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flurry of combat, the "alarums and excursions," the confused comings and goings—so confused, indeed, that I think medieval warfare, so different from modern warfare in so many other ways, must have been very similar to it in this; that it is almost impossible for the onlooker to tell who is on whose side. In this respect I found Laurence Olivier's *Battle for France* quite as bewildering as Errol Flynn's *Battle for Burma*: so much so, in fact, that until Fluellen indignantly explained the situation, I was under the impression that this play's medieval equivalent of an "atrocious"—the slaughter of the camp-boys by the French—was nothing more than a clever infiltration tactic by the English!

Apart from this, however, medieval warfare seems to have been, on the aristocratic level anyway, as polite and sporting as it was spectacular: you had to be quite sure that the other chap wasn't prepared to ransom himself and, failing this, that he was quite ready to fight before the heralds said, in almost those words, "Let battle commence!" These parleys between the French and the English, the councils-of-war in both camps, and the trotting back and forth of the French herald, Montjoy (excellently done by Ralph Truman), constitute some of the most satisfactory parts of the whole very satisfactory film.

ALL these spectacles, all this pictorial beauty of setting, backcloth, and costume, make *Henry V.* as much a delight for the eye as the impeccable diction of the players, speaking Shakespeare's lines, makes it a delight for the ear. This is no small achievement, since the usual tendency when verse is presented on the screen is for the poetry to suffer for the sake of the picture: it is difficult to appreciate both simultaneously. In *Henry V.*, however, a variety of ingenious devices surmount this problem. When the speech is all-important, the camera largely effaces itself: as, for example, in that magnificent soliloquy spoken by Henry on the eve of battle. Here again one feels that Shakespeare himself might have warmly approved; but whether he would or not, a modern audience is always conscious of the absurdity of having an actor go off into a corner to talk to himself in a voice loud enough for the people out front to hear every word, while those on the stage supposedly remain completely oblivious to what he is saying. The theatre can never overcome the artificiality of the soliloquy and the aside, but the camera can, and does in this sequence, by treating the soliloquy as genuinely "unspoken thought," letting us hear the words without seeing the actor's lips move.

Again, in the St. Crispin's Day speech and in the sequence where Henry woos Katharine (with Renee Asherson giving a delicious performance as the French princess), the camera holds single shots for much longer than is customary, so that one's attention is not distracted from the words. On the other hand, where the dialogue is less important, the cameraman is given a much freer hand, and so are the players. That long early speech in which the Archbishop of Canterbury expounds the Salic Law would, indeed,

be not merely boring but almost incomprehensible to a modern movie audience (and so would some of the comic bits with Pistol, Bardolph, and Nym), if the players were not allowed greater licence than on the stage, and if the camera did not aid and abet their foolery.

YOU should go to see *Henry V.* prepared for a treat, but you should also go prepared for a few surprises: the fact, for example, that the first part of the film is a re-creation of the play as it would have been performed in Elizabethan times at the Globe Theatre, with the audience on three sides of the tiny stage and joining in the fun. My own reaction to the first sight of a human figure in the film—the man who hoists the flag to the Globe's masthead—was one of distinct disappointment. I thought, "Somebody in very obvious fancy dress." But as you watch the actors playing to the gallery, while the groundlings join in with comments and applause, and as you get an occasional glimpse of the cast tumbling over one another in their communal dressing-room, the initial feeling of surprise (and possibly of disappointment) wears off. By Act. III. the pretence that you are attending an Elizabethan stage performance has wholly disappeared; the action is no longer confined "within the girdle of these walls"; we are in the realm of the cinema much more than of the theatre. And yet the effect of that novel introduction has been to emphasise the stage origins of the film and so to give added point and interest to the Shakespearean verse.

HOWEVER, although a new storehouse of dramatic material would now seem to be opened to us by the successful filming of *Henry V.* I think there will always be limitations to what the screen can accomplish with Shakespeare, even when you have for director and producer a man as much in love with his subject as Laurence Olivier. You may overcome the restrictions and artificiality of the stage, but the theatre still remains essentially a place for talk and the screen a place for action and realism. It is no accident, I believe, that the most effective portions of *Henry V.* are those showing the Battle of Agincourt. These are pure cinema, containing no spoken words, but only a stirring musical accompaniment by William Walton.

All the same, *Henry V.* is a daring experiment in more ways than one, and in more ways than one it succeeds magnificently. I have little doubt in my mind now about what film to name as the best of 1945.


NATIONAL FILM UNIT

THE National Film Unit's Weekly Review for the week beginning November 2, and released to all the principal theatres throughout the Dominion, contains the following items:

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