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Shakespeare, Orson Welles, and the Hermeneutics of the Archive

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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June 2016

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ABSTRACT

Shakespeare, Orson Welles, and the Hermeneutics of the Archive

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This paper examines certain theoretical underpinnings of the historical processes by which Shakespeare's history plays became the de facto collective memory of the events they depict, even when those events are misrepresented. The scholarly conversation about this misrepresentation has heretofore centered on Shakespeare's potential political motivations. I argue that this focus on a political, authorial intent has largely ignored the impact these historical distortions have had over the subsequent 400 years. I propose that, due to Shakespeare's unique place in the historical timeline of the development of collective memory, Shakespeare's historical misrepresentation in the history plays is a byproduct of the emerging ability to access historical sources while also shaping the nascent collective memory. Shakespeare became an archon, in the Derridian sense, of English history. As such he exercised the archon's hermeneutic right to interpret English history.

Tracing the methods by which the public experienced Shakespeare's plays, this project shows that in the 20th century film became the dominant medium by which audiences experienced Shakespeare for the first time. Using Orson Welles' *Chimes at Midnight* as the principle example, I show that the hermeneutic right shifted away from Shakespeare and was instead taken on by directors reinterpreting Shakespeare's version of history. Welles' knowing manipulation of the archontic function empowers his film, affecting subsequent interpretation and placing it squarely in the Shakespearean film canon.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Orson Welles, Jacques Derrida, archive, archon, collective memory

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History and the Problem of Collective Memory

The Shakespearean canon contains fourteen history plays,¹ more than any other genre. In contrast, Thomas Heywood wrote just four histories, and those have been seen as a thinly veiled attempt to mimic Shakespeare's history plays and "capitalize on their popularity" (Ribner 272). Marlowe may have eventually rivaled Shakespeare's number of historical dramas, but of course his output was limited by his early death, and scholars have argued as to whether Thomas Middleton wrote any history plays at all (*History. Plays.* 47). Clearly, Shakespeare was the historical dramatist of his day, intensely concerned with finding dramatic value in historical events; yet, his histories often contort even the recent past—they are, in the contemporary parlance, "based on a true story".

Of his fourteen history plays, eleven deal specifically with English history, history that was in some cases relatively recent. While Shakespeare was—obviously—unaware of the larger impact his historical plays would have hundreds of years later, his theatrical histories have come to serve as the de facto collective memory of the events they depict. In other words, our collective understanding of key historical events like Shrewsbury or Agincourt is more informed by Shakespeare's dramatized representation than it is any of the countless historical volumes written about Percy's Rebellion or Agincourt in the last six hundred years. Our memory of historical events is dominated by dramatizations, which—due to the necessity of creating a unified narrative experience—must reshape historical fact.

In contemporary culture we have, as Maynard Adams put it, "come to think, for the most part, that there is only one kind of knowledge, namely scientific" (Adams 569). By scientific

¹ Including *Edward III*, the probable collaboration between Shakespeare and Thomas Middleton.

Adams means objective, provable truth such as historical fact or a testable hypothesis; our modern principles of ethical inquiry tend to direct us towards this more scientific knowledge or truth. This leads to a natural conflict between Shakespeare's historical misrepresentation which dominates our collective memory (and in turn identity), and one of the principles of modern ethical inquiry. Insofar as our collective memory influences ethical identity, this poses a problem. There are many ways to address this question such as rationalist rather than empiricist approaches or aesthetic rather than factual emphasis. But, as a half-century of post-structuralist thought—led by Derrida in particular—have ingrained in us a mistrust of binary oppositions, we must step outside any overly-simplistic dichotomy of factual versus non-factual expectations of historiography (in our contemporary context the factual is almost always the privileged term). In my view, a particularly useful approach for moving past this binary will be a Derridian view of history, ultimately introducing the possibility that Shakespeare's histories are—in fact—ethical misrepresentations.

In an effort to adhere to contemporary principles of ethical inquiry, for most of the 20th century the scholarship surrounding Shakespeare's historical distortions has centered on a debate over the political motivations and implications of the history plays. E.M.W. Tillyard famously argued that Shakespeare's history plays are "political writings" (vii). Tillyard believed that the history plays were politically orthodox in that they portrayed the Elizabethan political order, which was itself a reflection of larger philosophical and cosmological beliefs that were almost universally held during the period (17). More recently, the new historicists have argued that Shakespeare's plays not only portrayed Tudor political thought, but that they also "helped to produce and sustain the dominant political theory" (McDonald 93). In other words, Shakespeare's plays actively perpetuated Tudor hegemony. Stephen Greenblatt pushed this idea

further in his seminal “Invisible Bullets,” claiming that Shakespeare’s Henriad plays are a “carefully plotted official strategy whereby subversive perceptions are at once produced and contained” (56). Essentially, the plays sustained the political hegemony by being intentionally subversive, a fact which the monarchy was aware of and allowed to continue, letting the plays contain “rebellious impulses that might have erupted onto the streets had they not been released and defused within the confines of the public theaters” (McDonald 94).

Each of these arguments assume that politics was Shakespeare’s principal motivation for distorting the historical record in his history plays; each attempts to reveal how those political motivations played out in the context of the historical period. While both useful and debatable, this critical attention focused on the politics of Shakespeare—which still dominates Shakespeare studies—is a byproduct of strict adherence to ethical inquiry’s search for fact. In order to study Shakespeare’s historical dramatizations, academics have focused on finding the truth which must underlie Shakespeare’s intentions and motivations. What this debate largely ignores is the larger impact of Shakespeare’s historical misrepresentations on English national identity in the subsequent 400 years. The complications in this regard begin early: the political effect of Shakespeare’s historical inaccuracies was in fact more a by-product of Shakespeare’s synthesis of the historical record. In focusing so strictly on the political climate surrounding the initial production of the history plays the scholarship ignores the larger multivalent character of the historical moment. Shakespeare was perfectly situated at a point in history in which he could synthesize the historical record, actively choosing what to omit from the nascent English collective memory. This active erasure or forgetting ultimately makes Shakespeare the *archon*, or interpreter of the English historical archive—a role which continues to shape English national identity.

Archontic Functions and Ethical Identity in Shakespeare

I pause here to clarify the meaning of this term as put forth by Derrida. He defined the archon as the guardian—physically if necessary, but more importantly hermeneutically—of the archive’s documents (Derrida 10). We will return later to the significance and power of the archive, but in order to understand the functions of the archon it is necessary to first understand how Shakespeare came to be one.

Shakespeare’s place in the historical timeline is key to understanding the impact of his historical fictions on the formation of English identity and his ultimate attainment of archontic status. In tracing the history of memory, Jacques LeGoff has noted four distinct historical periods: the antique, the medieval, the modern, and the 20th century (54). Shakespeare falls into a key space at the beginning of the third period, which LeGoff defines as the “modern phase, characterized by decisive advances in written memory connected with printing and literacy” (54). Per LeGoff’s model, Shakespeare’s ability to access and help create collective memory was only made possible by the explosion of print culture during his lifetime. For the first time, mass culture as we understand it was possible through the potentiality of the printing press. An entire country could collectively read the same text, leading to the creation of a much larger pool of shared accounts than was previously possible. As Leroi-Gourhan has pointed out, “with the advent of printing... not only was the reader faced with an enormous collective memory whose subject matter he could no longer assimilate in toto, but he was frequently put in a position to exploit new works” (qtd. in LeGoff 81). If, as Leroi-Gourhan asserts, collective memory was—for the first time—becoming too large to completely assimilate, then Shakespeare’s history plays can be seen as a response to this challenge. By synthesizing the historical information available to him (such as Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, Shakespeare’s most important historical source) and

repackaging it in a dramatic format more easily digested by the general public, Shakespeare was—perhaps even unknowingly—exploiting the possibilities of creating a new work within the emerging collective memory.

While collective memory itself can be a difficult concept to define, its most general definition is as “a metaphor or shorthand designation for the myths, traditions, customs, or heritages that represent the ‘spirit’ or ‘psyche’ of a group, tribe, society, or nation” (Leichter 114). However, the necessity and power of collective memory is best understood in a Ricoeurian model, which constructs collective memory as “a dialogue with others to make sense of a shared past” (Leichter 114). For Ricoeur, this shared past is a violent one as “there is no historical community which has not arisen out of what can be termed an original relation to war” (Ricoeur 82). While Ricoeur’s view may be overly simplistic, this—in part—explains the dominance of war in Shakespeare’s history plays, even when there’s no real need for it or even historical precedent for it, such as in *Henry IV Part 2*. The collective memory relies, in part, on attempting to understand the violence at the heart of national identity.

This is not to say that the politics of the history plays should be ignored. If there is a political element, it is that the histories present a “‘cross-examination’ of political issues from ‘differing points of view’” (Pugliatti 8). Those points of view include Holinshed, the Elizabethan court, the early modern public, and Shakespeare himself. But in order to best represent these points of view, Shakespeare dramatized and took liberties with historical events. The historical inaccuracies in the plays are, on a mass scale, what David Lowenthal calls revision, in that they take what is thought to be immutably fixed—in this case factual history—and reinterpret them “in the light of subsequent experience and present need” (206). Coleridge put it another way, arguing that this process takes “that part of real history which is least known, and infuses a

principle of life and organization into the naked facts, and makes them all the framework of an animated whole” (160). Taken together, Lowenthal and Coleridge help to illuminate the power that underlies Shakespeare’s revisional process. They understood that Shakespeare’s histories were more than just historical fact; without the playwright’s revisions of history the stories would lose their power. It’s the fictional oversight—the archon’s hermeneutics—that give the plays a power and status that a chronicle could never attain.

The *Henry IV* plays in particular provide a fascinating example of this revision; as Holderness et al. point out, compared to Shakespeare’s earlier histories, *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2*: are much less firmly attached to the solid *mimesis* of literary historiography, much less dependent on the chronicle sources; they display an infinitely greater liberty of invented incident, and focus intensively on a character—Falstaff—who can be tied to no recognizable historical provenance²; and, although the plays are structurally framed by authentic historical events...the plays reveal far less particularity in the depiction and delineation of time and space, far less specificity of historical vision (42).

By using the structure of historical events such as the battle of Shrewsbury to tell what is the mostly invented story of Hal’s rebellious friendship with Falstaff, Shakespeare is able to revise history in order to represent various social issues: Falstaff’s experience with the recruits represents class dynamics in Elizabethan England, the warfare is very much described in contemporary terms, and the conflict between Hal and Hotspur is is representational of feudal and chivalric thought (Holderness et al 42). More recently, Kristen Poole has explored Falstaff as

² Of course Falstaff does have some historical provenance in the character of John Oldcastle, although it seems clear that the final character of Falstaff is far removed from the historical man. See, Katsan, David Scott. *Shakespeare After Theory*. New York: Routledge, 1999, 93-106.

a Puritan satire (62-63) while Jonathan Baldo has reiterated the potential religious implications of revision in *Henry IV*, arguing that Falstaff's forgetfulness is linked to contemporary radical protestantism. The *Henry IV* plays are in many ways the ultimate example of Shakespeare's ethical revision, plays which are both "representational and fantasy" (Holderness et al. 41).

Yet, in our contemporary need for an empirical component in ethical inquiry, in this case the search for objective truth, the ethics of this revisional process that is both representational and fantastical is constantly called into question. Baldo describes Shakespeare's methodology in *Henry IV* as "historical error" (51) while saying that in the play "Shakespeare governs historical memory rather loosely" (52). Not that Baldo is necessarily a strict historical empiricist, but the tendency to term Shakespeare's version of history as error is common. In this form of ethical inquiry, fact is preferred to misrepresentation or revision. This is also partly why the tragedies—even those with historical antecedent—are so often given preference over the histories. Lily Campbell argued that the tragedies are about ethics while the histories are about politics (17), and ethics are always more interesting.

An Alternative Historiography for Understanding Shakespeare

As history moved forward beyond Shakespeare's lifetime, history plays like *Henry IV*—initially used to dramatize Elizabethan politics—gradually became the collective memory of the historical events they misrepresent. By the time of the restoration in 1660, Shakespeare's plays were out of print, having been kept alive mostly through secret performances during the commonwealth period (*Reinventing Shakespeare* 10-11). When Charles II returned to England he brought Shakespeare, and the theatre, back with him. But by this point the nuances of Elizabethan era politics became irrelevant to most audiences, and the historical facts of the past were lost in the fog of civil war; thus the history plays were largely unpopular and rarely

performed for restoration audiences³, who mostly experienced Shakespeare through adaptations and operatic reinventions by authors like Davenant or Dryden (*Reinventing Shakespeare* 30).

The 18th century saw another Shakespearean resurgence, mostly due to the popularity of printed editions. As Gary Taylor points out “in the seventeenth century the popularity of Shakespeare’s plays with audiences had stimulated the publication of reading editions. In the eighteenth century, their popularity with readers stimulated new productions” (*Reinventing Shakespeare* 94). It’s during this period that there was an important and massive “revision of literary history” (Kramnick 1087); spurred by the popularity of print, “critics began to rethink the consequences of widespread reading and the commodification of books” (Kramnick 1090). There was a perceived “cultural crisis” leading to a renewed critical nostalgia for past authors whose works were considered more difficult or obscure, ultimately leading to a conscious—and even legislated⁴—elevation of Shakespeare to canonical status (Kramnick 1090).

By the end of the 18th century Shakespeare’s dissemination in written form and his elevation within the emerging critical canon led to widespread popularity among the romantics, with Coleridge, Keats, and Wordsworth quoting *Hamlet* more than any other play (*Reinventing Shakespeare* 103). As they became part of the canon themselves, and other authors begin to quote the Romantics, the English canon quickly becomes an intricate web of references that ultimately trace back to Shakespeare. Shakespeare becomes foundational because, in order to understand a reference made by Woolf or Conan Doyle or Coleridge, you must necessarily also understand Shakespeare.

³ With the notable exception of *Henry IV*.

⁴ See, Ross, Trevor, “The Emergence of ‘Literature’: Making and Reading the English Canon in the Eighteenth Century. *ELH* 63.2 (1996): 397-422.

During the Victorian period and into the early part of the 20th century Shakespeare remained particularly popular among the working class (Murphy 113). As the working class became more and more educated throughout the 19th century, Shakespeare became a standard element of the curriculum, and thus many students' first exposure to the historical events represented in the plays was through the plays themselves. The kings and queens, battles and treacheries, love affairs and family feuds depicted in his history plays were remembered thanks to their dramatic value, not their historicity. Thanks to their narrative power, Shakespeare's revisions endured.

David Lowenthal suggests that "remembering the past is crucial for our sense of identity" (197). If key moments in English history such as Shrewsbury and Agincourt are remembered as they were portrayed in the history plays, then the past as revised by Shakespeare forms a crucial element of the English identity. This raises a much larger question: if "to know what we were confirms what we are" (Lowenthal 197), then what does it mean for what we are if what we were has been mischaracterized, even purposefully shaped? This adds a level of severity to the conflict between historical misrepresentation and our need for ethical inquiry to have some basis in fact.

It is the deconstructionist view of historiography that allows us to free ourselves from the "classical categories of history" (Derrida, *On Grammatology* lxxxix). In order to reconcile this apparent conflict, we must step outside the dichotomy of factual versus nonfactual, representational versus fantastical, to a more nuanced, Derridian view of history. This paradigm suggests that the plays serve as a certain kind of archive of English collective memory and identity. In *Archive Fever* Derrida posited that the archive could not only be a historical or nomological, but also metaphorical (9). For example, the literary canon serves as a metaphorical archive, while libraries physically store literature, the canon itself is metaphorical—an ever

evolving archive of the key texts presided over by various guardians such as academics, editors, or publishers.

In order to achieve archontic function, the archive, in this case the history plays, must provide both an origin and a law, “commencement and commandment” (Derrida 9). As already shown, Shakespeare’s moment in history gave him unique opportunity to shape the nascent collective memory. By doing so the histories attain a commencing or origin function, in that the plays are the literal origin for much of the public’s memories of key historical events. While—in a world without Shakespeare—the historians would have continued to chronicle the historical events Shakespeare would depict, they wouldn’t have achieved the permanent place in the collective memory they now have. In this case the plays are the originating memories, invoked again and again when the historical events they represent are referenced.

Likewise, the plays have come to serve a variety of commanding functions. There is a long history of invoking Shakespeare in order to empower your own work. The reverence for the Shakespearean canon has led to a referential culture among English-speaking authors. Canonical writers frequently referenced Shakespeare in their works; for example, Conan Doyle is responsible for popularizing “the game’s afoot”, while Virginia Woolf repeatedly used a passage from *Cymbeline* as an important thematic motif in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Similarly, numerous authors from Aldous Huxley (*Brave New World*) to David Foster Wallace (*Infinite Jest*) have titled their books using quotations from Shakespeare. These authors used Shakespeare to give a legitimacy, a commanding power, to their writing. Even beyond the realm of literature Shakespeare carries a commanding power, Douglas Bruster has pointed out that in the last century capitalism has appropriated terms like “Renaissance” and “Early Modern” to name businesses and products in the hope of associating themselves with Shakespeare (168-169).

If we consider the history plays as an archive of memory and identity, then Shakespeare himself is the archon of that archive. Derrida defined the archons as the guardians of the archive's documents (10). This is not only a physical guardianship; archons are "accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives" (Derrida 10). The archon not only has the power to choose what is and isn't included in the archive, the archon also is allowed to interpret the texts themselves. In Shakespeare's case, the author also becomes the archon—Shakespeare, in dramatizing his historical sources, became an archon of English history. He took on the "hermeneutic right" when he began to choose what to include, what to omit, and what to change in his representations of history.

Ultimately every creator takes on this right over their own work, becoming the archon of their archive, however small or large that may be. But due to his historical moment and eventual place in the canon, in Shakespeare's case this hermeneutic right becomes particularly important. Shakespeare became—perhaps for the first and only time in literary history—both archive and archivist. Shakespeare not only defined the archive, he became it.

It is the selective, interpretative, revisional power wielded by Shakespeare himself as both archive and archivist which can begin to reconcile false misrepresentation with true national identity. Lowenthal claims that "for memory to have meaning we must forget what we have seen... only forgetting enables us to classify and bring chaos into order" (205). Thus, if selective forgetting is what makes memory powerful, then Shakespeare's omission of historical truth fact gives part of his work the archival power. Jonathan Baldo has pointed out that the history plays "expose the degree to which national unity is produced by selective erasure of the past" (8). Shakespeare's histories could not achieve their power as an archive of English national identity

without the erasure of certain historical truths, an erasure which empowered the collective memory that leads to a national identity.

This selective forgetting accomplished by Shakespeare's hermeneutic right as the archon ultimately gives the history plays an introspective power. As Lowenthal puts it, "we synthesize identity not simply calling up a sequences of reminiscences, but by being enveloped... in a unifying web of introspection" (198). Shakespeare's contortion of individual historic facts and the possibility of a false collective memory give way to the overall introspective power the canon has on English identity. Whether or not Henry actually roused his troops with something resembling Shakespeare's St. Crispin's Day Speech isn't as important as the patriotism it evokes in the English memory. The historical verisimilitude of Hal's rebellious youth doesn't matter as much as the effect his acceptance of responsibility has on forging a national sense of duty.

Lowenthal argues that "the prime function of memory, then, is not to preserve the past but to adapt it as to enrich and manipulate the present" (210). But in the 21st century the question arises as to who is wielding the archontic power of Shakespeare's history plays to manipulate the present? Shakespeare's revisions of history are now over four hundred years old, and deeply seeded in the English national identity. But just as Shakespeare's plays became more engrained in the collective consciousness as they became a more important part of the educational curriculum, a similar transformation occurred in the 20th century as film became the dominant artistic medium. Film allowed Shakespeare's plays to reach "their largest and most diverse audiences in history (Shaughnessy 9). While in the past most people first experienced a Shakespeare play through the text itself or perhaps a staged performance, by the end of the 20th century most people's first exposure to Shakespeare was—and remains—through filmed adaptations. For example, Kenneth Branagh's *Henry V* made over ten million dollars at the U.S.

box office alone (“Henry V”). With an average ticket price of \$3.99 in 1989, that equates to over two and a half million tickets sold for just the film’s domestic theatrical run (“Annual Average Ticket Price”). In fact, there were more tickets sold in just the U.S. for that particular film than the entire annual ticket sales for the Royal Shakespeare Company (“Annual Review”).

The Archontic Function in Film

The dominance of filmed adaptations in the average person’s consumption of Shakespeare raises significant questions about Derrida’s hermeneutic right. As the original archon of the history plays, Shakespeare revised and reinterpreted history. And while stage adaptations have always had the ability to do the same, the film medium is able to more radically depart from Shakespeare’s text. In the 20th and now into the 21st century, the film auteur has taken the hermeneutic right, reinterpreting Shakespeare’s historical revisions in light of our experience.

This is only complicated by the canonicity of Shakespearean film adaptations. While certain iconic stage performances or particularly important productions can become vital in establishing a theatrical performance tradition, the ephemeral nature of live performance does not establish a canon per se. An actor can be aware of how important a particular performance of *Hamlet* might have been, but the performance can’t be revisited in the way a film can. Conversely, within the budding discipline of Shakespearean film studies there is “rapidly becoming an established canon of film versions of the plays” (Shaughnessy 4). This canon means that not only is the average person more likely to first experience a Shakespeare play—and more specifically a history play—through a film adaptation, but is more likely to first experience the play through a specific auteur’s interpretation of that play. Most people’s experience with *Henry V* will come through either Olivier’s nationalist version or Branagh’s

darker, grittier interpretation. *Richard III* is more likely to first be seen through Olivier's popular film (or one of its many parodies) or perhaps through Richard Loncraine's 1995 version, which turns the history play into a fascist allegory.

Saying that filmmakers take historical source material and reinterpret history in a different medium through the lens of their own biases is obvious. Every year dozens of films bearing the "based on a true story" moniker are released, and most of them bend history—some more severely than others—to create a more entertaining, streamlined, and audience friendly narrative experience. But in the case of Shakespearean films based on the history plays there is another layer of interpretation at play. If Shakespeare's revised histories exposed centuries of audiences to his version of history, contributing through a long historical process to national identity through collective memory, modern international audiences are now being exposed to revisions of the revisions. If we can classify Shakespeare's revisions of history as ethical misrepresentation, can a filmmaker ethically take on the same hermeneutic right to reinterpret the revisions and further mischaracterize historical fact on a mass scale?

Once again the *Henry IV* plays are particularly interesting to view in this context. For one thing, the text itself is about "the relationship between historiography, theatricality, and intersubjectivity" (Hawley 90). In other words, the text of the play itself raises questions of historiography. Despite remaining popular on the stage, *Henry IV* has proven less popular in the film medium. While there have been several BBC televised stagings of the plays, only three major film adaptations of the *Henry IV* plays have been undertaken in the last fifty years: Orson Welles 1966 *Chimes at Midnight*, Gus Van Sant's 1991 *My Own Private Idaho*, and the recent BBC film series *The Hollow Crown*.

The Case of Orson Welles' *Chimes at Midnight*

Upon its release in 1966 *Chimes at Midnight* was, for Orson Welles, the “culmination of an involvement with Shakespeare that spanned his entire career” (Lyons 3). *Chimes at Midnight* was Welles' third Shakespearean film and easily the most complex. His earlier efforts, *Macbeth* in 1948 and *Othello* in 1952, are more straightforward adaptations of Shakespeare. In those films the texts are condensed, but easily recognizable as Shakespeare's plays transposed to film, Welles' revolutionary directorial aesthetics being their most notable feature. *Chimes at Midnight* is significantly more complicated as an adaptation. For one thing, Welles worked on the adaptation off and on for a large portion of his life, beginning with a high school production that Welles later transformed into a play called *Five Kings* in 1938. That eventually became another play called *Chimes at Midnight*, which went on stage in Ireland in 1960, followed then by the film in 1966 (Lyons 3-4). Furthermore, unlike *Macbeth* and *Othello*, *Chimes* conflates several texts together. Dialogue from both parts of *Henry IV*, *Richard II*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Henry V*, and even *Holinshed's Chronicles* are cut and pasted together to form an adaptation that—while almost entirely composed of Shakespeare's dialogue—sometimes feels like a completely new story.

Much of the body of literature dealing with *Chimes at Midnight* deals with the process of this complex adaptation, with significant debate surrounding the potentially autobiographical nature of Welles' focus. By 1966, Welles was something of a living legend, having significantly pushed the cinematic art form forward with *Citizen Kane*. While Welles continued to work for many years after on various film and television projects, *Chimes* is his second to last completed film, and really his last film to gain mainstream attention. Lyons points to the film's title—and the famous line from which it is taken—as evidence of Welles' melancholy and nostalgia about

aging (5). Of course this is a predominant theme of *Henry IV Part 2*, but by shifting the “we have heard the chimes at midnight” scene from the end of *Henry IV Part 2* to the beginning of the film, making Falstaff the primary character, giving the film that name, and repeating the sound of bells throughout, Welles is stating from the outset that the entire story is dominated by melancholy and sadness about mortality (Lyons 5). In contrast, Robert Hapgood’s comprehensive analysis of the film is more interested in *Chimes at Midnight’s* relationship to Welles’ theatrical antecedents, arguing that the film is best understood as part of a “continuum of interpretation” that begins with *Five Kings*, Welles’ first attempt at adapting the *Henriad* (43). Meanwhile, Samuel Crowl interprets the film mainly from a character-driven perspective, understanding the film as part of “the rich and ongoing critical debate concerning Falstaff’s role and meaning in an understanding of Shakespeare’s second tetralogy” (35).

These analyses are important and valid examinations of the film, but much like the intense focus on Shakespeare’s political motivations they perhaps miss the larger importance of Welles’ place in the timeline. Derrida argued that “the technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content...The archivization produces as much as it records the event” (17). In other words, the medium is the message, and Derrida was concerned with what role the rapid advancement of archival technology would continue to have in shaping the content of the archive. As previously discussed, this bore out in Shakespeare’s lifetime as the booming print culture allowed him to access and reinterpret history on a mass scale. In the case of Orson Welles, he too held an important place in the timeline. Returning to Jacques LeGoff’s model of four distinct phases in the history of memory, Welles is within the fourth period “corresponding to the revolutionary changes of the past century” (55). These

changes take place “especially after 1950” as mass media quickly proliferates in electronic—and other—forms (LeGoff 90).

The rise of film to prominence during this period gave Welles’ a perfect place in time to reshape the Shakespearean archive of collective memory. As Douglas Lanier argues, this actually began with Welles’ radio productions of Shakespeare in the late 1930’s as “Welles brought authorship to radio” (198). While Welles wasn’t the first to bring Shakespeare to the American public via radio, he pushed the medium farther than anyone else, experimenting with what was capable with a radio play. This experimentation, plus Welles’ propensity to personally sign off at the end of his broadcasts, “established him as a Shakespearean auteur in the public’s mind” (Lanier 198). While radio productions of Shakespeare would be a generally short-lived phenomenon⁵, the young Welles used the medium to establish himself as the singular Shakespearean voice in America.

Just as Shakespeare had reshaped the chronicles and disseminated them to the public in a more easily digestible format during a time of rapid spread in mass culture, Welles is often charged as the central figure in the “democratization of high culture through low media” (Burt 3). And while the binary of high and low culture is not a generally useful categorization, in this case the terms illustrate Welles’ importance in reshaping and redemocratizing Shakespeare through the newly emerging mass media. Shakespeare’s adoption into the standard curriculum gradually moved him out of the realm of the working class and into the realm of the academic.

⁵ While radio productions of Shakespeare continue to occur, by 1950 the era of the radio play as a popular phenomenon had given way to the rapid rise of television. For more see Lanier, Douglas. “WSHX Shakespeare and American Radio”. *Shakespeare After Mass Media*. Ed. Richard Burt. New York: Palgrave, 2002. Print.

The mass media of film allowed filmmakers like Welles to shape Shakespeare for this new, mass audience.

That's not to say that the masses showed up. Welles' Shakespearean films were box office disappointments, *Chimes at Midnight* struggled to even find distribution in the United States. But Welles' democratization of Shakespeare lay in the content and lasting impact of his films, not in their box office performance. While filmmakers like Olivier were certainly distributing Shakespeare's stories on a massively popular level (his *Hamlet* even winning the Oscar for best picture), in his films "cultural authority is both assumed and reinforced: the performance of Shakespeare's text is simultaneously an affirmation of the value and status of that text" (Anderegg 64). That is to say Olivier's mostly straightforward adaptations reinforced the perception of Shakespeare as "high art." On the other hand, Welles' films—and *Chimes at Midnight* in particular— "qualify the cultural supremacy of Shakespeare by, to one extent or another, pushing the source text towards its own margins or by revealing, through the film's low-budget strategies and absence of gloss and finish, the fragmentary and tentative authority of the original" (Anderegg 64). In other words: Olivier affirmed Shakespeare's place as the archon, Welles directly—and knowingly—challenged it.

Anderegg's analysis of Welles' "low-budget strategies and absence of gloss and finish" also point us back towards Derrida's assertion that the technology and process of the archiving creates the content of the archive. Earlier Shakespeare adaptations like Olivier's *Hamlet* or Reinhardt's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* portrayed a glossy, Hollywood version of Shakespeare. Welles was a more technically ambitious filmmaker, and even with lower budgets he used his Shakespeare films to continue to push the medium forward. Rather than attempt to

create a filmed version of the play, Welles used experimental techniques to create *Chimes at Midnight*, not all of which were successful.

Notably, Welles was very aware of both his artistic standing and ambition—he knew he was avant-garde. Andrew Dudley argues that Welles “knew the auteur theory in advance” (152), and worked to cultivate through his art the image of the consummate auteur. The level of intentionality in Shakespeare’s historical revisions is debatable and beyond the purview of this project; however, it’s fairly clear that Welles’ challenge to Shakespeare’s authority is a conscious one. In a 1966 interview following *Chimes at Midnight’s* release, Welles’ said that in adapting Shakespeare “you mustn’t make a museum. You must find a new period, you must invent your own England. Your own epoch, on the basis of what you have learned through research. The drama itself dictates the kind of world in which it is going to happen” (Cobos and Rubio 260). Welles’ intention was never to perfectly adapt Shakespeare’s version of history. He admits that, rather than create a “museum”—in this case a purely historical adaptation—Welles is creating his own fictionalized England, in its own epoch, with its own story, characterization, and thematics.

However, in making his film Welles did not completely abandon history. As he indicated to Cobos and Rubios, Welles did conduct his own historical research beyond the texts of Shakespeare plays, leading him to—in some cases—circumvent Shakespeare’s archontic right. Like any other adaptation Welles freely excises lines, scenes, and entire acts in order to condense the massive amount of story contained in the *Henriad* plays into a single two-hour movie. For example, the rebellion plot line of *Henry IV Part 2*, in which civil war again threatens Henry IV’s reign, is completely missing, while the battle of Shrewsbury—the climactic fifth act of *Henry IV Part 1*, takes place significantly earlier in the story. Welles’ most inventive addition

comes from the material he adds from outside the two principle plays, and it's the addition of this material that most overtly signals Welles' seizure of the hermeneutic right. Not only does *Chimes at Midnight* quote from the two *Henry IV* plays, but Welles adds scenes and lines from *Henry V*, *Richard II*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and most notably a voice-over track quoting Holinshed's *Chronicles* (Cardullo 173). Shakespeare himself was revising Holinshed in his own time, synthesizing the historical record for his own purposes. By going right to the original historical source, in this example Welles bypassed Shakespeare completely—he superseded the archon's right to interpret history.

Here the question of ethical representation is raised once again. On the one hand, at times *Chimes at Midnight* feels like such a departure from the original text that it seems a misrepresentation of Shakespeare. On the other hand, in some instances Welles returns to Holinshed, reinserting Shakespeare's source material back into the story. He bypasses the archon, going back and reinterpreting the chronicler. The exact citations come from Ralph Richardson's narration, which, in giving historical information throughout the film, refers back to Holinshed. For example, during the film's final shot the narrator describes Henry V as "So humane withal, he left no offense unpunished nor friendship unrewarded" (Welles 254). This exact citation from Holinshed raises more questions of historical representation in that it is intentionally ironic. This narration plays as Falstaff's coffin moves through the frame, his death coming after the rejection by his friend, the newly crowned Henry V⁶. Despite Holinshed's assertion, Falstaff's friendship went unrewarded, punished for his offenses. The chronicler tells us one thing, Shakespeare something different, Welles something different still.

⁶ Falstaff's coffin is itself another revision of Shakespeare's text, as Falstaff dies off stage in *Henry V*.

Welles himself stated that in his film “there are bound to be values which can’t exist as it is played in the original. It’s really quite a different drama” (Cobos and Rubio 261). This is at odds with most theories of adaptation in which the core drama or thematics are to be preserved at the cost of detail, dialogue, or other features of the source text. Welles instead announces his intention to do the opposite, preserving instead bits of dialogue, character, and general plot structure to tell a story dramatically different from the one shaped by Shakespeare. Unlike Shakespeare, who wrote the various plays of the *Henriad* at different times, Welles had the advantage of knowing the full story in the beginning, and so he “directed everything, and played everything, with a view to preparing for the last scene” (Cobos and Rubio 261). In doing so, Welles admittedly removed much of the humor of the play in order to sharply focus on Falstaff’s eventual betrayal by Hal, an event which—although certainly foreshadowed in the plays—doesn’t take away from the humor of Hal and Falstaff’s relationship, particularly in *Henry IV Part 1*.

Chimes at Midnight’s refocusing of the *Henriad* on Falstaff also signals a challenge to Shakespeare’s authority. Welles clearly privileged the Falstaff character above all others, saying that Falstaff was “the most completely good man, in all drama” (Cobos and Rubios 261). Beginning the film with Falstaff’s lament over his increasing age and ending with his funeral (again, invented by Welles rather than stemming from the source material), Welles clearly demonstrates a sympathy for the character that is more ambiguous in Shakespeare’s text. The complete *Henriad* is left open to interpretation when it comes to Hal and Falstaff’s relationship. Any sympathy for Falstaff is balanced with an understanding of the role the prince must play in history and the necessity of Falstaff’s banishment in order to fulfill a greater destiny. Welles’

films is less ambiguous, ending with Bardolph and the Hostess's lament for Falstaff as the narrator—quoting Holinshed—juxtaposes the hypocrisy of the new king with Falstaff's burial.

If Welles' film abandons the dramatics, thematics, character ambiguities, plots, characters, and title of the original while also bypassing the source text to return to Holinshed, can it be considered an ethical representation of Shakespeare's play? If *Chimes at Midnight* had come and gone, and eventually been forgotten, then this may not pose a problem. However, *Chimes* has—since its original release—grown significantly in critical esteem, becoming one of the core films of the Shakespearean film canon. Furthermore, it is one of only three major film adaptations of Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays, making it a valuable film and the standard bearer for future adaptations.

Welles' clearly thoughtful intentionality in his revisional challenges to Shakespeare may lead us back to reconciling the question of an ethical representation. Hapgood argues that Welles' master of the film medium and his deep understanding of the play demonstrates that *Chimes at Midnight* “respects its Shakespearean theatrical original while also respecting its modern film idiom—and in such a way that, when it is at its best, Welles' vision and Shakespeare's coincide” (52). While in my opinion Hapgood overestimates the amount to which Welles' and Shakespeare's visions line up, the argument that the film is transitional, situated between the theatrical original and the modern and rapidly evolving film medium, allows for Welles to take on the hermeneutic right for himself in order to radically reinterpret Shakespeare in a new medium. Even if Welles is bypassing, excising, and reinterpreting Shakespeare to a point of creating an almost entirely new story, the archive's content must be dictated by the technology available to the archivist. This allows Welles to take on the hermeneutic right for himself, reshaping Shakespeare's revision of history in light of a new technological medium.

Welles “undermined the historical and rhetorical foundations of the *Henriad*” (Anderegg 130). But in so undermining the text, Welles’ managed to enter the ever-evolving archive himself and influence it in profound ways, reshaping how this particular portion of the Shakespearean archive is interpreted in the future. As cited earlier, David Lowenthal argues that “the prime function of memory, then, is not to preserve the past but to adapt it as to enrich and manipulate the present” (210). In this case the archive serves no purpose if it doesn’t affect the present.

Welles’ revision of Shakespeare’s history factually misrepresents Shakespeare’s version of history, while further spreading a false image of the past in the collective memory. However, Welles’ film ultimately entered into a symbiotic relationship with the archive itself, to the point that it is almost inextricable from the original text. Michael Anderegg has documented the impact *Chimes at Midnight* had on both the theatrical performance tradition of the *Henriad* and on the subsequent Shakespearean film adaptations by other canonical auteurs. Reports of *Chimes at Midnight* influencing the theatrical performance tradition start as early as Terry Hand’s 1976 production (Anderegg 140). The film also influenced Kenneth Branagh’s *Henry V* and Gus Van Sant’s *My Own Private Idaho* (the only other major adaptation of the *Henry IV* plays). Welles’ version of Shakespeare is firmly entrenched in the archive of the history plays if for nothing else than the *Henry IV* plays can’t be staged without first confronting what Welles accomplished in *Chimes at Midnight*.

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