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Kenneth Branagh: Mainstreaming Shakespeare in movie theatres

‘The Man who would be Olivier’: this was the cover title used by *Time Magazine* in November 1989 to describe a young Belfast-born theatre actor who had just made his debut as screenwriter and film director of a new version of *Henry V*, a play that had been famously directed on the big screen by Laurence Olivier in 1944. Branagh thus invited comparisons with the legendary English actor-director right from the start of his career. He has often acknowledged in interviews that Olivier was an inspiration to him; he has portrayed Olivier in the film *My Week with Marilyn* (Simon Curtis, 2011), directed *Sleuth* (2007), a remake of a 1972 Mankiewicz film starring Olivier, and performed the role of Archie Rice in a 2016 West End production of Osbourne’s *The Entertainer*, a play that served as an Olivier vehicle on stage and on screen. Like Olivier in 1957, Branagh was knighted in 2012. However, *Times*’ title was less revealing of what Branagh himself wanted to become than of what journalists and the public wished to create – a new heir in a line of Shakespearean kings. Branagh certainly fulfilled this hope as he eventually acted in and directed more Shakespeare plays than any other filmmaker before him; yet he also defied what was expected from a Shakespearean actor-director. First, he used the codes and genres of Hollywood cinema to make the plays entertaining and available to a younger, more popular audience. Second, he not only adapted Shakespeare but also ventured into directing Hollywood blockbusters, as well as more intimate projects on stage and screen, injecting Shakespearean echoes into a new range of productions. Through his taste for popular, mainstream movies, his bold self-made trajectory that carried him repeatedly in and out of the ‘Establishment’, and his blue-collar origins (his father was a joiner in Belfast, who moved his family to Reading during the Troubles in the 1970s) – all of which he emphasizes in his 1989 autobiography *Beginning*, in his published scripts and multiple interviews – Branagh has contributed to redefining relations between Shakespeare and Hollywood, between the art house and the multiplex, and between theatre and cinema.

From theatre to cinema

Branagh started his professional journey as a stage actor, trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London. In 1984, he joined the Royal Shakespeare Company where he performed the RSC’s youngest Henry V under Adrian Noble’s direction, before creating his own theatre company, Renaissance, in order to gain artistic freedom. However, from the early

stages of his career, Branagh alternated between roles on stage and on screen. He had his lucky break as Billy, a young working-class Protestant in Graham Reid's *Billy* teleplays, and soon learned the basics of filmmaking, surrounding himself with trusted fellow actors and crew (Brian Blessed, Richard Briers, Judi Dench, Gerard Horan, Derek Jacobi, Michael Maloney, Emma Thompson, Jimmy Yuill, Patrick Doyle for the scores, Tim Harvey for the designs...) with whom he would regularly work on his filmic projects, thus importing into film the special feel and rapport of a theatre company. This organization, which includes an important phase of rehearsals as in the theatre, finds its way thematically in films emphasizing family and/or communal experience.¹ His Shakespearean films bear the aesthetic and interpretative influence of previous stage productions in which Branagh was involved as an actor, with the RSC (playing Henry V and *Love's Labour's Lost's* King of Navarre in 1984, as well as Hamlet in an uncut production in 1992-93) and with Renaissance (*As You Like It's* Touchstone, *Much Ado's* Benedick and Hamlet in 1988).² From the early days of his Renaissance company, Branagh proclaimed his wish not only to bring Shakespeare to the people but also to turn the stage productions into films: *Twelfth Night*, which he directed for the stage in 1987, was subsequently recorded and broadcast by Thames television.

Branagh's fascination for the energetic movement of film may at first be thought as opposed to the ethos of theatre. However, if his films avoid static staginess, they always present theatrical effects in the sense of amplified, operatic forms – fluid steadicam or dolly movements, swirling circle shots, impressive long takes, symmetrical shots in which a central figure is flanked by two characters in profile (reflecting oppositions or tensions), festive or fairy-tales environments with songs, dances, masks and disguises. Much has been written against Branagh's cinema, which appropriates Shakespeare's plays into a highly stylized universe rooted in a pseudo-historical reality: it has been called too literal, too emphatic, too musical, too narcissistic, too manipulative and/or too conservative. One cannot deny, however, that his films have given a boost to Shakespeare's visibility from 1989 onwards, triggering a powerful new wave of screen adaptations. If Branagh believes in epic momentum, textual clarity, colloquial delivery, visual audacity and unashamed romantic force, this energy very often serves the Shakespeare play-texts. By promoting international casting and natural acting styles, the films strive to make us hear the words in fresh new ways.

Referencing mainstream films and genres

Branagh's five Shakespearean films to date – *Henry V* (1989), *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993), *Hamlet* (1996), *Love's Labour's Lost* (2000) and *As You Like It* (2006) mobilize various mainstream genres, from the western to the epic saga, from the thriller to the war film, and are filled with allusions to film classics such as Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane*, Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, or Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca*. *Love's Labour's Lost*, for instance, was turned into an American musical à la Busby Berkeley, with a synchronised swimming sequence evoking the aquatic ballets of Esther Williams and with songs by Cole Porter, Irving Berlin and George Gershwin that were first heard in *Top Hat* (1935) or *Shall We Dance* (1937). Shakespeare's iambic pentameters are even explicitly associated with the rhythm of tap-dancing.

Branagh's highly intertextual movies reach the 'third degree' theorized by Laurent Jullier: they mix references that viewers may spot but without generating ironic distance or parodic effects (second degree) and, more crucially, without giving up on emotion (first degree).³ While calling out to our filmic culture, Branagh paradoxically uses film genres to offer a very personal view of the plays. He favours the creation of a realistic and coherent story world, but on some occasions does not hesitate to subordinate the text to a general vision, for instance rethinking *Hamlet* as an epic and wintry saga reminiscent of David Lean's *Doctor Zhivago*, where flowers grow in winter, Hamlet's father rests in a snowy orchard and Ophelia drowns herself in a supposedly frozen river. Whether we consider these choices as inconsistencies⁴ or distancing devices, they are signs of Branagh artistically shaping the plays around themes that can be found all through his filmography. Often isolated in vast spaces and confronted to the power of nature (fire, ice, sun, water) and to reminders of impending death, Branagh's heroes, often endowed with memories and thoughts through flashbacks and mental images, undergo an initiatory quest for a lost state of harmony, nostalgically attempting to restore a sense of community after shocks of separation or loss.

Henry V and *Hamlet*: questioning Olivier's legacy

In *Henry V*, Hal has to give up the warm world of the taverns when he becomes King. The war against France comes to amplify this departure from a previously care-free life. Branagh uses intimate close-ups and flashbacks to delve into the king's mental space and establish the friendship that he shared with Falstaff, Pistol and Bardolph. During the execution of the latter, flashbacks and close-ups of the king, who vainly tries to conceal his tears, paradoxically create empathy towards the executioner rather than the victim. Henry is presented as an

earnest and conflicted youth: a Hamlet-like figure filled with doubts regarding the legitimacy of war and of his power, he becomes the tragic victim of the prelates' conspiracy to invade France as a diversion to protect the Church's financial interests.

In this interpretative context that constructs a path of fall and redemption, the comic altercation between Pistol and French soldier Le Fer is replaced with a brutal and bloody battle, the longest and most outstanding sequence in the film. Branagh's film stresses the atrocities of war by showing blood, mud, wounds, impaled bodies and looting. Damp, foggy weather intensifies hardships, while slow motion turns the battle of Agincourt into a chaotic and dreamlike sequence verging on nightmare, dilating time and adding power to the combatants' blows. Agincourt becomes a quasi-eternal fight that symbolises every other armed conflict. Branagh's *Henry V* was shot in England at a time when films expressing the disillusion of warfare were influenced by the Falklands war and remembrance of the destructive effects of World War I, which had ended seventy years before. But through scenes that show the solidarity between men, united in their fighting, Branagh's film makes war disgusting and heroic, hellish and glorifying, repulsive and attractive. As Chris Fitter notices, 'the structure [...] owes much [...] to Vietnam movies of the 1980s, particularly its moral ambiguity: war is hell but it heroizes.'⁵

Branagh ends the battle with the now-famous *Non nobis* sequence in which the king, followed by his soldiers, crosses the battlefield in one uninterrupted four-minute tracking shot with a score that builds into a crescendo of voices and orchestra. As soldiers start to sing the *Non nobis* hymn, Henry takes Falstaff's dead Boy on his shoulder and makes his way among the ruins of the battlefield. Carrying the youth like a cross, Henry is turned into a Christ-like figure bearing sin and misery on his back. The camera then cuts close on Henry's blood-stained face and the king's head drops as if in shame. Yet, again, it is through Henry's eyes, the eyes representing royal power, that all the wasteful carnage is observed. The film has, indeed, been criticized for the reactionary nature of its worldview, its legitimization of (royal) leadership and its private mode of fundraising.⁶ However, one also needs to recognize the ideological balance that the film achieves. While Shakespeare's play creates ambivalence by oscillating between parodic dissent and epic speeches, Branagh's film never fluctuates in tone but at the same time denounces and glorifies conflicts through a clash between terrible images of slaughter and swelling music of triumph.

For his 1996 *Hamlet*, contrary to Olivier who, in 1948, drastically cut the text to turn the play into a Oedipal domestic tragedy, Branagh conflated the three existing versions (Quarto 1, Quarto 2 and Folio) to offer an epic, monumental and cosmic four-hour production, taking

full advantage of the centrifugal qualities of cinema. Branagh's film is full of sparkling colours and includes a hall of mirrors highlighting duplicity, histrionics and situations repeating themselves. The film is set within the tradition of the Hollywood epic through its international cast of well-known stars, its length, landscapes, number of extras, and even its 'Intermission'. The impression of vastness is also enhanced by the film format: *Hamlet* was filmed using a 70mm photographic format instead of the traditional 35mm. Emotional details can thus be caught in extreme close-ups, as the entire frame is sometimes filled by an ear, an eye or a mouth. Faces become landscapes, and intimacy itself is turned into epic.

By making visual the verbal dilemmas of Shakespeare's play, Branagh gives greater importance to swashbuckling action. For instance, Branagh's Hamlet is seen stabbing Claudius at prayer: in an almost subliminal flash, a dagger is plunged into Claudius' ear – but the viewers are quickly jolted back into a reality in which Hamlet has not moved. Branagh plays on magnitude, not only by presenting the conflated text but also by stressing the play's military dynamics via the gleaming rooms, neat uniforms, fencing sessions and Fortinbras' conquering *coup*. The film constructs a world of discipline and hierarchy, violence and indifference towards suffering. Ophelia becomes a mistress abandoned by her lover (their sexual relationship is made explicit in flashbacks): she suffers from the incarceration and callous mistreatment typical of an overtly militarised nation. After Old Hamlet's murder, which is seen as a destruction of domestic bliss through various nostalgic flashbacks in which the family is playing together or enjoying dinner, the Ghost appears as a warrior in full armour, a representation which clashes with the filmic tradition that emphasizes his ethereal or pitiful aspects.

Even one of Hamlet's soliloquies, 'How all occasions do inform against me', is turned into an exhortation to war. Hamlet's rising voice rings out while his body disappears in the distance. The effect is huge, relying on its impulse and momentum, on its strength and evidence. This moment in which Hamlet asserts his new resolution to act ('My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth') recalls the epic sequence in *Gone With The Wind* (1939) in which Scarlett O'Hara proclaims her determination to survive ('As God is my witness, I'll never be hungry again!'). In both films, the camera races backward in a similar way just before the Intermission – turning Scarlett smaller and smaller under the tree at Tara; and Hamlet into a mere dot within the snowy landscape where Fortinbras' army marches.

This immensity emphasizes the hero's isolation. Space, like time, is dilated.⁷ The film *In The Bleak Midwinter*, which Branagh directed a year prior to making *Hamlet*, makes this idea explicit: when Fadge unveils her concept for the theatre set of an amateur production of

Hamlet, she says: ‘We must make the design all about Space. People in space, things in space, women in space, men in space.’ In his 1994 *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein*, man is also lost in infinite spaces of white ice. For such *tableaux*, Branagh was inspired by German romantic paintings, notably *Traveller Above the Sea of Clouds* (1818) by David Caspar Friedrich, with its representation of a man alone in a wild, snowy landscape. Hamlet, like Victor Frankenstein, is turned into an insignificant black dot, melting into powerful nature. Extreme backward moves serve to open spaces for the Prince to realise he is either a ‘king of infinite space’ or some mere ‘quintessence of dust’.⁸ Branagh here uses a specific shot chosen by Olivier to film the king’s speeches in his 1944 *Henry V*. Olivier thought that the camera had to be at a remove from the character when the vocal delivery reached its peak, in order to accommodate the actor’s rhetorical projection and gestural expansiveness.⁹ With this signature shot, Branagh insists upon the warlike aspects of Hamlet’s soliloquy and on his ‘bloody thoughts’. Thus, while Branagh had played his Henry V as a self-doubting Hamlet, he performed Hamlet as a swashbuckling action hero reminiscent of Olivier’s own Henry V. Olivier’s influence and that of the tradition of Shakespearean performance are always there – just not where one may expect them.

When Branagh illustrates Barnardo’s words ‘When yon same star that’s westward from the pole’ with a shot of the sky, and those of Horatio ‘But look, the morn .../ walks o’er the dew’ with a shot of the rising sun, these illustrations might be deemed superfluous but they free the film from the interior space of Elsinore and present the actions of men through a macrocosmic lens. The same artistic vision can be found at the end of the 1993 *Much Ado About Nothing*. The last crane shot allows for a flight towards the intensely blue sky, expressing the futility of the film’s events compared to celestial beauty, before carrying the audience out of the story with a last fade to black.

Filming the comedies

Contrary to other Shakespearean film *auteurs*, Branagh has directed Shakespearean comedies, a genre somehow neglected as its humour and clowns are often considered too outdated and anchored in the Elizabethan period. Branagh’s *Much Ado About Nothing*, filmed under the Tuscan sun, mixes the musical (the camera follows the characters whirling in the garden just as in Robert Wise’s *The Sound of Music*, while Branagh’s Benedick splashes in the fountain *à la* Gene Kelly) with the popular romantic film and the screwball comedy (Branagh and Thompson, married at the time, reproduce the witty bantering of Katharine

Hepburn and Spencer Tracy, recalling how much this Hollywood genre actually owes to Shakespeare's battles of the sexes).

The film starts with white words on the black screen – lyrics from the song 'Sigh No More, Lady' recited by Thompson's Beatrice – allowing the viewers to tune in to the language and its particular rhythm. The opening image then pans from Leonato's painting of the beautiful landscape to the landscape itself, suggesting that the film will make words and art come to life. By moving from darkness to light, from text to image, the film suggests how cinema may revitalize a play. As the opening credits unroll, we see the soldiers arriving on horseback, all lined up as in John Sturges' *The Magnificent Seven*, bouncing on their saddles as if anticipating their upcoming sexual encounters. Close-ups in slow motion of the horses' breasts and nostrils, of the hooves hitting the ground, of a waving flag, then shots of the men's bathing and of the women's dressing up, all contribute to convey energy and sensuality.

Though aesthetically very pleasing, the film has occasioned some criticism regarding its cultural politics. By adding a scene shot from Claudio's point of view, which shows how easy it is to confuse Margaret with Hero at her window meeting with a man, the film presents Claudio as a too likable youth, who thought in earnest that his wife-to-be was cheating on him. At the same time, Keanu Reeves' villainous Don John was perceived as a closeted gay man having his oily body massaged by Borachio, problematically linking homosexuality with treachery.¹⁰ Finally, the well-intentioned colour-blind casting has one unfortunate consequence: Denzel Washington's Don Pedro ends up single at the end of the play, as if he could only be rejected as a black man.¹¹

If Branagh's *Much Ado About Nothing* is located in a kind of timeless Shakespeare fairyland, his *Love's Labour's Lost* is placed just before World War II, with voice-over black-and-white sequences (narrated by Branagh) parodying the newsreels of the time. The study retreat proposed to his friends by the King of Navarre thus presents Branagh's vision of the 1930s as both an escape and 'a stolen, magical, idyllic time which nevertheless had a clock ticking'.¹² The context brings an explanation of the play's peculiar ending: when the war breaks out, the couples must separate and the men atone for their mistakes. They reunite not 'a twelvemonth and a day' later, but six years later on V-E Day. Branagh's adaptation of the play as a 1930s musical providing a hopeful vision of British endurance during the War has been seen as escapist nostalgia denying political realities.¹³ As one of the newsreels shots indicates that V-E Day takes place on November 11th, the day when World War I ended, the film thus merges the two world wars, generating historical indeterminacy and, again, shaping

the story to fit an auteuristic vision and give the *feel* of a period and place, without necessarily thinking through all the cultural and historical consequences.

Impression is also at the core of *As You Like It*: Branagh creates a Japanese environment, but a legendary one seen through a western prism, especially since the shooting took place in West Sussex. The film opens with a Kabuki piece (Japanese traditional theatre) but the show is soon interrupted by Duke Frederick's violent *coup* (recalling Fortinbras' irruption in the 1996 *Hamlet*) which destroys the stage set as if the world of war and politics brutally replaced the world of make-believe.

The film celebrates nature and the pastoral genre in its regular shots of the sun, waterfalls, rivers, trees, leaves, flowers, cobwebs. In this forest of Arden, almost every shot (in low angles) starts by focusing on the sky and the crowns of the trees, before meeting the characters below. The action in the wood thus always begins with an idea of freedom, and unfolds beneath cosmic benevolence and radiance. But grim realities are not hidden either: the two enemy brothers fight in the mud under the rain, and life in the woods is not always as idyllic as expected by Celia and Rosalind. The film shows what remains hidden in the play-text – the *coup* organised by Duke Frederick, Orlando's brother attacked by a lioness, or the Duke's final conversion. By giving flesh to these events, Branagh keeps validating all the reports voiced in the play. As with his *Much Ado*, this is a world where doubts over a character's account are not encouraged.

The camera revolves fluidly around the characters, unites the small community within long shots in which they can all be seen together, or slowly tracks forward to catch emotions on faces. Celia is repeatedly framed by Rosalind and Duke Frederick to highlight her dilemma about staying loyal either to her best friend or to her father; and is seen between Rosalind and Orlando, far in the background, to signal that she will be literally left behind, swapped for Orlando in Rosalind's affections. The camera follows Rosalind and Orlando in their first scene together in the forest, constructing a sequence-shot of several minutes, the length of which paradoxically emphasizes the theatricality of the actors' movements and voices through the bold display of cinematic virtuosity. The play on theatrical illusion reaches its peak during the end credits when Rosalind appears for her Epilogue, but this time as the actress behind the part, being handed drinks, wandering between the film crew and the modern-day cars before disappearing behind the door of her private van. The last words of the film belong to the director who wraps up everything with 'And... cut!', asserting the make-believe nature that links film and theatre, as well as Branagh's position as *auteur*.

From cinema to filmed theatre

Because *Love's Labour's Lost* and *As You Like It* were not commercial successes, Branagh could not film *Macbeth* that he had in store with his newly-founded Shakespeare Film Company. However, the project came to fruition through another channel when Branagh played and co-directed (with Rob Ashford) *Macbeth* during the 2013 Manchester International Festival in a small deconsecrated church. The pacey production evoked Branagh's *Henry V* with its muddy and bloody battlefield, which had been inspired by the 1984 RSC stage *Henry V* directed by Adrian Noble – in which the exhausted English army was lined up under a large canvas protecting them from a downpour. The production first ran from 3 to 20 July 2013, and was then transferred to New York at the Park Avenue Armory from 31 May to 22 June 2014, where a larger audience could be accommodated.

The Manchester performance was broadcast by National Theatre Live on a giant screen in Manchester and in a few cinemas in the UK; the recorded version was then shown in cinemas worldwide at the end of 2013 and beginning of 2014. A local, immersive theatrical experience was thus fixed, mediated and distributed globally, the live broadcast in cinemas capturing some aspects of the social event and sense of occasion that theatre-going represents. The several image feeds and soundtracks were mixed together live, so that the cast never knew which camera was broadcasting at any one moment and, therefore, whether they were seen by the cinema audience or not – just as they did not know if they were the focus of spectators' gazes in the theatre.

The Branagh/Ashford *Macbeth* was a show that certainly anticipated a future cinematic experience from the start – with its star-filled quality, cinematic and almost balletic rhythm, violent fighting, non-diegetic music composed by Patrick Doyle, down to the rain that fell on the muddy ground of the battlefield. Beyond the interpolated battle that stood as the second scene, moments that Shakespeare's play does not show were fully displayed. The 'dagger of the mind' was at first a cross of light on the muddy ground, but did not remain virtual: two of them, one on each side of the nave, were seen suspended in mid-air, glowing and guiding Macbeth towards the apse where Duncan slept. The audience also witnessed Macbeth's blasphemous stabbing of Duncan in the back – a scene supposed to happen off-stage.

Branagh seems to have learnt from this NT Live experience: when he founded the Kenneth Branagh Theatre Company to put on six plays at the Garrick Theatre in London for the 2015-16 season, he formed a partnership with Picturehouse Entertainment to broadcast live three of the six productions – Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and *Romeo and Juliet*; Osborne's *The*

Entertainer – to cinemas worldwide. Just as Branagh injects theatricality into his films, he likewise imports cinematic devices onto the stage: in his 2015 *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes' family gathers around the Christmas tree to watch home movies on a cinema screen, while Antigonus' exit 'pursued by a bear' is spectacularly rendered by the projected image of a giant, roaring bear. After many creations in the theatre and in the cinema, Branagh has now made it his 'brand' of combining both media through his own 'Branagh Theatre Live'.

Shakespearean echoes

Like Olivier, Branagh did not adapt *Othello* but starred in another director's *Othello* (Olivier played the Moor in Stuart Burge's 1965 version; Branagh played Iago in Oliver Parker's 1995 production). However, we may wonder if *Othello* does not haunt Branagh's filmography in subtle ways, resurfacing in films that critics do not label 'Shakespearean'. The Hollywood thriller *Dead Again* (1991) is thus centred on the murder, in her bed, of a spouse who sparked off her foreign husband's jealousy, while the Marvel super-hero production *Thor* (2011) works on the malevolent manipulation of a close relative: Loki poisons with lies the ear of his brother (and heir-apparent of the Asgard throne) in order to lead him to his fall. According to Pierre Berthomieu, *Thor* appears as a 'Shakespearean blockbuster', which also takes up many aesthetic motifs of Branagh's *Hamlet* and *Henry V*.¹⁴

As Jennifer Holl argues, 'To be a Shakespearean celebrity is to be both star and fan, or rather, Shakespeare's star fan [...] reeling in Shakespeare from otherwise elitist heights and grounding him in the everyday, accessible forum of popular celebrity'.¹⁵ Branagh as a Shakespeare fan comes through in *In the Bleak Midwinter*, a 1995 black-and-white film he wrote and directed: Joe Harper (Michael Maloney), an unemployed actor, heartily puts on *Hamlet* in a forsaken village's disused church and rejects the tempting offer of playing in a big-budget Hollywood sci-fi film to perform the gloomy Dane on stage. In *All is True* (2018), a film directed from a script by Ben Elton, Branagh embodies Shakespeare himself during the last years the playwright spent with his wife and daughters in Stratford-upon-Avon. Between fact and fiction, through intimate sequence shots lit like Rembrandt paintings, Branagh finds a subtle, melancholic way of playing Shakespeare: he neither glorifies nor debunks the myth, but faces the mysteries and contradictions of an ordinary bourgeois patriarch who could create such momentous art. Placing gender dynamics at the front and befitting the #MeToo generation, the film suggests that Shakespeare lost his young son Hamnet because he had failed to imagine his daughter Judith as a poet.¹⁶

Since Branagh is a Shakespearean celebrity in the eyes of the public and the media, each new filmic endeavour is perceived through a Shakespearean lens. Upon the release of his *Cinderella* (2015), pressed to talk about the Shakespearean themes he saw in the story, Branagh recalled how Shakespeare himself borrowed motifs from fairy tales and linked *Cinderella* with the cruel family context of *King Lear*.¹⁷

In a way that can be seen as very Shakespearean, Branagh's style combines tradition and modernity. Through his 'respect for both the textual richness of Shakespeare' plays and the visual possibilities of cinema',¹⁸ his cinema synthesizes, as Samuel Crowl aptly argues, 'Olivier's attention to the spoken text with Welles' fascination with camera angle and editing and Zeffirelli's visual and musical romanticism',¹⁹ but it has also found its own culturally synthesizing voice, as he has straddled 'rival legacies [...]: Protestant and Catholic in Belfast; English and Irish in Reading; and Stratford and Hollywood in his film career'.²⁰ Its specificity is perhaps not only to have revitalized Shakespearean adaptations at the end of the twentieth century but to have fuelled his Shakespearean projects with his Hollywood endeavours (his *Hamlet* would not have been the same without the previous *Frankenstein*) and to have, in return, injected Shakespearean motifs into Hollywood scripts that celebrate the creative energy inspired by Shakespeare. Through his ceaselessly renewed 'vaulting ambition' of bringing Shakespeare to the people, Branagh has constructed over the years the ideologically complex persona of a working-class Shakespearean entrepreneur.

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⁴ Bernice W. Kliman, 'The Unkindest Cuts: Flashcut Excess in Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet*', in Deborah Cartmell and Michael Scott (eds.), *Talking Shakespeare* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001), 151–167.

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⁷ The reorganisation of scenes through editing can generate extra time, suggesting for instance that Claudius has already spent a certain amount of time in deep thought before starting to pray aloud. See Russell Jackson, 'Kenneth Branagh's Film of *Hamlet*: The Textual Choices,' *Shakespeare Bulletin* 15.2 (Spring 1997), 37–38.

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¹⁶ Special thanks to Samuel Crowl without whom I could not have seen *All is True* before submitting this chapter.

¹⁷ <https://www.wsj.com/video/cinderella-and-shakespeare-crafting-fairy-tales/6AC0C33D-6070-4C96-A9E7-E621BF54BB6A.html>

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