

duce another generation of young people who love opera and the stage; they will do exactly the opposite. In 1924, a pro-Bolshevik stage director named Leopold Jessner tried to perform an Expressionist interpretation of Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* in Berlin. It never got past the first act; the audience shouted it down every time. This kind of "audience participation" has a long and venerable tradition in Europe and the United States. If we are to end the postmodernist robbery of our artistic heritage, perhaps it should be revived.

Branagh's 'Henry V': a second opinion

by Carol White

A recent commentary on a Shakespeare film in EIR stimulated much discussion, pro and con, among readers and editors. We print here one of several contributions received, in the interest of encouraging debate on such crucial questions of popular culture.

Having seen Kenneth Branagh's film production of *Henry V*, with great pleasure, I was considerably challenged by Renée Sigerson's review: "The Movie 'Henry V,' or, Why the British Elites Despise Shakespeare" (*EIR*, March 1, 1991.)

Language and great civilizations

A living language which is capable of conveying great thoughts is dependent upon poets for its development. The earliest great language known to us is Sanskrit; and it has been demonstrated by Indian scholars, such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak, that the Vedic scriptures contain myths which were actually astronomical poems based upon a solar calendar. These he dates to around 10,000 B.C. Such interconnect- edness between poetry and science is lawful. Indeed, before written language was common, poetry was the essential means of ensuring the transmission of knowledge for thousands of years. A similar case can be made for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. While they are ascribed to Homer, they may have had a longer oral history.

We are living in a dark age; poetry and true music are not only not composed, but the treasures of the past are being forgotten. Now we are even losing the capacity for literate speech. Our language is dominated by the present tense, verbs are replaced by nouns, we have ceased to use modes

of speech such as the subjunctive (as in—"would this were not the case"), and so on. The subtle use of language as a vehicle of conceptual thought is rare indeed. From the street child to the President, most Americans appear to be unable to compose even a simple sentence, far less a coherent dialogue capable of expressing complex concepts.

The film

Transforming a play to film involves some license with the original script—that, of course, is one of the reasons why in general the original version of a novel or play is superior to a film adaptation. Furthermore, the way in which a movie is constructed as a pastiche of scenes which are put together in the cutting room, transforms the demands upon an actor to something less than the coherent development of a given character. In a sense, the film director encroaches upon the freedom normally allowed on the stage. In this case, as director and lead actor, Branagh has the maximum opportunity to determine how the character is shaped, within the limitations of the medium.

In this day and age, however, how many Americans a) have access to and b) can afford to attend a staged theater performance? Films (and video tapes) are the media accessible to the most people.

Having said all of this, I did thoroughly enjoy the production. I think the reason is that, despite certain simplifications of plot and so on, Branagh preserves Shakespeare's language. Living in a country—the United States—in which most thoughts are barely articulated beyond a grunt or a mumble, hearing Shakespearean English is equivalent to attending a performance of classical music.

A nation which has lost the capability to speak English, will obviously have great difficulty in comprehending the dialogue of a Shakespearean play when it is performed; and certainly many Americans no longer have the linguistic ability to read Shakespeare or the King James version of the Bible, with anything approaching ease. I imagine that some of the plot devices used by Branagh to speed the action are intended to carry the audience along, and I can excuse this, because I am convinced that after seeing the film, many in the audience—like me—will be drawn to reading the original.

I would be happy to see the film shown in classrooms (certainly it would be a welcome change from such satanic pornography as the movie *Excalibur*, which is shown in many schools, purportedly to introduce students to a medieval world view).

In her review, Renée Sigerson implies that major changes in dialogue were made by Branagh—she implies for evil purposes. Such an inference is a gross exaggeration, as a careful comparison between the text and the film will show. The summary of the development of the action of the play, in the review, is precisely the development as it appears in the film. The key soliloquies and other major speeches remain as

written.

Would Shakespeare himself have been displeased at the scope of the action possible in a film—as compared to a small stage, when it comes to depicting a battle? I doubt it. I do agree with her that the musical background is an unpleasant distraction. While it does not dominate the performance, it detracts from it. Since there is a sufficient body of beautiful music composed in Shakespeare's time which could have provided a musical background accompaniment, we can certainly fault Branagh here; furthermore, Shakespeare's purpose would have been well served without relying upon any background score.

In thinking about why I would recommend this film, I was reminded of Ken Burns's recent seven-part video documentary on the Civil War, which I would also recommend. The battle scenes depicted in the video, and the descriptions of the fighting are, of course, gripping; however, what I found most notable was—from our barren standpoint today—the literacy of the average soldier, writing home to his family and friends, as he faced the rigors of battle. Just as today the "average Joe" and President Bush are both equally inarticulate, so then even the common soldier shared some of the grandeur of President Lincoln's poetic prose. These were times when Americans traveled with three books: the Bible, Shakespeare's plays, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

Were I competent to produce a television documentary about the Civil War, or to film *Henry V*, I would no doubt choose to emphasize more of the true subject of Shakespeare's concerns, as Mrs. Sigerson indicates them to be. Yet despite its superficiality, the Branagh production was sufficiently faithful to the original, and sufficiently well done—neither poorly acted nor overly realistic, as is the case of the BBC videos of Shakespeare—to be a useful bridge to Shakespeare's play itself.

Brave green world: Malthus refuted

by John Chambless

Sackgasse Ökostatt: Kein Platz für Menschen,

by Ralf Schauerhammer

Böttiger Verlags-GmbH, Wiesbaden, Germany, 1990
202 pages, paperbound, DM 14.80

In the approximately 30 years since the beginnings of what is called "environmentalism," that movement has gone from being the concern of cultists, cranks, and crazies to one of the dominant political and "scientific" forces in Western industrial society. Its message of impending eco-disaster and overpopulation now dominates the mass media, and its proclamations and warnings have become a part of our everyday life, as common in the classroom and popular movies as in the daily television news.

Ralf Schauerhammer, editor of the German-language science magazine *Fusion*, directs his recent book, *Sackgasse Ökostatt: Kein Platz für Menschen (The Ecostate Dead-End: No Place for Human Beings)* to those individuals who are concerned about the environment but are simultaneously bothered by arguments put forward to justify the drastic measures called for by environmentalists in order to preserve the environment, whether from the danger of toxic insecticides, the ozone hole, or the menace of "global warming." As he tells us, he makes no attempt to present a non-partisan review of all the arguments pro and con in the area of environmentalism, but rather to "scrutinize the fundamental arguments of the environmentalist movement" from the point of view of those "who intend to preserve and care for nature, above all, to preserve and develop human beings." The book "points out the conceptual errors of the environmentalist dogmas that pour out against us daily in a virtually indigestible mass from the media."

Approximately two-thirds of the book is concerned with the arguments that justify environmentalists' concerns. In this respect, Schauerhammer's work resembles that of Dixy Lee Ray, whose *Trashing the Planet*, appeared at about the same time (see *EIR*, Nov. 16, 1990). In both books, the dangers proclaimed by the environmentalist movement for human beings and the environment are carefully examined and, for the most part, the arguments are found to be totally

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