

NEWS

Shakespeareans honour Branagh for film work

By Nigel Reynolds, Arts Correspondent

BRITAIN'S "new Shakespeareans", keeping the playwright's flame burning 384 years after his death, met last night to see Kenneth Branagh honoured for his dedication to the Bard.

The actor-director was given the prestigious annual Gielgud Award by the Shakespeare Guild, an American foundation.

The award, a silver quill, was presented to him by last year's recipient, Dame Judi Dench, who also won an Oscar last year for playing Queen Elizabeth I in the film *Shakespeare in Love*.

The foundation praised Branagh, 39, for introducing young people to Shakespeare. He has made three acclaimed screen versions of Shakespeare plays — *Henry V*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Hamlet*.

In March, he will release *Love's Labour's Lost*. In the high-octane production, set in the Thirties, Branagh juxtaposes Shakespeare with songs from American musicals and Busby Berkeley dance spectacles. Branagh has also announced plans for

films of *Macbeth* and *As You Like It*.

When he made *Hamlet*, in which he played the Prince, he insisted that not one word should be cut. The film was four hours long, though his studio also put out a shorter version to be shown on aircraft.

At last night's ceremony in London, actors and comics including Sir Derek Jacobi, a past winner of the same award, Stephen Fry, Bob Hoskins, Ben Elton and Geraldine McEwan, performed a Shakespeare revel with readings, music and sketches.

Branagh's former lover, Helena Bonham Carter, from whom he split last year, also took part.

John Andrews, president of the Shakespeare Guild, said: "Through his remarkable films, Kenneth Branagh has introduced the works of Shakespeare to a new generation of audiences."

"In the process he has revived the sagging fortunes of a 435-year-old has-been and turned him into today's hottest screenwriter."

Pictures: HEATHCLIFF O'MALLEY



Bard's man: Kenneth Branagh arrives at the event



Star quality: Helena Bonham Carter joins the party

EVENING STANDARD

MONDAY, 17 JANUARY, 2000 23

Branagh collects a Gielgud honour at a feelgood event

IT WAS "an overwhelming evening" for Kenneth Branagh when he received the Shakespeare Guild's Gielgud Award for introducing Shakespeare to a new generation, writes Robin Springer.

The 38-year-old actor, director and producer sat in Middle Temple Hall, where Shakespeare is believed to have appeared in *Twelfth Night*, last night to hear warm tributes from stars including Nicole Kidman, Tom Cruise, Sir Derek Jacobi and Sinead Cusack.

Even Helena Bonham Carter, from whom he recently split, went on stage to show they are still, to borrow his words, best pals. "Having known Ken quite well, I can safely say he is one of the more extraordinary people of this world," she said.

Billy Crystal sent the message: "Kenneth has been to Shakespeare what Viagra has to me", while Robert De Niro felt Branagh might have been honoured a few years earlier had he let him play Beatrice — "not that Emma was not competent", he added. Surprisingly, perhaps, his former wife Emma Thompson did not figure in the proceedings. It



Guest tributes: Sinead Cusack, Sir Derek Jacobi and Helena Bonham Carter at the event

Pictures: DAVE BENNETT

is understood the organisers felt it would be inappropriate to ask her. Other congratulatory messages came from Hollywood directors like Martin Scorsese, Robert Altman and Woody Allen and from actors like Ralph Fiennes, Joan Collins, Julie Christie, Kevin Kline and Robin Williams.

On stage there was Ben Elton with a "Shakespeare is a boring old git" routine and from John Sessions with "to be or not to be" in the style of Al Pacino. Richard Briers thanked Branagh for turning him from a well-known comedy actor into a classical one. "My income

dropped 65 per cent but my family respects me," he said.

The award was presented by Dame Judi Dench, last year's recipient. She praised Branagh's sense of humour and stoicism. "I have to say that he is among a handful of people to whom, if they asked me to play a part without knowing what it was, I would say yes," she said.

Branagh said he was "uniquely blessed" and overwhelmed by "this medieval version of *This Is Your Life*".

He reserved special thanks for William Shakespeare "without whose inspiration I would not have had a career at all".



Double honours: Last year's winner Judi Dench with Kenneth Branagh last night

ROY RILEY



Kenneth Branagh receiving the Golden Quill from Dame Judi Dench last night

Much ado for hero of the Bard

By BENEDICT NIGHTINGALE

DEREK JACOBI said that the man filled him with awe and admiration. Helena Bonham Carter called him "one of the more extraordinary people in this world". Ben Elton declared that Shakespeare owed him a debt.

Those were some of the less extravagant compliments ladled out in Middle Temple Hall last night. Who was the Renaissance man receiving this praise? Well, at least it was someone who founded a theatre company called Renaissance.

It was Kenneth Branagh, a famously nice man, a thoroughly decent actor, a gifted director of plays and films, an energetic producer, but not yet quite the blend of Galileo and John Cleese that nearly two hours of adulation seemed to suggest.

Branagh was receiving the John Gielgud Golden Quill Award, an enormous gilded pen sticking out of an enormous black blot, given by America's Shakespeare Guild to an outstanding interpreter of the Bard. Usually, the presentation is made on the other side of the pond, but this year transposed to Shakespeare's homeland. Branagh was the winner because his films of *Henry V*, *Hamlet* and *Much Ado* have, in the programme's words, "re-

vived the sagging fortunes of a 435-year-old has-been and transformed him into today's hottest screenwriter".

Trumpets sounded. Elizabethan tunes were played. The American Ambassador declared that the Clintons would have liked to be there. And on came thespian after thespian who had worked with Branagh: Jacobi and Richard Briers, Dame Judi Dench and Bob Hoskins. What, one began to wonder, was Branagh thinking? Did he blush when Joan Collins told him via letter that he was "the butchest director I ever worked with". Or stop breathing to hear that Robin Williams wished him "a warm hand on your quill".

I suspect, or at least hope, that Branagh appreciated it when Briers, who played Lear for him, wryly complained of being turned from "a much-loved comedy actor" into "a highly respected classical actor" with two-thirds less income. Branagh received his vast quill from Dame Judi with becoming grace and modesty, recalling the words of an eminent teacher at RADA when confronted with his adolescent Hamlet: "No, no, no, no, no, no, you have got absolutely no sense of the man whatever — funny, though, funny."

Kenneth Branagh is our greatest living Shakespearean – and that's official. **Michael Billington** on why he won the Golden Quill

Method in his movies

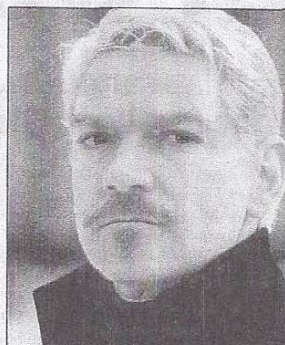
On Sunday Kenneth Branagh won the Golden Quill, established by the Washington-based Shakespeare Guild to honour the "greatest Shakespearean of our day". Clearly the guild's founder, John F Andrews, has a wry sense of humour. After praising the 38-year-old Branagh for introducing Shakespeare to a new generation through his films, he goes on: "In the process Mr Branagh has revived the sagging fortunes of a 435-year-old has-been and turned him into today's hottest screenwriter."

It is significant that the award is American and is given to Branagh primarily for his movies. In blasé Britain, where Shakespeare is still theatrically available and where Branagh-bashing is a popular sport, we have no idea of the impact the Belfast boy's movies have made in the US. I was in Chicago when Branagh's Renaissance Theatre Company was playing *King Lear* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The theatre was packed with young people, and at a panel on playing Shakespeare, in which Branagh took part, people talked about the *Henry V* movie with a glowing gratitude you wouldn't find in Britain. Americans, quite simply, have a hunger for Shakespeare which their theatre cannot begin to satisfy.

But Branagh doesn't merely have three Shakespeare movies made, with *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Macbeth* still to come. He has, in at least two of those cases, created a film that is comparable in linguistic richness and density of texture to a theatrical experience. Praising Branagh for making a movie that is like a play may seem a backhanded compliment, but in a medium where adapting Shakespeare usually involves textual dilution, Branagh has shown you can preserve the values of the original and still make exciting cinema.

Filming Shakespeare is always difficult. The Russian director Grigori Kozintsev once summed up the orthodox cinematic view: "The problem is not one of finding means to speak the verse in front of the camera... The aural has to be made visual. The poetic texture itself has to be transformed into a visual poetry, into the dynamic organisation of film imagery." This is easier if you're working in a language other than English; it's what Kozintsev himself did in *Hamlet*, Kurosawa in *Throne of Blood* – and Orson Welles in his sequence of Shakespeare movies, by treating the text as if it were in another tongue.

Branagh, however, has found a way of preserving the text and yet keeping the film visually alive. In *Henry V*, Derek Jacobi's Chorus, wandering through the battle-scenes like an ironic commentator, keeps the language constantly in front of us. Contrast the Olivier version, in which the Chorus is gradually



Popular touch... Branagh as Hamlet

reduced to an off-screen voice. Even more remarkable is the Branagh *Hamlet*, where we get a powerful image of Elsinore as a vast hall of mirrors and a place of imprisoning confinement, and the full four-hour text, which reminds us that the prince is part of a larger pattern.

Branagh has preserved the Shakespearean experience and yet produced popular cinema. What we forget, however, is that the Branagh movies, which triggered off a whole new cycle and made Shakespeare cinematically sexy, owe their exis-

tence to the Renaissance Theatre Company. Read Branagh's premature biography, *Beginning*, and you discover that, even as he was planning a Renaissance theatre season comprising *Hamlet*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It*, he was insisting that filming on *Henry V* start the second it was finished. The momentum created by the theatre project carried through into the movie. It also helped that Branagh had already played *Henry V* for Adrian Noble at the RSC and understood the rhythm of the role.

In short, Shakespeare on screen often depends on a pre-existing theatrical culture: both Branagh and Olivier used their regular team of actors and even Baz Luhrmann's high-concept *Romeo + Juliet* was the product of a group who had grown up together at drama school in Sydney. As ever, cinema feeds off theatre. But if Branagh amply deserves his Golden Quill, it is not just for his remarkablechutzpah and energy. It is for showing that you can do Shakespeare on screen without sacrificing his density and richness and without relentlessly transforming the aural into the visual. Imaginatively handled, the aural becomes the visual.

The Royal National Theatre presents the
Market Theatre, Johannesburg production of

THE ISLAND

by Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona

Set in the notorious Robben Island prison, *The Island* is a tribute to the men and women who were imprisoned for taking part in the fight for a free and democratic South Africa.

Following its premiere in 1973, the play toured internationally and was received with enormous acclaim, including Tony Awards for the two actors who are now coming to the National to perform the play for the last time.

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TUESDAY, JANUARY 18, 2000

reversal of the boxer Hurricane Carter's unjust conviction for three murders committed in 1966, mixed fact with fiction for the sake of better drama. That is not much of a surprise: rare is the movie about history that does not do the same. The justification, not yet put forward about "The Hurricane" but no doubt soon to be offered, is that a work of art cannot be tied down to the dross of mere fact as it strives for the uncluttered essence of the truth.

There is a corollary to that justification. Not only have all artists manipulated histo-

who never said them (Does anybody think that Henry V really proclaimed, "We happy few, we band of brothers" at the Battle of Agincourt?), then isn't it more or less the same when filmmakers do those things today?

A good question, one for which there is no easy answer. And yet it troubles the mind, especially if you believe as I do that at a time when fact and fiction are ever more blurred in film and on television, there ought to be something sacred about the historical truth.

wrote in his last book ("Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human") that Shakespeare's Richard III, unfairly depicted as an evil genius who had his nephews murdered in the Tower of London, was a reflection of the Tudor propaganda of the time.

Is there no ethical difference between the Shakespeare of Richard III and, say, the Oliver Stone of "J. F. K." and "Nixon" or the makers of "The Hurricane"?

There are important differences, some involving quality and others practicality. They are not easy to specify because they

most recent movie history is morally one-dimensional, bite-size and therefore easy to swallow. At least three points can be made in this regard: one, the nature of Shakespeare as a historian; two, propaganda as opposed to art; three, the enormous technical and public relations power enjoyed by moviemakers that was unavailable to playwrights of Shakespeare's time.

First: Shakespeare was a far better historian and a more serious one than most of the history-minded moviemakers of today. He

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Footlights



NEWS

Beholder's Eye

Some are hypnotic, others hallucinatory. They are sometimes sinister, like images from a dream. They are the provocative paintings that trace Salvador Dali's ex-

periments with various pictorial techniques from 1926 to 1982. Drawing upon its own collection and loans from other institutions, the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford will display some 60 of these paintings from Friday through March 26. The museum describes "Salvador Dali's Optical Illusions" as the first major exploration of the artist's preoccupation with optics and visual per-

ception. The show will be seen at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington from April 20 to June 18 and the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh from July 23 to Oct. 1.

Royal Homecoming

The stolen bust of an ancient queen is to be flown back to Egypt on Thursday, a decade after it was smuggled to Britain and displayed at the British Museum. Gaballah Ali Gaballah, chairman of Egypt's Supreme Antiquities Council, said the bust of Queen Meret, who lived during the New Kingdom, which lasted from 1550 B.C. to 1150 B.C., was taken from a storehouse by a British national. Ahmed Salah, a public relations officer at the Egyptian Culture Ministry, said the bust, partly damaged by the smugglers to obscure its identity, was acquired by the British Museum, which restored and exhibited it until Egypt demanded its return.

Family Affair

When it comes to father-and-son businesses, the Pizzarellis take a back seat to no one. So when tomorrow rolls around, the John Pizzarelli Trio will be performing at Feinstein's at the Regency. Under normal circumstances, the trio consists of the jazz guitarist and vocalist John Pizzarelli, the bassist Martin Pizzarelli, his brother, and the pianist Ray Kennedy. But this engagement, through Feb. 14 at the Regency Hotel, will establish a first for the family in New York. Joining his sons will be the jazz guitarist Bucky Pizzarelli.



The schedule calls for shows at 8:30 p.m. Tuesdays through Thursdays and 8:30 and 11 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays, a brunch on Feb. 13 and two shows on Valentine's Day.

Celebration

At the Middle Temple Hall in London, they came to praise Kenneth Branagh, whose films include "Henry V," "Much Ado About Nothing" and "Hamlet." They included actors like Derek Jacobi, Bob Hoskins, Helena Bonham Carter and Judi Dench, from whom Mr. Branagh received the John Gielgud Golden Quill Award of the Shakespeare Guild for his services to Shakespeare. The ceremony was the first in London by the American organization, whose previous honorees include Ian McKellen, Sir Derek, Zoe Caldwell and Dame Judi.

LAWRENCE VAN GELDER

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INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE, TUESDAY, JANUARY 18, 2000



CHEERS — Judi Dench presenting Kenneth Branagh with the Gielgud Award in London, for his services to the Shakespearean tradition.

AT LAST it can be known: the author John Blackthorn is actually Gary Hart. Hart, a former U.S. senator and two-time presidential candidate, has acknowledged that he wrote "I, Che," a political thriller set in Cuba. Hart—who now can also be credited with last year's "Sins of the Father" by Blackthorn—has traveled several times to Cuba, often carrying messages from the Clinton administration. The secrecy, he says, was necessary to continue his shuttle missions. "I wanted to tell these fictional stories but I didn't want to jeopardize any value I could add to my messenger role," Hart told Time magazine.

Jena Malone, a 15-year-old actress who appeared in "Contact" and "Stepmom," won legal emancipation from her mother after accusing her of squandering her earnings, her attorney, Neil Olsen, said. California law allows minors as young as 14 to seek emancipation from their parents. Malone won a court order barring her mother from interfering with her professional life.

PEOPLE

Prince William of Britain defied the husband of Queen Elizabeth II when he visited his aunt, the Duchess of York, to try to heal a rift between her and the royal family, newspapers in London report. William and his brother, Harry, took time off from a Christmas shooting party

with Prince Philip, the duchess's vocal royal critic, to call on the wife of the queen's second son P Andrew, the Sun tabloid said.

Prime Minister Tony Blair's c

Whitney Houston May Face Drug Charge

The Associated Press

KAILUA-KONA, Hawaii — Airport security guards here unsuccessfully tried to detain the singer Whitney Houston after they allegedly found 1 grams of marijuana in a bag she was carrying, a newspaper has reported.

The Tribune-Herald of Hilo, Hawaii, reported Sunday that an airport security officer at Keahole-Kona International Airport found the marijuana on Tuesday after he asked the Grammy-winning singer to open the bag for inspection. The bag was seized, but Houston walked away as security officers tried to detain her, said Lieutenant Robert Hickcox of the Hawaii police. Her flight to San Francisco departed 45 minutes before the police arrived, he said.

Airport security officers are employed by a private company and can arrest passengers only for crimes related to airport security. An answering service, Houston's spokeswoman, Carol Stone, said Stone was out of the country and could not be reached for comment. Possession of 15 grams of marijuana in Hawaii could lead to a charge of "promotion of a detrimental drug," Hickcox added, and could be punishable by up to 30 days in jail and a \$1,000 fine.