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Academe and Academy: Kenneth Branagh's *Love's Labour's Lost*

> Navarre shall be the wonder of the world,
> Our court shall be a little academe,
> Still and contemplative in living art.
>
> *(*Shakespeare*, Love's Labour's Lost*, I.i.12-14)

I

In 2000 Kenneth Branagh, one of the late twentieth century's most prolific and influential performers and directors of Shakespeare's plays, created a movie version of *Love's Labour's Lost* in the style of a 1930's musical comedy. This has become something of a *cause celebre* in its approach to adaptation, eliciting a variety of responses from academic critics, some of whom use a postmodern critique to applaud the production (Crowl 2003; Gay 2010; Severn 2013), while others, following Frederic Jameson rather than Linda Hutcheon, use one to highlight its failings (Wray 2002; Holste 2002). Branagh's adaptation is bold and, even though the director expected it 'might provoke hostile debate' (Gristwood 2000: 9), it has proved even more challenging to audiences and critics than he initially supposed. Its combination of the play's 'academe' with the Hollywood Academy style of 1930s golden age musical comedy has opened up debates about the text's relationship to modernity/post-modernity, the appropriateness of Branagh's chosen historical context, and most importantly the connection between 'high' culture, as represented by Shakespeare's text, and the 'low'/popular culture of romantic musical comedy.

In addition, the film invites us to consider the relationship between the theatrical and cinematic modes. Branagh's film is, of course, not alone in utilising a cinematic genre to explore a Shakespearean drama. Loncraine's 1995 film adaptation of *Richard III,* just a few years before Branagh's production*,* made extensive use of the gangster genre in its tone and visual representation. Lurhmann's 1996 movie *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* placed the contemporary MTV genre at the heart of its interpretation and style. While *Love's Labour's Lost* historical retrenchment into classic Hollywood cinema could be seen as a reaction against this MTV mode, the commercial success of Luhrmann's film encouraged Branagh and others to assert more directorial interpretative freedom. Branagh notes:

> we have broken away from the various earlier periods of Shakespeare movie making that were linked more closely to theatre... Now these stories are free for exploration in a way they weren't before. The canvas is blank again. (Griswold 2010)

This comment presupposes that it is possible to break away from the theatricality inherent within a Shakespeare text, as well as overlooking the fact that theatrical conventions and genres were often replicated in the new media of film, as is evident in classic film musicals. The possibility of working from a 'blank canvas' may be more problematic than Branagh suggests, and may explain why in Branagh's production the relationship between the cinematic and the theatrical is often an uncomfortable one.

II

In Shakespeare's play, the 'academe' is established in the first scene. The King of Navarre and his courtiers pledge to transform the court into 'a little academe,/Still and contemplative in living art' (I.i.13-14). The aspirations of the King and his three

friends are, as H R Woudhuysen notes, to pursue 'the art of living, the *ars vivendi* of Stoic philosophers; practical learning, knowledge, which has to do with the business of life; the living quality of art' (1998: 113). It should not then be art in a vacuum but a study of art focused on its practical application. The plot of the play demonstrates that this academe remains an unfulfilled aspiration thwarted by romantic intervention. Yet in another sense it is the style of *Love's Labour's Lost* that is 'living art': the play itself its own 'academe', with its welter of late sixteenth century tropes and conventions creating an exuberant artifice. The play also hints, through its stylistic echoes, at the disagreements among various factions in contemporary literary circles. Much critical activity has been expended in attempting to identify all the contemporary literary and historical references in the play. Editors of the play text may conclude with Woudhuysen that 'there is a difference between Shakespeare's drawing on these elements in a general or diffused way and his consciously deciding at this point in his career that he would write a play that directly alluded to or even was "about" them' (1998: 72). Yet it cannot be denied that the style of the play reflects an Early Modern aesthetic preoccupation with the form, content and purpose of artistic endeavours. The project of the King and his nobles in the play is reinforced by the decision that this study must be conducted in retreat from the everyday world, so that the men become

> … brave conquerors – for so you are,
> That war against your own affections
> And the huge army of the world's desires
> (Shakespeare, *Love's Labours Lost*, 1.1.8-10)

This passage, while drawing upon the Renaissance debate about the merits of a contemplative life, indicates that such disengagement is hard won, and, wittily

presents through its metaphors of warfare how, from the start, the 'academe' is embattled by affections and desire. The imagery also demonstrates the play's fascination with language itself as something which can either obfuscate or enrich. The linguistic fireworks provide the text with a distinctive character but they also present particular challenges. Miriam Gilbert notes:

> Critics recognise its verbal exuberance, but they do not always admire it, perhaps finding the characters so intoxicated with language that they seem merely witty speakers rather than characters worth exploring. Students find the play 'difficult' to read because of the intricate puns, and directors approach the play, blue pencil in hand, ready to cut the lines which seem to them obscure and inaccessible; the play's vulnerability to cutting derives from the repetition of certain passages (most notably Berowne's long speech at the end of IV.iii) which were clearly revised, but not clearly cancelled. (Gilbert 1996: 6)

These are some of the reasons that the play has presented difficulties to theatre practitioners since its earliest performances. They may also account for the play's comparative neglect and its disappearance from the English stage between the 'first decade of the seventeenth century and the third decade of the nineteenth' (Gilbert 1996: 21). In the twentieth century the play experienced a revival and there were eleven different productions at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. There have been, to my knowledge, no previous film versions of the play before Branagh's, although the play has been adapted for television twice, as a one-off in 1965 for the BBC, directed by Roger Jenkins, and as part of the BBC TV Shakespeare series in 1985, directed by Elijiah Moshinsky. It is clear, as Miriam Gilbert's valuable account of performances of the play indicates, that nearly all productions of *Love's Labour's Lost* in the twentieth century have modified the text to some extent. Most productions have emended the text either by cutting it or rearranging it, many have used the visual arts as a correlative to the artificiality of the play's language (for example, a Peter

Brook Stratford production (1946) adapted paintings by Watteau), some have examined the play in terms of their own contemporary motifs of engagement and retreat some derived from popular culture, and all seem to have pursued adaptation in the spirit of mining a vein of supposed authenticity.

III

Branagh's film is in this tradition of adaptation. Its most notable features are the removal of about three-quarters of the text and the transformation of the play into a classic musical comedy. Generally, as Pendleton comments, in the filming of Shakespeare 'the director …is more concerned with getting rid of words [than with adding or rearranging them]; most films cut a third or even half of the lines' (Pendleton 1998:62). Inevitably the question 'when does a Shakespeare text cease to be a Shakespeare text?' arises when, as in this instance, such a substantial part is removed. In *Love's Labour's Lost* the decision to cut the text was intertwined with the director's plan to transform the play into a musical. Branagh comments:

> A famous critic once said of it that it was a 'fashionable play 300 years out of fashion' because a lot of its references are very specific to its time. We have cut a lot of that material and replaced it with the songs of wonderful writers like Cole Porter, Irving Berlin or George Gershwin whose lyrics are arguably as witty in their own way as Shakespeare was in his and just as full of conceits and verbal trickery. Shakespeare was trying to convey how silly and wonderful and stupid and agonising it is to be in love and the songs we have chosen convey all the same ideas about the vicissitudes of love.
> (Pathe- *Love's Labour's Lost* Official website 2000)

Branagh's allusion here to Granville-Barker's *Preface* to the play may reflect awareness of the critic's openness to 'the question of cutting', although Granville-Barker also notes that 'one cannot thus eviscerate a scene and expect to see no wound' (Granville-Barker 1948: 40). This severe reduction of *Love's Labour's Lost* might be seen as a reaction against Branagh's own decision to present the

'complete' text of *Hamlet* in his four-hour film in 1996. In the case of *Hamlet* Branagh argued that the historical context adopted, in this instance a nineteenth century 'Ruritania', needed to be 'resonant' and to allow 'a heightened language to sit comfortably' (Branagh 1996:xv). With *Love's Labour's Lost* similar claims were made about creating 'something heightened, an atmosphere that was romanticised, highly glamorous, a safe world. I wanted it to feel like a terrific holiday romance which is interrupted by the real world' (Pathe – *Love's Labour's Lost*). But in this case much of the language of the play was thought to sit uncomfortably with his concept, and large parts of the text were sacrificed to the creation of an appropriate atmosphere in which to found an exploration of the 'vicissitudes of love.'

In part Branagh's decision to set the film just before World War II was influenced by his own knowledge and experience of stage performances of the play:

> [It's a play] that seems to have responded well to a very strong directorial hand, and the landmark productions of this century by Brook and Hall and Michael Langham have been ones that have been very strongly inflected, [with a] very strong sense of place, and my instinct in being in the play in the theatre was that it most certainly needed that - it needed a strong sense of reality, a strong sense of location, a strong sense of a world in which you were happy to accept or understand … why the King might engage in this three-year plan. (Branagh in Wray 2000: 174)

While Branagh is not the first to employ such a setting for the play, he goes on to explain why this inter-war period was deemed to be of particular significance to his production:

> I've always been interested in the period between the wars - what it offered up, the sorts of regret and grief and tragic legacy of the First World War, with the political situation as it was the threat of renewed violence, and what that seemed to do to the atmosphere of the time. The sense perhaps one last idyll in the twentieth century before the world really would change forever.

> That sense of a stolen, magical, idyllic time which nevertheless had a clock ticking… (Branagh in Wray 2000: 174)

This creation of an idyllic inter-war holiday world is in keeping with academic readings of the festive world of Shakespearean comedy (Frye 1957; Barber 1959; Laroque 1991). However, the tripartite structure of festive comedy is less manifest in *Love's Labour's Lost* than in some of Shakespeare's romantic comedies and so the 'normal world -green world- normal world' (Frye 1957: 181) structure is fleshed out further in the film. The 'green world' of Navarre is here a stylised Oxbridge setting in vivid Technicolour. A vast circular 'Bodleian' library dominates the buildings of the court, and a large grassy area forms part of its grounds. Two large iron gates mark the limits of this court/college, and outside is a paved square sloping down to the river. The women arrive by punt against the backdrop of a very artificial full moon with mist drifting across the water. In stark contrast, the outside world is presented through the flickering black and white images of Pathe newsreels. (The references to Pathe are somewhat self-referential, given that the film was produced and distributed by Intermedia films and Pathe Pictures.) Further context is presented at the beginning of the film, as the newsreel shows the four men returning from military manoeuvres in 1939, throwing off their flight jackets and donning academic robes, and at the end of the film a succession of short scenes show the characters involved in events during the Second World War. By these interpolations Branagh augments the structure of the play to bring it more in line with the structural movement of other Shakespearean comedies, spelling out a before and after, and emphasising a tripartite structure.

The visual style of the film's inter-war world is largely unrealistic, and even theatrical in its artificiality. The *mise en scene*, created almost entirely (except for the airplane shots in the final sequence), on a sound stage at Shepperton studios, is clearly not 'realistic', and employs a vivid Technicolor palette. If we set aside the use of colour, Branagh's film adopts an artificial staged style in keeping with the major interpretative framework of his adaptation: the musical comedy films of 1930s and 1940s. This artificiality importantly qualifies Branagh's comment quoted earlier that he wanted 'a strong sense of reality, a strong sense of location'. Here the location is derived from the classic Hollywood musical and is far from a 'realistic' representation of a historical period. Ramona Wray notes that 'in *Love's Labour's Lost*, the 1930s are realized as the musical, an elegant example of what Jameson describes as the "history of aesthetic styles" displacing "real history" (30)' (Wray 2003: 173). Moreover, as Wray notes, the interpolation of the British newsreels with their reports of impending war makes the American musical appear 'symbolically freighted - at best, foolhardy evasion, at worst, political cowardice ... a distractive indulgence' (2003: 174). This is compounded by the fact that Branagh himself provides the voiceover for the newsreels, so 'the director is identified as controlling agent, the paradoxical effect of which is to ensnare him in unresolved reflections upon censorship and creativity' (Wray 2003: 175). Gay is more positive about the postmodern function of these newsreel interventions, citing Branagh's acknowledgement that they were added later, after previews indicated that the late twentieth century audiences were uncertain 'how seriously to take the 1930s "screwball courtships"….Contrast and context are here used cleverly to acknowledge the fin de siecle's belatedness – this film made in 1999 cannot be viewed with the

innocent eyes of those audiences who first watched the 1930s screwball comedies' (Gay 2010: 10).

Branagh's own 'strong directorial hand', as noted above, creates the history of the 1930s with the widespread use of 'classic' songs and musical numbers[1] . The director comments:

> The play responds well to music. There are many references to music and dancing in it and the elegance, style and wit of the play seemed to me to sit well in a context not unlike the fictional world of the Hollywood musicals of the thirties and forties.
> (Pathe – *Love's Labour's Lost* Official Website 2000)

Branagh's film was certainly not the first adaptation of the play to make use of music. In 1771, as Miriam Gilbert notes, 'David Garrick commissioned a musical version …but that version was never staged' (1996: 21). Gilbert also gives a fascinating account of a production of *Love's Labour's Lost* at Stratford, Connecticut in 1968 which modelled the representation of the four men on The Beatles. Woudhuysen records a number of thwarted or successful attempts to adapt the play as opera, including that by W.H. Auden, Chester Kallman, and Nicholas Nabokov which was first performed in 1973 (1998: 100-103). The RSC's most recent production of the play in 2014 matched the first world war setting with music in the styles of Gilbert and Sullivan and Ivor Novello. Branagh himself made extensive use of musical numbers in his stage productions for the Renaissance Theatre company, including a song and dance number in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1990 (Bevington 1999: 499-502).

In Branagh's film the musical numbers take a number of different forms, with the anamorphic wide screen format providing the scope and definition to capture the pairs of dancers across the screen. The first dance precedes the sealing of the contract for the academe and is 'I'd Rather Dance the Charleston', initiated by Berowne but eventually involving all of the men, in an Astaire-style arrangement. This routine, shot mostly from the front with an occasional move in as the dancers retreat to the rear of the library/dance floor, emphasises the patterns created in the dance and the general companionship of the men. It also reveals a roughness in the execution of the dance with occasional lapses in the synchronicity of movements. The next routine 'I won't dance', following the initial meeting of the men and women, incorporates the camera amongst the dancers in the opening frames as it follows the individual pairs. This serves to reinforce the pairing of the couples for the audience, before the camera again occupies a front of stage shot for the remainder of the number. (Front of stage shots, common in 1930s film musicals, replicate the point of view of the audience watching earlier stage musicals. Such full-length shots were also utilised in classic Hollywood cinema to enable audiences to see the skill of individual performers. Unfortunately in Branagh's film they emphasise the less than successful execution, rather than effortless skill and grace.) The front of stage shot also enables the audience to see the patterning of the dancers, whose costumes are colour coded to reaffirm that they are appropriately paired. This motif of visual patterning, borrowed from 1930s cinema, is taken further in a dance number for the four women to 'No Strings (I'm Fancy Free)'. This begins as a chirpy exercise routine for the women, with their hair in curling ribbons, and wearing frilly pyjamas, but then moves to a swimming pool where they are joined by a chorus of other women

similarly dressed in gold swimming costumes and flowery bathing caps: this part of the sequence is shot from above as the women execute the kaleidoscope dance manoeuvres of Esther Williams. Aided and abetted by body doubles and members of the British Olympic synchronised swimming team, this scene is more convincing and proficiently executed. The routine arguably effects a correspondence between the highly structured and formal language of the play and the precise, almost mechanical, patterns of Busby Berkeley's routines. Phelan, commenting on such original routines in films such as *42nd Street* (1933), notes that Busby Berkeley's female dancers become 'figures of artificial femininity …as machine women' (Phelan 2000: 161) and the chorus line 'like the assembly line [in that it] dissects, isolates and serializes' (Phelan 2000: 167). As Kracauer observes 'they are no longer individual girls, but indissoluble girl clusters whose movements are demonstrations of mathematics' (Kracauer quoted in Phelan 2000: 167). In this respect the Busby Berkeley routines resemble the courtly love poems sent by the men in the play, in that they reduce the idealised women to a series of contained and conventional images. Yet whereas Shakespeare problematises the sonneteering conventions, and the sonneteers are made figures of fun because they spectacularly (in both senses) fail to distinguish among the women they idealise, Branagh's Busby Berkeley homage produces a routine which does not invite such critical engagement. The routine is presented with a certain archness and knowingness, which mimics what Altman calls in relation to 1930s musicals 'distantiation devices designed to remind and reassure the audience of their sophistication. ... [with] jokes, innuendo... and impish into the camera winks,' (1987: 177). . It is a 'can you see what we are doing here?' moment.

Other dances include an athletic blues number sung by Dumaine (Adrian Lester) and danced in the style of a Gene Kelly jazz number to 'I've Got a Crush on You', as he acrobatically circles the library tipping chairs in Act Four, Scene Three. The camera point of view is from the edge of the circular room stage, with close-ups interspersed to record the reactions of the other men secretly hidden around the room. This routine specifically replaces Dumaine's sonnet (lines 99-123), although the other love poems from the other participants in this scene were also cut.

In addition to the dances performed by the lovers, the comic characters perform two contrasting song routines in Act One, Scene Two and in Act Four, Scene Two. The first features Armado (Timothy Spall) and Moth (Anthony O'Dowell) who perform a series of vignettes seizing on the phrases in 'I Get a Kick Out of You'. The montage emphasises the somewhat pathetic and accident-prone nature of Armado who is seen falling out of a 'plane' and sneezing into his 'cocaine' (a comic borrowing from Woody Allen's *Celebrity* (1999) in which Branagh had starred). The later routine begins with Costard's delivery of Berowne's letter: the opening of Shakespeare's scene is cut along with Holofernes 'epitaph on the deer' and is replaced by a dance initiated by Holofernes, who in this production was transformed into a female school mistress, Holofernia, and played by Geraldine McEwan. This is a comic routine to 'The way you look tonight', executed with total seriousness, but highlighting its amateurishness, and featuring Nathaniel (Richard Briers) and Costard and Jacquenetta in a number of exaggerated poses only fleetingly held. Branagh refers to this as a 'comic ballet' (DVD Director's commentary) and it is again shot from a theatrical front of stage point of view. Holofernes/Holofernia's speech about her

'talent' (IV.ii.62) and 'gift' (IV.ii.65ff) in this reinterpretation is seen as assessment of her singing and dancing, rather than her learned linguistic skills! This dance however becomes part of the romantic courtship of Holofernia by Nathaniel, and 'I beseech your society' (IV.ii.157) is redolent with sexual innuendo. Branagh's decision to adapt *Love's Labour's Lost* into a musical was partially governed, he suggests, by this desire to develop the characterisation. He notes:

> It took me a couple of years, once I had had the initial idea, to work out all the songs. I wanted them to be truly organic and not to feel just stuck on top of the play. They had to really say something about how the character were feeling at the time or to advance the plot in some way.
> (Pathe – *Love's Labour's* Lost official website)

In the light of this densely metacinematic discourse, it is striking that the two most obvious metatheatrical episodes in the play were cut by Branagh. The Muscovite Masque of Act Five, Scene Two was filmed but does not appear in the final version[2]. (and was replaced by probably the least successful dance number in the production. The version of 'Let's Face the Music and Dance' presented here is a sensual blues number, more in the style of Bob Fosse than the musicals of the 1930s, which presents the four couples as a writhing mass of masked dancers. The intention was no doubt to emphasise the sexual undertones of all the courting rituals in the play, but the camera lingers on the artfully posed bodies of the dancers in a rather too knowing and voyeuristic manner. The misty staging and the circling camera seem to suggest that this is a dream: a wide departure from the all too real scene in the play where the men's attempts at courtly chivalric ritual are relentlessly punctured by the ladies' acerbic wit. The implied sexual promiscuity of the dance also seems far removed from the confused courtship rituals of the Muscovite masque and

disguising. The Pageant of the Nine Worthies was also cut from the final version, although the scene was filmed and the silent footage is part of the montage in the Pathe newsreel describing the court entertainment. This entertainment, in the spirit of 1930s musicals, occurs in a created performance space, a night club in the open air, beyond the gates of the academe. Initially the audience of lovers watches a performance of 'There's No Business like Show Business' by Costard (Nathan Lane). This develops into a thundering tap chorus in which all the cast participate. The long rows of this 'London Palladium' style finale are filmed entirely from the front. While this routine creates a rousing finale which is dramatically interrupted by the entrance of Marcade, the removal of the Nine Worthies undermines the play's thematic enquiry into intellectual aspiration undermined by human limitation, as well as losing the interplay of the various audiences for the Pageant. Here the demands of the film musical are uppermost, and enforce a conclusion which fits with Altman's observation that 'in the late thirties no self-respecting musical could do without a staged spectacle' (235). In Branagh's final sequence of 'There's no business like show business' all cast members participate, and perform directly for the camera. It is a big production number - a theatrical finale for the cinema audience.

The most extravagant dance number in the film, which is reprised behind the credits at the end, is 'Cheek to Cheek' by Irving Berlin. This concludes Act Four, Scene Three, where the cinematic adaptation is marked by a rather facetious comic literal-mindedness. The scene is set in the circular Bodleian-like library where the initial pledges have been made. Berowne strolls around the upper level and his comments

'By the Lord, this love is a mad as Ajax. It kills sheep, it kills me' (Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost* IV.iii.5-6) are accompanied by his gesturing to a bust of Ajax, and then watching through the window as a number of sheep file past outside, the last of which, obviously unreal, keels over at the words 'kills sheep'. This kind of literal visual joke is continued when the king's 'shrouded in this bush' (Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost* IV.iii.134) is represented by the totally inadequate shrouding offered by a small potted plant.[3] The song itself is interlaced into Berowne's speech starting at line 286. 'Have at you then, affection's men at arms' becomes the beginning of a tap routine which emphasises the line's iambic pentameter. At 'A lover's eyes will gaze an eagle blind' (Shakespeare*, Love's Labour's Lost* IV.iii.308) Patrick Doyle's soundtrack with its soaring strings intervenes, colouring the following twelve lines in a romantic gloss. The lines 'And when Love speaks, the voice of all the gods/Make heaven drowsy with the heaven' (Shakespeare*, Love's Labour's Lost* IV.iii.318-319) are followed by 'Heaven, I'm in heaven', the first words of 'Cheek to Cheek'. The remainder of Berowne's speech is cut. The dance itself is seen as a fantasy projection as the men initially float up to the azure 'heaven' painted on the library's ceiling. This is followed by a kind of Astaire-Rodgers routine in the courtyard, with the women in floaty dresses colour co-ordinated to the men's ties in order to clearly delineate the couples.

This routine, perhaps more than any other in the film, reveals the limitations of Branagh's decision not to use professional singers and dancers. His rationale was that 'I wanted to invest the singing and dancing with the kind of particular understanding of character which an actor can bring. So I was happy to accept –

even encourage – a certain rawness in the singing and dancing provided it came from a very clear sense of who the people were' (Pathe official website). There is indeed a certain rawness in his actors' dancing here, at odds with the professional faultlessness of the 1930s originals which was a major contribution to the fantasy on which they were based. Woody Allen in *Everyone Says I Love You* (1996) encourages a similar rawness, but this is consistent since his drama is essentially naturalistic, and as Green suggests

> while Allen is the purveyor of "deliberate" camp, Branagh offers the "pure" or "naive" variety. Allen's film acknowledges its campiness ... Branagh's *falls* into camp, helped along ... by his "melting pot" approach, to borrow an image from Lehmann (188) to highbrow and lowbrow culture.'
> (Green 2008: 87)

IV

Branagh's own assessment of his adaptation was that 'It seems to work well and I think that is because the play, which is one of Shakespeare's youngest works, is very exuberant and romantic and uncynical – very like the Hollywood musicals that these songs come from' (Pathe 2000). His film is, I think, 'uncynical', but most critics responding to its, at times, uncertain mix of playfulness and seriousness, have betrayed their doubts in characterising the film in terms of parody, pastiche, pasticcio, or (as above) camp. Some, such as Gay and Crowl, in asserting the film's postmodern credentials, have affirmed the celebratory energy of the production and its director:

> Branagh is a product of the postmodern moment dominated by a sense of belatedness; a sense that originality is exhausted and that only parody and pastiche and intertextual echo remain. Rather than finding such a condition enervating, Branagh's work seizes on its possibilities … (Crowl 'Flamboyant Realist' 2000: 226-7)

It is true that Branagh sometimes exploits the 'exuberant and romantic' devices of the musical effectively. An example is the dream sequence in Act Four, Scene Three. The balletic opening (as the men float around the dome of the library) fits the criteria identified by Jane Feuer where the 'Dream ballets of MGM musicals emphasise either the wish of the dreamer …or they represent a tentative working out of the problems of the primary narrative' (Feuer 1993: 74). The Astaire-Rogers number which follows further empathises the 'wish of the dreamer' (Feuer 1993: 75). Feuer goes on to note that 'very often the wish ballet will allow the dreamer to road test various possible mates'(1993: 2), which may explain the curious dance sequence to 'Let's Face the Music and Dance' described above.

However, Branagh's is a rather nostalgic understanding of the musical comedies of 1930s and 1940s. Feuer and Altman's examination of the social and historical context of the musical reveals a film genre whose escapism is in part a response to social and economic deprivation. Feuer stresses that the genre has 'one dominant impulse …the desire to capture on celluloid the quality of live entertainment' (1993: 2). However, she goes on to note that:

> The Hollywood musical as a genre perceives the gap between producer and consumer, the breakdown of community designated by the very distinction between performer and audience, as a form of cinematic original sin. The musicals seek to bridge the gap by putting up 'community' as an ideal concept. In basing its value system on community, the producing and consuming functions severed by the passage of musical entertainment from folk to popular to mass status are rejoined through the genre's rhetoric. (Feuer 1993: 3)

The implications of this for the musical in general are too wide-ranging to explore here, but it does suggest that the world of the Hollywood musical, perceived as

'uncynical' by Branagh, is also a pragmatic negotiation of aesthetic, cultural and social change, and that confidence about the notion of 'community' in such films is central to the debate. Feuer suggests that the familiar 'let's put the show on here in the barn' motif of many musicals is an attempt to compensate for this perceived lack of community in mass culture, which makes it even more telling that the amateur dramatics of the Pageant of the Nine Worthies were removed in Branagh's production.

Moreover, where Branagh does employ cinematic devices borrowed from the musical he sometimes underplays their potential to embrace a community. I have commented above on how some of the musical routines were shot from the front. In 1930s and 1940s musicals where similar shots were used they often incorporated an on-stage audience, either in a theatre, enclosed in a proscenium arch or in a cinema or in a night club[4], so encouraging the live cinema audience to see themselves as part of a wider communal experience while at the same time throwing the artificiality of the 'performance' into relief. Without such on-stage audience, in such scenes as the 'No Business like Show business' scene, Branagh's film misses the chance to open up the social issues surrounding the art/reality conflict which is part of both the musical genre and Shakespeare's play.

The conclusion of the play provided Branagh with his most difficult challenge in his attempts to adapt the text to the style of a 1930s musical. In contrast to most musical comedies, in Shakespeare's play the romantic resolution is deferred beyond the scope of the performance, and the text concludes with the potentially

melancholic song of Spring and Winter. Branagh found his 'solution' to the inconclusive romantic ending by utilising further the metacinematic devices of the newsreel, the musical, and the war film.

The arrival of Marcade, dressed in black, by river on a punt is greeted by the solemn tolling of a bell. The news of the death of the Princess's father is 'coloured' by Doyle's soaring strings, all creating a darker and more subdued atmosphere. Although supplemented by the somewhat intrusive musical colouring, this scene is one of the most complete sequences of adaptation, with comparatively little cut from the original play text. It is staged as an affectionate parting between the couples, although only Berowne's pledge is sealed with a kiss. A newspaper discarded by Berowne falls into a puddle, and as the camera focuses in upon it (in a film cliché borrowed from war movies) the headline 'French King Dead: will France fall?' is visible, along with a reference to the invasion of Poland. The song 'They Can't Take That Away' replaces the Song of Spring and Winter (V.ii.861-917). There is no dance routine at this point, only the choreographed interlacing of the couples as they share the lyrics of the song. This may be a version of what Feuer identifies as a song format of the musical, the 'passed-along song' (1993: 16), which she notes is usually accompanied by such techniques as 'the passing shot and the montage sequence' (1993: 16). In Branagh's film, the song continues, and the montage is used to show the departure of the Princess and her friends, who are dressed now in winter furs co-ordinated with the jackets of the men. There follows an airport departure, an obvious allusion to *Casablanca* (1942). As the plane takes flight, it writes an 'X' in the sky and then transcribes the final words of the play 'You that way,

we this way'. However, the narrative is then continued in a Pathe newsreel montage, as the events of the Second World War are sketched in. Berowne is seen under fire in a field hospital, interspersed with images of the Blitz; the fall of France results in the arrest of the Princess; the other men are in action in the trenches; Don Armado is in a concentration camp with Jacquenetta clutching a baby outside the wire fence Boyet is shot as a member of the French Resistance; Nathaniel is 'Digging for Victory'. The montage comes to an end with V.E. Day celebrations as the four couples come together across a crowded square. They embrace, as a voice-over reiterates the 'But love, first learned in a lady's eyes' speech from Act Four, Scene Three (lines 301ff). The black and white of the newsreel is transformed to colour, as a street party concludes the film with all cast raising their glasses to the camera. This montage is a version of the 'wedding coda', a device often used in musical comedy which 'follows the plot resolution and exists outside the time and space of the film proper, becoming a celebration of the end of the film itself' (Feuer 1993: 82). Here Branagh in using a number of filmic devices has not so much adapted as, in essence, rejected the ending of Shakespeare's play. In this final sequence, the prevailing structure and momentum of the musical comedy have become dominant. There is melancholia and poignancy at the end of the film but Branagh's audience, unlike Shakespeare's, is not asked to contemplate 'loss' beyond the end of film.

V

The transformation in Branagh's film of the 'academe' of Navarre to the norms of the Hollywood 'Academy' is thus a radical reworking of Shakespeare's text. It clearly shows how, as Boose and Burt comment, Shakespeare adaptations often 'speak within a metacinematic discourse of self-reference in which, through film quotation,

they situate themselves in reference as much to other films as to a Shakespeare tradition' (Boose and Burt 1997: 11). In excising so much of the language of the play and replacing it with music and dance Branagh has negotiated a shift in the balance of the play from high to low popular culture. Branagh views this popularisation positively saying:

> obstacles have been removed in our potential enjoyment of the plays. They now seem more audience friendly. Both directors and actors are less frightened of them and the audience seem ready to view these films as entertainment and not intelligent tests.'
> (Pathe 2000)

Perhaps one might read this as a pushing back against another kind of Academy, typified by the university led mores of the Royal Shakespeare Company and indeed the academic study of Shakespeare itself. Yet one must also question whether the film succeeded as popular entertainment. Its box office returns[5] suggest not, though certainly some audiences responded to it with real pleasure. One showing I saw in 2000, granted in a small art house cinema, was greeted with a round of applause. Such audiences are likely to be different from those of the multiplexes in terms of their class, age and maybe gender and the audience responded to what appeared to be a nostalgic remembrance of the original films, and the playfulness of their recreation in this film. Yet as critics such as Green, and indeed Branagh himself noted, the musical is 'a genre that hasn't really worked for the last forty years' (Crowl *Cineplex* 2003: 45) and it is not a film genre readily accessible to most under 25 year olds. It is also a genre with a complex relationship to its own theatrical roots, and the social and historical context which gave rise to it. Gay applauds Branagh's success in 'capturing the energy of live performance yet framing it as artificial, unrealistic' (Gay 2010:10). Even though this style was very much in keeping

with the original musicals, and a consequence of their technological limitations as well their desire to maintain connection with the hierarchical authority of stage performances, it is counter-intuitive from the standpoint of much contemporary cinema. In retrospect Branagh's *Love's Labour's Lost* represented a contemporary re-presentation or re-reading of the 1930s musicals as much as a re-reading of Shakespeare, and, perhaps paradoxically, it is this talent for reinterpretation of popular culture, with adaptations of the comic book (*Thor* 2011) and fairy tale (*Cinderella* 2015), which ultimately has brought him commercial success in movies.

Branagh's *Love's Labour's Lost*, and other film adaptations of Shakespeare in the late twentieth century, are a rich resource for adaptation studies. Branagh's movie may be a flawed experiment, but in its exploitation of the interaction between the cinematic and theatrical, one might see further evidence of a pattern in recent kinds of adaptation. The use of non-diegetic music in stage performances to underscore key moments, of cinema style trailers for forthcoming theatre productions, and more recently of digital cinematic effects on stage, as in the Gregory Doran's production of *The Tempest* at the RSC (2016) all point to the increased cinematisation of theatrical performances. Likewise the increased popularity of the theatre by way of the cinema adaptations of RSC Live, NT Live and, indeed, Branagh Theatre live, focuses fresh attention on the interplay between the two modes in promoting and celebrating the 'liveness' of performance (Wardle 2014). The interpenetration between cinema and theatre remains a matter of continuing enquiry and interest for adaptation studies.

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[1] The soundtrack included the following: 'I'd Rather Charleston' by George Gershwin, 'I Get a Kick Out of You' by Cole Porter, 'I Won't Dance' by Jerome Kern, 'No Strings (I'm Fancy Free), 'Cheek to Cheek' by Irving Berlin, 'The Way You Look Tonight' by Jerome Kern, 'I've Got a Crush on You' by George & Ira Gershwin, 'Let's Face the Music and Dance' by Irving Berlin, 'There's no Business Like Showbusiness' by Irving Berlin, 'They Can't Take That Away from Me' by George & Ira Gershwin.

[2] There is an interesting intertextual moment in this deleted scene, included in the DVD extras. Rosaline (Natascha McElhone), while in disguise imitates the voice of the Princess (American actress Alicia Silverstone) but her parody evokes the voice of the ousted silent film star Lina Lamont (Jean Hagan) in *Singin' in the Rain*.

[3] This joke has been used in a number of stage productions, including a RSC production at Stratford in 1990 directed by Terry Hands, in which Branagh played the King.

[4] The on-stage audience, in a theatre, enclosed in a proscenium arch can be seen in 'Couple of Swells', Judy Garland/Fred Astaire in *Easter Parade* (1948), the cinema in 'Singing in the Rain' (final song), Debbie Reynolds *Singing in the Rain*, (1952), and the night club in 'The Continental', Fred Astaire/Ginger Rodgers in *The Gay Divorcee* (1934).

[5] Wray notes'the film had cost $8 million, took less than £350,00 0 in the UK and $635,000 in the United States (Dantrey 42)' (Wray 2002: 171).