



SOPHIE BAKER

Kenneth Branagh as Henry V, woos Emma Thompson's Katherine in his brilliant Shakespearean production.

★★★★ Henry V

Oaks Four West

*Henry V* is a good place for filmmakers to enter the Shakespearean canon. It is brash, fairly direct and filled with enough pageantry to make it ideally suited for adaption.

Harry, as Henry V is called, led a dissolute life as a young man, but he has blossomed into a mature and commanding King of England. Advisers urge him to stake his claim to the throne of France.

Convinced his cause is fair and just, Harry leads his men across the Channel and engages in one victorious combat after another. His adventure culminates in the Battle of Agincourt, in which a small band of greatly outnumbered British soldiers slaughter their French opponents.

From the witty opening scene

(in which the one-man Chorus — played marvelously by Derek Jacobi — wanders across a movie set) to the charming and lighthearted ending, *Henry V* is a triumph. It proves Kenneth Branagh is a major new talent.

Of course, there is another movie version of *Henry V*, filmed by Laurence Olivier during World War II as spirit-raising propaganda. This is certainly bloodier and more realistic than that saber-rattler. But it's only a matter of degree, for this *Henry V* is very rousing indeed.

Several key scenes have been reinstated, scenes that Olivier was urged to omit for fear of clouding patriotic fervor. They make the movie more complex, but hardly revisionist.

Branagh's Harry is a just and compassionate man who gives due praise to God at every juncture. He

Harry's title is tainted by his father's deposition and eventual murder of Richard II. Never does Harry really question whether war is a suitable method for achieving his goal.

We do see how two bishops urge the King to war to protect their own interests, but Harry never comes to this understanding.

At another point, when the town of Harfleur is besieged, Harry orders them to surrender in a fiery speech. If they don't lay down their arms immediately, he threatens that his men will rape their shrill-shrieking daughters and have their naked infants pitted upon spikes. But rather than sounding barbaric or evil, it seems more like hyperbolic bullying. When the town does give in — trembling in fear — we are hardly surprised that Harry orders his men to use mercy.

This is not a criticism of the film, merely a look at the dramatic decisions Branagh has made. The final result is a boldly dramatic story filled with excellent performances. Michael Maloney is amusing as the self-possessed French Dauphin, whose advisers can barely contain their scorn for him. Christopher Ravenscroft turns what might have been the minor role of the French herald into a fascinating portrayal.

It is all beautifully shot and backed by an exceptional score by Patrick Doyle. His music manages to be stirring but never martialistic.

Naturally, Branagh himself is also terrific. He roars through the major hurdles of the role — such as the St. Crispin's Day speech — with magnetism and vigor. He is also unexpectedly charming during the wooing of the French princess Katherine.

*Henry V* is certain to be one of

Branagh's achievement with Shakespeare all the more later this fall. That's when Franco Zeffirelli promises to deliver a new version of *Hamlet* starring, of all people, Mel Gibson.

★★ Pretty Woman

Royal Park

A routine romantic comedy about a powerful businessman who hires a hooker to be his companion for a week. Richard Gere and Julia Roberts add some sparks of humor — especially in a shopping scene in which he tells an

an obscene amount of money and love to be sucked up to.

But it's all too predictable. She's a hooker, but hey — put her in a nice dress and she'll learn to behave herself and cry at the opera. He's a brutal corporate raider, but hey — a few fun evenings and he'll learn that it's better to walk through the park in his bare feet.

They both seem unduly embarrassed whenever the fact that she's a prostitute is mentioned. And only today could two characters have sex throughout most of the movie... only to have the real



RON BATZDORFF

Julia Roberts snuggles up to Richard Gere in *Pretty Woman*.

romance begin when they finally kiss on the lips.