciousness amid the comedy. By the time the French ambassador arrives, somehow or other Henry's forthcoming campaign seems to have been 'justified' without our noticing precisely how. (Geduld 1973: 28-9)

That is, ideological fog is thrown over the very issue which should decide whether Henry's war is legitimate or an act of wilful aggression, and, presumably, whether the audience is to identify with Henry or look upon him as a dangerous bully and manipulator—a matter of some weight in an ideological approach to the film. Note that both Shakespeare and Olivier can be said to bury the issue under the dynamics of theatricality. Now, the same is usually done by their critics in discussing the episode: whether it is Shakespeare's or Olivier's aesthetic treatment that is discussed in an appreciative way by the critic, there can never be a way the moral ugliness of Henry's war may surface long enough to hold our attention in a critical discussion. The crucial ideological point becomes lost amid the theatrics, which is not to say that an ideological effect is not produced, namely the jingoism alluded to by Geduld before he loses sight of the issue, as ideological criticism is not among his priorities—after the passage above Geduld goes on to provide a 'consonant' reading of Olivier's film's aesthetics in dealing with Shakespearean material.

In an ideologically informed critical approach like the one put forward here, the existence of rhetorical fog used to justify aggressive war is a crucial aspect of the study of *Henry V* and of the intertextual complex surrounding it. No doubt critics who deconstruct the discourse of aggression in *Henry V* do so because of their own political agenda, and it is with reason too that they point out that there is a political agenda involved as well in those approaches which take for granted the play's jingoism and further it with their own unquestioning acceptance.[10] In any case, the interactional context must be taken into account. Olivier's film was a patriotic film made and released in time of war, when Hitler's aggressive policy was such a pressing

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[10] For 'resisting' rather than 'consonant' readings of *Henry V*, see Greenblatt (1985), Dollimore and Sinfield (1988), Holderness (1995).

concern that any film promoting British patriotism was sufficiently
justified by it: all the more so one depicting an invasion of France
'like' the one which was taking place as the film was released in 1944.
While not losing sight of the terms of Shakespeare's play, Olivier's
film has an intended topical reading—England (and its allies), repre-
senting right and justice, invading a France whose weak, decadent
rulers deserve no better.[11] It is perhaps a shame that the dynamics of
aggressive patriotism seems to cut both ways, and that in the absence
of a clearly defined Hitler for the French King's Pétain, Henry
embodies to some extent both the aggressive justice of the Allies and
the aggressive madness of the Nazis—a reading of the film which no
doubt would be highly unwelcome to Olivier.

At the end of a 'Kiss me Kate' scene which draws some inter-
textual energy from Shakespeare's own *The Taming of the Shrew*, a
smug Henry addresses Princess Catherine, the embodiment of con-
quered France, as follows: 'I will tell thee aloud, "England is thine,
Ireland is thine, France is thine"' (Shakespeare 1992: 205). The
allusion to Ireland in between France and England is revealing.
Shakespeare's own symbolic analogue for Henry was the Earl of
Essex, the subject of a rare allusion to contemporary politics in
Shakespeare. The play was to provide some patriotic bolster for
Essex's 'pacification' of Ireland in 1599. Ironically enough, Essex,
whom the play imagines 'from Ireland coming,/Bringing Rebellion
broachèd on his sword' (Shakespeare 1992: 191) got his comeuppance
at the hands of the Irish 'rebels' shortly after the staging of Shake-
speare's play—the first step on Essex's way to an unworthier scaffold.
Not surprisingly, both the 1600 Quarto of *Henry V* and Olivier's film
(and, perhaps with better reason, the Irish-born Kenneth Branagh)
avoid any allusion to Essex or the Irish rebels—although it is just such

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[11] Gil-Delgado sees in Olivier 'un ingenuo tono de propaganda' ['a naïve propaganda
tone'] and a call to patriotic bellicism (2001: 69, 73), while Branagh's film, on the
contrary, is 'un tremendo alegato antibelicista' ['a tremendous anti-war statement']
(2001: 73). This view probably reflects the most widespread attitudes to these two
Henry V films, and it is grossly misleading as to the ideology of Branagh's film.
Holderness (1995), Buhler (2002: 107-11), Lehmann (2002: 161-212) or Hedrick
(2003) provide far more alert perspectives on Branagh's appropriation of *Henry V,*
although they insufficiently stress the extent to which Branagh's engagement with
Henry's ideology of aggressive self-promotion glorifies aggression *tout court* as the
shortest way to a sense of self.

problematic elements in Shakespeare's play that an adaptation willing to deeply engage with it, instead of sanitising it, or providing patriotic pap, would focus on.

An analysis of subsequent critical involvements with *Henry V* has to keep in sight both the play and the films' original context of production *and* the current context of critical discussion, which once again will not let the issue of aggressive war go away—witness, in the present case, the fact that as this volume was being put together both Britain and Spain were actively supporting the US policy of open-ended aggressive war and invasion against 'the invisible enemy', a war which involves of course its own measure of rhetorical fog, manipulation of evidence, and unmentionable interests.[12] The recent turn towards an international order resting on the right and might to aggression, instead of the right not to suffer aggression, is noticeable, perhaps more so in the countries in which it has already cost many lives. And it looms large as the background of any context we may decide we are addressing.[13]

A critical approach which is aware of cultural icons' treatment of the ideology of violence—or, which is the same, a critical approach wishing to draw attention to this matter—will note the ideological emphases, omissions and choices which emerge in the intertextual and interactional dynamics of meaning-making, whether through adaptations or critical readings. The emphases, omissions and ideological choices in our own approach emerge for others, and are for others to point out. I will conclude by adapting T. S. Eliot's dictum, and argue that it is the fate of any appropriation to be appropriated again. Or, to put it otherwise: never trust the teller, trust the tale—but not the one you have been told: trust *the whole tale.*

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[12] See e.g. Eno (2003) and Nagra (2003).

[13] For instance, close to home: on the days before the Iraq war, Spanish Anglists chose by majority vote, or rather by majority silence, to disregard a petition I sponsored to make the Spanish Society for Anglo-American Studies address the Spanish government and the Anglo-American embassies, in order to oppose these allies' advocacy of preventive war as an instrument of the new world order after 9/11. Whatever academics do or fail to do is, 'everybody knows' (Cohen 1992), irrelevant. War on terror will go on, although it is also a well known fact that the deepest terror lies behind mirrors (behind 'mirrors of all Christian kings' too).

FIG. 1 A retroactive avatar of Henry V's band of brothers: Alexander the Pig foreshadows Bush's Desert Storm II in Oliver Stone's *Alexander the Great* (2004)

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