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the works of Petr Il'ich Chaikovskii—or those listed under 18 other versions of the great composer's name. But a subject search under a heading such as *labor* will yield too many references to be useful; the computer does not make the kind of distinctions (e.g., between labor unions and labor during childbirth) that a card catalogue does.

Why are the putative guardians of the written word so eagerly disposing of their treasures? At work, Baker suspects, is the desire of library admin-

istrators (most of them men) to distance themselves from the old image of the (usually female) librarian. They "believe that if they are disburdened of all that soiled cardboard, they will be able to define themselves as Brokers of Information and Off-Site Hypertextual Retrievalists instead of as shy, bookish people with due-date stamps and wooden drawers to hold the nickel-and-dime overdue fines." A small justification indeed for an act that historian Helen Rand Parish likens to "the burning of the library at Alexandria."

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## ARTS & LETTERS

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### *Shakespeare Lite*

"When Blood Is Their Argument': Class, Character, and Historymaking in Shakespeare's and Branagh's *Henry V*" by Robert Lane, in *ELH* (Spring 1994), Dept. of English, Johns Hopkins Univ., Baltimore, Md. 21218.

When Kenneth Branagh's much-praised film *Henry V* appeared in 1989, many critics compared it with Laurence Olivier's 1944 movie version of the play. They said that Branagh presents "a much darker world" and a more complex King Henry than the earlier film did. That may be so. But when Branagh's version is compared with Shakespeare's, argues Lane, an English professor at North Carolina State University, the verdict is not so favorable.

Branagh himself described the play as "a journey toward maturity" by the end of which King Henry "has learned about true leadership" and acquires "moral *gravitas*." But Shakespeare, Lane contends, portrays the king and his war against France, culminating in the great English victory at Agincourt in 1415, in a much less approving light. The Bard, he says, stresses "the cynicism and doubtful legality that infected [the war's] initiation," the common soldiers' deflation of the king's noble rhetoric, and questions about Henry's character.

Branagh, Lane complains, prunes the roles of figures other than the king, "especially those who, like the commoners, might impinge on or question the narrative of the king's maturation." By use of cinematic techniques, Branagh

continually puts the focus on the king, "not as part of an ensemble (as he would be on stage), not even as a party to a conversation. What others say in the film is decidedly secondary, their diminished function as approving audience underscored by the persistent pattern of reaction shots to Henry's speeches—shots of [uniformly approving] nobles, common soldiers, and especially of the French herald Montjoy . . . cuing the audience to what its reaction should be."

Branagh's shots of battle, Lane notes, "climax with a series of slow motion close-ups of various individual soldiers, focusing on their faces in the midst of mortal combat. None show any trace of fear." Instead of carrying forward Shakespeare's probing examination of male comradeship in war, Lane says, Branagh "reinforces the cinematic spectacle's rehearsal of the timeworn notion that warfare provides the optimal occasion for men to achieve their highest fulfillment. He thus allows Henry and us—the audience—to evade the full force of [the Duke of] Burgundy's warning that when men 'nothing do but meditate on blood,' they 'grow like savages.'"

Branagh also obscures the king's responsibility for causing the violence. In the film, Henry marches across the battlefield, bearing the body of the slain character called Boy, "accompanied by the swelling chorus of a hymn." But the stirring scene is Branagh's invention; Shakespeare's Henry gives no indication that

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he even knows of the youth's death. The movie scene's tone is mournful, but there is no hint of remorse in Henry. "Branagh, instead, presents the Boy's death as a sacrifice, a martyrdom that, through appropriation (by Henry as surrogate parent), the king at once acknowledges and disavows any role in bringing about. The Boy's innocence, with his blood, spills over onto the king."

Shakespeare acutely recognized "the persistent penchant to sanitize the history of those who wield power," Lane writes. In his alteration of *Henry V*, he concludes, Branagh has provided an example of this tendency.

## ***The Birdman Of America***

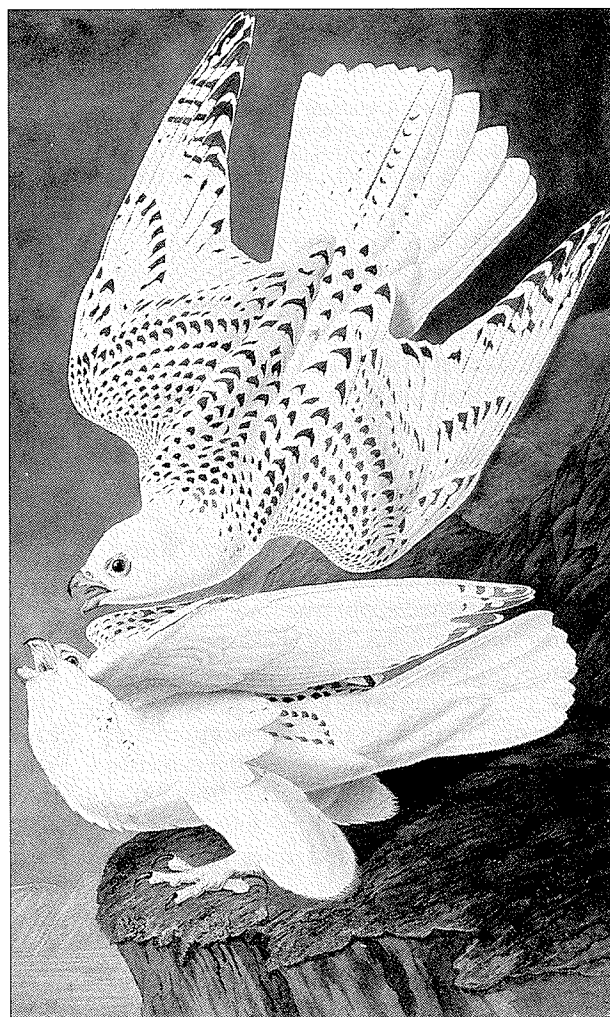
"Magnificent Obsession: Audubon's *Birds of America*" by Stephen May, in *American Arts Quarterly* (Winter 1994), P.O. Box 1654, Cooper Station, New York, N.Y. 10276.

Although John James Audubon's bird prints are familiar around the world, his original watercolors are seldom seen by the public. Now, with an exhibition of the paintings on a national tour, Audubon (1785–1851) can be widely recognized as not just an illustrator but an artist, May observes. The watercolors, says the freelance writer, "are refreshingly varied, deft in composition, brilliant in color, startlingly realistic, and dynamic in depicting each bird in characteristic action."

Born in Haiti, the son of a French sea captain and his mistress, a French chambermaid who died six months after her son's birth, Audubon was raised near Nantes, France, by his father and stepmother. They encouraged his love of nature and saw that he received some art training. At age 17, partly to avoid the Emperor Napoleon's draft, he was sent to manage his father's modest estate outside Philadelphia. His earliest surviving artworks are from 1805–12. He married in 1808 and soon sought his fortune as a frontier merchant in Kentucky; before

long he was reduced to eking out a living as an itinerant portrait painter.

In 1820, at age 35, Audubon audaciously decided to depict every bird in America from nature. Four years later, he took his portfolio to Philadelphia, then to New York, and finally to England and Scotland, before he found financial backing and an engraver to copy his works. *The Birds of America*, which came out in four volumes between 1827 and 1838, consisted of 435 hand-colored prints faithfully etched, aquatinted, and engraved from Audubon's original watercolors by Robert Havell, Jr., of London. Audubon's salesmanship and tireless labors ultimately led



*Audubon's Gyrfalcon*